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Abduction of 230 Girls in Nigeria by Terrorists: Building a "Humanitarian" Pretext for R2P Military Intervention?

Exterminate All The Brutes!

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On 14th April 2014, Boko Haram, an insurgent group operating in Nigeria, abducted up to 230 girls from their school in Chibok. The leader of the group, Abubakar Sheka, recently said in a video that the girls could be sold into slavery.

This is, by any standard, a horrendous crime.

In response to the abduction, there has been a campaign by people in Nigeria to draw attention to the plight of these girls, as a way of building up international pressure for their safe release.

In recent days, however, talk has also started to turn to a potential military response to the kidnapping. The Guardian have reported that 'The United States and Britain have offered military and technical support to Nigeria to hunt down the Islamist group which has abducted a new batch of schoolgirls'. Britain itself is prepared 'to send special forces and intelligence gathering aircraft'.

The article also carries a quote from Barack Obama, which strongly suggests that any potential military response won't just be about securing the release of these girls (if it's even about that at all).

He has said that:

> 'In the short term our goal is obviously to help the international community, and the Nigerian government, as a team to do everything we can to recover these young ladies' but that 'we're also going to have to deal with the broader problem of organisations like this that . . . can cause such havoc in people's day-to-day lives'.

Which does make it sound like any operation ostensibly designed to free these girls could just be the first shot in a wider war effort against Boko Haram.

The comments under the Guardian article are utterly depressing, if you ask me.

A few examples of some of the more popular ones at the moment:

> ‘Hunt the bastards down and terminate them …. all of them’.

> ‘It is the morally right thing to do. But you know that this is one of those good deeds that won’t go unpunished by the frothing anti-West brigade’.

(This in response to someone pointing out that Nigeria has lots of oil)

> ‘There it is! Faux ‘left-wing’ intellectual and apologist for extremist religion in oil reference! Would you prefer we just let those innocent girls be sold into slavery then?’.

There is barely any dissent at all, and any dissent there is is being shouted down as callous, anti-Western nonsense.

I remember it being *exactly* the same in the run up to the French/British intervention in Mali in early 2013. That people needed our ‘help’, and that anyone who questioned France’s/Britain’s motives, and whether they were really ‘helping’, was similarly shouted down as a callous hater of Western civilisation. That French and Malian regime forces later went on to commit or facilitate major atrocities was all too easily overlooked. As was the fact that it was another ‘humanitarian intervention’, NATO’s bombing of Libya, which had helped destabilise Mali in the first place.

And when considering any military ‘intervention’ in Nigeria, it might be worth remembering a few things:

1. That the forces the U.S./U.K. et al would presumably be aiding – namely, the Nigerian Security Forces – are no shrinking violets themselves. According to Human Rights Watch’s 2014 World Report, they have been

> ‘implicated in various human rights violations with regard to the Boko Haram insurgency’, including ‘ the indiscriminate arrest, detention, torture, and extra-judicial killing of those suspected to be supporters or members of the Islamist group. Security forces razed and burned homes and properties in communities thought to harbor Boko Haram fighters. In Baga, a town in Borno state, Nigerian troops destroyed more than 2,000 buildings and allegedly killed scores of people, apparently in retaliation for the killing of a soldier by Boko Haram’.

2. That the U.S./U.K. have no humanitarian credibility, and as part of other ‘anti-terror’ campaigns are employing things like extra-judicial execution, long term detention without trial, the bombing of funerals and rescuers, death squad activity, the treating of all military aged males as ‘militants’, and massacres. They have unaccountably killed thousands of women and girls in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and Pakistan, and strongly support formally misogynistic states in places like Saudi Arabia.

3. That Nigeria does indeed have considerable oil reserves. It is the largest producer in Africa, and Shell has a significant presence there, with a strong influence over the Nigerian government itself, according to leaked diplomatic cables. In February 2014, it was reported by AFP that ‘The leader of radical Islamist group Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, threatened attacks in Nigeria’s oil-rich Niger Delta region in a new video released on

Wednesday'.

Could the U.S./U.K.'s apparent new found determination to take on Boko Haram be, in part, a response to these threats to the oil industry, and a desire to protect the oil industry and the corrupt Nigerian state in general?

I think these are all legitimate questions to be asking, or points to be making, and my hunch is that they won't be asked or made too frequently in corporate media. And to ask such questions is not, as so many are suggesting, to express indifference to the fate of the abducted girls.

Personally, I very much doubt most of the people calling for 'Western' military intervention in Nigeria to 'save' these girls know a great a deal about the politics of the country. I will freely admit that I don't either. That is perhaps why it's so easy to frame this issue as a simple matter of Doing Good Vs Unspeakable Evil, and have people buy into that (there is also, if you ask me, a fair bit of racism and 'white saviour' stuff going on).

But I do know a thing or two about the politics of the U.K. and U.S., and how they regularly exploit humanitarian crises (real or imagined) to further their own strategic aims, often leaving a trail of destruction and misery in their wake – again, all too easily ignored by media and supporters of such 'interventions'.

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