

Kidnapped Girls Become Tools of U.S. Imperial Policy in Africa

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The “humanitarian” U.S. military occupation of Africa has been very successful, thus far. “The Chibok abductions have served the same U.S. foreign policy purposes as Joseph Kony sightings in central Africa.” Imagine: the superpower that financed the genocide of six million in Congo, claims to be a defender of teenage girls and human rights on the continent. If you believe that, then you are probably a member of the Congressional Black Caucus.

A chorus of outraged public opinion demands that the “international community” and the Nigerian military “Do something!” about the abduction by Boko Haram of 280 teenage girls. It is difficult to fault the average U.S. consumer of packaged “news” products for knowing next to nothing about what the Nigerian army has actually been “doing” to suppress the Muslim fundamentalist rebels since, as senior columnist [Margaret Kimberley](#) pointed out in these pages, last week, the three U.S. broadcast networks carried “not a single television news story about Boko Haram” in all of 2013. (Nor did the misinformation corporations provide a nanosecond of coverage of the bloodshed in the Central African Republic, where thousands died and a million were made homeless by communal fighting over the past year.) But, that doesn’t mean the Nigerian army hasn’t been bombing, strafing, and indiscriminately slaughtering thousands of, mainly, young men in the country’s mostly Muslim north.

The newly aware U.S. public may or may not be screaming for blood, but rivers of blood have already flowed in the region. Those Americans who read – which, presumably, includes First Lady Michelle Obama, who took her husband’s place [on radio](#) last weekend to pledge U.S. help in the hunt for the girls – would have learned in the *New York Times* of the army’s savage offensive near the Niger border, last May and June. In the town of Bosso, the Nigerian army killed hundreds of young men in traditional Muslim garb “Without Asking Who They Are,” according to the [NYT headline](#). “They don’t ask any questions,” said a witness who later fled for his life, like thousands of others. “When they see young men in traditional robes, they shoot them on the spot,” said a student. “They catch many of the others and take them away, and we don’t hear from them again.”

The *Times*’ Adam Nossiter interviewed many refugees from the army’s “all-out land and air campaign to crush the Boko Haram insurgency.” He reported:

“All spoke of a climate of terror that had pushed them, in the thousands, to flee for miles through the harsh and baking semidesert, sometimes on foot, to Niger. A few blamed Boko Haram — a shadowy, rarely glimpsed presence for most residents — for the violence. But the overwhelming majority blamed the military, saying they had fled

their country because of it.”

In just one village, 200 people were killed by the military.

In [March of this year](#), fighters who were assumed to be from Boko Haram attacked a barracks and jail in the northern city of Maiduguri. Hundreds of prisoners fled, but 200 youths were rounded up and made to lie on the ground. A witness told the *Times*: “The soldiers made some calls and a few minutes later they started shooting the people on the ground. I counted 198 people killed at that checkpoint.”

All told, according to Amnesty International, more than 600 people were extrajudicially murdered, “most of them unarmed, escaped detainees, around Maiduguri.” An additional [950 prisoners were killed](#) in the first half of 2013 in detention facilities run by Nigeria’s military Joint Task Force, many at the same barracks in Maiduguri. Amnesty International quotes a senior officer in the Nigerian Army, speaking anonymously: “Hundreds have been killed in detention either by shooting them or by suffocation,” he said. “There are times when people are brought out on a daily basis and killed. About five people, on average, are killed nearly on a daily basis.”

Chibok, where the teenage girls were abducted, is 80 miles from Maiduguri, capital of Borno State.

In 2009, when the Boko Haram had not yet been transformed into a fully armed opposition, the military summarily executed their handcuffed leader and killed at least 1,000 accused members in the states of Borno, Yobe, Kano and Bauchi, many of them apparently simply youths from suspect neighborhoods. A [gruesome video](#) shows the military at work. “In the video, a number of unarmed men are seen being made to lie down in the road outside a building before they are shot,” Al Jazeera reports in text accompanying the video. “As one man is brought out to face death, one of the officers can be heard urging his colleague to ‘shoot him in the chest not the head – I want his hat.’”

These are only snapshots of the army’s response to Boko Haram – atrocities that are part of the context of Boko Haram’s ghastly behavior. The military has refused the group’s offer to exchange the kidnapped girls for imprisoned Boko Haram members. (We should not assume that everyone detained as Boko Haram is actually a member – only that all detainees face imminent and arbitrary execution.)

None of the above is meant to tell Boko Haram’s “side” in this grisly story (fundamentalist religious jihadists find no favor at BAR), but to emphasize the Nigerian military’s culpability in the group’s mad trajectory – the same military that many newly-minted “Save Our Girls” activists demand take more decisive action in Borno.

The bush to which the Boko Haram retreated with their captives was already a free-fire zone, where anything that moves is subject to obliteration by government aircraft. Nigerian air forces have now been joined by [U.S. surveillance planes](#) operating out of the new U.S. drone base in neighboring Niger, further entrenching AFRICOM/CIA in the continental landscape. Last week it was announced that, for the first time, AFRICOM troops will train a Nigerian ranger battalion in counterinsurgency warfare.

The Chibok abductions have served the same U.S. foreign policy purposes as Joseph Kony sightings in central Africa, which were conjured-up to justify the permanent stationing of [U.S.](#)

[Special Forces](#) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, in 2011, on humanitarian interventionist grounds. (This past March, the U.S. sent [150 more Special Ops](#) troops to the region, claiming to have again spotted Kony, who is said to be deathly ill, holed up with a small band of followers somewhere in the Central African Republic.) The United States (and France and Britain, plus the rest of NATO, if need be) must maintain a deepening and permanent presence in Africa to defend the continent from...Africans.

When the crowd yells that America “Do something!” somewhere in Africa, the U.S. military is likely to already be there.

Barack Obama certainly needs no encouragement to intervention; his presidency is roughly coterminous with AFRICOM’s founding and explosive expansion. Obama broadened the war against Somalia that was launched by George Bush in partnership with the genocidal Ethiopian regime, in 2006 (an invasion that led directly to what the United Nations called “the worst humanitarian crisis in Africa”). He built on Bill Clinton and George Bush’s legacies in the Congo, where U.S. client states Uganda and Rwanda caused the slaughter of 6 million people since 1996 – the greatest genocide of the post War World II era. He welcomed South Sudan as the world’s newest nation – the culmination of a decades-long project of the U.S., Britain and Israel to dismember Africa’s largest country, but which has now fallen into a bloody chaos, as does everything the U.S. touches, these days.

Most relevant to the plight of Chibok’s young women, Obama led “from behind” NATO’s regime change in Libya, removing the anti-jihadist bulwark Muammar Gaddafi (“We came, we saw, he died,” said Hillary Clinton) and destabilizing the whole Sahelian tier of the continent, all the way down to northern Nigeria. As BAR editor and columnist Ajamu Baraka writes in the current issue, “Boko Haram benefited from the destabilization of various countries across the Sahel following the Libya conflict.” The once-“shadowy” group now sported new weapons and vehicles and was clearly better trained and disciplined. In short, the Boko Haram, like other jihadists, had become more dangerous in a post-Gaddafi Africa – thus justifying a larger military presence for the same Americans and (mainly French) Europeans who had brought these convulsions to the region.

If Obama has his way, it will be a very long war – the better to grow AFRICOM – with some very unsavory allies (from both the Nigerian and American perspectives).

Whatever Obama does to deepen the U.S. presence in Nigeria and the rest of the continent, he can count on the Congressional Black Caucus, including its most “progressive” member, Barbara Lee (D-CA), the only member of the U.S. Congress to vote against the invasion of Afghanistan, in 2001. Lee, along with Reps. Marcia Fudge (D-Ohio), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) and fellow Californian Karen Bass, who is the ranking member on the House Subcommittee on African, [gave cart blanche to Obama](#) to “Do something!” in Nigeria. “And so our first command and demand is to use all resources to bring the terrorist thugs to justice,” they said.

A year and a half ago, when then UN Ambassador Susan Rice’s prospects for promotion to top U.S. diplomat were being torpedoed by the Benghazi controversy, a dozen Black congresspersons scurried to her defense. “We will not allow a brilliant public servant’s record to be mugged to cut off her consideration to be secretary of state,” said Washington, DC Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton.

As persons who are presumed to read, Black Caucus members were certainly aware of the messy diplomatic scandal around Rice's role in suppressing United Nation's reports on U.S. allies' Rwanda and Uganda's genocidal acts against the Congolese people. Of all the high profile politicians from both the corporate parties, Rice – the rabid interventionist – is most intimately implicated in the Congo holocaust, dating back to the policy's formulation under Clinton. Apparently, that's not the part of Rice's record that counts to Delegate Norton and the rest of the Black Caucus. Genocide against Africans does not move them one bit.

So, why are we to believe that they are really so concerned about the girls of Chibok?

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