

Boko Haram and the West's Military Intervention in Nigeria

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Global Research, May 21, 2014

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#)

The kidnapping of hundreds of schoolgirls in Chibok town some three weeks ago has drawn widespread global opprobrium. Instinctively, Nigerians and people globally, pricked by human feeling, have seen the latest barbaric onslaught on poor Nigerians by the murderous Boko Haram terrorists, as an assault on human dignity and safety. To most people, this terror sect has reached its crescendo with the abduction of innocent schoolgirls.

Jonathan Government's Stunning Callousness

Ironically, the Nigerian government, led by Goodluck Jonathan did not see reason why it must be bothered about kidnap of schoolgirls. For it, the logic that this is not the first time justifies its lukewarm attitude. This explains government's careless attitude to the plight of the pupils and their parents. Even at the peak of the outcry by the parents to the government, the Jonathan government did not issue a single statement, at least to console the parents. On the contrary, it exploited the issue for its political interests. For instance, while the government did not sanction senior security chiefs who misled the nation by claiming that most of the schoolgirls have been rescued, many protesters, especially in the north were illegally arrested.

Tragic-comically, the president's wife, Patience Jonathan, whose husband could hardly lift a finger for two weeks, was quick to issue 'order' for the immediate release of the schoolgirls. She even arranged a tear-shedding session with journalists. Interestingly, the following day, two of the selfless and concerned parents, leading the campaign for the release of the girls were clamped into detention, because they 'embarrassed' the government of the madam's husband.

The President, at a media chat, was busy asking journalists to help him find the missing girls, because they (the journalists) know more about security and defence of the country than the Commander-in-Chief does! The same president that budgeted close to a trillion naira for defence last year was asking journalists to guide him on national security! Prior to this time, the President, in a show of pure callousness attended a political rally in Kano dancing, while in the nation's capital city, Abuja, more than seventy lives were burning to ashes in a terrorist bomb blast. Surely, Nigeria is in deep shit, when it comes to governance.

Imperialist Intervention: An Assured Failure

Consequent upon these official shenanigans, not a few people will be ready to accept any means possible to rescue these kids and reunite them with their parents. However, in our quest for immediate release of the girls and end to terrorism, we must spare thought for the kind of solutions on offer. The current messianic status being accorded western imperialist

governments of the United States (US), Britain, France, etc as being expressed in major newspapers in the country and internationally, is misplaced and indeed dangerous. Of course, behind the latest imperialist intervention is Nigeria's bankrupt, corrupt capitalist ruling class, through its rotten politics, which has failed Nigerians in all areas. While the western governments claim that only a few military and intelligence forces will be involved, the reality is that the country is in a protracted foreign military hostage.

The US and other western government's military involvement in the Boko Haram issue will not guarantee peace in the northern Nigeria or elsewhere. In fact, it has the capacity to draw in stronger forces of global terrorist network into Nigeria, as the country will be seen as another outpost of western imperialism against terrorism (a seed capitalist imperialism sowed in the first instance). Whether the Chibok schoolgirls are found or not, the US and western imperialist militaries will use the opportunity to seek a permanent base in the country, and play more roles in the internal security policies. With this will be deeper involvement of western imperialism in the politics and economics of the country. He, who controls the defence, dictates the pace of the politics and by extension controls the economy. A review of western media editorials and reports suggests that there is a conclusion being drawn that Nigeria is a failed state, and the government is incapable of addressing not just security situation but also the problems confronting the polity. This is a background to placing western capitalist governments as savior of Nigeria.

Already, western militaries, with US African Command in the lead, are playing decisive roles in the Gulf of Guinea, with the possibility of building military bases in the coast of Nigeria around Lagos. This is being done under the guise of combating oil bunkering and piracy. The Nigerian government, under Goodluck Jonathan, has already surrendered Nigeria's coastal defence to the western imperialist forces. With the latest involvement in northern Nigeria, in the name of fighting terrorism, the cycle may be complete. Moreover, the US drone bases have been situated in Niger, which borders Nigeria, while France has presence in Mali and other francophone African countries. There have also been previous attempts to set up a drone base in Nigeria without success. Just few years ago, Nigerians rejected citing of US African Military Command (AFRICOM) base in Nigeria; but today, western militaries may have achieved more than they dreamt. Nigerians must reject western military intervention.

This is in addition to gross human rights abuses this will engender. For instance, while one of the excuses of western imperialism in Afghanistan is the need for women liberation, the country, thirteen years after, has seen further degeneration of women's conditions with abduction, rape, etc being the order of the day. In Nigeria, half of over 1500 deaths in the first quarter of this year alone in the terrorist campaign were attributed to Nigerian military's indiscriminate killing, with many of those killed by the military suspected to be innocent people or detainees awaiting trials, according to Amnesty International report. Should we forget that the same Nigerian military razed a whole town sometimes last year, killing hundreds of people (the Baga massacre). Indeed, western intervention can only worsen these situations. The drone killings in Afghanistan and Pakistan are clear examples.

By helping to find the schoolgirls, western imperialisms will become an important factor in the counter-terrorism policy of the government, and the overall defence system of Nigeria. On the contrary, if the girls are not found, it will justify protracted involvement in Nigeria's internal security. Already, according to the UK Guardian, the British foreign policy experts and politicians are discussing using the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle, a 2005 principle agreed to at the UN, which has been used by imperialism for predatory

interventions in Darfur, Libya, Yemen, Mali, etc. Also, some sections of US security and diplomatic corps are considering the Yemen option. This means having unfettered right to locate and destroy enemies (potential and real), using lethal weapons including drones, without approval or oversight from local government. It will also involve control of a country's intelligence network, which will mean direct profiling of citizens. Why these may not be on immediate agenda, they are open options depending on how far western imperialisms are allowed by Nigerians. For instance, without strong opposition from the working people, western imperialism will be mired in deeper engagement with terrorists, not only in Nigeria but throughout the continent, using Nigeria as a launch pad.

The #BringBackOurGirls Campaign

The current social media campaign, especially the #BringBackOurGirls twitter campaign, while playing vital role in drawing international attention to the terror campaign in Nigeria, without clear background to the underlining causes, may be feeding the imperialists' interventions with confidence and authority. A one-line slogan hides a lot of information about the role of western governments in the germination and growth of terrorism itself. It, on the contrary, makes open-ended what kinds of solutions are needed to rout terrorism, thus leaving the initiative to the imperialist forces. A parallel can be drawn with the #Kony2012 campaign, which allowed imperialist forces to invade not just Uganda, but other countries like DR Congo, South Sudan, etc under the guise of finding Joseph Kony of the LRA (the Uganda rebel group, which has unleashed murderous terror on children and women).

While Kony has not been found, the US and other European military forces are still domiciled in the continent. With this, the US AFRICOM has been able to secure semi-permanent bases in many east African countries. In other parts of the continent, especially North Africa, US and European forces, under the guise of fighting terrorism and stopping genocide have secured bases in such countries as Mali, Djibouti, Niger, CAR, etc. While terrorism, genocide and piracy have not stopped, western forces are still present in Africa than ever. Therefore, the current social media campaigns, which may lose steam without clear mass mobilization campaign, need a class-conscious analysis to determine what solutions are needed and who should provide them. It is surprising that discredited capitalist politicians like David Cameron (who wanted to wage bloody war against Syria), Gordon Brown, Tony Blair (who, alongside George Bush, was the architect of the imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq), Hillary Clinton, etc are now using the campaign to rescue the girls as a whitewashing and image laundering tool. Moreover, this campaign, without a clear-cut slogans as the tendency to gloss over worse atrocities being perpetrated. For instance, just few days ago, over 300 lives were again wasted in Gamboru Ngala, in Borno State. This definitely cannot be covered by a #BringBackOurGirls campaign.

What is the way forward?

Consequently, Nigerian working people must understand that the capitalist classes, whose policies provided the breeding ground for terrorism to thrive, cannot genuine end terrorism. At best, they can only replace one terror with another. In ending terrorism, capitalists have created more problems than solution. Therefore, the genuine solution can only come from the working people themselves. As immediate measure:

1. NLC and TUC must call a 48-hour general strike with mass protests across the country, to mobilize popular mass movement against terrorism, and the flippant manner the Jonathan government is handling it. Such mass movement must also reject imperialist intervention

but mobilize for working class and community based defence committees. This strike and mass movements should be linked with all the other basic socio-economic demands of the people. By mobilizing mass movement across the country, Boko Haram will be isolated, and Jonathan government will need to justify its continued existence.

It is important to note that where mass of working and oppressed people are united in their collective struggle against anti-people policies, divisive tendencies of terrorism and fascism are easily subsumed. This is because, as stated earlier, divisive tendencies like terrorism are product of suffering wrought by globalised capitalism. Therefore, only mass movements of working and oppressed people can detach and erode the base of these divisive groups. Throughout the January 2012 protests and strike against hike in fuel price in Nigeria, no single bomb was thrown, neither was there any terror attack. However, a day after labour leaders botched the protests; a terror attack killing scores of people was carried out in the city of Kano. Indeed, the defeat of sit-tight regimes in the Arab world was not accomplished by bombs but by mass movements of workers, youth and the oppressed. Indeed, where mass movements develop, terror forces are isolated.

2. Democratic community and workplace defence committees should be set up across the country, especially in the north, as a counterweight to brutality of the terrorists and the Nigerian military. These defence committees should organize defence of communities, including intelligence gathering, searches, armed resistance, etc. The excuse that people will be killed does not suffice, as people are already being killed senselessly and without opportunity of self-defence. In fact, Chibok community people, including women organized a search and rescue team in the wake of the military's pusillanimity. According to a Dr. Manaseh, whose sister was among the abducted, "after the incident, over 204 people including volunteers from Chibok mobilized a day after the attack and stormed Sambisa forest with many contributing N15, 000 each for fuel to be used in their motorcycles for the rescue..." (Vanguard, 11 May 2014). Who says working and poor people cannot organize?

Will such self-defence committees not be abused? This is why there is need to put such committees under democratic control of communities, with every household involved in the formation and control of such committees. These committees will be different from the so-called Civilian JTF currently existing in Borno State, which has become an appendage of the deadly military forces, aside not being under democratic control of communities. It is nevertheless important to emphasize that the spontaneous rise of the Civilian JTF (a form of community defence committee), though not on democratic basis, shows the potential for independent organization by working and community people, if there is a national lead. The leadership of the labour movement, youth movement and the Left, in such initiative can make such committee serve as revolutionary platform.

3. Working and oppressed people must organize to bring down this bankrupt Jonathan capitalist regime and the rotten, neo-colonial capitalist system it superintends over. This system is the root cause of terrorism. How do you convince a 20 year old that book is not haram when all he ever saw in the past 14 years of civil rule is poverty, hunger, joblessness, oppression, injustice and obscene display of wealth by a rich few? How will you convince a young Nigerian who has not seen the wonders of chemical reaction or the importance of electromagnetism that book is not haram? The last 14 years of civil rule has seen unprecedented wealth accumulation in the country, which can take Nigerians to the Space more than 20 times, yet it is a miracle for Nigerians to have safe transit from Lagos to Kano. A government that can commit a trillion naira to defence, but can hardly spend less than a quarter of this on education and healthcare is a government of social terror.

Conclusion

We must end capitalism before it ends us all. Build revolutionary workers' party now! Workers should take over their unions and rebuild them on democratic, anti-capitalist and revolutionary basis! Build democratic revolutionary committees linked up from grassroots to the national level to replace this corrupt regime. Working people need a revolutionary socialist government that will put mainstay of the economy under democratic public ownership. With this, the enormous resources of the country, rather than being cornered by the rich few and multinational corporations, will be committed to developing infrastructures, creating decent and secure jobs, educating the youth, providing adequate healthcare, and industrializing the country. This is the only way divisive and deadly forces of religious fundamentalism, ethnic chauvinism and social annihilation can be ended.

With the economy of the country under democratic ownership, control and management of the working people, communities, professionals, etc, we can plan how the resources and wealth of the country will be best utilized, on an environmental sustainable basis, to secure decent and fulfilled lives for all Nigerians and incoming generations. This will also require the working people in Africa, and globally to rise to defeat globalised capitalism, and enthrone a democratic, revolutionary working peoples' governments. For instance, with revolutionary working people's governments in West Africa alone, enormous resources – human, material, natural, etc – can be harnessed to develop the region, as a prelude to forming a Socialist Federation (or Confederation) of Africa. That terrorism is fast spreading in Africa, and the world, underscores the fact that only an internationalised united working class struggles to end capitalism can permanently defeat terrorism. This is why the working people in Nigeria must build mass movements across borders to defeat both terrorism and globalised capitalism that is at the root of terrorism. The current wave of solidarity protests across continents shows that it is possible to build a trans-continental movement against capitalism.

Even if the Boko Haram sect is defeated, without working class revolutionary and socialist alternative, other divisive forces will tear society apart based on the present rotten arrangement. We need a working class political platform to lead the struggle for a socialist revolution.

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