

# “The Responsibility To Protect”, Compassion for Civilians: “Engage in War to Protect Them” ....

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*At first sight, compassion appears to loom large in ‘mainstream’ politics and media. When the American and British governments target countries like Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, ‘compassion’ is always at or near the top of the agenda.*

Time and again, the [cry](#) from the political system is: ‘We Must Do Something!’ ‘We’ must [save](#) Afghan women from the ‘Medieval’ Taliban. ‘We’ must [save](#) Kuwaiti new-borns flung from their incubators by Iraqi stormtroopers. ‘We’ must [save](#) Iraqi civilians from Saddam’s shredding machines. ‘We’ must [save](#) civilians in Kosovo from Milosevic’s ‘final solution’.

As for the suffering civilians of Aleppo in Syria, hard-right MPs like Andrew Mitchell [demand](#), not merely that ‘we’ save them, not merely that ‘we’ engage in war to save them, but that ‘we’ must confront Russia, shoot down their planes if necessary, and risk *actual thermonuclear war* – complete self-destruction – to save them:

‘If that means confronting Russian air power defensively, on behalf of the innocent people on the ground who we are trying to protect, then we should do that.’

State-corporate propaganda is full of ‘shoulds’, all rooted in ‘our’ alleged ‘responsibility to protect’. Why ‘us’? Why not Sweden or Iceland? Because ‘we’ care. ‘We’ just care more.

A key task of the corporate media is to pretend this is something more than a charade. The truth is hinted at in BBC political programmes that open with jovial, bombastic, comical music, as if introducing some kind of music hall farce. The cast is currently led by foreign secretary Boris Johnson, a P.G. Wodehouse character reimagined by Stephen King. After chuckling about how ‘There is no other country that comes close to [Britain’s] record of beligerence’ in invading or conquering 178 out of 200 countries existing today, Johnson [opined](#):

‘As our American friends instinctively understand, it is the existence of strong and well-resourced British Armed Forces that gives this country the ability to express and affirm our values overseas: of freedom, democracy, tolerance, pluralism.’

As Johnson doubtless understands, this was a near-exact reversal of the truth. He [noted](#) in

2014 of the 2003 Iraq invasion:

'It looks to me as though the Americans were motivated by a general strategic desire to control one of the biggest oil exporters in the world...'

If politicians are clearly bluffers, corporate journalists are selected because they powerfully echo and enhance the alleged need for compassionate 'intervention'. The likes of David Aaronovitch, Nick Cohen, John Rentoul, Jonathan Freedland and Oliver Kamm earn their salaries by appearing to tear their hair out in outrage at the crimes of official enemies and at the 'useful idiocy' of the perennial, naysaying 'leftists'. Aaronovitch of The Times has supported just about every opportunity to wage war, whether under Labour or the Tories, for decades. In March 1999, in an article titled, 'It's because we're rich that we must impose peace for others,' Aaronovitch commented:

'Given a choice, do we really think that the suffering civilians of Sierra Leone would object to a military presence by the British?' (Aaronovitch, The Independent, March 25, 1999)

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the United States, he wrote of Afghanistan:

'For a fair-minded progressive the call should not be Stop the War. That slogan is now irrelevant and harmful. The requirement is surely to win the peace...'

'So on Sunday, instead of listening to the same old tired stuff about cowboys with rockets and selective horror stories from Mazar; instead of marching along with mouth open and ears closed (however comforting that can be); instead of indulging yourself in a cosmic whinge, why not do something that might help the people of Afghanistan?' (Aaronovitch, 'Stop trying to stop the war, Start trying to win the peace,' The Independent, November 16, 2001)

The message is always the same: we understand you're sincere, but sometimes you have to drop your reflexive 'anti-Americanism', drop your blinkered adherence to 'principled opposition' and live in the real world. You can't just sit on your hands, you can't just righteously preach - you have to *act!*

This is the shtick of the corporate warmonger and it is repeated over and over again. It appears to be the key function that determines whether a commentator is granted job-for-life privileges at newspapers like the Guardian, The Times and Telegraph.

But the point is that compassion - the kind rooted in an understanding that all suffering is equal, the kind that feels even more responsibility for suffering caused by our own government - is not partial, it does not defer to power. It doesn't fall silent when 'we' are committing crimes. Quite the reverse.

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