

NATO and International Human Rights Law: The Great Hypocrisy
by David Johnson

Many people in the U.S. complain that America gets involved in international conflicts because we are always attempting to be “the world’s policeman”, as though we heroically only fight on behalf of the poor and downtrodden, and merely to preserve freedom and justice in the world. Unfortunately, this is merely a well-crafted sales pitch fed to the American public. In reality, we don’t get involved in international conflicts unless the U.S. government has something to gain from doing so, either strategically, financially, or both.

Consider, for example, the case of the genocide that occurred in Rwanda in 1994. The United Nations and NATO stood by and did nothing to prevent the mass genocide of well over a half million people (by conservative estimates). Another example is the events that took place in Darfur, a region of western Sudan. The horrific abuses that took place, and to some extent, are still taking place there, are well documented. Political leaders in this country were also well aware of these abuses as they were occurring, because former Marine Captain Brian Steidle fully documented the events in Darfur with photographs and strong witness testimony informing U.S. policy leaders that genocide was in fact taking place. Several politicians in Washington issued strong statements condemning the violence, but it was all empty rhetoric. Politicians showed by their actions (or lack of action) that they really didn’t care, despite what they may have said publicly.

To me, perhaps the most gut-wrenching portion of Steidle’s documentary about Darfur, entitled “The Devil Came on Horseback” was a portion where members of a local village told about how when men of the village went out to gather fire wood a group of militants with machine guns would catch them and then pin them down to the ground and castrate them. Because of this, the village had made the agonizing decision to only have women go out to gather fire wood because the militants would only rape them. Can you imagine living under such conditions yourself, or having your family in this situation? What if you had to send your daughter out to get needed supplies for the family, knowing full well that she will probably be raped, but feeling like there is no choice because if you send your son, he will come back castrated, if he comes back at all? Now, I realize that we need to make sure that such stories are true before acting, but if these things really are happening, and Steidle presents a lot of evidence that they have, and are, then wouldn’t that at least warrant further investigation if you are truly concerned about human rights? Yet, no U.N. or NATO “peace-keeping” troops were ever sent even to investigate these claims in Darfur.

If ever there was cause for international intervention because of human rights violations, it was so in the cases of Rwanda and Darfur. So, what could be the explanation for the failure of the west to take action in the cases of Darfur and Rwanda, but then later rush to protect Iraqi and Lybian civilians? Some might suggest that the discrepancy is racially motivated- that western governments do not care as much about Rwanda and Darfur because the people there are black. However, I would argue that it is merely a case of economics. The U.S. and Europe didn’t have

anything to gain from getting involved in the conflicts of Rwanda and Darfur, whereas Iraq, Lybia, Syria, and Iran all have massive amounts of oil and strategically useful locations within the Middle East region, and therefore NATO conveniently seems to care much more about human rights violations in these nations. Why else would the U.S. constantly hammer Syria and Iran for human rights violations but then simply ignore it when Saudi Arabia does the same? Saudi Arabia's government is already a U.S. ally, so we don't worry about anything that they do, but human rights makes for a convenient excuse to use as a pretext for war with Syria and Iran if you are already looking for one.

I am not suggesting that people in Lybia, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and other nations do not have legitimate grievances, and perhaps in some cases the U.S. should support them. In theory, International Human Rights Law is a good idea to protect innocent people from cruel leaders, and in theory at least, to prevent what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany from ever happening again. My concern, though, is that International Human Rights Law is being hijacked by war hawks in the U.S. and Europe to sell foreign intervention to U.S. and European voters; voters who would not stand for such intervention if they knew the true reason it was done. It is much easier for politicians to get voters on board with intervention if you say that the purpose is to protect the citizens of that country and promote democracy than it is to simply admit what I fear is the true purpose, which is to plunder the country's resources and get rid of any leader who does not cooperate with the international, but U.S. based, corporations doing business there. If NATO's leaders want to prove that their motivation truly is humanitarian, and not simply a power grab for oil reserves and resources, then they should prove it by their actions, which speak far louder than empty political rhetoric. Leaders should be just as worried about supporting democracy, freedom, and human rights in poor countries with few natural resources as they are with the resource rich ones, and be far more consistent in how International Human Rights Laws are enforced from nation to nation before American voters should support any such foreign intervention in any nation. Don't fall for the scam.