

# THE NATIONAL INTEREST

## *Skepticism Needed About “Freedom Fighters”*

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As if Rush Limbaugh didn't have enough problems following his defamatory rants against Sandra Fluke, the Georgetown University Law student who dared to speak out on the ongoing contraception controversy, critics have now dredged-up his astonishing statements in October 2011 regarding the infamous African warlord Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army. Not only did Limbaugh criticize the Obama administration's decision to send 100 U.S. troops to aid Central African governments that were battling the LRA (which was a perfectly legitimate criticism), but he went on to praise Kony and his insurgent force. The Lord's Resistance Army "are Christians," Limbaugh thundered. "They are fighting the Muslims in Sudan. And Obama has sent troops, United States troops, to remove them from the battlefield, which means kill them." He then read from the LRA's "manifesto," which included commitments to democracy and eliminating oppression. "These are the objectives of the group that we are fighting," Limbaugh said with exasperation.

Limbaugh's statements have become an acute embarrassment, especially since the release of the video documentary on the "invisible children," which exposes the LRA's many abuses against some extraordinarily young victims. But Limbaugh is hardly the first prominent American to have expressed ill-considered support for sleazy foreign political movements. One need only recall such naïve backing for fascist and communist movements in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s and for communist movements in the Third World during the Cold War. Unfortunately, that type of poor judgment has repeatedly plagued portions of the opinion elite in the United States. President Ronald Reagan once described the Nicaraguan Contras as the moral equivalent of America's own founders—

an assertion that probably caused Washington, Jefferson, and Madison to whirl in their graves. Americans across the political spectrum reflexively praised the Afghan mujahedeen as “freedom fighters,” even as evidence mounted that the anti-Soviet resistance was dominated by the most reactionary, authoritarian religious elements. Contrary to the assertions of American admirers, even the term mujahedeen meant “holy warriors,” not freedom fighters—a very different connotation indeed.

Even more troubling, the *Wall Street Journal* and numerous conservative activists enthusiastically supported Angola’s Jonas Savimbi as a staunch anti-communist hero, even when more and more evidence accumulated that he was both a sociopath and a political opportunist. A little investigation would have informed those naïve conservatives early on about Savimbi’s opportunism, contrary to his professed commitment to democracy and free markets. Before Savimbi sought the backing of the United States, he had solicited support from Maoist China. They might also have discovered that potential rivals within his UNITA organization had a nasty habit of meeting untimely ends.

In the late 1990s, Senator Joseph Lieberman argued that the Kosovo Liberation Army was fighting for the same values as the United States. In reality, the KLA (and much of the subsequent Kosovar government) helped make Kosovo the center of drug trafficking and prostitution in Southeastern Europe. The most nauseating revelation occurred in late 2010 when a European Union investigation found credible evidence that KLA leaders, including Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, had been guilty of murdering Serb prisoners and [harvesting their organs for sale on the black market](#).

One might think that given such a long history of embracing foreign political movements that turned out to be odious, American opinion leaders would learn to exercise extreme caution before making such endorsements. But Limbaugh’s gaffe and the recent fawning over rebel forces in both Libya and Syria—despite a woeful lack of knowledge about the ideological make-up of either force—makes it all too clear that such dangerous, delusional thinking is alive and well