

The Policy Critic

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Somalia for Dummies

Most think Somalia is a small, brutal, poor, war torn country of no importance, incapable of internal peace, and that is precisely what mainstream media and the US government would like you to believe, so perhaps a brief review of Somalia is needed.

First, Somalia is blessed or cursed, depending on your perspective, with abundant natural resources of oil, uranium, and natural gas. Additionally it has military strategic value as its coastal town of Berbera is situated on the Mideast oil route and is the site of a US naval base, a base unknown by most Americans.

Most think the only US foray into Somalia was a "failed humanitarian mission" when the ungrateful and barbaric people of Somalia rejected our "humanitarian mission" and shot down a US helicopter and killed 18 US soldiers in a firefight a la the movie "Black Hawk Down"? You might be very wrong again!

The US, back in the 70's while the Cold War was still on, supported Somali dictator Mohamed Siad Barre who was our man in Somalia and who countered the influence of Russia in next door Ethiopia (just as Saddam Hussein was our man in Iraq who countered the Iranians). To minimize the influence of Russia, we encouraged Barre to invade Ethiopia (as opposed to current day when we encouraged Ethiopia to invade Somalia). With the end of the Cold War and no Russian threat, we lost interest in Somalia and Barre, but continued to fund his dictatorship, and by the late 80's the major oil companies of Chevron, (that's right the same company that Condoleezza Rice was director of from 1991-2001) Amoco, Conoco, and Phillips had secured control of about two thirds of Somalia and it's oil.

Mohamed Siad Barre, over the years and with the support of US military aid and funding, established himself as a brutal ruthless dictator (something like Saddam Hussein) who repressed any opposition with brutality. Barre was finally removed in a 1991 coup during which the US envoy took cover in the offices of Conoco oil (seems appropriate) and a new government was established. The oil

rights however were now threatened by the new government so President Bush (Sr.) sent 20,000 US troops to restore the oil rights to the oil companies, justifying his intervention (1992-1993) as a “humanitarian mission”.

Unfortunately mission creep occurred and soon the US was taking sides in the Somali Civil War. US soldiers showed little respect for the people of Somalia and developed the policy of shoot to kill and ask questions later, an attitude considered callous and racist by the people of Somalia. Strong resentment and hatred occurred among the people of Somalia towards US troops (much like that in Iraq) and US troops became the enemy (much like in Iraq).

After the Mogadishu event resulted in the deaths of 18 US and over 10000 Somali's, the US withdrew its forces but continued to finance the warlords while Somalia degenerated into what some have aptly described as “Mad Max territory”. For the next 15 years anarchy ruled in Somalia with civil war and wars between CIA backed warlords adding to the instability and chaos. Finally a group of fundamentalist Islamists called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) began to recapture and restore order to one town after another, sometimes with brutality of their own. The US government, through the CIA in February of 2006, began to finance warlords to the tune of \$100,000-\$150,000 per month (big money in Somalia) fearing that the Islamic Courts Union might get to friendly with Al-Qaeda, and Islamophobics feared another strong Islamic government might represent a threat to the existence of the US naval base, and might even be a threat to nearby Ethiopia even though Somalia had no military.

Unable to send troops to combat the Islamic Courts Union because of the current quagmire in Iraq, we equipped and trained the Ethiopian army and encouraged them to attack Somalia (not to be confused with our encouraging Somali to attack Ethiopia in the 70's). The superior military might of Ethiopia easily overcame Somali resistance (as occurred in Iraq) but many now fear a strong resistance movement will develop in Somalia and this war torn nation will enter a new phase of violence (like Iraq). Recently in a large stadium in Somalia, the Islamic Courts Union held a rally where thousands of Somali's chanted: “Death to the Americans and Slit the throats of Americans”.

Some have suggested that people hate us “because we are free” but the Somalis hate us for a different reason. Chalmers Johnson coined the phrase “Blowback” in his book: “Blowback: the Consequences of American Empire, and surely there will be consequences in the future.

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