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## They Never Learn Somalia is Iraq writ small

The series of blunders and **willful** miscalculations that led to our present **predicament** in Iraq are now being replicated in Somalia, where a rather large U.S. footprint is being stamped into the **hard** Somali soil. Well, it isn't a footprint, quite yet, but rather a series of bomb craters, where the lives of "**many**" civilians, according to news reports, have been summarily ended. U.S. bombing raids, **ostensibly** aimed at al-Qaeda fighters supposedly hidden among **native Islamic militias**, have succeeded in killing scores, albeit none of the three dudes we are allegedly after. That's right: we're bombing a country because we're after a terrorist trio – **Fazul Abdullah Mohammed**, the alleged mastermind behind the **1998 attacks** on the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, that killed 225 people, and accomplices **Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan** and **Abu Talha al-Sudani**. While the Pentagon refuses to confirm or deny whether any of these guys were killed in the attacks, you can bet we would have touted our success to the skies if they had gotten even one. On the other hand, at least **27 civilians** were killed in Afmadow, a town in southern Somalia. "My 4-year-old boy was killed in the strike," said Mohamed Mahmud Burale, who can hardly be expected to be grateful for his "liberation" at the hands of the U.S. and its **Ethiopian allies**.

Oh well, it's just another day in Washington's "**war on terrorism**."

If America is once again playing its role as world policeman, in this case we are clearly casting ourselves as the **Keystone Kops**. The *Washington Post* reports:

*"The Bush administration has been leading an international diplomatic effort to stabilize Somalia, including organizing an African peacekeeping force. It has called on leaders of Somalia's new transitional government to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement with moderate members of the Islamic leadership who are not seen as terrorist facilitators and who are supported by a significant segment of Somali clans."*

Unfortunately, **however**:

*"The Americans have gone for the jugular. The danger is that the high loss of life reported and the likelihood that many non-al-Qaeda sympathisers have been killed, including more moderate leaders of the defeated Union of Islamic Courts, could see the operation backfire spectacularly and unite Somalis against its new US-supported government."*

The Americans have gone for their own jugular, because this will come back to haunt them – indeed, the ghosts of the slain are already exacting their revenge in the form of a **developing** insurgency. Mogadishu is roiled by **protests**, and the premature celebration of a "**victory**" in Somalia – taken up by **the neocon set** as an exemplar of how to do it right – is being rapidly undermined by the intrusion of reality. Any day now, I expect President Bush to burble the equivalent of "**mission accomplished!**" Then I'll *know* we're up to our necks in another quagmire, this time in the Horn of Africa – the only region on earth that rivals the Middle East in the persistence and intensity of its continuous warfare.

It has the potential to become much worse than Iraq, however, albeit on a smaller scale. Because this time we're coming in on the heels of another foreign invader, Ethiopia, which is **largely Christian** (Coptic)

and historically **at odds** with the Somalis: indeed, the Somali-Ethiopian relations are almost as bad as Ethiopia's **longstanding loggerheads** with neighboring Eritrea. If World War II saw Ethiopia as the first exemplar of Axis aggression, the archetypal victim of imperialist aggression, since that time it has taken on the role of local bully and would-be hegemon, battling either Somalia or Eritrea on **seven** occasions – to say nothing of its own long drawn out civil war (1974-91).

In **Meles Zenawi**, Ethiopia's "President," we have a real winner, and I don't mean that in a good way. I put the scare quotes around his title because the Ethiopian electoral process is, shall we say, **flawed** – the first contest, boycotted by opposition parties, installed Zenawi in the office he had already occupied on an "interim" basis. The second time around, when he did face real opposition, Zenawi's party stole the election outright. Protests were stamped out with an iron heel, with Ethiopian troops firing on unarmed crowds: **193 were killed** and many more wounded.

Now a full partner in Washington's "war on terrorism," Zenawi's Ethiopia has one of the darkest human rights records in Africa: **just south of Darfur** [.pdf] the Ethiopians are conducting a campaign of systematic **ethnic cleansing** against dissident ethnic groups, such as the Anuak. In the desperately poor and violence-ridden **Gambella region**, and elsewhere throughout the country, Zenawi is conducting a terrorist campaign against his own people – yet he is now hailed as a great "anti-terrorist" fighter, both by the warlords of Washington and those of Somalia.

The absurdity and criminality of our policy in the Horn of Africa is underscored by the ascension of **Hussein Mohamed Aideed**, the son of the hated warlord – and America's nemesis – Mohamed Farah Aideed, **the villain** of the "**Black Hawk Down**" narrative. When daddy died, sonny boy inherited the old warlord's mantle, which was suddenly transmuted into the white robes of a heroic pro-American ally. The only difference between father and son being that Aideed the Younger emigrated to America, grew up in southern California, and joined the Marines before he returned to become Interior Minister in the "transitional government" now being installed into semi-permanence by the U.S. and Ethiopia. He's *our* warlord, a reality that recalls Roosevelt's infamous **remark** about Nicaraguan dictator **Anastasio Somoza**.


U.S. intervention is limited, as far as we know, to air strikes, but, as I pointed out **not so long ago**, the presence of American "boots on the ground" is only a matter of time, and probably not much time at that. Certainly we are positioned to directly intervene, what with the U.S. military base of operations in nearby **Djibouti**. As to whether we'll be seeing a "surge" against the developing Somali insurgency around this time next year – or sooner – is more than a matter of pure speculation.

Now is the time to cut through the rhetorical subterfuge engaged in by this administration, and its Democratic enablers, and ask ourselves if this is what we really want. This time, we have the option to reject a course that is every day being proven wrong, and destructive to American interests: as to whether we will have the courage and the presence of mind to make the right decision, I have my doubts.

They never learn, and that's why our foreign policy is a recurring nightmare. Unless the American people wake up in time, we are bound to repeat in East Africa the same mistakes we made in the Middle East, with similarly deadly consequences.

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