



15 Years After Black Hawk Down: Somalia's Chance?

HISTORY OF THE U.S. IN SOMALIA

In 1993, Somali militias shot down two U.S. helicopters and killed 18 American servicemen in a battle that also killed more than 1,000 Somalis. Since that day, U.S. involvement has been rooted in counter-terrorism efforts, barely factoring in the suffering of the Somali people.

In 2004, an Ethiopian-backed transitional government was instituted in Somalia. The government is feeble, faction-ridden, and corrupt. Moreover, this government did not include representatives of many Somali communities, and some Somalis left outside threw their weight behind another group: a network of Islamic courts, some of whose members have links to al Qaeda. In an attempt to capture a few terrorist suspects, the U.S. supported a group of warlords to attack the Islamists. The strategy backfired: the Islamists routed the warlords, and the fighting killed hundreds of innocent Somalis.

After the Islamists established a foothold in southern Somalia in mid-2006, the U.S. supported an Ethiopian invasion in December 2006 to dislodge the Islamists. The offensive was successful, but neither the Ethiopians nor the U.S. had a post-invasion plan. The Islamists and others launched an insurgency. As violence escalated, the Ethiopian counterinsurgency has often failed to distinguish between civilian and military targets. Thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands have fled Mogadishu.

U.S. engagement in the crisis has aggravated the situation, and Washington has made 3 critical errors:

1. Aligning itself so closely with Ethiopia, a historical enemy of Somalia
2. Backing the unpopular Somali transitional government
3. Failing to differentiate between resistance movements and real terrorists; the U.S. has provided the Islamists the opportunity to cast themselves as nationalists and liberation fighters, deepening their legitimacy and broadening their appeal

WHERE IS SOMALIA NOW?

Somalia is at a crucial crossroads between further descent into a civil war or an opportunity to reverse the decline through negotiations and internationally-supported state reconstruction, as the Prime Minister of the Transitional Federal Government just offered to develop a power sharing agreement to end the war. Currently, a small African Union force in Mogadishu protects the government, but not the population.

WHAT IS NEEDED: ENOUGH'S 3 PS?

Peace: The international community must support real dialogue for Somalia to have a chance at peace and bring an end to the crisis and the strengthening of an Islamist movement that could pose a grave regional and international threat.

Protection: Coinciding with the peace process, a negotiated withdrawal of Ethiopian forces and a peacekeeping force is needed to achieve peace. Only once a peace process is established could peacekeeping troops potentially play a constructive role.

Punishment: The U.N. Security Council should impose targeted sanctions against Somali leaders inciting violence, establish a commission of inquiry to investigate violations of international law, and refer the case to the International Criminal Court.