

In Somalia, a Reckless U.S. Proxy War

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Undeterred by the horrors and setbacks in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon, the Bush administration has opened another battlefield in the Muslim world. With full U.S. backing and military training, at least 15,000 Ethiopian troops have entered Somalia in an illegal war of aggression against the Union of Islamic Courts, which controls almost the entire south of the country.

As with Iraq in 2003, the United States has cast this as a war to curtail terrorism, but its real goal is to obtain a direct foothold in a highly strategic region by establishing a client regime there. The Horn of Africa is newly oil-rich, and lies just miles from Saudi Arabia, overlooking the daily passage of large numbers of oil tankers and warships through the Red Sea. General John Abizaid, the current U.S. military chief of the Iraq war, was in Ethiopia this month, and President Hu Jintao of China visited Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia earlier this year to pursue oil and trade agreements.

The U.S. instigation of war between Ethiopia and Somalia, two of world's poorest countries already struggling with massive humanitarian disasters, is reckless in the extreme. Unlike in the run-up to Iraq, independent experts, including from the European Union, were united in warning that this war could destabilize the whole region even if America succeeds in its goal of toppling the Islamic Courts.

An insurgency by Somalis, millions of whom live in Kenya and Ethiopia, will surely ensue, and attract thousands of new anti-U.S. militants and terrorists.

With so much of the world convulsed by crisis, little attention has been paid to this unfolding disaster in the Horn. The UN Security Council, however, did take up the issue, and in another craven act which will further cement its reputation as an anti-Muslim body, bowed to American and British pressure to authorize a regional peacekeeping force to enter Somalia to protect the transitional government, which is fighting the Islamic Courts.

The new UN resolution states that the world body acted to "restore peace and stability." But as all major international news organizations have reported, this year Somalia finally experienced its first respite from 16 years of utter lawlessness and terror at the hands of the marauding warlords who drove out UN peacekeepers in 1993, when 18 American soldiers were killed.

Since 1993, there had been no Security Council interest in sending peacekeepers to Somalia, but as peace and order took hold, a multilateral force was suddenly deemed necessary — because it was the Islamic Courts Union that had brought about this stability. Astonishingly, the Islamists had succeeded in defeating the warlords primarily through

rallying people to their side by creating law and order through the application of Shariah law, which Somalis universally practice.

The transitional government, on the other hand, is dominated by the warlords and terrorists who drove out American forces in 1993. Organized in Kenya by U.S. regional allies, it is so completely devoid of internal support that it has turned to Somalia's arch-enemy, Ethiopia, for assistance.

If this war continues, it will affect the whole region, do serious harm to U.S. interests and threaten Kenya, the only island of stability in this corner of Africa.

Ethiopia is at even greater risk, as a dictatorship with little popular support and beset also by two large internal revolts, by the Ogadenis and Oromos. It is also mired in a conflict with Eritrea, which has denied it secure access to seaports.

The best antidote to terrorism in Somalia is stability, which the Islamic Courts have provided. The Islamists have strong public support, which has grown in the face of U.S. and Ethiopian interventions. As in other Muslim-Western conflicts, the world needs to engage with the Islamists to secure peace.

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