

Somalia: Another CIA-backed coup blows up

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“The Ethiopian invasion, which was sanctioned by the US government, has destroyed virtually all the life-sustaining economic systems which the population has built for the last fifteen years.” Abdi Samatar, professor of Global Studies at the University of Minnesota, Democracy Now

Up until a month ago, no one in the Bush administration showed the least bit of interest in the incidents of piracy off the coast of Somalia. Now that’s all changed and there’s talk of sending in the Navy to patrol the waters off the Horn of Africa and clean up the pirates hideouts. Why the sudden about-face? Could it have something to do with the fact that the Ethiopian army is planning to withdrawal all of its troops from Mogadishu by the end of the year, thus, ending the failed two year US-backed occupation of Somalia?

The United States has lost the ground war in Somalia, but that doesn’t mean its geopolitical objectives have changed one iota. The US intends to stay in the region for years to come and use its naval power to control the critical shipping lanes from the Gulf of Aden. The growing strength of the Somali national resistance is a set-back, but it doesn’t change the basic game-plan. The pirates are actually a blessing in disguise. They provide an excuse for the administration to beef up it’s military presence and put down roots. Every crisis is an opportunity.

There’s an interesting subtext to the pirate story that hasn’t appeared in the western media. According to Simon Assaf of the Socialist Worker:

“Many European, US and Asian shipping firms – notably Switzerland’s Achair Partners and Italy’s Progresso – signed dumping deals in the early 1990s with Somalia’s politicians and militia leaders. This meant they could use the coast as a toxic dumping ground. This practice became widespread as the country descended into civil war. Nick Nuttall of the UN Environment Programme said, “European companies found it was very cheap to get rid of the waste.”

When the Asian tsunami of Christmas 2005 washed ashore on the east coast of Africa, it uncovered a great scandal. Tons of radioactive waste and toxic chemicals drifted onto the beaches after the giant wave dislodged them from the sea bed off Somalia. Tens of thousands of Somalis fell ill after coming into contact with this cocktail. They complained to the United Nations (UN), which began an investigation.

“There are reports from villagers of a wide range of medical problems such as mouth bleeds, abdominal hemorrhages, unusual skin disorders and breathing difficulties,” the UN noted.

Some 300 people are believed to have died from the poisonous chemicals.

In 2006 Somali fishermen complained to the UN that foreign fishing fleets were using the breakdown of the state to plunder their fish stocks. These foreign fleets often recruited Somali militias to intimidate local fishermen. Despite repeated requests, the UN refused to act. Meanwhile the warships of global powers that patrol the strategically important Gulf of Aden did not sink or seize any vessels dumping toxic chemicals off the coast.

So angry Somalis, whose waters were being poisoned and whose livelihoods were threatened, took matters into their own hands. Fishermen began to arm themselves and attempted to act as unofficial coastguards.” (Socialist Worker)

The origins of piracy in Somalia is considerably different than the narrative in the media which tends to perpetuate stereotypes of scary black men who are naturally inclined to criminal behavior. In reality, the pirates were the victims of a US-EU run system that still uses the developing world as a dumping ground for toxic waste regardless of the suffering it causes. (just ask Larry Summers) In fact, the dumping continues to this day, even though we have been assured that we’re living in a “post racial era” following the election of Barak Obama. Unfortunately, that rule doesn’t apply to the many black and brown people who still find themselves caught in the imperial crosshairs. Their lives are just as miserable as ever.

ETHIOPIA’S PLAN FOR WITHDRAWAL

In 2006, the Bush administration supported an alliance of Somali warlords known as the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) that established a base of operations in the western city of Baidoa. With the help of the Ethiopian army, western mercenaries, US Navy warships, and AC-130 gunships; the TFG captured Mogadishu and forced the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) to retreat to the south. Since then the resistance has coalesced into a tenacious guerrilla army that has recaptured most of the country.

The Bush administration invoked the war on terror to justify its involvement in Somalia, but their case was weak and full of inconsistencies. The ICU is not an Al Qaida affiliate or a terrorist organization despite the claims of the State Department. In fact, the ICU brought a high level of peace and stability to Somalia that hadn’t been seen for more than sixteen years.

Political analyst James Petras summed it up like this:

“The ICU was a relatively honest administration, which ended warlord corruption and extortion. Personal safety and property were protected, ending arbitrary seizures and kidnappings by warlords and their armed thugs. The ICU is a broad multi-tendency movement that includes moderates and radical Islamists, civilian politicians and armed fighters, liberals and populists, electoralists and authoritarians. Most important, the Courts succeeded in unifying the country and creating some semblance of nationhood, overcoming clan fragmentation.”

The Bush administration is mainly interested in oil and geopolitics. According to most estimates 30 per cent of America’s oil will come from Africa within the next ten years. That means the Pentagon will have to extend its tentacles across the continent. Washington’s allies in the TFG promised to pass oil laws that would allow foreign oil companies to return

to Somalia, but now all of that is uncertain. It is impossible to know what type of government will emerge from the present conflict. Many pundits expect Somalia to descend into terrorist-breeding, failed state for years to come.

The latest round of fighting has created a humanitarian disaster. 1.3 million people have been forced from their homes with nothing more than what they can carry on their backs. Over 3.5 million people are now huddled in tent cities in the south with little food, clean water or medical supplies.

According to the UN News Center: "Nearly half the population is in crisis or need of assistance....Continuing instability, coupled with drought, high food prices and the collapse of the local currency have only worsened the dire humanitarian situation in recent months. The UN estimates that 40 per cent of the population, are in need of assistance. In addition, one in six children under the age of five in southern and central Somalia is currently acutely malnourished." (UN News Center)

The war between the occupying Ethiopian army and the various guerrilla factions has steadily intensified over the last two years. Fighters from the ICU, Al-Shabaab and other Islamic groups have moved from the south to the vicinity of Mogadishu where fighting could break out at any time. It's "game-over" for Bush's proxy army and the transitional federal government. They cannot win, which is why the Ethiopian leaders announced a complete withdrawal of troops by the end of the year. By January 1, 2009, the occupation will be over.

In a recent Chicago Tribune article, "US Appears to be Losing in Somalia", journalist Paul Salopek sums it up like this:

"(Somalia) is a covert war in which the CIA has recruited gangs of unsavory warlords to hunt down and kidnap Islamic militants...and secretly imprison them offshore, aboard U.S. warships. The British civil-rights group Reprieve contended that as many as 17 U.S. warships may have doubled as floating prisons since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks...

"Somalia is one of the great unrecognized U.S. policy failures since 9/11," said Ken Menkhaus, a leading Somalia scholar at Davidson College in North Carolina. "By any rational metric, what we've ended up with there today is the opposite of what we wanted." (Paul Salopek, "US Appears to be Losing in Somalia" Chicago Tribune)

The CIA has done its job well. It's created a beehive for terrorism and the potential for another catastrophe like 9-11.

Currently, negotiations are underway between the guerrilla leaders and the TFG over a power-sharing agreement. But no one expects the talks will amount to anything. The moderate ICU may regain power but the country will still be ungovernable for years to come. At best, Somalia is a decade away from restoring the fragile peace that was in place before Bush's bloody intervention.

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