

Radical islamic influence in the nation of somalia and its threat to the united r...

[Society](#), [Terrorism](#)



Purpose

Today, Christianity and Islam are the religions of the world that are practiced by the first and second largest group of people, respectively (Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents, 2007). However, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world today (The List: The World's Fastest-Growing Religions, 2007). Are the wars of this era, which are mostly in the form of terrorism or instigated by it, only a means to establish the power of a religion? Being the center of the world's technological development and being acknowledged as a superpower of the current era, is it the United States' natural responsibility to ensure world peace at any cost?

Contrastingly, does the United States simply have its own interests in mind with its aggressive stance against Islamism—similar to its stance on communism—when it reacts to world issues?

This paper conducts a research on the spread of radical Islamism in African country of Somalia and analyzes the United States reaction to it. The purpose of conducting this research is to understand if the United States is threatened by the growth and spread of Islam in Somalia. Somalia is among the poorest and most unstable countries in the world today (Bruton, 2010). Since 1991, there has been no central government in the country, and the nation has been declared to be a “failed state,” which means a nation “utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community” (Osborne, 2002). The Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which is approved by the United States, the African Union, and the United States, controls only a part of the country (Bruton, 2010). Most of the

southern and central parts of Somalia are controlled by an Islamic extremist union called the Al Shabaab, which means “ The Youth” (Shinn, 2011). The Al Shabaab has learned most of its strategies from ill-famous Islamic extremist groups such as the Al Qaeda and the Taliban (Shinn, 2011). The union’s aim is to overthrow the TFG and to establish its authority over entire Somalia as well as the Somali-populated areas of Kenya and Ethiopia, and thus to establish an Islamic state (Shinn, 2011).

Thesis

The radical Islamic influence in Somali politics threatens the global political interests of the United States.

Introduction

The United States has been politically involved with Somalia since the Cold War era (Shoup, 2007). Although Somalia gained independence from the British and the Italians in 1960, it was still struggling to restore a sense of stability and security to the Somalis, as it was surrounded by the colonial nations of Ethiopia, Kenya, where several Somalis were a major part of the population (Lewis, 1988). Moreover, with its geographical prominence, as it is located in the very tip of the African subcontinent, that is, in the Horn of Africa, it is the entrance to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal (Lewis, 1988). Thus, its strategic importance and the threat of the Soviet Union gaining control in Africa led to the United States offering its friendship to Somalia (Lewis, 1988). However, this support ended in 1991 along with the United States-supported autocratic rule of General Siad Barre, when 18 American soldiers and thousands of Somalis were killed in the war against Barre’s

government, and the warlords took over the country (Bunting, 2011). As the United States supported Barre's government despite its anticommunist stance, it was naturally looking after its own interests of keeping its association with the strategically located Somalia. However, it cannot be denied that at point of time, the interests in the country were also humanitarian.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States realized the enormity of the threat posed to it by Islamist extremists (Shoup, 2007) (Bunting, 2011). This resulted in a reawakening of the American interest in Somalia, as the country was suspected to be the core location where Islamic extremism was instigated to arouse terrorist sentiments (Mazzetti, 2006). Thus, after 9/11 the largest remittance agency in Somalis, the Al-Barakat, which is also a mainstay of the country's economy, had its assets frozen by the United States and a large amount of money was lost (Bunting, 2011). In the wake of the "counterterrorism" efforts by the United States, several Somali organisations with links, empathetic or otherwise, to terrorist groups were declared as criminal organizations (Bunting, 2011). With the United States' actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, its operations directed from its Djibouti base lost focus, and Somalia's turmoil was furthered by the Djibouti influence (Bunting, 2011). Some local warlords in Somalia began using United States' dread for Al-Qaida for their own mission, and the United States reacted by setting up a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) division in the capital of Somalia, and forming the TGF (Bunting, 2011) (Scahill, 2011). The CIA also built underground prisons in the basement of

Somalia's National Security Agency (NSA) headquarters (Scahill, 2011). The conditions in which the prisoners were kept are now known to be against the humanitarian laws, and in many ways, the United States also violated the Geneva Pact (Scahill, 2011). Moreover, the United States backed the anti-Islamic warlords and assisted the Ethiopians to attack Somalia (Mazzetti, 2006). This act of collaborating with the Ethiopians, which is a nation ruled by a Christian government, and aiding Ethiopia in becoming a formidable military power in the African subcontinent is somewhat similar to the United States strategy of "fighting terrorism" after 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq (Shoup, 2007) (Bunting, 2011).

The codes of neutrality that are essential for the effective functioning of associations providing aid to Somalia have been nullified after the United States policy changed since 9/11 (Bunting, 2011). Unlike the situation of the 1990s, when the warring clans acknowledged the impartiality of aid-providing bodies, now the humanitarian efforts are viewed as the western efforts to establish its control over Somalia (Bunting, 2011). The Al Shabbab views on the western threat to Somalia have been widely reported in the media, and indeed, the outfit's mistrust is rooted in facts, as the United States has manipulated the neutral status of the humanitarian efforts (Bunting, 2011). The average Somali leads a life fraught with adversity, and it was predicted that 750, 000 could die before the end of 2011 (Bunting, 2011). Since, 2009, no western aid has reached most Al-Shabbab-controlled areas of Somalia, and even the World Food Program had to withdraw and leave several of its dependants hungry (Bunting, 2011).

Ethiopia's United States-supported attack on Somalia's resulted in the deaths of thousands (Shoup, 2007). This is a good enough reason for the United States to change its strategy in Somalia. Moreover, the country has apparently seen more than its share of misery cause by the atrocities of war and terrorism. While the United States support has been indeed useful in the past for the country, and has even contributed toward stabilizing it, it is essential that the approach toward Somalia be tempered with a thorough understanding of Somalia's political system. As Somalia exists in an intensely unstable state, strategy considerations associated with the country have to cautiously contemplated before they are put into action. Furthermore, the United States should ensure that it employs a highly sensitive nature in exercising diplomacy with the Somalis. This is important as there are certainly some powerful anti-American sentiments within the country, and the Somalis should be truly convinced that the United States is interested in restoring stability and peace to the country.

Conclusion

The lack of the United States' alliance after 1992 and its change in the alliance policy from the Cold War era has perhaps cost Somalia its stability and peace. Moreover, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States, the latter has reacted with antagonism and displayed jingoistic behavior. The American government's reaction to the threat posed by the anti-American sentiments of the Islamic extremists has cost a lot of lives. Somalia has become a combat zone for the " War on Terror" waged by the United States. This has resulted in an incompetent and disorderly policy

agenda toward the humanitarian efforts in Somalia. It is essential that the United States joins hands with the rest of the world, including humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations, to bring Somalia out of its crisis. In doing so, the United States has to set aside its prejudices and angst and has to take the onus of being one of the most advanced nations in the world today.

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