

Poof! The Magic Jihadist!
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In the 1979 animation adventure, *Puff the Magic Dragon and the Land of Living Lies*, the Dragon takes a little girl called Sandy, who has a vivid imagination and lies a lot to escape the problems of her troubled home, to the Land of the Living Lies, where she meets such famous fibbers as Pinocchio and the boy who cried wolf, and honesty is prosecuted:

Sandy: Puff, look!

Puff: That is the famous purple cow that no one has ever seen.

Sandy: And the pink elephant.

Puff: That some see too often.

Sandy: Who is that?

Puff: Kilroy. Always was there, and never was anywhere.

Prosecutor: Little girl, isn't it true you zipped the zipper when you snipped the snoo?

Sandy: I can't understand him.

Puff: Because he's the prosecuting attorney: a genuine flim-flam.

Prosecutor: And furthermore, you frightened the flip by frying the frisbee. Uh huh! Therefore I put to case that all the while the fluster flittered, your velocipede matriculated. DIDN'T YOU?

Puff: [eating homework] Arithmetic. Ketchup goes well with lower mathematics.

Sandy: Where are we?

Puff: Oh, a long way from your house, I'm sure.

Puff: Don't you think it's odd that I, a dragon, should eat homework for lunch? Of course it's odd, for it never happened. It was a falsehood, a canard, a prevarication. Oh, why beat about the bush. It was a simple lie told by a little girl named Sandy.

The jihadists are coming! The jihadists are here. Poof! They are gone. "It was a falsehood, a canard, a prevarication. Oh, why beat about the bush. It was a simple lie told by...."

And so the horned jihadists of the Horn of Africa have come and gone like the "purple cow that no one has ever seen" or "the pink elephant that some see too often." Across the dusty Ogaden border, we were told, lurked 8000-strong wild-eyed jihadists poised to overrun Ethiopia. "Mothers, hide your children! Fathers, come out with your pitchforks! Soldiers, put on your battle dresses and sling your guns. The jihadists are coming! The jihadists are

here!” Where are they? Here! There! Everywhere! Poof, the magic jihadists are gone! Darn, you missed the whole show!

The Fireman and the Jihadists

The current invasion of Somalia by Zenawi evokes images of the fireman who deliberately sets a house on fire and calls the fire department to come and put it out. As the firemen arrive, he is heroically fighting the blaze, earning the gratitude and admiration of his colleagues.

Zenawi invented a jihadist bogeyman in Somalia, exaggerated the Islamist *qua Al-Qaeda* threat and sought to cynically exploit the Bush Administration’s knee jerk reaction to terrorism. He sought to depict Somalia as the New Front in the ongoing global war on terror, and flimflam the U.S. Now, having routed the ragtag motley crew of Islamist militiamen perched atop pickup trucks toting 50 cal. machineguns, Zenawi hopes to present himself to the world as #1 *Al-Qaeda* hunter and terror fighter in the Horn of Africa, and *defensor pacis* (defender of the peace) to boot. But we all know he is a “foo fighter.”¹

The truth of the matter is that the whole jihadist menace in the Horn of Africa -- the “New Talibans” -- is a figment of Zenawi’s imagination. The jihadist bogeyman was invented to divert international attention from Zenawi’s massive and gross violations of human rights in Ethiopia. But nobody bought it, except perhaps Jendayi Fraser, the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, who seems to share Zenawi’s hallucinations about wild-eyed and fire-breathing terrorists lurking behind every desert rock in the Ogaden.

The year 2006 was not a particularly good one for Zenawi. His cherished image of “democratic reformer”, “new breed of African leader dedicated to democracy, human rights and development”, etc. was gone, forever. He became known as the tyrant, the butcher, the mass murderer, the thief, and so on. Undaunted, he kept on tyrannizing, butchering, murdering....

The Somali jihadist PR offensive was supposed to provide respite and cover during a period of extremely bad publicity for Zenawi. He was facing increasing international condemnation for his brutal suppression of opposition and dissent in the country. The kangaroo trial of the opposition leaders, civic society and human rights defenders provided comic relief to all (but not the defendants) as the prosecutor paraded screwy perjurers before the court. When their lies were exposed on cross-examination, the perjurers fingered lead prosecutor Kamal as their coach for lying. The Inquiry Commission charged to investigate the massacre of unarmed protesters in November, 2005, returned its verdict, albeit in a briefing to the U.S. House of Representatives: “Zenawi, your boys did it! Ain’t nobody here to blame, but you. You are responsible!”

¹ Imaginary fighters believed to have shadowed allied fighter planes during WW II.

So, the Somali jihadists bogeyman was a God-send (no pun intended) to create a convenient diversion from the adverse international attention, and hoodwink the locals. The initial PR for the diversionary campaign was handled in standard “Keystone Cop” style. At the outset, Zenawi denied having any military presence in Somalia. A few days later, he admitted dispatching some military advisors to provide technical assistance to the Western-backed Somalia Transitional Government (STG). Shortly thereafter, he admitted having a few hundred soldiers loitering outside of Baidoa to protect the STG from being overrun by the Islamists. As he launched a full scale offensive, he declared he was pursuing Islamists who were battle-ready to attack Ethiopia and destabilize the Horn region. He explained, “Ethiopia’s defensive measures are targeted only at this terrorist group.”

One can not overlook the subtextual attempt to inflame religious passions in the war rhetoric. Zenawi charged the Islamists are fundamentalists who want to govern Somalia according to Islamic law, and have recruited foreign Muslims to join their jihad against Ethiopia. The Islamists publicly invited support from the Islamic world by presenting themselves as victims of Ethiopian Christian Crusaders supported by Islamophobic Western countries. Sheik Hassan Aweys, the leader of the Shura Council, charged that Ethiopia was a Christian nation in a Muslim region of the world. Bishop Eiustatwos Gebrekristos, a top prelate of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, countered by accusing the Islamists of trying “to convert Ethiopia to Islam.” Fortunately, the rhetoric found little traction among both sensible and not-so-sensible people in the region.

The Fire Department and the Jihadist

The Bush Administration has been supportive of Zenawi’s adventures in Somalia, first tacitly (“we urge restraint on all sides”), and in the past week days, openly “Ethiopia has genuine security concerns about the Islamists”). The rationale for supporting the intervention is the old “Islamists/*Al-Qaeda*-terrorists-running-loose-in-the-Horn” canard. Two weeks ago, Jendayi Fraser claimed that Sheik Aweys and the Shura Council were “controlled by *Al-Qaeda* cell individuals.” She alleged that “the top layer of the courts are extremists to the core, they are terrorists and they are creating this logic of war.”

For the past 15 years, Somalia has been in a state of internecine warfare and anarchy. Somalia has the dubious distinction of being the archetypal “failed state²”. U.S. policy in Somalia (if there ever was one) during this period has been a dismal failure. In 1993, the U.S. undertook Operation Restore Hope with the aim of averting a humanitarian disaster from the factional fighting and general anarchy in Somalia. A year later, the U.S. made a

² The Crisis States Research Centre defines a “failed state” as a condition of “state collapse” -- e.g. a state that can no longer perform its basic security, and development functions and that has no effective control over its territory and borders. Among the various characteristics of such a state are: mounting demographic pressures, massive movement of refugees, legacy of vengeance, sharp and/or severe economic decline, criminalization or de-legitimization of the State, progressive deterioration of public services, widespread violation of human rights, rise of factionalized elites, intervention of other states or external actors.

hasty exit following the disastrous attempt to capture the warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed. 18 American troops were killed in the battle, and their bodies dragged in the streets of Mogadishu.

The bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 oriented U.S. policy in Somalia towards counterterrorism, particularly, the capture or killing of a small number *Al-Qaeda* operatives and Somali collaborators who are believed to be responsible for the attacks. Repeated U.S. requests to turn over these operatives -- the so-called core of the East African cell-- have fallen on the deaf ears of the Islamists. The CIA spearheaded the counterterrorism effort by financing secular Somali warlords and businessmen under the auspices of an organization known as the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism.

The CIA effort failed to neutralize the terrorists, but contributed to the ascendancy of the Islamic fundamentalists, who were presumably coddling these terrorists. The Islamists, apparently spooked by all of the covert and no-so-covert CIA activity launched their own preemptive strikes, overrunning their opponents in a relatively short time and capturing Mogadishu in June.

This past summer, the State Department took over the policy role for Somalia from the CIA (cloak and dagger was out) hoping to diplomatically engage the Islamist militias, whose victory was claimed to be a major setback to American policy in the region. A few days ago, President Bush declared that the first priority for the United States was to keep Somalia from becoming a safe haven for terrorists. Ho-hum, the cycle repeats itself!

The Truth About U.S. Foreign Policy in Somalia

It is apparent that the U.S. has not had a comprehensive policy for Somalia over the past 15 years. The ironic truth is that 1) the Bush Administration does not have a coherent policy for Somalia as a *failed state*, and 2) the two individuals who are responsible for developing such a policy, Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, and Assistant Secretary Jendayi Fraser (regarded by many informed commentators as lacking the authority and skill to craft a diplomatic solution), both African American, have manifested little interest or political will to deal with the Somali issue.

Recent comments by important American policy makers on U.S. policy (or lack of) are revealing. John D. Negroponte, the director of national intelligence, asserted that Somalia “has come back on the radar screen only fairly recently.” Sen. Joseph Biden (D-DE), the incoming Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joseph R. Biden Jr. had special criticism for the Bush administration: “By making a bad bet on the warlords to do our bidding, the administration has managed to strengthen the [Islamic] Courts, weaken our position and leave no good options. This is one of the least-known but most dangerous developments in the world, and the administration lacks a credible strategy to deal with it.”

Sen. Russell D. Feingold (D-WI), the incoming chairman of the Senate Africa Subcommittee criticized Rice for failing to develop a “comprehensive strategy” and give high-level attention to Somalia. He has promised to hold hearings in January, 2007. Representative Donald Payne (D-NJ) implicitly rejected the Administration’s policy on the Horn by “strongly condemning” Ethiopia’s “aggression and called for the immediate withdrawal of Ethiopian and all foreign forces from Somalia.”

Gen. John P. Abizaid, chief of the U.S. Central Command, following his recent meetings with Zenawi urged “restraint” ahead of the inevitable invasion. According to Zenawi, Abizaid “shared his experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan with us and he indicated that we have, to the maximum extent possible, avoid direct military intervention in Somalia.”

John Prendergast, an expert on Africa who served in Clinton’s National Security Council described the Bush administration’s Somalia policy as “idiotic.” He claimed U.S. support for Ethiopia’s military incursion has “incalculably strengthened” the Islamic Courts, rejuvenated Somali nationalism and “made our counterterrorism agenda nearly impossible to implement”.

Following the sweeping victory of the Islamists, Prendergast argued: “A successful counterterrorism effort would require the United States to pull the political and military threads together into a coherent strategy of broader engagement.... Long-term counterterrorism objectives can be achieved only by American investment in the Somali peace process. Yet the State Department has just one full-time political officer working on Somalia -- from neighboring Kenya, and he was just transferred out of the region for dissenting from the policy on proxy warlords.”

In response to the scathing criticism from all quarters, the administration announced the formation of the Somalia Contact Group to hold talks with representatives of the Islamic Courts, the STG, other regional actors and U.S. representatives.

Throughout the crisis, the State Department has gone to extraordinary lengths to help shape favorable American public opinion, including issuance of a memo advising: “The press must not be allowed to make this about Ethiopia, or Ethiopia violating the territorial integrity of Somalia.” The U.S. has sought to dispel the belief that United States is using Zenawi to launch a proxy war against the Islamists. Zenawi has denied any involvement of American soldiers or weapons in battles in Somalia. He says there has been a sharing of intelligence, perhaps a little assistance in pinpointing the exact location of Islamist militiamen for artillery practice.

Quick Flashback: Why did Zenawi Invade Somalia in the First Place?

Zenawi has asserted that he has a legal and moral obligation to support and defend the STG, which is purportedly recognized by the international community. Of course, the claim of a

“legal obligation” to invade a sovereign country is nonsense, and unsupported in international law; and there is no such thing as a “moral” obligation or justification for military invasion. (See e.g. ENDNOTES for international legal authority on the use of force.) If external military action needs to be taken against a sovereign country *legally*, that authority belongs to the U.N, first and foremost. Even intervention motivated by humanitarian concerns requires U.N action, except under the most extraordinary circumstances (which Somalia does not present). Indeed, in 1992, the Security Council authorized a United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) to aid in humanitarian relief.³ Other U.N.-sanctioned humanitarian interventions have taken place in Cambodia, in Haiti and in the various republics of the former Yugoslavia. But Zenawi has no authority under international law to invade Somalia on the grounds of “legal” and/or “moral” obligation.

Assuming, for the sake of argument, that Zenawi had a “legal and moral obligation” to invade Somalia, we should ask the following questions: 1) Does the defeat of the Islamists bring about an end to terrorism in Somalia and the Horn? 2) Will Zenawi’s “support” to the STG result in the reconstitution of Somalia as a sovereign nation (and not merely establish the STG as an Ethiopian puppet government)? 3) Will Zenawi’s support for the STG guarantee security, peace and territorial integrity to Ethiopia? 4) Does Zenawi’s “support” to the STG obviate the need for an international and/or regional peacekeeping force in Somalia? How long will Zenawi have to provide “support” to the STG before his troops vacate Somalia and let the Somalis sort things out on their own?

Is there a Possibility for a Negotiated Settlement to Put Humpty Dumpty together?

The familiar children’s rhyme goes:

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.*

The questions is: After 15 years of clan warfare, anarchy and chaos, is it possible to put Somalia back together? Can Zenawi’s horses (tanks) and troops put Somalia back together? Can the U.S.? Can anybody put Somalia back together?

The answer is: Only Somalis can put Somalia back together. On their own terms!

For well over a decade, there have been countless efforts at national unity and reconciliation in Somalia. None have produced any meaningful results. In 1993-1994, Ethiopia sponsored several peace conference to bring together the numerous competing factions to develop a

³ Security Council Resolution 794 (December 3, 1992).

consensus without much success. Efforts by the governments of Egypt, Yemen, Kenya, and Italy to bring the Somali factions together have equally failed. In 2002, Kenya organized the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference, which led to the establishment of the STG under the leadership of Mohammed Gedi, the government for which Zenawi has now taken conservatorship.

Quo Vadis Somalia?

Where do we go from here in Somalia?

First and foremost, all foreign troops must go, immediately withdraw from Somalia. That includes Ethiopian troops, Eritrean troops, if any, the motley crew of mujahadeen fighters, if any. The African Union has called for the “the withdrawal of all troops and foreign elements from Somalia.” Other countries and international organizations have made similar calls.

Second, diplomacy must be given priority over any military solution, including one imposed by Zenawi as a matter of “legal and moral” imperative. The Arab League and various neighboring countries have called for dialogue and negotiation among the various Somali factions. Even the U.S. supports a diplomatic solution. The Somalia Contact Group aims to hold talks with representatives of the Islamic Courts, the STG, other regional actors and U.S. representatives.

Third, U.N. Security Council Resolution 1725 which passed just a few weeks ago should be vigorously implemented and monitored so that “all Member States, in particular those in the region,...refrain from any action in contravention of the arms embargo and related measures.” This resolution also authorized an East African peacekeeping force to prevent the overthrow of the STG by the Islamic militias. With the exception of Uganda, few other countries have expressed in building a peacekeeping force for Somalia. Even Museveni seems to be retreating in the face of a conspicuous absence of enthusiasm for such a force. Nonetheless, control of the influx of arms into Somalia will be critical to the overall success of any diplomatic solution, but also very difficult to achieve. A recent U.N Security Council report has confirmed that Ethiopia, Eritrea and other countries have circumvented the international arms embargo imposed on Somalia since 1992⁴.

Learn from the American Experience of “Shock and Awe” and “Mission Accomplished” Syndrome

When the U.S. invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003, it adopted a strategy called “Shock and Awe”, based on the military doctrine of using overwhelming military might to destroy not

⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 733 (Implementing an Arms Embargo on Somalia).

only the material capabilities of the enemy, but also his will to fight and resist. Six weeks later on May 1, 2003, President Bush delivered a speech on the aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* and declared the end of major combat operations in the Iraq War. In the background was a large banner declaring: “Mission Accomplished.”

The parallels between Zenawi’s invasion of Somalia and Bush’s Iraq folly are manifest. It is easy to feel irrationally exuberant about a victory against a ragtag crew of militiamen toting rifles and machineguns mounted on pickup trucks. Although some of the defeated Islamists have cast off their uniforms and joined the civilian population in the face of the advancing Zenawi/STG troops, others have presumably fled to the south to make a last stand or carry on a guerrilla war. Wherever they may be and however many are left, they will continue to hover in the shadows (but not lurk behind every desert rock) as a reminder to the larger Somali population that Somalia is under occupation by her historical enemy – her nemesis - - determined to install a puppet government. The riots that broke out in Mogadishu at the sight of Zenawi’s troops should be an indication of things to come if Zenawi insists on staying in Somalia for long.

The bottom line is that Somalia has been spinning out of control for a very long time; and one must grudgingly admit that the Islamists brought about a measure of internal stability and a semblance of order unseen in Somalia for a decade and half. Zenawi’s problem is whether he will be the one to restart the centrifuge that will plunge Somalia back into the familiar abyss of clan warfare, chaos and anarchy, a land where life is short, nasty and brutish! We should all pray that the future of Somalia will not be a mirror of its past.

“We Will Not Let Mogadishu Burn!”

As Zenawi’s forces entered the Somali capital, he made a curious statement of special interest to history buffs. He said: “We will not let Mogadishu burn!”

In 64 A.D., when fire broke out among the shops lining the Circus Maximus⁵ in Rome, Emperor Nero played his violin from a distance and watched Rome burn. Historians blamed Nero for the disaster, insinuating that Nero started the fire so that he could bypass the Roman senate and rebuild Rome to his liking.

If Zenawi “will not let Mogadishu burn,” what plans does he have for it anyway? Perhaps a series of villas and pavilions set upon a landscaped park and a man-made lake right in the middle of Mogadishu?

Anyway, now that the jihadists have come and gone (Rah! Rah! Rah! They have gone, haven’t they?), along with the “famous purple cow that no one has ever seen and the pink elephant”, *could we please talk about the serious issues of human rights, release of*

⁵ Hippodrome or open air stadium for mass entertainment and games.

political prisoners, arrest and prosecution of the murderers of 193 peaceful protesters and 2500 Anuaks, ..., and that sort of thing?

You are invited to share your comments at: <http://almariamforthedefense.blogspot.com/>

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ENDNOTES

Article 2 (4) All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

Article 33(1) The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice.

Article 35 (1). Any Member of the United Nations may bring any dispute, or any situation of the nature referred to in Article 34, to the attention of the Security Council or of the General Assembly.

Article 37 (1). Should the parties to a dispute of the nature referred to in Article 33 fail to settle it by the means indicated in that Article, they shall refer it to the Security Council. (2) If the Security Council deems that the continuance of the dispute is in fact likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, it shall decide whether to take action under Article 36 or to recommend such terms of settlement as it may consider appropriate.

Article 4 -- The [African] Union shall function in accordance with the following principles:

- (a) sovereign equality and interdependence among Member States of the Union;
- (b) respect of borders existing on achievement of independence;
- (e) peaceful resolution of conflicts among Member States of the Union through such appropriate means as may be decided upon by the Assembly;
- (f) prohibition of the use of force or threat to use force among Member States of the Union;
- (g) non-interference by any Member State in the internal affairs of another;
- (i) peaceful co-existence of Member States and their right to live in peace and security;
- (p) condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments.