

SOMALIA, A REPEAT OF AFGHANISTAN?



Al-Shabab Fighters at a Military Graduation Ceremony

After Al-Shabab's recent attack in Somalia where 57 Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) were killed in their forward operating base (FOB) on the outskirts of Bulo-Marer town, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has expressed his disappointment regarding America's failure to support the UPDF with their

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). In military terms, UAVs are force multipliers and are advantageous in such scenarios but over the years, they have proven to be ineffective against an enemy like Al-Shabab.

Al-Shabab's ideological faith is indifferent to drone strikes, battlefield losses, or the death of its leaders, and its jihadi venture has no anticipated end date. In fact, according to Islamic text, it will go on till doomsday. If the suspected factors that led to the UPDF's defeat were due to lack of aerial support, corruption, undue panic or poor training, as Museveni has critically highlighted days after the attack, then perhaps America could have avoided the humiliating defeat in Afghanistan. However, the underlying issue is not one of military prowess or stratagem but the fact that the U.S. and allies are oblivious about the religious impetus that propel the Islamists, and overly dwelling on enemy's death toll only gives a false sense of accomplishment.

For the West and allies, Al-Shabab is like an elephant at the living room and they are appallingly incapable to remove the giant beast out of the way. In such a scenario, common sense dictates political settlement by means of dialogue and in this article, I will explain why the U.S. should engage Al-Shabab diplomatically as it did with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Despite the West's absolute support, Somalia will never be a fully functioning democracy due to its historical, cultural, and religious affiliation with political Islam. Islam first entered Somalia in the northwestern city of Zeila during Prophet Muhammad's lifetime and after 14 centuries, Somalis still regard Islam as an unwavering identity including the non-practicing ones, adhering it with fiery heart that is intolerant to ifs and buts. For instance, Somali women wear Hijab at the heart of the neoconservative white America like Tennessee, South Dakota etc. - a passion that is rare among the Muslims today. Somali culture is deep-rooted in Islamic values that are directly traced back to the guidelines set out by Prophet Muhammed. And for many, all hopes are riding on Al-Shabab's struggle to reinvigorate Islam, and to restore the tremendous religious history that shaped their social ideals and made them culturally outstanding, and due to this, the imported doctrine has a grim prospect in blossoming despite the U.S.'s unrelenting exertion.

However, Islam hardly resembles that of 7th century, and due to the accrual of superimposed alien philosophies, much of its social ethics have eroded. In Somalia, Islam has been waning since the secular constitution was introduced in 1961, and in Barre's (the deceased former dictator) Godless era, it shrunk to merely monotonous rituals, dead phrase that occasionally incite outward submission, and intellectual fulfilment that hardly produces a change. And presently, if the federal government's secular constitution is fully implemented, the Western social norms will prevail dying away the moral ethics of Islam. For example, former minister of information, Mareye, criticized Somalis' natural contempt to gays & lesbians, calling for a "social restructure" to weed out what he characterized as "cultural defects". I doubt that Mareye had malicious intents but due to blind imitation, he sees the Western lifestyle as a gateway to prosperity in express lane. Emulating foreign civilization unroots the historical correlation between the present and the past, and it demises the intellectual ability to think sovereignly or to plan the future within the context of their religious and cultural outlook. For instance, in a video, Ahmed Madobe, Jubbaland president, wore a thick scarf, the one you would wear in Alaska winter in midday Kismayo temperature, and obviously, the urge was not due to a frosty weather. !

Secondly, in East Africa it was predominately Somalis that uncompromisingly carried the banner for jihadi movements led by the likes of Ahmed Grang, Sayid Muhammed Abdulle Hassan and Sheikh Hassan Barsame, and it is this same religious spirit that brought into being Al-Ittihad, the Islamic Courts Union, and Al-Shabab. The common factor is that they all unyieldingly resisted what they deemed as a hostile crusade against their land and religion, a common trait that has proven obstinate to remove. It is the holy Book expressed in esteemed social standards and the Al-Shabab's complementing Sword that are hinderance to the U.S.'s democratization effort. This project has failed in Vietnam, and more recently, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and the likelihood of eradicating an adversary that deems death as a venerated religious milestone with the wish to shape the world according to Muhammed's divine scripture is remote. For U.S., Somalia is like a patient with a brain tumor beyond surgery, sitting idly by the bedside due to urging compassion does not improve patient's medical condition, and walking away with the gullible assumption that death will somehow finish off the matter is not feasible either, like Afghanistan, this dilemma needs time to sort itself out.

Lastly, the U.S. has the tendency to cross into foreign borders arrogantly but it doesn't have stamina to endure the war particularly if the adversary employs asymmetric warfare. Fighting in its home turf, Al-Shabab will wear them out with its wait-out strategy because no time exist in this religious expedition. It has walked away from Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively and the probability of that happening in Somalia is probable, besides, the 'War on Terror' had since become dull and ineffective. [Somalia needs order – the ability of the state to gain and monopolize the use of violence. It seems to me that only Al-Shabab has the capacity to ensure that. We should therefore leave Somalia and let Al Shabab take over like the Americans did with the Taliban in Afghanistan.](#)