

US out of Somalia!

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The US air strikes on Somalia on Tuesday 9th January represent an escalation by the US imperialist warmongers of their interference in the affairs of Eastern Africa. They had recently supported, if not instigated, the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in December, which drove the Islamist forces from Mogadishu: now they have decided to lend more practical support with air attacks on positions of the United Islamic Courts (UICs).

The UIC is waging a war against the US backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT), which had been established by several clan war lords and businessmen to 'preserve order'. In reality, the ARPCT was an armed front for the CIA, which was funding it to the tune of \$150,000 a month. The UIC defeated the ARPCT and caused the downfall of the weak TFG in a war between February and June 2006. The UIC held power in Somalia until December 2006 when Ethiopia invaded, after being given the go-ahead by the US state department.

The UIC was driven back and finally defeated in late December. However they have now turned to a guerrilla war to carry on the struggle against the imperialist backed government and their stooges in the Ethiopian military. The UIC now has bases in the south of the country but the north and central regions are swarming with Ethiopian tanks and, no doubt, disguised US 'military advisors'. The US has sent a flotilla of ships, including the US aircraft carrier USS Eisenhower, to the coast of Somalia, to carry out what it calls anti terror operations.

This is not the first time that US imperialism has had an interest in Somalia and Ethiopia. As far back as the cold war, the two rival blocs of the Soviet Union and USA flooded the region with weaponry, stoking up rivalry between Somalia and Ethiopia. Somalia was first a Soviet and then a US client state, with both superpowers in turn supporting the dictator Mohamed Siad Barre.

The media will portray this as 'just another' African war, using racist insinuations that it is the fault of the Africans who simply live in perpetual conflict. Socialists must point out that the real cause of so much of the fighting was the division of the continent by the colonialist west into states and 'protectorates'. The Somali people were subject to invasion, occupation and control by the French, British and Italians.

The British and Italians fought for control of Somalia in the Second World War, as the imperialist powers grappled for control of the African colonies and their resources. Somalia gained independence in 1960, but the death of the President in 1969 ushered in a military coup, which allowed Siad Barre, an officer in the army, to seize power. Despite calling himself Comrade Barre, and claiming to be a socialist, Barre proved to be nothing more than a brutal dictator, who crushed all political opposition and killed political enemies on a horrific scale.

The US saw in Barre a dictator that they could do business with, providing about 100 million dollars in economic and of course, military aid until 1989. Ethiopia was supported by the Soviet Union and the US wanted to ensure that the coast of the Horn of Africa and the possibility of naval control of the Gulf of Aden

did not fall entirely into the hands of the USSR. Even though the cold war ended, the tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia remain, often breaking out into armed conflict.

The defeat of Barre in 1991 left Somalia as a 'collapsed state' with weak or non-existent governments. Eventually a United Nations 'humanitarian' intervention in the south of the country - in fact an intervention led by US forces with Pakistani and Malaysian support - ended in humiliating failure when 18 US Rangers were killed in a raid in Mogadishu in 1993: which Hollywood turned into a victory in 'Black Hawk Down.' President Clinton was obliged to 'cut and run' the following year, rather as his predecessor Ronald Reagan had to do from Lebanon in 1983. The US Empire's punitive raids and occupations do not have a high record of success.

The UIC itself is a military political coalition of various tribal Islamic 'courts', which come from different clans and traditions, most belonging to Salafism which is a quite distinct form of 'fundamentalism', not the radical political Islamism which has its origins in the writings of Sayyid Qutb.

The organisation arose from the Sharia courts that were established in many parts of the country, especially the rural areas. Each court had an armed militia attached to it, which was responsible for administering justice and implementing the Sharia laws, it was the organisational uniting of these militias, and the religious judges that controlled them, into the UIC that formed a national organisation which could challenge the US-backed transitional government. The political aim of the organisation was to restore order in the crisis and conflict ridden nation, and establish a form of Sharia law. Naturally, revolutionary communists totally oppose a society ordered on 'revealed' scriptures against which there is no appeal and whose interpretation is in the hands of what amounts to a clerical caste.

However, it would be simplistic to describe the entire UIC as 'militant Islamists', even though the US government and racist newspapers do so. Because the UIC is a coalition it contains both relatively liberal forces and more hard line fundamentalist organisations and tendencies. The US has argued that the UIC has links to Al-Qaeda, in particular to an Al-Qaeda cell that it holds responsible for the 1998 attacks on US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, which killed over 250 people and wounded thousands of others. The UIC vigorously denied this.

Since then, the USA has sought to justify intervention into Somalia within the framework of anti terrorism, and since 2001, as part of its 'war on terror'. However no less a personage than the former US ambassador and special envoy to Somalia in 1994-5 Dan Simpson has said: 'The idea that Mogadishu is a nest of al-Qaeda adherents is a fantasy sold to the United States by clever Somali warlords, always adept at working scams to get money for arms.'

Thus the claims that the US Air Force AC-130 gun ships are taking out al-Qaida operatives is a cynical lie and major civilian casualties are reported. However the USA certainly does have major strategic interests in the region. In late 2002 the US established a 1,800-strong Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa based at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti, which also hosts a large French air and ground forces base and a German naval base. The US gives more aid to Djibouti than to any other country in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The UN monitoring group for Somalia published a report in November which claimed that the UIC was receiving weaponry, military training and logistical support from several countries and organisations around the region, including Iran, Syria, Djibouti and Hezbollah. The UIC clearly represents to these governments and movements an anti-imperialist force in the region that is fighting against the US backed clan lords of the previous government.

That is why the US has taken such a keen interest in the situation in Somalia, they see the defeat of the

UIC as a way of defeating the proxy allies of Iran and Hezbollah. They want to avenge the defeat that Hezbollah inflicted on Israel over the summer of 2006 and to maintain pressure against the continued Iranian drive to develop its nuclear programme, in the face of international opposition and US and Israeli threats.

Workers should not support the actions of the US and their allies in Ethiopia. Their aim is to 'stabilise the region' which, for the imperialists, means crushing any movement or force which dares to oppose their political and military hegemony. The Somali government is plainly a puppet of the Ethiopians and the USA, which could never have been installed without their tanks and aircraft and will not maintain itself without the ever-greater subordination of the country to imperialism.

Ethiopia has plainly offered itself as a regional gendarme for Bush and his 'war on terror'. There is not the slightest doubt that the people of Somalia will, more and more, rise in resistance to this occupation of their country. The workers and anti capitalist movement worldwide must condemn in the strongest terms the US-backed Ethiopian invasion and support unconditionally the resistance to it whether this comes from UIC Islamists or 'tribal war lords' and despite the fact that we cannot support their political and social programme.

The people of Somalia alone have the right to decide on the political future of their country and to do so all foreign troops and imperialist advisers must be driven from there. The global antiwar movement must mobilise to call for the immediate withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from Somalia and the total withdrawal of the US fleet and its warplanes from the entire region.

? US and Ethiopian forces out of Somalia

? Victory to the Somali resistance

? All imperialist forces ? French and German as well as American out of the region.

? Down with the 'war on terror' and its godfathers, Bush and Blair

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