

U.S. must develop a Somalia strategy

Last month, the Bush administration missed its congressional deadline to produce a report on U.S. policy in Somalia. This failure is disappointing, baffling — and dangerous.

I applaud the administration's East African Counter-Terrorism Initiative, which recognizes that there are real threats in Somalia. We know that al-Qaida has used Somalia as a safe haven and training ground. We know that some of the more troubling actors on the international scene are sometimes the only ones involved in providing basic services to people in parts of Somalia — such that parents there can send children to an extremist school or to no school at all. But the East African Counter-Terrorism Initiative only focuses on the states around Somalia, not on Somalia itself. Shouldn't the United States get in the game, work toward order and stability, and compete for these hearts and minds? Shouldn't we have a policy toward Somalia?

I raised this issue at a hearing I chaired in early 2002, and confirmed my fear that we have no real strategy. I have asked about it since at hearings and in meetings. There have been no real answers.



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For two years in a row, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has approved legislation containing a provision that I authored calling for a Somalia strategy, but no such strategy has been shared with us. I worked with congressional appropriators to ensure that they called for a report — due July 23 — on our strategy in Somalia when they passed last year's foreign operations appropriations bill. My concern is not simply about the administration missing the deadline. It is about the fact that the United States has been failing to address this issue for years, even after the horrifying wake-up call of Sept. 11.

This is all the more disappointing as the failure to produce a viable strategy for U.S. policy in Somalia comes just as the 9/11 Commission's report has underscored the importance of doing just that. The 9/11 Commission report documents al-Qaida's history in Somalia and goes on to explicitly identify Somalia as one of a handful of places where experts believe terrorists are most likely to find sanctuary and base their operations. The commission's recommendation is clear:

"The U.S. govt. must identify and prioritize actual or poten-

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tial terrorist sanctuaries. For each, it should have a realistic strategy to keep possible terrorists insecure and on the run, using all elements of national power."

Somalia is perhaps the world's most apt example of a failed state. Our strategy toward Somalia cannot be limited to batting down immediate threats — it should also be about preventing more threats from emerging by helping to bring lasting stability to this highly unstable place. That entails building solid relationships, gaining access to solid information and giving Somali parents and youth a reason to feel some hope for their future. We should develop policies today with the aim of ensuring that our children will not face threats from the Horn of Africa in the years to come. We must, as the 9/11 Commission advised, prevent

the continued growth of terrorism.

I am told that perhaps a Somalia report will be produced and delivered to Congress over the next few months. I hope so. We cannot continue to bury our heads in the sand; we cannot continue to operate without any real foreign policy when it comes to this strategically located country that is home to millions of Muslims coping with insecurity and deprivation every day.

It is not easy to develop a strategy for engaging Somalis and working to create a future in which Somalia is not a source of chaos or an attractive haven for terrorists.

It is not easy, but it is necessary.

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