

Black America should offer Somalia support

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Somalia is an orphan of the Cold War. A toy played with by the Soviet Union and the USA, Somalia was invaluable during the heated contention between the two superpowers. Converting to an ally of the USA in the mid 1970s after years of proclaiming itself an example of "scientific socialism" on the east coast of Africa, the regime of Siad Barre was in actuality an authoritarian client state held together through repression and U.S. support.

The end of the Siad Barre regime coincided with the end of the Cold War, and as Somalia collapsed into clan-icide violence, most of the non-African world could have cared less for what was unfolding. The disintegration of the Somali state was countered roughly a year ago with the rise of a movement called the Union of Islamic Courts, a Taliban-like movement indigenous to Somalia that proclaimed an interest in ending the violence and unifying Somalia through a right-wing Islamist philosophy.

Regardless of one's opinion of the Union of Islamic Courts (and I happen to not have a favorable opinion of them), there was a several month reprieve from much of the criminal violence. As I noted in an earlier commentary, there was also no evidence of ANY connection between the Union of Is-

lamic Courts and the Islamic fascists of Al Qaeda.

The decision of the Ethiopian government to invade Somalia, allegedly in support of the very isolated provisional government of Somalia and in opposition to the Union of Islamic Courts, was a fateful one, and one that we in Black America should not avoid discussing. It is evident now that the Ethiopians, despite their alleged concern regarding supposed Somali separatists and Eritrean agents, would never have invaded Somalia had they not received a green light from the Bush administration. Shortly after the invasion, U.S. forces attacked an alleged Al Qaeda base in Somalia, but, once again, no proof was ever offered regarding who was being attacked. What did become public, however, was that civilians were among those killed in the attack.

Somalia is at war, once again. After an initial routing of the forces loyal to the Union of Islamic Courts, a vicious guerrilla war has unfolded, and it appears that the Ethiopians are being drawn in deeper and deeper. Rather than approach the chaos of Somalia as a political problem, the Ethiopian government, like their Bush administration puppet-masters, have treated it as a military problem.



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The intervention completely ignored long-term hostility between the Somalis and Ethiopians, and assumed that through sheer military force, decades of distrust could be removed and stability introduced. Quite the opposite has taken place.

As has too often happened in the post-apartheid era, we in Black America are strangely

silent regarding events in Africa and, in this case, in Somalia. When there are no White people directly involved, we seem to lose our bearings or feel that it is not up to us to comment one way or the other. But here is a situation where the USA has decided to further muck up a very complicated regional issue through encouraging an invasion. Should not we, Black America, be concerned about this? Should we not be prodding the Bush administration to pull back from further ridiculous adventures that tear apart already fragile situations?

Somalia, much like Darfur in the Sudan, is a situation that demonstrates the absolute need for an effective African Union. Somalia represents a country-specific crisis, as well as being part of a major regional tension. The forces within Somalia have been unable to resolve their clan-icide and need external

honest brokers to assist. The Ethiopian invasion was/is not assistance, but rather more akin to kerosene on hot coals.

The Somali crisis is also a part of a regional tension that involves conflicts between Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Sudan, Djibouti and Somalia. The USA has displayed little interest in helping to resolve these crises, though it did play a role in the north/south civil war in the Sudan (probably due, at least in part, to the oil in the southern Sudan). Encouraging the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, rather than paving the way toward regional reconciliation, was an act of recklessness that could result in the expansion of the fighting. The recent attack on the Chinese oil facility in Ethiopia by the Ogaden secessionists may be a new act in this on-going and potential escalating drama.

The voice of Black America, through our various vehicles, including but not limited to the Congressional Black Caucus, the NAACP, etc., must be turned up to speak out on these issues. We should also offer whatever support we can to those organizations that are seeking peace, justice and regional solutions to these ongoing conflicts. As we are seeing, in this globalized world, few conflicts are any longer local.

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Did Barack Obama lie about damaging comment?

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

This caught us by surprise.

The *Washington Post* quotes Barack Obama: "In Chicago, sometimes when I talk to the Black chambers of commerce, I say, 'You know, what would be a good economic development plan for our community would be if we make sure folks weren't throwing their garbage out of their cars.'"

First of all, this sounds very derogatory a la Amos 'n Andy or Stepin' Fetchit. Our chambers have sound and progressive economic development plans, and they are far more intricate than stopping litter. Second and most importantly, Senator Barack Obama refuses to meet with any of the Black chambers of commerce.

There are 21 Black chambers of commerce in the state of Illinois, which is the most for any state in the nation. They are well run, hardworking and dedicated to the economic development of Black communities through-

out the entire state. They are respected by their Governor, the entire Illinois Legislative Black Caucus and the powerful Chicago political machine.

However, they get no props from Senator Barack Obama. He appears to despise Black chambers of commerce.

There are 100 senators on Capitol Hill and the National Black Chamber of Commerce can make appointments with 99 of them. "Brother Man" refuses to allot time while we interact with the leadership of the Senate on a daily basis. I guess it's the syndrome: "The White man's ice is colder." Yes, I think it is clinical.

The best example of his problem happened in New Orleans last July at our 14th annual conference.

It was co-incidental that three U.S. sena-



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tors were in the area, Sens. John Kerry, Mary Landrieu and Barack Obama. Two of them, Kerry and Landrieu, jumped at the opportunity to visit our conference.

In fact, Sen. Kerry gave an inspiring keynote address while Sen. Landrieu was eloquent with her welcoming remarks. They stayed one and a half hours networking with

chamber executives and entrepreneurs from around the nation.

Where was Barack? He refused to come. He actually peeled off from their touring party while the other senators met with us. He just couldn't do it, even though 15 Black chambers from Illinois were there.

At first, we thought it might be a heritage thing. He isn't a descendent of slaves, sharecroppers, or a victim of Jim Crow, like us. But, no, that can't be it because he will run from the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, an affiliate of ours, in like fashion. The next time he goes to Kenya, he might want to allot 15 minutes with them.

They will tell him that the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act is flawed with serious loopholes. China brings in raw materials, such as cotton, and produces fabrics to be sold to U.S. companies tariff free under the AGO act. This assault has killed jobs for hundreds of thousands of African workers and has decimated agri-business in various nations, including Kenya. It's kind of insulting to go over there, smile and give out some cheers but be brain dead on the economic issues.

If Sen. Obama ever really decides to speak to any of the Illinois Black chambers, he had better come correct. The topics will include:

Tax Incremental Financing, or TIF, for neighborhood developments; the \$280 million in annual contracts the Chicago Housing Authority denies local Black-owned businesses; the front scandals at O'Hare Airport that deny real Black-owned franchises. Another topic will be the terrific job the Black chambers have done in Central Illinois by employing every Black contractor at 100 percent capacity on Illinois' highway projects (this should be expanded statewide). Other topics will cover the opportunities along the rebuilding of the Dan Ryan Expressway in Chicago and restructuring and improving our dismal school system. It can go on and on, but be assured it will be real business. It won't be about "throwing their garbage out of cars."

We don't need him! We are doing fine and making great strides.

The NBCC accounts for more Black dollars in the Gulf rebuilding effort than the federal government. We are providing opportunities at every level of the American economy. The NBCC is the largest Black business association in the world, and no one senator who has a phobia about meeting a group of Black business persons is going to stop us.

The Illinois State Black Chamber just took 60 Black business owners to the capital, Springfield, and met with the Illinois Legislature to discuss a business agenda. We are having proud moments and great successes.

He has a problem, but it is his problem, not ours. Let's pray for him.

Senator, you don't have to meet with us; but don't say you do, when you don't. We don't need the lies or the jive.

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versal healthcare for all Americans, increasing access to preschool programs, expanding affordable housing and either safeguarding workers' rights or expanding jobs. Each candidate has a different approach to protecting the Social Security Trust and dealing with the Bush tax cuts that mostly benefit the wealthy.

Although it's still early in the campaign season, it's not too early to begin addressing this critical issue.

There are 37 million people living in poverty, about 13.7 percent of the U.S. population, according to the Census Bureau. The poverty rate declined every year of the

Clinton administration, from 15.1 percent in 1993 to 11.3 percent in 2000.

However, it has increased every year under George W. Bush, who has diverted large sums of money to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

After tougher work requirements imposed by Bill Clinton, a Democrat, and the hardening of public attitudes toward the poor under the Republican Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush administrations, this is an ideal issue that could galvanize bipartisan support. However, we must first get the leaders to follow their followers.

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