

WHY WE CAN'T SAVE MOHAMED OSMAN MOHAMUD

Remember how Mohamed Osman Mohamud's father, Osman Barre, called the FBI in hopes they might help him turn his son away from extremism? Instead of helping, they sent informant after informant after him, to catch him in a terrorist sting.

FBI success story and human and societal failure!

Will McCants has the story of a new, laudable effort to pool funds and invest in countering extremism rather than killing it, largely by getting funds to NGOs in affected countries.

But it won't help someone like Osman Barre, who worries that his son is getting enthralled with violence. Because donors are worried that if they help a Mohamed Mohamud and he does attack something, they'll be charged with material support for terror.

Although it represents perhaps the most important part of CVE, most governments and NGOs have been leery of trying to turn around young men and women who have expressed support for terrorist organizations – and are thus in prime positions to be recruited – but have not broken any laws. This is because they worry about violating laws against support for designated terrorist organizations. For example, a government development agency or an NGO will not want to put an al-Shabab fanboy – even a law-abiding one – in their programs for fear of being seen as aiding a terrorist group. And, even they decide it's acceptable to try and reform the al-Shabab fanboy, they risk huge political backlash if he later engages in terrorism.

A cynic might suggest the material support laws – and the Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project decision that held even well-designed support might merit criminal penalties – is set this way to generate a continued supply of FBI success stories.