

TIME TO PULL OUT OF SOMALIA

(Updating *Backgrounder* No. 922, "To Save the Starving, Internationalize the Peacekeeping Force in Somalia," December 15, 1992)

Operation Restore Hope, George Bush's well-intentioned mission to relieve starvation in Somalia, has gone badly off track. What was supposed to be a limited mission, in the words of the President, "to open the supply routes, to get the food moving and to prepare the way for a [United Nations] peacekeeping force to keep it moving," has turned into an open-ended military intervention. The mission now, according to Defense Secretary Les Aspin, is the economic and political reconstruction of Somalia. This is an objective for which American troops are ill-suited and which is unachievable given the lack of organization and leadership of the U.N. force.

Fifteen Americans have died in Somalia so far; more surely will perish if President Bill Clinton stays the present course. The question must now be asked: Are the loss of American lives and the damage to U.S. credibility caused by the failed Somalia operation justified?

FROM PEACEKEEPING TO PEACEMAKING

The Clinton Administration is taking its lead from the U.N. in defining its policy toward Somalia. The United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) follows the guidelines of U.N. Security Council Resolution 814.¹ This calls for the U.N. to rebuild Somalia's government, reestablish the essential elements of its national economy, and develop an adequate system of justice and police to maintain order. In response, State Department official David Shinn has spoken of "basically re-creating a country" in Somalia,² while U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine K. Albright has suggested that it is necessary to raise Somalia from a failed state into an emerging democracy.³

Meanwhile, U.N.-sponsored talks on national reconciliation, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, have ground to a halt. The U.N. declared that General Mohamed Farah Aideed is ineligible to participate because of his June 5 attack on U.N. forces, which killed 24 Pakistani peacekeepers. Progress in communities other than Mogadishu has been more encouraging, though it remains spotty and peace agreements in places like the southern city of Kismayu remain fragile. There are still too many weapons in the hands of irresponsible partisans, and security comes only at the end of a gun. Although the U.N. envoy, Admiral Jonathan T. Howe, has spoken of an eighteen-month timetable for the creation of a democratic government in Somalia, U.N. officials have planned for little more than to capture Aideed.

1 The Unified Task Force (UNITAF) stage of the U.S. military involvement in Somalia, which was limited to providing sufficient security to relieve the famine, technically lasted from December 3, 1992 until March 26, 1993, when the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 814.

2 "U.S. Troops to Remain in Somalia," *The Washington Post*, August 11, 1993, A1.

3 "Yes, There is a Reason to Be in Somalia," *The New York Times*, August 10, 1993, A19.

Despite the significant commitment by the U.S., including over 20,000 U.S. troops, order has not returned to Somalia. Somalia remains awash in arms, with Aideed having access to more than enough weapons to make war on the U.N. In fact, security in Mogadishu is worsening. Some 12,000 U.N. peacekeeping troops stationed in the Somalian capital are now rendered ineffective, restricted to their compound by partisans of Aideed, who have taken recently to engaging U.N. troops in full-scale battle using anti-tank weapons and land mines.

It is time for Washington to realize that its Somalia policy is badly off track. Thus the Clinton Administration should:

- ✓ **Withdraw the some 5,400 American combat and combat support troops from the United Nations operation in Somalia.** The famine in Somalia has ended. This year's harvest is adequate to feed the country. As a result, foreign donors have abandoned food relief efforts and shifted much of their attention to such rehabilitation efforts as road construction. The humanitarian job in Somalia is complete; the U.S. mission is accomplished.

The Clinton Administration's policy is placing American troops in Somalia in an awkward and dangerous position. They are operating without clear objectives, and are further constrained by Aideed's non-conventional tactics, including the use of human shields. U.S. forces recently engaged a crowd of largely unarmed civilians in response to fire coming from within. This prompted Italian Defense Minister Fabio Fabbri to comment that "to shoot women and children is the antithesis of a humanitarian mission." Fabbri is right. Such incidents as this raise serious questions about the effectiveness of President Clinton's peacekeeping policies.

Responding to the August 8 deaths of four American servicemen in Mogadishu, Clinton said that one of the U.S objectives in supporting UNOSOM II is to "preserve the credibility of peacekeeping in Somalia and around the world." However, the U.S. operation in Somalia has greatly damaged the image of the U.N. and perceptions of its ability to manage crises. Furthermore, the U.N. operation in Somalia is peacemaking, not peacekeeping: an armed and aggressive intervention into a civil conflict in which the U.N. ends up choosing sides. As UNOSOM II continues to flounder, this failed notion of peacemaking will continue to suffer.

If the U.S. remains in Somalia, U.S. credibility will suffer as well. Allies sharing legitimate security interests with the U.S., such as Great Britain, will come to question America's judgment in determining its true security concerns.

The U.S. has made a significant and noble contribution to ending the famine in Somalia: over \$1.5 billion has been spent and American lives have been lost. To give the UNOSOM II mission even a chance of long-term success would require an enormous sacrifice, considerably more than the \$44 million a month the U.S. is now spending in Somalia. It also would cost more American lives. Should peace be achieved in Somalia, Washington should be open to supporting a true peacekeeping mission, but the current peacemaking in Somalia is a deadly and fruitless course for the U.S.

- ✓ **Acknowledge General Aideed as a legitimate Somalian political figure.** The U.N. is unwilling to deal with Aideed. Admiral Howe has established a cash reward for information leading to his capture. The American Special Forces sent to Somalia in late August are seeking to capture, if not kill, Aideed, with State Department official David Shinn declaring that he "must be removed from the equation."

The longer Aideed eludes capture, which may be a very long time, the stronger becomes his stature among the Somalian people. There is a long Somalian tradition of resisting invaders, upon which Aideed is playing. Aideed's stature will be further enhanced if he continues carrying out his increasingly aggressive attacks on the U.N. forces.

Alternatively, Aideed's capture could create an explosive situation in Mogadishu. His partisans, an effective and well-organized guerilla force, would likely continue their opposition to

the U.N. under different leadership. Moreover, another warlord may arise, and his supporters would surely assert themselves in the wake of Aideed's demise.

Aideed is no democrat. Yet he possesses a certain political legitimacy and support. Given that there are few democrats in Somalia, and that negotiations are stalled, Aideed should be brought back into the U.N.-sanctioned political fold for the sake of establishing political stability in Somalia. Thus, U.N. Security Council Resolution 837, authorizing his arrest, should be reversed.

- ✓ **Remove Admiral Jonathan T. Howe as the special United Nations envoy to Somalia.** With the elimination of the U.S. military presence in Somalia, there is no need for an American to be the U.N.'s chief representative there. Admiral Howe's diplomatic assignment has been greatly complicated by the lack of clear U.S. objectives. He also has become closely identified with the U.N.'s hostility toward Aideed. Howe reportedly was acting on his own when he offered the bounty of \$25,000 now out for Aideed's capture, thus damaging his credibility as a negotiator with Aideed.
- ✓ **Commit to supporting a legitimate peacekeeping operation only after peace is established through negotiations.** The U.S. should help foster negotiations leading to a political resolution of the Somali civil war. This may involve the appointment of a high-level envoy with the stature and experience to speak with authority for the U.S. Once a settlement is reached, and a cease-fire is in place, the U.S. should support traditional U.N. peacekeeping in Somalia.
- ✓ **Avoid open-ended military involvement in future humanitarian operations.** Hopes that U.S. troops could intervene in Somalia without becoming party to the armed conflict have proven wrong. Humanitarian crises do not occur in a political vacuum. For that reason, the U.S. and the U.N. could not remain neutral parties in the Somali civil war. Instead, they are at now war with the forces of General Aideed. This is the inevitable result of an open-ended and poorly conceived military operation that ignores political realities. The lessons of Somalia offer sober warning for future peacekeeping operations.

CONCLUSION

Military force is a blunt instrument. The Clinton Administration should remember this fact when the next humanitarian disaster arises and pressure builds for America to "do something." Absent security interests and the will to use its military force to impose a political solution, America is best served by avoiding such well-intentioned but ultimately misguided pleas. The U.S. can and should intervene militarily when its interests are threatened, but squandering U.S. power is very unwise. The U.S. should become involved in U.N. peacekeeping operations only after peace has been established and U.S. forces are needed only to enforce an existing settlement.

The U.S. has done a great deal for the Somali people. As a result, the Somali famine has all but ended. But to go beyond the original mission in Somalia—to begin nation-building—will only force the U.S. deeper into a quagmire, needlessly costing American lives. Its humanitarian mission accomplished, the U.S. should withdraw its troops from Somalia, while helping to foster a political solution to its crisis.

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