

MANAGING COMPLEX EMERGENCIES

CHAPTER 6. SOMALIA: DID LEADERS OR THE SYSTEM FAIL?

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Introduction⁶⁹⁶

Fifteen years ago the United States suffered a major foreign policy reversal that has never been fully explained. In late 1992, President George Bush decided to intervene in Somalia to prevent the mass starvation of millions of Somalis. Fractious warlords were obstructing the rapid distribution of international aid to the needy in the midst of widespread drought and economic collapse. U.S. forces performed admirably and ensured sufficient food distribution. Eventually, the mission was passed to a United Nations command, which embarked on a more ambitious reconciliation and reconstruction agenda and soon encountered stiff armed resistance. After several months of low-level conflict, U.S. special operations forces were re-deployed to Somalia to take the lead in dealing with the most troublesome warlord, Mohammed Farah Aideed. The assumption was that if U.S. forces

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696 This case study is adapted from a chapter in *United States Special Operations Forces* by David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, Copyright © 2007 Columbia University Press. It is reprinted with the permission of Columbia University Press.

could capture or eliminate Aideed, the remaining warlords would agree to negotiate a new government with the United Nations.

Unfortunately, the mission ended disastrously. On October 3, 1993, U.S. special operations forces were pinned down in a protracted engagement with Aideed's gunmen after a U.S. helicopter was shot down by a rocket-propelled grenade. After inflicting close to one thousand casualties on the enemy and losing eighteen soldiers, the special operations forces were extracted by a tardy UN relief force. The Clinton administration negotiated for the release of the lone U.S. soldier captured by Aideed's supporters and withdrew American military forces. The proposition that Aideed was the singular problem preventing national reconciliation was tested three years later when Aideed died in Somalia's continuing orgy of factional fighting. Aideed's radio station in south Mogadishu quickly announced that Aideed's clan had formed a committee to select a new leader, and that the clan militia should "remain watchful and defend their rights."⁶⁹⁷ The fighters took heed, and the internecine conflict continued despite Aideed's death. Some argue, however, that the factional warfare persisted because the steady hand of the United Nations and U.S. forces had long since departed in the wake of the October 3 disaster.

The Somalia intervention is an interesting case study for the Project on National Security Reform (PNSR) for several reasons. First, as many have noted⁶⁹⁸, the failed intervention had momentous consequences. It terminated the nascent Clinton administration's

697 CNN World News, "Somali faction leader Aidid dies," August 2, 1996; web posted at: 8:30 a.m. EDT; available at <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9608/02/aideed/>.

698 The consequences of the intervention in Somalia have been extensively discussed and debated. In their memoirs Clinton cabinet members describe how Somalia affected future operations, and numerous commentators linked the failure in Somalia to desultory and weak international responses to crises in Rwanda, Haiti and Bosnia. John Hirsch and Robert Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope: Reflections on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute for Peace, 1995). Also Scott Peterson, *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda: A Journalist Reports From the Battlefields of Africa* (New York, NY: Routledge 1994). Karin Von Hippel, *Democracy By Force: U.S. Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

foreign policy emphasis on “assertive multilateralism,” and the career of then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. The failure disinclined the United States from intervening elsewhere,⁶⁹⁹ including in Rwanda where horrific internecine tribal conflict led to mass murder. The Somalia experience undermined the credibility that the United States gained from the successful Gulf War the previous year. In addition, the intervention required close coordination between multiple national security bureaucracies, including the Department of State (DOS), Department of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, and U.S. Agency for International Development, among others. Hence, it allows for an examination of the United States’ ability to integrate multiple instruments of national power, as represented in the form of numerous bureaucracies.

The purpose of this case study is to accurately describe and explain the decision making and key events in the Somalia intervention. In the process, this paper will examine four issues: the extent to which the U.S. acted with a strategy in mind as opposed to ad hoc decision making; the extent to which the strategy—such as it was—required multiple instruments of power; the extent to which the instruments of power were well integrated; and finally, the consequences of not integrating the elements of national power well. Before assessing these four issues, however, a clear description of what happened is necessary, not only in Somalia, but also in Washington and at the United Nations.

Debate over Somali Intervention Objectives

Assistant Secretary of State Herman Cohen initiated the U.S. government response to the humanitarian disaster in Somalia with a March 25, 1992, declaration that a disaster existed in Somalia, Kenya,

699 A senior State Department official said, “Bosnia was already almost dead in terms of U.S. participation in peacekeeping, but Mogadishu put the last nail in the coffin.” The obituary was premature in one sense. It took two more years of bloodshed and a peace accord, but eventually the U.S. committed forces to Bosnian peacekeeping. Michael Gordon and Thomas Friedman, “Details of U.S. Raid in Somalia: Success So Near, a Loss So Deep,” *New York Times*, sec. A1, October 25, 1993.

and the surrounding area.⁷⁰⁰ The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, which is tasked with leading the U.S. government's response after a formal declaration of disaster, immediately went to work with a number of non-governmental relief organizations to provide assistance. By April 1992, the United Nations had established a presence in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, to monitor a shaky ceasefire between two of the main warring factions, and to assist with the delivery of aid. Despite the United Nations operation in Somalia, which would be called UNOSOM I, the plight of millions of Somalis worsened. The UN Secretary General's July 22 report estimated that a million Somali children were at immediate risk of malnutrition, and that four and a half million people urgently needed food assistance.⁷⁰¹ Other humanitarian assistance officials believed that as many as two million were at risk of starvation.

President George H. W. Bush was informed of the dire situation. The President was deeply moved by a cable from the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya, Smith Hempstone, titled "A Day in Hell." Ambassador Hempstone, a former journalist and outspoken proponent of African reform, wrote his unflinching July 1992 account of the unfolding disaster following a trip to northern Kenya near the Somali border. President Bush's empathetic reaction to the news about Somalia was heightened by his vivid recollection of dying children he saw during a visit to CARE feeding stations in Sudan during the Sahelian famine of the 1980s.⁷⁰² President Bush wrote on his copy of the ambassador's cable, "This is a terrible situation. Let's do everything we can to help."⁷⁰³ Hempstone's cable and the President's inclination were reinforced by a July 30 report from the Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance James Kunder who argued "people are

700 Andrew S. Natsios, "Humanitarian Relief Intervention in Somalia: The Economics of Chaos," in *Learning from Somalia*, eds. Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 80.

701 John Hirsch and Robert Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope: Reflections on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute for Peace, 1995), 23.

702 Natsios, "Humanitarian Relief: Intervention in Somalia," 78.

703 Don Oberdorfer, "U.S. Took Slow Approach to Somali Crisis; Delay in Action Attributed to Civil War, Other Global Problems, Lack of Media Attention," *Washington Post*, sec. A 13, August 24, 2007. Hempstone's cable was dated July 10.

dying in the thousands daily because aid workers cannot move relief food. The world community has the responsibility to end that.”⁷⁰⁴

While sympathy for the Somalis’ plight was growing in Washington, many continued to argue that Somalia’s troubles did not affect American interests. In fact Ambassador Hempstone, whose cable helped galvanize attention to the problem, was one such voice. Hearing that Washington was considering action in Somalia, he sent a cable in August 1992 warning against intervention:

There is little reason to believe that the bitter and long-standing clan rivalries that have turned Somalia into a particularly murderous African Lebanon will yield to outside intervention, armed or unarmed, by the United Nations or any other group. Tragic as the situation is in Somalia—and it is tragic— the dissolution of the Somali nation-state and, indeed of Somali society, does not affect vital U.S. government security interests. Accordingly, the U.S. Government should think—and then think again—before allowing itself to become bogged down in a quagmire without the promise of offsetting concomitant benefits.⁷⁰⁵

Hempstone’s message received mixed reactions, but did not prevent President Bush from ordering the deployment of U.S. military transports on August 14 to support the multinational United Nations relief effort in Somalia. In “Operation Provide Relief,” C-130s deployed to Mombasa, Kenya, and airlifted aid into Somalia. Yet, after nearly 2,500 flights, which provided almost 28,000 metric tons of food aid, the situation in Somalia had not improved. Looters and local militias extorted money and supplies for the “right” to land aircraft, raising already substantial costs to the United States. Moreover, much of the food never reached the suffering masses

704 Ken Menkhous and Louis Ortomayer, *Key Decisions in the Somalia Intervention*, Pew Case Studies in International Affairs, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Publications, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington D.C., 1995, 2. Quoting James Kunder, July 31, 1992.

705 Smith Hempstone in a cable to Deputy Secretary of State Frank Wisner on December 2nd 1992. Smith Hempstone, *Rogue Ambassador: an African Memoir* (Sewanee, TN: University of the South Press, 1997), 229.

because the armed warlords who controlled the militias diverted it for their own purposes. The United States also airlifted 500 Pakistani peacekeepers to Somalia, but soon after their arrival they were pinned down at the Mogadishu airport and unable to ensure safe delivery of the humanitarian assistance. On August 19, an interagency Policy Coordinating Committee meeting convened to discuss options for ameliorating the situation. In this meeting, the Department of State representative raised the prospect of U.S. military forces creating “zones of tranquility” to help with aid distribution. Department of State officials pointed out that merely airlifting food into Somalia would not suffice since the real problem was distribution. Department of Defense personnel countered that UN military forces should take on any such security mission.

As national security organizations in Washington considered options, Ambassador Hempstone became increasingly concerned that the United States was going to stumble into a protracted and unhelpful intervention. In late September, he sent another cable to the State Department recommending that the U.S. airlift operation be privatized. He believed that a private sector-led operation would be cheaper, more effective, and simultaneously eliminate the risk of losing American soldiers. In his message, Ambassador Hempstone argued it was “irrational, wasteful and dangerous to continue the operation in its U.S. military configuration,” and privatizing the relief operations would allow “the American military to make a dignified, rational and phased withdrawal from the Somali tar baby.”⁷⁰⁶

Hempstone was fighting an uphill battle. The president’s interest and a deteriorating situation on the ground were enough to stimulate U.S. government agencies to investigate alternative American responses to the Somali crisis over the course of the fall. President Bush’s loss in the November election also spurred the decision to intervene. Press accounts later indicated the president and his political advisors believed that intervention in Somalia provided an opportunity for the president to leave office on a high note and be remembered as a decisive leader rather than a vanquished politician.⁷⁰⁷ On November

706 Hempstone, *Rogue Ambassador: an African Memoir*, 227.

707 Maryann K. Cusimano, “Operation Restore Hope: The Bush Administration’s Decision to Intervene in Somalia, Pew Case Studies in International Affairs,

19, a *New York Times* article announced that key Bush advisors would be gathering the next day at the White House to encourage the President to address the mass starvation in Somalia instead of “dumping the problem on Bill Clinton’s Administration.”⁷⁰⁸

As the article predicted, the first of a series of Deputies Committee meetings took place November 20 to examine expanding the U.S. role in Somalia. The Deputies Committee technically consists of the second ranking officials from all the major departments represented on the National Security Council, but these officials are sometimes represented by subordinates. At the meeting, Paul Wolfowitz, then under secretary of defense for policy, broached the subject of using U.S. ground forces.⁷⁰⁹ The Joint Staff and Central Command, however, echoing Ambassador Hempstone’s concerns, were reluctant to commit ground forces for fear of becoming entangled in a low-grade conflict that would be difficult to escape.⁷¹⁰ Yet in a second Deputies Committee meeting the following day, the Joint Staff representative approached the issue differently. After consulting with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, and clarifying that at least one division’s worth of forces would be required, Vice Chairman Admiral David Jeremiah offered that “if you think U.S. forces are needed [in Somalia], we can do the job.”⁷¹¹ The military’s change of heart reflected a choice in favor of a lesser evil. Pressure to act was increasing in Somalia, but also in Bosnia where a civil war was raging. Somalia was considered a less onerous mission. The country’s flat terrain was believed to be advantageous for U.S. forces compared to Bosnia’s forests, and military leaders believed Somali opposition would

Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Publications, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington DC, 1995, 8. The Pew study cites: Michael Wines. “Aides Say U.S. Role in Somalia Gives Bush a Way to Exit in Glory,” *New York Times*, sec. A 34, December 6, 1992.

708 Leslie Gelb, “Foreign Affairs; Shoot to Feed Somalia,” *New York Times*, sec. A 27, November 19 1992.

709 Don Oberdorfer, “The Path to Intervention; ‘A Massive Tragedy We Could Do Something About,’” *The Washington Post*, sec. A1, December 6th, 1992.

710 Frank G. Hoffman, “One Decade Later -- Debacle in Somalia,” The Naval Institute: Proceedings, January 2004 http://www.military.com/NewContent/0,13190,NI_Somalia_0104,00.html

711 Don Oberdorfer, “The Path to Intervention; ‘A Massive Tragedy We Could Do Something About,’” *Washington Post*, sec. A1, December 6, 1992.

rapidly collapse.⁷¹² CIA reports agreed that “clan forces were both poorly organized and trained, had inconsistent morale and motivation, had weapons that could easily be overcome, and therefore did not pose a serious military threat.”⁷¹³ Some attendees remained concerned about the lack of an exit strategy, but the momentum had shifted in favor of intervention. Presidential advisors even saw a geopolitical advantage to the humanitarian intervention. They thought American military action to help improve conditions in a Muslim country might help deflect Arab pressure to help Bosnian Muslims.⁷¹⁴

On November 23 and 24, the deputies met to refine intervention options. Frank Wisner, then-under secretary of state for international security affairs, sought a larger U.S. force commitment to support a UN command, mainly with air and sea-based forces. He did not ask for ground troops because the Department of State believed the Pentagon would never acquiesce. Then-National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, however, thought U.S. ground forces might be required,⁷¹⁵ which opened a discussion of a U.S.-led ground force option. Brigadier General Frank Libutti, the commander of Operation Provide Relief, who by then had some months of experience with Somalia, warned that the insertion might be far less complicated than the subsequent extraction. He feared that U.S. troops could end up in Somalia for ten to fifteen years.⁷¹⁶ In reality, even getting in would not necessarily be easy. That very day a UN relief ship carrying 10,000 tons of food was shelled while trying to enter Mogadishu harbor and had to return to sea. The risk of protracted engagement identified by Libutti was duly noted and Scowcroft brought it up when the

712 Barton Gellman, “Pentagon Sees Likely Success; Somalia Anarchy Forces Policy Shift,” *Washington Post*, sec. A 16, November 28, 1992.

713 Cusimano, “Operation Restore Hope,” 8.

714 Robert F. Baumann and Lawrence A. Yates with Versalle F. Washington, “My Clan Against the World? U.S. and Coalition Forces in Somalia 1992-1994,” *Combat Studies Institute Press*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2004, 24..

715 Valerie Lofland, “Somalia: U.S. Intervention and Operation Restore Hope,” Air University, U.S. Air Force, 59 <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/navy/pmi/somalia1.pdf>.

716 Oberdorfer, “The Path to Intervention,” December 6, 1992.

Deputies Committee made its presentation to President Bush the following day.⁷¹⁷

In addition to Brent Scowcroft, others in attendance at the pre-Thanksgiving Day decision meeting were President Bush, Colin Powell, and Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney. The first option discussed was to continue with a limited level of U.S. support; the United States would provide air and sea power to the 3,500-strong UN force already approved by the Security Council.⁷¹⁸ Most believed this option would not have much effect. The second choice, dubbed “Ball-Peen Hammer,” would move 5,000 U.S. ground troops into Somalia to secure key areas, including the airport, seaports, and communication infrastructure. This option was designed to be quick and temporary, and to be followed by a larger UN force. The third option was a “sledgehammer” approach: full-scale intervention with a U.S. division, in addition to support from UN allies.⁷¹⁹ The Deputies Committee consensus favored the second option as the best approach.⁷²⁰ The meeting lasted less than an hour and concluded with President Bush choosing the “sledgehammer” approach. The president’s inclination was to direct a quick operation, in and out before President-elect Clinton was inaugurated. The president did not want to “stick Clinton with an ongoing military operation.” However, when the president’s advisors made it clear that such a quick exit would not be possible, the goal became turning the operation over to the United Nations as quickly as possible.⁷²¹ General Powell also stressed the need for an experienced, senior diplomat to work alongside the military, to avoid political mistakes that might seriously complicate the military mission. This advice was taken, and Ambassador Robert Oakley, who had previously served as ambassador to Somalia, was asked to serve as the president’s special envoy to Somalia. Later that day, General Joseph Hoar, the commander of the Pentagon’s Central Command, whose staff had prepared the military plan and who would be overseeing Somalia operations, argued for a more robust force. General Powell

717 Baumann, Yates, Washington, “My Clan Against the World,” 24.

718 Menkhaus, Ortomayer, *Key Decisions in the Somalia Intervention*, 6.

719 *Ibid.*, 7.

720 *Ibid.*, 7.

721 Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York, NY: Random House, 1995), 564–565.

succeeded in obtaining President Bush's agreement to increase the approved force to two divisions.⁷²² Otherwise, the president's decision stood as made at the November 25 meeting.

President Bush's decision alarmed some government officials and caught others by surprise. Frank Wisner, who in January would move from his position as Under Secretary of State for International Security Affairs to Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, sent a December 1 cable to Ambassador Hempstone soliciting his opinion on the feasibility of a large U.S. military presence in Somalia. Ambassador Hempstone responded the very next day with a cable arguing vehemently against U.S. intervention. Hempstone was emphatic that there was no U.S. national interest at stake, no quick fix to Somalia's problems, and that the operation would be long and expensive to get Somalia "just on its knees." Further, he insisted that the United States would certainly suffer casualties, and he questioned the purpose of such sacrifice, believing it would only delay the starvation of tens of thousands from one year to the next. He also worried that the intervention's only net effect would be "to reunite the Somali nation against us, the invaders."⁷²³ Hempstone argued that, as the Italians and British had discovered to their chagrin, the Somalis have a propensity for guerilla warfare. "They will mine the roads, they will lay ambushes, they will launch hit and run attacks." Hempstone's memorable phrase, "If you liked Beirut, you'll love Mogadishu"⁷²⁴ was repeated by National Security Council staff members, who were hard pressed to understand the President's decision.⁷²⁵ Then-CIA Director Robert Gates argued that "the anarchy in Somalia is so sweeping and the warring factions so firmly entrenched that the country will require long term international involvement, such as a United Nations protectorate..."⁷²⁶

722 Menkhaus, Ortomayer, *Key Decisions in the Somalia Intervention*, 7.

723 Smith Hempstone, *Rogue Ambassador: an African Memoir* (Sewanee, TN: University of the South Press, 1997) 230.

724 Ibid. and Lawrence E. Casper, *Falcon Brigade: Combat and Command in Somalia and Haiti* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 10.

725 Valerie Lofland, "Somalia: U.S. Intervention and Operation Restore Hope," Air University U.S. Air Force, 57, available at <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/navy/pmi/somalia1.pdf>

726 Elaine Sciolino, "U.N Council Essentially Agrees to U.S. Command in Somalia;

The decision had been made, however, and the national security bureaucracy turned its attention to implementation. Acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger went to New York to secure UN support, which was not easy. UN officials worried that a U.S.-led intervention, especially one based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter which would authorize all means necessary (i.e., lethal force), might compromise future UN operations. Ultimately, UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali accepted the U.S. proposal but rejected the condition that the U.S.-led coalition be replaced as quickly as possible by a UN peacekeeping force. Partly by putting off the contentious issue of when the handoff would occur, the Department of State succeeded in securing passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 794.

Consequently, Operation Restore Hope began on December 7. The next day, Ambassador Oakley arrived in Mogadishu as the president's special envoy to oversee the political and diplomatic dimensions of the mission. The Marines arrived a day later, followed by Army and coalition forces. A total of 29,000 U.S. troops supplemented by approximately 10,000 coalition forces were committed to the operation and became known as the United Task Force or UNITAF. Within days, the Marines established a Civil Military Operations Center which was collocated with the UN's Humanitarian Operations Center. The center quickly became the focal point for coordinating non-governmental assistance efforts and military operations. At the end of December 1992, President Bush demonstrated his personal interest in and commitment to the endeavor by visiting Somalia to witness the operations firsthand. The president reassured the troops on New Year's Eve and Day that their mission's objectives and duration were limited.

At the time, the decision to intervene was generally popular with the public and Congress. Some members of Congress, notably Senators Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) and Paul Simon (D-IL) had strongly urged the president to intervene. Now that he had, a few voices in Congress were critical, but for the most part the mission enjoyed bipartisan support, including President-elect Bill Clinton. Even so, the Somalia intervention came at an inopportune time since the

government was in the midst of one of its periodic turnovers. Senior Bush administration officials were leaving the government and, in many cases, former mid-level officials were left to oversee the Somalia operations in late December and January. The overall purpose and strategy of the intervention was not clear to many of them. The dominant motive appeared to be genuine humanitarian concern, but why was Somalia chosen rather than any number of other pressing humanitarian crises; how long would U.S. forces remain; and how would success be defined? Detailed answers were lacking and had to be cobbled together by the remaining officials bridging the two administrations.⁷²⁷

U.S. forces were told their mission was to prevent the mass starvation of Somalis through a brief and limited intervention that would quickly transition to UN forces. Yet, it was apparent early on that the United Nations defined the problem and the mission more broadly. The United Nations wanted to establish conditions that would preclude another famine in the future and resolve the underlying problems that had led to the civil war. In particular, the United Nations pushed hard for more aggressive disarmament of all Somalis. As early as November, the U.S. diplomatic mission to the United Nations in New York was agreeing with the UN position, arguing that the United States had a stake in strengthening UN peacekeeping operations, and that it was in U.S. interests that the United Nations should succeed in bringing peace to Somalia. In Washington, senior officials in the Department of State, such as Acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Gallucci,⁷²⁸ agreed with the United Nations regarding intervention objectives in general and disarmament in particular. The point repeatedly made by the Department of State in internal papers and interagency deliberations was that ignoring the larger security problem meant that the delivery of aid would only temporarily solve the humanitarian crisis. The U.S. delegation argued that the United States should address the disarmament issue quickly, decisively,

727 The author was one such lower level official, drafting policy papers in support of Jim Locher, who was by this time acting under secretary of defense for policy.

728 Cusimano, "Operation Restore Hope," 7.

comprehensively, and that failure to do so would seriously complicate the follow-on UN peacekeeping operation, which in turn would jeopardize long-term prospects for Somali peace and reconciliation. Ultimately, Department of State leadership believed that the United States would be held accountable for undertaking an operation that addressed only the symptoms and not the causes of the Somali disaster.

Other parts of the national security apparatus resisted the broader mission proposed by the United Nations and Department of State. The Department of Defense succeeded in convincing senior National Security Council staff that the human tragedy in Somalia did not affect U.S. national security interests. The mission was famine relief, and resolving broader problems was not a prerequisite for taking immediate steps to ensure food distribution. From the Department of Defense perspective, it was only necessary to provide enough local security to permit the distribution of aid at a level that staved off immediate mass starvation. Thus, U.S. forces should establish security at ports, airfields, and on convoys, but not provide countrywide security. Defense officials worried that any U.S. or coalition attempt to forcibly disarm the warlords would result in protracted resistance. When the original December 5 executive order somehow was drafted to include general disarmament, General Hoar quickly intervened with the Joint Staff to ensure it was deleted. When the issue continued to be debated, Ambassador Oakley also weighed in from Mogadishu against forcible disarmament; characterizing it as unrealistic and idealistic. In a December 20 cable, Oakley argued that the true threat that Somalia might become a tar baby did not lie in a Vietnam or Beirut scenario, but rather in an implied neocolonial attitude replete with impractical and overly optimistic objectives that could only be achieved at very considerable levels of foreign involvement and expense over a long period of time. Thus, he argued, arms reduction and control were acceptable objectives but the goal of total disarmament would negatively affect the operation. The initial conclusion to the debate was that the National Security Council in November and December sided with the Defense Department in favor of controlling arms in order to ensure a safe environment for U.S. military forces. In mid-December, President Bush and both the Departments of State and Defense made it clear publicly that the

United States did not view disarmament as an objective in and of itself, but rather as a limited means to accomplish the humanitarian mission. In this way, the U.S. national security bureaucracy successfully resolved its internal differences over the proper scope of the mission, but the United Nations remained unhappy with U.S. policy and continued to press the United States to do more.

UN Security Council Resolution 794, however, required a report from the secretary general that specified prerequisites for the United Nations accepting a mission turnover from U.S. forces. When the document was issued, it identified conditions that amounted to general disarmament of the warlords throughout Somalia, not just in key famine areas. While disarmament was the key UN requirement, the more ambitious goals of UN leadership included seizing large weapons stocked around Galcaio in northern Somalia, building a police force, and rehabilitating infrastructure. In general, the United Nations wanted to leave behind a new and functioning Somali government. Toward that end, UN leaders refused to create a follow-on force to take over from the United States until U.S. forces had established nation-wide security. UNITAF forces and Ambassador Oakley's staff had reestablished a nascent national police force (with reluctant approval from Washington) and even worked out a voluntary disarmament plan with the Somali factions that was offered to the United Nations for implementation in late February 1993. Rather than build on these initiatives, the United Nations focused on its broader goals and continued to pressure the United States to disarm the Somalis.

During this transition, Congress slowly began confirming Clinton administration officials, who were finding their way to new positions in the national security bureaucracy. Many were more sympathetic to the United Nations and Department of State positions on Somalia. Policy evolved accordingly. These new leaders agreed that Somalia was a test case of whether a multilateral institution in the post Cold War world could use armed force effectively to bring governance to a war-torn country. The initial Clinton administration national security policy stressed the importance of "assertive multilateralism," so it was consistent to argue that it was in the United States' interest to help ensure that the first attempt at forceful peacemaking by the United Nations was a success. If it was not, the United States would continue

to be called upon to shoulder the majority of the burden whenever such problems of general import to the international community arose.

The new Clinton appointees who supported the broader mandate for UN intervention in Somalia included some new Department of Defense leaders who were sympathetic to the Department of State's arguments. Morton H. Halperin who was slated (but never confirmed) to be assistant secretary of defense for democracy and peacekeeping and Ambassador Frank Wisner, now the under secretary of defense for policy, were two such officials. It was not easy, however, to modify the mission of the forces in the field executing the UNITAF mandate. Military leadership in particular looked askance at the nation-building mission of resurrecting Somali political, economic, and security institutions before U.S. forces departed. General Powell testified later that he was not informed of and disagreed with the mission to disarm. General Joseph Hoar, the regional commander responsible for Somalia and himself a Marine, was particularly alert to attempts to saddle U.S. forces with a general disarmament mission. These senior uniformed officers had support from the Joint Staff and select career officials in the Defense Department.⁷²⁹

While new Clinton administration leaders clarified their policies, U.S. and coalition forces pursued their original mandate. They aggressively enforced daily restrictions on Somalis bearing arms and placed heavy weapons in controlled areas, but they did not actively track down weapons hidden by Aideed or other warlords. As Ambassador Oakley argued, "given the limited... mandate, which deliberately excluded general disarmament, there was no perceived need to confront Aideed over the disappearance of weapons as long as they posed no threat to UNITAF forces or humanitarian operations."⁷³⁰ Despite the absence

729 "Great care was taken to develop an approved, well-defined mission with attainable, measurable objectives prior to the operation commencing. Disarmament was excluded from the mission because it was neither realistically achievable nor a prerequisite for the core mission of providing a secure environment for relief operations. Selective 'disarming as necessary' became an implied task which led to the cantonment of heavy weapons and gave UNITAF the ability to conduct weapon sweeps." Joseph P. Hoar, "A CINC's Perspective," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 58.

730 Robert B. Oakley, "An Envoy's Perspective," *Joint Forces Quarterly* no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 48.

of a comprehensive political settlement among rival factions, and periodic provocations and related military responses by UNITAF, the U.S.-led coalition retained its reputation for impartiality and avoided openly antagonizing Somali warlords. Ambassador Oakley, with cooperation from Lieutenant General Robert Johnston, was able to adroitly blend limited military force with political dialogue, aggressive psychological operations, and highly visible humanitarian activities.⁷³¹

As a result, the almost 40,000 U.S. and foreign military personnel were able to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid and fulfill their limited mandate. By March 1993, humanitarian agencies declared an end to the food emergency, local community activities were on the upswing, and marketplaces were open and functioning. Ambassador Oakley stepped down as the American special representative in Somalia on March 3. When he visited the Pentagon on March 10 and 11 to share his insights on Somalia, he again sounded the theme of his December 20 cable, emphasizing the importance of letting Somalis have a major role in solving their own problems. The Somalis had a prime opportunity to do so from March 13 through 28 when humanitarian and national reconciliation conferences were held back to back in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The humanitarian conference produced international pledges of \$130 million. The national reconciliation conference resulted in an agreement to end violence in Somalia, but one based on suspect intentions which left many critical implementation details unspecified.

Thus, despite a new administration that sympathized with the UN and Department of State policy positions favoring an expanded U.S. and UN mission, the limited mission viewpoint prevailed until U.S. forces prepared to withdraw in the spring of 1993, without having secured a general disarmament of the Somali factions. The American forces' impending departure finally prompted the United Nations to pull together a follow-on force. The United States did agree, however, in keeping with its original commitment and the Clinton administration's emphasis on UN success, to support the follow-on UN forces by providing 6,000 personnel for logistics assistance and a small

731 For Ambassador Oakley's leadership on integrating U.S. efforts, see Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World," 41.

quick reaction force in case United Nations forces ran into trouble they could not handle. In addition, Ambassador Oakley, who had coordinated his political efforts so closely with military operations, was replaced by another senior American official. Admiral Jonathan Howe was chosen to lead the follow-on UN force as the special representative to the secretary general of the United Nations. The UN force would be called UNOSOM II (United Nations Operation in Somalia), the successor to UNOSOM I, which ran from April 1992 to March 1993.

Policy, Strategy, and Transition to UN Command

In the first week of February, not long after President Clinton took office, his national security team reviewed policy on Somalia, after which they decided to focus on what could be done to prevent Somalia from falling back into anarchy and famine. Thus, policy shifted from the narrower Bush administration construct to greater support for the United Nations and Department of State point of view that a longer term and broader commitment to Somalia was in order. The policy did not translate into a modified mission for UNITAF, which was winding down, but it did produce new support for a broader UN mandate in Somalia. This support was evident in two respects.

First, the Clinton administration supported a broad mandate for the UN operations that were to follow UNITAF. Newly arriving civilian leaders in the Pentagon supported this shift in policy. They may even have drafted UN Resolution 814 on Somalia, adopted on March 26, 1993, which incorporated disarmament and broader nation-building objectives into the UN mission. Other sources maintain that the drafting took place privately at the U.S. mission to the United Nations, by the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright, and in the NSC, where Albright and National Security Advisor Tony Lake were champions of assertive multilateralism.⁷³² Regardless of who contributed the wording, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin acknowledged later that the Pentagon approved the resolutions.

732 Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, "Somalia and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention," *Foreign Affairs*, 75 (March/April 1996): 73.

Second, the new administration codified its new policy in a carefully coordinated presidential decision directive. It began as a presidential review directive in early February, which required a series of analyses, then circulated as a draft policy paper in mid-March for coordination at multiple levels, and finally was signed by the president on May 19. These internal policy and strategy papers were not clear about objectives or the level of U.S. commitment. The Department of State always argued for broader objectives and greater commitment, using words like “ensure UN success,” whereas the Department of Defense preferred narrower objectives with wording like “help or assist” UN success, and less commitment, to include a steady withdrawal of U.S. forces. The NSC cobbled these competing perspectives together with broader, “hoped for” outcomes but also minimum goals. Their products emphasized the importance of the success of the Somali “testbed” for UN peacekeeping, but acknowledged that the Somali people had to seize the historic opportunity being offered or else more modest aims might be in order. In any case, the minimum goal would be to ensure that Somalia did not return to the anarchy that precluded relief assistance from being distributed. Both the minimum and more expansive goals of U.S. policy required assisting the UNOSOM II mission.

If the United Nations force was to be successful in implementing its broader mandate, it clearly had to be at least as potent a force as the one the U.S. military had assembled. In testimony to Congress on January 29, the senior Pentagon military official in charge of operations promised that the follow-on UN force would be structured to have essentially the same capability as the U.S. intervention force it was relieving. Many doubted the UN force would be effective, however. Even if total planned numbers were similar, its combat capability was seriously doubted, which is why the U.S.-led quick reaction force was left behind. In addition, an internal Pentagon field assessment in late spring noted other critical shortfalls, including the woefully inadequate special operations and particularly psychological operations capability.

Given the expansive UNOSOM II mission mandate, it was all the more important for the United Nations to have robust force capabilities. With enthusiastic U.S. support, the Security Council had given UNOSOM II a much broader mission than UNITAF.

UNOSOM II was to establish security, political reconciliation, and economic reconstruction. Emblematic of the Clinton administration perspective at this juncture was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright's March 1993 statement that "we will embark on an unprecedented enterprise aimed at nothing less than the restoration of an entire country as a proud, functioning and viable member of the community of nations."⁷³³

Albright's enthusiasm reflected the predominant attitude among senior administration political appointees, but a core of career officials in the Department of Defense remained skeptical. Just as numerous Department of State leaders had been unhappy when the Pentagon prevailed in debate over the scope of the original mission in November, many Department of Defense officials were displeased with the new policy articulated in the spring. The fundamental schism over how to define U.S. national interest remained, and was debated repeatedly. Those who believed that the United States had no national interests that would justify a nation-building effort in Somalia, which they judged to be an enormous undertaking, were unenthusiastic about helping the United Nations. They further argued that it was not in the United Nations' interests either. Scarce UN peacekeeping assets were stretched thin, and Somalia was one of the few peacekeeping challenges in the world that did not threaten to blow up into a larger regional conflict. Those who contended the United States and United Nations had a lot at stake—prestige, credibility, precedent for future crises—wanted both to stay the course and to prevail. They pointed out that the Somalia intervention was a Chapter VII peace enforcement precedent,⁷³⁴ and that it was in the interest of the United States that the effort be seen as a success, both as a testament to U.S. leadership and because the United States needed a strong United Nations as a partner in conflict resolution.

733 Ambassador Albright made the statement on March 26, 1993. She is quoted to this effect in John R. Bolton, "Wrong Turn in Somalia," *Foreign Affairs* 73 (January/February 1994): 62

734 "Chapter VII" refers to the seventh chapter of the UN charter, which authorizes the use of force in response to "threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression."

Clinton administration policy statements attempted to resolve this tension by insisting the Somali people must be responsible for their future, and simultaneously noting that they needed help to make the transition to national self-governance. The United Nations was to bear the burden, but the United States would help initially, and gradually wind down even that modest support. The upshot was that a large, proficient U.S. force (essentially the Marines, Army, and special operations forces, with numerous small international contributing forces, in the form of UNITAF I) completed a limited and manageable mission, and then passed on a vastly increased and more difficult set of responsibilities to a much less proficient force (UNOSOM II) in May 1993. In short, insufficient means were employed to secure greatly expanded objectives. American policy and strategy for Somalia was long on hope and short on a sober calculation of requirements.

With few casualties (eight servicemen through mid-May), UNITAF had been relatively successful in adopting a posture of impartiality and responding forcefully but fairly to any challenge to their authority and mission. UNOSOM II would not be nearly as successful on any of these counts. Aideed perceived the UNOSOM II mission as hostile to his interests. Before the United Nations intervention, Aideed was clearly the strongest warlord, controlling most of Mogadishu and much of southern and central Somalia. Having played a major role in deposing the Somali dictator, Siad Barre, Aideed believed he should be the next ruler of Somalia, by any means necessary. He felt increasingly threatened militarily not only by UNOSOM II but also by rival warlords. For example, in late February, Aideed suffered a military setback in Kismayo, a city in southern Somalia. Omar Jess, a local warlord allied with Aideed, was forced out of Kismayo by Hersi Morgan's forces in a surprise attack under the nose of Belgian and U.S. Army soldiers. Angered, Aideed held UNITAF responsible and encouraged large-scale anti-UN demonstrations in Mogadishu that rocked the city for days.

Politically, Aideed was threatened by UNOSOM II as well, since the UN force seemed inclined to abandon the top-down political reconstruction begun at a January conference in Addis Ababa, where the power of the warlords was recognized, in favor of bottom-up political reconstruction through elected regional and district councils

that would limit the power of the warlords. Ali Mahdi, Aideed's toughest political competitor, had formed a political alliance of eleven factions that managed to consistently outvote Aideed's Somali National Army (SNA) faction at UN-sponsored conferences. The same thing would happen in any representative government. Admiral Howe believed that General Aideed perceived the United Nations as a threat precisely because of its intent to carry out the Addis Ababa accords pursuant to UN Resolution 814. If the United Nations succeeded, Aideed's clan would not retain its power because they would not have the votes in a representative government.⁷³⁵

Reflecting these concerns, Aideed mounted an increasingly hostile public relations campaign against the UNOSOM II forces and mission. The United States encouraged a more aggressive information campaign to counter Aideed's propaganda, but the United Nations was unable to respond effectively. Over the course of May it was clear that the United Nations was failing to make its case to the Somali people. Whereas UNITAF's Fourth Psychological Operations Group had over 150 personnel working on information dissemination with a Somali-language radio station and daily newspaper, UNOSOM II had less than five individuals working on information full-time. In light of the propaganda beating the United Nations was taking, some felt that Aideed's radio station had to be silenced one way or another. And, of course, there was the general disarmament mission to attend to as well. Both the need to silence Aideed, since the United Nations could not compete with his rhetoric, and the need to disarm his forces, in keeping with the broader UN mission,⁷³⁶ put the United Nations on a collision course with the warlord.

The collision was not a surprise; indeed it was fully expected and even welcomed by both sides as it turned out. In mid-May it was rumored that Aideed might be looking for opportunities to assassinate Americans as a way of expressing his displeasure with political and

735 Adm. Jonathan Howe, interview by PBS, *Frontline: Ambush in Mogadishu*, PBS, <http://pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/interviews/howe.html>

736 Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World" 111. The authors cite a confidential UN cable in which UNOSOM II Commander Lieutenant General Bir made the point that military operations had to support the UN's political agenda, including disarmament operations.

military trends. At the time, U.S. officials were sanguine about the threats, noting privately “that if Aideed was resorting to threats, their strategy of trying to ‘marginalize’ him was paying off.” One American civilian working for the United Nations concluded, “it shows we’re doing something right.”⁷³⁷

In fact, the United States was suffering from strategic confusion of the first order. Whereas the United States government declined comprehensive disarmament because it would require fighting the warlords, which was deemed inconsistent with U.S. national interests, it approved the comprehensive disarmament mission for far less capable UN forces. UNOSOM II was too weak to complete the mission of general disarmament, a mission that would have required fighting Aideed. The United States did not want its forces to battle Aideed’s. The terms of reference for the Quick Reaction Force stated that it would not be used for routine patrolling and other activities required for comprehensive disarmament that would involve conflict with Aideed. However, the Quick Reaction Force was used for these activities anyway, since it was the most (some would say only) capable force available. By extension, it was predictable that the U.S. Quick Reaction Force would end up fighting Aideed as well because other UNOSOM II forces were unable to do so effectively.

Thus on both the broader question of how to define the mission and what forces would be necessary to accomplish it, as well as on the narrower question of how the U.S.-manned Quick Reaction Force was to be employed, U.S. policy was inconsistent with operational realities. The United States adopted a policy of preventing U.S. forces from doing comprehensive disarmament when they were most capable of it, and obliging them to do it under UN auspices when they were least capable of it. The use of the Quick Reaction Force for disarmament activities contrary to its terms of reference was an early indicator that U.S. policy was not well aligned with operational reality, one that did not register with authorities in Washington. Aideed, however, quickly sent a signal that could not be ignored.

737 Keith B. Richburg, “Aideed Exploited UN’s Failure to Prepare,” *Washington Post*, sec. A1, December 5, 1993.

The June 5 Inspection, Ambush, and Aftermath

Although the collision course between the United Nations and Aideed was predetermined by the two parties' conflicting goals, the United Nations took the initiative and precipitated a confrontation. In keeping with its mandate to achieve general disarmament, the United Nations decided to conduct its first weapon storage area inspection and audit on June 5 using a list of weapon sites that belonged exclusively to Aideed and his faction.⁷³⁸ One was also the location of Aideed's Radio Mogadishu, which Aideed had captured after a bitter struggle with Ali Mahdi's militia and which was tormenting the United Nations with heavy-handed propaganda. UNOSOM II was determined to enter and search all designated sites to establish its authority to do so, an authority UNITAF had possessed but exercised only with advance approval by Aideed. The June 5 UNOSOM II inspection of five Aideed weapon depots was a break from the recent practice of U.S. forces, being conducted on short notice (less than 24 hours), and without Aideed's agreement.

The Aideed representative notified of the inspection was surprised and refused to approve it. Perhaps he knew that the site-inspection would reveal an Aideed arms build-up, which it reportedly did, showing "three times the number of arms officially listed."⁷³⁹ In any case, he recommended against the snap inspection and candidly warned the UN personnel "you are starting this war tomorrow." The UN representatives simply responded that he should contact appropriate SNA personnel (i.e., Aideed's clan) to ensure compliance. The United Nations knew that Aideed had told his supporters he was prepared to fire on UNOSOM II forces if they "invaded" his weapons storage areas, and thus the Pakistanis assigned the inspection mission were told they might encounter resistance and were instructed to force their entry, if necessary. The Quick Reaction Force was notified to be ready to support the Pakistanis. In short, all

738 Most of the details here concerning the conflict between Aideed and the UN on June 5 comes from Tom Farer's "Report of an Inquiry, Conducted Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 837, Into the 5 June 1993 Attack on UN Forces in Somalia," United Nations, New York, August 12, 1993. An executive summary of the report was reprinted in U.N. document S/26351, August 24, 1993.

739 Richburg, "Aideed Exploited UN's Failure to Prepare," December 5, 1993.

concerned were prepared for a showdown, and no one at the UN or U.S. headquarters in Mogadishu was surprised when it came. Officials in Washington and New York, however, were quite surprised by the result.

After the Pakistanis secured the radio compound, several Aided supporters arrived and began to incite the crowd. They also appeared to be giving direction to the crowd's feeling that the Pakistanis were fellow Muslims collaborating in the seizure of the radio station. The situation deteriorated rapidly. After killing one Somali, the Pakistanis disengaged from the radio station but quickly came under ferocious attack as they passed other sites, particularly feeding station 20. The fighting quickly escalated, and when the Pakistanis finally reached safety, they had sustained twenty-four dead and fifty-seven injured, with six captured.

The events of June 5 were important because they revealed Aided's military capabilities. The United Nations knew Aided might resist the inspection, but miscalculated his ability to orchestrate a violent response. Aided's reaction thus invited the United Nations and United States to rethink their strategy. They had three options. They could back off and negotiate the best agreement possible with the warlords; Aided in particular. They could hit back at Aided to punish him for his provocation, but keep open channels of communication for further negotiation. Finally, they could attempt to make an example out of Aided and eliminate him from the political landscape. The U.S. government and United Nations quickly chose the third option. In Mogadishu, there was complete consensus among U.S. and UN leaders that Aided must be punished. In fact, it was thought that some coalition members felt so strongly about the issue they would withdraw from the coalition if the United Nations tried to negotiate with Aided. In Washington, a hastily arranged interagency meeting immediately approved a quick and forceful UN response. Interagency consensus was so strong that participants cannot recall any debate on the course of action.⁷⁴⁰ The action came less than 48 hours after the event in the form of a new Security Council Resolution (837), strongly supported by the United States,

740 Menkhaus, Ortomayer, *Key Decisions in the Somalia Intervention*, 14.

that authorized punitive action against the SNA. UN forces quickly arranged for military action against SNA sites, and, a little later, Howe put a \$25,000 reward on Aideed, which served to solidify the state of conflict between him and the United Nations. Thus began a series of small raids and ambushes by both sides over the course of the summer that inflicted a growing number of casualties. Aideed's violent actions and the UN response locked both parties into a struggle from which it was difficult to retreat.

For the United Nations, the events of June 5 irrevocably marked Aideed as an outlaw. The UNOSOM II warrant for Aideed's arrest specified three categories of crimes: conspiracy to conduct premeditated attacks against UN forces, endangering civilians and UN personnel through organized incitement of violence, and crimes against humanity. Admiral Howe and the American diplomatic representative in Mogadishu, Ambassador Robert Gosende, used the terrorist epithet to characterize Aideed and his activities, perhaps to facilitate their increasingly frequent requests that Washington dispatch special operations forces to deal with him. The views of Howe and Gosende on the need to deal expeditiously with Aideed understandably hardened as more of their fellow citizens died. In a September 6 cable entitled "Taking the Offensive," Gosende wrote that "any plan for negotiating a 'truce' with Aideed's henchmen should be shelved. We should refuse to deal with perpetrators of terrorist acts."⁷⁴¹ Jonathan Howe insisted on June 12 that he still had plans to extend disarmament to the rest of the country. While he was coy about whether force would be used against other warlords, Turkish General Bir, the Commander of UNOSOM II, noted that he "would not lose any sleep if another warlord gave us reason to bend his cannons."⁷⁴²

Officials back in Washington, such as Defense Secretary Les Aspin, fully supported the disarmament mission that had brought UNOSOM II into conflict with Aideed, but they were less inclined to brand Aideed a terrorist. Both Washington and New York preferred to

741 Barton Gellman, "The Words Behind a Deadly Decision; Secret Cables Reveal Maneuvering Over Request for Armor in Somalia," *Washington Post*, sec. A1, October 31, 1993.

742 "Hope Behind the Horror," *Economist*, June 19, 1993: 41.

simply label Aideed a criminal and fugitive from UN justice. By treating Aideed not as a belligerent but as a criminal, the United Nations hoped to undermine his legitimacy with Somalis. But since criminals are apprehended rather than invited to the negotiating table, this approach still precluded negotiations. The problem with refusing to negotiate was that, unlike the U.S., the United Nations force did not possess the military capabilities to eliminate or apprehend Aideed. Whereas the earlier refusal to aggressively disarm Somalia was a decisive limitation on United States support to the United Nations, the decision to get Aideed following the events of June 5 was the opposite: a major escalation of U.S. commitment to the UN effort. It led to an increasingly active role for the American Quick Reaction Force and eventually to special operations to capture Aideed.

As for Aideed and the SNA clan, simultaneously fighting and talking were standard operating procedure. Aideed kept his lines of communication open. He communicated with major political leaders in the international community. For example, in a letter to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Aideed pleaded his case with a mix of fact and fiction, arguing that when American and Pakistani troops “seized Radio Mogadishu” thousands of Somali citizens demonstrated peacefully around the station until troops opened fire on the crowd. While making every attempt to characterize himself as the injured party, Aideed succeeded through intermediaries in making his positions known to the United Nations. Aideed made sure that U.S. and UN observers in Mogadishu learned, based on contacts with his closest advisors, that he wanted to be accommodated. Aideed believed UNOSOM II would back down. Instead, U.S. and UNOSOM II leadership concluded that the United Nations must not give in to Aideed, for if it failed to enforce order in Somalia, the credibility of UN peacekeeping operations in general would diminish significantly.

In the month following the June 5 combat, both Aideed and the UN forces could point to some tactical successes. On June 12, UN forces struck three weapons storage sites with American AC-130 gunships, and knocked out Aideed’s “Radio Mogadishu.” This action caught the attention of the White House, and subsequently it became more difficult to obtain permission to use American air and ground assets. Even so, five days later UN forces launched a larger raid into Aideed territory. Aideed’s headquarters compound, the residential

compounds of two top Aideed lieutenants, and weapon storage sites were targeted. Again, the operation began with strikes from American AC-130 gunships, but UN ground forces encountered stiff resistance. However, UNOSOM II leaders were pleased by the results of the raid, which coincided with a 30,000 person strong pro-UNOSOM demonstration in the northern sector of Mogadishu.

From Aideed's point of view, his ability to inflict casualties on UN forces was having some positive effects. The intense violence was discouraging some countries in the UN coalition from participating in combat operations in his sector. After the fierce fighting on June 17, the French, Italians, Moroccans, and Pakistanis decided to opt out of additional forays into Aideed territory. The United States also signaled to UN leadership that it was disturbed by the level of conflict, declaring that the success of recent operations obviated the need for further forays into Aideed's sector.⁷⁴³ Left alone, Aideed more easily repaired his losses. On July 2, his forces killed four Italians in an ambush, ending Italian support for UNOSOM II combat operations. Eventually it appeared to some observers that coalition members cut their own information-sharing deals and non-aggression pacts with Aideed to ensure the safety of their forces (e.g., the Italians and the Saudis). Thus, Aideed had some reason to believe that his military tactics were producing political benefits, and that he was effectively fracturing coalition unity.⁷⁴⁴

Whether UN leaders knew it or not, their attacks on SNA forces also had some political effect. SNA clan leaders were having second thoughts about the protracted conflict with the United Nations and United States. They gathered on July 12 at a site known as the Abdi House to reconsider the SNA's path of confrontation. The opportunity to try to decapitate SNA leadership was irresistible.

743 Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World," 113.

744 *Ibid.*, 111 and 133. The Army study relies heavily on UNOSOM II's after action report for its account of these events. On the agreement between Aideed and some UN contingents, see also the 1998 Frontline documentary "Ambush in Mogadishu," available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/>.

In it an Aideed militia leader notes "We had an understanding with some UN contingents that we would not attack them, and they would not attack us."

Having received intelligence on the meeting, U.S. helicopter gunships from the Quick Reaction Force—with White House as well as UN approval—attacked the house with no warning, killing over thirty senior SNA leaders and wounding perhaps another fifty. Four international journalists who arrived to cover the carnage instead became part of it when a frenzied crowd beat them to death. The attack hardened SNA clan attitudes as much as the June 5 attack on the Pakistanis had hardened the resolve of the United Nations. Until that time, many SNA had believed that the United Nations, and its Egyptian Secretary General, Boutros-Boutros-Ghali in particular, had been manipulating the naïve United States into supporting an Egyptian agenda under cover of a humanitarian mission. Years earlier Boutros-Boutros-Ghali had been an Egyptian diplomat promoting assistance to former Somali President Siad Barre in his clan-based civil war, which ultimately Aideed and his clan largely won. The SNA just tended to assume the Americans did not understand Boutros-Ghali's ulterior motives. However, the July 12 Abdi House ambush eliminated any residual sympathy for American simplicity. Popular opinion and the SNA rallied behind Aideed with greater purpose, fully united in pressing for direct attacks on U.S. forces rather than peripherally confronting the Americans by engaging UN forces.⁷⁴⁵

Special Operations and the Swing Back Toward the Political Track

Admiral Howe began requesting special operations forces the day after the June 5 attacks. Believing Aideed to be the main roadblock to progress, it was natural to want forces that were most capable of tracking and capturing or eliminating him. Others joined Howe in calling for U.S. special operations forces as the violence escalated and coalition partners began to express reservations about combating Aideed's forces. By early July, Ambassador Gosende was making explicit requests for special operations forces to capture Aideed and senior SNA officials. Yet decision makers at higher echelons of command and in the Department of Defense remained highly

745 Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World" 66, and Scott Peterson, *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda* (New York: Rutledge, 2001), 123–35.

skeptical of such a mission. General Hoar, the commander of U.S. Central Command, recommended against it, saying there was only a 50 percent chance they would get the necessary intelligence, and then only a 50 percent chance they would get Aideed. In sum, he considered it a 25 percent chance of success and a high-risk mission in any case. General Powell concurred. Within the secretary of defense's civilian staff component, Under Secretary of Defense Frank Wisner and his principal advisors on special operations and low-intensity conflict objected repeatedly to using special operations forces, noting that the intelligence on Aideed was insufficient, but more fundamentally that it was not in U.S. interests to get involved in a counterinsurgency campaign against Aideed.⁷⁴⁶ As late as July 14, in a memorandum responding to Secretary of Defense Aspin's uneasiness about Somalia, Wisner urged the Secretary to continue backing the United Nations but reiterated his opposition to using special operations forces, despite acknowledging that support for doing so from the Department of State and the U.S. mission at the United Nations was on the upswing.

Meanwhile, an interagency assessment team on Somalia led by David Shinn, the Department of State Coordinator for Somalia, visited the country from July 19 through July 27 to assess policy and field operations. UN military commander Bir and Major General Thomas, commander of the U.S. Quick Reaction Force, Montgomery candidly told the team that there was no military solution to the stalemate in Mogadishu, particularly with the forces at their disposal. The visit was a perfect opportunity for a major reassessment of policy and strategy, but when the team's report was released on July 27 it mostly provided "stay the course" recommendations. In two particular respects, however, the interagency team and its report were important.

First, the Shinn mission highlighted the current lack of a viable political approach to reconciliation and thus stimulated thinking

746 Brigadier General Wesley Taylor, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for policy and missions in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict), advised against the mission in a memorandum to the under secretary of defense (policy) on July 27, 1993, and in an earlier position paper of June 15, 1993.

about reinforcing “the political track” of the strategy.⁷⁴⁷ An August 4 Deputies Committee meeting that convened to consider the team’s findings concluded with a decision to encourage the United Nations to accept a revised and more realistic strategy for Somalia, but it did not abandon the U.S. commitment to making UNOSOM II a success with as small an allotment of U.S. forces as possible. Second, when the team briefed the secretary of defense in early August, they made clear the urgent need to deal with Aideed, and the advisability of increasing U.S. forces in order to capture him.

Aideed’s forces reinforced the “military track” of the strategy when they killed four U.S. soldiers with a command-detonated landmine on August 8. The U.S. response was to shore up resolve and escalate. Following the August 8 attack, President Clinton asked UN Ambassador Madeline Albright to write an op-ed in support of U.S. policy for *The New York Times*. Ambassador Albright’s piece reinforced the importance of disarming Aideed and helping rebuild the country. It also reaffirmed the White House’s commitment to engagement in Somalia and support for the United Nations’ mission. Ambassador Albright concluded, “The decision we must make is whether to pull up stakes and allow Somalia to fall back into the abyss or to stay the course and help lift the country and its people from the category of a failed state into that of an emerging democracy. For Somalia’s sake, and ours, we must persevere.”⁷⁴⁸

Meanwhile, inside the Department of Defense, the new casualties prompted Under Secretary Wisner to reconsider using U.S. special operations forces. He now personally made the case that more casualties would occur until Aideed was dealt with, and that special operations forces had the best chance of eliminating him. Thus, Wisner broke from the positions advocated by career Department of Defense officials and sided with the views of the Department of State and those in the field. Secretary Aspin agreed and General Powell came on board after consulting with the commander of the Quick

747 Baumann, Yates, Washington, “My Clan Against the World” 131; and Hirsch, Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope*, 122, fn. 20.

748 Madeline Albright, “Yes, There Is a Reason to Be in Somalia,” *New York Times*, August 10, 1993.

Reaction Force and the commander of the special operations forces that were to be deployed.

The Pentagon's decision to send U.S. special operations forces after Aideed was made using informal channels, but it was consistent with senior interagency meetings on Somalia taking place in mid and late August. An NSC Deputies Committee meeting on August 16 spent most of its time on the Aideed problem and concluded with a four-part plan that was heavy on the military dimension of the UN activities: continuing efforts to apprehend Aideed; pursuing the possibility of forced exile for Aideed; assisting the United Nations in arresting key Aideed supporters; and pressing the United Nations for detailed plans for detention and trial of Aideed, if captured. Interestingly, the Deputies also concluded that they needed a working group formed immediately to better integrate and implement their decisions. Apparently, there was some recognition that pursuing political and military tracks simultaneously could be tricky, and a more sustained level of oversight was necessary. The Somali Deputies Committee Working Group was created on August 18, and co-chaired by David Shinn from the Department of State, who had led the late July interagency assessment team, and Sean Darragh from the NSC.

With the Department of Defense now on board for using special operations forces to hunt Aideed, all that was required was a presidential decision. When a landmine injured six soldiers on August 22, President Clinton ordered Task Force Ranger to Somalia. The Task Force, consisting of Rangers and special mission unit personnel, arrived in Mogadishu on August 26. They were promptly welcomed with a mortar attack from Aideed's forces that wounded several of their personnel. The Task Force struck back several days later, but due to poor intelligence, they descended on a UN location and detained UN personnel in a case of mistaken identity. This event deepened the concern of critics like General Hoar, who continued to lobby against the Task Force Ranger mission to get Aideed. His view was that the Aideed problem could be handled only by a major infusion of ground forces, and that level of commitment exceeded U.S. interests in Somalia.⁷⁴⁹

749 "Rejecting 'facile solutions like get Aideed and all will be well,' Hoar concluded,

The day after Task Force Ranger arrived in Somalia, Secretary of Defense Aspin gave a major speech on policy in Somalia that was drafted with the help of advisors from the Department of State. It was designed to finally clarify U.S. objectives, but it only succeeded in demonstrating that policy had not yet come to grips with the cost of continued support for the expanded UN mission. Aspin noted that the current crisis was the result of UNOSOM II's mandate and activities, which undermined Aideed's position politically and militarily, and, like earlier UN officials in Mogadishu, concluded that the fighting was therefore evidence of success. He went on to identify the real threat to U.S. interests: "The danger now is that unless we return security to south Mogadishu, political chaos will follow the United Nations withdrawal... The danger is that the situation will return to what existed before the United States sent in the troops." Meanwhile, senior military and other observers were concluding that precisely because the United States and United Nations were threatening Aideed's power base, he would continue to fight, and that contending with him would be a drawn-out affair requiring years of patient effort and the continued employment of sizable military forces. For precisely this reason, and because the deployment of Task Force Ranger constituted further U.S. military escalation, General Hoar sent a message to Washington in the first week of September warning that the UN mandate in Somalia was too ambitious. He bluntly stated that the current strategy was inconsistent with the available resources, and he urged U.S. policy makers to convince the United Nations to scale back its objectives in Somalia. The message was sobering, but did not have an immediate impact on policy.⁷⁵⁰

Following the initial Task Force Ranger raid that went awry, the Task Force trained but otherwise did not launch any operations for the next six days or so. The intelligence community realized that real-time intelligence on Aideed's whereabouts was degrading precipitously. For one thing, their agents were suddenly disappearing. Perhaps

If the only solution for Mogadishu is a large-scale infusion of troops and if the only country available to make this commitment is the U.S., then its time to reassess." Barton Gellman, "The Words Behind a Deadly Decision," *Washington Post*, October 31, 1993.

750 Marshall V Ecklund, "Analysis of Operation Gothic Serpent: TF Ranger in Somalia," *Special Warfare*, May 2004.

in recognition of this fact, Ambassador Gosende, the senior U.S. diplomatic representative in Somalia, began having second thoughts, which he shared with Washington. He argued that it might just be better to negotiate a solution with Aideed, perhaps convince him to accept a golden parachute into exile. This was the first crack in the united front in Mogadishu that favored pressing the attack on Aideed, and it suggested the political tide was already turning against the special operations mission. The very next day (September 7), Major General William Garrison, the commander of the special operations task force, launched an attack against less important SNA targets and succeeded in capturing seventeen suspects, but this was not enough to impress Gosende. A week or so later, he sent a pointed high-priority cable from Mogadishu again underscoring his transition from a passionate advocacy of arresting Aideed to an equally heartfelt recommendation to enter into a cease-fire and negotiate with him.⁷⁵¹

Meanwhile, Aideed was lobbying for a policy change, as well. Perhaps feeling the strain from the presence of Task Force Ranger, Aideed launched an August 30 appeal to former President Jimmy Carter requesting help in “preventing an impending disaster.” Aideed claimed the U.S. government and United Nations were trying to handpick leaders for Somalia against the wishes of the vast majority of the Somali people, and this was the root cause of the conflict between the SNA and the U.S.-led mission in Somalia. Aideed called for the UN Security Council to appoint an independent commission to investigate the events in Mogadishu since June 5, identify those responsible for the crimes committed, and to settle the conflict peacefully through dialogue. He promised to abide by the commission’s decisions. Carter released a public statement on September 10 that deplored the violence and noted that communications with leaders of adjoining states indicated they would take Aideed in for the duration of the investigation. On September 13, Carter met with Clinton to discuss Somalia and he advised the president to abandon the

751 State Department sources said the cable was not ignored, but that “the new policy . . . was not worked out fully until after the October 3 firefight.” Keith B. Richburg, “U.S. Envoy to Somalia Urged Policy Shift Before 18 GIs Died,” *Washington Post*, November 11, 1993.

military confrontation in favor of a political solution. Carter had the impression that President Clinton agreed with him.

Perhaps Aideed's appeal to Carter was just a gambit to buy time or score political points. It is also possible that pressure from Task Force Ranger inclined him to investigate options for a safe departure. Clearly, Aideed's military successes encouraged the U.S. government to increase the emphasis on finding a political solution. The Department of State, which had favored the more aggressive military support of the UN mission, acknowledged in September that the military track was ineffective. By the end of September, Department of State position papers argued that as the political track built up, the military track should build down. It was suggested that the withdrawal of Task Force Ranger could best be covered as a logical part of the first phase of a new political strategy, even though the real reason would be the Task Force's lack of effectiveness. Internal Department of Defense strategy papers concurred that it was unlikely that Aideed would be captured, but they contained a subtle difference. Instead of talking about winding down military operations, they advised a transition to the political track while keeping up military pressure. The assumption was that in order for Aideed to be forced into accepting a political solution, the military efforts needed to continue for the time being.

Debate over whether the special operations should be kept up or abandoned while putting more emphasis on the political track emerged in U.S. discussions with UN leadership. On September 20, Secretary of State Warren Christopher gave UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali an informal memo recommending that the United Nations shift to a political track and negotiate with Aideed. Boutros-Ghali rejected the recommendation and said it was necessary to continue to hunt the warlord.

Two days later, on September 22, Ambassador Albright worked for and succeeded in passing UN Resolution 865, which stressed "the importance of going forward with a political and economic strategy."⁷⁵² Albright sought to depersonalize the conflict by not mentioning Aideed in her statement. Her omission might be

752 Madeleine Albright, "Madam Secretary: A Memoir," (New York, NY: Miramax Books, 2003), 181

construed as a tentative olive branch of sorts, but it was not much of one. The resolution reiterated support for a political process that ultimately would marginalize Aideed, and reaffirmed all previous resolutions, including Resolution 837, calling for the immediate apprehension of those responsible for the June attack. At best, it was a small step in the direction of conflict de-escalation.

The policy change was not evident in President Clinton's September 27 address to the UN General Assembly, either. President Clinton expressed concern about Somalia, but indicated no course change was in the offing. The president soft-peddled the policy change because he knew Boutros-Ghali did not want to abandon the military track. Pressure was put on Boutros-Ghali more subtly. The same day President Clinton addressed the General Assembly, senior officials from the Departments of Defense and State and the NSC (Frank Wisner, Peter Tarnoff, and Deputy National Security Advisor Sandy Berger, respectively) met with UN Undersecretary General for Peacekeeping Operations Kofi Annan. They warned that the United States would soon make its concerns about the political track known publicly. True to the warning, two days later a *New York Times* article made public the details of the difference of opinion between Boutros-Ghali and the United States. According to the article, Boutros-Ghali continued to insist that the Security Council resolution obliged him to bring Aideed to justice, despite the new American strategy, not yet announced publicly, to move away from the goal of capturing him.

In actuality, however, the renewed emphasis on the political track in U.S. strategy did not lead to the termination of the military track. As Ambassador Albright would later note:

We had decided on a new strategy, but coordination among officials in New York, Washington, and Somalia was not the best. No diplomatic solution was found and there was no letup in Aidid's attacks. The standing orders to the U.S. Ranger Force in Mogadishu remained the same—snatch him.⁷⁵³

753 Ibid., 182.

Later President Clinton and Secretary of State Christopher both would echo Ambassador Albright's surprise that Task Force Ranger operations continued after the decision to focus on the political track. However, as a subsequent Deputies Committee meeting would underscore, the ongoing Task Force Ranger operations were less the result of poor coordination than they were a conscious decision that the military pressure would encourage Aideed to seek political accommodation.

The day after the *Times* article and two days after the president's speech to the General Assembly, the Deputies Committee held a meeting to consider Somalia strategy. The mood was downbeat as all agreed Aideed was gaining strength while the U.S. ability to track him was much degraded. The deputies were quite conscious of pressure from Capitol Hill, and wanted to impress congressional critics that the Quick Reaction Force had disengaged from its patrolling activities and reverted to functioning as a true reaction force.

Congress was indeed showing signs of impatience. Bipartisan support for the intervention was gone. Now, many Republicans and some Democrats were alarmed about the course of events in Somalia, where humanitarian assistance had become what appeared to be an open-ended nation-building mission. Representative Benjamin A. Gilman (R-NY) introduced a joint resolution on March 16 and March 25 to withdraw U.S. forces from Somalia. Both times, the resolutions were rejected by votes along party lines. In May, Representative Toby Roth (R-WI) proposed a resolution to end financial support for U.S. operations in Somalia by June 30. It was rejected 127 to 299, with votes again mostly following party lines. John L. Mica (R-FL) introduced another resolution on August 4 to withdraw troops from Somalia. Mica's resolution included 45 cosponsors but also was defeated. Finally, in late September, both houses of Congress would pass a non-binding resolution asking the president to report his objectives in Somalia to Congress by October 15 and directing him to seek Congress's approval for a continued American presence by November 15.⁷⁵⁴ Sagging congressional support paralleled a decline in

754 U.S. Congress, Congressional Record, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1993) 11267; cited in Mark Peceny, "*The Democratic Peace and Contemporary U.S. Military Interventions*," *International Studies*

public support. In the last week of September, polls indicated public support for U.S. troops in Somalia was down from 79 percent to 46 percent, with only 22 percent in favor of trying to disarm warlords.

The deputies discussed the October 15 progress report due to Congress in their September 30 meeting. Failure to engage Congress successfully could leave the administration with the real possibility of a congressional demand for termination of a military operation for the first time since 1975. They decided the new political strategy could be used as the centerpiece of the report. The Department of State continued to argue that as the political track built up the military track ought to build down, and that such a course of action could be explained logically as part of the new political strategy. In the end, the deputies agreed that for the moment the United States was still pursuing the dual-track policy, including military operations to keep the pressure on Aideed. Although they considered it unlikely that Aideed would be captured, no one suspected that Aideed might deliver a decisive military blow to U.S. forces, not even the Pentagon's Somalia task force which was monitoring operations. Perhaps the Department of State did not feel it had the "votes" to force the decision to turn off military operations, but more likely it was not deemed an urgent requirement. No one knew that Task Force Ranger operations would soon precipitate the most intense ground force combat since the Vietnam War and a storm of attendant criticism.

Thus, as September drew to a close, U.S. policy and operations were seriously conflicted. Task Force Ranger had been dispatched and was actively hunting Aideed. Yet, as the costs of the UN mission increased and the likelihood of quickly capturing Aideed waned, U.S. commitment to the overall mission was declining. The conflict between the U.S. commitment and its operational resources was highlighted by a September 14 request from General Montgomery for armor to help deal with Aideed's roadblocks. Montgomery worried that UN troops with armor would not respond, if called upon. General Powell and Secretary Aspin denied the request as incompatible with the desire to gradually reduce the overall U.S.

military presence in Somalia. According to one account of Aspin's conversation with Powell about the request for armor, "the secretary told Powell that in terms of overall strategy in Somalia 'the trend is all going the other way' and that Congress would be all over the administration if it raised the visibility of its presence there."⁷⁵⁵

General Hoar agreed with Montgomery's request for additional armor but noted there was a political downside to the proposal. Sending armor would expand the "U.S. footprint in Somali[a]," elevate "Aideed's stature," and increase "collateral damage in Somali[a] due to the increased firepower." More importantly, as General Hoar noted at the time, the request for armor and Washington's negative reaction highlighted the tension between U.S. policy and operations. It was incumbent upon the United States to either persuade the United Nations to scale back its mission and activities in keeping with the effects its military forces could deliver, or significantly increase the American commitment and underwrite the UN mission for an indefinite period of time. Washington was unresponsive to General Hoar's warning about a mismatch between U.S. policy objectives and operational resources and it was even more removed from the reality of the tactical risks that Task Force Ranger was running.

In the latter half of 1993, Aideed's forces had begun to demonstrate competence in shooting down helicopters. Task Force Ranger began training for how it would react to a downed helicopter around the third week of September, about a month after one report indicated Aideed had offered a bounty of \$10,000 for anyone who could bring down an American helicopter. On September 25, Aideed's forces succeeded in shooting down a helicopter with a rocket propelled grenade, killing three Americans. While Task Force Ranger pilots considered it a "one in a million shot," Garrison's decision to have the Task Force train for the possibility of a downed helicopter suggests he understood the increased risk.⁷⁵⁶ Leadership in Washington did

755 Gellman, "The Words Behind A Deadly Decision," October 31, 1993; and Report from Senators John Warner and Carl Levin, "Review of the Circumstances Surrounding the Ranger Raid on October 3-4, 1993, in Mogadishu, Somalia," September 29, 1995, 34.

756 Marshall V Ecklund, "Analysis of Operation Gothic Serpent: TF Ranger in Somalia," Special Warfare, May 2004. Ecklund interviewed General Garrison,

not. Officials in Washington were aware that capturing Aideed was increasingly unlikely. There had not been a confirmed sighting of Aideed in over a month. However, judging from the results of a September 30 deputies meeting, no one was worried about a major military setback in Mogadishu. The Department of State thought there was a political cost to the Task Force Ranger operations and wanted to wind them down, but DOS did not insist on it happening immediately. Others wanted to continue Task Force Ranger operations to encourage Aideed to reach a political compromise. In the Department of Defense, which was responsible for assessing military risk, both military and civilian leaders were willing to deny field requests for additional forces. The view in Washington was that attempts to nab Aideed could continue while the Department of State negotiated with the United Nations and slowly worked its way toward greater emphasis on the political track. No one in Washington worried that Task Force Ranger operations might trigger a major firefight that would decimate Aideed's forces but present Washington with a political challenge of the first order, which is what happened.

The October 3 Firefight

On September 30, several days before the October 3 battle with Aideed's forces, the *Boston Globe* revealed that, according to a CIA report and official sources in Mogadishu, UN troops were isolated and facing the risk of a major assault by Aideed forces. In addition to quoting an official who said on September 29 that "the efficiency of the U.S. Army Ranger... teams sent in to track Aideed [was] decreasing by the day," the article noted that analysts knew Aideed was consolidating his position, able to move with increasing ease, and capable of hitting U.S. helicopters.

General Garrison understood his tactical and political situations well, both of which were turning against his Ranger and special mission unit operations. Garrison knew Aideed and his forces were concentrated in the Bakara market area, and that going in there would be a high-risk enterprise. Reportedly, he noted that going into

who explained he was aware of the threat but decided to accept the advice of his pilots that the risk was manageable.

the Bakara market might be a “win the gunfight, but lose the war” scenario, a concern that was prophetic. Prior to October 3, when Garrison ordered a daylight raid into the market, Task Force Ranger had conducted six live missions (three of which were conducted in daylight), while another thirty-five or forty were aborted because of insufficient intelligence. Much time had elapsed since the last “go,” and Garrison knew that the political winds were blowing against the military option and in favor of negotiations. As Garrison later said, he knew General Hoar was expressing reservations, as was Ambassador Gosende. Garrison and Hoar had discussed the risk of going near the Bakara market, and Hoar had told Garrison not to do so, except in certain circumstances. Garrison also knew the intelligence was not getting any better. Cognizant of all these factors, on the October 3 mission, General Garrison did something he had not done for any of those previous missions; he ordered that the helicopters carrying and supporting the troops on their raids be armed with rockets. He then went to salute personally each helicopter crew and its other special operations forces occupants before takeoff. In another first, he ordered the Task Force to shoot any threatening Somalis rather than giving them a chance to surrender.⁷⁵⁷ Special operations personnel later told senior diplomatic leaders on the scene that they knew they were operating “at the edge of the envelope”; i.e., that the operational risks they ran were high and that operating in the vicinity of the Bakara market was particularly dangerous. The envelope collapsed when first one and then another helicopter went down during the raid. It took a major effort to extract Task Force Ranger, during which 18 U.S. servicemen lost their lives and another 78 were wounded.

As *The New York Times* reported at the time, “... administration officials were at a loss to explain why a military raid... was conducted at the same time that Mr. Christopher was waging a campaign to persuade a reluctant Mr. Boutros-Ghali to pursue a political track aggressively... At the State Department, some senior officials said they were surprised by news of the military operations.”⁷⁵⁸ The *Washington Post* reported that:

757 Mark Bowden, *Blackhawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999).

758 Elaine Sciolino, “Puzzle in Somalia: The U.S. Goal,” *New York Times*, October 5,

internally, the President complained that without a full debate and without him understanding the implications, the United States signed on to a UN agenda that turned out to be a fatal error: pursuing the factional leader Mohammed Farah Aideed. Clinton told lawmakers that changed what he signed on to and was a mistake. He said this even though the United States approved the UN resolution authorizing the hunt for Aideed, which has been conducted almost exclusively with U.S. forces.⁷⁵⁹

When the father of one of the slain Rangers met with President Clinton, he asked why the raid had taken place if the U.S. government was pursuing a political solution. The president agreed that the raid was incomprehensible. He would later say it was the low point of his presidency. President Clinton accepted Secretary Aspin's resignation, but it was not clear that the secretary of defense was uniquely responsible (indeed, perhaps unique among cabinet-level officials, Aspin repeatedly expressed concern about the administration's policy). In any case, lower ranking officials soon admitted that even when the administration began to rethink its approach in September; it did not tell the U.S. forces in Somalia under Pentagon control to abandon their hunt for General Aideed. Orders to try to capture Aideed were not rescinded, "one senior official said, because Washington had not yet given up the idea of capturing him."⁷⁶⁰ In short, the U.S. and UN leadership in the field⁷⁶¹ were still pursuing a two-track military and political strategy when the October 3 raid took place.

While some expressions of shock and ignorance about ongoing military operations in Mogadishu may have been exaggerated, the surest sign that Washington was genuinely surprised by the scale

1993.

759 Ann Devroy, "Collapse of U.S. Collective Action May Force Second Look at Bosnia," *Washington Post*, October 8, 1993.

760 Michael R. Gordon with John H. Cushman, "Mission in Somalia; After Supporting Hunt for Aideed, U.S. is Blaming UN for Losses," *New York Times*, October 18, 1993.

761 Admiral Howe defended the two track policy before and following the events of October 3rd. Adm. Jonathan Howe, interview by PBS, *Frontline: Ambush in Mogadishu*, PBS, available at <http://pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/interviews/howe.html>.

and intensity of combat on October 3 was the inept public affairs response to the battle. For months, senior administration officials argued against abandoning the United Nations in Somalia because it was in U.S. interests to ensure the success of the first Chapter VII, UN peace enforcement operation. Yet, when President Clinton spoke to the American people, appalled and outraged by photos of desecrated American dead on October 6, he could only observe “it curdles the stomach of every American to see that, because we went there for no purpose other than to keep those people alive. We had no other purpose than a humanitarian mission.”⁷⁶² With the president of the United States only able to articulate a humanitarian purpose for the mission, there seemed no point in remaining in Somalia and shooting people.

At an October 6 NSC meeting, Clinton decided to shift completely to a political track. He gave orders that U.S. forces would no longer pursue Aideed and dispatched Ambassador Oakley and U.S. Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni to Somalia to ensure that Aideed and U.S. and UN forces received the new policy guidance. Upon arrival, Oakley and Zinni discovered Admiral Howe had not been informed of the change in policy. Not surprisingly, Howe was strongly opposed to the change. He could not believe the United States would abandon a mission after so much sacrifice, but that was the case, as he soon came to realize. Senior Aideed representatives also were deeply suspicious of the alleged policy change. It took a full day of discussions and a combination of persuasion and threats to obtain the release of warrant officer Durant, the one American captured on October 3, with no compensation or conditions as part of the new political approach.

In an October 7 meeting with congressional leadership, President Clinton encountered bipartisan opposition to the United States remaining in Somalia. A week later, in a letter to Congress, President Clinton argued that “having been brutally attacked, were American forces to leave now we would send a message to terrorists and other potential adversaries around the world that they can change

762 “President Responds to Recent Violence Against U.S. Forces,” *Washington Times*, final edition, sec. A13, October 7, 1993.

our policies by killing our people. It would be open season on Americans.⁷⁶³ The administration was able to negotiate a five-month delay in the pullout, during which the administration would try to strengthen UNOSOM II. This would not prove possible, however, as the U.S. change in policy and pending withdrawal of forces wrecked both UNOSOM morale and credibility.

Thus, with the administration unable to articulate a more compelling strategic rationale than damage limitation to the U.S. reputation, Congress pulled the plug on the operation. With eerie parallels to the Tet offensive in Vietnam, Aideed had secured a strategic political victory while suffering a huge tactical defeat. Task Force Ranger had inflicted almost a thousand casualties on the SNA on October 3 and a great deal of collateral damage on the civilian population. By some accounts, Aideed's blood-soaked clan was traumatized by the scale of death and destruction they had suffered without being able to overrun the small American contingent. Some intelligence later suggested that SNA support for Aideed's policy of confrontation was dealt a lethal blow on October 3.⁷⁶⁴ If so, Aideed aptly masked the dissension by continuing to inflict casualties with mortar attacks three days later and on through the month until the United Nations declared a ceasefire. Finally, in November, Aideed complied with the ceasefire so the United States could organize its withdrawal without the SNA sustaining further casualties. The United States sent a large joint military task force to ensure that U.S. forces could withdraw safely. The White House, wanting to avoid any possibility of casualties, made sure the task force would not undertake offensive actions or even enter Mogadishu.

763 President William Clinton, "Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Somalia October 13th, 1993," the American Presidency Project website: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid = 47197>, accessed September 6, 2006.

764 Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World," 158, 164, fn. 59, and 169.

Insufficient Explanations for the Disaster

Given that United States forces withdrew from Somalia without achieving stated political objectives, most commentators conclude the United States was not able to properly balance objectives and the means required to accomplish them. This is generally correct; but error creeps in when explanations for failure focus excessively on either inflated objectives or inadequate means to accomplish them. It will help to clarify the best explanation for failure in Somalia if we clear up some common misimpressions first.

There are many variations to the argument that the United States employed insufficient means, but they typically suggest a lack of commitment on the part of the world's remaining superpower.⁷⁶⁵ One broad formulation is that the American public is unwilling to tolerate casualties. The Clinton administration was not obliged to abandon Somalia because U.S. forces suffered casualties, however. If the American public understands the rationale for a military operation, it typically supports an operation until success is secured,⁷⁶⁶ in part to minimize unnecessary casualties by making the military contest as short as possible. The public and Congress demanded a withdrawal only when no adequate strategic rationale could be offered that would justify such sacrifices.

Another version of the case for insufficient means attributes failure to civilian meddling. Political leaders interfered and precluded the deployment of AC-130s, armor, and other military weapons that

765 The broadest formulation is simply to assert that smoothly functioning democracies are worth any price and that a hyperpower like the United States should simply have provided whatever resources were required for success. This seemed to be the underlying attitude of at least some at the time. One senior administration official, when asked why his short list of targeted countries for democratization included all the most unlikely cases, replied "because if we can do it there we can do it anywhere." In other words, the importance of democratization and the power of the United States were so great that there was no reason not to take on the hardest cases at whatever cost. If one accepts the premise that nation-building in Somalia was a vital interest of the United States, it follows that inadequate resources explains the failure there.

766 Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005) provides a good discussion of this point.

would have made it possible to save the day when special operations forces were pinned down in extended urban combat in Mogadishu on October 3. Task Force Ranger did not have AC-130 gunships, which can provide highly precise close air support for ground forces, because the planes require a lot of support personnel and decision makers wanted to limit the numbers of U.S. personnel in Somalia. The later request for armor was also turned down. However, General Garrison, who claimed he had all the firepower he needed, discounts the significance of the decisions not to send the AC-130s and armor. Tragically, one soldier who bled to death might have been saved had the armored relief force arrived earlier. Otherwise Garrison's belief that lack of more readily available firepower was not a key factor in the firefight appears substantiated by after-action assessments.

Another complaint is that the United States government did not make a larger commitment to the non-military portion of the UN mission. For example, the United States was not inclined and in fact had little to contribute to UN efforts to build up the Somali national police force so that it could stand up to the warlords. Without strong U.S. support, the small national police force started under UNITAF withered away. It is true that the United States does not have a full and robust range of nation-building capabilities, and that their presence would have helped, especially early on.⁷⁶⁷ However, building Somali civil infrastructure was a long-term proposition in the best of cases, and it could not be accomplished without a more secure environment. Indeed, that was the UN position, which was repeated frequently. As late as August 2, 1993, Kofi Annan sent Madeleine Albright a draft report to the Security Council on the Somali neutral police force. It argued that a critical prerequisite for reestablishment of the Somali police was disarmament of the entire country, a mission UNOSOM II had to accomplish. The police could not compete with the warlords unless the latter were disarmed, which raises the question of whether they should have been.

One of the most persistent explanations for failure is the argument that the United States should have disarmed Aideed and the other

767 Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World," 71.

warlords when it had a large force presence under UNITAF.⁷⁶⁸ Comprehensive disarmament would have been easier for UNITAF than UNOSOM, but not by much. Somalia was awash in arms. A much larger force than the Marines fielded would have been required to enforce comprehensive disarmament, something military leaders unanimously agree upon. Aideed (and perhaps other warlords) was prepared to fight to protect his perceived interests. Disarming the warlords therefore would have entailed not just more forces, but higher costs in general, including casualties. The Clinton administration did not have a lot of political support for such an agenda, especially on Capitol Hill, and they judged it necessary to keep the level of U.S. military operations low as a result. Senior administration officials tried to make the case for “assertive multilateralism,” and could have done so more systematically to the Congress and the public. However, given the resistance in Congress, and to a lesser extent in the Pentagon where major figures like General Hoar were even against using Civil Affairs forces to build up the Somali national police force, clearly it would have been an uphill battle at best. Thus, the desire to keep the size of the U.S. forces in Somalia low was understandable; much more so than the willingness to sign the United Nations up to an expansive mandate.

Those who do not agree with the broad mandate that the United Nations and United States adopted in Somalia stress the United States was overly committed rather than insufficiently so. One popular version of this argument notes United States lacked an “exit strategy” for shedding the UN commitment in a timely fashion. This view is particularly prevalent in the Pentagon, where nation building is generally viewed as a natural hazard to be avoided like quicksand; to wit, the United States got mired in Somalia and simply could not extricate itself before disaster struck.⁷⁶⁹ Yet this interpretation does not accord with the facts. UNITAF had an exit strategy. They left; it did not matter that the United Nations threatened not to send a replacement force.⁷⁷⁰

768 Walter Clarke and Robert Gosende, “The Political Component: The Missing Vital Element in US Intervention Planning,” *Parameters*, (Autumn 1996) 35–51.

769 Powell, *My American Journey*, 588.

770 They left despite direct appeals from Admiral Howe. Baumann, Yates,

It is true that the administration was concerned with exit strategies, and that the United States wanted to leave Somalia under the best possible circumstances. However discussion of exit strategies just obscures the central issue: U.S. interests and the costs they justify. Since the costs cannot be perfectly known before the operation, they must be assessed as the operation unfolds and resistance and force performance become evident. It is always possible to find a way to minimize damage to prestige or, more happily, to pass a successful operation on to others with greater interests in the outcome. In fact, the State Department was planning its face-saving rationale for a return to negotiations with Aideed when the October 3 fight occurred.

Finally, it is often observed that the United States failed in Somalia for lack of cultural understanding and intelligence. As one senior officer operating in UNITAF admitted, he “didn’t know Somalis from salamis.”⁷⁷¹ Yet, U.S. forces learned quickly, especially under Ambassador Oakley’s tutelage. Moreover, the specific connection between lack of cultural intelligence and the failure of UNOSOM is weak. The argument is that because U.S. forces and intelligence agencies did not understand the clan structure, they underestimated how hard it would be to obtain the intelligence necessary to capture Aideed.⁷⁷² However, this argument is contradicted by the fact that both in Washington and in the field there was an appreciation that obtaining the required intelligence would be difficult, which is why so many sources (including Hoar, Powell and the Office of the Secretary of Defense) recommended against deploying special operations forces.⁷⁷³

The General Explanation for Failure

Using “what if” hypotheses to envision a different outcome in Somalia is useful for generating recommendations for the future. For example, we could ask whether results might have been different if coalition nations eager to punish Aideed after the June 5 ambushes

Washington, “My Clan Against the World,” 88.

771 Ibid., 49.

772 Ibid. The authors cite Marine General Anthony Zinni on this point.

773 Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 550; Marshall V Ecklund, “Analysis of Operation Gothic Serpent: TF Ranger in Somalia,” *Special Warfare*, May 2004; fn 41.

had not bailed out after the June 17 fighting, and if so, whether measures to strengthen UN coalitions might be valuable. However, the purpose here is to explain the failure. In this regard, *ex post facto* prescriptions for curtailing U.S. and UN aspirations in Somalia or increasing the resources committed to realizing them only serve to obscure the key point; which is that they were seriously imbalanced. Before considering how this came to be, it is important to realize how prevalent the inability to balance means and ends was in U.S. policy, strategy, and operational decisions. Each will be considered in turn before attempting to explain why the U.S. national security establishment could repeatedly fail to properly balance means and ends.

Somalia was primarily a policy failure, not because the policy was wrong, which can be debated, but because it was inadequately clarified, communicated, resourced and defended. The Bush administration decided to intervene in Somalia for humanitarian reasons, claiming no other national security interests that would justify risks to servicemen. The Clinton administration, on the other hand, identified U.S. national security interests in Somalia, but did so without reconciling competing policies or being clear-headed about their implications, including the need to build sufficient political support to sustain operations. The administration's representatives waxed eloquent at the United Nations about a new unprecedented nation-building mission but did not acknowledge the costs of such an undertaking. The administration promulgated confused policy guidance, simultaneously insisting that the United States draw down its support and that it not let the United Nations fail. The tension between those who thought American interests were closely linked to the United Nations' success in Somalia and those who did not was papered over with confused and wishful thinking. Despite every expectation that Aideed would fight for his perceived interests, the Clinton administration hoped he would be less recalcitrant, and then that he would be easily thwarted, and finally that special operations would deal with him quickly. Worst of all, when U.S. forces were not able to capture Aideed and paid a heavy price for trying to do so, the administration could not articulate to the American people and Congress a strong national security rationale to justify the blood that was shed.

Confused and inattentive policy produced confused and extremely high-risk strategies to obtain expansive objectives with minimum resources. The United States wholeheartedly endorsed—even engineered—the broader UN mandate, which required an even more potent force than UNITAF had on hand. Yet, as one confidential assessment after another concluded—including spring and summer assessment teams sent to Mogadishu—UNOSOM II forces were not up to the task. In fact, on June 5 and June 17 when UN forces seriously challenged Aideed, they were badly bloodied and coalition member support for UNOSOM eroded, forcing the United Nations to rely on and request additional U.S. forces. These events and their effects begged for a reassessment of U.S. policy, as did the U.S.-led strike on the Abdi House on July 12. So did General Hoar. He requested that policy objectives be brought in line with available resources. He argued for a classic counterinsurgency method if Washington thought the stakes were sufficient to justify such an endeavor. Instead, Washington opted to neutralize Aideed with special operations forces. As it became apparent that snatching Aideed was a long shot, the United States increasingly pursued political options while keeping up military pressure on the warlord. Meanwhile, Aideed was pursuing the same strategy of talking while fighting, and the Marines had similarly combined a judicious use of force with constant communication. In theory, Gosende and Garrison should have been able to execute such a strategy, but they were handicapped by critical limitations of their own making.

Having declared Aideed a criminal, if not a terrorist, no one in Mogadishu (or Washington or New York) was inclined to negotiate with him. The use of lethal force against an adversary while trying to negotiate is always a complicated and delicate enterprise. It is impossible if either side is unwilling to communicate, which essentially describes the U.S. and UN post-June 5 positions. When Gosende changed his mind in the fall and concluded that negotiations might be necessary, he did not have the relationship with Garrison that Ambassador Oakley had with his military counterpart, General Johnston. They pursued different approaches. Garrison decided to undertake increasingly risky operations, and Gosende decided to lobby Washington for a switch to the political track. A combined approach from Garrison and Gosende would have stood a much better chance

of succeeding, as the Senate investigation into the events of October 3 later concluded.⁷⁷⁴

Washington's poor assessment of requirements for achieving objectives in Somalia also generated lesser operational failures. When the president opted to authorize special operations to snatch Aideed, military authorities should have explained the importance of tactical surprise. Instead, the United States abandoned the element of surprise, normally a key prerequisite for success in this kind of special operation. The U.S. Special Operations Command said shortly after the June 5 attack on the Pakistanis that special operations forces could nab Aideed.⁷⁷⁵ It would have been easier then, but the United States took a series of steps that substantially increased the operational difficulties. First, the United States declared Aideed a criminal and put a reward on his head, effectively putting him on his guard. Then, the Marines tried to capture him and failed, further increasing his alert status. Finally, the United States sent special operations forces, but not before publicly announcing that it was doing so; in effect warning Aideed to take extraordinary security precautions. He did so, ruthlessly eliminating or turning agents reporting to American intelligence officers. After ceding so much to Aideed, it might have been better to allow special operations forces the latitude of taking him dead or alive. They had several opportunities to eliminate Aideed at a distance, but there was concern that doing so would make him a martyr and hero (a notion which runs contrary to the assumption that Aideed was the particular problem and not the SNA more generally). As it was, policy and strategy were so confused that the Administration never agreed with the United Nations on how to handle Aideed if U.S. forces succeeded in capturing him.

With operational surprise gone and lethal fire not an option, special operations personnel could only hope for an immediate and short-

774 Report from Senators John Warner and Carl Levin, "Review of the Circumstances Surrounding the Ranger Raid on October 3-4, 1993, in Mogadishu, Somalia," September 29, 1995, 50.

775 Powell remembers SOCOM wanting the mission. Another source claims that before the departure of Task Force Ranger, SOCOM raised numerous objections. Marshall V Ecklund. "Analysis of Operation Gothic Serpent: TF Ranger in Somalia," Special Warfare, May 2004.

lived tactical element of surprise. But after Aideed's forces struck Task Force Ranger with mortars, General Garrison, with General Hoar's approval, adopted a tactical approach that had the effect of further reducing even these fleeting elements of surprise. Garrison argued that going after Aideed's lieutenants would pressure Aideed. While no doubt it would have increased his anxiety, eliminating many of Aideed's senior advisors in the missile attack on the Abdi House did not cause Aideed to sue for peace; it simply reaffirmed the SNA's political loyalty to Aideed and increased their willingness to attack American targets. In truth, as Garrison later testified, he really just wanted to go on the offensive after the mortar attack so his men would not adopt a "bunker mentality." The Senate report condemned this attitude: "The lack of a valid rationale for launching the raid should have alerted superiors in the chain of command to the need to carefully reevaluate the Task Force's mission after each operation."⁷⁷⁶ In other words, the military concept of operations needed to be reassessed. Ostensibly attacking Aideed's lieutenants to coerce him while actually just satisfying a broader desire to take and sustain the offensive was a flawed approach given Aideed's intelligence advantages and the uncertain willingness of political authorities to support a more general offensive against the SNA clan. The desire for action irrespective of the primary goal, and the inability to patiently wait for an opportune moment to achieve the main objective, made an already difficult mission much harder.

Thus policy, strategy, operational, and tactical decisions were all poorly coordinated, inadequately balanced with respect to means and ends, and inherently high risk. Worse, warning signals at each level were repeatedly ignored. A high-risk strategy must be monitored particularly closely, with fallback options prepared for untoward developments. However, on October 3, when risk turned in to actual high costs, everyone in the chain of command was caught by surprise but one man: General Garrison. He focused narrowly on the possibility of tactical success, which he knew was declining, irrespective of risks, which he knew were increasing. His decision to enter the Bakara market did not violate his guidance, but neither did he make an effort to share his knowledge of risks with others.

776 Warner, Levin, "Review Circumstance Surrounding Ranger Raid," 51.

Some argue that the events of October 3 could not have been predicted, and that when opportunities arose, the tactical commander did not have time to make decisions by committee. This is true, which is why the risks the special operations forces could run should have been thoroughly discussed and debated in advance, and if accepted, prepared for with political and information backup plans. The critical importance of close oversight of tactical operations in irregular warfare, and of special operations like Task Force Ranger in particular, is well recognized by experts. The relative independence of Task Force Ranger stands in stark contrast to the well-coordinated political and military operations under UNITAF. The Senate investigation correctly concluded:

U.S. foreign policy was and will be affected for years as a result of the raid of October 3–4. It is clear that both civilian officials and military leaders should have been carefully and continually re-evaluating the Task Force Ranger mission and tactics after each raid, with an eye toward recommending that the operation be terminated if the risks were deemed to have risen too high.⁷⁷⁷

Such oversight of Task Force Ranger operations was lacking. Even General Hoar, who was usually alert to the imbalance between the administrations objectives and the means employed and the importance of clear risk assessment, was surprised by the events of October 3. Higher up the chain of command there was surprise as well and an uneven appreciation of the need for closely monitoring Task Force Ranger risks.

The fact that the deputies concluded in mid-August that they needed a working group (the Somali Deputies Committee Working Group) to better integrate and implement their decisions suggests they were concerned about better oversight, but the nuances of Task Force Ranger risks were not within their field of vision. General Powell, like General Hoar, was more concerned with the imbalance between objectives and means than he was with looking over General Garrison's shoulder. Powell warned the president just before retiring on September

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

30 that the administration's policy on Somalia needed reevaluation.⁷⁷⁸ The president, for his part, later asserted that he purposefully remained disengaged from military matters in Somalia. When the president met with families of the soldiers slain in the October 3 fight seven months later, he told them he intentionally remained aloof because he did not believe in micromanaging the military.⁷⁷⁹

It may be true that a president does not have the time to monitor such operations closely, but just as the Senate investigation concluded, his subordinates must do so. Recognizing that tactical operations and their outcome can have political and strategic significance is conventional wisdom among those who study small and irregular wars, but this perspective was not on display in the oversight and leadership of Task Force Ranger. In both Mogadishu and Washington, leaders did not appreciate the risks being run by Task Force Ranger, and they were poorly prepared to defend them. It is not clear that an information contingency plan would have salvaged the devastating blow special operations forces inflicted on the SNA forces; but its absence relegated the tactical excellence of the special operations forces to a poignant afterthought, and magnified the consequences of the policy and strategy failure in Somalia.

Integrating Elements of National Power

The purpose of this case study was to determine how well the United States integrated the elements of national power in Somalia, and in so doing, answer four specific questions. First, to what extent did the United States act with a strategy in mind as opposed to ad

778 The Somalia intervention took place during a period when the Joint Staff still routinely excluded the Office of the Secretary of Defense from operational information. It could prove difficult for policy officials in defense to gain a full picture of what was taking place on the ground. The assistant secretary of defense (Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict), for example, actually received his best information from U.S.AID workers. Conversation with Jim Locher, who was the assistant secretary of defense (Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict) until mid-June, 1993.

779 President Clinton still may not understand what happened in Mogadishu. In his memoirs he confuses General Powell's last plea for policy adjustments with the earlier decision to dispatch special operations forces. Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 550.

hoc decision making? Prior to and during UNITAF's humanitarian operations, the National Security Council operated without the benefit of a strategy and on more of an *ad hoc* basis. It was not clear why the United States chose to intervene in Somalia but not in other countries that arguably suffered humanitarian crises of similar import. There is evidence that the intervention was driven more by the president's understandable personal feelings than by sober calculations of national interest. In any case, once the president's interest was established, the NSC was able to generate alternative courses of action, and to align its objectives with the means necessary to achieve them. However, absent a controlling strategy and given the change in administrations, basic mission and resource issues tended to be addressed in an *ad hoc* manner. For example, disarmament was originally inserted in the military's mission statement, then rejected by General Hoar, and then repeatedly debated in interagency meetings. It also was left for Ambassador Oakley and General Johnston to develop a strategy in the field for achieving Bush administration objectives without exceeding the resources made available to them. By contrast, the Clinton administration had a formal, coordinated and explicit policy for UNOSOM II codified in a presidential decision directive, even though it obscured the tension, if not contradiction, between objectives and resources. Thus ironically, the system generated worse policy and strategy when it deliberately set out to establish clear strategy.

The second question concerned the integration of multiple elements of power. The crisis in Somalia certainly required such integration. The intervention arose because U.S. aid officials could not manage the crisis alone. Yet, at no time did the United States or the United Nations have sufficient military force to rely solely upon that instrument of power. It would have been far more efficient and effective to integrate other elements of power even if an abundance of military force was available, as the able leadership of UNITAF demonstrated. Oakley and Johnston did a remarkable job of achieving unity of effort. They knit diplomacy and military force together judiciously, never failing to keep open lines of communication and limiting force to that which was necessary to ensure the delivery of aid. Force was backed up with civic action and information campaigns (including novel organizational structures and highly competent psychological operations) to assure the public that the UNITAF

presence was ultimately benign. UNITAF also paid reparations for collateral damage from its military forces. By the few available accounts, including the Senate investigation, intelligence agencies worked well with their military counterparts in the field, even if they were not fully integrated until after the disastrous raid on October 3.⁷⁸⁰ Oakley and Johnston carefully integrated the elements of national power, and constantly reassessed the appropriate application of each instrument relative to the others.

The United States was not able to closely integrate the elements of national power well in crafting policy for UNOSOM II, or in implementing the UNOSOM II mission. The interagency decision-making system repeatedly failed, both in Washington and in the field, even when circumstances begged for a sober reconsideration of policy alternatives. Interagency decision making bodies were not able to develop common and iterative assessments of the resources required to execute U.S. policy. Neither could they develop integrated assessments of risks, nor risk mitigation plans in the event of undesirable outcomes. The inadequacy of policy formulation and implementation was evident at three levels.

First, at the national level, the NSC papered over a fundamental mismatch between objectives and resources in the May 19 presidential decision directive that guided policy on Somalia, an oversight that never was corrected. Nothing like the trenchant analysis of a policy-resources mismatch offered by Ambassador Oakley in December and General Hoar later was available in Washington's deliberative bodies. Instead, the decision-making structures and processes that brought the intelligence community, the White House, Department of State, and Department of Defense together for collective decision making concluded with agreement to promote a mission mandate that the United Nations and by extension, supporting U.S. forces, could not execute with available resources. The inherent policy confusion persisted despite multiple assessments which concluded the United Nations did not have the ability to compel warlord compliance.

780 Vernon Loeb, "The CIA in Somalia," *Washington Post*, Sunday, February 27, 2000; posted at <http://www.somaliawatch.org/archivejuly/000927601.htm>, and Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World," 180.

Second, when the U.S. government stumbled into a high-risk strategy, its ability to respond nimbly to evolving circumstances and to coordinate its policy decisions proved woefully inadequate, particularly with regards to managing the inherently complex and difficult two track policy of pursuing both military and political initiatives. Washington was out of touch with the military and political risks being run in the field. The decisions to confront Aideed by surprising him with a June 5 inspection, to brand Aideed a criminal and terrorist, to attack the SNA leadership at the Abdi House, to deny requests for more forces in the field, to continue military operations after deciding they would not likely succeed and that a return to the political track was necessary—were ill-considered given the limited means on hand to achieve desired objectives. When special operations forces were called in as a last resort, their deployment and use were poorly coordinated with informational, diplomatic, and political activities. When the Department of State finally decided to switch back to the political track, its efforts at the United Nations were poorly coordinated with efforts in the field to keep pressure on Aideed. Ambassador Albright, the Secretary of State Christopher and, later, President Clinton claim to have been surprised by the continuation of the military operations against Aideed. Certainly no one understood or was prepared to defend high-risk military operations with a political and informational strategy in the event of a major military setback, which points to the third major integration failure.

In the field, U.S. leaders initially were united in their purpose, separated in their chain of commands, and eventually divided in their management of means. Howe, Gosende, and Montgomery all believed that their mandate required going after Aideed, and they were not about to accommodate him, which they considered akin to appeasement.⁷⁸¹ In pursuing Aideed, they relied heavily on the military instrument, the use of which rapidly diminished political support for UNOSOM II, except among anti-Aideed warlords. By October 3, the military and political tracks were completely separated in the field. Garrison and other UN and U.S. military personnel were ready for additional military operations against Aideed after the October 3-4

781 Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World," 171.

battle,⁷⁸² but they were out of touch with the limited political support for their mission. Howe and Gosende could not maintain coalition unity during aggressive military operations against Aideed, and Gosende in fact had given up on the military track altogether (unbeknownst to UNOSOM II staff) and was lobbying for a cease-fire and return to negotiations with Aideed. Both Howe and Gosende were out of touch with Garrison's high-risk operations and unprepared to defend them with political and informational efforts. As for intelligence, cooperation was apparently good and not a key factor in the failure. However, in terms of unity of effort, it should be noted that human operations were not fully integrated until after October 3, and that one of the CIA's frequently rotated senior leaders clashed and stopped talking with Ambassador Gosende during his tenure.⁷⁸³

In summary, the United States decided to intervene in Somalia without a strategy, but cobbled one together in the field. When the Washington decision-making system deliberately generated policy and strategy for Somalia, the results were worse than the *ad hoc* effort. The strategy required the integration of multiple elements of power since no one element could manage the crisis alone, but the elements of national power were not well integrated, either in crafting or implementing policy and strategy. The NSC, other senior councils, and assessment teams repeatedly papered over a fundamental mismatch between objectives and resources. Hope proved a persistent but poor substitute for clear analysis as the U.S. government stumbled into a high-risk, military-centric strategy, blowing through one warning after another that UNOSOM II forces and Task Force Ranger could not accomplish their assigned objectives. The decision-making system was not able to respond nimbly to evolving circumstances or to coordinate its policy decisions well, particularly with regards to managing the inherently complex and difficult two-track policy of pursuing military and political initiatives simultaneously. The national security apparatus could only digest and act on this reality slowly and incompletely, and as it turned out, too late to avoid being overtaken by events that

782 Ibid., 165.

783 Loeb, "The CIA in Somalia," February 27, 2000; posted at <http://www.somaliawatch.org/archive/july/000927601.htm>, and Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World," 180.

should have been assessed as increasingly likely and prepared for accordingly much earlier.

Not integrating the elements of national power well led to abject failure, and the failure cost the United States a great deal besides the lives lost. It produced deep policy divisions in Washington and poor results in the field that shook up a presidential cabinet and marked the low point of a presidential administration. Somalia effectively ended the Clinton administration's policy of "assertive multilateralism," terminated Secretary Les Aspin's short career as secretary of defense, and increased tensions between senior civilian and military leaders. Somalia also arguably encouraged America's enemies to challenge U.S. interests. Just as Aideed bluntly told Ambassador Oakley that American failures in Vietnam and Beirut proved the United States did not have staying power, Osama Bin Laden and others would similarly, but erroneously, conclude from Somalia and other events that the United States lacked the will to protect its interests.

Root Causes of Failure

Why was the United States' national security apparatus unable to develop a clear policy, an integrated strategy to pursue its objectives, or an accurate estimation of likely requirements for success? Why was the United States government's integrated policy formulation and implementation so grossly inadequate on multiple levels? A fatalist might argue that these types of complex contingencies are simply difficult to manage and sometimes go awry. It is true that making, implementing, and overseeing effective policy, strategy, and operations in an ambiguous irregular warfare environment is challenging. However, the level of failure in Somalia cannot be explained away as happenstance. The extended combat operations on October 3 and 4 brought a series of mistakes into high relief, but they were not the origin of those mistakes. Even if the operations had not ended in disaster, the United States was already on the way to a face-saving, "damage-limitation" withdrawal from the military confrontation with Aideed.

We must look beyond the vagaries of chance to understand the failure in Somalia. This is not easily done. History cannot be rolled back, variables changed, and then rolled forward to assess their impact.

Nevertheless, we can consider some of the more likely candidates for root causes of the failure, beginning with leadership. One common belief is that the command and control of such difficult operations is primarily a question of good leadership. General Johnston and Ambassador Oakley were effective in a complex and shifting environment; Admiral Howe, Ambassador Gosende, General Bir (and other military leaders) were not. While Oakley and Johnston were extraordinary in their rapport and practical wisdom, personality-driven explanations for success and failure in Somalia are unfair. They ignore the fundamental policy and strategy contradictions that Howe, Gosende, and others in the field had to contend with after Johnston and Oakley left: a U.S. government divided and promoting a vast expansion in mission without sufficient resources for its accomplishment. The broader UN mission would not allow those assigned responsibility for its completion the luxury of remaining nonpartisan. To accomplish the broad UN mandate of comprehensive disarmament and bottom-up political reconstruction, Howe, Gosende, and other field commanders inevitably had to challenge the warlords, chief among whom was Aideed. This was so much the case that they interpreted Aideed's wrath as evidence that they were doing their job properly. Later, Admiral Howe would complain that although the United States led the effort to pass the broader mandate included in UN resolution 814, Congress and the American people did not understand "what the resolution meant and the kind of commitment we were making with the passage of that kind of resolution."⁷⁸⁴ Other leaders in the field were incredulous that anyone in Washington could ask how the mission had changed from simply delivering humanitarian aid. Major General Montgomery considered the question disingenuous, since it was well known that the United States authored the Security Council resolution in May that clearly set out the expanded mission.⁷⁸⁵ Howe and Montgomery were correct. The problem was fundamentally one of policy choices, not personalities.

784 Adm. Jonathan Howe, interview by PBS, *Frontline: Ambush in Mogadishu*, PBS, available at <http://pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/interviews/howe.html>.

785 Baumann, Yates, Washington, "My Clan Against the World," 166.

In that case, can the policy and strategy failures be attributed to poor leadership in Washington? To some extent, they must be as it is altogether possible that different leaders would have made different decisions with different consequences. But, it seems unsatisfactory to chalk the whole debacle up to poor leadership. To begin with, many of the key decision makers at the national level were experienced foreign-policy professionals. National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, Under Secretary of State Peter Tarnoff, and Under Secretary of Defense Frank Wisner were “bureaucratic black belts,” in the words of one observer, and moreover they had known each other since their service in Vietnam.⁷⁸⁶ It is worth considering how they could have overseen a confused policy and strategy failure like Somalia. Were their decisions constrained by other factors? For example, what was the impact of the lengthy Senate confirmation process? These leaders were not fully in charge for some months after their appointments. Frank Wisner was appointed under secretary of defense for policy by President Clinton on February 23, 1993, but not confirmed until July 1, 1993. Peter Tarnoff was nominated on February 26 and confirmed by the Senate on March 10, 1993. Tony Lake, of course, did not require confirmation as national security advisor. The need to work through hold-over political appointees and career civil servants presumably complicated the process for these leaders, but as anyone who has worked in the national security bureaucracy can attest, there is no doubt that Wisner and Tarnoff were able to make their views known from the moment they were appointed. In addition, they were able to rely on experienced civil servants like Dick Clarke for NSC oversight of Somalia. He provided continuity from the Bush administration and was in charge of coordinating the March policy paper that ultimately led to the May presidential directive that codified the Clinton administration’s Somalia policy. Even though Clarke was a hold-over from the Bush administration, he was widely acknowledged as one of the most effective and experienced interagency leaders in Washington, and he stayed on with an appreciative Clinton team despite the outcome in Somalia. Moreover, Admiral Howe, who was dispatched to Mogadishu to lead the UNOSOM II mission, had served on the Bush NSC since 1991 and knew the key personalities

786 Leslie Gelb, “Foreign Affairs; ‘Chris’ and Aspin And Lake,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1993.

and how the system worked. In short, the lag time in getting senior Clinton officials appointed was an inconvenience but not a controlling factor in this case.

Another possible complicating factor, at least in the Pentagon, was that Secretary Aspin immediately instituted a major overhaul of his policy apparatus, creating new assistant secretaries of defense. As General Powell would later complain, “The policy show was a mess with all those assistant secretaries overlapping each other. Nothing happened.”⁷⁸⁷ Thus the staff providing support to senior leaders in the Pentagon was in some turmoil. While there were notorious differences of opinion among some of the newly appointed assistant secretaries, it had less to do with policy on Somalia and more to do with how their bureaucratic boundaries were defined. Over time, Under Secretary Wisner received plenty of staff support, even if initially it was not particularly well integrated. He managed the integration burden by relying on key advisors and by use of a special task force on Somalia. In any case, the policy contradictions and strategy lapses cannot be attributed just to Pentagon staff support. The key decision to send special operation forces to Somalia was made over Pentagon staff objections, and other key decisions were made outside normal staffing processes.

Perhaps it is more important to remember that individual decision makers in interagency councils represented organizations, and therefore organizational interests. Individuals can differ with the common institutional perspective, but at some bureaucratic and political cost. For example, Ambassador Hempstone was out of line with the Department of State’s general predisposition to recommend a greater U.S. commitment in Somalia. Frank Wisner supported State’s position until he transferred to the Department of Defense. He was then constrained to support the general Department of Defense predilection to eschew broader missions, such as general disarmament. As late as a July 14 memorandum to the secretary of defense, Under Secretary of Defense Frank Wisner also supported the Department of Defense position in favor of not deploying special operations forces to deal with Aideed. In the memorandum, Wisner continued

787 Warner, Levin, “Review Circumstance Surrounding Ranger Raid,” 35

to recommend against deployment while acknowledging that support for doing so from the Department of State and the U.S. mission at the United Nations was on the upswing. By the time mounting casualties caused Wisner to change his mind about sending special operations forces to Somalia, others in the Department of Defense also changed their position for the same reason, including General Powell. Later, Ambassador Wisner would come to favor greater emphasis on the political track, along with the Department of State leadership and other senior leaders. The point is that individual and institutional perspectives were mixed, changed over time, and had to be reconciled repeatedly. Therefore, it seems hard to attribute systemic failure to any one individual or institution's point of view.

In fact, the most salient and startling attribute of U.S. policy and strategy, from the first presidential review directive in February to the interagency assessment team's report at the end of July, was the inability to provide a sober balance between desired objectives and acceptable levels of resources. In this regard, we could hypothesize that an ineffective interagency policy structure and process might help explain the failure in Somalia. The first point to note is that the structure and process were typical for the U.S. national security apparatus. There were multiple layers of structure, ranging from the Principals Committee to the Deputies Committee to interagency working groups and task forces within the major national security organizations. It is true that it took the Clinton administration some time to set up its hierarchy of interagency groups, but the May presidential directive assigned the Deputies Committee responsibility for oversight of Somalia and the group met repeatedly for that purpose. Prior to the formalized structure, and afterwards, the process was typical. The NSC distributed issues for analysis by lead agencies with support and comments from others; papers were both tasked by and prepared for meetings at various levels, gradually working their way up for consideration by the highest officials if they were sufficiently important (in this case the end point being typically but not always the Deputies Committee).

Yet, as General Powell said in his Senate testimony, it was hard getting clear guidance from the interagency process. Many meetings produced no results, and it took too long to get a review of policy accomplished. Perhaps the ineffective formal decision-making system

explains why General Powell, and others like Admiral Howe, who lobbied the White House directly on numerous occasions, tended to make major decisions outside the formal structure and process. In this manner, the decision to send special operations forces to Somalia was made, as was the decision to deny the request for armor. In fact, Powell was upset when Secretary Aspin asked his policy staff for advice on the decision to dispatch armor to Mogadishu, an issue Powell had approached the secretary on directly. Powell's informal lobbying succeeded in getting the initial intervention force size doubled, but on other occasions it was no more successful at forcing an issue than the formal process. According to Powell, during his last weeks as Chairman he asked both Secretary Aspin and the president for a review of the imbalance between forces and policy objectives, but it did not happen.

The formal and informal structures and processes not only repeatedly failed to rectify the fundamental imbalance between forces and objectives; they often left key individuals poorly informed. General Powell was surprised by Security Council vote on March 26, 1993, that enlarged the UN mandate in Somalia, and he did not know that Secretary Christopher was lobbying the United Nations in September to move to the political track. Ambassador Albright, Secretary Christopher, and the president were surprised to find military operations against Aideed still taking place on October 3. The Deputies Committee, which was not surprised by any of these developments, was surprised by developments that were either anticipated or not surprising to leaders in the field. For example, the early June decision to confront Aideed that led to the June 5 ambush of UN troops, and the events of October 3 as well, surprised the deputies. Because the Deputies Committee felt that it was not able to keep up with implementation issues it created another oversight committee reporting directly to it. This adjustment did not sufficiently improve oversight, however. After the disaster on October 3, Deputy National Security Advisor Samuel Berger declared the interagency working group responsible for Somalia ineffective because the attendees were too junior in rank (typically the office director level); he wanted another group at the assistant secretary or three-star level to ensure tight implementation of policy. Evidently the deputies were considered too senior, and the interagency working group too

junior; so another layer of oversight was added. It is not clear why this layer was expected to be more effective than the earlier group that the deputies created and asked Ambassador Shinn to lead. What is clear is that the existing interagency structures and processes were typical and inadequate. Whether that is because of the individuals who commanded the structure and ran the process or the tendency of those structures and processes to generate compromise rather than clear alternative courses of action cannot be determined by analysis of a single case.

Conclusion

Since history cannot be manipulated to test the outcome of different variables, it is not possible to say how much of the national security system's repeated inability to develop clear policy, integrated strategy and accurate, iterative assessments of requirements for success can be attributed to leadership as opposed to organizational structure and processes. If comparative analysis of numerous cases suggests that the dysfunctional symptoms evident in the Somalia intervention—a tendency to reach policy consensus by papering over sharp differences, avoiding difficult choices, and leaving key players out of the decision process at all levels—are frequent or typical systemic attributes regardless of the coming or going of senior leaders, it would certainly go a long way toward substantiating the proposition that leadership is not the sole explanatory variable. In this regard, a candid comment from Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in 2003 that echoes General Powell's comments from 1993 suggest the problem may be systemic rather than personality dependent. Secretary Rumsfeld said that the innumerable hours spent in interagency meetings in Washington “just kind of suck the life out of you” while producing little benefit. In retrospect, the same might be said of Somalia.

When the United States performs poorly in smaller conflicts where less than vital interests are at stake, it nevertheless pays a price for failure, inviting miscalculations on the part of its enemies and higher overall costs for ensuring its security. Since the failure in Somalia had significant repercussions for the nation, understanding what went wrong and how to prevent it is valuable. Unfortunately, it is not clear

that we have learned much from the failure in Somalia. This case study, along with others being conducted on behalf of the Project on National Security Reform, is an attempt to correct that deficiency.