

December 26, 1989

PRESERVING AMERICAN SECURITY TIES TO SOMALIA

INTRODUCTION

Trouble is looming in Somalia, the Horn of Africa's eastern-most country, as political support for its regime appears to be eroding. This is creating problems for the United States.

Though the Somali government of President Mohammed Siad Barre was once a Soviet client, since 1977 it has been one of America's few allies in the region. Somalia granted the U.S. access to Somali military bases and has served as a balance to Soviet military involvement in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

Rebel Gains. Though Siad still enjoys strong political support from much of his native Marehan ethnic clan, based in south-central Somalia, his popularity outside these areas has diminished greatly. The Ethiopian-supported Somali National Movement (SNM) rebels, who have fought the Siad government since 1982, reportedly have taken substantial control of the country's northern territories with the exception of Hargesia, the regional capital, and four garrison towns. But early this month even Hargesia came under rebel attack.¹ And last month the rebels claim to have captured Galcaio, a town in central Somalia. Even in the capital, Mogadishu, support for Siad is diminishing. The Hawieh clan, the largest in Mogadishu, recently formed an opposition political movement, the Somali Union Congress.

1 Robert Dowden, "Somalia is disintegrating into anarchy," *The Independent* (England), October 10, 1989, p. 10; and *Agence France-Presse*, "Intensive Offensive Reported," December 7, 1989, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (FBIS).

Siad is also losing stature in the international community because of his regime's alleged human rights abuses. A U.S. State Department report this August charges that the Somali Armed Forces "appears to have engaged in a widespread, systematic and extremely violent assault" on unarmed civilians, and a September 1988 Amnesty International report contains similar charges.² Additionally, Siad's advancing age (he is believed to be over 80) and questionable health have led even his trusted inner circle of advisors openly to discuss a change of leadership.

Critical Bases. Siad's political weakness presents a dilemma for Washington not only in the Horn of Africa, but also in the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf. Siad grants American warplanes landing rights at airports and American warships use of port facilities at Berbera, a northern Somali port town on the Gulf of Aden, and at Mogadishu, the country's capital, which borders the Indian Ocean.

Access to these facilities have played an important role since 1980 in American military plans to respond to crises in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The airstrip at Berbera, constructed by the Soviets in 1976, is over three miles long, making it among Africa's longest. During the Iran hostage crisis in 1979, Jimmy Carter viewed the Somali bases as one of the few potential launching points for American forces attempting to rescue the American hostages in Tehran. The facilities also counter the Soviet air and naval facilities in Ethiopia, South Yemen, the Socotra island off the South Yemen coast, and on the Dahlak Archipelago off the Red Sea coast of Ethiopia.

The loss of American access to Berbera and Mogadishu would diminish greatly U.S. access to the region, and tilt the regional power balance substantially in favor of the Soviet Union.

Shopping the Globe. To make matters worse, relations between Washington and Mogadishu are at the lowest point in Siad's 20-year reign. To hold back the rebels, Siad needs outside military assistance. But American military aid, which amounted to \$7.5 million in 1987, was suspended in July 1988 because of Somalia's poor human rights record. This has forced the Somali leader to shop the globe for military equipment, even, it seems, requesting assistance from Libya and the Soviet Union. Also because of human rights abuses, the U.S. cancelled a proposed military exercise with Somalia, called "Bright Star," scheduled to have taken place last month.

As it has turned out, Washington's decision to trim its strategic and military cooperation with the Somali government has done nothing to improve human

² Robert Gersony, *Why Somalis Flee: Synthesis of Accounts of Conflict Experience in Northern Somali Refugees, Displaced Persons and Others*, Bureau for Refugee Programs, Department of State, August 1989, p. 60; and *Somalia: A Long-term Human Rights Crisis* (New York: Amnesty International, September 1988).

rights in Somalia. As recently as July, Somali troops reportedly opened fire on demonstrators in Mogadishu, killing dozens.³ With the government facing an arms shortage, the SNM has been able to attack areas in Somalia previously at peace, thus endangering political stability in the nation and forcing the government into a state of desperation. Human rights continue to be violated and peace appears to be further away than ever. America's policy of suspending strategic and military cooperation with Somalia, therefore, has failed to achieve its objectives.

Countering Moscow.

Because the Soviets are deeply entrenched militarily in the Horn of Africa, the U.S. needs some military presence to counter them. Somalia is one of the few appropriate locations for this. If Siad falls, however, a new regime could deny America access to the Somali facilities. To prevent this, Washington should modify its policy of disengaging entirely from Somalia. The Bush Administration should work to ensure that

SOMALIA

Official Name – Somali Democratic Republic.

Area – 246,000 square miles, about the size of California.

Population – 5.4 million.

Capital – Mogadishu (estimated population 700,000).

Ethnic groups – 98.8% Somali; 1.2% Arab and Asian. Major clans: Darod, Digil, Dir, Hawieh, Isaaq, and Rahanwein.

Religion – 99% Muslim.

Work force – About 2.2 million: Agriculture – 82%. Industry and commerce – 3%. Government – 5%.

Natural resources – Undetermined quantity of various minerals, including petroleum.

Agriculture products – Livestock, bananas, corn, sorghum, sugar.

GDP per capita (1987) – \$267

Infant mortality rate – 145/1,000. Life expectancy – 47 years.

U.S. trade with Somalia:

Imports from Somalia (1988) – \$1.4 million.

Exports to Somalia (1988) – \$27.1 million.

Somali Trade with the World:

Total exports (1987) – \$95 million

Total imports (1987) – \$418 million

Source: *Somalia: Background Notes*, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, April 1986, p. 1. and *World Tables* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 509; World Bank sources; and "Foreign Economic Trends and Their Implications for the United States," U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, prepared by U.S. Embassy Mogadishu, August 1988, p. 2.

3 The human rights group, Africa Watch, estimated that as many as 450 people were killed in this fighting, but government estimates were that the fatalities did not exceed 23. Jane Perlez, "Report for U.S. Says Somali Army Killed 5,000 Unarmed Civilians," *The New York Times*, September 9, 1989, p. 5.

Somalia does not fall into hostile hands and prod Siad to improve his human rights record and to move toward free elections.

To achieve these objectives, the U.S. should:

- ◆ ◆ Revive the military assistance program with Somalia.
- ◆ ◆ Urge the Somali government to upgrade security at the military facilities in Berbera and Mogadishu to defend them from attacks from the Somali National Movement and other insurgents.
- ◆ ◆ Extend the access agreement, first signed in 1980, to the Berbera and Mogadishu facilities when it comes up for renewal in 1990.
- ◆ ◆ Promote reconciliation talks between the Somali government and the Somali National Movement, the United Somali Congress, and other opposition groups.
- ◆ ◆ Open contact with the Somali opposition to encourage them to accept a cease fire and initiate talks with the government.
- ◆ ◆ Demand that Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam cease his military support for the Somali insurgents.

FROM COLONIALISM TO INDEPENDENCE

Located in eastern Africa, Somalia's coastline borders the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. Before achieving independence in 1960, Somalia was a colony of both Britain and Italy, each of which controlled separate regions of the country. Britain controlled what was called British Somaliland, now northern Somalia; Italy controlled what was called Italian Somaliland, now southern Somalia. British-controlled areas remained under London's rule from 1886 until June 1940, when Italian troops, following their declaration of war on Britain, overran British garrisons. As part of its military operations against the Italian East African Empire in 1941, Britain captured all of Somalia. The United Nations General Assembly ruled in November 1949 that Italian Somaliland should be placed under an international trusteeship for ten years, with Italy as the administering authority. Following the ten-year trusteeship, Italian Somaliland was to be granted independence.

Britain, meanwhile, took steps to prepare for independence of British Somaliland. Legislative assembly elections were held in British Somaliland in February 1960, and the new legislature on April 6, 1960 called unanimously for independence from Britain and declared its intention to unite with independent Italian Somaliland. British Somaliland was granted independence on June 26, 1960, and five days later, it joined Italian Somaliland to form an independent nation, the Somali Republic.

MODERN SOMALIA

Somalia borders the African nations of Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya. With its Horn of Africa location, Somalia is Africa's gateway to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Peninsula. As such, Somalia has been one of the few African nations whose trade and travel contact with the Arabian peninsula dates back centuries. Somalia is a member of the Arab League and (with almost all of its citizens professed Muslims) the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), two international organizations dominated predominately by Middle Eastern nations. It is also, understandably, a member of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Somalia's 5.4 million people inhabit a nation about the size of California, making it one of the more sparsely populated nations in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country lacks modern transportation and communication networks, which has discouraged foreign investment. There is no rail system, and a large portion of the country lacks phone service.

Ethnic Tensions. Unique for Africa, Somalia is composed of only one ethnic group, the Somalis, that share a common language (Somali) and religion (Muslim). They are divided into six major clans, the Darod, Digil, Dir, Hawieh, Ishaak, and Rahanwein, that have traditionally been rivals. With the independence of Somalia, these tribe-like clans were forced to govern and live side by side, causing ethnic tension.

Like its Horn of Africa neighbors, especially Ethiopia and Sudan, Somalia is extremely poor. It lacks many of the natural resources, such as copper, diamonds, gold, and manganese, found in abundance elsewhere in Africa. Its work force is largely unskilled, working almost exclusively in agriculture, fishing, and livestock. Though petroleum exploration has been undertaken, the results have been disappointing. Sound economic statistics are hard to come by in Somalia. The U.S. Department of Commerce's most recent analysis of the Somali economy reports that for 1987 gross domestic product per capita was \$267 (compared, for example, to \$368 for Kenya, \$950 for Nigeria, and \$1,739 for Mexico). In 1988, Somalia exported \$1.4 million worth of products to the U.S., mainly soybeans, corn oil, wheat, and corn meal. The U.S. exported \$27.1 million worth of products to Somalia, mainly instruments, appliances, and food products.⁴

Nationalist Parties. Somalia adopted its first national constitution in June 1961, providing for a European-style parliamentary democracy. Political parties were numerous and based on the different clans. The most prominent were the Somali National League, the United Somali Party, and the Somali Youth League. Though nationalist sentiments were strong, tension developed between the clans in the northern and southern territories. Political divisions

⁴ "Foreign Economic Trends and Their Implications for the United States," U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, prepared by U.S. Embassy Mogadishu, August 1988, p. 2; also, U.S. Department of Commerce sources.

also developed between those nationalist parties such as the Somali Youth League that wanted to bring territories in Ethiopia and Kenya inhabited by ethnic Somalis, under one unified Somali state, and the so-called "modernists," represented by the Somali National Congress, a coalition of former members of the Somali National League and the Somali Youth League, who were more concerned with economic modernization and improving relations with other African nations.⁵

One Somali political party, the Somali Youth League (SYL), won enough support from the diverse clans to assume political power in Somalia in 1967. The SYL's party leader, Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, was elected prime minister in 1967. He maintained Somalia's democratic political structure and worked to foster closer relations with neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya.

Socialist Regime. Egal's rule lasted only two years. Constitutional democracy ended in October 1969 when Somalia's army and police, led by Major General Mohamed Siad Barre, overthrew the government in a bloodless coup. The new regime governed through a 20-member Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) with Siad as chairman. And in an apparent effort to obtain military and political support from Moscow, Siad announced in October 1970 that he was a socialist.

The U.S. was strongly allied at the time with Emperor Haile Selassie's government in neighboring Ethiopia, and Siad's rise to power offered the Soviets an opportunity for greater influence in the Horn of Africa. The Soviets embraced Siad and signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Somalia in 1974. In the three following years, the Soviet Union sent an estimated \$435 million in military support to Somalia.

In the mid-1970s, Siad began training a rebel movement in the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia called the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF). The Ogaden, which is populated predominately by ethnic Somalis, was viewed by Siad as part of a greater Somalia. Siad hoped that by fomenting unrest in the Ogaden, he could someday detach it from Ethiopia and annex it to Somalia.

Strategic Prize. Siad ordered his forces to invade the Ogaden region in July 1977 to support the WSLF in their fight against Ethiopia. The same month, however, in a startling reversal of policy, the Soviet Union withdrew its support of Siad and began sending military assistance to Ethiopia's new leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, who took power following a two and a half year struggle within the coalition that had toppled Emperor Haile Selassie in September 1974. This dramatic shift in Soviet policy was due in part to Moscow's calculation that it could take advantage of the increasingly tense relations between Washington and Mengistu, spurred primarily by Mengistu's human rights violations. Another reason for the switch was Mengistu's more sincere ideological commitment to Marxism-Leninism.

⁵ "Background Notes: Somalia," U.S. Department of State, April 1986, p. 4.

Perhaps most important, in the choice between aligning with Ethiopia or Somalia, the Soviets simply viewed Ethiopia as the greater strategic prize — as it surely is. Soviet military presence in Ethiopia gave Moscow access to the Red Sea at ports only 200 miles from oil-rich Saudi Arabia. The Soviets also inherited existing American military facilities, like the communications center in Asmara, near the Red Sea.⁶ Since 1977, Moscow clearly has valued its strategic alliance with Mengistu, sending Ethiopia some \$7 billion of military assistance.

Breaking With Cuba. Following Moscow's embrace of Mengistu, Siad expelled all Soviet advisers in November 1977 and abrogated the friendship agreement with the Soviet Union. That month, too, because of Cuba's extensive involvement in the Ogaden War, Siad also broke diplomatic ties with Cuba.⁷ Without Soviet military backing, Somalia's forces were forced to retreat from the Ogaden in March 1978, though the WSLF continues to carry out guerrilla activity in the region to this day.

THE U.S. AND SOMALIA

Upon breaking with Moscow in 1977, Siad turned to the U.S. for military assistance, though the U.S. was initially reluctant to help him because of his support for the Ogaden insurgents in Ethiopia. Eventually, however, the U.S. became convinced of the need to counter Soviet involvement in the region, and responded favorably to Siad's request for closer relations.

As a result, the U.S. opened an Agency for International Development (AID) office in Somalia in 1978. Current AID programs include a livestock quarantine station designed to breed healthy cattle, management training programs and health services. AID also provides the Somali government with advice on export competitiveness. The U.S. has provided Somalia with \$300 million in economic assistance since 1985, most of which has been used for economic development, food aid, and management training programs.

U.S. Military Aid. The U.S. in August 1980 signed an agreement with Siad giving the U.S. access to airfields and dock facilities in Berbera and Mogadishu. The same year the U.S. began providing Somalia with military assistance. Since then, the U.S. has given Somalia \$133.5 million in such aid, in addition to military training. U.S. lethal military aid to Somalia has been mainly rifles and other small weapons. When Ethiopian forces invaded Somalia in summer 1982, the U.S. airlifted military supplies to help Somalia defend its territory.

Relations between Washington and Mogadishu were close from 1982 until last year, though military aid for Somalia was cut from around \$25 million a

6 For a fuller discussion of Ethiopia's strategic value, see Michael Johns, "A U.S. Strategy to Foster Human Rights in Ethiopia," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 692, February 23, 1989.

7 Cuba's Fidel Castro sent some 22,000 troops to the Ogaden to assist Ethiopia in its fight against Somalia. Diplomatic relations between Cuba and Somalia were just reestablished this year.

year to \$5 million a year in 1987 because of across-the-board reductions in the Pentagon's African military assistance budget. Siad visited the U.S. in 1982. Along with Zaire, Somalia has been viewed widely as one of the U.S.'s closest allies in Africa.

As reports of significant human rights violations by the Siad regime reached the West, the U.S. suspended its lethal military aid for Somalia in July 1988, and \$21 million in economic assistance was redirected to other African countries this August. Another reason for the suspension was U.S. unhappiness with Siad's refusal to talk with the SNM rebels. Siad since has expressed willingness to talk unconditionally with the SNM, has released most political prisoners, and has appointed a commission to provide recommendations on a return to democracy, but the U.S. ban on military aid to Somalia has not been lifted.

Staying Engaged. As a result, U.S. policy toward Somalia is in limbo. There is significant congressional opposition to reactivating U.S. military and economic assistance to Somalia, though both the Pentagon and State Department reportedly have expressed support for renewed assistance. "We don't want to give a signal of withdrawal," a State Department spokesman commented in October 1988. "We want to stay engaged."⁸ Earlier this month, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Africa Irvin Hicks visited Mogadishu for talks with top Somali officials. He reportedly praised Siad's recent decision to explore the possibility for a multi-party system in Somalia, but made no announcement about restoring U.S. economic or military assistance.⁹

Congressional opposition to aid to Somalia has been led by Democrat Representatives Howard Wolpe of Michigan and William H. Gray, III, of Pennsylvania. This September, Gray introduced a Sense of the Congress Resolution that insisted upon "significant improvements in the area of human rights as a precondition to the resumption of foreign assistance to Somalia."¹⁰

SOMALIA'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Somalia-U.S. trade relations are very limited, and Somalia possesses few natural resources required by the U.S. The U.S. interest in Somalia is limited almost exclusively to the African country's strategic value: its location along the coastline to the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden, two strategically important waterways.

The Somali coastline is the second largest on the African continent after South Africa. An estimated 500,000 barrels of crude oil passes through the Gulf of Aden each day, much of it destined for Europe, North America, and

8 David Ottaway, "Congress Blocking Aid to Somalia," *The Washington Post*, October 26, 1988, p. A20.

9 Mogadishu Domestic Service, December 4, 1989, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, December 7, 1989.

10 Congressman William H. Gray, III, letter to congressional colleagues, September 25, 1989.

American allies in Asia.¹¹ Given the volatile nature of the region, created by such unpredictable countries as Ethiopia and Iran, as well as the Soviet Union's deep military involvement, it is necessary for the U.S. to maintain naval and air power in the region. The Soviets have built a major military facility in the Dahlak Islands in the Red Sea, and have air and naval bases on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula at Aden and on the Yemeni Island of Socotra in the Gulf of Aden. These facilities enable the Soviets to dock and refuel ships, fly reconnaissance flights in the region, and to project air and naval power in the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea.

Renewing the Bases Agreements. The bases in Somalia allow the U.S. to counter Soviet military power in the region. In accord with the 1980 access agreement, the U.S. can operate Navy flights out of the air strips at Berbera and Mogadishu, conduct joint exercises with Somali forces, dock and refuel ships, and conduct military repairs. The air strips at Berbera and Mogadishu enable the U.S. to fly reconnaissance flights in the region, and could be used for combat air operations in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, or the Indian Ocean. Berbera and Mogadishu also are used for military training exercises in the region. The option for discontinuing the agreement comes up next year, but the Siad government has said it wants to renew it.

Political instability in Somalia, however, could make renewal uncertain. Siad is at war with the Ethiopian-backed Somali National Movement. Given the SNM's close ties with Soviet-backed Ethiopia, its victory over the government potentially could end U.S. access to the Berbera and Mogadishu facilities. Such a development could lead to not only greater instability in the Horn of Africa, but also to the expansion of Soviet military power into Somalia.

SIAD'S RULE

Major General Mohamed Siad Barre has ruled Somalia with an iron hand since taking power in October 1969. He has permitted little dissent and at times has crushed such dissent with force. Though his rule has been authoritarian, Somalia's human rights record, while heavily criticized, has been much better than that of Mengistu Haile Mariam in neighboring Ethiopia. Over one million Ethiopians have died, primarily as a result of atrocities committed by Mengistu's government and by the man-made famine created by Mengistu in 1984 in an effort to crush areas of political opposition.¹² Unlike many dictators, Siad recently permitted human rights investigators from Amnesty International, the Department of State, the General Accounting Office (GAO) and other institutions to visit Somalia and investigate the country's human rights conditions.

¹¹ *Petroleum Economist*, October 1989, p. 325; and Department of Energy sources.

¹² See Johns, "A U.S. Strategy to Foster Human Rights in Ethiopia," *op. cit.* Also, Michael Johns, "Gorbachev's Holocaust: Soviet Complicity in Ethiopia's Famine," *Policy Review*, Summer 1988, p. 74.

Findings by these human rights organizations over the past year, however, have revealed significant human rights violations under the Siad regime. These conditions are widely reported to have deteriorated since May 1988 when the Somali National Movement (SNM) launched its largest offensive to date against the Siad regime. A September 1988 Amnesty International report found that Somalia had engaged in "a consistent pattern of torture, lengthy and often arbitrary detention of suspected political opponents of the government and often unfair trials of political defendants."¹³ Amnesty International is planning a follow-up report on Somalia's human rights condition.

Room for Miscalculation. Another human rights report by Robert Gersony, a consultant for the State Department's Bureau for Refugee Programs, concluded this August that the Somali government was responsible for the murder of "at least 5,000" unarmed civilians who belonged to the Issak clan.¹⁴ The Gersony report must be viewed skeptically, however, because it relies on interviews with Somali refugees and displaced persons, which leaves room for miscalculation. Gersony's 1988 human rights report on civilian murders by the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) was done in a similar fashion, prompting condemnations of the report's methodology.¹⁵

Nonetheless, the number of accusations against Siad, coming from diverse sources, leave little doubt that a very serious human rights problem exists in Somalia. But such abuses are not restricted to the government. Somalia's major armed rebel movement, the Somali National Movement, also has been criticized for violating human rights. According to Gersony: "During the first three months of its 1988 offensive in northern Somalia, SNM combatants killed unarmed civilians in individual instances which together may have resulted in the deaths of at least several hundred or more persons....During its presence in Burao (in northern Somalia), the SNM conducted summary executions of fifty or more prisoners, some after perfunctory court martials."¹⁶ The fierce tactics of both the government and the SNM in northern Somalia have forced some 400,000 Somalis to seek refuge in Ethiopia.

Positive Steps. Human rights accusations have not been the only charges leveled against Siad. Many Somalis contend that Siad has granted special privileges to members of his native Marehan clan. Government positions and trade licenses reportedly often have been granted first to Marehans, which has been enormously frustrating to other Somali clans, especially the Issaqs. This practice has intensified ethnic-based tensions.

In the past year, however, Siad has taken positive steps. In February, an estimated 100 political prisoners were released and last month a commission

13 *Somalia: A Long-term Human Rights Crisis, op. cit.*, p. 1.

14 Gersony, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

15 See, for instance, William Pascoe, "The Controversial State Department Report on Mozambique," Heritage Foundation *Background Update* No. 75, May 4, 1988.

16 Gersony, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

was appointed to prepare constitutional amendments that will allow a multi-party political system. Siad has also remarked recently that elections could be held as early as next year.¹⁷

U.S. POLICY TOWARD SOMALIA

Washington now faces a challenge in Somalia. Siad is an aging dictator with diminishing support among his people, and his departure from power is widely believed to be imminent. The Bush Administration must anticipate Siad's departure and prepare for relations with his successor. In doing so, the Administration should have two main objectives: 1) continued American access to Somali airfield and seaport facilities in Berbera and Mogadishu; and 2) a peaceful transfer of political power in Somalia that will, among other things, improve the human rights condition.

In pursuit of these objectives, the U.S. should:

- ◆ ◆ **Revive the military assistance program with Somalia.** Denying Somalia the military aid it needs to defend itself against a foreign-supported insurgency and an aggressive Soviet-supported neighbor, Ethiopia, does not improve Somalia's domestic human rights climate and may aggravate the situation by creating a sense of desperation among the Somali armed forces. Such a policy also could push Siad into such hostile hands as Libya and the Soviet Union. The U.S. should revive its military assistance to Somalia, providing it with defensive-oriented military aid for use against rebel advances, while urging the Siad government to open peace talks with the rebels designed to reach political reconciliation and democracy.
- ◆ ◆ **Upgrade security at American military facilities in Somalia.** As the civil war in Somalia rages, chances increase that the Somali National Movement (SNM) or other armed insurgents may attack American facilities. The SNM is already fighting in Berbera. The U.S. should ensure that these Somali facilities are properly defended by upgrading their security. Because the bases are not owned by the U.S., this will require close cooperation with Somalia.
- ◆ ◆ **Renew the U.S.-Somali access agreement to the Berbera and Mogadishu facilities when it comes up for review in 1990.** The airport and seaport facilities at Berbera and Mogadishu respectively offer U.S. forces access to the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea. Given the volatile nature of this region, it is critical that the U.S. maintain such access to defend U.S. security interests. The access agreement with Somalia enables the U.S. to fly Navy flights

17 "Siad Barre Says Free Elections Planned for 1990," *Agence France-Presse*, November 12, 1989, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, November 13, 1989, p. 3.

out of the air strips, conduct joint exercises with Somali forces, dock and refuel ships, and conduct military repairs.

- ◆ ◆ **Open talks with Somalia's opposition.** To foster reconciliation between the government of Somalia and the Somali opposition groups, the Bush Administration should establish diplomatic contact with the Somali National Movement (SNM) and other opposition groups. The SNM refuses to talk with the Somali government until Siad leaves power. The U.S. should urge the SNM to change this policy.
- ◆ ◆ **Demand that Ethiopia's Mengistu not destabilize Somalia.** Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam is providing arms, trucks, fuel and other military assistance to the Somali National Movement. This aid, in part, has been used to attack Ethiopian refugee camps in Somalia, resulting in civilian fatalities. SNM forces, for instance, attacked two refugee camps in Agabar and Las Dhure, killing an estimated 43 people in May 1988.¹⁸ The U.S. should inform the Ethiopian leader that unless he ends his destabilizing role in Somalia, the U.S. will terminate all diplomatic contact with Ethiopia.
- ◆ ◆ **Link further U.S. economic assistance to Somalia to improvements in the country's human rights record and to progress toward democracy.** Instead of terminating military assistance to Somalia over human rights violations, which will endanger U.S. security interests and potentially push the Somali government into the hands of hostile nations, the U.S. should offer Somalia increased economic assistance as human rights improvements are made and steps are taken toward democracy. Siad has already set up a commission to explore constitutional options for a return to democracy, and the U.S. should encourage this commission to present such a plan as quickly as possible. Once a new constitution providing for a restoration of democracy in Somalia is agreed upon, the U.S. immediately should restore the economic assistance program, which was estimated at \$21 million before Congress suspended it this August. The U.S. should inform Siad that once free and fair elections are held in Somalia, the U.S. will be prepared to double this assistance.

CONCLUSION

Somalia has been one of America's closest allies in Africa since 1980. This useful relationship need not be sacrificed because of Siad's political weakness and poor human rights record. Instead, Washington should use its limited influence in Somalia to encourage political reconciliation between the warring factions and to promote human rights improvements, while at the same time

18 For a fuller discussion of human rights violations by the Somali National Movement (SNM), see Gersony, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-42, pp. 51-52, and p. 62.

safeguarding U.S. security interests in the region by ensuring continued access to Somali air and naval facilities.

Constructive Force. Human rights have been violated systematically in Somalia, but Siad has made modest progress in the past year. Political prisoners have been released, commissions to explore steps toward democratization have been appointed, and Siad has expressed interest in restoring a multiparty system and opening negotiations with Somali opposition groups. Washington's abandoning Somalia will not improve human rights in Somalia, but could only open the way for increased Soviet and Libyan influence.

Instead of disengaging from Somalia, the U.S. should work more closely with Siad to democratize Somalia and respect human rights, while still safeguarding U.S. security interests through a restoration of the military assistance program and greater cooperation on protecting the security of the important base facilities in Berbera and Mogadishu. As such, the U.S. can protect U.S. security interests in the region while becoming a more constructive and influential force in fostering a more humane and stable Somalia.

Michael Johns
Policy Analyst

All Heritage Foundation papers are now available electronically to subscribers of the "NEXIS" on-line data retrieval service. The Heritage Foundation's Reports (HFRPTS) can be found in the OMNI, CURRNT, NWLTRS, and GVT group files of the NEXIS library and in the GOVT and OMNI group files of the GOVNWS library.