

December 15, 1992

TO SAVE THE STARVING, INTERNATIONALIZE THE PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN SOMALIA

INTRODUCTION

For the first time in American history, United States troops have been committed to a military operation for a cause completely unrelated to protecting the national interest. Many Americans, understandably, are ambivalent about Operation Restore Hope, as the United Nations-authorized Somalia intervention is called. Their hearts go out to the famine-stricken people of Somalia, but they are nonetheless worried that the U.S. is becoming the world's policeman. They are anxious about the open-ended and unclear military nature of the U.S. commitment; about whether it is morally right to ask Americans to risk their lives when the nation or its interests are not threatened; about the precedent being set for interventions elsewhere — in Sudan, Liberia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Mozambique; and about the heavy burden Americans are being asked to bear, while the rest of the world gives relatively little in money and troops.

Nevertheless, now that the operation is under way, Americans naturally want Operation Restore Hope to succeed. The credibility of American foreign policy and the shattered lives of Somalis demand it.

Pitfalls for America. But Americans also want Restore Hope to end as quickly as possible. For this to happen, many pitfalls must be avoided. For example, the U.N. will be tempted to make Somalia Washington's problem, leaving the U.S. alone with the task of providing security for that starving and conflict-plagued nation. U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali already is calling for sending 5,500 U.N. troops to Mozambique to enforce a shaky cease-fire there. With so many peacekeeping operations underway around the world — in Bosnia, Cambodia, and elsewhere — the U.N. is already stretched to the limit. Distracted by these commitments and its desire to resolve other conflicts, the U.N. will be hard pressed to comply with George Bush's demand that U.N. troops take over from the U.S. once the food supply in Somalia is secure.

There is another pitfall to avoid. The U.S. should not assume responsibility for brokering a political deal among Somalia's warlords. If America gets involved in establishing political authority in Somalia, its troops will become the targets of armed gangs who are dissatisfied with the settlement. The U.S. also will have to remain in Somalia until the deal is finished, which could take years, and guarantee a political settlement afterward with huge commitments of foreign aid.

To avoid these pitfalls, Washington should demand that the U.N. begin planning immediately to take over Operation Restore Hope. A 13,000-strong U.N. force needs to be built now, and a deadline should be set for the U.N. force to be completely phased in, and the U.S. force to be phased out. This deadline should be March 31, 1993.

Other nations, moreover, need to commit more money and troops to the military operation, which will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. The U.N. should establish immediately a formal structure for compensating the U.S. for 70 percent of the costs of Operation Restore Hope. Washington should not be left alone, begging for money, as it did from the Japanese and Saudis after Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf.

Finally, the U.N. should bear the main responsibility for Somalia's political future; it is best suited for the task of trying to reestablish Somalia's government. In order to do so, the U.N. may have to establish a protectorate. The U.S. should recommend in the Security Council that a protectorate be established in Somalia as soon as possible.

DESCENT INTO ANARCHY

Somalia has been slipping toward anarchy ever since the overthrow of dictator Mohammed Siad Barre in January 1991. Siad Barre had ruled Somalia since his successful military coup in 1969, maintaining power through repression and by pitting one Somali clan against the other. Siad Barre was deposed by a coalition of opposition forces fighting under the banner of the United Somalia Congress (USC).

Soon after the ouster of Siad Barre from Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, however, the USC disintegrated. Two USC factions emerged, both from the Hawiyee clan. One faction was led by Ali Mahdi and the other by Mohamed Farah Aideed. These two factions turned on each other in an attempt to capture control of the central government. Today, Mahdi has a foothold in northern Mogadishu and parts of central Somalia, while Aideed, Somalia's most powerful warlord, controls the rest of Mogadishu and much of southern Somalia. Mahdi and Aideed are the prominent warlords; Somalia is plagued by a total of sixteen warring factions. These are based on continually shifting clan alliances. This turmoil leaves Somalia with no central authority. U.N. efforts to broker a political settlement to date have been unsuccessful.

Food As Weapon. Somalia's famine has come about because this clan warfare has destroyed much of Somalia's agriculture. With Somalia's economy now devastated, hijacked food is the sole means of power and a weapon wielded by warlords to win the allegiances of clan and subclan leaders. Some of this food is exchanged in neighboring countries for weapons. In an attempt to see that food reaches the starving, such relief agencies as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have been paying Somali gangs protection money. Some reports suggest that despite these security efforts, up to 80 percent of internationally provided relief food is stolen. As a result, Somalis are starving.

The lack of security hindering the international food relief effort led George Bush to launch Operation Restore Hope. The operation's goal is to afford the security necessary to suppress Somalia's famine. Some 28,000 U.S. troops, along with what can be expected to be a few thousand troops from other countries, will open supply routes for food relief efforts and prepare the way for a U.N. peacekeeping force to preserve the security of these routes. In the meantime, diplomatic initiatives will be underway to restore order and achieve a political peace in Somalia. Though no date has been set for the completion of this U.S. military operation, Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Colin Powell has suggested that it could be completed by

March. Addressing an often-heard criticism, President Bush stated in a nationally televised address to the American people that the U.S. military mission was not open-ended. In the words of the President, the U.S. military would not stay in Somalia "one day longer than is absolutely necessary." The U.S. also will be providing clothing, medicine, and other humanitarian aid to Somalia.

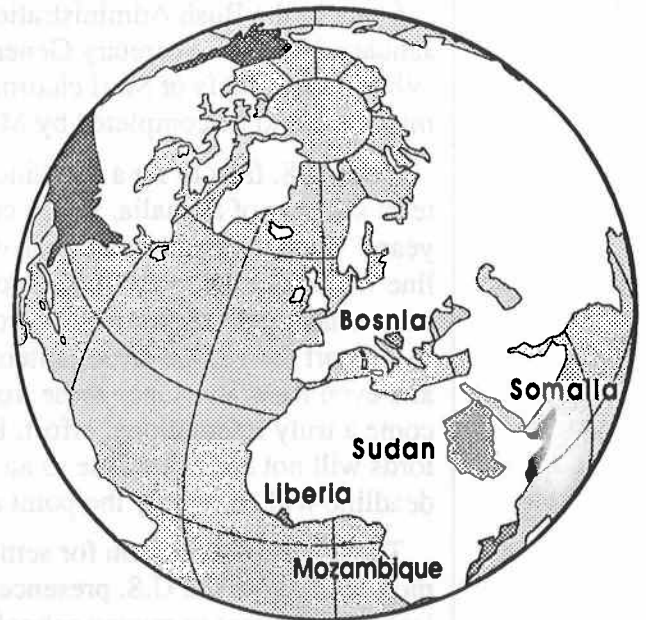
CROSSING THE RUBICON

It is an American tradition to offer humanitarian relief to those in the world suffering from natural disaster. The U.S. is sending hundreds of millions of dollars to combat drought in southern Africa, for example. Operation Restore Hope is entirely different because the lives of U.S. troops are being placed in direct risk. And while the Pentagon is confident that casualties will be limited, no one knows this for sure. It is uncertain how the warlords and their allied clans and sub-clans will react once they see their control over food, their source of power, being taken away by U.S. troops. These warlords control a plethora of weapons, including mortars, heavy artillery, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. U.S. troops also may encounter Islamic fundamentalists armed by Sudan, Iran, and elements within Saudi Arabia. Already, there have been charges by Islamic fundamentalists in Somalia that U.S. troops will be the vanguard of an orchestrated Western attack on Islam.

Moreover, with its military intervention into Somalia, the Bush Administration has opened the door to pressures for the U.S. to intervene into most of the world's many hot spots. The political pressure already is mounting for international intervention into civil conflicts in Liberia, Sudan, Mozambique, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and elsewhere where the U.S. would be expected to provide the bulk of U.N.-authorized military forces. From now on the U.S. will be hard pressed to make a moral distinction between saving starving Somalis and saving starving Bosnians.

Other precedents have been set by Operation Restore Hope. Earlier U.N.-sanctioned military operations in such places as Angola, Cambodia, and El Salvador have been limited to such tasks as monitoring cease-fires and holding elections. But the task in Somalia is different: using military force to make peace. Moreover, the U.N. presence in other countries was agreed to by all the warring parties. This is not the case in Somalia.

U.S.-Led U.N. Interventions: Somalia Might Be Just the Beginning



ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA

There is little doubt that U.S. troops will successfully open up supply lines and aid starving Somalis. However, a political settlement must be achieved in Somalia if its famine is to end completely. Unfortunately, the prospects for a political settlement in Somalia are anything but reassuring. This presents Washington with a dilemma: Does the U.S. attack the root cause of the famine — political chaos — which implies a prolonged military commitment? Or does it confine itself to the more narrow task of securing food shipments, which is a temporary solution at best?

Bill Clinton — not George Bush — will face this dilemma. As President, he will be pressed to keep the troops in Somalia so long as the famine continues or threatens to return once U.S. troops are withdrawn. The great temptation for Clinton, therefore, will be to turn Operation Restore Hope into an open-ended mission, despite Bush's promise to the contrary. In order to avoid this prospect, the U.S. should:

✓ **Internationalize Operation Restore Hope by establishing a fixed date for when a U.N. force should take over from U.S. troops.**

Some in the Bush Administration believe that Operation Restore Hope could be finished by January 20. U.N. Secretary General Boutros-Ghali suggests that this date is not unreasonable. While Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Colin Powell resists setting a deadline, he says that the mission could be completed by March.

If the U.S. fails to set a deadline now, Clinton will be pressured into guaranteeing the long-term security of Somalia, which could require a U.S. military presence for as long as ten years. Such a commitment goes well beyond the mission as explained by Bush. A firm deadline would put the international community on notice that the U.N. must build a military force now to take over responsibility from the U.S. Around 1,000 U.S. troops could remain behind to support the 13,000-strong international force comprised of Europeans, Asians, Africans, and even Russians. Once these troops are in Somalia, then Operation Restore Hope will become a truly international effort. Knowing that a large new force is on the way, Somali warlords will not see a deadline as an excuse to delay cooperation with the U.N. Rather, this deadline will be merely the point at which the heavy U.S. involvement will be phased out.

There is another reason for setting a deadline. It would disabuse the Somalis of the common notion that the U.S. presence will be a lengthy one in which hundreds of millions of dollars will be spent to reopen schools, pave roads, and provide job training for Somalis. The longer these current unrealistic expectations are held by Somalis, the more disappointed they will be when these expectations are not fulfilled.

✓ **Immediately start building a 13,000-strong U.N. force to take over from the U.S. troops.**

Boutros-Ghali says that after the U.S. troops improve security in Somalia, the U.N. will be able to implement a peacekeeping operation. The Bush Administration reportedly suggests that this U.N. peacekeeping operation will require 6,000 troops. If this is the case, the Administration is grossly underestimating what will be required to keep Somalia pacified after the U.S. departs. Other U.N. peacekeeping forces are much larger — 15,900 in Cambodia, for example. The U.N. peacekeeping force in Somalia almost certainly will face combat conditions. It also will be plagued by all the difficulties unique to a multinational force. This U.N. force

of 13,000 troops should be large enough to maintain the peace and, when necessary, disarm the warring factions.

If the U.S. wishes to withdraw its troops from Somalia within a few months, it must press the Secretary General to develop a plan now for the U.N. force. Boutros-Ghali already shows signs of foot-dragging on this responsibility. He suggests that it is best to wait and see before setting the course for composing the U.N. peacekeeping force. The longer the U.N. waits, however, the less likely it will be that other countries will provide troops for the U.N. force.

Having done the dirty and difficult work, the U.S. should not carry a disproportionately large burden in the follow-on U.N. operation. The new force, composed of armies from all around the world, should assume the task of securing Somalia. Some of the hundreds of thousands of idle Russian troops could help do the job. The Administration has suggested that a Marine force would be kept off the coast of Somalia should the U.N. force encounter trouble. Although the U.S. has never been part of a U.N. military force, this Marine contingent could be loosely allied with a U.N. peacekeeping force. The number of U.S. troops left behind should not exceed 1,000.

✓ **Demand that the costs of this mission be shared by every U.N. member.**

The Bush Administration has estimated publicly that Operation Restore Hope will cost several hundred million dollars. This loose estimate, of course, is based on its hopeful expectation that the operation will be a brief military mission. Other nations will be contributing troops and supplies as well. For example, France has pledged 1,700 troops, Canada 900, Belgium 550, Egypt 500, and Italy 1,500. Nonetheless, with its 28,000 troops, the U.S. still will be bearing most of the burden for the Somalia intervention.

The U.S. should recoup some of the cost of Operation Restore Hope from the international community. Normally the U.S. pays 30 percent of U.N. peacekeeping operations. Its overall and final contribution to the Somali operation should not exceed that amount.

To collect the money, the U.N. needs to establish a formal mechanism for compensating the U.S. Otherwise the U.S. will be left begging the Japanese and the Saudis for money, as it did with Operation Desert Storm. The total cost of the U.S. action, along with the contributions of other nations, should be calculated and divided among U.N. members.

Washington must press immediately for the establishment of this compensation mechanism. The longer the U.S. waits to pressure other nations into paying their fair share, the less likely it will be that America will recoup its costs. The U.S. supposedly is acting on behalf of the world. The world at least should help to pay for part of an operation in which many Americans are risking their lives.

✓ **Establish a U.N. protectorate in Somalia.**

President Bush has defined Operation Provide Hope as a non-political, humanitarian mission. Nonetheless, the U.S. unavoidably will become embroiled in Somali politics. U.S. decisions about where to deliver food will affect the power of Somalia's warlords dramatically. After all, denying warlords their ability to loot food is tantamount to taking away their power.

Despite this undeniable U.S. political influence, Washington must draw a line and avoid becoming responsible for political reconciliation in Somalia. This responsibility belongs to the U.N., on whose behalf the U.S. is undertaking its Somalia intervention.

The U.S. Army forces U.N. auspices will be establishing de facto military rule in Somalia. This role should be turned over to the U.N. force by March 31. The U.N. Security Council

should by then have endowed this force with full sovereignty over Somalia, making it a protectorate of the U.N. The U.S. must start now to pressure the Security Council to take this action. An administrative branch of the U.N. force should then convene a national conference, with participants coming from a wide array of Somali society. This conference must include Somalia's traditional elders, who represent the only modicum of stability in Somalia. The goal of this conference would be to develop a consensus on the country's future government and the date at which Somalia would reassume its full sovereignty. However, the U.S. must avoid the appearance of sponsoring such a conference. Otherwise it will have to accept responsibility for the outcome.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. has taken an unprecedented action in order to help the Somalis. It is still too early to tell if this was a wise course. President Bush may have opened the door for the dispatch of U.S. troops for other humanitarian causes all over the world. However, there also can be no doubt that the 28,000 U.S. troops will save Somali lives. This is a risky, albeit noble thing for the U.S. to do.

The challenge for Somalia will be to build a new political order so as to avoid future famines. Therefore, in the long run, Somalia must become responsible for its own security. While a U.N. peacekeeping force may stay in Somalia for a long time, Operation Restore Hope should be short-term. The U.S. should not be carrying the brunt of the Somali operation beyond the end of March.

Therefore, the U.N. — and not the U.S. — eventually must assume primary political and security responsibility for Somalia. It must begin planning for establishing a U.N. protectorate over the country to rebuild political authority and law and order. Since a U.N. protectorate requires widespread international involvement, many U.N. members should help pay for it and send troops to back it up. Otherwise, left without hope, Somalis will continue to starve by the millions.

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