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Somalia: Origins of Conflict and Unintended Consequences.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Somalia: Origins of Conflict and Unintended Consequences

Author: Major Brent R. Norquist, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Four distinct elements led to the conflict between UN/US forces and the Somalis. These key elements were (1) the Somali culture and character, (2) the impact of the legacy left by the dictator Siad Barre on the psyche and ambitions of the Somali clans, (3) the tainted relationship between the UN leadership and the Somali people, and (4) the failure of the US and UN leaders to effectively deal with the most powerful and influential Somali warlord, General Mahammad Farah Aideed. The failure of both the US and the UN political and military leadership to fully understand and address these factors, thereby failing to know themselves and their enemy, resulted in unintended negative consequences.

Discussion: The UN and US did not go into Somalia with the intent of picking a fight, yet they stumbled their way into a deadly one. While the first two factors leading to this fight, the Somali character and the legacy of “power addiction” left by Siad Barre were not a direct result of any US or UN action, they were critical elements to the eventual outcome of the campaign. Sadly, these factors went largely unmeasured with terrible consequences for the US and UN forces engaged. This oversight was the result of a poor understanding of the Somalis prior to Operation “RESTORE HOPE” and a failure, on the part of both parties (US and UN) to learn from their early experiences. These failures precluded the effective anticipation of the Somalis reactions to the US and UN courses of action. The tenuous relationship between the UN and the Somalis, which was compounded by Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s past involvement in Said Barre-era Somali politics, tainted the UN’s credibility and effectiveness. These dynamics thwarted the UN’s attempts, however honorable they may have been, to rebuild a functioning government in Somalia. Finally, the naive US policy of supporting the UN’s efforts to re-establish the Somali government while refusing to deal with General Aideed, arguably the most powerful man in Somalia, put the coalition’s mission on a collision course with misfortune.

Recommendations:

1. Future military operations in such environments must be planned and executed with a far better understanding of the culture, history, and character of potential adversaries in order to better control and shape the nature of any conflict in which US forces may be involved.
2. Future military and political strategists must take a hard look at themselves prior to engaging in a military campaign with the intent of identifying any factors that may contribute to an adversarial relationship with nonaligned elements within the area of operations as well as those factors that will be used by an adversary to support their position through an information operations campaign.
3. In order to maintain and capitalize on the legitimacy of an operation as well as reduce the amount of force required to coerce the adversary, future military and political leaders must focus on a strategy of perception control.

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PREFACE

In the fall of 1992, as a young First Lieutenant, I embarked aboard the USS Tripoli as the Supply Officer for the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable). Less than two months into our deployment, we were called on to be the initial United States force to land in Somalia during Operation “RESTORE HOPE”. My experience in Somalia, which has turned out to be the defining moment of my Marine Corps career to date, was limited to operations in the Mogadishu area. During the relatively short, two-month period, that I participated in the operation, it appeared as though our mission of facilitating food distribution and stabilizing the overall situation had been all but accomplished. As a result, in early February of 1993, when the 15th MEU left Somalia for further duties in the Arabian Gulf, I departed the area with a sense of pride and accomplishment that comes with playing a part in what I felt would turn out to be highly successful mission.

Upon returning home in April of 1993 following our deployment, I watched the news reports of the deteriorating situation in Mogadishu with increasing concern and shock. I was completely aghast when the report surfaced of the ill-fated Ranger raid on 3 October 1993 and the resulting loss of life. I couldn’t help but wonder in amazement at what had happened. How could the state of affairs in Somalia have deteriorated to such a level that a battle of this magnitude could play itself out on the streets of Mogadishu? How could the United States political and military leaders allow our military—arguably the finest in the world—to get decisively engaged in a bloody urban battle during what was originally promoted as a humanitarian operation? I wrote this paper in an effort to answer those questions.

I feel it is important to note that it is not my intent to take away from the exceptional and often valiant efforts of the servicemen and women who took part in the operation. Rather, my intent is to highlight some of the shortcomings of the political and military leadership's planning and execution (with the full benefit of hindsight) and, perhaps, to provide a source of information for future warfighters who may be faced with similar circumstances.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

On 9 December 1992, United States (US) Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) went ashore at Mogadishu, Somalia with the mission to facilitate the distribution of international aid in order to stop starvation in the African nation. This was the beginning of Operation “RESTORE HOPE”. Eventually, a multi-national coalition was formed numbering over 37,000, consisting of forces from 20 nations.¹ As the mission progressed, the famine was checked throughout Somalia. However, on 3 October 1993, 18 US Army soldiers, one Malaysian soldier, and an estimated 750 Somalis² were killed during a fierce 16-hour firefight. This clash has been referred to by the US as the “Battle of Mogadishu” and by the Somalis as the “*Ma-alinti Rangers*” (Night of the Rangers).³ This encounter proved to be one of the most violent urban battles involving US forces since the Vietnam War.

What happened? How did the situation in Mogadishu turn from feeding starving people to ferocious combat? This paper attempts to answer those questions and identify the factors that led to the combat between the Somalis and the United States (US)/United Nation’s (UN) coalition.

The key to understanding the origins of the conflict is best articulated by the Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu who identified the following tenet in his work titled The Art of War:

“...know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.”

¹ General Thomas Montgomery, US Army (ret), interviewed by Frontline, Public Broadcasting System, 1999.

² The number of estimated Somali deaths varies from 200 to 1,500 depending on the source. 750 is a rough average from a variety of sources.

³ Mark Bowden, Black Hawk Down, A Story of Modern War (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press) 331.

The intent of this paper is to analyze the origins of the conflict and answer the question of why the Somalis fought. In seeking that answer, this paper will argue that four distinct elements led to the deadly conflict. These key elements were (1) the Somali culture and character, (2) the impact of the legacy left by the dictator Siad Barre on the psyche and ambitions of the Somali clans, (3) the tainted relationship between the UN leadership and the Somali people, and (4) the failure of the US and UN leaders to effectively deal with the most powerful and influential Somali warlord, General Mahammad Farah Aideed. This paper will conclude that the failure of both the US and the UN political and military leadership to fully understand and address these factors, thereby not knowing themselves and their enemy, resulted in unintended negative consequences for both.

CHAPTER II. BACKGROUND

“Me and Somalia against the World, me and my clan against Somalia, me and my family against the clan, me and my brother against my family, me against my brother.”

-Somali Proverb⁴

GEOGRAPHY

“The Somali is as tough as his country...”

-Ambassador Smith Hempstone⁵

Somalia is a rough, arid country located on the northeastern “horn” of Africa. The landmass of Somalia occupies over 637,000 square kilometers. Flat plateau surfaces and plains characterize the terrain with rugged east-west ranges in the far northern regions. The only significant rivers are the Jubba and the Shabeelle rivers in the southwest territories. Of those two dominant rivers, only the Jubba flows year round while the Shabeelle runs only for about seven months each year.

The climate is continuously hot, except in the higher elevations. Two wet seasons, April to June and October through November, bring limited rainfall that rarely amounts to more than 20 inches per year. Droughts are common, and agricultural cultivation is limited to the relatively fertile areas between the Jubba and Shabeelle rivers. The remainder of the country is arid savannah made up of coarse grasses, thorn trees and thick trunked baobab trees, punctuated by the occasional giant anthill.

⁴ Montgomery interview.

⁵ Smith Hempstone, “Think Three Times Before You Embrace the Somali Tar Baby,” U.S. News and World Report, 14 December 1992, 30.



Figure (1) Map of Somalia⁶

The hostile terrain and weather notwithstanding, Somalia occupies a strategically important location. The country's northern shores border on the Gulf of Aden, a potential choke point for the southern Red Sea and the vital sea-lanes that converge there. The eastern shores provide access to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.⁷ Somalia's proximity to both the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea played a key role in the western colonial and political interests throughout the nation's history.

⁶ Taken from WWW.ODCI.GOV/CIA/PUBLICATIONS/FACTBOOK/GEOS/SO.HTML

⁷ Alan G. Hendrickson, "Somalia: Strategic Failures and Operational Successes" (MMS, USMC Command and Staff College, 1995), 6.

HISTORY

Somali history is filled with examples of internal strife and resistance to foreign intrusion. Against this backdrop, one can begin to see the foundation for Somali's distrust of and resistance to what they perceived as UN interference. The origins of what today is Somalia can be traced back as far as approximately AD 100. By that time, the Samaal (also referred to as the proto-Sam) peoples had migrated from the plains of northern Kenya and occupied the regions on the horn of the African continent. In doing so, they either killed or enslaved the indigenous inhabitants, the Habash.⁸ From 100-1800, Somalia existed primarily as a region of somewhat homogenous, loosely associated pastoral clans.⁹ Arabic traders and missionaries introduced Islam and it eventually became the dominant Somali religion. Throughout this period, Somalia was incorporated into various Muslim domains and periodically found itself at war with the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia to the west establishing a traditional pattern of animosities between Somalis and Ethiopians that exist even today.

During the 19th century, Somalia enjoyed a brief period of autonomy and enjoyed close relationships with the western world. These close ties proved to be the undoing of independent Somalia as the beginning of the 20th century found Somalia occupied by her western "allies" and divided into five separate colonial regions. The northwestern region was designated French Somaliland. The north-central regions were under British Imperial control. The south-central regions were known as Italian Somaliland. The western region along the Ethiopian border known as the Ogaden was under Ethiopian rule, and the southern most areas from Chisimayu to

⁸ Helen Chapin Metz, Ed. Somalia a Country Study, (Washington: Library of Congress, 1993) 5.

⁹ Metz, 6-9.

the south (known as the Northern Frontier Region) were incorporated into Kenya.¹⁰ The exploitation of Somalia during this colonial period planted the seeds of resentment towards western influences that would eventually come to full culmination in the late summer of 1993.

The Somalis considered their colonial relationship with the Italians to be mutually beneficial. As a result, there are few recorded instances of active insurrection by the Somalis against their Italian rulers. However, they found colonial rule under both the British and Ethiopians objectionable. Accordingly, from 1899 to 1920, Mahammad Abdille Hasan led a dervish revolt, uniting a number of Daarood sub-clans. Hasan was an excellent orator and poet (much-valued skills in a largely illiterate society). Hasan was able to effectively galvanize the often-fragmented Somali clans against their imperial overlords. The British initially thought Hasan was simply a religious fanatic and labeled him the “Mad Mullah”. Their assumptions proved to be terribly wrong. Hasan’s fierce resistance against the Ethiopians and the British proved to be one of the longest and bloodiest conflicts in the history of African opposition to alien intrusion. The bloody revolt resulted in the death of nearly one third of the population of northern Somalia and devastated its economy. The British finally quelled the insurrection in 1920 when they killed Hasan, who had become a hero of Somali nationalism, during a ravaging aerial bombardment of the dervish capital.¹¹

The “Mad Mullah’s” success in galvanizing thousands of Somalis in a violent struggle to rid Somalia of British colonial rule is an early blueprint of Somali resistance and unity against foreign encroachment. While Hasan’s efforts were not completely successful, he became a

¹⁰ Metz, 11-13.

¹¹ Metz, 13.

legendary figure in Somali culture and lore. The revolution he led served as an example for the Somalis as they struggled against the US and UN intervention.

Following WWII and the subsequent decolonization of the African continent, Somalia began its journey once again down the road to self-rule. In 1960, Somalia became a fully independent nation, and for a brief period from 1960 to 1969, was a model of African democracy. The population of Somalia enjoyed democratic suffrage and their participation in elections was very high. However, the fragmented multi-party system, which evolved from the numerous sub-clans, prevented any one party or group to obtain a substantial majority in the government. This situation resulted in frequent legislative stalemate and inaction. In 1969, with the economy turning sour, a bodyguard murdered the president of Somalia, Abdirashiid Ali Shermaarke. A short time later, the commander of the Somali Army, General Siad Barre, capitalized on the resulting chaos and assumed power through a “bloodless” coup d’etat.¹²

Siad Barre’s tyrannical rule plunged Somalia into a dark period of history. Barre instituted a form of government he referred to as Scientific Socialism. This political system was a mix of Marxist ideals interwoven with the principles of Islam and self-reliance.¹³ A key element of Barre’s philosophy was the end of clan-based dominance in Somali affairs. While he initially endorsed his anti-clan efforts as an attempt to bring Somalia into the modern age, in execution Barre merely promoted his own clan group by appointing them to the majority of the key government positions while he persecuted the remaining clans.¹⁴ Barre calculatingly engineered conflicts between rival clans while simultaneously focusing his government’s

¹² Metz, 34.

¹³ Metz, 37.

¹⁴ Siad Barre’s Daarood clan group was known as the MOD for his Mareehan sub-clan, his mother’s Ogaden sub-clan, and the Dulbahante sub-clan of his son-in-law.

repression on the weakened clans one at a time. The result weakened and oppressed the majority of the Somali clans while Barre's own clan group enjoyed the majority of power, influence, and prosperity.

Barre launched sweeping reforms to the Somali military raising the total end strength from just over 5,000 to over 65,000 troops.¹⁵ His superpower allegiance eventually shifted from the Soviets to the United States, but not before the core elements of his military had received training in the Soviet Union.¹⁶ Barre instituted mandatory military training for all Somali males age 18 to 40.¹⁷ Throughout Barre's tyrannical reign, his endless quest for foreign military aid, often at the expense of domestic programs, resulted in Somalia accumulating vast supply of modern weapons. These military reforms would directly influence the future clan fighting after the fall of Barre's regime by providing a glut of available weapons and out of work, trained and experienced soldiers.¹⁸

In an attempt to rally the Somalis to a single nationalistic cause, and flex his perceived military might, Barre launched an attack against neighboring Ethiopia in 1977. This failed assault known as the "Ogaden War" resulted in a series of defeats to Barre's forces. The skilled Somali General, Mahammad Farah Aideed, enjoyed the only successes during the campaign. The results of this embarrassing period for Siad Barre were the death of over 8,000 Somali soldiers, over 600,000 displaced refugees, near economic ruin, and rising civil unrest.¹⁹ Barre responded to this unrest with another series of brutal crackdowns on the dissenting clans.

¹⁵ Metz, 202-7.

¹⁶ By the mid 1970s over 60% of Somali military officers had received formal Soviet training.

¹⁷ Metz, 206.

¹⁸ At the end of the Barre regime there were an estimated 40,000 automatic weapons and hundreds of millions of rounds of ammunition circulating in Somalia. (Stevenson, 16.)

¹⁹ Metz, xxvi.

By 1989, organized insurgency throughout Somalia began threatening Barre's regime. The focal point of the insurgency was the United Somali Congress (USC). The USC was dominated by the Hawiye clan and led by General Aideed, who had fallen out of Barre's favor. Throughout the 1980's, Barre had brutally repressed the Hawiye clan, whose traditional roots were in Mogadishu. He replaced their preeminent role in the city with members of his own clan family and imprisoned and murdered thousands of Hawiyes. In January of 1991, the USC expelled Barre from the capitol city. In the midst of this conflict, the US and UN evacuated their personnel from Somalia. Shortly thereafter, Barre's army virtually disintegrated and he was forced into exile.²⁰

As the Somali army fell apart, most of the deserting Somali soldiers kept their weapons and went home to join one of the rising militias formed by their clans. This provided the manpower and equipment for the factional clans to begin their own power struggles. Somalia plummeted into yet another deadly civil war. Resistance to Siad Barre's regime had served as a unifying factor for the various Somali clans. Once he was expelled, they quickly turned on one another in a fight for preeminence. The once-solid USC split into two factions and began a fierce struggle for the city of Mogadishu, turning the capital city into a battlefield. This inter-clan conflict destroyed what was left of the fragile infrastructure of Somalia. By September of 1991, all remnants of civil society had disintegrated as a result of the bloody clan clashes. The fighting in Mogadishu alone is estimated to have caused over 14,000 deaths and 27,000 wounded.²¹ To make matters worse, central and southern Somalia fell victim to a devastating

²⁰ Mohamed Sahnoun, Somalia The Missed Opportunities, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1994), 8-9.

²¹ Metz, xxx.

drought. The resulting famine left hundreds of thousands of Somalis starving and prompted the eventual UN and US intervention.

The next chapter will deal with knowing your enemy as it pertains to the first two elements that played a key role in the eventual conflict between the Somalis and the coalition. The factors that will be analyzed are the culture and character of the Somalis and the legacy of Siad Barre.

CHAPTER III. KNOWING YOUR ENEMY:

“But of all the races of Africa there cannot be one better to live among than the most difficult, the proudest, the bravest, the vainest, the most merciless, the friendliest; the Somalis.”

-Gerald Hanley, Warriors²²

The first step in knowing your enemy is gaining an in-depth understanding of their desires and motivation. In so doing, it is vital to understand the root of the enemy's beliefs, their culture, their character, and their heritage. While early in the intervention, the UN and US did not consider the Somalis to be the enemy per se, they certainly recognized them as a potential adversary, and thus should have better focused their efforts to obtain an understanding of the Somali frame of mind. A complete familiarity with their culture and character as well as an appreciation of the key Somali power brokers would have greatly benefited the coalition. This knowledge could have allowed the political and military leadership to craft a more effective strategy resulting in a successful ending to the UN and US mission in Somalia.

To understand the Somali people, and their tenacious fighting spirit, it is important to first come to grips with some of the nuances of their culture. Somalis are linguistically and religiously homogeneous people. Religion plays a key role in Somali culture, but it is secondary in influence to the clan. Approximately 99% of Somalis are Sunni Muslims. The fact that Arabic is the secondary language of Somalia highlights the influences of both the Koran and Arab cultures. For years the Somalis had no written form of their native tongue. Any printed records were recorded in Arabic. In the 1970's, a written form of Somali was developed using a western alphabet, but literacy rates never exceeded 25%.²³ As a result of the largely illiterate

²² Jonathan Stevenson, Losing Mogadishu, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 3.

²³ Metz, 22.

population, much of Somali culture and traditions revolve around the spoken word. Poetry and narratives are a vital part of Somali tradition. Individuals gifted in the spoken word gain influence and importance in Somali society. The radio eventually became a vital tool for Somalis to keep in touch with proceedings within their region and monitor their interests. By early 1990, most Somali huts contained, if nothing else, a radio and a rifle. This relationship between the rifle, the radio, and the Somali “household” would prove to be a key component to General Aideed’s ability to recruit and mobilize supporters in his fight against the US and UN intervention. His notable skills as a public speaker as well as his powerful radio station allowed him to influence and sway the opinions of thousands of Somalis within his broadcast range.

Throughout the 1980’s and early 1990’s, Muslim extremism existed on the fringes of Somali society but did not amount to a significant factor. When it suited their ambitions, Somalis would play the “Islamic card” in order to agitate the population and gain support for an issue. In contrast to recent headlines, at the time of the US and UN intervention, Somalia could not be listed as a country that harbored significant Islamic fundamentalist elements. However, this would change when General Aideed played his “Islamic Card” and recruited fundamentalist veterans of the 1980’s war against the Soviets in Afghanistan to train and assist his fighters to effectively shoot down US Army helicopters.²⁴

One of the unique aspects of Somali culture that has influenced not only the Somali psyche, but also the foundations of Somali law is the custom of *diya* paying. Simply defined, *diya* is “blood money” paid to the victim or the victim’s heirs in cases of injury or murder. The amount varies based on the severity of the injury or nature of the death. Based on this system, in Somalia, the value of a human life is relatively cheap, about 100 camels or the equivalent of

\$600.00.²⁵ With the *diya* paying system, it is actually more costly to maim rather than to kill an individual, because in the case of maiming, the *diya* would have to provide for both the maimed individual and their dependents. Therefore murder is often less costly to the offender than serious injury and thus is more common.²⁶ This cold computation encapsulates the Somali character. Once the victim's survivors receive payment of the blood money, there are no further consequences for the perpetrator of the crime and no negative stigma is attached. As a result of this cultural system, there is little concept of individual responsibility in Somali culture and behaviors that most western societies detest Somalis tolerate and even embrace.

Another aspect of Somalis culture is their clan system. Somalis are unmistakably divided along clan lines.²⁷ These clans are outlined in Figure (2). The six major Somali clans can be divided into two groupings. The Dir, Isaaq, Daarood, and Hawiye clans are overwhelmingly pastoral nomadic peoples who primarily inhabit the vast savannah regions tending to herds of camels, cattle, and other livestock. These nomads spend the months of the dry seasons on a constant quest for water and forage for their herds. The pastoral clans make up approximately 75% of Somalia's indigenous population.²⁸ The remaining clans, the Digil and Rahanwayn, are primarily agricultural clans who cultivate crops in the fertile areas between Somalia's two rivers. The pastoral clans often hold the agricultural clans in contempt, believing their own nomadic lifestyle to be superior.

²⁴ These Muslim fighters allegedly had ties to Usama Bin Ladin and his Al Quada terrorist network.

²⁵ Somalis aligned themselves into collective "liability" groups within their families and clans for the purpose of offsetting potential *diya* payments. When one member of the *diya* group commits an offense, the cost is shared within the entire group.

²⁶ Stevenson, 3.

²⁷ "...Somalis don't ask each other where they are from, but whom they are from..." Ioan M. Lewis "In the Land of the Mad Mullah"

²⁸ Metz, 73.

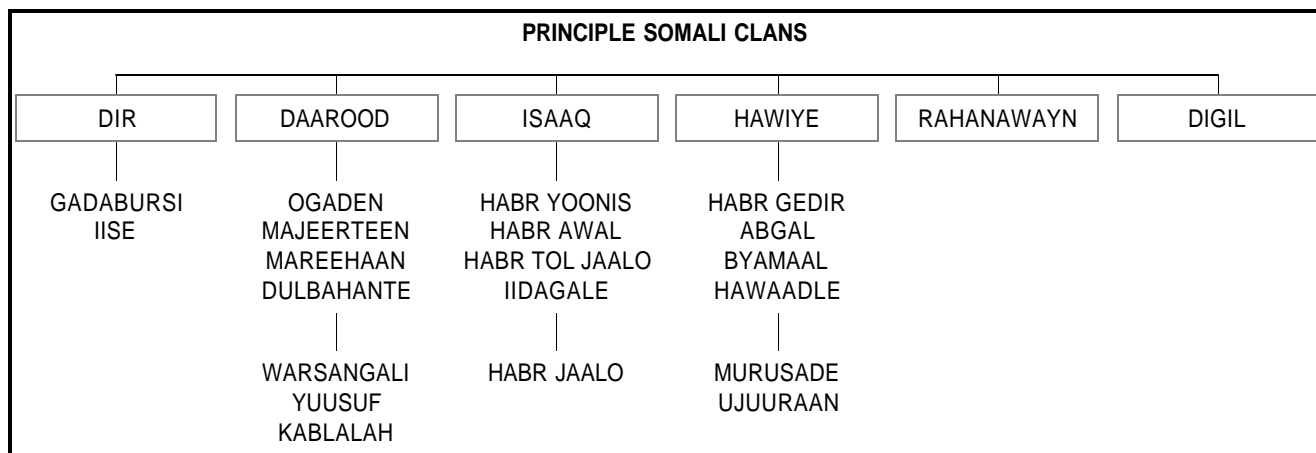


Figure (2) Major clans and clan-families

As illustrated above, these principal clans are further divided into a number of sub-clans. It is at the sub-clan level that most Somalis observe their strongest allegiance. As such, often sub-clans of the same clan family (e.g. the Habr Gedir and the Abgal of the Hawiye clan in Mogadishu) are involved in vicious and bloody conflicts. The allegiances and feuds among the Somali sub-clans are fluid and roll with the moment. It is common for Somali clans to be bitter enemies one day, only to unite the next day to fight a common foe. Conversely, allies often turn upon one another when the uniting force behind their allegiance is gone.

The majority of pastoral Somali males consider themselves members of one of two categories. These categories are the *waranle* (literally “spear bearer”) and the *wadaddo* (religious individuals).²⁹ Except for the *wadaddo*, Somalis regard nearly all men as potential combatants and instill them with values accordingly from their youth. While the religious leaders were highly respected, Somali society esteemed the *waranle* and rewarded military

²⁹ Scott Peterson, Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

proficiency.³⁰ Thus, the tradition of aggression and bloodshed is instilled into Somalis almost from birth.

Despite their humble existence by western standards, Somalis are a proud and prejudiced people, who hold most non-Somalis in contempt. They regard their closest contacts, their black African and Arab neighbors, as handicapped cousins or gifted brothers respectively. The outcome of these views is resentment towards both. Somalis demonstrated this antipathy during the UN intervention, often referring to the Nigerian troops as “niggers.” Their brotherhood with fellow Muslims only went so far as well. During one of the darker days of the operation, Somalis shamelessly ambushed and mutilated a number of Muslim Pakistanis while they operated a feeding site in Mogadishu.³¹

To sum up, Somali character and culture, the average Somali is resilient, aggressive, and proud. The Somali is so proud, that he borders on arrogance. He is a devout Sunni Muslim, fiercely loyal to his clan family, and suspicious and scornful of non-Somalis. He is most likely armed and illiterate and probably has experienced at least some rudimentary military training. He reveres strength and violence and is contemptuous of weakness. When you attack him, you attack his entire clan family. Finally, and most chillingly, he is not afraid to kill. All of this makes for a dangerous and potentially volatile adversary; one who will respond to and respect force and who will exploit perceived timidity.

This “average” Somali proved to be a very formidable adversary to the US and UN forces. His appearance was often ragged and he was easy to underestimate, but his character traits made him a surprisingly resilient and difficult foe. His inherited suspicion and loathing of

³⁰ Metz, 196.

³¹ Stevenson, 1.

foreign intervention made him a willing and eager audience for Aideed's eventual anti-UN/US rhetoric and a tough sale for the US and UN's efforts at "winning the Somali hearts and minds". His Muslim faith and dirt poor existence added the "icing on the cake"—a willingness to die coupled with very little to live for.

When analyzing a potential adversary, it is essential to factor in the effects of recent events on their point of view. Prior to the operation, what little understanding the UN and US had of the Somalis was based on out-of-date information. The impact of Siad Barre's tyrannical rule and self-serving policies significantly altered the Somali clan's leadership, infrastructure, and objectives. The leadership of the clans shifted from the traditional elders to the battle-tested warlords. The clans themselves became increasingly composed of heavily armed, young, unemployed combat veterans of either the Somali Army or the insurgent forces. The objectives of the more powerful clans transformed from limited self-interest to a desire for hegemony. These factors and their potential bearing on the coalition's operations in Somalia were largely unnoticed by UN and US leaders until it was too late.

By the end of Siad Barre's rule, the Somali clans were reeling from the years of his terrible persecution. They were bloodied and hardened by civil war and orchestrated clan infighting. As a result of the years of insurrection and civil war, warlords like Aideed emerged and usurped the customary leadership roles of the clan elders and the *wadaddo*. These warlords became the preeminent figures within their respected clan-groups and shaped their policies and goals. This new direction underscored the clans' already warlike characteristics and contributed

to the increasing inter and intra-clan violence. Additionally, they set the stage for the upcoming conflict with any outside forces who would pose a threat to the warlord's power base.³²

The glut of weapons and experienced former soldiers changed the demographics and capabilities of the clan militias. As discussed earlier, the Somali's had always revered the role of the *waranle* within the clans. During and after the uprising that led to the fall of Siad Barre, as the clans evolved into armed militias, the *waranle*'s influence became even greater. The consequence of Barre's mandatory military training for Somali males and his reform and restructuring of the Somali Army was a significant number of clan militiamen with formal military instruction and combat experience. Many of these experienced soldiers retained their weapons as they left the army. The thousands of weapons captured by the clans during the civil war supplied the rest of the clan militias. This proliferation of available weapons was the end result of years of military support to Barre's regime by both the US and Soviet Union.³³ An irony of Barre's influence on the clans is that although his intent was to suppress and subdue his rival clans, his efforts ultimately resulted in strengthening their military effectiveness.

After suffering years of Barre's cruelty and subjugation, while observing the President's own family enjoy the privileges of their dominant status, the Somali clans began to disregard their previous simple desires for influence over only their traditional clan territory. It can be said that Siad Barre's most tragic legacy is the addiction to power that he left the Somali clans with.³⁴ They had seen the power and privilege that Siad Barre's clan had amassed and they wanted the same for themselves.³⁵ The result of this new desire for unilateral power amongst the clans was

³² Clarke and Horbst, 162.

³³ Stevenson, 18.

³⁴ Peterson, 22.

³⁵ Stevenson, 5.

the turmoil and infighting that destroyed most of Somalia's infrastructure and caused the famine that led to Operation "RESTORE HOPE".

The impact of Barre's legacy ultimately poisoned the prospects for a UN brokered settlement with Aideed. Such a settlement would involve Aideed sharing most of his newly won power with other clans and parties and was accordingly doomed from the start. As the most powerful warlord in Somalia, with the largest and most capable militia, Aideed felt he was entitled to the lion's share of the control in any new Somali administration, just like his nemesis Siad Barre had. Of course, Aideed's rivals, especially Al Mahdi, had a different take on the future for Somalia, which only involved their own clan power base.

It was this "powder keg" situation that the UN and US forces unwittingly entered into in December of 1992 when they arrived in Somalia. The ultimate UN and US policy of not including any warlords, particularly Aideed, as the primary participant in the future of Somalia, was in direct conflict with his ambitions and desires. This put the entire operation on a collision course with Aideed. Additionally, in crafting their strategy, the UN and US military and political leaders considered the militias as separate entities from the clans.³⁶ While there were some unaffiliated militias acting as bandits in Mogadishu, most of the militias were associated with a clan. As such, the policy makers failed to understand that actions taken against these militiamen would be perceived as attacks against their entire clan. Finally, the UN and US leaders continually attempted to gain and maintain dialogue with the Habr Gedir clan elders and religious leaders in Mogadishu.³⁷ In doing so, they gained some influence with the Habr Gedirs but more importantly, they continued to drive a wedge deeper between themselves and Aideed,

³⁶ Montgomery interview.

³⁷ Jonathon Howe, Admiral, US Navy (ret), interviewed by Frontline, Public Broadcasting System, 1999.

the real power broker in Mogadishu. All these factors show a poor understanding on the part of both the UN and US planners and strategists of who actually controlled the Somali clans, their mind-set, and their potential reaction to the coalition's mission.

Despite his humble beginnings as the son of a camel herder, General Mahammad Farah Aideed³⁸ came to be the central figure in the conflict between the Somalis and the UN and US coalition. General Aideed was the *defacto* leader of a Hawiye sub-clan called the Habr Gedir.³⁹ Aideed's influence extended throughout the southern portions of Mogadishu, including both the seaport and airport, into the western and southern wilderness areas of the Jubba and Shabeelle Rivers. By 1992, he controlled more land, more fighters, and more military equipment than any other clan leader in Somalia. It was Aideed and his Habr Gedir fighters who would do battle with the UN and US forces on the streets of Mogadishu. Ultimately, the capture of Aideed became the focus of the entire UN operation leading to the notorious Ranger raid and the "Battle of Mogadishu" on 3 October 1993.

During the beginning of the Siad Barre regime, Aideed rose to the rank of General in the Somali army. He received military training in both the Soviet Union and in Italy. He was a competent, accomplished leader who was widely respected by his soldiers. This set him apart from most of the Somali military leadership who were appointed clansmen and cronies of Siad Barre. Finally, he was the only Somali General to enjoy tactical success on the battlefield during the Ogaden War.⁴⁰

³⁸ The Somali translation of the name "Aideed" is "One who tolerates no insults."

³⁹ Traditionally elders were the leaders of the clans. Aideed gained his authority by virtue of unchallenged control over hundreds of fighters and his ruthless employment of them.

⁴⁰ Doctor Joe Strange and General Anthony Zinni, USMC (ret) Capital "W" War, A Case for Strategic Principles of War. (Quantico: Marine Corps University, 1998), 256.

During the 1980's, Aideed became a victim of his own success and fell into disfavor with Siad Barre. Barre imprisoned him for nearly six years. Subsequent to his release, Aideed formed the USC with his fellow Hawiye clansmen to resist the clan's brutal repression by Siad Barre. In his capacity as a leader of the USC, from 1990-1992, Aideed and his militia twice defeated Barre's forces resulting in the dictator's eventual flight to Kenya and the overthrow of his government.⁴¹ While many reporters and western pundits justifiably labeled him a warlord, Aideed considered himself a freedom fighter—a Somali combination of both George Washington and Nelson Mandela.⁴²

By most accounts, Aideed was an intelligent, articulate, and well-educated individual. He served in Siad Barre's cabinet for a period and was the Somali ambassador to India for nearly six years before Barre recalled him.⁴³ He was a gifted orator who, like the "Mad Mullah" before him, adeptly used his talents to sway thousands of Somalis to support him. Aideed's gift for public speech proved to be an effective venue for information operations. This became a significant annoyance for the UN. Once motivated, he was able to articulate to his enthusiastic clansmen eloquent rhetoric turning the vast majority of them against the UN and US operations. To facilitate communications with his audience in Mogadishu, Aideed set up his own radio station, dubbed "Radio Aideed", that broadcasted his distinctive propaganda.

Aideed's tactical successes in freeing Somalia from the rule of Siad Barre were diminished by two disastrous factors. The first was the decimation to the Somali agricultural lands during the war. Throughout the conflict, Siad Barre's forces had practiced a "scorched earth" policy on the areas they had occupied in an effort to deny their use to the rebel clans. The

⁴¹ General Anthony Zinni, USMC (ret) interviewed by Frontline, Public Broadcasting System, 1999.

⁴² Strange and Zinni, 256.

path of destruction left in the wake of Barre's troops compounded the lingering effects of an unrelenting drought. The inevitable result was a devastating famine that is estimated to have killed over half a million Somalis.⁴⁴ This humanitarian crisis eventually prompted the UN and the US to intervene in Somalia.

The second regretful factor was internal strife within the USC that eventually led to a bloody inner-clan clash. A rival for control over Mogadishu and the USC emerged in the form of Ali Mahdi Mahammad (referred to as Mahdi). Mahdi was a member of the Abgal clan, another sub-clan of the Hawiye. He was an influential businessman during the Siad Barre regime. During the uprising, Mahdi joined in the resistance movement.⁴⁵ By the end of 1992, he controlled most of the northern portion of Mogadishu with a much smaller, yet still strong, militia. Mahdi had numerous business ties with outside nations as well as political and economic links with many of Siad Barre's former government workers, including Barre's son-in-law, the leader of a strong militia in southern Somalia. The USC appointed Mahdi as interim president following the ouster of Siad Barre.⁴⁶

Aideed felt his efforts during the expulsion of Siad Barre made him the right man to be the Somali President. As such, he refused to recognize Mahdi's ascendancy. He took his Habr Gedir faction and other elements of the USC and formed a breakaway group, the Somali National Alliance (SNA).⁴⁷ Aideed and his SNA fighters commenced to do battle with Mahdi and the remaining USC elements for the control of Mogadishu and southern Somalia. This

⁴³ Zinni interview.

⁴⁴ Robert B. Oakley and John L. Hirsch, Somalia and Operation Restore Hope, (Washington D.C., U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1995), 31.

⁴⁵ Metz, xxx.

⁴⁶ Oakley and Hirsch, 15.

⁴⁷ Walter Clarke and Jeffery Horbst, ed., Learning from Somalia, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 6.

brutal civil war, fought on the streets of Mogadishu significantly degraded the ability of relief agencies to deliver food and supplies to the starving people of Somalia. It was the insolvent security situation in the key city of Mogadishu that called for the military essence of the eventual UN and US intervention.

By the time the UN and US intervened, General Aideed was the most powerful warlord in Somalia. His struggle against Siad Barre had been bloody, and he had suffered personal repression and indignity. He was of the opinion that he had been the lynchpin to the success of Barre's overthrow and, as such, deserved the lion's share of the power and influence over the future of Somalia. In his violent reaction to Mahdi's claim to the Somali presidency, Aideed clearly showed that he desired the leading role in Somalia's future.

The UN and US deployed their forces to Somalia with little awareness of the potential impact of Somalia's history and culture on the success of the operation. They underestimated the Somalis' resilience and warrior tradition. They failed to anticipate Aideed's eventual reaction to their policies and the Somali's willingness to stand behind him in a struggle against perceived foreign incursion and UN colonization.⁴⁸ An in-depth understanding of the Somali culture and character prior to the US and UN intervention would have better prepared the coalition forces for the successful attainment of their mission. Certainly, a better understanding of the Somali's and their leader, General Aideed, would have allowed both the UN and US political and military planners to more effectively craft a successful strategy; one that would not have led their forces down the road to conflict. This "cultural preparation of the battlefield" would have allowed the coalition leaders to better determine and shape the nature of the impending operation.

⁴⁸ Clarke and Horbst, 162.

The following chapter will deal with the second element of SunTzu's tenet, knowing yourself and your allies, by dealing specifically with the UN's relationship with General Aideed and the Somali people.

CHAPTER IV. KNOWING YOURSELF

“Some people are intelligent in knowing themselves but stupid in knowing their opponents, and others the other way around; neither can solve the problem of learning and applying the laws of war”

Mao Tse-tung

As vital as knowing and understanding your enemy, the second element of Sun Tzu’s tenet deals with the importance of knowing yourself. This comprehension deals not only with the overall limitations and capabilities of friendly forces, but also with the intangibles of perception and legitimacy. While this may seem straightforward, it is often overlooked with potentially disastrous results. In the case of the UN involvement in Somalia, there was a significant oversight on the part of UN political leadership to understand the impact that their previous inaction during the initial months of the famine and the Secretary General’s past dealings with Somalia would have on the Somali’s perception of them. As it became clear, these two important elements were used by Aideed to shape the Somali’s reactions to the coalition intervention and resulted in a series of escalating confrontations.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

The relationship between General Aideed and the UN is laden with missteps and blunders. First, it was Aideed’s, and indeed many Somali’s, belief that the UN had abandoned Somalia after the overthrow of Siad Barre. It angered Aideed that while numerous nongovernmental agencies (NGOs) had stayed in Somalia throughout the civil war, the UN had suspended its own operations there.⁴⁹ Given the general feeling that the UN had left Somalia in

⁴⁹ Oakley and Hirsch, 18.

the lurch during its time of greatest need, it is no wonder why their ultimate intervention was met by cynicism and opposition.

Second, the one UN representative who had managed to earn the fragile trust of most Somalis, even Aideed, was a man named Mahamed Sahnoun. Sahnoun was an experienced Algerian diplomat and served as the UN's Special Representative to Somalia from April to November of 1992. His reputation for respecting Somali culture and traditions while maintaining his impartiality facilitated, if only for a brief period, the possibility of successful UN intervention. He brokered Aideed and Mahdi's consent to the initial deployment of 500 Pakistani UN peacekeepers. However, his fragile relationship with Aideed was undermined when UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali announced, without consulting Sahnoun, that the UN would be deploying another 3,000 peacekeepers. Sahnoun had promised to consult Aideed prior to any further deployments. Aideed was therefore infuriated when he heard of the additional deployment on the Somali edition of the BBC. Thus, the one hope for expanding UN credibility the Somalis now viewed as either a liar or a fool, and either way, irrelevant. Sahnoun protested the announcement to Boutros-Ghali who responded by accepting his resignation and replacing him.⁵⁰

Third, Aideed firmly believed that the UN was biased in favor of his rival, Mahdi. In December of 1991, Sahnoun's replacement, the newly appointed UN Special Representative for Somalia, James Jonah, announced his recognition of Mahdi as the Somali President.⁵¹ This, of course, infuriated Aideed who felt he and his Habr Gedir clan had earned the prominent role in future Somali politics. Mahdi, much weaker than Aideed militarily, took delight in his new

⁵⁰ Stevenson, 46.

⁵¹ Clarke and Horbst, 120.

perceived legitimacy and enthusiastically welcomed all suggestions of UN intervention made by Boutros-Ghali.⁵² A skeptical Aideed maintained his misgivings.

Fourth, the UN signaled that any involvement in Somalia would be of a long-term nature with the eventual goal of rebuilding the national structure. Aideed suspected that this would eventually lead to Somalia becoming a UN protectorate.⁵³ He had no doubt that his role in such a UN sponsored reconstruction of Somalia would be far less than what he envisioned for himself.

Finally, further cementing his belief that the UN favored his rival, in mid-June of 1992, Aideed's forces witnessed a cargo aircraft bearing UN markings delivering arms and currency to Mahdi north of Mogadishu. Aideed had no way of knowing that the aircraft belonged to a former contractor and had been leased to the UN months before but had not yet removed the UN markings. When confronted, the UN had no answer for Aideed other than denial.⁵⁴

While all this occurred, the UN did little to address their eroding credibility and perception amongst the Somali clans. This oversight significantly degraded their effectiveness and ultimately allowed Aideed to successfully portray the UN as an enemy of Somalia.

To further the gap between Somalis and the UN, Aideed and many of his countrymen had pre-existing bad blood with Boutros-Ghali.⁵⁵ Boutros-Ghali had been the Deputy Foreign Minister of Egypt during Siad Barre's rule. He had maintained close ties to Siad Barre during the most brutal phases of his regime, keeping a constant flow of military aid going to the Somali dictator. Boutros-Ghali had even purportedly arranged a land for arms deal with the Barre regime. The details of this alleged trade resulted in the displacement of thousands of Somali

⁵² Oakley and Hirsch, 19.

⁵³ Stevenson, 76.

⁵⁴ Stevenson, 37.

⁵⁵ Sahnoun,, 16.

farmers from their lands that were leased to Egyptian plantation owners in return for military hardware. Barre supposedly used the weapons provided by Egypt against his own people.⁵⁶

The complete disdain felt by most Somalis towards Boutros-Ghali was indicated during his January 1993 visit to Mogadishu where he was greeted by rock throwing crowds, jeers, and chanting against UN “neo-colonialism”. The Secretary General was eventually forced to flee by helicopter, cutting his embarrassing visit to just three hours.⁵⁷ In contrast, cheers and flower bearing children had marked President George Bush’s visit just days earlier. Based on this existing Somali animosity towards Boutros-Ghali, it is incredible that he chose to involve himself so deeply and personally in the Somali situation. His position as Secretary General notwithstanding, he should have recognized the disruptive effect his influence would have on future dealings with the Somali clans and removed himself from the process. Boutros-Ghali’s “hands on” involvement throughout infected the UN operation in the eyes of the Somalis, especially Aideed and precluded a successful settlement with his Habr Gedir clan.

The UN’s participation in and sanction of military operations usually brings with it a sense of legitimacy. This is due in no small part to their principle of neutrality and fairness. In the case of the Somalia operation, the UN depended on this view to succeed in assisting the Somalis to put an end to the famine and internal strife and rebuild a functioning nation. The UN somewhat arrogantly assumed that their aura of evenhandedness was intact when they intervened, and correspondingly did little to address their actual image. In doing so, they failed to understand and control the Somalis’ true perceptions of them. This failure ultimately led to increasing tension and contributed to the eventual undeclared war between Aideed and the UN.

⁵⁶ Stevenson, 47.

⁵⁷ Peterson, 65.

CHAPTER V. THE ROAD TO DISASTER: THE TRUE STORY

“In war, numbers alone confer no advantage. Do not advance relying on sheer military power.”

-Sun Tzu, The Art Of War

The critical oversight on the part of the UN and US strategists to understand both themselves and their eventual adversary set the entire operation up for failure. Without a clear understanding of the Somalis and a feeling for how they would react to a UN intervention, the foundation for the plans and policies was tenuous. As a result, they failed to properly determine and shape the nature of the conflict from the beginning. As the events unfolded, their faulty framework of awareness led them to a series of poor decisions and badly chosen policies that served only to increase the hostility of the Somalis towards the coalition’s mission. They failed to recognize the changing nature of the conflict and the potential consequences of those changes. The tragic result of their poorly thought out policies culminated on the afternoon of 3 October 1993.

On 3 December 1992, the UN Security Council accepted the US offer to intervene with military forces in Somalia. They passed Security Council Resolution 794 that authorized the US to

“...Use all necessary means to establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia;”⁵⁸

Subsequently, on 9 December, Operation “RESTORE HOPE” commenced.

General Aideed was initially pleased that the operation appeared to be primarily US led and not a UN affair. He promoted acceptance of the US forces to his people and the US

⁵⁸ The United Nations and Somalia, 1992-1996, (New York: The United Nations Department of Public Information, 1997), 216.

accomplished the initial landing without any organized resistance from his SNA fighters. To the Somali on the street, there was a perverse pride in the fact that the US intervention meant that they had attracted the attention of “biggest guy on the block”.⁵⁹ Aideed felt certain that the US would be an amicable and potentially corruptible supporter that he could exploit in his endeavor to assume the primary role in Somali leadership. The US, on the other hand, while attempting to assuage any Somali fears of heavy-handedness by maintaining close ties with all the clan factions involved, decided against “picking a winner”. Their policy was to support neither Aideed nor any of his rivals. This was in part a result of the US democratic mindset of traditional self-determination to which both the outgoing Bush administration and the incoming, far more altruistic, Clinton administration believed the Somali’s had a right to. Additionally, the US assumed their involvement would be of a short-term nature and developed their strategy accordingly. The UN, they reasoned, would accomplish the tricky business of nation building once they had taken over. In the meantime, the US political leaders dictated that the military execute a policy of “marginalizing, minimalizing, and isolating” the Somali warlords, to include General Aideed.⁶⁰

Neither the US nor the UN understood that the point of Somali self-determination was moot. Whether they liked it or not, the future of Somalia already lay in the hands of Aideed by virtue of his influence over the people and his military pre-eminence. The hope that Somalis would eagerly disassociate themselves with the warlords was another miscalculation based on the predominantly western mindset of the US leaders. This fault highlights the lack of in-depth understanding of Somali culture on the part of both the UN and US. Due to his cold-blooded

⁵⁹ Stevenson, 78.

⁶⁰ Strange and Zinni, 252-3.

methods, these leaders ostensibly categorized Aided in the same class as a leader of a street gang, not a well-respected military and political leader. They failed to recognize that qualities of ruthlessness and violent behavior that Aided so openly displayed were actually esteemed among Somali clansmen. Furthermore, Aided controlled the region in Mogadishu that included the port, the airport, and the US Embassy compound, which would become first the US then the UN headquarters. It should have been incredibly clear in the beginning that Aided would have to be dealt with one way or another.

While executing the mission of facilitating distribution of humanitarian relief supplies, the US policy on disarmament of the Somalis had been relatively modest. The US correctly identified that the overall glut of weapons in Somalia made the idea of total disarmament nearly impossible. As pointed out earlier, a significant number of these weapons were in the hands of the various militia and clan groups in Mogadishu. The resulting initial US policy was an all out ban only on large, crew-served weapons.⁶¹ These heavy weapons were to be stored by the various militia and clan leaders in specific areas know as “cantonments” as designated by the US commanders and were subject to inspections and inventories to verify compliance. Somalis were allowed to keep their “personal” weapons (AK-47s, RPGs, etc) as long as they did not brandish them in a threatening manner towards US or UN forces.

This relatively liberal disarmament policy contributed to the initial civility between the Somalis and the US as it took into consideration the fact that ownership of a weapon was as common for Somalis as car ownership is for Americans. The US also recognized that it would be inequitable to disarm only those individuals within their zones of control in southern

⁶¹ The US was especially concerned about the “technicals” which were pick-up trucks with large caliber machineguns mounted in their beds.

Mogadishu. It was clear that once their weapons were taken away, they would become likely prey for the remaining armed gangs and militias from the still-armed regions of Mogadishu. The UN, however, saw things differently.

For his part, the UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali insisted that the US step up their disarmament efforts before the UN began taking over control of the operation.⁶² While the US military leaders did not agree with this strategy, the US political leaders' anxiousness to turn over command of the operation and reduce the US presence in Somalia drove the military to comply with the UN demands. Still realizing that complete disarmament was impractical, they focused on confiscating weapons from the areas that they had firm control and influence over. As a result, beginning in mid-January, the US began seizing more and more arms from south Mogadishu—Aideed's area.⁶³

This ultimately became a significant source of friction between Aideed and the coalition. Due to the US and UN occupation of compounds that were within the areas his clan controlled, it appeared to him that his forces were being stripped of an unfairly high proportion of their weapons when compared to the other factions in Mogadishu. As a result, while maintaining outwardly cordial relations with the US leaders, he stepped up his anti-UN rhetoric on his private Mogadishu radio station. He also began to flavor his anti-UN speeches with elements that were unflattering to the US. Aideed must have understood that the US intelligence groups were monitoring these broadcasts. It is likely that he was again signaling the US that he would not tolerate what he perceived as unfair disarmament.

⁶² Clarke and Horbst, 158.

⁶³ Stevenson, 64.

Aideed viewed every weapon taken from his clansmen as a gain for his principal rival Mahdi. The US attempted to appear fair with their disarmament policy by conducting arms seizures against some of Mahdi's forces well. Mahdi's militia bases were located in the northern areas of Mogadishu, outside the immediate control of the US forces and away from the focus of both the press and Aideed's observers. Media reports of weapons seizures, particularly those broadcasted on the BBC, which many Somali households received, nearly always referred to only those raids that occurred in Aideed's areas.⁶⁴ The result was a strong perception by Aideed that the US was unfairly targeting his areas with disarmament thereby showing their growing bias towards his enemy Mahdi and their conformity towards the UN desires. The UN and US both failed to appreciate and address this alleged bias. In doing so, they relinquished the vital aspect of perception control to Aideed.

The UN's insistence on total disarmament in conjunction with the US's goal of quickly handing of the reigns and extracting US forces from the operation resulted in poor execution of both. While the US commanders ramped up the frequency of arms seizures in order to depict a stable, calm environment to the UN and encourage the turnover of command, they accomplished little to enhance the actual security in Mogadishu. They did, however, manage to anger many Somalis and simply motivated them to bury their weapons instead of surrender them. One observer prophesized

“...and when they (the weapons) reappear, they will reappear with a vengeance.”⁶⁵

The unintended consequence of the half-hearted efforts at disarming the Somalis was an ever widening divide between the most affected clan, Aideed's Habr Gedirs, and the US.

⁶⁴ Howe interview

⁶⁵ Stevenson, 69.

As US forces seized more weapons, the frequency of attacks against them increased. Somali sniping and stone throwing at US troops became almost daily events and the tension on the streets of Mogadishu increased. The US was approaching a culminating point in its relationship with Aideed and his Habr Gedir clan. Once Somalis stopped viewing the US forces as humanitarian saviors, US troops largely gave up all guise of being so. The Somalis whom they once considered poor, defenseless, even pathetic people in desperate need of help were increasingly becoming the enemy. US troops began contemptuously referring to them as “Sammies” or “Skinnies” just like the “Jerries, Gooks, and Dinks” of previous wars.⁶⁶ Although US military leaders attempted to keep the troops under control, frustration and irritation fueled the increasing tension.

Instead of attempting to reengage and repair the relationship with Aideed, the US was trying to disengage from the entire operation as soon as possible. US leaders viewed their initial humanitarian mission as complete by mid January 1993. The planned timeline for their deployment was rapidly expiring and the situation in Mogadishu appeared to be deteriorating. Consequently, in an attempt to placate and appease the UN's desires for increased security to facilitate a swift turnover, the US ended up destabilizing the balance of power among the Somali warlords. This jeopardized their critical relationship with the most important Somali leader, Aideed. Ironically, this attempt by the US to expedite their departure had the inadvertent result of ensuring their ongoing presence in the mission. As the hostilities continued to increase, the

⁶⁶ Stevenson, 68.

Boutros-Ghali insisted on continued US presence even after the UN assumed command to enhance the UN coalition's limited military capabilities.⁶⁷

The UN did not begin their painstakingly slow process of assuming the reigns of the operation in Somalia until mid-March. In the interim, the US forces were turning over responsibilities for security and patrolling in Mogadishu to coalition forces. The number of US forces was quickly being reduced from a high of over 21,000 to just over 5,000.⁶⁸ During this period, two things became clear to Aideed. The first was that his dreaded fear, UN takeover of the operation, was about to happen. He recognized this as a significant threat to his personal power base. The second was that the new coalition forces now patrolling his areas in southern Mogadishu were of much lesser quality than the US forces they replaced. The coalition forces chosen for these missions, the Nigerians and the Pakistanis were selected because the US and UN leaders thought that the Nigerians being African, and the Pakistani's being Muslims would endear them to the Somalis. This relatively simplistic analysis failed to take into consideration actual Somali prejudices. In the end, both the Pakistanis and the Nigerians just proved to be easier targets for the Somali gunmen.

When the US began turning over the Operation to the UN who made no secret of their desires to "Nation build" and thereby exclude the current powers in Somalia from the process, they felt a sense of betrayal.⁶⁹ Simply put, this was not what the Somalis had bargained for when they chose not to resist the initial intervention. The US and UN forces were now being painted

⁶⁷ This US presence amounted to a combat force of just over 1,200 soldiers (the Quick Reaction Force) from the 10th Mountain Division as well as approximately 3,000 logistics and support troops. (Montgomery interview)

⁶⁸ Ambassador Robert Oakley, US Ambassador to Somalia (November 1992 to May 1993), interviewed by Frontline, Public Broadcasting System, 1999.

⁶⁹ Stevenson, 58.

as invaders by Aideed in his regular radio propaganda broadcasts, and their increasingly heavy-handed actions were casting them in that role as well.

The newly elected Clinton administration tasked the US military leaders with executing a policy of “marginalizing, minimalizing, and isolating” Aideed and his fellow warlords as they supported the UN turnover and facilitated the withdrawal of the majority of US forces.⁷⁰ The US military leaders had difficulty in deriving a mission from this political guidance. Quite simply, they could not associate any military tasks with “marginalizing, minimalizing, and isolating.” As a result, the naive administration’s policy exasperated both the Somalis and the US military leaders tasked with executing the strategy. The resulting uncertainty on the part of the US generals of how to execute their mission contributed to a series of confused and incongruent undertakings that lacked focus and a defined end-state. This chain of events served only to inspire Aideed to further entrench his position against the US and UN while providing the context for his information operation campaign of increasingly anti-US radio broadcasts and speeches.

It is clear that Aideed was sending as loud of a signal as possible to the US that he did not like the way things were heading, and he would not stand for it. The situation was still salvageable, but it was obvious that Aideed would not stand by and allow himself to be “marginalized, minimalized, or isolated” as the US and UN leaders wished. As the hostilities continued to grow, the US continued to recall its forces and turn over responsibilities to the UN. In some aspects, it was prudent of the US to pull out its forces before the situation deteriorated and they took more casualties. It was, however, disingenuous of the US to hand over the

⁷⁰ Strange and Zinni, 252-3.

situation to the UN coalition forces that were simply not capable of taking on the task of neutralizing Aideed and his militia.

The US had two ostensibly viable choices at this point. They could either keep a significant force in Somalia with the mission of eliminating the threat of Aideed and his Habr Gedir militia or they could deal with Aideed and give him what he wanted—the key role in the future direction of Somalia. The first choice was politically untenable for the new US administration given the fact that they initially advertised the mission as a solely humanitarian one of a limited duration. The second option was unacceptable for the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Consequently, the US opted to pull out the majority of the combat units while still maintaining their limited presence in the UN coalition. While one of the intents of the reduction in US forces was to avoid casualties by having fewer soldiers potentially in the line of fire, the result was a correspondingly greater threat to the US forces that remained in Somalia. The coalition forces now providing security were far less intimidating to the Habr Gedir and other militias and therefore could not keep them contained. The “Butcher’s Bill” in Somalia was about to increase—greatly.

On 4 May 1993, the UN formally took control over the operation. Aideed realized that his hopes of dealing exclusively with America as a sponsor were dead. He continued to increase his anti-UN speeches on “Radio Aideed”. Aideed recognized both the timidity and vulnerability of the UN forces that replaced the US Marines in Mogadishu. As his Somali upbringing had taught him, he exploited these weaknesses. Aideed, it appears, was a scholar of Sun Tzu as his tactics are right out of The Art of War:

“An therefore those skilled in war avoid the enemy when his spirit is keen and attack him when it is sluggish and his soldiers homesick. This is control of the moral factor.”⁷¹

His forces began smuggling more and more arms back into Mogadishu under the less observant eyes of the UN soldiers. Aideed’s militia increased their presence on the streets of south Mogadishu. While he continued to signal the UN that he would not stand to be ignored, Aideed left the door open for negotiation. The UN refused to use it.

The UN continued with the policy of not dealing with the warlords. As the US had done previously, they focused their efforts on trying to create a council of traditional clan elders to govern the future Somali state. While this strategy seemed to recognize both western altruistic desires and Somali traditions, and had worked for the US and UN in the remote humanitarian relief sectors where the warlords and their militias had far less influence, it was doomed to failure in Mogadishu. Aideed alone had boasted of having nearly 35,000 fighters allied to him, of which a significant number were in Mogadishu.⁷² Given his power and influence, he would not stand by and be “minimalized”. Additionally, there were no longer the US forces there to intimidate and keep his militia at bay. He was ready and waiting for the chance to seize the initiative from the UN, and on the 5th of June, they provided him with the opportunity.

On 5 June 1993, the UN launched a surprise inspection of one of Aideed’s weapons cantonment areas. This inspection was in accordance with the agreement that both Aideed and Mahdi had signed with the US and UN forces that authorized them to keep and maintain their heavy weapons only in specific sites subject to US or UN monitoring. When the US had conducted the inspections, they gave the Somalis at least a day of notice before the inspection.

⁷¹ Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Translated by Samuel B. Griffith (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) 59.

⁷² Stevenson, 44.

US intelligence monitoring of the site before the inspection to insure no one moved or replaced the weapons, always followed this advance warning. This system had worked fairly well for all parties involved. In contrast, the UN provided only a few hours notice to the Somalis prior to the 5 June inspection. As a result, announcement of the inspection never filtered to the individuals in charge of the site and the Pakistani soldiers took them by surprise. Without prior notification, the Somalis believed the UN was conducting an attack so they resisted. Several Somalis were roughed up during the ensuing encounter and the cantonment site and adjacent buildings were damaged.⁷³

This mission was accomplished by the Pakistani contingent while simultaneously some of their lightly armed soldiers were operating a feeding site in downtown Mogadishu and conducting patrols throughout the city. As it turned out, the weapons cantonment site was adjacent to the building that housed “Radio Aideed”. During the melee resulting from the raid, the radio station was damaged. The word quickly spread through the Habr Gedir clan that the Pakistanis were attacking Aideed’s radio station. An angry mob met the Pakistanis as they exited the storage facility. Other violent crowds of Somalis began assaulting the Pakistanis at the feeding site as well as unsuspecting Pakistani patrols throughout the city. Somali gunmen fired at the Pakistanis from within the crowds of women and children and the situation quickly deteriorated into a series of vicious firefights. At the end of the day, 24 Pakistanis lay dead and over 70 were wounded. The bodies of several of the Pakistanis were mutilated and mistreated.⁷⁴ This calamity demonstrated the fierce devotion of the Habr Gedirs to Aideed and their willingness to employ all their clan members, even women and children, as combatants. It also

⁷³Howe interview.

⁷⁴Oakley and Hirsch, 114.

demonstrated the UN's lack of awareness of the potential fall-out of their actions. The violence with which the Somalis dismembered some of the Pakistanis corpses further showed the affect that "Radio Aideed's" unrelenting vilification of the UN had on its audience, and it was a chilling forecast of events to come.

In response to the actions of the previous day in Mogadishu, the UN Security Council passed resolution 837 on 6 June 1993. The resolution called for the

"...arrest and detention for prosecution, trial and punishment..." of those responsible for the attacks on the Pakistanis.⁷⁵ While the resolution did not name Aideed or his Habr Gedir clan specifically as the perpetrators of the attacks, there was no doubt in the minds of the UN leaders as to whom they held responsible. From June 5 on, an undeclared state of war existed between the UN and Aideed. The focus of the entire operation in Mogadishu shifted again from "marginalizing, minimalizing, and isolating" the warlords while facilitating the humanitarian relief effort to hunting down and bringing Aideed and his lieutenants to justice. The UN did not originally envision this change in the mission's overall focus. Rather they were now simply reacting to Aideed as he dictated the tempo and nature of the conflict. Their lack of understanding and knowledge of the Somalis had now cost them control over the character of the operation.

In a feeble attempt to orchestrate his capture, the UN placed a \$25,000 bounty on Aideed's head.⁷⁶ The UN published and distributed a wanted poster throughout Mogadishu to advertise this reward.⁷⁷ The result was far different from what the UN had wished. Aideed's ruthlessness was well known in Mogadishu. Those caught crossing him in the past were subject

⁷⁵ The United Nations and Somalia, 1992-1996., 236.

⁷⁶ Peterson, 93.

to swift retribution, often death at the hands of his militia. Few if any were willing to risk their lives by betraying Aideed for \$25,000. Aideed looked at the relatively meager bounty as an insult and responded by placing a \$250,000 bounty on the heads of the UN and US leaders.⁷⁸ The circulation of the wanted poster with Aideed's picture on it in combination with the successful game of "cat and mouse" he played while avoiding capture resulted in him becoming somewhat of a folk hero to the Somalis. Every day he avoided capture was an embarrassment to both the UN and the US (whose forces were most often used in the search for Aideed) and built up Aideed's reputation amongst his countrymen.

Throughout June and early July 1993, the UN unsuccessfully sought to capture Aideed and his top lieutenants. The US forces that remained in the coalition were limited to only a reinforced battalion of light infantry supported by helicopters. These forces were ill suited for the mission of capturing the Habr Gedir leadership but they were the most capable and willing forces that the UN had to employ.⁷⁹ The predominant use of US forces to hunt for Aideed eroded whatever goodwill remained between them and the Somalis. The US was now cemented in the same category as the UN in the eyes of the Somalis.

On 12 July, the US executed a raid on a house suspected to contain Aideed's SNA militia leadership responsible for the 5 June attack on the Pakistanis. This building was known as the "Abdi Abdiid house".⁸⁰ In executing the raid, US helicopter gunships fired sixteen anti-tank missiles and 2,020 20MM cannon rounds into the upper levels of the house.⁸¹ As it turned out,

⁷⁷ Howe interview.

⁷⁸ Montgomery interview.

⁷⁹ Montgomery interview

⁸⁰ Mats Berdal, Dr., "Beyond Peacekeeping: Reflections on the Evolution of International Peacekeeping After the Cold War" International Institute for Strategic Studies. Article for the JIIA-IFRI Joint Conference. (Tokyo: Japan Institute for International Affairs, 1994), 11.

⁸¹ Peterson, 121-122.

on the day of the raid, the Abdi Abdiid house was being used as a meeting place for over 200 Habr Gedir clan leaders. These leaders were primarily elders, businessmen, and religious *wadaddo* who, ironically, were meeting that day to discuss a possible peace initiative in response to their growing displeasure with the escalation of violence between Aideed's militia and the UN forces. Aideed and his primary military leaders were absent at the time of the attack. The Habr Gedir leaders present in the Abdi Abdiid house on that fateful day were the exact individuals who the UN was trying to forge relationships with in lieu of the warlords. The attack ended all hope of that occurring. The missile and cannon fire killed over 50 of the Habr Gedirs in the building during the raid. Included in the dead was the clan's eldest *wadaddo*, Sheik Haji Mohamed Iman Aden who was over 90 years old. In addition to those killed, nearly 170 Somalis were wounded in the attack, many seriously.⁸²

This raid was clearly the decision point for Aideed and his followers as to the potential for any peaceful settlement with the UN. The Somali's reaction to the attack on the Abdi Abdiid house was predictably violent. A mob of Somali's bent on revenge surrounded and murdered a western television crew attempting to report on the incident. The mob then put the newsmen's bodies on display for subsequent crews to broadcast.⁸³ Just as the June 5 attack on the Pakistanis had galvanized the UN's attitude against Aideed, the Abdi Abdiid house attack accomplished the same for the Somalis. Aideed and his entire clan were now at war with the UN as well.

In as much as the UN and US failed to know and understand their enemy—Aideed, the later clearly knew and understood them. Aideed shrewdly recognized that while the US forces were a significant strength for the UN coalition, they also represented a potential vulnerability.

⁸² Bowden, 72-75.

⁸³ Oakley and Hirsch, 121.

In his analysis, the US forces in Somalia were the center of gravity for the entire operation. If he could eliminate them, the coalition would fall apart and the UN would be forced to withdraw. His military and diplomatic experience had made him aware of the US political leadership's abhorrence to taking casualties. He identified this as the coalition's critical vulnerability and set out with plans to exploit it. As a result, he began specifically targeting US forces. His plan was to inflict as many casualties as possible on the US in order to cause them to withdraw and, thereby, eliminate them as a threat to his quest for unilateral control in Somalia. The Clinton administration had made it clear to the world that they were interested in getting US forces out of Somalia as soon as they could. It was apparent to Aideed that the administration was not interested in increasing their troop strength in Somalia beyond what they felt was the bare minimum essential. Therefore, he surmised that increased attacks by his forces would not bring substantial reinforcements.

This assumption was only partially true. While President Clinton and Secretary of Defense Aspin refused to send armor and armored personnel carriers as the ground commander requested, they did deploy the ill-fated Task Force Ranger to Somalia in August with the mission of capturing Aideed. Aideed responded by maintaining a low profile and continuing to avoid capture. All the while, he and his fighters observed and took note of the consistent tactics of Task Force Ranger. They noticed that on every raid, the Rangers would swoop in via helicopters in certain patterns. To combat these raids, Aideed recruited former Mujahadeen veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war to train them in anti-helicopter tactics. By the beginning of October, the Habr Gedirs had the motivation, the inspiration, and the training for their next opportunity to

strike against the Americans. The afternoon of 3 October 1993, that opportunity arose, with deadly consequences.⁸⁴

It was the UN and US political leaders failed policies that led to the series of escalating confrontations highlighted in this chapter. These policies put them on a collision course with Aideed in his quest for power. US political leaders acquiesced to UN desires and allowed US forces to be drawn into a fight in which Aideed controlled both the tempo and the nature of the conflict. They clearly lost the battle of perception control to Aideed, while they simultaneously whittled the US presence down to a level that resulted in reduced credibility and made them a lucrative target for Aideed and his militia. These mistakes were the result of a failure on the part of the US leaders to know and understand both their enemy and their UN allies. This misinterpretation left the US leaders without the ability to foresee the potential consequences that awaited them and set the stage for the eventual culminating battle on 3 October.

⁸⁴ For more on the actual Ranger raid, read [Blackhawk Down, a Story of Modern War](#) by Mark Bowden.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

“If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”

-Sun Tzu, The Art Of War

This paper has analyzed four major factors that contributed to the eventual conflict between the UN/US coalition and General Aideed and his militia. These factors include (1) the warlike character and culture of the Somalis, (2) the terrible legacy of “power addiction” left by the dictator Siad Barre, (3) the existing “bad blood” between the UN and Aideed, and (4) the failure of the US and UN to effectively deal with Aideed. It has further shown that in failing to adequately address these issues before and during the conflict, the UN and US did not know themselves or their enemy. This failure aggravated the existing factors and put the coalition forces on a collision course with Aideed.

The UN and US did not go into Somalia with the intent of picking a fight, yet US policymakers stumbled their way into a deadly one. While the first two factors leading to this fight, the Somali character and the legacy of “power addiction” left by Siad Barre were not a direct result of any US or UN action, they were critical elements to the eventual outcome of the campaign. Sadly, these factors went largely unmeasured with terrible consequences for the US and UN forces engaged. This oversight was the result of a poor understanding of the Somalis prior to Operation “RESTORE HOPE” and a failure, on the part of both parties (US and UN) to learn from their early experiences. These failures precluded the effective anticipation of the Somalis reactions to the US and UN courses of action.

The tenuous relationship between the UN and the Somalis, which was compounded by Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s past involvement in Siad Barre-era Somali politics,

tainted the UN's credibility and effectiveness. These dynamics thwarted the UN's attempts, however honorable they may have been, to rebuild a functioning government in Somalia. Finally, the naive US policy of supporting the UN's efforts to re-establish the Somali government while refusing to deal with General Aideed, arguably the most powerful man in Somalia, put the coalition's mission on a collision course with misfortune.

LESSONS LEARNED

In his book Capital "W" War, A Case for Strategic Principles of War, Dr. Joe Strange further stresses Sun Tzu's principle of knowing your enemy and yourself. In doing so, Dr. Strange points out that failure in this critical first step makes it "extremely difficult to apply the remaining principles and seriously jeopardizes chances for ultimate national success." Highlighted below, are some elements of Dr. Strange's principles that were negatively impacted by the UN and US's failure to know their enemy and themselves. Also included are recommendations pertaining to future operations:

- **Determine and (if necessary) Shape the Nature of the Conflict:** Lack of understanding and awareness on the part of the UN and US military and political leaders allowed Aideed to effectively manipulate the nature of the conflict. Their inability to foresee the potential consequences of their strategy and policies resulted in Aideed setting the tempo and changed the focus of the operation several times for the UN forces. Correspondingly, at the insistence of the UN leadership, US forces allowed themselves to be unwittingly drawn into the escalating conflict. Future military operations in such environments must be planned and executed with a far better understanding of the culture, history, and

character of potential adversaries in order to better control and shape the nature of any conflict in which US forces may be involved.

- **Legitimacy and the Credible Capacity to Coerce:** The greater the legitimacy of an operation, *as defined and perceived by the target*, the lesser the amount of force that will be required to coerce the target.⁸⁵ In this aspect the failure of the UN to know themselves and the Somali's jaded perception of them clearly impacted on the legitimacy of the entire operation and resulted in the requirement for the use of correspondingly high levels of force in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to coerce the Somalis to accept the UN objectives. Aideed initially viewed the US forces as both credible and legitimate, however, he never shared the same views regarding the UN leadership and forces. As the US began turning the mission over to the UN, Aideed's perception of US legitimacy eroded. At the same time, Aideed himself was gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Somalis. Eventually, Aideed viewed the US and the UN in the same negative light. All the while, as the US considerably reduced its force levels in Somalia, Aideed began to question their credible capacity to coerce. In the end he saw the US forces not so much as a threat, but as a potential high-value target. Future military and political strategists must take a hard look at themselves prior to engaging in a military campaign with the intent of identifying any factors that may contribute to an adversarial relationship with nonaligned elements within the area of operations as well as those factors that will be used by an adversary to support their position through an information operations campaign. While these factors may not be

completely eliminated, if they are identified in advance and better understood prior to the operation, measures can be taken to mitigate their potential negative effects.

- **Perception Control:** During their involvement in Somalia, the UN made little effective efforts to control the Somali's perception of their intervention. This "laissez-faire" policy had disastrous results. Aideed was able to "spin" his assessment of the UN, and ultimately the US, providing it to his audience virtually unchecked via his radio station. As his was the only version available, it was perceived by his public as the truth and therefore served as a foundation for the Somali's increasingly hostile resistance to the intervention. In order to maintain and capitalize on the legitimacy of an operation as well as reduce the amount of force required to coerce the adversary, future military and political leaders must focus on a strategy of perception control. To facilitate this, these leaders must first acquire a basic awareness of the adversary and the supporting civilian population's opinions and views. They must understand the true will of the people. Then they must focus an information operations campaign to both shape the target audience's overall view and counter negative information being presented by the enemy.

There will, no doubt, be future conflicts that US forces are involved in under similar circumstances as were found in Somalia. Recent events in Afghanistan have highlighted the importance of understanding warlords and clan/tribal rivalries. Of the many lessons learned from the US experience in Somalia, the critical factor is that in order to set the stage for success,

⁸⁵ Strange and Zinni, 16.

it is vital to first know and understand both your potential enemy and yourself before you become engaged. This will allow US leaders to shape and even control the nature of the conflict in order to better achieve mission success. The overall intent of focusing on this basic tenet before becoming engaged in military operations is not to avoid US involvement in scenarios like Operation “RESTORE HOPE” but rather to ensure that, when involved, US forces successfully achieve their mission instead of falling victim to unintended consequences.

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