

Chapter 12

Air Operations in Somalia: “Black Hawk Down” Revisited

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In response to an immense humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa, the United States joined with the United Nations to help secure humanitarian food distribution to the region’s starving people in 1992. The mission changed in 1993 when the United States/United Nations attempted to capture the Somali warlord Farah Aideed. Throughout this US/UN operation air power played an important role, involving air mobility, close air support, aerial interdiction, medical evacuation, and psychological operations. Despite the variety of air power applications, most of the focus in this chapter will be on the kinetic use of air power. Numerous problems of command and control (C2) developed in this operation and there were serious issues of coalition cooperation, especially in air–ground operations. There was a significant disconnect between political objectives and military operations as the campaign continued. This impacted on the use of air power. The limitations of air power in US/UN humanitarian operations were starkly demonstrated; furthermore, the misuse of air power helped cause the operation overall to fail in 1993, especially after the infamous “Black Hawk Down” episode. Civilian policymakers and military leaders forgot or never understood that the use of air power must take place in a political context and that force by air, as on the ground, is a very blunt instrument of policy. Further, they did not understand the historical context that they were operating in, especially the legacy of European imperialism.

Geography and Social Setting

Today the nation of Somalia is 637,660 sq km in size, or slightly smaller than the State of Texas, USA. It has a strategic location on the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. The major cities of this beleaguered country are Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa, and Berbera. Its population of almost 10 million people is mostly Sunni Muslim. Although relatively ethnically homogeneous (especially for Africa), the clan is the most important social unit. There are few rivers in this hot and arid country and the richest area for cultivation can be found south of Mogadishu. There is also some well-watered pasturage in the northwestern part of the country.

Traditionally, most Somalis are pastoral nomads.¹ It was a combination of ecological disaster and political chaos threw this society into turmoil in 1992. The terrain, climate, and lack of roads, railroads, and other lines of communication influenced military operations and particularly the use of air power.

The Collapse of Somalia

In 1991 the United States won a spectacular victory over Iraq in Operation Desert Storm and the Ethiopian dictator Mengistu was overthrown. By this point the Soviet Union had collapsed and Soviet influence and communism were no longer part of the international calculus. Islamism had replaced socialism in the Horn of Africa. In January 1991, as the United States was starting its air campaign in Kuwait and Iraq, Siad Barre, president of what was then the Somali Democratic Republic (1969–1991), was overthrown and the central government collapsed. Soon local government was severely degraded all over the country.

In the midst of the political chaos of early January 1991, the US ambassador to Somalia, James Bishop, called for the extraction of US embassy personnel from Mogadishu, the Somali capital. Operation Eastern Exit was launched by US Marines and Navy Sea Air and Land Teams (SEALs). These teams had trained and prepared for Operation Desert Storm, but had to be diverted to Somalia. Thus, the first US operation in Somalia was a non-combatant evacuation operation and helicopters played the dominant role. Because of US basing in the Persian Gulf and the fall of the Soviet Union, Somalia was no longer a strategic priority. Added to US evacuation, numerous European nationals fled the country, as well as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Somalia was alone; free to destroy itself.²

A civil war based on clans raged throughout the country, with Farah Aideed on one side and Ali Mahdi on the other side. Even Mogadishu was divided between these two warlords. Much of the fighting took place in the southern part of Somalia, the region that was the country's breadbasket. The battles between the clans in this agricultural region would be one of the principal causes of the famine. Aideed fought with Siad, who was trying to hold onto power, doing further damage to Somalia's agriculture. To make matters worse, southern Somalis felt betrayed because the United Nations focused its humanitarian aid on the northern part of the country.³

Attempts by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to alleviate the suffering were greeted by attacks in the fall of 1991. By early 1992 over 300,000 Somalis had died from famine and tens of thousands more were killed or wounded in the fighting.

1 See: Lewis, I.M. *A Modern History of Somalia* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002), Chapter 1.

2 Rutherford, K. *Humanitarianism Under Fire: The US and UN Intervention in Somalia* (Kumarian Press, 2008), 9–11.

3 Ibid, 16–17.

An international Red Cross aircraft was hit by a missile on 17 September 1992 and a month later 45 Red Cross vehicles were looted and Red Cross workers were robbed. Numerous other incidents continued on into December.

In January 1992 Boutros Boutros-Ghali became UN Secretary-General and he wanted to take a more aggressive stand in peacekeeping in general and in Somalia in particular. On 24 April 1992, the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM; later known as UNOSOM I) was authorized by the Security Council.⁴ This was the first move in Boutros-Ghali's new aggressive policy. At this time, the United States was suffering from peacekeeping fatigue and also trying to enjoy the peace dividend with the major drawdown of its military forces after the end of the Cold War.⁵ As food aid poured into Somalia, fighting intensified between the non-affiliated clans and at least 20 percent of all aid was stolen. By the summer of 1992 Boutros-Ghali became more insistent in intervening and in July he inserted a military observer team led by Pakistani General Imtiaz Shaheen, after the Security Council had established UNOSOM I.

A 50-man team landed in a country consumed by chaos and civil war; and this was soon followed by 500 more UN peacekeepers who would be flown in by United States Air Force (USAF) transport. The first major mission of air power in this escalating humanitarian crisis was air mobility. At this point the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington did not want US involvement in air mobility for humanitarian relief. But they were encouraged to do airdrops by Richard Clarke of the National Security Council in the White House. There was also growing pressure from the Congressional Black Caucus saying the United States was staying out of this crisis because of the Bush administration's racial prejudice.⁶

Operation Provide Relief, 15 August to 9 December 1992

Operation Provide Relief was under the control of US Central Command and it was supposed to be an attainable mission with measurable outcomes. It supplemented the meagre efforts of UNOSOM I to distribute aid in crisis-torn Somalia. George H.W. Bush (later dubbed "Bush the Elder") authorized this mission at the height of the 1992 presidential campaign and at a time when he was feeling great pressure to intervene in the escalating crisis in the Balkans. In accordance with Security Council Resolution 767, he authorized the immediate airlift of supplies

4 *Editor's note:* UNOSOM I was established by Security Council resolution 751 (1992) of 24 April 1992, to monitor the ceasefire in Mogadishu, to protect UN personnel and supplies, and to escort certain humanitarian deliveries. By resolution 775 of 3 December 1992 its mandate was expanded to protect humanitarian convoys and distribution centres throughout Somalia. United Nations, "Somalia – UNOSOM I, Mandate". Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unosom1mandate.html>

5 *Ibid.*, 21.

6 *Ibid.*, 40–47.

to southern Somalia. The USAF would stage out of Mombasa, Kenya, but was slow to let the Kenyan government of Daniel Arap-Moi know about the operation. This took some diplomatic finesse to make the operation viable. The operation was commanded by US Marine Brigadier General Frank Libutti, which is ironic since most of the initial mission was carried out by USAF personnel.

All planes were flown by pilots from USAF, given the difficulties of handling the poor conditions of the runways in Somalia.⁷ In the late summer and fall USAF would fly over 2,500 sorties with C-130s and C-141s that would deliver 28,000 tons of food aid to the starving people of this region. However, USAF had promised 28 C-141s but was only able to employ 12. This is significant because the C-141 is much larger than the C-130 and could provide strategic lift, whereas the C-130, with its much smaller payload, could do tactical airlift only. US Special Forces personnel were placed inside these cargo aircraft to provide security in case they were attacked.⁸

It soon became apparent that most of the airlifted supplies were not making their way to the starving Somalis and were taken by the warlords' forces. In fact, the warlords' political and military power grew with the introduction of more aid. As Boutros-Ghali became more aggressive, the Somali warlords became more hostile to the UN/US aircraft and ground forces. Soon USAF personnel were flying in more peacekeepers from Pakistan and Belgium. Besides a lack of success in getting the food to the famine victims, it was a very expensive campaign to maintain. To make matters worse, on 18 September 1992 one of the aircraft was shot at and soon all air operations were suspended. By this point one-third of all Somalis were at or near starvation. Nonetheless, because of the presidential campaign, the Bush administration did not want to intervene more aggressively. There was a great deal of finger pointing and disorganization at the UN peacekeeping operation (UNOSOM I). At the same time, UN force levels grew to 4,200 men, but still these soldiers could not protect the distribution of aid.⁹

Operation Restore Hope

After Bush lost the presidential election to Bill Clinton in November 1992, and with the immense difficulties that UN peacekeepers had in distributing food to the Somalis, President Bush decided to launch in December (a month before leaving office) a larger and more intrusive operation codenamed Operation Restore Hope. A great deal of international media pressure had been a factor in launching this operation. The Unified Task Force (UNITAF) was under US command and not UN

7 Ibid, 49.

8 Buer, Major E. "United Task Force Somalia (UNITAF) and the United Nations Operations Somalia (UNOSOM II). A Comparative Analysis of Offensive Air Support". Master's Thesis (United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 2001), 8.

9 Ibid, 10.

command. It would involve 28,000 US military personnel and it was expected by the United States that 10,000 more troops from other nations would also participate. The reason the force was so large was that General Colin Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wanted to attack the problem with overwhelming force, which was part of the previously developed Weinberger–Powell Doctrine. What Bush did not fully realize was that the United Nations had more ambitious goals of nation-building and disarming the militias. This was indicated by the fact that the United Nations was operating under Chapter VII of its Charter. The United Nations did not have any experience in running a Chapter VII operation with large numbers of troops (except perhaps decades earlier in the Congo).

Just before the operation, the US military had failed to carry out effective “intelligence preparation of the battlefield”.¹⁰ They could have gathered at least basic intelligence on current ground conditions from the NGOs.¹¹ Basic reconnaissance was done by US Navy SEAL teams three days before US forces landed in Mogadishu. Further, F-14As did intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) from the carrier battle group to supplement the SEALs’ work. Throughout the US involvement in 1992, the American military was quite willing to use US Special Forces in Somalia. In fact, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Low-Intensity Operations had been heavily consulted before this operation.¹² These clandestine maneuverings were quickly replaced by US Marines landing amidst the camera lights of the international media.

Nine hours after landing, a primitive Air Operations Center was established at Mogadishu Airport. The purpose of this center was to set up C2 of all air assets in the theater. Further, a Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC) was designated to run the Air Operations Center. He was responsible for all air assets in Somalia. Most of the military air assets were US Navy or Marine fixed-wing aircraft, or US Army helicopters. The Navy SEAL team provided security for the airport.¹³ From the US side, Marine Lieutenant General Robert Johnston commanded military operations and Ambassador Robert Oakley handled the political aspects of the operation.

There were many practical problems that the US military faced in trying to run air operations, even in a relatively permissive environment. The increased air traffic heavily taxed Mogadishu air traffic control. This operation was also complicated because it would be a joint, coalition, and inter-agency operation. Greater air traffic created new problems of refueling aircraft on the tarmac.¹⁴ Logistics in general was hampered by the poor and small harbor at Mogadishu. This meant a

10 See US Department of the Army. *Field Manual*, 34–130. Available at: <http://www.enlisted.info> [accessed 31 March 2014].

11 Bauman, R. and Yates, L. “My Clan Against the World, US Coalition Forces in Somalia 1992–1994” (Leavenworth County, KS: Fort Leavenworth, 2004), 34.

12 Rutherford, *Humanitarianism Under Fire*, 67.

13 Bauman and Yates “My Clan Against the World”, 3, 8.

14 Ibid, 44.

greater reliance on airlift for supplies and personnel, which aggravated the above problems. Very quickly the limits of airlift were discovered.

Air power was also used in a variety of other ways. US aircraft engaged in psychological operations.¹⁵ This could be done in three different ways: loud hailers, leaflet drops, or presence missions. Presence missions meant airplanes flying low and slow over potentially hostile areas to intimidate potential opponents. Radio broadcasts could also be used for information operations to assure the Somali people that the United States had no hostile intentions. On the ground, to better coordinate with NGOs and governmental agencies, a Civil Military Operations Center was created.¹⁶

Soon the United States pushed out from Mogadishu to expand the reach of air assets. Nine airfields were rebuilt in the southern half of the country and the airfields at Baledogle and Baidoa were taken by helicopter assault. It became quickly apparent that airlift was not a substitute for ground convoys, but the problem was that the roads and lines of communication were in very poor shape. There were also some mines on some of the roads. Despite these risks, by early 1993 US and UN forces were moving throughout the countryside.

Somalis were afraid of offensive air assets like F-18s or attack helicopters. Whenever there were meetings between US personnel and Aideed or Ali Mahdi, AH-1s flew presence missions.¹⁷ Oakley and Johnston proved to be a good team in managing the operation.¹⁸ They were believers of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine and they did not see arms reduction as an objective of this operation. It soon became clear that the United States and the United Nations had different and conflicting objectives. Very quickly US efforts began to overshadow UN involvement in Somalia.

Not long after establishing air assets, the Americans saw that it would be difficult to employ air power, especially in an urban environment like Mogadishu. The United States had poor maps of Mogadishu and the weather conditions and need for water caused problems for their helicopters.¹⁹ In general, since the first use of air power in an urban environment by the French in Damascus, Syria, in 1925, the urban environment has proved to be the most difficult for air operations. There were strict rules of engagement for the use of close air support and aerial interdiction in the Somalia campaign because the "peacekeeping" nature of this campaign also limited the capability of available aviation. US Air Force AC-130 gunships that operated out of Kenya were available, but the question arose: was this level of lethality appropriate for a peacekeeping mission? Oakley wanted to limit kinetic operations because of

15 For more detail on psychological operations in Somalia, see: Ibid, 47–8.

16 See: Ibid, 53.

17 Rutherford, *Humanitarianism Under Fire*, 91.

18 Buer, "United Task Force Somalia", 15.

19 Ibid, 22.

Somali public opinion.²⁰ He saw that kinetic air power was a blunt instrument that had to operate in a political context.

The warlords and their militias were a limited threat to US/UN air operations. These armed groups had received smuggled weapons from Kenya and Ethiopia and they knew the urban and rural environments. The key weapon of choice for the militias were the so-called “technicals”, which were trucks armed with heavy machine guns. These proved to be a very mobile and elusive target. Added to the machine gun anti-aircraft or AAA guns, there were some SA-7 surface-to-air missiles from man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS).

Unknown to the United States/United Nations was the fact that they faced a more deadly enemy that was meeting in Sudan. In February 1992, in the capital, Khartoum, al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and the Sudanese religious and political leader Hassan al-Turabi met members of the Iranian intelligence, to plan strategy. Osama bin Laden had spent the previous two years in Sudan turning al-Qaeda into an effective terrorist organization. Al-Bashir and al-Turabi were the political and spiritual leaders of Sudan who aided al-Qaeda. They would be useful to the Iranians, who now saw Somalia as part of their strategy. In spring 1992 bin Laden made clandestine visits to Somalia and in late spring al-Qaeda and Iranian Special Forces, known as “Quds forces”, were inserted into Somalia. Volunteers from Iraq and Pakistan landed on the remote shores of Somalia. To make matters worse, the Iranians gave the Somali militia stinger MANPADS. The Iranians would help promote conflict in Somalia from June to October 1993.²¹

Throughout the late winter and early spring of 1993, there were numerous problems of coordinating US and UN C2 and air power. The UN military staff had little impact on planning air operations. There was a slow process of managing UN requests for air support. The JFACC only controlled US Navy and Marine air operations, not US Army attack helicopters, so there was a lack of “jointness” in air operations.²² There was a slow and cumbersome cycle of Air Tasking Orders, which did everything from giving the vector of the target to deciding what type of ordnance would be used. In the case of this phase of the Somalia Operation, US communications and Air Tasking Orders had to be sent from headquarters in Mogadishu to an Aegis class cruiser to a carrier.²³ C2 was further hampered by the fact that only US personnel ran the Air Operations Center.²⁴ To make matters worse, there was a great deal of air activity to control.

Offensive Air Support (OAS) was focused on helping humanitarian relief. For the NGOs there were numerous examples of hijacked convoys and they made

20 See Ibid, 23.

21 On the involvement of Iran and al-Qaeda in Somalia, see Shay, S. *Somalia between Jihad and Restoration* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 59–66.

22 On “jointness” and C2, see Buer, “United Task Force Somalia”, 27.

23 Ibid, 29.

24 Ibid, 28.

this situation worse by hiring some members of the militias for security guards. OAS was flown to deter the militias and these air operations did bring more road security. UN ground operations also centered on protecting convoys. The Air Tasking Order processed at least 2,500 sorties a day.²⁵ At Kismayo Airport in the south, US attack helicopters went against the militias of Mohammed Said Hersi Morgan, Siad Barre's son-in-law, in conjunction with Belgian ground forces. This was an example of a successful joint and coalition operation.²⁶

The Security Council requested a smooth, phased transition from UNITAF to UNOSOM II in Resolution 814 of 26 March 1993. The expanded mandate for UNOSOM II was to *continue* the work of UNITAF and *expand* on it. UNOSOM II was to sponsor disarmament and reconciliation in order to re-establish law and order. The United States maintained a separate command in Somalia, which included the US Quick Reaction Force (QRF) that became involved in the "Black Hawk Down" episode. To complicate the C2 aspect, the Deputy Commander of UNOSOM II, Major General Thomas Montgomery, also exercised "tactical control when committed" over the QRF. But General Montgomery was only informed of the 3 October operation 40 minutes before its launch.²⁷

UNOSOM II

During the transition period from the Bush to the Clinton administration, Anthony Lake was named the National Security Advisor. He erroneously believed that most US military personnel would be out of Somalia by inauguration day in late January. Richard Clarke, who was part of his team, told him that they would be there several more months.²⁸ In Somalia, Oakley and Johnston had met with 15 warlords in the late winter and convinced them to park their "technicals". Oakley did not believe that democracy in Somalia was possible and that the best bet was to back the strongman Aideed. He thought "if you treat him like a statesman, he will act like a statesman". This political progress largely ended when Johnston was replaced by Admiral Jonathan Howe, who refused to listen to old Somalia hands.²⁹ He hated Aideed and was determined to get rid of him. Furthermore, Oakley and Howe disliked each other and leadership in the theater became dysfunctional. It

25 Ibid, 29.

26 For details on this, see: Ibid, 30–31. *Editor's note*: UNITA's mandate in Security Council Resolution 794 of 3 December 1992 "entrust[ed] to certain Member States, on a temporary basis, the responsibility for creating a secure environment for the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance" in Somalia.

27 Hillen, J. *Blue Helmets: The Strategy of UN Military Operations* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2nd edition, 2000).

28 Sale, R. *Clinton's Secret Wars. The Evolution of a Commander in Chief* (New York, 2009), 78.

29 On the problems of Howe's leadership, see: Ibid, 80–81.

was under Howe that the Somalis quickly came to see the United States as an enemy, just like their colonial oppressors of the past. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Washington said that the Somalis would not welcome a foreign presence because of the legacy of colonialism.³⁰

Under Howe (March 1993) there was a shift from humanitarian aid to nation-building and disarmament. This was far more aggressive than anything imagined by the Clinton administration, whose members wanted to forget Somalia. Meanwhile the US forces planned to draw down to a 4,000 man logistic force and a 1,300 QRF under the command of Army General Montgomery. UN Security Council Resolution 814 was passed on 26 March 1993 to authorize UNOSOM II. This mission received the enthusiastic support of US representative to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright.³¹ On 4 May UNOSOM II started and there was a poor transition from the previous UNITAF regime. Now most of the military forces would be UN peacekeepers under the command of Turkish general Çevik Bir. With UNOSOM II most US OAS forces went away. The only kinetic air power available were the AC-130s in Kenya and the Army attack helicopters. The United States had demanded that the United Nations take the leading role, but there was poor coordination between Washington and Somalia and ineffective coordination between the United States and the United Nations in the field. This would only get worse during the summer.

After the US military drawdown there were very limited US/UN military air assets. All OAS shifted from proactive air operations to reactive operations.³² To make matters worse, UNOSOM II had no control over any US air assets. This of course militated against the aggressive UN goal of disarming the Somali militias and nation-building. The UN's means did not match its strategy, but it tried to carry this policy regardless. For air mobility the United Nations had to rely on civilian aircrews. With fewer military personnel in the theater, there was a significant reduction of ground patrols, which meant the militias gained greater control of the cities and countryside. This weakened the political bargaining power of the United Nations because air power had helped bring the Somalis to the bargaining table. After July 1993, the US Air Force and Army would provide what OAS was available. Added to the problem of limited air capability was that the UN military officers were indifferent to the reality and potential of air operations. This meant that the UN forces did not have any air ISR capability and could not generate presence missions. The United Nations did not conduct psychological operations to counter Aideed's anti-US/UN radio messages.³³ This further increased the vulnerability of UN ground forces.

From the beginning UNOSOM II had real problems with C2. Further, there was divided C2 between UN forces and the remaining US military assets. American

30 Ibid, 80.

31 Rutherford, *Humanitarianism Under Fire*, 107–8.

32 Buer, "United Task Force Somalia", 33.

33 Rutherford, *Humanitarianism Under Fire*, 129.

military personnel answered only to Montgomery and not to General Bir.³⁴ The C2 problem would only worsen as the campaign wore on.

Aideed hated Boutros-Ghali, as well as Howe, because he believed the Secretary-General was a Christian Coptic Egyptian meddler who threatened his power and was a threat to Islam. On 5 June 1993 al-Qaeda, acting with Iranian advisers, attacked Pakistani peacekeepers and Aideed was blamed.³⁵ Twenty-four Pakistanis were killed and 55 men were wounded. There was no air cover available for these men and there were no Pakistani forward air controllers who could speak English.³⁶ This is another example of UNOSOM II's failure to understand the importance of air operations. This was a turning point in the operation. The attack on the Pakistanis showed that the policy of disarmament would be quite difficult and it appeared that Aideed was at war with UNOSOM II. In reality, the threat was far greater than the United States/United Nations realized. Local UN units tried to broker deals with local clans, but it was obvious that UN forces had no clear air or ground strategy.

Howe wanted to remove Aideed, but the rest of the US military was opposed to this. Both US and UN forces had poor human intelligence (HUMINT) – that is, intelligence gathered by interacting with people – regarding the activities of Aideed or other leaders. Howe demanded in June that the Pentagon send in US Special Forces, but Washington initially refused. On 12 June, as a measure to appease Howe and to show limited resolve to Aideed, AC-130 gunships were ordered to attack Aideed's radio station and weapons caches.³⁷ Part of the Ranger regiment along with Delta Force were ordered to start training for Somalia.

To further up the ante, on 12 July 1993 Howe ordered an attack on Aideed's headquarters at Abdi House in Mogadishu by helicopters and TOW missiles. This attack, codenamed Operation Michigan, was implemented by the US QRF.³⁸ To limit collateral damage Howe first sent helicopters to warn the civilian population of the impending attack. Nonetheless, some innocent Somalis were killed in the raid, including Somali leaders who were sympathetic to the United States/United Nations. After this the Somalis stopped talking to members of UNOSOM II. Howe failed to hit Aideed and so the admiral placed a US\$25,000 reward on the warlord. It was an all-out war between Aideed and the United States.

Immediately after the attack on his headquarters Aideed went to Khartoum, Sudan, to meet with al-Turabi. Clearly, the Somali warlord wanted another increase of military aid and personnel. The Sudanese thought they were the next target, so they were willing to help as part of a defensive strategy. Added to this, al-Qaeda and the Iranians wanted to make Mogadishu a second Beirut, where

34 Ibid, 122.

35 Shay, *Somalia between Jihad and Restoration*, 66.

36 Buer, "United Task Force Somalia", 39.

37 Bauman and Yates, "My Clan against the World", 111.

38 On this, see Rutherford, *Humanitarianism Under Fire*, 146.

several hundred US forces died, or Kabul, where Soviet forces were destroyed.³⁹ In any case, the attack on Aideed's house increased outside support, united the militias against the United States and set the stage for Task Force Ranger. The US Congress and the US military supported a change in mission from helping the United Nations with humanitarian operations to capturing or killing Aideed. Admiral Howe had driven the policy in this direction.

Task Force Ranger and the Battle for Mogadishu

By late July the militias were shooting at US helicopters and in early August US Army Military Police were killed by mines on the road.⁴⁰ This was the final impetus needed for the White House to send in Special Forces. A portion of the Ranger Regiment, Delta Teams, Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) and a few SEALs were sent in. SOAR would provide the helicopter support for the operation. There were also CIA assets on the ground. Task Force Ranger was under the command of Major General William Garrison of Joint Special Operations Command or JSOC. The Rangers and Delta Force, who were sent in late August, were not the units that had trained that summer for Somalia.⁴¹ Also omitted from this operation were the AC-130 gunships which the stateside Rangers and Delta had trained with. This was a conscious decision of Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, who wanted to avoid collateral damage. He wanted a surgical raid to capture Aideed.

The addition of Task Force Ranger to the theater made a complex system of C2 even more dysfunctional. Garrison did not report to Howe but to JSOC back in the United States and through them to General Hoar, the commander of US Central Command. Hoar had been opposed to the sending of Special Forces to Somalia and did not like Howe's aggressive policies. Further, Garrison did not report to Montgomery, who was in charge of the Army QRF. To make things worse, none of the US forces reported to UN forces. Each was its own little kingdom answering to its own master. It was a complete breakdown of coalition operations.

Early operations did not go well for Task Force Ranger. On 30 August 1993 Delta Force launched a raid to put Aideed out of business by capturing his aids and destroying his military infrastructure. The US Special Forces team repelled down ropes and mistakenly attacked a villa that housed UN development staff.⁴² They thought a UN staffer was Aideed! This showed what poor intelligence Task Force Ranger had. Clearly they were not communicating with CIA personnel on

39 See Sale, *Clinton's Secret Wars*, 83.

40 These mines were detonated by remote control by Aideed's men. See Shay, *Somalia between Jihad and Restoration*, 68.

41 Rutherford, *Humanitarianism Under Fire*, 152.

42 Ibid, 154.

the ground. Aspin said, "We looked like the gang who couldn't shoot straight".⁴³ Powell was shocked by the amateurish nature of the operation. The United States had underestimated the importance of the legacy of European colonialism and Somali resistance to foreigners. In this raid innocent Somalis were killed by US helicopters. Attacks by US helicopters continued through September and these helicopters were also used to protect Pakistani UN ground forces, who were still fruitlessly trying to disarm the militias.

In September, the United States declared Aideed an enemy and Boutros-Ghali thought that UNOSOM II was becoming too militarily focused. Clearly the peacekeeping mission had failed. In Washington there was starting to be a shift among policymakers to a political solution.⁴⁴ This could be seen when on 14 September Montgomery of the QRF was refused artillery and Bradley Fighting Vehicles. This change of policy was not transmitted to US forces fighting in Somalia. The day before, US Cobra attack helicopters hit a hospital while attacking militia members.⁴⁵ In September and early October the United States launched six new missions in the theater; these resulted in the loss of two Black Hawk helicopters that were to provide cover for Delta Force and the Rangers, who were capturing some of Aideed's lieutenants. Clearly the militias, with the help of foreign fighters, had learned how to shoot down US helicopters. US air assets were proving less effective than had been hoped. There was no question at this point of using fixed-wing assets like AC-130 gunships.

In terms of C2, Garrison left Howe and Bir out of the loop. Naturally, there was very poor coordination with the UN forces. Further, there was no coordination with Montgomery's QRF since Task Force Ranger did not think they would ever need any outside help because they were such an elite force. The downfall of Special Forces was their hubris. This demonstrated another problem of using Special Forces in a peacekeeping operation.

By the beginning of October 1993, certain Somali clans and their foreign allies were ready to stand up to the United States and had figured out how to shoot down US helicopters. The foreign fighters led by Quds force, al-Qaeda, and Iraqis were the dominant element. This coalition of terrorists used Aideed as cover. A CIA team told the US military that between 150 and 200 fighters arrived per day and that an attack was being planned. CIA leader Ernie Shanklin told the military that they should do a snatch and grab mission against two tier-one Somali leaders, Omar Salad and Abdi Awale. They had been spotted 400 yds from the Delta Force compound in a tea house. Shanklin wanted this to be a small mission with just ten JSOC and CIA members.⁴⁶

On 3 October, Garrison decided to launch a large raid with Delta and the Ranger battalion. P-3 Orions were sent up for ISR and C2 and this was the only

43 Sale, *Clinton's Secret Wars*, 84.

44 Rutherford, *Humanitarianism Under Fire*, 156–7.

45 Shay, *Somalia between Jihad and Restoration*, 68.

46 On the role of Shanklin and the CIA, see Sale, *Clinton's Secret Wars*, 85–87.

fixed-wing aircraft in the operations.⁴⁷ This platform was not really effective and JSOC's Somali-based HUMINT was only partially accurate. They did not fully leverage CIA HUMINT. Almost all of the air assets were helicopters, from Kiowas and Little Birds to Black Hawks to Cobra attack helicopters. These rotary platforms were engaging in ISR, C2, insertion of forces, air mobility and resupply, along with combat search and rescue (CSAR).

The story "Black Hawk Down" is well known in books and movies; what is important for this chapter is the role of air power. After a fairly successful snatch and grab at the Olympia Hotel, it soon became apparent that the foreign fighters and the Somalis could shoot down helicopters. The battle shifted from seizing Somalis to rescuing two Black Hawk crews; it went from decapitation to CSAR. All ground and air assets focused on rescuing downed helicopter crews. JSOC's loss of two helicopters and severe damage to another helicopter limited the robust use of rotary assets in this battle, which limited their key advantage over the insurgents. Airborne C2 proved ineffective and the ground columns got lost in the streets.⁴⁸

One of the key accomplishments was that helicopters were providing close air support all night long, as the Rangers were low on ammunition and were under constant attack.⁴⁹ The Cobra crews became adept at night operations and were greatly aided by their Forward-looking Infrared (FLIR) radar and night-vision goggles. Paramedics from the USAF were inserted to help with the wounded. Helicopters were employed successfully for resupply during the attack of the Rangers. The QRF, which had not been part of the planning, was waved off and no AC-130s were employed.

UN forces consisting of Malays and Pakistanis in UN armored personnel carriers working with US forces came to the rescue the second day. US troops rode inside the armored personnel carriers and US attack helicopters provided cover to the column.⁵⁰ Helicopters were also used for ISR and C2, which was more effective on the second day. Elements of the 10th Mountain division from the QRF were employed. There were still problems of coalition warfare between US and UN forces, especially regarding moving through roadblocks. Aspin blamed the slow response on the UN troops.⁵¹ Throughout the operation there was poor coordination between the CIA and all the military forces. Further, there was an intense rivalry between Delta Force and the Rangers.⁵² At the political level, President Bill Clinton and Admiral Howe were left out of the loop. In the end, 18

47 See Bowden, M. *Black Hawk Down: A Story of a Modern War* (New York, 2000), 112–13.

48 Ibid, 170–71.

49 Ibid, 230–31.

50 Ibid, 271.

51 Rutherford, *Humanitarianism Under Fire*, 164.

52 Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 173.

US servicemen died and some of their bodies were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu as a spectacle.

The Legacy of Somalia

The fiasco in Mogadishu was a shock to the Clinton administration and significantly affected his subsequent foreign policy.⁵³ Clinton announced the withdrawal of US forces from Somalia by 31 March 1994. To help the withdrawal there was a brief surge of US forces in Somalia. The biggest casualty of Black Hawk Down was Aspin, who was soon fired. One of the biggest criticisms leveled against him was a shortage of air power. After Somalia, Clinton would rely increasingly on air power for 1995 and 1999 operations in the Balkans and Desert Fox in Iraq in December 1998. Further, because of Somalia, Clinton was unwilling to use force to stop the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. The feeble coalition that was UNOSOM II quickly unraveled and there was a loss of international support. The final UN exodus was in 1995 and Somalia descended into chaos, with terrorist control, a foreign (Ethiopian) invasion and piracy on the horizon.

Conclusion

The debacle in Somalia in 1993 had numerous lessons for military professionals. It demonstrated how difficult coalition warfare was in a Chapter VII peacekeeping operation. It was clear the United Nations had little grasp on how to use air power and that the United States used air power in a political vacuum. The misuse of offensive air power by the United States was one of the key reasons Aideed turned against the United Nations/United States. In fact, the failure of the forces to understand the appropriate application of air power was the principal cause for the failure of UNOSOM II. The Somalia operation failed because the objectives were changed without congruent military force.

Failure of C2 was a major source of ineffectiveness on the ground and in the air. The various US elements on the ground failed to communicate or coordinate with each other, much less with the UN's forces. American commanders in Somalia were confused about the policies of the Clinton administration and there was poor coordination between Boutros-Ghali and the White House. The battle for Mogadishu showed problems inside JSOC with the intense rivalry between the Rangers and Delta Force and this impacted on their use of air power.

This was the first battle between the United States and al-Qaeda and the United States faced a much more adept and serious foe in the Battle for Mogadishu than has been previously presented. Black Hawk Down was just a foreshadowing of warfare in the twenty-first century, for in this century urban combat between

53 On this, see Sale, *Clinton's Secret Wars*, 87–8.

Western forces and insurgents has become quite common, from Iraq to Chechnya. The United States is still involved in fighting armed groups and insurgents in Somalia and has built a military command around this at Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa in Djibouti. The United States is still conducting air operations in Somalia with coalition partners. But because of the Black Hawk Down syndrome, the United States (like the United Nations) refuses to put ground forces into Somalia and operates with surrogates, like Ethiopia in 2006. Due to the quagmire in Iraq, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review called for surrogate warfare and this has had a great influence on US operations in Somalia. In fact, the future of US military operations will be conducted with a small footprint of Special Forces engaging in foreign internal defense. Large-scale counter-insurgency is dead and operations in Somalia in the twenty-first century will be lessons for the rest of the world.

Since counter-insurgency is unlikely, there will probably be a greater role for peacekeeping and the United Nations. This will mean that the United Nations will have to be more adept at Chapter VII operations. It will have to be more robust in its use of air assets. Of course the United Nations has learned to use kinetic air assets, as is exemplified by its use of Mi-24 Hind helicopter gunships in central Africa, shown by A. Walter Dorn in Chapter 14 in this volume. With extensive US interagency experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, perhaps coordination between the United States and the United Nations will be more effective in the twenty-first century. With yet further famines in Somalia, there is, of course, a new role for the United Nations. This time they will have to work with African Union soldiers. The Salafist Shahab militia has alienated the people of southern Somalia and perhaps there is only a little hope for this ravaged and desperate part of the world.

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