



## Is the American Military Ready to Die Again in Somalia? Part I

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### Introduction:

The report that a [U.S. Navy SEAL](#) was killed on May 4, 2017, brought back the memory of the October clash in 1993; the “Black Hawk Down” battle between General Aideed’s militia and the American Rangers in Mogadishu. But will the reported death of one U.S. Navy SEAL officer be the beginning of the withdrawal of the American forces, again? No one knows, but you bet your money on it! A lot has changed since the end of “Operation Restore Hope”, and no one gave a favorable appraisal on the way they ran that operation, nor how poorly the Americas left the scene in hurry.

It was also an object lesson for the UN inefficacies, its lack of understanding the entangled local politics, and the slum strategy of the warlords of the day. All the same, the U.S. has since been seen delving secretly into the daily security affairs in the country, but I don’t see how few



hundreds of American army forces, hiding in bunkers and keeping low profile, would impact the current situation of lawlessness. What they are doing now is a hit and run strategy with a lot of collateral damages and killings of innocent bystander. One would hope the U.S. doesn’t repeat her failed military tactics she had suffered in Mogadishu, as part of the hunt for warlord General Aideed in 1993.

That October clash left eighteen U.S. soldiers dead, seventy-eight Americans wounded, and over a 1,000 Somalis dead (no one counted the dead or the wounded Somalis). It was also reported that, in about 18 months in Somalia, an estimated thirty Americans were killed in 1992-93, but the U.S. army saved as many as 300,000 Somalis from starving to death, a laudable action (1). Nonetheless, that clash resulted in an immediate extrication and quick withdrawal of the U.S. army from Somalia. Now, after so many years of absence from the scene of the crime, the Americans are back to Somalia again with a hit and run strategy, their usual practice since 2013. What would that change? No one knows for certain, but probably nothing will change. It's not the same Somalia of 1991-1994, and it is not about chasing Mohamed Farah Aideed and his militia anymore.

The presence of the American army in Somalia today might be just an emotional issue for them, looking for some sort of closure—to have the last laugh. But today's Somalia is much more difficult and is a deadlier place than it was in 1992-1994. When Operation Restore Hope was launched in Somalia in December 1992, its scope was limited, “strictly humanitarian”. The U.S. was reluctant to place U.S. military forces into a civil war situation in Somalia in 1992. The U.S. military leadership feared that a peacekeeping operation didn't fit the mission for which U.S. forces have been trained. I wonder if the U.S. military is ready now to deploy its might and machinery into Somalia if fighting broke again between the U.S. forces and the Somalis (call it Al-shabab and their supporters).

Today, the field is much more challenging with multifaced new political players operating in the region: Al-shabab (now operating as a tribal militia), and the new fortune hunters (Dubai, Qatar, the Turkish, the Chinese and Saudis). Plus, the older, blood bone lickers—such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, and other African nations who are contributing to AMISOM forces, have become experts in Somalia's affairs and they have their hands on the deck, just in case.

In addition, US public has lost its support and trust for more wars for fear the U.S. may lose more of its boys and girls, and only to see problems getting worse; such as the case in Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In fact, Somalis from all walks of life all knew that America forces have been operating in secret bases and bunkers in all over Somalia, with a major base in Djibouti, to monitor Somalia's security apparatus. Americans made the claim that they were training Somali forces, for the last 10 years, to fight against Al-shabaab. But we all know that has not been an effective operation with a full force of military apparatus that made a noticeable dent on Al-Shabab's attacks. Now we are learning that Americans are preparing an exit strategy for AMISOM to leave Somalia very soon, in 2020. AMISOM is supposedly to “hand over responsibilities to local Somali security forces.” This reminds me of how American forces hurriedly left Iraq after incurring so many casualties, handing over the operation to a “trained” Iraqi army, only to find Iraq forces run away at the first sound of ISIS attack on their bases. So, shouldn't we expect the same scenario happening with the Somali “forces”? How fully trained are the Somali forces and how many are they in terms of numbers? We don't know!

As I write this piece, the London Conference has just been concluded, trying to raise more aid (\$900 million) for Somalia, and President Farmajo was rehearsing, rehashing and re-reading the same script his predecessors have composed to get more money for their pockets (the usual begging style). However, no one is asking the right question: where did the money go? Where is accountability? In a world with greater



uncertainty as the one we have today, no one nation or society can sit idly without begging their way out of poverty; we must explore our human and natural resources and use them wisely and peacefully to help ourselves out of this abysmal situation we have put ourselves into.

As for Donald Trump's empty talk about Somalia, he has nothing to offer to the millions of people suffering everywhere in the world, especially those in Muslim countries. Nor can he change the course of what is happening in Somalia. His administration has no interest in promoting fundamental human rights issues. The U.S. foreign policy under Donald Trump is embroiled in nuclear arms race in North Korea, Russia, Iran, India, and elsewhere. In addition, the mass killings in Syria by Russia, ISIS and the U.S. continue; all have become top priority of the American foreign policy these days, if any. In fact, American contributions to humanitarian aid, hunger and famine, prevention of genocide, or the campaign against global warming and the universality core value for promoting morality and stability—all have been pushed to the back burner under Donald Trump's right-wing universe (America First). Donald Trump is also on a hot seat domestically, sitting on a coverup of his secret dealings with Putin of Russia. You don't expect anything coming from the U.S. these days, maybe one of those "mother of all" bombs! The U.S. efforts in Somalia could have been appreciated if they were dropping food for the famine-stricken Somali people. Anyway, that won't happen!

All the same, the ultimate responsibility for restoration of any nation state always falls on the shoulders of its people, and the Somalis shouldn't be different. However, it was clear, even then, that Somalia, "the nation", has collapsed long before 1991, and it remains a failed state ever since. One cannot rebuild a state where one never existed. No serious political solution has been agreed on after so many years of clan strife. We still have the same misguided tribal and political fight—a different scuffle but even more serious. Aided is gone, of course—eventually killed by a

stray bullet in 1996—but hundreds of his surviving militia are the millionaires in Mogadishu today, deciding who dies and who lives—the proverbial saying that “crime pays”—is true in here, and Somalia remains a “failed state”.

This is a telling testimony that Somalis failed to govern themselves after 30 years of tribal war and segregated clan enclaves, creating multiple presidents (clan presidents). Today’s new generation of leaders, yesterday warlords, and a new breed of western educated Nuevo-warlords, either don’t understand the value of a “nation”, or don’t want a Somali nation at all. They are happy with their individual clan enclaves, manhandled by other countries. Today, the assassinations of innocent, non-threatening people, and the attack on restaurants and supermarkets continue in Mogadishu.



Though blaming Al-shabab has become the scapegoat of the day (Wixii Xunba Xaawaa Leh—blaming Eve for all that is bad), people remained suspicious that there must be an organized clannish, Mafia-like, criminal activists going on in Mogadishu. People know, or at least suspect, who is killing whom. It seems as if each clan has its own financed Al-shabab group carrying out these assassinations secretly for the clan when needed, as it is happening now in Mogadishu. Call it revenge, politically charged mistrust, or simply an attempt to show who controls Mogadishu (who is the boss)—I suspect the latter is true. This enforces the long-held conclusion that Somalis cannot govern themselves. But where are the U.S. forces when needed?

### **Does Somalia need another Operation Restore Hope?**

It depends on who you ask, but maybe we should revisit the past first to understand the present:

1. What made the *Operation Restore Hope* necessary?
2. Who made it possible to happen? And;
3. Why did it fail?

### **Background:**

#### **I: What made it necessary?**

It is impossible to capture all that had had happened during those years in this short article, but volumes have been written on how the collapse of Mohamed Siad Barre’s regime, and the subsequent violent encounter that followed, created a desperate situation and chaos for millions of Somalis. The world has witnessed thousands of displaced people fleeing to neighboring countries. Many of us vividly remember the horrifying images of skeleton, starving population in parts of the country where famine hit hard. The UN agencies and the NGOs were not able to help the hungry and homeless people, let alone carrying out a peacekeeping mission and

disarmament. The initial 500 peacekeeping soldiers (UNOSOM) from Pakistan were no match for the warlords and their militia. They were shackled by Aideed and his militia at the harbor area in Mogadishu. Mohamed Farah Aideed's outlaw and undisciplined forces were previously composed of Hawiye Habar Gedir nomadic groups from Mudug region (Northwest of Mogadishu) (3). Ali Mahdi Mohamed, not a military man, was a spokesman for the tradespeople and a native Hawiye Abgal, who were the majority population in pre-civil war Mogadishu (Benadir region). The fighting between Aideed and Ali Mahdi in November 1991 through March 1992 caused 30,000 to 50,000 noncombatant deaths and nearly completed the destruction of Mogadishu (2, 4). It was all agreed in 1992 that the situation warranted an outside military force that could change the power equilibrium and could loosen the tight grip of the warlords on local communities, a hope to give time the traditional problem-solving mechanisms of Somali culture to succeed.

Furthermore, there was evidence of a systemic planning for land grabbing, where Hawiye militias were moving into the settlements belonging to minority farming and fishing communities in Afgoi, Bur Hakaba, Shalambood, Jilib and beyond, to gain control of the productive plantation zones and their adjacent ports for banana export business. To solidify their grip and power, those militia who became victorious in Mogadishu have been rewarded with the expropriated urban properties of Darood and other clans who were fleeing Mogadishu. The loot was used as a reward to incentivize new Hawiye militia to be recruited to join the Hawiye militia. Other successful attempts made by Aideed and his militia were to occupy the fertile valley in Jubba and Shebelle for control and outright occupation. There were a lot of hostilities brewing in the whole country, but the UN operations in Somalia (UNOSOM I & II), and United Task Force (UNITAF) both failed to control the situations successfully because of many reasons that are beyond the scope of this short article. But their desperate request for reconciliation met deaf ears from the warlords and their militia, especially in Mogadishu.

There was a peace conference proposal by General Aideed in Mudug to resolve a conflict between Habar Gedir and Majeerteen in Galkayo, but that proposal also failed because some argued that Aideed wanted to drive a wedge between Col. Abdillahi Yussuf and General Abshir Musa. But though the accord produced some temporary ceasefire, it created a tension among the Majeerteen. In Kismayo, there was a proposed Jubba accord between Col. Omar Jess's militia (Ogadeni) and General Morgan (Majeerteen) who was drawing support from Harti and Marehan militia in the area. This was an attempt to reopen the city for displaced Ogadeni people, but neither side wanted to endorse the accord. The Rahanweyn and the Hawiye also protested the formation and the composition of the accord because they claimed it excluded them from the discussion.

## **II: Those Who Raised their Voices for the Somali Victims**

Even as early as in late 1991, a number of Congressional delegations from the U.S. visited Somalia. There was a hunger committee sponsored for a week-long fact-finding visit to northern Somalia (now Somaliland), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Djibouti. These congressional hearings,

trips, and resolutions expressed concern about the Somali situation. These initiatives helped to lay the groundwork for a large-scale humanitarian deployment to Somalia. In the latter part of 1992, the dominant African issue in the US Congress was the anarchy and famine that developed in Somalia. Congress had taken an interest in Somali affairs over many years, and some Members of the Congress thought there existed, special responsibility to come to the aid of the Somali people in their hour of need. This interest could have been viewed as a concern over the regional arms races and the lack of democracy in Somalia in early 1990s. In accordance with that concern, Congress had long exercised close oversight with respect to the use of U.S. military assistance program in support of the Republic of Somalia at the time (5). After government troops reportedly killed several thousand civilians in northern Somalia (6), the House Subcommittee on Africa held a hearing on July 14, 1988. Subsequently, the Bush administration terminated the military aid to the Barre government in 1989, largely because of the Congressional pressure.

However, not long after, Siad Barre government fell in early January 1991 amid chaotic violence in the capital, Mogadishu. Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kansas), introduced one of the first resolutions in April 1991, which pressured Congress to ask the President of the United States to lead in efforts to relieve the suffering from Somalia. It was a call for a world-wide campaign to make the humanitarian crisis in Somalia an “item of priority.” Senator Kassebaum criticized the Bush administration for having watered down the language of a “UN Security Council resolution” calling for deployment of UN peacekeeping troops to Somalia. She was the first Member of Congress to visit Somalia, the famine-stricken and war-torn region of Southern Somalia. The Senator pushed for a special envoy for Somalia instead of the technical team the United Nations was planning to send. She testified and presented the committee with a firsthand account of the Somali tragedy (7).

In March 1992, the Senate Subcommittee on Africa requested that the Congressional Research Services (CRS) organize a seminar on the Horn of Africa. Other Senators, such as the late Paul Simon (D-Illinois), Representative John Lewis (D-Georgia), and others followed Senator Kassebaum’s leadership and started criticizing the administration for its reluctance. They argued that the United Nations should go forward with the security proposed, with or without Aideed’s or Ali Mahdi’s approval (8). In October of that year, a member of the Black Caucus, Representative John Lewis (D-GA), introduced a resolution calling for a U.S. role in a possible humanitarian intervention in Somalia. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was highly active as the crisis worsened. Representative John Lewis led a delegation to visit Somalia (9). Many believe these pressures and visits to Somalia played a key role in the President’s decision to send U.S. troops to Somalia in early 1992.

By the end of the second session (December 1992), over a dozen letters were sent out, by different the Congressional subcommittees, to Secretary of State, James Baker, President George Bush, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Somali faction leaders, and several international organizations. The letters were all urging stronger efforts to provide a secure

environment for humanitarian assistance and peace talks to bring an end to the civil war. In late August of 1992, the Security Council approved 3,000 peacekeepers, to be led by a smaller group of security guards from Pakistan, but didn't arrive until the end of September. Mohamed Farah Aideed stalled the deployment of UN peacekeepers for months. Even when the Pakistani force had begun to deploy to the Somali capital, it had not moved out of the airport area, and the relief efforts around the country continued to be disputed by Somali factions (7, 8) and gangs, many of whom are probably today's millionaires in Mogadishu. On December 4, 1992, one month after his defeat, President Bush announced that the United States would deploy a substantial military force to Somalia to create a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian relief. This announcement came one day after the UN Security Council had enacted Resolution 794, authorizing the use of "all necessary means to establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operation in Somalia (9)."

On December 9, 1992, the first contingent of U.S. Marines arrived in Mogadishu. Operation Restore Hope was scheduled to take only six weeks and its purpose was to feed starving Somalis, not rebuild institutions. The U.S. Army Reserve Civil Affairs Units who were sent to restore government functions, particularly the police and judiciary systems were not activated by THE Joint Chief of Staff (JCS), who didn't want the U.S. Army to get involved in civil society and political matters in the country. But it soon became apparent that Operation Restore Hope was not a six-week endeavor (10, 11). Unfortunately, the failure, on the part of the U.S. Army, to implement a civil affairs program using military police (MP) ultimately led to the insertion of U.S. combat forces in the hunt for Aideed. A retrained Somali police force would have been much better suited for what was essentially a police function in the back streets of Mogadishu.

### **III: Why did it fail?**

#### **The UN, the U.S. and the Somali people helped the operation to fail**

##### **A. The UN**

The current members of the UN, most of them former colonies who gained their independence from their European colonizers, still chafe under the governance of the UN "Powerful Five". The UN is controlled by five powerful nations with veto powers: Russia, China, UK, USA, and France. What we see today in the UN is a power struggle between these countries with veto power. Nothing can be done if one of these powerful countries behaves cynical of the others, exactly how things are today between the U.S. and Russia. The UN had an opportunity to restore order in many troubled spots in the world after the end of the Cold-War (around 1991).

Somalia was the United Nation's first test to see if it's new, aggressive leadership to prevent conflicts, would work. However, customarily the UN doesn't have its own defense military power and it operates under serious limitations both in manpower and money. Some developing countries, such as India, Pakistan and Nigeria provide considerable military contributions to peace-keeping. Many of the Afro-Asian majority nations in the UN consider the UN as an

indispensable route to their goals; most of the governments in these countries need to rise economically closer to the industrialized countries. Hence, they support the concept of economic development that could benefit them, such as the peace-keeping missions of the UN. Just as an example, that is why we have AMISOM in Somalia today, and the Europeans are promising to pay the bill; a process known as “Collective legitimization”.

During the Operation Restore Hope, there were no clear coordination between the UN and the U.S. on how to run the operation. It also showed there was even a lack of cooperation among the UN leadership. For example, only in his final four days as a Secretary General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, informed the Security Council (December 27, 1991) that he proposed to send Undersecretary for Political Affairs, James O.C. Jonah, to Somalia to explore the opportunities for a cease-fire. Boutros Boutros Ghali (Secretary General of the U.N. 1992-1996) just became the Secretary General, and the U.S. Administration was against his selection for the post. They wanted to frustrate the UN under his leadership. After his inaugurated ceremony, Boutros Boutros Ghali (an Egyptian) strongly urged the U.N. to find ways to prevent conflicts in Somalia and save the Somali Nation. The humanitarian disaster in Somalia was on all televisions screens in the world by 1992. Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali wanted to disarm the warring factions in Somalia, but the United States military opposed employing disarmament measures in Somalia, because the Operation Restore Hope didn't authorize U.S. military involvement beyond humanitarian operation. It was also clear the UN was not equipped to force disarmament.

On March 3, 1992, after a symbolic cease-fire, Boutros Boutros Ghali assigned Mohamed Sahnoun (an Algerian skillful diplomat) to head a fact-finding mission to Somalia. Sahnoun, a former deputy director of the Organization of African Union (OAU), a man who knew the area very well, immediately visited Mogadishu. He deeply believed that the UN could have saved Somalia from catastrophe had the UN intervened much earlier. The UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR, April 24, 1992) authorized establishing the first UNOSOM and created a force of fifty UN technical observers to monitor the cease-fire in Mogadishu. But Sahnoun's ambitious diplomatic approach collapsed when he ran into Aideed's opposition, who decried that the UN was favoring Ali Mahdi. The problem was compounded by the emergence of Islamic zealotry in Northeast Somalia in 1992. The US representative envoy, Robert Oakley, was also suspected of having a one-sided relationship with Aideed, a man whose crimes against his own people were well documented. By mid-1992, Sahnoun's diplomatic efforts came to an end—it was just too late to restore the Somali conflicts with diplomacy, and this, in fact, caused Mohamed Sahnoun his job and ultimately lead to his dismissal.

## **B. How the U.S. Failed?**

The U.S. failed Operation Restore Hope because they lacked clarity and political guidelines. The U.S. also ignored the need to use trained Somali National Police, which was a high priority in the original plan that was coordinated with the appropriated agencies and forwarded to the Central Command (CENTCOM) headquarters. As it turned out, CENTCOM carefully removed the critical civil affairs and military police training components from the package. Even when

deployed to Somalia, UNITAF decided not to use the army Military Police (MP) units that were part of the original staffing plan for Operation Restore Hope. Despite the policy that Operation Restore Hope was only for humanitarian relief, there was a general recognition that rebuilding the police was necessary for the restoration of law and order. For example, there was a proposal made by General Ahmed Jama to Robert Oakley and others in the U.S. Army and members of UNITAF. He suggested that a Somali police force be built under the control of UNITAF in early December 1992. But the immediate problem was Mogadishu was divided by the “green line”.

General Ahmed Jama suggested to Oakley that Aideed and Ali Mahdi must be disarmed. He argued that the better people had been silenced by the guns, but they would support disarmament. He believed people would have the courage to come out after disarmament, and could have challenged the warlords. Instead, UNITAF turned the matter over to the warlords with predictable results, with no regard for the opinions of millions of Somalis, or to the suggestions of General Jama, who were all against such ignorant strategy in handing over the power to those criminals (the warlords). However, at the end, Oakley and the UNITAF presented General Ahmed a list of police officers composed of Aideed’s and Ali Mahdi’s groups only. General Jama declined to take the control of the proposed police structure because it was not the National Police Force he proposed. Even when Mogadishu police had begun functioning better and some prisoners had been held, there was another major problem, no funds to run even the proposed police force.

### **C. The role of Aideed: how he sabotaged the operation**

The absence of the UN was conspicuous and gave Aideed and his militia a vacuum after the collapse of the State. Aideed was convinced that his military strength would bring him the presidency of Somalia.

By July 1992, another UN-mandated additional 450 military forces deployed. Aideed’s rejections of the UN efforts was loud and clear and he exercised his clan-based power by blockading several hundred Pakistani peacekeepers within the premises of the airport until the arrival of United Task Force (UNITAF) in December 1992. Aideed established the Somali Alliance in October 1992, and believed that the collapse of the Somali State provided him and his numerous sub-clan members with the license to extend their influence from their barren, arid central region into Mogadishu and the rich Shebelle and Jubba valleys. In December 1992, the warlords had extended their personal and clan influences into many areas occupied by smaller, weaker, and marginalized clan groups. Aideed and his sub-clan militia trampled over all kinds of human rights violation and got away with it. But the UN and the U.S. military were not there to protect human rights violations, nor did they even bother to intervene.

The U.S. limited operations to capturing Aideed ended with a disastrous outcome, which eventually forced the U.S. forces to leave Somalia. Unfortunately, the UN’s approach of treating the Somali problems as “normal”, the standard peacekeeping practice, also failed gravely. On hindsight, the UN admitted it didn’t have a well thought through strategy, or the grassroots

knowledge of Somalia's complicated tribal culture, other than exaggerated claims the warlords in Mogadishu presented to them. Such poor strategy, satisfying the criminal elements of the society, killed the UN initiative on arrival. Satisfying the demands of the same agents of death and destruction of Somali people was what UN has done. These warlords explored the weaknesses of the UN and well understood the UN's lack of knowledge of who they were dealing with, warlords who didn't want a nation. Examples were many, but one of the noted organized efforts by Aideed was when he held a conference of warlord coalition in Shebelle valley, where he invited many of the warlords of the day: such as the united Somali congress USC (his group), the Somali patriotic movement (SPM of Omar Jess), the Somali democratic movement (SDM of Mohamed Nur Aliyo), the southern Somali national (SSNM of Abdi Warsame Isow), just to mention a few, and, of course of, many others of the warlords of the day.

Aideed's strategy (something he understood better than the UN) was to solidify a strong coalition to help them maintain power and their own militia, in opposition to the UN proposed cease-fire; this strategy worked for him, leading to a watered-down symbolic cease-fire. UN provided the warlords a venue by treating them with lavish conferences in Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Djibouti, Egypt, Asmara, or wherever they [the warlords] so decided. The warlords didn't want to meet in Somalia. At the end, the idea of the loose federal structure (tribal domains) we see today emerged from the 1993 meetings, and the warlords hijacked it into cleavages of locally controlled warlord domains. Aideed and Ali Mahdi even refused to hold a Hawiye conference. There were other attempts for traditional interventions, but all failed, one way or the other.

#### **D. The October Clash Changed the U.S. Policy**

In the wake of the October 3, armed clashes between the U.S. forces and General Aideed's militia in which eighteen U.S. Rangers were killed, once again awakened U.S. Senators and Representatives who took to the floor of the U.S. Congress; but this time to condemn the Somalia mission and ask for early withdrawal of the U.S. forces. The pressure mounted on both Houses for President Bill Clinton to send his report to Congress sooner than it was planned. With Somalis dragging dead bodies of U.S. soldiers in the streets of Mogadishu, and the U.S. public demanding their Representatives to do something, even those Senators and Congress Members who voted for the mission turned against the mission in Somalia this time. This time the pressure mounted on President Bill Clinton (a Democrat) to withdraw the American Army from Somalia immediately, within a week. The United States announced that it would withdraw from Somalia by March 31, 1994, and the mission was reduced to humanitarian only; dropping the demands to pressure Aideed and plans for "nation building" in Somalia. The withdrawal of U.S. troops marked the beginning of a shift toward isolationism in the U.S. This contributed to the American reluctance to save victims and intervene in the genocide in Kosovo and Rwanda (lesson learned from Somalia).

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**PART II: Lessons Learned: Will soon follow. Stay Tuned!**