



Is the American Military Ready to Die Again in Somalia?

Part II: Lessons Learned

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“Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.” JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, on social compact.

Looking back, people who have studied the Operation Restore Hope’s accomplishments came out with varied conclusions. Of course, some argue that the operation was not an abject failure. Others concluded that the outcome was not even close to what could be considered a success; not a desirable outcome. While others pointed out how the operation saved about 100,000 Somalis from starvation, some believed the



US set up the UN for failure by refusing to use their highly trained army forces to disarm the warlords and their lawless militia. All that pushed aside and letting the truth fall where it may, what we know today is that, after nearly twenty-five years of Operation Store Hope’s intervention, the fact remains a population of about 12 million Somalis failed to find a way to live together peacefully and govern themselves. Somalis still think the European tribes would resolve the Somali local tribal conflicts. The Europeans had no interest in resolving any of that. Anyway, that won’t happen. That is what we all know now, but we don’t seem to be drawing any lessons from our own failures of the past. Granted, the humanitarian intervention, if done properly, is the only way to halt massive starvation, genocide, and human rights abuses, particularly that on women and children.

However, humanitarian intervention is not the means to an end of lawlessness, corruption and lack of governance. It is just a temporary relief, a chance for the reemergence of stability and law and order in their country. Ultimately, however, it is up to the Somalis to fight for peace. Only when we find people with political will to stand up to these ugly practices, could the Somali society appreciate peace and security in their environment. As to the contribution, or the lack thereof, of Europeans during the Operation Store Hope, the truth remains that Europeans behaved as tribes themselves, some more powerful than others. These varied macro tribal differences and interests parlayed during the Operation Store Hope were nothing new. It is just that the Europeans are more civil tribes who set their own rules, respect each other (most of the time), but agreed to exert their interest and influences into different regions of the world; avoiding each other's way. Remember how president Trump alerted the Russians about his "mother of all bombs" that landed on an airstrip in Syria. The U.S. and the Russians avoid confrontation, and don't want to engage a face-off war anywhere in the world, but each tries to reduce each other's influence in the developing countries. The irony is that Somalis hoped these foreign countries would resolve their micro-insignificant, tribal differences festering in Somalia.



I have, for brevity, opted out of delving into a deeper forensic bone analysis and investigation of the question: what lessons have been earned from the Operation Store Hope in Somalia? Clearly, from a simple glimpse of the upper layer of multitude stratum of possible answers, many have revealed there had been aggregates of narratives where people agree and disagree on many aspects of the operation's outcome. In some reports, it is so profound that it shocks the conscience of the ordinary people, especially the Somalis, to know that both NATO forces and others, under UN leadership, have acted as dysfunctional as one could have imagined; yet trying to handle the affairs of another troubled family, Somalia. On hindsight, it is clear now that the Europeans have infused their tribal dislikes and infights into the situation during the operation. Most of the members of North Atlantic Organization (NATO) didn't want to participate in the operation to start with. It was the UN under Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali, who was pushing for the intervention and for nation rebuilding in Somalia. In fact, it's clear now how NATO forces were getting on each other's way, and were busy irritating one another. It was a

self-defeating behavior, to say the least, and was not helping the general purpose—rebuilding Somalia. The lack of proper cooperation and coordination, and the lack of proper messaging in sharing information and planning, became distraction and added credence to general malaise and the failing atmosphere during the operation. All these zero-sum games were displayed while the plight of millions of Somalis was in the throes.

One thing is certain, nonetheless, and worth mentioning, is that NATO countries have their rules to follow when it comes to how they normally treat each other: Article 5 treaty states: *The principle of collective defense is at the very heart of NATO's founding treaty. It remains a unique and enduring principle that binds its members together, committing them to protect each other and setting a spirit of solidarity within the Alliance.* Even the Russians are treated as brothers anyway (white Europeans). Winston Churchill was once quoted saying, *“In a true unity of Europe, Russia must have her part.”* Churchill's wishes almost came into fruition in 1991, after the collapse of the old Soviet Union. Boris Yeltsin was willing to sign cooperation with NATO. He turned away the nuclear weapons pointing towards American cities and destroyed tons of plutonium. He did so to bind Russia to NATO for economic development and to improve political relationships. Eventually, though, he faced stiff opposition from the State Duma and Oligarchs in Moscow, those who wanted to keep their distance from Europe and the United States. Russia wants to exercise its own power and control its neighbors to keep the western democracy at bay.

All the same, first, the United States and Russia were not willing to participate in any development proposal for Somalia's peacekeeping mission, beyond humanitarian efforts. Their point of contention, as reported, was about the cost. One characterized this rationale as “NATO-cum-Desert Storm Syndrome”. After the end of the “Cold War”, Russia and the US made an agreement to increase their economic development and political stability. A multinational agreement was signed for cooperation between NATO and the Russians. There are reports citing how unenthusiastic the NATO countries were about joining the UN plan for peace enforcement operations in Somalia. They had their own varied interests in the new world order, and each country acted accordingly. The NATO forces didn't want to be involved in the “Operation Restore Hope” in the beginning, but it was merely a domestic political pressure and the world opinion that forced these nations to reluctantly send their forces to participate. It was a feeling (a general obligation) of good conscience of solidarity that brought them to Somalia, to help each other out. Just in case need be!

However, overall, the Europeans believed that the U.S. was not prepared to lead the operation. There was a general feeling among the Europeans that Americans did not know what they were doing, and that the European forces had no reason to follow them. The Americans were the driving force of the operation early on, but they were not linked to the political reality of Somalia, and had no clear agenda. It was only the UN Secretary- General who had a clear view of what was needed to be done, disarmament; the Americans were not in support of disarmament. The Europeans concluded it was like “blind leading the blind” and they were just

waiting for the inevitability of failure. The European countries wanted to find enough reasons to withdraw their forces as soon as the Americans had left.

“It’s soon will be Christmas and it would be unthinkable to have the French Public eat its Christmas dinner while seeing on TV all those starving kids. But don’t worry, we will tip out soon”, Said Bruno Delhaye, the head of the African Unit in the French President’s office in 1992.

Secondly, the response from the UN was overall very slow to replace the NATO forces, resulting in a chaotic situation under the US-run operation. There was no agreed upon chain of command among the European forces either; each country was operating independently, applying their own style of impromptu governance. Most of these European forces declined to follow the American chain of command, and the Americans were not friendly either. To start with, the Americans didn’t want the Italians to come to Somalia because of the long relationship Italy had had with the corrupted government of Mohamed Siyad Barre. Italy, being a former colonial master of Somalia (1885-1941), then (1948-1960), had never left Somalia, and had even been selling weapons to Siyad Barre’s Regime.

Italy was also accused of money laundering operations (Mafia and P2 network) in Somalia. The U.S. presidential envoy, Robert Oakley, wanted the Italian forces to stay away from joining the operation, at least for a while. Even after the Italians arrived in Mogadishu, there was a rough start between the U.S. and the Italian army, who both stationed inside Mogadishu, and that itself affected the operation. Italy didn’t want to operate under the UN-US-chain of Command. The Italians complained about not having better information and coordination with the Americans. The Italians accused the Americans of keeping them in the dark, pushed them around and expected to go with their way or take the highway. Furthermore, there were reports of gross human rights violation by the Belgium troops stationed in Kismayo, the killings of unarmed civilians (16); neither the UN, nor the U.S. investigated these reports seriously.

Differences in Approaches:

France

Also, France declared her troops would be under her own commanders. The involvement of the French army in the operation was merely a political pressure at home also. The French Army was already stationed in Djibouti, monitoring the domestic fight between Djibouti Issa troops and Afar insurgents fighting over Danakil lands. The Americans chose not to work with the French, and the French preferred to run their own system. Things also went wrong early on between the French and the Americans when the French shot at a truck running over a roadblock at night, with its lights off. Americans accused the French troops for being trigger-happy idiots. Americans despised the French troops (known as the mercenaries) for their involvement in human abuses in African countries historically (the legendary mercenaries over Africa).

However, because of their long involvement in African countries, the French forces had a better understanding of the cultures and how to approach it. The French Army was the only group knowledgeable with the rigged environment, the tribal intricacies, and subtle nuances in Somali cultural expressions. That helped them to be successful, unlike the Americans who were on trucks with heavy weapons all the time, and with little interaction with the public. The French left their heavy machinery in Huddur, and then fanned out to the whole area; they were everywhere. They walked in small groups through the villages in the region, especially at night, and would reach so many people in remote villages in the morning on foot. People found the French Army friendly, but also strong enough to fight with the marauding criminals when need be; confiscating heavy arms and destroying them, and prohibited formation of privately owned, unlawful “Technical” militants from the French controlled area. The French forces also organized NGOs, composed of Somalis and the French personnel (a militia acting as police) keeping law and order; people welcomed their style and trusted them more. It was an effective approach (13), but why other European armies didn’t approach the public the same way the French had approached, no one knows.

Australia

The Australians in Baidoa approached the operation differently than the U.S. army in Mogadishu. First, the Australians realized that the Rahanweyn people in the area have been under terror attacks coming from the armed Habar Gedir militia of Aideed. The NGOs were paying extortion money of between \$2,000 to \$6,000 to these militia and their security guards per flight of relief supplies (13). The militia demanded that the NGOs hired only Habar Gedir bodyguards for protection. There were also out of control criminal elements of banditry engaged in the area. However, the difference between the Australians and the Americans was that the Australians followed the UN-mandated plan to rebuild Somalia’s “Police Technical Team” (PTT), under the heading of “Establishing of a Somali Police Force”. They brought their civil affairs plan to enforce the guidelines mandated by the UN. The Australians confronted any armed threat to the mission by promoting a secure environment, and safeguarding the humanitarian efforts. The Australians set up police stations, functioning judiciary systems, and criminal investigations, to enforce law and order. They used members of the Somali National Police Force, while the American army considered such approach as “mission creep” approach (13). The approach of police building was also reported to have started successfully in Borama, Hargeisa, in Garowe, Bosasso and Galkayo (13).

Furthermore, it has been reported that the cooperation between humanitarian civil society and military community outside Mogadishu went well, and generally got along. Overtime, teamwork developed and each group appreciated the contribution of the other. However, this degree of friendly cooperation was difficult to achieve in Mogadishu. So, the city remained the major thorn to the efforts of attaining peace and stability. Unfortunately, subsequently, the Australian initiatives failed because of politics and disagreements on approaches taken. In addition, it was because of failed the leadership under Kofi Annan (14), head of the UN Department of

Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) at the time. Despite of his knowledge with the regional issues, Annan, contrary to the UNOSOM reports and suggestions, concluded that Somalis would not support the rebuilding of the police and court systems. Annan didn't proceed with the UNOSOM request for hiring more personnel and asking for more funds for the justice programs. He refused to act upon that request, and that caused the delay of the funds. That was fatal to the initiative of rebuilding the police systems and the restoration of law and order in all regions in Somalia.

The United States

The greatest failure by the U.S. was its refusal to stick with the original proposal of disarmament. With a military force of more than 30,000 troops landing in Mogadishu, the United States had the opportunity to confront the unlawful warlords and their militia to disarm them. Instead, the United States chose to tell the warlords to keep their weapons and move to outside Mogadishu. That was Ambassador Robert Oakley's idea (a close friend of Aideed). This created a situation where the emergency responses were afraid to carry on their work because of the danger on the streets; they didn't get much help from the military. The presence of armed militia everywhere threatened the security of the emergency responses, and the NGOs staff in Mogadishu found it discouraging, if not completely confusing, to see the reluctance of the military to respond when they were in trouble.

An action to remove and destroy the heavy weapons would have sent a clear message that the U.S. troops were there to take control of the situation and introduce law and order. Because of the confusing signal by the U.S. army, other foreign troops from France, Belgium and Italy did little to improve the military situation. The warlords clearly read the signal and realized that their military power was not going to be challenged. They just laid low until the Americans had left, and then challenged the under staffed, less armed, untrained and organized UN forces. Some of the conclusions expressed, as the result of Operation Restore Hope, included that the U.S. should never involve itself with peacekeeping enforcement. On hindsight, the public rather see the UN leading the peacekeeping efforts, not the U.S. forces.

In 1995 interview, the “deep throat Jew”, Henry Kissinger expressed his opposition to sending U.S. peacekeeping forces to Somalia. “It was not the national interest of the U.S.”, he was quoted.

Traditional Problem-Solving Approach:

The Borama Conference, 1993

Some believed that the traditional problem-solving mechanisms were ignored when really needed. They argued that enough attempts of the use of traditional methods could have brought better results, if provided time and safe places (15). These narratives based their reasoning, partly, on one traditional conference, marked as a “successful conference” that took place in Borama between the SNM forces and the Gadabursi tribe. The Gadabursi sub-clans agreed to provide a safe and effective place for a 3-months long “peace meeting” in Borama city, Awdal

region (from February to April 1993). The Borama conference was to find peace [emphasis] between the tribes, Gadabursi and Isaak; and as such, it seized the political initiatives from the would-be warlords in Somaliland (13). It's believed now, on hindsight, that the length of time given the participants to sit and discuss issues, and the environment provided, were both crucial to the outcome. Unlike some of those conferences held outside the country under foreign pressure for two or three days, in luxury hotels, the conference in Borama was held at home, the typical Somali style under the tree discussions. It is also worth mentioning that President Mohamed Ibrahim Egal's leadership.

President Egal was elected during that conference, and he immediately urged the SNM forces to put down their weapons in Hargeisa [that is leadership]. Instead, he asked them to rebuild the government and the institutions that had been destroyed by the forces of Mohamed Siyad Barre regime. In addition, in several other tribal in-fights among the Isaak sub-clans, the Gadabursi intervened and mediated them when fighting erupted in Burao. These problem-solving approaches created some level of trust-building between the tribes. Some observers argue that a similar strategy would have worked in the south of Somalia if held in some selected sites, such as Baidoa. The agricultural Rahanweyn people of Baidoa could have been an ideal host for a national conference, some argue. Just like the Gadabursi tribes, the Rahanweyn tribes were not competing for the power of the presidency at the time [emphasis on peace], unlike Hawiye and Darood tribes whose emphasis were on gaining the seat of the president.

Furthermore, Baidoa had been one of the sites of greatest human suffering in the starvation crisis (mostly caused by warlords) of 1991-1992. That would have taken the initiative away from the trouble makers, the warlords. A conference inside Somalia, but outside the main concentrations of his tribal-base, would have pressured Aideed to join internationally sanctioned plans towards a return to a peaceful civil society. It has been said, "The true center of gravity in Somalia was the nexus of warlord-ethnic group ties". No warlord could have maintained power without a powerful support from his own ethnic group. Similar meetings took place in Kismayo, Benadir, and in other places but with lesser success.

Where are we today?

There is a general believe that any intervention, regarding colonized countries in Africa, is going to fail regardless of which country. For example, the futility of interventions in Somalia is because the Somali clan systems that existed before the colonization was never built on the idea of a nation, or centralized governance. It was only when the European colonizers arrived in the early 19th century that the idea of centralized power was subjected to the nomadic systems that existed before in Somalia. However, nomadic way of life, clan system, remains the preferred, dominant, governing system in today's Somalia societies. The Cain-mentality (Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, who murdered his brother Abel) remains dominant even today. Such mentality is partly predicated on the notion that a tribal dictator, warlord, or clan politics will serve one better than a whole country would do for everyone. It is an untenable mentality and Somalia remains a failed state because of it.

Several Presidents have come and gone since 1991, but there still exist irresistible impulse to confer legitimacy by the three major tribes (Darood, Hawiye and Isaak) over the minority tribes. Tribal dominance is the rule of the land, evident everywhere in the country, in the absence of political guidance and the void of any form of doctrine for conflict resolution since the collapse of the republic. We are now in a state where our bond to each other and to the “Nation” has been weakened, and our social responsibility to our nation doesn’t exist. Instead, interests of a small group of politicians gained dominance to exercise their tribe-based influences over the interests of the larger societies. The unanimity of an opinion doesn’t matter much, no common interest, and the general driving will of the day ceases to be the will of all; it is rather the will of the few that dominates.

We are in a state of contradictory debates where even suggestions for a better system and advices are questioned and deemed suspicious; a total chaos. We still have the same fundamentally wrong, clan-driven, political quagmire operating everywhere in the country. We still have people dying of hunger and the victims of drought, who are in dire need for humanitarian support today. The remnants of yesterday’s militia are still operating in the whole country; many of whom are the millionaires who are financing al-Shabab and other anti-government forces, as well as carrying out assassinations of those who present a different venue for Somalia. Where Aideed and his contemporary warlords were claiming that the UN and the US forces were external, Christian intervention taking over Somalia, today’s tribal millionaires and clan leaders are advocating that any thought of establishing a government in Mogadishu is an external threat aiming to taking over the clan properties and power from them.

So many years after the Operation Store Hope, there exists even a greater mistrust and suspicion among the Somali tribes, compounded by the threat from the metathesized Islamic fundamentalist—the confused al-Shabab and their supporters everywhere in the whole country. If Aideed and his supporters were the problems to deal with in 1992, today the problems are multi-faceted. Not much of functioning state institutions to mention, no law and order, and the normal functioning of the current federal government is greatly impaired and limited. As such, there exists no legally sanctioned authority, or state structures that have a full control of the country; not even in Mogadishu.

The traditional leaders of today are mostly either the warlords of yesteryears and their supporters, or tribal zealots who dominated the parliament in all tribal enclaves. They cannot govern a nation—they don’t want a nation, just like the warlords of yesteryears. There is clearly a failure of the traditional tribal systems to the extent its applicability is considered inappropriate in today’s Somalia. Even today, the UN-mandated African forces (AMISOM) in Somalia are not able to disarm al-Shabab, let alone the whole country. Somalis should know that the ultimate responsibility for the restoration of normalcy in their country rests on the shoulders of the Somalis. No foreign forces can make them do something the Somalis don’t want to do, governing themselves. Those who died defending General Aideed and other warlords didn’t do so because they were defending a nation, or to achieve a national unity. They all died in vain

while defending a warlord and killing their own people. There will never be, shouldn't be, a national Memorial Day for them, nor medals of Honor for them; no fallen heroes and no "Martyrs". Isn't that exactly what Al-Shabab and their supporters are doing today, all dying in vain? If Somalis are serious, they could have liberated Somalia from Al-Shabab today. People in other countries die defending liberty and their integrity, even under worse challenges than the Somalis have ever seen.

For example, during the Eritrean revolution, the Eritrean population faced decades of wars against Ethiopian arsenals, just to achieve their national unity. Granted, that liberty is now destroyed by the current dictator, Isaias Afwerki, who is holding the presidency since 1993. But the point here is to illustrate how the Eritreans fought against Ethiopia's military might, and Ethiopia's relentless, Soviet-backed military campaign, for over thirty years to create a functioning democracy, social change and nation identity for their own people. History matters! This is a population comprised of nine distinct ethnic and linguistic groups; divided into urban elites, farmers, and nomadic pastoralists (tribes like Somalis). Yet, the need for national unity has superseded their other differences. What made the Eritrean war very effective, as one explains, was their willingness and ability to learn from their own circumstances, adapt their political differences to their realities, and articulate a better vision and better life for their people.

Tell me if Somalis have even done anything close to such sacrifice for a national unity since the collapse of the republic, after the 1977-78 war with Ethiopia. None! ...Oh, yeah! Some of you are probably bought into the false claims made by the last Islamic Courts Union, the anti-everything-government, Islamic fundamentalists; now mythicized into the present Al-Shabab militia. Some of their leaders, like Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, put on another shirt and became a president of the federal government, the very "illegal thing" he had been condemning. Our history of today shows a path of blood, the blood of brothers killing each other [savage tribal wars]. If you could find solace in such history, good luck with that kind of history.

On the question of Ethiopia's diplomacy, some of us are wonderstruck and bewildered by the attitude of Ethiopian leaders towards the Somalis. But if we must know, Ethiopians have never accepted to be colonized, while most other African countries have been. Ethiopians have always fought with the colonizers in their country to preserve their Kingdom. In fact, they are colonizing parts of own country today, and manhandling the rest of the Somali tribes. But make no mistake: Abyssinia joined the League of Nations in 28 September 1923; Somalia's membership to the UN was 1960, Security Council Resolution 141 (1960), adopted by the Security Council at its 871st meeting, July 5, 1960. Today, Somalis still exist as ungovernable tribes, not as a nation. This is where we have been! We cannot measure our history against that of Ethiopia; unmatched!

From the novel, *Café on the Nile*, Bartle Bull narrates a story about Colonel Grimaldi, an Italian commander preparing an air attack on Abyssinia. He tells one of his young pilots, a Lieutenant, "Remember this day: October third, 1935. Once again, Rome is on the march in Africa, we will fight a war you have never seen." The Colonel continued to impress the young Lieutenant with the war plan, "In few minutes the bombers would pass above the marching columns from

Eritrea's high lands, approaching their target: Adowa. Hundred thousand men advancing from Eritrea into Abyssinia; and from the south, tens of thousands would be attacking Ethiopia from Italian Somaliland, supported by the great base at Mogadishu. The young Lieutenant, while flying his engine over the mountains of Abyssinia, lowered his plane closer to the ground after he spotted a group of lions lying in the shade around a carcass. One of the Lions, a dark one, stayed put, not intimidated by the sound of the plane's engine hovering over it; just looking up and keeping an eye contact with the pilot, as if daring him to shoot him. *"I thought of Ethiopia's tiny black emperor, Haile Selassie, calling himself the King of Kings, the Negus Negesti, the lion of Judah, the two hundred and twenty-fifth consecutive monarch to have claimed the title founded by Solomon the First, the son of David."*, reported the young Lieutenant, petrified by the courage of that wild and free animal. *The Battle of Adwa was fought on 2 March 1896/Yekatit 23, 1889 according to Ethiopian calendar between the Ethiopian Empire and the Kingdom of Italy near the town of Adwa, Ethiopia, in Tigray.* Of course, Ethiopians fought with the Italians and other colonizers (including Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime) during their long history of Kingdom, and finally Italy was defeated again in the early 1940s.

On a personal observation, I have transited through the Addis Ababa airport several times on my way to Djibouti and Somaliland. I was impressed with the historic record of pictures and centuries-old Abyssinian history displayed on the walls of Addis Ababa airport. These pictures depicted a proud history of their Kingdom, and how they fought and won wars against the Europeans. Was I jealous? Of course! But that is why their leaders, I think, are hubris by nature, with the condescending look and with the air of dominance when addressing Somali leaders. They are convinced they have a history to stand on; that they are the last colonizers, the kings in the Horn of Africa, still handling the Somali domains to their interests (to Ethiopian interests). That is where their pride emanates from, compared to the rest of black African countries.

There is a proverbial saying, "It is not where you stand, and it is where you sit". Ethiopian leaders see themselves as kings, they sit on a rich history of world diplomacy, dating back to 1400s; while a Somali leader stands on empty rhetoric of clan postures, standing on an empty history that is void of nationalism and love for a nation; void of love for your fellow Somalis and for humanity. That is why our leaders look like and behave like sheep when facing Ethiopian leaders of the day. Just ask yourselves, what is wrong with us today? Because Ethiopia sees us inferior to them and inferior is what we are. That is the naked truth! And that is what we know now; lessons learned.

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