

CIVIL AFFAIRS IN SOMALIA

Jeremy Patrick White

Description

Prior to 1960, Somalia was known as Somaliland, and was ruled by Italy in the South and Great Britain in the North. Following World War II and the gradual decolonization Africa, Somalia achieved its independence in 1960 and formed the Somali Republic. Somalia's experiment with democracy was however short lived. In October of 1969, the commander of the Army, General Mohammed Siad Barre, seized power in a military coup. Over the course of the next twenty years, Barre's government grew ripe with corruption. During this period, the Somali people felt increasingly alienated by their own government, which led them to define themselves more by tribal association than nationality. In 1988, open rebellion began in Northern Somalia and gradually spread throughout the country. Finally, in January, 1991, General Farrah Aideed's United Somali Congress forces stormed the capital of Mogadishu forcing General Barre to flee to Nigeria. However, Somalia's many tribes were unable to form a consensus government and by April of 1991, the country had plunged into all out civil war.¹

In the summer of 1992, the U.S. Agency for International Aid (USAID) and the International Committee of the Red Cross began reporting that somewhere between one-third and two-thirds of the Somali population was at risk of dying from malnutrition.² Unlike the Ethiopian famine that had occurred in the region 8 years earlier, the hunger crisis in Somalia was not a result of a lack of food, but rather a lack of access to food. Constant clan warfare had made it virtually impossible to safely transport humanitarian relief. Hunger had become a weapon used by rival clans against one another. A lack of security also led to the failure of the first UN humanitarian mission to Somalia (UNOSOM).³ The complete failure of the Somali state had made it impossible for relief workers to safely distribute aid to those in need and thus food was often left to rot in the Port of Mogadishu.⁴

Following the failure of the first UN peacekeeping mission to Somalia (UNOSOM I), the United States offered to take the lead in providing security for a humanitarian mission. On December 3, 1992, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 794 authorizing the use of "all necessary means to establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia."⁵ Lieutenant General Robert B. Johnson, commander of the I Marine Expeditionary Force, arrived in Somalia on December 9th and officially assumed command of Joint Task Force Somalia, later renamed Unified Task Force Somalia (UNITAF).⁶

¹ F.M. Lorentz, "Confronting Thievery in Somalia," *Military Review* 74, no. 8 (1994): 2

² James Dobbins, Michael Poole, Austin Long, Benjamin Runkle, *After the War: Nation Building from FDR to George W. Bush* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2008), 43.

³ United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I)

⁴ *Ibid.*, 44

⁵ F.M. Lorentz, "Confronting Thievery in Somalia," 46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

Key Actors

- **Blue:**
 - U.S. Military
 - USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
 - Presidential Envoy Ambassador Robert Oakley

- **Green:**
 - United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNITAF) represented 24 countries and provided an additional 17,000 soldiers.

Australia	Belgium
Botswana	Canada
Egypt	France
Germany	Greece
India	Italy
Kuwait	Morocco
New Zealand	Nigeria
Norway	Pakistan
Saudi Arabia	Sweden
Tunisia	Turkey
United Arab Emirates	United Kingdom
United States	Zimbabwe

- **Brown:**
 - World Food Program
 - International Committee of the Red Cross
 - Feed the Children

- **Red:**
 - General Farrah Aideed’s United Somali Congress militia

Objectives & End States

From the perspective of its commanders, the U.S. military's mission in Somalia was strictly limited to providing security for the humanitarian relief organizations. The complex task of rebuilding the Somali government was to be left entirely in the hands of the UN. The initial UNITAF deployment consisted of 31,000 troops who joined the 3,500 international peacekeepers left over from UNOSOM I.⁷ A precondition for U.S. involvement in Somalia was that UNOSOM and UNITAF forces would maintain entirely separate chains of command and control. This was done so as to ensure that the United States would not become involved in the much larger and more complex mission of nation building. The end-state goals of Operation Restore Hope, as the U.S. commanders came to call it, were to enter Somalia with an overwhelming force in order to quickly establish a secure pipeline for the relief mission. After fulfilling its mandate of providing security for the delivery of humanitarian relief, the U.S. military was to then establish conditions for a smooth transition of authority to the United Nations. While Operation Restore Hope was initially successful at providing security in Somalia, the lack of attention paid to rebuilding Somali society and the political pressure put on U.S. commanders to withdraw, ultimately destined the mission for failure. By March of 1993, just three months after their initial deployment, U.S. forces in Somalia had been reduced to approximately 4,000 soldiers.⁸

Operational Strategies/Key Missions and Tasks

Initially, UNITAF was quite successful in accomplishing its two main mission objectives of providing security for the distribution of humanitarian aid and working towards establishing conditions for a smooth transition of authority to the United Nations. Early in the morning of December 9, 1992, U.S. forces conducted an amphibious assault into the capital of Mogadishu. Performing simultaneous assaults from land and air, U.S. forces seized control of the Port of Mogadishu as well as Mogadishu International Airport thus securing a foothold for the arrival of the remaining UNITAF forces. Recognizing the superiority of the American forces, the local militias offered little resistance to the arrival of the U.S. military. UNITAF quickly went to work securing supply routes throughout Mogadishu and the greater Somali countryside. The transformation of the Port of Mogadishu into a secure military zone quickly allowed aid groups to continue the importation of humanitarian supplies free from the threat of thievery or extortion by the local militias.

Contribution of Civil Engineers

The Army Corps of Engineers made impressive improvements to Somalia's infrastructure in the brief year that they were attached to UNITAF. The main mission of the 36th Civil Engineering Group in Somalia was to construct and/or repair enough roads, airfields and base camps to satisfy the end state conditions required for transitioning the mission to U.N. control.⁹

⁷ James Dobbins, Michael Poole, Austin Long, Benjamin Runkle, *After the War: Nation Building from FDR to George W. Bush*, 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Phillip Anderson and Dwight Durham, "36th Engineering Group in Somalia," *Engineer*. 23 no. 3 (1993): 2.

In order to safely transport food across Somalia's war torn countryside, it was first necessary for the engineers to clear all the supply routes of land mines after which they quickly set to work upgrading over 1,000 km of roads to accommodate large tractor trailers and military transport vehicles. In addition to making substantial road improvements, the Army Corp of Engineers also built an additional 150 km of new roads in order to provide relief organizations access to some of the most remote regions of Somalia. Aside from road maintenance, 35 separate civic action projects were also completed in towns outside of Mogadishu. These projects included renovation and construction of schools, land clearing, well digging and various other construction projects. Financial and legal restraints limited the number of projects the U.S military could engage in as the guidelines for evaluating civic action projects specified that they meet all of the following criteria¹⁰:

- Support relief organization initiatives
- Benefit the community as a whole
- Promote self-help in the area
- Require little or no material investment
- Not interfere with mission accomplishment

Ultimately, civic action programs undertaken outside of Mogadishu proved to be of little consequence as the main struggle for power in Somalia centered on control of the capital.

The Civil Military Operations Center

While U.S. combat forces were responsible for temporarily halting the Somali civil war through their presence as peacemakers, it was a small contingent of civil affairs officers and USAID personnel who coordinated the security of the food convoys and ultimately prevented a famine. Shortly after the arrival of UNITAF forces, the military leadership desired to form a unity of command for the efficient distribution of humanitarian aid. The civil military operations center (CMOC) was formed to act as a liaison between the military and the NGOs. In addition to providing security for all the humanitarian convoys, the CMOC also served as a coordination point for the NGOs themselves, ensuring that the many different agencies did not overlap their efforts or neglect any part of the country.¹¹

Although the purpose of the CMOC was to aid the humanitarian relief organizations in their efforts, the various NGOs remained inherently distrustful of the military. Problems first began shortly after UNITAF arrived in Mogadishu and began disarming many of the smaller militias that the various relief organizations had hired to provide them with security. Furthermore, as security in Mogadishu improved, more and more NGOs ranging from the World Food Program to small religious organizations began to flock to Somalia to offer their services. This influx of relief personnel made it necessary for the civil affairs officers working in the

¹⁰ Phillip Anderson and Dwight Durham, "36th Engineering Group in Somalia," 3.

¹¹ Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned*, 67.

CMOC to take on the added responsibility of checking the bona-fides of all foreign aid workers and issuing them ID cards granting them access to the heavily guarded food storage centers in the Port of Mogadishu. These ID cards note only certified someone as a humanitarian worker but eventually came to be viewed as weapons permits as well.¹² While this particular task had not been included in the mission planning, the CA personnel responded effectively and took it upon themselves to build a database tracking all humanitarian workers operating in Somalia as well as the status of food shipments throughout the country.¹³ This system proved so effective that it was later adopted by CA personnel in Haiti.

The planning for Operation Restore Hope called for a mission of short duration and the military leadership made it clear that they stood in firm opposition to any efforts that remotely resembled nation building. As a result, the CMOC staff was purposely kept small in order to avoid mission creep. However, the decision to use civil affairs units as “economies of force,” directly inhibited their humanitarian mission as the shortage of personnel within the CMOC ultimately resulted in a lack of coordination between NGOs, military transporters and the Army Corps of Engineers.¹⁴ Furthermore, as nation building was seen as solely a U.N. mission, UNITAF civil affairs personnel did not participate in any long term planning efforts that would have resulted in the creation of a Somali government. As a result, when UNITAF forces withdrew in May of 1993, they left Somalia slightly better fed but no more secure.

Order of Battle

Operation Restore Hope called for 28,000 U.S. troops from the Army, Marines and Navy to secure Mogadishu and the surrounding countryside in order to allow for relief agencies to safely distribute aid to malnourished Somalis. Task Force Ranger functioned as the Special Forces component of UNITAF and was comprised of several of the Army’s elite Delta units as well as Navy Seal teams. The international community provided an additional 17,00 troops from 24 different nations to aid the United States in the humanitarian effort and to begin paving the way for a smooth transition of UNITAF into a UN Peacekeeping mission (UNOSOM II).¹⁵

The initial plans for Operation Restore Hope called for the activation of 8-10 Army Reserve civil affairs (CA) units.¹⁶ However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff deemed this unnecessary. According to public statements made by President George H.W. Bush, the mission was scheduled to be completed by the time President-Elect Clinton took office in just under 6 weeks.¹⁷ Furthermore, in the minds of the military leadership, the mission was to feed the Somali people and not to rebuild the country. As a result, only two active components of the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion were deployed to Somalia. There has been some speculation from members of

¹² *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³ Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned*, 70.

¹⁴ John T. Fishel, *Civil Military Operations in the New World*, 202.

¹⁵ United Nations, *Somalia-UNOSOM I*, <http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unosomi.htm>.

¹⁶ Martin R. Ganzglass, “The Restoration of the Somali Justice System,” in *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Sheldon Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 23.

¹⁷ James Dobbins, Michael Poole, Austin Long, Benjamin Runkle, *After the War: Nation Building from FDR to George W. Bush*, 46.

the U.S. military that the reason the civil affairs reservists were not activated had less to do with the expected length of the deployment and more to do with the inherent rivalry that exists between them and the active duty 96th Civil Affairs Battalion.¹⁸ Roughly 97% of the Army's civil affairs capacity is in the Reserves and thus it is not uncommon for some portion of them to be activated during overseas interventions.¹⁹

After the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989, over a thousand CA personnel were deployed to help stabilize the country, as was the case following the Gulf War in 1991, when 300 CA professionals were sent to Northern Iraq. However, in sharp contrast to previous civil affairs missions, there were never more than 30 CA personnel present in Somalia at any one time.²⁰ In the opinion of Ronald M. Smith, chief of the Civil Affairs Task Force for Kuwait, order could have been restored in Mogadishu in 90 days had UNITAF been supplied with 200 civil affairs reservists.²¹

The final aspect of the force planning structure for UNITAF called for U.S. forces to rely heavily on civilian and international agencies for support in the humanitarian effort. To help facilitate the international effort, presidential envoy Ambassador Robert Oakley and his staff from the State Department were deployed to Somalia along with several Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs) from USAID. However, unlike the DART team leader, William Garvelink, who reported directly to General Johnson, Ambassador Oakley's relationship to UNITAF was never specified.²² The lack of a clearly defined relationship between the military and the Ambassador ultimately led to the State Department being left out of much of the planning for UNITAF.

The high level of cooperation seen between the USAID DART teams and the military was established through their joint participation in a small civil-military operations center (CMOC) based out of Mombasa, Kenya that had been providing small scale logistical support to international agencies in Somalia six months prior to UNITAF's authorization. This facility fell under the joint command of Colonel Kennedy of CENTCOM and William Garvelink of USAID who eventually jointly took command of the highly successful CMOC in Somalia.²³ At the time of the arrival of U.S. forces, a total of 49 international agencies were already present in Somalia. These aid groups would remain the primary providers of humanitarian relief throughout UNITAF's mission in Somalia.²⁴

Ends-Means Relationships/Final Thoughts

The most important lesson to be taken from UNITAF's experience in Somalia is that a clear political objective is a necessary pre-condition for any successful military operation. While

¹⁸ Martin R. Ganzglass, "The Restoration of the Somali Justice System," 23.

¹⁹ United States General Accounting Office, *Contingency Operations: Providing Critical Capabilities Poses Challenges*, GAO/NSIAD-00-164, July 6, 2000.

²⁰ Karin von Hippel, *Democracy by Force: U.S. Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82.

²¹ Martin R. Ganzglass, "The Restoration of the Somali Justice System," 23.

²² John T. Fishel, *Civil Military Operations in the New World* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997), 194.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned* (Washington, DC Ft. McNair: National Defense University Press, 1996), 66.

UNITAF successfully completed its short term mission of providing security for the humanitarian convoys, the American military leadership was fundamentally opposed to engaging in longer term efforts to stabilize Somalia on a political level. Following the deaths of 18 Army Rangers and the wounding of 75 others, the U.S. military mission became focused on transferring authority to the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II). The political pressure to hastily withdraw from Somalia forced UNITAF to hastily transfer operational control to UNOSOM II despite the fact that only half the UN forces were in place. Furthermore, while UNITAF had been supported by tanks, helicopters, armored personnel carriers and AC-130 gunships, UNOSOM II was equipped with only a minimal amount of armor and a complete lack of military gunships.²⁵

Force planning for UNITAF was a combination of success and failure. Overall, there were more than enough troops to secure Mogadishu and to provide security for the delivery of humanitarian relief throughout the country. Military forces were complimented by the developmental experience of USAID, as well as, the diplomatic skills of Ambassador Oakely and his staff from the State Department. However, UNITAF lacked a civil affairs capability similar in size to previous U.S. interventions in Panama and Northern Iraq. While CENTCOM had realized the need for a larger CA contingent early in the planning stages, its concerns were overruled by the Joint Staff's worries over the political implications of calling up the reserve.

Dealing with NGOs is the military's primary challenge in the case of failed states, such as Somalia, where no government exists with which to coordinate their efforts. Following its experience in Somalia, the U.S. military came to realize that NGOs are the lasting keepers of the peace as they are typically on the ground before the arrival of military forces and stay behind well after those forces have departed. The civil-military experience in Somalia proved to many in the CA community that NGOs should be involved in the planning process for future missions, a lesson they would later attempt to implement in Haiti with limited success.

The civil affairs experience in Somalia demonstrated to the military the organizational value of the civil military operations center (CMOC) in bridging the gap between civilian and military operations. However, the importance of providing transport and credentials for relief organizations in Somalia was a lesson not learned by the CA community. These crucial logistical details would once again be neglected in planning for the civil affairs mission to Haiti just months later. If the NGOs are going to overcome their inherent distrust of the military, they need to see the military treating them more as partners in future stability operations.

Overall, the intervention in Somalia was a failure. However, despite a detrimental shortage of personnel, the civil affairs units operating in Somalia were able to accomplish their short term mission of coordinating the civilian and military operations and responded well to unforeseen challenges. The formal timelines incorporated into the planning of UNITAF forced the rushed execution of the mission and led to the transfer of authority to a U.N. mission that was not equipped to handle the chaotic situation on the ground. The U.S. military's eagerness to withdraw its forces ultimately led General Aideed to test the resolve of the remaining international peacekeeping force by ordering the murders of 24 Pakistani soldiers on June 4,

²⁵ Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned* (Washington, DC Ft. McNair: National Defense University Press, 1996), 206.

1994. The U.N. decision to arrest Aideed following this attack ultimately led Aideed's forces to declare war on the peacekeepers who eventually abandoned their mission in March of 1995. Today, Somalia still lacks a functioning central government and its people continue to suffer under the rule of warlords.

Recommendations

1. A clear political objective is a necessary pre-condition for a successful military operation.
2. Measures of effectiveness (MOE) should determine when it is appropriate to withdraw forces and not arbitrary timelines set in Washington.
3. NGOs need to be included in the military planning process if they are expected to play any part in future operations.
4. The Civil-Military Operations Center (CMOC) is an effective tool for facilitating coordination between the military and civilian agencies and NGOs and should be a part of future mission planning.
5. The Reserves contains 97% of the Army's CA capacity and thus should almost always be called up in some form regardless of the political consequences.

Order of Battle

Divisions	Capabilities	Forces Serving
U.S. Army	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10th Mountain Division <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment ○ 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment • 96th Civil Affairs Battalion • 36th Civil Engineering Group • Task Force Ranger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment ○ 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta ○ 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment 	Total U.S. Force composed of 28,000 Troops
U.S. Marines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st Marine Expeditionary Unit • 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit • 1st Battalion, 7th Marines • 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines • 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines 	Total U.S. Force composed of 28,000 Troops
U.S. Navy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naval Special Warfare Development Group 	Total U.S. Force composed of 28,000 Troops