**U.S. Intervention in Somalia: “Operation Restore Hope”**

**Background**

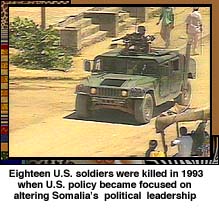
Over the last quarter of a century, Somalia has struggled with internal fighting and poor economic and social conditions for its people.  Since decolonization there has been no real centralized authority in Somalia, and presently the country is divided into at least sixteen warring factions, based on clan alliances, which constantly change.  In 1969 Mohammed Siad Barre became the leader of Somalia through a military coup.  After a long and difficult regime, he, in turn, was overthrown in January of 1991 by a coalition of opposing clans, known as the United Somalia Congress.  Soon after the revolution, the coalition divided into two groups, one led by Ali Mahdi and the other by Mohammed Farah Aidid.  The resulting inter-clan warfare led to the destruction of the agriculture of Somalia, which then led to starvation for many of its people.

One of the main sources of power in Somalia has been the control of food supplies.  Hijacked food was used to secure the loyalty of clan leaders, and food was routinely exchanged with other countries for weapons.  In the early 1990’s up to 80% of internationally provided food was stolen.  Meanwhile, between 1991 and 1992 it is estimated that over three hundred thousand Somalis died of starvation.  In July 1992 United Nations military observers were sent to Somalia in accordance with a ceasefire signed by opposing clan factions.  In August 1992 Operation Provide Relief (UNOSOM – I) officially began to provide humanitarian relief for the people of Somalia.  This mission was unsuccessful due to the UN’s inability to deliver food and supplies.  Relief flights into Somalia were often looted as soon as they landed.

The U.N. asked its member nations for assistance.  In December 1992, in one of his last acts as President, George Bush proposed to the U.N. that United States combat troops lead the intervention force.  The U.N. accepted this offer and 25,000 U.S. troops were deployed to Somalia.  President Bush stated that this would not be an “open-ended commitment.”  The objective of Operation Restore Hope was to rapidly secure the trade routes in Somalia so that food could get to the people.  President Bush stated that U.S. troops would be home in time for Bill Clinton’s inauguration in January.

Once President Clinton was inaugurated he stated his desire to scale down the U.S. presence in Somalia, and to let the U.N. forces take over.  In March 1993 the U.N. officially took over the operation, naming this mission UNOSOM – II.  The objective of this mission was to promote “nation building” within Somalia.  One main target was to disarm the Somali people.  UNOSOM – II stressed restoring law and order, improving the infrastructure, and assisting the people with setting up a representative government.

President Clinton supported the U.N. mandate and ordered the number of U.S. troops in Somalia reduced, to be replaced by U.N. troops.  By June 1993, only 1200 U.S. troops remained in Somalia, but on June 5, 1993 24 Pakistani soldiers were ambushed and killed during the inspection of a Somali arms weapons storage site.  The U.N. responded with an emergency resolution to apprehend those responsible.  While it was not specifically stated, Aidid and his followers were believed to be responsible.  On June 19, 1993 Admiral Howe ordered Aidid’s arrest and offered a $25,000 reward for information leading to this.  He also requested a counterterrorist rescue force after the massacre of the Pakistani troops.



From June 12 through June 16 U.S. and U.N. troops attacked targets in Mogadishu related to Aidid.  On July 12 U.S. Cobra helicopters attacked a house in Mogadishu where clan leaders were meeting.  They destroyed several buildings and many Somalis were killed.  When four Western journalists went to investigate the scene they were beaten to death by a mob of Somalis.  On August 8 four U.S. military police were killed when a land mine was remote-detonated by Somalis.  Two weeks later, six more U.S. soldiers were wounded.  It was at this point that Task Force Ranger was deployed to Somalia.

On August 29 Task Force Ranger flew into Mogadishu.  They were led by General William Garrison and consisted of 440 elite troops from Delta Force.  Their mission was to capture Aidid.  But, at the same time, in September 1993 the Clinton Administration began a secret plan to negotiate with Aidid.  U.S. military commanders within Somalia were not apprised of this.  U.S. Defense Secretary Les Aspin denied a request for armored reinforcements made by General Montgomery.

On October 3, 1993 Task Force Ranger raided the Olympic Hotel in Mogadishu to search for Aidid.  This led to a seventeen-hour battle in which eighteen U.S. soldiers were killed and eighty-four were wounded.  Bodies of dead American soldiers were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, shown on international news reports. Hundreds of Somalis also died, although the official number has never been released.  This was the longest, most bloody battle for U.S troops since the Vietnam War.  On October 7 President Clinton responded by withdrawing U.S. troops from Somalia.  The hunt for Aidid was abandoned, although U.S. representatives were sent to resume negotiations with clan leaders.

Two weeks after the Battle of Mogadishu General Garrison officially accepted responsibility. In a handwritten letter to President Clinton, Garrison took full responsibility for the outcome of the battle. He wrote that the Task Force Ranger had adequate intelligence for the mission and that their objective (capturing targets from the Olympic Hotel) was met.

What began as a peacekeeping mission to provide relief to the starving people of Somalia essentially ended with a firefight during the Battle of Mogadishu. After all of the U.S. troops were withdrawn in March 1994, 20,000 U.N. troops were still in Somalia. By the late Spring of 1994 all of the remaining U.N. troops were withdrawn, ending UNOSOM-II.