

Somalia II

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CDR Jim Sherman, USN stared at the piles of documents and notes on his desk and sighed. It was going to be a long night. Still, he told himself, there was no real grounds for complaint. He had been given four days to put this brief together—that was almost a luxurious amount of time. Especially with his current boss.

BGEN Hamlin was known in the Department of Defense (DoD) for being a “go-getter” and a “forward thinker.” He got that reputation by keeping his staff hopping, reacting to ideas that flew from the general’s mind in a steady stream. Three days ago the general had caught Jim coming out of the men’s room and delivered a classic “on the fly” tasking.

“Oh, Jim! I was hoping to see you.” The general had beamed. “I’ve been thinking about Afghanistan. With the Taliban defeated and al Qaeda coming apart, it seems clear that we may wind up in some post-war, nation-building program. To me, it sounds like Somalia and mission creep all over again. I need you to first put a briefing together on what happened in Somalia. Tell me who was involved, tell me why the mission grew. Then we’ll compare the two situations. I’d hate to see us make the same mistake.”

At first Jim found the going easy. There was a lot of material on Somalia. The intervention had happened far enough in the past that more than a few books had been written about the operation, but yet recent enough that most of the participants were alive and ready to talk about things. Jim was also lucky in being able to track down some fairly knowledgeable personal sources of information. The first person he sought out was Dr. Marti Van Buren, who had once been in his company at Annapolis. Marti had left the Navy as soon as her obligated service was up, got a Ph.D., and plunged into the world of D.C. think tanks. She was currently a senior researcher at the Brookings Institute. They spent a half day walking about the mall discussing Somalia.

“The first thing to remember is that Bill Clinton inherited Somalia from George Bush. I know you’re not looking at the Bush decision to get us involved in the first place but there are a few vital points to bear in mind.¹ Both President Bush and United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali believed that the end of the Cold War offered a golden opportunity for the UN to live up to the promise of its charter and take a much more proactive role in peace operations.² In order to make this work, the United States was going to have to shoulder major leadership responsibilities in such matters. Somalia, a failed state, caught in the grip of warlords and famine, seemed tailor-made for action. In December 1992, under

cover of UN Security Council Resolution 794, Bush sent in the Unified Task Force (UNITAF). UNITAF had UN blessing, but was a United States led operation all the way.³ It was a classic George Bush operation—a highly polished and efficient effort.

“In accordance with the Powell doctrine, overwhelming force was landed on the beaches of Mogadishu. Within days relief supplies were flowing to distant refugee camps and the local warlords hunkered down and got out of the way. Matching the show of military muscle was a polished diplomatic effort. The United States military commanders, most notably Marine Corps Generals Robert Johnson and Anthony Zinni, were extremely sensitive to local conditions and in executing their stated mission. Accordingly, senior U.S. leaders on scene actively resisted doing anything that might diminish their claim to neutrality.⁴ Together with Ambassador-at-Large Robert Oakley, who was serving as a U.S. special envoy to Somalia, senior U.S. leaders made contact with the various warlords and faction leaders. A “Joint Military Committee” (JMC) formed an essential part of the U.S. diplomatic effort.⁵ The committee consisted of senior United States and UN officials as well as the leader of each of the various clans and factions. Although the daily JMC meeting frequently took up a lot of time and often discussed rather trivial matters it was an important avenue of communication. The JMC also provided a way to defuse several potentially troublesome situations, some of which concerned occasions when UN forces had to fire on armed clansmen.⁶ Back in Washington, a senior Policy Coordination Committee, (PCC) met often to discuss events in Somalia and Somalia was frequently discussed at the National Security Council (NSC) Principals Committee meetings.⁷

Jim looked puzzled for a moment, then brightened. “Oh yeah, PCC was the Bush term for an interagency working group.” He realized Marti had stopped speaking. “Sorry. Go on.”

Marti continued. “By January, there was no doubt that the Somalia intervention was a success. Wherever UNITAF forces went, there was order. Food distribution was on-going.⁸ Famine had been averted and planting crops had begun. Private markets reappeared and ships began calling at the ports of Mogadishu and Kismayo. Somali refugees began to return to from neighboring states.⁹

“Marti, this is old news. I’m interested in mission-creep.” Jim complained.

“Keep your shirt on. We’re getting to that. Enter the Clintons. The fact that the Somalia intervention was being well conducted did not stop the Clinton team from criticizing aspects of the operation, even after Candidate Clinton became President-elect Clinton.¹⁰ While generally approving the Bush decision to intervene, the in-coming national security team argued that a greater role should have been played by the UN. Their preferred solution would be to turn the operation over to the UN and then get the maximum number of U.S. troops out of the country. This was precisely what UN Resolution 794 had called for from the beginning but Clinton spokesmen made it clear that they felt the transition was taking too long.¹¹

“So, the Clinton team’s plan for Somalia was to turn it over to the UN and get out as quickly as possible, leaving only a small ‘footprint’ of U.S. troops behind. UNITAF would

become UN Operations in Somalia II (UNISOM II). Originally, it was hoped that the turn-over could take place shortly after the inauguration, but getting the UN forces identified and prepared took longer than anticipated and UNISOM II was not actually stood up until March 1993. But even then the United States maintained nearly eighteen thousand troops in country assigned to the U.S. Joint Task Force in Somalia.

“There were several reasons for the delay. There were the usual difficulties in logistics. But there were also concerns that were continually raised by the secretary-general. From the beginning, Boutros Boutros-Ghali saw UN action in Somalia as a nation-building exercise. As the former Egyptian deputy foreign minister for the upper reaches of the Nile, Boutros-Ghali believed he had exceptional insight into what was required. He had long argued that the warlords would have to be disarmed and that UN troops would have to carry out this mission.¹² This was a very sensitive topic. The UN had facilitated such efforts before, notably in South America. But those disarmament campaigns had been carried out with a limited number of actors who had agreed to the program. In Somalia, none of the clans were willing to voluntarily give up their weapons. The Bush team, fearing a radical change in the scope and nature of the mission, had flatly refused to get involved in disarming any Somalis except those that posed a direct threat to relief columns or UN troops.¹³ This arrangement had worked reasonably well. The warlords got to keep their guns, but only if they kept them out of the way of the Americans.

Marti glanced at a group of tourists heading for the Smithsonian, then continued. “With Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s prodding them along, the Security Council approved UNISOM II. Its mandate was authorized under Chapter VII of the *UN Charter*, making it, in Boutros-Ghali’s words “the UN’s first peace enforcement mission.”¹⁴ As you should know, UN forces which carry out operations under Chapter VII are permitted to use force to accomplish the mission, thus the blue helmets in Somalia would be equipped and ready to fight. UNISOM II’s assigned missions specifically included disarming the clans; punishing anyone who violated the required cease-fire; conducting a massive de-mining campaign; and facilitating the return and resettlement of Somali refugees. All of these conditions, and much more, were spelled out in UN Security Council Resolution 814 of 26 March 1993.¹⁵ As a member of the Security Council, Madeline Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, voted for the resolution.

“The level and nature of United States participation in the operation was also a matter of political negotiation and importance. The secretary-general wanted the United States deeply committed to this effort. However, the Clinton team was reluctant to place U.S. combat forces under UN leadership, even though the administration’s first *National Security Strategy* would admit to such a possibility.¹⁶ At its height UNISOM II fielded 29,284 troops from twenty-nine countries, but only a small section of U.S. logistics personnel were assigned to UNISOM II.¹⁷ However, 17,700 U.S. personnel assigned to the U.S. Joint Task Force in Somalia, remained in country. Although not under UN command, this force operated in conjunction with UNISOM II personnel and contained a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) that was supposed to respond to any emergency situation that might arise.¹⁸

“It was also decided that the second in command of UNISOM II forces should be from the United States. The secretary-general wanted this arrangement because he thought it would ‘lock in’ United States support and participation. It would also provide him with a valuable channel of communication into the heart of the Clinton White House.¹⁹

Marti shook her head. “The Clinton team didn’t see it quite the same way. They believed that the second in command would be able to keep the UN reined in. He could also facilitate the hoped for draw down of U.S. forces. His presence would also alleviate some United States concerns about the UN chain of command and the possibility that U.S. troops would be under foreign commanders. Basically both Boutros Boutros-Ghali and President Clinton believed they would have a man on the inside.²⁰

“National Security Advisor Tony Lake hand-picked retired Admiral Jonathan Howe, USN to serve as deputy UN commander.²¹ Renowned for a keen intellect, Howe had distinguished himself as Ronald Reagan’s deputy national security advisor, however, he had no significant experience working with the UN, with Africa or with Somalia.²² Howe was also often described as imperial and autocratic. After the UN took over in March, one of the first things Howe did was suspend the JMC.²³ Another thing was to initiate attempts to disarm the rival clans.

“On 27 March 1993 a document known as the *reconciliation agreement* was signed at a UN sponsored meeting in Addis Abba, Ethiopia. Fifteen of the main Somali factions were present, as were Somali clan elders, leaders of Somali community and women’s organizations.²⁴ All present agreed to a two-year transition plan that would result in the establishment of a new central Somali government. Key to the plan was agreement that substantial disarmament would have to take place within the next ninety days.²⁵

“This proved to be easier said than done. It seemed as though every armed Somali resisted being disarmed. The clans claimed they required weapons to protect their power and many individual Somalis felt they needed weapons to protect themselves.²⁶ As the resistance to UN-led disarmament grew, some of the local UN military commanders began receiving specific instructions from their home governments, forbidding them to conduct offensive or disarming operations against the Somalis.²⁷ Yet Boutros-Ghali and Howe insisted that this needed to be done. The United States Quick Reaction Force (QRF) provided an answer to the problem. Not only were the Americans allowed to perform the missions, but they were among the very best troops available to the UN commander. Accordingly, the QRF shouldered an ever increasing share of the “disarming burden.”²⁸ The forces of Mohammed Farah Aidid were among the first clans targeted. While there were logical reasons for this, it was also true that Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Aidid had a long-standing history of enmity dating back to Boutros-Ghali’s days with the Egyptian Foreign Ministry. In fact, they hated each other.

“Aidid protested that the disarmament of his forces placed him at an unfair advantage and made it clear he would not accept unilateral disarmament. Soon after, several Italian soldiers attached to UNISOM II were killed when they inadvertently approached a hidden

heavy arms cache belonging to Aidid.²⁹ In an effort to avoid further such confrontations, the Italians began direct negotiations with Aidid's forces.³⁰

"As U.S. forces became more and more active, allied contingents became more and more annoyed. The Americans were perceived as being unwilling to listen to other military opinions, as well as arrogant and condescending to their allies. The French and Italians were especially aggrieved.³¹

"On 5 June 1993, twenty-four Pakistani troops were killed in an attack by Aidid's troops.³² The Pakistanis had one of the largest military contingents in the county, as well as most of the armor at the UN's disposal. The attack was conducted in response to the searching of one of Aidid's heavy weapons storage sites.³³ The attack was a incontrovertible signal that Aidid did not see the UN force as neutral and was serious about resisting being disarmed. Later that month an independent investigation of the situation, led by Professor Tom Farer of the American University in Washington, D.C., concluded that only Aidid's forces had the motive, means and opportunity to carry out the attack.³⁴

"The United States and the UN reacted swiftly. The UN Security Council, passed Resolution 837 calling for all necessary measures to be taken against those responsible for the attack.³⁵ The resolution also reaffirmed the need to disarm the factions and to "neutralize" radio stations urging resistance to UNISOM forces.³⁶ Once again the United States voted for the resolution. This was met with support from Tony Lake.³⁷ In fact, the U.S. Department of State provided most of the resolution's wording. No one in the administration disagreed with the resolution, including President Clinton, who was briefed on the issue.³⁸ In an unprecedented move, the UN placed a price on Aidid's head, offering \$25,000 to anyone who brought him in. Although the offer originated in Admiral Howe's office, the decision to authorize this move was the secretary-general's³⁹

"Initial moves against Aidid were quickly carried out by the QRF. They appeared to work so well that the president publicly spoke about Somalia. On 17 June 1993, he declared that operations against Aidid had been successful. In an address to the press the president stated that the United States had "crippled the forces in Mogadishu of warlord Aidid."⁴⁰ The words sounded good, and the president may well have believed them, but they were wrong.

"Aidid's forces were far from broken. Howe requested additional U.S. troops be made available, including the highly lethal and secretive Delta Force. The request caused considerable debate among the Joint Chiefs of Staff, although the NSC staff was strongly in favor of the idea.⁴¹

"On 8 August 1993, four U.S. servicemen were killed when their vehicle was destroyed by a remotely activated mine. The attack took place in an area controlled by Aidid's forces. The Joint Staff now recommended sending in a Special Operations Task Force which would include members of Delta Force. General Powell endorsed the request and recommended approval to Secretary Aspin. Powell also called Lake who agreed that Delta should go in, just as the NSC staff had wanted.⁴² Although no meeting was held, the geographically scattered principals discussed the issue through a series of phone calls and decided that the Task

Force should be sent. The president, who was on vacation in Martha's Vineyard was informed of the discussion by an NSC staffer who was in his entourage. The president allowed the decision to stand.⁴³

"The presence of Delta operators and U.S. Rangers, collectively identified as "Task Force Ranger," complicated matters for the forces already in Somalia. For one thing, Task Force Ranger was not under local command, but reported directly to General Hoar, the commander in chief of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM).⁴⁴ Local commanders frequently had no idea what Task Force Ranger was up to. Another problem was that both the Task Force Ranger had different cultures and attitudes than the rest of the peace-keeping forces. Finally, the first two operations that Task Force Ranger carried out were embarrassing failures. In each case the target house was incorrectly identified. Rather than attacking Aidid strongholds, Task Force Ranger hit a UN villa and the home of a friendly former chief of the Mogadishu police.⁴⁵

"Failure to bring Aidid to task began to sour the Clinton foreign policy team's attitude toward the effort. Accordingly, the Clinton administration began pursuing a different avenue in regards to Somalia.⁴⁶ They began to press for a UN-led diplomatic solution. The military option did not seem to be working, or more precisely didn't seem to offer a way out and it had begun to look as though twenty thousand U.S. troops might be required to deploy to Bosnia as part of a comprehensive peace package. UN Ambassador Madeline Albright, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and eventually the president himself began putting pressure on Boutros Boutros-Ghali to find a political solution.⁴⁷ The secretary-general assured the U.S. leaders that he was working hard for just such solution. To observers in Washington, this appeared to be typical bureaucratic inertia. In reality it was a deliberate effort by the secretary-general to give Task Force Ranger more time to kill or capture Aidid.⁴⁸ Thus a strange, almost schizophrenic, series of actions ensued with military forces trying to bring Aidid to justice, while at the same time he was being approached with an eye to negotiation. Tony Lake and others publicly explained that this was a deliberate effort to apply "pressure all across the spectrum."⁴⁹ And, even at this late date, Aidid was seeking some method that would allow him to rejoin the nation-building effort, and avoid punishment for actions that he claimed were taken in self-defense.⁵⁰

"Task Force Ranger raids continued through August and September, netting the occasional Aidid lieutenant, but getting no closer to the man himself.⁵¹ Then came the 3 October raid in which eighteen members of Task Force Ranger were killed, and one taken prisoner. The Quick Reaction Force also had an additional two soldiers killed and two Malaysian soldiers also lost their lives in the ensuing battle.⁵² When the dust settled, all you heard were cries of outrage at mission creep.

Jim reviewed his notes on their way to the Metro stop. "Marti, tell me when it became inevitable. When was U.S. policy doomed to failure in Somalia?"

She stopped. "Tough question. Some will say when George Bush said "go." I think that's wrong. The Bush experience with Somalia has to be rated a success. Others would point to

the moment when the UN took over and initiated disarmament, but I have reservations about that too. Just because the UN was running the show, didn't mean the United States had lost all ability to act. Most would say it was when we began going after Aidid—when the price was put on his head. That's pretty defensible, although the fact that Aidid was trying to work something out at the end indicates to me that, even then, we didn't have to wind up with eighteen dead Rangers and a policy failure. So I'd say the point you're asking about happened pretty late in the game. But I do know this. The president could have turned it all off with a single phone call. All he had to do was order the secretary of defense to have our forces stand down from offensive actions. That never happened."

The next day, Jim had lunch with Charlie Fairbanks. Charlie worked for the *Washington Post*, covering Capitol Hill. Each had a child in the same pre-school and they had initially met through their wives. Charlie had agreed to keep the conversation off the record, in return for the understanding that he might write something comparing Somalia to Afghanistan if he thought there was any merit in doing so. He promised to keep any mention of Jim, or military efforts along the same lines, out of his story. After providing Charlie a copy of his unclassified notes, Jim asked why the press had stopped covering Somalia after Clinton took over the White House.

"I know people, even people who were on the ground in Mogadishu, think we did stop reporting on Somalia.⁵³ But the truth is, if you go back and take just three major papers—the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, you will find that there is usually one story about Somalia per day. The coverage gets even deeper when you include other U.S. papers and the international press.⁵⁴ I'll be the first to admit that there was less total coverage than during the Bush invasion and the famine, but the notion that the world press failed to document changes of mission and events in Somalia just isn't so."

But you can't say U.S. public opinion was energized after January." Jim interrupted.

Charlie agreed. "That's so. You can lead a reader to an article, but you can't make him think. Still, look at it from the point of view of John Q. Public. Somalia is a success story. We moved in, stopped the famine and cowed the warlords. Publicly, the UN said everything was going okay. Publicly, the president and his foreign policy wonks say everything was going okay. The common denominator between "feed the starving of Somalia" and "build the nation of Somalia" is that "warlords are bad." And we are easily able to handle them—that's what DoD was saying. Besides, there is no large Somali-American contingent in the United States. Somali supermodel Imam and other celebrity spokespeople who had help publicize the famine apparently lost interest after we went in, and there was absolutely no United States economic interest in Somalia."

Charlie then held up his hands and ticked points off on his fingers." One, there were less than twenty thousand U.S. soldiers in Somalia and hardly any were getting hurt. Unless you happened to be related to one of them, it was nothing to fret about—not like the World Trade Center. Two, no one was feeling the Somalia story in their pocketbook. Three, there were no more pictures of starving babies. Food was flowing, crops were growing. Four,

we were going after the bad warlords who were standing in the way of peace and prosperity. These guys were why we went in the first place and were seen as no match for the heroes of Desert Storm. Five, the Clinton team was shooting itself in the foot almost every time it turned around and that was a lot more fun to watch. We had everything from Nanny-gate to the \$200 dollar haircut to the Vince Foster suicide.⁵⁵ Result? Somalia was a ho-hum issue. Until they killed eighteen of us at one time and dragged U.S. bodies through the streets of Mogadishu. That got the public's attention."

Jim had to agree. Charlie was abrasive and arrogant, but usually made sense. "What about Congress? Why didn't they do anything?"

Charlie cracked his knuckles. "Who said they didn't? But, don't forget that the congressional herd is motivated by the same basic influences as their constituents. If the folks back home don't care about Somalia, your average congressman isn't going to either. But there were some who did. For example, about the time that the UN was putting a price on Aidid, Robert Byrd (D-WV), Sam Nunn (D-GA) and others were starting to make critical noises about Somalia looking like an open-ended commitment.⁵⁶ Still, it's not all that surprising that about that same time, Clinton started pushing for a diplomatic solution to the Aidid problem.

"But I digress. Congress was also looking at Bosnia. Byrd and others were saying in so many words, "You get one big peace operation Mr. President. You want 20,000 troops in Bosnia, you get 20,000 troops out of Somalia." But all in all, Congress was pretty quiet until after Mogadishu. Then they unloaded on the White House and Aspin.

The two friends parted company, Jim feeling a little disappointed that Charlie couldn't provide more information. It was as if the U.S. public and its congressional representatives had simply not bothered to read or understand what was happening in Somalia after January 1994.

A day later Jim spent a couple of hours with Schuyler Colfax. Colfax had been on the Clinton NSC staff through both terms. Jim and he had worked on a classified project during an earlier tour in Washington. Now retired, the formerly reserved Colfax proved exceptionally forthcoming. Jim had once again explained his tasking and asked Colfax how the Clinton administration had allowed themselves to be surprised by what was happening on the ground in Somalia.

Colfax exploded with a snort. "Surprised!?! Listen, Jim, in the wake of Mogadishu everyone from the president on down ran around yelling "Oh, why didn't I know?" and "If we only had known." Let me tell you, they did the same thing with Rwanda and it wasn't any more true then. At this point, forcing himself to calm down, the former staffer started over.

"To understand Somalia, you have to understand the Clinton administration during the first year in office. In fact, you have to start before that. During the campaign, the Clinton team was spectacularly effective. Their instincts were sure, their tactics powerful and their cohesion enviable. A measure of how good they were is seen in the kinds of obstacles they

dealt with on the way to the White House. They were also young and mostly lacked real D.C. experience. Those who had once held real jobs in government had been away from them for a long time. Above all, they were so focused on getting into office, that they didn't prepare what to do when they actually got there.⁵⁷

“So, rather than hitting the ground running as most observers expected, they hit the ground fumbling. In part this was because there was a huge, multi-faceted agenda the president, the first lady and the Clinton team wanted to get at. These included such massive challenges as providing universal, national health care. And there were still the familiar, less exciting, but still critical, tasks like filling presidential appointments.⁵⁸ The administration's lack of experience showed as members of the team began moving in a lot of different directions at once. It was like a three ring circus without a ring master. Since we're on the subject of Somalia, did you know that it was not discussed even once during a Principals Committee meeting until after the October fire fight? Other concerns always seemed more important.

“And don't forget what a turn-over of presidents is like in the White House and NSC. Everything gets taken away. There is no pass down material. We were looking at empty desks, empty computer disks and empty filing cabinets. In retrospect we should have called in experts and gone to the interagency process for background information and continuity.”

“I take it that wasn't done?” said Jim.

Colfax shook his head. “No. The experts were all Republicans or had been on the Republicans' teams. How would that look? Take Somalia again. Robert Oakley was the most knowledgeable guy around, but he had been Bush's guy. So no one talked to him until after the October fire fight.⁵⁹ And the IWGs were pretty much all swept away. The Clinton leadership wanted a clean sweep. It's not an uncommon attitude among the newly elected. So the Somalia IWG went away and a lot of knowledge went with it.

“If Oakley was too political to consult, why not talk to General Johnston or Zinni?” Jim asked. “Everything I've seen indicates he knew the situation better than anyone except maybe Oakley.”

“Ah, well that brings up another first year problem—the relation of President Clinton to the U.S. military. Remember, the president was terribly vulnerable where his military experience was concerned. He had no military service on any kind and his record of avoiding the draft did not win him any friends in the Pentagon.⁶⁰ Another problem, one that cut deeply inside the Clinton security team, concerned gays in the military. Candidate Clinton had vowed to rescind the Executive Order which denied openly gay Americans the ability to serve in the armed forces. This decision infuriated the various service chiefs and General Colin Powell, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁶¹ Powell felt so strongly about the matter that he arranged a meeting with the president-elect where he spelled out how strongly he and the other Joint Chiefs would fight lifting the ban. The result was a compromise, the policy of ‘don't ask, don't tell.’ This didn't reduce the Joint Chiefs' fears of being used for a variety of new missions, social experiments and so on. It also did not alleviate the

administration's view that military leadership was reactionary and antagonistic from a political point of view.⁶² Colfax paused.

"And then it got worse. In a chance meeting between Dee Dee Meyers, the White House press secretary and Air Force General Barry McCaffrey, Meyers icily told the general "I don't talk to the military."⁶³ It was a deliberate snub.

"That was Meyers?"

"Indeed it was, although it took a long time before her name came out. From the military's point of view, this was seen as confirmation of their worst nightmares. A senior Clinton official, who by the way was decades younger than the general, who lacked the slightest military experience and who was female, had apparently dismissed and "dissed" all of them, their values and their contribution. Word of the insult flew like wildfire among the flag community. Attitudes hardened. It was clear that the administration had little feel for the military community or culture. The president even had to be taught how to salute properly.⁶⁴ And there were those in the administration who were convinced that the military was not above trying to intentionally embarrass the president.⁶⁵ These may seem like small things; they really were small things, but their cumulative effect was to strain potentially vital relationships."

"Couldn't General Powell have smoothed things over?"

"To answer that, I'll have to talk about a few personalities. Let's start with the president. To his credit, he's brilliant and that's not a term I toss around lightly. He's also got an incredibly forceful personality. Pundits talk about how well he works from a podium—well, multiply that by ten when he's in a more personal situation. He's also quick to anger and has an explosive temper. While president, he hated getting bad news and was prone to flare up at anyone who brought him some. Like most people in the heat of the moment he sometimes forgot if he had been told about a situation earlier or if he had said something that eventually turned out wrong. You know, like when you forget you told your teenager he or she can borrow the car and then yell at them for taking it when you needed to go golfing. To President Clinton's credit most people say that once he blew up at someone, there were no lingering hard feelings. It might simply have been a form of venting. But the rage and the tirades were hard on his staff and anyone who has worked for someone like that will tell you it doesn't make delivering unpleasant information a sought after job.⁶⁶

"And you can't forget that President Clinton was focused strongly on domestic issues. Fixing problems at home was what he viewed as his electoral mandate. Inside the borders was where he wanted to work. His foreign policy team would carry the load outside those borders.

"On paper that team seemed strong enough. Warren Christopher, the secretary of state, had served as deputy secretary of state under Jimmy Carter and had negotiated the return of the Iranian hostages. Madeline Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the UN was widely regarded in the field of international relations. National Security Advisor Anthony Lake had a

reputation for toughness and for principled, ethical behavior. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin came from decades of experience in Congress and was regarded as an expert on military matters. General Powell rounded out this powerful group. Of course, only Powell had any recent experience in the Executive Branch of government.

“While Christopher seemed to prefer a traditional approach to statecraft, Albright and Lake believed in aggressive multi-lateralism. The Clinton policy of engagement and enlargement owed much to their ideas. Where Colin Powell had a rather narrowly defined conception of when military force should be used, Lake, Aspin and Albright believed the U.S. military should be used for a much wider variety of missions, including humanitarian assistance.⁶⁷ Lake and Christopher were also highly competitive when it came to driving foreign policy. Lake was very interested in issues dealing with Africa, where Christopher was oriented more toward Europe and Asia. This at times led to some sparks between them. But that was nothing compared to the friction between Les Aspin and Colin Powell.

“Powell’s actions during the episode over gays in the military did not sit well with Les Aspin, Clinton’s new secretary of defense. Aspin complained that Powell had overstepped the boundaries of his job and had actually been insubordinate. Powell privately thought Aspin was not a good secretary of defense.⁶⁸ Although the two men tried to give an appearance of collegiality, there was a significant underlying personality conflict.⁶⁹

“General Powell was, to put it bluntly, too powerful a political figure. He was beloved by the American people. When it came down to any matter that involved the military, Powell had more credibility than his bosses. The Clinton team was also leery of the power and influence that he and other senior military leaders would be able to exert on Capitol Hill.⁷⁰ From the beginning, political advisors to the president marked Powell as a potential challenger in the 1996 election and began collecting material that could be used to counter a Powell campaign.⁷¹

“To make matters worse, Aspin was encountering friction from more sources than Colin Powell. The new secretary had widely been regarded as a defense expert when he was a congressman on Capitol Hill. But his professorial style, sloppy suits, and meandering meetings did not sit well with the culture of DoD.⁷² Also, Aspin believed the Powell Doctrine was flawed. Rather than using a sledge hammer to crack a walnut, Aspin argued a nut-cracker should suffice. This did not go down well with military leaders who had come to view the Powell doctrine as the best guidelines for the employment of U.S. military muscle.⁷³ Had Aspin been more autocratic, more authoritarian; had he chopped off a few heads, he might have brought the Defense Department to heel. But he did not work that way.⁷⁴

“At first, despite all the differences of personality and the friction, there was no disagreement over what to do about Somalia. That the UN should ‘run Somalia’ was a strong point of agreement between Tony Lake, Madeline Albright and Boutros Boutros Ghali. Each saw Somalia as the first great success story of the administration’s foreign policy and the new role of the UN.⁷⁵ It is doubtful whether Bill Clinton saw the matter in exactly the same light, but it does appear clear that he wanted Somalia to be settled. Having the UN take over the

operation would do just that—especially, if remaining U.S. troops could then be drawn down to a minimum level, or better yet, withdrawn entirely.”

“How informed were these key players about events in Somalia?”

Colfax smiled. “Very informed. Oh, sure, after 3 October everyone was running around denying knowledge, but that isn’t borne out by the facts. U.S. military leaders were filing reports up the chain of command every day.⁷⁶ A status on Somalia was provided Tony Lake on a daily basis. Reports were also flowing to Christopher and a mountain of data was going to the UN Security Council and thus to Ambassador Albright, who voted on each of the resolutions.⁷⁷ So, for example, it’s clear that everyone knew the hunt for Aidid was being stepped up.

“In fact, when Admiral Howe and others began to request additional troops, there was widespread agreement in Washington that this was a good idea. Madeleine Albright and Warren Christopher were both in favor of the increase as was the Central Intelligence Agency. The State Department, which had played a key role in the early days of the crisis had largely been pushed aside by DoD.⁷⁸ However, State registered no objections. Interestingly, the three most powerful individuals opposed to the idea were Secretary of Defense Aspin, Chairman Powell and Marine General Joseph Hoar who ran CENTCOM. There were several reasons for their reluctance. Hoar and Powell wanted to avoid ‘mission creep.’⁷⁹ Sending in additional forces would clearly allow for an increased scope of operations. Also, there would be no hiding the fact that U.S. military forces would be chasing Aidid. Hoar was concerned that the introduction of such forces would further erode whatever neutrality remained to the U.S. force. Finally, Powell and Aspin were astute enough to see that Congress was becoming increasingly critical of what seemed now to be an open-ended mission. And the Army was less than thrilled about this new dimension to the Somalia operation.

The troika of Powell, Aspin and Hoar might have been strong enough to carry the issue, but shortly after Howe requested reinforcements Aidid’s forces deliberately attacked an American vehicle, killing the four occupants.⁸⁰ After that, Task Force Ranger was going in.”

“What about the local guys requesting additional tanks? Didn’t Aspin say no?” Jim asked.

Colfax let out a long sigh. “I wondered when you would ask about the request for armor. The short answer is that there was such a request and that Aspin said no to it. But it’s just not that simple. The initial request was not just for four M-1 Abrams tanks. Artillery and four highly advanced Cobra helicopters were also included.”⁸¹

“I didn’t know that. What happened?”

“General Hoar disapproved the artillery request. He and the CENTCOM staff felt it had no utility in the environment of Mogadishu. In this environment it would be an aggressive, not a defensive, weapon and its use would inevitably cause casualties among non-combatants.⁸² He did positively endorse the request for the helicopters and the tanks.

“Somewhere going up the line the helicopters fell off the table. It turned out there were only fifty of these particular helicopters in existence at the time and they were all in Korea. In the words of a friend on the Army staff “Where the real war could break out.”

“My friend also reminded me that there is no such thing as a request for only four tanks or four helicopters. A great big bunch of logistics and material support comes along with them. The Army didn’t like this idea at all. Remember, they wanted to get out of Somalia. There was also an argument made that if the QRF got these additional capabilities they would just be assigned more challenging and difficult missions. The new platforms would facilitate mission creep.⁸³

But the request for tanks did land on Aspin’s desk. General Powell had favorably endorsed it, but didn’t say anything when the secretary said no.”

“That seems odd. Any idea why not?”

“Probably because he was on the eve of retiring. His relief was taking over. Some say the chairman had already checked out.⁸⁴ I don’t know that was the case, but it’s clear that he had a great deal else going on.

“As far as Aspin’s decision, I’ll simply point out a few facts. He was trying to get the United States out of Somalia and was very worried about mission creep. There was already armor assigned to UNISOM forces. These were Pakistani tanks.⁸⁵ They weren’t as advanced as the Abrams, but were certainly up to whatever the Somalis could throw at them. And the Abrams required a big support contingent. The final point I’ll make in this regard is that Aspin said no ten days before 3 October.⁸⁶ Even if he had said yes, it is highly unlikely any armor would have been in Mogadishu in time for the battle. After the fire fight, Aspin was besieged with questions about the tanks. He never really gave a coherent answer as to his reasoning.⁸⁷

“That’s fascinating.” Jim looked pensive. Then he asked a final question. “Okay, I understand about the tanks, now. That was Aspin’s call. But how much information about Somalia as a rule actually got to the president? Did he make the big decisions or was it someone else?”

“It’s clear a lot of information did get to President Clinton. What’s not so clear is how that information was packaged. The answer to your question also depends on what you mean by “decide.” In the Navy you have a concept known as ‘command by negation,’ right? As I understand it, you tell your boss what you are doing and what you are going to do and as long as you aren’t told no, you can do it? If not stopping something is a decision, then yes, the president did make the decisions.”

Now it was time to put the research together. Jim sighed. The situation involving mission creep in Somalia was a lot more complicated and messy than he had assumed it was. He didn’t know how applicable the events of 1994 would be to those of 2002. He didn’t even know if he could explain the events of 1994 by themselves. But he knew he would have to try.

Notes

1. President Bush's decision to intervene in Somalia is the subject of another case study in this volume. See Valerie J. Lofland, "Somalia: U.S. intervention and Operation Restore Hope."
2. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda For Peace*, (United Nations: New York, 1990).
3. United Nations, *The United Nations and Somalia, 1992–1996* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1996), 30–40.
4. General Anthony Zinni, USMC (ret.), interview with author, telephone, Newport, RI, 22 September, 1999.
5. Ambassador Richard Oakley, interview with author, telephone, Newport, RI, 6 December, 2001.
6. Oakley Interview.
7. Oakley Interview, Interview with Major Charles Ikins, USMC, interview with author, Newport, former member Somalia IWG, 9 February 2000.
8. United Nations, *The United Nations and Somalia, 1992–1996* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1996), 36.
9. Ibid.
10. Oakley Interview.
11. UN, 40.
12. UN, 40.
13. Zinni interview.
14. UN, 44.
15. UN, 44.
16. William Jefferson Clinton, *A National Security Strategy Of Engagement And Enlargement*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 1994), 13–14.
17. The following countries participated in UNISOM II: Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United States and Zimbabwe. Only 3,017 U.S. personnel were assigned. UN, 328.
18. Ibid.
19. Oakley Interview.
20. Oakley Interview.
21. Oakley Interview.
22. Oakley Interview; Interview with Dr. Thomas Farer, former legal advisor to Deputy Commander, UNISOM II, interview with author, telephone, Newport, RI, 2 January 2002.
23. Oakley Interview.
24. UN, 46.
25. UN, 44.
26. Vance J. Nannini, *Decisions In Operations Other Than War: The United States Intervention In Somalia*, (Leavenworth: United States Army Command And General Staff College, 1994), 114–118.
27. Casper Interview. Key among these states was Italy, which, due to its past colonial history had unusually deep ties with Somali clan leaders. See also: U.S. Department of Defense, *Somalia After Action Review: Briefing for Secretary of Defense* (Washington, D.C., Department of Defense, 1994) especially slides 11–16.
28. Interview with Colonel Lawrence Casper, United States Army (ret.), former Commander, U.S. Army 10th Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division and Commander U.S. Quick Reaction Force, Somalia, 17 December 2001.
29. Farer interview.
30. James C. Dixon, *United Nations Operations In Somalia II: United Nations Unity Of Effort and United States Unity Of Command* (Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1996), 92.
31. Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, *Learning From Somalia: The Lessons of Humanitarian Intervention* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 144.
32. Although the attack on the Pakistani forces resulted in the largest number of casualties, forces from Morocco and Italy had also been killed by Somali factions. UN, 52. Note: There are multiple spellings of the name "Aidid." This case study uses that adopted by the United Nations.

33. UN, 50.
34. UN, 51. A detailed reading of Professor Farer's report reveals numerous parallels between the strategy and tactics used against the Pakistani forces and those used against U.S. forces later in October. A copy of Professor Farer's report was provided to each member of the Security Council, including Ambassador Albright.
35. UN, 50.
36. UN, 50.
37. Drew, 320.
38. Elizabeth Drew, *On The Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 320.
39. Farer Interview.
30. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Vol. 29, Nr. 23, (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, 14 June 1993), 1098–1101.
41. Drew, 320.
42. Drew, 321.
43. Drew, 322
44. See Department of Defense, *Somalia After Action Review: Briefing For The Secretary Of Defense, 16 June 1994* (Washington, D.C.: L Department of Defense, 1994), 24.; Also James C. Dixon, *United Nations Operation In Somalia II: United Nations Unity Of Effort and United States Unity Of Command* (Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1996), Chapter Five.
45. Drew, 323.
46. Farer Interview.
47. Drew, 323.
48. Farer Interview.
49. Drew, 323.
50. Farer Interview.
51. UN, 55.
52. Casper, 75–76, 89.
53. Casper, 255.
54. Lexus-Nexus search for key word "Somalia," from 1 January 1994 to 4 October 1994.
55. Stephanopoulos, 143–145, 118–120.
56. Drew, 225.
57. Stephanopoulos, 119–120.
58. Stephanopoulos, 117.
59. Oakley interview.
60. Stephanopoulos, 69–70.
61. George Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human: A Political Education*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 123–129.
62. Drew, 48. Oakley interview.
63. Oakley Interview, Drew, 44.
64. Stephanopoulos, 132–133.
65. Drew, 87.
66. Stephanopoulos, 71, 74, 90, 96–98, 176, 217, 286–288.
67. Drew, 139–146.
68. Ibid., 356.
69. Oakley interview.
70. Stephanopoulos, 123.
71. Stephanopoulos, 195–197.
72. Drew, 356–358.
73. Oakley Interview.
74. Drew, 356–358.
75. Oakley Interview.
76. Casper Interview.
77. Oakley Interview.
78. John G. Sommer, *Humanitarian Aid In Somalia: The Role Of The Office Of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance: 1990–1994* (Washington, D.C.: Refugee Policy Group, 1994), 5.
79. Drew, 320–323.
80. UN, 424.
81. Casper Interview.
82. Casper Interview.
83. Oakley Interview.
84. Drew, 221–223.
85. UN, 328.
86. Farer Interview.
87. Drew, 320–323.

