

Somalia: U.S. Intervention and Operation Restore Hope

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On a bright, hot summer morning in July 2000, Lieutenant Colonel Rick Stevens got up at dawn to get ready to head out for his new job working at the National Security Council (NSC). Just one month earlier, he had been a student at the Naval War College and had graduated with honors. Rick was a C-141 pilot and had flown humanitarian aid airlift missions into Kenya and parts of Somalia in 1992 in support of Operation Provide Relief. The Air Force considered Rick a dynamic officer and following his stint at the Naval War College, he was assigned to work at the National Security Council in the African Affairs branch.

Over the last decade, Africa had become a continent rife with civil wars, extreme poverty and immense human suffering. More recently, the Clinton administration had debated sending humanitarian aid to Sierra Leone, and so Africa was on the NSC's agenda again. Rick's new boss at the NSC, John Preston, was aware of Rick's experience in Africa. He asked Rick to prepare a comprehensive analysis concerning President Bush's decision to initiate Operation Restore Hope, the United States led U.N. intervention in Somalia in December 1992.

Preston handed Rick numerous NSC files dating back to the early 1990s. Then he told Rick "Look these over to get a good understanding of what transpired in 1991 and 1992." Then he gave Rick his take on the Operation Restore Hope. "You see Rick, Operation Restore Hope was a milestone in the history of the United States as well as the United Nations. For the first time, the U.N. was involved in peace enforcement, that is the armed intervention into a conflict without the prior consent of the state authorities involved in the hostilities. Operation Restore Hope expanded the role of the United States as well as the U.N. in the post Cold War era."

With this backdrop, Rick began to read the old NSC files, which gave him a good foundation to begin his analysis. Rick also dusted off a joint military operations paper he had written at the Naval War College on the airlift operation in Somalia. In the early 1970s Somalia had been a client state of the Soviet Union, but had switched over to the West during the Ethiopia-Somalia conflict in 1977. During the 1980s, Somalia received large amounts of military and economic aid from the United States. Somalia had strategic value during the Cold War in maintaining open access to the Gulf's oil fields. Located on the Horn of Africa, Somalia was near the arc of the crisis of Middle Eastern oil fields and strategic sea-lanes.

After the Cold War and even more so after the Gulf War, Western access was available directly through the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) nations, and Somalia ceased to be of geostrategic interest to the United States.

At this point in his research, Rick decided to visit an old friend who now worked at the State Department. Jeff James, a retired Army colonel, had worked at the NSC from 1991 to 1993 and witnessed the Somalia crisis first hand. Jeff was now in the State Department's East Africa division. Jeff also arranged to have Sam Jameson, a former staff officer who had worked at State during the Somalia crisis, at the meeting.

When Rick arrived at Jeff's office, Jeff made introductions and then got down to business. He began by describing events in 1991 and 1992 that eventually led to President Bush's decision to initiate Operation Restore Hope.

"In early 1991, the situation in Somalia deteriorated quickly after the overthrow of the repressive dictator of twenty-one years, President Mohammed Siad Barre. Then the rebels who expelled Barre started fighting among themselves. Violence and drought ensued and brought on a terrible famine throughout the country. On 6 January 1991, the United States vacated the embassy in Mogadishu, and United States officials and relief experts fled the capital of Mogadishu. Without a presence in country, we miscalculated the severity of the famine and United States intelligence was limited. We did not realize the degree of horror the warring factions were creating as they ripped apart the country's very fabric. Armed clansmen took over food production and distribution, and the internal government ceased to function. Nearly one million Somalis were forced into exile in neighboring countries and an additional one million flocked to urban centers where NGOs (non-governmental organizations) such as the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Society attempted in vain to stabilize the situation and provide food and other humanitarian assistance. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), through the work of Audrey Hepburn, publicized the plight of the dying Somali children. As you may have seen on television, she worked with the international media to build a global awareness of this immense human tragedy.

"Meanwhile, within the Bush administration in early 1992, there were growing calls for some form of humanitarian intervention into Somalia, but nothing really got off the ground. Andrew Natsios, the assistant administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), spoke bluntly to the House Select Committee on Hunger. Natsios claimed Somalia was the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. He told the committee that mass starvation and violence against civilians had been going on since the fall of 1991. Natsios was quoted as saying 'the real tragedy was that of the starving Somali children where up to ninety percent of the children under age five were malnourished.' Natsios praised the work of the NGOs such as the International Red Cross, International Medical Corps, Save the Children, and Doctors Without Borders, but he admitted they alone could not get food to the starving people."¹

At this point in the discussion, Sam Jameson added an important note. "As convincing as Natsios' statements were, I'm afraid in the pecking order of agencies, the USAID was not

one of the more prominent foreign policy players in Washington. In case you haven't heard of the USAID, it is a rather small agency that used to be independent but has since been placed under the policy supervision of the secretary of state. USAID runs the United States foreign aid program and our foreign disaster relief program. USAID is often the main source in the United States government of information about humanitarian crises. It gets a lot of its information from its field officers, those USAID representatives in country."

Jameson continued, "At the time of the Somalia crisis, my boss Herman Cohen was the assistant secretary of state for African affairs, and I can tell you it was hard to get the secretary and the department as a whole to focus on the tragedy. After all, Somalia was just not as important to United States national interests as it once was. We fought tooth and nail to gain the attention of Secretary of State James Baker III, but with no success.² One of the problems with State was that after we closed the embassy in Mogadishu, the foreign service officers working in Somalia were reassigned to other posts. Therefore, the pressure that they would have normally kept on Washington from the in-country team ceased to exist.³ Foreign service officers are our eyes and ears around the world and we've cut back substantially on funding embassies since the end of the Cold War.

"I'd also have to admit that throughout 1992, Secretary of State Baker was also heavily involved in the reelection campaign for President Bush, his good friend. I don't believe Somalia was on his radarscope all that much. As a matter of fact, later on that year on 14 August, he left his post as secretary of state to head up the troubled presidential reelection campaign. Larry Eagleburger became acting secretary of state then. Eagleburger had been the deputy secretary of state."

Jameson then cleared his throat and raised a crucial point. "You could say that as far as the Bush administration was concerned, Somalia represented a house divided. While certain agencies such as the USAID were vocal in support of Somalia, other advisors cautioned the president against embarking on a massive peacekeeping mission in Somalia. The Assistant Secretary of State John Bolton warned U.N. officials of the administration's opposition to footing large peacekeeping bills for Somalia, due to perceived voter and congressional objections to expensive peacekeeping bills in an election year.⁴

"By the fall of 1992, during Bush's last few months as president, certain key advisors within the administration became much more vocal about intervention and that's when things really began to change. We'll go over this portion of the decision at length with you later, but let's first back up and we'll give you a more detailed overview as to how things progressed throughout 1992.

"On the international scene, Boutros Boutros-Ghali became the secretary-general of the U.N. in January 1992. Boutros-Ghali, an Egyptian by birth, was very concerned with events in Africa, particularly in Somalia. He was also more of an activist than his predecessor Javier Perez de Cuellar who was from Peru. The Egyptian embassy had stayed open in Somalia, and Boutros-Ghali was getting accurate information on the devastation due to the famine. On 23 January 1992, shortly after he came to the U.N., the U.N. Security Council voted

unanimously to increase humanitarian aid United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 733 to Somalia. Then the U.N. augmented aid in April 1992, with UNSCR 751, which authorized a fifty man UNOSOM (U.N. Operation Somalia) mission for food distribution. You could say things were starting to happen on a global scale but much too slowly.

“Unfortunately, the UNOSOM mission could not overcome the vast food distribution problems imposed by the warring factions. During the summer months of 1992, international pressure from NGOs, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the League of Arab States as well as the U.N. secretary-general was growing for the Western powers and the Bush administration to do something. Then on 24 July, Boutros-Ghali chastised the U.N. for a European tilt, while people starved in Somalia. He accused Western leadership of being racist, and this really shook up quite a few people.”

Jameson then added, “In addition, in July, the United States ambassador to Kenya, Smith Hempstone, Jr. wrote a dramatic State Department cable on the suffering in Somalia entitled “A Day in Hell” that caught President Bush’s attention.⁵ Ambassador Hempstone said the USAID estimated that 25 percent of Somali children under age 5 were already dead. Hempstone concluded that the UNOSOM mission as a military operation had been largely ineffectual and something drastic needed to be done.

Jameson continued “Especially significant at the same time, appeared to have been an assessment trip to Somalia led by Jim Kunder, the director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which is within the USAID. This trip coincided with the cable received from Ambassador Hempstone, and both are believed to have greatly influenced President Bush, as reported later by Andrew Natsios at congressional testimonies on 16 September.”⁶

Rick then decided to see where Congress fit in with all the action. “I know the summer months can be quiet in Washington D.C., but what was happening on the Hill?”

Jeff chimed in because he had worked the interface with the congressional staffers on the Somalia crises. “Congress picked up the tempo over the summer months and things really started heating up. The International Committee of the Red Cross declared that one-third of all Somalis, or about 1.5–2 million people were in imminent danger of dying from starvation. Senator Nancy Kassenbaum (R-KS) had visited Somalia in July and testified to the House Select Committee on Hunger on the urgent need for stepped up aid. Both Senators Kassenbaum and Paul Simon (D-IL), as members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, sponsored resolutions demanding urgent action. As you know, these resolutions are not binding. In fact, during the 1991-92 time frame, there were more congressional hearings, bills, resolutions and floor statement about Somalia, than any other country.

“Also during the early summer months, the media increased their reporting of events in Somalia. The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* began reporting on the tragic suffering and death of the Somalis. The networks were showing photos of starving children. Pundits called this the CNN factor because it wasn’t until the nightly news reporters began their vivid portrayal of events on the news, that the American people seemed to take notice.

That's the way the American public and the media work—it's a chicken and egg kind of thing. You're never sure which comes first—the activity in Washington that creates the media feeding frenzy or the media that creates the wake up call. In my opinion, the national media followed the action in Congress and there was plenty of it concerning Somalia.⁷

“Then in July 1992, the *New York Times* published a story by Jane Perlez about how the current airlift efforts were failing to feed the starving Somalis.⁸ Her story made an impression at the White House as President Bush read her piece and was very upset by the reports.⁹ He wanted something done and gave the crisis increased focus. He also instructed the State Department to be forward leaning on Somalia and told the national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft to begin exploring an enhanced airlift effort. At about the same time, I started attending NSC interagency meetings and it soon seemed apparent to me that a consensus on an airlift effort was not going to happen. When the president found out the interagency working group process was not cutting it through reports from the national security advisor, he decided to get a food airlift operation going despite the haggling.

“On August 12th, the president met quietly with Secretary of State Baker, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, and Brent Scowcroft to hammer out the details of Operation Provide Relief. President Bush had finally decided to shore up the current UNOSOM mission and authorized humanitarian relief airlift missions. This announcement occurred on a Friday, 14 August, just days before the Republican National Convention in Houston was to begin on 17 August. As you might have guessed, certain Democratic members of Congress thought Bush's decision was pure election year politics. But I sincerely believe the administration wanted to help but did not want to get involved in a huge peacekeeping effort in Africa at least at this stage in the game. The airlift missions that Operation Provide Relief promised was the next logical step. Hence, direct involvement in the Somali crisis began on 28 August when the airlift of relief supplies into Somalia was launched from bases provided by the Kenyan government.”

Rick then wondered where the military stood on the increased taskings coming from the White House. “What was the position of the Pentagon on all this?”

Jeff continued, “From the military standpoint, we were spread pretty thin at that time and bogged down providing humanitarian relief to the Kurds in northern Iraq. We were also working numerous issues with Haiti and there were concerns over the refugee camps at Guantanamo Bay. On top of that, the military units were busy cleaning up the damage from Hurricane Andrew in August 1992 which destroyed portions of Florida and the east coast. You could also say, there was a pervasive sentiment that if we got involved in Somalia, it could lead to a quagmire, similar to what Lebanon had been in 1983 when 241 marines died in Beirut during the Reagan administration. All you heard from NSC staffers was the following phrase, ‘if you liked Beirut, you'll love Mogadishu.’¹⁰

“The Pentagon's reluctance was echoed by Stephen J. Hadley, the assistant secretary of defense for international security policy. He really summed up the potential hazard with Somalia and said United States forces would become the object of attack and of a guerrilla

war that could have no end.¹¹ Hadley and the Pentagon's fear resulted from the confusion about the military's humanitarian and combatant roles in Lebanon, where United States troops were placed in a fight without giving them the means to control its outcome. Another concern of the Pentagon with humanitarian missions was not just the confusion of roles but that the small size of the relief missions did not give troops an overwhelming advantage of forces. This was what the Powell doctrine was all about."

Rick had learned a lot about the Powell doctrine at the Naval War College, a product to guide the proper use of military forces in the future due to the protracted Vietnam War and the Lebanon fiasco. The doctrine supported the use of military ground troops only when vital interests were threatened. In addition, it recommended using an overwhelming number of troops to maintain a distinct advantage. Lastly, the doctrine mandated clear objectives and an exit strategy.

Then Rick asked Jameson, "Where was the support from our allies in Europe on this issue?"

Jameson knew this was coming. "Western European countries were as preoccupied as we were with the breakup of the Soviet Union which occurred in late 1991 and the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, maybe even more so. After all, Eastern Europe and Russia were a lot closer to our western European allies than Africa was. Things were beginning to erupt in the former Yugoslavia with the breaking down of sovereign authority and continued ethnic cleansing. We were hearing a lot about Bosnia-Herzegovina then if you recall."

Rick interrupted and asked, "So why did we pick Somalia and ignore Bosnia at the time?"

Jeff replied, "That's another story but most analysts believe the Bush administration ultimately found Bosnia too hard to grapple with or maybe the administration felt that Bosnia was a problem that Europe could and should handle. I also believe President Bush wrestled with the role of the United States in the post Cold War world, the supposed New World order that he spoke about so often. I think he was worried about the role of moral concerns in United States foreign policy and of course, the administration's own place in history. Somalia played heavily in this respect. We on the NSC staff also believed we could get in and get out of Somalia in a relatively short period of time. That is, feed the starving masses, work to stabilize the situation, and then exit. We did not think that we could get out of Bosnia as quickly.

"By mid-November, despite enhanced airlift efforts from Operation Provide Relief, massive distribution problems on the ground still remained. The clans were hoarding the humanitarian supplies and there was extensive looting once supplies left the ports. The clans were using food as a weapon and as a result, there was widespread violence. NSC staff members knew something else was going to have to be done. The Pentagon, for example, typically opposes humanitarian intervention because of tight budgets. There are no readily available accounts to pay for such crises as Somalia.¹² In addition, the military was downsizing and the brass was not looking for another mission.

“Nonetheless, President Bush was determined to exit his presidency in glory when it came to the Somali. Politically, he was somewhat depressed due to the loss of his reelection campaign. Plus the death of his mother in November that year must have touched an inner cord. Perhaps Somalia was a way to leave a legacy and feed the starving masses.

“Inevitably, as the problems in Somalia continued despite the airlift and UNOSOM, the idea to intervene with a massive force started gaining momentum. By mid-November, certain civilian advisors were becoming more amenable to some sort of plan to have a massive force distribute food and supplies. At one of the first Deputies Committee meetings that month, Paul Wolfowitz, the undersecretary of defense for policy and planning, suggested using United States ground troops, but the JCS were noncommittal.

“Then at a second Deputies Committee meeting on 21 November, Admiral Jeremiah, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff startled the group by suggesting the ground forces might be able to do the job.¹³ Admiral Jeremiah wanted to use a large force—a division level of United States troops at least twenty thousand strong. His suggestion was also consistent with the Powell doctrine, in that United States troops should not be placed in a risky situation unless their numbers were overwhelming.

“Apparently, a sea change had occurred at the Pentagon. General Powell, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs supported deploying United States troops. Powell had visited Somalia in October and his influence affected senior Pentagon leadership. The brass began to believe Somalia was ‘doable’ on the ground and much less risky than Bosnia. The terrain in Somalia was relatively flat, unlike Bosnia, where thick woods and mountains would cause new challenges. Some in the Pentagon felt that Somalia was the lesser of the two evils, and by taking on Somalia, we might shake Bosnia off our backs. Eventually, the Pentagon came up with three plans to offer up to the NSC for the Somalia effort.

“The first option was to continue the status quo and stay with the existing U.N. plan to deliver food and supplies by air and sea, but at the same time also enhance the U.N. security presence. The United States contribution would involve transportation and financial support, but no United States ground forces in country. There were not many strong advocates for this position, because the status quo was not working. Then a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report made it clear that this option would not work since Somali warlords could easily massacre the lightly armed U.N. forces.

“Next, a bolder option was offered by Undersecretary of State for International Security Affairs Frank Wisner. He recommended the United States organize a coalition of international forces under a United Nations command. The United States would provide logistical, airlift, sealift and communications requirements and United States forces could be based off shore if an additional threat surfaced. By operating under a U.N. command, the U.N. would be bolstered with the troops into a larger role in the post Cold-War.¹⁴

“While Wisner and the State Department argued for more United States action, they did not argue for a direct United States military intervention, nor for the use of United States ground troops, fearing the Pentagon would be staunchly opposed to this route.

“At the same time, Brent Scowcroft believed that only the United States could provide the international community with the leadership it needed with regards to Somalia and other humanitarian tragedies. Scowcroft hinted at the idea of using ground troops directly and thus began plans for a third option for a United States led U.N. ground operation. If United States troops were to be used, General Powell wanted to retain United States command and control over the U.N. forces, and also determine the appropriate size of the force.”¹⁵

Jeff remembered working the three plans during Thanksgiving week. “Politically, things were pretty quiet in Washington during the week before Thanksgiving, with Congress in recess and Washington winding down. The presidential race was over on 2 November, but the White House was busier than a beehive working on the three Somalia options.

“Two more NSC Deputies Committee meetings occurred on the Monday and Tuesday, 23 and 24 November before Thanksgiving; however no consensus was reached as to which of the three options would be best. Also on 24 November, Boutros Boutros-Ghali sent a letter to all members of the U.N. Security Council once again requesting help with the Somalia crisis. President Bush read the letter and I believe it pushed the president to the final decision to intervene.”¹⁶

“In addition, media pictures of starving children were again all over the network broadcasts and the reports from Somalia were dire. Here we were in the United States getting ready to celebrate Thanksgiving with all the food and bounty the holiday conveys and the starving masses in Somalia were dying by the hundreds each day. These images connected with President Bush’s past experience when he witnessed the Sahelian famine in the Sudan during a visit in 1985. Andrew Natsios, mentioned this event in his book:”

In December 1992 I sat through a discussion between President Bush and Phil Johnson, president of CARE who was then acting as the director of humanitarian operations in Somalia, in which Bush described his visit with the First Lady and Johnson to a CARE feeding center for starving children during the Sahelian famine. He said that he and his wife would never forget the scenes of death, a memory, he said, that had clearly affected his decision to send troops into Somalia.¹⁷

Jeff continued, “The next morning, on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, President Bush held a National Security Council meeting to hash out the options for Somalia. Most of the NSC players supported a United States led U.N. peacekeeping force by this point in the game. To sell option three to the U.N., the United States had to provide the vast majority of the forces. Once agreed upon, Acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger was dispatched to New York later that day to discuss the plan with the secretary-general. Boutros Boutros-Ghali worked hard to get the U.N. Security Council to swiftly approve the massive United States led U.N. coalition, an operation that the United States defense officials called Restore Hope (U.N. Security Council Resolution 794). The Council approved the resolution on 3 December. Finally on 4 December, President Bush announced in a speech to the nation, the details dealing with the United States involvement and support of Operation

Restore Hope. The first U.S. Marines landed on Mogadishu beaches on 9 December. President Bush's final days in the White House were ones of great achievement concerning humanitarian efforts."

Rick suddenly looked at his watch and realized he had been at Jeff's office for over two hours. He thanked Jeff and Sam for their assistance, as he knew their first hand experience gleaned from Operation Restore Hope would greatly enhance his final analysis. Jameson had to be going as well to get back to a symposium at Georgetown University.

Before the three parted company, Jameson hesitated and remarked: "Rick, make sure you address these questions before you write your final analysis:

- Just how did the dynamics of the State Department, the DoD and the White House staff affect the final decision on Somalia?
- Do you think the decision to support Operation Restore Hope would have happened without the media sensationalism?"

Then as he walked out the door, Jameson added one final comment. "As you recall our stated aim of Operation Restore Hope was that of humanitarian intervention. Do you also think Somalia might have represented a new robust era of multilateral cooperation and thus an expanded role for the U.N. as well as the United States as the only superpower in the post Cold War era?"

As Rick headed for the Metro entrance at Foggy Bottom, he wondered just what Jameson had meant with his last remark.

CHRONOLOGY

Feb 88	Civil war erupts in Somalia among rival clans.		leaders, Ali Mahdi Mohammed and Mohammed Farah Aidid. UNSCR 746 urges compliance.
Jan 91	President Mohammed Siad Barre overthrown, NEO commences for diplomatic personnel and United States citizens (six days prior to start of Desert Storm).	Apr 92	UNSCR 751 authorizes 50-man UNOSOM mission.
Nov 91	Atrocities and starvation in Somalia spark international concern.	Jul 92	Senator Kassenbaum visits Somalia.
Dec 91	Senators Simon and Kassenbaum demand urgent action, including use of troops.	Aug 92	President Bush announces Operation Provide Relief airlift operation just prior to Republican National Convention. UNSCR 775 authorizes 3,500 additional troops.
Jan 92	Boutros Boutros-Ghali becomes secretary-general of the U.N.. U.N. Security Council votes unanimously for increase in humanitarian aid (UNSCR 733).	Nov 92	Bill Clinton wins election. Series of NSC Deputies Committee meetings on Somalia.
Mar 92	U.N. brokered cease-fire agreement signed in Mogadishu by clan	Dec 92	President Bush decides to take action with United States led intervention of U.N. forces. Announces Operation Restore Hope.

SOMALIA MAP



Notes

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4. Ibid, 13.
5. Ambassador Smith Hempstone, "Dispatch From a Place Near Hell," *Washington Post*, 23 August 1992, C1, 2.
6. House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa, *The Crisis and Chaos in Somalia: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa*, 102d Cong, 2d sess, 16 September 1992, 22.
7. Jonathan Mermin, "Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media Driven Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 112, No 3, 1997, 386.
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10. Ken Menkhaus and Louis Ortomayer, *Key Decisions in the Somalia Intervention*, Pew Case Studies in International Affairs, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Publications, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington DC, 1995, 5.
11. Barton Gellman, "U.S. Military Fears Balkan Intervention: Dual Combat, Relief Role Seen Unworkable," *Washington Post*, 12 August, 1992, A24.
12. Andrew Natsios, "Illusions of Influence: The CNN Effect in Complex Emergencies," in *From Massacres to Genocide, The Media, Public Policy and Humanitarian Crises* by Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss (Washington DC: The Brookings Institute, 1996), 161.
13. Don Oberdorfer, "The Path to Intervention," *Washington Post*, 6 December 1992, A36.
14. Michael R. Gordon, "Somali Aid Plan is Called More Ambitious Option," *New York Times*, 19 November, 1992, A27.
15. Maryann K. Cusimano, *Operation Restore Hope: The Bush Administration's Decision to Intervene in Somalia*, Pew Case Studies in International Affairs, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Publications, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington DC, 1995, 11.
16. Andrew Natsios, "Illusions of Influence: The CNN Effect in Complex Emergencies," in *From Massacres to Genocide, The Media, Public Policy and Humanitarian Crises* by Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss, (Washington DC: The Brookings Institute, 1996), 168.
17. Andrew Natsios, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Humanitarian Relief in Complex Emergencies*, (The Center For Strategic and International Studies: Washington, DC 1997), 178.

