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1. Enclosure (1) is forwarded as a matter of possible interest.
2. This research memorandum documents the events and discusses lessons learned from the noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) from the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia, in January 1991. During this operation, named "Eastern Exit," U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps forces evacuated 281 people from 30 countries (including 8 Ambassadors and 39 Soviet citizens).



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26A1	COMPHIBGRU TWO	46C1	MAG 11
26A1	COMPHIBWARCEN	46C1	MAG 12
26A2	COMPHIBGRU ONE	46C1	MAG 13
26A2	COMPHIBGRU THREE	46C1	MAG 14
	Attn: RAdm. S.S. Clarey	46C1	MAG 15
26V1	LFTCLANT	46C1	MAG 16
26V2	LFTCPAC	46C1	MAG 24
26QQ1	COMNAVSPCWARDEVGRU	46C1	MAG 26
	DAM NECK	46C1	MAG 29
26QQ1	COMNAVSPCWARGRU TWO	46C1	MAG 31
26QQ1	COMNAVSPCWARUNIT TWO	46C1	MAG 32
26QQ2	COMNAVSPCWARGRU ONE	46C1	MAG 36
26QQ2	COMNAVSPCWARUNIT ONE	46C1	MAG 39
26KKK1	TACTRAGRULANT	46C1	MAG 42
26KKK2	TACTRAGRUPAC	46H	VMGR-252
28L1	COMPHIBRON 10	46H	VMGR-352
28L1	COMPHIBRON 12	46P2	HMM-263
28L1	COMPHIBRON 2	46P2	HMM-365
28L1	COMPHIBRON 4	46P2	HMM-461
28L1	COMPHIBRON 6	46U	MAWTS 1
28L1	COMPHIBRON 8	50A	USCINCCENT
28L2	COMPHIBRON 1		Attn: J-3
28L2	COMPHIBRON 3		Attn: Col. J. W. Schmidt, USMC,
28L2	COMPHIBRON 5		J-3 (NEO Plans Officer)
28L2	COMPHIBRON 7	50A	USCINCEUR
28L2	COMPHIBRON 9	50A	USCINCLANT
31G1	USS TRENTON (LPH 14)	50A	USCINCPAC
	Attn: Commanding Officer	50A	USCINCSO
31H1	USS GUAM (LPH 9)	50A	USF Socom
	Attn: Commanding Officer	A1	NAVY OLA
45A2	CG I MEF	A1A	SECNAV
45A2	CG II MEF	A1B	UNSECNAV
45A2	CG III MEF	A2A	CHINFO
45B	CG FIRST MARDIV	A2A	CNR
45B	CG SECOND MARDIV	A2A	OPA
45B	CG THIRD MARDIV	A3	NAVY LIBRARY
45B	CG FOURTH MARDIV	A5	CHNAVPERs
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45Q	CG SECOND FSSG	A6	HQMC AVN
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45Q	CG FOURTH FSSG	A6	HQMC C4I2

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Eastern Exit: The Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) From Mogadishu, Somalia, in January 1991

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ABSTRACT

This research memorandum documents the events and discusses lessons learned from the non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) from the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia, in January 1991. During this operation, named "Eastern Exit," U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps forces evacuated 281 people from 30 countries (including 8 Ambassadors and 39 Soviet citizens).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early January 1991, U.S. military forces executed Operation Eastern Exit, a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) of the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia. The primary forces involved in this ten-day operation were U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine forces diverted from Operation Desert Shield.

Eastern Exit received relatively little attention as it was conducted on the eve of the war with Iraq. In other circumstances, the execution of such a short-notice and high-risk operation might have garnered front page headlines around the world. Noteworthy items included the evacuation of 281 people from over 30 nations, including 12 heads of diplomatic missions and 39 Soviet citizens from amidst a bloody civil war.

The military operation itself might seem more like a Hollywood script than reality. Little over two days after leaving the North Arabian Sea, USS *Trenton* launched two CH-53Es with a 60-man combined SEAL and Marine evacuation force. The launch occurred in the middle of the night, over 450 miles from Mogadishu. En route, the two helicopters conducted two nighttime aerial refuelings (though none of the pilots had exercised this for over six months). On arrival off the coast, the two CH-53Es descended to 25 feet and sped over the city, landing in the Embassy compound even as looters were at its walls.

The 60-man evacuation force quickly moved into fighting positions to protect the Embassy and the two CH-53Es soon took off with the first 61 evacuees. Despite intermittent harassing fire, the evacuation force held its fire during the 17 hours it spent on the ground. U.S. forces took advantage of night vision devices and conducted the final evacuation in the middle of the night via ten CH-46s operating from USS *Guam*.

A close examination of this operation leads to a number of valuable lessons—both positive and negative—of value for future NEOs. Eastern Exit was clearly a very successful operation. Following are some of the reasons things went so right.

- The results of MEU(SOC) training can be found throughout Marine Corps and Navy amphibious forces. While the NEO force was not a MEU(SOC), MEU(SOC)-developed SOPs greatly aided planning. The previous MEU(SOC) training of many Eastern Exit participants aided the execution of the operation.
- Desert Shield training had raised the forces to a high level of preparedness.
- U.S. Navy and Marine cooperation was close-knit, to the point of having a common command space and, essentially, a combined command staff.
- Unlike many other NEOs, the U.S. Ambassador had a clear understanding of his role. He had the Embassy organized for an evacuation, maintained a clear picture of the situation on the ground, and clearly expressed his intentions and orders to the inserted evacuation force. It seems plausible that the Ambassador's previous experience with NEO operations (including involvement with the first several months of Operation Sharp Edge, the NEO from Liberia) contributed to his actions during Eastern Exit.

On the other hand, a number of problems call into question the means by which the military and State Department prepare for and execute NEOs.

- The information on the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu possessed by the mission's forces was dated and inaccurate. Among other problems, the two CH-53Es had to fly over embattled Mogadishu for 20 minutes searching for the Embassy compound. A regular review of information provided to amphibious forces should be conducted at U.S. Embassies. On the basis of the Eastern Exit experience, it seems clear that the means by which basic NEO information is prepared and distributed deserves review.
- While the civil war in Somalia intensified rapidly, nonessential personnel were evacuated from the Somalia several weeks before the amphibious forces in the Persian Gulf were appraised that a NEO via military forces might be required. The State Department should request that the military commence NEO planning as soon as the decision is made to evacuate nonessential personnel (if not earlier).
- The ability of the Embassy to facilitate a NEO was deficient in several potentially vital areas. There was no direct secure communications capability between the Embassy and the evacuation forces (the only means to directly communicate was via an unsecured radio). The Embassy had minimal capabilities to mark a landing zone for rescue helicopters (just a strobe light and someone waving a white flag). Secure voice capabilities between military forces and an Embassy during an evacuation are vital. Common cryptologic material for NEOs should be promulgated, and these codes should be distributed to Embassies and deployed military forces. Means to mark helicopter landing zones should be maintained at every Embassy, possibly by the Marine Security Guard detachments.
- Some links of the chain of command did not receive orders and information on the seriousness of the situation on the ground in Mogadishu. This led to orders that delayed the movement of amphibious forces south. The chain of command must be delineated so that involved commands will not be acting on the basis of incomplete information.

These are some of the more vital lessons from Operation Eastern Exit. This research memorandum documents Eastern Exit and highlights issues raised during it.

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