

INTRODUCTION

In early January 1991, the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia, was evacuated via U.S. military forces. This noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO)¹ was named "Operation Eastern Exit." Although elements of the four services were involved, Navy and Marine Corps units were the primary participants.

Eastern Exit was notable for several features:

- Evacuation of 12 heads of diplomatic missions (eight Ambassadors and four Charge D'Affaires) and citizens from over 30 nations.
- Evacuation of 39 Soviet citizens.
- Insertion of a 60-man evacuation security force via a 466-n.mi. night CH-53E flight with two in-flight refuelings en route (and a 350-n.mi. return flight with 61 evacuees and another in-flight refueling).
- Final evacuation conducted by ten CH-46s in an all night vision goggle (NVG) operation.

The operation was executed without loss of life or injury and all involved forces were back on station in the Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR) well before the initiation of hostilities against Iraq.

While lauded for its "flawless execution," Operation Eastern Exit provides a number of valuable lessons. This research memorandum documents the operation and discusses various issues that derive from its execution. Recommendations are based on these observations.

The memorandum begins with a brief summary of Eastern Exit. The following sections focus on discrete segments of the operation, first describing the events and then discussing some of the issues that arose during that period/portion of the operation. The final section provides brief discussions of issues (many of which are analyzed in earlier sections) and presents recommendations for future action based on the Eastern Exit experience.

Sources on Eastern Exit included message traffic; articles and unpublished accounts of the events by participants; interviews with participants (see Appendix A for a list of interviews); and various files and logs from NAVCENT, PHIBRON SIX, *Guam*, and *Trenton*.

The author was deployed with the amphibious forces from the Persian Gulf and had more extensive access to information from these forces than from other involved forces and organizations. This memorandum, therefore, primarily focuses on the perspective from afloat.

¹ A list of acronyms is provided at the end of the document.

EASTERN EXIT: A BRIEF SUMMARY

Eastern Exit was initiated on 2 January 1991 following a request by the U.S. Ambassador to Somalia, James K. Bishop, for military assistance to evacuate U.S. personnel and others from the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu. Somalia's long-brewing civil war had been worsening through the fall of 1990 and, by the new year, violent anarchy reigned in Mogadishu. (Table 1 presents a brief chronology of Eastern Exit.) Threats to foreigners escalated tremendously; for example, on 4 January, U.S. Embassy personnel and guards had a gunfight with looters attempting to enter the Embassy compound.

Table 1. Eastern Exit Chronology

Date	Events
5 December 1990	Amb. Bishop recommends voluntary departure of non-essential U.S. personnel.
19 December	Number of official U.S. personnel reduced from 147 to 37.
30 December	Full-scale fighting between Somali government and rebel forces breaks out in Mogadishu.
2 January 1991	Amb. Bishop requests military assistance for evacuation; <i>Guam</i> and <i>Trenton</i> get under way at 2330.
4 January	Gun battle between U.S. Embassy personnel and looters; Italian and Soviet attempts to evacuate via aircraft fail.
5 January	CH-53Es launched from <i>Guam</i> at 466 n.mi. from Mogadishu, insert a 60-man evacuation force, and return to <i>Guam</i> with 61 evacuees aboard.
6 January	Four waves of CH-46s evacuate the remaining 220 evacuees and the 60-man evacuation force in the early a.m. Mission declared complete.
10 January	Early a.m., baby born aboard <i>Guam</i> .
11 January	Evacuees offloaded in Muscat, Oman.

In response to tasking from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the Commander-in-Chief, Central Command (CINCCENT) ordered (1) Air Force aircraft to the area, (2) the movement of amphibious ships to Mogadishu, and (3) the Special Operations Command (SOCCENT) to prepare to move forces to execute a NEO. The Commander of U.S. Naval Forces, Central Command (COMUSNAVCENT) dispatched two ships, USS *Guam* (LPH-9) and USS *Trenton* (LPD-14), from their anchorage off Oman to the Somali coast. Aboard *Guam* and *Trenton* were forces from the Fourth Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), including a CH-53E detachment (det) and two CH-46 squadrons. *Guam* and *Trenton* got under way late on the evening of 2 January.¹

¹ The two ships got under way at 2330D (or 1930Z) on 2 January 1991. Unless otherwise noted, the times discussed in this paper are "delta" times, which are four hours earlier than Greenwich Mean Time (GMT, or "zulu") and nine hours earlier than Washington, D.C. time. Both the military and the State Department operate on zulu time. Despite this standard, however, during this operation there was some confusion concerning time because there were at least three separate time zones of concern: the two ships in the Indian Ocean on delta time; CENTCOM, the USMC and USAF fixed-wing aircraft, and Mogadishu on charlie time (three hours ahead of GMT); and zulu time used as a worldwide standard by both the military and State Department.

Because Ambassador Bishop did not feel confident that the evacuees could safely transit from the Embassy compound to the airport and the conditions at the airport were uncertain, it became clear that the amphibious option was the only viable option for to evacuating the embassy. As the unrest in Mogadishu increased, Ambassador Bishop's calls for help became more strident. Aboard ship, the planners examined the insertion of an evacuation force via the two CH-53Es embarked on *Trenton*. A 1,500-n.mi. flight from the North Arabian Sea directly to the Embassy compound was the first option considered; then an 890-n.mi. mission was examined. Because the situation had evidently stabilized somewhat, the mission was delayed until an eventual launch early on the morning of 5 January, with an arrival time at the Embassy of shortly after dawn.

The CH-53E flight, launched from 466 n.mi. off *Guam* at 0347D, required two in-flight refuelings en route to the Embassy. The first refueling guaranteed that the helicopters could reach the Embassy and the second provided enough fuel for flying around the city, if necessary, and for a short-range return to the ships. Several features of the CH-53E flight were notable. During the first refueling, a pressure seal on the second CH-53E failed, resulting in spilled fuel in the cabin (this leak was fixed by the crew chief, thus allowing refueling to recommence). The Omega navigation systems could not support the flight, and the pilots were forced to rely on a combination of positive control from the ships, dead reckoning, and pathfinding by the refueling aircraft for navigation. In addition, the helicopters wandered some 15 to 20 minutes over Mogadishu because the pilots had difficulty finding the Embassy compound. Despite these problems, the two CH-53Es arrived at the Embassy at 0710, within minutes of their planned arrival time.

The 60-man evacuation force quickly deployed in the Embassy compound. The nine-man SEAL team concentrated on protecting the Ambassador in the Chancery building, augmenting the Embassy's five Marine Security Guards (MSGs). The Marines secured the remainder of the compound was secured. In addition to the Chancery, the other important building to protect was the Joint Administrative Office (JAO) building, located next to the helicopter landing zone (HLZ). The JAO building housed almost all the evacuees during the day. The 46-Marine security force provided a thin perimeter around the Embassy compound. Shortly after the CH-53E touchdown, an Air Force AC-130 arrived overhead. The AC-130 operated overhead for three hours, providing the evacuation force with intelligence on the ongoing fighting in Mogadishu. The aircraft was prepared to provide fire support on request.

After an hour on the ground, the CH-53Es took off for the return flight to *Guam*; the rendezvous was scheduled for a point 380 miles from Mogadishu. A total of 61 evacuees, including many Americans and several foreign VIPs, were on the two helicopters. One in-flight refueling was required during the return flight to the ships.

Aboard *Guam*, the evacuees were quickly accommodated. The CH-53E crews were debriefed for information for follow-on flights and evacuated U.S. Embassy staff members were also debriefed and requested to help process evacuees.

On the ground, the 60-man evacuation force remained within the compound except for a brief foray in mid-morning when a small convoy of hardened commercial vehicles was put together to escort four American officials and several foreign nationals from the Office of Military Cooperation (OMC) compound to the Embassy compound. Throughout the day, as fighting continued in Mogadishu, foreigners seeking evacuation made their way to the U.S. Embassy. Although the Embassy compound was not attacked directly, there was intermittent harassing fire including fire at two Marine snipers on the Embassy water tower and an RPG round that hit the Embassy wall in the afternoon. More typical, according to descriptions of the day's events, were trucks filled with armed men who

would occasionally fire their weapons into the air as they drove by the Embassy (with the occasional round heading into the Embassy compound).

During the late afternoon, the security force began to prepare the HLZ for a nighttime evacuation. All lights in the compound were extinguished, a number of vehicles were moved out of the HLZ, and chemical lights were laid out in a NATO Y in the HLZ to mark the landing area for the helicopters. The evacuees were organized into groups ("sticks") of 15 each. Between evacuees and the security force, there were 280 people to be extracted from the Embassy.

Guam and *Trenton* continued to steam at full speed toward Mogadishu. On arrival off the coast, following a one-hour delay awaiting AC-130 support, the final evacuation commenced at 0043D January 6. The final evacuation consisted of four waves of five CH-46s off *Guam*, with each of the two CH-46 squadrons on *Guam* contributing five aircraft to the mission (each helicopter made two round-trips). The first three waves were scheduled to be filled with civilians; the last wave was to take out the security force.

The first two waves were almost picture perfect, with evacuees moved smoothly to the helicopters. While the second wave was inbound, an SA-2 radar showed up on the helicopters' radar warning receiver. Because the CH-46s were flying low, the SA-2 (a high-altitude surface-to-air missile) was not viewed as a serious threat. Flying darkened, without exterior lights, the helicopters were essentially unthreatened during flight. According to evacuees, the helicopters were almost invisible until they were on the ground.

As the second wave arrived, however, a more serious threat emerged as a Somali Major approached the gate with two truckloads of troops and threatened to shoot down the helicopters if the "illegal operation" did not cease immediately. With the concurrence of the U.S. Ambassador, the operation continued unimpeded as the Ambassador began to negotiate with the Major. Because the Ambassador, his immediate staff, and the MSGs had been scheduled to go on the third wave, it took off for *Guam* with only a portion of the planned evacuees (and only four helicopters instead of five). Before the arrival of the final wave, Ambassador Bishop finished negotiating with the Somali Major. (He withdrew his opposition to the evacuation operation in return for several thousand dollars in cash and some car keys.) The last wave, therefore, had six helicopters. The disruption to the planned third wave added some confusion to the withdrawal and extraction of the evacuation force. Most seriously, the helicopters in the final wave waited in the HLZ for 5 to 10 minutes after the security perimeter forces had withdrawn and boarded the helicopters as a final head count was done. Two Marines (the communications team) were nearly left behind because they had not realized that this was the final wave.

Following the return of the last CH-46 wave to *Guam*, and following a quick check for all official Americans, Ambassador Bishop declared the evacuation complete at 0343D on 6 January and the ships turned north for Muscat, Oman. Aboard ship, the evacuees were processed aboard *Guam*. Eventually 222 (including almost all the VIPs) were housed aboard *Guam* and 59 were transferred to *Trenton*. The berthing was determined by the number of berths available for women and small children aboard *Guam* (69). After that number was reached, all remaining evacuees were sent to *Trenton* (they were transferred the next morning rather than risking additional nighttime flight operations). A number of medical problems were encountered, including surgery on a gunshot victim, care of a knife wound, and delivery of a baby via caesarean section on 10 January. The next day, *Guam* and *Trenton* arrived in Muscat, Oman, and offloaded all of the evacuees, thus bringing Eastern Exit to a successful close. (Figure 1 displays important Eastern Exit locations and figure 2 is a map of the Embassy compound.)

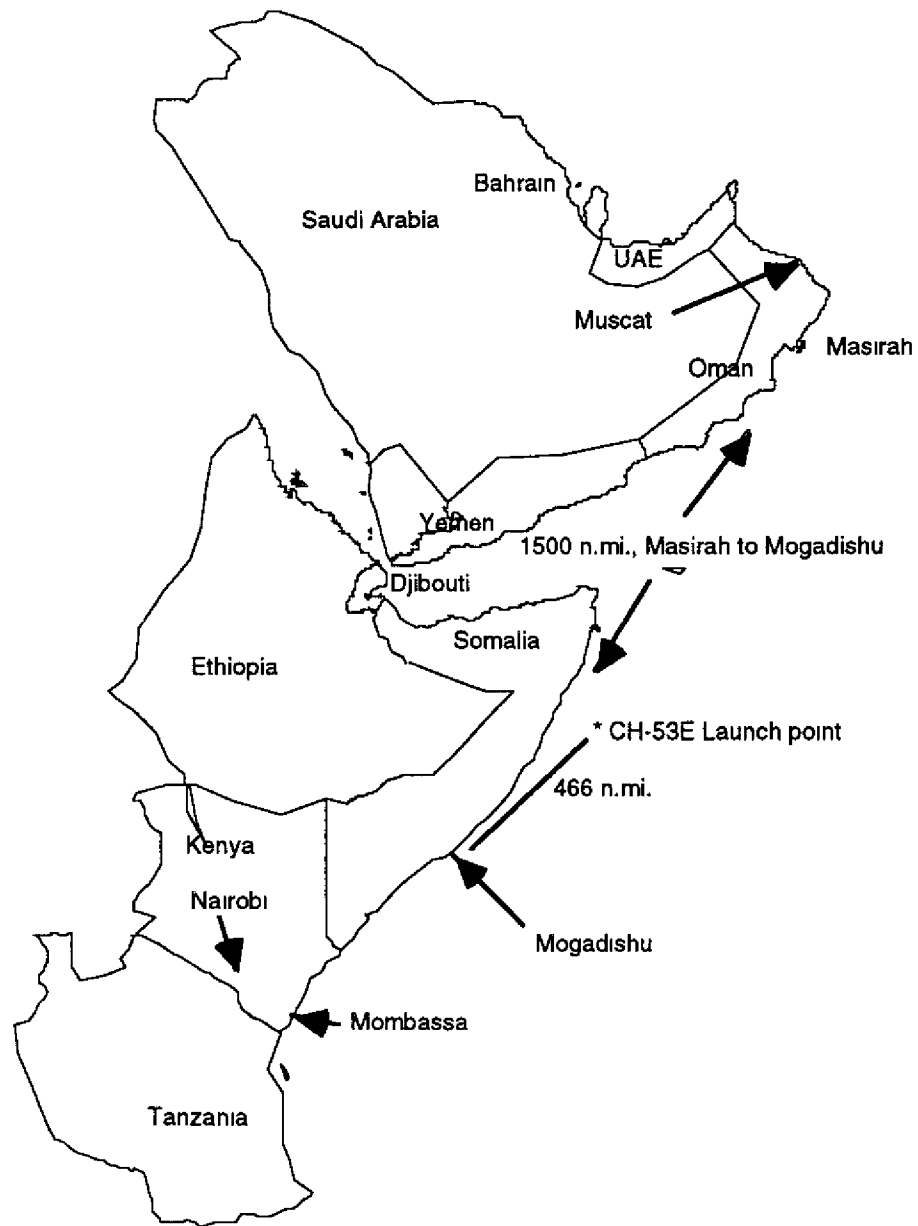


Figure 1. Eastern Exit Map

K7 Complex

AFGOY Road - 4 lane asphalt

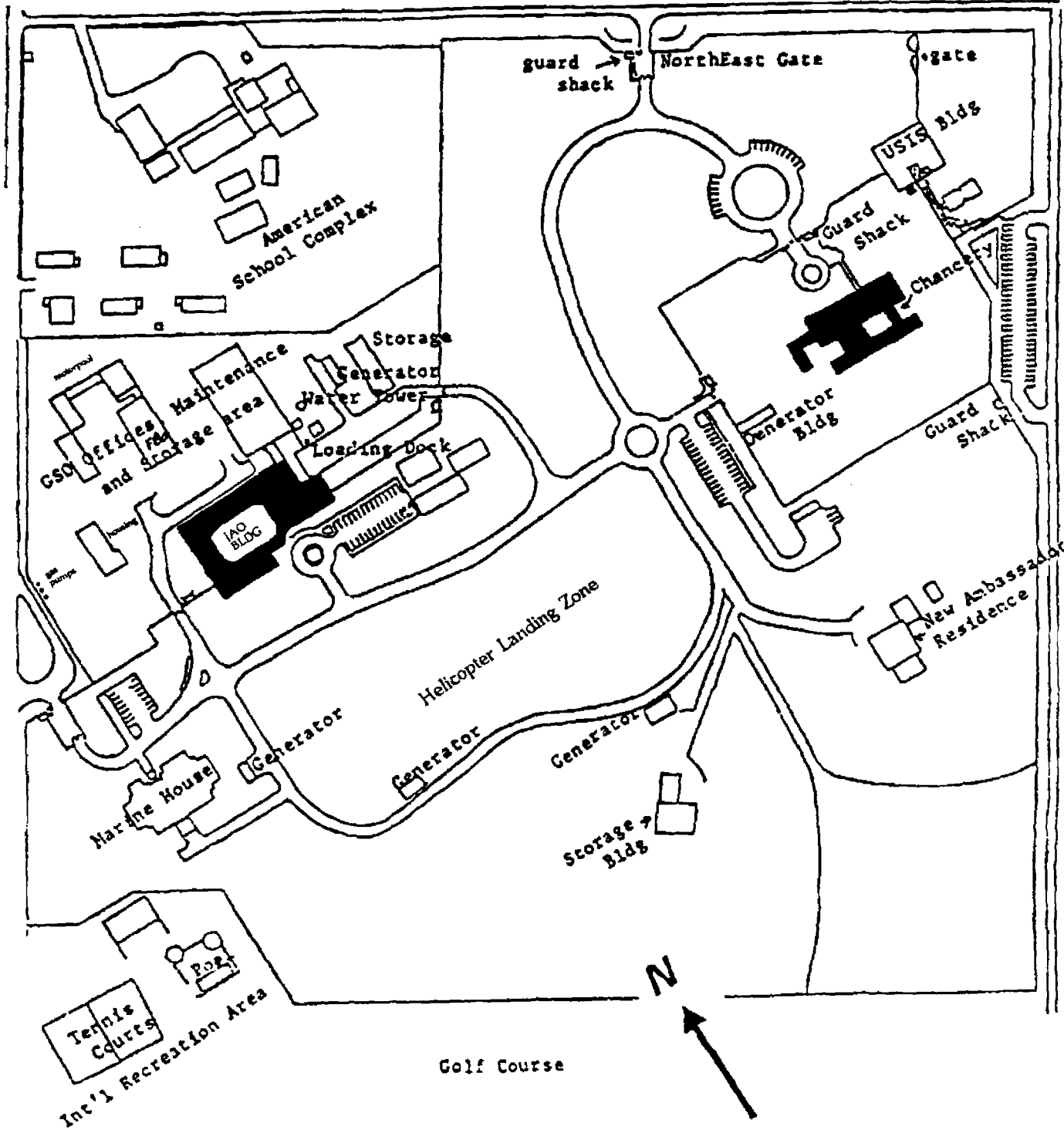


Figure 2. U.S. Embassy Compound in Mogadishu, Somalia

DISINTEGRATION IN SOMALIA¹

DISCUSSION

Like most noncombatant evacuation operations that the military is called on to perform, a long period of disintegration within Somalia preceded Eastern Exit. Since 1989, two major resistance organizations had taken up arms in Somalia against the regime of Siad Barre. Siad Barre, who was nicknamed the "earth scorcher" by rebels, had taken power in 1969 and ruled the country with a stern hand since that time.

Armed resistance had been picking up against the Siad Barre regime in the late 1980s. In late 1990, there were three main rebel organizations active in Somalia: the Somali National Movement (SNM); the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM); and the United Somali Congress (USC) (see table 2). The SPM had taken up arms against the government in 1989 and the USC in July 1990. The increasing rebel activity led the regime to adopt reforms. The rebels dismissed these reforms as meaningless and called for an end to Siad Barre's control of the country.

Table 2. Major Somali Rebel Movements, December 1990

Somali National Movement (SNM)	Active in northern Somalia Oldest movement (formed in London in early 1980s)
Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM)	Operational in southern Somalia Largely from Ogaden Started fighting in mid-1989
United Somali Congress (USC)	Active in central Somalia Primarily from Hawiye tribe Formed in 1989, commenced fighting in mid-1990

In October 1990, the SNM stepped up its attacks on government forces and the USC began an offensive, from its bases in central Somalia, which quickly gained success against the government forces. By late November, signs of disintegration in the government were readily apparent, from the disappearance of government daily newspapers from the newsstands due to a paper shortage to increased banditry inside Mogadishu. By the beginning of December, USC forces were reported to be within 30 miles of Mogadishu. USC armaments included twin-barrel antiaircraft guns mounted on trucks, light and heavy mortars, Browning machineguns, and a wide variety of assault rifles. The government reacted with offers of mediation, and peace negotiations between the government and the rebel movements were scheduled for 11 through 13 December in Cairo. These fell through, however, because none of the three major movements were willing to participate. A SNM radio commentator phrased it this way:

¹ Two main sources were used for this section: various articles in the Federal Broadcast Information Service African (hereafter, FBIS-AFR) reports from November and December 1990, and, Ambassador Bishop's account of the evacuation (James K. Bishop, "Escape from Mogadishu," *Foreign Service Journal*, March 1991, pages 26-31).

This last distress call by Siad Barre can fool no one. The dictatorial regime's tenure has reached its end, and no amount of dishonest diplomacy can save it. Let us hasten to overthrow the dictatorial regime and throw it into the trash.

The growing unrest in Somalia increasingly threatened the foreign community. During the fall, a Marine security guard was injured in a robbery and other Westerners were killed. Soon after arriving in Somalia, Ambassador Bishop's wife was shot at during a robbery at a "supposedly safe beach" outside Mogadishu. The violence was as much, or more, crime-related as part of the civil war. By 4 December, "a de facto curfew" kept "foreigners and diplomats holed up at home once night fell." The four-wheel drive vehicles used by international organizations were favorite gang targets; drivers were apt to be killed for their vehicles.

On 5 December, Ambassador Bishop announced to the American community in Mogadishu that he had recommended the voluntary departure of dependents and non-essential personnel (with his wife and daughter among the early evacuees). By mid-December, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States had called on their citizens to leave the country and the UN was evacuating almost all of its 300 employees. Even as this voluntary evacuation was under way, the U.S. Embassy was further threatened—a driver was wounded (and his vehicle stolen) and there was light arms fire near the Embassy compound (and even into some of the compound housing). By 19 December, the official American community had been reduced from 147 to 37 people and the majority of the private Americans in Somalia were thought to have left as well. Through the end of the month, the situation in the capital continued to deteriorate.

On 30 December, Mogadishu erupted in fighting, with government forces using all weaponry on hand in an attempt to crush the growing USC presence in the capital. Fighting was intertribal as much as it was political. Government forces, primarily from the Marehan tribe, reportedly separated out members of the USC-supporting Hawiye tribe and indiscriminately fired artillery into predominantly Hawiye areas of Mogadishu. On December 31, the defense attache arrived at the U.S. Embassy with several bullet holes in his car, at least one of which had penetrated the vehicle's armor. Later in the day, a vehicle parked outside the Chancery building was hit by stray rounds and that evening the deputy OMC chief was attacked at a roadblock. He drove the vehicle back to the compound on the rims of the tires. On December 30 and 31, all official Americans were moved into the Embassy compound except for two volunteers who remained in the nearby K-7 apartment complex to act as look-outs. Ambassador Bishop expected that the Embassy staff could sit out the fighting behind the compound walls.

Late on the 31st (with arrival in CENTCOM AOR on the morning of 1 January), the first warning to military forces of the threats to the Embassy compound was issued. To his N3, COMUSNAVCENT directed in a note on the top of the message: "Better have Amphib crowd take a look at a helo NEO of Mogadishu! time/distance to get there from Masirah OP area." Thus, NAVCENT consideration of a possible NEO commenced late on New Year's day and initial plans were in place when the CENTCOM orders came in.

Ambassador Bishop's New Year's Day jog in the Embassy compound was repeatedly interrupted and then ended by small arms fire around the Embassy as the fighting in the city escalated. That day, the Ambassador requested permission from the State Department to evacuate the entire American community from Somalia. By January 2, the State Department had approved this request. Ambassador Bishop stated his intention to evacuate with the Italian effort (either C-130s operating from Kenya or a ship being sent from the Persian Gulf—see table 3), if possible, but stated a preference to be evacuated by

U.S. military forces. Many other nations were starting to attempt to evacuate their citizens from Somalia in addition to the United States and Italy. Options explored for evacuating the trapped Americans at various points in the coming days included evacuating with the Italians, Germans, and French. While exploring these options, Ambassador Bishop directly requested U.S. military assistance in evacuating the embassy compound on 2 January, thus setting into motion Operation Eastern Exit. For a variety of reasons, including Ambassador Bishop's perception that the Americans could not safely transit from the Embassy compound to the various other possible evacuation sites, the Americans were not evacuated via these other nations' efforts. Most importantly, by the time any of these other operations were successfully evacuating people from Mogadishu, the 60-man Marine and SEAL evacuation force had arrived at the Embassy compound.

Table 3. Foreign Evacuation Efforts from Somalia in January 1991

China	The Chinese used merchant ships for evacuating their citizens. On 11 January, MV <i>Yongmen</i> arrived in Mombassa with 144 evacuees (143 Chinese and 1 Portuguese).
Egypt	On 4 January 1991, the Egyptian foreign ministry announced plans to evacuate its 672 nationals from Somalia by 6 January. On 13 January, an Egyptian flight evacuated 77 Egyptians and 19 Iraqis. (This author is unaware of any other Egyptian activity.)
France	The French conducted evacuations via two Navy vessels, which brought the evacuees to Djibouti following evacuation. On 5 January, 16 people (including 10 French citizens and the charge d'affaires) moved by small boat out to the frigate <i>La Motte Picquet</i> . On 7 January, 21 Red Cross Workers were brought out to the repair ship <i>Jules Verne</i> via rubber boats through Mogadishu harbor, followed by 47 more evacuees the next day. On 9 January, 12 evacuees were heloed out to <i>La Motte Picquet</i> , which was then 65 miles south of Mogadishu.
Germany	German Air Force aircraft were flown to Nairobi to attempt evacuation via Mogadishu airport. They were unable to make it into the airport and the German Ambassador was evacuated via Eastern Exit. (As an interesting aside, the Germans had stated that they would be willing to evacuate Americans but only after all citizens of EC members countries were taken care of.)
Kenya	The cruise ship <i>Ambassador I</i> was diverted from a scheduled trip to Zanzibar to support evacuation efforts from Mogadishu. It arrived in Mombassa on 17 January with 1,100 people aboard, primarily Pakistani nationals.

Table 3. (Continued)

Italy	The Italians evacuated people from Somalia via military aircraft, merchant vessels, and Navy ships. Aircraft from the 46th Air Brigade flew into Nairobi, Kenya, on 3 January. While the Italians were able to get aircraft successfully to the Mogadishu airport on a number of occasions (evacuating 205 people on 5 January, 250 on the 7th, 139 on the 9th, and 200 on the 12th), they were frequently stymied in attempts to send aircraft into the airport due to fighting on the ground (flights on 4, 6, 8, and 11 January were cancelled). Also on 2 January, an Italian merchant ship, <i>Venetian Universal</i> , moved toward Mogadishu and eventually evacuated 15 people. In addition, the Italian Navy frigate <i>Orsa</i> , due for rotation back to Italy after duty in the maritime interception force (MIF), arrived off Mogadishu on 7 January. She evacuated 25 people on the 8th. On 10 January, a North Korean diplomat was killed and several Italians wounded by rockets fired during fighting around the Italian Embassy.
Soviet Union	On 4 January, a Soviet aircraft attempted to fly into Mogadishu airport from Aden, Yemen, but was unable to land. Eventually, 39 Soviets were evacuated via Operation Eastern Exit.

ISSUES

Before the initiation of Operation Eastern Exit on 2 January 1991, there were a number of critical issues that affected later operations. Most critical was the late notification of a possible NEO requirement. The first direct notification of a possible NEO requirement that arrived on USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19), the NAVCENT command ship, came on 1 January—almost a month after non-essential personnel began to leave Somalia. Although there were intelligence updates of the situation in Somalia before this, they were contained in general message traffic and may not have the prominence they might have had in other circumstances (with the nation not on the eve of war). Many problems encountered during the operation (and which are discussed later in the paper) would have been avoided if the amphibious forces had begun contingency planning in early or mid-December. Whether the disconnect occurred in Washington or in theater, the failure to involve NAVCENT and the amphibious forces prior to 1 January added risk to the execution of the NEO.

THE MILITARY OPTION

DISCUSSION

The Pentagon moved quickly in response to Ambassador Bishop's 2 January request for military assistance; the execute order was issued before the end of the day. The CJCS execute order directed USCINCCENT to: "(A) deploy 2 C-130s and 1 AC-130 plus security team; (B) deploy LPH, LPD and appropriate escort at best speed consistent with preparations for extraction and weather to MODLOC vicinity Mogadishu. Conduct helicopter extraction of AMCITS at AMEMBASSY Mogadishu as soon as possible while optimizing survivability of extraction forces; (C) provide OPORD as soon as possible: advise earliest possible time for commencement of extraction operations." The first and second went into motion almost immediately, while the third never went past the alert stage (as far as this author is aware; see table 4). The Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) execution order noted that "armed helicopter escort and armed security contingent on extraction helicopters (or on C-130's if used) is authorized." It also made USCINCPAC and USCINCSOC supporting commanders.

Table 4. CINCCENT Eastern Exit Force Options

Organization	Task
1. CENTAF	Stage three C-130s and one AC-130 in preparation for evacuation in a permissive environment. (ARCENT deployed one MP security platoon to provide security of the NEO force at Mogadishu airport.)
2. NAVCENT	Deploy designated naval forces at best speed of advance (SOA) to station off Mogadishu to conduct NEO while optimizing survivability of extraction forces. Low intensity resistance should be expected.
3. SOCCENT	Be prepared to deploy six MH-53s and appropriate tanker support tanker to conduct NEO of American Embassy, Mogadishu.

Even before the written execute order, forces were moving toward evacuation. Generally, the preferred NEO means is via aircraft (preferably civilian, then military aircraft); thus, U.S. Air Force C-130s deployed to Nairobi, Kenya, to execute the NEO if permissive conditions would allow use of the Mogadishu airport. A platoon of U.S. Army Reserve military police (MPs) deployed to provide security on the ground at the airport in Mogadishu. An AC-130 was staged to provide gunfire support for an evacuation. While the C-130s remained on alert in Nairobi throughout the operation, Ambassador Bishop stated that he felt that the people in the Embassy compound could not safely transit the 1.5 miles to the airport and that the conditions at the airport were such that air operations would be at risk.

The CINCCENT warning order also directed "COMSOCCENT to be prepared to deploy six MH-53 and appropriate tanker support aircraft to conduct NEO. ... Aircraft will, on order, stage for further deployment to Mogadishu, when directed." As far as can be determined at this point, this option was not pursued further and thus the only U.S. military option remaining, with the airport unusable, was use of the amphibious forces deployed from the North Arabian Sea.

FORMING THE AMPHIBIOUS OPTION

On the afternoon of 2 January, NAVCENT contacted PHIBGRU TWO (PG-2) and gave a one-hour deadline for a proposal for an amphibious force to execute Eastern Exit. PG-2 was embarked on LHA-4 *Nassau*, which was then on the last day of a port call in Dubai, UAE. CPG-2 looked at the closest amphibious ships to Mogadishu, those off the coast of Oman, to be the components of the contingency amphibious task force (ATF). Two LPHs, an LPD and LSD, and three LSTs were in the anchorage at that time.¹ Also present were two MPS ships and five replenishment ships.² BB-63 *Missouri* was nearby with three escorts.

The orders stated that the amphibious forces should plan on the assumption that they would operate in a semi-permissive environment in the event of a NEO from Mogadishu from the sea. In other words, that there was the possibility of low-intensity opposition to their operations. In his response to NAVCENT, CPG-2 suggested a total contingency ATF of seven ships: four amphibious ships (to include an LPD, LPH, LSD, and an LST), two escorts, and an oiler. CPG-2 wanted four amphibious ships to be sent so that the full range of amphibious capabilities would be present for the NEO (see table 5). For command and control (C2), CPG-2 wanted to deploy the Commander of Amphibious Squadron SIX (CPR-6) with the task force. CPR-6 was embarked on LPD-12 *Shreveport*, which was also in Dubai on 2 January; thus, the Commodore and his staff were able to be briefed aboard *Nassau* before departure on the operation. The PHIBRON operations officer was given the material the PHIBGRU staff had concerning Mogadishu (which turned out to be the same, incorrect information already aboard *Guam*) and the Commodore was able to discuss the operation with COMPHIBGRU TWO. CPR-6, his staff, and air control augmentees from Tactical Air Control Squadron TWELVE (TACRON-12—part of the air control unit aboard *Nassau*) would have to be flown to Masirah and from there they would fly aboard the contingency ATF ships.

VAdm. Stanley Arthur, COMUSNAVCENT, decided on a two-ship force. Uppermost in his mind were the ongoing operations off Liberia, which had involved amphibious forces for over six months by then.³ COMUSNAVCENT knew that war with Iraq was inevitable absent a diplomatic solution and did not want to divert more forces from the theater than was absolutely necessary. He feared that any forces sent to Somalia would be lost to him for an extended period of time. Also involved in this consideration was the belief that additional forces could be sent later if necessary. Finally, with Allied naval forces (French and Italian frigates) en route, it was felt that Allied navies would be able to provide protection in the event of a threat to the ships at sea from Somali government or rebel forces—a possibility that was viewed as unlikely, at best, due to their limited

¹ LPH-9 *Guam* (with two CH-46 squadrons embarked) and LPH-2 *Iwo Jima* (with CH-53Es); LPD-14 *Trenton* (with a CH-53E det aboard); LSD-38 *Pensacola*; LST-1194 *La Moure County*, LST-1192 *Spartanburg County*, and LST-1188 *Saginaw*.

² Including three oilers (AOE-1 *Sacramento* and two commercial ships—*AJ Higgins* and *WS Diehl*) though, importantly, one of the three, *AJ Higgins*, had run aground that morning and was unavailable for operations due to damage sustained in the grounding.

³ Operation Sharp Edge commenced on 25 May 1990 with the deployment of the MARG and a destroyer from the Mediterranean. Sharp Edge concluded on 9 January 1991. Of note, Ambassador Bishop's previous assignment had been in Liberia, which he left in March 1990. He continued involvement with Liberia from Washington through July 1990—over a month after the amphibious forces deployed off the coast of Monrovia, Liberia.

capabilities. While discomfited by the delay that moving personnel from Dubai to the ships in the North Arabian Sea would mean, VAdm. Arthur approved the transfer of the PHIBRON SIX staff and the TACRON personnel.

Table 5. PHIBGRU TWO Proposed Amphibious Task Force Capabilities

LPD	<i>Trenton</i> had a CH-53E detachment aboard, thus providing a heavy lift and long-range helicopter option. Embarked troops included SEALs and BSSG-4 personnel (including MPs).
LPH	<i>Guam</i> had two squadrons of CH-46s embarked as well as BLT 1/2, thus providing a mass troop lift capability. Also embarked were a large medical contingent from BSSG-4 and the alternative command group of FOURTH MEB (FOURTH MEB DET ONE).
LSD	<i>Pensacola</i> had three LCACs aboard with LAVs, which would provide an over-the-horizon across-the-beach capability and an amphibious evacuation capability.
LST	All three LSTs available had AAVs embarked. AAVs would provide a capability to move forces and evacuees across a beach in a semipermissive environment.

On the Marine side, Maj. Gen. H.W. Jenkins, Jr., (CG FOURTH MEB) also began preparations for the NEO. He designated the commander of BSSG-4, Col. J.J. Doyle, to be CLF. Col. Doyle was embarked aboard *Trenton*; he transferred to *Guam* later that same day. With only two ships going to Mogadishu, Col. Doyle requested augmentation of his force with weapons-carrying HMMWVs (to provide mobile fire support that could be airlifted by the CH-53Es into Mogadishu, if necessary). FOURTH MEB denied this request.

In the early evening on 2 January, CPR-6, Capt. Al Moser, four members of his staff, and TACRON personnel boarded a P-3 patrol aircraft for transport to an airport near *Guam* and *Trenton*. The two ships got under way about 2330D. Commo. Moser heloed aboard *Guam* at 0030D January 3, and the two-ship task force headed south at 14 knots for Mogadishu. When the CINCCENT warning order arrived early in the morning, CATF (Commo. Moser) ordered the ships to increase speed to 19 knots.

On the morning of 3 January, PHIBGRU TWO questioned why the two ships were steaming at 19 knots and ordered them to steam at 14 knots. CPG-2 was concerned over fuel usage and thus ordered transit at a more economical speed. The ships continued steaming at 14 knots for only a few hours as the PG-2, NAVCENT, and CINCCENT staffs discussed the issue. CENTCOM ordered an increase of speed to 16 knots followed by orders within a few more hours to increase speed to 18 knots.

ISSUES

Perhaps the most important issue in this period of the operation was the delay in getting *Guam* and *Trenton* under way once they were selected as the NEO force and then the order to slow down once under way. In response to the urgency communicated by Ambassador Bishop and the State Department, the CINCCENT orders explicitly stated that the ships were to steam at the "best speed of advance (SOA)." Implicit in this order, it

would seem, would be the requirement to get the ships under way at the earliest possible time as well. The decision of which ships to send was made by mid-afternoon; however, the force's departure was delayed by about eight to ten hours awaiting the augmentees from PHIBRON SIX and TACRON 22.

As the orders explicitly stated "best SOA" (which was approximately 19 knots for *Trenton* and 24 knots for *Guam*, or approximately 19 knots sustainable for the two-ships together), CPG-2's orders for the ships to transit at 14 knots would seem to counter the CINC requirement. The problem, it seems, was that PHIBGRU TWO, while in the chain of command, was not receiving the relevant message traffic and was not an addressee on the CJCS nor the CINCENT orders.

The calculation by which the decision was made to order a 14-knot transit deserves to be examined. Both ships left the NAS with approximately 80 percent of fuel capacity on board. Steaming at high speed would lead to consumption of about 3 percent a day as opposed to a 2 percent per day consumption at 14 knots. A "best SOA" transit would have meant that the ships would have approximately 65 to 70 percent fuel capacity on board on arrival off Mogadishu, with slower steaming leaving at most 70 to 75 percent fuel. At best SOA, the two ships would have had enough fuel for about two weeks of on-station time off Mogadishu. Steaming the NEO force at a slower speed would have led to a delay of over 24 hours in arrival off Mogadishu, with perhaps a two-day extension in loitering time. The urgent consideration for Ambassador Bishop was arrival time, not duration of stay.

Also related to the orders to slow in order to save fuel is the question of why the two ships were not refueled before leaving the NAS. The eight- to ten-hour delay awaiting arrival of CPR-6 should have allowed refueling of *Guam* and *Trenton* from one of the two available oilers (or even from one of the other amphibious ships or the battleship, if necessary). With full fuel tanks, the fuel situation would have been less likely to be of high concern to CPG-2 and the two ships' loiter time off Mogadishu, if that situation occurred, would have been increased by about ten days.

Both issues (which slowed the amphibious response) should be balanced by the influence that the lengthy Liberia operation and other similar experiences had on decision-making. When beginning Eastern Exit, the amphibious planners did not really expect ships to sprint down to Somalia, quickly evacuate the Embassy, and then return within a week to the North Arabian Sea (as actually occurred). First, they thought the Embassy would evacuate via aircraft, as frequently happens. If that didn't occur, they expected a lingering requirement for forces projected indefinitely (days, weeks, months...) into the future. Thus, the sense of urgency was somewhat dulled by previous experience and this experience greatly affected decisions concerning which ships to send and at what speed to have the force steam.

The military's previous experience with State Department NEO requirements therefore led to a less than optimal response to the crisis in Mogadishu. The urgency of the situation as felt on the ground in Mogadishu was not adequately communicated to PHIBGRU TWO, which consequently focused on providing C2 augmentation and on the ships' fuel usage rather than on an expedited arrival of the force off Mogadishu.

In light of the expectation of an extended requirement, the decision to limit the number of ships involved made eminent sense. However, the NAVCENT decision to send only an LPH and LPD (and not the LSD and LST) eliminated potentially important capabilities from the task force: to be able to conduct the evacuation across-the-beach via LCAC or AAV. While the Embassy is located well inland, the planners aboard *Guam* did not know this. The decision to overrule the concerns of the assigned CLF and not

authorize the transfer of HMMWV augmentation to *Guam* is less clear. Whatever the reason for this decision, Col. Doyle clearly felt that he lacked forces, which could have been made available, that were potentially vital to his operational abilities.

Aboard *Guam* was located what was termed "FOURTH MEB DET ONE." Maj. Gen. Jenkins had required that an alternative command group be created, referred to as the Bravo Command Element, so that in the event of damage to *Nassau* there would be continuity of command for the FOURTH MEB. Thus, when Col. Doyle transferred to *Guam*, he found an entire planning staff awaiting him ready to act. This greatly facilitated planning and operations.

PREPARING FOR INSERTION

DISCUSSION

As the ships moved southward, Col. Doyle and Commo. Moser worked to organize their efforts. They quickly decided to create a combined command center in *Guam's* supporting arms coordination center (SACC). While there was no certainty that they would execute the NEO, the combined staffs began planning at once. A contingency MAGTF was formed (see figure 6) and CLF chopped to CATF for the operation.

Table 6. Contingency MAGTF Organization and Forces Available

CE	Command element (CE) comprised of 4TH MEB DET ONE staff, and detachments from: 2D SRIG, 8th Comm BN, 2D Intel CO, and 2D Recon CO. Commander was Col. J.J. Doyle (CO, BSSG-4).
GCE	Consisted of a HQS Company, a rifle company, and 81mm mortar platoon from BLT 1/2. Potential augmentation of seven to nine provisional rifle platoons from the CE, CSSE, and ACE. Commander was Lt. Col. R.P. McAleer (CO, BLT 1/2).
ACE	Consisted of HMM-263 (12 CH-46s), HMM-365 (12 CH-46s, MWSS-274, det HMLA-269 (2 UH-1s armed with 2.75 in rocket pods) and det HMH-461 (2 CH-53Es). The commander was Lt. Col. R.J. Wallace (CO, HMM-263).
CSSE	Consisted of a headquarters (HQ) detachment, MP platoon, a landing support det, and a medical/dental section that would be responsible for ECC. Commander was Maj. W.N. Saunders (XO, BSSG-4).

Almost immediately, CATF, CLF, and their staffs began to work out options. On the morning of January 3, the problems with the information about Mogadishu aboard ship became clear as the PHIBRON staff compared their Mogadishu map with the the force's capabilities. They questioned why they had not be given an across-the-beach option and requested that an LST be added to the force. NAVCENT denied this request. Col. Doyle brought with him from *Trenton* a warrant officer who had served with the MSG det at Mogadishu in the mid-1980s. He proved his value when he looked at the NEO material and questioned its accuracy. He informed the planning staffs that he believed the Embassy had been moved from the location shown because a new compound had been planned and had been under construction several years earlier. That morning, in discussions with CINCCENT, the PHIBRON operations officer (N3) confirmed this error and got the new Embassy compound's grid coordinates. After confirming that the new compound was far inland (not in central Mogadishu), the planners felt their options were greatly reduced. An over-the-beach evacuation was not sensible because the forces might have to fight their way across town. Thus, the only option was the use of helicopters; the question was whether to use CH-53Es or CH-46s. As the CH-46 has a very limited range and cannot be refueled in flight, the CH-53E would be the only option until the ships arrived off the coast of Mogadishu. Under the initial planning, the two ships wouldn't reach the CH-46 launch point until 062200Z, or early in the morning on 7 January local time.

There was initially, therefore, a four-day period in which the CH-53E option was the only means with which to conduct the NEO from the sea. Almost immediately, the HMMH-461 detachment aboard *Trenton* started planning for a 1,500-n.mi. flight for an immediate execution of a NEO from the North Arabian Sea if necessary. This was not considered a particularly viable option because five refuelings would be needed and there would have been two occasions in which the helicopters would have had to refuel successfully or make a forced landing. Despite this, the CH-53Es were reported ready on three-hours notice for insertion of forces (as long as refueling could be coordinated). For the CH-53Es, the next option considered was an 890-n.mi. flight, with one "must-have" refueling. This plan was put on hold when the situation in the Embassy compound appeared to stabilize while the ships steamed southward.

As the planners began working on preparing a security force to insert into the Embassy compound, the uppermost question was the threat they might face. The intelligence was unclear concerning both the threat and the situation in Mogadishu.

Late on 3 January, the NEO force began direct contact with the Embassy, sending an elements of essential information (EEI) list of questions. The preparation of this EEI list was greatly simplified as it was essentially taken directly from standard operating procedure (SOP) manuals for NEOs prepared by previous MEUs and in the MEU(SOC) program. Contacts with the Embassy were limited by several problems. First, the Embassy reportedly had few uplinks working and was required to maintain voice contact with the State Department in Washington until the morning of 4 January. Second, there was no common crypto material for the Embassy and the ships, so that when direct voice communication became possible, it was in the clear. The fact that all voice communications were transmitted in the clear greatly limited the amount and type of information that could be passed over the radio between the Embassy and the forces aboard *Guam*; secure communication occurred via State Department cable and Navy message traffic. Some means were used to get around this restriction when possible. For example, the Embassy requested that the top ten questions be listed from the 42-item EEI list so that they could be answered immediately. The numbers were provided over the radio and these questions were answered by message traffic almost within the hour. By late afternoon on 4 January, the full set of questions had been answered.

After receiving authority to exceed the CH-53E peacetime passenger restriction of 18, an 80-man force was outlined to be inserted on the first wave of CH-53Es (40 on each CH-53E). The basic requirements for an evacuation force call for three different organizations on the ground: the forward command element (FCE), which will include the ground commander who will liaison with the Ambassador and a communications team; a ground combat element (GCE), which is to provide security during the evacuation; and an evacuation control center (ECC), which is responsible for processing evacuees.

The 80-man force included both Marines and SEALs. That this was a mixed force was one of the few areas of disagreement between CATF and CLF ("we agreed to disagree"). CLF questioned the requirement for including the SEAL team, because the Marines and SEALs that would make up the force had not worked together before and did not know each other. CATF felt that the close quarter warfare (CQW) training of the SEALs would be useful on the ground and that the two groups (SEALs and Marines) would thus compliment each other's capabilities. As CATF commands in an amphibious operation, both SEALs and Marines were included in the evacuation force. CG FOURTH MEB then required the force to be reduced to no more than 30 passengers on each helicopter. Reductions included a ten-person cut in the GCE, removing two of three members of the ECC, and eliminating the two-member combat camera team from the operation. (See table 7 for the composition of the inserted security/liason group.) As the

planners expected follow-on forces, the reduction in the size of the ECC was not viewed as a serious matter because much of the processing could be held until after a second wave was sent in. The reduction in the size of the GCE was made reluctantly, however, because there was a feeling that the force was at a minimum size to execute the mission. Included in the organization were two Lieutenant Colonels, a Commander, two Majors, two Marine Captains, and two Marine Lieutenants for a force of 60-people. CLF and CAF included this large contingent of officers because they wanted senior officers on the ground in Mogadishu.

Table 7. Composition of Inserted Security/Liaison Group

4TH MEB	
Forward Command Element	3 Marines, Lt. Col. Oates
SEAL Team	9 SEALs (part of FCE) Cdr. Louma
Evacuation Coordination Center (ECC)	2 Marines Maj. Saunders and 1 counter-intelligence Warrant Officer
Security Force	C Company, BLT 1/2 46 Marines and sailors (corpsmen) Lt. Col. McAleer

By the morning of 4 January, Ambassador Bishop decided that it was not safe to transit Mogadishu from the Embassy compound to the airport; in addition, the conditions at the airport were uncertain. While there remained some hope for an Italian-mediated ceasefire that would allow foreigners to evacuate, it became less likely as the days progressed. On 4 January Italian and Soviet attempts to evacuate via the Mogadishu airport failed (see table 2). Late in the evening on 3 January, Embassy buildings were hit by 10 to 15 rounds of machinegun fire. The next morning, rebels threatened the two Americans in the K-7 compound and the two were withdrawn to the Embassy compound. A warehouse next to the JAO building was struck by an RPG and a shoot-out occurred between looters and Embassy guards. Around midday on 4 January, Ambassador Bishop communicated a rather desperate requirement for immediate assistance. He noted that the Embassy was

falling behind the curve in our ability to protect ourselves from the lawlessness which now prevails in Mogadishu. Recommend immediate airlift from Saudi Arabia of a parachute force sufficient to provide augmented security to the Chancery and JAO building where everyone ... currently is safehavened. Two platoons should be sufficient.

At that time, with the airport inaccessible to both aircraft and evacuees, the preferred option for the evacuation had become the CH-53Es off the amphibious ships. The potential launch point had varied as the ships steamed south, and dawn on 5 January was seen as the earliest potential arrival time in Mogadishu. (This was driven by several factors that the CH-53E pilots felt would improve the chance of mission success: a mission under 500 n.mi. was preferable due to lowered in-flight refueling requirements; and, a dawn/daylight arrival in Mogadishu would facilitate insertion of the security force/liaison group.) When informed of this, Ambassador Bishop responded with some distress that he

hoped this is not the definitive response for a 27 hour delay [sic] may have tragic consequences. Hard to believe that among the 240,000 American military deployed to the Gulf there are not two platoons who could be put in position to provide assistance in timeframe shorter than 27 hours.

Clearly, the Ambassador felt the situation on the ground in Mogadishu was getting desperate for the Americans in the Embassy compound.

By late afternoon on 4 January, therefore, a long-range CH-53E insertion of a security force looked probable as the question became "when" rather than "if." One of the more difficult problems then faced was coordinating flight times between the USMC KC-130s and the CH-53Es they would refuel in-flight on the way to Mogadishu. Three KC-130s from VMGR-252 and VMGR-352 departed Bahrain shortly before 1300Z for an airfield closer to Mogadishu (with an ETA of 1430Z), where they would assume a two-hour alert posture. At that point, planning called for the first refueling to occur at 050530Z.¹

By mid-afternoon, *Guam* and *Trenton* were both steaming at full speed, with *Guam* pulling ahead about 4 n.mi. an hour. The CH-53Es flew ahead to *Guam* in the early evening, carrying the SEALs and Maj. Saunders, the ECC officer, and awaited the order to head to Mogadishu. Several times during the evening there were false starts as the forces aboard ship thought they had a go. CINCCENT issued the final execute order late in the evening with a launch time of 0345D. With this launch time, the CH-53Es would arrive at 0620C, shortly after dawn, in Mogadishu.

In the evening, weapons and ammunition were issued to the 60 men going in. The forces were heavily armed, with almost every man carrying some form of automatic weapon and antitank weapon (which included Dragons, light anti-armor weapons (LAAWs), and AT-4s). Some of the weaponry was carried in its wrapping out of concern for the ability to return the ammunition to the landing forces operational reserve material (LFORM) stocks in the magazines aboard ship following the operation. Certain classes of ammunition (for example, hand grenades) cannot be returned to magazines according to regulation following removal of the protective wrapping. Because the forces involved were looking ahead at a possible amphibious assault against Iraqi forces in Kuwait, they did not want to lose ammunition that otherwise would be available. In BLT 1/2, there was a perception that they were very low on certain types of ammunition (again, for example, grenades) and that if this ammunition could be retained, it would be.

Follow-on forces were readied and were planned to be inserted into the Embassy during the afternoon of 5 January on a second CH-53E flight. These forces were organized into numbered 15-man sticks that could be called in by the FCE commander by number so that the forces in Mogadishu could tailor the augmentation to his requirements. For example, the 81-man ECC included a CE, medical personnel, MPs (for screening evacuees), an administration and processing section, and a transportation section (for coordinating helicopters), which could be called in mixed groups to properly augment the forces already in the Embassy compound.

¹ For the KC-130s, planning occurred back in Bahrain as the three planes headed to Oman. The KC-130s planners were told first that CH-53Es would be refueled, then that it would be F-14s, then AV-8Bs, and, finally, CH-53Es. If it had been a fixed-wing refueling operation there would have been problems because the three KC-130s that deployed to Oman from Bahrain were all equipped with helicopter refueling drogues, which cannot be used to refuel jets.

Early in the morning of 5 January, the 60-man evacuation force made its way from *Guam*'s hangar deck to the CH-53Es for the flight into Mogadishu.

ISSUES

Issues in this period of the evacuation include the inaccuracy of the information aboard ship about Mogadishu, complications in command and control, communication with the U.S. Embassy and national intelligence organizations, use of human intelligence (HUMINT) available aboard ship, the benefits provided by developed NEO SOPs, and the combined command and control center in SACC aboard *Guam*.

Command and Control

The command and control set-up for Operation Eastern Exit generated some confusion. While the on-scene commanders believed that they had been chopped to NAVCENT, in actuality the command chain ran through COMPHIBGRU TWO. (See figure 2.) NAVCENT's tendency to bypass the PHIBGRU and directly contact the rescue force contributed to this impression. That CPG-2 was not on distribution for much of the message traffic related to Eastern Exit meant that he and his staff were working without crucial information at times, such as when the two ships were ordered to slow to 14 knots. Additionally, if CLF chopped to CATF (CPR-6), as he thought he had, the CLF in the North Arabian Sea (NAS) was no longer in the command and control chain. Therefore, in the circumstances, there may have been no authority for the CLF in the NAS to order that the CH-53Es could carry no more than 30 passengers.

Combined C2 in SACC

All involved elements in the operation have agreed that combining the two staffs, PHIBRON SIX and FOURTH MEB DET ONE, in one working space facilitated the operation by easing coordination and communication. This was done mostly from necessity. COMPHIBRON SIX only brought five members of his staff with him from *Shreveport*; serendipitously, this led to a more efficiently run operation.

HUMINT

One of the first things done by a Marine Corps unit involved in a NEO is to poll the force to see if there are any Marines with unique experience that will aid the mission. The fact is that in any Marine unit one will typically find Marines with experience as MSGs around much of the world. Having a former Mogadishu MSG on hand proved invaluable to Col. Doyle from the very beginning.

SOPs

The existence of SOPs greatly eased planning and execution of the NEO from Mogadishu. From expediting the transmittal of the EEI list to the Embassy to outlining forces and organization of an evacuation force to outlining the authority and obligations of major players, the SOPs answered most of the questions and solved issues for the Eastern Exit forces before problems occurred. The existence of the SOPs allowed the planners to focus on problems specific to this operation, such as the coordination of the in-flight refuelings of the CH-53Es, rather than on the basic concepts and organization of a NEO.

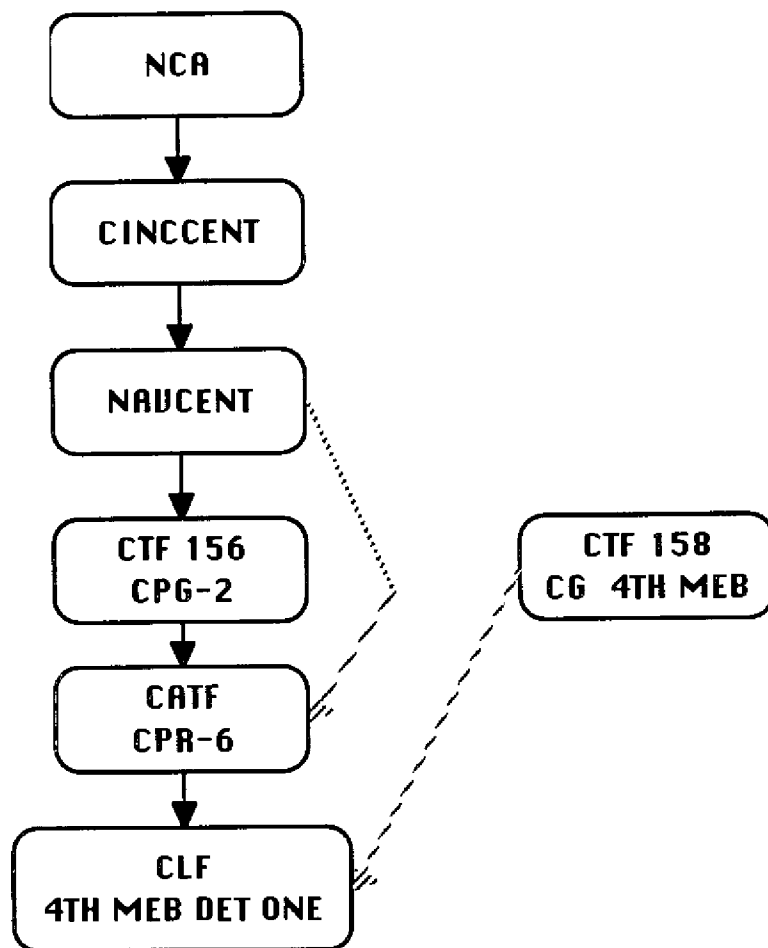


Figure 3. Operation Eastern Exit Command Relationships