

6. CONCLUSIONS

The UN operations in Somalia began propitiously with UNOSOM I, which initiated political negotiations, involving local authorities²⁰, and created good relations with humanitarian agencies. UNITAF was essentially a high-powered military operation after which the UN had difficulty in recovering its original humanitarian objectives. The final phase, UNOSOM II, became progressively enmeshed in aggressive, war-like action, and ended up devoting all its energies to fighting a Somali warlord. Assisting humanitarian actions became marginal to the cause.

The UN operations in Somalia were characterised on the one hand by extraordinary generosity and goodwill, and on the other by an alarming lack of reflection and planning. Even the well-known precautions/principles for humanitarian action in conflicts, reinforced by repeated advice from field agencies, seem to have been ignored. For example, the following actions were noted as critical but were never given priority:

- (i) stepped-up campaigns of vaccination could have reduced mortality levels and protected children from future epidemics;
- (ii) reduction of high-value food supplies would have reduced the incentive for looting;
- (iii) setting up retraining programmes for demobilised soldiers and the introduction of public employment programmes would have helped to reconstruct the human resource base, facilitate disarmament and control violence;
- (iv) emergency reconstruction of sanitary systems would have pre-empted the cholera outbreaks that predictably occurred in spring 1994.

²⁰ Questions were raised about the legitimacy of involving "warlords" as local authorities in the negotiations.

All of these measures were feasible and could possibly have been undertaken at a fraction of the cost that finally incurred.

The rest of the section highlights some of the main issues revealed in the body of the paper.

6.1 Success of the military intervention

Humanitarian agencies requested, for the first time, armed support in Somalia. They possibly got more than they bargained for, but the military presence did go a long way to securing ports and providing protection to food convoys. To a certain extent, **general security** also improved and heavy artillery was impounded. The formidable logistics capability of the military played a key role in the functioning of humanitarian operations, and ground transport operations benefited from their presence.

6.2 The peacekeeper on the ground - a no-win situation

UN forces in Somalia were faced with a situation for which they had received neither the appropriate training nor the necessary operational mission objectives. More importantly, internal disagreements and **confused mandates** compromised their ability to function optimally. This was mainly due to the fact that the Security Council resolutions (e.g. "use all means necessary" or "create secure environment") were achievable only through a frank strategy of war in the absence of clearer field guidelines oriented towards humanitarian action. Thus the military field commanders and troops were placed in an operational dilemma that was not of their making.

6.3 Choice of military strategy - a wrong reading of the problem:

The world was proved embarrassingly wrong in its view that Somalia was a **simple military problem** involving disorganised groups equipped with low-technology arms. The US government misjudged the situation sufficiently to

declare in November 1992 that the US forces would be back within four months. They eventually left the country on March 31, 1994.

The UN perception of the military intervention in Somalia, as a feasible and time limited operation, was an indication of the lack of understanding of the local situation. While judicious use of military strength is easier to speak of than to achieve, the main problem with the UN effort was its erratic policy on both the military and the political fronts in Somalia. The experience in Somalia demonstrated that technical superiority does not ensure military success, and that it guarantees humanitarian accomplishment to an even lesser degree.

Finally, the loss of neutrality of the UN forces was a serious setback and impediment to the success of the peacekeeping operations and was largely responsible for the escalation of violence.

6.4 Accountability - who is responsible?

Institutional accountability for military incidents involving the Somalis effectively did not exist²¹. The number of incidents of human rights abuses at all levels (from intimidation to shooting into civilian crowds) was unprecedented (African Rights, 1993_b, SCF-UK, 1993_a). In general, Somali casualties were rarely accounted for systematically, although qualitative mentions were made acknowledging the many deaths of women and children reported by ICRC (SCF-UK, 1993_a). Allegations of incidents of shooting were frequently countered by the claim that the victim was a "bandit". No channels of verification existed. This one-sided situation aggravated the sense of outrage and injustice among the local people and the humanitarian agencies working with them (African Rights, 1993_a).

²¹ National contingents such as the US, Canada and Belgium did create, after protests from Africa Rights, bureaux to receive complaints. In practice, their existence was virtually unknown to the public and was largely restricted to complaints concerning traffic accidents and the like, and therefore did not serve any real purpose.

6.5 Reality of Somali culture

The cultural insensitivity of the UN towards Somali-style problem-solving was evident in many ways. The reconciliation meetings, held at short notice, fixed schedules and agendas and countered the fundamental Somali approach to discussion and problem resolution. The comparative success of Somaliland, where the Council of Elders organised an open-ended reconciliation meeting for four months, resulted in democratic elections and the appointment of a new government. The UN intervention, for the most part, neglected local practices and traditions as guidelines for sustainable conflict resolution. This oversight was a significant cause of the deficiency of the intervention (The Horn of Africa Bulletin, 1993).

6.6 An institutional desert?

The importance of identifying and bolstering local technical and community institutions cannot be over-emphasised. Some of the failures of the Somalia intervention were at least partly due to distancing these organisations and neglecting their needs. This short-sightedness also implies that the nation-building process would become that much more difficult, lacking local structures on which to establish programmes. Although it is by no means an easy task to select local institutions for support, it is an issue that could have been addressed with more success, given imagination and flexibility.

6.7 At what opportunity cost?

Humanitarian operations in Somalia did not come cheap. Seven months of UN-led peace-keeping operations in 1993 were estimated to cost \$US1.5 billion. One estimate says that 0.7% of this sum was spent on humanitarian aid (Drysdale, 1994), while the Economist (April 15, 1994) estimates 10% for the entire period. The former Under Secretary-General for humanitarian affairs also estimated that a tenth of the total assistance to Somalia was spent on

humanitarian action. The Secretary-General reported in November 1993 (United Nations, 1993a) the gross commitment of \$US84.5 million a month for the UNOSOM operation over the November 1993 - February 1994 period. Additional aid arrived direct from bilateral donors, such as the European Union, which spent some \$US14 million (Marin, 1993). With GNP per capita in Somalia reaching only \$US170, the amount spent there could have rebuilt the entire country from scratch and the humanitarian action could have quadrupled or more in volume. It is possible that a judicious mix of humanitarian action and nation-building initiatives early on in UNOSOM II could have resolved the situation at lower cost. At these levels of expenditure, the financial implication of military involvement demands a cautious approach and justifies a better examination of the opportunity costs.

6.8 Interface between UNOSOM and Humanitarian agencies

Relations between NGOs and UNOSOM I were gratifyingly good, largely due to the open-minded and flexible policies of the Special Representative's office. Relations between the NGOs and UNOSOM II, however, were less encouraging. The military nature of the operation was evident from an early stage and the NGOs felt that this was neither the purpose of the intervention nor the right strategy to resolve the humanitarian crises. In addition, the NGOs, traditionally against large institutions, saw themselves more than ever in Somalia as the upholders of public morality and closer to the Somali reality, as it were, than UNOSOM II. On the other hand, the UN, also traditionally uncomfortable with non-governmental structures, continued to keep them at a distance, both in their operations and in policy decisions²². The NGOs provide a

²² A senior officer of the US Marines, speaking in a private interview, described the interface of NGO humanitarian agencies and the military as mixing oil and water. More picturesquely, he described the military as having no peripheral vision and the NGOs as having too much. As a result, the military were unable to adapt to situations or conditions marginal to stated mission objectives but critical to the overall success of the humanitarian operation, while NGOs quickly lost track of their objectives being diverted easily by other "peripheral" considerations.

service that can never be replaced by the UN and vice versa. Co-operation between these two structures are the least that an emergency humanitarian operation owes to the victims, in whose name they are there in the first place.

6.9 Did the military intervention respond to the humanitarian need?

While the decision for military deployment was clearly indisputable, the type of military services provided by UNITAF and UNOSOM did not appear to serve significantly the humanitarian action. First, the food shipments, unloaded in Mogadishu port began increasing from July, reaching a peak in December 1992, when the UNITAF forces arrived. The field agencies had to maintain their private militia throughout the period. In addition, several hundred Somalis, not to mention 18 UNITAF troops and at least 57 UNOSOM II peacekeepers, were killed as a direct result of clashes between UN forces and Somalis, and, finally, the image of the neutral UN was badly tarnished. The widely acknowledged claims of improvement in mortality and nutritional status in 1993 can be seriously questioned. There is no convincing evidence with which to conclude that this improvement was due to better conditions, or whether, in fact, the most susceptible people had already died. Given the extremely high death rates of 1992, the latter may be the more likely explanation of the amelioration of nutritional rates in 1993.

7 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In 1988, on average, 214 Somali children died each day²³. Since then the civil war can only have aggravated the situation. The international community did not see fit to support the democratic development of the country at that time

²³ This figure has been calculated from statistics provided in the report entitled "Statistics on Children in UNICEF-Assisted Countries", UNICEF Monograph, 1990, and includes all children under five years of age.

but was willing in 1993 to spend more than \$US1.5 billion on the humanitarian-military operation.

Somalia exemplifies all the possible points of contention related to humanitarian response to famine, civil disorder and the demise of national structures. It should be a lesson to the world. Although one can hope that it will not occur again, recent events in Liberia and Rwanda make it clear that such situations are likely to re-occur and that therefore coherent policies should be developed - based on these experiences.

- i) The Somalia experience showed the **need for preventive diplomacy and political negotiations** to take the front seat in resolution of civil conflicts rather than the use of force. For these measures to be effective, however, they must be initiated sufficiently early in the process to avoid a situation arising in which military action becomes the only resort.
- ii) While there is no doubt that the UN forces require teeth and the ability to follow up the intention to enforce peace, the events in Somalia have shown us that **military superiority does not guarantee humanitarian success**, and does not even assure military victory. The policy of military intervention is not in doubt, but the implementation urgently requires review and correction.
- iii) Future international military interventions should be clearly identified either as an UN intervention, and therefore **under UN authority with unambiguous command structures**, or alternatively as an allied force intervention under a jointly agreed command. Confusion between these two forms of intervention and lines of command, as in Somalia, should be avoided.
- iv) Humanitarian and military operations should be adapted to the local socio-cultural environment for sustainable and effective

results. This requires decentralising the decision-making process and bringing it closer to the frontline.

v) UN Security Council resolutions with regard to military interventions should be realistically formulated to allow translation into achievable military mission objectives.

vi) Specific efforts should be made to organise internationally standard training for military contingents drawn from national forces for humanitarian operations.

vii) The supply of weapons from one door and the supply of humanitarian aid from another, is a policy that saws through the branch on which we sit. **High-sounding and moral resolutions for disarmament** will remain meaningless until serious efforts are made to control the production and sale of arms.

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