

SOMALIA

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH?

LEAVING CIVILIANS AT THE MERCY OF TERROR AND STARVATION

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Introduction

A year after the fall of the government of President Mohamed Siad Barre in January 1991, there has been no respite from massive violations of human rights in Somalia. The capital city, Mogadishu, has been the scene of some of the most widespread and flagrant violations, since a new and particularly bloody round of fighting broke out again in November 1991. This shows little sign of abating at the time of writing. Unknown thousands of civilians have been killed and injured, as both sides indiscriminately attack civilians and civilian targets. Following the destruction of the public health infrastructure of the city, acute shortages of food and the displacement of perhaps one third of the population to refugee camps around the city, epidemic disease and undernutrition are feared that could exact a death toll which will dwarf the number killed in the fighting itself.

During the first week of February, 1992, Africa Watch visited Mogadishu, and expressed its total unequivocal condemnation of the indiscriminate violence against civilians perpetrated by forces loyal to each of Interim President Ali Mahdi and General Mohamed Farah Aidid. Africa Watch expressed this condemnation to both leaders, and has reiterated its views in letters delivered to delegations from both sides in New York.

Africa Watch is deeply concerned at the tardy and inadequate response of the international community, particularly the United Nations, to the tragedy that has befallen the Somali people. Both humanitarian and diplomatic initiatives have been belated and incommensurate with the seriousness of the situation. The much-publicized visit of UN Assistant Secretary General Mr James Jonah, far from achieving progress towards a ceasefire, only made conditions in Mogadishu appreciably worse. Unless the United Nations posts a resident representative to Mogadishu who is able to gather detailed information about the situation on the ground, on the basis of which the UN can engage in prolonged and discreet negotiations with both leaders, clan elders, and neutral Somalis -- all of whom must play an essential role in negotiating and enforcing any ceasefire or political agreement -- current UN initiatives are also likely to founder. The Organization of African Unity has notably failed to make any serious attempt to resolve the crisis.

The war in Mogadishu is complex, including both a power struggle between two ambitious and ruthless men who display a callous disregard for the value of human life, and a struggle for basic resources, including food, by groups of impoverished but heavily-armed men and boys. But the situation is far from hopeless. The solution to the conflicts lies in simultaneous humanitarian and diplomatic initiatives.

In this newsletter, Africa Watch deals not only with human rights issues, but with the shortcomings of the peacemaking process in Mogadishu. This is because this process

should promise the only prospect of providing protection to civilians.

The Politics of the Conflict

The Fall of Siad Barre

In late 1990, as the demise of the 21-year regime of Siad Barre finally appeared imminent, several rebel groups controlled different regions of Somalia. In the north, the Somali National Movement (SNM), drawn from the Isaaq clan, was dominant; this had been fighting since 1981. The Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), consisting mainly of the Majerteen sub-clan, was active in the northeast; this was the oldest opposition force, dating from 1978, though it had been relatively inactive during the 1980s. In the south, there was the Darod clan Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), and in the center, the Hawiye-based United Somali Congress (USC). The USC, having been founded in January 1989, was a relative newcomer to armed struggle, but came to occupy a preeminent position in 1990 because the capital city, Mogadishu, lies in a Hawiye area.

In May 1990, as the government visibly crumbled, a group of businessmen and intellectuals in Mogadishu published a Manifesto against Siad Barre. Many of the "Manifesto group" were detained, but later released after popular protest against their detention.¹ In December 1990 and January 1991, as the USC and SPM forces closed on Mogadishu, Siad Barre began to instigate fighting inside Mogadishu. The fiercest clashes began on the morning of December 30, with fighting between members of the Darod clan (many of them armed by Barre) and the Hawiye clan (supporters of the USC). At the same time he opened negotiations with the Manifesto group, and appointed some senior members of the group (notably Omer Arteh Ghalib)² to a new government. Other members of the Manifesto group organized armed resistance to Siad Barre in the city, in the form of a new Mogadishu wing of the USC.

On January 19, USC forces under the command of General Mohamed Farah Aidid entered the city. On January 26, Siad Barre fled in a tank to his home area of Gedo. A mere three days later, without consulting the leaders of the other armed opposition groups, and preempting those leaders' repeated calls for a national conference to establish a democratic framework, prominent members of the Manifesto group formed a government, with Ali Mahdi as Interim President. This was scornfully described as "a

¹ See *News from Africa Watch*, "Somalia: Evading Reality," September 12, 1990.

² Omer Arteh, who is from the north, held several ministerial positions under Siad Barre before being held in detention from 1982 to 1989.

government to clean the streets of Mogadishu and bury the dead" and "a counter-coup that has happened over our heads" by members of the Aidid wing of the USC.³ The decision was defended by leaders of USC-Mogadishu on the grounds that they had been fighting in the city for three weeks to depose Siad Barre before General Aidid arrived "very late in the day"⁴ to claim the fruits of a victory that was rightfully theirs.

Interim President Ali Mahdi was formerly a wealthy Mogadishu hotelier, a member of the Manifesto group, and a financier of the USC. He never left Mogadishu. General Aidid is a professional soldier, trained in the USSR, and long-time opponent of Siad Barre (he spent six years in detention in the 1970s before returning to favor and taking several government positions). General Aidid led the USC armed struggle from Ethiopia during 1989, and was elected Chairman of the organization in June 1990 at its second congress, held in Hiraan region.

The USC had a core of about 500 trained soldiers, but most of its fighters were (and are) clansmen without military training who joined for reasons of clan loyalty or economic advantage -- membership of the USC brought considerable opportunities for looting. Rather than a centralized political-military organization, the USC was (and is) therefore a semi-organized militarized clan, without a single locus of command. When Siad Barre fled, his huge arsenal in and around Mogadishu fell largely into the hands of whatever subdivision of the USC happened to be in control of the area at the time. These subdivisions corresponded closely to the subclans of the Hawiye.

Disputes within the USC

In the months following the flight of Siad Barre, there was a succession of attempts to reconcile the different armed organizations, legitimize the government, and unite the USC. All failed. No national conference was called, and in anger at the failure of the Interim Government to pay heed to their wishes, in May the SNM unilaterally declared independence for northern Somalia ("The Republic of Somaliland"). Taking advantage of the USC's disunity, Siad Barre was able to advance to within 20 miles of Mogadishu in April in an attempt to return to power. This caused a brief reunification of the factions in the face of this threat, and Siad Barre's forces were driven back.

At a USC Congress in June-July, the various factions of the USC met together for the first time. General Aidid was overwhelmingly voted in as chairman of a united USC. This was described by a senior Aidid aide as "the only fair election in the history of this

³ Africa Watch interviews with Ahmad Abdille Qawane and Abdel Karim Ahmad Ali, February 5, 1992.

⁴ Africa Watch interview with Aweys Haji Yusuf, Minister in the Presidential Office, February 2, 1992.

country,"⁵ and is one of the main sources of Aidid's claim to legitimacy.

General Aidid continued to regard the Interim Government as illegal, as having snatched the victory of the armed fronts from them at the last moment. He described it as "nothing but a continuation of the Siad Barre regime," and expressed particular objections to the inclusion of Omer Arteh.⁶

In an attempt to resolve this problem, two conferences were held in Djibouti in July. All the armed movements were invited to send delegations, though the SNM refused, the SPM later repudiated their representation, and the USC-Aidid considered the meeting to be arranged too hurriedly, and to be subject to manipulation by foreign powers, chiefly the Italians.⁷ General Aidid himself did not attend. The second Djibouti conference agreed on a transitional period of two years pending free elections, a return to the 1960 (independence) constitution, and a division of the senior government posts between the different armed groups. The Presidency was given to the USC. Ali Mahdi claimed that this confirmed him as Interim President (in his capacity as a member of the USC); General Aidid claimed that the USC should be allowed to nominate its candidate for President -- with the clear implication that this candidate would be the General himself. This dispute was resolved by a nine-point agreement made between the USC-Aidid and Ali Mahdi, on August 5-6, which confirmed Ali Mahdi as President, on condition that various practical steps were taken to contain the security situation (especially continued fighting against Siad Barre), work towards an establishment of basic civil infrastructure, and that he adhered to USC policy for reconstituting a national army.

Ali Mahdi insists that his government is legitimate, largely basing this claim on the Djibouti accords, which he says represent the views of "ninety per cent" of Somalis. He regards General Aidid as a rebel: "There cannot be any forceful taking over of the nation's democratic rule."⁸

Clan Elements in the Conflict

⁵ Ahmad Abdille Qawane, interview with Africa Watch, February 5, 1992.

⁶ Interview with Africa Watch, February 7, 1992.

⁷ Italy, the former colonial power in southern Somalia, was a close ally of Siad Barre and made strenuous efforts in various diplomatic fora to defend the regime as late as 1989, when evidence of its appalling human rights record had encouraged other donors to distance themselves. When Barre's fall looked imminent, the Italian government supported the formation of the Manifesto group, which included many former southern politicians with close links to Italy.

⁸ Interview with Africa Watch, February 3, 1992.

During 1991, the conflict between General Aidid and Ali Mahdi became in part a fight between two sub-clans. This was surprising, as there are no appreciable religious, cultural or other differences between the two sub-clans. There is no history of inter-clan fighting within the Hawiye, and there is no traditional enmity between Aidid's Habr Gidir sub-clan and Ali Mahdi's Abgal sub-clan. Most Habr Gidir come from Mudug, to the west of the city, while the Abgal are the majority population of Mogadishu itself. The rivalry between the sub-clans is an outcome of the way in which first Siad Barre and then the two USC leaders have sought to manipulate clan loyalty in order to secure a political power base. This legacy of newly-manufactured ethnic tension is one of the most damaging elements of politics in contemporary Somalia, once regarded as the most homogenous nation in Africa.

On September 5-8, there was serious fighting in Mogadishu following an attempt by the newly-appointed Mayor, Omer Hashim, to disarm many of the fighters in the city. General Aidid and Ali Mahdi blame the fighting on each other. Aidid was undoubtedly failing to cooperate with the disarmament effort, though the incident that sparked full-scale confrontation was an attack on Aidid's headquarters -- possibly preemptive -- by Ali Mahdi's forces. The fighting was brought to an end by the intervention of two neutral clans, the Hawadle and the Murasade, who came between the two factions with their armed vehicles and troops.

Ali Mahdi claims that Aidid violated the nine-point agreement by refusing the attempt at disarmament. Aidid levels accusations at Ali Mahdi, claiming that there was no attempt to restart the activities of the ministries of education or health. Ministerial appointments proliferated (reaching a record total of 83) without consultation with the armed movements. Foreign aid, principally from Italy, could not be accounted for -- Aidid claims that the amount totals 100 billion Somali shillings (US\$ 12 million). In early November, General Aidid prevented first an Italian delegation and then a consignment of banknotes from landing at Mogadishu airport, by firing artillery over the airport. He claimed that the government was misusing the money. Ali Mahdi disputed the General's right to do this, and on November 13, began to move his forces close to Aidid's headquarters.

The Outbreak of Full-Scale War

General Aidid responded on November 17 with a lightning military strike. Ali Mahdi's forces were driven out of the south and center of the city, but were unable to finish the task. Stiff resistance from Abgal sub-clan infantry in the Karaan area of the town stopped the advance of the Habr Gidir forces. Nevertheless, on November 18, General Aidid announced the deposition of the "illegal" government of Ali Mahdi, and the formation of a USC Administrative Council to assume governmental responsibility in

the areas of the country controlled by the USC, pending a national conference.

The fighting in Mogadishu since November 17 has been the most bloody and sustained in that city's history, surpassing the destruction wreaked during the fight to oust Siad Barre, and the several incidents that had occurred in the following months. Ali Mahdi has been confined to a small area in the north of the city (chiefly Karaan, Lido, Shibis and Yaqshiid). General Aidid has much more territory; he securely controls the southern end of the city, including Kilo 4, Kilo 5 and Wadajir, and most of the western periphery. He has access to the airport (which is controlled by the Hawadle), the southern part of the port, and other areas. Most of the central area of the city is contested, with pockets controlled by Ali Mahdi, Aidid, and the neutral clans.

Both sides claim to have offered ceasefires which the other rejected: Aidid claims he made his first offer on November 19; Ali Mahdi says his first offer was on November 20. Six mediation committees composed mainly of members of neutral clans were formed; these tried to negotiate ceasefires on several occasions. In late December, the two most prominent committees, headed by Abdullahi Muallim and General Mohamed Ibrahim "Liqliqato" respectively, merged to form a single committee. General Liqliqato, a Hawiye from the Sheikhal subclan, remains the most influential neutral in the city, though Ali Mahdi accuses him of being biased in favor of Aidid. The existence of these committees has meant that indirect negotiations between representatives and clan elders on the two sides have continued constantly.

The two sides are deeply suspicious of each other. General Aidid's supporters describe Ali Mahdi as "Mr Yes, Mr Okay," claiming that he agrees to everything and sticks to nothing. Supporters of Ali Mahdi's government describe General Aidid as a reincarnation of Siad Barre, saying that he is just another military dictator, who is psychologically unstable into the bargain. They blame him personally for the tragedy: "He caused all this loss."⁹ Mohamed Qanyare, a prominent supporter of Ali Mahdi, told Africa Watch: "Aidid is a dishonest man -- we cannot trust him. To make a ceasefire and Aidid to respect the ceasefire is not possible."¹⁰

One element in the conflict is a deep personal antipathy between the two leaders, who visibly detest each other. Another element is sub-clan loyalty; as the conflict continues, this element deepens as sub-clan pride -- even sub-clan survival -- is increasingly at stake. Both sides have been responsible for deepening the ethnic element in the conflict. Leaving aside the differences in political programs -- which are trivial --

⁹ **Ali Mahdi, interview with Africa Watch, February 3, 1992.**

¹⁰ **Interview, February 2, 1992.**

the final element in the fighting is money. In a poor and aid-dependent country such as Somalia, control over the symbols of "legitimate" or "sovereign" government are more than a matter of status, they are a license to print money. The government not only literally manufactures banknotes, but controls the exchange rate, can run up debts on the national account, and receives foreign aid -- all of which are elements that can bring great personal fortunes to those in office. Ali Mahdi and his ministerial colleagues have mostly lost their businesses (Mahdi's hotel is destroyed), and depend upon anticipation of future office for future income. Similarly, General Aidid and his financial backers (notably the businessman Osman Arteh) anticipate sharing in the spoils of office should they win.

The Visit of Mr James Jonah

In mid-December, stung by repeated accusations that it was neglecting Somalia, the United Nations began to take a less supine position on the humanitarian and diplomatic problems presented by the fighting. In an exceptional move, the International Committee of the Red Cross publicly criticized the UN: "How come UNICEF-Somalia has 13 people in Nairobi and no one inside Somalia?" asked a senior ICRC official.¹¹ The senior UN representative for Somalia responded: "in a situation of war, we don't operate."¹² UNICEF staff returned to Mogadishu on December 24, and started small programs of distributing high-energy biscuits to relief organizations already operational in the city.

Diplomatic interest culminated in the visit of Mr James Jonah, UN Assistant Secretary General, on January 3-5.¹³ This visit, which was a fiasco when considered from almost any angle, illustrated the dangers of attempting instant diplomacy without even rudimentary groundwork, which was not possible in the absence of a UN representative in Mogadishu.

Mr Jonah's agenda was to meet with General Aidid and Ali Mahdi, and to negotiate a ceasefire and free passage of relief aid. He was due to land at the main airport, in the south of the city. In anticipation of his visit, the neutral clans (Hawadle, which controls the airport, and Murasade) combined forces to meet Mr Jonah at the airport, planning to present him first to Aidid and then to Ali Mahdi, and possibly to offer their services as a local peacekeeping force. Mr Jonah appeared totally unaware of the

¹¹ **Pierre Gassmann, Delegate-General for Africa of the ICRC, quoted in Jane Perlez, "Somali Fighting Keeps Aid from a Suffering City," *New York Times*, December 11, 1992.**

¹² **Marco Barsotti, UNDP Acting Resident Representative for Somalia, quoted in *New York Times*, op cit. Somalis were quick to point out that the UN remains operational in countries such as Yugoslavia and Sudan.**

¹³ **Mr Jonah has since been promoted to Under-Secretary General.**

existence of the neutral clans, and made no arrangements to meet them.

General Aidid, unwilling to acknowledge that he did not directly control the airport, contested the neutrals' plan, and fired artillery shells close to the airport to deter Mr Jonah's airplane from landing. Not realizing this ploy, Mr Jonah agreed to divert to General Aidid's securely-controlled airstrip at Balidogley, well south of the city, where he was personally received by the General. After discussions with Aidid, Mr Jonah was due to cross into the north of the city to meet Ali Mahdi. However, rather than using the normal and direct route, which involved passing through territory controlled by the Murasade, General Aidid's escort took Mr Jonah on a roundabout route which passed only through areas controlled directly by Aidid's forces. This was presumably designed to impress upon the envoy the extent of the General's control. Close to the planned crossing point, the mission had to be aborted due to shelling, and Mr Jonah returned to Nairobi. Ali Mahdi was angered by the ease with which Mr Jonah's itinerary had been manipulated by General Aidid. The following day, Mr Jonah flew to the north of the city for a brief meeting with Ali Mahdi.

Immediately after returning to Nairobi, Mr Jonah issued a statement that President Mahdi had agreed to international intervention, but General Aidid remained the obstacle to progress. This remarkably undiplomatic and premature statement delighted Ali Mahdi, who felt that his position of insisting on the legitimacy of his interim government was strengthened, and came to believe that international intervention would confirm his government in office. "We very faithfully and sincerely accepted the plan of James Jonah," Ali Mahdi told Africa Watch with satisfaction, "but General Aidid did not."

General Aidid came to fear that it might be true that an international peacekeeping force, or indeed any international diplomatic involvement, would confirm the legitimacy of the Interim Government. He became angry with the UN and more distrustful of international diplomatic initiatives. "We believe that since the situation in Somalia is not menacing the international community and regional stability, it is not necessary to employ international forces in Somalia."¹⁴ General Aidid insists that a political solution must be found by Somalis, in Mogadishu.

Following Mr Jonah's visit, both parties thus became more deeply entrenched in their positions. If Mr Jonah's intention was to bring the two parties to the negotiating table, his high-profile visit made progress only in the opposite direction.

The most immediate consequence of Mr Jonah's visit was that the airport remained closed. It remained shut for ten days -- halting essential humanitarian relief deliveries --

¹⁴ **General Aidid, interviewed by Africa Watch, February 6, 1992.**

until an airplane from UNICEF landed there because the pilot had not been informed that it was closed. As he landed without incident, the airport was quietly reopened.

The most serious consequence of Mr Jonah's visit was the reaction of the Murasade leaders, who felt spurned and humiliated by General Aidid (and indeed Mr Jonah). Their neutral position -- which had allowed them to play a key role in resolving the September fighting -- became more precarious, and in mid-January they were clearly moving closer to Ali Mahdi's camp. On January 21, General Aidid struck against Murasade positions in various parts of the city, and quickly overran them, though fierce fighting continued for several days. Strengthened by the defection of Murasade leaders to his camp, Ali Mahdi convened a meeting of some members of the USC Central Committee on January 27-30. This meeting voted to remove General Aidid from the chairmanship and elect in his place Mohamed Qanyare Affrah, a Murasade businessman. Responding to the charge that this vote could only polarize the situation, Qanyare defended the vote as entirely constitutional and legitimate.¹⁵ General Aidid dismissed the meeting as fraudulent. Meanwhile, Murasade forces regrouped and staged an assault on February 1, sparking several more days of fighting. Thus the invaluable asset of a neutral clan was lost, in addition to several hundred human casualties caused by the fighting.

The perils of high-profile diplomacy in the tinderbox of Mogadishu did not seem to daunt the United Nations. On February 5, a delegation led by UN Special Coordinator Brian Wannop made a brief and well-publicized visit to the city, flying to both north and south, to present invitations to the two leaders to attend talks in New York scheduled for February 12. The agenda of the meeting was not specified beyond mention of a ceasefire and the provision of humanitarian relief. In an astonishing display of ignorance of the realities of Mogadishu, no clan leaders or independents were invited. The day after the invitations were delivered, fierce fighting broke out in the Hodan area of the city, which was interpreted by many Somalis as an attempt by Ali Mahdi to gain maximum territorial advantage before the talks began. On the first evening of the fighting, more than civilian 80 casualties were brought into Digfer hospital in four hours.

Fortunately, the United Nations has not made the only diplomatic initiative in Mogadishu. Delegations have visited from Kenya and Sudan, and most significantly, Eritrea. The Eritrean delegation stayed more than two weeks and held extensive discussions with both sides, clan elders and independents. The Eritrean delegation has considered it unwise to make public statements about the progress of its talks and the positions taken by each side. The Eritrean mission commands widespread respect and approval by all sides in Mogadishu. Its drawback is that Eritrea is unable to offer any economic incentives to the parties as an incentive to enter into peaceful negotiations.

¹⁵ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 2, 1992.**

The Nature of the War

The Forces

Ali Mahdi is estimated to control about 20,000 fighters in Mogadishu, and General Aidid a somewhat smaller number. No more than 2,500 of these have military training, the majority of them on the side of Aidid. Few of the older generation of military officers are involved in the fighting itself. Those who are, such as General Aidid himself and Ali Mahdi's chief of staff, Colonel Nero, have a conventional military training in the USSR. This training predisposes them to the use of artillery as a means of inflicting high rates of attrition and impressing the adversary with firepower, followed by infantry assaults. Few Somali soldiers have training in guerrilla warfare, and they prefer conventional field engagements whenever possible. None has had training in or experience of urban guerrilla warfare.

None of the soldiers are paid. This fact lies at the heart of the crisis. According to Ahmad Omer Abdille "Basha", Aidid's Defense Liaison officer, almost all volunteers are immediately accepted into USC-Aidid forces.¹⁶ "It is good to have a gun," he said, and admitted that membership of the Habr Gidir subclan was also an advantage. While members of other subclans were scrutinized before admission, very few were turned away. Basha confessed that "discipline is very bad." A senior member of Aidid's camp, Ahmad Abdille Osman, said: "A man with a gun, it is very difficult to control him. Our people are doing the best they can."¹⁷ Despite such claims, no fighters have been punished for breach of discipline: "if you give him a salary, you can punish him. If you don't, you can't."¹⁸ Under the circumstances in which most of the fighters are self-armed and self-financing, command and control structures are tenuous in the extreme.

Colonel Elmi Shamark, one of Aidid's commanders, told Africa Watch that often "a boy joins [the USC] because he just wants to steal something, to get something."¹⁹ Sub-clan loyalty and pride, and fear of the opposing sub-clan (in part orchestrated by the military leaders) also play a part in the fighter's motivation. This means that clan elders are able to exercise some control over fighters belonging to their subclan, and will certainly have to play a crucial role in enforcing any ceasefire.

¹⁶ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 7, 1992.**

¹⁷ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 5, 1992.**

¹⁸ **Africa Watch interview with Ahmad Omer Abdille "Basha", February 7, 1992.**

¹⁹ **Interview, February 7, 1992.**

The structure of Ali Mahdi's Abgal (and now Murasade) forces is almost identical, though clan loyalty may play a greater role in recruitment and securing loyalty. As Aweys Haji Yusuf, Minister in the Presidential Office, admitted:

People don't care about the President and the government. They care about Abgal and Murasade and fear Habr Gidir. They are defending their existence. We screwed their hands when we gave eleven [government] posts to the Habr Gidir and twenty others to the Darod -- the Darod never came to their aid. So the Abgal people see the Habr Gidir as the target for their attack. Every Habr Gidir is a legitimate target.²⁰

In addition to the forces with at least nominal loyalty to either side, there are the forces loyal to neutrals such as the Hawadle, and wholly independent looters and bandits. Some of these "free guns" are simply young men with automatic rifles who engage in looting in order to survive. The price of food is so high in the city, and employment is so scarce, that robbery and looting are the easiest way to make a living. Some of the "free guns" are gangs employed by businessmen to engage in systematic looting for profit; in such cases their weaponry may also include high caliber jeep-mounted machine guns.

Small Arms

The majority of the weaponry in Mogadishu consists of automatic rifles, supplied to Siad Barre by both the USSR (from 1961 to 1977) and the United States (from 1978 to 1988, following Somalia's switch in sides in the Cold War). There are also numerous "technicals", which are pick-up trucks mounted with Browning machine guns or weapons of similar caliber, or anti-tank guns. It is common practice for fighters to be paid a bounty of 1,200,000 Somali shillings (about US \$150) for each technical captured.

The casualties caused by small arms fall into several groups. One relatively small category consists of fighters deliberately shot in combat. Another group consists of civilians deliberately shot because they belonged to the opposing clan. These killings do not consist in large-scale massacres, rather sporadic incidents of individual killings and woundings.

A former university teacher who tended a number of wounded people trapped by the fighting in his area witnessed a deliberate killing of an Abgal man. A Habr Gidir fighter was enraged, claiming that an Abgal had killed his son. He reportedly said "I am not going to spare a woman from them," and seized and murdered an old Abgal man.

²⁰ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 2, 1992.**

Doctors working in the hospitals in the south of the city have also reported receiving a number of cases of Habr Gidir men deliberately shot, often in the groin or the genitals, by Abgal fighters.

Others are caught in the crossfire or shot while running away from a street battle. Mohamed, a 30-year old Abgal man, was shot through the hip while a gun battle raged nearby. Ibrahim, a 20-year-old Habr Gidir, was shot in the leg while running away from a group of Abgal who were attacking his street.

Many of the deliberate shootings are done by bandits or thieves. In one case, Yusuf, an eleven-year-old boy, was shot through the face by thieves who had demanded that he hand over some tin cans -- when they discovered the cans were empty, they shot him at close range. Aden, an 18-year-old, was shot in the legs by thieves after they had demanded two packets of cigarettes -- the young man placed the packets on the ground and ran away, whereupon he was shot.

Perhaps the most common bullet wounds are caused by stray bullets, known in Mogadishu as "yusuf" bullets. These can travel for several miles, so that a person on the other side of town from the fighting can suddenly be struck down. Cases interviewed by Africa Watch include:

- * Hassan, a 13-year-old shoe shine boy, was struck in the arm by a stray bullet in Bokara market. He does not know its origin.
- * Mohamed, aged 20, was a cigarette-seller sitting in the market place. There was a jam of people blocking the roadway, and an armed jeep was blowing its horn to clear a path. When this failed, one of the gunmen shot in the air to encourage the people to move. One of the bullets fell to earth, striking Mohamed's leg. The leg has now been amputated.
- * Farhiya, aged two, was playing in front of her house when a stray bullet struck her in the abdomen.
- * Amina, aged 20, was sleeping on her bed in the yard of her house when a bullet fell from the sky and struck her arm.

Artillery

There are also considerable numbers of heavier weapons in the city, most of them under the control of General Aidid. Armored vehicles include T-54 and T-55 Soviet-built tanks, Italian M-41 tanks and French Panhard armored personnel carriers. Artillery

includes 155mm and 152mm heavy artillery, 122mm D-30 artillery, B-24 "Stalin Organ" rocket launchers and numerous mortars (120mm, 82mm and 81mm). Most artillery is Soviet-made, but US-made mortars are also used. Anti-tank weapons (106mm and 89mm rockets) are also used against vehicles, personnel and buildings. Anti-aircraft artillery (22mm ZU-23-2/4 and 37mm ZU-22 or M-1939) is used horizontally against similar targets. One of the more unusual weapons seen is an air-to-air missile taken from a MiG-17 fighter-bomber and mounted on a jeep for use as short-range artillery. There are also reports that technicians are investigating the use of SAM-2 and SAM-7 anti-aircraft missiles as ground artillery. General Liqliqato commented: "This is not a normal war. The arms in the city -- some of them are even forbidden to be used against men."²¹

There is a dire shortage of trained artillerymen -- an estimated 200 to maintain and use a larger number of artillery pieces, mostly with Aidid's forces. As a result, most of those using the weaponry have little or no training, and do not know how to use much of the equipment with any precision. Aiming is done by eye, not by instrument. The war is also very mobile, so that most firing positions are taken up hastily and soon abandoned. Artillerymen do not use maps, compasses or spotters on the ground with walkie-talkies to determine their targets and the degree to which they are striking them. At best, a spotter on a high building or piece of ground uses eye observation (they do not even use binoculars) to determine the accuracy of a shot. More often, the guns are merely fired in the approximate direction intended. Residents describe artillery crews firing "to whom it may concern" shells randomly into the city.

The most systematic use of artillery is in responding to an artillery bombardment by the other side. Shells may be directed to the approximate position from which the other side is firing, and in some cases this is reported to have the desired effect of halting the shelling.

Africa Watch observed shelling on both sides of the city. The artillerymen appeared to have a cavalier and careless attitude towards aiming their guns. In the north, shells were observed landing in residential areas of Karaan on February 2, where no artillery fire had been observed that morning. In the south, shells were seen to land close to Digfer hospital. On February 2-4, numerous shells landed in Bokara market, and on February 6, a shell exploded by the perimeter of Benadir hospital, killing two people waiting for a minibus.

Africa Watch interviewed some of the casualties of the shelling, in both north and south Mogadishu. There are innumerable similar cases.

²¹ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 4, 1992.**

- * Abdel Gadir, aged 15, was sitting with his brother in Bokara market when a shell exploded. Abdel Gadir suffered a fracture to his leg; his brother and one other person were killed.
- * Dahir, aged 25, was in his house in Wardhiigley. Ali Mahdi's forces attacked the area on February 2, and then retreated when two of General Aidid's technicals drove up. These technicals fired machine guns and then retreated. While withdrawing, one fired a mortar. The mortar struck Dahir's house, killing four people and wounding ten; Dahir himself suffered leg and arm wounds.
- * Ahmad, aged 12, was sitting in front of a drinks shop in Bokara market, when a shell exploded. Ahmad was wounded by shrapnel in both ankles. Two others were wounded in the explosion.
- * Fatima, aged seven, and her grandmother were wounded by falling masonry and shrapnel when the neighboring house was hit by a shell. One person was killed and 20 wounded, both Fatima and her grandmother suffered multiple wounds. The grandmother also reported that the little girl's father had earlier been deliberately killed by an Abgal man slitting his throat, and her mother had died in childbirth because it was not possible to transport her to hospital.
- * Another Fatima, aged six, was hit in the abdomen by fragments from a shell which exploded in her home, killing her grandmother and wounding nine others.

Cases in which the artillery shell or mortar appears to have been aimed at a military target are the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, in such cases, as with Dahir above, the weapon seems to have been aimed so casually or rapidly that it was extremely unlikely to hit its target.

Control of Territory

General Aidid's forces exercise varying degrees of control over the majority of the city. The only area from which they are completely excluded is the Karaan-Lido-Shibis-Yaqshiid area, which is completely controlled by Ali Mahdi. However, within the "Aidid" area of the city, there are substantial pockets controlled by neutrals such as the Hawadle, and large areas with either implicit or open support for Ali Mahdi.

Most of the population of the city is Abgal, and Ali Mahdi has the advantage over General Aidid in terms of infantry, though he is outgunned in technicals, artillery and armored vehicles. When there is a major battle, Aidid's forces tend to win. In the slower war of attrition that occurs between the big artillery duels, Ali Mahdi's forces tend to advance. The Abgal forces take over positions quietly at night, and surrender them to the

Habr Gidir counter-attack in daylight. However, because neither side is trained for urban guerrilla fighting, and discipline cannot be enforced, there is little systematic taking and holding of territory. After a block or street has been captured by one side, often it will be abandoned simply because the fighters need to resupply themselves, because there is no centralized logistics to give them the rations and support they require.

Official Claims

Both sides claim that they are taking all reasonable precautions to protect civilian life. Interim Vice-President Omer Muallim spoke of Ali Mahdi's forces using the "utmost restraint."²² Ali Mahdi himself claimed:

For the first thirty days [after November 17] we have completely disallowed the use of heavy artillery -- we have always tried to avoid and minimize casualties.²³

This is contradicted by the fact that from the very first day of the fighting in November, the hospitals in the south of the city were receiving civilian casualties with shell wounds. When this was pointed out to the Interim President, he said:

We don't want to deny that there could have been civilian lives lost, but relatively if we ask ourselves, "who initiated this effect?" it will be evident that General Aidid started the fighting. The cause of the fighting lies on the shoulders of General Aidid. The government is defending its rights as the legitimate administration of the nation. The responsibility for all these casualties lies with General Aidid.

Ali Mahdi did not hesitate to condemn his opponent for indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas, and using tactics that served no military purpose other than spreading terror:

This is very important -- it is a very sad situation. Someone who wants to lead this nation is indiscriminately shelling civilian areas.

In a press release issued on January 3, General Aidid also claimed to use "much restraint." According to official statements, human rights are high on the Aidid's list of

²² **Interview with Africa Watch, January 31, 1992.**

²³ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 3, 1992.**

priorities: "our essential aim when we took up arms was to protect our human rights."²⁴
"If an inch is liberated, we protect [human rights], as opposed to Siad Barre's violations."²⁵

Interviewed by Africa Watch, General Aidid was insistent that his forces were not responsible for killing civilians indiscriminately:

We declare that we have not intentionally shelled or killed any Somali population or any person in Mogadishu. That's why we have very strong armaments and forces, [but] we are in defense, repulsing only the attack, and seeking a ceasefire to stop the bloodshed.

When the facts of the civilian casualties in the north of the city were pointed out to him, the General explained:

We are trying to shell where the firing and attack is coming from ... we are in defense, we are attacking military targets. This is our plan, but mistakes can happen. There is no intentional fire against the civilian population from our side. Absolutely.

In the north of the city, more than 5,000 casualties have been treated, primarily for shell and gunshot wounds. The great majority -- perhaps three-quarters -- are civilians. In the south of the city, the figures are almost identical. The casualty wards of the hospitals are filled with between 50 and 250 emergency cases each day, consisting almost exclusively of people suffering from shell and gunshot wounds.²⁶

Africa Watch categorically rejects as wholly unfounded the claims by either side that they are using their weapons with discretion and against only military targets. The killing is wanton and indiscriminate.

Protection of Hospitals and Humanitarian Work

The only modest success so far in persuading both sides to observe the neutrality of humanitarian work concerned Karaan hospital. When the city became divided on November 17, all the hospitals fell within General Aidid's zone of control. The doctors in the northern part of the city had nowhere to work. Within two days, five Somali doctors had formed a Health Emergency Committee and requisitioned a villa formerly belonging

²⁴ **Africa Watch interview with Ahmad Abdille Osman, February 5, 1992.**

²⁵ **Africa Watch interview with General Aidid, February 6, 1992.**

²⁶ **A future Africa Watch newsletter will detail medical aspects of the tragedy in Mogadishu.**

to a marine colonel which they turned into a makeshift casualty ward and operating theater. Over the following weeks they also requisitioned 43 houses to serve as post-operative wards. Though known as Karaan Hospital, the casualty ward, operating theater and most of the wards actually lie within northern Lido. This area is well behind the lines and has no military significance. However, in late November and early December, Ali Mahdi fired artillery shells from this area, and General Aidid bombarded it. A tacit agreement was reached whereby Ali Mahdi ceased to fire from the area, and General Aidid ceased attacking it. For the most part, this has been respected. It has not however stopped other residential areas in the north of the city being used as artillery sites, and being subjected to shelling.

General Aidid's headquarters and principal workshop lies squarely between Digfer and Benadir hospitals. As a military target, it therefore draws fire to the hospitals. As he controls large areas of the city, it should not be difficult for the General to move. However, he refuses to do so. Interviewed in his headquarters, General Aidid said:

We are here to protect humanitarian installations. We don't fire any artillery [from here]. This area would be attacked anyway; our being here [is] a deterrent, a protection.²⁷

General Aidid then made the apparently extraordinary claim that the presence of his forces adjacent the hospitals had been agreed with the UN. This is confirmed by a UN press release of January 3, which states:

The Jonah delegation and the Aidid faction of the [USC] also reached agreement that three hospitals in Mogadishu would be declared "areas of tranquility" and would as such be protected by troops of the Aidid faction from incursions from armed civilians and other elements which could interfere with the work of the hospitals.

The presence of the General's ground forces, artillery and several tanks may deter a ground attack, but they undoubtedly attract shelling from Ali Mahdi's artillery. A shell landed in the compound adjacent to Aidid's headquarters a few minutes before he made the remarks quoted above to an Africa Watch representative. Mr Jonah appears to have been unaware of this dimension of the problem. Unfortunately, once again Mr Jonah's mission made progress in a direction diametrically opposite to that demanded by humanitarian considerations.

Prisoners of War

²⁷ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 6, 1992.**

Neither side appears to hold any prisoners of war. Each side claims that when it captures members of the opposing force, its soldiers merely take the others' weapons and then let them go. Each side claims that the other routinely summarily kills captured fighters from its own side.

Prospects for the Immediate Future

Should there not be a ceasefire, both sides believe they can win. General Aidid claims that he has had many opportunities for outright victory, which he has not pressed home out of concern for the welfare of the civilian population of the north of the city. A press release on January 3 read: "The fighting forces of the government have been defeated and they are now more of a nuisance than a threat." General Aidid himself explained: "people ask me why we did not finish off Ali Mahdi. We could have done it."²⁸

Ali Mahdi is equally confident of winning. Asked about the prospect of victory, he replied:

That is doubtless. Because, where are his [Aidid's] forces now? The areas where they are staying -- fighting is taking place. We cannot say the hour, the day [when we will win], but we are sure, militarily, we will win.²⁹

The reality is that it is unlikely that either side can achieve outright military victory in the foreseeable future, and that such a victory could only be achieved at the cost of reducing the city to a graveyard. When asked whether it would be worth winning at the cost of destroying Mogadishu, Ali Mahdi confessed that he suffered from "internal feelings of burning."

Famine

War and famine in Mogadishu feed on each other in a vicious cycle of deprivation and destruction. The scarcity of food and its high price causes many young men to turn to banditry and looting in order to survive, and is one motivation for the two armies to

²⁸ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 6, 1992.**

²⁹ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 3. Ali Mahdi had been speaking in English, contrary to his normal practice of using an interpreter, and at this point his interpreter interrupted to explain that the President was of course totally committed to a negotiated solution.**

fight -- the more they fight, the more property is available to loot. The fighting in turn disrupts commerce, drives people from their homes, and prevents relief supplies from coming in. Hunger and fighting are inextricably inter-twined: beneath the fight for political control there is a fight for survival. It follows that a solution to the political conflict cannot succeed without a solution to the food problem.

Mogadishu, like all modern cities, has never fed itself. It has traditionally imported food from the farms of the Shebelle and Juba valleys, and pasta from Italy. The widespread rural violence since mid-1990 has disrupted agricultural production throughout central and southern Somalia, and has made trade more dangerous -- though also more profitable.

In addition to the partial breakdown of the former production and marketing systems, there are several elements contributing to the present famine crisis, which may yet turn it into a major disaster of starvation and disease. These elements include:

- * The deliberate denial of food by each side to the civilian population on the other side (see below).
- * The absence of a United Nations relief effort (see below), or indeed any significant assistance program by a major donor, including the United States.
- * The displacement of about 250,000 residents of the city to displaced camps, where there is inadequate shelter, no clean water or sanitation, and numerous health hazards such as carcasses of dead animals.
- * The displacement of a similar number of people from the central part of the city to the northern and southern extremities, where they are living in extremely overcrowded conditions. There are also numerous shallow graves which could become an important vector for infectious disease when the rains start in April.
- * The disruption of the city's water supply, due to damage to the pipes (which is surprisingly limited), lack of fuel to run the pumping station at full capacity, and (most significantly) a dispute between General Aidid and the subclan that controls the pumping station.

A survey by the International Committee of the Red Cross in several regions of Somalia in August 1991 found alarmingly high levels of child undernutrition. These levels can only have deteriorated. The combination of undernutrition with poor water and sanitation makes it probable that the next few months will see the outbreak of epidemics of water-borne diseases such as dysentery, typhoid and -- most alarming of all -- cholera. The death toll from such epidemics would dwarf the numbers killed in the

fighting.

Denial of Food

During the war in Mogadishu, both Ali Mahdi and General Aidid have tried to prevent food and humanitarian resources from reaching the other side. The following incidents have occurred:

- * The shelling of Bokara market by Ali Mahdi's forces in late January and again between February 2-4. Bokara market is one of the largest food markets in south Mogadishu.
- * The prevention of a ship chartered by the International Committee of the Red Cross from docking in Mogadishu port in mid-December. The port was largely controlled by Aidid but within range of Ali Mahdi's artillery. While Ali Mahdi himself claimed to Africa Watch that the shelling had come from Aidid's forces, his foreign minister, Abdille al Sheikh, implicitly admitted responsibility when he tried to justify the action with the (erroneous) claim that a ship bringing arms to General Aidid was attempting to dock at the same time.³⁰
- * For ten days following the visit of Mr James Jonah of the UN, General Aidid closed the main airport in Mogadishu and tried to insist that all humanitarian supplies be delivered to Balidogley airfield, some distance south of the city.
- * For eight days in late January, General Aidid threatened to shoot at any airplanes bringing humanitarian supplies to north Mogadishu.

No internationally-donated food relief was supplied to Mogadishu in late 1991, save small amounts of supplementary food for malnourished children. A consignment of 7,000 tons of food belonging to the US voluntary agency CARE was held in storage in the port from August until January 1992, because the two sides could not agree on a distribution plan. Ultimately, the Hashamud militia which controls the port area agreed to open the store, without a formal agreement having been signed between the clans. The food was then released, or "looted." While the distribution was haphazard at best, this had the effect of bringing down the market price of food by three-quarters for a few days, after which the price climbed again to a level a little over half its previous high. The greater availability and lower price of food tangibly reduced tension in the city, demonstrating the close link between food and violence.

³⁰ **Interview with Africa Watch, January 31, 1992.**

Experience has shown that small amounts of aid become resources which the looters and bandits fight over, but large amounts -- sufficient to affect the market price of food -- reduce tension.

The Absence of the United Nations

Since January 1991, the United Nations has displayed an extraordinary reluctance to become involved in Somalia. While there are legitimate security concerns, these appear to have been used to excuse a disgraceful history of inaction.

The United Nations withdrew from Mogadishu, together with the entire diplomatic corps save the Egyptians, shortly before the flight of Siad Barre. The UN office was transferred to Nairobi, Kenya. It has still not returned. For six months in early 1991, the UN debated whether Mogadishu was safe. On July 3, the UN Development Program sent in a consultant to investigate the possibility of reopening the office. He reported favorably and on August 15 an office was reopened, with a skeleton staff from four UN specialized agencies -- UNDP, UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the World Food Program. No resident representative was posted, however.

On September 3, an incident occurred that has been used to justify subsequent UN inaction. A United Nations car was held up and a driver shot in the leg. Four UN staff accompanied by five guards went to investigate. The UN staff were held at gunpoint for a short period by unidentified gunmen and robbed of most of their possessions. Two of the guards were shot dead and one was saved from summary execution by the intervention of a Somali employee of UNDP. Two days later, for unrelated reasons, fighting broke out in the city near to the UN offices in Kilo 5, and on September 7, all expatriate UN personnel were evacuated.

The then-UNDP representative, Osman Hashim, visited Mogadishu briefly in October. Thereafter, no visits were made until mounting international criticism compelled UNICEF to reopen its office in Mogadishu south on December 24. Following the mission of Mr James Jonah, and his failure to obtain an agreement for safe passage of relief from south to north, a UNICEF office was also opened in Mogadishu north.

The main reason cited for the absence of the UN has been concerns over security of personnel. Mogadishu is certainly a dangerous place. In mid-December, a Belgian employee of the International Committee of the Red Cross was shot during a dispute over food distribution and later died; a Somali elder who threw himself between the gunman and the ICRC worker was killed outright. All humanitarian organizations employ armed guards, to travel in their vehicles and to guard their houses, workplaces, stores and hospitals. Even the International Committee of the Red Cross has, for the first time in its history, employed armed guards to escort its vehicles. Nevertheless, there have been

incidents in which food convoys have been diverted at gunpoint, and shooting incidents in which guards have been killed or injured.

As well as the ICRC, which works on both sides of the conflict, several private humanitarian organizations have continued to operate in Mogadishu. These include the British agency Save the Children Fund, the US organization International Medical Corps, the Belgian/Dutch Medecins Sans Frontieres, and the Italian CISP. The Somali Red Crescent has also remained active, while individual Somali doctors, nurses and health auxiliaries have continued to work long hours under appalling conditions without having been paid for 14 months. All these people are volunteers; none are compelled to stay. Within the UN in Nairobi there are also people who have expressed their willingness to be posted to Mogadishu, the UN has however decided not to grant them their wishes.

Unlike in war situations such as Yugoslavia and Southern Sudan, no UN or relief personnel have been deliberately killed by one of the warring parties in Mogadishu. Mr Jonah has repeatedly referred to the murder of a UNICEF doctor in Bosasso (northeastern Somalia) as a reason for continuing UN reluctance to engage in Somalia. Firstly, Bosasso is the most remote part of the country from Mogadishu, and the murder was the work of gunmen unaffiliated to any warring faction. Second, Somalis and many foreigners were quick to contrast this argument with the attitude of the UN and the European Community when, around the same time, five EC observers were killed in Yugoslavia when their helicopter was shot down by one of the warring factions. Despite representing an objectively much more serious threat to foreign intervention, the unanimous response was that this tragic incident should not be allowed to derail the peace process in any way.

The absence of senior UN staff and a significant UN relief program has severely dented the credibility of the organization in the eyes of Somalis from all sides.

Aweys Haji Yusuf, a minister in Ali Mahdi's interim government, commented angrily:

For us the international community does not exist, that is the reality. We do not respect them. We have a record of their promises; they are responsible for what is happening here. If [they donate] a small amount, we don't want it. If the same thing happens as has gone before, it will just enhance looting.³¹

³¹ **Interview with Africa Watch, February 2, 1992.**

General Aidid has also little patience with the UN, especially following Mr James Jonah's undiplomatic statement in Nairobi that he presented the main obstacle to the UN initiative:

The UN is interested in the wrong way. Instead of concentrating on the humanitarian aspects of the problem, it tries to meddle in politics.³²

However, Africa Watch observes that neither side has made concrete steps to make it easier for the UN to operate. While the UN undoubtedly deserves criticism, the primary responsibility for the disaster lies not with the international community, but with Ali Mahdi and General Aidid.

Much more importantly, ordinary Somalis were angry with the UN, with more justification. "We have been forgotten," said one doctor. Similar sentiments were repeatedly expressed to Africa Watch: "where is the UN, which fed Siad Barre for so many years?" Some medical staff commented that the amount of money spent to fly in the UN mission on February 5 to deliver the invitations to New York to the two leaders could have paid the entire staff of all the hospitals their wages for one month, and suggested that if the UN were concerned about the security of its expatriate staff it should spend its money paying Somali staff.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has also taken the unusual step of publicly criticizing the UN for its absence. "The sooner they come, the happier we are," said the ICRC delegate to Mogadishu south.

The Role of the United States

Before the fall of Siad Barre, the United States was a strong supporter of the regime and provided extensive foreign assistance to Somalia from 1978 until 1988. Military assistance to Siad Barre was suspended by the U.S. Congress over the course of 1988 and 1989 in response to the extraordinary level of violence against civilians committed by Barre's forces in their counterinsurgency campaign in the north.³³ Though the U.S. has not supplied weapons to Somalia since mid-1988, the legacy of a decade-long policy of

³² **Interview with Africa Watch, February 6, 1992.**

³³ **The last shipment of military aid to Somalia was in June 1988, including \$1.9 million worth of spare parts for previously supplied weapons.**

extensive military aid to Somalia lives on in the form of the weaponry that fell into the hands of the USC factions in January 1991.

Siad Barre's flight from Mogadishu largely coincided with the end of the Cold War and the end of Washington's security interests in Somalia.³⁴ The U.S. Ambassador to Somalia, Ambassador James Bishop, who took office in September 1990, attempted to remain in the country, even as security deteriorated dramatically in the city. Shortly before the Barre government fell, armed assaults on the Embassy itself necessitated a helicopter rescue of the Ambassador and his staff, on January 5, 1991, and since then there has been no permanent U.S. presence in Somalia.³⁵

Following the destruction of its Embassy the U.S. was slow to reengage with Somalia. Refugee organizations note that the State Department dragged its feet because of security concerns and withheld permission for some months to Nairobi-based AID officials who wished to travel to Somalia to make an assessment of humanitarian need.³⁶ Nonetheless, despite the slow start, the U.S. came to contribute significantly to relief efforts for Somalia throughout the remainder of the year. According to the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. has provided over \$40 million in assistance to Somalia since January 1991, including grants to the International Medical Corps, Save the Children Fund of Britain, Medecins Sans Frontieres, CARE and various UN programs.³⁷ (Not all the money donated to the UN has yet been spent.)

Andrew Natsios, formerly head of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and newly appointed Assistant Administrator for Food and Humanitarian Assistance played an important role in publicly rebuking the United Nations agencies for their failure to re-establish a presence in Mogadishu. In a statement unusual in its candor for a State Department official, Natsios expressed disappointment in the United Nations' "failure to

³⁴**Past U.S. support for Siad Barre was justified on the grounds of U.S. security interests in Somalia, including a naval and military facility for the U.S. Central Command at the port of Berbera and naval, military and electronic facilities located elsewhere in the country.**

³⁵ **Ambassador Bishop, however, retains an abiding interest in the country and has played an important role in attempting to focus attention on Somalia's present plight within the State Department, where he now serves as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.**

³⁶**The first visit by an official from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance was made in May, though private U.S. relief and refugee personnel had visited some months before.**

³⁷**Statement of Andrew S. Natsios, Assistant Administrator for Food and Humanitarian Assistance Before the House Select Committee on Hunger, January 30, 1992.**

engage themselves" in the Somalia disaster.³⁸ *The New York Times* further reported that Natsios told senior UN officials that they had been "unreasonable" in refusing to lend aircraft to the aid effort and noted that "The United Nations is involved in six other civil wars in Africa. Are they going to pull out of those?"

Natsios presented strong testimony at a hearing of the House Select Committee on Hunger on January 30, 1992, where he described the humanitarian situation in Somalia in apocalyptic terms and stressed the need for the United Nations to play a leadership role in coordinating the massive relief effort required for Mogadishu and outlying areas. He stated: "What is most needed from the UN is a competent emergency response team on the ground complementing the work of the NGOs [non-governmental relief organizations] and ICRC. We have been given assurances that the UN recognizes this and is in the process of creating such a team."

Unfortunately, Andrew Natsios's activism on the emergency relief front has not been matched by his State Department counterparts on the diplomatic front. Concerned by the lack of attention to Somalia by the State Department and White House, Senators Paul Simon and Nancy Kassebaum, the chairman and ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Africa Subcommittee introduced Senate Resolution 115 in April of 1991, which called upon the President to "actively explore possible U.S. initiatives to reconcile the conflicting factions and should encourage and support efforts by outside mediators;" as well as calling upon the UN and OAU to engage in conflict resolution.³⁹

Despite the Senators' plea, however, there appeared to be little interest by the State Department or National Security Council in the United States' taking a leadership role at the United Nations. Indeed, press reports indicated that the U.S. was actually reluctant to see the U.N. take on the issue. An unnamed American official was quoted as saying that the U.S. had done little more than "thrash around ideas" on the diplomatic front.⁴⁰ And *The New York Times* reported that "Senior Administration officials rejected the suggestion, made by some at the State Department, of putting Somalia onto the Security Council agenda at the United Nations."⁴¹

When Somalia actually was considered by the U.N. Security Council on January 23, at the instigation of Cape Verde, U.S. support for the measure was reportedly

³⁸Jane Perlez, "U.S. Increases Aid to Somalia After U.N. Balks," *New York Times*, December 15, 1991.

³⁹The resolution passed the full Senate on June 28, 1991.

⁴⁰Jane Perlez, "Somalia Self-Destructs, and the World Looks On," *New York Times*, December 29, 1991.

⁴¹ibid

lackluster. And the U.S. even insisted upon a change in the resolution so as to downplay U.N. engagement in conflict resolution in Somalia. The original Cape Verde resolution called upon the Secretaries General of the U.N., OAU, and Arab League to contact all parties involved in the conflict "*to ensure their commitment* to the cessation of hostilities and promote a cease fire and its compliance and assist in the process of political normalization of Somalia." (emphasis added.) The U.S. representative insisted upon revising the draft so that instead of "ensuring" a commitment by the warring parties the resolution "seeks" their commitment, and called for assistance in a "political settlement of the conflict" as opposed to the political normalization of Somalia. The difference appears very slight, though apparently the change sent an unmistakable signal in diplomatic terms that the U.S. was not in favor of the level of U.N. engagement in the crisis that was implied in the initial draft.

The United States' failure to press the United Nations to become actively engaged politically is apparently due to concerns by the International Organization Affairs Bureau at the State Department, which fears that the U.S. might have to foot the bill for extensive U.N. efforts in Somalia. Knowledgeable sources in Congress have indicated that the Africa Bureau and Human Rights Bureau of the State Department are in favor of a more vigorous U.S. posture but have been outweighed by the International Organizations Bureau and the National Security Council (NSC) at the White House. The NSC is apparently fearful that engagement in Somalia would set a dangerous precedent for future US actions in Africa, particularly with regard to the deteriorating situation in Zaire.

Wherever the opposition to international engagement with Somalia might be originating, it is extremely regrettable. The U.S. managed to find hundreds of millions of dollars for the Siad Barre regime for a decade; indeed, past U.S. support for his repressive rule helped lay the groundwork for the country's destruction today. The failure of the Bush Administration to lead international efforts to press for an end to the fighting is a disgrace.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The situation in Mogadishu is both dire and complex. However, it is not hopeless. The prospects for an immediate ceasefire and negotiated settlement are not good, but there are many practical and concrete steps that could be taken which would substantially improve the situation, to the extent of preventing the majority of civilian casualties and averting the imminent severe famine.

To Interim President Ali Mahdi and General Aidid

Any claim to legitimacy that either of these men may have enjoyed due to the

Djibouti Conference, a vote at the USC congress or a political program of free elections, has been fatally undermined by their indiscriminate killing of civilians in Mogadishu since November 17. The denials made by both these men of responsibility for the atrocities in the city are wholly unconvincing. They are equally responsible for the deaths and injuries of thousands of innocent men, women and children.

It is likely that Ali Mahdi and General Aidid will be remembered in history primarily for the appalling and unnecessary suffering they so brutally unleashed on the capital city of Somalia. If they claim that they are concerned for the Somali people, it is necessary for them to act at once, unilaterally, to curb the wanton and gross violence against civilians which their forces are currently engaging in. Africa Watch recognizes that under current circumstances some aims are probably unattainable, such as a complete ceasefire (see below). Therefore, Africa Watch calls upon the two leaders to enact two unilateral steps which will go a long way towards minimizing the human cost of their war. These steps are:

- (1) A suspension of shelling. Each side recognizes that the other's shelling serves no military purpose. Therefore a unilateral suspension of shelling by either side is a possibility, irrespective of the response of the other. It could be achieved at minimal military disadvantage. As the artillery pieces are relatively few, conspicuous, and under central control, such a suspension would be relatively straightforward to monitor. A suspension of shelling would at a stroke remove the main source of civilian casualties and the main danger to relief personnel operating in the city.
- (2) The guaranteed protection of relief commodities from port or airport of arrival to delivery to clan elders for distribution. Either side could divert professional soldiers from its front line, at minimal military disadvantage, for such escort duty, irrespective of the response of the other. The food should be handed over to clan elders for distribution, as any attempt to take greater control of the distribution would bring relief organizations into sensitive and dangerous political areas.

These steps should be announced and implemented immediately and unilaterally.

To the United Nations and the International Community

The disaster in Mogadishu is complex. The war is being fought at several levels: there is the basic war for food and essential commodities; there is commercial looting; there is a fight for clan pride and even clan survival; and there is a fight for government office and the power and money that flow from it. The clan and political conflicts are in principle amenable to negotiation; the fight for food requires economic interventions, primarily massive food aid. The political and economic problems must be tackled

simultaneously, or any attempt to resolve the conflict is doomed to fail.

The United Nations proposal for a ceasefire negotiated between the two sides in New York is essentially naive and unattainable. The proposal for free passage of humanitarian aid across the battle lines is both naive and largely irrelevant. The linking of the delivery of aid to a ceasefire can only lead to deadlock.

Under present circumstances, a ceasefire is unattainable. Even if both sides agree formally, the level of discipline among the troops is so low, the number of free guns so high, and the need to loot for food so great, that firefights will undoubtedly continue in the city. With the massive distrust between the two sides, it is likely that each one will blame the other for violating the ceasefire, and full-scale war will resume. A ceasefire is possible only when the economic basis of the war -- hunger -- is at least partly solved.

Free passage across the lines is also fraught with problems. Who is to protect the relief convoys? General Aidid remains opposed to any form of foreign intervention while he perceives that such intervention may implicitly provide recognition to Ali Mahdi's government. Zones of control cannot be demarcated because each side claims to control the center of the city, and neither recognizes the areas controlled by neutral clans. Moreover, as access by both air and sea is possible to both north and south, the practical need for free passage does not arise.

The UN proposals fail to address the economic basis of much of the fighting, and the need to link a diplomatic initiative to the provision of large-scale humanitarian assistance. Were the UN to address this issue, it would quickly realize that one of the main obstacles is the lack of credibility that the UN itself has in Somalia. Noone in Somalia believes in UN promises of aid. The residents of Mogadishu and the leaders of the factions will not believe that the UN will deliver until they see the ships arriving and the airplanes flying -- and then they will wait to see if it is just a one-off operation or whether it will continue.

No conditions should be attached to the immediate delivery of large-scale humanitarian relief to Somalia, save that operations are conducted in both the north and the south of the city. A ceasefire is not a necessary precondition. There should not be any attempt to target the food to the most needy people, as this is impractical, and almost everybody -- including the fighters -- are needy. It does not matter if food delivered to Mogadishu is eaten by fighters or sold in the marketplace rather than donated to the poorest. It will have the effect of reducing prices, allowing people to eat more, and thus reducing tension. All means of delivering food should be attempted.

In negotiation with the two sides, the UN should initially set itself attainable goals short of a ceasefire. On the basis of extensive discussions with the two leaders and others,

Africa Watch proposes the following:

- (1) A suspension of shelling, unilaterally by each side.
- (2) The guaranteed protection of relief convoys from port or airport to the city.

The United Nations above all must recognize its past failures in Somalia. It must recognize that these failures, notably the adverse consequences of the mission of James Jonah, have stemmed from a failure to take the time to learn the details about the situation on the ground, and to talk at length with the two leaders, clan elders, representatives of the neutral clans, members of the reconciliation committee, and -- on questions of relief aid -- representatives of the private humanitarian organizations. The UN is a stranger to post-Barre Mogadishu, and must learn from those who are there. It is therefore essential that a resident representative be assigned to Mogadishu immediately, who can begin the slow task of gathering the necessary information, on the basis of which the UN can at last begin to make informed decisions.

To the United States

The United States provided extensive economic and military support to the regime of President Siad Barre during 1978-88, turning a blind eye to widespread abuses of human rights. Many of the weapons which are now being used to kill and maim civilians were supplied by the US, which therefore has a residual responsibility to ensure that the violence against civilians is brought to an end. Like the United Nations, the US has also been absent from Mogadishu for over a year. Though it has provided finance to voluntary organizations through the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), it has yet to make a significant diplomatic attempt to resolve the conflict.

Ideally, the United States should lend its expertise, prestige and economic resources to ensuring that the UN efforts at negotiation are more likely to meet with success. Despite its previous support for the Barre regime, the United States is held in high regard in Mogadishu, and US backing would greatly enhance the chances of success of any diplomatic or humanitarian initiative. It is time for the United States' representatives to the United Nations and the State Department to match the commitment to the humanitarian needs demonstrated by the OFDA, and support attempts by the UN, the Eritreans and others to limit the human cost of the conflict and if possible bring it to a peaceful resolution.

Africa Watch is a non-governmental organization created in May 1988 to monitor human rights practices in Africa and to promote respect for internationally-recognized standards. Its Chairman is William Carmichael and the Vice-Chair

is Alice Brown. Its Executive Director is Rakiya Omaar; its Associate Director is Alex de Waal; Janet Fleischman and Karen Sorensen are Research Associates; Barbara Baker, Ben Penglase and Urmi Shah are Associates.

Africa Watch is part of Human Rights Watch, an organization that also encompasses Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch and Middle East Watch. The Chairman of Human Rights Watch is Robert L. Bernstein. Aryeh Neier is Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, the Deputy Director is Kenneth Roth, Holly Burkhalter is Washington Director and Susan Osnos is Press Director.