CHAPTER 4: US SPECIAL FORCES INVOLVEMENT IN SOMALIA
4.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the US Special Operations Forces (US SOF) in a comprehensive way, a case study on Somalia is critical. This is because the involvement of US SOF here have seen the failure of US SOF in achieving their objectives. This chapter therefore focus on the involvement of US Special Forces in Somalia which also involves UNOSOM I in Somalia in 1992. The history of the events would be presented briefly but it is an important factor contributing to the humanitarian disaster in 1992. The Somalia operation culminated in the planned assault and capture of a Somali warlord, General Aideed. This assault codenamed Task Force Ranger, which consisted of US Special Forces, ended tragically with the failure to capture Aideed, but left 18 American soldiers dead.

4.2 BACKGROUND OF THE CONFLICT

The state of Somalia is the result of the combining of two separately administered colonies\(^1\). The British Somaliland in the north and Italian Somaliland in the south. The two colonies were inhabited by ethnic Somalis who may also be found in Djibouti (French Somaliland), Kenya’s Northern Frontier District (NFD) and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. The majority of Somalis are Sunni Muslims but a small proportion are Christians. Somalis are united by one common language which is Somali. However, other languages are also widely used such as Arabic, English and Italian.\(^2\) For a short period during the Second World War, the Somali people enjoyed a temporary reunification

\(^2\) United Nations Peacekeeping; UN DPI/1306/Rev. 4; February 1995; pp 5-6.
following Italy's occupation of Ethiopia's Ogaden region and Italian Somaliland in addition to British Somaliland in August 1940\textsuperscript{1}. The enforced reunification of Somalia was subsequently reversed in March 1941 when Britain defeated Italy in the Horn. After the war, both the British Somali and Italian Somali were put under the UN Trusteeship system\textsuperscript{4}. 

The Italian Somali gained its independence in 1959 under the Somali Youth League (SYL) governance whose leader Seyyid Abdullah Issa emerged as Prime Minister. It then joined the British Somaliland and attained its independence on 26 June 1960 and the Republic of Somalia was formed\textsuperscript{5}. At unification the parallel institutions of government were merged with Mr Aden Abdullah Osman as President and Seyyid Issa of SYL as Prime Minister. \textsuperscript{6} In 1969, Major-General Mohammed Siad Barre assumed absolute power after a coup d'etat. Barre adopted a socialist state. He also resorted to a divide and rule strategy which by the 1980s has resulted in several state orchestrated mass murderings of elites belonging to opposing clans\textsuperscript{7}. The downfall of President Siad Barre in January 1991, however had resulted in a power struggle and clan clashes in may parts of Somalia. In November, the most intense fighting since January broke out in the capital, Mogadishu, between two factions- one supporting Interim President Ali Mahdi Mohamed and the other General Mahamed Farah Aidid.

\textsuperscript{1} Lewis, I.M.; The Modern History of Somaliland; From Nation to State; Weidenfield and Nicolson, London, 1965; pp.116-139.
\textsuperscript{2} Lewis, I.M.; The Modern History of Somaliland; From Nation to State; Weidenfield and Nicolson, London, 1965; pp.116-139.
\textsuperscript{4} United Nations Peacekeeping, UN DPI/1306/Rev. 4; February 1995; UN pp 128-129.
\textsuperscript{5} United Nations Peacekeeping, UN DPI/1306/Rev. 4; February 1995; UN pp 128-129.
Since then, fighting persisted in Mogadishu and spread throughout Somalia, with heavily armed elements controlling various parts of the country. Some declared alliance with one or the other of the two factions, while others did not. Numerous marauding groups of bandits added to the problem. The hostilities resulted in widespread death and destruction, forcing hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee their homes and causing a dire need for emergency humanitarian assistance. Almost 4.5 million people in Somalia – over half of the estimated population – were threatened by severe malnutrition and malnutrition-related disease, with the most affected living in the countryside. It was estimated that perhaps 3,000,000 people died since November 1991 and at least 1.5 million lives were at immediate risk. Almost one million Somalis sought refuge in neighbouring countries and elsewhere.\(^8\)

The political chaos, deteriorating security situation, widespread banditry and looting, and extent of physical destruction compounded the problem and severely constrained the delivery of humanitarian supplies. Furthermore, the conflict threatened stability in the Horn of Africa region. And its continuation will threaten the international peace and security in the area. Essentially, Somalia had been thrown into a vicious cycle of famine and violence.\(^9\)

\(^8\)"Pity the peacemakers"; *Time*, June 28, 1993; pp. 19-20.
4.3 THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT IN SOMALIA

There are a variety of reasons for the US involvement. The most crucial among them is the failure of the United Nations to play its role satisfactorily. The United Nations were involved in Somalia through UNOSOM I, UNITAF and UNOSOM II. The United Nations went in because of the desperate situation the country was facing in terms of humanitarian. Vast starvation and hunger have left thousands dead and millions waiting to die. The world’s media also played up the situation by constantly portraying images of the dying and starving Somalis. However, the UN mission failed because of lack of protection on humanitarian supplies due to constant political chaos and clashing clans of Somali militias\(^{10}\).

Despite concerted efforts by officials in Washington to treat the Somalia crisis as a humanitarian issue that was best handled by international relief agencies, the intensity of American media focus on the failure of on-going UN humanitarian efforts in Somalia finally brought the subject to the attention of the White House towards the end of summer 1992\(^ {11}\). President Bush instructed his top national security advisers to do whatever was necessary to stop starvation in Somalia.\(^ {12}\) The outcome of this process was Bush administration’s decision to dispatch a sizeable contingent of US forces led by the First Marine Expeditionary Force (1 MEF) to Magadishu to ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian aid. Thus, Operation Restore Hope had begun.

\(^{10}\) Findlay, Trevor; Challenges for the new peacekeepers; SIPRI Research Report No. 12; Oxford University Press; Great Brittain; 1996; pp. 36-37.
In the mean time, UNOSOM remained fully responsible for the political aspects and for humanitarian assistance to Somalia. Good coordination on the ground and at UN HQ was established between UNTAF and the UN. UNOSOM remained in the capital and continued to liaise with UNITAF and plan for the transition to normal peace-keeping functions. The presence and operations of UNITAF had a positive impact on the security situation in Somalia and on the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. However despite the improvement, a secure environment had not yet been established in Somalia and incidents of violence continued to occur\textsuperscript{13}. The Secretary-General concluded that UNITAF should transit to UNOSOM II. UNOSOM II would be endowed with enforcement powers.

UNOSOM II would seek to complete through disarmament and reconciliation the task begun by UNITAF for the restoration of peace, stability, law and order. The mandate would also empower UNOSOM II to provide assistance to the Somali people in building their economy and social and political life, reestablishing the country’s institutional structure, achieving national political reconciliation, recreating a Somali State based on democratic governance and rehabilitating the country’s economic and infrastructure\textsuperscript{14}. However the US forces was not too keen on the disarmament issue. As far as the White House is concerned, the basis of US political consensus on Operation

\textsuperscript{11} "Frontline: The lost American Intervention in Somalia"; PBS Online and WGBH/FRONTLINE; 1998.
\textsuperscript{12} Hilsman, Roger; The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs; Harper & Row; pg12-17.
\textsuperscript{13} Rikhye, Indar Jit; Harbottle, Michael; Egge, Bjorn; The Thin Blue Line: International Peacekeeping and Its Future; Yale University Press; New York, 1974; pp 286-302.
Restore Hope would be eroded if disarmament was inserted into the mission mandate\textsuperscript{15}. Such a mandate would increase the length of the US mission as well as the risk factor that is, the greater likelihood of American casualties.

The US, however, to some extent appreciated the importance of disarmament but not well enough to have it written into the mission mandate. The consequence of this difference was a situation in which the organization which desired the vigorous implementation of a disarmament programme in Somalia lacked the capability necessary to back it up, whereas the body with the capacity to disarm Somali units and irregulars lacked the will to do so. These had a profound impact on the conception and implementation of a disarmament programme in Somalia\textsuperscript{16}.

As required under the Addis Ababa agreement and mandated by the Security Council, one of the crucial tasks that fell to UNOSOM II after it took over from UNITAF was the disarmament of all Somali factions and armed groups who terrorized the people and obstructed humanitarian activities. However certain clan leaders not only refused to disarm but resorted to violence. On June 5 1993, 25 Pakistani troops were killed, 10 missing and 54 wounded in a series of ambushes and armed attacks against UNOSOM II troops throughout south of Mogadishu by Somali militiamen, apparently belonging to the United Somali Congress/Somali National Alliance led by General

\textsuperscript{15} Zamels, Estantias Angél; Managing arms in peace processes: The issues; The United Nations Institute For Disarmament Research; Geneva; UNIDIR/96/46; 1996; pp.135-168.

\textsuperscript{16} Zamels, Estantias Angél; Managing arms in peace processes: The issues; pp.135-168.
Mohamed Farah Aideed. The bodies of the victims were mutilated and subjected to other forms of degrading treatment\(^\text{17}\).

International reactions to the June 5 incident were immediate and intense. These would significantly affect the course of disarmament embarked upon by UNOSOM II. The UN Security Council adopted resolution 837 condemning the incident\(^\text{18}\). Resolution 837 also contributed to the escalation of the tension in Mogadishu as it provided the legal basis for the series of man-hunt operations launched by UNOSOM II to apprehend General Aideed\(^\text{19}\). Air strikes were launched and managed to destroy some arms dumps. A reward of $25,000 was offered for Aideed’s head. US Army Rangers and Special Forces launched an operation in south Mogadishu aimed at capturing a number of key aides of General Aideed who were suspected of complicity in the 5 June attack as well as subsequent attacks on UN personnel and facilities.

The US lost 18 soldiers killed and 75 were wounded. The bodies of the killed US soldiers was subjected to humiliating treatment.\(^\text{20}\) Following the events of 3 October 1993, the Clinton Administration responded in two opposing directions. First it increased the strength of the US Forces. It sent the 13\(^\text{th}\) Marine Expeditionary Unit to Mogadishu to conduct mire strikes against suspected Somali targets. However, the US


\(^{20}\) Adibe, Clement; Managing arms in peace processes; UNIDIR; pg 60-61.
soon abandoned the first plan, and announced the complete withdrawal of US Forces in Somalia.\textsuperscript{21}

Resolution 897 of February 1994 formally obliged UNOSOM II to terminate its mission by the end of March 1995. Many national contingents pulled out long before that deadline so that by 2 March 1995 the UN accomplished an orderly withdrawal from Somalia.

4.4 THE USE OF THE US SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

The humanitarian effort soon became a special operations to capture General Aideed and his warlords. Among the Special Forces troops involved was the third battalion, US Army 75th Ranger Regiment and US Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Delta (Delta Force).\textsuperscript{22} In public there had been no mention of the Special Operations Forces which was dispatched by President Bill Clinton on August 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1993 with orders to capture the warlord, General Aideed, and kidnap him offshore to face murder charges. He was suspected to be the main mastermind on the ambush that killed 24 Pakistani peacekeepers.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Time}, October 18, 1993; pp. 46-47.
\textsuperscript{23} Day, Clifford E. and Millsap Jr, Ralph P. \textit{Critical Analysis on the Defeat of Task Force Ranger}. 54
A Pentagon spokeswoman Kathleen de Laski mentioned then that only the US Army Rangers were sent there but announced no changes to US Policy in Somalia. On August 30, the US Delta Force and members of the Rangers launched their first attempt to capture General Aideed. However, they failed as their primary target included one man who looked like Somalia's dominant political leader but turned out to be a member of the UN Relief Mission. This was the first of six failed attempts to capture Aideed. It will culminate into the sixth and final attempt ending in a bloody firefight near Bakara Market in Mogadishu. This operations involved what was to be known as The Task Force Ranger.

The battle of Mogadishu (sometimes called "the Battle of the Black Sea" after the neighborhood in which most of it occurred) was the climax to the UN-sponsored, American-led intervention in Somalia that began in 1992. The peace thereafter was supposed to be overseen by a modest international contingent as the UN assembled a new Somali government. This is not what happened. Clan violence resumed, due in no small part to the ambitions of the Habr Gidr clan and its leader, Mohamed Farrah Aideed, who hoped to dominate any new government. Aideed's forces assassinated Somalis working for the UN and began attacking UN peacekeeping forces.

In one incident in July, 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed and their bodies mutilated. The chief of the UN mission in Somalia at the time, US Admiral Jonathan Howe, was outraged by this turn of events and determined to intimidate the Habr Gidr into cooperation. Using his connections in Washington, he contrived to secure the deployment

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of a special operations force, Task Force Ranger, consisted of US Army Rangers and also included a contingent of the legendary Delta Force. What they were supposed to do in Mogadishu was raid the residences and bases of the leaders of Habr Gidr. The Rangers would provide a screen while Delta would arrest the militia leaders.

Task Force Ranger managed to complete five raids of this type with only trivial injuries to themselves. The Special Forces had received word on October 3rd that they will be conducting their sixth operation to nab Aideed. For the first time, the Special Operations Forces would be moving into Aideed’s neighbourhood. There, most of the Somalis were militias with weapons and angry with the Americans. But five previous failed missions to nab him without serious injuries had instilled confidence in the special operations troops. However, on that mission their luck ran out. The force arrived in helicopters at the site of a meeting of Habr Gidr notables. They quickly secured some of the surrounding streets and bundled the prisoners into a truck in a small convoy. General Aideed was not there. The Task Force was disappointed again on the failure of precise intelligence. Then one of the Black Hawks was shot down, crash-landing nearby. The US forces underestimated the strength and the weapons available to the Somali militia. The narrow open spaces available in the urban streets for helicopter movement was also overlooked by the Americans.

28 "Pity the peacemakers", Time, June 28,1993, pp.18-20.
29 Time, October 18,1993, p 40.
28 Time, October 18,1993; pp. 40-44.
29 Time, October 18,1993; pp. 45-46.
The Ranger force had to go to that site to rescue the survivors and to destroy sensitive equipment. A few minutes later, another helicopter was shot down. The second site was soon overrun, despite a last-ditch defense by two members of Delta Force, and the pilot, Major Durant was taken prisoner. The two Delta operators were killed along with three of Durant’s crew. Durant himself was spared and taken prisoner.31

What turned an unfortunate mishap into the biggest fire-fight involving American forces since the Vietnam War, was that the convoy was unable to find the first crash site. Whether despite or because of the guidance it received from observation aircraft, the Lost Convoy, as it became known, blasted its way up and down the city, narrowly missing its destination (the first helicopter crash site) on several occasions and taking 50% casualties before arriving back at its base. The Lost Convoy had a harrowing experience driving through the narrow streets of Mogadishu32. From building windows, rooftops, behind walls, Somalis showered them with automatic gunfire and grenades. Five of the six Rangers killed in this operation died in this convoy33. The Ranger commander soon ordered the convoy to retreat to its base at the airport but one Ranger foot patrol of platoon strength pressed on to the first helicopter crash site34.

A relief convoy was soon organized, manned in large part by support personnel, but was similarly defeated by the terrain of the city. The Somalis’ new-found facility with rocket-propelled grenades had ruled out extraction of the force around the first

31 "They beat me violently with their fists and sticks"; Time, October 18,1993; p.40.
32 Bowden, Mark; Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War; Penguin Books, 2000; adapted from Philadelphia Online website.
crash site by helicopter. In fact, three other helicopters had been badly damaged but managed to return to friendly territory. It was not until nearly midnight that a relief column of 500 men consisting men of the US Army 10th Mountain Division, Pakistani troops and Malaysian troops could set out, including tanks from the Pakistanis and armored personnel carriers (APC) from the Malaysians\(^35\). For a variety of reasons, the interface between the Rangers and the Malaysian drivers was not altogether happy\(^36\).

The Americans were furious that the relief convoy took a long time to organize. Accordingly, the Malaysian Army’s doctrine of engagement was different with the American’s. But according to a Malaysian Army officer who was present there, the Malaysian troops performed exemplary well. It was the Pakistanis, who had main battle tanks, was responsible to escort the convoy, made a u-turn just before reaching Bakara market\(^37\). The Malaysian troops in the APCs radioed back to their headquarters and the Malaysian commanding officer made the decision to go ahead to rescue the Rangers and Delta Force members trapped there\(^38\). Without the courage of the Malaysian troops, the outcome of the operation might have been far worse\(^39\).

This column knew exactly where it was going, and it was big enough to ignore most obstacles in its way. Nonetheless, mostly because of a long delay at the crash


\(^{35}\) "They beat me violently with their fists and sticks"; *Time*, October 18, 1993; p 40.


\(^{37}\) Interview with Lieutenant-Colonel Sani Ruyan, Royal Intelligence Corps, Malaysian Army; He was a member (then as a Major) of the Malaysian contingent sent to Somali and was involved in the operational aspect of the peacekeeping mission there. He interview was conducted on 15th March 2001.

\(^{38}\) Interview with Lieutenant-Colonel Sani Ruyan, Royal Intelligence Corps, Malaysian Army.

\(^{39}\) Interview with Major C. Douglas Dawson, United States Air Force, Deputy Chief, Security Assistance Office, Embassy of USA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
site to remove the body of a pilot from the Black Hawk, it was not until after sunrise that the column pulled into a sports stadium that was pressed into service as a field hospital\textsuperscript{40}. It was also costly for this relief column to run the gauntlet. Three 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division soldiers were killed and a Malaysian soldier was also killed. The toll for the Americans was 18 dead and several dozen wounded\textsuperscript{41}. The figure usually given for deaths among the Somalis was 500.

4.5 THE OUTCOME OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

This operation had revealed a military force that underestimated its enemy. The assault was launched into the most dangerous part of Mogadishu in daylight, even though the Ranger and Delta forces were trained and equipped primarily to work in darkness, where their night-vision devices can afford a decisive advantage\textsuperscript{42}. Commanders who thought it unlikely that Somalis could shoot down helicopters saw five shot down by the Somalis (three had limped back to base before crash-landing). During that operation, ground rescue convoys were blocked for hours by barricades and ambushes, leaving at least five U.S. soldiers to die awaiting rescue, including two Delta sergeants who were posthumously awarded Medals of Honor. On the whole, US SOF in Somalia witnessed one of the most intense firefight since Vietnam. They suffered 18 killed and 75 wounded.

\textsuperscript{40} Interview with Lieutenant-Colonel Sani Ruyan, Royal Intelligence Corps, Malaysian Army.
\textsuperscript{41} "They beat me violently with their fists and sticks"; \textit{Time}, October 18, 1993, pp 40.
The American soldiers were so confident of a quick victory that they neglected to take night-vision devices and water, both sorely needed later. Carefully defined rules of engagement, calling for soldiers to fire only on Somalis who aimed weapons at them, were quickly discarded in the heat of the fight. Most soldiers interviewed said that through most of the fight they fired on crowds and eventually at anyone and anything they saw. The bad animosity between the elite Delta units and the Ranger infantry forces effectively created two separate ground-force commanders, who for at least part of the battle were no longer speaking to each other. Delta commandos had took accidental fire on several occasions from the younger Rangers. The poor coordination between commanders in the air and a ground convoy had also sent vehicles meandering through a maelstrom of fire, resulting in the deaths of five soldiers and three Somali prisoners.

The US military's initial concerns about locating Aidiedd in the narrow dusty alleyways of Mogadishu had become a reality. At least four risky missions ended in failure because of bad intelligence, according to US commanders in Somalia. From the beginning, the Special Forces had argued that without adequate intelligence, a Special Operations force would be useless. And military intelligence capability had been reduced as most US combat troops were withdrawn as ordered by Clinton three months earlier.

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43 Bowden, Mark; Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War; Penguin Books, 2000; adapted from Philadelphia Online website.
44 Interview with Lieutenant-Colonel Sani Ruyan, Royal Intelligence Corps, Malaysian Army.
However, there was a CIA team skilled in intercepting communications and other techniques which was dispatched to Somalia. They were able to listen in on satellite telephone and radio communications with Aideed’s associates. But Aideed did not call them and went into deep cover. The CIA high-tech approach was useless in pinpointing Aideed because the warlord communicated by using walkie-talkies too low powered to be detected by the CIA. He also used an old, low powered transmitter aboard a truck to make mobile radio broadcasts to his followers. In addition Aideed’s forces kept an eye on helicopter operations at Mogadishu airport, where the Delta Force was based.

The withdrawal of most of the combat troops from Mogadishu has left the US troops still there without armoured protection. To deal with the increasing threats, the US military commander had made a request for more heavy armour like M-1 Abrams tanks, Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles (IFV) and some heavy artillery. The request was turned down by the US Defence Secretary, Les Aspins. This was in line with Clinton’s new administration’s policy of cutting down US involvement in overseas military operations. Clinton wanted to focus his resources on domestic matters. As a result the demand for more combat support arms in Somalia was turned down.

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46 "Wanted warlord no. 1"; Time, June 28, 1993; p. 20.
47 "Frontline: Ambush in Mogadishu: Readings: Learning from Aidid"; 1998 PBS Online and WGBH/FRONTLINE.
48 "Frontline: Ambush in Mogadishu: Readings: Did my son have to die?"; PBS Online and WGBH/FRONTLINE, 1998.
4.6 CONCLUSION

In sum Somalia has been a major blow to US SOF, it denied the initiative of US SOF as an elite unit. It has been a shattering experience for US SOF as an capable force. America went to war in Mogadishu in an effort to remove warlord Aideed from the political equation. The United Nations was attempting to form a coalition government out of the nation's warring clans, but encountered stiff and bloody resistance from Aideed. Jonathan Howe, who managed the United Nations effort, sought and obtained the intervention of special U.S. forces for the purpose of arresting Aideed and other top leaders of his clan. Since the objective of capturing the Habr Gidr notables was achieved, the Rangers insist to this day that the mission was a success. By most accounts, Mohamed Farrah Aideed was indeed deeply shaken. After the dispatch of an aircraft carrier and some diplomatically phrased threats from Admiral Howe, the captured pilot was released. However, such support as remained in the US for the Somalia intervention collapsed. The raids by Task Force Ranger ceased. The US withdrew entirely a few months later. The task of special forces is to make assaults that are sudden, surprising and limited. Such operations can be an invaluable component of a larger campaign. The special forces operations in this instance, operated without concerted support from other groups. Because the failure of the operation, it was a futile attempt of using US SOF as the main operating unit.

49 Bowden, Mark; Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War; Penguin Books, 2000; adapted from Philadelphia Online website.

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