

## **Success in Failed States: Canadian Military Strategy in Somalia and the Implications for Afghanistan\***

by  
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### **ABSTRACT**

*This article on the Canadian mission in Somalia takes a contrarian approach to the conventional wisdom, which — focusing on the torture and murder of a Somali civilian — holds that the Canadian effort was a disaster. It points out that in the Somalia operation one can see the genesis of the “3D” (Defence, Development, Diplomacy) approach which now so clearly defines the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces first worked to establish security, then encouraged Somalis to embrace the peace-making process. The Canadians ‘led from behind,’ working with and encouraging local leaders to define community needs and projects. Finally, they engaged other Canadian government agencies to provide the development and reconstruction resources. However, I caution readers about the perils of drawing ‘lessons’ from the Somalia case, if only because one lesson that could be drawn easily would be to avoid such operations altogether and leave failed states to fester. The article argues that the application of the 3D approach in Afghanistan was simply a case of doing ‘what works.’ The real lesson of Somalia is that rescuing failed states requires patience — years, even decades, of commitment — and huge amounts of money, talented people, and political will.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Somalia was the scene of separate United Nations peacekeeping and non-United Nations enforcement operations in 1992-93. The Horn of Africa country was one of the first of the post-Cold War era to experience the misfortune of state failure and to inspire urgent calls for intervention because of massive human suffering and disorder. Somalia had no choice but to serve as the first test of peacekeeping (United Nations Operation in Somalia I) and peace enforcement (United States-led Unified Task Force) in the midst of a still-simmering civil war. Both missions were expected to make rapid progress; the United States-led coalition, in particular, was conceived as a short-term intervention to quickly alleviate the humanitarian situation and depart.

The international community had not attempted to succour and rebuild a failed state since the United Nations Operation in the Congo (1960-64).<sup>1</sup> The Congo operation established stability, which solidified under a kleptocratic dictator who ruled for over thirty years.<sup>2</sup> Although a qualified success, it was of little use or relevance to the United Nations in 1992. The Congo was such a searing experience none of the organization's leaders wanted engagement at that level of intensity again, and the mission cannot be disentangled from the global Cold War confrontation, the principle of territorial integrity of newly independent African states, and decolonization.<sup>3</sup> For Somalia, the context, nature of the conflict, and challenges were different. The United Nations was compelled to re-examine traditional operating assumptions and practices. The organization had to shrug off its naivety and recognize that internal conflicts can be worse-case scenarios, requiring sustained and multifaceted support; to not rush the resolution faster than the local population was willing to accept; and to find reliable local leaders to work with on stabilization and reconstruction.

The United Nations decided in December 1992 to suspend its mission and transfer command on the ground to the United States-led intervention. The Canadian Forces had been anticipating a peacekeeping role, but it reorganized its contingent for the coalition.<sup>4</sup> As part of the Unified Task Force, the Canadian Joint Force Somalia secured its area of responsibility, escorted humanitarian relief supplies, and, though they were not obligated to do so, encouraged stabilization and reconstruction during the six month (one troop rotation) deployment to the Horn. The contingent listened to the local people and leaders, and gave them control over the direction of the recovery process. Community leadership made it more likely the Canadians would advance genuine Somali priorities and make a real difference in the peoples' lives. Security had to come first, for without security little could be accomplished, but diplomacy and development programs were required to help the Somalis stabilize and reconstruct their state. The contingent sought to operationalize the other Canadian government departments and agencies that provided these services. Their openness to multi-departmental participation and advice, and to the principle of 'leading from behind,' set a precedent evident in other failed state missions with Canadian Forces participation, such as Afghanistan (2005-present).<sup>5</sup>

In Canada, these operational achievements were overshadowed by two suspicious Somali civilian deaths directly connected to Canadian troops. Although it is wise to have reservations on the drawing of 'lessons learned' from history, for this implies past and present events can be connected in a linear fashion, without regard to context, cause, and effect, or the free will of human actors,<sup>6</sup> the incidents and scandal that followed gave the military a concrete reason to critically reflect on its conduct of overseas expeditions, and how it explains them to the Canadian media and public. The incidents underlined, in the most emphatic way possible, the importance of strong leadership at all command levels. Senior officers in Canada learned of the need to change the military's

practice of public relations and rules of engagement that govern the operational use of force.

### **Somalia as a Failed State**

These matters were not fully understood in the context of failed state interventions when Somalia collapsed late in January 1991. After years of raids and skirmishes, and three of full-scale combat, several rebel militias or “factions” overthrew Somali dictator Mohamed Siad Barre on the twenty-sixth. The state had never been an important part of the daily lives of Somalis, who were nomadic and highly self-reliant, and Barre’s brutal campaigns to quash the rebellion eroded its popular support and legitimacy except among the tribes or ‘clans’ related to his family.<sup>7</sup> The faction leaders could not agree on who would be the new president, and the fighting between them and against the deposed Barre destroyed what remained of the shattered state. In 1991-92, the civil conflict disrupted farming in the south, causing a mass famine so shocking that Western publics began demanding something be done to help. To make matters worse, Mogadishu, Somalia’s capital, was awash with armed bandits and faction fighters. Many of the thousands of gunmen were addicted to *khat*, a local narcotic known to suppress hunger and heighten feelings of paranoia and aggressiveness. Mogadishu was closest to the routes into the famine zone, yet factions and bandits were looting and impeding the humanitarian deliveries to the starving and sick.<sup>8</sup>

The United Nations operation established under Security Council resolution 751 (24 April 1992) was in serious trouble by July 1992. Violence and a lack of consent was limiting effectiveness. Peacekeepers need local consent to perform their duties but some faction leaders, including one of the most powerful, Mohamed Farah Aidid, would not cooperate with the Somalia mission. The United Nations personnel could not confront and demand respect from the factions and bandits because they were outnumbered and outgunned, and they and the humanitarian relief workers were vulnerable to reprisals.<sup>9</sup> After months of dangerous work, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Somalia, Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun, was still negotiating permission from the factions so that the operation’s 500-person infantry battalion could join its 50 peace observers in the field. Food aid reaching the starving was but a trickle. Sahnoun urged the United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to strengthen and decentralize the mission to encompass not just Mogadishu but all Somalia, arguing that this would make famine relief and the peace process easier. In a report to the council, Boutros-Ghali proposed that United Nations Offices supported by small battalions be established at major ports: Kismaayo (south), Mogadishu (centre), Boosaaso (northwest — assigned to Canada), and Berbera (northeast).<sup>10</sup>

The plan found a strong and enthusiastic advocate in the secretary-gener-

al, but its objectives may have been too ambitious. Boutros-Ghali believed African wars were being neglected by the permanent members (the great powers) of the security council. The war in former Yugoslavia (1991-95) was receiving an enormous amount of attention. Boutros-Ghali wanted to end this apparent double-standard and make the United Nations more effective in Somalia.<sup>11</sup> The redesigned mission would protect non-governmental organization humanitarian relief convoys, supplies, and workers, and monitor ceasefires (peacekeeping); foster a political settlement through “conciliation, mediation and good offices” (diplomatic peace-making); and demobilize, disarm, and reintegrate the factions and gunmen (peace-building). The latter related to durable, self-sustaining peace, and in Somalia’s case would have extended to broad-based structural initiatives to rehabilitate the institutions of the state.<sup>12</sup> The peace-building and reconstruction responsibilities may well seem excessive, especially for such a small mission, but they are consistent with the international understanding at the time that, once the United Nations provided a respite from the fighting, the disputants would come to their senses and with help sort out things by and for themselves.<sup>13</sup>

The United Nations plan was undercut by the way the operation’s strength was increased. Sahnoun’s negotiations with the factions had revolved around three additional 500-person battalions.<sup>14</sup> The secretary-general’s 24 August 1992 report to the security council on the recommended next steps in Somalia reflected an important shift in attitude. He called for an increase to 4, 219 troops, more than twice what Sahnoun had been proposing and, without pausing to consult the factions, got approval with Council Resolution 775 (28 August 1992) and letter S/24532 (8 September 1992).<sup>15</sup> The Somalis saw this as a breach of faith. According to Sahnoun, they grumbled,

the United Nations are double-crossing us. They tell us something, and they are doing something else.’ That was the sort of thing people resented. . . . We were suddenly seen as enemies. They were before more sitting as friends, but suddenly, they became suspicious. . . . And that is when the problems started.<sup>16</sup>

As Sahnoun indicates, Somalis greeted news of the expansion with surprise and hostility. The United Nations had shown a lack of commitment to consultation and willingness to push for more progress than the Somalis were ready to accept. This display of disrespect foreshadowed a major change in how Somalis perceived and responded to the mission, and it would not be the last. The same impatience would be evident in the creation of the United States coalition, which had a few months to make Somalia safe for humanitarian deliveries.<sup>17</sup> But while the Unified Task Force could act and react no matter what the Somalis thought or did about the intervention, the first United Nations operation had recourse to arms only in self-defense under Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter and depended on local acceptance to achieve success.

Boutros-Ghali’s *fait accompli* was not a misreading of the Somali polit-

ical scene. It was his way of “getting tough” with the factions. The United Nations had been slow to move but the leaders of the Somali militias were more responsible than anyone for the stuttering international peacekeeping and relief efforts. The organization was unsure how to give effect to the international community’s will in places where no government existed.<sup>18</sup> There was no one who could negotiate a Status of Forces Agreement to confirm what peacekeepers could and could not do (thereby providing the troops with a measure of protection). Under-Secretary-General Murrack Goulding, head of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, said that the difficulties of the first Somalia mission related directly to the absence of political leaders who could reliably conclude agreements on peacekeeping deployments and activities.<sup>19</sup>

The United Nations decided, with Canadian government and broad international support, to adhere less rigorously to the principle of consent. This was evident in the first edition of Boutros-Ghali’s conflict resolution blueprint, *An Agenda For Peace* (June 1992), which described peacekeeping as “the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, *hitherto* with the consent of all the parties concerned.”<sup>20</sup> This did not imply the United Nations was prepared to use force. That would have run against its non-violent and impartial organizational culture.<sup>21</sup> The intention was to give the organization more flexibility when dealing with inhospitable environments. *An Agenda For Peace* showed that the United Nations was profoundly naive regarding the control of civil violence, in that decreased reliance on consent could easily, as in Somalia, heighten the resentment the “peace-kept” felt toward the peacekeepers, making avoidance of the use of arms more difficult. Respecting the consent boundary did not mean it could not be crossed, but the United Nations needed to know what it was doing if and when it was. The organization unrealistically expected conformity to its wishes in civil wars and failed states, where anything can happen, and, since the Somalia manoeuvre was ordered by the secretariat and not by member states, the resources were lacking to quickly up the ante in response to rapid and unpredictable actions by faction leaders.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Canadian Mission in Somalia**

The Somalia operation admitted defeat in November 1992. Its position became untenable in October, when Aidid withdrew his consent and declared that he would not tolerate further intrusion into Somalia’s internal affairs.<sup>23</sup> Some Western governments, aware that the media had made the famine a political issue, remained determined to see humanitarian relief get through, with or without local consent. The United States, having consulted with Boutros-Ghali and allies like Canada, France, and Italy, announced that it would lead an ad hoc peace enforcement coalition into Somalia. Under Security Council resolution 794 (3 December 1992), the Unified Task Force was to establish, if necessary by force, a secure environment so aid deliveries could safely proceed.<sup>24</sup> The com-

mitment of the Canadian Joint Force Somalia, a 1,300 person joint task force ('joint' because it comprised more than one national military service; in this case all three Canadian Forces Environments were represented) was clear evidence of Ottawa's support for the coalition. Assigned the Beledweyne Humanitarian Relief Sector, Canada's contingent was in place at the beginning of January 1993.

The task force commander, Colonel Serge Labbé, and the commander of the Canadian Airborne Regiment battlegroup (the task force land component), Lieutenant-Colonel Carol Mathieu, conducted a 'hearts and minds' campaign, similar to what the British military had used to defeat communist resistance in Malaya in the 1950s.<sup>25</sup> This involved earning the respect of the local people and convincing them to align themselves with the security forces, winning their hearts and minds in other words and marginalizing troublemakers. Labbé and Mathieu settled on the British model intuitively as the only way to achieve both tracks of their two-track strategy. They wanted to establish short-term security and the conditions for self-sustaining peace. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia spent about 70 percent of its time working on track two, encouraging Somalis to reject violence as a political tool. Labbé believed the coalition would not leave a lasting legacy of peace unless the Somalis came to see the foreigners as genuine guarantors of their livelihood and not as fly-by-night opportunists.<sup>26</sup>

The Canadian Airborne Regiment battlegroup quickly took control despite harsh environmental conditions. Day and night patrolling began, and its armored vehicles — Cougars, Bisons, and Grizzlies — were rumbling along the roads soon after they arrived. The Canadians were referred to by the Somalis "as the white technicals who never sleep."<sup>27</sup> The "white" reference may have related to the color of their vehicles, which were painted white in anticipation of the cancelled United Nations peacekeeping role. More likely it referred to the skin color of most Canadian soldiers. This was a sign of how Somalis initially perceived them — as foreigners who were self-evidently different, alien, and suspect. The regular patrols were meant to create an impression and gain the local people's respect, and they had the desired effect. Most of the Humanitarian Relief Sector assigned to Canada was secured by late February. The Canadians declared the whole sector 'secure' on 27 March 1993.

This was achieved in "the worst environmental conditions experienced by the Canadian Forces in many years." Simple day-to-day survival was a constant challenge. Cleanliness was next to impossible because fine flour-like sand blew around incessantly and covered everything. Normal daytime temperature highs were a punishing 35-45 degrees Celsius with 60-80 percent humidity.<sup>28</sup> Soldiers used bottled water for drinking and washing because local sources were unsafe, and the decision not to bring cooks required the Canadians to choose from a limited selection of pre-packaged dinners for all meals during their entire tour (except for periods of leave). No indigenous support was available, the local

infrastructure having been completely destroyed, and there was a constant risk of disease, scorpions, snakebites, and armed Somali attacks.

Labbé and Mathieu reduced the risk of destabilizing violence several ways, but most important was pursuing arms control rather than disarmament. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia dealt with weapons and most mission challenges in the same general way. This involved a “complete immersion into the communities of the Humanitarian Relief Sector, which led to the confidence-building first between Canadians and Somalis, and then between the clans themselves.”<sup>29</sup> Immersion was the surest way of melding the primary coalition objective — curbing armed violence — with what locals believed would help stabilize the community. The intelligence gained helped the Canadian Joint Force Somalia to analyze the politico-military weapons issue, and convince local and faction leaders to keep heavy weapons out of circulation and most light weapons identified, tagged, and removed from view.<sup>30</sup> Somalis were urged to store heavy and crew-served weapons (those requiring more than one person to operate) in one of three collection sites. Ammunition and arms caches were seized. Personal weapons were tolerated but had to be pointed at the ground in Beledweyne, and armed vehicles, including “technicals,” were banned. “I will not tolerate any armed vehicles on the roads,” Mathieu said. “I have been repeating that every day.”<sup>31</sup>

Arms control, patrolling, and unceasing vigilance yielded security sufficient for humanitarian operations and the winning of hearts and minds. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia did not have any preconceived ideas about relations with non-governmental organizations, but the coalition provided a model. The Unified Task Force was holding daily meetings to determine what the humanitarian organizations needed. Labbé and Mathieu adopted a similar policy. A group of soldiers was assigned to regularly meet with locally engaged non-governmental organizations and arrange assistance as required. The group’s senior officer, battlegroup deputy commander, Major Rod MacKay, had Mathieu’s complete support and was the sole contact point for the non-governmental organizations.<sup>32</sup> The battlegroup escorted non-governmental organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children, and International Medical Corps, while OXFAM-Québec relied on the Somalis to protect them and their animal vaccination program.<sup>33</sup> The soldiers impressed some non-governmental organizations. “They came, they listened,” observed Michelle Kelly, the International Medical Corps program director in Beledweyne. As a result, “the situation has really improved.” She was encouraged by the initiative they had shown. The Canadians were “innovative and forward-looking. They don’t want to just sit on a few food trucks.”<sup>34</sup>

Extra efforts won the local people’s appreciation. Battlegroup members helped the Somalis to recruit teachers and rebuild schools, roads, and bridges; they ran a hospital that cared for the battlegroup and provided medical training and supplies to the Somalis; and they re-established and obtained uniforms for

the police force.<sup>35</sup> Guy Naud, co-ordinator of the OXFAM-Québec program coincidentally located in Beledweyne, wrote that the Somalis admired the battle-group's gentlemanly behavior. The local authorities "deplore the imminent departure of the Canadians and wish that the Canadian Army would continue working here instead of being replaced by military forces from other countries."<sup>36</sup> Didier Roguet of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation noted that after departing "the Canadians were quickly regretted" by Somalis and non-governmental organizations.<sup>37</sup>

These sentiments were echoed by influential Somali leaders in and outside the Hiiraan region (where Beledweyne City and most of Canada's sector was situated). Abdi Osman Farah, vice-chairman of Aidid's faction, which had the allegiance of almost all Somalis in Hiiraan, praised the Canadians: "we have received countless appeals from the people of the region to ensure your stay." This "shows how the people of Hiiraan were truly satisfied with your stay in the region and the humanitarian assistance you extended to them." General Mohamad Ahmed Hubero, commander of Aidid's forces in Hiiraan, observed that the "Canadian Forces have done more for our region in five months than the previous two regimes in thirty years."<sup>38</sup>

The good works were used to draw attention to the benefits arising from non-violent methods of dispute resolution. The Canadian soldiers told the local clan elders that security had been established so that they, the traditional leaders, could make peace themselves.<sup>39</sup> "We always recognized," Labbé said, that "you must get the local people to make the decisions."<sup>40</sup> The Canadian Joint Force Somalia created, with some coalition assistance, broad-based grassroots committees on relief, reconstruction, reconciliation, and security.<sup>41</sup> The committees found a place in Hiiraan because they built on indigenous practices and preferences for consensus-based decision-making. Clan leaders used the committees to reassert their community standing after years of being stifled by the gun. Committees encouraged development of Somali solutions for Somali problems, not plans fabricated in the Canadians' likeness.<sup>42</sup>

These committees were the Canadian Joint Force Somalia's most challenging task. This was an unfamiliar role for soldiers, adjusting to local nuances of deal-making and bargaining was difficult, and many of the clans appeared to have multiple representatives and sometimes presented conflicting claims that were virtually impossible to verify. The Canadians had to be patient and use the relationships they had developed to further the consensus-building between and among Somalis that was essential for collective action. Labbé believed longer-term security depended on the committees achieving some form of success before the Unified Task Force departed.<sup>43</sup> But he and Mathieu, in the pursuit of timely results, may have inadvertently caused offence by neglecting existing alliances, favoring some leaders over others, and short-circuiting the way Somali clan elders painstakingly forged binding contracts.<sup>44</sup>



Yet it was reasonable to hope that the Somalis, over time, would come to accept the committees as authentic political structures. Labbé believed that political stability and order centred on the committees would be strengthened if diplomatic, development, and humanitarian efforts complemented the application of defensive military power.<sup>45</sup> This view was not based on concern for unbalancing Somalia's recovery by neglecting, for example, development. Having observed the situation on the ground, he believed that state failure created comprehensive requirements that had to be met comprehensively.<sup>46</sup> Unless the Canadian soldiers took a broader view of their security responsibilities to include extensive civil-military cooperation on the civilian side of stabilization, order could quickly dissolve after their withdrawal.

Consequently, contingent members worked with everyone they could — the United Nations aid agencies, non-governmental organizations, the coalition, and other Canadian government departments and agencies. Initially, with no Department of External Affairs and Canadian International Development Agency personnel in Somalia, Labbé requested and received coalition resources to form an international 3D (Defence, Diplomacy, Development) approach for the nascent stage of the rehabilitation process that his troops would be on hand to oversee.<sup>47</sup> Soon after, he and Canada's High Commissioner in Nairobi (who was accredited to Somalia), Ambassador Lucie Edwards, developed a close working relationship. She pledged her full support from a political and developmental perspective and sent Matthew Bryden to advise Labbé for 10 days each month. Bryden, a Somali-speaking Canadian and expert on Somalia's society and culture, was working as a contract employee at the High Commission.<sup>48</sup> Labbé assigned Lieutenant-Commander H.W. McEwan as a full-time liaison officer at the High Commission, thereby putting in place Canada's 3D for the Somalia operation.<sup>49</sup>

### **Mission Problems**

Two highly disturbing incidents during the Canadian Forces' mission in Somalia drew attention away from the contingent's innovative operational practice. A storm of controversy followed publication in the media of reports of two killings of Somalis by Canadians, one shot fleeing the Airborne's camp in Beledweyne (4 March 1993), the other tortured and beaten to death while being held under Canadian authority at the camp (16 March 1993). Mathieu was the highest-ranked officer with direct responsibility for the incidents. Months before, he told his subordinate commanders that Somali camp raiders could be shot.<sup>50</sup> This unauthorized elaboration to the rules of engagement confused the officers commanding the Airborne reconnaissance platoon and Airborne 2 Commando. These more junior officers made errors in judgment of their own that undermined their ability to fully control themselves or their soldiers. This led to platoon and commando members committing the 4 and 16 March incidents, respectively.<sup>51</sup>

For the Canadian military, the lessons of the incidents pertained to the rules and public relations. The rules were not appropriate to the range of potential threats in failed states (such as looters) or adequately understood by all contingent members because of the rapid transition from peacekeeping to peace enforcement the previous December. The incidents exposed the Canadian Forces and the Department of National Defence to heavy media and public scrutiny, and officials struggled to meet expectations for transparency. This led to doubts about the military's accountability to the taxpayer and to questioning about its professionalism. Despite the Canadian Joint Force Somalia's achievements, most Canadians came to perceive the mission as a failure.<sup>52</sup>

Proponents of the "joined-up government" approach to failed state stabilization in Afghanistan may have learned from the Somalia experience. The Somalia operation was the first such intervention of the post-Cold War era, and it is understandable how certain factors, even important ones, could be overlooked in the government's move to deploy. The government did not consider all the non-military challenges, such as the need for a prisoner detention and release policy, and, as a result, this matter had to be dealt with ad hoc by the Canadian Joint Force Somalia in the theatre.<sup>53</sup> For the Afghanistan mission, agreements on prisoner detention were negotiated with Afghan authorities (they may not have been humane or responsible enough when measured against Canadian standards,<sup>54</sup> but that is a separate serious issue) before the soldiers deployed. The contingent did not have to develop a policy in Afghanistan.

But all in all, it is unlikely the government's prisoner policy for the Afghanistan mission came about because of Somalia lessons learned. The historical context was far more important and decisive to what was done in each case. There was, for example, no government in existence in Somalia with whom to negotiate prisoner policy, whereas negotiation with Afghanistan's was possible. In Somalia, faction leaders were the only ones besides the coalition with the power to influence outcomes. However, Aidid and others were unhappy with the presence of international soldiers and only grudgingly cooperated on order and justice.<sup>55</sup> The West had an advantage in Afghanistan that it was lacking in Somalia. Most Afghan people and government officials welcomed and wanted to work with Western military, civilian, and non-governmental organization personnel until state rebuilding was completed.<sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Somalia crisis of the early 1990s was precedent setting. Somalia was the first country to urgently require humanitarian intervention and to host successive peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in the post-Cold War era. This was the first time since the Congo's collapse 30 years previous that the international community had been called upon to stabilize and reconstruct a failed state. The situation in the Horn of Africa was complex and troubling.

Somalia's government had collapsed, a mass famine caused by the unfinished civil war was killing thousands, and the capital, nominally the hub of a large-scale humanitarian relief effort, was awash with gunmen and gripped by chaos. It was hard to see a way through to peace and stability.

After a slow start, the United Nations drew up an ambitious plan to help Somalia. Ambassador Sahnoun, head of the United Nations Operation in Somalia I, recommended expanding the mission across the country and increasing its strength. He and Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali believed that this would make it easier for the mission to succeed. During the latter half of 1992, however, Boutros-Ghali grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress and cooperation in Somalia. He more than doubled the operation's strength in August without consulting the faction leaders. The Somalis began to believe they were being lied to and the trust relationship that had been slowly developing with the United Nations broke down. This was the beginning of the end for the first UN mission in Somalia. Aidid and some other faction leaders, using this perceived slight as justification, declared that the UN was no longer welcome in Somalia and halted new deployments. This, of course, suited his personal political objectives. He had guns and power in the streets of Mogadishu.

The Canadian government supported the United States-led peace enforcement coalition after the cancellation of the United Nations effort. The coalition had been asked to establish a secure environment so humanitarian deliveries could proceed in Somalia. Like the first UN mission, the coalition sought to make rapid progress to suit UN and US political objectives that had nothing to do with how or the pace at which Somalis wanted help. Despite the harsh and threatening environment, the Canadians secured the Beledweyne Humanitarian Relief Sector in under two months. Although not obligated to do so, they initiated a stabilization and reconstruction process during their six months in the Horn.

The Canadians adopted a "hearts and minds" strategy in Somalia. This involved encouraging the Somalis to support the coalition, while isolating trouble-makers intent on causing problems for the foreign troops, humanitarians, and local Somali leaders. The first part of the strategy, establishing security, was achieved through regular patrolling and the control of arms throughout the sector. The second part, convincing Somalis to embrace peace, demanded more subtlety. The Canadians "led from behind." They worked with individual local leaders, slowly and patiently built trust relationships, and helped to implement projects that reflected local wants and needs and what Somalis believed would stabilize the region.

Labbé recognized that the military could not be the sole provider of international support. Somalia's reconstruction requirements, which the coalition and contingent could only begin to address in the time available, were incredibly vast. Developmental officers, diplomats, non-governmental organization and humanitarian workers, area experts, and others had roles to play. The contingent

was open to these contributions but diplomats and development officials were instrumental to reconstruction and stability and so links were forged first with them. It was convenient that most people with these talents worked in government bodies that were more amenable to being organized and operationalized than the United Nations aid agencies or fiercely independent non-governmental organizations. Labbé obtained support from External Affairs and International Trade Canada (as it was then called) and the Canadian International Development Agency.

Operational collaboration with the rest of government and “leading from behind” may sound familiar, for Canada pursued these techniques even more vigorously over the course of several years in Afghanistan. The striking parallel with Somalia is not a result of Canada’s military (or its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies) applying what the international community learned in Africa in 1992-93. The hearts and minds strategy and joined-up government and “leading from behind” techniques reappeared in Afghanistan because failed states present many of the same challenges to would-be reconstructors and stabilizers, and soldiers have been trained to respond to them in similar ways. According to Lieutenant-Colonel Nico Tak, commander of the Dutch-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in Uruzgan, Afghanistan, in 2006-07, the commonality of operational approach was a reflection of how soldiers problem-solve what they find in failed states.<sup>57</sup>

The disturbing incidents in Somalia involving Canadian soldiers brought concerns about leadership and discipline to the forefront of public and media discussion about the military. The Canadian Forces did not come away from Somalia unchanged, even though it had been fully aware of the importance of leadership and discipline long before the Somalia deployment and had no lessons to learn about those matters. What the military understood about leadership and discipline had to be reemphasized and policy on rules of engagement and public affairs was revisited. Senior military leaders learned that they must be certain the rules were relevant to the situation on the ground and known by every soldier and that Canadians expected the armed forces to be open, proactive, and transparent in the release of timely information. According to one report, Department of National Defence media and public relations have become the most progressive in the Canadian federal government.<sup>58</sup>

However, scholars should avoid giving “lessons” too much credence. The extent to which lessons learned are presentist is important. Drawers of lessons are chasing the present rather than learning from history. They are using facts from the past to fortify a position that serves a present day need. It is important to be cautious even when, as with Canadian prisoner detention policy in Somalia and Afghanistan, it seems at first glance that a clear linkage between events and a lesson exists. And lessons may be irrelevant to what happens in the world.

Political pressures can force governments and international organizations to act regardless of what the lessons say. For example, a major ‘lesson’ from the Somalia engagement was that the international community would be better off letting hopelessly intractable situations fester, supplying what aid can be supplied but no more, until they are amenable to resolution. For political and moral reasons the application of this lesson to future world crises is hard to envision. Another lesson from Somalia is that stabilization and reconstruction requires patience — years, even decades of commitment — and huge amounts of money, talented people, and political will. The West accepted this burden for Afghanistan because it refused to permit the Taliban to reconquer the southeast Asian country,<sup>59</sup> but the Haiti case suggests this lesson is sometimes ignored. Haiti hosted no less than five United Nations operations in nine years (1993-2001), collapsed again, and accepted a sixth in 2004.<sup>60</sup>

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### Endnotes

\* This paper is based on my recently published first book, *Here is Hell: Canada's Engagement in Somalia* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2007). I thank the Press for generously allowing me to reprint material from the book.

1. Kevin Spooner has written the definitive study on Canada in the United Nations Congo operation. Until his book is published, see Kevin Spooner, *Canada, the Congo Crisis, and United Nations Peacekeeping, 1960-1964*, PhD Dissertation, Carleton University, Ottawa, 2002.
2. The dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, was Congo's president from 1965-97. See James Dobbins, et al., *The UN's Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005), pp. 12-13.
3. Ibid, pp. 215-16; and William J. Durch, ed., “The UN Operation in the Congo, 1960-1964,” *The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping: Case Studies and Comparative Analysis* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), pp. 315-16.
4. Kenneth D. Bush, “Somalia: When Two Anarchies Meet,” in Gregory Wirick and Robert Miller, eds., *Canada and Missions for Peace: Lessons from Nicaragua, Cambodia, and Somalia* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1998), pp. 92 and 96.
5. The Canadian Forces has been in Afghanistan every year since 2002 but only assumed leadership of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar in August 2005 (the PRT has been under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization since spring 2006).
6. Lessons learned was the theme of The Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society “Rescuing Failed States” conference at which this paper was presented in October 2007.
7. Helen Chapin Metz, ed., “Introduction,” *Somalia: A Country Study*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, 1993), pp. xxi, xxv, xviii, and xvix.
8. Durch, ed., “Epilogue: Peacekeeping in Uncharted Territory,” *The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping*, p. 472.
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47. Dawson, *Here is Hell*, pp. 169-70.
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60. The first five operations were: the United Nations Mission in Haiti (1993-96), United Nations Support Mission in Haiti (1996-97), United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti (1997), United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti (1997-2000), and International Civilian Support Mission in Haiti (2000-01). The sixth was the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (2004-present).