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Relief, Reconciliation, and Reconstruction in Somalia — Views of Prominent Somalis

Highlights:

A group of prominent Somalis, meeting as a Study Group of the U.S. Institute of Peace, on November 18, 1992, made the following recommendations regarding international intervention in Somalia:

- The international community providing relief must have the authority, the resolve, and the military means to deliver relief supplies without obstruction.
- It should be made clear to local factions that the international community has no intention of recolonizing Somalia or of transforming Somalia into a UN trusteeship.
- Close contact must be maintained between international military and relief officials and local factions and leaders.
- Careful attention must be given to the varying conditions prevailing in different parts of the country, and the relief efforts need to be adapted to local circumstances.
- International assistance needs to be provided at an early stage to help organize local and regional police forces.
- The existing international arms embargo must be enforced more vigorously, with appropriate sanctions imposed.
- The UN needs to be more active in facilitating dialogue and promoting political reconciliation both within and among various political parties and factions in Somalia. Dialogue across regional lines can come after reconciliation advances further within regions.
- The question of whether Somalia should be a single state or divided into two states need not be a preoccupying issue at this moment, since the survival of the Somali people takes priority.

For additional information, contact Dr. David Smock, U.S. Institute of Peace, 202-429-3843.

Study Group Meetings

With the situation in Somalia deteriorating day by day, the U. S. Institute of Peace organized a conference on Somalia on October 16, 1992. Seven Somalis made presentations and a majority of the 150 persons in attendance were Somalis. The open conference was followed by an intensive discussion among a smaller group of Somalis selected to reflect a range of political and regional perspectives.

On November 18 a group of 15 Somalis from this smaller group, holding differing points of view, was reconvened at the Institute for a daylong discussion of the Somali situation. Although all of those present are resident in the U.S., they are in close contact with the situation in Somalia and some have recently returned from Somalia. Many are in regular communication with the various factions and parties shaping events in that strife-torn nation. The group included several former Somali ambassadors, a retired general of the Somali army, several professors, a physician, leaders of NGOs, and other professionals.

The purpose of the meeting was to see if this diverse gathering of Somali professionals could develop consensus recommendations about how to promote more effective relief efforts in Somalia and how to advance toward political reconciliation and reconstruction. Given their divergent perspectives, the group was able to achieve an impressive degree of consensus on key points. The purpose of this report is to summarize these points of consensus.

The participants in the study group were:

Ms. Nura Ahmed Gureh
Ambassador Mahmoud H. Nur
Ambassador A. M. Darman
Professor A. I. Samatar
Dr. Mohamud Jama
Professor Hussein M. Adam
Mr. Abdullahi Koshin
General Abucar M. Liban
Ambassador Ali H. Hashi
Mr. Yussuf A. Ibrahim

Mr. Ahmed M. Bile
Ms. Filsan Darman
Mr. Abdi Awaleh Jama
Dr. Abdullahi H. Farah
Mr. Mahdi A. Abdi

From the U.S. Institute of Peace:

Ambassador Robert B. Oakley (subsequently appointed Special U.S. Envoy to Somalia)
Dr. David R. Smock, moderator and recorder

Recommendations of the Study Group:

Provide Adequate Security for Emergency Relief

The UN has thus far been unable to provide sufficient security to protect relief supplies from armed looters. Allowing relief supplies to come under the control of military leaders within Somalia can exacerbate conflict by bolstering their positions and strengthening their resolve to continue fighting in order to gain advantage for today and to assure their place in Somalia's post-war political order of tomorrow.

The Study Group agreed that the most critical requirement is for relief supplies to be delivered to those in need. *People must be saved from starvation and disease, and to accomplish this the international community providing relief must have the authority, the resolve, and the military means to deliver relief supplies without obstruction.* This means that ports and airports must be secured and that relief convoys must be protected. Moreover, any attempt to disrupt the delivery of relief supplies must be resisted with force. All agreed that the international community must not tolerate any obstruction to the delivery of relief supplies.

The group concluded that the UN's method of operation in Somalia has become too dependent on solicitation of support from local factions. While consultations and negotiations should continue, obstruction by local groups to the delivery of relief supplies to those facing starvation should not be tolerated.

It should be made clear to local factions that the international community has no intention of recolonizing Somalia or of transforming Somalia into a UN trusteeship. The agenda is a limited one and does not include the control or manipulation of Somalia's political future.

The change in policy that the group advocates has two components: (1) Greater protective force has to be available to the UN to assure the delivery of relief supplies. (2) There has to be a preparedness to use force if necessary to assure delivery of supplies.

Adapt Approaches to Different Regions of the Country

Due attention needs to be given to the varying conditions prevailing in different parts of the country, and the relief effort needs to be adapted to local circumstances. The security situation varies significantly from north to south, while political complexity prevails throughout. In recognition of the highly politicized character of the conflict, political advisers need to be attached to those responsible for providing relief in the various regions of the country to assure that political mistakes are minimized.

In the northern and northeastern portions of Somalia and in parts of the central areas, where some semblance of order and security exist, the provision of relief is more manageable. Existing incipient administrative structures can be utilized to assist with the delivery of relief supplies. In these areas the international community should also assist in strengthening local institutions.

In the less secure and less stable portions of the south, international officials will need to keep in close contact with local authorities, including leaders of military factions. The purpose of this contact would be to minimize misunderstanding and to build local support, while not granting veto power to local factions in the provision of relief. *Close contact must be maintained between international relief and military officials and local factions and leaders.* The fact that local factions will not be allowed to obstruct the delivery of relief supplies does not mean that close contact should not be maintained with them.

Those portions of the country that are relatively stable and are not in a state of destitution should be given other kinds of assistance. Health facilities and schools need to be reopened and supported. The provision of this additional assistance to relatively peaceful areas will provide incentives to those in regions of turmoil to settle their conflicts and to rebuild the social and physical infrastructure with international assistance.

As part of the critically important process of local empowerment, the international aid givers, including international NGOs, should work with and support local NGOs. These Somali organizations, although impoverished and weakened by the prevailing state of conflict and poverty, nevertheless offer substantial potential. They can assist international NGOs and the UN in delivering relief supplies and in rebuilding Somalia. Strengthening these NGOs in itself can be an important part of the rebuilding process.

The group also agreed that the actual and potential roles of women in Somalia have been underestimated both by the international community and by local factions. Women have been at the forefront of local efforts to promote peace, and their potential role in the provision of relief and the attainment of reconciliation must not be neglected.

Help Organize Police Forces on a Regional Basis

International assistance needs to be provided at an early stage to help organize local security or police forces. Among the many tasks of these security forces will be the disarming of the armed, unorganized youth who are terrorizing many parts of the country and disrupting the flow of relief supplies. It is too early to organize security forces on a national

basis; forces should be constituted and trained locally and regionally. In most parts of the country there are local or regional committees to which these forces should be accountable. Wherever possible, accountability needs to be to civilian authorities.

A critical role for the international community is to feed these newly organized local security forces, preferably through a program of food-for-work.

Enforce the International Arms Embargo

The existing international arms embargo must be enforced more vigorously, with appropriate sanctions imposed. Several countries are permitting arms to cross their borders into Somalia and some governments are themselves providing arms.

Take Account of the Role of Islam in the Process of Reconciliation

Traditional Islamic values of peace, fairness, and justice can serve as a base for the moral reintegration of Somalia. However, Islamic fundamentalism is not a positive force in the country. Disruptive foreign agendas often come wrapped in the guise of Islamic fundamentalism.

Promote Reconciliation

The international community, and particularly the UN, needs to be more active in facilitating dialogue and promoting political reconciliation both within and among the various political parties and factions in Somalia, to enable them to rise above their internal divisions. The political parties which fought for the overthrow of the repressive regime of Siad Barre still constitute important political actors in the country. They need to be assisted to resolve their internal disputes and to engage in dialogue with each other.

One of the most important roles for the UN to play is to promote dialogue among groups within each region of the country and to help build trust among opposing groups. *The UN has not been as energetic and effective in promoting dialogue among opposing groups and factions as it needs to be if political reconciliation is to be achieved.*

One of the purposes of this dialogue should be to identify and encourage leadership potential, and these new leaders could include clan leaders, religious leaders, professional and business people, women, and others.

Dialogue across regional lines can come after reconciliation advances further within regions.

Postpone Consideration of the Question of One State or Two

Within the group, some believe that Somalia's long-term interest will best be served by having a single state and others believe that two states should exist, dividing the north from the rest of the country. Others believe the best approach is a confederation between north and south. But the group agreed that this question need not be a preoccupying issue at this moment, since the survival of the Somali people takes priority. Feeding the people, providing security, and promoting reconciliation are the urgent tasks.

The long-term outcome in terms of the character of the state or states should be decided by democratic processes, with the people of the north enjoying the right of self-determination.

Within the single state option, there are various forms of government that could be adopted to recognize regional differences and the strong desire for local control. Various federal or confederal arrangements can be considered. But these questions are of secondary importance at the moment.

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