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Somalia

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Case Preview

STATE COLLAPSE AND DROUGHT in 1989–90 brought millions of Somalis to the brink of starvation. Without a local government interested in their welfare or able to forestall the humanitarian crisis, hundreds of thousands of Somalis left their homes for neighboring states and other areas within Somalia in search of food and water. Rival clans fought on the city streets and in the countryside for power and food, worsening the refugee problem and deepening the economic crisis. International refugee relief efforts, begun by private charities and later aided by the United Nations and Western nations, eventually yielded to an ill-fated nation-building project led by American forces. On March 3, 1995, all foreign troops were withdrawn after failing to capture Mohammed Farah Aideed, the leader of the most important Somali faction. Those forces also were unable to create an economic and political infrastructure capable of averting a future crisis. After the U.S. withdrawal, few Somalis were in danger of starvation, but this was not due to effective state building or foreign-assisted political development. It stemmed, rather, from better weather and improved prices for Somalia's primary export, livestock.

The Somali case serves as an object lesson in the need for planning and goal setting before international interventions occur. Political leaders must also ensure that relevant objectives can be met by the forces committed.

The case demonstrates the need for effective cooperation between international actors; proper coordination in Somalia could have saved lives and money. It also demonstrates the enormous economic cost of internal conflict to the international community, even in an isolated place such as Somalia. These costs would have been reduced if intervention had occurred earlier in the crisis, but the costs in human and economic terms were insufficient to spur early intervention. The international community and the United States in particular need a greater awareness of the remedies that might have been applied early. The total cost of the Somalia crisis to the United Nations, the United States, and the rest of the international community exceeded $7 billion.[1] About 50 percent of this was spent directly by the United States, 40 percent by the United Nations through its peacekeeping budget, and 10 percent by other nations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This estimate is an extremely conservative one and understates the total cost. It includes only direct expenses and not regional losses due to economic disruption. The estimate also does not include the substantial cost borne by NGOs for famine relief, economic development, and refugee resettlement.

There were two occasions when more cost-effective preemptive action could have averted the crisis and much of the expense that was ultimately incurred. The first conflict prevention point was in 1989, and the second was in mid-1991. In 1989, Western economic and military aid to Somalia stopped.[2] The U.S. government expressed a desire to spend less on foreign affairs and was dismayed over increasing human rights violations by the Siad Barre regime. While there were human rights violations, the regime in power had been supported by the United States for many years as part of its Cold War strategy in East Africa.[3] American aid to Somalia had averaged $20–$50 million per year and peaked at $100 million in 1986. This aid, though small by Western standards, was sufficient for the regime to maintain internal order and allow Somalia to function as a political unit.[4] The money produced balance in a subsistence economy and helped keep the peace. Even as late as 1987, a consortium of Western donors was considering funding a long-term, large-scale rural electrification scheme based on the construction of a hydroelectric power station near the town of Bardera. The sudden and unexpected withdrawal of foreign aid and foreign investment in 1989 triggered the collapse of the Somali government. The aid had supported the power of one man and his clan, and its withdrawal led to a fight for independence from his regime.[5] Resources that might have bought or produced food were diverted to a power struggle just as foreign aid of any type disappeared. Chaos and starvation were the result. By simply continuing the relatively small amount of aid and changing its character from military support to sustainable economic development aid, the international community could have at least maintained the status quo and averted a humanitarian and financial disaster. While paying leaders to maintain order may seem like a misguided policy, the United Nations in fact frequently compensated rival factions in hopes of stopping the fighting, though with little success.[6]

The second point at which early action could have changed the course of events was in mid-1991. At that time, a smaller-scale relief effort, coupled with a UN or American force to contain and disarm the rival factions, could have prevented the massive refugee exodus and civil violence for a fraction of the eventual cost. Supported by a resumption of some economic and development aid, these actions would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives, prevented a mass flow of refugees into neighboring countries, and saved most of the money that was later spent. A small force of 5,000–7,000 troops, similar to the early UN presence, and refashioned economic development aid could have achieved these goals. A three-year deployment of 5,000–7,000 troops and $50–$100 million per year in development aid would have cost less than $1 billion and saved many thousands of lives, as well as $3 billion.

Given the feasibility of intervention, policymakers' awareness of the situation, and the costs involved, this case study supports the hypothesis that early intervention is cost-effective. The case study also refutes the null hypothesis that early intervention would have had no impact on the costs borne by the international community, since significant savings would have been realized in both early intervention scenarios.

Origins of the Conflict

The two primary factors causing internal conflict in Somalia were the termination of all Western economic and military aid and the decline in world prices of Somalia's main export, livestock.[7] The loss of foreign aid coupled with the decline in export earnings led to the collapse of the Somali economy and then to the fall of the Somali government. Once the global military rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union receded, there was no geostrategic reason for either nation to supply aid to countries in the horn of Africa.

Somali dependence on foreign aid began in 1969 after a military coup overthrew the postcolonial democracy. Somalia soon became a Soviet client, and from 1971 to 1973 received $87 million in economic aid from the Soviet Union.[8] From 1974 to 1977, the Soviet Union sent $435 million in military support to Somalia. The death of pro-American Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia and the rise of Mengistu Haile Mariam dictated a new pattern of alliances. The Soviet Union had always coveted Ethiopia as the most important potential client in East Africa, and soon abandoned Somalia. In response, Cold War rivalry led the United States to recruit Somalia as a replacement for Ethiopia and to maintain the regional balance of power. Somalia became a firm U.S. ally in 1977 when the Soviets began to support Ethiopia and Mengistu in territorial disputes against Somalia. Gradually, American involvement in Somalia increased and came to include substantial cash payments, food and agricultural programs, health services, and economic advice. Unfortunately, little of the aid went to sustainable economic development projects.[9] The people remained dependent on American economic assistance, and the government needed American military aid. Yet with all the assistance, only 11 percent of the population had access to treated drinking water in 1987.[10]

From 1985 to 1989, the United States provided $300 million in economic aid, and from 1980 to 1989, $33.5 million in military aid. During this period, the American-Somali relationship was quite strong and the Barre regime cooperated with American military units in the area. The U.S. Air Force had landing rights at Somali airports, one of which maintained the longest runway in Africa (built by the Soviet Union), and the U.S. Navy had port-of-call privileges.

In the late 1980s both superpowers reduced overseas commitments, since there seemed to be less need to pay for military allies and greater reasons to address economic problems at home. Somalia, which was in the worst economic position in East Africa and suffered from an absence of effective government, was hard hit by their decisions. The Somali regime, like some other Cold War allies, was also undemocratic and had a poor human rights record. As the threat to the United States from the Soviet Union receded and Soviet support for its allies diminished, human rights issues came to dwarf the remaining strategic value of Somalia. In response to congressional pressure and in the absence of compelling strategic need, the United States cut off all military aid to Somalia in mid-1988 and diverted $21 million in economic aid to other African nations. In 1988 Somalia's GDP was only $1.7 billion and declining, inflation was rising, and the annual trade deficit approached $400 million.[11] Later congressional action, in October 1989, closed the door on Somalia.[12] The sudden removal of Western aid, about 25 percent of GDP,[13] combined with drought and low export prices for livestock, led to internal economic collapse.[14] The civil war that followed was particularly bloody since Somalia was well endowed with Western weapons, mostly arms made in the United States.

The Somali political structure had been directly supported by American military aid and arms transfers. Barre's forces were the best armed in the country and could effectively control rival factions. These factors allowed him to keep rival clans at bay and keep a grip on political power. Barre had used the economic aid to maintain at least a subsistence level of nutrition for most of the populace. He also instituted programs to reach rural Somalis and increase their dependence on his regime, seeking to eliminate potentially competing social and political organizations. Therefore, when his government fell, there were no institutions that could take over the critical functions of providing public order, administering food aid, and enforcing laws and contracts throughout the country. The United Nations, recognizing this problem, made the establishment of replacement institutions a primary goal of its mission in Somalia.[15] In summary, the total and sudden absence of economic aid led to economic collapse. Economic collapse in turn produced internal conflict. Political ineffectiveness, drought, and other environmental factors hastened and worsened the regional crisis. The national government's inability to provide food, coupled with the absence of a viable private economy, resulted in mass migration, a devolution of power to the clans, and starvation. The civil war that followed further weakened the economy. Since no faction had the strength to hold an economically viable area, continued conflict was inevitable unless an external force intervened. In retrospect, it would have been cheaper to continue the $20–$100 million per year in American aid.[16] This was enough for the country to function and would have averted the crisis and the costly intervention that ensued. By 1989, total Western expenditures in Somalia were $360 million, though this was largely famine relief.[17] Continued American aid, coupled with investments from other Western nations, the World Bank, and other NGOs, would have mitigated the cost of famine relief and kept the country together.

Overview of the Conflict

The path to the crisis in Somalia began in 1988 when a faction opposed to the Barre regime, known as the Somali National Movement (SNM), took over the capital of the northwestern province of Glabeed and transformed what had been a guerrilla resistance movement into a civil war. Fighting in the region in late 1988 cost 50,000 lives, made 500,000 people homeless, and destroyed the provincial capital.

By the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990, widespread fighting had broken out, and the Barre regime was rapidly losing control of the country. Two additional factions, the United Somali Congress (USC) and the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), based on clans that were in opposition to Barre, joined together to fight the government in the Somali capital of Mogadishu. In response to this new threat, Barre declared a national state of emergency and concentrated all his energies on staying in power. He was, however, quickly defeated and on January 5, 1991, the American Embassy was evacuated as the capital fell to rebel forces. Barre, also defeated in Northern Somalia, fled to the southern part of the country.

Throughout 1991 civil war spread. Rival factions fought over territory and loot, and putative allies turned on one another. In May 1991 one faction, the SNM, declared that the northwest region of Somalia had seceded to become the independent republic of Somaliland. These events led to the first of many international efforts to negotiate peace between the rival factions in June and July 1991. These conferences, organized by Egypt, Italy, and Djibouti, failed to achieve any substantial result. As the conflict continued, fighting between the forces led by Barre and Aideed became the focus of an increasingly brutal civil war. Both sides destroyed wells and canals, burned fields and homes, and plundered grain supplies. This forced people to move, and those farmers who remained were unable to plant grain for the next harvest.

In November of 1991 full-scale war over Mogadishu began in earnest and lasted for four months. There were more than 25,000 civilian casualties, 600,000 cross-border refugees, and several hundred thousand internal refugees. Areas south of Somalia also became battlegrounds as fighting continued throughout the country. In May 1992 Barre was finally defeated by a coalition of rival factions led by Aideed. He then fled to Kenya and later to Nigeria.

After the fall of the Somali government, local, regional, and clan rulers took over areas of the country. There was no central government to administer food aid, distribute medical supplies, or maintain infrastructure (power, roads, and port facilities). Lack of electricity, fuel, and sanitation in turn idled plants. Fields lay fallow in the countryside. Plant equipment, wiring, and other portable items were looted by contending clans and militia, thus destroying the little industry and infrastructure that had existed before the civil war began.

The United Nations resumed activity in Somalia in response to the heightened humanitarian crisis. UN officials, who had left Mogadishu in January 1991, returned in August 1991 and attempted to get relief supplies to the Somali people. Throughout the rest of 1991 and early 1992, Aideed and rival factions fought in the capital and in other cities, continuing to prey upon aid workers. In response to the deepening crisis, the United Nations passed Security Council Resolution 733, which urged the parties to cease fighting, reconcile their differences, and allow humanitarian aid to flow into the country. The Security Council followed this resolution with a global arms embargo on Somalia.

During March and April, 1992, the United Nations attempted to negotiate a lasting cease-fire between the rival factions, with little success. Finally, on April 24, 1992, UN Security Council Resolution 751 established the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I). A UN force of 500 light infantrymen was approved, and its mission was to protect aid workers and supplies, and escort aid convoys into the countryside. An additional fifty cease-fire observers were asked to report on violations of the cease-fire. Unfortunately, the United Nations required an agreement with the clans fighting over Mogadishu before these troops could be deployed. Reaching an agreement took several months, and the cease-fire observers were not sent until July 23, 1992. The lightly armed infantry was not deployed until September 14, 1992.

Sadly, as early as July 1992, drought and disease had pushed nearly two-thirds of the Somali population to the brink of starvation. The United Nations and other relief agencies continued to feed 4.5 million people every day in increasingly dangerous conditions. Since no political solution had been reached, fighting continued in Mogadishu and in the surrounding regions. From January until May 1992, no seaborne relief supplies had been unloaded as rival factions shelled ships in the port of Mogadishu.

Through July and August the situation deteriorated further and the international community began to take notice. Prompted by the United Nations, relief supplies and logistical support were provided by member countries, and in August 1992 Operation Provide Relief was authorized by U.S. President George Bush. Initially this American operation gave relief supplies to southern Somalia and to refugee camps in Kenya, though no American ground forces were committed. However, the lack of both a central authority and agreement between the rival factions made delivery of humanitarian relief difficult. On August 16, 1992, one Somali faction stole the first relief supplies in the southern town of Kismayo where many thousands were on the brink of starvation. Raids on relief supplies continued throughout Somalia.

On August 28, 1992, the United Nations proposed that UNOSOM be augmented by 3,000 additional troops; however, these troops were never actually deployed, as Somali faction leaders would not give their assent. The Somali factions became increasingly resistant to UN requests for security forces to protect humanitarian supplies and workers. By the end of October 1992, General Aideed, now the most powerful man in Mogadishu, objected to the deployment of the first UNOSOM troops, demanded they be removed, and expelled a UN official. By the end of November, when the flow of relief supplies to the starving was further slowed by factional fighting, the United Nations began to consider changing its mission objectives.

During Operations Provide Relief and UNOSOM I, which lasted from August 15 through December 1992, there was a growing consensus that a more forceful intervention would be necessary to stop the famine from claiming further lives. After losing the presidential election in November, President Bush considered a full-scale intervention and informed the United Nations that American troops were available for a large-scale deployment in Somalia.

On December 3, 1992, the United Nations passed Security Council

Resolution 794, which approved a military intervention in Somalia and authorized member states to use "all necessary force." The U.S. intervention plan was named Operation Restore Hope, and the UN mission was dubbed Unified Task Force (UNITAF). These missions lasted from December 9, 1992, through May 4, 1993. The United States assumed operational command of UNITAF and provided the largest contingent of troops. By the end of December, American troops had occupied key points in Somalia. At its peak, UNITAF deployed 37,000 troops, including 8,000 troops on U.S. Navy ships offshore. Of these troops, 28,000 were provided by the United States. By early March 1993, however, the UNITAF force had been reduced to 28,000 troops.

During the UNITAF operation, humanitarian efforts achieved their maximum effect. The famine was finally contained to a few small areas, and most Somalis were receiving food aid. Medical care was increasingly available, and supplies entered various Somali ports without resistance. In addition, the United Nations began programs to restore agricultural and livestock production and made various attempts at state building, realizing that only a stable, central government could avert a replay of the recent crisis.

In January 1993 and again in March, Somali faction leaders met with UN officials and delegates from African nations in an attempt at national reconciliation. While agreements were reached for a cease-fire and the disarming of faction troops, the peace did not last. By late March the fighting had resumed. It was soon evident that a strong international presence in Somalia would have to continue.

On March 26, 1993, UNOSOM II was approved for comprehensive peacekeeping and had the additional mission of disarming faction troops and local militia. Compared to UNITAF, UNOSOM II had an expanded mission and fewer troops. The United Nations assumed command of UNOSOM II, and American forces, deployed as an offshore Quick Reaction Force, operated with their own commanders in support of UN operations. Some additional American forces were deployed to Mogadishu, though they were small, special operations units. Though these forces imposed a continued peace, humanitarian efforts were still necessary to cope with the large refugee population. On March 27, 1993, the United Nations allocated $142 million for relief and rehabilitation efforts in addition to peacekeeping expenses.

These steps, however, did not resolve the crisis. Previous cease-fire agreements were ignored, and UN forces and relief workers were threatened. On June 5, 1993, a Pakistani force of UN peacekeepers was ambushed by Aideed loyalists. Twenty-four Pakistani troops were killed. UN efforts to punish those responsible were unsuccessful. Operationally, UNOSOM II was experiencing severe problems in achieving its mission.

There were constant coordination problems between contingents from different nations, and the definition of mission goals remained unclear. The United Nations admitted it had no operational blueprint, and that without better planning and information, mission success was in danger. Coupled with an expanded set of goals and fewer resources, these problems made success unlikely.

The failure of UN efforts led to increased American actions to disarm the factions. During one of these missions on October 3, 1993, an American Ranger unit suffered eighteen dead and seventy-five wounded in a raid on a weapons storage site. Frustrated by UN failures and under increasing domestic political pressure, American President Bill Clinton announced on October 7, 1993, that all American combat forces and most logistics units would leave Somalia by the end of March 1994.[18] Other nations followed suit, and by March 1994 two-thirds of UNOSOM II troops had been withdrawn. The remaining UN troops turned to keeping the peace in smaller areas of Somalia, though factional fighting continued.

Over the next twelve months, UN troops and humanitarian aid workers continued in decreasing numbers to keep the peace and feed the hungry in Somalia. Mass starvation had been averted, but no new national government was installed, and factional violence continued. The UN mission officially ended in March 1995, having achieved some measure of humanitarian success but failing in its mission to settle an ongoing internal conflict.

Costs of the Conflict to International Actors

The following sections provide estimates for the costs to international actors and the United Nations for operations conducted in Somalia from 1990 to 1995. The bulk of documented expenditures are direct costs of intervention and include the cost of military operations, famine relief, and actual grants for economic recovery. Military costs are presented first, followed by humanitarian costs, other direct economic costs, and indirect (opportunity) costs.

Military Costs

The final total of American intervention costs in Somalia is about $2 billion.[19] This includes the cost of American intervention through the UN operations UNOSOM I and II and UNITAF, as well as the U.S. Forces in Somalia (USFORSOM). This figure is adjusted for American contributions to the United Nations for peacekeeping, which are counted in the UN estimates in table 4.1. UNOSOM II, the UN operation that replaced American troops, cost over $1 billion per year and lasted over two years.

TABLE 4.1
Somalia: Military Costs ($U.S. Billions)

U.S. costs for all military operations	2.0
UN costs: UNOSOM I	0.4
UN costs: UNOSOM II	1.6
Additional direct costs, U.S. and UN combined	0.4
TOTAL	**4.4**

Sources: "The Final Cost of a Mission of Hope," *Newsweek* (April 4, 1994), 44. Tom Pfeiffer, "US Hands Over Somali Mission to New UN Peacekeeping Force," *Arms Control Today* 23 (June 1993): 28. UNDPI, *The United Nations and Somalia, 1992–1995,* Document 110, 482–83. Michael Maren, "Spoiled," *The New Republic* (December 12, 1994): 13.

The prospect of a continuing civil war and the failure to build a state where one no longer existed eventually forced the United Nations out of Somalia.[20]

Cost of equipment left behind and donated to local communities was valued by the United Nations at $235.7 million.[21] In addition to equipment, the United Nations abandoned the American Embassy that it used as a headquarters.[22] The costs involved are all in addition to the figures cited above.

The UN cost for UNOSOM I was $351.5 million.[23] It involved the maintenance of a small military force as well as sustained and widespread relief efforts. A summary of military costs is presented in table 4.1.

Humanitarian Costs

Major American costs were incurred before the intervention, including nearly $600 million for the three months immediately preceding deployment.[24] These were spent for humanitarian relief and continued to accumulate as the crisis continued. Total American relief aid, not including military costs counted above, was about $800 million over the entire crisis.

Food aid costs continued after the intervention, largely donated by international organizations, though at a reduced annual amount. For example, the World Food Programme (WFP) spent $50 million in 1994, after the crisis was over, and planned to continue that level of spending. The Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) spent over $500,000 received from the British government to feed returnees in 1994.[25] The United Nations spent nearly $500 million in famine and other relief operations during various phases of operation in Somalia, including $142 million through March 1993, which accumulated to $160 million by the end of 1993. Similar amounts were disbursed in 1994.[26] (See table 4.2.)

TABLE 4.2
Somalia: Total International Costs of Conflict ($U.S. Billions)

U.S. costs: Intervention	2.0
U.S. costs: Humanitarian, rebuilding, refugees, and other nonintervention costs	0.8
UN costs: Intervention	1.9
UN and other humanitarian aid costs	0.5
Costs of debt write-off to the international community	2.1
TOTAL	**7.3**

Sources: E. Palmer, ''Putting a Price on Global Aid,'' *Congressional Quarterly Weekly* 51 (January 23, 1993): 186. *Somalia News Update* 3 (January 7, 1994); UNDPI, The United Nations and Somalia, 1992–1995 (New York: United Nations, 1995). Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook,* assorted years (Washington, D.C.: CIA). Tom Pfeiffer, ''US Hands Over Somali Mission to New UN Peacekeeping Force,'' *Arms Control Today* 23 (June 1993): 28.

Other Direct Economic Costs

After the conflict was settled, the United Nations estimated that creating and maintaining a judicial system and police force to guarantee internal order would cost the United Nations and donor nations $45 million for the first year and an additional $10 million per year for several years.[27] Actual costs incurred by member states for UNOSOM police development efforts included $20.6 million in cash payments and $43 million in in-kind contributions that consisted largely of equipment and facilities.[28]

Somalia also had in excess of $2 billion in external debt at the beginning of the crisis. This equals roughly 120 percent of precrisis export earnings.[29] Current export earnings are a small fraction of precrisis amounts, and there is little reason to believe that any increased export earnings will be used to pay back this debt, especially since there is no Somali government willing to assume these liabilities. This combination of circumstances suggests that the entire portfolio of Somali debt, already in technical default, will be written off. This is a further expense to international actors like the World Bank and decreases the capital available for development projects worldwide. The capital to rebuild Somalia must come from external sources. Prior to the conflict, net capital expenditures were $111 million per year, and some amount must be spent to replace destroyed infrastructure and encourage development.[30]

Indirect and Opportunity Costs

According to UN estimates, at least 1.8 million refugees needed to be resettled. Ethiopia had 300,000 Somali refugees and Kenya had 500,000. Somalis fleeing within their own country and to Djibouti made up the remainder.[31] Precise estimates of these costs to neighboring states are unavailable, but they are substantial. Refugees received food and shelter while in other countries, though some of this aid was paid for by NGOs. The refugee crisis disrupted trade, including nonmonetized trade, which is important in subsistence areas and inherently difficult to estimate. Areas closest to the fighting experienced a sharp decline in economic activity.

Somalia exports livestock and bananas, and imports mostly petroleum products and foodstuffs. Its trade proportion of GDP prior to the crisis was 9.3 percent (1.8 percent for imports and 7.5 percent for exports). The small absolute value of this level of trade coupled with the wide distribution of trading partners indicates that there was little external monetary loss due to trade disruption.

Significant costs were nonetheless incurred by regional actors in terms of nonmonetary trade in livestock. Animal husbandry, which accounts for 40 percent of GDP and 60 percent of export earnings, was severely disrupted. Groups in neighboring states that relied on livestock trade with Somalia were severely affected and the famine in Somalia, which resulted in the slaughter of livestock, spread to other nations in the region.

In Kenya one consequence of the influx of Somali refugees was increased inflation. Since August 1991, prices for basic staples such as sugar and rice have doubled throughout the economy and apartment rents have tripled.[32] Refugees also smuggled goods across borders and evaded customs taxes. Camps were turned into bazaars where all sorts of goods were sold without payment of sales tax, costing the local governments uncounted millions.

In aggregate, regional opportunity costs were quite high. The regional GDP in 1989 was $25.4 billion, whereas the 1994 figure was only $18.6 billion, a 27 percent decline. Some of this was due to the effects of the civil war in Somalia. States have lost the potential benefit from economic activity that could not occur.

Total Costs

A summary of the international costs of the internal conflict in Somalia is presented in table 4.2. Opportunity losses to economies in the region are not included, as it is difficult to measure to what extent the regional decline in GDP was due to the conflict in Somalia or the drought. East African states had to spend more on their militaries to protect themselves during the war, impinging on economic development. While these costs are difficult to estimate, they are real and substantial.

For several reasons the direct costs presented in table 4.2 almost certainly underestimate the actual direct cost of the internal conflict in Somalia to the international community. First, these figures do not include a full accounting of costs incurred by other nations involved in UN operations that were borne directly by these nations and not spent through the United Nations. For example, the costs over and above UN assessments paid by France and Italy are not included as they were not readily available. Second, private organizations undertook large-scale humanitarian efforts in Somalia, and only a fraction of their costs is known and included above. Red Cross, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), and other organizations were in Somalia throughout the crisis and incurred considerable costs in food and medical supplies that are not publicly reported. These costs are not reported because they are difficult to quantify and are not as clearly a direct cost of conflict as those costs recounted earlier.

Estimated Costs of Preventive Action

There were at least two points in time when early intervention in Somalia would have saved lives and billions of dollars. Early intervention was feasible in both cases. In the first scenario, intervention would not have required the large-scale troop deployments that are regarded as a great political risk by most Western leaders.

The first intervention point when the conflict in Somalia might have been deferred or prevented had to do with economic choices in 1989. If American foreign aid had been continued, the crisis might never have occurred. This aid was sufficient to maintain internal stability prior to the crisis and would likely have prevented the civil war as well as mitigated the cost of famine relief. Continued Western economic aid of $40–$60 million per year would have maintained the status quo. During the drought period, this aid might have been doubled to cover the costs of feeding those who relied on livestock in the affected rural areas. At most, the incremental cost for this "crisis" period would have amounted to $30 million per year for four years. This stream of aid need not have been continued forever. If the character of the aid had been altered according to World Bank strategies, it is possible that a stable and self-sufficient economy could have developed. Instead of food shipments and arms, capital to develop raw materials extraction capabilities and expand banana production could have boosted export earnings. Modern farming and irrigation, programs to vaccinate livestock and increase herds, together with a stimulus to some industrial sectors, would have allowed Somalia to become self-sufficient, reducing the likelihood of later famine. These measures would have stimulated trade and private capital inflows, creating the basis for a more stable economy.[33] Even vastly increasing the previous aid, creating new conditions and purposes for the grants, and continuing it for a decade would have cost the international community less than $1 billion, or less than 25 percent of the direct military costs of intervention.

A second opportunity to preempt the eventual crisis occurred in mid-1991.[34] After the Barre regime ultimately fell, in January 1991, no military force capable of opposing American troops existed in Somalia. The absence of any potential opposition to a U.S. Marine landing was a necessary precondition to intervention. Opposition by heavily armed, though poorly trained, soldiers would have made the costs of intervention prohibitive in economic and political terms. By mid-1991, however, there was no faction able to oppose intervention. There was also some support for external help, especially among the displaced population.

By this time, the central government had fallen and rival clans seized what assets they could to survive. Interclan warfare was beginning to spread and this generated large refugee populations. The situation was rapidly deteriorating, and the humanitarian and regional costs were rising. At this time, a small, well-armed, mobile force could have secured the important ports and city areas and separated warring factions. This would have also facilitated the distribution of food aid, slowing and eventually reversing the refugee flow into neighboring countries.

A preemption mission in mid-1991 would have consisted of 5,000–7,000 troops broken down into three elements. The first element would have combined U.S. Marines, mechanized equipment, and organic air support with the primary mission of separating groups in conflict and making peace in the countryside. These units would have also secured the airports.[35] The second element of light infantry or additional U.S. Marines would have swept and held the cities and ports and responded when fighting broke out.[36] These combat elements would have deployed sufficient heavy weapons support, and their superior tactical ability would have enabled them to accomplish their primary mission of pacifying the cities. Removing heavy weapons and reducing the amount of small arms available would also have been an early goal of the first two elements.[37] The third element would have consisted of military police and civil affairs personnel who would have kept order in the cities after the other elements had removed the threat of armed clan units. The third element would have also facilitated the distribution of food and medical aid throughout the country, and begun the process of reconstituting the state apparatus while fostering an interclan bargain that might have ended the fighting.

As early as mid-1991, no remaining clan or faction would have been able to oppose an American landing force or mount an effective, long-term resistance to American forces. Recognition of the actual tactical situation would have allowed a deployment far smaller than the 29,000 specified in the American operational plan and in the actual operation. Even early deployment plans under consideration in late 1991 envisaged only 12,000–

15,000 troops.[38] An earlier preemption force would have faced a less threatening environment and could have been small compared to the actual forces deployed.[39] This smaller contingent would have been large enough to remove heavy weapons from the clans and enforce peace.

The original proposal for a rapid reaction force during the Carter administration, which led to the development of the Central Command (CENTCOM) with pre-positioned stores at Diego Garcia and Oman, could have formed the nucleus for the proposed preemption force.[40] Additional units from NATO deployments and from the continental United States would have rounded out the force. To succeed, however, new political institutions would have had to be crafted to facilitate internal peace and economic development.

Using the costs of USFORSOM as a baseline for estimation, this smaller intervention force would have cost $500 million over a four-year period.[41] The cost of an expanded economic assistance program, similar to that proposed in the first preemption scenario, would have represented no more than $1 billion over a ten-year period. This brings the total cost for this proposal to $1.5 billion.

Conclusions

The Somalia case demonstrates the high cost of waiting too long. Even in the more expensive of the two proposed early action scenarios, the international community would have saved billions. The international community was certainly aware of the growing crisis and the need for outside intervention.

By mid-1990 the United States was making contingency plans for an intervention in Somalia, and the West knew well in advance that a costly internal conflict and humanitarian crisis were imminent. Despite forewarnings, the international efforts undertaken were insufficient to stop the crisis before it became acute. As the crisis worsened, the economic costs of intervention mounted as did the humanitarian costs. The lateness of international intervention is most often blamed on domestic political concerns. Few elected governments commit troops to an area where no compelling vital interest is at stake. However, governments need to recognize that risking a small yet decisive military intervention early in a crisis could produce domestic political success.

Since it was clear to the West early in the crisis that some deployment would eventually be necessary, waiting only increased the costs that would eventually be incurred. The case clearly supports the hypothesis that early intervention is cost-effective and refutes the null hypothesis that early intervention would lead to no savings.

The cost analysis of this case provides a clear economic rationale for early intervention. Continued economic aid, proposed in the first alternative scenario, would have saved nearly $6.5 billion. The second proposal, a small, early preemption operation launched in mid-1991, would have saved nearly $6 billion.

The cost savings generated by early intervention are even greater if indirect and economic opportunity costs are counted. For example, if only 10 percent of the decline in regional GDP is attributed to the Somali conflict, the total cost savings generated by early intervention would increase by $680 million. Additional costs would have been saved by preventing refugee movements, increased inflation, and opportunity costs. These costs are also large, though difficult to estimate precisely. The cost savings that would be generated by early intervention indicate that there is a purely economic rationale for the proposed policy.

The peace provided by an early, preemptive strategy would have allowed for increased foreign assistance and capital investment. Of course, ultimately, only the development of stable economic and political institutions in Somalia would prevent a recurrence of the crisis. Early intervention would have made this much more likely.