

A NEW DIPLOMACY



BY HENRY BUTTERFIELD RYAN

If the U.S. military deployment to Somalia provides American diplomats with a glimpse of the future, it is not a future toward which they are rushing headlong. The government is learning a new dance with an old acquaintance. As the U.N. Secretary General tries to pull the nation into a tighter embrace, it pulls back, wanting to be friendly but worried about where increasing intimacy might lead.

U.S. diplomats agree that engaging in armed peacemaking and humanitarian assistance under a U.N. mandate constitutes a new kind of diplomacy, especially considering that Somalia is devoid of U.S. geopolitical interests. But they want desperately to keep our mission limited and clearly defined. In a late-December interview, ambassador to the United Nations Edward Perkins projected confidence that the United States would be able to set limits, but also said that "as we get more involved," we may end up "doing more than we said we would do."

As Perkins' remarks indicate, uncertainties abound. He points out that this is the first time the United Nations has sent an armed force into a country uninvited and also the first time a "first-class fighting machine has been used for humanitarian purposes." The United Nations enlisted the United States to act in its behalf, but U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said he would prefer a standby force at his command. That is something the United States, for one, is not yet willing to endorse, although Perkins acknowledges that the United Nations needs a quicker, better way to respond to emergencies. In any event, a standby U.N. force remains so far from reality, not only in terms of troops but of planning and logistical capability, that the question was moot when the Americans went into Somalia last December.

Getting Involved

The United States had been "looking at Somalia for four or five months fairly intensively," Perkins says, before offering military assistance. In fact, the government was doing more than just looking. The Agency for International Development, the Pentagon and the State Department (especially its



Ambassador Brandon Grove heads the Somalia Task Force in Washington, which has been given a broad mandate to help formulate American policy in the region.

Politico-Military Bureau), together with private relief agencies, had been financing and delivering humanitarian supplies to Somalia since last August.

By late November, Washington had become convinced it needed to do more. Although staffers on the National Security

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Council neither confirm nor deny this, key officials meeting in its top forum, the Principal's Committee, reportedly agreed upon military intervention—but only under certain conditions. First, we would need a U.N. invitation; second, American forces must be under American command; third, the goal must be limited and well defined; and fourth, other countries would have to join the effort. That decision reached, President Bush informed Boutros-Ghali that we wanted to

give more aid and dispatched Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger on Nov. 25 to explain the government's intentions.

By then, a desperate Boutros-Ghali already had proclaimed traditional U.N. peace-keeping activities hopeless in Somalia. Relief supplies either could not land or were stolen. Warlords had neutralized his lightly armed 550-soldier Pakistani force, in effect holding it hostage, and told the United Nations not to send in 3,500 additional soldiers if it valued the Pakistanis' lives. By late November, Boutros-Ghali found himself and his organization humiliated and helpless. Even his own representative in Somalia, Algerian diplomat Mohammed Sahnoun, had joined a growing chorus criticizing U.N. ineffectiveness. Meanwhile, as one U.S. official put it, the world's media "was full of pictures of starving Somalis and grinning bandits riding around with machine guns." No wonder Eagleburger seemed like Santa Claus when he arrived at U.N. headquarters with an offer to send 30,000 U.S. troops to Somalia.

Eagleburger did his best to assure Boutros-Ghali that the Americans would not pull out until such time as a force under U.N.

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command was able to handle the situation, but the Secretary General still feared the United States would not stay the course. His fears were reinforced a few days later when White House officials remarked that U.S. troops would be home by Inauguration Day, Jan. 20. Officials at the Pentagon, also alarmed, declared at once that sometime next spring would be more realistic.

On Dec. 3, the Security Council accepted the American offer and issued an authorizing resolution. This was despite misgivings on the part of many African officials, who feared the American mission might revive colonialism and seemed unaware or unconvinced of the U.S. government's profound aversion to long-term involvement in Somalia.

Now, in a flurry of activity, top-level American diplomats started commuting to U.N. headquarters in New York. Eagleburger returned two days before Christmas, and undersecretary of State Frank G. Wisner began visiting the United Nations at least once a week. He was usually accompanied by Rear Adm. Frank L. "Skip" Bowman, the Pentagon's top contact with the United Nations on Somalia, and ambassador Brandon Grove, head of the Somalia Task Force in Washington.

A New Kind of Task Force

The Somalia Task Force is at the core of U.S. diplomacy in this crisis. It consists of some 15 officials working round-the-clock in eight-hour shifts on the State Department's seventh floor, the "power floor," near the Secretary's office. Around a conference table littered with papers and dotted with constantly ringing telephones, they help formulate American policy, referring occasionally to maps of Africa, Somalia and Mogadishu tacked around the walls.

Ambassador Grove emphasizes that the task force has an unusually broad mandate. It not only maintains contact with every foreign affairs element of the U.S. government, it deals with policy on a much more broad and evolving basis than do many task forces, which tend to be established to handle specific occurrences, often natural disasters.

Getting started, however, was not easy. The task force includes officers not only from several State Department bureaus but from the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) and AID. The early days were "rocky," says one official, as the group, insisting upon its supremacy on Somali issues, called on reluctant bureaucrats to leave their own offices and chains of command and work in the new setting. The operation took shape in November, but only as a "working group," a far more relaxed, work-a-day undertaking than a "task force." But faced with mounting Administration concern about Somalia, within a week it became a high-energy, 24-

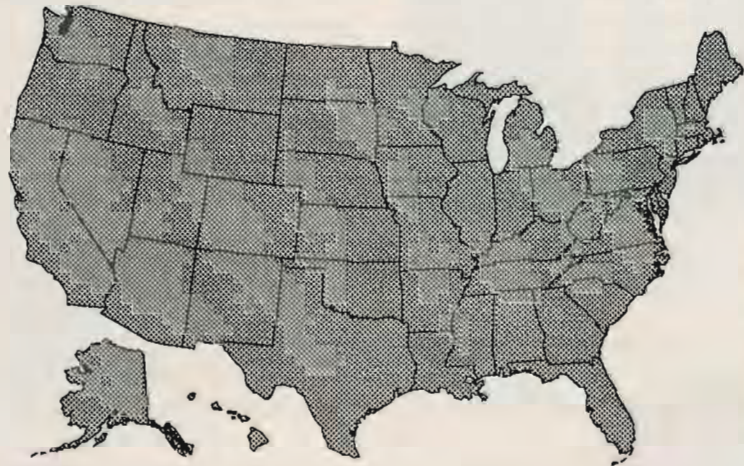
hour-a-day effort—the Somalia Task Force.

The fact that this force has become a point of contact with the United Nations, says one State Department officer who has seen task forces come and go, strengthens it within the bureaucracy, which has a beagle's nose for the most subtle scents of power and influence and a prima donna's sensitivities. Consequently, Grove takes care that his contacts with the U.N. Secretary General go through the U.S. Mission to the United Nations (USUN). Meanwhile, Perkins is equally careful to keep the Bureau of International

Organization Affairs at State informed on any contacts he makes in Washington. That bureau normally serves as the Washington channel to the USUN, although some diplomats in New York grouse that it often can be more of a barrier.

Other Players

The National Security Council remains deeply involved in the Somalia policy process, coordinating the work of the foreign affairs agencies. Furthermore, President Clinton and his foreign affairs team arrived



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in office fully informed on the crisis, thanks to outgoing National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, who saw that they received briefings on Somalia at least once a day.

The main NSC action soon moved to its second level, the Deputies Committee, chaired in the last administration by Adm. Jonathan Howe, Scowcroft's deputy. Wisner attends its sessions, accompanied by Grove and State Department assistant secretary for African affairs Herman J. Cohen. One step down the NSC ladder, an interagency "core group" fine-tunes policy at the working level. The Bush Administration named career civil servant Richard A. Clark to head it. As NSC senior director for both Africa and International Organizations, Clark was ideal for the Somalia crisis.

In Mogadishu, ambassador Robert B. Oakley receives constant information and policy guidance at the roughly refurbished American Embassy, nearly destroyed by looters two years ago as order in Somalia began to collapse. Oakley, who served as U.S. ambassador there in 1983-84, retired from the Foreign Service last October only to be whisked back to it in late November to go to Somalia. Not only has he brokered a truce between the two major warlords, but his efforts to precede U.S. armed units around the country, arranging for their work

to progress as peaceably as possible, have been acclaimed as truly extraordinary. Starving Somalis have received more aid more quickly than anyone thought possible because of Oakley's constant negotiations with whatever influential individuals or local authorities he could find.

One of the Oakley team's primary objec-

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tives is to get out the word about U.S. intentions, a responsibility that falls largely to USIA's Robert Gosende, who has already served in Mogadishu and speaks Somali. He was enjoying a training year at Georgetown University when U.S. troops entered Somalia. A week later he was in Mogadishu. He and his deputy, Frank Stovas, work with the military to tell Somalis why U.S. forces and those of six allied countries, the Unified



Edward Perkins, U.N. ambassador under Bush, predicts the United States will get more involved in Somalia than it had intended.

Command, are there. It isn't easy. The media consists of two small radio stations and seven "newspapers"—mimeographed sheets. In Somalia the term "media" also includes leaflets dropped from airplanes. The U.S. message is that the Unified Command has no political ambitions and no links with local clans or political groups; rather it is part of a U.N. humanitarian mission and needs the Somalis' cooperation.

The British Broadcasting Corp.'s Somali service agreed to carry the same message, and on Dec. 27 the U.S. government's broadcasting service, Voice of America, began broadcasting 15 minutes a day in Somali. The VOA also uses its Arabic programs to get the word to Somalia's Arabic-speakers.

American officials invariably express optimism about operations in Somalia. The warring factions are cooperating more easily than expected, and the troops face less opposition than anticipated. But unofficial reports provide an unsettling counterpoint. They speak of lawlessness and violence flowing in wherever the troops vacate. Meanwhile, even the U.S. government reluctantly agrees that it must become more involved in confiscating arms, while still refusing to take as much responsibility for Somalian affairs as Boutros-Ghali would like.

For their part, the Americans want an ad hoc multinational force established as soon as possible under U.N. command, with the United States playing a supporting role at best. The new operation would help establish law and order, create a police force and develop a government.

But in the long run, as Grove points out, "it is really only the Somalis who can put Somalia back together." □



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