

@CHAPTER = SOMALIA

For the past 20 years, Somali president Mohamed Siad Barre has presided over a one-party military dictatorship. His reign has been characterized by vicious discrimination against certain ethnic groups -- currently the Isaaqs in northern Somalia -- as well as political imprisonment, torture and summary executions, in an effort to suppress all dissent in Somalia. A long-simmering war in northern Somalia between the Somali National Movement ("SNM") and government forces erupted in May 1988 when the SNM launched military operations from Ethiopia. The army responded with a savage counterinsurgency campaign. Throughout the rest of 1988 and 1989, the Somali armed forces engaged in extensive efforts to deprive the SNM of civilian support -- members of the Isaaq clan make up most SNM combatants -- by driving Isaaq noncombatants from the country through such means as indiscriminate aerial bombardment, the widespread killings of civilians, the destruction of crops, cattle and food-storage facilities, the poisoning of wells, and the jailing of hundreds of political prisoners. Some 450,000 Somalis fled such attacks for Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya, and an additional 600,000 were displaced within Somalia.

Until September 1989, the Bush administration's policy toward Somalia was largely a continuation of that of the Reagan administration. That policy was based on interest in the Berbera port as a strategic location -- it is viewed as an important staging area for the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. That interest provided the rationale to extend economic, military and diplomatic support to the U.S. ally in Mogadishu. At the same time, paradoxically, the administration went to considerable lengths to investigate the human rights situation in Somalia, and U.S. officials appeared to have no delusions about the ruthlessness of the Barre regime.

By late 1989, the Bush administration appeared to have reevaluated its policy toward Somalia, and took steps to limit U.S. assistance to the government. A factor in this seemingly revised policy was that the confidence of U.S. military analysts in the capabilities of the Somali army appeared to have been seriously shaken in the summer of 1989 when intense fighting broke out between government forces and soldiers from the Ogaden region who had deserted the Somali army. The government forces, despite brutal reprisals against civilians from Ogaden as well as those from the Harwiye clan, have been unable to retake portions of southern Somalia held by the Ogadenis. This erosion of confidence appears to have led to the cancellation of the "Brightstar" military exercises with Somalia this year. These exercises are high-visibility maneuvers, conducted by the United States with a number of countries in the region, and their cancellation was a blow to Barre's stature as a close U.S. ally. Both the Reagan and Bush administrations -- prompted by Congressional interest in human rights violations in Somalia -- have attempted to persuade the Barre regime to take steps to improve its human rights record. According to U.S. Ambassador to Somalia Frank Crigler, he raised the issue of certain political prisoners in private discussions with the government on several occasions.

Both the Reagan and Bush administrations also took steps to investigate gross abuses of human rights in Somalia. In August 1988, for example, the Reagan administration sent Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Refugee Assistance Kenneth Bleakley to investigate human rights abuses by visiting refugee camps in Ethiopia and displaced Somalis within Somalia. Assistant Secretary Bleakley spoke frankly with human rights advocates and Congressional staff about his findings, which confirmed prior reports of indiscriminate aerial bombardment, hundreds of political prisoners and torture. Assistant Secretary Bleakley conveyed his findings in a cable to U.S. Ambassador Crigler, who reportedly gave the cable to President Barre. But

when members of Congress asked to see the cable, it was promptly classified, according to Congressional sources. This reluctance to publicize its findings deprived the administration of an excellent opportunity to pressure the Somali government. Moreover, the act of classifying the document suggested that the administration wanted to shelter the Somali government from Congressional criticism.> In August 1989, at the request of Congress, the State Department released an investigation by Robert Gersony, a consultant and refugee expert who had investigated the situation of Somali refugees in Ethiopia and those displaced within Somalia. He conducted some 252 interviews with refugees and displaced persons, and concluded that the government had committed extensive abuses, including targeted bombings of civilian structures and fleeing refugees, and extrajudicial executions.

Unfortunately, the potential impact of the Bush administration's decision to investigate and report on Somali abuses was all but nullified by the administration's efforts to persuade Congress to provide military and economic assistance to the very forces responsible for those abuses. At various critical moments over the past two years, when abuses have been at their height, the Reagan and Bush administrations have acted to shore up the faltering Barre regime. Military aid, including arms and ammunition, was shipped to the Somali government in 1988,<FIncluded in the military aid provided to the Somali government in 1988 was a \$1.4 million shipment of M-16 automatic rifles and ammunition. The shipment arrived on June 28, 1989, and was used to arm Ethiopian refugees living in camps in Somalia operated by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. The timing of the aid could not have been worse: it arrived at precisely the moment when government forces were waging indiscriminate warfare against unarmed civilians throughout northern Somalia. To escape government terror, as noted, hundreds of thousands of Somalis fled into Ethiopia.> and the Reagan administration requested an additional \$38 million in military and budgetary support for Somalia in its request to Congress for fiscal year 1990.

In similar fashion, in mid-July 1989 the Bush administration went so far as to request an infusion of \$21 million in additional assistance in the form of Economic Support Funds -- direct budgetary assistance to the government. The timing of the request sent a terrible signal, since it came as the Barre regime was engaging in a massive crackdown in Mogadishu in which hundreds of civilians were executed and many hundreds more were jailed in sweeps through Isaaq and Harwiye neighborhoods.

When members of Congress blocked the additional aid and criticized the Bush administration for the poor timing of its request, State Department officials claimed to Congressional aides that the request had long been pending and that the notification to Congress just days after the July massacres was simply an unfortunate coincidence. The officials did not explain why the request was not reconsidered once the massacres became known.

Moreover, the Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Richard Schifter, actively defended the aid request in a letter to *The New York Times* on September 2, 1989. Rejecting the suggestion that the aid infusion was an attempt by the Bush administration to shore up the faltering Barre regime, Assistant Secretary Schifter defended the aid, stating:

@QUOTENOIND = The administration's request to obligate \$21 million in economic support funds for Somalia was directly tied to our support for economic reforms in that country. These reforms, worked out with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, are designed to transfer economic decision-making power from the Government to the people and the marketplace -- to support the very people who are suffering both from poverty and from human rights abuses.

Assistant Secretary Schifter's defense of the balance-of-payments support for the government is highly objectionable. First, despite the claimed economic benefits, the aid violates Section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, which prohibits the granting of Economic Support Funds to governments such as that of Somalia which engage in "a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights." Second, the notion that Somali citizens can benefit from aid at a time when many are fleeing in the face of summary execution, torture and political imprisonment seems insensitive at best.

We note, however, that Schifter did acknowledge the severe abuses being committed by the Barre regime. He stated:

@QUOTENOIND = The United States has strongly protested the latest human rights violations in Somalia, asked for an investigation and insisted that those responsible be brought to justice.... The serious human rights violations in Mogadishu...compel us to give careful scrutiny to assistance to Somalia.

@NOIND = This was a welcome departure from the State Department's prior refusal to condemn the Barre government publicly -- even when the Department's own investigations revealed extensive atrocities. But it is regrettable that this new human rights message was overshadowed by Assistant Secretary Schifter's public support for aid to the abusive regime.

On one occasion, the State Department not only failed to condemn an important human rights abuse, but also rebuked Africa Watch for calling for an investigation of the problem. In 1988 and 1989, the international press carried numerous credible reports that Libyan President Quadaffi had shipped chemical weapons to Somalia. One such report was aired on January 12, 1989 by NBC news, and the British Foreign Office was said to be deeply concerned about the reports. The State Department denied these reports, and when Africa Watch raised concerns about the possible use of chemical weapons against civilians in northern Somalia, then-Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker rebuked Africa Watch. In a January 4, 1989 letter, he stated that he was satisfied with the Somali government's categorical denials, and reminded Africa Watch that "prudence and fairness warrant a heavy burden of proof with respect to charges about willful use of weapons of mass destruction by a government against its own people." In view of the Somali government's campaign of mass destruction in the northern part of the country, which caused the death or flight of hundreds of thousands of noncombatants, the Assistant Secretary's failure to investigate the charges of possible use of chemical weapons and his uncritical acceptance of the government's denial seems unwarranted.

On June 20, 1989, the Bush administration missed an important opportunity to condemn the Somali government's abuses publicly when it refused to send a witness to a hearing sponsored by the House Banking Subcommittee on International Development Institutions and Finance. The hearing was called to examine U.S. human rights policy with regard to multilateral lending to China and Somalia. The administration's failure even to appear at the hearing, after having been invited by the subcommittee chairman, Representative Walter Fauntroy, says volumes about its disinclination to embarrass the Barre regime.

Undoubtedly another factor in the administration's refusal to appear before the subcommittee was the U.S. law barring U.S. support for loans to such abusive regimes as that of Somalia. Section 701 of the International Financial Institutions Act requires that U.S. representatives to the multilateral development banks (such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank) oppose loans to governments engaged in "gross violations of internationally recognized human rights." Far from opposing loans to Barre, the Bush administration reportedly promoted Somalia's cause within the banks. In June

1989, the World Bank approved a \$70 million "quick disbursing cash loan" to Somalia, and the African Development Bank supplied an additional \$25 million as part of the economic stabilization package. According to World Bank officials and Congressional staff, human rights conditions in Somalia were completely ignored in both the administration's and the World Bank's deliberations on future lending to Somalia. On September 29, Chairman Fauntroy, along with 46 other members of the House of Representatives, wrote a letter to Secretary of State Baker urging him to reexamine U.S. support for loans to Somalia by the World Bank and African Development Bank.

What progress has been made in using U.S. influence to promote human rights in Somalia is largely due to Congressional efforts. In 1989, Congress placed aid to Somalia on a "reprogramming basis," which requires advance notification from the executive branch before aid is disbursed. After Congress requested a hold on the \$2.5 million in military aid allocated to Somalia in fiscal year 1989, the Bush administration, apparently so as not to lose the amount completely, reprogrammed the amount to other countries. Beginning in July 1988, the Reagan administration suspended shipment of arms and ammunition, but it and the Bush administration continued to provide non-lethal military assistance left over from previous years, until the Congressional action. In July 1989, as noted, Congress also prevented the administration from providing \$21 million in Economic Support Funds which had been authorized but not spent for fiscal year 1988. By September, the administration announced its intention to reprogram the \$21 million to other countries in Africa. We hope that this welcome decision, in part in response to Congressional criticism, represents a new willingness by the Bush administration to use aid as a lever for promoting human rights in Somalia.

We urge the Bush administration to continue to limit assistance and to take further steps to distance itself from the Barre government. It is important that the U.S. take the lead and make clear, in forceful terms, that a government which consistently disregards human life and basic rights has no place in the international community and will not benefit from international largesse.