
SOMALIA: SECURITY ASSISTANCE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

By

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BACKGROUND

Somalia has an ancient and rich history. Once known as the "land of punt" and famed for its frankincense and myrrh (which it still exports), Somalia is today better known for its pastoral economy, nomadic population and refugee problems. Additionally, it has a long history of conflict with its neighboring states, and also suffers from prolonged periods of drought. However, Somalia also possesses bountiful wildlife, beautiful beaches and a harsh -- but picturesque -- desert landscape. The Somali people are considered among the most handsome in all of Africa.

Somalia is a rarity in Africa in that its population is virtually homogeneous, both ethnically and linguistically. It is a land of nomadic herdsman. Well over half of the population follow the grazing of camels, cattle, sheep and goats over arid regions covering much of the countryside. Only the area between the two large rivers of the south -- the Shabelle and Juba -- has sufficient rainfall for settled agriculture. The Somalis have traditionally considered the nomadic way of life the most noble calling. It is a harsh life, but the Somalis are a very self-reliant people with a strong sense of national and cultural identity. They seem a happy and friendly people renowned for their story-telling abilities and a rich tradition of oral history.

When people realize you are being assigned to Somalia, their typical reactions are either "Where is that?" or "What did you do to deserve that?" In terms of general knowledge, Africa remains the dark continent to many people, and unfortunately their knowledge of Africa is gleaned from old Tarzan movies or tales of the Stanley and Livingstone exploits. Somalia is located in a region known as the Horn of Africa. It is roughly shaped like the number seven and juts into the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. The Somali coastline is approximately 1,800 miles long. The country is nearly the same size as the East Coast of the United States extending westward towards Tennessee.

Those who profess some knowledge about Somalia generally envision it as a primitive, arid country with sand dunes and intense heat. While each of these characteristics are correct to an extent, none are completely accurate. True, Somalia is a less developed country, but it has a growing literacy rate and the people are accomplished livestock breeders and traders. The country does have its desert area, but the majority of the countryside is still suitable for the grazing herds of the nomads. In the north the temperature reaches about 130°F. In the shade during August, however, the majority of the country experiences year-round temperatures between 80-90°F (28-34°C). In fact, the evening weather in Mogadishu rivals that of Honolulu, but without the intermittent threat of rainshowers experienced in Hawaii. Vast stretches

of sunny, white sandy beaches with mild, cool waters await those interested in perfect beach weather 365 days a year.



A Typical Somali Coastal Scene

U.S. OFFICE OF MILITARY COOPERATION (USOMC) - SOMALIA

The U.S. Office of Military Cooperation (USOMC) in Mogadishu is authorized nine personnel (six military, one civilian, and two local wage-rate employees). Its modest size does not imply that the role of the USOMC is also small. Located on the Indian Ocean and Red Sea littoral, and situated in proximity to the Bab El Mandeb, Somalia plays a significant role within the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) area of operations. Relations with the United States have steadily improved since the expulsion of Soviet and Cuban advisors in 1977. U.S. economic aid was reestablished in 1978, and military aid commenced in 1981. The full extent of military aid to Somalia includes equipment, training, and construction.

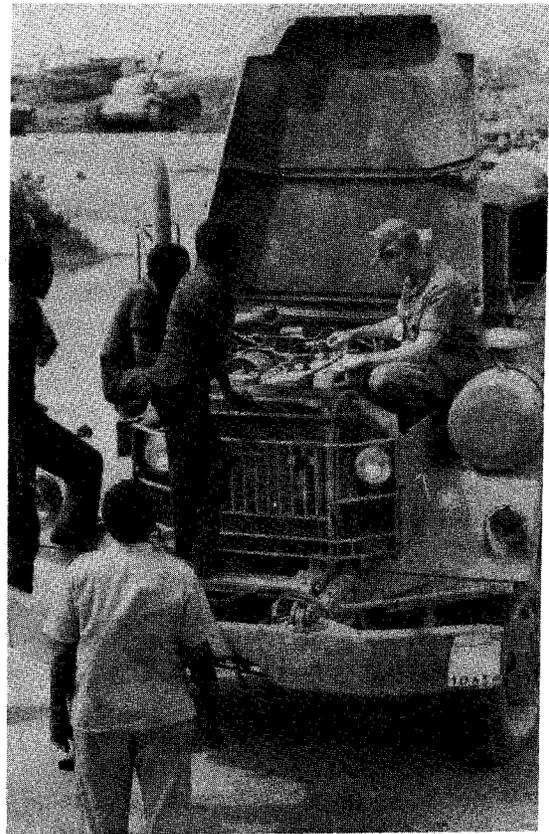
Since 1981, Foreign Military Sales (FMS) to Somalia has reflected a relatively significant financial commitment for both U.S. defense services and equipment, as well as military construction projects. In the area of FMS sales, Somalia has received air defense radars, missile-equipped armored personnel carriers, light infantry weapons, and other assorted military vehicles. Additionally, during fiscal year (FY) 1985, the Government of Somalia will also receive Howitzers. Currently the Peace Horn project -- the sale of air defense radars -- represents the single largest security assistance program in Somalia. There are several radar sites throughout the country, and a depot level supply and maintenance facility has been constructed to support their continued operations. At each location U.S. security assistance personnel are training and assisting a Somali cadre in the care and operation of the radar and its ancillary equipment.



A "Peace Horn" Radar Site in Somalia

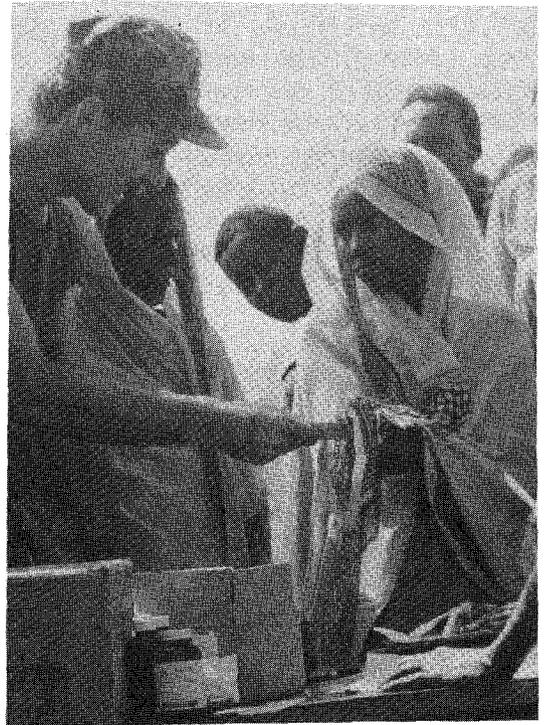
Defense services to date have concentrated on providing logistics Technical Assistance Field Teams (TAFTs) and U.S. military Mobile Training Teams (MTTs), with additional teams scheduled for FY 1985. These MTTs are the cornerstones of our security assistance efforts in Somalia. They provide not only training to Somali military personnel, but also a personal link in the development of U.S. credibility and exposure to our way of life. The logistics TAFTs and the Medical Civic Action Program (MEDCAP) are of particular note in this respect.

The TAFT provides the Somali military with U.S. expertise and assistance in a myriad of logistical functions ranging from warehouse and repair parts management to actual hands-on repair of equipment and data processing. Although the team primarily remains in Mogadishu, field visits and site inspections of field maintenance facilities are not uncommon.



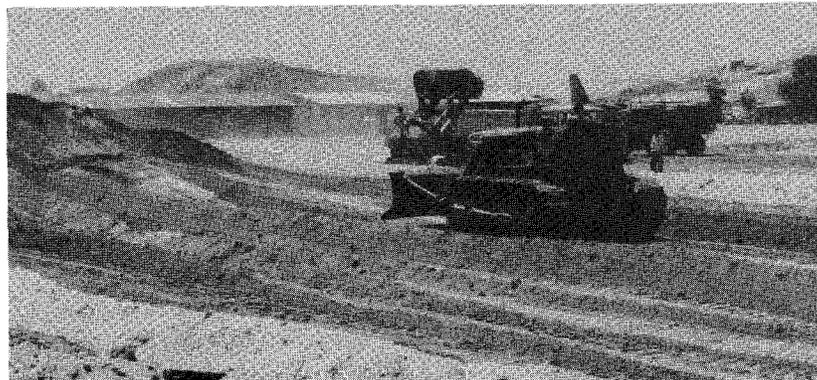
A U.S. Logistics TAFT in Somalia

The MEDCAP team, on the other hand, usually operates outside of Mogadishu. It deploys with Somali counterparts to isolated locations to train military nurses and medics, as well as indigenous personnel in basic health care and first aid. Aside from its training mission, the team also provides some of the only medical care available to literally thousands of nomadic herdsman in remote regions. The response from the population has been overwhelming. When medical supplies run out, the team returns to Mogadishu for resupply before its next foray into the bush.



A U.S. MEDCAP Team in Somalia

Military construction projects have been aimed specifically at the expansion of port and airfield facilities in Berbera, as well as improvements at the military/international airport in Mogadishu. These military construction efforts not only provide valuable and highly visible evidence of continuing U.S. support to Somalia, but also serve to enhance Somalia's infrastructure development as a prerequisite for modernization of the Somali armed forces.



Military Construction in Somalia

The International Military Education and Training (IMET) Program for Somali personnel has increased steadily, from a small number of officers initially trained in the U.S. in FY 1981, to over 112 scheduled for FY 1985. IMET training in the past was hampered due to nonavailability of sufficient English-speaking Somali officers; however, since the arrival of an English Language Training Detachment (LTD), the program has increased to its present size. During FY 1985, we are anticipating the arrival of a second LTD to assist in the development of a program in the city of Hargeisa, located in northern Somalia, thus increasing our potential for IMET students in FY 1986.

QUALITY OF LIFE IN SOMALIA

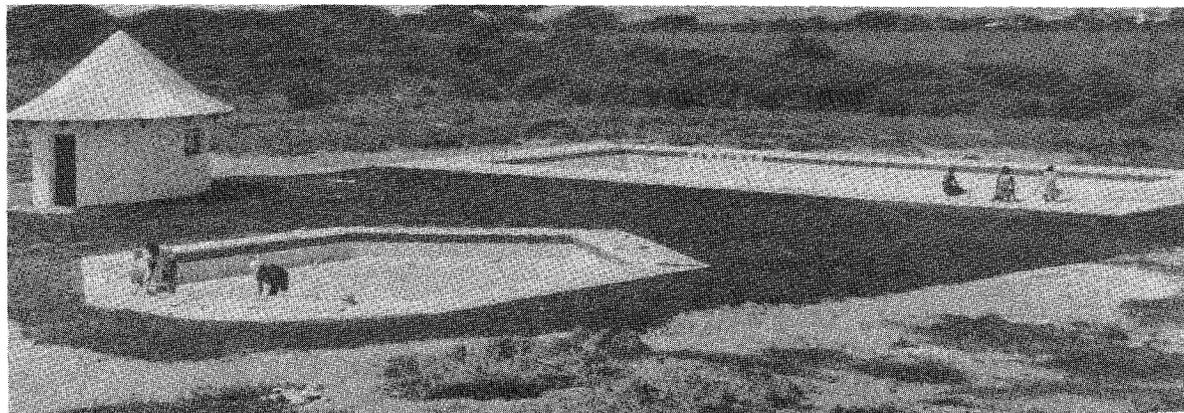
Living in Somalia does present some difficulties but is certainly not insurmountable. Although the local standard of living is not very high (\$280 per capita annual income), permanently assigned personnel, as well as those on temporary duty, will find Somalia a pleasant and exotic place. Certainly the electricity is sometimes erratic, most streets are not paved, and you have to boil your drinking water, but there are compensations. The government-leased quarters are in private compounds and for the most part are air conditioned and spacious, averaging 2,900 square feet, and are furnished with quality, brand name furniture. Another positive aspect of life in Mogadishu is the very low crime rate. Americans feel little or no threat to their physical security.



Government-Leased Quarters in Mogadishu

There is also a cooperative commissary in Mogadishu run by the American community that has most essential food and grocery items. Military personnel, as well as Department of Defense employees, also have access to a monthly commissary flight from Diego Garcia that provides them with food items in bulk issue. Since Somalia is still a remote location, assigned personnel are authorized two environmental and morale leaves per year.

Right now the basic needs are provided to personnel assigned in Somalia, but a look toward the future provides an even brighter picture. During the Fourth of July celebration last summer, former Ambassador Robert B. Oakley dedicated the new 25-meter swimming pool at the new American compound. When completed, the compound will house not only the American school, commissary, health unit, and golf and tennis club (which are already completed) but will also have the new chancery, official residence, and several other sets of quarters.



The New Swimming Pool at the
U.S. Compound, Mogadishu

CONCLUSION

Somalia is a Third World African nation which the United States and several other nations are helping to move into the modern era at a quickened pace. The U.S. presence and the work performed by the USOMC in Somalia is in consonance with the needs of the Somalis and the policy of our government. We who serve here on the forward edge of freedom are proud of what we have already accomplished and the goals we are working to achieve. With the continued help of our hosts -- the Somali people -- future security assistance operations will be a success here on the Horn of Africa.

Captain Donald M. Johnson, USA, was assigned on temporary duty to the USOMC - Somalia from April through October 1984. He is a Foreign Area Officer currently assigned to the Strategic Studies Detachment of the 8th Psychological Operations Battalion at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Captain Johnson graduated from the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) in 1974 and holds a Masters Degree in National Security Affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School.