

# **Will the state that waged war against Nicaragua save Somalia?**

Conor McLoughlin

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“Liberal Interventionism” is the new buzzword for 1993. In every newspaper they are baying for blood. “US intervene in Bosnia”, “America sort out Somalia” scream the headlines. People who might have questioned American intervention in Nicaragua, Panama or the Middle East are raging that the marines didn’t go into Somalia sooner. Aid agencies who condemned America’s role in Central America are begging them to extend their mission in Somalia. It is time to look at how the crisis in that country is being used to justify America’s ‘big brother’ role in the New World Order.

Sending the marines in to “solve” the crisis in Somalia was rather like sending a pyromaniac with a can of petrol to put out a fire. The famine in Somalia is man-made. It is a result of the underdevelopment caused by colonialism and the later refusal of the big powers to let many of the ex-colonies develop their economies. Somalia up to 1991 was a net exporter of agricultural products, 64% of it’s exports being livestock and meat. Most of the population are subsistence level nomads but two million were involved in fairly well developed agriculture.

George Bush’s intervention actually goes back to the 1970s when he was director of the CIA. \$356 million worth of weapons were poured into Somalia. Before this the country had been split between Britain and Italy. In 1960 it was granted independence. In 1969 a military coup bought Major General Siad Barre to power.

## **Guns, Guns And More Guns**

His dictatorship was propped up with Soviet money so naturally the CIA attempted to subvert it. In 1977 he tried to take over part of Ethiopia, at that time a Soviet puppet. From then on this was a dictatorship which was “on-side” with the ‘free world’. It received more “aid” and, especially, more guns. It became increasingly dependent on foreign aid, its agriculture remained underdeveloped and export-orientated. Its people began to starve.

Aid agencies estimate that there are now 7.5 million guns in the country. In 1990 the population was estimated at 7,555,000 (Encyclopedia Britanica, Micropedia 1991). Since then it has been devastated by war, famine and disease. So there is an average of more then one gun per person in this sad country.

In January 1991 the hated Siad Barre was finally toppled. The various factions which opposed him began to fall out and the country slid into civil war. The reaction of the West was to withdraw all aid. The UN pulled out.

The intervention of 20,000 American marines is not going to put the country to rights. While in the short-term they have secured aid supplies the signs are there that the long-term prospects are not good. The Americans will try and sort out some form of puppet government. They are already setting up “interim security councils” (New York Times Jan 3<sup>rd</sup>). After something has been cobbled together with UN help they will exit. They will leave behind a country with at least 14 waring factions and 7.5 million guns. From there things can only get worse.

## **Armed Photo Opportunities**

So why go in in the first place? It is difficult to support the claim that the Americans might have any direct strategic interests in Somalia. Oil has been discovered there and it might make a useful

staging post on the way to the Middle East. The main consideration, however, is simple: good publicity.

During operation “Desert Storm” the media was restricted and their reports had to be passed by military censors. Operation “Restore Hope” has taken place under the direct glare of media publicity. Newspapers, magazine and TV crews have been allowed unrestricted access and reporting. The marines daring dawn raid of December 4<sup>th</sup> faced batteries of cameras and TV floodlights. The marines were somewhat irritated (not having the chance to, at least, put on a bit of makeup beforehand for the cameras) but clearly somebody quite high up had given sanction for the media invasion.

The high point of the armed photo-opportunity was the Christmas visit of the “great white father” himself. This nauseating stunt was dubbed “Showmalia”. Bush patted heads in foodlines and orphanages. The cameras clicked obligingly. As soon as he left the press pulled out as well. “The hiss you hear” noted Associated Press on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, “is the air going out of a good story”.

## **Hitman**

The US economy is now massively dependent on arms manufacturing and the arms merchants are a hugely powerful lobby. Increasingly America is becoming the hitman for the more buoyant Western economies. The Gulf War was an excellent showcase for the Pentagon’s “usefulness and capabilities” in this regard. They were the ones who “sorted out” Saddam, and were massively bankrolled by Saudi-Arabia, Japan and the EC.

As well as wars conducted in the name of ‘democracy’ (like the Gulf War where America’s allies included Saudi Arabia where women are not even allowed to drive cars!), there are to be ‘humanitarian’ interventions. These help to make invading other peoples’ countries more acceptable to the public. There is always enough cash for arms and armies, but not for food, healthcare or education. We are supposed to forget that the big world powers are the ones who wreck third world economies and prop up the dictators.

The invasion of Somalia is an attempt to get over the ‘Vietnam Syndrome’. It is an attempt to legitimise invasions in the 1990s. Somalia is an ideal ‘theatre’ in which to intervene. It contains a lot of small arms but nothing which could stand up to high-tech American ordnance. And it was easy, even the liberals and soft-left wanted intervention in this “exceptional situation”. On the other hand, despite the pleading of the ‘liberal interventionists’, they are in no rush to jump into the former Yugoslavia This would involve confrontations with well armed forces in extremely difficult terrain. It could become a long and complex war, where public support would bleed away. It would be too reminiscent of another continent, another time, another place and a country called Vietnam.

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