

# Somalia: Friction In Operations Other Than War

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SUBJECT AREA Operations

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** Somalia: Friction in Operations Other Than War

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**Thesis:** Though not delineated in current doctrine, addressing the potential sources of friction in Operations Other Than War increases their chances of success.

**Background:** The great difference between the situation when U.S. forces first entered Somalia and the events, which led to U.S. withdrawal, are evidence that friction plays a significant role in Operations Other Than War (OOTW). This concept is included in both the Marine Corps and Army capstone doctrine that describes how these services wage war. Carl von Clausewitz originated the concept and listed eight potential sources of friction in an 1812 essay. Using this information as a foundation, this paper investigates potential sources of friction in OOTW using Operation RESTORE HOPE as a case study. Three major areas were identified as sources of friction in OOTW: (1) the mission, (2) the enemy, and (3) the environment. Parallels are evident between the sources of friction identified by Clausewitz and events in Somalia that appear to have been most burdened by the presence of friction.

**Recommendation:** Planners and operators in Operations Other Than War should deliberately address the potential sources of friction to decrease the effects of this sapping force.

## Somalia: Friction in Operations Other Than War

**Thesis statement:** Though not delineated in current doctrine, addressing the potential sources of friction in Operations Other Than War (OOTW) increases their chances of success.

**I.** The difference between the situation when the U.S. committed forces to a humanitarian mission in Somalia and the events leading to its decision to withdraw highlight a need to understand the concept of friction in OOTW.

- A.** Army and Marine Corps capstone doctrine describing how these services wage war includes discussions of friction.
- B.** In 1812, Carl von Clausewitz explained the concept of friction in an essay that included an explanation of eight sources of friction.

**II.** An examination of events in Somalia reveals three major areas as potential sources of friction.

- A.** Mission statement and mission analysis can lead to friction at the outset.
- B.** Analysis of the enemy, especially identification of potential gainers and losers as a result of U.S. presence, reveals another potential source of friction.
- C.** Aspects of the environment, particularly attributable to the level of threat and the austerity of infrastructure, create significant friction.

**III.** Friction, the concept and specifically its potential sources, needs to be considered early in the planning of OOTW as well as throughout its execution.

## Somalia: Friction in Operations Other Than War

### Introduction

In his 4 December 1992 address on the deteriorating situation in Somalia, President Bush warned "We will not tolerate armed gangs ripping off their own people, condemning them to death by starvation," and that American troops had the authority to "take whatever military action is necessary to safeguard the lives of our troops and the lives of Somalia's people."

On 9 December 1992, approximately 1,800 U.S. Marines arrived in Somalia's capital of Mogadishu as the vanguard of the American-led humanitarian operation: RESTORE HOPE. They quickly secured the city's port and airfield and raised the flag over the ruins of the former U.S. embassy. For the first time in almost two years, ordinary Somali citizens could walk the streets without fear. The unopposed landing was due in part to an agreement worked out in advance between the U.S.'s special envoy, Robert Oakley, and the two principal warlords in the area: General Mohammed Farah Aidid and Mohammed Ali

Mahdi. The U.S. operation would eventually involve 16,000 Marines from I MEF and 10,000 soldiers from the Army's 10th Mountain Division.

In a 7 October 1993 statement, President Clinton announced that 31 March 1994 would be the deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from support of the now U.N. -led operation in Somalia. The announcement came on the heels of a 3-4 October battle in which at least 12 U.S. soldiers were reportedly killed and 75 wounded while attempting to "neutralize" General Aidid. U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali declared that the U.N. would "stay the course" despite U.S. withdrawal. Though many aspects of operation RESTORE HOPE went exceptionally well, it is obvious from the disparity of circumstances described in the "snapshots" above that the course of events from beginning to end was littered with unplanned and unforeseen obstacles.

A doctrinal search for a description of the principals of Operations Other than War (OOTW) would be a futile one at present. The periodical literature is full of opinion pieces that illuminate (or attempt to) one or more aspects of these nebulous extensions of policy. Eventually, a comprehensive field manual may be written which captures the essence of these operations in its own vocabulary. Since conflict is woven into the fabric of many of these operations, it would not be surprising to find a degree of

commonality between some of our current doctrine and that which would guide OOTW. The preceding account of U.S. forces during Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia highlights the presence of a long-recognized characteristic of war which will undoubtedly find a place in future doctrine as well: friction. The purpose of this paper is to place the nature OOTW under a microscope of sorts, using the concept of friction as a lens and the experience of Operation RESTORE HOPE as the specimen. To accomplish this objective with any kind of clarity or accuracy, a more comprehensive working definition of friction is required. Once accomplished, this information will be used to systematically address the innate complications of Operation RESTORE HOPE with an eye toward extrapolating the realities of operations in Somalia to OOTW as a whole. Admittedly, this is a narrow slice of a large, complex issue. If the analysis is accurate, a better understanding of friction and OOTW will be forthcoming, which would be beneficial to both future planners and operators.

### Friction

In the Marine Corps' FMFM 1: Warfighting, which is the service's "authoritative basis for how we fight,"<sup>1</sup> friction is addressed early in the chapter describing the nature of war. According to FMFM 1, the very essence of war creates friction. It is the "force that resists all action. It

makes the simple difficult and the difficult seemingly impossible."<sup>2</sup> Friction may be mental as well as physical, originating externally or internally. Though "Warfighting" addresses the goal of minimizing self-induced friction, it places a greater emphasis on the ability to fight effectively under friction's influence. The manual instructs that friction can only be overcome by the strength of a moral force: will. The discussion ends with a warning that true friction cannot be duplicated in training and that commanders should not be misled into believing that training can accomplish this level of simulation.<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. Army's FM 100-5: Operations is that service's keystone doctrine that "describes how the Army thinks about their conduct of operations."<sup>4</sup> Under the subheading of "The Tenets of Army Operations," a discussion of agility includes the concept of friction. In this manual, friction is defined as "the accumulation of chance errors, unexpected difficulties, and confusion of battle that impede both sides."<sup>5</sup> The guidance provided by FM 100-5 is that friction cannot be eliminated but it can be reduced. Similar to the use of will in FMFM 1, the Army's manual instructs leaders to be vigilant and decisive if friction is to be overcome.<sup>6</sup>

Though these documents make selective use of friction to support larger concepts, neither is as comprehensive as the originator of the concept: Carl von Clausewitz. The

concept was fully developed in an 1812 work that Clausewitz wrote for his pupil, the Prussian crown prince Frederick William. The essay was titled "The Most Important Principles For The Conduct Of War To Complete My Course Of Instruction Of His Royal Highness The Crown Prince," and was written as Clausewitz travelled to Russia after leaving the service of Prussia in protest of his king's treaty with France. Not to be confused with his classic work Vom Kreige (On War), this essay was the distilled version of many of Clausewitz's notes, lessons and lectures at the Allgemeine Kriegsschule (General War School) where he held a concurrent position while instructing the crown prince. The essay is broken into four parts: (1) Principals For War In General, (2) Tactics Or The Theory Of Combat, (3) Strategy, and (4) Application Of These Principals In Time Of War. The lasting message conveyed during this final section to the prince was that the preceding principles were neither hard to understand nor apply. "The great difficulty is this: To remain faithful throughout to the principals we have laid down for ourselves."<sup>7</sup> The "difficulty" which Clausewitz referred to was friction, and he devoted the final paragraphs of the essay to explaining what he understood this critical concept to mean.

Clausewitz likened the conduct of war to "the workings of an intricate machine with tremendous friction, so that combinations which are easily planned on paper can be

executed only with great effort."<sup>8</sup> Though he acknowledged the incompleteness of the effort, Clausewitz enumerated what he felt were the main sources of friction with respect to the conduct of war. The following is a brief synopsis of Clausewitz's eight sources of friction.

The first source is the lack of complete knowledge of the enemy. Self-doubt and indecision are symptoms of this deficiency, and "half measures" the resultant condition.

Second is what Clausewitz called "rumor." This is the information concerning the enemy from a myriad of official and unofficial sources such as spies, observation, and intelligence. The net effect of this friction compounds the lack of complete enemy knowledge, exaggerating and distorting the true image of the opponent. Thorough planning and confident execution were his prescription for overcoming these distractions.

The enemy is not the sole source of friction, as shown by the third: lack of complete knowledge of friendly forces. Associated with this type of friction is the desire to wait and delay under the assumption that a clearer view of the situation will be forthcoming. The solution is identical to the second, with an emphasis on trust in the abilities of wisely chosen subordinates.

The fourth source of friction comes from obstacles that appear "insurmountable." The debilitating effects produced by the acceptance of these opinions are best conquered by



an inner strength, or "faith in our own insight and convictions."

Fifth is the inevitable mismatch between plans and actual results due primarily to unforeseen circumstances. To prevent the cumulative effects of these minor problems requires great effort on the part of the leader. In fact, "severity bordering on cruelty" is what Clausewitz prescribed.

Sixth - one's forces are never as strong in reality as the commander believes them to be. This friction originates from the commander's closeness and familiarity with his own army, and a desire to compensate for his lack of knowledge about the enemy.

The ubiquitous problems associated with logistics are the seventh source of friction. Though the supply of war is not downplayed, Clausewitz advises that if an army can adjust to the austerity of wartime supply conditions it will have a distinct advantage over its opponent.

In the style of Clausewitz, the eighth source of friction is last only to guarantee a more lasting impression on its reader: The opinions formed as a result of what one sees on the battlefield are rarely an accurate gauge of the situation. "Fear and exaggerated caution" are the likely reactions to these first impressions, and the value of "mature reflection" is diminished. To avoid this natural tendency, the conviction of sound judgments based

in the study of military history is required.<sup>9</sup>

The preceding discussion of friction and Clausewitz's eight sources (with the recommended remedies which accompany them) serves as both background and a foundation for an analysis of U.S. operations in Somalia. The focus is on situations or events which appear to have been most burdened by the presence of friction and are drawn from the views of others as well as the author's own experiences during the operation. Three broad areas will serve as a framework to categorize friction in operation RESTORE HOPE: (1) Mission related, (2) Enemy related, and (3) Environmental.

#### Mission

Friction, as it relates to the mission, often originates at the highest levels. Whether one attributes this to the media coverage, the international impact of the operation, or simply the political nature of OOTW, a strong strategic linkage exists in what may otherwise appear to be a minor operation. The finite mission which the National Command Authorities (NCA) originally agreed to was to end the inter-clan fighting which would create a secure environment and permit humanitarian operations to proceed in famine stricken southern Somalia. Overwhelming force would be available to the United Task Force (UNITAF) to quell Pentagon reservations on using ground forces in Somalia.

The decisions, which culminated in this basic mission

statement, had a ripple effect throughout the services as they reacted to warning orders. In the Army's case, criticisms have been leveled at the planning process that did not give the Army component commander the opportunity to influence task organizations, intelligence requirements or end state conditions. Most of these decisions had been made already and early use of parallel planning could have included the commander's valuable input. Specifically, "force caps" were developed early in the process and Army planners felt constrained by them.<sup>10</sup> Mission analysis by the Marine Corps was also frustrating. Two specified tasks were understood: (1) provide security for humanitarian relief, and (2) provide escort for food relief deliveries. The challenge lies in the seemingly endless list of implied tasks that must also be understood to effectively accomplish the specified tasks. This list included: security within assigned sector, integration of coalition forces, establishment of ad hoc committees, explosive ordnance disposal, coordination of relief distribution sites, and preparations to turnover sectors to joint, coalition, or U.N. forces.<sup>11</sup>

The aforementioned implied tasks are directly related to a friction-producing phenomenon in OOTW: mission creep. Sometimes the influence of "other things" that occur as part of implied tasks grows disproportionately. A good example of this is the nation building aspects of RESTORE

HOPE. Though these efforts were clearly beneficial to Somalis and certainly within the spirit of the overall reason for operations in Somalia, one must understand that they also compete with the specified tasks. Constant vigilance is required to maintain the focus of the mission.

Another aspect, which added to mission related friction, was the advance deployment of the 15th MEU. All of the difficulties associated with conveying specified and implied tasks, commander's intent, and endstate were compounded when the lead element of the operation departed CONUS a month earlier. A forward deployed unit depends on properly worded message traffic and phone conversations for its guidance. Success in OOTW often hinges on the complete understanding of mission, intent, and end state at the lowest possible level and anything that hinders the accurate flow of this information down to that level produces friction.

Lastly, all participants need to know when the mission is redefined as well as who now has the power to change it. The fateful battle on 3-4 October 1993 is clear evidence of what can happen when forces are tasked to execute a mission that is fundamentally different from the original purpose for their presence. In this case, the NCA decided not to risk further episodes of U.N.-led mission creep and publicly declared when it would terminate its support.

## Enemy

The first, and not necessarily the easiest, question that must be answered regarding OOTW is "Who is the enemy?" In Somalia, the quick answer would appear to be the clans and sub-clans. But who are they? A fundamental concept must be understood on the eve of U.S involvement on someone else's soil: there are going to be gainers and losers as a result of our presence. One theory would suggest that the "losers" are the potential enemies. However, one cannot identify all of the potential losers at the outset, so the rolls delineating the enemy may fluctuate as the operation unfolds. There were approximately 21 clans and sub-clans that could be labeled "enemy" in Somalia. Each had its own agenda and interests. The straightforward nature of the initial mission made the task of identifying the enemy relatively easy: Anyone threatening or interfering with the free passage of humanitarian relief was enemy.

Many of the methods used to counter "anti-relief" actions were accompanied by friction. The primary method was that of negotiation, which was always charged by the politics of dealing with potential gainers and losers. Attempts to use the advice of elders in conjunction with agreements among clan leaders and warlords were often successful at achieving the level of consensus required for progress. Integral to all aspects of relief delivery was the inclusion of nongovernmental agencies (NGO). Similar to

the friction associated with negotiating with clans, the NGO's had separate agendas and different views of not only their role, but also the proper role of armed forces in Somalia. To lessen the probability of armed resistance, disarmament was practiced early against the thugs and bandits encountered in the relief sectors. The risks associated with taking arms away from Somalis, and thus overtly designating the "losers," were outweighed by the benefits of having a decreased potential for armed, sporadic resistance. The final example of enemy related friction deals with the interpretation of rules of engagement. In an environment where forces were literally having countless interactions with potential enemies each day, the restraints placed on the use of force were rapidly deciphered by Somalis and used to their immediate advantage. The Somalis often interpreted the restraint that U.S. forces displayed, by not using their weapons, as a sign of weakness. People who literally fought for their food every day during the period of civil unrest found military and NGO vehicles easy prey.<sup>12</sup>

### Environment

The complete absence of infrastructure in Somalia created friction in many unique and challenging ways. Any capability that was required to support the planned operation ashore had to be brought into the country because

planners could not assume that it was already there. Unlike conditions in Southwest Asia, there simply wasn't anything to "fall in" on. The expeditionary nature of the Marine Corps forces in Somalia, especially the combat service support elements, adapted well to the austere conditions.

The MEU Service Support Group (MSSG) was typical of this inherent flexibility. During the first week ashore, 15th MEU (SOC) was able to reach inland 120 miles from its support base of Amphibious Ready Group shipping. Though stretched to its limits, the training and operating procedures employed by the MEU gave its commander the confidence required to move so far inland prior to the arrival of significant follow-on forces and sustainability.

Another aspect of the environment that caused friction was uncertainty concerning the level of sophistication of the threat. During the first three weeks of the operation, the composite helicopter squadron from 15th MEU provided all of the rotary wing support to ground forces on the shore. A single SA-7, which certainly may have been in their possession, could have produced enough casualties to jeopardize the mission at the outset. Again the MEU (SOC) training, which includes urban tactics, paid dividends as evidenced by the use of high threat tactics until virtually certain that they could be relaxed.

The port, which was vital to follow-on support, is located in an observable line of fire. Common sense, as

well as doctrine, dictates the use of benign ports when employing maritime prepositioning ships. However, the capital city of Mogadishu surrounds this port and, because of the density of this area and the chaos associated with the many clans and factions, the port would probably never be considered benign. With the MEU ashore and the agreements worked out by Special Envoy Oakley intact, the risk incurred by operating contrary to doctrine was deemed acceptable. In the anarchy sometimes associated with OOTW, a willingness to think and operate "out of the box" becomes a standard operating procedure in itself.

The final example demonstrates how persistence and innovation can overcome environmental friction. To make the strides inland that occurred within the first week of operations in Somalia, the MEU was constrained by fuel for both vehicles and helicopters. To operate so close to the limit of their operational radius, multiple methods of refueling were employed. Refueling trucks from the MPS shipping were dispatched whenever possible. As insurance, the squadron carried its own Helicopter Expeditionary Fuel System to intermediate bases. As added insurance, the squadron incorporated the contingency use of a fuel dispensing system from its CH-53E into its planning should a situation arise which could not be supported by the other conventional refueling means. Thus, redundancy and creativity are effective deterrents to friction.



## Conclusion

Though by its very name OOTW is not war as depicted by state versus state armed conflict, it often does include the use of force in its execution. For this reason, many tenets of OOTW already exist in the doctrine written with conventional war in mind. However, current doctrine falls short of either describing or prescribing actions in OOTW. Part of the ambiguity surrounding these operations can be attributed to the uniqueness of the friction that accompanies them. Overcoming friction requires a persistent "iron will" which refuses to be overwhelmed by its cumulative effects. Understanding the concept friction, especially its potential sources, increases the likelihood of resisting its affect. This paper discussed three major sources of friction that impacted Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia to highlight the relevance of this resistant element. By consciously addressing these potential sources of friction and identifying counteractions, planners and operators decrease the tendency for the seemingly simple to be so difficult in OOTW.

## NOTES

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2. FMFM 1: Warfighting, (U.S. Government Printing Office 1989) 4.
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4. FM 100-5: Operations, (U.S. Government Printing Office 1993) v.
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6. Ibid.
7. Carl von Clausewitz, ed./trans. Hans W. Gatzke, Principles of War (Harrisburg: The Telegraph Press, 1942) 61.
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10. S. L. Arnold and David T. Stahl, "A Power Projection Army in Operations Other Than War," Parameters (Winter 1993-94) 7-13.
11. John M. Taylor, "Somalia: More Than Meets the Eye," Marine Corps Gazette (November 1993), 75.
12. Gilbert S. Harper, "Operations Other Than War: Leading Soldiers in Operation RESTORE HOPE," Military Review (September 1993) 77-79.

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