

Report of Senate Armed Services Committee Investigation on Battle of Mogadishu

Report criticizes Clinton Administration for lack of support

Defense Secretary Les Aspin and his deputies rejected sending needed tanks and armored vehicles to Somalia because they feared a political backlash would undermine their pro-United Nations policy, says a Senate Armed Services Committee report.

The armor, as well as AC-130 gunships that also were withheld, was sought by commanders to protect U.S. troops, the report stated.

The weapons "could have been used decisively in the rescue operation of Oct. 3-4, [1993] and if available," could have been used by Army Rangers in a raid to capture Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid, Sen. John Warner, Virginia Republican and report co-author, said in an introduction.

"Only compelling military - not diplomatic policy - reasons should ever be used to deny an on-scene commander such a request," he said. "Those officials who advocated and approved this policy must bear the ultimate responsibility for the events that followed."

The military raid ended with the deaths of 18 U.S. soldiers who were caught in a furious firefight with Aidid forces in Mogadishu, Somalia. Crowds were filmed dragging the corpses of two U.S. soldiers through the streets.

Armored vehicles may have saved lives and reduced casualties during the raid and subsequent rescue, the report concluded. The report was released late Friday in an apparent effort to mute its stinging critique of Clinton administration foreign and military policy. Sen. Carl Levin, Michigan Democrat, is the other co-author.

The report is based on a two-year study of the firefight in Mogadishu Oct. 3, 1993, and tells how top administration officials, including National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and Mr. Aspin, allowed the United Nations to influence deployment of U.S. forces, with disastrous results.

It also lays out how U.N. officials pressured the administration into sending 450 Rangers to capture Gen. Aidid, against the advice of senior U.S. military commanders who saw little chance of success.

In doing so, U.S. interest was subordinated to "the Clinton administration's desire to see this U.N. operation succeed," Mr. Warner said.

The report says Gen. Colin Powell, at the time chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was unable to resist the U.N. pressure and then was unable to get Mr. Aspin to approve the military's request for tanks and armored vehicles and AC-130 gunships.

The pressure was put on the administration by U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali; his deputy in Somalia, retired U. S. Adm. Jonathan Howe; and the deputy U.N.

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military commander in Somalia, Army Maj. Gen. Thomas Montgomery, who told congressional investigators he favored sending British special forces soldiers, not U.S. Rangers.

Gen. Powell, now retired and contemplating a run for president, is quoted in the report as saying the pressure was "a steady drumbeat," and ultimately he agreed to "go along, since as a general principle I believe in supporting the commander in the field."

Gen. Montgomery was acting in the dual role as deputy commander of U.N. forces and as commander of the 4,000 U.S. forces left behind after a humanitarian operation involving 25,000 U.S. troops ended.

On the request for armor, Gen. Montgomery told congressional investigators he needed tanks because of attacks by Somali militias. "I believe that U.S. forces are at risk without it," the Sept. 14, 1993 request stated.

"I would have used it on Oct. 3-4 for the rescue," he said. "If we had it, we would have gotten there faster. We would have taken fewer casualties."

Gen. Joseph Hoar, commander of the U.S. Central Command that dispatched forces to Somalia, said he told Gen. Montgomery, "There is no stomach in D.C. for new forces, but I think I can get something."

The Pentagon's formal answer to why Mr. Aspin, who died of a stroke earlier this year, turned down the armor request was that "U.S. policy in Somalia was to reduce its military presence . . . not to increase it."

Gen. Powell said he was "upset" when the matter was turned over to Frank Wisner, undersecretary of defense for policy, and other Pentagon civilians. "The policy shop was a mess with all those assistant secretaries overlapping each other," Gen. Powell said. "Nothing happened."

"Aspin was looking at the broader implication of this decision and wasn't willing to approve it just because the commander wanted it," Gen. Powell said. "I took Aspin's answer as being 'not now,' rather than 'never.' "

Mr. Wisner told investigators he misunderstood the purpose for the armor. He also said "there was no need to increase the violence nor increase the aggressiveness" of the U.S. special forces.

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Powell pressed for Somalia policy change report

Retired Gen. Colin Powell said he pressed President Clinton's top aides a week before the fatal 1993 U.S. commando raid in Somalia either to beef up U.S. forces or change his policy, according to a Senate report released Monday.

"The overall policy for Somalia should have been reviewed long before October 3rd," the report quotes Powell as telling Senate Armed Services Committee investigators.

The commando raid killed 18 U.S. soldiers between Oct. 3 and 4. One American's body was dragged through streets, drawing an outcry in Congress that forced Clinton eventually to withdraw U.S. forces from Somalia.

The Senate report said the dual U.S. policy in 1993 of keeping forces in Somalia small but sending them on military raids to prevent failure of the U.N. mission "stretched the capabilities of U.S. forces."

It quoted Powell, who was chairman of the U.S. military joint chiefs of staff at the time of the raid, as saying he pushed for a U.S. policy review for weeks.

"I aggressively pushed Secretary (of Defense Les) Aspin for such a review and on Saturday, September 25th, when we had a meeting at the White House on Bosnia, I said at the end of the meeting that we need to do something about Somalia- either reinforce our forces or change our policy."

The report quoted Powell as saying he recommended Aspin support a request from U.S. commanders weeks before the raid that tanks and armored personnel carriers be sent to Somalia.

Criticism in Congress of Aspin's decision not to send the armor, on the grounds U.S. policy was to reduce American forces in Somalia rather than build them up, has been cited as one reason for Clinton's replacement of him with Defense Secretary William Perry. Aspin died this year.

The report quoted former U.S. commanders in Somalia as backing Aspin's contention that he was not told the armor was needed for the U.S. raids in Somalia but was told it was needed to escort convoys and for general force protection.

Although he backed commanders' request for the armor, the report said Powell did not back an earlier request that AC-130 Spectre gunships be sent to Somalia with the special forces. It quoted special forces commanders as saying the AC-130s frightened Somali militia so they would have had psychological impact in the October raid.

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But it said Powell and another senior commander rejected the request, saying as few new U.S. forces as possible should be sent to Somalia and the Spectres were not useful because they should not fire in Mogodishu itself.

It quoted Powell as saying he did not remember the AC-130 decision but that when Spectres had been in Somalia earlier "they wrecked a few buildings and it wasn't the greatest imagery on CNN."

Powell is now touring the United States promoting his book on his experiences and says in response to repeated questions that he has not decided whether to run for president.

The Senate report also criticized the use of U.S. special forces in a series of raids in Mogadishu, saying each revealed tactics to the Somali militia and increasingly cut the element of surprise and the safety of the special troops.

Report Criticizes Powell's Staff on Somalia Raid

A Senate report into a disastrous 1993 Army raid in Somalia portrays Gen. Colin Powell bending to pressure to keep U.S. involvement to a minimum when field commanders sought greater firepower.

The report criticizes a decision by Powell's staff - one that Powell says he does not recall making - against sending AC-130 gunships along with Task Force Ranger, a force of 460 Army troops assigned to capture a Somali clan leader, Mohammed Farah Aidid.

The report by two senior members of the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Oct. 3, 1993, raid in Mogadishu that left 18 U.S. soldiers dead criticizes the omission of the AC-130s. It also provides a window into the thinking of a general now considered a possible presidential candidate.

"It is difficult to understand the decision to omit the AC-130 gunships from the Joint Task Force Ranger force package," concludes the report written by Sens. John Warner, R-Va., and Carl Levin, D-Mich. "The AC-130s were part of all the force package options and were included in all of the training exercises. This decision is inconsistent with the principle that you fight as you train."

Top generals interviewed for the report - even those who requested the ponderous, heavily armed, propeller-driven aircraft - indicated that the AC-130s probably would not have changed the raid's outcome. But they make clear that political pressure drove the decision against sending them.

Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, apparently agreed with Clinton administration concerns about avoiding escalation of the Somali conflict.

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The report quotes Gen. Wayne Downing, head of the United States Special Forces, as saying "we were under incredible pressure" from the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"I advised that I would like to have the AC-130s," he said. "Gen. Powell advised that we needed to keep the numbers down."

Downing goes on to say that the AC-130s "would not have prevented" the casualties in Mogadishu but "would have been useful once the battle started."

Powell told the senators preparing the report that he could not recall the AC-130s being part of the original requested force package. But he noted that the warplanes had been used earlier in the conflict. "They wrecked a few buildings and it wasn't the greatest imagery on CNN," he said.

Gen. Joseph Hoar, head of the United States Central Command and the top-ranking officer on Somalia, said he opposed using the AC-130s in a three-way discussion with Powell and Downing.

"This weapon system was never designed to fire into civilian populated areas," Hoar said.

In another indication of the Pentagon's sensitivity about the Somali mission, Downing recalls that Powell's staff vigorously opposed various proposals from the commander of Task Force Ranger, Gen. William Garrison, to conduct ambushes and patrol areas adjacent to the Mogadishu airport.

"This provoked a firestorm - it was not a minor issue. It was not a negotiable issue," Downing told the senators. "Powell was concerned about mission creep. People were very emotional during this time."

Another aspect of the Somali mission that drew criticism after the fact was the decision by then-Defense Secretary Les Aspin to refuse a request for tanks as part of the overall U.S. force in Mogadishu. Powell indicates that, like Aspin, he had reservations about sending tanks but decided reluctantly to support the request from a field commander.

"In my talks with Gen. Hoar, I kept asking for the justification," Powell told the senators. "I didn't want M1A1 tanks to blast buildings in Mogadishu."

Powell was similarly dubious about other aspects of the U.S. strategy in Somalia, but apparently unable to sway that strategy.

On the dangerous work of trying to collect arms from various Somali factions, Powell said, "I always said that disarming the factions was stupid. ... Disarmament is not possible in a country where everyone has a weapon." He said he had no role in the United Nations

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Security Council decision of May 26, 1993, supported by the United States, that called for disarming the factions.

Similarly, Powell said he was concerned about sending Task Force Ranger to Mogadishu with a mandate to "get Aidid."

"We sent Task Force Ranger with the greatest reluctance," Powell told the senators. But because the top officers in Mogadishu supported the mission, he said, "I will go along since as a general principle I believe in supporting the commander in the field."

Senate Report Raps Administration's Plan to Capture Warlord

The Clinton administration failed to see the risks of the U.S. effort to capture a Somali warlord, a shortcoming that contributed to a disastrous 1993 raid that left 18 U.S. soldiers dead, a Senate review concludes.

The report, released late Friday, went to lengths to avoid placing specific blame on President Clinton. But it made clear that Clinton and his top advisers supported the United Nations' request to capture Mohammed Farrah Aidid, the Somali faction leader, despite the reservations of U.S. military commanders. When difficulties emerged, it said, these officials failed to change course.

"It is clear that both civilian officials and military leaders should have been carefully and continually re-evaluating the Task Force Ranger mission and tactics after each raid, with an eye toward recommending that the operation be terminated if the risks were deemed to have risen too high," the report concluded.

Written by Sens. John Warner, R-Va., and Carl Levin, D-Mich., two senior members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, the report focuses on the fatal Oct. 3, 1993, firefight in Mogadishu that precipitated a hasty American withdrawal from what began as a famine-relief effort.

"U.S. foreign policy was and will be affected for years as a result of the raid," according to the report.

A sharp, partisan debate over how much blame should be placed on Clinton delayed the release of the report for months.

Warner argued in a separate preface that Clinton and then-Defense Secretary Les Aspin should have provided armor and other equipment requested by military commanders in Somalia. Levin contended in his own preface that Maj. Gen. William Garrison, commander of Task Force Ranger "stated that he had all the equipment he needed."

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Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., chairman of the Armed Services Committee, pressed for the report's release before the second anniversary of the raid in response to requests by relatives of those killed in action.

The report makes clear that Army Gen. Colin Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Marine Gen. Joseph Hoar, then the U.S. commander overseeing Somalia, voiced reservations about the Ranger mission to "get Aidid."

It quoted Hoar as saying: "I told the policy guys that it was a bad thing to do. I thought there was a 50 percent chance of getting the required intelligence, and, once gotten, only a 50 percent chance that we would get Aidid. So it was a 25 percent chance of success"

Powell was similarly dubious.

"We sent Task Force Ranger with the greatest reluctance," he was quoted in the report. But because the top officers in Mogadishu supported the mission, he said, "I will go along since as a general principle I believe in supporting the commander in the field."

The aggressive pursuit of Aidid amid a broader policy of U.S. force reductions in Somalia reflected the "uncoordinated and unclear" U.S. policies, according to the report.

"It was a mistake to seek to marginalize the (Somali) warlords," it contended. "More emphasis should have been placed on political negotiations prior to deciding to use military force."

The military did not escape criticism in the report. It said the Army Ranger unit that conducted the Oct. 3 raid was hampered by an overzealous, "can-do" attitude typical of special forces.

Moreover, it said, Gen. Garrison established a predictable pattern in the Rangers' pursuit of Aidid that "served to announce the presence and mission of his task force, if they were not already known, and to reveal some of the tactics that the task force would use."