

*Grant Dawson*

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“Here Is Hell”:  
Canada’s Engagement in Somalia



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## The Canadian Joint Force Somalia: In the Field

The Unified Task Force landed in Somalia on 9 December 1992. The United States had decided to lead the multinational peace enforcement coalition to create a secure environment that would enable humanitarian relief deliveries to proceed in famine-stricken southern Somalia. The Unified Task Force's mandate avoided contentious tasks that could have prompted opposition, such as the promotion of full disarmament and political reconciliation. These were assigned to the successor mission, the United Nations Operation in Somalia II. But even without such assignments, many Somalis refused to support the US intervention.

Canada's contingent, the Canadian Joint Force Somalia, encountered some of this resentment when it deployed to the Beledweyne humanitarian relief sector in late December on what the Canadian Forces nicknamed Operation Deliverance. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia secured its area, built relationships with local people, and encouraged peace. Its work was marred by incidents in which Somalis were killed under questionable circumstances, one while in custody of the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup (the largest unit of the Canadian Joint Force Somalia). These incidents revealed leadership and discipline problems at the Battlegroup unit and subunit level but should not obscure the fact that the Canadians accomplished their mission. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia and other national contingents achieved much, and the Unified Task Force was making progress toward ending the civil war, but the coalition did not stay long enough to provide Somalia with peace and stability.

The Unified Task Force sought to create a benign environment for aid deliveries through a strategy combining dialogue and co-optation. Using the implied threat of overwhelming force, the coalition tried to encourage the faction heads to gain prestige by showing leadership and co-operating with the international community.<sup>1</sup> Before the landing in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, US Ambassador Robert Oakley, the president's special envoy and the Unified Task Force's political contact point with the Somalis, met

powerful faction leaders Mohamed Farah Aidid and Ali Mahdi Mohamed to explain the coalition's mandate. The Unified Task Force participated in the joint security committee they formed to reduce tension in Mogadishu and set up a Civilian-Military Operations Centre for Unified Task Force and nongovernmental organization (NGO) co-ordination. The success of these bodies and the Somali tradition of relying on committee leadership to achieve consensus decisions gave Oakley the idea of working through broad-based committees. Before each humanitarian relief sector was occupied, he met local community leaders and representatives of all major factions (not just Aidid's and Ali Mahdi's). Once the sector was secured, the Unified Task Force sponsored the formation of local committees; by using these committees as a forum for explaining their plans and learning from Somalis, coalition and NGO personnel could maximize humanitarian and military success while minimizing friction and tension.<sup>2</sup>

The coalition forces (initially American, although significant numbers of French and Canadian troops arrived in the first week) swiftly occupied and divided the area of operations in southern Somalia into eight (later nine) humanitarian relief sectors. The Unified Task Force's strength peaked in January 1993 at 38,300, of which 25,400 were US forces. Rapid progress was possible because of Oakley's advance political preparations, good tactical intelligence, slight resistance, and the coalition's formidable military reputation.<sup>3</sup> The coalition developed according to the four-phase concept of operations devised by Commanding General Lieutenant-General (US Marine Corps) Robert Johnston. The first phase was complete as of 16 December, by which time Mogadishu port and airport, Baledogle airport (later the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup staging area), and Baydhabo (also known as Baidoa) had been seized. The occupation of all sectors, phase two's objective, was achieved on 28 December after a combined Canada-United States aerial movement secured Beledweyne. Phase three, controlling and protecting land routes to interior relief areas, was underway by mid-January 1993. The US government was by then signalling to the United Nations that the coalition was almost ready for the last phase, the transition to the second UN mission.<sup>4</sup>

Although the coalition operation was initially mocked as a walkover, the closer one looked, the more intractable Somalia's problems appeared. When the Unified Task Force landed on the beach at dawn, the troops had to pass through the camera floodlights of the international media determined to film the event "live." The humour this provoked – one cartoon pictured a rotund soldier with campaign medals for "Best makeup in a combat situation" and "Most graceful photo-op in a land invasion"<sup>5</sup> – belied the chaos and violence in Mogadishu. The Unified Task Force was such a capable and confident force that it was able to intervene decisively even though the US Marine Corps and Army knew little about Somalia.<sup>6</sup> But it soon became

clear that maintaining order would be challenging. The coalition gradually came to terms with the fact that their potential adversaries were tough and skilful manipulators, waist-deep in a war of attrition. "We have a simple desire for simple solutions," a US Army captain said two months into the deployment, "and all of a sudden we're playing chess with Boris Spassky ... this is the big leagues."<sup>7</sup> According to Major-General S.L. Arnold, US Army Force Commander in Somalia, as Unified Task Force learned more about the conflict it "became apparent that history was not on our side."<sup>8</sup>

The Western view of the civil war appears to have been influenced by a well-meaning but patronizing attitude regarding Somalia. Journalist John Stackhouse noted that the Western media helped create the perception that Somalia was sick and unable to care for itself. "The Somalia we created in the world's mind was an invalid. The real country was not." He said there were "food crops, rivers, oceans and human talent in Somalia that almost none of us ever reported."<sup>9</sup> The invalid image served the purposes of Western governments, militaries, and relief organizations. Aware that the suffering on television had drawn public sympathy and concern, Western governments engaged in Somalia because they were confident their forces could end the suffering. To a certain degree, the Unified Task Force showed that the West was still seduced by modern colonial stories of white knights sorting out black threats. The mission was not free of Western ideologies of superiority over the largely nonwhite developing world.<sup>10</sup>

To Oakley, the coalition's strictly humanitarian mission was prudent. On one occasion, he appeared relieved that national reconciliation was not his responsibility because this activity was overly complex and likely not achievable in the short term. "There's an awful lot of negotiating going on amongst every possible faction and all of the clans," he commented. "It's something I don't understand. It's something that I think is almost impossible for a foreigner to understand ... I don't envy [head of the first UN mission] Ambassador Kittani his job."<sup>11</sup> Oakley and his deputy, John Hirsch, wanted local political institutions with which the Unified Task Force could work. Somali community and civil society leaders were invited to pick any structure they wanted any way they wanted, as long as it was not through the barrel of a gun. A few, such as Baydhabo's "governor," a representative of Aidid's faction, resisted this. The coalition removed him and repulsed his attempts to regain authority over the region.<sup>12</sup>

Oakley and Hirsch had no preconceived ideas of how to encourage reconciliation. Before long it became evident to them that the committees should be used to organize local grassroots leaders. As Hirsch noted, "we quickly identified the existence of local community leaders, and the willingness on the part of a lot of people to try to restore a modicum of normal life at the town and village levels. So we worked in that direction."<sup>13</sup> Another positive result of the committee process was the after-the-fact hope that it might

make the UN's diplomatic peacemaking easier.<sup>14</sup> Otherwise, the Unified Task Force did not intervene in Somali politics. Long-term reconciliation was left to the Somalis and the second UN operation because the United States wanted to avoid entanglements and antagonisms that could complicate the Unified Task Force's humanitarian mission.

Despite the care that was taken, the coalition proved to be provocative. The Unified Task Force went to great lengths to appear sensitive. For example, Johnston decided that US Marine and Army forces would eat field rations while in Somalia and not have hot food and turkey for Christmas. He believed that since Somalia was an austere environment, his troops should live austere.<sup>15</sup> Social and cultural issues were still sharp because the West was forcing help on Somalis and dictating the contact with local people. Somalis who expected the United States to bring prosperity and shut down the factions were seriously disappointed when the coalition showed no interest in doing so.<sup>16</sup> Those who had occupied responsible positions in the former Somali state found it humiliating taking orders from foreign expatriates, many of whom were young and inclined to act as if they were indispensable to success.<sup>17</sup> The coalition even had implications for gender relations. On 15 December, a mob attacked and disrobed a Somali woman suspected of consorting with French Foreign Legionnaires. The mob accused coalition forces of spreading HIV/AIDS.<sup>18</sup> Before long, youth groups were distributing leaflets deploring the West's loose and corrupting ways.<sup>19</sup>

Commander of the Canadian Joint Force Somalia Colonel Serge Labbé noted that Somalis in Mogadishu were beginning to resent the coalition. He observed on 15 December, his second day, that "many [are] neutral, many visibly happy with our presence but some, particularly the young men, [are] scowling with disdain."<sup>20</sup> It was not long before the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup encountered the same in Beledweyne. In his situation report for 9 January 1993, Labbé commented that "the mood in Belet Uen [Beledweyne] has changed. In essence, the honeymoon is over. Although there have been no overt demonstrations of hostility, there are more and more young men glaring disparagingly at Canadian troops in much the same way as those of Mogadishu do."<sup>21</sup> This was evidence of the resentment that had emerged because of the Unified Task Force, despite its carefully scripted humanitarian image.

Labbé and Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup Commander Lieutenant-Colonel Carol Mathieu responded with a campaign of "hearts and minds," similar to what the British had used to defeat a communist resistance in Malaya in the 1950s. This involved earning the respect of the local people and convincing them to align themselves with the security forces, winning their hearts and minds in other words, and marginalizing troublemakers. Labbé and Mathieu settled on the British model intuitively as the only way to achieve both tracks of their two-track strategy. They wanted

to establish short-term security and the conditions for self-sustaining peace. Most of the humanitarian relief sector would be under control in seven weeks. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia spent about 70 percent of its time working on track two, encouraging Somalis to reject violence as a political tool.<sup>22</sup> Labbé believed that the Unified Task Force would not leave a lasting legacy of peace unless the Somalis came to see the foreign troops as genuine guarantors of their livelihood and not as fly-by-night opportunists.<sup>23</sup>

The Battlegroup would be responsible for winning Somali hearts and minds, but moving its personnel and equipment 290 kilometres inland to Beledweyne was a joint and combined effort that involved the other two Canadian Forces environments and US troops, respectively.<sup>24</sup> Somalia was the first time in many years that units from all three Canadian Forces Environmental Commands were placed under a joint task force commander (Labbé) to achieve one mission in one Canadian area of operations.<sup>25</sup> The multi-environment or “joint” co-operation was closest during the Canadian Forces arrival in the theatre. HMCS *Preserver*, for example, assisted with watercraft and Sea King helicopters that unloaded and transported tons of contingent supplies ashore. The ship served as Labbé’s headquarters for a month until a joint headquarters was formed and co-located with the coalition’s in Mogadishu.<sup>26</sup>

The Unified Task Force advised the Somalis in Beledweyne that the Canadians were coming and then sent the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup to secure the area. The coalition airdropped psychological warfare leaflets explaining its friendly intentions on 26 December. James Kunder, the country director of the US government Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, reinforced the message in meetings with community and faction leaders a day later on behalf of Oakley (who was in the United States at the time).<sup>27</sup> On 28 December, the members of the Battlegroup advance party, who had gathered at Baledogle airport, their staging area, in anticipation of the move, marched into Canadian air force Hercules transports and flew to Beledweyne. Unsure about what to expect upon arrival and unwilling to take chances, they moved quickly to seize control of the airstrip and town and establish a commanding presence through determined day and night patrolling.

Coalition forces actively assisted the Canadians. On the 28th, F-18 fighters were launched from the aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk* to conduct patrols above Beledweyne and give Somalis a tangible demonstration of the Unified Task Force’s power, and a US Army 10th Mountain Division battalion accompanied the advance party on Marine Corps and Army helicopters.<sup>28</sup> As the Battlegroup main body arrived in waves over the next three days, the US soldiers simultaneously redeployed south of Mogadishu. Arnold, commander of US Army forces in Somalia, called this a flawlessly executed example of combined operations and coalition co-operation.<sup>29</sup> During five days of surge operations, eight Canadian air force Hercules transported 1,125 people and 480 tons of supplies



in 56 flights. By 1 January 1993, the entire Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup was in the humanitarian relief sector, though its vehicles did not arrive by contracted sealift and complete the two-day journey down the Imperial Highway, an Italian-built colonial era road, until 15 January.<sup>30</sup>

Labbé's concept of security operations was to divide the 30,000-kilometre-square Beledweyne humanitarian relief sector into four zones. Mathieu allocated these zones to his Battlegroup. Mathieu assigned the southwest, nearest the humanitarian relief sector commanded by the French Foreign Legion, to the Airborne Regiment's 1 Commando (which comprised members of the French-speaking Royal 22nd Regiment). The footborne 2 Commando (Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry) and 3 Commando (Royal Canadian Regiment) received Beledweyne and the southeast zone, respectively. The Royal Canadian Dragoon's A Squadron, whose Cougar armoured vehicles came equipped with the strongest weapons (76-mm guns) in the Battlegroup, was sent to the northeast. This zone was the most unstable because of the presence of two opposing factions, Aidid's branch of the United Somali Congress and the Somali National Front under General Omar Hagi Mohamed Hersi.<sup>31</sup> The Airborne Commandos operated from Beledweyne and the Dragoons from Matabaan, which was approximately 90 kilometres northeast of Beledweyne.

The Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup took control despite the harsh conditions. The day and night patrolling continued, and its armoured vehicles – Cougars, Bisons, and Grizzlies – were rumbling along the roads soon after they arrived. The Canadians were soon referred to by the Somalis “as the white technicals who never sleep.”<sup>32</sup> The regular patrols were meant to create an impression and gain the people's respect, and they had the desired effect. The Airborne had secured its zones by the third week of February. The northeast was more difficult because it was so volatile and the Canadians had too few troops to cover the zone.<sup>33</sup> The whole humanitarian relief sector was declared “secure” by 27 March.

This was achieved in “the worst environmental conditions experienced by the Canadian Forces in many years.” Simple day-to-day survival was a constant challenge. Cleanliness was next to impossible because fine, flour-like sand blew around incessantly and covered everything. Normal daytime temperatures were a punishing 35-45 degrees Celsius with 60-80 percent humidity.<sup>34</sup> Soldiers used bottled water for drinking and washing because local sources were unsafe, and the decision not to bring cooks required the Canadians to choose from a limited selection of prepackaged dinners for almost all meals during their entire tour (except for periods of leave). No indigenous support was available, the indigenous infrastructure had been completely destroyed, and there was a constant risk of disease, scorpion and snakebites, and armed Somali attacks.

Labbé and Mathieu reduced the risk of destabilizing violence several ways, but most important was the pursuit of arms control rather than disarmament.

The US position was that the coalition should not forcibly seize Somali weapons (see Chapters 7 and 9). Johnston therefore left this to the discretion of humanitarian relief sector commanders. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia dealt with weapons and most mission challenges in the same general way. This involved a “complete immersion into the communities of the humanitarian relief sector, which led to the confidence-building first between Canadians and Somalis, and then between the clans themselves.”<sup>35</sup> The intelligence gained helped the Canadian Joint Force Somalia analyze the political-military weapons issue and to convince faction leaders to keep heavy weapons out of circulation and most light weapons identified, tagged, and removed from view.<sup>36</sup> Local leaders were urged to store heavy and crew-served weapons (those requiring more than one person to operate) in one of three cantonment sites. Ammunition and arms caches were seized. Personal weapons were tolerated but had to be pointed at the ground in Beledweyne, and armed vehicles, including “technicals,” were banned. “I will not tolerate any armed vehicles on the roads,” Mathieu said. “I have been repeating that every day.”<sup>37</sup>

Arms control, patrols, and unceasing vigilance yielded security sufficient for humanitarian operations and the winning of hearts and minds. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia did not have preconceived ideas about relations with NGOs, but the coalition provided a model. The Unified Task Force was holding daily meetings to determine what the aid groups needed. Labbé and Mathieu adopted a similar policy. A group of soldiers was assigned to meet local NGOs regularly and arrange assistance as required. The group’s senior officer had Mathieu’s complete support and was the sole contact with the NGOs.<sup>38</sup> The Battlegroup escorted NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children, and International Medical Corps, while OXFAM-Quebec relied on the Somalis to protect them and their animal vaccination program.<sup>39</sup> The soldiers impressed some NGOs. “They came, they listened,” Michelle Kelly, the International Medical Corps program director in Beledweyne, observed. As a result, “the situation has really improved.” She was encouraged by the initiative they had shown. The Canadians were “innovative and forward-looking. They don’t want to just sit on a few food trucks.”<sup>40</sup>

These extra efforts won the appreciation of Somalis. Although not obligated to do so, the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup helped the Somalis recruit teachers and rebuild schools, roads, and bridges; they ran a hospital that cared for the Battlegroup and provided medical training and aids to the Somalis; and they re-established and obtained uniforms for the police force.<sup>41</sup> Guy Naud, co-ordinator of the OXFAM-Quebec program coincidentally located in Canada’s sector, wrote that the Battlegroup won the community’s admiration through their gentlemanly behaviour and by working side by side with the people. Local authorities “deplore the imminent departure of the Canadians and wish that the Canadian Army would continue working

here instead of being replaced by military forces from other countries."<sup>42</sup> Didier Roguet of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Beledweyne recalled that after departing "the Canadians were quickly regretted" by Somalis and NGOs.<sup>43</sup>

Good works were used to draw attention to the benefits arising from nonviolent methods of dispute resolution. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia followed Oakley's lead and, with some coalition assistance,<sup>44</sup> created broad-based grassroots committees on relief, reconstruction, security, and reconciliation. "We always recognized," Labbé said, that "you must get the local people to make the decisions."<sup>45</sup> Committees were the Canadian Joint Force Somalia's most challenging task because it was an unfamiliar role, adjusting to local nuances of deal making and bargaining was difficult, and there were sixteen clans that appeared to have multiple representatives and sometimes presented conflicting claims that were virtually impossible to verify. The Canadians had to be patient and use the relationships they had developed to further the consensus building among Somalis that was essential for collective action. Labbé believed longer-term security depended on the committees achieving some form of success before the Unified Task Force departed.<sup>46</sup> But he and Mathieu, in the pursuit of timely results, may have inadvertently caused offence by neglecting existing alliances, favouring some leaders over others, and short-circuiting the way that Somali clan elders painstakingly forge binding contracts.<sup>47</sup>

The Canadian Joint Force Somalia found working with Somalis difficult. Labbé noted that the Unified Task Force came as "guests in Somalia, not as an occupation force or a colonial power to govern, but as part of a coalition committed to providing this country with a secure environment so the Somalis can re-establish and govern themselves."<sup>48</sup> From the intervention's first days, many Somalis appeared unwilling to welcome the Unified Task Force on that account. Somalis expressed disdain for the aid effort by looting and selling food on the black market. They taunted, stoned, swarmed, and sniped at NGO and coalition personnel, including Canadian Joint Force Somalia sailors and soldiers. Night and day thieves raided the Battlegroup base in Beledweyne, called Camp Pegasus. Airborne patrols, including the "heart patrols" sent to encourage community members to work with the coalition, could be met with smiles – or stones.<sup>49</sup> According to one Canadian, "many soldiers were intensely frustrated to realize that not all Somalis (like the bandits put out of a job) welcomed help."<sup>50</sup>

Animosity did not escalate dramatically, notwithstanding the disturbing incidents that involved the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup. On 17 February, Airborne paratroopers shot and killed a Somali while repulsing a violent anti-Unified Task Force demonstration that included an attack on Camp Pegasus. David Bercuson has argued that this was a sign of rising tension between Canadians and Somalis,<sup>51</sup> but this is doubtful. The Canadian

Forces determined that the riot did not represent a groundswell of local dissatisfaction with the Canadian presence and that the townspeople were satisfied with the Battlegroup. The agitators responsible had been paid by Aidid.<sup>52</sup> Oakley said the incident was related to certain Canadian Joint Force Somalia and coalition actions that were against Aidid's interests. The Canadians were marginalizing his local "governor" by supporting community leaders with genuine popular support and, in conjunction with US Special Forces, were interdicting the communication and supply lines of Aidid forces to the north-east and the southwest of their humanitarian relief sector. This was valuable to the coalition because it helped stifle his faction and allies and prevent fresh conflict. The coalition wanted to keep everything bottled up since fighting in one part of Somalia automatically resulted in difficulties elsewhere. Aidid had arranged for the riot to show he disapproved of these efforts.<sup>53</sup>

Problems emerged in March because some Battlegroup leaders could not completely control themselves or their men. The Somali response to the Unified Task Force may have affected the contingent in a way a straightforward military attack would not. Canadians prefer to believe that their military commitments (short of war) are shaped by values such as human rights and noble instincts like helpfulness and compassion, but Canadians have never been inherently good, and this virtuous self-perception did not shape the clay of the mission for every Canadian soldier. Paradoxically, some Canadian soldiers reacted by caring less about the human rights of Somalis while the rest of the Canadian Joint Force Somalia asserted its special responsibilities toward them.<sup>54</sup> The government and military leaders in Ottawa did not have solutions to recommend when those the Battlegroup had come to assist acted like enemies. In frustration, like some Belgians in Somalia and US soldiers in Kosovo in 1999, several Canadians turned their anger inward and closer to home.<sup>55</sup>

Labbé was a professional commander, but the command climate in the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup was unable to handle these strains. Commanders, through their leadership style, attitude, self-discipline, and drive create a climate or environment around themselves. Informal and formal factors (such as orders and standard operating procedures) help shape the climate, but personal example is the key. Subordinates read and adopt the attributes of the commander when setting the environment at their level.<sup>56</sup> Labbé's charisma and professionalism as a commander have been recognized. Johnston awarded him the United States Legion of Merit in May 1993, and Oakley, Hirsch, and Johnston praised Labbé in letters to Canadian government leaders. Vice-Admiral Larry Murray, the deputy chief of the defence staff in National Defence Headquarters as of February 1993, never lost confidence in Labbé as a commander.<sup>57</sup> Steve McCluskey, who served in Canadian Joint Force Somalia headquarters in Mogadishu, said he has rarely met a more capable officer and "would go to war with the man in a heartbeat."<sup>58</sup> Lucie

Edwards, Canadian High Commissioner to Nairobi (with accreditation to Somalia), has called Labbé “a hero,” an honour she rarely bestows.<sup>59</sup>

As Canada’s man on the spot in the Somalia theatre, Labbé represented the country operationally. His main responsibility as Canadian contingent commander was the management of command and control arrangements between Canadian Forces units and coalition headquarters. Labbé received strict instructions from the chief of the defence staff that defined when and under what conditions operational or the more restrictive tactical control could be transferred to allied commanders.<sup>60</sup> Initially, given the urgent need to stabilize the area of operations under an existing coalition chain of command, Labbé placed the Battlegroup under the operational control of the Unified Task Force. (The latter delegated control to 10th Mountain Division, the coalition land component, for about three weeks until the division redeployed. Thereafter the Airborne returned to the direct control of the Unified Task Force.) Later, at Johnston’s behest, Labbé placed the HMCS *Preserver* under tactical control of the coalition’s multinational maritime component, called Naval Force, for specific missions limited in time and place. One such mission was the provision of the *Preserver*, with its three forward infrared radar-equipped Sea King helicopters, in support of US and Belgian combat operations in the Kismaayo area (18 February-2 March).

The reality, however, was that Unified Task Force headquarters did not like dealing directly with individual units. The coalition gave direction to the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup via Labbé’s headquarters. In light of this, with the departure of *Preserver* on 6 March and arrival of Canadian Forces Twin Huey utility helicopters to replace the Sea Kings, Labbé seized the opportunity to restructure the Canadian contingent. He decided to put his headquarters, and hence his entire newly reorganized seven-unit force, under coalition operational control.<sup>61</sup> This brought him formally into the operational chain (between the Unified Task Force headquarters and the Battlegroup), while keeping the contingent intact as a joint force under his command.<sup>62</sup>

Normally it is axiomatic to say that national commanders are responsible for their entire contingent. Scholars have argued that the principle of command responsibility and personal liability is fully recognized by national and international law. Officers who order, collude in, or fail to prevent abuses by subordinates may be held accountable for those actions.<sup>63</sup> Yet, in the Somalia case, it was not realistic to hold Labbé responsible for the climate or actions by members of Battlegroup subunits. Labbé regularly visited the Battlegroup and could monitor its activities by scanning its situation reports, but he was headquartered in Mogadishu and removed from day-to-day operations until 7 March. Though he informally conferred with Labbé, operational taskings were Johnston’s responsibility until that time, when as noted the Canadian Joint Force Somalia headquarters shifted into the operational chain.

In this context, what command responsibility means is thrown into question. Andrew Leslie, a major-general and the Canadian Forces contingent commander in Afghanistan in 2003, has observed that as the commander Labbé was responsible, but he could not exercise operational oversight or possess full situational awareness of Battlegroup subunits when that was two rank levels below and in a different chain.<sup>64</sup> Even with frequent visits, it was entirely possible that a commander would not pick up all the issues, especially if there were people who did not tell him about certain things he should know. Labbé, then, was not responsible for the incidents, but he was responsible in the sense that the troops who committed those actions were under his command. Labbé did not order or collude in any abuses and could not have prevented incidents he did not know were about to occur. He trusted Mathieu to set the Battlegroup climate and expected that the Canadian rules of engagement would be strictly followed.

Labbé made the second change to the contingent structure when the operation was winding down. It was not because the 4 March incident occurred shortly before. Though Labbé did not lose confidence in Mathieu, this incident revealed that Mathieu was having trouble adopting Labbé's command presence with the necessary fidelity. Mathieu had unintentionally undermined the Battlegroup command climate when he told his officers on 28 January 1993 that Somali thieves raiding Camp Pegasus could be shot. Everyone present "understood they could use deadly force against someone, armed or not, who fled after stealing Canadian equipment." Some of Mathieu's officers believed the instruction, which was later clarified to mean shooting at the legs (to maim), to be immoral, if not illegal, and they refused to repeat it to their soldiers. The instruction was not rescinded until 8 March.<sup>65</sup>

Mathieu was responsible for the command climate of the Battlegroup and its subunits, and his comment about shooting intruders may have resulted in the national rules of engagement not being followed by members of his command.<sup>66</sup> On 4 March, Captain Michel Rainville, the officer commanding the Airborne Reconnaissance Platoon, was ordered to provide Camp Pegasus' engineering compound with extra night-time security. The platoon took up various positions and monitored the compound perimeter. It also laid out bait to draw would-be-thieves to a specific area. Before the night was over one Somali would be wounded and another killed. Service Commando Surgeon Major Barry Armstrong, MD, believed that the Somali had been executed at close range. This allegation was refuted by the pathologist's autopsy and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police ballistics report included in the ensuing National Defence Headquarters military police investigation.<sup>67</sup> The Somalia Inquiry, after very careful examination, was "not able to endorse or rule out" his hypothesis.<sup>68</sup>

The Inquiry determined that Rainville had erred. It argued that the incident was a clear violation of the rules of engagement resulting from "an abhorrent

failure of leadership."<sup>69</sup> Labbé's testimony partly reflects this. He said Rainville exercised bad judgment when he placed bait (rations and water) to entice Somalis into the camp, and the wounding may have been an excessive use of force in contravention of the rules of engagement (see also Chapter 8).<sup>70</sup> Labbé also defended Rainville. He argued that the killing was within the rules of engagement because the platoon had cause to fear for its safety given that shots had been fired (they did not know for certain by whom), it was dark, and a Somali was running toward them ignoring orders to halt. They had to react instinctively in seconds.<sup>71</sup> Labbé added that Rainville had tried to respect the rules of engagement and honestly believed that he had done so.<sup>72</sup> Rainville appears to have acted within his authority, but he did not act wisely or humanely.<sup>73</sup> On 4 March, he fell short of the professional standard expected of him. Rainville did not display a most important attribute of professionalism, expertise, which for the military profession is defined as the ordered management of violence.<sup>74</sup>

Mathieu's instruction also appears to have confused Major Anthony Seward, who was having trouble restraining 2 Commando. A 2 Commando patrol entered a mined area that Mathieu had declared off limits on 7 January. This was only one of the signs that Seward was not in total control.<sup>75</sup> On the 16th, Mathieu had issued Seward a reproof (nonjudicial reprimand) for ignoring directives to reduce aggressiveness in accordance with the hearts and minds campaign. Seward was fined for accidentally discharging his weapon, one of a large number of misfires (five) by 2 Commando.<sup>76</sup> Mathieu believed a lack of command and control was involved,<sup>77</sup> but his attempt to give Seward direction was undermined by the "shoot intruders" instruction. This comment "bewildered" Seward because it seemed to contradict a restrained approach.<sup>78</sup> The aggressive patrolling and actions in contravention of Mathieu's orders continued. In early February, 2 Commando was again criticized for behaving too forcefully toward the Somalis.<sup>79</sup>

On or about 14 March, Seward ordered that intruders infiltrating the Commando compound should be "abused." Seward wanted these Somalis run down and physically apprehended, if necessary abused, but not killed. He did not ensure this nuance was communicated to his soldiers<sup>80</sup> prior to the 16th, when sixteen-year-old Shidane Arone was brought to the Commando holding area (a bunker) for the night to await transfer to local authorities. Master-Corporal Clayton Matchee, with Private E. Kyle Brown's active assistance, tortured and beat Arone to death while he was in Canadian custody. Seward's order was interpreted as being authority to abuse prisoners, and this directly influenced the treatment Arone received. Matchee told observers of the torture that his officer had approved the abuse.<sup>81</sup> This may explain why, as sounds came out of the bunker, no one tried to stop Matchee. The incident was attributable to Seward's abuse order, and as the officer commanding 2 Commando, Seward was responsible for the climate in which the

killing occurred. Whether Matchee and Brown killed Arone accidentally or by design, they were responsible for their actions. Their lapse in discipline was egregious. On 19 March, Matchee, now under arrest, attempted to hang himself. The suicide attempt left him seriously brain-damaged and unable to explain his actions.

The 16 March incident can be compared to the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal involving US troops in Iraq in 2003. According to Johnston, the Unified Task Force commander, both episodes demonstrate that when soldiers are given power over others, personal character flaws can come to the fore that open the door to unethical and immoral behaviour.<sup>82</sup> Just as the US prison guards' actions did not reflect the attitudes or behaviour of all American forces in Iraq,<sup>83</sup> so too Matchee's and Brown's actions were not representative of the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup or Canadian Joint Force Somalia. Most of the Battlegroup's members remained disciplined despite the camp intrusions and provocations. For example, the Dragoons and a US Special Forces Detachment that was working closely with them received mortar, 106-mm recoilless rifle, and M-47 tank fire at Balanbale on 10 February 1993, but they did not shoot back because of the risk to noncombatants.<sup>84</sup> Speaking privately to reporters, some Airborne soldiers confessed feeling the urge to lash out, but overall their record was one of restraint in the face of hostility.<sup>85</sup>

In Canada, the incidents were soon overshadowing the Canadian Joint Force Somalia's accomplishments and the changes to the international effort in Somalia. Labbé urged Canadians to be balanced when assessing the Canadian Joint Force Somalia, noting that the work completed was "something all Canadians should be proud of" and "we should not let an incident that might be an aberration cloud that."<sup>86</sup> It was to no avail. National Defence Minister Kim Campbell told the House of Commons that the 16 March incident, which had triggered a massive political scandal and a second military police investigation, "casts a shadow on the fine reputation of the Canadian Forces."<sup>87</sup> The new chief of the defence staff, Admiral John Anderson, admitted that 16 March was a "black mark" on the mission's leadership aspects.<sup>88</sup> *Maclean's* editor Robert Lewis said that the Canadian Joint Force Somalia had "besmirch[ed] the peacekeeping tradition that has become ... a major source of this country's positive self-image in the world."<sup>89</sup> Allegations of widespread racism and neo-Nazi connections began to be made about the Airborne.<sup>90</sup> As fresh revelations emerged and the momentum grew, sharply critical stories became commonplace. Labbé wrote that he found April and the succeeding months among the most difficult of his life because he had to reconcile the impressive work he saw being achieved with the negative press coverage in Canada.<sup>91</sup>

The Canadians continued to provide security and rebuild the Somali community in their humanitarian relief sector, but flagging morale complicated



matters. The 16th of March was not the final incident. On the 17th, an Airborne patrol shot and killed a Somali guard working for the International Committee of the Red Cross while trying to control rioting Beledweyne citizens who were unhappy because the humanitarians had not used locally hired truck drivers. The De Faye Board of Inquiry determined this use of deadly force was in accordance with the rules of engagement.<sup>92</sup> These disruptions did not deflect the Canadian Joint Force Somalia from its pursuit of short-term security and peaceful long-term stability. They were first in the coalition to re-establish schools.<sup>93</sup> Retired US Navy admiral Jonathan Howe, the new special representative of the secretary-general for Somalia who arrived in March, officially opened the first school on 8 April in Matabaan (three others were opened in Beledweyne before the end of May). Canada's High Commission in Nairobi provided \$25,000 to build the last two schools from the mission-administered Canadian International Development Agency Canada Fund and \$50,000 to the restoration of a Mogadishu orphanage by sailors from *Preserver* and NGOs.<sup>94</sup> Good works were largely overshadowed by the 4 and 16 March incidents in Canadian news coverage of Operation Deliverance. This became a morale issue for the Canadian Joint Force Somalia. Labbé observed that many of his soldiers looked dejected, depressed, and stunned by the news depictions, and he tried buttressing spirits by keeping them active.<sup>95</sup>

In addition to the storm brewing in Canada, the lack of a clear withdrawal date hampered morale.<sup>96</sup> Labbé knew that the decision to send a second rotation should have been taken in January, because months were needed to select, train, and deploy troops for missions. In February, when Deputy Minister of National Defence Robert Fowler toured Canada's area of operations, and in mid-March, when Admiral Anderson did so, Labbé reminded his guests of the closing window of opportunity (leaving with the coalition) and of the morale and logistical reasons for not prolonging the rotation.<sup>97</sup> Military personnel work hard when they know why and for how long, and Canadian Joint Force Somalia soldiers and air/ground crew (*Preserver* had departed for home on 6 March) knew the government had stated that Canada would depart when the Unified Task Force did.<sup>98</sup> Not only would an extension be disappointing, but also the harsh conditions and negative media coverage had made the mission especially taxing.

The timing of the withdrawal grew more pressing as United Nations Operation in Somalia II took shape and the transition to UN command neared. On 26 March, the UN Security Council created the second Somalia operation by approving resolution 814. The blue helmets did not take charge until 4 May, but the United Nations and United States could finally conduct detailed transition planning.<sup>99</sup> Like Ambassador Howe, UN military commanders wanted the Canadian Forces to stay for another six-month rotation or at least delay its departure (see Chapter 9). This was raised, for example,

during a briefing following the Canadian-initiated mission (13-22 March) to the city of Gaalkacyo (also known as Galcaio) north of the Unified Task Force area of operations, to deter aggression and defuse tension between Aidid and other factions. US Army Major-General Thomas Montgomery, the deputy force commander of the second UN mission, observed that the Canadians should be kept on and their area expanded to include the Gaalkacyo district.<sup>100</sup> But Labbé, in his dealings with Somalis in Beledweyne, refused to compromise on the principle that the Canadians were short-term guests. He resisted the Somalis who wanted Canadian Joint Force Somalia personnel to make decisions for them because he believed lasting peace could only come from the people.<sup>101</sup>

The push toward peace was frustrated by the short-term nature of the Unified Task Force's deployment, which did not allow the Somalis enough opportunity for nonviolent dialogue through the committee system. The United States and its allies like Canada were not willing to provide the long-term political and military commitment required to achieve sustainable and measurable peace.<sup>102</sup> The international community's success in Somalia depended on whether pressure was maintained on the faction leaders to keep them talking and moving toward peace.<sup>103</sup> The promise of state offices or shares of state resources might have facilitated co-optation of some faction heads. The US desire to leave quickly heightened the chances that the international effort would encounter turbulence. It introduced the possibility, which in fact came to pass, that the Unified Task Force's approach to fostering dialogue backed by superior force would not be continued by the second UN operation, that the United Nations would not have an effective alternate strategy, and that the United Nations would not be ready for the magnitude of the task being thrust upon it.

As of April 1993, Labbé still did not know whether the Canadian Joint Force Somalia would be assisting the UN's second mission or when the Canadians would be departing. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia was pleased to learn on 17 April that National Defence Headquarters finally approved its redeployment plan. Approval meant that if all went well, Canadians could start going home on 15 May. At the start of May, 1 Commando was redeployed to Mogadishu to provide security at the Old Port, where vehicle washing and sea container packing would take place. The UN flag was raised above Canadian Airborne Regiment Battlegroup headquarters on 4 May to signify that the Unified Task Force had left Somalia and the second UN operation was the new headquarters, but the Battlegroup never donned UN accoutrements even though it would operate under UN command for over three weeks.<sup>104</sup> Complications arose when the UN's second Somalia mission had trouble finding a successor to the Canadians in Beledweyne, and this delayed the redeployment.<sup>105</sup> Not long after the 15th, a German logistics formation was confirmed, and the Germans agreed to maintain the hearts and minds

approach. An Italian force, along with a Nigerian force of which it would have operational control, would provide security. The change of command ceremony took place in Beledweyne on 31 May, and afterwards the remaining Canadians redeployed to Mogadishu.

The Canadian Joint Force Somalia had ceased operations, and 550 Canadians left the theatre on 3 June. As the rest of the contingent waited their turn to go, the security situation in the capital deteriorated dramatically. On 5 June, in the early morning, Aidid's fighters ambushed Pakistani forces with the second UN mission during an inspection of five weapons-collection points, including four in Mogadishu. Near two of the Mogadishu sites, twenty-four Pakistanis were killed, many brutally, six Pakistanis declared missing (one later died and five were returned), and sixty-one UN troops were wounded.<sup>106</sup> Ferocious firefights between gunmen and UN rescue forces continued until the afternoon.

The Canadians were spread out at three locations – the Old Port (vehicle/equipment washing), the New Port (where the supplies would be loaded on ships), and the airport (flights to Canada) – and no longer privy to intelligence from the second UN mission. Labbé did not know how the United Nations would react to the 5 June attacks. He learned from Canadian Brigadier-General Jim Cox, then chief of staff of the UN's second operation, that the United Nations would start attacking Aidid's infrastructure on 12 June.<sup>107</sup> Labbé decided to consolidate at the New Port and airport by the 10th. This would make force protection easier while waiting for sealift to arrive. This was accomplished without incident, and, a week later, Labbé and most Canadians left Somalia by air, bound initially for Nairobi, Kenya. On the 18th, two chartered container ships – the *MV Anderma* and *MV Guber* – sailed out of Mogadishu port with the Canadian Joint Force Somalia equipment in their holds, and the last members of the Canadian Joint Force Somalia flew out of Somalia.

## Conclusion

The Unified Task Force deployed to Somalia to create security for aid deliveries. The coalition had a strategy of dialogue and co-optation, through which it hoped to encourage the factions to co-operate with the intervention. Oakley understood the local dynamics and was able to quickly begin working with faction leaders on resolving their differences. The troops occupied southern Somalia swiftly because the force was so confident and capable and resistance was slight. However, Unified Task Force had much to learn about the civil war in which it had intervened. To a certain degree, the West was still under the influence of ideologies of superiority over the largely nonwhite developing world. Ending Somalia's suffering and disorder proved to be difficult.

Oakley and Hirsch did not have a mandate to rebuild Somali political society. They wanted political structures with which Unified Task Force could partner,

and they decided to create committees to work and share information with Somalis in hopes of avoiding misunderstanding and confrontation. Oakley and Hirsch thought the committee system could be an asset to the second UN mission, which had been assigned comprehensive national reconstruction and peace-building tasks. The committees provided Somalis with an opportunity to reconcile and build a peaceful future. With a longer commitment, the committees might have brought lasting stability to Somalia.

The US-led coalition took care to avoid antagonizing the Somalis, but the presence of foreign troops was still provocative. The factions co-operated minimally because the Unified Task Force was so militarily powerful. But many Somalis wanted the coalition to provide more help than its leaders were authorized to deliver. Somalis who were educated professionals or intellectuals saw the Unified Task Force as a visible reminder of their country's humiliatingly weak position. The prospect of unmediated close contact between Somali women and coalition troops was an immediate source of cultural and gender-related tensions.

Labbé detected these feelings in the Beledweyne humanitarian relief sector. He and Mathieu responded with a "hearts and minds" campaign that encouraged Somalis to align themselves with the security forces and with peace while marginalizing fighters and malcontents. The hearts and minds campaign dovetailed with the Canadian Joint Force Somalia two-track approach to their assignment. The first track was establishing a secure environment in the humanitarian relief sector so that relief deliveries could proceed. Though not easy, especially in the harsh Somali environment, this was largely achieved in roughly seven weeks. Contributing to this success was the Canadian Joint Force Somalia decision to conduct arms control and eschew disarmament, which could have turned local Somalis against the Canadians.

The second, more difficult, track was building local capacities for longer-term, self-sustaining peace. Through voluntarily performed good works, the Canadians sought to draw Somali attention to the benefits obtainable with peace. This included re-establishing schools and the police in Beledweyne. Another important track two element was the committee system that Oakley and Hirsch developed and Labbé and Mathieu adopted for use by the Battlegroup. The Canadians worked hard at this because Labbé believed that the committees would not survive unless Somalis saw achievements from the nonviolent instrument before the Canadian Joint Force Somalia left. The Canadians found understanding the local nuances of deal making and bargaining difficult to master, and they may have been forced to rush this delicate process.

The Canadian Joint Force Somalia found that working with the Somalis could be a major challenge. Many Somalis were resentful of the coalition and unwilling to appreciate or even tolerate what the international troops were trying to do for them. It was simply unacceptable that the Western-led

coalition had forced help on them and strictly delineated how much help would be provided. As a result, many Somalis appear to have had no difficulty stealing from the aid effort and lashing out at coalition troops. Some Canadians found this situation extremely frustrating.

The four incidents that resulted in Somali deaths were not signs of escalating animosities. The 17 February and 17 March incidents are not controversial because they occurred during the normal performance of duties. The 4 and 16 March incidents, and particularly the latter, have been held up as proof that the Airborne was almost out of control and that the entire military was in crisis. Both incidents can be attributed to the flawed command climate at the Airborne unit and subunit level. Mathieu's comment about shooting intruders may have contributed to the national rules of engagement not being followed on 4 March. Rainville appears to have believed that what he was doing was right, but on this occasion he exercised flawed judgment by leaving out bait and using excessive force contrary to the rules of engagement. Seward could not maintain an appropriate command climate in 2 Commando. By ordering the abuse of prisoners and not ensuring his full meaning was understood down the chain of command, Seward diminished the subunit command climate to the point where some undisciplined soldiers imagined torturing prisoners was permissible.

The 4 and 16 March incidents and the Armstrong allegation quickly came to dominate Canadian media coverage of Operation Deliverance. This was a heavy blow to the Canadian Joint Force Somalia, which had to keep going even though conditions and tensions were as severe as before. The final months of the mission were doubly difficult because the Canadian Joint Force Somalia did not know until mid-April – four months after arrival – when they would be coming home.

It must have seemed ironic to Labbé that while the Canadian Joint Force Somalia was being denounced in Canada, officials with the second UN operation were asking Canada for a second rotation and an extension of its current contingent. The Canadian Joint Force Somalia had deployed expecting that it would withdraw roughly when the Unified Task Force did. An extension would have been a blow to morale. In the event, the Canadian Joint Force Somalia served under the second UN mission for over three weeks before being relieved by UN forces. The fighting that flared up in June was in part an indication that many Somalis were prepared to rise up against foreign troops and were not committed to peace.