

**Book Review: UN
Peacekeeping Operations in
Somalia, 1992-1995: The
Pakistani Perspective by
Tughral Yamin**

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Despite the fact that Pakistan is one of the longest serving and largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations with more than 6000 military and police officers on active duty, academic and policy works on Pakistan's peacekeeping operations are relatively scarce. Dr. Tughral Yamin's valuable and novel undertaking on the UN's peacekeeping mission in Somalia and Pakistan's contribution fills the much needed literature gap on the subject. Laden with primary sources including diary collections of the 7 Frontier Force (FF) Regiment – the first battalion in the world – to land in Mogadishu, personal interviews with Army personnel involved in operations and Pakistani journalists who covered Somalia including also parliamentary debates, Dr. Yamin provides a holistic account of the motivations that inspired Pakistan to become part of a major UN peacekeeping exercise as well as organisational difficulties in carrying out its functions and tasks.

Not only Pakistan but the author takes account also of American and UN motivations in Somalia as well as delineating causes that led to the operation's eventual failure. In doing so, the book raises and answers the following questions: Why did the UN and the US intervene in Somalia? Why did Pakistan become a part of UN peacekeeping operations? What were the major organizational bottlenecks and gaps that resulted in the peacekeeping operations' failure? How did Pakistan contribute to UN peacekeeping operations and what were its relative successes? The book also provides a detail assessment of two key events that dotted the Somalian peacekeeping venture: the June 5th 1993 incident resulting in the deaths of 24 Pakistani peacekeepers and the October 3rd 1993 Black Hawk Down incident where 18 American soldiers were killed including the harrowing and graphic incident of the body of an American soldier dragged on the streets of Mogadishu.

The author rightly notes that Somalia presented an opportunity to both the United Nations and United States to reinvent themselves in a transitioning international order marked by the end of the Cold War. For the United Nations founded on the principle of preventing managing inter-state wars and conflicts, Somalia presented a challenge and opportunity to realign its major function, that is, peaceful settlement of disputes at the intra-state level. The then United Nations Secretary General's Agenda of Peace enunciated in 1992 reiterated that UN should now direct attention at civil wars. The 1990s and the implosion of not only Somalia but also former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in 1994 presented novel challenges to the UN's traditional role of responding to inter-state wars.

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As far as the United States is concerned, the author brushes aside the notion that oil and uranium deposits were the reason for American intervention. Instead, American intervention could well be explained in enhancing their political influence in the region as well as the urgency of laying the basis of a novel interventionism in a now Communism-free world. For the United States, domestic factors were also at play including the security establishment facing budget cuts, which perhaps explain the rather pompous American amphibian landing by US Marines in December 1992 (p. 75). Pakistan's contribution to Somalia was driven by a multitude of factors shaped by American policies after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. As the 1990s dawned, Pakistan now faced sanctions to its nuclear program under the Pressler Amendment as well as accusations of supporting terrorism and terrorist actors in the region. In an interesting depiction, the author reiterates how the Pressler Amendment almost compromised a ration supply to the Pakistani peacekeepers as US Marines refused to allow offloading of the cargo; a problematic situation that was resolved successfully later (p. 82). For Pakistan, participation in the peacekeeping mission provided an opportunity to come out of its relative isolation and project its image as a responsible member of the international community. In fact, when the then COAS, General Abdul Waheed visited the Pakistani contingent in Mogadishu in September 1993, he asserted that 'it was because of them [Pakistani peacekeepers] that Pakistan stood a chance of winning the diplomatic battle to retrieve the F-16s that the US had refused to release after the application of the Pressler Amendment' (p. 120).

Both General Abdul Waheed and his predecessor, General Asif Nawaz professed a more robust engagement with the United States as opposed to General Mirza Aslam Beg, who opposed Pakistan's participation in the Gulf War to liberate Kuwait. In times of political instability and civil-military discordance, 'the military solely made the decision regarding sending troops to Somalia' (p. 12). In making the decision, Pakistan was not completely oblivious or alien to developments in Somalia but in fact, Pakistan Army helped build Somali armed forces in the 1970s and Somali warlords 'accepted peacekeepers from Pakistan because it had supported them in their war in Ogaden in the 1980s' (p. 66).

The author notes that Pakistani peacekeepers restored food supplies to the local population winning their hearts and minds with the streets of Mogadishu soon echoing with slogans of *Pakistani-Somali Walal-Walal* (Pakistanis and Somalis are brothers) (p. 72). This initial bonhomie between the Pakistani peacekeepers and locals soon gave way to the June 5th incident where 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed, 57 injured and six went missing, out of which one died in captivity and five were released later. The author provides intimate details as well as major findings of the Commission of Inquiry established by the UN and blames the incident, at a generic level, on the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General (SRSG), US Admiral Jonathan Howe who believed in the use of force in order to settle the tribal feud between the challenger General Farah Aidid and the incumbent Somalian President, Ali Mahdi.

More specifically, the author reiterates that the onus of the tragedy lies squarely on UNOSOM which failed to apprise the Pakistani contingent that General Farah Aidid's Somali National Alliance had not provided express consent to a routine Authorised Weapons Storage Site (AWSS) in Mogadishu (p. 90). According to the author, 'Americans did not share operational intelligence with other nations leading to the June 5th incident' (p. 121). As the Pakistani contingent moved in and locals surrounded the Pakistani peacekeepers, a chain of events resulted in the death of a civilian and the siege of Pakistani troops. Most unfortunately, the rather delayed

mobilization of Italian troops increased the Pakistani death toll. While providing critical insights into the botched operation, the author sensitizes the reader to tribal customs which were less well understood by the peacekeepers. He asserts: 'Had the Pakistanis known that the Somalis were averse to being disarmed they would have been more careful and wary of the consequences of such an exercise' (p. 98).

The June 5th incident invigorated the peacekeeping mission leading to General Farah Aidid now being identified as all that was wrong with Somalia, however, more casualties were to follow. A rather ill-planned attack on General Farah Aidid's compound where presumably tribal elites had gathered to broker a deal with the United Nations resulting in deaths ranging from 20, according to UNOSOM and 54 dead and 161 injured on the part of the ICRC, led to the Black Hawk Down incident where American soldiers were ambushed with 18 killed and two helicopters brought down by Somali insurgents. Subject of a Hollywood movie by the same name, *Black Hawk Down*, the author takes serious notice of the underestimation of the rescue operation undertaken by Pakistani troops which was not made part of the movie nor does it occupy any compelling mentioning in the operation's narrative. In fact, when 'General Montgomery asked the Pakistani Brigade for tank support for the rescue operation, the response was immediate and positive and the four operationally fit M48 tanks were dispatched for the rescue operation' (p. 136).

Not only American troops but the Pakistani contingent also rescued the Indian, Zimbabwean and Bangladeshi troops in the course of 1993 and 1994 as well as providing escort to the World Food Program's food convoys. In all, Dr. Yamin reiterates that the failure of UN's peacekeeping mission in Somalia was 'due to the lack of coordination and understanding at the planning and execution stages' (p. 183). The book is an excellent undertaking in not only providing a first class account of the exigencies and tribulations that drove the peacekeeping mission in Somalia from a Pakistani perspective but is also valuable in shedding light on why the peacekeeping mission failed as a consequence of organizational handicaps. For all those interested in peacekeeping missions, the United Nations, collective security and peaceful settlement of disputes as well as socio-economic and political problems inflicting failing states, this is an excellent text worthy of read.