
U.S. PUBLIC OPINION AND THE INTERVENTION IN SOMALIA: LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE OF MILITARY- HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS

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In December 1992, with massive public support, United States military forces under President Bush began Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, a mission aimed at ending the famine that was devastating parts of the country. Ten months later, in October 1993, under intense public pressure, the Clinton administration announced its decision to withdraw these troops after the death of 18 American soldiers during a battle to capture Mohammed Farah Aideed, one of Somalia's leading warlords.

While the mission to Somalia was conceived as a bold initiative that could set precedents for action in the "new world order," in retrospect it is viewed largely as a failure. Moreover, this perception of failure appears to have had substantial impact on U.S. foreign policy since the intervention.¹ The prevailing view seems to be that Americans have little interest in humanitarian missions and virtually no tolerance for costs, especially casualties, incurred in pursuit of purely humanitarian goals, particularly in Third World countries where American economic and political interests are not directly at stake. This belief has served as the justification for policies such as Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD 25), enacted on May 3, 1994, which provides guidelines that virtually preclude American involvement in most types of peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.²

PDD 25 represents a radical departure from Clinton's stance during the 1992 presidential campaign and the early days of his administration, when he expressed support for strengthening the United Nations' peacekeeping capabilities and even for the creation of a permanent U.N. rapid reaction force. Thomas Weiss directly attributes this retreat to the perceived failure in Somalia and laments the fact that the "Somalia Syndrome" has inhibited further American participation in or leadership of humanitarian and peacekeeping missions, most noticeably during the crisis in Rwanda in 1994.³ Understand-

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ing the dynamics of public perceptions about U.S. involvement in Somalia is essential in order to overcome the negative impacts of these experiences, to avoid recurrence of similar problems in the future, and to counter current isolationist trends and promote a continued role for the United States in such missions around the world.

The U.S. mission in Somalia was a relatively new type of intervention in the international arena. Assessments of what went wrong there correspondingly cover a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from inadequate international institutions to poor policy selection by both the United Nations and the United States. I will not try to untangle all of these issues or evaluate policy decisions but will focus instead on one critical element in the intervention: American public opinion. While it would be wrong to call public opinion the determining factor in this involvement, its importance is readily apparent; members of Congress received thousands of phone calls after the 18 American deaths, and subsequent congressional pressure on the White House for a change of policy was a major factor in bringing about the administration's decision to abandon the mission and withdraw all U.S. troops.

Public opinion is complex and not always well or easily understood. Its most notable features with respect to the Somalia involvement were the initially exceptionally high levels of support for the mission—up to 84 percent of those polled approved of it in the early stages⁴—and the huge decline in support in later stages, with only 33 percent in favor of U.S. troop presence in Somalia by October 1993.⁵ The pertinent questions, then, are what caused these initially high levels of support, why did opinion change so drastically, and what impact did opinion have on policy.

The first section of this paper begins with a discussion of trends in public opinion during Operation Restore Hope based on a wide selection of survey data, and then evaluates those trends using models of public opinion with respect to U.S. military actions overseas developed by John Mueller⁶ and Louis Klarevas and Daniel O'Connor.⁷ This analysis suggests that while opinion did respond to the rising U.S. death toll, as Mueller predicted, those costs alone were not enough to explain the changes in opinion; at times support did not decline despite losses, while during other periods support dropped sharply even in the absence of any additional casualties.

A fuller understanding of opinion change develops if we consider these costs relative to the particular goals being pursued by the mission at the time they are incurred, as Klarevas and O'Connor suggest. During the Somalia intervention, the primary goal of the mission changed drastically over time, from ending the famine, to rebuilding the state, to capturing the warlord Aidid. While the public valued the first of these goals highly and tolerated costs incurred while achieving it, the latter two goals were much less important to Americans, leading to a decline in support when the goals changed and to a much lower tolerance for costs. In most analyses, however, this distinction is rarely made; public anger over the American deaths in Somalia in October 1993 is erroneously linked with the original humanitarian goals, rather than with the goals that were actually being pursued at the time of the deaths,

leading to the errant conclusion that there is not sufficient U.S. public support to take risks in pursuit of humanitarian goals.

In fact, public opinion data gathered after the October 1993 incidents in Somalia indicated a very high level of support among Americans for U.N. peace operations, with a substantial majority supporting an increase in the U.S. financial contribution to these missions. At the same time, polls indicated that the public was much less clear about if and when American troops should be directly involved, with levels of support wavering from as low as 29 percent to as much as 71 percent in favor of U.S. participation under different circumstances.⁸ Deploying American troops is a highly sensitive and contentious issue. When taken as a whole this polling evidence strongly challenges the claim that the current isolationist trend among some policymakers accurately reflects the views of the general American public.

Based on this understanding, I will draw some lessons for future interventions, taking into consideration some of the underlying forces that influence opinion, including the structure of public attitudes, the administration's leadership on the issue, and the media coverage of U.S. involvement. In particular, I will consider the public's perceptions of the value of the goals being pursued, the benefits being realized, and the costs being incurred. Three key lessons derive from this analysis:

1) The public still generally supports U.S. and U.N. intervention in Third World humanitarian crises, but the coalition of support can be difficult, though by no means impossible, to maintain during long-term interventions.

2) Building and maintaining a coalition of support requires strong leadership and a proactive stance on the part of the president and the administration, including a willingness to lead discussion and debate, a clear definition of goals and objectives, a clear justification of why Americans should value these goals, and the initiation of a cooperative relationship with the media to convey these messages to the public.

3) There is a need to challenge the role of the media regarding the ways the public and policy are being affected by media images, potentially leading to ill-considered "photo foreign policy." The media should also be forced to address problems of unbalanced or even biased coverage of events and their failure to provide the public with an adequate context for understanding and decision making.

In light of these points, the president should design criteria for U.S. support for and participation in peace operations in the Third World that are less

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media-driven than was the case in Somalia, but that also better reflect the actual level of public concern with humanitarian problems than does PDD 25. These criteria should be developed through an open public debate on these issues. The public, policymakers, and the media, meanwhile, need to reconsider what responsibilities and obligations the media have, if any, toward the public, particularly in cases of foreign affairs where the public has few other sources of information on events and issues. While the media are inherently driven at least in part by the goal of attracting readers or viewers, it is worth considering how their role can be fulfilled more constructively and responsibly. If U.S. foreign policy is influenced by public opinion, which is in turn shaped by media coverage of an event, then it is in everyone's interest that this opinion be as well-informed as possible.

The Influence of Public Opinion

Historically the complexities of foreign affairs were thought to make it a domain reserved for the president and other informed experts; the uninformed and capricious public could have little useful role. Even recently, political realists such as Hans J. Morgenthau have suggested that foreign policies are—and should be—determined by geostrategic power relations among states, not by ignorant publics that are driven by “naive moralism” and “uninformed emotion.”⁹ Theory about public opinion and foreign policy has been dominated for years by the Almond-Lippmann consensus, which suggests that not only is public opinion a poor basis on which to build foreign policy (due to its volatility and lack of coherence and structure), but that in fact it does not have much impact on these policies.

Recently, however, a number of analysts have challenged these views, claiming instead that public opinion is better informed and, perhaps more importantly, more structured, stable, and rationally determined than formerly believed, and that it does in fact have a substantial impact on foreign policy. The findings of Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro are fairly representative of those on which these challenges are founded.¹⁰ Based on a large sample of survey data, they found not only that opinion remains consistent over the vast majority of issues but also that when it does change, even abruptly (as it did in the case of Somalia), such changes are usually linked to external events and the public's “reasonable” or “sensible” responses to them.¹¹ This lies in sharp contrast to Gabriel Almond's view of a moody public whose flip-flopping opinions fluctuated more on the basis of whim or uninformed chance than on the basis of rational evaluations of circumstances.¹² These findings do not, however, counter earlier claims that the public is still relatively poorly informed about international affairs. The fact that even in October of 1993 only 38 percent of the public could name the capital of Somalia, and 57 percent the continent in which it lies, is still unsurprising.¹³ This lack of information does not, however, necessarily preclude rational preferences in the way that the Almond-Lippmann consensus had assumed.¹⁴

There is also increasing documentation of the impact of public opinion on

foreign policy. Recent data analyzed by Donald Jordan and Benjamin Page suggest a strong correlation between actual foreign policy choices and public support for them and find that public opinion changes are followed by congruent policy changes about two-thirds of the time.¹⁵ These findings appear to be validated by the case of Somalia as well. They also note, however, the "great difficulty in untangling the extent of reciprocal processes: the effects of policy on opinion, for example, or officials' efforts to educate or manipulate the public."¹⁶ There is nevertheless a growing consensus that public opinion does in fact affect foreign policy, although the evolution of the process and the significance of the effects are still debatable. Ronald Hinckley believes that opinion polls themselves have a great impact, claiming that they are brought into almost all major discussions of national security.¹⁷

Policymakers themselves have little doubt about the impact of public opinion on policy, and they too point to the importance of polling data. Based on interviews with policymakers, Philip Powlick finds that they believe public support, or perhaps more accurately, the lack of public opposition, is necessary for the implementation of most policies. He also finds, however, that many decision makers believe this is true because of necessity, not because they necessarily believe that public opinion is rational and therefore should influence policy. Powlick notes that policymakers are generally inclined not to change policy in the face of public opposition, but instead to try to educate the public, convincing it of the value and benefits of the policy preferred by decision makers.¹⁸

In the case of Somalia, Representative Harry Johnston, former chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa for the House International Relations Committee, has acknowledged the significance of public opinion in determining congressional support for the administration's policies. He points out that although "there are times we cannot run our foreign policy on overnight Gallup polls," at the same time "Congress was watching the polls [about Somalia], and as the polls went down, the opposition in Congress went up."¹⁹ It is also widely recognized that the thousands of phone calls received by representatives in the days immediately following the October 1993 losses had a major impact on Congress, and the growing and increasingly heated congressional opposition that resulted was a major factor in forcing the White House to shift its policies.

Public Opinion Trends

To evaluate trends in public opinion, a collection of 236 survey questions about the involvement in Somalia, asked between September 10, 1992 and August 4, 1994, were evaluated.²⁰ These questions cover many of the issues involved in the intervention and range from simple questions such as expectations about the length of the involvement to somewhat more complex questions about the nature of U.S. goals in Somalia. Ole Holsti notes the growing recognition during the Vietnam War era that many of the standard questions asked by polling organizations, such as whether a respondent supports or

opposes current U.S. policy on the involvement, are too restrictive and simplistic to develop a full understanding of public sentiment.²¹ Unfortunately, in the case of Somalia only simple questions were asked repeatedly in a consistent form so as to allow an analysis of trends in opinion over time, so I will focus on the responses to these questions here, although I will also briefly discuss some of the more complex questions.

Another weakness of this collection of survey data is its uneven distribution over the period of interest. Of the 236 questions compiled, only one was asked before December 1992, 66 (28 percent) were asked in the first two months of the operation, while 121 (51 percent) were not asked until the month following the October 1993 incident. Far fewer surveys were conducted between

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February and September 1993, and during several months no polls were conducted at all. In addition, several key questions were only asked in December 1992/January 1993, and then not again until October 1993. Thus, while in several instances it is relatively clear how opinion changed between the start of the operation and the decision to end it, it will not always be possible to look at a continuous trend over time.

There are three questions in the collection that were asked frequently enough and over a long enough period of time to lend themselves to an analysis of public opinion trends. The first of these asks about one's general opinion about either the plan to send U.S. troops to Somalia or their actual presence there: "Do you approve or disapprove of Bush's decision to send United States troops to Somalia?" (December 1992) or

"In general, do you approve or disapprove of the presence of United States troops in Somalia?" (September 1993). The responses show that initial support for the intervention was exceptionally high, averaging 77 percent through early April 1993, with several polls recording up to an 84 percent approval rating from January 1993 through April 1993. This question was not asked again until September 1993, by which time support had dropped to only 45 percent. After the October 1993 incident, support for the mission fell still further to an average of only 33 percent, a level that remained relatively constant across polls despite some significant variations in question wording.

The most frequently asked question concerns the president's handling of the situation. In general, the question was phrased as follows: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush/Clinton/the United States is handling the situation in Somalia?" Between December 1992 and April 1993, the approval rating ranged from 73 percent to 77 percent. By June 1993, however, after 24 Pakistani soldiers had been killed and the hunt for Aideed had begun, approval of Clinton's handling of the situation dropped to 51 percent. By September 1993 it dropped still further to 41 percent, and after the October

1993 deaths it fell to an average of only 31 percent. These numbers are strikingly similar to those observed for approval of U.S. troop presence discussed above, both in the early stages through April 1993, and in the final stages in September and October 1993.

The third question asked with some regularity concerns the amount of attention that respondents were paying to events in Somalia. The number of respondents reporting that they were either "paying a lot of attention to" or "following very closely" the situation in Somalia was only 11 percent in September 1992, but had risen to 39 to 46 percent in December 1992, and still further to 52 percent in January 1993. The level of attention then dropped substantially to 28 percent by February 1993, and to only 7 to 16 percent by June 1993. However, as the Aideed hunt intensified the number began to rise again, reaching 20 percent in September 1993, and then leaping back up to 50 percent immediately after the October 1993 events. It may have also been significant for the decision-making process that fully 84 percent of those polled had seen pictures in the media of a dead U.S. soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu or of an American soldier who was being held hostage, while only 18 percent had heard Clinton's speech on October 6 about the future of the administration's policy regarding Somalia.

Did the United States Do the Right Thing?

I will now turn to some of the questions for which there is less information on trends over time, but which nevertheless can provide important insights into public opinion and its change during this period. One of the most interesting of these is a question asked by several organizations in October 1993 regarding whether the United States had done the right thing or made a mistake by getting involved in Somalia in the first place. This was the main question that Mueller used to assess changes in public opinion during the Korean and Vietnam Wars,²² but in the case of Somalia this question was asked only after the tragic events of October 1993.

There are some important differences in the response to this question depending on its wording. In particular, when asked if the United States had done the "right thing" or not, the positive response was consistently between 62 percent and 67 percent. When asked whether in retrospect they approved or disapproved of Bush's decision to send the troops, still a majority of 56 percent of respondents answered with approval. On the other hand, when asked whether the United States had made a "mistake" by going in, a slight majority of 52 percent agreed that it had been a mistake. These responses are not necessarily inconsistent. They may instead reflect changing U.S. objectives and the public's correspondingly mixed response. It appears that Americans did feel that the original purpose of the mission was worthwhile, but that the loss of lives in October 1993 had occurred during the pursuit of other goals. As these new goals were not as highly valued, the deaths were unacceptable, or a "mistake." In responding to a single, simply worded question, it is difficult to express both of these views. The positive or negative focus of

the wording of the questions may therefore have triggered respondents to focus on either their positive or negative evaluation of the mission.

A related question concerned whether or not respondents felt that the mission would be (or had been) worth the potential (or actual) costs. In December 1992 and January 1993, 66 to 70 percent of the public felt that ensuring that those affected by the famine would receive food would be worth even "the possible loss of [American] lives." At the same time, 77 percent thought it was somewhat or very likely that U.S. troops would become targets for the Somali militias while they were there, and 55 percent thought we would either achieve our objectives only through a military conflict or that we would not be able to achieve them at all (presumably due to conflict). Another question, however, found that 64 percent were somewhat or very confident that the United States would "be able to accomplish its goals with very few or no American casualties." It is difficult to compare these different questions about the risks involved, but Mueller has that suggested that high sensitivity of responses to changes in question wording may be an indication of uncertainty about an issue.²³ This may have been the case regarding Somalia. The U.S. public was not sure what the real risks to American troops were in this situation. Nevertheless, in early 1993 the public was still overwhelmingly supportive of the mission and willing to accept these risks.

When this same question was asked in October 1993, the response was equally divided between those feeling that it had been worth the cost (45 percent) and those feeling that it had not (44 percent). These questions did ask specifically whether it was worth the costs "to make sure food got through to the people of Somalia," perhaps suggesting that a significant proportion of the public did not feel that ending the Somali famine was worth the loss of American lives. However, it is again essential to recognize the changing nature of the mission and the potential impact of this on the public's response to this question. In earlier polls, Americans had clearly stated their willingness to accept losses in order to achieve the goal of ending the famine (67 to 70 percent). However, by October this goal had long since been achieved; the United States was pursuing other goals when the lives were lost. Given the timing of the surveys (shortly after many Americans had seen the disturbing coverage of the events of October 3-4 in Somalia), the response to this question may have had much more to do with the acceptability of these deaths at the time of the survey relative to the new goals than with how the public felt about these deaths relative to earlier goals.

The Goals of the Intervention

Finally, a wide variety of questions were asked about the goals of the mission. There were numerous, often interrelated goals for this mission that changed substantially during the course of the involvement. As a result, questions asked about the importance of or support for various goals also varied widely, making it difficult to compare the responses over time. I will discuss first the questions asked when the mission began in December 1992 and Jan-

uary 1993 and then turn to those asked in September and October 1993 when the nature of the mission had changed drastically and public support had dropped to very low levels.

Perhaps the most important issue with respect to the questions regarding goals during the early phases of the mission is the apparent inconsistency of the responses and their susceptibility to influence by question wording. Although 81 percent agreed that the "principal objective" of the mission was supporting famine relief, rather than disarmament, maintaining security, or rebuilding the government of Somalia, beyond that there was a great deal of indecision about the proper extent of or limits to the mission. For example, when asked only whether they supported the policy of "having U.S. troops disarm the warring factions in Somalia," 71 percent of respondents agreed that they should do so.²⁴ However, the responses changed markedly when the question was rephrased as a comparison of goals, as follows:

*Do you think the U.S. troops in Somalia should be responsible for disarming the rival warlords there, or should the U.S. troops only be responsible for making sure that food is delivered to areas affected by the famine?*²⁵

In this case only 41 percent supported disarmament, while 52 percent thought that the mission should be limited to famine relief. Another similar question, however, reverses the split, with 51 percent supporting staying for disarmament and only 44 percent desiring to limit the mission to famine relief. The responses were similar when respondents were asked about the goals of creating a stable, peaceful environment and/or creating a stable government. The following comparison demonstrates once again the susceptibility of response to question wording (both questions were asked in December 1992):

Once the U.S. troops complete their mission of getting relief to the starving people in the countryside, should the soldiers leave Somalia in the hands of the warring gangs that now control it or should they stay until a new and effective government is put in place, even if that takes a long time?

28 percent—leave after famine relief

63 percent—stay until new government is in place²⁶

What should be the U.S. goal in Somalia, assuring the delivery of relief supplies only, or assuring delivery of relief supplies, then helping to restore peace and a working government?

47 percent—relief only

46 percent—relief and a working government²⁷

The responses varied significantly when wording changed slightly. This may again reflect the public's uncertainty about the proper goals and extent of the mission.

Similarly, responses varied greatly according to question wording in the later stages of the involvement. In September and October of 1993 the questions asked either about the value of a goal itself or about the value of pursuing

that goal instead of withdrawing U.S. troops. For example, in October 1993, when asked whether establishing a stable government in Somalia should be an important U.S. goal, 43 percent of respondents agreed that it should be, but when asked whether troops should remain in Somalia to establish a stable government or proceed with the planned withdrawal, only 24 percent felt that the troops should stay. At the same time, 32 percent preferred staying to maintain peace and stability instead of withdrawing. It is quite apparent that public support for goals other than famine relief (which was less important by this time, as the famine was almost over) had fallen drastically since January.

Lastly, American public opinion should be examined with respect to the attempt to capture the faction leader General Aideed, which came to be perceived as the primary goal of the mission in its later stages. The hunt for Aideed began in June 1993 after the killing of Pakistani peacekeepers. Initial support for this effort was quite high at 66 percent; however, after the October losses, the value of this goal apparently became ambiguous in the minds of Americans. When asked if it was in some respects a worthwhile objective, 51 to 71 percent agreed that it was. However, when compared to the option of withdrawing all U.S. troops, the latter choice was favored by 56 to 60 percent, with only 34 percent in favor of keeping of the U.S. troops in Somalia to ensure Aideed's capture.

The Future of Intervention

I will now turn to another set of 23 questions about peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions, which were asked after the decision was made in October 1993 to withdraw from Somalia.²⁸ As noted above, there is a widespread perception that Americans are becoming more isolationist, that they have little interest in humanitarian or peacekeeping missions, and that they are unwilling to support them or to tolerate their costs.²⁹ However, recent public opinion data do not support these claims. Instead they reveal some interesting trends, many of which contradict the perception of growing U.S. isolationism.

The responses to questions asking only about the use of U.N. peacekeeping forces (i.e., with no direct mention of U.S. participation) were overwhelmingly in favor of such missions. A February 1994 survey sponsored by the United Nations found that 84 percent of the U.S. public either strongly or somewhat favors the idea of U.N. peacekeeping missions; support for the use of peacekeeping forces under specific circumstances, from civil war to gross human rights violations, ranged from 69 percent to 81 percent. Support for the current U.N. intervention in the civil war in Burundi was also high at 73 percent. Questions about funding for peacekeeping also revealed some surprising results. When told that the average U.S. taxpayer spends only about four dollars per year for U.N. peacekeeping, 74 percent said that this amount was somewhat or much lower than they had expected, and 62 percent agreed that it was either somewhat or much too low.

When polls asked about whether U.S. troops should participate in international humanitarian or peacekeeping operations, the results varied more and were more difficult to interpret, but in general they did not reflect isolationist tendencies. The wording of the 10 questions asked on this topic between October 1993 and October 1994 varied substantially (e.g., some refer to a U.S. role in U.N. interventions, while others did not refer to the United Nations). The results varied significantly between questions that did or did not refer to U.S. "national interest." Five of the 10 questions mentioned national interest, asking whether the United States should get involved militarily only when its national interests are at stake, or whether it should also intervene in other situations where national interests are not directly involved. In these questions, support for involvement in missions that are not related to national interests ranged from a low of 29 percent to a high of 49 percent. The other five questions did not mention national interest, for example: "Generally speaking, do you think the U.S. should or should not send U.S. troops to participate in U.N. peacekeeping efforts around the world?" Here, the levels of support for U.S. participation were much higher, ranging from 51 percent to 71 percent. Finally, during the crisis in Rwanda in July and August of 1994, surveys found that 63 to 69 percent of Americans supported the use of U.S. military forces in this intervention.

Thus, the high variability in responses relative to the wording of questions on this issue—and especially the impact of the mention of national interests—suggests that the public is itself undecided about what the proper role of U.S. soldiers should be. While the American public is not unambiguously supportive of full U.S. participation in peace operations, it is equally clear that the extreme isolationism of some current political leaders does not reflect public attitudes. Public debate on peace operations, on PDD 25, and on the U.S. role in these operations needs to be reopened, particularly with an eye toward understanding what really is encompassed by the term "national interest" in the minds of Americans.

Support as a Response to Casualties

Based on his studies of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, Mueller has developed a relatively simple hypothesis to explain the patterns of decreasing public support for these wars. He suggests that the number of American casualties is the key determinant of support for a war and that the relation is logarithmic. This means that the public will be quite sensitive to lower levels of casualties at the beginning of an engagement, but only to increasingly larger numbers as the total number of casualties rises. For example, the impact of the first 100 deaths will be the same as the impact of the next 1000, and so on. Mueller found that in both of the wars, public support decreased about 15 percent whenever the number of casualties increased tenfold.³⁰ He also identifies a rally-round-the-flag effect that contributes to high levels of support early in an engagement.

While there is much support for Mueller's theory, two key gaps remain:

1) it does not fully address what determines the initial level of support for an engagement; and 2) it does not identify a baseline figure of acceptable casualties (that is, the level of losses that will cause the first 15 percent decline in support). While the numbers of casualties in the Korean and Vietnam Wars were roughly of the same order of magnitude (hundreds of thousands), Mueller's survey data on the Gulf War suggests that the number of tolerable casualties for this involvement was much lower, on the order of thousands or tens of thousands.³¹ Mueller notes that this difference may be due in part to the fact that Americans did not expect the costs to be anywhere near as high in the Gulf War, but he does not attempt any further analysis. Thus, while his approach offers some insight into the dynamics of public support for military engagements, it is necessary to develop it further to incorporate a greater understanding of what determines initial levels of support and the limits of "tolerable losses."

Applying Mueller's theory to the Somalia case presents some difficulties due to its short duration, the low overall number of casualties, and the lack of sufficient public opinion data. It would have been necessary to take much more frequent and carefully timed public opinion surveys (to coincide with the relatively few deaths that did occur prior to October 3) to establish clear connections between the number of casualties and level of support for the involvement. Nevertheless, examining the Somalia involvement in light of this theory does yield some helpful insights.

Between the start of Operation Restore Hope in December 1992 and the decision to withdraw in October 1993, the Somalia peace operation saw 29 American military personnel killed and an additional 146 wounded. Eighteen of the deaths and 78 of the injuries occurred during the battle with Aideed's militia on October 3. These deaths had a major impact on public opinion, due both to the large number and to the vivid footage of the mistreatment of a dead U.S. soldier that was seen by a significant majority of Americans.

The first U.S. death in Somalia was that of a civilian army employee in December 1992. Two more U.S. soldiers were killed in January 1993, and a fourth in March. After the battles with Aideed began, four more were killed on August 8, three on September 25, and the final 18 on October 3. Comparing these figures with the public opinion data presented above, particularly those concerning support for the intervention and approval of the president's handling of the situation, reveals that despite the obvious importance of the October 3 deaths, Mueller's theory cannot explain all of the changes in public opinion that occurred.

Public support for the intervention and the president's handling of it dropped approximately 50 percent between March and October 1993. However, both measures remained at their peak levels of 77 to 84 percent throughout the first several months of the operation (at least through early April 1993) despite four deaths in action during this period. In other words, these early deaths appear to have had no impact whatsoever on public support for the involvement. This suggests that four deaths were well below the public's perception of tolerable losses incurred to help end the famine.

The picture had changed markedly by June 1993, however. As is evident from the opinion data presented above, after the start of the confrontation with Aideed but before any additional U.S. casualties, support for the president's handling of the situation had already dropped substantially, to 51 percent. (There is no data on public support for the troop involvement at this time.) Since this large drop in support occurred when there were no additional casualties, the change must be due to other causes. The most probable explanation is that opinion shifted due to major changes in mission goals. By mid-September, when four additional soldiers had been killed, support for the U.S. presence had dropped to 45 percent, and only 41 percent approved of the president's handling of the situation. The final surveys, conducted in early October after the remaining 21 battle deaths had occurred, show that support for both the U.S. involvement and the president's handling of it had dropped to a low of about 33 percent.

In sum, while U.S. casualties were a critical factor in the declining support for the intervention during its later stages, this factor alone does not adequately explain the changes. The dramatic shift in mission goals that occurred in June 1993 was a second key factor. This change had a profound effect on perceptions of the mission, as reflected in the coverage in *The New York Times* during this period. An analysis of every fifth article about Somalia that appeared in the paper during this time reveals that while coverage prior to June was steadily declining, it remained fairly consistent in its approach to the subject and its discussion of the goals.³² Once the Aideed manhunt was initiated in June, however, there was a distinct change. From this point onward, nearly every article covering the mission mentioned two things: the increasingly dangerous environment in Mogadishu for U.S. and U.N. soldiers and the fact that the goals of the mission had changed substantially. While the current mission goals were not always obvious before June 1993, as the famine was almost over, after June the coverage consistently reflected the perception that seeking vengeance against Aideed was the primary mission focus.

It also appears that the public response to U.S. deaths was different before and after the change in objectives. When the goal was famine relief, four deaths had no apparent impact on support. After the goals changed to nation-building and/or capturing Aideed, four deaths appear to have had a substantial impact on support, and an additional 21 deaths had a major impact. The noticeably different responses over time suggest that public perception of the tolerable costs must have changed as the goals of the mission changed. Klarevas and O'Connor's thesis may help to explain this difference.

Costs Relative to Interests

Klarevas and O'Connor suggest an approach to analyzing American public support for foreign involvements that fills in some of the gaps left by Mueller's theory. While they find strong support for Mueller's contention that casualties are a key determinant of levels of support, they also provide a framework that can help to determine both the initial levels of support for an

intervention and the level of casualties that the public will tolerate. Klarevas and O'Connor propose that support for using military force in a given situation will be based on the anticipated costs—including casualties, money, and duration—relative to the interests at stake, such as military and economic security, and legal and moral concerns.³³ This suggests that members of the public consciously or unconsciously make a cost-benefit calculation, comparing the value they place on the goals or objectives of a mission to the expected or actual costs of the undertaking. This hypothesis is intuitive; it simply suggests that the public values different goals differently, and so its perceptions of the tolerable costs of achieving those objectives will differ as well.

In contrast to the impression that Americans are increasingly isolationist after Somalia, there is a more subtle lesson to be learned: support for humanitarian goals has not collapsed, but neither can it be taken for granted.

Despite its simplicity, this approach offers useful insights into our understanding of public opinion in the case of Somalia.

Klarevas and O'Connor's framework is important to understanding public perceptions about U.S. involvement in Somalia because of the radical change in the mission's goals. Prior to June 1993, the primary goal of the mission was clear: ending the famine. Moreover, this goal appears to have been highly valued by the public, as there was a willingness to tolerate some casualties in its pursuit. Four deaths, tragic as they were, did not dissuade Americans from supporting this objective. On the other hand, after June 5, 1993, the nature of the mission changed. It was widely recognized that the famine was, for the most part, over. As mentioned, there was confusion about what the secondary goals should be. There was also evidence that the public was content to leave these problems to the United Nations, as it had often done in the past.

Public contentment ended, however, when a new primary goal emerged: retaliation against or capture of General Mohammed Farah Aid-
eed. Apparently, this change in objectives caused the largest single decrease in support (from 77 percent to 51 percent for the president's handling of the situation between April and June 1993). Public tolerance for deaths was much lower relative to this goal, and as the number of casualties mounted, support rapidly dropped even further.

This interpretation is also consistent with some of the public's other responses to survey questions. For example, even after the October 1993 losses, when public support for the mission was at its lowest level of only 33 percent, 62 to 67 percent of the public still agreed that the United States had done "the right thing" by going into Somalia in the first place. This indicates that

many people still believed that the original goals had been worth whatever price was paid, but that the present goals were not worth the costs.

Changing Goals and the Real Lessons from Somalia

In interpreting the events in Somalia and the public response to them, it is necessary to separate the negative response to deaths late in the mission from the public support for the initial, primarily humanitarian, portion of the mission. The "Somalia Syndrome" arises because this distinction is not being made. Policies such as PDD 25 seem to reflect a general sense within the administration that the public is no longer willing to tolerate any costs, human or otherwise, in the pursuit of humanitarian missions to regions where national interests are not immediately at stake, thus precluding not only rapid action in severe crises (as in Rwanda) but almost all future involvement in humanitarian crises in the Third World. Attitudes toward peacekeeping after Somalia offer strong evidence to the contrary, however, and the analysis presented in the previous section further suggests that such an interpretation is flawed.

Klarevas and O'Connor's work suggests that the most important factors determining public support are the perceived value of the mission and the mission's costs. We have already observed how the balance between these two factors changed in the case of Somalia. The next step, then, is to look at the factors underlying these perceptions of benefits and costs. There are many factors that can influence public perceptions, most notably presidential leadership, media coverage, and the dynamics of public opinion itself. Examining how this influence was poorly used or misused during the Somalia intervention yields important lessons for the future of U.S. intervention.

Lesson 1: The Public Often Does Support Humanitarian Goals, But . . .

In contrast to the impression that Americans are increasingly isolationist after Somalia, there is a more subtle and valid lesson to be learned about the basic nature of public opinion: support for humanitarian goals has not collapsed, but neither can it be taken for granted—coalitions of public support are very difficult to maintain, especially for long-term, less crisis-oriented goals.

Public support for more immediate, humanitarian goals has been demonstrated in the case of Somalia. Even after the October losses, the evidence indicates that Americans continue to value humanitarian and peacekeeping interventions. However, it is more difficult to generalize about support for long-term, secondary goals of a mission, such as holding elections, rebuilding governments, and promoting long-term recovery. Anthony Downs, in his discussion of the issue-attention cycle, suggests one explanation for this difficulty, which he describes as the "post-problem stage" of public interest.³⁴ This approach argues that while there may not necessarily be high levels of active support for such long-term missions, there may be adequate levels of "tolerance" for them—or lack of a strong opposition—as long as the costs remain relatively low. This tolerant disinterest is evident both from the declining trend

in the level of interest that occurred with respect to Somalia, and from looking at the tolerance for a number of other long-term missions that the United Nations has been involved in around the world, including Cambodia, northern Iraq, and Angola.

Nevertheless, Wittkopf suggests that maintaining strong support for these long-term missions may be very difficult. Wittkopf finds that the apparent instability of public opinion is actually due to the fragmented structure of foreign policy attitudes. Division along only one dimension of belief, for instance, isolationism versus internationalism, could still result in relatively stable foreign policy views. Americans, however, seem to be divided along two dimensions: supporters and opponents of militant internationalism, and supporters and opponents of cooperative internationalism. These two dimensions lead to four possible types of foreign policy attitude: internationalists (who support both), accommodationists (who support cooperation only), hardliners (who support militancy only), and isolationists (who support neither). Wittkopf has found that the mass public is divided roughly equally among each of these categories (although the isolationist group is somewhat smaller than the others) and that the proportions are remarkably stable.³⁵

Bruce Russett describes the implications of Wittkopf's proposed structure when it comes to generating support for a given policy. He notes that when attitudes are distributed along more than one dimension, "one can assemble a majority behind a particular action . . . [but] the ability to keep that majority together for a set of actions that crisscross these dimensions is extremely problematic (for example, supporting the U.N. in a peace-keeping operation)."³⁶

This seems to be precisely what happened in the case of Somalia. One particular goal or policy—ending the famine—had the power to bring together a large coalition that even included some isolationists. However, the administration did not succeed in keeping this coalition together as the goals of the mission changed to nation-building and thug-chasing. Wittkopf's results suggest that maintaining this coalition would have been difficult, if not almost impossible, despite the best efforts.

Lesson 2: The Need for Presidential Leadership

Earlier I addressed how much influence public opinion has on policymakers. Now I turn to the opposite side of the debate—how much influence policy elites, especially the president, have on public opinion, and whether this influence was used effectively in the case of Somalia. In particular, could Presidents Bush and Clinton have affected public perceptions about the value of the objectives of the mission, did they do so, and should they have done more?

Public opinion analysts agree that there is some opportunity, within limits, for presidents to influence public opinion. However, the Bush and Clinton administrations failed to provide the leadership that was needed for this mission. Each tended to avoid, rather than promote, open discussion and debate about U.S. involvement in Somalia. They also failed to clearly define the objectives of the mission, and Clinton in particular failed almost entirely to justify why Americans should value these objectives, especially during the later

stages of the mission. In addition, the media were often allowed to dominate public perceptions. As suggested above, maintaining support for this engagement would likely have been difficult even under the best of circumstances and the most active leadership. Given the shortcomings of these administrations' leadership, however, there was little hope of maintaining public support.

Thus, there are four key lessons for presidential administrations with respect to future interventions, all of which focus on the need to provide active leadership and guidance to the public. These lessons are as follows:

- 1) Lead the discussion and debate about the mission and its goals rather than avoiding it;
- 2) Clearly define the objectives of the mission and do not get diverted from them;
- 3) Provide clear justification for why these objectives should be valued by the U.S. public, especially if they do not obviously fall within the (usually narrowly defined) scope of national interest;
- 4) Be proactive with the media and try to ensure that the above messages, and the news of successes as well as failures, reach the public.

Bert Rockman points out that presidents were once given considerable deference in foreign policy decision making. However, the Vietnam War and other events have reduced the public's trust in and willingness to follow the president, and he now competes with a wider variety of opinion leaders on foreign policy issues, especially members of the media.³⁷ Nevertheless, opportunities for presidential influence and guidance of the public's opinion still exist. Rockman finds that the influence a president exerts today depends primarily on three factors: the goals of a given policy, the level of the president's commitment to them, and the clarity with which the goals are articulated.³⁸ However, he also adds that even high levels of presidential commitment cannot guarantee success in winning support for a policy.³⁹ Page and Shapiro, for example, find that in some cases "even intensive efforts over several months by highly popular presidents appear to bring about changes in opinion poll results of only some 5 or 10 percentage points, hardly a tidal wave."⁴⁰

Nevertheless, neither Bush nor Clinton was able to use his influence effectively. In the early stages of the mission during the Bush administration, the lack of open discussion and debate about the intervention was an especially important problem. The widespread support for the mission at this stage meant that there was little demand for public debate on this issue. While Bush is not to blame for this lack of demand, he is accountable for going along with it, and more importantly, for passing off any difficult issues that were raised regarding the U.N. mission that was to replace Operation Restore Hope. Rather than addressing issues such as what should follow the efforts to end starvation and to what degree the international community should pursue nation building, Bush simply explained that the mission would be handed over to the United Nations.⁴¹ The implication was that these were not really U.S. problems. Given the U.S. participation and leadership in the subsequent U.N.

mission, however, these eventually became very important issues to the Clinton administration and the U.S. public.

During the later phases of the mission, the Clinton administration failed to clearly articulate the goals of the mission. By mid-1993, it was widely recognized by Americans and frequently stated by the President that the primary humanitarian mission had been achieved and the famine was over. Clinton acknowledged that the mission had moved into a nation-building phase, yet he did not articulate how this mission would be accomplished or when it should be considered complete.⁴² Given the media's coverage of events after the June incidents, the public could not have doubted that the mission had become focused on capturing Aideed. Yet the President never assumed a clear position on this goal nor drew a clear link between the pursuit of Aideed and the other nation-building goals.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Clinton administration failed to provide any justification for the goals that were being pursued in the later stages of the mission, a critical omission in a situation involving high risks.

Since rebuilding failed states is not generally considered a vital national interest, leadership, public discussion, and education are needed to build a coalition that supports such a goal.

Klarevas and O'Connor emphasize the importance of not only the objectives themselves, but how highly people value those objectives and their value relative to expected costs. There are few foreign policy goals that can be considered to have a self-evident value to Americans, such as protecting U.S. citizens and territory. Rebuilding failed states, on the other hand, is not generally considered a vital national interest. While this does not mean that it is not a U.S. interest, or that Americans simply do not value it, it does mean that leadership, public discussion, and education are needed to build a coalition that supports such a goal.

In that respect the Clinton administration failed almost entirely, as recognized by Susan Rice, Director for African Affairs on Clinton's National Security Council during the Somalia intervention. She admitted that the administration "did a horrible job of communicating to Congress and the public about why we were in Somalia."⁴³ In addition to being unclear about the new mission goals and neglecting to clarify the significance of the Aideed hunt, the President conducted virtually no discussion about the value of those goals and why Americans should be willing to accept risks and costs to achieve them. As suggested above, the public may have rejected such a justification in any case, but in the absence of strong leadership and guidance, there was almost no chance that a coalition of support could have been maintained.

A final issue for the administration to consider is its ability to influence media coverage. During other foreign military involvements, the press has

sometimes appeared to be “controlled” by the administration,⁴⁴ yet the White House appears to have had surprisingly little impact on the media regarding Somalia. The administration must reassess its interactions with the press in humanitarian-military engagements and make a more concerted effort to get its message out to the public. These issues will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Lesson 3: The Need to Reexamine the Role of the Media

The impact of the media on public opinion and hence on policy remains a hotly debated topic, and the role of media coverage in the Somalia intervention has served to fuel this debate. The media had a substantial impact on the intervention. Questions remain whether such an impact is desirable and whether the media used their influence responsibly. Charges that media coverage drove irresponsible “photo foreign policy” as well as accusations of shallow, imbalanced, or biased coverage have all been levied. It is difficult to analyze in detail the impact of media coverage on public opinion, particularly on public perceptions about the goals of the operation, its benefits, and its potential and real costs. However, we can draw some general conclusions about the likely impacts and identify several serious problems regarding the role of the media.

The media’s role as an agenda-setting agent—determining which issues will become most important to the public—has long been recognized. Bernard Cohen notes that the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”⁴⁵ This is especially true in the case of foreign policy, since the public has few alternative sources of information about these issues. Advanced technology has increased the media’s influence, especially through the media’s ability to transmit images from disaster scenes and war zones to American living rooms almost instantaneously.⁴⁶ Everette Dennis, executive director of the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, points out that while public opinion used to form gradually over weeks or months, it now “takes only hours for [it] to in some way be galvanized.”⁴⁷ This was certainly true in the case of the Somalia intervention after the October 3 incidents. Somalia has become one of the preeminent examples of “photo foreign policy”—foreign policy that is driven by media images and the emotions they can generate, rather than by careful analysis.

The extent of the impact of images—first of starving Somali children and later of dead and mistreated U.S. soldiers—is debated, but policymakers have acknowledged that the public reaction to them definitely affected U.S. involvement in Somalia. The impact of these images has been questioned and challenged by some, and applauded by others. On the one hand, many journalists and others point out that without the initial intensive media coverage, no action would have been taken to end the famine. On the other hand, it is also frequently noted that even as the media were providing the most thorough coverage of the Somalia crisis, several equally horrific situations in other African countries—most notably in Sudan and Angola—were ignored by the press, and consequently by the rest of the world as well.

Although the media deserve some credit for making the public aware of one foreign crisis, following the whims of the media is hardly a sound approach to developing U.S. foreign policy. *The New York Times'* Walter Goodman has asked, "What sort of policy making is it to have Washington's actions decided, even in part, on the latest affecting pictures on the evening news?"⁴⁸ Goodman is probably overstating the case; pictures can tell us something about what is going on in a place, and they can make a problem more real and important than it might otherwise seem. Such pictures cannot provide adequate information about a situation, nor should they have a major impact on policy. Moreover, any credit given the media for bringing a situation to public attention must be tempered by a consideration of the motives of the news organizations. Choosing Somalia over Sudan or Angola may be based on the belief that it is the most important or critical story, but the choice may just as well be based on the relative ease of access to a location, or the exceptional intensity of the available images.

Retired diplomat George Kennan emphasizes another crucial problem that arises from photo foreign policy: the tendency for issues driven by images to become over-simplified, over-emotional, and under-debated. He notes that the public's easy acceptance of Bush's decision to intervene enabled the mission to go ahead with ambiguous objectives that had not been thoroughly discussed. Furthermore, he believes that "there can be no question that the reason for this acceptance lies primarily with the exposure of the Somalia situation by the American media, above all, television."⁴⁹ The same issues are relevant with respect to the impact of the images of dead U.S. soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Did these images too drive the United States to hastily adopt policies that had not been thoroughly considered? If so, we need to consider whether media decisions about what stories to cover and how to cover them should play such an influential role in U.S. foreign policy.

Moreover, a number of researchers disagree with Cohen's contention that the media do not influence what people think, but only what they think about. Russett, for example, notes that particularly in the realm of foreign policy the public's access to alternative information sources is quite limited, so it is not possible for the public to respond to "objective international conditions." Instead, people must rely on how those conditions are interpreted for them by elites and especially by the media.⁵⁰ He and Nincic both conclude, therefore, that opinion does tend to follow the media to a fair extent, although Russett qualifies this by noting that the media can affect the direction and magnitude of change, but it may not be able to actually initiate change.⁵¹

Given that the media do appear to have a significant impact on the public, it is next essential to consider whether or not the media's coverage can be considered balanced and unbiased. While it may be important to distinguish between lack of balance and intentional bias in coverage of events, in the case of Somalia the media must bear some guilt on both counts.

Accusations of media bias during military interventions have been raised frequently over the years. Mueller finds that press coverage of military in-

volvements is generally biased, although the media's slant may be in either direction (for or against the involvement). For example, he cites several specific instances from both the Vietnam and Gulf Wars of stories unfavorable to the military that were dropped or ignored by news organizations.⁵² There is evidence of bias in media coverage during the involvement in Somalia. In this case the media shifted from being "embarrassingly enthusiastic" in their support of the mission in the early days to openly antagonistic in the later stages.⁵³ Jacqueline Sharkey and Peter Pringle both cite examples of bias, noting, for example, that as the press increasingly focused on American casualties and the ungratefulness of Somalis, it often neglected to cover adequately the human losses that the United States inflicted upon the "thankless" Somalis—losses much greater than those of Americans.⁵⁴ Even more telling, Sharkey notes that the media often ignored demonstrations in support of the United States that were occurring outside of Aideed's domain, and provided little coverage about the success of the mission in restoring normality outside of Mogadishu. Dave Marash of ABC's *Nightline* rightly concludes that "the pictures that we don't have from Somalia are as significant as the pictures that we do have."⁵⁵

There was, in general, a lack of balance in media reporting on Somalia. Media coverage focused predominantly on Mogadishu, or perhaps more correctly, on Aideed's territory in southern Mogadishu, while virtually ignoring other areas of the country. This imbalance may have been particularly important in shaping American perceptions of what, if any, benefits were resulting from the mission. For example, a review of *The New York Times* coverage of the mission, covering 66 of the 326 articles (every fifth article) that appeared between October 1, 1992 and October 31, 1993, reveals this trend.⁵⁶ From December 1992 through May 1993, 9 of the 33 articles reviewed focused on developments in small towns and rural areas. From June through October 3, 1993, however, in the 13 articles reviewed, the rural areas of Somalia are briefly mentioned only twice. References to rural areas often highlighted the positive impact the mission was having in the countryside, while the reports on the negative events in Mogadishu drew constant attention to the failures and costs of the mission. This imbalance in the coverage likely had important effects on public perceptions of the progress of the mission.

Thus, after the goal of famine relief had largely been achieved, and especially after the capture of Aideed became the primary objective of the mission, events in Mogadishu and the Aideed chase in particular became virtually the sole focus of media coverage. Aside from an occasional reference back to the earlier goals and accomplishments, the current state of affairs in the countryside—which was mostly peaceful and hence relatively uninteresting in comparison to firefights in Mogadishu—was largely ignored. As one *New York Times* correspondent wrote in August 1993,

U.S. officials insist that southern Mogadishu is an aberration, that in the rest of the country the mission is a success. . . . In any case, with a dwindled international press corps staying mainly in the

capital, what the world hears of Somalia now is primarily ambushes, angry Somali supporters of General Aidid pelting U.N. soldiers with rocks, and bickering among members of the international force.⁵⁷

Admiral Jonathan Howe, the U.N. secretary-general's special representative to Somalia from May to October 1993, confirms this trend. He argues that the United Nations recognized that the media's focus on Mogadishu was a public relations problem for the mission, and that it made numerous attempts to convince the media to cover some more positive developments outside of the capital. He reports, however, that even when free helicopter transport was offered to locations elsewhere in the country, the United Nations could find few takers among members of the media.⁵⁸

David Gergen points to one final problem of media coverage: the tendency to focus on covering events rather than on providing context and background information or analysis.⁵⁹ This trend was also apparent in the review of Somalia coverage in *The New York Times*. Analysis of every fifth article on the mission prior to the October 3 incidents reveals that they are almost entirely focused on reviewing events, while only a handful discuss the background and context of these events. Moreover, of the few that did include substantial analysis, only one article actually devoted significant attention to the background to the civil war and to the previous role of the superpowers in the region. This lack of context and analysis may have influenced the public perceptions of costs as well, in particular whether the mission was worthwhile, whether the goals were worth achieving, and whether the United States had any inherent obligations in Somalia.

While the evidence does indicate serious shortcomings in the coverage of Somalia provided by the media, it is also necessary to consider some of the constraints that news organizations faced. They may not be solely to blame for these shortcomings. In fact, the media are frequently deserving of commendation for their efforts to bring important stories that might otherwise be ignored to the attention of the public. Perhaps their most important constraint is financial: media organizations must sell newspapers or attract viewers, and if reporting on battles and atrocities rather than on quiet successes is what they must do to accomplish this, then these are the stories they will cover. In other words, the excitement-seeking and lack of depth in coverage may be driven at least as much by what the public demands as by what the media are willing to supply. The media were also constrained by limited resources, the need and desire to focus these resources on the scene of breaking stories, and the problems of security faced by everyone working in Somalia. There are certainly some clear instances of bias in coverage for which the media must take full responsibility, such as the failure to cover the pro-U.S. and U.N. demonstrations occurring in other parts of Mogadishu and the country. It is unfair, however, to simply accuse the media of wrongdoing on all counts without recognizing the demands and constraints under which they operate.

There is no consensus on what the media's responsibilities and obligations

to the public may be, or who, if anyone, can or should be responsible for seeing that they are met. Simon Serfaty notes that while the media tend to see their role as "serving as a watchdog for the public interest,"⁶⁰ they often also absolve themselves of any responsibility for educating the public on foreign affairs and tend to deny bias in their coverage. At the same time, the media's argument that they are providing what the public demands is a powerful one. Thus, the final lesson from Somalia is to recognize the need to continue to challenge the media and their impact on the public, to seek ways to balance this impact, and to provide the public with the full context of events rather than their superficial characteristics.

Conclusion

The radical changes in the international arena since the late 1980s have left the United States (like many other countries) trying to identify and clarify the principles that will guide its relationships with the rest of the world. The intervention in Somalia was initially seen as a bold step in this process, defining a new kind of mission, and a new kind of interaction between the United States and other states, including those in the Third World. The perceived "failure" of that undertaking has caused many policymakers to retreat from pursuing these new directions and move toward a new isolationism. Thomas Weiss has pointed out, however, that we tend to remember the mistakes in our new international ventures—such as those made in Somalia—while forgetting that there have also been notable successes, such as the intervention in northern Iraq in 1991.⁶¹ Policymakers must recognize that Somalia was not a total failure and that this is a time for creating new ways of interacting with the world, not a time to retreat. As Charles Petrie of the U.N. Department of Humanitarian Affairs stated, the international "train" will not stop moving just because the United States has burned its fingers and wants to get off, so if the United States does not want to get left behind, it needs to remain engaged in the events of the world, as difficult as that may sometimes be.⁶² Nor are Americans likely to remain comfortable for very long retreating into their living rooms only to observe the crises of the world. Polls today indicate that this is not what the public wants to do. Instead, the United States needs to learn the important lessons from Somalia, let these lessons inform the creation of new, more effective policies, and move on.

I have addressed here only one component of the foreign policy arena, that of public opinion, but it has been, and will continue to be, a critical component. Maintaining long-term support for humanitarian and peacekeeping missions that involve risks will never be an easy task, but it should not be seen as an impossible one. Strong leadership from the administration, and especially from the president, will always be critical to building and maintaining these coalitions of support. Furthermore, the media are increasingly playing a pivotal role, and their influence must be critically reviewed both internally and externally. We need to recognize the constraints faced by media organizations, but at the same time look for ways to ensure that the media can both meet

their own needs and serve the interests of the public and of good national decision making. The administration should develop independent criteria for foreign engagements that are less susceptible to some of the problems that arose in Somalia. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is a need to reopen public debate about the role of the United States in the world and about the meaning of the term "national interest." The present dialogue is dominated by those who interpret this term in a relatively narrow political/economic sense, but there is evidence to suggest that this may not be an accurate reflection of the views of the public. The Clinton administration appears to be backing away from this debate and accepting a narrow interpretation, but there are other alternatives. It is time for the administration to take the initiative in this debate and to establish strong and humane principles to guide the future involvement of the United States in the international arena.

Notes

1. See Thomas G. Weiss, "Overcoming the Somalia Syndrome: 'Operation Rekindle Hope?'" *Global Governance* 1 (1995): 14-19.
2. The recent NATO mission to Bosnia does not counter this trend, because although U.S. interests in the region may not be as strong as they are in other parts of Europe, they nonetheless exist if for no other reason than that close allies of the United States have strong interests there. It is worth noting, however, that PDD 25 has rarely been mentioned in the public debate about this intervention.
3. Weiss, 171-172.
4. Based on polls conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* from January 14-17, 1993 and by the Americans Talk Issues Foundation and the W. Alton Jones Foundation from March 23 to April 4, 1993. Results are aggregates of "strongly approve" and "somewhat approve" responses. The results of these polls and all others referred to in this paper are available through the Public Opinion Online service on Lexis/Nexis of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut.
5. Average results from the two polls conducted by NBC on October 6, 1993 and one by *Time*, CNN, and Yankelovich Partners Inc. on October 7, 1993.
6. John Mueller, *Wars, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973); and John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).
7. Louis J. Klarevas and Daniel B. O'Connor, "At What Cost? American Mass Public Opinion and the Use of Force Abroad," manuscript, 1994. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, Washington, DC, March 31, 1994, and at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association Midwest/Foreign Policy Analysis Section, Chicago, IL, October 29-30, 1993.
8. Based on polls conducted by Gallup, CNN, ABC, NBC, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *Time*, Yankelovich Partners Inc., the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, and the United Nations between October 8, 1993 and October 25, 1994.
9. Miroslav Nincic, "A Sensible Public: New Perspectives on Popular Opinion and Foreign Policy," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36 (December 1992): 773.
10. Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
11. Nincic, 777.
12. Gabriel A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950).

13. From a survey conducted by *Time*, CNN, and Yankelovich Partners Inc. on October 7, 1993.
14. Ole R. Holsti, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus," *International Studies Quarterly* 36 (December 1992): 447.
15. Donald L. Jordan and Benjamin I. Page, "Shaping Foreign Policy Opinions: The Role of TV News," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36 (June 1992): 227.
16. *Ibid.*, 228.
17. Ronald H. Hinckley, *Peoples, Polls, and Policymakers: American Public Opinion and National Security* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), 139.
18. Philip J. Powlick, "The Attitudinal Bases for Responsiveness to Public Opinion Among American Foreign Policy Officials," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35 (December 1991): 634-636.
19. Harry Johnston, comments made at the conference "Learning from Operation Restore Hope: Somalia Revisited," Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, April 21-22, 1995.
20. These questions are drawn from polls conducted by the following organizations: ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report*, *USA Today*, *Times Mirror*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, Gallup, Harris, Yankelovich Partners Inc., Americans Talk Issues Foundation, the W. Alton Jones Foundation, and the United Nations. The results of all of these polls are available via the Public Opinion Online service on Lexis/Nexis of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut. Because a large number of polls were used, and the figures given are often averaged across several polls that asked the same questions, in most cases I will not cite the individual sources of the responses reported here.
21. Holsti, 445.
22. John Mueller, "Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam," *American Political Science Review* 65 (June 1971): 358.
23. *Ibid.*, 368.
24. Poll conducted by Harris from January 22-26, 1993.
25. Poll conducted by *Time*, CNN, and Yankelovich Partners Inc. from January 13-14, 1993.
26. Poll conducted by Harris from December 4-8, 1992.
27. Poll conducted by Gallup and *Newsweek* from December 3-4, 1992.
28. These questions are drawn from polls conducted by ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, *Time*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, Gallup, Yankelovich Partners Inc., the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, and the United Nations between October 1993 and March 1995. The results of all of these polls are available via the Public Opinion Online service on Lexis/Nexis of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut.
29. See, for example, Weiss, 14-19; and Peter Pringle, "Horror Comes Home for GIs in Somalia," *World Press Review* 40 (December 1993): 11.
30. Mueller, "Trends," 366-367; and Mueller, *Wars*, 60-62.
31. Mueller, *Policy and Opinion*, 77.
32. Analysis conducted by the author.
33. Klarevas and O'Connor, 12-13.
34. Anthony Downs, "Up and Down With Ecology: The 'Issue-Attention Cycle'," *The Public Interest* 28 (Spring 1972): 40-41.
35. Eugene R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 25-27, 116.
36. Bruce Russett, *Controlling the Sword: The Democratic Governance of National Security* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 115-116.
37. Jordan and Page, 237.
38. Bert A. Rockman, "Presidents, Opinion, and Institutional Leadership," in *The New Politics of American Foreign Policy*, ed. David A. Deese (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 66.

39. *Ibid.*, 68.
40. Page and Shapiro, 659; cited by Rockman, 102.
41. See, for example, George Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Somalia, December 4, 1992," and "Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Situation in Somalia, December 10, 1993," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, 1992-93, Book II* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 2176, 2180.
42. See, for example, William J. Clinton, "The President's Radio Address, June 12, 1993," and "The President's News Conference, June 17, 1993," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William R. Clinton, 1993, Book I* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 840, 872.
43. Susan Rice, comments made at the conference "Learning from Operation Restore Hope: Somalia Revisited," Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, April 21-22, 1995.
44. See, for example, Mueller, *Policy and Opinion*, 74-75, for examples from the Gulf War.
45. Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13; cited in Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1972): 18.
46. See, for example, W. Lance Bennett, "The Media and the Foreign Policy Process," in *The New Politics of American Foreign Policy*, ed. David A. Deese (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 168-188; and Simon Serfaty, "The Media and Foreign Policy," in *The Media and Foreign Policy*, ed. Simon Serfaty (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 1-16.
47. Jacqueline Sharkey, "When Pictures Drive Foreign Policy," *American Journalism Review* (December 1993): 19.
48. *Ibid.*, 14.
49. *Ibid.*, 16.
50. Russett, 101.
51. *Ibid.*, 102; and Nincic, 781.
52. Mueller, *Policy and Opinion*, 74-75.
53. Andrew Kohut and Robert C. Toth, "Arms and the People," *Foreign Affairs* 73 (November/December 1994): 53.
54. Pringle, 10.
55. Sharkey, 18.
56. Analysis conducted by the author.
57. Steven A. Holmes, "The Man Who Makes Somalia Worse," *The New York Times*, August 15, 1993.
58. Jonathan Howe, comments made at the conference "Learning from Operation Restore Hope: Somalia Revisited," Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, April 21-22, 1995. Correspondent Michael Maren's response to Howe's comment was that members of the media always assumed that when the United Nations offered them a trip out of town it was because they were planning to capture Aideed that day, so the media were reluctant to accept the offer!
59. David R. Gergen, "Diplomacy in a Television Age: The Dangers of Teledemocracy," in *The Media and Foreign Policy*, ed. Simon Serfaty (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 46-63.
60. Serfaty, 11.
61. Weiss, 171.
62. Charles Petrie, comments made at the conference "Learning from Operation Restore Hope: Somalia Revisited," Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, April 21-22, 1995.

