



UN PEACEKEEPING MISSION IN SOMALIA

UN MISSION IN SOMALIA (UNOSOM-I) (1992-1993)

The geopolitical significance of Somalia can be traced back to the ancient times as it served as a commercial route of trade for exquisite products. It is located at the tip of 'Horn of Africa' and is strategically one of the most important trade routes even today. It is part of the Gulf of Aden, that forms a natural sea link between the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. The Berlin Conference of 1884 colonized the whole of Africa and Somalia (then called Somaliland) became a British Protectorate. In 1889, Italy acquired control over Eastern Somaliland and the tussle for power between the Great Britain and Italy continued until the country gained its independence. The Somali people struggled to defeat their colonisers and on 1 July 1960 the portion of Somaliland under the British and Italian Protectorates united together to form the Somali Republic. This administration lasted till 1969 when the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) took over and renamed it as Somali Democratic Republic.



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Somalia>



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The military coup of 1969, staged by General Said Barre gave way to a series of civil wars and internecine conflicts due to the changing dynamics of Cold War politics. The situation escalated with the Ogaden War of 1977 in which General Barre's government invaded Ethiopia, resulting in the latter losing its territory. Eventually, Barre's autocratic nature resulted in the other forces, i.e., Somali National Movement (SNM), Somali Salvation Democratic front (SSDF), Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) and United Somali Congress (USC) to join together, against General Barre.

The years following the Ogaden War, militant outfits like SSDF and SNM undertook guerilla operations against Barre's government. The 1977 war also served as a significant point for General Barre to assess his relation with the neighbouring states of Ethiopia and Kenya. In 1988, a peace accord was signed between Ethiopia and Somalia. However, this peace accord escalated the political situation as the anti-Barre groups retaliated, resulting in a bitter conflict. By 1991, SNM took control over the former British protectorate of Somalia and declared the 1960 federation as invalid. Amidst the continuous strain of war, there were food storages which became severe as the country was stuck by famine.

The United Nations (UN) Mission in Somalia was launched to address the inter-clan conflict that had continued for decades. The UN volunteers were already working in Somalia providing humanitarian aid to the people trapped between civil war and famine. On 23 January 1992, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 733(1992) urging the concerned parties in Somalia to end all hostilities and promote reconciliation and facilitate smooth transportation of humanitarian assistance. The UNSC also imposed an embargo on all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Somalia, under the Chapter VII of UN Charter. On 24 April 1992 under UNSC Resolution 751 (1992), the first UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM-I) was launched. It comprised of 50 military officers of different nationalities to monitor the situation. A '90-Day plan of action' was launched in association with the UN relief agencies to help people with basic amenities.

On 3 December 1992, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 794 (1992) authorizing USA to step in and take unprecedented actions to ensure humanitarian relief was delivered without any intervention. As a result, the 'Operation Restore Hope' was launched which was led by the United States of America under the United Task Force (UNITAF). An Indian Naval Task Force under Rear Admiral Sampath Pillai, comprising of INS Deepak, INS Kuthar and INS Cheetah were deployed to aid the United States of America led UNITAF. This was the first time the Indian Navy was part of any UN peacekeeping mission.¹ Unfortunately, UNITAF did not succeed in its mission due to the constant inter-clan rivalry.

¹ For the Honour of India: A History of Indian Peacekeeping, Lieutenant General Satish Nambiar, PVSM, AVSM, VrC (Retd), Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, USI, New Delhi (pg 257)



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Image of INS Deepak which was employed in the UNITAF.

Source: <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/deepak-class-fleet-tankers/>

UN MISSION IN SOMALIA (UNOSOM-II) (1993-1994)

Consequent to the failure of UNOSOM-I, on 26 March 1993, UNSC Resolution 814(1993) was passed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, establishing UNOSOM-II. This was a more stringent resolution that moved beyond the humanitarian dimension and demanded responsible deployment of forces to end the violence immediately. The mandate laid specific focus on disarmament of armed groups, facilitated the return of refugees and internally displaced people and rebuilding the Somalian society.² The Indian Army sent 66 Mountain Brigade of 20 Mountain Division to the mission in Somalia. The infantry brigade group comprised of three infantry battalions, one mechanized infantry battalion, and an independent armoured squadron, an artillery battery, an engineer company, a signal company, field ambulance and other supporting elements. This was the first mission of UN peacekeeping where the Indian contingent was accompanied by a dedicated Public Information Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Anil Shorey. The brigade group was commanded by Brigadier M.P. Bhagat with Colonel D.P Merchant as his deputy.

² The Blue Helmet Odyssey: Defining India's UN footprint. Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, New Delhi, India (pg no 21-23)



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The UNOSOM was one of the most complex and challenging operations of the UN. The primary mission of the Indian troops was to maintain a stable environment and easy passage of humanitarian aid. They were also required to assist in other activities like economic development, support in disarmament and demobilization, occupy and secure key population centres and crossroads among others. They were also deployed to facilitate negotiations between rival clans. In one such instance in Baidoa settlement the elders of different clans were facilitated by 3 MECH INF for a dialogue to resolve a dispute in which several villages being set on fire.



An Image showing a damaged building from Somalian War (1993-1994)

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unindia/28865616287/in/album-72157669659638117/>

The Indian troops were also employed in self-defence and on 15 March 1994 in retaliation to an ambush upon an Irish convoy, the Indian escorts retaliated. The convoy was escorted by troops of 5 MAHAR along the main supply route from Mogadishu to Baidoa. The Indian troops fought the militia resiliently and killed seven militiamen and captured 26 of them. The action was successful and made safe route for convoys for the following months. For their conspicuous courage, Captain Pradeep Bhatia and Subedar Dharam Singh were awarded Shaurya Chakra for gallantry.

The Indian troops achieved immense success not only in dealing with the armed conflict thereby maintaining peace and stability but also in the effective execution of humanitarian



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and civic actions. The contribution of the medical and the veterinary teams were also commendable. This was the first time in the history of Indian Army that in an UN Mission, lady doctors and women nurses were employed to take care of women and children.

The Indian troops deployed in UNOSOM-II displayed gallantry and valour of a very high order in the UNOSOM-II. The contingent was able to realize its full potential by optimally combining humanitarian and military operations. Moreover, the Indian troops furthered the process of nation building by successfully maintaining peace and harmony. They managed to build good liaison with the locals and facilitated community growth. There was a good intelligence set up created by generating knowledge of Somali culture and building good rapport with the locals.

The mandate of UNOSOM-II was terminated in March 1995, as there was no extension from the Security Council. The Indian contingent successfully accomplished the seemingly conflicting roles of coercive disarmament and humanitarian relief. They laid emphasis on peace building, community growth, and building local-cultural links.

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