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POTUS Speech Files-Somalia Action, June 12, 1993

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Somalia

Q. Why are the goals of U.S. actions in Somalia? Are we entering a quagmire?

- A. -- As I told the American people on Saturday, the objectives of our actions in Somalia are clear and finite.
- Over the past week, we have moved against forces that have contributed to the deaths of literally hundreds of thousands of people by obstructing humanitarian relief efforts.
- These same forces were responsible for the worst attack in three decades on U.N. peacekeepers, killing 23 of them. To allow this act to go unpunished would have destroyed the capacity of the United Nations to conduct peacekeeping not only in Somalia, but around the world.
- U.N. actions over the past 10 days are sending a clear message: the world will not accept the interference of armed gangs in the process of rebuilding Somalia and protecting innocent lives.
- These actions enjoy the broad support of the world. Twenty-two nations have forces participating in the action in Somalia.
- I was particularly moved by the thanks expressed to the American people yesterday by President Nujoma of Namibia. President Nujoma said that the leadership shown by the United States and later the U.N. in Somalia has ended the starvation of thousands of Africans and restored hope for the people of that country.

Q. Is the United Nations still committed to going after Aideed?

- A. -- The United Nations has now ordered the arrest of General Aideed. Aideed's actions over the past weeks have shown that he remains the principal obstacle to peace and security in Somalia.
- The focus on the capture of General Aideed should not divert our attention from the important progress achieved so far in rebuilding Somalia or from the work that remains ahead.
- Our actions over the past week have been very successful. We have destroyed vast amounts of weapons, ammunition and military vehicles while keeping to a minimum the danger to civilians.

Q: What action was taken to avoid civilian casualties in the military operation in Mogadishu?

- A: -- U.S. military planners in Mogadishu worked closely with the UNOSOM Commander to develop a plan that would minimize the risk to civilians.
- Before the air attacks started, targets were lit with floodlights and warnings were broadcast giving people ample time to clear the area.
- Planners were careful to target these facilities with weapons that are among the most accurate available.

Q: Why did the U.S. take this action by itself?

- A: -- This is not an American action; it is a United Nations action. Twenty-two countries currently have nearly 20,000 troops in Somalia in support of UNOSOM II. The U.S. has about 3,000 noncombat logistics troops and 1,100 in a quick reaction force. Pakistan has the largest contingent in Somalia. Other major troop providers in the country are France, Italy, Morocco and Belgium. Pakistan has been primarily responsible for Mogadishu, where our quick reaction force is also based. France, Italy, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey also have troops in Mogadishu.

Q: What is the Administration's reaction to the death of 20 Somali civilians at the hands of the UN contingent?

- A: -- We deeply regret the loss of life in Somalia resulting from this and other recent incidents.
- As you know, there has been a tense situation on the ground in Mogadishu that comes in the aftermath of the cold-blooded ambush by General Aideed's forces of UN peacekeepers on June 5, using civilians as a shield.
- The United Nations is conducting an investigation to determine what actually took place during the demonstrations last Sunday.
- In general, I am satisfied with how the UN operation is proceeding.

Q: Have the United States and the United Nations lost the moral high ground because of this attack, as some relief agencies have alleged?

- A: -- We should not allow the events of the last 10 days obscure the real progress that has occurred in Somalia since the engagement of the U.S. forces late last year and the introduction of the UNOSOM forces thereafter.

- As I noted on Saturday, by the time we arrived, more than 350,000 Somalis had died in a savage civil war that had caused the disintegration of Somali society. Today, crops are being planted and harvested, schools and hospitals are re-opening and refugees are returning home.
- I understand that relief organizations have criticisms of and concerns about the current UN operation in Somalia.
- The relief organizations have expressed legitimate concerns about violence. That is why UNOSOM has moved against Aideed's forces. If the relief organizations are to operate as they were before, order has to be reestablished. That is what UNOSOM is doing now.

Q: Is the UN planning to take over the administration of Somalia?

A: -- The United Nations has no desire to exercise sovereign power in Somalia. In the absence of a Somali-designated authority, however, it must carry out its humanitarian mission and protect its people from attack, as authorized in Security Council Resolutions 814 and 837.

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