

Editorial

A bloody Somali side-show

Simultaneous with Russian President Boris Yeltsin's bloody assault on the Russian parliament on Oct. 4, the United States peacekeeping forces launched a helicopter attack on the so-called Somali warlord Gen. Mohamed Farah Aideed. That evening, and throughout the week, U.S. television and many establishment newspapers saw fit to give equal or even greater coverage to the events in Somalia, than the epoch-shaping events in Moscow. In effect, this coverage helped obscure the colossal U.S. policy failure shown by the Moscow bloodbath.

Grisly photos of mutilated U.S. corpses on the TV screen, film footage of a U.S. soldier taken hostage, and pontification by government officials, dominated much of the airwaves. Typically, the media obscured the fact that the U.S. troops slaughtered an estimated 1,000 Somalis and injured another 500 in their raid.

A great number of the Somali casualties happened to be civilians, among them women and children. The State Department termed the operation a "success," because, after killing hundreds of Somalis, the Americans had managed to capture about 20 Somalis whom they claimed were "close Aideed supporters," including "three high-ranking officials," of Aideed's faction.

When U.S. President George Bush began his "Operation Restore Hope" in December 1992, he reported that its purpose was "to secure the environment that will allow food to get to the starving people of Somalia." His National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft claimed that that mission would be completed by the time of Bill Clinton's inauguration in January 1993.

Now, nearly a year later, the United States appears increasingly caught in a quagmire, while the stated, professedly humanitarian mission of Restore Hope has not been achieved.

Since the summer of 1991, some 500,000 Somalis have died of the combined effects of a war and famine caused by the combined pressure of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and governments of western Europe and the United States. We reported at the time that concrete economic measures would have to be carried

out in Somalia. They have not been.

These measures, which we called for then, must still be implemented. Included among them are:

- Food and supply warehouses must be established directly in the middle of the famine zones. Forcing tens of thousands of starving people to walk hundreds of miles to "feeding stations" is one of the hidden ways that governments and relief agencies often intentionally kill populations.

- Somalia's ravaged infrastructure must be restored. This will require an investment of billions of dollars, together with the creation of new rail, power, and water-management systems. Once known as "Aden's butcher shop" for its role in supplying animal protein to British forces in Yemen, Somalia has a vast food production potential.

According to a U.N. development program study, the region between the Juba and Shabeelle rivers now at the center of the famine, could produce enough food to sustain *50 million people*. Nearby Sudan, meanwhile, is potentially one of the great breadbaskets of the world, which could easily feed all of Africa. It is therefore also urgent that Sudan receive massive investment for this reason.

- Somalia's clearly unpayable \$2.2 billion foreign debt must be canceled, along with the \$275 billion debt of the rest of the continent, as a necessary precondition for Africa's rapid industrialization.

Throughout the 1980s then-Somali President Siad Barre repeatedly came into conflict with the IMF, arguing that its demands prevented the development of his country, particularly such projects as building dams on the Juba and Shabeelle rivers in order to increase food production. Barre was toppled in January 1991, after the IMF forced the government to cut food subsidies, leading to an increase in food prices of 200%, and after it forced the government to devalue its currency by 500%. The same IMF and U.S. policies that caused a catastrophe in Somalia are currently causing a catastrophe in Russia.