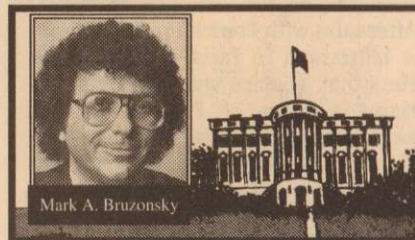


The US and the UN bungle it

If they decide they don't want to pursue peace enforcement, we...will not be able to find a solution. The confrontation that happened before will continue.... Unless you pay the price and send thousands of troops and continue the disarmament, it appears more and more that the international community is not ready.

UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali
October 1993

From



Washington

LOST IN SOMALIA

MY OLD FORMER FRIEND Boutros Ghali is right, neither the international community nor the United States is seriously ready for the kind of "peace enforcement" that Somalia would require and which the very name of Somalia has now come to represent.

Somalia, it now seems, is destined to become a major political debacle not so much for the US but for the UN.

Having tasted the bloody political cost of military intervention in a place that has no real importance for the Americans, they are just waiting for March so they can pull out.

Hunkered down spending most of their time protecting themselves, American troops are now being symbolically used to stay put for a few more months so the

Ghali himself has but thinly disguised his own desire to fight on.

"In the capital and elsewhere, major factions are rearming, apparently in anticipation of a possible return to widespread fighting sometime in 1994," Ghali warned in his report to the Security Council clearly hoping to create enough anxiety to generate support for going on without the Americans.

After all, it was Ghali himself who drew the world's attention to the starvation in Somalia in the first place, publicly complaining that while the world was focused on matters in the Balkans starving Af-

termination to enforce, the US sent in more troops, civilians in considerable numbers were repeatedly massacred from the air by US forces (claiming UN authority), and chaos reigned supreme.

That's when the uneasy commander-in-chief in Washington decided to prove American resolve by sending in the elite Ranger forces. And that's when these supposedly superbly trained troops proceeded to make one mistake after another.

First they raided buildings that were actually controlled by friends rather than foe. A lot of civilians continued to get killed. Then the Rangers attacked with

By Noel Rogers
Special to Saudi Gazette

IF THERE IS ANY NATION IN THE world worse off than Albania, other than one at war, it is difficult to imagine where it could be. The country was taken over by the communists in 1944 and until the collapse of communism, which in the case of Albania was not until March 1992, it was largely cut off from the rest of humanity. For most of this time it was under the psychotic leadership of Enver Hoxha who ruled until his death in 1985.

The world has become used to the excesses of communist dictators such as Stalin, Ceausescu, Honecker and the others that populated Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Hoxha, however, was exceptional even by the abnormal standards normally applied to leaders of these regimes.

Hoxha's rule over Albania is often described as "Stalinist" despite the fact that even Stalin felt things had been carried too far in Albania! As a consequence of ideological differences with Russia's brand of communism, Hoxha sided with the Chinese at the time of the Sino-Soviet split in 1967. It was then that he virtually sealed off the country from the rest of the world and forbade contact with the remainder of mankind.

Hoxha maintained his regime of terror by the usual communist methods of violence and intimidation. Those who opposed him were simply eliminated by the Albanian security forces, the Sigurimi, whose loyalty to their leader was as unswerving and uncritical as was their devotion to his personalised interpretation of communism. Like the Soviet Union, Albania had its prison camps where political dissidents, malcontents or others could be sent. Unlike the Soviet Union, Hoxha routinely dispatched whole families into this nightmarish existence. Subsequent generations born into captivity continued the back breaking labour of their parents under the gaze of a brutalised security service that never demonstrated the least sympathy for its victims.

The Dosti family, which had been one of the wealthiest in pre-communist Albania, suffered particularly badly. During their 47 years in internment, six of the family were married and 15 children and six grandchildren were born in the prison camps. Even the third generation was forced to endure the unspeakable horrors of what came to be known as Hoxha's Hell. There was little effort made to escape. As one prisoner summarised the situation, "at that time, freedom meant absolutely nothing to me because it was also a prison on the outside".

Victor Dosti, who is now head of an Albanian commission investigating the grievances of former political prisoners, describes his time in an internment camp as follows: "In gaol you had only yourself to worry about, but for a man to see his wife, daughter and grandchildren — everyone he loved — being beaten by every policeman around, it was quite unbearable. Your children were asking for bread and you couldn't give it to them.

ALBANIA



Jailed

Three generations of an Albanian family spend in a labor camp.

generations



Russians during the war, estimated at some 30 million, Stalin was determined that any future conflict should not be fought on Russian soil. The Soviet Union installed puppet regimes in Eastern Europe that could be relied on to carry out the orders of their masters in Moscow. As subsequent uprisings such as those in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia showed, behind every East European communist government there were Soviet tanks.

The monopoly of force in the hands of the state allowed whole nations to be intimidated. Hoxha's troops of oppression, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, operated with complete impunity secure in the knowledge that the government supported their activities. Those who opposed this regime were assassinated, imprisoned or disappeared while others simply fled the country.

As a recent book, *Albania: Who Cares* (Autumn House, England, £4.95) by BBC reporter Bill Hamilton makes clear, the present situation in Albania remains absolutely desperate. There are serious shortages of everything and virtually the whole nation is living a hand-to-mouth existence. The temperature inside a hospital visited by Hamilton during a trip he made to the provincial town of Elbasan during the winter of last year, was minus 7 degrees celsius!

Unfortunately, things are unlikely to get much better without substantial assistance from abroad. At the moment, the country survives on aid supplied by the European Community. Vast sums of money are required to renovate the

was arrested and died under torture in the local prison. The present leader of Albania's Muslims, Haxhi Hafizi Sabri Koci, was imprisoned for 21 years. "I refused to recant my faith. They tried to beat me into submission. My flesh came off piece by piece. I never saw my family. We lost 1,300 mosques completely destroyed, but now we are building again." While the people of Albania lived in appalling squalor deprived of even the

politicians back home can claim that they completed their job and that America didn't cut and run.

Contemporary Washington, with all of the problems America faces at home and with no more Cold War to justify its actions, clearly has no stomach for fighting on the streets of Mogadishu. America's preference these days is for situations where it can use overwhelming military force, totally destroy the enemy, and bring the troops home to parades and flag-waving ceremonies.

Meanwhile, the same old Somali factions are pretty much making plans to go back to their same old ways just as soon as they can. The arms bazaars are already being resurrected, the wheeling and dealing for power is all coming back to life.

Ghali's UN is also looking to save face but not quite sure how to do so without abandoning Somalia altogether. The Americans are free to do so precisely because the UN is left holding the bag. With the secretary general just having presented, on November 13, three options for when the Americans depart he has now thrown the whole bloody convoluted matter back to the Security Council.

And yet it's pretty obvious at this point that, rightly or wrongly, if the United Nations couldn't handle the situation and couldn't enforce its will with the American army's firepower, it is certainly not going to be able to do so without it.

Now if the United Nations were still an independent organisation as it at least tried to be back in the days of Dag Hammarskjöld, and even at times under U Thant, it would simply replace the American forces and continue on with its basic goals.

Indeed, if the UN weren't so bankrupt these days, both financially and politically, it would realise that there would be some important advantages in doing just that.

In terms of the UN's image the notion that the international organisation would finally be doing something without the Americans, though hardly in opposition to them, would be a big plus.

And in terms of military command structure — since the Americans always insist on having their own officers running any UN military operation in which they participate — it would be desirable to see the UN conduct an important peace enforcement operation using resources and personnel other than those allocated from Washington.

But this is hardly what's now likely to happen, though Ghali did list keeping the mission in Somalia "essentially unchanged" and replacing American forces with others as the first of his three options.

The other two options presented by the secretary general to the Security Council are to either reduce the current force of more than 26,000 troops to some 18,000, keep the humanitarian operation alive (at least for a dignified period of time) and rely on "the cooperation of the Somali parties"; or to cut back to some 5,000 troops and simply keep the sea and air ports open while maintaining a symbolic UN presence.

But it's not likely Ghali is going to get his way, having already lost the struggle with Washington. More than likely, Ghali's attempts to resurrect the image of an activist secretary general after the years of Waldheim and Perez de Cueller, may well dissolve the organisation into even more international impotence.

The end result could very well be even greater reluctance by the UN to undertake any missions other than those fully backed, and funded, by the US or its major allies.

At first a humanitarian operation, the intervention by the United Nations and the United States in Somalia last year quickly degenerated into a confused and misguided fiasco. In short, in Somalia it seems the UN is failing its first major post-Cold War test of "peace-making" quite miserably.

Not only did the Security Council fail to come forward with clear policies, and then fail to implement its decisions. Additionally the UN, mostly in the form of American military forces of course, also engaged in bloody massacres of civilians, and then — true to its nature as an inter-governmental body — did what it could to lie, distort, and cover up what had happened.

For the UN, with some 184 member states, the unwillingness of the US to ever put its military forces under UN command serves to highlight the historic tragedy that without the US there really is no UN these days.

For the US, it is on the dirt streets of Mogadishu that the Clinton administration is proving its lack of both direction and fortitude, weaving and swaying in the political wind for months and now getting ready to bring its forces home and declare a job well done.

At the moment, after just a few months ago having sent in the elite Rangers to capture Muhammad Farah Aidid and attempt to bring some political order to the anarchic situation, the American military is sitting tight, primarily protecting itself, awaiting the arbitrary deadline the White House set for departure under threat of congressional action.

Just consider for a moment the basic overall facts of what has happened in Somalia.

Responding to a humanitarian situation of gross starvation and lawlessness in its waning days, the Bush administration committed American military forces, with a United Nations mandate, to Somalia. The troops came ashore to no resistance but for the glare of television lights. Food supplies were landed, the starvation was alleviated, and much of the American force was then brought home in the opening months of the Clinton administration.

Then, last June, the UN found itself under attack and on one day some two dozen Pakistani soldiers were killed — probably by Aidid's faction which had concluded the UN was working against it.

Then all hell began to break loose. The Security Council passed various resolutions it lacked the power and de-

tremendous and overwhelming force a meeting of Aidid's people obviously trying to capture the former ambassador and general, now termed warlord and criminal. But in the end all they succeeded in doing was to kill a lot more Somalis and create more hatred of themselves.

Pictures of US soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu tremendously angered the American public of course. But more than anger, these pictures created a groundswell of questions about what the US was still doing in Somalia anyway. And when the weak Clinton administration couldn't really define the American role and stand up for it, the debate over leaving Somalia gained steam.

This all then led to the Somali mini-version of the Vietnam offensive.

Of course in the end the American military prevailed — but at such a huge cost to themselves that they were perceived to have suffered a major defeat. Something psychologically similar happened in Vietnam in 1968.

And then we all learned, after press investigations, that far fewer American soldiers would have been killed had it not been for the Ranger code of never leaving any bodies behind — dead or alive. Thus, in the attempt to extract the body of a single dead helicopter pilot the elite American military forces found themselves pinned down in a bloody day-long firefight that resulted in 18 dead, nearly 50 percent of the Ranger unit wounded, and one live hostage with his picture splashed on the front cover of all the news weeklies.

Then the UN secretary general and the Americans found themselves squabbling in public over just about everything — so much so that when the secretary general decided to again visit Somalia in October the Americans first tried to dissuade him and then weren't even told he was on his way even though during his earlier visit American troops had to rescue Ghali from threatening Somali crowds.

And then another sorry spectacle. During his very short visit to Mogadishu, the UN secretary general didn't even manage to meet one single important Somali official or even get outside the perimeter of his own forces at the airport!

As for the American military, the politicians have managed to make US forces look a bit foolish and certainly weaker than they really are.

The great American military is now sitting around in its barracks in Mogadishu spending most of its time and energy protecting itself, passing the weeks until next March when the president has said they'll all be coming home.

The way Bill Clinton and his foreign policy team have handled matters in Somalia, and by extension relations with the United Nations, raises severe questions about the foreign policy resolve and abilities of today's United States of America.

And the way Ghali and the UN have been made to look in all of this raises grave questions about the ability of the UN to seriously involve itself in matters that go beyond the debating lounges overlooking the East River.

How can anyone suffer that?" Families that have spent nearly 50 years in these camps remain in them to this day because they have nowhere else to go and the country has no money to help them.

Sadiq Poda, a Muslim, now 72, was first imprisoned when he was 23 years old. His "crime" was to have been a member of the nationalist opposition to the communists. He was at a meeting at which he shouted the slogan "down with the Red imperialists".

He still lives in Savra internment camp, now decommissioned, near the city of Lushnje in a shack which he shares with his two sons, their wives and their two grandchildren. They survive on packets of baby food provided by a British charity. He married his wife Verore in the camp when she was just 19 and he was 39 and "a sack of bones".

Despite a lifetime of suffering they have not lost their faith. "We go to bed every night and get up every morning with Allah on our lips. We're begging for God's mercy all the time."

It was Hoxha's attack on religious activity within the country that demonstrated, perhaps more than anything else, the sheer paranoia of the man. In a country where 70 percent of the population are estimated to be Muslims, all religious activity was forbidden and buildings such as mosques were destroyed. Religious figures were persecuted and imprisoned.

Mustapha Varoshi, the head of the Muslim community in the city of Durres,



Bread with dirt: Albanians under communism had been condemned to the worst form of poverty. 'Mechanised' bakeries were scenes of chaos, ABOVE, and hospitals laundries, RIGHT, did not even have space to wash and dry linen hygienically

most basic facilities, Hoxha built a ring of one million concrete pillboxes in the country to protect it against a non-existent threat from abroad. This represents enough cement to have built a decent house for every man, woman and child in the country. While the average Albanian lived a life of utter degradation and poverty, Hoxha lived a life of unimaginable luxury. At a cost of millions he built a museum to himself that was to become a repository for artifacts associated with his regime and a final testament to his egomania.

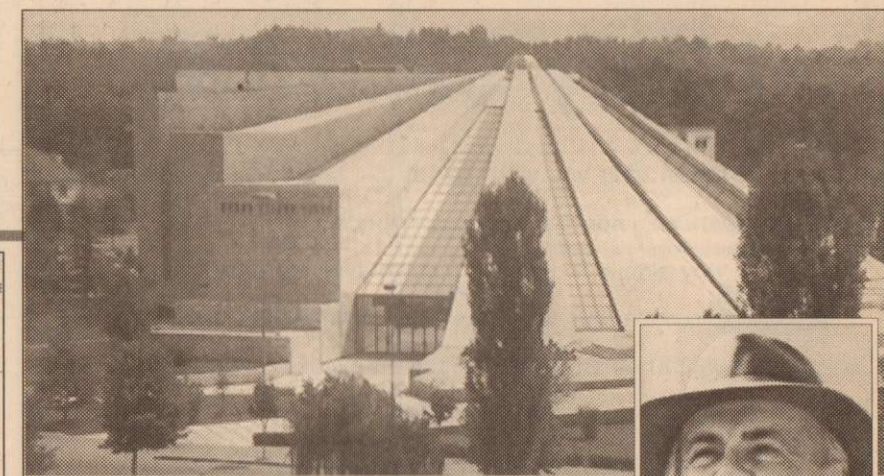
Why did people put up with it? The answer is, of course, that they didn't but they had little choice in the matter. Following the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945, the Allied leaders partitioned Europe where their armies met. The dividing line was Germany where the Russian land forces advancing from the east came face to face with American and British forces advancing from the West. The dividing line between these two conquering armies became known, in Winston Churchill's phrase, as the "Iron Curtain".

After the appalling losses suffered by the

country's obsolete industrial infrastructure, such as it is.

Despite all the difficulties, Sali Berisha, Albania's democratically elected Prime Minister, has made a start at reforms. A recent survey conducted throughout Europe showed that people in Albania were the most optimistic about their future. Given their past that is scarcely surprising.

The biggest cloud on the horizon is the future of Kosovo which was partitioned from Albania in a peace settlement in 1912. This Serb-occupied enclave, where about 1.5 million Muslims of Albanian extraction are under the control of a minority of some 200,000 Serbs, looks set to go the way of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Already, extreme Serbian nationalists have succeeded in forcing some half a million ethnic Albanians to leave. At the same time, they are encouraging their own brethren to settle in Kosovo. Serbian nationalism has already created havoc in one part of former Yugoslavia. There is little stopping it from wreaking as much havoc in another. If that happens, the Albanian people will once again be plunged into the heart of darkness.



Millions for the megalomaniac: While the treasury was empty for the people, Enver Hoxha, INSET, built a museum, ABOVE, to perpetuate his name. Albanians today need international help to rebuild their devastated country

