

UN'S FIRST MASSACRE

WHETHER ANYTHING OF this kind has happened before in modern history I can't be completely sure in the heat of the moment.

A few days will be needed to see if anyone comes up with any similar examples of what has just happened on the streets of Mogadishu going back to the founding of the United Nations after World War II, or for that matter in the years of the League of Nations before that.

But I would bet not.

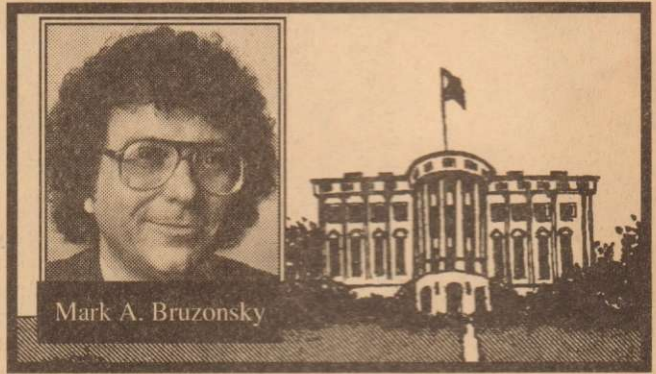
Having spent three years at the UN myself representing the International Student Movement for the United Nations, plus having got a Masters in international affairs at Princeton where I studied the history of the UN and international organisations, I think we are dealing with something totally new.

The UN is now extending itself in ways quite unprecedented, with the Western nations, especially the US, using the international body in novel ways.

So at this moment, as I write, it does seem that a significant and terribly tragic historic "first" has just occurred — the first time that blue-helmeted troops operating under a United Nations imprimatur have committed a civilian massacre and then proceeded to attempt to lie and cover-up the deed.

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From



Mark A. Bruzonsky

Washington



Bill Clinton



Boutros Ghali

SELF-RIGHTEOUS JUSTIFICATION

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For the actual massacre itself in which it now appears at least 20 persons might have been killed, another 50 badly injured, was terrible enough. Heavily armed soldiers in fortifications with automatic weapons fired at point-blank into a civilian demonstration. There was no warning, there was no attempt to scatter the crowd by firing over their heads, there was no use of tear-gas.

Such actions have all the hallmarks of what would be called "massacres" had they happened in other places by others to others.

But the lame excuses that followed; the blatant misrepresentations and distortions, if not outright lies, engaged in by officials of the UN bureaucracy and the US government; the "cover-up", if you will — these are what has made this whole episode even more outrageous.

Listening to the UN under-secretary responsible for "peace-keeping", along with the US ambassador to the UN, Madelaine Albright, the past few days — these two officials trotted out in front of the media to explain away what happened — has been most depressing. For now the international community itself under authority of the United Nations is engaging in the same kinds of deceptions and public opinion chicanery that we have all watched various nation-state governments perform in the past. The UN it seems is truly an organisation of nation-states, not one of the people.

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Now just what is really in contention here?

The issue is *not* whether or not attacking "warlord" Muhammad Farah Aidid's weapons stores was a good idea; not whether attempting to provoke Aidid's fighters made much sense; not whether taking on Aidid in the first place was wise; and not whether something had to be done to "retaliate" for the clandestine attack that killed many UN soldiers earlier this month and for which Aidid has been said to be responsible.

All of these issues are other matters. And all of these other matters can be legitimately discussed and debated.

But the two major issues that should be in contention are:

■ Should UN troops have been authorised to shoot to kill into a crowd of demonstrating civilians without warning, without teargas, without any serious attempts at crowd control?

And:

■ Once this "massacre" had occurred what should have been done by UN and US officials?

The answer to the first contention should be a simple and firm *no* — and the only good outcome that can come from all this bloodshed is for nothing like this to ever be allowed again.

All over the world police and military forces train in non-legal crowd control and use teargas along with other non-killing methods of dispersing demonstrations and preventing danger to themselves.

In this particular case, it should be underscored that not

a single Pakistani soldier was injured on the day of the "massacre". Furthermore the on-scene press has reported that the excuses given by the Pakistani soldiers that armed Somalis were hidden in the demonstration and shooting at them do not seem to have been the case.

And this brings us to the second contention; what should have been done by ranking UN and US officials.

And the answer here is that immediately instructions should have been sent to UN forces to cease shooting at civilians, to only use non-lethal forms of crowd control, and to always fire warning shots even in the most extreme cases.

Furthermore UN and US officials should have immediately required the Pakistani and US commanders in Mogadishu to fully report on exactly what had occurred while at the same time immediately dispatching an investigative team.

But this is not what happened.

It was only days later that there were the most grudging comments from Secretary General Boutros Ghali and President Bill Clinton about the civilian deaths.

It's quite clear in retrospect that the UN was totally unprepared for street demonstrations even though it didn't require much insight that things like this were bound to take place if the UN-US forces started attacking Somalis — whether in the forces of General Aidid or anyone else.

Secondly UN and US officials apparently lacked both the judgment and the strength of character to immediately reprimand the Pakistani forces and immediately insist on a full investigation and disciplinary action against those forces involved. The Pakistani government was even worse. The day after the "massacre" the government in Islamabad was still publicly denying that any civilians had been killed and a government spokesman was quoted as saying that "our troops are under instructions not to fire at any unarmed civilians and they never do it".



■ This week's column was to be a follow-up to the previous one I wrote about "Clinton and Gergen". But this "little" UN massacre got in the way and I felt compelled to focus on it this week. So, next week, back again to the Washington game and the new political duet being done by Democrat Bill Clinton and Republican David Gergen.

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