America Again Shows Lack of Global Leadership

In a column last week ["U.S. Can Shape the World for the Better," Oct. 5] I argued that the United States today occupies a unique position on the world stage. We have the opportunity, and the ability, to provide needed leadership to alleviate suffering and foster democracy worldwide. Unfortunately, recent developments in Somalia have shown that America has consistently failed to take advantage of this opportunity wisely, and is instead practicing the misguided, mismanaged, and sometimes unethical interventionism that has historically plagued our foreign policy. Political and commercial gains are providing the impetus for a process that, by its nature should be evaluated solely on social implications. While we cannot afford to be protectionist and nationalist, we also cannot afford this abuse of our power.

In Somalia, Operation Restore Hope began with noble intentions. America, a prosperous and powerful country, along with the other nations of the world, acted to help relieve the effects of a disastrous famine. We intended to practice the novel concept of humanitarian intervention, a paradoxical and potentially dangerous use of force to produce peace.

The intervention decision begs the question, "Why Somalia?" What does Somalia have that other countries lack, that makes it the first choice for relief? Yes, Somalia has famine, but so do Sudan and other nations. Liberia, Chad, and countless other countries undergoing post-colonial growing pains have problems just as severe as Somalia's. If the relief of human suffering were the only motive for American action, there would be no argument as to the validity of this policy.

Below the surface, however, lurk darker reasons. Two such motives are, unfortunately, oil and publicity. Before the tribal warfare erupted, American oil companies had lucrative contracts which they will doubtlessly lay claim to once a new government is established. And American interest in Somalia, as with most other events, was pegged by high levels of media exposure. Journalism is very useful as a vehicle for the swift, accurate reporting of important information, but publicity should never dictate foreign policy, as it has more and more so in this modern Information Age.

Another driving force of the quasi-imperial U.S. foreign policy until recently was the struggle between the superpowers. Aid to countries such as Angola was justified more by the net effect on Soviet influence in the region than on any goodwill considerations.

Unfortunately for the Somalis, they are neither photogenic nor oil rich, and they are not being attacked by Communists. Thus, in accordance with a one-sided commercially and politically driven policy that provided the real justification for action in Granada, Nicaragua, and Kuwait, Bosnia and other "unpopular" nations are doomed to solve their problems without U.S. help.

In Somalia, the humanitarian intentions were further soured by the battles and skirmishes between United Nations (mainly American) "peacekeepers" and the forces of now-fugitive warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid, whose soldiers have killed peacekeepers and captured, but fortunately recently released, a prisoner. While such actions are deplorable, we need to ask how much of this is more the result of our sometimes brutal armed presence than any antagonistic intentions on Aidid's part. It is important also to realize that the United States was a major contributor to the situation that prompted the current economic and political disaster in Somalia.

Recently, the Clinton administration's waffling on the issue of Aidid has only made the situation worse. The President's speeches about pursuing the warlord conflict state-ments made by special envoy Robert Oakley, who Thursday called for an informal truce in the situation worse. The President's speeches warrant the precarious nature of the American commitment. This equivocation leaves other nations unclear as to the United States' ultimate objectives, both in Somalia and around the world.

It is obvious to the entire world community that the global political climate is changing rapidly. It is equally obvious that the United States has the potential to provide productive, decisive leadership to shape the future of humankind. Recently, however, it has become painfully obvious that we are not, or will not, provide such leadership, and will instead continue to cater to political and commercial interests.

Can you spot the PCSI employee in this picture?

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