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Somalia (1992): The War Zone and Famine

Author(s)

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Description

An article about Fred Cuny's work in Somalia and his plans for disaster relief.

Body

Fred Cuny: 1992, Somalia

It was 1992, and the country of Somalia was becoming a full-fledged war zone. The "scorched earth" policies of the warring clans in Somalia caused a famine. When relief workers attempted to bring food in, one of the clans would burn it to prevent it from falling into the hands of their enemies. The U.S. indicated an interest in getting involved and aiding the famine-stricken.

Fred Cuny studied the situation and decided the best strategy would be to avoid working in Mogadishu, the capital city. He wanted to create a "zone of tranquillity" away from the capital. Cuny believed that it was best to stay away from the cities because it was too difficult to give aid in such a chaotic setting. However, the U.S. government decided to they would try to solve the problem by landing in Mogadishu and restoring order there. Cuny needed to decide whether or to offer his expertise to the government in carrying out their plan or continue campaigning for his own.

For Fred Cuny, it was an easy call. He felt the government's plan was dangerous, so he wrote op-ed articles in many major U.S. newspapers carefully spelling out his plans. But the U.S. government ignored the disaster relief expert and went into Mogadishu anyway. The expedition was a huge failure, with several Americans being killed and the famine still going strong after they left. It was not a happy situation for anyone involved, but once again Cuny demonstrated the depth of his understanding of relief efforts and what is needed to make them effective.

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Topics

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Engineering