

A political statement?



Mark Steckbeck holds up his state of Virginia vanity license plate reading "GOVT SUX." After the state canceled the plates, Steckbeck filed suit claiming violation of free speech.

STANDOFF IN SOMALIA

Aidid 'uncooperative,' violates truce

The Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia — The Somali security chief for the CARE aid agency was killed Monday when U.N. peacekeepers fired on gunmen who attacked them in territory controlled by Mohamed Farrah Aidid.

The attack was the fourth on foreign troops in as many days and suggested that Aidid's month-long truce with U.N. forces seemed to be crumbling.

A spokesman for the U.S. force in Somalia criticized Aidid as being "uncooperative" and said the United States was sticking by plans to put American forces back on Mogadishu's streets.

Aidid, whose followers control southern Mogadishu, had been clashing with the United Nations since June, when the United Nations blamed him for the deaths of 24 Pakistani peacekeepers. After four months of fierce battles with U.N. forces, he declared a truce Oct. 9.

Some people have speculated that Aidid was trying to buy time until the United States withdraws from Somalia in March.

Aidid has been known to strike back when his power seems to be waning. And at a news conference Sunday, he made it clear that the old acrimony toward the multinational mission had not dissipated.

He vowed not to negotiate with the United Nations, and on Monday, his Somali National Alliance boycotted two U.N.-sponsored meetings: one to discuss how to improve the city's security, the other to meet face-to-face with the faction headed by Ali Mahdi Mohamed, which controls Mogadishu's northern half.

The United States has been bending over backwards to meet some of the requests by the Somalia National Alliance, U.S. military spokesman Col. Steve Rausch said Monday. "We are disappointed. They seem uncooperative."

He did not specify what requests Aidid's faction made.

At his news conference Sunday, Aidid said there could be trouble if U.S. troops return to the streets after a six-month hiatus. On Monday, confrontation edged closer when Rausch reaffirmed that Army reinforcements soon will be venturing beyond their compounds.

"You will see an increased presence," he said, adding a warning of his own about the repercussions of Americans coming under fire: "These forces are very capable. They are very lethal."

The United States has pushed back the starting date for joint checkpoints and patrols with forces from other countries. When the Americans moved into their new base outside the capital a week ago, officials talked about a couple of days. Now they say a couple of weeks.

Americans have been off Mogadishu's streets since May, when the United States handed over command of the multinational mission to the United Nations.

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