



Threat and Hazard Components of Somalian Famine: A Case Study

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This white paper is designed to provide analysis of relevant, publicly available information on threat and hazard events/trends and their potential impacts to the interests of the United States, both at home and abroad. This product is not intended to be an all-encompassing assessment of the subject.

Introduction

The discussion and analysis of risk often falls into one of two categories: threat or hazard. Simply put, threats are deliberate while hazards are accidental. For example, a cyber attack is a threat while a HAZMAT spill is a hazard. However, there are times when broader trends or events in risk analysis involve both threats and hazards. The intermingling of man-made threats with naturally occurring hazards is a potent combination often leading to increasingly severe consequences. The Somalian famine will be examined as a case study to highlight the intermingling of these factors, exacerbating a dangerous situation.

Somalia has faced famine before, most recently in 1992 and 2011. The 2011 famine saw an estimated 260,000 deaths. The current famine is the worst seen there in 50 years. An estimated 7.8 million people are currently affected by the ongoing drought, 210,000+ of which are considered at 'high risk' of famine. Furthermore, 640,000 children are acutely malnourished. The UN estimates 3.2 million Somalis need immediate life-saving assistance. In seeking to understand this crisis, there are multiple threats and hazards that must be addressed. Drought, climate change, and land use are all hazards contributing to the current situation. Additionally, the impacts of political, military, and terrorist groups must be considered.

Drought

In the midst of its fifth failed rainy season in a row, Somalia's drought conditions have intensified the country's crises of impoverishment, mass displacement, and violence. Increases in weather extremes, exacerbated by climate change, have made Somalia particularly vulnerable to years of drought. While droughts occurred about once per decade before the 1990s in the region, they started to occur every other year or in some years consecutively in the past 20 years. Also, over the past 20-year period, Horn of Africa countries have dried at their fastest rate since more than 2,000 years ago.^{1,2}

While Somalia is an insignificant contributor to climate change, as the nation releases less than .03% of total global emissions, the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index's 2020 data deemed Somalia the 2nd most vulnerable country to the impacts of climate change in the world. Somalia is particularly susceptible to climate change due to its geographical setting, as over 80% of its land is considered Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALS). The region has encountered an increase in soil erosion, a decrease in soil moisture retention, and declining soil fertility levels. Therefore, while more than 70% of Somalia's GDP relies on the agriculture and livestock sectors, drought intensified by climate change has reduced the capacity of land to support plant and animal life. As a result, Somalia has encountered barren harvests, depleting livestock, and limited water supply. These impacts have led some researchers to find potential evidence of a causal relationship between drought and local violent conflict in the case of Somalia. Based on Somalia's projected rise in temperature by 2050, open-source research indicates that drought and intergroup conflict could continue to increase in the country. Ultimately, per UNICEF's Humanitarian Situation Report for Somalia, as of 31

October 2022, an estimated 6.4 million people are dealing with acute water shortages, and more than one (1) million people have been displaced due to the drought.^{3,4,5,6,7}

Land Use

In addition to drought in the region, deforestation has contributed to the crises in Somalia. Open-source research indicates that when the Government of Somalia collapsed in 1991, the illegal, unrestricted production of charcoal rapidly increased. The illicit trade in charcoal has decimated plant life, such as acacia trees, which play a significant role in Somalia's hot and arid climate. These trees improve soil fertility by storing water and reducing surface run-off and soil erosion during the rainy season.⁸

Furthermore, overgrazing and farming issues in Somalia, which have been intensified by drought, have contributed to the country's ongoing issues. For instance, livestock remains in specific pasture areas for too long when rains are delayed or insufficient; however, families typically migrate and leave for greener pastures without sufficient time for regrowth when rain occurs. As a result, pasture lands become incredibly rivalrous, especially since Somalia's Federal Government does not fully control many areas where pastoral people reside and graze their animals. In addition, farming issues in Somalia have contributed to the ongoing food insecurity crisis. Open-source research suggests crop production has suffered in the country due to pests damaging crops, poor transportation, and looting. Furthermore, many farmers in Somalia have high post-harvest crop losses due to poor storage structures and inadequate access to pesticides and crop chemicals. Similar to the country's experience with drought, these issues may intensify due to climate change.^{9,10}

Politics

According to international aid workers, climate change is the major contributing factor responsible for the fifth failed rainy season in a row for impacted nations within the Horn of Africa. The consequences of this severe drought, the global COVID-19 pandemic, along with years of enduring an insurgency by Islamist extremists have placed a significant burden upon the people of Somalia. In addition to these contributing factors, hunger has worsened due to the soaring cost of grain, fuel, and fertilizer following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Somalia relies heavily upon both Russia and Ukraine for 90% of its wheat. This is further complicated by price increases of basic commodities to as high as a 160%.¹¹

The much-needed decision to declare a famine, which is usually made jointly by the government and the United Nations, has been drastically delayed. In September, the newly elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud admitted that the prospect of famine in parts of Somalia were serious. However, a famine declaration could be politically contentious for his leadership as governments view this as a blemish upon their rule and an opportunity for opponents to point to a failure of governance and inability to provide basic protection. Aid workers in Somalia plainly indicate President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's reluctance to declare famine will damage public support and play directly into the hands of the al-Shabaab

terrorist group. The Somali government also fears a famine declaration could dissuade current and future investors and possibly divert foreign aid aimed for long-term development projects to the famine crisis response.^{11,12,13}

The U.S. recently decided to redeploy almost 700 ground forces to Somalia to train the Somalian military to counter the growth of al-Shabaab insurgency. The Biden administration believes that a persistent presence of U.S. forces in the country will help the Somalian military make more gains against al-Shabaab than they have made in the past year. The African Union (AU) has continuously kept forces in the country with the same goal as the U.S. and international aid organizations continue to work in Somalia, but as al-Shabaab influence grows, it makes it harder for them to distribute life-saving aid and famine relief.¹⁴

Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab was formed in the early 2000s and has quickly established itself a local and regional threat to Somalia and Horn of Africa nations like nations Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya. From its beginning, the terrorist group has made significant gains; however, as AU and western forces entered to mitigate its growing security threat, the insurgency was forced from major population areas. Al-Shabaab has several goals, primarily being to establish an Islamic State in Somalia and oppose any secular or Western-backed government. The group is principally located in Somalia, having established strongholds in the southern and central districts of the country. Al-Shabaab continues to gain control in the north, ultimately advancing its role of becoming the significant security threat within the Horn of Africa.^{15,16,17}

In January 2022, al-Shabaab announced that it would start a “drought relief” campaign in an effort to help Somalis and boost their insurgency campaign. This action contradicts their taxing efforts because while they are simultaneously exacerbating the drought and famine, al-Shabaab is attempting to solve the problem in an attempt to gain support from the public. This campaign by al-Shabaab has made no difference in mitigating the famine. Al-Shabaab continues its previous 2009 practice of banning several international aid groups from the region, though some sub-groups have attempted to permit aid recently. Currently, six (6) districts encompassing over 250,000 people are at high risk of famine in Somalia. 72 out of the 84 districts within the country are impacted directly by three consecutive unsuccessful crop production and rainy seasons, leaving the country at its driest in 40 years and forcing over 500,000 people to relocate. In 2011, an estimated 250,000 Somali deaths were attributed to famine. Ultimately, food insecurity for over six million people has left international aid organizations scrambling to provide food to malnourished individuals.^{18,19}

The famine crisis has managed to weaken al-Shabaab, but it currently controls the majority of the most fertile areas of land in the country that include both the Jubba and Shabelle rivers. It is estimated that the terrorist group collects nearly as much tax revenue every year as the entire government of Somalia through sophisticated networks making countering this issue that much more difficult. There was a faction of insurgents that announced they were pulling out of Mogadishu, but the reports as of recent clearly indicate pockets of al-Shabaab

presence remain in Mogadishu, and insurgents have been conducting attacks against the AU peacekeeping forces.^{20,21,22,23}

Outlook

The multi-factor nature of this crisis serves as a potent case study in risk analysis. Each hazard and threat contributing to this humanitarian crisis will grow or shrink independently, developing over different time frames. Recovery from the drought alone will take years, even if the next rainy season does not fail. The growth or regression of al-Shabaab is impossible to accurately predict. Just last week, al-Shabaab recaptured several strategic locations but appeared to have abandoned a town that had been occupied for decades. Furthermore, these threats and hazards are not confined by national borders. Other nations in the region are suffering from the same hydrological cycle changes and man-made patterns. The residents suffering physically, emotionally, or financially will be impacted for decades to come. Those displaced will have unique needs and journeys across the globe, potentially placing strain on inadequate refugee systems. This case study aims to convey the complexity of large-scale disasters. While complex, analysis is necessary to address each hazard and threat component. Understanding the numerous timelines, scales of impact, and interrelated nature of factors will all serve to aid in recovery and support.

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