

FAMINE IN SOMALIA OUGHT TO LEAD US TO RETHINK WAR ON TERROR

In the US, most of the news on Somalia in recent days has focused on the war on terror. First, there was the arrest of alleged al-Shabaab figure Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame. Then there was Jeremy Scahill's important piece on the CIA's black site in Somalia. And then the push to conflate al-Shabaab with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula with al Qaeda.

Somalia, you see, is all about the war on terror.

Except that it's also the focal point of what the UN has now declared is a growing famine in the Horn of Africa.

Which really ought to make us question our priorities globally.

Check out the list of factors behind the famine.

The current crisis in southern Somalia is driven by a combination of factors:-

- *The total failure of the October-December Deyr rains (secondary season) and the poor performance of the April-June Gu rains (primary season) have resulted in crop failure, reduced labor demand, poor livestock body conditions, and excess animal mortality*
- *Local cereal prices*

across the south are far above average, more than 2 to 3 times 2010 prices in some areas, and continue to rise. As a result, both livestock to cereal and wage to cereal terms of trade have deteriorated substantially. Across all livelihoods, poor households (~30 percent of the population) are unable to meet basic food needs and have limited ability to cope with these food deficits

- During July, FSNAU conducted 17 representative nutrition and mortality surveys across southern Somalia; results are available for 11 surveys. The prevalence of acute malnutrition exceeds 20 percent in all areas and is higher than 38 percent (with severe acute malnutrition higher than 14 percent) in 9 of the 11 survey areas. The highest recorded levels of acute malnutrition are in

Bay, Bakool, and Gedo (agropastoral) where the GAM prevalence exceeds 50 percent. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has verified these findings

- Population-wide death rates are above the famine threshold (2/10,000/day) in two areas (Bakool agropastoral, and all areas of Lower Shabelle) and are elevated across the south. Under-5 death rates are higher than 4/10,000/day in all areas of the south where data is available, peaking at 13-20/10,000/day in riverine and agropastoral areas of Lower Shabelle. Tens of thousands of people have died in the past three months.¹

One of these issues—the 2-300% increase in cereal prices—can be tied at least partly to commodity speculation, the gambling over foodstuffs that helps companies like Goldman Sachs get richer.

And the part of that price increase that doesn't come from commodity speculation—that is, the part of that price increase tied to real market issues—derives largely from catastrophic weather. The failed rains in East Africa are just one part of that. More important to the world market are the drought and fires in Russia and the floods in Australia. And while we can't prove that the last year's freakish weather is a very tangible sign that climate change has started to affect our day-to-day life, there's little doubt that climate change is a big part of it.

Now, you can't actually separate al-Shabaab's presence in Somalia from its famine; the absence of a functioning government, after all, is what leads to famine. And al-Shabaab's presence makes it more difficult for aid organizations to work.

But it's unclear that launching drone strikes on Somalia is the best way we can help them. It's probably not even within the top 10. And whatever our counterterrorism presence in Somalia, focusing on that—but not on the financial and behavioral things the developed world does that exacerbates this crisis—ignores some of the most important underlying causes.