

SOMALIA'S UNSPOKEN ARMED CONFLICT: NATURE'S WAY OF SHIFTING COMBAT

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I. CLIMATE CHANGE'S UNSPOKEN RELATIONSHIP WITH ARMED CONFLICT

Climate change is the largest existential threat facing our generation. Unlike “bad weather” which tends to create localized disruptions for a small period of time, climate change is the culmination of sustained actions that has led to a measured change in local weather patterns.¹ Climate change can be natural; however, the recently measured climate changes can be linked to human actions.² Climate change is not contained to a single continent or region; rather, it can be found all across the Earth making it something that we all have to live with.³

When one talks about climate change, the dialogue tends to focus on how it has negatively impacted the local and regional environment. The dialogue also discusses how climate change has impacted and will impact cities and economies down the road.⁴ The dialogue focuses on these two things because changes in environments and the development and maintenance of cities and economies have first, second, and third-order effects that can shape millions if not billions of lives.⁵ These conversations are important, but another conversation needs amplifying: climate change and armed conflict.

II. TYPES OF ARMED CONFLICT WITHIN INTERNATIONAL LAW

What exactly is armed conflict? Armed conflict can be bifurcated into two separate realms: international armed conflict (IAC) and non-

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¹ *What is Climate Change?*, UNITED NATIONS, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change> (last visited Aug. 21, 2022).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ See Heather Leighton, *How Climate Change is Going to Affect Cities, Urban Spaces*, RICE UNIVERSITY (Sept. 19, 2019), <https://kinder.rice.edu/urbanedge/2019/09/03/how-climate-change-going-change-cities-urban-spaces>.

⁵ See Prashant Kumar, *Climate Change and Cities: Challenges Ahead*, FRONTIERS (Feb. 25, 2021), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frsc.2021.645613/full>.

international armed conflict (NIAC).⁶ IACs occur when two sovereign states begin to fight one another, like Ukraine fighting against Russia.⁷ An example of NIAC would be the United States fighting the Taliban fighting in Afghanistan.⁸ Within the sphere of international law, the Geneva Conventions helm a small contingent of treaties that aid in governing and shaping how the aforementioned armed conflicts are to be waged.⁹ There really is no specific threshold that must be achieved to determine if an “armed conflict” is occurring. Instead “under Common article 2 to the Geneva Conventions the two determining factors are: (1) the legal status of the belligerent parties to the conflict (normally States), and (2) the nature of the military confrontation between them (e.g. declared war, partial or total occupation of the territory of a State party to the Geneva Conventions).”¹⁰ Like climate change, armed conflict is ubiquitous to Earth. It has touched almost every continent and its first, second, and third-order effects continue to shape daily whole swathes of civilization.

Climate change does not necessarily create new armed conflicts per se; rather, it exacerbates pre-existing tensions that exist within a state(s) or region(s).¹¹ This exacerbation leads to new forms of armed conflict in a different way. Recent studies have shown that states that currently have conflict tend to be less capable of handling the environmental issues that are occurring because the conflict displaces people and resources.¹² The maelstrom from these combined winds of change has proven to be

⁶ *Classification of Armed Conflicts*, GENEVA ACADEMY OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS, <https://www.rulac.org/classification#collapse3accord>, (Apr. 21, 2017).

⁷ See Steve Hendrix, et. al., *Amid Ukraine’s startling gains, liberated villages describe Russian troops dropping rifles and fleeing*, WASH. POST (Sept. 11, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/11/kharkiv-liberated-retreat-izyum-russia/>.

⁸ See James Stavridis, *I Was Deeply Involved in War in Afghanistan for More Than a Decade. Here’s What We Must Learn*, TIME (Aug. 21, 2021), <https://time.com/6090623/afghanistan-us-military-lessons/>.

⁹ See Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, Aug. 12 1949, 75 U.N.T.S. 31 [hereinafter First Geneva Convention]; Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea, Aug. 12 1949, 75 U.N.T.S. 85 [hereinafter Second Geneva Convention]; Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Aug. 12 1949, 75 U.N.T.S. 135 [hereinafter Third Geneva Convention]; Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Aug. 12 1949, 75 U.N.T.S. 287 [hereinafter Fourth Geneva Convention].

¹⁰ *Categorization of Armed Conflict*, UNITED NATIONS OFF. ON DRUGS & CRIME, <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/terrorism/module-6/key-issues/categorization-of-armed-conflict.html> (last visited Mar. 15, 2023).

¹¹ *Climate and Conflict*, UNFCCC SECRETARIAT (July 12, 2022), <https://unfccc.int/blog/conflict-and-climate>.

¹² INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS, WHEN RAIN TURNS TO DUST: UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO THE COMBINED IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICTS AND THE CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT CRISIS ON PEOPLE’S LIVES 8–12 (2020) https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/topic/file_plus_list/rain_turns_to_dust_climate_change_conflict.pdf.

exceptionally deadly, especially in Africa where its effects are the most visceral.¹³ We can see these effects in Somalia.

III. SOMALIA'S INTERNAL ISSUES PREVENT PROGRESS

Somalia is a coastal state occupying most of the Horn of Africa on the eastern section of the African continent.¹⁴ Somalia encompasses a large portion of the continent and is home to over 12 million citizens.¹⁵ Somalia's economic structure is not diverse, leading the state to heavily rely on its agricultural and telecommunications businesses.¹⁶ What does this mean for the citizenry? The lack of diversity requires Somalia to be over reliant on these industries, so if famine or harm occurred to the agricultural sector, it could cripple the state and deepen socioeconomic issues.

Outside of the economic issues, Somalia remains devastated by generational NIACs.¹⁷ Stemming from the overthrow of a military junta in the late 1980s, Somalia has seen armed conflict touch every corner of the state and has had a regional spillover effect into neighboring states.¹⁸ Further, Somalia is home to a powerful terrorist organization – Al-Shabab – that has caused many acts of domestic and transnational terrorism and remains a present threat today to regional security.¹⁹ Currently, the state of Somalia is fractured into different regions of governance where in the northern region exists an autonomous region called “Somaliland” which is not formally recognized by foreign states and still resides within Somalia.²⁰ Somalia's government faces legitimacy issues as Al Shabab remains a primary threat because it remains able to provide economic support and stability in places Somalia's government cannot.²¹ Multiple attempts have been made by foreign states and international organizations of trying to intervene and bring

¹³ Press Release, World Meteorological Organization, State of Climate in Africa Highlights Water Stress and Hazards (8 Sept. 2022), <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/state-of-climate-africa-highlights-water-stress-and-hazards>.

¹⁴ *Somalia*, CIA (Jan. 11 2023), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/somalia/>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Non-international Armed Conflict in Somalia*, GENEVA ACADEMY OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS (Nov. 10, 2022), <https://www.rulac.org/browse/conflicts/non-international-armed-conflict-in-somalia#collapse2accord>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Somalia/Somaliland: The Differences and Issues Explained*, ACTIONAID UK (2022), <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/somaliland/somalia-somaliland-differences-explained>.

²¹ Claire Kaubista, et. al., *Al-Shabaab: Backgrounder*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS (Dec. 6, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabaab>.

order and help to the state and its citizens.²² Governing and creating solutions in Somalia are not easily done and any outside actions that exacerbate the domestic tensions make resolving these issues seem a distant hope.

Unfortunately, Somalia has been victim to issues of climate change in the past couple of years that have compounded the already pre-existing issues.²³ First, during the years of 2016 and 2017, Somalia was afflicted with the most severe drought in its history and was named *Sima*, meaning “equal” in Somali, as locals state that the drought has harmed all socioeconomic classes equally.²⁴ The drought stems from Somalia falling behind on its annual rainfall percentages for multiple years thus crippling the agricultural sector of its economy and creating widespread famine.²⁵ It was estimated that because of the drought more than a quarter of a million people died and more than 6.2 million people faced crises during the drought.²⁶ This drought nearly eliminated the pastoral communities that act as one of the bedrock occupational communities for Somalian citizens.²⁷

The drought *Sima* harmed all facets of Somalian life from its governance structure at both the national and local levels, to its economy, and exacerbated tensions amongst the local tribal communities.²⁸ The scarcity of food and water and the displacement of peoples throughout the country make it difficult for the government to recover and the international community has come in to assist.²⁹ However, *Sima* laid the foundation for the next issue: locusts.

In 2019, the delayed rains in Somalia created an environment for the arrival of massive swarms of locusts.³⁰ It is considered the worst outbreak of

²² *Id.*

²³ *Timeline: Breaking Down More than a Decade of Drought*, CONCERN USA (Oct. 22, 2022), <https://www.concernusa.org/story/somalia-drought-timeline/>; see also Press Release, ReliefWeb, As Climate Change Strains Somalia's Path to Peace, Communities Hold the Key (July 14, 2022), <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/climate-change-strains-somalias-path-peace-communities-hold-key>.

²⁴ *A Drought So Severe It has a Name*, INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (Sep. 26, 2019), <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/drought-so-severe-it-has-name>.

²⁵ *Somalia Drought: 2015-2022*, RELIEFWEB, <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/dr-2015-000134-som> (last visited Mar. 15, 2023).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Somalia: A Family Without Food Sees Drought turn into Disaster*, INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (Mar. 15, 2017), <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/somalia-africa-food-drought-disaster-threat-of-famine>.

²⁸ *Somalia's Drought Induced Crises: Immediate Action and Change of Strategy Needed*, THE HERITAGE INSTITUTE (Apr. 2017), <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Somalia's-Drought-Induced-Crises-Immediate-Action-and-Change-of-Strategy-Needed.pdf>.

²⁹ *Id.*; see also *Somalia: 2022 Drought Impact Snapshot*, U.N. OFF. FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS (Apr. 5, 2022), <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-2022-drought-impact-snapshot-5-april-2022>.

³⁰ *Horn of Africa: Locust Infestation – Oct. 2019*, RELIEFWEB, <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/2019-000149-eth>, (last visited Mar. 15, 2023).

locusts in Somalia in more than 25 years, and it has destabilized not only the state, but also the region.³¹ The locusts have consumed more than 100,000 hectares of crops or over 1k sq km.³² These locusts have also harmed Somalia's neighbors: Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Kenya.³³ Collectively, the locusts have eaten hundreds of hectares of land destabilizing pastoral communities within these states.³⁴ With all of these environmental crises occurring so frequently, states in the Horn of Africa cannot recover adequately to address humanitarian concerns or the rise in terrorist organizations.

Somalia's internal fractures continue to be exacerbated by the aforementioned environmental events. Without pastoral communities or water, the scarcity of supplies and displaced peoples allows for violence to spread more quickly and prevents the local and state governments from being effective.³⁵ These environmental issues allowed Al Shabab's power and influence to grow – so much so that the terrorist organization has developed a parallel government system that some Somalians prefer to the actual Somalian government because it offers necessary stability and support.³⁶ Recently, Al Shabab laid siege to a hotel in Mogadishu, which resulted in 21 deaths and left more than 100 people injured.³⁷ The new President of Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, then announced in his presidential address an "all-out war" against the terrorist organization to finally end its reign of terror in Somalia.³⁸ Al Shabab countered that its reign will continue and pledged to fight against the new Somali government and others.³⁹ Violence will continue to be a part of Somalia unless Somalia can help itself through the mitigation of one of the root causes – climate change.

IV. MOVING FORWARD WHAT CAN WE DO?

Addressing the issue of climate change's effect on armed conflict requires the international community to take a new approach. For the past few decades, the international community has combatted climate change

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ Rayna Alexander, *Food Insecurity and Terrorism: What Famine Means for Somalia*, FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE (Aug. 16, 2022), <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/08/food-insecurity-and-terrorism-what-famine-means-for-somalia/>.

³⁶ Mary Harper, *Somalia and al-Shabab: The Struggle to Defeat the Militants*, BBC (Aug. 24, 2022), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-62644935>.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Mohamed Dhaysane, *Somalia's President Vows 'Total War' Against al-Shabab*, VOICE OF AMERICA (Aug. 24, 2022, 9:15AM), <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-s-president-vows-total-war-against-al-shabab/6714508.html>.

³⁹ *Id.* (noting that the fractures in Somalia and the region not only allowed Al-Shabaab to continue its influence, but allowed itself to have the capability to launch an incursion into Ethiopia to attack military bases).

through treaties and global initiatives with singular goals.⁴⁰ For example, in 1996, states agreed to adhere to the Kyoto Protocol whose sole goal is to operationalize “the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by committing industrialized countries and economies in transition to limit and reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets.”⁴¹ Then with the Paris Agreement, we have over 160 states binding together to take accomplish two goals: first, create a global goal of slowing global temperature levels from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius in the next century; and second, ensuring countries facing climate issues have the funds available to help put programs or initiatives in place to slow down.⁴² Achieving the goals outlined in these treaties would have a positive net effect on reducing the effects of climate change globally. However, these treaties fail to address armed conflicts in different regions. A better approach would be to have treaties and organizations concentrate resources to resolve climate change and armed conflict issues at the regional level. How would this work? Again, Africa provides an example.

Taking a smaller, more focused approach, the Africa Union Commission (AUC) chose to partner with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2021 to combat climate change.⁴³ Through the Comprehensive Africa Climate Change Initiative (CACCI), an organization designed to help states meet their goals in the Paris Agreement, countries in Africa aim to increase climate resilience, strengthen food security, and inclusive growth.⁴⁴ The two central goals extend from the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).⁴⁵ NDCs provide the outline of how a state will meet its emission reduction targets and will clearly state what those goals are.⁴⁶ NAPs tell us the specific policies and investments that states will pursue to help their citizens - farmers and firms throughout their respective economies - to adapt to climate change in a way that protects their livelihoods and the state from future conflict.⁴⁷ Funding from USAID and CACCI will allow African states to meet these

⁴⁰ See Lindsay Maizland, *Global Climate Agreements: Successes and Failures*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS (Nov. 4, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/paris-global-climate-change-agreements>.

⁴¹ *What is the Kyoto Protocol?*, UNFCCC, https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol (last visited Mar. 15, 2023).

⁴² *Key Aspects of the Paris Agreement*, UNFCCC, <https://unfccc.int/most-requested/key-aspects-of-the-paris-agreement>, (last visited Mar. 15, 2023).

⁴³ Press Release, U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID Announces New Partnership with African Union Commission to Reach Paris Agreement Goals in Africa, (Nov. 9, 2021), <https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/usa-id-announces-new-partnership-with-african-union-commission-to-reach-paris-agreement-goals-in-africa-kmih7q9x>.

⁴⁴ Policy, Research, Capacity and Influence Innovation Lab, *A New Plan for Global Climate Action through Policy and Research Capacity Building*, CLIMATELINKS (June 28, 2022), <https://www.climatelinks.org/blog/new-plan-global-climate-action-through-policy-and-research-capacity-building>.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

goals through their own plans which gives them more autonomy in choice making. This funding is beneficial as it gives the regions more incentive to be cohesive and to work to end climate change which would help alleviate armed conflict emergence.

In 2016, Somalia ratified the Paris Agreement, cementing itself as a state that wants to work with CACCI to mitigate future harm.⁴⁸ This is positive. CACCI can provide the needed tools and resources to Somalia to help its affected citizens if Somalia elects to use them. CACCI's existence gives regional control to African states to fight climate change rather than having the international community direct changes without being present in that region. This stability will produce steady results, and it helps build interstate relationships. For example, addressing the pastoral issues in Somalia from the droughts could help the millions of displaced Somali citizens in Somalia's neighboring countries like Kenya and Ethiopia return back to Somalia. CACCI's provision of stability could reduce regions of Somalia's reliance on Al-Shabaab and reduce the potential for more conflict down the road. If success can be found in reducing Al-Shabab's presence by mitigating climate change harm, then CACCI and its resources may be used more extensively to end armed conflicts with other terrorist organizations throughout Africa.

The changes the international community and Africa would like to see will not happen in the next year or the next couple of years. Why not? The changes sought are wholesale to Somalia instead of trying to impact a focused subset of government or region of the state. The first few years will see Somalia work out issues with the regional paradigm and begin making small but positive changes to negate the effects of climate change. We should look farther out. The sustained efforts of local leadership to meet their requirements under the Paris Agreement could help see changes in the next decade or two. The level of harm presently done to Somalia will take time to heal. The international community, i.e. members of the U.N. and CACCI, needs to ensure that local leaders within Somalia can continue providing direct efforts into investments in local Somali communities' abilities to resist climate change. Stability can be realized if the international community continues to fund CACCI and allows the local states to use the funds in ways they perceive will better their regions. For Somalia, continued funding of CACCI could help it diversify its economy outside of pastoralism and telecommunications and wean off the dependence of charcoal which has led to deforestation, droughts, and violence.⁴⁹ A diversified Somalian economy would legitimize the government and eliminate environment activities that exacerbate climate issues.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Climate Change, Charcoal Trade, and Armed Conflict in Somalia*, CLIMATE DIPLOMACY, <https://climate-diplomacy.org/case-studies/climate-change-charcoal-trade-and-armed-conflict-somalia> (last visited Jan. 22, 2023).

This funded autonomy will help quell the influence of Al-Shabab and halt the development of future domestic terrorist groups in Somalia and the Horn of Africa.⁵⁰ Being involved with CACCI and taking small steps now will help reap positive results, but it must remain sustained and must continue to have local buy-in to see the goals through. If this model of climate change mitigation and thus armed conflict prevention is fruitful, then we could see it used more extensively in other destabilized regions around the world.

⁵⁰ *Id.*