

An Avoidable Crime Against Humanity

by Douglas DeGroot

Aug. 12—Although the world has been inundated by reports of the food crisis in the Horn of Africa, the reports do not tell the full truth. Yes, 12 million people in the region are at risk of dying, and there must be rapid shipments of emergency supplies of food, but the fundamental truth is that this crisis is man-made, and could have been prevented, if the United States had not abnegated its responsibility to provide an alternative to the approach of the British financial empire, which is to reduce the population through wars, famines, and disease.

In the case of President Obama, there are already indications that he is moving to limit U.S. financial support, because it would increase the U.S. debt. For Obama, two purposeless wars and the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of his Wall Street friends take precedence over human lives in Africa.

And with the U.S. Congress proposing cuts of \$488 million to USAID in FY2012, over last year's level, the risk to the people of the Horn is greater than ever. The grim economic outlook in the United States and Europe—traditionally major aid donors—is raising fears that other sources of assistance could dry up. So far, there has been less help than during the 1992 crisis.

However, even if sufficient aid were received to save the populations in the Horn who are under threat, this would not prevent the disaster from recurring. Without infrastructural development of the region, the cycle will repeat itself.

Somalia, where the crisis is now the worst, always had a potential for water development that would have prevented the food crises that have hit that country, according to African economists who know the region well. At least as early as 1979, the World Bank had completed in-depth studies of proposals for development of irrigation projects in the Shabelle/Jubba drainage basin. The construction of irrigation projects in the

basin between the Shabelle and Jubba rivers, both of which originate in Ethiopia—the Jubba flows all year, while, after crossing the country, the Shabelle dries up near Mogadishu during the dry season—would have prevented the successive droughts that have afflicted the area, and forced so many people to leave. Even before this most recent crisis, more Somalis lived outside the country, than in it.

Speculation; Soaring Food Prices

The other factor that is forcing so many people to flee, is the skyrocketing price of food. Because of the worldwide food shortage, and speculation in food by hedge funds and other speculators, the price of food has tripled. Pastoralists in Somalia, who would have bought food to keep themselves and their herds alive, were not able to do so after prices tripled. So, after their herds die and they are left with nothing, people flee for camps in Kenya or Ethiopia, many going on foot. During the difficult journey, parents with small children, according to refugee testimony, sometimes have to make the agonizing decision to leave one of their children to die along the road, because trying to carry one more child would result in none of the family making it. Fifteen thousand Somalis each month flee to refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia, looking for food and water. The refugee camp at Dadaab, in Kenya, has been overwhelmed by an estimated 400,000 people.

The third factor forcing people to flee is a radical insurgent group, Shabaab, disguised as an Islamic group, which receives aid from British assets in the Arab Gulf, and which is training terrorists for elsewhere in Africa. Shabaab has claimed responsibility for bombings in Uganda, and Nigerian insurgents have claimed they received training in bombing from the group.

The World Bank—part of the British-run imperial monetarist system—refused to approve the irrigation projects, thereby scuttling them. At that time, a country could not get financial support for such projects with-



UN/Stuart Price

Twelve million people in the Horn of Africa are at risk of dying from a combination of famine and disease. But the crisis is man-made and could have been prevented. It is still not too late to save millions of lives. Here, a Somali woman hands her severely malnourished child to a medical officer of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Mogadishu, July 15, 2011.

out World Bank approval. This was before the era of Chinese involvement in infrastructure-building in Africa.

The British imperial policy of enforced non-development is a crime against humanity. By not offering an alternative to this policy, the United States is complicit in the crime. President Franklin Roosevelt wanted a development policy, as did President John Kennedy, but since the assassination of Kennedy, that impulse has lain dormant. Instead, the British doctrine, imported by Henry Kissinger during the Nixon Presidency as National Security Study Memorandum 200 (NSSM 200), which decreed that foreign aid had to be designed so as not to promote population growth in the former colonial sector, has been the critical feature of U.S. foreign policy to this day.

The countries most at risk in the present crisis are Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia. South Sudan and Djibouti are also at risk. UNICEF spokeswoman Marixie Mercado said today that half a million children in Somalia alone are at imminent risk of death if food help is not available within weeks. She emphasized that chil-

dren with compromised immune systems because of malnutrition, are more vulnerable to disease. Each day, 250 children die, according to reports.

This latest avoidable but devastating food crisis in the Horn of Africa will lead to an untold number of unnecessary deaths unless a rapid and much larger intervention of urgently food and medical care, than what is now being mounted, is organized and delivered by an emergency Army Corps of Engineers-style operation.

Cholera Stalking the Camps

If this is not done rapidly, the ugly specter of cholera will expand—181 have already died of the disease in a Mogadishu hospital, and there have been other confirmed cases elsewhere in country. Refugees crowded into confined areas are vulnerable to the spread of disease. During the upcoming rainy season, the waterborne disease could wreak havoc in the camps. Cholera is easy to treat, but the basic supplies needed—oral rehydration salts and antibiotics—are lacking. Refugee movement also spreads disease.

One hundred thousand displaced persons have arrived in Mogadishu in the last two months, looking for food. Almost one third of Somalia's 10 million people—3.2 million—are in need of immediate live-saving assistance.

Pastoralists whose existence is marginal in normal times, have to move when grass supply for livestock is exhausted. This is something that would not have been necessary with irrigation. With that advance, the pastoralists, who cultivate food for themselves when rain is sufficient, could lead a more stable existence, and raise more food.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton proposed an additional \$17 million in aid yesterday, bringing the level of U.S. assistance to the Horn of Africa to \$508 million, but nothing substantial on the development front, aside from local self-help-style projects, which will not solve the long-term problem. The UN has requested \$2.4 billion for some 12.4 million people in the Horn of Africa it deems at risk, but this is just for short-term survival.

Shabaab insurgents withdrew most of their forces from Mogadishu this past weekend, which could open the way for food distribution in Mogadishu, although some militants remain, and there is still some fighting. The AMISOM peacekeeping force in Mogadishu re-

portedly needs an additional 8,000 soldiers, in addition to the 12,000 there now, to secure those areas Shabaab has, for now, abandoned. After the Shabaab departure, the danger becomes the possibility of conflicts between local militias and the forces of the weak provisional government.

Shabaab's withdrawal to the countryside, which it has controlled for the last four years, will make aid shipments into those areas still more difficult. The World Food Program reports that aid agencies have not been able to reach more than 2 million people in the rural areas of Somalia. Somalis in Shabaab territory in the South have been the worst hit by the food crisis, because Shabaab had blocked access to most aid organizations.

Twenty years ago, Somalia suffered a famine that was more deadly than the current one thus far—but the current one is by no means over. What has changed? The government and the opposition are different, but one generation later, we are witnessing again the mass death of Africans. What policies are being put in place to make sure that this type of human catastrophe is not repeated? Sadly, none. That is the real crime.