

Media Disinformation and the Causes of the Somali Famine

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

BBC news coverage of the famine in Somalia has been saturating the airwaves and it's always like this whenever 'natural disasters' strike. Fundamentally it's little more than a fund-raising promo paid for with our taxes as endlessly repeated shots of emaciated babies and dying people serves no informative purpose except to tug covetously at our purse strings. And of course it has the added benefit of distracting us from our own condition - until the next crisis comes our way.

The experience of Somalia shows that famine in the late 20th century is not a consequence of a shortage of food. On the contrary, famines are spurred on as a result of a global oversupply of grain staples. Since the 1980s, grain markets have been deregulated under the supervision of the World Bank and US grain surpluses are used systematically as in the case of Somalia to destroy the peasantry and destabilize national food agriculture. The latter becomes, under these circumstances, far more vulnerable to the vagaries of drought and environmental degradation. — Michel Chossudovsky

News coverage is further complicated by the fact that the disaster is taking place in a Western-originated and maintained 'war on terror'. Thus the ban on aid entering the region controlled by al-Shabab, the 'terrorists' is made play of by the BBC, though it presents us with conflicting stories on the subject.

On 6 July the BBC carried a story titled, '[Somalia Islamists lift aid ban to help drought victims](#)' but then on 22 July we read that somehow al- Shabab had managed to maintain a ban that it had supposedly lifted, '[Somali Islamists maintain aid ban](#)'. Methinks the BBC speaks with forked tongue.[1]

But what of the US sanctions in place on Somalia? The BBC carries one story on the subject of the sanctions put in place by Obama in April 2010 that banned any US aid to areas controlled by al-Shabab (which is pretty much the entire country apart from a few streets in what's left of Mogadishu, the capital) and now revised with the following proviso made by the deputy administrator of USAID:

"What we need is assurances from the World Food Programme and from other agencies, the United Nations or other agencies, both public and in the non-governmental sector, who are willing to go into Somalia who will tell us affirmatively that they are not being taxed by al-Shabab, they are not being subjected to bribes from al-Shabab, that they can operate unfettered" — '[US 'to aid Islamist areas of famine-hit Somalia](#)', BBC 20 July 2011

In other words, so far no aid is being sent by the US, thus the reality betrays the claims of the headline.

Meanwhile...

“They call it “bug splat”, the splotch of blood, bones, and viscera that marks the site of a successful drone strike. To those manning the consoles in Nevada, it signifies ♦suspected militants♦ who have just been ♦neutralised♦; to those on the ground, in most cases, it represents a family that has been shattered, a home destroyed.” — [‘Murder By Video Game And ♦Bug Splats♦: CIA Drone War In Pakistan’](#) By Muhammad Idrees Ahmad

The BBC is less effusive on death by drone attack. Shots of the the uncouneted victims of the Empire’s drone attacks are also somewhat thinner on the ground (ie. zero) with a total of just six stories between the 27 May 2011 and today and no closeups of ‘bug splats’. But every time one of the Empire’s soldier’s dies somewhere, the BBC not only notifies us of the death but we a get a photo and short bio thrown in. No such tribute to the people of Pakistan wiped out so casually by somebody sitting in a room in North Carolina playing real death video games.

Just how coy the BBC is about the Empire’s reign of death from the sky is summed up thus:

“The US says the region is home to al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgents.

“It says militants who have found sanctuary in these areas are involved in attacks on Nato forces in Afghanistan. North and South Waziristan are regularly targeted by drone missiles.

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A number of militants, some of them senior, have been killed in the raids, but many civilians have also died.” — [‘Pakistan: Drone attacks in Waziristan ‘kill 30’](#), BBC 12 July 2011

The BBC has even given up inserting the word ‘alleged’ before ‘militants’ as the only source is apparently the US military for the claims of ‘dead militants’ and one wonders just how many ‘many civilians’ really is as no one is bothering to count the ‘bug splats’.

The IMF as a ‘natural disaster’

The disjuncture is complete. On the one hand endless video footage of emaciated Somalis trudging through a parched (or flooded) landscape, and on the other – nothing except a PR handout by the Empire.

The reality behind the ‘natural disaster’ in Somalia is altogether different than the Western media’s portrayal of events in the Horn of Africa and extends back to the transformation of Somalia by the IMF into a ‘failed state’ in 1991.

“Far beneath the surface of the tragic drama of Somalia, four major U.S. oil companies are quietly sitting on a prospective fortune in exclusive concessions to explore and exploit tens of millions of acres of the Somali countryside.

“According to documents obtained by The Times, nearly two-thirds of Somalia was allocated to the American oil giants Conoco, Amoco, Chevron and Phillips in the final years before Somalia’s pro-U.S. President Mohamed Siad Barre was overthrown and the nation plunged into chaos in January, 1991. — [‘Somalia: the Real Causes of Famine’](#) by Michel Chossudovsky, 21 July 2011

Between 5 July and 3 August, the BBC ran 30 stories on the famine in Somalia but without exception not a single story recounts the history of Somalia or the role of of the West in creating the conditions that have led to the unfolding disaster.

“Somalia was a pastoral economy based on “exchange” between nomadic herdsman and small agriculturalists. Nomadic pastoralists accounted for 50 percent of the population. In the 1970s, resettlement programs led to the development of a sizeable sector of commercial pastoralism. Livestock contributed to 80 percent of export earnings until 1983. Despite recurrent droughts, Somalia remained virtually self-sufficient in food until the 1970s.

“The IMF-World Bank intervention in the early 1980s contributed to exacerbating the crisis of Somali agriculture. The economic reforms undermined the fragile exchange relationship between the “nomadic economy” and the “sedentary economy” - i.e. between pastoralists and small farmers characterized by money transactions as well as traditional barter. A very tight austerity program was imposed on the government largely to release the funds required to service Somalia’s debt with the Paris Club. In fact, a large share of the external debt was held by the Washington-based financial institutions.” — (ibid)

So, far from being a ‘natural disaster’ events in Somalia can be traced directly to Western intervention, an intervention carried out in at least one hundred indebted economies the world over in the name of ‘structural adjustment’.

Note

1. [World Food Program in Somalia: Angel of Mercy or Angel of Death? By Thomas C. Mountain](#)

See also: [‘US-backed forces launch military offensive in Somalia as aid is used as a weapon of war By Susan Garth’](#)

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