

Strategic Options Memo

Issue: Response to Potential Terrorist Released Smallpox Pandemic – Somalia

Relevant National Interests:

Vital:

- Prevent the threat of biological attack/pandemic in the United States
- Ensure viability and stability of global trade and international economic systems.

Extremely Important:

- Suppress terrorism
- Prevent the threat of biological attack/pandemic outside the United States
- Prevent massive uncontrolled immigration to the United States or Europe

Important:

- Prevent and, if possible, end conflict in strategically less significant regions.

Analysis:

Smallpox Pandemic. The highly infectious nature of smallpox could overwhelm the medical system and lead to largescale panic. The resulting impact on travel and trade could have a significant global economic impact. Unlike Ebola, the public is familiar with the effects of smallpox, a sizeable portion of the population is vaccinated, vaccines exist in adequate quantities to protect the nation in the event of an outbreak, and the country has successfully eradicated it before. The real threat is uncontrolled fear. Public messaging is vital.

Multiple Lines of Defense. The threat is currently geographically limited to the Horn of Africa. Direct transportation from Somalia to the United States is limited and easily controlled. Infected carriers of the disease will need to likely travel through Africa, to Europe, before entering the United States. Slowing this process and addressing the issue in Africa – and Europe, if needed – will limit the threat to the United States.

Al-Shabaab in not al-Qaeda or ISIS. With the exception of a relatively small-scale attack in Minnesota and other thwarted attacks in the United States, al-Shabaab's focus and reach has been limited to Somalia and its neighbors. The al-Shabaab tie is unconfirmed, and it is unclear that the group could successful coordinate an attack of this nature. It is not in the U.S. interest to elevate the status of this group. Attributing a potential attack to the group will greatly increase its standing among international terrorist organizations and would-be radicalized individuals, to include the large Somali population in the United States. It would also place the United States as a prime antagonist in its struggle and recruiting efforts.

Operational Objectives:

Immediate actions:

- Suspend inbound travel from Horn of Africa and travelers with Somali passports.
- Deploy additional TSA agents to overseas airports to screen for symptomatic passengers.
- Dedicate additional Counter Terrorism and intelligence resources to HOA.

Short Term:

- Prevent entry of smallpox into United States.
- Prevent introduction of smallpox in Europe.
- Prevent the collapse of international travel and trade.

Prevent mass migration out of the Horn of Africa.

Medium and Long-Term:

Eradicate Smallpox in Horn of Africa.

Build capacity of Somalia and African nations to treat pandemics locally.

Build capacity of Somalia government to secure country.

Defeat al-Shabaab.

Strategic Options:

- 1. Fortress America and Counter Terrorism.** The United States will treat this as a national security crisis focused on terrorism with the intent of securing U.S. borders and militarily eliminate the al-Shabaab threat. The U.S. government will notify the public of the terrorist plan. All flights from Africa will be immediately suspended as well as visas for people with passports from east Africa, regardless of where they begin their travel. The CDC will administer smallpox vaccines to health professionals, first responders, and forward position vaccines throughout the United States and offer them on a volunteer basis.
U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in conjunction with U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) will rapidly deploy additional forces in significant numbers to Somalia and Djibouti focused on the military defeat al-Shabaab. These offensive operations may be done in conjunction with European allies and partners and preferably with the invitation of the Somali government, but they will not be constrained by them. The United States will also take the lead in advancing smallpox immunization throughout the region to eliminate the biological threat. These measures will remain in effect for a prolonged period.
- 2. Contain, Eliminate, and Build.** The United States will treat this as a humanitarian crisis focused on intervention in Somalia with the intention of preventing the spread of smallpox and a robust effort to rebuild the Somali state. The U.S. government will notify the public about the spread of smallpox in Somalia but will not highlight the direct nexus to terrorism. Smallpox will be noted alongside famine, general terrorism, and piracy as justification for intervention to address the root causes of Somalia's issues. Through diplomatic and economic incentives (and threats) Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti will be enticed to close their borders with Somalia. Flights from east Africa to the United States will be cancelled.
U.S. medical teams, in conjunction with the African Union (AU), NATO, UN, and/or like-minded partners will deploy to further vaccination programs and establish treatment centers in Somalia to prevent the need for infected populations to leave the country. U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department of State will allocate significant funds to assist in the rebuilding of Somali institutions and nation building on a scale not seen since the early 1990s. USSOCOM and AFRICOM will rapidly deploy forces to Somalia and Djibouti under a multinational flag to increase the pressure to militarily defeat al-Shabaab. These efforts will be multiyear and will likely continue for a decade or more.
- 3. Multi-tiered Defense.** The United States will treat this primarily as a public health crisis and protect the homeland through treating the outbreak in the region and slowing the ability of infected populations to travel to Europe and the United States. The U.S. government will notify the public about the spread of smallpox in Somalia but will not highlight the potential nexus to terrorism. Flights from east Africa to the United States will be suspended and foreign airlines will be encouraged to cease operations between Europe and the region.

U.S. medical teams will be deployed to the region to advance vaccination efforts and provide care for already infected populations, thus stemming the need for them to travel outside of the country for medical attention. Similar support will be provided to European countries. USAFRICOM will deploy forces or oversee private security contracts to expand the reach of vaccination efforts to areas currently contested by al-Shabaab. These programs will be transitioned to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) over the next year.

These efforts will be complimented by a slight increase in USSOCOM forces to track and degrade al-Shabaab in Somalia. These efforts will not constitute a significant change in overall force posture in Africa and will not alter existing policy in the region.

Recommendation:

The Multi-tiered Defense option has the highest chance of success in addressing the immediate vital and extremely important national interests, while limiting further direct U.S. involvement in the region. This course of action seeks to regionally contain the threat and insulate the global economic system which is dependent on the free flow of people and goods (outside of Africa). It prevents the elevation al-Shabaab which could place the U.S. at greater future risk, including by radicalized individual Somali refugees currently living the United States. Although it does not address important national interests, it does not foreclose on the ability to include state capacity building measures in the future, without placing the burden unduly on the United States.

Implementation:

The U.S. government will immediately suspend inbound travel from Horn of Africa, suspend visas for all travelers with Somali passports or travelers that have been to Somalia in the last month, deploy additional TSA agents to overseas airports to screen for symptomatic passengers, and dedicate additional intelligence resources to the region. If intelligence reporting confirms al-Shabaab attempts to transit infected passengers to North America, vaccine stockpiles will be forward positioned within the United States. The president will make the announcement about the smallpox epidemic in Somalia – without reference to terrorism – and the deployment of medical teams to the region. In the same telecast, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) director will provide information on domestic safety measures, which will be followed by a series of public service announcements.

Intelligence agencies will share information with allies and the FAA will tell European and Canadian airlines to cease travel to East Africa or lose their routes to the United States.

U.S. Ambassador to Somali Don Yamamoto will ask Somali President Mohamed Farmaajo formally request international assistance through the UN, EU, and AU for assistance in combating the spread of smallpox as well as additional security forces for the medical teams. Acting U.S. Ambassador to the UN Jonathan Cohen will address the Security Council and seek support for a UN-led mission to address the health crisis and a small security force. The U.S. military will serve as the lead logistical organizing agency in country, but will transition to NGOs, UN, and AU when appropriate. Programs will be conducted with Somali officials to establish official government control in areas traditionally outside of Mogadishu's control.

Outside of the UN efforts, USSOCOM and allied special operations forces will slightly increase its footprint to target al-Shabaab forces associated with the potential terrorist plot.

Talking Points:

- Smallpox was eradicated over 40 years ago in the United States and much of the world, saving countless lives. We are protecting America first, by fighting this disease overseas, not waiting for it. If there is a reoccurrence in our country in the future, we have all the resources to completely handle the problem again.
- The interconnected world presents new challenges and calls for aggressive action to keep the disease from our shores and finish it once and for all. This allows all Americans to continue to live free and secure.
- The issue is exclusive to Somalia and current travel restrictions are only precautions. They will be lifted as soon as the medical situation in Somalia is under control.
- We are working with the government of Somalia and our international partners to vaccinate vulnerable populations to help rid the world of this problem. Our courageous military and health professionals are providing care in the region and deliver much needed aid, so smallpox can be treated at its source.

If pressed on nexus to potential terrorism:

- This is a medical emergency. However, there is no denying the region is plagued with terror groups, lawlessness, famine, and pirates. All of these are reasons the smallpox outbreak must be treated now in Somalia.