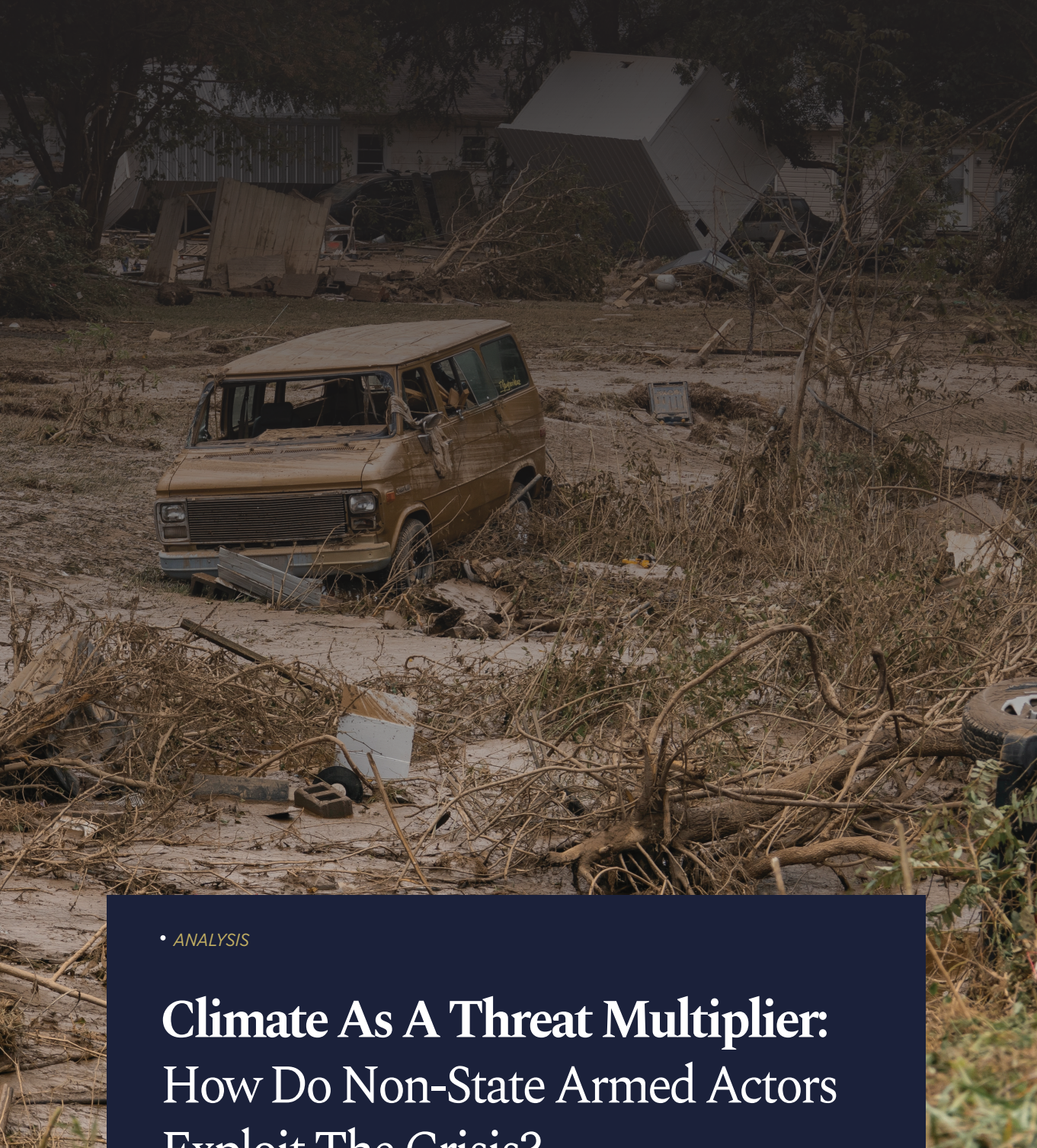




• ANALYSIS

Climate As A Threat Multiplier: How Do Non-State Armed Actors Exploit The Crisis?

Çağla Vural, Tunç Demirtaş

CLIMATE AS A THREAT MULTIPLIER: How Do Non-State Armed Actors Exploit The Crisis?

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SETA Yayınları

ISBN: 978-625-5703-88-0

Editorial Team: Ebrar Üzümcü, Sudib Sontoran, Gizem Akbaş
Layout: Said Demirtaş

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This analysis examines the opportunities that the climate crisis presents to non-state armed actors, when these opportunities expand, and why different actors exploit the same opportunities in different ways, through the cases of Somalia, the Northern Triangle, and Senegal.

SUMMARY

The climate crisis is not a direct cause of terrorism and organized crime. However, climate-related pressures such as drought, floods, and hurricanes create new opportunities for armed groups. The literature has largely explained the pathways through which these opportunities arise. This analysis asks when these opportunities grow and why different non-state armed actors use the same opportunity in different ways. It does so through the cases of Somalia, the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), and Senegal. The first finding is that risk peaks when a climate shock, a security gap, and an aid gap coincide. The second finding is that, within this window of opportunity, the armed actor's goal determines how it exploits climate pressure. In Somalia, al-Shabaab, which seeks to overthrow the existing government and establish rule based on sharia, turns to taking control of aid and services and to collecting taxes during droughts. In the final months of 2026, the three gaps are coinciding in the country once again. In the Northern Triangle, gangs seeking profit and local control blocked aid from reaching communities in Honduras after the 2020 hurricanes, extorted people returning to their homes, and tightened their control. In the Sahel, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is in an expansion phase, targets trade routes and mining areas in western Mali, and this pressure also affects the economy of Senegal. Senegal faces climate pressure, but its security and aid gaps have not yet opened, and there is still time for prevention. The analysis makes four

recommendations. The first is for early warning tools to monitor drought and flood forecasts together with the activities of armed groups, the presence of security forces, and aid funding. This would make it possible to see in advance when the gaps will coincide. The second is for decisions on security and aid to be taken up together. In Somalia, it would be appropriate to assess the future of the African Union mission and humanitarian funding within the same timeline while the risk of Famine persists. The third is for responses to differ according to the actor's goal. Visible state services stand out against a terrorist organization seeking sharia-based rule. Against gangs, the priority is to protect aid and the people returning home, and against an expanding terrorist organization, to protect trade routes and border areas. The fourth is to take preventive steps in places such as Senegal, where the window has not yet opened.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, the climate crisis was treated as an environmental and development problem. Since the second half of the 2000s, it has also entered the international security agenda. Climate-related disasters such as droughts, floods, and hurricanes erode livelihoods and displace people. Naturally, the effects of these disasters vary with the condition of societies and states. In regions where state authority is weak and armed groups are already active, climate pressure can aggravate existing problems. In these regions, armed groups can exploit the opportunities the crisis creates.

Somalia is one of the countries where this situation is most visible today. Al-Shabaab launched a counteroffensive in February 2025 and, by mid-May, had retaken most of the territory it had lost in Middle Shabelle since 2022.¹ In the same country, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) published an analysis on September 23, 2026. It projected that about 5.4 million people would face Crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) in October-December 2026. Under a plausible worst-case scenario in which El Niño leads to more severe flooding and displacement than expected, it identified a Risk of Famine for displaced people in Baidoa in Bay region.² In September 2026, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) reported a credible risk

1 Daisy Muibu and Yaycedior Mbengue, "Somalia at a Crossroads: Resurgent Insurgents, Fragmented Politics, and the Uncertain Future of AUSSOM," *CTC Sentinel* 18, no. 5 (May 2025): 3.

2 IPC Somalia Technical Working Group, *IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis July-December 2026* (IPC, September 23, 2026), 3, 10, accessed October 18, 2026, https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Somalia_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Malnutrition_Jul_Dec2026_Report.pdf.

of Famine in southern Somalia for October 2026-January 2027. It said that it expected food assistance to decline substantially from previous months, reaching an average of 125,000 people per month across the country between September and November.³ The mandate of the African Union mission that supports the fight against al-Shabaab expires on December 31, 2026.⁴ In short, the climate shock, the security gap, and the aid gap have once again opened at the same time in Somalia.

This picture raises a question. Does the climate crisis fuel terrorism and organized crime? This analysis gives a measured answer. Climate change amplifies, accelerates, and spreads existing terrorism and conflict. Of course, drought does not by itself force a villager to join an armed organization. But for a young person who has lost the harvest, whom the state cannot reach, and who has no other way to make a living, the wages, food, and protection offered by an organization can become an option. The same drought can also allow an armed group to present itself as the only service provider in a village where the state cannot deliver aid.



Does the climate crisis fuel terrorism and organized crime? This analysis offers a measured answer: climate change amplifies, accelerates, and spreads existing terrorism and conflict.

The literature has largely established the pathways through which climate pressure creates opportunities for armed groups. This analysis focuses on the questions of when these opportunities become greatest and why different “non-state armed actors” use the same opportunity in different ways. In this analysis, the term covers both terrorist organizations and organized crime groups. The answer consists of two findings. Risk peaks when a climate shock, a security gap, and an aid gap coincide. Within this window of opportunity, the armed actor’s goal determines how it exploits climate pressure.

Accordingly, the first section reviews the concept of the threat multiplier and the literature on the relationship between climate and armed groups. The second section sets out the framework built on coinciding gaps and the actor’s goal. The third section tests this framework through three cases. The first is al-Shabaab, a terrorist organization that seeks to overthrow the existing government and establish rule based on sharia. The second is the gangs of the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), which seek profit and local control. The third is JNIM, which is in an expansion phase. The final section brings the findings together and offers policy recommendations to the relevant institutions.

³ “Risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) Persists in Southern Somalia Ahead of October Deyr Rains,” FEWS NET, September 2026, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://fewsn.net/east-africa/somalia/key-message-update/september-2026>.

⁴ “AUSSOM Welcomes the UN Security Council’s Renewal of Its Mandate,” AUSSOM, December 24, 2025, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://au-ssom.org/aussom-welcomes-the-un-security-councils-renewal-of-its-mandate/>.

CLIMATE AND ARMED GROUPS: WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

The concept most often used to describe the effect of the climate crisis on security is that of a “threat multiplier.” CNA is a US-based research organization. In a 2007 report, its Military Advisory Board of retired generals and admirals stated that climate change is a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world.⁵ A 2008 paper submitted to the European Council by the High Representative and the European Commission of the European Union (EU) also described climate change as a threat multiplier that exacerbates existing trends, tensions, and instability. The paper stressed that climate change could overburden states and regions that are already fragile and conflict-prone.⁶ Similarly, the 2009 report of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General to the General Assembly noted that climate change is often seen as a threat multiplier that exacerbates threats. The report also discussed conditions and policies that could reduce this effect.⁷ In its Climate Change and Security Action Plan of June 2021, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) described climate change as a threat multiplier that affects Allied security.⁸ In December 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres told the UN Security Council that climate change has a multiplier effect on instability, conflict, and terrorism.⁹

Why the concept is built on the word multiplier becomes clear when one looks at the sense in which climate change is not considered a threat. A threat can be defined along five dimensions, namely negativity, intentionality, ability, relativity, and emergence. Climate change has the dimensions of negativity, relativity, and emergence. It negatively affects health, livelihoods, and societal stability, its effects vary with the vulnerability of societies, and it develops over time as an ongoing process. However, there is no conscious actor behind it that intends to cause harm. In the absence of intent, the term used is danger. For this reason, climate change is treated as a threat multiplier that aggravates existing tensions and vulnerabilities.¹⁰ Scientific assessments also support this measured approach.

5 CNA Military Advisory Board, *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change* (The CNA Corporation, 2007), 6-7, accessed October 10, 2026, [https://www.cna.org/reports/2007/national%20security%20and%20the%20threat%20of%20climate%20change%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.cna.org/reports/2007/national%20security%20and%20the%20threat%20of%20climate%20change%20(1).pdf).

6 EU High Representative and European Commission, *Climate Change and International Security: Paper from the High Representative and the European Commission to the European Council* (Council of the European Union, 2008), 4, accessed October 10, 2026, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30862/en_clim_change_low.pdf.

7 UN General Assembly, *Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/64/350 (September 11, 2009), 2, 6, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://undocs.org/A/64/350>.

8 “NATO Climate Change and Security Action Plan,” NATO, June 14, 2021, accessed October 10, 2026, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_185174.htm.

9 “People, Countries Impacted by Climate Change Also Vulnerable to Terrorist Recruitment, Violence, Speakers Tell Security Council in Open Debate,” United Nations, SC/14728, December 9, 2021, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14728.doc.htm>.

10 Katie Woodward et al., “Climate Change, Climate Security and Conflict,” in *Climate Change and Terrorism: NATO COE-DAT Research Project*, ed. Elif Çolakoglu (Ankara: Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism, 2025), 55-56.

According to the Working Group II contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), non-climatic factors are the dominant drivers of existing intrastate violent conflicts. In some regions, extreme weather and climate events have had a small, adverse impact on the length, severity, or frequency of these conflicts, but the statistical association is weak (*medium confidence*).¹¹ The report assesses the influence of climate on conflict as relatively weak compared to other socioeconomic factors (*high confidence*). It also assesses that, in the near term, violent conflict will be driven by socioeconomic conditions and governance more than by climate change (*medium confidence*).¹²



The most commonly used concept to describe the impact of the climate crisis on security is the “threat multiplier.”

The literature has also largely set out the pathways through which climate pressure creates opportunities for armed groups. Nett and Rüttinger identify two main mechanisms. By increasing fragility, climate change makes it easier for armed groups to operate in areas beyond state control. By eroding livelihoods, it makes people more vulnerable to recruitment by these groups. The authors also note that armed groups increasingly use natural resources as a weapon of war and sometimes try to fill the vacuum left by the state by providing basic services.¹³ Romm explains the relationship between climate and terrorism through deteriorating livelihood conditions, migration and mobility, elite exploitation and resource mismanagement, and the tactical considerations of violent non-state actors. In her view, a direct causal link between climate change and terrorist activity is not clear. Climate change is, however, an indirect contributor that helps create conditions that support terrorism.¹⁴ Tunca and Oğultürk stress that the relationship runs both ways. In their view, terrorist activities also harm the environment, and resources such as land and water are increasingly becoming instruments of pressure.¹⁵ Field research also shows the weight of livelihood concerns. In interviews conducted by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) with people in Africa who had joined

11 IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers,” in *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. H.-O. Pörtner et al. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), SPM.B.1.7.

12 IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers,” SPM.B.4.7 and SPM.B.3.1.

13 Katharina Nett and Lukas Rüttinger, *Insurgency, Terrorism and Organised Crime in a Warming Climate: Analysing the Links Between Climate Change and Non-State Armed Groups* (Berlin: adelphi, October 2016), III-IV, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://www.cbd.int/financial/doc/climate-insurgency.pdf>.

14 Madeline Romm, *A Climate of Terror? Climate Change as an Indirect Contributor to Terrorism*, Rapid Review 1 (College Park: START, University of Maryland, May 2022), 1, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/climate-terror-climate-change-indirect-contributor-terrorism>.

15 Hakan Ömer Tunca and Mehmet Cem Oğultürk, “Climate Terror as a Tool of Geostrategic Competition,” in *Climate Change and Terrorism: NATO COE-DAT Research Project*, ed. Elif Çolakoglu (Ankara: Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism, 2025), 87-90.

such organizations, a quarter of those who joined voluntarily cited employment opportunities as their primary reason.¹⁶

However, the literature also shows that climate shocks do not always strengthen armed groups. Walch's field research on two typhoons in the Philippines found no evidence of a sudden rise in recruitment into the rebel group after the disasters and showed that the group was temporarily weakened. Walch attributes this to the disasters also shrinking the group's own resources and to the greater visibility of the state and international organizations in the area after the disasters.¹⁷ This is an important finding. It suggests that whether a climate shock becomes an opportunity or a burden for armed groups depends on whether the state and aid are present on the ground after the shock. The literature, then, has largely explained the pathways through which climate pressure works. The less answered question is when these pathways open and why different actors use the same opportunity in different ways.

COINCIDING GAPS AND THE ACTOR'S GOAL

The framework of this analysis rests on two findings, and the first concerns timing. Climate pressure offers armed groups the greatest opportunity in windows where three gaps coincide. The first is the livelihood gap caused by a climate shock such as a drought, flood, or hurricane. The second is the security gap, in which the state, or the international force supporting it, weakens on the ground. The third is the aid gap, in which humanitarian aid and basic services fall short. Naturally, a climate shock alone does not open this window. As Guterres noted, when climate disruption hinders institutions from providing public services, grievances and mistrust toward authorities grow.¹⁸ Nett and Rüttinger also state that disaster risk reduction can prevent armed groups from exploiting state weakness.¹⁹ Walch's finding shows the other side of this. When the state and aid are present on the ground after a disaster, a climate shock can become a burden for armed groups. What matters, therefore, is whether the security and aid gaps open at the same time as the shock.

The second finding concerns the actor. The same window is used in different ways by armed actors whose goals differ. This analysis distinguishes three types of actors. The first type consists of terrorist organizations, such as al-Shabaab, that seek to overthrow the existing government and establish rule based on sharia. For

16 UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement* (UNDP, 2023), 16-17, accessed October 10, 2026, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-02/JOURNEY%20TO%20EXTREMISM%20IN%20AFRICA%20PATHWAYS%20TO%20RECRUITMENT%20AND%20DISENGAGEMENT_2023.pdf.

17 Colin Walch, "Weakened by the Storm: Rebel Group Recruitment in the Wake of Natural Disasters in the Philippines," *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 3 (2018): 336.

18 "People, Countries Impacted by Climate Change Also Vulnerable to Terrorist Recruitment."

19 Nett and Rüttinger, *Insurgency, Terrorism and Organised Crime in a Warming Climate*, V.



According to the Global Terrorism Index, al-Shabaab can function simultaneously as an insurgent movement, a terrorist organization, and a parallel state, thanks to its intelligence network, parallel governance and taxation systems, and propaganda apparatus.

these organizations, a climate shock is an opportunity to present themselves as an authority that provides aid and services in place of the state and to collect taxes. The second type consists of criminal organizations seeking profit and local control, such as MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha) and Barrio 18 in the Northern Triangle. The main goal of these organizations is to earn a regular income through extortion. For them, a disaster is an opportunity to increase extortion, restrict movement, and find new recruits. The third type consists of terrorist organizations in an expansion phase, as in the case of JNIM on the Senegalese border. When entering a new area, these organizations first target economic arteries, trade routes,

and mining areas. The boundaries of this typology are not sharp, and the same organization can pursue different goals in different areas. In rural areas of the Sahel beyond the state's reach, for example, terrorist organizations arbitrate land and water disputes and behave like a parallel administration. In Mali, Katiba Macina, one of the forerunners of JNIM, sets its own rules for access to pasture.²⁰ On the Senegalese border, JNIM relies mainly on economic pressure.

Legal designations partly reflect this difference. On August 24, 2015, the Supreme Court of El Salvador classified MS-13 and Barrio 18 as terrorist organizations, together with other criminal organizations that violate the fundamental rights of the population or seek to seize state power.²¹ The United States designated MS-13 as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on February 20, 2025, and Barrio 18 on September 24, 2025.²² A discussion of the legal status of these groups is beyond the scope of this analysis. The question of whose security is being protected is also part of the framework. Security approaches may take the state, the international community, the individual, or the ecosystem as their referent object.²³ This analysis focuses on the security of the communities caught between climate pressure and armed groups, and of the states responsible for protecting them.

20 Tunç Demirtaş and Abdullatif Hüseyin Mazı, "Climate Change and Security Dynamics in the Sahel," SETA, May 12, 2026, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://www.setav.org/en/climate-change-and-security-dynamics-in-the-sahel>. On Katiba Macina as one of the forerunners of JNIM, see Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney: IEP, March 2026), 55.

21 Arron Daugherty, "El Salvador Supreme Court Labels Street Gangs as Terrorist Groups," InSight Crime, August 26, 2015, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/el-salvador-supreme-court-labels-street-gangs-as-terrorist-groups/>.

22 US Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organization Designations of Tren de Aragua, Mara Salvatrucha, Cartel de Sinaloa, Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generacion, Carteles Unidos, Cartel del Noreste, Cartel del Golfo, and La Nueva Familia Michoacana," *Federal Register* 90, no. 33 (February 20, 2025): 10030-10031; US Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organization Designation of Barrio 18," *Federal Register* 90, no. 183 (September 24, 2025): 45969-45970, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://federalregister.gov/d/2025-18498>.

23 Çağla Vural, "Küresel İklim Değişikliği ve Güvenlik" [Global Climate Change and Security], *Güvenlik Bilimleri Dergisi* 7, no. 1 (2018): 72-73.

THREE REGIONS, THREE ACTORS

SOMALIA: A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION SEEKING SHARIA-BASED RULE AND RECURRING WINDOWS

Somalia's central government collapsed in January 1991.²⁴ The Islamic Courts Union later took control of a large area around Mogadishu but was driven out of Mogadishu by Ethiopia's intervention. Al-Shabaab, a group linked to this structure, rose to prominence through its resistance to Ethiopia. It grew stronger in the power vacuum created by Ethiopia's withdrawal from the country in January 2009 and pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012.²⁵ From 2010 onward, with the support of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the group was pushed out of many urban centers in southern and central Somalia. However, the government's gains remained fragile and dependent on international military support. In those periods, al-Shabaab retained the capacity to carry out major attacks in the areas under its control in various parts of the region.²⁶

To understand al-Shabaab's response to climate pressure, one must first look at its goal. The group aims to overthrow the central government, expel foreign forces from Somalia, and ultimately establish an Islamic state based on its own interpretation of sharia.²⁷ To this end, it seeks to control territory at certain points and to replace the state there. According to the Global Terrorism Index, al-Shabaab's intelligence network, parallel governance and taxation systems, and propaganda apparatus allow it to function simultaneously as an insurgency, a terrorist organization, and a parallel state.²⁸ The group has set up a taxation system that divides southern and central Somalia into different revenue zones.²⁹ At checkpoints it taxes transport, goods, agricultural produce, and livestock. It also collects mandatory contributions under the name of "zakat" and extorts businesses. According to some data, al-Shabaab's annual revenue from checkpoints alone exceeds \$100 million.³⁰ The UN Security Council's Panel of Experts on the al-Shabaab sanctions regime also found in 2025 that the group continued to generate more than enough revenue to finance its insurgency through extortion at checkpoints and from businesses.

24 Tunç Demirtaş, "Devletin Yeniden Yapılandırılmasında Riskler ve Fırsatlar: Afrika Boynuzu Örneği" [Risks and Opportunities in State Rebuilding: The Case of Horn of Africa] (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Bursa Uludağ University Institute of Social Sciences, 2022), 52.

25 Demirtaş, "Devletin Yeniden Yapılandırılmasında Riskler ve Fırsatlar," 134, 160-161, 237.

26 Demirtaş, "Devletin Yeniden Yapılandırılmasında Riskler ve Fırsatlar," 242.

27 Claire Klobucista, Jonathan Masters, and Mohammed Aly Sergie, "Al-Shabaab," Council on Foreign Relations, last updated December 6, 2022, accessed October 18, 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabaab>.

28 Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 18.

29 Demirtaş, "Devletin Yeniden Yapılandırılmasında Riskler ve Fırsatlar," 248-251.

30 Jay Bahadur, *Terror and Taxes: Inside al-Shabaab's Revenue-Collection Machine* (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, December 2022), 2, 5, 21, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/AS-protection-economics-WEB.pdf>.

Sources informing the Panel reported that zakat collection had increased in areas where the group is present.³¹ This goal helps explain the group's behavior during droughts. For an organization that seeks to replace the state, drought becomes an opportunity to present itself as an authority that provides aid and services.

This behavior has changed over time. Between October 2010 and April 2012, a period marked by drought, sharp rises in food prices, and restrictions on humanitarian access, about 258,000 people died from severe food insecurity and famine. Of these, 133,000 were children under the age of five.³² According to Stephen Harley's study comparing three drought periods in Somalia, al-Shabaab



Al-Shabaab has also cultivated the perception that it offers more than violence by taking measures such as banning tree felling and the associated charcoal trade, and asserting control over land rights to prevent the depletion of grazing lands.

blocked aid convoys, burned aid supplies, and attacked aid workers in this first window, while also taxing aid. In the 2017 drought, by contrast, it set up local Drought Committees, repaired damaged canals, and distributed food. In this period, messages about the group's good deeds made up an average of 30 percent of its publications. Even so, 700,000 people were displaced from areas under its control, and only 10-15 percent of the aid that would reach an area under government control reached these areas. The group did not give up punitive methods against communities that came under government control either. In 2019 it contaminated water sources with fuel in Lower Shabelle, and in 2022 it destroyed buildings, wells, and generators in the village of Bokore in Hirshabelle. Since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, rainfall in the Gu (April-June) and Deyr (October-December) seasons has been insufficient five times in a row, and climate change is

estimated to have displaced 1.3 to 2.9 million people. In this period, the group announced at the end of 2023 that it had set up a Flood Relief Committee, and it claimed that it had dealt with the floods better than the Western-backed government. Through steps such as banning logging and the related charcoal trade, and controlling land rights to prevent the depletion of pastures, it created the image of a group that offers more than violence. Harley describes this shift as a "soft power" approach that continues the violence but puts the weight on a narrative of service. The accuracy of the group's claims is, of course, disputed. Still, according to Harley, the effort the group puts into publicizing its service provision is an experience from which its opponents can also learn.³³ The charcoal case reflects

31 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 28 November 2025 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolution 2713 (2023) Concerning Al-Shabaab Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2025/777 (November 28, 2025), 3, 11.

32 "Technical Release: Study Suggests 258,000 Somalis Died Due to Severe Food Insecurity and Famine; Half of Deaths Were Children Under 5," FSNAU and FEWS NET, May 2, 2013, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://fsnau.org/in-focus/technical-release-study-suggests-258000-somalis-died-due-severe-food-insecurity-and-famine->.

33 Stephen Harley, "Al-Shabaab's Exploitation of Climate Change in Somalia," in *Climate Change and Terrorism: NATO COE-DAT Research Project*, ed. Elif Çolakoglu (Ankara: Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism, 2025), 106-109, 113-114.

the same orientation. In 2021, Guterres listed charcoal production among the group's sources of income.³⁴ Yet a study of the group's tax receipts found no record of taxes collected on charcoal shipments. The same study notes that, by late 2019, UN sanctions monitors reported that the group had stopped taxing charcoal and had in fact begun attacking and burning these shipments.³⁵

In 2025 and 2026, the three gaps coincided once again. The security gap became evident with al-Shabaab's offensive. According to the Panel of Experts, the group significantly increased its operations in central and southern Somalia in 2025.³⁶ With the Shabelle offensive it launched in late February 2025, it seized government positions in Middle Shabelle, Lower Shabelle, and Hiran, and by mid-year it had advanced to within 50 kilometers of Mogadishu.³⁷ In the same period, the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), established to begin operations on January 1, 2025, secured less than 20 percent of the roughly \$96 million it needed for January-June 2025.³⁸ In December 2025, the UN Security Council extended the mission's mandate until December 31, 2026, through Resolution 2809, and the mission stressed its need for predictable and sustainable resources.³⁹ The climate shock deepened with consecutive dry seasons. Because the October-December 2025 Deyr rains were below average and were followed by the dry Jilaal season, the Deyr cereal harvest in southern Somalia was 83 percent below the 1995-2025 average.⁴⁰ With the April-June Gu rains also starting late and remaining below average, the IPC projected that about 6 million people would face Crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) in this period. About 1.9 million of them were projected to be in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), and a Risk of Famine was identified for Burhakaba district under a plausible worst-case scenario. The IPC analysis also stresses that ongoing conflict and insecurity disrupt agriculture and markets.⁴¹ In its September 2026 analysis, the IPC identified a Risk of Famine for displaced people in Baidoa in October-December 2026 under a plausible worst-case scenario.⁴² The aid gap coincides with this period as well. Funding shortfalls have in fact forced aid organizations to reduce ration sizes and the number of

34 "People, Countries Impacted by Climate Change Also Vulnerable to Terrorist Recruitment."

35 Bahadur, *Terror and Taxes*, 12.

36 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 28 November 2025*, 6.

37 Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 18.

38 Muibu and Mbengue, "Somalia at a Crossroads," 4.

39 "AUSSOM Welcomes the UN Security Council's Renewal of Its Mandate."

40 "Somalia's Humanitarian Crisis Worsening with 6.5 Million People Facing High Levels of Hunger, Federal Government and United Nations Warn," FAO, February 25, 2026, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/somalia-s-humanitarian-crisis-worsening-with-6.5-million-people-facing-high-levels-of-hunger--federal-government-and-united-nations-warn/en>.

41 IPC Somalia Technical Working Group, *IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis April-June 2026* (FSNAU, May 14, 2026), 1-3, accessed October 10, 2026, https://fsnau.org/downloads/IPC_Somalia_Projection_Update_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Malnutrition_Apr_Jun2026_Report.pdf.

42 IPC Somalia Technical Working Group, *IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis July-December 2026*, 3.

people they reach.⁴³ According to FEWS NET, there is a credible risk of Famine in southern Somalia in October 2026-January 2027, and Famine would become possible if the Deyr season brings extreme and widespread flooding. Food assistance is expected to decline substantially from previous months, reaching an average of 125,000 people per month across the country between September and November.⁴⁴ For al-Shabaab, this situation naturally creates a window in which it can return to the narrative of service and aid it tried in earlier droughts.

THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE: PROFIT-SEEKING GANGS AND THE POST-DISASTER WINDOW

In the Northern Triangle, climate pressure is felt in an environment where gangs are already strong. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, insecurity has long been fed by high homicide rates, gang violence, extortion, weak institutions, and drug trafficking. Because agriculture is central to the economy, employment, and food security of these three countries, they are particularly sensitive to changes in rainfall, rising temperatures, and climate-related disasters.⁴⁵ According to the IPCC, 10.5 million people in Central America lived in the Dry Corridor in 2015, an area exposed to severe droughts in recent years.⁴⁶ That year, rainfall was 50 to 70 percent below the historical average. Up to 80 percent of bean production and up to 60 percent of maize production were lost, and 2.5 million people faced food insecurity, 1.6 million of them in the Dry Corridor.⁴⁷ Projections also point to rising pressure. Under the Representative Concentration Pathways (RCP) scenarios RCP4.5 and RCP8.5, seasonal droughts are projected to become 12-30 percent longer, 17-42 percent more intense, and 21-42 percent more frequent by the end of the century.⁴⁸

The goal of the gangs in this region differs from that of al-Shabaab. The main criminal economy of MS-13 and Barrio 18 is extortion, which the gangs themselves call “rent.” The gangs extort public transport companies, businesses, and shops.⁴⁹ In other words, these gangs aim to earn a regular income from extortion. According to a risk assessment prepared for El Salvador, the gangs recruit young people, mostly from low-income families, who are looking for belonging,

43 “Somalia’s Humanitarian Crisis Worsening with 6.5 Million People Facing High Levels of Hunger.”

44 “Risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) Persists in Southern Somalia Ahead of October Deyr Rains.”

45 Cynthia Brady and Lauren Risi, *Addressing Climate Security Risks in Central America*, ECSP Report 16, no. 1 (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, April 2023), 2.

46 Edwin Castellanos et al., “Central and South America,” in *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. H.-O. Pörtner et al. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 1698.

47 Castellanos et al., “Central and South America,” 1699.

48 Castellanos et al., “Central and South America,” 1699.

49 Chris Dalby, “Extortion Explainer 2: From a ‘Cora’ to the Rent,” InSight Crime, April 26, 2019, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/extortion-explainer-from-a-cora-to-rent/>.

material resources, and status.⁵⁰ In Guatemala too, the lack of alternative livelihoods for households that depend on rain-fed subsistence farming can increase participation in illegal activities and recruitment by criminal groups.⁵¹

This goal also helps explain how the gangs behaved after disasters. According to official figures, Hurricanes Eta and Iota, which struck less than two weeks apart in November 2020, affected more than 4 million people in Honduras alone.⁵² The hurricanes opened all three gaps at once. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, as many as 330,000 people in Honduras were estimated to be cut off from emergency aid in December 2020 because roads and communications had been severed. Hundreds of thousands of people in the two countries were still waiting for aid. Criminal groups began to exploit the situation. They prevented humanitarian organizations from reaching communities and extorted people trying to return to their homes.⁵³ According to the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Honduras, gangs also exploited the desperation of hurricane victims to tighten their control and impose restrictions on movement. In one example reported by UNHCR, a family in San Pedro Sula whose home had become uninhabitable could not return to its old neighborhood, which was controlled by a gang. In the new area where the family took refuge, it encountered another gang that demanded extortion payments and forcibly recruited young people.⁵⁴ In Guatemala, people displaced by extreme weather events mostly move to places where infrastructure and social services are inadequate and state control is weak. Both those who migrate to cities and those who cannot migrate and stay behind are exposed to the violence of gangs and organized crime groups.⁵⁵ According to Brady and Risi's report for the Wilson Center, the two hurricanes aggravated existing insecurity and economic hardship in the region and played a part in the large migration wave of 2021.⁵⁶ In short, gangs seeking profit and control used the disaster to increase extortion, restrict movement, and recruit members.

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In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, insecurity has long been fueled by high homicide rates, gang violence, extortion, weak institutions, and drug trafficking.

50 Herman Rosa Chávez et al., *Climate-Fragility Risk Brief: El Salvador* (Berlin: adelphi, March 2023), 11.

51 Tània Ferré Garcia et al., *How Does Climate Exacerbate Root Causes of Conflict in Guatemala? Climate Security Pathway Analysis*, Factsheet 2023/4 (CGIAR Climate Security Observatory, 2023), 1, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://cgspace.cgiar.org/items/c10ca298-370b-4352-ac6b-f524a0bfb97>.

52 María Rubi and Tim Gaynor, “In Honduras, Climate Change Is One More Factor Sparking Displacement,” UNHCR, November 9, 2021, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://reliefweb.int/report/honduras/honduras-climate-change-one-more-factor-sparking-displacement>.

53 “Hundreds of Thousands Still Waiting for Humanitarian Aid in Honduras and Guatemala,” Norwegian Refugee Council, December 8, 2020, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2020/december/hundreds-of-thousands-still-waiting-for-humanitarian-aid-in-honduras-and-guatemala>.

54 Rubi and Gaynor, “In Honduras, Climate Change Is One More Factor Sparking Displacement.”

55 Çağla Vural, “The Interaction of Climate Change With Terrorism as a Threat Multiplier: The Case of the Northern Triangle,” in *Climate Change and Terrorism: NATO COE-DAT Research Project*, ed. Elif Çolakoglu (Ankara: Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism, 2025), 137.

56 Brady and Risi, *Addressing Climate Security Risks in Central America*, 2.

El Salvador, by contrast, is a case in which, according to official data, the security gap was largely closed. Under the state of exception declared in March 2022, mass arrests were made of people suspected of being gang members. According to government data, the homicide rate fell from 53.1 per 100,000 in 2018 to 1.9 per 100,000 in 2024. Some analysts, however, note that deaths in police operations, deaths in prison, and remains found are not included in the official data, and that including them would make the 2023 rate up to 47 percent higher.⁵⁷ According to InSight Crime's data for 2025, El Salvador reported a homicide rate of 1.3 per 100,000, which InSight Crime counted among data that are not comparable with those of other countries. In the same year, the rate was 23.2 per 100,000 in Honduras and 17.4 per 100,000 in Guatemala.⁵⁸ The case of El Salvador suggests that when the security gap closes, the gangs' ability to exploit disasters also narrows. Climate pressure and the livelihood gap in the Dry Corridor, however, remain. This means that a future disaster could open a new window for other actors unless the aid and service gap is closed.

SENEGAL AND THE SAHEL: AN EXPANDING TERRORIST ORGANIZATION AND A WINDOW NOT YET OPEN

The Sahel is now the global epicenter of terrorism. In 2025, the region accounted for more than half of all terrorism deaths worldwide. In 2007, this share was less than 1 percent.⁵⁹ NATO also describes the Sahel as one of the hotspots of climate change because of its harsh climate, high dependence on subsistence agriculture and livestock, and limited adaptive capacity.⁶⁰ JNIM, which is affiliated with al-Qaeda, appears to be an organization in an expansion phase in this region. On April 25, 2026, together with the Tuareg rebel group Azawad Liberation Front (FLA), the organization carried out simultaneous attacks across Mali, including in Bamako, Gao, Kidal, and Sevare. Malian Defense Minister Sadio Camara was killed in an attack on his home in Kati.⁶¹ According to the Global Terrorism Index, even before these attacks, the group had expanded toward the gold-rich Kayes region and had imposed a de facto economic blockade on towns and cities in southwestern Mali. In 2025, it tried to cut off fuel supplies to the capital, Bamako, by attacking tankers.⁶² According to an assessment by Critical Threats,

57 Leticia Chacon, *El Salvador's State of Exception and U.S. Interests*, IN12510 (Washington: Congressional Research Service, February 20, 2025), 1-2, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IN/PDF/IN12510/IN12510.2.pdf.

58 "2025 Homicide Rates in Latin America and the Caribbean" (infographic), InSight Crime, March 12, 2026, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://insightcrime.org/news/insight-crime-2025-homicide-round-up/>.

59 Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 4.

60 NATO, *NATO Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment*, 3rd ed. (NATO, 2024), 7.

61 "Mali's Defence Minister Sadio Camara Killed During Coordinated Attacks," Al Jazeera, April 26, 2026, accessed October 18, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/4/26/malis-defence-minister-sadio-camara-killed-amid-coordinated-attacks>.

62 Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 17.

JNIM has for years built support zones along the borders with Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Mauritania, and its new blockades have targeted vital trade and transport corridors. At least 60 percent of Mali's trade passes through the Bamako-Dakar corridor, and Kayes accounts for about 80 percent of industrial-scale gold production.⁶³ On July 1, 2025, the group targeted Diboli near the Senegalese border, the nearby towns of Kayes and Sandere, and other towns in western and central Mali.⁶⁴ In September 2025, the blockade extended to Bamako, and fuel tankers coming from Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal were targeted. Senegal and Mali increased joint border patrols, but no concrete counterterrorism cooperation framework has yet been established.⁶⁵ An expanding organization entering a new area thus turns first to cutting economic arteries.

The effects of the blockade have spread to the economy of Senegal. According to a June 2026 assessment by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the Dakar-Bamako corridor appears to be the route most affected by insecurity in western Mali. In 2024, Mali took 26.5 percent of Senegal's exports and was Senegal's largest customer. In September-November 2025, about 120 containers a day sat in the Port of Dakar without being shipped, and by the end of November 2025 more than 2,000 containers were waiting in Dakar.⁶⁶ Jessica Moody, a contributor to the Index, also notes that the attacks on the Senegalese border linked to the Kayes blockade were a first in the group's history. In her view, the group's continued activity along the border likely suggests that it has expanded its recruitment area, and this increases the threat to Senegal. The concentration of the mining sector along Senegal's border with Mali also adds to the risk. Mining has often been an important source of revenue for JNIM.⁶⁷

Even so, the window has not yet opened in Senegal. The country is nevertheless vulnerable to climate shocks. A 2023 CGIAR article reports the results of a workshop held in Dakar in October 2022. According to the experts at the workshop, Senegal is vulnerable to climate variability, especially to changes in rainfall patterns. They add that because of the country's heavy dependence on rain-fed ag-

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The Sahel is now the global epicenter of terrorism. In 2025, the region accounted for more than half of all terrorism-related deaths worldwide. In 2007, however, this figure was less than 1%.

63 Liam Karr, Michael DeAngelo, and Yale Ford, "JNIM Economic Warfare: Africa File, September 11, 2025," Critical Threats, September 11, 2025, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/jnim-economic-warfare-africa-file-september-11-2025>.

64 "Mali Army Says 80 Fighters Killed After Earlier al-Qaeda Linked Attacks," Al Jazeera, July 1, 2025, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/1/mali-army-says-80-fighters-killed-after-earlier-al-qaeda-linked-attacks>.

65 Tunç Demirtaş and Abdullatif Hüseyin Mazi, "Blockade in Mali: Terror Threat from Sahel to West Africa," *Daily Sabah*, January 14, 2026, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/blockade-in-mali-terror-threat-from-sahel-to-west-africa>.

66 Felix Fodé Bongono, "JNIM's Blockade Tactics Threaten West Africa's Trade Corridors," ISS Today, June 4, 2026, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/jnim-s-blockade-tactics-threaten-west-africa-s-trade-corridors>.

67 Jessica Moody, "Jihadists in the Sahel: What Is Behind Expansion and What Is the Threat to Coastal West Africa?" in Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney: IEP, March 2026), 73.

riculture, fluctuations in rainfall affect agricultural productivity and therefore food security. According to the same article, there is no climate-related armed conflict in the country.⁶⁸ According to the World Food Programme (WFP), extreme climate events continue to weaken agricultural production through recurrent droughts, erratic rainfall, and land degradation. About 837,000 people were projected to face Crisis or Emergency levels of food insecurity in the 2026 lean season.⁶⁹ The security and aid gaps, however, are not open to the extent seen in Somalia. According to Atvur, Uysal Oğuz, and Özer, Senegal is politically stable compared to its neighbors. Yet existing socioeconomic and political vulnerabilities mean that climate-related risks could weaken this stability. The risk comes through two channels. The first is migration from the Sahel, together with the internal migration expected as a result of sea level rise, declining fish stocks, and drought. The second is the border with Mali, which carries the risk that Senegal will be used for financing, recruitment, and supplies in addition to attacks. The authors stress that these risks require new approaches beyond traditional security policies and that adaptation strategies are very important for securing peace and security in the country.⁷⁰ Walch's finding also suggests that a climate shock may not turn into an opportunity for armed groups when the state and aid are present on the ground after a disaster. Senegal's advantage, then, is that it can act before this window opens.

TABLE 1. THREE ACTORS, THREE WINDOWS				
Region/ Country	Actor and goal	State of the gaps	Main form of exploitation	Situation in 2025-2026
Somalia	Al-Shabaab; overthrowing the existing government and establishing rule based on sharia	Climate shock, security gap, and aid gap coincided in 2011, 2017, and 2025-2026	Blocking or taxing aid, claiming to provide services, collecting taxes and zakat, attacking water sources	Shabelle offensive, AUSS-OM's funding problem and mandate expiring at the end of 2026, Risk of Famine in southern Somalia, declining food assistance
Northern Triangle	MS-13, Barrio 18, and other criminal groups; profit and local control	Climate shock, security gap, and aid gap opened at once after Hurricanes Eta and Iota	Blocking aid, extorting returnees, restricting movement, forced recruitment	State of exception and fall in official homicide data in El Salvador, continuing violence in Honduras and Guatemala, continuing climate pressure in the Dry Corridor
Senegal and the Sahel	JNIM; expansion	Climate pressure in Senegal, security and aid gaps not yet open	Cutting trade and fuel routes, mining areas, recruitment along borders	Kayes and Bamako blockades, attacks on the Senegalese border, disruption of trade on the Dakar-Bamako corridor

Source: Compiled by the authors.

68 Carolina Sarzana et al., “Toward a Shared Vision on Climate Security in Senegal,” CGIAR, January 24, 2023, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/news/toward-a-shared-vision-on-climate-security-in-senegal>.

69 “Senegal,” World Food Programme, accessed October 10, 2026, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/senegal>.

70 Senem Atvur, Ceren Uysal Oğuz, and Sanem Özer, “Climate Crisis As a Catalyst of Terror? An Analysis on the Impacts of Climate Change in Senegal and the Potential of Terrorism,” in *Climate Change and Terrorism: NATO COE-DAT Research Project*, ed. Elif Çolakoğlu (Ankara: Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism, 2025), 154, 158-159.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This analysis has examined the relationship between the climate crisis and terrorism and organized crime through two questions. The first question is when the opportunities that climate pressure offers armed groups grow. The analysis answers with timing. A climate shock alone is not decisive. Risk peaks when a climate shock, a security gap, and an aid gap coincide. In Somalia, the periods of 2011, 2017, and 2025-2026 are examples of such coinciding gaps. The case of the Philippines shows that the same shock can weaken armed groups when the state and aid are present on the ground. The second question is why the same opportunity is used in different ways. The analysis answers with the actor's goal. Al-Shabaab, which seeks sharia-based rule, turns to taking control of aid and services and to collecting taxes. Gangs seeking profit and control turn to extortion and restrictions on movement, and JNIM, which is in an expansion phase, turns to trade routes and mining areas. In Senegal, there is climate pressure, but the security and aid gaps have not yet opened. Four recommendations follow from these two findings. The first two concern timing, and the last two concern the actor.

First, to see when risk grows, climate data should not be monitored on its own. When drought and flood forecasts, the activities of armed groups, the presence of security forces, and aid funding are monitored together, it becomes possible to see in advance when the gaps will coincide. In 2021, Guterres noted that a third of the global population lacks early warning systems and that the UN Climate Security Mechanism is strengthening the capacity of field missions, country teams, and regional organizations in this area.⁷¹ However, according to Arı, the mechanism is underfunded. It has also been criticized for focusing on research and analysis and not turning enough to concrete solutions on the ground.⁷² It would therefore be appropriate for the UN Climate Security Mechanism and the NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence (CCASCOE) to develop early warning tools that combine these four types of data at the local level and to make them usable in the field.

Second, to prevent the gaps from widening at the same time, decisions on security and aid need to be taken up together. The most immediate example is Somalia. The October 2026-January 2027 period, for which FEWS NET sees a risk of Famine, coincides with the expiry of AUSSOM's mandate and with the period in which the mission's future will be reconsidered. Food assistance is also expected to decline in the same period. Assessing decisions on the mission's future and on humanitarian funding within the same timeline, with this risk of Famine

71 "People, Countries Impacted by Climate Change Also Vulnerable to Terrorist Recruitment."

72 İzzet Arı, "Assessing Efforts to Address Nexus Between Climate Change, Conflict and Terrorism," in *Climate Change and Terrorism: NATO COE-DAT Research Project*, ed. Elif Çolakoglu (Ankara: Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism, 2025), 79.

in mind, could make it harder for the service and aid narrative that al-Shabaab used in earlier droughts to gain traction again.

Third, it is recommended that responses differ according to the actor's goal. Against a terrorist organization seeking sharia-based rule, the most important tools are fast and visible service delivery by the state during disasters and monitoring arrangements that prevent the group from blocking or taxing aid. Against gangs seeking profit and control, the priorities are delivering aid safely to communities and protecting people returning home and displaced people from extortion and forced recruitment. Getting cash to households before a disaster can also be an effective way to reduce risk. A Mercy Corps pilot project in Guatemala that encouraged remittance transfers ahead of extreme weather events is one example.⁷³ Against terrorist organizations in an expansion phase, protecting trade corridors and border areas is the priority. According to ISS, border trade corridors need to be protected jointly, and counterterrorism efforts could revive regional cooperation between coastal states and Sahel states.⁷⁴

Fourth, it would be appropriate to take preventive steps where the window has not yet opened. Senegal is the clearest example. It is recommended that Senegal and Mauritania carry out adaptation and development projects together with security cooperation in their border areas with Mali, and that they turn the increased joint border patrols into a lasting cooperation framework. Donor countries and development banks directing adaptation finance to livelihoods in these areas would also support this effort. According to the IPCC, adaptation contributes to reducing vulnerabilities associated with conflict by reducing the impacts of climate change on climate-sensitive drivers of conflict (*high confidence*). Supporting people in climate-sensitive economic activities also reduces risks to peace (*medium confidence*).⁷⁵ The Liptako-Gourma Climate, Peace and Security Action Plan (2026-2030) is an example of this approach. It aims to reduce competition between farmers and herders through land restoration in border areas and to narrow the recruitment base of terrorist organizations.⁷⁶ Of course, climate shocks cannot always be prevented. But when the state and aid are present on the ground as a shock hits, it can become harder for armed groups to exploit it.

73 Brady and Risi, *Addressing Climate Security Risks in Central America*, 9.

74 Bongono, "JNIM's Blockade Tactics Threaten West Africa's Trade Corridors."

75 IPCC, "Summary for Policymakers," SPM.C.2.12.

76 Demirtaş and Mazi, "Climate Change and Security Dynamics in the Sahel."

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Climate As A Threat Multiplier: How Do Non-State Armed Actors Exploit The Crisis?

Çağla Vural, Tunç Demirtaş

L The climate crisis is not a direct cause of terrorism and organized crime. However, climate-related pressures such as drought, floods, and hurricanes create new opportunities for armed groups. The literature has largely explained the pathways through which these opportunities arise. This analysis asks when these opportunities grow and why different non-state armed actors use the same opportunity in different ways. It does so through the cases of Somalia, the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), and Senegal. The first finding is that risk peaks when a climate shock, a security gap, and an aid gap coincide. The second finding is that, within this window of opportunity, the armed actor's goal determines how it exploits climate pressure. In Somalia, al-Shabaab, which seeks to overthrow the existing government and establish rule based on sharia, turns to taking control of aid and services and to collecting taxes during droughts. In the final months of 2026, the three gaps are coinciding in the country once again. In the Northern Triangle, gangs seeking profit and local control blocked aid from reaching communities in Honduras after the 2020 hurricanes, extorted people returning to their homes, and tightened their control. In the Sahel, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is in an expansion phase, targets trade routes and mining areas in western Mali, and this pressure also affects the economy of Senegal. Senegal faces climate pressure, but its security and aid gaps have not yet opened, and there is still time for prevention. The analysis makes four recommendations. The first is for early warning tools to monitor drought and flood forecasts together with the activities of armed groups, the presence of security forces, and aid funding. This would make it possible to see in advance when the gaps will coincide. The second is for decisions on security and aid to be taken up together. In Somalia, it would be appropriate to assess the future of the African Union mission and humanitarian funding within the same timeline while the risk of Famine persists. The third is for responses to differ according to the actor's goal. Visible state services stand out against a terrorist organization seeking sharia-based rule. Against gangs, the priority is to protect aid and the people returning home, and against an expanding terrorist organization, to protect trade routes and border areas. The fourth is to take preventive steps in places such as Senegal, where the window has not yet opened.



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