

**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**

**Subcommittee on African Affairs**

**Hearing on Strengthening U.S. Diplomacy to Anticipate, Prevent and Respond to Conflict  
in Africa**

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**Testimony of**

**Princeton N. Lyman**

**Adjunct Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations**

I welcome this opportunity to discuss the needs for strengthening U.S. diplomacy for preventing and or reducing the impact of conflicts in Africa. As members of this Subcommittee know well, conflicts have taken a terrible toll in Africa, with millions of lives lost, terrible human rights depredations, the weakening of authority and governance, and the setting back of development for hundreds of millions still living in poverty. These conflicts also open the door to criminal activities that bear on U.S. interests, as in the case of Somali piracy, or interruptions in the supply of energy as in Nigeria.

At the same time, we need to be aware that the number of conflicts in Africa has been dramatically reduced over the past two decades, and the lessons of those resolutions are pertinent to the subject today. Wars in Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, and between the north and south in Sudan have been brought to a close, some on a promising long term basis, some with fragile peace processes still under way. There are lessons to be learned from those processes. Very serious conflict situations remain, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Darfur region of Sudan, Somalia, parts of Ethiopia, the delta region of Nigeria, and in both Chad and the Central African Republic. Several other countries face internal unrest and potential outbreaks of violence, including Guinea, Guinea Bissau, the Comoros, Mauritania, and the Casamance region of Senegal.

### **Distinguishing the Skills Required**

Despite the dedicated efforts of many diplomats, envoys, and consultants over the past several years, the U.S. capacity to address this range of challenges is very weak. Senior officials run from one emerging crisis to another – Kenya, Somalia, the DRC – but the ability to mobilize and deploy a significant team of experts and resources to follow up to address these situations on a consistent and adequate basis is often not there. For example, the once significant and dedicated team that backed up the negotiations to end the North-South civil war in Sudan in was disbanded and the capacity lost to competing requirements in Iraq and elsewhere. Thus the work of special envoys for Darfur has been hampered by inadequate back-up capacity in the Department and a confusion of roles and responsibilities. Conflict management and resolution requires a dedicated effort, with strong staff support, ready outreach to a wide number of international actors, and strong embassies and other agencies on the ground. We also need to remember these are long term processes. Peace in southern Africa was the product of nearly a decade of intensive, well resourced efforts throughout the 1980s.

We need to distinguish here between the diplomatic capacity needed to prevent or restrain conflict, including early steps in conflict resolution, and that needed to respond to major crises situations. Much of the recent writing on conflict diplomacy has related to the latter, with proposals for surge capacity in such situations as Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. I applaud those recommendations, and I commend to the Committee's attention the report of the American

Academy of Diplomacy, *A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future: Fixing the Crisis in Diplomatic Readiness*, October 2008. Included in that report are detailed proposals for in-house and reserve surge capacities.

**In Africa, do sweat the small stuff.** In Africa, however, we need to recognize that there are potential conflict situations spread across Africa and involving in some cases quite small countries in which our diplomatic presence is very limited. Keeping abreast of those situations, and even more, assessing the imminence and importance of threatening circumstances, is not easy. For these situations, we need embassies with the capacity to tap into and utilize the several highly developed IT systems for analyzing potential conflict situations, e.g. the Fund for Peace's system for anticipating failed states, Robert Rotberg's governance index, Mo Ibrahim's governance index, and other such systems. Embassies also need resources to respond early to signs of stress, with flexible resources to help in conflict resolutions exercises, assistance to weak governing institutions such as the judiciary, and to be able to call on AFRICOM for help in training security forces. Back-up in Washington is essential, with analytical as well as bureaucratic skills. Little of that presently exists. If a country as large and important as Nigeria has but one person on the Nigeria desk, you can imagine the capacity to do serious analytical and back-up work for the large number of smaller countries of the continent.

**Major crisis situations.** The current major crises in Africa – in the DRC, Sudan, and Somalia -- are exceptionally complex, involving not only civil war but a host of regional and international involvements that demand virtually worldwide diplomacy to address adequately. One standard response to these situations has been (and is now being reinvigorated) the designation of envoys. Having a high level envoy is a useful device: it demonstrates serious U.S. concern, brings often higher level political attention to the situation, and attracts serious responses from other interested countries. But all too often the designation of an envoy is a substitute for the hard, long institutional commitment to the crisis. Part-time envoys are in particular ineffective if their work is not backed up on a full time basis by a team dedicated to that situation, sending out messages, monitoring agreements, and doing their own diplomatic outreach. For a crisis like that in the DRC, there should be staff as well in each of the key European embassies designated as part of this team, keeping in close touch on a daily basis with our European partners. That was done throughout the southern Africa diplomacy of the 1980s.

I characterize envoys without such back-up as “going naked into the jungle.” They have neither the capacity nor resources to bring U.S. influence and resources to bear adequately on the situation.

With this background, let me address the specific questions raised in the invitation to testify.

- 1. Does the State Department on collaboration with our Intelligence community, have sufficient capacity to assess the long-term threats on the continent?**

First, we must recognize that there is no sure science to assess long term threats in a timely action-oriented way. It is not hard to identify the many potential causes of conflict in Africa, a continent with generally weak states, poor governance, poverty, and in particular weak institutions to channel political and social grievances into peaceful resolution, e.g., parliaments, courts, police, etc. One could find these characteristics in most African countries. But identifying in which countries over which time frame these factors may produce crisis or conflict is much harder. Liberia descended into horribly brutal civil war in the 1980s, but only after more than 100 years of inequitable class rule and general poverty. Mali is one of the poorest countries on earth but has a functioning democracy; can it thus manage the unrest among its northern Taureg population, egged on to some degree by radical foreign elements, or will it suffer a growing crisis in this regard? These are hard calls.

The answer to the question posed by the Committee is of course no. But to counter this on a practical basis, the Department needs to access, as recommended earlier, the several computer-based systems for identifying potential sources of weakness and conflict. Staff needs to be trained in these systems and have the equipment to access them on a regular basis. But these only point to the potential causes. Nothing takes the place of on the ground contacts, sensitivity, and outreach. That takes staff, with language skills, travel money, and overcoming some the risk-adverse policies now in place. Finally, to avoid having to “cry wolf” to seek to engage the attention of the Department, embassies in these smaller countries need resources and flexibility to address local conditions early without waiting for serious conflict to erupt.. Those resources today are quite limited.

The Department does not have to do this alone. There are numerous think tanks, universities, and other non-governmental organizations which have the skills and means to assist in these analyses. The Department utilizes some of these, some of the time, but not consistently and not to study a single problem over a long period of time. The early studies by CSIS on Sudan (Barton and Crocker) are an exception worth reexamining.

## **2. Which regions are neglected?**

**Somalia.** Up until recently Somalia was badly neglected. But our response reveals other weaknesses. U.S. policy on Somalia, since the take-over of Mogadishu by the Islamic Courts Movement in 2006, has been divided. On the one hand, there are the diplomatic approaches to the situation, fronted by State, led by the UN and for a time with the support of a multilateral body led by Norway. But within DOD, and within parts of State as well, the focus has been on getting at terrorists within Somalia. This meant U.S. bombing raids, support for the Ethiopian invasion that dislodged the ICM from Magdishu but unleashed a long insurgency, and an inconsistent attitude toward the moderate Islamists within the Islamist Courts movement. The recent focus on piracy could produce a similar divide, but hopefully a more comprehensive and well directed policy will emerge. Without a clear, unified policy, lack of capacity is only part of the problem.

Somalia illustrates another weakness in addressing conflicts in the Horn of Africa. Somalia is a Middle Eastern as well as African problem. The Africa Bureau, and indeed some of the other diplomatic efforts on Somalia, have failed to engage seriously enough key Middle Eastern players, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Yemen whose cooperation is essential. The Africa Bureau is not well equipped, bureaucratically or with sufficient personnel, to engage the Near East Bureau and other elements of the State Department in a high priority regional diplomatic effort. Only high level direction, from the Secretary, can create the necessary inter-Bureau structure to address this situation on a continuing basis.

**DRC.** While the U.S. has played an important role in helping the eastern regional neighbors of the DRC come together and overcome some of the proxy warring within the DRC, and has supported financially the UN force, MONUC, the DRC has not had the focus that it deserves. The DRC influences much of central and eastern Africa, and its rich mineral resources will always be attractive to outsiders, e.g. neighbors, companies, or rogues, and usually all three. The war has also been the most costly in terms of lives lost, nearly 5 million. The US has not been ready to support a more robust UN force, struggling to keep down peacekeeping costs, and has not engaged at high levels with the relevant players. In large part, the U.S. has left leadership in this conflict to the UN, South Africa and the AU, and the Europeans. That is not bad but U.S. support to the peace processes could be much more vigorous. A new envoy is about to be appointed. But the question will be whether this envoy is backed up by real commitment of staff, time, and resources, or only sent out to show a U.S. face? All too often in the past, this has been the fate of our Great Lakes envoys, despite they having been exceptionally dedicated individuals.

## **Nigeria**

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and the fifth (sometimes sixth) largest supplier of oil imports to the U.S., is going through one of its most difficult periods of governance and stability. The conflict in the Niger delta has grown steadily more costly, with Nigerian oil production reduced by as much as 500,000 bbl/d. Stolen oil and other criminal activities finance the importation of ever more sophisticated arms by the various militia. Unrest has spread to neighboring countries, as militia attack oil facilities and carry out kidnapping there. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea rivals that off the Somali coast and endangers the entire Gulf of Guinea oil region.

Experts disagree whether Nigeria teeters on the edge of breakdown or is simply going through one of its many difficult transitions having only restored civilian rule in 1999 and being a difficult country to manage in the best of circumstances. But the delta crisis presents serious challenges and is not being addressed effectively by the Nigerian government. Beyond the delta, the economic deterioration in the north, Nigeria's Islamic center, with factories closing and large number of unemployed youth, poses long term threats to stability.

At present the U.S. has no presence in the delta, and its staff is forbidden to travel there for security reasons. This greatly limits U.S. ability to assess and impact the situation. The Embassy also has no consulate in the north. While vacancies have recently been filled, almost all key positions in the embassy are filled under grade.

One should recognize that assisting Nigeria in addressing any of its issues is not easy. The government has spurned most offers to assist with the crisis in the delta, including technical help from AFRICOM to counter the illegal oil exports. The economic problems in the north and elsewhere are due to long term neglect of the power sector and other infrastructure, the effect of over dependency on the oil sector, and various governance problems. None of these are ones that the U.S. is in a position to help, except perhaps for advice, encouraging of investment, and support through the IFIs. But our ability to play even this role is compromised by our lack of outreach. In addition, high level attention to Nigeria, and in particular to the problem in the delta has been at best sporadic. AFRICOM has expressed the most sustained concern, with visits and offers of assistance. But the State Department, taken up perhaps with more immediate crises, has not invested heavily in the Nigerian relationship.

### **The Sahel.**

This region has attracted special attention from DOD, first through EUCOM and now with AFRICOM. The concern has been infiltration into the region from Algeria's AQIM and the potential of radical elements exploiting local grievances. The Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Program (TSCTP) is designed as an inter-agency, State-led program to address this concern. But State has two disadvantages in matching AFRICOM's concerns and resources: (a) neither State nor USAID has sufficient personnel or resources to address fundamental grievance issues in this area, and (b) while AFRICOM has been effective in bringing north African and Sahelian states together in this endeavor, here again State has difficulty coordinating across bureaus. Our counter terrorism programs meanwhile risk running against the internal political needs of the governments in this region, where sensitive political oversight and better resource allocations are needed. Again too State and USAID lack language skills for engaging the people in the area of most concern.

### **The Narcotics Infiltration**

If there is one new dangerous crisis in Africa it is the growing infiltration of influence, money and power of narcotics syndicates. They operate primarily from Latin America, using west Africa as transit point for shipping drugs to Europe. In the process, they increase addiction in these African states, corrupt governments, and grow their role in the local economy. Poor and weak states, like Guinea Bissau are prominently affected, but most west African states are involved. A similar problem exists in east Africa, again using Africa as transit point to Europe with the same corrupting effects. We know from Columbia and Mexico just how destabilizing this industry can be. African states are poorly structured to address it, and it takes place in some

of those countries where our diplomatic presence and aid programs are small. The way to proceed may be to establish a high level inter-agency task force, under State leadership, which can work with individual embassies and across regional boundaries, set up counter programs, and if necessary greatly increase assistance to these states. Mobilizing African opinion and support will also be critical. This is an emergency and will take much effort to overcome if it can be done in time.

### **3. How to address security concerns**

As a former Ambassador I am acutely aware of the responsibility of every mission to protect its employees and their families. In the field, the embassy relies on the assessment of the Regional Security Officer in assessing the risks. We should send our diplomats and assistance experts into possible danger only where our interests truly demand.

In Africa today, as elsewhere, our interests do demand that we be more in touch with a broad array of society. In areas where the danger of radical infiltration exists, being able to reach those populations involved and assess the reality of the threat is essential. For example, without more direct knowledge of the so-called “ungoverned spaces” in the Sahel, it is hard to assess the seriousness of the threat and to see whether our counter-terrorism programs are effective. In Nigeria, without more direct contact with the areas in which the unrest takes place, the U.S. is not in a position to offer more than generalities to the Nigerian government, and perhaps more important, unable to interact with the oil companies, the local communities, and local officials, to understand what really is going on.

For these reasons, we need to provide employees with a better framework for such activities. We must honestly assess the risks. We need to compare our practices with those of the UN, other countries and NGOs. For example, in Nigeria, many of these entities go regularly to the delta. And we should be able to do likewise. However, I suggest we not force employees to take such risks, but seek only volunteers for such duty. We should also increase language training so that diplomats can travel in remote areas with greater interaction with people and maneuver better. We also can ask employees (as many now do) to entertain more in local restaurants and in their homes, rather than meet with counterparts in the rather forbidding surroundings of today’s fortress embassies.

We need to ask these same employees to be prepared to manage consulates in less than fully secure areas. We need to fashion, with Diplomatic Security, the technological and physical arrangements that would make such posts relatively more secure, even if far from perfect.

### **4. Do our Ambassadors have sufficient authority and flexible resources to carry out their mission appropriately?**

Again I would refer the Committee to the Academy of American Diplomacy report, which details the additional authorities and resources needed. Ambassadors need more flexible funds on

the ground to sponsor better communications within local societies, to provide educational and professional travel, and to promote better governance. The AAD report recommends in particular that the “Emergency in the Diplomatic and Consular Service“ fund be increased from \$5 million to \$25 million and be used more for conflict prevention than only response to crises once they have emerged..Other increases for authorities and funds are detailed in the report.

One difficult challenge is that while AFRICOM can operate across regions, like the Sahel, and indeed such regional approaches are necessary, Ambassadors can approve or disapprove activities in their own countries of assignment, but are not in a position to help shape regional programs nor to monitor them. A study last year by the National Defense University suggested that in particular where the U.S. military is actively engaged, the Department arrange for one Ambassador in the sub-region to coordinate with his neighboring colleagues, with the funds to bring them together, and that Ambassador or the regional group have some authority to pass on regional programs operated by other agencies. The Horn and the Sahel are good examples of where this would be valuable.

#### **5. How can we better engage with regional actors, like Nigeria and South Africa, sub-regional organizations, and the African Union?**

One of the lessons of the resolution of many of Africa’s conflicts is that African leadership, or very active involvement, was essential. Particularly since the formation of the AU in 2000, African leaders have been instrumental in bringing peace to Burundi, the early agreements to end the civil war in the DRC, and to fashion efforts at creating a government in Somalia. In west Africa, only when neighboring states finally came to agreement that the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, in which several of them were indirectly involved, was costing them more than they gained, was ECOWAS and its peacekeeping arm, ECOMOG able to bring peace to those countries. Indeed in virtually every conflict on the continent, both internal and external actors are involved, and only agreement by both will bring a conflict to an end.

Unfortunately, however, Africa currently suffers from a dearth of strong and regionally committed leadership in key countries like Nigeria and South Africa. Nigeria’s Obasanjo, who was personally involved in overcoming coups in several west African countries and a force behind the forward leaning policies of the AU, has been succeeded by a president who is not well, and less inclined to be a major figure on the continental scene. Thabo Mbeki is gone from South Africa, depriving the AU and Africa in general of a leader who thought long and hard about how to advance the continents’ own peacemaking and peacekeeping capacities and who used South Africa’s resources, e.g., in Burundi and the DRC, for that purpose. Another formerly leading player, especially in the Horn, was Kenya. But Kenya is now absorbed in its internal political crisis. The AU has itself suffered from setbacks in its peacekeeping operations in Darfur and Somalia. It is questionable that the organization will take such forward leaning steps in the near future, as it did in Burundi, Darfur, and Cote d’Ivoire, but rather look to UN or western led

operations being initiated first in which to participate. For the immediate future therefore we must recognize that African leadership is relatively weak.

Nevertheless, in every conflict situation on the continent today, active African participation in both the peace process and possible sanctions or peacekeeping is essential. In some cases, however, as in Sudan and Somalia, we will need to find a broader regional structure than the AU, to bring in Middle East countries as well. The decision to establish an Ambassador to the AU was a valuable step and thoughts that the position should be absorbed with the Ambassador to Ethiopia would be an unfortunate setback. Strengthening the AU's conflict resolution capacities, its peacekeeping role, and its progress in implementing other reforms as represented in NEPAD, are valuable investments. The Ambassador's role might be enhanced, moreover, to take on the role of coordinator of US policy in the Horn, along the lines described above.

Among the sub-regional organizations, ECOWAs stands out for progress made in both conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Continued investment in it is eminently sensible. SADC will only achieve effectiveness in this regard after it resolves the situation in Zimbabwe and perhaps reconciles relations more between South Africa and Angola.

South Africa itself remains key, but with the current economic downturn, and the change in leadership, it is questionable how active it will be beyond the southern and central region. Yet, the U.S. should make a major effort to turn a new page in our relations with South Africa following the election there.

The bottom line here is that African leadership will be less able in the next few years. Conflict prevention and resolution will thus have to combine African participation along with vigorous outside participation. Each conflict will need to be surrounded by a group of nearby affected African states, U.S. and European involvement and help, and in several cases like Somalia, heavy reliance and support for the convening and negotiating role of the UN.

## **Conclusion**

Comparisons are misleading. Sub-Saharan Africa consists of 48 states, many weak and most subject to the spillover effects of conflict in neighboring countries. Conflicts will be a part of the continental scene for decades to come. That is why every Assistant Secretary of State for Africa starts out with a broad agenda, of development, good governance, regional integration, more trade, and improvements in the environment, etc., but spends most of his or her time dealing with one crisis after another or more likely several simultaneously. The structure of the Africa Bureau, and other support units of the Department, do not reflect this reality.

The Africa Bureau staff is smaller than that of the East Asia and Pacific, Western Hemisphere, or the Europe and Eurasia bureaus. It lacks surge capacity, the ability to assemble teams of people to work over years on serious, complex conflicts. Where active conflicts do not exist, the staffing is thin. There is one desk officer for Nigeria, the most populous and one of the most important

countries on the continent. The Office of the Coordinator for Post-Conflict Recovery and Stabilization was supposed to supplement this capacity. It has to some extent, but it too has been limited, and bureaucratic rivalries have further limited its role. If we are serious about conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, we have to recognize that this is a labor-intensive effort, and that the labor assigned to the Africa Bureau has not been appropriate to the task.

Naming special envoys can also be a diversion if not backed up by a team of professional staff, with resources and the ability to manage a complex diplomatic process on a full time basis. We should not confuse form with substance, nor saddle highly dedicated and competent envoys with tasks that are not adequately resourced.

But no amount of staffing nor resources can make up for competing or confused policies. U.S. policy in the Horn has long been pulled back and forth between agencies and between elements in State, reducing our leverage and confusing both partners and combatants. Our policy in the DRC has at times been conflicted between the realities on the ground and the desire to protect relations with neighbors who deny their involvement. As AFRICOM takes a more active role on the continent, and addresses more and more the security issues that affect the U.S., as it must, the situation cries out for dynamic and broadly based leadership from State, at the Washington, sub-regional, and local level. That will take strategic thinking, more and better trained staff, and more resources.