

# African Conflicts and U.S. Diplomacy

## Roles and Choices

A Report of the CSIS Africa Program and the  
American Academy of Diplomacy

### AUTHORS

Jennifer G. Cooke  
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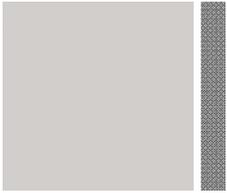
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# AFRICAN CONFLICTS AND U.S. DIPLOMACY

## ROLES AND CHOICES

*Jennifer G. Cooke and Richard Downie<sup>1</sup>*

## Acknowledgments

The conference, “African Conflicts and U.S. Diplomacy: Roles and Choices,” was cosponsored by the Africa Program of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the American Academy of Diplomacy (AAD), whose participation was made possible through a generous programs grant from the Arthur Ross Foundation. The event brought together, in both the audience and the panel sessions, a remarkable array of senior U.S. diplomats with tremendous breadth of experience in Africa. The result was a set of lively and informed discussions on the challenges and possibilities for U.S. diplomacy in Africa, and the organizers are most grateful to all who participated for their thoughtful contributions.

Special thanks are due to Ambassador William Mark Bellamy, director of the African Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University; Herman Cohen, independent business consultant; Ambassador Frances Cook, chair of Ballard Group LLC; Chester Crocker, professor of strategic studies at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service; Ambassador Princeton Lyman, adjunct senior fellow for Africa policy studies at the Council on Foreign Relations; and Ambassador David Shinn, adjunct professor at the George Washington University Elliott School of International Affairs. CSIS and AAD also wish to thank Elizabeth Burrell, AAD program director; Tara Haase and Aniekan Udoh, CSIS Africa Program interns; and Richard Downie, CSIS Africa Program fellow, who served as conference rapporteur.

The report encapsulates the general conclusions of the October 29 conference; the ideas expressed are not the views of any one speaker, but a compilation of broader themes.

## Introduction

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the American Academy of Diplomacy (AAD) cohosted a conference on October 29, 2009, to examine the role of diplomacy in U.S. relations with Africa. Discussions were grounded in the belief that as U.S. interests and engagement in Africa expand, U.S. diplomatic capacities must expand accordingly. The need to

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer G. Cooke is director of the Africa Program at CSIS. Richard Downie is a fellow with the program.

effectively manage multiple strands of U.S. investments in security, development, and conflict mitigation and management has become more complex and more important. The United States faces a far more competitive environment in Africa than in previous decades, with “emerging powers”—most notably China, India, Brazil, and a number of smaller Asian states—making major political and economic plays, and with regional organizations, transnational influences, and African civil societies asserting themselves more and more in national affairs. At the same time, the United States faces continuing constraints in diplomatic resources and personnel. In this context, the United States will need to identify how best to use its influence in Africa, which policy areas and places it should prioritize, and how to balance effectively the use of diplomatic, military, and developmental tools.

The event was staged at CSIS, which has maintained through its Africa Program a long tradition of conducting analytical research aimed at informing U.S. foreign policy toward the region. The conference was cosponsored by AAD, an organization dedicated to explaining and enhancing the diplomatic conduct of the United States in foreign affairs. Of particular concern to AAD, said the organization’s president, Ambassador Ronald Neumann, in his opening remarks, is “the broken nature of our diplomatic institutions,” the result of inattention and two decades of staff and resource cuts in the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development.

Many of the conference speakers were drawn from the membership of the AAD, an illustrious group of former high-ranking U.S. diplomats and individuals influential in U.S. foreign policy. A large audience was in attendance, including former and serving diplomats from the United States and Africa, U.S. policymakers, and representatives from the corporate sector, the development community, and nongovernment organizations (NGOs). They contributed to the lively question and answer sessions that followed the presentations. This report picks out the major topics to emerge from the conference and presents a collage of the main opinions expressed and the points of consensus that emerged.

## **Panel I. The Place of Diplomacy in U.S. Africa Policy**

U.S. diplomacy in Africa is at a crossroads. New challenges and opportunities are emerging in Africa that require new approaches. At the same time, the United States is grappling with how best to coordinate its overall policy toward Africa and integrate a number of major new Africa-related initiatives launched in the last decade. In particular, the newly established U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) continues to raise questions about the balance of tools and resources available to policymakers; the appropriate division of labor among civilian and military institutions; and the much broader global U.S. foreign policy challenge of effectively integrating diplomacy, development, and security.

These new questions and demands coincide with a continued decline in capacity at the State Department’s Bureau of African Affairs. A report by the Office of the Inspector General, released in August 2009, describes the Africa Bureau as demoralized, overstretched, and short of staff, particularly at senior levels. It describes the Africa Public Affairs Office as a “failure” and argues

that AFRICOM is “stepping into a void created by a lack of resources for traditional development and public diplomacy.”<sup>2</sup> While longer-term investments in diplomatic capacity will ultimately be required to redress deficiencies, in the current context, it becomes ever more important that limited diplomatic capacities are used effectively. Further, policymakers will be called on to make difficult decisions in setting priorities and making trade-offs in diplomatic investments.

The first panel examined a number of these broad themes underpinning U.S. diplomatic efforts toward Africa. William Mark Bellamy, director of the African Center for Strategic Studies and former U.S. ambassador to Kenya, talked about the various policy tools the United States has at its disposal and its options for coordinating them; Frances Cook, chair of Ballard Group LLC and former U.S. ambassador to Burundi and Cameroon spoke about diplomatic resources and setting priorities for engagement; and Chester Crocker, professor of strategic studies at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and former U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs addressed the question of where and when the United States should intervene in Africa. The discussion was moderated by William Harrop, chairman of the program committee of the AAD and a former ambassador to Guinea, Kenya, Seychelles, and Zaire.

## The Changing African Context

There was agreement among the panelists that Africa has made significant progress on a number of fronts in the past decade, although important challenges remain. The continent posted average national growth rates of 6 percent annually from 2003 to the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008. Many countries have weathered the crisis far better than would have been the case a decade ago, having established much stronger fiscal management structures and planning capacities. A number of countries are struggling to tackle corruption, and investment in Africa, although small in global terms, has increased dramatically, with new investors, many from Asia, sparking renewed interest and largely healthy economic competition. In terms of democratic progress, the record is generally positive, despite some recent reversals. By 2006 more than 30 countries had abandoned single-party rule. These gains remain fragile, however, in the absence of strong institutions such as functioning courts, a free media, and engaged civil society leaders.

In the security arena, the number and cost of African conflicts have declined over the course of the past decade, though some very hard cases remain. The African Union and African subregional organizations can claim some responsibility in this, having helped to delegitimize military coups d'état and taken a tough stance against illegal takeovers in the likes of Guinea, Madagascar, and Mauritania. But looking forward, several trends combine to threaten the security environment. Climate change and environmental degradation, population growth, food insecurity, urbanization, underemployment, and a burgeoning “youth bulge” all have the potential to exacerbate competition for scarce resources and employment, and potentially raise the risk of conflict if not

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<sup>2</sup> Office of Inspector General, “Report of Inspection: The Bureau of African Affairs,” OIG Report No. ISP-I-09-63, U.S. Department of State, p. 8, <http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/127270.pdf>.

effectively managed by African societies and leadership. With institutions still chronically weak, many governments are likely to face continued internal challenges, ranging from social disorder and crime to armed insurgencies. Because of these emerging “mega trends”—and ongoing conflict in Eastern Congo, Somalia, and Sudan—it is premature to argue that Africa has turned the corner on crisis and instability.

Stated U.S. priorities for engagement have remained fairly consistent over time. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson has recently outlined the administration’s core objectives as strengthening democracy and governance, promoting economic development, preventing conflict, and increasingly, dealing with transnational threats. Speakers welcomed the Obama administration’s emphasis on agriculture and food security and its decision to retain successful Bush-era initiatives in Africa such as the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which one panelist praised as one of the “most successful new approaches to foreign aid in generations.” There was also general agreement on the benefits of a dedicated military command for Africa, focused on building African military capacities to better respond and manage insecurity, engage in peacekeeping operations, and respect civilian authorities and the rule of law.

Nonetheless, serious concerns persist about the State Department’s capacity to effectively coordinate and manage these multiple programs, in light of a prolonged “hollowing out” of Africa Bureau capacities, made more pronounced in recent years by diversion of personnel to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East. Absent major increases in staffing and resources, said Cook, the Africa Bureau risks “a decline to a role of concierge or administrative support for other executive branch agencies and programs.”

The advent of the U.S. Africa Command has put these concerns in stark relief. Many of the most heated debates around AFRICOM have been grounded less in fact than in perceptions and a more generalized concern over the role of the military establishment in U.S. foreign policy. Some of these misperceptions stem from AFRICOM’s “messy birth.” The formation of the command was announced with great fanfare and provoked unnecessary alarm in many African capitals, which feared neo-imperial intentions, high-profile counterterrorism initiatives, and a permanent U.S. military presence on the ground. AFRICOM was slow in clearing up those misunderstandings, partly because it was unclear about its own role. The controversy is slowly subsiding, particularly after the announcement that plans to locate command headquarters in Africa have been shelved and as the command gets on with the tasks that were carried out under the previous command structure but divided among the European, Central, and Pacific Commands.

Among the biggest and most persistent issues of contention that accompanied the launch of AFRICOM have been claims that the new command is so well resourced in comparison to the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that it risks overwhelming U.S. diplomatic and development initiatives, leading to a militarization of U.S. foreign policy. AFRICOM, said one panelist, seems to bustle with energy and can-do attitude, while the Africa Bureau, traditionally the least resourced of the State Department’s regional

bureaus, struggles to carry out its core responsibilities. Some of these fears are overblown, said one panelist. AFRICOM's budget for 2010 is "miniscule" (\$278 million) compared to U.S. foreign assistance programming for Africa. It has no dedicated troops, much of its staff is on secondment from civilian agencies, and permanent staff at headquarters in Stuttgart number "only" 1,300.

Nevertheless, real concerns persist that AFRICOM will lead to a distortion of U.S. priorities and resource allocations in Africa. The command has the ability to draw on major Department of Defense funding sources, to which the State Department does not have access. One area of potential concern is in public diplomacy/strategic communications, an area that the inspector general's report on the Africa Bureau singled out for particularly harsh criticism, but where the Defense Department has ample funding. A draft program under the auspices of AFRICOM, for example, proposes a \$250,000 anonymous communications campaign to combat extremism in the Sahel region using messaging in mosquito nets and water bottles and other advertising vehicles to spread its message that terrorism is inconsistent with local character and custom.<sup>3</sup> Those funds, said one speaker, would be better spent on providing scholarships for Sahelian students.

The funding gap between the Department of Defense and the Department of State is a generally shared concern. A 2008 report published by AAD and the Stimson Center calls for an increase of 46 percent in Department of State staffing by 2014, if the department is to effectively carry out its core mission.<sup>4</sup> But while it is important to continue to make the case to Congress and the administration to bolster staffing and investment in USAID and State, fully adequate resourcing is unlikely to materialize any time soon. The task of policymakers, said Bellamy, is to accept the reality of this funding mismatch and try to manage and mitigate it. The State Department and USAID should embrace the idea that AFRICOM is a fact and work to shape the command while it is still in its formative stages. The State Department should be clear about its own objectives of advancing security, development, and good governance and build whole-of-government approaches around these goals. To date, the State Department has not stepped up to play this role and has instead left it to the command to integrate civilian agency personnel and perspectives into AFRICOM headquarters. That DOD should lead a whole-of-government approach may make some sense in a region where the United States is engaged in active conflict, but there is no reason that in Africa this approach cannot be State Department led.

This leadership should begin first and foremost at the country level, where the chief of mission, under National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 38 authorities, "controls the size, composition, and mandate of overseas full-time mission staffing for all U.S. Government

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<sup>3</sup> See Elizabeth Dickenson, "Can Mosquito Nets Stop Terrorists?" *Foreign Policy Magazine*, September 1, 2009, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/09/01/debating\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_winning\\_hearts\\_and\\_minds](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/09/01/debating_the_future_of_winning_hearts_and_minds).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Boyatt et al., *A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future: Fixing the Crisis in Diplomatic Readiness* (Washington, D.C.: American Academy of Diplomacy and Stimson Center, October 2008), [http://www.academyofdiplomacy.org/publications/FAB\\_report\\_2008.pdf](http://www.academyofdiplomacy.org/publications/FAB_report_2008.pdf).

agencies.” Too often, however, U.S. ambassadors in Africa have been unwilling to fully exercise these authorities. The State Department, said Bellamy,

“must do a better job of preparing and demanding that chiefs of mission exercise these whole of government leadership responsibilities, particularly with regards to security and security assistance. Too many ambassadors are still uncomfortable taking charge of intelligence and security programs or dealing with corruption or tough problems of governance. This is certainly true in the African context and is a professional bias that needs to be corrected.”

There is a strong sense that AFRICOM personnel expect this leadership and in fact would welcome it.

As for AFRICOM’s appropriate function going forward, panelists agreed that its role should be carefully defined. The command should focus on its core competencies: training African security forces. AFRICOM’s role is not primarily one of conflict prevention, except perhaps in professionalizing militaries so that they do not become a source of crisis. Its role is building African military capacity to effectively manage and respond to crises—whether in conflict, humanitarian relief, or disaster response.

AFRICOM, as Princeton Lyman pointed out, has the very valuable advantage of being able to mobilize African countries at a subregional level around an issue of common concern, whether maritime security, counterterrorism, or disaster response. The State Department, by contrast has no structure through which to relate to subregions, and USAID’s funding for regionally based programs has been gutted over the last 10 years. The State Department, said Lyman, needs to be thinking about new ways to relate to Africa’s subregions in order to match AFRICOM’s capability in this area.

## **Faced with Limited Resources and Changing Priorities, Deciding When, If, and How to Intervene Is More Important than Ever**

U.S. engagement can take on many forms, ranging from humanitarian assistance to diplomacy to military action. Given finite resources and capacities, the United States must often make hard choices on how much diplomatic capital to invest in crisis or conflict situations. It cannot invest equally in every crisis or potential crisis. In intervening in these situations, decisionmakers must be careful and sensitive in setting ground rules for engagement since intervention is never impartial—it can decide, for better or worse, who governs, who eats, and who survives. At the same time, setting rules for where, when, and how to intervene has become more difficult as U.S. interests in Africa have become harder to define following the end of the Cold War.

The reality is that decisions are made on a case-by-case basis or in response to events. A triage process is inevitable, whereby possible types and places of intervention are ordered in terms of priority and their likelihood of success, based on the availability of resources. For this reason, U.S. diplomatic activity has focused on the Horn of Africa and Sudan in particular, to the detriment of other crises such as those in the Great Lakes region or Niger Delta. Decisionmakers must make hard-nosed decisions in setting criteria for intervention. Among the criteria that

policymakers need to consider, said Crocker, are cases where U.S. security interests are at stake; where a crisis risks having broad, regional consequences; where the United States is expected to take the lead; where the United States can usefully follow the lead of others such as the United Nations; and where grave humanitarian values are at stake and where domestic public opinion demands that the United States provide policy leadership. The United States must also take into account the willingness of African governments and regional bodies to accept such leadership.

Triage has its limitations, however, and policymakers must be flexible, nimble, and sensitive to new facts on the ground in making assessments. Africa has had a strong tendency to throw up crises from unexpected corners of the continent. Countries that at first blush may appear marginal in broader U.S. interests may become engulfed in conflict that ultimately has a major impact on regional stability and U.S. interests. The Rwandan genocide is the most prominent example of such a crisis, and the failure to intervene has left an enduring black mark on the U.S. record in Africa.

Assessing country vulnerabilities, the potential for crisis, the likely trajectory and impact of crises, and the optimal timing and method of U.S. intervention all require nuanced understanding of in-country dynamics. Embassies must be empowered to make the case back to Washington for greater attention and capacity, and the Africa Bureau leadership can then presumably prioritize interventions according to the criteria above. With U.S. embassies in Africa chronically understaffed—even in large, fragile, politically important states—adequate coverage of potential hot spots is often impossible. The result is that U.S. responses are more often than not driven by crises, with far less investment in crisis prevention. Too often missing is U.S. diplomatic engagement in helping move seemingly intractable conflict toward negotiated settlement.

## **Panel II. Today's Most Salient Hot Spots**

The second panel sought to apply the broad themes outlined in the opening section to three regions of Africa that will perforce figure on the United States' Africa policy agenda. Princeton Lyman, former ambassador to Nigeria and South Africa, discussed Nigeria, a continental powerhouse in which the United States has significant energy stakes. David Shinn, former ambassador to Ethiopia and Burkina Faso described the Horn of Africa, where a web of national and transnational conflicts has had devastating humanitarian impacts and has security implications for the United States in violent extremism, piracy, and regional destabilization. And former assistant secretary of state for African affairs Herman Cohen discussed the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has at times involved seven neighboring states, has left some 5 million people dead since 1998, and has seen horrific (and rising) levels of sexual violence and brutality against civilians in its eastern region.

### **Nigeria**

Nigeria has been described by Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson as the most important country in Africa. As the fourth-largest supplier of U.S. imported oil, Nigeria is of strategic importance to

the United States. But oil production has been erratic and often interrupted by insecurity in the oil-producing Niger Delta. Beyond its impact in the global energy market, the crisis in the delta has the potential of destabilizing Nigeria at a national level and in addition has given rise to a range of criminal enterprises in the Gulf of Guinea region, including piracy, arms trafficking, and money laundering. Nigeria has been a valuable partner in regional security—contributing to peacekeeping operations, taking the diplomatic initiative in helping to resolve conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and spearheading the African Union’s Peace and Security Council. But the country’s regional role has diminished as Nigeria’s currently weak federal government has become preoccupied by multiple internal problems. Political crises in Guinea and Niger are left to fester for want of the regional leadership that Nigeria has traditionally provided.

Given the clear importance of Nigeria to the United States, it is perhaps surprising that relations between the two countries have drifted. But there are a number of reasons for this. First, Nigeria has been a victim of policy triage: scarce diplomatic resources have been directed elsewhere in Africa, mainly to the Horn of Africa and Sudan. Currently, the United States has no diplomatic presence in either the Niger Delta or the north of the country. U.S. embassy personnel, because of security concerns, are barred from travelling to the Delta.

Engaging with Nigeria will be difficult in the best of circumstances. Nigeria’s oil sector has created a rentier economy around which an entrenched and deeply corrupt political system has developed. Much of the country’s political elite neither understands nor cares enough about the long-term problems of the country to take real action in changing its development trajectory or political culture. And the country does not respond positively to offers of help from outsiders, preferring to find its own ways of dealing with its problems. It has rebuffed suggestions of outside mediation in the delta, and while it might accept military hardware, for example, it does not particularly welcome offers of military training.

Given its many problems, it is easy to listen to those who warn that Nigeria is on its way to becoming a failed state. While state collapse is extremely unlikely, the country could very well become increasingly difficult to govern. The recent amnesty agreement in the Niger Delta has opened up a small window of opportunity to solve the long-running insurgency, although there has been very little planning for sustained disarmament, reintegration, or employment for the thousands of young militants that made up the insurgency.

Faced with these challenges, what options does the United States have for engagement with Nigeria? U.S. public diplomacy should be used to press both the federal government and the armed groups to follow through on their commitments. The role of the U.S. ambassador is particularly important here and a powerful tool if used carefully and judiciously. A well-timed speech or interview can help galvanize public thinking in the country in question. It was used to great effect by the former ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, when he spoke out against President Olusegun Obasanjo’s attempts to run for a third term in office. Perhaps the most important message that Nigeria should hear right now, said Lyman, is that those who care deeply about Nigeria have never been so worried about the country as they are right now. Hearing this

from partners and friends may push Nigerian policymakers to take a harder look at the country's looming challenges.

The forthcoming U.S.-Nigeria binational commission provides an opportunity for useful engagement, but the United States needs to be careful in how it uses the commission. Rather than coming to the table with a list of demands and a reform agenda, the United States should be prepared to offer creative, positive ideas for tackling some of the issues that matter most to Nigerians. This could include, for example, public-private initiatives on infrastructure or power generation and distribution.

The United States could make a greater effort to reach out to the politically independent Nigerian business community, which is large and sophisticated, but which to date has not engaged as much as it could in advocacy for electoral reform, better governance, and rule of law.

AFRICOM can play a useful role in Nigeria, although it will need to be careful not to reinforce perceptions that the United States is solely interested in the security of oil resources. Previous offers of help in the Niger Delta (on tracking oil theft, money laundering, and arms trafficking) have been rejected. But AFRICOM can nonetheless seek to build mutual trust, engage with reformist elements within the military, and help reinforce an ethic of military professionalism.

Finally, the State Department must overcome the risk-averse culture that bars U.S. diplomats from travelling to the Niger Delta. The United States can make a strong contribution by engaging and building relationships in the delta and by strengthening the capacities and political acumen of the region's future leaders.

## **The Horn of Africa**

The Horn of Africa has been the most conflicted region on earth since the end of World War II and is therefore a place where the triage approach to intervention comes under most strain. Sudan has been wracked by Africa's longest civil war, between the North and South, the war in Darfur, and multiple other internal conflicts. It has also been involved in periodic clashes with neighboring Chad. In Ethiopia, there is an unresolved border conflict with Eritrea, as well as ongoing struggles for independence or greater autonomy by groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Somalia is in the throes of an Islamist insurgency and was occupied by Ethiopian troops for more than a year. Djibouti suffers periodic clashes between government forces and the opposition Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) and is involved in a border dispute with Eritrea.

Faced with these multiple conflicts, the United States has largely chosen to focus its efforts on Sudan in recent years. The Bush administration invested heavily in ending the North-South civil war in Sudan, and its efforts were rewarded by the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, the most significant diplomatic achievement in Africa for many years, in terms of conflict resolution. In Darfur, intervention has been driven by domestic public opinion in America.

Public opinion and media interest have also played a part in moving Somalia up the policy agenda, particularly its links with piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean (even if the direct impact of piracy on U.S. interests is perhaps less than the intensive media coverage would suggest). U.S. engagement in Somalia's internal crisis has been less successful. A series of interventions—such as the decision to back warlords against the Islamic Courts Union in the early 2000s, to support Ethiopian military intervention in 2006, and to launch cruise missile strikes against suspected al Qaeda terrorists in early 2007—have probably caused more harm than good and reduced the number of viable options for positive engagement today. Military interventions, as was pointed out in the first panel, tend to radically change the balance on the ground. The Obama administration should be mindful of this as it supplies military equipment to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Such interventions can easily backfire, and already there are credible reports that U.S. military equipment supplied to the TFG is finding its way onto the streets of Mogadishu.

U.S. engagement with Ethiopia is particularly problematic and highlights the difficulties of exercising leverage over an ally that performs a useful role in promoting U.S. security interests in the region yet is moving backwards on democratic reform. Withdrawing aid is not an option because most of the funds are tied to HIV treatment and prevention, and it is not ethically possible to use people's lives as a bargaining chip. One panelist questioned whether the alliance with Ethiopia was worth preserving.

The prospects for resolving the multiple conflicts in the Horn of Africa are gloomy. Climate change and resource scarcity are likely to be additional drivers of conflict in this region. Water, said Shinn, should be an issue of tremendous concern, with Nile River levels falling as populations in 10 ten riparian states rise. Finding an equitable way of sharing this dwindling resource will be a major challenge for the future.

## **The Great Lakes**

The United States has been engaged with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since its chaotic inception in 1960. The prevailing view in Washington has been that the DRC is too big to be allowed to fail. Nevertheless, engagement has been patchy and has failed to tackle the country's underlying problems in any meaningful way. These include professionalizing the national army, the FARDC, so that it becomes a force for stability rather than a threat to its own population; and resolving the fractious relationship between the DRC and Rwanda. Rwanda, said Cohen, has reaped enormous economic rewards from natural resources taken from the eastern Congo. Finding a way of transforming this relationship into a mutually beneficial one is crucial.

The United States has traditionally allowed other countries and organizations to take the lead role on engagement in the DRC, most notably the United Nations and the European Union. However, there are useful ways in which the United States can contribute. AFRICOM can play a constructive role in helping the DRC to professionalize its army. Training is important but so too is ensuring that an effective military bureaucracy and management structure is put in place. The

State Department should work closely with AFRICOM to push for accountable, effective management structures within the security sector. Soldiers will continue to prey on civilian populations if they are not paid regularly. Reaching a deal on army pay is therefore of the utmost importance.

The United States is well placed to help address tensions between Rwanda and the DRC. It is viewed as an honest broker and enjoys generally good relations with all the states in the region. The United States should seek ways to formalize economic relationships within the Great Lakes region by encouraging the formation of a regional economic group encompassing the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi. Exploitation of the DRC's vast resources will happen with or without regulation. Establishing a framework to regulate trade and to ensure that local populations realize economic and developmental benefits will be critical to longer-term stability in the region.

The final way the United States can usefully engage with the DRC is in exploring ways to mitigate the country's "resource curse." Some of the damage caused by the exploitation of the DRC's mineral wealth can be offset by resetting the economy on the path of agricultural development. The DRC is an ideal partner for the Obama administration as it sets about implementing its food security initiative.

## **The Strategic Impact of Foreign Assistance**

Andrew Natsios, distinguished professor at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and administrator of USAID between 2001 and 2005, offered a luncheon address, focusing on the role of development assistance in U.S. engagement with Africa and the challenges that confront the U.S. foreign assistance establishment. Political dynamics in the United States, Natsios argued, have distorted U.S. assistance programs in ways that have been extremely destructive.

### **Development Policy Should Be Decentralized to the Field**

In the development arena, the U.S. government has become overly centralized and fails to pay sufficient attention to skilled practitioners in the field, people who have more insight into what policy tools are likely to work and which approaches are less successful. Special interest groups and debates among U.S. policymakers in Washington tend to drown out the voices of Africans and development workers in the field. The trend toward centralization leads to a distortion of priorities, a process exacerbated further by the "F" process, the name given to the Bush administration's efforts to realign foreign assistance programs with U.S. policy goals. USAID should be given department-level status, said Natsios, or at the very least robust independence under the direction of the secretary of state.

### **Washington's Regulatory Bureaucracy Inhibits Long-term Investment in Development**

A formidable Washington bureaucracy of regulators and oversight agencies, led by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and others, is leading

to a preoccupation with quantitative measurements of performance, said Natsios. This approach, while appropriate perhaps for U.S. bureaucracies that perform the same task over and over, is an utter disaster for a development agency and is a disincentive to creativity and innovation. This bureaucracy has overregulated development programs and has stifled the ability of USAID to operate effectively. Regulators have created a target-driven process that skews the focus in favor of short-term projects that can be easily measured and produce dramatic short-term results. They do not, however, produce long-term, sustainable development. PEPFAR, said Natsios, although very popular, is an example of this tendency. Its principal focus is on service delivery, not building long-term African capacities in the public health sector.

Another outcome of this tendency are the deep cuts in the provision of scholarships for future professionals in targeted sectors like agriculture and engineering, historically deemed one of the most successful U.S. foreign assistance interventions. The United States used to provide some 20,000 such scholarships per year; today it provides 900 annually. These programs were cut largely because their impact is not felt for 15 to 20 years—too long a timeframe for the accounting bureaucracy, said Natsios.

## **Interest Groups Are Dominating the Discourse on Development, Leading to Skewed Priorities**

Special interest groups create another series of distortions that undermine U.S. efforts to pursue a coherent policy on development. First, these groups often push aggressively for congressional earmarks for a particular issue, stifling flexibility in foreign assistance efforts. Twenty years ago, almost none of the Economic Support Fund (ESF) account was earmarked. Today, the account is worth \$2.9 billion, and all but \$67 million of it is earmarked. At the same time, there are no earmarks in place for agriculture or democracy and governance programs, two areas in which Africa desperately needs assistance. U.S. development assistance in Africa should place far greater emphasis on African priorities, not on those of U.S. special interest groups.

Food assistance efforts have also been undermined by U.S. domestic interests, said Natsios, undone by an “unholy alliance” of environmentalists who are distrustful of scientific, industrial-scale farming, and U.S. farming interests, which do not wish to see help given to potential competitors in other parts of the world. One of the results of this alliance is a warped food assistance program in which recipient countries must accept U.S. supplies, shipped at great cost across huge distances, instead of purchasing food supplies from neighboring countries with a food surplus.

## **Ways Forward**

For U.S. development assistance to get back on track, said Natsios, it must refocus in favor of long-term capacity and institution-building projects of 10 years or more, rather than short-term goals. Investing in people—by improving training capacity and bringing students from developing countries to study at U.S. universities—is of particular importance. This kind of investment makes a fundamental difference to a struggling country over the long-term, creating a

new cadre of trained professionals with the necessary skills to start businesses or run government departments.

Agriculture is another area where long-term development funds should be directed. The first Green Revolution passed Africa by, and it is now time to try again. Africa needs the application of science, fertilizer, and irrigation systems in order to raise farming productivity. Putting the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in charge of these efforts, as the Obama administration proposes to do, is ill-advised. USDA's mandate is to promote the interests of U.S.—not African—farmers.

Finally, it is important that the United States uses development in a more strategic way. Having a set of operating principles is important, but so too is the need to be flexible. Africa is not homogenous. The United States needs to adopt different, flexible approaches in its engagement with good performers, bad performers, and those that are in a phase of potential transition. Ultimately, it is not how much money the United States spends, but how it spends it that counts.

## Conclusions

The conference heard a range of views about the proper role of the United States in Africa, how it should marshal its limited resources, on what grounds it should intervene, and what forms of intervention are most relevant and feasible. Although there was no consensus on many of the issues, some common messages emerged from the discussions. Among the recurrent themes of the conference was that strong, capable, empowered diplomats, willing and able to take on diplomatic and policy leadership responsibilities and marshal resources and U.S. capabilities judiciously, will be essential to U.S. engagement in Africa.

- The administration should continue to make the case to Congress and the American people that as U.S. interests in Africa expand, diplomatic resources should increase accordingly.
- Even with a persistent shortage of resources, the Africa Bureau must be far more proactive in articulating its objectives in the security, development, and conflict-management arenas and in taking the lead in crafting whole-of-government approaches to these challenges. The State Department and USAID should be more assertive in helping shape and define the U.S. Africa Command while it is still in its formative stages.
- U.S. ambassadors in Africa must be prepared and encouraged to take on leadership responsibilities at the country level in managing and directing U.S. engagement—both civilian and military—in partner countries. They should seek creative ways to leverage additional capacities of NGOs and the private sector.
- The Africa Bureau should reconfigure and invest in its public diplomacy capacities, and the bureau and in-country embassies should play a greater role in shaping U.S. communications strategies—whether military or civilian—in African countries. U.S. ambassadors have a powerful bully pulpit in delivering messages directly to the people and governments of partner states, but they need to use this powerful tool judiciously.

- The United States should consider intervention when important strategic interests are at stake, when a crisis has regional implications, when others expect the United States to take the lead, when the United States can usefully follow the lead of others, and when engagement has a chance of achieving its objectives. In the great majority of cases, U.S. intervention should be diplomatic and political, rather than military.
- In the development arena, the United States needs to do a better job of listening and responding to partner-country priorities and empowering field staff to be flexible and innovative and to be more fully integrated into program development. The United States should prioritize its efforts on long-term projects that help African governments build capacity and develop strong institutions.

# Annex: Conference Agenda

## African Conflicts and U.S. Diplomacy: Roles and Choices October 29, 2009

### **Introductory Comments**

Ambassador Ronald Neumann, *President, American Academy of Diplomacy*

Jennifer G. Cooke, *Director, Africa Program, CSIS*

### **Panel I. The Place of Diplomacy in U.S. Africa Policy**

Policy tools and coordination: Ambassador Mark Bellamy, *Director, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University*

Diplomatic resources and priorities for engagement: Ambassador Frances Cook, *Chair, Ballard Group LLC*

Where and when to intervene: Chester Crocker, *James R. Schlesinger Professor of Strategic Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service*

Moderator: Ambassador William Harrop, *Director, American Academy of Diplomacy*

### **Panel II. Today's Most Salient Hot Spots**

Nigeria: Ambassador Princeton Lyman, *Adjunct Senior Fellow for Africa Policy Studies, Council of Foreign Relations*

Horn of Africa: Ambassador David Shinn, *Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University*

Great Lakes: Ambassador Herman Cohen, *Independent Business Consultant, Africa*

Moderator: Jennifer Cooke, *Director, Africa Program, CSIS*

### **Luncheon Address: The Strategic Impact of Foreign Assistance**

Andrew Natsios, *Distinguished Professor in the Practice of Diplomacy, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service*

To listen to a recording of the conference, follow this link on the CSIS Web site:  
<http://csis.org/event/african-conflicts-and-american-diplomacy-roles-and-choices>.

