

Testimony of Thomas R Pickering

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Strengthening US Diplomacy to Anticipate, Prevent and Respond to Conflict in Africa

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased and honored to be asked to testify before the Sub-Committee this afternoon on the important subject of anticipating, preventing and responding to conflict in Africa.

Over the years I had the privilege of serving our government and people on three separate occasions in Africa. First, I was assigned as a naval officer in Port Lyautey (Kenitra), Morocco from 1957 to 1959. Later I served as a Foreign Service officer in Tanzania as Consul in Zanzibar from 1965 to 1967, and then later as Deputy Chief of Mission at our Embassy in Dar es Salaam from 1967 to 1969. Subsequently, I was Ambassador to Nigeria from 1981 to 1983.

Later I served as Under Secretary for Political Affairs in the State Department from 1997-2000 where I dealt frequently with African issues. These assignments have given me a good basis to understand Africa and African developments, particularly as they relate to conflict.

Recently, I had the pleasure of participating in several relevant studies and panels including the Prevention of Genocide, a Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future, The Embassy of the Future, former Secretary of State Rice's Panel on Transitional Diplomacy, a Study of China, the US and Africa among others. These helped also to give me a firmer understanding of the challenges and the solutions.

Today I want to do several things in my testimony. First I want to sketch out the nature of conflict and some of the issues which lead to conflict in current day Africa. Then I want to point to some of the steps and ideas that will contribute to anticipating, preventing and responding to conflict in the continent. Lastly, I want to try to answer some of your specific questions.

Conflict in Africa

While Africa over the years had has more than its share of conflicts and problems which might lead to conflict, a careful review of some of the current issues and problems in Africa will set out some of the kinds of issues which Africans and those outside the continent interested in conflict resolution face now and in the future. In this testimony it is not possible to review all of the issues. However, drawing heavily on the work of the

International Crisis Group, where I am Co-Chairman of the Board, I believe I can provide information on a broadly representative sample of current questions and issues to set the stage.

Let me begin in West Africa. Just a few months ago the important country of Guinea underwent a transition with the death of president Conte, a long serving president of the country who had been in charge for several decades and ran the country almost as a personal fief. His death led to serious uncertainty and a difficult selection process for his successor. The disappearance of autocrats in Africa without any clear system for their successor is often a source of tension, uncertainty and potential conflict. The African Union, The Economic Organization of West African States (ECOWAS) and friendly countries can play a diplomatic role in easing those transitions and avoiding conflict in the region. This requires good personnel in our Embassies and strong Ambassadorial leadership from knowledgeable and experienced professional diplomats. A recent report setting out the needed funding to make up for shortfalls in these areas in the State Department will be reviewed in a following section of my testimony to point out some of the way forward.

A second problem arose in the small country of Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony before its independence some years ago. This is not the first time Guinea Bissau has experienced troubles. Recently, the Army Chief was assassinated and the Head of State was later killed during the ensuing confusion. It was clear to many observers that the root cause of these problems was increased drug trafficking through the country and the involvement of these elements in trying to influence governing relationships to protect their own activities. In this case, intelligence collection on site, strong leadership with good contacts and an ability to work diplomatically with other foreign representatives and to engage them in working together are critical requirements and skills need to help avoid conflict or prevent wider conflict.

In Zimbabwe over recent months the extensive crises leading to starvation and a nearly unchecked cholera epidemic as well as economic collapse and a dispute over election returns and the participation of the opposition in governance and indeed the future of President Robert Mugabe who has ruled the country since independence in 1980 all impacted the country and raised the potential for extended internal conflict.

What happened was the slow and painful working out of a potential solution around creating a unity government with the opposition leader as Prime Minister. This took a great deal of time and much political skill, mainly on the part of African states willing to work closely with both sides. It was an important example of how a political crisis that could lead to open conflict was resolved, at least temporarily, with a complex political solution involving both compromise and the beginning of a transition from long time one person rule to a more open leadership. The problems of Zimbabwe are a long way from full resolution, but efforts to build a shared leadership, introduce the dollar as the current currency, fight the epidemic and open the door for more trade have helped.

South Africa tomorrow will have national elections. The succession in the African National Congress (ANC) has been disputed and fraught with local difficulties. New parties have emerged to contest the ANC's dominance of the political scene. The US has to watch this issue with care, understand the trends and issues, maintain close contacts and on its own, and quietly speak to all the parties to insure that a tense and difficult situation does not become worse. In these kinds of situations, the US is often not the major player and must coordinate its actions carefully in quiet support of others who will take the lead.

East Africa continues to present challenges. Many are increasingly worried that in Kenya, the violence of the past year will emerge again to dominate the scene as the two factions and tribal groups, Kikuyu and Luo, show signs of preparing for further violence in the wake of the deterioration of political cooperation. This is the time to begin to take action, working with the parties to prevent a worsening of the situation and working with others to help quietly seek and broker political solutions to current difficulties.

Elsewhere in East Africa, Somalia is in more than just partial chaos. The resignation of a president who had little influence in the country is not the only sign of difficulty. Piracy off the coast has grown and is a current major story which will require naval and military cooperation as well as possible humanitarian assistance to deal with.

And up until now we have not touched on the complex sets of problems which impact two of Africa's giant states – The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan. Since each of these would take a hearing in itself, I will only touch on some of the recent highlights to give you an idea of some of the areas which must be addressed to prevent further conflict and deal with the present and potential humanitarian challenges.

Congo has undergone some of the most dramatic change. Eastern Congo has been the locus of longstanding conflict between Rwandan-backed and supported groups and the Army of the Congo. Rwanda has been sympathetic to its fellow Tutsis in the Congo, the Banyamulenge. This situation recently reversed itself when apparently Rwanda concluded that its erstwhile Tutsi ally, General Laurent Nkunda, was causing more difficulties than they could handle. Rwanda changed course, arrested General Nkunda which led to the dispersal of his forces, joined the Congolese Army and played an effective, leadership role in pushing some 6500 former Hutu Genocidaires in the Eastern Congo further back into the bush. Rwanda's motives were not all benign. It was beginning to take heavy international heat for its relationship with Nkunda, including from the US. The process was helped by an active role on behalf of the UN played by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. Congo still has many unmet priority needs, including what to do about a feckless national army, how to extend state authority over the Eastern Congo, the introduction of accountability into the government and how to improve governance and sustain regional relationships in general.

Sudan is, if anything, more complex. The indictment of its president, General Omar Bashir, by the International Criminal Court has led to retaliation from Sudan through the

expulsion of 13 humanitarian organizations working with displaced persons and refugees in Darfur.

The situation is further complicated by growing pressure on the North-South peace arrangement under which there will be a referendum in 2011 on whether the South will separate from the North. Difficult questions in the likely event of such a move such as border alignment need to be addressed. In addition, uncertainty and tensions over Darfur and the indictment of the president have in turn brought about greater pressures on the North-South peace agreement. This will require careful international handling and close coordination of the various players if we are to avoid new conflicts breaking out in Sudan.

Anticipation, Prevention and Response:

The above review notes a number of capacities and activities which can play a useful role in Africa.

First is the collection of intelligence. Africa has traditionally been seen as only a peripheral part of US strategic interest and even at the height of the Cold War and during the contention with the Soviet Union and China in Africa we had a weak intelligence presence in the continent. Embassies were in the forefront of collection and reporting information on events likely to lead to conflict. Often these were confused and unclear and our analysis capability was focused elsewhere and did not deal with African events on a timely basis. There were exceptions such as when we were negotiating to remove Cuban and Russian forces from Angola and Namibia and assisting with the independence of Namibia.

A second set of capacities relates to our diplomatic tool box. We must have experienced personnel, trained in local languages, knowledgeable and ready to move to deal with these issues in concert with others. We need specialized teams ready and able to deploy to assist in working some of the problems in Africa. Over the years we have been hollowing out our diplomatic capabilities and Africa has been low on the list of priorities. Shortly I will talk about some much needed remedies.

Anticipating, preventing and responding to conflicts in Africa, as elsewhere, requires effective and active public diplomacy. In recent years this capacity too has been scaled back. That too needs to be reversed as I will suggest below.

Similarly, our capacities in foreign assistance for both humanitarian needs and development have diminished quite remarkably. Both the total amount of funding available as well as the personnel trained and equipped to deal with these issues have diminished markedly in recent years.

In the same fashion, until we stood up AFRICOM, we had fewer resources and organizational capability to provide training and assistance to African military forces for the peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions of the African Union and the United

Nations both in and outside of Africa. While some have questioned our shift to a larger military quotient in our African policy, there is a small but significant role for our military assistance to play in preventing and responding to conflicts in Africa and supporting African Union peacekeepers. I suspect our present African Command, which I understand has over 1300 staff, is considerably larger than we need and will convey a signal to our friends in Africa that we are militarizing our policy.

In post conflict stabilization and reconstruction, we too have had almost no capacity until recently. The new office of Stabilization and Reconstruction in the State Department has set about rectifying that weakness.

What Should We Do Now?

“A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future”, a report prepared in October 2008 by the American Academy of Diplomacy and the Henry L. Stimson Center supported by the Una Chapman Cox Foundation provides some answers. It was predicated on the need to provide additional funds in the next five budget years to assure that the Department of State and AID would have sufficient personnel and training to be able to carry out their assigned tasks.

Let me review some highlights because they relate directly to the areas singled out in the discussion above of African conflicts. While we did not in specific terms provide direct recommendations on the African area of staffing we felt strongly that it should receive at least its traditional proportion of the increase, and because of past stinting, perhaps an even larger than proportionate share.

In traditional core diplomacy, a function which includes anticipating, preventing and responding to conflicts, the report recommends an increase in 1099 positions over FY 2008 levels by FY2014 at a cost of \$510.5m annually by FY 2014. The purposes served by this increase include funds for proactive and preventive shaping capabilities directly related to the purpose of this hearing, for pre-crisis conflict mediation and resolution and for the development of joint planning and joint-response strategies and capabilities.

Engagement of non-traditional actors, especially in the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector is another element that bears directly on the issues in this hearing and additional funds are called for in this area.

Increases include 100 positions in multilateral diplomacy, 20 additional staff in helping to shape new international law, 80 staff in the economic area, the analysis and reporting on which is often critical in crises leading to conflicts, and 175 positions in all aspects of greater inter-agency coordination in the Department of State.

In addition, it is proposed that funds made available to Ambassadors to deal with crises be increased from 25k to 250k, as well as up to \$30m to deal with reconciliation conferences, civil society and micro development projects, the ability to deploy rapid

mediation and reconciliation teams, and similar rapid deployment capabilities for civil police trainers and advisers who can deal with impending civil strife.

A major problem has been training. There are few positions set aside for this purpose and so to train people State has to pull them out of operational tasks. The report proposes an increase in such positions to 1287 by FY2014 at a cost of \$309.8m in FY2014 for all areas of training including hard languages such as Arabic, Urdu, Farsi and Chinese

Public diplomacy has been under funded for years. The report proposes an increase in personnel of 417 US and 369 locally engaged staff by FY2014 at a cost of \$155.2m. The report also recommends 100% increase in academic exchanges, 50% increase in visitor grants and 25% increase in youth exchanges as well as an expansion of English language training, 40 new oversea cultural centers and increased support for our existing, now privatized, Latin American cultural centers all at a cost of \$610.4m in FY2014.

Foreign aid is one of our primary tools in conflict prevention and response. AID personnel declined from 4300 in 1975 to 2200 in 2007. AID has only five engineers to work worldwide and 29 education officers to cover 84 countries. AID has become a contract management agency.

The proposal is to increase AID direct hire staff by 1250 above FY2008 levels by FY2014, offset by the reduction or conversion of some 700 contractors at a cost for the increase of \$521m by FY2014.

On Stabilization and Reconstruction, it is proposed to increase the staff at State by 562 by FY2014 including 500 to serve as an active response corps to deal with conflict prevention and response actions. In addition, it is proposed to establish a stand-by corps of 2000 people working in federal agencies and a civilian reserve of another 2000 working outside the federal government. The cost for these activities is high because it will require regular, on-going training as new personnel are brought on board, equipment including vehicles to support deployment, and security protection where security in particular cannot be provided by the US military.

Finally the report recommends the realignment of military assistance authorities so that except for places in which we are engaged in combat operations, the Secretary of State is responsible for approving the countries to receive assistance and the expenditure levels and the Secretary of Defense provides advice and implements the programs. Where combat is going on the Secretary of Defense will carry out the country designations and expenditure level determinations with the Secretary of State's advice.

We are pleased that FY2009 budget decisions included a first slice of many of these items and that we understand FY2010 budget proposals will similarly carry forward expanded requests. These should go far toward improving our capability in Africa to anticipate, prevent and respond to conflicts.

Questions:

Does the State Department or the Intelligence Community have sufficient capacity to assess long-term threats and anticipate potential genocide or mass atrocities?

Taking a leaf from the Genocide Report cited earlier. I believe the answer is no. That report recommends setting up a special office to cover, report on and follow these developments closely and to support a special interagency committee which is set up to deal with these issues as they emerge. While the report makes recommendations, exact staffing levels and arrangements should be the product of expert study by the agencies concerned.

What kind of additional resources, expertise or programs can add the most value?

The information provided above sets out a broad response. From my perspective I think the following activities are most important – mediation and negotiating teams specialized in dealing with conflict and conflict prevention; a special economic team which can assess weak and declining countries and recommend programs for the US and others to deal with this aspect of deterioration which might lead to conflict; rapid response humanitarian and economic assistance programs and military training programs to be used in cases where such tools could play a constructive role in conflict prevention; special public diplomacy teams which could deploy when required or be used in cases where such support is required to explain to the public and the regional and international community our policies and actions to prevent or respond to conflict.

Specifically in Africa, what regions are being neglected?

East Africa – Somalia; Central Africa – Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan; Southern Africa – Madagascar.

Do our Ambassadors in Africa (everywhere) have sufficient authority and flexibility to carry out their missions appropriately?

No. They need access to larger funds (250K) to respond to crises; the president needs to write a permanent executive order setting out the authorities of Ambassadors over all US Government employees except forces reporting to a Combatant Commander and to define the relationship in the latter case between the Combatant Commander and the Ambassador.

How do we get our folks out of compounds and still maximize security?

We follow the advice in the Embassy of the Future Report and train our people and equip them to deal with risk management, recognizing that risk avoidance is not compatible with being able to do their job. This involves improved training in issues like surveillance detection, secure driving practices, physical security best practices and situational awareness.

Thank you for this chance to testify. This is an important subject and I believe that the many recommendations made in a number of recent reports will help significantly in Africa, and elsewhere, to improve our capacity to anticipate, prevent and respond to conflict.