Testimony
of
Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael Gonzales
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U.S. Department of State
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Understanding Conflict in Africa

Chair Bass, Chair Deutch, Ranking Member Smith, Ranking Member Wilson, and members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to testify on conflict in Africa. This hearing is very timely.

Almost half of the world's 34 armed conflicts in 2020 were concentrated in Africa, 15 at current count. Once thought to be anachronistic, the number of coups in Africa has risen, with three successful military coups during the past year and two unsuccessful attempts. The stakes involved with preventing, managing, and deescalating conflict in Africa are high. Conflict in Africa has vast humanitarian, human rights, political, economic, security, environmental, and geo-strategic consequences for Africa and its international friends and partners.

Long-term and sustainable peace and prosperity in Africa have direct implications for U.S. national interests and those of our closest allies. Conflict and political violence in Africa have had devastating effects, destabilizing states and borders, creating and perpetuating humanitarian and environmental crises, increasing poverty and stifling economic growth, and robbing young Africans of the opportunity for an education and a better life. Beyond the loss of life and livelihoods stemming from

conflict, the shifting of resources to engage in and win conflicts takes resources away from public services, distracts governments from needed reforms, curbs economic opportunity, and keeps business and investors away – all exacerbating the dynamics that first enabled the conflict.

The drivers of violent conflict in Africa are diverse. The violence and conflict between states that marked previous decades has, for the most part, been replaced by intra-state violence and insecurity. The conditions that perpetuate insecurity around the continent are unique to each situation, but regardless of whether we are talking about Mali, Cameroon, the Sahel, Nigeria, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, or Ethiopia, it is possible to draw several commonalities regarding the key drivers of conflict in Africa. Particularly, conflict is usually fueled, enabled, and exacerbated by poor governance.

These conditions undermine the legitimacy of governments in the eyes of their populations and exacerbate competition for economic and political power. Individual or group grievances are sparked by exclusion or perceived exclusion from the political process for reasons of personal, ethnic or value differences, lack of genuine access to national institutions of governance, or the perpetuation of dynastic political ruling classes. Good governance goes well beyond carrying out credible elections. National and local governments must deliver essential services to their people. Security forces must be professional, capable, accountable, and respect human rights. Civil society and a free press must be empowered. Women must be meaningfully engaged as peacebuilders and leaders across civil society, government, and the security sector. Independent judiciaries must ensure accountability and access to justice for all. These are not just best practices and aspirational principles; they are security imperatives.

Grievances from Government Neglect: Even under relatively benign circumstances when governments or ruling elites are not consumed by zero-sum political and economic competition, frustration and often violent competition is sparked by the state's limited capacity and resources, and sometimes unsuited policies that result in the inability to deliver services, jobs, basic security, or socio-economic development for its people. The spread of COVID in some areas has increased the stress on already fragile economic and health delivery services and reinforced perceptions regarding state inability or willingness to protect its citizens. Given the size of Africa's youth population, if governments are unable to prioritize education and training opportunities and create jobs commensurate with population growth ,then high rates of youth unemployment will exacerbate instability and increase the vulnerability of both young men and women to violent extremist messaging and recruitment.

Terrorist organizations and criminal organizations remorselessly exploit and exacerbate African state weakness. In Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, and elsewhere, these groups often neither seek out large scale military engagements nor attempt to establish permanent control over major population centers. Instead, they engage in targeted assassinations or intimidation of local administrators, magistrates, religious leaders, market venders, and security officials to destroy local communities and break down links with national or subregional governments. Terrorist organizations exploit harmful gender norms, exacerbate gender inequalities, and perpetrate gender-based violence. In some cases, these groups do deliver forms of alternative economic assistance, administrative services, and effective – although often brutal – administration of justice and security. This strategy allows terrorists and criminal organizations to operate with virtual impunity in large sections

of territory and draw upon expanding pools of recruits joining their ranks out of fear or desperation for even modest financial rewards.

Predatory, Corrupt and Discriminatory Government Actions: Too often, it is more predatory government actions – whether in terms of corruption, human rights abuses, sub-national favoritism, or intolerance of different views and dissent – that instigate public grievances and conflict both among groups and against the state. Security forces often generate fear and hatred from the populations they are supposed to protect. Security forces may perpetrate gender-based violence. Heavy-handed security tactics against the political opposition, the media, and civil society have a corrosive effect that propels a constant cycle of conflict and alienation. When corruption goes unaddressed, citizens may conclude the government exists not to serve, but to exploit. Such predatory actions by the state against the governed drives grievances and, hence, conflict.

The Role of External Actors

As discussed, al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their affiliated groups in Africa represent a direct threat to peace and stability to the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, coastal West Africa, and parts of Southern Africa. Somalia-based al-Shabaab is al-Qaeda's largest and best financed affiliate in the world and represents a threat to U.S. interests and allies throughout East Africa. In the Sahel, the threat posed by JNIM (Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin) is expanding beyond its traditional operating areas to new areas in coastal West Africa. In the Lake Chad Basin, ISIS-West African Province (ISWAP) continues to terrorize populations in northern Nigeria and neighboring countries. In Mozambique, ISIS has terrorized the population in northern parts of the country and hampered investment in one of the largest natural gas deposits in the world.

Other external actors are also contributing to conflict in parts of Africa. For example, we are concerned about the Russian mercenaries including the Wagner Group who have fueled violence, resource exploitation, and human rights abuses in Syria, Libya, and central Africa and now appear poised to expand into Mali. The group has expanded its paramilitary activities from Libya but is increasingly active in sub-Saharan Africa. A June 2021 United Nations Panel of Experts report accused Russian instructors in the Central African Republic (CAR) of indiscriminate killings, looting, and enforced disappearances conducted alongside the Central African military. Russia was the largest arms exporter to sub-Saharan Africa in 2016–20. Its arms deliveries to 12 states represented 30 per cent of total sub-Saharan arms imports.

The United States Response

Addressing conflict in Africa requires a comprehensive and balanced approach. It is important to resist the temptation to focus solely on the security aspects of conflict because too often these are merely the symptoms of deeper grievances that must be addressed if African countries and their international partners are going to stem and resolve conflict sustainably. Military, intelligence, and law enforcement tools are important components of our response, and we are prepared to protect American lives and interests in Africa when necessary. As vital as our security efforts are, these efforts must support -- and not replace -- robust diplomacy, development, humanitarian assistance, and civilian-led stabilization and conflict resolution efforts. As a wide range of factors contribute to conflict in Africa, it is vital that the United States has the flexibility to tailor our responses to address most effectively the unique challenges presented by conflict situations. The State Department, USAID, the Department of Defense, and several other agencies offer unique expertise and capabilities, and it is essential that

each organization has the tools to contribute to the prevention, management, and de-escalation of conflict.

The State Department has a multi-faceted role. Recognizing the damaging effects that conflict has on local populations and implications for regional stability, the United States focuses diplomatic efforts on preventing and stemming violence and working alongside others to create conditions for enduring resolutions to conflict. For example, Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman and U.S. diplomats are working with regional and international partners to promote a negotiated ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access in northern Ethiopia and create conditions for a permanent, non-military end to the conflict. Similarly, we have mobilized our diplomatic resources to enable and coordinate regional and international efforts to resolve serious conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan, the Great Lakes, the Sahel, and the Lake Chad Basin. In individual countries, our professional diplomats provide conflict and atrocity early warning, work with international partners and the U.S. interagency to develop violence prevention and peace-building programs, and plan and implement conflict-resolution and humanitarian assistance efforts.

The United States is committed to building and sustaining partnerships and alliances to address conflict in Africa. Our role and approach is not to come in as outsiders to fight insecurity, but to enable our African partners to develop the security capabilities to provide security themselves. Africa's leaders have intensified individual and collective efforts to address these challenges and take greater ownership of their own security. Individual African governments, the African Union (AU), and sub-regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) are taking leading roles in addressing security and

political challenges in Africa. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin, the G5-Sahel in West Africa, and other African-led efforts are essential. These efforts allow the United States to pursue our security interests in Africa and help reduce violent conflict using a very small military footprint and modest resources. Our focus on partner capacity-building and enablement provides maximum value through comparatively limited investments.

Let me emphasize, however, that violence and conflict are often the security manifestation of deeper grievances that often stem from governance deficiencies. So, while security responses may be necessary to temper the symptoms, the State Department, USAID, and other U.S. government agencies use a range of bilateral and multilateral tools to address these underlying drivers of conflict for more sustainable peace. We leverage our diplomatic, development, and defense partnerships to bolster the capabilities, responsiveness, and credibility of state institutions – at national and local levels – to enhance public confidence in the state, improve service delivery to the people, and create and foster opportunity for future prosperity. We do this because strong, stable, healthy, and prosperous partners are in America's interest, and addressing the underlying dynamics that enable and fuel conflict ensures the successful pursuit of these interests while delivering on our values to our African partners.

We do this by leveraging the flagship initiatives designed over the years with bipartisan support to help African people, governments, and institutions to achieve their full potential, and realize their own version of the American Dream. For example, through the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), we are investing in the next generation of African leaders, as it is they who will deliver the brighter futures for

their countries. Moreover, in addition to saving millions of lives, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) have bolstered health systems capacity across the continent that have been critical in the responses to outbreaks of Ebola and have been the backbone of the C19 response.

The U.S. Government is the first globally to enact national legislation codifying its commitment to Women, Peace and Security (WPS), recognizing that peace and security is more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts, and in the forging of lasting peace. The State Department, USAID, the Department of Defense are equally committed to building USG capacity to ensure that women are more prepared and increasingly able to participate in efforts that promote stable and lasting peace; and that women and girls are safer, better protected, and have access to humanitarian services. The U.S. government implements a wide range of WPS programming across Africa, empowering women and girls as leaders and peacemakers and preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

Recognizing that it is the private sector and jobs that will develop Africa, the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act provides market access benefits to the American market to deepen U.S.-African business ties while giving African producers a leg up. Since the launch of Power Africa in 2013, more than 88 million people in sub-Saharan Africa have first-time electricity access. Since 2019, Prosper Africa has helped to close 800 deals across 45 countries for an estimated value of $50 billion in exports and investments in sectors such as energy, agribusiness, health, and information and communication technology. The Millennium Challenge Corporation puts our money where our mouth is, investing catalytically

in the success of those countries demonstrating the policies and political will to unleash their citizens' potential.

Collectively these efforts help African governments and communities to meet the needs, desires, and expectations of the people to prevent and address grievances that drive conflict. This Committee has played instrumental roles in creating and ensuring the success of many of these initiatives and I applaud your vision, support, and partnership in enabling our successes. We also appreciate strong congressional support via the Global Fragility Act (GFA) , which directs the Departments of State, Treasury and Defense, and USAID to prioritize conflict prevention via a forward-looking, integrated, and locally owned approach. The GFA will bolster U.S. efforts to prevent and respond to conflict in Africa.

While USAID implements significant programming toward these objectives, allow me to offer some specific examples of State Department programming:

In Nigeria, a Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) and the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP) program helped decentralize conflict prevention to the sub-national level. To date, we have supported the establishment of state peace building institutions in four Northern Nigerian states, which have brokered cross-border peace agreements and trained a cadre of local peacebuilders to identify and address tensions before they escalate into violence.

In Nigeria, CSO is also strengthening early warning and early response in atrocity-risk areas. This program employs innovative technology to alert trained early responders to take action to prevent attacks in near real time. It also helps document attacks, which are currently

underreported, to improve our understanding of the nature and scope of the violence.

In Mozambique, as part of the multi-pronged strategy, the Partnership for East Africa Counterterrorism (PREACT) and other initiatives support the creation of a network of civil society organizations, peace clubs, and government officials, to foster trust, communication, and collaboration among citizens and between civilians and authorities. We are also working with youth leaders and the private sector to strengthen opportunities for young people to engage positively in their communities--as entrepreneurs, mentors, and change agents to prevent violent extremism. Although the situation in northern Mozambique remains dire, we have seen the impact of these efforts at the local level, particularly in integrating internally displaced people and engaging youth and women to build cohesive communities that are resilient to violent extremism.

In Niger, Cameroon and Chad, our Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP)-funded Disengagement, Disassociation, Reintegration and Reconciliation project supports government efforts to manage defectors from Boko Haram and ISWAP.

In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, TSCTP and the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI) are working together to increase women's capacity, agency, and level of engagement to support them as effective peace and security leaders through a regional program to build capacity and a cross-border network of women working on violent extremism in the Sahel.

Also in Nigeria, our embassy partnered with the YALI Network to launch an election-focused campaign to deter electoral violence and boost civic participation in the presidential and gubernatorial elections in

2019. Over the course of the six-month campaign, over 15,000 people joined the NaijaVotes campaign against violence, and campaign messages reached hundreds of thousands.

To complement and support these activities we use targeted TSCTP and PREACT programs build professional, capable, and accountable military and civilian forces to meet the expanding threat of terrorism and insecurity. Examples include embedding advisors within host nation air forces, military intelligence organizations, logistics organizations, and special forces units; provision of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities; strengthening counterterrorism training institutions; provision of key training and operational support infrastructure; and, donations of critical equipment required to responsibly execute counterterrorism operations.

Proactive diplomacy by our dedicated diplomats across the continent inform, advise, and influence African officials, civil societies, and influencers to promote reforms, policies, and engagements that enable citizen-responsive governance, prosperity, and stability.

Conclusion

We appreciate the Committee's interest in addressing conflict in Africa. The United States is a committed partner with African peoples, governments, and institutions. We work intently across agency lines to support and enable them to stem violence, secure their citizens and ours, and realize Africa's full potential in an increasingly interconnected global market and community of nations. We are under no illusions about the challenges associated with reducing conflict and the spread of violent extremism. There are no quick fixes or magic solutions. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of Africa's leaders to meet the needs and aspirations of their populations and address the conditions that fuel

conflict. The United States will remain engaged to support these efforts. It is in our national interest to prevent the spread of conflict and insecurity that threatens American lives and interests, and to work with our African partners to realize the continent's vast potential.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.