

## Emerging Challenges – Africa Matters

Dr. Thomas WUCHTE<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction – Foresight Strategy in Africa

What is the utility of improving strategic foresight in national security planning in Africa? This question caused the author pause when a recent remark considered whether Lesotho matters or if anyone knows where it is located. Specifically, how such dismissive foresight relates to emerging challenges in Africa that are mostly considered second-tier concerns by many in America, unfortunately. Each misstep, however, will have overlap effects as like-minded try to balance and predict challenges with Russia, China and perhaps others in the region's future. Moreover, traditional national security efforts have been overly burdened in the seemingly endless war on terrorism that has difficulty finding an end state. At each point where we think we can have a strategic pause and get back to the basics of force structure appropriate to our regional presence, we have often gotten drawn into chasing the latest terrorist threat (now add drug cartels) at the expense of building coherent armed forces. Is there a better way that we can empower an interagency process that combines defense preparedness with international development with the US State Department. And we do not add to the conditions creating terrorist breeding grounds and now drug cartels? Here the example focuses on Africa and specifically the region of the Sahel where too few Americans care, but the terrorists are creating intolerable conditions that Russia and China are more than happy to swoop in and provide the framework of institutional support. Does this matter?

Despite the overwhelming hope that rule of law and humanitarian approaches would be better received in Africa, our strategic foresight has ended up with a disaggregated international order and countries such as North Korea/Iran along with Russia and China forming a new nexus of partnership. All four are working collaboratively in ways that

1- Dr. Thomas WUCHTE, CEO & President, Center for Multilateral Leadership, USA.

few could have expected 20 years ago after 9/11. Our strategic foresight has stumbled through Russia's invasion of Ukraine and given China the green light that an invasion of Taiwan would receive the same tepid response. We have no international regional power base like NATO in Northeast Asia. AFRICOM, as so named, is not even located in Africa. NATO has tried to rise to the task of threats along all its borders. NATO managed to only add a few new members and spend some additional inadequate amount of money on its own defense. The only significant and somewhat unexpected positive (perhaps) change recently was the collapse of the Syrian regime under Assad. Syria has opened an opportunity. One can point to the USA being an enabling contribution. However, the more likely stronger force has been the relentless and strategic efforts by the Israeli Defense Forces that have cleared out insurgencies in Lebanon, Gaza and surrounding areas.

One could point a finger at the Biden administration for not having the foresight on the surprise attack in Israel or the inability to handle the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The honest answer is that these deficits predate the Biden administration, continued in the first Trump administration, and were evident before in the Obama administration. One could argue all were launched through the ill-conceived military operations after 9/11 under the Bush administration. These are not individual failures of our leaders at the top, but the entire interagency process that lacked a long-term view with Defense and State Department personnel leading our foreign policy without long-term foresight. Often strategic planners rotate too quickly, changing with the political winds and trying to adjust without any real durable plan. Whether one appreciates authoritarian regimes or dictators, the author does not, it is clear having the same leader for 10/15/20 years has provided a strategic view. How do we overcome our limitations and where can we move the bar a little farther forward with national security foresight strategy in Africa – because the author does think it matters.

While there were several successes over the course of 20 years fighting terrorism and other emerging challenges, a clear lesson learned was understanding of the landscape and the factors of conflict are key to mitigating that threat and engaging to fully understand the dynamics. On the topic of non-traditional security issues, such as climate fragility, there are lessons we can learn from other regions that are applicable to Africa and hot spots like the Sahel. The argument is not that climate, water scarcity, and loss of natural habitat radicalizes recruits to terrorist groups. There must still be the interplay of the terrorist group itself. These

emerging challenges do, however, greatly affect movement, trade, stability and interoperability of humans within a country and across neighboring borders.

## **Maintaining Multilateral Collaboration with Africa**

While the current global disagreements portray reluctance to embrace such preventive diplomacy as it applies to intra- and interstate conflicts, there should be a forward-looking call for leadership to expand the definition of transnational and non-traditional security challenges. Multilateral collaboration is especially important to keep abreast of threats and to mitigate never-ending “on-the-ground” presence. Over the past two decades, lack of integrating non-traditional aspects of security has limited the US in its goals of eradicating al Qaeda and ISIS and supporting democratic leaders around the world. This is why terrorist groups in the Sahel resisted international cooperation efforts – effectively receding from and engaging around incomplete strategies – with vast geographic areas away from security forces.

The reality, since the recent resurgence of populist policies, is that there has not been either the political will to redirect these processes or have the resources been devoted to pushing bold ideas forward for Africa. A well-aligned spirit of multilateralism should now focus beyond traditional threats. Strengthening constructive engagement on non-traditional (e.g., climate, poverty conditions, water, and loss of natural habitat) security concerns among countries of this ever-smaller globe is especially timely and important. Organizations like the UN and regional bodies such as the African Union, OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and others should receive an even more resourced diplomatic lead in promoting international cooperation.

## **Way Forward Multilaterally**

The ramifications of fragility shifts will be most extreme in regions and countries that are both environmentally marginal and where governance is weakest – the Sahel especially. Many of the countries at the most risk of environmental disaster is also those most impacted by potential conflict or unrest. We must address the underlying conditions with local resources along with right-sized capacity-building – drawing more heavily on defense and security budgets directed towards these

emerging challenges. Elevating awareness to fund confidence building measures (CBMs) to lessen the symbiotic relationship between fragility and extremism is an important step. With long-term foresight leading us towards building an effective and responsive peace and security architecture in partnership with Africa and for the Sahel. Reaching consensus multilaterally among security partners would help to align national and developmental priorities. This would set the stage for future engagement with African regional organizations and states. Resource limitations can be overcome by enlisting traditional security organizations to add emerging challenges to their portfolio of work and request that they ‘burden share’ by reallocating security funds to address the range of underlying conditions and root causes. This will be a rightsizing while benefiting local communities.

### **Supporting Future Foresight – Considering China/Russia as Partners**

Uncovered spaces in countries with a lack of rule of law and democracy are breeding grounds. The strategic foresight outlined in this analysis should allow us to take a nuanced relook at why the US national security should be heavily involved in the Sahel region and Africa. As sad as it may seem, this is not a foreign policy priority for constituents in middle America. Terrorist groups aligned with al Qaeda and the Islamic State can operate without interference. With the clear understanding Russia and China are propelling a large buildup of US conventional forces, we will benefit from strategic foresight to invest more of our resources on addressing the systemic causes of regional fragility. Despite millions and millions of dollars, perhaps billions and billions, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali have found more coalescence with mercenary contractors from Russia’s former Wagner Group. These coup leaders are more worried about maintaining power and not having another overthrown regime -- then incorporating the rule of law and humanitarian lessons which we have spent 20 years trying to pass on as capacity building. Poor strategic foresight created these losses and disperse our forces too thinly to concentrate on reasonable partnership with Russia and China.

Multilateral leadership should support the importance of such a shift to prioritize non-traditional aspects of security issues to better integrate US security and development assistance for Africa. The multilateral work ahead should be fostering agreement among the competing interests which often overlook the conditions conducive to

fragility at the expense of hard security. Under the “War on Terrorism” launched after 9/11, the US left many broken alliance threads and a strategy and policy focus in a position that is incomplete. A functional interagency process would support a re-balancing of hard security resources towards emerging challenges. With prevention and mitigation strategies a part of US strategy with African partners (including Lesotho) – perhaps even with Russia and China if the rules-based order changes – Africa matters.

**Mr. Thomas Wuchte** is the Founder of the Center for Multilateral Leadership, based in Washington, DC and Bangkok. He is a graduate of West Point and received a post-graduate degree in International Relations/Russian from the University of Illinois. Tom is the recipient of the US Department of State’s highest award for Excellence in International Security Affairs. He recently completed his assignment as the Executive Director for the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IJ). Before the IJ, he led counterterrorism efforts for the 57 participating States in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Tom also worked for 6 years with the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) to support grassroot NGOs in civil society with several African partners. His current focus is on empowering multilateral collaboration on emerging security issues such as climate fragility.