



## **152<sup>nd</sup> GREAT LAKES POLICY FORUM**

*Thursday, March 11, 2010*

### **“A Report From the Field: A Conversation with Howard Wolpe”**

#### **Speaker**

**Howard Wolpe**

US Special Advisor for the Great Lakes Region

#### **Moderator:**

**Sandra Melone**

Executive Vice President, Search for Common Ground

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The Great Lakes Policy Forum met on March 11 to hear the United States Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region, Howard Wolpe, speak about current issues in the region. Moderating was Search for Common Ground's executive vice president, Sandra Melone. In attendance were over 60 academics, peacebuilding practitioners and foreign policy professionals.

**Burundi-** The upcoming Burundi elections are very important both to the region and to the US. While there is tension about the elections there is a strong sense of normalcy and optimism. The training program for the military command structure is one of the greatest successes in the region as the military seems to be refraining from political involvement and behaving in an impartial manner with respect to the elections. Further training is ongoing or planned for political party leaders and the police. President Nkurunziza is being proactive in helping the elections occur and has strong international support, especially from the East African Committee which is taking the lead on elections and training.

He is facing resistance from some members of his own party but that resistance is peaceful at this time. Discussion between a panelist and the audience also concluded that the recent military mutiny was not politically motivated but about pay and thus not a threat to the electoral process. There was also speculation that if the ruling party wins the election they might feel secure enough to start some sort of judicial or truth and reconciliation process.

**Rwanda-** Rwanda also has upcoming elections and although many parties have been disbarred President Kagame is allowing some opposition. An internal point of tension is that one of the candidates is raising the issue of race, a subject that has been avoided internally in the past. The DRC-Rwanda rapprochement has been very positive despite the fact that the joint military operations were more symbolic than effective. The rapprochement has also made it easier for the UNHCR to set up large scale refugee swaps between the two countries.

**DRC-** The issues involving MONUC's presence in the DRC are a high priority for the US, especially the issue of human rights violations by the DRC national army, the FDRC, working with MONUC. The US & others in the Security Council are working on establishing better conduct by the FDRC, particularly through vetting units, giving MONUC more responsibility for the behavior of the FDRC and planned training for top FDRC officers. There is also the issue of renewal for MONUC, in which the future conduct of the FDRC working with MONUC will be an important factor. President Kabila has asked that a timetable for MONUC's eventual withdrawal be provided in time for the anniversary of independence in June.

Beyond the issues involving MONUC there is a need for reform within the FDRC. The CNDP is essentially independent from Kinshasa and has occupied mines and set up its own administrative structures in some regions. Bosco Ntaganda continues to avoid prosecution for war crimes and is setting up his own militias. Many donor nations and organizations are engaged in training in the Congo but due to corruption, lack of funding and disorganization on the part of the FDRC and national government the units they train are not sustainable.

An audience member also expressed suspicion about Angola's participation in these training programs. Angola's participation seems to be genuine as many of the disputes that have existed between the DRC and Angola have either been resolved or are being resolved. The Lord's Resistance Army continues to operate in the eastern DRC despite joint Ugandan and DRC operations against it. These operations were diplomatically significant but did little more than disperse the LRA. There is a risk that due to the FRDC's desire to claim a victory little will be done about the LRA in the near future.

There is also planned civil reform within the Congo, with president Kabila accepting US aid on five issues, corruption, economic development, food security, gender violence, and security sector reform. There are also plans to train female police officers to help deal with gender violence in the Congo. Decentralization will probably not be extended beyond current levels due to issues with expense and logistics. The government has recently put in motion preparations for the next election but because of this late start it is unlikely that they will be both local and national.

**External:** There is widespread informal cooperation among diplomats from various nations focused on the Great Lakes Region that is enabling better cooperation among the various donor or other interested nations. Attempts to engage China in this process have not been successful but there are plans to bring China into the cooperative framework that currently exists. There is also interest in whether the Chinese method of giving aid in the form of goods rather than money might decrease the amount lost to corruption.

The United States government is currently very interested in events in the DRC and Great Lakes region and is trying very hard to engage positively and support peacebuilding efforts in the region.

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**Howard Wolpe**, a former seven-term member of Congress, is currently the Obama Administration's special advisory for Africa's Great Lakes region, a position similar to one he previously held under the Clinton administration. Before his appointment he was director of both the Africa Program and the Project on Leadership and Building State Capacity at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. A specialist in African politics, for ten of his fourteen years in the Congress Wolpe chaired the Subcommittee on Africa of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He also chaired the Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee. His other roles in the Congress included the co-chairmanship of the bipartisan Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition and the Congressional Energy and Environmental Study Conference. Prior to entering the Congress, Wolpe served in the Michigan House of Representatives and as a member of the Kalamazoo City Commission. Wolpe has taught at the Political Science Department of Western Michigan University and at the Institute of Public Policy Studies of the University of Michigan, and has served as a visiting fellow in the Foreign Policy Studies Program of the Brookings Institution, as a Woodrow Wilson Center public policy scholar, and as a consultant to the World Bank and to the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. State Department. Wolpe received his BA degree from Reed College, and his PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Sandra Melone** is Executive Vice President at Search for Common Ground, having served the organization in numerous capacities since 1995. Before coming to SFCG, she worked in human rights advocacy with Amnesty International and in

international education. Sandra has given numerous presentations and led workshops on conflict prevention, resolution and transformation, mediation, negotiation, consensus-building, facilitation and cross-cultural communication. She has appeared on CNN, BBC, and Voice of America and has written articles on the media and conflict resolution; the role NGOs can play in the field of Track II diplomacy and reconciliation; and the complementarities of governmental, non-governmental, intergovernmental and private sector initiatives. She is a founding member of the European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation (EPCPT) and of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO). She has served on the Board of the Fédération des Associations Internationales en Belgique (FAIB); and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP), where she currently serves as Board Vice Chair and head of the Membership Committee. She studied at the University of Chicago and Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich.

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