



Memorandum for Anita Sharma
Conflict Prevention Project, The Woodrow Wilson Center

I wanted to write out these comments and send them to you directly after the initial meeting on May 31, but my work schedule didn't permit that, so my apologies for their lateness.

I have been gathering data on wars and conflicts systematically since 1968.* (It now comprises three floor to ceiling bookcases, and another 50 file cartons of materials)

In the briefing note which you prepared in advance of the first meeting, you wrote that "it is critical that we realistically assess trends," and Julia Taft, during her presentation, noted that one has to "separate facts from opinions."

1. If I list some of the wars in the past two decades, selected at random, and not excluding any of any particular character:

Bosnia	Afghanistan	Falklands
Kosovo	Columbia	Liberia
Timor	Somalia	Eritrea-Ethiopia
Cambodia	Iran-Iraq	Sierra Leone
Mozambique	Gulf War	Chechnya
Angola	Congo	Azerbaijan-Armenia
Sudan	Nepal	Georgia-Abkhia
Rwanda	Israel/Palestinians	
Burundi	India/Pakistan	

I believe that is clear that not a single one was caused by any of the five factors which the Briefing Note lists as "non-traditional threats to security and stability":

- Economic and Social Isolation
- Governance
- Demographic shifts
- Natural resources scarcity and environmental degradation
- Health

And if you look at the two major international armed conflicts of this moment, Israel-Palestinians, and India-Pakistan/re Kashmir; one dates back in its direct and immediate causes to 1947, and the second to 1949.



The same holds for every other "terrorist" group that one can mention. Memorandum for Anita Sharma
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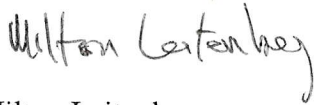
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story of Somalia in 1990 to 1991, prior to US entry; of Bosnia between 1991 and 1995; of the rejection by the Office of the UN Secretary General Dallaire's entreaties in the year prior to ~~June~~^{April} 1994, and then everyone's "hands off" response after June 1994; of the years delay in East Timor -- that leads to the disasters. But more to the point, it is a critical element of their occurrence: It is the knowledge of international disinterest that allowed the Indonesian military to arm the irregulars in East Timor, of the Rwandan government to arm and release the Interamwhe, that permitted the Angolan conflict to continue 6-7 additional years, and so forth.

If not a "source" of conflict, in Lalani's phrase, it is certainly a very major contribution to the initiation and exacerbation of wars and conflicts. It should not only be added to the issues you are studying, but much as you may wish to speak of "trends," and to point to possible problems to come, it is unquestionably a far greater real and present factor than all the five that you itemized in your list, put together.

The "trend" is that the problems that exist now still remain the classical ones as before.

Regards,



Milton Leitenberg

* If you look at the first SIPRI Yearbook, in 1968, you will find a short chapter on war and conflict. That was written from materials that I had brought with me from the U.S. I then continuously urged for a decade that SIPRI take on the subject in a major way, as well as in each Yearbook. The suggestion was rejected, but finally taken up by a group at the University of Uppsala, and finally, in the late 1980's, SIPRI placed that material in each Yearbook, and after another few years took on the subject as part of its regular work agenda.