

Expeditionary Diplomacy and the Casamance Conflict

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My assignment here as Casamance Advisor for the past year is an example of a new concept in American diplomacy that emerged over the past several years, called “expeditionary diplomacy.” This is a term borrowed from vocabulary usually associated with military operations, as in an “expeditionary army,” referring to a specially-constituted force which is sent abroad for a particular purpose and for a limited time, and then returns home. It contrasts with normal diplomacy, the conduct of on-going, permanent relations between states, which is an unending process with multiple purposes and objectives.

The “expeditionary diplomacy” concept first emerged in the Bush Administration as an effort to make the State Department better prepared and more effective in working together with military forces in large-scale operations such as Iraq and Afghanistan. However, it received little funding or practical development until the Obama Administration. Under the leadership of Secretary of State Clinton, it was substantially modified and no longer associated with major military operations. Now, the idea is focused on making the U.S. government more effective in working with local partners and the international community to prevent, contain, and end conflicts, using limited, primarily non-military, resources.

The institutional expression of the expeditionary diplomacy concept is the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, usually known by its initials, “CSO.” Created in 2010, it now has a staff of about 150, plus a standby reserve of a few hundred people who have special skills and can be mobilized for particular operations. The reserve includes a few retired diplomats, like me.

Recent examples of CSO expeditionary diplomacy operations are related to conflicts in Darfur, South Sudan, Kenya, Burma, Libya, and Syria.

Another CSO operation was in support of the U.S. Embassy here in Dakar in early 2012, when a turbulent presidential election seemed to threaten Senegal’s stability. After the election proved successful, President Sall launched a new initiative to end the Casamance conflict, as he had promised in his campaign. Since President Sall welcomed international assistance for this initiative, the CSO staff, together with the Embassy, recognized an opportunity for an expeditionary diplomacy engagement to support it. One of the CSO officers, Rebecca Wall – who happens to be here on a visit and is with us tonight – wrote a proposal that was approved by

the State Department. Next, Secretary Clinton, during her visit to Dakar in July 2012, offered our help on the Casamance to President Sall, and he accepted. I was fortunate enough to be chosen by CSO to undertake this mission, and I arrived in Dakar October 1.

Why was the Casamance conflict chosen, from among the dozens of conflicts throughout the world, for this special attention? Because Senegal is an important regional leader that has long been one of our best friends and partners in Africa. Since its independence, we have invested many millions of dollars in its economic development and in its emergence as a leading contributor of military forces to UN and other peacekeeping operations. We realized that the Casamance conflict retards Senegal's economic development and ties down military forces that are needed for peacekeeping missions. A small investment in expeditionary diplomacy to support the Casamance peace initiative, we believed, could not only contribute to humanitarian objectives but also promote our interest in Senegal's economic growth and continued regional leadership in peacekeeping.

In commenting on her experience as Secretary of State, Secretary Clinton said she had discovered that a very important part of diplomacy is "just being there." I experienced what she meant by this remark in the extraordinary warmth with which I was welcomed in Senegal – not just by President Sall and senior officials in his government, but also by ordinary people, especially the leaders of women's organizations and other civil society groups in the Casamance. The chambermaids in my hotel, when they saw press reports of my arrival, effusively thanked me for coming to help end the conflict. Even MFDC representatives expressed their appreciation for my presence. While this welcome was personally gratifying, I have enough diplomatic experience to recognize that it had nothing to do with me as an individual, but was based on what my appointment represented: the serious engagement of the United States government in support of the Casamance peace initiative.

I understood from the beginning that the United States cannot bring peace to the Casamance – only Senegalese can do that. We can provide a limited amount of help, but we can't impose a settlement, nor do we seek to do so. If this 30-year conflict were easy to resolve, it would have ended long ago.

I'm gratified, however, that progress has been made over the past year:

- The level of violence has been greatly reduced and remains low as compared to previous years.

- Negotiations between the government and the two principal MFDC factions have begun.
- And a surge in development has gotten underway, with new or augmented projects by the Senegalese government as well as the World Bank, the UNDP, the European Union, the United States and other partners.

Our expeditionary diplomacy contributed to this progress by mobilizing and focusing U.S. Government resources on the Casamance; by encouraging the involvement of our allies and the international organizations of which we are a member; and by “just being there” as an engaged, committed partner in the peace process, offering encouragement and help whenever we can.

I’m grateful for the support I’ve received from Senegalese and diplomatic colleagues; from the U.S. Embassy staff, especially Sheryl McCarthy, who has been a close friend as well as colleague; from my deputy – soon to be my replacement – Sue Patrick; and from the CSO Bureau and Rebecca Wall. As a member of the CSO election support team in 2012, she conceived this project, got it approved by the State Department, and continues to be our primary link to Washington. Sue and Rebecca will assure that U.S. support for the Casamance peace initiative continues beyond my departure.

Finally, I want to thank Tuy-Cam, my wife and partner for the past 45 years, who has been at my side throughout this great adventure in expeditionary diplomacy. I could not have done this work without her constant support.

And thanks to you all for coming and giving Tuy-Cam and me another splendid Senegal memory to take into our retirement.