



On June 25, JMU professor J. Peter Pham testified before the U.S. Congress, providing expertise during more than three hours of testimony to a subcommittee examining "Somalia: Prospects for Lasting Peace and a Unified Response to Extremism and Terrorism."

Why Africa matters

— to me, my students and our country BY J. PETER PHAM, professor of justice studies

When I began my career, one of my mentors, knowing of my passionate, personal and professional interest in Africa, advised me to refrain from talking too much about it. "It will be too eccentric for most of your colleagues," he warned, "and certainly irrelevant to your students." While I have benefited immensely over the years from the counsel of more senior colleagues, I am glad that I ignored this particular piece of advice as my scholarship and teaching — and, consequently, my students' intellectual and social horizons — have been immeasurably enriched by my continuing engagement with African peoples and countries and their relations with the United States.

How is this fascination of mine even relevant? That is a fundamental question since I belong to an academic community "committed to preparing students to be educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives," as the mission statement of James Madison University succinctly puts it.

First, if the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, taught us anything, it is that poorly governed spaces like those found in many parts of Africa can be exploited to provide facilitating environments, recruits and eventual targets for Islamist terrorists. As the *2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America* noted, "Weak states . . . can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders." With the

possible exception of the Greater Middle East, nowhere did this analysis truer than Africa where, as the document went on to acknowledge, regional conflicts arising from a variety of causes, including poor governance, external aggression, competing claims, internal revolt, and ethnic and religious tensions all "lead to the same ends: failed states, humanitarian disasters and ungoverned areas that can become safe havens for terrorists."

The attacks by al-Qaeda on the U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya, in 1998, and on an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, and, simultaneously, on an Israeli commercial airliner in 2002 only underscore the deadly reality of the terrorist threat in Africa, as have the more recent "rebranding" of Algerian Islamist terrorist organization Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (usually known by its French acronym GSPC) as "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb" (AQIM), and the ongoing activities of various militant Islamist movements in the territory of the former Somali Democratic Republic, including al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda-linked group designated a "foreign terrorist organization" by the U.S. State Department in early 2008, as well as the threat posed to global commerce by Somali piracy, the challenge of which have been underscored in recent months.

Second, it is in America's interest to protect access to hydrocarbons and other strategic resources, which Africa has in abundance, and promote the integration of African nations into the global econ-

omy. President Barack Obama has repeatedly set as a goal to “eliminate our current imports from the Middle East and Venezuela within 10 years.”

In 2008, according to data from the U.S. Department of Energy’s Energy Information Administration, African countries accounted for more of America’s petroleum imports than the states of the Persian Gulf region: 916,727,000 barrels (19.5 percent) versus 868,516,000 barrels (18.4 percent). Moreover, most of the petroleum from the Gulf of Guinea off the coast of West Africa is light or “sweet” crude, which is preferred by U.S. refiners, because it is largely free of sulfur. While production fluctuates, the significance of Africa for America’s energy security cannot be underestimated. And it goes without saying that U.S. planners have not been oblivious to the fact that other countries including China, Russia and India, have been attracted by the African continent’s natural wealth and recently increased their own engagements there, sometimes seeking exclusive arrangements.

Third, another priority of U.S. foreign policy is empowering Africans and other partners to cope with the myriad humanitarian challenges, both man-made and natural, which afflict the continent with seeming disproportion — not just the devastating toll which conflict, poverty and disease, especially HIV/AIDS, exact on Africans, but the depredations of the continent’s remaining rogue regimes. While Africa boasts the world’s fastest rate of population growth: By 2020, today’s more than 900 million Africans will number more than 1.2 billion — more than the combined populations of Europe and North America — the dynamic potential implicit in the demographic figures just cited is, however, constrained, by the economic and epidemiological data. The United Nations Development Program’s *Human Development Report 2007/2008* determined that all 22 of the countries found to have “low development” were African states. While Sub-Saharan Africa is home to only 10 percent of the world’s population, nearly two-thirds of the peo-

ple infected with HIV are Sub-Saharan Africans. Numbers like these offend against America’s conscience even as their consequences threaten our interests.

As a consequence of the existence of these significant national interests, my research work in African political and strategic issues has opened the door to numerous experiences, which have permitted me the rare privilege of truly integrating my scholarship, teaching and public service. The subject of my research, like that of any dedicated scholar, necessarily informs the examples used in lectures and other course settings. But, thanks to the increasing recognition by policymakers and other opinion leaders of the importance of political, economic and security developments in Africa, my students and I have the satisfaction of seeing our in-class discussions mirrored in and, occasionally, anticipate civic discourse. A few of my students have even worked with me in research that has impacted public debate if not directly led to or otherwise influenced specific policy decisions.

Because much of the material I study and write about when I examine security issues is constantly evolving, in order to get it out in a timely fashion, I began writing a weekly Internet column more than three years ago. Since then, my weekly analysis has garnered a worldwide audience of about 5,000 regular readers, many of whom are senior government, military and intelligence officials. Since my column posts every week on Thursday morning, I usually have a draft by Tuesday evening. I have been wont to assemble a group of some of the students I work most closely with on Wednesday to discuss the material on the basis of the draft, occasionally taking their comments and other contributions into consideration before “locking down” the piece and filing it.

For example, at the end of March 2009, following this habitual pattern, I wrote a commentary on the challenge of Somali piracy — a subject that I have followed for several years — and warning that it was only a matter of time before the United States, which had up to then largely remained aloof, would have to tackle the issue head

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FOCUS ON AFRICA: THE 2009 BYRD SYMPOSIUM

International affairs majors study Africa-China relations

BY SIERRA STANCZYK ('09)
AND RACHEL YANG ('09)

ON MARCH 23 AND 24, the JMU Department of Political Science, Africana Studies, the College of Business and Madison Political Affairs Club sponsored the 2009 Byrd Symposium. This year, the title of the symposium was “Focus on Africa: Business at the Bottom, Scramble at the Top.”

Numerous students attended the two-day event and showed incredible enthusiasm and interest in the future of the African continent. Intelligent and challenging questions were posed to the guest speakers, demonstrating that JMU students feel a deep sense of responsibility and concern for the people of Africa.

Margaret C. Lee delivered the keynote address, “Re-enter the Dragon: China-African Relations and the 21st Century Scramble for Africa.” Lee is associate professor at the Department of African and Afro-American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Lee also spoke with students in the classroom, along with panelists Anita Spring (University of Florida), Trushna Patel (Aga Khan Foundation) and Irene Safi (George Mason University). Issues ranged from microcredit to China’s growing presence in Africa.

Guest lecturers and attendees discussed the relationship between China and Africa vis-à-vis trade and investment at length during the Byrd Symposium and it quickly became apparent that there are both positive and negative implications tied to this relationship. Many hope that China will assist in building up a continent that



International affairs major Sierra Stanczyk talks with classmates about global issues.

has faced challenges since the dawn of Western colonialism. A recurrent theme in the presentations and discussions was the notion that Chinese investment in Africa will lead to South-South cooperation and increased security and stabilization of Africa's food supply. However, some participants posed critical questions regarding this investment and enterprise, such as how Chinese involvement will affect Africa's natural resources and environment. A common concern is that China will extract and control a large portion of Africa's natural resources for a one-sided profit.

With a large part of the symposium focusing on Sino-African relations, Irene Safi, who hails from the Congo, shared a particularly interesting anecdote regarding

'A common concern is that China will extract and control a large portion of Africa's natural resources for a one-sided profit.'

Western and Chinese involvement in Africa. Ms. Safi explained that the West metaphorically eats with a fork in Africa, meaning that while the West "gobbles up" resources, there are "scraps" that fall through the prongs that become available for Africans. Meanwhile, the anecdote

goes, the Chinese eat with a spoon and so there is no spillage and nothing left once they are done.

This analogy reveals a lot about on-the-ground African sentiment toward the Chinese. Are we witnessing a 21st-Century scramble for Africa? What will the continent look like once the commodity boom is over? Another interesting anecdote discussed during the symposium was the fact that Chinese vendors are selling kebabs in many stands throughout Africa, which many see as a clear indication that the Chinese are moving in and taking jobs away from the average African.

Time will tell if the positives will outweigh the negatives as the relationship between China and Africa progresses. As one can tell from the anecdotes, the general sentiment expressed by the panelists regarding China's presence in Africa leaned toward caution and the belief that the global community should pay close attention to any type of growing foreign influence on the continent. ¶

About the Authors: *Sierra Stanczyk ('09) of Marlton, N.J., earned a B.A. in international affairs with concentrations in Africa and the Middle East. She was an Honors Program graduate and member of the Madison Political Affairs Club, JMU Arabic Club, Sigma Iota Rho and Alpha Phi. During her senior year she served as a managing editor of the James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal. Rachel C. Yang ('09) of Ann Arbor, Mich., also earned a B.A. in international affairs and was listed on the President's List.*



on. Barely a week later, pirates briefly hijacked the MV *Maersk Alabama* and then tried to escape with Captain Richard Phillips as a hostage. I quickly found myself no longer talking about piracy to my seminar, but rather addressing international audiences on outlets like the BBC, CNN and the Fox News Channel as well as briefing officials in Washington and testifying before a congressional hearing. I subsequently even had the opportunity to address senior European Union diplomatic and military officers and was invited to address U.S. businesses with a stake in maritime and port security under the auspices of the Corporate Council on Africa. As a direct result of these engagements as well as further research, I published several more Internet commentaries and several journal articles. Currently, I am writing a major monograph on the subject of Somali piracy which will look at the phenomenon from a variety of disciplinary perspectives — history, political science, international relations, economics, international law, security studies, etc. I anticipate that this study will make its way into the classroom somehow, thus completing the circle.

It has been a great source of both encouragement and satisfaction for me and the students who have carried research under my supervision that our work is appreciated and often supported outside the immediate university community. In particular, it has been a privilege to work closely with

the Department of Defense and the men and women in the Armed Forces whose responsibilities for America's

Peter Pham accompanies personnel from the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa based in Djibouti as they engage Somali nomads in January 2008.

defense cover Africa in particular. I was honored last year when General William E. "Kip" Ward, commander of the U.S. Africa Command, invited me to give the keynote address in Mainz, Germany, at the command's first-ever Senior Leaders Conference. I am, however, even more gratified when in my travels to Africa I come across one or another former student who, perhaps just slightly influenced by our time together at JMU, has opted to work on the continent himself or herself.

I admit that I have been extraordinarily lucky. I have been able to work in the field that I am interested in and enjoy both the support and stimulus necessary to do it well. However, my experience also confirms my conviction that when faculty members use the firm ground of pressing real-world concerns to integrate their varied strands of research, teaching and civic engagement, all three aspects of the academic life are enhanced to the benefit of the scholar and the enrichment of his or her students and peers as well as the community as a whole. ¶

* Read Peter Pham's weekly analyses of African security issues for *World Defense Review* at <http://worlddefensereview.com/phamarchive.shtml>.

About the Author: *J. Peter Pham is associate professor of justice studies, political science and Africana studies. He is the recipient of the 2008 Nelson Mandela International Prize for African Security and Development presented by the Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies, the Benthurst Foundation, and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. He is currently on leave from James Madison University to serve as senior fellow and director of the Africa Project at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, a New York-based think tank. He is also a non-resident senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies in Washington, D.C. He currently serves as vice president of the American Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa. On Nov. 21, Pham spoke on the Fox News channel about the recent surge of piracy off the east coast of Africa on the Fox News Channel. He was the principal expert commentator on Fox News Reporting: Pirates of the 21st Century, anchored by Geraldo Rivera. Pham has also authored, edited or translated more than a dozen books and is the author of more than 300 essays and reviews on a wide variety of subjects in scholarly and opinion journals. In addition to the study of terrorism and political violence, his research interests lie at the intersection of international relations, international law, political theory and ethics with particular concentrations on the implications for United States foreign policy and African states as well as religion and global politics.*