



# Center for Policy Analysis & Research (CfPAR)

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## U.S. Foreign Policy in Somalia: CfPAR's Interview with former U.S. Ambassador David H. Shinn

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On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Wendy Sherman gave a well received address about the US foreign policy in Somalia at USIP. Based on the speech, many people may think that there is a shift of U.S. policy toward Somalia. This shift may rightly begin after the U.S. officially recognized the "permanent" government that was established in September 2012. However, others, on the other hand, may think that even though the U.S. has recognized the Somali government, it does not mean that there is a total/complete policy shift, and everything still remains the same, i.e. the dual track policy will be in place due to the realities on the ground in Somalia.

In order to clarify those speculations, CfPAR reached out former U.S. Ambassador David H. Shinn to contribute his insights about what the Under Secretary's speech means for the U.S.-Somalia relations.

### **A Brief bio about Ambassador David H. Shinn:**

- U.S. Ambassador to Burkina Faso from 1987-1990
- State Department Deputy Task Force Director and then Coordinator for Somalia from 1992-1993
- Director for East African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 1993-1996
- U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia from 1996-1999
- Ambassador Shinn now teaches International Affairs at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

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Here is our interview with Ambassador David Shinn:

1. **CfPAR:** What is your overall reaction to Ambassador Wendy Sherman's address at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) on 3 June 2014?

**Ambassador Shinn:** The fact that this key speech on U.S. policy towards Somalia was given by the U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs rather than the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs underscores the importance that the United States wanted to attach to the statement. The remarks are comprehensive and were obviously vetted widely within the U.S. government. While the speech focuses primarily on U.S. policy in Somalia and Washington's relationship with the Somali government, I was pleased to see acknowledgment of the importance of some 130,000 Somali-Americans.

Under Secretary Sherman was a good choice to deliver the remarks. She actually has some background on Somalia. In 1993, during the Clinton Administration, I worked with her closely on Somali issues in Congress when she was the Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Affairs and I was serving as the State Department Coordinator for Somalia during the international intervention in the country.

2. **CfPAR:** Could policy shift be the impetus driving the speech, or was it simply driven by rapidly changing realities on the ground?

**Ambassador Shinn:** Comprehensive speeches such as this are often driven simply by the fact that there have been numerous changes in Somalia and the Horn of Africa since the last comprehensive speech dealing with Somalia. I suspect this, more than anything else, dictated the timing of the remarks. The speech does not suggest any radical change in U.S. policy. It is, rather, a nice summary and update of evolving U.S. policy over the past couple of years.

3. **CfPAR:** Somalia is considered a failed state though there are efforts in peace-building. What is your evaluation of the U.S. engagement in Somalia's peace-building efforts?

**Ambassador Shinn:** I was publicly critical of U.S. policy for many years after the United States pulled out of Somalia in 1994 and paid little attention to it until after the events of 11 September 2001. Then the U.S. focus became excessively one of trying to counter terrorism with minimal regard to helping to fix the root causes of the problems in Somalia. In recent years, the policy has been more nuanced. While counterterrorism remains the singular most important U.S. interest, there is a realization that the United States must play a more important role in trying to reestablish a viable state in Somalia that has widespread support of the Somali people. This has been a positive development. Under Secretary Sherman's remarks set forth both the reasons for U.S. interest in Somalia and current policy.

4. **CfPAR:** There are a great number of Somali-Americans who want to see the U.S. directly dealing with the Somali government instead of dealing with multiple entities. Do you think the U.S. has been slow in dealing with the permanent Somali government despite the formal recognition announced by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in January 2013?

**Ambassador Shinn:** As I noted earlier, the United States was slow to reengage in Somalia following the departure of U.S. troops in 1994. Since formal U.S. recognition of Somalia in January 2013, however, I believe the U.S. government has been fully engaged with the Somali government led by Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. In fact, the United States also worked closely with his predecessor. I would not fault Washington for failure in recent years to work with the existing Somali national government.

There is, of course, a need to recognize reality on the ground. This means that the United States must interact with centers of political authority in parts of Somalia that have varying degrees of autonomy such as Puntland, Jubaland, and Somaliland. Under Secretary Sherman tried to deal with this issue when she said “the United States will remain actively engaged with both national and regional leaders to strengthen institutions and promote cooperation on every level.” The trick is to balance U.S. interaction with national and regional leaders in a way that does not exacerbate the relationships among these leaders.

5. **CfPAR:** Ambassador Sherman has revealed the U.S. intention to nominate a full ambassador to Somalia. Does this mean we will see a U.S. embassy opening in Mogadishu before the 2016 election?

**Ambassador Shinn:** While I believe the new ambassador will be named soon, Sherman made clear that the ambassador will reside initially in Nairobi. The security situation in the Mogadishu area will determine when the embassy formally opens there and when the ambassador moves to the capital. Events such as Benghazi cause Washington to be very conservative when it is a question of safety of U.S. personnel. Should there be a significant improvement in the security situation in Mogadishu before the 2016 election, I would anticipate there will be an embassy in the capital by the election.

6. **CfPAR:** With China now increasingly engaging in Africa’s business sector and the U.S. mainly focusing on security, how might the U.S. find balance in security, diplomacy and investment?

**Ambassador Shinn:** The United States has always placed a premium on pursuing diplomacy in Africa. I believe this will be seen at the August summit in Washington for African leaders a long overdue emphasis on U.S. trade and investment in Africa. While the U.S. government can cajole the U.S. private sector and offer some incentives, it will

still depend primarily on the private sector to pay more attention to Africa. Nevertheless, there finally seems to be an understanding within the U.S. government that investment and trade with Africa must be raised to a higher priority.

The government of China came to this conclusion about 15 years ago. But China has some advantages because of its large number of state-owned enterprises and the much closer connection between the government of China and its manufacturing sector. China also has a policy of offering more government incentives to manufacturers than is the case in the United States, which expects the private sector to succeed largely on its own.

What is interesting, however, is the fact that as China's interests in Africa and the number of its personnel living on the continent increase, it is experiencing growing security threats. After the fall of Qadhafi in Libya, China had to evacuate 36,000 nationals from the country. It has experienced deadly attacks on its personnel in countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia. Most recently, there was an attack, presumably by Boko Haram, on a Chinese company in northern Cameroon that resulted in the abduction of ten Chinese employees. As a result, China is now spending more time on security issues and ways to protect its interests and people in Africa. For example, while it has long sent peacekeepers to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, it recently agreed to send to the UN mission in Southern Sudan, where it has significant oil interests, an infantry battalion of 850 troops to join 350 non-combat Chinese soldiers.

We may have reached a point where the United States begins to focus more and more on trade and investment with Africa while China is forced to shift to a greater emphasis on security concerns.

**CfPAR:** Thank you Ambassador David Shinn for your time to share your insights with us.

**Ambassador Shinn:** You are welcome.

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