THE 'MEGA-EIGHTS':
URBAN LEVIATHANS AND INTERNATIONAL INSTABILITY
by P. H. Liotta & James F. Miskel

February 8, 2010

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The following is excerpted from The Leviathan Returns: The
Rise of the Megacity and Its Threat to Global Security.

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By 2015, there will be 58 cities on the planet with a
population of five million or more and by 2025, according to
National Intelligence Council, 27 cities with a population
exceeding ten million. The United Nations Population
Division classifies populations in excess of 10 million as
megacities and many of these urban behemoths will be located
in the so-called 10/40 window—the area in Africa and Asia
between north latitude 10 and 40 degrees. This emerging
growth will have serious, if as yet largely
underappreciated, consequences for international stability,
human security and environmental degradation.

The "10/40 window" demarks regions of the world where
socioeconomic challenges are the most daunting; where two-
thirds of the world's population and four-fifths of the
world's poor live.[1] This "window" is a veritable stew of
competing religious identities and ethnic groups. This part
of the world has been resistant to western political and
social culture in general—yet mass media make the people
there keenly aware of the advantages of the materialism
associated with western modernity.

The friction between traditional cultures and the tangible
appeal of western modernity (better hospitals, longer life
spans, healthier children, more comfortable homes) has yet
to yield a new synthesis in many parts of the 10/40 window.
Until it does, turmoil and violence are unavoidable.
Without doubt, unchecked growth in the "10/40 window" will change the face of the global map in the twenty-first century. The questions are: how and what should be done about it?

Through mini-case examples of three megacities in or near the 10/40 window, we illustrate the diverse and sometimes common challenges emerging megacities are facing and in turn pose to us. Recognition of the threats that megacities create for the environment, to the human security of those who live in and around them, and to regional and global security is critical.

THE MEGA-EIGHTS
A handful of megacities should be of particular concern because of their very size, strategic locations, role in the global economy, or environmental vulnerability. Lagos, Cairo, Kinshasa, Dhaka, Karachi, Lahore, Mumbai, and Jakarta (all located in or near the "10/40" window) are overflowing and ungovernable, yet continue to grow rapidly. Each of these "mega-eights" will have populations in excess of ten million in 2025. Each has already reached, or may well soon exceed, its carrying capacity for effective governance and control.

Let us put this in relative terms: If New York City were to have grown at an equivalent rate as Dhaka Bangladesh did between from 1950 to 2015, New York's population in 2015 would be 684 million—two and a quarter times the current population of the United States. Yet New York and many of the "established" megacities of the world avoided the sudden, population tsunamis that Dhaka, Karachi and some other cities have had to face; they were able to take their present shape after the parent national government had secured itself and had developed the major muscle groups needed to govern large populations and expansive tracts of land.

Left to their own devices, (as they have been and likely will be) by inept or uncaring governments, these urban populations must eventually erupt in turmoil—destabilizing all around them. All the while, these unmanageable cities will continue to pollute their environs, provide bases for organized crime and private militias, and export their residents in the form of human migrations as well as terrorist recruits and desperate terrorist operatives.

The following case examples of three megacities in the 10/40 window demonstrate the complexity, diversity, and seemingly overwhelming challenges that the "mega-eights" face, and, in turn, present to the world.

LAGOS: OIL, GUNS AND CORPSES
In Lagos, police rarely enter slums, life expectancy is less than 40 years, and fishing is one of the main occupations even though raw sewage is routinely dumped directly into the
water. Thirty-eight percent of children under five are stunted by malnutrition; 50 percent have never received an inoculation; only 60 percent attend school; and residents must provide transportation for investigators to a crime scene. As conditions in Lagos deteriorate, large numbers of city residents may ultimately vote with their feet and stampede into nearby Benin which is only a half-day walk from the city.

Four words—oil, guns and corpses—tell all you really need to know about Lagos, in particular, and Nigeria more generally. A land rich in petroleum reserves (and one of the major U.S. suppliers), Nigeria has earned hundreds of billions of dollars from oil exports since the 1970s and when oil prices escalated as they did between 2001 and 2007 so too did the central government's revenues. Yet, even as oil revenues were surging per capita incomes fell by 60 percent. Corruption and government misspending siphoned the profits into the hands of a tiny sliver of the population. Thus, despite years of healthy revenues from oil exports, the people of Nigeria and the residents of Lagos in particular have lost ground. In fact, in 2006 oil-rich Nigeria was rated an appallingly low—159 out of 177 by the United Nations Human Development Index.

Nigeria and its major city are crime and violence ridden. Fighting between ethnic and religious groups is common. Indeed, in Lagos weapons are more evenly distributed than money. In a study funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, Bradford University's Center for International Cooperation and Security reported in 2005 that small arms and light weapons were freely available, and armed gangs in Lagos were engaged in what amounts to an arms race amongst (and between) themselves and the police to acquire more lethal weapons.

Writing in the Atlantic Monthly, Jeffrey Tayler characterized Nigeria and Lagos, in particular, as "de-developing" in the sense that its infrastructure is collapsing beneath the weight of neglect and corruption.

A drive across Lagos reveals unmitigated chaos. The government has left roads to decay indefinitely. Thugs clear away the broken asphalt and then extract payments from drivers, using chunks of rubble to enforce their demands. Residents dig up the pavement to lay cables that tap illegally into state power lines. Armed robbers emerge from the slums to pillage cars stuck in gridlocks (aptly named "hold-ups" in regional slang) so impenetrable that the fourteen-mile trip from the airport to the city center can take four hours.

It seems unlikely that Nigeria will be able to reform Lagos, not to mention disarm its factions. The structures for municipal reform are not in place and the national government seems not to appreciate the extent of the problem.
Yet not only is Nigeria the most populous nation in Africa, it has the second highest GDP on the continent-despite the uneven distribution of income. Moreover, Nigeria is itself bifurcated between Muslim and non-Muslim zones and has already seen an increase in Islamist violence in its Northern provinces. Continuing urban dysfunction in Lagos can only make extremist ideologies more appealing to the vast number of marginalized city dwellers desperate for change.

KARACHI: CITY OF BLIGHT
A small coastal village 150 years ago, Karachi (in Urdu, the City of Lights) grew in punctuated spurts to become Pakistan's largest city and was, for a short time, like Lagos, the national capital. As Karachi grows, as is expected by 2015 to become one of the five most populous cities on the planet, the city's inability to control crime and terrorism and to provide public safety for its citizens will have dire consequences on Pakistan and its neighboring states.

High profile attacks on Western diplomats and fire bombings of Western fast food restaurants in the city are regular features of Karachi's cultural terrain. While the brutal assassination of Benazir Bhutto and several similar attempts against former president Pervez Musharraf-both in Rawalpindi-and vicious sectarian assaults upon Shiite mosques and gatherings are now well known, we also know that the source of the terrorist attacks that killed 163 in Mumbai in November 2007 originated in a specific location: Karachi.

Fully half of the population lives in shantytowns that the city government classifies as illegal. Municipal authorities have no control over where millions of people build ramshackle huts and land use is unregulated. The city provides little in the way of public services-particularly law enforcement and public safety-to millions. The incapacity of the government to provide educational opportunities and other services has left a vacuum that has been partially filled by religious schools, or madrassas. Some of these schools are funded by Islamist extremists who have used them to polarize society and to recruit jihadists opposed not only to the West but also to the Pakistani government.

Karachi is the financial and industrial capital of Pakistan and the country's largest seaport. Karachi has grown too big, too fast.

CAIRO: TRIUMPHANT FAILURE
Cairo (in Arabic, al-Qahira or the triumphant) is the capital of the Arab world and, like Lagos, a collection of un-integrated neighborhoods that function independently from each other and from the municipal and national governments-a city of many faces.
To most of its residents, the city is not a city at all. For good reason: most Cairenes regard the municipal government as either non-existent or potentially hostile because virtually no public services exist in most neighborhoods. Yet the national government clearly understands the importance of keeping Cairo under control, if not well cared for. The municipal budget is set by the national government, which also provides broad direction on how funds are to be spent. Indeed, the city was directly administered by the national government until the end of World War II. Even today, the national government appoints the head of the municipal government.

Cairo is a prime example of a national government acting as a megacity's "Puppet Master"—attempting to prevent urban events from spinning out of control, without actually improving the lives of city dwellers. As with Pakistan, less populated regions of the country are virtually ignored, ironically creating resentment and disaffection in both urban and rural areas. Residents of Sinai, for example, have long felt ignored by the Egyptian government and anti-government violence and domestic terrorism on the peninsula have increased in recent years.

In Egypt today, the government's failure to provide services evenly throughout Cairo has opened niches for the Muslim Brotherhood (the parent of Hamas). In addition, the focus on maintaining control over the city has caused other parts of Egypt to be overlooked.

THE "LEVIATHAN EFFECT": RECOGNIZING AND ACTING
Our concerns about the dangers of ungoverned megacities should not be dismissed as mere "predictions." The trends and events we describe are already taking place and have begun to sculpt the future. The question cannot be whether these things will actually happen; it is already too late for that. As the consequences take hold, we may well enter an ecology of urban ruin in some of the most fragile yet connected (by trade and migration) locales in the world.

While terrorism, homelessness, poverty and failure of government to provide support are not one and the same, they often co-exist and collectively are symptomatic of a severe "dis-ease" within the system—one with which the system in many countries are demonstrably unable to cope. Yet there are practical applications that the larger international system can and should take on to strengthen governance in the states most directly threatened by the challenges that new, urban leviathans pose.

What we offer here are not panaceas for seemingly insurmountable problems; equally, these actions cannot be taken in isolation from each other. As practical means to achievable ends, they should be tailored to deal with specific environments, as well as common symptoms within the "mega-eights." One of the most deep-rooted problems is an
element common to many states and urban leviathans: corruption. Practical steps for effective action include:

1) Take on the Politics of Plunder. Governments and megacity leaders themselves—not foreign donors—should design projects and set agendas that focus on both physical and social infrastructure improvement, urban design and planning, as well as health and education improvement. Political leaders must be held accountable.

2) Heavy Investment in Regional Organizations. Within the 10/40 window there are regional organizations that have begun to play an important role in peacekeeping; for example, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States. These regional organizations offer better prospects for more effective action than global organizations, like the United Nations.

3) Specialized Networks for Transnational Project. New regional organizations or subcomponents of existing organizations should also be fostered to address specific transnational problems, such as crime, pollution, climate change and terrorism.

4) A Grand Bargain between Governments and Non-governmental Organizations.

As a recent World Bank study noted, aid works best when donors work together for common long-term goals, instead of as competitors for political advantage or, in the case of private organizations, for fundraising publicity.

5) Mobilize and Coordinate the Targeting of Private Donations. A considerable amount of aid—and of course, investment—comes from the private sector.

For the United States alone, the dollar value of American "foreign aid" provided by citizens, corporations and foundations through private sector channels was almost $16 billion in 2000. There is no question, but that this aid could be more effectively spent. One important area where more funds should be spent is municipal governance in the emerging megacities.

6) Programs to Harness Remittances. Remittances are funds that are "remitted" or transferred from individuals in one country to individuals in another country. Internationally, the sheer volume of remittances sent by migrants has grown remarkably, outstripping foreign aid) and all global foreign direct investment.

7) Redirect Security Assistance towards Police and Court Reform. Establishing confidence in the administrative competence and integrity of the governmental organs charged with executing the law is one of the signal challenges facing many countries in the less developed parts of the world.
8) Widen the Use of Microcredits. Through innovative use of microlending—giving numerous, so-called "high-risk" loans to needy peoples (often of extremely limited means)—dramatic changes have taken place in numerous locales throughout the 10/40 window. There should be a particular focus on urban lending.


10) Promote Megacity-oriented Civil Society Organization. Civil society organizations perform useful functions and can help overwhelmed municipal and national governments provide essential services, as well as aid in educating urban populations on community self-help and neighborhood level political organization.

MOVING FORWARD
Conditions in the megacities we describe here have created fertile earth for terrorist, criminal and extremist organizations. In Cairo and Karachi, urban poverty and chronic instability leave their population few options for a better life. With their non-existent services, poverty, and basic inequities, they have proven top breeding grounds for Islamic extremism. Some of these entities have the potential to become so powerful within their megacities as to be virtually invulnerable to the power of the governments of their respective states.

Others may actually seize control of the state. This is, after all, more or less what took place in the Gaza Strip, a place so densely populated it qualifies as a mini-megacity, sharing many of the same problems of the larger urban masses that are not circumscribed by geographical barriers, and where wretched living conditions and an unresponsive government led to Hamas' victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections and, portentously, to its success since then in violently driving rival elements of the Palestinian Authority government out of Gaza.

The concerns here are not over the lack of governance. Who, after all, ever thought that Karachi or Cairo or Lagos had effective governance? Rather, our focus is on the conditions that arise in the security vacuum in the critical megacities of the planet, which allow for criminality, terrorism, and parallel power structures to follow in the wake of collapsing urban environments. Indeed, in this space—and if conditions are ignored or overlooked—we may well see an age of continuous conflict breaking out across the 10/40 window. Urban warfare may be the new operating environment that international security forces could be drawn into. Successful alliances, such as NATO, may adapt or permanently fracture in rising to the challenge.
The world is not prepared for these major shifts in the global landscape that megacity growth portends. No one-state, international regime or organization has directed sufficient focus to this topic. Thus, we must recognize and address ways to assist weak or poorly equipped states to better manage their skyrocketing urban populations. To do this wisely requires strategic attention, strategic planning, and strategic investment—and best serves long-term global security interests.

Notes