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5 April 2011
Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, DC

I would like to thank Steve McDonald and the Woodrow Wilson Center for inviting me to speak today. It's a pleasure to see many longtime friends and colleagues. The Woodrow Wilson Center plays a vital role in providing policymakers like myself with the deep thinking and analysis that helps guide our work.

My original goal for today's talk was to provide you with a broad overview of the major issues and policies we anticipate for the coming year. Before I do that, however, I would like to first draw your attention to two situations of grave and immediate concern to the United States. The first has largely been eclipsed by developments in places such as Japan, North Africa, and the Middle East. It is not making big headlines or receiving much coverage on the news networks. Nonetheless, it is something on which we should all be focused. I'm talking about the elections in Nigeria.

Nigeria is one of the two most important countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, and what happens in Nigeria has consequences for Africa, the United States, and the global community. This past weekend Nigeria was to have held the first of a series of elections that will shape the direction of Africa's most populous country and second-largest economy.

Nigeria has not had credible national elections since 1993, and overcoming this negative legacy remains a significant challenge. This challenge was manifest on Saturday, as Nigeria's independent electoral body, INEC, intervened a few hours into the polling to postpone the first round of voting for the National Assembly. The postponement was due to a variety of logistical problems, notably the failure to deliver voting materials to numerous polling stations across the country. We share the disappointment of INEC and of the Nigerian people that this important electoral event had to be postponed, and we renew our call for credible and transparent elections in this critically important African country.

As many of you know, the last elections in 2007 were deeply flawed and in no way reflected the ability and capacity of Nigeria to

organize and run successful elections. They were also a major embarrassment to many Nigerians. Rigging and theft of ballot boxes took place in full view of the public. Violence was rampant, and actual voting did not even occur in many places. The results announced by the electoral commission had no basis in reality.

Most Nigerian and international observers agreed the 2007 elections represented a major setback for democracy in Africa. Although the former elections commissioner Maurice Ewu has gone, to this day, nobody has been held accountable for the fraud and mismanagement in running those elections.

The appointment last June of Attahiru Jega as national electoral commissioner raised expectations that this year's elections would meet minimum standards of credibility. Dr. Jega is a respected university administrator, professor, and civil society activist who brought well-needed integrity and competence to the position. He has inspired many Nigerians to become more actively involved in the elections process and to insist on greater transparency to combat fraud. Dr. Jega has also given international observers greater access to the electoral commission,

and he has been open to advice from election experts from Latin America, Africa, and the United States.

However, as we have seen this past weekend one man alone cannot overcome significant systemic and logistical challenges, nor can one person or one electoral event transform a political culture in which stolen elections and disregard for basic democratic principles have been the norm for decades. The logistical challenges and inevitable confusion associated with the administration of elections in a country of Nigeria's size and population—not to mention its poor infrastructure—also create opportunities for political manipulation. And some politicians have acted in ways to make proper electoral oversight all the more difficult.

Although the level of violence associated with the 2011 election might, in some locations, appear diminished from what we witnessed in 2007, any election violence is unacceptable, and it casts a dark shadow over the entire electoral process. Assassinations of candidates, bombings, riots, stoning of motorcades, other forms of political hooliganism, are to be condemned. The spoilers must not be allowed to prevail.

Despite the poor start this past weekend, we encourage all Nigerians to exercise their rights as citizens to vote and to have their votes counted openly and transparently. Reports of a significant and peaceful turnout of Nigerian voters last Saturday are a positive indication of their democratic aspirations. We continue to support fully Dr. Jega and other like-minded election officials in their efforts to achieve better election results. But, we are also monitoring the political environment closely. Democracy is important, and we are prepared to take appropriate measures against those individuals who violate basic democratic norms, as we have in places such as Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, and Madagascar.

Our government will not turn a blind eye to a repeat of the political violence and wholesale electoral theft that took place in Nigeria in 2007. If Nigeria's current elections are not a significant improvement over the 2007, and if the current elections do not meet the expectations of a majority of voters, Nigeria and Nigerian citizenry will lose confidence in their leaders, their democratic institutions, and the capacity of Nigeria to sustain a positive democratic trajectory.

We believe Nigeria has an historic opportunity to allow the Nigerian people the opportunity to elect their local, state and national representatives in a climate free of violence and intimidation. We hope that opportunity will not be lost.

The second situation of great concern to the United States is the current crisis in Ivory Coast. For the past four months, the African Union, ECOWAS, and United Nations have been calling upon Laurent Gbagbo to accept the choice of Ivorian voters and hand power over to Alassane Ouattara, the winner of last November's presidential elections. Accredited Ivorian and international observers assessed the first and second round of those elections to be free, fair, and credible. The U.N. Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) conducted a separate and thorough analysis of over 20,000 tally sheets from all the polling stations and supported the finding of Cote d'Ivoire's own Independent Electoral Commission that Allasane Ouattara had won the second round with 54 percent of the vote. However, the Ivorian Constitutional Council nullified the results from several northern polling districts to eliminate Ouattara's margin of victory. The Council did so

without any regard for transparency and explanation of the complaints that were used to justify the nullification.

Having lost the elections but unwilling to relinquish power, Gbagbo is now betting that the current chaos, violence, and humanitarian crisis will cow the African Union and international community into backing down and accepting a settlement. Gbagbo's intransigence has exacerbated tensions and provoked violence across the country; he and his ministers have openly threatened the United Nations operation, which is charged with protecting civilians who are caught in the crossfire of his political ambitions. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced, and violence last week probably has pushed the death toll to well above a thousand.

Gbagbo's attempt to cling to power regardless of the high cost to millions of Ivorian citizens, regional stability, and to Africa's reputation is a direct insult to the many millions of Africans who have worked so hard in recent years to promote economic development, democratic reforms, and political stability.

The situation in Cote d'Ivoire is frequently compared to that of Libya in terms of the international community's responsibilities to protect innocent civilians. That notion is simply wrong. For the past four months, the United States has been working closely with its African and other international partners to achieve a peaceful outcome to the Ivorian crisis. A robust international peacekeeping force has been on the ground since 2002, beginning first as an ECOWAS operation and then converting in 2004 to a U.N. led effort. The peacekeepers prevented what many analysts believed could have turned into another prolonged bloody civil war like what had occurred in the previous decade in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Over the past four months, the peacekeepers have helped deter and contain violence while ECOWAS and the African Union tried to achieve a diplomatic solution to this crisis. French forces have also played a key role in preventing Cote d'Ivoire's civil war from escalating over the past decade, and, as we see this week, are taking action with U.N. forces to take out Gbagbo's heavy weaponry and thereby reduce the risks to the civilian population in Abidjan. I think these actions demonstrate the willingness and ability of the U.N. and

French forces to adapt to the changing circumstances in what has become a highly volatile situation. Without the presence of the peacekeepers, there is no doubt the situation in Cote d'Ivoire would be far worse than it is now.

Overall, the international community's response in Cote d'Ivoire thus far has been appropriately matched to the political and military circumstances on the ground. Gbagbo has virtually no airborne military assets, and UNOCI, with French assistance, has been able to neutralize his heavy military weaponry, a very different picture than the situation in Libya.

We should nonetheless be humble about what can be expected of external interventions in general. We are in regular contact with President Ouattara and his Prime Minister Soro to insist that forces claiming to fight on their behalf refrain from violence against civilians, looting, and other excesses. We are heartened by President Ouattara's and Prime Minister Soro's clear directives to their forces to maintain the utmost respect for the civilian population, and their calls for transparent international investigations of all reported human rights abuses. We

have also raised our concerns about violence committed by pro-Gbagbo forces with representatives of his dwindling regime. We have made it clear that actors on all sides will be held accountable for war crimes and other atrocities.

In the remainder of my remarks today, I will provide an outlook for the coming months and overview of some specific policy priorities. I'm happy to answer your questions afterwards, but am also very much looking forward to hearing your thoughts and suggestions.

Some of you might already be familiar with the five focal areas of our Africa policy: strengthening democracy and governance; helping mitigate conflict; promote economic growth and development; assist with addressing its health issues; and focus on prevailing over certain transnational problems. Over the past two years, Africa has made gains in some areas, maintained the status quo in others, and in experienced a few setbacks.

The recent referendum in Southern Sudan was a great achievement for that country and for Africa as well. Over a year ago, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) appeared at risk of unraveling.

In response, we stepped up our diplomatic engagement and increased our human and material resources. Our international partners, particularly the United Nations and African Union, led the negotiations and referendum mechanics, but our interventions at critical moments helped sustain the progress and momentum. It is one of our greatest achievements in the past two years.

Smaller scale but equally intensive diplomatic efforts, in collaboration with ECOWAS, our European partners, and Guinean leaders, helped avert the outbreak of war in Guinea-Conakry and steered that country through a transition that led to credible elections last year. Likewise, our collaboration with ECOWAS facilitated the eventual transition back to a democratically elected rule in Niger.

I wish that I could include Zimbabwe and Madagascar on this list of countries that made progress this last year, but clearly the situation in both remains paralyzed as their hard-nosed leaders continue to try to manipulate the democratic process in their favor. Increasing political repression and economic stagnation in Eritrea has put that country on par with North Korea.

Over the next year, we will continue to work in close collaboration with our African and other international partners to address the many challenges ahead while capitalizing on the great opportunities that already exist in Africa. The most historic event for Sub-Saharan Africa this year is likely to be the emergence of Southern Sudan as an independent nation on July 9, 2011. The referendum was only one component of a still incomplete process. The North and South must still negotiate and implement a wide range of agreements, and South Sudan must begin building the foundations for a stable government and growing economy. The United States has already committed hundreds of millions dollars to the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and we must remain engaged in the coming months and years.

The 17 national elections scheduled for this year across Africa are also noteworthy. Although there's more to democracy than just elections, they do serve to be seen as an important barometer of overall governance, and we must remain proactive in encouraging success. The election scheduled to take place in the Democratic Republic of Congo in

November will be critical for consolidating the still fragile peace and building public confidence in that government. The Congolese people and international community are increasingly concerned with the government's performance in areas such as the rule of law, corruption, human rights, and security sector reform.

Tough and unresolved conflicts in Darfur, Somalia, and the eastern DRC are likely to remain among our greatest preoccupations over the next year. We recently appointed a senior diplomat, Ambassador Dane Smith, to intensify our efforts on resolving the Darfur conflict. And Ambassador Princeton Lyman was named last week as the President's Special Envoy replacing Scott Gration. We are seeing signs of some progress in Doha, and urge the parties to continue to negotiate in good faith. We are encouraging the armed movements that are not participating in the Doha Peace Process to send a delegation to Doha to try to resolve this problem. The prospect of normalized relations between Khartoum and the United States, as laid out in the road map presented by Senator Kerry to the northern Sudanese leadership several months ago, also provides a new context in which to develop a

constructive diplomatic relationship between Khartoum and Washington.

Regarding Somalia, last year we rolled out a revised approach to this twenty-year-old crisis. We call it a “dual-track strategy” because it provides for continuing support of the Transitional Federal Government and also recognizes the potential role that other actors can play in ending conflict and establishing basic governing institutions. Without question, the TFG remains weak and highly dependent on the African Union Mission to Somalia, AMISOM, for its security and survival. Its mandate expires in August, and its members will need to find a credible way to build legitimacy moving ahead. For the other part of our dual track strategy, we are looking to continue our support for AMISOM and increase our engagement and support for Somaliland, Puntland, and local administrative entities and civil society groups in south central Somalia such as the current local administration in Galguduud.

Secretary Clinton’s visit to Goma in 2009 underscored the importance we attach to seeing an end to the violence in the eastern DRC. We are planning to reinvigorate our diplomatic efforts in the

coming months, to include the presentation of a revised strategy. We have heard numerous calls for the appointment of a roving special envoy, but we believe for a variety of reasons that our ambassadors and their embassy teams in Kinshasa, Kigali, and other capitals are in a strong position to tackling these problems.

The UN peacekeeping operation MONUSCO also has a vital role to play in the Congo, and we will explore ways to improve its capacity and strengthen its mandate. Security sector reform is vital for building the professionalism of the DRC military and weeding out those responsible for past atrocities. Recent U.S. Dodd-Frank legislation on conflict minerals provides us with still another tool to improve the situation in the DRC.

In the course of my forty-year career, I have seen many situations considered “intractable” that have come to resolution to the surprise of the pessimists. For this reason, I have learned to be persistent and use the tools at our disposal. Despite lack of progress in Zimbabwe, Madagascar, and Eritrea, we will not slacken in our efforts. You don’t win a basketball game with a single fancy dunk or jump shot from mid

court. Those baskets only make a difference if you've kept your score up with mostly repetitive, boring layups and ordinary shots from inside the lane. That's what diplomacy is about.

The Obama administration is committed to recognizing Africa's strategic importance and drawing more attention to its enormous promise and potential. This is especially important in the economic arena, where there is growing awareness of Africa's potential as a high-growth market and investment destination. We remain committed to a strong and revitalized AGOA, and look forward to participating in this year's AGOA Forum in June in Lusaka, Zambia. But we must do more in the business arena to remain competitive.

I have only touched on a few of the priority issues and events anticipated for the coming year. My staff will also be working on a variety of other "normal" diplomatic tasks of a trans-global nature, such as preparing for the next United Nations climate change conference in South Africa; implementing programs to improve food security and health; promoting regional economic cooperation; becoming more attentive to the welfare of women and girls; engaging more with civil

society and youth; promoting the rights of disabled persons. But we are also engaging in dialogue to address the many challenges facing Africa.

Thank you for your attention.