

**Remarks by Special Envoy for Somalia John Yates
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
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A briefing on Somalia**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm pleased to be here today and I thank the Wilson Center for inviting me to speak.

I'd like to review our goals for Somalia and the nature of our efforts thus far, then I'll be happy to take some questions.

I have been in Nairobi since January of 2007 and was appointed by Secretary Rice as Special Envoy for Somalia in May of this year. I lead a team based at our Embassy in Nairobi but dedicated entirely to Somalia. Of course, there are countless other actors both in Washington and various overseas posts concentrating on our efforts towards Somalia.

The United States continues to engage with the leadership of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Somali stakeholders across the political spectrum to achieve U.S. foreign policy objectives in Somalia: 1) eliminate the terrorist threat; 2) promote political stability and support the establishment of a functioning central government; and 3) to address the humanitarian needs of the Somali people. U.S. priority initiatives in Somalia remain focused on three priorities designed to restore governance and long-term stability. First, encourage political dialogue between the Transitional Federal Institutions and other key Somali stakeholders with the goal of resuming the transitional process outlined by the Transitional Federal Charter leading to national elections in 2009. Second, achieve full deployment of an African stabilization force, known as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Third, mobilize international assistance to help build the mid-level governance capacity of the

Transitional Federal Institutions and support the continuation of the transitional political process as outlined by the Transitional Federal Charter. Clearly, all three elements are intertwined. Neither the humanitarian crisis nor the extremist elements will go away without a stable government. Likewise, the government is unlikely to become stronger without a political process that isolates extremist elements in Somalia.

The United States remains actively engaged in a range of bilateral, regional, and multilateral efforts to encourage positive developments and further political progress inside Somalia. On a bilateral basis, the United States continues to interact with TFG representatives and Somali stakeholders to achieve U.S. policy goals through the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, which maintains responsibility for U.S. engagement in Somalia. Officers in the Somalia Unit at Embassy Nairobi meet and communicate regularly with President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi, Speaker of Parliament Sheikh Adan Mohammed Nur “Madobe” and other members of government and parliament, as well as key segments of Somalia society.

We also continue to meet and discuss Somalia with regional leaders on a regular basis. The U.S. embassies in Djibouti and Ethiopia regularly call on host-nation counterparts to review developments in Somalia. The U.S. Mission to the African Union (AU) is actively engaging with the AU leadership on its plans in Somalia.

Our ultimate goal is to see Somalia through to free and fair elections in 2009. These elections would signify the successful achievement of the goals of the transitional process that started in 2004. The most recent milestone on this road to elections was the National Reconciliation Conference (NRC), which took place between July and August of this year. The primary objective of the NRC was to achieve equitable representation in

the Transitional Federal Institutions and agree on a roadmap for the remainder of the transitional process. Unfortunately, due to the lack of participation from key opposition figures – despite repeated invitations from the Congress managers and encouragement from the international community – the Congress has not yet fully achieved these objectives. However, there were some positive outcomes from the NRC, and we have encouraged the TFG to continue to reach out to key stakeholders and to implement the conclusions of the Congress in good faith and in keeping with a continued process of dialogue and reconciliation. In moving forward with the transitional process, all transitional committees appointed by the TFG must be fully inclusive of all key stakeholders, including those who may not have participated in the Congress. We are again calling on all players in the transitional process to join and participate in a non-violent political process that will ensure a successful roadmap to 2009.

More immediately, we must have a ceasefire among all armed groups in Somalia to establish a framework for longer-term security sector reform and isolate extremist elements that are able to exploit the current environment. The level of violence must be reduced, if not for the sake of the political process then for the sake of the innocent civilians who continue to suffer injury and death at the hands of extremist elements who continue to resort to armed conflict in pursuit of their individual agendas.

The humanitarian situation in Somalia is a grave one. USAID is spearheading our aid efforts and we're working closely with the United Nations and the international community to optimize those efforts. We have provided approximately \$24.5 million to date in fiscal year 2008 (which only began on October 1) in humanitarian assistance to the UN and international agencies and NGOs to provide life and livelihood saving

assistance to internally displaced persons, host communities, agrarian and pastoralist populations in all regions of south central Somalia. Between FY 2007 and FY 2008, we have also provided approximately \$59 million in food aid to vulnerable Somalis through the distribution networks of CARE and the UN World Food Program. We will continue to monitor the situation and coordinate with the donor community to ensure an effective response to Somalia's dire humanitarian needs.

In closing, I'd like to share with you a recent example of our engagement with key figures in Somali society. I hosted an Iftar dinner in Nairobi on September 30 and nearly 80 people accepted the invitation. We had several notes afterwards from guests who said that many of the people under the tent seated at the tables were people who would not ordinarily share a meal together. We take some hope from events like this. By the same token, we were struck when a speaker at the Iftar declared that Somalis want to hurt no one, to which the crowd replied in sync, "Except for themselves!" It struck me that a key factor in Somalia's political future would be in translating this self-awareness into a willingness to work together in pursuit of common objectives and towards reconciliation in the near future.

It is important for the Somali people to focus on the future, moving forward in the transitional political process as envisioned by the Charter, rather than focusing on the current composition of the TFG and its Institutions. Like in Liberia or the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Transitional Federal Institutions are not permanent institutions – they are a transitional mechanism that provides a framework for achieving the objectives outlined in the Charter and the formation of representative governance institutions following the transitional process.

We understand that this is an ongoing process, and that we have not reached the end. Along with our regional and international partners, the United States will remain engaged in supporting this much-needed process of inclusive dialogue, however long it may last, while also responding to the humanitarian needs of the Somali people.

Thank you and I'll be happy to take your questions.

Drafted: J Yates, SE Somalia/Nairobi

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