

NWX-WOODROW WILSON CENTER

Moderator: Drew Sample
June 21, 2013
9:00 am CT

Coordinator: Excuse me. I'm sorry for the interruption. This is the conference coordinator. I would like to inform all participants today's conference is being recorded. If anyone has any objections, you may disconnect at this time, and now we will turn the meeting over to Mr. Drew Sample. Sir you may begin.

Drew Sample: Great. Thank you very much. So this is Drew Sample from the Wilson Center. I want to thank everybody for joining us this morning and we're going to be talking about Obama's trip to Africa, traveling to Senegal, Tanzania, and South Africa for his second time on the continent.

And we have here with us Steve McDonald, the Director of the Africa Program here at the Wilson Center and Mame Khady Diouf, Associate at the Africa Program here at the Wilson Center. They're here to take your questions, so with that I think we'll just launch right into it.

Since we're all on the same line, just ask that we don't sort of talk over everyone. But if anybody has questions to start things off, please feel free to jump in.

Steve McDonald: This is Steve McDonald. Do you want us to say any preliminary remarks?

Drew Sample: That would be great.

Steve McDonald: Okay. Yes, again, I'm the director of the Africa Program here at the Woodrow Wilson Center and also a project on leadership and building safe capacity. I think it's imperative and I - (Tammy) hello to you. It's good to be talking to you again.

(Tammy): Hi, Steve, yes.

Steve McDonald: (Colleen) and (James), I don't know you but I know your organizations well, so it's a pleasure to talk to you. The - I think one would start by saying for all of us Africanist individuals and organizations in the broader community that follows Africa closely, we obviously welcome the trip.

And I don't mean to correct my colleague, Drew, but it's actually the third time on the continent if you're looking at all of Africa, in Egypt, and in Ghana and now for this trip. I think we all also in the community are breathing a sigh of relief and saying it's about time.

We'd certainly would like to have had a broader trip that first time around when he went to Ghana. I won't start commenting yet on sort of country choices and focus yet. I would just to say that obviously we really do welcome the fact that he will be on the continent, that he will be giving it the attention that it deserves, and we think it's high time that he got there.

And, you know, he'd be - he follows in the wake of, as we all know, a very, very active Secretary of State in Hillary Clinton, who I think visited the

continent I believe about six or seven times including a leader summit - Heads of State Summit.

And of course in her first trip in 2009 which she famously visited the nine countries and took on some of the kind of difficult issues including their trip to Gambia, which was quite bold for a Secretary of State. So, he follows in some strong footsteps there, but he is the President. He carries a whole different symbolic message with him.

(Tammy): Thanks, Steve. We're going to hear before our questions from Mame Khady Diouf.

Woman: It's okay?

Steve McDonald: Would you like to say anything preliminary?

Mame Khady Diouf: No. I think I would just echo what Steve had. Just good morning, everyone, first of all - has just said. I think, you know, it is a very welcome trip and a necessary one. I think his administration understood that, you know, it was time to go ahead and, you know, visit the continent.

And the fact that he's doing this trip which means not necessarily the choices but that he's going to three countries this time is also very good and symbolic as well. I think we'll be able to get into, you know, details of the choices, et cetera as Steve said. And the perception, you know, of what this trip will mean, you know, on the side of the Africans first of all but the Diaspora people as well as Africans in the community here indeed.

Steve McDonald: Mame Khady, by the way was at both of the Security Council briefings on the preparations for the trip. One of them being, which I welcome, I thought was very good briefing of the Diaspora Community.

Mame Khady Diouf: Indeed.

Steve McDonald: Not sort of the regular old...

Mame Khady Diouf: Yes, it was.

Steve McDonald: ...incumbents like that.

Mame Khady Diouf: It was a briefing first of all but also to get our opinion and our insights as well and what we thought of this upcoming trip and what else we would like to see covered as well.

(Tammy): And can you give us some sense of what the Diaspora Community presented as hopes and dreams for the trip and the response that you got?

Mame Khady Diouf: Of course. I mean, you know, there were a lot of questions. We were 40 - there were 40 of us and we met with Mr. (Harris), met with Mr. (Unintelligible), and - how do you call it - Mr. - somebody who represented Diaspora which is the Diaspora State Department and also (Leo Smith)...

Steve McDonald: (Leo Smith).

Mame Khady Diouf: ...as well in NSB. So we were meeting with them for about an hour and what some of my fellow Diasporans I would say talked about was, you know, focused on (Agora), you know, they wanted to see more done on that front and making sure that people understood what (Agora) was really.

Because they really sensed that, you know, although if there in some countries are using this mechanism that they didn't fully utilize it. There was also a focus on and what they wanted to see more was education. A focus on education and I would say (tertiary).

So university, at the university level. Because as we know the university has done a lot in terms of primary and education, but they wanted to see a focus on universities. They also talked about inclusivity and making sure that all, you know, in terms of youth, you know, also the LGBT community being included in the different programs that the U.S. was doing.

We talked about also in terms of entrepreneurship and small, medium enterprises given that the president is going to be focusing on trade and investment with, you know, bigger corporations and what the U.S. corporations have been doing so far.

They wanted to see a focus on entrepreneurs in the Diaspora and how they connect to entrepreneurs on the continent and making sure that was also emphasized. But also just making sure that Diaspora was involved because they are the cultural brokers in a way.

So they - we've been educated in the U.S., work here, have skills that can be also transferred and understand the context as well. So I think what the Diaspora, you know, the expectation they welcome, of course this trip but wanted a more in depth I would say in terms, you know, as I mentioned (Agora), education, just to name a few.

Making sure that programs were more inclusive and also governance in terms of, you know, in the bilateral discussions that the President will be having

with respective presidents to make sure that, you know, (that's what stressed).
I said in a nutshell those were the things that were talked about.

Steve McDonald: Maybe the kind of - to stir things up a bit and kick off some more pointed questions, I should come out up front with some of my concerns are. Some of what relate to what Mame Khady was just saying.

But it starts with, in my mind, that well I'll have to give away sort of a policy perspective that I'm coming from. I'm concerned the United States still supports Africa on a bilateral basis. And is not very strongly supportive of the Africa Union or of regional immigration and trade and et cetera.

So I think this trip which has been in the planning stages for months and months and months probably way back into last administration when I had my first - last term of this administration when I had my first talks with people like Johnny Carson and (Grant Harris) about it.

And I think I just a wonderful opportunity and it's our (err apparel) to not go through the African Union and address a larger group than (Addis Ababa) and to not stress the regional economic community which he could do and might do still when he goes to Tanzania and when he goes to South Africa and Senegal because that will be representative obviously of community and Zaduk and Commasa. I'm sorry and Ecowas.

But that doesn't seem to be the focus. He seems to be going to countries with whom he has a very good relations to talk about specific issues of those countries and trade and investment and security. And not looking at the broader picture.

Another thing that I feel strongly myself is by addressing the AU, he then would have helped ameliorate the criticism that'll come his way for why he didn't visit other countries, so like Nigeria or Kenya or you name them (unintelligible) issues of course that we know he has to deal with.

And there's some domestic constituencies which might have had negative reactions should he have chosen to do one or the other but by choosing to speak to the AU that covers all those issues and gives himself some cover.

And the other thing of course is what Mame Khady was mentioning in terms of being sure that he's reaching out - to the shoes on the ground in each country and to the constituencies there. For instance I'm concerned because I know how these trips go.

And the Embassy and the White House set the Embassy at the local residents and White House set them up, the kinds of individuals that are brought out to meet with them and et cetera. I wish it were more of a fact finding tour where he was really reaching out to in terms of youth for instance was an issue.

I fear that we're not really reaching out to the marginalized youth where issues will develop that from what I've seen anyway in terms of the African Youth Leadership Program that he's conducted here at the White House.

Being involved in, you know, highly university educated rather elite youth and don't really represent those marginalized youth. And so that's the inclusivity that I think Mame Khady was talking about which the Diaspora was concerned about and it does concern me too.

I just don't want him to see him doing a visit where, you know, he stops and talks with the President, sees the Chamber of Commerce and then goes onto

his next stop. He needs to reach out to some of the real people in the grass roots and to understand the issues that are in these areas.

(Tammy): Are you concerned, Steve, that there's no Secretary of State for Africa in place for this trip. Do you think that's a disadvantage?

Steve McDonald: I am concerned about that, partly because it takes away from the new Assistant Secretary of State for Africa a wonderful opportunity to legitimize him or her - we think it's going to be her. And just start her stewardship off with a bang.

It seems to be like it's an appointment that could have been pushed through far more quickly. Why they dragged their feet so long, I don't know, and it really is a missed opportunity. But that's just like, you know, I saw the 15th anniversary at the AU and Addis a month ago as a missed opportunity.

I think the (Comonogoa) summit in August in Addis is another missed opportunity. I think there's a lot of things they could have done to structure this differently so they had an Assistant Secretary in place so they were able to make some AU stops. But, yes, I just - I think that's too bad that that's happening that way. Obviously, her introduction to the continent would have been wonderful had it been alongside the President.

Mame Khady Diouf: And I also think that in terms of follow up, you know, after the trip concludes. I think one of the things that has been raised was the fact that if the Secretary is not in place, then how about the follow up.

And whatever will be said during that trip, who takes on making sure that these things go? And if we had a Secretary in place that would be definitely

easier, but just to add to that. That was a concern of some of the NGO folks who were present at the NFB briefing.

Steve McDonald: I harken back to Hillary Clinton's trip in August of 2009 when of course Johnny Carson was with her. So when she was fashioning the new strategic partnerships with Nigeria, Angola whatever promises and discussions she was having, there was Johnny to follow up on them immediately. And that won't be in place now. And that's not a role that The National Security Council African Advisor can fill.

(Tammy): I don't want to dominate. Please everyone pile on really and let me just follow up a little bit then. I've just come from three weeks in Nigeria. Before that I was in South Africa including at the World Economic Forum with a session, have a small roundtable with the state department official and a group of Nigerians and South Africans.

And one of the big issues that was discussed and pressed upon the state department representative was that there's a fear among many Africans that - and certainly there are critics in Nigeria who believe this that there's too much of a focus on national security as the African interest of the United States.

And that it's even that is misplaced as one of the participants said in Northern Nigeria we don't have a security issue, we have an inclusiveness a governance and economic opportunity issue. If we address those things in Nigeria, we wouldn't have a security issue and we don't see the United States pressing that point of view on our government. Is this something that resonates with the two of you or the people that you talk to in the Diaspora community, Mame Khady?

Mame Khady Diouf: I think that one and this goes back to the meeting, not the Diaspora that I had because we didn't talk about the security at that level. But during the briefing, they did talk about particularly in the visit to Senegal the health situation of course and Mali and they did say that, you know, that they would talk about security issues of course in their bilateral meetings.

However, some of the NGO participants that were there definitely warned about the militarization of, you know, assistance and also Africa as well. So that definitely an issue that's on our minds I would say and focusing on that too much takes away from the rest of the issues of course.

And I would totally agree that some of the people that you just mentioned was that who took the governance and inclusivity as well because I think those are part of the problem of course. I mean nobody can deny that there are security issues.

But I think focusing on those too much takes definitely away from the broader issues and they did say benefited say that they would try to definitely not make it about that and that they would definitely, you know, in their meetings just raise it of course and they would stay away from questions about militarization et cetera from the press even if they're asked.

I mean those tabloids - because they wanted to emphasize other issues. That's according to them. But I think in terms of Diaspora they, as I said in our other meeting that wasn't raised because they were more concerned about the issues that I talked about earlier, but I would definitely say that that's on everybody's minds.

Steve McDonald: Yes, I would absolutely agree (Tammy). You don't - it - how this trip is perceived will depend a little bit on how he formulates all of this when he's

out there. But there's no doubt in my mind and Mame Khady just underwrites that.

But from my rather large set of contact throughout the continent and everyone we talked to that the perceptions of U.S. policy right now are tied up very negatively and our definition of the war of terror means and how it should be.

It's as if as soon as Al Qaeda gets involved, as soon as there's international link that all sight is lost of the core issues that have created the unrest, the situation in the northern Mali, in the Sahel or in Somalia or wherever across the (Magrab).

And that the United States, you know, drops the final to these and goes back to defenses, it's the core piece. I think this is a perception that begins way back in September 2007 when Bush announced Africa and did it in such an awkward and clumsy manner without consultation of Africans.

And you'll remember the hysteria that almost erupted then on the continent of people thinking the United States is going to invade Africa, you know, military footprint, blah, blah, blah. And it's never quite died down because of the way we respond to it. And there's little doubt in my mind that in our own policy formulation community, that is a priority.

And so, you know, when you talk about well don't send in drones in Niger, you know, let's work on reconciling the ethnic groups and dealing with the inclusiveness and marginization of those groups in Northern Mali and Niger and et cetera across that region.

And no one really focuses on that. I think this is something that is being played out constantly in front of our eyes and there are different perspectives.

I know I work quite closely with Romano Prodi who's the former prime minister of Italy and as you're aware he's now the Special Envoy on Sahel for the secretary general.

And he's very concerned about this balance trying to, you know, see a military solution, the French intervention and everything else and that sort of overwhelms all of the attempts at reconciliation in dealing with the core problems. So it's a very serious perception that has to be dealt with and I hope the president deals with it.

(Tammy): Thanks.

(Colleen): Hi. This is (Colleen).

Steve McDonald: Yes, (Colleen).

(Colleen): I wondered if you could talk a little bit about this kind of - how do you think Obama is viewed in Africa and typically in the countries that he's visiting. I mean obviously there was such high hopes when he came into office and I wondered if there's any frustration that he hasn't engaged more or sooner and I'm just interested in your view of how he's going to be greeted and just what kind of the perception of Obama is at this point in Africa.

Steve McDonald: My response will sound very contradictory because I think on the one hand there was very high expectations and all of us before the election in our positions people following and trying to help Africans understand U.S. policy towards Africa were very cross, you know, we're very - great caution of Africa.

So not to expect too much because Obama would have to march to a different drummer and be driven by restraints that were not the zone making and et cetera. And he couldn't just turn all of us to Africa which turned out to be true. But the extra - they're still there.

I sense overall that there is mostly disappointment. That there has been a clear and more coordinated outreach on policy. There have been statements of principles on policy by the president and his teams in the White House and the State Department and et cetera and then that the UN.

But the Africans aren't blind, you know, and they look at the Trans Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic trade and investment partnership and, you know, all that's going on in other areas of the world where we have, you know, global trade initiatives and we have all kinds of things governing how we deal with those. And there's no such animal for Africa.

It's kind of a hit and miss and they're very aware that, you know, Obama has not visited the African union, has not really given it that high level attention as a continent. So I think there's suspicion even cynicism out there, but having said that, his trip is going to be - I mean it shouldn't they're going to be overjoyed and he's going to knock them dead, there's no doubt about that.

He's brilliant at that and so he's going to leave in his wake a great deal of good will. But there's where we get to the issue of why isn't there an Assistant Secretary with him to follow up and build on that and et cetera.

So, he will perform his magic and Africa will be delighted. But I think then there'll be a lot of people holding their breath afterwards saying okay now what does this really mean and there is where the crux will come.

Mame Khady Diouf: Yes, and I definitely and totally agree and I would say that and talking about Senegal. I mean we need - I think people are proud that he's going there and definitely expect a lot.

I wouldn't say expect a lot but definitely are happy that it was - their country was chosen and they will definitely give him a warm welcome. And then people are already urging people to come out and make sure that they welcome Barack Obama.

And I think given that the whole world watched when he was elected, you know, for the first time then the second time and knowing what - who he is and what he can do and I think his persona. That's what definitely, you know, drawing people.

Although, as Steve just said, in terms of what we expected in terms of policy, you know, we have not seen those things fulfilled. But I think the majority actually of the population when we talked about people who live in the neighborhood and people who've seen him on TV, they were very overjoyed that he is coming to these countries. And will expect to hear him perform his magic as Steve said, definitely.

Steve McDonald: Well, you know, when you drive down a road in the marketplace area in Africa anywhere and (Tammy) will know this very well. You always see outside of the barbershops and beauty shops, these hand painted signs of the kind of haircuts you can get.

And there's always a Mandela, but now there's a Barack Obama as well. You can get an Obama cut, so he - personally there's a great deal of admiration for him and that will come pouring out from the people when he's there. Have we satisfied you? (James), was there anything from you?

Drew Sample: (James) actually is sending an email. He had to step out unfortunately.

Steve McDonald: That's why I haven't heard from him.

Drew Sample: Yes, exactly. If there are no further questions though - this is Drew Sample again, I'll just ask Steve and Mame Khady if they have any final statements about the trip or final comments.

(Tammy): Well I could ask one other question if that's all right.

Drew Sample: Sure.

(Tammy): What do the two of you as policy people hope will come out of this? What are your top aspirations for what this trip could do for U.S./Africa relations and for Africa?

Steve McDonald: Mame Khady, you want to start?

Mame Khady Diouf: Sure. I will start. I think I hope that myself as top aspiration, one would be, you know, emphasis on regional integration. I think I would hope that, you know, given all of the issues that he will would be on the table in the three countries.

That he will be able to emphasis regional integration - critical and crucial that the African countries, you know, sit down and involving the of course the AU and the rest as well and figure it out. Even when it comes to a goal as well which is I think integration is very important in that aspect.

And in terms of, you know, renewed U.S., Africa partnership - given that, you know, what China is doing currently on the continent and their involvement. I think it is important that U.S. renews and affirms that it is there and the investors as opposed to companies and corporations will definitely be on the ground.

And because in our world, you know, we have roundtables with different corporations who are underground or want to be underground and need to just - a door to be able to get there in terms of investment and money given to them by the OPEC and et cetera.

So I would hope that it would be tangible when it comes to those partnerships in trade and et cetera. And also just the engagement with youth and civil society. I think it's very important and emphasizing the government in Senegal and Tanzania that the society and youth organizations marginalized as well as established one are definitely important and need to be engaged at all levels here.

Steve McDonald: Yes. I would echo all of that. I think maybe the best that could come out of this and what my hope is Africa policy under Obama during (unintelligible) administration and for this first year - the President has been a ghost.

And although there's, you know, a statement of principles on his part and there's an active executive branch on Africa led by the National Security Council and State Department officers, what's missing has been this presidential role. And you hear that all over even the talk about Angola Renewal and enhancement hopefully maybe even rewriting of that legislation.

The complaints coming from the members of congress themselves as we haven't been able to engage the president on this. So what I'm hoping is he

becomes no longer a ghost, that the symbolism of this trip and again there - we've all had some criticism at the end that he didn't do this and he didn't do that, could have done that, could have done that. I've already issued some of those cautions on my own.

But the best that could come out of this is that stamp of his personal commitment to Africa is there which then makes the interagency and the executive congressional branch relations on all of these issues that exist out there, far more positive with some force behind them.

And I think that's what we hope will come out of it that this will be the president saying okay, I do care, I am here, I am watching you all. Get to work and make you see - or put these policies in place, get Angola renewed, get it enhanced, you know, get all these things done and everybody will take heed.

(Tammy): Well, one final question then follow up to all that. With the focus of this trip on trade and investment and with the people trying to attract trade and investment quite right with pointing out the opportunities in Africa, the sizzling economic growth rate relatively speaking in this global economic climate of African countries.

There is also a concern among many people on the ground in Africa that there needs to be pressure for equitable growth and development as a result of investment and, you know, (David Cameron) just hosted a summit prior to the GA on nutrition and with reports in the lancets and other places that something like 40% of children born in Nigeria and Kenya which have seen growth and are moving into middle income status, are stunted.

Meaning they'll never reach their full intellectual and physical potential and with all sorts of economic implications for the country as well as personal

implications for children and families. Is this something you would like to see emphasized as the U.S. promotes trade and investment?

Steve McDonald: Absolutely. That's like asking do you love your mother. We have to say yes to that and I hope that as I mentioned of what he says and what he says privately to governments and to private sector and civil society while he's out there.

But that - the question sort of underlying part of my concern. I was talking about country choices and why he's not speaking to the AAU itself. Because that will give him a broader - he's avoided the difficult issues where pressure needs to be put on in different countries where you have growth or even in countries where you're still struggling, you know, I personally would have urged him not to avoid the DRC or instance.

Very intractable situation there. All of it stopped because of a recalcitrant President Kabila who, you know, for his own corrupt purposes whatever you can define - you can analyze it anyway you want to. It doesn't allow that society to get over the bump and become and meet the potential that it has to being one of the richest nations on earth and serving its people well.

And no one can seem to get to Kabila, President Obama could, you know, those are the kinds of missed opportunities where the bully pulpit, just his presence, just the force of who he is in his office might make a big difference.

And so those are the kinds of pressures that need to be put on in societies where there are problems - I'm talking human rights and security and the quality of life kinds of issues altogether in this. I do think that's something that we would hope would come out of it and we'll just have to see it play out and see what happens while he's out there. Mame Khady shook her head.

Mame Khady Diouf: Yes, agreed.

Steve McDonald: Only one other thing Drew was asking us. This isn't a summary but one point that I didn't mention which I think is kind of important in terms of how the trip is being structured. And this isn't about the cost of it or how many planes they will have and things like that.

But I do know and I can't cite my source on this. But I do know that at least at this point in time there's no plan for a congressional delegation to accompany. And there's been a request to do so from high level leadership in the House of Representative to have their presence on the trip.

And I think given the role that congress has to play particularly in the Angola Renewal, but in everything else as well, that that's an oversight that he shouldn't have made.

Drew Sample: Okay. Well, thank you, Steve, for those final remarks. Thanks, Mame Khady, as well for joining us. And thank you (Tammy) and (Colleen) for your insightful questions. Thanks to (James) as well even though he had to run.

I enjoyed the conversation very much and hope that you all did as well. And I will be distributing the full recording of this and the transcript as well on Monday at about 10:00 AM, so look out for that as well.

Steve McDonald: What we might mention also on our blog, Africa Up Close. We're going to be following daily the trip. We might post a few remarks before and after that are kind of an analytical much in the vein that we just stated.

But the crux of it will be reporting from Africans on the ground out there who are sort of going to give us alternate news we hope from what's being reported in the mainstream press. Yes, it might be kind of interesting.

Drew Sample: Yes, I will send out the link for that and send out updates on those posts as well.

(Tammy): Thank you for doing this.

Drew Sample: Of course. Thank you.

Steve McDonald: Good to talk to you (Tammy), and good to meet you (Colleen).

(Colleen): Nice to meet you.

Steve McDonald: Bye-bye.

(Tammy): Bye-bye.

Drew Sample: Well, thanks.

.

Steve McDonald: Was it?

Drew Sample: Yes.

Steve McDonald: Oh, good.

Drew Sample: Yes, I mean we'll use it.

Steve McDonald: See when I would get finished with something...

END