

**Testimony of Ambassador Robert P. Jackson,
Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs,
before the
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Human Rights,
and International Organizations
“Nigeria on the Brink?”
January 27, 2015, 2:00 PM**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss U.S. policy and relations with Nigeria, one of our most important African partners. With Africa’s largest population, biggest economy, vibrant culture, vigorous democracy, and current service on the UN Security Council and its Human Rights Council, Nigeria’s success is important to us, to Africa, and to the world. This is especially true as Nigeria prepares to hold complicated and closely contested elections, against the unwelcome backdrop of escalating bloodshed at the hands of violent Boko Haram extremists in the Northeast, and the pressures on the country’s currency and fiscal balance stemming from falling oil prices.

Last year, I testified to your counterparts in the Senate, saying in part, “A peaceful and stable Nigeria is crucially important to the future of Africa, and we cannot stay on the sidelines if it stumbles.” Now more than ever, the United States is committed to our strong bilateral relationship with Nigeria, and we are engaged with Nigeria and its neighbors in the fight against Boko Haram. As Secretary Kerry said in Lagos two days ago, the United States stands ready to work with Nigeria and its people. Helping Nigeria combat insecurity in the Northeast and address its root causes – including expanding economic opportunity to all Nigerians – are enduring challenges that will remain on our agenda.

Nigerian Elections

Before delving further into those challenges, I would like first to discuss the **general elections**, now just 18 days away. Because even in the face of horrifying attacks, terrorist organizations like Boko Haram must not distract Nigeria from carrying out credible and peaceful elections that reflect the will of the Nigerian people. The United States has focused significant diplomatic and programmatic effort on civic and political engagement, preventing electoral violence, and improving electoral administration. Our goal is to minimize violence, increase

transparency, and boost credibility, so that whoever wins has the legitimacy to lead Nigeria to address its serious challenges.

Presidential and national assembly elections February 14 will be followed by gubernatorial and state legislative elections on February 28. These upcoming elections present exciting opportunities for Nigerians to choose candidates who will govern well. During my visit to Abuja and Lagos last October, I was again struck by Nigeria's dynamism. Many of these elections, particularly the presidential poll, will be closely contested, because a consolidated opposition party, the All Progressives Congress, is backing one candidate, former military head of state Major General (Retired) Muhammadu Buhari, against incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan, who heads the People's Democratic Party. Nigeria's elections are among the earliest of many across the continent in 2015 and can serve as an example to other countries.

Organizing elections for 69 million voters at more than 120,000 polling stations is no easy task. The Secretary's trip to Nigeria just weeks ahead of the elections to meet with the candidates was intended to send a strong signal that we appreciate the enormity of the challenge and are invested in its peaceful outcome. As part of our broad support to Nigeria's election, we are working closely with Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on processes to ensure as many eligible voters as possible are free to exercise their civic duty safely. We're doing everything we can to support the efforts of INEC and respected INEC Chairman Attahiru Jega as they distribute voter registration cards (PVCs) and electronic card readers, develop a communications plan, and prepare plans for dispute resolution and violence mitigation.

To increase the transparency of the electoral process and our ability to assess its credibility, the U.S. government is funding and fielding complementary election observation missions across the country. USAID has had a program to strengthen Nigerians' capacity to observe their own elections. Over 3,000 locally recruited U.S. Government-funded election observers (in all 774 local government areas in the 36 states and Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria) are already hard at work gathering data and monitoring for early warning signs of electoral violence. We are also funding a 36-member international electoral observer mission conducted in tandem by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). On top of this, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield will lead our diplomatic elections observation in Abuja on February 14, while an elections observation mission based within U.S.

Mission Nigeria will field observation teams throughout the country during the general elections.

A U.S. Government electoral security expert returned last week from Nigeria, where he provided direct support to INEC. He also visited Nigeria last fall, has consulted with Nigerian counterparts in the intervening months on both security and strategic communications, will continue to liaise with INEC, and will return to Nigeria during the presidential election to lend more support. This is in addition to two long-term Security and Strategic Communications advisors we deployed in December 2014 to support INEC throughout the elections period.

It is vitally important that the elections in Nigeria are not only credible, but that Nigerians see the elections as credible. Following 2011 elections, 800 people died during three days of protests – despite those polls being deemed by international observers as the most credible since Nigeria’s return to civilian leadership. Ambassador Entwistle has led an aggressive campaign to persuade Nigerian candidates, political party leaders, and opinion makers to pledge publicly to condemn violence. During his visit, Secretary Kerry reiterated to both President Jonathan and General Buhari that the world is watching Nigeria’s elections, and prevailed upon them to encourage their followers to commit to nonviolence. He welcomed the signing by both on January 14 of the “Abuja Accord” on nonviolence and their agreement to accept the results of the election. This committee and other Members can help by further emphasizing the need for a credible, non-violent election, which would amplify other high-level outreach that we are pursuing. At the end of the day, of course, it is the responsibility of Nigeria’s political elite and security institutions to ensure that the coming elections are peaceful.

Boko Haram

A peaceful and smooth transition is equally essential, so that whoever is elected can quickly turn his focus to **confronting and defeating Boko Haram**. The threat is unfortunately not new, but attacks have increased in intensity and impact, as well as expanding to threaten Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Recent estimates are that some one million Nigerians have been displaced internally and more than 200,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries. We are appalled by the accelerated pace and brutality of Boko Haram’s attacks. This unchecked killing must stop.

We estimate that Boko Haram killed more than 5,000 people last year– doubling in one year all of its killings since 2009. The trend of attacks has continued unabated

this month. Satellite images of destruction from the early January rampage in and around Baga have gone viral. An unwitting 10-year-old girl was blown in half when the device around her waist detonated at the edge of a market in Maiduguri January 10, killing 19 others. The next day, two other young female suicide bombers struck Potiskum, killing at least six others. Just last week (January 20) Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, claimed responsibility for the attack on Baga, warned "this [was] just the beginning of the killings," and threatened to wage war on neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

We are often asked why Nigeria has been unable to curb Boko Haram's advances. The answer is a complex mix of reasons. Public critics and Nigerian military sources have cited the pervasive corruption that prevents the Nigerian Armed Forces from properly equipping front-line soldiers. Government officials respond to criticism by highlighting the tremendously difficult task of fighting a well-armed insurgency that hides within local communities and noting that their forces have not been trained in counterterrorism. Last week one of Nigeria's top security officials called Nigerian forces cowardly. Most recently, Nigeria's failure to send a senior official to Niamey, Niger for a January 20 ministerial on Boko Haram hindered the ability of all the affected countries to craft an effective regional approach to the problem, which we believe is integral to countering Boko Haram.

The United States was in Niamey, and we will continue to support Nigeria and its neighbors as they address the violence caused by Boko Haram. At the same time, Nigeria must commit to a comprehensive, holistic strategy for countering Boko Haram that protects civilians, respects human rights, and addresses the underlying causes of the conflict by bringing both civilian and security tools to the fight.

We are supporting Nigeria to help it counter Boko Haram. U.S. assistance includes information sharing and technical assistance. We have provided commercial satellite imagery and are flying intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft over Nigeria, and we immediately share the results of those missions with Nigerian authorities. We have also helped establish a program to provide care, counseling, and education to victims of Boko Haram and are providing humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected and internally displaced populations in the Northeast, as well as to Nigerian refugees who have fled to neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

Boko Haram is not just a Nigerian problem; it's a regional security problem. Most recently, Boko Haram kidnapped 80 people on January 18 (30 adults, and 50 young girls and boys) in a cross-border attack in Cameroon. Although

Cameroonian forces were subsequently able to repel the attackers and free 24 hostages, Boko Haram's largely unchecked success in seizing territory and the expanding reach of its attacks underscores the need for a robust coordinated regional approach, a fully realized Multi-National Task Force (MNTF) to fight Boko Haram. Last week, Chad sent more than 2,000 soldiers, 400 trucks, and attack helicopters to reinforce Cameroon. At last week's ministerial meeting in Niger, Assistant Secretary Thomas-Greenfield called on Nigeria and its neighbors to make the MNTF into a force that can better fight Boko Haram. At the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa this week, we will encourage other partners to redouble their efforts and press for meaningful AU political support to the MNTF and the Lake Chad Basin Commission's efforts to cooperate to defeat Boko Haram.

As Assistant Secretary Thomas-Greenfield told this committee in November 2013, "Boko Haram's activities call our attention not just to violence, but also to poverty and inequality in Nigeria." Achieving and sustaining peace in the Northeast of Nigeria will require the Nigerian government to address legitimate concerns about government corruption, unfairness, accountability, and impunity that alienate the population and provide grievances used to radicalize disaffected youth.

Economic Challenges

Nigeria has the largest **economy** in Africa, and it is diversified. Eighty-five percent of the economy is in non-extractive industries. Agriculture, services, and manufacturing are driving economic growth, which was 6.1 percent in the third quarter of 2014 and expected to be 4.8 percent in 2015. Although the country is a global petroleum powerhouse, corruption is pervasive, and 60 percent of Nigeria's population lives in poverty. The impact of a more than 50 percent drop in oil prices since last summer has posed major fiscal and monetary challenges and is contributing to the slowdown in economic growth. The central bank has devalued the naira and raised interest rates. Over 70 percent of government revenue comes from petroleum exports; so the government has been forced to revise its budget, cut government spending, and look for ways to increase revenues. **The administration that is elected next month may well face greater challenges with fewer resources to govern.** Improving governance, implementing economic reforms, and committing to transparency would help secure Nigeria's long-term stability and the welfare of its people.

In closing, Nigeria's success is important to us and critical to Africa. As Secretary Kerry declared in Lagos last Sunday, "our hope is that Nigeria will set a remarkable example for the world in this election ...".

We appreciate the Committee's interest in these issues. I hope that you and other Members will remain engaged, and I invite you to lend your voices – including by making statements or taking to social media – in calling for peaceful, credible elections next month.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.