

Whitney Baird
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs
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Good afternoon members of the subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be here today to discuss the complex, multifaceted challenges in the Sahel and our approach to them. I want to thank you for the bipartisan interest and support we receive from Congress and this Subcommittee, in particular. Your willingness to visit the region and engage directly with the men and women at our Embassies across Africa is greatly appreciated.

This Administration recognizes that the rapidly-spreading instability in the Sahel threatens U.S. national security and undermines our broader diplomatic goals. The fragility of these states and the instability they face enable the spread of terrorism, facilitate transnational organized crime, stifle economic growth, thwart democratic institutions, allow the spread of pandemic disease, and prompt further destabilizing migration flows. To address these challenges, and to restore security to the troubled region, State is focused on three lines of effort: greater coordination across the U.S. Government and with international and regional partners; bolstering state legitimacy; and implementation of the Algiers Accord in Mali.

The broader Sahel is an immense, sparsely populated territory, covering more than 3,300 miles from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. Farmers, herders, traders, traffickers, and terrorists all share this enormous expanse. I focus on the western end of this area, which is a vast, largely unpopulated and undergoverned region, and which several HFAC members have visited recently. I have traveled there several times to see the situation on the ground, and the heroic work our people do in challenging circumstances. I also engage routinely with stakeholders, including the Europeans, international actors such as the UN, regional organizations like the G5 Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) and ECOWAS in order to encourage greater action and attention to the creeping instability. I remain in close contact with our ambassadors on the ground to ensure unity of action between Washington and the field.

As some of you have seen, despite our efforts the situation in the Sahel continues to deteriorate. In Mali, signatories of the 2015 Algiers peace accord underperform

in their efforts to implement the agreement. Terrorist groups in central Mali exploit intercommunal tensions to further undercut tenuous government presence. These and other groups enjoy freedom of movement within northern and most of central Mali, and capitalize on porous borders to move between Libya, Niger, and Burkina Faso to resupply, conduct raids, and engage in illicit trafficking along trade routes. In spite of these threats, the Government of Mali has largely failed to take the urgent steps needed to reestablish state legitimacy and address insecurity. We are engaging at every level with the Malian government, and with the UN, the French, the European Union, and others to incentivize progress and to hold bad actors accountable, for example through sanctions regimes.

Burkina Faso faces its own rising terrorist threat, compounded by cross border incursions from neighboring violent extremist organizations. Although the Government of Burkina Faso understands the dire nature of the growing crisis, its ability to respond is limited. To that end, we are employing diplomatic, defense, and development initiatives to help respond to the crisis and prevent violence and insecurity from spreading further. In one example, our proactive engagement on human rights vetting caused the Government of Burkina Faso to suspend officers from an anti-drug unit after eleven individuals in their custody died and to open an investigation. Prompt action in this case helped keep the situation from turning into a flash point. Our programs are a microcosm of what is needed across the Sahel: greater state legitimacy, including by building effective, rights-respecting and citizen-responsive security services, and coordination across the U.S. Government and with our partners.

On the other hand, Niger has managed to blunt threats and prevent extensive terrorist incursions, in spite of instability on four borders. Niger is a good partner in a bad neighborhood, and has the political will and growing capacity to respond. However, this response is unsustainable. Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world and spends close to 25 percent of its budget on security. This expenditure on security precludes investing in health, education, and other basic needs of the population. Niger has deftly managed ethno-regional tensions to discourage terrorist groups' recruitment within the country. The situation remains tenuous, and we should not assume long-term success without sustained support and engagement. We focus on coordinating with partners and shoring up state legitimacy, especially in underserved, remote, or otherwise marginalized regions.

Mauritania and Chad bookend this core, and have been impacted less directly. Mauritania has not had a terrorist attack on its territory since 2011, and continues to pursue avenues to rehabilitate and reintegrate its citizens who have been

involved in violent extremist activity. However, Mauritania is dealing with underlying ethnic and political tensions while simultaneously working out how to share proceeds from natural resource finds equitably. Chad's security services thus far have curtailed violent extremist activity within the country's borders. Chad faces internal divisions and threats from Libya and the Lake Chad region that tear at national cohesion. This underlying fragility makes both Chad and Mauritania vulnerable, and we continue to engage diplomatically to keep fragility from turning into fracture, for example, by encouraging these governments to engage with all parties as they chart a course for an inclusive future.

Beyond the Sahel, we are aware of the possibility that this instability could take root in the coastal states of West Africa, directly threatening the heart of U.S. economic interests in the region. Ghana, Guinea, Benin, Togo, Cote D'Ivoire, and Senegal are all at risk. To address this vulnerability, we are expanding our assistance to help these countries develop accountable, stable security institutions and promote human rights and good governance. We also applaud and continue to support the efforts these countries have undertaken through the Accra Initiative to improve coordination and information sharing among their military and security services.

We approach this litany of challenges through a comprehensive and balanced approach. Again, state legitimacy and coordination are key. Security-focused solutions, including military, intelligence, and law enforcement tools, are necessary, but not sufficient in and of themselves to address the insecurity that plagues the region. Development tools help governments provide vital services to their citizens and improve economic opportunities for populations. Both DoD and USAID activities provide invaluable diplomatic leverage, both with our host countries and with our European partners as we formulate sustainable divisions of labor. Diplomatic engagement likewise bolsters rights-respecting, citizen-responsive governance, improves coordination with our partners and other donors to ensure complementarity of effort, and advances cornerstone objectives, such as implementing the Algiers Accord in Mali. Our embassies maintain robust dialogue with civil society organizations that play a crucial role in stabilizing the region, holding governments accountable, and linking citizens to their institutions. Further, I am pleased to report that we are exploring new ways to ensure women have the tools they need to speak out on countering violent extremism.

Our African partners play a role in addressing their own challenges. We are encouraged that the Sahelian countries have individually and collectively exercised greater leadership in addressing their fragility and security challenges, with support

from the United States and other international partners. In 2017, the G5 Sahel launched a Joint Force to coordinate counterterrorism efforts. African troop and police contributions are likewise critical to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. The coastal states launched the Accra Initiative to improve coordination and information sharing among their military and security services. These efforts are noteworthy, but U.S. leadership nurtures and strengthens them over the long-term.

Thank you again for allowing me to appear before you today and I look forward to answering your questions.