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**Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and**  
**Related Programs**  
*Hearing to Review Fragility in the Sahel*  
**March 10, 2020**

Good afternoon Chairman Graham, Vice-Chairman Leahy, and Members of the subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be here today with Administrator Green to discuss our collective efforts toward addressing the causes of fragility and violence in the Sahel. I appreciate your focus on these issues and look forward to discussing our shared objectives in this critical region.

The President's National Security Strategy directs the State Department to strengthen institutions in fragile states and work with political reformers and civil society to advance our shared interests. The Global Fragility Act of 2019 (GFA) also speaks to the need to stabilize conflict-affected areas and prevent violence and fragility globally.

This Administration recognizes that fragility and instability in Africa, and particularly in the Sahel, threaten American interests and undermine our diplomatic goals. A fragile and unstable Sahel region enables the spread of terrorism, facilitates transnational organized crime, stifles economic growth, thwarts democratic institutions, and prompts destabilizing migration.

Today's hearing is an opportunity to discuss the complexities of these threats and the realities facing many of our partners. 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 inhabit this enormous expanse. I have traveled twice to the Sahel in the past year, and saw last month that the situation had significantly deteriorated since my first visit. My trip affirmed the driving force behind our Sahel strategy: security conditions throughout the region are worsening as the key players in Mali fail to fully implement the Algiers Accord nearly five years after its signing.

American engagement is crucial. I made clear to our partners that America is not abandoning the region. To the contrary, we are bolstering our diplomatic engagement through the appointment of a Special Envoy. I assured African leaders that, as the Department of Defense conducts its Combatant Command reviews, we will not undertake hasty or destabilizing adjustments to our military

posture. But our continued investment requires improved performance by our partners.

Addressing fragility in the Sahel – in particular in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso – requires a comprehensive and balanced approach. Military, intelligence, and law enforcement strategies are vital for success, but they cannot replace diplomatic and development initiatives. Our strategy promotes inclusive and just political systems; advances regional security by combatting violent extremists and traffickers; and encourages economic growth and opportunity through sustainable development and increased American investment. Our diplomatic engagement focuses on three primary elements: improving state legitimacy; supporting the peace process; and improving coordination with our partners.

Terrorists and transnational criminals exploit areas that lack state presence. These groups recruit from, extort, and terrorize marginalized communities, many of which have been victimized by security forces. As governments retreat from increasing violence, extremist organizations further delegitimize governments by providing services in abandoned areas. The number of refugees and internally displaced persons is increasing at an alarming rate across the region and signal a growing humanitarian crisis. With the support of America and our partners, Sahel governments and their neighbors urgently need to reassert control over ceded ground, establish a rights-respecting and capable security presence, and rebuild frayed relationships with populations. Meaningful participation by women at all levels, from policy negotiations to peacekeeping, is essential.

A viable political process in Mali is a necessary condition for good governance to prevail. Our diplomatic efforts are focused on supporting the 2015 Algiers Peace Accord, which remains the best mechanism for achieving a peaceful and reconciled Mali. We will press and incentivize signatories to implement the Accord.

Improved coordination will help us achieve our state legitimacy and peace process objectives. On March 8, the State Department announced the appointment of Dr. J. Peter Pham as the Special Envoy for Sahel Stabilization. In this capacity, Dr. Pham will increase American diplomatic engagement and coordination with West African governments, as well as the French, the European Union, and other international partners. Crucial to this effort will be employing integrated, coordinated approaches to the region.

I have asked Dr. Pham to focus on the following five tasks:

1. Coordinate existing strategies with international and regional partners;
2. Encourage members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to assume a larger role in working with Mali, the G5 Sahel, and affected countries;
3. Promote rapid implementation of the Algiers Accord;
4. Improve the effectiveness of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); and
5. Develop and propagate initiatives for strengthened state authority and good governance.

Mali remains a focal point of terrorist activity in the region. Years of political conflict and stalled implementation of the 2015 Algiers Accord have created a climate of instability that has permitted terrorism to take root and thrive. Terrorist groups in central Mali exacerbate and exploit intercommunal tensions, particularly in areas that lack state presence or have been victimized by armed groups or state security forces. Terrorists enjoy freedom of movement in northern and most of central Mali, and transit between Libya, Niger, and Burkina Faso to resupply, conduct raids, and enrich themselves through illicit trafficking along trade routes. The potential for foreign fighter migration between North Africa, the Middle East, and the Sahel is a significant concern, in part because of countries' porous borders.

Together in Bamako last month, my French counterpart and I delivered a clear message to Malian President Keita that we expect full implementation of the Algiers Accord. The government and signatory armed groups should fulfill by June the priority measures laid out in MINUSMA's mandate. We also urged President Keita to follow through on the commitments made at the Pau Summit convened by the French in January.

I emphasized that, in the absence of sufficient progress, America is prepared to support altering MINUSMA's mandate and to sanction individuals who are identified as spoilers to the peace process.

Throughout the Sahel, we are employing coordinated diplomatic, development, and security initiatives to emphasize respect for human rights and civilian protections. Our programs enhance local leaders' ability to provide more effective government services; train local law enforcement to encourage cooperation with the communities they protect; and improve the capacity of security forces to interact more productively with civilian actors. Over the last two years, the State Department has obligated over \$195 million in security assistance to the G5 Sahel

countries, including over \$69 million to Burkina Faso, which is also the largest recipient of American bilateral assistance among the nations of the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

The G5 Sahel Joint Force (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) was launched in 2017 to coordinate counterterrorism operations among member countries. The G5 Sahel is not yet able to disrupt the growing terrorist footprint across the Sahel, but has potential as a coordination mechanism. French Operation Barkhane, with 5,200 troops on the ground, plays a crucial role in the counterterrorism fight. The D-ISIS Coalition, which plans to hold its first meeting in the region in April, will provide best practices on intelligence sharing and other counterterrorism tools to the countries of West Africa.

ECOWAS and its member states have a vital role to play alongside the G5 Sahel. These countries can contribute a range of capabilities and expertise to address problems in the Sahel. We are engaging directly with regional partners to mobilize their efforts to shore up their own security and provide greater support to the Sahel countries, as announced during the September 14 ECOWAS Heads of State Summit on Terrorism.

Instability in the Sahel is spreading to the coastal states of West Africa, directly threatening the heart of American interests in the region. Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Togo are all at risk. We are expanding our assistance to these countries to develop accountable, stable security institutions; respect for human rights; and good governance. In Togo, we supported government efforts to overhaul legislation to distinguish between criminals and maritime pirates. In Ghana, we supported the development of border security protocols and best practices to help confront the spread of violent extremism. We also support regional efforts to improve coordination and information sharing between military and security services through the Accra Initiative.

We support Sahelian countries' efforts to individually and collectively exercise greater leadership in addressing their fragility and security challenges. The African Union, its regional economic communities, and its member states are seeking to develop their own Continental Early Warning System and lead with diplomatic responses when potential threats arise. These efforts represent a noteworthy intention, but American leadership will be required to nurture and strengthen them over the long-term.

Effective implementation of our goals requires a coordinated and integrated approach across U.S. government efforts. The Department of State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan prioritizes improved security conditions and the promotion of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, accountability, rule of law, and women's full participation in society. In July 2019, the Office of Foreign Assistance Resources, together with our Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations and USAID, completed the Strategic Prevention Project. The project's final report underscores that our assistance can prevent violent conflict when closely coordinated with diplomacy and aligned with host-nation and local civil society. The report identifies a series of actions for the State Department and USAID to better align assistance to fragile states. We are working towards implementing these recommendations.

In 2018, the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Defense completed a wide-ranging, inter-agency review to explore more effective means to promote stability in areas affected by armed conflict. The Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR) reflected a recognition that we need to be more selective and strategic with how we use American resources and demonstrate a return on investment for the American taxpayer. The SAR outlines an improved framework for coordinating and targeting resources to stabilize conflict-affected states based on our national security interests and an assessment of where we can have the greatest impact. The State Department operationalized the SAR in 11 countries, including the Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and South Sudan. Each of these missions is now implementing coordinated and integrated stabilization strategies.

The recently-passed GFA presents an opportunity to build and expand upon these strategic prevention and stabilization assistance reform initiatives. We are working with our interagency partners to develop the strategy called for by the legislation. We look forward to consulting and collaborating with stakeholders and Congress as we implement the GFA and draft the associated strategy.

On the security front, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership is a multi-year, initiative to build long-term capacity in the Sahel and North Africa to address security threats and conditions exploited by terrorists and other malign actors. Coordinated across the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Defense, this partnership provides American law enforcement, military, development, and public diplomacy expertise and resources to build and sustain regional partners' capabilities.

Mr. Chairman, in spite of our plan and strong efforts already underway, we do face obstacles. First, in such insecure environments, American officials cannot spend sufficient time in conflict-affected areas to build relationships and better understand conflict dynamics. We are working to improve the ability of our personnel to identify and report on early warning signs of violent conflict. We look forward to working with Congress on these efforts. We appreciate the flexibility provided by the Relief and Recovery Fund over recent years to transfer funding across accounts. We welcome similar flexibilities for the new Prevention and Stabilization Fund established pursuant to the GFA. This authority ensures we have the tools at our disposal to meet the needs on the ground.

Mr. Chairman and Members of this subcommittee, thank you for your bipartisan support and for facilitating this discussion on a region vital to American national security.