

**EXAMINING U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM PRIORITIES
AND STRATEGY ACROSS AFRICA'S SAHEL REGION**

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CONTENTS

	Page
Benjamin, Hon. Daniel, Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Department of State, Washington, DC	7
Prepared statement	9
Responses to questions submitted for the record by Senator Russell D. Feingold	47
Carson, Hon. Johnnie, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Department of State, Washington, DC	3
Prepared statement	5
Responses to questions submitted for the record by Senator Russell D. Feingold	45
Feingold, Hon. Russell D., U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, opening statement ..	1
Gast, Earl, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa, U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, DC	12
Prepared statement	13
Responses to questions submitted for the record by Senator Russell D. Feingold	50
Gutelius, Dr. David, founder and partner, Ishtirak, consulting senior fellow, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, San Francisco, CA ..	32
Prepared statement	33
Huddleston, Hon. Vicki, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa, Department of Defense, Washington, DC	15
Prepared statement	17
Responses to questions submitted for the record by Senator Russell D. Feingold	48
Kennedy-Boudali, Lianne, senior project associate, RAND Corporation, Arlington, VA	25
Prepared statement	27

EXAMINING U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM PRIORITIES AND STRATEGY ACROSS AFRICA'S SAHEL REGION

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2009

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICAN AFFAIRS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:30 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Russell D. Feingold (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senators Feingold and Isakson.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RUSSELL D. FEINGOLD,
U.S. SENATOR FROM WISCONSIN**

Senator FEINGOLD. This hearing will come to order.

Good morning everybody. I apologize in advance; it looks like we're going to have three votes or so, starting at about 11:15, maybe a little earlier. We'll see if we can get through the first panel by then, but I do appreciate everybody's patience if we have to take a break in the hearing.

On behalf of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, I welcome all of you to this hearing entitled "Examining U.S. Counterterrorism Priorities and Strategy Across Africa's Sahel Region." I'm honored to be joined later by the ranking member of the subcommittee, Senator Isakson. When he arrives, I'll ask him to deliver some opening remarks, as well.

Let me first clarify what constitutes the Sahel region. This region covers those territories on the southern border and directly to the south of the Sahara Desert. For our discussion today, it includes parts or all of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. The Sahel is a region on the front lines of climate change, facing the challenges of soil erosion, deforestation, and desertification. It also is a vast land-area home to nomadic communities, many of them minority ethnic groups, which have long been in conflict with some of the centralized state authorities in those regions.

Over the years, this region's long porous borders and ungoverned spaces have been exploited by criminal groups, particularly for the trafficking of drugs, weapons, illicit goods, and people. And over the last decade, there's been increasing concern about the potential for violent extremist groups to do so, as well.

Counterterrorism officials have particularly focused on an al-Qaeda affiliate, a group known as “al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb.” AQIM, as it’s known, emerged in Algeria and has primarily operated in North Africa, but it has extended its region to parts of the Sahel, and could expand farther. Some U.S. intelligence officials have expressed concern at AQIM’s increasing capabilities and more sophisticated attacks.

Today’s hearing is an opportunity to assess the threat posed by AQIM amidst other transnational threats in the Sahel region. This is yet another reminder that al-Qaeda is operating in countries around the globe, and our fight against them, therefore, must be global, too.

The administration is right to focus attention on the Pakistan/Afghanistan region, but we cannot lose sight of other places where al-Qaeda is seeking to gain ground. As we have seen in Somalia and Yemen, weak states, chronic instability, ungoverned spaces, and unresolved local tensions can create almost ideal safe havens in which terrorists can recruit and operate. Several parts of the Sahel region include that same mix of ingredients, and the danger they pose, not just to regional security, but to our own national security, is real.

At the same time, crafting an effective counterterrorism strategy toward the Sahel requires an appreciation of the unique local conditions that al-Qaeda seeks to exploit and the factors that could motivate individuals to join their struggle. We need to understand ongoing changes in conflicts—political, economic, and social—that are shaping this region. Without an appreciation of these local dynamics, injecting new U.S. resources into the region could actually end up complicating or even exacerbating the threat, rather than mitigating it. We need to seriously consider how short-term activities relate to our long-term goals of promoting good governance and the rule of law.

In 2005, the Bush administration launched the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership to enhance the capabilities of governments across the Sahel, as well as in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, for counterterrorism and to help confront the spread of extremist ideology. Nearly \$500 million has been allocated for this program since fiscal year 2005, yet nearly 5 years later it remains unclear to what extent these efforts have been successful.

Today’s hearing is an opportunity to review our approach to counterterrorism in the Sahel, the continuing challenges, and what progress has been made. Because this is not in a classified setting, I realize we are limited in how much we can get into specific activities. But, we can discuss the overall strategy and priorities of our counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel and the roles played by different implementing agencies. I believe it’s important that we can explain to the American people, at least generally, what we’re doing and why they should be confident that our efforts are making progress.

Let me just briefly introduce our witnesses this morning. I’m very pleased that we have such great interagency lineup for our first panel: the Department of Defense, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa, Vicki Huddleston; from USAID, Senior Deputy Assistant

Administrator for Africa, Earl Gast; and from the State Department, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Johnnie Carson.

In addition, State is also represented by its coordinator for counterterrorism, Daniel Benjamin. Ambassador Benjamin's presence here is particularly important because, while this subcommittee approaches issues from the lens of sub-Saharan Africa, the threat from AQIM cuts across regions and the traditional boundaries of State Department's regional bureaus.

So, I thank all of you for being here, and I ask that each of you keep your remarks to 5 minutes or less so that we have enough time for questions and discussion. And, of course, we will submit your longer written statements for the record.

Our second panel, we'll hear from Dr. David Gutelius, who brings together a unique mix of expertise on this region and technological innovation and media strategies. Dr. Gutelius was a visiting professor at Stanford University. He founded and is currently a partner of Ishtirak, a Middle East and Islamic Africa-focused consultancy. He's also a consulting senior fellow at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory's National Security Analysis Department.

We also hear from Lianne Kennedy-Boudali, who has done research and written about the history and evolution of armed groups in Maghreb up in Sahel regions. Ms. Kennedy-Boudali was a senior associate and assistant professor at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and now works as a senior project associate at the RAND Corporation.

So, again, I thank all of our witnesses for being here. And now I will—unless the ranking member shows up in the next couple of seconds. So, I'll turn to Ms. Huddleston—nope, he came just as I was about to turn to the witnesses.

I'm pleased to recognize, for his opening statement, Senator Johnny Isakson, the ranking member.

Senator ISAKSON. I will waive my opening statement, except to say welcome to Secretary Carson—it's good to see you again—and all of our witnesses. Counterterrorism is of particular interest. In my travels to Africa, I've been very interested in seeing our engagement on that continent, because the potential for some very dangerous things to happen very well could take place.

So, I welcome you all here. I apologize, Mr. Chairman, for being late, and it's good to be with you.

Senator FEINGOLD. I thank you, Senator Isakson, and we'll begin with Honorable Johnnie Carson.

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHNNIE CARSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR AFRICAN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador CARSON. Chairman Feingold, Ranking Member Isakson, other members of the committee, I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our support to the countries of Africa's Sahel region to approve their long-term security and to constrict the ability of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

I have a longer statement that I would like to submit for the record, if I may.

Senator FEINGOLD. Without objection.

Ambassador CARSON. Terrorism in the Sahel has become an issue of increasing concern. Over the past 5 years, AQIM and its predecessor organization, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, GSPC, have stepped up their activities across the Sahel. In the past 6 months alone, AQIM has been implicated in the killing of an American nongovernmental organization—NGO—worker in Nouakchott, Mauritania; the execution of a British hostage in Mali; the assassination of a senior Malian military officer; and an attempted suicide bombing against the French Embassy in Nouakchott.

The countries in the region have recognized the problem and have intensified their efforts against AQIM. Algeria recently hosted regional chiefs of defense to promote improved cooperation, and we understand that Mali will organize a heads-of-state meeting in Bamako to address the situation soon.

However, all the countries in the Sahel face daunting challenges. They are among the poorest countries in the world and lack the resources to develop effective antiterrorism programs on their own. They are also vast countries, stretching over thousands of miles, where government services and authority are weak or nonexistent. They are preoccupied with critical humanitarian and development issues, and, in some cases, terrorism is not their most pressing challenge.

The United States is committed to helping these countries address the counterterrorism problems that these states face in the Sahel. However, we believe that this is best done in a supporting role rather than a leading role. We want to avoid undertaking actions that could make the situation worse. We must consult with the governments of the region to assess their needs. We must encourage regional collaboration and cooperation across borders. We must consult with our European partners and urge them to be helpful. We have emphasized to those partners that, while the United States will do its part, the burden must be shared by us all. We have also stressed that we must make sure that the assistance we in the United States provide does not aggravate longstanding historical and cultural problems that exist in some of the states in the region.

Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and others in the region can manage and contain this issue if they work together and receive appropriate encouragement and support from countries like the United States. We should not seek to take this issue over. It is not ours and doing so might have negative consequences for U.S. interests over the long term.

We must also recognize that the governments in the region have explicitly stated that the Sahel's security is the responsibility of the countries in the region. They have not asked the United States to take on a leadership role in the counterterrorism efforts. In fact, they have clearly signaled that a more visible or militarily proactive posture by the United States might, in some instances, be counterproductive.

The focal point of our effort has been the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. Created in 2005, TSCTP allocates between \$120 and \$150 million per year for programs in 10 countries. TSCTP originally included Algeria, Chad, Mali, Morocco, Mauri-

tania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. Burkina Faso was added in 2009.

The TSCTP program reflects our recognition that sporadic engagements without adequate followup or sustainment would fail to achieve the meaningful, long-lasting results that we seek in the region. The emphasis, therefore, has been placed on addressing key capacity shortfalls that could be addressed over a period of years in these countries. The program draws resources and expertise from multiple agencies in the U.S. Government, including the State Department, the Department of Defense, and USAID.

TSCTP does not provide a one-size-fits-all assistance package. As the current threat levels prevail in the region, we look at the states on a case-by-case basis and adjust the program to meet the needs of the countries.

We will continue to work with the countries in the region to identify capacity, weaknesses, and to ensure that TSCTP programs are adequately funded.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to make this brief statement, and I will be happy to answer questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Carson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHNNIE CARSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR AFRICAN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Chairman Feingold, Ranking Member Isakson, and members of the committee, I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our counterterrorism approach in Africa's Sahel region. I look forward to working with the Congress, and especially with this committee, to identify appropriate tools to support the efforts of the countries in the region to improve their long-term security and constrict the ability of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and a variety of criminal networks to exploit the area's vast territory.

This hearing is very timely. While the security challenges in the Sahel are not new, several attacks in recent months against African and Western targets have drawn additional focus to the situation. Key countries in the area, including Algeria, Mali, and Mauritania, have intensified efforts to coordinate their activities against AQIM and address the region's short, medium, and long-term vulnerabilities. At the same time, we have consulted with African and European partners to identify areas where we can more effectively support regional efforts to improve the security environment in the Sahel over the long term.

The United States can play a helpful supporting role in the regional effort, but we must avoid taking actions that could unintentionally increase local tensions or lend credibility to AQIM's claims of legitimacy. First and foremost, we must be sensitive to local political dynamics and avoid precipitous actions which exacerbate longstanding and often bloody conflicts.

AQIM's ideology and violent tactics are antithetical to the vast majority of people in the region and the group's ability to mobilize significant popular support for its objectives has been largely frustrated. It has failed to build and sustain meaningful alliances with insurgencies and criminal networks operating in the region. In fact, AQIM's murder of a Malian military officer this summer, the unprecedented execution of a British hostage, and the murder of an American citizen in Mauritania may have caused some groups in Northern Mali to sever opportunistic economic arrangements occasionally established to supplement local groups' efforts to survive in the region's austere environment. By contrast, the perceptions of the United States have been generally favorable throughout the Sahel, even during periods when our popularity around the world declined. It is instructive that a 2008 poll involving 18 Muslim countries revealed that Mauritians had the highest opinion of the United States.

The countries in the region continue to demonstrate the political will to combat terrorism and transnational crime. They have explicitly stated that the Sahel's security is the responsibility of the countries in the region. They have not asked the United States to take on a leadership role in counterterrorism efforts and have, in fact, clearly signaled that a more visible or militarily proactive posture by the United States would be counterproductive. We fully concur that the appropriate

roles for the United States and other third countries with even more significant interests in the region must be to support regional security efforts while continuing to provide meaningful development assistance to the more remote areas. Moreover, we have emphasized that while the United States will do its part, the burden must be shared.

We recognize, however, that the security environment in the Sahel requires sustained attention to address a wide range of vulnerabilities and capacity deficits. There is insufficient capacity to monitor and protect immense swaths of largely ungoverned or poorly governed territory. The arid northern half of Mali alone covers an area larger than Texas. Niger is the poorest country in the world according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Mauritania and Mali rank near the bottom of the Human Development Index scale.

The vulnerability of the northern Sahel has not only led AQIM to seek out safe havens in the region, but has also enabled the operations of a range of transnational criminal networks. Criminal traffickers in human beings, weapons, and narcotics also exploit parts of the region. West Africa has emerged as a major transshipment area for cocaine flowing from South America to Europe. Narcotrafficking poses a direct threat to U.S. interests since the proceeds of cocaine trafficked through the region generally flow back to Latin American organizations moving drugs to the United States.

The committee has asked how our counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel relate to our long-term goals of good governance, civilian control over security forces, and respect for human rights. The first priority President Obama has identified for our Africa policy is helping to build strong and stable democracies on the continent. This is essential in West Africa. In recent years, the region has witnessed two military coups in Mauritania, deeply flawed elections in Nigeria, and an undemocratic seizure of power in Niger. Our experience in the region has underscored the urgency of improving governance, strongly promoting the rule of law, developing durable political and economic institutions at all levels of society, and maintaining professional security forces under civilian control.

Meaningful progress in these areas is crucial to the success of ongoing efforts against AQIM and other criminal networks. The groups are drawn to areas where they can take advantage of political and economic vulnerabilities to safeguard their operating spaces and lifelines, cross borders with impunity, and attract recruits. They benefit when security forces and border guards lack the necessary training, equipment, intelligence, and mobility to disrupt their activities. Their cause is advanced when human rights abuses undermine the credibility of security forces. Terrorists and criminal organizations also take advantage of weak or corrupt criminal justice systems unable to effectively investigate, prosecute and incarcerate all forms of criminals.

Underdevelopment in key areas represents a critical security challenge in the Sahel. The region is extremely diverse and the sources of insecurity in the region vary. In Northern Mali, for example, insecurity in isolated border areas and along traditional smuggling routes is perpetuated by unmet economic expectations and the lack of legitimate alternatives to smuggling or opportunistic commerce with criminal networks. Mali is one of Africa's most stable democracies, but its efforts to address insecurity in the northern part of the country are severely hampered by poor infrastructure and the inability to provide adequate service delivery and educational and vocational opportunities to isolated areas. This dynamic can become particularly problematic in cases where AQIM has provided small amounts of food and other consumables to generate good will or at least tolerance from groups living in their vicinity.

Although AQIM's attempts to recruit in Mali and elsewhere in the Sahel have been largely unsuccessful, its limited successes in countries such as Mauritania can largely be traced to its ability to capitalize on the frustration among the young over insufficient educational or vocational opportunities. AQIM has also attracted recruits and material support from isolated communities or neighborhoods in Mauritania and elsewhere that lack alternatives to schools, media, or networking centers that promote violent extremism.

The United States primary instrument to advance counterterrorism objectives in the Sahel and the Maghreb is the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). TSCTP is a multiyear commitment designed to support partner country efforts in the Sahel and the Maghreb to constrict and ultimately eliminate the ability of terrorist organization to exploit the region. The rationale and overarching strategy for TSCTP was approved by a National Security Council (NSC) Deputies Committee in 2005. TSCTP originally included Algeria, Chad, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia; Burkina Faso was added in 2009.

TSCTP serves two primary purposes. The program identifies and mobilizes resources from throughout the interagency to support sustained efforts to address violent extremism in the region. It was understood when TSCTP was created that sporadic engagements without adequate followup or sustainment would fail to achieve meaningful long-term results in a region with a multitude of basic needs. The emphasis was therefore placed on key capacity deficits that could be addressed over a period of years. The program draws resources and expertise from multiple agencies in the U.S. Government including the State Department, the Department of Defense, and USAID. As the threat levels, political environments, and material needs differ substantially among the partner countries, most engagements and assistance packages under TSCTP are tailored to fit the priorities of the individual countries.

TSCTP was also designed to coordinate the activities of the various implementing agencies. The coordination takes place at several levels. Action Officers representing the various agencies meet periodically in Washington to coordinate activities and share information. Representatives from Washington and AFRICOM also meet regularly with our Embassies in TSCTP countries. The first line of coordination and oversight takes place at our Embassies. While various assessments and inputs from throughout the interagency inform decisions regarding TSCTP programming, Chiefs of Mission must concur with all proposed activities. They are best placed to understand the immediate and long-term implications of various activities and are ultimately the primary interlocutors with the host countries.

Forming a definitive conclusion at this relatively early stage regarding whether our counterterrorism approach in the Sahel is working is difficult, but we believe that we are making important progress. For example, TSCTP resources contributed to training and equipping more capable and professional security forces in Mauritania. We believe that our work with Mali to support more professional units capable of improving the security environment in the country will have future benefits if they are sustained. Our public affairs teams and USAID are implementing a range of beneficial exchanges and projects in Mali and promoting outreach to communities potentially vulnerable to extremism in Mauritania, Chad, Senegal, and elsewhere.

The decision in 2005 to focus on long-term capacity-building rather than search for quick fixes was clearly correct, even more so given the limited absorptive capacity of these countries. Clear victories against the underlying security and developmental challenges in the region are unlikely to clearly announce themselves in the near term, but I am confident that a steady and patient approach provides the best opportunity for success.

The recognition that we must take a holistic approach involving multiple agencies was also correct. Efforts to improve interagency coordination and the vital coordination between our missions and program managers in Washington and Stuttgart have been crucial. We continue to seek a balance between the financial resources for the development and diplomatic pieces of TSCTP and funding devoted to military-to-military activities. We will continue to work toward a balanced approach envisioned when the program was created.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you, Mr. Carson.

Mr. Benjamin.

STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL BENJAMIN, COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Senator Feingold, Ranking Member Senator Isakson, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today about the Department's role in countering terrorism in the Sahel region.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb continues to menace parts of the Maghreb and the Sahel. In the north, it is frustrated by Algeria's effective counterterrorism operations, but in parts of the Sahel, it continues to operate with considerable impunity.

We are working bilaterally, regionally, and multilaterally to develop the capacity of countries in the region to control their sov-

foreign territory, disrupt terrorist conspiracies, and counter those who advocate violence. A well-thought-out, long-term approach provides the best opportunity to ensure our security and that of our friends and allies against the terrorist threats from this region.

AQIM has failed to meet its key objectives and, under pressure from Algerian security forces, is on the defensive in Algeria. AQIM is financially strapped; indeed, it appears that the Algerians have AQIM in the northeastern part of the country increasingly contained and marginalized. The group has largely worn out its welcome in the Kabylie region, where residents have become increasingly resentful of its presence.

One of the central questions about AQIM has long been whether it would be able to establish itself in Europe and carry out attacks there. Some of our closest counterterrorism partners in Europe have identified this possibility of infiltration as one of their foremost concerns. That said, we currently view the near-term possibility of such an expansion of operations as less likely than it was just a few years ago.

In the Sahel, however, the picture is different. AQIM maintains two separate groups of fighters in northern Mali and has recently increased attacks and kidnappings, including against Western targets.

The group relies, to a considerable extent, on hostage-taking for ransom while carrying out murders and low-level attacks to garner media attention. In the last 2 years, AQIM in the Sahel has stepped up the pace. It has kidnapped two Austrian tourists along the Tunisian/Algerian border in early 2008; two Canadian diplomats in Niger in December 2008; four European tourists near the Mali/Niger border in January of this year.

One of the Europeans, a British hostage, was subsequently murdered by AQIM, as you all know.

AQIM has also increased other kinds of attacks in the Sahel. This year the group killed a Malian official in northern Mali; an American NGO worker in nearby Mauritania; and attempted a suicide bombing outside the French Embassy in Mauritania.

Despite the uptick in violence, hostage-taking, and the murder of individual Western citizens, we believe that these operations reveal some AQIM weaknesses. AQIM has failed to conduct attacks or operations in Morocco, Tunisia, or Libya. The Muslim population in the Sahel and the Maghreb, as a whole, still reject AQIM's extremism. There are exceptions, however, and the increase in AQIM recruitment in Mauritania is troubling.

That said, if we play our cards right, we can further contain and marginalize AQIM's threat to U.S. interests, and we can make investments that will be productive and reasonable.

We're striving to build countries' capacity through long-term programs such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. We're also working closely with other key international partners to ensure that our collective efforts in the region are well targeted, well coordinated, and effective.

Our quiet, but solid support for their counterterrorism—that is, those in the region—has emboldened our partners to stand up to extremism. We have been, if you will, leading from the side. These

partners have shown the will to take on terrorists in the past, and we expect that that will continue.

Our support to military and law enforcement capacity-building has led to stronger controlled borders and remote spaces, and that continues to improve. Our programs for countering violent extremism—such as radio programming, messaging from moderate leaders, and prison reform—have bolstered the region’s traditionally moderate inclinations.

We believe that our relatively modest efforts in the region are paying off and are worthy of continuation. A steady, long-term commitment to building effective security in the region will benefit the United States by enabling others to take the lead in stopping terrorists in their own countries before those threats reach our borders.

These countries have made it clear that they do not want the United States to take a more direct or visible operational role, but welcome assistance from the United States and other third countries.

We are particularly pleased that our regional partners are working together to weaken AQIM, motivated in part by the group’s recent atrocities. In August, Algeria hosted a conference for high-level defense ministry representatives from Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and Algeria to coordinate AQIM efforts, and we expect Mali to follow that up with a regional heads-of-state summit before the end of the year.

We’re also working with our European partners, with whom we met in Paris last month, on this issue, specifically to coordinate assistance to our partners in the Sahel and the Maghreb. Additionally, we have met with Canadian officials to discuss cooperation in the wake of the hostage-taking of one of their diplomats.

I should add that capacity-building is not the only contribution the Western partners can make to defeating terrorism in the region. It is also imperative that we do what we can to remove incentives for kidnapping. This administration plans to make a broader acceptance of the no-concessions approach an important initiative.

In closing, let me reiterate. We welcome the readiness of our partners in the region to take the lead in confronting AQIM, and we are pleased about the cooperation among our Western allies as we take effective steps to help build security in the Sahel. This cooperation, I strongly believe, will help fulfill the vision of working in partnership with other nations in troubled areas that has been a hallmark of President Obama’s foreign policy. I believe, also, that as we continue to provide support using the TSCTP as our primary tool, we will achieve our goal of reducing the danger AQIM possess to the region and to American interests.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Benjamin follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL BENJAMIN, COORDINATOR FOR
COUNTERTERRORISM, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Senator Feingold, Ranking Member Senator Isakson, members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today about the Department’s role in countering terrorism in the Sahel region. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) continues to menace parts of the Maghreb and the Sahel. In the north, it is frustrated by Algeria’s effective counterterrorism operations, but in parts of the Sahel,

it continues to operate with significant impunity. We are working bilaterally, regionally, and multilaterally, to develop their capacity to control their sovereign territory, effectively disrupt terrorist attacks, and counter those who advocate violence. A well-thought-out, long-term approach provides the best opportunity to ensure our security and that of our friends and allies against the terrorist threats from this region.

AQIM has failed to meet its key objectives and, under pressure from Algerian security forces, is on the defensive in Algeria. AQIM is financially strapped, particularly in Algeria, and unable to reach its recruiting goals. In the Sahel, they are also having difficulties recruiting although the influx of Mauritanian recruits has meant that their manpower situation is not as critical as in the north.

AQIM has historically focused on Algerian targets in the northeastern portion of Algeria. After AQIM's 2006 merger with al-Qaeda, the group has continued to attack the Algerian Government and military, while expanding its targeting of Western interests in the region. In December 2007, the group conducted sophisticated dual suicide bombings of both the Algerian Constitutional Council and U.N. office buildings in Algiers.

Since then, however, the group's fortunes have been ebbing. AQIM has been unable to conduct large-scale attacks since summer of 2008, in part due to pressure from Algerian forces, which have achieved important successes in breaking up extremist cells and disrupting operations. Increasingly, it appears that the Algerians have AQIM in northeastern part of the country increasingly contained and marginalized. Nonetheless, AQIM has continued to conduct low-level attacks in northeastern Algeria by carrying out ambushes, laying mines, and using small explosives, primarily against military checkpoints, gendarmes, police, and army vehicles. AQIM has also largely worn out its welcome in the Kabylie region, where residents have become increasingly resentful of the group's presence. Although AQIM has never conducted attacks on U.S. diplomatic targets in Algeria, U.S. and Western business interests, particularly those linked to oil companies have been targeted in the past, and remain at risk.

One of the central questions about AQIM has long been whether it would be able to establish itself in Europe and carry out attacks there. There is no question but that we need to take this possibility very seriously, especially in light of past attacks carried out by predecessors to AQIM such as Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in France. Some of our closest counterterrorism partners in Europe have identified this possibility of infiltration as one of their foremost concerns. That said, we view the near-term likelihood of such an expansion of operations as less likely than it was just a few years ago. This, in large measure, is because of the pressure on the group in Algeria.

In the Sahel, the picture is different. AQIM maintains two separate groups of fighters in Northern Mali, and has recently increased attacks and kidnappings, including against Western targets. They rely to a considerable extent on hostage-taking for ransom while carrying out murders, and low-level attacks to garner media attention. In the last 2 years, AQIM in the Sahel has stepped up the pace: Kidnapped two Austrian tourists along the Tunis-Algerian border in early 2008; two Canadian diplomats in Niger in December 2008; and four European tourists near the Mali/Niger border in January 2009. One of the Europeans, a British hostage, was subsequently murdered by AQIM.

AQIM has also increased other kinds of attacks in the Sahel, although their capabilities still compare poorly with earlier AQIM operations in Algeria. This year, AQIM killed a Malian official in northern Mali, killed an American NGO worker in neighboring Mauritania, and attempted a suicide bombing outside the French Embassy in Mauritania. In 2007, AQIM fighters killed four French tourists in Mauritania. AQIM in the recent past has attacked Mauritania and Malian security units with some success as well, killing 12 Mauritanian soldiers and beheading them in one instance and annihilating a Malian unit searching for AQIM elements after the murder of the British citizen.

Despite the uptick in violence, hostage-taking, and murder of individual Western citizens, we believe that these operations reveal some AQIM weaknesses. AQIM has failed to conduct attacks or operations in Morocco, Tunisia, or Libya. The Muslim population in the Sahel and Maghreb, as a whole, still rejects AQIM's extremism. There are exceptions, however, such as the increase in AQIM recruitment of Mauritians, which is troubling.

In the future, we view AQIM as posing a persistent threat to Western individuals in the Sahel, including our Embassies and diplomats, as well as tourists, businesspeople, and humanitarian workers. I would like to emphasize, however, that AQIM represents less of a threat to stability in its region than do al-Qaeda in the Federally Administered Territories in Pakistan or al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in

Yemen. The group cannot seriously threaten governments or regional stability, nor is it poised to gain significant support among the region's population. AQIM cannot drive a wedge between the United States and its partners; it also cannot ignite an ethnic-based civil war as al-Qaeda in Iraq nearly did.

If we play our cards right, we can further contain and marginalize AQIM's threat to U.S. interests, and the investments required are reasonable.

We are striving to build countries' capacity through long-term programs such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). We are also working closely with other key international partners to ensure that our collective efforts in the region are well targeted, well coordinated, and effective.

The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) is a multiyear, multi-agency commitment designed to support partner efforts in the Sahel and the Maghreb to constrain and ultimately eliminate the ability of terrorist organizations to exploit the region. The program supports partner efforts to: Build long-term capacity to defeat terrorist organizations and facilitation networks; disrupt efforts to recruit, train, and provision terrorists and extremists; counter efforts to establish safe havens for terrorist organizations; disrupt foreign fighter networks that may attempt to operate outside the region; address underlying causes of radicalization; and increase the capacity of moderate leaders to positively influence vulnerable populations. It also supports efforts to increase regional and subregional cooperation and interoperability, in such areas as communication and intelligence-sharing.

Our quiet but solid support for their counterterrorism efforts has emboldened our partners in the region to stand up to extremism. We have been "leading from the side," if you will. These partners have shown the will to take on terrorists in the past. In 2003, for example, Mali, Niger, and Chad worked together to track down and arrest the extremist leader al-Para, who was infamous for taking 32 European hostages for ransom. In 2005, Algeria, Mauritania, and Mali conducted relatively successful joint combat operations against the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), the precursor group to AQIM, in northwestern Mali. The United States supported these operations from the background by providing information and logistics support. Our capacity-building assistance has enabled Niger and Chad to take on antiregime rebels successfully. Our support to military and law enforcement capacity-building has led to stronger control of borders and remote spaces, and that continues to improve. Our programs for countering violent extremism—such as radio programming, messaging from moderate leaders, prison reform, and university linkages, such as connecting U.S. universities to the Algerian university in Constantine—have bolstered the region's traditionally moderate inclinations.

We believe that our relatively modest efforts in the region are paying off and are therefore worthy of continuation. A steady, long-term commitment to building effective security in the region will benefit the United States by enabling others to take the lead in stopping terrorists in their own countries—before they reach our borders. These countries have made it clear that they do not want the United States to take a more direct or visible operational role, but welcome assistance from the United States and other third-party countries.

The good news is that Algeria has been relatively successful against AQIM in northeastern Algeria. Despite its political turmoil, Mauritania has retained a strong interest in working with the United States on counterterrorism issues. Malian Government efforts, including a brief period of stepped-up military operations in mid-2009, have also helped to disrupt AQIM operations in the Sahel. We hope that our recent deliveries of trucks, communications gear, and nonlethal logistical supplies will reinforce an effort that suffered from physical/logistic incapacity issues. We are particularly pleased that our regional partners are working together to weaken AQIM, motivated in part by AQIM's most recent atrocities. In August, Algeria hosted a conference for high-level Defense Ministry representatives from Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and Algeria to coordinate anti-AQIM efforts. Mali plans to host a followup regional heads of state summit before the end of the year. That the region will take on AQIM is clear; we should make clear our commitment to enable them to succeed. We remain troubled by the extra-constitutional actions taken by President Tandja in Niger to stay in power and we have halted our assistance to that country for the time being.

We are also working with our European partners, whom we met with in Paris last month on this issue specifically, to coordinate assistance offered to our partners in the Sahel and Maghreb. At the Paris meeting, which included Stephane Gompertz and Olivier Chambard from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Charlotte Montel from the Foreign Minister's Cabinet, as well as officials from the European Union, Great Britain, and Germany; discussions centered on cooperation in the future. Additionally, we have met with Canadian officials to discuss cooperation in the wake of the hostage taking of their diplomats. We share the opinion that the

best way to bolster the regional will to defeat terrorism in the trans-Sahara will involve building the law enforcement and military capacity of our regional partners.

I should add that building capacity is not the only contribution that Western partners can make to defeating terrorism in the region. It is also imperative that we do what we can to remove the incentives for kidnapping for ransom. The key will be for other countries to embrace a policy of no concessions to hostage takers. This administration plans to make broader acceptance of the no-concessions approach an important initiative. We have seen that, over time, kidnappers lose interest in nationals of countries that adhere to such a policy.

In closing, let me reiterate: We welcome the readiness of our partners in the region to take the lead in confronting AQIM, and we are pleased about the cooperation among our Western allies as we take effective steps to help build security in the Sahel. This cooperation, I strongly believe, will help fulfill the vision of working in partnership with other nations in troubled areas that has been a hallmark of President Obama's foreign policy. I also believe that as we continue to provide support, using the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership as our primary tool, we will achieve our goal of reducing the danger AQIM poses to the region and U.S. interests.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you very much, Mr. Benjamin.
Mr. Gast.

**STATEMENT OF EARL GAST, SENIOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT
ADMINISTRATOR FOR AFRICA, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTER-
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. GAST. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Isakson. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the role USAID is playing in the fight against terrorism in Africa's Sahel region.

Terrorism is a challenge that has plagued U.S. Government work around the world. In Africa, our efforts to improve governance and create opportunity are increasingly threatened by the emerging forces of violent extremism.

To counter the forces that would derail our progress toward development in this fragile region, USAID is working in concert with the Departments of Defense and State in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership to define how development assistance can most effectively be used to contribute to long-term peace and stability.

Because of the dearth of information about the drivers of extremism in Africa that existed in 2005 when the program started, USAID commissioned two studies: one to aggregate and supplement what was known, and one to apply those findings to programs that would address those drivers.

The studies highlighted the complex nature of extremism and showed that an overarching root cause, such as poverty, is often just one of many factors that contribute to radicalization; rather, a number of factors often work together. For instance, corruption undermines state capacity and facilitates the emergence of ungoverned or poorly governed spaces, which, in turn, may provide opportunities for extremist groups and local conflicts to flourish.

These findings are critical to our decisionmaking and inform what interventions will be the most effective toward preventing drivers of extremism from spiraling out of control.

Youth empowerment, education, media, and good governance are the four areas where we see the greatest opportunity for local partnerships and progress. Unlike traditional development programs, our counterextremism efforts often target narrow populations, and

we specifically reach out to young men, the group most likely to be recruited by extremist groups.

While it can be different to measure success in countering extremism, we have seen some progress in our efforts. As a result of our outreach in Chad, the Association of Nomads and Herders has created a youth branch of its organization. Youth participation in organizations like this one helps to build stronger ties with the community and provides youth with a voice in society. This type of empowerment can greatly reduce the feelings of marginalization that feeds into—recruitment into extremist groups.

In the uranium mining areas of northern Niger, communities have formed listening clubs to discuss USAID-funded radio programs on good governance. One club even reports that they are pooling funds together to purchase a phone card so that they can call the radio station with feedback.

But, despite the promise of these community-based efforts, national governance has seen a setback in Niger. The recent referendum and sham elections have done more to empower the current antidemocratic regime than to provide a voice for the people, and we are concerned about the path that regime is taking.

For our programs to be successful, we must invest in strong local partnerships, and our methods of engagement must be nimble and creative. Because trends in extremism are fluid, we must constantly reassess our priorities, our progress, and our policies to ensure that our work is based on the realities of today.

Toward this end, we are pleased with our strong and productive partnership in the interagency. Sustained engagement within U.S. Government, with other donor governments, and with our partners in the Trans-Sahara region will be the key to combating extremism today and securing peace and stability for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Isakson.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gast follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF EARL GAST, SENIOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR AFRICA, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WASHINGTON, DC

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Isakson, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the role USAID is playing in the fight against terrorism in Africa's Sahel region.

Terrorism is a challenge that has plagued U.S. Government work around the world. In Africa, especially in the trans-Saharan region, our efforts to improve governance and create economic opportunity are increasingly threatened by the emerging forces of violent extremism. To counter the forces that would derail our progress toward development in this fragile region, USAID is working in concert with the Departments of Defense and State in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). USAID has been committed to TSCTP since its inception in 2005, working to define how development assistance can most effectively be used to contribute to long-term peace and stability.

Because of the dearth of information about extremism in Africa that existed when the partnership began, USAID commissioned two studies: one to aggregate and supplement what is known about the drivers of extremism in Africa, and one to take those findings and apply them to programs that could address those drivers. These exhaustive, peer-reviewed studies have helped create the foundation on which we design our development programs.

The studies highlighted the complex nature of drivers that lead to extremism and showed that an overarching "root cause," such as poverty, is often just one of many factors that contribute indirectly to radicalization in Africa. Socioeconomic drivers such as social exclusion and unmet economic needs often contribute to the threat of violent extremism. Politically, extremism can be driven by the denial of political rights and civil liberties, or endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected

elites. And broader cultural threats—to traditions, values or cultural space—also are drivers that may need to be addressed. Our research shows that these drivers are neither static nor globally consistent, and they evolve over time.

A number of factors often work together to contribute to radicalization, and the full impact of one factor often depends on whether other factors are present at the same time. For instance, as noted in the study, someone who has been marginalized socially may only be radicalized if he also has the opportunity to form personal relationships and networks with violent extremists. A person who feels thoroughly estranged from mainstream society may drift into violent extremism groups, not primarily because of his anger at being excluded, but because social alienation fuels the types of personal relationships and group dynamics that, in turn, facilitate the turn to violent extremism. Along similar lines, pervasive corruption undermines state capacity, and facilitates the emergence of “ungoverned,” “undergoverned,” “misgoverned,” or “poorly governed” spaces, which, in turn, may provide opportunities for violent extremist groups. In addition, failed or failing states are creating more space for local conflicts to flourish, which may then be co-opted or hijacked by transnational terrorist networks. These findings are critical to our policy and programming decisions and will inform what interventions will be the most effective toward preventing drivers from spiraling, how to monitor our progress, and how to integrate counterterrorism concerns into our future efforts.

Combined with country assessments, these findings have led us to focus our work on maintaining low levels of violent extremist threat in Chad, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania by reducing the drivers we identified through activities that strengthen resiliencies and communicate messages among at-risk groups. USAID’s TSCTP approach has concentrated on youth empowerment, education, media, and good governance—the four areas where we see the greatest opportunity for local partnerships and progress. Each activity is tailored to meet the specific threat levels, political environments, and material needs of each country. Unlike traditional development programs, our counterextremism efforts, when necessary, target narrow populations that generally aren’t reached by other programs. We also specifically reach out to young men—the group most likely to be recruited by extremist groups.

In Niger, we have been building the capacity of local leaders to launch and sustain community development projects. In Mali, the 11 community radio stations we’re building will reach 385,000 people with messages of peace-building, governance, and education. And in Chad, we are developing conflict mitigation and community stabilization projects that reach into the country’s remote north.

While it can be difficult to measure success in countering extremism, we have seen some progress in our efforts. As a result of our outreach in Chad, the Association of Nomads and Herders has created a youth branch of its organization, which has given those young men who participate greater stature in their community. The promotion of youth participation in organizations such as this one helps to build stronger ties between youth and their communities, and provides them with a voice in society. Empowering youth in this way can greatly reduce the feeling of marginalization that feeds recruitment into extremist groups.

In northern Mali, where one of the underlying drivers of extremism is the lack of educational opportunity, a USAID radio-based program has trained more than 1,400 teachers in 217 schools.

And in Niger, our early partnership with a local imam has directly resulted in more than a dozen madrassas adding a course on peace and tolerance to their curricula.

In the uranium-mining areas of northern Niger communities have formed listening clubs to discuss USAID-funded radio programs on good governance. One listening club even reports that they are pooling funds to purchase a phone card so that they can call the radio station with their feedback.

But despite the promise of these community-based efforts, national governance has seen a major setback in Niger. The recent referendum and sham elections have done more to empower the current antidemocratic regime than to provide a voice for the people, and we are concerned about the path the regime is taking. As a result, most development assistance has been frozen, and programs that work with local officials and provide skills training to young people are now on hold, though our work in media is ongoing.

Similarly, in Mauritania, our work was curtailed by the August 2008 coup d’etat. However, with Mauritania’s return to constitutional order following the signing of the Dakar Accord and July 2009 elections, we are again focusing on strengthening democracy and human rights.

The FY 2010 request for \$32 million in development assistance and economic support funds for TSCTP seeks to build on these programs through more robust programming reaching a greater number of people, particularly youth, and a possible

scaling-up of activities to additional countries such as Burkina Faso, where we plan to conduct an assessment in the near future. This continued funding in the base budget will allow USAID to develop long-term staffing and procurement plans to ensure we continue to make progress countering extremism through strategic development programming.

For our programs to be successful, we must invest in strong local partnerships and our methods of engagement must be nimble and creative. Because trends in extremism are fluid, we must constantly reassess our priorities, our progress, and our policies to ensure that our work is based on the realities of today.

Toward this end, we are pleased with our strong and productive partnership with the Departments of Defense and State on the planning and implementation of TSCTP, as well as our work with other donors on coordinating efforts to counter extremism. Sustained engagement—within the U.S. Government, with other donor governments, and with our partners in the trans-Sahara region—will be the key to combating extremism today and securing peace and stability for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Senator Isakson, and members of the subcommittee for your continued support for USAID and our programs.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you very much, Mr. Gast.
Ms. Huddleston.

STATEMENT OF HON. VICKI HUDDLESTON, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR AFRICA, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador HUDDLESTON. Chairman Feingold and Ranking Member Isakson, thank you for the invitation to testify today about the Department of Defense's role in the Sahel region.

DOD is the third pillar of the 3-D approach—diplomacy, development, and defense—in the Sahel and Maghreb region to address the challenges posed by al-Qaeda in the land of the Islamic Maghreb known, as you said, Mr. Chairman, as AQIM.

Under the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, we have a comprehensive approach that addresses political, developmental, and defense issues. Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson, Coordinator for Counterterrorism Dan Benjamin, and USAID Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa Earl Gast have all addressed the underlying political, ethnic, and geographic challenges. So, I will focus my remarks principally on the military dimension.

The Department of Defense, through primarily the U.S. Africa Command, is supporting an overarching U.S. Government strategy to counter AQIM in the Sahel and north Africa. The principal DOD activity supporting the TSCTP effort is Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans-Sahara, OEF-TS, which focuses on building the capacity of regional militaries, so that they can counter the presence of AQIM and prevent terrorist operations in those areas.

In addition, through our DOD military training, equipping, and advising activities, we seek to foster greater coordination and cooperation among the security institutions in the region.

We believe that the long-term solution must be that each nation is capable of governing and controlling its territory with professional militaries accountable to civilian governments that have the support of local populations. If this is not the case, then those who espouse violent extremism and acts of terrorism, even if temporarily deterred, will return to the ungoverned spaces.

DOD military cooperation programs and activities span a broad spectrum, from relatively simple outreach and humanitarian-related efforts through academic courses and education programs, to tactical and operational-level training and exercises, sharing

military advise, information, and equipment, to enable our partner nations to carry out military operations.

The U.S. Africa Command train and liaison missions use our special forces in support of the OEF-TS mission objectives throughout the Sahel.

Algeria and Mali are critical to leading and resolving the challenge posed by AQIM. The AQIM leadership is headquartered in Algeria, the majority of its members are Algerian, and most of its attacks, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, have been against Algerian targets. AQIM's rear base, or safe haven, has been in Mali since 2002. Near neighbors, namely Mauritania, Niger, and Chad, have all been negatively impacted by AQIM attacks over the past several years.

Our military relationship with Algeria is designed to support our mutual security interests. Algeria is working with Mali to bring the region together around a common solution acceptable to the countries that are directly involved. Algeria—indeed, the region and our allies, as Mr. Benjamin pointed out—believe that a solution is only possible when the response is coordinated and implemented through a regional approach.

Mali is a major recipient of DOD military cooperation efforts in the Sahel, receiving equipment in FY 2009, through security assistance resources, as well as section 1206 authority. In addition, DOD has carried out over 10 training events with the Malian military throughout the year, an extremely high tempo for operations and tactical training.

President Amadou Toure and the chief of the Malian military, General Poudiougou, have consistently expressed their appreciation for our assistance in helping them address the challenges posed by AQIM, and President Toure has said that he is committed to a regional summit to coordinate efforts across the board to counter AQIM.

DOD military cooperation activities with Mauritania were suspended in August 2008, following the military coup there. Military cooperation is now restarting, following this country's return to a constitutional system in July 2009. AFRICOM planning has already begun, with exercises and training to start after January 2010, and possibly equipment enhancement starting at the end of FY10. Unfortunately, our cooperation with Niger is limited because of President Tandja's suspension of the constitution. U.S. military cooperation with Niger prior to January 2008 was good and similar in scope and effort to the current activities in Mali. We hope that President Tandja will return to a democratic and constitutional framework so that AFRICOM can again work with Niger.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member—

Senator FEINGOLD. Let me ask you to conclude, if I could.

Ambassador HUDDLESTON [continuing]. Oops—your invitation letter asked me to address our interagency coordination related to our Sahel programs. The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership is a good example of bringing together State, USAID, and DOD to address an issue that impacts the stability and growth up the north and west Africa.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss DOD's efforts and AFRICOM's role as part of the larger USG government effort in

addressing the challenges posed by AQIM in the Sahel and Maghreb regions of Africa. My colleagues and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Huddleston follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. VICKI HUDDLESTON, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR AFRICA, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Senator Feingold, Senator Isakson, members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today about DOD's role in the Sahel region. DOD is the third pillar of the "3-D approach—Diplomacy, Development, and Defense—in the Sahel and Maghreb region to address the challenges posed by al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

The DOD through primarily U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) is supporting an overarching U.S. Government (USG) strategy to counter terrorism—specifically al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—in the Sahel and North Africa. The principal tools for doing so are the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans-Sahara (OEF-TS), which seek to build the capacity of regional militaries so that they can counter the presence of AQIM and prevent their operations within their countries. In addition, through our military training, equipping, and advising efforts, we seek to foster greater coordination and cooperation among the security institutions in the region. We believe that the long-term solution must be that each nation is capable of controlling its territory because it has the support of its citizens while maintaining the military capacity to ensure stability. If this is not the case, then those who espouse violent extremism and acts of terrorism, even if temporarily defeated, will return to the ungoverned spaces.

Under TSCTP we have a comprehensive approach that addresses political, developmental, and defense issues. Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson, Coordinator for Counterterrorism Dan Benjamin, and USAID Acting Administrator for Africa Earl Gast, have addressed the underlining political, ethnic, and geographic challenges, so I will focus my remarks principally on the military dimension. However, the military aspect of our combined strategy cannot effectively move forward without the political will and buy-in by the regional partners themselves.

Algeria and Mali are critical to leading and resolving the AQIM challenge. The AQIM leadership is headquartered in Algeria and most of its attacks have been against Algerian targets. The majority of its members are Algerian; however, Mauritians now make up a substantial number of AQIM's foot soldiers. AQIM's rear base or safe haven has been in Mali since 2002, when its predecessor organization, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), moved 15 European hostages into the Malian Sahara Desert from Algeria. Near neighbors, namely Mauritania, Niger, and Chad, have all been negatively impacted over the past several years by the GSPC and its successor AQIM. Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Libya, and Morocco, could also be future targets of opportunity where AQIM could attempt to recruit, link up with like-minded organizations, or carry out terrorists attacks.

I recently met with the Algerian leadership, including the Minister of State for African and Maghreb Affairs, the Presidential Advisor on Terrorism, and the Minister-Delegate for the Ministry of National Defense, who all expressed their desire not only to cooperate with the USG and our allies, but also to lead the region in facing this challenge. To this end, Algeria has already moved forward by organizing in August of this year a meeting of the military Chiefs of Defense (CHODs) of Mali, Mauritania, and Niger in Tamanrasset, Algeria. The CHODs agreed to establish a united command which will rotate among these militaries. We believe that this initiative is critical to dealing with the AQIM challenge.

The other side of regional military coordination is the political commitment among the regional partners to a comprehensive strategy that addresses the developmental and political issues as well as the security and stability issues. During my visit to Mali in June, President Toure informed U.S. Ambassador Milovanovic and me that he is committed to hosting a Bamako summit that would address achieving a regional agreement on the way forward against AQIM. We consider this summit critical to the region's success. It would also provide a framework in which the USG and our European partners could provide assistance that would support regional development and security.

General Ward, Commander of AFRICOM, is also scheduled to travel to both Mali and Algeria in the next few weeks to consult on the progress in planning for the Bamako summit and other collaborative initiatives for the region.

DOD military cooperation in the Sahel is conducted primarily through the authorities and resources of OEF-TS. OEF-TS is the DOD contribution to the larger counterterrorism effort of TSCTP, which I mentioned earlier and of which you've heard from my colleagues here today. Executed under the operational control of USAFRICOM, led by General Ward, the objectives of OEF-TS flow from the TSCTP strategy, using military cooperation programs and activities to build military capacity in our African partners to reduce the availability of the Sahel region as a safe haven and operational support, resupply, and sustainment area for AQIM.

DOD military cooperation programs and activities span a broad spectrum from relatively simple outreach and humanitarian-related efforts, through academic courses and education programs, tactical and operation-level training and exercises, up to sharing of military information and providing equipment to enable partner nation military operations.

DOD, through USAFRICOM training and liaison missions, has deployed to several countries in the region to support achievement of OEF-TS mission objectives. In this region, DOD has deployed teams including: the Joint Planning Advisory Teams (or "JPAT") that work closely with embassies to schedule, support, and synchronize the multiple training events occurring across this region; Civil-Military Support Elements (or "CMSE") that coordinate DOD humanitarian and other civic action projects; and Military Information Support Teams (or "MIST" teams), that work closely with Embassy Public Affairs officers to positively counter the messages of violent extremism and proactively project U.S. efforts, particularly those by the U.S. military.

When we look, at AQIM, Algeria is the focus and primary target of their attacks. Our military relationship with Algeria is designed to support our mutual security interests. Algeria is working to bring the region together around a common solution acceptable to the countries that are directly involved. Algeria believes—as we do—that a solution is only possible when the response is coordinated and implemented together. As I mentioned earlier, Algeria organized a meeting of CHODs in August in Tamarrasset to coordinate a military approach. This effort, however, is dependent upon an endorsement by the political leadership in the region. This endorsement could be possible through the long-awaited Bamako summit that I mentioned earlier. Algerian officials told me that they remain committed to a regional approach.

Mali is a critical player. It is a recipient of DOD military cooperation efforts in the Sahel, receiving over \$10M in equipment in FY09 through security assistance resources as well as the section 1206 authority. In addition, DOD spent over \$5M in FY09 through OEF-TS in Mali conducting over 10 training events with the Malian military throughout the year—an extremely high tempo for operations and tactical training. I visited Mali in June of this year, meeting with President Toure and General Pougouyou, the chief of the Malian military. They expressed their appreciation for our assistance in helping them address the challenges posed by AQIM. President Toure stated his commitment to a regional summit, however, we would like to see Mali take a more proactive stand in combating AQIM.

With respect to Mauritania, while all DOD military cooperation activities with Mauritania were suspended in August 2008 following the military coup, DOD is restarting military cooperation following Mauritania's return to a constitutional system following democratic elections in July 2009. DOD outreach activities with Mauritania have already begun, with exercises and training to start after January 2010, and possible equipment enhancements starting near the end of FY10.

Unfortunately our cooperation with Niger is limited because of President Tandja's decision to suspend the constitution. Past U.S. military cooperation with the Nigerien military was good and was similar in scope and effort to current activities with Mali. However, DOD military cooperation with Niger was terminated in compliance with growing U.S. policy restrictions against Niger due to President Tandja's actions. We hope that the Nigerien Government will return to a democratic and constitutional framework, so that DOD can again work with the Nigerien military to address the challenges posed by AQIM in the Sahel.

Your invitation letter asked me to talk about our interagency coordination related to our Sahel programs. In my opinion, TSCTP is an excellent example of how interagency coordination should work. While our Departments' and Agencies' programs are typically separately funded and implemented, in the case of TSCTP, there is close collaboration between the State Department, USAID, and DOD, including in annual planning, leveraging appropriate resources from multiple and disparate programs, monthly interagency teleconferences between Washington organizations and the field (including our Embassies and USAFRICOM, and synchronizing scheduling and implementation of activities on the ground in our partner nations.

I assess that the greatest challenge to our regional partner's security forces is due to the vast distances and harsh environment of the Sahara. This vast, sparsely pop-

ulated region, has a long tradition of trade and routes that carry whatever goods are traded. In addition, there are preexisting tensions and wide porous borders that also contribute to the region's challenges. It is the geographic and environmental realities of this region that is used by AQIM to find refuge in the vast, undergoverned spaces. Our partner nations have a daunting challenge from a security perspective in maintaining awareness, monitoring their borders and providing the necessary security functions traditional of a government to its population.

I'd like to again say thank you for this opportunity to discuss DOD's role as part of the larger U.S. Government team addressing the challenges posed by AQIM in the Sahel and Maghreb region in Africa. My colleagues and I look forward to answering your questions.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you, Ms. Huddleston. And thank all of you.

Let's start with the rounds—7-minute rounds—in the hope that each of us could get a round in before the votes start.

Ambassador Benjamin, as you cite in your testimony, there's been a long concern about AQIM's ability to establish itself in Europe and carry out attacks there. You've said that, "We view the near-time likelihood of such an expansion of those operations as less likely than before." But, as you know, the AP recently reported the arrest, in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, of 17 Algerians suspected of raising money to finance terrorism. Do we believe that AQIM is still trying to gain a foothold and carry out attacks in Europe? And to what extent does this continue to be a pressing concern for our European partners?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Senator Feingold, it certainly remains a high concern for our European partners. I think that, at the moment, it would be safe to characterize AQIM activity outside of Africa, and particularly in Europe, as being aspirational and focused, at the moment, more on fundraising and logistics; and they have not yet acquired an operational capability on the continent.

That said, it remains a high priority. But judging by what we know about the goings-on within the group and also the very strong capacities of Algerian law enforcement and also French intelligence, we believe that the group's ability to project itself has been somewhat degraded and that, as I said in my testimony, it's probably less likely than before.

That said, we are always confronted with the same problem in terrorism, and that is, it's an arena in which small numbers can make a big difference and you can't ensure that you can detect every small number, every operative, every small cell. I think we are fairly confident in our assessment, but, nonetheless, we can't be absolutely certain that nothing would happen.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you. Your testimony states that, "Our capacity-building assistance has enabled Niger and Chad to take on antiregime rebels successfully." Is this a reference to AQIM or to other opponents of the regimes?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. It's primarily a reference to other rebel groups, Senator.

Senator FEINGOLD. And isn't that outside the scope of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership? Isn't there some risk that, if we're providing general support to these abusive governments, that we could fuel anti-American attitudes and undermine our overarching counterterrorism goals?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. It is certainly true that the fundamental target of this assistance is al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, but, as a

general rule, this is about capacity-building, and capacity-building often allows governments to strengthen themselves and extend their controls over larger areas of territory.

Perhaps Secretary Carson would like to add to that.

Ambassador CARSON. Mr. Chairman, let me just say that we are constantly monitoring how our assistance is used by different governments, not only in the Sahel, but across Africa. The last thing that we want to do is to provide bad governments with the capacity to inflict harm on their people, to carry out human rights violations. So, we do monitor these assistance programs very, very carefully.

And in the case of a country like Chad—Chad has been subject to invasions from rebels coming across the border from Sudan, and, in some of those instances, it is believed that those rebels have received assistance from foreign governments. In those instances, we think that it is important to help governments strengthen their capacity to defend against rebel groups and rebel incursions.

Now, our assistances may not, in fact, exclusively be from or out of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership Program, but may come from other assistance that we provide. One of the other points we're also making when we extend assistance to the government of a country like Chad is that it is important that their militaries operate under civilian control, that they follow human rights norms that are universal, and that they not act against their citizens.

Senator FEINGOLD. Well, obviously it's terribly important that we get this right. The nature of these regimes is not something to be very comfortable with vis-a-vis this kind of activity. So, whether it's part of the Trans-Sahel or some other source of funding, this is something that I'm going to want to monitor closely and be as fully informed as possible with regard to non-AQIM uses of this capacity that we're help building.

Ambassador Benjamin, AQIM's activity cuts across several countries and involves both the Bureau of African Affairs and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department. What mechanisms exist to encourage information-sharing and collaboration among the relevant embassies and these two bureaus, and what role does your office play in ensuring that State has a coordinated approach to dealing with AQIM?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Senator, thank you for that question.

One of the virtues of the TSCTP is that it has led us to create, I think, a more robust coordinating mechanism than we have for many other areas of the world. There is a standing interagency working group for the Trans-Sahara, which meets regularly on a monthly basis in Washington, with action officers from State, OSD, and USAID, to discuss issues. There are an enormous number of daily contacts. We also have a regular monthly videoconference with AFRICOM. TSCTP has annual conferences that include DCMs or ambassadors from all the embassies in the region, as well as representatives from across the interagency. We also host two regional strategic initiative meetings per year that include the ambassadors and senior interagency representatives. It was the first RSI that I had the pleasure of addressing.

So, I think that this is one very well-coordinated process. There's always room for improvement, but I think that we're pleased with the way it has worked and that it's a model for cooperation in other geographical areas.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you, Mr. Benjamin.

Senator Isakson.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Carson—and this may apply to someone else as well; feel free to chime in—we had a hearing a few weeks ago on narco-trafficking in West Africa, and with AQIM in that area, are they being financed, in part or in whole by narco-trafficking?

Ambassador CARSON. The AQIM groups that are operating in the Sahel are engaged in a lot of illicit activities, including smuggling across the border, and probably to include some narco-trafficking, as well.

We don't have specifics on precisely how they get all of their money, but we do know that they engage in smuggling goods, smuggling and trafficking people, probably moving illegal drugs, and, most recently, engaging in high-profile kidnappings for ransom of Europeans.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you.

Mr. Daniel, we had a death of a British citizen, I believe, in Mali or Mauritania, an American citizen there, as well. What is the level of cooperation with those governments in bringing those who perpetrated those crimes to justice?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. As a general rule, Senator, the level of cooperation is very high. In fact, one of my colleagues from the British Embassy is right behind me. We have met multiple times on a range of counterterrorism issues, including this one. I was in Ottawa last month to discuss this and other relevant issues with Canadian officials. In general, we are in touch on a very close and regular basis to do what we can both to prevent such kidnappings and hostage-takings and murders, and to deal with them when they happen, but also to track down the offenders and bring them to justice. And there's close cooperation with regional partners, as well.

Senator ISAKSON. Was either of those crimes tied to AQIM?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I believe they both were.

Senator ISAKSON. They both were.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Yes. The American NGO worker and the British hostage, Dyer, were both, I believe, victims of AQIM.

Senator ISAKSON. Well, I know we, unfortunately, had a Georgian, who was a Peace Corps volunteer that was murdered in Benin earlier this year, and I want to say again, how much I appreciate the Government of Benin, which is in the region, it's not a part of the partnership, I don't think, but it's just south of there—they've done a wonderful job in helping to bring justice to the perpetrator of that crime.

Mr. Gast, you made an interesting comment in your remarks, and I wrote it down. You talked about "strategies, given the realities of the day." And then you made a reference to the four areas you were focusing on, which were youth empowerment, education, government, and then young men.

I have found in my travels to Africa that some of the efforts we're working on relate to reducing the vulnerability of young African men to be exploited or misdirected, for lack of a better term, because it is a serious problem in many African countries. Are you developing any programs that deal directly with young African men?

Mr. GAST. Very good question, and it's something that we've been struggling with for more than a year, is looking at the youth bulge and looking at many of the states that are in conflict now throughout the continent, or just emerging from conflict. There is a very large youth population and a very large young male population, and we're seeing violence perpetrated by young men in southern Sudan, and we're coming up with country-specific or region-specific approaches in trying to deal with those issues.

We in AID also have recognized that this is a big issue, and not just in Africa, but also in Asia, and we're coming up with an agency strategy and approach to addressing the issues related to young men—unemployed young men; idle young men.

Senator ISAKSON. Well, I—my observation is—and I have not been to any of the countries—well, I have been to Algeria and Tunisia, but I haven't been to any of the ones directly involved here—but, in my travels in South and Central Africa and in Sudan and Ethiopia, it seems like the single largest vulnerability we have is to get the energies and direction of these young men out of nefarious activity and into some type of productive economic activity.

For many women, this has been done in terms of the Village Savings and Loan programs and things of that nature.

I appreciate your answer on that, because I think it is a critically important thing to do.

Ms. Huddleston, you mentioned AFRICOM and some visibility or support in the counterterrorism partnership. Is some of that coming out of our deployments in Djibouti?

Ambassador HUDDLESTON. Thank you, Senator Isakson.

The most of the support that we do under the Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans-Sahara is from, what we call, SOCAF, our Special Forces of the Africa Command. And so, although Djibouti supports, it's mainly out of Stuttgart and component commands from the Special Forces.

And I wondered if I could just go back one moment to the chairman's question regarding our accountability of our training of forces in the region.

Senator ISAKSON. Please.

Ambassador HUDDLESTON. Senator Feingold, I'd just like to point out that I think we've been particularly good on this one. In Mali, of course, they have remained democratic and the forces that we've provided—JSETs to, as well as train and equip, have been the forces that are focused on the AQIM; in other words, the region to Timbuktu and the Gao region where those—where the AQIM is active.

In the case of Chad, we actually redirected a train-and-equip because we were dissatisfied with the chain of command. That has now been resolved.

In the case of Niger, of course, we have suspended our assistance. And in the case of Mauritania, we suspended our assistance;

and now we'll resume. But, again, that training and those—that assistance will be directed at military capacity that is directed at counterterrorism activities.

So, just—

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you.

Ambassador HUDDLESTON [continuing]. To clarify a bit.

Senator ISAKSON. That's all, Mr. Chairman.

Senator FEINGOLD. I'm going to continue until the vote starts, and we'll leave the record open for this panel so we can ask additional questions if we like.

But, let me go to Assistant Secretary Carson. As you know, the GAO study released in July 2008 found that the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership suffered from a lack of comprehensive integrated strategy. Given that the Africa Bureau is the program lead, I'd like to ask you now: Is there now a comprehensive integrated strategy that has been agreed to be the interagency?

Ambassador CARSON. We are still working off of the previous documents with respect to strategy, but the strategy that we're using, Mr. Chairman, focuses on several elements. One is to deter violent extremism and to put programs in place that will help prevent violent extremism from taking root in various countries. The second part of the strategy is to build security capacity within the various African militaries in the region. And the third is to strengthen the coalition and the regional cooperation among states. These remain a core part of our activity: deterring extremism, building security capacity, and strengthening regional focus.

We, here in Washington, work extraordinarily closely together, as Ambassador Dan Benjamin has pointed out in his testimony. We are in frequent contact, coordinating our efforts in the field and our strategic efforts back here in Washington.

We—

Senator FEINGOLD. A little more specifically, what mechanisms exist for the interagency to review and assess the appropriateness and progress of specific activities in light of this strategy?

Ambassador CARSON. Well, we do, in fact, get together, under the guidance of the NSC, and we also meet regularly within the State Department, under various mechanisms that have been outlined for myself and for Ambassador Huddleston and for Special Coordinator Dan Benjamin, to review where we are, review the progress that we're making in the field, and review what we need to do to modify and adjust our core elements in the strategy.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you, sir.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Huddleston, you have a unique vantage point, given your experience as previous U.S. Ambassador to Mali, and we were there together, as you, I'm sure, remember. As you know, the Malian military has engaged this year in several military confrontations with AQIM. Have these been successful engagements? And, more broadly, what are the greatest needs of the Malian military and other militaries in the Sahel as they seek to combat AQIM and carry out effective counterterrorism?

Ambassador HUDDLESTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I remember your visit very well; in fact, you said it was one of the better USAID projects, if not the best—

Senator FEINGOLD. It was excellent.

Ambassador HUDDLESTON [continuing]. That you had ever seen. [Laughter.]

Thank you.

Mali has been a good partner, but Mali lacks capacity. And so, it is sometimes also hesitant in the way in which it carries out its operations.

Right now, in order to address that issue, we are providing \$3.5 million through the Department of State to help them improve their logistics capacity, as well as their training. And this is continuing to be an enormous problem for Mali, because the area up there, as you know so well, Senator, above the Niger River is so vast. I think that area itself is about the size of Texas. And there have been two Tuareg rebellions in that area. And as a result, in many ways Mali has lost the capacity to govern successfully in that area.

And so, long-term success depends upon its ability both to reestablish its security presence, something that we are trying to help them do, along with the State Department, as well as to have the support of the people, both the Tuaregs and the Berabiche, in the area.

I think you saw this one operation in which a number of Malian military were killed. I think that showed, in itself, that they were—there was a resolve on the Malian part to try to face this threat. But, it also showed that sometimes they're not—they don't have the capacity to do it as well as they should.

And that's why this Algerian/Malian initiative, at which they held in Tamanrasset with the chiefs of staff of the various defense organizations of Niger, Mauritania, Mali, and Algeria, is so important. Because the only really effective way to address this challenge is for the region to address it together.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you.

Mr. Gast, when USAID carries out assessments to identify communities most at risk to violent extremist organizations or ideology, what are the characteristics that you're really looking for? And how specifically has USAID adapted its development programs to try to target these kinds of risk factors?

Mr. GAST. Yes, thank you, Senator Feingold.

Recently, within the last year, we had a final version of our Drivers of Extremism paper, as well as our programming options, which we peer tested. And, from that, we have used—we have come up with an analytical framework that we're using in the countries. And we've used this analytical framework in all four of the primary participating countries. And we're looking at areas that are most vulnerable to violent extremism. And so, that would be, for instance, areas where there's marginalization; it could be ethnic conflict, it could be high unemployment. And so, it depends on the region.

And, for example, in Mauritania, we have determined—and by the way, these assessments are done on an interagency basis, so it's not just AID; State Department officers, DOD officers participate in the assessments, as well—in Mauritania, we've determined that the youth who've come into the city are most vulnerable to messages of violent extremism. So, the program is urban-targeted.

In Mali, for instances, it is in the north, and—as well as Niger, also in the north.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you.

Senator Isakson.

Senator ISAKSON. Just one question, and Secretary Carson, I'll ask you, but somebody else might answer it.

The eastern border of Chad borders western Sudan, which is where Darfur is, and in the displacement and the tremendous refugee problem that we have there, a lot of those people were—in Darfur—were displaced by Chadian rebels. Is there any evidence, that you know of that AQIM-supported, in whole or in part?

Ambassador CARSON. Senator, no, we have no indication that AQIM has been operating in that part of Africa along the Chad border with Sudan. No indication whatsoever.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you.

Senator FEINGOLD. One more quick question for Deputy Assistant Secretary Huddleston.

Assistant Secretary Carson's testimony states that, "Chiefs of mission must concur with all proposed activities," related to TSCTP. Can you assure the committee of the Department of Defense's unqualified support for this principle?

Ambassador HUDDLESTON. Yes, Senator, I can, and I would cite the fact that General Ward has been very conscientious in always going to the ambassadors and making sure that the ambassadors in each of the countries are comfortable with and support whatever activity we are engaged in.

Senator FEINGOLD. I thank you, and I thank all the panelists. We will recess at this point, because the votes are about to start. I'm hoping we'll be able to come back and begin with the second panel in roughly 45 minutes.

I thank you.

[Recess.]

Senator FEINGOLD. Call the hearing back to order.

Thank you for your patience. And it was almost exactly 45 minutes, so I thank the second panel for waiting.

And, at this point, I would like to ask Ms. Lianne Kennedy-Boudali to give her testimony. And, of course, we'd be more than happy to put your full statement in the record.

**STATEMENT OF LIANNE KENNEDY-BOUDALI, SENIOR
PROJECT ASSOCIATE, RAND CORPORATION, ARLINGTON, VA**

Ms. KENNEDY-BOUDALI. Thank you, Chairman Feingold.

It's my honor to be here. I have been asked to provide an assessment of threats to the Sahel from al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, and other extremists groups.

Insecurity in the Sahel is not a new condition, and although recent terrorist incidents have drawn greater attention to the region, terrorism is not the primary problem. Weak states, ineffective governance, civil conflict, smuggling of goods and people, drug and weapons trafficking, and criminality all contribute to insecurity in the region.

The problems of poor education, a lack of economic opportunity, and poor social mobility create an environment in which AQIM's recruitment messages find an audience. AQIM has the capacity to

threaten U.S. citizens and U.S. interests in the region; however, the group is not in a position to destabilize any of the states in the Sahel, and it is not likely to form the nucleus of a Taliban-like insurgency.

I would like to briefly discuss AQIM's current activities in the Sahel.

In September 2006, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat, the GSPC, declared its allegiance to Osama bin Laden, and became an al-Qaeda affiliate in January 2007 by changing its name to "the al-Qaeda Organization in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb."

AQIM's goal—the overthrow of the Algerian state—has not changed since the merger, although the group has increased its rhetorical attacks on the West, and it has greatly expanded its outreach to jihadists in the region. AQIM has incorporated increasingly sophisticated IED technology into its attacks against Algerian security services, and it began conducting suicide attacks in 2007. Suicide attacks make up a small percentage of AQIM's attacks, however, and the deadliness of these attacks has been decreasing over time.

AQIM's association with al-Qaeda may have provided new sources of external donations, but the group still appears to get most of its funds from its own criminal activities, including kidnapping and smuggling in Algeria and the Sahel, and from petty crime in Europe.

AQIM has capitalized on insecurity in the Sahel to maintain safe havens in Mali and Mauritania, but its ability to operate beyond Algeria depends on maintaining cooperative relationships with the Tuareg and Berabiche tribes in the region.

AQIM's alliance with al-Qaeda allowed it to attract fighters from the Sahel, but, despite this, the group does not appear to be gaining strength. The recent expansion of activity into Mauritania and Mali is taking place in part because AQIM has been increasingly constrained in Algeria, and because it has been unable to organize operational cells in Morocco, Libya, or Tunisia.

AQIM's strict interpretation of Islam holds little appeal in the Sahel, and its recent actions in Mali—the execution of a British hostage in May and the assassination of a Malian military officer in June—may have put its safe haven in jeopardy.

The group also suffers from internal personality conflicts and has lost many of its experienced fighters to the Algerian Government's amnesty programs and its aggressive counterterrorist actions.

Despite fears to the contrary, AQIM does not appear to have received a large influx of foreign fighters from Iraq, which is one of the few variables that could have significantly increased the group's capability for violence.

AQIM is likely to continue kidnapping foreigners, and it may increasingly seek to target Western interests in the region. As such, the group poses an ongoing threat to U.S. citizens and interests in the region. This threat is best countered by a multipronged U.S. policy response that includes programs designed to support development, governance, and security.

States in the region need assistance in creating the conditions for social development, including better education, more economic

opportunity, more transparency in governance, stronger rule of law, and support for countering both criminal and terrorist violence.

Additionally, longstanding civil conflicts, notably the ongoing problems between the states in the region and the Tuareg minorities, require resolution before progress can be made in improving security and development.

The best option for reducing terrorism and improving security in the Sahel is to focus our efforts on improving human security in all forms—physical, economic, environmental, and so on—by supporting the Sahel states’ ability to deal with these problems themselves.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Kennedy-Boudali follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LIANNE KENNEDY-BOUDALI, SENIOR PROJECT ASSOCIATE,
RAND CORPORATION, ARLINGTON, VA

Chairman and distinguished members, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations’ Subcommittee on African Affairs session on “Examining U.S. Counterterrorism Priorities and Strategy across Africa’s Sahel Region.” This testimony will focus on the nature of the terrorist threat posed by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

REGIONAL INSTABILITY IN CONTEXT

As this committee is well aware, the Sahel is a sparsely populated area that is extremely difficult to govern. National borders are remote and poorly monitored, and significant distances separate the developed areas in the south from the northern areas where terrorist activity largely takes place, making it difficult for security services to respond rapidly to terrorist activity. The states themselves are weak or poorly institutionalized, and effective governance is hindered by lack of transparency and accountability. Corruption and a lack of professionalization negatively affect the performance of local security services, while ongoing civil conflict with minority ethnic groups creates distrust between the governments and their citizens.

Insecurity in the Sahel is not a new condition, and although recent terrorist incidents have drawn greater attention to the region, terrorism is not the primary problem. Corruption, civil conflict, smuggling of goods and people, drug and weapons trafficking, and terrorism all contribute to insecurity in the region. Although the indigenous practice of Islam in the Sahel is tolerant and syncretic, less tolerant external religious influences are increasingly making inroads in the region as foreign-sponsored religious organizations introduce Salafi, Wahabi, and Tablighi teachings. Given that many people cannot read at all, let alone read the Qur’an in Arabic, Muslims in the Sahel are vulnerable to the influence of extremist clerics, particularly those who have external support and are thus able to attract followers through charitable spending and provision of Qur’anic education. Poverty, environmental degradation, poor access to primary education, and a lack of economic, social, and political progress create conditions for radicalization and extremism, and AQIM’s calls for Islamic governance and anti-Western violence have found traction with certain audiences in North Africa and the Sahel. That said, the majority of Muslims in the region appear to reject the extremist messages put forth by violent groups such as AQIM, and despite the apparent increase in violence in the region, terrorist groups do not pose a strategic threat to governments in the region. In sum, AQIM has the capacity to threaten U.S. citizens and U.S. interests in the region, however, the group is not in a position to destabilize any of the states in the Sahel, and it lacks the resources and popular support that would be needed to form a broad, Taliban-like insurgency.

AQIM

AQIM emerged in January 2007 when the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GPSC), having declared its allegiance to Osama bin Laden in September 2006, changed its name to the “Organization of al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb.” Prior to the merger, the GPSC was considered a nationalist jihadist organization focused on challenging the Algerian state, although it had longstanding ties

to al-Qaeda and the wider international jihadist movement.¹ Since the merger, AQIM has increasingly mirrored al-Qaeda in its rhetoric and its actions, and this has led to speculation that AQIM might become a much more dangerous group, capable of threatening U.S. interests and conducting attacks in Europe. Although its alliance with al-Qaeda has given AQIM greater legitimacy among jihadists, provided increased access to media outlets, and possibly introduced the group to new sources of private funding and other resources, the group itself is under enormous stress, and its ability to operate in Algeria appears increasingly constrained. This has forced AQIM to shift its focus toward the Sahel, particularly Mauritania, in search of new recruits and easier targets. The expansion of operations in the Sahel should not be taken as an indication of greater strength, however; the group may have become more violent, but it is not necessarily more dangerous, as the following discussion will show.

The Effects of the al-Qaeda Affiliation

AQIM's overarching goal—the overthrow of the Algerian state—has not changed since the merger with al-Qaeda, despite an increase in rhetorical attacks on the West and the governments of neighboring countries.² AQIM has sought to legitimize its violence by associating itself with al-Qaeda's vision of global jihad, and its recruitment has increasingly drawn on themes linked to al-Qaeda, particularly the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.³ AQIM has attempted to radicalize potential recruits in neighboring countries by pointing out events that appear to have negative consequences for Muslims or by inserting itself into local affairs.⁴ For example, AQIM commented on apparent police brutality in Morocco in June 2008 and later warned Mauritians about the futility of participating in national elections in May 2009.⁵ Although AQIM appears to have succeeded in recruiting some fighters from the Sahel countries, its overall success in attracting new recruits appears marginal, as the group has shown few signs of increased strength or capability as a result of its various radicalization efforts. Furthermore, AQIM does not appear to have received a large influx of “foreign fighters” from Iraq, which is one of the few variables that could have significantly increased the group's capacity for violence.

AQIM's headquarters remains in northeast Algeria, but AQIM maintains several operational units (called *katibah*—plural *kata'ib*—in Arabic) in the Sahel.⁶ These units are nominally under the command of AQIM's national leadership, led by Emir Abdelmalek Droukdal (aka Abu Mus'ab Abd-al-Wadud), but some units in the Sahel control independent resources and are self-sustaining.⁷ AQIM appears to get most of its funds from its own criminal activities, including kidnapping and smuggling in Algeria and the Sahel, and from petty crime in Europe.⁸

The vast majority of AQIM's attacks are in the form of ambushes, roadblocks, kidnapping, extortion, and bombings. AQIM has occasionally attacked Algeria's energy sector, targeting natural gas pipelines with explosive devices or attacking foreign

¹ Interview with Emir Abu Ibrahim Mustafa, Media Committee of the Salafi Group for Call and Combat, December 18, 2003; Muhammad Muqaddam, “Nabil Sahraoui Confirms Relationship with al-Qaeda and Stresses Continuation of Struggle Against Algerian Authorities,” *al-Hayah*, January 9, 2004.

² Abu Obeida Yusuf al-Annabi, “Congratulations to the People of Tawhid in the Occasion of Eid,” *Al-Fajr Media*, October 6, 2008, and Abu Musab 'Abd al-Wadud, “A Message to Our Ummah in the Islamic Maghreb,” *Al-Fajr Media*, September 21, 2008.

³ “The War of Bombs and Mines,” video released November 3, 2008. Summary available from SITE Intelligence Group, November 4, 2008; Information Committee of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, “Press or Nonsense?! In Response to Some of the Lies Published in the Algerian Press,” *al-Fajr Media Center*, December 25, 2008; Abu Mus'ab 'Abd al-Wadud, “A Message to the Algerian Muslim People,” January 2006.

⁴ Abu Musab 'Abd al-Wadud, “A Message to Our Ummah in the Islamic Maghreb,” *al-Fajr Media Center*, September 21, 2008; Abu Musab 'Abd-al-Wadud, “Gaza: Between the Hammer of Jews and Crusaders and the Anvil of Apostates,” *al-Fajr Media Center*, January 15, 2009.

⁵ ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Shanqiti, “My People, Follow Me, for I Will Lead You to the Path of Right,” May 30, 2009; Abu Musab 'Abd al-Wadud, “Statement in Relation to Moroccan Sister and Baby Who Were Beaten Near the Prison,” June 4, 2008.

⁶ AQIM is organized into four operational zones: Center, East, West, and South (alternately Sahara), each with its own military commander. The Southern zone contains the *kata'ib* that operate in the Sahel.

⁷ Mokhtar bel Mokhtar, who was also active in the Sahara under the GPSC, has longstanding ties to Touareg and Berabiche tribes in Mali and Mauritania. It is bel Mokhtar who is believed to run AQIM's Saharan training camps.

⁸ “The Sinews of the ‘Holy War’: Racketeering, Holdups, and Kidnappings,” *Le Monde*, December 11, 2008; “Bejaia Court: The Terrorists’ Treasurer Given Life Sentence,” *Liberte*, May 2, 2007; “Sahara Zone Kidnappings,” *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, March 3, 2009; International Crisis Group, “Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page,” ICG Middle East Report No. 29, July 30, 2004.

personnel involved with gas production. Following its merger with al-Qaeda, AQIM incorporated increasingly sophisticated IED technology into its attacks against Algerian security services, and it adopted suicide attacks in 2007.⁹ Suicide attacks make up a small percentage of AQIM's attacks, however, and the deadliness of these attacks has decreased over time, as has their frequency. The group suffers from internal personal conflicts and has lost many of its experienced fighters to the Algerian Government's amnesty programs and aggressive counterterrorist actions, which may have resulted in the loss of experienced trainers, planners, and bomb-makers.¹⁰

AQIM'S NEW EMPHASIS ON THE SAHEL

The recent expansion of terrorist activity into Mauritania and Mali is taking place in part because Algerian security services have put AQIM on the defensive, but also because AQIM has been unable to organize operational cells in Morocco, Libya, or Tunisia. In Morocco, there is no logical counterpart with whom AQIM might form an effective relationship. Moroccan security services arrested thousands of suspects after the 2003 suicide attacks in Casablanca, effectively splintering the emerging jihadist movement. Jihadist presence is weak in both Tunisia and Libya, and as a result, AQIM's outreach in North Africa has been limited to attracting a handful of recruits to join its Algerian units.¹¹ AQIM has had little choice but to turn its focus to the Sahel.

AQIM, like the GSPC before it, has been able to capitalize on insecurity in the Sahel to maintain safe haven, capitalize on smuggling routes, and draw recruits from criminal groups and disenfranchised populations. AQIM's continued ability to operate outside of Algeria depends on maintaining cooperative relations with the Touareg and Berabiche tribes in the region. Cooperation between these tribes in the Sahel and the Algerian jihadists is based on mutual interest in generating revenue and avoiding interference from state security services. However, AQIM's actions generated a great deal of attention from the international community—particularly following the execution of British hostage Edwin Dyer in May 2009—and this increased tensions between the Algerian terrorists and the Touareg. Most Touareg do not share AQIM's goal of establishing an Islamic state, and even militant Touareg groups are not seeking to overthrow the governments of Mali and Niger. If AQIM's presence becomes too disruptive, the Touareg are probably capable of eliminating AQIM's safe havens in Mali and Niger—either alone or with the help of their governments' security services.

Despite these tensions, the number of fighters recruited in Mali, Niger, and Mauritania—although not large—is believed to be growing.¹² Some of these fighters are operating in the Sahel, while others have been incorporated into AQIM's Algerian-based units. In 2008, AQIM claimed responsibility for two attacks in Mauritania, including an attack on a military patrol that resulted in the beheading of 12 Mauritanian soldiers near Zouerate and an attack on the Israeli Embassy in Nouakchott.¹³ In 2009, AQIM claimed responsibility for the murder of an American working in Mauritania and for a suicide attack targeting the French Embassy in Nouakchott (during which only the bomber was killed).¹⁴ AQIM claimed the suicide attack after a delay of 10 days, suggesting that AQIM's central leadership may not have anticipated the attack, and it appears that AQIM's Mauritanian cells remain weak.

Until recently, AQIM appears to have had a tacit noninterference agreement with the Malian Government: AQIM refrained from attacking Malian interests and the

⁹ Andrew Black, "AQIM's Expanding Internationalist Agenda," CTC Sentinel, Vol. 1 Issue 5, April 2008; Hanna Rogan, "Violent Trends in Algeria Since 9/11," CTC Sentinel, Vol. 1 Issue 12, November 2008.

¹⁰ Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center, "JTIC Briefing: Algerian Jihadists Continue Attacks Despite Internal Rifts," September 27, 2007.

¹¹ In 2008, al-Qaeda announced that the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) had merged with al-Qaeda. LIFG has little (if any) ground presence in Libya, as most of its members were either arrested or fled the country in the late 1990's. As a result, LIFG is unlikely to provide much in the way of support to AQIM.

¹² Hamid Yas, "Police Investigation Reveals that Mauritians, Nigerians, and Libyans are Members of Al-Qaidah in Algeria," El-Khabar, May 22, 2007.

¹³ Media Committee of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb, "Statement on New Victories of the Mujahidin in Algeria and Mauritania," Al-Fajr Media, December 29, 2007.

¹⁴ Media Committee of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb, "Claim of Responsibility for Killing the American Infidel: 'Christopher Langis (sic),' in Nouakchott," Al-Fajr Media, June 24, 2009 and "Statement Claiming the Operation on the French Embassy in Nouakchott," Al-Fajr Media, August 18, 2009, respectively.

government ignored its presence.¹⁵ However, AQIM's execution of Edwin Dyer in May 2009 followed by the June assassination of a senior Malian army officer in his home in Timbuktu appear to have tipped the balance.¹⁶ Malian forces engaged AQIM in May and again in July of this year, killing dozens of AQIM fighters while losing at least five of their own.¹⁷ AQIM may be at risk of losing its safe haven in Mali as a result of its strategic miscalculation. In order to permanently deny AQIM sanctuary, however, the Malian Government would need the cooperation of the local Touareg population. In the near term, AQIM may be able to ride out the Malian armed forces' campaign by relocating to Mauritania or Niger.

There has been some speculation that AQIM could join forces with other militant Muslims living in sub-Saharan Africa, specifically extremist groups in Northern Nigeria and the Polisario in Western Sahara. Although AQIM may share some ideological common ground with a small number of militant Nigerians, there are cultural, linguistic, and geographic barriers that inhibit cooperation between them. Conservative Islamist elements in Nigeria have been primarily concerned with implementing shari'a law in the northern areas of Nigeria. AQIM has little to offer them, and they are unlikely to see any benefit in aligning with a foreign terrorist group. While a handful of Nigerians may join AQIM's combat units or provide logistical support, it is unlikely that AQIM will recruit large numbers of Nigerian jihadists. As for the Polisario—an armed group seeking an independent state for the Sahrawi people in the Western Sahara—while Salafi and Salafi-jihadist ideologies may be making inroads within the Polisario camps, the Polisario does not share AQIM's goal of establishing an Islamic state, and the Polisario itself has denied any association with al-Qaeda.¹⁸ As such, the likelihood of AQIM absorbing or affiliating with the Polisario is remote, although it is possible that the groups may cooperate on the movement of people or materiel.¹⁹

THE NEEDS OF STATES IN THE REGION AND U.S. POLICY RESPONSES

AQIM is likely to seek to expand its activities in the Sahel, including the kidnapping of foreigners, and it may increasingly seek to target Western interests in the region as a means to maintain its bona fides within the larger jihadist movement. As such, the group poses an ongoing threat to U.S. citizens and interests in the region. This threat is best countered by a multipronged U.S. policy response that includes programs designed to support development, governance, and security.

The causes of insecurity in the Sahel need to be understood and addressed in a regional context. Although each country in the Sahel poses unique opportunities and challenges for engagement, U.S. policy toward the region needs to take an integrated approach that incorporates both the Sahel and the states in North Africa. Although certain kinds of engagements—such as police training and support for greater rule of law—that target particular ministries or departments are best conducted via bilateral agreements, many of the problems in the region are transnational in nature, and are best treated as such. It will be of little use to improve education in Mali without a comparable effort in Niger, and little help to improve police capability in Mauritania but not in Mali.

Recent studies indicate that emphasizing police and intelligence capabilities is particularly useful in countering terrorism, and research also suggests that political violence may be reduced through measures that improve the quality of life for people in the affected areas.²⁰ The Sahel states need support in improving governance, transparency, accountability, political participation, and rule of law. Traditional development assistance should be targeted toward building local capacity to improve health, the environment, sustainable agriculture, and education, with particular

¹⁵ In a statement released on July 7, 2009, AQIM articulated its understanding of the tacit agreement: "You know very well that we do not have to fight you. . . . We only came your way in the past after you captured our brothers and you committed acts of aggression against us." Media Committee of al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb, Al-Fajr Media, July 9, 2009.

¹⁶ Jeune Afrique, "Murders in the Sahel," June 9, 2009.

¹⁷ BBC News, "Mali Army 'Takes al-Qaeda Base'"—June 17, 2009, online report, last accessed August 23, 2009, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8104491.stm>.

¹⁸ Anneli Botha, "Terrorism in the Maghreb: The Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism," ISS Monograph Series, No. 144, June 2008.

¹⁹ Abu Mus'ab al-Sun suggests that some cooperation took place between the early Algerian jihad movement—specifically the GIA—and the Polisario, but he later states that the relationship deteriorated over time. See al-Suri, "A Call to Global Islamic Resistance," p. 781.

²⁰ Recent related RAND reports include: "How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida," by Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, MG-741-RC, 2008; "Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together," edited by Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin, MG-8949-08D, 2009; and "More Freedom, Less Terror? Liberalization and Political Violence in the Arab World" by Dalia Dassa Kaye et al., MG-772, 2008.

emphasis on improving educational access for girls. Security sector training and assistance is needed to professionalize local security services—including the police and judiciary, the gendarmerie, and the military—and to institute legal and judicial frameworks to facilitate criminal prosecution of terrorist suspects. Regional military and security services also need support in developing efficient intelligence structures and appropriate mechanisms for rapid response to terrorist incidents.

The United States has wide array of policy mechanisms to combat terrorism in the Sahel. AQIM (as well as its predecessor organizations, the GPSC and GIA) is designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the State Department, and several AQIM members, including Emir Abu Mus'ab 'Abd al-Wadud, are on the Department of Treasury's list of Specially Designated Nationals. Additionally, the FBI's legal attachés support initiatives that promote regional counterterrorism cooperation, and traditional bilateral military relationships facilitate counterterrorism training and operations. One of the main avenues for regional engagement on counterterrorism has been the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). The goal of the TSCTP is to build partner capacity for counterterrorism and facilitate efforts to counter extremist thought. Begun in 2005 as the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), this interagency program has grown to include nine countries—Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Niger, Tunisia, and Mauritania, Senegal, Nigeria, and Chad.²¹

Some critics of the TSCTP have suggested that the program has encouraged African governments to exaggerate the nature of terrorist threats in their territory in order to receive military assistance that might then be used to suppress internal dissent. This may have been the case when the PSI was created in 2005, but given that AQIM has moved aggressively into the Sahel over the last several years, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger have even greater reason to participate. In the early years of the program, there was an essential difference of opinion between the United States and the African governments over the nature of the terrorist threat in Africa. The United States has necessarily been primarily concerned with incidents of international terrorism, whereas most African officials are preoccupied with terrorism that poses a threat to domestic security. In the last year, AQIM has demonstrated that it, at least, is both a domestic and international threat.

High-profile programs like TSCTP are an effective way to focus human and financial resources on the problem of terrorism in the Sahel, but difficulties in implementation and interagency cooperation appear to hinder the effectiveness of the program. Furthermore, a visible U.S. footprint may not be appropriate in all countries, as particular aspects of the TSCTP are politically sensitive. For example, when the United States assisted the Algerian Government in expanding its physical military infrastructure in the south of the country, local press reports immediately suggested that the United States was constructing a secret intelligence base in the desert. Suspicion, misinformation, or confusion about the nature of U.S. counterterrorist programs in the Sahel will undermine our ability to reduce terrorism, extremism, and anti-American sentiment. Many people in the Sahel are already suspicious of U.S. motives for involvement in local security affairs, and on several occasions, AQIM has pointed to TSCTP activities and AFRICOM's presence as evidence of American "occupation" of Muslim lands.²² In planning anti- or counter-terrorist policies, the United States needs to take into account local sensitivities and ensure that the scope and the reasons for our activities are communicated to both the host government and the local population.

CONCLUSION

Reducing terrorism and insecurity in the Sahel requires steady, consistent, long-term engagement by the United States in order to address the immediate threat of terrorism and criminality while improving human security in a broader sense. There is no silver bullet for solving the problems in the Sahel, and the region faces complex, interconnected problems that require integrated solutions. Going forward, the United States should continue to focus its efforts on developing partner capacity. Specifically, the United States should seek to build counterterrorist, antiterrorist, and judicial capacity in the affected states and, rather than emphasizing military capabilities, the United States should focus on programs that support the professionalization and modernization of police, investigative, and intelligence services. The United States should also push for serious, tangible mechanisms for regional cooperation, specifically intelligence-sharing, both within the region and with European partners.

²¹ <http://www.africom.mil/tsctp.asp>, accessed November 8, 2009.

²² Abu Musab 'Abd-al-Wadud, "A Message to Our Ummah in the Islamic Maghreb," September 21, 2008.

AQIM and other terrorist groups will always be able to find recruits among the small pool of fellow extremists who share their distorted vision of jihad, but their ability to draw active or tacit support from populations in the Sahel can be curtailed with a combination of targeted security assistance and development aid. Activities that allow local governments to reduce AQIM's ability to operate while also undermining its appeal to potential recruits stand the best chance of reducing insecurity in the Sahel.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you very much, Ms. Kennedy-Boudali. Dr. Gutelius.

STATEMENT OF DR. DAVID GUTELIUS, FOUNDER AND PARTNER, ISHTIRAK, CONSULTING SENIOR FELLOW, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY APPLIED PHYSICS LABORATORY, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Dr. GUTELIUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify on a set of issues that I believe is key to the stability of both the Sahel and greater Saharan region.

Today we face an uncertain, complex, ever-shifting situation across the nations that straddle the Sahara and Sahel. While certain issues seem new—natural resource exploitation, the emergence of AQIM, and recent revolts in both Niger and Mali—these are, in many ways, simply newer threads of a much older weave.

From a local perspective, neither GSPC nor AQIM are considered major threats, nor is Salafism, per se. To those living on the southern edge of the Sahara, the most critical issues are perhaps not surprising: (1) Environmental degradation; (2) differential access to resources and extreme poverty; (3) the sharp growth of smuggling; and (4) continued political disenfranchisement of key northern populations.

Many of these issues, with one exception, is new. The Sahel has seen serious desiccation punctuated by periodic droughts over the last 40 years, which has had a devastating local impact.

Northerners, Berabiche and Tamashek in particular, are largely marginalized by southern majorities that control national politics, armed forces, foreign direct investment, and the foreign aide that flows into Mali and Niger.

Informal trade remains a staple of economic activity through the desert because there are few other ways for people to sustain themselves.

One major exception to these longer term dynamics is the changing nature and scale of smuggling. Over the last 4 to 5 years especially, the volume of the cross-desert trade has grown sharply, and cocaine has overtaken other commodities: people, cigarettes, fuel.

This new trade may be creating the conditions for serious political disintegration. This, to me, is the largest current threat to regional stability, rather than either AQIM specifically or reformist Islam more generally.

My written testimony discusses AQIM's shifting fortunes, the tenuous links between ideology and violence in the Sahel, the rise of the Trans-Saharan drug trade, and local perceptions of the TSCTP response.

Let me just summarize in saying that the threat of instability in the Sahel is very real, but the source of that threat is more directly linked to economic desperation, criminality, differential access to

political and economic control, rather than al-Qaeda or Salafist ideology.

Terrorists do indeed pose a real threat, but we tend to give these groups more credit than they deserve. U.S. counterterrorism efforts should provide a well-integrated programmatic focus on those larger regional challenges and hold U.S. agencies and their partners accountable for outcomes. The stakes are high and growing, not just for African Governments, but for the United States and Europe, as well.

I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Gutelius follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. DAVID GUTELIUS, PARTNER, ISHTIRAK, CONSULTING SENIOR FELLOW, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY APPLIED PHYSICS LABORATORY, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Thank you, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to testify on a set of issues that I believe is key to the stability of both the Sahel and greater Saharan region.

Today we face an uncertain, complex, ever-shifting situation across the nations that straddle the Sahel and Sahara. It is worth pointing out, however, that this is hardly new. While certain factors seem new, such as the discovery of and interest in natural resource exploitation, the emergence of a new al-Qaeda franchise in AQIM, and recent revolts in Niger and Mali, in many ways are simply newer threads of an older weave and belong to a much longer history.

Today the committee is focused on two related subthemes, roughly the performance to date of U.S. counterterrorism efforts and especially the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and emergence and prospects for violent extremism and criminality in Mali and Niger, with a particular focus on al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM). From a local perspective, neither GSPC nor AQIM have ever been considered major threats, nor has Salafism's more violent strain, per se. U.S. policy, on the contrary, has made these a priority and in doing so, has sometimes made worse local political and social dynamics in Sahel and worked to bolster, rather than suffocate, AQIM and the GSPC before it. To be sure, AQIM poses a certain kind of threat and the United States and its Malian and Nigerien allies have had important tactical successes over the last 6 years. But these successes have come at some cost, and it is unclear if U.S. officials appreciate that those continuing costs affect the overall success of such programs as the TSCTP.

The most critical regional issues are (1) environmental change (2) differential access to resources and extreme poverty (3) the growth of the value and volume in real terms of smuggling (4) and continued political disenfranchisement of northern populations, particularly the Tamashek (Tuareg). Yet U.S. policy has more narrowly focused on terrorism and extremism, and indirectly addressing these much more pressing concerns.

None of these larger issues—with one exception—is new. The southern Sahara has seen serious desiccation punctuated by severe periodic droughts over the last 40 years, which has had a devastating impact on local livelihoods. Northerners (Arabs and Tamshek in particular) are, as ever, largely seen and treated as bandits by the southern majorities who control national politics, armed forces, foreign direct investment, and the foreign aid that flows into Mali and Niger. Informal trade remains a staple of economic activity through the desert—there are few other ways for people to sustain themselves in the Sahara's edge.

The one major exception to these longer term dynamics is the changing nature and scale of smuggling. Over the past decade, and particularly in the last 4 to 5 years, the volume of trade has increased and cocaine has rapidly overtaken other commodities (people, cigarettes, fuel) in the long distance cross-desert trade. Demand from Europe and the relative efficiency of South American cartels in moving drugs to and through West African ports has led an exponential growth in the value and volume of the trade. Less appreciated, however, is that this has affected social and political patterns that may be creating more opportunities for political disintegration as the sheer number of those involved in this new trade grows. In my view, this is the largest current threat to regional stability—rather than either AQIM specifically or reformist Islam more generally. I will return to this point, below.

The fortunes of AQIM and of Abdel-Wadoud (Abdel Malik Droukdal) have waxed and waned over the past 5 years since he rose to the head of GSPC (Groupe Salafiste pour la predication et le combat). His reputation in the community and related ability to command have relied on several discrete factors: (1) closeness (real and perceived) to the al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan; (2) success in attacking Algerian military targets, the older focus of GSPC's ire; (3) attacks against Western civilian targets; and (4) personal relationships between key lieutenants (called Emirs) located across the major Algerian provinces, and particularly the Emirs of Zone IX, the southernmost Algerian province, and other Saharan-based cells.

By 2005, serious rifts appear to have threatened Droukdal's authority and AQIM's ability to keep or attract members. His move to ally himself and the remnants of the GSPC with al-Qaeda in 2006 was likely a last-ditch effort at shoring up support among a core of harder-line, more ideologically driven members of his organization and a perceived path to gaining newer, younger adherents. In some ways, the move has succeeded. From all accounts, the GSPC in 2005–06 was a broken, dysfunctional organization of loosely affiliated gangs, with those hiding in the Sahel seemingly more interested in smuggling and extortion rather than any particular Salafi Jihadiyya ideals. While Droukdal also likely expected a windfall of financial resources and perhaps equipment and advisors, AQIM has not done much better than GSPC did. It has attracted new members (who appear to be a mixture of everything from committed Salafis to common criminals), but also seen many of the older guard GSPC leave, retire, or take advantage of the periodic amnesty programs Algeria offers. It appears to have received a small sum of money from abroad in 2006–07. But it also appears that a combination of multinational, multiagency counterterrorism efforts effectively put pressure on key transnational networks that could link AQIM with other groups.¹ It seems clear that today AQIM finds it difficult to effectively resource its operations from foreign donations.

The Algerian military establishment remained the main stated focus of GSPC violence throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Droukdal's somewhat abrupt switch from Algerian military targets to mainly Western civilian in 2006 was carefully calculated to manage his new brand. At the same time, Droukdal purged much of the senior GSPC leadership, in a conscious effort to reject the semi-independence (particularly in an economic sense) of what he saw as less "pure" Salafists—mainly those south of the Atlas Mountains. The calculation also took into account the fact GSPC as a brand had a weak reach outside of Algeria proper, the fact that America and allies had begun the Pan-Sahel Initiative which had already stirred local anger in conservative Islamist circles across North and West Africa, and the hope that al-Qaeda would reward the newly reminted organization for its renewed commitment to proper Salafi credentials.²

But below the surface, Droukdal balanced a new commitment with older GSPC tendencies and principles. Fearful of alienating a large contingent of older GSPC members, Droukdal renewed tactically familiar hit and run attacks on Algerian military targets even while younger members of the AQIM blew themselves up in the hopes of gaining martyrdom (for example, the 11 April 2007 suicide bombings in Algiers that killed 30 and wounded 220).

In late 2008 and early 2009, however, AQIM scored important victories that have put them in a stronger position, and more importantly offered a path to financial independence. The committee is no doubt familiar with the spate of recent kidnappings in Mali and Niger. More than any other single factor, the willingness of governments and companies to pay ransoms for prisoners has been the decisive factor in bolstering AQIM and its growing network of semiadherents and smuggler allies. It has created in the two several years a small-scale industry of targeting foreigners, mostly Westerners, and served to help realize some of Droukdal's larger ambitions in the region. While formal recruitment into the organization is still likely challenging, the organization has been able to strengthen its ties with a number of local leaders, throughout the Sahara and Sahel—not on the basis of ideology, but mostly

¹ Souad Mekhennet and Michael Moss, "Ragtag Insurgency Gain a New Lifeline From al-Qaeda," *New York Times*, July 1, 2008. Nicolas Schmidle, "A Saharan Conundrum" *New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 2009.

² A fascinating example of this can actually be heard in a *New York Times* audio interview with Droukdal, where Droukdal uses carefully chosen classical Arabic when explaining AQIM's Islamist credentials and goals, but inadvertently switches to his native Algerian dialect when asked about his opinions of Bouteflika and the Algerian Government. He literally could not reframe the older, familiar anti-Algerian state GSPC rhetoric in the language of the global Jihad. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/world/africa/01algeria.html?_r=2&hp&oref=slogin.

on the basis of shared economic interests. This does not mean an increase in the absolute numbers of fighters under AQIM command, but does mean that AQIM is developing an enabling support network for its larger interests.

IDEOLOGY AND VIOLENCE

AQIM's stated brand of Islam is generally and quite often roundly rejected in the Sahel. There is something of a stereotype of "African Islam" being more "tolerant" and moderate than Islam as it is practiced elsewhere, and like most stereotypes it has a shade of truth to it. The vast majority of Muslims in the Sahel follow the generally more tolerant Maliki and Shafi'i jurisprudence rather than the Hanbali school associated with Wahhabism and Salafism. But the Sahel is generally a fairly conservative place; memory is strong (if fluid), customary practice matters, and there is a long history of Islamic intellectual production—the traces of which are on full display today in traveling exhibitions of unique manuscripts from places like Timbuktu, Gao, and Agadez.

It is vital that we not lump reformist-oriented Muslims together. Following a more or less conservative interpretation of Islamic law (in comparison to what?) does by no stretch necessarily mean sympathy with AQIM or even with nonlocal interpretations of Islam such as Wahhabism. Do Wahhabi and Salafi ideas find some purchase in the Sahel? To a certain limited extent and in some communities, yes. But so do the ideas of the Pakistani Jama'a al-Tabligh as well as the Libyan Dawa (both of which opened missions in northern Mali in the past several years). More importantly, there exists a long, rich and local history of quite conservative interpretation of Islamic law; whether within the Songhai, Arab or Tamashek populations, sources of reformist thought and education are readily at hand.

The question about the "spread" of Salafism/Wahhabism/Qutbism as it has so often been posed within U.S. analyst circles (each of which is distinct) is both distracting and unhelpful. It presumes both a kind of ideological epidemic and weakness of mind on the part of local actors. It also presumes a causal connection between ideology and violence in the Sahel that does not exist. In any case, countering ideology is fraught with difficulty, and carries the burden of neocolonialism that makes it nearly impossible to succeed. More importantly, however, the presumed spread of Salafi al-Jihadiyya is not nearly as important to the stability of the region as more prosaic problems of smuggling, differential resource access, and the changing natural environment.

The U.S. has the opportunity to avoid making similar mistakes and becoming perceived as a neocolonial power in the region. But this will take not just reframing questions and avoiding easy stereotypes of entire populations as "tribal" and susceptible, but also taking a substantively different tack in addressing deeper regional challenges. And it will take a level of coordination and commitment that we have so far been unwilling or unable to muster.

SMUGGLING

One key variable in the political stability of the Sahel remains control of informal capital flows and markets, which, next to aid dollars, bolster the wider Saharan region (Keenan 2006: 286–287). The question over who gets access to capital of differing types—to a more expansive sense of capital that includes social prestige, *baraka*³, authenticity, rightful claims to privilege as well as property, goods, and currency—and the extent to which local leaders establish their own social positions as providers of this capital directly reflect the social power they can wield.

Particularly since 2001, smuggling has become a major site of struggle between various interest groups, including U.S. military, national governments, and local authorities, as the main way (outside foreign donations or investments) for many northern leaders and their communities to remain self-sufficient and autonomous. American pressure to completely shut down illicit market networks completely in order to starve potential terrorist networks has largely backfired so far. Here again, Kel Ifoghas and Kunta leaders have told me that the United States is increasingly characterized as working with corrupt government lackeys against the interests of everyday people in the Saharan fringe, the vast majority of whom rely on informal economies to get by every day.

These informal marketing activities include important social practices by which communities in desert-side societies not only cope with environmental degradation and social change, but also shifting formal sector markets that continue to put northern populations at a disadvantage. Smuggling remains a long-cherished symbol of autonomy and control and an important part of both social practices (ideas

³Literally, "blessing" or divine presence.

of protection, blessing, or right of passage) and shifting political alliances. Here, religious authority and memory may be mixing in ways akin to the 19th century Sahara when the Kunta, for instance, used their religious authority to legitimize the tobacco and slave trades, partially as a way of competing with reformist Massina leaders in the south. Today's struggle over illicit trafficking bears resemblance to the ways in which leaders established and deployed Islam both before and during the colonial era. The rhetoric of this social process may differ, but the outlines of that past remain powerful. This is not to make excuses for illicit trafficking, but it does point up that there's more to smuggling than outright banditry.

While analysts rightly point out how ransom revenues has allowed AQIM to purchase an ever-more sophisticated array of weaponry, there is a far more productive way of putting that capital to work for longer term growth: smuggling drugs. The older smuggling operations in people, fuel, cigarettes, and other commodities still exist but the potential profits simply cannot compare to cocaine. This is relatively new. When I first lived in Timbuktu over a decade ago, smugglers favored cigarettes as the preferred commodity and had constructed sophisticated and relatively efficient mechanisms that included import, remanufacture and repackaging, forgery, a secure system of exchange and a network that spanned from the ports of West Africa through the Sahara to Eastern Europe. The new cocaine operations, bankrolled now by a number of stakeholders from major South American cartels to AQIM to Eastern European mafia, make the cigarette trade seem quaint.

As pressures have grown on smugglers since 2002, increased risk seems to have recently helped push some key commodity prices higher in major Saharan markets, and touched off violent competition between major merchant groups operating in and around the desert (Cissé 2003; Sylla 2004).⁴ But with the newer cocaine trade there is a qualitatively and quantitatively different phenomenon. The stakes and scale of both the extended trade networks supporting it and the levels of violence are growing at an alarming rate. And trying to kill off the entire regional informal economy without viable short- and long-term livelihood alternatives would likely have the opposite effect to what most American strategists and Bamako or Niamey politicians intend: that is, it would increase political instability in the north and ire against the governments of both Mali and Niger.⁵

The rise of the cocaine trade, fueled by South American cartels' credit and transport from West African ports, has grown exponentially over just the past 5 years. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime estimated that West Africa handled 40 to 50 tons of cocaine, worth an estimated \$1.8B at European wholesale prices, in 2007.⁶ The real volume is likely much higher.⁷

This growth has worked to both destabilize authority (both central government authority and that of local leaders) and catalyze or concretize networks that support the trade. If the trans-Saharan cocaine trade develops as other cocaine smuggling routes have, we can expect to see an explosion of violence as different gangs, groups, and factions vie for control and a share of the profits. Distribution networks will be paid in drugs, which will likely fragment competition and gradually draw more people into the traffic. Again, if history is any guide, this will likely infect police and military forces and could eventually lead to the Sahel to become a fragmented narcoregion.⁸ And in fact, the phenomenon is currently on full view in places such as Senegal, where drug money is reportedly fueling a building boom in Dakar.⁹

So far it remains unclear how deeply involved the AQIM organization is in these networks, but anecdotal evidence suggests that individual AQIM members—particularly operating in Mauritania, Mali and Niger are already directly involved.¹⁰ It seems clear that at least sections of AQIM are not just willing to engage in drug smuggling, but are also looking for additional ways to support their future oper-

⁴The recent bitter feud between prominent Kunta and Moor families, particularly since 2003, are apparently linked to these market shifts—again with echoes of competition that are, in this case, well beyond a century old.

⁵Certainly the recent history of the unintended consequences of trying to quash black markets can provide lessons, most particularly in Afghanistan and Columbia.

⁶Douglas Farah, "Confronting Drug Trafficking in West Africa" Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, June 23, 2009.

⁷Thomas Harrigan of DEA estimates between three and five times higher than the U.N. estimate in 2007. See his "Confronting Drug Trafficking in West Africa" Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, June 23, 2009.

⁸Farah, "Confronting Drug Trafficking in West Africa."

⁹Christopher Thompson, "Fears for Stability in West Africa as Cartels Move In." *Guardian* U.K. March 10, 2009.

¹⁰Cf. the blog Moor next Door, "AQIM-Mauritania—Quite Saharan, In Fact." Sept 21, 2008. Accessed 11/10/09 at <http://themoornextdoor.wordpress.com/2008/09/21/aqimmauritania-quite-saharan-in-fact/>.

ational activities. Their expansion in the Sahel will depend less on finding those who share their ideology and more on where economic opportunities coincide with other groups. Again, this highlights the importance of the larger shifts in informal markets, protection rackets, and money laundering rather than the particular attitudes and ideologies in the future of AQIM in the region.

PAN-SAHEL INITIATIVE AND TSCTP

In 2002, the U.S. Government's goal was simply to watch and monitor activity in and around the Sahara, since at that point there was little consensus within the American administration as to what next steps should be. What began as an extension of intelligence gathering, however, became an important campaign to quash what at that time was loosely referred to as "Al Qaida in Africa." In late 2002, this culminated in the formation of the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), the U.S. State Department-funded, Defense Department-run program meant to provide training and equipment to regional militaries as well as to develop military-to-military relationships with key regional military commanders.¹¹ American military advisors spent time in Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad between 2003 and 2005, training security forces in weapons and communications technologies, small unit maneuvers, and mobile warfare.

From the beginning in 2003, key Tamashek and Arab populations were largely left out of PSI-sponsored activities, exacerbating the longstanding ill-will between these groups and the national governments of Niger and Mali. This fact, combined with the rhetoric U.S. officials and their local allies used at the time very quickly brought out older tensions and suspicions, and linked them to the U.S. military.¹² Fearful, highly speculative language remains a common element in reports and public statements from the American Government—statements which are widely published and easily accessible across Mali and Niger, including the north (Fisher-Thompson 2004; USAID 2005: 3–4; Keenan 2006: 274–275). Part of this self-fulfilling prophecy stems from the outlook of U.S. analysts and other personnel, who have tended to lump reformist leaders and organizations in the Sahel as undifferentiated Salafist-oriented threats to regional peace and stability. On a trip into the north of the Mali, for example, former U.S. Ambassador to Mali Huddleston warned with alarm: "With the Dawa [alTabligh], were dealing with something even more worrisome because they're in the north. The Salafists are in the north and they are terrorists. And there are connections between them." (Anderson 2004) This attitude, along with the Malian Government's responses, had the effect of driving Islamic missionaries and at least some Muslim community leaders closer together (Kimberly 2005).

Rumors of inappropriate conduct of U.S. personnel also began to spread across the southern Sahara over 2004, and public statements by American military leaders and interpreted and rebroadcast by northern political leaders added to resentment among northern leaders (ICG 2005: 31; U.S. House of Representatives 2005: 22–27). The rhetoric on the American side often continues to repeat allusions to the Sahara as a lawless, traditionally violent place; a breeding ground for terrorists, and a swamp that needs draining (For example, Powell 2004; CBSNews 2004; Motlagh 2005; McKaughan 2005). Political pundits and armchair analysts in the West have used the repeatedly same imagery and even phrases repeatedly—imagery that some political clients in Mali and Niger in the Sahara have since adopted in their own statements as way of attracting and maintaining American aid (Diarra 2006; Takiou 2006). On the desert side, stories about these stories and about U.S. forces began to spread both informally among trade networks and in radio broadcasts—at a time (in 2003) when the American military in Iraq had become the daily focus of every Middle East media outlet in the world.

For its missteps, PSI also had clear and important successes, most notably in helping to capture El Para and a number of accomplices when they kidnapped several dozen European tourists in 2003. But these strategic successes have come at some cost. In Mali and Niger, PSI money and programs acted to widen the perceived gulfs between north and south, as well as between northern nomadic and sedentary populations. The U.S. has funneled millions of aid dollars to the Malian and Nigerien Governments since 2003 under PSI and subsequently under TSCTP. Northerners complain that these new moneys have remained solidly within the hands of the Bambara-dominated government, taking both local political and economic oppor-

¹¹ See the State Department's official announcement at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/14987.htm>.

¹² Gutelius, "U.S. Creates Enemies Where There Were None," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 11, 2003.

tunities away from local people. It seems that whatever the case, the PSI program aid—and to a lesser extent, TSCTP aid—quickly became a politicized symbol of a contest for power in the North. It is unclear to what extent this affected the dynamics of the most recent (but separate) Tuareg rebellions in Mali and Niger in 2007–09, but infighting and claims of economic and political oppression became core rallying cries of both movements.

WAYS FORWARD

In assessing the effectiveness of U.S. counterterrorism activities and particularly the TSCTP, I can only speak from the perspective of (a) what I see firsthand and through local French and Arabic press and (b) what locals and NGO practitioners in Northern Mali, and less directly, in Niger tell me—and less from any privileged government view.

Partnering with the Malian and Nigerien Governments, while without a doubt necessary, has had a mixed record, in my view. The emphasis on working with national-level institutions, while necessary, creates a preset friction in the northern Sahel that is difficult to overcome without balancing those efforts with more local society outreach, sustained local presence and specifically nonmilitary programming. PSI's initial execution increased local resentment of both national armies and their U.S. backers. Over time and with TSCTP, the United States began to alter the approach and although TSCTP programs are showing the first signs of progress, more needs doing. Related, TSCTP programs appear as overly executed by proxies, whether those are NGO subcontractors or Malian and Nigerien Government institutions.

Agencies involved in TSCTP should consider increasing their presence where establishing long-term local relationships are key to the success of its programs. There continues to be a severe lack of information about ongoing programs and their effects at the local level, in large measure because we have few people on the ground and few specialists with relevant languages and training interfacing with local communities. Funding for local data gathering and analysis, including survey instruments, should be a part of the TSCTP toolkit (and in fact exactly such a capability has inexplicably been removed from AFRICOM's FY 2010 budget). This may also mean opening staffed offices in Timbuktu, Agadez, and perhaps even Kidal. At the same time, more concerted nonmilitary efforts to visit effected communities on the desert edge, support of local cultural programs and institutions, and above all addressing local economies' viability are all requisite to addressing the larger issues of stability in the Sahel. In this connection, appropriate diplomatic pressure should be brought to bear on both Bamako and Niamey to ensure that aid and other resources are reliably reaching populations in the north of Mali and Niger and that U.S.-funded programs are having some expected local impact.

Can innovative technology help in addressing these questions? Yes, particularly in better information gathering, coordination, and decisionmaking. At Ishtirak, for example, we are working with NGOs and corporate social responsibility programs on a series of tools that can track development projects, lessons learned, and metrics, and assist with program planning and resource allocation. This can be coupled with lightweight data collection applications that work on any modest mobile or satellite phone, providing a near-real time picture of what's happening, who's involved, and how to improve outcomes. Technology, appropriately designed and deployed, can provide transparency, accountability, and coordination at a much higher level than we see today. As most of this technology is based on free open source software, there is no excuse not to make the most of it.

USAID, at its best, is one of the most effective ways to change minds on the ground about the United States and its motives. It needs a larger presence in the region, and should make program and infrastructure investments in concert with other U.S. agencies, development NGOs, and local partners. We should increase commitments to local livelihood programs and environmental monitoring and training programs and target more specifically fragile communities scattered across the Sahara's southern edge. GeekCorps and other creative USAID communications programs should be focused to improve communications networks in these areas, and should create a cadre of Malians and Nigeriens who can help sustain these networks on an ongoing basis. Most importantly, sustainable, small-scale businesses are needed to counteract the growing influence of illicit trafficking.

AFRICOM must work in concert with USAID and other agencies in both meeting the demands of the TSCTP and its own mission. While the command is still in its early days, General Ward has a chance to shape an innovative, nimble organization that works cohesively with both local African partners and other U.S. Government agencies. AFRICOM is making headway and this should be commended and fully

supported. But there is also a great deal of suspicion on the part of those who have not seen direct benefit from its military-to-military exchanges. AFRICOM should consider extending its outreach activities directly to those in northern Mali and Niger, in ways that also align with bettering lives in the region. And of course, working closely with USAID and the Department of State here can help in a number of ways.

Many of these ideas are recognized within U.S. policy circles already. The GAO completed an assessment of the TSCTP in July 2008 and found a number of aspects of the program that needed improvement.¹³ There is no comprehensive, integrated TSCTP plan. TSCTP lacks both coherent high-level goals and metrics for assessing progress against those goals over time. This holds true for U.S. Government activities and with Malian and Nigerien partners. While interagency coordination seems to have improved over time, it is clear that cooperation needs improvement. Continued tensions over State Department's authority over Defense Department personnel under TSCTP reflect this need.

Beyond this, however, TSCTP needs to shift its frame of reference from terrorism per se to the context that makes a sustained AQIM possible. It must more directly address the deeper, more immediate threats to Mali and Niger: environmental degradation, systematic disenfranchisement of Northerners, and the new smuggling economy. TSCTP in its current form will likely never have more than tactical successes against what is in reality small, loosely organized, opportunistic terrorist franchise—because addressing the larger threats are largely secondary to its focus on terrorism.

We must be clearer about what the stakes are in the Sahel and what our national interest is. I can tell you that the local perception, based on PSI and the initial activities under AFRICOM and the TSCTP is still strongly that the United States is first concerned with protecting and expanding American economic interests followed by controlling an al-Qaeda threat that exists mostly in the minds of American Government analysts and some European allies. The more we ignore the region's larger issues, the more this misperception gets reinforced.

In summary, the threat of instability in the Sahel is real, but the source of that threat is more directly linked to economic desperation, criminality, and differential access to political and economic control rather than al-Qaeda or Salafist ideology. AQIM and its allies still pose a real threat. But we tend to give the group more credit than it deserves. U.S. counterterrorism efforts should provide a well-planned, integrated programmatic focus on those larger regional challenges and hold itself and its partners accountable for outcomes. The stakes related to the growing criminality in the region that feeds violence and erodes societal institutions are high and growing—not just for African Governments, but for the United States and Europe as well. We ignore these at our collective peril.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you very much. And I certainly agree with you that the problem here has to do with the types of things you're talking about. It's an environment in which al-Qaeda-type organizations can thrive, but that is not necessarily the leading issue. It's something we have to address as a country with regard to our national security interests. But, having been to most of these countries, I certainly would share that assessment.

Let me start with Ms. Kennedy-Boudali. You wrote in your testimony that one of the reasons AQIM has turned its focus to the Sahel is that it has not been able to organize operational cells in Morocco or Libya or Tunisia. In your view, why is that? What challenges does AQIM face in these three countries?

Ms. KENNEDY-BOUDALI. Thank you, Senator. I think that's a really important question, because those three countries are the most logical partners for AQIM to seek support—support or recruits. But they have been unable to do so, in part because those states are that much more capable than the Sahel states, in terms of their ability to monitor extremist recruitment in their region, in

¹³GAO, GAO-08-860 "Combating Terrorism: Actions Needed To Enhance Implementation of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership," Report to the ranking member of the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, July 2008.

their ability to keep track of who's entering and exiting the country, and in their ability to control their populations, frankly. Those three states have very strong security services, as I mentioned. In Morocco, in particular, after the bombings in Casablanca in 2003, there was a wave of arrests, as I'm sure you're aware, of extremists; not only those with jihadist tendencies, but anyone who opposed the government, frankly. And as a result, whatever public support there might have been for terrorist activity was fragmented and splintered.

In the case of Libya, there was a jihadist movement that was quite active there in the 1990s, but it is severely weakened. And, additionally, a number of the jihadists that might have supported AQIM in Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia have probably switched their attention to conflicts elsewhere, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So, the pool of recruits that might have supported jihad in the region may now be more interested in looking toward Iraq or Afghanistan as a theater for their activities.

Senator FEINGOLD. You write that, while AQIM has succeeded in recruiting some fighters from the Sahel, its overall success in attracting new recruits is actually marginal. Now, to what do you attribute that lack of success, and what are the constraints to AQIM expanding its region's support in the Sahel? And you've alluded to some of these already, but—

Ms. KENNEDY-BOUDALI. Within Algeria, Senator, I think it's important to remember the context of that country's experience, with an extremely bloody civil war in the 1990s that killed—estimates range up to hundreds of thousands of people.

So, I think there's a sense, in Algeria itself, that the people are, quite simply, tired of hearing about these jihadist groups, and they're not supporting them because they've seen no benefit from them. They're—they make the lives of the people more difficult through extortion, through roadblocks, through violence and criminality. They're not proposing any positive political solution. They're seeking to overthrow the state, but I don't think people in the region see that their success would be any kind of improvement in their lives.

In the Sahel region—this has been mentioned by the previous panel, as well—I think AQIM's idea of what Islam means and what a good Muslim should do is, quite simply, an anathema to the people in the region. They don't support the idea of a Shariah-based governance; they're not interested in overthrowing the states in the region. It's just not a very competitive message.

Senator FEINGOLD. And you've mentioned the Tuareg, most of whom do not share al-Qaeda's ideological goals, either. What do you see as the key to gaining the support of Tuareg communities in the fight against AQIM?

Ms. KENNEDY-BOUDALI. I think this is probably the most important question regarding ways to disaggregate the threat in the Sahel. Different populations of Tuareg have different interests, so we don't want to bunch them together. Certainly, there is an element of some of the Tuareg populations that is involved in criminality, and they are probably best disaggregated from AQIM by highlighting the danger to themselves that AQIM has posed, because the increase in their—AQIM's—activity in the Sahel has

drawn the attention of, not only American, but also European and local security services. AQIM is making peoples' lives harder there.

For the majority of the Tuareg, who are law-abiding citizens with political concerns about representative government or the level of state interference in their affairs, I think governments in the region need support in finding solutions to reduce those grievances, whether that's a matter of increased educational opportunities, education in local languages, or increased access to economic opportunities, by presenting a better alternative. I think whatever level of Tuareg support or tolerance or tacit support may be going on, it could be reduced through engagement.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you very much.

Dr. Gutelius, I'm very interested in your observation of the trade in cocaine across the Sahel as rapidly increasing. And this subcommittee held a hearing earlier this year to explore the growing problem of drug trafficking in West Africa. In your assessment, what is driving the increasing trade in cocaine, and who are the key players in the trade?

Dr. GUTELIUS. Yes, that's an excellent question, Senator, thank you.

This is really a change over the last 5 years of, you know, being based in the north, living in Timbuktu for some time in the late 1990s, I've watched the nature of smuggling really change in pretty substantial ways.

It seems clear that South American cartels are directly involved from the supply end, but it goes beyond that. These cartels, as you've heard testimony on before, have a quite sophisticated array of both ways of getting the goods to the eventual markets, but also things like financing mechanisms. They've done this before, they're very experienced at it, and now it seems that they're following a similar pattern in West Africa, which I think is, you know, akin to the cancer we see throughout Central and South America.

The November 5 crash outside of GAO—I don't know if you're aware, but it was a—I think it was a DC-10, about 10-ton capacity flying from Venezuela, crashed on takeoff; it was able to deliver its goods, unfortunately, and forces are still trying to recover those. But, it highlights this problem of these desert-side entrepôts—these desert-side centers—for the trade across the Sahara.

The other part of the problem, obviously, is demand, and largely demand in Europe now, which is driving that trade and sucking it across the desert. The profits involved, I'm afraid, are driving different kinds of social and political relationships in the desert that I haven't seen before, alliances that I wouldn't have expected, necessarily.

Senator FEINGOLD. Give an example of an alliance—

Dr. GUTELIUS. Well, so, in the older—say 6 to 8 to 10 years ago, with the cigarette trade, which was the kind of king trade across the Sahara, in terms of profitability—about a billion-dollar industry 5 years ago—was really run by a set of Berabiche and Tuareg families, Tamashek families, that were fairly well known, they'd been in the trade for awhile, and, you know, had established networks that not only got the goods from West African ports, but also safely across the desert to their partners in North Africa.

Those same families are now competing with new kinds of networks that are much more directly related to the cocaine trade; much more specialized, in some ways. And that poses a problem for those older families and the power structures that they represent.

So, young guns—Lianne and I were actually talking about it before the session—young guns are actually able to challenge, in some ways, these more established networks. And a big problem there is that the middlemen are being paid now—just like we see in other areas where drug smuggling's a problem, being paid in drugs.

So, you have—as the sheer number of people involved in the trade grows, you have this possibility that the cancer that has affected other parts of the world will infect these societies, as well. That's not the case yet, but I fear, given the current trajectory, and just the, it seems, focus of the South American cartels and the ease with which they can still move those goods across the desert, that's where we're headed.

Senator FEINGOLD. OK.

Doctor, you were critical in your testimony of the tendency by U.S. analysts to sometimes conflate the spread of conservative Islam, particularly Wahhabism, and violent extremism. What are the implications of this tendency for counterterrorism efforts? And how could you recommend that the United States could shift its programming to avoid this kind of conflation?

Dr. GUTELIUS. I think there are several areas that we can focus on, and first and foremost is continuing to improve the execution of TSCTP. I think it's an innovative program in many ways, it can be an example for similar types of programs in the future. At this point, I still have to agree with the 2008 GAO assessment. And, from what I see on the ground, there's still a lot of fragmentation, in terms of, again, carrying out the program elements.

I think, from a Washington, DC, perspective, I think they are making a lot of progress, in terms of coordination. From a field perspective, from an on-the-ground perspective, it doesn't look that way.

So, I think a lot can be done there to harmonize what's happening on the ground. I think a big need is simply to listen a lot more for what some of these local populations, especially the targeted populations—Berabiche and Tamashek—want and need in their communities.

And I think the speaker from the previous panel—Ambassador Gast, I believe—mentioned listening clubs in Niger. And that's a great example. That's a great example of creating support on the ground and using that information to drive priorities, in terms of—whether it's USAID or AFRICOM types of activities.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you, Doctor.

Finally, before I turn to Senator Isakson, I agree with you that we need to increase our diplomatic presence in order to better gather information and build long-term local relationships. And I've been saying this about many neglected regions of Africa for many, many years.

If you were to advise the United States on expanding our presence in the Sahel, where would you begin? In your view, where

could opening a new U.S. office tomorrow make the biggest difference?

Dr. GUTELIUS. Yes. I think, Timbuktu, for a few different reasons. It's geographically central and allows us a kind of reach, not only in terms of just purely geography, but also culturally, that would afford us much more reach into the communities that we're interested in working with. And that's not simply the Tuaregs who, you know, many of which are based up in the Kidal region. But, also, it is, traditionally, a kind of, sort of, cross section of the desert population down there. So, that's one area, I think, where having a permanent mission or some small presence, especially with the State Department or USAID kind of leading that outward-facing representation of the United States would make a huge difference, in terms of credibility, for local populations.

Senator FEINGOLD. Well, I strongly agree with that. I had—one of the most memorable moments of my career was in Timbuktu, meeting, having lunch ceremony with the local Tuareg and other people, and we were discussing these kinds of issues, but also the broader range of issues. And this sense of it being not only a critical place now, but a traditional crossroads, as well as the classic center of Islamic learning, centuries ago. It really does make sense as a location.

Senator Isakson.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize I was late, to both of you. I really have two questions. The first, just to both of you. I think you both were here for the previous panel, is that not correct? If I state this wrong, please correct me, but our policy with regard to the partnership in the Sahel is basically to be a partner but sort of a step back from the forefront. Do you agree? I'd like for both of you to answer this. Do you agree with the posture the United States is taking with regard to the Counterterrorism Partnership?

Dr. GUTELIUS. I'll begin. Thank you, Senator.

In a sense, yes, especially when we're considering—specifically counterterrorist activities, and specifically with our AFRICOM initiatives. I think that's the right thing to do. I think that can be balanced; if you look at the program as a whole, I think that can be balanced. And, in fact, I think we need to actually put a United States or American face on especially some of the development activities that are happening, even ones that AFRICOM carries out. I think that's an important message that we're interested in more than simply bolstering militaries. We're interested in actually improving societies, in a very general sense.

And so, in a sense I understand the approach to kind of being a silent partner; at the same time that generates some cost, I think, for us. And one of the best ways this country has of showing its support for development worldwide is USAID. And I would love to see them more, kind of, publicly on the ground, creating these programs, and, again, putting an American face on the effort.

Senator ISAKSON. So, not a bunch of a public face in counterterrorism, but a big public face in terms of economic development, health care, things of that nature. Is that what I hear you saying?

Dr. GUTELIUS. That's correct.

Senator ISAKSON. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. KENNEDY-BOUDALI. I would agree with what Dr. Gutelius has said. And I would add that I think that approach is appropriate; to keep the counterterrorism and antiterrorism mission somewhat in the background, because it is very prone to misinterpretation in the region, particularly with the—I don't want to say the tendency—particularly with the fact that there are few trusted media outlets in the region, and so there's a great deal of rumor and misinformation and misinterpretation about the U.S. military presence in the region.

I think one of the things that could be done better is explaining to local governments and local media outlets what exactly the United States is doing in the region, to reduce this tendency for misinterpretation.

As far as putting a U.S. face on development activities, I think that's a great idea, and it does build—it does support—it could contribute to a reduction of anti-American sentiment, particularly programs, not only like USAID, but also the Peace Corps, which I—Senator, I believe you're also a member of the committee that governs Peace Corps funding. And that's dollar for dollar, a great program that puts an American face on very positive work that's done in the region.

Senator ISAKSON. Yes, it's something we lovingly refer to as “soft power” around here, but it is very important. I have not traveled to any of these countries, but many all around it where we have significant USAID, CARE, Save the Children, the Basic Education Coalition, and others that are winning a lot of friends and really changing the lives of the African people.

I have one other question. And I was reading the conclusion, Ms. Boudali, of your report, where you talked about there not being a silver bullet for solving the problem. I certainly agree with that, but I have a great concern because when you look at the map and you end at Chad, if you go further to the east is Sudan, next is Ethiopia, and next is Somalia. And if the Comprehensive Peace Agreement—which comes to a head, I think, February 2011—falls apart, and we get into civil war in Sudan again, it is close to tying a heavily terrorist-based Somalia closer and closer to some of these other organizations. Is that something that you worry about, or is the expanse of territory between the Sudan and Ethiopia so great you wouldn't worry about it?

Ms. KENNEDY-BOUDALI. That's a good question, Senator. I would worry about it, but I think we want to be careful to keep the caveats in mind. As you mentioned, there is a distance that separates those two conflicts, currently—not only a geographic distance, but there's also a cultural distance—that we should keep in mind.

One of the things that we know now from declassified documents is that al-Qaeda has experienced difficulty operating in Africa, and they are considered foreigners when they go there. So, despite the fact that they do seem to be increasingly involved in the conflict in Somalia, there are reasons to think that there are local interests that are not particularly supportive of al-Qaeda. And, although there has—it looks like there's some evidence of trafficking of weapons and people and things back and forth from the Horn of Africa to the Sahel and to North Africa, those relationships have existed throughout time. And I think when we look at those two

conflicts, we need to keep in mind that there are some differences between them.

I think it is important to watch what's going on and keep in mind what assistance we might give to states in the region that would particularly help them monitor borders and to keep track of flows of goods and people, because that could be one of the earliest indicators that there is a greater connection between the two theaters.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you, Senator Isakson, for your very active participation in this helpful hearing.

I want to thank the witnesses very much for your expertise and for your sharing it with us.

And that concludes the hearing.

[Whereupon, at 12:35 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY JOHNNIE CARSON TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR RUSSELL D. FEINGOLD

Question. As was mentioned, there have long been tensions between nomadic Tuareg communities and the governments in Niger and Mali, leading to a series of rebellions in the past. The most recent rebellions have ended, thanks to successful peace talks in both countries, but AQIM may seek to exploit lingering resentment among the Tuareg and to link up with existing rebel groups. How much of a concern is this and what can be done to prevent such partnerships from forming? Is there any risk that we could become a target of Tuareg grievances and play into AQIM's hands if we are seen by them as too closely associated with the government and specifically the military in Mali and/or Niger?

Answer. Tuareg communities in Niger and Mali have not proven receptive to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's (AQIM) ideology or tactics. There have been isolated instances where Tuaregs have tolerated AQIM's presence in their areas or entered into temporary arrangements to facilitate smuggling or other opportunistic trade. This dynamic has been problematic in cases where AQIM has purchased goods locally and provided small amounts of food and other consumables to generate good will or at least tolerance among those living in the vicinity. However, we have not seen a trend toward durable alliances or successful recruitment of individual Tuaregs. In fact, there have been indications that AQIM's murder of a Malian military officer this summer, the unprecedented execution of a British hostage, and murder of an American in Mauritania may have alienated certain groups in northern Mali that occasionally did business with the group.

We recognize, however, that AQIM may wish to exploit low levels of development and frustration produced by unmet economic expectations in northern Mali. Furthermore, in Mali a political settlement of Tuareg unrest is closely linked to promises of government attention and resources to the underdeveloped north. Whether in service of countering prospective extremism, or preventing renewal of tensions between the Tuareg and the Government of Mali that could undermine the recently solidified united front against AQIM, government development efforts in northern Mali are important. We are also concerned that breakdowns in the rule of law and poor economic conditions in certain areas have made individual Tuaregs and non-Tuaregs receptive to AQIM offers of bounties for hostages.

The United States has traditionally enjoyed good relations with Tuareg communities and our strong ties with the Malian Government have not negatively impacted those relations. Our Embassy in Bamako implements a range of outreach initiatives, including radio programming, with communities in the north that include Tuareg populations. USAID and State Department resources support a range of conflict resolution and development initiatives. In Niger, this has included the ESF-funded U.S. Institute of Peace conflict mitigation workshop held in Niamey in October 2008, which the High Commissioner for Restoration of Peace personally credits for advancing peace talks with rebel Tuareg groups. We have also been unequivocal

during our contacts with Tuaregs and government officials that we support peaceful resolution of outstanding political and economic disputes.

Question. As you know, Niger is in the midst of a political crisis. I am pleased that the administration has spoken out against the disputed legislative elections there in October and President Tandja's blatant disregard for democratic institutions. What is the administration currently doing to press for the resolution of this political crisis? And if it is not resolved soon, how will it affect our ability to cooperate with Niger on counterterrorism matters?

Answer. Our Ambassador to Niger on several occasions has made it very clear both to President Tandja and to other levels of the Government of Niger (GON) that there will be consequences to President Tandja's recent undemocratic actions. We are cutting off all bilateral nonhumanitarian assistance to the government and have placed visa restrictions on government officials who block Niger's return to democracy. We also support the efforts of international and regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, and the European Union, to pressure the Nigerien Government to return to democracy. ECOWAS, for example, has recently suspended Niger and sent a high-level mediator to start a dialogue between the GON and the opposition. The United Nations Secretary General offered for U.N. offices to work with regional partners, in particular the African Union and ECOWAS, to find a solution to this political crisis.

The current political situation limits the scope of our counterterrorism engagement with Niger. Prior to the events of the last several months, our military-to-military engagement had already been severely curtailed following credible reports of human rights violations by a Nigerien military unit. We anticipate using a similar approach to that used in Mauritania after the August 2008 coup, where security sector engagements were limited to low-profile activities that addressed potentially imminent threats. Security-sector engagements with longer term capacity-building objectives were halted.

Question. In the case of Chad, we are engaging with government that has a troubling record with regards to the rule of law and respect for human rights. As you know, the State Department's most recent human rights report for Chad cites "torture and rape by security forces" and "the use of excessive force and other abuses in internal conflict, including killings and use of child soldiers." Given that record and the lack of internal controls for accountability, does it make any sense to provide new capabilities to Chad's military without significant reforms? Outside of training and equipping the military, what are the other ways we can engage with the government there to strengthen the rule of law and law enforcement?

Answer. We continue to engage with the Government of Chad (GOC) on its human rights record, in particular, because of its abuses by its security forces and we do hold them accountable when abuse is confirmed. The GOC has taken steps to address certain human rights abuses, most notably the issue of child soldiers. The government, along with UNICEF, has visited Chadian military barracks in recent months to raise awareness on the issue of child soldiers and hand over child soldiers to UNICEF. We continue to urge the GOC to launch initiatives to eradicate child soldier recruitment and enforce the Chadian National Army Law prohibiting such recruitment. The GOC has also made its own attempts to reform the Chad Armed Forces (ANT) since February 2008, including efforts to support ethnically mixed units, eliminate military salaries to nonauthorized persons and enforce mandatory retirement for long-serving generals to rationalize its command structure. The GOC has further plans to retire some 300–500 colonels in the coming months.

The State Department seeks to ensure all Leahy vetting requirements are met. The State Department conducts thorough Leahy vetting procedures on any USG training of security officials or units, and has denied trainings due to reported human rights abuses. In an advocacy effort, we regularly discuss with the GOC our concerns with reports of human rights abuses attributed to individuals in the Chadian Army (ANT), including specifically with the PSI chain of command. Chad's PSI unit and its new chain of command recently have been vetted and cleared for training.

U.S. counterterrorism (CT) training will not provide Chad with new capabilities, but will provide its CT unit with expertise and training on combating terrorism. This training will have a multiplier effect on our ability to achieve other U.S. strategic goals in Chad. Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) security assistance can professionalize Chad's Armed Forces, including training on respect for human rights, while making the exercise of state power more legitimate in the eyes of the Chadian people and making Chad a more reliable partner in efforts to

reinforce regional security. Our programs allow U.S. security experts to reach out to Chadian police, customs officers, and other law enforcement officials as well as to the Chadian military.

Governing justly and democratically is a USG strategic goal that includes strengthening the rule of law in Chad. With limited Economic Support Fund resources, we have provided support for the Justice Ministry, and coordinate with our international partners, including the EU, which has a 35 million euro project to strengthen Chad's judicial system, including 4.8 million euros for training criminal investigators, magistrates, court clerks and other justice personnel, including those working in the penal system. For the rule of law to take hold in Chad, a change in mentality needs to occur and this must begin at an early age. Accordingly, we have supported the Education Ministry's efforts to develop a standardized civics education curriculum for Chad's schools, which led to the development of locally produced textbooks for grades 1–12 currently being used throughout the country.

RESPONSES OF COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM DANIEL BENJAMIN TO
QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR RUSSELL D. FEINGOLD

Question. You acknowledged that sometimes our counterterrorism training and assistance is used by governments in the Sahel “to take on antiregime rebels successfully.” When we provide training or assistance under the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), what mechanisms do we have to monitor and account for how governments use these new capabilities? And can you provide a thorough description of ways in which we have witnessed the use of our assistance by governments against groups not connected to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)? This may be classified if necessary.

Answer. The fundamental goal under the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) remains that our assistance be used specifically for counterterrorism (CT) purposes but we recognize that such assistance, like training and equipping, is fungible. We constantly monitor how our assistance is used and we remain vigilant to any reports of abuse. We do make it clear that our assistance comes with the price tag of the military operating under civilian control and that the military operate under respect for human rights norms in a bona fide and concrete manner.

We establish 505 End Use Agreements on how equipment can be used and we vet the personnel to be trained under the auspices of the Leahy law. We may also enter into a Memorandum of Understanding that will spell out the intended use of this equipment or training. Use of this equipment and the activities of the units is monitored on a continual basis by our embassies, Global Combatant Command personnel, and by visits from Washington-based officials. If a country acts in contravention to these agreements we can place future engagement on hold until the situation is clarified. We can also cancel or redirect engagement as we have done in Mauritania and Chad in the past and are doing currently with Niger.

The U.S. trained and equipped one Niger mobile light infantry company in 2005, funded during the pilot program to the TSCTP, the Pan Sahel Initiative. This company was active in providing security along Niger's northern border, but was, at times, deployed against the Nigerien Movement for Justice (MNJ) rebels which was conducting a low-intensity fight predominately consisting of skirmishes, ambushes, and mining of roads. At the time, the MNJ was a Tuareg-based rebel group challenging central government authority over the issue of perceived economic marginalization. The democratically elected Government of Niger, with U.S. encouragement that included a conflict negotiation workshop facilitated by the U.S. Institute for Peace, pursued several rounds of peace talks with the MNJ and other rebel groups, resulting in a de facto cease-fire, weapons handovers, and an executive order providing amnesty to rebels and those who supported them, including members of the Nigerien Armed Forces. In the end, the U.S. strategy was successful in encouraging a peaceful end to the conflict.

In Chad, units trained and equipped the Pan Sahel Initiative, known as PSI units, were utilized by the Chadian Government to thwart a Sudan-backed rebel takeover of the capital and government; i.e., during a national emergency. Upon learning that the government placed PSI units under a different chain of command with a primary mission that did not have CT as a core mission, we objected and halted assistance. Eventually, Chad reorganized again and placed its PSI units under an appropriate chain of command after the United States made it clear that further assistance would be impossible without this change.

Question. In your assessment, what motivated AQIM's predecessor, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, to formally merge with al-Qaeda in 2006? And without getting into classified information, how would you characterize the current relationship between AQIM and al-Qaeda?

Answer. The decision to affiliate followed after the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) was increasingly marginalized by Algeria's successful amnesty program and security operations. We believe that first and foremost the GSPC saw linkage with al-Qaeda as an attempt to enhance its recruiting ability by co-opting the name of a larger, more notorious, and more famous terrorist organization, a move, likely to secure steadier streams of financial and other types of support. Shortly before and after the announced merger, AQIM conducted an attack on a western oil worker bus (10 December 2006) and a car bomb attack on the Algerian Prime Ministers office (April 2007) and the attack on the United Nations compound in December 2007, which garnered significant media attention, which seemed to underscored the new link with al-Qaeda. However, AQIM has not been able to sustain these types of large jihadist operations. AQIM has published many public statements that heavily borrow from al-Qaeda's style and rhetoric, especially as it pertains to a call for jihad in North Africa and the Sahel. However, AQIM is different in that it still retains GSPC's focus on traditional targets of the Algerian State as a practical matter while taking haven in the northern regions of neighboring Mali.

Question. You mentioned a meeting with European partners in Paris last month. Given France's historic relationship with many of the countries in the region, its partnership in our overall counterterrorism strategy is particularly important. Do we have the same strategic priorities as France in the Maghreb and the Sahel? And what is the day-to-day working relationship like between our embassies?

Answer. Strong French ties in this region remain pivotal and France has expressed a sincere desire to cooperate with the United States in this area of the world. The Paris meeting in September was the first senior-level meeting that mapped out a way forward for such cooperation.

Our strategic counterterrorism (CT) priorities in this region are very similar, focusing as they do on building law enforcement, military capacity and development. We expect that further meetings in the new year will spell out more specific areas of cooperation in followup to the information that we exchanged about our respective activities in the region.

RESPONSES OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY VICKI HUDDLESTON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR RUSSELL D. FEINGOLD

Question. As you've said, DOD is engaged, at different levels, in training and equipping militaries across the Sahel for purposes of counterterrorism. However, is there a risk that these militaries could misuse their new capabilities, particularly to suppress groups with arguably legitimate political grievances or opponents of governments? To what extent is that risk considered before DOD decides to provide training or equipment, and what steps can be taken to minimize that risk?

Answer. DOD conducts a wide range of military cooperation activities with partner nation militaries in Africa. These activities span the spectrum from relatively simple outreach efforts (e.g., seminars and conferences), to training events and on to joint/combined exercises. The principal objective of DOD military cooperation activities is to work with our partner militaries in Africa to foster stability, build capacity, and reduce threats. DOD achieves these goals by promoting civil control and defense institutional reform, developing professional militaries, and building or strengthening African security capacities.

While military capacities can be a foundation for stability and security in a society, there is always a risk that the capabilities, if misused or misdirected, could be used to suppress legitimate political processes or oppress rightful civil activities. DOD takes this risk seriously, and works closely with the State Department to mitigate the possibility of abuse. Both DOD and State Department monitors what Chad does with the assistance the United States provides and does not hesitate to inform the Chadian Government of the consequences should any abuse be detected. In every case, DOD military cooperation events, including section 1206 train and assist programs are closely coordinated with the respective U.S. Embassy as well as the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to ensure that partner nation military participants; i.e., individuals and units, are appropriately nominated, reviewed, and vetted by the State Department in accordance with the requirements of the Leahy amendment prior to their participation in a DOD activity.

Question. Chad is perhaps the most extreme example in this regard. Since 2005, we have provided some training and equipment to Chad through 1206 funds. However, DOD recently briefed committee staff that it had to redirect some equipment originally intended for Chad because we learned that a unit we had trained for counterterrorism was being used for unrelated domestic purposes. As you know, Chad's security forces have a poor human rights record with reports citing torture, rape and the use of excessive force as well as the use of child soldiers. Looking to the future, under what conditions, would we seek to provide new training or equipment to the Chadian military?

Answer. This question refers to DOD plans to implement two section 1206 projects for Chad in FY07. The first was a tactical airlift equipment package of \$1.7M, which was processed and delivered. The second was a combined \$6.0M equipment and training package for a counterterrorism (CT) unit in Chad. Delivery of the equipment to the Chadian unit, a former recipient of U.S. assistance under the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), was initially delayed due to instability surrounding Chadian rebel attacks into Chad in February 2008. Following the attacks and the government's successful effort to reestablish control over the capital city of N'Djamena and other key areas, the government placed their CT unit under a new chain of command with the primary mission of regime protection.

In response to this unit's command and mission reorganization, the USG inter-agency suspended CT cooperation with the unit due to concerns that Chad had shifted the unit's primary focus away from CT activities. By spring 2009 it was not clear when or if the CT unit would return to its previous organization and CT mission, and DOD was incurring monthly storage fees for the purchased equipment. DOD and the State Department jointly decided in May 2009 to redirect the original equipment and training package to Nigeria, thereby reducing the FY09 section 1206 program cost by the amount of the Chad package. The Secretary of Defense approved, the Secretary of State concurred, and Congress was notified of the redirection.

In July 2009, Chad realigned the CT unit back into the main Chadian Army chain of command and restored its primary mission to CT, which allowed DOD to consider a measured resumption of the suspended security cooperation program. DOD monitors what nations do with U.S.-provided military training or equipment. DOD will continue to work closely with the U.S. Embassy in N'Djamena and the Bureau of African Affairs at the State Department to mitigate the risk of possible abuse by the Chadian military. DOD also will work closely with the State Department to ensure that Chadian military participants, both individuals and units, are appropriately nominated, reviewed, and vetted in accordance with the requirements of the Leahy amendment prior to their participation in a DOD activity.

Question. As you know, there has been some suspicion throughout the continent about AFRICOM's activities and intentions. As DOD carries out its work in the Sahel, how are you seeking to address these suspicions? What public diplomacy activities is DOD carrying out, and how are those efforts coordinated with the efforts of State and USAID?

Answer. DOD provides information to the public regarding military cooperation activities in Africa principally through its public affairs system and the local U.S. Embassies. This public affairs effort is conducted mainly through U.S. Africa Command, which coordinates all DOD military cooperation activities in Africa. U.S. Africa Command maintains a robust public affairs Web site (www.africom.mil) which outlines the purpose, mission, leadership, and organization of the command, as well as providing updates on U.S. Africa Command activities, such as senior leader travel on the continent, conferences and seminars, training events, and exercises. This Web site also provides a discussion-thread forum by which the public can post comments as well as questions that can be addressed by U.S. Africa Command personnel—in many cases by the commander himself. In addition to this Web site, U.S. Africa Command's Public Affairs office works closely with U.S. Embassies to prepare, coordinate, and support press coverage, both international and local, of DOD activities and events in Africa.

DOD works closely with U.S. Embassies in the region in support of the State Department's public diplomacy efforts. U.S. Africa Command has deployed military personnel to several regional embassies to ensure the official message being disseminated is consistent with U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives. These Military Information Support Teams coordinate closely with the Chief of Mission and Public Diplomacy officer.

RESPONSES OF SENIOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR EARL GAST TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR RUSSELL D. FEINGOLD

Question. As I understand it, most of USAID's work with the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership is carried out by contractors or grantees. Are there any challenges to the fact that this work is not being carried out directly by U.S. Government employees? How does USAID oversee this work and monitor the impacts?

Answer. Countering violent extremism is a relatively new area of work for USAID, and we are providing training to our officers. This work does not naturally fall under one technical specialty; rather it touches on several technical areas in which USAID has vast experience. TSCTP programs are cross-cutting and bring in elements of education, conflict mitigation, governance, and media. TSCTP targets its activities at youth, a population group with which USAID works extensively across development sectors.

As with other USAID programming, our implementing partners—contractors and grantees—use familiar development practices such as training, community development grants, microcredit, and community radio. Wherever possible, they work through local nongovernmental partners and associations as a way to promote sustainability and partnerships. These local organizations are becoming the primary partners in TSCTP implementation, sometimes involved from the initial design phase of activities. In some cases, it is these organizations—not USAID or a U.S.-based NGO—that are executing the community-level grants.

In the countries where USAID does not have a bilateral mission—Niger, Chad, and Mauritania—TSCTP activities are overseen by USAID's West Africa Regional Mission based in Accra, Ghana, in conjunction with USAID's resident representatives in Niger and Chad. The program in Mali is managed by the bilateral USAID mission in Bamako.

Along with reporting on the standard foreign assistance indicators related to counterterrorism, USAID has developed custom indicators at the country level to help monitor more incremental progress in TSCTP programs. For these indicators, our implementing partners have gathered solid baseline data against which progress is being monitored quarterly. Additionally, USAID and the Departments of State and Defense are utilizing more broad-based, independent polling data to gauge general attitudes and support for violent extremist organizations. We expect that this polling data will allow for a broader assessment of the impact of TSCTP activities. Meanwhile, the impact of the program is becoming evident in certain trends; for example, youth beneficiaries are more involved in their communities and are working to involve their peers in positive and constructive activities.

Question. About how many staff in USAID work on programs of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership in, respectively, Washington and in each of the participant countries?

Answer. There are seven USAID staff working on TSCTP programs: An advisor based in Washington to provide technical support; a program manager and program assistant in Niger; one program manager and program assistant in Chad; a program manager and program assistant in Mali; and a regional program manager based in the West Africa Regional mission based in Accra, Ghana. While all of these staff manage TSCTP programs as their primary duties, they all have additional program responsibilities.

Question. Do you think USAID's limited presence in the region affects its ability to be an equal partner in shaping and implementing the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership?

Answer. The USAID West Africa Regional mission based in Accra, Ghana, manages numerous programs in West African countries where USAID does not have a permanent mission; the TSCTP program is not unique in this respect. In the countries where there are TSCTP programs, other development projects are being implemented with strong results. For example, in Chad, USAID efforts focus on governance, elections, and conflict mitigation and reconciliation.

In these countries, USAID's resident representatives work closely with the embassies, other agencies, and implementing partners to ensure the appropriateness and quality of TSCTP program activities. In fact, the way USAID operates in close partnership with local organizations at the grassroots level makes it uniquely qualified to undertake these activities. However, we would prefer a greater level of coverage on TSCTP and are looking to increase the number of officers working on the program.