

**INSTABILITY IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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OCTOBER 24, 2023  
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## **INSTABILITY IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2023**

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Cardin [presiding], Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Van Hollen, Risch, and Ricketts.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND**

The CHAIRMAN. The Committee will come to order.

First let me share with my colleagues, some of us just got back early this morning from a visit to the Middle East. Ten of our colleagues were there. I was joined by Senator Coons and Senator Booker of this Committee. The trip was headed by Senator Graham. It was a bipartisan group, five Democrats, five Republicans. Joining Senator Graham on the Republican side were Senator Collins, Senators Thune, Sullivan, and Britt. Senators Blumenthal and Reed joined on the Democratic side, so there were 10 of us there.

Our visit to Israel was shocking. We saw firsthand the brutality of Hamas. We saw that in the scars in the country. We saw the videos. We saw the photos. We saw things we would never thought we would ever see in our lifetime, as we have characterized Hamas as ISIS. It is evil. What it did is unspeakable.

We made it clear that we stand with Israel and the right to defend themselves. We met with the families of the hostages. It was not an easy meeting. The pain, the uncertainty, the fate of their loved ones, all that weighed very heavily on us as we were able to meet with the Israeli officials to try to understand the game plan. We stressed that Israel has a right to defend itself, and we need to do everything we can to provide the humanitarian assistance and safe harbor for those Palestinians who are trying to escape Hamas.

It was a difficult trip and it is difficult times. As we were there, there were rockets and missiles being fired in parts of Israel and in Gaza, and we know the situation is deteriorating. We made it clear that the United States stands strongly against any escalation of this conflict by the enemies of Israel who would try to take advantage of this situation.

We also visited first the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It was a very encouraging visit. We were there because we know Hamas was trying to end the normalization talks between the Saudis and the Israelis. We made it clear, and in our conversations with the Crown Prince, that that could not happen. We need to stay focused first on the tragedies of Hamas, what it caused in Israel, but to keep alive the normalization and integration of the countries in the Middle East, and we have received positive conversations with the Crown Prince.

I just really wanted to update our Committee that we thought this visit was extremely important, underscoring the importance of bipartisan response by the United States Congress to the tragedies that are taking place in the Middle East.

From the Middle East to the subject of this hearing, the governing crisis in West Africa and Sahel.

Five nations in the region are suffering coups since 2020. This includes Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Chad, and most recently, Niger. Mali and Burkina Faso have actually had two coups. At the same time, there has been an alarming increase in terrorist attacks by militant Islamist organizations.

Today we are going to examine this recent wave of coups and violence and what it means for U.S. policy. I welcome Assistant Secretary Phee. I want to thank you for the work that you and your team are doing in this area. Your efforts to support this region as it responds to the situations in West Africa and the Sahel are vital.

The challenges are great, but we must acknowledge the current trajectory is grim. It requires a critical evaluation of our policies. Congress demanded that when we passed the *Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership Act*.

The junta leaders justified their coups by pointing to their elected governments' failure to improve security, but they themselves have failed to deliver as well. In both Mali and Burkina Faso, security has sharply deteriorated. Even as civilian deaths have skyrocketed, incidents in Niger are on the rise, as well.

The spiraling security situation is already impacting coastal West African nations. Attacks in Ghana, Togo, and Benin are increasing. Sudan and Gabon have both had coups. Instability now stretches from the Red Sea to the Atlantic. Why? What is driving this dynamic?

It is hard to say our security assistance has been effective in the Sahel or in countries in West Africa. We certainly have very little to show in terms of improved security, stability, or stronger democratic institutions, and quite frankly, there is an uncomfortable truth in all of this. Across the Sahel, the United States trained militias and militaries responsible for the coups. We have trained the very people overthrowing civilian governments. It is critical that we take a brutally honest look at our approach to date.

Assistant Secretary Phee, I would like to hear your thoughts. Is it time for the United States to change its strategy? Is our security assistance helping or leading or contributing to the negative outcomes? How should we adjust these policies?

We also need to be consistent in our response to coups in Africa. I understand one size does not fit all, but it is important for the United States to take a principled stance when coups occur. We

need to lead with our values as we try to advance an agenda of good governance in the region. I think we need to make our position crystal clear: military takeovers of civilian-led governments are coups. We should not mince words. Anyone engaged in coups should be personally sanctioned. The failure to sanction, a policy shift that has clearly taken place here in our government, sends the wrong message.

The presence of the Russian Wagner mercenary group presents an additional serious threat. The impact of Wagner's operation in Mali have been disastrous for civilians. Wagner and the Malian military stand accused of massacring as many as 500 people in Moura in 2022. Moscow is making overtures in the military regimes in Burkina Faso and Niger. Russian expansion, coupled with the expulsion of the French and United Nations peacekeepers in Mali, could trigger chaos that would be difficult to recover from.

I know we do not want to lose ground to Russia or China, but we should not fall into the trap of giving free passes to authoritarian and military regimes for the sake of Great Power competition. We made that mistake too often during the Cold War, mistakes for which our foreign relations still suffer with some countries today. I hope you will speak to how we are responding to these challenges.

I understand that ultimately the course of history in other countries is up to the people who live there. However, we have the responsibility to at least do no harm through our approach, and to stand in solidarity along with millions of Africans whose democratic aspirations of living in a dictatorial regime, just as we supported the people of Eastern Europe for decades after World War II in their fight for democracy.

Assistant Secretary Phee, we have lots to discuss. I look forward to that discussion. This has been a hearing that we had planned. It is an extremely important subject. We hope we can have a frank discussion during this hearing.

I now turn to our distinguished Ranking Member, Senator Risch.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Assistant Secretary Phee, for being here with us today. All of us here know that you deal with a portfolio that is difficult, troubling, which is a gross understatement, I suspect, but you deal with it. It is unfortunate you are here today alone without the support of representatives from USAID and the Department of Defense. It is a difficult task to address all of these issues in the Sahel without these perspectives, but here we are.

There are concerning trends, much of which has been outlined by the Chairman here in the last few minutes, that we are witnessing in the region and the wider continent—a decline in democracy, challenges in U.S. diplomatic engagement, both bilaterally and multilaterally, and the effectiveness of our regional policy, if a clear one exists, including our incentives and deterrents, some of which have been outlined by the Chairman this morning. Global events have accelerated these changes, including Russia's war in Ukraine, interference with countries like China, Russia, and Iran, and the

COVID-19 pandemic. We have had seven coups in Africa—seven coups—during the years of the Biden administration. Things are not working.

The ongoing significant changes in the Sahel and West Africa affect our national security and that of our regional and global allies. The primary threat is Islamic terrorism. Large parts of Mali and Burkina Faso are controlled by groups linked to al Qaeda and the Islamic State, and terrorist groups are expanding their attacks on governments and populations in many countries.

In countries such as Mali, the presence of Wagner's mercenary is particularly concerning. This group is known for severe human rights abuses, spreading false information, and unjustly taking local resources. Since Prigozhin's demise, Wagner's activities in Mali have become a more significant threat to the United States national security, boosting the Russian state capacity for harmful global operations while providing questionable security gains in return.

Many Sahel and Western African governments are unstable and lack public support. In areas controlled by military juntas, citizens' opinions are wholly ignored, and the government merely enforces military orders. The remaining democracies in the region struggle to meet the needs of their expanding youth populations, often fall short in combatting corruption and cannot handle security and economic challenges independently.

That is not the whole story. These challenges make it difficult for Africa to prepare for upcoming threats like coups, terrorist attacks, election issues, or food crises, and not the least of which is their burgeoning population over the next decades.

Secretary Phee, the last time you spoke to this Committee about the Administration's Sahel policy, you highlighted a 5-year inter-agency strategy designed to address the region's challenges and better the lives of its people. You mentioned in your written testimony that this strategy would adapt to significant changes in context. However, given what has occurred in the Sahel and West Africa over the past 14 months, that strategy clearly is not working.

I believe the fundamental assumptions and approach require significant revision. The Department must prioritize resources for the region and strengthen our diplomacy. When supporting our African partners and implementing regional solutions, we should lead, not merely be an active bystander.

The leadership includes coordinating with our European allies as well. We have seen the Department demonstrate it can prioritize in times of crisis, like in Ukraine and most recently in Israel. We must similarly prioritize the crisis unfolding in the Sahel and West Africa or we are going to continue to face the consequences.

Finally, I am concerned about the Administration's unclear policy on Sudan. I have asked President Biden to appoint a special envoy for Sudan. Given the many issues you and the Africa Bureau handle, we need a seasoned diplomat singularly—singularly—devoted to Sudan to steer U.S. policy, assist the Sudanese people, coordinate with regional partners, and handle complex diplomacy to stabilize the nation and foster genuine democracy.

I also encourage the Department to move quickly to make an official determination about the ongoing atrocities in Darfur and other



areas of the country. Such a designation would go a long way in making clear to the world where we stand on the killings and human rights abuses occurring in Sudan.

Again, I fully recognize that dealing with the issues in the region is a heavy lift. I hope you can point out ways in which Congress can help you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch.

Our witness today, Ambassador Molly Phee, is Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Ambassador Phee has led a long and distinguished career in the State Department before being sworn in as Assistant Secretary in September 2021. She served as the Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. She was U.S. Ambassador to South Sudan from 2015 to 2017. She served as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Ethiopia, Chief of Staff in the Office of Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, and as Acting Assistant Secretary for International Organizations, among other positions that she served.

Thank you for being here. We look forward to your testimony. Your statement will be made part of the record. We ask you summarize in about 5 minutes so we can get engaged in Committee questions.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MOLLY PHEE, ASSISTANT SECRETARY,  
BUREAU OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. PHEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. May I start by thanking you and your colleagues for traveling to the Middle East. All of us are concerned about what is happening there and fearful of global impacts, so thank you for your service in advancing our interests and values. Thanks to the both of you for welcoming me here today. I will try and answer some of your questions in my prepared testimony and through dialogue.

The urgent challenges in Ukraine and the Middle East at times overshadow the U.S. partnership with Africa, but we must prepare for the future. By 2050, one in four people on the planet will be an African. The talents today of more than 1 billion Africans already enrich the world's culture, politics, and economy. The continent is the source of critical minerals such as cobalt. The Congo River basin is the largest carbon sink in the world. This is why the strategy of the Biden-Harris administration recognizes Africa as a major geopolitical force and why we seek to elevate African voices in institutions such as the U.N. Security Council, the G-20, and the IMF.

The sub-region of the Sahel is integral to our relationship with the continent. The coups that have occurred recently in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and now Niger illustrate the democratic regression that threatens not only the people of the Sahel, but their neighbors and our partners in coastal West Africa.

Allow me to address the drivers of political instability and what the United States has done and could do. The primary problem is weak governance. Every country where a coup has taken place had previously experienced military takeovers. Many of these governments had engaged in corrupt practices, failed to provide basic

services, and ignored democratic values by extending term limits or disregarding human rights. Such practices tested the presumption that democracy delivers, but context matters, too. Historical legacy, enduring poverty, climate change, and a decade of escalating terrorist violence further weakened the performance and resilience of Sahelian democracies. Atrocities by the Islamic State and the branch of al Qaeda known as JNIM, and predations by criminal armed groups, have placed unrelenting pressure on governments and civilians.

Military rulers point to the supposed failure of democracy to justify their actions. As you noted, Mr. Chairman, military rule does not improve people's lives. In fact, military rule leaves populations poorer and less secure. The number of deaths from political violence increased by 150 percent in Mali and 77 percent in Burkina Faso in 2022. Violence targeting civilians in Mali increased by 38 percent this year, nearly a third of these incidents perpetrated by Malian security forces or the Wagner Group. Violent incidents in Niger—which had been declining significantly due to President Bazoum's leadership and the partnership between Nigerien security forces and U.S. and European forces—rose by 42 percent in the month after the coup.

How to foster a return to democracy? Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, we are considering and adjusting based on these events. In the case of Niger, we are working closely with the regional organization ECOWAS. The African Union and Africa's regional economic commissions are essential partners in advancing peace and democracy. That is why, although we promptly paused the majority of U.S. assistance for Niger after the coup, we delayed at the request of our African partners the formal assessment that the outcome constituted a coup while they sought to restore President Bazoum to office. Acting Deputy Secretary Victoria Nuland traveled to Niamey in August to try and convince the generals to restore constitutional order. I later traveled to West Africa to consult on how to encourage a quick and credible restoration of democratic rule. Secretary Blinken met with ECOWAS Foreign Ministers at the recent U.N. General Assembly to propose a phased approach to resuming U.S. assistance based on concrete actions to return the country to democratic rule. Committed to the Nigerien people, the United States has maintained humanitarian and basic health and food assistance. Swiftly resolving the crisis in Niger could serve as a positive alternative, and we are now actively encouraging negotiations between the junta and ECOWAS.

How to prevent coups? With the support of Congress and the *Global Fragility Act*, we are helping countries in coastal West Africa to strengthen governance by programming such as increased engagement in historically marginalized communities. We are also working to implement the African Democratic and Political Transitions initiative as well as the 21st Century Partnership for African Security, programs launched by President Biden at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit.

There is a perception that we spend too much on security, but in the past five fiscal years, from 2018 to 2022, the State Department provided approximately \$2 billion in bilateral assistance to

the Sahel, and of that, less than 15 percent was for security assistance.

Adequate staffing is essential, so I ask you to support the Administration's budget request and to confirm ambassadors. We are now missing ambassadors in Nigeria, Gabon, and the African Union.

Thank you again for scheduling this important discussion.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Phee follows:]

#### **Prepared Statement of Ms. Molly Phee**

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the crisis in the Sahel and the U.S. role in promoting democracy, economic development, and security in West Africa.

The urgent challenges in Ukraine and the Middle East at times overshadow the U.S. partnership with Africa. But we must prepare for the future. By 2050, one in four people on the planet will be an African. The talents of more than 1 billion Africans already enrich the world's culture, politics, and economy. The continent is the source of critical minerals such as cobalt. The Congo River basin is the largest carbon sink in the world. This is why the strategy of the Biden-Harris administration recognizes Africa as a major geopolitical force and why we seek to elevate African voices in institutions such as the UN Security Council, the G-20, and the IMF.

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Allow me to address the drivers of political instability and what the United States has done and could do. A primary problem is weak governance. Every country where a coup has taken place had previously experienced military takeovers. Many of these governments had engaged in corrupt practices, failed to provide basic services, and ignored democratic values by extending term limits or disregarding human rights. Such practices tested the presumption that democracy delivers. But context matters, too. Historical legacy, enduring poverty, climate change, and a decade of escalating terrorist violence further weakened the performance and resilience of Sahelian democracies. Atrocities by the Islamic State and the branch of al-Qaeda known as JNIM, and predations by criminal armed groups, have placed unrelenting pressure on governments and civilians.

Military rulers point to the supposed failure of democracy to justify their actions. But military rule does not improve people's lives. In fact, military rule leaves populations poorer and less secure. The number of deaths from political violence increased by 150 percent in Mali and 77 percent in Burkina Faso in 2022. Violence targeting civilians in Mali increased by 38 percent this year, nearly a third of these incidents perpetrated by Malian security forces or the Wagner Group. Violent incidents in Niger—which had been declining due to President Bazoum's leadership and the partnership between Nigerien and U.S. and European forces—rose by 42 percent in the month after the coup.

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How to prevent coups? With the support of Congress and the Global Fragility Act, we are helping countries in coastal west Africa to strengthen governance by programming such as increased engagement in historically marginalized communities. We are also working to implement the African Democratic and Political Transitions initiative, or ADAPT, as well as the 21st Century Partnership for Africa Security,

or 21PAS—programs launched by President Biden at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit.

There is a perception that we spend too much on security, but in fiscal years 2018–2022, the State Department provided approximately \$2 billion in bilateral assistance to the Sahel. Of that, about less than 15 percent was for security assistance.

Adequate staffing is essential so I ask you to support the Administration’s budget request and to confirm Ambassadors. We are now missing Ambassadors in Nigeria, Gabon, and the African Union, among other posts.

Thank you again for scheduling this important discussion to renew our shared commitment to advance democracy, peace and security as the cornerstones of a successful U.S.-Africa partnership.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, once again, thank you for being here and the work that you are doing. We will have 5-minute rounds.

I want to start by challenging the delay in Niger on the determination. You said you did that because you were trying to restore the deposed leader. The coup occurred on July 26. It was 2 and a half months later before the declaration of coup was made.

The delay did not work. Some of us think it may have shown the military authorities that the consequences of a coup are not going to be felt. They look at the fact that we have not imposed sanctions on any of the individuals involved in coups, which is, to me, a change in our previous policy. In Gambon you just announced, as I understand, last night a determination of coup that occurred on August 30. That was a 2-month delay.

To me it is giving the wrong signals, looking at the number of coups we have seen in this region, that the consequences will not be there, so tell me why we are not considering sanctions. I understand Europe is. Why are we not considering sanctions against those who have allowed these coups to occur?

Ms. PHEE. Mr. Chairman, I welcome and respect your perspective. Let me address both Niger and Gabon.

Our friends and partners in ECOWAS and coastal West Africa, including the leaders of Ghana, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Nigeria, all asked us to delay making our formal assessment because they were fully committed to trying to restore President Bazoum to power, and they thought that our statement would derail their efforts. We were trying to support the sub-region in its leadership and efforts to promote democracy and to promote restoration of democracy. That is the reason for the delay, because they asked us. They asked me. They asked Secretary Blinken. They asked Acting Deputy Secretary Nuland.

In Gabon, last week Senior Director for Africa Judd Devermont and Deputy Assistant Secretary Melanie Higgins from the Africa Bureau, traveled to talk with the coup leaders there about a restoration of democracy, and we announced the 7008 designation following those consultations.

In both cases, in contrast to how we responded to the problem in Mali, we actively engaged directly with the leadership of the region and with the leadership of the generals who had seized power to tell them they had a choice. The better choice, as described by the statistics I reported to you on the increase in violent incidents in Mali and Burkina Faso is to get back to a democratic path and to be able to resume their partnership with the United States and others in the international community to help develop their economies, provide stability, and progress their governance.

That is why there was a delay in both of those cases. We tried to engage directly with the leaders to try and force a different path, and we also were responding to the requests and pleas from our allies.

I want to assure you that we continuously look at options for sanctions, but in the current approach in which we are trying to direct the leaders back to a path of democratic transition, that is factor in the assessment.

The CHAIRMAN. It seems like other than Mali dealing with those associated with the Wagner Group, none of the others have been even considered for sanctions. This seems like a shift in policy that, in the past, have made it clear that there will be a consequence. I do not see that in our policy today.

Ms. PHEE. I believe there have been consequences because we have suspended assistance—

The CHAIRMAN. But you have not imposed any sanctions.

Ms. PHEE. No, sir, but in the case of Niger, we have not only suspended the assistance captured by Section 7008, but we have expanded the freeze to include assistance and cooperation not captured by the law. We are actually doing more than you have asked us to do because we believe that our engagement was very positive in Niger.

The CHAIRMAN. In Niger, we see that they have requested the exit of other countries' military presence. We have a military presence in Niger. Tell me why it is important for us to maintain our military presence in that country.

Ms. PHEE. In 2022, according to data collected by reputable sources, there were approximately 5,000 violent incidents in Mali and 4,000 violent incidents in Burkina Faso. In the first 6 months in Niger, there were only 450. The violent incidents had declined from about a third since 2021, and civilian casualties were declining. That is a result of the sacrifices of Nigerien security forces, the role of the United States and European partners, and our programming to strengthen the conduct of security forces, including the police and the gendarme and the judicial sector in Niger.

It was the leadership of President Bazoum to talk to marginalized communities. We were making a positive difference. We believe the Nigerien leadership now recognizes that that was a positive difference. They have said they want to remain a partner with us, and we have said we cannot remain a partner with you unless you get on a serious, credible path back to democratic transition.

The CHAIRMAN. In short, what would happen if we removed our troops?

Ms. PHEE. As Senator Risch pointed out, Ranking Member Risch pointed out, it would be preferable if the military were here to address that themselves. However, as I have described to you, we believe that we have made a significant difference in Niger. I also want to tell you that our partners in coastal West Africa believe our presence is important to them and to their security, and they are quite apprehensive about a scenario in which the French were gone and then we would leave as well.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary, when can we expect that the State Department is going to make an atrocities determination for Sudan? I think we can note that the U.K. came out with a definitive statement, calling atrocities in Darfur ethnic cleansing last week, and there is no shortage of information about the crimes being committed against civilians in Darfur, Khartoum, and other parts of Sudan.

When can we expect the State Department to make a determination?

Ms. PHEE. Senator Risch, the Office of Global Criminal Justice is actively reviewing the crimes that have been taking place in Darfur right now, and I expect that they, in the near future, will be able to make a recommendation to the Secretary. We asked them to look at that early on. We have made public statements about our concern, and we are working in Geneva with the Human Rights Council on these matters, including successfully seeking a Commission of Inquiry.

Senator RISCH. I appreciate that. To really answer the question, could you try to narrow that down a little bit more? We know that, like I say, U.K. acted last week. It seems to me we could be further along than where we are.

Ms. PHEE. I am trying to be very careful as someone responsible for policy, not to intervene in the legal review. I know that Beth Van Schaack and her team are closely and actively looking at this. I am sorry. I defer to their judgment, but I expect it to be soon. I will relay to them your concern and desire for —

Senator RISCH. I assume you are interested in this also.

Ms. PHEE. I am absolutely interested. I, in fact, asked them to undertake this review. Just to be careful not to affect their legal deliberation, I just wanted you to understand it is their authority to make that decision.

Senator RISCH. I appreciate that. If you pass along all of our concerns, that may be helpful to you, and maybe you could get back to us with what you find out in that regard. I would appreciate it.

Help me out here. How is the State Department working within the interagencies, namely with the Department of Defense and the National Security Council, to address the growing challenges including related to our counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel and West Africa? I know you have addressed that briefly, but I wonder if you could drill down on that a little bit for us please.

Ms. PHEE. Absolutely. As I have described, we have had important programs, not only what the military has been doing, but what the State Department has been doing in Niger—our Counterterrorism Bureau, our Bureau of International Narcotics and Law, my own bureau, the Africa Bureau, in our support for civilian security assistance. We believe we were making a very positive impact in Niger.

We have suspended those activities because of the coup, and we have told the authorities in Niger that our partnership was making a difference, and if they would like to resume that partnership they need to make changes.

Niger has a history of coups. As I described, all of the countries where coups have taken place were vulnerable because they had experienced coups before. In Niger, they have a tradition of the

military passing power back to the civilians often within a relatively short time frame, such as 1 year. That is what we are trying to do in order to address the counterterrorism concerns in Niger.

In coastal West Africa, through the programming under our Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, the same State Department offices I have described as well as our cooperation with the Defense Department and the intelligence community means we are trying to help those countries have more capability, both in the security area as well as in the governance and development area so that they are more resilient in responding to the terrorist threat from the Sahel.

Senator RISCH. How do those countries respond to you when you talk to them about the not very good situation with the coup for changing the governments as opposed to a nice clean election that the people could have a say in? How do they respond to you on that?

Ms. PHEE. I think it is really important that both the African Union and the Regional Economic Commissions—in the case of West Africa, ECOWAS—very strongly believe in their protocols and in their policies and in their conduct that coups and irregular changes of constitutional order are not good for the people of Africa, and they speak forcefully about it. In the case of Niger, ECOWAS has imposed very strong sanctions on Niger. They have cut off electricity, they have closed the borders, and they have also frozen the regional currency, Niger's access to the regional currency.

They tell us that, in Niger, for example, they call it one coup too many. That is why, Mr. Chairman, we were trying to respect their request to us. We were trying to support them in their efforts to advocate for democracy and our shared values.

They do also, when we spoke to them about what our options are—for example, one option is to just terminate our relationship in Niger and depart—they expressed a lot of concern about that option in coastal West Africa because, as I said, again, from their perspective they are fighting some of our enemies—ISIS, AQ, the Wagner Group—and they would like our partnership to help them deal with those challenges.

Senator RISCH. My time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have got a couple more questions, but I will submit them for the record if that is okay.

The CHAIRMAN. Certainly. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Assistant Secretary Phee, for being here this morning.

In your opening statement you ended by talking about the importance of having personnel on the ground who could help in these countries, and I just want to point out—and this is really not for the State Department as much as it is for my colleagues—that in Africa alone there are 11 vacant ambassadorial posts, including, as you mentioned, the African Union. Burkina Faso, while it has an ambassador there now, I understand that ambassador is on their way out and the new ambassador has been nominated, but still has not been approved.

When we are not there, we cannot compete with China and Russia. Can you talk about how the absence of U.S. ambassadors is affecting your ability to do your job and our ability to support democratic governance in countries?

Ms. PHEE. Thank you, Senator. You probably said it better than I can. We have a unique system where the Secretary recommends, the President selects and nominates, and the Senate confirms. That gives the voice of an American ambassador weight. It gives us influence. It makes us more effective. When we are missing that voice, we are diminished in all of our efforts.

There is also an internal impact. A strong leader attracts staff and is able to engage in the interagency more effectively.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I am really pleased to have joined Chairman Cardin on his *HARM Act*, to designate the Wagner Group as a foreign terrorist organization. It is clear that we are still seeing Russia engage in the Sahel and try to partner with anti-democratic leaders there. We also know that there is a real impact on what is happening in Ukraine and that war on African nations.

What is our ability to track and rebut Russian information operations, because right now they are winning the information war in most of these African countries on who is responsible for the food shortages that they are experiencing and the rising costs.

Ms. PHEE. Thank you for highlighting the challenge and the deleterious effects of Russian disinformation and misinformation. This is something our African partners also express great concern about.

Our Global Engagement Center is actively working to help us be more effective in working with partners on the ground, so making sure accurate information is available to independent sources in the media and in civil society, making sure they have the correct information, and making sure they have a voice to share that information, but it remains a very difficult problem as it is here.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, I appreciate the work of the Global Engagement Center. I am a big fan, but clearly, they are not accomplishing the task. Is the challenge that they do not have enough resources? Is the challenge that there is not enough coordination? Because we are still losing that battle.

Ms. PHEE. I do not think it is a problem of coordination, and of course more resources are always welcome. I would welcome more resources for my public diplomacy sections, for example, and embassies in the region. I think it is genuinely a tough problem. Russia devotes a lot of effective resources to this effort. I do not think it is a coincidence that they have focused their efforts in Francophone Africa. They are trying to exploit the complicated French colonial history. I think opportunities like this, Senator, where we can speak openly about this problem and provide the republics of Africa the real truth about what is happening if Wagner comes to your country are one way we can continue to address the challenge.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, tomorrow Senator Ricketts and I are going to chair a hearing on the Black Sea region, which obviously has the critical connection to what is happening in Africa. What can we do to better engage with our partners in the Black Sea re-



gion to help address the information problem we have got in Africa?

Ms. PHEE. The Ukrainians have been very active in trying to reach out and speak to African leaders and African publics, and continuing to encourage that approach, I think, would be helpful.

I think when we think about the challenges in the Sahel as broadly for Africa, sort of the triple whammy of COVID, the loss of fertilizer, the loss of grains, the increase in petroleum prices, the increase in inflation, it has really damaged the ability of African governments to help support their constituents. That is why in the Administration's supplemental request you will see a request for some small assistance and some authorities that would leverage more money for the IMF and World Bank to make them better able to help Africans deal with this economic crisis.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I am out of time, but I would just encourage us to recognize that the Black Sea region and what is happening is a lot more than just what is happening in Ukraine, and to reach out to our partners in Romania and Moldova and Turkey, and even in Georgia, where they understand very directly what is happening and why it is causing the food insecurity and the rising costs. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Shaheen. Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Assistant Secretary, for being here. I would like to follow up on the Chairman's questions with regard to sanctions. My understanding is the European Union countries created a framework for sanctions that would target certain entities or individuals, freeze assets, hand out travel bans, that sort of thing. You also mentioned ECOWAS actually did implement a number of pretty restrictive sanctions such as cutting off electricity.

Do the European countries, are they also holding off on these sanctions? Because they have established a framework, but they are not sanctions yet. Are they also holding off on doing the sanctions in deference to the ECOWAS countries' concerns about trying to get the junta in Niger to give up power and turn it back over to civilians?

Ms. PHEE. Yes. I think there are different ways to consider what sort of economic or other pressure we put on juntas, for example, and in this instance the EU has previously provided direct budget assistance to Niger, and they ended that direct budget assistance following the coup.

Senator RICKETTS. Sorry. Would that be the equivalent of what we did with the 7008?

Ms. PHEE. Yes. Similar. We do not provide direct budget assistance, but ending your aid, and that has also had a big economic impact on the situation in Niger.

Senator RICKETTS. Are you concerned, and I understand again, I heard your reasonings earlier about why you are holding off on the sanctions, but are you concerned this is sending the wrong message to other nations, to other African nations, where the governments may be under the threat of a coup?

Ms. PHEE. I think it is extremely important what you are saying, and I hear you. As I said, I think there are multiple ways to put pressure. I believe the economic pressure that we have placed on

Niger and other governments is significant and profound. They desire, they have told us, for example, the resumption of our security assistance and cooperation. Those are factors that seem to us to be very persuasive in our negotiations, but I hear you on the travel restrictions, which we could do in terms of sanctions on individuals.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you. I will switch topics a little bit. You mentioned a little bit about the security, how much we have provided, but also in other areas as well, obviously, our approach to build up the militaries in different countries, to fight terrorists, training and equipping local forces. Over the past decade the U.S. has spent about \$500 million to build up Niger's security forces to target terrorism.

Obviously this is very important, but there is also the criticism now that the forces that we trained were part of the coup that replaced the civilian government. Are we somehow missing the boat here with regard to our strategy that we are training up these militaries and then they are responsible for participating in these coups? It is not just us. It is the French and other European countries' counterterrorism efforts as well.

Can you talk a little bit about that criticism? Is that a fair criticism? What can we do to really mitigate the opportunity for us to train these troops and then have them participate in the coups?

Ms. PHEE. I want to say that we all share the disappointment that military leaders with whom we have worked would make a decision to support a coup. I do not know necessarily that that is fully representative of the large program that DoD runs, particularly the military training program. They trained tens of thousands, and of course they are better placed than I to discuss this, and generally speaking have positive results in terms of increased professionalization, increased respect for human rights, and increased respect for civil-military relations.

I am not sure that some of these exceptional, spectacular, exceptional actions are representative of the program as a whole.

I do believe that many times we have very productive relations with military leaders with whom we have engaged and with whom we have trained. It is certainly something we should review.

Senator RICKETTS. Are our efforts too narrowly focused on counterterrorism here and training of the militaries, or do we need to change our strategy with regard to how we do this in these countries to avoid these coups?

Ms. PHEE. I think our strategy, which is true also globally, not just in Africa, is to understand that when you have a problem of political legitimacy because of weak governance and the aggravation from this terrorist threat that the root cause is the political problem, but it cannot be resolved easily in an environment where the terrorist threat is so great.

I actually think it is just hard. We have seen this in Afghanistan. We have seen this in Iraq. We have the best military in the world. We have really good impacts on managing security threats. The harder, tougher work is helping work with governments, helping work with economic development, which is also hard to accomplish when you are under a terrorist threat.

It is a different type of human endeavor that I think requires a long investment.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Assistant Secretary. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Senator Coons.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member Risch. Thank you in particular, Mr. Chairman, for helping organize, focus, and lead our recent trip to the Middle East that I think, as you said in your introduction, was very productive and critical at this time. Thank you for holding a full committee hearing on the Sahel.

The Sahel is one of the critical areas in the world where the forces of chaos, whether it is Wagner or jihadists or other sources of chaos, frankly, are on the march against the forces of stability, democracy, and development. I am disappointed that we do not have representatives of our military and USAID here as well. Assistant Secretary Phee, thank you for your engagement, your hard work, your leadership in this area.

To the point that Senator Ricketts was just asking, I think we need to stay on this and press both how the intelligence failure happened in Niger that we did not know that folks we had trained and we were very closely integrated with were about to overthrow the duly elected President Bazoum, and to then ask some tough questions about our path forward, given the departure of a critical security partner in the region, given the very urgent calls we are hearing from democratically-elected Presidents, like Akufo-Addo of Ghana, who has over and over pressed for more priority to be placed by our military in security in the region, and then to make sure that we have a focused, coordinated strategy for defense, development, and diplomacy.

This is a region—more people have died in terrorist attacks in West Africa in the last 5 years than the rest of the world combined, and Wagner sees an opening and is taking it and exploiting it. The last supplemental request included funding specifically to counter Wagner's influence in West Africa. It is not in the current supplemental. I hope we will consider adding some focused resources for security and development work in partnership with diplomacy.

As you said, Assistant Secretary, we have, after 10 weeks, reached a coup designation, I think long overdue, but I understand the reasons why, in consultation with ECOWAS and with the remaining democratically-elected leaders in the region, that you were holding open space for a transition back to democracy, specifically in Niger. It is partly why we gave the Administration flexibility in 7008 waiver authority in the SFOPS bill this past year.

Could you just be specific about whether there are now clear conditions for the junta under which full security partnership and development assistance can be restored, and where we are on that path? I am concerned about President Bazoum's security, and I am concerned about losing the progress that you described, that we were making towards reducing the number of terrorist attacks and improving security and stability in Niger when this coup unexpectedly happened.

Ms. PHEE. Thank you, Senator. As I have discussed here, we have discussed with our ECOWAS partners, and Secretary Blinken talked directly to them, about how we could combine our efforts so we have leverage, our assistance and cooperation, the sanctions

that they imposed, and to work with the junta on a package of actions they would take and actions we would take reciprocally.

Those discussions are initial, I would say, at this stage. We are encouraging them. We have made very clear we will not be able to resume the partnership that is so important to both sides, I think, and to our neighbors, without action on their side. Those discussions are underway and not ripe for public discussion.

Senator COONS. There is something like \$500 million in assistance to Niger that is now hanging in the balance. The MCC, roughly \$300 million compact that has been suspended, \$200 million at least in assistance that has been suspended. It is my hope you will work with Congress on plans for reprogramming. As you know, Senator Graham and I have worked for years on the *Global Fragility Act*, which has been referenced here. I am very disappointed at how this and previous Administration have chosen to prioritize regions and countries that I do not think fit the framing of that law, but coastal West Africa demonstrably does.

I hope that we will work together to strengthen your voice in the interagency, to priority security assistance for coastal West Africa, and I would be interested in your comments on what we can do to support the use of the *Global Fragility Act* in this region, particularly in the coastal region that I think is now really under dramatic threat as a result of this series of coups and the loss of a stability partnership across the core of the Sahel.

Ms. PHEE. My colleague, Michael Heath, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for West Africa, was just in Benin last week, meeting with U.S. ambassadors in the region in countries where the *Global Fragility Act* is being implemented. They welcome, and our partners in coastal West Africa welcome, those resources. As we move into the second year, Senator, I hope we are going to be in the position because metrics is a big part of that program, to give you updates.

We are also talking with AFRICOM about how to increase our support to those governments in managing the threat, which they had originally been focused on the threat from the Gulf of Guinea. Now they are looking north because of the pressure from the Sahel.

We are having wide-ranging conversations with them in coastal West Africa and with our partners in the interagency to see how we can do more, and I am confident that we are going to be in a position to provide the additional support.

Senator COONS. Well, thank you. I would welcome a classified briefing at some point, Mr. Chairman, on the intersection between DoD, USAID, and State, and on the ongoing threat to stability posed by Wagner, by jihadists, by poor governance, as the Assistant Secretary said in her opening statement. This is a region where if we take our eye off the ball, we will be back, having more and more urgent hearings about the impact for the people of West Africa and for the governance of West Africa.

Thank you for your hard work in this difficult area. I look forward to following up with you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Coons. We will try to arrange that type of information.

We are going to have a vote perhaps later this week on our military presence in Niger, and I think it is incumbent upon the Ad-

ministration to get information to this Committee prior to that vote as to the importance of our troops in that country as well as the impact that it has on the region. Because we are going to be asked, and we have little time.

Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you Secretary Phee. Just a word about Niger. One of the reasons this matters so much is we lost four servicemembers there in 2017, and it was under circumstances that were pretty unusual. There were questions about whether there were ample legal authorities for the missions they were on, were they trained for the mission that they ended up having to execute? There were a whole lot of questions that came out of that. Then in the aftermath of the coup, the fact that we still have 1,000 troops, and their mission has been redefined, there are a lot of questions about the utility. If the training we provided ended up leading to the coup, why?

I do think sometimes we forget how unusual we are to have a military that is subordinate to civilian political leadership. In many nations around the world, the military is not really subordinate to civilian political leadership. They are a separate power base. Pakistan would be a good example. If you do even the right things to train a military that is not subordinate to civilian political leadership, you empower the military, and sometimes you empower them against the civilian military leadership with the best of intentions.

In a nation where there has been a history of coups, in a nation where the military does not necessarily envision itself as completely subordinate to civilian military leadership, anything you do to empower the military could have this potential of a negative consequence. You are empowering them vis-à-vis the elected leadership and undermining democratic institutions, and I think that is something that bears a lot of thought.

I wanted to ask you a question just about staffing. The GAO identified, in 2019—now this is a couple of years old—that 10 percent of State's Africa Bureau total positions at overseas posts were vacant, and the figure seems to have increased based on State's most recent staffing report figures that have been shared with this Committee. Can you talk about how the Department is trying to address the staffing shortage?

Ms. Phee. Thank you for highlighting that. The whole team will be happy to know that you support. In the State Department as a whole, we have about an 89 percent fill, but for the Africa Bureau, particular in West Africa, it is about 83 percent. There are a couple of reasons for that. As you know, the previous Administration did a freeze on hiring. Then we had a problem with attrition. That is why Secretary Blinken has set up robust budgets to try and get us back to proper staffing.

Within the Bureau we have the biggest challenge at the mid-level. That is usually at a time of life where folks have children that need schooling, may need medical care, and those are resources and facilities that are hard to find in places like West Africa.

We are doing a lot to attract people. There are still many who are interested and going out and engaging in what has been called expeditionary diplomacy. We are trying to provide special incen-

tives. Fundamentally, we need resources to make sure that we hire predictably and regularly. Thank you.

Senator KAINE. Well, and I think your point about this mid-level issue, that is a really important one, too. Resources is part of it, but there may be creative strategies to try to get people to either stay at the mid-level or come back if they have been as an FSO and exited the service. We may need to think about that a little more.

I want to ask about Sudan. I join the Ranking Member and some others wrote a letter, asking about the appointment of a special envoy. Before we get to that, just to put some numbers to this, the horrific situation has been going on for about 6 months. I have dialogued with my Sudanese community in Virginia. The U.N. reports 9,000 people have been killed, more than 7 million have been forcibly displaced, and nearly 25 million are in need of humanitarian assistance.

Can you share any updates pertaining to the ceasefire negotiations that are being held in Jeddah between the SAF and RSF?

Ms. PHEE. Thank you so much for raising this urgent and tragic problem. I am happy to report today that I do have some updates in this grim situation. I will start first, if you will, with what I am sure you will agree is our priority, which is the civilians. For the past few days, about 100 Sudanese civilians have been meeting in Addis Ababa. They are using the African Union as their house—they call it the “African House”—to have discussions. They are working towards forming an inclusive and representative pro-democracy civilian front.

It is an important group of Sudanese. It includes people from the resistance committees. It includes people from professional associations, universities, civil society groups, as well as the political parties that have previously dominated the discussions.

They have taken some time to come together. There are a lot of divisions among the Sudanese folks, but we are actively encouraging those dialogues, and we hope that this is the start of a serious process to form the next Government of Sudan and to serve as a counterweight to the security forces. Ambassador John Godfrey has been in Addis with a team supporting those talks.

Later this week, on the 26th of October, after a lot of hard work by Secretary Blinken, talks will resume in Jeddah. There will be a very important change. There will be an African co-facilitator to join the Saudis and the Americans. The regional group in East Africa known as IGAD, the executive director will participate in those talks, and he will be representing both IGAD and the African Union, based on an agreement between those leaders.

These talks will be structured differently from before, but fundamentally they will be as they were before, emergency diplomacy limited on trying to pursue ceasefires and ultimately a cessation of hostilities, and given the relationship between reducing violence and allowing humanitarian assistance to get in, there will also be discussions on improving delivery of humanitarian aid. Martin Griffiths of OCHA has said Jeddah is very important for humanitarian aid.

Senator KAINE. I am over my time, but both of those are positive development, the citizens’ meeting in Addis Ababa and then the re-

sumption of the somewhat reformatted talks in Jeddah. I know the Committee is going to want to follow up to get the State Department's take on how successful those efforts are.

Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Kaine. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Assistant Secretary Phee, great to see you. I want to follow up on really some of Senator Ricketts' questions here.

Back in August 2022, the Biden administration put forward its U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa, which explicitly said it was crafted to "incorporate lessons learned from overly securitized approaches," to the Sahel. We have now, of course, seen a serious of coups, most recently in Niger, but also in Mali, other West African countries.

My question is, what lessons have been learned about oversecritization and did the most recent events mean we should go back and look even harder? Have you done that, and what lessons have you learned based on the most recent coups?

Ms. PHEE. Thank you for that question, and I would like to answer it in two ways. I would like to compare how we responded to the situation in Mali and how we are now responding in Niger, and also in Gabon, in Central Africa.

In Mali in 2020, when the previous President was overthrown, it was wildly popular because that President was very corrupt. We thought there was an opportunity to work with the generals to get to a better outcome. Over time—and I can list all the negative actions they have taken—it became clear that that was not possible, and most spectacularly, in December of 2022, when they invited in Wagner, and last year when they made clear they wanted MINUSMA to leave, and then in August when the Russians vetoed the sanctions regime for Mali.

Correspondingly, we have hardened our approach to Mali, limiting the development assistance we provide there. We are already applying 7008 there more fully than we did initially, and we have done increased sanctions there, although not the sanctions of all the leaders as the chairman asked.

In Gabon, similarly, there was a coup, and it was wildly popular because it overthrew a government that was considered inept, corrupt, and not democratic.

What are we doing differently there and what are we doing differently in Niger? First of all, we are more actively engaged at a senior level. Victoria Nuland went to Niamey. I went to coastal West Africa to consult. Judd Devermont of the National Security Council went to Gabon last week.

We are working with our partners. We are expanding what we are doing in terms of suspending assistance, not only assistance captured by 7008, but even security assistance and cooperation that is not required to be limited by the law. We are not invoking notwithstanding authorities. We are not invoking waivers. We are trying to make very serious that our partnership, which can be and has been positive, requires the leaders, the generals that have taken power to make active, concrete steps to get back to democracy, because we understand that democracy is the long-term solution to the root causes of problems.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Right. No, I appreciate your sort of going back and taking a look at how we can better respond in a more targeted way. You mentioned that you have rolled back some of the security assistance that is not required by law to be rolled back. I do not know if you are referring to some of the DoD assistance, but I do want to ask you a question about the DoD assistance because the coup provision does halt State- and USAID-administered funds, but as you know, some DoD support has continued in Niger.

Congresswoman Jacobs and I introduced legislation last Congress, and are planning to reintroduce it again, that would require Leahy Law vetting be applied also to the DoD Section 127 Echo provision. When I asked Dr. Carlin about this at a hearing a little while back, the response from Dr. Carlin was, "I welcome working with my colleagues at the State Department to look at that."

As a representative of the State Department I would like to ask your opinion on whether we should not, as a matter of consistency, in cases where the coup provision is triggered, also halt the DoD assistance.

Ms. PHEE. Thank you for that question. I would like to share with you, although I am a representative of the State Department, as you just said, my understanding is that our recommendation to the interagency has been, and that has been agreed, that we do suspend our security cooperation and assistance with Niger until we sort out a path forward. To the best of my knowledge we are not providing any security assistance, not from State and not from the DoD.

We are in a good position because we have had conversations with the junta about operations that are necessary for force protection, but beyond that we are trying to make clear that if they want that partnership that has made such a positive impact they need to make changes in governance.

With regard to the specific question, I would welcome an active discussion. That seems like a very positive suggestion from my perspective. I would have to consult with other stakeholders.

I would also like to make a suggestion to the Committee which relates to the trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Partnership program, which, when it was started in 2005, was very innovative in terms of cross-regional and cross-functional. Over time, I think its success has been impeded by several factors, including that there was no central authority as there is, for example, in the *Global Fragility Act*, and declining resources.

I think it would be worthwhile if we could have a discussion with Congress about ways to improve that to deal with the changed environment in the Sahel.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me just comment on your statement that we have multiple ways to put pressure, but it seems like it is not working because we are going to from coup to coup to coup. I understand the strategy in Mali, but that did not work. In Niger it looks like the policies have not worked.

I would just argue the fact that we do not have a consistent response to those who participate in coups has led to the view that you can commit a coup and still maintain a relationship with the



United States. It may not be as strong as you want. You may get a suspension of aid. It may have other impacts, but it will not have the personal impact of preventing the use of travel or banking.

I just want to stress the point that the failure—which was our previous policy, as I understand it, to consider immediately sanctions—has had a negative impact in discouraging the number of coups we have seen in that region. Our strategy is not working. At least the results are not there. Too many coups. One coup is too many.

I still have not gotten a clear response from you as to whether we are adjusting—what is our policy? When we see a military takeover, what is our policy? I am not sure I understand. Do we immediately cut off the aid and consider sanctions and other actions to make it clear that this is unacceptable? All governments are unpopular. We recognize that, but the coup is not the answer. That has been our policy for a long time. It seems like what you are saying, we justified our delay because it was an unpopular regime. That just leads to others feeling they can commit coups even against popular regimes.

Ms. PHEE. I hear you and I agree with you. I was trying to explain how we have adjusted our policy because what we did in Mali did not work. What we are doing now, in Niger and in Gabon, is not only applying 7008, which applies to State and USAID, as you know well, but also incorporating other U.S. Government assistance and cooperation, so there is an across-the-board suspension.

There is an effort to coordinate effectively with our partners in the region, such as ECOWAS, with our European partners, so that everyone is united in saying you cannot have a partnership with us if you do not make changes. In fact, Mr. Chairman, we have tried to adjust based on the fact that what we did in Mali was different and not successful.

It is true that each country is different and has their own circumstances, but as I described in my opening statement there are also many common factors which contribute to this situation. I want you to know that we are trying, actually, to be very strong about our rejection of these behaviors by taking what you gave us in terms of law and expanding it, making a policy choice to include all U.S. Government engagement, to make it very clear that these actions are not acceptable.

The CHAIRMAN. I would argue that from Mali we should recognize that our changing of policies and not imposing sanctions has not worked. We are learning from Mali, but in Mali we did not impose sanctions. The only sanctions that you are now imposing is against some of the Wagner Group people.

Senator Risch, anything further?

Senator RISCH. No. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Ricketts?

The Committee record will remain open for 2 days for questions for the record. We would ask that you respond to those questions promptly. Thank you very much for your service, and with that the hearing will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:17 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

## ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF MS. MOLLY PHEE TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

*Question.* Is there any effort underway to review and revise the Sahel strategy and its implementation in light of these new events? If so, what is the scope and substance of this review, and what resources is the Administration proposing to Congress to help support its efforts?

*Answer.* There is a fluid situation in the Sahel, and we constantly revisit our strategy considering changing dynamics. Our principles have not changed. We remain focused on working with our African partners and the people to address challenges and support democracy, which is the best foundation for development, social cohesion, prosperity, and stability across the Sahel and the African continent.

*Question.* Do you plan to update the strategy for Mali? Do you commit to this Committee to respect legislative requirements going forward?

*Answer.* The current Mali strategy remains applicable in most ways—including our continued advocacy for a return to democracy and for the respect of human rights. Since the writing of the strategy, however, the transition government withdrew its consent of the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA). As MINUSMA's continued presence underpinned our strategy, we will update it. I commit to respecting all legislative requirements.

*Question.* In your view, what went wrong in Niger? What lessons have we learned?

*Answer.* Our partnership with Niger led to concrete benefits for the Nigerien people in both development and security. We are deeply disappointed that the actions of a few men have put so much at risk for the people of Niger. Our response to the coup, which is different from how we have responded to recent coups in West Africa, is to restrict our assistance and relationship beyond what is required by law. Humanitarian, food, and health assistance for the benefit of the people in Niger will continue. Any resumption of assistance or cooperation will require the CNSP to take steps toward civilian-led democratic government.

*Question.* Do you believe that the failure to impose consequences on junta leaders elsewhere in West Africa in any way emboldened military officers in Niger and also now Gabon to carry out coups?

*Answer.* The United States has imposed consequences for coups, including restricting much-appreciated security and other assistance for governments pursuant to section 7008. Our limited partnership amid rising terrorist threats, however, creates opportunities for Russia and China to expand their influence. Motivations of individual actors in coups differ across the region. When democratically elected governments fail to effectively meet the needs of their people or tackle corruption, they provide motivation for coup leaders that cannot be overcome solely by the threat of U.S. visa restrictions. The suspension of U.S. assistance to governments run by junta leaders sends a clear message that they must return to democratic governance that is accountable to the people of their countries.

*Question.* What will be the impact of a U.S. military withdrawal on security in the Sahel and littoral West Africa?

*Answer.* U.S. military withdrawal in the Sahel could have an impact on regional security and our ability to conduct counterterrorism operations in the Sahel. Additionally, coup countries will become increasingly vulnerable to Russian and Wagner influence if the United States withdraws completely from the Sahel. Wagner Group activity in Mali has coincided with a rise in civilian deaths. Military withdrawal would also render coastal West African states vulnerable as we already have witnessed a spillover of violence to their borders. We are working closely with our partners in Coastal West Africa to support their efforts to counter threats of violent extremism through the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (SPCPS).

*Question.* Does the U.S. rely too much on a short-term, tactical, counter-terrorism approach in its security assistance efforts and not enough on institution building?

*Answer.* The United States relies on a balanced approach to security assistance that includes programs focused on building both short- and long-term capacity at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. U.S. assistance in the region includes programs that focus on military professionalization; the promotion of respect for human rights and democratic governance; and the development of stronger institutions to oversee these security forces. Our security assistance is designed to secure

U.S. interests and mitigate threats while inculcating U.S. values like respect for human rights and healthy civil-military relations that make these institutions stronger and more responsive to their people over time.

*Question.* Do the militaries of these countries perceive that the U.S. will give them a pass on coups and remain engaged because it privileges a security approach to addressing terrorism as opposed to one that addresses root causes of terrorism?

Answer. The countries that have experienced coups all understand that the overthrow of a democratic government results in restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance previously supporting government actors, and therefore a diminution in their partnership with the United States. Some of the coup governments recognize that the United States is a vital partner in global and regional affairs and that U.S. assistance is important to their security and economic development goals. As a result, they may seek to maintain a positive relationship by taking steps to return to democratic governance. We have raised the cost of doing business with the Wagner Group by imposing sanctions on those who cooperate with it. We continue to message the importance of addressing root causes of violence and protecting civilians during counterterrorism operations.

*Question.* Do security assistance programs provide leverage the U.S. can use to influence the military leadership in these countries? What does it allow us to do that we cannot otherwise? Can you provide examples?

Answer. On its own merits, U.S. military assistance and training programs have had a positive influence in professionalizing military units and fostering greater respect for human rights and civil-military relationships. Our partners in the region value U.S. assistance due to the high quality of our training, equipment, logistical support, and other lines of support, and the prospect of losing or regaining access to this support can encourage sound decision-making within our partners. The degree to which this incentive is decisive depends on a multitude of other individual factors.

*Question.* Do you still believe, over a year later, that visa restrictions or financial sanctions against coup leaders responsible for gross violations of human rights, serious corruption, or undermining basic democratic principles is “incongruent” with U.S. efforts to restore democracy and respect for the rule of law in the Sahel?

Answer. We are committed to promoting accountability for human rights violations and abuses, democratic backsliding, and corruption using a variety of tools, including sanctions and visa restrictions, where appropriate. In Niger, we have sent a strong message that our relationship is no longer business as usual. The measures we have taken, including by not relying on available authorities to overcome section 7008 restrictions, will have a strong impact in our effort to achieve a credible transition to democratic rule in Niger. We continue to assess the use of financial sanctions and visa restrictions to respond to the crisis in the Sahel.

*Question.* Do you still believe these illegitimate, undemocratic, and abusive military juntas are capable of, as you stated in July 2022, undertaking “reforms that are demanded by their people to form the foundation of a more democratic system?”

Answer. We constantly revisit our strategy considering changing dynamics. In Mali, we and international partners listened to claims by transition authorities that, backed by popular support, they would implement long-needed reforms and combat the corruption that had plagued the presidency of Ibrahim Keita. We took an expansive approach to using our notwithstanding authority to continue as much assistance as possible following the military coup in August 2020. Unfortunately, the collective optimism from the international community was misplaced. In Niger, we have not relied on available authorities to overcome section 7008 restrictions, and sent the message that it is no longer business as usual. We are using a phased approach where we must see concrete progress toward a credible transition to democracy in Niger in order to restart assistance under available authorities.

*Question.* Has the Africa Bureau drafted a sanctions strategy for any of the coup countries in West Africa? I would include Chad, despite the State Department’s finding that there was not a coup there. They got off on a technicality, in my view.

Answer. As situations change, we continually review all tools available to us and determine what is the best tool to use to advance U.S. foreign policy goals. Sanctions and visa restrictions, where appropriate, can promote accountability and support policy priorities. The Bureau of African Affairs continues to consult with the Office of the Sanctions Coordinator to review sanctions-related points of leverage in West Africa. We continue to assess the use of sanctions and visa restrictions to respond to the crisis in the Sahel.

*Question.* Can you clarify why the Administration decided to sanction three senior Malian military officers for coordinating with the Wagner group but has not sanctioned any Malian officials specifically for killing Malian civilians, sexual violence, or other gross violations of human rights?

*Answer.* The arrival of the Wagner Group in Mali resulted in great suffering for the Malian people. More civilians were killed in 2022 after the Group's arrival than in any other year since the conflict broke out in 2012. By sanctioning those individuals, including the Malian defense minister, who were instrumental in bringing the Wagner Group to Mali and making overtures to Burkina Faso, we hope to deter others from making similar mistakes. In May, we also imposed visa restrictions on two Malian military commanders for their involvement in gross violations of human rights committed in Moura in 2022.

*Question.* What message does it send other military juntas or people in Mali and across the Sahel when the United States decides to sanction security force members for working with Russia but not for massacring their own people?

*Answer.* As the Wagner Group is responsible for or contributed to much of the violence perpetrated against civilians in Mali, sanctioning those who worked to bring them into Mali does demonstrate our outrage for this violence. In addition, we imposed visa restrictions on two Malian commanders for their involvement in the killings in Moura in 2022, a massacre the Wagner Group supported. We will continue to use various tools against those who are responsible for increasing violence in Mali and elsewhere.

*Question.* Can you explain why the Department has not sanctioned any member of Chad's security force for the October 2022 massacre and subsequent campaign of forces disappearances, and torture?

*Answer.* The U.S. Government condemned the violent clashes with protesters on October 20, 2022, as well as the arrests and deaths of protesters in custody following these protests. We have pressed for Chad's transitional government to conduct a full investigation of these events, and hold accountable those responsible for killing protesters, including several in front of the U.S. Embassy. On the 1-year anniversary of the deadly protests, we renewed our call for full investigation of these events and accountability for anyone responsible for human rights violations and abuses.

*Question.* The standard of "credible information" articulated by Section 7031© is not a high bar. Does the Department lack credible information implicating Chadian security forces in these abuses despite what would appear to be numerous, credible reports by international organizations and the Chadian Government's own Human Rights Commission?

*Answer.* The United States has urged the Government of Chad to investigate the violence in Chad on October 20, 2022, and facilitate an international inquiry in order to provide a full account of these events and identify those responsible for killing protesters. This includes the assailants in civilian clothes and private vehicles who cleared police checkpoints and killed four individuals outside the main gate of the U.S. Embassy. One year after these events, we have yet to receive any results from these investigations. We have also tried to independently identify those responsible, and we are working with civil society to gather more information.

*Question.* My understanding is that both Gabon and Niger may lose their eligibility under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as a consequence of recent coups. Can you explain how Chad, which also experienced a coup and is clearly going in the wrong direction when it comes to political pluralism, respect for the rule of law, the right to due process, or the protection of human rights—all of which are essential criteria for trade benefits under AGOA—manages to retain its AGOA eligibility?

*Answer.* The United States Trade Representative (USTR) leads an annual inter-agency review of sub-Saharan countries' eligibility for AGOA benefits. We are using the AGOA Forum to discuss a forward vision for AGOA that reflects the opportunities for improvements, as well as the changes on the continent. For additional information, we refer you to USTR.

*Question.* Do you think the United States should provide constitution drafting or election related assistance to military governments in, for example, Mali or Chad when these processes appear engineered to extend the current military government's grip on power?

*Answer.* While transitional governments are often rife with corruption and lack the credibility to advance genuine reform, they are also opportunities to reframe his-

torical grievances, establish accountability mechanisms for past abuses, and support reconciliation needed for social cohesion and long-term peace and prosperity. A successful democratic transition needs to be built from the ground up, ensuring public consultation and buy-in throughout the process, including a wide range of civil society actors.

The Department continues to identify and deploy available resources to support sustainable democratic transitions across the continent and will leverage available expertise and ensure a coordinated response to the multiple dynamic transitions processes taking place, particularly where unique approaches are required. Programming will continue to be targeted and specific to each country's context.

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RESPONSES OF MS. MOLLY PHEE TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

*Question.* Since 2020, military coups have occurred in Mali, Chad, Sudan, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger and Gabon. In your testimony to the Committee, you note that a primary driver of political instability is weak governance, and that countries with a history of military takeover, government corruption, failing to provide basic services, and ignoring democratic values by extending democratic values or disregarding human rights are at risk for coups. I agree with your analysis, which points to a few countries at particular risk for coups moving forward, including Cameroon, Burundi, Mauritania, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Senegal and Zimbabwe.

What lessons have been learned from the recent coups that should be applied to other countries at risk? How is the Biden administration adjusting its approach to countries like Burundi, Cameroon, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Nigeria to ensure they remain on a positive democratic trajectory?

*Answer.* Recent coups have brought into stark relief the critical importance of ongoing U.S. efforts, in partnership with regional allies and civil society, to stem democratic backsliding and confront human rights violations and abuses using a mix of punitive measures and positive inducements. Throughout the continent we are supporting civil society and working to ensure marginalized groups, including women and youth, have a voice in political processes. Where appropriate, we will provide resources and guidance to encourage democratic governance, effective service delivery, accountability, economic growth, anti-corruption measures, and dialogue between capitals and communities, which are keys to ensuring long-term stability, development, and prosperity for countries and communities.

*Question.* Do you assess that support for democracy and governance in countries at risk for coups is sufficient and appropriately targeted? Where should adjustments be made given lessons learned from the Sahel?

*Answer.* We remain committed to supporting key stakeholders, including regional bodies, governments, democratic and inclusive political movements, and civil society, to advance the shared democratic goals of the United States and the majority of African publics. With the support of Congress and the Global Fragility Act, we are helping countries in coastal west Africa to strengthen democratic governance through foreign assistance programming. We are also working to implement the African Democratic and Political Transitions initiative (ADAPT) as well as the 21st Century Partnership for Africa Security, or 21PAS—programs launched by President Biden at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit.

*Question.* What guidance has Department leadership, including yourself, provided to our Ambassadors and Embassy personnel in countries in Africa at risk for coups on how to engage with stakeholders at post to make clear that support from the United States is dependent on credible constitutional transfers of power and to provide public support for such processes?

*Answer.* I encourage our Ambassadors and Embassy personnel to engage with governments, political parties, and civil society to advance our shared democratic goals. Our public condemnation of coups, and announcements of the restrictions imposed as a result, are disseminated with regional partners. In the case of West Africa, our engagement with ECOWAS member states as the regional body has confronted the various coups has allowed us to clearly communicate the consequences, particularly regarding section 7008 restrictions.

*Question.* Have lessons learned from situations in Mali and Sudan informed the State Department's sense of urgency in addressing protracted conflicts and failed peace processes in places like Cameroon and South Sudan? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Answer. While all have unique causes, at the core of undemocratic transfers of power and violent conflicts on the continent is a lack of accountable democratic governance and open political space, and each requires a democratic governance solution. Sustainable peace and democracy require investments in institutional reforms and civil society, including by empowering civil society advocacy through programs like our Civil Society Partnerships for Civilian Security program.

In South Sudan, the United States is working to mitigate and prevent sub-national violence, promote respect for human rights, better target U.S. assistance to communities in need, protect and defend civic space, independent media, and peaceful political voices, and hold the transitional government accountable to its commitments to manage the country's natural resources transparently. Since the submission of our annual report to Congress on South Sudan policy in March, we have taken additional steps, including, the release of a business advisory, the renewal of the arms embargo, support for civil society, and consistent messaging with our partners to advance our policy. We also continue to work with our African partners, international actors, and local civil society to support peace and stability across the central African sub-region and to promote a peaceful resolution between the Government of Cameroon and separatists in the English-speaking northwest and southwest regions of Cameroon.

*Question.* How is the United States demonstrating and communicating to local populations that we are a reliable partner committed to their long-term best interests?

Answer. The United States communicates that we are a reliable, long-term partner in the Sahel by investing in host countries' human capital and cultivating credible voices among the local population in support of U.S. policy and values. Our public diplomacy tools include exchange programs that build lasting ties between local policymakers, influencers, and young leaders and their American counterparts. Almost without exception, these exchange alumni return to their countries with positive impressions of the United States and its role in the world, which they promote among their colleagues and audiences over the course of their careers.

Our public affairs campaigns on traditional and social media use compelling images and language to highlight U.S. investments across the region in good governance, public health, quality education, and other universal benefits. U.S. diplomats also engage local audiences in person at public gatherings, in board rooms, in government offices, and in academia, making the case that we are there for them over the long haul.

*Question.* Is the State Department making adequate use of resources, like local radio, to communicate with local populations about issues important to them, as well as the significant lifesaving assistance the U.S. provides?

Answer. Our diplomatic missions in Africa employ all communications methods at their disposal to reach target audiences where they live. For example, the Bureau of African Affairs is currently expanding an innovative multi-platform media campaign in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia to counteract PRC messaging around its many high-visibility infrastructure projects by highlighting the tangible benefits of long-term U.S. investment in the health and education sectors. We are working to expand this program to more than 20 countries in the region.

We also engage vulnerable, under-served audiences in the region through, for example, the U.S. Agency for Global Media's new Fula language Voice of America programming. This project, tentatively scheduled to be launched in early 2024, with an initial \$700,000 grant via Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability funding, targets underserved audiences who are most at risk to adversarial influence with objective news and information.

In addition, we are developing a second season of Limitless Africa, our radio and podcast series that addresses contemporary African issues. This program provides a potential regional audience of 15 million listeners with an accurate picture of the positive impact of U.S. policy and engagement, while advancing narratives that oppose misinformation and disinformation from other actors.

The Global Engagement Center (GEC) is supporting counterterrorism strategic communications projects in the Sahel region. These projects incorporate public service announcements and a radio drama series as strategic messaging to educate local populations on the manipulative tactics deployed by terrorist groups. The content is disseminated via radio in multiple local languages including Fula, Hausa, Kanuri, Shuwa Arabic, and French. Materials are available for posts' own use in developing similar programming.

*Question.* Given the rapidly deteriorating conditions for constructive relations with the junta, what are the Biden administration's current top priorities for Mali?

**Answer.** The United States remains committed to helping the Malian people achieve their aspirations for democracy, development, and stability. We continue to be the largest bilateral donor of development and humanitarian assistance that benefits people in Mali. Our priority is to provide people in Mali with access to humanitarian assistance, food, healthcare, and education while growing our relationships through cultural and exchange programs. While we support Mali's population, we will advocate for the transition government to return Mali to democracy and provide responsible security that respects human rights.

**Question.** With the departure of the French, as well as significant anti-French sentiment by the junta, which allies does the United States view as having the most influence with the junta? How are we working with these allies to advance mutually beneficial outcomes?

**Answer.** The transition government is not readily influenced by any allies, although it maintains relatively robust partnerships with some European partners, including Germany, Spain, and Italy. Russia is the transition government's preferred partner, which is unfortunate for the people of Mali who suffer from the abuses of the Wagner Group. The transition government has also increasingly sought to expand partnerships with China, Iran, Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger. We continuously engage our allies on the ground in Bamako as well as through capitals and in Washington to advocate for mutually beneficial outcomes.

**Question.** Please provide a detailed breakdown of the foreign assistance and security cooperation programs have been suspended, terminated, or cleared to continue in Niger following the decision to apply restrictions under Section 7008 of annual SFOPS appropriations measures.

**Answer.** Please see attachment of current programs for Niger that have been restricted as a result of the military coup. \$29 million in assistance benefitting the government that is currently continuing under available notwithstanding authorities includes the provision of life-saving health programs. \$138 million in assistance for the government of Niger remains suspended under section 7008, the majority of which are programs in counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and military professionalization programs benefitting the Nigerien military. The further use of available authorities to continue certain assistance will depend on the National Council for Safeguarding the Homeland taking steps to usher in civilian-led democratic government.

| State and USAID Restricted Assistance to Niger                                                                |                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Assistance outlined below is restricted per Sec 7008 in which funding was supporting the government of Niger. |                      |
| <i>actual dollars</i>                                                                                         | Amount               |
| <b>Total Restricted Assistance</b>                                                                            | <b>\$182,028,131</b> |
| <b>Sub-total Niger Reprogrammings</b>                                                                         | <b>\$15,211,681</b>  |
| <b>Of which, expiring PKO reprogramming to Somalia</b>                                                        | <b>\$14,530,126</b>  |
| <b>Of which, expiring NADR-CWD reprogramming to Coastal West Africa</b>                                       | <b>\$681,555</b>     |
| <b>Sub-total programs relying on NWA</b>                                                                      | <b>\$29,233,131</b>  |
| <b>Of which, USAID funding with available NWA</b>                                                             | <b>\$29,233,131</b>  |
| <b>Sub-total suspended programs</b>                                                                           | <b>\$137,583,319</b> |
| <b>NADR</b>                                                                                                   | <b>\$50,274,615</b>  |
| <b>PKO</b>                                                                                                    | <b>\$41,693,240</b>  |
| <b>INCLE</b>                                                                                                  | <b>\$9,443,697</b>   |
| <b>FMF</b>                                                                                                    | <b>\$6,434,558</b>   |
| <b>GHP</b>                                                                                                    | <b>\$4,929,619</b>   |
| <b>DA</b>                                                                                                     | <b>\$21,268,144</b>  |
| <b>IMET</b>                                                                                                   | <b>\$246,113</b>     |
| <b>ESF</b>                                                                                                    | <b>\$3,293,333</b>   |

*Question.* In your testimony, you indicated that in addition to applying Section 7008, the Administration has decided, as a matter of policy, to suspend additional foreign assistance and security cooperation for Niger. What programs and security cooperation activities, specifically, has the Administration suspended pursuant to a policy decision (as opposed to legal restrictions)?

*Answer.* The United States has paused military cooperation with the Nigeriens and declined to use available authorities that would allow us to continue much of the restricted assistance pending actions by the National Council for Safeguarding the Homeland to make concrete steps toward ushering in civilian-led democratic governance. In some recent coups in West Africa, we used available authorities to continue certain assistance without interruption. We are taking a different approach in Niger and have not exercised such authorities in order to encourage progress on a transition.

*Question.* Under 22 USC §2349aa, the State Department is authorized to provide anti-terrorism assistance to foreign law enforcement personnel “notwithstanding any other provision of law that restricts assistance to foreign countries”—including Section 7008. In which post-coup countries (Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger) has the State Department continued to administer ATA programs, including under the Department’s Counter-Terrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF) program? What is the projected or requested budget for such programs in each country in FY2023 and FY2024?

*Answer.* In accordance with section 7008 of the annual appropriations act, the Department has suspended its foreign military assistance for the governments of Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger. The Department is in limited cases relying on available notwithstanding authorities for Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger, to strengthen civilian counterterrorism institutions. This includes some CT bureau programs, including ATA, CTPF, TIP, and TSCTP programming. State is currently weighing FY23 funding in West Africa against global priorities.

*Question.* Please describe Ambassador Hammer’s official mandate and priorities assigned to him by Department leadership as Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa.

*Answer.* Special Envoy Ambassador Mike Hammer continues to work to advance peace in Ethiopia and support efforts to achieve a diplomatic resolution to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam dispute involving Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan. In addition, on Sudan, Special Envoy Hammer is engaging international partners in the region, starting with our African partners from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development for East Africa (IGAD) and the African Union, as well as other international partners, like the European Union, to support accountability and chart a path forward for restoring democratic civilian governance, while mobilizing support for humanitarian needs.

*Question.* Do you agree with my assessment that the United States needs a presidential special envoy to Sudan?

*Answer.* The Department of State agrees that the conflict in Sudan requires an urgent and robust response, and we have an all-hands-on-deck effort led by Secretary Blinken. Our Ambassador to Sudan, John Godfrey, is leading the Embassy team and is focused on engaging Sudanese civilians and senior representatives of the belligerent parties. We have recalled Ambassador Daniel Rubinstein back to duty to lead the U.S. delegation in Jeddah that is co-facilitating talks, along with Saudi Arabia and IGAD, participating on behalf of the AU, between the belligerent parties to establish ceasefires, press for unhindered access for the provision of humanitarian assistance, and institute confidence building measures enabling progress toward a cessation of hostilities. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Mike Hammer is engaging our international partners, with a focus on African and European partners.

*Question.* When was the last Principals Meeting on Sudan?

*Answer.* There have been frequent interagency meetings since the beginning of this conflict, including the Principals Committee, the Deputies Committee and other meetings. Stemming from this, Secretary Blinken and other senior officials are frequently engaged in diplomatic engagements to coordinate with regional and international partners, support civilian dialogue, and to press the two parties to establish a ceasefire, protect civilians, and allow unhindered humanitarian access.

*Question.* In response to questions for the records I sent to Mr. Riley for his confirmation for U.S. Ambassador to Somalia, he “committed to regularly travelling to Somaliland and engaging with the Government of Somaliland.”



Will you support Mr. Riley in his efforts to travel to Somaliland and engage with the Government of Somaliland in Hargeisa?

Answer. Yes, if he is confirmed, I will support Mr. Riley's efforts to travel to Somaliland safely and engage with officials in Hargeisa within the framework of our single Somalia policy.

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RESPONSES OF MS. MOLLY PHEE TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CORY A. BOOKER

*Question.* How can you leverage the tools in programs like USAID's Democracy Delivers Initiative to not only strengthen democratic systems but also provide access to meaningful economic resources?

Answer. The Democracy Delivers Initiative focuses on countries experiencing a promising democratic opening—when there's an opportunity to enact democratic reforms, strengthen transparency and the rule of law, advance human rights and development, and deliver economic dividends—to help governments, civil society, and citizens seize the moment. This program brings together the development and diplomatic tools of the U.S. Government, together with contributions by other bilateral and multilateral donors, the private sector, and the philanthropic community to support countries experiencing a moment of democratic opportunity to implement and expand their reform agendas. At present, the Democracy Delivers Initiative countries in Africa are Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia.

While no countries in the Sahel currently participate in the Democracy Delivers Initiative, the Department of State and USAID leverage other types of foreign assistance resources and engage across all sectors to support democratic governance and promote economic progress. We remain focused on working with our African partners and the people to address challenges and support democracy, which is the best foundation for development, social cohesion, prosperity, and stability in the Sahel and across the African continent.

*Question.* Is there more the DFC and MCC could be doing to provide a comprehensive approach?

Answer. MCC and DFC have robust, dynamic programs in Africa that are highly respected and sought after by African governments. We work closely with MCC and DFC at the leadership and working levels to share our foreign policy priorities so that we can optimize their work on the continent.

MCC is actively working in 14 African countries with about \$3.7 billion in signed compact and threshold programs, and another estimated \$2.3 billion in the developing pipeline. Passage of the Millennium Challenge Corporation Candidate Country Reform Act would expand MCC's candidate pool to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's graduation threshold. Such a change would add countries to MCC's candidate pool, including some in Africa.

DFC has \$9.7 billion in exposure in Sub-Saharan Africa across more than 280 projects in 38 countries. The private-sector led projects DFC finances have a far-reaching impact—they are expanding access to lifesaving vaccines and other essential healthcare, building data centers and other critical infrastructure, helping vulnerable communities address the climate crisis, bolstering food security, and expanding access to electricity.

DFC mobilizes private sector capital, bringing much needed investment dollars to impactful projects, along with the highest standards for doing business. These investments help support African economies and create economic opportunities for Africans across the continent—both of which are critical to a comprehensive approach to USG engagement with our partners in the Sahel and beyond.

*Question.* What tools and methods are most effective against disinformation in the Sahel and West Africa? Can we do more?

Answer. In West Africa, building capacity has proven one of our most effective counter-disinformation strategies. Exchange programs and in-country workshops provide reliable partners in host governments, media, and civil society with the tools to detect and counter disinformation.

The United States and its partners must edge out competitor narratives by filling the communications space with positive messages that underscore our values, partnerships, and commitment to shared prosperity in the region. Our Missions in West Africa are doing heroic work with limited resources. With more resources, we can further erode our adversaries' capacity to dominate these fragile information spaces, while strengthening our partners' ability to counter disinformation.

One example of this work is the U.S.-West Africa Tech Challenge that U.S. Embassy Abidjan and the Global Engagement Center (GEC) hosted with Côte d'Ivoire's Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy in September 2023 to encourage innovative solutions to combat disinformation from violent extremist groups and reinforce USG initiatives under the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability.

The two small businesses that won the challenge will develop products to respectively combat agricultural disinformation in rural Côte d'Ivoire and support free and fair elections in Nigeria, addressing violent extremist group tactics to spread disinformation and exploit socio-economic issues and local grievances.

*Question.* What is the State Department doing to ensure that our embassies across the Sahel and West Africa are fully staffed?

*Answer.* The Department continues to use increased incentives for service in historically difficult to staff (HDS) posts around the world, including service needs differentials? for extended service, along with hardship differentials, and prioritized assignments. Additionally, several initiatives are underway, including development of regional support models, to better ensure that we are providing posts across the region with adequate support. In the last year the Department has reformed incentives to better focus bidders' attention on the most difficult to staff posts.

*Question.* Lack of adequate participation mechanisms for civil society results in missed opportunities for frank exchange of information and ideas about how to properly address the root causes of instability.

What steps is the Biden administration taking to ensure that civil society perspectives, particularly from women and youth, are incorporated into decision making processes at the national and regional level, particularly as it relates to governance and timelines for transition to civilian rule in coup-affected countries?

*Answer.* Through concerted diplomatic efforts and the provision of U.S. foreign assistance across Sub-Saharan Africa, we seek to promote respect for human rights, free and fair elections that reflect the will of the people, an active civil society, accountable and participatory governance, and access to justice for all. Our foreign assistance resources help empower and bolster the impact of civil society, with a particular focus on women, youth, and other marginalized populations.

Specifically, U.S. foreign assistance supports efforts to ensure democratic transitions, as well as governance writ large, are inclusive and take into account the input of a broad swathe of civil society. This includes support for civil society participation in national dialogues as well as longer-term civil society capacity building and advocacy training. Additionally, we work across sectors, including efforts to ensure civil society plays a role in strategic planning in sectors such as wash, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), health, education, and economic growth. Taken together, these efforts ensure civil society is capable of advocating for the needs of the people of their countries and their input is heard by government actors.

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RESPONSES OF MS. MOLLY PHEE TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TIM SCOTT

*Question.* What message do you believe was sent to the region by our decision to delay these coup determinations? Do you assess that regional damage was inflicted by that decision?

*Answer.* We have made clear that we stand with the Nigerien people in their aspirations for democracy, prosperity, and stability. We did not want to conclude that a military coup had taken place while we believed there was still some chance to preserve the constitutional order, potentially including having Mohamed Bazoum continue to serve as President. We are continuing to support ECOWAS efforts to work with Niger to achieve a quick and credible return to democratic rule. We regret that regional and international efforts were not successful in preserving the constitutional order, including with respect to President Bazoum. We now assess that former President Bazoum has been deposed.

*Question.* You have said that the delay on Niger's designation was due in part to a request from ECOWAS, to enable the regional body to take steps to restore President Bazoum to power. Do you believe the delay had any impact on ECOWAS' success, or lack thereof?

*Answer.* No. We have engaged with ECOWAS at every step since the events of July 26. For example, immediately following these events, we worked closely with ECOWAS to support efforts to preserve the constitutional order in Niger. When the situation made it clear that there had been a military coup and President Bazoum

was in fact deposed, we announced that we were applying Section 7008 of the annual Appropriations Act to the Government of Niger.

*Question.* I also understand there was a hesitancy to issue a coup designation on Niger for fear of triggering Section 7008 restrictions. Congress included a national security waiver in Section 7008 to enable administrations to promptly designate coups when they occur, without jeopardizing our national security interests. If the Administration was concerned about the impact a designation on Niger would have on our national security, can you explain why a waiver was not utilized in the immediate aftermath of such an obvious military coup.

*Answer.* We initiated a pause on assistance for the Government of Niger on August 5 consistent with the restrictions in section 7008. Our deliberations on whether there had been a military coup triggering Section 7008 of the annual *Appropriations Act* were tied to the facts, including whether there was a path to preserve constitutional order in Niger. We assessed that there had been a military coup in Niger once we concluded that President Bazoum had been deposed and there was no constitutional path forward. The waiver only applies to FY 2023 appropriations, as well as to FY 2024 appropriations under the CR. Now that the restrictions of Section 7008 are in effect, we will consider whether use of a waiver is appropriate.

*Question.* To what degree have ongoing security assistance challenges impacted U.S. counterterrorism operations in the Sahel and West Africa? How is the Administration addressing these challenges to ensure the effectiveness of ongoing counterterrorism efforts while simultaneously dealing with the instability caused by military coups?

*Answer.* The U.S. Government continues to pursue robust counterterrorism coordination with our partners in West Africa. Department of State counterterrorism programs build partner capacity to constrain terrorists' ability to move resources and fighters, conduct terrorism investigations and prosecutions, mitigate and respond to terrorist incidents, and counter violent extremism. In support of regional efforts to promote coup countries' return to democracy, we continue to provide much-needed civilian counterterrorism support to build stronger institutions. We are aligning this support with important investments in Coastal West Africa under the *Global Fragility Act* to bolster resilience and stability in at-risk countries bordering the Sahel to prevent the spread of instability across remaining democracies in the region.

*Question.* Do you believe the growing number of military coups has enabled or promoted terrorist activity in the region?

*Answer.* Violence has quantifiably increased since the coups d'états in all three Sahel states, rising 46 percent since 2021. In Mali in particular, attacks on civilians rose 50 percent in 2022, compared to the previous year, and have risen a further 38 percent in 2023. While terrorist violence accounts for nearly half of attacks in Mali since 2021, violence by the Malian armed forces or Wagner Group represented 29 percent. In Niger, terrorist attacks have increased 43 percent in the 3 months since its coup, as compared to the same period in 2022.

*Question.* Have you assessed a trend in post-coup states in the region moving closer to China, Russia, or Iran? If so, what steps is the Department taking to counter this trend?

*Answer.* Russian, Iranian, and PRC activity on the African continent remain fluid. Russia has continued to exploit instability in states like Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, including through disinformation tactics. Mali is an example where military governance has paved the way for Russian influence. Russia—through the Wagner Group—has been a primary supporter of Malian counterterrorism operations. These operations, however, have only increased violence in Mali and have not diminished the terrorist threat. The PRC seeks to export its political governance model, including in post-coup states. Gaining support for its approach to governance is an integral part of Beijing's strategy toward Africa, which the PRC views as the vanguard of its effort to consolidate the Global South around the creation of a Sino-centric world order. The Department of State's Global Engagement Center has been working on countering disinformation in the Sahel. We reassure our partners that strong, accountable, and democratic institutions—sustained by a deep commitment to respect for human rights—remain the most reliable avenue to long-term peace and prosperity and remain the best way to counter instability and dehumanization of authoritarian rule.

Iran continues to explore opportunities to proliferate weapons and build relationships in Africa, and the United States will continue to enforce sanctions on Iran and impose costs on those who contravene these sanctions.

*Question.* What steps is the Administration taking to modify or update the existing interagency strategy on the Sahel in response to the rapid destabilization we've seen over the past few months?

*Answer.* There is a fluid situation in the Sahel, and we constantly revisit our strategy considering changing dynamics. However, our principles have not changed. We remain focused on working with our African partners and the people to address challenges and support democracy, which is the best foundation for development, social cohesion, prosperity, and stability across the Sahel and the African continent.

