

**DASD Huddleston Proposed Testimony to the
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations' Subcommittee on African Affairs
Subject:
"Examining U.S. Counterterrorism Priorities and Strategy across Africa's Sahel
Region"
November 17, 2009, 10:30am
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 419**

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

The DoD through primarily U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) is supporting an overarching U.S. Government (USG) strategy to counter terrorism – specifically al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – in the Sahel and North Africa. The principal tools for doing so are the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-TRANS-SAHARA (OEF-TS), which seek to build the capacity of regional militaries so that they can counter the presence of AQIM and prevent their operations within their countries. In addition, through our military training, equipping, and advising efforts, we seek to foster greater coordination and cooperation among the security institutions in the region. We believe that the long-term solution must be that each nation is capable of controlling its territory because it has the support of its citizens while maintaining the military capacity to ensure

stability. If this is not the case, then those who espouse violent extremism and acts of terrorism, even if temporarily defeated, will return to the ungoverned spaces.

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

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

where AQIM could attempt to recruit, link up with like-minded organizations, or carry out terrorist attacks.

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

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

European partners could provide assistance that would support regional development and security.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unfortunately, our cooperation with Niger is limited because of President Tandja's decision to suspend the constitution. Past U.S. military cooperation with the Nigerien

military was good and was similar in scope and effort to current activities with Mali. However, DoD military cooperation with Niger was terminated in compliance with growing U.S. policy restrictions against Niger due to President Tandja's actions. We hope that the Nigerien government will return to a democratic and constitutional framework, so that DoD can again work with the Nigerien military to address the challenges posed by AQIM in the Sahel.

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

I assess that the greatest challenge to our regional partner's security forces is due to the vast distances and harsh environment of the Sahara. This vast, sparsely populated region, has a long tradition of trade and routes that carry whatever goods are traded. In addition, there are pre-existing tensions and wide porous borders that also contribute to

the regions challenges. It is the geographic and environmental realities of this region that is used by AQIM to find refuge in the vast, under-governed spaces. Our partner nations have a daunting challenge from a security perspective in maintaining awareness, monitoring their borders, and providing the necessary security functions traditional of a government to its population.

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