West Africa:

A "Ticking Time Bomb"

or an Opportunity
to Advance U.S. National Security Interests?

by Raymond Everhart, John Morris and Mohamadou Amar

As international relations expert Francis Fukuyama wrote, "Since the end of the Cold War, weak and failing states have arguably become the single most important problem for international order."[1] The turmoil-ridden West African states are the result of a fractured legacy of colonialism, which has brought intractable, sectarian conflicts throughout the region over the past 50 years. As a former colonial region, West Africa did not become contested during the Cold War because of the lack of resources and influential powers within the area. The rise of militant, Islamic terrorism further shifted the focus of the U.S. and other leading powers to the Middle East and other regions of strategic interest. The void created by Western powers' absenteeism and the consequential weakening of West Africa states left the region vulnerable to transnational terrorism, epidemic diseases, organized crime, and human right violations at the hands of the different political regimes.

The Sahel region, stretching in a band from west to east across the center of Africa, south of the Sahara Desert, garners little or no attention from the international community, despite years of terrorist activity from organizations such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Boko Haram. Furthermore, nations in the region lack the political will to take any action against terrorist organizations.[2] The uncontrolled borders and the vast lawless areas allow militant groups to move and act freely with little interference. The arid Sahel is now the breeding ground for trafficking illicit small arms and narcotics, terrorism, kidnappings, and assassinations. The AQIM attacks in Mali in November 2015, in Burkina Faso in January 2016, and in the Ivory Coast in

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March 2016 claimed the lives of 68 people, mostly civilians, including several foreigners.[3] Additionally, AQIM's audacity to attack in the southern, Christian-dominated parts of the Ivory Coast might catalyze an outbreak of religion-based conflict given the country's recent history of civil strife between its Christian and Muslim populations.[4]

In the past year, Boko Haram, which pledged allegiance to The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2015, flexed its muscles and expanded its reach, attacking beyond its normal areas of operation in Nigeria and crossing into neighboring countries. These attacks prove, beyond a doubt, that the terrorist network is expanding in West Africa, facilitating the spread of international terrorism. In fact, the worsening security vacuum in the region increases collaboration among militant groups, which allows them to strengthen their forces in the West African region and increase their reach. Meanwhile, ISIS deepened its foothold in Libya. Unlike the situation in the Middle East where Al-Qaeda and ISIS are contenders, some of these terrorist branches in Africa are reportedly collaborating in arms procurement and training.[5] Today, Islamic terrorist organizations and insurgencies have risen up and gained control of enough territory to establish *de facto* safe havens, and they are striving to dismantle regional governments and implement Islamic law, primarily in Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.[6]

Another significant threat to U.S. security interests is epidemic diseases that spike in West Africa. In 2014, the outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD), which caused more than 11,000 deaths, created tremendous fear across the international community. The U.S. approached the EVD outbreak as a national security matter and took appropriate actions, deploying 4,000 personnel to West Africa to assist with the outbreak. Additionally, the fact that the EVD outbreak occurred in a conflict-driven zone with terrorist organizations, such as Boko Haram or AQIM, present raised further concerns about bio-terrorism.[7] As the U.S. Ambassador in Senegal noted, the next crisis in West Africa could be another epidemic or natural disaster calling for a humanitarian response or a terrorist threat calling for a different kind of response.[8]

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The U.S. Policy and Involvement in West Africa

The U.S. foreign policy in West Africa is not usually thought of in terms of a direct approach to security. In fact, the Obama Administration's Africa policy is based on U.S. "fundamental interests in promoting democratic institutions and good governance, peace and stability, and sustained economic growth..."[9] The U.S. post-2001, anti-terrorism campaign in the Sub-Sahara is nearly a "hands off" approach that focuses on security cooperation through a combination of indirect military aid and joint, small-scale exercises to build capability and capacity with partner nations and regional powers. The U.S. security cooperation programs in West Africa include but are not limited to the Pan Sahel Initiative, Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, African Crisis Response Initiative, African Contingency Operations and Training Assistance (ACOTA), International Military Education and Training (IMET), Counterterrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP), Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), Joint Combined Exchange Training, and Exercise Flintlock.[10] Yet, all these efforts

failed to significantly improve the capabilities of partner nations' military and civilian institutions.

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The Need for a New U.S. Approach in West Africa

Despite all U.S. efforts in West Africa, generally referred to as failures by most pundits, the Sahel region continues to witness the degradation of the West African states. The degradation is leading to internal unrest fueled by multiple, interrelated, causal factors from poverty, human rights violations, and bad governance and corruption to ethnic tensions, narcotic trafficking, epidemic disease, and terrorism.[11] Previous U.S. efforts to counter insurgencies in both Iraq and Afghanistan have achieved some appreciable success but only provided temporary solutions to abominable regimes and freely-operating, bad actors.

For more than a decade, the U.S. government has pursued a national security policy that has been prohibitively expensive in blood and treasure, but without credible allies in these regions, long-lasting stability and peace are hard to come by. The coordinated, small-scale footprint, enduring-engagement approach proposed in this article provides the U.S. national leadership with strategic options for advancing the interests of national security without committing large combat forces to costly, long-lasting, counterinsurgency operations.

The U.S. national interests in West Africa demand an enduring ability to build defense capabilities of partner nations to counter regional security threats, respond to crises, and promote stability. Capacity-building success is achieved by persistent, small-footprint engagements; investing resources in training partner nations; and developing educational institutions in concert with international partners. High-quality training and strong educational institutions develop the human capital necessary for long-term capacity building. Sustained, small-scale engagements and capacity building facilitated through actions taken by the a joint, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIM) community assist partner nations in deterring and defeating transnational threats to promote regional security. The three-dimensional approach proposed in this article to diffuse the "ticking time bomb" of West Africa's turmoil is low visibility, low risk, and low cost. It emphasizes capacity building through a combination of enduring engagement, patience, and coordinated efforts across the U.S. interagency.

Implementing High-Quality Training and Strong Educational Institutions

The U.S. must improve security force training with partner nations in West Africa by providing increased access to educational professionals and institutions. West African nations have benefited from a number of U.S. security programs designed to educate their militaries, including ACOTA, IMET, CTFP, and GPOI. However, most of these programs are limited to a few individuals (e.g., IMET) or tailored to a specific mission (e.g., GPOI intended to support UN peacekeeping missions). As a result, these efforts do not result in an increase of the overall effectiveness of West African militaries.[12]

In order to improve the effectiveness of these security programs, partner nation young leaders must have increased access to U.S. civilian and military educational institutions. Furthermore, the U.S. should explore the techniques used by

enemies such as ISIS to successfully train people of other cultures within West Africa.

The Department of State (State) currently manages the overall U.S. security assistance program funds through the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs in concert with the Department of Defense (DoD), which executes the military programs. The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs manages security assistance through five accounts: (1) foreign military financing; (2) peacekeeping operations; (3) IMET; (4) nonproliferation, anti-terrorism, demining, and related programs; and (5) the Pakistan counterinsurgency capability fund.[13] On the other hand, the U.S. Army Security Assistance Command executes the U.S. Army's security assistance and foreign military sales programs for 145 different countries and agencies.[14] The complexity of these programs, operating under multiple cabinet secretaries, requires a strong partnership, complementary in nature, between State and DoD to ensure they are adequately funded and effectively executed.

Increasing U.S. budget constraints and problems associated with deficit spending will continue to challenge the U.S. government's ability to implement security assistance programs. Therefore, the U.S. must take a more refined, targeted approach by incorporating effective lessons learned, and ensure it trains the right nation on the correct tasks. Over the past 35 years, there are a slew of successful partnering experiences to learn from, including operations in Colombia, the Philippines, and even Iraq.

The other side of building partner capacity is a targeted focus on the partnership region One of the most important considerations is the stability of the nations the U.S. chooses to support and the commitment of their civilian and military leaderships. The U.S. assesses a nation's stability through its corruption index, democratic structures, civil-military relations, and influence of regional powers. The diplomatic, military, information, economic (DIME) concept can be used as a model in assessing a nation's stability in those areas.

Next, assessing the nation's capability shortfalls will determine what capabilities they lack, their ability to improve those capabilities, and the ability of the U.S. to provide those shortfalls.

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Finally, the U.S. must determine where to partner or provide security assistance to each nation based on cultural similarities/colonial history, technological capabilities, and logistical reach. In the case of the Ivory Coast, the U.S. could look to France, a former colonial power in West Africa, for both leadership in country training and cultural expertise. France may request U.S. logistical support and technical expertise. For instance, France provides the infantry trainers, while the U.S. provides trainers for aviation engine mechanics and transport aircraft for moving personnel.

As a result of limited space in educational institutions and shrinking defense budgets, the U.S. must revisit its options for providing highly-specialized training and partnership. Currently, foreign military students receive training at the Army's centers of excellence and military colleges (Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, KS, and the Maneuver Center of Excellence and the Western Hemisphere Institute of Security Studies [WHINSEC], both at Fort Benning, GA) under the IMET and other educational programs. In 2015, the WHINSEC trained 1,983 students from 24 countries, primarily from Western Hemisphere.[15]

Programs that train large numbers of students are not available in African nations. In the civilian arena, the U.S. should replicate current efforts underway in Middle Eastern nations, such as Qatar, where major universities, including Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, have satellite campuses in Qatar's Education City.[16] While this may not be possible in all of West Africa, wealthier nations such as Nigeria could host pilot projects to institute a similar model that brings expanded U.S. quality higher education to West Africa.

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Militarily, the security assistance/partnership model continues to follow the mantra, "Do more with less." Consequently, barring an attack on the U.S., future military budgets will decrease or stagnate for the foreseeable future. Conversely, the military's role in Phase 0, shaping operations, continues to grow. One way to bring quality military education and training to a broader array of international partners is by leveraging technology. As connectivity grows, military training centers and colleges can exploit online training to provide a comparable quality of education to students in West Africa. U.S. military colleges currently employ similar models for students enrolled in distance learning.

Understanding the Enemy's Culture

Currently, despite a limited budget, ISIS is exporting its culture, tactics, techniques, and procedures and is effectively recruiting Muslims around the world to fight for its cause. On the eastern frontiers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Russia is currently able to convince and train parties sympathetic to

its cause inside neighboring NATO nations. In 2014, General David Rodriguez, former commander of the U.S. Africa Command, stated that ISIS was training and building the logistics capabilities with aligned groups in eastern Libya.[17] ISIS also targets young, disenfranchised youth sympathetic to its message and looking to be part of a successful cause.[18]

Although the U.S. and allied nations successfully executed security force assistance over the past 50 years, they also made mistakes along the way. The U.S. must incorporate these lessons learned to build a targeted approach to future security assistance endeavors that must include methods that employ modern technology to allow increased access to U.S. military and civilian education and training institutions. Furthermore, the U.S. must look to the enemy for new techniques to train with fewer resources and focus training on the appropriate tasks.

Incorporating the Regional Aligned Forces and the National Guard's State Partnership Program

The U.S. in concert with partners has the resources and ability to promote regional security in West Africa through enduring and sustainable relationships involving regional aligned forces (RAF) and the National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP). The RAF are those Army units allocated to combatant commands and prepared by the Army for regional missions in specific geographical areas. They include the active Army, the Army National Guard, and the Army reserve. SPP is a joint DoD program executed by individual states and managed by the National Guard in coordination with the State Department. SPP is an innovative, low-cost, small-footprint, security cooperation program that links a state's National Guard with a partner nation's military/security forces in a cooperative, mutually-beneficial relationship that supports combatant commanders and U.S. embassy objectives.[19]

While Africa faces challenges due to poor governance, threats from violent extremist organizations, corruption, and poverty, there is a potential for democratization and economic development.[20] State spearheads the U.S. efforts to develop partner nations in Africa and advance national security interests in order to achieve stability and security in the region. The U.S. has embassies in more than 45 African countries that can synchronize a JIM approach to build partner capacity using a whole-of-government approach with all elements of national power (DIME).[21] Since National Guard and reserve forces reside in the public/state domain, they are more capable to spread the diplomatic and military successes of the SPP within the U.S. and partner nations. Additionally, reconnecting the RAF can be the first step of a whole-of-government approach to building a long-term, mutually-beneficial partnership to secure a safe and stable West Africa. RAF creates an opportunity to deter and defeat potential transnational threats by allowing the governments of fragile, fractured, or failing host nations to partner with the U.S. military to train their security forces. This security force training, also known as security force assistance (SFA), is one of the U.S. Army's newest core competencies. RAF conducting SFA is a method by which the U.S. will do more with less to enable secure and stable West Africa.

SFA training through the RAF program allows West African nations to benefit by building capacity using a tailored plan coordinated through the Department of State. This program expands capacity-building efforts by employing conventional forces to conduct operations normally in the realm of special operations forces (SOF). SOF are specifically organized, trained, and equipped to execute special operations core activities: direct action, special reconnaissance, counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, counterinsurgency, information operations, military information support operations, and civil affairs operations.[22]

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SOF are the synchronizers who nest the geographic combatant commander's theater campaign plan within the ambassador's integrated country strategy and the security sector reform programs. The integration of SOF ensures enduring engagement and the achievement of mutually-beneficial goals and objectives. SOF are extremely limited in number due to their specialty and selection criteria. RAF can now fill training gaps by training host nations on simplistic and more complex, mission command functions, freeing up SOF to conduct missions that fall more into their core competencies. This means RAF will be required to have some tailored regional and specialized training in order to transition into a JIM integrator. This does not mean SOF will not be utilized at all, it means they can use their core competencies to address the capability shortfalls of a fragile country in need. As with all U.S. forces, SOF is scalable as the mission and priority dictate. These new requirements and evolving relationships create new apertures to adapt and innovate forces to meet the demands of West Africa aligned with the interests of U.S. national security.

Should The Army Warfighting Challenges Be Integrated?

The 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS), Quadrennial Defense Review, Quadrennial

Diplomacy and Development Review, and the Army Strategic Planning Guidance have an underlying, though not well articulated, message: You will work together. Integration and intelligence sharing will be the keystones for West African success as the U.S. adapts and innovates. The U.S. government has a responsibility to create the conditions to leverage the intelligence that support a secure and stable environment for the West African people. Intelligence, integration, and innovation have the ability to transform perspective and processes faster with more purpose and fluidity than operating within a specific branch of service. The 2016 Army Warfighting Challenges (AWfCs) are 20 first-order problems, the solutions to which improve the combat effectiveness of the current and future force. [23] AWfCs spur discussion and guide the Army's innovation process to answer evolving global security and stability challenges. AWfCs, such as shape the security environment, provide SFA, and ensure interoperability and operate in a JIM environment, provide the framework for intelligence, integration, and innovation to take hold in supporting the strategic objectives of Africa outlined in the 2015 NSS.

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Intelligence, integration, and innovation should be framed as such: In order to efficiently and effectively innovate, there must be an existing environment where intelligence is shared and leveraged through integration. Assessing the existing environment and providing intelligence to an integrated JIM approach will allow the U.S. to frame the issues affecting the current situation and provide innovative options to adapt and mitigate complex, unforeseen situations. This ability to frame and reframe along the way are keys to understanding what will be required of a whole-of-government investment in West Africa. U.S. resources are limited, but ideas to design options are unlimited.

Shape the security environment (AWfC#2) is foundational to Africa's interests. State is the lead for a building partnership capacity objective that resides in DoD Phase 0 of the joint planning process construct. Phase 0 focuses on preventing conflict and shaping security environments. West Africa is a huge opportunity to highlight the ability to shape a complex security environment with RAF and consolidate gains through a modern peace-building approach. The continuous reframing of the operational environment through a JIM lens allows resources to be leveraged more efficiently by building partner capacity in Phase 0. The Army's "prevent, shape, win" strategy can be viewed as, "Win by successfully shaping the operational environment in order to prevent conflict." AWfC #2 can serve as the catalyst for successful gains using intelligence, integration, and innovation.

Ensure interoperability and operate in JIM environment (AWfC #14) vectors the JIM community to integrate to ensure unity of effort by creating a shared understanding through the seamless planning, coordination, and execution of operations. This resonates in Africa where so many different operations must be coordinated for a synchronized and lasting effect.

Provide SFA (AWfC #3) highlights RAF and their ability to increase local, regional, and host nation security force capability, capacity, and effectiveness to protect the people of West Africa. Having RAF as an effective means to provide SFA will be a step in the right direction to consolidate efforts in Phase 0.

West Africa, RAF and the AWfCs

The unrest in West Africa is becoming

a growing threat to U.S. national security. Historically, the U.S. has made positive impacts in the region using coordinated efforts through a whole-of-government approach. Similarly, for any security engagement to succeed, it must be coordinated across U.S. government agencies. The U.S. Army cannot operate independently and expect to build partner capacity in West Africa. Partner building capacity can be achieved through SFA by using the RAF in West Africa. Successful capacity building activities must look at all options and capabilities within all elements of national power.

As the lead agency for foreign policy, State must ensure U.S. goals and objectives in West Africa are communicated across the JIM community to blend all efforts in a whole-of-government approach. State should ensure foreign policy objectives are nested with the national security strategy and synchronized with DoD personnel deploying to West Africa. It is equally important to create a common goal by considering partner and ally goals and interests by analyzing conditions on the ground. Currently, RAF and the SPP provide the necessary means, but will the end state change and, therefore, require the AWfCs to be reframed?

The AWfCs are designed to address the constant and evolving nature of the problems the U.S. faces; however, there is no forum to collaborate on the joint warfighting challenges the U.S. faces in the current and future operating environments. The AWfCs need more "buy-in" and involvement across the JIM community in order address global security and stability challenges through collaboration. Collaboration will allow the JIM community to innovate faster than the perceived enemy can or will.

The U.S. current efforts in West Africa to build partner capacity are the result of lessons learned from past missions and will rely on efforts at the tactical level. Future U.S. engagements in West Africa must leverage every element of national power efficiently in order to maximize a mutually-beneficial return on investment.

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Conclusion

West Africa's rising tide of epidemic diseases, poverty, organized crime, human rights violations, and an inevitable drive into transnational terrorism is a threat to U.S. national security objectives in the region. Despite the U.S. past commitment to consolidate peace and stability in West Africa, a new wave of challenges caused by global terror groups who want to impose strict Islamic law in portions of the Sahel region is creating a security crisis of epic proportions. Pundits continue to scrutinized U.S. efforts in the West Africa because of a lack of persistent engagement using a whole-of-government approach to address the wide range of issues. While enduring engagement using a whole-of-government approach seems the way of the future, it certainly is easier said than done.

Effective coordination or delivery of security assistance programs is often impeded by challenges related to the bureaucracy of U.S. government stakeholders. Furthermore, the inability of partner nations to endorse and sustain capabilities or their lack of shared security interests with the U.S. constitutes another roadblock to capacity-building activities. Success in security cooperation and capacity building is strongly correlated to partners with favorable contextual characteristics. For instance, the security assistance programs in

Colombia and the Philippines have succeeded and are widely described as models of effective capacity building thanks to the host nations' leadership commitment and enthusiasm. Conversely, the failure to replicate these successful models in Iraq and Afghanistan is, in part, related to the U.S. strategy to quickly develop security forces necessary to meet the pressing demands of an exit strategy without a mature government in place.

The solution is a hybrid approach that is more integrated and consolidated to fill the gaps in capacity by building the right mix of U.S. government interagency capabilities. The 2013 Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) 23 instructed national security agencies to improve, streamline, and better organize all U.S. security assistance and cooperation efforts. PPD 23 success in West Africa will mainly depend on the willingness of the DoD and State to synchronize their efforts in executing security cooperation and building partner capacity. Historically, DoD and State have not had open lines of communication at the field or operational level. This chronic failure to communicate across the foreign policy stakeholders creates a divide that has led to frustrations on both sides and, too often, charges of building partner capacity failure.

State possesses the experience, placement, and diplomatic tools critical to advance U.S. national security interests, and it employs diplomatic efforts to strengthen alliances, treaties, and partnerships to facilitate enduring engagement with host nations. For instance, Senegal signed a defense cooperation agreement to ease access for U.S. troops, should they need to deploy to the West African nation in case of a security or humanitarian crisis, and to facilitate the continued presence of the U.S. military in Senegal. Such an accord is unprecedented between the U.S. and a Sub-Saharan country in Africa and comes amid heightened extremist threats in the region following major attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ivory Coast.[24]

State is also critical to addressing human security concerns such as food, water, health, education, and employment, which are root causes of regional instability, humanitarian concerns, and other transnational issues.[25] Furthermore, as chiefs of mission and direct representatives to the President, Ambassadors should serve as active coordinators for the security programs. State does not have necessary capabilities, such as personnel and funding, and the operational knowledge necessary to manage large-scale, capacity-building activities in West Africa. On the other hand, the DoD with SOF and RAF has the human resources and the know-how to effectively and efficiently conduct security programs in West Africa, but it lacks much of the cultural and linguistic capabilities.

In sum, the hybrid approach proposed in this article requires both the DoD and State to complement each other's capabilities in order to promote regional security and advance U.S. national security interests in the region. Both the DoD and State have doctrine to address capacity-building activities, but this proposed hybrid approach requires a unified way of thinking and executing security engagement. A shared doctrine crafted by the DoD and State to address a capacity-building strategy can be a good starting point.

Finally, the U.S. should work with major allies in the region to coordinate their respective foreign assistance programs. Countries such as France and Germany have been actively engaged in West Africa. Over the past few years, the French military has waged campaigns against AQIM and its allies in Mali, resulting in the country reestablishing control of its sovereign territory. France's luxury of having viable partners in this region facilitated its success. Therefore, the U.S. should provide support to France that complements its own security engagement in the region. ***IAJ***

NOTES

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