



## A Sankofa Retrospective Literature Review & Analysis of “What Really Went Wrong” in the Sahel

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### Abstract

*It has been over two decades since Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African Affairs of Department of State Robert Perry and S/CT Deputy Coordinator Stephanie Kinney, along with other State representatives, visited Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Mali, to brief host nations on the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), a program designed to protect borders, track movement of people, combat terrorism, and enhance regional cooperation and stability, terrorism remains a pivotal national security threat to the United States and regional peace security challenge facing the Western Sahel regions. Since then, the countries in the Western Sahel have now become the epicenter for terrorists' activities in the world with its consequences on U.S National Security interests, while the ECOWAS regional block struggles to raise \$2.6 billion annually to establish a 5,000-strong security force to combat terrorism and promote regional peace and security. The epicenter of global terrorism has shifted from the Middle East to Africa's Central Sahel region. For the first time in 13 years, a country other than Afghanistan or Iraq has topped the GTI, with Burkina Faso now ranked first. Mali and Niger remain among the most affected by terrorism as well. According to the latest data from the Africa Union Counter Terrorism Center (AUCTC), the five most affected countries by terrorist attacks during the second quarter of 2024 (April-June 2024) were Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, Mali, and Cameroon in decreasing order. The most active terrorist groups on the continent include Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al Muslimin (JNIM), Al-Shabaab, Islamic State West Africa (ISWAP), Boko Haram, and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). While no region of the continent is spared from conflicts involving terrorist groups, apart from the dire situation in the Sahel, particularly troubling, as noted by the President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, is the expansion of terrorism into the coastal states of West Africa, including Benin, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire. (Amani Africa 2024). With all the CT U.S. security assistance to the member states of the Sahel region, one will ask “What Really Went Wrong” and what next for U.S. in the region?*

## INTRODUCTION

The Pan Sahel Initiative, a State-led effort to assist Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania in detecting and responding to suspicious movement of people and goods across and within their borders through training, equipment and cooperation to support U.S. national security interests in waging the war on terrorism and enhancing regional peace and security (circa 2002-2005) and the Trans- Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a multi-agency effort and security assistance counterterrorism policy instrument created in 2005 to assist partner countries in West and North Africa in addressing domestic terrorist threats yielded the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) request focused on providing CT support to partner nations for capacity-building, augmenting U.S. capability to support partners in CT operations, and enabling DoD to respond to unexpected crises (circa 2005-2024) have been bedeviled with their own challenges. Recent events in the Sahel and Coastal West Africa regions notably the successful withdrawal of all US personnel and essential assets from Air Base 101 in Niamey, Niger, on July 7, 2024 and the recent spate of coups in Mali, Niger and Burkina

Faso (major recipients of nearly 20 years of significant U.S. military assistance) have raised questions about the US counterterrorism efforts and its goals of enhancing regional peace and security. Throughout the PSI and TSCTP periods ECOWAS did not request nor receive U.S. military cooperation and assistance to enhance its regional peace and security capacity and capabilities. ECOWAS as a regional block of which Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso belonged prior to seceding from the block have in recent times stepped up in its security sector reform efforts by calling for inclusive and innovative governance strategies to enhance regional stability and peace by way of ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance signed by the Heads of State and Government in June 04, 2016 in Dakar. On July 03, 2024 during the 52nd Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council (MSC) at the Ministerial Level held at the ECOWAS Commission Headquarters in Abuja, H.E Dr. Omar Alieu Touray, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, in his welcome statement emphasized the importance of addressing regional security and political issues, highlighting democratic transitions and peaceful elections in various member states. Dr. Omar Alieu Touray, further noted the critical need to combat terrorism and violent extremism, through coordinated regional efforts and enhancing the region's security infrastructure by reviewing and strengthening the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Action Plan and operationalizing the ECOWAS Standby Force to combat terrorism. On the operationalization of the ECOWAS Standby Force to combat terrorism, Defense and Finance Ministers from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in an earlier meeting on June 27, 2024 aimed at providing actionable recommendations for financing and equipping the ECOWAS counter-terrorism forces, with a focus on crafting a sustainable financing model that addresses immediate security threats and laying the foundation for long-term stability and resilience. Despite the current terrorism and other security challenges and financial constraints facing member states, Defense and Finance Ministers agreed to two options for a regional force: one which would cost \$2.6 billion annually for a brigade of 5,000 and another that would cost \$481 million for 1,500 troops, with both figures underscoring the gravity of the task ahead. Regional and counterterrorism experts, Study Groups, career diplomats and government officials of the Western Sahel which spans Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania given the recent spate of terrorism activities and regional instability have in recent times been making postmortem analysis of "What Went Wrong" and recommendations of what Washington needs to do to reassert its influence over the Sahel region. In this paper, I present a proverbial *Sankofa* (The visual and symbolic representation of a mystic bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg, symbolizing the future, in its mouth" (Bangura 2011), retrospective qualitative literature review and analysis of "What Went Wrong" in the Sahel of Kamissa Camara's analytical article "It is Time to Rethink U.S. Strategy in the Sahel" and the Bi-Partisan Senior Study Group for the Sahel: Final Report and Recommendations.

On Thursday, April 15, 2021, Kamissa Camara, a Senior Advisor, on Africa at the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) in an article titled "It is Time to Rethink U.S. Strategy in the Sahel" argues that if Washington wants to play an effective role in the Sahel, it needs less counterterrorism, better diplomacy by suggesting four ways to get there. Excerpts of the Senior Advisor's article on why the U.S. needs to rethink its Strategy in the Sahel states "Close to 10 years after the French military intervention pushed al-Qaida affiliated fighters out of northern Mali, the Sahel region continues to make headlines with the world's fastest growing Islamist insurgency and one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. Across the region, insecurity and socio-political instability continue to reach new heights. Yet, unrelenting setbacks in the fight against terrorism are undermining political support for international actors within a region where a donor "traffic jam" is currently at play. For these reasons, a change in international policy toward the Sahel is not only necessary, it has become inevitable" (Camara 2021). The 10-year French intervention coupled with over militarization by way of U.S. military assistance and under democratization rendered the political instrument powerless with an unobstructed path for national militaries take assume political path. Over confidence in Paris coupled with normal French military comportment poorly matched to that of the sovereign nation armies appears to have done little towards professionalization and development may have contributed to the unrelenting setbacks in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region. The author proceeds to present an in-depth analysis of the explanatory causal factor of "An Overly Militaristic Approach" of "What Went Wrong". Camara writes "Over the years, Sahel countries, which include Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad, have received substantial U.S. security assistance under the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) policy instrument. The TSCTP was created in 2005 as a multi-agency effort to assist partner countries in West and North Africa in addressing domestic terrorist threats. Through the TSCTP, U.S. foreign policy in the Sahel — in theory — takes a holistic approach which addresses political, development, socioeconomic and governance challenges. In reality, the United States' engagement in the Sahel has been overly militaristic, as proven by the millions of dollars of yearly spending in security assistance and institutional support for domestic warfare against militant groups in the region. Unfortunately, the U.S.-backed wars against terror in the region have more than often resulted in civilian casualties, pervasive human rights abuse and widespread corruption. In February, Human Rights Watch reported more than 600 unlawful killings since 2019 committed by the security forces of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso during counterterrorism operations (Camara 2021).

Kamissa Camara's analysis on how the Overly Militaristic Approach of U.S. strategy towards the Sahel as the cause of "What Went Wrong" in the Sahel must raise foundational issues and operationalization strategy about the TSCTP approach. The foundational issue is based on the approach of engagement of the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), the precursor

to the TSCTP. In 2002, when State Department AF and S/CT briefed Chad, Mali, Niger and Mauritanian officials on the Pan Sahel Initiative in supporting two goals of U.S. national security interests in Africa. The PSI goals were support two U.S. national security interests in Africa: waging the war on terrorism and enhancing regional peace and security by assisting participating countries to counter known terrorist operations and border incursions, as well as trafficking of people, illicit materials, and other goods. Accompanying the training and material support will be a program to bring military and civilian officials from the four countries together to encourage greater cooperation and information exchange within and among the governments of the region on counterterrorism and border security issues. The foundational issue of the PSI's approach to engagement in contributing to "What Went Wrong" in the Overly Militaristic approach in the Sahel was that State AF and S/CT usurped ECOWAS leadership and regional peace and security centralization and coordination responsibilities. The infusion of \$1Billion from National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) CTPF subsidized (U.S. and France) operational strategy within the context of CT contributed to the Overly Militarization Approach in the Sahel to French and US defense establishments from (FY2015) and (FY2016). The significant financial enrichment on the CT approach to U.S was as a result of WOT being waged in the Middle East. On the other hand, the direct DOD support primarily to the French operations proved less effective because they failed to integrate and serve as comrades in arms on the WOT with the Nigerian, Malian, and Burkinabe soldiers. Official data from the Comptroller of Defense on Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) requests for Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) for Fiscal Years (FY 2015 & 2016) for the continued implementation of President Obama's goal of a sustainable, partnership-focused approach to counterterrorism (CT) show that the Overly Militaristic Approach to CT as a causal explanation of "What Went Wrong" was beyond the Sahel and included East Africa and the Chad Basin explains with windfall from Congress and DOD. The CTPF which allows the Department of Defense to address evolving terrorists in the US. Central Command (CENTCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) to enhance the United States' ability to support partner nations in CT operations will show that, the CT Approach extended beyond the Sahel region as shown in the table below in the AFRICOM region.

### Counterterrorism Partnership Fund

(Dollars in Millions)

By Region	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2016	FY 2017
AFRICOM	PLAN	REQUEST	PLAN	REQUEST
Sahel Maghreb	113	262	105	125
Lake Chad Basin	133	338	105	125
East Africa	220	669	165	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>1,269</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>450</b>

Source: Overseas Contingency Operation (OCO). [www.comptroller.defense.gov](http://www.comptroller.defense.gov)

From the table above, for Fiscal Years (FY 2015) and (FY 2016), \$1.269B and \$450M were requested for Counterterrorism operations in the Sahel Maghreb, the Lake Chad Basin and East Africa. A comparative analysis of the CTPF requests to each region reveals that in (FY 2015), the Sahel Maghreb received \$262M, followed by Lake Chad Basin \$338M and East Africa \$669M. In (FY 2016) requests, Sahel Maghreb region was \$125M, Lake Chad Basin \$125M and East Africa \$200M. Even though the data showed huge disparities between CTPF requests to East Africa than to Sahel Maghreb, it was a testament to the success of the WOT in East Africa but this success was not replicated in the Sahel region making the CTPF requests a windfall from Congress and DoD to U.S and French troops and the governments of the Sahel regions for national militarization is what is meant by over-militarization. The challenges of the financial enrichment during the height of WOT to Sahel troops was as a result of the Middle East being the epicenter on the WOT. On the other hand, the French soldiers had short-lived financial enrichment because of an inability to integrate and serve as comrades in arms in the various Sahelian countries on the WOT and followed a western rather than an integrated concept of operation, living the proverbial first world way of life in a Third World less developed region (LDR). In reference to Camara's statement "in reality, the United States' engagement in the Sahel has been overly militaristic, as proven by the millions of dollars of yearly spending in security assistance and institutional support for domestic warfare against militant groups in the region", however, these millions of dollars were partially used to subsidize the French, in lieu of U.S., military intervention and more so than Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso Security Sector Reform and Governance, making the P3 (US/UK/France) to maintain awareness of global terrorism, instability and insecurity and respond where and when possible since 2002 to present day. The hundred millions of dollars yearly spending under the TSCTP programs according to the State Department's Office of the Inspector General highlighted some mismanagement. In September 2020, the State Department's Office of the Inspector General released an unclassified audit of the Department of the Bureau of African Affairs Monitoring and Coordination of TSCTP found that inadequate oversight of contracts and activities managed by the State Department's bureau of African Affairs has led to mismanagement of funds and complete inefficiency of TSCTP programs. The OIG audit report states that contracting officer's representatives (COR) had approved invoices for four contracts without adequate supporting documentation. In

addition, they relied on Department of Defense (DoD) partners to monitor contractor performance; however, these DoD partners were not delegated authority to serve in this role, nor were they trained to be government technical monitors or alternate CORs. Furthermore, none of the six TSCTP contracts reviewed had the required monitoring plans, and five contracts were missing Government quality assurance surveillance plans; both plans are essential oversight tools. Lastly, AF was not ensuring that the assistance provided to the host countries was being used to build counterterrorism capacity. AF officials stated that the lack of clear guidance and limited staff contributed to these weaknesses. Because of these weaknesses, OIG considers the \$201.6 million spent on these six contracts as potential wasteful spending due to mismanagement and inadequate oversight. OIG is specifically questioning almost \$109 million because the invoices lacked supporting documentation. With respect to the grant and cooperative agreement reviewed, both had required monitoring plans included in the files. OIG also found that AF is not effectively coordinating with stakeholders to execute a whole-of-government initiative. Although TSCTP partner agencies meet to formulate strategic priorities, the execution of activities among the partners in the host countries receiving assistance is insufficient. For example, U.S. Air Force officials said they were not consulted on the plans and construction of a C-130 aircraft hangar on a base that they share with the Nigerian military. Government officials stated that undefined roles and responsibilities, the lack of knowledge management, and staffing shortfalls hinder effective coordination (Office of Inspector General Department of State 2020). The shortcomings of the TSCTP highlight a deep conceptual fault, one that makes it almost impossible to measure the effectiveness of the fight against terrorism on foreign soil. Drawing from the State Department's Office of the Inspector General's TSCTP reports, AF inadequate management and oversight had a direct bearing upon at the Interagency Policy level. A postmortem investigation of the IP level will show among its weakness, such as the large portfolio of agency leaders to cover the entire continent of Africa; limited AF office staff, and interactions with 50 plus U.S. embassies most with small staff of junior U.S. officials. It is also important to note that aside the near to impossible measure of effectiveness of the TSCTP program, State AF and OSD Africa allowed Sahel self-organization to the G-5 Sahel. Given the challenges of the TSCTP program, the Senior Advisor argues that if Washington wants to play an effective role, it needs less counterterrorism, better diplomacy. The mismanagement of the TSCTP programs highlights a deep conceptual fault, one that makes it almost impossible to measure the effectiveness of the fight against terrorism on foreign soil. In the Sahel, the United States has provided the French military with critical intelligence and logistical support. The recent visit of France's minister of defense to Washington confirms the importance of U.S. presence in the region. During her visit, Minister Florence Parly explained very explicitly how France's military operations in the region would suffer should Washington remove the much needed intelligence and logistical support it currently provides to its French counterpart in West Africa. As such, a complete U.S. military withdrawal from Africa would be highly undesirable. However, as France remains the lead on counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel, the opportunity arises for the United States to become a diplomatic leader in the region (Washington Post 2020). It is worthy to note that from the author analysis that France's operations would suffer should Washington remove much needed intelligence and logistical support it currently provides the French military intervention operation as Sahel partners are keen to exceptional U.S. support to the French CT operations in the Sahel greatly exceeding U.S. support to Sahel partner CT operations. Camara in her analysis on how Washington can play an effective role in terms of less counterterrorism and better diplomacy presents four ways to reorient U.S Foreign Policy in the Sahel stating "The United States' foreign policy apparatus is not currently organized properly to deal with the humanitarian, development and security issues of the Sahel. For the problems of the Sahel to not outrun Washington's reactive efforts as they have in the past, the United States needs to change the way foreign policy bureaus conduct business". (Camara 2021)

The first way out according to the author's analysis is first recognize the connections between political and security developments in North Africa and the Sahel and reorganize accordingly. To this Camara writes "there is a need for reorganization at the State Department, which places North African countries into the Africa Bureau. Terrorist groups like Ansar Dine, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and al-Mourabitoun have their roots in Algeria and operate across the borders of several countries of northern Africa. Particularly since Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi's fall in 2011, arms and fighters have flowed into the Sahel from Libya, which in turn is now the favored route for trafficking people and drugs from the Sahel to Europe. Drugs, human trafficking and poaching finance both disaffected groups as well as terrorists and criminal organizations. Yet the U.S. State Department continues to divide the region into two bureaus, linking North Africa to the Middle East not to sub-Saharan Africa. While the Department of Defense has taken steps to operate regionally across these borders, the State Department provides no comparable counterpart. The rationale for separating North Africa from the Africa Bureau, taken in the Kissinger era, was that the North African countries were important to and actively engaged in Middle East diplomacy, particularly between Israel and the Arab world. That might have been true then, but it is largely no longer their focus. Although Morocco and Sudan signed U.S.-brokered normalization agreements with Israel last year, all North African countries — save Egypt in part — are consumed today with problems of stability, extremism, terrorism and criminal activity, tying them more to the countries to their south than to the east.

Secondly, the Senior Advisor recommends that Washington should rethink its policies by developing a single U.S. aid program for the Sahel, avoiding stove-piped efforts, stating "U.S. programs are divided by function between drug



trafficking, protection of wildlife, development and security and are primarily bilateral rather than regional. A positive step forward would be for the Biden administration to request Congress to appropriate a single Sahel aid program, which can be apportioned as needed between bilateral and regional programs, for addressing transnational crime, environmental resilience and development". However, it is interesting to note that U.S. programs are primarily bilateral rather than regional. The goals of PSI, TSTCP, and G-5 Sahel – CT and war on terrorism are towards enhancing regional peace and security, therefore U.S. should reorient its strategy in Sahel in partnership with and support of ECOWAS Regional Security Division of the ECOWAS Commission. Camara, as part of her analysis and recommendation for Washington to play an effective in the Sahel and rethinking its policies of less counterterrorism and more of diplomacy recommends the reorienting of U.S. Foreign Policy by developing economic opportunities in the Sahel region. To this the Senior Advisor writes "by utilizing such structures as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Club du Sahel, the United Nations and regional African structures, the United States can more effectively direct efforts on such plans as regeneration of the Lake Chad basin and other programs that provide more economic opportunity across the region, an area often neglected in U.S foreign policy in the Sahel.

Last but not the least the Senior Advisor, Africa at USIP recommends that the U.S should assert its diplomatic leadership in the Sahel. Towards the reassertion of U.S. diplomatic leadership in the region, the author states "The United States only recently created a special envoy for the Sahel position. The special envoy is first and foremost tasked with maximizing U.S. diplomatic efforts to address the threat of Violent Extremist Organizations." The special envoy also "engages actively in support of governance, political liberalization, economic growth and development to achieve long-term peace and stability in the region. Dr. J. Peter Pham was the first-ever U.S. special envoy for the Sahel when he was appointed in March 2020 by the Trump administration. He remains to be replaced by the Biden administration. A central piece to the coordination of American diplomatic efforts in the region, the new Sahel envoy should be a highly regarded professional with strong relationships both in Washington and the region. While Pham reported to the State Department, the new envoy's position could be upgraded to a U.S. presidential envoy for the Sahel, like John Kerry's appointment as U.S. presidential envoy for the climate, which would sit at the National Security Council and could directly influence U.S. foreign policy in a holistic manner. This would certainly send a strong signal to regional leaders and international partners alike. Qualified staff and adequate resources should also make for a successful envoy. At the epicenter of the Sahel's multilayered crises, Mali has been in turmoil since a military coup toppled a democratically elected president in 2012. History repeated itself in August 2020 when another military takeover removed democratically elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. Following the coup, a transitional government was put in place and a new president appointed. At the U.N. Security Council in early April, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations urged Mali to hold free and fair elections at the end of the 18-month transition period. While the United States' recent remarks at the Security Council did not go unnoticed by Malian officials, Washington has remained extremely cautious in statements condemning key destabilizing events in the region. Asserting U.S. diplomatic leadership in the Sahel will require unambiguous U.S. positioning through clear and targeted statements and strategic leverage of U.S. representation at the United Nations, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, commonly referred to as ECOWAS. Keeping in mind that localized conflicts and terrorist threats are better tackled by national and regional entities, it is still time for the United States to recast its Sahel policy. Due to weak militaries, porous borders and fragile states, international assistance has been essential in the region. However, it will not hurt the United States nor its Sahelian partners to redirect funds toward a cleverly articulated diplomatic architecture. Continuing a policy overly focused on militarized counterterrorism won't cut it. Enhancing and expanding diplomatic efforts in Washington and in the region will certainly be a step in the right direction" (Camara 2021).

The Sankofa qualitative analysis of Kamissa Camara's article on "What Went Wrong" with the Overly Militaristic Approach in the Sahel is mindful of and not questioning the judgment of the distinguished, outstanding, and rich expertise of the career diplomats at Africa at USIP, and ST AF towards the mismanagement of the TSCTP program given the 2020 OIG Report. However, Kamissa Camara, a Senior Advisor, USIP (Africa) did not address the (i) the foundational issue of State AF and S/CT PSI, the precursor to the TSCTP approach to engagement to the countries in the Sahel inclusion of ECOWAS's ownership, obligation, and responsibility to enhance regional peace and security and (ii) the CTPF operationalization strategy resulting on over-militarization in the Sahel. Also, US Ambassador to the United Nations and Former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (2013-2017) Hon. Linda Thomas Greenfield's statement on December 5, 2023 on UN Peacekeeping Mission at the Kofi International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) blaming US's adversary, Russia for the instability and coups in the Sahel were misplaced and a clear lack of accountability for the mismanagement of the TSCTP program when the allies had lost faith in their own accord given the fact that Russia has not had strong footprints in the Sahel for decades after the end of the Cold War. Hence a change in U.S. Foreign Policy towards the Sahel is needed as recommended by Kamissa Camara reinforcing that at the heart of "What Went Wrong" lies weak French military to military relations and interactions with Sahel militaries and CTPF abuse and high-level mismanagement as noted in the OIG Report. To reorient U.S. Foreign Policy towards the Sahel region in terms of less counterterrorism and more diplomacy, reverting to the unchanged offices in the White House National Security Council (NSC), Bureau of African Affairs of the State Department and the Office of the Secretary of

Defense (OSD) Africa, in all likelihood will produce the same results. What needs to be done going forward is review the matter under the provisions of the ECOWAS framework for SSR/G perhaps with diplomatic engagement via a U.S. Special Envoy and Staff to ECOWAS Peace and Security (PS) separate from the U.S. Embassy Abuja.

In May 2021, Bipartisan Senior Study Group for the Sahel created by United States Institute of Peace (USIP), comprising of 12 current and former high-levels U.S. and foreign Officials, renowned academics and prominent diplomats joined together with the aim to generate new insights into the complex challenges facing the Sahel region, including food security, human rights, security assistance, private sector development and job creation-as well as great power competition. On January 18, 2024 the Bipartisan Senior Study Group presented their findings titled “Senior Study Group for the Sahel: Final Report and Recommendations”. The Senior Study Group in their Executive Summary writes “The United States has not traditionally viewed the Sahel as a region of vital interest, whether in terms of security or from an economic or business perspective. To underscore this point, as U.S. security relates to Africa, recent Defense Strategic Guidance provided “Whenever possible, we will develop innovative low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives. The Study Group states, “This has led to a pattern of reactive involvement shaped by the circumstances of specific events rather than proactive commitments. This pattern reveals the lack of a comprehensive strategy for the volatile Western Sahel region, which includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. In Sankofa analysis, as the group did not include anyone directly from ECOWAS involved in the TSCTP 2010 to 2020, the statement appears speculative as U.S. military planners operationalize strategic plans. In fact, officials from State Department, USAID and DOD, Niger, Mali, France, and UK contributed to TSCTP.

State Department, USAID, DoD, Niger, Mali, France, UK, others and TSCTP is not a comprehensive strategy. In April 2022, President Joe Biden announced that the US government would advance the “U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability” in coastal West Africa by prioritizing a partnership with Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo. This policy was formulated to prevent Sahelian terrorism from expanding its reach rather than as a reflection of deep-seated interests in the Sahel itself”. (Senior Study Group for the Sahel Report 2024). Interrogating the Senior Study Group Executive Summary further it will interest one to note The United States, in particular, the national security council not traditionally viewing the Sahel as a region of vital interest, whether in terms of security or from an economic or business perspective have (i) led to a pattern of Interagency Policy reactive involvement shaped by the circumstances of specific events rather than proactive commitments expressed through a comprehensive Africa Regional Defense and Security Policy, e.g. a comprehensive ECOWAS Regional Defense and Security Policy as prescribed in the Policy Framework for ECOWAS SSR/G. A Sankofa Analysis of the 2022 “U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability” in coastal West Africa by prioritizing a partnership with Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo is the latest reactive involvement shaped by the circumstances of specific events. This initiative places State AF leading and directing conflict prevention and promotion of stability where there is no expertise in lieu of diplomacy. Conflict prevention and promotion of stability are not tradecraft for diplomatic cones.

A critical analysis of parts of the report addressing why the U.S.’s inattention to the Sahel is unwise shows career diplomats pushing an agenda for the Sahel. This agenda is reflected in the Bipartisan Senior Study Group 2024 statement “this inattention is unwise, given the Sahel’s strategic location between the Maghreb and the Southern Sahara, the presence of terrorist factions linked to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, the region’s economic potential, and the major immigration transit routes to Europe and South America that originate there. The Sahel is also inextricably linked to numerous pressing global challenges, including climate change, great power rivalry, and the tug-of-war between democratic governance and authoritarianism. Moreover, there is more at stake here than the immediate challenges: the Sahel’s future is certain to be dynamic and has the potential to be prosperous. The region is undergoing one of the world’s most rapid population surges; its expansive fertile lands are ripe for innovative, sustainable agriculture; the sun-soaked terrain beckons for lucrative solar energy ventures that can usher in energy autonomy; and the region stands on the brink of a technological revolution powered by increasing mobile connectivity and digital access. (Senior Study Group Report 2024). A review of the report addressing why the U.S.’s inattention to the Sahel is unwise also shows foreign diplomats: Ambassador Kamissa Camara, *Chair*; Ambassador Smaïl Chergui, former Commissioner for Peace and Security, African Union; and, Ambassador Rama Yade pushing the Study Group agenda for the U.S. to engage the Sahel now without mention of ECOWAS’s agency for regional peace and security, the regional block which has a robust security sector reform and governance (SSRG) policy framework. Highlighting U.S.’s engagement and security assistance with ECOWAS is likely to go much further than without ECOWAS on combating terrorism and violent extremism, through coordinated regional efforts and enhancing the region’s security infrastructure by reviewing and strengthening the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Action Plan and operationalizing the ECOWAS Standby Force to combat terrorism.

The Bipartisan Senior study Group in their final report identified four emerging trends that should help guide long-term US and multilateral policy in the Sahel: the increasing influence and presence of external powers in the Sahel, particularly China and Russia, and the diminishing role played by France; the growing presence of regional middle

powers, most notably, Algeria, Morocco, and Turkey; an astonishingly rapid and substantial growth in population that has created a potentially destabilizing “youth bulge”; intensifying threats to agricultural production and food security created by armed conflict, terrorism, and the effects of climate change that needs to be addressed reorienting U.S. Foreign policy from its current approach in the Sahel security crisis. “The current US approach—which is focused on containing the Sahel’s security crises and preventing them from spilling over into coastal West Africa—will be largely inadequate for addressing the challenges presented by these trends. As the root causes of conflict and instability go unaddressed, cycles of violence are bound to continue, risking a dramatic international expansion and strengthening of jihadist groups in the Sahel. Containment and disengagement by the United States and its Western allies can lead to unforeseen consequences, such as vast stretches of territory falling under the control of violent extremist organizations in a region highly interconnected socially, economically, and culturally. This would threaten Sahelian partners, citizens, and US interests alike and would reinforce the devastating cycles of violence and impunity”. The Study Group’s long-term U.S. and multilateral policy approach in addressing the emerging security threats in the Sahel does not align with either the 2022 “U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability” or the ECOWAS policy Framework for SSR/G. While the Study Group alluded to the diminishing role played by France a better accounting may have given an honest report on France’s exploitation and extraction rather than uplifting and development. France and best suited and able to achieve a strong and uplifting partnership with African countries.

The U.S.-Africa Interagency Policy Committee practice of P3 consultation, collaboration and coordination, bilateral coordination with ECOWAS member states but not with ECOWAS’s head of the regional block is self-limiting. Correction of the Africa IPC falls in line with Rethinking U.S. Strategy in the Sahel. On the emerging threats of the increasing influence and presence of external powers in the Sahel, particularly China and Russia with respect to the coups in the Sahel countries (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), as the unintended but rational consequences of the “diminishing role played by the French” and flagrant TSCTP and CTPF mismanagement France and the U.S. loss grounds in the Sahel on their own and not so much due to wishful China and Russia inroads. “The recent spate of military coups and the increasingly conspicuous Russian presence in the region must not be ignored, but these dangers can best be tackled over the long term by devising a comprehensive approach that addresses underlying causes of current and future regional insecurity while recognizing Sahelian agency and empowering the people of the Sahel, not least the youth”. (Senior Study Group Report 2024). It is incumbent for Washington to note that this comprehensive approach was the cause of the CT failures in the Sahel as analyzed by Kamissa Camara on “What Went Wrong” in the Sahel. This approach culminated in the departure of all French forces in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, removal of the U.S. drone base in Niger, and the open-door policy for Russian Private Military Company where there is minimal Russian diplomatic presence.

The Senior Study Group in their final report developed two sets of recommendations for US policymakers. The first set consists of steps that the US government should take to create a policymaking and implementation apparatus with which the United States can engage the Sahel strategically and effectively. Toward this end, the United States should position itself to display robust diplomatic leadership in the region and resolve the structural challenges to implementing a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach. The second set of recommendations calls for the US government to develop a strategy to work in partnership with local, national, and regional actors. Across much of the region—and in contrast to European countries dealing with colonial legacies—the United States continues to be regarded as a trustworthy actor that can positively influence political processes, support state and regional institutions, advance reform, and spur investment and economic growth.

The United States should harness its comparative advantages to develop and leverage partnerships in specific areas. More specifically, the United States should take full advantage of its credibility and pursue an innovative, five-pronged agenda: (i) provide security support while recognizing Sahelian and ECOWAS agency and crafting an independent US strategic approach. In Sankofa’s analysis, this agenda did not recognize ECOWAS let alone its regional agency; (ii) promote peace, stability, and democracy by deterring coups, facilitating peace talks, and supporting democratic governance. This agenda in Sankofa’s analysis is in full support of and cooperation with ECOWAS SSRG Policy; (iii) work multilaterally by partnering with regional organizations. A Sankofa qualitative literature review of the Study Group’s five-pronged agenda will show that agenda (i) did not recognize ECOWAS let alone its agency; agenda (ii) is in full support of and cooperation with ECOWAS SSRG Policy framework and agenda (iii) does not make ECOWAS foremost in and enhancing cooperation between and the Maghreb. To this end, Sankofa analysis is of the view that for the United States to take full advantage of its credibility and pursue an innovative agenda, it should recognize ECOWAS and its agency in the region.

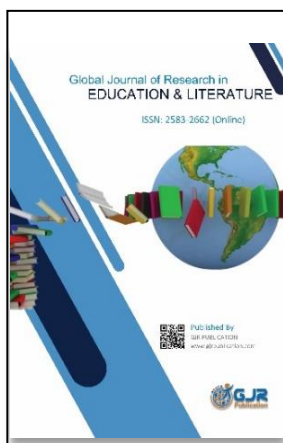
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