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## “Sovereignty” means never having to say you’re sorry: The Sahel’s new geopolitics



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The ongoing American military exit from Niger has focused international attention not just on the Sahel, but on the swirling and increasingly complex geopolitics in the region. The arrival of a group of Russian military advisors at Airbase 101 in Niger’s capital Niamey – the same base that housed American, French and other military forces– brought the region’s awkward geopolitical context into even finer focus.<sup>1</sup>

The current fixation on Russia and Russian activities in the Sahel has led some in Europe

and the United States to depict a kind of Russian-centric expansion across the region. In testimony before Congress in March 2024, the head of US Africa Command Gen. Michael Langley postulated that “A number of countries [in Africa] are at the tipping point of actually being captured by the Russian Federation.” He continued, saying that “I think at an accelerated pace, the Russian Federation is really trying to take over Central Africa as well as the Sahel.”<sup>2</sup>

1 Paulin Kola, “[Russians sent to Niger airbase occupied by US troops](#),” BBC, May 3, 2024.

2 John Vandiver, “[Several African countries on verge of falling prey to Russia, leading general tells senators](#),” Stars and Stripes, March 8, 2024.

This stark image of Russian expansion in the Sahel masks not just the presence of other actors, but also how the central Sahelian countries – in this case Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, but many points apply to other countries in the region – use geopolitical rivalries for their own ends, extracting concessions and needed benefits and support from those willing to give them. These countries and others have upended what many in Europe and the United States thought was a well-established geopolitical order and embraced a posture of aggressive sovereignty in conjunction with new and older security, economic, and political partners.

This alert highlights what Sahelian military leaders seek from geopolitical competition, and to inform how Europe and the United States can position themselves in better in the region. The Western position needs to be focused on long-term engagement and more attuned to the wants and needs of Sahelian states themselves. This alert then focuses on both the “offer” of outside partners to Sahelian states, and what these states themselves want out of geopolitical engagement.

### Geopolitics and outside offers to Sahelian states

There are real and perceived security benefits for Sahelian states from working with partners such as Russia, but also Turkey, the UAE, and China. These include the acquisition not just of weapons that directly contribute to the ongoing fight against internal enemies (which can mean jihadist groups but also separatists, as in the case of Mali), but also more high-end systems such as air defense batteries.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, this is a response to the frequent refrain – albeit incomplete and sometimes incorrect – that Western partners did not supply weapons that Sahelian militaries need to fight jihadist groups.

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3 Laurent Larcher, “Mali : cette menace que Wagner fait planer dans le ciel du pays,” *La Croix*, March 17, 2023; “Niger : des instructeurs et du matériel militaires russes sont arrivés à Niamey,” *Le Monde (with AFP)*, April 12, 2024.

Russia’s security and political support to the region’s juntas are in many ways the most visible and garner the most attention in Europe and the United States in recent years. Russian-linked troops under first the Wagner Group, and then the restructured Africa Corps, have operated in Mali since late 2022. As many as 2,000 personnel were operating in Mali at peak presence, where they have been implicated in the deaths of civilians in Central and northern Mali as part of wide-ranging combat operations in support of Malian forces and militias.<sup>4</sup> They also reportedly provide security for the junta itself.<sup>5</sup> The Africa Corps presence in Burkina Faso and Niger is less significant, but nonetheless reportedly comprises several hundred personnel providing training particularly for Burkinabè Special Forces,<sup>6</sup> assistance that has been documented by the FSB-linked media outlet called Africa Initiative.<sup>7</sup> These forces also arrived in Niger in April 2024, where masked personnel told the country’s media that they had arrived to make further contacts with Niger’s military and to provide training and setup for an advanced aerial defense system.<sup>8</sup>

China’s support for Sahelian governments, like Russia’s, dates back to the post-independence period, where both China and the USSR

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4 Pro-Wagner Telegram channels have published numerous photos of Wagner personnel operating throughout Mali not just alongside Malian forces, but also groups like the ethnic Dogon Dan Na Ambassagou, which means “those who put their trust in God” in Dogon.

5 Antonio Giustozzi, Joana de Deus Pereira and Jack Garnett, “Wagner Group and Russia’s Presence in Africa and the Middle East,” RUSI.

6 Morgane Le Cam et al., “[Au Burkina Faso, la première base militaire russe d’Africa Corps](#)” (video), *Le Monde*, March 6, 2024.

7 Thomas Eydoux and Morgane Le Cam, “[African Initiative, le nouveau réseau de propagande russe en Afrique après le démantèlement de Wagner](#),” *Le Monde*, March 7, 2024; Christo Grozev et al., “[Intercontinental lies: FSB launches disinformation and conspiracy campaign in Africa](#),” *The Insider*, February 8, 2024; [Tweet](#) by the Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie, 12 April, 2024.

8 *Le Monde*, [Des instructeurs et du matériel militaires russes sont arrivés](#).

developed especially close ties with Mali.<sup>9</sup> Chinese companies and government entities are present across the Sahel, reflecting China's growth as a primary trading partner for many African countries.<sup>10</sup> China is a major weapons supplier to Sahelian countries, delivering important shipments of small and heavy weapons as well as armored vehicles and more to Sahelian countries before and after their coups, reflecting an unchanged role in supplying regional militaries.<sup>11</sup> China, like other partners who remain tied to Sahelian governments, has expressed its willingness to work with regional governments with or without elections.<sup>12</sup> China has also tried to mediate between Niger and Benin to allow oil to flow from the partially Chinese-owned pipeline at Agadem, and gave Niger's junta a much-needed infusion of capital as an advance on future oil production.<sup>13</sup>

Turkey has also become deeply involved in the Sahel, including through weapons supply. They have supplied drones as well as other lethal munitions that have proven essential for Mali in its effort to retake the symbolically important city of Kidal,<sup>14</sup> while drone and other aerial footage

has been important for all three central Sahelian countries in demonstrating their purported successes against militant groups. Russian military aid, whether in the form of equipment and training or direct combat as in Mali, has also helped fulfill essential political goals for Mali's government, demonstrating its perceived utility even as these interventions have taken a heavy toll against civilians.<sup>15</sup>

For Gulf countries like the UAE, the Sahel has also been an area of growth in security partnerships and investment, even if Gulf investment there pales in comparison to the efforts of the Emirates and others in Libya, Sudan, and the Horn of Africa.<sup>16</sup> The UAE's involvement in Sahelian security since 2016 was largely oriented around assistance to the now-defunct G5 Sahel, though the Emirates (and Qatar as well) have given armored vehicles to Mali and Burkina Faso after 2018.<sup>17</sup>

While the United States and European partners have supplied equipment ranging from aircraft and armored vehicles to clothing and medical kits, other equipment like a transport plane destined for Mali were held off due to concerns about child soldiers in armed groups.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, lethal munitions were generally withheld and security forces in Mali trained by

9 Manon Tournon, "[Le Mali, 1960-1968. Exporter la Guerre froide dans le pré carré français.](#)" *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin* (N° 45), 2017/1, pp. 83-95.; François Bart, "[Chine et Afrique, une longue histoire, une nouvelle donne géographique.](#)" *Les Cahiers d'Outre-Mer* (n° 253-254), 2011/1-2, pp. 193-208.

10 Fred Dews, "[8 Facts about China's Investments in Africa.](#)" *Brookings*, May 20, 2014.

11 Souleymane Yahaya, "[Coopération militaire Niger-Chine : Réception des matériels militaires d'une Valeur de 2,5 milliards de francs CFA offerts par la République Populaire de Chine.](#)" *Le Sahel (with ONEP Niger)*, July 14, 2023; Christian-Geraud Neema B., "[Le Burkina Faso acquiert de nouveaux équipements militaires de Chine.](#)" *Le Projet Afrique Chine*, January 22, 2024.

12 "[La modernisation à la chinoise – Une modernisation pour une grande population.](#)" *Le Sahel (with ONEP Niger)*, September 28, 2023.

13 "[Niger : la Chine va verser une « avance » de 400 millions de dollars sur la commercialisation de pétrole brut.](#)" *Connaissance des Energies (with AFP)*, April 13, 2024 ; "[Qui est Wapco, l'opérateur chinois du pipeline de la discordie entre le Bénin et le Niger?](#)" *RFI*, June 8, 2024.

14 Célian Macé, "[Dans le nord du Mali, la ville de Kidal frappée par des drones de l'armée malienne.](#)" *Libération*, November 8, 2023; Souleymane Fall, "[Mali : l'impact des drones turcs TB2 dans la reconquête de Kidal.](#)" *Yeni Şafak*, January 5, 2024.

15 Guillaume Maurice, "[Drones turcs de l'armée malienne : des frappes ciblent les civils.](#)" *France 24 Observers*, April 23, 2024; "[Mali : l'armée et le groupe Wagner commettent des atrocités contre les civils.](#)" *Human Rights Watch*, March 28, 2024; Hannah Rae Armstrong, "[Counter-terror turned the Sahel into a coup belt: U.S. policy in the region should move on.](#)" *Center for International Policy*, April 2, 2024.

16 Eleonora Ardemagni, "[The UAE's Rising Military Role in Africa: Defending Interests, Advancing Influence.](#)" *ISPI*, December 21, 2023.

17 Ardemagni, *The UAE's Rising Military Role in Africa*; also see Mariam Ouédraogo, "[Le rôle des drones dans les opérations militaires au Sahel.](#)" *Lefaso.net*, February 15, 2024, and "[L'émir du Qatar Cheikh Tamim équipe en famille les armées africaines.](#)" *Africa Intelligence*, June 3, 2019.

18 Elias Yousif, "[What Niger's Coup Says About U.S. Security Assistance in the Sahel.](#)" *Stimson Center*, August 17, 2023; Ekene Lionel, "[U.S. continues to block delivery of CASA C-295 aircraft to Mali.](#)" *Military Africa*, September 10, 2021.

the EU Training Mission (EUTM) sometimes made to train with sticks instead of real weapons.<sup>19</sup> The belated pledges of lethal aid to Niger under the European Peace Facility (EPF) had yet to arrive in the country by the time of the July 2023 coup.<sup>20</sup> EU foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell subsequently discussed reallocating funds under the EPF earmarked for Mali and Niger, as French insistence within the EU guaranteed no movement back toward providing security assistance after the coup.<sup>21</sup>

Security partnerships are a way of expressing this focus on sovereignty, which has been one of the focal points for discourse and actions of Central Sahelian states in recent years. For Mali's junta, for instance, military actions against militant groups (jihadist groups as well as largely Tuareg separatist groups) is often framed in terms of the country's "rediscovered sovereignty" or *souveraineté retrouvée*. So much so that the government declared January 14 the day of rediscovered sovereignty in honor of protests on that day in 2022 against the sanctions placed on Mali by ECOWAS.<sup>22</sup>

Burkina Faso and Niger, similarly, emphasize sovereignty as a core element not just of their decision making, but the very *raison d'être* behind the military leadership's actions in seizing and maintaining power.<sup>23</sup> This sovereignty, as portrayed by Sahelian governments, extends to choices of security and other partners, and is a cornerstone of the Alliance of Sahelian States

(AES in French).<sup>24</sup> This push for sovereignty allows these states to justify their military takeovers, but also represents real frustration and a search for independence in partnerships and decision making that extends beyond the Sahel into West African states like Senegal, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>25</sup> For Sahelian populations as well as governments, this drive for sovereignty also reflects histories of exploitation and feelings of mistreatment and failed governance seen as promoted by democratic leadership over the past several decades as well as Western governments and NGOs.

### What do Sahelian States want?

It is essential to focus on what Sahelian states want and gain from geopolitical competition in the region, rather than just seeking to counter outside actors like Russia.<sup>26</sup> Western governments have sought for years to emphasize approaches to fighting insurgency that emphasize governance and development work instead of primarily focusing on security issues. Sahelian governments however have sought more, not less, support in terms of "hard" counterterrorism operations, operations which countries like Russia, China, and Turkey are more willing to support. This reflects the authoritarian approach of the coup governments that seek to suppress opposition primarily with force. It also reflects longstanding views among some members of the region's militaries that internal threats – whether from rebel groups or more recent jihadist movements – are best dealt with through military means, rather than negotiations, though the central Sahelian states have historically taken somewhat different attitudes

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19 Ulf Laessing, "[The West fast losing influence in the Sahel](#)," IEMed Yearbook (2024).

20 Council of the EU, "[European Peace Facility: Council adopts two assistance measures to support the Nigerian Armed Forces](#)," June 8, 2023.

21 "[EU approves new rules to prohibit energy imports from Russia](#)," Agence Europe, April 5, 2024; Interviews with EU officials based in Brussels and the Sahel, April 2024.

22 Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement du Mali, "[Journée nationale de la souveraineté retrouvée](#)," January 14, 2024.

23 "[Au Burkina Faso, Ibrahim Traoré joue la « souveraineté » face à l'impérialisme](#)," *Jeune Afrique*, February 17, 2024; also see "[Niger suspends military cooperation with US](#)," *AI Jazeera*, March 17, 2024.

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24 The Governments of Burkina Faso, the Republic of Mali and the Republic of Niger (Alliance des États du Sahel), "[Charte du Liptako-Gourma](#)," September 16, 2023.

25 Nadia Massih, "[Senegalese PM Ousmane Sonko questions French military presence](#)," *France 24*, May 17, 2024; "[Thousands of Ghanaians protest controversial military deal with US](#)," *Africanews (with AFP)*, March 28, 2018.

26 Christopher Faulkner and Raphael Parens, "[Russia's Mercenary Industrial Complex in Africa](#)," *War on the Rocks*, June 6, 2024; also see Guido Lanfranchi and Kars de Bruijne, "[Russia's Growing Presence in Africa & Implication for EU Policy](#)," Clingendael, June 16, 2022.

among themselves toward peacebuilding processes.<sup>27</sup> Each Sahelian junta has also suppressed dissent among political parties as well as civil society, although this trend against free expression was underway even before the wave of coups in the region.<sup>28</sup>

One ask of Sahelian juntas to outside partners is to keep their governments in power. This is what groups like the Africa Corps and potentially like Turkey's private military company Sadat provide: protection for sensitive sites and junta officials and to insulate them against the threat of political protests and coups.<sup>29</sup> But the overall trend toward more authoritarian modes of governance, as with the focus on sovereignty, also represents a desire for Sahelian juntas to focus on the central state as the locus of power in their countries.

Indeed, one noteworthy aspect of the Sahelian coup governments has been their nostalgia for the pre-democratic past, whether the period of Moussa Traoré in Mali, Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso, or Seyni Kountché and Mahamadou Tandja in Niger.<sup>30</sup> This rejection of democratic systems that emerged amid social protest and repression in the 1990s in Mali and Niger in particular is on the one hand a justification not just for the military rule that largely prevailed before, but also for a particularly authoritarian mode of governance that aligns with the interests of military juntas. It is also a rejection of the endemic corruption of democratic systems in the region as well as the

political systems that helped transform party politics into a division of resources and focused on consensus to the detriment of political and ideological competition.<sup>31</sup> The "new" partnerships in the Sahel are also a means of seeking external support for this central and centralizing state apparatus. And one could further argue that the push for sovereignty and territorial control has become the defining ideology of these regimes.

Two elements are important for understanding why Sahelian states increasingly view their current geopolitical partnerships as more aligned with their needs. The first is that in a more openly transactional relationship, the state, rather than the outside partner, is the actor that chooses and defines the nature of partnerships, at least in theory. In practice the outside partners can still set some terms of the arrangement, such as how Russian mercenary forces increasingly took economic and political control in the Central African Republic, or in terms of China providing much-needed cash to Niger's government even while exerting more long-term pressure on the country's oil exports and budget.<sup>32</sup> Still, in these cases – and particularly when thinking about Russian security engagement under the Wagner Group and now the Africa Corps – these forces arrive at the behest of Sahelian governments, and in Mali are conducting intense combat operations that respond to the decisions and directions of the Malian government.<sup>33</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the suite of Western-led counterterrorism trainings and operations in the Sahel, which though important and beneficial to these states nonetheless faced limits and constraints imposed by the partners themselves.<sup>34</sup>

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27 Yvan Guichaoua and Mathieu Pellerin, "[Faire la Paix et Construire l'État: Les Relations entre Pouvoir Central et Périphéries Sahéliennes au Niger et au Mali](#)," Étude IRSEM n°51 (July 2017).

28 See for instance "[Disparition d'un journaliste au Mali : pourquoi le fils de l'ex-président doit être entendu](#)," Reporters Without Borders (RSF), July 7, 2021; also see Nathaniel Powell, "[Why Washington Failed in Niger](#)," *War on the Rocks*, June 3, 2024.

29 "[Niger: plusieurs centaines de mercenaires turcs déployés dans le pays](#)," RFI, May 21, 2024.

30 "[Des complices aux alliés : avec qui le général Tiani veut-il s'imposer au Niger ?](#)," *Jeune Afrique*, September 10, 2023; Charly Hessoun, "[Burkina : Ibrahim Traoré pointe l'erreur de Sankara qui a conduit à son meurtre](#)," *La Nouvelle Tribune*, January 31, 2024; "[Police nationale : la promotion Tiekoro Bagayoko des commissaires prête à servir](#)," Maliweb, February 22, 2024.

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31 Rahmane Idrissa, "[Rule by Junta](#)," *New Left Review*, August 7, 2023.

32 Antonio Giustozzi, "[A Mixed Picture: How Mali Views the Wagner Group](#)," RUSI, March 27, 2024; "[Niger : la Chine va verser une « avance » de 400 millions de dollars sur les ventes de pétrole brut](#)," APA News, April 14, 2024.

33 Sergey Eledinov and John Lechner, "[Wagner, Mali, and prospects for peace in Africa](#)," *Responsible Statecraft*, December 27, 2023.

34 Armstrong, *Counter-terror turned the Sahel into a coup belt*; also see Jaïr van der Lijn et al., "[Assessing the Effectiveness of European Union Civilian CSDP Missions Involved in Security Sector Reform: The Cases of Afghanistan, Mali and Niger](#)," SIPRI, May 2024.



The second important aspect of these more transactional relationships is that many in the Sahel, both in and out of government, see these relationships as more honest. In interviews and discussions with Sahelian officials and populations over a number of years, many expressed disbelief that development programs and security cooperation, often framed by Western partners in terms of providing assistance for Sahelian communities, masked a secret agenda. Although other states like Turkey and China do engage in development work and humanitarian assistance, the perception of more transparent commercial ties and a sense from Sahelians of mutual respect in these “win-win” engagements lends a kind of popular credibility to these actions, one encouraged by misinformation and friendly state-aligned news coverage.<sup>35</sup> These accords and deals are also negotiated and dictated at the central state level, whereas European and American development assistance often focuses on local communities and decentralized governance to the detriment of the state and national institutions.<sup>36</sup>

There is a tendency, particularly in France, to attribute the shifts in popular attitudes in the Sahel to disinformation and outside manipulation. They and others argue that much of the Sahelian governmental and popular turn against Europe and the United States stems from Russian but also Chinese media and propaganda efforts to shape perception and undermine cooperation between the West and Sahelian states.<sup>37</sup> These disinformation networks, troll farms, and outright propaganda certainly exist and have spread throughout Africa in the past several years.<sup>38</sup>

However, there are very genuine – if also complicated and at times manipulated – roots and reasons for Sahelian populations to be suspicious of France and European actors, even though these reasons vary between countries.<sup>39</sup> Western countries are often too quick to dismiss the weight of historical memory. While Emmanuel Macron in his 2017 speech in Ouagadougou noted that he came from a generation that had not known colonialism, heavy-handed approaches toward Sahelian leaders nonetheless evoked a feeling of France commanding subject Africans.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, reported American accusations of Niger’s collaboration with Iran and attempts to dictate Nigérien partnerships with Russia and others provided a pretext for removing American forces from the country while still demonstrating a domineering attitude that many Sahelian military officials and populations understandably abhor.<sup>41</sup>

### What next for Western engagement?

The current political climate at the state, regional, and international level makes it difficult for Europe and the United States to continue operations, even in a limited form. There are few options available to Europe and the United States for influencing events in the Sahel absent a shift toward massively funding and supporting security engagement in the region, including through the provision of weapons. Such actions are unlikely in the case of Europe and would require exceptions to American law governing security engagement following a coup. They would also put these countries in the position of providing security support alongside Russian and other actors, and in support of governments credibly accused of committing or abetting abuses against civilians.

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35 Andrew Lebovich and Nienke van Heukelingen, “[Unravelling Turkish Involvement in the Sahel](#),” *Clingendael*, July 28, 2023.

36 Gregory Mann, “[From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality](#),” (Cambridge University Press, 2014)

37 Christophe Châtelot and Cyril Bensimon, “[Au Sahel, Paris échoue à contrer la propagande russe](#),” *Le Monde*, May 18, 2022; Vincent Collen, “[Désinformation russe : la France sonne l’alarme](#),” *Les Echos*, February 12, 2024.

38 “[Mapping a Surge of Disinformation in Africa](#),” Africa Center for Strategic Studies, March 13, 2024.

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39 Jonathan Guiffard, “[Le sentiment anti-français en Afrique de l’Ouest, reflet de la confrontation autoritaire contre l’Occident collectif](#),” Institut Montaigne, January 4, 2023.

40 Elysee, “[Emmanuel Macron’s speech at the University of Ouagadougou](#),” November 28, 2017; Sophie Douce and Paul Lorget, “[G5 Sahel : le sommet de Pau n’a pas fait taire les critiques au Burkina et au Mali](#),” *Le Monde*, January 14, 2020.

41 Catherine Nzuki, “[The Cost of Paternalism: Sahelian Countries Push Back on the West](#),” CSIS, March 21, 2024.

There are some exceptions to this exclusion of Western partners. Germany and Italy have maintained their presence in Niger, in part by showing their willingness to engage with the government regardless of the coup and because of Italy's clear and stated focus on containing migration. However, these ties leave little prospect for influencing the government on its political or security decisions. Others have also suggested that Americans and Europeans try to work through alternative partners in the region such as the UAE or Turkey to maintain some form of influence and presence.<sup>42</sup> But such a policy would leave the United States and Europe reliant on countries with their own agendas and policies, and is no substitute for a more coherent, developed strategy.

The point of departure for Europe and the United States should be developing long-term strategies for the Sahel. While the EU, the United States, and member states have strategies for the Sahel, these have changed and shifted and failed to be applied in meaningful ways as the political and security situation in the region has continued to deteriorate.<sup>43</sup> In order to remain meaningfully engaged in the region and demonstrate commitment, members of the international community should not just formulate, but properly resource long-term commitments to the region. A well-resourced strategy (one that includes filling in endemic staffing shortages in embassies in the region for the United States and others) would show not just political commitment, but also an active interest in developing connections and exchange in crucial economic industries, including agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure, commodities, and energy.<sup>44</sup>

In formulating these strategies three interests could play a role.

First, prepare for re-engagement. Instead of pulling away from Sahelian states or even eliminating embassies in some cases due to a lack of opportunities for activities, however, European member states and the United States should maintain and even expand political engagement through their embassies in the region, rebuilding contacts and increasing their interactions with and knowledge of Sahelian government and civil society actors. This will help develop increased awareness as well as a broader array of contacts that will inform policymaking and show a sustained commitment to the Sahel beyond the security and development spheres. Such a commitment will help Western states more effectively re-engage with Sahelian populations, governments, and security forces when the region's political situation makes a larger role for Europe and the United States in the region more feasible.

Second, consider that addressing the expansion violent extremism in the coastal states of West Africa requires continued engagement with the Sahel. In discussions with European and American policymakers since the coup in Niger, these officials have regularly explained that since "programming" – defined usually in terms of either security assistance or development work – was no longer possible because of the political and security situation in the Sahel, their countries would likely refocus their efforts toward ostensibly more cooperative governments in coastal West Africa.<sup>45</sup> This "containment" strategy ignores the transnational nature of the security threats to the region, and the fact that Sahelian states will not only face extreme security conditions, but that the continued expansion of militant groups like the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) in the Central Sahel will pose a long-term risk to these

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42 Discussions with European officials, April-May 2024.

43 Andrew Lebovich, "[Halting ambition: EU migration and security policy in the Sahel](#)," ECFR, September 25, 2018.

44 For instance: Jonathan Guiffard, "[Sécurité en Afrique de l'Ouest, investir la filière Agricole](#)," Institut Montaigne, September 2023.

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45 This explains in part the United States' designation of Coastal West Africa (rather than the Sahel) as a priority under the Global Fragility Act. See U.S. Department of State, "[The U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability 10-Year Plan for Coastal West Africa](#)," March 22, 2024.

countries even with increased security and development assistance to coastal states.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, develop a clearer communication strategy. Efforts to disrupt misinformation and disinformation have so far been haphazard and uncoordinated. As part of the diplomatic engagement in Sahelian countries and as an integrated part of a larger strategy, officials should communicate not just openly, but frequently with Sahelian populations. This should include not just social media engagement, but interviews and discussions on media outlets including television and radio that are used by local communities. This is one means of confronting misinformation directly, and showing openness and transparency about European and American opinions and activities in the Sahel which can help rebuild trust after many years of confusion and opaqueness.

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46 Pierre Englebert and Rida Lyammouri, "[Sahel: Moving beyond military containment policy report](#)," Atlantic Council, February 11, 2022.



### About the Clingendael Institute

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