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PRESS RELEASE

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Flintlock 11: New Approach to Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

- Innovative strategic, operational, and tactical-level regional counterterrorism engagement
- Planned, coordinated, and led by West African partner nations
- North African observers deepen North-West Africa civil-military dialogue

This year U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) expanded its traditional approach to addressing irregular security challenges across the Trans-Sahara region of West and North Africa. For the first time, Exercise Flintlock – currently taking place across Senegal – expands beyond tactical and operational training to include two strategic-level working engagements. African partner nations -- Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Senegal -- plan, coordinate, and lead the exercise. In Dakar, Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara is coordinating and synchronizing with Special Operations Command Africa through the Trans-Sahara Security (TSS) Senior Leader Symposium, a senior-level strategic training program.

During her opening ceremony remarks, US Ambassador to Senegal, Marcia Bernicat, said: “One of the greatest lessons of this symposium for each and every one of you is that a truly effective campaign against insecurity must involve a full range of civilian and military players in the execution of every operation.”

While improving information-sharing across the Trans-Sahara region, this TSS Symposium fosters unique collaboration and coordination among participants, who come from militaries, civilian ministries and agencies, and observers from two North African countries as well as six Western countries (Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and the US). Colonel Babacar Seck, the Senegalese Flintlock Exercise Director, stated that “the Trans-Sahara Security Symposium is a unique opportunity to bring together senior military and civilian officers in an interactive session that provides them with the tools to reflect and develop strategies on how to engage in multinational cooperation, to give them a better understanding of the dangers of extremists.”

In the first week, operational and intelligence officers focused on developing a joint intelligence operating picture of the regional counterterrorism threat. During the second week, these officers connected with 30 strategic leaders to produce a joint action plan during the TSS Senior Leader Symposium.

With a preventative objective in mind, this TSS Symposium addresses specific threats to national and sub-regional security in the Trans-Sahara region: terrorism, trafficking in persons, weapons, drugs, and religious extremism. Leading African civil-military thinkers and practitioners from security-focused sub-regional organizations lead participants in identifying interagency and regional mechanisms to counter these threats.

To date, TSS has graduated more than 600 West African armed forces and civilian security agency leaders from its rigorous country-specific and regional training program which examines threats and common approaches to military, governance, and developmental solutions.

Flintlock 11 builds upon previous engagements, establishing and developing cooperative relationships among the military institutions of TSCTP nations in three critical ways: strengthening security institutions, promoting multilateral sharing of information, and facilitating informal network building. Exercise Flintlock accomplishes US AFRICOM objectives to build civil-military partnerships as well as interagency and regional cooperation in the region.

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