

**Statement of the Senior Bureau Official for the Bureau of African Affairs
Nick Checker Before the Senate Foreign Relation Committee's Subcommittee
on Africa and Global Health Policy**

“The U.S. Approach to Counterterrorism in Africa”

April 21, 2026, at 2:30 p.m.

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Booker, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Trump Administration's counterterrorism policy in Africa.

Africa will play an important role in America's economic future. The continent holds vast critical minerals, energy resources, and tremendous human capital. However, these opportunities cannot be fully realized amid persistent instability in parts of the continent, including terrorist threats, which continue to affect U.S. interests.

Currently, U.S. policy toward the continent is undergoing a necessary reset because past approaches failed to deliver outcomes for American interests or our partner African countries. Under President Trump and Secretary Rubio's leadership, this Administration has responded with clarity. We will pursue a disciplined, interest-driven strategy rooted in flexible realism.

The strategy calls for partnership over dependency. No longer will there be open-ended commitments and diffuse objectives that prioritize aspirations over outcomes. For decades, U.S. engagement in Africa was defined by aid-centric models that too often fostered reliance rather than self-sufficiency, including in the counterterrorism space. Going forward we will prioritize enabling and cooperating with African nations with demonstrated commitment and capacity to take the lead in addressing their security gaps while advancing core U.S. national interests. We will no longer make open-ended investments in nations that are unable or unwilling to sustain CT efforts.

But we are not naïve: burden sharing and shifting must extend beyond the continent. We are working closely with European allies, partners in the Middle East, and other like-minded nations to ensure a more coordinated response to this challenge. These partners have stepped up, benefiting from longstanding ties, geographical proximity, and complementary capabilities that are essential for

success. Our role is to reinforce their leadership – not substitute for it – and encourage greater regional support where sustained external involvement is neither feasible nor effective.

First, our counterterrorism posture in Africa is narrowly focused and aligned with U.S. national security priorities. The primary objective is clear: we will protect the homeland from threats while safeguarding U.S. citizens and commercial interests abroad. Groups affiliated with ISIS and al-Qaeda remain active in the Sahel, Nigeria, and parts of East Africa. These threats are real, but our response must be disciplined. We will not pursue large-scale, indefinite military engagements, or nation building efforts. Instead, we are adopting a targeted approach that emphasizes intelligence sharing and limited, high impact security cooperation with partners who demonstrate both capability and political will.

Second, our strategy recognizes that counterterrorism cannot be separated from broader political and economic dynamics. Instability creates space for terrorist networks to operate, but the solution is not simply more security assistance – that has not worked as shown from our investments in the Sahel. A region that accounted for 5-10% of terrorism-related deaths a decade ago, now represents more than 50%. Despite significant American engagement, the strategic picture demonstrates that open-ended, aid-centric approaches have not delivered sustainable security outcomes. This is why a fundamental rethink is necessary. Additionally, there are regional and cultural dynamics that must be accounted for to address the underlying conditions that fuel conflict - weak governance, lack of economic opportunity, and unresolved regional disputes – challenges that the U.S. cannot unilaterally address.

Third, we are refocusing foreign assistance to ensure every dollar advances U.S. interests and delivers measurable outcomes. We will prioritize programs with clear objectives and defined timelines. These changes also mean making difficult choices, focusing resources where they can have the greatest impact, and eliminating programs that do not. In the counterterrorism context, success will be evaluated on reductions in terrorist activity and unfettered access to financial and criminal networks, improved partner performance, and better protection of U.S. interests.

Finally, our approach is grounded in respect for sovereignty and realism about political conditions on the ground. We engage governments as they are, not as we wish them to be. This does not mean abandoning our values but pursuing them

through pragmatic diplomacy rather than public pressure that can undermine cooperation. We will work with countries, even when they have partnerships with our strategic competitors, if doing so advances U.S. interests and protects the homeland. Effective counterterrorism partnerships require trust, and trust is built through consistent, interest-based engagement. This principle informed my recent travel to reengage Sahelian partners and advance efforts to bring home American citizen Kevin Rideout.

In closing, we are prioritizing partnerships that matter, aligning our resources with our strategic objectives, and ensuring that our engagement delivers real benefits for the American people and results for our African partners.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.