

Is the US Training the Next African Coup Leader?

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AFRICOM is ready to begin this year’s annual special operations training for [African military leaders](#), dubbed ‘Flintlock.’ The program is labeled as part of America’s counter-terrorism strategy on the continent, yet its graduates often have goals other than fighting jihadists.

Most recently, two-time Flintlock grad Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba seized power in Burkina Faso, ousting President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré in January. Reporting on Damiba’s deep ties to the US military establishment, journalist Nick Turse [writes](#).

“In 2010 and 2020, he participated in an annual special operations training program known as the Flintlock exercise. In 2013, Damiba was accepted into an Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance course, which is a State Department-funded peacekeeping training program. In 2013 and 2014, Damiba attended the U.S.-sponsored Military Intelligence Basic Officer Course-Africa. And in 2018 and 2019, he participated in engagements with a U.S. Defense Department Civil Military Support Element in Burkina Faso.”

Another Flintlock grad and coup plotter is [Col. Assimi Goïta](#), leader of Mali’s military junta government. Using skills gained from his US advisers, the colonel has now led two successful coups. A recent decision to delay elections and accept Russian military assistance has split Goïta from his French and American partners, with French President Emmanuel Macron even declaring an end to its nine-year counter-terror mission in Mali, Operation Barkhane.

[Flintlock 2022](#) will be held in the Ivory Coast and include participation from three other African nations – Cameroon, Ghana, and Niger. Six Western states will also take part, among them the US, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK. A total of 400 soldiers will participate, according to AFRICOM.

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Will Porter contributed to this article.

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Featured image: Tunisian navy personnels aboard USS Hershel "Woody" Williams (ESB 4) on May 23 when the Phoenix Express 2021 was underway. Photo: AFRICOM

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