

White House Concerned Over Niger Coup

Military leader of the CNSP calls for change in the domestic and foreign policy of the landlocked West African state.

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A new leader has emerged in the uranium-rich West African state of Niger just two days after the elected head-of-state, President Mohamed Bazoum, was toppled by his special forces.

The presidential guard on July 26 took over the residence of Bazoum and other key government buildings including the national media.

Colonel-Major Amadou Abdramane spoke for the newly established National Council for the Safeguard of our Homeland (CNSP), saying that the president had been detained. Abdramane later claimed that the government had been seized by the presidential guard due to the declining security, economic and social conditions prevailing in the former French colony of 25 million people.

On July 28, yet another television announcement was made, this time by General Abdourahmane Tchiani, who said he was the leader of the CNSP and the present head-of-state for the country. General Tchiani continued a similar narrative related to the worsening atmosphere in Niger and the need to embark upon a different course.

Niger has been a close ally of France and the United States in its "war on terror" across the continent of Africa. The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and the French Armed Forces maintain a significant troop presence inside the country. Published figures indicate that France has at least 1,800 soldiers in the country while the Pentagon forces stand at approximately 1,100.

There are two drone stations established by the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Niger ostensibly to curtail the attacks by armed Islamist groups which have been staging operations in the south and west of the country. However, anyone assessing the military presence in Niger by NATO states cannot ignore the western interests in the

uranium producing areas of the country.

[In the statement by Tchiani](#) which aired on July 28 on national television in Niamey, he emphasized:

“We can no longer continue with the same approaches proposed so far, at the risk of witnessing the gradual and inevitable demise of our country. That is why we decided to intervene and take responsibility. I ask the technical and financial partners who are friends of Niger to understand the specific situation of our country in order to provide it with all the support necessary to enable it to meet the challenges.”

Immediately after the seizure of power by the presidential guard, the National Security Advisor for the White House, Jack Sullivan, along with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, called for the restoration of President Bazoum to office. In subsequent statements from Washington, administration spokespersons urged members of the conventional military forces in Niger and the population to prevent the consolidation of power by the CNSP.

However, on July 27, the day following the coup, the Nigerien military leadership expressed their support for the putsch, setting the stage for the appearance of Tchiane on July 28 as the new head-of-state. The coup has provided a dilemma for the Biden administration which has continued the support for AFRICOM which was launched from Stuttgart, Germany in February 2008.

Reports from the capital of Niamey suggest that the situation has calmed. Friday prayers in the Muslim-dominated state took place as usual.

Through successive U.S. Republican and Democratic administrations, there has been no wavering on the Pentagon and CIA operations in Africa. In 2011, the destruction of Libya under the previous Jamahiriya government of Col. Muammar Gaddafi, represented the first full-fledged destabilization and occupation project of AFRICOM. Since the overthrow of the Gaddafi administration, there has been no stable government in Libya. Since 2011, the North African oil-rich state has become a source for internecine conflict and human trafficking which has spread throughout other states within North and West Africa.

Supporters of the Niger Takeover Express Solidarity with Russia

Interestingly as well, on July 27, youthful adherents to the CNSP coup set fire to the Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS-Tarayya) headquarters of ousted President Bazoum. During the demonstrations in favor of the CNSP, people waved Nigerien and Russian national flags.



Omar Issaka, one of the demonstrators supporting the CNSP, [told the Associated Press](#):

“We’re fed up. We are tired of being targeted by the men in the bush. ... We’re going to collaborate with Russia now.”

Following a similar pattern which emerged in Burkina Faso and Mali in 2022, these leaders have moved closer diplomatically and militarily towards the Russian Federation. Obviously, the military forces, although being trained and groomed by AFRICOM and the French Armed Forces, have accused France and the U.S. as being a major impediment to stabilizing their countries.

In response to the CNSP takeover, the U.S. warned that the continued assistance to Niger is contingent upon cooperation with the Pentagon and CIA. Vice-President Kamala Harris reiterated this position on July 27.

The same above-mentioned article from the Associated Press noted regarding the level of funding by the U.S.:

“The United States in early 2021 said it had provided Niger with more than \$500 million in military assistance and training programs since 2012, one of the largest such support programs in sub-Saharan Africa. The European Union earlier this year launched a 27 million-euro (\$30 million) military training mission in Niger. The United States has more than 1,000 service personnel in the country. Some military leaders who appear to be involved in the coup have worked closely with the United States for years. Gen. Moussa Salaou Barmou, the head of Niger’s special forces, has an especially strong relationship with the U.S., the Western military official said. While Russia has also condemned the coup, it remains unclear what the junta’s position would be on Wagner.”

Which Way for Niger?

It is not clear as of yet which line the Niger CNSP will take on continued cooperation with AFRICOM and the French military. The White House, having failed so far to reverse the coup,

may decide to continue its cooperation for the time being in consideration of the declining status of Pentagon-NATO forces in Mali and Burkina Faso.

Other states such as the Central African Republic (CAR), Republic of Sudan and Mozambique are utilizing the services of the Wagner Group in handling internal security issues. While the coup was unfolding, the Russia-Africa Summit was being held in St. Petersburg.

Russian President Vladimir Putin in his consultations with the leadership of African Union (AU) member-states pledged to provide grain to the most distressed countries on the continent. This announcement was made in the aftermath of the suspension of the Black Sea grain deal in effect since the closing months of 2022.

Persistent efforts by the White House to persuade African states to condemn the Russian Federation have not been successful. The AU says it is guided by a policy of nonalignment and therefore is urging a diplomatic solution to the Ukraine crisis.

The Democratic administration of President Joe Biden is opposed to any negotiated settlement or even a pause in the fighting, viewing such a set of circumstances as an admitted failure militarily and diplomatically. After sending \$115 billion for weapons, training and other logistical support to continue the proxy war, the Ukrainian forces have failed miserably in the much-championed spring and summer offensives.

While losing influence in the West African Sahel nations, the State Department has refrained from describing events in Niger as a coup. Such a declaration would require the termination of assistance approved by the Congress.

Moreover, the deposits of gold and uranium in Niger are a cause for concern by Washington and its NATO allies. France and the U.S. would not want Russian military consultants and operatives in Niger since their hegemony over the natural resources could be jeopardized.

[An update published](#) by World Nuclear News on the developments in the country says:

“Niger produced 2248 tU in 2021, around 5% of world uranium output. Current production is from the open-pit operations of SOMAÏR (Société des Mines de l’Air), near the town of Arlit. SOMAÏR is 63.4% owned by French company Orano and 36.66% owned by Sopamin (Société du Patrimoine des Mines du Niger). Sopamin manages Niger’s state participation in mining ventures. According to data from the World Bank, uranium is Niger’s second largest export, in monetary terms, after gold. Uranium was first discovered at Azelik in Niger in 1957, and commercial uranium production began at Arlit – 900 km northeast of the capital Niamey – in 1971. COMINAK (Compagnie Minière d’Akouta) – also majority-owned by Orano – began production from an underground mine at Akouta in 1978, producing more than 75,000 tU before operations came to an end in 2021.”

Therefore, in pursuit of its strategic competition against Russia and China, the military option remains the most probable in the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy in Africa. However, based upon the outcomes of recent invasions and occupations, the spectrum of defeat will inevitably haunt the Biden administration in its campaign to win reelection in 2024.

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