

Mass protests in Niger demand withdrawal of French troops

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3 September 2023

On Saturday, tens of thousands of people marched outside the French military base in Niger's capital, Niamey, to demand French troops withdraw from Niger.

French President Emmanuel Macron has refused to withdraw from this former French colony, on the pretext that the Nigerien regime demanding it came to power in a coup, on July 26. Macron poses as a defender of democracy against the coup that toppled French-backed Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum. On this basis, Macron is keeping French troops in Niger and refusing the Nigerien regime's demand that he replace French Ambassador to Niger Sylvain Itté.

The mass protest in Niamey exposed the fraud of Macron's neocolonial arguments. In reality, it is above all the Nigerien people, and not the Nigerien military junta, that wants an end to the French military presence in Niger and across the Sahel. As in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso, both of which French troops have left within the last year after waging a bloody nine-year war in those countries, there is explosive anger against French imperialism and its NATO allies.

Demonstrators rallied on Escadrille square in Niamey, in front of the French military base, after smaller protests on Thursday and Friday. They shouted slogans calling on French troops to immediately leave Niger, a leading supplier of uranium and other critical raw materials for major French corporations. They held up signs that said: "France is a leech that sucks the blood of Nigeriens," "Niger for Nigeriens, Africa for Africans," and "Brave People of Africa, Nothing Can Ever Stop Us Again."

"We are ready to sacrifice ourselves today, because we are proud," demonstrator Yacouba Issoufou told Reuters. "They plundered our resources and we became aware. So they are going to get out."

Another protester in Niamey, Mariama Amadou, told the *Hindustan Times*: "Our only request, our ultimate request, is the departure, the departure, the departure of the French who are on Nigerien territory. We don't need these people here, we don't need them, and we repeat: we are ready to die to defend our country. We are ready to die to make them leave. They must leave, we do not need them here."

The protest in Niamey came amid mounting opposition and protests across West Africa against imperialist-driven economic sanctions and plans for an invasion by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

Macron has called for such an invasion, aiming to use ECOWAS troops as cannon fodder for a French-led campaign to reconquer countries French troops were forced to leave. The regimes of Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Benin have expressed willingness to send troops to Niger.

ECOWAS sanctions have already had a devastating effect on Niger, leading to electricity cutoffs and halting trade in key pharmaceutical products, food and other essential goods. The sanctions are costing an estimated 13 billion nairas (€15 million) in weekly trade between Niger and Nigeria alone.

Last month, protests against plans for war with Niger shook the city of Kano in the north of Nigeria. Protesters bore signs saying "War against Niger is injustice," "It is the handiwork of America", "It is justice we want," and "Niger is ours." The Nigerian daily *Vanguard* noted that the planned ECOWAS military mission "has been largely opposed by most Nigerians."

Even within ruling circles in Nigeria, there is growing concern at the prospect of an all-out war. ECOWAS

parliamentarian Idris Wase said: “We should be careful not to start what we can’t finish. When the Russia – Ukraine war started, people thought it was to be a sharp war. A year after, the war is still lingering on ... [Nigerian] subregional military chiefs know what they stand to benefit economically. That’s why they’re eager to militarily intervene in Niger. Most of them are corrupt. Any war on Niger will have adverse effects on 60 percent of Nigeria, especially northern Nigeria.”

Nigerien workers in Senegal also spoke to Radio France Internationale to voice their opposition to the ECOWAS sanctions and war plans. Tassiou, a worker in Dakar, said: “We live abroad, we cannot take land routes, we cannot take air travel to go back home. If we need to send money via the banks, it is no longer possible, so commerce is blocked. Sending money to help our families is blocked.”

Abdourahmane, a Nigerien working in the finance sector in Senegal, denounced a potential ECOWAS military intervention, stating: “Senegalese people with whom I speak at the office generally do not support this military intervention. And I think that any African, today, should not defend this intervention, because it would be a battle between Africans.”

The danger of war is, however, rapidly growing. In particular because the conflict in Africa is becoming bound up with NATO’s fast-escalating war with Russia in Ukraine, as well as plans for a US military confrontation with China. The military juntas in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso have all sought ties with the Russian private military contractors of the Wagner Group, or with Russian military officials directly.

China, whose firms in Niger are working on a oil pipeline to Benin and building food-processing plants, faces the risk that French-backed sanctions will block its industrial plans. It has cautiously signaled its support for the junta in Niamey. On Friday, Chinese Ambassador to Niger Jiang Feng met Nigerien Defense Minister Salifou Mody. Jiang told Mody that Niger’s government has the “support” of China, the Agence Nigériane de Presse reported.

The Turkish, Egyptian and Algerian governments have all criticized calls for an ECOWAS intervention as well. The Turkish government is reportedly selling Bayraktar drones, which it is also sending to Ukraine amid the NATO war on Russia, to Niger in case ECOWAS tries to invade it.

None of these capitalist regimes are friends of the working class or consistent opponents of imperialism, however. While the Algerian military regime opened its airspace to French bombers during the Mali war before closing it this year, the Egyptian regime is infamous for working closely with Washington to drown the revolutionary struggles of the Egyptian working class in blood during General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s 2013 putsch.

The strategy of all of these regimes—trying to negotiate a deal with imperialism and avoid mobilizing the revolutionary sentiment among African workers—emerged in the remarks last month of Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova. Shortly after the coup, she called for “re-establishing civil peace, ensuring law and order” in Niger. She also called on “the African Union and regional organizations,” like ECOWAS, to resolve the conflict.

The alternative is unifying mounting working class opposition to imperialist war across Africa and beyond, including in the imperialist countries themselves, in a struggle for socialism. This year has seen an explosion of bitter mass strikes across Europe, as workers oppose the diversion of massive resources from wages and social spending to the military and war. In France, Macron trampled on the will of the people, imposing a pension cut in the face of overwhelming popular opposition and mass strikes that were savagely assaulted by riot police.

In these objectively revolutionary conditions, the ground is being laid for building a common movement of the African, European and international working class for socialism and against imperialism. Such a movement, guided by a revolutionary internationalist perspective, can compel the withdrawal of French troops from France’s former colonial empire and halt the decades of plunder of the Sahel and of Africa by imperialism.



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