

Military junta accuses France of preparing invasion of Niger

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A month and a half after a coup toppled the French-backed regime of President Mohamed Bazoum in Niger, tensions are mounting between Paris and the junta. Amid mass protests demanding the withdrawal of French troops, the Nigerien junta is accusing France of preparing to invade Niger.

On Saturday, the spokesman for the military junta, Colonel-Major Amadou Abdramane, accused France of deploying troops and military equipment to the West African countries of Benin, Ivory Coast and Senegal to prepare to invade Niger. He said, “France continues to deploy its forces in several ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] countries as part of preparations for an aggression against Niger, which it is considering in collaboration with this organization.”

He added that “that two A400M type military transport aircraft and a Dornier 328 were deployed as reinforcements in Côte d'Ivoire. And two Super Puma type multirole helicopters and around forty armored vehicles were deployed in Kandi and Malanville in Benin. On September 7, 2023, a French military ship docked in Cotonou [Benin] with personnel and military assets on board. The generals in power also report around a hundred rotations of military cargo planes having made it possible to land significant quantities of war material and equipment in Senegal, Ivory Coast and Benin, to name but a few.”

The goal of the French military build-up, the spokesman said, is “to achieve a successful military intervention against our country.”

On Sunday, French President Emmanuel Macron issued a belligerent statement refusing to recognize the authority of the Nigerien junta or the legitimacy of demands for a withdrawal of French troops from Niger. “We do not recognize any legitimacy in the statements of the junta in Niger,” he said during a press conference

at the G20 summit in Delhi.

Macron’s remarks effectively amounted to repeating his threat to organize a French-backed intervention into Niger carried out with ECOWAS troops. He claimed that the Bazoum regime and the French military presence in Niger are legitimate, despite mass protests against French troops in Niger and across the region.

Macron said, “France, French forces were set up on Niger soil at the request of Niger. And we are here to fight against terrorism at the request of Niger and its democratically elected authorities, namely President Bazoum, his government, and his parliament. A coup d’état since last July has held a democratically elected president hostage. France has a simple position: We condemn it. We demand the release of President Bazoum and the restoration of constitutional order.”

Macron’s attempts to dress up his neocolonial policy and plans for wars of plunder as a defense of democracy is a cynical fraud. Since the formal independence of France’s sub-Saharan African colonies in the 1960s, Paris has backed countless military coups in what the French press refers to as its “backyard.” After its bloody 2013-2022 war in Mali, that then spread across most of the Sahel, masses of workers and youth in the region legitimately want French troops out.

French troops withdrawn from Mali in 2022 were initially stationed in Chad and in Niger, which hosts 1,500 French troops.

Every day for over a week, thousands of people have been demonstrating in the capital of Niger, Niamey, outside the base where French and NATO troops are stationed, demanding their departure. Washington, which has 1,100 troops in Niger, has begun moving them from Base 101 in Niamey to Base 201 in Agadez, in central Niger. The trip to Agadez from Niamey is

around 920 kilometers by road.

So far, Niger's military junta has not demanded that US, Italian, or German troops stationed alongside their French counterparts leave the country. The junta leaders' behind-the-scenes negotiations with Washington expose the junta's anti-imperialist pretensions.

At a Pentagon news conference, Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh indicated that despite the decision to move US troops, Washington still hopes to work with the Niger junta. She said, "There is no threat to American troops and no threat of violence on the ground, this is simply a precautionary measure. We're hopeful that there can be some diplomatic way to resolve what's happening."

Nonetheless, there is a growing danger that the imperialist powers will provoke a major escalation of the war in response to mounting opposition among African workers and youth. This is particularly the case since the conflict between France and the other imperialist powers with the juntas in the Sahel is becoming caught up in the global conflict between NATO and Russia centered in the war in Ukraine.

After the July 26 military coup in Niger, ECOWAS countries put their armies on alert along their borders, with the support of France. There has been open discussion in the ruling elites of Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Togo of possibly launching a war against Niger. Moscow has responded by making limited offers of support to the juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger that are demanding the departure of French troops.

On August 15, in a statement on its ties to the Malian junta, the Kremlin announced: "At the initiative of the Malian side, Vladimir Putin had a telephone conversation with President of the Transitional Period of the Republic of Mali Assimi Goita." Its statement further reported that Putin and Goita had discussed the situation in Niger. The Kremlin said this was a "continuation of Russian-Mali high-level talks" held at the Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg.

Putin also discussed the crisis in the Sahel while speaking that same day in a pre-recorded message to the Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS). He said: "The countries of the Sahara-Sahel region, such as the Central African Republic and Mali, were under direct attack from numerous terrorist groups

after the US and its allies unleashed aggression against Libya, which led to the collapse of the Libyan state."

On August 24, the Nigerien, Malian and Burkinabè juntas established "an agreement for matters of mutual security in matters of security and defense in case of aggression or terrorist attack," the junta in Niger announced.

After a decade of bloody French military operations in the Sahel and over a half-century of neocolonial domination of the region since formal independence, French imperialism faces explosive opposition among African workers and youth. In this context, condemnations of Russian actions in Africa by Paris and its NATO allies are correctly dismissed in Africa as a hypocritical fraud.

Nonetheless, the perspective advanced by the juntas in the impoverished Sahel countries is not a way forward for the working class. They aim to rely on Russian protection and their own military strength to discourage France from intervening directly and to work out a deal with the NATO powers behind the scenes. But the NATO powers themselves are currently and recklessly escalating their war with Russia that now threatens to explode across Africa, as well.

Moreover, the Russian post-Soviet oligarchy led by Putin sees the Sahel mainly as a bargaining chip in dealing with the NATO imperialist powers amid the war in Ukraine. Should Moscow believe itself to be in a position to work out a deal with the major NATO powers at the expense of its allies in Africa, it would do so.

The struggle against imperialism, which has deep ties in the African bourgeoisie, requires the unification and mobilization of the working class across Africa and internationally in a movement against imperialism and war, aimed at the overthrow of the economic and political power of the capitalist ruling elites.



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