

Macron announces pull-out of French troops from Niger

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Amid massive protests in Niger against French imperialism, French President Macron announced the withdrawal of the French ambassador to Niamey on Sunday. The withdrawal of French troops from Niger is to occur by the end of the year. After leaving Mali and then Burkina Faso, the French military is now slated to leave a third country in the Sahel.

After a decade of devastating counterterrorism military operations in the Sahel since it launched a war in Mali, France now has only 1,000 troops stationed in the region. They are concentrated in Chad, on Niger's eastern border.

After coming to power via a coup on July 26, the Nigerien junta led by General Abdurahmane Tiani canceled security cooperation agreements between Paris and Niamey. It also ordered the withdrawal of French troops from Niger by the end of August.

Macron initially refused to evacuate French troops or to recognize the Nigerien junta. He accused them of ruling Niger "illegally." At the same time, France encouraged ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) countries to prepare military action against Niger. Niger's military regime accused France of deploying troops and military equipment for a war of aggression against it in alliance with the ECOWAS countries of Nigeria, Benin, Ivory Coast and Senegal.

French imperialism's war plans in Africa are now inseparably bound up with the escalating NATO war with Russia in Ukraine. Niger has signed a military self-defense alliance with Mali and Burkina Faso, which has sought out ties with the Russian military. This creates conditions for the war in Ukraine to rapidly escalate to a war involving large swathes of West Africa.

On Sunday, as he announced the withdrawal of

French troops, Macron nonetheless hailed the French war in Mali, praising the "success of the Barkhane military operation ... Without it, most of these countries would have already been taken by territorial caliphates and jihadists."

Macron's attempt to justify France's wars in the Sahel as an "anti-terrorist" struggle is a cynical fraud. France and NATO countries waged a war of aggression against Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, arming jihadists linked to the Al Qaeda terrorist network as their principal proxy forces in Libya. The fighting then spread across the Sahara into Mali, which provided a pretext for France's military intervention in Mali.

Last year, Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop sent a letter to the UN Security Council accusing France of aiding the jihadists. Diop alleged that Mali's "airspace has been breached more than 50 times this year, mostly by French forces using drones, military helicopters, and fighter jets. These flagrant violations of Malian airspace were used by France to collect information for terrorist groups operating in the Sahel and to drop arms and ammunition to them."

Macron tried to rewrite history, alleging that the African military juntas, not French imperialism, were to blame for the fighting across the Sahel. He said, "We are not here to be hostages of the putschists. ... The putschists are the friends of disorder."

Due to growing social anger and mass protests against French troop deployments in the Sahel and West Africa, however, Macron has been forced to agree to the putschists' demands that he withdraw his troops. It marks a setback for French imperialism's strategy of plundering resources from its former colonial empire in Africa.

The junta in Niger has banned all French aircraft from

flying over its airspace since Saturday evening. It announced that the airspace would be open to all national and international commercial flights except those chartered by France, including French Airlines and Air France.

Macron made clear, however, that French imperialism is leaving Niger only as part of a plan to buy time and reestablish its political domination over the region. He stressed that France will continue to work with West African governments. This shows that even with the withdrawal of French troops from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, France is not ready to give up its economic and strategic positions in the geographical heart of West Africa.

The French withdrawal from Niger has also highlighted growing tensions between Paris and Washington in the region. While France was pressuring ECOWAS to intervene militarily to restore Nigerien President Mohamed Bassoumi, who was ousted by the currently ruling military junta, Washington made efforts to pacify the ECOWAS countries.

RFI reported: “At the UN, the Americans try in vain to change the position of ECOWAS countries on Niger. In New York, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, the United States tried to convince the countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to soften their position on respect for the putschists in Niger. It was this Friday morning during a meeting organized by American Secretary of State Antony Blinken. But clearly, the maneuver was not successful.”

RFI added that Blinken hosted several West African leaders, such as Nigeria’s Bola Tinubu and Senegal’s Macky Sall.

As French troops withdraw from Niger, the US will “review all actions” regarding its military presence, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced Monday in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. “While giving diplomacy a chance, we will also continue to consider any future measures that will prioritize both our diplomatic and security objectives,” he told journalists at a news conference in Nairobi.

While worker and youth struggles against imperialism mount across West Africa, the Nigerien junta does not oppose imperialism or the

NATO alliance. It is ready to work with US imperialism, which is now waging a devastating war against Russia in Ukraine, while taking measures to expel French troops—for now, at least. The dubious maneuvers of the Nigerian junta with Washington expose its anti-imperialist fraud.

Two weeks ago, the junta authorized US forces to operate from Air Base 201 in Agadez, Niger. Currently, 1,100 US troops are stationed in Niger and the US has resumed drone and warplane operations from this airbase against the jihadists. Also, the US has stationed troops near Niger’s strategic uranium mines.

Relations between France and the United States have undoubtedly been strained by the coup in Niger. As such, Niger’s ruling circles and the Nigerien military seek to maximize the political advantages they can gain by pitting the great powers against each other.

Ultimately, however, even the withdrawal of French troops from Niger cannot ultimately free the workers and youth in Niger and the Sahel from the grip of imperialism. Exploiting their control of global financial flows and military power, the imperialist countries will use the most ruthless policies to return French and NATO troops to the region. Already, France is working closely with the ECOWAS governments to strangle Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso with economic sanctions.

The critical question is to unify the African workers and youth across the artificial national borders established by European imperialism, in a common struggle against imperialism and war with their class brothers and sisters in Europe and across the world.



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