

Niger's junta cancels military agreement with the United States

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On March 16, the military junta in Niger, which took power amid mass protests against the French military presence last July, unilaterally canceled a military agreement signed last year, allowing US military personnel and contractors to operate in Niger. Now, after the French withdrawal last year, about 1,100 US military personnel are to leave Niger.

Niger junta spokesman Colonel Major Amadou Abdramane said on national television: “The government of Niger, taking into account the aspirations and interests of its people, decides with full responsibility to denounce with immediate effect the agreement relating to the status of military personnel of the United States and civilian employees of the American Department of Defense in the territory of the Republic of Niger.”

The announcement by the military follows an unannounced meeting in the Nigerien capital of Niamey on March 12-14 between Nigerien officials and a high-level US delegation led by the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee. General Michael Langley, the commander of the US Africa Command, also participated in this meeting.

Abdramane accused the US delegation of being “disrespectful” and “disrespecting diplomatic procedures.” He stated that Niamey was not informed of the details of the US delegation, the date of their arrival or the agenda. Therefore, he said, “This agreement is not only profoundly unfair in its substance but it also does not meet the aspirations and interests of the Nigerien people.”

Abdramane added, “the government of Niger forcefully denounces the condescending attitude accompanied by the threat of retaliation from the head of the American delegation towards the Nigerien government and people.”

During this visit, the US delegation demanded to meet General Abdourahamane Tchiani, the head of the Nigerien junta. However, Tchiani refused to meet the US delegation.

Washington began developing military ties with Niamey in 2003, after the September 11, 2001 attacks and the fraudulent “War on Terror” under the George W. Bush administration. After this, about 1,100 US military personnel and civilian security personnel started operating in Niger under a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) signed between the United States and Niger concluded in 2012.

The US military operates Airbase 101 in Niamey. It has also built Airbase 201, one of its largest aircraft and drone bases in Africa, near Agadez, 920 km (572 miles) southwest of Niamey. Under the guise of “war against Jihadi groups” in the region, the base operates a fleet of drones. At the same time, US forces do the dirty work of stopping refugees from West Africa and the Sahel region from coming to Europe, placing them instead in detention camps in Agadez.

Intelligence, surveillance and drone reconnaissance operations are carried out from this base across the entire Sahel, from the Red Sea on Africa's eastern coast to the Atlantic Ocean. The base currently plays a key role not only in NATO wars in West Africa, but in NATO attacks on Houthi forces in Yemen who are attacking Israeli shipping in the Red Sea in retaliation for the genocide in Gaza.

Nigerien military spokesman Abdramane also accused Washington of trying to deny Niger's right to choose its diplomatic, strategic and commercial partners. He said, “Niger regrets the intention of the American delegation to deny the sovereign Nigerien people the right to choose their partners and types of partnerships capable of truly helping them fight against

terrorism.”

Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh responded that US officials had “lengthy and direct” talks with members of the Junta, over US concerns about Nigerien relations with Russia and Iran. “We were troubled by the path Niger took,” Singh said.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Washington is monitoring Russian military activities in Africa to “assess and mitigate potential risks to personnel, American interests and property,” AfricaNews reported.

Washington, Paris and other NATO imperialist powers are notorious for toppling African governments and assassinating political figures they see as obstacles to their domination. They view the economic and military ties African countries including Niger are developing with China, Russia, Iran and other countries as an intolerable threat.

France is the former colonial overlord in Niger, and its corporations plunder Niger’s vast natural wealth, particularly its uranium mines. It plunged Niger and the entire Sahel into bloodshed by invading neighboring Mali in 2013 on the false pretext of waging a “war on terror.” However, as massacres mounted across the Sahel, there were widespread accusations in the population—echoed even by top state officials—that Paris was secretly arming Islamist terror groups to justify keeping troops to its former empire.

Amid mass protests across the Sahel and in Niger against the French military presence, a faction of Niger’s military, previously a fixture of a French-dominated regime, launched a coup and seized power last July. France’s response was ruthless: as it grudgingly moved to withdraw its troops, Paris pressed countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to impose sanctions on Niger. France was forced to completely withdraw its army and diplomatic staff from Niger last December.

That same month, a delegation led by the Russian Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Yunus-Bek Yevkurov was received by Tiani, the head of the Nigerien junta. At the end of this meeting, both countries agreed “to the signing of documents as part of the strengthening of military cooperation between the Republic of Niger and the Russian Federation,” Nigerien authorities reported. After the talks in Niamey, the Russian delegation went to the Malian

capital, Bamako, for similar talks.

In January, Nigerien Prime Minister Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine, Defense Minister Salihou Mody, and the ministers of petroleum and trade made a long diplomatic visit to Russia and Iran. They met Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk in Moscow for talks aimed at deepening the two countries’ economic and military relations.

During the talks, Overchuk declared, “The Russian Federation regards the Republic of the Niger as a friendly state, with which it has built up mutually beneficial and constructive relations over a long period. We are interested in expanding our trade, economic and investment ties, as well as in boosting trade. For this, it is necessary to take further joint steps to promote our partnership in promising areas such as agriculture, energy, infrastructure, and geological exploration.”

In Tehran, the Nigerien delegation reportedly discussed how to deal with ECOWAS sanctions, as Iran has long suffered under crippling US-European sanctions.

These events show how the Sahel and all of Africa have been drawn in to the global war the NATO alliance is waging on Russia, China and their allies. The war hysteria of French President Emmanuel Macron, who is calling to send European ground troops to Ukraine to fight Russia, reveals how the imperialist powers will brook no challenge to their hegemony. They are determined to cut across any economic ties between Africa and the rest of the world that call into question their domination of the world economy.

The only viable strategy in response is to build an international, anti-war movement in the African and international working class, fighting against imperialism and for socialism.



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