



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on August 29, 2023

## Niger's Military Expels French Ambassador, France Defies the Move

On August 25, Niger's new military leadership proclaimed France's ambassador to Niger, Sylvain Itté, as *persona non grata* and gave the diplomat 48 hours to depart Niger, based on international media reports.

The junta, which ousted the pro-Western President Mohamed Bazoum in late July, provided reasons why it ousted Itté, accusing the latter for undertaking actions "contrary to Niger's interests" and supposedly refusing to meet with Niger's newly nominated foreign minister.

However, French President Emmanuel Macron said on August 28 that France's ambassador would remain in the African country, while speaking out against the coup leaders and maintaining that France is not Niger's adversary.

Macron also shrugged off worries that defying Niger's junta could be a risky move.

"Our policy is the right one. It depends on the courage of President Mohamed Bazoum, the commitment of our diplomats, of our ambassador on the ground who is remaining despite pressure," Macron declared at a gathering of French ambassadors in Paris.

Furthermore, the French foreign ministry declared that it had "taken note of the putschists' conditions," but that they "do not have the authority to make it," since the ambassador's approval "comes solely from the legitimately elected Nigerien authorities."

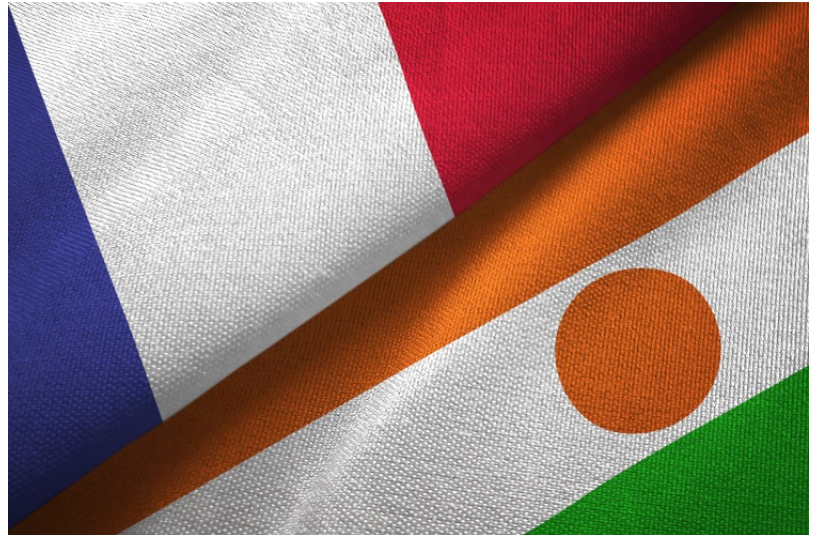
Bazoum, kept under house arrest ever since being deposed, was a close ally of France (as well as the globalist EU). Currently, France still has around 1,500 military personnel based in Niger.

Besides, Niger is a uranium-rich country (it provides 15 percent of France's uranium), making it a highly strategic trading partner for France.

Nonetheless, anti-French sentiment had been increasing for some time in Niger. After the coup, advocates of the new regime took to the streets a few times to demonstrate against what they regarded to be modern-day French colonialism.

Also, the military cooperation between French and local Nigerien troops has been temporarily halted since the coup, whose leaders accuse Bazoum's government of not adopting adequate measures to safeguard the country.

In response to the coup, the EU decided to deprive Niger of all development aid, while ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) enforced strict economic sanctions and threatened military intervention.



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On August 11, leaders of ECOWAS had gathered in Abuja, Nigeria, where they lambasted Bazoum's removal.

Previously, ECOWAS imposed economic sanctions on Niger, leading to a steep rise in food prices and a cessation of trade with what is deemed one of the most impoverished countries in the world.

While the West African alliance expressed its commitment to a diplomatic solution to the coup, ECOWAS troops have been put on standby. ECOWAS chairman and Nigerian President Bola Tinubu proclaimed that he did not exclude the use of force to address the Niger crisis, stating, "You will see from the communiqué of this extraordinary summit that no option is taken off the table including the use of force as the last resort. If we don't do it, no one else will do it for us. We remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting Niger towards peaceful and democratic stability in the country."

Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara [already pledged](#) 850 troops to Niger. "The putschists are held responsible for everything that happens in Niger," Ouattara said, pledging that if the junta liberates Bazoum, he would "show leniency" toward them.

It would be the first time ECOWAS would mobilize such a force if the bloc decided to deploy troops to Niger.

Analysts voiced concerns that any conflict in Niger would drag various global powers with strategic and economic stakes in the country into the quagmire.

In a similar fashion to the EU, the African Union (AU), a confederation of African states whose goal includes protecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of African countries, imposed punitive measures against Niger's junta by suspending the country's membership in the union.

Consequently, Niger will forfeit its ability to vote in the AU and can no longer join the group's committees or working groups.

In a [communiqué](#) on August 22, the AU Peace and Security Council publicized its move to suspend Niger during a meeting on August 14. The suspension would last until constitutional order is restored in the country, the [communiqué](#) read.

The Council urged all 54 AU member states and the international community not to recognize Niger's change of government as well as "refrain from any action likely to grant legitimacy to the illegal regime." To boot, the group threatened sanctions and other punitive measures against members of the military junta and civilian supporters of the coup d'état in Niger.

Moreover, the Council called on the military junta to immediately and unconditionally return to its barracks and acknowledge civilian authorities instead. The union cautioned non-African countries against interfering in Niger, possibly alluding to the Russian mercenary group Wagner, which presently provides security in neighboring Mali.

On August 21, ex-Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, [now confirmed dead by Russian officials](#), had hailed Niger's coup in a recruitment video (his first since his own mutiny in Russia failed) as he urged "strongmen" to back Wagner's activities in Africa.

ECOWAS mediator Abdulsalami Abubakar, a former general of Nigeria, had [said](#) on August 21 after a visit to Niger's capital of Niamey that talks with the junta had been "very fruitful" and that he was optimistic for a peaceful resolution to the crisis.



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“Nobody wants to go to war,” he told reporters in Abuja after briefing the ECOWAS chairman Tinubu. In Niger, Abubakar also reportedly met with the deposed Bazoum, who was allegedly not receiving sufficient healthcare.

Divisions within ECOWAS on the issue of Niger, nonetheless, have been cited as reasons for Niger’s new military government’s resistance to foreign pressure.

For instance, Nigeria, which shares the longest border with Niger, objected to ECOWAS’ military intervention. Since 2009, Nigeria’s troops have been involved in the essential task of tackling Boko Haram forces and their goals to set up an Islamic state in the region.

Ali Ndume, a representative from Nigeria, said, “Our stand is informed by the grave implications of a military intervention in Niger. [There is] no alternative to a diplomatic solution,” he told journalists in Abuja.

Mali and Burkina Faso, ECOWAS members that were suspended by ECOWAS after experiencing coups of their own, stated they would regard an intervention by ECOWAS as a declaration of war on them as well.

That being said, should diplomatic solutions be futile, and ECOWAS not respond militarily, its authority could be threatened, promoting further chaos. Seven coups have happened in West and Central Africa alone since 2020, with Niger’s being the latest.



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