

# U.S.-TRAINED NIGER JUNTA KICKS OUT U.S. TROOPS, DRONE BASE

The junta denounced the “condescending attitude” of an American delegation that tried to save a quarter-billion-dollar U.S. base in Niger.

Nick Turse

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Col. Maj. Amadou Abdramane (center), Gen. Mohamed Toumba (center left), and Col. Ousmane Abarchi (right) are greeted by supporters upon their arrival at the Gen. Seyni Kountche Stadium in Niamey, Niger, on Aug. 6, 2023. Photo: AFP via Getty Images

**COL. MAJ. AMADOU** Abdramane, a spokesperson for Niger's ruling junta, took to the national television network on Saturday to denounce the United States and end the long-standing counterterrorism partnership between the two countries.

"The government of Niger, taking into account the aspirations and interests of its people, revokes, with immediate effect, the agreement concerning the status of United States military personnel and civilian Defense Department employees," he said, declaring that the security pact, in effect since 2012, violated Niger's constitution.

The announcement came in the wake of spiking terrorist violence in the West African Sahel and on the heels of a visit to Niger by a high-level U.S. delegation that included top officials from the State and Defense Departments, as well as Gen. Michael Langley, the chief of U.S. Africa Command, or AFRICOM.

"Niger regrets the intention of the American delegation to deny the sovereign Nigerien people the right to choose their partners and types of partnerships truly capable of helping them fight against terrorism," Abdramane said. "The government of Niger forcefully denounces the condescending attitude accompanied by the threat of retaliation from the head of the American delegation."

The full-court press by U.S. officials was just the latest clumsy diplomatic effort since a July 2023 coup. Junta leader Gen. Abdourahmane Tiani rebuffed Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland in August 2023, and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee, who was also in this month's high-level delegation, led a failed effort in December to exchange resumed security cooperation for a commitment to a democratic transition.

"We can only hope that this marks the end of this senseless and costly Niger mission," said Erik Sperling of Just Foreign Policy, an advocacy

group critical of mainstream Washington foreign policy. “It’s been painful to observe the repeated trips by U.S. officials pitifully hoping to woo or pressure the coup government to allow the mission to continue.”

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Asked for comment, AFRICOM spokesperson Kelly Cahalan referred The Intercept to the State Department. The State Department directed The Intercept to the transcript of a press conference dealing almost exclusively with U.S. diplomatic efforts in the Philippines and the Middle East.

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## **Ex-Friends as Coup Leaders**

The U.S. has roughly 1,000 military personnel and civilian contractors deployed to Niger, most of them clustered near the town of Agadez, on the southern fringe of the Sahara desert, at Air Base 201. Known locally as “Base Americaine,” the outpost serves as the linchpin of the U.S. military’s archipelago of bases in North and West Africa and a key part of America’s wide-ranging surveillance and security efforts in the

region. Since the 2010s, the U.S. has sunk roughly a quarter billion dollars into the outpost. This is in addition to more than \$500 million in military assistance provided to Niger since 2012.

After a group of military officers deposed Niger's democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum last summer, the U.S. spent months avoiding the term "coup" before finally, as mandated by law, suspending approximately \$200 million in aid. The U.S. did not, however, withdraw its forces from Niger and continued drone operations.

In the wake of Niger's March 16 decree ending their status of forces agreement with the United States, both the State Department and Pentagon have done little more than acknowledge it. "[W]e're seeking further clarification for ... what that statement means," said Defense Department Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh on Monday.



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Singh went on to say that the U.S. delegation had "expressed concern over Niger's potential relationships with Russia and Iran." Earlier this month, Langley, the AFRICOM chief, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Russia was attempting to "take over" the Sahel. "During the past three years, national defense forces turned their guns against their own elected governments in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger," he said, complaining that due to U.S. aid limitations following coups, these governments "turn to partners who lack restrictions in dealing with coup governments ... particularly Russia."

Langley failed to mention that at least 15 officers who benefited from U.S. security assistance have been involved in 12 coups in West Africa and the greater Sahel during the war on terror, including Burkina Faso (2014, 2015, and twice in 2022); Guinea (2021); Mali (2012, 2020, and 2021); and Niger (2023). At least five leaders of the July 2023 coup in Niger received American assistance, according to a U.S. official. The coup leaders, in turn, appointed five U.S.-trained members of the Nigerien security forces to serve as that country's governors.

Asked about the situation in Niger on Monday, State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel said security partnerships in West Africa "are mutually beneficial and are intended to achieve what we believe to be shared goals of detecting, deterring, and reducing terrorist violence."

**"The U.S. needs to accept reality that lasting partnerships require fostering genuine development, not just helping to gun down impoverished rural militants."**

While U.S. troop strength in Niger grew by more than 900 percent in the last decade, and U.S. commandos trained local counterparts and fought and even died there, terrorist violence in the African Sahel has been neither deterred nor reduced. During 2002 and 2003, according to the State Department, terrorists caused just 23 casualties in all of Africa. Last year,

according to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, a Defense Department research institution, attacks by Islamist militants in the Sahel alone resulted in 11,643 deaths — a more than 50,000 percent increase.

“This security cooperation did not live up to the expectations of Nigeriens – all the massacres committed by the jihadists were carried out while the Americans were here,” said a Nigerien security analyst who has worked with U.S. officials and spoke on the condition of anonymity due to his ties with the Nigerien military. He said that the U.S. needed to negotiate a new agreement with more favorable terms for Niger that was free of the trappings of “paternalism and neocolonialism.”

In the wake of last year’s coup, Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., introduced a joint resolution requiring President Joe Biden to “remove United States Armed Forces from hostilities in or affecting the Republic of Niger” within 30 days. The resolution failed in a lopsided 11-86 vote. Now Niger’s ruling junta has seemingly done what Congress failed to.

“The bipartisan minority of Senators who voted last year to bring these troops home had it right,” said Sperling. “The U.S. needs to accept reality that lasting partnerships require fostering genuine development, not just helping to gun down impoverished rural militants who posed no threat to Americans.”

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