

# **Niger: France must stop playing the incendiary and get out of denial by evacuating its troops**

Tuesday 22 August 2023, by [Survie](#) (Date first published: 14 August 2023).

**With a meeting of the chiefs of staff of several ECOWAS countries imminent with a view to planning an armed intervention against the putschists in Niger, the Survie association, which campaigns against Françafrique, is calling on the French authorities to finally evacuate the 1,500 troops stationed in the country. Otherwise, France would become a co-belligerent and set in stone its interference in this crisis.**

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Although the [communiqué from the extraordinary ECOWAS summit on 10 August](#) still gives negotiations a chance, preparations for armed intervention by member countries are well under way. It is impossible to know if this will happen, or when exactly, but France has already announced its support. This support could be very tangible, since the French contingent in Niger is in a strategic position to control Niamey airport very quickly [1]: a considerable advantage for a major intervention on the ground. Keeping its soldiers in Niger therefore runs the risk of placing France in the position of direct co-belligerent. This would confirm its interference in the ongoing crisis, already marked by the martial postures and bellicose declarations of Emmanuel Macron and his minister Catherine Colonna.

Since the first hours of the putsch, France has shown its exasperation and contributed to aggravating the situation, reinforcing the support of part of the population for the military putschists: immediate condemnation on 26 July [2] when diplomatic silence was the prudent thing to do, threats from the Élysée Palace on 30 July in the event of an “attack against France and its interests”, evacuation of French nationals on 1 August (well before the end of the ECOWAS ultimatum) to prepare people for armed intervention, suspension on 6 August of financial aid to Burkina Faso for supporting the Niger putschists [3], affirmation on the evening of the ECOWAS summit on 10 August of “full support for all the conclusions” [4] and therefore for the military option... However, all commentators, especially retired French officers such as those who are helping to accentuate the rumours [5], know that armed intervention by ECOWAS could only take place with the material support of the French army.

## **A virtuous war**

The “defence of democracy” argument, which is difficult to contest, is put forward, hammered home at every political intervention and widely reported in the media. Since the overthrown president

refused to resign in the face of the coup plotters (unlike his former counterparts in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso), according to certain legal interpretations, he retains his legitimacy - despite the catastrophic conditions in which he himself came to power and exercised his power [6]. In 2011 and 2013, there was the same unanimous support for the intervention in Côte d'Ivoire, the attack on Libya and the war in Mali, again claiming to be virtuous objectives. The "protection of populations" sowed chaos in Libya and then allowed Alassane Ouattara, then presented as the "democratically elected president" [7], to be imposed on Côte d'Ivoire. In Mali and then among its Sahelian neighbours, the "war on terror" has been waged with a vengeance to this day, despite the growing realisation that it is a dead end.

The situation facing Niger and its neighbours is the legacy of these military adventures, and the indisputable motives sometimes contradict each other: when, in the name of this same "war on terror", France supported - and endorsed by a visit from Emmanuel Macron - the constitutional coup in Chad in April 2021, the French authorities showed how little regard they have for democracy among their allies - just as in Togo, Mauritania, Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, etc., where masquerades are used as a pretext for democracy. where masquerades are used as elections. As for the threat of the Wagner group, whose terrible abuses in other countries have been well documented, this should not obscure the [predictable](#) failure of the "war on terror" and the French authorities' double-talk on human rights, which pave the way for such bloody alternatives. Democracy in Niger will not be promoted by a new military adventure supported by the Western powers, with the risk of setting the region ablaze.

**An indispensable ally.** "This is one coup d'état too many" [8], explains Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, who makes clear what we all know: France, scalded by the loss of close allies in Mali and Burkina Faso, cannot tolerate history being written without it in Niger. Historically a source of uranium for the French nuclear industry, Niger is now a secondary, but nonetheless important and loyal supplier (supplying 10-15% of French power plants according to Orano [9], and perhaps even more if the Imouraren deposit is ever exploited). It also supplies uranium for military use. In recent years, the country has become a pillar of the European Union's policy of externalising its borders, delegating to it the dirty work of blocking migratory routes - a direction that was strongly pushed by Emmanuel Macron when he was elected in 2017 [10], even though Mohammed Bazoum was Niger's Interior Minister at the time. Above all, in recent months the country has become central to the maintenance of a French military presence in the Sahel at a time when the French military presence in Africa is being re-articulated, alongside Chad where a thousand French soldiers are still stationed, and when, in response to growing criticism, a further reduction in the number of permanent bases in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon has been announced [11] (Djibouti is not affected). Despite the legal vagueness surrounding their presence (neither external operations, since the official end of Barkhane, nor permanent bases), Emmanuel Macron was even preparing to make official the maintenance of troops in Niger, widely presented as the French army's "laboratory" in the Sahel [12]. France is not prepared to resign itself to losing its Niger ally and is even refusing to take note of the putschists' denunciation of the military agreements signed with it at the beginning of August, on the pretext that "the legal framework of its cooperation with Niger in defence matters is based on agreements that have been concluded with the legitimate Niger authorities" [13].

### **Accepting that history will be written without France**

Ironically, the intransigence displayed by Paris since the start of the coup, even if it flatters the imperialist ego of the French, plays into the hands of the new Niger authorities. It made it easier for them to mobilise the population of Niger's major cities, thereby providing them with the legitimacy that was lacking in their accession to power, which was initially more akin to a palace revolution.

This mobilisation paid off, helping to sway ECOWAS member states: Cape Verde said it was opposed to military intervention [14], Togo disassociated itself from the regional organisation [15] and the new president of Nigeria, in particular, seems to be reluctant to embark on such an adventure, which is strongly contested in his country. On the other hand, the clear distancing of the United States from France is isolating the latter in its martial postures to the point where its own military base could be sacrificed so that other Western countries can keep theirs [16].

With its sole compass once again being the cynical preservation of its influence in Africa, Paris has done nothing but fan the flames since the coup d'état, when too long a colonial and neo-colonial history should have encouraged it to be discreet and neutral. On the contrary, France must finally accept that the history of French-speaking Africa is being written without it. To achieve this, the French army, which found a displacement of jihadist groups a formidable pretext for deploying 10 years ago, must leave the Sahel and Africa in general.

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<https://survie.org/pays/niger/article/niger-la-france-doit-cesser-de-jouer-les-incendiaires-et-sortir-du-deni-en>

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## Footnotes

[1] La base aérienne de Niamey où sont stationnés la plupart des soldats français est en effet située au niveau de l'aéroport international Hamani Diori. On se souvient par ailleurs qu'en 2008, le contrôle français de l'aéroport de N'Djamena au Tchad avait permis à la France de sécuriser les moyens militaires d'Idriss Déby alors assiégé par une rébellion, et de renverser la situation.

[2] « Situation au Niger (26 juillet 2023) »

<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/niger/evenements/article/situation-au-niger-26-07-23> ; condamnation réaffirmée avec fermeté le 28 juillet

<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/niger/evenements/article/situation-au-niger-28-07-23>

[3] « Burkina Faso - Suspension de l'aide au développement et de l'appui budgétaire (6 août 2023) »,

<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/burkina-faso/evenements/article/burkina-faso-suspension-de-l-aide-au-developpement-et-de-l-appui-budgetaire-06>

[4] « Niger - Communiqué du ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (10 août 2023) »,

<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/niger/evenements/article/niger-communique-du-ministere-de-l-europe-et-des-affaires-etrangeres-10-08-23>

[5] Voir par exemple [« Niger : Si le contingent de la Cedeao n'a pas le soutien occidental, l'intervention militaire n'ira pas loin affirme le général Clément-Bollée »](#), *La Dépêche du Midi*, 12 août 2023

[6] Voir [« Niger : L'espace civique en voie d'extinction »](#), Rapport de la coalition internationale Tournons La Page, juin 2022

[7] À ce sujet, voir Raphaël Granvaud et David Mauger, *Un pompier pyromane - L'ingérence française en Côte d'Ivoire d'Houphouët-Boigny à Ouattara*, coll. Dossier noir, Agone-Survie, 2018

[8] [« Niger : « Les putschistes ont jusqu'à demain pour renoncer à leur aventurisme », affirme Catherine Colonna »](#), RFI, 5 août 2023

[9] [« Au Niger, la mine d'uranium géante exploitée par Orano pour les centrales nucléaires françaises sous la menace du terrorisme et de la pollution »](#), *Le Monde*, 13 avril 2023

[10] [« Demandes d'asile : Macron défend ses « hot spots » au Niger et au Tchad »](#), *Libération*, 28 août 2017

[11] Bases que l'exécutif français cherchait depuis février à relégitimer, voir Thomas Borrel, [« Coup de bluff à l'Élysée »](#), *Billets d'Afrique* n°326, mars 2023

[12] Voir Raphaël Granvaud, [« Militaires français en Afrique. Le trompe-l'œil de la « réarticulation » »](#), *Afrique XXI*, 12 juillet 2023

[13] Point presse du MAE français, 4 août 2023, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/niger/evenements/article/q-r-niger-extrait-du-point-de-presse-04-08-23>.

Précédemment, au Mali et au Burkina Faso, les autorités « légitimes » aux yeux de Paris avaient démissionné, ce qui n'a pas laissé cet artifice aux Français lorsque les nouvelles autorités ont dénoncé les accords militaires.

[14] AFP-FranceTVinfo, [« Niger : le Cap-Vert, membre de la Cédéao, est opposé à une intervention militaire »](#), 11 août 2023

[15] IciLomé, [« Niger-Une visite discrète de Faure Gnassingbé au Niger fâche ses pairs »](#), 11 août 2023

[16] Leslie Varennes, [« Au Niger, la France lâchée par ses alliés »](#), note d'Iveris, 11 août 2023