

# Niger: Rumours of a coup d'état

Tuesday 22 August 2023, by [TCHANGARI Moussa](#) (Date first published: 20 February 2023).

**During the day yesterday, from Bamako, Ouagadougou and other far-flung places, several people, mainly long-standing comrades, alerted by rumours of a coup d'état in Niger called us; they all wanted to know if these rumours were true, but also to hear from us and find out how we stand in relation to the announced event. Their voices were all hesitant, and their questions were almost the same: what's going on in Niamey? Is it true that there's a coup d'état underway? What do you think?**

To each comrade, we had to explain that nothing was happening in Niamey, at least as far as we knew. Some of the rumours circulating were linked to recent reposting of videos of old events... But, as everyone seemed sure they had the right information, doubt also crept into our minds. As in other countries in the region (Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Chad), a military coup is of course possible in Niger. It could certainly happen here too, as many citizens, including eminent enlightened minds, are fervently hoping that some messiah in camouflage fatigues will finally emerge from one of the barracks around Niamey to restore the people's dignity and the country's sovereignty.

In Africa, as we all know, moments of great crisis have always been conducive to such bouts of messianic fever. In the case of Niger, it has to be said that this is not the first time that a notorious part of our elite has been won over by this fever. On 27 January 1996, barely three years after the first democratic elections in our country's history, a military coup d'état, eagerly awaited by many, including in certain circles of power, took place in broad daylight. But those who welcomed it were the first to be disillusioned when its perpetrator decided, with the support of Paris, to unfold an agenda in which they would play none of the prestigious roles to which he had earlier aspired.

For three years, those who welcomed the coup d'état paid the price, just like those who condemned it from the outset. Some paid with their flesh and their dignity. Despite so many disappointments, many again began to pray that another soldier would emerge from somewhere to close the parenthesis and restore the previous situation. Predictably, on 9 April 1999, the man of 27 January 1996 was brutally murdered, along with a few companions, on the tarmac of Niamey international airport. This tragedy did not serve as a lesson either to politicians, to calm the population, or to the military, to stay out of power struggles.

In any case, ten years after this tragedy, on 18 February 2010, another military coup took place in Niger, to the great satisfaction of certain political and social players; revealing at the same time that in political and social circles, just as in military barracks, the disappointments of the past do not constitute obstacles to new adventures.

Some of those who are today hoping for a military coup d'état in Niger are thinking only of the pleasure they would get from seeing a regime they dislike brought down, for good and bad reasons. Others are thinking only of the opportunities that might open up for them. One thing is certain: many are losing sight of the fact that, in the current context, a military coup d'état in Niger could cost all of us much more than the previous coups did.

In Bamako, Ouagadougou and Conakry, the professionals of politics, those who were overthrown by

the coups d'état, as well as those who wished for and facilitated them, are today mostly unhappy. They really do not know where to turn, some live in exile, and almost all fear that it will no longer be possible for them to play politics.

The historical figures of the democratic struggles, those who for decades stood firmly on the barricades to denounce authoritarian excesses and policies dictated from outside, have also been silenced and stripped of their anti-imperialist rhetoric. Some have felt obliged to align themselves behind the new masters of their countries, but they are now nothing more than pale copies of their former selves.

Today, it is common knowledge that the military regimes of these three countries have gone even further than the civilian regimes they overthrew in restricting public freedoms. They rely not only on the repressive apparatus of the State, but also on squads of white-hot supporters ready to silence any dissident voice by any means. The henchmen of these military regimes, who set themselves up as censors, do not hesitate to openly threaten those who criticise their excesses. The most serious thing is that the management of the security crisis, especially in Burkina Faso, is marked by a strengthening of the role of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP), now tends to be anchored in the stigmatisation of certain communities.

Taking all these facts into account, and even if it is fashionable to welcome the willingness shown by the military regimes of these countries to defend national sovereignty, in particular by refusing to harbour French forces, we cannot hope for a military coup d'état in Niger. The desire for national sovereignty, which is entirely legitimate, as well as the necessary fight against the various armed groups, must be achieved other than by calling into question the gains of the democratic struggles. Admittedly, these gains are today also in jeopardy under civilian regimes here and elsewhere; but we cannot lose sight of the fact that they are and will be even more so in jeopardy under military regimes.

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