



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 18, 2023

## African States Sign Sahel Security Pact to Counter External Interference

The military governments of three African states, which all ousted their Western-backed leaders in recent years, have decided to help each other, individually or collectively, to counter external aggression or domestic threats to their sovereignty.

Mali's interim president, Assimi Goita, declared on September 16 that he had signed the Liptako-Gourma Charter with the leaders of Burkina Faso and Niger, "with the aim of establishing a collective defense and mutual assistance framework."



"Any attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one or more contracted parties will be considered an aggression against the other parties," the text of the charter read, as quoted by Reuters.

Moreover, the charter obliges all three countries to cooperate to prevent or address armed rebellions.

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The charter sets up an Alliance of Sahel States, which consists of three countries that had previously been members of the Paris-backed G5 Sahel pact with Chad and Mauritania, and which has disintegrated after a chain of military coups.

Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop stated that this "alliance will be a combination of military and economic efforts between the three countries" to concentrate on combating terrorism, especially in the Liptako-Gourma region straddling the borders of the three countries.

"Our priority is the fight against terrorism in the three countries," Diop revealed.

Notably, Mali and Burkina Faso erstwhile warned that any foreign intervention in Niger would be a "declaration of war" against them as well, after several of Niger's neighbors from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) threatened to send troops to reinstate ousted President Mohamed Bazoum. The Nigerien military had ousted the U.S.-backed Bazoum in late July, slamming him for failing to execute the war on terrorism. Top French officials have also maintained on various occasions that Paris would back military action by the bloc.

Earlier in September this year, Niger's military leaders alleged that Paris was plotting to intervene in Niger, as France continued to mobilize its troops to various regional countries in the region. Since the military junta in Niger assumed power following a coup in July, Niger-French ties have taken a nosedive.



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“France continues to deploy its forces in several ECOWAS countries as part of preparations for an aggression against Niger, which it is planning in collaboration with this community organization,” Colonel Amadou Abdramane, spokesman for the government in Niamey, declared in a statement broadcast on national television, as cited by AFP.

Nevertheless, Niger’s military-appointed prime minister, Ali Lamine Zeine, claimed that military action by ECOWAS was not championed by all member states. Zeine also told the media earlier in September that the new government in Niamey was hoping to reach a consensus with ECOWAS in the “coming days.”

During his speech at the G20 summit in New Delhi, French President Emmanuel Macron proclaimed that since France does not acknowledge the authority of the new Nigerien military government, any reassignment of its forces might be done only “at the request of President Bazoum.”

Paris was forced to withdraw troops from Mali following tensions with the military government in 2020. Mali’s junta eventually prompted [France](#)’s anti-jihadist force to withdraw from the country in 2022, with the [UN](#) peacekeeping mission MINUSMA also leaving the country in 2023. Earlier this year, French forces also pulled out of Burkina Faso after the country’s military rulers demanded that they leave. Niger’s coup leaders also abandoned military agreements that permitted French forces to tackle jihadists in the Sahel region, giving France only a month to pull out its 1,500 troops. Nonetheless, France disregarded the Nigerien junta’s demands for its ambassador to leave, as it refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new Nigerien leadership.

For its part, the United States had begun “repositioning” its troops in Niger and hopes to cut their number “nearly in half” over the next several weeks, according to a Politico news report earlier this month, quoting two Defense Department officials.

As part of the move, the United States hopes to cut the overall number of troops in Niger from around 1,200 to somewhere between 500 and 1,000, one official told Politico.

“It’s about matching the right people to the right mission,” the second official said. “The number is not as important to us as the function they are performing,” the official added.

Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh disclosed that some of the American troops based at the airport in Niamey have already been redeployed to the smaller base in Agadez about 500 miles (739 km) away.

Together with France, the United States mobilized troops and drones to Niger to deal with Islamist insurgents following the 2011 NATO regime-change intervention in Libya.

Although Bazoum has [urged](#) the United States to step in and “restore democracy,” the United States has refrained from considering his ouster as a coup, as that would require Washington to cease all military aid to Niger. While the Pentagon has “suspended” the training of Nigerien forces, it has been hesitant to leave the country altogether.

Although Singh classified the situation in Niger as “relatively stable” and pointed out that there was no “specific threat” to U.S. troops, one of Politico’s sources admitted that America’s move to redeploy its troops was undertaken as a cautionary measure, in wake of recent protests outside the French military base in Niamey.

“We are trying to reduce the footprint in Niamey but still maintain our ability to conduct counterterrorism operations,” she said.

On September 7, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) cautioned that the United States might



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be plotting the assassination of the leaders of Niger's military government, as the threat of military intervention by ECOWAS did not convince them to reinstate Bazoum.

While the White House was "not satisfied" with events in Niger, it does not want to depend on military intervention by Niger's regional neighbors, the evaluation released by the SVR alleged. Washington would prefer a "network" solution by a proxy to military action by ECOWAS, the Russian agency continued.

"Representatives of American special services are directly discussing with partners who could carry out killings" in Niger, the SVR posited. The ideal candidates would be people who have undergone "special training from the Pentagon's schools" and mingle among the transitional leaders' inner circles.

"It looks like the White House has decided to resort to old and, as they say, time-tested solutions, after facing what it perceives as a surprising and unpleasant geopolitical awakening of Africa," the SVR evaluation stated.

The Russian agency hinted that the U.S. government would classify any move taken against Niger's present administration as "strengthening democracy."



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