



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on February 1, 2011

## Russia Launches Uranium Mining Efforts in Niger

Russian natural gas corporation Gazprom was given the green light by the government of the north-central African nation Niger for the purpose of exploring the impoverished country for possible uranium mining opportunities. Gazprom subsidiary Gazprombank NGS, based in Moscow, was given a license to explore for uranium in the region of Agadez in northern Niger, reported Bloomberg World News.



According to a statement [released](#) by the Nigerien government on Friday, January 28, the Russian company — described by many as comprising a new, robust elitist oligarchy with influence in the government of Vladimir Putin — will invest \$5 million in the project.

*Reuters Africa* says that Niger's ruling military junta has awarded Russia's Gazprombank rights to explore and produce uranium at two sites, according to a statement read over state TV [late on Thursday](#):

“The company Gazprombank GTB NGS of the Gazprom group has been awarded mining conventions for research and mining of uranium on the perimeters of Uranium fields Toulouk 2 and Toulouk 4,” according to a government statement referring to mining blocks in the northern Agadez region.

Gazprombank, one of Russia's largest lenders and a former banking arm of state-owned energy giant Gazprom, holds a minority stake in Russian nuclear firm Atomstroyexport — which is helping build Iran's Bushehr nuclear plant.

The statement said Niger expected exploration work on each permit to average \$5 million, and said Niger would be granted a 20-percent stake in any operating company should commercial quantities of uranium be developed.

The announcement ironically comes on the same day that Russian President Dmitry Medvedev was scheduled to sign the START Treaty, which was previously ratified by the Duma, and approved by the U.S. Senate in December 2010, with the support of 13 Senate Republicans. As Russia is ratifying a treaty which [The Washington Times](#) properly describes as a “Victory for Russia,” due to its weakening of American defense capabilities, it is embarking upon yet another program of aggressive uranium exploration and enrichment which will directly benefit America's enemy Iran, which enjoys a strategic nuclear program with Russia.

Niger is currently under the rule of a military junta which wrested control of the beleaguered nation in February 2010. The leader of the junta, Colonel Salou Djibo, opened Nigerien uranium to Russia, and dubs the junta “the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy,” committed to “saving the population from poverty, deception and corruption.”



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The junta has cracked down on political dissidents, and is praised by opponents of former President Mamadou Tandja, including Socialist leader Mahamadou Issoufou, who leads the Nigerian Party for Democracy and Socialism, a member of the Socialist International.

Socialist Party leader Mahamdou Karijo has also praised the soldiers for “fighting tyranny,” and [said](#) regarding the junta, “They behave like they say — they are not interested in political leadership, they will fight to save the Nigerien people from any kind of tyranny.”

Opposition leader Mohamed Bazoum also expressed his support for the junta, claiming that deposed President Tandja “violated the country’s constitution”; he is also a ranking member of the Nigerian Party for Democracy and Socialism, a coalition partner of the Niger Progressive Party (NPP), the country’s branch of the Pan-African movement African Democratic Rally (RDA), which initially had ties to the French Communist Party. The party’s history also reveals long-standing relationships with the Soviet Union and China throughout the past 50 years.

According to Donald F. Busky’s book *Communism in History and Theory: Asia, Africa, and the Americas*, Nigerien leaders such as Djibo Bakary, once-Secretary of the NPP and later head of the Niger Democratic Union (UDN), were aided and trained by the USSR, along with other members of the African Socialist Movement (ASM). In the 1990s, the ASM, NPP, and NPDS were all unified members of the leftist opposition bloc “Alliance for the Forces of Change,” which opposed Mamadou Tandja and helped usher in the junta in 2010.

It is no coincidence that a junta regime opening Niger’s resources to Russia was ushered in by political forces with a clear and documented history of Communist connections.

Busky explains that the ASM’s leaders were trained along with other African revolutionaries at Moscow’s Friendship University, and that it utilized guerrilla forces trained in China, Ghana, and Algeria to try to overthrow the existing government in 1963, after which the so-called “Sawaba,” or Independence, movement came under strict Soviet influence. Sawaba’s current leader, Issoufou Assoumane, along with other socialist leaders, opposed Tandja and attempted to legitimize the junta’s sweep into power.

Geopolitical influences apparently do not change, but merely assume constantly changing, cunning, and baffling permutations of influence.

Indeed, commenting on Russia’s scramble for African uranium, Russian atomic energy expert Pavel Yakovlev [said the following](#):

As is known, projects in Africa, especially in Nigeria, Tanzania and Namibia are relatively cheap for development and economically effective. This purchase will enable the Russian ARMZ Holding to strengthen its international presence by developing not only the market of Russia, but also Africa’s markets. We know that the (former) Soviet Union also had strategic interests in Africa. Now the ARMZ Holding has several projects in African countries. It is possible to say today that that the Russian Holding is on its way to the leading position. And very soon, thanks to the increasing demand for uranium in China and India, this will become clearly visible.

The move is a part of Russia’s larger gambit to amass as much African uranium as possible, not only ensuring a steady supply of resources for the construction of Russian nuclear weapons, but also guaranteeing that developing countries such as Niger continue to remain hostile to American interests and within the good graces of Russia and China.



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Previously, in December 2010, according to [The Financial Times](#), Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear energy group, expanded its worldwide uranium reserves with the acquisition of Tanzanian uranium projects valued at \$1.15 billion:

ARMZ Uranium, Rosatom's mining division, plans to acquire the Tanzanian assets by taking over its owner, Australia-based Mantra Resources in an agreed bid. Mantra said on Wednesday that it had recommended the offer to its shareholders. Mantra's principal asset is the Mkuju River Project in Tanzania, which holds 101.4 million pounds of uranium.

"Mantra's flagship asset, the Mkuju River Project, is a world class deposit," ARMZ Director General Vadim Zhivov said. "We believe Mantra will complement our portfolio of assets and is consistent with our stated strategy of acquiring low cost, long life, geographically diverse assets."

Rosatom first went into Africa in 2008 with a joint venture with SWA Uranium Mines in Namibia. There was a time when such aggressive expansion in the nuclear industry by a Russian state company would have raised hackles in Washington. But not now. The US relies heavily on imported uranium, including from Russia. And, when it comes to natural resources acquisitions, it is more concerned about China than Russia.

In addition to Niger now supplying Russia with uranium, it also provides Red China with the uranium it needs to develop its own arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Under the current Socialist-backed junta, China and Russia have been given unprecedented access to Nigerien natural resources. In April 2009, China issued a \$95 million preferential loan to Niger for the purpose of boosting a uranium mining project, and the Nigerien government serves as a 33 percent joint venture partner in the project with the China National Uranium Corporation. In a statement on state television, the Nigerian government said:

China has agreed to the Export-Import Bank of China granting Niger a preferential loan of 650 million yuan (\$95.22 million) with a view to supporting the SOMINA uranium exploration project.

On January 4 of this year, China National Nuclear Corporation began trial operations at the Azelik mine in northern Niger, and produced their first barrel of uranium on that date.

According to [Bloomberg News](#):

China's uranium demand may rise to 20,000 metric tons annually by 2020, more than a third of the 50,572 tons mined globally last year, according to the World Nuclear Association. The nation may purchase about 5,000 tons this year, more than twice as much as it consumes, to build stockpiles for new reactors, Thomas Neff, a physicist and uranium-industry analyst at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said in July. China National Nuclear and Shenzhen-based ZTE Energy Co. expected to start production at uranium mines in Niger in 2009 and expand the annual output to 700 tons by 2011 and 1,000 tons ultimately, Chen Yuehui, deputy general manager of China National Nuclear's overseas exploration unit, said in June 2008.

On August 30, 2010, Russia and China, who are jointly the leaders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, even announced joint efforts to mine for uranium in Niger. Russian state news source [RIA Novosti](#) reported in its story "Russia and China consider joint exploitation of uranium deposits in Africa" that the Chinese have an active interest in a cooperative agreement with Russia on uranium production in third world countries. "It is possible, we have mentioned African countries, in particular," Rosatom head Sergei Kiriyenko announced.



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This is yet another example of growing Sino-Russian cooperation on military and diplomatic matters, as Russia and China jointly seek to benefit from uranium mining in African countries, including Niger, which is still seen by Russia and China as a strategic partner in Africa. From training armed guerrillas in the 1960s, to supporting the overthrow of the Nigerien government by proxy through Communist Parties, to now, pursuing an aggressive policy of nuclear weapons proliferation using uranium obtained from Niger, the long-standing strategic relationship between Niger, China, and Russia continues.



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