



Türkiye Remarks on Possible Military Intervention in Niger

SINGAPORE — Türkiye is deciding how it can contribute to restoring democratic order in Niger, where a military junta seized power in July this year, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said. The coup provoked sanctions and threats of military intervention from regional countries around Niger.

Addressing reporters while returning from a trip to Hungary, Erdoğan slammed plans by ECOWAS, a regional alliance of West African nations, to mobilize troops against Niger's coup leaders as "unacceptable."

ECOWAS has been urging the military government in Niger to liberate deposed President Mohamed Bazoum and restore him to power.

"I do not find the decision of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) right to intervene militarily in Niger. Military intervention in Niger would mean spreading instability to many African countries," Erdoğan cautioned.

The West African authority has prepared a "standby force," which it claims will be mobilized in the Nigerien capital of Niamey to reverse the coup if its "preferred" diplomatic means do not work.

In his recent statements, Erdoğan said his country would continue to back Niamey, believing that "the people of Niger will take care of democracy and go to the elections as soon as possible."

The Turkish leader also broached the topic of the "important" role his country can play to resolve the quagmire in "friendly and brotherly" Niger.

Some in Ankara are also worried that instability in Niger could affect nearby Libya, where Türkiye has a strong economic and military presence.

Last month, some protesters outside the French embassy in Niamey carried Turkish flags along with Russian flags to support the coup leaders, disparaging France's colonial past in the country.

Additionally, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security Abdel-Fatau Musah declared that a "D-day" for possible military involvement in Niger had been agreed upon.

He said the bloc would continue to hold dialogue with Niger's new military rulers peacefully following a gathering of defense chiefs in Accra, Ghana, to confirm details of the planned military operation. Apart from Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Chad, all other member states were open to supplying troops for the standby force, group officials claimed.

In a new diplomatic effort to defuse tensions, an ECOWAS peace delegation met Niger's military rulers



AP Images
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan



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in Niamey last weekend. ECOWAS proclaimed that it has decided on a date for sending troops into Niger if diplomatic efforts at Bazoum's restoration prove unsuccessful.

General Abdourahamane Tchiani, the leader of the new military government, was optimistic following the meeting that he could cooperate with ECOWAS to solve the present crisis. He then suggested that the country transition to civilian rule within three years.

The general also warned that, while Niamey was not keen on war, it was ready to protect itself against any external "aggression."

Notably, Niger's new military government has constantly slammed ECOWAS for acting at the behest of former colonial ruler France, which has supported the bloc's efforts to reverse the coup.

ECOWAS has denied the claim, with Musah positing that the "rules-based organization" is ready to act alone or with the help of "other democracy-loving partners."

On Sunday, ECOWAS dismissed the general's suggested transition plan, with Musah saying it was unacceptable and stating that "the earlier [the coup leaders] give power back to civilians, the better for them."

Similarly, after a week of rigorous debate, the African Union Peace and Security Council publicly voiced its stance on Niger, limiting itself to "taking note" of the ECOWAS move to deploy military troops, without articulating its explicit approval for such a decision. Nonetheless, the AU stated its "solidarity" with ECOWAS' diplomatic efforts and its strong backing for the "peaceful restoration of constitutional order." Moreover, the AU has suspended Niger and firmly condemned the coup d'état, while also calling upon any non-African country or force not to interfere in the crisis.

Ali Lamine Zeine, the top civilian official of the new military government in Niger stated that the coup leaders have "no intention" of cooperating with Russian defense contractor Wagner Group PMC, according to a *New York Times* report. Earlier reports hinted that the country's new military leaders had contacted Wagner in light of fears of external intervention. Nonetheless, Zeine warned, "Don't push Nigeriens to go toward partners that you don't want to see here."

The pro-Western Bazoum was toppled and detained last month in a coup led by Tchiani. The general's men set about abandoning trade and military agreements with France and, according to the Associated Press, convened with Wagner Group representatives in neighboring Mali.

The Wagner Group did not respond to whether the supposed meeting took place, although the PMC's chief, Yevgeny Prigozhin, who was recently killed in a plane crash, voiced support for the coup, hailing it as a "justified rebellion of the people against Western exploitation."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken remarked that while the coup "was not orchestrated by Russia or Wagner," Washington believes the Russian contractor will "take advantage of" the unrest to increase its clout in Africa.

Meanwhile, Algeria has rejected a request from France to use its airspace for a military operation in Niger, several media reports indicated on August 23, quoting the North-African nation's state radio.

Algerian national radio reported that it had learned from sources that Paris was plotting a strike against Niamey's new military rulers if they did not free Bazoum, who has been held in captivity since July 26.

"Faced with Algerian refusal, France turned to Morocco, asking for authorization to pass its military planes through its airspace," state radio said, according to the Nova News Agency.



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France, which has around 1,500 troops in Niger and has been staging operations in the Sahel region against jihadist insurgencies, has been castigated by the coup leadership for planning to participate militarily to restore the ousted president's rule.

The French Foreign Ministry rejected accusations of armed intervention in the West African country, but has maintained that it backs ECOWAS, the latter which has threatened to use force to restore the deposed leader.

"France's joint defense staff denies making a request to fly over Algerian territory," a source in the French army informed Reuters.

Earlier this month, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune voiced concerns about an armed response to the crisis in Niamey, which he worries "could ignite the whole Sahel region." He added that Algeria would not use force against its neighbors.

In a statement on Saturday, the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Algeria insisted on a peaceful restoration of democratic order, objecting to the possible use of an ECOWAS "standby force" against the military leaders in Niger, saying military actions "have brought more problems than solutions."



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