



Thousands Rally Demanding French Troops Pull Out of Niger

On September 2, thousands of demonstrators convened outside the French military base in Niger's capital, Niamey, to demand that French forces leave the country, responding to a call from civic organizations that object to the French military presence in the region.

The Al Jazeera news outlet reported that a slate of smaller demonstrations prior to the September 2 protest were "relatively calm and organized," but that some of the September 2 activists were seen "breaking the barriers set up by the security forces, police and the military" and trying to break into the base, which is home to about 1,500 soldiers.

"French army, leave our country," banners from demonstrators stated.

The M62, a coalition of civil groups objecting to the French military presence in Niger, organized the three-day protests. "France must leave and she will leave, because Niger is not her home," said an M62 leader, Falma Taya.

Notwithstanding warnings by the French military that it would retaliate if their military and diplomatic facilities were attacked amid rising hostilities, the protesters did not leave.

"We want to fight to remove from our country all military bases," a protester told Al Jazeera. "We don't want it. Because for more than 13 years terrorism has been here. They don't care to fight terrorism," he said.

French President Emmanuel Macron admitted on September 1 that he speaks to ousted Nigerien leader Mohamed Bazoum "every day," and voiced his backing for Bazoum's regime. Macron's comments prompted an outcry from Niger's new military leaders, who lambasted the French leader for using "divisive rhetoric and seeking to perpetrate neo-colonial relationships."

Macron said, "I call on all the states in the region to adopt a responsible policy," and declared that France "supports [the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS] diplomatic action and, when it so decides, [its] military' action."

While he paid tribute to Bazoum, lauding his "commitment, action and courage," he criticized Niger's new rulers as lacking "legitimacy," and maintained that France would make its decisions vis-à-vis Niger



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“on the basis of exchanges with President Bazoum.”

In turn, Niger’s military government spokesman, Colonel Amadou Abdramane, stated that Macron’s remarks “constitute further blatant interference in Niger’s domestic affairs,” elaborating that Niger’s “differences” with France “do not touch on the relationship between our peoples, or on individuals, but on the relevance of the French military presence in Niger.”

“Mr. Macron’s comments and his unceasing efforts in favor of an invasion of Niger aim at perpetuating a neo-colonial operation against the Nigerien people, who ask for nothing more than to decide its own destiny for itself,” he said.

Last month, the military rulers declared the cessation of military agreements with France and demanded the “immediate expulsion” of the French ambassador, Sylvain Itté. The new junta removed the French envoy’s diplomatic immunity, as his presence was regarded as a threat to public order. In a statement addressed to Paris, Niamey’s ministry of foreign affairs said Itté “no longer enjoys the privileges and immunities attached to his status as a member of the diplomatic staff of the French Embassy.”

France, which has some 1,500 troops based in Niamey to combat jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel region, has refused to comply with the junta’s demands to withdraw its forces, arguing that the cooperation agreements were signed with the “legitimate” but now deposed Bazoum regime.

The French government has constantly refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of Niger’s new rulers, and has disregarded the junta’s demands to remove Itté from Niger. Instead, France has declared that, despite demands from Niger’s “illegitimate authorities,” the ambassador will remain in Niamey.

In an interview with French news outlet Le Monde published on September 3, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna stated that the French military could not carry out its duties in Niger owing to a lack of cooperation with Nigerien troops since the coup in the African country. Justifying France’s continued military presence in Niger, Colonna said that “these troops are there at the request of Niger’s [legitimate] authorities to support them in the fight against armed terrorist groups and to carry out training activities.”

She continued:

He [Itté] is our representative to the legitimate authorities of Niger, accredited as such, and we don’t have to bow to the injunctions of a minister who has no legitimacy, not according to the countries of the sub-region, the African Union, the United Nations, or France. That’s why we’re keeping our ambassador. We are making sure that he can safely face up to any pressure from the coup leaders.

Niger’s junta leaders have also forbidden United Nations (UN) agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other international agencies from working in its military “operation zones,” based on a recent declaration from Niger’s Interior Ministry.

The prohibition came in response to “the current security situation and the ongoing operational engagement of the Nigerien Armed Forces,” the ministry announced in a statement showcased on national television and reported by local media.

All “activities and or movements [of the organizations] in the zones of operations are temporarily suspended,” the statement said, without providing further detail as to where the impacted regions



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were.

Following the military takeover in Niger, the UN had previously pledged to “remain engaged and committed” in the country. In July, UN Acting Resident Coordinator Nicole Kouassi voiced worries about the temporary halt of the organization’s humanitarian air-service flights after the coup leaders sealed off Niger’s airspace.

Additionally, Niger’s new rulers are at loggerheads with the West African regional alliance ECOWAS, which has adopted a firm position opposing the recent coup in Niamey and vows military action if diplomatic measures to restore civilian rule to the country fail.

In a [statement](#) issued on August 31, ECOWAS reinforced its plea for Niger’s military leaders to reinstate democratic order in the country, highlighting its disapproval of the three-year leadership transition period suggested by the junta.

“The demand of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government is clear: the military authorities in Niger must restore constitutional order immediately by liberating and reinstating H.E. Excellency President Mohamed Bazoum,” the ECOWAS statement said.

Soldiers of Niger’s armed forces were deployed to France’s military base in Niamey to keep tabs on French servicemen and women following the junta’s demands for French troops to leave the country, according to a report from Al Jazeera. The report said that Nigerien troops had received orders to track at the base French soldiers who had not departed from the country despite demands to do so.

Previously, Sky News Arabia reported that Niger’s Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie, or the CNSP, had demanded a total departure of French troops from the country by September 3.

On August 18, local media also reported that Burkina Faso and Mali had mobilized combat aircraft on standby in case of any military aggression against Niger. Guinea was the first country to support Niger’s military.



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