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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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02.08.2023

## *Niger Is the Fourth Country in the Sahel to Experience an Anti-Western Coup*

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**Source:** Globetrotter

**Tags:** Opinion, Politics, Europe, North America/United States of America, Africa, Time-Sensitive, News, Trade, Europe/France, Africa/Niger, War, Europe/Russia

**[Article Body:]**

At 3 a.m. on July 26, 2023, the presidential guard [detained](#) President Mohamed Bazoum in Niamey, the capital of Niger. Troops, led by Brigadier General Abdourahmane Tchiani closed the country's borders and declared a curfew. The coup d'état was immediately condemned by the [Economic Community of West African States](#), by the [African Union](#), and by the [European Union](#). Both France and the United States—which have military

bases in Niger—said that they were watching the situation closely. A tussle between the Army—which claimed to be pro-Bazoum—and the presidential guard threatened the capital, but it soon fizzled out. On July 27, General Abdou Sidikou Issa of the army released a [statement](#) saying that he would accept the situation to “avoid a deadly confrontation between the different forces which... could cause a bloodbath.” Brigadier General Tchiani went on television on July 28 to [announce](#) that he was the new president of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie or CNSP).

The coup in Niger follows similar coups in Mali (August 2020 and May 2021) and Burkina Faso (January 2022 and September 2022), and Guinea (September 2021). Each of these coups was led by military officers angered by the presence of French and U.S. troops and by the permanent economic crises inflicted on their countries. This region of Africa—the Sahel—has faced a cascade of [crises](#): the desiccation of the land due to the climate catastrophe, the rise of Islamic militancy due to the 2011 NATO war in Libya, the increase in smuggling networks to traffic weapons, humans, and drugs across the desert, the appropriation of natural resources—including uranium and gold—by Western companies that have simply not paid adequately for these riches, and the entrenchment of Western military forces through the construction of bases and the operation of these armies with impunity.

Two days after the coup, the CNSP [announced](#) the names of the 10 officers who lead the CNSP. They come from the entire range of the armed forces, from the army (General Mohamed Toumba) to the Air Force (Colonel Major Amadou Abouramane) to the national police (Deputy General Manager Assahaba Ebankawel). It is by now clear that one of the most influential members of the CNSP is General Salifou Mody, former chief of staff of the military and leader in the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, which led the February 2010 coup against President Mamadou Tandja and which governed Niger until Bazoum’s predecessor Mahamadou Issoufou won the 2011 presidential election. It was during Issoufou’s time in office that the United States government [built](#) the world’s largest drone base in Agadez and that the French special forces [garrisoned](#) the city of Irlit on behalf of the uranium mining company Orano (formerly a part of Areva).

It is important to note that General Salifou Mody is perceived as an influential member of CNSP given his influence in the army and his international contacts. On February 28, 2023, Mody met with the United States Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General

Mark Milley during the African Chiefs of Defense Conference in Rome to [discuss](#) “regional stability, including counterterrorism cooperation and the continued fight against violent extremism in the region.” On March 9, Mody visited Mali to [meet](#) with Colonel Assimi Goïta and the Chief of Staff of the Malian army [General Oumar Diarra](#) to strengthen military cooperation between Niger and Mali. A few days later on March 16, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [visited](#) Nigerto meet with Bazoum. In what many in Niger perceived as a sidelining of Mody, he was [appointed](#) on June 1 as the Nigerien ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. Mody, it is said in Niamey, is the voice in the ear of Brigadier General Tchiani, the titular head of state.

### **Corruption and the West**

A highly informed source in Niger tells us that the reason why the military moved against Bazoum is that “he’s corrupt, a pawn of France. Nigerians were fed up with him and his gang. They are in the process of arresting the members of the deposed system, who embezzled public funds, many of whom have taken refuge in foreign embassies.” The issue of corruption hangs over Niger, a country with one of the world’s most lucrative uranium deposits. The “corruption” that is talked about in Niger is not about petty bribes by government officials, but about an entire structure—developed during French colonial rule—that prevents Niger from establishing sovereignty over its raw materials and over its development.

At the heart of the “corruption” is the so-called “joint venture” between Niger and France called Société des mines de l’Aïr (Somaïr), which owns and operates the uranium industry in the country. Strikingly, 85 percent of Somaïr is owned by France’s Atomic Energy Commission and two French companies, while only 15 percent is owned by Niger’s government. Niger [produces](#) over 5 percent of the world’s uranium, but its uranium is of a very high quality. Half of Niger’s [export receipts](#) are from sales of uranium, oil, and gold. One in three lightbulbs in France are [powered](#) by uranium from Niger, at the same time as 42 percent of the African country’s population [lived](#) below the poverty line. The people of Niger have watched their wealth slip through their fingers for decades. As a mark of the government’s weakness, over the course of the past decade, Niger has lost over \$906 million in only 10 arbitration cases brought by multinational corporations before the [International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes](#) and the [International Chamber of Commerce](#).

France stopped using the franc in 2002 when it switched to the Euro system. But, fourteen former French colonies continued to use the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA),

which gives immense advantages to France (50 percent of the reserves of these countries have to be held in the French Treasury and France’s devaluations of the CFA—[as in 1994](#)—have catastrophic effects on the country’s that use it). In 2015, Chad’s president Idriss Déby Itno [said](#) that the CFA “pulls African economies down” and that the “time had come to cut the cord that prevents Africa from developing.” Talk now across the Sahel is for not only the removal of French troops—as has taken place in [Burkina Faso](#) and in [Mali](#)—but of a break with the French economic hold on the region.

### **The New Non-Alignment**

At the 2023 Russia-Africa Summit in July, Burkina Faso’s leader, President Ibrahim Traoré wore a red beret that echoed the uniform of the assassinated socialist leader of his country, Thomas Sankara. Traoré reacted strongly to the condemnation of the military coups in the Sahel, including to a recent [visit](#) to his country by an African Union delegation. “A slave that does not rebel does not deserve pity,” he [said](#). “The African Union must stop condemning Africans who decide to fight against their own puppet regimes of the West.”

In February, Burkina Faso had hosted a meeting that included the governments of Mali and Guinea. On the agenda is the creation of a new [federation](#) of these states. It is likely that Niger will be invited into these conversations.