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by Dave DeCamp

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Niger PM Says US Threats Led to Withdrawal Order

The US threatened Niger over its relationship with Russia and Iran

The US was asked to withdraw troops from Niger due to threats US officials made to the country over its relationships with Russia and Iran, Nigerien Prime Minister Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine told *The Washington Post*.

Niger announced it ended its military relationship with the US back in March and said the US presence was no longer legally justified. Officials said at the time that Niger took the steps due to the US not respecting the country's sovereignty.

Zeine, who was appointed by a military junta after a July 2023 coup, elaborated on the reason for ordering the US withdrawal. He pointed to comments made by Molly Phee, the State Department's top official for African affairs, who warned Niger against strengthening relations with Russia and said it could affect US military support. She also threatened sanctions if Niger went through with a potential uranium deal with Iran.

"When she finished, I said, 'Madame, I am going to summarize in two points what you have said,'" said Zeine. "First, you have come here to threaten us in our country. That is unacceptable. And you have come here to tell us with whom we can have relationships, which is also unacceptable. And you have done it all with a condescending tone and a lack of respect."

Zeine also said Niger was unhappy with the US for freezing military assistance following the coup and not helping with the fight against terrorists while remaining in the country. "The Americans stayed on our soil, doing nothing while the terrorists killed people and burned towns," he said. "It is not a sign of friendship to come on our soil but let the terrorists attack us. We have seen what the United States will do to defend its allies, because we have seen Ukraine and Israel."

The US has said it will comply with Niger's order to leave, and the Pentagon ordered a withdrawal it says will take place over the next few months. However, the US is dragging its feet and is claiming negotiations could lead to a reversal of Niger's decision. But Niamey has shown no sign that it's open to a new deal with the US, and a whistleblower has said by refusing to leave Niger, the administration has put US troops in danger.

US troops stationed at Airbase 101 in Niamey are now sharing the base with Russian soldiers. Most US personnel in the country are at Airbase 201 in Agadez, a major drone base that cost over \$100 million to build and acts as a hub for US operations in the Sahel, a foothold the US doesn't want to give up.

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