



Research Report

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Discussing the military coup in Niger

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President



INTRODUCTION

On the 26th of July 2023, a coup d'etat took place in Niger. Abdourahamane Tchiani, leader of the presidential guard¹, ordered the guard to seize the president, Mohamed Bezoum and warned that any opposition would be dealt with by the National Guard and army. The army blockaded the presidential palace, and after a few hours, colonel Abdramane released a statement. He said the defence and security forces had decided to “put an end to the regime that you know due to the deteriorating security situation and bad governance”.² The president was detained and Tchiani declared himself to be the president of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP).

This was not the first coup in the Sahel region, as over the last three years, seven coups have occurred there.³ These were not all successful, however, but did result in the governments of Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso -as well as Niger this summer- being overthrown and replaced by juntas. This general regional instability was not the only reason behind the coup. Over the last years, foreign military presence in Niger has increased, among the countries being present in Niger are the US and France. Niger has historically been a Western ally in the Sahel region in the fight against terrorism and the general unrest in the area. For example, in 2014, a large US drone base was built in Niger, with the goal of surveillance and operations in the entire region. This base is the second-largest US base in Africa and sparked debates on the involvement of the US within the country.⁴ After France also withdrew its military presence in the Sahel to Niger, after the democracies in Mali and Burkina Faso fell, these debates reached even higher levels.

The uranium industry in Niger, being the sixth biggest in the world⁵, has also received quite some foreign attention in the form of investments. The military leaders had also previously expressed their discontent on this matter. They stated that these investments and the general amount of foreign interference in the country undermined their control over the region, and therefore the security.

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This research report will further investigate the reasons for the coup, possible ways of solving this issue, and what the current situation could mean in the future.

Definitions of Key Terms

Junta

A junta is a council or committee for political or governmental purposes, and in this context can also mean a group controlling the country after a revolutionary seizure of power.

Coup d'état

A coup d'état is typically an illegal attempt to overthrow a government viewed by the plotters as incompetent or insufficient. These coups generally have the goal of replacing the current seat of power with a new one viewed as better by the plotters.

Ethnic stacking

Ethnic stacking is when the upper ranks of the military and/or government are all filled in by members of the ethnic majority of the country. This has both positive and negative effects. The positive side is that it bolsters the government, and encourages trust from the ethnic majority in the country. The adverse effect is that it creates mistrust between groups, as minorities can feel underrepresented and sometimes even threatened by the government.

Military intervention

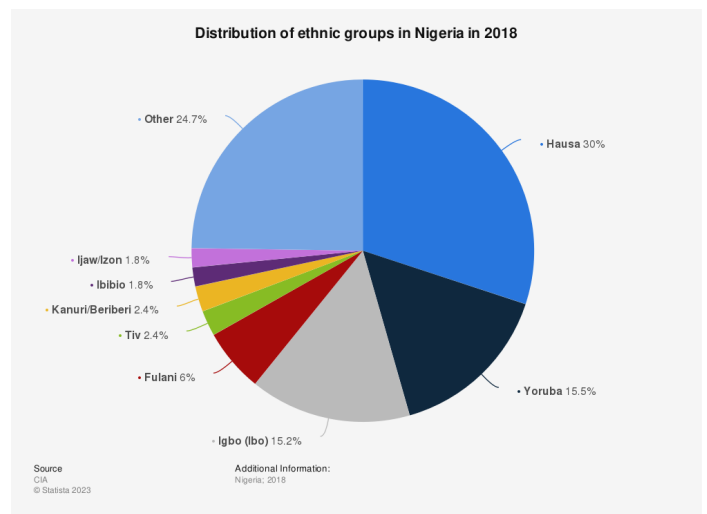
A military intervention is an intervention by a country or coalition of countries which entails forces being moved into another state, aimed at altering the current political situation and/or policies. These are usually a last resort, as they can destroy the relations between the countries involved.

General overview

The coup did not stem from one issue, but rather the effects of many small(er) issues combined. This is why in the general overview the research report will start off discussing the causes in depth, and will then discuss the current situation and what will happen next.

Ethnicity

When the president was elected in 2021, winning against the previous president who was also ousted by a coup, protestors took to the streets. These were quickly dispersed by the police, but this did already reveal a glimpse of the unrest regarding the election⁶. This is because of the fact that President Bazoum is the first president from the Arab minority, from the Ouled Slimane people. In Niger, a process that can be referred to as ethnic stacking had previously taken place (see: key terms). This meant that all of the key positions in the military were held by people from the Hausa ethnic group. When Bazoum, a member of another ethnic group, became president, the ethnically aligned military felt threatened. This caused tensions right from the start, and these tensions only grew with times as ungrounded rumours about Bazoum being a “foreigner” were spread.⁷



The failing of regional powers

After the first successful coups in the region, the inability of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS; see: main parties) and the African Union to act as one front became apparent. ECOWAS showed no apparent response after the successful takeovers of Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso. This emboldened many other military

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leaders in the region, including Tchiani to take matters into their own hands, as there were apparently no consequences anyhow.

The reason behind this inactivity partly lies in the foundation of the ECOWAS, which is that it is consensus-based.⁸ As four of the fifteen members -including Niger- have turned from fragile democracies to military dictatorships over the span of three years, it has been increasingly difficult for ECOWAS to continue its current zero-tolerance policy regarding unconstitutional changes of governments. During all of these coups, ECOWAS was forced to stand by, unable to take military action, thereby further increasing the probability of more coups (the reason for this is further explored in the section: after the coup). ECOWAS as of now has two options regarding its policy: it can either pivot, accept its failure and accept the military leaderships amidst its ranks, or it has to reaffirm its stance against these coups with sanctions and force, preventing more governments from falling apart.⁹ The African Union has also repeatedly failed to take sufficient actions against the leaders of the juntas, failing in its goal of protecting democracy in the region¹⁰.

Presence of foreign militaries

As also stated in the introduction, many Western countries are involved in Niger, which also caused more tension between the military and the government. Niger has been a key ally of countries such as the US in the battle against Islamic insurgencies in the region. Because of this, at the time of the coup, there were around 1000 US troops in Niger, stationed in the two American bases in the country¹¹. The US has also actively participated in the training of Niger forces, and in supplying aid to the government. France, the former colonial ruler of Niger, also had around 1500 troops in the country. These were more spread out over the Sahel region, but following the coups in Mali and Burkina Faso, France had withdrawn the bulk of its troops to Niger. France stated that the sole purpose of its forces was to support the army, but last month, President Macron announced that the military cooperation was “over” and that a full withdrawal would take place by the end of 2023. Macron stated that the post-coup leadership “no longer wanted to fight terrorism”¹².

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After the coup

After the coup on the 26th of July 2023, in the country itself, there were not a lot of changes. The junta instated a curfew, certain prices increased, the airspace was locked down and there was a general uncertainty, but in general, things remained calm. There were pro-coup protests the day after, and Russian flags were waved, indicating the anti-french, pro-Russian sentiment in the country¹³. On the 30th of July, ECOWAS set an ultimatum for the junta to reinstate Bazoum as president. This ultimatum set a one-week deadline for the coup leaders to back down and give the governing seat back to the president, threatening military intervention should the coup plotters fail to meet this deadline. When the deadline expired on the 6th of August, it became clear such an intervention was nowhere to be found. This was mainly due to the fact that the member states of Mali and Burkina Faso affirmed their support of the junta. They said that “any military intervention against Niger would be tantamount to a declaration of war against Burkina Faso and Mali”, threatening the ECOWAS to prevent them from intervening¹⁴. On this day, the leaders of the junta sought out Wagner's support at a meeting in Mali and afterwards warned against military intervention¹⁵.



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As the deadline had passed, the ECOWAS countries met again on the 10th of August, rediscussing their plans. After extensive meetings, ECOWAS ordered the activation of military stand-by forces, expressing their preference for a peaceful solution. However, they were also affirming that all options, including a military intervention, were on the table¹⁶. After more attempts at peace talks and ECOWAS readying its forces, Tchiani declared his desire for the government to transfer back to civilian power within three years. He also warned against any intervention, stating that it would “not be a walk in the park” for any parties involved.

Current situation

As of this moment, there have not been any major changes in the situation. France and the US have both started to withdraw their troops, in accordance with the junta's wishes¹⁷. The US has resumed some ISR (Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) drone missions for retreating their troops because “of course, we are wanting to make sure that our troops and our equipment is safe.”, they stressed that this was purely out of their desire to maintain the safety of personnel¹⁸. The junta in Niger is doing its best to become a *fait accompli*, and this has proved to be effective to a certain extent. It will be up to the delegates to decide upon a course of action on the situation. Will delegates choose an intervention, leaving the junta as is or other actions? (For more information see possible solutions.)

Major parties involved

Niger

Niger's democracy has been a fragile one ever since it was formed in 1960 after gaining independence from the French. Since that time, the country has seen five successful coups, with more unsuccessful

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insurgencies in between¹⁹. According to the junta leader, the country will return to civilian rule after three years, should the situation remain constant.

ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States is an organisation comprised of fifteen members: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sénégal and Togo. It is an economic and political block, which aims to create peace and stability in the region. For more information and their list of aims see further reading. They have attempted to push back the coup attempts in the region but failed to prevent them.

United States of America

The US holds an important position in the matter, as they have been using Niger as a base for their counter-terrorist actions in the entire region. The junta has ordered them to remove all their troops, and the US has been doing this steadily, withdrawing people from drone base 101 near the capital.

France

France, the former colonial ruler of the country, had remained in tight cooperation with the Nigerian government after they gained independence. Such as the US, France used Niger as a base of operation for their counter-terrorism actions in the region. After the democracies in Burkina Faso and Mali fell, the French government decided to move the majority of the troops in those countries to Niger, further increasing the tension in the country. They have declared their plan to have all troops out of the country by the end of this year.

African Union

The African Union is an organisation of 55 countries on the African continent. It is the successor of the OUA (Organisation of African Unity) and has the primary goals of unifying Africa and is guided by its vision of

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“An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena”²⁰.
Following the coup, they suspended Niger from all AU activities and warned all members against any action that might legitimise the junta²¹.

Timeline of Key Events

1960	Niger gains independence from France
1974	Lt. Kountche leads a military coup
1996 new coup	Mainassara takes over the country in a new coup
1999	Mainassara is assassinated and the new coup leader announces elections will take place by 2000
2000 elected president	Democracy is restored as Tandja is elected president
2009 the parliament	Tensions rise again as Tandja dissolves the parliament
2010 elections	The Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy overthrows Tandja and promises new elections
2011 becoming president	Issoufou wins the new elections, becoming president
2020	President Bazoum is elected
26th of July 2023 coup	Tchiani takes over the country in a new coup

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July 30th democracy to be restored	ECOWAS sets a deadline for
August 6th tensions mount	The ECOWAS deadline passes as
August 10th	ECOWAS readies an emergency force
September 2023 from the country	France and the US withdraw troops
Current <i>accompli</i>	The Niger junta tries to become a <i>fait</i>

Previous attempts to solve the issue

As explained before, not a lot has been done to solve this issue. The ECOWAS has attempted to, but they were met with threats by Mali and Burkina Faso. The current policy of the US has been to avoid any conflict and quietly retreat from the country. France is taking a similar path, with Macron having stated that the time for cooperation with Niger is “over”. Peace talks have been attempted, but have not proved effective, as the coup leaders believe they are improving the peace and stability in the area.

Possible solutions


Delegates stand at a crossroads on this issue. On one hand, they can prevent further conflict by complying with the wishes of the junta. If the junta keeps its word, this would mean that civilian power would be restored within three years. However, should the delegates feel the president cannot just be detained and the government overthrown, they can choose an intervention or similar tools for restoring democracy. Some countries within ECOWAS have previously stated their willingness to

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support an intervention (See further reading 3) including Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. In solving this issue, delegates should remain careful and refrain from simply attacking the country, as this would cause further instability, which neither the country nor the region would benefit from.

Further Readings

General information about the coup:

 [Gravitas Plus: Niger Coup: Who is the real culprit? | Is Africa head...](#)

Ecowas official site:

<https://ecowas.int/about-ecowas/#>

African Union official site:

<https://au.int/en/overview>

Video from france24 on the possible intervention:

<https://www.france24.com/en/video/20230817-crunch-time-for-ecowas-a-u-divided-niger-junta-doing-business-as-usual-creating-fait-accomplis>

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