

Former diplomat says Niger coup stems from people's rejection of French presence



A protester holds an anti-France placard during a demonstration on independence day in Niamey on August 3, 2023. (Photo by AFP)

Paris, August 4 (RHC)-- A former French diplomat says the coup in Niger can be traced back to the frustration of people with French interventions and their rejection of the European power's presence in the country.

G rard Araud, former ambassador to the United States, the United Nations and Israel, said in a Thursday interview with EURACTIV that the current crisis in Niger is a "rejection of the French presence in the country. He said the local populations' frustration with the "Fran afrique" legacy, a term used to describe the close and "incestuous" economic and diplomatic ties France holds with former African colonies.

Araud said the absence of a concerted African strategy is a "failure" of Europe. "We are witnessing a revolt of the youth" against both France and their national governments, which are seen to be France's puppets in the region."

General Abdourahamane Tiani, the former head of Niger's presidential guard, ousted president Mohamed Bazoum in a coup d' tat on July 26 and announced himself the leader of the Sahel country, days later. The ousted president is being detained by soldiers at the presidential palace in the capital Niame.

In a Washington Post op-ed published on Thursday, Bazoum warned that the junta's power grab could have "devastating consequences for our country, our region, and the entire world."

"Niger is under attack from a military junta that is trying to overthrow our democracy, and I am just one of hundreds of citizens who have been arbitrarily and illegally imprisoned," wrote the ousted president who enjoys strong support from Western countries.

The coup in Niger, the latest in a series of military takeovers in West Africa, is yet another blow to the French military strategy in the Sahel region. France has been a colonial power in West Africa until 1960. Since independence, France however has maintained trade relations and a military presence in the region.

France has 1,500 soldiers in Niger. American and European soldiers as also stationed in Niger. According to Araud, closing French army barracks in Niger is long overdue. "Having military bases signals wanting to meddle in African affairs."

"Niger is to France what Afghanistan is to the United States," the ex-diplomat said, noting that it is high time France treat its African counterparts as sovereign nations. France no longer has any "eminent" role in the region, he stressed.

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