

France backs ECOWAS push to reverse Niger military coup



Protesters hold an anti-France placard during a demonstration on independence day in Niamey on August 3, 2023 [AFP]

Paris, August 5 (RHC)-- France will support efforts by the West African regional bloc ECOWAS to make the military coup in Niger fail, the French foreign ministry said on Saturday. French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna met with Niger Prime Minister Ouhoumoudou Mahamadou and the Niger ambassador in Paris on Saturday.

Earlier, Colonna said the coup leaders in Niamey had until Sunday to hand back power, otherwise a threat by member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to stage a military intervention had to be taken “very seriously”. “The threat is credible,” she said on French public radio.

France did not specify on Saturday whether its backing would entail military support for an ECOWAS intervention in Niger. On Friday, ECOWAS said its military chiefs had agreed on a plan for a possible intervention in Niger.

“All the elements that will go into any eventual intervention have been worked out,” ECOWAS commissioner Abdel-Fatau Musah said. These included “the resources needed, and including the how and when we are going to deploy the force”, he added.

“We want diplomacy to work, and we want this message clearly transmitted to them [the junta] that we are giving them every opportunity to reverse what they have done,” Musah said.

Mali and Burkina Faso, where military leaders have taken power since 2020, have warned that any regional intervention would be tantamount to a “declaration of war” against them.

Russia has clearly said that a foreign intervention would not resolve the crisis. Neighbouring Benin and Germany on Friday urged continued diplomacy to defuse the situation.

The United States said on Friday it was suspending some aid to Niger following the coup. Washington is pausing “certain foreign assistance programmes benefitting the government of Niger”, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

“As we have made clear since the outset of this situation, the provision of US assistance to the government of Niger depends on democratic governance and respect for constitutional order,” Blinken said, adding that Washington would continue to review its foreign assistance as the situation on the ground evolves.

Blinken did not specify what programmes would be affected but said life-saving humanitarian and food assistance, as well as diplomatic and security operations to protect US personnel, would continue.

“We remain committed to supporting the people of Niger to help them preserve their hard-earned democracy and we reiterate our call for the immediate restoration of Niger’s democratically-elected government,” Blinken said.

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