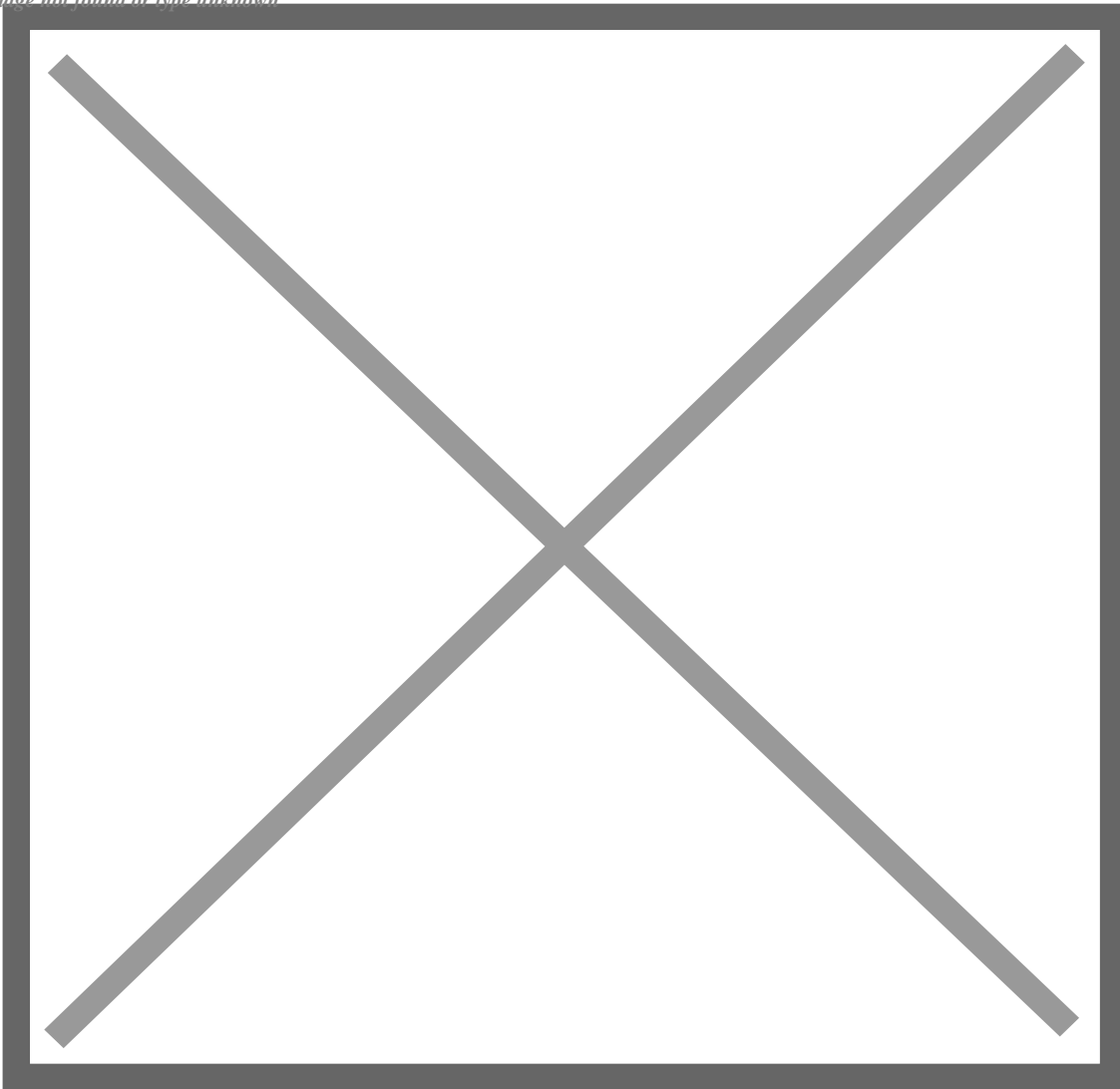


France to keep troops in Niger, refusing calls to withdraw forces

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Paris, August 6 (RHC)-- The French government has refused to pull its troops out of coup-hit Niger, saying it backs regional countries' push to reinstate the ousted pro-West president Mohammad Bazoum. Last Wednesday, Bazoum was taken into custody at the presidential palace in the capital Niamey by Niger's Presidential Guard (PG), and two days later, PG's head, General Abdourahamane Tiani, declared himself as the new leader of the former French colony.

The French government said on Friday that it did not recognize the junta as the legitimate rulers of the Sahel country located in a strategic region bordering seven other African states, including heavy-weight countries such as Libya, Chad, and Nigeria.

“France recalls that the legal framework for its cooperation with Niger in the area of defense is based on agreements that have been concluded with the legitimate Niger authorities,” read a Friday statement from the French foreign ministry. “These are the only ones that France, and the entire international community, recognize.”

France was the main colonizer of the West African country until the nation's independence in 1960. Since independence, France has maintained its military presence and it has 1,500 soldiers currently deployed in Niger. The U.S. also has military troops stationed in Niger.

The French government statement follows a Thursday declaration from the junta calling on the Western military forces to evacuate the country.

The growing crisis across Niger and the military coup against President Mohamed Bazoum by his own presidential guards seems to be turning the tables for the West. Amadou Abdramane, the spokesperson for the military coup leaders, said the junta was scraping the military agreements with its former colonial rulers.

However, the French foreign ministry said on Saturday that France will support any move by member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to reinstate Bazoum in power. 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 ... including the how and when we are going to deploy the force,” ECOWAS commissioner Abdel-Fatau Musah warned, adding, “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.”

The Kremlin said interference of non-regional powers, such as the U.S., was unlikely to help improve the situation. Niger's putschists, however, remained defiant, saying they would respond to force with force.

In neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso, where similar juntas have taken power since 2020, the rulers said any attack on Niger would be seen as a “declaration of war” against them. In addition, Russia said a foreign intervention would not resolve the crisis.

Meanwhile, the West has imposed sweeping sanctions against the coup-hit country in an effort to mount international pressure on the putschists to reinstate Bazoum.

The ousted president himself has appealed to the international community, the United States in particular, to intervene militarily and restore his presidency.

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