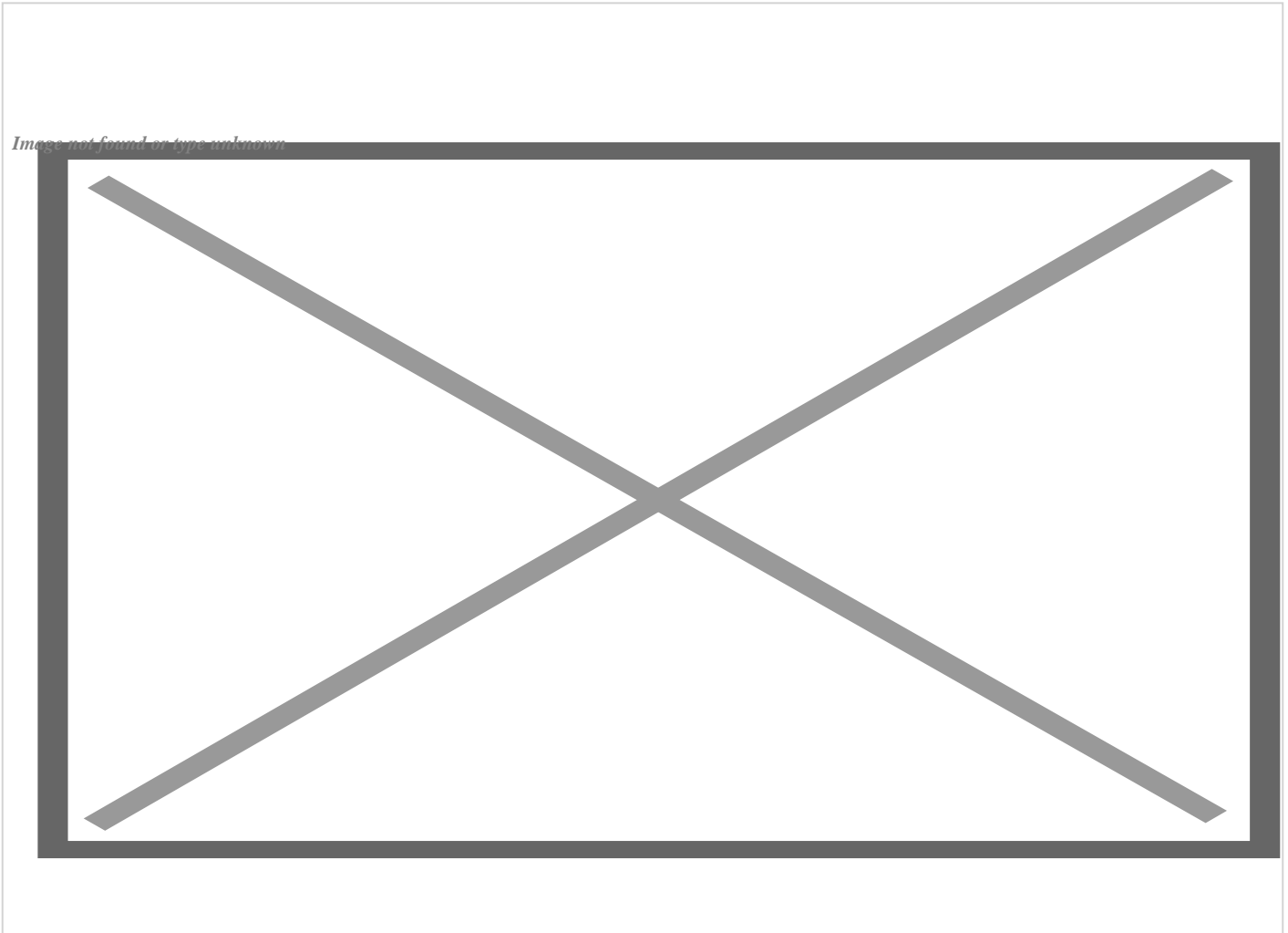


Military governments in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso sign mutual defense pact



Bamako, September 19 (RHC)-- The military leaders of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso have signed a mutual defense pact where they agree to help each other militarily against outside aggression and against internal rebellions. The three nations are all former French colonies which experienced military coups in recent years.

Mali's Foreign Affairs Minister Abdoulaye Diop told reporters: "Any attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one or more of the contracting parties will be considered as an aggression against the other parties and will entail a duty of assistance and relief on the part of all parties."

This comes as tension is escalating between France and Niger's new military leaders. On Saturday, thousands of protesters rallied outside a French military base in Niger after French President Emmanuel Macron claimed France's ambassador is being held hostage at the French Embassy.

Protesters called on French troops to leave Niger. One organizer of a recent protest, Issaka Oumarou, said: "We know that Emmanuel Macron is looking for a war pretext to invade our country. But Emmanuel Macron must understand that the people of Niger are determined. Emmanuel Macron must understand that we have understood their game, and we are not going to fall into their trap."

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