

U.S. set to evacuate its army troops from Niger after protests against military presence in the African nation



Nigeriens gather to protest against the U.S. military presence, in Agadez, Niger, in April 2024

Niamey, May 20 (RHC)-- The United States says it will pull all its troops out of Niger within the next four months or so after the West African country's military government ordered them to leave.

Niger last month told Washington to withdraw its military personnel, which number close to 1,000, branding their presence "illegal." The military government, which took power last year, has already overseen the withdrawal of troops from former colonial power and traditional security ally France as it has strengthened ties with Russia.

The U.S. pullout has already begun, the Pentagon and Nigerien defence officials confirmed in a joint statement on Sunday, with all of the troops set to vacate the country by September 15 "at the latest."

Until a coup last year, Niger had been a key partner of the West and involved in Washington's fight against armed groups in the Sahel. The new agreement between Niger's defense ministry and the U.S. Department of Defense, reached after a five-day meeting, guarantees the protection of US troops until their withdrawal, the joint statement said.

"The withdrawal of American forces from Niger in no way affects the pursuit of relations between the United States and Niger in the area of development. Also, Niger and the United States are committed to an ongoing diplomatic dialogue to define the future of their bilateral relations," the statement added.

U.S. troops and some gear have already begun leaving the country, senior military officials told Reuters and The Associated Press news agencies. The plan is to remove all lethal, hazardous or classified equipment before the last U.S. troops depart, but items determined to be too expensive to fly out could be left for the Nigerien military to use instead, the officials added.

They admitted that Niger had been an "anchor" in U.S. counterterrorism efforts over the last decade and that they were still looking at options on how to fill the gap. A few months later, the military government asked French forces to leave and turned to the Russian mercenary group Wagner for security assistance.

In October, Washington officially designated the military takeover as a coup, which triggered US laws restricting military support and aid.

Niger announced in March it was ending a military cooperation agreement with Washington, saying the presence of US soldiers was now "illegal." The order for the U.S. to withdraw came after Washington expressed concern about "potential Nigerien relations with Russia and Iran."

The coup and subsequent breakaway from Western countries in favor of Russia follows similar moves in neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali. Among the Nigerien public, opinion has long been hostile to the presence of foreign forces.

In 2022, about two-thirds of Nigeriens disagreed with the government's use of foreign military forces to secure the country, according to an Afrobarometer survey.



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