

Niger cuts military ties with U.S. over Washington's threats

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Niger's Prime Minister Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine

Niamey, May 15 (RHC)-- Niger's prime minister says the termination of military cooperation and bilateral relations between his country and the United States was due to American threats and Washington's opposition to the African nation's partnership with Iran and Russia.

Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine told The Washington Post in an interview published on Tuesday that the U.S. had tried to dictate what countries Niamey can have close relations with and had not justified its military presence in the West African country.

Underlining the U.S. failure to combat terrorism in Niger and the Sahel region for a decade, Zeine said, “The Americans stayed on our soil, doing nothing while the terrorists killed people and burned towns. It is not a sign of friendship to come on our soil but let the terrorists attack us.”

Zeine said the United States' tone and behavior toward Nigerien officials were the “primary reason” for the broken relations. The Nigerien prime minister criticized US officials' call on Niamey not to engage closely with Iran and Russia as they were two of Washington's adversaries.

Zeine said he had been given an ultimatum by the U.S. administration to have security with Washington or be close to Tehran and Moscow. “First, you have come here to threaten us in our country. That is unacceptable,” he told The Post. “And you have come here to tell us with whom we can have relationships, which is also unacceptable. And you have done it all with a condescending tone and a lack of respect.”

Citing U.S. officials, the American daily newspaper reported that the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Niger, which is slated in the coming months, marks a notable setback for U.S. President Joe Biden's administration.

Niger's ruling military decided to suspend a military agreement with the United States after a delegation of senior U.S. military officials had visited the West African country and warned it about growing ties with Russia and Iran.

Niger's military led by General Abdourahamane Tiani ousted the Western-backed former president Mohamed Bazoum last July, and formed a government that has strained relations with some Western countries.

Washington then suspended security support and paused its so-called counter-terrorism operations run out of Air Base 201 near Niamey, where the U.S. conducts drone surveillance of Daesh- and al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist groups in the Sahel region and stationed more than 1,000 military personnel.

Last month, the U.S. acted on Niger's demands that U.S. troops leave and agreed to withdraw its forces.

Russia was among the countries that welcomed the new leadership in Niamey with “open arms.”

A first set of about 100 Russian advisors arrived in Niger on April 10 along with air defense systems after talks between Tiani and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russian advisors are now staying at a Nigerien air base near the Niamey airport.

Zeine visited Iran in late January and held talks with President Ebrahim Raeisi to discuss bilateral ties and issues of common interest.

Back in October 2023, Foreign Minister of Niger, Bakary Yaou Sangare, also visited Tehran to explore opportunities for strengthening political and economic ties, as well as boosting cooperation in scientific and technological sectors between the two countries.



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