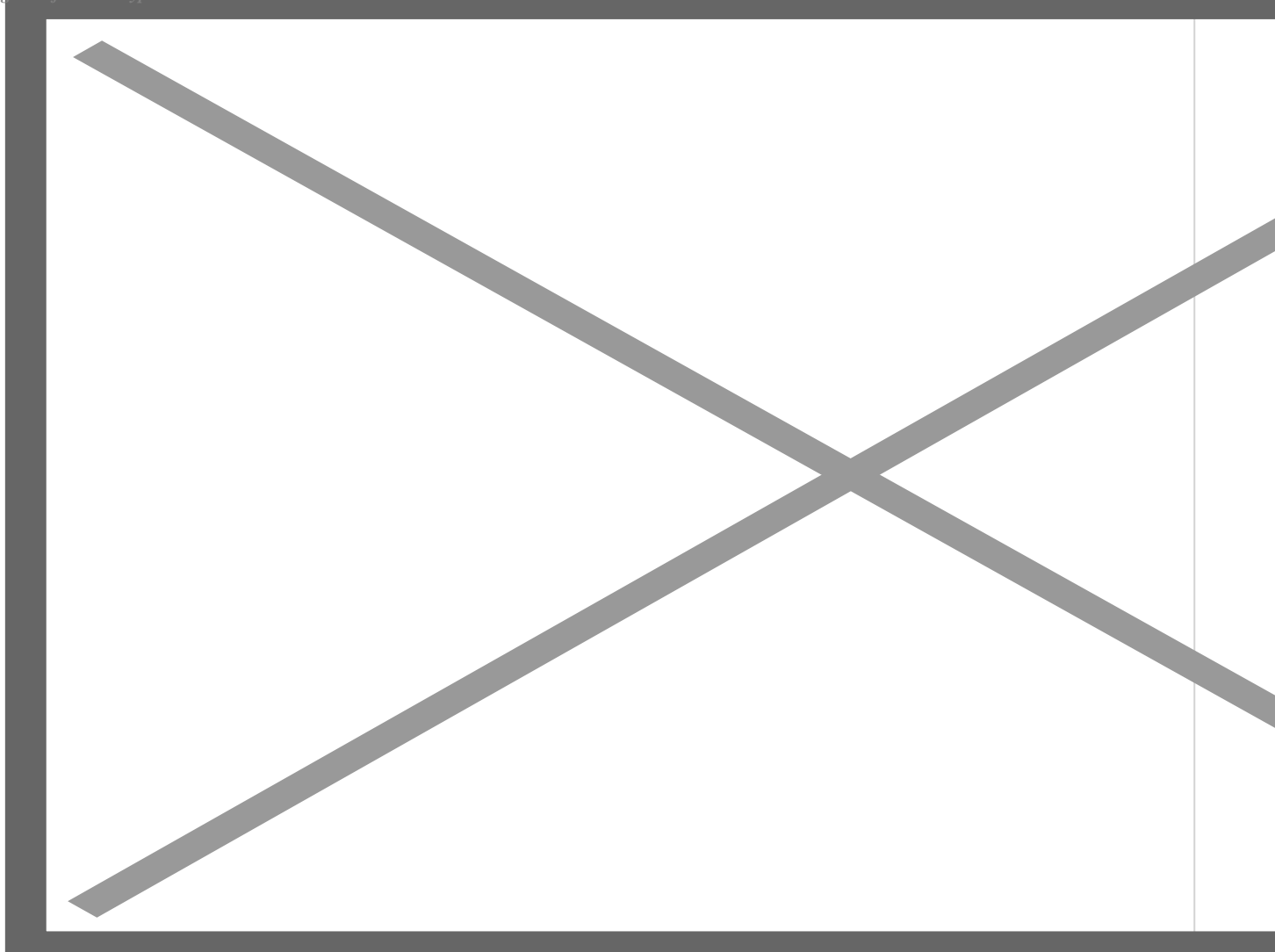


U.S. will completely withdraw troops and equipment from Niger base on Sunday

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U.S. Major General Kenneth Ekman speaks in front of a “Welcome to Niamey” sign depicting

U.S. military vehicles at Air Base 101 in Niger, Niger, on May 30, 2024. (Photo by U.S. Air Force via AP)

Niamey, July 6 (RHC)-- The United States military will completely vacate its remaining troops and equipment from its base in the Nigerien capital on Sunday, following the cancellation of a military agreement by the African country's new leaders.

The U.S. is set to complete its withdrawal of forces and equipment from Niger's Air Base 101 in Niamey, said Major General Kenneth Ekman of the US Air Force, overseeing the withdrawals in Niger, in a video conference on Friday.

"We will do a joint ceremony on that occasion that marks the departure of the last US C-17 (aircraft). The government of Niger will assume control of former US areas and facilities," he said.

Following this, the U.S. plans to complete its exit from a drone base in Niger by August, the general added, in accordance with a September 15 deadline set by Niger's ruling junta after a coup in Niamey last year.

Ekman further explained that most American forces would relocate to European bases, with smaller teams moving to other West African nations. Despite withdrawing valuable equipment, the US would not destroy facilities left behind, aiming instead to leave them in good condition for potential future use, he added.

"Our goal in the execution is, leave things in as good a state as possible. If we went out and left it a wreck, or if we went out spitefully, or if we destroyed things as we went, we'd be foreclosing options that both nations need for the future. And our security objectives are still entwined," Ekman said.

Back in July last year, a successful military coup unseated the government in Niger and Tchiani, the then-commander of the Presidential Guard, assumed power as the leader of the country before establishing the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP).

As of last year, a little more than 1,000 US troops were present in Niger, where the US military ran two bases, including a major drone base called Air Base 201 built in the vicinity of the central city of Agadez, some 550 miles from the capital Niamey, at a cost of more than \$100 million.

Niger's military leaders have set a deadline of September 15 for the US to withdraw its troops, including vacating the \$100-million Agadez drone base in central Niger.

Ekman indicated that the departure from Air Base 201 might finish ahead of schedule and is expected to occur next month.

"Now our weight of effort flows to Air Base 201," he said.

The decision by the military government in Niger to expel the US military forces from the country after kicking out France marks another thumping win for multipolarity.

The withdrawals, particularly from the drone base, represent a setback for the US's so-called counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel, a sprawling region where Takfiri terrorist groups linked to al-Qaida and Daesh are active.

Ekman, who directs strategy at US Africa Command, further claimed that other African nations concerned about Sahel-based threats had already expressed interest in partnering with the US to combat these militants.

The U.S. general acknowledged the logistical challenges ahead, with future operations in the region now requiring access from outside Niger. “Niger was immensely helpful for us as a location because it was in the Sahel and it was adjacent to those areas where the threat is most concentrated,” Ekman added, reflecting on the strategic advantage the location provided for US operations.

The withdrawal of American troops from Niger will follow the pullout of troops from France, the former colonial power that for the past decade has led the so-called foreign counter-terrorism efforts against Takfiri groups in West Africa.

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