

Niger: Old Europe on trial

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Gold, silicon, oil (reserves estimated at 2 billion barrels), and above all, uranium are essential for both French nuclear power plants and atomic bombs. Strategic raw materials for imperialism, which needs to consolidate its domination at the expense of the countries of the South. This is the key to understanding the fibrillation

provoked, in the United States and especially in the European Union, by the coup d'état in Niger.

On July 28, General Abdourahamane Tchiani, head of the Presidential Guard, was proclaimed the new leader of Niger and assumed the presidency of the National Council for the Protection of the Homeland (CNSP), after having ousted the Western-backed President Mohamed Bazoum. The communiqué of the rebel military denounces the “lack of measures to face the economic crisis and the deterioration of the security situation”, undermined by the violence of the jihadist groups. Bazoum is accused of having “tried to convince people that everything is going well, the harsh reality is a lot of death, displaced people, humiliations and frustrations. Today’s approach has not brought security despite great sacrifices.”

Niger is, in fact, the first supplier of uranium to the EU, covering 24% of its needs. With its 3,527 tons (5% of world production), it is the world’s sixth-largest uranium producer. A resource from which, however, it does not benefit, considering that, according to World Bank data from 2021, out of a population of 27 million, only 18.6% had access to electricity.

Then there is on the table the large amount of depleted uranium, waste from nuclear power plants also transferred for military use. Nuclear energy multinationals save millions of dollars in safe storage by passing it on to weapons companies, who use it as virtually free “raw material” to produce anti-tank munitions for use in theaters of war.

France directly controls two uranium mines, Akouta and Arlit, through the company Orano, which changed its name in 2018 when Areva was shut down. Akouta, the “largest subway mine in the world”, managed by a French, Japanese, and Spanish joint venture 6 km from the town of Akokan, was closed in 2021, after having extracted 75 thousand tons of uranium in 43 years of activity. Behind it, it left 20 million tons of radioactive sludge, 600 unemployed and cancer-stricken workers,

houses without electricity and water, and an area that would need 145 million euros to be recovered.

History reminds us that when the people of Congo decided to regain control of the resources by electing Patrice Lumumba, imperialism unleashed secession in the Katanga mining region and cut short the life of the president in 1961. The pro-Western dictator Mobutu was put in his place, to ensure that Congo's strategic resources, such as the plutonium that was used for the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, did not end up in the hands of the people and under the influence of the Soviet Union. Times change, but the nature of imperialism and its purposes do not.

Paris has threatened military intervention in what U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, during his last visit, had praised as an "example of democracy in the Sahel". An African region in which Moscow's influence is advancing. This was made clear at the Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg, which brought together 49 African delegations (from 54 nations), 16 of them at the level of heads of state, and gave space to the new anti-imperialist military figures of Burkina Faso or Mali, spokesmen for the growing intolerance towards the Western powers.

Also, on the African continent, the number of countries oriented to focus on the BRICS is increasing, in particular, Russia and China (two members of the BRICS, together with Brazil, India, and South Africa), which offer military and economic aid not conditional on "structural reforms" or adherence to cultural models different from the local ones. Within this framework, collaboration with the progressive countries of Latin America is increasing after the historically consolidated collaboration with Cuba and Venezuela, supporters of a south-south relationship model based on relations of equality.

Brazilian President Lula da Silva confirmed his intention to strengthen Brazil's ties with the African continent, as he had already done in his previous periods in power.

In the framework of the G7 summit, during a bilateral meeting with the President of Comoros, he said that he wants to support the entry of the African Union into the G20 in order to favor a global diplomatic rebalance. It is in the same perspective of South-South integration, which characterizes Gustavo Petro's policy that one should read the trip made in May by Francia Marquez, Vice President of Colombia, to Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Africa, three key countries in their respective geographical areas and on the continent.

The governments of Burkina and Mali have responded harshly to threats of military intervention by France and its allies in the region, who do not intend to "recognize" the patriotic junta. The High Representative for European Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, considered the coup "unacceptable" and announced, as did the U.S., the interruption of economic aid and the suspension of security cooperation programs. An unprecedented decision after the end of the "cold war", which definitively subjected Africa to a new colonialism following the failure of the independence movements.

In June, the EU Council approved the allocation of a further 5 million euros in military aid to support Niger's armed forces. The measure was financed by the European Peace Facility (EPF), the same fund used to send arms to Ukraine. In Niger, which has remained in the Western orbit, along with Chad, there are about 2,000 soldiers from the French anti-jihadist force Barkhane and those from the European-mandated mission Takuba, in which Italy participates with about 300 soldiers.

However, the failure of a neo-colonial security model for the Sahel shows that it is not the security of the citizens that the European military has gone to guarantee but its own material interests. A further sign is that the rebel officers in Niger had been trained by Western forces....

In Niger, the M62 Movement, which includes associations and trade unions, and

which has been fighting for years against the colonial presence, has led thousands of people to protest, waving Russian flags and shouting pro-Putin slogans in support of the military junta that seized power. Faced with the spread of radical Islamism, used as a weapon of control by the US and its allies, the Sahel, like the rest of the African continent, has seen the spread of a new colonial occupation through the military missions of multinational forces.

Military insurgents have denounced that, despite having become the “core of the French and Western intervention in the Sahel”, Niger has remained exposed to jihadist attacks in the area of the “three borders” (Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso), which, in 2023 alone, caused more than 400 deaths. The colonial division of Africa was sanctioned by the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), in which, however, the African rulers did not participate.

A fact that marked in a striking way the legitimization of the hegemonic design of European colonialism over the whole continent. Dividing “with the team and the rule” territories, creating forced separations and inclusions, generating borders that unite or separate different peoples who previously lived together, and sowing the seeds of devastating conflicts, disguised as “ethnic” conflicts.

The recent example of Libya confirms the same colonial logic, the same strategy of “balkanization” of the world (and of brains) that is part of the fourth and fifth-generation wars deployed by imperialism. On May 26, 2011, then-Nigerian President Mahamadou Issoufou, invited to the Deauville summit, was the only one to tell Western leaders that intervention in Libya would transform the country into another Somalia, offering an incredible opportunity for radical Islamism.

“We assessed the Libyan war – he said – as a threat to our country and to the region that will drag on for years to come... We warned the West against the destruction of the Libyan state... We told the West not to lose sight of reality and to take Libyan society into account.” A voice crying in the wilderness, as was that of the ALBA

countries, which proposed, unheeded, a non-asymmetrical negotiation based on peace diplomacy.

The failure of the neo-colonial model in the Sahel presents a scenario similar to that recorded in the Arab world where today, especially among the Gulf monarchies, there is a marked detachment from the American protagonists who, with the Obama Administration, supported the so-called “Arab Spring”, which destabilized or attempted to destabilize the Arab regimes, including many governments friendly to the West.

Niger is also a center of migratory routes, and the issue of Libya, a neighboring country, has much to do with the management of flows imposed by “fortress Europe”, where migrant trafficking is rampant. Into this picture fits the so-called “Mattei plan” that the Italian government of Giorgia Meloni (extreme right) is trying to impose in Africa, and especially in the Sahel, which has great importance in the management of migratory “flows”, relying on rulers friendly to the West.

In recent years, Libya has become a transit point for millions of people of different nationalities trying to reach Europe. Since the signing of the infamous Italy-Libya Memorandum in 2017, more than 100 million euros have found their way into the pockets of the so-called Libyan coast guard in training and equipment. One billion from Italy and the EU for the various missions in Libya and the Mediterranean often used more to counter volunteer rescuers on NGO boats than to save lives. Since 2017, more than 100,000 people have been turned back after being intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard in central Mediterranean waters.

Italy, like all EU member states, needs oil and gas from Libya, a country that imperialist forces dismembered by killing Gaddafi in 2011 and which now has three “governments.” Meloni recently signed an \$8 billion deal between Eni, the Italian national hydrocarbon company, and the Libyan National Oil Corporation for the exploitation of an offshore gas field off the coast of Tripoli.

To follow NATO and European Union directives, Italy does not recognize the Libyan government legitimized by a duly elected parliament, that of Prime Minister Fathi Bashagha, who controls most of Libya's territory and energy resources, and who operates on a parallel track from the cities of Syrte and Benghazi because Dbeibah government militias prevent him from entering Tripoli. Bashagha would be willing to offer Italy, whose Libyan gas imports have fallen from about 8 billion cubic meters per year before 2011 to about 2.5 billion in 2022, gas and oil at low prices. Italy, however, refuses.

In addition, it is estimated that from 2015 to 2022, the European Union spent between 93 and 178 million euros to reinforce Tunisia's land and sea borders. To this must be added a final tranche of 105 million. A trend that will certainly not diminish with the rhetoric of the so-called "Mattei plan" for the development of Africa, launched by Meloni with a new intention of "colonialism in disguise",

As Immanuel Ness, author of the book "Migration as Economic Imperialism" rightly explains, neoliberal capitalism and economic imperialism in its present form cannot survive without Third World migration. If we examine – says Ness in an interview to El Salto – the demographics of most rich countries, migrant labor, mostly temporary migrants, represents more than 10% of the population.

In Qatar, foreign migrant labor makes up 90% of the population without citizenship rights. They are integral to the satisfaction of a whole range of needs of the capitalist class: from agricultural products, housing, and manufactured goods, to domestic and welfare services. Benefits that, without workers from the global periphery, would not be possible.

But these migrant workers, who serve to ensure that capitalist profitability is not reduced and the working class in the North continues to maintain a high standard of living, cannot enter and remain in the Global North permanently but are considered temporary or "illegal" in most of Western Europe and North America, as well as in

other rich states and economic centers; and are under relentless threat of detention, imprisonment, and deportation. It is a central feature of the depravity of 21st-century economic imperialism, says Ness.

In Niger, the military rebels issue a precise warning: “Any external military intervention, whatever its origin, would risk having disastrous and incalculable consequences for our populations and would be chaos for our country”. Words that echo those of the Ghanaian revolutionary, a leading figure in the history of decolonization and pan-Africanism, Kwame Nkrumah, born in 1909 and died in 1972: “Dedicated as I am to the total destruction of colonialism in all its forms, I do not support any colonial government of any kind. The British, French, Portuguese, Belgians, Belgians, Spanish, Germans and Italians, at one time or another, have ruled parts of Africa or continue to do so. Their methods may have been different, but their objectives were the same: to enrich themselves at the expense of their colonies.”

Source: [Cuba en Resumen](#)

