

The people do not want war: mass protests continue in Niger against ECOWAS threats

written by Tanupriya Singh

August 23, 2023



Thousands of people in Niger have taken to the streets to condemn the threat of

military intervention and the severe sanctions imposed by ECOWAS. Photo: ActuNiger

The political situation in Niger and West Africa as a whole continues to be in flux. While people and their movements across the region are mobilizing against war and neo-colonial intervention, regional bodies have taken a stand in favor of the status quo.

In a communique released on August 22, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) announced its decision to suspend Niger from all the bloc's activities in response to the July 26 military takeover. The declaration released by the PSC on Tuesday had been adopted at a meeting held on August 14.

While it had been indicated that the AU would not back an intervention in Niger by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the PSC stated that it had taken note of the regional bloc's decision to activate a "standby force," welcoming the communique in which this decision was taken by ECOWAS on August 10. The PSC has called upon the AU Commission to "undertake an assessment of the economic, social, and security implications" of such a deployment.

It has also urged all member states to "refrain from any action likely to grant legitimacy to the illegal regime in Niger" and has also endorsed the severe sanctions that ECOWAS has imposed on Niamey, calling on members to "fully implement" these measures.

It further rejected any interference by any actor or country outside Africa in the continent's peace and security affairs, "including engagements by private military companies."

These statements have emerged as Niger continues to witness mass protests in favor of the military leadership and in rejection of the threat of a West-backed invasion by

ECOWAS.

Thousands of people took to the streets in Niger's capital of Niamey on August 20. With slogans of "No to sanctions," "Down with France," and "Stop the military intervention," the protest was held a day after the regional bloc dispatched another mission to Niger to hold talks with the military leaders, the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP). Meanwhile, thousands of women also gathered in the Dosso region on Saturday, denouncing France and ECOWAS while expressing their support for the CNSP.

After previous failed attempts, the ECOWAS officials, led by former Nigerian president Abdulsalam Abubakar, finally met with the head of the CNSP, General Abdourahamane Tchiani, on Saturday afternoon. The mission then met with ousted president Mohamed Bazoum, who has been in custody since July 26.

"Neither the CNSP nor the people of Niger want war, and remain open to dialogue," Tchiani stated after the meeting.

Importantly, while much of the focus of the public anger has been on France as the colonial and neo-colonial power, hundreds of people gathered in Agadez on Saturday to demand the closure of the U.S. drone base located in the city, as well as the removal of the 1,100 U.S. troops present on Nigerien soil. Known as Air Base 201, the site is considered to be the [largest base-building effort ever undertaken by troops in the history of the U.S. Air Force.](#)

The U.S. suspended its military cooperation with Niger shortly after the coup. It is now [reportedly](#) preparing precautionary plans to vacate its bases in Niger and redeploy its forces to other countries in the Sahel and Saharan regions. While France has been more open in its backing of ECOWAS' "all measures necessary" approach and repeatedly called for the reinstatement of Bazoum, the U.S. seems to be more keen on negotiations.

On August 21, the state-owned *Radio Algerie* [reported](#) that Algeria had denied a request by France to fly over its airspace for a possible attack on Niger. The allegation was denied by the Chief of Staff of the French army. Algeria has firmly rejected any military intervention in Niger as a “direct threat” to itself, warning that such actions could inflame the entire Sahel.

According to the French newspaper *Le Monde*, in the hours following the coup, France had [received](#) a request from the Nigerien army to intervene. However, according to the source cited in the report, the “loyalists changed sides and joined the putschists.” On July 31, Niger’s military leadership also accused France of holding a meeting at the headquarters of the National Guard to seek the necessary political and military authorizations.

Meanwhile, following a visit by the Acting U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland, to Niamey, the U.S. has [now sent](#) Ambassador Kathleen FitzGibbon: “Her diplomatic focus will be to advocate for a diplomatic solution that preserves constitutional order in Niger and for the immediate release of President Bazoum, his family, and all those unlawfully detained.”

Intervention threatens ECOWAS split

The ECOWAS delegation’s arrival followed a meeting between the bloc’s chiefs of defense staff in Ghana between August 17 and 18, following which it was announced that the “D-Day” had been decided for an intervention.

ECOWAS has repeatedly invoked the threat of military action despite opposition by countries both within and outside the bloc, who have warned that any such action could further destabilize the Sahel region as a whole. Moreover, people and political parties in countries including Senegal and Nigeria have also rejected their leaders’ decision to commit troops for the same.

Meanwhile, Mali and Burkina Faso—who were sanctioned and suspended from ECOWAS following popularly-supported, anti-French coups—have maintained that any action against Niger will be interpreted as a declaration of war against them. Speaking to *Sud FM*, Mali's Prime Minister Choguel Maïga stated, “If ECOWAS goes to war in Niger, there is no longer ECOWAS. But that is the objective of some countries from the start, to break ECOWAS. They do not want African countries to unite.”

Burkina Faso's defense minister, Colonel Kassoum Coulibaly, told *Sputnik* that not only would the country support Niger, it was also ready to withdraw from ECOWAS—“We have no right to fight each other. We are part of a single economic union. The very idea that some states of the association want to wage an internecine war is shocking. It is also shocking that some heads of state want to wage war against other countries under the guise of democracy.”

On August 18, in a “translation into concrete actions of their commitments,” Mali and Burkina Faso deployed combat aircraft to Niger, reported *RTN*. The news agency added that 311 trucks carrying various goods from Burkina Faso had arrived in Niger over the weekend.

Shortly after the coup, ECOWAS suspended Niger and proceeded, along with the West African Economic and Monetary Union, to impose extreme, sweeping sanctions on the land-locked country, including closing down borders, a ban on commercial flights, the suspension of commercial transactions and financial assistance, and the freezing of national state assets in both the regional central bank (the BCEAO) and commercial banks.

The border closures have also wreaked havoc on the [livelihoods](#) of communities living in the surrounding areas.

Aid agencies have warned of the drastic toll these measures will have on the already

precarious humanitarian conditions in Niger, including putting two million children at risk of severe malnutrition. Niger's dependency on aid, with foreign financing accounting for 40% of the national budget, is very much a function of the decades of neo-colonial extraction that have created a situation where despite being among the world's biggest producers of uranium, over 40% of Niger's population is [impoverished](#).

This manufacturing of aid dependency, which is then used as a tool of coercion, has had disastrous consequences for other countries around the world who have been subject to similar imperialist and neo-colonial interventions.

CNSP to hold “inclusive national dialogue” to outline transition period

In a televised address on the evening of August 19, Tchiani reaffirmed that an ECOWAS intervention would be treated as an occupation and that Niger would respond to any aggression while also warning that an intervention would affect all countries in the region. He also stated that the CNSP was ready to engage in any dialogue accepted by the people.

Meanwhile, huge crowds of people gathered outside a stadium in Niamey on Saturday to sign up for “The Mobilization of Young People for the Homeland” as volunteers for defense roles in the event of an intervention.

Tchiani stated further that Niger would not surrender to ECOWAS sanctions, calling them illegal and inhumane and aimed at dividing and subjugating the country and its people, noting that the measures had led to the loss of medical materials at the border.

Notably, Tchiani proposed a three-year transition period for the country — “We do not seek power, but we will not accept the [subjugation] of the will of the people” — and announced the convening of a 30-day “Inclusive National Dialogue” between the

CNSP and the people, to define the fundamental principles that should govern the transition, its duration, and the national priorities during this period.

Meanwhile, people's movements in the region have continued to express their vehement rejection of the ECOWAS's planned intervention as well as the "illegal and barbaric" sanctions imposed on Niger. Warning that the danger of an "imperialist war being unleashed against the peoples of Niger, and a subsequent general conflagration in the sub-region" had continued to grow, the West Africa Peoples Organisation (WAPO) expressed its solidarity with the "besieged people of Niger" in a statement on August 16.

It has called upon all its member as well as non-member organizations to protest at French embassies in their respective countries, to demand the dismantling of every foreign military base from the sub-region, and has called for the urgent lifting of all sanctions against Niger. It has also called for the establishment of Solidarity Committees in every country to express their rejection of "the current imperialist aggression against the peoples of the Sahel and Niger."

This work has already started in parts of the region, WAPO Secretary General, Kafui Kan-Senaya, told *Peoples Dispatch*, including with the launch of the Benin-Niger Solidarity Campaign, which has denounced the "illegal, criminal and inhuman sanctions of ECOWAS" and called for the "immediate cessation of war preparations" and saying no to the deployment of the Benin Armed Forces for the intervention.

Moreover, he added that civil society organizations and even retired military personnel who had participated in ECOWAS' intervention in Liberia have "joined the fray to protest and demand a stop to the senseless war preparations."

Source: [Peoples Dispatch](https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2023/08/23/the-people-do-not-want-war-mass-protests-continue-in-niger-against-ecowas-threats/)



<https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2023/08/23/the-people-do-not-want-war-mass-protests-continue-in-niger-against-ecowas-threats/>