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**UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL &
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CRISIS DEBRIEF

The Situation In Niger

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JOINT CRISIS BRIEFING

The Coup d'Etat

On the early morning of 26 July 2023, General Abdourahamane Tiani (who served as the Chief of the Nigerien Presidential Guard from 2011-2023) led an insurgency that ultimately overthrew the government of Niger and took former president Mohamed Bazoum hostage.¹ The military *coup d'état* /coo-day-tah/ not only came with the capturing of former president Mohamed Bazoum but was also met with the seizure of power and the suspension of the Nigerien constitution. The junta –a military group that rules a country after taking power by force– is comprised of various senior officers from various branches of Nigers defense and security forces and named themselves the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Homeland (CNSP).² Citizens were notified of the seizure of power via televised broadcasts, and on the same day as the attack, Nigers citizens were met with the following message from the CNSP: “We, the CNSP, have decided to put an end to the regime, you know. This follows the continuing deterioration of security and poor economic and social governance. Land and air borders are closed until the situation has stabilized.” The following day, the Nigerien Armed Forces joined the CNSP, citing their intent “to avoid lethal confrontation and to safeguard the president and his family.”³ Following the coup within Niger, many Western nations, such as the United States of America as well as the French Republic, condemned this act of violence within Niger but did not initially classify the insurrection as a coup. On a more regional level, members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) condemned the act of treason within Niger. They threatened sanctions and military intervention to pressure the junta to reinstate President Mohamed Bazoum, giving them a 1-week ultimatum.⁴

Deep Rooted Turmoil

The situation in Niger is not happening in a vacuum and is a common occurrence within the confines of the Sahel region, which marks a semiarid region of western Africa that, over the past couple of decades, has seen a rise in jihadist insurgencies. These jihadist insurgencies have caused widespread fear and panic to spread within the Sahel region,⁵ and many nations within the area have joined forces to combat these various groups, which have deep-rooted ties to various established terrorist organizations classified by the United States Department of State (and various other nations) such as ISIS and Al Qaeda. The rising threat of terrorism within the region has put West African nations on high alert for imminent attacks that may stem from the emergence of The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) as well as Jama'At Nusrat Al-Islam Wal-Muslimin (JNIM).⁶ These acts of terror on West African countries both instill fear within their populations and have created economic and social instability within the Sahel region. On October 3rd, 2023, at least 29 Nigerien soldiers were killed in one of the deadliest attacks in the year 2023 alone.⁷ According to the Niger Defense Ministry, “The soldiers were killed by hundreds of jihadists using improvised explosive devices and kamikaze vehicles.”

¹ Aksar, Moussa, and Boureima Balima. 2023. “The Niger General Who Ousted a President He Was Meant to Protect.” Reuters, July 31, 2023.

² Aksar, Moussa, and Boureima Balima. 2023. “Niger Soldiers President Bazoum’s Government Has Been Removed.” Reuters, July 28, 2023.

³ Nsaibia, Hèni. 2023. “Fact Sheet: Military Coup in Niger.” ACLED. August 23, 2023.

⁴ Mednick, Sam, and Chinedu Asadu. 2023. “Western Officials: Niger Junta Warned They’d Kill Deposed President After Any Military Intervention | AP News.” AP News, August 10, 2023.

⁵ “Violent Extremism in the Sahel | Global Conflict Tracker.” n.d. Global Conflict Tracker.

⁶ Nctc. n.d. “National Counterterrorism Center | FTOs.” https://www.dni.gov/nctc/ftos/jnim_fto.html.

⁷ Jazeera, Al. 2023. “A Dozen Soldiers Killed After Rebel Attack in Southwest Niger.” Al Jazeera, September 29, 2023.

The defense ministry also noted that various terrorists were killed in a counter-offensive operation in response to this attack.⁸ These attacks highlight the reality of terror within the Sahel region. Niger is not the only victim of these heinous crimes, and this question of “What can be done?” has puzzled leaders within Niger; the resulting confusion has seen the citizens of Niger begin to take matters into their own hands.

The International Stage

The *coup d'état* in Niger on 26 July 2023 catalyzed significant international condemnation and punitive actions. The African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) responded to the coup by suspending Niger's membership, citing an unconstitutional change of government.⁹ Nigeria, which is one of Niger's bordering neighbors, cut off all electricity to Niger following the coup on August 3rd, 2023, citing fear of potential spillover across the border.¹⁰ ECOWAS members such as Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria introduced the idea of military intervention to restore constitutional order; however, this aggressive measure was rebuked by the AUPSC, which instead advocated for dialogue between ECOWAS and Niger's emergent junta despite their decision to suspend the nation from its council.¹¹ The AUPSC recognized and responded to the unconstitutionality of the coup, but would not go so far as to support a military operation to restore the previous government. Tensions further escalated on 15 December 2023 between ECOWAS and the Nigerien junta when Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali were temporarily suspended from ECOWAS after failing to comply with the organization's deadlines for returning to civilian governance.¹² Mali and Burkina Faso then portended that any ECOWAS military intervention would constitute a *de facto* declaration of war against their nations. Concurrently, France, the former colonial power of all three nations, withdrew all military forces from the region and shut down its embassy in Niger following the coup as well as attacks on the French Embassy, which was set ablaze and was the center of protests in support of the coup.¹³

On 30 July 2023, the Nigerien junta began to receive support nationwide as many citizens took to the streets and called for the expulsion of French forces. It was reported within the region that many citizens were waving Russian flags while also voicing their long-term opposition to France, stating, “They've exploited all the riches of my country such as uranium, petrol, and gold. Since childhood, I've been opposed to France. I'm pro-Russian, and I don't like France.”¹⁴ This apparent Nigerien shift towards Russia cannot be taken with a grain of salt: it has become evident within recent years that the Western bloc has lost much of its geopolitical influence in the African Continent. This comes after many initiatives stemming from members of the opposing permanent bloc of the Security Council, Russia, and China. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has led several African nations to pivot away from their traditional Western partners and towards deeper engagement with the Russia-China bloc. China has become the continent's largest trading partner and external creditor through major investments in African infrastructure and development projects under the BRI framework. This growing

⁸ Jazeera, Al. 2023. “A Dozen Soldiers Killed After Rebel Attack in Southwest Niger.” Al Jazeera, September 29, 2023.

⁹ “Communique of the 1164th Meeting of the PSC Held on 28 July 2023, on the Situation in the Republic of Niger - Niger.” 2023. ReliefWeb.

¹⁰ AfricaNews. 2023. “Nigeria Cuts Electricity to Niger After Coup.” Africanews. August 2, 2023.

¹¹ Sotubo, Oluwatimilehin. 2023. “ECOWAS: In Need of Help in Niger?” RAND. August 25, 2023.

¹² Premium Times. 2023. “ECOWAS Finally Suspends Niger Republic.” Premium Times Nigeria. December 15, 2023.

¹³ Rfi. 2023. “France Ends Decade of Missions in Sahel as Last Troops Leave Niger.” RFI, December 22, 2023.

¹⁴ The Associated Press. 2023. “Supporters of Niger's Coup March, Waving Russian Flags and Denouncing France.” NPR, July 30, 2023.

economic dependence on China has reduced some African countries' reliance on Western aid and loans.¹⁵ Simultaneously, Russia has built military and diplomatic ties across Africa, supplanting France's previously unrivaled influence in its former colonies.¹⁶ African nations increasingly see Russia and China as attractive alternatives to the West due to their "no-strings-attached" development financing and military assistance. By leveraging the BRI's economic influence and Russia's growing strategic partnerships, the Russia-China bloc has successfully drawn key African nations like Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Mali into its orbit and away from their traditional Western allies.

The Wagner Group

The recent coup in Niger is likely to lead to deeper military ties between Niger and Russia, mirroring similar developments in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso after their recent coups. Following the ouster of their former governments, Mali and Burkina Faso established security partnerships with the Kremlin-linked Wagner Group, a private military contractor. The Wagner Group has deployed mercenary forces to help train local militaries and conduct counterterrorism operations, shoring up the new junta regimes.¹⁷ Already, there are signs that Niger may follow suit, with the Wagner Group potentially offering military support to Niger's new junta in exchange for mining rights.¹⁸ Russia stands to gain greater influence in the region by securing military basing and mining deals through the activities of para-military actors like the Wagner Group. These private military contractors allow Russia to project hard power abroad while maintaining a veneer of plausible deniability about direct state intervention. The Wagner Group's expanding footprint after coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and potentially Niger demonstrates how Russia can leverage political instability in Africa to further its strategic interests.

What lies ahead

The coup in Niger and the country's pivot towards Russia is the latest example of the shifting geopolitical dynamics in Africa. As Western influence wanes, authoritarian regimes fill the vacuum by providing security assistance and economic deals without political conditions. This represents a concerning trend that threatens democratic consolidation and human rights in the region. The international community, particularly organizations like the African Union and ECOWAS, must urgently develop a unified strategy to address the rise of authoritarianism. Rather than ineffective suspensions or divisive military interventions, multilateral institutions should focus on incentives and accountability mechanisms to promote transparent and democratic governance. Additionally, Western nations must re-engage with African partners through development aid, counterterrorism cooperation, and mutually beneficial trade and investment. By taking a nuanced, carrot-and-stick approach, the international community can check unfavorable trends and put countries like Niger back on the path toward stability and democracy. Timely and unified action is needed to stem the tide of authoritarianism and prevent long-term geopolitical realignment away from liberal values.

¹⁵ "China in Africa: The Role of Trade, Investments, and Loans Amidst Shifting Geopolitical Ambitions." n.d. Orfonline.Org.

¹⁶ Lawal, Shola. 2023. "Au Revoir, Sahel: Did 2023 Crush France's Influence in Africa?" Al Jazeera, December 31, 2023.

¹⁷ Verbiyani, Volodymyr. 2024 "Russia Recruiting Africa Army Replace Wagner Group's Mercenaries." Bloomberg., January 30, 2024.

¹⁸ Mednick, Sam. 2023. "Niger's Junta Asks for Help From Russian Group Wagner as It Faces Military Intervention Threat | AP News." AP