

# [***Russia's New Military Alliance Encroaching on US Sphere of Influence***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B90-C2G1-JBR6-9007-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 514 words

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**Highlight:** Niger's role in fighting militants, and uranium and energy reserves, make it important for the West but Moscow is gaining influence in the West African state.

**Body**

Russia's drive for closer military ties with Niger shows Moscow's determination to boost its presence in West Africa, posing a challenge for the U.S., which has a significant stake in the former French colony, an analyst of the region has said.

The country has been under military rule since [*General Abdourahamane Tiani ousted President Mohamed Bazoum*](https://www.newsweek.com/niger-coup-proxy-war-between-russia-west-what-we-know-1816944?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)in July 2023. In a pivot away from Paris, the junta expelled French troops and cut security pacts with Europe, sparking fears that Moscow would step in to fill the void.

Niger's role in fighting Islamist militants in the Sahel region plus its uranium and energy reserves make it strategically important for the West.

However, in January, Russia's defense ministry said it would develop military cooperation with Niger, including "increasing the combat readiness" of the country's military.

"Russia is definitely increasing its foothold on the region and trying to expand its military cooperation," Olayinka Ajala, senior lecturer in ***politics*** and international relations at Leeds Beckett University in the U.K., told *Newsweek*.

The West Africa analyst said it was significant Russia deployed 100 soldiers as part of its new Africa Corps in neighboring Burkina Faso, where there was a coup in September 2022. Russia has also inserted itself into Mali, whose junta welcomed Russia's Wagner mercenary group after a coup in 2021.

Mali and Burkina Faso have offered mining concessions in return for arms, ammunition and mercenaries, the *Africa Defense Forum (ADF)* magazine, published by U.S. Africa Command, said in March 2023

"But Niger is more strategic for Russia," said Ajala, noting that it is the site of the Niger Air Base 201, near Agedez in central Niger, which is operated by the [*U.S. military*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/u.s.-military?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

The U.S. called the overthrow of Bazoum "an effort to seize power by force" and cut aid to Niger by more than $500 million, also removing from its duty free export program. Ajala said if Washington labeled it a coup, it runs the risk of having to leave the country "and they know that any void left will be filled by Russia and China."

Moscow was also motivated to disrupt the $13 billion Trans-Saharan gas pipeline between Nigeria and the [*European Union*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/european-union?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), that runs through Niger, and when completed will lessen reliance on Russian energy.

"Russia would not want that to happen because it would weaken them," Ajala said. "With Russia an ally of Niger, it will be more difficult for that pipeline to be constructed."

Following the coup, France and the regional economic bloc ECOWAS threatened to use force to reinstate the deposed president, but Russia, which did not formally back the coup, warned against military action.

Ajala said that Russia does not have any troops on the ground in Niger at the moment, "but it's only a matter of time if Russia continues to have its way."

"They probably will start sending members of the military for training and reconnaissance and then this could then expand further with heavy machinery," he said.

*Newsweek* has contacted the Russian foreign ministry and Niger's consulate in London for comment.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2346454/niger-russia-flag.jpg)

**Graphic**

Niger and Russia flag

Getty Images

Supporters of Niger's National Council for Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) hold up Niger's and Russia's flag at the General Seyni Kountche stadium in Niamey on Agust 26, 2023.

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