

Huge protests in Niger demand French forces to leave



Niamey, September 4 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of protesters converged outside a French military base in Niger, demanding its 1,500 soldiers leave as France shows no sign it will comply after a coup d'etat removed the elected president.

Outside the base, demonstrators slit the throat of a goat dressed in French colours and carried coffins draped in French flags over the weekend as a line of Nigerien soldiers looked on. Others carried signs demanding France to depart. "We are ready to sacrifice ourselves today because we are proud," said one protester. "They plundered our resources, and we became aware. So they're going to get out."

It was the largest gathering since the July 26 coup, indicating support for the new military leadership is not waning.

France had cordial relations with overthrown President Mohamed Bazoum. President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday he spoke to the deposed Nigerien leader every day and "the decisions we will take, whatever they may be, will be based upon exchanges with Bazoum."

Anti-French sentiment rose further last week when France ignored a military order for its ambassador, Sylvain Itte, to leave. Police have been instructed to expel him.

The July coup -- one of eight in West and Central Africa since 2020 -- has raised the question of foreign neo-colonialism on the continent. Most affected is France, whose influence over its former colonies has waned in West Africa in recent years as popular vitriol has grown. Its forces have been kicked out of neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso since coups in those countries.

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