

Summary

The Nigerien coup of July 26, 2023 and, subsequently, the possible military intervention by ECOWAS have increased the potential for regional destabilization. Protests remain likely throughout West-Africa, both in favour of and against the Nigerien Junta, as well as against the military intervention. In addition, pro-Niger coup protests might carry anti-Western sentiment. Furthermore, the disruption caused by the coup is likely to lead to increased terrorist activity throughout West Africa and the Sahel.

Recent events and developments

On July 26, 2023, the Nigerien presidential guard overthrew Niger's president Mohamed Bazoum, with general Abdourahmane Tchiani proclaiming himself the leader of the new military junta. In response, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), chaired by Nigerian president Bola Tinubu announced on July 30 that it would intervene militarily if Bazoum was not reinstated within 7 days. Although ECOWAS did not act upon this threat, Mali and Burkina Faso sent military support and declared that an intervention would be treated as a declaration of war. Public opinion in many ECOWAS nations seems to oppose the intervention, with Nigeria's influential labour union NLC announcing that it will consider a nationwide strike. Protests have also occurred in Ghana, Benin, and northern Nigeria. These have taken place both in favour of and against the coup, and against the military intervention. Nevertheless, on August 10 ECOWAS ordered the activation of a standby force, further escalating the threat. On August 21, it insisted that Niger's junta's proposal for a 3-year transition period increased the likelihood of the organisation using force to depose the junta.

Impact assessment

While no demonstrations have been registered in favour of a military response by ECOWAS, the organisation's interventionist rhetoric is likely to further fuel protests which may increase in intensity over time in West African nations. These demonstrations will concentrate on regions bordering Niger, although big cities throughout West Africa could also experience turmoil. As anti-Western sentiment is an important theme in the Niger coup, Westerners can be targeted in protests supporting the Nigerien junta. This hatred can grow amid the European economic sanctions. Military intervention could also destabilise ECOWAS nations as they divert resources that are necessary to maintain internal security. In northern Nigeria, for example, the threat of Islamic terrorism could rise if the Nigerian military redirects its attention to Niger.

Thus, Islamic terrorism is expected to rise in the Sahel. Western antiterrorism efforts in the region strongly relied upon cooperation with Niger. Therefore, the installation of an anti-Western junta will severely weaken the West's ability to combat terrorism, especially French and EU operations.

Advice from Forth Global

- Make sure all employees travelling to ECOWAS countries undertake a 3-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Monitor local news and liaise with local contacts to be informed of relevant developments.
- Avoid all non-essential travel to regions bordering Niger. If travel is necessary, staff should plan their journey ahead, check the state of roads, and be aware of potential checkpoints and roadblocks.
- Advise staff to avoid protests and other demonstrations due to the risk of being targeted.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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