

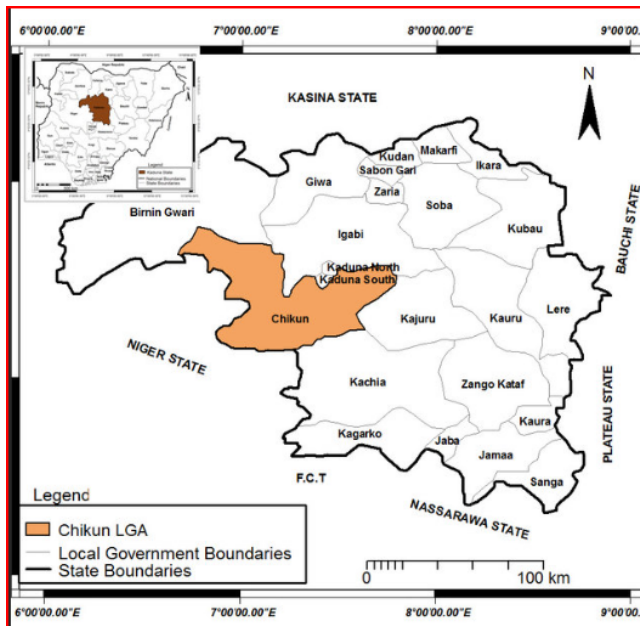
Nigeria: Digital Leadership; Niger: US Military Pact, Back in ECOWAS

EDITORIAL COMMENTS: on KIDNAPPING of 287 CHILDREN

March 21, 2024

EDITORIAL COMMENTS: on KIDNAPPING of 287 CHILDREN: www.DiGiNews360.com hopes the **Governors** would sincerely **take up the responsibility** of maintaining **Law and Order** in their areas. Till today, only 16 States have submitted their proposals for setting up **State-level Police** systems, while 20 have yet to send their proposals. www.DiGiNews360.com hopes, the **Federal Police** will, from the beginning, establish itself as an **effective and technologically superior force**, which is able to work in **co-ordination with the State Police systems**, and, which maintains a mapping of all jungles and rural areas, which are sparsely populated.

www.DiGiNews360.com is worried about the **287 children, kidnapped from L.E.A Primary and Secondary School in Kuriga village, in Kaduna's Chikun District** on March 7, 2024. The kidnappers stormed a government primary school, shortly after morning assembly at 8am, and took the pupils hostage before any help could come.



Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, a prominent Muslim cleric, has offered to get the 287 students released, if the government asks him to negotiate with the kidnappers. He is a former army captain, who has, during the previous years, worked as a middleman with the gangs indulging in the kidnap-for-ransom acts in Kaduna State.

In addition, there has been continuous news about **kidnappings from Abuja**, where the President and the Chiefs of Security organizations stay. Kidnappers have recently struck in the **rural areas of SouthWest Nigeria** area also.

www.DiGiNews360.com warns against encouraging persons like **Sheikh Gumi** by seeking their help in such cases. Short-cuts of using this kind of persons, rather than strengthening and making the Police system effective, must be avoided by those, who want **to make Nigeria safe for all its citizens within a short period**.

Bola Tinubu took over as the 16th President of Nigeria on **May 29, 2023** after promising to end the insecurity, caused by kidnappings and associated violence. But, www.DiGiNews360.com notes that there has been **no tangible improvement in security** for ordinary citizens and the gangs of kidnappers continue to strike at will.

www.DiGiNews360.com notes the recent steps for creation of State-level Police systems. But an **efficient Police system**, consisting of both **Federal and State Police systems, working together effectively**, will be required, if President **Bola Tinubu** is to fulfil his promise of security to the satisfaction of Nigerians.

www.DiGiNews360.com hopes President **Bola Tinubu** proves to be a **Jagaban**, (means a "leader of warriors" - a title from **the Emir of Borgu in Niger state**). We hope Jagaban **Tinubu** will succeed in winning over the feeling of widespread insecurity and separatism in a country that is retreating into regional lines and religious blocs, as the election results showed. (Reference: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61732548>)

www.DiGiNews360.com believes that the Nigerian State has the strength and the resources, and, the Nigerians have the education and intelligence to be able to build a great place, where people from all over the world, would like to come and set up their homes.

March 21, 2024: Abuja, Nigeria: "Nigeria poised to lead Africa in DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY," said the President to META: On Thursday, President **Bola Tinubu** received a delegation from **Meta Platforms Inc**, led by **Sir Nick Clegg**, 'former UK Deputy Prime Minister (from 11 May 2010 to 8 May 2015) of Liberal Democratic Party' and **Meta's President of Global Affairs**. The President said that Nigeria would implement the Sustainability Reporting Standards, which safeguard the environment in Nigeria. At a meeting with Mr. **Emmanuel Faber**, Chair of the **International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB)**, **President Tinubu** endorsed the launch of Nigeria's Adoption Readiness Roadmap by the **Financial Reporting Council (FRC)** in collaboration with ISSB.



The President said that transparency of reporting, by businesses in Nigeria, will **benefit Africa and the humanity**, as a whole. **Dr. Rabiu Olowo**, the Executive Secretary of FRC said that voluntary adoption by businesses of the ‘best practices’ will help when Nigeria will have to **mandatorily adopt the standards in 2028**.

Earlier, **Kashim Shettima**, the Vice-President of Nigeria and Chairman of the **National Economic Council (NEC)** had launched the Investment of \$617 Mn in **Digital and Creative Enterprises (i-DICE)** in 36 States of the Federation and in FCT. VP **Shettima** asked the Governors to nominate the right persons to represent each Geo-political zone and to lead the implementation of the program in their respective States. The program aims **to create 100,000 jobs** through i-DICE.

March 21, 2024: **Abuja**, Nigeria: ESTABLISHMENT of STATE POLICE: 16 States have sent in their proposals while 20 States were yet to submit their proposals.

The Vice-President said that creation of **State Police systems** was an important step for **improvement of Law and Order** in Nigeria and every State will have to take up the implementation of the proposal as a first priority.

March 21, 2024: **Abuja**, Nigeria: **Dr. Jumoke Oduwole**, Special Adviser to the President on EASE of DOING BUSINESS and the nation received a Report on the

work done by the Secretariat of **Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC)**.

March 20, 2024: **Abuja**, Nigeria: NATIONAL COUNCIL ON SKILLS (NCS): **Kashim Shettima**, the Vice-President of Nigeria said that the re-constituted Council should aim at cultivating a skilled workforce, capable of contributing to both national and international endeavors.



The Vice-President highlighted the importance of **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)** as the 4th pillar of NCS program.

---NEWS about NIGER---

March 19, 2024: Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary **Sabrina Singh** said that a high-level U.S. delegation, led by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs **Molly Phee**, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs **Dr. Celeste Wallander**, and the commander of U.S. Africa Command **General Michael Langley**, had traveled to Niger for a meeting with the **Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie (CNSP – meaning “National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland”)**. The U.S. delegation met with a CNSP delegation led by **Ali Lamine Zeine**, the Prime Minister of Niger and several Cabinet ministers, as well as technical experts and advisors. The lengthy and direct discussions included an exchange of views on how to chart a new path of cooperation forward.

Dr. Wallander and General Langley also had a separate meeting with the Chief of the General Staff of the Nigerien Armed Forces.



*Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary **Sabrina Singh***

The US delegation had also met with civil society organizations and diplomats from other partner nations and international organizations.

The basic issue for USA is Niger's decision to move closer to Russia, after throwing out the French and other European forces, who were asking the Military junta to restore back democracy and the deposed President **Mohamed Bazoum**.

Debt Default and Economic Challenges: Niger has faced economic challenges, including debt defaults since the coup. The country's **total debt default since last July is now \$519 million**. Before the military coup in July 2023, the US was a significant contributor of aid to Niger.

The US delegation had expressed **concern over Niger's potential relationships with Russia and Iran**. The Wall Street Journal reported on Sunday, March 17, 2024 that the US delegation, that visited Niamey last week, accused the Nigerien government

of working on a deal to supply uranium to Iran. (*Niger is the world's seventh-largest uranium producer.*)

After a dispute over Niger's ties to Russia and Iran, during the discussions between the two delegations, Niger suspended the "**Status of Forces**" military agreement, signed in 2012, with the United States, which permitted about 1,000 US military personnel and civilian defense staff to operate from Niger, and, which provided American troops with **a key base and launchpad in Africa's Sahel region**. This move came. Another ostensible reason, that could be cited by Niger, is that the US presence in the country has failed to completely crush the activities of armed Jehadi groups there.

Niger has been under military rule since **July 26, 2023** when an elite guard force led by **General Abdourahamane Tchiani** detained democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum and declared **General Tchiani**, as the new President.

Immediately after the coup, **Yevgeny Prigozhin**, the late founder of the Russian state-funded Wagner military group, hailed the coup as a long-overdue liberation from Western colonizers.

"Niger regrets the intention of the American delegation to deny the **sovereign** Nigerien people the **right to choose their partners** and **types of partnerships capable of truly helping them fight against terrorism,**" said **Colonel Amadou Abdramane**, the Niger military spokesperson, after the meeting with US Delegation.

Niger's military leader, **General Abdourahamane Tchiani**, refused to meet the delegation. Local media reported that **Molly Phee** met **Ali Lamine Zeine**, the Prime Minister in Niamey.

March 16, 2024: Washington D.C.: **Matthew Miller**, the spokesperson, US State Department, said on X that USA was aware of the statement from CNSP in Niger. He said that USA was in touch with CNSP and would provide further updates, as warranted. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/did-russia-iran-provoke-niger-walkout-from-us-military-pact/ar-BB1kaoVE>

February 25, 2024: **Abuja**, Nigeria: **LIFTING SANCTIONS** on NIGER: Just eight months after imposing sanctions on **Niger**, after a **Military coup on July 24, 2023**, **President Tinubu** has lifted all the restrictions, since these proved to be highly unpopular.

Nigeria and Niger share **strong ethnic, economic and cultural ties**, with families living either side of the border. Closing the border and cutting off the electricity, which caused **blackouts in cities across Niger**, also angered many. Trade suffered - and **essentials such as cement** could no longer be imported by the landlocked country. The poor communities on both sides had suffered most.

In **Nigeria**, business in the **northern city of Kano** - an **economic hub for the region** - was greatly affected because of the sanctions.

In the Ramadan month of fasting, 'Lifting sanctions on Niger' is good news for the economy. Niger has always been Nigeria's friend and this move will go a long way to repair the damaged relationship.

After military coups, **Niger, Burkina Faso** and **Mali** had been suspended from ECOWAS, at different times. ECOWAS has been urging them to return to democracy.

The three military regimes did not listen to ECOWAS. Instead, **Niger**, along with its fellow juntas in **Burkina Faso** and **Mali**, hugely increased the stakes by saying they would pull out of ECOWAS altogether. **The trio** went ahead to **form an alliance**, to **severe ties with France**, and to **forge closer relations with Russia and Iran**.



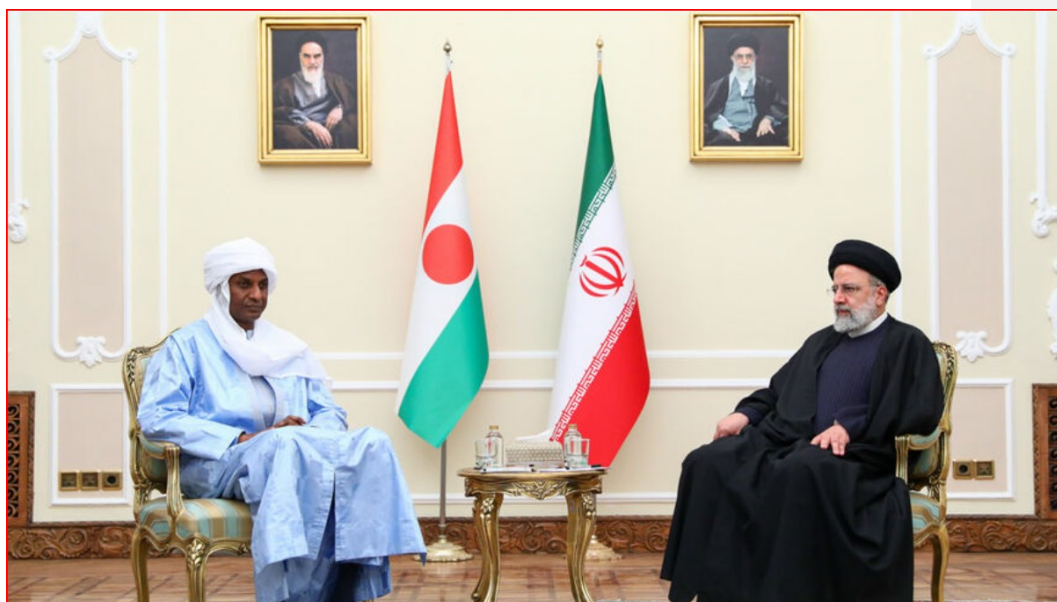
December 4, 2023: Niamey, Niger: Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, Russia's Deputy Defense Minister

A Russian delegation, led by **Yunus-Bek Yevkurov**, **Russia's** Deputy Defense Minister, visited **Niamey** on December 4, 2023.

In Mali, Russian soldiers have been training the military government's officers. Wagner, the Russian paramilitary group, has a presence there. And relations between Mali and the US are strained: In July 2023, the US sanctioned officials in Mali's military for ties with Wagner fighters. The military juntas in Mali and Burkina Faso are on friendly terms. So, it is possible that after France withdrew its troops from Burkina Faso, which has been under

military rule since a 2022 coup, the Wagner's Group may also be providing military support to the regime in Burkina Faso.

In January 2024, Nigerien Prime Minister **Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine** visited Moscow to discuss military and economic ties. On January 25, 2024, **Zeine** also visited Iran, where he met **Ebrahim Raisi**, the President of Iran.



January 25, 2024: **Tehran, Iran: Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi with Niger's Prime Minister Ali Lamine Zeine**

----A BACKGROUNDER on NIGER----

Republic of the Niger is a member of the **West African Economic and Monetary Union** (WAEMU, also known as UEMOA in French, *Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine*), that share CFA Franc. The exchange rate of CFA Franc is tied to that of the **euro** and is guaranteed by the **French Treasury**. WAEMU is both a Customs Union and Currency Union. It is an organization of seven French-language West

African states (Estd. January 10, 1994) and Guinea-Bissau, the 8th member, which joined on 2 May 1997, and, which is a former Portuguese colony). WAEMU is within the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**.

Niger **borders seven countries** and has a total perimeter of 5,697 Km. **Nigeria, Chad, Algeria, Mali Burkina Faso, Benin and Libya.**

Niger's terrain is predominantly desert plains and sand dunes, with flat to rolling savanna (A savanna is a grassy woodland ecosystem characterized by the trees being sufficiently widely spaced so that the canopy does not close. The open canopy allows sufficient light to reach the ground to support an unbroken herbaceous layer consisting primarily of grasses.) in the south and hills in the Air Mountains, in the north. The highest point is **Mont Idoukal-n-Taghès** at 2,022 m (6,634 ft).

Niger is more than twice the size of France, and the world's 21st largest country.

Though, Niger is well known as one of the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Niger is the fourth largest uranium producer in the world. Niger also has coal, gold, iron ore, tin, phosphates, petroleum, molybdenum, salt, and gypsum. Niger has a good amount of oil reserves, which is being exploited by a Chinese company. But, the information about the quantum of its oil-reserves is not known in the public domain.

Niger was a member of the **Organisation internationale de la Francophonie**, representing countries and regions where French is the first or customary language, where a significant proportion of the population are francophones (French speakers) or where there is a notable affiliation with French culture. Niger's Membership was suspended due to a military coup on July 26, 2023.

The US military Airbase 201, built from 2016 to 2019 at a cost of more than \$100Mn, near Agadez, a city 920 Km NorthEast of **Niamey**, is used for **manned and unmanned surveillance flights** and other operations in the Sahel. The base is one of the biggest drone facilities the US has in Africa. It has been used since 2018 to launch drone operations against armed groups linked to **ISIL (ISIS)** and **al-Qaeda** in the Sahel. After the coup, the US military consolidated its forces in Niger, moving some of its soldiers from Air Base 101 in the capital to Air Base 201.

Niger is the center of US operations in West and North Africa. Having a base in the Sahel is important for great power projection against countries like Russia and China. Hence, USA may make efforts to retain the base in Niger.



US Base 101: **Niamey** (capital of Niger), located in **TILLABERI**, in the Southern part.

US Base 201: **Agadez**, located in **AGADEZ**, in the NorthEastern part.

Capital and largest city: **Niamey** (Population: About 1 Mn)

Other cities (population of more than 100,000): **Maradi, Zinder, Tahoua, Agadez**

Population (2023 Estimate): 25.4 Mn (56th); Area: 1,267,000 Km² (21st); Density: 12.1/Km²

GDP (2023 Estimate): \$17.1 Bn (145th); GDP/ capita \$630 (185th)

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EDITORIAL COMMENT on NIGER: The view-point of www.DiGiNews360.com is that Military juntas are not bothered about elimination of poverty or about optimum use of natural resources for serving the nation.

Since military regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso have survived in spite of attacks by Jehadi armed groups, the US bases may not seem to be of any crucial value. Secondly, the Wagner's Group may be providing military support to Mali and the same may have been assured to Niger also.

The UN, the French and the US military support has not succeeded in eliminating the Jehadi depredations in Africa due to the following reasons:

- The UN and the West have to respect national boundaries, whereas the Jehadi armed groups are trans-national in their operations.*
- They also have to diligently respect human rights of the local people, when there is no easy way of differentiating between the civilians and the Jehadis. This makes it easy for the Jehadis to survive.*

At the moment, the Sahel region, in spite of these partnerships, remains the center spot for terrorism in the world. However, these partnerships have ensured that the Jehadis remain in the borderlands between countries and they are not able to upset the stability of governments in the countries of Africa.

The military regimes have been known to be brutal even in dealing with their own citizens. So, it is possible that without the support of UN, US or French military support, the military regimes may be able to survive. It is also possible that these regimes may be able to buy military support from the Wagner's Group or from some Chinese Groups, interested in using some natural resource, available in a commercially-exploitable quantity.

The view-point of www.DiGiNews360.com is that the military regimes will lead to keeping the lives of the poor miserable, whereas there is no reason for the people in the 21st century not to have a life of dignity with proper education and use of technology.
