

## *Niger: Extremism & Terrorism*

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On February 15, 2024, the junta governments of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger confirmed the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) confederation to further distance the three countries from other regional decision-making blocs. A month earlier, the three Sahelian states withdrew from the Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS), further compromising broader West African cooperation. The (AES) pact was signed on September 16, 2023, to guarantee mutual military support to one another in the instance of any rebellion or external aggression. Details of how AES will cooperate along political, economic, and military lines have not been revealed, but in recent years the three have further distanced themselves from the region and closer to Russia. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [Reuters](#))

On December 4, 2023, Nigerien military authorities reportedly “signed documents to strengthen military co-operation between the Republic of Niger and the Russian Federation.” The details of the deal have not been revealed, however, Niger is currently tackling a multipronged insurgency perpetrated by the regional affiliates of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. As the Kremlin’s relationship with Niger’s junta has formalized, the government in Niamey has further distanced itself from its former Western partners by terminating its participation in two ongoing stabilization programs in the country, the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Sahel Niger) and the EU Military Partnership Mission (EUMPM). The EUCAP was designed to build up Niger’s civil society and the EUMPM attempted to strengthen Niger’s response to violent extremist insurgencies. (Sources: [Times](#), [Le Monde](#))

A month following its July 2023 coup, Niger experienced a 42 percent increase in political violence, the highest levels since March 2021. Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) significantly increased its attacks, targeting civilians four times as much in August as in July of 2023. Al-Qaeda affiliate Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), the other prominent terror group in the region, also exploited the political upheaval and carried out high casualty attacks on military forces. Mass casualty attacks continued through the year. On October 3, more than 100 jihadists ambushed soldiers in western Tahoua region, killing 29 and wounding two others. The attack came shortly after news of France’s decision, under pressure from the ruling junta, to withdraw its remaining 1,500 troops from the country. (Sources: [Le Monde](#), [Newsweek](#), [Armed Conflict Location and Event Database](#), [BBC News](#))

Since the July 2023 coup, Niger has drawn inward, cooperating with a few neighboring countries rather than continuing relationships with France and other Western nations. Burkina Faso and Niger further compromised regional cooperation in December 2023 following their withdrawal from the G5 Sahel, a counterterrorism force made up of states across the Sahel. The G5 was first deployed in 2014 to offset developing terrorist threats in the region. However, according to Burkina Faso and Niger, “[t]he organization is failing to achieve its objectives.” Niger has previously been a critical Western ally in the fight against violent extremists in the Sahel, especially as junta-led Burkina Faso and Mali have shifted alliances towards Russia. (Sources: [France 24](#), [Africa News](#), [BBC News](#), [Reuters](#))

## **Overview**

Niger is situated in one of the most vulnerable areas of the Sahel, as all seven of the country’s borders face terrorist threats from neighboring countries. Regional affiliates of [ISIS](#) and [al-Qaeda](#), such as Islamic State Sahel (IS Sahel) and [Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin](#) (JNIM)—a conglomeration of three Mali-based groups and [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb](#) (AQIM)—have quickly advanced throughout Niger as Mali and Burkina Faso have failed to deter their spread. The terrorist organizations with the greatest presence across the western and northwestern regions of Niger are JNIM and IS Sahel, while the southeast is ravaged by the [Boko Haram](#) splinter group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Niger has not experienced levels of domestic violent extremism as high as [Burkina Faso](#), [Mali](#), and [Nigeria](#). However, the spillover of violent extremism from surrounding countries has devastated Niger since at least 2013. In the first major terrorist attack in Niger, on May 23, 2013, militants from the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) carried out two suicide bombings targeting Niger armed forces and a French-owned uranium site in northern Niger. The explosion killed at least 20 people. MUJAO was one of the three Salafi jihadist groups that seized control of northern Mali after the military coup in Bamako in March 2012. However, following the deployment of French troops as part of Operation Serval in January 2013, they were driven out of Mali. (Source: [European Union Institute for Security Studies](#))

The Nigeria-based Boko Haram, an ISIS-affiliated jihadist group, became a threatening presence in Niger and claimed its first attack in the country in February 2015. Boko Haram primarily staged attacks in the southwestern Diffa region, on the border with Nigeria. Boko Haram was particularly active between February and October 2015, when it carried out at least 57 attacks in Diffa alone. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [Africa Center](#))

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According to Human Rights Watch, intercommunal tensions between the nomadic Peuhl, the agrarian Zarma across the northwestern Tillabéri region, and Taureg groups in western Tahoua region, have further exacerbated armed conflict in Niger. Clashes are rooted in resource allocation but also prejudice against the Peuhl, who the Zarma and Taureg have accused of siding with Islamist armed groups. The Peuhl therefore have been violently targeted by not only rival ethnic groups considered loyal to the state, but security forces who consider the Peuhl violent insurgents.

(Source: [Human Rights Watch](#))

A former French colony, Niger received military aid and counterinsurgency support from France, the United States, and regional partners. In July 2015, the Multinational Joint Task Force launched operations against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region. With headquarters in N'Djamena, Chad, the force established sectors in Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and Nigeria. The force was made up of 10,000 troops from the four frontline countries and the Republic of Benin. However, on the heels of growing anti-French sentiment fueled by disinformation campaigns by Russian-backed organizations, Niger, like Mali and Burkina Faso before it, fell to a military coup on July 26, 2023. Since the coup led by General Abdourahmane Tchiani, the junta has revoked five military deals with France and suspended counterterrorism military exercises with the United States. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [Guardian](#), [The Conversation](#))

Amid successive coups in the region, violent extremists have intensified their activity along the Niger-Mali border, turning the Sahel into an epicenter of violent extremism and terrorist deaths. However, many Western countries have been forced to terminate development and security aid to the country under its military government, leaving civilians even more vulnerable to terrorist violence and recruitment efforts. (Source: [The Conversation](#))

As Niger remains surrounded by al-Qaeda and ISIS-linked groups, the country has been flooded with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria. Estimates as of 2023 place the number of IDPs at more than 361,000 and refugees at more than 255,000. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [New York Times](#), [ACAPS](#))

### **Radicalization and Extremist Groups**

Islamist groups in Niger have attempted to attract new recruits by capitalizing on ethnic and regional divisions. Ansar al-Dine (AAD) was largely comprised of Tuaregs from the same tribe as its founder and former leader, [Iyad Ag Ghaly](#). Accordingly, the al-Qaeda- and AAD-affiliated Macina Liberation Front (MLF), a Mali-based group that seeks to expel Western influence and establish an Islamic state in the Sahel, is led by extremist preacher [Amadou Koufa](#), an ethnic Fulani who eventually founded JNIM. MLF was understood to be a predominantly Fulani movement. To that end, of the group's 4,000 members, the majority are primarily of Fulani ethnic origin. Although primarily based in Mali, the group conducted attacks across Niger and Burkina Faso as well. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#), [Newsweek](#), [Reuters](#), [National Counterterrorism Center](#), [Marine Corps University Press](#))

Similar to Mali and Burkina Faso, Niger's population is vulnerable to recruitment efforts by militant Islamists who exploit grievances regarding state services and inadequate protection from the national military. IS Sahel and JNIM maintain a violent rivalry, which has led JNIM leaders to collude with local militias to counter IS Sahel. In areas where IS Sahel has a presence, JNIM has benefitted from protecting local clans and communities. In 2023, JNIM met with several armed militia groups in northeastern Mali and signed a non-aggression pact to better combat IS Sahel. Included among the armed groups were the High Council for the Unity of Azawad, an ethnic Tuareg group with ties to AAD; the Permanent Strategic Framework for Peace Security and Development; and the pro-government militia, the Tuareg Imghad Self-Defense Group and Allies. (Sources: [Stratfor](#), [Long War Journal](#))

#### *Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)*

The Nigeria-based Boko Haram is a Salafist-jihadist organization that has subjected Nigeria and its neighbors to violent attacks since 2003. The terror group carried out its first attack in Niger in February 2015 when more than 100 Boko Haram militants ambushed Bosso and Diffa, two southeastern towns near the Nigerian border. The attack killed four soldiers and wounded 13 others before the Nigerien army repelled the attackers. In August 2016, Boko Haram split into two factions, with one faction retaining the Boko Haram name and the other rebranding as Islamic State West Africa Province (Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiya or ISWAP). ISWAP, previously led by the late ISIS-appointed [Abu Musab al-Barnawi](#), regularly carries out attacks in Niger. ISWAP drastically increased its attacks and established strongholds throughout Niger in 2019, forcing the population to provide recruits, pay Islamic tax (*zakat*), and submit to repressive policies, including what is considered *haram* (forbidden) under Islamic law. (Sources: [CNN](#), [Reuters](#), [Brookings Institution](#), [Council on Foreign Relations](#), [BBC News](#), [Economist](#), [Human Rights Watch](#))

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### *Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)*

The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) was founded in 2011 by former AQIM members Hamad el-Khairy and Ahmed el-Tilemsi. While a member of AQIM, Khairy planned the December 2008 abduction of U.N. envoy and Canadian Ambassador Robert Fowler in Niger. In January 2012, Khairy stated that MUJAO's goal was to "impose sharia law across the whole of West Africa." Tilemsi served as the military leader of MUJAO. Previously, while a member of AQIM, Tilemsi played a role in the January 2011 kidnapping of two French nationals in Niger. MUJAO is one of the three Salafi jihadist groups that seized control of northern Mali after the military coup in Bamako in March 2012. However, following the deployment of French troops in Operation Serval in January 2013, they were driven out of the country. On December 7, 2012, the U.S. Department of State placed both Khairy and Tilemsi on its list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists. MUJAO was responsible for one of the first terrorist attacks on Nigerien soil in May 2013. During the attack, two suicide bombers ambushed Nigerien armed forces at a French-owned uranium site in Arlitz, northern Niger. The ambush killed at least 20 people. The group was relatively short-lived as it merged with fellow jihadist group [al-Mourabitoun](#) in 2013 and the remaining members were then absorbed into JNIM. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State, Rewards for Justice](#), [European Council on Foreign Relations](#), [European Union Institute for Security Studies](#))

### *IS Sahel (previously Islamic State in the Greater Sahara ISGS)*

Formerly known as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), IS Sahel has carried out attacks on Niger and Mali since its inception in 2015. In May 2015, [Adnan al-Sahrawi](#) and his followers split from al-Mourabitoun and pledged allegiance to ISIS. IS Sahel reportedly includes members of the Peuhl ethnic group from the Mali-Niger border region. Sahrawi and IS Sahel have carried out several attacks on military targets in Niger. The first major attack occurred in May 2019, when the group ambushed and ultimately killed 28 Nigerien soldiers in the southwestern village of Tongo Tongo in the Tillabéri region near the border with Mali. The U.S. government sanctioned Sahrawi and ISGS in May 2018, with the United Nations following suit in February 2020. During a meeting of G5 Sahel leaders in January 2020, France declared Sahrawi a "major enemy." The French government estimates that in the period since its founding until August 2021, ISGS was responsible for the deaths of 2,000 to 3,000 people in the region. French forces killed Sahrawi in a drone strike in August 2021. (Sources: [United Nations](#), [France 24](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [United Nations Security Council](#))

IS Sahel has operated under its current name since March 2022, as ISIS declared the group a separate province from ISGS. Since then, IS Sahel has regularly targeted civilians and used violence to force communities to submit to their rule. ISGS is the most active militant Islamist group in Niger's jihadist-heavy Tillabéri region, where almost two out of every three ISGS attacks targets civilians. Given the group's growing presence, the terrorist outfit has regularly clashed with JNIM and its affiliated groups to maintain control and revenue from the gold mining hub. In recent years, ISGS has expanded its territorial operations along the Niger-Burkina Faso border and in the Gourma region, south of Timbuktu. (Sources: [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project](#), [European Council on Foreign Relations](#), [Africa Center](#))

### *Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam Wal-Muslimeen (JNIM)*

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal- Muslimeen (JNIM), meaning "The Support Group for Islam and Muslims," is an al-Qaeda-affiliated group based in Mali that has in recent years expanded its operations to Niger, Burkina Faso, and Senegal. As a formal al-Qaeda affiliate in Africa, JNIM is dedicated to dismantling regional governments and implementing *sharia* (Islamic law) in areas where it operates. (Sources: [U.S. Department of Defense](#), [Critical Threats Project](#), [Public Safety Canada](#))

The jihadist group was officially founded on March 2, 2017, when the Sahara branch of AQIM—a formal al-Qaeda affiliate that operates primarily in Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Libya, Tunisia, and Niger—merged with local Salafist groups Ansar al-Dine (AAD), al-Mourabitoun, and the Macina Liberation Front (MLF or Katiba Macina). Iyad Ag Ghaly, the former emir of AAD, became the new group's leader. (Source: [Long War Journal](#))

Prior to the founding of JNIM, in September 2010, AQIM notably kidnapped four French nationals in the uranium mining town of Arlit in northern Niger, releasing them after three years although no ransom was paid. JNIM initially targeted French counterterrorism forces in the Sahel region, deployed under Operation Barkhane—France's anti-terror mission in Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Niger, and Mauritania from 2014 until 2022. JNIM has also targeted the UN Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, a military counterterrorism partnership between Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad. JNIM, along with IS Sahel, continues to carry out attacks in Niger's border areas with Mali and Burkina Faso as of 2023. (Source: [France 24](#), [MENASTREAM](#), [Africa News](#), [Center for International Security and Cooperation](#), [Long War Journal](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

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### **Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents**

#### **Domestic Counter-Extremism**

##### *French Campaigns in Niger*

In late 2014, France began setting up a base in northern Niger to supplement their counterterrorism operations in the Sahel as part of Operation Barkhane. In France's first operation on Nigerien soil in October 2014, French forces intercepted a convoy of weapons traveling through Niger from Libya. The troops also detained fighters belonging to AQIM. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [Reuters](#))

France launched Operation Barkhane on August 1, 2014, to counter jihadists in Mali's north and the surrounding Sahel. Niger deployed more than 300 troops during the operation with Niger's capital Niamey serving as the operation's intelligence base. In 2022, after the military junta demanded the French withdraw from Mali, the operational base moved to Niger. Following political instability in the region and disagreements among political leaders regarding how to contain the terrorist threat, France withdrew its troops from Mali in August 2022. Disillusionment with French military strategy then spread to Niger, and following the July 2023 coup led by General Abdourahmane Tchiani, five military deals with France were revoked. In late September 2023, France began the process of withdrawing its 1,500 remaining military personnel from Niger. Niamey announced the departure of all French counterterrorism forces on December 12. By December 22, France further severed ties and announced the closure of its embassy in Niger, stating "it is no longer able to function normally or carry out its missions." (Sources: [International Peace Institute](#), [Le Monde](#), [New York Times](#), [Africa News](#))

##### *U.S. Missions in Niger*

Prior to the July 2023 coup, the United States had more than 1,000 soldiers in Niger assisting Nigerien troops in counterterrorism operations and security force training. The United States maintains a drone base in Niger, which is important for collecting intelligence and for tracking insurgent groups across the Sahel. However, after the coup, counterterrorism military exercises between the United States and Niger were suspended. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [New York Times](#), [ACAPS](#))

##### *Counterterrorism Legislation and Agencies*

In 2008, Niger introduced anti-terrorism legislation that would penalize the manufacture or possession of explosive devices, hostage-taking, attacks on transport, and unlawful possession of radioactive materials. Although the legislation was targeted at Tuareg rebel groups seeking greater autonomy from the state, the legislation granted the police greater authority and specified punishments for those found guilty of financing and recruiting for terrorist purposes. (Source: [Reuters](#))

Niger launched the Rural Border Patrol Operations Program in 2019 to better contain the spillover of violent extremism from neighboring countries. The program bolstered rural patrol units along Niger's western border with Burkina Faso and provided the units with equipment, training, and mentorship to better identify and arrest violent extremists and stop their operations. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Niger amended its penal code in 2018 to provide conditional amnesty or lesser sentences for those who voluntarily defected from violent extremist organizations. In 2020, Niger also amended its National Framework to better manage defectors and rehabilitation efforts. Not only did the amendments determine a defector's eligibility for rehabilitation services, they also established regional rehabilitation centers and a National Disengagement, Disassociation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DDRR) Steering Committee. By 2021, the DDRR was implemented across multiple regions throughout Niger. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [International Organization for Migration](#))

Since 2020, the European Union has financed the Joint Investigation Team Against Terrorism in Niger (ECI CT Niger). The objective of the investigatory team is to strengthen Niger's criminal justice system against terrorist offenses. The French and Spanish national police spearheaded the effort in supporting Nigerien police to be able to appropriately respond to counterterrorism offenses through the criminal justice system. (Source:

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[International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies](#))

### *G5 Sahel Joint Force and Regional Cooperation*

On February 16, 2014, Niger joined the G5 Sahel Movement, along with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Mauritania, to counter the increasing threat of al-Qaeda and ISIS elements across the Sahel. The member states intended to improve security along their borders to prevent the movement of terrorists between countries. One year after Mali's May 2022 withdrawal from the G5 Sahel, the remaining joint force members increased the number of battalions deployed across the Sahel from six to 14, with Niger contributing five battalions. The joint force's headquarters were also relocated to Niamey. On December 3, 2023, Niger and Burkina Faso left the G5 Sahel, claiming the "organization is failing to achieve its objectives." On December 6, Chad and Mauritania released a joint statement announcing the pending dissolution of the G5 Sahel Movement. (Sources: [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#), [U.N. Security Council](#), [U.N. Security Council](#), [BBC News](#), [Al Jazeera](#))

In January 2023, the three Sahelian states withdrew from the Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS), further compromising broader West African cooperation. On February 15, 2024, the junta governments of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso went further in distancing themselves from their regional neighbors, and announced they were moving forward with their Alliance of Sahel States (AES) confederation. The group initially signed an agreement to form the AES in September 2023. The confederation did not reveal further details on how it will cooperate along political, economic, and military lines to combat the Islamist insurgency.. (Source: [Reuters](#))

### *The Wagner Group and Russian Interference in Niger*

Suspicion of Niger's growing alliance with the Kremlin-backed private military company (PMC) the Wagner Group came days after the July 2023 coup. On August 5, the junta reportedly asked Wagner for help in containing the jihadist threat. Previously, Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin marketed the PMC to Niger, releasing a statement through Telegram claiming that "a thousand Wagner fighters are able to restore order and destroy terrorists... preventing them from harming the civilian population." Prigozhin's suspected assassination by the Russian government shortly after the Nigerien coup did not change Wagner's ambitions. According to the *Guardian*, Niger-related content increased 6,645 percent across 45 Russian Telegram channels following the coup (all on accounts associated with the Russian government or the Wagner Group). Prior to the coup, there were reportedly only 11 pieces of content related to Niger. Russia's intentions in Niger remain unclear, but Niger possesses vast mineral and oil reserves. According to All Eyes on Wagner, an investigative project focusing on the activities of the private military company, the Kremlin's "objective is not to support the junta or an alternative political approach but to sow discord, create chaos, destabilize." (Sources: [Defense One](#), [CNN](#), [Time](#), [Guardian](#))

A month after the July 2023 coup, Niger experienced a 42 percent increase in political violence, the highest levels since March 2021. The Islamic State in the Sahel (IS Sahel) significantly increased attacks, targeting civilians four times as often in August than in July of 2023. JNIM also exploited the political upheaval and carried out a high casualty attack that killed more than 100 people. According to an October 2023 article in the *New York Times*, the Kremlin further gained Nigerien support through PARADE, a Nigerien civil society group created and funded by Russia's foreign ministry. Notably, PARADE has reportedly influenced discussions of opening a Russian embassy in the Sahelian country. (Sources: [Le Monde](#), [ABC News](#), [New York Times](#), [Le Monde](#), [Armed Conflict Location and Event Database](#))

By November 2023, the Russian Defense Ministry released a statement claiming Wagner "has been finally disbanded" with many of its soldiers being transferred to other Kremlin controlled units. It is uncertain whether Wagner forces were expected to complete their mandates in Africa. Later in November, the Defense Ministry launched a recruitment campaign for the "Africa Corps"—further cementing the Kremlin's military footprint on the continent. The name of the unit reportedly refers to the Afrika Korps, the German battalions that fought in North Africa during WWII. On December 4, 2023, Nigerien military authorities reportedly "signed documents to strengthen military co-operation between the Republic of Niger and the Russian Federation." The details of the deal have not been revealed, As the Kremlin's relationship with Niger's junta was being formalized, the coup government further distanced itself from its former Western partners by terminating its participation in two stabilization programs in the country, the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Sahel Niger) and the EU Military Partnership Mission (EUMPM). The EUCAP was designed to bolster Niger's civil society, while the EUMPM was designed to strengthen Niger's response to violent extremist insurgencies. (Sources: [Le Monde](#), [ABC News](#), [New York Times](#), [Le Monde](#), [Newsweek](#), [Armed Conflict Location and Event Database](#), [Middle East Media Research Institute](#), [Times](#))

### *Countering Violent Extremism*

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In 2021, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) established peace committees designed to promote community cooperation in conflict monitoring, prevention, and management. In the jihadist-heavy Tillabéri region, USAID involved local youth in promoting conflict mitigation and stabilization efforts. The agency has also disseminated messages across radio stations to counter the spread of violent extremist narratives and partnered with local leaders under the Niger Stability Support Initiative, to offset emerging threats via stronger government action and response throughout the Tillabéri and Dosso regions. Although the strategy was due to maintain operations through 2027, there has been no news regarding the status of the initiative or other peace committees following the June 2023 coup. (Sources: [USAID](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Under additional debate is whether Niger has preserved their national Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Reconciliation (DDRR) framework that was established in Diffa and Tillabéri regions in 2022. The program was an initiative propped up by the Ministry of the Interior to determine the rehabilitation eligibility of violent extremist defectors. However, French funding, which has been withheld from Niger since 2023, was used to rehabilitate and release 113 defectors in Diffa in 2022. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

### **International Counter-Extremism**

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Suspicion of Niger's growing alliance with the Kremlin-backed private military company (PMC) the Wagner Group came days after the July 2023 coup. On August 5, the junta reportedly asked Wagner for help in containing the jihadist threat. Previously, Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin marketed the PMC to Niger, releasing a statement through Telegram claiming that "a thousand Wagner fighters are able to restore order and destroy terrorists... preventing them from harming the civilian population." Prigozhin's suspected assassination by the Russian government shortly after the Nigerien coup did not change Wagner's ambitions. According to the *Guardian*, Niger-related content increased 6,645 percent across 45 Russian Telegram channels following the coup (all on accounts associated with the Russian government or the Wagner Group). Prior to the coup, there were reportedly only 11 pieces of content related to Niger. Russia's intentions in Niger remain unclear, but Niger possesses vast mineral and oil reserves. According to All Eyes on Wagner, an investigative project focusing on the activities of the private military company, the Kremlin's "objective is not to support the junta or an alternative political approach but to sow discord, create chaos, destabilize." (Sources: [Defense One](#), [CNN](#), [Time](#), [Guardian](#))

A month after the July 2023 coup, Niger experienced a 42 percent increase in political violence, the highest levels since March 2021. The Islamic State in the Sahel (IS Sahel) significantly increased attacks, targeting civilians four times as often in August than in July of 2023. JNIM also exploited the political upheaval and carried out a high casualty attack that killed more than 100 people. According to an October 2023 article in the *New York Times*, the Kremlin further gained Nigerien support through PARADE, a Nigerien civil society group created and funded by Russia's foreign ministry. Notably, PARADE has reportedly influenced discussions of opening a Russian embassy in the Sahelian country. (Sources: [Le Monde](#), [ABC News](#), [New York Times](#), [Le Monde](#), [Armed Conflict Location and Event Database](#))

By November 2023, the Russian Defense Ministry released a statement claiming Wagner "has been finally disbanded" with many of its soldiers being transferred to other Kremlin controlled units. It is uncertain whether Wagner forces were expected to complete their mandates in Africa. Later in November, the Defense Ministry launched a recruitment campaign for the "Africa Corps"— further cementing the Kremlin's military footprint on the continent. The name of the unit reportedly refers to the Afrika Korps, the German battalions that fought in North Africa during WWII. On December 4, 2023, Nigerien military authorities reportedly "signed documents to strengthen military co-operation between the Republic of Niger and the Russian Federation." The details of the deal have not been revealed, As the Kremlin's relationship with Niger's junta was being formalized, the coup government further distanced itself from its former Western partners by terminating its participation in two stabilization programs in the

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country, the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Sahel Niger) and the EU Military Partnership Mission (EUMPM). The EUCAP was designed to bolster Niger’s civil society, while the EUMPM was designed to strengthen Niger’s response to violent extremist insurgencies. (Sources: [Le Monde](#), [ABC News](#), [New York Times](#), [Le Monde](#), [Newsweek](#), [Armed Conflict Location and Event Database](#), [Middle East Media Research Institute](#), [Times](#))

### *Countering Violent Extremism*

In 2021, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) established peace committees designed to promote community cooperation in conflict monitoring, prevention, and management. In the jihadist-heavy Tillabéri region, USAID involved local youth in promoting conflict mitigation and stabilization efforts. The agency has also disseminated messages across radio stations to counter the spread of violent extremist narratives and partnered with local leaders under the Niger Stability Support Initiative, to offset emerging threats via stronger government action and response throughout the Tillabéri and Dosso regions. Although the strategy was due to maintain operations through 2027, there has been no news regarding the status of the initiative or other peace committees following the June 2023 coup. (Sources: [USAID](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Under additional debate is whether Niger has preserved their national Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Reconciliation (DDRR) framework that was established in Diffa and Tillabéri regions in 2022. The program was an initiative propped up by the Ministry of the Interior to determine the rehabilitation eligibility of violent extremist defectors. However, French funding, which has been withheld from Niger since 2023, was used to rehabilitate and release 113 defectors in Diffa in 2022. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

### **Public Opinion**

The Center for Insights in Survey Research on behalf of the International Republican Institute conducted a survey of 1,668 Nigeriens in 2020, polling participants in all accessible localities of Niger, including Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Niamey, Tahous, Tillabéri, and Zinder. The study revealed that 62 percent of those polled believed their regional governments were doing a “very good” job of fighting terrorism. However, about half of respondents believed their regional governments were doing a “somewhat bad” or “very bad” job of providing access to three categories of public services, namely, electricity, improving food security, and creating jobs. Of the three categories of electricity, food security, and jobs, figures show that 54 percent, 57 percent, and 64 percent of respondents, respectively, believe the regional government is not doing a sufficient job in delivering these services. Unfortunately, the common drivers of radicalization and terrorist recruitment are often tied to the inadequate and inconsistent delivery of basic public needs. However, during the years since the survey was taken, geopolitical conditions have drastically changed with the humanitarian crisis in the region reaching dire levels not seen in decades. The 2020 results do not likely reflect current conditions on the ground as of early 2024, but do suggest why political instability and the increase of violent extremism swept through the state shortly after the findings were published. (Source: [Center for Insights in Survey Research](#))