

## Coup in Niger

After a days of uncertainty in Niger, the commander of the country's Presidential Guard Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani claimed the leadership of the West African country in a televised address after ousting President Mohamed Bazoum. Members of the country's Presidential Guard encircled the president's palace on Wednesday, 26 July, and held the president hostage. Col. Amadou Abdramane, read out a printed statement justifying their actions as a response to "the deteriorating security situation and bad social and economic governance." Colonel Abdramane was flanked by the deputy military chief of staff and senior members of the National Guard and Presidential Guard. The coup comes after a raft of coups in recent years in a number of West African nations that has seen US trained soldiers overthrowing the French backed governments. France criticised the coup and immediately forced the EU to suspend financial support to the country. Similarly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the 15-nation African bloc gave the coup leaders in Niger one week to cede power and reinstate the country's democratically elected president before it took "all measures necessary to restore constitutional order in the Republic of Niger," In response to the recent military takeover in Niger, ECOWAS imposed sanctions, including border closures and bans on commercial flights, as well as freezes on financial transactions, national assets and aid flows. In response to this wave of political instability, ECOWAS leaders agreed in 2022 to set up a regional security force to respond to terrorism threats and prevent military coups, since 6 coups have taken place in the region form 2002. The US response has seen no condemnation, but that US officials are following the situation. The US has even refused to call it a coup. Niger is not the latest nations since Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea that has seen US trained soldiers do coups. Brig Gen Moussa Salaou Barmou, the chief of Niger's Special Operations Forces was part of the junta that ousted Mohamed Bazoum. He was trained by the US military and just last month met with Lt. Gen. Jonathan Braga, the head of U.S. Army Special Operations Command, at Air Base 201, a drone base in the Nigerien city of Agadez that serves as the lynchpin of an archipelago of US outposts in West Africa. Barmou trained at Fort Benning, Georgia, and the National Defense University in Washington.

## US to Establish New Spy Center in Australia to Keep an Eye on China

After two days of talks in Australia, the US and Australian governments announced they will form a "Combined Intelligence Center" to give the US more spy capabilities in the region to monitor China. "The principals agreed to establish Combined Intelligence Center – Australia within Australia's Defense Intelligence Organization by 2024," the US and Australia said in a joint statement. "The Center would further enhance the long-standing intelligence cooperation between the Australian Defence Intelligence Organization and the US Defense Intelligence Agency, focused on analysing issues of shared strategic concern in the Indo-Pacific," the statement added. According to Australia's ABC News, officials from the Defense Intelligence Agency and their Australian counterparts have said the center is expected to "focus sharply on China's military footprint in the region and its moves to cement security ties with countries across Asia and the Pacific." The spy center is part of a broader increase in the US's military footprint in Australia that was announced during Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's visit to Canberra.

## Peace Talks in Saudi Arabia Intended to Isolate Russia

Saudi Arabia invited 30 countries to a summit on Aug. 5-6 to discuss the realisation of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's 10-point peace plan for the Russia-Ukraine war. The upcoming summit in Jeddah is a continuation of June peace talks in Copenhagen, Denmark, which Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, South Africa, India, Ukraine and several Western countries attended.

Russia was not invited, though Saudi Arabia hopes Russia's BRICS partners — China, Brazil, India and South Africa — will attend. Ukraine's supporters hope the summit will help convince the Global South to back Zelenskyy's peace plan, which reaffirms Ukraine's territorial integrity. Such support would diplomatically isolate Russia from a number of its key partners in the Global South, as more foreign states would refuse to diplomatically recognize Russian annexations or endorse business activities in occupied areas of Ukraine. As a result, Russia's strategy of a long-term war would become costlier and less attractive.