



香港亞太區域發展研究所

Asia Pacific Regional Development Institute of Hong Kong

Niger: the struggle for the real independence

Zhanchong WU

The recent military coup in Niger has thrust the ongoing struggle for the real independence in former French colonies in West Africa into the spotlight. This coup is not an isolated incident; the Sahel region has witnessed numerous coups in recent years, with French-speaking nations experiencing a majority of them. This raises questions about France's role in these countries and the impact it has had on their quest for true sovereignty.

To capture its interests in Africa, France mostly employs three strategies.

I. Resource Looting:

France's exploitation of West Africa's natural resources, particularly natural uranium, is a significant concern. France heavily relies on nuclear energy for both civilian and military purposes and requires substantial quantities of natural uranium to fuel its nuclear power plants and maintain its military capabilities. Niger, a major uranium producer, has contributed significantly to France's nuclear industry. However, Niger receives little in return, with the majority of its population lacking access to electricity, and only a small fraction of the proceeds from uranium exports flowing back into the country. French nuclear energy group Orano profits from this resource while not adequately compensating Niger. This lopsided economic relationship has exacerbated Niger's already dire economic situation.



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II. Financial Control:

France exerts economic control through its management of the CFA franc, which is used by West African countries, including Niger. This currency is pegged to the euro and controlled by the French Ministry of Finance. These nations pay a mint tax to France, and their foreign exchange reserves are held in the French central bank, limiting their monetary autonomy. The introduction of the ECO currency by ECOWAS is delayed due to economic criteria not being met and France's opposition to its use. The CFA franc offers stability in exchange rates but hinders the ability of these countries to make loans and manage their economies effectively.

III. Military Presence:

France has maintained a significant military presence in Africa, particularly in the Sahel region, to combat terrorism. Despite these efforts, the Sahel remains plagued by poverty and conflicts, and the effectiveness of these military operations is questionable. Some have even suggested that external forces, including France and the United States, may be indirectly supporting terrorist groups to justify their continued military presence in the region. In recent years, anti-French sentiment has risen, leading to the departure of French troops from several Sahel countries.

Following the military coup in Niger, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso came together to establish the Alliance of Sahel States. This alliance aims to combat terrorism, organized crime, and enhance common defense. It represents a coordinated response to the challenges the region faces. In fact, it has resulted in the creation of a "coalition against France" in West Africa and the dissolution of the G5 Sahel. With the withdrawal of French troops and the decline of French influence in the region, the influence of the Russian Wagner Group appears to be on the rise.



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Overall, the struggle for true independence in West Africa is intricately connected to France's historical and ongoing exploitation of resources, its economic control through the CFA franc, and its military presence. With French troops withdrawing and the Russian Wagner Group's influence growing, the region faces new challenges. African leaders must work tirelessly to achieve genuine development and independence, free from external interference, and ensure that the African continent can chart its own path towards progress.