

Obama's Military Presence in Niger: US Control over Uranium under the Disguise of Counter-terrorism

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President Obama's military incursion into Niger, ostensibly to establish a drone base to counter «Al Qaeda» and other Islamist guerrilla activity in neighboring Mali, has little to do with counter-insurgency and everything to do with establishing U.S. control over Niger's uranium and other natural resources output and suppressing its native Tuareg population from seeking autonomy with their kin in northern Mali and Algeria.

The new drone base is initially located in the capital of Niamey and will later be moved to a forward operating location expected to be located in Agadez in the heart of Tuareg Niger... The base is being established to counter various Islamist groups - including Ansar Dine, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Nigeria-based Boko Haram, and a new group, Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA) - that briefly seized control of northern Mali from Tuaregs, led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, who took advantage of a coup d'état in Mali to establish an independent Tuareg state called Azawad.

The U.S. has long been opposed to any attempt by the suppressed Tuareg people to establish their own independent state in the Sahara. American opposition to the Tuaregs dovetails with historical French opposition to Tuareg nationalism.

However, U.S. State Department and CIA personnel have been discussing a U.S. presence in Niger since February 25, 2010, when a U.S. delegation met with the Chairman of the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSR), General Souleyman Salou, just one week after the military junta overthrew democratically-elected President Mamadou Tandja in a coup and suspended the Nigerien constitution. According to a leaked State Department cable from the U.S. embassy in Niamey:

Eric Whitaker, the U.S. Charge d'affaires met with Salou and Colonel Moussa Gros, the Senior Military Advisor to the CSR, in a session that drew praise from Salou, who highlighted «the friendship between the two countries». Salou also told the U.S. emissaries «the CSR would continue bilateral information liaison via the Directorate General for Documentation and External Security (DGDSE) [The Nigerien intelligence agency].» He stressed that the CSR sought cooperation with Washington in the areas of security assistance, the fight against al-Qaida, and support for the regime. Although the United States has a policy of not recognizing governments that achieve power through military coups and force of arms, the Obama administration was as quick to embrace the Nigerien junta as it had in supporting similar CIA-installed juntas in Honduras and Paraguay.

Salou smiled as he stated that he understood the United States did not support military

coups and armed seizures of power. Obviously, Salou was in on the Obama administration's dirty little secret. While publicly opposing coups, Washington had already supported one in Honduras and would soon be supporting them in Paraguay, Libya, Syria, and other countries. Salou's resume spoke volumes of his U.S. training and according to the leaked cable from Nimaey:

«BG [Brigadier General] Salou has been the Chief of Staff of the Nigerien Air Force since at least 2003. He is a graduate of the US Air Force's Command and Staff College and is assessed by the DATT [Defense Attache] as extremely pro-U.S...Col. Gros, prior to assuming his role as the advisor to the President of the CSRD, was the military advisor to the Nigerien Prime Minister. Also assessed to be pro-U.S., at least one of his children was educated in the United States and he reports to have served as the Defense Attache) to the U.S. for a short period in 1987».

Niger is a poor African backwater country only of importance to the United States when it can be used as a pawn in wider international geopolitical security matters. The George W. Bush administration used Niger and what turned out to be bogus attempts by Saddam Hussein to obtain Nigerien «yellow cake» uranium to justify its invasion and occupation of Iraq. It was later discovered that forged Niger government documents on a Niger-Iraq uranium connection were provided to the White House by the chief of Italy's SISMI intelligence service, General Nicolo Pollari, on the orders of then-Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

In addition to using uranium-rich Niger as a cause for intervention in the country, the Pentagon and CIA have also eyed Niger's other mineral and its oil resources. Those who have stood in the way of plans by Western companies to exploit Niger's natural resources have often paid with their lives. In 1995, Niger's Tuareg leader Mano Dayak was killed in a suspicious plane crash in northern Niger. Dayak was engaged in peace negotiations with the central Niger government and was on his way to Niamey when the plane crashed shortly after takeoff. However, an autonomous Tuareg government in northern Niger threatened to undermine the plans of Exxon and other U.S. oil companies and mineral miners to have a free hand in exploiting oil and mineral resources around Lake Chad, along the Chadian-Nigerien border. Many Tuaregs believed Dayak's plane was sabotaged by the CIA. Ironically, the location of America's future drone base in Agadez, northern Niger, complete with CIA officers and U.S. Special Operations personnel, will be at Mano Dayak International Airport, named for the martyred Tuareg leader.

Washington's increasing military presence in the Sahel region has been at least two decades in the making. U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency personnel began recruiting agents-of-influence among the 400-man contingent sent by Niger to fight alongside American troops battling Saddam Hussein's forces in Operation Desert Storm. Under the rubric of the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), the United States, with the cooperation of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), has pumped hundreds of millions of dollars in security assistance to the security and intelligence services, as well as the military forces of West African nations. The TSCTP was formerly known as the Pan-Sahel Initiative. Nigerien security forces have used U.S.-supplied lethal military and non-lethal crowd control equipment, including night-vision equipment, armored high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles, global positioning systems, and secure radios, to forcibly put down pro-autonomy Tuareg and other pro-democracy protesters.

U.S. military training for Niger is provided annually during the Pentagon's OPERATION

FLINTLOCK military exercise. U.S.-trained Nigerien forces are also used to protect the uranium mines operated by the French state-owned Areva nuclear power production company in cooperation with Japanese and Spanish companies.

In addition to U.S. military personnel in Niamey, there are also U.S. bases in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Bamako, Mali; Nouakchott, Mauritania; and Tamanrasset, Algeria. The U.S. presence in Burkina Faso is known as Creek Sand. From these and other suspected bases, the United States has let loose armed and unarmed drones across the Sahara. This is how the peoples of West Africa have been introduced to America's first president of African descent. Such a military incursion into Africa would have been unthinkable and undoable for such white American presidents as Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, John F. Kennedy, or Dwight Eisenhower. However, Obama, as a president with roots in Kenya, gives weighty cover for the U.S. plans to establish a neo-colonialist regime for Africa, one run out of Washington.

Niger was once a colonial backwater of the French empire. It is now transitioning into a full-blown protectorate of the American empire. However, Niger should not grow used to its new American masters. The American empire is crumbling due to financial and moral decay. When Pax Americana finally falls, it will leave much of the world, including Niger, in shock.

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