

Strategic Visit? Victoria Nuland in Niamey: Some Interesting Details About Her Discussions in Niger

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Acting Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland of "EuroMaidan" infamy traveled to Niger to hold discussions with its interim military-led government after the expiry of ECOWAS' one-week deadline for reinstalling [ousted President Mohamed Bazoum](#). A [regional war is looming over West Africa](#) in the event that this NATO-backed bloc invades like it earlier threatened and/or that country's former French colonizer acts unilaterally, which is why it's important to analyze what she revealed about her trip there.

Her [special briefing to the press](#) began with platitudes about restoring Niger's constitutional order following the patriotic military coup last month and then referenced the aid that the US would be legally obliged to cut off if this doesn't happen. Nuland then mentioned that she also met with "a broad cross-section of Nigerien civil society. These are long-time friends of the United States. They are journalists. They are democratic activists. They are human rights activists."

Considering her role in Ukraine's [Color Revolution](#) that ultimately led to the ongoing [NATO-Russian proxy war](#) in that country, it's reasonable to suspect that she might have signaled to these civil society forces that the US supports them initiating large-scale and riotous protests against the military authorities. This scenario could unfold either in lieu of a NATO-backed and possibly French-supported Nigerian-led ECOWAS invasion of Niger, as a pretext for publicly justifying the aforesaid, or during such an invasion.

Nevertheless, that doesn't appear to have been the main reason for her trip since such signals could more conveniently and securely be sent to those forces remotely without a top US diplomatic official having to do so directly in-person, but this still can't be ruled out. Moving along, Nuland then disclosed that her discussions

"with the self-proclaimed chief of defense of this operation, General Barmou, and three of the colonels supporting him...were extremely frank and at times quite difficult".

She explained that this was because “we were pushing for a negotiated solution”, which could either be an insincere effort designed to get the Nigerien military’s guard down ahead of the potentially imminent destabilization scenarios that were just described or might actually be the US’ preferred way forward. The first possibility is plausible owing to the Ukrainian precedent, while the second might be due to fears that a wider regional war could go awry and eventually create space for Russia to expand its influence.

The next part of her briefing was very interesting. She said that she wasn’t allowed to see Bazoum despite talking to him on the phone and also wasn’t permitted to meet interim President General Abdourahamane Tiani. Keeping her away from Bazoum could have been meant to retain some ambiguity about his status so as to deter the earlier mentioned destabilization scenarios while also reaffirming President Tiani’s legitimacy, whereas the latter’s refusal to meet Nuland was a deliberate snub.

She then said that

“I hope they will keep the door open to diplomacy. We made that proposal. We’ll see. As I said, they have their own ideas about how this goes forward. They do not – their ideas do not comport with the constitution, and that will be difficult in terms of our relationship if that’s the path they take. But we gave them a number of options to keep talking and we hope they take us up on it.”

Simply put, the interim military-led government isn’t backing down despite this jeopardizing ties with the US.

Another intriguing detail that was revealed during her briefing is that

“General Barmou, former Colonel Barmou, is somebody who has worked very closely with U.S. Special Forces over many, many years. So we were able to go through in considerable detail the risks to aspects of our cooperation that he has historically cared about a lot.”

It’s remarkable that a close US military ally ended up participating in the overthrow of his US-backed leader, became the new defense chief, and then didn’t back down.

This shows that even those high-ranking foreign military officials who closely cooperate with some of the US’ best-trained forces “over many, many years” don’t always become its puppets, which suggests that other similarly positioned officials elsewhere across Africa might follow in General Barmou’s footsteps. It can therefore no longer be taken for granted that the US’ foreign military programs successfully lead to the cultivation of elite proxies. They sometimes backfire as proven by this particular case.

Near the end of her briefing, Nuland answered two questions about Wagner and Russia in the following way:

“Of course I raised the – Wagner and its threat to those countries where it is present, reminding them that security gets worse, that human rights get worse when Wagner enters. I would not say that we learned much more about their thinking on that front.

...

With regard to Wagner, you will have seen some boasting by Prigozhin in St.

Petersburg. I will say that I got the sense in my meetings today that the people who have taken this action here understand very well the risks to their sovereignty when Wagner is invited in.”

These statements are obviously contradictory, so she either got confused or is lying in one of her answers.

Regardless of the signals that the interim military-led government might have sent to Nuland pertaining to speculation that it might request [Wagner’s “DemocraticSecurity”](#) services, it would have likely been meant for deterrence purposes. Entertaining this scenario could hint that the US risks losing even more of its influence if it doesn’t stop a regional war from breaking out, while downplaying it could be intended to convince the US that it shouldn’t overreact to the consequences of the coup.

Altogether, the top takeaways from Nuland’s trip are that: the US is making a public effort of dubious sincerity to show the world that it doesn’t want a regional war; her meeting with Nigerien civil society means that a Color Revolution can’t be ruled out; the interim military-led government isn’t backing down despite its new defense chief being a close years-long partner of the Pentagon; and its envisaged post-coup relations with Russia and Wagner remain unclear.

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