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Russian Officials Visit Niger to Bolster Military Ties

By AFP

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Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov. **Vadim Savitsky / Russian Defense Ministry / TASS**

A Russian delegation led by the deputy defense minister met with Niger's military leaders in Niamey on Monday, Nigerien authorities said, with the two countries agreeing to strengthen military cooperation.

The trip was the first official visit by a member of the Russian government since the coup in Niger on July 26, when the army ousted the civilian government prompting international condemnation.

The delegation led by Colonel-General Yunus-Bek Yevkurov was hosted for talks by the head of Niger's military government General Abdourahamane Tiani.

The parties "signed documents to strengthen military cooperation between the Republic of

Niger and the Russian Federation," according to Nigerien authorities.

Russian diplomacy is in a favorable position in Niger after relations soured with former colonial ruler France following the July coup.

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France has begun withdrawing its 1,500 troops from the country following demands by the military rulers who ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, a key ally of Paris.

The Russian delegation on Sunday also visited the military leaders in Mali, Moscow's main ally in the region, where development projects including work on renewable and nuclear energy were discussed, according to Bamako's finance minister.

Alousseni Sanou also spoke about the construction of a railway and tramway network, the creation of a regional airline and mining projects, in a video released by Mali's presidency.

The military regimes in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso are all battling long-running jihadist insurgencies and have come together to support the creation of an Alliance of Sahel States, setting up closer economic ties and mutual defense assistance.

Burkina Faso and Niger on Saturday joined Mali in quitting the G5 anti-jihadist force in Africa's Sahel region, the latest blow to the fight against insurgents in one of the world's most troubled zones.

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