

Russia Sends Instructors, Air Defense System to Niger

By [AFP](#)

April 12, 2024



Soldiers who ousted President Mohamed Bazoum addresses supporters of Niger's ruling junta. **Sam Mednick / AP / TASS**

Russian military instructors have arrived in Niger with an air defense system and other equipment as part of the West African nation's deepening security ties with Moscow, state television announced late Thursday.

Niger's military government agreed in January to step up military cooperation with Russia after expelling French forces that were helping to fight jihadist rebellions in several neighboring countries.

The Tele Sahel broadcaster showed a Russian transport plane arriving at Niamey airport on Wednesday night. It said that the "latest military equipment and military instructors from the Russian Defense Ministry" had arrived.

Russia will help "install an air defense system ... to ensure complete control of our airspace," the report said.

"We are here to train the Niger army and help it use the equipment that has just arrived. The equipment is for different military specialties," one of the Russian instructors was quoted as saying.

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The head of Niger's military government, General Abdourahamane Tiani, spoke by telephone with Russian President Vladimir Putin in late March.

During that call, the two leaders were said to have discussed security cooperation as well as "global strategic cooperation" against "current threats."

Niger, one of the world's poorest countries, had been a frontline partner of the West in battling jihadists in Western and Central Africa. But since the elected president was ousted in a military coup last year it has gradually turned to Moscow.

Niger has also joined neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso — both ruled by military leaders after coups — to create a joint force to battle insurgent jihadist groups.

The United States has some 1,000 troops deployed in Niger, though their movements have been limited since last year's coup, and Washington has curbed assistance to the government.

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