

**African Journal of Terrorism and Insurgency Research  
(AJoTIR)**

ISSN: 2732-4990(Print) ISSN: 2732-5008(Online)

Indexed by IBSS, EBSCO and SABINET

Volume 5, Number 1, June 2024

Pp 27-39

**Deconstructing the Exploitation of Natural Resources  
and the Surge in Terrorism in the Sahel Region:  
The Case of Niger**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2732-5008/2024/v5n1a2>

**Author: Felix Makonye**

*Senior Research Fellow, Rwanda Basic Education,  
TTC Kabarore, Gatsibo District, Eastern Province, Rwanda,  
Email: worms7the@gmail.com  
+250792047422.*

&

**Georgina Maramba**

*PhD Candidate, University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Pietermaritzburg (PMB) Campus, School of Arts,  
Durban, South Africa.  
Email: makaitanenyasha@gmail.com  
+250792047409.*

---

**Abstract**

This paper gives thought to the exploitation of Niger's natural resources by France, the European Union (EU), and the United States (US), among other countries. The objective of this paper is to deconstruct the exploitation of Niger's uranium, gold, and coal, among other natural resources, and the surge in terrorism. This paper adopts qualitative secondary research as its methodology and resource curse theory as its theoretical framework. The gap that the paper bridges is that most research about the exploitation of Niger's natural resources and the rise in terrorism ignores the involvement of France among other

Western countries. Findings that develop from this paper reveal that France has exploited Niger's natural resources since colonisation. Similarly, the EU and the US, among other countries, have been accomplices in the exploitation of Niger's natural resources. Additionally, Western countries, namely France, the EU, and the US, including Britain and Russia, have been involved in supporting administrations or terrorists that advance their interests in Niger, among other issues. Further results show that successive administrations in Niger and those that took control through the coup in July 2023 enjoy the support of the major global powers.

**Keywords:** *Terrorism, Mineral Resources, Exploitation, Sabel Region, Niger, EU, US, France, Russia*

## **Introduction**

The website <https://www.icct.nl/publication.com> contends that Niger is endowed with some of the most sought-after uranium deposits among other precious natural resources in the world. The country is among the top 10 producers of uranium in the world, thereby making it a centre of attraction for exploitation by mostly Western governments, including France, its EU allies, the US, and terrorists, among others. The bulk of Niger's uranium deposits are located in the Air Massif's central region. The uranium mines include those that are operational and those that are under development in Dasa, Arlit, and Imouraren, among others. Lukmaan (2024) posits that other minerals, such as salt, are traditionally exploited in the Kaouar and Air regions, as well as in the Dallol and Manga districts. Natron (hydrated sodium carbonate) is extracted locally. Cassiterite (an ore of tin) is mined at open workings in Air. Small quantities of gold are obtained by panning in the Sirba River. Limestone and an important deposit of gypsum have been located at Malbaza and in the Ader Doutchi and Majia regions. In addition to tungsten, the Air region has been found to contain traces of copper, lignite, molybdenum, zinc, phosphates, and titanium. These elements are being prospected further. A reserve of iron ore, with an iron content of about 50 percent, has been located in the Say region, and petroleum deposits lie untapped in eastern and central Niger. The presence of these most coveted minerals in Niger has made it a hotbed of exploitation by foreign superpowers, including France, the EU, the US, and terrorist groups, among other players (Bohm and Demuynck, 2023).

## **Literature Review**

The US Department of State (2020) asserts that Niger faces terrorist threats on each of its seven borders. Terrorist organisations take advantage of Niger's extensive borders and sparsely populated desert regions to attack and recruit among populations where access to government services is limited and economic opportunity is negligible. Terrorist groups active in Niger include ISIS-Sahel (formerly known as ISIS-GS), Boko Haram, Islamic State-West Africa (ISIS-WA), and al-Qa'ida affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). The motivation for all these terrorist groups derives from the desire to have a stake in the lucrative natural resources of Niger, which have been exploited for decades by France, among other EU and Western countries.

The web site <https://www.britannica.com/place/Niger/Independence-and-conflict> states that Niger became independent from French colonial rule on 3 August 1960. However, despite the end of colonial rule in West African states, France maintained a firm grip on the country's natural resources through clandestine agreements on mineral resource extraction with all its former colonies, including Niger. Despite recent coups and growing anti-France sentiments across West Africa, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, among other countries, France is desperate to continue its mineral resource exploitation in the Sahel region. Similarly, despite these countries severing military partnerships, France remains reluctant to withdraw its military presence and continues to extract natural resources, aiming to uphold its grip on the region. This is evidence that, for centuries, Sahel countries, including Niger, have propped up France's economy through the exploitation of their mineral resources. Many pan-African scholars believe that the new military rulers of Niger are fighting French neo-colonialism in the Sahel region, along with Burkina Faso and Mali (Britannica, 2024).

France24 (2023) reported that Germany threatened Niger's military rulers with EU sanctions unless they returned to the constitutional order after the ouster of their ally in the Niger coup of 26 July 2023. Germany supports the regional efforts to resolve the crisis in Niger. Our goal is to restore constitutional order, the German Foreign Ministry said in a statement. After having suspended development and security cooperation, we are in favour of EU sanctions against the new military rulers as a next step, the ministry said.

According to Chihombori (2023), Germany's announcement came after Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock held phone calls with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, and African Union (AU) Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat. In August 2023, General Abdourahamane Tchiani, the former commander of Niger's Presidential Guard, declared himself the head of a transitional government after President Mohamed Bazoum was ousted by a military intervention. General Tchiani responded to Germany's threats, saying:

The EU brought nothing to Africa and Niger but looting our mineral resources including uranium and gold. As Nigeriens, we have the freedom to choose our allies without outside pressure from anyone. We are turning to Russia for military cooperation and sustainable development. Let me state that Russia is the way to go. Germany can leave Niger if they feel doing so.

Reuters (2024) contends that Russia and Niger, under military rule since a coup in July 2023, have agreed to develop military cooperation, the Russian Defence Ministry announced. According to Russian news agencies, Russian Deputy Defence Ministers Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and Alexander Fomin met Niger's Defence Minister Salifu Modi.

The parties noted the importance of developing Russian-Niger relations in the Defence sector and agreed to intensify joint actions to stabilise the situation in the region, and increasing the combat readiness of Niger's military.

President Mohamed Bazoum was overthrown in July 2023, and General Abdourahamane Tchiani led the military council that replaced him. The new rulers kicked out French troops and severed security pacts with the EU, leaving former Western allies concerned that the country could become a new foothold for Russia in the region. Niger's newly-appointed Prime Minister, Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine, visited Moscow in January 2024. During the visit, Zeine discussed widening a partnership with Russia in the areas of Defence, agriculture, and energy, among other key areas. Niger's uranium and oil reserves and its pivotal role in fighting Islamist terrorists in the Sahel region give it economic and strategic importance for the US, EU, and Russia, among other countries.

In support of the submissions above, the website <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/germany-concerned-about-spillover->

effects-of-niger-crisis-in-africa/2972919 underscores that Germany is concerned about the spillover effects of the military takeover in Niger and seeking EU sanctions to increase pressure on the military leaders, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said. Speaking at a joint news conference with her Senegalese counterpart, Baerbock said Germany would continue to support the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in its efforts to increase pressure on the military leaders.

We stand behind ECOWAS' decision to react with sanctions. As the European Union, we are there working on similar sanctions. We support ECOWAS' efforts to find a diplomatic solution to this crisis. We should keep up the pressure to make it clear that we cannot get used to coups in democratically elected countries, and that we have to do everything to avoid further spill over effects.

Senegalese Foreign Minister Aissata Tall Sall said ECOWAS was continuing its diplomatic efforts but also considering the potential use of force if the military administration does not return to democratic order.

We have extended our hands to this junta in Niger to start a conversation and to see if the military goes back to the barracks, and the president, who was democratically elected, can return to power. We hope that the junta can be brought to its senses and that the use of force will no longer have to be an option to settle this matter.

The website <https://ecfr.eu/article/lone-changer-germany-mali-and-russian-influence-in-africas-arc-of-instability/> posits that Russia's intervention in Niger has created a dilemma for Germany. It has emboldened the Nigerien military rulers to confront Germany and made an EU exit from Niger seem to signify a defeat by Russia. Moscow may not have planned this from the start, but the situation is now playing out much to its advantage. The Kremlin is on track to kill two birds with one stone: encouraging Niamey to overplay its hand by ending EU involvement in Niger and gaining a monopoly on foreign influence in the resulting vacuum.

Similarly, the website <https://tass.com/defense/959862> suggests that Russia plans to sign a military cooperation deal with the Republic of Niger in West Africa, including interaction in the war on terror and measures to strengthen international security, according to a Russian government resolution. Under the document, the Russian government

had made a decision to approve a draft military cooperation agreement between the government of the Russian Federation and the government of the Republic of Niger, submitted by the Defence Ministry and approved by the Foreign Ministry of Russia and other departments concerned. The document instructs the Russian Defence Ministry to hold negotiations with the Nigerien side and, upon agreeing, sign the relevant deal. The Defense Ministry is authorised to make amendments to the draft document if these alterations are not of a fundamental nature. Under the draft agreement, the sides will interact in the war on terror, exchange information on military and political issues, and address the issue of strengthening international security. Moscow and Niamey will also develop relations in the area of joint troop training, in the sphere of military education, military medicine, and other fields. Russia and Niger intend to exchange the experience of peacekeeping missions and interaction in peacekeeping operations under UN aegis.

The Centre for Preventive Action (CPA, 2023) contends that a 26 July 2023, coup in Niger, the ninth attempted overthrow of a West African government in the last three years, dealt a significant blow to counterterrorism and stabilisation efforts in the Sahel. Niger's government fended off a coup attempt in March 2021, two days before President-elect Mohamed Bazoum assumed office, but the most recent coup attempt succeeded in unseating him. Despite pressure from ECOWAS, including sanctions and the threat of military intervention, the coup leaders have refused to cede power and declared a new government. Nearby military rulers in Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Mali have backed the military government, with the latter two vowing to treat military intervention in Niger as a declaration of war.

CPA (2023) asserts that Niger had become the West's last major counterterrorism partner in the Sahel in recent years after a series of coups in neighbouring countries, but the takeover threatens to upend its status as a bulwark against an expanding power vacuum. Shortly after seizing power, the military rulers ceased military cooperation with France, which moved its troops to Niger in 2022 as its relations with Mali deteriorated. The US maintains around one thousand troops in the country, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Niger a model of democracy during a March 2023 visit. After the coup, Blinken warned that while Russia's Wagner Group likely did not instigate the coup, it is taking advantage of Niger's instability.

The website, <https://www.icct.nl.org>, suggests that while Niger has managed to distinguish itself from its Sahelian neighbours as a less

problematic partner for Western allies, it nonetheless has a range of structural weaknesses and vulnerabilities that might help explain recent events and their potential implications. First, Niger has a long history of coups, with this takeover marking the fifth successful coup in the country's history since its independence in 1960. Most recently, its democratic institutions were under threat from an attempted coup in March 2021, just two days before Bazoum's inauguration. Against this backdrop, experts describe ongoing events as a sad reminder of the factionalism and power rivalries that have plagued Nigerien military and political spheres in recent years, an undermining factor that has for long been underestimated.

Bohm and Demuynck (2023) observe that a disconnect seems to have grown between Bazoum's official discourse, actively calling for more international troops to be deployed in Niger, and broader public opinion. Some incidents, such as the blockade of a French convoy in Tera in November 2021 that resulted in three demonstrators being killed, signalled and likely worsened the population's resentment. Similarly, the march against the presence of Barkhane forces that was banned before it could take place on 17 August 2022, points to stronger anti-French sentiments and popular discontent than the political discourse had suggested.

Such resentment is thought to be linked to the population's unmet expectations towards external forces, with experts underlying that the populations do not understand why the terrorist attacks continue, given the big means available to the French forces, and exacerbated by so-called disinformation campaigns, framing Western imperialism as the root of all issues. Some civil society figures and organisations have also expressed their opposition to an increased international presence. Among the greatest critiques is the movement M62, whose protests were often either banned or violently dispersed under Bazoum's regime but have been revived in the wake of the president's removal (Bohm and Demuynck, 2023).

## **Methodology**

Makonye (2022) asserts that secondary research/desk research is a research method that falls under the qualitative methodology and makes use of existing data from previous research. The data are found in websites, newspapers, academic articles, media houses, and archives, among others. This paper extends secondary research to include posts on

the X platform, speeches, the internet, and libraries, among others. Secondary research does not require the researcher to go and gather data in the field, as is the case with primary research. The researcher uses existing data gathered by forerunners in an existing literature review. This methodology saves time and resources on the part of the researcher.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The key theorists of the resource curse theory include Frynas and Burr (2020) as well as Fernando (2020), among others. The major tenets of the theory question how countries that are endowed with precious mineral resources become underdeveloped, especially on the African continent. This theory is applicable to the current situation in Niger, which has valuable mineral resources such as uranium but remains one of the most underdeveloped nations in Africa. Mittelman (2017) submits that discovering oil or gold would signify the quick development of a country. However, the discovery usually gives rise to conflicts leading to terrorism and insurgency. There are several countries, especially in Africa, including Niger, whose natural resources have been perpetually syphoned off by foreign corporations in France, the EU, and the US among other countries. Nigeriens have very little to show for their resources except for a ravaged environment since the Berlin Conference that partitioned Africa in the 1800s. This phenomenon is what is termed the resource curse. Several decades after the end of colonialism in most African countries, some Western countries, including France, Germany, and the US, have maintained their presence on the continent to continue to exploit natural resources for their own benefit. Africans have continued to live in abject poverty while Western countries continually pillage their natural resources.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The findings that derive from this paper are analysed and discussed in this section. France deployed 5,100 troops to protect its interests in Niger in 2020. The US provided logistics and advisory support to the former administration that was ousted in a military takeover in 2023. In addition, the U.S. military increased its presence in Niger, deploying approximately 1,500 troops in the country and building a drone as a platform for strikes against groups across West and North Africa. The presence of ground troops from both France and the US in Niger



prompted the jihadists to increase their attacks, leading to the loss of some US soldiers (CPA, 2023).

France's economic interests in Niger are now rather limited, but some companies are still perceived as a symbol of the hoarding of Niger's wealth by the majority. This is notably the case for Orano (formerly Areva), a French company that owns three uranium mines in Niger. Just a few months before the coup, Orano renewed its agreement with Niger to exploit the only active of these mines and has plans to exploit one of the major uranium deposits in the world by 2028. Although the military did not ban uranium exports, border closures hamper Orano's logistics, slowing down its activities. Nevertheless, Orano and Euratom estimate a loss of uranium supply from Niger, which accounts for about 20% of France's nuclear plants' needs; this negatively impacts nuclear power production in France and other EU Member States due to current stock levels (European Parliament Research Service, EPRS, 2023).

France has a long-established, strong military presence in Niger. Following the coups in Mali and Burkina Faso, a portion of the French military left those countries and are currently based in Niger. France has nearly 1,500 military staff in Niger, working with the Nigerien army in operations to tackle armed groups. Despite this contribution, the presence of French troops has been increasingly criticised by Nigerien politicians and citizens, criticism nurtured by information allegedly circulated by Russian or Wagner-affiliated media. The authors of the coup reject military cooperation with France, arguing that this cooperation failed to help restore the government's authority over territories under armed groups' control. Consequently, the military rulers have demanded the withdrawal of French troops, a demand supported by many Nigerien pro-military protesters. Other EU Member States, including Belgium, Germany, and Italy, have a military presence in Niger, but the military in power has not demanded their withdrawal (Makonye, 2022).

On 5 August 2023, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna declared that France 'supports with firmness and determination the efforts of ECOWAS to defeat this coup attempt', including a military intervention by ECOWAS, a position that other EU Member States do not share. On 29 August, the junta removed the French Ambassador's diplomatic immunity and ordered his expulsion. In response, a military spokesperson stated that French military forces were 'ready to respond to any upturn in tension that could harm French diplomatic and military

premises in Niger'. On 9 September, the military regime asserted that France was actually deploying troops in several West African countries (mentioning Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Benin) in preparation for an intervention in Niger, coordinated with ECOWAS. In response, President Macron emphasised that France does not recognise the legitimacy of the military declarations and that any redeployment of troops would only occur upon a request from the deposed head of state. According to an analyst, in maintaining troops in Niger, France risks being perceived as an occupying force, reinforcing support for the military rulers that took over the country. Other observers note that the departure of French troops from Niger could create a vacuum for other powers to fill, such as Russia, Turkey, or, China, or on the contrary, that it could diminish Russia's symbolic appeal as 'anti-France'. France initially refused to abide by the military's request for its ambassador and troops to leave Niger, but has now agreed to recall its ambassador and withdraw French troops from Niger at the end of 2023 (EPRS, 2023).

On 16 January 2024, Reuters emphasised that Russia and Niger, under military rule since July 2023, had agreed to develop military cooperation. The Russian Deputy Defence Ministers Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and Alexander Fomin met Niger's Defence Minister Salifu Modi in Moscow. The parties noted the importance of developing Russian-Niger relations in the defence sector and agreed to intensify joint actions to stabilise the situation in the country and the Sahel region. The two parties further agreed to continue dialogue on increasing the combat readiness of Niger's armed forces. Niger's military rulers kicked out French troops and severed security pacts with the EU, leaving Western allies concerned that the country could become a new foothold for Russia in the region. Similarly, the military-appointed Prime Minister Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine also visited Moscow. During the visit, Zeine discussed a widening partnership with Russia in the areas of defence, agriculture, and energy. Niger's uranium and oil reserves and its pivotal role in fighting Islamist militants in the Sahel Region give it economic and strategic importance for the US, EU, China, and Russia (Reuters, 2024).

The Moscow Times (2023) submits that a Russian delegation led by a deputy defence minister met with Niger's military leaders in Niamey on 4 December, 2023. The two parties agreed to strengthen military cooperation on bilateral issues. The trip was the first official visit by a member of the Russian government since the military takeover on 26 July 2023. 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 advance military cooperation between the Republic of Niger and the Russian Federation. Tass (2024) reported that Russia plans to sign a military cooperation deal with the Republic of Niger in West Africa, including interaction in the war on terror and measures to bolster international security. Under the agreement, the Russian government made a decision to approve a draft military cooperation agreement between the governments of the Republic of Niger and the Russian Federation submitted by the Defence Ministry and other departments concerned. The document instructs the Russian Defence Ministry to negotiate with the Nigerien side and, upon agreeing, sign the relevant deal. The Defence Ministry is authorised to make amendments to the draft document if these alterations are not of a fundamental nature. Moscow and Niamey will also develop relations in the area of joint troop training, in the sphere of military education, and in military medicine, among other fields.

## **Conclusion**

This paper looked at the countries involved in the exploitation of the natural resources of Niger and the escalation of terrorism in the Sahel Region. It concluded that France, the EU, and the US, among other Western countries, have syphoned Nigerian uranium and oil, among other mineral resources, since colonialism to the present day. Successive changes in governments, including the recent one in July 2023 in Niger, have attracted other foreign powers, such as Russia, to enter the fray. The involvement of Western powers in the extraction and exploitation of Nigerien mineral resources has also brought with it varying degrees of terrorism in the country. The paper concluded that the new Niger military rulers lost faith and confidence in the former French, EU, and US allies whom they accuse of looting their natural resources for endless decades and have extended the olive branch to the Russian Federation for salvation and survival. The shifting of alliances by Niger's military rulers from France, the EU, and Germany, among other Western countries, to Russia has caused tensions among the superpowers.

## References

- Ajansi, A. (2023) Germany concerned about spill over effects of Niger crisis in Africa, Available on: <https://www.aa.tr/en.com> , Accessed on 11 February 2024.
- Bohm, M. and Demuynck, M. (2023) Unravelling the Niger Coup and its implications for violent extremism in the Sahel, Available on: <https://www.icct.nl.com> , Accessed on 11 February 2024.
- Britannica (2024) Niger Independence and Conflict. Available on: <https://www.britannica.place/Niger> . Accessed on 11 February 2024.
- Centre for Preventive Action. (2023). Available on: <https://www.cfr.org/programs/center-preventive-action>, Accessed 2 February 2024.
- Chihombori, E. (2023) How France made some West African Countries Perpetual Colonies, Available on; <https://www.nigerien.mineral.resource>. Accessed on 7 March 2024.
- European Parliament Research Service. (2023). Available on: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/home> , Accessed on 2 February 2024.
- France24. (2023). Available on: <https://www.france24.com>>France, Accessed on 31 January 2024.
- Fernando, J. (2020). *The resource curse theory*. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/172202> Accessed on 7 March 2024.
- Frynas, J., & Burr, L. (2020). The presource curse in Africa: Economic and political effects of anticipating natural resource revenues. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 7(4), 1257-1270.
- Lukmaan, I.A.S (2024) Scramble for the Sahel: Interests of Global Powers, Available on: <https://www.blog.lukmaan.com>. Accessed on 19 January 2024.
- Makonye, F. (2022). Dissecting the Franco-Rwandese Alliance in Southern Africa: Case of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, *Journal of African Foreign Affairs (JoAFA)* ISSN 2056-5658 (Online) ISSN 2056-564X (Print), Volume 9, Number 3, December 2022 pp 161-172.
- Mittelman, M. (2017). The Resource Curse, Available on: <https://www.bloomberg.com>, Accessed on 29 January 2024.
- Reuters. (2024). Reuters Institute of the Study of Journalism. University of Oxford. United Kingdom.
- Reuters (2024) Russia and Niger agree to develop military ties, Available on <https://www.reuters.news.com> , Accessed on 10 February 2024.

Tass (2024) Putin plays major global role, despite Western attempts to demonize him. Available on: <https://www.tass.com/defense/95962> . Accessed on 11 February 2024.

The Moscow Times (2023) Russian Officials Visit Niger to Bolster Military Ties.

The US Department of State. (2020). Available on: <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2020/niger>, Accessed on 29 January 2024.

The website, <https://ecfr.eu/article.com> , Lone changer: Germany, Mali, and Russian influence in Africa. Accessed on 22 January 2024.

The website, <https://icct.nl/publication.com> , What are the major natural resources of Niger? Accessed on 11 February 2024.