Beat: Politics

Hours before the coup in Niger, U.S. diplomats said the country was stable.

These Officials were dead wrong.

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USPA NEWS - Hours before the recent coup in Niger, American diplomats painted a picture of a democratic government that, while imperfect, was more stable than others in the region.

“There’s a public perception of general corruption, but it’s not as bad as other countries in the area,” a U.S. official told NBC News on July 25. Later that day, Nigerien security and military leaders overthrew the country’s democratically elected president, Mohamed Bazoum.

Niger was the sixth country in Africa’s sprawling Sahel region, which spans the continent from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, to have experienced a coup since 2020. It is also a base for emboldened Islamist militants and one of the world’s largest producers of uranium, which is coveted by many nations. France, the former colonial power in the region, has scaled back its once-frequent military interventions.

But the U.S. response to the coup raises questions about how effectively the West will be able to counter Islamist terrorist groups and Russian disinformation in a region that risks becoming a region of failed states.

On Sunday, Niger's new military leaders announced that they will prosecute the country's democratically elected president for "high treason," a charge that could result in the death penalty.

Though rumors of a coup had circulated in Niger for some time, U.S. officials were blindsided when it happened because the U.S. has not prioritized Africa for years and does not have enough personnel there, more than a dozen current and former U.S. diplomatic and military officials said. The U.S. did not even have an ambassador in Niger on the day of the coup.

Once the coup began in the nation of roughly 25 million, it took U.S. officials days to accept that short of an international military intervention, it would not be reversed. Asked why the U.S. was caught off guard, White House National Security Council officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment.
At first, U.S. diplomatic and military officials insisted the cause was a personal dispute between the president and the head of his Presidential Guard, Gen. Abdourahamane Tchiani, and that it could be resolved quickly. Tchiani had allegedly taken Bazoum hostage because he expected Bazoum to fire him.

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“In the first day, we were told by all of our contacts that nobody supported this,” a senior State Department official said 48 hours after the coup began. “And then in the second day it seemed to balloon a little bit, but those who we talked to said they were just acting to make sure that the president and his family weren’t hurt and that there was no conflict among the military or with civilians.”

U.S. military officials believed that the head of the Nigerien Special Forces, Gen. Moussa Salaou Barmou, their close ally, was going along with the other military leaders to keep the peace. They noted that in a video showing the coup leaders on the first day, Barmou was in the back of the group with his head down and his face mostly hidden.

It remains to see what will happen with this situation.

This is a developing story.

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