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From Anchor of Stability to Crisis Hotspot: Background and Consequences of the Military Coup in Niger

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As the last country in the central Sahel with a democratically legitimized government, Niger was seen as an anchor of stability in a crisis-ridden region. As a result, Germany and other Western partners became increasingly involved in strengthening Niger's army to support its fight against jihadist groups. Now, following similar cases in Mali and Burkina Faso, the Western-trained army has seized power in Niger – winning the support of large sections of the population. Tensions in dealing with the security crisis and the government's lack of legitimacy facilitated the coup and contributed to its success. To prevent further regional destabilization, Germany should support a negotiated solution to the crisis, even if this means making political concessions to the coup leaders.

On the morning of 26 July 2023, the presidential guard prevented Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum from leaving his palace. What the presidential office on social media initially described as an "anti-republican mood" by the elite military unit had by the end of the day turned into a coup. A ten-member group of high-ranking military officers appeared on national television under the name "Conseil national pour la sauvegarde de la patrie (CNSP)"¹ and declared they had deposed the government, citing the continued deterioration of the security situation in the country as well as inadequate economic and social governance as reasons for taking action.

Since Niger's independence from its colonial power France in 1960, the military has shaped the country's political history. Domestic political crises have been the catalyst for past military interventions.² As recently as 2010, the army overthrew then-President Mamadou Tandja after he tried to unlawfully extend his term in office a third time. That coup paved the way for a new democratic beginning.

However, the threat of military coups lingered even with the election of Mahamadou Issoufou in 2011 and Niger's first democratic change of government in 2021, which saw Issoufou's long-time party colleague Mohamed Bazoum assume the presidency. Despite regular personnel rotations within the military elite, several coup attempts were thwarted

¹ In English: National Council for the Salvation of the Fatherland.

² Kimba Idrissa, *Armée et Politique au Niger* (CODESRIA, 2008), 4.

during Issoufou's and Bazoum's presidencies.³ Nevertheless, the coup d'état on 26 July 2023 came as a surprise to many observers, as it was not preceded by mass protests, unlike the military takeover in Mali in 2020, nor had the army recently suffered heavy losses, as in Burkina Faso in 2022.

What exactly triggered the recent military coup in Niger remains unclear. Nigerien and international observers agree that Brigadier General Abdourahmane Tiani initiated it. Some reports suggest that he was due to be dismissed as head of the presidential guard the following day. Other sources indicate disputes between Bazoum and Tiani over the budget of the presidential guard. What is certain is that the president was in the process of renewing parts of the military leadership – whether by retiring generals or transferring them abroad, as in the case of Chief of General Staff Salifou Modi, who was sent to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador in March and is now regarded as the junta's number two. Tiani's closeness to Bazoum's predecessor Issoufou, Issoufou's unclear stance during and after the coup and his son's role in the flourishing oil sector, which Bazoum reportedly wanted to restructure, leave plenty of room for speculation about the possible involvement of Issoufou in initiating the overthrow.⁴

What presumably began as an ad hoc revolt by the presidential guard, driven by parochial interests within the political-military elite, was however only able to become a successful overthrow due to the united backing of the military and the massive support of the population.

Domestic political tensions over the approach towards the security crisis

Even though the defence and security forces backed the coup leaders to prevent bloodshed, according to Chief of Staff Abdou Sidikou Issa, it was undoubtedly decisive for their unity that the relationship between Bazoum and the military had apparently been strained for some time. Differences existed mainly over the question of how to deal with the security crisis.⁵ Given the growing threat posed by jihadist violence, Bazoum had advocated the establishment of dialogue formats with violent actors already during his time as interior minister. His efforts were met with resistance, particularly in the ranks of the military. During a meeting of the National Security Council in February 2017, the military leadership spoke out against Bazoum's proposal to start talks with local leaders of the “Islamic State”.⁶

However, with his election as president in 2021, Bazoum turned the dialogue approach into a pillar of a political conflict resolution strategy that was intended to complement military operations. The aim of this “outstretched hand” policy was to establish channels of dialogue with jihadist groups, demobilise and reintegrate Nigerien combatants and reduce intercommunal tensions with the help of local mediation initiatives.⁷ Although violence against security forces and the population had declined substantially since 2021,⁸ parts of

³ Rahmane Idrissa, “Notes sur un putsch”, *La Gazette Perpendiculaire* (Blog), 28 July 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

⁴ Gilles Yabi, *The Niger Coup's Outsized Global Impact* (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 31 August 2023), last accessed 14 November 2023.

⁵ Rahmane Idrissa, „Rule by Junta”, *Sidecar* (Blog), 7 August 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

⁶ International Crisis Group, *Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger's Tillabery* (International Crisis Group, 3 June 2020), 18, last accessed 14 November 2023.

⁷ Hannah Rae Armstrong, *Comprendre l'accalmie : une reprise en main du Nord-Tillabéri au Niger* (Bamako : Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), 2023), last accessed 14 November 2023.

⁸ Héni Nsaibia, „Fact Sheet: Military Coup in Niger”, *ACLEDA*, 3 August 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

the opposition were quick to criticise the dialogue initiatives as a sign of the government's weakness and inability to guarantee the security of its citizens.

Elements of the military, too, continued to view the approach as problematic. Particularly because the army had never been as well equipped as in the past years, the military leadership saw its operational scope restricted by Bazoum's dialogue initiatives. In a conversation held in Niamey in February 2023, a Nigerien security official accused the president that he was using negotiations and non-aggression pacts with violent actors to keep the number of major attacks low to win the next elections. In reality, however, the critique alleged, the jihadist groups benefited from the agreements, which allowed them to move freely on Nigerien soil, recruit new members and equip themselves with material. Only their attacks they carried out on the other side of the border, in Mali.⁹

In addition, Bazoum's open admission that he had released prisoners and received them for talks in the presidential palace as part of his "outstretched hand" policy,¹⁰ or an interview in which he described "terrorists" as "stronger and more battle-hardened" than the army, were perceived as contemptuous of the army both in military circles and by the public.¹¹

In view of the regional dimension of the violence, the military leadership also saw another strategic mistake in Bazoum's dismissive attitude towards the military governments in Mali and Burkina Faso, which made military cooperation more difficult. Some joint manoeuvres with Burkina Faso's army did take place at an operational level, such as operations "Taanli" (June 2021, November/December 2021, April 2022) and "Koural" (June to July 2022). And a military rapprochement with Mali took place in spring 2023 after terrorists attacked Nigerien security forces in Intagamey in February 2023.¹² However, Mali's cooperation with the Wagner mercenary group and the redeployment of French troops to Niger following the withdrawal of Operation Barkhane from Mali in the summer of 2022 prevented greater regional collaboration.

In March 2023, the then Chief of General Staff Modi met with the Malian junta for talks. Just a few weeks later, he was removed from office without any explanation. Many now interpret this as a sign of escalating differences between the military leadership and Bazoum over whether and to what extent cooperation with neighbouring countries should be further intensified. Finally, a week after the coup, Modi returned to Bamako, where he reportedly met with a representative of the Wagner group.¹³

In addition, anti-French resentment grew in the ranks of the Nigerien military. This hampered the military cooperation with France that Bazoum had expanded and contributed to his growing unpopularity in military circles.¹⁴ For example, France was accused of continuing to conduct military operations in Niger in an uncoordinated and autonomous manner, despite ostensibly having revised the approach of its cooperation.

Against this backdrop of growing tensions, it is not surprising that in his first speech as president of the CNSP, General Tiani justified the military coup by citing both Bazoum's "outstretched hand" policy and the lack of a regionally oriented security policy. He could be

⁹ Interview member Nigerien security forces, Niamey, February 2023.

¹⁰ "Niger : Mohamed Bazoum libère des " terroristes " en vue d'ouvrir le dialogue", *Jeune Afrique*, 27 February 2022, last accessed 14 November 2023.

¹¹ François Soudan, "Mohamed Bazoum : " Armer les civils pour combattre les terroristes est une tragique erreur """, *Jeune Afrique*, 26 May 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

¹² According to official figures, 17 Nigerien soldiers were killed in the attack in Intagamey, in the Tillabéri region on the border with Mali, which was claimed by the Islamic State.

¹³ Simone Schlindwein, "Will Wagner soon support the new junta in Niger?", *n-tv.de*, 8 August 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

¹⁴ Rémi Carayol, "Aveugle, sourde aux critiques et inaudible : les trois handicaps de la France au Niger", *Mediapart*, 2 August 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

sure that his narrative would be well received both in security circles and among the population.

The Bazoum government's legitimacy deficits

Similar to recent coups in Mali and Burkina Faso, thousands of sympathisers took to the streets of Niamey and some regional centres after the military seized power. In Niamey, protesters then attacked the French embassy and the headquarters of the ruling PNDS-Tarayya party. Those living in rural areas also describe support for the coup as high.

Abdourahmane Idrissa, a Nigerien political scientist, says the coup doesn't just mark the violent end of democracy, but rather reflects a failed democracy.¹⁵ Bazoum's election in 2021 was internationally hailed as the first democratic transfer of power in the country's history, despite allegations of irregularities. However, accusations of fraud and violent protests in several cities accompanied the announcement of the results.

The fact that these protests quickly subsided was partly due to the successful co-optation of a fragmented opposition through the generous allocation of ministerial and advisory posts. On the other hand, Bazoum, like his predecessor and party colleague Issoufou, relied on repression against government critics.

In February 2022, for example, a decree was issued that made it more difficult for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to operate by imposing bureaucratic hurdles and requiring programmes to be aligned with government priorities. A report published in June 2022 by a coalition of Nigerien NGOs also documented the banning of many planned demonstrations and the arrest of journalists and activists critical of the government.¹⁶

Bazoum, a philosopher by training who had been involved in Niger's pro-democracy movement alongside Issoufou since his youth, came into office promising his own policy priorities, such as the fight against corruption and greater inclusiveness in the education system. But many in Niger saw him as a mere stooge of his predecessor – and therefore as part of a corrupt political elite. Nigerien critics call the form of government established by Issoufou the “Guri system” (derived from an election campaign slogan of Issoufou's and the Hausa word for “wish”): While promising democracy, he actually established a quasi-one-party system that politicised both the public administration and the judiciary.¹⁷

This perception was particularly evident in the fight against corruption, where critics saw Bazoum's political room for manoeuvre as severely limited, despite his good intentions. In particular, civil society organisations criticised the inadequate investigation of a case of alleged massive embezzlement of state funds in connection with arms purchases under the Issoufou government.¹⁸ Doubts were also raised about Bazoum's political priorities during his time in government in the area of education policy. Several tragic cases of fires in thatched schools drew public attention to the inadequate infrastructure of the education system, which Bazoum had promised to radically change in his inauguration speech. The president's stance on the widespread practice of polygamy, which he had denounced as a cause of population growth and poverty, also sparked outrage among conservative and religious sections of society.

¹⁵ Idrissa, "Le coup d'État bloqué".

¹⁶ Amnesty International, *Niger: Conviction of investigative journalists marks deepening repression of media freedom* (Amnesty International, 13 January 2022), last accessed 14 November 2023.

¹⁷ Idrissa, "Rule by Junta".

¹⁸ Mark Anderson, Khadija Sharife and Nathalie Prevost, *How a Notorious Arms Dealer Hijacked Niger's Budget and Bought Weapons From Russia* (OCCRP, 6 August 2020), last accessed 14 November 2023; Tournons La Page (TLP), *Niger. Civic space on the verge of extinction* (Tournons La Page, June 2023), 42, last accessed 14 November 2023.

The withdrawal of Operation Barkhane from Mali in the summer of 2022 and the redeployment of French troops to Niger triggered a new wave of discontent, channelling the pent-up frustration of the population. As early as November 2021 demonstrators in Téra tried to block a French military convoy. Three people were killed. According to a survey conducted by Afrobarometer in June 2022, 64 percent of the population were against external military intervention in Niger, while only 6 percent considered military aid from France and the EU desirable.¹⁹ On 3 August 2022, the 62nd anniversary of Niger's independence, civil society organisations created the M62 movement, an ad hoc coalition calling for the withdrawal of the French army. However, apart from one authorised demonstration in September 2022, the government suppressed the coalition's protests. Its leader, Abdoulaye Seydou, was sentenced to nine months in prison in April 2023 for disturbing public order.

Although the decline in jihadist attacks and the improvement in the economic situation suggest a positive government record for Bazoum, figures and statistics ultimately failed to help the government win the necessary popular support.

As in neighbouring countries, Niger's military junta exploited massive popular discontent after the coup to gain support and legitimacy. Particularly in Niamey, the traditional stronghold of the opposition, the new rulers used the mobilisation potential of the M62 and other influential civil society actors. Shortly after the coup, an appeals court acquitted M62 leader Seydou. On the day of the coup, however, a demonstration organised by PNDS-Tarayya supporters in front of the presidential palace to demand Bazoum's release was dispersed by the presidential guard with warning shots. The response of the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS) to the coup and the support it received from France and other international partners was crucial to the persistence of popular protests.

One coup too many

In contrast to the well-established protocol of suspension, sanctions and agreement on a transitional period as in the case of recent military coups in the region, ECOWAS reacted more drastically in Niger. In addition to severe economic sanctions, the regional organisation threatened military intervention immediately after the coup if Bazoum did not return to office within one week. Niger's Western partners – France, Germany, the EU and the US – backed ECOWAS's response, suspending budgetary and development aid, as well as cooperation in the security sector, and quickly evacuated their nationals. In particular, the tone between the military junta and France, which had some 1,500 troops stationed in Niger, became increasingly tense. Following violent protests outside the French embassy on 30 July, for example, Paris immediately threatened to take decisive action if its interests in the country were threatened.

Several factors explain the rapid escalation. First, ECOWAS elected Nigeria's leader Bola Tinubu as its president in July 2023 and subsequently pledged to change course in order to act more decisively against autocratic tendencies in the region. Against this backdrop, Niger's military coup was, according to several West African leaders, one coup too many that could not be allowed to pass without consequences. Given the seemingly unplanned beginnings of the coup and the initially unclear stance of the Nigerien military, it is also likely that ECOWAS had hoped to be able to stop the coup attempt in its early stages with a decisive

¹⁹ Mahamne Tahirou Ali Bako, *AD653: Terrorisme : Les Nigériens sont satisfaits de l'implication de leur armée et ne veulent pas de l'aide d'une armée étrangère* (Niger: Afrobarometer, 18 June 2023), last accessed 14 November 2023.

response.²⁰ However, the opposite was the case. Negotiations between the CNSP and ECOWAS failed, as did mediation efforts by Chad's ruler Mahamat Deby, the US and religious leaders from northern Nigeria. While the ECOWAS ultimatum passed without consequences, the external threat allowed the junta to consolidate its power. Within a week, the coup leaders had arrested many members of the old government, appointed a civilian-military transitional government and deepened their relations with the military governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea.

In addition, harsh sanctions, which exacerbated the already precarious supply situation for the population, and fears of an ECOWAS military intervention fuelled popular support for the putschists. Civil society initiatives, led by M62, called for the formation of 'patriotic guards', who continue to set up nocturnal checkpoints in the streets of Niamey until today. Thousands also responded to a call in early August to volunteer for the defence of the country.

However, the escalation was thwarted by opposition within ECOWAS to its intervention plans. In Nigeria, which would have provided most of the troops in the event of a military intervention, the Senate called on Tinubu to favour political and diplomatic means in dealing with the crisis in Niger and warned of the possible consequences of a military intervention. Northern Nigeria in particular, which not only shares a border with Niger but also has close cultural and economic ties with the neighbouring country, opposed military intervention. Togo, a member of ECOWAS, also engaged in several bilateral dialogue initiatives aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the crisis.²¹ The country had already successfully asserted itself as a mediator in regional crises in the past, such as in 2022 with the release of 49 soldiers from Côte d'Ivoire who had been arrested in Mali on charges of being mercenaries.

Niger's northern neighbour Algeria, which is not a member of ECOWAS but is seeking to consolidate its role as a regional power in North Africa and the Sahel, also strongly condemned the regional organisation's plans for military intervention, describing them as a direct threat to itself.²² At the same time, Algeria tried to find a political compromise by proposing a six-month transition period followed by democratic elections.

For ECOWAS, Niger thus appears to have become a test case that will be decisive not only for the legitimacy of the governments of its member states, but also for the regional influence of the democratically oriented regional organisation. Against this background, the extent to which Algeria or Togo can establish themselves as mediators in Niger's political crisis will be crucial. After the military junta in Niamey rejected Algeria's efforts in early October, a Nigerien delegation from the CNSP travelled to Lomé in early November and asked Togo to act as mediator in the dialogue between Niger and the international community.²³ The geopolitical implications of the military coup are also significant for Europe and the US. On the one hand, Bazoum's overthrow threatens to remove an important regional partner in the fight against international terrorist networks, organised crime and irregular migration. On the other hand, there are concerns about Niger's political reorientation through a deeper partnership with authoritarian regimes such as Russia or China, as can be seen in

²⁰ Yvan Guichaoua and Nina Wilen, "A coup like no other: Three reasons why the coup in Niger is different from previous coups in the Sahel (and why it's very serious)", *Democracy In Africa*, August 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

²¹ "Niger: military regime asks Togo to mediate", *Africanews*, 7 November 2023, last accessed 15 November 2023.

²² "Algeria proposes transition to resolve Niger crisis", *Reuters*, 29 August 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023; Kersten Knipp, "Algeriens komplexes Verhältnis zu den Putschisten im Niger", *Deutsche Welle*, 8 August 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

²³ "Niger: military regime asks Togo to mediate".

neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso. However, instead of adopting a coordinated diplomatic and de-escalatory stance, diverging interests have dominated the picture.

After weeks of wrangling with the military junta, Paris was forced to agree to the withdrawal of its troops and ambassador. By contrast, and much to France's displeasure, Washington opted for a pragmatic approach towards the putschists in Niamey in order to maintain the option of military cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Not even four weeks after the coup, the US sent a new ambassador to Niamey. Aiming to avoid being dragged into a military confrontation between France and Niger, the US later moved its soldiers stationed in Niamey to an airbase in the north of the country and resumed reconnaissance flights as part of its counter-terrorism efforts.

Under the influence of France, Europe however continued to insist on political support for ECOWAS and initiated its own sanctions plans against those responsible for the coup. As a response, the junta in Niamey revoked a law which was passed in 2015 under European influence to stem migration movements towards the north, and denounced the accords on two European-led capacity-building missions for Nigerien security forces.

Outlook

The military coup in Niger in July 2023 is another major blow to the pro-democracy movement in the Sahel. At the same time, a reinstatement of Bazoum and a return to the status quo ante is no longer conceivable, given the military's support for the new rulers and the backing of the junta by the population. However, the recent history of coups in the region shows that even military regimes that have seized power cannot sustain themselves in the long term on populist slogans alone, unless they also deliver results.

There is therefore a risk of further destabilisation in Niger, as could be observed after the military coups in Mali and Burkina Faso. One possible scenario is that tensions within the Nigerien military leadership could lead to a coup within a coup. In particular, the arrest of Issoufou, which the M62 coalition has been demanding since late July, threatens to become a bone of contention that could ultimately lead to the break-up of the CNSP alliance. While large sections of the military also see Issoufou as the embodiment of the PND system that the coup was supposed to put an end to, Tiani appears to be refusing to take action against his former patron.²⁴

The continuing threat from jihadist groups could also justify the dismissal of CNSP leader Tiani. Just a few weeks after the coup, there was a marked increase in jihadist attacks. A split in the army based on identity politics is also possible, in which the military cadres around General Modi, who traditionally come from the West, could strengthen their position.²⁵

The question of Niger's future foreign policy orientation could also lead to conflicts within the CNSP. While the junta signed a protocol agreement with Russia in early December which envisages an increased collaboration in the defence sector, some members of the putschists appear to be very interested in further cooperating with Western partners.

There is also a risk of increased conflict and violence within society. The self-defence militias and armed vigilante groups operating in the areas of influence of the jihadist groups

²⁴ " Au Niger, l'alliance entre Abdourahamane Tiani et Salifou Mody peut-elle tenir ? " *Jeune Afrique*, 2 October 23, last accessed 15 November 2023.

²⁵ Frédéric Bobin, "Au Niger, " les putschistes semblent conscients du caractère inflammable de la question des équilibres ethnorégionaux "" , *Le Monde*, 11 August 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

could gain in popularity with the new wave of attacks.²⁶ As a result, ethnic conflicts could flare up. Meanwhile, the mobilisation of the population in the capital, Niamey, threatens to take on a violent dynamic of its own. Cases of vigilante justice, looting and sexual assault at the nightly checkpoints set up by the population have been reported. Furthermore, PNDSTarayya supporters have used social media to call for violence against protesters calling for Issoufou's arrest.

It is also possible that the support of segments of the population that currently see the military as the driving force behind political change will diminish over time if hopes for an improvement in living conditions are not met. At a pro-CNSP demonstration in Niamey on 5 September, for example, taxi drivers called for a reduction in diesel prices, reiterating an old political demand.²⁷

Expectations are currently particularly high for the national dialogue process announced by the coup leaders, which is to take place during a three-year transition period. However, as similar initiatives in neighbouring countries have shown, Niger's military government could also use promises of political inclusion and restructuring to secure its power, for example by co-opting opposition forces.²⁸ Conflicts over participation and representation in the regional primaries have already emerged. These conflicts could intensify with the start of the national dialogue. In particular, the fact that the political parties suspended after the coup are not allowed to participate in the dialogue process has led to resentment among the population. The beginning of the national dialog, however, has been reported to an unknown date, under the justification of the ongoing threat posed by ECOWAS.

Another possible scenario which risks further destabilising the country would be spillover effects from the resumption of fighting between Mali's Tuareg-dominated separatist groups and the Malian military junta. With the so-called Liptako-Gourma Charter, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso have created a new military alliance, the Alliance of Sahel States. In the charter, the military junta of the three countries have pledged to support each other in the event of an attack on sovereignty and in the fight against rebellion and terrorism.²⁹ If Niger's army was to take part in the fighting against the separatist groups in Mali, a resistance movement against the new rulers could gain momentum that was founded in Europe in early August 2023 by former Tuareg rebel leader and later Minister of State Rhissa Ag Boula and that so far has little political support in Niger.³⁰

In order to prevent further destabilisation of Niger and the region, and to allow a return to democratic principles and the rule of law, negotiations between the national and regional parties to the conflict and the affected populations remain the only realistic way forward. This is true even if negotiations make political concessions unavoidable, such as the recognition of the new authorities and the agreement on a compromise.

In the interest of a value-based foreign policy, Germany should also contribute to a diplomatic solution to the crisis instead of unconditionally supporting ECOWAS's confrontational course, which is also controversial among ECOWAS member states and the African Union.

²⁶ Delina Goxho, "Self-defense Militia Groups in Niger: Risking a Time Bomb", Policy Brief 17, *Megatrends Afrika* (Berlin: October 2023), last accessed 14 November 2023.

²⁷ Moussa Tchangari, interviewed by Lisa Tschörner, "Zivilgesellschaftlicher Protest in Niger: "Europa sollte die Meinungen der Bevölkerung ernst nehmen.", 21 September 2022, *Megatrends Spotlight*, 2022 15, last accessed 14 November 2023.

²⁸ Wolfram Lacher, "Krisenbehaftete Transition im Tschad", SWP-Aktuell 2022/A 71 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), 8 November 2022), last accessed 14 November 2023.

²⁹ Service d'Information du Gouvernement Burkina Faso, Charte de Liptako-Gourma instituant l'Alliance de Etats du Sahel (AES), 18 September 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

³⁰ Elise Barthelet, "Putsch au Niger: "Nous sommes prêts à entrer en guerre", menace un ministre du président Bazoum", *Le Monde*, 14 August 2023, last accessed 14 November 2023.

This leads to three possible courses of action for Germany's cooperation with Niger, all of which are fraught with risks and disadvantages.

The first option would be to suspend cooperation with Niger until the country returns to a democratic form of government, and to continue providing humanitarian aid only until then. This would minimise the risk of Germany supporting the military junta, while mitigating the impact of the crisis on the population. The problem with this option, however, is that it would mean abandoning joint long-term development and security goals, such as food security or strengthening Nigerien security forces in the fight against jihadist groups, for an indefinite period of time. Authoritarian powers such as Russia, China or Turkey could further take advantage of the resulting vacuum to expand their geopolitical influence in the region.

A second option would be to seek a resumption of cooperation with Niger in the interests of longer-term goals, even if this requires cooperation with the military junta. However, this option risks further strengthening the authoritarian rulers and their institutions. For example, Niger's new rulers could misuse the means and methods made available to combat violent jihadist actors to crack down more effectively on critics of the system. A unilateral move by Germany in this direction could also create tensions with ECOWAS and within the European Union. It would also send a negative signal to other potential coup plotters in the region. However, recent developments in Gabon suggest that even tougher international reactions to military takeovers will not stop the trend towards coups in the region.

A third option, and a middle way, could therefore be to resume cooperation with democratically oriented sections of civil society and with the decentralised municipalities, which continue to be administered by elected representatives even after the coup. In the fight against jihadist violence, for example, the focus could be put on civil, preventive conflict management methods. However, there would still be the risk that the military vacuum will be filled by authoritarian states. Without the direct involvement of the new rulers and a regional or national focus of programmes or projects, this approach would also risk being limited in scope, ineffective or even having unintended consequences if the measures taken contradicted national priorities. Bazoum's "outstretched hand" policy, for example, has already shown that a lack of coordination between military and civilian approaches to jihadist violence can lead to violent reactions from jihadist groups and thus to setbacks for peace efforts. In any case, this approach would also require the approval of the military government, so direct cooperation would ultimately be unavoidable.

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