



US Military Official Says No Final Decision on Niger Withdrawal

Description

US : A top US military official told The Associated Press that the US has still made no final decision on withdrawing from Niger despite the State Department saying it had agreed to the Nigerien government's request to leave.

The official said the US also hasn't decided to leave Chad, where the government is threatening to scrap the deal that justifies the US presence in the country.

"We are all trying to establish ourselves as the partner of choice," said Joint Chiefs Vice Chairman Adm. Christopher Grady, the US's second-highest ranking military officer.

"It's up to us to establish why we think our partnership with them is important. We certainly want to be there. We want to help them, we want to empower them, we want to do things by, with and through (them)," Grady added.

US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said last Friday that the US had agreed to Niger's request for a withdrawal and that the US would begin discussions with Nigerien officials on how to carry it out.

But Grady claimed there were discussions ongoing on a potential new military agreement, although Niger has not shown any sign that it wants US forces to stay.

"There's still negotiations underway," Grady said. "I don't believe there is a final decision on disposition of US forces there."

The US has about 1,100 military personnel in Niger and a major drone base, known as Air Base 201, that cost over \$100 million to build and serves as a hub for US operations in the region.

A senior Air Force leader recently blew the whistle on the situation for US troops in Niger in a letter to Congress, saying the US refusal to leave was putting US personnel in danger.

The whistleblower also said that US officials were suppressing intelligence to maintain a "facade" of

good relations between the US and Niger.

“It is clear that the country of Niger does not want a permanent military presence in the country and they have informed us that we need to leave.

At the same time, there are approximately 1,100 US Military Service Members in the country who are essentially being held hostage from returning home to their families while the State Department continues with failed diplomacy by not communicating with the country of Niger on what their withdrawal plans will look like,” the whistleblower said.

Since the July 23 coup that ousted former Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum, the new military-led government has expelled the French military and is increasing ties with Russia.

Niger announced it was ending its military partnership with the US in March after US officials lectured their Nigerien counterparts about Niamey’s relationship with Moscow.

by Dave DeCamp

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