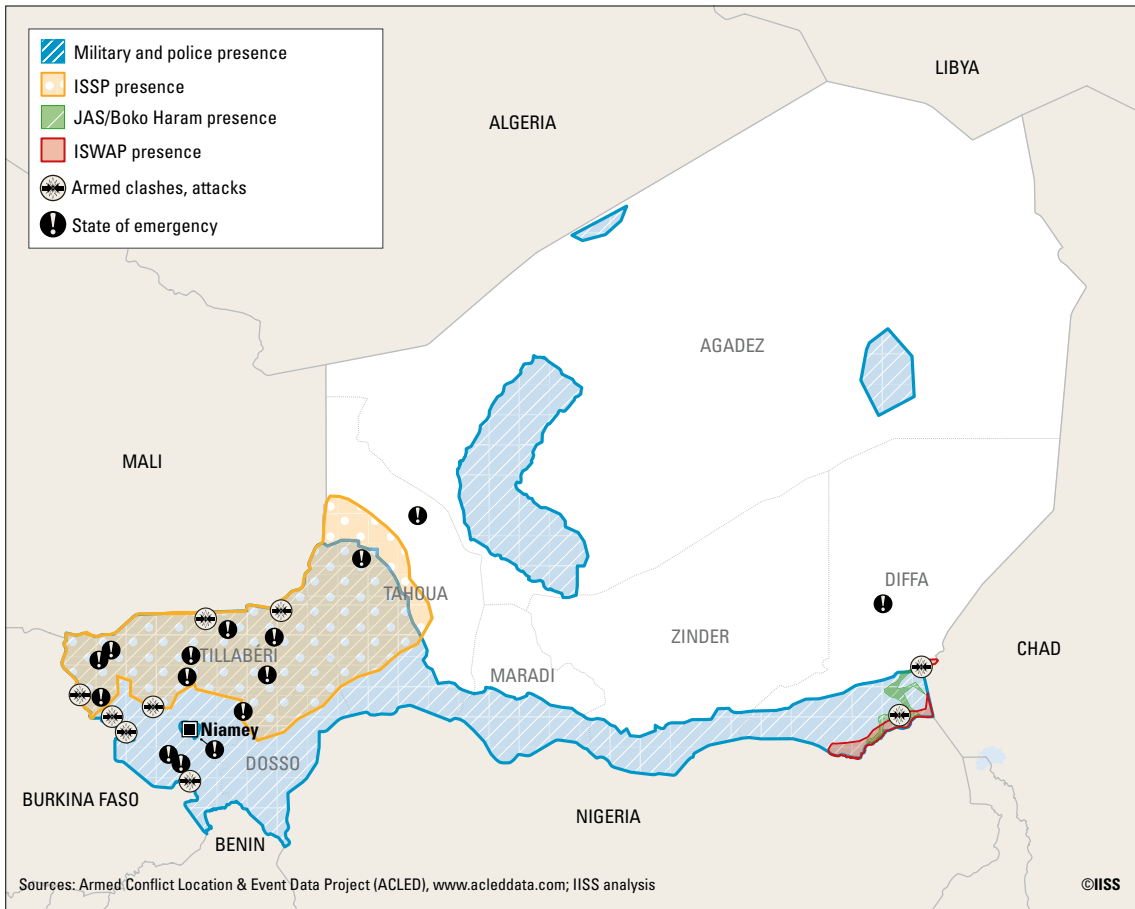


# NIGER

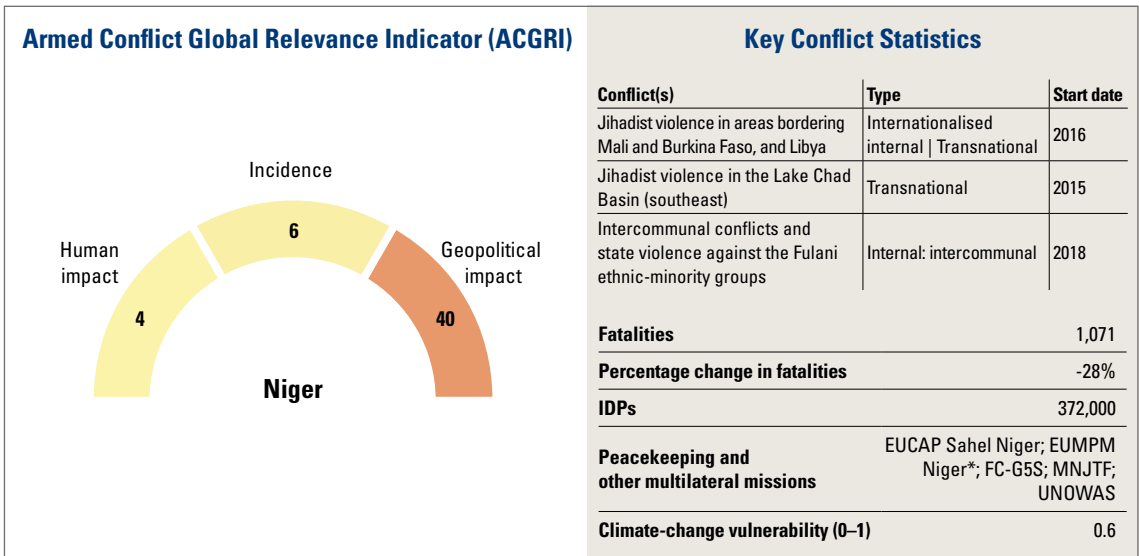


## Conflict Overview

Niger is located within the Sahelo-Saharan strip, where growing cross-border security threats in the last decade have undermined the country's fragile political and economic stability, as well as eroded its social cohesion. The conflicts in Niger are multidimensional, with various groups challenging the state's authority and criminal networks exploiting prevailing insecurity. Intensifying cycles of violence, deteriorating governance conditions and a growing humanitarian crisis all shape the conflict environment.

Niger has long been known for providing a highly active transit route that enables circular migratory flows for those travelling across the region. Yet, as of 2023, six of the seven countries bordering it face a crisis of one degree or another. As a result, Niger's

border areas are most affected by conflict. Porous borders have enabled an influx of violent extremist organisations (VEOs) from Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali and Nigeria into Niger. Historically, northern Nigeria-based Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS, popularly known as Boko Haram) and its splinter group the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) were the most dominant actors contesting state power in the south and east of Niger. In the past couple of years, however, they have been outpaced by the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM) and the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), which are increasingly operating in the western border areas of Niger's Tahoua and Tillabéri regions, adjacent to Burkina Faso and Mali.



ACGRI pillars: IISS calculation based on multiple sources for 2022 and 2023 (scale: 0–100), except for some cases according to data availability. See Notes on Methodology and Data Appendix for all variables and further details on Key Conflict Statistics. \*Launched in February 2023. However, all security cooperation between the EU and Niger was suspended after the military coup in July 2023.

Meanwhile, cross-border banditry is increasing in the Lake Chad Basin along Niger's southeastern border with Nigeria.

Insecurity has disrupted the local economy, leaving the country more vulnerable to criminality and compounding issues of poverty, food insecurity, unemployment and weak governance. Intercommunal conflict has accelerated since 2018, as groups compete for control over land, resources and political power.

The Tuareg and Fulani communities, in particular, have been involved in clashes over grazing rights, access to water and political representation. High levels of poverty and a lack of livelihood opportunities all fuel local grievances and exacerbate conflict dynamics. At the same time, the heavy-handed (and, at times, abusive) approach of the Niger Armed Forces (FAN) deployed to respond to the violence has undermined their legitimacy and ability to operate effectively.

## Conflict Update

Niger has taken steps to position itself as a vanguard in the fight against terrorism, and it has committed significant national resources to tackling the ensuing crisis. As of June 2023, however, the situation remained highly volatile. Furthermore, after the end of the reporting period, a *coup d'état* on 26 July 2023 removed from power the legitimate president, Mohamed Bazoum, fuelling a domestic and regional crisis that is highly unpredictable. In August 2023, the regional body Economic Community of West African States threatened military intervention, but this did not result in the coup leaders ceding power and reinstating Bazoum.

Throughout the reporting period, in Niger's southwest areas, rival groups fought for control over the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, claiming the lives of dozens of soldiers and civilians.<sup>1</sup> Particularly in Tahoua and Tillabéri, both ISSP and JNIM conducted several

armed operations, intimidated local authorities and targeted civilians. Towards the southeast, in the Lake Chad Basin and along the border with Nigeria, JAS/Boko Haram and ISWAP played a destabilising role, stoking intercommunal tensions and exploiting grievances around access to resources.<sup>2</sup> These groups all openly contest the state and propose alternative orders.

Before being overthrown in July 2023, Bazoum pursued his campaign slogan 'consolidate and move ahead' by prioritising national security, strengthening military capacity and improving intelligence gathering to combat violent extremism.<sup>3</sup> His efforts may have yielded some results, as conflict-related deaths decreased in 2022 compared to previous years.<sup>4</sup> One contributing factor to this trend was the state's commitment to local dialogues. Talks with non-state armed groups, facilitated by the government's High

Authority for the Consolidation of Peace, increased community-level peace prospects.

Another contributing factor was the reinforcement of the FAN across the country, as evidenced by the large-scale operations in border areas in early 2023, as well as the government's efforts to strengthen international partnerships. In March 2023, Niger committed to separate security-cooperation agreements with Benin and Mali. Furthermore, a number of its ongoing bilateral partnerships and public commitments to multilateral operations – including the G5 Sahel and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) – aim to address the underlying grievances fuelling conflict in the country. Thus, as neighbouring countries have turned away from cooperation with traditional security actors, Niger's geopolitical influence has grown. From 2022–23, the country engaged in close economic and military cooperation with the European Union, France and the United States, indicating that it is positioning itself as an ally to Western forces in their fight against violent extremism in the Sahel. Bazoum's removal from office in July, however, threatens Niger's partnership with the West.

Attacks by the FAN against civilians – mostly ethnic Fulanis due to their perceived over-representation within jihadist groups, a trend that is common in Mali

and Burkina Faso as well – exacerbated communal tensions and contributed to Niger's humanitarian crisis in the reporting period. In January 2023, for instance, at least 11 Fulani civilians were killed by the FAN and buried in a mass grave near the border with Burkina Faso. Three months earlier, in the same area, an attack on a mine killed 11 workers.<sup>5</sup> The FAN and its partners' efforts to combat VEOs left communities vulnerable to criminality and banditry. Likewise, kidnapping and other illicit activities became increasingly common in areas where the state had almost no presence. Niger's focus on securitisation therefore did not address the root of the country's multidimensional crisis – as evidenced by the way drivers of instability resurfaced elsewhere.

A number of challenges such as poverty, food insecurity, criminality and corruption continued to affect the country across the reporting period. Niger remained among the world's poorest nations in 2022, and 4.4 million people faced food insecurity in the same year, according to the European Commission.<sup>6</sup> Acute food insecurity in 2023 is predicted to reach a ten-year high.<sup>7</sup> Amidst important geopolitical shifts in the Sahel, finding ways to address these structural challenges will be pivotal in determining Niger's trajectory towards peace and stability.

## Conflict Parties

### Niger Armed Forces (FAN)

**Strength:** 33,100 active military personnel (army: 33,000; air force: 100) and 24,500 active gendarmerie and paramilitary personnel (gendarmerie: 7,000; republican guard: 9,000; national police: 8,500).

**Areas of operation:** Regions of Tahoua and Tillabéri in western Niger, the northern region of Agadez, as well as the southern and southeastern regions of Maradi and Diffa.

**Leadership:** President Mohamed Bazoum (until July 2023), Alkassoum Indatou (defence minister) and Gen. Salifou Mody (chief of staff).

**Structure:** Consists of the army, the air force, the gendarmerie, the republican guard and the national police.

**History:** Founded upon Niger's independence in 1961 and officered by the French Colonial Forces, the FAN was

reorganised following a 1974 military coup. In 2003, an air-force component was created.

**Objectives:** Maintain internal and border security against jihadist groups and protect territorial integrity.

**Opponents:** Ansarul Islam, ISSP, JNIM, ISWAP and JAS/Boko Haram.

**Affiliates/allies:** Benin, Burkina Faso, France, G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S), Mali, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the US.

**Resources/capabilities:** Niger's defence budget was US\$243m (1.6% of GDP) for 2022 and is US\$326m (2.0% of GDP) for 2023.

### Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM)

**Strength:** Unknown.

**Areas of operation:** Limited presence in western Niger.

**Leadership:** Iyad Ag Ghaly, a long-time Tuareg militant who is also the leader of Ansar Dine, one of the main groups constituting JNIM.

**Structure:** Created as an alliance of equals.

**History:** JNIM was created in 2017 as a coalition between al-Qaeda-affiliated groups such as Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb–Sahel, Katibat Macina and other smaller factions.

### Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM)

**Objectives:** Establish an Islamic state in the Sahel, replacing existing state structures and expelling foreign forces.

**Opponents:** FAN, foreign forces, Russian private military contractors and ISSP.

**Affiliates/allies:** Al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb–North Africa, Katibat Macina and Katibat Serma. Cooperates with Ansarul Islam, though their relationship is ambiguous.

**Resources/capabilities:** Heavy weaponry and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), including vehicle-borne IEDs and suicide-vehicle-borne IEDs.

### Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP)

**Strength:** Unknown.

**Areas of operation:** Western Niger (Dosso, Tahoua and Tillabéri regions).

**Leadership:** Abdul Bara al-Sahrawi (also known as al-Ansari) and a cadre of local commanders.

**Structure:** Unknown.

**History:** ISSP emerged from a split within al-Mourabitoun in 2015 and was originally known as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). ISGS pledged allegiance to the Islamic

State (ISIS) in 2015, and in 2019 it became part of ISWAP. ISIS recognised the group as an independent *wilayat* (province) in March 2022 under the name ISSP.

**Objectives:** Establish an Islamic caliphate based on strict interpretation of the Koran and adherence to ISIS ideology.

**Opponents:** JNIM, MINUSMA and FAN.

**Affiliates/allies:** Katibat Salaheddine, ISIS, ISWAP and other smaller militias.

**Resources/capabilities:** IEDs and light weaponry.

### French armed forces

**Strength:** Approximately 1,500 troops in Niger.<sup>8</sup>

**Areas of operation:** Border areas in the Nigerian part of the Liptako-Gourma area, including Inates, Ti-n-Gara and Tongo Tongo.

**Leadership:** Sébastien Lecornu (French minister of defence).

**Structure:** Consists of French military personnel formerly operating in Mali and Burkina Faso as part of *Operation Barkhane*.

**History:** In January 2021, former president Mahamadou Issoufou ordered the immediate deployment of special forces in *Operation Almahaou*, which has been supported by the French armed forces. Later, following the withdrawal of the

French Army from Mali in February 2022 and Burkina Faso in February 2023, and the end of *Operation Barkhane*, French authorities announced that a section of the army's troops would be redeployed to military bases in Niger.

**Objectives:** Assist the FAN in the fight against VEOs; protect local communities from attacks; and free villages and towns from insurgent control.

**Opponents:** ISSP and JNIM.

**Affiliates/allies:** FAN and FC-G5S.

**Resources/capabilities:** Heavy weaponry.

### G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S)

**Strength:** Between 5,000 and 10,000 troops provided by the four remaining member countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger).<sup>9</sup>

**Areas of operation:** Border regions between Mali and Mauritania, between Niger and Chad and in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area.

**Leadership:** Eric Yemdaogo Tiare (executive secretary).

**Structure:** In January 2023, the defence ministers of the four member countries announced the operationalisation of 14 new battalions, including five in Burkina Faso, two in Chad, two in Mauritania and five in Niger.<sup>10</sup> However, as of 30 April 2023, the task force was still in the process of developing a new concept of operations.

**History:** While the G5 Sahel as an organisation was established in 2014 (comprising members Burkina Faso, Chad,

Mali, Mauritania and Niger), the joint force was created in February 2017 with the support of France and the UN to address threats across the Sahel, such as terrorism and transnational organised crime, including the smuggling of goods and human trafficking. Mali withdrew from FC-G5S in May 2022.

**Objectives:** Strengthen security along the borders of member states through intelligence sharing and the deployment of joint patrols.

**Opponents:** JNIM and ISSP.

**Affiliates/allies:** Foreign and regional armed forces and MINUSMA.

**Resources/capabilities:** Suffers from underfunding and unpredictable financing. Troop deployment is slow due to a lack of logistical capacity and equipment.

### Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)

**Strength:** Approximately 13,000 troops from the armed forces of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.<sup>11</sup>

**Areas of operation:** Lake Chad Basin.

**Leadership:** Maj.-Gen. Gold Chibuisi (force commander).

### Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)

**Structure:** Headquartered in N'Djamena (Chad), the MNJTF comprises four geographical sectors, with their own headquarters in Monguno (Nigeria), Baga Sola (Chad), Diffa (Niger) and Mora (Cameroon). Each sector is led by a commander with wide autonomy, while the MNJTF force commander has coordination powers.

**History:** The MNJTF evolved from a Nigerian initiative in 1994 to a multinational force in 1998 to tackle cross-border crimes and banditry affecting the Lake Chad Basin. After years of inactivity, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) agreed to revive the MNJTF in 2015 to counter JAS/Boko Haram's growing activity.

**Objectives:** Coordinate regional counter-insurgency efforts and restore security in areas affected by JAS/Boko Haram

and ISWAP in the Lake Chad Basin. The MNJTF also helps support stabilisation programmes, humanitarian-assistance efforts and the return of forcibly displaced people.

**Opponents:** JAS/Boko Haram and ISWAP.

**Affiliates/allies:** The national armies of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria; international partners (the AU, Burkina Faso, the EU, France, Mali, the United Kingdom and the US); FC-G5S; and MINUSMA.

**Resources/capabilities:** Estimated initial operational budget of US\$700m. The EU is the force's main contributor, channelling its funds through the AU. Bureaucratic delays and lack of adequate resources have hampered the MNJTF's ability to fulfil its mandate.

### Other relevant parties

JAS/Boko Haram and ISWAP are both present in Diffa region in southeastern Niger as part of the transnational Lake Chad Basin conflict involving primarily Nigeria and Cameroon, as well as Chad.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), [www.acledata.com](http://www.acledata.com).
- <sup>2</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-insurgency', Report no. 245, 27 February 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> Seidik Abba, 'Sahel: What's the Secret to Niger's Security Resilience?', 30 June 2022.
- <sup>4</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, 'Global Terrorism Index: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism', March 2023, p. 14.
- <sup>5</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), [www.acledata.com](http://www.acledata.com).
- <sup>6</sup> European Commission, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 'Niger Factsheet'.
- <sup>7</sup> World Food Programme, 'Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in West and Central Africa at 10-year High as Crisis Spreads to Coastal Countries', 18 April 2023.
- <sup>8</sup> French Ministry of Armed Forces, 'NIGER – Operation conjointe pour la sécurisation du Liptako nigérien' [NIGER – Joint Operation to Promote Security in the Nigerien Liptako], 25 April 2023.
- <sup>9</sup> UN Security Council, 'Peace and Security in Africa', S/2022/838, 16 November 2022.
- <sup>10</sup> A. Y. Barma, 'G5 Sahel: l'Etat-major de la Force conjointe ramené à Niamey, 14 bataillons bientôt opérationnels (Ministres de la Défense)' [G5 Sahel: Joint Force Headquarters Brought Back to Niamey, 14 Battalions Soon to Be Operational (Ministers of Defence)], *ActuNiger*, 12 January 2023.
- <sup>11</sup> Freedom Chukwudi Onuoha, Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Mariana Llorens Zabala, *A Quest to Win the Hearts and Minds: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Multinational Joint Task Force* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2023), p. 37. The MNJTF website puts this number at around 10,000 troops.

