

Niger closes airspace as it refuses to reinstate president

Niger closed its airspace on Sunday until further notice, citing the threat of military intervention from the West African regional bloc after coup leaders rejected a deadline to reinstate the country's ousted president.

Earlier, thousands of junta supporters flocked to a stadium in Niamey, the capital, cheering the decision not to cave in to external pressure to stand down by Sunday following the July 26 power grab, according to Reuters.

The coup, the seventh in West and Central Africa in three years, has rocked the Sahel region, one of the poorest in the world. Given its uranium and oil riches and its pivotal role in a war with terrorists, Niger holds importance for the US, Europe, China and Russia.

Defense chiefs of the Economic Community of West

African States (ECOWAS) have agreed a possible military action plan, including when and where to strike, if the detained president, Mohamed Bazoum, is not released and reinstated by the deadline. ECOWAS leaders are scheduled to meet on Niger coup on Thursday.

"In the face of the threat of intervention that is becoming more apparent ... Nigerien airspace is closed effective from today," a junta representative said in a statement on national television on Sunday evening.

He said there had been a pre-deployment of forces in two Central African countries in preparation for an intervention, but did not give details.

Niger last week revoked military cooperation agreements with France, which has between 1,000 and 1,500 troops in the



country. Sunday's television broadcasts included a roundtable debate on encouraging solidarity in the face of

ECOWAS sanctions, which have led to power cuts and soaring food prices. The bloc's military threat has triggered fears of fur-

ther conflict in a region already battling the deadly insurgency that has killed thousands and forced millions to flee.



Children walk past burned cars outside the headquarters of Nigeria's President Bazoum's Nigerian Party for Democracy and Socialism in Niamey on August 7, 2023.

AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Syrian soldiers killed in Israeli airstrikes



AP — Israeli airstrikes hit areas around Damascus early Monday, killing at least four Syrian soldiers, Syrian state media reported.

Syrian state television, citing a military source, said four other soldiers were also wounded while the strikes caused "some material damage."

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes on Syria in recent years, but it rarely acknowledges them.

Thousands protest Bangladesh Qur'an burning



AFP — Thousands of people mounted furious protests after dozens of copies of Muslims' holy book, Qur'an, were burned in Bangladesh, leaving several officers injured, police said Monday.

Police said they fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse a crowd of "at least 10,000 people" overnight from Sunday to Monday as they tried to attack the two men accused of destroying the holy books, police officer Ajbahar Ali Shaikh said.

The two men were arrested in the northeastern city of Sylhet and claimed they had burned the books as they were "very old and some had printing mistakes".

14 dead in China floods



REUTERS — Fourteen people were reported to have died over the weekend in the Chinese city of Shulan due to flooding caused by Typhoon Doksuri.

Northeastern China, Beijing and Hebei Province have seen heavy rainfall and floods since the typhoon made landfall in southern Fujian Province two weeks ago.

The deaths in Shulan, in northeastern Jilin Province, add to the more than 20 who died last week in Beijing and Hebei. Authorities have yet to provide an overall death toll for the entire country.

China asks Philippines to remove grounded ship in South China Sea

China told the Philippines on Monday to remove its grounded warship from the Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea after blocking two Manila supply ships with water cannons over the weekend as both sides asserted their claims of the area. The Philippines accused the Chinese coast

guard of blocking and water-cannoning a Philippine military supply ship on what it said was a routine troop rotation and resupply mission on Saturday for the Philippine warship, a rusty World War II-era American ship that a handful of troops live aboard, according to Reuters. China said it had earlier

told Manila not to send ships to the Second Thomas Shoal and not to send "construction materials used for large-scale repair and reinforcement" to the warship after it learned of this recent supply plan, the Chinese coast guard said in a statement on Monday. The Philippines in

1999 intentionally grounded the warship to stake its claim to the Second Thomas Reef, a submerged reef that is part of the Spratly Islands. China over the weekend said it had "indisputable" sovereignty of the area and urged the Philippines to stop infringing activities in this waters.



Russia-US goals gap; a barrier to peace

By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

In the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, a meeting took place on August 5 and 6, centered on deliberations on the war in Ukraine and viable pathways to attain lasting peace. This gathering drew the participation of envoys from more than 30 countries, but Russia did not have any representatives. The crucial question that arises is whether one can harbor optimism regarding the meeting's potential success in ending the Ukraine conflict.

To gain further insights into this matter, Iran Daily sought the insights of Mahmoud Shouri, an expert on international affairs. Shouri holds a dim view of immediate prospects for peace, and his reasoning hinges upon the substantial disparity in the demands posited by Russia and NATO, spearheaded by the United States. These substantial gaps create a substantial hurdle that impedes any positive outlook for near-term peace.

Iran Daily: Can one envision a constructive outlook regarding the effectiveness of gatherings like the Jeddah meeting in bringing an end to the Ukrainian conflict?

Shouri: Such optimism appears elusive, particularly when considering the immediate horizon. The intricacies of the Ukrainian crisis remain enmeshed and the prospects for resolution in the near future are dim. Consequently, on initial assessment, the Jeddah meeting might appear to be a futile endeavor. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that these diplomatic undertakings are vital for charting a course toward a solution. Drawing from historical precedent, such convocations have the potential to steer crises toward eventual peace.

Shifting the focus to the objectives of the meeting's organizers, it becomes evident that one of the primary aims is to forge consensus or arrive at a conclusive stance among the world's influential nations with regards to addressing the Ukrainian



conflict. This collective effort could serve as a stepping stone toward cultivating a pathway to future tranquility. However, the absence of Russia casts a shadow over these discussions, introducing an element of one-sidedness. Consequently, harboring expectations of immediate positive outcomes from this assembly would be unrealistic.

What do you perceive as the primary hindrances to achieving peace? Is it Russia's unwavering stance, reluctant to relinquish its positions? Or is it Russia's apprehension that Western parties, particularly NATO, fail

to provide the necessary security assurances? Alternatively, could the issue be attributed to Europe and the US, who might view the perpetuation of the conflict as a means to further weaken Russia for their own strategic advantage?

The complexities at play encompass multiple facets. On one hand, Moscow's outlook appears entrenched, as it discerns limited potential for realizing its objectives or addressing its demands through such diplomatic gatherings. On the opposing front, the NATO alliance, under the US leadership, is reluctant to bring the conflict to an immedi-

ate end. In essence, the overarching predicament resides within the profound chasm that separates the aspirations of the opposing factions. Consequently, it appears that forums like the Jeddah meeting may fall short in bridging this considerable gulf, hindering meaningful convergence between the divergent aims of the involved parties. Despite this, the Jeddah meeting and analogous assemblies could serve as a platform, paving the way for broader talks that encompass Russia's active participation.

Wouldn't it be more prudent for Russia and the US to engage in direct bilateral talks, rather than convening meetings involving a multitude of nations? Why has this avenue not been pursued thus far?

The reality lies in the fact that Russia and the US-led NATO, have yet to arrive at a consensus that bilateral talks would yield a viable solution or fulfill their respective objectives. The crux of the issue, however, stems from a deeper division between the core

aims of the two factions. Put differently, the groundwork for dialogue at the leadership level – that is, between the heads of Russia and the US – has not been adequately laid.

Could the Russia-Ukraine conflict influence the US Democrats' prospects in the forthcoming 2024 presidential election, positively or negatively?

In the context of the US presidential election, the prominence of domestic matters has reached such heights that foreign concerns may not wield the same degree of impact. My assessment revolves around how the outcomes of the impending US presidential election could potentially shape the trajectory of the war in Ukraine conflict. Should the Republicans secure victory, a recalibration in the nature and extent of US aid to Ukraine becomes plausible. The partisan shift could translate into a withdrawal of the robust support that the Biden administration extended to Ukraine. This, in turn, might emerge as a pivotal determinant in the course of the Ukrainian war.