

Obama Tells Congress US Military Personnel Arrive in Niger

About 40 U.S. military personnel have arrived in Niger, President **Barack Obama** told Congress on Friday, the last of a deployment of about 100 to help coordinate intelligence sharing with French forces operating in Mali.

The **U.S. forces** are equipped with “weapons for the purpose of providing their own force protection and security,” Obama said, and are there with Niger’s consent.

France intervened in Niger’s neighbor **Mali** last month as Islamist forces, who seized control of the north in the confusion following a **military** coup in March 2012, pushed towards the capital Bamako.

That had pushed Mali to the forefront of U.S. and European security concerns, with fears the Islamists would turn the country into a base for international attacks.

Niger gave permission for U.S. surveillance drones to be stationed on its territory to improve intelligence on **al-Qaeda**-linked **Islamist** fighters in northern Mali and the wider Sahara, a senior Niger government source said in January.

The U.S. ambassador to Niger, Bisa Williams, made the request at a meeting with President Mahamadou Issoufou, who immediately accepted it, the source said.

Reporting by Mark Felsenthal; editing by Vicki Allen.

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