

Rand Paul Out to ‘Repeal and Replace’ US Interventionist Regime

The American Conservative sat down with Sen. Rand Paul to discuss the recent events in Niger and why it should force Congress to restore a constitutional foreign policy.

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Global Research, September 13, 2023

[The American Conservative](#) 8 September 2023

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#),
[Militarization and WMD](#)

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“America,” President John Quincy Adams famously said, “goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.”

In theory, Congress has ruled that America can, so long as the president consults Congress and the monster hunt lasts for 60 days with a 30 day time period to get home. In practice, the war dogs can pursue these monsters endlessly without Congress’s supposed leash.

On Tuesday, Sen. Rand Paul sent a [letter](#) to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, asking what authority justifies the presence of U.S. troops in Niger and what training the U.S. gave Brig. Gen. Moussa Barmou and other forces responsible for the recent coup in that country.

“U.S. servicemembers have been stationed in Niger for about a decade, ostensibly to train, advise, and assist Nigerien forces. One of those individuals trained by the United States, Moussa Salaou Barmou, is one of the coup leaders who toppled the duly elected government of Niger on July 26th,” the Kentucky senator wrote. “As a result of the military coup d’etat in Niger, over 1,000 U.S. service members deployed there now face additional dangers to their safety.”

Beyond the aforementioned questions, Paul requested detailed accounts of U.S. forces killed or wounded in Niger since the U.S. established operations there in 2013 and asked how funding was distributed to train, equip, and otherwise support Nigerien forces, citing Title 10 of the U.S. Code.

“What steps has the Department of Defense taken to ensure that nations receiving U.S.

funds, training, equipment, or other kinds of support pursuant to Title 10 are not engaged in human rights violations?" the senator added.

Following the senator's letter, Paul gave an exclusive interview to *The American Conservative* about America's presence in Niger and how America might restore a constitutional foreign policy so beautifully encapsulated by John Quincy Adams.

U.S. involvement in Niger began a decade ago.

"Initially, I think they were sent over there to support French troops," Paul said over the phone.

"I think their mission, like so many other military missions, has morphed into something different now and includes training and equipping the military. My concern is that in the midst of a military coup over there, with threats of war from surrounding countries, threats of retaliation to the military junta, that it's a bad place to be, in the middle of something like that." Paul told TAC that because of the instability plaguing Niger and the entire region, which has experienced several coups in just the last few years, "an accidental or purposeful attack could lead us and draw us into a larger war."

"There's always the potential for troops being involved in an escalation of the war, and to do this in the middle of a civil war, and not only potentially in the middle of a civil war," Paul said. "The Economic Community of West African States has threatened to intervene from outside this year by sending troops in and then you've got Burkina Faso and Mali have threatened to respond to that on the side of the new military junta."

"That looks almost like it could become a regional conflict," Paul said. If it comes to that, American troops stationed in Niger would be "in a completely defensive position." America would quickly find itself in a situation where "1,000 troops who really aren't supposed to be fighting, really don't know who we're supposed to attack and how they're supposed to defend themselves," would be in the throes of a regional conflict likely far beyond their original mission and way beyond Congressionally approved actions.

"The 9/11 AUMF is used to justify all of these activities. That's a real insult to any soldier who's asked to give his or her life around the world," Paul argued.

"Don't they at least deserve a vote? If you're going to be sent to Syria and die in Syria—there are still a couple hundred U.S. troops in Syria, we have troops in Iraq, we have got troops in probably a few dozen countries—if you're going to give up your life, shouldn't there have been a debate in Congress?" Paul asked. "I think if there was more debate in Congress, there would actually be less support of this," Paul added, specifically taking aim at the continued use of the 2001 AUMF.

"While it may not be a cure all, the debate over repealing the 2001 AUMF is an important one," Paul suggested. "Look at our history. Throughout our history, we have not had sort of open ended, ongoing AUMFs so we didn't have to vote. I mean, that's 22 years ago now. Do our young soldiers who weren't even born then not deserve a live current debate over the current situations if we're going to send them to war?"

"We have got a long way to go to winning the argument," Paul admitted, but "it's not all pessimism." On the Republican side, "probably 10 percent of elected Republicans are

for less or for no additional money to Ukraine,” for example, but “I think over 50 percent of the Republican primary voters are now opposed to sending more money to Ukraine,” and “the Trump administration made it easier to be a non interventionist or less interventionist Republican now than it was years ago.”

“My father began that debate and popularized it, but it still wasn’t a popular or dominant position. Trump came along and embraced quite a bit of that doctrine,” Paul told TAC. Probably a majority of the Republican primary voters actually believe in less intervention,” and “we have many more candidates running around the country who actually have those beliefs.”

As for Democrats, Paul said,

“several Democrats have come up to me have said, ‘well, you’re right, we should repeal it, we have to repeal and replace.’ My response to that is, ‘yeah, we should repeal and replace it with the Constitution,’” Paul continued, “replacing it with something that could really absolve us from another debate vote is a mistake.”

American troops in Niger have already paid the price for Congress’s unwillingness to act on its constitutional authority. In October 2017, four Green Berets were [killed](#) in an ambush by ISIS-affiliated fighters close to Niger’s border with Mali. Yet, “the so-called bipartisan consensus on foreign policy is still pretty strong,” Paul said. Refusing to take action is an action, and it is a full-throated endorsement of the status quo. America’s justification for having troops in Niger is, “the same sort of argument that has been trotted out across most of the Middle East: that is terrorism is everywhere, al-Qaeda is everywhere, and we can create a world with less terrorism by trying to stomp it out one terrorists at a time, one drone at a time.”

The Kentucky senator believes this “overstates” what’s happening on the ground. “Most of these are tribal disputes. Most of them involve disputes over land. In almost every case, “these aren’t people sitting around with the plans to come and attack New York City. These are the people that are pissed off at the people who are taking part of their goat herd. These aren’t international criminal masterminds. These are local people involved in conflict.”

Since U.S. troops were stationed in Niger in 2013, “there has actually been an escalation of activity.” Beyond the four Green Berets who perished on patrol in Niger, the U.S. military has trained several soldiers responsible for destabilizing Niger and the surrounding region. Reporting from the [Intercept](#) suggests U.S. trained military officers have played major roles in at least eleven coups in West Africa since 2008. Moussa Salaou Barmou, the leader of July’s coup in Niger, reportedly received training at Fort Benning in Georgia and the National Defense University in Washington. “We really have a bad record here,” Paul told TAC. “We think we’re training people to set up governments in the image of the American republic,” but in reality, “we’re training officers who then go home and lead a coup.”

“If ostensibly our goal is democracy and free elections, it seems we’re not having the right effect,” Paul suggested, adding that presidential administrations current and previous have been “lying by omission,” to Congress about America’s activities in Niger and other countries like it. “I think they work day and night to obscure details from Congress.”

“I see it as a recipe for disaster,” Paul says of the situation. “I’m going to force the

debate. I don't believe we'll probably have the votes to win, but at the very least, it's a privileged vote under the War Powers Act, which means that they can't stop me," Paul said.

The vote is likely going to be scheduled in the next two weeks, conveniently buried in the fight over a potential government shutdown.

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