

Top military leaders from several West African countries have agreed a plan for a possible intervention in Niger as a deadline approaches for the country's junta to restore civilian rule.

It follows an extraordinary summit of the regional bloc ECOWAS in Nigeria's capital Abuja.

On 30 July the Economic Community of West African States gave the junta who toppled elected president Mohamed Bazoum in a coup earlier the same week, one week to restore him or face the potential use of force.

Commissioner for political Affairs, peace and security of ECOWAS, Amb. Abdel-Fatau Musah, said: "The chiefs of defence staff and their teams have worked round the clock to come up with a concept of operation for an eventual military intervention in the Republic of Niger to restore constitutional order and to ensure the release of the detained President.

"All the elements that will go into any eventual intervention have been worked out here and been refined including the timing, including the resources needed and including the how and where and when we are going to deploy such a force."

Nigeria, which currently chairs ECOWAS, is taking a hard line against coup plotters after the military takeover in Niger; the latest to hit Africa's Sahel region since 2020.

"We are determined to stop it, but ECOWAS is not going to tell the coup plotters when and where we are going to strike," added Musah.

"That is an operational decision that will be taken by the Heads of State. We want diplomacy to work and we want this message clearly transmitted to the leaders of the Junta in Niger that we are giving them every opportunity to reverse what they have done. "

Niger's junta has vowed to respond "immediately" to any foreign intervention and has been holding Bazoum and his family in his official residence in the capital Niamey for nine days.

The military-ruled governments in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso have said an intervention in Niger would be tantamount to a declaration of war against them.