

Pro-US military strongman elected president in Mali

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Military strongman General Amadou Toumani Toure (known as ATT) was declared the new president of the West African country of Mali on May 16, in a run-off vote that followed the first round of voting held at the end of April.

ATT won 64 percent of the vote as against 36 percent for Soumaila Cisse, candidate of the ruling Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali (Adema) party. Turnout figures were not given, but were said to be even less than the 38 percent out of the 5.7 million registered voters in the first round.

Little is known about Toure's political views except that both he and Cisse support the economic policies pursued by Mali's government for the last decade—keeping up payments on its \$3.3 billion debt to the Western banks and carrying out the decentralisation and privatisation put forward under the International Monetary Fund's structural reform programme.

According to *Africa Confidential* magazine, Toure has links to Washington Democrats. He has headed a charitable foundation dedicated to child vaccination and supporting education, backed by the Jimmy Carter foundation. Mali has played a key role in sending troops to military policing missions in Africa—they were given US training for such tasks in the late 1990s. In 2000, General Toure acted as United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan's special envoy to the Central African Republic attempting to secure a peace agreement. He retired from the army last October in order to enter the presidential contest.

Until his retirement he made a point of staying out of politics. Although, he is well known for leading junior officers in a 1991 coup that overthrew the dictator General Moussa Traore. After 23 years of Traore's despotic rule the country was heading for bloody conflict. Troops fired on demonstrating youths in the

capital, Bamako, killing over 300. After overthrowing Traore, instead of continuing in power, Toure handed over to multi-party elections and the rule of President Alpha Oumar Konare of the Adema party.

The first round of the current elections resulted in a row over ballot rigging. Several of the 24 presidential candidates, including former prime minister Ibrahim Boubacar Keita ("IBK"), protested against irregularities.

Apparently Cisse's campaign manager is the wife of the minister of the interior, who organised the ballot. Allegations were made that the votes collected by the Interior Ministry did not have the necessary tally sheets and that local mayors in many remote areas were tampering with the votes. In some oasis districts around Timbuktu and further north, Cisse was getting 99 percent of the votes cast. As well as complaints from the candidates, observers from the US-based Carter Center were also critical, saying there were a "significant number of irregularities."

Mali's Constitutional Court deliberated on the poll and also accepted there were "irregularities". It annulled 541,000 of the votes cast (about a quarter of the total), but claimed that Toure still had the highest number. Cisse's votes were reduced but he still came second, meaning that he and Toure went on to the next round according to Mali's electoral procedure.

Cisse seems to have been a victim of factional disputes in the Adema party. Infighting within Mali's tiny ruling elite exposed corruption scandals and heavily compromised the Adema government. Apparently even outgoing President Konare switched his vote to Toure. Keita, who had split with Adema in 2000 to form his own party, also supported Toure in the second round. According to *Africa Confidential*, Keita was the favored candidate of the French establishment;

the former colonial ruler of the country. Both the French Socialist Party and Chirac's Rassemblement Pour la République (RPR) are said to have backed Keita because of their concerns about Toure's US links.

Last year US secretary of state Colin Powell picked out Mali as one of the four countries he visited in Africa. It was, he said, "a model for the rest of the world to see and focus on." When his predecessor Madeleine Albright visited the former French colony in 1999, she described the country as being "central to our partnership with African democracies."

In terms of democratic credentials, the comments were patently false. The first round of the parliamentary elections in 1997 were condemned as fraudulent by opposition parties, who then withdrew from the second round in protest at Adema's rigging of the polls. Opposition parties then boycotted the 1997 presidential elections, which meant that Konare was elected on a very low turnout. Several opposition politicians were jailed for protesting at Konare's investiture. In late 1997 Amnesty International accused the Malian government of using torture against jailed opponents.

The "model" offered by Mali to the rest of Africa was its apparent stability and willingness to abide by IMF directives. Toure's appointment is designed to insure that position continues, when there are growing doubts about the clique around Adema.

Last year the World Bank issued a critical report on Mali that said corruption is "systemic and pernicious because of a system of political clientelism", referring to the ruling party buying votes and support with top jobs or lucrative government contracts.

There are also signs of growing popular discontent with the ruling clique. Fully 72 percent of the population of 10 million lives below the poverty line. Average income is \$240 a year, and Mali is the fifth poorest country in the world. Despite being Africa's third largest gold producer, after an initial increase in growth in the 1990s the economy is declining. More than half the population is illiterate, and less than half attend school.

Interest from the US may also relate to possible oil and gas exploration, following discoveries in Chad and Mauritania. Mali's Ministry of Mines is offering 15 blocks of land for potential oil finds. Some indication of the importance the US administration attaches to oil

and gas sources in West Africa is given by the statement of assistant secretary of state for african affairs, Walter Kansteiner, that by 2005 fully 20 percent of US oil supplies will come from Africa—a figure expected to rise to 25 percent by 2015. The main US export to Africa is oil-drilling equipment and oil is the main import. As well as Nigeria and Angola, other oil exporters include Equatorial Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon and Cameroon, with a pipeline from Chad to Cameroon under construction.



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