

Imperialist powers, bourgeois “opposition” reach out to military junta in Burkina Faso

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Burkina Faso’s pro-imperialist “opposition,” local African regimes, and the major imperialist powers are stepping in to provide a civilian, democratic façade to last week’s coup, following mass protests that led to the ouster of French-backed dictator President Blaise Compaoré.

The US, Canada and the African Union have all threatened sanctions if the military does not hand over power to a civilian government in two weeks. They fear, as the French daily *Le Monde* wrote on November 4, that “Popular insurrection could re-start at any time,” and are anxious to prop up discredited pro-imperialist regimes throughout West Africa. The army intervened to head off mass protests that erupted on October 28 against Compaoré’s attempt to prolong his 27 years in office, deposing Compaoré on October 31.

On November 5, a delegation from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—consisting of the presidents of Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria—rushed to the capital, Ouagadougou.

They issued a statement the next day affirming that they had “secured an agreement with stakeholders in Burkina Faso for the immediate lifting of the suspension of the constitution and the holding of presidential and legislative elections within 12 months to resolve the crisis created by last week’s resignation of former president Blaise Compaoré and the dissolution of his government.”

Issued after talks with the “opposition” and the junta led by Lt. Colonel Isaac Zida, who took power on November 1, the ECOWAS statement called for the “urgent designation by consensus of a suitably eminent civilian to lead the transition.”

Making clear its support for Compaoré’s services to imperialism during his 27 years in power, it added:

“The leaders recalled the important contributions by Burkina Faso to the promotion of global peace and security as well as political stability within the region and the continent at large, particularly its active participation in peacekeeping and mediation processes.”

Burkina Faso’s army is a key element of France’s military intervention in the Sahel, above all the war in Mali. Forty French firms are present in most sectors of Burkina Faso’s economy, and Paris is the main provider of finance for its former colony. The French ambassador Gilles Thibault has been playing “a great role”, according to French President François Hollande’s entourage.

The protests against Compaoré were called by the “Leadership of the Opposition” coalition of bourgeois parties on October 21, when Compaoré’s proposed constitutional changes became known. By Tuesday, October 28, to the consternation of the “opposition,” protests drew in hundreds of thousands of mainly young people in the capital and other major cities across the country.

French imperialism, backed by its international allies, moved quickly to install a new and pliant regime. Compaoré fled Ouagadougou last Friday, escaping angry protesters only thanks to a French army helicopter and then a plane taking him to Ivory Coast—where Compaoré had helped Paris install the current Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara in a French military intervention in 2011.

On October 30, the army, backed by the “opposition’s” appeals to it to prevent chaos, moved to strangle the revolt and solidify the control of Zida, an officer of Compaoré’s presidential guard. In a November 2 communiqué, Zida warned rival General Kwamé Lougué that any attempt to oppose him was

“an attack on the ongoing transitional process ... Any act that might challenge the transitional process will be repressed with vigour and firmness.”

The “opposition” is publicly led by spokesman Zéphirin Diabré, who under Compaoré combined a mining finance consultancy with the post of minister of trade and mines. He heads a UN development agency and until 2011 was CEO of the Africa branch of French mining and nuclear energy conglomerate Areva.

His organization called a demonstration on Sunday afternoon at Nation Square to demand a civilian government. However, according to *Jeune Afrique*, “The protest on Nation Square ... nevertheless was a failure, with only 1,000 people present. Opposition leader Zéphirin Diabré did not come as he was meeting with representatives of the army at the time, according to his aides.”

Diabré has stated that the opposition would not be opposed the participation of the army in the transition to a civilian government. He and the “opposition” have been in talks with the UN, ECOWAS and the African Union.

In a *Le Monde* interview on Tuesday, he declared: “The army itself recognized that what took place was a popular insurrection ... Because there was a power vacuum, the army stepped up to its responsibilities and held on to the machinery of state. We met on Sunday with Lt. Col. Zida, who was designated by the army to lead the transition.”

The comments of demonstrators who did turn up on Nation Square highlight the class gulf between the workers and oppressed masses of Burkina Faso and the pro-imperialist opposition.

Protester Amadou Yamiro told BBC, “This morning we came out, because up until now the situation is not clear. We still don’t have a leader for our country. We don’t want the army to be in power, especially the special presidential regiment...We went to the national TV to try to understand what is going to happen, and while a colonel was reassuring us, some troops arrived and started to shoot. We are told it was the presidential regiment again, the same ones that shot people [during unrest] on the 30th [October], the ones that killed many people ...The presidential guard with Zida will put this country into chaos.”

General Kuame Lougué, who at times poses as a radical descendant of the petty-bourgeois nationalist

Burkinabé president Thomas Sankara but was Compaoré’s defence minister, has played a dubious role during the protests and the military coup. *Médiapart*, a French news site linked to the pseudo-left New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), has promoted him, declaring he was “propelled to the head of the protests,” and there were reports of protesters chanting his name in the streets.

He recently made a statement to RFI radio, pledging his support for the army. RFI noted that Lougué “is still on active duty, as general of the second section, and that while he is no longer in the army command, he remains at the disposal of the general staff. He stresses that he supports his comrades in arms ... he will support decisions of the general staff.”



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