

Burkina Faso pressured to reinstate interim government after coup

Kumaran Ira
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The West African nation of Burkina Faso has been paralysed by protests against the coup launched by the presidential guard unit (RSP) last Wednesday, toppling the interim government of President Michel Kafando. Due to international pressure, it appears Kafando's interim government may well be reinstated.

On Wednesday, troops led by General Gilbert Diendere—a former spy chief and close ally of deposed President Blaise Compaoré, who was ousted last October after 27 years in power—stormed into a cabinet meeting. They detained Kafando, Prime Minister Yacouba Isaac Zida, and numerous cabinet members of the transitional authorities. The next day, the military takeover was announced on national television. On Friday, the junta released Kafando, though Zida remains under house arrest.

Amid international pressure and mounting opposition to the coup, Senegalese President Macky Sall, who chairs the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Benin President Thomas Boni Yayi met with Diendere in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, for talks Friday.

After two days of negotiations, mediators declared that Burkina Faso will return to civilian rule and the interim government of Kafando will be reinstated until elections to be held on November 8. The elections previously planned for October 11 were postponed following the coup.

A foreign diplomatic source in Ouagadougou confirmed that mediators were seeking a return of the interim government. “What is envisaged—and what will be done—is maintaining Kafando as head of state and for the government to complete the transition,” the source said. “Diendere should leave.”

At a press conference late Saturday after a third round of talks with Diendere, Yayi said, “We are going to

relaunch the transition that was underway—a transition led by civilians, with Michel Kafando.”

The situation remained tense yesterday, however. Supporters of the coup stormed a hotel in Ouagadougou that was due to host talks, reinstating the interim government and attacking participants arriving for the meeting.

“They invaded the hotel. It was violent,” one witness told Reuters. “They attacked ex-opposition members as they arrived. One had to be saved from the crowd by security forces.” The pro-coup protesters are reportedly the militants of the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), the former ruling party of Compaoré.

The coup triggered protests throughout the country as hundreds of people descended into the streets, throwing stones, burning tires and blocking streets. The Balai Citoyen (“Civic Broom”) movement, comprised of opposition and petty bourgeois layers, which called protests against Compaoré last year, called supporters onto the streets to “say no to the coup d'état under way.” They demanded the return of the interim government. At least 10 people were killed and more than 100 injured in the crackdown by the RSP.

The major powers, including Burkina Faso's former colonial power, France, the United States, the UN and the African Union (AU), condemned the coup, fearing street protests could paralyse the poverty-stricken country and escape the control of pro-imperialist political operatives.

French President François Hollande condemned the “coup d'état,” calling for the “immediate release of all people arrested, the reinstatement of transitional authorities, and the resumption of the electoral process.”

The African Union suspended Burkina Faso's membership of the bloc and warned of sanctions on

coup leaders. The AU has given coup leaders until September 22 to restore the transitional government or face travel bans and asset freezes.

After an emergency meeting, the AU's Peace and the Security Council voted to adopt sanctions against "all members of the National Democratic Council" that led the coup, imposing travel bans and freezing assets they held in all member states of the AU.

The circumstances under which the coup occurred remain murky. However, the British *Daily Telegraph* cited Paul Melly, associate fellow of the Africa Programme at Chatham House, saying, "the immediate trigger for the coup may have been a proposal earlier this week to dissolve the 1,300 strong presidential guard that was loyal to Mr. Compaoré."

After Compaoré was deposed, the presidential guard has remained intact. It apparently fears the loss of their privileges. According to the *Telegraph*, "as members of the old regime, they are also banned from participating in the elections that were due to take place in October."

The coup also exposes the cynical manoeuvres of petty bourgeois forces, including the Civic Broom movement in Burkina Faso. Last year, these forces called protests against Compaoré after his ruling party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress, called for a referendum that would allow him to alter the constitution in order to seek re-election in 2015.

Compaoré, who enjoyed the support of French imperialism during his 27 years of dictatorial rule due to his free-market and anti-communist views, came to power via a coup against President Thomas Sankara, who was killed in 1987.

As Compaoré's move triggered mass protest, the bourgeois opposition, backed by imperialist powers, headed off the protests, ousted Compaoré, and installed the interim government of Kafando. The transitional government, however, was led by junta leader Colonel Isaac Zida, who was a former member of RPC, and received military training sponsored by the US military. Paris applauded the installation of the Kafando-Zida regime.

The political crisis in Ouagadougou underscores the escalating intervention into the region by the imperialist powers, including the United States and France. Paris has deployed over 3,000 troops across the Sahel, including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and

Niger, under the guise of fighting terrorism. France uses Burkina Faso as a launching pad for its special forces operations in the Sahel-Sahara region.

Paris is terrified that political instability among the region's sclerotic regimes could undermine the imperialist interests of the European powers and the United States in West Africa.

According to the *Washington Post*, "The US military has developed a close relationship in recent years with Burkina Faso, which has allowed the Pentagon to operate a secretive Special Operations base that it uses to conduct reconnaissance flights across West Africa."

After the coup, on September 18, *Le Monde* worried that the coup in Burkina Faso "will have repercussions on the entire continent. Its stability is decisive for its development first of all, but not only for that. It borders on a half dozen West African countries, and Burkina Faso has an important place in the system set up by France and a number of African countries to fight jihadism or Islamo-gangsterism in the entire Sahel region." *Le Monde* indicated, however, that it was aiming for a balance between the transitional authorities and the army, explaining, "The dispositions that [the opposition] had taken to keep anyone even vaguely connected to Blaise Compaoré from coming to power are unjustifiable."



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