

French-backed deal reinstates transitional government after Burkina Faso coup

By Stéphane Hugues
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A week after a putsch by supporters of deposed President Blaise Compaoré toppled the French-backed transitional government in Burkina Faso, a deal brokered by African heads of state and backed by France and Burkina Faso's army has reinstated the transitional government.

The putsch leaders in the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP) backed down under diplomatic pressure from Washington and Paris, who are working through the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). After Paris criticized the putsch and the army began to march on the capital, Ouagadougou, the putschists agreed to end their coup attempt so that the Transitional Authority can be reinstated.

Thus France and the US have achieved their immediate aim of securing the maintenance of the Kafando transitional authority and government that they put into power after having supported the November 2014 coup against ex-President Blaise Compaoré nearly one year ago.

At that time, imperialist-backed opposition forces were stunned as their call for protests against the Compaoré regime led to mass protests and riots across the country. They were protesting the attempt by Compaoré, after 27 years and four terms in office, to change the constitution and gain a fifth term in office. They were dismayed, however, as their call for protests aiming to secure greater influence inside the political establishment suddenly unleashed far broader protests, and rapidly sought to get the situation under control by making a deal with elements of the Compaoré regime.

All factions of the army and the political parties in opposition had nearly lost control of the situation. The only way France found to unwind the crisis was to force the resignation of Compaoré and fly him out of

the country to the Ivory Coast whose President, Alassane Ouattara, was himself installed by French forces in the midst of a civil war. Today, Compaoré is the “guest” of King Mohammed VI of Morocco, another close ally of French imperialism.

Burkina Faso's Army led by Colonel Isaac Zida and the pro-imperialist bourgeois “opposition” chose Michel Kafando as President to lead the transitional authority and prepare new elections. Kafando promptly named Zida as his Prime Minister of the transitional government.

This month's failed putsch against the transitional government was led by General Gilbert Diendéré, the head of the RSP, the elite unit of 1,300 soldiers formed by Compaoré as his pretorian guard. Diendéré had been Compaoré's closest collaborator until the latter lost power. The PSR demanded the maintenance of the PSR as an organization, an amnesty for the putschists, and guarantees that Compaoré's political associates could participate in upcoming elections.

The putsch also provoked large demonstrations. Ten people died and 113 were injured when Diendéré ordered the PSR to attack the demonstrators.

French President François Hollande reaction to the putsch was clearly hostile. He called on “the forces involved in the putsch... to immediately lay down their arms and turn themselves in to the legitimate authorities, if not, they will have to bear all the consequences”.

In a statement, Hollande said that “France completely supports the preparation by ECOWAS of transparent and equal elections as soon as possible.” He confirmed that “civil, financial and military cooperation were suspended” until “the effective reinstatement of the transition under civilian authority.”

Susan Rice, President Obama's national security

adviser, said: “The junta should step aside and allow preparations for the October elections to resume immediately. The U.S. stands squarely with the people of Burkina Faso in rejecting this threat to their democratic progress.”

None of the putschists’ demands have been settled, except an agreement that the PSR would release government officials that they had taken hostage and return to their barracks. The rest of the army, loyal to the transitional regime, is to remain at a distance of 50 kilometers outside of Ouagadougou.

With the release of the government, its reinstatement was immediately organised at a ceremony in Ouagadougou, in the presence of a number of ECOWAS heads of state who had brokered the deal. Present were the president of Benin, Boni Yayi, of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama, of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou and the Vice-President of Nigeria, Yemi Osinbajo.

“This ceremony symbolizes the continuation of the transition to a free and peaceful election. (...) The role of the ECWAS can only be to support and accompany the efforts of the people of Burkina Faso to carry through this civil transition”, said Yayi.

Michel Kafando, the reinstated President of the Transitional authority and the interim government said: “I am resuming my position. The transition is back and starts again this very minute.”

Kafando added, “With regard to the latest proposals of the ECWAS to stop the crisis, it is obvious that we will only agree to them if they take into account the will of the people.” These empty promises reflect primarily the fears of the Army, the political parties, the surrounding African states and the imperialist backers of the transitional regime of again losing control of the situation.

At the reinstatement ceremony, the putschist leader Diendéré declared: “The putsch is over, we should speak no more of it.” “The biggest mistake was to have launched this putsch (...) Today, when we talk of democracy, we cannot permit ourselves actions of this type. (...) We saw what happened. We knew that the people were against it. That’s why we simply abandoned the coup.”

Prime Minister Isaac Zida, the second in command of the transitional authority, announced that elections would be pushed back by a few weeks. Zida is an

ex-lieutenant-colonel in the PSR who had been one of General Gilbert Diendéré’s men. He switched sides after the success of the October 2014 coup against Compaoré, however, and ever since he has been trying to dissolve the PSR.

Before the putsch the PSR had pressured for the resignation of Zida as Prime Minister. Only a couple of days before the coup the National Reconciliation and Reforms Commission (NRRC) published its report on the Compaoré regime. The NRRC, made up of many civil society organizations hostile to the PSR, called the PSR “an army within the army” and demanded its dissolution. Such conflicts doubtless played a role in triggering the latest failed putsch.

The current regime is clearly an uneasy compromise between the conflicting forces inside the ruling elite; as Zida was reinstated as Prime Minister, one of his first comments was that it would be “unimaginable” to “keep the PSR as it is”.

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