

France, US back purge of leaders of failed Burkina Faso coup

By Stéphane Hugues
8 October 2015

The reinstated transitional government headed by President Michel Kafando is moving rapidly against leaders of the failed coup in Burkina Faso, ordering General Gilbert Dienderé and his subordinates to be court-martialed. The army is actively tracking some of the officers who have not yet voluntarily turned themselves in.

In the ten days or so since Dienderé released his hostages and ended the coup, the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP), an elite corps of 1,300 men loyal to ex-President Blaise Compaoré, has been officially dissolved. Its soldiers were ordered to integrate back into their original Army regiments.

Arrests of Compaoré's top associates began with ex-Foreign Affairs Minister, Djibril Bassolé, on September 29. The transitional government accuses Bassolé of being part of the coup; like the leaders of the coup, his assets have been frozen. Since his arrest Bassolé's whereabouts have been unknown to his lawyer. His party, the New Alliance for Faso (NAFA), held a press conference to deny that either Bassolé or NAFA had participated in the coup.

On October 2, the government arrested Colonel-Major Boureima Kéré, ex-chief of the President Compaoré's General Staff and a close associate of Dienderé, as well as Captains Dao and Zoumbri and three young Lieutenants.

In the last several days, two other high-ranking members of the Compaoré regime have been arrested: Léonce Koné, the second Vice-President of Compaoré's party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress, and Herman Yaméogo, son of ex-president Maurice Yaméogo and head of the National Union for the Defense of Democracy.

The two denied being part of the coup. Koné said, "We state again, our parties were neither the organizers

of nor participants in nor the suppliers of any resources to the coup d'état".

Before the coup, the interim government had excluded all these politicians and their parties from the upcoming Presidential and parliamentary elections.

In reaction to the pronouncement of its dissolution, between 100 and 150 troops barricaded themselves in the RSP's barracks "Camp Naaba Koom II" next to the Kosyam Presidential Palace. The army general staff claims that it brought in artillery a few miles from the barracks and fired 3 or 4 salvos into "uninhabited areas" of the camp.

However, many people in Burkina Faso, including leading politicians, received text messages from "RSP-Info" about dozens of dead in the camp, contradicting army and government claims there were "zero dead and zero wounded" in the assault. The army is forbidding entry to the camp even for journalists, claiming that it has not yet been cleared of mines and booby-traps.

One of the officers leading the assault claimed, "There were no victims because those who had barricaded themselves in the camp fled before the assault started after the artillery and machine gun fire ... There were no combats. They fled on motorbikes or running—we let them flee". He added that all civilians living in the camp had been evacuated earlier.

These soothing stories about a bloodless elimination of their opponents reflect above all the fear of the Interim government and the Army of new mass protests, and their desire to stabilize a country considered to be a strategic asset of US and European imperialism in their wars in Africa.

France, via the European Union, is organizing a team of 80 people from Europe to observe the upcoming elections. The transitional government will come to an

end after the election of a new government.

An unidentified US official told ABC News last year: “The location of Burkina Faso is strategic, if you look at the other sides of it. It’s an important, strategic place for CT [counter-terrorism] efforts and it’s one of those places that needs to be calm”.

Burkina Faso is sandwiched between the operational zones of two major terrorist groups—Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali, and Boko Haram in Nigeria—that are both of notable interest to the French and American governments.

The government of Burkina Faso previously agreed to allow US spy planes and drones to operate from its airfields, according to a 2012 report by the *Washington Post*. The *Post* called Burkina Faso’s capital Ouagadougou a “key hub of the US spying network” in the region, from which the US conducted a surveillance mission code-named Creek Sand out of an air base built onto the city’s international airport.

The imperialist powers have sought aggressively to use anti-Compaoré opposition forces and the interim government that took power last year to stabilize the corrupt ruling elites in Burkina Faso, one of the world’s poorest countries.

Last year, imperialist-backed opposition groups like Citizens’ Broom called for protests against then President Compaoré’s bid to change the constitution in order to have a fifth term in office. The opposition’s plans exploded, however, when masses of people across Burkina Faso began to protest the regime. Stunned by expression of mass opposition to the social system that they had had no intention of provoking, they turned 180 degrees, trying to stop the demonstrations.

President François Hollande used the pent-up anger of these mass demonstrations against Compaoré to convince him to resign and flee the country on a French plane.

Paris and Washington quickly convinced one of Compaoré’s followers, Isaac Zida, a Lieutenant-Colonel in Compaoré’s RSP, to stabilize the situation, to work with the opposition to establish an interim, “transition” government.

Trained in the US, he quickly became the strongman of the new regime. When the French and Americans chose Michel Kafando, 72 years old with a long pro-imperialist record, as Presidential figurehead of the

interim regime, his first act was to appoint Zida as his Prime Minister.

Moving quickly in an attempt to halt the mass protests, the opposition and their French and US backers were not able to entirely dispose of Compaoré’s regime. The RSP was left intact, and many of Compaoré’s political supporters in his party, “Congress for Democracy and Progress”, remained active in the country’s politics.

Over the last year Zida made numerous initiatives to dissolve the RSP but had been pushed back by Compaoré followers in the RSP and within the state. Just three days before the RSP launched the coup, Zida joined forces with the National Reconciliation and Reforms Commission (NRRC) which published its report on the Compaoré regime. The NRRC, made up of many militants hostile to the RSP and Compaoré, called the RSP “an army within the army” and demanded its dissolution. This sparked the failed coup d’état by the RSP.

Now that it has failed, the RSP’s coup has given Paris and Washington the opportunity to act decisively against the RSP and the rest of Compaoré’s supporters.

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