

Amid French occupation pro-imperialist coup topples Malian president Keïta

By Alex Lantier
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A military coup Tuesday toppled Malian President Ibrahim Bouba Keïta, who is widely hated for his complicity in the bloodbath that has followed the French occupation of Mali begun in 2013. The opposition June 5 Movement-Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RPF) linked to imam Mahmoud Dicko is organizing celebrations today of Keïta's ouster in the capital, Bamako.

The sharpest warnings must be made about the class character of this coup. Led by a self-proclaimed National Committee for Popular Salvation (CNSP), it is not opposed to the French occupation, which has dragged Mali into bitter ethnic conflicts that Paris uses to divide and rule the country. The CNSP has declared its loyalty to the French intervention force, Operation Barkhane. The coup is aimed at opposition among the workers and oppressed masses of Mali and all of Africa against imperialism and the failure of official attempts to halt the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Malian news site *Bamada*, the mutiny began around 8a.m. Tuesday, at the Kita army base, from which the 2012 coup that paved the way for the French intervention in 2013 was launched. The mutineers put government districts in Bamako on lockdown, called on public service workers to go home, and entered discussions with other army units.

Around noon on Tuesday, the mutineers were fighting loyalist troops of the Anti-terrorist Special Forces (Forsat), who had cracked down on previous M5-RPF demonstrations in Bamako. Reports on social media stated initially that the mutineers had been arrested, as well as Defense Minister Dahirou Dembélé.

Dembélé, who became head of the military after the 2012 coup, is now reportedly a leading figure in the CNSP junta.

Around 1p.m. Tuesday, Oumar Moriko, the leader of the SADI (African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence) party, linked to France's petty-bourgeois

New Anti-capitalist Party, launched a public appeal to Bamako youth to mobilize behind the putschists.

As youth sacked and burned the residences of several leading figures of the Keïta regime, several military units joined the mutiny. At 4p.m., Keïta as well as Prime Minister Boubou Cissé were arrested and interned at the Kita base. They then announced that they were in talks with Dicko and that they would make a public statement that evening.

It was around midnight that Keïta gave a brief, five-minute address announcing his "decision to leave all my positions effective immediately, and with all the legal consequences: the dissolution of the National Assembly and that of the government."

While the M5-RFP presented this putsch to the Malian people as a popular uprising against crimes committed during the Mali war under Keïta's presidency, the CNSP was busily reassuring Paris. CNSP spokesman Colonel Ismaël Wagué spoke at around 3a.m. Wednesday to insist that order would be restored in the face of growing demonstrations against French troops in Mali, and that the CNSP would work with the Operation Barkhane forces to suppress internal opposition.

Wagué declared, "For some time, politico-social tension has prevented our country from working properly... Mali is sinking ever day further into chaos, anarchy and insecurity, and it is the fault of the men tasked with overseeing its destiny." Wagué declared that the CNSP wanted "all trade union and socio-political groupings to act with calm."

He raised the violent inter-ethnic attacks and tensions that have accompanied French occupation troops' operations in Mali: "Entire villages are burned, peaceful citizens are massacred, and every day we must grieve for losses among our comrades-in-arms. Horror has become a daily event in the lives of Malians."

Wagué stressed that the Malian army would continue its

close collaboration with French and German troops of Operation Barkhane, as well as their UN (Minusma) and Sahel auxiliary forces: “We ask sub-regional and international organizations to accompany us in seeking Mali’s happiness. The Minusma, the Barkhane force, the G5 Sahel force, the Takuba force are still our partners for stability and the restoration of security. Speaking to my comrades in arms, I ask you to ensure the continuity of your police and military missions.”

European authorities have barely masked their support for the coup. The UN Security Council adopted a pro forma declaration criticizing the putschists and calling for the re-establishment at some point in future of an elected government. Their statement emphasizes “the urgent necessity to re-establish the rule of law and to go in the direction of a return to constitutional order.”

French President Emmanuel Macron met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel whose troops are deployed to assist Operation Barkhane. He insisted that criticisms of the coup should not stop French troops’ collaboration with the Malian army. Having himself briefly criticized the coup, he added, “But it not our task to substitute ourselves for Malian sovereignty... Nothing should distract us from the struggle against the jihadists.”

The French daily *Le Monde* almost applauded the coup, writing in an editorial, “It is an understatement to say that there are no regrets in Paris about ‘IBK’'s fall.” Complaining of the “wave of protests” now engulfing Mali, the daily added that the coup against Keïta had been carefully prepared: “The visit in Bamako last July of five West African heads of state come to help their Malian colleague to find a solution—no doubt themselves fearing that the protests could be contagious—ended in failure. From then on, ‘IBK’'s days were numbered.”

An international wave of strikes and demonstrations against the neo-colonial interventions of France and its European allies is shaking Africa. The strikes of Malian teachers and railworkers, as well as several demonstrations demanding the withdrawal of French troops had further staggered the Keïta government. Last year also saw a mass movement of workers and youth in Algeria against the French-backed military regime, and protests are growing in Ivory Coast against President Alassane Ouattara, installed by a French military intervention in 2011.

This international opposition to imperialism among workers and oppressed masses finds no genuine reflection in the African political establishment. Struggling against imperialist war requires building an international socialist

movement in the working class, where workers in struggle against imperialist war and plunder in Africa would appeal to the class solidarity of European workers in struggle against social austerity and police-state forms of rule at home.

The cynical role of SADI, Dicko, and the M5-RFP is a warning: they are complicit in a pro-imperialist putsch, which they are trying to pass off as a popular uprising. After the putsch Dicko has tried to minimize his role and gave an interview on *Radio France Internationale* to insist he has no ambitions for the next presidential elections: “In 2023, I will be a candidate for no position.” This comment led the news site *Sénégal7* to note: “The M5 has done the work, and the mutineers are collecting the results.”

Dicko and Mariko have served as tools of French imperialism, whose troops in Mali are closely following the political situation and decided not to intervene to try to save Keïta. Everything points to the fact that this coup was made in France.

In July, *Le Monde* published a column hailing Dicko and declaring: “Imam Dicko can offer a way out of the crisis for France in Mali.” It continued, “Imam Dicko is a skillful politician, who is aware of power relations. He represents the possibility of negotiating peace with the jihadist groups... Let us recall that after 18 years of war, the Americans were finally forced to cut deals with the Taliban” in Afghanistan.

As for the putschist general Dembélé, trained according to his official biography at the Applied Infantry School in Montpellier, France in the 1990s, his services for French imperialism have led him to receive the Gold Medal of French National Defense and the citation of Commander of the French National Order of Merit.

It is not difficult to foresee that a junta led by such reactionaries is preparing to turn violently against Malian workers and youth seeking to oppose the neo-colonial French occupation of their country.

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