

# Burkina Faso Coup Makers Refusing to Disarm

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*Can the popular movement push ahead with the Sankaraist revolutionary program?*

*Gen. Gilbert Diendere, a former intelligence chief for the President Security Regiment (RSP), was forced to release interim President Michel Kafando and Prime Minister Isaac Zida by the last full week of September.*

These developments were in response to the public rejection of the coup which was led by Diendere designed to derail the elections that grew out of the rebellion in late October 2014.

The rebellion stemmed from the desire of ousted military-turned-civilian President Blaise Compaore's efforts to extend his 27-year tenure in office.

A division within the military based upon the allegiance to the presidential guard and the broader military forces proved to also be a key element in the resolving the crisis that unfolded in September. The presidential guard was founded by Compaore during the period after the coup staged against the revolution between 1983-87.

Nonetheless, the presidential regiment was accused of refusing to disarm on September 28.

The Reuters press agency reported that "Burkina Faso's government on Monday (September 28) accused the military general who was the leader of this month's failed coup of derailing the disarmament of his supporters. For his part, Gen. Gilbert Diendere said his soldiers are under threat and need their arms for protection."

This same article goes to say "The setback for reconciliation in this West African nation comes just days after the international community applauded the reversal of the coup when Diendere agreed under heavy pressure to return power to the civilian president he had overthrown."

Public opposition to the coup was represented through demonstrations and other forms of resistance. During the course of the NCD brief reign, 11 people were killed and more than 270 injured.

African Union (AU) sanctions and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) mediation efforts resulted in the release of Kafando, with a tentative agreement on Sunday September 20 and the subsequent freeing of Zida. Leading up to the putative agreement, units of the Burkinabe military threatened to march on the capital of Ouagadougou and overthrow the NCD junta.

## **A Legacy of Right-Wing Coups in Burkina Faso**

Diendere was close to Compaore during the period of 1987-2014. Despite the ostensible

relieving of the former intelligence director of his duties after the uprising of October 2014, he reportedly participated in a leading manner in Pentagon military maneuvers with other West African defense forces in early 2014, known as Operation Flint Rock.

Compaore, the leader of the counter-revolution which toppled and assassinated revolutionary Socialist and Pan-Africanist leader Capt. Thomas Sankara, has never been compelled to account for his actions. His supporters within the RSP are concerned that he and others may be forced to stand trial for their crimes against the Burkinabe people.

Sankara also came to power through force of arms but from a left-wing perspective. He had become introduced to Marxist thought while undergoing military training in France during the 1970s.

During the course of the Sankara government, emphasis was placed on breaking links with the transnational corporations and the neo-colonial legacy of economic dependency on the former imperialist powers and the dominant western regime in the United States. Although Burkina Faso has become the fourth largest producer of gold in Africa, the masses of workers, farmers and youth remain impoverished decades after the Sankara government was overthrown.

This latest coup beginning on September 17 led by National Council for Democracy (NCD) was announced over national radio and television saying that the new regime was committed to elections but not under the conditions of the upcoming October 11 poll. Millions were looking forward to the elections where several parties claiming the legacy of Sankara are contesting for parliamentary and administrative positions.

In the early hours of the coup the Interim President Michel Kafando and Prime Minister Isaac Zida were held under house arrest. Obviously they were taken captive in an attempt to derail the elections that were scheduled for Oct. 11 in this West African state.

### **Elections Designed to Derail Popular Political Will**

The elections grew out of a mass uprising in late October 2014 when longtime neo-colonial puppet leader Blaise Compaore, who had ruled the underdeveloped country for 27 years, was for over 27 years.

The masses rejected the coup prompting action from the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the continental African Union (AU). After several days a section of the broader army threatened to remove the junta headed by Diendere by force.

Burkina Faso underwent a socialist-oriented revolutionary process between 1983-87 under Capt. Thomas Sankara, a proponent of African unity, social justice, women's equality and youth empowerment. Sankara was assassinated in October 1987 by Compaore and Deindere at the aegis of France and other imperialist-allied leaders in West Africa.

However, the movement of October-November 2014 was not capable of seizing power in the name of the workers and farmers in Burkina Faso. The interim regime was a compromise with neo-colonialism in the sense that a figure such as Isaac Zida was appointed as prime minister.

Zida, like Diendere, had developed close ties with U.S. and French intelligence agencies and

military commands. Burkina Faso has been a base for the so-called “war on terrorism.”

These coordinated efforts between the imperialist military forces and African governments have not led to any genuine economic stability and growth on the continent. Inside Burkina Faso the majority of people remain in poverty and unemployed.

### **Military Coups and African Development**

Army and police units in colonial Africa were of course established by the European imperialist states in an effort to maintain the economic interests of the ruling classes. African military forces were geared towards repressive measures against the masses in any rebellious or revolutionary movement towards independence and socialism.

Nearly 50 years ago, on February 24, 1966, renegade police and military forces coordinated by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. State Department overthrew the revolutionary First Republic of Ghana led by President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the founder of the Convention People’s Party (CPP) which took transitional power during 1951-57 leading the independence government after 1957 to 1966. The revolutionary process in Africa suffered a tremendous blow after the coup against Nkrumah while the actual history of the Ghana Revolution became a source of contention even within the West African state itself.

Subsequent coups within Africa have largely maintained the same right-wing political character, although there have been some exceptions such as in Ethiopia under Mengistu Haile Mariam during the mid-to-late 1970s and in the 1980s under Sankara. The developments in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso were led by lower-ranking officers within the military and relied on the workers and youth for the maintenance of political power.

Both revolutionary movements in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia recognized the necessity of creating a Marxist-Leninist Party. In Ethiopia, the Workers’ Party was formed during the 1980s.

However, in Burkina Faso the process was reversed after the assassination of Sankara in 1987.

Even in Ethiopia, with the demise of the Soviet Union and the socialist states in Eastern Europe, material and diplomatic support for the Mengistu government was withdrawn leading in part to its dissolution under imperialist pressure. Mengistu took refuge in Zimbabwe in Southern Africa which is still under the leadership of the national liberation movement turned political party, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

These historical lessons must be studied by the current generation of revolutionaries in Africa and around the world. The total political and economic bankruptcy of imperialism illustrates that socialism and anti-imperialism is the only viable solution to the periodic crises of underdevelopment and economic exploitation

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