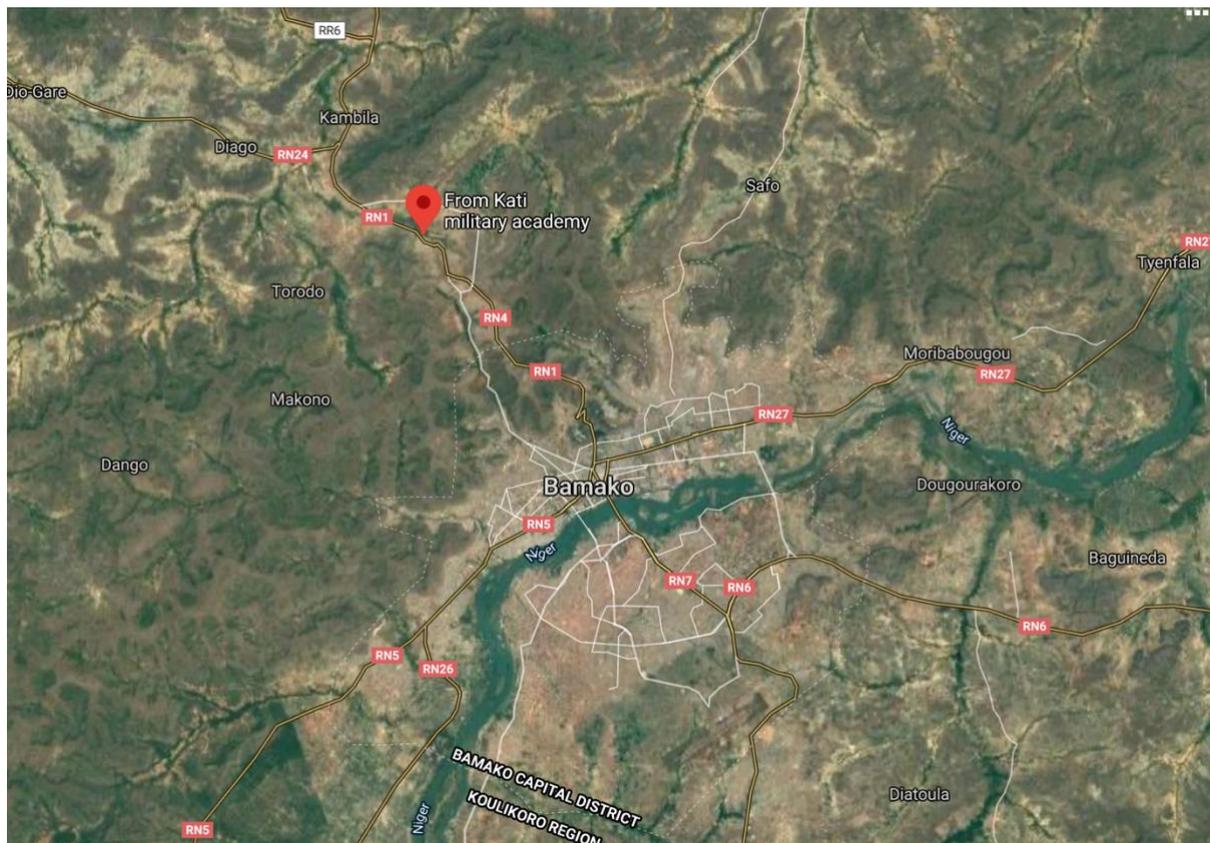


Update Advisory: Current Situation in Mali



On Monday 24 August, talks between West African mediators and Mali's military coup leaders concluded after three days of discussions without any decision on the make-up of a transitional government. The talks began with a brief session on Saturday and then continued through both Sunday and Monday, with ECOWAS suspending the talks after no agreements could be reached. While the ECOWAS bloc had deployed mediators to Mali in a bid to reinstate former President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, who was ousted in the coup last week, the talks focused more on who would lead the West African country and for how long rather than addressing the possibility of reinstating the president. Last week's coup has raised concerns that the latest political turmoil in Mali could fuel further terror attacks while enabling Islamist militants to expand their foothold.

SUMMARY OF 18 AUGUST COUP D'ÉTAT

Early on Tuesday 18 August, gunshots were heard at a military base in Kati, located just outside Bamako. By the afternoon, mutinying soldiers had seized President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and Prime Minister Boubou Cissé with the Malian leader resigning late on Tuesday following months of mass protests against alleged corruption and the country's worsening security situation. The president's resignation was met with jubilation by anti-government demonstrators on Wednesday 19 August, with leaders of the military coup stating that they would enact a political transition and hold elections within a "reasonable time." On Wednesday morning, the soldiers behind the coup, who are calling themselves the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP), appeared on state television, pledging to stabilize the country. On 20 August, Col. Assimi Goita, one of the five mutinous military officers, declared himself chairman of the junta that is now in power. On Friday 21 August, thousands rallied in the capital in support of the military junta that had forced Keita's resignation and the government's disbanding earlier in the week. Demonstrators also denounced ECOWAS for condemning the coup and for closing Mali's borders to neighbors in the region's blocks 14 other member nations. Also on Friday, junta leaders met with members of the former majority Rally for Mali party, who have denounced the coup but who have stated that they were ready to discuss next steps. Junta leaders also met with civil society groups. Meanwhile Keita, who along with at least a dozen other officials, was seized on Tuesday by military personnel and taken to the army officers' training facility in the town of Kati, has since been transferred back to the capital,

where he has been placed under house arrest. The 75-year-old deposed leader has been allowed to meet with his personal physician, his relatives and with officials of the UN mission in Mali.

CONDEMNATION FROM INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The international community has condemned last week's coup d'état in Mali. The president's arrest and resignation have been denounced by France, the United States, the United Nations, the African Union (AU) and the 15-nation regional bloc ECOWAS.

On 21 August, the US envoy to West Africa's Sahel region announced that the US has suspended all cooperation with Mali's military until the political situation has been clarified. ECOWAS meanwhile, which had tried to mediate in the political crisis between Keita and the opposition, has instructed its member states - Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo - to keep their land and air borders with Mali closed. It also demanded sanctions against "all the putschists and their partners and collaborators." The bloc also stated that it would suspend the country from its internal decision-making bodies. On 19 August, the AU announced that it was suspending Mali's membership until constitutional order is restored. Meanwhile the United Nations Security Council on 19 August urged mutineers in Mali to immediately release detained officials, including the country's president, and "return to their barracks without delay." According to a Council statement, the 15 members also "underlined the urgent need to restore rule of law and to move towards the return to constitutional order." European Union (EU) leaders also called for the "immediate freeing" of the detained politicians and "for a return to the state of law."

Across the African continent, a number of heads of state have reacted to the coup, calling for an immediate return to civilian rule. On 19 August, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa urged the Malian people to "observe the rule of law and engage in peaceful dialogue to resolve their differences." Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs Geoffrey Onyeama condemned the military coup and called for the "immediate and unconditional restoration of constitutional order." Angolan President Joao Lourenco also denounced the events in Bamako, while Algeria rejected the coup and called for elections in line with its constitution. A statement released by the foreign ministry indicated that Algeria was following with "concern" development in Mali, with which it shares an almost 1,400 km-long (870-mile) border.

TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

The current time frame for the transitional period remains unknown, though numerous sources have reported that Keita will not be involved in any transition. Two separate sources have indicated that a year-long transition was on the table, while another source noted that the junta was eager to prioritise reforms over elections, meaning that the period could be longer. Col. Wague has denied reports by French radio RFI that the CNSP wanted a three-year transitional government that would be led by a soldier and mostly composed of military officials. ECOWAS meanwhile is said to be pushing for a short transition period, with a focus on holding elections and allowing an elected civilian administration to handle the reforms. It will however be crucial not to rush the election period, and numerous issues, including corruption and mismanagement, which have been highlighted by opposition leaders in weeks of protests leading up to the coup, will need to be addressed.

IMPLICATIONS TO TRAVEL AND COMMERCE

While on 21 August, the junta in power in Mali announced that all ports of entry have reopened, ECOWAS has ordered that its 14 members close land and air borders with Mali. ECOWAS has also suspended trade while the 14 member countries have halted banking transactions in line with ECOWAS measures that were implemented on 18 August. A nationwide curfew, previously in place from 21:00 - 05:00, remain in effect, though it has been shortened (midnight - 05:00).

Within Mali, tensions remain high, notably in the capital Bamako. Further restrictions may be imposed in the coming weeks should the situation deteriorate further.

IMPLICATIONS WITHIN MALI AND WIDER SAHEL REGION

The coup is likely to have consequences for both the stability of Mali and the wider Sahel region in West Africa. It will also present a security concern, as it could result in a power vacuum which Islamist militants, who already have a strong foothold in the country, could seek to exploit.

The US Pentagon has formally suspended cooperation with the Malian army, which will likely have significant consequences given that the US holds annual joint exercises that involve Mali and its neighbors. Meanwhile with Mali depending on foreign aid, donors may seek to hold off donations or withdraw aid altogether as they wait for further clarification on the political situation in the West African country. The effects of this are likely to play out over the coming weeks and months and could have devastating implications on the local populations.

Within Mali, the intentions of the junta leaders currently remain unclear. Though what is evident is the fact that the country needs to address deep-rooted problems, which have so far been neglected. A failure on the part of the junta to address the ongoing security situations, corruption and mismanagement of the country will likely fuel further unrest and tensions between local and the political elite.

With local, regional and international attention focusing on the removal of Keita from power, there has been minimal focus on the ongoing terror threat in Mali and the jihadist groups that operate with relative ease within the country. This recent coup is likely to further undermine the country's ability to fight terrorism within its borders, which will in turn have implications on the fight against terrorism in the wider West African region. With the mutineers being members of a segment of the Malian army that was tasked with fighting the jihadist threat in the country, their focus, should they remain in power, will undoubtedly turn to leading the country, and less time and resources will likely be allocated towards fighting the jihadist threat. Mali's regime change could effectively cause a power vacuum that will certainly be exploited by jihadist groups operating in Mali who are seeking to expand their areas of operation and influence. This will not only have implications within the country, but also on the wider West African region.

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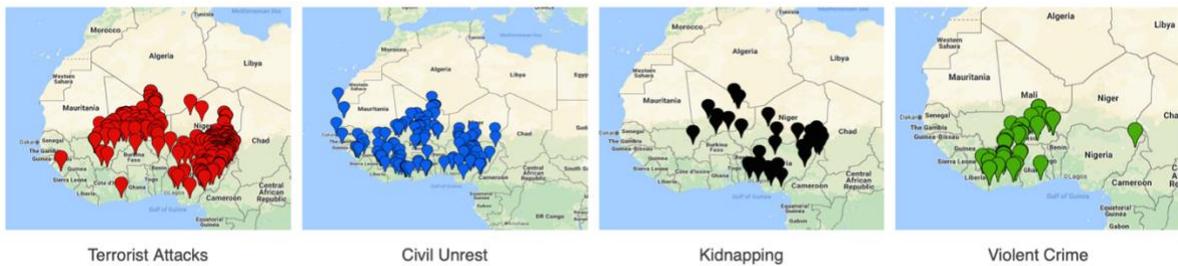
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