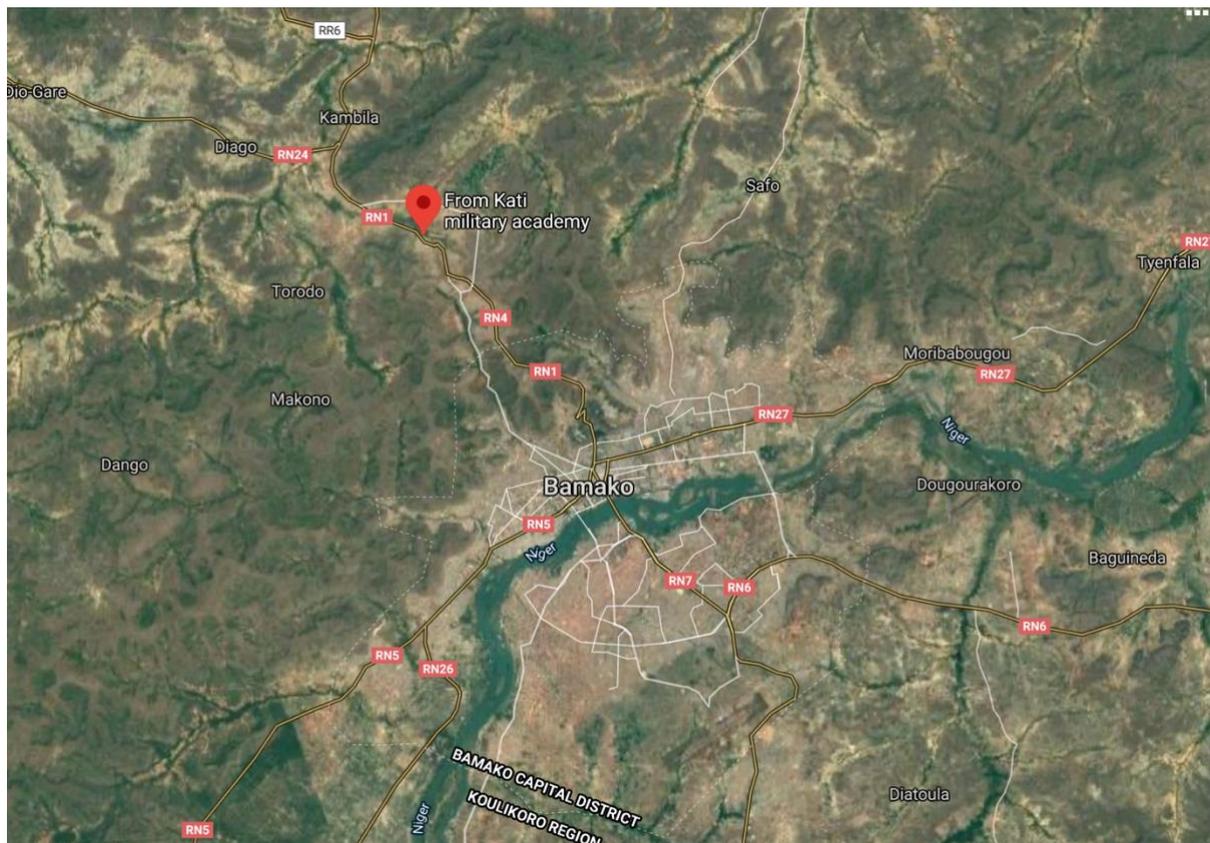


Update Advisory: Current Situation in Mali



Weeks after the 18 August coup d'état in Mali and the West African country is no closer to putting in place a transitional government that will lead the nation to new elections. The military officers now in charge, who call themselves the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP), have promised to include the opposition and civil society in a transition back to civilian rule, pledging that this will happen within a “reasonable” timeframe. While for the moment, the coup seems to have the popular support of the Malian people, who have long been frustrated with a lack of security and declining economy, the international community is pushing for a short transitional period, with elections being held as quickly as possible.

UPDATE ON CURRENT SITUATION

Almost two weeks after Mali's military rulers removed former President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta in a coup, they postponed their first meeting over the transfer of power due to “organizational reasons.” The coup leaders had invited civic groups, political organizations and former rebels to consultations on 29 August, however in a statement they confirmed that the meeting was postponed to a later date. The so-called June 5 Movement - Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP), an opposition coalition that had in recent months organized large protests against Keïta, had not been invited to participate in Saturday's meeting, though its representatives met with military rulers late Saturday. The M5-RFP has demanded that military rulers give it a role in the transition to civilian rule.

ECOWAS AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY PUSH FOR QUICK TRANSITION

While the army officers have promised a transition to civilian rule, so far, no timetable has been released and reports have emerged that coup leaders are seeking to remain in power for the next three years before elections are held.

In the wake of the coup, the 15-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional bloc suspended Mali from its institutions, shut borders and halted financial flows with the country following Keïta's overthrow. On 28 August, it told the coup leaders that they must transfer power to a civilian-led transitional government immediately and hold elections within a year. In exchange, ECOWAS committed to gradually lifting

sanctions as the coup leaders complied with its demands. The bloc further outlined four main points that it wanted to see progress on before sanctions could be gradually lifted, reinforcing its hard line over concerns that prolonged instability in Mali could potentially undermine the ongoing fight against armed groups in the wider Sahel region. Niger President Mahamadou Issoufou, who currently chairs ECOWAS, disclosed that Mali's transitional president and prime minister must be civilians, and would be banned from running in the next legislative and presidential elections. President Issoufou further indicated that "no military structure should be above the transitional president." ECOWAS also called for the quick establishment of a government that would be able to prepare for legislative and presidential elections within 12 months. On 28 August, Djibrila Maiga, a spokesman for the military rulers, stated that the bloc's decisions were being discussed.

Late on 29 August, military rulers received a delegation of about 10 representatives of the M5-RFP at the Kati barracks near Bamako. The meeting aimed to ease tensions just hours after it appeared that differences had emerged between civilians and the military on the organization of discussions on the transitional period. The protest movement, which has demanded that the military junta give it a role in the transition, has, according to Chogule Maiga one of the movement's leaders, proposed "a transition of 18 to 24 months" with civilians heading a transitional presidency, government and assembly. He further disclosed that the movement has called for "a committee to monitor and supervise the transition which will be composed of a majority of members of the junta and the June 5 Movement." The military junta has so far not commented on the meeting, or the movement's proposal.

On 30 August, France called on Mali's military junta to "quickly" organize a transition to civilian rule, warning that terrorists could benefit from the ongoing political crisis. Speaking to French media, Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly stated, "this transition must be done quickly...It is a matter of months," adding "if this is not done, then the risk is that it will first benefit the terrorists, because terrorists feed on the weakness of states and the Malian state is weak, very weak at the moment." She further warned, "moreover, the international community, which has committed itself to the Sahel, and Mali in particular, could ask itself questions."

Meanwhile Mahmoud Dicko, Mali's influential imam who has been a key player in the mass opposition protests, stated on Friday that the new military rulers did not have "carte blanche." Dicko's spokesman, Issa Kaou Djim, later expanded on this, stating that the imam "said the people have started to doubt" the junta. His comments came shortly after a new document was published on the Malian government's official journal, stating that the junta's head had been effectively invested with the powers of the head of state.

The military junta is due to hold transition talks this weekend (5 - 6 September) with political parties and civic groups, including the M5-RFP. A junta spokesman has disclosed that the talks on Saturday and Sunday are aimed at producing a blueprint for the transition. Further discussions are also scheduled to be held between 10 - 12 September. This comes as Mauritania's foreign minister on 3 September confirmed that he would be meeting with the military coup leaders. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed is being accompanied by four other high-ranking officials in the ministry, though no details about the scheduled meeting have been released.

KEÏTA

On 1 September, reports emerged that Keïta was hospitalized late Tuesday at a private clinic, raising concerns about the former leader's health after he was detained for 10 days. According to doctors, he suffered a mini stroke. Keïta had been arrested on 18 August. He was detained by the junta in Kati and was released on 27 August, though he remained at his private home in Sebeninkoro, a residential neighborhood of Bamako, under military surveillance. On 3 September, the head of Mali's new junta visited the former leader, with the junta stating that Keïta is free to seek additional medical treatment abroad. Keïta left the clinic where he was hospitalized on Thursday and it is believed that he could travel to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for further care.

IMPLICATIONS OF COUP

There is growing concern that the political situation in Mali could enable Islamic groups to extend their reach, a move that would upend several years of international support that has been working to stabilize the country. As a result of the coup, questions have emerged about ongoing military operations in the country and across the wider Sahel region.

On 26 August, the European Union (EU) announced that it was suspending its military and police training missions due to the coup. The United States had also announced earlier that it was stopped any further training or support for Malian armed forces in the wake of the coup. Reports have also emerged from Canada, that Canadian officials are increasingly rethinking the country's commitment to Mali. In a statement released on 19 August, Foreign Affairs Minister François-Philippe Champagne strongly condemned the coup d'état. At the time, the minister went on to say that Canada would work closely with West African countries, the African Union and the United Nations to return Mali to civilian rule. While the statement largely reflected the priorities of the international community to create political stability in Mali, in an interview with The Canadian Press in late August, Champagne disclosed that the Canadian federal government was rethinking its relationship and support for Mali in light of the coup, noting however that it would not simply walk away. Canada has had a long history with Mali, which has been a recipient of Canadian foreign aid and which is home to a number of Canadian-backed mines. In recent years, Canada's contributions have included the year-long deployment of hundreds of peacekeepers who in late 2018 provided helicopter-borne medical evacuation and logistical support to the UN. However while the federal Liberal government received numerous requests to extend the mission in Mali, all were declined in what appeared to be a signal that the situation in Mali was not a major priority for Canada. As of 2020, Canada has ten military officers working at the UN mission headquarters in Bamako and five police officers who help train local security forces. This is far fewer than the 20 police officers that had been pledged in 2018.

While France has confirmed that its Operation Barkhane will continue, international focus has turned to the establishment of a transitional period, taking attention away from pushing back jihadist militants who are increasingly threatening the wider West African region. Over the coming days and weeks, the international community is likely to increase pressure on the military junta to establish a short transitional period. ECOWAS has already announced its support for a short transitional period, with elections being held within 12 months, and is likely to maintain this stance while threatening further sanctions on military leaders. If a transitional period is not established quickly, a power vacuum could lead to Islamist militants expanding their foothold in Mali.

IMPLICATIONS TO TRAVEL AND COMMERCE

On 28 August, ECOWAS confirmed that it would maintain the closure of its borders with Mali and keep in place a ban on trade and financial flows with the West African country.

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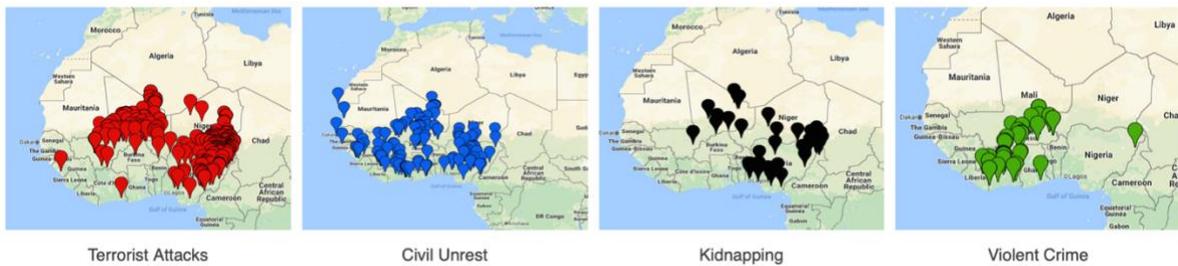
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