

ONE MORE MILITARY COUP IN BURKINA FASO

Within one year, two military coups took place in Burkina Faso: on January 24 and September 30, 2022. This was the eighth in a row since the country gained independence in 1960.

On September 30, detachments under the command of Captain Ibrahim Traore entered the capital Ouagadougou and, after a series of clashes with government troops, defeated them. The roads leading to the palace of the President, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba, were blocked, and television broadcasting was stopped. Ibrahim Traore immediately announced the dismissal of Paul-Henry Damiba. However, the latter did not agree with the order to renounce power at that moment. Negotiations between Lieutenant-Colonel and those who remained loyal to him, and the putschists, lasted all day in the residence of Damiba. Only on October 2, the former president announced his resignation, after which he flew from the French air base in Cambuansin (30 km from Ouagadougou) to the Togolese capital, Lome.

Having seized power, the military on the RTB television channel appealed to the people on the night of September 30, announcing a change of power, the dissolution of the government, the National Assembly, the termination of the Charter, the closure of borders, and the establishment of a curfew from 21 to 5 in the morning. However a day later it was already canceled.

Captain Ibrahim Traore announced that he was becoming the new president of the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (Le Mouvement Patriotique, Pour Sauvertage et Restauration, MPSR) and that he served as head of state, supreme commander, that he is the guarantor of national independence, territorial integrity. Before the coup, this movement was headed by Paul-Henry Damiba. Ibrahim Traore accused France of helping the deposed President Paul-Henry Damiba, as it allowed him to take refuge in a military base in Cambuansin to prepare a counteroffensive. However, this information was immediately refuted by both the French Foreign Ministry and Damiba himself.

In those days, many observers noted the presence of Russian flags among the supporters of the coup, which gave rise to the Western press to claim "Moscow's influence in the new putsch." It is no secret that there are quite a few supporters of establishing partnership relations with Russia within the Burkinabe army and population. No wonder the image of a Burkinabian soldier standing on a tank and waving the Russian flag went around the world. However, according to Malian analyst Idriss Traore, "we should not expect a break in relations between Burkina Faso and France. Although cooperation with Russia may become closer."

The reason for the putsch was a terrorist attack by Islamic groups on September 26 on a convoy of 150 trucks with food, which was escorted by the military in the city of Djibo. The terrorist act took place about 20 km from the city. This was the tenth attack by armed groups since February 2022. It must be taken into account that 40% of the territory of Burkina Faso, according to the Economic Co

mmunity of West African States (ECOWAS), is under the control of armed groups that are not subordinate to the state. For this reason, the city of Djibo has been living on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe for a long time, under the blockade of these illegal groups. During the latest attack on September 26, 27 military personnel and more than 50 civilians were killed. All this, of course, caused criticism and discontent among the population. In the last weeks before the military coup (September 30), demonstrations took place in the north of the country related to the aggravation of the situation due to the lack of security in the region. Public concern was raised by the Legislative Assembly's Powers Act, which allows the government to take action based on orders in the framework of "national defense and the fight against terrorist groups."

Paul-Henry Damiba ordered the creation of "zones of military interest" in the north and east of the country. This meant forcing residents to leave their places of the residence located on the territory of these zones.

As tensions grew between supporters and opponents of Paul-Henry Damiba, acts of intimidation of journalists - attacks, and censorship of broadcasts - were intensified. There are tendencies to restrict political freedoms in the country. On August 4, 2022, supporters of Paul-Henry Damiba, the ceremony of creating the Patriotic Front, an association of 30 organizations that called for the overthrow of the military junta, were disrupted. In early September, Ollo Mathias Kambou, an active member of the Civic Broom movement that led the 2014 uprising, was detained.

One of the important reasons for the September 30 coup d'état was a split within the army between the military elite, which was far from the front and continued to enrich itself, and soldiers fighting against terrorist groups, who, according to the Burkinabian researcher from Ouagadougou University Sheikh Yarananzore, had the impression that they were "thrown away".

The fact of arrival in Ouagadougou in July 2022, at the invitation of Paul-Henry Damiba, the former president of Blaise Compaore, who was overthrown and expelled from the country in 2014, negatively affected the split of society. In addition, in April of this year, he was sentenced to imprisonment for life by a Burkinabian court for the murder of his predecessor Thomas Sankara, who remains a national hero during already 40 years after his death for many Burkinabians. For the first time in eight years, Blaise Compaore returned to the country, which caused great controversy. If his supporters associated this return with "hopes for peace", then his opponents called for his immediate arrest and the execution of a sentence in absentia. Nevertheless, Blaise Compaore participated in the meeting not only with Paul-Henry Damiba but also with another former president of the country, Jean-Baptiste Ouedraogo (1982–1983). Its goal, according to their statement, was "to overcome political, ethnic and religious divisions between generations to restore peace in the country together." Paul-Henry Damiba thus wanted to enlist the support of not only these two political figures but also their numerous supporters.

The facts show that, despite the promises to recapture the national territory that has become uncontrolled by the state, neither President Marc Christian Kabore, who was overthrown in January 2022, nor Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henry Damiba failed to solve this problem.

The presence of French troops in the country also caused popular discontent. In July 2022, anti-French protests erupted in Ouagadougou. Back in March, the Burkinabians took went out to the streets of the capital demanding an end to military cooperation with France and support for Russia in solving the country's security problems. Protesters were reportedly waving Russian flags. One of the protesters said that Russia was the only country in the world that "worked positively to eliminate the terrorist threat in Syria, Venezuela, the Central African Republic, and neighboring Mali."

As for the reaction of the world community to the military coup in this small African country with more than 20 million people, it was sharply negative. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned any attempt to "seize power by force of arms" in a statement. The African Union expressed its disapproval of the "unconstitutional change of government".

Although ECOWAS condemned the coup, nevertheless, on October 4, its delegation arrived in Burkina Faso to assess the situation. The emissaries were received by Ibrahim Traore. After this meeting, a member of the delegation and ECOWAS mediator, former Nigerian President Mahamadou Issoufou, said that his representatives left "confident" that the new president would continue to fulfill the obligations to ECOWAS undertaken by Paul-Henry Damiba. First of all,

this concerns the organization of elections and the return of civilians to power no later than July 2024.

The European Union considered that this putsch "jeopardized the efforts that had been made for several months to move towards the civilian rule."

The attitude of the Russian Federation to the military coup that took place on September 30 was reflected in the statement of the press secretary of the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Peskov, who noted that "Russia would like the fastest normalization of the situation in Burkina Faso so that the country is completely restored to order and there is back to the rule of law."

On October 14, Ibrahim Traore, who led the military coup, was officially appointed president of the transitional period of Burkina Faso. Representatives of the national assemblies in the amount of 300 people voted unanimously for him. At the same time, the "Charter of the Transitional Period" was adopted.

The inauguration of Ibrahim Traore took place on October 21 in the meeting room of the Constitutional Council. As transitional president, he presented a plan of action aimed at strengthening the sovereignty of Burkina Faso. It contains only six points: 1) Decreasing the salaries of the president and members of the government; 2) Limiting the number of government members to 25; 3) Return to the idea of Thomas Sankara, according to which the Burkinabians should consume only what they produce; 4) Issues of security and the return of displaced persons are the top priority of the President. Civil affairs are the prerogative of the prime minister; 5) Requiring the partner state to respect the sovereignty of Burkina Faso; 6) Lower fuel prices. Comparing the program of Paul-Henry Damiba with the program of Ibrahim Traore, we can conclude that the latter has a more populist character. This can be explained by the fact that Captain Ibrahim Traore is young (34 years old) and does not have such a track record as his predecessor.

Ibrahim Traore was born in a religious family in 1988 in Bondokuy, in the north of the country. He was educated at the University of Ouagadougou, and during his studies, he was a member of the Association of Muslim Students. In 2010, he entered the service in the Burkinabian army. In 2012, he was assigned to a motorized infantry regiment based in the city of Kaya, in the northeast of Burkina Faso. There he took part in anti-terrorist operations, including as part of the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali. Awarded for the defense of Timbuktu Airport. In 2014, Ibrahim Traore received the rank of lieutenant.

In 2019, he joined the new army counter-terrorism unit of Burkina Faso "Cobra". In 2020, he was awarded the rank of captain. In January 2022, Ibrahim Traore was one of the participants in the armed coup carried out by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henry Damiba. After the latter came to power, he was sent to the city of Kaya, already the head of the Cobra, where he took an active part in the fight against jihadists. There, the young captain united around him a group of officers loyal to him, he was popular among the soldiers, thanks to his attentive attitude towards them.

The unsuccessful course of the military conflict and a series of defeats from Islamic fundamentalists shook the position of President Paul-Henry Damiba, to whom Ibrahim Traore offered cooperation with the Russian PMC Wagner, which suppressed the uprising in Mali. However, Paul-Henry Damiba refused. At the same time, Lieutenant-Colonel reduced the funding of "Cobra", causing dissatisfaction with the most combat-ready part of the army, which did not want to put up with the situation in the country.

Experts note that the modest captain Ibrahim Traore now has the image of the savior of the fatherland in the country. His coming to power gives many Burkinabians hope for the renewal of generations. He is compared with the national icon of Burkina Faso - Thomas Sankara. The new president in his first program of action "Six Revolutionary Steps of Captain Ibrahim Traore" refers to the need to use the ideas of Thomas Sankara. Observers drew attention to the red beret, which, like Thomas Sankara, is worn by the new leader, and also to the fact that both are captains; both came to power at the age of 34. They became the organizers of military coups against the military, who seized power by force.

The new president intends to take an independent position in international relations. Although the European Parliament in its resolution recommended the new authorities of Burkina Faso "not to resort to the help of the Wagner group to train their army and achieve stability", nevertheless Ibrahim Traore openly stated that he was not going to refuse it, including because of the need to strengthen the state border with Mali, from where there is a constant flow of weapons. In the near future, Ibrahim Traore plans to hold negotiations with gold mining companies in the country. He is dissatisfied with low tax revenues from foreign corporations and is ready to go for nationalization.

Burkina Faso is not the most resource-rich state in Africa. The mining industry is concentrated on the development of large gold deposits (3 tons are mined annually). The country ranks fourth in its production. Antimony and marble deposits are being exploited in small volumes. And in the extreme northeast, deposits of manganese ore (about 14 million tons) have been discovered, which, due to poor transport infrastructure in the area of the deposit, have not yet been developed. Burkina Faso has reserves of zinc, lead, nickel, silver, limestone, and phosphates. For Western countries, it is interesting, first of all, as a transit state for the implementation of the Trans-Saharan Highway project, which will allow the transfer of goods across the entire continent from East to West.

This state is an old partner of Russia. At the moment, relations between the two countries need to be strengthened. We are talking about political dialogue and interaction in international organizations, in the fight against terrorism and transnational crime. Of course, it is necessary to intensify the economic and business cooperation that has existed for more than 50 years. Our country has trained more than 3,500 Burkinabian specialists.

An analysis of the situation shows that the actions of the new military authorities will be primarily aimed at army reform and cooperation with international partners, including Russia. This is necessary to change the course of the fight against Islamic terrorist groups.

According to the report of the French Institute for Strategic Research (Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École militaire, IRSEM), published in September this year, Burkina Faso "today is among the African countries that are in the field of view of Wagner PMCs." This document draws attention to the "significant expansion this year of the audience of French-language sites of Russian media: RT and Sputnik." It traces the fear that the replacement of one military regime by another may weaken the influence of France in this region of Africa. However, it is still unclear how strong Ibrahim Traore's position is among the country's political elite. In addition, Burkinabian society is strongly split into those who support the new president, those who are on the side of Paul-Henry Damiba, and those who still dream of the return of Blaise Compaore. Much will depend on success in striking terrorist groups and liberating the national territories under their control.

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