

Committee: Security Council

Issue: The Question of the Situation in Burkina Faso

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Introduction

The Question of the Situation in Burkina Faso refers to the long lasting political instability and violence between different armed groups. The political crisis has been ongoing since the 28th of October 2014. The crisis started with the intention of President Blaise Compaoré to change the constitution to extend the presidential term limits¹. After this announcement, thousands of opposition supporters took to the streets and demanded for the disbandment of the parliament and resignation of President Compaoré². Mr. Compaoré resigned after a night of violence on the 30th of October. Prior to this announcement, there had been various acts of violence. The protesters had raided the ruling parties offices and set fire to the house of parliament, at least five people were killed during the night³. Mr. Compaoré himself fled the country with the aid of French special forces and is now living in exile in Ivory Coast.

After Mr. Compaoré's resignation the country found itself in a state of political crisis and there was a power vacuum to be filled. The Burkinabe military decided to act and declared the Yacouba Isaac Zida as the acting head of state on the 1st of November⁴. The international community feared that Burkina Faso was heading into a new dictatorship under Mr. Zida. There were also fears of a civil war due between the army and the ousted President Compaoré's supporters. These fears were calmed down due to the announcement by Mr. Zida, of a new government, which would be lead by Michel Kafando. He would serve as the acting President until new presidential elections⁵. These elections were to be held on the 29th of November 2015. Mr. Kafando is a highly respected retired Burkinabe diplomat and he has for example served as the representative of Burkina Faso for the United Nations. (UN) He also appointed Mr. Zida as the interim prime minister until the new general elections. Roch Marc Christian Kabore won the presidential elections by a majority of 53.5%.⁶ Burkina Faso will now enter a stage in its history, where it does have a democratically elected President for the first time in almost 30 years.

The country remained in a state of great political uncertainty. For example the country's economy suffered and also many people fled the country to the neighboring countries.

¹ <http://www.tvcnews.tv/?q=article/burkina-faso-ruling-party-calls-referendum-term-limits>

² <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/30/protesters-storm-burkina-faso-parliament-constitution-vote-president-blaise-compaore>

³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-29831262>

⁴ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/lt-col-isaac-yacouba-zida-declared-burkina-faso-s-new-leader-1.2820991>

⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30076907>

⁶ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/burkina-faso-elects-leader-historic-election-151201033702594.html>

Nonetheless, the interim government was able to stabilize the country to an extent that the risk of civil war was practically zero. Regardless of the stability, the Burkinabe people had deep distrust towards the government and the democratic system. The military was also divided. These uncertainties lead to a military coup, which started on the 16th of September 2015⁷. The coup was lead by General Gilbert Diendéré. The new military junta quickly took over the state institutions and imprisoned the acting President Kafando and his cabinet⁸. The coup lasted until the 23rd of September when Mr. Diendéré resigned and gave the power back to Mr. Kafando's government. The coup caused the deaths of 11⁹ people in total. The coup also destabilized the country yet again. The timing of the coup unstabilized the country and compromised the peace plan put forward by the AU, which included general elections on the 29th of October. Despite the ongoing uncertainty in the country, the elections were held on the 29th of October.

Throughout the crisis the international community has been active in trying to solve the situation. Especially the African Union (AU) has taken a leading role in trying to solve the crisis peacefully. The organization for example suspended Burkina Faso as its member¹⁰ during the coup of September 2015. This decision partially influenced the failure of the coup. AU was also active when Mr. Campaoré resigned and AU suggested that Mr. Kafando would be the ideal interim President. In general AU does not want that another of its member country would head into internal chaos. In addition France has also been advocating peace in Burkina Faso¹¹. The two countries have long lasting diplomatic ties, due to the fact that it is a former colony of France. The UN has also expressed its worries concerning the situation in Burkina Faso¹². Thanks to the active work of the international community, the situation hasn't deteriorated, but it must be stated that the situation hasn't improved considerably either.

The coming months will be crucial for the future of Burkina Faso and its democracy. The transition from a dictatorship to a democracy is never easy. The coming elections will be key. Especially what happens after the elections will be crucial, the elections must be democratic and all political parties in the nation must respect the results. Regardless of the relative stability in the country, the international community has to remain active in keeping the question of Burkina Faso at the top of their list. It cannot be left as a frozen conflict. As has happened for example in the Central African Republic. (CAR) There is a real risk and a threat that the violence would fire up and turn the situation into chaos. There is also a risk of a civil war, between that opposition and the old supporters of Mr. Campaoré. The stance and loyalty of the military are also still questionable. The crisis needs a strong resolution, to reinstitute credible democracy and state structure. The international community cannot afford Burkina Faso to go the same route that CAR and South Sudan have gone. There needs to be a show of strong and united diplomacy to solve this crisis.

⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13072857>

⁸ <http://news.yahoo.com/burkina-faso-military-says-takes-power-dissolves-government-090705810.html>

⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34276807>

¹⁰<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/african-union-suspends-burkina-faso-military-coup-150919073352770.html>

¹¹<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/african-union-suspends-burkina-faso-military-coup-150919073352770.html>

¹² <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51900>

Definition of key terms

Coup

A coup refers to the illegal overthrow of a country's government. Coups are usually organized by military officers. They are almost always violent and cause human casualties. The aim of a coup is to seize all the relevant state institutions and then replace the old government with a junta that will make all the decisions in the country

Burkina Faso

The sovereign state of Burkina Faso is located in West Africa. Burkina Faso as a country is very poor. Its GDP per capita is only around 1700 USD¹³. The country's acting President is Michel Kafando.

Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping is an essential part of UN's strategy of stabilizing a country after a instability. There are currently 16¹⁴ UN run peacekeeping operations around the world. There have been talks of launching a peacekeeping operation also in Burkina Faso.

International community

This refers in Burkina Faso's case to the international organizations and countries linked to the current crisis. This term includes the AU and the UN, including all their respective member nations.

Political instability

This term refers to the lack of stability in Burkina Faso's political system. The term also includes that a large number of the Burkinabe population doesn't trust the democratic system. Political instability is closely linked to acts of violence.

Background

The Burkina Faso gained full independence from France on the 5th of August 1960. The first President of the newborn nation was Maurice Yaméogo. The new country faced massive problems. It was one of the poorest countries in the world and the population was not highly educated. The infrastructure and state institutions were also quite weak. The first 30 years of the country's existence were politically unstable. There were 6 coups between the years 1960 to 1987. Many of these coups were violent. The high amount of coups, lead to public distrust towards the political system. This distrust can be seen even today. On 15th of October 1987 Blaise Campaoré organized a coup to overthrow the previous President Thomas Sankara. Campaoré and Sankara were actually partners in 1983, when Mr. Sankara seized power. The reasons why Campaoré betrayed his former partner are unknown to this day. One of the suggested reasons for the coup, were the deteriorated

¹³ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/uv.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/current.shtml>

foreign relations. Mr. Sankara's Marxist policies and nationalization projects were unpopular with the west.

After rising into power, Mr. Campaoré canceled the Marxist policies of Sankara. He also started to improve the relations with the west. This consolidated his power both inside the country, but also with the west. Mr. Campaoré ruled the nation in a dictatorial manner. Presidential elections were held, but these have been implicated that election fraud was a common practice. Another reason for his long reign was that he considerably hindered the possibilities of the opposition to run an effective campaign against him. Most of the elections he won by a majority of over 80%. As is the first rule of a dictator, he kept the military reasonably happy. Because of this, there were not that many attempts by the military, to overthrow the government. He was also quite able with foreign affairs. Especially keeping up good relations with Burkina Faso's former colonial overlord, France.

As nothing lasts forever, Mr. Campaoré's time as the ruler ended in October 2014. This was expected something expected by the international community, because at the time Mr. Campaoré was the longest reigning head of state in Africa. The AU had taken a stance that African leaders should not change the constitution in order to extend presidential term limits¹⁵. The Burkinabe population was tired of Campaoré's reign and wished for a change. These are few of the reasons why the opposition took to the streets after the announcement to amend the constitution. After Mr. Campaoré's resignation and the formation of an interim government, the situation looked relatively positive. Many African and western countries hailed the successful change of power. But these countries were also worried for new violence. The international community was especially worried due to the events of CAR, which after a similar situation plunged into a bloody civil war. Also the risk of Boko Haram taking advantage of the situation was and still is a real threat. These are the main reasons why the AU and the UN want a stable Burkina Faso.

The situation remained quite calm for the majority of the time under the reign of the interim government. There were some acts of violence but nothing too severe to destabilize the country. But as time went on, especially the army became ever more discontent. Due to this discontent General Diendère made his attempted coup. The coup largely failed because it never gained support with the population. The international community also condemned it very strongly. Surprisingly the newborn military junta laid down its arms and decided that it would be better for the country to develop in a democratic way rather than through a military regime.

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world. The social and economic development has been stagnating behind its neighbors such as the Ivory Coast and Ghana. Its Human Development Index (HDI) in 2012 was 0,343¹⁶. This is one of the lowest in the whole world. Around 50%¹⁷ of the total population lives under the UN set poverty limit. In economical terms the country's economy is quite undeveloped. 40%¹⁸ of the total workforce

¹⁵http://www.saiia.org.za/doc_view/517-the-african-union-and-the-promotion-of-democratic-values-in-africa-an-electoral-perspective

¹⁶<http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/BFA.pdf>

¹⁷<http://data.worldbank.org/country/burkina-faso>

¹⁸<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uv.html>

still works in agriculture. The agriculture is also quite inefficient. Only 20%¹⁹ of the population works in industry. The GDP per capita is only around 1700 USD²⁰. Life expectancy 56 years, which is one of the lowest in the world. So in economical and social terms, the country is not very developed.

This stagnation can also be seen as a part for the recent distrust towards the government. When the living conditions have not improved significantly over the two decades, the people saw that the old government was unable to improve the people's lives. There is a relatively high unemployment and much of the new money arriving to the country, comes through NGOs and international support. This is especially problematic as a large part of this development money is lost because of corruption²¹. Another problem is the fact that a large part of the youth is leaving the country²², many of the moving to neighboring countries and some even try to leave to Europe as refugees. It is always a sign of trouble for the country if the educated youth emigrate the country. Burkina Faso has to solve its economic and social problems if it wants to achieve long lasting stability.

Parties and organizations involved

Blaise Compaoré and his supporters

During his 27 in power, Blaise Compaoré managed get a vast number of supporters, both in and outside Burkina Faso. For example some in the Burkinabe military have expressed their support to Mr. Compaoré. There has even been speculation about Mr. Compaoré having something to do with the coup of October 2015²³. He was the longest reigning African head of state until his resignation in 2014. Many in Burkina Faso would want Mr. Compaoré to return as President from exile. Especially now, after the recent acts of violence. This is because Burkina Faso as a country was relatively stable during his reign. But on the other hand many in the country desperately want change to happen. In the end the chances of Mr. Compaoré's return to power are quite slim, but he still has the power and support, to destabilize the internal politics of Burkina Faso if he would want to do so.

The opposition

The possibilities to operate in fair conditions for the opposition during Mr. Compaoré's long reign were close to none. This was due to the harsh rules imposed on the opposition by Mr. Compaoré. The media was controlled by the state and any dissent by the opposition was not reported. Also there have been claims of widespread election fraud in many of the elections²⁴. During the last few years, the opposition has been able to operate more freely and due to this; it was able to organize the mass protest that in the end overthrew Mr. Compaoré and his government. Though Mr. Compaoré was ousted, the opposition was responsible of not controlling the masses and due to this, for example the house of parliament was burned

¹⁹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uv.html>

²⁰ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uv.html>

²¹ <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/burkinafaso>

²² <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483de6.html>

²³ <http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2014/11/exiled-strongman-tricky-legacy-blaise-compaor>

²⁴ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/12/07/uk-burkina-elections-idUKBRE8B61D720121207>

down. After the change of power, the opposition was scattered and still is. It was not able to unite under one policy and this is why the political scene in the country is very scattered.

Michel Kafando and the interim government

After the violence in October of 2015 and the exile of Mr. Campaoré, the country was taken over by Yacouba Isaac Zida. There was a real threat of Burkina Faso returning to a state of dictatorship. But due to international pressure, Michel Kafando was appointed as the interim President. The first action that Mr. Kafando took was to appoint Mr. Zida as the Prime Minister. This eased the pressure from the military, because Mr. Zida had the backing of the military. As a lifelong diplomat, Michel Kafando successfully kept the stability. He made efforts to prepare fair elections and to return the country to democracy. He promised that he and his cabinet will step down and acknowledge the new elected government.

The military

As in many other African countries, the military has held great power in politics. Almost all of the previous leaders of Burkina Faso have been part of the military. The military has also orchestrated various coups, some of them being successful and the others not so. This will to influence politics has not disappeared. After the resignation of Mr. Campaoré, the military was deeply divided into three groups. In the first group there were the supporters of Mr. Campaoré, who wished his return to power. The second group was comprised of officers that wished to seize the power for themselves. The last group wished to stabilize the country and respect the rule of law. Until this day the military is divided. There is a real threat of a new coup. The new government has to gain the support of the military to be able to stay in power.

African Union (AU)

AU has been remarkably active and relatively successful in handling this crisis. When it seemed that Burkina Faso was heading into a new dictatorship under Mr. Zida, the AU pressured Burkina Faso and was successful in negotiating a plan²⁵ for an interim government lead by Mr. Kafando. The handling of this crisis is crucial for the AU and Africa in general. If it can show that dictatorships are not in order, it might discourage other countries and their leader to bend the law in their favor. This is a question of authority and respect for them and it is crucial that the transition to democracy is successful. AU is also an umbrella term for other countries around Burkina Faso, who have been active in solving the crisis. This question is truly a test for all of Africa

United Nations (UN)

The UN has been working closely with the AU to solve the situation. It is also for the UN a big priority that countries would have a peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy. UN supports the plan put forward by the AU. UN has also made it clear that African nations should take the lead on this matter and make Burkina Faso an example of Africa's ability to solve its own problems. Regardless of this, the UN is fully committed in solving this crisis. There have also been talks of a UN peacekeeping mission in the country, but this is totally up to the Security Council. But in total UN would wish a strong resolution on the matter.

²⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-29928059>

France

France is the most important western country in related to this crisis. This is largely due to the fact that France was the colonial overlord of Burkina Faso until 1960. France has been extremely active, when it comes to its old colonies. It has a military presence in CAR²⁶ and Mali²⁷, also because of their internal situation. France has expressed its concerns about the crisis in Burkina Faso and states that it wants a democratic solution for the country. It wants that the military would back off from politics and leave the governing to the democratically elected government. In addition, France has been closely working with the AU in putting pressure on Burkina Faso.

UN resolutions

S/RES4461(1960) Security Council recommends Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) to be a member of the United Nations for the General Assembly²⁸

CRC/C/BFA/3-4(2009) Report of the rights of the child in Burkina Faso²⁹

CEDAW/C/BFA/4-5(2004) Report of the discriminations against women in Burkina Faso³⁰

CERD/C/304/Add.41(1997) Report on eliminating racial discrimination in Burkina Faso³¹

Timeline

1960 August, Burkina Faso gets its full independence from France

1987 October, Blaise Compaoré seizes power by killing Thomas Sankara.

1992, Compaoré's Organization for Popular Democracy-Labor Movement wins a majority of seats in the first multi-party parliamentary elections since 1978.

2011 July, Seven people are killed when government forces suppress mutiny in Burkina Faso's second city, Bobo Dioulasso.

2013 July, Thousands of demonstrators take to the streets over plans to create a Senate. Opposition leaders say the move will allow President Compaoré to extend his rule.

2014 January, Demonstrators across the country oppose possible plans by President Compaoré to prolong his rule. Defectors from the ruling party found a new political movement to challenge the president.

2014 October, More mass protests against proposed constitutional changes to allow the

²⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13150044>

²⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/9803771/Frances-military-intervention-against-Islamist-fighters-in-Mali.html>

²⁸ [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/149\(1960\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/149(1960))

²⁹ http://www.geneva-academy.ch/RULAC/pdf_state/Burkina-Faso-CRC.doc.pdf

³⁰ http://www.geneva-academy.ch/RULAC/pdf_state/9-February-2004.pdf

³¹ http://www.geneva-academy.ch/RULAC/pdf_state/18-September-1997.pdf

president another five years in power turn into a mass uprising that drives President Compaoré from office.

Military takes charge in move condemned by opposition, civil society groups, United States and African Union.

2014 November, Agreement reached on a framework for a transitional government to run the country until elections proposed for the end of next year. Political and military leaders choose former Foreign Minister Michel Kafando as interim president.

2015 April, Romanian security officer at a mine in the north is kidnapped. Islamist militants later claim to be holding him. Interim parliament bars politicians allied to deposed president Blaise Compaoré from running in the presidential and general elections planned for later in the year.

2015 October, A coup lead by Gilbert Diendéré is successful and Michel Kafando's interim government is overthrown. The coup lasts only for few days and after international pressure; Mr. Diendéré yields the power back to the interim government.

2015 November, Roch Marc Christian Kabore elected as the President of Burkina faso.

Possible solutions

It is clear that this crisis needs a strong and potent resolution. The main aims of a resolution should be firstly to stabilize the county. There still looms a risk of new violence and if this violence would escalate, even a civil war is possible. This crisis has quite many similarities with CAR. Taking into account what happened there, the country needs stability to reintroduce democracy and the rule of law. The second thing is to ensure that all relevant parties will respect the democratically elected government. This includes Mr. Campaoré's old supporters and the military. Burkina Faso cannot afford yet another coup. There is a real possibility to bring peace to the country if the resolution is strong and takes into account all the relevant parties.

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