

## BRIEFING: BURKINA FASO—THE FALL OF BLAISE COMPAORÉ

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BLAISE COMPAORÉ RESIGNED AND FLED BURKINA FASO on 31 October 2014 under the sustained assault of a coalition of youth, cultural leaders, civil society organizations and opposition parties, and after the defection of core segments of his military. Compaoré had been in power since the assassination of his predecessor Thomas Sankara on 15 October 1987. This briefing first discusses the actual sequence of events that led to the transition. We then identify some deeper trends that weakened the regime, including the dilemma of succession in a semi-authoritarian regime, the rise of youth and cultural elites as opposition actors who placed themselves beyond the reach of regime co-optation, and the use of Sankara imagery as a tool of mobilization. We then jointly analyse two features of the transition and the current regime of Lt-Col Isaac Yacouba Zida who, despite being only prime minister, appears to be the country's new strongman. The first is the relative institutional uncertainty that accompanied the fall of the Compaoré regime and which continues to hamper the transition. The second is the enduring role of the military in Burkinabè politics. We conclude by singling out some implications of the transition and the challenges ahead.

### *A miscalculation brings about an abrupt ending*

Blaise Compaoré had been re-elected president for a second and constitutionally last term in 2010.<sup>1</sup> Hoping to stay in power beyond the November 2015 end of his term, he had toyed with multiple options to revise the two-term limit set forth in Article 37 of the constitution. He was reluctant to choose the risky referendum route and hoped to be able to directly change

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1. Although he seized power in 1987 and was elected four times thereafter (1991, 1998, 2005 and 2010), only his last two elections were under the 1991 constitution as amended in 2002, which limits the president to two five-year terms.

Article 37 by putting together a 75 percent majority in parliament, as allowed by the constitution. Because his ruling *Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (CDP) did not command such a majority in the National Assembly, Compaoré tried to set up a Senate which, though constitutionally provided, had never been implemented. Since he could personally appoint some members of the Senate, he hoped this would enable him to secure the majority he required in the combined parliament. Strong opposition prevented him from making these appointments, however, and Compaoré sought thereafter to co-opt members of the National Assembly to reach a 75 percent majority.<sup>2</sup> He was finally successful in October 2014 when the *Alliance pour la Démocratie et la Fédération-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (ADF-RDA) of Gilbert Noël Ouédraogo rallied to his cause after secret negotiations, giving him the necessary number of seats. Thus, on 21 October the Council of Ministers announced that the National Assembly would vote on amending Article 37 on 30 October.<sup>3</sup>

In anticipation of popular protests, the government closed all schools and universities for one week on 26 October. Nevertheless, many groups rapidly mobilized to counter the government's move. On 27 October, women armed with wooden spoons marched against the proposal. The next day several hundred thousand people demonstrated in Ouagadougou and other towns, behind the leadership of Zéphirin Diabré from the *Union pour le Progrès et le Changement* (UPC), who had been officially appointed leader of the opposition, and civil society organizations such as the *Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples* (MBDHP), trade unions, students associations, the *Centre pour la Gouvernance Démocratique* (CGD), as well as a handful of new groups such as the *Collectif des Femmes pour la Défense de la Constitution* (COFEDEC), the *Front de Résistance Citoyenne*, and youth movements like *Balai Citoyen*, the *Collectif Anti Référendum* (CAR), and *Ça Suffit*.<sup>4</sup>

On 29 October, as a few demonstrators marched through Ouagadougou, the first instances appeared of signs directly asking for Compaoré's departure ('*Libérez Kosyam*' or '*Compaoré Dégage*'), instead of merely opposing the modification of Article 37.<sup>5</sup> That same evening, youth began squatting

2. The Senate was part of the 1991 constitution but had been abrogated in the 2002 revisions. Compaoré then sought to bring it back through another constitutional reform in 2012. For a discussion of the Senate, see International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: avec ou sans Compaoré, le temps des incertitudes* (ICG, Rapport Afrique No. 205, 22 July 2013).

3. Technically, the government could only refer the law to the National Assembly in view of the convocation of a referendum, which it did, but the National Assembly was then allowed to sidestep the referendum if it had a 75 percent majority, which it did.

4. The organizers claimed a million demonstrators, but international media observers confirmed 'hundreds of thousands'. *Le Monde*, 'Hundreds of thousands of people in the streets in Burkina Faso', 29 October 2014, <[http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/video/2014/10/29/des-centaines-de-milliers-de-personnes-dans-les-rues-au-burkina-faso\\_4514307\\_3212.html?xtmc=burkina&xtcr=98](http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/video/2014/10/29/des-centaines-de-milliers-de-personnes-dans-les-rues-au-burkina-faso_4514307_3212.html?xtmc=burkina&xtcr=98)> (20 January 2015).

5. 'Free Kosyam' refers to the presidential palace.

in some of the main intersections, burning tires and using rocks to impede traffic.

On 30 October, before the members of parliament could convene, people gathered outside the National Assembly. After receiving signals from the deployed military that they would not use force against them, the demonstrators rushed the National Assembly building and set it on fire. As the day unfolded, similar targeted acts of arson and looting occurred at specific sites across the country associated with the regime, such as symbolic public buildings, the headquarters of the CDP and the ADF-RDA, and the residence of François Compaoré, the much reviled brother of the president.

A few hours later, Compaoré proclaimed a ‘state of siege’ and the dissolution of the government. Soon thereafter, Army Chief of Staff General Honoré Nabéré Traoré issued a communiqué stating that he was in charge, that the National Assembly and government were dissolved, and that he would set up a ‘transitional organ’ in order to prepare elections within 12 months. However, he did not specify the status of the president, giving the impression that he was doing Compaoré’s bidding. At 21:00, on a private TV station (the national television building had been looted), Compaoré confirmed that he was still the president and that the government was dissolved, and announced he was withdrawing the amendment and would surrender his office at the end of his term to a democratically elected successor.

Too little too late? By then at least 24 Burkinabè were confirmed dead in the day’s events,<sup>6</sup> and the opposition, sensing momentum, became more radical and demanded Compaoré’s resignation. On 31 October, the *Place de la Nation*, Ouagadougou’s main square, was packed. Demonstrators marched again towards the presidential palace, which is located in the Ouaga 2000 neighbourhood at the outskirts of town. This time, apparently, the Presidential Security Regiment informed Compaoré that they would not shoot at the unarmed youth progressing with their hands raised. It was then that Compaoré, after signing a resignation decree, left the palace with his entourage in a convoy and headed south towards the town of Po. *En route*, a French helicopter picked him up and evacuated him to Côte d’Ivoire. Other core members of his regime fled to Benin and France, while some stayed in Ouagadougou.

At around 13:00 on 31 October, several radios announced Compaoré’s resignation and there was obvious incredulity and exhilaration in the streets

6. Most people were killed near François Compaoré’s house and Kosyam. Amnesty International, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’ils avaient dans la tête pour tirer sur les gens? La répression de manifestations contre le gouvernement au Burkina Faso’ (Amnesty International, London, 15 January 2014). For the english version of the report, go to <[http://www.amnestyinternational.be/doc/IMG/pdf/rapport\\_burkina\\_20150104\\_en.pdf](http://www.amnestyinternational.be/doc/IMG/pdf/rapport_burkina_20150104_en.pdf)> (24 January 2015). A report by the Burkinabe Movement of Human Rights and Peoples (MBDHP) confirmed a total of 33 dead. MBDHP, ‘Report’, December 2014, <<http://www.mbdhp.bf/>> (27 January 2014).

and Place de la Nation, renamed Place de la Révolution for the occasion. The next 48 hours witnessed much confusion. First, a fair amount of arm wrestling seems to have taken place within the military. When Compaoré's resignation was announced, the deputy chief of the Presidential Security Regiment, Lt-Col Isaac Yacouba Zida, a largely unknown character until then, was at the Place de la Révolution with the main civil society leaders and called for power to the people. But later that afternoon General Traoré, who leads the military (except for the Presidential Security Regiment) declared he would 'assume from this day the responsibilities of head of state'. Soon thereafter, Zida declared he was the head of state. Negotiations ensued, and on 1 November the military hierarchy confirmed its endorsement of Zida.<sup>7</sup>

The opinion of civilians on the matter was more complex. Traoré, having been close to Compaoré, was most likely seen as not acceptable by the political opposition and civil society leaders. They may have perceived Zida as both less threatening and more capable of preventing chaos, since the Presidential Security Regiment is well armed and well trained, while regular troops in Ouagadougou are often not armed (a consequence of the 2011 mutinies). Zida was also adroit, invoking Sankara in his speeches and symbolic actions such as the raised fist, which may have comforted many opponents. In turn, his alliance with demonstrators probably strengthened his hand as a credible leader against Traoré. However, as the number-two man in the security apparatus of the deposed president, he most likely had mixed motives, and Compaoré's easy escape suggests he received active assistance from the Presidential Security Regiment. While the *Balai Citoyen* (civic broom), one of the main civil society organizations, supported some form of transitional role for the military, opposition parties rejected the idea of a military presidency. Several rounds of discussion between Zida and opposition figures took place during 1 and 2 November, but disorganized political parties had little credible alternative to offer and in the end Zida got away with his 'soft coup'<sup>8</sup> in exchange for promises of power sharing and of setting up a transition charter.

*A succession crisis reveals the decay of a semi-authoritarian regime*

While the fall of Compaoré was abrupt, the decay of his regime, compounded by the rise of new opposition forces, had been increasingly visible for a few years. The decline of the Compaoré regime can be traced back to the assassination of journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998 and its political effects. Zongo was investigating deals made by the president's brother, and

7. For a chronology of these events, see *L'Observateur Paalga*, 31 October 2014, <[www.lobserveur.bf](http://www.lobserveur.bf)> (25 January), pp. 3–4.

8. Ousséni Ilboudo, 'Le prix de l'entêtement', *L'Observateur Paalga*, 31 October 2014, p. 5.

his killing, which was probably politically motivated, was followed by widespread and sustained demonstrations behind the slogans ‘Enough is enough’ and ‘*Na lara, an sara*’ (translated: If we lie down we are dead).<sup>9</sup> It was the increasing abuses of the regime that demonstrators opposed and they demanded justice, as well as an end to impunity. Compaoré survived the crisis with a mix of mild concessions, including the introduction of term limits in a revised constitution, and successful efforts at dividing the opposition, many among whom let themselves be co-opted for political, material or financial benefits.<sup>10</sup> By and large, despite its democratic veneer, his system remained semi-authoritarian,<sup>11</sup> boosted by international legitimacy acquired in multiple regional conflict mediations.

Political conditions dramatically worsened in 2011 following popular protests in the wake of the beating to death of a student in a Koudougou police station. From February to June, a succession of strikes and demonstrations took place and culminated in several instances of mutinies in the military.<sup>12</sup> While the killing of the student provided the impetus, the 2011 crisis had more economic underpinnings than previous ones. Although the country had experienced decent growth, inequality had surged under Compaoré, particularly to the benefit of those associated with the regime, while the youth had a hard time finding employment. Even in the military, inequality between privileged regiments such as the Presidential Security Regiment and the rank and file fed deepening grievances. Compaoré solved the crisis once again with token concessions, including the firing of several hundred military and the disarming of most deployed in Ouagadougou, but the deeper causes of the malaise remained unaddressed.

Impunity, corruption, and inequality (particularly salient in the ostentatious behaviour of the presidential entourage) continued to feed popular grievances in the ensuing years. The neopatrimonial and nepotistic management of the economy and the appropriation of many assets by regime insiders progressively raised the question of the president’s succession. For opponents, seeing him go meant the possibility of redistribution and greater social justice. For insiders, it involved serious risks to their acquired wealth.

9. Ernest Harsch, ‘Trop c’est trop! Civil Insurgence in Burkina Faso, 1998–1999’, *Review of African Political Economy* 26, 81 (1999), pp. 395–406; Sten Hagberg, ‘Enough is enough: An ethnographic account of the struggle against impunity in Burkina Faso’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, 2 (2002), pp. 217–46.

10. Newton Ahmed Barry, ‘Révision constitutionnelle: Blaise veut 15 ans supplémentaires,’ *L’Événement*, 25 October 2014, p. 8.

11. Mathieu Hilgers and Jacinthe Mazochetti, *Révoltes et oppositions dans un régime semi-autoritaire* (Karthala, Paris, 2010).

12. Mathieu Hilgers and Augustin Loada, ‘Tensions et protestations dans un régime semi-autoritaire: croissance des révoltes populaires et maintien du pouvoir au Burkina Faso’, *Politique Africaine* 131 (2013), pp. 187–208.

The president's first response to his looming succession crisis had been to promote his brother, François, officially his economic adviser, to succeed him, even before his last term began. This was a tall order. François was deeply unpopular for his alleged role in the death of Norbert Zongo, and he and his mother-in-law Alizeta Ouédraogo, a very wealthy businesswoman, symbolized the nepotism of the regime.<sup>13</sup> Given resistance within the ranks and leadership of the CDP itself, where others expected their turn in power, in 2007 Compaoré started putting together a network of supportive associations, the *Fédération Associative pour la Paix et le Progrès avec Blaise Compaoré* (FEDAP-BC), to bypass the CDP and promote his brother for the presidency. This strategy reached its dénouement at the Fifth Congress of the CDP in 2012, when FEDAP-BC candidates took control of the leadership of the party while a number of historic leaders like Simon Compaoré, Salif Diallo, and Roch Marc Christian Kaboré were sidelined.

Given the unpopularity of François, however, Blaise seemed to have been at a loss in terms of finding a successor capable of winning elections while also guaranteeing his own impunity and the assets of his entourage. There are few signs that he was himself enthusiastic about staying in power, but he appears to have at least wanted more time to continue engineering his succession. Hence the attempts to reinstate the Senate, which started in 2013, and subsequently to revise Article 37.

His conundrum was made significantly more complicated in January 2014 when Simon Compaoré, Salif Diallo, and Roch Kaboré quit the CDP and created their own party, the *Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès* (MPP). The MPP took with it about 100 other top party members and National Assembly deputies, including one popular member of the traditional Mossi hierarchy, the Laarlé Naba, who had been both a member of parliament since 1992 and a member of FEDAP-BC. These defections came only four years after the departure from the CDP of Zéphirin Diabré, another former stalwart of the regime. Diabré had set up the UPC in 2010, which won nineteen seats in the 2012 legislative elections and became the largest opposition party. The defections shocked the president and may have reinforced his perception that he needed to stay in power, or at least buy more time to engineer a safe transition.

Thus, the year 2014 witnessed a back-and-forth of increasing intensity between the regime and the new opposition parties, as well as the Catholic Church, which had forcefully condemned the proposed amendment as

13. Rémi Carayol, 'Burkina Faso: François, l'autre Compaoré', *Jeune Afrique*, 18 July 2012, <<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/JA2687p038-041.xml0/>> (14 January 2015).

early as 2013.<sup>14</sup> Marches, strikes, and mass meetings, increasingly focused on Article 37, culminated in the events of October.

*En chantant: Music, youth, and new forms of politics*

One of the most unusual sights of the October uprising must have been that of Lt-Col Zida standing atop an armoured vehicle outside the military headquarters together with two popular musicians, reggae artist Sams’K le Jah (Karim Sama) and rap singer Smockey (Serge Martin Bambara). Sam’s K le Jah became popular with a show on Ouaga FM radio station in which he alternated music and political commentary. In 2011, he released a song whose chorus was ‘This president, he must go and he will go.’ His programme was suspended and he was fired, becoming a symbol of youth resistance to the regime. Smockey (“s’moqueur” or to poke fun) is a pioneer of Burkina’s rap scene, who started his music career in 2001. A fan of Thomas Sankara, he dedicated his Kora award (awarded to the best African hip hop singer) in 2010 to Sankara in the presence of Blaise Compaoré (who is widely believed to have been behind the assassination of Sankara).

Together the two artists set up *Balai Citoyen* in July 2013, an association aimed at mobilizing youth to sweep ‘bad governance, political patronage, poverty, lack of respect for human rights, [...] corruption, decay, there are so many things to sweep! Burkina Faso gives the impression of being a democratic country, but in reality we put the dust under the carpet.’<sup>15</sup> The birth of *Balai Citoyen* was an important development as it provided a hitherto largely alienated and disconnected youth with a means of political mobilization at the same time as it illustrated the relative impotence of regular political parties to genuinely represent the aspirations of the youth and, in general, to aggregate the demands of citizens beyond the small cliques of their members. This capacity to represent youth is well captured in *Balai Citoyen*’s slogans: ‘Our strength is in number’ and ‘Together we are not alone’. *Balai Citoyen* rapidly expanded, with clubs in many urban neighbourhoods. Together they launched a ‘Hands off my constitution’ campaign in June 2014. For a regime used to manipulating opposition through patronage and intimidation, *Balai Citoyen* offered few opportunities for leverage.

14. *LeFaso.net*, ‘Situation nationale: Les évêques du Burkina mettent en garde contre la dégradation du climat social’, 21 July 2013, <<http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article55150>> (14 January 2015).

15. Interview by Marianne Saddier, ‘The upright citizens of Burkina Faso’, *Africa is a country*, 1 October 2014, <<http://africasacountry.com/the-citizens-of-burkina-faso/>> (23 January 2015).

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of youth in Burkina Faso, where about 65 percent of the population is below the age of 25.<sup>16</sup> With higher education levels than their parents, yet few opportunities to make a decent living or build a decent life, this youth found itself increasingly at odds with the regime and with politicians of the older generation.<sup>17</sup> But, like their peers around the world, they liked music, which became a powerful tool in mobilizing them: promoting not only opposition to the regime but also civic engagement.

The extent to which music provided the rhythm and the narrative of Compaoré's decline and eventual fall is worth highlighting. There is a liberating element in the songs of Burkinabè rappers that set the youth free from the yoke of political parties and traditional political action. As the musician Basic Soul, a member of *Balai Citoyen*, sang in 2012:

And you my brother, and you my sister  
 Raise your arms in the air  
 For a better life  
 Let's go to Kosyam  
 Come on, let's go to Kosyam  
 We have suffered so much<sup>18</sup>

Others were equally explicit and threatening, and the regime's attempts at modifying the constitution paradoxically fertilized the creativity of opposition artists and amplified their voice:

A quarter century, that's a lot  
 For a presidential mandate . . .  
 With honors, leave today or in catastrophe leave tomorrow  
 The choice is now in your hands.<sup>19</sup>

The music built up to and continued through the October 2014 uprising.<sup>20</sup> On the evening of 28 October, Smockey left the *Place de la Nation* – soon to be renamed – to perform at a show<sup>21</sup> where he captured the moment in a remarkably prescient song written a few months earlier:

16. Nicolas Hubert, *Burkina Faso, une révolution portée par la jeunesse* (Brussels, GRIP, 15 December 2014).

17. Hilgers and Mazzochetti, *Révoltes et oppositions dans un régime semi-autoritaire*; Hilgers and Loada, 'Tensions et protestations dans un régime semi-autoritaire'.

18. Basic Soul, *Allons à Kosyam*, 2012, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjUhPOUWNzU>> (23 January 2015). All citations to lyrics reflect the author, song title, and year of publication. All songs were released in Burkina Faso.

19. Faso Kombat, *Naam*, 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KH0dcs3MAYU>> (23 January 2015).

20. Other significant artists (songs) include Sana Bob (*On n'est pas d'accord*), Smarty (*Le chapeau du chef*), and Zédess (*Il faut dire non*).

21. Louise Agar, 'Ouagadougou: A la scène comme dans la rue', *Libération*, 11 November 2014, <[http://www.liberation.fr/theatre/2014/11/11/ouagadougou-a-la-scene-comme-dans-la-rue\\_1140955](http://www.liberation.fr/theatre/2014/11/11/ouagadougou-a-la-scene-comme-dans-la-rue_1140955)> (14 January 2014).



We switch to attack mode alright and the whole country goes wild  
 We shut down schools and take out signs and banners  
 Everywhere in the city there is excitement in the air  
 The *Place de la Nation* will become *Place de la Révolution*  
 And a multicoloured crowd moves about enthusiastically  
 Realizing the threat has switched side and location ...<sup>22</sup>

New communication technologies played an important role. Many songs were banned on national media but played on private radio stations. Omnipresent cell phones were used to listen to the radio, particularly Oméga FM, to text and, for some, to follow Facebook and Twitter with popular hash tags such as #lwily and #burkina.<sup>23</sup> These technologies reinforced the effects of the more investigative journalism that had developed over the past few years and had contributed to undermining the regime's credibility.

*Balai Citoyen* calls itself a political movement that does not seek power and has refused to be associated with the transition organs. Its youth, lack of political experience, and weak organizational structures occasionally leads it to controversial moves, however. Thus, the decision by Smockey and Sam's K le Jah to endorse Zida in the wake of Compaoré's resignation was seen by some as a tactical mistake, although the two argued it was necessary to prevent further violence. With hindsight, the strength of such a movement might be more in mobilizing for change than in engineering specific new futures. While *Balai Citoyen* made the fall of the regime possible where opposition parties had been impotent, the relative absence of these parties (surprised by the speed of events) at the critical juncture of regime change appears to have facilitated a partial reappropriation of the uprising by the military.

#### *Sankara redux: A search for morality*

The uprising focused almost exclusively on Compaoré as an individual, as befits a system based on personal rule. Some of the slogans included 'Blaise = Burkina's Ebola' 'Compaoré, do not confuse kingdom and republic', and '*Blaise dégage*'. However, the movement was not devoid of an ideological agenda, having been fed over time by inequality and the regime's corruption. Given the nature of these grievances, it is no surprise that for many people the person of the late Thomas Sankara came to symbolize the

22. Smockey, *On passe à l'action*, 2014.

23. *Lwily*, bird in Moore, refers both to the Twitter bird and the bird *lwili pendé*, which is often represented on traditional Burkinabè fabric. In 2014, 66.38 percent of the population had a mobile phone, but only 4.4 percent had access to the Internet, according to the International Union of Telecommunications, *ICT Facts and Figures*, 2014, <<http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>> (23 January 2015).

uprising and the subsequent transition. Although Sankara was himself a military leader who seized power in a violent coup and had limited inclination to liberal democracy, he was young and charismatic, with a genuine aversion to corruption, a penchant for personal austerity and aspirations for popular dignity that have contributed to his lasting appeal. Moreover, he too was a musician, having played the guitar at political meetings on occasion.

Throughout the uprising, Sankara's effigy was on display, as were the raised fists he was fond of. Demonstrators sang the national anthem that dates back to Sankara's regime, including the final sentence 'Fatherland or death, we will vanquish', which was then the country's motto (borrowed from Cuba). For Burkina's youth, none of whom lived through the 'revolution' of 1983–7, Sankara came to represent Compaoré's antithesis, a call for morality against corruption, an aspiration to dignity, justice, equality, and an end to impunity. As Smockey sang in a number about the killing of Sankara:

They preserved peace without dignity  
Give us back dignity  
And we will give you peace.<sup>24</sup>

This moral dimension can be interpreted as an extension of the 'Enough is Enough' campaign of 1999, which followed the killing of Norbert Zongo.<sup>25</sup>

Whether out of conviction or opportunism, Zida rapidly joined the Sankarafest, raising his fist and endorsing the *Place de la Révolution* name change. Together with civilian president Michel Kafando, he adopted this Sankarist theme for the transition. Joséphine Ouédraogo, once a junior minister under Sankara, was appointed Minister of Justice with the task of re-examining both Norbert Zongo's assassination and Sankara's – starting with an exhumation of his grave, given rumours that another body is buried there. During his inauguration speech, Kafando (who like Zida does not have a Sankarist past) stated:

Here is a modest and humble country, which could have become a model of egalitarian ... development with its population's simple lives. Such was the ideal of the 1983 revolution. Instead, thirty years later, we observe ... unexplained wealth, undue privileges, and oligarchic advantages.

The near future will tell whether these Sankarist professions are genuine.<sup>26</sup>

24. Smockey, *A qui profite le crime*, 2007, <<http://www.thomassankara.net/spip.php?article610>> (24 January 2015).

25. Sten Hagberg, 'Enough is enough'.

26. For discussion of this point see Newton Ahmed Barry, 'Trop de déclarations, pas d'actions' and 'Sankara: La justice est possible', *L'Événement*, 293 (10 December 2014), pp. 7–8.

*Institutional uncertainty and military control*

The fall of Compaoré offers insights for the study of African regimes. It is worth noting that Burkina joins Malawi, Nigeria, and Zambia as a case of the failure of term-limit removal. In Niger and Senegal, the president extended his term but was then overthrown or defeated. In contrast, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Namibia, Togo, and Uganda have all experienced term-limit removals since 1990, and Congo-Brazzaville took a step in that direction in December 2014. Such removals are not necessarily permanent, however. Compaoré had to reinstate term limits in 2002, and ongoing demonstrations in Togo are also demanding their return.

More importantly, Burkina Faso's uprising and transition challenge the notion that African states have strengthened their institutions in recent decades.<sup>27</sup> Although Compaoré resigned formally, few of the constitutional provisions for regime succession were implemented. This is in part because his legal successor, the president of the National Assembly, Soungalo Ouattara, left with him. But it is mostly because the military announced, as early as 30 October, that it had dissolved the National Assembly and the government at a time when the president had not yet resigned, and when it had no constitutional authority to do so. Moreover, the military then announced that it would set up a transitional organ, another institutional improvisation with no relation to the constitution. The subsequent takeover by Zida, the number two in the Presidential Security Regiment in competition with the military chief of staff, further indicated that the military itself could not function along established institutional lines, and that the transition arrangements might legitimately be thought of as a coup.

Civilian leaders negotiating with Zida over his apparent takeover in the first days of November agreed to recognize his authority in exchange for a civilian presidency, something outside observers were also pushing for, and a civilian-dominated National Council of the Transition with legislative powers. Former ambassador to the United Nations Michel Kafando was appointed on 16 November by a council of 23 "wise men" selected by the military, opposition parties and civil society organizations.<sup>28</sup> Then, after fifteen days of negotiations, a group of religious authorities, traditional chiefs, political parties, military leaders and civil society organizations unanimously adopted a Transition Charter to complement the constitution until the next elections. The Charter bans all members of the transition

27. Daniel Posner and Daniel Young, 'The institutionalization of political power in Africa', *Journal of Democracy* 18, 3 (2007), pp. 126–40.

28. Benjamin Roger, 'Burkina Faso: Les civils au garde à vous', *Jeune Afrique*, 21 November 2014, <<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/JA2811p010.xml0/>> (28 January 2015).

from participating in the next round of elections: hence the lack of opposition politicians in the National Council of the Transition.<sup>29</sup>

During this whole period, all these actors had limited legal authority, given that the constitution had been temporarily suspended. Although they represented a cross-section of public opinion, they were largely self-selected and did not include members of the previous regime, who had been legally elected. No popular vote took place on the Charter, the president, or the National Council of the Transition. While these solutions might well have been the only expedient ones at the time, and most transitions operate with a significant degree of legal uncertainty, they did somewhat undermine the constitutional nature of the regime and the already limited institutional developments of the Compaoré period. Moreover, they set a precedent: if the constitution previously approved by popular referendum could be so easily devalued, what guarantees the Transition Charter and Zida's commitments? Ironically, while Compaoré fell while trying to change the constitution legally, it is those who overthrew him while chanting 'Hands off my constitution!' who went on suspending it (albeit temporarily).

Zida's somewhat forceful ways provide some fodder for those concerned about the success of the transition. First, he managed to convince the Council of Wise Men that Kafando should appoint him prime minister, which he did on 18 November in what some called a 'Putin-like scenario',<sup>30</sup> partly undermining his promise of a civilian-led transition. Since then, he and Kafando have adopted several largely populist decisions that seem to exceed both the mandate of the Transition Charter and the expectations of civil society organizations that the military would limit itself to providing security. In November, the government dissolved all the elected municipal and regional councils and replaced them with appointed special delegations. In December, it nationalized SOCOGIB, a real estate company owned by Alizéta Ouédarogo (exiled in France); fired the heads of two state-owned companies appointed by Compaoré; and temporarily suspended the CDP, ADF-RDA, and FEDAP-BC for 'activities incompatible with the law'.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to measures to promote reconciliation, restore justice, and fight corruption, which were mandated by the Charter, these decisions suggest a rather bold executive taking forceful initiatives, even if the initiatives were supported by those who took part in the uprising.

29. *RFI*, 'Burkina: la charte de transition validée', 14 November 2014, <<http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20141114-burkina-faso-consensus-transition-ete-trouve-isaac-zida-cnt/>> (28 January 2015).

30. Newton Ahmed Barry, 'Zida à la Poutine,' *Sans détour*, 19 November 2014, <<http://sans-detour.blog4ever.com>> (23 January 2015).

31. Benjamin Roger, 'Burkina: le gouvernement suspend le CDP, le parti de Blaise Compaoré', *Jeune Afrique*, 15 December 2014, <[http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Articleimp\\_ARTJAWEB20141215143020\\_burkina-le-gouvernement-suspend-le-cdp-le-parti-de-blaise-compaor.html](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Articleimp_ARTJAWEB20141215143020_burkina-le-gouvernement-suspend-le-cdp-le-parti-de-blaise-compaor.html)> (22 January 2015).

Nevertheless, the executive remains sensitive to social pressure, as witnessed by the sacking of two transition ministers following protests.

The institutional uncertainties of the transition are partly a consequence of the unabated influence of the military in Burkina politics. Although the military was largely absent from the contestation movement that built up during the course of 2014, it suddenly appeared centre stage on 30 October. It did so largely to curtail looting and guarantee security, but it ended up also stealing the show. To some extent, the centrality of the military in the transition derives from lack of preparation of the political parties and the acephalous nature of civil society organizations. It also reflects a calculated risk by these actors to secure social order and have the military on their side rather than having to confront it (this must be the appeal of Zida for many, as his Presidential Security Regiment was the most feared). But the salience of the military is also a function of its central political role since the first coup in 1966, similarly triggered by a popular uprising, after which the furthest it ever got from power was when its leader won elections as a civilian (Lamizana in 1978–80 and Compaoré after 1991). If not to protect its corporatist interests, why would the military have taken the prime ministership; the defence, interior and mines portfolios in the government; and 25 seats out of 90 in the National Council of the Transition? That it was protecting its own interests (and reflecting its own inequalities) was further illustrated by the presence of the former head of the Presidential Security Regiment, Gilbert Diendéré (Compaoré's former henchman), at Kafando's swearing in. Diendéré was subsequently dismissed from his position as chief of presidential security, but he has not been singled out otherwise.

### *Challenges*

Despite legitimate optimism, challenges lie ahead. In the short run, the success of the transition is not guaranteed. The ambiguous role of the military, the lack of leadership of civil society, the power of the street, and the challenge of genuine reconciliation with former regime insiders are some of the many hurdles. In the longer run, potential problems include the probable ambition of the military to retain a central political role; the possibility that Compaoré could engineer a comeback; the likely difficulties that a new government will face in seizing the parallel levers of power that Compaoré used without falling into a similar patrimonial system; and the overwhelming challenge of addressing the economic grievances and aspirations for social justice of the population at a time of declining international gold prices – Burkina Faso's main export. Whoever inherits power after November 2015 will need a strong and legitimate mandate to have a chance of succeeding.