



Military keeps a tight grip on transition

HAROUNA TRAORÉ/AP/SIPA

MALI

Sanogo no go

The March coup ended with the return of civilian rule by a transitional government, but the coup leaders may not vanish into the background and the government may not meet its election deadlines

Initial optimism that Mali would move quickly from coup to the ballot box looked overblown in April as the country's security situation made it highly unlikely that elections would be organised within a 40-day deadline. It came as a surprise to many when a mid-ranking soldier, Captain Amadou Sanogo, overthrew the Malian government on 22 March, sending President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) into hiding. The coup, just weeks before a scheduled presidential election, opened a power vacuum that Tuareg rebels in the north used to take Timbuktu and declare an independent state of Azawad on 6 April.

With the rebels advancing and economic sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Sanogo and his *Comité National pour le Redressement de la Démocratie et la Restauration de l'Etat* (CNRDRE) junta backed down, paving the way for ATT's resignation and for the former president of the

National Assembly Dioncounda Traoré to be sworn in as interim president on 12 April.

The agreement reached between the CNRDRE and ECOWAS was for elections to be held within 40 days – by 22 May. But Capt. Sanogo has refused to disappear. He was at Traoré's side at the swearing-in ceremony, receiving the biggest cheers from the crowd. Despite Traoré's threat of "total war" to win back the north, uniting Mali will take much longer. Sanogo has not ruled out a return when the deadline ends but could likely be appeased if his soldiers are given appointments in the interim administration. Other political parties, some of which have looked favourably on the junta, are adopting a 'wait and see' attitude.

Welcomed by thousands who turned out in the streets of Bamako, the coup brought to light a number of deep cracks in the political and social spheres. Malians were tired of the high levels of unemployment, the soaring cost of living

and the rebel problem in the north. The feeling was that ATT's time, steeped in corruption, was up. It was impossible to get a government contract without passing a large payment through one of the country's top officials.

Corruption had spread to the army and, crucially for ATT, this was the trigger point for March's coup. Fighting a war in the north against the *Mouvement National pour la Liberation de l'Azawad*, whose fighters had been armed during Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's losing battle in Libya, Malian soldiers were sent into battle under-equipped while the top brass were siphoning off donor funds.

The advance of radical Islamist group *Ansar Eddine*, which is calling for sharia law across Mali, and tie-ups with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, made the situation in the north explosive. Malians believed ATT was naive in his handling of the situation, unwisely offering impunity and funds in a bid to appease the rebels.

Before the coup, there were fears that the planned elections would be rigged. Suspicions that ATT had chosen a successor and the overriding sense that it would be impossible to hold a fair election while the country was split in two prompted support for the coup. Even if new elections can be organised, deep rifts still remain: ethnic division, a separatist movement and lack of faith in the democratic process. ●

Rose Skelton in Bamako