



## Developing

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MAY

8:37 UTC

### Mali Analysis: President Bah N'Daw, PM Moctar Ouane continue to be detained by military on May 25; situation to remain volatile

#### Executive Summary

- President Bah N'Daw and PM Moctar Ouane were detained by the military on May 24 following a Cabinet reshuffle that sidelined two prominent leaders of the August 2020 coup, suggesting that the dissolution of the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP) military junta was in name only and that the 2020 coup leaders are unlikely to easily relinquish their power.
- Even though Vice President Assimi Goita is reportedly involved in the arrests, it is not clear to what extent the military or even the military junta supports the detention of the civilian leadership. Thus, there is potential for infighting within the military over the coming days and weeks.
- It is possible that N'Daw and Ouane will be released should they reinstate the junta leaders who were sidelined during the reshuffle. However, this will set a bad precedent and may provoke the civil society and the polity who have been dissatisfied with the military's outsized role in the transitional bodies. Conversely, should the military not get their way, they may enact a coup in actuality.
- The situation remains very volatile and uncertain at this time and may change drastically over the coming days.
- **Those operating or residing in Bamako over the coming days are advised to minimize nonessential movement given the ongoing uncertainty and significant potential for violence and unrest.**

#### Please be advised

- Reports indicate that President Bah N'Daw, PM Moctar Ouane, and Defense Minister Souleymane Doucoure were detained and taken to Kati military base outside of Bamako by military officials a few hours after the new transitional government was announced following a reshuffle on May 24.
- Reports indicate that PM Ouane revealed over a call that he was being taken to the residence of President N'Daw by men associated with Vice-President Assimi Goita.
- Two members of the dissolved [National Committee for the Salvation of the People \(CNSP\)](#), which led the [August 2020](#) coup against former President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, Colonel Sadio Camara and Colonel Modibo Kone, were reportedly sidelined from the new government, with the Defense and Security and Civil Protection ministerial portfolios allocated to other military leaders.
- Reports speculate that the discontent of the two August 2020 coup leaders over being replaced from the government is the cause for the transitional leaders' detention with some reports citing an unnamed military official as referring to the cabinet reshuffle as "not good."
- Unconfirmed reports indicate that there are ongoing negotiations between N'Daw, Ouane, Camara, Kono, and Goita at the residence of Goita in Kati with a central demand being the inclusion of Camara and Kono in the new Cabinet.

- Sources indicate that the situation in Bamako was calm during the evening hours of May 24.
- The Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS), the UN, as well as US, UK, and France have condemned the leaders' arrests and demanded their unconditional release. Goodluck Jonathan, the ECOWAS mediator for the Malian coup, is expected in Bamako on May 25.
- Unconfirmed sources indicate an upcoming demonstration is planned at 10:00 (local time) at Bourse du Travail in Bamako on May 25 against the perceived coup.
- At the time of writing, there has been no official communication from the government or the military regarding the ongoing situation.

## Assessments & Forecast

1. This is emblematic of the intensified tensions between civilian and military stakeholders in the transitional process as the President and the PM have been trying to appear more inclusive following discontent with the military's outsized role in the transitional bodies and the slowness of promised reforms. There have been rumors of dissatisfaction within the military as well, with reports of rising tension between Goita and Camara over the management of the transition at the Kati military base on May 21. Thus, the announcement of the new Cabinet and the exclusion of prominent junta leaders likely exacerbated the situation, culminating in the arrest of the civilian leadership.
2. This development is reminiscent of the arrest and forced resignation of PM Cheick Modibo Diarra by soldiers in December 2012 following the March 2012 coup and does not bode well for the future of the ongoing transition. **FORECAST:** It suggests that the dissolution of the CNSP military junta was in name only and that the officers who perpetrated the August 2020 coup do not intend to relinquish their power and influence. This portends heightened tensions and conflict through the remaining months of the transition and during the 2022 general elections.
3. While the participation of Colonels Camara and Kono in a possible coup is unsurprising given their ouster from the Cabinet, the involvement of Assimi Goita is notable, especially since the number of government portfolios held by the military following the reshuffle remains unchanged. It is possible that he wanted to maintain the influence held by army leaders who participated in the August 2020 coup, which would indicate factionalism between the CNSP members and others in the military. Conversely, he may have gotten involved to appease Camara and Kono and keep the military and the CNSP cohort from fragmenting and prevent infighting. It is also conceivable that he is participating as a mediator and had his men detain N'Daw and Ouane rather than Camara's to keep the situation from worsening and resolve it via negotiation. Regardless, at this time, it is not clear how much of the military or even the CNSP is in support of the civilian leaders' detention. **FORECAST:** Thus, there remains potential for infighting within the military between officers and soldiers loyal to the transitional leadership and the former CNSP over the coming days.
4. The military possibly perceived that the discontent against the government because of security and economic issues, with an ongoing widespread trade union strike, may make the public supportive of another coup, as it did in August 2020 where the military took advantage of the large-scale June 5 Movement – Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP) protests the previous month. However, the slated protest at the Bourse du Travail on May 25 and the fact that a substantial section of the public was unhappy about the military's prominence in the transition suggests that this is unlikely to be the case. **FORECAST:** Both planned and spontaneous protests against the president and PM's detention are likely over the coming days. It is possible that the military will attempt to disperse these demonstrations, leading to violence and clashes.
5. **FORECAST:** Given the particulars of the development, it is possible that N'Daw and Ouane will be released if they reinstate Camara and Kono in the cabinet or if Ouane resigns and another PM is appointed. While this may somewhat alleviate the situation in the immediate term, it sets the stage for the military to strongarm the government whenever they do not get their way. It is also likely to be widely denounced by the civil society, the polity, and the public who will perceive it as government weakness and military overreach and may manifest as widespread protests and riots. Conversely, if N'Daw and Ouane refuse to give in to the military's demands, the military may enact a coup in actuality and reconstitute the CNSP and assume transitional power. Should this

happen, the military can be expected to move swiftly to secure government buildings and consolidate their hold over Bamako.

- 6. FORECAST:** Regional and international organizations have strongly condemned the arrest of N'Daw and Ouane and are liable to continue to denounce the military's actions. The ECOWAS mediator is expected in Bamako today and is liable to establish lines of communication with Goita and other involved military leaders to start negotiations. Should a resolution not be reached today or tomorrow, the organization is likely to impose sanctions on Mali, which is liable to worsen discontent among the public. While the organization did not militarily intervene during the 2020 coup, there remains an albeit distant potential for ECOWAS to deploy troops if the situation continues to worsen. The political and security situation is highly uncertain at this time and is anticipated to remain volatile and in flux over the coming days.



## Recommendations

1. Those operating or residing in Bamako over the coming days are advised to minimize nonessential movement given the ongoing uncertainty and significant potential for violence and unrest.
2. We advise against all travel to the border region between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, given the extreme risks of militancy, ethnic conflict, and violent crime.
3. Avoid all travel to northern and central Mali, including Timbuktu, Kidal, Gao, Mopti, and northern Segou region, given the threat from militant and rebel groups operating in the area, as well as ongoing ethnic tensions and intercommunal violence.
4. MAX Security has strong on-ground capabilities in Mali to facilitate contingency planning and ground support, or provide custom travel risk assessments to meet your needs. Contact us at [operations@max-security.com](mailto:operations@max-security.com) or +44 20-3540-0434.