

## **Under-Resourced Topics in Machine Translation: West African Politics and the Limitations of Google Translate**

This project was an experiment in using machine translation to translate an article about a topic that is not widely known about and receives little attention. To execute it, I translated the article “Non aux sanctions contre le Mali! Non à l’impérialisme! Non à la dictature militaire!” from French into English, first using Google translate and then translated it by hand. I then lined them up side by side and attempted to merge the two translations to be more similar. There were some areas that the MT did very well in that surprised me, and other areas that it translated poorly. I predicted that the MT would struggle with pronouns, polysemous words, and acronyms the most. While it struggled with differentiating between personal gendered pronouns (he/she) and the non-human gender neutral “it,” the MT did much better with acronyms than I expected. It was able to accurately translate the Cedeao to ECOWAS, but it did not accurately translate the BCEAO to CBWAS. In addition, like all texts that undergo MT, the machine was unable to recognize and translate the register of the piece, particularly the political jargon, evidenced most clearly in its translation of “populaire” as “popular” rather than “working class.” This is likely due to the under-resourced nature of the content. It would be interesting to see if the MT would make similar mistakes on the same scale when translating a similar political piece about European politics.

The accuracy of Google translate has improved greatly over the years. For many years, the machine used statistical translation that, as a 2011 study of using the tool to translate a Parisian tourism brochure from French into English found, favored literal translation over “free” or “idiomatic” translation (Hilma). However, the technology was significantly improved with Google's adoption of neural machine translation technology in 2017. The results of Google

Translate are now unable to be predicted using statistical methods. A 2019 study found that Google Translate was surprisingly effective at translating writing by Voltaire from French to English (Constantine). The MT technology for French, one of the official EU languages, has come a long way and continues to improve. However, even though French is a very well resourced language, West African politics is a *topic* that is under-resourced. Due to the lack of attention given to news coming from Mali and West Africa, the machine translated target text contained certain flaws that needed to be fixed. This was shown in instances such as the one described above, where the MT failed to accurately translate the CBWAS acronym. The most surprising and blatantly obvious mistake made by the MT was its translation of “Du côté international, elle n’a jamais pris de position de confrontation ouverte vis-à-vis de l’impérialisme, toute occupée à la négociation” as “On the international side, it has never taken a position of open confrontation vis-à-vis screw imperialism, all occupied with negotiation.” Since there is not a large dataset with information about West African politics for the machine to draw from, there is a higher likelihood that the MT will fall short of complete accuracy.

## **Non aux sanctions contre le Mali ! Non à l'impérialisme ! Non à la dictature militaire !**

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Le 9 janvier, de lourdes sanctions ont été imposées par la Cédéao (Communauté économique des États d'Afrique de l'Ouest) contre le Mali pour la décision des autorités maliennes dites de « transition » de reporter les élections initialement prévues pour février 2022. Ces sanctions économiques, qui incluent un gel des fonds de l'État et un blocus logistique, et frapperont surtout la population, ont provoqué une vague d'indignation et suscité de grandes marches de protestation au Mali mais également dans d'autres pays. Les manifestants, dont une partie est issue de la gauche panafricaniste et anti-impérialiste, dénoncent le fait que ces sanctions ont été commanditées par la France, puissance de tutelle de la plupart des États de la sous-région.

### *Déclaration de Militant – Côte d'Ivoire*

Le Mali est un pays pauvre enclavé dont la principale richesse aujourd'hui est l'or, dont seul 1 % de la production est taxé, et qui fait l'objet d'un important trafic avec les pays voisins.

Depuis que les frontières des pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest ont été tracées par les puissances impérialistes, le pays fait notamment face à un important mouvement des Touaregs pour la réunification de leur territoire saharien, qu'ils nomment « Azawagh ». Des conflits ont également lieu entre éleveurs nomades peuls et agriculteurs bambaras, dogons, zarmas, etc., intensifiés par la privatisation des terres à des fins commerciales (notamment pour la culture du coton), mais aussi la croissance de la population et les changements climatiques. De plus, la découverte de gisements miniers créent des inégalités et une lutte entre les différentes élites régionales pour le contrôle des bénéfices des compagnies minières. Enfin, l'effondrement de la Libye, au nord, voulu par l'impérialisme français, et la guerre civile qui y a cours, ont provoqué une importante entrée d'armes au Mali.

De manière générale, la pauvreté, le manque d'éducation, l'incapacité de l'État à satisfaire aux besoins de base de la population, la perte de repères, la soif de vengeance engendrée par le cycle de la violence, etc. encouragent de nombreux groupes à s'armer en milices pratiquant l'autodéfense, le banditisme, le racket, certains de ces groupes se dotant d'une idéologie fondamentaliste réactionnaire prônant un « retour » aux valeurs d'un islam plus « pur », allant souvent à l'encontre de l'islam traditionnel local.

En août 2020, un mouvement généralisé contre le président Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, jugé inefficace et corrompu, avait eu lieu dans le pays, suivi par un coup d'État militaire dirigé notamment par le colonel Assimi Goïta, l'actuel président du régime de transition.

Les putschistes sont tous des gradés de haut rang, ayant fréquenté les écoles militaires de France, des États-Unis et de Russie. Ils ont pris le pouvoir parce que le pays était dans une impasse et qu'il fallait couper court au mouvement populaire, contraindre les gens à « rentrer à la maison ». Depuis leur arrivée au pouvoir, ils semblent jouer un rôle indépendant. Depuis sa prise du pouvoir, la junte fait face à la méfiance de l'impérialisme et à des sanctions. Surtout depuis le

nouveau coup d'État « interne » de mai 2021, par lequel Goïta a mis fin aux fonctions du président officiel (civil) de la transition, Moctar Ouane, pour prendre de lui-même le contrôle de l'État, accusant entre autres ce dernier de n'avoir pas pu couper court à la vague de grèves qui secouait alors le pays. Ce nouveau coup d'État a contribué à exposer davantage les affirmations de la classe dirigeante française selon lesquelles la France intervenait au Mali et au Sahel pour assurer la stabilité et protéger la démocratie, et a précipité la décision de Macron de mettre un terme à l'opération Barkhane et de désengager ses forces armées du Mali, dix jours plus tard. Cette décision a été prise dans un contexte marqué par la débâcle de plus en plus évidente de cette intervention, exprimée par la hausse exponentielle des violences dans la région et du rejet populaire de la présence militaire française (lequel avait partiellement alimenté le mouvement de masses précédent le coup d'État contre Keïta).

D'un autre côté, à aucun moment la junte n'a montré la moindre posture révolutionnaire, voire même « sociale ». Elle s'est surtout préoccupée de maintenir l'ordre et d'affermir son pouvoir, notamment en écartant des négociations les partis d'opposition qui ne l'arrangeaient pas. Après plus d'un an de transition, la junte a fait face à de nombreux mouvements de grève des enseignants, des soignants, des travailleurs des mines... Du côté international, elle n'a jamais pris de position de confrontation ouverte vis-à-vis de l'impérialisme, toute occupée à la négociation. Tout porte à croire que la junte cherche à régler la crise malienne par des moyens purement militaires, en tentant de gagner du temps malgré l'opposition tant de l'impérialisme que d'une grande partie de la société civile.

## **QUE VEUT LA FRANCE ?**

Le principal souci de la France est le contrôle. Les grandes entreprises françaises sont très présentes au Mali, même si la plupart du secteur aurifère y est aux mains de groupes australiens, britanniques, canadiens et sud-africains. Ces dernières années, le Mali a également vu l'influence de compagnies chinoises, israéliennes, marocaines, qatariennes, turques... s'accroître, notamment pour le contrôle des ressources minières encore non exploitées (on mentionne la présence de gisements de pétrole, d'aluminium, de fer... encore intouchés). La France n'a donc pas de très grands intérêts économiques dans le pays.

Elle n'a évidemment pas non plus le moindre souci pour la démocratie : c'est la même France qui ferme les yeux face aux manipulations de la constitution et la prolongation des mandats de la famille Bongo au Gabon, de Wade au Sénégal, de la famille Faure au Togo, de Ouattara en Côte d'Ivoire, de la famille Déby au Tchad...

Pourquoi alors une telle mainmise ? C'est essentiellement pour des raisons géostratégiques : la principale considération de la France est d'assurer la sécurité de ses mines d'uranium au Niger. Il y a aussi le souci de maintenir une certaine stabilité pour éviter des flux de population immigrées massives vers l'Europe, mais aussi vers les pays de la sous-région tels que la Côte d'Ivoire. Enfin, il y a le prestige, l'autorité que la France tire de sa domination de l'Afrique : sans son contrôle sur l'Afrique, la France perd une grande partie de son statut de grande puissance, qui justifie notamment son siège permanent au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU.

Citons également l'intérêt que représente le Mali pour l'industrie française de l'armement, pour qui les opérations Barkhane et précédentes ont été l'occasion de faire la démonstration de son matériel de pointe, en plus d'être un important marché. De même, il est bien connu que les routes du désert servent au passage de drogues illégales vers l'Europe, que la France entend policer.

C'est dans ce contexte que la France a été rendue furieuse par l'appel de la junte malienne aux mercenaires russes de Wagner.

En outre, la débâcle malienne intervient également à un très mauvais moment pour Emmanuel Macron, vu que les élections présidentielles françaises se tiendront dans trois mois. Le régime français fera donc tout pour préserver un semblant de maîtrise de la situation jusqu'en juin de cette année.

D'autant plus que tout signe de bienveillance envers un régime issu d'un coup d'État et qu'elle ne contrôle pas pourrait encourager d'autres coups d'État similaires dans les pays voisins, comme le Burkina, le Niger ou le Sénégal, et donner à la junte déjà au pouvoir en Guinée-Conakry des velléités de se maintenir également au pouvoir pour une durée indéterminée. Tout comme la répression forcenée qui avait été déclenchée contre le régime de Laurent Gbagbo en Côte d'Ivoire (lequel à aucun moment n'a représenté la moindre menace pour le système capitaliste), le Mali doit donc servir d'exemple pour les autres pays de la sous-région.

## **QUE VEUT LA RUSSIE ?**

Des groupes maliens ont manifesté pour appeler la Russie à une intervention militaire. Il y a l'illusion parmi une grande partie des militants panafricains dans le fait que la Russie serait une puissance anti-impérialiste bienveillante. S'il est vrai que la classe dirigeante russe actuelle est opposée aux classes dirigeantes occidentales, la Russie reste un pays capitaliste impérialiste qui n'a pas la moindre sympathie envers les masses africaines. L'État russe est lui-même caractérisé par sa politique de répression envers sa propre population (le droit de manifester est extrêmement restreint, des milliers d'opposants au régime de Poutine ont été enfermés lors des grandes marches de 2020, des leaders de l'opposition sont abattus en pleine rue ou empoisonnés, etc.), notamment envers les minorités ethniques réduites au rang de citoyen de seconde zone, tandis que toute l'économie appartient à quelques grands groupes privés contrôlés par une poignée d'« oligarques ». La Russie est également intervenue début janvier au Kazakhstan pour y aider le régime dictatorial et corrompu à y massacrer les manifestants qualifiés de « terroristes ».

La Russie n'a cependant aucun véritable intérêt économique dans la sous-région. Cependant, la Russie cherche à se frayer une place en Afrique pour, tout comme la France, se présenter comme un élément contribuant à la stabilité régionale, et éventuellement, dans un deuxième temps, utiliser son influence pour s'accaparer des marchés et élargir son accès aux matières premières. Évidemment, Wagner étant une entreprise privée, son « assistance » ne sera pas gratuite non plus, constituant un juteux marché en soi. Surtout, la Russie est ravie de saper un peu plus l'autorité de la France, dans la continuité de son intense propagande sur les réseaux sociaux (avec des armées de cyberactivistes au faux profil actifs sur Facebook) et de son soutien aux partis de droite populiste en France et ailleurs en Occident.

C'est également dans le même sens qu'il faut comprendre la décision de la Russie (et de la Chine) de s'opposer à des sanctions imposées par l'ONU au Conseil de sécurité : par pur intérêt calculé, et non par un quelconque soutien à la population malienne.

## **LA JUNTE PRISE À SON PROPRE JEU ?**

En assumant le rôle de « sauveur de la démocratie » malienne, la junte a créé un espoir pour une partie de la population. Même si elle suscite la méfiance d'une grande partie de la société civile nationale et de l'opposition civile politique, qu'elle cherche visiblement à contrôler, les masses ont une méfiance encore plus grande envers les partis politiques bourgeois, et ont le sentiment de pouvoir plus facilement négocier avec elle.

Assaillie par l'impérialisme et la grande bourgeoisie occidentales, la junte se retrouve donc de plus en plus contrainte de reposer sur sa base politique qui est le peuple au nom duquel elle a pris le pouvoir. C'est ainsi que sa décision de reporter les élections a tout d'abord été validée par des « assises nationales de la refondation » qui ont duré tout le mois de décembre et ont été organisées dans près de 725 communes sur 749, et dans 51 cercles (départements) sur 60 (elles n'ont pu se tenir dans 9 cercles pour des raisons sécuritaires), ainsi que dans 26 ambassades maliennes du monde entier. Ces assises ont abouti à la recommandation de prolonger les élections « de six mois à un an », tout en faisant bon nombre de recommandations pour la santé, l'enseignement, les infrastructures, etc. Il faut toutefois noter que ces assises ont été boycottées par bon nombre d'organisations de la société civile et partis politiques, qui les considèrent comme une pure manœuvre destinée à gagner du temps et à donner un cachet démocratique à la junte.

On voit donc l'émergence d'une sorte de régime bonapartiste non désiré par l'impérialisme et contraint de reposer sur la population tout en luttant pour maintenir son contrôle et son indépendance vis-à-vis d'elle. Et en l'absence d'une alternative politique prolétarienne révolutionnaire, les masses se satisfont, pour le moment, de déléguer à la junte le pouvoir de les représenter. Même si la même junte n'a toujours pas signifié le moindre programme de gouvernement.

C'est à ce titre qu'on constate à quel point les sanctions imposées par la Cédéao sont contreproductives. L'effet immédiat a été de souder la population autour du régime, en permettant à ce même régime d'adopter à présent une rhétorique un peu plus ouvertement nationaliste qu'avant, tout en appelant les syndicats des travailleurs à s'abstenir de tout mouvement de grève ou de protestation « au nom de l'unité nationale », et en gardant la porte ouverte en vue de négociations, puisqu'il n'a toujours pas déclaré s'il allait reporter les élections à dans six mois ou à dans cinq ans.

Le régime a aussi beau jeu d'accuser la France d'être la véritable instigatrice de ces sanctions, car cela permet de susciter un fort soutien panafricaniste tout en évitant l'épineux problème du fait que la société africaine moderne est elle-même une société capitaliste divisée en classes, dirigée par des États bourgeois. Les chefs d'État africains de la Cédéao, défendant leurs propres intérêts, n'ont pas besoin de la France pour prendre des sanctions contre un autre État africain qui menace ces mêmes intérêts.

D'ailleurs, les autres pays occidentaux, États-Unis en tête, et pas seulement la France, sont tous unis dans le soutien aux sanctions, tout comme le Secrétaire général de l'ONU. L'agitation du croque-mitaine français sert surtout à la junte de point de ralliement pour la colère des masses maliennes et africaines, se donner une fausse image de combattant patriotique, et détourner l'attention de sa mauvaise gestion de l'économie et du manque d'avancées sociales.

La Cédéao, par contre, a déjà prouvé maintes et maintes fois son inefficacité lors des négociations tant avec le Mali qu'avec la Guinée, et joue ici son va-tout. C'est sa raison d'être qui est en jeu, la Cédéao a donc décidé de frapper fort afin de rappeler qu'elle est à même de faire exécuter ses décisions. Ici aussi, le but est de faire un exemple du Mali afin de décourager les éventuels candidats aux coups d'État dans les autres pays de la sous-région. Ce faisant, cependant, la Cédéao se démasque un peu plus encore en tant qu'alliance des patrons de la sous-région, non représentative de la volonté populaire.

La junte au pouvoir au Mali n'est pas capable de satisfaire aux attentes de la population malienne. Elle le sait, et mise tout sur sa promesse de ramener la sécurité et la stabilité dans le pays. C'est pour cela qu'elle est prête à faire appel à des mercenaires étrangers. Mais le risque est qu'en cherchant à rétablir l'unité du pays par des moyens purement militaires, elle ne fasse que créer une situation encore plus explosive dans les régions séparatistes. Une véritable unité ne pourra se faire que suite à un vaste plan d'investissement social dans les régions délaissées, et par un dialogue sincère entre les diverses communautés, qui envisagerait la possibilité pour ces régions de prendre leur indépendance si telle est effectivement le désir de la majorité de leur population. En fait, comme il a été décidé que les élections ne pourraient se tenir avant que l'autorité de Bamako n'ait été rétablie sur tout le territoire national, il est tout à fait possible que la junte se serve de l'insécurité pour reporter encore et encore les élections, de façon indéfinie.

De leur côté aussi, les Touaregs comme les Peuls ne forment pas une nation unie. Parmi ces groupes aussi, des élites de riches propriétaires, d'intellectuels, de chefs traditionnels et religieux dominant une population soumise et vivant dans la misère. Le simple fait d'accorder l'indépendance de l'Azawagh ne garantira pas un mieux-être des populations touarègues, tant que les ressources minières, les armes, les grands troupeaux, le contrôle des terres et des points d'eau appartiendront à une petite élite.

## **OÙ ALLER ?**

Les mouvements de protestation actuels ne suffiront pas à faire plier la Cédéao. Tôt ou tard, le pays sera asphyxié.

Il n'est pas du tout sûr que la junte puisse tenir bon : pour ce faire, il lui faudra soit nouer des alliances avec d'autres puissances (mais il n'est absolument pas sûr que la Russie ou la Chine soient prêtes à soutenir ouvertement et de façon décisive un régime mis au ban de la communauté internationale, car elles préfèrent conserver une posture neutre), soit adopter un programme révolutionnaire axé sur la nationalisation des secteurs stratégiques de l'économie, éventuellement en alliance avec le régime militaire guinéen. Assimi Goïta a déjà déclaré être un admirateur de Thomas Sankara : aura-t-il le courage de s'avancer dans cette voie ? On a déjà vu des personnalités politiques plier au dernier moment face à de telles sanctions : c'est, encore une

fois, ce qui s'est passé en Grèce avec la capitulation surprise d'Alexis Tsipras une semaine après sa victoire majeure à un référendum populaire.

Et bien entendu, les masses le savent, elles n'ont aucun intérêt à voir des élections se tenir dès maintenant, vu qu'il n'existe pas un parti politique qui défende ouvertement leurs intérêts et soit prêt à prendre le pouvoir.

## **POUR LA DÉMOCRATIE POPULAIRE, POUR UNE NOUVELLE CONFÉDÉRATION D'ÉTATS SOCIALISTES OUEST-AFRICAINS**

La solution passe donc par l'organisation de la population à la base, autour d'un programme de reconstruction socialiste qui inclura la nationalisation des secteurs stratégiques de l'économie, dont les banques (y compris celle de la BCEAO), les mines, l'énergie, les télécommunications. Cela permettrait de dégager des ressources pour résoudre la crise sociale et environnementale, en créant de nombreux nouveaux emplois dans la fonction publique, en assurant que les fonctionnaires sont bien payés, et en développant de nouveaux secteurs économiques, notamment l'agriculture vivrière, l'industrie locale et les énergies renouvelables.

Il faudra aussi créer et former (y compris la formation politique) des groupes d'autodéfense pluriethniques dans les différents cercles et villages, pour lutter contre la menace djihadiste et les divisions communautaires.

Au-delà des actuelles assises nationales, il faudra organiser une véritable assemblée constituante composée de délégués issues de chaque village du Mali, qui devra définir les nouvelles structures de l'État socialiste, et notamment œuvrer à résoudre la question nationale, en étant ouverte à la possibilité d'une indépendance complète de l'Azawagh et des autres régions séparatistes si tel est effectivement la volonté de ses populations, tout en maintenant des liens fraternels avec ces nouveaux États.

Des liens doivent également être tissés avec les travailleurs et les opprimés en lutte dans les pays voisins, pour encourager l'installation de régimes frères avec qui commercer, en vue d'une nouvelle confédération socialiste d'États ouest-africains.



## Machine Translated Text (Google Translate):

**No to sanctions against Mali! No to imperialism! No to military dictatorship!**

On January 9, heavy sanctions were imposed by ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) against Mali for the decision of the so-called “transition” Malian authorities to postpone the elections initially scheduled for February 2022. These economic sanctions, which include a freezing of state funds and a logistical blockade, and which will mainly affect the population, have provoked a wave of indignation and sparked large protest marches in Mali but also in other countries. The demonstrators, part of whom come from the pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist left, denounce the fact that these sanctions were sponsored by France, the guardian power of most of the states in the sub-region.

### *Activist Statement – Ivory Coast*

Mali is a poor landlocked country whose main wealth today is gold, of which only 1% of production is taxed, and which is the subject of significant trafficking with neighboring countries.

Since the borders of West African countries were drawn by the imperialist powers, the country has faced a major movement of Tuaregs for the reunification of their Saharan territory, which they call "Azawagh". Conflicts also take place between nomadic Fulani herders and Bambara, Dogon, Zarma, etc. farmers,

## Human Translation:

**No to Sanctions Against Mali! No to Imperialism! No to the Military Dictatorship!**

On January 9, heavy sanctions were imposed by ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) against Mali for the decision of the supposed Malian “transition” authorities to postpone the elections initially scheduled for February 2022. These economic sanctions, which include a freezing of state funds and a supply chain blockade, and will hit the population the hardest, have provoked a wave of indignation and sparked large protest marches in Mali and also in other countries. The demonstrators, part of whom belong to the Pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist left, are denouncing the fact that the sanctions were sponsored by France, the administrative power over most of the states in the sub-region.

### *Statement by Militant - Ivory Coast*

Mali is a poor landlocked country whose principal wealth today is gold, of which only 1% of production is taxed, and is the subject of significant trafficking with neighboring countries.

Since the borders of West African countries were drawn by imperialist powers, the country faces a major movement of Touaregs for the reunification of their Saharan territory, which they call “Azawagh.” There are also conflicts between nomadic Fulani herders and

intensified by the privatization of land for commercial purposes (notably for the cultivation of cotton), but also population growth and climate change. . In addition, the discovery of mining deposits creates inequalities and a struggle between the different regional elites for control of the profits of mining companies. Finally, the collapse of Libya, in the north, wanted by French imperialism, and the civil war that is taking place there, have caused a major influx of arms into Mali.

In general, poverty, lack of education, the inability of the State to meet the basic needs of the population, the loss of reference points, the thirst for revenge generated by the cycle of violence, etc. encourage many groups to arm themselves in militias practicing self-defense, banditry, racketeering, some of these groups adopting a reactionary fundamentalist ideology advocating a "return" to the values of a "purer" Islam, going often at odds with local traditional Islam.

In August 2020, a widespread movement against President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, deemed ineffective and corrupt, took place in the country, followed by a military coup led in particular by Colonel Assimi Goïta, the current president of the transitional regime. .

The putschists are all high-ranking officers, having attended military schools in France, the United States and Russia. They took power because the country was at an impasse and the popular movement had to be cut short, people had to be forced to "go

Bambara, Dogon, Zarma, etc. farmers, intensified by the privatization of land for commercial purposes (especially for the cultivation of cotton), but also population growth and climate change. Furthermore, the discovery of mining deposits has created inequalities and a struggle between different regional elites for control of the mining companies' profits. Finally, the collapse of Libya to the north, desired by French imperialism, and the civil war taking place there, have caused a sizable influx of arms into Mali.

In general, poverty, lack of education, the inability of the state to meet the basic needs of the population, disorientation, the thirst for vengeance brought about by the cycle of violence, etc. have encouraged numerous groups to take up arms in militias practicing self defense, banditry, and extortion. Certain groups have adopted a reactionary fundamentalist ideology, advocating a "return" to the values of a more "pure" form of Islam, often contradicting the traditional local ways of practicing of Islam.

In August 2020, a widespread movement against president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, considered ineffective and corrupt, took place in the country, followed by a military coup commanded principally by the colonel Assimi Goïta, the current president of the transitional regime.

The putschists are all high ranking officers who attended military schools in France, the United States, and Russia. They took power because the country was in a deadlock and it was necessary to cut the popular movement

home". Since coming to power, they seem to play an independent role. Since taking power, the junta has faced mistrust from imperialism and sanctions. Especially since the new "internal" coup of May 2021, by which Goïta put an end to the functions of the official (civilian) president of the transition, Moctar Ouane, to take control of the state himself, accusing among others the latter for not having been able to cut short the wave of strikes which then shook the country. This new coup helped further expose claims by the French ruling class that France was intervening in Mali and the Sahel to ensure stability and protect democracy, and precipitated Macron's decision to end the operation Barkhane and to disengage its armed forces from Mali, ten days later. This decision was taken in a context marked by the increasingly obvious debacle of this intervention, expressed by the exponential increase in violence in the region and the popular rejection of the French military presence (which had partially fueled the previous mass movement the coup against Keïta).

On the other hand, at no time did the junta show the slightest revolutionary, or even "social" posture. It was above all concerned with maintaining order and strengthening its power, in particular by excluding from the negotiations the opposition parties which did not suit it. After more than a year of transition, the junta has faced numerous strikes by teachers, caregivers, mine workers... On the international side, it has never taken a position of open confrontation vis-à-vis screw imperialism, all occupied with negotiation. Everything suggests that

short and convince people to "return home." Since their ascent into power, they seem to be playing an independent role. Since taking power, the junta has been faced with mistrust from imperial powers and sanctions, especially since the new "internal" coup of May 2021, during which Goïta put an end to the functions of the official (civilian) president, Moctar Ouane, to take control of the state himself, accusing the latter of failing to cut short the wave of strikes that shook the country. This new coup has helped to further expose the claims by the French ruling class that France intervened in Mali and the Sahel to ensure stability and protect democracy, and it preceded Macron's decision to put an end to Operation Barkhane and withdraw armed forces from Mali ten days later. This decision was made in a context marked by the increasingly obvious debacle of this intervention, expressed by the exponential increase in violence in the region and the popular rejection of French military presence (which had partially sparked the mass movement before the coup against Keïta).

On the other hand, the junta has not shown the slightest revolutionary or even "social" stance at any moment. It is mostly concerned with maintaining order and strengthening its power, such as by removing opposition parties who would not come to an agreement from negotiations. After more than a year of transition, the junta has faced numerous strikes by teachers, nurses, mineworkers, etc. From an international perspective, it has never taken a position of open confrontation with

the junta is trying to settle the Malian crisis by purely military means, trying to gain time despite the opposition of both imperialism and a large part of civil society.

## WHAT DOES FRANCE WANT?

France's main concern is control. Large French companies are very present in Mali, even if most of the gold sector there is in the hands of Australian, British, Canadian and South African groups. In recent years, Mali has also seen the influence of Chinese, Israeli, Moroccan, Qatari, Turkish companies, etc. increase, particularly for the control of mineral resources that have not yet been exploited (we mention the presence of oil deposits, aluminium, iron... still untouched). France therefore does not have very large economic interests in the country.

It obviously does not have the slightest concern for democracy either: it is the same France which turns a blind eye to the manipulations of the constitution and the extension of the mandates of the Bongo family in Gabon, of Wade in Senegal, of the Faure family in Togo, of Ouattara in Ivory Coast, of the Déby family in Chad...

Why then such a stranglehold? This is essentially for geostrategic reasons: France's main consideration is to ensure the security of its uranium mines in Niger. There is also the concern to maintain a certain stability to avoid massive flows of immigrant populations to Europe, but also to countries in the sub-region such as Côte d'Ivoire. Finally, there is the prestige, the authority that France derives from its domination of

Imperialism, all too busy with negotiations. There is every reason to believe that the junta is seeking to resolve the Malian crisis by purely military means, trying to gain time despite the opposition from both imperialism and a large part of civil society.

## What Does France Want?

France's main concern is control. Large French companies are very present in Mali, even though the gold sector is in the hands of Australian, British, Canadian, and South African parties. In recent years, Mali has also seen the influence of Chinese, Israeli, Moroccan, Qatari, and Turkish, etc. companies increase, particularly for the control of mineral resources that have not yet been exploited (we mention the still untouched presence of oil, aluminum, iron deposits, etc.). France therefore does not have very large economic interests in the country.

France evidently does not have the slightest concern for democracy: this is the same France that turns a blind eye to the constitutional manipulations and mandate extensions of the Bongo family in Gabon, Wade in Senegal, the Faure family in Togo, Ouattara in the Ivory Coast, the Déby family in Chad...

Why, then, such a stranglehold? It is mainly for geostrategic reasons: France's main consideration is to ensure the security of its uranium mines in Niger. There is also the desire to maintain a certain amount of stability to avoid massive influxes of migrant populations into Europe and also

Africa: without its control over Africa, France loses a large part of its status as a great power, which justifies in particular its permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

We should also mention the interest that Mali represents for the French arms industry, for which the Barkhane and previous operations have been an opportunity to demonstrate its state-of-the-art equipment, in addition to being an important market. Similarly, it is well known that the desert roads are used to smuggle illegal drugs to Europe, which France intends to police.

It was in this context that France was infuriated by the Malian junta's call for Wagner's Russian mercenaries.

Furthermore, the Malian debacle also comes at a very bad time for Emmanuel Macron, given that the French presidential elections will be held in three months. The French regime will therefore do everything to preserve a semblance of control of the situation until June of this year.

Especially since any sign of benevolence towards a regime resulting from a coup and which it does not control could encourage other similar coups in neighboring countries, such as Burkina, Niger or the Senegal, and give the junta already in power in Guinea-Conakry the desire to also stay in power for an indefinite period. Like the frenzied repression that had been unleashed against the regime of Laurent Gbagbo in Côte d'Ivoire (which at no time represented the slightest threat to the capitalist system),

into other countries of the sub-region, such as the Ivory Coast. Finally, there is status--the authority that France gains from its domination of Africa: without its control over Africa, France would lose a large part of its status of a world power, which justifies, in particular, its permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

We should also mention the interest that Mali represents for the French arms industry, for whom Operation Barhane and those preceding provided the opportunity to demonstrate its state of the art equipment, in addition to showing its importance as a market. Likewise, it is well known that the desert roads serve as a passageway for illegal drugs into Europe, which France intends to police.

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Moreover, the Malian debacle has also occurred at a very bad moment for Emmanuel Macron, given that the French presidential elections will be held in three months. The French regime will therefore do everything to preserve a semblance of control over the situation until June of this year.

All the more so, any sign of benevolence towards a regime resulting from a coup that is not under French control could encourage other similar coups in neighboring countries, such as Burkina Faso, Niger, or Senegal, and also give the junta already in power in

Mali must therefore serve as an example for other countries of the sub-region.

## WHAT DOES RUSSIA WANT?

Malian groups demonstrated to call on Russia for military intervention. There is the illusion among a large part of Pan-African activists that Russia is a benevolent anti-imperialist power. While it is true that the current Russian ruling class is opposed to the Western ruling classes, Russia remains an imperialist capitalist country that does not have the slightest sympathy for the African masses. The Russian state is itself characterized by its policy of repression towards its own population (the right to demonstrate is extremely restricted, thousands of opponents of Putin's regime were locked up during the major marches of 2020, leaders of the opposition are shot in the street or poisoned, etc.), especially towards ethnic minorities reduced to the rank of second-class citizens, while the entire economy belongs to a few large private groups controlled by a handful of "oligarchs". Russia also intervened in early January in Kazakhstan to help the dictatorial and corrupt regime there massacre demonstrators qualified as "terrorists".

However, Russia has no real economic interest in the sub-region. However, Russia is seeking to carve out a place for itself in Africa in order, like France, to present itself as an element contributing to regional stability, and possibly, in a second phase, to use its influence to monopolize markets and expand its access to raw materials. Of course, Wagner being a private company, his

Guinea-Conakry vague hopes of also staying in power indefinitely. Just like the extreme repression that was unleashed against the regime of Laurent Gbagbo in the Ivory Coast, (which never at any moment represented the slightest threat to the capitalist system), Mali must therefore serve as an example for other countries in the sub-region.

## What Does Russia Want?

Malian groups demonstrated to call on Russia for a military intervention. There is an illusion among a large part of Pan-African activists that Russia is a benevolent anti-imperialist power. Though it is true that the current Russian ruling class is opposed to the Western ruling classes, Russia remains an imperialist capitalist country that does not have the slightest sympathy for the African masses. The Russian state itself is characterized by political repression towards its own population (the right to protest is extremely restricted, thousands of protestors against Putin's regime were locked up during the large demonstrations of 2020, opposition leaders were slaughtered on the streets or poisoned, etc.), especially towards ethnic minorities reduced to the rank of second class citizens, while the entire economy belongs to a few large private groups controlled by a handful of "oligarchs." Russia also intervened in Kazakhstan in early January to help the corrupt dictatorial regime massacre protestors considered to be "terrorists."

Russia does not have, however, any viable



“assistance” will not be free either, constituting a lucrative market in itself. Above all, Russia is happy to undermine France's authority a little more, in the continuity of its intense propaganda on social networks (with armies of cyberactivists with false profiles active on Facebook) and its support for right-wing populist parties in France and elsewhere in the West.

It is also in the same sense that we must understand the decision of Russia (and China) to oppose the sanctions imposed by the UN on the Security Council: out of pure calculated interest, and not out of any support for the Malian people.

### **THE JUNTA CATCHED AT ITS OWN GAME?**

By assuming the role of Malian "savior of democracy", the junta has created hope for part of the population. Even if it arouses the mistrust of a large part of national civil society and the political civil opposition, which it visibly seeks to control, the masses have an even greater mistrust of bourgeois political parties, and feel to be able to negotiate more easily with her.

Assailed by Western imperialism and the big bourgeoisie, the junta therefore finds itself increasingly forced to rely on its political base, which is the people in whose name it took power. This is how its decision to postpone the elections was first validated by "national re-foundation meetings" which lasted the whole month of December and were organized in nearly 725 municipalities

economic interest in the sub-region. Nonetheless, Russia seeks to open up a place in Africa to, just like France, present itself as an element contributing to regional stability and potentially, over a second phase, use its influence to monopolize markets and increase its access to raw materials. Of course, the aid of the Wagner Group, being a private company, will also come at a price, constituting a lucrative market in and of itself. Above all, Russia is delighted to further undermine France's authority in the continuation of its intense propaganda on social media sites (with armies of cyberactivists with false profiles active on Facebook) and in its support of right wing populist parties in France and elsewhere in the West.

The decision of Russia (and China) to oppose the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council must be understood in the same sense: out of pure calculated interest, and not out of any support for the Malian people.

### **The Junta Beaten At Its Own Game?**

By assuming the role of the Malian “savior of democracy”, the junta has created hope for part of the population. Despite arousing mistrust among a large section of the national civilian population and the civilian political opposition that it evidently seeks to control, the masses still have a greater mistrust towards the bourgeois political parties and the feeling of being able to negotiate more easily with the junta.

Besieged by imperialism and the large

out of 749, and in 51 circles (departments) out of 60 (they could not be held in 9 circles for security reasons), as well as in 26 Malian embassies around the world. These meetings resulted in the recommendation to extend the elections "from six months to a year", while making a number of recommendations for health, education, infrastructure, etc. It should be noted, however, that these meetings have been boycotted by many civil society organizations and political parties, who consider them a pure maneuver intended to gain time and give a democratic stamp to the junta.

We therefore see the emergence of a kind of Bonapartist regime not desired by imperialism and forced to rely on the population while struggling to maintain its control and independence from it. And in the absence of a revolutionary proletarian political alternative, the masses are content, for the moment, to delegate to the junta the power to represent them. Even if the same junta has still not meant any government program.

It is in this respect that we can see to what extent the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS are counterproductive. The immediate effect was to unite the population around the regime, allowing the same regime to now adopt a slightly more overtly nationalist rhetoric than before, while calling on the workers' unions to refrain from any movement to strike or protest "in the name of national unity", and keeping the door open for negotiations, since he has still not declared whether he will postpone the elections for six months or five years.

Western bourgeoisie, the junta therefore finds itself increasingly pressured to rely on its political base, which is the people in whose name it took power. This is why its decision to postpone the election was first validated by "national conferences on reform" which lasted the entire month of December and were organized in nearly 725 out of 749 municipalities, and in 51 cercles (departments) out of 60 (they could not be held in 9 cercles for security reasons), as well as 26 Malian embassies around the world. These conferences resulted in the recommendation to postpone the elections "by six months to a year," while making a number of recommendations for health, education, infrastructure, etc. It should be noted however, that these conferences have been boycotted by a number of civil society organizations and political parties, who consider them to be a pure maneuver designed to gain time and give the junta a democratic stamp.

We see, therefore, a kind of Bonapartist regime emerging, unwanted by imperialism and forced to rely on the population while fighting to maintain its control and independence over them. In the absence of a revolutionary proletarian political alternative, the masses will be content, for the moment, in giving the junta power to represent them, even though the same junta has not meant the creation of any government program.

It is in this respect that we can see the extent to which the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS are counterproductive. The immediate effect was to unite the population



It is also easy for the regime to accuse France of being the real instigator of these sanctions, because that makes it possible to generate strong pan-Africanist support while avoiding the thorny problem of the fact that modern African society is itself a capitalist divided into classes, ruled by bourgeois states. The African Heads of State of ECOWAS, defending their own interests, do not need France to take sanctions against another African State which threatens these same interests.

Moreover, the other Western countries, led by the United States, and not just France, are all united in their support for the sanctions, as is the UN Secretary General. The agitation of the French bogeyman serves above all for the junta as a rallying point for the anger of the Malian and African masses, to give itself a false image of a patriotic fighter, and to divert attention from its mismanagement of the economy and the lack of social progress.

ECOWAS, on the other hand, has already proven over and over again its inefficiency in negotiations with both Mali and Guinea, and is playing its game here. It is its raison d'être that is at stake, ECOWAS has therefore decided to strike hard in order to remind that it is able to enforce its decisions. Here too, the goal is to make an example of Mali in order to discourage potential candidates for coups in other countries of the sub-region. In doing so, however, ECOWAS un.masks itself a little more as an alliance of the bosses of the sub-region, not representative of the popular will.

around the regime, allowing it to adopt a slightly more overtly nationalist rhetoric than before, while calling on trade unions to abstain from any movement to strike or protest "in the name of national unity," and keeping the door open for negotiations, since it has not been declared whether the elections will be postponed for six months or five years.

It is also convenient for the regime to accuse France of being the true instigator of these sanctions, which allows it to spark a strong Pan-Africanist support while avoiding the elephant in the room that modern African society is itself a capitalist society, divided into classes, ruled by bourgeois states. The African heads of state of ECOWAS, defending their own interests, do not need France to impose sanctions against another African state that threatens these same interests.

Western countries, for that matter, led by the United States, and not only France, are all united in support for the sanctions, as well as the UN secretary general. The evocation of the French boogeyman for the junta serves, above all, as a rallying point for the anger of the Malian and African masses, giving itself the false image of a patriotic fighter, and to turn attention away from its mismanagement of the economy and lack of social progress.

ECOWAS, on the other hand, has already proven time and time again its ineffectiveness during negotiations with both Mali and Guinea, and is risking it all here. Its raison d'être is at stake, so

The junta in power in Mali is not able to meet the expectations of the Malian population. She knows it, and is betting everything on her promise to bring security and stability to the country. This is why she is ready to call on foreign mercenaries. But the risk is that by seeking to restore the country's unity by purely military means, it will only create an even more explosive situation in the separatist regions. True unity can only be achieved following a vast plan for social investment in the neglected regions, and through a sincere dialogue between the various communities, which would consider the possibility for these regions of gaining their independence if such is indeed the desire to the majority of their population. In fact, as it was decided that the elections could not be held before the authority of Bamako has been restored throughout the national territory, it is quite possible that the junta will use the insecurity to postpone elections again and again, indefinitely.

For their part too, the Tuaregs like the Fulani do not form a united nation. Among these groups too, elites of wealthy landowners, intellectuals, traditional and religious leaders dominate a submissive population living in misery. The simple fact of granting the independence of Azawagh will not guarantee a well-being of the Tuareg populations, as long as the mining resources, the weapons, the large herds, the control of the lands and the water points belong to a small elite.

## WHERE TO GO ?

ECOWAS has decided to strike hard to show that it is capable of enforcing decisions.

Here too, the aim is to make an example of Mali to discourage potential candidates for coups in other countries in the sub-region. In doing so, however, ECOWAS is further showing its true nature as an alliance of the rulers of the sub-region, not representative of the popular will.

The ruling junta in Mali is not capable of meeting the expectations of the Malian population. It knows this, and is placing everything on its promise to bring security and stability back into the country. This is why it is ready to call on foreign mercenaries, but the risk is that seeking to reestablish national unity by purely military means will only create a more explosive situation in the separatist regions. True unity will only be achieved by following an extensive plan for social investment in neglected regions, and through a genuine dialogue between the various communities that envisions the possibility for these regions to gain independence if that is indeed the desire of their populations' majorities. In fact, as it was decided that the elections only could be held after the authority in Bamako had been reestablished throughout the entire national territory, it is completely possible that the junta will use the insecurity to continue postponing elections indefinitely.

For their part too, the Touaregs, like the Fulani, do not form a united nation. Among these groups as well, elites composed of wealthy landowners, intellectuals, and traditional and religious leaders dominate a

The current protest movements will not be enough to bend ECOWAS. Sooner or later, the country will be suffocated.

It is by no means certain that the junta can hold its own: to do so, it will either have to forge alliances with other powers (but it is by no means certain that Russia or China are ready to support openly and decisively a regime ostracized by the international community, because they prefer to maintain a neutral posture), or adopt a revolutionary program centered on the nationalization of strategic sectors of the economy, possibly in alliance with the Guinean military regime. Assimi Goïta has already declared that he is an admirer of Thomas Sankara: will he have the courage to go down this path? We have already seen politicians bend at the last moment in the face of such sanctions: this is, once again, what happened in Greece with the surprise capitulation of Alexis Tsipras a week after his major victory in a referendum. popular.

And of course, the masses know it, they have no interest in seeing elections held now, since there is no political party that openly defends their interests and is ready to take power.

## **FOR POPULAR DEMOCRACY, FOR A NEW CONFEDERATION OF WEST AFRICAN SOCIALIST STATES**

The solution therefore involves organizing the population at the grassroots around a program of socialist reconstruction which will include the nationalization of strategic sectors of the economy, including banks

defeated population living in misery. The simple act of granting Azawagh independence will not guarantee a greater well-being for Touareg populations as long as mining resources, arms, large herds, and control of the land and watering places belong to a small elite.

## **Where To Go From Here?**

The current protest movements will not be enough to bend the will of ECOWAS. Sooner or later, the country will be suffocated.

It is not at all clear whether the junta will be able to hold on: to do so, it will either have to form alliances with other powers (but it is not absolutely clear whether Russia or China are ready to openly and decisively support a regime ostracized by the international community, since they prefer to maintain a neutral stance), or adopt a revolutionary program centered around the nationalization of strategic sectors of the economy, potentially in alliance with the Guinean military regime. Assimi Goïta has already stated that he is an admirer of Thomas Sankara: will he have the courage to go down that path? We have already seen politicians bend at the last moment in the face of such sanctions: it is, once again, what happened in Greece with the unexpected capitulation of Alex Tsipras a week after his major victory in a popular referendum.

And of course, the masses know this; they do not have any interest in holding elections right now, seeing that there is no political

(including that of the BCEAO), mines, energy, telecommunications. This would free up resources to solve the social and environmental crisis, creating many new jobs in the civil service, ensuring that civil servants are well paid, and developing new economic sectors, including subsistence agriculture, local industry and renewable energies.

It will also be necessary to create and train (including political training) multi-ethnic self-defense groups in the different circles and villages, to fight against the jihadist threat and community divisions.

Beyond the current national meetings, it will be necessary to organize a real constituent assembly made up of delegates from each village in Mali, which will have to define the new structures of the socialist State, and in particular work to resolve the national question, by being open to the possibility of complete independence for Azawagh and other separatist regions if such is indeed the will of its populations, while maintaining fraternal ties with these new states.

Links must also be forged with the struggling workers and oppressed in neighboring countries, to encourage the establishment of sister regimes to trade with, in view of a new socialist confederation of West African states.

party that openly defends their interests and is ready to take power.

### **For Working Class Democracy, For a New Confederation of Socialist West African States**

The solution comes, therefore, by organizing the population at the grassroots around a program of socialist reconstruction that includes the nationalization of strategic sectors of the economy, including the banks (which include the Central Bank of West African States), mines, energy, and telecommunications. This would free up resources to resolve the social and environmental crises while creating many new jobs in the public sector and ensuring that civil servants are well paid, and allow for the development of new economic sectors, especially in subsistence agriculture, local industry, and renewable energies.

It will also be necessary to create and train (including training politically) multi-ethnic self-defense groups in different cercles and villages to fight against jihadist threats and communal divisions.

Beyond the current national conferences, a genuine constituent assembly composed of delegates from each village in Mali must be created, which will have to define the new structures of the socialist state and in particular work towards resolving the national question by being open to the possibility of the complete independence of Azawagh and other separatist regions, if such is indeed the will of their populations, while maintaining friendly ties with these

new states.

Links must also be formed with struggling workers and oppressed people in neighboring countries to encourage the establishment of sister regimes to trade with, in sight of a new confederation of socialist West African states.