

title: "Captain Ibrahim Traoré: Burkina Faso's Interim Leader" date: 2025-05-16 tags: [BurkinaFaso, Sahel, MilitaryCoups, PanAfricanism, France, Russia, ECOWAS, AES]

Military Background & Rise to Power

Burkina Faso's current leader, **Captain Ibrahim Traoré**, is a career army officer (born 1988) who commanded an artillery unit in Kaya ¹. He first rose to prominence during the January 2022 coup that ousted President Kaboré, when he joined like-minded soldiers—including his commander Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba—in a junta promising to refocus on the jihadist insurgency ¹. But by late 2022 many frontline officers (including Traoré) had grown disillusioned with Damiba's leadership. On 30 September 2022, Traoré—still a *captain*—led a new putsch. Backed by elements of Damiba's own forces (especially in the elite "Cobra" counter-terror unit) he declared himself head of state ¹ ². In a televised address he dissolved the Damiba government, suspended the constitution, and assumed full control as the new junta leader ³. The Africa Center notes he cited Burkina's worsening security crisis to justify this takeover ¹. In the days after the coup Traoré quickly secured the support of the top brass and publicly promised to reconquer territory from jihadist groups, formally naming himself president of the *Mouvement patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration* (MPSR) ³. By assuming the title "President of the Transition" on 6 October 2022, he inherited Damiba's *de jure* pledge to hold elections within two years – a commitment he later put on hold ⁴ ³.

Ideological Positioning

Traoré projects a strongly **anti-colonial and pan-Africanist** persona. In speeches and interviews he repeatedly rails against Western influence – especially France – and praises African sovereignty. For example, at a diplomatic reception in Ouagadougou he denounced French President Macron's recent remarks, saying "(Macron) has humiliated all Africans... We are not human beings in his eyes" ⁵. He bluntly asserted that "*France exists today thanks to our ancestors. They should pray for us.*" ⁶, invoking a history of colonial exploitation. Traoré has publicly lamented that he "spent much of [his] youth listening to radios like RFI and France24," arguing that these media outlets "condition our brains to accept what they want" ⁷. In extended comments (given to RT-Mali), he even claimed "**Russia saved the world, Africa saved the world**" during WWII and accused Western media of lying: "*Western media... only lie. Every time, they try to send information to divide, to manipulate youth. But it no longer works. People are awake*" ⁸. He frames the West's view of Africans as paternalistic and racist: "*As long as they see the African as a sub-human who is not capable of thinking or innovating, we can never be friends*" ⁹.

Traoré also embraces pan-African alliances. He has aligned Burkina Faso with the other Sahelian juntas in Mali and Niger. In September 2023 the three countries proclaimed an **Alliance of Sahel States (AES)**. He touted the AES as "a model" of regional unity ¹⁰. In their joint announcement (August 2024) the Sahel leaders announced the withdrawal from ECOWAS – denouncing West Africa's main bloc for deviating from pan-African ideals and imposing "inhumane" sanctions on their countries ¹¹. At the AES founding talks in

Moscow (July 2024), Traoré and his counterparts emphasized sovereignty and independence from foreign powers. His government quickly ratified the AES treaty (signed July 6, 2024) to cement military and economic cooperation ¹² ¹³. In sum, Traoré's discourse is firmly *souverainiste*: he scorns ECOWAS pressure, courts Russia and even Iran as "new horizons," and casts Burkina's struggle as a continuation of anti-colonial liberation ⁷ ⁸.

Governance & Domestic Policy

Under Traoré's rule, the **military remains supreme**. He has expanded the "Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP)" militia and centralized command over civilian agencies. In May 2024 an official "national consultation" (boycotted by most political parties) rubber-stamped a five-year extension of his transitional presidency ¹⁴. Electoral democracy has receded: Traoré has repeatedly postponed elections until security improves ⁴, effectively breaking the previous pledge to hold a vote by mid-2024 ¹⁵. While announcing these delays, he insisted "we will fight... we will attack" the insurgents rather than negotiate ¹⁶ ⁴.

Civic space has **shrunk under the junta**. Traoré's government has used emergency decrees to outlaw many protests and arrest critics. Human Rights Watch reports that since 2022 his regime has "systematically cracked down on the media, the political opposition, and peaceful dissent" ¹⁷. In March 2025, for example, intelligence agents detained two leaders of the Journalists' Association and a TV reporter – disappearing them for questioning about press restrictions ¹⁸. HRW and other rights groups warn the junta arrests academics, civil society leaders and even magistrates under sweeping emergency laws ¹⁷. On the other hand, Traoré openly courts *popular mobilization*: he organizes big rallies of supporters (especially youth), warning citizens not to heed "apatrides... who discourage this patriotic momentum" ¹⁹. His nationalist rhetoric resonates strongly with many young Burkinabè. Thousands marched in Ouagadougou in April 2025 chanting anti-ECOWAS and anti-France slogans in his support ²⁰. Social media has also seen a wave of pro-Traoré posts, reflecting both genuine support and organized campaigns (see below).

Security Doctrine



Fawohodie (*Adinkra symbol of freedom/independence*) underscores how Traoré frames the fight against jihadists: as a **war of independence**. He repeatedly proclaims that Burkina is in an "independence war" against its enemies, exhorting citizens to arm themselves rather than remain "esclaves" (slaves) ²¹. As early

as January 2023, he publicly vowed “we will fight... we will defend... we will no longer do passive defense” but instead “we will attack” the terrorists ¹⁶ . He has mobilized the army and tens of thousands of VDP militia under national campaigns like “Operation Kapidougou” (initiated April 2023), deploying about 800 regular troops and volunteers in the northern regions ²² . Traoré’s strategy rejects negotiations with jihadists until they are decisively weakened ²³ . In interviews he speaks of “liberating the land of our ancestors” and fighting “without pity” ²¹ .

However, the effectiveness of this hardline approach is debated. In late 2024 and 2025 insurgent groups (especially al-Qaeda’s JNIM) continued to overrun towns like Djibo, exposing security gaps. The Institute for the Study of War notes Traoré “has failed to improve security” while his “counterinsurgency strategy... encouraged state-sanctioned massacres of civilians” ²⁴ . Traoré himself calls for a *total war*: outlawing passive defense and rallying civilians as combatants. He has publicly scolded officers who consider peace talks, insisting on annihilation of the enemy ¹⁶ ²¹ . Regionally, he has tied Burkina’s security to its new allies: in early 2024 he called for the AES members to coordinate military efforts, and joint operations with Mali’s army have been reported. Notably, Traoré has expelled French military forces (Feb 2023) and rebadged any foreign trainers as “win-win” partners – in practice shifting towards Russian support (officially via training or “contractors”) and Chinese equipment.

Media Representation & Global Perception

Traoré is depicted very differently across media and regions. In much of African press and on social media, he is portrayed as a youthful nationalist hero. BBC Afrique reports that his blunt, anti-imperialist *franc-parler* appeals to African youth, earning him comparisons to legendary Burkina leader Thomas Sankara ²⁵ ²⁶ . Indeed, thousands of supporters (not only in Burkina but in Nigeria, Senegal, etc.) have staged rallies lauding him as a defender of sovereignty ²⁰ ²⁷ . Popular blogs and some state outlets in West Africa share memes and videos showing Traoré overseeing national development projects or rejecting foreign influence – often with exaggerated or false claims. For instance, viral posts (debunked by fact-checkers) have falsely credited him with building low-cost high-rises or drastically cutting commodity prices ²⁸ ²⁹ . An AFP report notes how this “**digital cult**” around Traoré is fueled by coordinated propaganda: Nigerian influencers, aided by content from “Russian propaganda units,” broadcast a sanitized image of Traoré as a “fearless reformer” restoring national dignity ²⁹ ³⁰ . As one Good Governance Africa analyst warns, this “propaganda campaign... frames Traore as a messianic figure,” normalizing military rule among disaffected youth ³¹ ³⁰ .

In contrast, much of the Western press emphasizes the junta’s democratic backsliding and security failures. Journalists highlight the emergency laws, press arrests and the fact that promised elections keep slipping. Many Western analyses label Traoré’s regime a **military junta** and question its legitimacy. Reports from NGOs (e.g. Human Rights Watch) and think tanks (e.g. ISW) stress his human-rights abuses and crackdown on dissent ¹⁷ ²⁴ . U.S. officials in 2024 publicly warned Burkina’s gold reserves were being diverted to the junta’s security rather than public needs, a claim the government angrily denied. Overall, while African media often focus on Traoré’s anti-colonial rhetoric and youth backing, Western outlets tend to spotlight his links to Russia and any abuses – though all agree he has decisively severed ties with France and ECOWAS. In cyberspace, disinformation is a two-way street: supporters flood social platforms with pro-Traoré content, and critics note some of this traffic is pushed by foreign (notably Russian) networks seeking to expand their influence ³⁰ ⁵ . The full picture of Traoré’s tenure thus remains contested, reflecting broader divides in global narratives about Sahelian governance.

Sources: Authoritative analyses and news reports were used to compile this profile. Citations include strategic studies and academic sources (Africa Center, Crisis Group, ISW), Francophone African press (Jeune Afrique via AFP/AA, RFI, Wakat Séra), African news and NGO reports, plus direct interviews and statements by Capt. Traoré ¹ ²¹ ⁵ ¹⁷. This account prioritizes Traoré's own words and primary documents, complemented by English-language media for broad context.

¹ ² ³ Understanding Burkina Faso's Latest Coup

<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/understanding-burkina-faso-latest-coup/>

⁴ ¹⁴ ¹⁵ ²³ Ibrahim Traoré - Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibrahim_Traor%C3%A9

⁵ ⁶ France's Macron 'insulting all Africans,' says Burkina Faso president

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/frances-macron-insulting-all-africans-says-burkina-faso-president/3450047>

⁷ ⁸ ⁹ ¹⁰ Ibrahim Traoré : « Mon plus grand regret, c'est d'avoir passé une bonne partie de ma jeunesse à écouter des radios comme RFI France 24 » - L'actualité au Mali en direct et en continu

<https://www.maliweb.net/interview/ibrahim-traore-mon-plus-grand-regret-cest-davoir-passe-une-bonne-partie-de-ma-jeunesse-a-ecouter-des-radios-comme-rfi-france-24-3104833.html>

¹¹ Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger withdraw from ECOWAS, accusing Bloc of 'Inhumane' Sanctions | Africanews

<https://www.africanews.com/2024/01/28/mali-burkina-faso-and-niger-withdraw-from-ecowas-accusing-bloc-of-inhumane-sanctions/>

¹² ¹³ Burkina Faso ratifies confederation of Sahel States treaty | APAnews - African Press Agency

<https://apanews.net/burkina-faso-ratifies-confederation-of-sahel-states-treaty/>

¹⁶ ¹⁹ Le Chef de l'Etat aux VDP en formation : « Vous êtes l'espoir » – Présidence du Faso

<https://www.presidencedufaso.bf/le-chef-de-letat-aux-vdp-en-formation-vous-etes-lespoir/>

¹⁷ ¹⁸ Burkina Faso: Journalists Arrested in Media Clampdown | Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/27/burkina-faso-journalists-arrested-media-clampdown>

²⁰ ²⁵ ²⁶ Capitaine Ibrahim Traore : pourquoi est-il si populaire auprès de la jeunesse africaine ? - BBC News Afrique

<https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/c2kvykyy9g3o>

²¹ Burkina: le capitaine Traoré salue l'engagement des Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie | Wakat Séra

<https://www.wakatsera.com/burkina-le-capitaine-traore-salue-lengagement-des-volontaires-pour-la-defense-de-la-patrie/>

²² State of emergency in Burkina Faso: jihadist attacks across the country - L'Osservatorio: research centre on civilian victims of conflicts

<https://www.losservatorio.org/en/civilians-in-conflict/web-review/item/3940-state-of-emergency-in-burkina-faso-jihadist-attacks-across-the-country?tmpl=component&print=1>

²⁴ Africa File, May 15, 2025: JNIM Seizes Burkinabe Provincial Capital in Latest Blow to Traoré; IS West Africa Regains the Advantage in Lake Chad; IS Sahel Operationalizes Support Networks in Nigeria; Tripoli Clashes | Institute for the Study of War

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/africa-file-may-15-2025-jnim-seizes-burkinabe-provincial-capital-latest-blow-traor%C3%A9>

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