

## Mali Coup Shows Tensions Over Tuareg Fighters Back From Libya



**AP**  
Soldiers outside the presidential palace in Bamako, Mali, on Friday after a military coup

This is IN THE NEWS in VOA Special English.

This week, soldiers in Mali seized power. They said they acted because the president has failed to end a rebellion by ethnic Tuareg rebels in northern Mali. That conflict started again in January after Tuareg fighters returned from Libya. They had been allied with Moammar Gadhafi.

Leaders of the overthrow suspended the constitution and arrested government ministers. In Bamako, the capital, the price of fuel doubled and bread was reported in short supply.

Mali was set to hold presidential elections in late April. President Amadou Toumani Toure, a former army officer, was not seeking another term. The democratically elected president has served two terms, the legal limit. Years ago, he himself led an overthrow.

The United Nations Security Council condemned the ouster of President Toure. The U.N.'s political chief, Lynn Pascoe, said the return of the Tuaregs from the Libyan army has fueled the rebellion.

LYNN PASCOE: "A sizeable number had gone to Libya because there they could earn more money working in the military and other areas. They were welcomed by the Gadhafi regime. We think that somewhere in the range of fifteen hundred to two thousand of them returned. Some of them were actually quite high-ranking people in the Libyan Army. And they also came with weapons."

The Tuareg rebellion has been happening on and off in Mali for many years. But Mr. Pascoe says the new weapons have changed the situation.

LYNN PASCOE: "They have clearly added much more firepower and drive to this operation, which made it very difficult for the Malian Army to deal with."

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland expressed the support of the Obama administration for President Toure. She said Mali has been a leading democracy in West Africa and its democracy must be respected.

VICTORIA NULAND: "The United States condemns the military seizure of power in Mali. We echo the statements of the African Union, of ECOWAS and of other international partners in denouncing these actions. We've called for calm. We've called for restoration of the civilian government under constitutional rule without delay, so that the elections can proceed as scheduled."

The United States has been providing Mali with as much as one hundred forty million dollars a year in security, economic and financial assistance. That is in addition to humanitarian aid.

Ms. Nuland says the change of power in Libya has affected security in the Sahel area, with rebels again fighting for an independent Islamic state.

VICTORIA NULAND: "It's certainly true that there has been increasing concern inside Mali about Tuareg activity over the last number of months, and particularly since the Tuaregs have had less to fight about in Libya and have moved on to Mali."

Tuareg rebels have taken control of several towns in the north. The United Nations says the fighting has forced at least one hundred thirty thousand people from their homes.

The military uprising started on Wednesday. The next day, the soldiers announced a National Committee for the Recovery of Democracy and the Restoration of the State. They promised elections but set no date.

In Bamako, people from Tuareg and Arab ethnic groups say the soldiers must work to avoid renewed discrimination against those groups. Many Malians thought the government was poorly handling the Tuareg rebellion. Still, people had praise for government efforts to spread the message not to treat Tuareg civilians or other light-skinned groups unfairly.

And that's IN THE NEWS in VOA Special English. I'm Steve Ember.

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