

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Demobilised former Forces Nouvelles (FN) rebels block access to the southern entry to Bouaké, demanding payment of bonuses and salaries totalling FCFA 18m (\$30,516) per person. Negotiations between the government and demobilised rebels collapse, as former rebels within the armed forces stage a mutiny. Mutineers demand payment of a remaining FCFA 7m (\$11,023) per person after a mutiny in January. Mutineers capture the defence ministry and military headquarters in Abidjan and shoot counter-mutiny protestors in Bouaké. The government reportedly disburses FCFA 5m (\$8,527) to mutineers, who agree to stand down.

Demobilised rebels demand \$207.5m bonus payment

Factions of former **Forces Nouvelles (FN)** rebels have increased security tensions in **Côte d'Ivoire** since 8 May, as rebels reintegrated into the army and demobilised rebels compete for government concessions promised to them after the civil war of 2002-2007. Several hundred demobilised former rebels on 8 May blocked access to the southern entry of **Bouaké (Vallée du Bandama District)**.¹ The rebels, members of the **Cellule 39** grouping, demanded payment of bonuses and salaries they claim date back to 2007 and total FCFA 18m (\$30,516) per person.² The demobilised Cellule 39, which served the **Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)** peacekeeping force from 2007 to 2011, claims to represent over 6,800 former rebels.³ Total disbursement for all its members would amount to FCFA 122.4 billion (\$207.5m).⁴ In particular, the security threat in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire's second largest city, was significant; reportedly over 4,000 of Cellule 39's members reside in the city.⁵ Although short-lived, the roadblock had meaningful economic implications. The road lies on the trade route between the economic capital **Abidjan** and the neighbouring countries of **Burkina Faso** and **Niger**.⁶ The **Port Autonome d'Abidjan (PAA)** (Abidjan port) provides these countries with their sole maritime export gateway.

Former rebels integrated into the army, who coordinated a mutiny in January, made similar claims and won government concessions (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire January 2017*). These former rebels, referred to as mutineers, received government commitments for a FCFA 12m (\$19,550) bonus for each of the 8,500 mutineers, a total of \$166m.⁷ The government agreed to pay the full amount to the mutineers, although requested to extend full repayment by approximately eight months. This deal is the main source of tension among former rebel groupings. The government's strategy appeared to seek to factionalise rebel groupings, although this may have proven counterproductive. The demobilised rebels claim that they deserve to receive compensation: "we want our slice of the cake".⁸

*"[The mutineers] are soldiers, they have salaries, and we have nothing. Thank God, they battled, and they won. We too must battle in our own way and be successful."*⁹

On this occasion, however, the government had a more difficult negotiation process,

¹ Connection Ivoirienne, 8 May 2017.

² Connection Ivoirienne, 8 May 2017.

³ Reuters, 8 May 2017.

⁴ Reuters, 8 May 2017.

⁵ RFI, 17 May 2017.

⁶ Connection Ivoirienne, 8 May 2017.

⁷ Connection Ivoirienne, 6 Jan 2017.

⁸ VOA, 8 May 2017.

⁹ RFI, 17 May 2017.

“What could the government do? They simply don’t have the money. There is this idea that the government hides a chest full of money at the presidency. They can’t afford to pay.”¹⁰

The government was not initially receptive to the demobilised rebels’ demands. Local authorities stated that demobilised rebels had already benefitted from social reinsertion programmes, and would not receive payment of the bonuses.¹¹ Local residents in Bouaké claimed that the Cellule 39 members were simply former rebels who failed to find employment, and were largely illiterate “bandits”.¹² Budgetary constraints, due largely to a lacklustre cocoa price environment (see *ARC Briefing Côte d’Ivoire April 2017*), appear to have forced the government to stall talks with Cellule 39 rebels.¹³ Although the government recognised the demobilised rebels’ threat, the lack of concrete information about armaments and support from mutineers in particular appear to explain the government’s apprehension in negotiations. Some members of the demobilised rebels claimed to be unarmed, while others alluded to hidden armament supplies.¹⁴

The government appeared to take the mutineer threat more seriously. Reportedly, the mutineers were annoyed with the government after it missed a FCFA 1m (\$1,690) monthly instalment of their bonuses.¹⁵ Following a public statement from the mutineers on 9 May to remind the government to make the payment, the government reportedly asked demobilised rebels in Bouaké for a further delay in negotiations.¹⁶ The mutineers also offered to mediate the discussions between the demobilised rebels and the government.¹⁷ This raised suspicions that there may be collaboration between the mutineers and the demobilised. Local reporters believe their mutual demands could hinder each other,

“It’s hard to gauge the level of solidarity... I think the mutineers already have enough pressure they can exert on their own. They’ve already shown that in 2014 and this year. So I am not sure they need to use the demobilised to exert more pressure. Maybe they are using Cellule 39, but I don’t think there is necessarily a thought-out strategy at play here. I suspect it could just be jealousies and opportunism.”¹⁸

The highly guarded negotiations appeared to collapse, with no public communication of whether agreement had been reached. A resurgent mutiny soon overshadowed Cellule 39 (see below). According to a demobilised Cellule 39 member,

“[The mutineers] betrayed us. They are our former brothers in arms; they know us and we know them. We are all a part of Cellule 39. They stole our fight... We informed them of our movement regarding the ECOMOG bonus; they even said that they were solidary in that struggle. In January, we started protesting, and they also took away our fight and relegated us to the background. They quickly stated that this was a military thing and not a demobilised thing.”¹⁹

The same source claims that mutineers only acted in their own interest, even as a mediator in negotiations,

“Our former brothers in arms fight against us today, because we are demobilised. They have forgotten yesterday. Even during negotiations with authorities, they think only of themselves. They do not plea our case. Yet, we all fought; what they forget is that we outnumber them. They are not any more warriors than we are.”²⁰

¹⁰ Source, analyst, Abidjan

¹¹ Le Monde, 12 May 2017.

¹² Le Monde, 12 May 2017.

¹³ Source, journalist, Abidjan

¹⁴ Le Monde, 12 May 2017.

¹⁵ Source, journalist, Abidjan

¹⁶ Reuters, 11 May 2017.

¹⁷ Source, journalist, Abidjan

¹⁸ Source, journalist, Abidjan

¹⁹ Source, demobilised rebel, Bouaké

²⁰ Source, demobilised rebel, Bouaké

One mutineer commented explicitly to ARC:

*"This is not the demobilised's fight. If the demobilised interfere with our movement, we will kill them. We are soldiers; they are civilians."*²¹

... and mutineer flare-up steals limelight

Using the alias **Sergeant Fofana**, a representative for the mutineer grouping unexpectedly announced on 11 May in the middle of negotiations between demobilised rebels and authorities, that the mutineers would drop their financial demands.²² Fofana claimed to have met president **Alassane Dramane Ouattara** (2011-present), and apologised publically on behalf of the mutineers.²³ At this stage, the mutineers had reportedly received FCFA 5m (\$8,527) each, or 41.67% of the total FCFA 12m (\$19,550) amount agreed with the government in January (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire January 2017*). The government had said that it would delay the payment of the first FCFA 1m (\$1,690) instalment until June.²⁴ However, there were increasingly signs of fracture among groupings of the mutineers who did not wish to accept this proposition.

Less than 24 hours later, in the early hours of 12 May, there were reports of gunfire at the military headquarters in Abidjan, stemming from mutineers who had begun an armed revolt.²⁵ The **Conseil National de Sécurité (CNS)** (national security council) held an emergency meeting a few hours later, while chief of staff of the armed forces **Sékou Touré** called for mutineers to end their revolt.²⁶ By the end of the day, mutineers had organised throughout the country, in Bouaké and Abidjan, as well as several other major cities such as **Korhogo, Man** and **Odienne**.²⁷ Mutineers took control of both the military headquarters in Abidjan and the defence ministry.²⁸ In response, the government-led troops deployed approximately 100 special forces operatives, including armoured vehicles, to surround the perimeter of both premises.²⁹ Defence minister at the presidency **Alain-Richard Donwahi** adopted a hard-line stance,

*"Some [mutineers] have understood the message. Others haven't understood the message. We're not negotiating. Those who don't accept this decision must simply leave the army."*³⁰

Simultaneously, on 13 May residents and demobilised rebels of Bouaké held a protest against the mutiny.³¹ In response, mutineers shot and wounded three demobilised rebels.³² The following day, on 14 May, mutineers shot and wounded a further five protestors.³³ Another representative for the mutineers, **Sergeant Seydou Koné**, said that they would not compromise their position, and refused to negotiate, claiming they would fight *"if we are attacked"*.³⁴ Koné said that the mutineers simply want payment of the remaining FCFA 7m (\$11,023) per person.³⁵ The government responded with deployment of a special forces unit to Bouaké, demanding that the group surrender.³⁶ The mutineers refused.³⁷ On the morning of 15 May, shooting broke out in **San Pedro**, the coastal city that hosts the

²¹ Source, mutineer, Bouaké

²² Reuters, 11 May 2017.

²³ Reuters, 11 May 2017.

²⁴ Reuters, 11 May 2017.

²⁵ Reuters, 12 May 2017.

²⁶ www.presidence.gouv.ci

²⁷ Jeune Afrique, 12 May 2017.

²⁸ Jeune Afrique, 12 May 2017.

²⁹ Reuters, 12 May 2017.

³⁰ Reuters, 12 May 2017.

³¹ Le Monde, 15 May 2017.

³² Reuters, 13 May 2017.

³³ Reuters, 14 May 2017.

³⁴ Reuters, 13 May 2017.

³⁵ Reuters, 13 May 2017.

³⁶ AFP, 14 May 2017.

³⁷ AFP, 14 May 2017.

Port Autonome de San Pedro (PASP), Côte d'Ivoire's second largest port.³⁸ Mutineers blocked traffic out of both Bouaké and Abidjan, as well as the border crossing to Burkina Faso.³⁹ Economic activity came to a standstill, as the Abidjan port closed due to fears of an insurrection.⁴⁰ Initially, the government upheld its non-compromising stance.⁴¹ However, as pressure from mutineers mounted, Donwahi announced in the afternoon of 15 May that he had reached agreement with mutineers.⁴² Some factions of the mutineers immediately rejected the agreement, stating that they would only abandon their revolt after payment of the outstanding amount of their bonus.⁴³ The following morning, on 16 May, reports emerged that some mutineers had received payments of FCFA 5m (\$8,527) in their bank accounts.⁴⁴ The same afternoon, mutineers reportedly agreed to stand down and resume their functions within the army.⁴⁵ Since this report, however, the government has refused to communicate on the exact disbursement made to the mutineers. Press sources reported that the mutineers received FCFA 5m (\$8,527) immediately, and would receive a further FCFA 2m (\$3,380) per person in June.⁴⁶ An Abidjan source reported,

*"They wanted the whole amount. They have received less. This is not the last we hear from them."*⁴⁷

The government on 17 May announced a death count of four people and nine injured following the mutiny.⁴⁸ A local resident of Abidjan's **Akouédo** neighbourhood (near a military barracks) explained the negotiating logic of the mutineers,

*"They need to shoot. If they don't shoot, they don't get any money. Everyone knows this."*⁴⁹

Government spokesperson **Bruno Nabagné Koné** said that resolution of the situation was most important,

*"There is a clear logic, which is to act such that this situation is resolved with the minimum possible impact on the population. To choose to negotiate was the best option, as this allowed for soldiers to return to their barracks and allowed for a resumption in economic activity."*⁵⁰

Since the events, Ouattara has called for an inquiry into the regional dynamics of the revolt, while Donwahi announced that there would be an inquiry into reports of a weapon stockpile at a private residence in Bouaké.⁵¹

The government has not currently met Cellule 39's demands, after negotiations collapsed amid the mutineer revolt. It remains unclear how the demobilised former rebels could respond to the apparent FCFA 5m (\$8,527) disbursement to mutineers. The payment to mutineers could intensify grievances among demobilised former rebels, although it appears less likely that these would employ similarly violent means to achieve their demands. It is clear that Cellule 39 has significantly less negotiating power than the mutineers. The government's response to the mutineers, in contrast to the Cellule 39 demobilised rebels, highlights the seriousness of factions within the army, as well as the implications of the mutineers' ability to coordinate a near standstill of economic activity across the country. If the government's initial strategy was to factionalise the former rebel groupings, it appears to have

³⁸ Reuters, 15 May 2017.

³⁹ Jeune Afrique, 15 May 2017.

⁴⁰ Reuters, 15 May 2017.

⁴¹ Jeune Afrique, 15 May 2017.

⁴² Reuters, 15 May 2017.

⁴³ Reuters, 15 May 2017.

⁴⁴ Reuters, 16 May 2017.

⁴⁵ Reuters, 16 May 2017.

⁴⁶ L'Observateur, 15 May 2017.

⁴⁷ Source, business owner, Abidjan

⁴⁸ Jeune Afrique, 17 May 2017.

⁴⁹ Source, Akouédo resident, Abidjan

⁵⁰ RFI, 17 May 2017.

⁵¹ Multiple sources: AIP, 17 May 2017; Reuters, 16 May 2017.

succeeded, although at a significant social and economic cost. The state of government finances, as a result of an apparent disbursement of close to \$72.5m to a total of 8,500 mutineers, will be significantly impaired. The government would argue that the economic cost of prolonged insecurity is greater.

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