

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Côte d'Ivoire Monthly Briefing September 2022

Côte d'Ivoire Summary 14 September 2022

Negotiations continue between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire for the release of 46 soldiers arrested in Bamako (Mali) on suspicion of being mercenaries, with Mali demanding the repatriation of political refugees in return for the release of the soldiers. Controversial former first lady Simone Gbagbo is appointed president of new opposition party Mouvement des générations capable (MGC) during the party's extraordinary general assembly held on 19-20 August. The MGC plans to run in future elections but has not confirmed if Gbagbo will be its presidential candidate in 2025. Former minister of planning and development Tidjane Thiam announces via United Kingdom-based newspaper The Telegraph on 3 September that he plans to run for president in 2025. The Conseil des ministres (council of ministers) grants two new gold exploration permits to local companies Global Mineraie SA and Mankono Exploration as part of the government's plan to diversify revenue sources and push for gold mining growth.

Negotiations continue for release of MINUSMA soldiers

Negotiations between **Mali** and **Côte d'Ivoire** for the release of 46 soldiers arrested in **Bamako** (Mali) on suspicion of being mercenaries continue amid diplomatic tensions between the two neighbours. The soldiers were deployed as part of security and logistical support contractors for the **United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)** but Malian authorities claim they were not aware of their deployment and therefore considered them to be mercenaries. Tensions between the two countries stem from Mali's belief that Côte d'Ivoire pushed the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** in 2021 to harden sanctions against the country, which it lifted in July after Mali's military government vowed to hold elections in February 2024.¹

Progress was made on 3 September when the Malian authorities agreed to release three female soldiers from the 49 arrested on 10 July (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire July 2022*); however, negotiations have since been at a standstill.² **Togo's** President **Faure Gnassingbé** (2005-present) has been involved in mediation efforts to release the soldiers and is believed to have had a hand in the freeing of the three soldiers. President **Alassane Ouattara** (2010-present) has left most of the negotiations up to Gnassingbé and the relevant authorities. Ouattara on 24 August authorised the deployment of 425 Ivorian peacekeepers to be deployed as part of MINUSMA, despite the continuing tensions and detention of the soldiers.³

However, Ouattara's hands-off approach may have unintended consequences for Côte d'Ivoire. The leader of the ruling military junta in Mali, Colonel **Assimi Goïta**, announced on 9 September that in return for the release of the soldiers, Mali demands the repatriation of Malian politicians who found a haven in Côte d'Ivoire following the 2020 coup d'état.⁴ Goïta appears to be referring to the son of former president **Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta** (2013-2020), **Karim Keïta**, former prime minister **Boubou Cissé** and former minister **Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly**, for whom Mali has issued arrest

¹ Jeune Afrique, 9 Sep 2022; VOA, 4 Jul 2022

² Reuters, 4 Sep 2022

³ Agence Ecofin, 25 Aug 2022

⁴ RFI, 10 Sep 2022

warrants.⁵ It is not known whether the men have remained in Côte d'Ivoire since their initial arrival. A source close to the Ivorian presidency has reportedly described Mali's demands as "hostage-taking".⁶

Côte d'Ivoire and Mali are not only neighbours but also trading partners and part of the same fight against insurgency in **West Africa**. Mali is facing a precarious position with the withdrawal of **French** soldiers previously stationed in the country as well as the withdrawal of **Russia**-linked paramilitary organisation **Wagner Group**, which is sending reinforcements to Russia for its special military operations in **Ukraine**. Mali's security situation risks deteriorating further while facing potential trade restrictions from Côte d'Ivoire. Although Côte d'Ivoire has the upper hand in the situation, it will need to take more forceful action if it wishes to keep this position.

Simone Gbagbo launches political party ...

Fledgling opposition party **Mouvement des générations capable (MGC)** has appointed former first lady **Simone Gbagbo** as its president. During the party's extraordinary general assembly held on 19-20 August, Gbagbo was elected for a five-year term, which can be extended after another vote.⁷ MGC, a former citizen's movement under Gbagbo, officially transformed into a social democratic political party during the general assembly. MGC says it intends to participate in all upcoming elections but has not indicated whether Gbagbo will be the party's candidate for the 2025 presidential election.⁸ Gbagbo, who is 73, has voiced her opposition to an age restriction law for presidential candidates, hinting at her ambitions.⁹

Gbagbo divorced former president **Laurent Gbagbo** (2000-2011) in 2021. Laurent Gbagbo started his own political party in October 2021, **Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI)**. Simone Gbagbo helped co-found the **Front populaire ivoirien (FPI)** with her former husband and other allies in exile in the 1980s. Simone Gbagbo served in the national assembly as a representative of FPI in 1996 and was re-elected in 2000. The FPI and former youth minister **Charles Blé Goudé's Congrès Panafricain des Jeunes et des Patriotes (COJEP)** were both present during the general assembly, an early indication that Simone Gbagbo has support from the political field.

Simone Gbagbo has been critical of Ouattara, most notably of the pardon he granted to Laurent Gbagbo in August as part of Ouattara's national reconciliation process (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire Aug 2022*).¹⁰ Commenting during the general assembly, Simone Gbagbo described the amnesty as a weight on the socio-political atmosphere of the country,

*"...so we won't say thank you to Alassane Ouattara."*¹¹

Like her husband, Simone Gbagbo is a controversial figure in Ivorian politics. The **International Criminal Court (ICC)** sought to press charges of crimes against humanity against her in 2012, for alleged actions during the post-election crisis in 2010 and 2011.¹² The crisis was spurred on by Laurent Gbagbo refusing to hand over power, resulting in a period of violence in which approximately 3,000 people were killed. In 2015, an Ivorian court sentenced Simone Gbagbo to 20 years in prison instead of being sent to the ICC. However, in 2018 she was released following a presidential pardon. An ICC arrest warrant for Simone Gbagbo remained in place until July 2021 when the ICC dropped the case.

Simone Gbagbo noted that she is not opposed to collaboration with her former husband's party; however, the MGC and the PPA-CI have not yet discussed this.¹³

⁵ RFI, 10 Sep 2022

⁶ AfricaNewsWatch, 12 Sep 2022

⁷ ABS, 21 Aug 2022

⁸ ABS, 21 Aug 2022

⁹ Fratmat.info, 30 Aug 2022

¹⁰ Africanews, 21 Aug 2022

¹¹ Africanews, 21 Aug 2022

¹² Africanews, 30 Jul 2021

¹³ Fratmat.info, 30 Aug 2022

... as Tidjane Thiam announces presidential run

Former of planning and development minister **Tidjane Thiam** announced via **United Kingdom**-based newspaper **The Telegraph** on 3 September that he plans to run for president in 2025. Thiam was active in Ivorian politics between 1994 and 1999, serving as the director general of the **Bureau national d'études techniques et de développement (BNETD)** (national bureau of technical studies and development) and then as planning and development minister.¹⁴ Thiam left political life in Côte d'Ivoire after the 1999 coup d'état. After leaving politics, he served as managing director of **Switzerland**-headquartered bank **Credit Suisse** and **United States**-headquartered **Prudential Financial**. He was forced to resign from Credit Suisse in 2020 after a corporate spying scandal broke. Thiam denies any wrongdoing.¹⁵

Thiam returned to Côte d'Ivoire for the first time on 8 August, meeting with President Ouattara, along with his brothers, **Yamoussoukro** governor **August Thiam** and transport minister **Aziz Thiam**.¹⁶ Thiam also met with former president **Henri Konan Bédié** (1993-1999), under whom he served. Thiam used the meeting as an opportunity to reaffirm his membership of the opposition **Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire-Rassemblement démocratique africain (PDCI-RDA)**, currently under Bédié's presidency.

Thiam comes from a prominent political family. He is a great-nephew of Côte d'Ivoire's first president, **Félix Houphouët-Boigny** (1960-1993), while his father, **Amandou Thiam**, was also a politician.¹⁷ Thiam's uncle, **Habib Thiam**, twice served as prime minister of **Senegal** between 1981 and 1998.

Thiam's absence from the country for the past 22 years may prove an obstacle in garnering support. He will also face a challenge from Bédié, who has reported his desire to run for president again in 2025 despite his advancing years – Bédié, born in May 1934, will be 91 in 2025. However, Thiam's strong political connections in Côte d'Ivoire may help him to draw support from political stewards.¹⁸

Government continues gold mine push

The **Conseil des ministres** (council of ministers) on 6 September granted two new gold exploration permits to local companies **Global Mineraie SA** and **Mankono Exploration** as part of the government's plan to diversify revenue sources and push for gold mining growth.¹⁹ The permits will expire in 2026. Côte d'Ivoire's gold mining sector has seen strong growth over the last ten years, reaching production of 41.85 tonnes in 2021.²⁰ The council of ministers has awarded 127 mining titles in the last five years, including 116 exploration permits, all for gold mines.²¹ There are five active gold mines in the country and another four are expected to start production by 2025/2026.²²

Côte d'Ivoire's mining sector has been neglected in comparison to its top export, cocoa. The government is aiming to boost gold production to 65 tonnes by 2025, diversifying the economy and taking advantage of its natural resources.²³ Currently, mining contributes 3% to gross domestic product (GDP), with a goal to increase this to 6% by 2025.

¹⁴ Agence Ecofin, 5 Sep 2022

¹⁵ The Heritage Times, 4 Sep 2022

¹⁶ Agence Ecofin, 5 Sep 2022

¹⁷ The Heritage Times, 4 Sep 2022

¹⁸ ARC Côte d'Ivoire analyst

¹⁹ Agence Ecofin, 7 Sep 2022

²⁰ Agence Ecofin, 7 Sep 2022

²¹ Agence Ecofin, 7 Sep 2022

²² Mining weekly, 23 Mar 2022

²³ Mining weekly, 23 Mar 2022

Planner

2023 **(Côte d'Ivoire)** Local elections
 2025 **(Côte d'Ivoire)** Presidential elections

Chronology

10 Sep 2022 **Washington (United States)** *Fratmat.info*. Vice-president **Tiémoko Meyliet Koné** arrives in the **United States** for a two-day working visit, meeting with ambassadors and senior officials of the **Bretton Woods** institutions;

10 Sep 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *AIP*. Italy-headquartered oil and gas major **Eni** CEO **Claudio Descalzi** confirms to President **Alassane Ouattara** that the **Baleine** oil field will produce oil from the first phase in the first half of 2023;

9 Sep 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Abidjan.net*. The traceability committee of the **Conseil Café-Cacao** (coffee and cocoa council) presents the traceability system to the **World Bank** during a working session between the two;

9 Sep 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Fratmat.info*. **Burkina Faso's** military junta leader, Lieutenant Colonel **Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba**, meets with President **Alassane Ouattara** to discuss the transition and bilateral ties;

7 Sep 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Abidjan.net*. President **Alassane Ouattara** hosts his **Polish** counterpart, **Andrzej Duda**, petitioning for increased cooperation between the two countries;

3 Sep 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Agence Econfin*. Former development minister **Tidjane Thiam** announces to **United Kingdom**-based newspaper **The Telegraph** that he plans to run for the **Ivorian** presidency in 2025;

3 Sep 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Abidjan.net*. A partial legislative election takes place, with 16,448 voters from **Bodokro**, **Lolobo**, **N'guessankro** and **Marabadiassa** electing their respective representatives to national assembly;

31 Aug 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Agence Econfin*. Government announces it disbursed \$9.59m in the second quarter of 2022 to vulnerable populations to support them against the increasing cost of living;

31 Aug 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Abidjan.net*. Finance minister, **Adama Coulibaly** signs two financing agreements with the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Bank for Investment and Development** for the health and agricultural sectors, worth 67 billion FCFA (\$103m);

25 Aug 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Fratmat.info*. General **Lassina Doumbia**, chief of the general staff of the armed forces, confirms that negotiations continue for the release of the 49 **Ivorian** soldiers still detained in **Mali**;

23 Aug 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Offshore Technology*. **Norway**-based oil and gas operator **DNO** signs deal to buy shares in **Mondoil Enterprises** and acquire operated stakes in offshore gas and associated liquids production assets in **Côte d'Ivoire** from **United Kingdom**-headquartered **RAK Petroleum** for \$117.25m;

21 Aug 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Africanews*. Former first lady **Simone Gbagbo** launches a political party, **Mouvement des générations capable**, two years ahead of the next presidential election;

16 Aug 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Global Trade Review*. Sources say authorities in **Côte d'Ivoire** have agreed on a €200m (\$204m) transaction with **Germany**-headquartered **KfW**

Ipex-Bank, Swedish state-owned Swedish Export Credit Corporation, and Israel-based Bluebird Finance & Projects to install clean water systems across more than a thousand villages;

15 Aug 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Fratmat.info*. Local energy company **Biovea Energy** signs a contract with **China**-headquartered (**China Energy Engineering Corp**) **CEEC** for the construction of a biomass power plant, the first of its kind in **West Africa**;

15 Aug 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Fratmat.info*. **Germany**, the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** and the Ivorian government launch a programme titled "*Engagement of young people and women for crisis prevention, social stability, peacebuilding and reduction of violence community in northern Côte d'Ivoire*", costing 3 billion FCFA (\$4.5m).

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