

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Côte d'Ivoire Monthly Briefing December 2022

Côte d'Ivoire Summary 15 December 2022

Former Jeune Patriotes leader Charles Blé Goudé returns to Côte d'Ivoire following a decade in exile, and almost two years after his final International Criminal Court (ICC) acquittal for crimes against humanity. His arrival has been a sober affair with many arguing that it will help defuse long-standing political tensions before the multiparty elections in 2025 but others believe his return could have a more incendiary effect. This will depend on whether he intends to run in the 2025 presidential elections. Regional bloc, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 5 December gives Mali a month's ultimatum to release the still-detained Ivorian soldiers or face crippling sanctions as relations between Côte d'Ivoire and Mali remain at breaking point after Mali detained 49 Ivorian soldiers in July, accusing them of being mercenaries. The completion of a second container terminal at the port of Abidjan helps to further Côte d'Ivoire's mission to become a regional shipping hub. The new infrastructure will create a twofold increase in container traffic while also allowing the port to accommodate high-tonnage ships from Asia. This will directly benefit Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the West African landlocked countries where Abidjan acts as a port.

Charles Blé Goudé arrives back

Politician **Charles Blé Goudé** returned to **Côte d'Ivoire** on 26 November after a decade in exile, prompting fears that his arrival could trigger unrest in a country that is still nursing its wounds from the **2010-11 Ivorian Crisis**. Blé Goudé was the youth minister under former president **Laurent Gbagbo** (2000-2011) and former head of the **Jeune Patriotes (JP)** movement.¹ He is seen as a key player in the post-electoral violence of the 2010-2011 crisis and remains a significant, and controversial figure, in the political realm. The former populist leader, known as the 'street general' for his ability to mobilise a crowd, is now in control of his political party, the **Congrès Panafricain des Jeunes et des Patriotes (COJEP)** and will likely use it as a vehicle to re-establish his presence in the country.

Blé Goudé was met, under a heavy police presence, by his family and the former first lady **Simone Gbagbo** and later staged a walkabout in the Abidjan suburb of **Yopougon** where he addressed thousands of his supporters.³ Blé Goudé thanked the government authorities for facilitating his return and said his duty was to "*support the peace process*".⁴ This acknowledgement was followed by a meeting, on 29 November, with national reconciliation minister **Kouadio Konan Bertin**.⁵ Blé Goudé asserted that he was questioned for an hour by the **Ghanaian** police during a stopover in **Accra** (Ghana) on his return flight over long-standing arrest warrants, but that the intervention of the Ivorian authorities resolved the situation.⁷

Blé Goudé's power and influence in Côte d'Ivoire stems from his time spent as the right-hand man of Gbagbo. Along with Gbagbo, he played a major part in the post-election crisis of 2010-2011 that resulted in the deaths of an estimated 3,000 people. In October 2010, Gbagbo lost that year's presidential election to Ouattara but refused to concede defeat to his rival. The ensuing showdown split the country along north-south lines, triggering a wave of violence in 2011. Blé Goudé, who

¹ Africa News, 28 Nov 2022

³ APA News, 26 Nov 2022

⁴ Africa News, 28 Nov 2022

⁵ RFI, 29 Nov 2022

⁷ RFI, 29 Nov 2022

headed the notorious JP at the time, was alleged to have incited attacks on civilians and **United Nations** soldiers. Blé Goudé has since been accused of mobilising JP, a pro-Gbagbo organisation seen by many as a street militia, to defend the former Ivorian president. Human rights groups assert that the JP created a climate of terror, erecting barricades, and checkpoints where they attempted to identify “*enemies of Côte d’Ivoire*” - often the supporters of Ouattara.⁸

Gbagbo was forced from power in April 2011 but Blé Goudé continued holding his regular rallies where he used increasingly incendiary rhetoric which many believe incited his supporters to violence. These few months of turmoil, which in essence amounted to a civil war, have contributed to long-lasting socio-political tensions that are still present in the country. The shadow of electoral violence continues to haunt Côte d’Ivoire - at least 20 people died in clashes when President **Alassane Ouattara** (2010-present) decided to run again in the 2020 elections.

The **International Criminal Court** in the **Netherlands** acquitted Blé Goudé, along with Gbagbo, in March 2021 of charges which included murder, rape and persecution following the disputed election (see *ARC Briefing Côte d’Ivoire Apr 2021*). Legal action was also taken domestically and Blé Goudé was sentenced *in absentia* by an Abidjan court in 2019 for his role in the civil war and remains under a 20-year prison sentence set out by the Ivorian justice system.⁹ These challenges have so far presented no obstacles to his return, and it remains to be seen if they will impact his future.

Blé Goudé’s homecoming signifies an important step in the rebuilding of relations between warring political factions whose destructive upheavals have plagued Côte d’Ivoire for years. **Pascal Affi N’Guessan**, the leader of the **Front populaire ivoirien (FPI)**, remarked:

*“It is important that all those who want national reconciliation are there to welcome the return of Blé Goudé, to welcome this essential link in the reconciliation which is being set up.”*¹⁰

There has been precedence over the last few years in the official pardoning of Ivorians who had fallen out with the current administration. Bertin confirmed that the government wants to continue to facilitate the return of those exiled following the civil war.¹¹ Blé Goudé is the latest high-profile political figure to return home and the last major pro-Gbagbo figure from the conflict to be granted clemency, a year and a half after his former mentor.¹² Ouattara pardoned Gbagbo in August after the ex-president returned to Côte d’Ivoire in June 2021 – a move seen by many as a peace offering on the part of Ouattara. Ouattara also held a rare meeting with Gbagbo and **Henri Konan Bédié** (1993-1999) in July, another political rival who was president until his removal in a 1999 coup d’état (see *ARC Briefing Jul 2022*).¹³ These pardons and dialogues can be seen as part of the government’s reconciliation drive ahead of elections due in 2025.

Some, however, fear that Blé Goudé’s arrival could trigger unrest in a country that is still nursing its wounds from the 2010-11 conflict. **Ibrahim Sorie Yillah**, vice president of the ICC’s victims’ fund, underlines that Blé Goudé’s return is a significant moment but does not draw a line under the post-electoral violence, adding that:

*“A large number of victims of crimes committed during that period continue to wait for reparations for the harm they suffered”*¹⁴

Blé Goudé has expressed remorse for his role in the violence while also sympathising with the memory of the victims in a revealing, exclusive interview with the **French** news channel **Radio France Internationale (RFI)**.¹⁵ Blé Goudé’s newfound goodwill will depend on his plans in the

⁸ Washington Post, 26 Nov 2022

⁹ RFI, 26 Nov 2022

¹⁰ RFI, 26 Nov 2022

¹¹ RFI, 29 Nov 2022

¹² Al Jazeera, 26 Nov 2022

¹³ Reuters, 15 Jul 2022

¹⁴ France 24, 26 Nov 2022

¹⁵ RFI, 24 Nov 2022

coming years and his presidential ambitions for the next election. Blé Goudé has been evasive on the topic saying only *"I have a political party that will meet, and the resulting decisions will be applied."*¹⁶

If Blé Goudé did decide to run, it would set up a showdown between himself and Gbagbo who is also increasingly seen as likely to return to the political arena, pitching mentor against protégée. Blé Goudé and Gbagbo have had a complicated relationship over the years and while Gbagbo was not present to greet Blé Goudé on his return, he sent a delegation from his party **Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI)**.¹⁷ Blé Goudé told RFI:

*"We are in 2022. In politics, what is true today will not necessarily be true tomorrow, and I think we should not be in a hurry, time will tell the rest. But I am not an opponent of Laurent Gbagbo."*¹⁸

Ouattara's role in facilitating Blé Goudé suggests that he was working to reduce political tension ahead of the elections in 2025. However, there is also a strong argument to be made that Ouattara favours Blé Goudé's return to weaken the camp of Gbagbo and that of the Ivorian left, raising the question of if he is acting as a peacemaker or a subtler political manoeuvrer.

Blé Goudé is also not out of trouble and despite his acquittal domestic legal activists are still pressuring for more action. The **Observatoire Ivoirien des Droits de l'Homme (OIDH)** (Ivorian observatory for human rights) wrote to the ICC on 3 October asking for an update on the progress of investigations into Goudé in Côte d'Ivoire. ICC prosecutor **Karim Kahn** responded by noting that the court is continuing its investigation. It is also possible that Ouattara could use the 2019 legal action against Blé Goudé as leverage.¹⁹ After years of instability and conflict, many Ivorians advocate addressing their differences from the past, however it remains to be seen whether these differences can be ironed out in the run-up to the 2025 elections.

Côte d'Ivoire and Mali tensions remain

Regional bloc, **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** on 5 December gave Mali a month's ultimatum to release the still-detained Ivorian soldiers or face crippling sanctions after relations between Côte d'Ivoire and Mali have been at breaking point after Mali detained 49 Ivorian soldiers in July, accusing them of being mercenaries (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire Jul & Oct 2022*).²⁰ ECOWAS leaders designated **Togolese** foreign affairs minister **Robert Dussey** to enter into talks with Mali during an ECOWAS summit held in **Abuja (Nigeria)** on 4 December. Dussey arrived in **Bamako** on 8 December accompanied by the **United Nations** diplomats **Jean-Pierre Lacroix** and **El-Ghassim Wane** signalling that a combination of diplomacy and negotiation will be deployed to secure the release of the Ivorian troops.²¹ Dussey's visit was also aimed at ascertaining whether the soldiers will be charged or acquitted for the crimes they have been accused of. ECOWAS already condemned Malian authorities in September for using 'blackmail' in their negotiations with Ivorian authorities over the detainment of 49 Ivorian soldiers in Mali (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire Jul & Oct 2022*).

Côte d'Ivoire notified the **United Nations** on 11 November that it will withdraw its military and police contingent from the **United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)** in Mali (*ARC Briefing Oct 2022*).²² Bilateral relations between the two countries have been at breaking point after Mali detained 49 Ivorian soldiers in July, accusing them of being mercenaries (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire Jul & Oct 2022*). Several other UN members have also withdrawn their forces from Mali following two military coups and the junta's growing ties with the

¹⁶ RFI, 24 Nov 2022

¹⁷ France 24, 26 Nov 2022

¹⁸ RFI, 24 Nov 2022

¹⁹ Reuters, 27 Nov 2022

²⁰ APA News, 05 Dec 2022

²¹ RFI, 08 Dec 2022

²² Reuters, 15 Nov 2022

Russian mercenaries the **Wagner Group**. Côte d'Ivoire is the third African country to leave the UN mission after **Benin** and **Egypt**.²⁴

Mali has for a decade relied on regional allies and peacekeepers to contain an **Islamist** insurgency that has killed thousands of people and taken over large areas of the centre and north but with the continued withdrawal of UN forces, this situation is likely to deteriorate with the creation of a power vacuum once filled by erstwhile allies which jihadist forces could exploit. ECOWAS leaders announced their intentions on 4 December to create a regional force to help contain jihadism and discourage coup d'états.²⁸ **Omar Alieu Touray**, president of the ECOWAS commission, told journalists at the ECOWAS summit in Nigeria that the move was to provide security:

*"A regional force that will intervene in the event of need, whether this is in the area of security, terrorism and restore constitutional order in member countries"*²⁹

Inauguration of second Abidjan terminal points to higher maritime productivity

Authorities confirmed on 25 November the completion of the second container terminal at the port of **Abidjan**. Operations at the new **Côte d'Ivoire Terminal (CIT)** have been underway since 1 November. The project cost approximately \$953m and was 85% financed by **China's Eximbank** and 15% by the Ivorian state. Following an international call for tenders, the **Bolloré Ports** and **APM Terminals** consortium won the contract to build and manage the second container terminal.³⁰

The new terminal will be able to receive large ships from **Asia, Europe** and the **Americas** that previously had to land goods in **South Africa**, transferring them to smaller ships to reach **West Africa**.³¹ As CIT technical director **Andre N'Doli** stated, the terminal will allow Abidjan to increase container traffic to 3 million TEU containers from 1.2 million TEU containers per year.³² New infrastructure includes automated gate management and an online appointment system, to facilitate the delivery and collection of containers.³³ Abidjan Port is an important node for **Côte d'Ivoire** and crucially is also a gateway for landlocked nations to the north. This is well summarised by Bolloré ports and terminals managing director **Olivier de Noray**, who said:

"The commissioning of Côte d'Ivoire Terminal reflects the commitment made by the terminal to increase volumes and boost import and export flows in Côte d'Ivoire and West Africa. This new infrastructure encompasses all the latest innovations and perfectly showcases our commitment to the development of port activities in Africa."

Planner

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

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

Chronology

10 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) RFI**. **Henri Konan Bédié** has put himself forward as the renewed head of the **Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire- Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (PDCI-RDA)**;

²⁴ Le Figaro, 18 Nov 2022

²⁸ France 24, 04 Dec 2022

²⁹ France 24, 04 Dec 2022

³⁰ Agence Ecofin, 4 Nov 2022

³¹ Reuters, 26 Nov 2022

³² Reuters, 26 Nov 2022

³³ Agence Ecofin, 4 Nov 2022

9 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Le Figaro*. France's foreign affairs minister, **Catherine Colonna**, visits **Abidjan** for meetings with her counterpart, **Kandia Camara**, and President **Alassane Ouattara** during which she reaffirms France's continued support to **Côte d'Ivoire** in security and military matters;

8 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Agence Ecofin*. **World Bank** approves \$400m in budgetary support for **Côte d'Ivoire**, to strengthen public and private investment, human capital, economic development and sustainable use of natural resources;

8 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Mining Review*. **Canada**-based mining company **Fortuna Silver Mines** identifies new prospects at the **Séguéla** gold project located in **Côte d'Ivoire**;

8 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *The Guardian*. The **African Union** summit on malnutrition and food security is held in **Abidjan**, bringing together more than a dozen **African** government delegations, and international and continent organisations;

6 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Confectionary Production*. The **Ivory Coast-Ghana Cocoa Initiative (CIGCI)** announces plans to publish origin differential prices on a monthly basis in attempt to create transparency in cocoa pricing;

5 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Sika Finance*. **United States**-headquartered tax, advisory and audit firm **Grant Thornton** expands its **Africa** presence by establishing a francophone hub of its **Africa Tax Desk** in **Abidjan**;

5 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *The Guardian*. President **Alassane Ouattara** publishes an op-ed piece in **United-Kingdom**-based newspaper **The Guardian** highlighting the effects of malnutrition and hunger on the **African** continent as **Côte d'Ivoire** hosts an **African Union** summit in **Abidjan**;

1 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *RFI*. Political parties encourage their supporters to register during the revision of **Côte d'Ivoire**'s electoral lists, with **Laurent Gbagbo**'s **Parti des peuples africains-Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI)** particularly vocal;

30 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Reuters*. Eighteen suspects arrested in connection with the 2016 **Grand-Bassam** Islamic extremist attack appear in an **Abidjan** court to face murder and terrorism charges;

29 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *RFI*. Ivorian trade unions agree on plans for a 25% increase in minimum wage (**salaire minimum interprofessionnel garanti -SMIG**) that they say they will present to the government at the start of 2023;

25 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *BBC News*. The **World Bank** agrees to finance a \$149m initiative to promote Ivorian forest regeneration after deforestation caused by cocoa plantations over the last 50 years;

24 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Innovation Village*. Fintech start-up **Djamo** raises \$14m in a funding round to expand the company into two new francophone countries in 2023;

24 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. Director of veterinary services for the animal and fisheries ministry, Dr. **Kalo Vessaly**, announces that the poultry sector has made a turnover of 250 billion FCFA (\$394m) in 2022 thus far and created 50,000 direct jobs;

22 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Abidjan.net*. Court of first instance prepares to trial three individuals on 30 November on charges of acts of terrorism for their roles in the 2016 attack on **Grand-Bassam** beach which killed 19 and injured 33;

22 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *AfricaNews*. In a joint statement, the national cocoa management bodies of **Côte d'Ivoire** and **Ghana**, as well as the **Ivory Coast-Ghana Cocoa Initiative (CIGCI)**, acknowledge progress with multinational chocolate companies in their

efforts to better pay producers; an ultimatum on the purchase price of cacao is pushed back by four months;

21 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Mining Review*. **Canada**-based **Endeavour Mining** announces a major gold discovery at its 100% owned **Tanda-Iguela** greenfield exploration property;

20 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *RFI*. The ruling **Rassemblement des houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix (RHDP)** announces its first candidates for next year's local elections, notably **Adama Bictogo** who will contest for mayor of **Yopougon**;

19 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *RFI*. The **Commission électorale indépendante (CEI)** launches an operation to revise **Côte d'Ivoire's** electoral lists with the work scheduled to end on 10 December;

18 Nov 2022 **Accra (Ghana)** *BBC News*. Officials from several **West African** coastal states, including **Ghana, Togo, Benin** and **Côte d'Ivoire**, meet in Accra to discuss ways in which to tackle the spill-over of Islamic jihadist violence from the **Sahel region**;

18 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Bloomberg*. The Ivorian government caps the prices of basic food items to curb inflation with selling at higher-than-decreed prices now punishable by law;

15 Nov 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *RFI*. The **International Criminal Court (ICC)** continues to investigate the post-election violence of 2010-2011 with the Prosecutor confirming that possible crimes committed by pro-**Alassane Ouattara** factions are now under scrutiny; the ICC acquitted **Charles Blé Goudé** and **Laurent Gbagbo** of war crimes and crimes against humanity in March 2021;

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