

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Côte d'Ivoire Monthly Briefing January 2023

Côte d'Ivoire Summary 17 January 2023

Malian leader Assimi Goïta gives a surprise pardon to the 47 imprisoned Ivorian soldiers held in Mali, allowing them to return home after six months of captivity. The move signals the start of a thawing of relations between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire after a bitter and protracted politico-diplomatic spat. The decision also has ramifications for the multilateral relationship between Mali and West Africa's main political and economic bloc, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has been at a low over the last year. A rapprochement between the military junta, Côte d'Ivoire and the regional bloc is an important step in the re-establishment of security support for a region embroiled in jihadi violence. ECOWAS announces plans on 4 December to create a peacekeeping force to combat violent extremism and as an instrument for the restoration of democratic rule in a region susceptible to coups. Côte d'Ivoire will form an important part of this force given the capabilities of its armed forces. Government finalises financing arrangements for two new major infrastructure projects - the Abidjan Metro Line 1 and the expansion of Abidjan International Airport. France's involvement in the project, both in a financial and organisational capacity, underlines its cooperation with Côte d'Ivoire as a national investor in the country.

Mali ends diplomatic dispute with the release of detained Ivorian soldiers

President **Alassane Ouattara** (2010-present) welcomed home the 49 Ivorian soldiers held in **Mali** for six months on 14 January, saying that the crisis in relations with the Malian junta was now at an end and that reconciliation was at hand. **Mali's** military junta leader, Colonel **Assimi Goïta** pardoned the soldiers on 6 January in a surprise move, as a week earlier, on 30 December, the soldiers received sentences from a **Bamako** court condemning them to 20 years in prison. Public prosecutor **Ladji Sara** explained that the soldiers were convicted of "attack and conspiracy against the government" and for seeking to "undermine state security".¹ Colonel **Abdoulaye Maiga**, the government spokesman, said on national television:

*"This gesture demonstrates once again [Colonel Goïta's] commitment to peace, dialogue and pan-Africanism, as well as the preservation of fraternal and secular relations with regional countries, in particular those between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire."*²

Ouattara also reiterated his desire for a resumption of cordiality with Mali in a speech made during the arrival of the soldiers in **Abidjan**:

*"Now that this crisis is behind us, we can resume normal relations with the brother country of Mali, which needs us and which we also need."*³

The release of the soldiers followed mediation by **Togo's** President **Faure Gnassingbé** (2005-present) who visited Bamako together with an Ivorian government delegation on 22 December.⁴ This diplomatic effort ended with the signing of a memorandum of understanding

¹ VOA, 7 Jan 2023

² Reuters, 7 Jan 2023

³ BBC News, 08 Jan 2023

⁴ Africa News, 05 Jan 2023

(MoU) which the Ivorian defence minister, **Téné Birahima Ouattara**, said drew a final line under the episode.

The result also came after months of continuous negotiations and the involvement of members of the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** in an arbitration effort. Bilateral relations between the two countries have been at breaking point after Mali detained the 49 soldiers in July 2022, accusing them of being mercenaries (*see ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire Jul, Oct, and Dec 2022*). The Côte d'Ivoire government repeatedly denied the allegations, saying the soldiers had been sent to Mali as part of the **United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)**. Other official channels confirmed that the soldiers were deployed as the **8e détachement de l'Élément de soutien national** in a security and logistic support role for the **German** contingent of MINUSMA.⁵

In **Abidjan**, the detentions were interpreted as reprisals for Côte d'Ivoire's heavy-handed treatment of the Malian junta's legitimacy within the ECOWAS organisation, while in Bamako, the military authorities accused Côte d'Ivoire of harbouring and supporting opponents of the transitional government.

The incarceration of the soldiers also had regional ramifications. The increasingly vocal condemnations from ECOWAS members against Mali placed additional strain on an already fractious relationship. ECOWAS members went as far as to hold an extraordinary summit to resolve the crisis during the 77th session of the UN **General Assembly in New York (United States)** on 21 September 2022. Relations between the Malian junta and ECOWAS have been at breaking point ever since forces led by Colonel Goïta staged the coup that overthrew former president **Ibrahim Boubacar Keita** (2013-2020) in August 2020. The new rulers initially promised elections by February 2022 but then announced a four-year delay, weeks ahead of the vote.⁶ The move prompted stiff ECOWAS sanctions that crippled Mali's economy which were lifted in July when Bamako proposed a 24-month transition to democracy and promised a new electoral law.

Côte d'Ivoire, as an important member of ECOWAS, was one of the most strident critics of the regime change and likely influenced these decisions, including the imposition of sanctions. However, it should also be noted that despite concerns over the junta's legitimacy, ECOWAS members were instrumental in leading diplomatic efforts to secure the release of the Ivorian troops. ECOWAS leaders designated **Togolese** foreign affairs minister **Robert Dussey** to enter talks with Mali during a summit held in **Abuja (Nigeria)** on 4 December, Dussey arrived in Bamako on 8 December accompanied by the UN diplomats **Jean-Pierre Lacroix** and **El-Ghassim Wane**. This meeting appears to have paved the way for Gnassingbé to intervene later with decisive success.

The repatriation of the Ivorian soldiers is a positive outcome as an ongoing politico-diplomatic fall-out between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire risked further destabilising **West Africa's** already volatile **Sahel** region which has been plagued for a decade by an evolving jihadist threat. One of Africa's most turbulent countries, Mali has for years had to rely on regional allies, like Côte d'Ivoire, and peacekeepers to contain **al-Qaeda** and **Islamic State**-linked insurgents. The country, therefore, had little to gain from antagonising a key neighbour in Côte d'Ivoire and becoming a pariah state in the process. Côte d'Ivoire will have an important role to play in Mali's future and the recent patching of relations will go some way to mitigating a potential power vacuum that jihadists could exploit.

⁵ VOA, 7 Jan 2023

⁶ Al Jazeera, 8 Jan 2023

ECOWAS launches plans for regional military force

ECOWAS has publicised its intention to create a regional peacekeeping body drawn from its members. The plans were announced during the 5 December ECOWAS summit in Abuja. The ECOWAS standby force will be led by defence chiefs from member nations and will be primarily designed to help combat jihadism, but also to help restore constitutional order in a region that has experienced several coups over the last two years.⁷ President of the ECOWAS commission **Omar Alieu Touray** noted that the bloc's leaders had expressed a desire to "*take care of our own security in the region*", which it believes the standby force could achieve.⁸ Touray added that the particulars of the planned regional force would be considered by defence chiefs in the second half of 2023. ECOWAS defence ministers again met on 19 December in Guinea-Bissau to accelerate the establishment of the organisation's joint anti-terror and anti-coup force. The immediate operational availability of the force is perceived as an "*emergency*" by the committee of the ECOWAS chiefs of general staff.⁹

The plans seem to be a reaction against the inability of national armies to effectively engage with the jihadist threat, powerless as they are against insurgents operating across borders. The move would also give ECOWAS members a degree of autonomy without having to rely on external factors such as the UN, **France**, and **Russia** for their security. There are, however, several hurdles to overcome before such a force would be operational and eventually effective.

Cote d'Ivoire's army is considered one of the most powerful forces in the **Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA)** (West African economic and monetary union) and the second most powerful military in ECOWAS, behind Nigeria.¹⁰ The 15-member political and economic bloc is yet to provide further details on how the force will be formed, including details of its make-up, however, with the fight against terrorism now a priority in the sub-region, the strength of the Ivorian armed forces will have an important part to play.

Major infrastructure projects commissioned in Abidjan

Côte d'Ivoire has moved one step further towards the construction of two major infrastructure projects in Abidjan - a new metro for the city, as well as an extension for the international airport. While both projects are major projects in terms of infrastructure, they are also economic and political projects, that will cement Côte d'Ivoire's place as the main international hub in West Africa

Ivorian authorities announced on 19 December that they had finalised funding for the **Abidjan Metro** with an agreement signed between the government, the French treasury, and a consortium of French private investors.¹¹ France's economy and finance minister **Bruno Le Maire** was present for the announcement, highlighting the scale and importance of the two new programmes:

*"The metro is one of the largest infrastructure projects on the continent. It is an ambitious project, a social project that will benefit millions of people in Abidjan."*¹²

Ivorian economy and finance minister, **Adama Coulibaly**, said that the financing was now covered and fully complete with the next stage being the effective start of work after the preparatory phases. While construction has stalled for several years, the government hopes the metro will be operational by 2025. The proposed line will bisect Abidjan over 37km, running

⁷ VOA, 7 Dec 2022

⁸ DW,

⁹ Mali Web, 20 Dec 2022

¹⁰ Abijan.net, 15 Jan 2023

¹¹ APA News, 20 Dec 2022

¹² Africa News, 20 Dec 2022

from **Anyama Centre** in the north of the city to the southern suburb of **Port-Bouët** and **Félix-Houphouët-Boigny International Airport**, effectively linking the northern communes of Abidjan to the economic districts and the airport.¹³

The approximate cost for the project will be \$1.47 billion of which the French Treasury provided a loan of more than \$257.5m while also underwriting its private financing after a French consortium was selected to carry out work on the critical infrastructure at the end of 2019. This group is comprised of **Bouygues Travaux Publics** (project manager), **Alstom** (supplier of rolling stock), **Colas Rail** (responsible for the traction power supply and overhead electrification along with tracking, ticketing and passenger information) and **Keolis**.¹⁴ **Abidjan Rail Transport Company (STAR)**, headed by Côte d'Ivoire's transport minister **Amadou Koné**, submitted approval of the tender.¹⁵ The project's completion was initially foreseen for 2020 but was dependent on the government completing the land acquisition and finalising a financing agreement with France. The project was subsequently delayed by the **Covid-19** crisis and other factors.

The project will be a major triumph for Ivorian public investment when complete, providing the city of Abidjan with an ambitious modern public transport system. It should help improve mobility and the fluidity of urban traffic in the city by ensuring the daily movement of more than 50,000 passengers.¹⁶ These developments also consolidate France's position as the leading bilateral donor to Côte d'Ivoire.

The concurrent development of Abidjan's airport is also noteworthy, having been finalised at the same time as the metro. Prime Minister **Patrick Achi** launched the extension and rehabilitation of the airport on 20 December.¹⁷ This includes the urgent construction of two lagoon terminals (described as a type of "*advanced terminal*") with one located in **Cocody** in the east of Abidjan and the second in **Port-Bouët**.

The airport extension comes at a time when Abidjan airport is experiencing continuous growth in traffic with a pressing necessity to accommodate the increase in travellers. With nearly 2.3 million passengers in 2019 (the last year of reference before 2022) the country wants to reach 5 million passengers at the end of this expansion phase.¹⁸ Koné remarked that the "*new program that we are launching today, with an estimated cost of 330 billion CFA francs [\$540m], will increase the capacity of the airport of Abidjan*".¹⁹ With the added infrastructure, the airport will continue to function as one of the most efficient in the West Africa region.

¹³ International Railway Journal, 14 Nov 2022

¹⁴ Africa News, 20 Dec 2022

¹⁵ International Railway Journal, 14 Nov 2022

¹⁶ APA News, 20 Dec 2022

¹⁷ APA News, 20 Dec 2022

¹⁸ APA News, 20 Dec 2022

¹⁹ APA News, 20 Dec 2022

Planner

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

Chronology

15 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *RFI*. **Jean-Louis Billon**, current vice-president of the **Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire- Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (PDCI-RDA)**, announces his intention to run in the presidential elections of 2025, and positions himself against the candidacy of the former president **Henri Konan Bédié**, current head of the PDCI-RDA which is likely to renew tensions within the party;

12 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Africa News*. **Charles Blé Goudé**, leader of **Congrès Panafricain des Jeunes et des Patriotes (COJEP)** expresses interest in the Ivorian presidency and signals his intention to run in the 2025 presidential elections but faces challenges as he is banned from participating in elections due to a 20-year jail sentence linked to the 2010-11 post-election violence;

12 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Jeune Afrique*. The **Emerging Africa Infrastructure Fund (EAIF)**, which belongs to the **Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG)**, announces the completion of financing for the **Singrobo hydroelectric project** which is scheduled to begin operations in 2023 as Côte d'Ivoire looks to boost renewables in its electrical consumption;

11 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. The **Green Cities Initiative**, a project supported by the **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** that aims to put food at the centre of the development of cities, will be implemented in partnership with Abidjan district, through the **Institute of Circular Economy of Abidjan (IECA)**;

10 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Fratmat.info*. Greece's foreign affairs minister **Nikos Dendias** meets with President **Alassane Ouattara** and foreign minister **Kandia Camara** to discuss the strengthening of business relations between the two countries and Côte d'Ivoire's support for Greece's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the **UN Security Council** for the period 2025-2026;

10 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Junior Mining Network*. Canada-headquartered **Sama Resources** announces four additional drill holes from the **Samapleu**-located **Grata nickel-copper prospect** as demand for nickel continues to grow, driven by its use in electric vehicle batteries;

9 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Reuters*. Exporters estimate that cocoa arrivals at ports have reached 1.346 million tonnes since the start of the season, an 11.6% increase from the same period last season;

9 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Africa News Watch*. Local reports suggest cocoa farmers fear a prolonged dry spell and uncertain climatic conditions could adversely impact the April-to-September mid-crop;

8 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Business Recorder*. Cotton exports for the period January to November 2022 reach 390,248 tonnes, up nearly 3.4% from the same period the previous year;

6 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. The 2023 tax schedule raises the rate of excise duties on tobacco products by one point, a measure aimed at increasing tax revenues;

4 Jan 2023 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *ABYZ News*. President **Alassane Ouattara** chairs the first 2023 council of ministers meeting awarding an exploration licence for molybdenum and other

rare earth minerals to state-owned mining entity **Société pour le Développement Minier de la Côte d'Ivoire (SODEMI)**;

1 Jan 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *RFI*. Political parties call for a peaceful year of voting that will see Côte d'Ivoire engage in municipal, regional, and senatorial elections;

30 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Agence Ecofin*. **Orange Côte d'Ivoire**, a subsidiary of French telecoms giant **Orange**, is listed on the regional **West African** stock market, **Bourse Régionale des Valeurs Mobilières SA (BRVM)**, after a successful initial public offering earlier in December;

29 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *RFI*. The **Hévéa Palmier à Huile Council** suspends palm oil exports from Côte d'Ivoire to better regulate its internal market and avoid shortages;

28 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *France24*. Judge **Charles Bini** sentences 11 people to life in prison for the 2016 terror attack in the **Grand-Bassam** resort area;

27 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Reuters*. Exporters' association **GEPEX** notes that Côte d'Ivoire's cocoa grind was up 6.9% year on year in November to 113,803 tonnes;

26 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Construction Review*. Côte d'Ivoire commissions its first solar plant in the northern town of **Boundiali** with a capacity of 37.5 MWp, which will be sold directly to the country's state-owned **Société des Energies de Côte d'Ivoire (CIE)** for integration into the national electricity grid;

24 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. Road hauliers plead with the government to open land borders, which have remained closed since March 2020 due to the **Covid-19** pandemic, estimating that 20,000 people have lost their jobs because of the cessation of road hauling activities;

16 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Sika Finance*. **United States**-headquartered **Meta** announces **Côte d'Ivoire** will host the Meta-led '2 Africa' cable project that will provide faster and more affordable internet access to **African** countries;

16 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *RFI*. **Pascal Affi N'Guessan**, the leader of the **Front populaire ivoirien (FPI)**, receives former first lady **Simone Gbagbo** as each prepares possible alliances for the regional and municipal elections of 2023;

14 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Offshore Energy*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered oil and gas company **Tullow Oil** adds an additional license in Côte d'Ivoire to its asset portfolio, following the inking of a new production sharing contract for this offshore exploration license;

05 Dec 2022 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Military Africa*. **Nigeria**-based security company **SecPro Africa** establishes its presence in Côte d'Ivoire to handle business in francophone **West Africa**;

About Africa Risk Consulting:

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ARC's core consulting services include integrity due diligence and corporate investigations, political advisory and country assessments, opportunity monitoring and reputation risk management. Most relevant to private equity firms is ARC's integrity due diligence and corporate investigations capability. Specifically, ARC offers pre-deal

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