

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Monthly briefing – Madagascar

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1 Summary

Security forces detain former president Marc Ravalomanana (2002 -2009) after he discreetly returns from exile in South Africa. Political tensions are high but will not lead to any significant destabilisation. Office des Mines Nationales et des Industries Stratégiques (OMNIS) awards Norway-based Spectrum the brokerage rights to vintage seismic data. The locust invasion is under control as a result of local and international efforts, but risk of a resurgence remains as Madagascar enters the rainy season.

1.1 Former president Marc Ravalomanana returns from exile

Former president **Marc Ravalomanana** (2002-2009) returned to Madagascar from exile on 13 October. Ravalomanana's return is a significant political event but will not destabilise Madagascar as all stakeholders in Madagascar's transition publicly and privately agree that reconciliation – not more political conflict – is the only way forward for Madagascar's transition to democracy.

Ravalomanana fled into exile, initially to **Swaziland** and later to **South Africa**, in February 2009 when troops loyal to former president **Andy Nirina Rajoelina** (2009 – 2013) ousted him in a military coup. Rajoelina and Ravalomanana were bitter political enemies. Rajoelina's **Haute Autorité de Transition (HAT)** (high transitional authority) government consistently “*did everything*”¹ to prevent Ravalomanana's return from exile despite a **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** peace roadmap that called for the unconditional return of political exiles.² Rajoelina feared Ravalomanana's strong popular 50-60% political support base in the capital, **Antananarivo**.³

Ravalomanana's highest profile failed attempt to return to Madagascar occurred in January 2012 when he boarded a commercial **SA Airlink** flight from **Johannesburg** to Antananarivo. When

¹ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

² Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

³ Multiple sources: Source, businessperson, Antananarivo; Source, locally engaged western embassy official, Antananarivo.

Rajoelina's HAT closed Antananarivo's **Ivato International Airport** to prevent the flight from landing, it was forced to return to Johannesburg.⁴ Ravalomanana's advisers and supporters

*"... put a lot of work to get the return of exile provision put into the SADC-backed roadmap ... but there was a lot of pressure from the **African Union (AU)** and the SADC on Ravalomanana to not return before the December 2013 elections ... they were afraid it would destabilise the transition... and Rajoelina was afraid of Ravalomanana's political power..."⁵*

After much persuasion from his advisers, Ravalomanana "*reluctantly agreed*"⁶ not to attempt to return to Madagascar again until after the December 2013 presidential election. After the **Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante de la Transition (CÉNIT)** (independent national electoral commission) had declared president **Hery Rajaonarimampianina** (2013-present) winner, Ravalomanana initially contested the results. He later accepted the outcome and his political movement, **La Mouance Ravalomanana**, agreed to support Rajaonarimampianina, but not under a government of national unity.⁷ As part of an agreement struck between the two, Rajaonarimampianina said he was willing to talk to Ravalomanana about his return from exile after a he formed a new government.⁸ Rajaonarimampianina formed a new government in February, but Rajaonarimampianina did not respond to requests to start discussions with Ravalomanana.

"Finally in May 2013, Ravalomanana's advisers were able to persuade Rajaonarimampianina to start to discuss at least holding meetings towards negotiations for Ravalomanana's 'managed return'... but nothing happened and the government did not act..."⁹

The government also blocked Ravalomanana's attempts to renew his expired **Malagasy** passport.¹⁰ Hence,

"...without telling his senior advisers he unilaterally decided to return to Madagascar. He used a series of small aircraft departing and landing in small airports so he could get into Madagascar without proper travel documents. He landed in an airport 700 km north of Antananarivo."¹¹

Ravalomanana eventually made it to his family home in Antananarivo. Police raided the residence and detained him without a warrant¹² and he is now "*being held in prison conditions*"¹³ at **Bana** military

⁴ Source, political analyst, Antananarivo

⁵ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

⁶ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

⁷ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

⁸ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

⁹ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

¹⁰ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

¹¹ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

¹² Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

base in **Antsiranana**, at the northern tip of Madagascar. Prior to his arrest, Ravalomanana told his supporters *"I am here to support peace and democracy"*.¹⁴ Ravalomanana's detention has raised political tensions in Madagascar. His wife **Lalao Ravalomanana**

*"... flew off to see her husband after he was detained. When she headed back, the government issued a 'notice to airmen' (Notam) that prevented her from boarding a plane back to Antananarivo ... she had to drive, it took 17 hours ... when she got back, she rather unfortunately, called on Ravalomanana supporters to rise up. However, with internal pressure from Mouvement Ravalomanana and external pressure from the international community, she retracted her statement and called on the reconciliation process to go forward."*¹⁵

Security forces have used tear gas to disperse hundreds of pro-Ravalomanana supporters after his arrival and subsequent detention.¹⁶ Although there is now a level of tension in Madagascar, *"...there is unlikely to be major destabilisation as a result of Ravalomanana's return"*.¹⁷ Yet the government is clearly afraid that Ravalomanana will use his strong support based in Antananarivo (see above) to launch a political comeback.

*"Local and mayoral elections [are] coming up ... the government likely fears that Ravalomanana will influence the outcome of the mayoral elections in Antananarivo, the most important local government post with lots of political influence; that is why the government is trying to break up Antananarivo municipality into five separate municipalities [see ARC Madagascar August 2014 Briefing], so there is not one over-arching political force governing at the local level in Antananarivo."*¹⁸

However, the government has made several statements in support of the reconciliation process. Presidency chief of staff **Henry Rabary-Njaka**, said

*"We are not a country that exiles or deports its own citizens. That's not at all our mentality. He's here and we hope that Ravalomanana will actually participate in this (reconciliation) process."*¹⁹

Moreover, the government is unlikely to arrest Ravalomanana over his conviction (in absentia) to five years' hard labour for abuse of office and complicity in murder, handed down under the Rajoelina regime.²⁰

¹³ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

¹⁴ www.bbc.co.uk

¹⁵ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

¹⁶ AFP, 17 Oct 2014.

¹⁷ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

¹⁸ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

¹⁹ AFP, 18 Oct 2014.

²⁰ File No. 236/09-CR 102/10-anta; File No. 284/09-CR 178/10-Anta – www.tananews.com, 20 Sept 2011.

“... it would send a wrong message and will not get wide support from locals or the international community. Plus the Rajaonarimampianina government has been trying to distance itself from the previous Rajoelina regime. He has moved away from Rajoelina politically ... Rajoelina is now in opposition; there is bad blood between Rajaonarimampianina and Rajoelina; they are now seen as enemies.”²¹

The SADC, the AU, the **United Nations (UN)** and the **United States (US)** have made public statements in support of the democratically elected Rajaonarimampianina government, but have urged him to use the arrival of Ravalomanana to engage in reconciliation.²²

1.2 OMNIS awards seismic survey brokerage rights

The **Office des Mines Nationales et des Industries Stratégiques (OMNIS)** (office of national mines and strategic minerals) signed an agreement with **Norway**-based and **Oslo Stock Exchange (OSE)**-listed **Spectrum ASA**²³ for exclusive brokerage rights for most onshore and offshore vintage seismic data currently on file in Madagascar. The seismic datasets total over 69,000 km.

The agreement with OMNIS also grants Spectrum the right to reprocess any of the seismic datasets and to license these to interested oil and gas companies on a multi-client basis. The data will complement Spectrum’s existing seismic library for the **Morondova** and **Majunga** basins in Madagascar.²⁴ Madagascar is still considered a hydrocarbon frontier despite comparisons with **Kenya** and **Mozambique**. The west of the country has long been said to be rich in heavy oil.

OMNIS falls under control of the presidency. The presidency minister in charge of strategic resources, **Joeli Valerian Lalaharisaina** (see *ARC Madagascar April 2014 Briefing*), was formerly head of OMNIS under Rajoelina. The current OMNIS director general is **Bonaventure Rasoanivo**. In September 2011, Rajoelina replaced Lalaharisaina, a respected technocrat with a good track record, with Rasoanivo as part of his strategy to put OMNIS under his direct control. Rasoanivo’s wife was close to Rajoelina’s wife at the time.²⁵

²¹ Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

²² Source, senior Ravalomanana adviser, South Africa

²³ www.spectrumasa.com

²⁴ www.spectrumasa.com

²⁵ Africa Intelligence, 9 Sept 2014.

After Lalaharisaina was replaced, many OMNIS technicians started to leave. They believed OMNIS was on a “downward trajectory” due to increased politicisation under Rajoelina.²⁶ Rasoanivo has kept his position as head of OMNIS, but Rajaonarimampianina is expected to replace him with another – senior internal – OMNIS official.

1.3 Locust plague halted

The locust plague that threatened Antananarivo and Madagascar’s main staple food crops this year is now successfully contained (see *ARC Madagascar September 2014 Briefing*). The overall damage to staple food crops, such as rice and maize, was reduced due to a joint UN **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** and Malagasy government locust-control campaign.²⁷ Preliminary results of an FAO and **World Food Programme (WFP)** assessment mission conducted between mid-June and mid-July in collaboration with the agriculture ministry indicates that the first anti-locust campaign prevented larger damage to crops and pastures and protected the large rice producing regions in Madagascar’s centre and north. However, with the onset of the rainy season from October onwards, the locust situation will deteriorate, as seasonal temperatures and humidity are ideal breeding conditions for locusts. The Malagasy government has asked for urgent support to maintain the locust-control campaign during the rainy season to control and prevent the outbreak of another locust plague.²⁸

2 Implications

Ravalomanana remains in detention and the situation is fast-moving. His return has increased political tension, but it is clear that all sides of the political equation favour dialogue and reconciliation and an end to further political conflict. His presence is unlikely to create significant political destabilisation. In the short term, sporadic pro-Ravalomanana protests may disrupt business activity in central Antananarivo, his main centre of political support.

The longer term political impact of his return from exile will depend on whatever deal he strikes with the Rajaonarimampianina government. The chances of an accommodation are – in theory – good. Ravalomanana’s years in exile have weakened his influence and reach, both inside state institutions and outside Antananarivo. He is less of a threat than he was. At the same time, Rajaonarimampianina is seeking both to establish his own independent credentials and to distance himself from Rajoelina.

²⁶ Source, former senior OMNIS official, Antananarivo

²⁷ MENA Network, 3 Oct 2014.

²⁸ MENA Network, 3 Oct 2014.

One easy way to do both is to reach some kind of accommodation with Ravalomanana (Rajeolina's personal hatred for Ravalomanana is unabated). But he will be very cautious about ensuring that Ravalomanana does not again become a political force.

The sale of seismic brokerage rights is a sign that foreign investors are increasingly interested in Madagascar as a frontier oil and gas player. Following the generally successful elections in 2013, ending years of uncertainty, confidence has slowly started to return to Madagascar's extractives sector. However, it is unclear when Rajaonarimampianina will replace Rasoanivo as OMNIS head: he is moving deliberately, but slowly, against Rajeolina's appointees. If Rajaonarimampianina were to choose a respected technocrat to replace Rasoanivo, it would further rebuild confidence in Madagascar's strategic minerals sector, particularly oil and gas.

Despite the success in containing the recent locust invasion, the Malagasy government and the international community seem likely to maintain their control campaign and prevent another plague during – and after – the current rainy season. This would add a further boost to the economy if key staple crops were able to emerge unscathed.