

Crisis and Military Rebellion in Ivory Coast

Ouattara Regime Dismisses Security Chiefs in Aftermath of Mutiny

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Global Research, January 11, 2017

Former IMF functionary Alassane Ouattara exposed in military rebellion over treatment of soldiers

Thousands of troops in the military forces of the Ivory Coast defied orders and rebelled against the national government of President Alassane Ouattara. The troops were reportedly angry over the deplorable conditions they are living under inside the country.

Since the eruption of violence, the security establishment leaders have been terminated from their positions by the government. General Soumaila Bakayoko, the army leader; Gervais Kouakou Kouassi, the superior commander of the National Gendarmerie; and Bredou M'Bia, director-general of the National Police, were relieved of their duties by the president's office.

Military leader General Soumaila Bakayoko – the previous head of a 2002-2011 rebel army, who obviously had fallen out of favor with his troops, was replaced by his deputy, General Sekou Toure. Gervais Kouakou Kouassi, superior commander of the National Gendarmerie, and Director General of the National Police Bredou M'Bia were also replaced by their seconds in command.

These decisions came soon after the resignation of Daniel Kablan Duncan, the prime minister, which prompted the dissolution of the government. These measures had been anticipated as a result of the elections held in late 2016 where Ouattara was declared the winner.

Nonetheless, Duncan was re-appointed as Vice-President on January 10. It is believed that this move was made to ensure his positioning as a successor to Ouattara after 2020 when he is slated to end his term of office.

Duncan is a close ally of Ouattara who said: "This is a person of experience, a great servant of the state, who has demonstrated his exceptional personal and professional qualities in all the high functions he has occupied."

From the political capital of Abidjan to Bouake and other cities, army personnel took over barracks, blocked roads and held governmental officials hostage in lieu of a commitment to address their concerns.

Reports of unrest within the military began in Bouake on the morning of Friday January 6 when soldiers began to fire rocket-launchers. The unrest quickly spread to the cities of Man, Daloa, Daoukro, Odienne and Korhogo. By the following day soldiers had taken control of the military headquarters in Abidjan.

Later in the evening of January 7, President Ouattara took to the airwaves of national television announcing that a deal had been reached. He said to the public: "I confirm that I have agreed to take into account the demands of the soldiers over bonuses and better working conditions."

Ouattara was out of the country when the rebellion erupted attending an inauguration ceremony in neighboring Ghana for the installation of the newly-elected President Nana Akufo-Addo. This was the second time in three years that the army has protested violently over the failure of the government to pay adequate salaries and provide quality housing for themselves and their families.

Nonetheless, by January 10 there was still conflicting reports over whether the situation had been adequately resolved to the satisfaction of the discontented soldiers. The promised bonuses remained unpaid and hostility towards the government was still considerably high.

Background to the Crisis

Many of the mutinous troops were the former rebels that were utilized in the French-backed Operation Unicorn that toppled the previous President Laurent Gbagbo under the guise of a United Nations peace mission on April 11, 2011. Gbagbo defied the dictates of France and the United States saying that the disagreements over the elections should be resolved internally within Ivory Coast.

The bonuses in question were promised to rebel soldiers in 2011 as an incentive for their participation in the coup against the Gbagbo government. French paratroopers stormed the Gbagbo's residence arresting him, members of his government and family. He was later transported against his will to the Netherlands where he is under the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In addition, the former First Lady Simone Gbagbo, a political figure in her own right, is currently imprisoned inside Ivory Coast. Mrs. Gbagbo was prosecuted in a highly politicized trial in 2015 for a number of alleged offenses including distributing arms to those who engaged in violent actions against opponents of President Gbagbo. She was given a twenty year sentence.

Later in August 2016 she faced a second trial over charges of human rights violations. Her attorneys argued that there was no concrete evidence to implicate her in the purported crimes that were committed.

During the proceedings in October 2016, her defense lawyer Rodrigue Dadjé emphasized that: "The prosecutor has witnesses that are not credible. They're able to testify what they have seen but cannot prove any links towards Mrs. Gbagbo. Otherwise we will have a whole day of witnesses telling stories, but you will clearly see that there is no link with Mrs. Gbagbo."

A spokesman for the mutinous soldiers claimed that they had been promised over \$19,000 (U.S.) in 2011. The funds were supposed to have been paid on January 9 as part of the settlement to end the mutiny which was negotiated between the soldiers and Defense Minister Alain-Richard Donwahi.

The payment of the funds would cost the Ivorian government the equivalence of hundreds

of millions of U.S. dollars. Defense Minister Donwahi has subsequently denied promising to pay this amount in funds and claims instead that there would be what he described as “mission bonuses” handed over to the soldiers.

Donwahi told the international press that it was the negotiators for the disgruntled troops that requested a delay in the bonus payments, a claim that the soldiers emphatically deny. “There’s a timetable that was made with their leaders. Their leaders know what we are doing,” Donwahi told Reuters. “We were ready. They themselves told us to wait.” (Jan. 10)

Imperialism and the Role of the ICC

The situation in Ivory Coast is a clear indication of the links between the imperialist states which have intervened in African affairs and the ICC. Deposed President Gbagbo was a leading figure in the political and trade union opposition to the neo-colonial regime in Ivory Coast for many years having been imprisoned and forced into exile under the regime of the first French-allied President Felix Houphouët-Boigny.

President Gbagbo came to power in 2000 after he was declared the winner in an election. The military junta leader Robert Guei then controlling Ivory Coast was toppled by a mass uprising. The Ivorian Popular Front took control of the government and maintained authority until the disputed election in 2010.

Gbagbo accused the opposition led by Ouattara of engaging in massive fraud in nine provinces in 2010. However, the former colonial power of France and their allies within the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) declared Ouattara as the winner.

Later the Ivorian Constitutional Council examined the results and decided that Gbagbo was the victor. The president refused to step down under enormous pressure from ECOWAS and France. His forced removal by French paratroopers coincided with the imperialist war efforts against the governments of Col. Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and President Bashar al-Assad of Syria.

Since 2011, three African states have withdrawn from the ICC. These governments are Gambia, Burundi and the South Africa. The African Union (AU) during its 50th anniversary commemoration of the founding of its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), held extensive discussions on the problems associated with the ICC and its approach to continental affairs.

The ICC has been pre-occupied with investigations and prosecutions of African heads-of-state and non-governmental actors. President Gbagbo was the first sitting leader to be arrested and transported to the Netherlands to stand trial at the ICC.

At present the incumbent President of Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, is under pressure from ECOWAS to relinquish power in the aftermath of an election in which he subsequently declared was marked by irregularities. If the electoral dispute in Gambia is not resolved through negotiations there is the possibility of yet another military intervention in West Africa.

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