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# Mutiny in Côte d'Ivoire

Rebecca Schiel, Christopher Faulkner, and Jonathan Powell

**Abstract:** Since 1990, Côte d'Ivoire has experienced over a dozen army mutinies, with three major events occurring in the first half of 2017. This paper explores the underlying causes of these events, considering both this year's mutinies and the state's prior experiences with military insubordination. A review of the events of Côte d'Ivoire's tumultuous 2017 indicates a number of parallels with some of its earlier mutinies, though these more recent events are perhaps unique due to the presence of a larger range of dynamics and the scale of the mutineers' demands. Beyond requests for better pay, which are nearly ubiquitous, these events also illustrate the general hazards of post-conflict civil–military relations, including challenges related to demobilisation, integration of rebel forces, the consequences of soldiers having contributed to a leader's ascendance, and the perils of soldier loyalties lying with personalities instead of the state.

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On 6 January 2017, Ivorian soldiers in Bouaké launched a mutiny that quickly spread to as many as nine cities, including the commercial capital Abidjan, and resulted in the brief kidnapping of the defence minister.<sup>1</sup> The majority of mutineers were former rebels, integrated into the army after the Second Ivorian Civil War, in which they helped drive Laurent Gbagbo from power. The demands of the soldiers were varied, though financial considerations would become the primary emphasis. The government's quick concessions alleviated concerns that the mutiny might escalate into more large-scale violence in the short term. However, by February other soldiers had followed this precedent in an effort to secure similar payouts. This effort stalled, but the original mutineers launched another revolt in May following the government's attempt to backtrack on the terms of the January agreement.

The mutinies of 2017 have led many to question the stability of Ouattara's regime. Several characteristics of the recent events offer some areas for concern. First, the mutinies highlight common problems that accompany the integration of armed forces in post-conflict environments, problems that could make conflict recurrence more likely (Krebs and Licklider 2015). Second, mutinies occasionally escalate into coups d'état, as seen previously in Côte d'Ivoire (1999) and more recently in neighbouring Mali (2012) (Whitehouse 2012). Finally, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) was scheduled to end on 30 June 2017, suggesting a potentially stabilising influence would soon depart.

In this paper, we contextualise the 2017 mutinies by briefly reviewing Côte d'Ivoire's civil–military history. We begin with a general overview of mutinies prior to 2017. We then explore the events of 2017, giving an overview of the actions and demands of the mutineers, and we review the regime's response, while assessing commonalities with and departures from prior acts of military insubordination.

## Prior Mutinies in Côte d'Ivoire

As is the case elsewhere, mutinies in Côte d'Ivoire have consistently been dominated by grievances related to compensation.<sup>2</sup> The country's expe-

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1 For this paper, we follow the lead of Rose (1982: 561) and Dwyer (2015: 7) in defining mutiny as “an act of collective insubordination, in which troops revolt against lawfully constituted authority.”

2 The description of events in this section is based on the following news reports: *Agence France Presse*, “One Killed in Ivory Coast as Soldiers Mutiny,” 29 March 2000; *Associated Press*, “Ivory Coast Rebels Start to Disarm,” 4 May 2008; *Associated Press*, “Military Strikes a Deal with Mutinous Soldiers in Ivory

rience with mutiny began on 14 May 1990, when a group of conscripts attempted to take over the national radio station in Abidjan. The effort was quickly quelled, but a second mutiny two days later proved more serious: 900 soldiers took control of the international airport in Abidjan. March of 1993 saw more than 40 members of the Republican Guard occupy the presidential palace and take three officers hostage. Demands included the ubiquitous request for better pay, improved living conditions, and other general benefits, and the mutinies ended after direct – and favourable – involvement from President Houphouët-Boigny (Cornwell 2000; Daddieh 2001; Fauré 1993).

The consequences of mutinies would grow more serious over time. On 23 December 1999, soldiers took to the streets of Abidjan and seized control of key communication installations (Toungara 2001). Grievances again centred on salaries, including from disgruntled peacekeepers recently returned from the Central African Republic. President Henri Konan Bédié also faced widespread popular dissatisfaction, largely owing to his Ivoirité policy and the associated disenfranchisement of many Ivoirians. Set against this backdrop of ethnic politics and increasing violence, Robert Guéï was able to seize the moment, and power, on 24 December 1999.

Initial reactions within the army were positive, but the mutiny-turned-coup of 1999 was merely a precursor to worsening events. March 2000 witnessed a small mutiny at Daloa barracks. July 2000 saw a more widespread mutiny begin in Abidjan and spread to Bouaké. Soldiers seized the radio station and demanded wage arrears, in addition to payment both for peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for their participation bringing Guéï to power. On 6 July, the soldiers agreed to return to their barracks upon receiving payouts of the equivalent of USD 1,600 – a small percentage of their initial USD 9,000 request.

Guéï's rule proved to be short-lived. Despite surviving a coup attempt in September 2000, he fled the country the following month in the face of sustained and growing popular protests against his interference in

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Coast," 5 July 2000; *BBC Monitoring Africa*, "Côte d'Ivoire Funds Released to Pay Demobilized Soldiers in Bouaké," 21 June 2008; *BBC Monitoring Africa*, "Côte d'Ivoire: Soro Advised to Deal with New Forces Protesting Unkept Promises," 21 August 2008; *L'Intelligent*, "Quand Ouattara défendait la cause des mutins," 22 May 2017; *Reuters*, "Ivory Coast Army Protests Sow Fears of Return to Unrest," 30 November 2014; *UN Integrated Regional Information Networks*, "Côte d'Ivoire: Ex-Rebel Uprising Threatens Disarmament Process," 19 June 2008; *UN Integrated Regional Information Networks*, "Ivory Coast: Shooting Breaks Out in Commercial Capital," 23 December 1999.

the presidential election that he had clearly lost (Akindès 2004). Laurent Gbagbo was installed and refused to submit to new elections based on more inclusive guidelines, including allowing Alassane Ouattara to be a candidate (Bah 2010). Another transition did not solve the army's problems, as President Gbagbo soon faced a series of coup attempts and plots by Guéï loyalists, sympathisers of his rival Ouattara (Daddieh 2001). On 19 September 2002 soldiers began protesting their demobilisation, which they assumed to be ethnically motivated. The movement quickly escalated into rebellion, and the abortive coup would serve as the opening salvo in the First Ivorian Civil War (El-Khawas and Anyu 2014).

Problems related to integration of forces, payment of soldiers, and demobilisation allowances plagued the army following the war. The Ouagadougou peace agreement stipulated a 2 May 2008 deadline to begin disarmament of the Forces Nouvelles (FN). The process entailed 26,000 soldiers being expected to reintegrate into civilian life, while another 17,000 were to be integrated into the national army. The disarmament process was, as many disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes are, riddled with difficulties. On both 16 and 18 June 2008, ex-rebels rampaged through Bouaké, demanding the demobilisation payments (USD 210 per month for three months) that they had been promised by the new government. By 21 June, *Le Patriote* reported that disbursement of three months' worth of salaries for thousands of former rebels had begun, and the soldiers returned to their cantonments. Another mutiny was reported by *L'Inter* on 18 August, in which ex-rebel forces blocked roads in Bouaké and briefly seized the FN command centre. The protest was brief, with soldiers quickly involved in talks with their commanding officers regarding better payouts for service. Daloa, Daoukro, and Yamoussoukro saw similar efforts the next month. Soldiers returned to their barracks only when Guillaume Soro, then prime minister, assured them that payments were en route.

The issues plaguing the military were far from solved. Little progress had been made with the demobilisation of the FN, and the importance of retaining loyal soldiers was soon demonstrated. President Gbagbo's infamous effort to annul his 2010 electoral loss launched the Second Ivorian Civil War, during which veterans and new recruits to the FN would prove instrumental in driving Gbagbo from power. Problems with demobilisation would persist. The failure to integrate the security sector in Côte d'Ivoire and Ouattara's reliance on former FN members to seize power would prove costly.

On 18 November 2014 Côte d'Ivoire experienced its first major mutiny following the Second Ivorian Civil War. Again undertaken by former

FN personnel, the effort quickly spread. Demands were varied, including arrears from 2009 to 2011, faster promotions, improved subsistence allowances, housing, and retroactive payments that would provide Ouattara loyalists with the same pay as international elements of the intervention by the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Notable was an attitude that the soldiers' role in pushing Gbagbo from power had incurred a debt owed by Ouattara. These feelings among soldiers appear to be a recurring theme. Similar complaints were raised by mutineers against Guéï, as well as by Ouattara's critics in 2017, who questioned the use of taxpayer money to buy off "bandits" (N'zi 2017). By 19 November 2014, soldiers had returned to their barracks with government promises to disburse pay in two installments, the first in late November and the second in December of 2014. Ouattara's overtures included efforts to signal a long loyalty to the military, even pointing to the role he had played in providing improved benefits to the armed forces as far back as the 1990 mutiny. The government swiftly negotiated a resolution, but the peace – again – would not last.

## Rewarding Insubordination?

The 2017 mutinies began with heavy gunfire in Bouaké in the early morning hours of 6 January 2017.<sup>3</sup> Soldiers broke into an armory, seized

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3 The description of events in this section is based on the following news reports: *Afrique sur*, "Déclaration du Pr Stéphane Kipré relative à la situation militaire et sociale en Côte d'Ivoire," 20 January 2017; *Agence France Presse*, "Côte d'Ivoire: Des militaires mutins contrôlent Bouaké malgré l'appel au calme du Gouvernement," 6 January 2017; *Al Jazeera*, "Behind Ivory Coast's Army Mutiny," 8 January 2017; *Al Jazeera*, "Ivory Coast Soldiers Stage Fresh Revolt over Pay," 12 May 2017; *Associated Press International*, "Ivory Coast Seeks End to Unrest as Gunfire Cuts off Port," 18 January 2017; *BBC Monitoring Africa*, "Calm Returns to Ivorian Town of Adiaké after Soldiers Mutiny," 8 February 2017; *BBC Monitoring Africa*, "Ivorian Cabinet Condemns Army Mutiny in Southeast Town of Adiaké," 10 February 2017; *Cameroon Voice*, "Mutinerie en Côte d'Ivoire: Ceux qui ont renoncé aux primes n'ont pas parlé au nom des mutins," 15 May 2017; *Ivorian.net*, "Côte d'Ivoire: La république abonnée à la mutinerie," 11 January 2017; *Koaci*, "Mutinerie: Gendarmes et policiers délogés, Daoukro dans la danse," 6 January 2017; *Koaci*, "Mutinerie à Yamoussoukro, deux militaires abattus devant la," 17 January 2017; *Koaci*, "Côte d'Ivoire: Mutinerie, de nouveaux tirs entendus à Adiaké nouvelle panique dans la ville," 8 February 2017; *L'Intelligent*, "Ce n'est pas Soro qui tire les 1celles oudécryptage d'une mutinerie," 17 May 2017; *Radio France Internationale*, "Côte d'Ivoire: Les mutins demandent un geste au gouvernement," 8 February 2017; *Reuters*, "Demobilized Rebels Block Road to Ivory Coast's Second City," 8 May 2017.

local police stations, and shut down roads into the city. The soldiers, the majority of them veterans of the 2014 mutiny, demanded bonuses, promotions, increased wages, and improved living conditions. Within hours, soldiers in Daloa and Korhogo had also taken to the streets, and within a day soldiers were mutinying in as many as nine cities, including Abidjan. The two-day mutiny ended on 8 January as the mutineers and government reached an agreement that would see 8,500 soldiers each paid around XOF 12 million (approximately USD 19,000) in two separate installments, the first of which was slated to be disbursed on 9 January. Within weeks, the government began disbursing payments of XOF 5 million (approximately USD 8,000), with the remaining XOF 7 million to be distributed by the end of May.

The government was able to avoid the mutiny escalating to wider hostilities, but the “solution” was costly, amounting to between USD 150 and 160 million. The announced payout, however, did not bring stability. First, former soldiers protested their exclusion from the deal struck in Yamoussoukro on 17 January; at least two were killed in the dispute. Second, a larger mutiny commenced on 7 February. Emboldened by the January mutineers, angered by pay discrepancies, and frustrated by their exclusion from the negotiated agreement, members of the Forces Spéciales revolted in Adiaké. Radiodiffusion-Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI) reported these soldiers were paid a mere USD 80 of their USD 400 monthly salary. The soldiers vied for a similar deal to the January settlement but were quickly rebuffed. Information Minister Bruno Nabagne Koné, for example, remarked,

The government deplors and condemns the events in Adiaké and all forms of violent demands because of the collateral risks that they make the civilian populations run and their negative effects on the economic activities. (*BBC Monitoring Africa* 2017a)

On 8 February, the government announced that it would open talks but maintained a strict tone of disapproval. Five days later, Chief of Defence Staff General Touré Sékou announced that the special forces “acknowledged that they displayed an attitude which was against the rules of their profession [...and] expressed regret and apologized to the nation,” and requested to be pardoned for their error amidst the government’s promise to “take care of them” (*BBC Monitoring Africa* 2017a, 2017b).

On 8 May, several hundred demobilised rebels blocked roads and demanded that they be paid bonuses promised upon demobilisation, in addition to demanding jobs in the army and other state institutions. The mutineers’ spokesman claimed that these protestors were representative of nearly 7,000 demobilised soldiers across the country; the protestors re-

turned to their barracks within a few hours of receiving promises from local government officials that Ouattara would meet with their leaders. Only a few days later, on 12 May, shots rang out from military outposts in Abidjan, Bondoukou, Bouaké, and Korhogo as active-duty soldiers launched the third mutiny in five months. Mutineer spokesman Sergeant Fofana had issued an apology to the president on national television the day prior, absolving the government of its promise to disburse the second round of payments of the January agreement, saying, "Given such sacrifices granted to us during this difficult time, we, soldiers [...] definitively renounce all financial demands" (Bavier 2017). The announcement angered many of the mutineers, who responded by blocking roads in Bouaké, firing guns into the air, and demanding the government follow through on the agreement. By 15 May, Defence Minister Alain-Richard Donwahi announced an agreement, and the following day clarified that the remaining balance of XOF 7 million would be allocated. XOF 5 million was to be distributed immediately to the 8,400 soldiers, with the remaining 2 million to be paid at the end of June.

## Comparative Perspective

Comparing recent mutinies with historical examples offers insight into the recurring nature of these events. By examining the themes present in both recent and historical cases, including pay grievances and expectations of loyalty, we are able to see these events in a larger perspective.<sup>4</sup>

First, beyond the financial matters that will be assessed below, both the January and May mutinies of 2017 were related to perceived slights of loyalty. Though their demands centred on payment arrears and bonuses dating as far back as the 2007 Ouagadougou Agreement, the muti-

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4 The description of events in this section is based on the following news reports: *Agence France Presse*, "Côte d'Ivoire: Des militaires mutins contrôlent Bouaké malgré l'appel au calme du Gouvernement," 6 January 2017; *Associated Press*, "Military Strikes a Deal with Mutinous Soldiers in Ivory Coast," 5 July 2000; *Connection Ivoirienne*, "Accord Ouattara / Mutins / Le parti de Blé Goudé réagit," 16 January 2017; *Connection Ivoirienne*, "La Fidhop accuse le chef de l'état et exige de l'égalité dans les solutions," 9 January 2017; *The Guardian*, "Shots Fired at Ivory Coast Army HQ after Mutineers' Apology," 12 May 2017; *ICCO*, "Daily Prices of Cocoa Beans, International Cocoa Organization," 8 June 2017; *Jeune Afrique*, "Côte d'Ivoire: L'affaire de trop pour Guillaume Soro?," 12 June 2017; *Jeune Afrique*, "Côte d'Ivoire: Les mutins présentent leurs excuses, des tirs entendus à Bouaké," 8 June 2017; *Koaci*, "Côte d'Ivoire: Après la mutinerie, les soldats passent à la caisse Bouaké et retirent 5 millions de Fcfa," 17 May 2017; *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan*, "Quand Ouattara défendait la cause des mutins," 22 May 2017.



neers also felt they deserved to be rewarded for the central role they played in driving Gbagbo from power. Commentators noted the “certainty” of a government payout given that President Ouattara owed his accession to power to the current mutineers. In May 2017, these same soldiers again revolted when the government failed to adhere to the initial deal. This follows a common assumption that the military’s involvement in settling political disputes inherently increases their willingness to engage in future political meddling (e.g. Hounnikpo 2016). The theme of abused loyalty is apparent in at least two prior cases: In July 2000, mutineers demanded bonuses for their participation in the coup that brought General Guéï to power. These soldiers were compensated for their assistance and returned to their barracks. And in November 2014, soldiers who brought Ouattara to power demanded wage and bonus arrears. Following the same trend, the soldiers reached an agreement with the government wherein they would be paid over the following six months. They promptly returned to their barracks.

Second, financial considerations were central to the mutinies of 2017. Indeed, pay-related grievances are ubiquitous in the country’s mutinies. Soldiers in 1990 and 1993 demanded extended employment contracts, increased wages, and better living and working conditions. The 1999 mutiny initially began with demands for peacekeeping bonuses, increased wages, and better living conditions. In 2002, troops protesting their demobilisation – and subsequent unemployment – revolted, plunging the country into civil war (El-Khawas and Anyu 2014). Later mutinies in 2008 were largely related to demobilisation payments, while 2014 witnessed a mutiny by integrated soldiers demanding back pay. Though other grievances have been aired, pay has remained a recurring and pronounced theme, especially apparent in 2017. January’s mutiny saw a range of demands, including pay increases, bonuses, promotions, and better living conditions. February witnessed the Forces Spéciales become both disgruntled and emboldened by the government’s response to January’s mutineers, prompting similar financial demands. In May, January’s mutineers returned to the streets when subsequent payments promised in January went unfulfilled, despite ongoing efforts to improve housing and modernise the army.

Third, it is imperative to understand the context in which the government is navigating these demands. After reporting significant economic growth in prior years, the economy experienced a shock when cocoa prices plummeted from over USD 3,100 per metric ton in June 2016 to USD 2,250 by the start of the January mutiny. The drop continued following the original deal, hitting USD 2,000 on 7 June. This was not lost on Ouattara,

who pointed to a revenue loss of “nearly one billion euros.” Regarding payouts to the mutineers, he remarked that “Côte d’Ivoire can no longer bear the payment,” while Defence Minister Donwahi simply noted the coffers “are empty” (Kouassi 2017; Sylvestre-Treiner and Duhem 2017). Further putting the payouts in perspective is their individual scale, as soldiers are demanding a USD 19,000 payment in a country with a per capita GDP of USD 1,400. By comparison, the mutineers in 2000 received a reported USD 1,600 against the previous year’s GDP per capita of approximately USD 770 (World Bank 2017).

Regardless of the fiscal realities of the state and the scale of the payout relative to the earnings of other Ivoirians, the mutineers remained steadfast that the government could and should pay, with one mutineer claiming, “They are all billionaires with their big bellies and they want us to believe that there is no money” (Touré 2017). Meanwhile, civil servants repeatedly protested in January, demanding wage increases and pension reforms. This left the government with the decision of whom to pay: armed soldiers or civil servants? As one mutineer put it, “We’re not like teachers who express themselves with pens: our profession is guns” (*Deutsche Welle* 2017). Indeed, the May announcement of the end of the mutiny included other important revelations, specifically the cancellation of a variety of public projects, including the construction of schools and healthcare and cultural centres, and the delay of Ouattara’s plan to vastly expand access to electricity.

Pay-related issues are a common grievance for soldiers around the globe, but mutinies are particularly common in countries still healing from the scars of war. Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Mozambique, for example, each experienced numerous episodes of post-conflict military insubordination. These incidents also included both active and demobilised elements of both state and rebel forces following their respective wars, in what have been described as “corporatist backlashes of post-crisis situations in Africa” (Nyamsi 2017). However, the mutineers of 2017 are notable in the scale of and commitment to their financial demands, especially against the state’s financial backdrop. These financial demands are perhaps unsurprising. McGovern (2011) presciently questioned the ability of the state to maintain its soldiers’ loyalty in the absence of war. The military’s involvement in a variety of industries, and especially the informal “roadblock economy,” was previously justified as a necessity of wartime (McGovern 2011: 166). The World Bank estimated that roadblock shakedowns run by soldiers and local militia cost the economy as much as USD 363 million annually, illustrating the financial stakes of instability (McGovern 2011: 185).

Finally, the mutinies raise serious concerns regarding the loyalty of armed forces. Some solace may be taken knowing that post-conflict countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Mozambique have weathered numerous mutinies without a resumption of large-scale hostilities. Further, while regional coups against Bédié and Mali's Amadou Toumani Touré highlight the potential for mutinies to escalate into power grabs, these are rare occurrences. However, the current regime is bruised, with loyalty guaranteed only so long as it can be purchased. This is readily acknowledged by the public, including many who see the payouts as covering "a private debt arising from a [...] contract between Ouattara [...] and his soldiers" (*Abidjan.net* 2017). Others have described the mutinies as extortion of the people by Ouattara's "spoiled children" (Syddick 2017). Yet others have suggested that demands would not end with soldiers, and would soon involve other groups, "from cocoa farmers to civil service [personnel]" (*Bloomberg* 2017). And while payouts may sometimes represent a reward for loyalty, commentators point to implications of the identity of mutineers, noting that "Ouattara was suspicious of the old elements of the defence and security forces, always labelled pro-Gbagbo, [...] and] he has learned to his detriment to distrust also the former rebels who had supported him" (Sylvestre-Treiner and Duhem 2017).

Recent events confirm that Ouattara has reason to be suspicious of those close to him. Speculation has been rampant that Guillaume Soro, former FN leader and current president of the National Assembly, was involved in organising the mutiny. Soro is under renewed scrutiny after a large cache of arms was discovered at a close relative's home. The weapons appear to have strengthened the resolve of the mutineers in May, just when they were under threat of intervention from loyalist security forces. While Soro's role in recent mutinies has yet to be fully elucidated, the possibility of collusion with mutineers raises serious questions about the future stability of the country. Until Côte d'Ivoire finds a way to ensure that its soldiers remain loyal to the state instead of to its personalities, these questions will persist.

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## Meuterei in Côte d'Ivoire

**Zusammenfassung:** Seit 1990 kam es in Côte d'Ivoire zu mehr als einem Dutzend Fällen von Aufruhr in der Armee; drei bedeutendere Einzelereignisse waren in der ersten Hälfte des Jahres 2017 zu verzeichnen. Die Autoren des Beitrags untersuchen die Hintergründe, indem sie sowohl das Geschehen im ersten Halbjahr 2017 betrachten als auch frühere Erfahrungen des Staates mit Gehorsamsverweigerung von Militärs. Die Analyse der Ereignisse in Côte d'Ivoire im bislang turbulenten Jahr 2017 offenbart Parallelen zu früheren Meutereien, auch wenn die jüngsten Fälle wohl einzigartig sind, was die Breite der Dynamik und die Größenordnung der Forderungen angeht. Abgesehen von den fast immer vorgetragenen Forderungen nach besserer Bezahlung offenbaren die jüngsten Meutereien

auch die generellen Gefahren für die zivil-militärischen Beziehungen in Nachkonfliktgesellschaften, wie die Herausforderungen der Demobilisierung und der Integration bewaffneter Rebellen und die Risiken, die sich ergeben, wenn Soldaten zum Aufstieg von Führungspersonlichkeiten beigetragen haben beziehungsweise wenn die Loyalität von Soldaten Einzelpersonen gilt und nicht dem Staat.

**Schlagwörter:** Côte d'Ivoire, Nachkonfliktphase, Militär, Aufstand/Revolution, Militär und Gesellschaft