

## **After 5 army mutinies since January, next may topple Ivorian President Ouattara**

*By Sebastian Spio-Garbrah, Chief Frontier Markets Analyst*

After half a dozen separate mutinies in Côte d'Ivoire since the beginning of this year, the next mutiny may very well see off 75-year old term-limited President Alassane Ouattara from power. Despite the May 31 agreement to pay off ex-rebels, and denials by former Forces Nouvelles rebel leader and current Speaker of Parliament Guillaume Soro that he doesn't support the errant soldiers, it's more likely that if current worrisome trends continue, Ouattara, much beloved by western capital markets, may not see the end of his term in 2019. Up to 40% of the armed forces of Côte d'Ivoire remains in sporadic rebellion against their superiors. Every branch of the military has mutinied in some form in 2017. Ouattara, who himself took power after a violent army mutiny following an election impasse in 2011, now struggles to maintain control over his government and military forces. His unpopular budget cuts and economic austerity measures, as well as a mishandling of his relationship with the speaker of the country's parliament and former president have precipitated the current crisis. The crisis is not likely to abate.

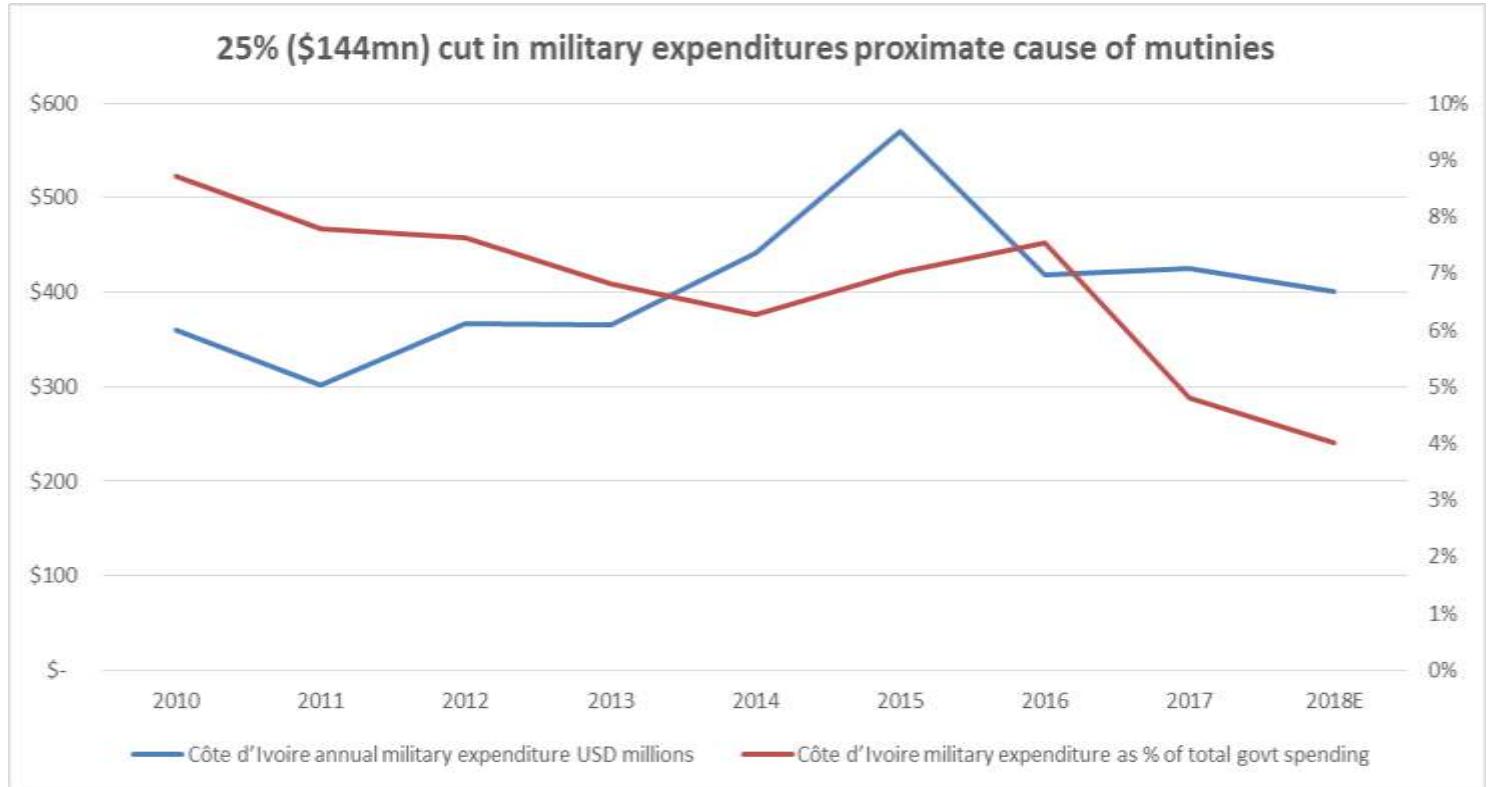
### **Worrying Timeline of Mutinies May Signal Impending Military Coup**

- **Jan 6, 2017** – Disgruntled army troops seize control of Ivory Coast's second city Bouake
- **Jan 7, 2017** - Troops fire at government offices in Bouake, Abidjan, several other towns
- **Jan 8, 2017** – President Ouattara fires army, gendarmerie and police chiefs
- **Jan 13, 2017** – Government reaches deal with mutinying soldiers
- **Jan 17-18, 2017** - 4 soldiers are killed in capital Yamoussoukro as new protests erupt in six towns
- **Feb 7-9, 2017** - Elite troops from presidential guard mutiny over bonus. Shoot up Adiaké barracks, 56 miles east of Abidjan.
- **May 11, 2017** - A spokesman representing 8,400 mutineers (38% of total armed forces) apologizes on TV
- **May 11-12, 2017** – New mutiny. Shots fired in Abidjan, Bouake and Korogho.
- **May 15, 2017** – Another mutiny this at military camps in Akouedo and in Bouake.
- **May 31, 2017** – Announcement of new cash-for-peace deal with ex-rebels

While grievances over cuts to military expenditures are the proximate cause of the mutinies, the deeper structural causes are the internal political disagreements within Ouattara's camp over his presidential succession. Ouattara and technocrats around him favor 73-year old southern Vice President Kablan Duncan, an economist. Sections of the military and ex-rebel political operatives in the ruling party favor Speaker of Parliament and former rebel leader 45-year old northern Guillaume Soro. Côte d'Ivoire is plagued by a north-south ethno-religious divide, which permeates much of the politics of West Africa.

Furthermore, two large outside players are believed to also be stoking the embers of rebellion in the military. Former Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré, a key player in Ivorian domestic politics, in exile in Côte d'Ivoire, favors Soro and is weary of Duncan. Compaoré fears Duncan could extradite him back to Burkina Faso to stand trial for various crimes. Supporters of former President Laurent Gbagbo, currently standing trial at The Hague are also desirous to see Ouattara toppled from power, and

Gbagbo's former acolyte Soro installed, hoping that he will seek to bring Gbagbo home from the Hague. As cocoa prices have fallen and the country's macroeconomic fundamentals have deteriorated, cuts to public expenditures have exacerbated factional political tensions between ministers, with over \$140million cut from the country's military expenditures.



Source: SIPRI/DaMina Advisors

Ouattara, whose term ends in 2020, has no chosen successor. A recent constitutional change and cabinet reshuffle has effectively sidelined the most powerful contender for the presidency in 2019, Soro. Angry ex-rebel military factions aligned with Soro within the army remain the key linchpins for the ongoing mutinies. They are prepared to eventually stage a coup to topple Ouattara if it becomes clear that Soro's path to power is completely blocked. Soro's rebel forces, who hail mostly from the Muslim north and incidentally, helped install Ouattara as president in 2011 following a decade of civil war, and north-south partition of the country vow not to countenance any attempt to install Duncan as a successor to Ouattara.

The mutinies signal that Soro, a former rebel leader still holds strong sway over large sections of the Ivoirian military. Historically, the Speaker of the Ivoirian National Assembly based in Yamoussoukro was second in line to the presidency. However a new constitutional change pushed by Ouattara has installed a vice president as the second in line, – effectively demoting Soro in the line of presidential succession to an unfavorable third, thus effectively torpedoing his political ascent.

Côte d'Ivoire is the world's largest cocoa exporter and West Africa's third largest economy behind Nigeria and Ghana. After almost a decade of partition and civil war in the 1990s, the country's stability may yet become imperiled again if the current political disequilibrium and risks around President Ouattara's succession are not clarified soon.

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**Contact:** Stephanie Dei  
VP, Corporate Affairs & Media  
[Stephanie@daminaadvisors.com](mailto:Stephanie@daminaadvisors.com)  
Tel: +1 647 808 9671

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**EUROPE**  
3 Abercorn Mansions  
17 Abercorn Place  
London NW8 9DY

**AFRICA**  
10 Abokobi Road  
East Cantonments, Accra  
Ghana, West Africa

**AMERICAS**  
55 Fifth Ave,  
Suite 1702, NY 10003  
New York

**CANADA**  
103 The Queensway, Suite 714  
Toronto, ON, M6S 5B3

Tel: +1 647 808 9671 / +1 416 276 1997  
E-mail: [info@daminaadvisors.com](mailto:info@daminaadvisors.com)