



## CÔTE D'IVOIRE UPDATE

### Implications of the débâcle at the International Criminal Court

*The crimes-against-humanity case against Laurent Gbagbo has effectively collapsed, the prosecutor having **failed to prove any of the highly questionable charges** levelled against the former Ivorian president.*

1) This should have come as no surprise, given the **number of prosecutorial howlers** as the submission in 'evidence' of footage of Kenya's post-election violence in 2007<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, Gbagbo and his co-accused<sup>2</sup> are to remain in custody until Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> when a hearing will rule on the chief prosecutor's petition to appeal the Court's verdict. **But, the outcome of that proceeding can be regarded as a *fait accompli*.**

2) After seven years of involuntary exile, the founder of the *Front patriotique ivoirien* will soon be homeward bound. Naturally, **this will alter Côte d'Ivoire's political landscape**, though far less seismically than many observers anticipate.

In the first instance, **Gbagbo's return is certain to cement the split between the two FPI factions** that have been feuding since 2011. Whereas the party's official wing<sup>3</sup>, has pursued a policy of dialogue and accommodation with the Ouattara government<sup>4</sup>, the numerically superior dissident faction<sup>5</sup> has refused to participate in the political process so long as Gbagbo remained a 'political prisoner' in the Hague.

3) The most likely outcome is that **the official wing breaks with the party completely and then makes common cause with the PDCI**. As will be recalled, Henri Konan Bédié has been assiduously courting Affi Nguessan in an effort to build a coalition<sup>6</sup> able to challenge the RHDP unifié formation that Ouattara is putting in place.

However, **any such arrangement could well split the Côte d'Ivoire's oldest party**, given the fundamental contradictions between its centre-right orientation and the FPI's democratic socialist convictions. Nor should one forget that **Bédié is already struggling to contain a dissident PDCI faction**<sup>7</sup> that sees refusing to join the RHDP as a recipe for political oblivion.

4) On the other hand, while Gbagbo would retain the loyalty of the FPI rump, **his prospects for extending that base would remain quite limited**. Indeed, these might extend no farther than the array of tiny left-of-centre parties<sup>8</sup> that participated in the 2016 parliamentary elections under the umbrella of the Alliance des forces démocratiques but failed to win a single seat.

<sup>1</sup> À propos, it is also worth recalling, inter alia, the correspondence between the former chief prosecutor (Luis Ocampo-Moreno) and a senior official of the French foreign ministry, discussing the need to arrest and detain former president Gbagbo. First reported by the investigative site [Mediapart](#), the damning exchange took place months **before** the ICC authorized an investigation into crimes committed during Côte d'Ivoire's 2010-11 post-election crisis. [More, in due course, on why France expended so much effort, between 2002 and 2011, into ensuring Gbagbo's removal.]

<sup>2</sup> I.e. his former Youth minister Charles Blé Goudé.

<sup>3</sup> Affi Nguessan, who had run Gbagbo's successful campaign in the 2000 presidential race, was then appointed prime minister, and subsequently elected party chairman in 2001.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to fielding candidates in both the presidential election of 2015 and the parliamentary elections of 2016, the party campaigned actively ahead of the constitutional referendum in 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Until his death in Nov. 2018, Aboudrahamane Sangaré, a long-standing collaborator of Gbagbo's, served as the faction's interim leader (the substantive chairmanship being occupied by Gbagbo himself). Since Sangaré's demise, former first lady, Simone Gbagbo has emerged as the group's *de facto* interim leader.

6) Moreover, **it is simply inconceivable that he would ever consider joining forces with either Bédié or Soro**. In an interview last month<sup>9</sup>, he recalled with understandable bitterness how a procession of ‘barons’ from the newly installed Ouattara administration came by to gloat, following his 2011 capture and subsequent detention in Abidjan’s Hotel du Golfe.

In other words, **the prospective reconfiguration of the political landscape is likely to strengthen rather than weaken Ouattara’s hand**, going into the 2020 election.

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### Post scriptum, Jan 23, 2019

Last year, when **President Ouattara appeared to backtrack on his stated intention to retire from politics** and hand over to a ‘new generation’, we weren’t convinced that he was actually throwing his hat into the ring. The gesture looked more like **a shot across the bow of his longstanding frère-ennemi**, HKB, whose equivocation on the RHDP unifié project betrayed a fixation on the *fauteuil présidentiel* from which he’d been forcibly ejected in Jan. 1, 1999.

Since then, however, **a couple of considerations appear to have changed the incumbent’s mind**:

- With the emergence of the PDCI as Côte d’Ivoire’s principal opposition party, Ouattara now seems **determined to publicly humiliate his one-time nemesis**<sup>10</sup>. *La vengeance est un plat qui se mange froid!*
- The increasingly public flirtation between Soro and Bédié holds out **the possibility of a tactical alliance that would boost the PDCI’s electoral prospects**<sup>11</sup>.
- The realization within President’s inner circle that **his ‘chosen’ successor**, prime minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly **is more technocrat than homme politique**<sup>12</sup>.

In the light of the foregoing, it is not inconceivable that the Congrès Constitutif for the RHDP unifié scheduled to convene this week-end could feature a ‘spontaneous’ call for Ouattara to be the new party’s standard-bearer in 2020<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> To date, Henri Konan Bédié has very little to show for this initiative, apart from a stage-managed courtesy call by the embattled – and opportunistic – Guillaume Soro. Nominally a vice president of the RDR party, the *enfant terrible* of Ivorian politics has conspicuously withheld support from Ouattara’s pet project, a Unified RHDP party, so his days as speaker of the National Assembly are clearly numbered.

<sup>7</sup> I.e. the *Dans les traces d’Houphouët-Boigny* movement.

<sup>8</sup> Comprised of twelve individual parties, including the Parti ivoirien du travail and the Union pour la Côte d’Ivoire, the group attracted a mere 0.11% of the total ballot.

<sup>9</sup> See “[Gbagbo raconte son arrestation le 11 avril 2011](#)” in *L’Infodôme*, Dec. 12, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> I.e. to exact retribution for the infamous *Ivoirité* amendment to the Constitution that Bédié forced through the National Assembly in 1994 specifically to make Ouattara ineligible to stand in the 1995 presidential election. The measure triggered a wave of anti-immigrant pogroms that paved the way for the 1999 coup and ultimately, the 2002 insurgency that led to the country’s partition between the North (controlled by Guillaume Soro’s Forces Nouvelles) and the South (held by the duly elected government of Laurent Gbagbo).

<sup>11</sup> As discussed yesterday, I think this assessment seriously overstates Soro’s political weight.

<sup>12</sup> It has even been suggested that he has enough of a charisma deficit to constitute an electoral liability.

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that over the last year, civil society appears to have grudgingly accepted the argument that in 2020, ADO would actually be seeking his first presidential mandate under the new Constitution that took effect in Jan. 2017.

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