

A SUMMARY OF ARMED GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN COTE D'IVOIRE

17 January, 2007

This article is an extract from a report written by Safer Access during a consultancy conducted for a humanitarian organization working in Cote d'Ivoire. Safer Access exists as a resource for the NGO community. Our aim is to assist relief and development organisations to safely and effectively access their beneficiaries. It is a highly principled organisation that seeks to provide expert assistance to those helping some of the world's neediest people. For operational support or training assistance from Safer Access, contact us at www.saferaccess.org.

The following is a summary of the many armed groups and political parties that are present in Cote d'Ivoire

AP-WÊ (*Alliance Patriotiques – Wê*) This militia, prevalent in the west and headquartered in Duekoue, is pro-Gbagbo and receives support from the local administration and FANCI forces. They are armed with a range of military small arms, including AK-47/74s, RPGs and PK machineguns. They have some light vehicles which can be quickly converted into "technicals." Their activities include augmenting official forces at roadblocks, the conduct of unofficial roadblocks to extort money, outright robbery, and activities in the *zone de confiance* to discredit international forces and harass other ethnicities. Their leader in Duekoue is known as "Colombo," (actual name Mompého Julien) who has close relations with both the Governor and the local FANCI forces. He has directly threatened UNOCI forces with the tacit support of FANCI commanders. His forces are believed to have been behind the attack on Fengolo on 11 December, 2006, but it is unlikely that there is much central control of the activities of most members. Composed of people who self identify as part of the *Guéré* ethnicity (of which the Wê are a part). Strongly opposed to members of the Baoulé, Burkinabé and Malinké ethnicities.

Comites de Surveillance – Many villages within the *zone de confiance* have raised these self-defense forces to protect themselves from militias and robbers. Normally composed of the young males from the village, these groups conduct patrols during the night time. Although essentially they are only intended to raise an alarm should there be any threat, some members are armed with civilian and military weapons and can defend themselves. LICORNE and UNOCI are believed to be currently negotiating a means of identifying members of the

Comites de Surveillance in order to simplify identification of non-authorized armed personnel.

“*Dozos*” – The name of a traditional society of hunters that commonly carry civilian weapons in order to practice their trade. Members must be initiated in order to join the society, with membership often being granted to males who are the son of a member. *Dozos* are widely respected and are credited with mystical powers. Members can be identified by their particular dress, including a large straw hat, and magical amulets made from local materials and animal parts. The *dozos* hat and amulets are believed by some to make them bulletproof, and to give them greatly improved sight and hearing. *Dozos* follow a strict moral code that compels them to fight against oppression, leading some to support the *Forces Nouvelles*. The particular dress of the *dozo* is believed to be used as a cover by militia groups in the west to infiltrate the *zone de confiance* and when conducting ambushes/roadblocks in order to rob vehicles.

FA-FN (*Force Armees des Forces Nouvelles*) – An umbrella term for the armed forces loyal to the *Forces Nouvelles* that was adopted in 2003, and has since been superseded by the term FDS-FN (*Force de Defense et Securites des Forces Nouvelles*)

FANCI (*Force Armee Nationales de Cote d’Ivoire*) FANCI is in fact composed of five parts, all of which are generally referred to collectively:

Army – Highly politicized, at least 10% of the national army sided with the *Forces Nouvelles* in 2002. Of very mixed levels of training and efficiency, the Ivorian army is not effective by Western standards. They are armed with a mix of Soviet small arms (AK-47/74s, RPGs, PK machineguns). The President maintains direct control over many units through primarily South African mercenary “trainers” present in most units. These lines of control bypass the national or official chain of command, further consolidating power in the hands of Gbagbo.

Navy – There is little naval capacity to speak of in Cote d’Ivoire. There is believed to be a total of 2 operational craft (Patra Class patrol craft of 150 tonnes each) and approximately 950 personnel, and they are limited to coastal operations only. Additional craft remain in port and are likely unserviceable. The navy retains limited ability to support amphibious landings by army personnel. Most effective patrolling of the coast is conducted by two small craft (Rodman 890 Class, 5 tonnes apiece) operated by the Ministry of Fisheries.

Air Force – Much of the Ivorian air force was destroyed on 6 November, 2004 after 9 members of LICORNE were killed by an airstrike in Bouaké. While the Ivorian government claimed that the air strike was an error,

French forces believed that it was intentional. The decision to destroy the Ivorian aircraft on the ground in Abidjan was made by the French President in person. This action resulted in violent anti-French riots in Abidjan. It is believed that one fixed wing plane (a Bae 167 Strikemaster) and one attack helicopter (a Mi-24 Hind) remain in the Ivorian inventory, primarily piloted by Byelorussian mercenaries.

Gendarmerie – A force of approximately 6000 paramilitary police who are regarded as intensely loyal to President Gbagbo.

Republican Guard – Previously known as the Presidential Guard, this force of 1000 is loyal directly to Gbagbo and is present primarily in Abidjan. A fully military force, they spearheaded numerous offensives during the fighting in 2004.

FDS-FN (*Force de Defense et Securites des Forces Nouvelles*) This is the latest in a succession of names for the armed forces of the rebel movement. Formed around a core of former Ivorian soldiers, much of the FDS-FN is without formal military training. The exact numbers of soldiers in the FDS-FN is not known, even to the leadership of the FDS-FN, but is estimated to be around 25,000. Levels of equipment are widely varied, although the FDS-FN is in possession of some heavy equipment such as artillery pieces captured during the army mutiny in 2002. The FDS-FN likely receives support from the governments of Mali and Burkina Faso.

Femmes Patriots – An unarmed, pro-government political party with ties to violent demonstrations in Abidjan. Led by Mme Bro Grebe.

FESCI (*Federation Etudiante et Scolaire de Cote d'Ivoire*) A pro-government group led by Serge Kouyo. Linked to violent demonstrations in Abidjan.

FLGO (*Front de Liberation de Grand Ouest*) – Founded and led by Maho Glofié Denis. A strongly pro-government militia present in the west, and headquartered in Guiglo. Armed with a mix of military and civilian weapons. The FLGO enjoys good relations with AP-WE, present in the same region. The FLGO is also composed of Wê people. Maho is rumoured to receive directions from the President, in particular through the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Civil Service, who is from a local village.

Forces de Scorpions – A “self defence” militia raised in Bangolo to protect citizens from attacks by other militias. Lightly armed with civilian and military weapons, their primary activities include enforcing the Bangolo curfew through the use of checkpoints and extorting money and goods from Bangolo’s Sunday market. They appear to be somewhat tolerated by both UNOCI and LICORNE,

though they undoubtedly attempt to limit their contact for fear of being disarmed or worse.

FPI (*Front populaire ivoirien*) – The main political party in Cote d'Ivoire, led by Laurent Gbagbo. Although an unarmed party, the *Jeunes Patriotes* groups effectively form their armed wing.

FRGO (*Forces de resistance du Grand Ouest*) – An umbrella organization of pro-government militias, including AP-We, FLGO, MILOCI and UPRGO. Nominally led by the FLGO leader, Maho Glofiéi Denis. He is likely the main contact between the militias and central government.

FSCO – (*Front de Securite du Centre Ouest*) A paramilitary pro-government group with ties to violent demonstrations in Abidjan. Led by Cdt Marc Bertrand Gnatoa.

GPP – (*Groupement de Patriotes pour la Paix*) – A pro-government student group with ties to violent demonstrations in Abidjan. Led by Charles Groguhet.

Hezbollah (English translation: *Party of God*) – A Shi'a political and military organization with its roots in Lebanon, Hezbollah is present in Cote d'Ivoire amongst the large Lebanese population living there, particularly in Abidjan. Some nations view Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, others as a political or resistance movement. Hezbollah has been responsible for violent attacks, sometimes targeting civilians, in Lebanon, Israel and other places. At the same time, Hezbollah provides many social services in Lebanon that are not provided by the government. The presence of Hezbollah elements, particularly in the Marcourie area of Abidjan, may act as a stabilizing influence on levels of street crime. Association or communication with Hezbollah would be very dimly viewed by those nations that list them as a terrorist organization: Australia, the UK, Canada, the U.S., the Netherlands, and Israel.

Jeune Patriotes – A militia loyal to Gbagbo, and composed of both rural youth and urban students. Armed with military and civilian weapons provided by the government, a large portion of this group (5000+ persons) are believed to have received military training as light infantry and as such could fight in support of the President and FPI in conventional operations. Led by former student leader Charles Blé Goudé.

“Lima Militias” This name was given to mercenary/bandit gangs from Liberia that have operated in the west of Cote d'Ivoire. It does not necessarily represent their own means of identifying themselves. Many Liberians in Cote d'Ivoire who were not associated with the militias continue to be labelled in this manner.

MFA (*Mouvement des Forces de l'Avenir*) – A non-armed political party generally opposed to Gbagbo, nevertheless the MFA currently form part of the unity government.

MJP (*Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix*) – An anti-government force formed in 2002 at the outset of the civil war. Largely composed of ethnic Yacoubas. Poorly armed and equipped, and known for looting and extortion. Primarily based in and around Man.

MILOCI (*Mouvement de Liberation de l'Ouest de la Cote d'Ivoire*) A pro-government militia active in the West. Responsible for operations within the *zone de confiance*, including a number of ceasefire violations against forces of the *Forces Nouvelles*. Led by Pasteur Gammi. Composed largely of members of the Yacouba ethnic group, although there may also be Liberian mercenaries involved as well.

MJG – (*Mouvement J'aime Gbagbo*) A pro-government student group led by Toure Moustapha, with ties to violent demonstrations in Abidjan.

MPCI (*Mouvement Patriotique de Cotes d'Ivoire*) An anti-government militia formed in 2002 by approximately 750 members of the armed forces who mutinied. In 2003, this group changed their name to become the *Forces Nouvelles*. Their main support continues to be in the region of Bouake. It is rumoured that they have employed South African mercenaries to train their troops and stiffen them in combat.

MPIGO (*Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest*) An anti-government militia that forms part of the *Forces Nouvelles* and that was formed in 2002 in the area around Danané. Composed largely of ethnic Yacoubas, they also include Sierra Leonean and Liberian mercenaries in the group. MPIGO emerged after the death of the former Presidential candidate and General Robert Gueï, the nucleus of the group being formed from his former personnel bodyguard. Known for their chaotic and disorganized manner, they are known to resort to looting and extortion. They are also known to have links to other militias in Western Africa, including those allied to former Liberian President Charles Taylor. Before the collapse of Taylor's regime, MPIGO formed part of a gun-running network that stretched from Burkina Faso into Liberia.

ONUCI (*Operation des Nations Unies en Cote d'Ivoire*) Approximately 9000 soldiers from 49 countries. The main troop contributors are Bangladesh, Morocco, Ghana, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal, Benin and Togo. The mission is deployed under a "Chapter VII" mandate, giving them authority to use "all available means" to ensure the peace agreement remains in place. Present throughout the country, though they are of widely varied effectiveness. On 10 January, 2007, their mandate to remain in the country was renewed and they

were given a fresh mandate to cooperate with the UN mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to tackle the problems of cross border arms movement, much of which is being conducted by local militias.

Operation L'ICORNE – The French military normally has only the *4e Regiment de Marines* stationed in Cote d'Ivoire, comprised of approximately 850 personnel. After the coup attempt in 2002, this force was bolstered with additional troops and a force of *gendarmes*. This increased force was called *Operation L'Icorne* (Unicorn) and remains at a strength of approximately 4000 troops. It's primary task is to support ONUCI and to protect French citizens and interests. If required, additional troops from other parts of Africa could be called in to assist. The French military maintain bases in the following locations:

- Bouaké;
- Man;
- Yamoussoukro.
- Port Bouet - Permanent Marine base;
- Bangolo (Company size only)

PDCI (*Parti démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire*) Formed in 1944, this is the oldest political party in Cote d'Ivoire. Was the ruling party from 1960 to 1999, largely under the leadership of Houphouët-Boigny.

PIT (*Parti ivoirien des travailleurs*) Led by Professor Francis Wodie. Largely supportive of the Gbago government, PIT forms part of the government of national unity.

Police Nationale – A force of about 3500 officers, organized along French lines in the major population centres. Generally considered to be under funded compared to the Gendarmes.

PLCI (*Parti Libéral de Côte d'Ivoire*) – A minor political party, not represented in parliament.

PPS (*Parti pour le progrès et la solidarité*) - A minor political party, not represented in parliament, and led by Bamba Moriféré.

PSI (*Parti Socialiste Ivoirien*) - A minor political party, not represented in parliament, and led by Mandou-Adjoa Kouakou.

RDR (*Rassemblement des Républicains*) – Formed in 1994 by Djény Kobbina. Later led by Alassane Ouattara, an ethnic Burkinabé. His right to run for election has been challenged on the basis of his ethnicity. The RDR is widely thought to be behind the coup attempts of 1999 and 2003, and is associated with the *Forces Nouvelles*.

UDCI (*Union des Démocrates de Côte d'Ivoire*) - A minor political party, not represented in parliament.

UND (*Union Nationale des Démocrates*) - A minor political party, not represented in parliament, and led by Amadou Kone

UPRGO (*Union Patriotique de Résistance du Grand Ouest*) A pro-government militia present in the West, and particularly in Guiglo. Enjoys good relations with other pro-government militias in the area. Led by Gabriel Benao.

USD (*Union des Sociaux-Démocrate*) A pro-government group that is led by Bernard Zadi-Zaourou.

UPLTCI (*Union des Patriotes pour la Libération Total de la Cote d'Ivoire*) A pro-government group led by Eugene Djue.