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Human Transformation of the Armed Forces for Democratic Stability in Cote d'Ivoire

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SUMMARY

Historical factors including ethnic and political manipulation of the military by successive political leadership, civil war and post-election crisis have bequeathed Cote d'Ivoire with a factionalized armed forces. There have been efforts by UNOCI and government to reform the armed forces as part of wider Disarmament Demobilization Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) programmes. The UN mission has since closed its doors after a more than decade operation to help restore peace and stability in Cote d'Ivoire. The country is on track to post-conflict recovery. However, there are lingering tensions within the armed forces, in particular, and the security sector in general, which if not addressed effectively could undermined the stability of the country. This policy brief therefore argues that, transformation of the military to achieve regional representation and professionalism is essential to sustaining civil-military stability.

Introduction

Cote d'Ivoire is recovering from a civil war (2002-2007) and post-election crisis (2010-2011) that divided the country and its armed forces along political, ethnic, and religious lines. President Allasane Ouattara assumed office in May 2011 and went on to overwhelmingly secure a second term of office in October 2015. The general political climate has since improved despite deep-seated social and political divisions. The United Nations Operations in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) closed at the end of June 2017. The United Nations (UN) and government officials point to successful implementation of national reconciliation processes, Disarmament Demobilization Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR), Security Sector Reform (SSR) programmes among other mandate of UNOCI.¹ However, there are concerns that some of the programmes have been rushed and poorly conducted. There are simmering tensions within the armed forces, in particular, and the security sector in general, which if not addressed effectively could undermine the stability of the country. The government of Allasane Ouattara is struggling to deal with the legacy of decomposed armed forces. The former, Forces Armées Nationales de Cote d'Ivoire (FANCI), despite its small size was arguably among the professionally well-trained forces in West Africa. However, civil war and

successive political crises have weakened the military leaving it oversized, fractionalized and politicized, thereby losing its discipline, unity and neutrality.

The divisions that fragmented the army have taken on a different form with the creation of the Forces Republicaines de Cote d'Ivoire (FRCI) by the government of Ouattara on March 17, 2011. The FRCI symbolically unified ex-rebel Forces Nouvelles (FN), and members of the former national Defense and Security Forces (DSF) that were deemed to have remained neutral or sided with Ouattara during the crisis.² This short-term approach does not solve the deeper problems of the armed forces. There have been instances where undisciplined elements of the security forces-particularly FRCI members ineligible for the unified military, armed groups loyal to former President Laurent Gbagbo and militia groups have acted independently of civilian control to perpetuate violent attacks in different parts of the country.³ Perhaps, the most visible signs of the problems within the armed forces have been the spate of military mutinies that happened in January, February and May 2017. The demands of the mutineers included payment of monies owed them for the period they fought for Ouattara and recognition of their ranks as rebels in the regular army.⁴ Even though mutinies are not new to the Ivorian military, past experiences such as

¹ United Nations Security Council, (2016), Resolution 2284: Adopted by the Security Council at its 7681st meeting, on 28 April

² Allouche, J. and Padonou, O. (2017), Cote d'Ivoire: the mutiny may be over, but the army's problems are not", African Arguments, May 17. Available at <http://africanarguments.org/>

³ <https://www.state.gov/> (Accessed on June 23, 2017)

⁴ United States Department of State (2011), Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Cote d'Ivoire. Available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186399.pdf>

⁵ Allouche, and Padonou (2017), op. cit.

the 1999 mutiny eventually resulted in a military coup and ousted President Konan Bédié. This first coup opened the flood gate to the country's lingering civil-military and socio-political tensions. Therefore, the underlying causes of the recent mutinies if not addressed could undermine efforts at consolidation peace and democracy in the country. This policy brief argues that, transformation of the military with regards to its human composition is essential to sustaining civil-military stability. While there are ongoing efforts at SSR, a holistic transformation is needed to align armed forces with the current defence and security needs of the country by building a representative and professional armed forces which are subject to effective civilian oversight.

Reforming a Decomposed Armed Forces

Since the inception of the Ouattara administration, there have been calls for the government to establish democratic governance of security and defence sector and trim the army down to a size proportionate to the country's security needs, and control small arms and light weapons amassed during years of conflict.⁵ The government has taken some steps as part of the SSR process. This include the adoption of the National Security Strategy of April 2014 that clarifies the operational arrangements for the reorganization of the security and defence forces.⁶ The National Security Council was supported by UNOCI in the implementation of the strategy to build and strengthen the capacities of local governance and oversight structures, and national defence and security forces.⁷ The presidency through the National Security Council coordinates efforts at reforming the military. However, there are challenges in the implementation of the national SSR strategy. For instance, the expansion of SSR activities beyond Abidjan has been slow and there are serious confidence deficits within and between security and defence forces.⁸

Another important step was by the promulgation of two major laws on National Security in January 2016. Specifically, Law N°2016-09 relates to the Programming of Internal Security Forces (2016-2020) and the Law N°2016-10, relate to Military Programming (2016-2020).⁹ The crucial challenge is the effective implementation of these important laws. Besides, the approach of the government in dealing with the grievances of the military has been ad hoc. The government appears to be responding to the financial demands of the

military anytime they revolt. There is yet no comprehensive process to transform the defence sector. The critical concern is the sustainability of this carrot approach. Most worrying is the fact that monies needed to maintain an oversized armed forces constitute a drain on the government's resources as a fall in the global prices of cocoa has resulted in significant cut of the national budget.¹⁰

Human Transformation of FRCI

Human transformation of the armed forces generally aims at configuring the human composition of the institution with regard to its racial, ethnic, and regional and gender composition.¹¹ The human resource of every armed forces in principle is expected to be a fair representation of the demographic makeup of general society. In most African societies historically rooted factors have contributed to over and under-representation of some ethnic groups in the colonial armies that formed the nucleus of the post-independence militaries. Instead of transforming the armed forces at independence, the first president Felix Houphouët-Boigny used the security apparatus to guarantee political power by using a variety of nefarious strategies and tactics. These included ethnic and political manipulation of the military, use of the military in the political arena through co-optation of military officers in political and administrative ruling circles and the exploitation of inter-service rivalries.¹² There was also heavy reliance on the close political and military ties with France to ward-off internal and external aggression from the military.

In the post-Houphouët-Boigny era, successive leaders continued in a similar fashion.¹³ However, it is the issue of identity politics typified by Ivoirité that has been a major cause of the civil war. The concept proffers a controversial distinction to be made between 'indigenous' Ivoirians and Ivoirians of 'immigrant descent'.¹⁴ Following from this distinction, people of northern origin were lumped together with immigrants from neighboring countries as foreigners or 'non-indigenous' Ivoirians. This fomented xenophobic and anti-northerner sentiments within the Ivorian society.¹⁵ The perceived domination of southern ethnic groups in the political and administrative sectors, and the army in the post- Houphouët-Boigny era contributed to the 1999 coup.¹⁶ Successive governments of Konan Bedie, Robert Guei and Laurent Gbagbo resorted manipulation of identities which

⁵ Bavier, J. (2017), "Army mutiny exposes cracks in Ivory Coast success story", January 19, *Reuters*, <http://www.reuters.com/article> (Accessed on June 23, 2017)

⁶ See Salihu, N. (2016), "Peacekeeping In Cote d'Ivoire", In *Annual Review Of Peace Support Operations In Africa*, Edited by Emma Birikorang, Thomas Jaye and Frank Okyere, 73-96, Accra: KAIPTC

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Curtis, F. (2016), "National Security in Cote d'Ivoire: 2 Laws Passed!" Available at <https://scid.blog/tag/ivory-coast> (Accessed on July 12, 2017)

¹⁰ Naik, A. (2017), "Taking the Gun out of Politics": Rethinking Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration", *IPI Global Observatory*, May 22. Available at <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/05/> (Accessed on June 23, 2017)

¹¹ Chuter, (2000), op. cit.

¹² N'Diaye, Boubacar, (2005), "Not a miracle after all... Côte d'Ivoire's downfall: flawed civil-military relations and missed opportunities", *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, 33(1): 89-118.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bah, B. A. (2010), Democracy and civil war: Citizenship and peacemaking in Cote d'Ivoire. *African Affairs*, 109(437).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Amedzator, L. and Abdallah, M. (2015) "Escaping the Repertoire of Election Crisis: Prospects and Challenges of the Evolving Infrastructure for Peace in Côte d'Ivoire", Policy Brief 2/ August

had adverse effects on the armed forces. The government of Ouattara finds itself with similar challenges of identity politics. Some have argued that the current government seems unable to deal decisively with the armed forces because of the large numbers of former rebel fighters who fought for Ouattara's long quest for power.¹⁷

The selection processes for appointment in the military is often influenced by nepotism and tribalism. The recent military revolts have been analyzed from various angles.¹⁸ Delays in addressing key reforms in the defence sector since the civil war has been a crucial factor in the army's rising disenchantment. There are also concerns about the inconclusive implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2011-2014). Particularly, some of the members of FRCI and former FN fighters have been indicted for various egregious war crimes during the conflict and the post-election crisis.¹⁹ Even though the government have reiterated its commitment to respect human rights and punish the perpetrators regardless of party affiliation; there has been little progress in this regard. Harboring such people in the military tends to reinforce a culture of impunity. The reinsertion or integration of former combatants into the new FRCI has resulted in a factionalized military with questionable loyalties, parallel chains of command, lingering suspicions, and poor interoperability.²⁰ Transforming the human composition of the entire armed forces to ensure a modicum of regional balance is essential to maintaining civil-military stability. This is because in cases where the human composition of armed forces is not a reflection of the general societal make-up, minorities especially, (or even majorities), may see such imbalances as inimical to their political power and safety. Members of the armed forces must be oriented to demonstrate their allegiance to the state first rather their regional or ethnic affiliations.

Conclusion

The defence sector played a key role in the collapse of the Ivorian state in the past. It also holds the key to sustaining the peace. There have been attempts at resolving the challenges of the armed forces as part of DDRR and SSR processes. However these processes are not conclusive as the noted problems of a divided armed forces still persist. The teething problems of the military can be addressed by moving beyond the piecemeal objectives of past peace agreements that aimed at the reunification of security forces and DDR and SSR to transform the entire security and

defence architecture of the country. This process can be started by addressing the representativeness of the armed forces and building a more professional defence force that meets the security and defence need of the country.

Recommendations

1. The government must initiate a national consultative process aimed at effective implementation of the national security policy and use it as a framework to transform the defence sector. The policy and the related laws should be reviewed periodically to capture the changing needs of the defence and security environment.
2. There is need to right-size the armed forces to meet the current needs of the country. The undesired elements in the armed forces should be adequately integrated into society to prevent them posing further threat to the security of the state.
3. The international community must support Ivorians to build a professional defence force that is fairly representative of the entire societal makeup of the Ivorian state.
4. Efforts should be made to depoliticized the military and foster a change in the relationship between political elites, the armed forces and the wider population.
5. Members of the military who have been indicted of crimes and human rights violations should be prosecuted.

¹⁷ Allouche and Padonou (2017), op .cit.

¹⁸ Bjarnesen, J. (2017), Neglected reconciliation takes its toll", January 30, Available at <http://nai.uu.se/news/articles/2017/01/30/095910/index.xml> (Accessed on June 23, 2017)

¹⁹ Boutellis, Arthur,(2011), "The Security Sector in Côte d'Ivoire: A Source of Conflict and a Key to Peace", New York: International Peace Institute

²⁰ International Crisis Group, (2012), "Côte d'Ivoire: Defusing Tensions", *Africa Report* N°193 – 26 November

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