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Promoting peace and stability in La Côte d'Ivoire: negotiating the cost of international inaction and the need for decisive action

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There is the need for clear and robust international leadership in the Ivorian situation that provides the opportunity for mobilizing international support for the peaceful resolution of the conflict;
- The Ivorian conflict should be given the same degree of urgency by the UN as other conflicts elsewhere;
- The international community needs to act swiftly and decisively to prevent further violence and protect civilians ;
- The AU in particular should intensify its mediation efforts to reduce tension in La Côte d'Ivoire;
- There is the need to increase the strength of UNOCI to enable it embark on enforcement action to stop the escalating violence; and
- Enforcement action to protect civilian population should take place alongside diplomatic means to find a more permanent solution to the Ivorian conflict.

Introduction

Violence continues after the 28 November 2010 Presidential run-off elections after which the winner, opposition leader Alassane Ouattara, has been prevented from taking office by the incumbent president, Laurent Gbagbo. For the past four months, international efforts, largely by the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN), have failed to persuade Gbagbo to cede power to his rival Ouattara. Recent efforts by the African Union

(AU) has only led to a decision by the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) to meet 'in two weeks' to start negotiations between the two Ivorian political rivals 'to develop modalities for the implementation of the proposals' by a panel of five African presidents.¹ Details of the proposals made by the panel of five are yet to be made public, though the AU at a meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia formally recognised Ouattara as President of La Côte d'Ivoire.

¹ . France 24, 'Gbagbo hints ready for talks with bitter rival' at <http://www.france24.com/en/20110318-gbagbo-hints-ready-talks-ouattara-ivory-coast-crisis> . Access 21 March 2011.

While the AU is bidding time to act, there is a growing humanitarian crisis that continues to define the post-election stand-off. Recently, the UN estimates that over 400,000 people are on the move: 200,000 displaced from Abidjan alone, and 90,000 having already crossed into Liberia and Guinea.² 5,000 have since mid-March crossed into Ghana. The death toll on civilians caught in-between the fighting forces also continues to increase on a daily basis. So far the UN reports that about 425 people have been killed.³

In spite of the growing humanitarian situation in La Côte d'Ivoire, the conflict is gradually falling into oblivion. The international community now appears too busy with more 'urgent' issues. On 17 March 2011 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) took a decisive action to protect civilians in Libya by imposing a no-fly zone over the country.⁴ Following that decision, international military action has begun in Libya to stop Colonel Muammar Gaddafi from massacring his own people.⁵ At the same time 25 civilians were reported to have been killed in La Côte d'Ivoire, yet responses from the international community to the two situations have been remarkably different.⁶ When it relates to the crisis in La Côte d'Ivoire, it appears that the initial enthusiasm by the international community to resolve the deadlock over the presidency of the country has died down and given way to indecision and

prevarication about implementing decisions on the way forward. More worryingly is the fact that there is no clear leadership on the situation from the side of the international community (i.e UN, AU and ECOWAS). This lack of clear leadership has resulted in confused signals to all parties to the conflict.

Admittedly, it is clear that the international community has lost control over the Ivorian situation. Initial attempts at mediation have born little or no fruit. For the past one month, there have been constant reports of fighting between forces loyal to President (or Ex-President) Gbagbo and the 'Forces Nouvelles', a rebel group that supports President Ouattara (based on recognition by the international community). Another rebel group is reported to have sprung up and it operating in Abidjan. The clashes between forces loyal to both Gbagbo and Ouattara have resulted in increase in civilian suffering.

In our first policy brief on the situation in La Côte d'Ivoire in January 2011, we argued against military intervention and a called for a negotiated third party settlement of the crisis.⁷ Given that all endeavours at a negotiated settlement have been characterised by entrenched positions by all parties to the conflict, and the fact that fighting has escalated, in this second policy brief on the situation in La Côte d'Ivoire we are calling for enforcement action led by the United Nations Operations in La Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to stop the fighting, protect civilians and restore stability to the troubled country. We argue that given the extent to which the situation has degenerated, it is only a UN force with a strong enforcement mandate, action and capability that can save the situation and protect hapless civilians who are at the

² . Ibid.

³ . BBC News, 'Ivory Coast: Laurent Gbagbo supports "join" army' at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12804728>. Accessed 21 March 2011.

⁴ . See UN Security Council Resolution 1973 (SC 10200) at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>. Access 19 March 2011.

⁵ . BBC News, 'Missile destroy Gaddafi building', at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12801812>. Accessed 21 March 2011.

⁶ . France24, 'Shell kill 25 in Abidjan market', at <http://www.france24.com/en/20110317-deadly-shell-strikes-busy-abidjan-market-place-ivory-coast>. Accessed 18 March 2011.

⁷ . See Aning, Kwesi and Atuobi, Samuel, 'Challenges of the Cote d'Ivoire crisis for West Africa: exploring options for a negotiated settlement', *KAIPTC Policy Brief*, 4/January 2011.

mercy of the warring factions. It is, however, important to note that our main argument in the paper is without prejudice to diplomatic measures by the international community to resolve the Ivorian crisis. This is because we recognise that, eventually, enforcement action supported by diplomatic efforts will achieve greater results.

The failure and cost of international inaction

What can be learned from the Ivorian crisis is the apparent failure of the Ivorian state led by Gbagbo to fulfill its responsibility to protect civilian populations. Though the responsibility to protect principle emphasises prevention, from the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, its signatory states also acceded to the principle and responsibility to take action to save lives should other preventive measures fail. In March 2011 alone, the UN Security Council has stated its preparedness to impose measures, including targeted sanction, against those who commit violations against human rights and international humanitarian law. Again, given the number of civilians who have been killed, it can be said that the international community has also reneged on its responsibility to protect Ivorian civilians thus far. We recognise that the efforts by UNOCI personnel to do their best under the circumstance are commendable. However more needs to be done.

Broadly speaking, two factors have contributed to the worsening situation in La Côte d'Ivoire in which four months of diplomatic efforts have produced little result. First, while from the beginning there was consensus over who had won the elections, there was no clarity about specific actions that needed to be taken to ensure that the winner of the election acceded to power. Several options were explored to negotiate this difficulty. These options ranged from verbal persuasion and assurances

(through diplomatic means) for Gbagbo to step down, the imposition of targeted sanctions, proposals for negotiations between the two parties (this is the position that the AU appears to have taken in recent times), to the use of military force to remove Gbagbo (an option proposed by ECOWAS). Given the several options and the lack of consensus on the course of action to be taken, valuable time has been wasted. The second factor is the frustrating lack of strong and decisive leadership among international actors on the situation. While initial leadership clearly rested on the shoulders of the regional group, ECOWAS (whose backyard, the crisis is taking place), there appears to have been a shift towards an AU leadership. But in this situation, the AU can only succeed with the strong backing of ECOWAS. The UN on its part, through the Secretary General, has issued strong statements condemning the deteriorating situation. But this has remained at the level of words and rhetoric and very little concerted action to back the words. The UN appears to have left the leadership of the situation to African institutions (AU and ECOWAS).

The need for enforcement action by the UN

UN leadership in Libya has demonstrated that when it wants to act, it can act decisively. Given the fact that things have come to a head in La Côte d'Ivoire, and there is now the need for action (beyond words) to protect and save populations who are being killed or forced to free their homes. At this stage of the conflict in which fighting is intensifying, we argue in favour of stronger enforcement actions (and capability) by UNOCI. The need for enforcement action is necessary for several reasons. First there is the need for UNOCI to acquire adequate capability to stop the fighting currently going on in La Côte d'Ivoire. With the current peacekeeping force of 9,000, it will difficult for UNOCI to stop the warring factions from further fighting. The UN recognises the need to boost the strength of its

troops in La Côte d'Ivoire, and in January, this year authorised additional 2,000 to be deployed. But as the situation stands now, an additional 2,000 troops and few helicopters may not be sufficient to stop the warring parties from further fighting.

Second, although the current mandate of UNOCI allows it 'to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, within its capabilities and its areas of deployment',⁸ it has not been able to do so due to its current strength. The purpose of enforcement action in La Côte d'Ivoire should have its object as the protection of civilians. There is therefore the need for enforcement action back by the necessary troops and logistics to enable UNOCI to fulfill its protection of civilian mandate.

Third, embarking on enforcement action guarantees the security of civilians and promotes stability, and will provide the UN with the opportunity to establish itself as the leading body in the search for stability in the Ivorian conflict. Leadership here means that the UN should be able to mobilize all the necessary logistics, financial resources and personnel to manage the operation in the Ivory Coast.

Fourth, in the long-term, it is important for the UN to strengthen the UNOCI to restore stability in La Côte d'Ivoire. Eventually, the success of UNOCI's operations will be based on its ability to restore normalcy and create the conducive environment for civilians to feel safe and protected. Finally, enforcement action should not be interpreted as being divorced from diplomatic action. There will be the need to continue with diplomatic initiatives along enforcement action to find a more permanent and enduring end to the conflict.

⁸. UNOCI, 'UNOCI Mandate' at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unoci/mandate.shtml>. Accessed 21 March 2011.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recent events in La Côte d'Ivoire have clearly demonstrated that the situation is getting out of control. The conflict has begun again. This calls for decisive action on the part of the international community to stop the return to violence, protect civilians and restore stability to La Côte d'Ivoire. We conclude with the following recommendations:

- There is the need for clear and robust international leadership in the Ivorian situation that provides the opportunity for mobilizing international support for the peaceful resolution of the conflict;
- The Ivorian conflict should be given the same degree of urgency by the UN as other conflicts elsewhere;
- The international community needs to act swiftly and decisively to prevent further violence and protect civilians ;
- The AU in particular should intensify its mediation efforts to reduce tension in La Côte d'Ivoire;
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