

The Crisis in Cote d’Ivoire: What lessons for Africa and the International Community?



Synthesis and reflections on the seminar jointly hosted by the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) and the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD), AISA boardroom, 20 June 2011.

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Notes on the Speakers

Nicasius Achu Check

Mr Nicasius Check is a research specialist in the Peace and Security Unit of the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA). He holds a BA from the University of Buea – Cameroon and an MA in History from the University of South Africa. He is currently doing his doctorate with the University of Johannesburg. Before joining AISA, Check served as a Junior Lecturer in History at the Vista University Distance Education Campus, VUDEC, where he taught modules on the spread of Islam in West Africa, Pan Africanism and decolonisation. He is co-author of a chapter title: “The Legislative Framework for Civil Society in Gabon” in the book, *(Dis) enabling the Public Sphere: Civil Society Regulation in Africa* edited by Bhengkosi Moyo and published by the Southern Africa Trust. Check is also editor of a forthcoming book on the “Interface National Interest and Regional Stability: The Nile and the Riparian States”, and is also the author of the Rwandan chapter of the book entitled: “Rwanda and the Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement: Assessing the 1929 Nile Water Agreement”. Check’s research interests include: Environmental insecurity; Transborder natural resource management; Transitional justice; the security architecture of RECs; Conflict management and resolution.

David Zounmenou

Dr Zounmenou is currently a senior researcher for West Africa in the Africa Conflict Prevention Programme (ACPP) at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS). He was appointed as senior researcher in the African Security Analysis Programme at the ISS Tshwane (Pretoria) office in July 2007. Dr Zounmenou is a graduate from the Ecole Nationale d’Administration (ENA-BENIN) - option Diplomacy and International Relations. He joined Wits University where he completed his postgraduate studies (BA Honors, MA Cum Laude and PhD) in International Relations. His areas of interest include Foreign Policy Analysis, Contemporary Development Issues, Democracy and Good Governance, Armed Conflicts and Human Security. Dr Zounmenou tutored at Wits University and lectured at Walter Sisulu University before joining the ISS.

Siphamandla Zondi

Dr Zondi is the Director of the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) after taking over from the founding Executive Director, Prof. Garth Le Pere, in January 2010. He was recently appointed by the Minister of Science and Technology to serve on the Council of AISA. Dr Zondi received his BA and Higher Diploma in

Education from the former University of Durban-Westville before graduating with MPhil and DPhil in African Studies at the University of Cambridge, UK. Prior to his current position, he headed the IGD's programme on Africa studies and SA Foreign Policy Analysis for five years. Between 2000 and 2004, he co-ordinated the Africa Institute of South Africa's (AISA) Regional Integration and Sustainable Development Programmes. Dr Zondi has published widely in his areas of research interest, namely: regional integration and governance, South Africa's international relations and foreign policy, and public health policy. His recent publications are on the SADC mediation in Zimbabwe; the future direction of SA's foreign policy; and Africa's health governance. He is a regular media commentator and writes a weekly political column for The Witness newspaper.

Introduction

After numerous postponements, Cote d'ivoire finally went to the polls on 31 October 2010 to elect a new president. The incumbent Laurent Gbagbo had been in power since 2000, but his administration lost control of the northern region of the country to the *Forces Nouvelles (FN)* rebels after a failed coup d'état in September 2002. Organised under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), the presidential election was meant to settle the leadership contestation that had defined Ivorian political history in the past few decades and set the country on the path to reconciliation and economic recovery.

Whereas the first round of the presidential election was relatively uneventful, the same could not be said of the November 2010 run-off, which pitted Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara, the candidate of choice for the rebel-controlled north of Cote d'ivoire. At the end of the hotly contested election, there were two official versions of the results. The one pronounced by Cote d'ivoire's electoral commission awarded victory to Ouattara, while the other, originating from the Constitutional Council, declared Gbagbo as winner. These two interpretations of the election outcome were later to find resonance in constituencies both in Cote d'ivoire's immediate region and the wider African continent, thus triggering a complex and drawn-out political crisis that embroiled the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Africa Union (AU) and foreign powers with a stake in Cote d'ivoire. It took a controversial French-backed military assault on Gbagbo's palace to put an end to the standoff and accompanying human rights abuses that were allegedly perpetuated by forces loyal to both antagonists.

The contested outcome of Cote d'ivoire's presidential election was not unexpected, given the huge stakes involved for a variety of actors within and outside the country. Even so, the degree to which external actors became involved in the conflict was not anticipated. With Ouattara now formally inaugurated as President of Cote d'ivoire and Gbagbo put under house arrest pending possible prosecution for crimes against humanity, the focus of the Ivorian people has now shifted to the challenges facing the country in the areas of reconstruction and reconciliation. For Africa and the rest of the world, and mindful of the divisions, recriminations and mutual suspicions that defined the painful moments of the crisis, it is perhaps time to take stock of the manner in which different actors engaged with the situation. It is this latter concern that inspired AISA and the IGD to jointly convene a seminar on the crisis in Cote d'ivoire on 20 June 2011. The meeting sought to understand the dynamics of the Ivorian crisis and interrogate the role played by external actors, with a view to highlighting pertinent lessons that are embedded in the experience.

The meeting was opened by the Chief Executive Officer of AISA, Dr Matlotleng Matlou and moderated by Dr. Ridwan Laher, Chief Research Specialist & Head of the Sustainable Development Unit at AISA. It unfolded in two parts. In the first section, Nicasius Check from AISA's Peace and Security Unit and David Zounmenou, attached to the African Conflict Prevention Programme of the ISS, made presentations on the internationalisation of the Cote d'ivoire crisis and the regional dynamics of the crisis, respectively. These presentations were followed by a response from Siphamandla Zondi. The second and last section of the seminar was dedicated to critical exchanges between the speakers and the audience. This report is a synthesis of and reflections on the presentations made at the seminar, together with the salient points that emerged from the interactive discussion.



The speakers and representatives of AISA's management & the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO): From left to write: Nicasius Check (AISA), Dr David Zounmenou (ISS), Dr Siphamandla Zondi (IGD), Ambassador Mdu Lembede (DIRCO), Dr Matlotleng Matlou (AISA).

The Ivorian crisis: a deadly interplay of neo-colonial interests, identity issues and political manipulation?

The Ivorian conflict which expressed itself in the form of violent contestations of the results of the November 2010 presidential run-off does not lend itself to one simple explanation. This assertion sums up the different positions and arguments advanced at the seminar with regards to the root causes of the crisis in Cote d'ivoire. While the key actors and their supporters worked hard to market their concocted interpretations of the conflict, and a number of 'analysts' continue to uncritically reproduce and reinforce these half-truths, a more nuanced examination of the situation, as advocated by Zondi in his response to the main speakers, would reveal a complex mesh of contrasting interests and unresolved national issues that made an explosion practically inevitable.

The determination of Laurent Gbagbo to halt and reverse decades of French hegemony and "economic strangulation" of Cote d'ivoire, according to Check, constitutes the single most important factor that accounts for the conflict in the West African country, even though due consideration ought to be given to the contributing role of identity and ethnic politics. Similar to its engagements with most of its former colonies in Africa, France continues to wield enormous economic and, in Marxist reasoning, political influence in Cote d'ivoire, 50 years after independence. France has so much at stake in Cote d'ivoire that any leader who was perceived to be threatening the status quo, as did Gbagbo, was bound to be a victim of regime change masterminded by Paris, argued Check.

This thesis is not without contestation, though. While one cannot safely dismiss the neo-colonial roots of the Ivorian conflict, its centrality in defining and understanding the contours of the crisis runs the risk of being exaggerated. As Zounmenou suggested, an informed observer, with extensive knowledge of the intricacies of Cote d'ivoire's political economy, including Gbagbo's business links with French enterprises, would be less sympathetic to the neo-colonial rhetoric that appears to have gained currency in explaining the Ivorian debacle. From this perspective, the political and economic ambitions of local actors assume greater salience in trying to make sense of the conflict in Cote d'ivoire, with issues of nationality, ethnicity as well as the fear of neo-colonialism becoming instruments of manipulation.



Dr Zounmenou argued for the recognition of ECOWAS' relentless efforts to stabilise the West African region through progressive norms and institutions.

Weak political institutions in Africa create opportunities for Western interference

France's continuous influence in Cote d'Ivoire and the extent to which this has contributed to the longstanding conflict in the country may be open to debate, but the active involvement of Paris in the post-electoral crisis, either directly or under the veil of the United Nations (UN), was conspicuous. Just how do we make sense of this interference was another major preoccupation of participants at the seminar. There is an enduring tendency for the African elite to enter into unholy partnerships with foreign allies, which do not only undermine the interests of the African people, but also continue to frustrate the aspirations of the continent in fashioning workable institutions of governance. To paraphrase Zounmenou, the experience in Cote d'Ivoire, and perhaps Libya, points to a trend in which weak political institutions at the national, regional and continental levels, on the one hand induce and swell conflicts, and on the other hand create opportunities for foreign powers to promote their interests in Africa. A case in point was the responsibility entrusted to the UN to certify election results, a process which in the view of participants should be the exclusive responsibility of well-capacitated local institutions.

Ironically, the damaging effects of this institutional deficiency have been exposed in a region, which, according to Zounmenou, is in an advanced stage of building a normative and institutional framework *par excellence*, which among other things should mitigate and contain the incidence of conflict in the region. Although it took a commendable lead in peacekeeping and mediation, ECOWAS later proved to be handicapped in taking Cote d’Ivoire out of its malaise, creating a vacuum that France was so willing to fill. For Zondi, this ineptitude on the part of one of Africa’s revered regional organizations is symptomatic of a continental-wide challenge, where due to the fact that a good number of African states still lack *de facto* autonomy, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) on the continent are fast becoming the new vehicles for external influence. This emerging trend does not only call into question the independence of the positions adopted by bodies such as ECOWAS, but could likewise explain why both ECOWAS and the AU found themselves in a state of gridlock that impeded meaningful action in the Ivorian crisis. The rebuff by some members of ECOWAS of the military option to take out Gbagbo, as well as the hesitancy of the AU to consensually back Ouattara’s alleged victory could hardly be dissociated from perceptions harboured by a segment of the African elite that both positions were sponsored by France to promote its agenda in Cote d’Ivoire.



African analysts must stop relying on concocted “templates” and independently engage with issues if they are to make meaningful contributions to the emancipation of the continent, argued Dr Zondi.

Dissecting the “black box” of the UN: a call for an African consciousness of the embedded interests in IGOs

The Ivorian crisis did more than expose the vulnerability of African institutions. For the attentive observer of world politics, the politicking that lay behind the events that culminated in the capture of Laurent Gbagbo equally spoke volumes of the amount of faith that should be placed on institutions of global governance such as the UN. The relevance of multilateral institutions like the UN in a chaotic and interdependent world is perhaps not a subject for debate. Nevertheless, this should not be mistaken to mean these institutions are immune to the *realpolitik* that defines relations between states, and would always work for the common good of the world’s people. Their general orientation is often tainted by the interests of their dominant members. Check and Zondi put it better in their respective arguments that the actions of the UN during the Ivorian crisis were devoid of the neutrality that is often wrongly attributed to IGOs, suggesting that what masqueraded as a collective security effort under the aegis of the UN was largely a French-inspired intervention executed with the blessing of like-minded veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council, in the spirit of what could be termed great power reciprocity. This scenario presents an important lesson to African states, most of which operate at the bottom half of Thucydides’ international hierarchy of power. They must be prudent enough to recognise the interests of world powers in the continent, and constructively engage with these actors so as to align their respective interests, remarked Zondi.



Participants at the seminar expressed worry over the mismatch between the interests and perspectives of African leaders and those of their people, a weakness that reinforces conditions for conflict.

A grassroots version of the notion of “African solutions to African problems”?

It is fair enough to recommend that African states continually engage with their Western counterparts in order to harmonise their respective geopolitical interests, but there is no guarantee that this would curb the spate of violent conflicts on the continent, to which Western powers are often a party. In fact, one may even argue that a defining feature of the post-colonial African state is its propensity to ally itself with different external interests. The problem is that too often than not, these alliances are forged at the elite level, with little regard for the broader interests of the African people. Strangely enough, when vested interests in the status quo appear to be threatened, these transnational elite alliances tend to degenerate into a battle between democracy and African independence. As the crisis in Cote d’Ivoire proves, it is the African people for whom this phoney conflict is ostensibly waged that are left worse off.

It is in this context that participants at the seminar, while reflecting on possible remedies to the recurrence of political crises on the continent, expressed scepticism over the belief that Africa would be better off if only it was left to solve its own problems. Without discounting the imperative of local ownership of political processes in the continent, there was a shared understanding that this crude sense of nationalism would amount to nothing unless African leaders make considerable efforts to synergise their interests and perspectives with those of the people they purport to lead. In other words, the liberation of Africa from its many problems, be they internally or externally induced, must be inspired and driven from below before it could have any chance of succeeding. This brings to the fore the role of civil society, which, as Zounmenou rightly observed, remain pivotal to the dismantling of the paternalistic Franco-African ties and other undemocratic networks that continue to undermine the peace and development of Africa.

Conclusion

Although participants could not agree on the details relating to the root causes of the Ivorian conflict, there was convergence on the observation that Western powers [read: France] took advantage of the institutional deficiency that is characteristic of governance processes in the continent to align the outcome with their interests. More than anything else, this experience instructs that Africa continues to be of strategic importance to foreign powers, and that the interests of the latter cannot be ignored in the discourses that seek to shape the political, economic and security trajectory of the continent. The major challenge going forward is to develop workable and legitimate institutions that will democratise

the processes through which the different internal and external interests in the continent are articulated and negotiated, in a bid to prevent future crises.

List of Participants

Sam Lekala	AISA
Siphamandla Zondi	IGD
Lesley Masters	IGD
Francis Kornegay	IGD
Lyndsey Duff	IGD
Fritz Nganje	IGD
Penelope Masenamela	IGD
David Zounmenou	ISS
Henning Snyman	SAlIA
Linos Mapfumo	Embassy of Zimbabwe
Donald Tlaka	HSF
Khaya Daki	YDA
Tobile Gqili	YDA
Golden Mathonsi	YDA
David Nghatsane	Vurhonga
Kedibone Aphané	MRC
Dieudonne Tumba	UNISA
Khuiso Golelo	
April Yazini	AISA
Makgwatheme Mothapo	AISA

Matlotleng Matlou	AISA
Neo Ramoupi	AISA
Maria Mata	AISA
Laurette Mkhwebane	AISA
Tandeka Nkiwane	DRI
Cecilia Silolo-Tshishonga	AISA
Elizabeth Mokotong	DOBE
Tiego Basaya	UNISA
Azwifaneli Managa	AISA
Tandokazi Kela	AISA
Matshidiso Modisaotsile	AISA
Kapinga Dago	UNISA
Justice Mkhabela	NRF
Amb. Mdu Lembede	DIRCO
Sehlare Makgetlaneng	AISA

Seminar Programme

10h20 – 10h30	Welcome by Dr Matlotleng Matlou (AISA)
10h30 – 11h00	The internationalisation of the Cote d’Ivoire conflict (Nicasius Check, AISA)
11h00 – 11h30	The Cote d’Ivoire Crisis: Regional Dynamics (Dr David Zounmenou, ISS)
11h30 – 12h00	Response from Dr Siphamandla Zondi (IGD)
12H00 – 12H45	Interactive Discussion
12h45	Vote of thanks

About the Hosts

The Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) – www.igd.org.za



The IGD is an independent foreign policy think tank dedicated to the analysis of and dialogue on the evolving international political and economic environment, and the role of Africa and South Africa. It advances a balanced, relevant and policy-oriented analysis, debate and documentation of South Africa's role in international relations and diplomacy.

The IGD was initially established in 1995 as the *Foundation for Global Dialogue* after several years of effort led by the former South African president, Nelson Mandela, in his capacity as the president of the African National Congress. He and his team of leaders saw a need for a research organisation that would facilitate the new South Africa's engagement with the changing global order after 1994. This was a period in which three vectors of change coincided: the tectonic shift in global power politics after the collapse of the Soviet Union; the wave of democratisation that hit Africa and South America; and the near miraculous transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa. The initial funding came from the German government and went towards establishing the *Foundation's* competitive edge, a combination of policy-oriented research, catalytic dialogue, tailor-made publications and grant-making for NGOs interested in international relations.

The IGD's research agenda has three broad programmatic focus areas: *Foreign policy analysis* with special reference to the making and management of foreign policy and diplomatic tools like economic, developmental, and public diplomacy; *African studies* focusing on the role of regional and continental integration in African politics and development as well as the study of peace diplomacy; and *International diplomacy*, analysing dynamics in international diplomacy that have a bearing on African peace and prosperity.

Mission: The IGD strives for a prosperous and peaceful Africa in a progressive global order through cutting edge policy research and analysis, catalytic dialogue and stakeholder interface on global dynamics that have an impact on South Africa and Africa.

The Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) – www.ai.org.za



The Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) was first established in 1960 as a non-profit organisation. Today it is a statutory body following the Africa Institute of South Africa Act (no 68 of 2001). Although the institute has been in existence for more than 40 years, this saw it being brought into the fold of science councils in South Africa, and given the full support of the Department of Science and Technology.

South Africa and Africa have undergone fundamental changes in the past decade and AISA has been at the forefront of research and training on African affairs. Through the AISA campus, an annual training programme that educates students from disadvantaged universities in research methodologies, AISA has contributed to fostering a new generation of research specialists. AISA has also been able to produce some of the finest research on contemporary African affairs by having its dedicated and highly qualified researchers conduct field research every year throughout the African continent. This means that all research output is based on first hand empirical evidence.

AISA has also become involved in community outreach programs, by doing all it can to provide maps and other resources to under-privileged schools in rural South Africa. AISA has undertaken to promote knowledge creation as a fundamental part of development and growth for Africa and as such aims to encourage research as a career choice for young people as they leave school.

As Africa changes and development becomes ever more important, especially in the globalised world economy, AISA will continue to produce research of the highest standard. By working with the best researchers and guided by the highest standards, AISA will contribute to development and knowledge creation for all of Africa.