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THE CONFLICT IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE:
South Africa's diplomacy, and prospects for peace

Abdul Rahman Lamin

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AU	African Union
CFA	<i>Communauté Financière d'Afrique</i>
CPP	Convention Peoples Party
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FPI	<i>Front Populaire Ivoirien</i>
ICG	International Crisis Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MJP	Movement for Justice and Peace
MPCI	Ivory Coast Patriotic Movement
MPIGO	Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PANA	<i>Parti Nationaliste Africain</i>
PAP	Pan African Parliament
PDCI	<i>Parti Democratique de Côte d'Ivoire</i>
PSC	Peace and Security Council
RDR	<i>Rassemblement de Republicaines</i>
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SLPP	Sierra Leone Peoples Party

Introduction

South Africa's diplomatic involvement in Côte d'Ivoire in 2004 continues to raise questions about Pretoria's ability to broker a lasting peace in that country. Notwithstanding South Africa's positive contribution to peace processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi, sceptics continue to doubt whether it is capable of delivering long-term peace in Côte d'Ivoire. This view holds that South African officials do not fully understand the complexities of the Ivorian conflict, and more broadly, the political and security landscape of West Africa. Comments attributed to the French president, Jacques Chirac, questioning South Africa's inability to deliver peace in Côte d'Ivoire because its leaders do not 'understand the psychology' of West Africa, illustrates the breadth of this thinking.

However, the signing of the Pretoria Agreement in April 2005 by parties to the conflict has forced those sceptics to rethink the doomsday scenario with which South Africa's diplomatic efforts in Côte d'Ivoire had been associated. Suddenly, the discourse seems to have shifted from whether South Africa has the capability to deliver peace, to whether its leverage over the conflicting parties is more effective than that of other third parties such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and France, both of which have previously tried to secure peace in Côte d'Ivoire. What 'magic', some wondered, had Mbeki applied to suddenly rekindle hope and optimism about prospects for peace in Côte d'Ivoire?

This question became even more relevant following the announcement of a decree by the Ivorian president, Laurent Gbagbo, essentially repealing sections of the national constitution that had previously been the source of contestation among key players in the conflict. Gbagbo's pronouncement, made barely weeks after the conclusion of the Pretoria talks, had immediate implications for Allasane Ouattara, a political heavyweight and former prime minister who had in the past been barred from contesting the country's presidency due to controversial legislation passed in 1994, restricting the definition of citizenship. Indeed, while acknowledging the significance of this move, it is by no means clear whether it will bring final closure to the controversy surrounding the discourse on citizenship, identity, and their respective roles in the conflict. For instance, it is useful to interrogate whether the repeal affects candidates vying for other offices than the presidency. Besides, does the repeal address the broader question of political franchise for all Ivorians, thus 'delegitimising' previous claims to exclude the predominantly northern Muslim population that has historically constituted the bedrock of Ouattara's political support? These and many other related questions are critical to unlocking the intentions of Gbagbo and other principals involved in the conflict. Where South Africa's diplomatic efforts are concerned, the question to raise would be what sets the Pretoria Agreement apart from its predecessors, namely, the French brokered Linas-Marcousis Accord, and the ECOWAS-sponsored Accra Agreements?

To address these key questions one needs from the outset to establish a clear understanding of the issues, dynamics, and contexts of the Ivorian conflict. This paper seeks to analyse those issues, dynamics and contexts, in an effort to locate South Africa's diplomatic role specifically and, more importantly, its effectiveness in the Ivorian peace process. A secondary objective, stemming from the above, would then be to identify more broadly some lessons for future Africa-led peacemaking initiatives. Mindful that Mbeki's crucial engagement in the conflict was mandated by the African Union (AU), and given that in the last five years Africa's political leadership has made fundamental commitments toward crafting norms and building institutions that promote peace, security, and good governance in the continent, it is timely to interrogate South Africa's role in Côte d'Ivoire.

The paper opens with a brief examination of the nature of politics in post-independence Côte d'Ivoire. The reign of the country's first leader, Felix Houphouët Boigny, is brought under the microscope, to illustrate how and why he was relatively successful in maintaining a reasonable balance among competing interest groups, and consequently achieved political and economic stability in a subregion with a long history of political instability.

This overview is followed by an analysis of the immediate post-Houphouët era, focusing specifically on the politics of identity and exclusion as a source of the present conflict. Here, we briefly examine the politics of succession following the death of Houphouët in 1993, a contest that saw the ascension to power of Henri Konan Bedie, the then president of the country's national assembly. The enactment of strict citizenship laws, otherwise known as Ivoirite, by the Bedie administration, is examined in an effort to understand the rationale behind them. The role of Ivoirite as a polarising factor among the country's main political elites is highlighted and further analysed. A much broader question interrogated is, why did the contestation for power become suddenly intense in the immediate aftermath of Houphouët's death among elites who had coexisted and to a large extent played a direct role in Ivorian politics prior to 1993?

An analysis of two critical events that occurred in the country between 1999 and 2002 – the 1999 military coup that unseated Bedie from power, and the failed attempt in 2002 to unseat President Gbagbo – is provided. As is widely acknowledged, the failure by dissidents in the army to unseat Gbagbo from power plunged Côte d'Ivoire into a civil war that has since led to the partitioning of the country between government-held south, and rebel-held north.

The French-brokered Linas–Marcousis agreement signed in 2003, which was later complemented by ECOWAS-sponsored talks known as the Accra Process, is subsequently examined. The central question is why the implementation of both agreements failed to achieve lasting peace, in spite of the optimism that greeted their arrival. As a corollary to that question, we also tease out the extent to which the Ivorian parties fulfilled

their commitments, and the role that moral guarantors of both processes played in assisting the belligerents implement both agreements

South Africa's crucial involvement in the conflict is then analysed, posing the obvious question of why, in the first place, South Africa was mandated by the AU to intervene, especially given the complexity of the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. Could this possibly be an opportunity for South Africa to muster more support for evolving institutions of the AU such as the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), the Peace and Security Council (PSC), and the Africa standby force, which it has championed since Mbeki took power in 1999? To be precise, how does one balance South Africa's diplomacy with the political and economic interests of France, which has historically been Côte d'Ivoire's chief patron? Where does Nigeria fit into this trajectory, given its well known rivalry with France for 'hegemonic' influence in West Africa? Unpacking this dynamic is central to understanding South Africa's engagement, and for that matter Nigeria's role in the sub-region, as both countries position themselves for a possible seat on an 'expanded' UN security council, proposed by UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, in his UN reform package.

The paper concludes with a summary of the key issues, dynamics, and contexts of the conflict, vis-à-vis South Africa's diplomatic involvement in Côte d'Ivoire. A few policy recommendations are offered and lessons for future Africa-led peace initiative are ad-duced.

Côte d'Ivoire under Houphouet Boigny: a brief historical context

Côte d'Ivoire, like the majority of former French colonies in Africa, maintained strong political and economic ties with France long after independence was achieved in 1960. Under its policy of assimilation, France administered its colonies in Africa as part of a greater 'French empire'. From that point of view, France, unlike Britain, saw its role in Africa as far more than a civilising mission designed to exploit 'African natives' economically and ultimately wield political influence over their lives. The French approach to colonial rule in Africa had a much broader cultural dimension, beyond the mere quest for political domination of the 'subjects' within its 'spheres of influence'.

We should emphasise that although relations between France and Côte d'Ivoire blossomed in the post-independence era, formal contacts between the two did not occur until the late 19th century. Aristide Zolberg, for instance, reminds us that the first French school was established in Côte d'Ivoire only in 1885, with the first Catholic mission opened a decade later, in 1895 (see, generally, Zolberg 1964). He attributes the late arrival of Christianity in general, and missionary education in particular, to 'French xenophobia', suggesting that prior to the late 1800s, French political elites were unsympathetic to 'priests' and 'nuns', whose mission was to spread the 'gospel' to the 'uncivilised'.

The above point is instructive for two reasons. First, 1885 is quite significant in the political history of Africa because it was the year that the 'scramble and partition' of the continent was formalised at the Berlin conference. Of course, long before 1885, major European powers involved in the colonial project had already acquired 'possessions' in Africa, which were later legitimised at the Berlin conference. The fact that 'formal' French control and authority over Côte d'Ivoire was exerted only at close of the 19th century should perhaps not necessarily come as a surprise, given this historical context. However, as we shall later illustrate, it undermines the notion that French domination of Côte d'Ivoire's political, economic, and socio-cultural life predates the Berlin conference. Secondly, the religious dimension of French influence is also significant, in light of the apparent Christian-Muslim divide that frequently features in the analysis of the current conflict. Given the late arrival of Christianity in Côte d'Ivoire, one cannot help but question the viability of the religious/regional thesis deployed in explaining the country's political turmoil.

In the administering its colonies, France emphasised mastery of the French language by the Africa elites, a critical element that speaks to the nature of cultural domination that France was out to attain. That African elites such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Senegal's first president, and Côte d'Ivoire's founding leader, Felix Houphouët Boigny, among others, served as deputies in the French national assembly ahead of independence in their respective countries, attests to the French idea of a 'greater empire' of which 'African possessions' were to be an integral part. Although Africans in the colonies did not necessarily enjoy similar rights and privileges to those of their counterparts in the French homeland, the philosophical underpinning of assimilation was to create a semblance of Frenchness in the minds of the colonised people. It is perhaps no surprise that with the exception of Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea, who openly opposed French president Charles de Gaulle's Africa policy, and with great courage and consequence declared his country independent in 1958, virtually all post-colonial leaders in former French colonies remained loyal to their colonial bosses, decades after independence was achieved.¹

However, as suggested earlier, due to the late 'formalisation' of colonial rule in Côte d'Ivoire, the country's political elites did not have an opportunity to sit in the French national assembly until later in the 20th century. By contrast, Senegal for instance, elected its first deputy to the same body in 1916 (Zolberg 1964). In fact, it was not until the end of the Second World War that French colonial rule really intensified in Côte d'Ivoire. In the post-war dispensation, the French government embarked on an aggressive effort to recruit and train Africans to take responsibilities in, particularly, the civil service. Zolberg asserts that it took only one generation for Côte d'Ivoire to be transformed from a formal colonial territory to one in which 'nationalist movements' emerged, with independence as the political mantra (ibid). In other words, unlike in other colonies, particularly those under British rule, the intensity of anti-colonial struggles did not last for long in Côte d'Ivoire, due to the late 'formalisation' of colonial rule in the country.

Felix Houphouët Boigny's rise to power in Côte d'Ivoire predates his appointment to the premiership of that country prior to independence in 1960. By the 1940s, Boigny had emerged as the dominant African politician in the country. The formation of the Parti Democratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) in 1946 under his leadership was one of the high points of Boigny's political career. By establishing a broad-based nationalist party ahead of independence, he certainly positioned himself well to take on the reigns of power once imperial rule ended. His election to the French national assembly, albeit much later than say, that of Senghor of Senegal, was a clear acknowledgment by the French authorities and the Ivorian population that Boigny would emerge as a major force to reckon with, as the country made its transition from colonial rule to independence. Immanuel Wallerstein (1964) has argued that the 'creation of a nation seems to require a national hero'. In reference to Boigny and Kwame Nkrumah, Wallerstein posits that the 'national hero ... symbolizes and legitimizes the new order', incarnating the Weberian concept of 'charismatic authority'.

To be sure, the strategy of nationalist leaders positioning themselves by forming broad-based political parties or movements in the run-up to independence is not unique to Côte d'Ivoire. In the former British colonies of Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Sierra Leone, for instance, Kwame Nkrumah's Convention Peoples Party (CPP) and Sir Milton Margai's Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) respectively were already well established by the time independence was achieved. The broad national profile of these two parties gave Nkrumah of Ghana and Margai of Sierra Leone a comparative advantage over their lesser-known rivals in the contest for power at the dawn of independence.

Having ruled Côte d'Ivoire from independence in 1960 till his death in 1993, Houphouët Boigny is credited for maintaining robust economic growth and relative political stability in a subregion long associated with military coups and political violence. The success of his economic stewardship can be attributed to a combination of factors. Apart from the fact that it was for decades the world largest exporter of cocoa, Côte d'Ivoire's close ties with France under Boigny's rule assured the West African country of massive capital investment into its economy from French business and its private sector. It is no surprise, then, that France had always prized Côte d'Ivoire, which for the most part has served as an economic counterweight to West Africa's powerhouse, Nigeria. The historical rivalry between Nigeria and France for economic and political influence in West Africa should therefore be seen in this context.² Adebayo Adedeji (2004), the intellectual architect of ECOWAS, has argued that part of the reason why ECOWAS has failed to achieve its objective of creating a monetary and economic union in the subregion has to do with the support France continues to offer its former colonies, through the vigorous protection of their local currencies. For instance, until France adopted the euro in line the EU's monetary union plan, the common currency in its former colonies – the CFA (Communauté Financière d'Afrique) – was directly tied to the French franc. Thus, the strength or weakness of the CFA at any given time was largely influenced by policies emanating from the French treasury and central bank.

Houphouët Boigny's success in creating an economically viable and politically stable state in West Africa can also be explained in part by the nature of the politics over which he presided for more than three decades. Like many other 'strongmen' and authoritarian rulers of his generation, Boigny presided over a patronage system in which the entire state machinery revolved around his personality. Under his rule, it was almost impossible to resist government policies and practices openly, as doing so would never be without consequences. In 1970, for instance, following the establishment of the Parti Nationaliste Africain (PANA) and a subsequent uprising by the Bete ethnic group in the Guebie region, the Ivorian military used violent tactics to put down the unrest. This heavy-handed measure by Boigny and his supporters in the PDCI was clearly designed to send an unmistakable message to those bent on challenging the regime, that a no-nonsense approach would be adopted in dealing with dissent.

Ironically, while Boigny's strong tactics succeeded in cowing potential dissidents into submission and consequently buying the unqualified loyalty of many political elites, it also sowed the seeds of future discord with his demise in 1993. It is quite interesting, for instance, to note that virtually all the key political elites currently engaged in the struggle for power in Côte d'Ivoire were in some way direct beneficiaries of the patronage system built by Boigny. These elites did not only refrain from directly resisting Boigny's policies and practices, in many ways they maintained amicable relations with one another. Because power and authority was centralised in the presidency, the country had not had an opportunity, by the time the 'strongman' died in 1993, to prepare itself seriously for a smooth transition to participatory democracy. As a consequence, the nature of political succession was unclear, and this paved the way for fierce political contests among elites who at one point in their careers were allies. The question that demands urgent answer, then, is how did Houphouët's legacy affect the succession process which ensued after his departure from the political scene?

The post-Houphouët era and the politics of succession in Côte d'Ivoire

Houphouët Boigny's death in 1993 created, for the first time, a unique opportunity for Côte d'Ivoire to move out of the shadow of its 'big man'. For more than three decades, Boigny had personified the Ivorian state. His death was therefore an opportunity to revisit his legacy, and in the process chart out a new political course for the country. We should note in this context that, in addition to its relative economic development and political stability in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire attracted unwanted international attention in the 1980s. The construction in Houphouët's home town of Yamoussoukro of the largest Roman Catholic cathedral outside of the Vatican's St Peter's called into serious question his judgment as a political leader. With the formal inauguration of the church presided over by the late Pope John Paul II, Yamoussoukro was transformed into the unofficial capital of the country, and became the scene of numerous subregional conferences in 1980s and 1990s.

Although the basilica brought enormous publicity to the tiny West African state, the rationale of investing huge state resources in such a project was questioned, especially at a time when there were already signs of pressing socio-economic problems that demanded urgent attention from the state. The extent to which Houphouët chose lavishly to invest state funds in building a cathedral, as opposed to addressing the social needs of the population, is indicative of insensitive leadership. His death, therefore, was an opportunity for Ivorian elites to rescue the situation and thus move their country in completely new direction, where the interests of the general population would take precedence over the personality and ego of the leader.

The process of electing a successor to Houphouët led to fierce battles among the competing political elites in the PDCI. The contest for the top job was essentially narrowed down to one between Henri Konan Bedie, the president of the country's national assembly, and Allasane Dramane Ouattara, who had been prime minister since 1990. With both candidates commanding strong support among their respective political bases, Ouattara's supporters alleged fraud when the final decision was made in favor of Bedie.

To understand the tensions between Bedie and Ouattara in the succession struggle, it is important to put things into some perspective. Ouattara's appointment to the premiership in 1990 had caused consternation among some elements, particularly within the ruling PDCI. His selection for the post drew concern among this group not so much because of his mixed descent – partly Burkinabe and partly Ivorian – but in large part because of his affiliation with the Bretton Woods institutions. A US-trained economist, Ouattara was tapped by Boigny from his senior position at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to take up the premiership in 1990, with specific responsibility to manage the country's relationship with the international donor community.³ The rapid decline of world cocoa prices by the late 1980s was enough warning to Boigny that Côte d'Ivoire needed to manage its economy efficiently in order to attract donor assistance, to make up for the shortfall in export earnings. From a professional and technical standpoint, therefore, entrusting such a responsibility to the hands of Ouattara made perfect sense.

Politically, however, Ouattara's appointment to the premiership created unease among some elites, and in a way sowed the seeds for future discord. Given his affiliation with the IMF and World Bank, two institutions criticised by, among others, leading African economist Thandika Mkandawire for their insensitivity to the challenges facing developing countries, particularly in Africa,⁴ Ouattara was seen by his nemeses as nothing more than an 'agent' for those bodies. Indeed, his crackdown on corruption and insistence on accountability and probity in government did very little to endear him to critics who were already aware that state resources were shrinking due to the changing dynamics in the global economy. The implication was that access to those resources was no longer guaranteed as in the past. In this context, we should acknowledge the

so-called 'greed and grievance' theory advanced by analysts such as William Reno and Paul Collier, among others, who argue that the contestation for political power among elites becomes more intense when state resources begin to dwindle (see Reno 2000: 43–68; Collier 2000: 91–111). The logic is that in such a situation, where the patronage system needs to be maintained, distribution of state resources becomes a central point of contest. The contest is more intense when differences – ethnic, religious, and regional – are politicised by the elites. Côte d'Ivoire is thus no different from other African states in this respect, and Ouattara's role in Boigny's administration at such a crucial time made the contestation even more tense. That his ambition to succeed Boigny, following the latter's death in 1993, clashed with those of Bedie, was to be expected. Whether one subscribes to the notion that Ouattara was Boigny's favorite to succeed him is not of much relevance to understanding the ferocity of the power struggle between him and Bedie. What is certain is that the perception painted of him as a stooge of donor institutions, hostile to the interests of the political class, was enough to rally powerful domestic forces against him. That Bedie finally won the contest and, through a controversial constitutional amendment process, immediately proceeded to exclude Ouattara and his followers from full participation in the political process is indicative of the depth of the problem that ultimately manifested itself in armed conflict, almost a decade later.

It is useful, before delving into the complexities of policies of exclusion, to unpack briefly the social geography of Côte d'Ivoire's political history, as this has direct relevance to our understanding of the present conflict. The political and social configuration of the modern Ivorian state derives from 60 'disparate ethnic groups' that have been 'classified into four culture circles or civilizations, differentiated in terms of social structure, language and economic activity' (Zolberg 1964). These 'four culture circles' dovetail with the so-called regional divide between south and north. In the south, which is home to the Baoulé – Côte d'Ivoire's largest ethnic group – and the Beté, the physical setting of 'tropical rainforests and coastal lagoons' is markedly different from the 'savanna grasslands' of the north, home to the Sénoufo- and Bambara-speaking ethnic groups (ibid). The main southern ethnic groups, in particular the Baoulé, are believed to have migrated into modern-day Côte d'Ivoire following the death in 1750 of Osei Tutu, leader of the Ashanti confederacy (ibid). Given this history, it is perhaps no surprise that these groups have maintained a matrilineal descent pattern, with political power and organisation centralised within the chiefdom. Of note here is that, while the south constitutes roughly about 60 per cent of the total population of Côte d'Ivoire, the notion that it is heavily Christian is perhaps overstated. Historically, ethnic groups in this part of the country have practiced traditional religions (ibid). The advent of Christianity in the late 19th century did not radically change that dynamic.

In the north, where 'two waves of migration ... resulted in two types of social and political organisations', a patrilineal system of inheritance dominates among the major ethnic groups (ibid). Furthermore, unlike southern groups which had late contact

with Christianity, northern groups, particularly the Malinké and the Dioulas – who were historically part of the Mande-speaking empire in West Africa – had early Islamic influence. It is therefore no surprise that this influence has dictated their socio-cultural and political practices to date.

While it is not entirely accurate to interpret current events in Côte d'Ivoire as a contest between two religious influences, the distinct differences between northerners and southerners of socio-cultural patterns and political practices lend themselves to such analyses. After all, as Zolberg (1964) has suggested, 'these classifications are by no means the result of ethnographic imagination alone but correspond to widely shared perceptions among the population'. He adds that, because the country historically had nothing like the Hausa Fulani empire or the Ashanti confederacy, 'Africans in Ivory Coast have not found within their past a source of myth for contemporary unity'. Perhaps it is not far-fetched to suggest that the absence of such a 'myth' in the country's social and political history explains in part why certain elites in the post-Boigny years have sought to 'exclude' others from full participation in the political process, in the process creating disunity.

The politics of exclusion and the genesis of Côte d'Ivoire's conflict

Upon taking office, Bedie's first objective was to consolidate power. With the power struggle between him and Ouattara still fresh in his mind, the new president, relying on his support in the national assembly, immediately proceeded to enact stringent citizenship laws that laid the foundation for the current political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. The controversial law, popularly known as Ivoirite, was specifically designed to exclude certain segments of the population from full participation in the political process. A key provision of the law restricted the eligibility requirements for candidates seeking the presidency of the country. According to the now-infamous article 35 of the national constitution, anyone seeking to run for the presidency must first show that they were born in Côte d'Ivoire to parents who were also born to Ivorian nationals. In other words, contrary to previous practice where citizenship was defined by birth within Ivorian territory, to at least one parent of Ivorian nationality, under the new law the conditions were much more stringent, excluding a vital segment of the population.

Disregarding, as it did, the long history of migration from other countries, the new citizenship law was bound to create problems among certain segments of the Ivorian population. Indeed, it is clear, as others have pointed out, that the intended target of this law was Ouattara, since one of his parents is believed to be of Burkinabe nationality (ICG 2004). Given his popularity in the largely Muslim-dominated northern region of the country, Ouattara was still seen as a potential threat to a Bedie presidency. Bedie was therefore not prepared to take any chances, so excluding Ouattara, even if on the most flimsy of technical grounds, appeared to be the logical thing to do. It is quite

paradoxical that in preparation for the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, Ouattara's Rassemblement des Republicaines (RDR) has forged an alliance with Bedie's PDCI, apparently against Gbagbo's Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI). It would have been unthinkable even a year ago to imagine the two arch political rivals coalescing to defeat a common enemy, particularly given that Bedie is the architect of draconian citizenship laws that excluded Ouattara from contesting the presidency in the last two election cycles. Whether this alliance survives and ultimately unseats Gbagbo when elections are conducted remains to be seen. What is instructive about this move however is that in a sense it validates the thesis that both leaders are indeed 'reinventing' the relationship they had forged while they held senior positions in Boigny's government prior to his death in 1993. Then, as now, both men and their supporters are essentially illustrating that it is possible for them to co-exist, if only they can summon the courage to suppress their personal political ambitions in the interest of the common good. The critical thing to watch from here on is whether they will agree to file a single presidential candidate for the October poll and if so, who that would be.

Ivoirite predictably turned out to be counterproductive and highly polarising. Legally barring certain portions of the population from exercising their constitutional rights to participate in governance must be interpreted as an attempt to practice political exclusion. It therefore came as no surprise that Ouattara and other leading politicians, including the current president, Gbagbo, denounced the law and labelled its intentions xenophobic.

To follow up on this logic of exclusion, one could argue that in the Côte d'Ivoire under Boigny, when resources were abundant and his grip on the political machinery quite firm, it was not difficult to control competing elites and hence buy their loyalties. However, with his demise and the country's rapidly shrinking economic resource bases, in part due to the effects of globalisation, the new elites had to find ways of managing those limited resources. Bedie's strategy was therefore to exclude segments of the political class from sharing in the largesse of the state. Obviously his calculation was that by doing so, he would be able firmly to consolidate power. Subsequent events however undercut this calculation.

To be clear, while scarcity of resources by itself does not fully explain the feud among competing political elites who once worked amicably together under Boigny, it partly underlies the nature of the problem following his death. Clearly, factors such as Boigny's personality – his larger-than-life status – and the strong support he received from France throughout his long career had combined to hold the system together. That Bedie lacked similar attributes, which could have insulated him from the stiff opposition from rival political elites, is without question. His strategy was, therefore, clearly geared toward crafting a way of dealing with the situation, and the fact that he choose to protect himself behind the wall of citizenship reform is testimony to a failed approach that contributed to his eventual political downfall.

The 1999 military coup and the outbreak of civil war in 2002

Bedie's attempt to consolidate his rule was suddenly interrupted when low-level officers in the national army staged a coup that forced him to flee the country in December 1999. The coup plotters subsequently called on Robert Guei, a retired general and former chief of staff of the Ivorian military, to take over the presidency. Guei, who had had a long career in the military, had fallen out of favor with Bedie when the latter became president in 1993. This had led to his removal from the top post and subsequent retirement from the military.

It is significant to locate the 1999 coup in Côte d'Ivoire in some perspective. By 1999, the move to transform the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the AU was well under way. In fact, in July of that year, at their annual summit in Togolese capital of Lomé, African leaders had already adopted the AU Constitutive Act, which among other matters stipulated that 'unconstitutional changes of government' would no longer be tolerated on the continent. Although it took another three years to establish the AU formally as the successor organisation to the OAU, there were already normative shifts underway by 1999, with significant implications for governance in the continent. It therefore came as no surprise that the military authorities in Côte d'Ivoire came under serious pressure from within the continent to cede power immediately to a civilian, democratically elected government. That Guei quickly announced multiparty elections, scheduled for October 2000, underscored the effects of the pressure from continental leaders.

However, notwithstanding its commitment to elections, the Guei administration established a national commission with a mandate to review the constitution and revise the electoral code ahead of the polls. The Belgian-based watchdog International Crisis Group suggested that as one of the foremost opponents of Ivoirite when the policy was enacted in 1994, Guei would use this opportunity to finally address the problem (ICG 2004). However, to their surprise, while the commission did indeed recommend the repeal of certain portions of the constitution deemed 'prejudicial' to some of the aspirants, Guei refused to abide by those recommendations and instead proceeded to retain the constitution in its original form. This essentially meant that Ouattara and others of mixed Ivorian descent would be ineligible to run in the October 2000 elections. In a further boost to Guei's tactics of exclusion, a supreme court ruling ahead of polls nullified the candidacy of 14 individuals vying for the presidency. With most of the country's most prominent politicians affected by that ruling, the only candidate of substance left in the race was Gbagbo, a socialist-leaning politician who became the standard bearer of the FPI, a party he had founded in 1982. Guei's attempt to manipulate the results of the elections by using the military to declare him the winner led to street protests organised by youth brigades and militias loyal to Gbagbo. The ensuing mayhem eventually forced Guei into exile, and Gbagbo was sworn in as president of the country.

Amid his controversial rise to power, Gbagbo's first task was to unite the country and deal directly with the issue of citizenship once and for all. He offered an olive branch to other opposing political factions by including them in his 'government of national unity' and preached national reconciliation. However, Gbagbo's inability or unwillingness to repeal unequivocally the Ivoirite provision in the constitution made him part of the problem. As with his predecessor, Robert Guei, who also publicly denounced the law when it was first enacted, Gbagbo's ambiguity over the issue upon taking office led to speculation about his true intentions. Although he was not the architect of Ivoirite and pronounced his opposition to the law when it was first enacted, he was nonetheless prepared to accept the status quo as long as that meant enhancing his chances of retaining power at the expense of excluding others. In effect, Gbagbo had no problem being the beneficiary of a law that he was philosophically opposed to, since it gave him an unfair advantage over his strongest opponent, Ouattara. It was therefore very clear from the outset that regardless of his public gesture of reconciliation, Gbagbo's aggressive pursuit of citizenship and immigration policies and his non-committal attitude toward repealing Ivoirite were radically inconsistent.

In 2002, while he was traveling abroad, an attempt by segments of the Ivorian military to overthrow President Gbagbo was foiled. The fallout from this was essentially to plunge the country into a full-scale civil war, with the emergence of a rebel group known as the New Forces or Forces Nouvelle. Since then, Côte d'Ivoire has been effectively partitioned into two parts, with the Gbagbo government controlling the mostly Christian south, and the rebels and their allies controlling the mostly Muslim north. A bitter power struggle among different sides of the political divide has thus been at play since 2002.

At this juncture, it is worth asking: who, really, are these so-called New Forces? It has been alleged, particularly by Gbagbo's supporters, that the group is linked to Ouattara, and that it is financially sponsored by foreign sources. Put directly, Ouattara has been accused of being one of the key financiers of the rebellion, which incidentally has its stronghold in the northern part of the country, a region that the former prime minister himself hails from. The polarisation of the country along regional and religious lines during the period of conflict has made it easier to levy those allegations against Ouattara. However, while the interests of the New Forces and those of Ouattara may have coincided during the conflict, there is no direct evidence linking the two.

There is a tendency to conflate what seems to be both a religious and regional contest playing itself out in the Ivorian theatre. Given that Ouattara is a Muslim who hails from the north, it is easily assumed that he must be the political godfather of the New Forces, who incidentally control the northern region of the country. Furthermore, the fact that both sides have constantly portrayed Gbagbo as the main obstacle to peace makes for reinforcement of this 'conspiracy theory'. In a sense therefore, the exclusion of Ouattara from full participation in the political process, apparently on the basis

of his religious and regional (ethnic) origin, becomes a rallying cry for other groups, such as the New Forces, that may not necessarily have a co-ordinated strategy with the RDR.

However, we must move beyond what could arguably be a simplistic analysis of the conflict, its players, and the issues involved. A much broader conceptualisation is preferable. In doing so, then, we should make it quite clear that the New Forces are not really a monolithic group. In fact, they are a collection of three different rebel groups that decided to form a political alliance in the midst of war. These groups, the Ivory Coast Patriotic Movement (MPCI), the Movement for Justice and Peace (MJP), and the Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West (MPIGO), all have different political agendas, but strategically decided to harmonise their differences as the conflict intensified, presumably to maximise their gains at the negotiating table. The MPCI, for instance is believed to be made up of disgruntled elements within the national military that felt discriminated against when Gbagbo took office in 2000, along with the president's own former allies. Guillaume Soro, the public face of the New Forces, is not only a Christian, like president Gbagbo, but was previously leader of youth wing of Gbagbo's FPI. The MJP and MPIGO, which have had their stronghold in the western part of the country, are believed to be seeking 'revenge' for the death of General Guei who was killed in 2002, following his implication in the failed coup attempt against Gbagbo.

It is important at this point to inject the subregional dynamic of the Ivorian conflict into the debate. With Sierra Leone emerging from more than a decade of armed conflict, and its neighbor, Liberia, heavily engulfed in its second civil war by 2002, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire faced a real threat of degenerating, with the risk of (ex) combatants crossing the border in search of 'opportunities'. With Liberia's former warlord president under military pressure from various groups, one of which – the Movement for Democracy in Liberia – was linked to Côte d'Ivoire, it is not difficult to see why the two Ivorian rebel groups that emerged would get the full backing of the beleaguered regime in Monrovia.

Given the fluid security situation in the neighborhood, Côte d'Ivoire's vulnerability to cross-border attacks by militias from both Sierra Leone and Liberia was already a foregone conclusion by 2002. Even a cursory knowledge of the history of attacks and counter-attacks by warlords operating in this subregion, where borders are porous, would have suggested that Côte d'Ivoire would become the new flashpoint in West Africa's interconnected and intractable conflicts. With demobilised combatants from Sierra Leone seeking economic opportunities elsewhere in the subregion, one could easily see why they would cross the border into Liberia and subsequently Côte d'Ivoire, to peddle their services as 'freelance fighters' willing to 'work' for whoever could pay them.⁵

Indeed, while Ouattara may have benefited politically from the northern-based rebel-

lion against Gbagbo's government, there is little evidence to suggest that he is directly linked to these rebel groups. Of course the fact that the MPCJ, in particular, has consistently raised the issue of citizenship as one of its grievances, a position consistent with that of Ouattara, reinforces the perception that the two are working together. However, without any direct evidence to link them, these charges would remain mere allegations. In the long term, though, it is likely that the history of fragmentation among the three rebel factions that make up the New Forces may resurface, and could potentially erode whatever gains Ouattara and his followers have attained to this point.

The Linas–Marcousis Accord

The disintegration of Côte d'Ivoire into armed conflict in 2002 sent shock waves not only through West Africa, but far beyond. France, Côte d'Ivoire's former colonial master and that country's single largest foreign investor, was concerned about the interests of its nationals. With a huge population of French citizens and other foreign nationals based in Côte d'Ivoire, French troops arrived in the country within days of the foiled coup to 'protect foreign nationals'. At the same time, ECOWAS, which had gathered tremendous experience in peacekeeping in the subregion, established a 'contact group' to serve as interlocutors between the conflicting parties. After a number of failed attempts at securing a ceasefire agreement, Senegal's president Abdoulaye Wade finally got the parties to commit to a ceasefire, and this subsequently cleared the way for the reinforcement of French troops to serve as a buffer between the fighting forces – a temporary measure designed to hold things together until the deployment of ECOWAS forces.

In 2003, the Ivorian parties signed the Linas–Marcousis Accord outside Paris after intense diplomatic negotiations sponsored by French officials, and supported by African leaders and the UN. However, despite the optimism that greeted the signing of the accord, implementation proved futile. The question is, why? To what extent did the parties genuinely attempt to fulfill their commitments? Did the moral guarantors also play their part in helping the parties implement the accord? A broader question to pose would be whether the accord was set up to fail, given that Gbagbo and his supporters immediately objected to what they considered too many 'concessions' given to the rebel groups, implying that France was to blame.

To answer these questions, it is useful first to spell out the key elements of the Linas–Marcousis Accord. Briefly, the agreement can be divided into two broad parts: political and security aspects. The political element was based on a power-sharing model, while the security dimension emphasised demilitarisation. Power-sharing, as a model for conflict resolution in Africa, has become increasingly fashionable since South Africa's political settlement was achieved in the early 1990s. In employing this model, proponents argue that a 'zero-sum' approach is counterproductive to achieving the

objectives of lasting peace, particularly in a transitional society. Excluding sections of society from political participation, it is argued, is a source of conflict. To the extent, therefore, that belligerents can devise an inclusive mechanism which brings on board all competing interests, the risk of future disputes is minimised.

Clearly, there is evidence both in Africa and elsewhere to illustrate the veracity of this argument. However, it should also be stated that power-sharing as a model for resolving protracted armed conflicts have failed in other situations in the continent. The risk of failure for such an arrangement is always high in an environment where there is toleration for treating human rights violations with blanket impunity.⁶ With respect to the Linas–Marcousis Accord, this point is quite instructive. As mentioned, shortly after signing the accord, Gbagbo's supporters denounced it, arguing that it made too many 'concessions' to the opposing sides, and France was blamed squarely for that. The fact that the agreement made provision for the allocation of ministerial positions, including the sensitive ministries of defence and internal affairs, to rebel forces was construed by Gbagbo's followers as a conspiracy orchestrated by France. For them, it did not matter that the agreement also made provision for the appointment of an independent prime minister – a post later assigned to Seydou Diarra – who would more or less serve as a bridge between the two sides. Hardliners in the FPI argued that instead of including them in the government, the rebels should have been prosecuted for their crimes against the civilian population.

Although Gbagbo himself never openly expressed these sentiments, the fact that such noises emanated from prominent members of his ruling party, such as the speaker of the national assembly, suggests at the minimum his passive acquiescence. To be sure, Gbagbo's socialist leaning as a political figure had never truly endeared him to president Jacques Chirac of France. Ideologically, Gbagbo had for the most part been opposed to French manipulation of Ivorian politics, dating back to the days of Boigny. He had, therefore, historically been suspicious of France's, and more precisely Chirac's, political involvement in Côte d'Ivoire. Although the French authorities welcomed him to Paris following his controversial elections in 2000, and subsequently lifted sanctions imposed on the country after Guei's 1999 coup d'état, clearly Gbagbo's relationship with the former colonial power was fluid. The Linas–Marcousis process thus provided an opportunity for Gbagbo and his supporters to undercut France's involvement in Côte d'Ivoire.

Interestingly, France was criticised by Ouattara's RDR when it decided in 2000 to lift sanctions against the regime in Abidjan, in spite of concerns about the validity of the polls that brought Gbagbo to power. Similarly, France was also slammed by the New Forces when it deployed troops in the country, following the failed coup attempt against Gbagbo in 2002. This move was clearly interpreted by the rebels as an attempt to protect the Gbagbo, thus giving his regime the chance to buy time and prepare itself for war.

The security aspect of the Linas–Marcousis Accord made provision for disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of armed combatants. Given the country's militarisation, it made sense that any attempt at solving the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire had to take into account this very critical element. With all the parties committing themselves to the process, the agreement thus made provision for support from the international community to assist the Ivorian parties in fulfilling their obligations. On 27 February 2004, the UN security council adopted resolution 1528, establishing a peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire, with a much broader mandate than that of its political mission, which had been in place since May 2003. Among other things, the new UN mission was specifically charged with the responsibility of monitoring the cessation of hostilities; assisting the parties in fulfilling their disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration obligations; and monitoring an arms embargo which had been in place since the conflict broke in 2002.

Of course, it is clear by now that there was very little, if any, success achieved in the disarmament process. The first question is whether the Ivorian parties failed to live up to their commitments, and if so, how proactive the international community was in ensuring that the agreement was implemented. Fairly obviously, all parties, without exception, did indeed fail to live up to their commitment to disarm, and instead chose to accuse each other of bad faith. In such a situation, it is difficult to see what third parties could have accomplished. In a situation where all sides played spoilers, the international community was hamstrung. In hindsight, though, one could argue that punitive measures such as sanctions could have been imposed against certain individuals and the groups they represent for failing to fulfill their obligations. In any case, that did not occur, and it therefore was no surprise that, after months of delay in the disarmament process, West African leaders initiated another process that led to what are known Accra I and II. The ECOWAS-led process essentially provided a forum for the Ivorian parties to engage each other and recommit themselves to the Linas–Marcousis Accord. Clearly, to the extent that ECOWAS was successful in getting the parties to recommit to the peace process, it has to be commended. However, as we now know, both Accra I and II were unsuccessful, and hence lay the foundation for the intervention of South Africa in November 2004, at the request of the AU.

Enter South Africa: Thabo Mbeki's diplomatic involvement in Côte d'Ivoire

South Africa's crucial diplomatic involvement in Côte d'Ivoire came at the specific request of the AU. By the time the continental body mandated Pretoria to get involved, the peace process was in real danger of collapsing. After more than a year of stalemate and lack of progress in the implementation of both the Linas–Marcousis and Accra agreements, the situation had deteriorated so much that by October 2004, there was unease both within the subregion and internationally about the country's future.

Furthermore, France, which since 2002 had maintained a visible military presence in Côte d'Ivoire as part of a multinational peace operation, was directly involved in a confrontation with the Ivorian military, following the bombing of its base in north by Ivorian forces. Provoked by this action, the French military responded heavily, using air strikes to destroy the entire Ivorian air force. This response clearly led to an escalation of the conflict, as a war of words sharpened between Paris and Abidjan. In such an environment, therefore, the appointment of an independent third party respected by all sides became extremely necessary. Having acquired experience in resolving conflicts in Burundi and the DRC, South Africa appeared to be the most suitable candidate for the job in Côte d'Ivoire.

Since its designation by the AU as mediator, the unanswered questions have remained: why Pretoria, and, more importantly, why only in 2004 and not prior to that? Implied in these questions is whether South Africa possesses the capability to address the problem in Côte d'Ivoire, given its limited involvement in West Africa prior to 2004? It is useful to address this within the context of what has been achieved since Pretoria threw its hat into the diplomatic ring.

A number of reasons can be advanced to explain the AU's choice of South Africa for the Ivorian job. First, one must acknowledge that the choice was logical, given Pretoria's willingness to advance the cause of peace in the continent, particularly since Thabo Mbeki became president in 1999. The progress toward peace in the Great Lakes region, and more specifically Burundi and the DRC, has been largely due to South Africa's commitment toward espousing the vision of African Renaissance with which Mbeki has been famously associated. That commitment is clearly a good foundation upon which to judge Pretoria's capability and readiness for the task at hand in Côte d'Ivoire. To be clear, though South Africa was not directly involved in brokering the Linas–Marcousis or the Accra agreements, both president Mbeki and his foreign minister, Nkosasana Dlamini-Zuma, played a role behind the scenes, and in fact attended the signing ceremonies of both agreements in Paris and Accra respectively. In the past five years, there has increasingly emerged what has been referred to as a 'division of labour' among Africa's two powerhouses, Nigeria and South Africa. This has become a defining feature of the move toward greater unity and co-operation in continental politics.⁷ Until Pretoria's direct involvement in Côte d'Ivoire, it had been generally understood that West Africa remains Nigeria's 'sphere of influence' while Southern Africa remained South Africa's. That leaders of both countries understood this dynamic and respected each other's jurisdiction in dealing with problems in their respective subregions was the rule, prior to South Africa's direct involvement in Côte d'Ivoire in 2004. However, we should emphasise that, despite this 'division of labour', it has not been uncommon for officials on one side to play a behind-the-scenes role in the other's subregion, as illustrated by Mbeki and Dlamini-Zuma's involvement in Linas–Marcousis and Accra processes.⁸ One could, therefore, infer from the foregoing that by the time South Africa took up the job of mediator in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2004, it already had a sense

of what the key issues were, in large part because of the behind-the-scenes role it had played in the peace process.

The second, and perhaps more important consideration has to do with the Ivorian parties' seeming lack of trust of the other third parties involved in the peace process, prior to November 2004. As noted earlier, with the outbreak of open hostility between loyalist Gbagbo forces and the French military, France was no longer considered an honest broker by the Gbagbo faction. To be sure, France's impartiality in the conflict had always been an issue for different factions involved in the peace process. Its role as an honest broker had been questioned by virtually all the parties, as argued earlier. However, the most pronounced opposition to Paris's role had always come from the Gbagbo camp.

As a socialist-leaning politician, Gbagbo had never really been a fan of France. His ideological opposition to the French political leadership of Chirac had been well known long before his rise to power in 2000. The call by France for the annulment of the 2000 presidential polls which brought Gbagbo to power, on the grounds that the elections did not reflect the will of Ivorians,⁹ has never gone down well with Gbagbo and his supporters in the FPI. Even though both sides managed to patch up their differences after Gbagbo's state visit to France in 2001, the relationship had always been one of suspicion. It thus came as no surprise, as we have already argued, that France was severely criticised by pro-Gbagbo loyalists for making 'concessions' to the New Forces, under the Linas–Marcousis agreement. With France considered untrustworthy by Gbagbo and his allies, and given the interests of various West African actors in the Ivorian conflict, the Ivorian president and the other factions were desperate to have another mediator in whom they could place their trust. Ideologically, South Africa was considered a better option than France, at least from the point of view of Gbagbo and his FPI. Although the South African government is not a socialist regime, it is fair to argue that Mbeki's forceful articulation of an 'Africa agenda' on the world stage has won him admirers globally, not least among his peers on the continent. That an African leader had the courage to define a place for Africa in global politics as partners of the developed world, and not as dependants of the latter, is unprecedented. To admirers such as Gbagbo, Mbeki essentially symbolises the constructive resistance that African leaders must advance, to assert control over their own affairs. It is certainly plausible to suggest that Gbagbo saw in Mbeki a reflection of his own direct opposition to the 'master-servant' relationship, which has, for centuries, epitomised European domination of Africa.

Thirdly, ECOWAS's active diplomatic involvement in Côte d'Ivoire was scaled down by the end of Ghanaian president John Kufuor's tenure as chairman of the subregional body. Coinciding with his re-election bid for a second five-year term as president of Ghana, Kufuor's profile as a peacemaker in West Africa had been gradually lowered even before he vacated the ECOWAS chair in May 2004. It is plausible to argue that

after two years at the helm of an organisation preoccupied with peacemaking in the subregion, Kufuor's retreat may have been borne out of a genuine desire to focus more on Ghana's domestic problems and less on foreign policy. Naturally, Nigeria, as the 'big brother' in West Africa, could have been a logical choice to succeed Ghana in that role, but given its historical rivalry with France for influence in the subregion, it was understandably an unlikely candidate for the job. Under these circumstances, then, it made sense for the AU to look outside West Africa for a suitable candidate agreeable to all Ivorian parties. With South Africa's profile as a peacemaker in the continent on the rise and with Mbeki's personal commitment to the mission, it was not surprising to learn that Pretoria was designated for the job.

In acknowledging South Africa's suitability, it is also important to bring some context to this discussion. Firstly, it would be a mistake to assume that South Africa's intentions in Côte d'Ivoire are purely altruistic. Although there is a genuine commitment in Pretoria to promote peace, security, and good governance in Africa, officials in Pretoria are by no means oblivious to South Africa's national interest. As with every other state in the international system, South Africa's foreign policy decisions are driven by considerations of national interest. With respect to Côte d'Ivoire, South African businesses, in particular, stands to benefit economically if it succeeds in bringing peace to that country. As a former oasis of economic development in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire would require massive amounts of foreign investment once it solves its political problems. Given the withdrawal of French businesses from the country in the wake of the escalation of the conflict, there is a potential void that could be filled by businesses from South Africa, many of which are paradoxically beneficiaries of a free and democratic country, with apartheid-era restrictions now removed from their activities in the continent. In the long term, therefore, Côte d'Ivoire offers an opportunity for South African businesses that have in the last decade increasingly taken advantage of their country's proactive diplomatic posture on the Africa.¹⁰

Secondly, we should also take into account South Africa's bid to secure a permanent seat on an 'expanded' UN security council, as proposed in the UN reform package presented by UN secretary general Kofi Annan to the general assembly. While it would be unfair to suggest that the country's involvement in Côte d'Ivoire is motivated by this consideration, it would certainly be naïve to ignore that factor in the calculation of policy makers in Pretoria. With uncertainty about how many seats, if any, would be allocated to Africa, the three leading contenders from the continent, namely South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt, understandably have to seize on every opportunity available to make a case for why any of them is best suited for that responsibility. To the extent that South Africa is successful in delivering peace in Côte d'Ivoire, that would help to strengthen its case when the general assembly debate on UN reform ultimately opens up in New York in September 2005. Of course, it is impossible to determine at this point which of the three countries would ultimately receive the support of the African caucus in the UN general assembly, in the event that, say, a decision is made to allocate

only one seat to the continent. One view suggests that the decisions to expand the security council and, more importantly, on who gets a seat on the 'new' body, would be made solely by the permanent members of the council. Implicit in this is that South Africa stands to benefit in such a scenario, since it is perceived more favourably by council members than its rivals. It is, however, the view of this writer that the decision on security council expansion would be arrived at through a series of compromises among various power centres within the UN. While the security council clearly has an advantage in influencing that decision, given its power under the current charter, the general assembly would most definitely have a crucial role to play in the process. For instance, if one were to move the debate about security council expansion beyond Africa, and take into account the bids of other countries – Japan, Brazil, and India among others – vying for a seat, the politics become even more complex, and hence the need to build alliances outside the security council is extremely urgent and desirable. To that extent, then, South Africa and, indeed, Nigeria and Egypt would have to play to those other audiences and 'power centres' within the organisation if they are to achieve their goal of clinching a seat on the 'new' body.

Having analysed the reasons for, and potential benefits that could accrue from South Africa's involvement in Côte d'Ivoire, the next question is what leverage Pretoria has applied on the parties that has rekindled hope in the peace process? Related to that, it is also crucial to ask whether the Pretoria Agreement of April 2005 is substantively different from the previous agreements. In other words, what sets it apart from its predecessors? With respect to the first question, one can safely say that the trust of South Africa by all the Ivorian parties has been Pretoria's greatest asset, and hence constitutes its leverage in that country's peace process. As mentioned earlier, with France's role compromised, and ECOWAS's seeming inability to resolve the matter, parties to the Ivorian conflict enthusiastically welcomed the designation of South Africa, a clear reflection of their frustration with previous mediators. Mbeki's personal commitment to ending the conflict – he flew to the country within a few days of his appointment as the AU envoy – and his willingness to accommodate the grievances of all sides, must undoubtedly have endeared him to the Ivorian parties. This non-partisan approach toward the situation was clearly manifested in April when parties to the conflict came to South Africa and met separately with the president, before finally announcing a breakthrough in the peace process.

Substantively, however, the Pretoria Agreement of April 2005 does not in any way differ much from the Linas–Marcousis and Accra accords. Like its predecessors, the new agreement addresses both political and security issues. Politically, the Pretoria Agreement provides for the 'reunification' of the country by securing commitments from the New Forces to rejoin the power-sharing government agreed to under Linas–Marcousis. We should be reminded that South Africa's involvement in the peace process came in the wake of the withdrawal of rebel ministers from the Gbagbo-led coalition government, on the grounds that the president had failed to delegate, in any substan-

tive way, executive authority to the prime minister, as stipulated under Marcousis and Accra. With the mandate of the UN mission in Côte d'Ivoire set to expire on the eve of the Pretoria talks, South Africa therefore had the unenviable task of getting the Ivorian parties to understand the urgency of the moment. To the extent that it succeeded in getting all sides to take into account the interests of their country and thus reach compromise, South Africa must be commended.

Where the Pretoria I is concerned, perhaps the most critical contribution made by South Africa politically is the diffusion of the controversy surrounding Ivoirite. Although the issue of citizenship eligibility was left unresolved at the end of the April talks, the fact that the parties empowered Mbeki to assist them in finding a solution to the problem is instructive for two reasons. On the one hand, the parties specifically requested that Mbeki's decision on the citizenship question be taken in consultation with AU chairman, president Obasanjo of Nigeria, and UN secretary general Kofi Annan, both of whom are respected African statesmen. This reflects the faith and confidence that the Ivorian parties had in the Africa-led process. On the other hand, one cannot help at first glance but regard the decision to defer the matter to third parties as an abdication of responsibility by the Ivorian parties themselves. While this interpretation might arguably be superficial and may even be dismissed by some as uninformed, it is not unreasonable to see why some would be sceptical about such an approach. That said, the issuing of a decree by Gbagbo – only weeks after the Pretoria Agreement was negotiated – essentially removing the constitutional impediment that had prevented Ouattara from contesting the presidency, coupled with the latter's new-found alliance with his former political nemesis, Bedie – the architect of Ivoirite – illustrates that the three African statesmen may indeed have applied significant pressure that led to Gbagbo's concession. The question then is, as Côte d'Ivoire gradually moves toward elections in October 2005, would these commitments be kept by all sides, particularly given the lack of progress in the disarmament process up to now?

From a security angle, Pretoria I, like Linas–Marcousis and Accra I and II, prioritises the disarmament and demobilisation of all armed combatants, and their reintegration into a national force. However, given the parties' past history of failure to implement peace agreements, there were concerns even back in April that the accord might unravel because there were no specific measures on how to punish those who undermined it. While the parties committed themselves to the process as in the past, the absence of a punitive mechanism through which spoilers could be held accountable made the agreement vulnerable to failure. Although it spelt out specific timelines to guide the implementation process, its weakness lay in the fact that the Ivorian parties were simply given the benefit of the doubt by the South African mediators. In other words, as a non-partisan peacemaker, Pretoria chose to rely merely on the goodwill of the parties, and was unwilling to wave the 'big stick' that could potentially dissuade spoilers from undermining the process. Thus, it came as no surprise that when the disarmament process progressed at snail pace, with parties missing the deadlines, doubts

were raised about whether it was even feasible to contemplate elections in October 2005.¹¹

Clearly, the delay in implementing the disarmament component of Pretoria I must have been a source of worry for the South African mediators when they summoned all parties to a second round of talks, only a day after the deadline had elapsed for the process to commence.¹² The two-day summit in Pretoria concluded with a joint communiqué, in which all parties committed themselves to start the disarmament immediately, and finish the process on 20 August 2005. If this were to happen, a window of opportunity would still exist for the elections to go ahead in October as previously scheduled. Two questions ought to be further explored here: what have been the stumbling blocks to the disarmament up to now, and what is the guarantee that the parties will abide by their commitment this time around?

Prior to the second round of talks in Pretoria, various incidents of ceasefire violations, claiming the lives of innocent civilians in different parts of the country, were reported. To strengthen their respective cases, each faction has accused the other of failing to respect the terms of the agreement. For instance, the New Forces have blamed their refusal to disarm on president Gbagbo's failure to disarm youth militias allied to his FPI. Gbagbo and his close-knit circle of advisers, including his wife, Simoné, and the national assembly president, Mamadou Koulibaly, have been accused of planning genocide against northerners and Muslims, using the so-called Young Patriots. Allegations of secret meetings by this group, designed to execute their plan, have been widespread in rebel circles. Their strategy has been compared to those of Hutu extremists, who planned the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In Rwanda, former president Juvenal Habyarimana's wife, Agathe Kanza, along with a small group of extremists known as Akazu, are believed to have been the brains behind the pogrom executed against minority Tutsis, by using state radio to spread hate messages and mobilising the notorious militias known as Interahamwe and Ex-Far.

While it is unfair to accuse Gbagbo and his supporters of planning genocide, as was the case in pre-1994 Rwanda, it is certainly useful to interrogate the role of the so-called Young Patriots in the Ivorian conflict. The Young Patriots, comprising largely unemployed and urbanised youths, reflect the subaltern culture in parts of West Africa that Ismail Rashid theorised about, almost a decade ago, in explaining the role of the youth in Sierra Leone's brutal armed conflict (see Rashid 1997). In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, as in other settings, these youth essentially see their destiny tied to their patron, Gbagbo. They will continue to take their cues from him and his closest associates, as long as they are made to believe that their country is under siege from foreign forces.

This point is quite instructive because, even though the Ivorian government has committed itself to disarmament as spelt out in the Pretoria II agreement, it remains to be seen whether the rhetoric of nationalism will be tempered down to the point where

the Young Patriots are no longer convinced that their 'motherland' is under attack. We should note here Gbagbo and his supporters have consistently argued, throughout the conflict, that the rebellion in their country is sponsored by outside forces. In fact, to them, this is essentially a 'liberation war' with the obvious implication that the struggle for decolonisation is still being fought against France. Their contention is that France is using its 'agents' in the subregion, notably Burkina Faso, which has a terrible history of supporting rebellions in the neighborhood, to re-colonise Côte d'Ivoire.¹³ To the Gbagbo camp, therefore, unless this element of 'foreign invasion' is removed from the scene, they may continue to argue that disarming the Young Patriots would be suicidal. After all, they argue, the Young Patriots are no more than civilians, who in the midst of a military assault on their 'motherland', took up weapons to defend themselves and their communities. The logic then is that there should be no 'moral equivalence' between the Young Patriots and rebel groups that are mere stooges of foreign actors.

Given this backdrop, one must ask whether Pretoria II will be fully implemented by the parties this time around. Of course, the answer to that clearly depends on how seriously the Ivorian parties themselves take the commitments they have made. More importantly, however, success will depend on how robust and hands-on the moral guarantors are during the implementation phase. As suggested earlier, it is clear that all parties respect the mediating role played by South Africa so far. However, it would be a mistake to assume that respect for South Africa as a non-partisan mediator is enough to get the agreement implemented. To that extent, it is instructive that Pretoria II, unlike its predecessor, emphasises punitive consequences against those who renege on their commitment. This is crucial because, ultimately, the 'kid gloves' would have to be taken off if the Ivorian parties are to take this agreement seriously. Although the imposition of sanctions in of itself does not necessarily guarantee compliance by conflicting parties, as other cases have shown, it is no doubt a very useful tool to have in one's possession. The extent to which South Africa has, perhaps in a reluctant manner, endorsed the imposition of sanctions by the AU and UN, in the event that parties fail to abide by the terms of the agreement, illustrates the sense of urgency with which the situation in Côte d'Ivoire is treated in Pretoria.

The way forward for Côte d'Ivoire

After three years of armed conflict, Côte d'Ivoire may have been given a final chance to rescue itself from the devastation and suffering caused during this period. In looking forward, the first point that needs to be made is that the onus lies on the leaders of the various armed factions and political groups to ensure that this opportunity does not slip away from them. They have a responsibility and duty to put the greater interest of Côte d'Ivoire ahead of their own personal political agendas. The military stalemate that has characterised the conflict illustrates that the only solution to the problem is

political accommodation on all sides. That there has been progress on the political front is impressive. However, for that achievement to bear fruit, the security situation needs to be addressed seriously. Disarmament is therefore critical. If the Ivorian parties are to be summoned to Pretoria for another round of talks, it should no longer be about the implementation of previous agreements, as that would clearly foretell doom.

Secondly, the AU mediation team, spearheaded by South Africa, needs to play a hands-on role in the implementation. The suggestion that president Mbeki may designate a personal envoy to work with the Ivorian parties during this critical period is a step in the right direction. There is clearly a need for South Africa to have a high-profile individual directly involved in trying to unlock what ever other obstacles may crop up between now and the 20 August 2005 deadline for the completion of disarmament. Such an official must be in a position to call things as they are, so that the Ivorian parties would understand the need to be serious about the process.

Thirdly, the international community, through UN mission in Côte d'Ivoire, must continue to work with the parties and the South African team to ensure full compliance on all sides. In the past few years, the UN has learned a lot of lessons working with ECOWAS, in ensuring that peace was achieved in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The co-ordination among the three UN missions in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire must be strengthened, and co-ordinated with the activities of African actors. While institutional tensions and differences may arise among them, the focus should be on minimising those differences and tensions, and supporting the Ivorians in their effort to achieve peace. This is so crucial because without lasting peace in Côte d'Ivoire, the gains already made in Sierra Leone and Liberia could potentially be eroded.

Finally, it is important to briefly reflect on prospects for democracy and democratisation in the aftermath of elections in October 2005. Of course, one must acknowledge that at this critical stage in the peace process, the elections are by no means a fait accompli. In other words, while it is theoretically feasible for them to take place as scheduled in October, there are no concrete guarantees that they will actually happen. Beside the fact that there is a tight disarmament schedule to comply with, there are other political and technical requirements – such as putting in place an independent electoral commission, updating the electoral register and so forth – to be met before the polls can take place. However, assuming all these political and technical hurdles are overcome, coupled with a smooth disarmament process ahead of the elections, the critical question for Côte d'Ivoire would then be, what next?

In the scenario described above, it would not be overly ambitious to suggest that Côte d'Ivoire would be on the path toward reconstructing its infrastructure, while at the same time attempting to build institutions of democracy, and developing a political culture of tolerance. Gbagbo's concession on the contentious issue of citizenship therefore needs to be institutionalised, in the immediate post-election period, since it has

always been at the heart of the crisis. The decree issued by the president in April, essentially waiving restrictions placed on certain individuals, should thus be fully incorporated into the constitution.

To make the transition irreversible, serious efforts must be made to address the needs of all disarmed combatants urgently, to take away from them the incentive of going back to their 'old ways'. In this sense, the developmental aspect of Côte d'Ivoire's peace-building process must be prioritised and strengthened by both the post-election government and the international community. State funds should be specifically allocated for the efficient training of the young ex-combatants into skilled and productive citizens, so as to avoid a situation where they could be lured back to fighting a few years down the road. While it may not be possible for the state to finance such an initiative by itself, Côte d'Ivoire may be better off not relying exclusively on the international community, if the experience of other transitional societies such as Sierra Leone and Liberia are anything to go by. In the long term, civil control over the military is the best guarantee for consolidating democracy, and to the extent that ex-combatants are reintegrated into productive civilian lives, all Ivorians stand to benefit.

Endnotes

- 1 In a keynote address delivered in Pretoria on 14 June 2005, while launching the book *A tortuous road to peace: the dynamics of regional, UN and international interventions in Liberia*, edited by Festus Agboaye and Alhaji M S Bah, Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, executive secretary of ECOWAS, suggested that the depth of France's influence in its former colonies partly explains why the Togolese constitution provided a limited transitional period in the event that the sitting president dies. That issue clearly became the source of political crisis, following the death in February 2005 of Gnassingbe Eyadema, who had ruled Togo for 38 years. While Chambas was speaking directly about France–Togo relations, his analogy can undoubtedly be applied to Côte d'Ivoire in assessing French influence in that country, decades after colonial rule was abolished.
- 2 For more on France–Nigeria rivalry in West Africa, see Whiteman and Yates 2004.
- 3 For more on Ouattara's background, see ICG 2004.
- 4 For African critique of IMF–World Bank-imposed structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), see Mkandawire and Soludo 1999.
- 5 In 2003, following his indictment by the UN-backed special court for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Sam 'Maskita' Bockarie, Sierra Leone's notorious rebel commander, was widely reported to have crossed the border from Liberia into Côte d'Ivoire with a band of former Revolutionary United Front (RUF) fighters, who quickly took sides with anti-government rebels in that country's war.
- 6 Although Sierra Leone and Liberia seem to be recovering, relatively speaking, from more than a decade of armed conflict in both countries, concerns have been repeatedly raised in some quarters about the general amnesty provisions included in their respective peace agreements.
- 7 The concept of 'division of labour' is credited to Adekeye Adebajo (2004) and James Jonah

- (2004) in analysing the relationship between the UN and ECOWAS in peacekeeping efforts in West Africa in the 1990s. Although the concept was used in another context, its application is certainly relevant here.
- 8 Mbeki also played a role behind the scenes in the Liberian peace process, even though that process was spearheaded by ECOWAS, under the leadership of the Ghanaian government.
 - 9 France's argument essentially was that since a large number of candidates who filed an application to contest the 2000 presidential elections were disqualified, the outcome of those polls was not necessarily representative of the Ivorian electorate.
 - 10 South African companies could eventually benefit from peace in Côte d'Ivoire, just as they are now taking advantage of the relative peace in Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo, made possible largely by Pretoria's tireless diplomatic engagement in both countries over the past few years.
 - 11 Even the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire expressed some doubts about the feasibility of elections in October, given the delay in disarmament.
 - 12 27 June 2005 was the date by which the disarmament was scheduled to commence, but because of the delays, that did not occur, prompting another round of talks in Pretoria on 28 and 29 June 2005.
 - 13 Throughout the 1990s, Burkina Faso was involved in sponsoring rebel groups in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

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