

Unpacking the crisis in Anjouan: a thin line between independence and the struggle for power

Timothy Othieno

Dr Timothy Othieno is senior researcher in the Africa programme at the Institute for Global Dialogue, Johannesburg.

On 14 June 2007, the outgoing president of Anjouan Island of the Comoros archipelago, Mohamed Bacar, inaugurated himself as president for a second term. This event occurred after Bacar held an unconstitutional election in which he was the only candidate, and claimed to have received 90 per cent of the total vote. This process was subsequently declared null and void by the Union of the Comoros government of Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi (an Anjouanais) and the AU. In response, the international community, led by the EU, rejected the elections and called for fresh elections for the island of Anjouan.

Earlier, on 10 June, the archipelago had held scheduled elections on two of its three islands – Grand Comore and Mohéli. However, after incidents of violence and intimidation occurred during the run-up to Anjouan's election (which involved clashes between Union forces and Anjouan's para-military forces that are reported to have left four or five people dead) the polls on the island were postponed until 17 June by the Union government. On 20 June, after his inauguration, Bacar named a government, while condemnation by the AU and EU mounted against him and the separatist Anjouanais government, with calls to dissolve the government and allow fresh elections to take place. The criticism against Bacar arose from his unconstitutional attempt to establish a government outside the structures of the Union of Comoros government, in violation of the agreements that established the Union in 2003. Bacar's justification for declaring himself president of Anjouan was that the Anjouanais had experienced a decade of discrimination at the hands of the central government, based in Moroni.

Although the situation in which the Comoros finds itself at the moment is not new, the worrying aspect of this current debacle is that it threatens the existing union arrangements put in place in 2003. The question that needs to be asked, however, is whether the crisis in Anjouan is a genuine case of the struggle for sovereignty and self-determination, as Mohamed Bacar would want the world to believe, or just a simple case of self-aggrandisement. This policy brief will attempt to assess the genesis and evolution of the Anjouan crisis. This will be done with a view to determining whether the crisis is a question of independence or the struggle for power.

History of the Comoros

The Comoros archipelago is located in the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and Mozambique. The archipelago is composed of four islands, namely, Grande Comore (*Njazidja*), Anjouan (*Nzwani*), Mohéli (*Mwali*), and Mayotte (*Mahoré*). The northernmost island is Grande Comore, and south of it is the small island Mohéli. To the east is Anjouan, the second largest of the islands after Grande Comore, and just south-east of Anjouan is the

Global Insight aims to provide members of the policy community with concise but insightful analyses of topical issues. Comments and suggestions are invited.



disputed island of Mayotte. While Grande Comore, Anjouan, and Mohéli gained independence from France and became the Republic of the Comores in 1975, Mayotte remained part of France with the status of a *collectivité territoriale*. However, although Mayotte is a territory of the French republic, the Union government of the Comoros lays claim to the island, and, de facto, it is therefore part of the Union. The archipelago, which has close to 700 000 people, is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world.

Comoros has had an unstable history, having experienced 20 coups and attempted coups since its independence in 1975. The coups are an indication of the vicious elite struggles in the archipelago over political and economic power. In this regard, the various histories of the islands and their ethnicities have been exploited in an intense struggle for control of the archipelago. This contestation over political and economic power has thus led to inter- and intra-island rivalries among various political players since independence.

Although the earliest inhabitants of the islands were travellers from Indonesia-Polynesia, the archipelago was later occupied and settled by immigrants from Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Persia. It was these later immigrants who consequently shaped the current Comorian society. The most notable of these early immigrants were the Shirazi Arab royal clans, who arrived in the Comoros in the 15th and 16th centuries, and who stayed to build mosques and set up royal houses, and who introduced architecture and carpentry. From the 15th to the middle of the 19th century, the archipelago was governed by a series of sultanates, until France took the islands over. They were subsequently occupied by France from 1886 until 1975, when partial independence was gained by Anjouan. After the breakaway from French rule, Anjouan joined the Republic of the Comoros.

In 1974, the archipelago held a referendum in which three of the four islands that constitute the Comoros archipelago voted for independence, while the fourth island, Mayotte, voted overwhelmingly to remain under the French republic. In Mayotte, France heavily influenced the political leaders of the island into voting against independence. It was Mayotte's decision not to join the republic that prompted Ahmed Abdallah, one of Comoros's political leaders, to declare independence for Comoros unilaterally in July 1975. He became its first president. However, due to his anti-French stance and vision of a united Comoros that included Mayotte, Abdallah was deposed in a coup by French mercenary Bob Denard hardly a month after the declaration of independence. Denard would consequently orchestrate a number of successful coups on the archipelago over the next 20 years. Ali Soilih, who became president in 1976, tried to turn the country into a secular, socialist republic, which resulted in the alienation of the Comorian traditional and political leaders. In 1978, after prolonged economic decline and conflict with traditional leaders, Soilih was overthrown and killed by mercenaries led by Denard, who restored Abdallah to power.

During Abdallah's reign from 1978 to 1990, the Comoros endorsed a decentralised system of government, and officially became the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, with a constitution that included all four islands. Abdallah's regime was heavily centralised, personalised and corrupt, while Denard was efficiently used by the government to deal with dissent. In this symbiotic relationship, Abdallah and Denard controlled vast sectors of the economy, monopolised Comoros's scant resources, curtailed political freedom, and committed massive human-rights abuses. Abdallah's regime was fully supported by France, Comoros's major trading partner, and the apartheid South African government

Unpacking the crisis in Anjouan

(Denard provided military support in Pretoria's fight against anti-apartheid movements in Southern Africa). Abdallah's period in office, which saw the economy severely decline and resulted in increased impoverishment, especially in Anjouan, ended in 1990 when Denard and his mercenaries killed him in yet another coup d'état.

Abdallah was succeeded in 1991 by Said Mohamed Djohar, who was elected president for a five-year term. Djohar, whose rule was characterised by financial scandals and rampant corruption, was deposed five years later by Denard. This time, the French government intervened, and arrested Denard and his mercenaries, placing them under custody in France. The removal of Djohar created a political vacuum in the archipelago which lasted until March 1996, when Mohamed Taki came to power. In a bid to change the turbulent political history of the archipelago, Taki drafted a new constitution which extended the authority of the president, and established Islam as the basis of the law. Taki's regime was even more centralised and corrupt than those of his predecessors. The economy also continued to stagnate, causing internal opposition to Taki's kleptocratic regime. This resulted in the islands of Anjouan and Mohéli declaring their independence from the Federal Republic of the Comoros in August 1997, with the intention of 'rejoining' France. Although France did not accept the two islands' request, the standoff between the islands and the federal government persisted until August 2001, when Anjouan experienced a military take-over whose sole aim was to enable Anjouan to rejoin the federation. This event precipitated two coups in Anjouan, in September and November 2001, by separatists who wanted to maintain Anjouan's status as a separate state outside the federation. These coups were subsequently crushed by a Major Mohamad Bacar, who tried to unify Anjouan with the other islands. Meanwhile, the federal government experienced two more coups between 1998 and 2001.

International mediation and the creation of the Union

Against the background of these upheavals, the international community, led by the now defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU), brokered the Fomboni Agreement of 2001 among all three islands and the central government, to end the crisis in the archipelago. This agreement led to the archipelago voting on a new constitution in December 2001 that would keep the three islands as one country, but would grant each of the islands greater autonomy in their internal

affairs. The island of Anjouan voted overwhelmingly [90 per cent in favour] for autonomy. At the same time, election dates for each of the islands were set for April 2002. In the April elections, Colonel Mohamed Bacar was elected leader of Anjouan, Mohamed Said Fazul was elected leader of Mohéli, and Mze Abdou Soule Elbak was elected president of Grande Comore. Azali Assoumani from Grand Comore was elected president of a reunited Comoros for a four-year term.

Although the elections were free and accepted by most observers, most Anjouanais did not vote in the federal presidential elections. The rationale for this action was that voting in the federal elections would have meant Anjouanais accepted the union arrangement, and its president as their own. Hardly a year after these elections, the Comorian security forces foiled another coup plot, against president Assoumani in February 2003. In December 2003, the leaders of the semi-autonomous islands reached a power-sharing deal, the Beit Salam Agreement, which paved the way for local and Union assembly elections in March 2004 on the three semi-autonomous islands.² In May 2006, the Union held its second democratic elections and first peaceful transition since independence, in which a Muslim cleric, Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi, won the federal presidential elections. The presidential elections for the islands of Mohéli and Grand Comore, with the exception of Anjouan, were held in June 2007.

The Mayotte link and its effects on Anjouan

As mentioned earlier, in 1974, and prior to the unilateral declaration of independence, three of the islands that make up the Comoros voted for independence while the fourth island, Mayotte, voted overwhelmingly to remain under the French Republic. It is this 'incomplete' independence of the Comoros that has, to a certain extent, contributed to the secessionist tendencies in Anjouan. France's decision to grant independence to three of the four islands of the archipelago was indeed against the international principle of *uti possidetis* (as you now possess), which guides the UN-led decolonisation process. This process is meant to guarantee new states the territorial sovereignty inherited from colonial powers. The French government's actions can be explained by the geo-strategic concerns of the Giscard government. France found itself in an increasingly militarised Indian Ocean, where it had already 'lost' the strategic position held by its former colony, Madagascar, and as such wanted to continue to have a reliable strategic 'base' in the Indian Ocean to maintain its influence in the region.

Anjouan's secessionist tendencies can also be attributed to the island's history. Prior to French involvement in the archipelago, the island was an independent sultanate that had existed from about 1500.³ The sultanate continued to exist until it was crushed by the French when the islands came under French protection in 1886, and French annexation in 1912. Anjouan joined the Comoros nation only when it became independent in 1975. In 1997, Anjouan's declaration of independence and attempt to rejoin the French republic had economic and political motivations behind it. Geographically, Anjouan is closer to Mayotte than any of the other islands, and as such has closer historical, social, and cultural links with it than with any of the other islands. Moreover, since independence, Anjouan had been exposed to the economic prosperity of Mayotte, with thousands of Anjouanais working in this nearby French *department*. The sense of a better life was a motivating factor for successive separatists who believed that each island would be better off without the other, since their interaction only impoverished them further in comparison to Mayotte.

The Anjouan economy

As a result of Anjouan's economic and legislative independence within the Union of the Comoros, the government of the state of Anjouan is granted full control over its economy, economic development, and foreign investment. The economy of Anjouan is mainly driven by farming and related industries. Agriculture, fishing, hunting, and forestry constitute the bulk of the economy on the island and in the archipelago. These four sectors contribute 4 per cent to GDP, employ 80 per cent of the labour force on the islands, and provide most of its exports. The economy of Anjouan, which is arguably the most vibrant in the Union, is based on the export of vanilla, ylang-ylang,⁴ flowers, perfume oil, and cloves.

The Comoros is the world's primary producer of ylang-ylang oil, a basic ingredient in all perfumes. The Comoros produces about 60 tonnes of ylang-ylang a year, or about 80 per cent of the world's production. The archipelago is also the world's fifth largest producer of vanilla. Comoros plans to boost production of ylang-ylang by about a third over the next two years. Nearly all of these exports are destined for France (a world leader in perfume-making) and the United States. Although Anjouan has no vast natural resource reserves, it is self-sufficient in energy, which is supplied by the hydroelectric plant at Marahani.

Anjouan's economy is also significantly boosted by its

position as a tourist, internet gambling, and offshore banking centre. In this regard, the Anjouan government passed new laws and legislation in 2005 enabling the island to create a superior offshore banking sector, which provides the right environment for economic development and foreign direct investment (FDI). Under these new offshore laws in Anjouan, provision was made for licences to be granted for offshore companies, as well as offshore banking, internet gaming, and insurance licences, as well as mutual funds, trusts, shipping, and aviation licenses. However, one setback to the Anjouan economy is that, in 2002, an amendment to the Anjouan constitution gave the president of Anjouan total power over all offshore businesses.

Socio-political dynamics in Anjouan

Anjouanais, like most Comorians, base their identity on their families, home towns or regions of residence, and not on the state or central administration. Thus, few Anjouanais identify themselves with a federation or union. Moreover, history has demonstrated that, although there has always been a strong tendency in the Comoros towards integration, inter-island jealousies and identity rights have made the integration project difficult. Besides, the highly centralised political system that existed from independence till 2003 is deeply rooted in the Comorian elite's political culture. In this regard, successive presidents concentrated their power in Moroni and, in the process, flouted the concept of federalism. Even the current president has refused to entrust the islands with a degree of security and financial management. Consequently, since independence, the Comorian state has chosen to promote the interests of individuals, the ruling class, and powerful families over the greater public interest. However, one should also not discount France's role in fomenting divisive forces by encouraging dissent in Anjouan by supporting various leaders and factions.

The pre- and post-'election' situation in Anjouan

In December 2006, the authorities in Anjouan failed to hand in all the weapons in their possession as part of the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) process agreed to with the creation of the Union government. This situation did not go down well with the Union government, which felt that Anjouan was reneging on an agreement in which the DDR process of Anjouanais militia was to be

Unpacking the crisis in Anjouan

concluded by a December 2006 deadline. It was also at this time that communication between the Union government and Anjouan ceased. In April 2007, when Mohamed Bacar's term of office was about to come to an end, the constitutional court of the Comoros ruled that he had completed his term, and could no longer stand for re-election. As a result, Union president Mohamed Sambi nominated Kaabi Houmadi as Anjouan's interim president to serve until elections in June, when all three islands in the Union would elect their respective presidents. However, as Houmadi unveiled his cabinet, Bacar denounced the move and initiated what amounted to a coup in Anjouan, when his forces took control of all federal offices and installed an interim government.

When clashes between the Comorian army in Anjouan and Bacar's men started, residents began fleeing the island in fear of more fighting. In the run-up to the election, the airport was shut down, thereby effectively stopping president Sambi and the AU troop commander from landing on Anjouan. At the same time, no campaigning was permitted, the national radio offices were ransacked, and journalists tortured or detained. The situation forced Sambi to postpone the elections in Anjouan by a week to allow for calm to return, and for security measures to be put into place for the polls.

Although the Union government contemplated military means to depose Bacar, the Union did not have the forces to do so. This in contrast to the fact that Bacar commands 100 per cent loyalty from the gendarmerie on the island, in addition to some 500-strong well-armed militias on Anjouan (commanded by Bacar's younger brother, Abdou). This situation certainly tilted the balance of military forces towards Bacar.

According to the Union government, Bacar can only be removed through military means. The AU initiative, led by South Africa, prefers the military option as a last resort. Currently, Bacar will not back down or compromise on his position, even if faced with the threat of military force from the AU. Bacar has, however, gone on record that he does not yet want AU involvement in the current crisis. Although Bacar would want the world to believe that his 'coup' (which is the result of Anjouan's decade-long marginalisation by the central government) has grass-roots support, this is highly unlikely as very few people turned up to vote in his 'elections' – not out of fear, but rather conceding that by voting, they would agree to separation from the Union.

In the meanwhile, diplomatic efforts by South Africa, the AU's co-ordinator of the regional sub-committee on the Comores, continue. Led by foreign minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, talks have taken place in Cape Town and in Moroni, as part of the AU ministerial committee on Comoros,⁵

to try to resolve the crisis and revive the stalled national reconciliation process. A major challenge facing South Africa will be to find ways and means to address the strife and inter-island rivalry that has been perpetuated by deep historical divisions. On 10 October, the AU took a decision to impose sanctions on Anjouan as the AU attempts to resolve the impasse.

Critique of the Anjouan crisis

The crisis on Anjouan is rather complex, and one has to tread very carefully when attempting to critique the current situation. The crisis has been precipitated by a host of factors, such as the contestation over state power and, by extension, its control over resources; personality clashes; violations of agreements; and legal procedures. A major contributing factor to the current crisis in Anjouan, however, is the contestation over state power (Anjouan state power), which has implications for the control of Anjouan's economic resources. As mentioned previously, this is probably the most vibrant economy in the Union, as one of the world's top five producers of vanilla, and the world's primary producer of ylang-ylang oil. It therefore makes sense that both Union president Sambi and self-declared Anjouanais president Bacar would like to control, or at least have influence over, the Anjouan government and the resources it controls – although the men come from different backgrounds. Bacar, a career soldier, values Anjouan's independence, while Sambi, an Islamist businessman, favours having a strong central government with some control over Anjouan's economy, as has been the case in the past. While Sambi and Bacar both prefer strong governments, Sambi prefers centralisation of power, while Bacar would like to maintain the economic autonomy of Anjouan. In his quest to legitimise his 'coup', Bacar has opportunistically used the element of discrimination by the Union government against the Anjouanais people as a justification for his 'capture' of Anjouan.

Tensions between the central government in Moroni and the various islands have also led to inter-island jealousies and identity rights. Historically, the central government neglected Mohéli and Anjouan in favour of Grand Comore, but has always exploited Anjouan's resources for the benefit of the central government and its political elite. Since independence, the Comorian state has promoted the interests of individuals, the ruling class, and powerful families over the greater public. The point is that both Sambi and Bacar would like to capture the state, because, inevitably, it is the state that captures the society and the economy, and has monopoly over them. As a consequence of this monopoly, the state is then in a position

to dispense patronage and resources, with the sole capacity to create conditions and policies that privilege the accumulation of wealth by the political elite (Ajulu 2005: 64–8). Consequently, the state, with its organisational capacity, performs the functions of the ruling class. For this reason, it can be argued that both Sambi and Bacar would like to hold public office for purposes of private accumulation. This would explain the vicious contestation for control of the Anjouan government, and why the two leaders have strong views regarding the jurisdictional boundaries of the national government over the island government. In addition, this bitter struggle has witnessed a severe deterioration of the relationship between Sambi and Bacar, to the extent that there has been no communication between the two since December 2006.

The crisis in Anjouan can also be attributed to the violation of agreements and disregard for legal processes. When Bacar's term of office was approaching its end in April 2007, the Union government had to appoint an interim president for the island until June 2007, when elections for all the three islands were scheduled. On April 17, the Union government filed a case in the constitutional court with the intention of declaring Bacar's seat vacant after he had completed his five-year term. Under the law, the constitutional court has jurisdiction over all electoral matters, although the ruling of the court held that the federal president would be the one to appoint an interim government. According to the Anjouan authorities, the action taken by the Union government was a violation of article 21 of the Anjouan constitution, which provides that the president of the court of appeal should take power in the event of a 'final vacancy' in the executive. However, constitutional court judges went on to hold that the Anjouan constitution had no mechanism for succession after an expired term, and that in the absence of governing law, the federal government could appoint a caretaker to govern the island until the election. There were serious implications for any decision that would have been taken, whether in adopting the constitutional court decision, or abiding by the Anjouan constitution. This is because, on the one hand, if the island's constitution were to have been applied, then the Anjouan court of appeal president would have become the interim president – a Bacar ally. On the other hand, if the constitutional court view were to apply, then the interim presidency would go to the president of the Anjouan assembly, who was a Bacar opponent. In the event, the constitutional court decision was put into effect and the interim presidency went to Kaabi Houmadi, president of the island assembly. Bacar's camp immediately rejected the appointment as unconstitutional, but there was little they could do in legal terms because constitutional court judg-

ments could not be appealed. To make matters worse, Kaabi unveiled an interim cabinet composed mainly of figures hostile to Bacar, and this proved to be the breaking point. However, Bacar, who retained the loyalty of the 500-man Anjouanais security forces, was able to return to office by force.

Anjouan's state of affairs demonstrates the phenomenon of sub-national coups. These occur when regional governments are powerful enough to take over the region, and at the same time the central government is either too weak to intervene, or willing to look the other way.⁶ Comoros's combination of a weak federal authority and powerful and financially independent provinces provides an ideal environment for such incidents. Bacar's 'coup' evidently extended his term of office, which puts him in a strong position should the Union government want to negotiate with him to end the stand-off. In any case, his current position as "*de jure*" leader of Anjouan gives him the advantage of incumbency, should pressure force him to hold fresh elections. Bacar's take-over of the island can, therefore, be seen as seeking to negotiate a settlement with the Union government on his terms, although this is highly unlikely, given the hostility between Bacar and Sambi. At this point, the situation appears to be one of an internal coup, rather than an attempt to secede from the Union. However, we also have to determine whether the Anjouan case has a basis for self-determination, as Bacar would have us believe.

This current debacle in Anjouan further demonstrates the existence of elite struggles in Comoros under the guise of ethnic nationalism. Even within Anjouan itself, there have been power struggles between elites, which would explain why since 1997, there have been more than five coups or coup attempts in Anjouan, as power was contested between separatists and unionists. However, the current situation in Anjouan, where Mohamed Bacar orchestrated a coup and declared himself president, has been justified as a fight against discrimination, emphasising the 'Anjouanness' of the islanders. Seen in its broader context, the situation described above can be explained by the fact that many ethnic groups view states as an obstacle to their own claims to sovereignty and identity. This is because sovereignty is linked with power, control of territory, and international status. Hence, groups that emphasise 'ethnic sovereignty', as Bacar purports to be trying to achieve, act as if they are sovereign at the political, social, military, and institutional levels – a form of quasi-sovereignty. This sovereignty often comes about due to the inability of states to provide or guarantee security and justice (Richmond 2002: 382–6). This is precisely what Bacar and his regime have tried to demonstrate publicly as the consequence of the long exclusion and marginalisation of the Anjouanais

Unpacking the crisis in Anjouan

by the central government. Thus, ethnic sovereignty's outward expression is separatist violence, which is by nature a threat to the integrity and survival of nation states (ibid). Some of the common reasons given for seeking self-determination are discrimination and humiliation by central government, the desire for greater political and economic freedom, and the quest for power and prestige among nationalist elites (McCrary & O'Leary 1993: 15).

This analysis of ethnic nationalism asserts that what is taking place on Anjouan is a classic case of the defensive right to self-determination.⁷ This defensive approach does not in any way have an effect on the territorial status quo of the state, but, rather, only affects the internal state dimensions. This would make sense, since Anjouan has not mentioned secession in the current crisis; rather its position within the Union is that it seeks to alter the internal structures of the Union by operating outside of its frameworks. This approach would then legitimise the argument for political, social, economic, and cultural sovereignty. It is for this reason that the 2003 peace agreements that established the Union of the Comoros granted a degree of autonomy to the islands. This was done explicitly to weaken such secessionist tendencies. The Anjouan case, therefore, cannot be described as a case of self-determination, since the territorial integrity of the Union overrides that of Anjouan. Even the UN charter clearly states that any partial or total disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the charter. Therefore, self-determination, in this case, is not to be equated with independence or the formation of a new state.

Conclusion

This policy brief has shown that the crisis in the Comoros is not a struggle for political independence (secession). On the contrary, it is a result of the contestation for control over state power and resources. In other words, the struggle taking place is for control or influence over the Anjouan government, and, by extension, its resources. This contestation for power and control over resources in Anjouan has contributed to the Union agreements and constitutions being violated, as the central government and the Anjouan government clash with each other. There also appears to be a 'crisis' in the interpretation of the constitution between the Union government and the Anjouan government.

This policy brief has analysed some of the major factors that have conspired to create very fertile ground for the

current crisis that engulfs the archipelago, and more so in Anjouan. These are the factors that South Africa will have to address, as the AU's co-ordinator of the Comorian transition project. The Anjouan case is complex, and comes at an extremely delicate period in the transition of the Comoros. Pretoria faces an enormous task in trying to diffuse the tensions that exist between Anjouan and the Union government, and reconciling the two protagonists. Diplomacy will have to work in this case, since the military option that the Union government prefers to resolve the impasse may exacerbate the already volatile situation in the archipelago.

Moreover, the interests of the Anjouanais should be taken into consideration if a solution is to be found. Already, significant gains were made in the first-ever democratic transition in the archipelago in May 2006, after the Union presidential elections, and this momentum needs to be maintained. What Comoros needs is for its leaders not to put personal agendas and interests ahead of the greater Comorian population. Thus, these two leaders need to be in a position to resolve their differences amicably, without putting the country at risk unnecessarily, and dismantling the gains made thus far.

Policy recommendations

- **To the Union government:** Avoid the temptation of using military means to diffuse the standoff with Anjouan; reconsider the presidential appointment of the interim Anjouan president by Union president Sambi; and abide by article 21 of the Anjouan constitution, which provides that the president of the court of appeal should take power in the event of a 'final vacancy' in the executive.
- **To the Anjouanais authorities:** Avoid believing that they have the support of the population in their conflict with the Union government as the 'election participation' by the Anjouanais in Bacar's 'election' demonstrated; avoid using claims of discrimination by the Union government to satisfy their personal desires to achieve political power; and compromise with the Union government over the appointment of a transition leader.
- **To the AU and South Africa:** Explore all possible means for resolving the impasse, and do not resort to military means; quickly build confidence as an honest broker by being fair, and provide leadership where necessary, and condemnation where it is warranted; and carefully assess the grievances of both parties to the crisis.
- **To the French government:** Impress on both parties to resolve the impasse by directly using their economic

leverage over the archipelago, as well as their historical relationship with the islands.

References

- Ajulu Rok. 2005. Stabilising the DRC: the roles of the state and the corporate sector. The Transition in the Democratic Republic of Congo: problems and prospects. Johannesburg: Institute for Global Dialogue.
- Alwahti Ali Y. 2003. Prevention of secessionist movements in a micro-state: international mediation in the Comoro Islands. *Swords and Ploughshares: A Journal of International Affairs* 13(1): 65–83.
- Anon. 1994. Editorial comment. *American Journal of International Law* 88(2). 304–11.
- Cornwell Richard. 1998. Anjouan: a spat in the Indian Ocean. *African Security Review* 7(3).
- Higgins Rosalyn. 1995. *Problems and Process: International law and how we use it*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- McGarry John and O’Leary Brendan (eds). 1993. *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation*. London: Routledge.
- Pahlavi Pierre 2002. Comoros – the federation of the quarrelsome Sultans. *Gateway –Academic Journal on the Web*. Winter.
- At <http://grad.usask.ca/gateway/pierrepahlavicomoroslands.html>.
- Richmond Oliver. 2002. States of sovereignty, sovereign states and ethnic claims for international status. *Review of International Studies* 28. 381–402.
- Shaw Malcolm N 1991. *International Law*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- UN. 2003. *Basic Facts about the United Nations*. New York: United Nations.

Endnotes

- 1 Politics in the Union of the Comoros takes place in a framework of a federal presidential republic, whereby the president of the Comoros is both head of state and head of government, in a pluriform multi-party system. The Constitution of the Union of the Comoros was ratified by referendum on 23 December 2001. Executive power is exercised by the government. Federal legislative power is vested in both the government and parliament. Each of the islands (according to title II of the constitution) has a great amount of autonomy in the Union, including having their own constitutions (or ‘fundamental law’), president, and parliament. The presidency and assembly of the Union are distinct from each of the islands’ governments. The presidency of the Union rotates among the islands and the constitution states that the islands have financial autonomy.
- 2 The current flag of the Anjouan government (a bright red flag with a white human hand at the centre) is identical to that of Anjouan’s last sultan, before he was deposed by the French in 1886.
- 3 An aromatic tree a tree with flowers that yields a fragrant oil used in perfumery, native to tropical Asia and northern Australia. Latin name: “*Cananga odorata*”.
- 4 This committee includes the foreign ministers of Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and the Seychelles.
- 5 The 2003 peace agreement that brought about the Union government severely weakened the central government, since the three islands now had autonomy over their economies, unlike pre-2003, when the central government controlled the archipelago’s wealth, and determined where to redistribute resources.
- 6 In contrast, the offensive right to self-determination leads to the balkanisation of a nation state, that is, a typical case of secession.

Institute for



Global Dialogue

Block 12, Thornhill Office Park, Bekker Street,
Vorna Valley, Midrand, South Africa
PO Box 32571, Braamfontein 2017, South Africa
Tel +2711 315 1299
Fax +2711 315 2149
Email info@igd.org.za · Web www.igd.org.za

All rights reserved. The material in this publication may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted without the prior permission of the copyright holder. Short extracts may be quoted, provided the source is acknowledged.

ISSN 1607 2375

Produced by Acumen Publishing Solutions, Johannesburg.