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Côte d'Ivoire: a regional quandary

by
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Introduction

Most of the conflicts on the continent have similar root causes; namely, nationality and citizenship, uncontrolled cross border migrations, porous borders, struggles for scarce resources and politicised ethnicity. Moreover, approaches to conflict management and resolution largely ignore these root causes and tend to focus on peace-making, thereby addressing the symptoms rather than the causes of the problem. This paper is a case study of Cote d'Ivoire and how it reflects the broader dynamics that drive most conflicts on the continent.

In September 2002, a group of Ivorian soldiers in exile in Burkina Faso and some members of the national army, the *Forces Armees Nationales de Côte d' Ivoire* (FANCI), attempted a coup d' etat against Laurent Gbagbo's government by attacking the cities of Abidjan, Bouake and Korhogo. Having failed to capture the capital due to rapid intervention by French troops based in Abidjan, the *Mouvement Patriotique de la Côte D' Ivoire* (MPCI) seized cities and towns in the northern and central regions effectively dividing the country in two: the rebel troops controlled the north, and the forces loyal to president Gbagbo's government controlled the south. In response to the developments in Côte d' Ivoire, a ceasefire brokered by Senegal's president Abdoulaye Wade was only signed unilaterally by the MPCI. The ceasefire line de facto split the country in half. The French force in Abidjan ("Operation Licorne") agreed to monitor the ceasefire agreement until troops from Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) could take over. However, in November two new insurgent groups, the *Mouvement Populaire du Grand Ouest* (MPIGO) and the *Mouvement pour la Justice et la paix* (MJP) (both not bound by the ceasefire), emerged in the western parts of the country, further complicating the already existing ceasefire agreement.

Background: the "Ivorian miracle"

The origin of the current crisis in Côte d' Ivoire has its roots in the post- Houphouët-Boigny policy of exclusion that emerged under President Henri Konan Bédié. Under President Houphouët-Boigny, the government's policy of inviting mass immigration of plantation labourers from neighbouring countries, especially Burkina Faso, provided cocoa farmers with a steady flow labour supply. Houphouët's famous statement: A policy "land belongs to those that

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cultivate it”, justified the massive acquisition of land by immigrants in the rich cocoa and coffee belt.