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COTE D'IVOIRE: A SITUATION ANALYSIS

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Executive Summary

The political and humanitarian situation in Côte d'Ivoire has improved markedly since the signing of a new ceasefire on 3 May. Insecurity persists in the far west, and is heightened by the upsurge of fighting across the border in Liberia, but the deployment of French and West African peacekeepers in the area since 23 May has improved the situation. The international troops have established a "zone of confidence", cleared of both government and rebel fighters, where people are returning to their homes.

Humanitarian issues: The main humanitarian issues relate to assistance to populations returning home, particularly in areas where villages have been razed and water supplies contaminated during the fighting, and to ensuring adequate food supplies, especially in communities hosting large numbers of internally displaced persons. Côte d'Ivoire is also bracing itself for a new wave of Liberian refugees as the situation across the border deteriorates.

Peace and disarmament: The government army and the rebels have agreed on sites for cantonment of troops as a prelude to disarmament, and that process seems to be moving ahead gradually, despite a standoff at government level over the appointment of a permanent defence minister.

Politics: President Laurent Gbagbo and the hardliners surrounding him are critical of the Government of National Unity, hampering its effective operation. The Economic Community of West African States, and the committee set up to oversee implementation of January's Marcoussis peace accord, are playing a vital role in keeping the process on track.

Outlook: Lasting peace depends on a resolution of the conflict in Liberia. This will require further strong involvement of the international community to bring into being a credible civilian administration in Monrovia to replace the discredited President Charles Taylor, who has been indicted for war crimes by the Special Court in Sierra Leone. Otherwise Liberia's various factions will go back to tearing the country, and the region, apart. Côte d'Ivoire now seems to have a real chance of peace, provided the activities of all the region's assorted rebel movements are curbed.

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Conflict

Nine months into the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, there are signs that peace may slowly take hold, but the process will be far from straightforward. A ceasefire has halted fighting in most of the country, but the involvement of numerous armed groups on both sides of the conflict in the western part of the country has made the situation there rather less tractable. A Government of National Unity (GNU) is in place, but is largely ineffective because of opposition from hardliners around President Laurent Gbagbo. But there are signs of progress in the disarmament process, and the movement of goods and people across the front line that has cut the country in two is getting easier.¹

President Gbagbo has been in post since October 2000, when he defeated the military ruler, General Robert Guei, in an electoral contest from which other significant opponents were excluded. Guei tried to declare himself the winner, but Gbagbo's supporters marched on the presidential palace to demand that he be installed as head of state. However, those who hoped the long-time opposition leader would usher in an era of peace and democracy were disappointed. Opposition leader Alassane Ouattara, a former prime minister, was barred from running in the December 2000 parliamentary elections, and his Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR) boycotted the vote.²

As well as the political tensions in Abidjan, ethnic tensions persisted in western Côte d'Ivoire over land ownership, and there was continued unrest within the military, until on 19 September 2002, rebel soldiers carried out more than a dozen coordinated attacks in Abidjan, the central city of Bouaké, and the main northern town of Korhogo. General Guei and interior minister Emile Boga Doudou were killed. Few believe government claims that Guei died in an exchange of fire as he was heading to the television station to announce a coup d'état.

The rebels, mostly low-ranking soldiers who were recruited into the army by Guei and were resisting Gbagbo's plans to demobilize them, called themselves the Mouvement Patriotique de la Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), and in mid-October named as their secretary-general Guillaume Soro, a former head of the Ivorian student union, the Fédération Estudiantine et Scolaire de la Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI). The two sides agreed a ceasefire brokered by West African mediators in mid-October and French troops deployed in a buffer zone between the rebel-held North and the government-held South.³ However, two smaller rebel groups operating in the western part of the country, Mouvement pour le Justice et la Paix (MJP) and Mouvement Patriotique Ivoirien du Grand-Ouest (MPIGO), only agreed on a truce in early January and have had difficulty maintaining it since then.

During January talks convened by the French government were held in Marcoussis near Paris, between a wide range of Ivorian political parties and rebel movements. The resulting

¹ Unless otherwise indicated the main narrative in this paper is based on international, regional and local media sources

² See Human Rights Watch, *The New Racism: The Politics of Ethnicity in Côte d'Ivoire*, New York, 28 August 2001

³ This period is analyzed in more detail in Griffiths, T., *Côte d'Ivoire: Continued Crisis*, Writenet for UNHCR, October 2002

peace agreement, the Marcoussis accord, has only been partially implemented due to obstruction from all sides. However, by the beginning of July most of the initial problems experienced in relation to the Marcoussis political arrangements, the Government of National Unity, have been ironed out, though it still faces opposition from hardliners of Laurent Gbagbo's Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), who make no secret of their reluctance to accept the accord. However the peace process is starting to gain momentum, and many rank and file FPI members support Marcoussis.⁴

1.2 Assessment of the Current Security Situation

The MPCCI controls the northern half of the country, including the central city of Bouaké and the main northern town of Korhogo, while MJP and MPIGO still operate in the West. The government has maintained control of the South and therefore of most of the "cocoa belt" despite rebel efforts to hold on to the key cocoa town of Daloa, and an apparent plan to capture San Pedro. The conflict did not have a significant effect on the vital main cocoa crop harvest, in part because the government, realizing it had few other potential sources of revenue, made maintaining cocoa exports a priority.

France has more than 3,500 troops in Côte d'Ivoire, while the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has provided a force of some 1,300 men from Senegal, Benin, Togo, Niger and Ghana. Another 300 are expected in the coming weeks and ECOWAS is hoping to increase the total to 3,025 men. The UN Security Council agreed on 13 May to send an initial token force of 26 unarmed UN military observers, which while insignificant in military terms does provide a UN "umbrella" for the French and West African forces operating in Côte d'Ivoire. The Security Council is authorized to send another 50 officers if UN Secretary General Kofi Annan determines that there is a need and security conditions permit.⁵

In most of the country there has been no fighting since the first ceasefire signed in Lomé in October. Insecurity persists in the far west, in the area controlled by the two smaller rebel movements, MJP and MPIGO. The security problem has been heightened by the upsurge of fighting across the border in Liberia, where rebels opposed to President Charles Taylor are on the offensive, but the deployment of French and West African peacekeepers in the area since 23 May has improved the situation. The international troops have established a "zone of confidence" adjacent to the border, over an area about 50 km wide by 200 km deep, cleared of both government and rebel fighters, where people are returning to their homes.

Elsewhere in the country traffic is moving more easily across the ceasefire line that effectively cuts the country in two from just north of the political capital Yamoussoukro. This has enabled basic goods to reach the North and agricultural exports such as cotton, to move south.

2 The Marcoussis Agreement

The Marcoussis peace accord was signed on 24 January 2003 at the conclusion of ten days of round table talks in Linas-Marcoussis, near Paris, which brought together representatives of the three rebel movements, the parties represented in parliament, and Alassane Ouattara's

⁴ Senior FPI official. Personal interview, 20 March 2003

⁵ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1479 (2003), 13 May 2003, S/RES/1479 (2003)

Rassemblement des Républicains (which boycotted the December 2000 parliamentary elections and therefore has no seats). A key element of the accord was the provision for a transitional government, to include representatives of all sides and to take over many of the powers held by President Gbagbo. France, as the former colonial power, was criticized at the time for pushing the parties into an agreement of its own design. Gbagbo supported the accord while in France, but tried to distance himself from it as soon as he returned to Abidjan, implying that it had been imposed by the French and he had been obliged to sign. He also instigated mass protests, led by student firebrand Charles Blé Goudé's Jeunes Patriotes, to show the international community that the agreement was politically unacceptable to his supporters. As the country's elected president, he was not keen to hand over authority in many areas to an appointed interim prime minister.

Nevertheless a Government of National Unity (*gouvernement de réconciliation nationale*), with ministerial posts allocated to the different factions and led by respected northern businessman Seydou Elimane Diarra who headed the country's national reconciliation conference in late 2001, was set up in March. It suffered serious delays before it could come into operation, with the rebels refusing to take their seats because of security concerns and ministers representing Ouattara's RDR spending several weeks staying in Abidjan's Hotel Tiama guarded by West African troops because of fears for their security.⁶ Gbagbo's adversaries also felt that he was not respecting the Marcoussis accord, e.g. by refusing to hand over powers to Diarra as interim prime minister for the stipulated period of three years. Instead Diarra has been given a mandate for an initial six months, which can be renewed, though the process for doing this is not entirely clear.

The Marcoussis process is overseen by a Continuation Committee (*comité de suivi*), led by Albert Tevoedjre, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, with representatives of the European Union, France, the Group of Eight (G-8), the African Union, ECOWAS, the IMF and World Bank and the Francophonie.

Specifically with regard to the cessation of hostilities, the Marcoussis accord states that armed forces should be regrouped under supervision of ECOWAS and French forces. A second phase would tackle disarmament and demobilization. All recruits enrolled since 19 September would be demobilized immediately. The government would pursue disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement, and reintegration (DDRRR) programmes with donors.

The accord does not set a timetable for the peace process. President Gbagbo's mandate expires in October 2005, and elections should be held by then, but there is already speculation that the process may take longer than that.

The Government of National Unity is also tasked with reviewing the nationality provisions now in force and come up with a simpler, more workable formula, as well as revising the conditions of eligibility for the presidency and the 1998 law on land ownership.⁷

⁶ 'Républicains' et rebelles dans la ville, *Jeune Afrique – l'Intelligent*, 18-24 May 2003

⁷ France, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, *Texte de l'Accord de Linas-Marcoussis*, 24 January 2003, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actu/article.asp?art=31727> [accessed 30 June 2003]

3 Political Situation

3.1 Political Strength of Gbagbo and His Party

As a lifelong opposition leader Laurent Gbagbo enjoyed considerable support at home and abroad. Domestically, support for the FPI was traditionally drawn essentially from students and disaffected young people, ethnic Bétés resentful of the dominance of the Baoulés of the former single ruling party, the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI). The rise of the RDR has cut into this support base, notably splitting the highly politicized student union into rival factions. The FPI also has important international support. Gbagbo is a member of the Socialist International, and retains the support of some prominent figures in France's opposition Socialist Party, though others are disappointed by his handling of the crisis and have distanced themselves from him. The French government is thoroughly disillusioned with him, especially since his attempts to distance himself from the Marcoussis accord, though relations had deteriorated so badly already by December 2002 that the French ambassador had to be replaced. Gbagbo is increasingly isolated in the region as well, with neighbouring states angry at the treatment of their nationals and at Gbagbo's resistance to negotiation. Domestically he is increasingly seen as the main obstacle to progress in the peace process outlined by the Marcoussis accord.⁸

3.2 Balance of Forces in Parliament and in Government

The Government of National Unity (GNU) consists of ten ministers from Gbagbo's Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), seven from Henri Konan Bédié's Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), seven from Alassane Ouattara's Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR), seven from the rebel Mouvement Patriotique de la Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), two from the Union pour la Démocratie et la Paix en Côte d'Ivoire (UDPCI, made up of Guei's followers), two from the Parti Ivoirien des Travailleurs (PIT) of Francis Wodié, and one each from the Mouvement des Forces de l'Avenir (MFA) of Anaky Kobenan, the Union Démocratique Citoyenne (UDCY) of Théodore Mel Eg, and the rebel Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix (MJP) and Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand-Ouest (MPIGO).⁹

The FPI won 96 parliamentary seats in the December 2000 election, leaving it well short of an absolute majority in the 225-seat national assembly. The PDCI won 77 seats, making it the second biggest party, but several PDCI members who stood as independents now vote with the party, and the PDCI parliamentary group is now put at 98 members.

The RDR is represented in the GNU, though not in parliament. Party leader Alassane Ouattara remains resident in Paris because of fears for his safety, and the party's in-country leadership has shown signs of strain. RDR Secretary-General Henriette Diabaté was named justice minister in the GNU and has been criticized by party loyalists for taking too conciliatory a line. RDR militants say she is not doing enough to free the RDR's political detainees (party spokesman Ali Keita has been in jail since October), or to create a more independent judiciary by removing legal officials believed to be in Gbagbo's pay.¹⁰

⁸ Unity's Opponents, *Africa Confidential*, 4 April 2003

⁹ Côte d'Ivoire, Présidence de la République, Présentation du Gouvernement de réconciliation nationale du 20 mars 2003, issu des Pourparlers de Linas-Marcoussis et de la table ronde d'Accra, Yamoussoukro, 20 March 2003, <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/0/22ccee743048f777c1256cf3004ff721?OpenDocument> [accessed 30 June 2003]

¹⁰ Senior RDR activist. Telephone interview, 28 May 2003

One effect of the establishment of the GNU has been to cast Gbagbo and his hardline supporters as the barrier to the peace process, rather than the RDR, which had been blamed since the start of the crisis. The row over the naming of defence and interior ministers (see below, Section 3.4) has been vital in this shift, and Gbagbo's stubborn attitude could be his undoing.

3.3 Current Strength of the Rebel Groups

The main rebel group, the MPCCI, is relatively well organized, certainly by the standards of West African rebel movements. Its political leader, Guillaume Soro, is a former student leader, while its military leadership is made up of army deserters who fled to Burkina Faso after falling out with General Guei. Their numbers have been estimated by the French military at between 4,000 and 6,000.¹¹ They have not been involved in active combat since the October ceasefire, and many rebel soldiers spend their days driving around in looted vehicles in the sunglasses and T-shirts that are the standard outfit of West African rebel groups. After months of power without responsibility, a return to civilian life will not be easy.

The two western rebel movements, MPIGO and MJP, are less disciplined and have a less formal organizational structure. Both contain a significant element of Liberian and Sierra Leonean mercenaries, which makes their numbers difficult to estimate. MPIGO appears to have been formed by Guei loyalists, while MJP seems to be closer to the MPCCI, but there are links between all three groups.

Recently the western rebels tried to end their ties with Sam Bockarie, the leader of the Liberian and Sierra Leonean mercenaries and a veteran of Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front. In the resulting clashes, MPIGO leader Felix Doh was killed and Bockarie had to flee back to Liberia, where he was reported to have been killed by Liberian troops, apparently after a row with Liberia's president, Charles Taylor.¹² Some doubt was expressed as to whether the body returned to Freetown is that of Bockarie, who has been indicted for war crimes by Sierra Leone's Special Court,¹³ but the subsequent death of another Special Court target, the leader of the 1997 military coup in Sierra Leone, Johnny Paul Koroma, suggested Taylor might be systematically removing anyone who could testify against him.

3.4 Effectiveness of the GNU

The government set up in March is still not complete and may continue to be ineffective while Gbagbo and the hardliners around him maintain their opposition. The key defence and security posts remain to be filled, and Gbagbo is opposing the nomination of General Gaston Ouassenan Koné, who heads the PDCI in parliament. Ouassenan took a tough line against political opposition under Bédié, and was involved in the crushing of a revolt by the Guébié people in Gbagbo's home region in the 1970s. He has little respect for Gbagbo, and would immediately carry out the Marcoussis accord's stipulation that recruits (overwhelmingly Gbagbo supporters) brought into the army since September be demobilized.

A further two key issues agreed at Marcoussis have yet to be tackled. The accord stipulated changes to the provisions for eligibility for the presidency in Article 35 of the constitution.

¹¹ Voyage au pays des rebelles, *Jeune Afrique – l'Intelligent*, 19-25 January 2003

¹² Horse-trading, Arms-trading, *Africa Confidential*, 16 May 2003

¹³ No Cash, No Court, *Africa Confidential*, 30 May 2003

These had originally been introduced in 1994, by Henri Konan Bédié, in order to prevent Alassane Ouattara from contesting the presidency, and has kept Ouattara out of presidential electoral contests since. Likewise the accord recommended changes to the 1998 law on land ownership, an issue that has been at the heart of ethnic conflict in western cocoa-growing areas. The new government should be drafting the necessary changes and presenting them to the national assembly.

Another key issue is that of national identity cards. A variety of identity papers are in circulation. New green computerized cards have been issued mainly to southerners, while many northerners are still without them, and they are needed for example to open a bank account. They are also likely to be essential for the process of revising voter lists ready for the elections that are supposed to take place in 2005. Under the Marcoussis accord, the GNU is supposed to review the whole question of nationality, draw up a new naturalization law clarifying problems arising from the 1961 law and 1972 modification, and launch a new national identification process.¹⁴

3.5 Xenophobia Trends

Since early in the conflict hostility to foreign nationals, particularly Burkinabè, permanently or temporarily resident in Côte d'Ivoire, has been fuelled by hardliners in Gbagbo's FPI. These have been promoting a particularly intolerant version of the nationalist doctrine of *ivoirité* (Ivorian-ness), backed by groups of agitators such as Charles Blé Goudé's Jeunes Patriotes. The nationalist media, notably the FPI daily *Notre Voie*, are still putting out a strongly anti-foreigner, anti-northerner, anti-Muslim message, but another factor underlying the continued violence is the settling of scores. In western Côte d'Ivoire, Burkinabè communities attacked earlier in the conflict have been making revenge attacks on indigenous villages, prolonging the cycle of violence, though the deployment of international peacekeepers in the region since May has improved the security situation. The question of land rights is at the heart of this conflict, and the Marcoussis accord provides for the government to accompany implementation of the 1998 land ownership law with an information campaign among local populations, and an amendment allowing leases to be inherited.

4 International Reaction

4.1 France and the International Community

Since the start of the crisis, French relations with President Gbagbo have not been easy. France blames Gbagbo for prolonging the crisis through his intransigent attitudes, and in December 2002, relations deteriorated to the point where Ambassador Renaud Vignal was recalled for consultations. He was quickly replaced with Gildas Le Lidec, a forceful diplomat who is playing a central role in shepherding the Marcoussis process along. France's intervention has been criticized by both sides. Gbagbo felt France should have done more to defeat the rebels, and has consistently criticized France's role, even though without French military support the rebels would have taken Abidjan. The rebels, for their part, were disappointed to be prevented from marching on the commercial capital, while the mediators' decision to bring the rebels to Marcoussis and give them equal status with the country's political parties was also widely criticized.¹⁵

¹⁴ West Africa Network for Peace-building, *Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire: Saving the Peace after the Peace Accord*, Accra, February 2003, <http://www.fewer.org> [accessed 30 June 2003]

¹⁵ Côte d'Ivoire: Pour qui roule la France?, *Jeune Afrique – l'Intelligent*, 20-26 April 2003

France keeps troops in Côte d'Ivoire under a 1961 defence pact. The usual force of 600 has been increased to more than 3,500 under *Opération Licorne* ("unicorn"), with a mandate to monitor the ceasefire and protect the civilian population.

ECOWAS is also very actively involved, although the role of the regional body is far from straightforward, as several member states are involved in the conflict, though Ghana, the current president of ECOWAS, has worked hard to bring the two sides together. The previous ECOWAS president, Senegal's Abdoulaye Wade, was not entirely happy to see Togo take on the main regional mediating role in the early weeks of the conflict. Wade is senior in age and has a considerably better democratic record than Togo's President Gnassingbé Eyadéma and would like to carve out a role for himself as an African peacemaker. Eyadéma had some success in bringing the parties together, but after he pushed through a constitutional amendment in his own country in late December allowing him to stand for a further presidential term, France decided he was just too much of an embarrassment and moved the process to Marcoussis.¹⁶

The UN and the US, preoccupied with the Middle East, have on the whole preferred to leave the problem to France and to ECOWAS. Early involvement by the UN was blocked by the US as a form of retaliation against France's opposition to the war in Iraq. The Security Council has now agreed a token UN observer force. However, on the ground, the US Ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire, Arlene Render, is playing an active role in the Continuation Committee, and Washington is now starting to become involved in the Liberian aspect of the conflict.

The African Union's Secretary-General, Amara Essy, is a former Ivorian foreign minister, and the recent improvements in the security situation have been accompanied by an increase in government lobbying for him to win the AU Commission chairmanship. The AU is leaving it to ECOWAS to lead the negotiating process, but supports the Marcoussis process, is represented on the Continuation Committee and is following the situation closely.

4.2 Role of Neighbouring States

Mali

Despite his experience as an international diplomat, President Amadou Toumani Touré has not taken any significant part in the regional efforts to resolve the Ivorian crisis. Poor relations with former ECOWAS president, Abdoulaye Wade – another keen international mediator, are one issue here, as well as Mali's implication in the crisis, as Malian migrant workers have been among the groups attacked in Côte d'Ivoire. Landlocked Mali has been seeking alternative routes to the sea to replace Abidjan port, while coping with an influx of refugees and returning migrant workers. Some 48,000 Malians are officially recorded as having returned from Côte d'Ivoire, although the Bamako government estimates that in fact up to 200,000 people have fled across the border, which reopened to normal traffic in late May.

Guinea

President Lansana Conté's ill health has prevented him from having a high profile in regional diplomacy, though Guinea is implicated in the wider regional conflict as Conakry supports the rebel Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). While their operations

¹⁶ Regional analyst. Personal interview, February 2003

along the Guinea-Liberia border provide a degree of security, Liberian President Charles Taylor's support for Guinean dissidents provides another unwelcome ingredient in a potentially explosive regional mix. Conté's relations with his neighbours are cool at the best of times.

Burkina Faso

Dissident soldiers who had fled to Burkina Faso after falling out with General Guei originally launched the Côte d'Ivoire rebellion. Burkinabè President Blaise Compaoré has a history of regional trouble-making and no reason to support the xenophobia emanating from Abidjan, but his discreet logistical support for the MPCJ is becoming less significant with the ceasefire and formation of the GNU, and relations between Abidjan and Ouagadougou are improving. Though Burkina Faso bitterly resents the treatment of its nationals and Côte d'Ivoire is angry at Burkina's support for the rebels, the two countries are mutually dependent. Burkina Faso is reliant on access to Abidjan port, while the Ivorian cocoa industry needs migrant workers. President Compaoré also has powerful friends, notably in Paris. A Burkinabè delegation led by Foreign Minister Youssouf Ouédraogo visited Abidjan on 9 May, and preparations are under way for the reopening of the border, closed since the start of the rebellion. No firm date has been set, but a meeting of senior Ivorian and Burkinabè military officers in Ouagadougou in late May recommended reopening the border by the end of June. The railway line between Abidjan and Burkina Faso, a vital freight link, reopened on 22 May, when a trainload of cement and fertilizer headed north with a military escort.¹⁷ A more general opening of the border is now envisaged for mid-July.¹⁸

Liberia

Liberia's involvement is complex. Relations between presidents Gbagbo and Taylor are not cordial, at least partly due to the fact that Taylor was backed in the early days of his rebellion by Côte d'Ivoire's founding president Felix Houphouët-Boigny. Ivorian Army chief of staff General Mathias Doué, and the late General Robert Guei are both Guéré, an ethnic group with close links to Liberia's Krahn, Taylor's long-standing foes. While veterans of the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars are fighting with MPIGO and MJP forces with Taylor's support, Gbagbo in turn is sponsoring Liberian anti-Taylor forces fighting alongside the Ivorian loyalist forces. Recruited from refugees who fled after Taylor's crackdown on Krahn leader Roosevelt Johnson, they have formed into a militia called the Lima Force (apparently deriving from the name of the letter "L", for "Liberia"), while other Krahn have crossed back into Liberia to form the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), a militia active in the southeast which is linked to the main anti-Taylor LURD.¹⁹ After a string of successes, MODEL was reining in its activities by mid-June, showing signs that Côte d'Ivoire had reduced its support under pressure from France.²⁰

¹⁷ Agence France Presse, *Etats-majors ivoiriens et burkinabè prêts pour la sécurisation des frontières*, 13 June 2003

¹⁸ Agence France Presse, *Réouverture de la frontière Burkina/Côte d'Ivoire à la mi-juillet (militaire)*, 2 July 2003

¹⁹ See International Crisis Group, *Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm*, Freetown; Brussels, 30 April 2003

²⁰ *Weird Scenes Inside the Gold-mine*, *Africa Confidential*, 27 June 2003

5 Rebel Actions

5.1 Reaction to Peace Agreement

Before the Marcoussis peace talks, the MPCCI had demanded an eight-month transition period to be followed by elections supervised by the international community, but in the event they agreed to cooperate with the process. Having an equal seat at the negotiating table with Côte d'Ivoire's main political parties gave them a degree of political legitimacy unattainable for most African rebel groups. The MJP and MPIGO are rather vague about their political aims, and the better-organized MPCCI provides leadership on this issue.²¹ The rebel groups, now known under the umbrella name of Forces Nouvelles (The New Forces), have a significant representation in the GNU, and most of their complaints now are about what they see as Gbagbo's non-compliance with the accord.

The situation is still far from stable. This instability was illustrated on 30 June when the rebels suddenly announced the suspension of their participation in the disarmament process, following an incident in which MPCCI leader Guillaume Soro, communications minister in the GNU, was blockaded at the television station by young Gbagbo loyalists. However, at a news conference following the issuing of their communiqué, Soro said he was "more than ever" committed to the peace process.²² The incident did not appear to herald a serious rift, and on 1 July, the visiting Security Council mission was able to express satisfaction with the progress of the Marcoussis peace process.²³ The incident appeared to show Gbagbo's followers in a worse light than the rebels, at a time when senior UN officials were present to witness events, and does not seem to have caused significant damage to the peace process as a whole. On 17 June an agreement was reached during a meeting in the political capital of Yamoussoukro between government officials and rebel leaders to confine fighters to designated military camps. On 4 July when President Gbagbo acknowledged that the government and rebel military leaders had signed a joint declaration that formally ended the state of military war in the country. During the same ceremony Gbagbo announced that he had approved a draft amnesty law for rebels occupying the North and had urged parliament to pass it quickly. These developments while promising must be regarded with a degree of caution since implementation on the ground will not be as straightforward.

5.2 Rebel Controlled Areas

The MPCCI controls an area stretching from just north of Yamoussoukro, and including the main northern cities of Bouaké and Korhogo. Though virtually no money is circulating in the North, basic services are operating, and in the MPCCI-controlled area at least law and order are being maintained – albeit by bizarrely-dressed gunmen. Southerners have mostly fled rebel territory, leaving a population relatively sympathetic to the MPCCI cause, and there is little tension reported, though the vast majority of civilians would prefer a return to normality.

²¹ Delegates at Marcoussis peace talks. Personal interviews, 15 January 2003

²² Agence France Presse, Les Forces Nouvelles restent au gouvernement, plainte contre le président de l'assemblée nationale, 30 June 2003

²³ Agence France Presse, Côte d'Ivoire: l'ONU "satisfaite" du déroulement des accords de Marcoussis, 1 July 2003

The MPIGO and MJP control a rather more lawless area west of Guiglo and Séguéla as far as the Guinea and Liberia borders, but even there security is improving since the deployment of French and West African peacekeepers in May.²⁴

6 Refugee and IDP Situation

Many migrant workers, who are employed, have remained in Abidjan and sent their families home for safety. Housing is a significant problem following the destruction of the shantytowns where many lived. Many men are staying with friends whose homes are intact. Conditions are crowded, though less so since their families have left. The FPI government said at the time of the “clean-up” operations that it would provide more suitable housing if donors wanted to pay for it, but this looks improbable.

The Ivorian government says that between 40,000 and 50,000 Ivorians have fled to neighbouring countries since 19 September. The government is organizing the repatriation of refugees from neighbouring countries where they can easily gain access, such as Guinea and Mali, but has said that an organized repatriation from Liberia, which hosts the biggest number of Ivorian refugees – between 25,000 and 35,000 fled there – is too difficult and dangerous. Many are making their own way back with the worsening of the situation in Liberia and the improvement on the Ivorian side of the border, but they are returning to villages without food and often finding their wells contaminated by corpses thrown into them.

Some 750,000 Ivorians are thought to have been internally displaced by the conflict. Typically they are living with friends and family, or in empty or abandoned buildings in what they feel are safer areas. This puts pressure on host communities as well as the IDPs themselves.

The World Food Programme issued an appeal on 27 May for US\$16 million of aid to feed over 500,000 people for eight months in Côte d’Ivoire. This is aimed chiefly at refugees from Liberia, internally displaced Ivorians and the families sheltering them, and the unemployed and very low wage earners. For the general population availability of food is not a significant problem, except in the far west. In most of the MPCCI-controlled North, agriculture has suffered relatively little disruption. One problem is a lack of money to buy food, as many workers in the North, especially state employees, have not been paid for many months.

In neighbouring Burkina Faso, July to September are traditionally the “lean season” where subsistence farmers must live off their food stocks. Returning migrant workers as well as refugees from Côte d’Ivoire are putting additional pressure on the system. The US Famine Early Warning System (FEWS) reports large grain inventories in southern and western Burkina Faso, and interventions by humanitarian agencies in the north. There is good grain availability in all parts of the country, though not everyone has their food situation under control and many are still vulnerable to food insecurity problems and will need outside assistance to make it through the rainy season in good health.²⁵

²⁴ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Sleepy Rebel Capital Slowly Wakes Up to Peace*, 18 June 2003

²⁵ Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS), *Monthly Report on Food Security in Burkina Faso*, 14 May 2003, <http://www.fews.net/centers/current/monthlies/report/?f=bf&m=1000915&l=en> [accessed 30 June 2003]

The growing number of Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire are highly vulnerable, both to attacks from local people who associate them with the rebels, and to recruiters seeking fighters for the MODEL and Lima militias.²⁶

7 Overall Economic and Social Situation

7.1 Foreign Aid

Finance Minister Paul Bohoun Bouabré has worked hard to maintain contacts with donors and reassure them that the government remains committed to economic reform. He is one of the few FPI ministers to have kept their posts in the GNU, along with mines and energy minister Leon Emmanuel Monnet, another key figure.

When the rebellion began, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank had been negotiating a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility to be put in place in 2003, as well as significant debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative. Donors are anxious to support the peace process to prevent further social breakdown. The European Union has promised €400 million in aid over five years if the Marcoussis accord is successful. Fortunately, the war has not caused major infrastructure damage, but help for refugees and IDPs will be a priority.

In May, the United Nations relaxed its security warning from Phase 4 to Phase 3, which means that international agencies can restart development cooperation in the country.²⁷ The IMF had indicated that a relaxation of the security warning was required before an assessment mission could visit the country in order to determine what form of economic assistance was required to help in the reconstruction. A visit is expected in the next few months, and the key decision will be whether to restart the previous IMF programme or to negotiate a new one. An IMF programme is essential to attract support from other quarters and to revive negotiations on debt relief under the IMF and World Bank's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative.

The African Development Bank's decision to evacuate its Abidjan headquarters has been a major blow to the economy. The Bank has moved to a temporary headquarters in Tunis, severely affecting Abidjan's service industries. A decision on a return cannot be made until next year, for return in 2005, but the Bank may decide the planned elections represent too great a security risk.²⁸

7.2 Cocoa Production for 2002/2003 and Prospects for 2003/2004.

Here the picture is reassuring. The government realizes that cocoa income is essential, and has worked hard to keep the crop moving to port. ED&F Man is forecasting production for 2002/2003 of 1.3 million tonnes, compared to 1.24 million in 2001/2002. Virtually the entire main crop was harvested and commercialized, and yields were boosted by exceptionally good bean counts. Some cocoa was smuggled from rebel-held territory in the north west of the cocoa zone into Liberia and Guinea, but cocoa was also smuggled into Côte d'Ivoire from Ghana in January and February, when the farmer price in Côte d'Ivoire rose on the back of

²⁶ See Amnesty International, *No Escape: Liberian Refugees in Côte d'Ivoire*, London, 24 June 2003

²⁷ UNICEF Humanitarian Action, Côte d'Ivoire Sub-regional Crisis Donor Update, 17 Jun 2003

²⁸ Agence France Presse, Le Premier ministre ivoirien plaide pour le retour de la BAD à Abidjan, 4 June 2003

higher international prices. Overall, these high prices had the effect of encouraging farmers to remain in the cocoa zone to fully harvest the crop despite security fears. The record farmer price has also had a positive effect on farm maintenance and fertilizer use. With relatively benign weather over the main dry season, this has resulted in the development of a very large mid-crop on the trees.

Prospects for the 2003/2004 crop are also encouraging. With farmers taking better care of their farms and applying more inputs to increase yields, reasonable weather for the forthcoming main crop should lead to higher production next season unless the security situation deteriorates further.²⁹

7.3 Economic Implications for the West African Region

The crisis has had a serious impact on the landlocked Sahelian states to the north of Côte d'Ivoire that were previously dependent on Abidjan port. Diverting goods to Ghana's Tema port substantially raises costs, as Ghana is not part of the free trade zone operated by the Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine (UEMOA). Lomé is considerably further away, and Guinea has poor roads and limited infrastructure. In Burkina Faso prices for products like fuel and building materials have soared. Communities with few spare resources are often struggling to absorb an influx of returning migrant workers.³⁰ However businesses in Burkina Faso are facing a more optimistic outlook on the future as the vital rail link between Abidjan and Burkina Faso is soon to be reopened. Mali is the only West African country that looking different options for longer-term solutions in order to reduce their economic dependence on Abidjan.

UEMOA finance ministers meeting in Niamey said in April that the Ivorian crisis and poor agricultural output would lead to lower than expected growth in 2003. Côte d'Ivoire generates 40% of the UEMOA's gross domestic product. GDP growth in the zone slowed to 1.5% in 2002, compared to 3.7% in 2001. Ministers are forecasting a return to higher growth in 2004, but this assumes an end to the Ivorian crisis.³¹

7.4 Status of Foreign Investment

New foreign investment is unlikely for the time being, but the departure of foreign businesses has not been as widespread as was originally feared. Many foreign businesspeople left in January when embassies recommended evacuation, but most plan to return, and businesses with significant infrastructure investment in the country are not pulling out. The kinds of businesses that have left are regional representations, whose investment is limited to renting some office space. The evacuation of the African Development Bank is a serious blow to the economy, but bank officials are at pains to emphasize that the departure is not permanent. Oil exploration is carrying on unhindered, with the full support of the government, and two recent finds near the producing Baobab field suggest the acreage operated by Canadian Natural Resources may contain a significant oil system. The fields are offshore, which minimizes the security problems they represent.³²

²⁹ ED&F Man Cocoa, *Market Report*, April 2003, <http://www.edfman.com/cocoa/main.html> [accessed June 2003]

³⁰ Ouaga face à la crise Ivoirienne, *Jeune Afrique – l'Intelligent*, 23-29 March 2003

³¹ Reuters, Zone franc Afrique: La croissance ralentie en 2002, 10 April 2003

³² CNR Makes New Find, *African Energy*, June 2003

8 NGO/IGO Role

Insecurity hampered NGO operations earlier in the conflict, but this has now improved, though the government has been criticized for doing too little on the humanitarian front. The rebels, at least the MPCCI, have rather more of a vested interest in appearing cooperative to the international community, and in ensuring that essential food and medical supplies reach the most needy and some semblance of normal life continues in the areas under their control. Visiting Côte d'Ivoire in late April, UN Humanitarian Envoy Carolyn McAskie identified better and more secure reception and living conditions for the displaced as the greatest need. She noted that the Ivorian government had the administrative and an infrastructure facility to help improve the conditions of these vulnerable groups and said too little was being done.³³

Violence towards relief workers and journalists has been reported. Four volunteers of the Ivorian Red Cross were kidnapped in the far west around Danané in December and were found dead two months later near Toulepleu, a town on the Liberian border. A correspondent of the state Agence Ivoirienne de Presse, Kloueu Gonzreu, disappeared in Toulepleu on 11 January. His body was found on 19 March. The nationalist press had accused him of being an apologist for the rebels, and he was believed to have been detained by Liberians fighting with loyalist Ivorian troops.³⁴ Foreign journalists and correspondents on newspapers that do not follow the nationalist line have suffered death threats and harassment in Abidjan, though the atmosphere is now improving.

The peace process is making aid operations much simpler, though the deterioration in Liberia is creating new problems, notably the increasing militarization of the Nicla refugee camp, which is being used for recruitment by the MODEL and Lima militias. Travel in the interior of the country is not impossible, but is slowed by numerous informal roadblocks, generally manned by local youths hoping to extract money from drivers. Limited health services have been kept open in the rebel-held north. The Ivorian Red Cross continues to conduct public health and vaccination programmes, sends drugs to hospitals and provides basic medical care to the victims of conflict. Médecins Sans Frontières operates a series of mobile clinics. Action Internationale Contre la Faim also operates feeding programmes in rebel controlled territory. The UN reopened its coordination office in the western town of Man in April and this has made it easier for agencies like the World Food Programme and UNICEF to operate effectively in the far west, the area of most need, and most of the country is now accessible.

On 29 April, the UN launched an appeal for US\$85.8 million of emergency aid for about 2.8 million people in West Africa affected by the Ivorian conflict. Attracting funds will be difficult at a time when many countries are concentrating on rebuilding Iraq, but on 8 May, the European Commission approved €5.74 million through its Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) budget, for vulnerable groups within Côte d'Ivoire and refugees in neighbouring countries. Some €3.4 million will go to fund humanitarian operations within the country to cover basic needs such as health, food, water, shelter, transport and protection, while €2.1 million will pay for emergency aid measures and reintegration assistance for refugees in

³³ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, Côte d'Ivoire: Protection Becoming the Central Issue – McAskie, 28 April 2003

³⁴ Reporters sans Frontières, Côte d'Ivoire: Kloueu Gonzreu, 20 March 2003

Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ghana. The remaining €240,000 will be kept in reserve.³⁵

9 Review of Possible Scenarios

9.1 Best Case

It would be possible to construct a coherent scenario for a successful resolution of the Ivorian crisis on the assumption that most of the initiatives that have been started since the initial ceasefire of October 2002 receive adequate support nationally and internationally. Under such an assumption pressure from the international community would help the Government of National Unity to pick up momentum. In line with January's Marcoussis peace accord, disarmament would get under way and the government would identify preparations for elections as a priority. Revisions of electoral lists would form part of a new national identification process as outlined in the Marcoussis accord, and the presence of international peacekeepers would reassure the population.

The realization that the GNU is serious about organizing free and fair elections would restore confidence around the country. Main opposition leader Alassane Ouattara, who has been barred from successive elections in the past, risks being disqualified on residence grounds, but since his status has been a key flashpoint in past elections, this may in fact turn out to be another factor dispelling tension. He could head off a wave of protest by publicly endorsing Justice Minister and RDR Secretary-General Henriette Diabaté as the candidate of national unity. She won't win, but would do very creditably, and the party would win strong support in parliamentary elections. Former President Henri Konan Bédié, who was ousted in the 1999 coup d'état is also likely to be disqualified as a PDCI candidate, but could concentrate on his overseas business activities. His party would capitalize on its wide national support base and the fact that it has not been implicated in the turmoil since 1999, and the country would essentially go back to being run by ethnic Baoulé civil servants, many of whom are still in the key posts they held in the 1990s under the PDCI government.

Donors, recognizing Côte d'Ivoire's central economic role in West Africa, would be anxious to resume aid to support the peace process and avert further trouble, and the new government would enjoy strong international support.

9.2 Worst Case

The most serious threat to the Ivorian peace settlement could come from the Liberian leader Charles Taylor, if he – as now seems most likely – is driven out of Monrovia by a rebel assault. If Taylor refuses to go into exile, he might instead retreat to his central Liberian stronghold of Gbarnga with a force of veteran supporters who have essentially spent the past 15 years at war. From there, they would conduct hit-and-run operations to loot food and sow insecurity. After years of civil war, there is not much in Liberia to loot, and western Côte d'Ivoire would offer better prospects. Taylor's original rebellion was launched from Côte d'Ivoire in 1989, and cross-border raiding is a mode of operation he and his top commanders know well. With a new administration installed in Monrovia, there is a risk that the international community would pay little attention to insecurity in Liberia's provinces, which after all has been going on since 1989. While international troops are keeping the peace

³⁵ European Commission, Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), Côte d'Ivoire: Commission Approves almost EUR 6 Million in Humanitarian Aid, Brussels, 8 May 2003 (press release)

effectively in western Côte d'Ivoire at the moment, keeping up an effective international peacekeeping force capable of containing the threat from Liberia over a period of years would be extremely difficult.

Pro-Taylor rebels in western Côte d'Ivoire could undermine peace and disarmament efforts in the rest of the country, especially if the GNU remains ineffectual due to the FPI's lack of support for the Marcoussis peace process. If indeed the peace process were to falter, Gbagbo, as its main opponent, would take much of the blame. This would lose him what little international support he still enjoys, and this in combination with the powerlessness of the GNU could then encourage the rebel MPCJ and its allies to organize another coup attempt. If successful the international community would reluctantly accept this, as Guei's 1999 coup was, but would carry the consequence that the country would remain cut off from all but the most basic international support for another period of months or years.

9.3 Most Likely Scenario

On balance it appears most likely that the presence of French and West African troops will prevent any serious worsening of the security situation. However it is very possible that the GNU will never manage to be particularly effective, and that tensions will continue between Gbagbo's FPI, which opposes the Marcoussis peace process, and the rebels and political parties who support it.

International pressure is likely to ensure that elections are held at the end of 2005 or soon after. But unless a massive effort is put into resolving the issue of Ivorian nationality definition (and therefore candidate and voter registration), which is at the heart of the current conflict's north-south divide, the elections could turn out a political failure. Gbagbo's main opponents might again refuse to take part as they did in 2000, which would mean that the elections would produce a government less representative than the GNU.

It is very possible that the disarmament and demobilization programme will be only partly effective, pushed through by the French who are desperate to reduce their presence, but meeting strong opposition from elements in the Gbagbo-loyalist army who are virulently anti-French and anti-Marcoussis. Effective disarmament is impossible without strong backing from the Ivorian authorities, which is not currently available in view of Gbagbo's reluctance to accept the Marcoussis plan. It is also likely that insecurity will persist in western Côte d'Ivoire, irrespective of the outcome of the Liberian power struggle, in that Liberian fighters backing either the rebels or the government in the Ivorian conflict may prove difficult to get rid of. There is also a risk of cross-border raids from Liberia as the situation deteriorates there.

10 Conclusions

Concern has been expressed by NGOs that the need to rebuild Iraq may divert aid and other resources from Africa, but the lack of international focus on West Africa is a perennial problem. Their worst fears seem not to have been realized, with a Security Council mission visiting the region in late June³⁶ and a visit by US President George Bush from 7 to 12 July.

France, Britain and the US are discussing a military intervention to halt the fighting in Monrovia, but there is a need to tackle the problems of the whole region, dealing with all the

³⁶ UN News Service, Security Council Mission in West Africa Wraps Up Talks in Côte d'Ivoire, 1 July 2003

different rebel groups and their supporters, not just at national level. Increased pressure on Taylor has not been balanced by any effort to tackle the LURD, or Guinea's support for it, while the Ivorian conflict has seen the rise of the MODEL militia in Liberia and the Lima Force in Côte d'Ivoire.³⁷ The gains won in the international effort to bring peace to Sierra Leone and hopefully Côte d'Ivoire risk being lost unless the international community can bring peace to the whole region. Otherwise the same fighters will simply appear somewhere else, and the humanitarian emergency will continue.³⁸

Politically, the UN needs to provide leadership for the regional peace process. At the moment, there is general agreement that Liberian leader Charles Taylor is a key to the problem and must go, but there is no coherent plan for what should happen after that, and no country or institution seems prepared to take a lead. On the humanitarian front, help to resettle returning refugees and to ensure that communities hosting IDPs have adequate food supplies are priorities. But apart from the more obvious humanitarian needs, funding and know-how for the national identification process, establishing who is eligible for Ivorian nationality and issuing them with national identity cards, is another area that would benefit from UN help. This issue lies at the heart of the current crisis. Ivorians will have difficulty trusting each other, and strong international support for the process will play a key role in building confidence.

³⁷ See Human Rights Watch, *The Regional Crisis and Human Rights Abuses in West Africa, A Briefing Paper to the U.N. Security Council*, New York, 20 June 2003

³⁸ See United Nations, Report of the Panel of Experts Appointed Pursuant to Paragraph 4 of Security Council Resolution 1458 (2003) Concerning Liberia, 24 April 2003, S/2003/498

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