

Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire : Which Way out ?

Paris, 25 January 2011
Africa Briefing Report (Summary)
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The aim of this briefing was to explore the main challenges surrounding the current crisis in Ivory Coast. The following issues were discussed:

- 1/ Possible scenarios of crisis management
- 2/ Strengths and weaknesses of the main actors
- 3/ The role of international and regional actors.

1/ Possible scenarios

There are currently four options being considered to deal with the crisis in the Ivory Coast. **Mediation** efforts undertaken by the African Union have proved ineffective so far, and negotiations between the parties have reached a dead end. Nigeria, backed up by Burkina Faso, has been pushing for a **military intervention** in Ivory Coast to remove Laurent Gbagbo from power. This option, however faces major operational, political and legal challenges. **Economic sanctions** appear to be the most realistic solution presented so far, but this will require time and positive results are not guaranteed. Another option, also proposed by Nigeria, would be to **couple economic sanctions with a military embargo on the San Pedro and Abidjan's ports**.

2/ Strengths and weaknesses of the main actors

M. Gbagbo enjoys significant political support, both inside and outside Ivory Coast. He controls the well-structured security apparatus and the main media. He also benefits from the economic power of Ivory Coast, the second largest economy in Western Africa. M. Gbagbo has been able to take advantage of the divisions within the African Union and ECOWAS: Angola has officially sided with the incumbent president, and the South African president has called for a ballot recount. Although the popular adherence to M. Gbagbo's regime has been eroding over the past years, he is still able to rely on the most radical elements of the various militias present in Ivory Coast. In contrast, part of the military might turn their back to the regime, should violence and repression escalate.

Part of M. Gbagbo's strengths derive from M. Ouattara's weaknesses. Some participants identified the lack of a clear communication and political strategy of M. Ouattara and his allies. The Forces Nouvelles, led by M. Ouattara's Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, do not have the military capacity to intervene, nor the willingness to do so. The relationship between M. Ouattara and M. Soro are ambivalent, since the former has to rely on the latter for his military protection. In the field, relationships between the RHDP and the FN are sometimes tense.

3/ The role of international and regional actors

Because of its political and economic importance, the Ivory Coast has been the subject of growing international concern. External actors also fear that the current crisis might create a precedent for other elections to be held in Africa in 2011 and 2012.

Nigeria and **Burkina Faso**, both members of ECOWAS, are very concerned with the consequences of the potential destabilization of Ivory Coast, due to a wide range of economic and political reasons. **Ghana** has adopted a more neutral stance.

The UN mission in the Ivory Coast is in a difficult position, since M. Gbagbo has openly called for its withdrawal. Blue helmets are regularly targeted by forces loyal to M. Gbagbo. ONUCI might also suffer as a consequence of the internal divisions within the UNSC: Russia is opposed to any form of intervention in what it considers Ivoirian internal affairs. China is by contrast less implicated, since it does not have strong interests in this country.

The EU sent an election observation mission to the Ivory Coast during the elections. The EU has resolved to impose firm sanctions to force M. Gbagbo out of power. Some participants however noted that the EU should define its policy line more clearly when it comes to its electoral observation missions. In particular, it should be clearly stated that the loser of the elections has to recognize his defeat and leave power. The EU should start considering alternative actions to be undertaken, should the embargo option be endorsed. Contingency and emergency planning, necessary to deal with potential humanitarian consequences resulting from a deterioration of the situation, should be undertaken by ECHO.

More generally, some participants questioned the opportunity and the usefulness of elections as a post-conflict management tool in African contexts. A further point, relating to the lack of renewal of the Ivorian political elite, was stated as a contributing factor to the current crisis.

The role of the ICC was also evoked: preliminary investigations over crimes committed after September 2002 are under way. The ICC prosecutor has warned that he would prosecute those responsible for any deadly violence following the elections, which was viewed by the participants as an important preventive mechanism.

Conclusion

Some participants questioned **the viability of a ballot recount**, considering the fact that the preliminary conditions – mainly the disarmament of former rebels – for the presidential elections had not been met. However, most participants dismissed this point arguing that the votes have already been counted, and the counting has been validated by both parts. A recount would benefit M. Gbagbo's strategy, who claims that the current crisis is can be attributed to the contentious outcome of the elections. Besides, it is not certain that a ballot recount would solve the current crisis, since many power sharing configurations have been explored since 2002. Peaceful exit strategies should not be dismissed as it is imperative to avoid to a situation that would result in another civil war in the Ivory Coast.