

A PRECIS OF THE HISTORICAL SECURITY CONTEXT OF COTE D'IVOIRE

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Although Portuguese explorers first mapped the coastline in 1460, the recorded history of Cote d'Ivoire began in 1637, when missionaries from France landed on the coast. The undoubtedly rich history of Cote d'Ivoire preceding this contact remains largely unknown. Exchanges with the native inhabitants of the region were limited by the fears of the Europeans and the difficult coastline.

An influx of African cultures from outside the immediate region occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries. Ethnic *Kru* settlers from what is now Liberia occupied the western portion of the country. *Senoufo* and *Lobi* peoples migrated from what are now Burkina Faso and Mali to occupy the north of the country. In the 18th century, the *Agnis* peoples settled in the southeastern portion of the country, while the *Baoulés* occupied the central portion of the country, both groups

origating in what is now Ghana. In addition, *Malinké* peoples from what is now Guinea came to settle in the northwest. These many ethnic groups continue to be represented in Cote d'Ivoire to this day, along with many sub-groups, for a total of 400 identified ethnic groups.



L.E. Bouet-Williaumez

Although the slave trade targeted much of the coastline of West Africa, the area which is now Cote d'Ivoire was relatively untouched due to the lack of usable natural harbours. It was only in the middle of the 19th century that France took an interest in establishing an actual colony in the region. In 1843-44, Lieutenant Commander (later Admiral) Louis Edouard Bouet-Williaumez signed treaties with two local kings, one located in Grand

Bassam, making their territories into French protectorates. From a base in Grand Bassam, French explorers and traders began to expand their influence in the region, annexing additional territory as they went.

Cote d'Ivoire, with Grand Bassam as its capital, became an official French colony in 1893. "Pacification" efforts against a number of the native inhabitants, most notably the *Malinké* peoples, took the form of a raiding and occupation policy on the part of the French, countered with a guerrilla campaign on the part of the native inhabitants. Although the *Malinké* surrendered in 1898, sporadic violence continued throughout the country until approximately 1915.

French efforts in the region were primarily to create a series of plantations that grew produce for export. These products included cacao, coffee and bananas, which remain as the major exports of the country. Cote d'Ivoire was somewhat unique in West Africa due to the number of French settlers present, which was much higher than in other colonies that had only small expatriate communities to administer them.

A federation of France's colonies in West Africa, known as *Afrique Occidentale Francaise (AOF)*, was formed in 1895, with Cote d'Ivoire as one of the original four members. The *AOF* later grew to encompass eight French colonies, and was only abolished in 1958.

Throughout this period, Cote d'Ivoire was administered by French bureaucrats and governmental decisions were taken in Paris. Ivorians were considered French subjects, not citizens, and had no right to vote or be represented in government. Reforms in 1946 granted French citizenship to all French subjects, ending the forced labour systems that had been in place since the previous century and beginning the process of building a political system in Cote d'Ivoire.

Further reforms led to the granting of independence to Cote d'Ivoire in 1960. The first elected president, Felix Houphouet-Boigny, was an ethnic *Baoulé* and one of the first labour organizers in the former colony.

Cote d'Ivoire was considered somewhat of an economic miracle, with high levels of production supporting a growing economy. The same agricultural products introduced by French colonists in the previous century formed the crux of the Ivorian economy, along with new exports such as pineapples and palm oil. Unlike much of the rest of former colonial Africa, European planters and technocrats did not flee Cote d'Ivoire after independence, and in fact the European population there continued to grow over the coming decades, adding to the



Felix Houphouet-Boigny

economic growth. Along with the technical expertise of European residents, this economic growth was fuelled by a massive influx of landless people from neighbouring countries, who came to clear and settle land in Cote d'Ivoire. It was accepted that ownership of land derived from making it productive, affording great opportunity to those who came and were willing to work hard. This policy would also lead to the many complex land disputes that remain contentious and unresolved today.

Political turmoil appeared early in the history of an independent Cote d'Ivoire, with the first coup attempt against Houphouet-Boigny taking place in 1963. It was suppressed firmly by Houphouet-Boigny, leading to mass arrests and secret trials. Many leading members of government were implicated in the coup, solidifying the power of the President by removing all possible rivals. Whether or not an actual coup was ever attempted is unclear, though the results allowed Houphouet-Boigny to maintain power until his death. Later coup attempts, in 1970, 1973, and 1990 were also suppressed with a firm hand.

Houphouet-Boigny remained a popular leader throughout much of his 33 years as President. Although elections were duly held every five years, the only party permitted by law was Houphouet-Boigny's PDCI (*Partie Democratique de Cote d'Ivoire*), and so he was continually re-elected. Although he has been criticized for some of his grand projects, such as transforming his home village of Yamoussoukro into the capital, he retained popular support until economic difficulties began in the 1980s in response to a global recession.



Laurent Gbagbo

Limited democratic reforms in 1980 also changed the political landscape in Cote d'Ivoire. A National Assembly was formed whose members were elected in the first true democratic practice to be held in Cote d'Ivoire. These reforms were widened in 1990, when opposition parties were first allowed, leading to a large number of them being formed. Despite the fact that the elections in 1990 were the first multi-party elections held in Cote d'Ivoire since independence,

Houphouet-Boigny was again re-elected, defeating the only other candidate to run, Laurent Gbagbo of the FPI (*Front Populaire Ivoirien*). Upon winning the election, Houphouet-Boigny appointed Alassane Ouattara to the new post of Prime Minister.



Alassane Ouattara

Upon the death of Houphouet-Boigny in 1993, the

leader of the National Assembly, Henri Konan Bédié, assumed the Presidency. This took place according to the provisions of the Ivorian constitution. Upon taking power, Bédié forced the resignation of Prime Minister Ouattara.

Bédié, now leader of the PDCI as well as President, undertook a number of economic reforms, coupled with political repression of opponents and an increasing degree of corruption amongst those in high government positions. Nevertheless, he was given a fresh mandate in 1995 in new elections, although they were boycotted by Laurent Gbagbo and his party.

Against the backdrop of a difficult economic situation, exacerbated by international pressures due to perceptions of corruption, Bédié sought to use nationalism to aid him in retaining power. He introduced the concept of *Ivoirité*, which saw many people lose citizenship if they could not prove that their parents



Henri Konan Bédié

had been born in Cote d'Ivoire. Given that previous economic success had encouraged many immigrants from around the region, and had in fact relied on the influx of labour in order to be successful, this proved a highly unpopular policy amongst the masses. In addition, it served to prevent Bédié's main rival, Alassane Ouattara, from standing for election as he also lost citizenship.

The period leading up to the 1995 election was extremely difficult, with many clashes between opposition political parties and both the police as well as pro-government militias. In addition, ethnic tensions increased as many Muslims in the north became disenfranchised under the process of *Ivoirité*, and a large number of *Burkinabé* were forced to return to Burkina Faso despite having been long time residents of Cote d'Ivoire.

On 22 December, 1999, an army mutiny led by General Robert Gueï began over the issue of having not been paid wages owed for participation in the UN peacekeeping mission in Central African Republic. This mutiny soon became a military coup d'état, seizing power as Bédié fled to France. Gueï installed a joint civilian-military administration, which prepared the way for democratic elections. Bédié soon returned to the region and re-established control over the PDCI, prepared to run in the elections.



General Robert Gueï

Gueï also ran as a presidential candidate in the election, and was declared the victor. Widespread perception that this victory was achieved through fraud led to public demonstrations and an uprising that forced Gueï to flee. The apparent victor, Laurent Gbagbo, assumed the role of President in his stead. Following the election were a series of clashes between supporters of Gbagbo and Ouattara. An alleged coup early the next year was blamed on *Burkinabés* (such as Ouattara), causing another large exodus of peoples from Cote d'Ivoire into Burkina Faso.

A process of reform and reconciliation was begun by the government in order to try and quell discontent and regain the confidence of international institutions, in particular the International Monetary Fund. This process seemed to achieve positive results, even leading to a joint statement in early 2002 by Gbagbo, Gueï, Bédié and Ouattara supporting the democratic process and opposing coups, etc.

This process essentially halted when in September of 2002, the military launched another coup which failed to seize power, but did succeed in seizing the northern 60% of the country. The coup originated in the army base at Bouaké, seizing a large portion of the Ivorian army's heavy equipment at the outset of the coup, with other elements attempting and failing to assassinate the President. That same night, Robert Gueï was killed, either leading elements of the coup or innocently while at home depending on the source. An attempt was made on the life of Ouattara as well, though he survived and was sheltered in an embassy in Abidjan. The French military forces in Cote d'Ivoire intervened on behalf of the government, but failed to prevent the rebels from seizing a large portion of the country. The political leader of the rebels, Guillaume Soro, has no military background but is in fact a lawyer who some accuse of acting as a front for other military leaders who in fact hold the reins of power.

A government of national unity, involving both the rebels and government, was signed into being in January, 2003, though it has been essentially paralyzed since that time due to disagreements between the parties, as well as obstructionist tactics. By the end of 2003, the rebels were no longer participating fully in the government, and they were beginning to lose full control over the various regions of the north. This loss of control was in part because the rebels, initially known as the MPCJ (*Mouvement Patriotique de Cotes d'Ivoire*), and later as the *Forces Nouvelles*, were not an entirely cohesive group and included many violent opportunists amongst those who seized power from the central government following the coup.



Guillaume Soro

The country lurched onwards, neither fully at war nor at peace, with ongoing struggles between the government, other legitimate

political parties, and the *Forces Nouvelles*. On 4 July, 2003, a peace agreement was signed between the government and the *Forces Nouvelles*, though in August another coup attempt was thwarted by the French intelligence services, with Gbagbo remaining in office and unscathed. Progress on the issues of citizenship and reform that had sparked the initial remained unresolved, with no real progress being made.

The UNOCI mission was created at the start of 2004 in order to better stabilize the country and allow for the return of normalcy in the two zones. This was accompanied by ongoing protests on the part of citizens looking for a conclusion to the crisis, and repression on the part of the government in return.

The government broke faith with the preceding agreements on 4 November, 2004, launching a renewed assault on the north supported by fighter-bomber aircraft piloted by Byelorussian mercenaries. This offensive failed in its initial objective to take Bouaké, and had a likely unintended result. The air attacks on Bouaké resulted in the deaths of 9 French soldiers and an aid worker, an act that France interpreted as being deliberate. French reprisals, in the form of attacks of their own, destroyed most of the Ivorian air force while it was on the ground. This in turn led to violent attacks by *Jeunes Patriotes* against French and other international citizens, particularly in Abidjan. These attacks included a number of rapes, murders and beatings. The majority of the international community evacuated in the face of these attacks.

These attacks quickly died out, and the country returned to the state of “no war, no peace” that made the resumption of every day life so difficult. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1572, imposing an arms embargo on all parties to the conflict. Regional leaders continued to try to engage both sides and broker a peace deal, and in April of 2005 a summit was held in South Africa, hosted by President Mbeki. This summit appeared to succeed, though the “Pretoria Agreement” that resulted was essentially a reaffirmation to abide by the terms of the peace agreement made in 2003.

The Pretoria Agreement also led to direct talks between the military leaders of the *Forces Nouvelles* and the government, with discussion focusing on the establishment of a *zone de confiance* to separate the forces. The next step that was envisaged was the creation of a new national army including forces from both sides.



Charles Konan Banny

This process, however, was obstructed by parties on both sides, leading to a resumption of the earlier paralysis. Elections that were to be held in 2005 were

not achieved, despite the support of the UN for the process, and were then rescheduled for 2006, with Gbagbo retaining the presidency until then.

In December of 2005, the interim Prime Minister was replaced with Charles Konan Banny, who it was thought would be able to limit the powers of Gbagbo and move the peace process forward. This has not been the case, despite the adversarial relations between the two.

In January of 2006, pro-Gbagbo militias began violent protests across the country, calling for a number of changes including the withdrawal of peacekeepers. In some areas these protests became so violent that UN troops were virtually under siege. In Guiglo, these protests led to the deaths of a number of people and spiralled into widespread violence that destroyed all but one of the UN and NGO offices in the town.

Throughout 2006, there were three main issues of contention between the government and the *Forces Nouvelles*, as well as between the government, Banny and the international community. The disarmament process was one, with the government insisting that FANCI not be involved in the process while the *Forces Nouvelles* take the opposite stance. Secondly, the issue of identity cards and the underlying questions of citizenship and ethnic identity has resulted in the programme being stalled since the summer. Thirdly, the scheduled elections themselves remain contentious, and all the more so as the first two issues need to be satisfactorily resolved for “free and fair” elections to actually take place.

The polls scheduled for 2006 have since been rescheduled for 2007, the deadlock that is afflicting Ivorian society seems unlikely to change. It is interesting to note, however, that many of the underlying issues of citizenship and ethnic identity, as well as large movements of IDPs, are hardly new problems. In fact, the history of Cote d’Ivoire is essentially the story of these problems being wrestled with over the past few hundred years. Little surprise, then, that neither domestic politicians nor the international community has achieved a “quick fix” to the issues affecting Cote d’Ivoire.