

# MEDIATION, LOCAL RESPONSE AND THE LIMITS OF INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN COTE D'IVOIRE

Giulia Piccolino  
PhD candidate, Università degli Studi di Firenze  
Dipartimento di Studi sullo Stato

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## *Abstract*

The belief that all conflicts, including internal conflicts, can be resolved by promoting a negotiated settlement consciously or unconsciously underpins the strategy of international peacemakers (Stedman 1996; Clapham 1998; Tull and Mehler 2005). In case of failure, their usual reaction is to “try again”. In Côte d’Ivoire, an economically important West African country that is *de facto* divided in two after an armed rebellion took hold of its Northern part in 2002, this inclination has resulted in the conclusion of not less than four internationally negotiated agreements. However, peace negotiations have only partially succeeded in solving the crisis that the country experiences.

This paper compares three different efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement of the politico-military crisis in Côte d’Ivoire through international mediation: the French-sponsored Linas-Marcoussis agreement, the South African mediation and the so-called direct dialogue, mediated by Burkina Faso. My paper makes reference to Christopher Clapham’s (1996) observation that international peacemaking and peacekeeping can be better explored by considering the point of view of the conflicting parties. It argues that the multiplication of different cycles of negotiations in Côte d’Ivoire and the introduction of new mediators in the Ivorian crisis have become a subtle strategy to weaken and marginalize the international community and revert an unfavourable power-relation on the part of the Ivorian *camp présidentiel* (presidential coalition).

On September 2002, after a failed *coup d’Etat* attempt, Côte d’Ivoire, once considered the most prosperous state of West Africa, succumbed to the spiral of civil war that had already shattered several other West African states. The civil strife was the foreseeable - albeit by no way inevitable – outcome of a protracted economic and political crisis. It was also the fruit of an intoxicated geopolitical environment, with two neighbouring countries – Burkina Faso and Liberia - fuelling the Ivorian civil unrest.

While in 1989 the outbreak of the first major West African civil war in neighbouring Liberia had met sheer indifference on the international scene, this was not going to be the case with Côte d’Ivoire’s civil war, for reasons that have both to do with the specificities of the Ivorian

situation and to changes in the international environment. The level of international involvement was impressive, given the low-intensity characteristics of the conflict. As one analyst has pointed out, “if one calculates the ratio of the number of peacekeeping deployed to war casualties, concerns about events in Côte d’Ivoire would appear to have far outstripped that in any African conflicts in which the United Nations have mounted a peacekeeping operation” (McGovern 2010: 75). However, the same analyst also remarks the limits and modest achievements of such an apparently massive undertaking.

Côte d’Ivoire seems today indefinitely stuck in an ambiguous no-peace no-war situation. While violence since the last actual fighting in 2004 has been sporadic and the security situation on the ground has considerably improved, none of the major elements of the *processus de sortie de crise* (roadmap for crisis resolution) has been fully implemented and elections are periodically reported.

The politics of containment of the international community is not without responsibility in eliminating the unstable equilibrium that allows Ivorian political leaders to indefinitely postpone the solution of the crisis and to profit from the current infinite transition. But, in the political environment of Côte d’Ivoire, international players seem also to have had little choice. This has happened because of the specific nature of the relationship between peacemakers/peacekeepers and local élites in Côte d’Ivoire, especially the so-called *camp présidentiel*, the coalition of the political and social forces supporting the Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo, which, before the conclusion of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement in 2007, has ranged from the covert mistrust to the open confrontation, with the worst peaks in November 2004 and in January 2006.

Internationally sponsored negotiations have constituted one important dimension of the international effort aiming at solving the Ivorian crisis. Côte d’Ivoire has witnessed several cycles of negotiations, with the conclusion of a long series of peace arrangements. The Linas Marcoussis (2003) under French mediation has served as a reference for all the successive agreements, but its power-sharing component has very soon become the object of fierce contest on behalf of the President and his allies. Marcoussis has been followed by the Accra II (2003) and Accra III (2004) agreements under the aegis of Ghana and of the UN, the South-Africa sponsored Pretoria Agreement (2005) and, eventually, the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (2007), brokered by Burkinabé President Blaise Compaoré. Every peacemaking attempt had its particular flaws: however, the inability of any of them to put a definitive end to the crisis suggests that other elements should be taken into account, such as

the different rationale of international peacemakers local élites for engaging in this endless cycle of negotiations and the political and economical profitability of the political blockage.

In this paper, I have chosen to concentrate on three peacemaking attempts: the Linas-Marcoussis negotiations, conducted under French mediation in Paris, the South African mediation and the negotiation of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement. Linas-Marcoussis and Ouagadougou have been the two cycles of negotiations that have had the more significant impact on the evolution of the crisis. However, the negotiations of Pretoria are also worth of an analysis, as they have represent the more significant attempt to translate into reality the search for an ‘African’ – but not internal - solution of the crisis.

My aim is to show how the multiplication of cycles of negotiations has been exploited by the *camp présidentiel* to retake control of the peace process, postpone the solution of the crisis and marginalize the influence of the international community. The first part of this paper is a general presentation of the problems of international peacemaking, without any aim to be exhaustive but to present evidence on some issues that have relevance for the case of Côte d’Ivoire. In the second part, I retrace the background of the Ivorian crisis and I summarize its history since 2002. Then, I analyze the Linas-Marcoussis, Pretoria and Ouagadougou negotiations and I draw some conclusions in the final part.

It is hoped that this paper can be both a contribution to the history of the Ivorian politico-military crisis and provide some interesting insight for the general study of international peacemaking in internal conflicts. In addition to the official documentation available, including the texts of the peace agreements and the Resolutions and Reports of the United Nations, I conducted a number of interviews in France and Côte d’Ivoire to diplomats, UN officers, policy-makers and Ivorian former government members and politicians representative of the four main political forces.<sup>1</sup>

### **Civil conflicts and external mediation**

The post-Cold War era has seen an unprecedented expansion in international efforts aimed at solving civil conflicts and in the institutions and structures specializing in such an enterprise. While in the mid-‘90s the setbacks of the UN in Bosnia, Rwanda and Somalia seemed to have put a halt to international experiments in conflict management, the trend is now

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<sup>1</sup> Gbagbo’s Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI), the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR) and the former rebels of the Forces Nouvelles.

reversed, as the launch of new ‘complex peace operations’ (Bellamy and Williams 2004) and the growth of the discourse on peacebuilding<sup>2</sup> testify.

While it is much debated if post-Cold War internal conflicts are by any means ‘new wars’, it is undisputed that the way both international policy-makers and academics look at these conflicts has changed.<sup>3</sup> While internal conflicts were once interpreted through the lenses of the Communism-‘Free world’ confrontation, with international actors often supporting one or the other side, now the international community usually steps in as a peace promoter, claiming its impartiality and neutrality with regards to the conflict.

External actors are today often involved in internal conflicts at all stages of a peace process. They are expected to mediate peace agreements (peacemaking), to deploy peacekeeping troops with multidimensional and sophisticated mandates and to assist in the economic and political reconstruction of a war-shattered country (peacebuilding). The trend to engage with internal wars and post-conflict countries has been so marked that some scholars have seen in it a “radical development agenda of social transformation” (Duffield 2001) or a form of “*mission civilisatrice*” (Paris 2004) rather than a neutral and reactive enterprise.

International conflict resolution attempts in the post-Cold War era have generally been based on a series of implicit assumptions and have followed certain standardized patterns, independent of the geographical and political context where they were occurred. Interestingly, while some of these assumptions are carved out in the Western liberal ethos, regional and sub-regional organizations have also internalized at some extent this general framework.

One of these assumptions is the idea that a negotiated settlement is morally and politically preferable to unilateral military victory.<sup>4</sup> The pressure on warring parties to get into negotiations stems not only by the perception of being unable to win the conflict militarily,

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<sup>2</sup> The term “peacebuilding” has been popularized in 1992 by Boutros Boutros Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace*, which defines it as the “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” (art. 21). For a discussion of the concept of peacebuilding and an evaluation of the activities carried under this label see Paris 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Kaldor 1998 has popularized the label ‘new wars’, arguing that post-Cold War conflict display some peculiar characteristics. In a more loose way, the term has been used by other authors, such as Duffield 2001. For a critique of the concept of ‘new wars’, see Melander, Oberg and Hall 2009. See also Richards 2005 for a discussion of post-Cold War wars and of the attitude of the academia towards them.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Stedman 1996 and Clapham 1998. Tull and Mehler 2005 argue that, with regards to civil wars in Africa, negotiated agreements with a power-sharing component have become a favoured tool for conflict resolution because of limited interest and commitment by the part of Western policy-makers, who do not want a costly engagement on one side of the conflict. This can be of course a reason why such agreements are so popular. But my interpretation is also that negotiated settlements satisfies certain moral and ideological expectations that have emerged in the West since the end of the Cold War. Mehler himself seems to have changed his mind, as in a successive article he writes that the choice of power-sharing “seems not to be a function of the strength of international engagement, as power sharing could be a cheap solution (for example, in the Central African Republic) or a rather expensive and transitional one (in Liberia)” (Mehler 2009).

but also by political pressure at the international level. Negotiated peace agreements concluded under international mediation are typically expected to include two key elements. On the one hand, they would address the insurgents' grievances and sketch a political programme to tackle, if not all, at least some of the root causes of the conflict. On the other, they would set up the implementation formula to achieve such an end, in general by designing a power-sharing arrangement for a transitional government supposed to lead the country to elections and by setting provisions for the disarmament of the warring parties.

The belief in the virtues of negotiated settlements and transitional power-sharing entertains a complicated relationship with another central pillar of the West's peacemaking strategy, namely the promotion of democracy. On the one hand, the idea that all parties have a stake in the conflict is deeply rooted in a democratic conception of politics and the design of transitional government is seen as a way to lead to democratic elections. On the other, by encouraging the inclusion of insurgents in transitional governments without regard to their credibility as true representatives of their alleged constituency and to their human rights record, power-sharing agreements *de facto* legitimize the use of force in politics and is at odds with the commitment to disqualify the taking of power by unconstitutional means.

Not all scholars of international politics share the belief in the importance of international peacemaking in ending civil wars. The most extreme opposition has been expressed by a controversial article of Edward Luttwak (1999) which proposes to "give war a chance". Luttwak contends that internationally-sponsored cease-fires and peace agreements give to the belligerents time to reorganize and reconstruct their resources, only to resume fighting in the medium term. Other authors have expressed their scepticism in international pressure for the conclusion of peace agreements at all costs in more nuanced terms. In the case of Rwanda, Christopher Clapham (1998a) contends the view that indifference should be to blame for the Rwandese catastrophe and points out at the considerable international involvement in Rwanda prior to the genocide. In Clapham's view, the Rwandese conflict was in its essence a total war that could end only through fighting; internationally sponsored negotiations were accepted by the belligerents only for opportunistic reasons, and the cease-fire provided the time and opportunity for the extremists on the Hutu side to organize the genocide.<sup>5</sup>

Other scholars have been less pessimistic, but have argued that external mediation can help restoring confidence among former belligerents and contribute to achieve peace only in the presence of certain specific conditions. According to the classical work of William Zartman

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Jones is less clear-cut than Clapham in blaming international peacemaking for the Rwandese genocide. However, he shares with him the view that "conventional wisdom would have Rwanda be a story of the failure to take action; it is in fact a story about the failure of action taken." (Jones 2001: 3).

(2009), international mediation can only work when warring parties reach a 'hurting stalemate': the moment when they realize that they will not achieve their goals by force and peace becomes less costly than the continuation of war. Another important scholar of international mediation, Saadia Touval (1994; 2003), has pointed out to the necessity for the mediator to have leverage: for Touval, who bears in mind the role of the United States in the Arabo-Israelian negotiations, it is not that important that the mediator is rigorously impartial but that it has the capacity to extract concessions from the parties.

The literature on international peacemaking and peacekeeping has generally a prescriptive and problem-solving character, which explains the focus on international actors themselves and the relative lack of attention for their local counterparts. But, as Clapham (1998b) reminds us, trying to shift the attention on whom he calls the 'peacekept', any external intervention takes place in the context of existing power relations and social structures: for abundant that the resources available to international peacemakers and peacekeepers may be, local élites have a superior knowledge of their society and the support of entrenched power-structures. They see international intervention both as a challenge to their political and economic interests and as the provider of 'resources of extroversion'<sup>6</sup>: resources that can be tangible and economic, but also political and immaterial, as the legitimacy that international recognition can confer to an armed movement. The relationship between international actors and local élites in a country in crisis has been also explored by some of the recent literature on peacebuilding. An example is Barnett and Zürcher (2009)'s concept of 'peacebuilding contract', where game-theory is applied to international peacebuilding in order to explain the apparent paradox that leads external peacebuilding to leave aside its transformative agenda and reinforce the existing State-society relations.

In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the role of the international mediators can be observed by two opposite points of view. One is the point of view of the mediators themselves. They have tried, with different approaches, to bring peace in Côte d'Ivoire. Of course, they had their own interests in stopping the Ivorian conflict and they were influenced by their prejudices and past experiences. The other perspective to be considered is the point of view of the Ivorian actors, and in particular of the Ivorian president, that, after having been somewhat forced to the negotiation table in Linas Marcoussis, have used the multiplication of different cycles of negotiations as a way to revert an unfavourable power relation.

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of extraversion has been developed by French scholar of African politics Jean-François Bayart (see Bayart 2000). For its application to international conflict management see also Marshall 2005.

## **Côte d'Ivoire's politico-military crisis: a background**

The roots of the current Ivorian crisis can be traced back to the exhaustion of a political and economic model that had fared well until the 80's. This model had been shaped by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the man that guided the country towards independence and remained in power for more than thirty years. The ingredients of the Ivorian economic miracle of the '60s and the '70s were a thriving plantation economy based on the influx foreign capital and on migrant labour, while, under the firm grip of Houphouët, the neo-patrimonial political system relied on the country's wealth as a means to appease political contrast and ensure a certain economic redistribution at the élite level.

The fall of primary commodity prices in the '80s undermined the general consensus around Houphouët-Boigny's administration. Economic crisis also led to the rise of xenophobic feelings that were equally directed against migrants from neighboring countries and against internal migrants from the unproductive areas of the North of the country to the cocoa-producing regions of the West. The regime survived up to the first multiparty elections in 1990, but the death of the Ivorian president in 1993 triggered a major crisis of succession between the speaker of the National Assembly and designated *dauphine* Henri-Konan Bédié and Prime Minister Alassane Dramane Ouattara. The Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), the only long-time legal party of Houphouët, split as Ouattara's supporters founded the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR). While Bédié came from the same ethnic group of Houphouët, Ouattara he was a Northern Ivorian who had spent most of his life in Burkina Faso. With a view to prevent his rival from running in the presidential elections, Bédié forged the concept of *ivoirité* and pushed for the adoption of a new electoral code, which prevented Ivorians with one foreign parent from running for the presidency.

In different ways, the successors of Bédié, General Robert Guei (who took power in a bloodless military coup in 1999) and Laurent Gbagbo (a long standing opponent of Houphouët-Boigny who won the 2000 election after Bédié and Ouattara had been prevented from running) continued to exploit the xenophobic and nationalist rhetoric to reinforce their power and disqualify their adversaries. Only in 2002 did Gbagbo engage in some conciliatory gestures. However, repression following the fear of another *coup d'état* and the growing politicization of the armed forces had driven by then into exile in Burkina Faso a group of young Northern militaries associated with the 1999 coup. This group found in Ouagadougou the political and economic support that it needed, and formed the initial core of the Ivorian rebellion.

The Ivorian civil war officially started on 19th September 2002. Fighting began in Abidjan, in the form of a *coup d'Etat* attempt. Rebels failed to take Abidjan, but rapidly took hold of the North, including Bouaké, the second city of the country in terms of population. While initially the rebellion had appeared little more than a mutiny of disgruntled soldiers, it took a different tone with the announcement of the creation of the Mouvement Patriotique de la Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI). Former student leader Guillaume Soro emerged as the political leader of the rebellion, emphasizing the opposition to the Gbagbo regime and the defence of Northern Ivorians as the political platform of the MPCI. The name Forces Nouvelles (New Forces) was adopted by the rebels only in February 2003, after the fusion of the MPCI with two minor rebel groups which made their appearance in the West of the country at a later stage, the Mouvement Populaire de Grand Ouest (MPIGO) and the Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix (MJP).

Although the Gbagbo regime had been initially able to defend itself, with the help of loyal militia groups, the Forces Armées de la Côte d'Ivoire (FANCI) were poorly armed and organized and probably unable to contain the rebels.<sup>7</sup> What prevented the war from escalating was the decision of France to keep the military force initially sent to evacuate the French trapped in the North in Côte d'Ivoire. French troops cut the way to the rebels, with the effect of freezing their advance and avoiding a full-scale civil war, but at the price of a *de facto* division of the country which, eight years later, it is still in operation.

### **Linas Marcoussis: the bitter medicine**

The peculiarity of the case of Côte d'Ivoire is that the military stalemate that led to the decision of the government and of the FN to engage in negotiations was artificially provoked by France's intervention, rather than the outcome of a mutual exhaustion. Until the Ouagadougou agreement in 2007, all efforts to resolve the Ivorian crisis by negotiations had suffered somehow from this 'original sin' and from the lack of an effective Ivorian ownership.

Although France's decision to assume an impartial posture and promote a negotiated settlement was crucial in leading to peace talks, France's engagement as a mediator in the

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<sup>7</sup> This observation is, not surprisingly, vehemently rejected by the leadership of the Ivorian army. The opinion of most external observers and in particular of the French high-ranking officers implicated in the management of French mission *Licorne* is however that the rebels would have easily advanced towards the South without any external intervention. (interviews with General Emmanuel Beth, General Alain Pellegrini and General Bruno Clément Bollé).

Ivorian crisis was not immediate.<sup>8</sup> The expectation of French diplomats and policy-makers was that the deployment of *Licorne* could facilitate a negotiation under the aegis of the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS). The weakness and lack of cohesion of ECOWAS were however a predictable obstacle to such a possibility. Furthermore, the capacity of the designated mediator, Togo's president Gnassingbé Eyadema, to lead effectively the talks was rapidly questioned by both parties. At the end of 2002, French Foreign Minister Dominique De Villepin announced that France would have hosted the Ivorian political forces for a roundtable in Paris.

France was feeling that the future of its influence in Africa was at stake in Côte d'Ivoire but it also had good reasons for wishing that someone else could mediate the Ivorian crisis. Although in theory France had unequalled economic and military means to influence the Ivorian parties, its leverage was more apparent than real and several circumstances put severe constraints on its action. On the one hand, since the start of the crisis, the relation between the Ivorian government and France had become very tense. As French military operation *Licorne* had chosen to stop the rebels but not crushed the uprising, Gbagbo was publicly accusing France of not honouring the defence agreements stipulated between the two countries at the beginning of the '60s.<sup>9</sup> Since the outbreak of the hostilities, France had become the target of vehement demonstrations staged by ultra-nationalist youth groups (the so-called *jeunes patriotes*) loyal to the president. On the other hand, since the mid '90s and particularly the Rwandese genocide, France's security policy in Africa was experiencing strong criticism at the international level. The fear of being accused of meddling and of neo-colonialism narrowed the options that French-policy makers could choose in dealing with the Ivorian crisis. Lastly, France had important economic interest and a large expatriated community in Côte d'Ivoire: although this meant that France had a strong interest in restoring peace in Côte d'Ivoire, it also meant that it was vulnerable to any attack by the part of the Ivorian government.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of France's policy in the Ivorian crisis and its rationale see in particular Smith 2003; Marshall 2007; D'Ersu 2007.

<sup>9</sup> French diplomats responded that the Ivorian government had not advanced formally a request of activation of the defence agreement and that in any case France was not obliged to intervene in absence of an external attack (interview with Michel De Bonnecorse, Jacques Chirac's Africa advisor). The two arguments have however their flaws. On the one hand, Gbagbo's decision not to put ahead a formal request could be motivated by the fact that the Ivorian president had already good reasons not to expect any help from France, given the at best mild response of the French authorities to his request of logistic support. On the other, France and Côte d'Ivoire are linked also by a secret convention about the maintenance of internal order, which the French government considers obsolete

<sup>10</sup> It is significant that France could never use the more obvious threats that it had at its disposal: the menace of leaving Gbagbo alone in front of the rebellion by withdrawing *Licorne* if he refused to comply or of attacking the rebels if they refused to comply.

France's intervention as an impartial peacemaker and not in support of a friendly regime was a revolutionary step with respect to France's traditional role of *gendarme de l'Afrique*. However, the success of the peace agreement was based on an outdated vision of the power relationships between France and its former colony: on the idea that the belligerents would have accepted a negotiated settlement just because France wanted it. Furthermore, France's wish to put an end to the crisis as soon as possible encouraged the French diplomacy in seeking an agreement at any costs, which meant the hasty inclusion of potential 'spoilers' in the peace process.

France's approach to conflict resolution in Côte d'Ivoire, which shaped also some of the subsequent efforts to end the crisis, had its good points but also its limitations. The French diplomacy interpreted the rebellion as the symptom of a long standing 'disease' that was affecting Côte d'Ivoire's existence as a nation and that had to be resolved by addressing the root causes of the crisis.<sup>11</sup> Such an interpretation has its rationale, but in practice it has also meant that the rebels were automatically considered as legitimate interpreter of political grievances, that other dimension of the civil war, such as the external implication of Burkina Faso and Liberia, were put aside and that the importance of the power-sharing component of the agreement was underestimated.

What has become known as the Linas-Marcoussis agreement is in reality the sum of two different agreements. The properly called Linas-Marcoussis accord was negotiated between the 15th and the 23th of January by a roundtable of the Ivorian political forces at the National Rugby Centre of Linas-Marcoussis, in the periphery of Paris. The delegations included all Ivorian major political parties and all rebel movements. There was however no specific representation for the Ivorian State and its institution and Laurent Gbagbo had chosen not to participate. Then, a series of arrangements were taken informally at a following summit of the heads of States that opened the 25th of January in avenue Kléber, in central Paris, this time with the participation of president Gbagbo. Although the *camp présidentiel* has always regretted the absence of the Ivorian State at Linas-Marcoussis, the first part of the peace accords has been the object of a relative consensus and have formed the basis for all the subsequent tentative to negotiate an end to the crisis. By contrast, the Kléber arrangements have raised major controversies since the start.

The accord negotiated at Linas-Marcoussis is an ambitious exercise, addressing a long list of major political issues: the identification process, the condition of the immigrants, the eligibility to the presidency, the land issue, the reintegration of the rebels in the army and

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Romain Serman; Interview with General Emmanuel Beth. The metaphor of the disease is of Gbagbo himself, who however also compared Marcoussis to a 'bitter medicine'.

even the role of the media in fuelling xenophobia. While it sketches a political programme that looks appropriate, its major flaw lies in the formula of implementation. Some observers noticed immediately that its application would have required the establishment of some sort of international trusteeship on Côte d'Ivoire. While Gbagbo, who had for a long time criticised Houphouët-Boigny's close links to France, was eliminating the rhetoric of the battle against neo-colonialism and of the struggle for a 'second independence' with his *jeunes patriotes*, such an option appeared rather unworkable.<sup>12</sup> It was unlikely that the *comité de suivi*, the international monitoring body set up in the agreement,<sup>13</sup> could aspire to the role of a trusteeship council.

The vagueness of the written agreement meant that several crucial provisions concerning the transitional arrangement were adopted during the following Kléber summit. This second phase of the negotiation was opened by French president Jacques Chirac, in the presence of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, of Thabo Mbeki in his function of chairman of the African Union, of the Head of the European Commission Romano Prodi and of a large group of West African heads of State. The presence in Kléber of many important personalities was meant to give a stronger legitimacy to the agreement, by showing that the whole international community was supporting it. It was also probably a way of forcing the hand of the Ivorian parties, and in particular of the Ivorian president, into accepting it.

While Linas-Marcoussis had adopted a transparent format, in Kléber arrangements on the power-sharing formula were taken informally, in a way that involved the former participants to the round table in a selective and arbitrary way. The MPCCI received from the French diplomacy an encouragement to push ahead with its claims to a major share in the transitional arrangement. As the rebels argued that transitional Prime Minister Seydou Diarra had been chosen according to Gbagbo's preferences, they asked for themselves the Defence and Interior Ministries. Surprisingly, the Ivorian president seemed to accept. The decision was however destined to become a long-standing *casus belli*.

Notwithstanding its flaws, the outcome of the Linas-Marcoussis and Paris negotiations was welcomed internationally as a major step towards the resolution of the Ivorian crisis. The UN endorsed Marcoussis through their Resolution 1464 and declarations of support for France came from the United States and the United Kingdom.

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<sup>12</sup> See S. Smith and J-P. Tuquoi « Les risques et les contraintes de l'engagement de la France dans la crise » e S. Smith « Trois Questions à Jean-François Bayart » in *Le Monde*, 25 January 2003, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> This plethoric body included a freshly nominated Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) of the UN, representatives of the AU, of ECOWAS, of the International Organization of the French-speaking countries, of the International Financial Institutions (IFI), of the European Union (EU), of the G8 and of France. All entities were represented at ambassador-level. The Accra III agreement of August 2004 revised its composition, retaining only the SRSG and the representatives of ECOWAS and of the AU.

By pressing for an agreement at all costs and designing a transitional arrangement that would have reduced the prerogatives of the Ivorian president at the advantage of the transitional government and Prime Minister,<sup>14</sup> France had however misunderstood Gbagbo's strength and the power of his nationalist and anti-colonialist rhetoric. Such a power became suddenly evident when, just after the closure of the negotiations, the *jeunes patriotes* staged a new round of demonstrations, on a much larger scale than in the past occasions. From his side, Gbagbo sent mixed signals, calling the agreement just concluded 'a set of proposals', declaring his commitment to honour the 'spirit' but not the 'letter' of the agreement and putting into question the power-sharing formula just worked out.<sup>15</sup>

The climate escalated further among France and the Ivorian president in February as, probably not without any complicity of the French intelligence, a series of confidential reports about human rights violations in the government-controlled zone leaked on the French press.<sup>16</sup> At the Franco-African summit in Paris Jacques Chirac even threatened the Ivorian president with prosecution in front of the International Criminal Court: a menace that he and De Villepin had already used face-to-face with the Ivorian president and a clear effort to use the human rights discourse as a mean of pressure.<sup>17</sup> Gbagbo counterattacked, accusing France of propagating false accusations and, not without some reason, of paying insufficient attention to war crimes committed by the rebels. While the peace process stalled, a relative normalization of Franco-Ivorian relations did not take place until the beginning of 2004 and even then was short lived.

### **The South African mediation: an African alternative?**

Before South Africa stepped in, the intention to resuscitate the Linas Marcoussis Agreement had already led to a series of new talks: the Ghana sponsored Accra II agreement (March 2003) revised the power-sharing formula agreed at Kléber; the Accra III (July 2004) agreement, promoted by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, had the ambition of 'tropicalising Marcoussis' by obtaining Gbagbo's signature. However, neither these

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of this see S. Smith and J.-P. Tuquoi, « Côte d'Ivoire: accord de paix au détriment du président Gbagbo » in *Le Monde*, 25 January 2003.

<sup>15</sup> See Gbagbo's speech to the Ivorian television, whose text is integrally reprinted in Gomé Gnoité 2004.

<sup>16</sup> See for instance S. Smith and J.-P. Tuquoi, 'Côte d'Ivoire: enquête sur les exactions des escadrons de la mort', *Le Monde*, 8 February 2003.

<sup>17</sup> *Le Monde* 22 février 2003 'Côte d'Ivoire: Jacques Chirac condamne les escadrons de la mort'. See MacGovern 2010 for a discussion about the political use of human rights in the Ivorian conflict.

arrangements nor the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission (Opération des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire, ONUCI) in April 2004 were able to prevent a restart of hostilities.

On 4th November 2004, the Ivorian army launched the so-called *Opération Dignité* ('Operation Dignity'), a campaign of air strikes against the MPCCI-controlled North. *Opération Dignité* led to a major crisis between France and Côte d'Ivoire when, only two days after its start, a base of *Licorne* in Bouaké was bombed, killing nine French soldiers. The French army retaliated destroying the Ivorian air force, while in Abidjan most of the French population had to be evacuated following violence and intimidation by the *jeunes patriotes*. There were also serious polemics about the behaviour of the French army which, allegedly in self-defence, opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators on more than one occasion.<sup>18</sup>

In the wake of these events, the UN Security Council threatened to assume a new coercive attitude and passed Resolution 1572 on 15<sup>th</sup> November, which imposed an arms embargo on the country and set up a committee with the power of applying individual sanctions. An international Commission of Enquiry compiled a list of 95 possible targets of sanctions and handed it to the Security Council.<sup>19</sup> The relations between Côte d'Ivoire and the international community were at their lowest point.

Thabo Mbeki's designation as new mediator of the Ivorian crisis came just after the launch of *Opération Dignité*. The African Union (AU), which had just launched in 2004 its new Peace and Security Council, had had an active role in the appointment of the South African mediation. Mbeki's nomination was also a signal of the ambitions and dynamisms of South African diplomacy, which had already intervened in several major African crises, from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Burundi and Darfur. It was however the first time that South Africa tried to act as a peacemaker in a former French colony and, although Côte d'Ivoire is an important commercial partner for South Africa, the involvement of the latter in the Ivorian crisis before 2004 had been limited. With respect to France, post-apartheid South Africa had on its side the legitimacy that stemmed from its undisputed prestige in the Africa arena. However, it also knew the Ivorian situation far less than France did, which was not

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<sup>18</sup> The most notorious episode is the shooting of the Hotel Ivoire. This is a luxury establishment that had been turned by *Licorne* soldiers into the base to coordinate the evacuation of the French population of Abidjan. The rumour that the French were preparing a *coup d'Etat* spread and groups of *jeunes patriotes* but also ordinary people of Abidjan gathered around the building and were preventing the French troops from leaving it. On 9th November, after two days of siege, under circumstances difficult to verify, *Licorne*'s soldiers opened the fire on the crowd, killing and wounding several demonstrators. For an account see Amnesty International...

<sup>19</sup> The content of the list leaked on the press only the following year. It allegedly contained the names of some top figures of both parties, such as Guillaume Soro, Simone Gbagbo, first lady and head of the FPI parliamentary group, and Gbagbo's security advisor Kadet Bertin. (*Le Monde*, 10 décembre 2005, 'Un rapport préconise l'application de sanctions en Côte d'Ivoire').

necessarily a disadvantage, as one of the Ivorian protagonists, Alassane Dramane Ouattara, remarked.<sup>20</sup>

For Laurent Gbagbo, the arrival of Mbeki at such a critical moment was welcome, both because it represented the first serious alternative to a peace process dominated by France or by the French-speaking members of ECOWAS, both because he saw in Mbeki's political background and nationalist convictions a possibility to influence the South African president. Probably not by chance, Mbeki convened a meeting in Abidjan on 9<sup>th</sup> November, while the city was *de facto* under French occupation and the confrontation between French troops and demonstrators degenerated.

Gbagbo's effort to draw a fallacious parallel between the post-colonial oppression allegedly suffered by Côte d'Ivoire and apartheid South Africa seemed at first to produce its effects on Mbeki and on his collaborators. Apparently shocked by what he had seen in November in Abidjan and afraid that the application of targeted sanctions could further deteriorate the political climate and hamper his mediation efforts, Mbeki pushed the UN to postpone their application. Again in Abidjan in December for presenting his proposal of a timeline for the resolution of the crisis,<sup>21</sup> Mbeki continued to stress his respect for the Ivorian sovereignty and the Ivorian Constitution.<sup>22</sup> Such steps earned him the praises of the so-called *presse bleue*, the press loyal to the regime.<sup>23</sup> A diplomatic crisis almost broke out between South Africa and France, when Jacques Chirac awkwardly expressed his mistrust in the South African mediation and his hope that Mbeki "immerse himself into West Africa, in order to understand its psychology and soul".<sup>24</sup> The French diplomacy suspected South Africa, probably rightly, of using its engagement in the Ivorian conflict as a means to acquire an influence, especially in economic terms, in the former French *chasse gardée* in Africa.<sup>25</sup>

However, notwithstanding France's suspicions and the FPI's praises, Mbeki was less biased towards Gbagbo than it could be thought. As chairman of the African Union in 2000, he had been one of the few who had refused to recognize the validity of the 'calamitous' elections

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<sup>20</sup> *Jeune Afrique*, 15th January 2005, cit. in Bouquet 2007: 124.

<sup>21</sup> This can be downloaded from the website of the Ivorian presidency:  
<[http://www.cotedivoirepr.ci/?action=show\\_page&id\\_page=583](http://www.cotedivoirepr.ci/?action=show_page&id_page=583)>.

<sup>22</sup> *Notre Voie* (the FPI newspaper), 7 December 2004, 'Thabo Mbeki : "L'article 35 va être traité dans le cadre de la Constitution"'.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance *Notre Voie*, 17 December 2004, 'La première victoire de Mbeki sur Chirac' ('Mbeki's first victory over Chirac) and *Notre Voie*, 4 January 2005, 'Mbeki, l'espoir de tout un peuple' ('Mbeki, the hope of an entire people').

<sup>24</sup> This is the quote of Chirac's comments per extenso : « L'Afrique de l'Ouest, c'est l'Afrique de l'Ouest. Elle a sa propre caractéristique, il faut bien la connaître. Et je souhaite beaucoup que le président Mbeki (...) s'immerge dans l'Afrique de l'Ouest de façon à en comprendre la psychologie et l'âme. Car dans une période de crise, il faut bien connaître la psychologie et l'âme des gens » in *Le Monde*, 5 February 2005 'Les propos de Jacques Chirac irritent les Sud-Africains ; Polémique au sujet de la Côte d'Ivoire'.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Michel de Bonnecores; See also Rahman Lamin 2005.

that had brought the Ivorian president into power.<sup>26</sup> In the span of a few months, several observers acknowledged that the South African mediation team looked able to grasp the complexity of the situation. After a trip to Pretoria in January, the FN and the opposition claimed that any misunderstanding with Mbeki had been resolved<sup>27</sup> and the relations with France become more collaborative and relaxed.<sup>28</sup>

South Africa's negotiation style radically differed from that of France. While the Marcoussis negotiations had had the ambition of finding in a few days a comprehensive solution to the Ivorian crisis, the choice of the South African negotiators was to proceed step by step, to address the easier issues first and postpone the solutions of the more difficult ones. Mbeki was eager to avoid any open clash with the Ivorian parties. He was hoping that he could create the political will that was needed to relaunch the peace process by building personal relationships of trust with them and by playing on his prestige of anti-apartheid fighter.<sup>29</sup>

The South African president waited until April 2005 before convening a meeting with Gbagbo, Ouattara, Bédié and Soro on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2005 in Pretoria. After three days of intense negotiations, held in total secrecy and isolation, the parties signed the Pretoria agreement. While the new accord reactivated and reactualised the dispositions of the Marcoussis and Accra III agreements, Mbeki's main preoccupation was to avoid its perception as creating winners and losers, as had been previously the case with the France-sponsored negotiations. He seemed to have succeeded in this, as all the parties praised him at the closure of the summit.<sup>30</sup>

The political context at the end of 2004 – beginning of 2005 had been dominated by the question of the article 35 of the Ivorian Constitution. The article set conditions for the eligibility to the presidency that would have disqualified Ouattara<sup>31</sup> and had already been a source of major controversy at Linas-Marcoussis, where National Assembly chairman Mamadou Koulibaly had abandoned the talks protesting about the proposal of the mediator to amend it. What complicated the issue was that the Constitution had been put to a referendum

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<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group... Interview with Guy Labertit...

<sup>27</sup> See Guillaume Soro's account in Soro 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Confidential Interview with French diplomat; interview with Bruno Minas, Radio France Internationale; interview with General Emmanuel Beth.

<sup>29</sup> See T. Hofnung « Ultime sommet pour sauver la Côte d'Ivoire » in *Libération*, 2 April 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Former president Henri Konan Bédié, now in the opposition, defined Mbeki "a real mediator, endowed with a spirit of arbitrage, imaginative and creative", while Gbagbo recognized to his South African homologue "a lot of method... realism and modesty". See « Pas de triomphalisme après l'accord sur la Côte d'Ivoire; A son retour à Abidjan, le président Gbagbo minimise les concessions faites à Pretoria » in *Le Monde*, 08 April 2005.

<sup>31</sup> The article states indeed that the presidential candidate should be « Ivorian of origin, with both parents Ivorian of origin » and that he should "never have made use of another nationality". While it is disputed if Ouattara satisfies the first condition, he certainly does not comply with the second one, as he sat in several international organizations as a representative of Burkina Faso.

in 2000 and at the time all Ivorian parties had invited their constituencies to approve it. Although in December 2004 the FPI-dominated National Assembly voted for the amendment of article 35, Gbagbo contended that a new referendum was needed to finalize it: the occupation of the Northern half of the country posed however severe problems for holding such a consultation in a fair way.

The summit of the AU's Peace and Security Council held on 10th January in Libreville had left the question of the reform of the article 35 open, vaguely admitting the possibility of organizing a referendum.<sup>32</sup> Even in Pretoria, no consensus was found. However, an important aspect of the new agreement was the attribution of important powers to South African mediation, such as determining the conformity of the laws passed by the National Assembly with the Marcoussis agreement and pronouncing on any disagreement on the interpretation of the accord. Such powers included the right of the mediator to take the final decision about the reform of the article 35 after discussing it with the leaderships of the AU and of the UN. This provision allowed Mbeki to circumvent the problem. On 13<sup>th</sup> April the South African President addressed an open letter to Gbagbo, where he recommended him to make use of the special powers granted to the president by the article 38 of the Ivorian Constitution to finalise the amendment of the article 35. This was what the Accra III agreement had approved in August 2004, without obtaining it.

However, after the acceptance by Gbagbo of the right of Alassane Dramane Ouattara to participate in the presidential elections, the peace process stalled again. The envisaged disarmament of the FN and the dismantlement of the militias did not start. Hoping that the deadline of 2005 for the presidential election could be kept, Mbeki convened another meeting in Pretoria between the Ivorian parties at the end of June. A second agreement which reaffirmed the provisions of Pretoria was produced, but it failed to put the peace process back on track.

In the end, Mbeki was falling victim to the same trap that had swallowed France: with all its goodwill, South Africa could not "save the Ivorians from themselves" (Smith 2003) as one author said, make peace on their behalf if they did not want it. One analyst notices that "as a non-partisan peacemaker, Pretoria chose to rely merely on the goodwill of the parties, and was unwilling to wave the 'big stick' that could potentially dissuade spoilers from undermining the process" (Rahman Lamin 2005: 25). It should be added however that France's more muscled approach had obtained even less than South Africa.

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<sup>32</sup> Communiqué of the 23rd meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, Libreville, 10 January 2005, art. 6. <[http://www.africa-union.org/root/AU/AUC/Departments/PSC/ps/PSC\\_2004\\_2007/pdfs/2005E.html](http://www.africa-union.org/root/AU/AUC/Departments/PSC/ps/PSC_2004_2007/pdfs/2005E.html)>.

While it was becoming clear that the date of the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2005 for the presidential election could not be respected, the unanimity that had previously surrounded Mbeki started to disintegrate. On 15<sup>th</sup> July, Gbagbo promulgated a series of new laws on the electoral process that were judged satisfactory by the South African diplomats, but that the opposition and the FN rejected. The latter started to question the effective neutrality of the South African mediation, arguing that Mbeki's representative in Abidjan was biased against them and that business contracts awarded by Gbagbo to South African enterprises had compromised the mediator's credibility.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August, when the South African Defence Minister presented the outcome of the South African mediation to the Security Council, despite his efforts to defend its achievements, it appeared clear that they were limited. By securing Ouattara's candidacy South Africa could reasonably claim that it had obtained more than any previous mediator, but it was evident that the issue from the crisis was still far away.

### **The direct dialogue: the internalization of the peace process**

The expiry of Gbagbo's presidential mandate in October 2005 gave the African Union, led by Nigerian President Olosegun Obasanjo, the opportunity to propose an alternative framework for the resolution of the crisis. This framework, first illustrated by the AU Peace and Security Council during its 40<sup>th</sup> meeting, was endorsed and reinforced by UNSC Resolution 1633. It implied clear violations of the sovereignty of Côte d'Ivoire and amounted to the partial institution of an international trusteeship on the country. Along with a Prime Minister with reinforced powers, the AU and the UN envisaged the creation of an International Working Group (IWG) at Ministerial level with important monitoring powers. Former governor of the Central Bank of West Africa States Charles Konan Banny, considered a stronger figure with respect to Seydou Diarra, was chosen as the internationally-legitimated new Prime Minister. In January 2006 the new arrangement led to the first serious confrontation with the *camp présidentiel*, as the IWG announced the expiration of the mandate of the FPI-dominated National Assembly. The IWG had to step back after virulent protests of the *jeunes patriotes* but the taboo of targeted sanctions was eventually removed with the decision to apply them to two 'patriotic' leaders and an FN commander:<sup>33</sup> it was a clear sign that pressure was mounting on the Ivorian parties.

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<sup>33</sup> The *jeunes patriotes* still under sanctions are Charles Blé Goudé, notorious star of the movement, leader of the Congrès Panafricain des Jeunes Patriotes and Eugène Djué, president of the Union des Patriotes pour la

France was again the advocate of a tougher stance against the Ivorian president within the UN Security Council. The French diplomacy lost however two diplomatic battles at the end of 2006. On the one hand, Resolution 1721 of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2006 was purged of references to the prevalence of international engagements over the Ivorian Constitution contained in the French-authored draft.<sup>34</sup> On the other, a proposal to have targeted sanctions eventually applied to two leading FPI politicians, Pascal Affi N’guessan and Mamadou Koulibaly, was also rejected in December 2006. In both cases, Russia and China, arguing in favour of an intransigent conception of national sovereignty, were responsible for the blockage, with the US supporting them on the issue of Resolution 1721.

It was in this context that, expressing his satisfaction because the Ivorian Constitution had not been called into question by the Security Council, Gbagbo announced his intention to propose a new framework for the resolution of the crisis: the so-called *dialogue direct* (‘direct dialogue’). This new framework was in its essence radically alternative to the scheme supported by the AU, the UN and France, albeit both parties claimed the contrary in the aftermath of the conclusion of the OPA: on the one hand, it would have rendered the IWG redundant and eliminated the figure of a transitional Prime Minister nominated by the international community; on the other, it would have been based on direct negotiations between Gbagbo and the FN, with the consequent marginalization of the unarmed opposition. The idea of the direct dialogue had gradually emerged, in particular through a tripartite meeting between Gbagbo, Blaise Compaoré, now ECOWAS chairman, and Thabo Mbeki in September 2006. The proposed new mediator, Blaise Compaoré, was in many ways an “insider” of the Ivorian crisis: supporter of Gbagbo and of the FPI at the time of Houphouët-Boigny (Labertit 2008), he had later opposed him and had provided the FN with shelter and financial support. Suspected of implication in many destabilization plots all around West Africa, Compaoré had lost an ally with the arrest and deferral to an international tribunal of the controversial Liberian president Charles Taylor. In 2006, he was feeling that his political survival depended on his capacity of clearing his image and promoting himself as a man of peace.

For the first time since the start of the Ivorian crisis, a proposal to go to the negotiation table had been advanced internally, as Gbagbo was stressing, remarking the difference between the direct dialogue and the ‘neo-colonialist’ negotiation of Linas-Marcoussis. Within the FN,

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Libération Totale de la Côte-d'Ivoire. The FN commander is Martin Fofié, who controls the FN stronghold of Korhogo in the North.

<sup>34</sup> See *Le Monde*, 4 November 2006 ‘Côte d'Ivoire : Nouvel Equilibre Institutionnel; M. Gbagbo salue la résolution de l'ONU sur la transition ivoirienne’ ; Interview with Romain Serman.

there was at the beginning a certain amount of perplexity about the new scheme, motivated by the fear that it could hide an intention of Gbagbo to weaken them.<sup>35</sup> Soro ensured that at least lip service was paid to Resolution 1721 and that the Ivorian opposition was associated to the implementation phase of the agreement. The direct dialogue eventually started on 5 February in Burkina Faso, but the final Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA) has been signed by Gbagbo and Soro only on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2007, after one month of laborious negotiations between the presidential camp, represented by a delegation guided by Gbagbo's advisor Desiré Tagro, and the delegation of the FN, guided by Louis Dacoury-Tabley.

Although the UN was formally associated with the negotiations as an observer, the conclusion of the OPA has meant the reduction of the international partners to a role of mere facilitators of an internally-driven process— this is indeed the title given to Blaise Compaoré, while the United Nations and the international donors routinely talks about 'accompanying' the peace process.<sup>36</sup> While the Ivorian opposition earns recognition by being included in the so-called Cadre Permanent de Concertation, the OPA does not include a monitoring body where the main international partners are represented. While no mention is made of other international actors – apart the Burkinabé facilitator - the agreement provides that the UN SRSG will be merely "informed" of the progresses in peace implementation – it participates as an observer to the Comité d'Evaluation et d'Accompagnement on an *ad hoc* basis only at the invitation of the former belligerents.<sup>37</sup> The UN mission ONUCI retains some important powers, for example that of certifying the electoral process, but the recall, in the aftermath of the conclusion of the OPA, of High Representative of the UN for elections Gérard Stoudmann – who has not been replaced - and of SRSG Pierre Schori – the second dismissal of an SRSG after the recall of Albert Tevoedjiré in 2004 – are signs of this trend.

Apart from marginalizing the international community, in spite of the much mediatised nomination of Guillaume Soro to the post of Prime Minister, the OPA strengthens the *camp présidentiel*. Ouagadougou abandons two key elements that the Linas Marcoussis negotiations had first affirmed and that the other mediation attempts had retained – the principle of the delegation of special powers to the Prime Ministers and of the parallel disarmament of the two belligerents. Although Soro, as head of an armed movement that controls 60% of the Ivorian territory, has a bargaining power that Seydou Diarra and Charles Konan Banny lacked, for the first time since Marcoussis the FPI retains the Defence and

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<sup>35</sup> Confidential interview with French diplomat.

<sup>36</sup> Interviews with UN officials.

<sup>37</sup> Interviews with UN officials and with members of the office of the facilitator.

Interior Ministry and Gbagbo the power of dismissing the government as envisaged by the Ivorian Constitution – a power he has recently made use of.

Given this two characteristics of the OPA, it is not surprising therefore that nationalist mobilization has become much less virulent after its conclusion – as the president does not need it anymore to reassert its power – and that the OPA has put an end to a period where tensions between international peace-makers and the *camp présidentiel* were always possibility. There have been no major declarations or demonstrations of the *jeunes patriotes* against an international deliberation after 2007, as UN officers in Abidjan favourably remarks, and their leaders have even been received by ONUCI in a relaxed climate. However, this has happened at the expenses of the possibility of the UN to influence the situation.

The international community has by the way endorsed without any hesitation the Ouagadougou agreement, probably for two sets of reasons. On the one hand, there was a genuine hope that the agreement could effectively lead the country on the road for peace. On the other hand, the ‘internal solution’ could also provide a much needed exit-strategy for those actors, like France, who had invested much in the effort of solving the Ivorian crisis without reaping any concrete result. France seems to have partly succeeded in this operation by passing to the Ivorian players the political responsibility and retiring the bulk of Licorne – although the disengagement is still incomplete.

The OPA’s results are rather mixed. It has taken the peace process farther on than all the previous agreements, by permitting the dismantlement of the *zone de confiance* which divided the Ivorian territory in two and the freedom of circulation in all the country. The identification process, while much more time-consuming than initially foreseen, has been taken to its conclusion and has led to the compilation of an electoral list judged fair by the UN. The security situation has improved.

On the other hand, the electoral list is again put into question by the FPI, the long-awaited disarmament of the FN has not taken place and the steps towards the reunification of the country are a pure façade. A plethora of supplementary agreements has been concluded: Ouagadougou II concluded in November 2007, which designates the French enterprise SAGEM as technical operator in charge of preparing the elector cards; Ouagadougou III, also signed in November 2007, which mainly concerns the reorganization of the army and the integration of some elements of the FN in the military; and Ouagadougou IV, issued on December 2008, which contains several provisions about all the dimensions of the *processus de sortie de crise*. This multiplication of new arrangements is another sign of the ambiguity

of the current situation of the country. In 2010, Côte d'Ivoire is preparing to celebrate its 50 years of independence in a context of improved security, but of continued political blockage.

### **Conclusions**

International players' expectations about mediating civil conflicts are that, if a first attempt fails, it is still worth 'trying again'. But to whom does the introduction of new mediators profit and what logic does the introduction of new crisis resolution frameworks follow? In the case of Côte d'Ivoire my argument is straightforward: the president Gbagbo and his political allies have been the main beneficiaries of the multiplication of cycles of negotiations. They have been able to manipulate the introduction of new mediators in the crisis and the launch of new formulas for the resolution of the crisis on their behalf.

The first peace accord concluded in Côte d'Ivoire was perceived, unsurprisingly, as a victory for the Forces Nouvelles and a defeat for the *camp présidentiel*. The first gained international recognition, its political grievances were enshrined in the Linas Marcoussis agreement and received a major share in the transitional government. By contrast, Gbagbo was to remain President only under the condition of sharing most of his powers with a reinforced Prime Minister and with Defence and Interior Ministers issued from the rebellion. The *camp présidentiel* had only been able to obtain agreement that there would not be the anticipated elections, but that electoral consultations would be held in October 2005, at the expiry of Gbagbo's mandate. Seven years after Marcoussis the picture looks totally different from the schema drawn up in Paris. Gbagbo is on the point of concluding a second mandate, for which he has not been elected, and he has repositioned himself at the centre of the transitional arrangement.

This process has also meant that the influence of international actors and their scope for action have been gradually reduced. Resolutions 1633 and 1721 placed the UN Security Council and the IWG in a position of 'arbiters of peace', a position that the South African mediation and the UN SRSG and High Representative for elections had previously held. Today the United Nations, the African regional organizations, France and the main donors have taken a role that it is mainly limited to technically assisting an internally-driven process. A look at the timing of the launch of new cycles of mediation shows significantly that it coincided with crucial phases of the peace process, where there were acute tensions between Gbagbo and the international community and the menace of adopting a more coercive posture against the *camp présidentiel* was being agitated on the part of the UN Security Council. This was true for the South African mediation, whose launch coincided with the

violation of the ceasefire by the loyalist forces (*Opération Dignité*), the quasi-war between Côte d'Ivoire and France and the imposition of an arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire. One of the more immediate steps of Mbeki was indeed to postpone the application of targeted sanctions, which eventually were taken more than one year later, in 2006. This was also true for the launch of the direct dialogue, whose explicit aim was to neuter the Resolution 1721, which would have reinforced the position of the Prime Minister vis-à-vis to the President and the control of the IWG.

Also the choice of the new mediator shows the effort of the *camp présidentiel* to retake the initiative. From France, which Gbagbo perceived for ideological reasons and for its role in Marcoussis as hostile to him, through the initiative of the AU the mediation placed in the hands of Mbeki, whose firm anti-colonial political roots were seen as a guarantee for the *camp présidentiel*. Mbeki's mediation did not however mark a major break from the framework agreed in Marcoussis, nor the end of any external control on the Ivorian peace process. Mbeki obtained from Gbagbo important concessions that went in the same direction as Marcoussis, such as the eligibility of Ouattara or a composition of the Independent Electoral Commission favourable to the opposition. The external controls on the peace process were not eliminated, as testified by the leading role of the AU in appointing Mbeki as a mediator in the Ivorian crisis, the attribution of strong powers to Mbeki and the fact that the agreement does not abrogate the monitoring body set up in Marcoussis and amended by Accra III.

By contrast, the 'direct dialogue' is to a large extent a new framework where the first input has been provided by the Ivorian president himself,<sup>38</sup> as well as the choice of the 'insider' Compaoré as a facilitator. In the passage from the Marcoussis agreement to the 'direct dialogue' the influence of international actors and their scope for action have been gradually reduced. The fierce nationalism displayed by Gbagbo and the FPI has meant the refusal not only of post-colonial influence, but also of the form of global governance enshrined by bodies such as the UN and the African Union.

However, the internalisation of the peace process is a double-edged sword for Gbagbo, as it prevents him from playing the card of nationalism to blame an external scapegoat for the

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<sup>38</sup> Alain Handy and Charles (2008) cite the words pronounced by Laurent Gbagbo during a celebration of peace in the former 'rebel capital' Bouaké in July 2007: "When I realized that the resolutions coming from the outside had failed and when I proposed a new solution, someone had to offer me a hand, someone had to reply positively to me for us to be able to discuss. Soro Guillaume had to tell me yes, for this dialogue to start. Soro Guillaume, I thank you for this. But the process had to be framed somehow. I discussed the issue with some friends. Toumani Touré [the president of Mali] told me "talk to Blaise". When I talked to Blaise, he replied: "I am with you". Blaise Compaoré agrees, Toumani Touré agrees, Soro Guillaume agrees... as one would say, here's the direct dialogue!". With his usual effective rhetoric, Gbagbo suggest that, although Soro's participation was indispensable and Toumani Touré and Compaoré played a role, the initiative lies on himself.

blockages in the peace process. And, while Gbagbo and the FPI have accepted, with extraordinary – some would say cynical - pragmatism to make a deal with those that they had been previously singled out as their worst enemies, the outcome is still more to prolong a difficult equilibrium than to implement a political agenda that would lead to the reunification of the country.

The blockage of the *processus de sortie de crise* should not make one forget that Côte d'Ivoire has not after all experienced any large-scale armed confrontation since *Opération Dignité* in 2004. Some kind of 'peace' seems thus to be emerging from the conclusion of the OPA. It has however little to do with the 'liberal peace' that officially the international community tries to promote. It is useful in this regards to recall Berdal and Keen's (1997) observation that, in practice, "a 'transition from war to peace' is likely to represent a realignment of political interests and a readjustment of economic strategies, rather than a clear break from violence to consent, from theft to production, or from repression to democracy".

With the Linas-Marcoussis agreements as a point of reference, the idea that a peace deal should address the 'root causes of the crisis' was one of the major underpinnings of the internationally driven peace process, including the African-sponsored Accra III and Pretoria. In this sense, the outcome of the Ivorian crisis is a serious defeat for the international community.



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