

# Conflict Resolution and the UN Peacekeeping Operation in Côte d'Ivoire

Written by Agossou Lucien Ahouangan

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## Conflict Resolution and the UN Peacekeeping Operation in Côte d'Ivoire

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AGOSSOU LUCIEN AHOUGAN, FEB 25 2019

Post-colonial Africa is marked by several internal conflicts, and it is seen as a place of weak states, non-states, and violent confrontations: Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Angola, Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo are non-exhaustive examples. Even though in recent years, interstate conflict has become increasingly rare both internationally and on the African continent[1], internal conflicts have increased in Africa. Non-international armed conflict, internal conflict, and civil wars are characterized by confrontation between a state's army and one or more dissident or rebellious armed forces. Article 3 of the Geneva Convention of 1949 assumes that there is an "armed conflict" when the situational conflict reaches a level that distinguishes it from other forms of violence where international humanitarian law does not apply, such as situations of internal tension, internal disturbances such as riots, isolated and sporadic acts of violence, and other similar acts (IRCC, 2008), with two fundamental criteria, the intensity of the violence, and the organization of the parties (TPII, 1997).

The increasing number of internal conflicts globally has made the International Community pay more attention to these types of conflicts and in certain cases act with different tools of intervention and conflict management. The United Nations (UN) in specific, whose mission is to keep peace and security globally has employed several Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) in various regions. PKOs include the deployment of, usually, United Nations personnel, known as Peacekeepers, with the consent of the parties involved and with a peace agreement in place, in order to maintain a ceasefire and prevent the resumption of hostilities. Peacekeepers remain neutral to the conflict, do not intervene and only engage in cases of self-defense (David, 2006; ONU, 2008). At the moment there are 15 peacekeeping operations globally, eight of which are in the African continent. This article will look into the problematic nature of peacekeeping operations and conflict resolution by placing its focus on the Côte d'Ivoire mission which ended in 2017.

### Peacemaking in Côte d'Ivoire

After the rejection of Alassane Dramane Ouattara's (ADO) candidacy during the 2000 elections, dissident groups launched coordinated attacks on September 19, 2002, on various Ivorian army bases in Bouaké, Korhogo and Abidjan, and demanded new presidential elections. As a response, then-President Laurent Gbagbo mobilized his army which was the beginning of the state of exception in the country. The situation led to the breakdown of institutions, and to an already fragile political, social, religious, and economic stability which threatened internal peace.

Following the instability in the country, the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) along with the African Union's management and conflict resolution section established the so called "*groupe de contact*" which was an attempt to mediate between the two parties (Danfakha, 2003). However, these attempts were unsuccessful due to the lack of consensus on the appropriate approaches of conflict resolution. One of the reasons for these failed attempts may be the fact that many of the countries who participated in the ECOWAS and African Union summits were authoritarian or dictatorial at the time, thus they might have been afraid of finding themselves in a similar position as Laurent Gbagbo. In addition, one could argue that ECOWAS's and its lack of coercive power also played a role.

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Following ECOWAS's failure and the African Union's absence from any political process, France which had encouraged dialogue<sup>[2]</sup>, asked Senegal, which held the ECOWAS's presidency, to bring the Ivorian case to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Sada, 2003). The decisive peace agreement which was reached in Linas-Marcoussis marked a turning point in the process of ending the crisis (Sada, 2003) as it included the holding of new presidential elections as soon as possible. In the meantime a national unity government would be created and Laurent Gbagbo would remain in power until the new elections took place.

The UNSC on May 13, 2003, adopted resolution 1479 which established the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire – MINUCI which would force the parties to respect the ceasefire. For this reason a contingent of 26 military officers arrived in Côte d'Ivoire. But in September 2003, the Forces Nouvelles, an armed opposition group, left the national reconciliation government making the situation increasingly worrisome. ECOWAS then called for an increase in MINUCI military officers and the conversion of the mission into a PKO. On February 27, 2004, the 1528 UNSC Resolution established the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to facilitate the implementation of the peace agreements and to end the civil war.

UNOCI's mandate was to oversee the disarmament of militias and to conduct the presidential elections scheduled for October 2005. The Council also requested the Secretary-General to transfer the authority of MINUCI and ECOWAS forces in Côte d'Ivoire to ONUCI. The resolution also authorized the French forces of Operation Licorne to use all necessary means to support UNOCI. But the fragile peace situation in the country continued to deteriorate. A new political crisis emerged on March 5, 2004, when the party of former Ivorian President, Felix Houphouët Boigny, withdrew from the government. On March 25, 2004, violent clashes between pro-government and opposition militants resulted in several deaths. In response to the events, the other opposition parties also decided to withdraw from the government, accusing Gbagbo of sabotaging the peace process.

In June 2004, Ivorian army helicopters attacked rebel positions after a clash between the army and an unidentified armed group. The peace process was becoming more fragile as there was no peace agreement, but after external pressure the parties signed the Accra peace agreement on July 31, 2004 (ROP, 2019). However, the lack of effort from both sides led the country to new clashes. On November 4, 2004, clashes restarted when an Ivorian military aircraft was used to bomb rebel positions in the north of the country. The UNSC adopted resolution S/RES/1572 on November 5, 2004, condemning the government's attacks and establishing an embargo on arms sales. The African Union sent South Africa's president, Thabo Mbeki, to Côte d'Ivoire as a mediator. After the negotiations the Pretoria agreement was signed which obliged all sides of the conflict to cease hostilities immediately and reaffirmed the upcoming presidential elections in October 2005 (ROP, 2019). Nevertheless, the presidential elections were postponed due to difficulties regarding the agreement's implementation. UNSC resolution S/RES/1721 of 2006 accepted these developments as long as the election took place by October 31, 2007. The UNSC also extended the mandate of its High Representative for Elections so that they could play a greater role in the resolution of disputes related to the electoral process and in solving problems resulting from procedural or logistical issues guaranteeing open, free, fair, and transparent elections.

The country's political situation did not change, and Côte d'Ivoire continued to face this impasse. Another agreement was signed on March 4, 2007, in Ouagadougou, under the leadership of President Blaise Compaoré. Finally, after several postponements Côte d'Ivoire had its presidential elections with a participation rate of 80% on October 31, 2010 (Commission Electorale Indépendante, 2010). The UNSC adopted resolution S/RES/1942 in 2010 authorizing an additional 500 peacekeepers within UNOCI to ensure the good running of the elections. The result of the first round did not guarantee a parliamentary majority and led to a second round (Commission Electorale Indépendante, 2010).

Ethical and religious quarrels during the second round's electoral campaigns led the country into further conflict. On November 24, 2010, the UNSC adopted resolution S/RES/1951, authorizing the temporary transfer of three battalions of peacekeepers and two helicopters of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to Côte d'Ivoire. On December 2, Commission Electorale Indépendante published the second round's provisional results which declared Alassane Ouattara as president, with 54% of the votes against 46% for Laurent Gbagbo. These results were immediately invalidated by the Constitutional Council which proclaimed, two days later, Laurent Gbagbo the winner

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with more than 51% of the votes against 48% for his political opponent. The day after these announcements, ONUCI certified the victory of Alassane Ouattara. This was the beginning of a political chaos that lasted more than four months (ROP, 2018).

The two candidates declared themselves winners and formed their respective governments. President Laurent Gbagbo called for the withdrawal of UNOCI as well as France's Licorne Forces. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, however, refused to accede to Laurent Gbagbo's request: UNOCI's mandate was extended by the Security Council until May 2011 by resolution S/RES/1962 of 20 December 2010. The situation within the country worsened and the uncontrollable armed conflict between the two parts led to several deaths on both sides.

Following numerous unsuccessful attempts to resolve the conflict peacefully, in January 2011 the UNSC unanimously adopted resolution S/RES/1967 which strengthened UNOCI by increasing the number of additional troops by 2,000 (the maximum number of troops authorized). In addition resolution S/RES/1975 which was adopted in March 2011, condemned Laurent Gbagbo and his supporters of serious violations of human rights and other war crimes and crimes against humanity during the clashes.

After five months of clashes, President Laurent Gbagbo was defeated by the forces of President Alassane Ouattara. Laurent Gbagbo was arrested on April 11 and transferred to the International Criminal Court where he is being tried. Alassane Ouattara was proclaimed President in May 2011. The UNSC held ONUCI until June 30, 2017, the official end date of the mission.

Since the end of the conflict Côte d'Ivoire has been trying to rebuild itself politically and economically. After nine years of conflict the country lost its economic leadership in the region, many investors have had to leave the country, political forces have to be rebuilt and the rule of law must be re-established. In 2015 Alassane Ouattara was re-elected for a new term of five years.

## Conflict Transformation After De-escalation?

The resolution of a conflict is not only a matter of negotiations, or the end of hostilities, but also of conflict transformation. The School of Conflict Transformation focuses on a possible transformation of rooted armed conflicts in a peaceful conflict, based on a different understanding of peacebuilding. It has been suggested that the term "conflict resolution" should be replaced by the term "conflict transformation" (Rupesinghe, 1995). The first approach to comprehensive and widely discussed conflict transformation was developed by John Paul Lederach in 1997. Lederach saw the need to resolve the dilemma between short-term conflict management and long-term relationship building, as well as the resolution of the underlying causes of conflict. His proposal is the construction of a "long-term infrastructure" (reducing social, economic and religious inequalities) for the construction of peace, supporting the potential of social reconciliation (Lederach, 1997). Such a proposal is appropriate as a way of transforming conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, since the origin of the Ivorian conflict has its roots in the social ruptures between the North and the South of the country.

In Africa, the lack of democracy is considered the main cause for the emergence of internal conflicts. However, it is important to note that the colonial past of the continent and its Balkanization cannot be concealed when referring to internal instability. According to Okoyo (1997), political instability is rooted in the structure of society and, for most new countries, in the colonial past<sup>[3]</sup>. But, several economic, political, ethnic and identity factors seem to have played a role in the Ivorian civil war, principally the concept of "*ivoirité*". This term first appeared in 1974, in an article on *Fraternité-Martin* where Pierre Niava (1974) defined it as "a multifaceted concept encompassing socio-economic dynamics, [...] the thought of Ivorian man in all his depth<sup>[4]</sup>." The "*ivoirité*" appeared as a category of ethnic nationalism, however, in the 1990s, it was transformed into a concept of exclusion, and marked the beginning of the social division in Côte d'Ivoire. This was so because, at the beginning of 1990s, many people, generally the population of the North of the country, were questioned about their origin. Also, many northern Ivorians have similar surnames with neighboring countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry). The 1990s was additionally the decade of the democratization of Côte d'Ivoire. The social division led to a civil war, and destroyed the former peaceful relationship among Ivorians. In this sense, the Ivorian social cohesion would have to be (re)construct through conflict

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transformation in order to end the conflict in an effective manner.

In this perspective, Lederach (1997) claims that it is necessary to rebuild destroyed relationships, focusing on reconciliation within society and on strengthening the potential for peace building in it. For him, a third-part intervention should focus on supporting internal actors and coordinating external peace efforts. It would be necessary to take into account the sensitivity of local culture and a long-term time frame would also be needed (Lederach, 1997). From this point of view the UN peacekeeping operations should be pragmatic and propose a solution involving national actors and take into account the social history of Côte d'Ivoire. It is in this important aspect that the first failure in the approach to solving the Ivorian conflict appeared during the mission of UNOCI.

As we saw, the UNSC resolutions for Côte d'Ivoire gave more priority to the military aspect of the conflict, and focused on the fact that the elections had to take place. The elections were seen as very important for the peace building process as a de-escalation of the civil war. These different resolutions were useful for maintaining the peace agreement and the ceasefire at distinct negotiation stages of the Ivorian conflict. Nevertheless, looking more closely, the social disturbances started after the establishment of democracy in the 1990s, the first civil war began after the 2002 elections and other clashes after the 2010 elections. According to Snyder (2000), democratization plays a role in the kind of nationalism that a country develops, which in turn can engender violence depending on the type of developed nationalism.

In the Ivorian case, this nationalism engendered violence and conflict. This would be transformed only through the (re)construction of destroyed relationships and national reconciliation. The elementary civilian components were not associated in these UNSC resolutions for Côte d'Ivoire. This seems to be the difficulty in resolving conflict in not only the Ivorian case, but in Africa as a whole. This is because, as a general rule, UNSC resolutions aim is more to contain the conflict, or for conflict settlement, than to transform the conflict. In December 20, 2005, the UNSC and UNGA established the Peacebuilding Commission, with resolution A/RES/60/180 and resolution S/RES/1645 (2005) to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery. The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission have a mandate in Liberia, Somalia and others African countries, but, not in Côte d'Ivoire. Since the end of the UNOCI in 2017, the social (re)construction is underway more by the Ivorians' own will than anything else, which is not the case for other African countries where many of the same methods have been used in conflict resolution. The Ivorian case can be considered successful, although, this is a shortsighted approach.. Social, political. and ethnic tensions were still palpable after the withdrawal of UNOCI. In addition some considered that Ouattara failed to reconcile Ivorians – after having imprisoned his predecessor Laurent Gbagbo at the International Criminal Court and Laurent Gbagbo's wife, Simone, who was arrested by the Ivorian court. The Ivorian army still faces tensions since there is agitation between Pro-Ouattara and Pro-Gbagbo groups. The climate is between doubt and hope even after the release of Simone Gbagbo and the probable release of Laurent Gbagbo.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the many UNSC resolutions the UNOCI had a hard time managing the Ivorian crisis. However, following years of civil unrest Côte d'Ivoire's reconciliation process started and the Ivorian case is considered a peacekeeping success story. The UNOCI was used as a politico-judicial instrument to help Côte d'Ivoire's conflict resolution process. However, the Ivorian case showcases that the UNSC should consider a conflict's historical and sociological aspect when drafting the resolutions. Conflict transformation differs from conflict management and conflict resolution since the first stresses the need for long-term structural, relational, and cultural changes. In the Ivorian case, conflict transformation should have been associated with conflict resolution, but that was not the case. It seems that the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission pays little to no attention to the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery after internal conflicts. Also, there is little support to the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for a sustainable development in Côte d'Ivoire. The conflict then, seen as a social phenomenon of rupture with a pre-established order, consequently needs a social change. Conflict resolution should be more than ending violence; it should be rebuilding a society and the ties among the population that were severed by conflict.

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## Notes

[1] The most recent was between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1998 to 2000

[2] Since its politico-military fiasco in Rwanda in 1994, France adopted a politics of "non-intervention". After the blockages of individual and regional mediations, France, through its Foreign Minister after the signing of a cease-fire on January 3rd and 4th, convenes a round table in Paris on January 15th.

[3] The colonial past, the process of decolonization, the formation of the state, and the construction of the nation in postcolonial Africa have an impact on the causes and consequences of internal conflicts in Africa.

[4] See also Nathalie Labonté. *La Guerre Civile En Côte D'ivoire: L'influence des facteurs économiques, politiques et identitaires*, Mémoire de Maîtrise, ULAVAI, 2006.

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