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POLITICAL IMPASSE AND UN INTERVENTION IN COTE D'IVOIRE

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Introduction

From the late 1990s to early 2000 a series of civil wars and political crises affected several West African countries including Cote d'Ivoire. As a result, state authority was virtually dissolved, governing institutions collapsed, millions became internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees. There was to say the least political chaos in several West African countries.[2] When Alassane Dramane Ouattara's candidacy for president was rejected in 2000 on the basis of a contested identity, dissident groups emerged and launched coordinated attacks on various army bases in the cities of Bouaké, Korhogo and Abidjan on September 19, 2002. They demanded for new presidential elections with Ouattara as a candidate. President Laurent Gbagbo responded to their posturing against the state in equal measure. The result was the compounding of a dire political, social, religious, and economic situation of Cote D'Ivoire which threatened internal peace.

The 2002 rebellion, otherwise a failed coup against Gbagbo, eventually paved the way for the establishment of UNOCI (Novosseloff, June 2018). Although the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) established a *groupe de contact* in collaboration with the African Union (AU) to address the situation before it spiralled out of control, this was unsuccessful. France surged forward and urged Senegal to present the matter to the UN Security Council where France is a permanent member. The Linas-Marcoussis Peace Agreement that followed the crisis compelled all parties to accept the holding of an election sooner than later. To keep the

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2 Jean-Pierre Lacroix, "Peace, Progress and Potential: The Legacy of UN Peacekeeping in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone," https://medium.com/@UNPeacekeeping/peace-progress-and-potential-the-legacy-of-un-peacekeeping-in-liberia-c%C3%B4te-divoire-and-sierra-696ef83cb165, accessed on November 18 2020.

peace, a national unity government would be created and Laurent Gbagbo would remain in power until new elections were organised. In the midst of this, the UN Security Council on May 13 2003 adopted resolution 1479 to establish a United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI) to monitor respect for a cease-fire by warring parties until the holding of new elections.

Things rather unfolded rapidly because the *Forces Nouvelles*, an armed opposition group operating in the northern part of the country backed out of the national reconciliation government sooner than later. Faced with a more serious crisis, ECOWAS asked the UN Security Council to enlarge the mission of MINUCI by converting it into a peacekeeping operation. It was in response to this call that the Council on February 27, 2004 through resolution 1528 established the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to facilitate the implementation of peace agreements and to end the civil war.[3]

The UNOCI with a force of over 6000 from the very beginning was to oversee disarmament of militia groups and to conduct presidential elections scheduled in October 2005. The Secretary General of the United Nations was mandated to transform the authority of MINUCI and ECOWAS into UNOCI. The Security Council resolution also authorised French forces of *Operation Licorne* to give support to UNOCI. All these developments were in the midst of a very tense political atmosphere. To make matters even worse, the *Parti Démocratique de la Cote d'Ivoire* (PDCI) withdrew from the national reconciliation government in 2004. This was followed by violent clashes between pro-government and pro-opposition forces leading to several deaths. Other opposition parties also withdrew from the government and accused Gbagbo of jeopardising the peace process. It was thanks to external pressure that the parties in conflict signed the Accra peace agreement on 31 July 2004. The agreement, like others before, was not recognised soon afterwards. This was due to the entrenched position of belligerents.

In reaction to increasing differences between belligerents, the AU appointed Thabo Mbeki to broker peace between them and this culminated in the Pretoria peace agreement. This agreement obliged all sides to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities and reaffirm participation in the presidential elections of October 2005. The election had not taken place because of the need to sort out sticky electoral issues and logistical problems to ensure free, fair and transparent elections. The impasse led to another agreement, the

3 Agossou Lucien Ahouangan, "Conflict Resolution and the UN Peacekeeping Operation in Côte d'Ivoire," https://www.e-ir.info/2019/02/25/conflict-resolution-and-the-un-peacekeeping-operation-in-cote-divoire/, accessed on November 17, 2020; Role of the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire Special Report of the Secretary General United Nations Security Council, S/2018/968.

Ouagadougou agreement of March 4 2007. The UN Security Council was present to ensure compliance. When the warring parties settled on October 31 2010 for elections to take place, the Council passed resolution S/RES/1942 which authorised 500 additional peacekeepers to be sent to Cote d'Ivoire to help keep the peace through to a successful election.[4] The elections failed to broker peace and the UN Security Council increased the mandate of UNOCI. The number of peacekeepers was increased to 12000.[5] The Security Council recognised the country's progress after thirteen years and in April renewed UNOCI for one final period until June 30, 2017 when all uniformed and civilian components of UNOCI would have been withdrawn for authorities to once again take full control of their country. This UN mission in Cote d'Ivoire cost the organisation a lot as over 150 peacekeepers lost their lives (Editor, 2017).

Spheres of UNOCI Intervention

The UNOCI mission was to address and bring about durable peace in Cote d'Ivoire, an economic giant of West Africa upon whom countries like Burkina Faso and Mali relied for survival. Among its key areas of intervention were to accompany Ivorian parties as part of the Ouagadougou Agreement, build social cohesion among the people, promote national reconciliation, fight against gender-based violence, ensure maintenance of the rule of law, human rights, transitional justice, build community security, seek a peaceful solution to the post-electoral crisis, assist government to disarm, demobilise and reintegrate former combatants, implement security sector reforms and relaunch the Ivorian economy as soon as it was possible (Cissé 2019; Traughber 2017).[6]

One core assignment of UNOCI was to build social harmony among the people. It was also to ensure protection of all civilians during conflict no matter their political persuasion and ethnic affiliation. Mr Alain Le Roy, Head of UN peacekeeping operations on a visit to Cote d'Ivoire in December 2010, in the heat of the disputed presidential elections, praised UNOCI for its success in this direction. However, he regretted the worrisome disturbances in the

4 Ibid.

5 UN to End Peacekeeping Mission in Ivory Coast, https://www.dw.com/en/un-to-end-peacekeeping-mission-in-ivory-coast/a-19223843, accessed on November 18 2020.

6 UNOCI Reaffirms its Military Impartiality, Press Release UNOCI -971; Transcript of an Interview Given to Afreekelection by the Spokesman of UNOCI, Hamadoun Touré, Abidjan 14 February 2011.

western and northern parts of the country (Summary of Press Conference, 29 November 2010).[7] Still in line with ensuring that social harmony and confidence was bestowed on the Ivorian people, UNOCI office insisted that the will of the Ivorian people must be upheld following the October 31 2010 presidential elections. This statement was made by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Cote-d'Ivoire Mr Y.J. Choi (Introductory Remarks, 1 November 2010). He assured the people of UN protection and certification of the vote of the winner in the second round of elections.

The UNOCI also protected the population through regular dissuasive patrols,[8] medical assistance (Summary of UNOCI, 10 February 2011), [9]monitoring, documenting and conducting inquiries into human rights abuses. This was to curb impunity (Summary of Press Conference, 13 December 2010). It also provided potable water and medical care to patients in times of crisis. Day and night patrols were organised in very sensitive and potentially violent areas. These actions protected civilians and humanitarian workers who were in immediate danger. In addition, UNOCI meticulously recorded and investigated all cases of human rights abuses that were reported to it and ensured or threatened that instigators and perpetrators would be held accountable. This was especially so for those who used heavy weapons against civilians after the post-electoral crisis of 2010 (Summary of UNOCI, 24 March 2011; Summary of UNOCI, 21 April 2011).[10] In one such instance, Gbagbo security forces fired 81mm mortar shells into a market and the surrounding Abobo area which killed or maimed over 100 persons.[11] The UNOCI also comforted IDPs and assured them of the restoration of normal life. On a visit to an IDP camp in Cocody Abidjan on May 22 2011, UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-moon said that "I am very happy to meet you but also very sad because you have witnessed and lived through terrible things. But my heart is with you and I am here to show my solidarity and give you hope of a normal life."[12]

One other mission of UNOCI was to help build stable and acceptable

7 Head of UN Peacekeeping Operations Visits Cote d'Ivoire. Press Release UNOCI 952.

8 UNOCI Intensifies its Patrols, Press Release UNOCI – 947.

9 UNOCI Condemns Deadly Violence in Cote d'Ivoire, Press Release UNOCI – 981.

10 General Hafiz Looks Back with Pride at his Record as Head of UNOCI's Force, Press Release UNOCI – 986; UNOCI Concerned about the Use of Heavy Weapons against the Civilian Population in Abidjan, Press Release UNOCI – 985; UNOCI Deplores the Level of Post-Electoral Violence, Press Release UNOCI – 972.

11 81mm Shells Fired on Abobo Claimed about a Hundred Victims, UNOCI Says, Press Release UNOCI- 984.

12 United Nations Secretary General Visits Camp for Internally Displaced Persons, Press Release UNOCI, - 1020.

democratic institutions although this remained a serious problem during the elections of 2010. Mr Y. J. Choi, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, was unhappy with the Ivorian *Commission Electorale Indépendante* or the Independent Electoral Commission for not promptly releasing the results of the Presidential election of 2010 because of internal division among its members. As certifier of the elections on behalf of the UN Security Council and as was recognised by the Ivorian government, the tally sheets or the *procés verbaux* from all over the country showed that Alassane Ouattara defeated incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo. Explaining further, Mr Choi said that three methods of data were used to prove impartiality and professionalism in the certification of results according to the will of Ivorian people (Statement on the Second Round, 8 December 2010).[13]

Earlier on, Mr Choi assured a delegation of the Rally of Houphouetists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) that UNOCI would take appropriate measures to correct any errors of the first round of voting for a successful second round (UNOCI Chief Discusses, 24 November 2010). He added that even if the complaints of the *Majorité Presidentielle* or Presidential Majority were taken into consideration, the winner was still the opposition candidate. This was in spite of the fact that a group of political actors wanted to thwart it for their own reasons (Retranscription du point de presse, 3 December 2010).[14] Through the UN Special Representative therefore, it was clear that the president of the *Conseil Constitutionelle* or Constitutional Council of Cote d'Ivoire, Mr Paul Yao N'Dre was not right in rejecting the results as proclaimed by the President of the Independent Electoral Commission Youssouf Bakayoko though belatedly.

The close supervision and certification of the 2010 presidential elections results in Cote d'Ivoire by UNOCI was appreciated in several quarters. For example, a delegation of the High Council of Kings and Traditional Chiefs of the country under the leadership of His Majesty Agnini Bilé of Djablin met on May 31 2011 to congratulate UNOCI for a job well done. The international community also supported the winner of the 2010 elections and traditional rulers expressed gratitude to UNOCI "for having saved democracy in the country" through patience, endurance, dedication and courage. This was against a background of many difficulties in the second round of voting. The UNOCI Special Representative of the UN Secretary General was also lauded by traditional rulers for UNOCI logistical support.

13 Y.J. Choi Responds to Questions on the Post-Electoral crisis from the Media in New York, Press Release UNOCI- 965.

14 UNOCI will Help Cote d'Ivoire Close the Post-Election Parenthesis, Press Release UNOCI – 956; UNOCI Chief Meets President Alassane Ouattara, Press Release UNOCI – 944.

It enabled kings and traditional chiefs to meet one another and for council members to attend many seminars.[15] In fact, UNOCI gave full support to the Independent Electoral Commission by providing them with logistical, material and security support for smooth presidential elections in 2010. After elections, the Golf Hotel where Alassane Ouattara lodged and all his cabinet members were protected by UNOCI forces.[16] On 21 May 2011 when he was inaugurated President, a glowing tribute was paid to the entire world and the United Nations in particular for solidarity and protection of democracy.[17] Thanks to certification of this election by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General that the international community respected the November polls. This led to crisis recovery and the gradual stabilisation of Cote d'Ivoire.[18]

The restoration of peace was a core mission of UNOCI. Member countries of the United Nations that contributed troops and police promised to support the mission's effort to restore durable peace in Cote d'Ivoire after the second round of presidential elections in 2010. They also pledged material support for UNOCI to succeed in maintaining peace, security and protection of the population.[19] This mandate would have succeeded more if Kings and traditional chiefs harkened to the call of UNOCI by asking their people to surrender many weapons in their keeping to relevant authorities. In this way peace and security would be guaranteed in the volatile Abidjan and other parts of the country.[20]

Following the defeat of incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo, UNOCI played a pivotal role in convincing public opinion and the diplomatic community to recognise the verdict of the ballot box.[21] It was also at the centre of security measures taken before and during the installation of Dramane Alassane Ouattara on May 21 2011. Peacekeepers were deployed to secure the airport and main routes in Yamoussoukro. They also provided security at the Houphouet Boigny Foundation, venue of the installation ceremony. The

15 UNOCI Chief Receives Kings and Traditional Leaders, Press Release UNOCI – 1027.

16 General Hafiz Looks Back with Pride at his Record as Head of UNOCI's Force, Press Release UNOCI – 986.

17 UN Secretary General Meets with President Ouattara after his Inauguration, Press Release UNOCI – 1017.

18 "Cote d'Ivoire: A Success Story for UN Peacekeeping Missions," https://reliefweb.int/report/c-te-divoire/cote-d-ivoire-success-story-un-peacekeeping-missions, accessed on November 18 2020.

19 Troops and Police Contributing Countries Welcome the Work Done by UNOCI. Press Release UNOCI 968.

20 UNOCI Chief Receives Kings and Traditional Leaders, Press Release UNOCI – 1027.

21 Déclaration de L'ONUCI a L'occasion des marches du RHDP.

overall responsibility of UNOCI was to ensure the success of the event. Other preventive measures prior to the installation were air and ground patrols and mixed patrols with the *Forces Republicaine de Cote d'Ivoire* (FRCI) (Summary of UN Weekly Press, 19 May 2011).[22] This support was necessary for a hitch free installation ceremony.

Determined to preserve the lives of people in insecure areas because of ethnic origin, political leaning, religion or region, UNOCI remained in permanent contact with all active forces in Cote d'Ivoire. This was also motivated by a humanitarian catastrophe in Western Cote D'Ivoire following the disputed elections of 2010. The UNOCI deployed troops in Duékoué to protect over 10,000 IDPs in the Catholic Mission. It also provided protection for IDPs in camps at the Union of Evangelical Churches, Nazareth and St Joseph (Summary of UNOCI, 5 May 2011). Through intervention of UNOCI forces, lives of many local populations and foreign nationals were spared during fighting in different parts of the country. One hundred and fifty priests regained freedom in Abobo because of UNOCI intervention (Summary of UNOCI, 13 March 2011).[23] Regular patrols to protect the population were also carried out in places like Abobo, the main area of tension in the Ivorian commercial capital.[24] Preservation of lives remained a problem because of the absence of collaboration between UNOCI officials, security and political authorities. In one such instance in Abidjan in December 2010, security forces prevented these officials from investigating mass grave allegations (Summary of UNOCI, 20 December 2010). The UNOCI Head of Human Rights Division Simon Munzu expressed his disenchantment with this and argued that only UNOCI could tell the international community the truth about whether there was a mass grave or not.

It was also the responsibility of UNOCI to support civil society, grassroots groups and exchange views with political party representatives in order to build peace after the presidential election turmoil of 2010 (Summary of UNOCI, 12 May 2011). In one such instance, UNOCI supported the *Union generale des femmes de Bondoukou* peace crusade to reinforce social cohesion. It also supported the *Collectif des ONG et Associations de Bondoukou* in sensitisation sessions in the North East of Abidjan aimed at encouraging the population

22 Impartial Forces Prepare President Ouattara Investiture, Press Release UNOCI – 1013.

23 Inter-Agency Mission in the Western Cote d'Ivoire, More than 16000I Internally Displaced Persons, Press Release UNOCI – 958.

24 Ivorian Crisis at the Centre of Meeting of Heads of Peacekeeping Missions, Press Release UNOCI - 977

to preserve the peace.[25] It also organised awareness sessions for women to preserve peaceful post-election in Nagnenefoun (UNOCI Runs Awareness, 9 January 2011). Similarly, UNOCI programmed activities with youths of different political parties in different parts of the country in collaboration with all civil society sections (Summary of UNOCI, 27 January 2011) to build trust and re-engage people in peaceful co-existence. In addition, UNOCI was involved in sensitisation campaigns for example in the Worodougou region and Odienné to prepare the population for an end to the crisis, national reconciliation and social cohesion (Summary of UNOCI, 17 February 2011).

Besides, UNOCI was engaged in the disarmament and peace parade after the post-election violence of 2010. This was to defuse political impasse and return the country to normalcy. Apart from disarmament in army camps in the wake of Laurent Gbagbo's fall, 50 light weapons and 3000 ammunition were recovered including communication equipment by April 2011. The UNOCI clearance team was also involved in demining in Cocody to save the population. The exercise was extended throughout Cote d'Ivoire to diffuse explosive devices (Summary of UNOCI, 21 April 2011; Summary of UNOCI, 5 May 2011; Summary of UNOCI, 2 June 2011). The UNOCI organised on 14 April 2011 a peace parade across the streets of Abidjan, one of the cities where fighting and killing was a regular occurrence. It consisted of a caravan of a dozen cars. The aim was to pay homage to the Ivorian people yearning for an end to the political impasse and an improvement of security in the country.[26]

Following the careful management of the post-electoral crisis of 2010, UNOCI through the Special Representative of UN Secretary General Y.J. Choi chose to protect the Golf Hotel and keep close to the population no matter the circumstance. The hotel's protection was to ensure that the government of elected President Ouattara should not relocate to Bouake which would further confirm the partition of Cote D'Ivoire into two.[27] In a meeting with the elected president, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General emphasised in clear terms that the mission of UNOCI was to protect the population at all cost and ensure the security of the new government trapped in the Golf Hotel.

Efforts to tone down the political climate in Cote d'Ivoire made UNOCI to consult different personalities including the Archbishop of Abidjan and

25 UNOCI, NGOs Conduct Sensitisation for a Peaceful Post-Election Environment in Soko and Wélékéhi, Information Note 1030.

26 UNOCI Organises Peace Parade through the Streets of Abidjan, Press Release UNOCI – 1007.

27 Le Chef de L'ONUCI échange avec le Président Ouattara, Communiqué de Presse ONUCI – 970.

other religious authorities. Following the meeting with Archbishop Cardinal Jean Pierre Kutwa, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General intimated that "I came in search of spiritual guidance of the Cardinal during these difficult moments."[28] Such was really a difficult moment because of heightened insecurity in many towns and cities of the country. On his part, the Archbishop of Abidjan told the press that "We tried, with the Special Representative, to see what could be done to save this nation. For us we are asking God to help us find what needs to be done. In this kind of situation, we have to look to God."[29] The religious leaders of Cote d'Ivoire had generally established synergy in their action to ensure that candidates to the presidential elections of 2010 did not make any inflammatory statements (Summary of Press Conference, 4 November 2010). Unfortunately, this was not respected because the leaders were more concerned with power at whatever cost.

The UNOCI was also involved in security sector reforms with its peacekeeping forces once the threat posed by the post-election violence of 2010 was over and smooth presidential elections took place in 2015. It was a ten-year plan intended to help the Ivorian government to modernise its security services and keep abreast with new security challenges that might prop up in the future. Responsibilities were handed over to the ministries of Defense, Interior, and Solidarity and Social Cohesion, as well as the National Commission on Human Rights, National Police, and National Security Council by UNOCI.[30] This was to make them effectively implement and follow up security reforms to help contribute to the stability of the country.

Through various election-education efforts UNOCI was able to counter disinformation from politicians and other sectarian groups during electoral periods in Cote d'Ivoire. The information disseminated through its radio helped to reduce violence in one way or the other. It also contributed to forestall the spread of rumour by politicians and interest groups. There was also anti-immigration rhetoric and threats of eviction of aliens from ancestral land[31] and UNOCI intervened through its educational programmes to counter these. Its other educational programmes encouraged Ivorians to forget

28 UNOCI Chiefs Discusses Post-Electoral Situation with Archbishop of Abidjan, Press Release UNOCI -946.

29 Ibid.

30 Colleen Traughber, "A Peacekeeping Success Story in Côte d'Ivoire," http://2007-2017-blogs.state.gov/stories/2016/12/08/peacekeeping-success-story-c-te-d-ivoire.html, accessed on November 18 2020.

31 Hannah Smidt, "Mitigating election violence locally: UN peacekeepers' election-education campaigns in Côte d'Ivoire," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022343319884993, accessed on November 18 2020.

grudges and promote forgiveness prior to the 2015 elections. UNOCI officials educated Ivorians on the importance of peaceful co-existence that would lead to development of their villages. All these continued to nurture the climate of peace and stability which was necessary for the people's collective good.

Following efforts to resolve the Ivorian crisis, the Security Council engaged in various strategies including diplomatic engagement through regional mediation efforts of ECOWAS and the AU. It also ensured the deployment of a regional force as well as supported simultaneous deployment of a French force (*Opération Licorne*) to work in cooperation to bring about peace in Cote d'Ivoire and protect the population. There was also implementation of an arms and diamonds embargo and targeted sanctions against troublemakers causing mayhem across the country. A commission of inquiry for human rights abuses was established and defaulters were promised extradition to the International Criminal Court.[32] These combined measures helped to ease tension but also fuelled a tension of its own kind.

The mellowing down of post-election violence and firm installation of Ouattara as President, made UNOCI to turn attention towards disarming ex-combatants especially in Abobo and Yopougon. It equally accompanied the Ivorian people in handling sticky issues like national identity which brought about the crisis. This was done in the first two weeks of June by the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Division of the mission. During this time, ex-combatants handed over weapons to UNOCI. The collection of arms all over the country was to build confidence in the security sector of Cote d'Ivoire during the post-crisis period. It would also facilitate reconstruction and revival of the economy for everyone's good (Summary of UNOCI, 16 June 2011). UNOCI accompanied the country in the organisation of a constitutional referendum on the identity issue which was at the root of the Ivorian crisis.[33] These lofty intervention measures of UNOCI notwithstanding, the challenges and criticisms to overcome were overwhelming and frustrating to say the least.

Challenges and Criticisms

32 "Cote d'Ivoire: A Success Story for UN Peacekeeping Missions," https://reliefweb.int/report/c-te-divoire/cote-d-ivoire-success-story-un-peacekeeping-missions, accessed on November 18 2020.

33 Role of the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire Special Report of the Secretary General, United Nations Security Council S/2018/958; Ivory Coast United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) African Politics, African Peace, World Peace Foundation, 6.

In spite of UNOCI intervention to avert a political impasse and make Cote d'Ivoire secure for all its citizens there were challenges to overcome. One of these were accusations and attacks on the Blue Helmets by the people and government of Gbagbo. On 29 December 2010 for instance, angry youths attacked the Blue Helmets in Abobo Abidjan. These peacekeepers fired shots in the air to safely return to base. The *Radio Television Ivoirienne* (RTI) gave a different picture of what actually happened. Similarly, while stationed at the entrance to the Pullman Hotel and waiting to receive the Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga on a peace mission to Cote d'Ivoire on behalf of the African Union (AU), UNOCI forces were shot at by pro-Gbagbo youths. The same radio station carried a distorted version of things in the evening of the same day.[34] Similarly, on 10 January 2011, a food convoy to the Golf Hotel accompanied by an UNOCI escort was attacked by a group of youths from the Gbagbo camp. Several such provocative attacks took place between 10 and 13 January 2011 and beyond and forced UNOCI forces to fire back.[35] UNOCI was disappointed with the RTI and untoward attitude of Gbagbo boys. This state owned media house propagated a hate campaign and anti UNOCI-propaganda which made a segment of the population to discredit its activities.

Furthermore, some hostile segments of the population and political leaders were against UNOCI because it certified the results of the second round of voting to favour the opposition candidate Alassane Ouattara instead of the incumbent Laurent Gbagbo (Summary of Press Conference, 29 December 2010; Summary of Press Conference, 9 December 2010). UNOCI was accused of siding with one camp therefore becoming partial in the case (Transcript of an Interview, 14 February 2011). Leaders of the UN operation appealed for calm and categorically stated that UNOCI would bring lasting peace to Cote d'Ivoire because that was the mission.[36] This appeal notwithstanding, attacks multiplied against UNOCI, one of which was from the Gbagbo camp. It accused it of killing a policeman at Daloa, transporting, equipping and accommodating non-UN troops and setting up a television channel for President Ouattara's camp. These accusations were roundly condemned by UNOCI whose authorities in Cote d'Ivoire reiterated their determination to protect civilians and help the country find a permanent solution to the post-election crisis.[37]

34 Forces from President Gbagbo's Camp Shoot at UNOCI Peacekeepers in charge of Security of Kenyan's Prime Minister's Delegation, Press Release UNOCI – 964.

35 Physical Attack against UNOCI Personnel and Property, Press Release UNOCI – 961; A New Media Campaign against UNOCI, Press Release UNOCI – 957.

36 UNOCI Peacekeepers did not shoot at the crowd at Abobo, Press Release UNOCI – 955.

37 UNOCI Denounces the Gbagbo Camp's New Propaganda Phase, Press Release UNOCI –

Other challenges for UNOCI to execute its mission were in the humanitarian domain in places like the Abidjan neighbourhoods of Yopougon and Abobo and parts of the western region. Human rights abuses were also common (Summary of UNOCI, 28 April 2011). In Duékoué for example, the Catholic parish was overwhelmed with numbers of displaced persons especially women and children. It barely provided them with water and electricity. Girls resorted to prostitution to survive (Information Note, 30 March 2011). This was the aftermath of the presidential elections of 2010. Following post-election violence, some pro-Gbagbo youths attacked and killed others. In one such instance in the Riviera area of Abidjan, a young boy had a tyre put on his neck and burnt. They also unleashed attacks on UNOCI staff. While on a reconnaissance flight above Duékoué in March 2011, a UN helicopter was fired at by the *Forces Republicaines de Cote d'Ivoire* (FRCI) although it did not hit it.[38] Faced by this, UNOCI continuously reminded those who were engaged in impunity that the time was coming when they would pay for their crimes.[39]

Several attempts were made to prevent movement of UNOCI forces and its headquarters was attacked. This affected the efficacy of its work. There were also repeated acts of aggression against UNOCI troops and officials which were handled with tack (Summary of UNOCI, 11 March 2011).[40] Regular clashes between competing forces acted as a bulwark to the success of UNOCI in Cote d'Ivoire. Civilians blocked its forces from free movement. UNOCI peacekeepers laboriously dismantled barricades and dispersed excited young people. They used teargas to move on like on 26 and 27 January 2011 when getting into Abidjan.[41] Communal violent clashes between Defence and Security Forces, militia, mercenaries on the one hand and Republican Forces of Cote d'Ivoire (FRCI) and *dozos* (traditional rulers) on the other hand (Summary of UNOCI, 26 May 2011) often set the hand of the clock backwards. It took tact, diplomacy and other intervention measures for UNOCI to bring the situation under control. The headquarters of UNOCI was also attacked by pro-Gbagbo Special Forces in April 2011 with consequences on the neighbouring Attecoubé settlement which was condemned by the

975.

38 UNOCI Condemns Attack on its Helicopter by the Forces Republicaines, Press Release UNOCI – 987.

39 UNOCI Denounces the Killing of Innocent Civilians, Press Release UNOCI – 988.

40 Video-Conference by Secretary-General's Special Representative for Cote d'Ivoire; UNOCI Deplores Ambush on Peacekeepers in Abidjan, Press Release UNOCI – 959.

41 UNOCI Deplores Continuous Attempts to Hinder its Movements, Press Release UNOCI-967.

UNOCI leadership in Cote d'Ivoire.[42]

Another challenge and difficulty for UNOCI was misinterpretation of its recognition of matches organised by the *Rassemblement des Houphouetistes pour la democratie et de la paix* (RHDP) and certification of presidential results of 2010. There was also competition in claims of military support. The UN Secretary General's Special Representative argued that contesting parties misconstrued the role of UNOCI to safeguard results of elections so that only the person declared President of Cote d'Ivoire became President. One of the camps claimed that UNOCI did not help it with military force and the other said that it was supporting the other camp militarily. This led to frequent attacks on UNOCI patrol teams as well as erection of checkpoints by President Gbagbo uniform officers on the access road to the Golf Hotel to block UN vehicles including UNOCI ambulance carrying medical personnel. These checkpoints were to deny access to food and water supply trucks to the Golf Hotel and probably staff the people to death. Blue Helmets and civilians were deprived of food and medicines. In addition, the public media accused UNOCI of supporting marches of the RHDP. These claims were denied by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General. There were also intimidations on UN staff asking them to leave Cote d'Ivoire (Summary of Press Conference, 20 December 2010).

A serious challenge that persistently undermined the restoration of peace and protection of Ivorians was the distribution of arms among the population, intransigence of political actors and irresponsible actions of the public and private media (Summary of UNOCI, 13 January 2011). The proliferation of arms frustrated attempts at restoring lasting peace in Cote d'Ivoire. Young boys used these to terrorise the population and this increased the number of IDPs especially in the western and northern parts of the country. The intransigence of the Gbagbo and Ouattara camps delayed the peace process and national reconciliation in Cote d'Ivoire. Marches of the RHDP became a time boom and pro-Gbagbo militia attacked UNOCI troops. The media did not also help matters because while the pro-government RTI became the government's mouthpiece, the private media sympathised with RHDP. This made the press not to play the role of the fourth arm of power in a crisis situation.

In several quarters UNOCI was accused of partiality. The intervention of its forces in the post-electoral crisis in April 2011 together with French military forces and forces loyal to Ouattara to arrest Laurent Gbagbo and

42 UNOCI HG Continues to Come under Fire from Gbagbo's Special Forces, Press Release UNOCI – 998.

disgrace him in public was roundly confirmed by militants of Gbagbo's party, the *Front Populaire Ivorien* (FPI). They questioned UNOCI's impartiality in the political crisis in Cote d'Ivoire. As militants and sympathisers of the FPI chastised UNOCI, adherents of the *Rassemblement des Republicains* (RDR) of Alassane Ouattara and its allied partner the PDCI, were in jubilation.[43] The intensity of violence was exacerbated by support for Ouattara working with France, former coloniser of Cote d'Ivoire whose ties with her former colonies were always in the spotlight.

Virulent criticisms notwithstanding, UNOCI defended its action against Gbagbo's compound and weaponry. It argued that this was a proactive measure to protect civilians in Abidjan from the indiscriminate shooting of Gbagbo forces. Besides, his party violated the peace agreement and UNOCI could not stand by and compromise peace. The Security Council in Resolution 1975 gave UNOCI a stronger mandate and with support of French troops tried to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence. In clarifying UNOCI involvement on 11 April 2011, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon intimated that ""The United Nations, together with [French] forces, have... been trying to prevent heavy weapons from killing the civilian population, and we really had to defend the United Nations peacekeepers' safety and security...This is exactly what we did in accordance with the Security Council mandate."[44] However, this was condemned by the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov who thought that the peacekeepers went too far in their operation.

After the closure of UN operations in Cote d'Ivoire on 30 June 2017, the security situation remained fragile. Although post- war revival was rapid, withdrawal took place amidst impunity, a fractured and mutiny-prone army which threatened the long-term stability of this economic giant of French West Africa. It was a sign that peace remained tentative (Novosseloff 2018). Although Ouattara brought about fast economic recovery with international investors streaming into the country, there were problems of a different kind. A wave of army mutinies spelled doom for the country. It clearly exposed the government inability to have a grip on the military put together in the wake of war. It was also clear that the government needed to address the pervasive immunity and army lack of discipline. Former rebels in the army asked for bonuses and on two occasions forced the government to bend backwards as

43 Hannah Smidt, "Mitigating election violence locally: UN peacekeepers' election-education campaigns in Côte d'Ivoire," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022343319884993, accessed on November 18 2020.

44 Rebecca Friedrichs, "Côte D'Ivoire: UN Peacekeeping, Impartiality and Protection of Civilians," https://www.stimson.org/2011/cote-divoire-un-peacekeeping-impartiality-and-protection-civilians/, accessed on November 18 2020.

violence spread across towns and cities. The 2007 peace deal that brought key rebel leaders into the administration still showed that deep divisions remained even with the departure of the UN peace operations in Cote d'Ivoire.

In expression of fear about the future of Cote d'Ivoire after UNOCI, a student in Abidjan argued that "The U.N. mission should stay in place a few more years during the process of reconciliation and restructuring the army." To buttress his argument, he said that "The seeds that led to the previous crisis are gradually re-emerging."[45] This incident revealed that Cote d'Ivoire was still grappling with a longstanding culture of impunity, needing to reform security services, strengthen the rule of law and heal political wounds that divided the country into the rebel controlled north and government controlled south. Army commanders and leaders implicated in a decade of serious human rights violations on both sides of the military-political divide had not been held to account for their acts at the time UNOCI was leaving the country.[46] It was therefore not a surprise when the 2020 elections led to many deaths. Ouattara defied all odds, modified the constitution and ran for a third term in office. The country's security services remain highly polarised and a time boom. Were any lessons learnt from the UN operations in Cote d'Ivoire for over thirteen years?

Lessons Learnt?

The UNOCI was in Cote d'Ivoire from 2004 to 2017 lasting over thirteen years during which period it tried to ensure free and fair elections in the country, strengthened the country's fragile institutions, protected the civilian population and built some level of trust among the Ivorian people. Prior to the downsizing and eventual departure of UNOCI, several issues were raised based essentially on the experience in the field. These issues were meant to keep the peace in the country especially after the successful and peaceful presidential elections of 2015 and legislative elections of 2016. The country had been transformed into a peace haven so to speak and there was a seeming need for opportunity and prosperity for all. UNOCI was also proud to have built trust with civil society organisations in Cote d'Ivoire and the government which they hoped would continue after its mission would have

45 "UN Ends Peacekeeping Mission in Ivory Coast," https://www.voanews.com/africa/un-ends-peacekeeping-mission-ivory-coast, accessed on November 18 2020.

46 Joe Bavier, "U.N. Closes Ivory Coast Mission, Security Remains Fragile," https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ivorycoast-un-peacekeepers-idUSKBN19L1VK, accessed on November 18 2020.

ended in the country. The stability of the country came at an enormous cost among which was the death of over one hundred and fifty military and civilian personnel of the United Nations.

The authorities of Cote d'Ivoire were called upon to sustain the peace to avert such from happening again. The economy of Cote d'Ivoire had been rebuilt and the citizens of the country should feel the benefit brought by peace for social development. There was an appeal for a smooth power alternation in the presidential elections of 2020 if the country was to remain on the path of peace and prosperity and to strengthen its democratic institutions.[47] Other issues UNOCI advised Ivorian authorities to take into consideration were the opportunity to focus on social cohesion, transitional justice, and inclusive economic growth. It was also time to use the hard-won peace and stability to focus on long-term development in the country.[48]

After the announcement of the UN withdrawal of over 6000 peacekeepers in Cote d'Ivoire, a flurry of statements were made to the effect that all had been well and that the country was going to do well. The French Ambassador to the UN opined that the lifting of sanctions showed "the amazing path taken by Ivory Coast on the way to peace, reconciliation and security."[49] On his part, the Ivorian Ambassador to the UN Bouah-Kamon said that his "country would now focus on implementing military modernization and security reforms."[50] The question that arises today is how far has the country gone in this direction. Ouattara heated the political atmosphere again with his penchant to cling on to power. The cracks between the north and south are still visible and political hawks continue to play with the people of Cote d'Ivoire through their age-old grievances against one another. The security sector is still volatile and if not properly handled may spell greater doom for the country. Therefore, there is a need to build on the foundation that was established by UNOCI and learn from its mistakes so that Cote d'Ivoire might regain its stability of the yesteryears once and for all.

47 Statement by Ambassador Peter Wilson, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on the situation in Cote d'Ivoire, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-united-nations-operation-in-cote-divoire-will-close-after-13-years-of-service-in-that-time-cote-divoire-has-been-transformed, accessed on November 18 2020.

48 Colleen Traughber, "A Peacekeeping Success Story in Côte d'Ivoire, "http://2007-2017-blogs.state.gov/stories/2016/12/08/peacekeeping-success-story-c-te-d-ivoire.html, accessed on November 18 2020.

49 UN to End Peacekeeping Mission in Ivory Coast, https://www.dw.com/en/un-to-end-peacekeeping-mission-in-ivory-coast/a-19223843, accessed on November 18 2020.

50 Ibid

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined the role that the UN through its peacekeeping operations played in contrB ibuting to the return to peace by addressing the socio-political problems of Cote d'Ivoire though not without serious challenges and criticisms. Through its numerous activities, UNOCI tried to protect the population, build a viable civil society, provide humanitarian assistance, security sector reforms, voter education among others. The mission was set up in Cote d'Ivoire because of the failure of parties to respect a cease-fire agreement and the selfish and egotistical disposition of political actors in the country among other issues. The UN establishment of a peace mission saw it address a number of things and by the time that its mandate was over, a lot had been done and the Ivorian authorities were made to understand that there were still sticky issues to be addressed and followed up. The recent crisis following Ouattara's re-election contrary to the constitution which he modified shows that the country is at the brink of a precipice and it would take courage for the political class to sink differences and truly call for national reconciliation which provide an enabling socio-political climate congenial for Cote d'Ivoire to truly bounce back to the enviable position of the economic giant of West Africa putting Nigeria aside.

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we argue that the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Cote D'Ivoire contributed to the return of peace in the country but encountered enormous challenges and scathing criticisms. The mission was established in April 2004 with the aim of normalising the tense political atmosphere in a divided country where rebel forces (*Forces Nouvelles*) controlled Northern Cote D'Ivoire and government forces controlled the Southern part of the country. The mission was to build community security, trust in the people and institutions and protect human rights in a country torn apart by civil war. Prior to the 2002-2003 cease-fire agreement between belligerents, Cote D'Ivoire's political terrain was heavily polluted with no agreement on almost every sticky issue. This widened regional and political cracks in the country and the despicable human rights situation re-ignited political violence. Besides, prior electoral concertation fuelled mistrust among politicians and indiscipline reigned supreme in the army threatening peace. Army commanders had soiled their hands in illicit natural resource exploitation and soldiers erected clandestine checkpoints to extort money from the population. Gender-based violence was rife and mercilessly gullible political hawks did not protect the population. Through a content analysis of essentially documents produced by the UN operations in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) we conclude that it was able to navigate through numerous hurdles amidst accusations, counter accusations and virulent criticisms.

KEYWORDS

UNOCI, Cote D'Ivoire, Peacekeeping Operations, Civil War, Human Rights

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