Ivory Coast

No Development, No Peace

by David Cherry

The refusal of Ivory Coast's army to accept the peace deal imposed in Paris "puts the President in a seemingly impossible position," said Tom McKinley, the BBC's Sherlock Holmes in Abidjan, on Jan. 28. As usual, my dear Sherlock, you are concentrating on a brunette hair found where it doesn't belong, instead of on what is really happening. That works only in fiction. In truth, it is not the Paris peace agreement, not the Ivorian army, and not President Laurent Gbagbo, but Ivory Coast itself which is in a seemingly impossible position; and it is the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Anglo-American and French powers that have put it there.

Even while Ivory Coast was regarded as the model of stability in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, it was being undermined by the economic policy prescriptions of the IMF and World Bank, which, with the backing of powerful governments, forced developing sector nations away from the path toward mechanized agriculture and industrialization. As Lyndon LaRouche noted in the 1960s, their approach leads only to economic decay. By 1990, Ivory Coast had a foreign debt of $17.7 billion (up from $7.4 billion in 1980), which amounted to a whopping 164.3% of Gross Domestic Product (up from 73.3% in 1980).

World Bank and IMF Bring Poverty

And so, in 1989, it formally called in the ever-helpful World Bank and the IMF. The two institutions provided aid and loans with the usual conditionalities: reduction in government expenditure; elimination of wheat and flour subsidies; extensive privatization of state enterprises; lowering of barriers to trade and foreign investment; and raising interest rates. And the currency was devalued by 50% in 1994.

How did these measures help? The amount the government was able to pay for foreign debt service, which from 1991 to 1993 had averaged 177 billion CFA francs annually, burgeoned by 1997-99 to 386 billion annually and rising. Did this relieve Ivory Coast's burden of foreign debt? On the contrary, the debt, which was 4 trillion CFA francs in 1991, grew to 9 trillion by 1999. Meanwhile, government expenditure, including spending on education and health, had been cut significantly. (Teachers' and college teachers' starting pay was cut by 50% in 1991, for example.)

The combined impact of low world cocoa prices and the World Bank and IMF measures increased the official measure of poverty, from 17.8% to 37% of the population between 1988 and 1995. Cocoa farmers—most of them on small family farms of 2-10 hectares—resorted increasingly to using workers under the age of 18, usually family members or relatives, rather than paid workers. A U.S. State Department study of 2002 estimates there are now about 15,000 children under the age of 12 working illegally on cocoa, coffee, and cotton farms; the law is not enforced.

Foreign workers from Mali, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Ghana, and elsewhere, and their families, amounting to more than a quarter of the country's population—so helpful in time of prosperity—were now seen as competing for jobs. When President Félix Houphouet-Boigny died in 1993, his successor, Henri Konan Bédié, invented the concept of "*ivoirité*" to encourage discrimination against foreigners. This also tended to work against Ivorians in the North, who share Muslim culture and Dioula ethnicity with many of the foreigners. The government of President Gbagbo, most especially elements in its military and security forces, has continued to use the "*ivoirité*" weapon.

Between 1996 and November 1999, the sale of cocoa—the country's main crop—was completely deregulated. Until then, the government's Caisse de Stabilisation had guaranteed a minimum price to cocoa farmers. Cocoa and coffee account for about 15% of GDP and 40% of total exports, with cocoa being much the larger contributor. Deregulation thus exposed cocoa farmers—and the national economy—to the instability of the world cocoa price. The world cocoa price improved significantly in the 1994-98 period, peaking in 1998 at about $1700 per ton. Then, in the last quarter of 1999, it nose-dived to under $1,000 per ton.

That reversal could have been borne if Ivory Coast had undergone more than superficial development in the 40 years since independence. But as it was, it was a detonator of an explosion.

On Christmas Eve, 1999, soldiers led by Gen. Robert Guei, angry over arrears in their pay, overthrew Bédié. And so political instability began. Its two chief axes have been conflict between the military (and security) forces and the government; and the combination of government and military against the poor, agricultural, largely Muslim North, led by its ostensible champion, Alassane Ouattara.

Enter a U.S. Oil Scheme

In what world-strategic context did Ivorian instability appear? With the collapse of Soviet power, British intelligence hand Bernard Lewis' concoction of an inevitable Clash of Civilizations made its appearance in 1990, including his ambition to redraw the map in the Middle East in a sea of blood—today, Baghdad, tomorrow, Riyadh. In the process, Lewis—and such co-thinkers as Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Samuel Huntington—hope to engage the American people so deeply in the imperial adventure, that the resurgence of historically American republican ideas, led by Lyndon LaRouche, will be smothered. Much of Africa, centered on the Gulf of Guinea, they think, could be used by an "imperial U.S.A." to replace a portion of Mideastern oil imports during the uncertainties of the adventure.

With that in mind, the Jerusalem- and Washington-based Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies (IASPS—see *EIR* Nov. 6, 1998), which stands somewhere to the right of Israel's Likud party, held a symposium on "African Oil: A Priority for U.S. National Security and African Development" in Washington in January 2002 and created the African Oil Policy Initiative Group (AOPIG). The ideas in AOPIG's June 2002 policy paper advocating the oil grab have made significant inroads into the State Department, Defense Department, and the Africa Subcommittee of the House of Representatives. In fact, Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Walter Kansteiner is said to be close to IASPS.

Despite the fact that Ivory Coast has not so far been a major source of oil in Africa, it was not overlooked in the AOPIG policy paper, which claimed, "Recent significant discoveries have been made off the coast of Equatorial Guinea, Congo (Brazzaville) and Côte d'Ivoire. . . ." An Ivory Coast Country Analysis Brief issued by the Energy Information Administration of the U.S. Department of Energy in December 2002 was perhaps more exact in stating, "Recent offshore discoveries in the Gulf of Guinea, including natural gas finds in its territorial waters, make Ivory Coast a leading area for hydrocarbon exploration in sub-Saharan Africa."

Given the energy now being invested in making the Gulf of Guinea into an American lake (Angola already half-way to being an American colony, covert plans for a U.S. naval base on São Tomé), it is reasonable to suppose that nothing moves in the region that Washington does not scrutinize for possible advantage. France's *Le Figaro* speculated on Oct. 4, 2002 on the insurrection in Ivory Coast as the beginning of a struggle for influence between Paris and Washington, with oil the prize, and criticized "the passivity of Paris." It implied Washington's covert patronization of the insurrection.

But Paris and Washington have appeared to be actively working together. Their common objective appears to be to open the door to the Presidency for Alassane Ouattara, whose connections are primarily in the United States.

Who Is Alassane Ouattara?

Who, exactly, is Alassane Dramane Ouattara, or "ADO" as he is called? He earned his Ph.D. at the Wharton School of Economics of the University of Pennsylvania in 1972, and married an American wife while a student. He was a principal economist at the IMF from 1968 to 1973, and then rose in the ranks at the Central Bank of West African States (CBWAS), in Paris and Dakar, from 1973 to 1984. He was back at the IMF as director of the Africa Department from 1984 to 1988. Ouattara was prime minister of Ivory Coast from 1990 until the death of President Houphouet-Boigny in 1993. He was deputy managing director of the IMF from 1994 through July 1999. He assumed the presidency of the Rassemblement des Republicains (Rally of Republicans) party in August 1999. The possibility of political instability in the country was already in the air, and General Guei's coup was only months away. At the same time, Ouattara founded the International Institute for Africa (IIA)—a consulting firm and spin-off of the IMF—of which he is president of the board, with corporate headquarters in Chevy Chase, Maryland, and offices in Paris, Abidjan, and Libreville, Gabon. The IIA says its typical clients in the public sector "include the offices of heads of state and government, central bank governors, and ministers." Of IIA's four other principal officers, two are career IMF men with backgrounds at Harvard and Yale. A third is a senior official in the RDR party.

General Guei organized Presidential elections in October 2000, and Outtara declared his candidacy, but Guei arranged the disqualification of all candidates except Gbagbo and himself. Yet Ouattara did not give up.

Ouattara looks like a very useful asset for the U.S. oil grab. He has the necessary connections in the United States, throughout West Africa, and beyond. As President of Ivory Coast, his usefulness would be multiplied. Even before the Sept. 19, 2002 coup attempt, President Gbagbo had already given the ministries of transport, higher education, technology, and foreign trade to members of Ouattara's RDR, under pressure from Paris and Washington. But these are not the key posts in a government.

Coup Attempt and Insurrection

When President Gbagbo, under pressure from the IMF, announced the demobilization of hundreds of troops, the troops attempted the Sept. 19 coup, with the help of a group of army officers involved in an earlier coup attempt, who had been welcomed into neighboring Burkina Faso and provided posh quarters there. Informed French sources say that a Libyan, Liman Chafi, is apparently coordinating the northern revolt for Burkina Faso's President Blaise Compaoré. Compaoré and Rwandan dictator Paul Kagame are close. Does Compaoré have the same Anglo-American patrons as Kagame? Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi is said to be financing the purchase of weapons, indirectly, according to French secret service sources cited by *Le Canard Enchaîné.* The northern rebels have better weapons and telecommunications than the Ivorian army.

While the rebels succeeded in taking and holding Bouaké, the gateway to the North, on Sept. 19, they failed to overthrow the government in Abidjan. But the would-be coup makers were embraced by Ouattara's party, and on Oct. 2, the Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast (MPCI)—which soon controlled the northern half of the country—was born. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kansteiner arrived in Abidjan Oct. 9 to confer with Gbagbo, and echoed a principle of the newly founded African Union (AU) in saying that the rebels would not be allowed to come to power by force. But, he told the press afterwards, "We encouraged President Gbagbo to look for a non-military solution. . . . We encouraged him to enter into negotiations."

The French also refused to help the government defeat the insurrection, but they provided troops to hold the ceasefire line established Oct. 17, to prevent the rebels from taking the southern half of the country. When negotiations with the rebels, sponsored by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Lomé, Togo, broke down, the French government convened a conference in Paris, Jan. 14-23, that included the government, the MPCI, two smaller rebel groups, and all of the Ivorian political parties. All did not go smoothly in Paris. The president of the National Assembly, Mamadou Koulibaly, considered number two in the government, left the talks in anger Jan. 20 and flew back to Abidjan, denouncing the French coordinator of the talks, Pierre Mazeaud, a former government minister. Koulibaly said, "What the rebels did not succeed in doing militarily, he has done at Marcoussis [near Paris]." Mazeaud, he said, was "too favorable to the rebels and the RDR," and he felt "under attack as a representative of the State," and called the peace conference "a constitutional coup d'état" according to *Libération* Jan. 23.

Koulibaly's departure did not, however, constitute a departure of the government side from the peace talks. A spokesman for the Ivorian government in Paris, Toussaint Alain, told Associated Press, "We have no other choice but peace, so there will be an accord," even as he condemned Mazeaud for "refusing to describe the rebels as 'rebels.' " Gbagbo flew to Paris Jan. 23 and accepted the deal under intense pressure from French President Jacques Chirac, AU Chairman Thabo Mbeki, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and the European Union. While ECOWAS as a body was also supposed to play a role in endorsing the Paris agreement, it refused, in anger over the French taking the matter out of African hands. The U.S. State Department gave the deal its blessing.

But what *was* the deal? Gbagbo flew home to consult with his government and military before making a public announcement. As of Jan. 30, he still had not made the agreement public, and its contents have become known only through a consensus of leaks. Koulibaly's eruption about a "constitutional coup" proved accurate: The agreement handed control of the government to the MPCI and the RDR. The MPCI rebels are given the defense and interior (security) portfolios; justice goes to the RDR; a technocrat from the North, Seydou Diarra, becomes the prime minister and—in theory—runs the government; Gbagbo stays on as a ceremonial President.

Thus, the RDR and MPCI are to come to power, thanks to their resort to force. With such an arrangement, one might expect Ouattara to reach the driver's seat in the next election, if not before—the apostle of the IMF achieving victory from the very miseries his policies had imposed on the country.

Abidjan Appeals to Washington

The deal, however, is in doubt. Abidjan exploded in several days of rioting and demonstrations against the French and French facilities. Six thousand demonstrators, waving U.S. flags, mobbed the U.S. embassy, carrying posters with slogans such as "Our freedom is in your hands, U.S.A." and "No more French, from now on we speak English," as they chanted, "U.S.A., U.S.A., U.S.A." The Ivorian ambassador to Washington appealed to the United States to prevent the defense and interior portfolios from going to the rebels. Full-page ads in the *Washington Post* carried the same message in less specific terms.

The army also said no. "It carries within it the germs of a national implosion," the army statement said. Then former President Bédié told the French daily *Le Parisien* Jan. 28 that the distribution of cabinet posts was decided by Chirac, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and Gabon's President Omar Bongo. "The Ivorian political parties never got to say a word," he said. "Giving the rebels the posts of defense and interior minister poses a problem." De Villepin became emphatic. "Let me tell you one thing," he said on French television, "that political accord will remain the basis for reconciliation among Ivorians. . . . These are decisions taken by Ivorians, not by France." But now all of the leading political parties, with the exception of the RDR, have issued a joint statement adopting Bédié's declaration.

De Villepin still believes he holds the ace: He is hinting that the French could just evacuate, which would leave the Ivorians to a probable bloodbath.

Is it possible that Washington could turnabout on its French ally—so uncooperative in the matter of Iraq—and respond to the appeals from Abidjan as a way of promoting U.S. hegemony in the area? Installing Ouattara might then take a lower place on the agenda. A news analysis of the French effort, by John Vinocur in the *International Herald Tribune* Jan. 30, suggests that some in Washington may be thinking of it. "France has collided with an African crisis that may more cruelly mark out the limited character of its diplomatic and practical powers," he writes. "A French-engineered peace agreement . . . signed here with the trappings of inviolability . . . in the presence of President Jacques Chirac and a handy phalanx of Gardes Républicaines—has imploded. There is no international mandate for the presence of French troops in the Ivory Coast, only a state-to-state agreement."

For Ivory Coast, as for all Africa, there will be no peace without development; it cannot simply be ordered up in a crisis.

Christine Bierre in Paris contributed to this article.