
Ivory Coast

West Behind Rebels in Raw Materials Grab

by Uwe Friesecke

The rebel movements in Sierra Leone illegally marketed diamonds; in Liberia, diamonds, rubber, and timber. In Ivory Coast, the source of wealth is predominantly cocoa, of which the country is still the largest producer in the world. Here, both sides—the rebels, called the New Forces, led by Guillaume Soro, and the government of Laurent Gbagbo and its militias—are involved in these illegal schemes. Suddenly, Burkina Faso has become an exporter of cocoa, even though it does not produce it. The Ivorian rebels are the source of it, but also, the Gbagbo government uses proceeds from the sale of cocoa to buy weapons through illegal business channels to supply the network of government-sponsored militias. The purchasers in these shady deals for cocoa, timber, or, in the northern, rebel-held Ivorian territory, cotton, are Western multinational companies, among others. Unilever and Cadbury could not exist without cocoa from Ivory Coast.

Because Western intelligence networks and business circles are so deeply involved in these African conflicts, Western governments can never organize lasting peace agreements. It happened in Ivory Coast. At the end of 2003, the French government brokered a so-called peace deal; but the implementation—to form a government of national unity and disarm the rebels—never succeeded. Instead, both sides prepared for a new round of war, and by the beginning of this November, Gbagbo's forces apparently saw the chance to try and defeat the rebels militarily. And they were encouraged to do so.

Through his wife, Laurent Gbagbo is linked to the Four-square Gospel Church, a U.S.-based fundamentalist sect. Sources from the Gbagbo camp have said that the “men of god” told them to go to war. The weapons for the offensive were bought from the government of Israel and private Israeli arms merchants. French media even claim that Israeli mercenaries assisted the Ivory Coast army. In the meantime, the French military has destroyed the airplanes and helicopters of the Ivory Coast government and deployed a total of 4,600 troops to the country.

Leaders of the African Union, who clearly see the handwriting on the wall for their countries—foremost among them Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo and South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki—were quick to organize the African Union to support United Nations Security Council sanctions

against both sides in the Ivory Coast. A weapons embargo is now imposed and, if the leaders of the parties to the conflict do not restart the peace process by Dec. 15, they will face travel sanctions and the freezing of their financial assets abroad.

The Root of the Problem

As in the Congo or other African conflicts, such peace agreements imposed from outside will not last because they do not address the root of the problem. By the end of the 1990s, Ivory Coast was ripe for rebellion. France, the former colonial power, had exerted power over the country through its founder, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, since independence in 1960. The relative economic prosperity and political stability was beginning to be destroyed when Houphouët-Boigny, who ruled until his death in 1993, was forced by the French government to implement structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This culminated in the 50% devaluation of the CFA franc for all former French colonies in January 1994. For the Ivory Coast, this was the final blow.

Right now, Nigeria is living through a similar nightmare. The constantly deteriorating economic disaster could trigger even worse conflicts and chaos. Peace needs development as its foundation. So far, neither the French, British, nor American governments are willing to change their policies for Africa accordingly. As in colonial times, Africans are supposed to deliver raw materials, but not to use them for their own development and the benefit of their people. For this purpose the former colonial powers France and Britain, and the United States, are trying to use outright puppets as leaders of governments, or rebel groups that control territory and raw materials.

Sometimes then, African conflicts become also a factor in the larger strategic quarrels. It may very well be the case that some in the neo-conservative camp in Washington and London have encouraged Laurent Gbagbo's attack on French troops, to hit French President Jacques Chirac in the context of his role in Southwest Asia and his opposition to the Iraq war.

The fighting in Ivory Coast may have been stopped for now by the moves of the French and other governments through the United Nations. But we are far from any meaningful peace in the country, and the danger of new eruptions of violence in Ivory Coast, its neighbors, and especially Nigeria is completely incalculable. Only a drastic change in the West's Africa policy toward a new, just world economic order, as promoted by U.S. political leader Lyndon H. LaRouche, can reverse that destructive trend.

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