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An alternative policy option to post-conflict elections in Africa

It has almost become canon law within the academic and policy circles that post-conflict elections can end armed conflicts, usher in democracy and development by demilitarizing politics. While there is little doubt about the potential of post-conflict election on stability and peace, there is a lack of policy consensus on how to achieve this. The policy practice so far seems to suggest there is an inherent trade-off involving conflict resolution, stability and democratization.

The direct policy implication of this approach has been that, often, when conflict situations have stabilised, the international community disengages, with the result that violence resumes later. This policy approach has not only helped sustain the conflict trap in Africa¹. Importantly, this policy option has led to a phenomenon where post-conflicts elections have merely reflected the military asymmetries of the conflict that preceded

them². The resumption of violence after post-conflict elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006, in the Republic of Congo in 2003 and in Liberia in 1997 suggests that a new policy approach to post-conflict elections is needed.

In order to explore an alternative policy option to post-conflict elections in Africa a two-folded rationale could be adopted. As the African Union (Au) increasingly succeeds in halting conflicts in the continent, it is crucial that it focuses on how to consolidate these gains³. 2009 will be critical to Africa's political economy as over twenty elections are expected to be held. In a region like Central Africa, for example, which is endowed with immense resources, plagued by weak political governance

² T. LYONS, *Post-Conflict Elections: War Termination, Democratization, and Demilitarizing Politics*, Working Paper 20, Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Arlington 2002; http://icar.gmu.edu/Work_Paper20.pdf.

³ For the African Union's approach to post-conflict reconstruction and development see AFRICAN UNION, *Policy Framework on Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy*, Banjul 2006, http://www.african_review.org/docs/conflict/PCR%20Policy%20Framework.pdf.

¹ For an analysis of the conflict trap see P. COLLIER *et al.*, *Breaking the conflict trap: civil war and policy development*, World Bank Policy Research Report, Washington D.C. 2003; <http://go.worldbank.org/MR2JESLL70>.

N. 118 - FEBRUARY 2009

Abstract

It has almost become canon law within the academic and policy circles that post-conflict elections can end armed conflicts, usher in democracy and development by demilitarizing politics.

The policy practice so far seems to suggest there is an inherent trade-off among conflict resolution, stability and democratization. This policy approach seems to emphasize strengthening the technical aspects of the election process, without due attention to the preceding political and institutional context to the elections and how to manage the election results.

Consequently, most post-conflict elections merely reflect the military asymmetries of conflicts that preceded them. The direct policy implication of this approach has been that, most often when conflict situations have stabilised, the international community disengages, only for violence to resume later.

Using the example of Côte d'Ivoire this policy brief explores an alternative policy option that is grounded in a comprehensive approach aimed at stability and peace concurrently.

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and low levels of integration⁴, the effect of elections in the region and on the global political economy environment will be notable.

Using the example of Côte d'Ivoire this policy brief explores an alternative policy option that is grounded in a comprehensive approach aimed at stability and peace concurrently and aims to call for a policy rethink. It does so by first taking a look at the debate on post-conflict elections, later it examines how post-conflict elections can manage the security dilemma of Ivorian belligerents and, in the process, how they can ensure stability. It moves on to interrogate how post-conflict elections will affect the democratisation process in the country. It ends by proposing some policy considerations for future debate.

The debate: post-conflict elections

Post-conflict elections and conflict resolution

Elections are increasingly being viewed as a conflict-resolution mechanism since it is believed that they can "manage" the security dilemmas posed by belligerents⁵. In post-conflict soci-

eties, security dilemmas are exacerbated by failures to share information and by the uncertainties surrounding peace deals, thus making the parties involved often reluctant to abandon the military option and accept electoral results. Unless the strategic and security dilemmas are well managed during implementation, it is likely that conflicts will flare again, blocking both elections and long-term democratization.

It is also argued that elections can serve as conflict-resolution mechanism in so far as, when constitutional and institutional reforms are carried out, and when grievances are aired, the belligerents can be herded into a framework of laws and mutual agreements, significantly reducing the chance that conflicts will explode into violence or destabilization⁶. Clearly, this is an optimistic view of elections, but it is also the one embraced by the international community.

Post-conflict elections and democracy

It is argued that political pluralism can help manage conflicts because open and fair competition for power, structured around elections, inevitably leads to democracy. The logic here is that when the electorate is the final arbiter of who achieves power, and when the candidates are accountable to that electorate,

voting power will reduce the acrimony that might otherwise develop among competing political interests.

Empirical evidence suggests that this is not always so. The election of Charles Taylor in Liberia in 1997 did not transform the country in a democracy. It is important, then, to consider the variables that underpin elections. Elections do not exist in a vacuum: they are shaped and controlled by external variables. Furthermore, the impact of elections on a democracy can be strongly influenced by the institutional legacies of the existing order⁷. Thelen and Steinmo contend that «institutions (formal such as constitution and informal such as culture) shape the goals that political actors pursue and [...] structure power relations among them»⁸. Thus, the characteristics of the previous regime are important in assessing the impact of post-conflict elections⁹.

⁴ For an analysis of the politics of integration in Central Africa see C. AYANGAFAC (ed.), *The political economy of regionalisation in Central Africa*, «ISS Monograph Series», 155, Pretoria and Addis Ababa 2008; http://www.iss.co.za/index.php?link_id=3&slink_id=7047&link_type=12&slink_type=12&mpl_id=3.

⁵ T. LYONS, *Post-Conflict Elections: War Termination, Democrat-*

ization, and Demilitarizing Politics, cit.

⁶ C. OBI, *Introduction: Elections and the Challenge of Post-Conflict Democratization in West Africa*, in «African Journal of International Affairs», 10, 1 and 2, 2007, pp. 1-12.

⁷ G. O'DONNELL - P. SCHMITTER, *Transitions from authoritarian rule: tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies*, Baltimore 1986.

⁸ K. THELEN - S. STEINMO, *Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics*, in K. THELEN - S. STEINMO (eds.), *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 1-32.

⁹ J.J. LINZ - A. STEPAN, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore 1996, p. 55.

The politics of post-conflict elections in Côte d'Ivoire

An assessment of the possible impact of the upcoming presidential elections on stability and democracy in Côte d'Ivoire will be carried out taking into account a number of critical factors that will give an idea of the political will of Ivorian politicians to have elections; of the capacity of holding elections and of the political and institutional anchor of the elections.

Political will, who wants elections and why

Elections are partly about political and economic power. The coming presidential elections will be a watershed event in Côte d'Ivoire. The elections will have the potential to dictate the rules of the game with regard to managing competing interests. In this regard, it is imperative that the winner's legitimacy be enhanced by the electoral process. Credible elections – indeed, elections of any sort – will enable the international community to rally around the winner, which in turn leads to much-needed resources flowing in for post-conflict reconstruction and development, since development aid from the international financial institutions is contingent on some degree of political stability.

The upcoming presidential elections will do much to decide who has the political initiative in the country. At the heart of the Ivorian conflict lays a legitimacy crisis. For now, the regime's legitimacy hinges on the fact that the country is at war with itself.

Thus, it is urgent that President Laurent Gbagbo renews his mandate. That mandate effectively ended in 2005, though it has been extended once by the United Nations Security Council (Unsc) on the recommendation of the Africa Union's Peace and Security Council (Aupsc). For now, he lacks a popular mandate, and he needs one if he hopes to bolster his legitimacy as he struggles to strengthen his hold on power.

There is little doubt that the Ouagadougou political accord (Opa) which provides the framework for the upcoming elections reflect the desire of Gbagbo and his Prime minister, Guillaume Soro, to seize control of the peace process, which was rapidly being hijacked by the international community. By winning an election, they will be able to ensure their political survival. There are grounds to contend that Gbagbo and Soro need the legitimacy of fair elections in order to counter arguments that their partnership is designed to share the spoils of war.

A credible election will enable the main political opposition (*Rassemblement des républicains*, Rdr, and *Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire*, Pdc) to reassert themselves, considering that for a long time they have been overshadowed by the rebels. It will also offer them a chance to take or at least influence power. Indeed, they have a legitimate chance of doing so: if Gbagbo fails to secure a first-round victory, the opposition combined ticket could

well offer him a serious challenge. Perhaps the political opposition will be contesting the presidential election with an eye on the parliamentary elections. This is a real chance since the Pdc won the last parliamentary elections but failed to win a simple majority to form a government. Considering the country is very polarised along ethnic and generational lines, it is quite likely that the political opposition will do well in the legislative elections and that in the process it will take the political battle to the legislature. This probability might spell future political troubles, since there might be a scenario where the Prime minister and the President come from different political parties. Having elections is not enough to ensure the composition of the political interests of the various political parties. Thus, it is of immense importance to understand how they influence the transitional process and by extension the electoral process.

Managing the security dilemma, the electoral process and the surrounding environment

The Opa was basically aimed at overcoming the security dilemma of the belligerents. The Opa can be viewed as a strategic manoeuvre by the principal belligerents to secure their relevance, institutionalize the distribution of power, and reduce uncertainty. Direct dialogue with the rebels gave Gbagbo the manoeuvring room to seize control of the peace process, which was slipping farther and farther out of his control; most

importantly, however, it allowed him to sideline an increasingly hostile international community as well as break up the formidable alliance between the rebels and the political opposition (Rdr and Pdc). The fact that Gbagbo agreed to talks with people he once vowed never to negotiate with suggests how important the accord is to his political survival.

As for the rebels, the Opa offered them an escape from an untenable situation. The war had caused dire hardships to the people in the North, much of the region having been cut off from state resources. They had quickly grown tired of the war and were withdrawing their support from the rebels. The Northern economy had collapsed, partly because of war deprivations, mismanagement, and weak infrastructure, but also because the region had been cut off from the rest of the country. The rebels had never been a homogenous group, which led to a great deal of arguing over strategy. Military force had not provided the desired results, and the stalemate could not last forever. Secession was never an option; it would have been economically unviable and politically unsustainable. Sooner or later, the rebels would have to agree to talks.

The Opa is extremely important in part because its provisions will inform the decisions of competing political actors. Will they embrace the electoral process or subvert it? As Lyons points out, the choices the actors make early in the peace-implementation phase will

establish precedents, norms, and institutional frameworks that will in turn structure the post-conflict political order¹⁰. The electoral process in Côte d'Ivoire will strongly affect how post-conflict elections are conducted in the country. Control of the transitional period and by extension the electoral process may create different interest groups and new elite coalitions, as well as – most importantly – may determine who controls the country's wealth and governing institutions, not just in the run-up to the elections but also after the elections. He who controls the transitional process will certainly determine the political life of the country at least for the next five years. In that sense, struggles for influence over the electoral process and the Opa implementation are quite simply attempts at political survival. Thus it is a political prize to acquire control over citizen identification, voter registration, compilation of electoral lists, and disarmament and demobilization. While acknowledging some technical problems, it must be stressed that the slow pace of the electoral process is purely political. Negotiating the security dilemma of the belligerents hinges on the logic of a guarantee of the participation of Northerners in exchange of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

Over the past three months, attempts at disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration have sparked riots in the North by the ex-combatants, who claim that they have not been paid money owed to them. Combatants are to hand in their weapons and be paid 499,500 Cfa francs (£518; US\$970) each. They can also benefit from loans for small business start-ups, or farming, to a maximum of 430,000 Cfa (£446; US\$830)¹¹.

At the centre of the blocked disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process are attempts to control the security apparatus. There is squabbling over the project of merging the *Forces nouvelles* (Fn) with the National armed forces of Côte d'Ivoire (*Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire*, Fanci). The Fn argues that the military grades obtained by its soldiers during the war should be maintained during integration and that personnel should receive the retirement benefits associated with those positions. The government seems to be proposing a lump-sum package with no offer of indemnity. Another problem relating to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration involves raw numbers – that is, how many Fn soldier will join the National armed forces, and in which ranks? The numbers are important in determining the amount of money each combatant will receive for

¹⁰ T. LYONS, *Post-Conflict Elections: War Termination, Democratization, and Demilitarizing Politics*, cit.

¹¹ See the UN Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration website for Côte d'Ivoire; <http://www.unddr.org/countryprogrammes.php?c=51>.

disarming, as well as what they will be doing in the united army.

Identification will certainly determine the number of people who are eligible to vote. It is important to note that this problem have affected mostly the Northerners. Soro insists that the slow pace of the identification process is a result of underfunding¹². Louis Michel, the European Union Commissioner for development and humanitarian assistance, has stated that he does not believe that underfunding is the cause of this problem¹³.

Voter registration will determine who will actually vote. The fact that the National institute of statistics (Ins), a government agency, will be playing a key role in the elections has casts serious critiques. First, since voter registration will be based on the 2000 electoral list, the process will be inherently flawed, considering that the 2000 list excluded many Ivoirians. Moreover, the Independent electoral commission will be supported in its work by the Ins, which is under the political umbrella of the Minister of state in charge of planning (Paul Antoine Bohoun Bouabre, a close confidant of Gbagbo). Henri Konan Bédié and Alassane Ouattara oppose any attempt to give the Ins a chance of even slightly influencing the

¹² K. COULIBALY, *Soro veut contrôler l'identification*, in «Soifinfo», October 27, 2007, http://www.soifinfo.com/article.php3?id_article=4525.

¹³ Ibidem.

elections¹⁴. The appointment of a French company, *Société d'application générales électriques et mécaniques* (Sagem), as the private technical agency that will carry out the issuance of identity cards has not gone down well with many Ivoirians, especially within some factions of the *Forces nouvelles* and the government, because of the role France has played in the country history and politics¹⁵.

If the rebels and the government do find some consensus in managing their security dilemma, the upcoming election will certainly end the armed conflict and in the process provide stability. However, its impact on democratization will depend to a huge extent on the nature of the political and institutional governance prior to the conflict if they have not been changed.

Post-conflict election and democratization

Firstly, it should be noted that elections are not synonymous to democracy. Being a critical impact on democracy the intention here is to see how elections will impact on the democratisation process in the country that started in 1991. The structural tenets that informed political and institutional governance in

¹⁴ M. YAHMED, *Gbagbo-Soro: le divorce?*, in «Jeune Afrique», 48, 2444, pp. 54-58, 2007; http://www.jeuneafrique.com/jeune_afrique/article_jeune_afrique.asp?art_cle=LIN11117gbagbecrovi0.

¹⁵ J. NANGA, *A "Civil War" that is French and neo-colonial*, in «International Viewpoint», 4, 2005, p. 364.

Côte d'Ivoire have not changed. Politics is still a zero-sum game, corruption and patrimonialism is rife, political institutions are still weak, the media is very polarized and civil society is weak. Popular participation and inclusivity remain issues of critical importance.

Electoral systems – the rules and procedures under which votes are translated into seats in parliament or the selection of executives – are a critical variable in determining whether elections can simultaneously serve the purposes of democratization and conflict management¹⁶. Systems of proportional representation are generally regarded as more suitable in divided societies because they favor the creation of broad and inclusive governments¹⁷. The electoral system of Côte d'Ivoire, despite how diverse the country is, is grounded in a first pass the post, single-constituency, simple-majority system¹⁸. Since power is still concentrated on the President, one can conclude that Ivorian politics is a zero-sum game or winner takes all¹⁹.

¹⁶ T. SISK - A.S. REYNOLDS (eds.), *Elections and conflict management in Africa*, Washington 1998.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ R.C. CROOK, *Côte d'Ivoire: Multi-Party Democracy and Political Change: Surviving the Crisis*, in J.A. WISEMAN, *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, London 1995, pp. 11-44.

¹⁹ A zero-sum game is a situation or interaction in which one participant's gains result only from another's equivalent losses.

Way forward: policy options and recommendation

- 1) It is crucial that the technical issues that inform the electoral process must be strengthened and that the electoral process is thoroughly supported. It is imperative for the Ivorian government and the international community to sustain the current identification, voter registration and the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process. There is a legitimate argument from government that funding is a problem, though this cannot be overstated. The international community should provide the requisite funding that has been promised. Supporting the technical sides of elections will certainly help manage the security dilemma of the belligerents.
- 2) In order to manage the security dilemma, it is imperative to insist on a reform of the security sector.
- 3) There should be a clear effort to move beyond the technical process. It is important also to strengthen the various institutions and agents of democratisation. Ivorians should at least have a discussion concerning their electoral system. The media should be held responsible and civil society organisations should be strengthened.
- 4) The African Union has been almost absent in the transitional process. It is important for the Au to be visible during the transitional

process and election period. This will give the Au some leverage in managing the elections fall-out. One area where a strong action from the Au could bring value-added is to solicit a pledge from the various contestants to abide by the election results.

The international community, in this case the Au and the European Union should send election observers to monitor the electoral process and not just the voting process. These observers should be preferably be technocrats rather than diplomats.

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