

**CENTER FOR
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

**DISCUSSION WITH ALASSANE OUATTARA,
PRESIDENT-ELECT OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

**WELCOME:
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**SPEAKER:
PRESIDENT-ELECT ALASSANE OUATTARA,
REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

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JENNIFER COOKE: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to CSIS. My name is Jennifer Cooke. I'm director of the Africa program here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, as you know. CSIS is delighted to join with the National Democratic Institute, the U.S. Institute of Peace and the Open Society Institute in co-hosting this very important event this morning.

We're going to begin our remarks – our session today with remarks from President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire. He remains in the Golf Hotel in Abidjan.

PRESIDENT-ELECT ALASSANE OUATTARA: Yes.

MS. COOKE: The president's temporary offices are surrounded by U.N. peacekeepers, who, according to reports this morning, are coming under increased attack from individuals among the more extreme supporters of former president Laurent Gbagbo.

After his remarks, President Ouattara has agreed to take a few minutes of questions. And following his interventions, we will turn to a broader panel discussion with Chris Fomunyoh of NDI and Akwe Amosu of the Open Society Institute.

I think most of you gathered here today know the broad parameters of the Ivorian situation, and I think the size of the audience attests to the importance we attach to it. In the country's presidential runoff election of November 28th, a fairly significant majority of Ivorians voted for Alassane Ouattara to lead the country as president.

These results were recognized by the West African regional group in ECOWAS and by the U.N., both of whom had a formal role affirmed previously by Mr. Gbagbo himself in supporting and certifying the election process and results.

Mr. Gbagbo, as you know, has refused to recognize the results, to relinquish office, and has been impervious so far to mounting pressures by remarkably united international community as well, it should be said, as offers for a graceful and gracious exit. The situation today is precarious and reports of violent attacks in Abidjan and other parts of the country are mounting, as are reports of outflows of refugees into West Africa's neighboring states.

The standoff has become a test of the resolve of the international community and the mechanisms of leverage that are available to it. It's become a test of the rule of law and democratic principle, enforcement of peace agreements and conflict prevention interventions. It poses an increasing risk to the stability of other fragile states in West Africa, and how this standoff is resolved will have important ramifications throughout Africa and beyond.

But I think we should remember that, at its core, this crisis is about the aspirations and future of the Ivorian people and who they have chosen to lead them through the many challenges of rebuilding and reconciliation that lie ahead for Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. President, I would like to welcome you to Washington and to CSIS, albeit via telephone conference. We are honored that you have taken the time to talk to us this morning about the current situation, the challenges that lie ahead, and the way forward for Côte d'Ivoire.

I'll keep the introduction short because I know your time is precious. Let me turn to you now, and welcome. Thanks very much.

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Well, thank you very much, madam. Good morning to you all. And, yes, I am at the Golf Hotel. I've been in the hotel now since November 28th, so it's been more than six weeks. And I have been able to form a small team, provisional government of 13 people. I have appointed former Prime Minister Soro Guillaume as prime minister and also defense minister.

And I know that many of you are aware of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, so I think it may be better for me to receive your questions rather than to give you a long speech on recent developments.

But the most recent developments are about the assassinations in some quarters of Abidjan, in Abobo. As you are aware, the troops of Mr. Gbagbo encircled Abobo, which is the largest – one of the largest districts of Abidjan, with more than 1 million people. They voted for me at about 65 percent, and clearly Mr. Gbagbo is trying to intimidate the population and to threaten them.

As you are aware, the human rights violations are terrible. He has – we have more than 250 people are killed; many hundreds of women have been brutalized, not to use a harder word; and also more than 1,000 people are now hospitalized. And so this is clearly a situation of gross human violation.

In terms of the discussions on how to get out of this crisis, we received a few – a week ago, actually, President Obasanjo, from Nigeria, who had come – followed – I think he followed the visits of the three presidents of ECOWAS – President Pires of Cabo Verde, President Yayi Boni of Benin, and President Koroma of Sierra Leone, and with Prime Minister Raila Odinga of Kenya.

That visit didn't give much because Mr. Gbagbo has a strategy of trying to win time so that he can remain in the palace in the presidential offices. He always made promises that he has met – commitments which certainly are never respected. And as so, he told them he's going to think about the discussion and for them to come back again. I told clearly the visitors that I don't think it's very useful, but if they want to come back, of course they will be welcome.

Mr. Obasanjo – President Obasanjo was here last weekend – same scenario, same discussions. Nothing came out of it. Always the same strategy: to gain time. And the time he is

gaining is to try to import arms and munitions despite the embargo, to clearly import mercenaries from Liberia and militia from his southwestern country of Côte d'Ivoire. And basically, he does not want to step down.

I think we have come to a point where I believe seriously that force should be used to remove Mr. Gbagbo. I'm a man of peace. Personally this would have not been the outcome I would like, but I think – it's been six weeks now. The suffering of the Ivorian people is just too great and the number of people being killed is unacceptable, and I believe it's time to really remove Mr. Gbagbo.

I'm counting on the ECOWAS decision to do so. As you are aware, they will meet – the chief of staff of defense will meet in Bamako next Tuesday, and thereafter there will be another summit of the ECOWAS head of states, I believe before the end of January to make final preparation for decisions that we'll implement.

So, in short, these are the few words I wanted to develop. As I've said, I prefer to take your questions but I can go on, on specific aspects if you think that could be useful to the participants.

MS. COOKE: Thanks very much. Yeah, it's great that we're able to be interactive here and get some questions to you.

Let me start perhaps with your last point on the use of force in Côte d'Ivoire. I know ECOWAS – President Atta Mills seems to have balked somewhat at the idea of military intervention. I think there's some legitimate concern that the use of force, even if it's limited initially simply to extract Mr. Gbagbo might unleash perhaps a wider conflict and perhaps inflame the situation rather than calm it.

I wonder if you might comment on that, sitting from where you are. Obviously there are diminishing options at present, but I wonder if you can comment on what the impact of an intervention might be and how prepared ECOWAS or the U.N. peacekeeping force might be for a broadening of violence.

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Yes, thank you. Well, as I said, I am a man of peace. I believe that only with peace you can have development. But the problem with Mr. Gbagbo, his psychology is that he has always used force to get to where he has been.

You recall that in 2000 we are not sure that he won the election. He manipulated part of the army. It's through force that he removed President Gueï – General Gueï to get to the office. And every time there have been demonstrations, he has used force to kill people. According to our accounts, since Mr. Gbagbo came into office in October of 2000, more than 1,000 people have been killed through various interventions that he has ordered.

So, clearly he likes the use of force. At the same time, he's very much afraid of force because during the time he had a problem with General Gueï in October 2000, he had one of his deputies take him in the trunk of his car from one place to another.

So, he is a coward, and I believe that if ECOWAS shows clearly its will to intervene, Mr. Gbagbo will stop. But if nothing is done; if he has not the feeling or is not sure that there will be force, he will continue to negotiate and to continue to have the Ivory Coast and the Ivorian people suffer.

I feel that extracting him should not be difficult, you see, because the army in Côte d'Ivoire, army police and gendarmerie are about 25,000 people. Mr. Gbagbo's group of people protecting him are about 2,000. And they're the ones who have all the arms. The arms are with them at the Presidential Palace, at his residence, and at the Garde Républicaine.

So, I think that ONUCI knows where these depots of arms are. And Ivorians don't want a civil war. Of course I'm the president of all the Ivorians. It's not only the 54, 55 percent who voted for me, but I'm also the president of the 45 percent who did not vote for me.

So, obviously I do not want bloodshed. I do not want to get into a palace full of blood and dead people. But Mr. Gbagbo certainly is playing with people, and at some stage he has to know that things are getting serious. I do not believe in the hypothesis of a civil war because what people ignore is that Côte d'Ivoire is a country with a lot of métissage. People have married among – across ethnic borders.

In effect, you have a group of extremists supporting Mr. Gbagbo, and clearly this is – yes, this is a problem. And even that minority I don't want obviously to be killed or destroyed, but that minority has to know that where they're using violence, it can be used against them, but my wish is that it will not come up to there.

And the mercenaries; the mercenaries are – I think there are about 3,000 mercenaries. They have come for money, so clearly they know that it's becoming serious or they will leave. So I think the military intervention always should be the last resort, the ultimate resort. I think the military of ECOWAS should start organizing this situation and make it serious that they will use it if Mr. Gbagbo does not step down. And I think he will step down before force is used. I know him well.

MS. COOKE: Thank you very much. I think we all agree that military intervention would probably be a last resort, and I think the international community would want to exhaust every other option before taking such a step. And we have a couple of questions related to that.

One is from James Clinton Francis of the Eurasia Group, that despite the regional bank's formal recognition of you as president of Ivory Coast, Gbagbo still maintains control of the Ivorian oil and cocoa sectors. "Do you think cutting off his sources of funding will be an effective approach in loosening his control of the state? And if so, how do you plan to do this?"

And if I can just connect to that a question from Tony Carroll at Manchester Trade: "Sir, would you support economic sanctions if Mr. Gbagbo refuses to yield power? And would this position make your presence untenable or does this add to the pressures to Mr. Gbagbo and make it more of a waiting game?"

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Yes. I think my preference would be to continue with the personal sanctions about traveling, about the freezing of assets, about financial sanctions.

Secondly, I believe that the decisions made by the Regional Central Bank should be implemented fully. As of today, this is not the case because the governor, as well as the national director and the deputy national director of the central bank in Côte d'Ivoire do not give clear messages to the banks and to companies how to deal with the Gbagbo issue.

So this is a major problem because even a couple of days ago the financial controller of Mr. Gbagbo removed, I think, \$10 million from the central bank, and this was done with the complicity of the local officials of the bank in Abidjan. We have returned to the governor and we have told them that if they continue, we will ask the European Union, the U.S. and the U.N. to put them on the list of people to be sanctioned. So, this is the second area of sanctions that should be tightened, the sanctions through the Regional Central Bank.

Thirdly, the local banks also should be told that they have to recognize only the signature of my government and my representatives. Not all the local – all the banks – commercial banks are doing that because some of the local banks are owned by Ivorians who are connected to people of the Gbagbo regime and they continue to provide funds to Mr. Gbagbo and his group. So this is another area of decision. In that respect, I'd like the U.S. and the Europeans and other countries whose banks are in Côte d'Ivoire to give instructions to their banks not to deal with the illegitimate government of Mr. Gbagbo.

Now, on top of that you have now the question of trying to cut off use of funds through the petroleum, cocoa, coffee business. We are working on that. We have had several meetings with the major petroleum companies abroad and also with the Cargill, ADM, Armajaro – all these cocoa business companies – to tell them that if they pay export taxes to the Gbagbo government, we will consider that these taxes are due when the situation gets normalized.

So they should not pay taxes to the Gbagbo government. Of course, they have problems because Mr. Gbagbo uses the military forces to go and intimidate them, and this is a major problem of security for most of them. So these are some of the areas.

Now, concerning economic sanctions globally. A priori, I'm not yet for economic sanctions because this will hurt the Ivorian people, and clearly my duty is to protect the Ivorian people. I was elected on an economic program to help and to promote the well-being of the Ivorian people, so clearly I will not like – because I want to remove Mr. Gbagbo – to have more suffering for the Ivorian people at large.

But these are still specific measures we are looking into. For example, domestically we are looking at a possibility of strikes in the transport sector, in the domestic crude sector, and in other areas to block the economic system domestically. So these are some of the measures I could describe to you.

MS. COOKE: Great. And I wonder – just a quick follow-up to that. I mean, what might be the timeframe for these kinds of non-military interventions to bite and be effective, and how long a timeframe would you and your supporters and perhaps the international community be willing to countenance?

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Yes, we believe the end of the month is an important benchmark because salaries usually – especially to a military staff being paid around the 20th of the month. So, in fact, I will make decisions next week to remove many of the people who are not in compliance with other instructions so that they will not be able to debit the accounts of the treasury, because this has been a major difficulty.

Sometimes they have just – they have taken people out. They have taken their families as hostage. I'm talking about the Gbagbo group. They have taken hostages or wives of some of the public accountants. They have removed them from the house or they have the houses surrounded by the military to force them to sign – to sign the order to debit the account of the central bank or domestic banks.

So all these are details which can seem minor but it's very, very difficult to implement because we are in the Golf Hotel. Of course it's easier to work by Internet and so forth, but when it's physical, it's difficult to protect people. So, every time we have to protect someone – to get someone out and to appoint a new person, we have to protect a new person first.

So it's quite complicated, but I think in a week or 10 days we'll be able to completely close the financial windows. And if the cocoa, the petroleum companies, the banks also, play the game according to what we have asked them to do, this will be very helpful, because I think the crux of the matter is for Mr. Gbagbo not to have money to pay the military and the mercenaries and the militia. We think that's the most effective way to get them to abandon power.

Of course, a second avenue would be to prevent them from lobbying and getting money to go and get lobbying groups elsewhere, especially in France and in the United States, to broadcast live, as they are doing now, about the elections.

You know the elements of the elections don't – I don't want to bother you with that, but all Ivoirians know that Mr. Gbagbo lost the elections, and this was certified by the United Nations, by ECOWAS, and in the southern regions of Côte d'Ivoire, which – in the north and center, which were excluded – which were used to exclude 600,000 votes, was not something which would be possible, even for those who would defend the constitution.

As they are saying, the constitutional court had only two options: either to confirm the results published by the electoral commission or to cancel them and to call for new elections 45 days later. But the constitutional courts did not do that, so they did not act rightfully and they did not tell the truth. They went against the law.

And therefore it's important for us, and I think for the whole world, to know that that constitutional court did something illegal by trying to get the votes of the seven departments in the north and the south excluded from the total ballot, because obviously Mr. Gbagbo tried

everything. And he knew also that if the constitutional court had decided to cancel the election and call for a new election 45 days later, I would have won not by 54 percent but maybe by 70 percent. So that's why they went through that illegal action.

MS. COOKE: We're getting laughter from the very large crowd here –

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Okay.

MS. COOKE: – on that last point.

Let me ask just two more questions, perhaps. One, it's been reported that you have offered positions within your cabinet to members of the Gbagbo administration – perhaps an important signal in terms of changing calculations in the immediate standoff but also perhaps setting the tone for eventual outreach from the Ouattara administration in reconciling the country. How formal would you want to make that offer, and how structured? And can you give a little detail on that, perhaps?

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Yes. Actually, there was a bit of confusion on this matter. Before the election, during my campaign, I put emphasis on the need for reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire because – I know most all of you know the history of this country over the past 10, 15 years. My conviction is that we're getting out of some sort of apartheid in this country, as South Africa had before the democratic election with Nelson Mandela.

And I offered during my campaign that I will form a government of a union – a union government, including all the major parties, including Mr. Gbagbo's party, and of course including the civil society.

I think this idea is what has been again repeated by my ambassador in New York. It's nothing new. Actually it's something in which I believe. Despite all these atrocities, despite the behavior of Mr. Gbagbo and a few people who surround him, I think the majority of the people who voted for him are now fed up with the way he's acting and his shameful behavior on Côte d'Ivoire and the image of Côte d'Ivoire.

So I'm still really decided to have a government which would include people in Mr. Gbagbo's party because I want to govern with all Ivoirians. I don't want to exclude a group of Ivoirians because the crux of this crisis was the issue of exclusion, a part of the national – of this country.

Now that I have succeeded, through democratic elections, to be elected as president, my first priority is to ban exclusion and also to protect minorities, because one important issue in Côte d'Ivoire – people don't say it, but the very small ethnic groups are afraid of the two large groups, which are PCDI and RDR, because PCDI includes essentially people from the center of the country. They represent about 30 to 35 percent of the population. RDR has essentially people from the northern part of the country, but I would say northerners, whether they're in the north or in the southern part of the country. And they comprised 40 percent, maybe more, of the population.

So if you take – and people see our alliance as the alliance of the two large groups, which account for 70 to 75 percent of the population. And if you look at the electoral map, you will see that it's in the areas that you have the small ethnic groups which have voted for Mr. Gbagbo. So there is a fear among the minorities that they might be mistreated by the majority.

So, that's really an important reason also why I want a government of large union, so that the minorities will be protected, they will be part of the government, they will be part of the decision-making process, and they will know that their president is not from the north or the center but is a present of all the Ivorians, without exception.

MS. COOKE: Thank you. I have a final question, and perhaps it relates to that. You know, just the technical difficulties of getting in touch with you today – and I know news crews have been having trouble getting to you. And related to that last point, how – and this is a question from William Bushman at the Joint Staff – “How are you transmitting your message of unity to the residents of Abidjan” – and I think I would add, to the broader country? How much are you able to communicate to Ivorians?

And perhaps related to that, you know, we hear of the ardent Gbagbo supporters in Abidjan and kind of the polarized nature, but you spoke of kind of getting transport workers and so forth. Are there other groups within Côte d'Ivoire that are not so polarized – unions, religious leaders perhaps – that you it's important to reach in terms of mediation, and how able are you to reach out to them?

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Yes. Well, on communication, we have been able to set up a radio at the Golf Hotel, thanks to the support of the many friends and companies, and that radio crosses most of the country. And so we broadcast up to 24 hours a day. That has been – it started about three weeks ago, and that has been quite useful in relaying my messages. And we're working to set up a television. I hope within a week or 10 days we will have also a television at the Golf Hotel.

Of course, we're doing all this but we do work for our stay to be as short as possible at the Golf Hotel. As I said, the benchmark for us –

MS. COOKE: I imagine, yes.

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: – is the end of January.

Now, in terms of the messages, the problem is RTI – which is national television – is really a hate television being broadcast by Mr. Gbagbo, and it insults all those who are not with them; it insults the foreigners in Côte d'Ivoire; it insults all the people from countries outside of Côte d'Ivoire that do not support them, which is almost the world. They insult, of course, daily, France and the United States and so forth and so on.

And so that hate television really is a major problem, and we believe that the United Nations should have authority to stop the broadcasting of a television like that because it's really feeding hate to people, especially to a youth.

Now, in terms of the discussion or negotiations, I met with the religious leaders. I met with a lot of people during the first two weeks after the election until mid-December, and they know – they all know that Mr. Gbagbo lost the elections, and some of them have had the courage to do it – the archbishop of Bouaké, the archbishop of Korhogo, Odiénné and so forth.

They know, but clearly the problem in Côte d'Ivoire is that our society is very, very, very divided, and sometimes even those who know the truth are afraid to say the truth because they could be harassed by the people of Gbagbo; they could be assassinated. And this is a major problem. It's a situation where they use terror to try to get people not to say what they think.

And I can tell you, many people have had – to live – to go to neighboring countries or to France, elsewhere, because they have written articles in the newspaper, and those articles did not please the people of Gbagbo, and they went to their house and destroyed their house, or they went to their house and kidnapped the kids.

So this regime of Mr. Gbagbo is a regime of terror; it's a fascist regime, and I believe that it's important for the world community to help us in a peaceful manner to get him out. And, really, I appreciate this opportunity to speak to all of you.

And I think that Côte d'Ivoire has had really bad luck because Gbagbo got to office in 2000. Some of us felt that it was not a bad idea, because I felt that, well, first, he was running against a military man. I had been excluded from the election, but I said I prefer a civilian to a military. And, secondly, he's from a minority tribe, and I said, well, maybe it's not a bad thing for us to have a minority person as president because in Africa ethnic conflicts are very damaging.

But Mr. Gbagbo has failed. And the fact that he's refusing to recognize the results of this election is just terrible for the country. And I think every step should be taken to really remove him. Obviously I do not want force to be used – if possible, to really get all means except force, but if ultimately force should be used, I think it should be used.

I am a democrat. I have been in this process for more than 10 years, and for many of you who are listening to me, I know you because I was in Washington for many years, and I tell people here in Côte d'Ivoire that I was grown up in a democratic environment, because when I went to the United States I was 20. I grew up in democracy. I know the system of democracy. I know the system of check and balance.

And I really want Côte d'Ivoire to benefit from my experience, and I will do everything for this country to get out of this crisis peacefully and to show that democracy can be implemented in Africa and that this will lead to economic growth, to social growth, and that Africans will be proud to have a country, a continent where it's important to count for the rest of the world.

MS. COOKE: Mr. President, thank you very much for taking time to talk with us. We have a big audience here today – probably 120, 130 –

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Thanks.

MS. COOKE: – many more I think following on the Internet.

MR. : Two-hundred-and-fifty.

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Thank you. Thank you very much.

MS. COOKE: Two-hundred-and-fifty. I'm sorry. I'm corrected – 250 in the room –

MR. : On the Internet.

MS. COOKE: – on the Internet so far. Obviously there is a great deal of attention and focus on this, a lot of debate and discussion here on what added pressures might be brought. And I think everyone here can join me in hoping for a peaceful resolution to this and wishing you luck, but most important in wishing the Ivorians –

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Thank you.

MS. COOKE: – a peaceful 2011, and hopefully an end to this precarious standoff.

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Yes.

MS. COOKE: I do hope we can welcome you back to Washington and to CSIS in person at some point. As you say, the Golf Hotel is very nice but I'm sure you're very anxious to get out at this point.

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Very much. First I want to get fully back to work and really develop and implement my program, and I think Côte d'Ivoire will be a better place, a good place to live in the few years when I'm able to be fully in office.

I really want to thank all of you, to wish you all a happy new year, and to seek your support again and to thank you for your support.

MS. COOKE: Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT OUATTARA: Thank you, madam.

MS. COOKE: Please join me in thanking the president. (Applause.)

(END)