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Cote D'Ivoire: The 'Forgotten Crisis'?

By: Chelsea Plante

It reads like a scantily conceived Hollywood film: A national election in some West African nation goes terribly wrong when the sitting president refuses to vacate his position despite losing at the polls. A bloody standoff between forces loyal to the two candidates ensues, catching thousands in the crossfire and forcing even more to flee and seek refuge. The incumbent is supported by the army while the challenger – and internationally recognized victor of the most recent round of elections – is backed by former rebels and the international community. Contrary to popular (dis)belief, this is no Hollywood film; this was the political situation in Cote D'Ivoire over the last 5 months.

The Elections

Supervised by the United Nations, last year's vote was intended to be one of the last legs of a peace process that began after the country's civil war ended in 2003. Originally set to take place in 2005, it was repeatedly postponed in order to allow the post-war disarmament process to be completed. This meant that Laurent Gbagbo, who had been elected in 2000, continued on as leader of Cote D'Ivoire through a series of one-year extensions. The first official round of elections was held on October 31, 2010, and a second round, in which President Gbagbo faced opposition leader Alassane Ouattara, was held on November 28, 2010.

The election was drawn along ethnic and regional lines as President Gbagbo who has strong support in the south, was pitted against Prime Minister Ouattara whose base of support lies in the north. Violence shaped the pre and post election environment as tensions boiled in this divided West African state. The elections themselves were, however, widely considered to be free and fair.

On December 2, 2010, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) released provisional results showing that Ouattara had won the runoff elections by a margin of more than 350,000 votes. Gbagbo, however, claimed that there were irregularities in the election procedures followed in northern Cote D'Ivoire. As a result, the Constitutional Court – which is heavily controlled by Gbagbo – altered the results of the election, cutting Ouattara's share of the vote from 54% to a losing 49%. Both Gbagbo and Ouattara claimed victory and took the presidential oath of office.

The international community, including the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union, the United States, and former colonial power France confirmed their support for Ouattara and called for Gbagbo to step down.

In the days following the election, however, the incumbent president enacted measures to stifle all forms of dissent. Military officers loyal to Gbagbo shut down local newspapers, began intimidating journalists, and firing into crowds of Ouattara supporters. Clashes between supporters of both men escalated, costing thousands of lives and sparking a mass exodus of Ivoirians into Liberia and Ghana. In this chaotic environment, Ouattara found himself besieged in a hotel.

The Forgotten Crisis?

Humanitarian organizations warned that the conflict might lead to another protracted civil war with severe repercussions for the entire region. Oxfam reported in March that Cote D'Ivoire was becoming a 'forgotten crisis' as world attention lingered on other stories. Commenting on this issue, Tariq Roland Riebl, Oxfam's program manager in Liberia stated; "With over 45,000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in the west of Cote D'Ivoire, up to 300,000 in Abidjan, and over 70,000 refugees in Liberia, the Cote D'Ivoire crisis is extremely serious and requires the international community to respond to this emergency...Whilst current important global events in Libya, North Africa and Japan are attracting the bulk of the media attention at the moment, with serious political and humanitarian dimensions, the international community cannot afford to ignore the deteriorating situation in Cote D'Ivoire and resulting influx of refugees into neighboring countries."

The International Response

Similar to the situation in Libya, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a resolution in March demanding an immediate end to the escalating violence in Cote D'Ivoire. The Resolution, supported by Canada, urges all Ivoirian parties to respect the election of Alassane Ouattara as president, condemns president Gbagbo's decision not to accept Ouattara's election and requests that he step down immediately. The Resolution also places a travel ban and asset freeze on Gbagbo, his wife, and three key aides. On Monday April 5, 2011, the United Nations and French forces opened fire with attack helicopters on Gbagbo's heavy weapons capabilities. The following day, Gbagbo began negotiating his surrender as rival forces laid siege to his residence in Abidjan. After five days of heavy fighting which saw French and UN helicopters firing at targets within the presidential compound, troops loyal to Ouattara captured Gbagbo with the support of French land and air forces.

Pascal Affi N'Guessan, the leader of strongman Gbagbo's party, urged die-hard militants to lay down their arms following Gbagbo's arrest and called for reconciliation on April 16. He read a declaration to the nation stating that the war has ended, and that the people of Ivory Coast must halt all revenge killings and other acts of violence in order for the peace process to run its course. Mr. Ouattara has said that Mr. Gbagbo's safety is assured but that he wants the former strongman tried by both national and international courts for his alleged crimes. The International Criminal Court in The Hague has said it is conducting a preliminary analysis into crimes perpetrated by all side in the conflict.

Further Reading: [Cote D'Ivoire Civilians Seek Refuge in Abidjan Showdown](#), [Ivory Coast Strongman Gbagbo Surrenders After Weeks of Fighting](#), [Ivory Coast Strongman Makes His Final Stand](#), [One Regime Falls But Ivory Coasts Future Still Far From Secure](#), [Ivory Coast: Laurent Gbagbo 'Negotiating Surrender'](#), [Cote D'Ivoire: The Forgotten War](#), [Ivory Coast Massacre Revelation Makes US Deeply Concerned](#)

A Holiday in Afghanistan? Bamiyan Province Ponders Tourism

By: Chelsea Plante

For most, a holiday in Afghanistan would seem dangerous at best. But despite Afghanistan's troubled past, one area of the country is trying to resurrect itself as a center for tourism. Bamiyan Province, almost 3km above sea level, is recognized all over Afghanistan for its exceptional natural beauty and cultural landscape. Last year, Afghanistan's first national park was opened in the Band-e-Amir Valley as a conservation area by the Province's Governor Dr. Habiba Sarabi. "Our province has a lot of potential for tourism," says Dr. Sarabi, "We have different historical sites, and landscape very attractive for tourists."

Following the Bamiyan River, at an altitude of 2500m, the Bamiyan Valley has been nominated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site. Some of the criteria presented by UNESCO for the nomination include, but are not exclusive to:

- The Bamiyan cliffs on the north side of the valley include two colossal niches that used to contain the large standing Buddha figures destroyed by the Taliban in 2001
- The Kakrak Valley caves, some 3km south-east of the Bamiyan cliffs, date from the 6th to 13th centuries
- Shahr-i-Zuhak and Qallai Kaphari consist of fortification walls, towers, and citadels of earthen structures dating from the 6th to 8th centuries
- The Shahr-i-Ghulghulah is a fortified citadel situated on a hill in the center of the valley and dates from the 6th to 10th centuries

Taken together, the landscape and archaeological remains of the Bamiyan Valley exemplify the artistic and religious developments which characterized ancient Bactria from the 1st to 13th centuries, integrating various cultural influences into the school of Buddhist art. The area holds numerous Buddhist sanctuaries and ensembles, as well as several structures from the Islamic period.

With beautiful trails, scenery and mountains, Bamiyan also has the perfect landscape for skiing and mountain sports. Seeing this untapped potential, one entrepreneurial company has decided to develop the region's mountainous landscape. With donations from Switzerland and Italy, they've set up a ski lodge in Bamiyan city for tourists to visit and help support the local economy. "To start skiing with all the problems we have in Afghanistan may seem absurd, but it's also a local development project, a travel agent that we have helped to grow. We've made sure that we have real income for the economy," says Ferdinando Rollan, an Italian ski instructor in Bamiyan City.

Skiing in Afghanistan can be traced back to the 1960s, but up to this point, it has been the pastime of foreigners looking to get away from the commotion of Kabul. So when he is not taking out a group of tourists, Ferdinando gives lessons to local boys and girls keen to learn how to master the mountains and have fun. "I'm a fully qualified mountain guide, so we offer children an introduction to skiing. We have classes for kids, who are not in school this season, where we teach the basics of skiing," says Ferdinando. The lodge is hoping that more donations for equipment combined with a stable security situation in Bamiyan will attract tourists from within Afghanistan and outside the country to come to this unique destination.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, there were several commercial flights to Bamiyan each week with about 65,000 tourists coming to the region each year. But after 30 years of war and destruction and a further decline in tourism as a result of the 2001 destruction of the Buddhist statues, flights are scarce and local roads are in bad condition. Furthermore, the journey from Kabul carries the risk of improvised explosive devices and hijacking by insurgents looking for cash. Accommodations in the area are poor and, although Taliban activity in the region is significantly lower than in other parts of the country, security cannot be guaranteed.

In light of this, the Governor has pledged to build new and secure roads over the next few years. UNESCO has also unveiled plans to preserve the site of the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan and have recommended that two statues be fully rebuilt in replica. "If we have good security in the highways for tourists, I am 100% sure that we will have thousands of tourists here every month," says Bamiyan director of Culture and Information, Mohammad Ibrahim Akbary.

Further Reading: [UNESCO Plans Museum Complex for Bamiyan Buddha Site](#), [Afghanistan: Undaunted, Bamiyan Province Ponders Tourism Possibilities](#), [Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley](#), [Tourism in Bamiyan](#), [Afghan Buddha Province Hopes to Attract Skiers](#)

An Update on the Libyan Conflict: More Moammar, More Problems

Tom Aagaard

One month after the start of Western intervention in Libya the conflict seems to be edging dangerously close to stalemate. The rebels, under the leadership of the Benghazi-based National Transitional Council, control the eastern third of the country but appear incapable of advancing the main front line past Ajdabiya due to superior government forces and supply line overextension. Conversely, Col. Muammar Gaddafi's forces appear incapable of traversing the wide-open desert spaces between cities without being decimated by NATO airstrikes. Misratah, the country's third largest city and strategically important deep-water port, is holding out as the rebel's only major stronghold in the west despite three weeks of siege and punishing bombardments. On Monday the Libyan government promised the United Nations access through a "humanitarian corridor" to the city. However the Libyan government refused to promise a temporary ceasefire for the mission and appeared hostile to the proposed European Union escort force. Currently the port remains open but ships delivering goods and extracting immigrant workers must run a gauntlet of government fire. The most surprising news as of late was the announcement that rebels had taken the town of Wazin, a town on Libya's western border – as far from the front line as possible – forcing the defending pro-Gaddafi soldiers, reportedly including a general, to turn themselves in at the Tunisian border post.

Last week featured two important NATO meetings concerning Libya. The first was the April 13 meeting of the NATO Contact Group on Libya in Doha, Qatar. This was convened following the rebels' rejection of an African Union peace proposal which was deemed unacceptable as it allowed Gaddafi to remain in office. The closed-door meeting brought together top-level representatives from the UN, NATO, AU, Arab League, Organization of the Islamic Conference, EU, and other interested parties to discuss a solution to the Libyan crisis. The Contact Group appeared unanimous in its denunciation of Gaddafi's regime as illegitimate and pledged to continue offering the rebels material support (in the form of food, fuel, communications equipment, etc.) but split over the issue of NATO providing actual arms. The rebel forces appeared unconcerned with this impasse given reports of bilateral arms transfers. The Contact Group also agreed to establish a "trust fund" where donations could be easily and directly made to the Transitional National Council. In addition to fighting, the TNC requires large funds to maintain basic government services in the area it occupies, a situation only partially alleviated by Qatar's recent sale of oil exported out of Benghazi on the international market. Some participants suggested that Gaddafi's frozen financial assets could be channeled into the fund, a move reportedly met by opposition from German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwell who questioned its legality.

The next day saw Foreign Ministers from NATO countries convene in Berlin for a two day conference covering a variety of issues. The allies reaffirmed their commitment to implementing UN Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 1973 on Libya and their military aims: an end to all attacks on civilians, the return of all government military forces to base, and open access for humanitarian organizations. While officials have been wary of using the term "regime change," Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen restated NATO's commitment to fight as long as a threat to civilians existed and stated "it is impossible to imagine that threat disappear with Qaddafi in power," – a position reiterated by the French, British, and American leaders in an open letter published in several major international newspapers.

While the summit may have demonstrated a "unity of purpose," it also highlighted the major tensions among the Alliance partners about the scale and depth of intervention. Initially the intervention, under the code-name Operation Odyssey Dawn, was US-lead and American air assets conducted the majority of the sorties. On the March 31, command was handed over to NATO, with Canadian Lt. General Charles Bouchard in charge, and the US withdrew from offensive operations – although it has continued to attack ground forces threatening Alliance aircraft. Of twenty-eight full members, only fourteen are participating in the air and sea operation plus the addition of Sweden, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Of this number, only six, France, Denmark, Belgium, Norway, Canada, and the UK, are conducting ground strikes. This is important since the rebel forces rely on NATO air power to prevent being overrun by Gaddafi's armored support and have repeatedly requested more air support. The UK and France, who have been shouldering the majority of this burden since the American withdrawal, have been vocal in demanding more assistance in the role but their overtures, particularly to the US and Italy, were rebuffed at the Berlin Conference last week. Their frustration has grown as rebel demands have become more insistent, their reserves of precision-guided munitions dwindle, and their allies continue to fly air patrols against an air force that has been decimated.

Most sorely missed are the American A-10 and AC-130, aircraft designed specifically for close-air support. While the aircraft currently being flown have proven very effective in the interdiction role – destroying government tanks, trucks, and artillery as they advance on rebel-held towns – they tend to fly fast and high with large munitions. These characteristics greatly raise the chances of collateral damage making them essentially unusable once government forces actually penetrate an urban area. Despite some media reports to the contrary, both France and Great Britain possess attack helicopters and have previously deployed them in Afghanistan. These aircraft are ideally suited for the operation. However; one of the surprises of this conflict has been the appearance of SA-24 surface-to-air missiles in Libyan hands. These are small, highly capable missiles designed to be carried and fired by a single man. So far they have only appeared in the truck-mounted version in Libya – a move that allowed the Russian manufacturer to skirt the convention on reporting the export of this type of missile. While their limited range prevents them from threatening high-flying aircraft, they present enough of a threat to severely discourage deployment of helicopters and more low-flying aircraft to support the rebels.

Perhaps the biggest recent development occurred on April 19, when British Foreign Minister William Hague announced the UK would be sending military advisors to the rebel command in Benghazi stating, "[t]hey will advise the National Transitional Council on how to improve their military organizational structures, communications and logistics,

including how best to distribute humanitarian aid and deliver medical assistance," but stressing that they would neither arm nor train the rebels. France and Italy made similar statements shortly after. While France insists its officers are going to help organize the protection of civilians, Italy explicitly stated that its contingent of ten men would be going to help train rebel soldiers. Despite these announcements, all countries firmly restated that they had no intention of deploying ground combat forces.

Further reading: [NATO Struggles for Consensus on Libya](#), [NATO Showing Strain over Approach to Libya](#), [Misrata: City Under Siege](#), [U.K. to Send Military Advisors to Benghazi to Aid Libyan Rebels](#), [Libya: Rebels 'capture Wazin post' on Tunisian Border](#)

The NATO-Russia Council meets in Berlin

Chelsea Plante

The foreign ministers of the NATO-Russian Council (NRC) met in Berlin on April 15 for the first NRC session after the Lisbon Summit. In his opening address, NRC Chairman and NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated; "Our meeting in Berlin today is an important stepping stone on the way to the true strategic partnership we pledged to develop together in Lisbon. Day by day we are building this modernized relationship for the 21st Century, because we know that by acting together, we can do more for international security." Among the topics discussed during this meeting were the current conflicts in Libya and Afghanistan as well as the issues of international terrorism and missile defence.

On Libya, NATO allies reaffirmed the points agreed to during the recent Doha Contact Group meeting, the most fundamental of which being that Col. Qadhafi has lost all legitimacy and should relinquish his power over Libya. In order to precipitate this outcome, members of the NRC agreed to maintain a high operational tempo against legitimate military targets and to exert pressure on the Qadhafi regime to the point that the following objectives have been met. First, all attacks and threats of attack against civilians and civilian-populated areas must end. Second, the regime must withdraw all military and para-military forces from populated areas that have been occupied. Finally, the regime must permit immediate, full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all people in Libya who are in need of assistance. This statement is significant in that point all 28 NATO allies, plus the six partner states, were able to agree on a very explicit set of objectives, making it clear that military operations will continue until those goals are met.

The primary focus of the session on Afghanistan was the handover of responsibility of security to the Afghan authorities and maintaining a lasting partnership with Afghanistan. In addition to representatives from NATO member states and the Afghan Foreign Minister, participants included representatives from the United Nations, the European Union, and the 21 non-NATO states that have provided troops to the ISAF mission. During this session, Secretary General Rasmussen emphasized that NATO's cooperation with Afghanistan will not cease following the end of combat operations. Rather, it was stressed that the Alliance is committed under the framework of an enduring partnership to provide support to Afghanistan and its security institutions throughout the transition phase and beyond 2014.

During the meeting, the NRC also approved an updated NRC Action Plan on Terrorism. The updated Plan builds on the NRC Joint Review of 21st Century Common Security Challenges that was adopted by NRC Heads of State and Government in Lisbon and increases the scope of cooperation in the fight against terrorism. The NRC agreed to enhance its capabilities to act, individually and jointly, in three critical areas: preventing terrorism, combating terrorist activities, and managing the consequences of terrorist attacks. Additionally, given the transnational character of terrorist threats, the NRC agreed to complement efforts by the United Nations.

Although progress was made in most areas at the meeting, there remained a critical rift between NATO and Russia on the issue of missile defence. Russia insists on a missile defence system that excludes mutual targeting. At the same time, NATO continues to advocate two separate missile defence systems in Europe – one for NATO and one for Russia. "We are thinking about two systems that will cooperate and exchange information to make us more secure," Fogh Rasmussen said. A joint center for coordinating everything that concerns missile defence has also been proposed. However, when it comes to NATO-Russian relations, missile defence is sure to be a slow, tedious and cumbersome progression.

Further Reading: [Lavrov Eases Libya Stance but NATO Rift Stays](#), [Meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Berlin](#), [NATO Ministers Pledge Support for Afghanistan Beyond 2014](#), [NATO's Berlin Ministerial](#), [Statement on Libya following the working lunch of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs with non-NATO contributors to Operation Unified Protector](#), [NATO-Russia Council Action Plan on Terrorism](#), [Collective European Missile Defence in the Offing](#)



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