Cote D'Ivoire: National Interest and Humanitarian Intervention

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Abstract. *Overtime, resurgent global concern for human rights regarding life, property, security, peace and freedom became a 'popular' ground for justifying international intervention in the domestic matters of supposedly independent states. Though it is dangerous and even fruitless to justify war and its concomitant negative appurtenances, recent developments cast serious doubts upon the claim of global humanitarianism as the primary justification for intervention in local conflicts. While the international community under the aegis of the United Nations Organization (UNO) barely hesitated before intervening in Iraq, twice, in less than two decades and in Libya and Cote D'Ivoire very recently, on-going conflicts characterized by abysmal human carnage and material destruction in places like Syria and Egypt are yet to receive similar international response. This double-standard approach to conflict management and resolution inevitably leads one to opine that beyond global humanitarianism, more fundamental considerations bordering on the national interest of powerful states are crucial to international interventions in local conflicts. In this light, this paper seeks to contextualize the place of national interest and global humanitarianism in the international military intervention in the Cote D'Ivoire Civil War of 2010-2011.*

Keywords: *Globalism, National Interest, Humanitarian Intervention, Cote D'Ivoire Civil War.*

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Introduction / Setting The Context

Historically, national interest has been the fulcrum of the foreign policy principles and actions of modern states. National interest is a very broad term such that it is rather very difficult to define. The global community of scholars has been unable to create a generally accepted definition of the concept of national interest, thus the perception and understanding of the meaning and significance of national interest in inter-state relations varies among the many users of the term. The Merriam-Webster

Dictionary defines national interest as "the interest of a nation as a whole held to be an independent entity separate from the interests of subordinate areas or groups and also of other nations or supranational groups" (Merriam-Webster, 2013). National interest has also been defined as "any action that gives an advantage to the state". In another sense, national interest connotes the "vital interests" of a state, a phrase that sometimes accommodates nearly everything in the world. A good illustration of this perception of national interest is the widespread view that the United States of America (USA) must provide leadership in virtually every crisis and conflict on account of the numerous interests the country supposedly has in the surrounding region that the conflict threatens. We may go on and on with an endless rendition of the different shades of the definition of the concept, but the bottom line is that each government has its own definition of the national interest. That definition may be correct or not; it, however, determines the kind of foreign policy the country operates. Above all, the interest of a nation is to satisfy national needs, and, therefore, national interests are objective, and there are as many national interests as national needs (Larison, 2013; Kaplan, 1961; Nuechhterlein, 1976). This indeed provides the breeding ground for a conflict of interests over diverse issues between and amongst nation-states within the international political system.

Globalism as a concept also reflects various meanings. To some observers, globalism is "a national geopolitical policy in which the entire world is regarded as the appropriate sphere for a state's influence" (Houghton Mifflin, 2000). Some view it as "the policy or doctrine of involving one's country in international affairs, alliances, etc." (Random House). Some others see it as "a national policy of treating the whole world as a proper sphere for political influence" (Merriam – Webster, 2013). The Oxford American Dictionary defines globalism as the "advocacy of the interpretation of planning of economic and foreign policy in relation to events and developments throughout the world". The most extreme forms of expression of globalism involves the usage of phrases such as "one world", "support for a single world government", "world citizen or global citizen", (Conservapedia, 2013; Oxford University Press, 2011). The conceptualization of globalism also involves the theory of a "global economy" in which the economic achievements and wellbeing of most if not all nation-states are interdependent upon those of other states due to international trade (Conservapedia, 2013). Scholars like Manfred Steger et al., and Paul Turpin to a lesser degree, view globalism as the ideology of globalization, that is, a term for the discourse advancing the political and economic processes of globalization. In the words of Turpin:

> *Substantively, the content of globalism is the reemergence and increasing political dominance of ideas concerned with the individualism and market mechanism, characteristic of early liberalism, whose central goal is to eliminate protectionist tariffs and roll back much of the social program of the modern welfare state in the name of governmental fiscal austerity* (Steger *et al.*, 2004; Turpin, 2013).

Despite the multiplicity of scholarly views on the concept of globalism, a solid deduction from the above discussion is that globalism is an integral component of globalization, which itself generally connotes the process by which domestic and local phenomena can transform into international and global phenomena.

Let us turn to the concept of humanitarian intervention. In December 2001, the report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) was published. In September 2003, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the report and in April 2006 the UN Security Council (UNSC) via resolution 1674 re-affirmed the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine. One of the cardinal principles of that report is germane to the theoretical conceptualization of humanitarian interventionism and, therefore, needs to be presented here:

> *States sovereignty implies responsibility, and the primary responsibility for the protection of its people lies with the state itself. Where a population is suffering serious harm as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principles of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.* (ICISS, 2001; Lar, 2007/2008)

The prime significance of the above declaration is that the UN legitimized the norm of military intervention by one or more states in local conflicts in another state on the grounds of protecting human rights whenever necessary, albeit under certain modalities outlined by the world body.

If the UN's "Responsibility to Protect" document prescribed the circumstances that should warrant international intervention in local conflicts of sovereign states, what exactly does humanitarian intervention mean?. Although there exists quite a number of scholarly definitions of the concept, however, for the purpose of this present study, it connotes the threat or use of force across state borders by a state or group of states aimed at averting or halting widespread and grave violations of fundamental human rights of individuals other than its own citizens, without the permission of the state within whose territory force is applied (Holzgrefe, 2003).

Within the crucible of conceptual clarifications above, and using the 2010-2011 Cote D' Ivoire conflict as case study, this paper will argue that although the principle of humanitarian interventionism as a framework for protecting fundamental human rights during local conflicts has become a logical reality in the contemporary international system, in practice it is a mere pawn in the political, diplomatic and strategic chess game amongst the big powers. The paper argues that the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine of the current global order is being operated by the super powers along the lines of deceitful discrimination in terms of where and when to intervene in local conflicts. We argue further that this double – standard approach to conflict management and resolution is informed by the desire of powerful states to protect and advance (their) key economic

and strategic interests in and around the theatres of conflict with little or no regard for international norms such as common humanity, global humanitarianism, and even the "Responsibility to Protect". The paper concludes that these aforestated standards of international behavior of states, if properly applied, will complement and strength other existing international mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, resolution and peacebuilding. The study proceeds in five sections, namely (a) Introduction / Setting the Context, (b) Background and Outbreak of the Second Cote D'Ivoire Civil War, (c) International Response to the Ivorian Conflict: Global Humanitarianism or National Interest, and (d) Conclusion.

Background and Outbreak of the Second Cote D'Ivoire Civil War

Recall that prior to the conflict under consideration, Cote D'Ivoire had fought a civil war between the incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo and the rebel group under the name New Forces of Cote D'Ivoire, who were at the forefront of the resistance by Muslim Northerners against alleged discrimination by the politically dominant and largely Christian Southerners from September 2002 to late 2004. However, considerable tension remained in the country until the Linas – Marcoussis Peace agreement to end the conflict was signed on 4th March 2007. After several extensions of the transition timeline, elections were eventually held in October, 2010. Renewed tension and violence resumed on 24th February, 2011 following President Gbagbo's rejection of the election results (on account of alleged widespread irregularities in the rebel – held North) that declared Northern candidate Allassane Ouattara winner and President – Elect. In response to the support and recognition given to Ouattara by the international community, particularly the UN, African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union (EU), United States of America (USA), and Cote D' Ivory's erstwhile colonial master, France, Gbagbo had on 18th December, 2010 ordered all UN peacekeepers (earlier deployed during the previous conflict) to leave the country. The UN declined and instead, extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Cote D' Ivories (UNOCI) to 30th June, 2011 (Fox News, 2010; Wikipedia, 2013).

Nonetheless, diplomatic efforts to settle the dispute recorded very little success. Thus, sporadic bouts of violence that emerged especially in Abidjan, in the wake of the disputed election escalated by early 2011. As an illustration, in western Cote D'Ivoire at the close of February fighting erupted between pro – Ouattara fighters and regime forces. In consequence, a number of towns were taken over by the New Forces in quick succession. On 25th Feburary, they seized Zouan Hounien and Binhauye (near Liberia), on 7th March claimed nearby Touleplev, on 12th March captured Doke, while Blolequin fell on 21st March. On 28th March, the New Forces, under a new name – Republican Forces of Cote D'Ivoire (RFCI) launched a total onslaught against Gbagbo's forces and supporters across the country resulting in the capture of towns like Daloa and Duekoue in the West as well as Bondoukav and Abengourou near Ghana in the East. By 31st March,

Cote d'Ivoire's administrative capital, Yamaussoukro, the western town of Soubre, the port city of San Pedro (world's biggest cocoa exporting outlet) and the coastal town of Sassandra had all fallen to the RFCI while Gbagbo was arrested the following month (BBC, 2011; Daily Times, 2011; Vasilenkov, 2012).

From the preceding discussion on the background to the Second Ivorian Civil War, we can deduce that political, ethnic and religious differences were major precipitating factors in the outbreak of the conflict. However, it is apposite to point out that economic issues also constituted an important underlying factor in the conflict. Cote d' Ivoire, hitherto seen as a model African state in terms of political stability and economic progress lapsed into an acute political and economic crisis after 1998. The implacable economic crisis, ignited largely by a sharp plunge in the international prices of primary goods and the corruption of the patrimonialism system of the Parte democratic de Cote'Ivoire (PDCI) one – party government, greatly undermined the country's national unity and integration. The increasing problem of national indebtedness made the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to impose a structural adjustment program (SAP) alongside its vicious austerity policy in return for financial aid. These policies had a debilitating impact on the workings of the state and society as well as on the standard of living of the majority of the people. It is significant to note that limited opportunities to access resources such as land, coupled with the problem of unemployment were factors that further deepened conflict between the supposed indigenous inhabitants and African economic immigrants in both the urban and rural areas of Cote d'Ivoire (Bovcon, 2009).

Moving forward, there is need to note that France has played a crucial role in shaping the political and socio-economic structure of Cote d'Ivoire since early 20th Century. As Gonnin puts it: "The common history of the people of Cote d'Ivoire as a single entity only began with the arrival of Europeans… in particular, French colonizers (Gonnin, 1998). Along the same line, Marshall-Fratani posits that the freeing up of labour and it's subsequent categorization and compartmentalization, encompassing the creation of a hierarchy of ethnic categories among the local population, has been an all – important process of capitalist development and lies at the heart of the modern state. In the light of this, one cannot but allude to the view of Bovcon that France is partially culpable for the intractable Ivorian conflict (Marshall-Fratani, 2006; Bovcon, 2009).

This leads us to the issue concerning the role of economic globalization in the Ivorian conflict. A cursory look at the socio-economic condition prevalent in one of the forest regions of Cote d'Ivoire where the country's over one million cocoa farmers live would further illuminate causation regarding the outbreak of fighting again in 2011. For one thing, the deeply unfair international economic order that pays the Ivorian cocoa producers a pittance for their produce created communities bedeviled by acute unemployment and poverty, and a people ever prepared to fight one another over scarce resources. In this scenario, giant global commercial outfits such as the American Agri-

business cooperation, Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), and Switzerland's Barry Colabout constitute a major part of the problem. This is better understood when one acknowledges the fact that Cote d'Ivoire is the world's leading producer of cocoa accounting for 35% of World production, and that many big global industries are cocoa-based. Aside the cocoa based corporations, a large number of big, medium and small French enterprises have always been active players in various sectors of the Ivorian economy. Examples of big French firm with access to big contracts in the country include Bougues (electricity and water), France Telecom (Telecommunication) or Bollore (transport) etc. To put it straight, France remains the leading economic partner of Cote d'Ivorie (Bovcon, 2009).

Back to the cocoa industry, the grievances of the Ivorian farmers are legion. First, they frown at a situation whereby Cargill, ADM, Barry Collabout and others purchased their produce at unstable rates far below the world price. Second, they had to pay huge taxes to the corrupt government of Gbagbo. The small farmers had to pay bribes at the numerous roadblocks that traversed the highway all the way down to the port at Abidjan. The farmers suffered from the dearth of financing at affordable interest rates as well as technological assistance. Added to these woes is the fact that the farmers live in rudimentary homes constructed of wood or bamboo, a complete misfit for people whom since the early 1900s have been the rubric of what has transformed into a multibillion-dollar global industry. They have neither a health clinic, nor a pharmacy, let alone a hospital, and their only school is a product of self-help. Yet, the Ivorian government, and Cargill, ADM and other big global enterprises continued to reap huge benefits in terms of tax revenues and profits respectively.

The entrenched crisis in the cocoa industry served as a major causative factor in the Ivorian conflict in at least two respects. In the first instance, abysmal poverty and socio-economic stagnation enthroned an atmosphere of serious discontent and aggressiveness among the people. Secondly, the ethnic frictions in the cocoa industry provided unscrupulous politicians with the opportunity to aggravate an already bad situation, for their personal ends. To elaborate, it is noteworthy that some selfish and unethical politicians exploited the economic crisis that began in the late 1980s to their own advantage at the expense of national peace and integration. Since they did not intend or were unable to challenge or stave off the exploitative international economic structures erected by capitalist globalism that constituted the fundamental basis of the problem, they resorted to the strategy of mobilizing their own ethnic followership by scapegoating and mudslinging others. As Ivorians are normally able to distinguish one another's ethnic origin by appearance, dressing and name, conflict began to brew in the racially mixed rural settlements and in the surrounding localities of Abidjan. The above discussion represents a picture of the socio-economic and political setting in Cote d'Ivoire on the eve of the outbreak of the Second Ivorian civil war.

International Military Intervention in the Cote d' Ivoire Civil War: Global Humanitarianism or National Interest?

The international community responded to the Ivorian crisis in divergent ways. However, our discourse in this section will focus on the interventionist actions and inactions of the big actors, particularly France, USA, Britain, Russia, China and the UN.

By April 2011, the conflict had deteriorated so much that about three thousand persons had died, about a million had become refugees, while almost the entire population lived under deplorable human rights conditions. Evidence indicate that both the Gbagbo regime forces and those of the new president, Allassane Ouattara were culpable for inciting the conflict, and guilty of human rights violations including extra – judicial killings, rape and torture, etc. (Vasilenkov, 2012. In response, France and the UN launched a joint military intervention in the country with the stated objective of protecting lives and property and reversing the deteriorating human rights situation. As part of an alleged peacekeeping mission, the joint interventionist force attacked the presidential palace, captured Gbagbo and handed him over to the supporters of Ouattara.

However, on the basis of available evidence, France's claim of humanitarian concerns as the reason for intervening in Cote d'Ivoire is unconvincing. Indeed, France's intervention in the conflict can be better understood within the national interest context of foreign policy analysis vis a vis her age-old opportunistic and corrupted African policy. Historically, a major aspect of France's relations with her Francophone African allies has been in the realm of military and defense pacts. Since 1960 till date, France has operated at least twenty – three military technical assistance agreements and eight defense agreements with the Francophone African States as a unit and with some states such as Zaire, Zimbabwe, Burundi and Rwanda that are traditionally not part of her sphere of Influence within the continent. France has at least 8,650 soldiers deployed across Cote d'Ivoire, Central Africa Republic (CAR), Chad, Djibouti, Gabon, Senegal and Rwanda. About 960 French military advisers operate in twenty-three other African countries. Aside it's numerous military bases in Africa (now gradually being phased out) France had since 1983 established a Rapid Deployment Force (*Force d'Action Rapide*) comprised of five units aggregating 44,500 soldiers with the capacity to intervene at short notice in any part of Africa from its operational bases in France. Significantly, this elaborate mechanism of military and defense pacts has allowed France to intervene in Africa more than thirty-three times in about five decades since 1963. There is need to emphasize that these overwhelming military presence in Africa has been defined largely by the extent of France's economic and strategic interests, the number of French residents, and the network between her and the filling national elites. This explains why states such as Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Togo, Cameroun and Gabon that maintain very close defense and security ties with France are by coincidence the places were French's economic interests are most visible. In other words, France holds dealings more with major African

states where her economic interests are met. Without any doubt, the French – enforced political stability in many African countries over time has guaranteed France's access to the national wealth and resources of such states.

Cote d'Ivoire, in particular, is of maximum economic and geostrategic importance to France. Cote d'Ivoire is the economic powerhouse of Francophone West Africa and an immigration pull for less developed states in the hinterland. In addition, despite the sudden change in France-Cote d'Ivoire relations during the conflict, coupled with Gbagbo's propaganda alleging French neo-colonialism, France remained Cote d'Ivoire's foremost business partner. Hundreds of big, medium and small French companies continued to thrive in the country, accounting for about 30% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 50% of fiscal revenue. A protracted war in Cote d'Ivoire was bound to have a pernicious effect upon the entire West African sub-region or beyond, and by extension France's economic and strategic interests there (Bovcon, 2009). It is the contention of this writer that France intervened in Cote d'Ivoire in 2011 to avert a long-drawn conflict thus protecting her massive commercial and strategic interests in the region, using UN support as diplomatic cover and humanitarian interventionism as justification.

The UN itself came under criticism for its role in the conflict. While the military intervention lasted, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed open skepticism about the activities of the French forces in Cote d'Ivoire. Also, he declared his country's demand for an explanation as to why the UN soldiers engaged local law enforcement agencies in armed conflict, despite the mandate of impartiality. The UN has also been criticized for its opinion that the civil war was unleashed by the Gbagbo couple and also for taking sides in the conflict. According to an expert on West Africa and a member of Amnesty International, Gaetan Mutu: "both sides were guilty of inciting the conflict". The UN unilaterally identified the perpetrators, which is fundamentally wrong" (Vasilenkov, 2012).

The USA, United Kingdom (UK) and Germany, granted formal recognition to the new government of Allasana Ouattara. The USA also clapped international trade and financial sanctions on Gbagbo, his wife Sinone, and his close associates. In addition, the USA offered Gbagbo a "dignified exit", employment and residence abroad on the condition that he stepped down (BBC News Africa, 2011). It is significant to note that the UNSC permanent members, namely, USA, UK, Russia, France and China easily reached a 'rare consensus' to dismiss the validity of the Ivorian Constitutional Council's declaration of Gbagbo as winner of the disputed election and authorize an armed intervention in the conflict. The basis for this unanimity can be located in the fact that none of the big powers had economic and strategic interests which an international military intervention in Cote d'Ivoire could jeopardize substantially. Conversely, the international intervention was mutually beneficial to big power interests. This viewpoint is better appreciated when one considers the discordant tunes currently being played by the big powers at the UNSC over the protracted and deteriorating Syrian conflict that has

recorded human casualties and human rights violations that are far beyond what occurred in Cote d'Ivoire.

Conclusion

We have shown in this paper that beyond anything else (humanitarian interventionism and the Responsibility to Protect inclusive), the strongest pull factor for international military intervention in the Second Cote d'Ivoire civil war was the combined forces of economic globalism and the national economic and strategic interests of powerful states, particularly France and the USA. In Cote d'Ivoire (like in Libya and Mali) it was very easy for the international community under the aegis of the UN to agree to intervene decisively on the platform of common humanity and the Responsibility to Protect because there were no fundamental differences among the big powers in terms of their strategic calculations in the Ivorian conflict. Whereas in Syria, where President Bashir Al-Assad continues to preside over the slaughter of tens of thousands of persons and some of the worst human rights violations ever known in modern history, the international community continues to vacillate simply because the strategic calculations of the western powers, the USA, UK and France are opposed to those of Russia and China. This double standard and 'discriminatory' approach to conflict management and resolution is gradually but consistently giving the UN the toga of a biased umpire in global affairs. The UN conflict management and resolution mechanism would function better and the world would become safer and more peaceful if the Responsibility to Protect doctrine is operated as a standard and 'constant' framework for international response to local conflicts in order to protect human lives, property and rights, instead of being applied in a 'discriminatory' manner according to big power interests.

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