

### Liberia's Foreign Minister Says Ivorian Crisis Threatens Regional Security

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Washington, DC — With the African Union (AU) intensifying efforts to resolve the ongoing political stalemate in Cote d'Ivoire, concern is growing about the widening impact of the crisis. In the wake of presidential elections, clashes have spread within Cote d'Ivoire and refugees are pouring into neighboring Liberia.(...)

(...) "The decision to mount another mission supported by an expert group was made by consensus," according to Liberian Foreign Minister Togo McIntosh, who accompanied President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to the closed-door summit session in Addis Ababa. "That meeting gave us some confidence that the cracks we had seen in the preceding two weeks were disappearing and that Africa could once again speak with one voice on the issue," he said in an interview in Washington.(...)

(...) However, the united African front was dented this week when Ecowas president James Victor Gbeho of Ghana complained that the presence of a South African naval replenishment ship in waters off Cote d'Ivoire could encourage Gbagbo to hold onto power. The charge was dismissed by South Africa's ambassador to Nigeria, Kingsley Mamabolo, who told AFP "there is nothing amiss about the vessel," which he said could be used to evacuate civilians or host negotiations and was not on a military mission.

His comments reflect the view that South Africa, along with Angola, Cape Verde, Gambia, Uganda and Zimbabwe have been tilting in favor of Gbagbo. Those governments viewed as backing Ouattara include Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya and Burkina Faso.(...)

(...) President Johnson Sirleaf has also played an influential role behind the scenes, her foreign minister said. She was asked to be a member of the first Ecowas delegation to Abidjan but decided to participate in other ways, he said, including being constantly engaged by telephone. He said the views she presented during the AU summit debate were well received by the leaders taking part. Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire's other next-door neighbors - Sierra Leone, Guinea - have been among the strongest backers of negotiations, along with Ghana, Libya, Congo, Gabon, Cameroun and Tanzania.

The impact of the Ivorian crisis on Liberia has been significant, and the toll is rising. The flow of Ivoirians fleeing across the border began as soon as tensions rose, immediately after the election results were announced. Well over 30,000 refugees are spread among more than two-dozen Liberian villages, according to UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency. (...)

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