

Ivory Coast Needs Economic Lifeline The Australian Alex Bellamy 13 April 2011 The belated removal of Laurent Gbagbo, defeated at the polls last November, signals another welcome step towards realising the **responsibility to protect** principle.

Ivory Coast

's recent past provides a cautionary tale about the complexities of protecting populations from harm. Its future remains in the balance.

After independence, Ivory Coast flourished. The world's largest exporter of cocoa, its economy grew rapidly, attracting hundreds of thousands of foreign workers. But a combination of mismanagement, poor governance and the catastrophic decline of cocoa prices produced an economic downturn that prompted the regime to shore up its rule by playing sectarian politics.

Violence came in 2002 when the mainly Muslim north rebelled. France and the UN stepped in quickly to enforce a ceasefire and police an uneasy truce. After a power-sharing deal in 2007, international pressure forced the government to hold the elections in November last year.

International monitors declared opposition leader Alassane Ouattara victor of a largely free and fair election. But Gbagbo refused to go. The EU, the US and China formally recognised Ouattara as the president. The UN Security Council called for Gbagbo to step down and imposed sanctions. The Nigerian-led regional grouping ECOWAS, which had invaded Liberia to take on Charles Taylor in the 1990s, sent a delegation to Abidjan, threatening intervention.

Gbagbo stood his ground, and ECOWAS blinked. Chastened by heavy losses in Liberia and facing challenges at home - Nigeria had little stomach for another war. With few options, the UN pursued mediation. Fourteen rounds were attempted. Behind the scenes, though, French and UN officials were courting a military solution.

With world attention fixed on Libya, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1975 on March 30. The seemingly innocuous resolution demanded that Gbagbo step down and reiterated that UN peacekeepers in Ivory Coast were mandated to use "all necessary means" to protect civilians. (...)

(...)This was not as unprecedented as the UN's activism in Libya. The UN has authorised force to support recognised governments before, such as in Sierra Leone in 2000. But, as in Libya, decisive action in Ivory Coast was premised on the need to protect civilians, lending further weight to the idea that the "

responsibility to protect

" has become more than just fine words. (...)

(...)Much depends on whether Ouattara is a genuine reformer. The new government needs to be careful about how it treats Gbagbo and his followers. For all his sins, the former president won 46 per cent of the vote in November, suggesting that many will be unhappy he has gone.

Almost a decade of sectarian strife has opened up deep divisions that will not be easily healed. Ouattara will need to establish a government of national unity that includes his former enemies while retaining his fractious friends. Disaffected soldiers are a recipe for future chaos. A new national army must include much of the old army.

The new regime should think hard about prosecuting Gbagbo and about who is best placed to do it, not least because it, too, has blood on its hands. Earlier this month, Ouattara's forces massacred at least 300 people in Duekoue, a Gbagbo stronghold. Ouattara promised an international investigation and he should follow through on his word by inviting the International Criminal Court to investigate and prosecute all suspected cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity. (...)

(...)Technical support is just as important as money here. Ivorians need their livelihoods back, and quickly. Foreign aid is a short-term panacea, but if directed at establishing self-sufficiency it can help to lift incomes, improve health and strengthen education, which in turn minimise ethnic divisions. Getting the cocoa business going again will be critical. (...)

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