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## Restoring Peace to Ivory Coast

West Africa is facing another disastrous civil war. Ivory Coast, once a beacon of relative stability and wealth, is split across the middle, convulsed by mercenary gang killings reminiscent of recent conflicts in neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone. If the situation deteriorates further, the entire region could be imperiled. As the world's biggest cocoa producer, Ivory Coast remains central to West Africa's economy.

France, which likes to describe its policy toward its former colonies as "neither interference nor indifference," is being forced into direct involvement. It has intervened with 2,500 soldiers and a vow to bring the conflict to an end. The warring sides have been wooed to a sports complex south of Paris for a closed, marathon negotiating session that began on Wednesday and is scheduled to end with a meeting of West African heads of state. To succeed, the French will need fortitude, a clear political plan — and perhaps support from the United States and other allies.

The current crisis began last September when the main rebel movement took over the north, leaving the south in the hands of Laurent Gbagbo, the president who won a tainted election in 2000. But the situation has been some years in the making. Ivory Coast is the victim of its own success. The thriving cocoa industry drew in millions of foreign workers, most of them Muslim. Their presence threatened the Ivoirians already there, most of whom are Christian or animist. This led them to promote the notion of Ivoirité, or Ivoirian-ness. Under this concept, which was soon enshrined into law, both parents have to be Ivoirian for someone to qualify for citizenship. This effectively leaves 30 percent of the country's residents as second-class citizens.

Mr. Gbagbo has used the citizenship doctrine to maintain his grip on power. The rebels are demanding early elections and a revision to the identity laws. Their complaints are legitimate but their methods deplorable.

Over the coming days, the French mediators will try to gain agreement on a timetable for elections, perhaps through a referendum. The goal must be to rid the country of the unreasonable citizenship qualifications and produce a more representative and inclusive form of government as well as reformed land ownership laws.