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Ivory Coast Army Rejects Power-Sharing Deal With Rebels

By SOMINI SENGUPTA

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Jan. 28 — A French-brokered peace accord aimed at ending a brutal four-month-long civil war in this country seemed to teeter this evening, as the army rejected key elements of a power-sharing deal with rebel groups and aligned itself with supporters of Ivory Coast's elected government.

The military made its position clear in a letter to Ivory Coast's president, Laurent Gbagbo, rejecting calls for demobilization.

"Rather than contribute to a quest for peace," the letter read, the accord "carries within it the germs of a national implosion."

Government backers protested the accord in the streets of Abidjan, Ivory Coast's main city, while France and the rebels called for Mr. Gbagbo to carry out its terms.

Crowds converged on the United States Embassy, demanding that Washington intervene. People chanted "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!" and waved American flags. Some held aloft a sign that read: "America welcome in Ivory Coast. France bye bye."

Not far away, the French Embassy was marred with ugly graffiti and the detritus of the violent weekend that resulted from the signing of the accord. Someone had scrawled "Zone de Guerre," or war zone, on the white fence outside.

Supporters of Mr. Gbagbo, who was elected in 2000, accuse France of imposing the pact. Mr. Gbagbo seemed only to add to the confusion on Monday when he characterized the agreement as merely "proposals," throwing into question whether he was prepared to abide by its terms. His spokesman in France, Toussaint Alain, pointed out today that the president himself had not signed the document, though his representatives had.

Meanwhile, clashes between Christians and Muslims were reported to kill about 10 people today in Agboville, about 50 miles north of here. Churches and mosques were burned in violence brought on by a pro-government rally. The conflict here has an undercurrent of religious tension: Mr. Gbagbo's southern base is largely Christian, while the rebel-held north is largely Muslim.

The streets here were mostly free of violence today, in contrast to the rioting that began late Saturday and continued through midday Monday. Banks and restaurants were shuttered. The streets were sooty with the remains of burned tires.

The French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, called on Mr. Gbagbo to explain the accord to the "extremists in his camp." President Jacques Chirac said, "I of course ask President Gbagbo to make sure his commitment is respected."

Kofi Annan, the United Nations secretary general, also expressed support for the peace accord, and said this afternoon that he would consider sending a technical team to study whether civilian or military observers ought to be deployed.

Mr. Gbagbo is expected to address the country on Wednesday. Until he does, said Honorat de Yedagne, editor of the government newspaper, *Fraternité Matin*, chaos is likely to prevail. "If Gbagbo wants peace, he has to explain frankly to his citizens what happens under this agreement," he said. "The citizens are not ready to accept an interim government until they are given clear answers."

A central issue is whether the northern rebel group will be granted control of the Defense Ministry — a suggestion that Mr. Gbagbo's supporters resolutely oppose.

The rebel group's spokesman, Antoine Beugré, refused to comment on the Defense Ministry issue today, but he accused the Gbagbo government of not respecting the new accord. And he demanded that French troops leave the front line and allow rebels to march to Abidjan.