Côte d’Ivoire’s peace process continued throughout 2008 as the parties worked to implement the Ouagadougou Agreement. But despite important elements of progress, Côte d’Ivoire remains precariously close to its conflict-ridden past. Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants, as well as electoral preparations, have lagged as a consequence of logistical and financial shortfalls and uncertain political will. While the country remained largely stable in 2008, sporadic acts of violence, including an increased spate of armed robberies and demonstrations over unpaid allowances by former combatants and the country’s military, exposed the fragility of Côte d’Ivoire’s security.

Background
Côte d’Ivoire was plunged into conflict in September 2002 following a mutiny and a failed coup attempt by soldiers of the country’s armed forces. The country has since played host to peace operations led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations, and France. Established in April 2004, the UN Mission in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI) was mandated to support implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Accord, signed in 2003. Since then, the mission has supported the implementation of several follow-on peace deals, including, most recently, the Ouagadougou Agreement, signed on 4 March 2007 under the auspices of President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, chairman of ECOWAS. France’s Operation Licorne forces, deployed to operate alongside the earlier ECOWAS Mission in Côte d’Ivoire (ECOMICI), continue to complement the UN mission by providing additional rapid reaction capabilities.

The Ouagadougou Agreement laid out a road map for the feuding parties and UNOCI, addressing, among other things, issues of identification and voter registration, holding of elections,
disarmament of militias, reestablishment of state administration throughout the country, removal of the zone of confidence, and perhaps most importantly, the merging of rebel and government forces through the establishment of an integrated command center. It established clear timelines for implementation, and created two follow-up mechanisms. One is a standing consultative mechanism composed of current president Laurent Gbagbo, current prime minister Guillaume Soro, former president Konan Bedie, former prime minister Alassane Ouattara, and President Compaoré in his capacity as facilitator. The second follow-up mechanism—the Evaluation and Monitoring Committee (EMC)—is comprised of the facilitator as the chair, and three representatives from the signatories to the agreement. The consultative mechanism was mandated to address all issues pertaining to the agreement, while the EMC is charged with assessing and recommending ways of enhancing the peace process.

Despite being a bilateral agreement between Gbagbo and Soro, the Ouagadougou Agreement enjoys broad political support from Ivorian opposition parties and civil society. This support is based in part on a popular sense of the agreement being a homegrown initiative, in contrast to previous efforts to secure peace.

Key Developments

Overall, the political and security environments in Côte d’Ivoire remained relatively calm throughout 2008. But the apparent stability belied a potentially volatile situation, and the slow implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement was a cause of concern throughout the year.

Following months of intensive negotiations, in April 2008 the government of Côte d’Ivoire announced its intention to hold the first round of presidential elections on 30 November 2008. While the announcement was welcomed after more than two years of political deadlock on the subject, the actual holding of the elections would be contingent on the successful conduct of contentious civilian identification and voter registration programs within an extremely tight time span.

With support from UNOCI, the government began to identify and register voters in the second half of 2008. Out of the 9 million anticipated voters, by October 2008 only 5,849 had been registered and only 1,500 of the 6,000 registration kits needed throughout the country in advance of the elections had been delivered. Further complicating matters was the issue of internally displaced persons, who have no identification papers but are regarded as a necessary component of an inclusive electoral process. While observers felt that the initiation of the identification and voter registration processes had set the country on an irreversible path toward the polls, questions about the feasibility of holding the elections as planned began to be raised as the election date grew closer and progress lagged. In mid-November, the signatories of the Ouagadougou Agreement decided to delay the elections, once again citing slow voter registration.

Following the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement, the zone of confidence that had divided Côte d’Ivoire since 2002 was dismantled and replaced by a green line patrolled by new mixed police units, consisting of the national police and those from the Forces Nouvelles, and overseen by seventeen UNOCI observation posts. By July 2008, UNOCI had dismantled all of its observation posts along the green line in reflection of the findings of a technical assessment of the security situation and consultations with all parties involved.

The removal of the observation posts demonstrated significant progress in the reunification process, but the security situation remained fragile, mainly as a consequence of the stalled DDR of former combatants. The government committed to paying the equivalent of three months’ allowance to each demobilized combatant. However, complaints of nonpayment of the country’s armed forces and demobilized combatants led to demonstrations that required the response of UNOCI and Operation Licorne to calm the situation. This is a critical issue, because
a disgruntled military has been the source of unrest in the past.

Despite its exclusion from the two follow-up mechanisms provided by the Ouagadougou Agreement, UNOCI continued to support DDR efforts in other ways. In April 2008, for example, it established a DDR operations center focused on building the planning and coordination capacities of the integrated government and Forces Nouvelles contingents.

However, the lack of resources to implement the integration program remained an ongoing
source of tension. In April 2008, the Forces Nouvelles, together with the chiefs of staff of Côte d’Ivoire’s national armed forces and government officials, presented its cantonment plan to Operation Licorne and UNOCI force commanders. The plan indicated that 36,000 Forces Nouvelles personnel would be cantoned during a five-month period. By October, 11,364 Forces Nouvelles personnel had been cantoned; 7,598 of these elected to be demobilized, while 3,766, including 28 women, chose to join the national armed forces. UNOCI provided logistical and technical support to this process, but as in the past, financial shortfalls stalled the reintegration process. It was reported that the government had failed to provide a promised $214 monthly allowance over the course of three months to cantoned combatants. Recognizing this challenge, the World Bank promised the Forces Nouvelles that its $40 million reinsertion and community rehabilitation program would prioritize former combatants. In this vein, in August 2008, UNOCI launched a $5 million project aimed at the reintegration of former combatants. Named the “1,000 Micro Projects,” the initiative is aimed at ex-combatants as well as youth and women at risk. It will support technical training aimed at providing employment opportunities.

Meanwhile, militia groups in the western region of the country have remained largely outside the DDR process. According to the Ouagadougou Agreement, militias were to have begun disarming in December 2007; however, their leaderships have refused and instead have continued to demand support packages similar to those received by other militias that demobilized under a different agreement during 2006. Furthermore, the handover of Forces Nouvelles weapons proceeded at an alarmingly slow rate. By the end of July 2008, only eighty-six weapons had been turned over, a mere ten of which were serviceable. This is a paltry figure given the large stocks in the hands of the Forces Nouvelles, raising questions as to its commitment to the peace process.

The integrated command center reached its authorized strength in 2008, combining 587 government and Forces Nouvelles personnel. Despite reaching this milestone, the command center remains beset by shortfalls in logistics and financial resources. During the second half of the year, it was reported that this situation resulted in the non-delivery of food and fuel to members of the integrated units for five months, and that members of the Forces Nouvelles had not received salaries since their deployment. Meanwhile, the unification of the forces remained stalled over disagreements about the numbers and ranks of Forces Nouvelles to be integrated into the new force.

The extension of state authority throughout Côte d’Ivoire registered mixed results. Power was gradually transferred to national administrators in the north, but limited progress was made in the deployment of crucial elements such as magistrates and judges. The Ouagadougou Agreement stipulated that state officials from the south were to be redeployed to the north, and that parallel governing and tax structures were to be terminated in the region. But by October 2008, very few judges and tax or customs officials had been redeployed, and even the few who had faced serious obstacles from the Forces Nouvelles, who were not willing to hand over territorial control to national authorities. The prevailing environment remained one of insecurity as crime and banditry increased throughout the country.

Nonetheless, the relatively stable security situation led to the withdrawal of 600 Operation Licorne personnel, leaving the operation’s total strength at 1,800. Meanwhile, UNOCI’s troop strength remained at the authorized level, pending developments regarding the planned elections.

**Conclusion**

While no open conflict was reported in Côte d’Ivoire in 2008, competition over representation in both military and public institutions exposed the deep fault lines in the country. Slow progress in implementing DDR, extending state authority throughout the country, registering
voters, and creating a unified military continued to occupy regional and international attention. But it was the postponement of national elections for the third time that was the most significant source of concern at the end of 2008, as the elections are recognized to be a crucial first step in restoring the legitimacy of the government and consolidating stability in the country.