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infrastructure. The leading producer of cocoa and 5th largest producer of coffee in the world, Ivory Coast was the most prosperous country among the 15 West African nations. Unfortunately, the country was divided into two with pro-government forces controlling the southern part and the armed opposition controlling the North. A 15- km wide buffer zone separated the two forces. A 3000-strong peacekeeping force from ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) was deployed there supported by 6000 French military personnel.

MINUCI was essentially a political mission. Our challenge was to maintain contact with the belligerents and to establish liaison with the military forces. We were trying to build confidence and trust between the armed groups in cooperation with the French and West African forces. Unfortunately, there was very little progress on the implementation of the peace process; the trust between the parties was lacking and we witnessed political unrest and sporadic violence. As the situation started worsening and ECOWAS was unable to support its forces, UN deployed a full-fledged peace-keeping mission in April 2004. ECOWAS troops were rehatted and Bangladesh joined this mission with three infantry battalions, a brigade HQ, a level II hospital and military observers. For me, it was a rewarding experience to participate in the transformation process of a small political mission into a fairly big peacekeeping operation. Having to prepare the ground work for this transformation was a big challenge for us.

I became the Deputy Force Commander of the military component of UNOCI. Primarily I had to exercise control over the military observers and conduct negotiations with the military commanders of armed groups. The most challenging experience for me and for the Bangladeshi contingent was the relapsing of conflict between the two belligerents in November 2004. A full-blown war erupted between the two sides when the opposition withdrew from the government. The situation further



degenerated when an Ivorian attack helicopter killed 9 French soldiers and a US aid worker. The French military retaliated by destroying Ivorian Air assets. Thousands of angry protesters came down on the streets of Abidjan vandalizing businesses, shops and attacking the houses of foreigners. Most of the UN mission's installations and camps in the government controlled territory came under attack by violent protesters who laid blockades outside the compounds. Dealing with the security of UN installations was a big challenge but it was all the more difficult to take care of hundreds of foreigners who took refuge on our premises. Three great lessons were learnt – but these were not new:

First, there has to be credible progress in the political roadmap agreed upon by the parties. If not, relapse to civil war is most likely.

Second, there has to be “a peace to keep” and peacekeepers go in to keep it. This is of course an underpinning principle of peacekeeping.

Third, peacekeepers must foresee the consequence of fast-evolving situation on the ground and be prepared to face it.

On completion of a 2-year tour of duty in Ivory Coast, I returned home in 2005. After 5 years, I had the opportunity of

serving as Force Commander in UNOCI. With enhanced political endeavour of the international community and UNOCI, the much awaited Presidential Elections were held in Ivory Coast in October 2010.

My first experience in this tour of duty was spearheading the dialogue between the two militaries and to encourage them to adhere to the ceasefire. At the military level, Force HQ had to continuously remain engaged with the belligerents so as to keep the peace process going.

My second experience was working out the security arrangements for the elections. The planning, arranging and providing logistical and security support throughout the country to the two rounds of Presidential elections was a very crucial task. UNOCI military secured the transportation of all electoral material to the voting centers. Our Units that included two Bangladeshi battalions escorted the result sheets from 326 local election centers to the Election Commission in the capital. There was not a single incident of ballot boxes or result sheets being lost or intercepted by miscreants. Through extensive patrolling in all sensitive areas as a “show off force”, we were able to create an environment that saw more than 80% turnout of voters – which is rare in African context.

Unfortunately, President Gbagbo refused to accept the results and refused to hand over power to the winner of the elections, Mr. Ouattara. This triggered the third civil war in November 2010. Gbagbo also asked UNOCI to leave the country.

So, my third experience was to operate and function under a tremendously hostile situation; the pro-Gbagbo media was carrying out deliberate and vicious anti-UNOCI campaign trying to project that the UN military – the blue berets, were fighting alongside the “rebels” against the government and the people. Being instigated, the Gbagbo loyalists were either attacking or blocking UN convoys and posts/premises. Therefore, having to deal with hostilities from pro-Gbagbo military and loyalists was a routine affair for nearly five months.

My fourth experience and biggest challenge was ensuring protection of the President-elect, important dignitaries and ministers who took refuge in a hotel in the capital. UNOCI military and police had to face every kind of intimidation, provocation, hate propaganda and barricades by pro-Gbagbo elements and supporters. In spite of the blockade at the two main approaches to the hotel, we succeeded in providing regular supplies to 600 UN troops including Formed Police Units deployed there. Having served as UN Force Commander at a very critical time in Ivory Coast, I would like to highlight three lessons:

-- There has to be peace to keep. And peacekeepers go in to keep it. Time and again Ivory Coast was spiraling back into conflict – there were situations in which there was no peace to keep.

-- Assumptions made at the time of initial planning and deployment may prove to be wrong.

-- In order to face hostilities and intimidation, a commander needs troops with good training, motivation and resilience.

In a nutshell, I had to go through a profoundly complex and difficult situation. Nevertheless, it was a highly rewarding and most challenging experience for me.

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## UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)

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Father Sava, who was leading the negotiation on behalf of the Monks, a suave and astute person more in the mould of a diplomat than a religious leader. He spoke English fluently and had a good grasp of the international situation. The negotiations at the Italian base were long and protracted but eventually paved the way for an amicable solution which recognized the legitimate interest of both the parties.

I was then moved to Skendergi/ Srbica in the Mitrovica region of Kosovo. This was even more of a militant municipality and bastion of the KLA's legendary hero Adam Jeshari whose brutal killing along with his family members by the Serbian forces provided the immediate spark for the outbreak of conflict of Kosovo. The successful handling of this municipality, acknowledged as the most dangerous and difficult one, led to my transfer to the Regional Headquarters of the Mitrovica

Region first as the Deputy and subsequently as Regional Administrator. This was the most challenging assignment as Mitrovica was the main flash-point of the conflict from where the war of Kosovo began.

In my capacity as the UN Regional Administrator of Kosovo, the first diplomat from a developing country to hold the post, I was fortunate to be able to make my modest contribution to the process of peaceful resolution of the Kosovo crisis. As the Regional Administrator of Mitrovica, I sustained the process of direct negotiations initiated by my predecessor David Mitchels involving the elected presidents of three Albanian municipalities in the south of Mitrovica region and three presidents of the Serbian municipalities in the north of Mitrovica. Mitrovica was characterized by a de facto partition between the Kosovo Albanians in the South and the Kosovo Serbians in the North separated by the river Ibar and

connected by a bridge on the river. The painstaking negotiations took place in the UN Regional headquarters in Mitrovica and lasted for months.

I was ably assisted by the French KFOR General, the Irish police commander and the UNMIK Municipal Administrators of the region, among others. The fact that the two antagonistic parties involving local elected Albanian and Serbian leaders had begun to talk among themselves with the UN Regional Administrator acting as an honest broker was by itself a diplomatic success considering that there was no direct communication between them after the bloody conflict.

The historic process of building a democratic, multi-religious and multi-cultural Kosovo is ongoing. Its success is crucial to building of democratic multi-cultural, multi-religious societies in other states of former Yugoslavia, particularly in Serbia dominated by the rise of the radicals and haunted by the ghost of

Melosovic. The international community's support to the process of ensuring peace and stability in the Balkans is essential for achieving global peace and for success in the fight against the menace of terrorism, militancy and extremism afflicting the world at large.

The lesson learnt from UN experience in Kosovo is that there is no durable military solution to essentially political, religious, sectarian and ethnic conflicts. It is time for the world to opt for patient negotiations and diplomacy. The outcome achieved through such peaceful means is generally more lasting as violence, conflicts and wars create perpetual hatred in the hearts and minds of the people. It is said, 'If war begins in the hearts and minds of the people, it is in their hearts that defenses of peace should be built'.

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