Cote d'Ivoire Presidential Crisis

Background:
An international crisis in Cote d'Ivoire related to the Second Ivorian Civil War began on 3 April 2011 and lasted until 11 April 2011. Cote d'Ivoire was the only crisis actor. France was also involved in the crisis.

A civil war was fought in Cote d'Ivoire from 2002 to 2004 between the regime of President Laurent Gbagbo and rebel forces representing Muslim northerners, who felt that they were being discriminated against by the politically dominant and mostly Christian southerners. In 2002, France sent a large contingent of troops to Cote d'Ivoire as the Operation Unicorn peacekeeping force. In February 2004, the United Nations established the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to facilitate the implementation of peace agreements.

PRE-CRISIS:
A presidential crisis began in Cote d'Ivoire in early December 2010 when the incumbent president, Laurent Gbagbo, disputed the results of the presidential election held the previous month, in which challenger Alassane Ouattara claimed victory. The Ivorian Constitutional Council supported Gbagbo's claim, while the Ivorian Independent Elections Commission (CEI) and the majority of the international community supported Ouattara's claim. A series of protests followed, eventually escalating to the Second Ivorian Civil War. Gbagbo's control of the country's armed forces and the state media gradually crumbled under the weight of international sanctions and massive defections from the armed forces due to a successful military campaign by pro-Ouattara rebel forces. On 18 December, Gbagbo ordered peacekeeping forces from the United Nations and France to leave the country.

The violence escalated in March 2011. On 10 March, Gbagbo banned French and UN aircraft from Ivorian airspace, but the UN continued to fly helicopters despite the order. On 30 March, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1975, calling for Gbagbo to step down, placing sanctions on Gbagbo and his associates, reaffirming the mandate of UNOCI to use all means necessary to protect civilians, and supporting Ouattara as President of Côte d'Ivoire. The resolution was co-sponsored by Nigeria and France. French and UN forces began actively supporting pro-Ouattara forces.

On 31 March, pro-Ouattara forces advanced on Abidjan from several directions. UNOCI said its headquarters were fired on by Gbabgo's special forces that day, and it returned fire in response. UNOCI took control of the Abidjan airport when Gbagbo's forces abandoned it. On 2 April, heavy fighting was reported around the Agban military base and the presidential palace.

Summary:
On 3 April 2011, French forces took direct action in the conflict by taking control of, and reopening, the Abidjan airport. This made it clear to the Gbagbo regime that France was a direct threat to its survival and triggered a crisis for Cote d'Ivoire. Hundreds of additional French troops landed in the Abidjan airport that same day. Cote d'Ivoire implemented its major response the next day: Gbagbo issued a vehement condemnation of France, calling it an "ugly colonist" that was planning a "Rwanda-style genocide," and according to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-

moon, pro-Gbagbo forces attacked UN forces and headquarters in Abidjan. UN and French helicopters began firing on pro-Gbagbo military targets that day.

On 5 April, pro-Ouattara forces announced that they had captured the presidential palace. On the same day, Gbagbo's military chief called for a ceasefire. Following this, it was reported that fighting had ceased in Abidjan. That same day, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) promised a "safe and dignified" exit for Gbagbo and his family if he conceded the election and handed power over to Ouattara. However, negotiations failed and forces loyal to Ouattara moved to seize Gbagbo at his residence in Abidjan on 6 April. Within the next few days, pro-Gbagbo forces retaliated in Abidjan and took control of the Plateau and Cocody areas of the city.

On 9 April, pro-Gbagbo forces fired on the Golf Hotel, where Ouattara was located. UN peacekeepers, mandated to protect Ouattara and other civilians, returned fire. Pro-Gbagbo forces also fired on other civilians and the UN base. In response to this series of events, UN and French forces carried out further air strikes the following day against Gbagbo's residence and the heavy weaponry of his supporting forces.

The crisis terminated on 11 April 2011, when pro-Ouattara forces, supported by French forces, captured Gbagbo without harm. The actual capture was made by Ouattara's troops, but French forces assisted in the final assault with tanks and helicopters, the latter delivering rocket strikes. Ouattara became the undisputed President of Cote d'Ivoire. Following his arrest, Gbagbo and members of his family and entourage were placed under UN police guard at the Golf Hotel. Gbagbo was then extradited to the International Criminal Court.

Both during and before the crisis, the AU and ECOWAS called on Gbagbo to step down and affirmed their view of Ouattara as the legitimate president of Cote d'Ivoire.

References:
AfricaNews; Agence France Presse; Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; BBC; Christian Science Monitor; CNN; Guardian; New York Times; Reuters; Telegraph; United Nations Human Rights Council; United Nations Security Council resolution; Voice of America.