

A half century after the wave of declarations of independence that booted Europeans from the African continent, it is largely accepted that Africa should be - and should have always been - run by Africans. But the wound of European colonization in Africa has not yet fully closed, and Africans are weary of the supposedly benevolent intentions of “the West.” And so they should be; after all, no other continent has endured the sheer quantity of mistreatment and cruelty at the hands of foreigners than has Africa.

Unfortunately for Africans, many of their leaders in the post-colonial period have harnessed the power of this exploitation legacy and used it as a means to avoid accountability to the world community. Because the memory of colonial abuse is so fresh, the very concept of external intervention seems offensive. Tragically, Africa needs this intervention now more than any other region.

Take the most recent conflict in Ivory Coast. Laurent Gbagbo clearly and indisputably lost the majority vote to his Northern rival, Alassane Ouattara. But Gbagbo, like many rulers (African and non-African alike), has grown accustomed to power and refuses to hand over the government to the legitimate winner. Ivory Coast, lacking a stable political tradition, is on the brink of war because a man has begun entertaining the all-too-common fantasy that he is so *individually* important to his country’s future, that he is willing to bring this very country to the depths of chaos to preserve his power over it.

Gbagbo is not the first political leader to play by democracy’s rules only when they bend his way. Gnassingbe Eyadema did it in Togo, Idi Amin did it in Uganda, and Robert Mugabe is still doing it in Zimbabwe. Like these rulers, Gbagbo disguises his megalomania as desire for justice, and accuses all critics of being “neocolonialists.”

Gbagbo explicitly calls Ouattara an “agent of French interests,” and accuses the U.N. of “declaring war on the Ivory Coast.” However, it’s not the UN that has declared war on Ivorians, but Gbagbo himself. By ignoring the rules of the game, Gbagbo puts Ivorian democracy (and countless Ivorian lives) at serious risk. And why does he do it? Because he can.

Despite economic pressure from Europe, the UN, the World Bank, other African nations, and the US, Gbagbo shows no signs of relenting. And why should he? Gbagbo has learned from recent years in Kenya and Zimbabwe that one doesn’t have to act democratically to run a democracy. Power-sharing agreements are the solution *du jour* in Africa, and as of now, that’s the way the Ivory Coast is headed. Gbagbo’s intransigence, then, can be understood as a rational political maneuver

based on an expected likely outcome. But power-sharing, though good in the short term for business and stability, is disastrous for the continent's long-term political and economic development. And it's simply unfair to Ivorians - who, in the last three years, have resurrected their country from a civil war to a flourishing democracy - to let Gbagbo ruin it.

The Ivory Coast needs intervention. Ouattara lacks the military might to force Gbagbo to accept his loss. ECOWAS, though theoretically willing to take action, is constrained by its small size and confused management. Unfortunately, this whole episode takes place at a time when those most capable of intervening (Americans and Europeans) are least likely to do it, given their current commitments in Asia.

But beware the temptation to settle for a power-sharing agreement that legitimizes Gbagbo's stand against his own people. Gbagbo's obstinacy is a learned behavior, one that stems from having watched a half century of compromises with dictatorship. And though a small country with a smaller economy, a partial Gbagbo victory will send a very clear message to other world leaders intent on staying in power when they've been voted out: don't worry, you can get away with it.

Ouattara must become president, even if by force. Let Gbagbo rant and rave about *ivoirité* and the will of the people. The fact is, the people (or at least most of them) aren't listening to him any more. We cannot allow accusations of neocolonialism to prevent us from doing what Ivorians have called for - installing Ouattara as president.