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GUINEA: SITUATION ANALYSIS AND OUTLOOK

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commissioned by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,
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Acronyms

CENI	Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante
CNTG	Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée
ECOMOG	Economic Community (of West African States) Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FIDH	Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme
FRAD	Front Républicain pour l'Alternance Démocratique
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MRU	Mano River Union
OGDH	Organisation Guinéenne des Droits de l'Homme
ONDH	Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme
PRGF	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PUP	Parti de l'Unité Nationale
RPG	Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinée
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
UFGD	Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée
UFR	Union des Forces Républicaines
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPG	Union pour le Progrès de la Guinée
UPN	Union pour le Progrès National
UPR	Union pour le Progrès et le Renouveau
US(A)	United States (of America)
USTG	Union Syndicale des Travailleurs de Guinée

Executive Summary

Crisis has become a permanent condition in Guinea. The 2003 presidential election – heavily rigged and with only one minor opposition figure permitted to mount an ineffectual challenge to President Lansana Conté – confirmed the determination of Guinea’s strongman ruler to remain in charge.

Mass protests in early 2007 were met with brutal repression. Almost 200 people died. The immediate crisis was resolved through the appointment of a moderate reformist prime minister, Lansana Kouyaté; the IMF and EU restored financial support. But Kouyaté was undermined by hardliners and replaced in May 2008 by presidential loyalist Ahmed Tidiane Soaré.

However, President Conté is now beset by difficult circumstances and in failing health. Rising food prices and the decay of basic services, combined with a weakening of discipline in the military, have enhanced popular resentment and the risk of a slide into violent confrontation. This would have serious consequences for regional stability and impose strain on neighbouring states, despite Guinea’s relative isolation from the West African mainstream.

Legislative elections have been promised, but previous polls have been heavily rigged. Opposition parties remain highly active at the grassroots level. But trade unions moved into the forefront of reform campaigning in 2007, while the parties were divided over whether to accept posts in Soaré’s new government.

Guinea’s mineral wealth may allow the government to escape IMF and European pressure by negotiating external financing with new international partners such as China who do not make support conditional on reform.

The possibility of significant reform progress cannot be totally ruled out, however. But there is a high risk of continued stasis, with only limited progress on improving human rights and bolstering economic reconstruction. Given the dismal state of basic living conditions in the capital, Conakry, this would perpetuate the risk of renewed mass protest, or a military coup.

1 Introduction

This paper seeks to analyse the main factors shaping developments in Guinea and to consider the possible consequences of the present uncertain, tense and potentially deadlocked situation. It will look at the roles played by President Lansana Conté's regime, the security forces, opposition groups and civil society and assess the social and economic context. It will also look at Guinea's international relationships, the West African regional context and the position of neighbouring countries. Finally it will suggest possible ways in which events in Guinea might evolve and consider the capacity of its regional neighbours to cope with any influx of refugees, should the crisis worsen to the point where it provokes large population movements.

1.1 The Present Situation

Crisis has become a permanent condition in Guinea over recent years. In 2002 the participation of some opposition parties in the parliamentary elections briefly held out the prospect of progress towards a more consensual and democratic political climate, but it rapidly became clear that President Lansana Conté and his close allies were not willing to cede any significant power or tolerate any constraint on their privileged and often corrupt economic position. The 2003 presidential election – heavily rigged and with only one minor opposition figure permitted to mount an ineffectual challenge to Conté – confirmed the determination of Guinea's strongman ruler to remain in charge.

Despite the president's poor health and occasional absences from public view, the four and a half years since that election have seen the regime maintain its position without making major concessions. Conté has allowed a series of prime ministers to introduce limited reforms, to placate domestic opposition and foreign donors – provided the core power and privileges of his inner coterie are left untouched. But the prime ministers have little real power and they have proved completely unwilling or unable to prevent the security forces' repeated resort to repressive and often lethal violence and human rights abuse, aimed at curbing public protest by trade unionists, students and opposition party supporters.

Opposition parties remain highly active at the grassroots level. But trade unions moved into the forefront of reform campaigning in 2007. The main opposition parties have proved unable to maintain a common front: three accepted posts in the cabinet of the new prime minister Ahmed Tidiane Soaré in June 2008, while two refused to do so.

Socio-economic conditions remain grim, despite Guinea's mineral wealth and an increase in foreign investment. The government has an IMF programme, but lacks the will to implement reforms that would threaten vested interests.

Anxious to avert a slide into complete state failure and conflict, the European Union and the IMF have led efforts by the international community to re-engage with Guinea and provide new aid, provided the government implements steps to enhance democratization and economic reform. But President Conté himself shows little interest in liberal modernization or poverty reduction, while the military and other vested interests around him appear actively resistant to change. Under international pressure the government has promised legislative elections for late 2008, but there is a high risk these will be manipulated by the regime or boycotted by at least some of the main opposition parties.

1.2 Some Background Data

The land area that is today's modern Guinean state was once largely part of a series of African empires – the Ghana, Sosso, Mali and finally Songhai empires. Its first known European visitors were fifteenth century Portuguese mariners. An Islamic state was established in the eighteenth century. Guinea was under colonial rule, as part of French West Africa, from the 1880s to 1958. The territory's decision to opt for independence in 1958, ahead of neighbouring colonies, provoked a bitter rift with Paris and a two decades-long suspension of French assistance. From independence until his death during heart surgery in 1984, Guinea was ruled by the dictator Ahmed Sékou Touré. Determined to maintain a measure of distance from France, he pursued a socialist agenda and developed close relations with the Soviet Union. His regime was characterized by extreme brutality and repression, driving many thousands of Guineans into exile.¹

Touré was succeeded by Lansana Conté, head of the armed forces, who has ruled continuously since, despite the official introduction of a multi-party political system in the early 1990s. Conté founded the ruling Parti de l'Unité Nationale (PUP). Conté was re-elected, for a seven year term, in December 2003. His ruling PUP won the last parliamentary election, in 2002, and the last municipal elections, in 2005. He has appointed a succession of prime ministers, but has allowed them little real power or freedom of action; Ahmed Tidiane Soaré took over the premiership in May 2008.

Guinea has a land area of 245,857 sq km. The 9.8 million population, some 37% resident in urban areas, is growing by 2.2% a year. The population includes three main ethnic groups – the Peul (40% of the population) in the central north, the Malinké (30%) in the north-east and central south and the Soussou (20%) in the western coastal belt; there are substantial populations of all three ethnicities among the 2 million inhabitants of the capital, Conakry. Minority groups predominate in the far south. Guinea has a tropical climate, wetter on the coast, drier in the north-east, and considerable agricultural potential. The country has major reserves of bauxite, iron ore, gold and diamonds; however, its utility and transport infrastructure has been poorly maintained.²

In comparison with other similar African countries Guinea is underperforming in economic terms, especially taking into account its rich mineral resource base at a time of high commodity prices. Social indicators are mixed, but government investment in key services is weak. Monetary policy is also weak.

¹ For general historical background see e.g. Collins, R.O. and J.M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Clark, J.F. and D. Gardinier (eds), *Political Reform in Francophone Africa*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1997

² See, United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook 2008: Guinea*, updated 24 July 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gv.html> [accessed July 2008]

1.3 Outline of Events since 2006³

2006

- **April-June.** The moderate reformist prime minister Cellou Dalein Diallo is replaced by the hardline Secretary-General of the Presidency, Fodé Bangoura, as State Minister of Presidential Affairs. Security forces shoot school pupils protesting over the postponement of the baccalauréat.
- **December.** An EU offer to restore €17 million in aid suspended since 2004 persuades the government to promise legislative elections supervised by an independent commission. Conté frees key allies, the tycoon Elhadj Mamadou Sylla and a former minister, Fodé Soumah, who had been detained over financial allegations.

2007

- **January-February.** The USTG and CNTG trade union federations launch a strike to press for the restoration of “republican order”. Opposition parties and the unions demand a consensus government and launch mass protests in Conakry, Labé and other towns. The security forces, especially the Bérets Rouges presidential guard units, repeatedly engage in violent repression; the president’s son Ousmane plays a leading role. Fodé Bangoura is dismissed. Peace is only restored on 27 February, when Conté names a respected former diplomat, Lansana Kouyaté, as prime minister. He reaches an agreement with the unions. Almost 200 people have died, most killed by the security forces, assisted by troops from Guinea-Bissau and former fighters from the Liberian LURD guerrilla movement.⁴
- **March-April.** Kouyaté forms a government of technocrats and civil society figures. He wins union backing and persuades donors, led by the EU, to agree to provide interim aid.
- **July-December.** New chiefs of the police and intelligence are selected, but hardliners block many other Kouyaté appointments. Human rights abuses persist. Sidikiba Keita, a known critic of Conté, and Lansana Komara, an official of the opposition RPG party, are detained without charge. Conté names the new Secretary General of the Presidency, Sam Soumah, as his effective number two, relegating the premier to a subsidiary role. The new independent electoral commission complains that it was not given the means to work properly.

2008

- **January.** Conté dismisses the reformist information minister Justin Morel Junior without consulting the premier. The commission of enquiry into the 2007 killings says it is starved of vital resources.
- **May-June.** Prime Minister Kouyaté is dismissed after a government audit report exposing presidential corruption is leaked to *Jeune Afrique* magazine. Conté chooses an ally, Ahmed Tidiane Soaré, as the new premier. Soaré persuades the UPG, UPR and UFDG parties to nominate one person each to junior posts in his cabinet. Presidential allies hold all key positions.

³ Unless otherwise indicated this section is based on news media reports, mainly from Agence France Presse, Reuters, PANA, *Le Monde*, Radio France Internationale, *Jeune Afrique/L’Intelligent*

⁴ International Crisis Group, *Guinea: Ensuring Democratic Reforms*, Dakar, 24 June 2008, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5503&l=1> [accessed August 2008]

2 Overview of the Crisis

2.1 Political Dynamics

The central question at issue in Guinea today is whether President Lansana Conté and his close associates will continue to rule the country in the way that they have over the past 15 years – or whether there is a prospect of fundamental change taking place. This could take the shape of profound reform, or a slide into greater instability and violence, or through a continuation of authoritarianism, but in a reshaped form.

There is speculation over the degree of control really exercised by Conté, given his poor state of health; but whether it is the president or his close associates who take the key decisions, their rule is notable for corruption, secretiveness and a lack of transparency and effective public accountability mechanisms. The protection of the vested interests of the military – a key base of Conté's power – and of the business interests of the presidential circle takes absolute priority. The formal democratic framework is controlled and manipulated to ensure the predominance of Conté's PUP party and to prevent the opposition parties exerting any significant influence on government, despite the strength of their grassroots popular activist base. The authorities tolerate expressions of criticism in the media but routinely resort to active repression and human rights abuse to curb campaigning by political parties and counter mass civil society protest.

The president is uninterested in long-term strategic thinking about economic growth and social or political development; he allows his prime ministers to implement limited reforms, to fend off domestic and international criticism – but only insofar as these measures leave the central power structure and its associated vested interests untouched.

This situation has continued for many years. But in the present context, there are reasons to ask how much longer it can continue:

- Conté is now elderly and in poor health; he has weathered several serious bouts of illness, but there is no certainty that he will remain capable of exercising power up to the end of his current term in 2010;
- there is growing external African and donor pressure for reform, and incentives for change, in the form of increased aid; some members of the presidential circle might therefore agree to limited reforms, to placate donors and domestic critics;
- the army is a key base of Conté's power, but many of his close military associates are dead or retired; discipline has frayed as the government struggles to sustain soldiers' pay and perks;
- rising fuel and food prices, and decaying public services, are undermining already low living standards and further increasing the extent of popular anger; the positive socio-impact of new mineral sector investment is too narrow to offset this.

These gathering tensions may come to a head in Guinea over the coming months. In Conakry and other main towns, public protest has been a regular feature of recent years, despite the authorities' brutal suppression of demonstrations. The protests of early 2007 came close to threatening Conté's hold on power. Should Conté's health decline dramatically, the military could step up pressure or intervene directly. More open-minded elements of the PUP and the presidential coterie might combine with moderate opposition parties, to nudge the regime towards limited reform, to preserve the underlying status quo.

Guinea has been relatively isolated from regional trends in West Africa by its distinctive history and non-membership of the franc zone. Conté plays little role in the politico-diplomatic affairs of ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States). This has helped sustain his traditional strongman style of rule. But it seems unlikely that this can continue indefinitely; at some stage, something has to give.

The regime may be able to coopt elements of the opposition into a political arrangement that fends off the direct pressure from more hard-line opposition parties. But unless the regime implements fundamental economic and governance reforms, to lay the basis for long-term development and greater freedom, the core socio-political pressures will remain unresolved and Guinea will continue to risk a slide into confrontational crisis. The accord reached between government and civil society leaders after the January-February 2007 crisis created a popular expectation of progress – which remains largely unsatisfied. Hopes for change now rest on the legislative elections planned for late 2008; should these fail to open the path to effective reform, popular frustration will deepen.

Although the central bureaucracy has a cadre of skilled technocrats, the political vision to articulate and lead an effective programme of reform and recovery is absent from the Conté regime. In terms of power and privileged interests, the core of the regime is a solid presence; and for decisions on specific issues, individuals such as the secretary-general of the presidency, Sam Soumah, wield decisive influence. However, when it comes to serious policy-making capacity, there is a void at the heart of the power structure. Decisions are shaped by factional and ethno-regional considerations, security fears and personal and family material interests, rather than any coherent concept of national development.

In a context of deep social tension, severe popular deprivation, military discontent and committed labour, student and opposition party activism, this is a recipe for continued instability, incipient crisis and potential violence.

2.2 Economic and Social Dynamics

Guinea could be one of the strongest economies in West Africa. It has adequate land for a relatively small population, a well-watered climate and rich reserves of bauxite, diamonds, gold and iron ore. It has a good supply of well-educated and technically trained personnel. There is a long history of foreign investment in the mining sector and new projects are in sight: Global Alumina, a joint venture between BHP Billiton and United Arab Emirates interests, is building a US\$ 4.3 billion alumina plant;⁵ Rio Tinto was planning a US\$ 6 billion iron ore mine at Simandou, but its rights were rescinded at the start of August 2008, which could provoke a dispute, since Rio Tinto maintain that they have fulfilled all legal requirements.⁶ The step was possibly taken to clear the way for a deal with China, who has also expressed an interest in Guinea's iron ore; Ousmane Doré recently confirmed the existence of bilateral talks over a deal under which China would develop Guinean infrastructure in return for mineral rights.⁷

⁵ Senior mining industry source. Telephone interview, July 2008

⁶ Rio Tinto Upbeat over Troubled Guinea Mine, *The Australian*, 5 August 2008, <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24128735-5005200,00.html> [accessed August 2008]

⁷ Reuters, Guinea, China Study Mines-for-Infrastructure Deal, 31 July 2008, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/allBreakingNews/idUKL156803320080731> [accessed August 2008]

However, the unfavourable terms of agreements with some mining investors, poor financial management and corruption – local independent press reports claim that up to US\$ 600 million was embezzled in less than two years, although this figure cannot be confirmed – and a paucity of foreign aid have left public services and long term development badly underfunded.⁸ Over the past 15 years, much of francophone West Africa has seen sustained progress towards financial stabilization, liberal economic reform, and strong donor support. But Guinea, with a dismal record of governance and poor donor relations, has almost entirely missed out on this process.

Conditions in Conakry are particularly difficult: local power and water supply to poorer districts of the city is erratic – students commonly sit under streetlamps at the airport to do their homework because they have no light at home – and public sector salaries are low. Most households struggle to afford basic essentials. The price of rice, the key staple, has been driven upwards both by world trends and by systematic hoarding by major import traders who enjoy the protection of the presidency. Politically vested business interests blocked a reformist attempt by then prime minister Kouyaté to raise US\$ 5 million to buy cheap foreign rice to ease the supply shortage.⁹

3 Forces at Play

3.1 President Conté and His Inner Circle:

The presidency is the heart of power in Lansana Conté's Guinea. In the wake of the January-February 2007 mass protests, Conté appeared to consent to a reduction of his personal power, in favour of the prime minister; but in fact he retained the essence of power within the presidency. Fundamentally, nothing changed.¹⁰

A succession of prime ministers have found that they cannot exercise extensive authority in their own right; they have been allowed to advance modest reforms, but these are rarely implemented in full or for a sustained period of time. Measures that challenge the vested interests of the president's family and close associates are blocked. Lansana Kouyaté, prime minister from March 2007 to May 2008, was dismissed after a massive customs duty evasion by the presidential family was exposed by a revenue audit that he had commissioned.¹¹

While power is concentrated in the presidency, this does not necessarily mean that it is wielded by Conté in person. He suffers from advanced diabetes and has at times been completely incapacitated, spending significant periods of time abroad undergoing medical treatment. It is reported that his ability to manage affairs fluctuates from one day to the next; this can lead to sudden reversals of policy or appointments, depending on who has the president's ear at any one time. Conté sees himself as a national father figure who restored a measure of moderation and stability after the bizarre tyranny of Ahmed Sékou Touré. A career soldier, he believes in exercising authority from the top and has never fully accepted the implications of a democratic system. At his most alert and determined, Conté has the

⁸ See reports in *Jeune Afrique*, 2008, *passim*, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/pays/guinee/guinee.asp> [accessed August 2008]

⁹ Europe-based Guinea analyst. Personal interview, July 2008

¹⁰ See, International Crisis Group, *Guinea: Change or Chaos*, Dakar, 14 February 2007, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4661&l=1> [accessed August 2008]

¹¹ See reports in *Jeune Afrique*, March-May 2008; Europe-based Guinea analyst. Personal interview, July 2008

capacity to set a decisive course and lead from the front: in 1996 he confronted army mutineers in person, and this year, despite his health problems, he defused a new mutiny by holding face to face talks with the ringleader. However, he is not always well enough to show such leadership, and he spends a lot of time outside Conakry, at his farm at Wawa. This leaves him heavily reliant on his family and close associates.

Sam Mamady Soumah, secretary-general of the presidency, is thought to be the decisive figure behind many of the key decisions of recent months. Also hugely influential is the country's leading businessman, Mamadou Sylla, head of the Futurelec group and honorary president of the ruling PUP. The wider circle of key associates, many from the president's Soussou ethnic group, may include former minister for the presidency Fodé Bangoura, former interior minister Moussa Solano and former deputy central bank governor Fodé Soumah. Members of the president's own family are also highly influential, particularly his senior wife, Henriette, and his eldest son, Ousmane, who used to stay mainly at Wawa but has become involved with the Béréts Rouges presidential guard.¹²

3.2 Prime Minister Soaré and the Government

Ahmed Tidiane Soaré is a presidential protégé from Conté's PUP party. His government – appointed in late June – was shaped strongly by the presidential coterie. The reshuffle eliminated most allies of his predecessor, Lansana Kouyaté, including Saidou Diallo, who had run the audit that exposed the Conté family's customs fraud. Unusually, a civilian, Almamy Kabele Camara, has been appointed defence minister, but real authority over the military will remain with Conté and his military command allies. Soaré lacks stature, but he is from the presidential camp. He may therefore achieve more practical progress on minor reforms than Kouyaté, who lacked political savvy and was not trusted by Conté.¹³

Still, the ultimate test will be effectiveness. In mid-July 2008 the government set up a national human rights watchdog, Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme (ONDH), with a remit to bring the country's human rights legislation into line with international norms and to track down cases of abuse, a move welcomed by the UNDP resident representative Mbaranga Gasarabwé.¹⁴ But Guinea's independent electoral commission, CENI (Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante), and the commission charged with enquiring into the repression of early 2007 have been starved of the resources they need to operate properly.¹⁵

Economic portfolios are also highly sensitive. Finance minister Ousmane Doré initially sought to meet IMF criteria for financial discipline; he remains in post under Soaré but over recent months controls on the presidency's access to the state treasury have been relaxed. Youssouf Diallo, an aide to the Futurelec boss and presidential ally Mamadou Sylla, is now minister of small business. Where the wider interests of national economic policy clash with the interests of presidential associates, it seems unlikely that Soaré will be able to successfully assert national priorities. The important mining portfolio is traditionally entrusted to a member of the Malinké ethnic group. But although the present incumbent,

¹² International Crisis Group, *Guinea: Change or Chaos*

¹³ Europe-based Guinea analyst. Personal interview, July 2008

¹⁴ Lancement d'un Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme, *Info-Guinee.com*, 22 July 2008, <http://www.infoguinee.com/beta3/content/view/998/1/> [accessed August 2008]

¹⁵ IRIN, Guinea: Elections in Doubt for 2008, 25 June 2008, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=78943> [accessed August 2008]

Ahmed Kanté, is from an important family, high level contacts with key investors may be handled by Conté himself and his closest aides such as Sam Soumah.¹⁶

3.3 The Security Forces

The security forces are a critical foundation of the regime of Lansana Conté, a career soldier who was himself commander of the armed forces before taking power in 1984. Conté's personal rapport with the military, his ability to relate to ordinary soldiers and his personal alliances with senior commanders have been essential tools. The military have held a distinctly privileged position in Guinea, thanks both to their essential role in ensuring national security and to their significance as a weapon of regional policy. The Guinean army – estimated at 18,000 strong following a reported recent recruitment of 6,000 men – was for many years relatively well trained and disciplined, playing a key role in the ECOMOG regional peace force that intervened in Liberia. The army was vital also in protecting Guinea's frontiers as rebel groups sought to extend their activities from these neighbouring countries into Guinea itself; and this regional security imperative was recognised by the US, which helped to train an elite force of 500 Rangers troops.¹⁷

But in domestic terms, the military have a powerful vested interest, enjoying material privileges denied to the civilian population. The most important perk is access to cheap rice, at a time when civilians struggle to meet the cost of living. For senior officers, this creates lucrative trading opportunities, and even lower ranking soldiers are known to resell supplies at a profit. Soldiers wives even sell rice to prisoners' relatives in the outer courtyard of the Sûreté/Maison Centrale security and prison complex in Conakry.¹⁸ Senior officers engage in cross-border commercial smuggling of various products, including weapons.

The powerful position of the military and, to a lesser extent, the police and gendarmerie, has protected them from any significant control as regards human rights abuse. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty, FIDH, the US State Department and numerous individual witnesses have reported extensively on the routine use of torture and extreme maltreatment in Guinean official detention facilities, such as the Sûreté/Maison Centrale and PM3 detention centres in Conakry, the Alpha Yaya Diallo military base in the city and the main jail in the town of Kindia.¹⁹ Moreover, in repressing demonstrations, the military and the police have routinely resorted to the use of lethal force, shooting even schoolchildren demonstrators on numerous occasions; they have also staged raids into the outer suburbs of Conakry, where support for the opposition is strong, to target individuals perceived as opposition activists and even civilians in general who might be perceived as sympathetic to the opposition.²⁰ Notable instances of such intervention to detain civilians occurred in January 2005, after shots were

¹⁶ Senior mining company executive. Telephone interview, July 2008

¹⁷ Specialist European diplomat. Telephone interview, July 2008

¹⁸ Former detainee. Personal interview, February 2007

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, *The Perverse Side of Things: Torture, Inadequate Detention Conditions, and Excessive Use of Force by Guinean Security Forces*, New York, August 2006, <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/guinea0806> [accessed August 2008]; Amnesty International, Systematic Use of Torture in Guinea, *The Wire*, June 2007, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/NWS21/005/2007/en> [accessed August 2008]

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Guinea: Security Forces Respond to Protests with Killings*, New York, July 2006, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/05/guinea13689.htm> [accessed August 2008]; Human Rights Watch, *Dying for Change: Brutality and Repression by Guinean Security Forces in Response to a Nationwide Strike*, New York, April 2007, <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/guinea0407/> [accessed August 2008]

fired at President Conté's car as it passed through the Enco 5 district, in June 2006 after the protests by school pupils and in January-February 2007 after the mass protests in Conakry.²¹ Such harsh tactics have been a key tool for the Conté regime in intimidating the opposition and particularly in guarding against the risk that mass street protest over political or social issues could gain sufficient momentum to develop into the sort of people powerful uprisings that have brought about changes of government in some other francophone African states.

However, there are signs that the Conté regime's hold over the security forces may no longer be as tight as it used to be. Military discipline is weakening. Travellers in the countryside report a marked increase in the incidence of non-official military checkpoints set up by soldiers to extract bribes; these used to be a rarity, by comparison with some other West African states.²² And while Lansana Conté has always faced the risk of coup plots and mutinies, these have become more frequent. For instance, soldiers mutinied over pay in May 2008 in Conakry – provoking the dismissal of defence minister General Bailo Diallo – and the government had to give in to their demands. It then had to rely on forceful tactics by the army itself to quell a subsequent police mutiny just weeks later, in June.²³ During the crisis of early 2007, Conté felt so unsure of army loyalty that he borrowed several hundred troops from the allied government of Guinea-Bissau and former members of the Liberian LURD guerrilla movement.²⁴

However, the Béréts Rouges presidential guard, largely recruited from the president's own Soussou ethnic group and at least partially under the command of the president's son, Ousmane Conté, still plays a key security role. There have been numerous reports of the force's readiness to engage in direct physical brutality against civilians.²⁵

Two factors may have contributed to the general erosion of military command discipline. At the political senior level, a number of Conté's longstanding former comrades are now retired or dead. Moreover, the government's dire financial situation has pushed pay into arrears and may even have disrupted the continued provision of cheap rice to the forces. The mutinies of May 2008 were fuelled by material grievances rather than political demands. Although some ambitious younger officers are growing impatient, there is no clear evidence that a pro-reform or pro-democracy cadre of younger men is emerging.

3.4 Opposition Parties

Guinea has a highly developed culture of opposition political activity, with at least four major well-established parties that have distinct identities and bases of support, together with a number of smaller groups. Particularly in poor districts of Conakry, and in certain provincial areas, opposition party campaigning is a major factor in the political environment. And because they are influential, opposition parties have been the frequent target of repressive

²¹ Human Rights Watch, *The Perverse Side of Things*

²² European diplomat travelling in southern Guinea. Personal interview, July 2008

²³ See Reuters, Tanks Deployed as Guinea Troops Confront Mutineers, 29 May 2008 and other news reports available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/doc106?openform&rc=1&cc=gin&po=0&so=8&stc=NAM> [accessed August 2008]

²⁴ Political risk/security specialist on Mano River countries. Telephone interviews, January-February 2007

²⁵ See, e.g. Amnesty International, Guinea: Security Forces Still a Threat, London, 27 June 2007 (press release), <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR29/004/2007/en/dom-AFR290042007en.html> [accessed August 2008]

interventions by the security forces but also occasional beneficiaries of friendly if limited overtures from the Conté regime.

There are several main opposition parties.²⁶

- **Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinée (RPG)**, led by Alpha Condé, primarily draws its support from the Malinké population of eastern and central-southern Guinea and Conakry; its strong activist base in the capital has been regularly targeted by repressive security force action and party leader Alpha Condé spent three years in jail after the 1998 election. Condé has spent much time abroad and day to day leadership of the party activities is largely entrusted to the administrative secretary Mohamed Diané. Condé has maintained a vigorous anti-government line. The RPG boycotted the 2002 parliamentary elections and rejected an offer of a minor ministerial post in the new Soaré government.
- **Union pour le Progrès et le Renouveau (UPR)** is one of two parties that depend mainly on the support of the Peul population, particularly in Conakry and the Fouta Djallon highlands in the central north of Guinea. It was led until his death in 2004 by Siradiou Diallo, a prominent former journalist who campaigned in traditional style, visiting community leaders in Fouta Djallon. The Peul have sometimes been the target of particularly harsh treatment – in 1998 the authorities bulldozed the mainly Peul district of Kaporo Rail in Conakry – yet Diallo was sometimes willing to compromise with government. The UPR participated in the 2002 election and in 2008 Diallo's successor Ousmane Bah nominated the holder of a minor ministerial post.
- **Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG)**, the other main party drawing on Peul support, was founded by Mamadou Bâ (also known as Bâ or Bah Mamadou), a onetime ally of Siradiou Diallo. The UFDG has taken a stronger opposition line than the UPR but resisted Alpha Condé's invitation to join a radical opposition alliance with a more outspoken stance. This somewhat equivocal positioning was confirmed with the recent recruitment of the moderate former prime minister (2004-2006) Cellou Dalein Diallo as leader to succeed Mamadou Bâ. The UFDG has also accepted a post under Soaré.
- **Union des Forces Républicaines (UFR)** is led by Sidya Touré, another former prime minister. But it has adopted a more confrontational approach, refusing to participate in the 2002 and 2003 elections and refusing to join the Soaré government. Originally founded by Bakary Goyo Zoumanigui – now its general secretary – it was joined by Touré after he had been forced out of government in 1999. As prime minister he had been notable for technocratic competence in restoring reliable power and water supplies in Conakry but was clearly uncomfortable with the tough line adopted by the security forces during the Kaporo Rail affair; he was dismissed after his efforts to combat corruption began to threaten presidential allies. The UFR's appeal to the Conakry urban electorate and among the young is based on Touré's successful public service track record and independence from any particular ethnic constituency. (Touré himself is from the small Diakhanké ethnic group.) Its organizational vigour among young people – organizing football tournaments and distributing T-shirts and posters – has made it the target of harassment by

²⁶ Information on the opposition parties derived from interviews with leaders/senior figures/organizers/activists/supporters of the RPG, UFDG, UFR, UPG and UPR parties 2004-2008 as well as documents issued by these parties and interviews with journalists from Guinean independent media 2007-2008

the authorities, anxious to forestall a fresh “people power” campaign; at least seven known UFR activists were killed in the confrontations between the authorities and protesters of January and February 2007.²⁷

- **Union pour le Progrès de la Guinée** (UPG), which draws much support from minority ethnic groups from the Guinée Forestière region in the south, is led by Jean-Marie Doré. He was the spokesman for the Front Républicain pour l’Alternance Démocratique (FRAD) opposition alliance and he has taken a relatively firm anti-government stance; but he did participate in the 2002 legislative election and he has nominated a minister to Soaré’s government.

Officially, Guinea operates a multi-party democratic system. Both to contain domestic dissent and to fend off international pressure, the regime has felt the need to maintain the normal cycle of regular presidential, legislative and municipal elections – even though it has been determined to control the outcome of these contests. The significance of the opposition parties as political actors has therefore fluctuated in line with the electoral timetable. In the 1998 and 2003 presidential election years, and the municipal elections of 2005, the parties were the major challengers to Lansana Conté and the ruling PUP and thus became the targets of harsh repressive measures. In 1998 Condé was imprisoned for three years on questionable charges; in 2003-2004, the RPG and Sidya Touré’s UFR were repeatedly the targets of arrests and aggressive security force attacks on campaign meetings; in late 2005 RPG activists were detained in Siguiri when their party appeared poised to win the mayoralty. However, during 2006 and 2007 the parties played a less important role as trade unions and the student movement moved to the fore.²⁸

Faced with the certain prospect of defeat, because of the Conté regime’s control over electoral arrangements, opposition groups have had to ask themselves whether or not it is worth contesting elections at all. In 2002 the UPG and UPR did join parliamentary elections and were rewarded with a minority slice of parliamentary seats in what was a totally rigged contest.²⁹ But in 2003, largely under the umbrella of the FRAD alliance, all the main opposition parties boycotted the presidential vote; the only challenger to Conté was Mamadou Bhoie Barry, leader of the small Union pour le Progrès National (UPN), an ally of the ruling PUP. In 2005, pressed by the European Union to make a gesture towards national reconciliation, the opposition parties relented and took part in the municipal polls; but once again, these were rigged to ensure a comprehensive PUP victory and it remains unclear whether any or all of the parties will deem it worthwhile joining the next legislative election.³⁰

The Conté regime commands all the tools of official patronage, the state machine and public spending, the security forces and extensive networks of loyalty among local chiefs and

²⁷ UFR senior local party organizer. Personal interview, Conakry, early 2008; this organizer provided the names of the individual UFR party members killed by the security forces in the early 2007 crackdown.

²⁸ Account based on news media sources including reports by Agence France Presse, Reuters, PANA, Jeune Afrique and Radio France Internationale

²⁹ European Foreign Ministry head of West Africa policy. Personal interview, asserting that the votes in the 2002 legislative election were not fully counted at all and that the Conté regime simply negotiated a share-out of parliamentary seats with the UPR party

³⁰ Account based on news media sources including reports by Agence France Presse, Reuters, PANA, Jeune Afrique and Radio France Internationale

notables built up by the president over more than two decades in power. This has forced opposition parties to rely on a blend of ethnic and lineage loyalties and a remarkably vigorous culture of grassroots activism.

The roots of modern Guinean political culture lie in the country's early independence decades. Like a number of other sub-Saharan states that pursued a socialist path, Guinea developed strong traditions of grassroots political organization and engagement. When the move to a multi-party system allowed their emergence in the early 1990s, the new opposition parties built on this culture of mass activism (*militantisme*). But they also drew on ethnic and family connections – which meant that most were heavily reliant on ethno-regional networks of support. The UPR and the UFDG rely substantially on party leaders' traditional ties to village leaders, local families or imams in the Fouta Djallon. The RPG blends traditional campaigning with urban activism. The UFR is almost totally reliant on urban grassroots mobilization. Ethnicity influences political loyalties but does not always decide them. Reliable membership figures for parties are not available. The RPG may well have the largest full membership overall.³¹

The decision of the UPG, UPR and UFDG to take up the offer of posts in Soaré's cabinet should not be taken as a sudden shift in stance or a move towards alliance with the PUP. But it would not be surprising if these three parties participated in the next legislative elections while the UFR and RPG boycotted the poll.

3.5 Civil Society Actors

Guinea is a predominantly Islamic society and imams play an important role as figures of authority in the community. They have largely avoided being drawn into partisan support for either the Conté regime or the opposition in the confrontations of recent years, although some in the Fouta Djallon have been active supporters of the UPR.

At village level, local chiefs have frequently been coopted into the patronage structures built up by President Conté over the past 24 years.

The highly respected human rights monitor OGDH (Organisation Guinéenne des Droits de l'Homme), led by Thierno Sow and affiliated to the International Human Rights Federation in Paris, has proved itself ready to speak out against abuses.³²

But in Conakry and other urban centres, it is the trade unions and the student movement that have emerged as the most vocal and independent voices of civil society. The Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée (CNTG) and the Union Syndicale des Travailleurs de Guinée (USTG) led the protests of January-February 2007. The union leaders Rabiadou Serah Diallo (CNTG) and Ibrahima Fofana (USTG) remain the moral conscience of the reform campaign, widely viewed as non-partisan judges of whether the government is living up to the promises of reform made in the agreements with the unions that restored order after the protests of early 2007.³³

³¹ See further Clark and Gardinier (eds), *Political Reform in Francophone Africa*; Kaba, L., *Le "Non" de la Guinée à De Gaulle*, Paris: Chaka, 1989

³² See e.g. interview with Thierno Sow on the website of AfricaGuinee.com, <http://www.africaguinee.com/index.php?monAction=detailNews&miniAction=imprime&id=319> [accessed August 2008]

³³ See International Crisis Group, *Guinea: Change or Chaos*

The student movement has also been a significant voice. The years since 2000 have seen repeated protests in both schools and universities, of which the main are in Conakry and Kankan. The protests are generally motivated by questions of student welfare, such as delays to grant payments, problems with accommodation or, in lycées in June 2006, delays to exams. But there is considerable overlap between these movements and the involvement of young people in opposition party activism.³⁴ In poorer districts of Conakry, there is a significant degree of youth gang activity. There are indications that some youths took advantage of the mass protests of January and February 2007 to engage in criminal violence. However, this was the activity of a small minority; it should not detract from the overall significance of what was a genuine mass popular protest.

The media is also a significant civil society force. Guinea has a highly developed and diverse range of print and internet media, surprisingly frank in its critical and satirical coverage of the Lansana Conté regime. Conté allowed independent newspapers to speak fairly freely because they were hardly read outside educated sections of the population in Conakry itself and had limited influence. This may have proved a miscalculation, particularly as most publications now also appear in website form, reaching a wider range of people, particularly among the politically aware and among youth. Broadcasting used to be a state monopoly. But under the premiership of Cellou Dalein Diallo (2004-2006), donor pressure persuaded the government to liberalize the law to permit the establishment of independent radio stations.³⁵ This could become politically important, because radio, especially when broadcast in African languages rather than French, can reach many people who would never read newspapers or the internet.

3.6 Donors and Investors

As previously noted, Guinea's poor governance record and lack of economic strategy has crippled relationships with the IMF, World Bank and international donors. Some of Conté's prime ministers, in particular Sidya Touré (1996-1999), Cellou Dalein Diallo (2004-2006) and Lansana Kouyaté (2007-2008) have demonstrated a clear understanding of economic and development strategy and sought to revive working relationships with donors. But they have always been unable to retain sustained backing from President Conté.

However, despite the regime's erratic track record, donors have decided over the past two years to take some risks in the hope of drawing Guinea into a new partnership with the international community and saving it from economic collapse and conflict. The European Union's development commissioner Louis Michel, a strong advocate of "constructive engagement" with states that have a poor governance record and risk collapse, has led the new approach towards Guinea. He offered the restoration of EU aid, if the government agreed to reforms; the IMF followed suit last year, agreeing a US\$ 75.2 million Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) in December.³⁶ And in January 2008 the Fund approved interim debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, once the government

³⁴ Youth activists in student and party campaigning. Personal interviews, 2005-2008

³⁵ Media Freedom a Casualty of Guinea Crackdown, *Mail & Guardian* [Johannesburg], 19 February 2007, <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2007-02-19-media-freedom-a-casualty-of-guinea-crackdown> [accessed August 2008]

³⁶ International Monetary Fund, IMF Executive Board Approves US\$75.2 Million PRGF Arrangement and Additional Interim HIPC Assistance for Guinea, 21 December 2008 (press release), <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2007/pr07309.htm> [accessed August 2008]

had produced a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).³⁷ On 28 July 2008 the IMF announced that it had completed the first review of Guinea's programme and agreed to increase its financial support to help the country cope with the increased cost of food and fuel imports. The Fund said that inflation had fallen and the fiscal position had improved.³⁸ Yet although Guinea has a cadre of technically capable officials, there is little to suggest that the leadership of the regime has fundamentally been won over to the case for reform. Indeed, recent reports indicate that the finance ministry has granted the presidency unfettered access to the treasury.³⁹

There is also a risk that Guinea will use its mineral wealth to escape the constraints of reform conditionality imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions, the African Development Bank and western donors. China has already demonstrated its willingness to extend substantial long-term financing to African countries that agree to supply it with strategic raw materials; such support usually comes without any political or economic policy conditions attached. The Conté regime may hope to negotiate arrangements with China – which is anxious to secure access to Guinean iron ore – that would allow it to step aside from a relationship with the IMF, EU and other mainstream donors.

4 Guinea and Its Neighbours

4.1 The West African Context

Guinea is situated in a part of Africa that is relatively advanced in terms of economic integration and the development of regional security structures. ECOWAS was pioneering in its creation, in 1990, of the ECOMOG intervention force, in an attempt to contain conflict in Liberia and protect civilians; and Guinea was a significant troop contributor. Subsequently, ECOWAS has sought to enhance its capacity for crisis management and the planning of intervention missions; despite its formal “economic” title, the organization has developed a strong political dimension to its activities. West African governments, acting as a group, do feel able to apply pressure to countries or individual leaders in or on the verge of conflict. And linguistic boundaries between Francophone and Anglophone states, and the specific vested interests and alliances of individual governments – strong though these sometimes are – have not blocked the capacity for group collective action when disaster appears to threaten.⁴⁰ ECOWAS' membership includes many countries whose armed forces have experience of international peacekeeping or intervention; the Nigerian, Senegalese and Ghanaian armed forces have particularly wide experience of UN or African Union operations.

However, the Conté regime has become somewhat detached from broader regional trends, and West Africa's further progress in terms of integration and security will not necessarily translate into a stabilizing influence upon Guinea. The president has shown himself ready to

³⁷ Guinea, Ministry of the Economy, Finances and Planning, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, Conakry, 11 January 2008, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.cfm?sk=21579.0> [accessed August 2008]

³⁸ International Monetary Fund, IMF Executive Board Completes First Review under PRGF Arrangement for Guinea, Increases Financial Assistance to Mitigate Food and Fuels Price Impact, and Approves US\$28.7 Million Disbursement, 28 July 2008 (press release), <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2008/pr08185.htm> [accessed August 2008]

³⁹ Europe-based Guinea analyst. Personal interview, July 2008

⁴⁰ See the official website of ECOWAS, <http://www.sec.ecowas.int/> [accessed August 2008]

ignore external African pressure, as when he ignored African attempts to encourage him to hold reasonably free and fair presidential elections in 2003. Political links between Guinea and most other West African governments are relatively weak, with a few exceptions. Guinea is not part of the franc zone and is therefore outside the regular network of high level connections that brings ministers and senior officials in most other former French colonies into frequent contact. Together with Sierra Leone and Liberia, Guinea forms the Mano River Union (MRU). However, this sub-regional grouping – originally formed by Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1973, with Guinea joining seven years later – was inoperable for most of the period 1989-2003, because of the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia. It was formally reactivated at a summit in 2004 but practical cooperation was still hindered by border disputes. In 2007 Guinea hosted a new summit aimed at rejuvenating the Union, but the practical results have so far been limited. The MRU's potential role is complicated by the marked differences in administrative and state culture between Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, although cultural and ethnic connections between all three MRU states are strong and some cooperation structures outside government are well developed, for example, the Mano River Women's Peace Network, which coordinates the activities of women's rights specialists and activist campaigners in the MRU states.

So, although West Africa has quite well-developed regional security arrangements, it is far from clear how ECOWAS would bring this capacity to bear on an emerging crisis in Guinea. A regional management of crisis in Guinea, or an ECOMOG intervention, might have to be led by Nigeria, as the major regional power but one that is sufficiently distant to have no major bilateral problems of its own in relation to Guinea.

4.2 Guinea's Neighbours

4.2.1 Sierra Leone

The relationship between Guinea and Sierra Leone is complex. During the Sierra Leonean civil conflict, the then government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah developed close ties with the Conté regime, which became a key security partner. Guinea had been a key member of ECOMOG but also became involved, on the government's side, as a bilateral ally: in response to raids into Guinea by Sierra Leonean rebels, the Guinean army raided Sierra Leonean territory. Although the prime targets were groups such as the RUF rebel movement, there were complaints that civilian communities had suffered assaults too. The situation was particularly troubled in the "Parrot's Beak" area, where Guinean, Liberian and Sierra Leonean borders converge, and where there were large concentrations of refugees and significant activity by armed groups.⁴¹

The Guinean army also occupied territory whose ownership is disputed by the two countries along the Makona River, including the town of Yenga. Guinea accommodated huge numbers of Sierra Leonean refugees during the latter country's civil war and their return home proceeded relatively smoothly (although some had suffered abuse at the hands of the Guinean security forces while they were in camps in Guinea). The border dispute is yet to be finally settled, but Sierra Leone and Guinea have not allowed this to disrupt their wider bilateral relationship. This remains fairly good, even following the retirement of President Kabbah, to be succeeded by President Ernest Bai Koroma.

⁴¹ Former senior official of the Guinean refugee camp system in the Parrot's Beak area. Personal interview

Because it is surrounded by Guinean territory both to the north and the east, and because of its own fragile state of post-conflict reconstruction, Sierra Leone would probably be the country most affected should Guinea subside into ongoing conflict and instability. Sierra Leone would have great difficulty in protecting its borders against the movement of armed groups from Guinea. Moreover, a breakdown of ordered state control in Guinea would facilitate the regional circulation of arms, and also diamonds – which are easily smuggled and can be sold to finance weapons purchase and other destabilizing activity.

4.2.2 Liberia

Although Liberia is at an earlier stage of post-conflict reconstruction, it would probably be less exposed to destabilizing impacts from a major crisis in Guinea, partly because the mutual border is shorter and abuts the Guinée Forestière region, far from Conakry. Furthermore, the government of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf still enjoys strong international support for the post-conflict process.

However, there is no room for complacency. Any breakdown of order in Guinea would facilitate the revival of trading in weapons and diamonds and the movement of armed groups, with obvious risks of destabilization for Liberia. There are still thought to be elements of the former LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy) militia at large in Guinea, whose co-leader Ayesha Conneh has frequently based herself in Conakry; she has the ear of President Conté, whom she regards as a quasi-godfather and patron. US intelligence secured clear evidence that Conté supported LURD during the latter stages of the Liberian civil conflict; more recently, in early 2007 Ayesha Conneh returned the favour, providing fighters to help the Conté regime stave off mass protests in Conakry.⁴²

Liberian refugees in southern Guinea have largely returned home. But this region remains fragile. Within Guinea itself there is latent tension in Guinée Forestière, in the far south, between the local Guerzé ethnic group and Malinkés who have moved into the region. A breakdown of central government authority, as a result of political upheaval in Conakry, could create conditions in which these local tensions might slide into conflict again. That could pose security threats for Liberia if armed groups began to circulate in the Guinean far south. Liberia does not itself have the military strength to seal its border against such destabilizing influences, although international forces might be able to achieve this.

4.2.3 Côte d'Ivoire

Western Côte d'Ivoire, still an unstable and fragile region, is exposed to risks similar to those facing Liberia, in the case of a breakdown of stability within Guinea. It too abuts the sometimes tense Guinée Forestière region. As in the case of Liberia and Sierra Leone, in the past there have been substantial movements of refugees across the border. However, there has been less armed cross-border activity. And although a crisis in Guinea would have impacts for the west of Côte d'Ivoire, in terms of refugee movements and local security, the overall risks for the Ivorian state are much less than for Sierra Leone and Liberia. The focus of tension and political activity in Côte d'Ivoire is further east, in Abidjan and Bouaké. Côte d'Ivoire's internal problems – still far from a certain resolution despite the current peace process – are quite distinct from the situation in Guinea; the crisis overlap evident in the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone does not apply to the same extent.

⁴² See, International Crisis Group, *Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm*, Freetown, April 2003, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1493&l=1> [accessed August 2008]; Political risk/security specialist on Mano River countries. Telephone interviews, January-February 2007

At a political level, relations between the Ivorian president, Laurent Gbagbo, and President Lansana Conté are actually quite good. While Gbagbo was regarded with mistrust by most other West African governments because of his failure to rein in violence against Muslim northerners, he continued to have the supportive friendship of Conté. Like Gbagbo, Guinea's president also found himself treated with wariness by western donors because of human rights issues. But this political relationship has not translated into a substantive practical partnership. Côte d'Ivoire is too preoccupied by its own difficult process of domestic reconciliation to divert much attention to the affairs of other countries. And in the event of a breakdown of stability in Guinea, the international peacekeepers still present in Côte d'Ivoire could be deployed to help protect the western border areas from overspill impacts.⁴³

4.2.4 Mali

Mali has strong democratic institutions, a deeply rooted culture of political consensus, well-trained armed forces and a president, Amadou Toumani Touré, who commands respect both at home and across the region. These assets should leave the country relatively well-placed to cope with the overspill impact of the crisis in Guinea. Relations between the governments in Bamako and Conakry are correct rather than close, but there are no major issues of dispute at official level. Touré's personal standing as a former soldier but also a democratic reformer, and his experience of crisis mediation in the Central African Republic, means that he might be seen by many in Guinea as a suitable external mediator during a crisis. He has taken care to remain strictly neutral towards Guinea's recent internal political and social conflicts.

However, there are some complicating factors in Malian relations with Guinea. The Malinké ethnic group which largely supports the RPG, one of the most hardline Guinean opposition parties, has close socio-ethnic ties across the border with populations in neighbouring regions of Mali. That could engender distrust of Mali among Soussou supporters of President Conté.

Another factor that could foster mistrust in Guinean security circles and in Conté's entourage is the fact that radical opponents of the regime appear to have occasionally been allowed to use Mali as a refuge. N'Famara Oulare, an escaped participant in the abortive 1996 coup attempt against Conté, is thought possibly to be living in Mali. Another rebel exile, N'Faly Kaba – who claimed to have set up a Union des Forces pour une Guinée Nouvelle, with an armed wing headed by a former 1996 putschist – was certainly based in Mali as recently as 2003; the Guinean government even sent an envoy to negotiate with him there. There have been rumours that Oulare has been linked to relatively recent putsch attempts against Conté.⁴⁴ There is no suggestion that Mali has actively supported any such exiled rebel activity, but the fact that it has not arrested any known Guinean dissidents and handed them over to the government in Conakry is bound to foster a degree of wariness of Mali in Conté's inner circle.

There have also been some local land disputes between villages on either side of the Mali/Guinea border; these have not assumed any national political tinge in either country and the two governments have cooperated in trying to pacify the quarrelling communities. But in a situation of national crisis, with feelings running high, these minor issues could be a complicating factor.

⁴³ See United Nations, Secretary-General, Progress Reports on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, 2005-2007; see also news media sources including reports by Agence France Presse, Reuters, PANA, Jeune Afrique and Radio France Internationale

⁴⁴ See, Economist Intelligence Unit, *Quarterly Reports on Mali*, London, 2007-2008

4.2.5 Senegal

Like Mali, Senegal is a well-established democratic state with strong institutions. In particular, its army is among the most professional in Africa, with a strong tradition of political neutrality. The president, Abdoulaye Wade, is one of the most prominent regional leaders and elder statesmen in West Africa, and he has taken some interest in Guinea's internal problems. He is also highly active on the diplomatic scene and is perhaps the most plausible potential external mediator in a Guinean crisis, at least from among the neighbouring states. In January 2008 Wade visited Conakry, hoping to hold talks with Conté; but he was unable to secure a meeting with Guinea's president and was forced to limit his trip to a meeting at the airport with then prime minister Kouyaté. In geographical and ethnic terms, Senegal is relatively isolated from Guinea's internal problems. However, there are some complicating factors to take into account. Senegal's own southernmost region, Casamance, has a long history of instability and local guerrilla activity, a problem not always successfully managed by the Dakar government or the Senegalese army. The army would almost certainly be wary of intervening directly in Guinea after a difficult experience in doing so in Guinea-Bissau, at the request of the government – many of whose own troops then switched to join local rebels, while the Senegalese were accused of human rights abuses. So in diplomatic terms, Senegal could be a major player; but in security terms it might be cautious.⁴⁵

4.2.6 Guinea-Bissau

President João Bernardo Vieira of Guinea-Bissau is a firm ally of President Conté. Indeed, relations are so close that during the crisis of early 2007 he sent several hundred troops to Conakry to buttress the forces of the Guinean government in facing down protesters; indeed, Conté had sent Guinean troops to help deal with upheavals in Guinea-Bissau in 1996 and 1998.⁴⁶ In an extreme breakdown of order in Guinea, Vieira could therefore play a military role of support to the Conté regime. But in other respects, his country is probably too weak, politically and economically, to play a major role; at the socio-economic level relations are much less extensive than between Guinea and Sierra Leone. Moreover, Vieira's firm military alignment with Conté's repressive security campaign of early 2007 means that his support would be regarded with mistrust and potentially outright enmity by Guinean opposition parties, trade unions, students and other civil society groups. But Guinea-Bissau's proximity as a coastal neighbour means that it might see an influx of refugees from coastal largely Soussou communities should Guinea slide into violent crisis.

4.2.7 The Gambia

Gambia's President Jammeh is also a firm friend of Conté. Indeed, in July 2008 he made a notably effusive visit to Conakry to signal his support.⁴⁷ This suggests that in an extreme crisis his government might be prepared to offer some form of support. However, Gambia is too weak to be a major player in the management of a crisis in Guinea, and its government is probably too deeply mistrusted by the opposition and by civil society to be considered as an honest broker. In practical terms Gambia is too distant to feel much overspill impact from a crisis in Guinea, other than the return of its own expatriate community from Conakry.

⁴⁵ See news media sources including reports by Agence France Presse, Reuters, PANA, Jeune Afrique and Radio France Internationale, 2003-2008; Abdoulaye Wade. Personal interview, Dakar 1998

⁴⁶ Political risk/security specialist on Mano River countries. Telephone interviews, January-February 2007

⁴⁷ Gambia, Office of the President, Guinea a True Friend, Says President Jammeh, 17 July 2008 (press release), http://www.statehouse.gm/conakry-bjl-airport-intview_170708.htm [accessed August 2008]

5 Conclusions

5.1 Possible Future Scenarios

The initial conciliatory gestures by Soaré may signal that the president and his close acolytes appreciate that frustration with lack of progress under the former prime minister Lansana Kouyaté has created a window of opportunity for the new government – as suggested by the readiness of three opposition parties to accept ministerial posts – and that they are prepared to take the political risk of pursuing reform. Or Soaré's early moves may be no more than a bid to buy time and placate domestic critics and foreign donors without giving any ground on the real substance of power. There is little sign of the emergence of a reformist element in the military, prepared to stage a pro-democracy putsch, although such a development cannot be totally ruled out.

We have not so far seen a mass movement of Guineans out of the country; there has not so far been outright conflict between armed groups. But this does not mean such developments are impossible, even if they remain unlikely.

This section therefore explores three possible evolutions. But it should be understood that these scenarios are not mutually exclusive. The future development of events in Guinea could well include elements from two or even three of these scenarios – i.e. progress in some areas, reversals in others.

Conciliation, Stabilization and Gradual Reform

Prime minister Soaré is a presidential loyalist, but he has persuaded some opposition party representatives to join the government and the trade unions seem prepared to wait and see whether he will in fact move reform forward. The agreements made in the wake of the early 2007 mass protests offer a route-map towards political reconciliation and cautious democratizing reform; Guinea's huge mineral wealth, especially at a time of high world commodity prices, could combine with renewed donor support to provide the economic resources required for reconciliation and recovery. Opposition movements remain committed to peaceful electoral politics; a fair and free parliamentary election in late 2008 could be the platform for reconciliation and peaceful change, and a honourable run-up to retirement for Conté in 2010.

Continued Stasis

Despite minor concessions, which just about keep donors on side and dissuade the unions and the opposition from launching a fresh wave of mass street protests, little serious progress is made on reform. The elections of end-2008 are either postponed yet again or manipulated to preserve the dominance of Conté and the PUP; softer opponents are bought off with a few parliamentary seats, but the real power structure remains unchanged. The army remains a machine for self-nourishment and sporadic repression. The most dynamic opposition parties remain unreconciled. There is little or no serious policy reform, and donors maintain support at minimal levels. Mineral investment, possibly from China, provides a new financial lifeline for the regime, allowing Guinea to ignore European, US and IMF/World Bank conditionality.

Renewed Confrontation and Violence

Soaré proves to be no more than a marginalized token; the opposition remains alienated and the trade unions lose all hope of reform. Fresh disenchantment and protest is met with renewed violent repression. Donors respond by halting non-emergency support. The Guinean state becomes even more deeply in thrall to military and sectional clan and political interests.

There is a risk of instability with overspill consequences for regional neighbours. Guinea becomes a net exporter of refugees. In such circumstances the risk of a military coup or a fresh attempt at popular uprising would sharply increase.

5.2 Assessment of Potential Developments

For the first scenario – conciliation and reform – to succeed, the powerful vested interests associated with the regime will need to believe that they can continue to do well, even under a reforming agenda. That is to say, the overall growth of the economy and launch of effective basic development measures would create a situation in which today's elite would continue to prosper from the overall growth of the economy and would continue to wield a share of power, because it would be in the interest of reformists to build a broad national consensus and not risk alienating Conté's allies. This is not impossible. The EU, France, the US and most neighbouring African governments will certainly be trying to persuade Conté and his allies that a future of reform and recovery can be beneficial for them too. There are moderate figures within the PUP regime, such as parliamentary speaker Abou Somparé and perhaps also some of the more technocratic ministers and younger military officers, who may be open to such arguments. But it is far from certain that the president and his key allies can be persuaded.

The second scenario – continued stasis, perhaps because the government is released from donor pressure by the receipt of alternative unconditional funding from China or other new economic allies – may be the most likely. Certainly, the track record of the past 10 years suggests that this is the course with which Conté may feel most comfortable; and there is little evidence of reformers emerging around him who command real influence. Five years ago, one might have concluded that, ultimately, donor pressure would force the regime of Conté, or a successor from his inner circle, to embark on sustained democratization and economic reform. However, in present world commodity market conditions, we are seeing how some resource rich African countries are able to cultivate new international alliances that release them from the need to comply with the conditionalities imposed by the traditional alliance of the IMF and World Bank and western donors. Angola and Equatorial Guinea, producers of oil, are the prime examples of this; Guinea's case may show whether such freedom of manoeuvre can also be achieved by a state whose wealth lies in the metal ores needed by China and other new emerging powers.

Nor can the risk of renewed violent confrontation (the third scenario) be completely ruled out. Discipline in the army and police is fracturing, even if recent mutineers have been appeased with financial concessions. Meanwhile, anger is deeply rooted among large segments of the urban population; activists have already shown their readiness to return to the streets despite earlier bouts of repression and they could do so again, especially if material conditions in Conakry – further rises in the price of rice, or disruption to water and power supplies – produce a renewed mood of desperate frustration.

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