

WRITENET Paper No. 19

GUINEA: EARLY WARNING ANALYSIS

A Writenet Report by Paul Melly

**commissioned by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,
Emergency and Security Services**

August 2003

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List of Acronyms

AFP	Agence France Presse
COSALAC	Comité d'appui à l'action de Lansana Conté
EDF9	Ninth European Development Fund
EU	European Union
FRAD	Front républicain pour l'alternance démocratique (Republican Front for Democratic Change)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICG	International Crisis Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
Nepad	New African Partnership for Development
OHADA	Organisation pour l'harmonisation en Afrique du droit des affaires (Organization for Harmonization of African Business Law)
PANA	Pan-African News Agency
PRGF	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PUP	Parti de l'unité et du progrès (Unity and Progress Party)
RPG	Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée (Union of Guinean Peoples)
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SMP	Staff Monitored Programme
UFDG	Union des forces démocratiques de Guinée (Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea)
UFR	Union des forces républicaines (Union of Republican Forces)
UK	United Kingdom [of Great Britain and Northern Ireland]
UPG	Union pour le progrès de la Guinée (Guinean Progressive Union)
UPR	Union pour le renouveau (Union for Renewal)
US	United States [of America]

Executive Summary

Guinea has been an island of relative calm in a region scarred by violent civil conflict and political instability. But there is now a serious risk that it too could be tipped into domestic upheaval by tensions surrounding the presidential election due in December this year. President Lansana Conté is standing again, despite his severe diabetes. He dominates Guinea, but leaves everyday affairs to prime minister Lamine Sidimé. The prominence of his minority Soussou ethnic group within government is widely resented; corruption has spread. Central bank deputy governor Fodé Soumah represents Conté on the campaign trail, but his high profile provokes mistrust among other leaders of the Parti pour l'unité et le progrès (PUP).

Previous elections were characterized by abuses. The Front républicain pour l'alternance démocratique (FRAD) alliance of opposition parties wants fair media access, liberalization of radio broadcasting and an independent electoral commission – demands backed by donors. But the government has yet to signal a readiness to give ground. Indeed, foreign dignitaries were barred from a conference of Alpha Condé's Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée (RPG) in June and security forces treated protesters harshly. A failure to reform election arrangements could jeopardize access to aid; new European Union support is now on hold.

Living conditions, especially in Conakry, are difficult, with repeated power and water cuts. Socio-economic issues have provoked unrest, including a violent riot in June in Coyah, just outside the capital. Nutritional conditions are poor. Guinea qualified for HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) debt relief, but its International Monetary Fund programme has run off track; activity in the important bauxite mining sector was recently disrupted by a strike. Foreign investors have been deterred by political tensions and transparency concerns.

The regional context, in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, is fragile. To limit the impact of the Liberian crisis, the authorities and international organizations have been transferring refugees to camps away from the border. Many Guinean migrants have fled Côte d'Ivoire.

Several scenarios can be envisaged. The most favourable would see the government agree to reform arrangements for the presidential election, thus persuading the opposition to participate. The victor would have a widely accepted mandate and could then launch a reinvigorated reform process.

A worst-case scenario would see the government refusing all concessions and manipulating a much-disputed re-election victory for the president. This would provoke widespread protests, which would be fiercely suppressed, provoking further popular anger, the erosion of national cohesion and more generalized destabilization or even conflict. There would be a risk of a military coup. Foreign refugees would be caught in the backlash and humanitarian work would be seriously disrupted.

The most likely scenario lies somewhere between these extremes. Limited government concessions would not be enough to ensure national acceptance of the election – which most opposition groups might boycott. Sporadic protest would be treated harshly. Donor relations would be damaged. A re-elected but ailing President Conté would be unable to provide effective leadership, but his continued reliance on Fodé Soumah could deepen rifts within the PUP. Urban refugees would be at risk of harsh treatment by an insecure and nervy regime.

1 Introduction: The Historical Context

Lansana Conté took power in 1984, through a bloodless military coup after the death of Sékou Touré, Guinea's post-independence leader. Under Touré, who refused to accept the independence conditions set by the colonial power, France, Guinea had become isolated from the West and heavily reliant on Soviet aid; internally, the regime was characterized by extreme repression, which drove many Guineans into exile. Conté released prisoners, began a limited liberalization and improved ties with the West; this created a measure of popular goodwill which has helped to sustain him over the subsequent years.

Faced with the 1990-1991 wave of democratization sweeping across West Africa, he introduced a quasi-democratic multi-party constitution. With the advantage of incumbency, he easily secured election as head of state under the new system in a clearly flawed poll in 1993.¹ After narrowly surviving a military mutiny and coup attempt in February 1996 – through sheer personal courage and refusal to surrender to the putschists – Conté began to move the country down the reformist track already taken by a number of other francophone African states. He appointed Sidya Touré, a reformist technocrat returned from exile in Côte d'Ivoire, as prime minister, and the government began a drive to liberalize the economy, reduce corruption, focus resources on grassroots development and poverty reduction and attract foreign investors.

But after securing re-election in 1998 – in another flawed poll – Conté retreated to a much more authoritarian and traditionalist style of leadership, dismissing Touré and entrusting most key government posts to members of his Soussou ethnic group (which accounts for only about 10-20 per cent of the population). Progress on IMF-supported economic reform began to slow down and political development went into reverse, as the government adopted a more authoritarian style.

The regime has been reluctant to effectively implement a properly functioning democracy. Alpha Condé was imprisoned after the 1998 presidential poll and only released in 2001. The 2001 referendum permitting Conté to seek a third term produced an implausible 98 per cent majority in favour of the change, and the 2002 election was widely regarded by donors as lacking credibility. The European Union (EU) refused to endorse the resulting victory for Lansana Conté's ruling Parti de l'unité et du progrès (PUP); some international observers allege that the votes were not even counted and that the government simply negotiated a share-out of national assembly seats with those opposition parties that had not boycotted the poll, notably Siradiou's Diallo's Union pour le renouveau (UPR). Siradiou Diallo has denied these allegations.²

¹ For the basic information in this section see United States, Department of State, *Background Note: Guinea*, December 2001, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2824.htm> [accessed August 2003]; France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Dossiers pays: Guinée*, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actu/actu.asp?DOS=12449> [accessed August 2003]

² Senior European diplomat. Interview, October 2002

2 The Political Context

2.1 President Conté and His Government

President Conté is head of state within what is formally a democratic system. But his style of leadership is that of an old-style strongman African national leader, shaped by his military background and with the paternalistic airs of a traditional chief. Conté began his military career under the French colonial authorities and he has personal experience of combat in Algeria, Angola and Guinea-Bissau. He has the mentality of a military commander: he gives orders and is uninterested in consultation. His ministers, even Lamine Sidimé, the Prime Minister, have little personal authority. Unlike many other African heads of state, he refuses to personally hold talks with the leaders of the opposition. His close colleagues address him as Mangué, a Soussou term for chief. He lives in relatively simple style in military accommodation at Samory-Touré barracks in central Conakry and maintains a family home on his farming estate at Gbantama, 70 km from the capital. He travels little outside Guinea. A rare personal extravagance is his accumulation of expensive cars. He is interested in agriculture and has built up substantial landholdings, which are managed by his eldest son, Ousmane, who stays out of politics.³

But President Conté's top-down approach to leadership has left Guinea badly exposed as the president grows old and unwell, seriously debilitated by diabetes. Despite his weak health, he is reported by local sources to be preparing to travel nationwide on the election campaign trail.⁴ His state of health fluctuates and is surrounded by uncertainty. Earlier this year he spent some time being treated in Morocco and at one point was rumoured to be close to death; more recently he has been back home and taking a more active role, especially in maintaining his domestic image, but Guinean Internet media have also reported rumours of a fresh trip to Morocco.⁵ He made no public appearance during a recent visit by Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo; but he made a point of asserting his authority in a paternalistic manner when he received community youth leaders from the Coyah/Manéah area to admonish them about local riots.⁶

Day-to-day government affairs are entrusted to Prime Minister Lamine Sidimé. With President Conté's activities limited by illness, Sidimé's public role has extended beyond the traditional arena of domestic policy and development into foreign affairs, for example, meeting dignitaries to discuss the Liberian crisis. But, so far, Sidimé has not been seen as a major political player or potential president in his own right. Foreign Minister François Lonseny Fall plays an important diplomatic role, but is careful not to speak beyond established official policy on contentious domestic issues such as the election rules.⁷

³ Un chef de village à la présidence, *Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent*, 16 September 2002

⁴ Guineenews, Querelles de leadership au sein de la mouvance présidentielle, 17 August 2003, <http://www.boubah.com/Articles/Articles.asp?Id=712> [accessed August 2003]

⁵ Sylla, M.K., Général Lansana Conté évacué d'urgence au Maroc, Conakry, 9 July 2003, <http://www.guinea-forum.org> [accessed August 2003]

⁶ Condé, A., Les aveux répétés sur la maladie du général Quelle interprétation politique?, n.d., <http://www.aminata.com/SIDE/Afrique/Baveux.htm> [accessed August 2003]

⁷ F. L. Fall interviewed by the editor of *La Nouvelle Tribune* [Conakry], July 2003, <http://www.aminata.com/SIDE/Afrique/Binterview.htm> [accessed August 2003]

In extending the regime's political base beyond President Conté's relatively small base of ethnic support among the Soussou of the coastal southwest, a crucial role is played by the ruling PUP. Two government figures have emerged as key players in preparing the ground for the election. Moussa Solano, the minister for territorial administration, has emerged as the lead figure, chairing a new ministerial committee set up to handle discussions with the opposition parties over election arrangements.⁸ The dynamic Fodé Soumah, who is both vice-governor of the central bank and "national sponsor" (*parrain national*) of the PUP, has toured provincial centres, mobilizing the PUP base and preparing the ground for December's election, calling for a plebiscite vote endorsing President Conté.⁹ In mid-August there were reports that Soumah was set to be appointed director of President Conté's re-election campaign.¹⁰ Soumah has effectively been standing in for Conté at meetings around the country, apparently with the President's blessing. The PUP's Secretary General, Sékou Konaté, has a somewhat lower profile; he and the president of the National Assembly, Abou Somparé – who is also unpopular with Conté himself – are seen as rivals, and in the public arena they are being eclipsed by Soumah.¹¹

However, by mid-August serious rifts were emerging over the increasingly prominent role played by Soumah; much of the PUP establishment was becoming resentful of his influence and concerned that he might exploit his position to serve his own ambitions – given the President's poor state of health, the potential succession remains a key issue in Guinea. Among those thought to be disenchanted with Soumah are Solano, Konaté, presidency general secretary Fodé Bangoura and perhaps even prime minister Sidimé, who is said to have made caustic remarks about Soumah's National Sponsor role. But Conakry governor M'Bemba Bangoura and Karim Kane, leader of the Comité d'appui à l'action de Lansana Conté (COSALAC) association of Conté supporters have come out in his support. His energy appeals to women and younger voters.

2.2 The Opposition

Guinea has a number of substantial opposition players, but each is to some extent limited by a dependence on regional or ethnic support.¹²

Alpha Condé was released from jail in 2001 on condition that he keep a relatively low profile. Consequently he has spent much of the subsequent period abroad, travelling around Africa, where he has support among fellow members of the Socialist International. The government is especially suspicious of his high level connections in Angola. His Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée (RPG) draws much of its support from the Malinké ethnic group (about 30 per cent of Guinea's population). He is seen as a major potential challenger to the present head of state and his campaign is already informally underway. But the authorities have yet to restore his full civic rights, and, technically, he is therefore not eligible to stand for office.

⁸ Agence France Presse, Présidentielle: un 'comité interministériel' chargé du dialogue avec les parties, 24 July 2003; Le Comité interministériel va-t-il réussir?, *L'Indépendant* [Conakry], 10-13 July 2003

⁹ Le Parrain national du PUP associe la presse privée à son voyage, *L'Indépendant* [Conakry], 10-13 July 2003

¹⁰ Guineenews, Querelles de leadership...

¹¹ Guinea: Anarchy Looms as President's Health Fails, *Oxford Analytica*, 28 March 2003

¹² Information in this section is based on the following sources: Agence France Presse dispatches from Conakry, January-August 2003; Guinean press and website reports January-August 2003; Guinea: Anarchy Looms...

Siradiou Diallo, leader of the Union pour le progrès et le renouveau (UPR), has in recent weeks embarked on a national tour, clearly designed to lay the groundwork for his presidential campaign. Starting in Conakry, he has now moved on to his home region, the Fouta Djallon highlands. A former journalist with the internationally known magazine *Jeune Afrique*, he has a sufficiently high profile to attract support beyond his natural ethnic base among the Peul. But his controversial decision to participate in the parliamentary election last year, and for his party to take up seats in parliament, could alienate voters who are opposed to any compromise with the Conté regime.

Diallo should be able to draw on strong support from the Peul, Guinea's largest ethnic group (40 per cent of the population), but he will lose some Peul votes to Mamadou Bâ, leader of the Union des forces démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG). The two men had brought their respective parties together to form the UPR, but Mamadou Bâ – runner up to Conté in the 1998 presidential contest, with 24 per cent of the vote – subsequently broke away.

Condé, Bâ and Diallo are probably the strongest potential challengers to Conté. But the positions of Bâ and Condé should be reinforced through their participation in the Front républicain pour l'alternance démocratique (FRAD) alliance, which was created in June 2002. This grouping also has valuable members and allies who are not likely to be major presidential challengers in their own right but help to broaden its appeal. These secondary players include Sidya Touré, Jean-Marie Doré (Union pour le progrès de la Guinée – UPG) and former national assembly speaker Boubacar Biro Diallo. The latter was expelled from the ruling PUP in 1998 after criticizing the human rights situation; he went on to describe the 2001 referendum on the abolition of limits to the president's term of office as a "constitutional coup d'état". Doré draws his support from Guinée Forestière, the country's far south, peopled by minority groups such as the Guerzé, Mano and Toma.

2.3 The Regional Setting

There are close cultural, economic and political connections between Guinea and most neighbouring countries.¹³ But this has also meant that Guinea has been severely affected by problems in these neighbouring states; it has had to accommodate large numbers of refugees and there have been some attempts to undermine its own internal stability. Mali and Senegal are stable and democratic neighbours; the local conflict in Senegal's Casamance region has not significantly affected Guinea. The country has also escaped serious damage from the upheavals in Guinea-Bissau. It is events in Sierra Leone and Liberia that have had the greatest impact on Guinea over recent years.

The Peul and Malinké ethnic groups – Guinea's largest – are found in neighbouring regions of Mali and Senegal; the savannah regions of north-east Guinea, around Kankan and Siguiri, have much in common with adjacent Malian regions further down the Niger river basin. Côte d'Ivoire, the region's leading economy and a well established importer of migrant labour, has traditionally harboured very large numbers of Guineans; many initially fled during the 1960s

¹³ Information in this section is based on the following sources: France, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, *Données générales et relations bilatérales avec la Guinée*, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/actu/article.asp?ART=26314> [accessed August 2003]; material available at *Ohada: Le portail du droit des affaires en Afrique*, <http://www.ohada.com> [accessed August 2003]; International Crisis Group, *Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm*, Freetown; Brussels, 30 April 2003; author's personal information contacts in the region

and 1970s to escape the Sékou Touré dictatorship. Some have recently been repatriated, to escape the recent violence in an Ivorian domestic climate that has become much less welcoming to foreign workers. Cross-border connections with Guinea-Bissau are limited, save for one main road link, to Koundara. But any renewed upheaval in Guinea-Bissau could have some impact on communities in north-west Guinea.

Economic connections with other Francophone states, both formal and informal, are also extensive, although – unlike its Francophone neighbours and Guinea-Bissau – Guinea does not belong to the Euro-linked CFA franc single currency zone. Membership would strengthen Guinea's economic integration with the region, but Guinea has strong traditions of national independence, rooted in its post-colonial rift with France. However, Guinea has subscribed to the Organisation pour l'harmonisation en Afrique du droit des affaires (OHADA – Organization for Harmonization of African Business Law), an initiative to create a common business law framework for francophone African countries.

There are strong cross-border ethnic and linguistic connections between Guinea and Sierra Leone. The two countries are linked by traditional coastal trading and Conakry has a substantial Sierra Leonian community. During the worst periods of upheaval in Sierra Leone, the shipping route to the Guinean capital was a vital lifeline for inhabitants of Freetown; road traffic was often hampered by insecurity and by frequent military checkpoints. Guinea was strongly supportive of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah in his struggle against Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels and relations are friendly.

Many people in Guinea's inland south, Guinée Forestière, have ethnic ties to Liberia and both countries have a mutual interest in the development of mineral deposits in the border region. But relations between Guinea and Charles Taylor – president of Liberia until his departure to exile in Nigeria earlier this month (August 2003) – were bedevilled by mutual suspicion, with each government supporting rebels trying to overthrow the other. Taylor has been succeeded by a loyal supporter, Moses Blah, but the new leader's room for manoeuvre is somewhat limited by the presence of Nigerian peace-keeping troops. The Guinean government has actively supported the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebels who have been attacking Monrovia. While many Sierra Leoneans have now returned home, the flow of refugees from Liberia has been increasing, as conflict in that country intensified.

3 Review of Early Warning Indicators/Factors

3.1 Socio-economic Conditions

Social and economic conditions in Guinea are typical of those in sub-Saharan Africa. UNDP's 2003 Human Development Index ranks the country 157th in the world, between Senegal and Rwanda (and just above Benin and Tanzania).¹⁴ In 1999 the economy was hit hard by the slump in the market for bauxite and alumina, its key exports, and by the effect of instability in neighbouring countries. Average per capita income fell from US\$560 in 1997 to US\$410 in 2001.¹⁵ Guinea was granted entry to the HIPC debt relief programme in 2000.

¹⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2003*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003

¹⁵ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*, New York, April 2003, <http://devdata.worldbank.org/data-query/> [accessed August 2003]

Living conditions in Conakry are difficult, due to repeated water and power supply shortages.¹⁶ Evidence from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization indicates severe deprivation country-wide: more than 12 per cent of children under five in all regions except Guinée Forestière suffer from stunted growth and rates frequently range as high as 30 per cent, while a quarter of adult rural women are seriously underweight. In all regions except Basse Guinée goitre affects 75 per cent of the population – one of the highest rates in Africa – despite the launch of a salt iodization programme some years ago. In Haute Guinée, the inland savannah belt, protein and fat intake is low. There is extensive urban poverty in Conakry, where some groups are at high risk of inadequate food intake and the country's lowest levels of energy intake are recorded.¹⁷

The government's IMF-supported economic recovery programme aims to achieve 6.5 per cent growth by 2004, but performance continues to suffer from the overspill impact of regional instability. The IMF approved a three-year Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF), starting in April 2001, but progress has been mixed. Donors were impressed by the consultative approach taken in formulating the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which aims to foster equitable and sustainable growth, extend the reach and quality of basic services and strengthen governance and human and institutional capacity.¹⁸ However, revenue collection fell behind target; moreover, in trimming expenditure to cope with this, the authorities targeted precisely the priority services that were supposed to help the poor.¹⁹ The IMF finally approved its first review of the PRGF in August 2002, after the Bank had given the green light to the PRSP.²⁰ Despite the effects of the crisis in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea managed to achieve real GDP growth of 4.2 per cent in 2002, thanks to strong farm output and sustained activity in the secondary sector.²¹ But Guinea's programme subsequently drifted off-track²² and the Fund has been making preparations for a Staff Monitored Programme (SMP) – which would provide no new money but would, if successfully pursued for six months, prepare the ground for a fresh PRGF.

The collapse of the IMF programme has damaged already fragile donor confidence in Guinea's governance capacities. The situation has not been helped by disagreements with bilateral donors over the government's reluctance to satisfy pressure for more effective democratization, media freedom and electoral transparency. The EU has withheld final approval of the country's funding allocation under the Ninth European Development Fund (EDF9) until agreement on a way forward is reached.²³

¹⁶ See Agence France Presse, Conakry dispatches, April-June 2003, *passim*

¹⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization, Nutrition Country Profile: Guinea, 4 February 1999, <http://www.fao.org/es/esn/nutrition/gui-e.stm> [accessed August 2003]

¹⁸ International Monetary Fund, IMF Completes In Principle First Review of Guinea's PRGF Program, Approves In Principle US\$17 Million Tranche, and US\$3.6 Million in Additional Interim HIPC Assistance, Washington, 25 July 2002 (press statement); World Bank, *Guinea Country Brief*, Washington, April 2003, <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/gn2.htm> [accessed August 2003]

¹⁹ International Monetary Fund, IMF Completes...

²⁰ International Monetary Fund, IMF Gives Final Approval of First Review of Guinea's PRGF Loan, Washington, 5 August 2002 (press statement)

²¹ International Monetary Fund, *Guinea: Conclusions of the Article IV Consultation Mission*, Conakry, 10 May 2003, <http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2003/051003.htm> [accessed August 2003]

²² World Bank, *Guinea Country Brief*...

²³ Spokesman for the European Commission's Director General for Development. Telephone interview, July 2003

This socio-economic background adds to political pressures. This year has already seen the outbreak of protests in Conakry over the water and power cuts. The city is built on a narrow peninsula, which limits development space and makes conditions particularly uncomfortable in poor inner city areas when key services break down. Moreover, the government is coming under intense pressure from donors during the politically delicate run-up to December's elections: Guinea may well find itself under the tight financial target constraints of the IMF's Staff Monitored Programme,²⁴ with future funding at stake, just when it might otherwise seek to release extra spending to placate public opinion in the run-up to voting. It is already struggling to restore power supplies during this difficult period.

3.2 Strength and Weakness of the State

Having endured an early break with its former colonial power, France, Guinea was forced to develop its own cadre of trained personnel at an early stage. However, in recent years, the capacity of the administration has been undermined by corruption and a shortage of skilled middle-ranking officials. Public confidence in the government has been further weakened by the concentration of top positions largely in the hands of members of President Conté's Soussou ethnic group. District leaders have traditionally been elected, but they are now unilaterally appointed by Conté; these local officials have a decisive role in making election arrangements.

The security forces are primarily loyal to Conté, who has taken care to maintain a close personal identification with the military and to consolidate its loyalty since the failed coup attempt of 1996. The chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Kerfalla Camara, reports to the president. Guinea has a small navy (900 men) and air-force (700 men). But the army, with 10,000 men, is the dominant military service; it has had some experience of "live" action, in the Sierra Leone border areas and in West African interventions in Guinea-Bissau and Liberia. The paramilitary gendarmerie is several thousand strong. The army has supplemented the police and gendarmerie in enforcing internal security and attempts to control banditry; security force roadblocks are common. Military spending accounted for 3.3 per cent of public expenditure in 2002.²⁵

The possibility of a new military intervention cannot be entirely ruled out, particularly if Conté's health deteriorates further or if a distorted election process provokes widespread unrest. There has even been some speculation that Conté might himself engineer a military coup to reassert his own power. But this would of course deepen the rift with aid donors and also provoke Guinea's formal suspension from the African Union – whose rules prevent the recognition of regimes that come to power through coups d'état. Senior members of the regime and the military are probably aware of the risk of diplomatic isolation; junior officers may not be – but the harsh treatment meted out to the participants in the failed 1996 coup attempt may act as a deterrent to repeated attempts.

²⁴ World Bank, *Guinea Country Brief...*

²⁵ United States, Department of State, *Background Note: Guinea...*; United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook 2003*, Washington DC, 2003, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html> [accessed August 2003]; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 2002-2003*, London, 17 October 2002

3.3 Public Discourse – Ideological Stances

As in many other West African countries today, politics in Guinea is almost devoid of ideology and policy. That is partly because the scope for freedom of choice in economic decision-making is limited by the policy requirements of the IMF and international donors, promoting an agenda of economic liberalization, monetary and fiscal stability, and action to reduce poverty and improve basic health and education. The real question is over the vigour, or lack of it, with which these goals are pursued. Nominally, Alpha Condé's RPG has a socialist orientation; but the party's appeal is more personal and ethno-regional than ideological.

In presenting its own case to the public in the run-up to December's election, the ruling PUP has focussed primarily on promoting Conté as a figurehead national leader. The president's down-to-earth style – combining the paternalism of a traditional chief and a soldier's plain-speaking, but without pomp or overtly militaristic show – has considerable appeal for many ordinary Guineans. It has helped the regime to mobilize support, or at least acceptance, beyond the president's natural ethnic support base among the Soussou and to counteract the wider potential ethno-regional appeal of the main opposition leaders. Moreover, most Guineans only see Conté through the favourable prism of state radio and television and the road-show campaigning of PUP leaders, particularly National Sponsor Fodé Soumah, as they call for a plebiscitary endorsement of the head of state in December. Soumah's energetic campaigning has of course raised his own profile, leaving him well-placed for the succession should the ailing head of state feel unable to carry on after all.

Guinea's opposition parties have taken some steps towards presenting a united front, but there are still deep rifts, particularly between Siradiou Diallo and the members of the FRAD alliance. Diallo has been trying to raise his personal profile with a fresh national tour.²⁶ He has consistently argued that it is pointless boycotting parliament, which at least offers some chances to speak out on national issues, even if government members are dominant. The FRAD parties boycotted the 2002 parliamentary elections. Diallo is still piqued that the other party leaders formed the alliance at a meeting in Paris that he was not free to attend. Even the prospect of a split opposition vote, allowing Conté an easy victory in December, may not be enough to persuade Diallo and the FRAD leaders to agree on a compromise. However, addressing a UPR conference – held in the Fouta Djalon highlands town of Labé on 25-27 July 2003 – Diallo insisted that his party had no secret agreement with the government. Indeed, he openly discussed the possibility of the military seizing power to prepare for genuinely free and fair elections although he held back from actually calling for such a move.²⁷

For the opposition parties, the overriding issues are those of civil rights, democratic freedom, election transparency and how to deal with the regime's determination to preserve its hold on power. FRAD has set out a list of key demands, including radio broadcasting freedom, free access for all parties to state media, freedom for political activities, meetings and demonstrations and an amnesty for politicians who have been convicted. The establishment of an independent electoral commission is also a concern. But Diallo's focus is narrower,

²⁶ GuinéeNews, L'UPR en campagne présidentielle: Siradiou à la conquête du pays, Toronto, 24 July 2003, <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200307310774.html> [accessed August 2003]

²⁷ See, Raison fondamentale du boycott par le Frad; and, L'UPR: parti indécis, *L'Indépendant/ Le Démocrate*, <http://www.mirinet.com/lindependant/ledemocrate/politique.htm> [accessed August 2003]

challenging the legality of the 2001 referendum that abolished the restrictions on presidential term of office. The opposition parties have held a first meeting with Moussa Solano's inter-ministerial committee on election arrangements; but the party leaders did not attend in person, preferring to send lower ranking officials instead.

Canada and other donors arranged for government and opposition officials to visit Mali and Sierra Leone to see how these countries had established democratic election procedures.²⁸ But it is far from clear that the Guinean regime is prepared to make the concessions sought by the opposition and foreign donors that would be necessary to ensure that December's poll is genuinely fair and seen to be so in international eyes. Election arrangements in Guinea have hitherto been handled by the government itself. President Conté's nomination of local officials has further reinforced the government's capacity to influence the poll and he has not yet given any sign of a readiness to relinquish this control. Meanwhile, members of FRAD appear willing to unite around a single candidacy to challenge President Conté in the election run-off, but they are far from agreeing to present a single challenger in the first round; agreement with Diallo on a sole opposition candidacy from the outset seems even less likely. A FRAD or even total opposition boycott of the poll is a possibility, if the demands for an independent electoral commission, international observers and radio broadcasting freedom are not met. Diallo has indicated that he might agree to a boycott, accepting that the presidential election, which can have only one winner, is quite different from the parliamentary election.

Conakry's independent newspapers, notably *La Lance*, *L'Indépendant* and *Le Lynx*, are lively and critical; they are supplemented by an active Internet culture, with several websites carrying local media and foreign news services such as Agence France Presse (AFP) and Pan-African News Agency (PANA), and giving ample space to opposition views and activity. But the independent and opposition media only reaches a small middle class urban readership. Most Guineans must rely on state broadcasting; they will only get access to independent news and a broad spectrum of political views if donor pressure persuades the government to allow the establishment of independent private radio stations; broadcasting in the vernacular, these have proved to be a crucial factor in the political development of West Africa's genuine democracies such as Senegal and Benin.

3.4 Security and Violence

Security conditions in Guinea are uneven. In urban areas the security forces are fairly effective, at least in daytime. But violent criminal gangs are active in parts of Conakry. The security forces maintain numerous road checkpoints and there are complaints that they extort bribes; this was one factor behind the riot at Coyah in June: quarry workers at nearby Manéah were being forced to hand over some of their pay to police, independent Guinean media sources claim. Conditions in areas near the Liberian border are, unsurprisingly, particularly insecure.²⁹

Political law and order is a difficult issue. The authorities are not afraid to take a harsh stance against protest, as in the recent crackdown on RPG supporters protesting over the government's refusal to allow foreign politicians to enter the country with the returning party

²⁸ Le Comité interministériel ...

²⁹ France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Conseils aux voyageurs: Guinée*, 27 June 2003, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/voyageurs/etrangers/avis/conseils/fiches/fiche.asp?onglet=1&pays=GUINEE> [accessed August 2003]

leader Alpha Condé. An Amnesty International report of May 2002 concluded that more than 20 people, including women and children, had been killed by the security forces since December 1998 in confrontations with protesters; the report itemizes the individual killings. The security forces have fired live rounds at groups of protestors on numerous occasions; those who carry out such extra-judicial killings are not disciplined.³⁰ The armed forces have sometimes been used to provide extra force in dealing with domestic protest – for example, after the Kaporu-Rails incident of 29 March 1998, when a number of people were killed resisting the government's demolition of a large Peul district of Conakry.³¹

3.5 Current Refugee Situation

Guinea has been seriously affected by instability and conflicts in neighbouring countries. There are close cross-border ties with both Sierra Leone and Liberia and large numbers of refugees from both countries have taken refuge in Guinea.³² This year there have also been smaller movements of people from conflict zones in western Côte d'Ivoire. Sierra Leone was originally the biggest source of refugees in Guinea, but the re-establishment of peace at home has allowed many to leave.

By September 2002, Guinea hosted in the camps 92,950 refugees registered with UNHCR, about 45 per cent from Sierra Leone and 55 per cent from Liberia, concentrated in a number of camps. Over the following months about 40,000 new non-Guinean refugees arrived, fleeing the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. From the start of 2003 the number of Sierra Leoneans began to fall steadily, as many returned under an official repatriation programme.³³

As of 1 January 2003, 40,553 Sierra Leoneans refugees were still registered in the camps in Guinea. In 2002, 21,664 refugees were repatriated. From January 2003 to June 2003, a total of 25,159 were repatriated. Of this number, 14,302 through Kambia/Pamelap at a steady rate of about 2,500 a month and 10,587 through the Languette route in April and May. This has eased the refugee strain on western and north-central Guinea, allowing the authorities to prepare for the closure of the Sembakounya camp near Dabola.³⁴

But the outflow of Sierra Leoneans has been offset by the arrival of many more Liberians, fleeing the resurgence of conflict between LURD rebels and the Taylor regime. An upsurge in fighting in late March produced a fresh influx of refugees, initially estimated by local authorities at 14,000, although international agencies later revised the estimate down towards 5,000-6,000, although not all may have stayed in Guinea and not all have registered as refugees with UNHCR.³⁵ This has put huge strain on existing facilities: in April OCHA

³⁰ Amnesty International, *Guinea: Maintaining Order with Contempt for the Right to Life*, London, May 2002

³¹ *Africa Analysis*, May-June 1998; Sidya Touré, Prime Minister of Guinea. Personal interview, Conakry 1998

³² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Guinea Humanitarian Update*, Conakry, 17 July 2003

³³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Final Report of the Joint Humanitarian Field Review Mission to West Africa July 2003*, Geneva, August 2003, <http://www.ochagn.org/documents/jhfrfinalreport.doc> [accessed August 2003]; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Guinea Office, Annual Report for 2002 [unpublished document]; Norwegian Refugee Council, *New Displacements Poorly Monitored*, Geneva, 5 August 2003

³⁴ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, Guinea: Government, UNHCR Agree to Close Sembakounya Camp, Abidjan, 29 May 2003

³⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Guinea Humanitarian Update: Influx of Liberians into Guinea*, Conakry, 9 April 2003

reported that Kouankan camp, east of Macenta, held 33,422 refugees.³⁶ Recent fighting in Ganta, on the Liberian side of the border, produced a further influx and UNHCR officials fear that if the new West African peace-keeping initiative fails to end the Liberian conflict, up to 200,000 new refugee arrivals can be expected.

The crisis in Côte d'Ivoire has added to the strain, especially on Guinée Forestière's capacity to absorb new arrivals.³⁷ Xenophobic resentment of migrants from other African states has become a potent factor in Ivorian politics, creating an uncomfortable climate for the large migrant community, which includes many Guineans. Moreover, people resident in areas of military conflict have been at direct military risk. After the outbreak of civil war in Cote d'Ivoire in September 2002, some 98,479 new arrivals were registered in Guinea. Of these, 58,436 were Guinean migrants returning home. The others included 6,500 Ivorian refugees and 17,200 Liberian refugees registered by UNHCR, many of whom had been taking refuge in Cote d'Ivoire from the ongoing war in their own country – and 13,971 nationals of other countries such as Mali.³⁸

Fresh fighting around Danane in Côte d'Ivoire in April produced new refugee movements. Between 9 and 16 April, some 2,160 arrivals were registered at the Guiela border reception centre. They included 1,573 Guineans, 534 Ivorians, 70 Liberians and 27 Malians.³⁹ More recently, a further 177 Guineans have been brought from Abidjan to Kankan by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).⁴⁰

Faced with these challenges, the Guinean authorities, in collaboration with international agencies, have sought to contain the impact of the refugees on the domestic environment, and also to move the arriving Liberians away from the unstable frontier zones. The Guinean military were concerned that Liberia's President Taylor would seek to mount a counter-attack in this area, or support further local destabilization. Earlier this year, the government decided to concentrate refugees in two main camp areas, at Lainé (north of Lola) and Albaderia (near Kissidougou), with three official reception centres near the border villages of Bossou and N'Zoo and also about 40 km back from the frontier, at Nonah.

In 2002, 83,802 Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees were living in Guinea outside the camps. At least 40,000 Sierra Leoneans and Liberians – not formally registered to receive UNHCR help – live in Conakry itself, with many of the former waiting to return home under the resettlement programme.⁴¹

³⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Population in Refugee Camps and Reception Centres in the N'Zerekore Region*, 18 April 2003 (map)

³⁷ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Guinea Humanitarian Update*, Conakry, 23 December 2002

³⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Guinea Humanitarian Situation Report No. 2, March-April 2003*, New York, 25 April 2003

³⁹ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Guinea: Government Relocates Refugee Camps*, Abidjan, 30 April 2003

⁴⁰ Accueil: arrivée de 177 évacués guinéens de Côte d'Ivoire et du Libéria, *JMJ Newsroom*, 25 July 2003

⁴¹ Humanitarian agency officials. Personal interviews, April-July 2003; United Nations agency press briefings, Geneva, April-July 2003, quoting Guinea government figures on non-registered refugee numbers

Conditions for the refugees, whether registered or not, are often difficult. Social relationships can be disrupted, income is limited and many sell part of their official food supplies to pay for other basic purchases. There are problems of sexual exploitation and risk of HIV infection. Lacking a good knowledge of French, many of those living outside camps, in Conakry, have struggled to make a living in the local economy; they also complain of frequent harassment by the Guinean authorities and some have been arbitrarily arrested and detained. Following an attack on the vehicle of a UNHCR official in Conakry, UNHCR has been informed by the government that refugees are no longer allowed to reside in Conakry. Following negotiations, an action plan for the transfers which includes a general census of the urban refugees in Conakry scheduled for October 2003, was agreed by the government.⁴²

3.6 The Regional Context

The vast movement into Guinea of refugees from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire has taken place against the background of complex political relationships.

The polarized political climate in Côte d'Ivoire and the risk of further moves by some Ivorian politicians to exploit local resentment of foreign migrant workers represents a continuing cause for concern in Guinea and other labour-exporting countries of the region.⁴³

The context for relations with Sierra Leone is rather more favourable. Guinea supported the government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah in its struggle against the RUF rebels. At times of heightened activity by the RUF, there was a serious risk that the conflict might overspill into Guinea itself, but this potentially destabilizing impact was contained. Sierra Leone and Guinea have also been united in their hostility towards the Taylor regime in Liberia. They have both provided support for the LURD rebels, although Guinea appears to have been the more active in doing so.⁴⁴

Guinea and Liberia have a mutual interest in cooperating over the development of mineral deposits around their common border – for which the most direct export route lies through Liberian territory. Together with Sierra Leone they form the Mano River Union. The inhabitants of Guinée Forestière, the inland far south, have ethnic ties to Liberia.

But relations with Liberia have been embittered by the deep mistrust between President Conté and Charles Taylor, President of Liberia until his resignation in August 2003. Conté and the Guinean military have repeatedly been accused of active support for the LURD guerrillas who were fighting to overthrow Taylor; they have denied these charges, but detailed research by the International Crisis Group (ICG) has highlighted the extent of connections. A report published by ICG in April 2003 alleges that the Guinean authorities installed a radio communications system for LURD at the Conakry home of Ayesha Conneh, wife of LURD chairman Sekou Dammate Conneh. There is some disagreement over the exact extent of Guinean help for LURD, but credible reports suggest it has provided artillery cover, allowed the movement to operate a political headquarters at Macenta in Guinée Forestière, helped imprison critics of Conneh, provided extensive military supplies and allowed the

⁴² United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, Refugees Asked to Move Out of Conakry, Conakry, 17 July 2003

⁴³ Agence France Presse, Conakry dispatches, January to August 2003, *passim*.

⁴⁴ *Sierra Leone News*, January to August 2003, *passim*, <http://www.sierraleonenews.com> [accessed August 2003]

trucking of supplies to Macenta and on, across the Liberian border, to LURD's main in-country base at Voinjama.⁴⁵

The Conakry government had regarded Taylor as an active threat to Guinean security at least since September 2000, when a group of exiled Guinean dissidents known as "the Missionaries", based in Foya Kamala in Liberia, launched an incursion into Guinea, in partnership with RUF fighters. More recently, Guinea feared the rebels might see Conté's illness as a chance to step up their attacks, amidst uncertainty over the country's future political leadership. Some observers suggest the recent intensification of LURD activity reflected a desire to see LURD make the best possible progress, whilst Conté is still able to support it.

With Taylor now in exile in Nigeria, succeeded by Moses Blah, and with West African peacekeeping troops in Monrovia, Guinea may feel that the Liberian threat has reduced. But Blah is a Taylor loyalist and Liberia remains highly unstable. The security of Guinea's southern border regions is not yet assured. The Conakry government is under heavy pressure to persuade LURD to support the peace process; but LURD is cautious about retreating or disarming rapidly and President Conté seems more likely to encourage it to take a firm line, guarding against a resurgence of Taylor-supported military activity. The peace-keepers had only about 1,000 troops in Liberia by mid-August and were not in a position to supervise the activities of armed groups in provincial areas such as those neighbouring Guinea.⁴⁶

Guinea's northwestern neighbour, Guinea-Bissau, also has a recent history of instability, although this has so far had less impact. Conditions remain fragile. Repeatedly postponed legislative elections are now due to be held in October 2003 and President Kumba Yala promised West African parliamentarians, visiting in late July, that the poll will be fair.⁴⁷ But inevitably the electoral period will be delicate, whatever the conditions surrounding the poll, and whatever its outcome.

3.7 The International Context

Both the EU and the US have become increasingly disenchanted with the Conté regime, partly because of its uneven record on economic management but mainly because of its resistance to further political reform and transparency. Latterly, President Conté's support for LURD has also been a cause of complaint. The concern registered by the EU and the US carries potential economic consequences – these key donors could withhold aid and they also have great influence in the IMF and World Bank.

The US made no secret of its anger at the abuses surrounding the parliamentary elections of 2001. More recently, the issue of support for LURD has been seen as particularly important. For a time, Washington – which was also hostile to the Taylor regime – appeared to deliberately ignore Guinean support for the rebels. But more recently, faced with the mounting civilian death toll as LURD battled Taylor's forces in Monrovia, the US pressed Conté to halt his backing. On 26-27 July 2003 Pamela Bridgewater, assistant under-secretary of state for West Africa, visited Conakry to tell foreign minister François Fall of US

⁴⁵ International Crisis Group, *Tackling Liberia...*

⁴⁶ Rebels Stay Put despite Peace Force, *Financial Times* [London], 18 August 2003

⁴⁷ Agence France Presse, Législatives en Guinée-Bissau: Kumba Yala promet d'être 'fair-play' (mission Cedeao), 29 July 2003

“indignation at the active support that Guinea is providing to LURD fighters”.⁴⁸ She said Guinean army cartridge cases had been found in the US embassy premises in Monrovia. On 30 July a more senior US official, assistant under-secretary of state for Africa Walter Kansteiner, visited Conakry to deliver the same message to Fall and Prime Minister Sidimé.⁴⁹

The EU has had concerns about Guinean domestic politics. Despite its scepticism over the legislative elections of last year, it opted not to suspend development support once the government had allowed Diallo’s UPR to take up seats in parliament.⁵⁰ However, European governance concerns relating to the forthcoming presidential poll are now centre stage, a fact openly admitted by Foreign Minister Fall. He and other senior officials visited Brussels in January 2003 for talks over the political conditions attached to the new round of EU aid – the EDF9 funding round, formal approval of which has been withheld. Fall accepts that the Conakry accord imposes political conditions but has admitted that the decision on whether or not to accede to EU demands, notably to approval of independent radio stations, is out of his hands. He says he will return to Brussels for fresh talks in September.⁵¹

At a bilateral level France has been pressing for the establishment of an independent electoral commission and it has ended its help for police training, because the police were being used for political purposes. It also stopped military aid, because of Guinea’s support for LURD. But Paris has also tried to maintain friendly diplomatic ties and bilateral development aid. France is an influential voice in shaping EU policy towards Africa and it may shelter behind the EU in applying tough aid conditionality as a tool to promote political reform, while maintaining a gentle bilateral stance.⁵² While Alpha Condé was jailed, France lobbied for his release but held back from taking stronger action.

The AU is committed to raising governance standards and this is also a theme of the Nepad (New African Partnership for Development) initiative. But in practice, the AU has taken a much firmer stance in scrutinizing new leaders – such as Madagascar’s President Marc Ravalomanana⁵³ or the Central African military putschist General François Bozizé⁵⁴ – than it has towards established presidents who employ dubious practices to ensure their electoral survival. It seems likely that only the most extreme electoral abuse or repression would be likely to provoke pressure on Guinea from fellow AU states. The international Francophonie organization is even less keen to take a harsh line.

It seems that it is American and, above all, European donor conditionality that is likely to apply the greatest pressure on Guinea over the arrangements for the forthcoming election and the treatment of political opponents. For a time, earlier this year, Guinea’s position on the UN Security Council, and its spell as Council president, provided a measure of protection from international pressure, as the US and UK, on one side, and France, on the other, sought to win

⁴⁸ Agence France Presse, Crise au Liberia: Ultimatum des Etats-Unis à la Guinée et au Lurd, 29 July 2003

⁴⁹ Agence France Presse, Liberia: le sous-secrétaire d’Etat américain aux Affaires africaines à Conakry, 30 July 2003

⁵⁰ Senior European government diplomat. Personal interview, October 2002

⁵¹ F. L. Fall interviewed...

⁵² French government officials, Paris. Personal interviews, October 2002

⁵³ Agence France Presse, L’UA maintient la fermeté de l’OUA sur Madagascar, prend un an pour bâtir, 9 July 2002

⁵⁴ Agence France Presse, Le ministre des Affaires étrangères centrafricain présent à Maputo, 11 July 2003

its support for their rival positions on Iraq. But with the Iraq invasion complete, Guinean bargaining power over this issue has long since evaporated.

3.8 Ameliorating Factors

There are some factors that could mitigate the risk of major instability in Guinea. Perhaps the most significant is the strong sense of national identity, dating back to the post-colonial breach with France. Abandoned by Paris during its early independence years, Guinea developed its own cadre of trained personnel and its own institutions. Although ethnicity is an important factor in Guinean politics, it is not uniquely dominant. Despite the very strong pressures to which the country has already been subject over recent years, it has not so far slid into the sort of civil conflict that shattered Sierra Leone and Liberia. There are marriages across ethnic lines and political culture is not seen in purely ethnic and regional terms.

A second positive factor is the underlying strength of the natural resource base. The country has rich mineral resources, ample agricultural potential and major water and potential hydro-power resources, although there have been rainfall shortages recently. The resource base for an improvement in living standards is there, provided the government can ensure effective economic management.

4 Analysis of Likely Developments

Uncertainty hangs over the outlook for Guinea. It is quite reasonable to envisage a number of different ways in which the situation might evolve, with widely varying consequences for stability, security conditions and human welfare. The possibilities range from benign political evolution towards greater democracy and restored economic progress, at one end of the scale, to violent upheaval and repression at the other. The domestic situation is further complicated by the impact on Guinea of developments in surrounding countries. The near future could offer significant pointers to the longer-term course of events, both within Guinea and externally – and in both respects the attitude of the government in Conakry will be crucial.

4.1 The Domestic Arena

Tensions within Guinea itself are likely to increase as the presidential election approaches. They could actually become more intense if opposition leaders overcome their individual ambitions and differences and present a single united candidacy for the election: this would raise real opposition hopes of victory and mean that more was at stake. The key question is whether the government will accept the demands of the opposition and the donors for steps to ensure the fairness of December's presidential election: the creation of an independent electoral commission, the right for opposition parties to campaign freely nationwide and permission for the establishment of independent radio stations. If the government concedes these points, opposition parties would find it hard to justify an election boycott and it becomes more likely that the election itself will be accepted by the international community as fair. Donors would be more willing to approve new aid allocations. But if President Conté refuses to concede the key requirements for a fair poll, a partial or total opposition boycott becomes likely. Guinea's relations with donors would be further compromised, with damaging consequences for aid flows and foreign economic confidence. The risk of instability and repression will be increased.

Even in a fair poll, the advantages of incumbency would give Conté a good chance of defeating a divided opposition, especially if the FRAD parties and Siradiou Diallo spend much of their time fighting each other, rather than attacking the current head of state. But if

the opposition unites around a well-known individual candidate such as Alpha Condé, Bâ Mamadou or Siradiou Diallo, the strength of its support among the large Peul and Malinké ethnic groups would give it a good chance of victory in a fair election. If the poll is rigged or campaign conditions are manifestly unfair, this would create deep resentment and probably lead to widespread protests; ethnic resentment at the exclusion of Peul and Malinké from power and anger at poor living conditions, particularly in Conakry, would fuel popular anger.

In an extreme deterioration of conditions in Guinea, there could be widespread protest, harshly repressed by the state, affecting populations in many different parts of the country, but especially in areas with large populations of Peul and Malinké – the groups most closely associated with support for the opposition. But there could also be unrest in other areas; the recent violent riots in Manéah and Coyah – a coastal area that might be regarded as broadly supportive of the government – is a reminder of the depth of underlying resentment and tension over socio-economic issues, which add fuel to concerns about political election issues. Protest of any kind would probably be met with harsh security force repression, as has happened on numerous occasions in the past. As in 1998, when Alpha Condé was jailed, the government might resort to the arrest of opposition leaders. Relations with donors would be damaged, compounding the damage to Guinea's economy and deepening social deprivation. In a worst case scenario, protest and repression could produce a slide into more widespread violence, although in past situations, a harsh response by government security forces has usually cowed protesters into submission or retreat.

The risk of a further serious deterioration in Conté's health cannot be ruled out. He might have to spend a more time being treated abroad; despite his apparent determination to contest December's election, he might even decide not to seek another term after all. He might die. In the longer term, his departure from the political scene might improve the prospects for stability, opening the way for him to be succeeded by a new PUP standard bearer with a greater awareness of modern political realities and the need for Guinea to retain external donor support. Such a successor – PUP national sponsor Fodé Soumah appears perhaps the most likely name at present – might be readier to accept the electoral and media reforms sought by donors, and thus to take the risk of losing in a relatively fair election. But there is the risk of a power tussle within the regime, if Conté withdraws. He might even connive at a military intervention, to protect military interests and the supremacy of the Soussou ruling elite. That would provoke Guinea's international isolation and sharp cuts in international aid.

4.2 The Regional Arena

Externally, Conté's attitude towards the incipient efforts to stabilize Liberia will be important. As the prime military backer of the LURD rebel movement, he can strongly influence its readiness to cooperate with the West African peacekeeping force and negotiate a peaceful route forward. If Guinea supported LURD in taking an unhelpful and belligerent line that would damage Conakry's standing with the international community and with the West African states who are risking their troops in an attempt to stabilize Liberia.

On both these points, it is still too early to be sure of the line that the Conté regime will take. But it seems likely that Guinea will seek to take a helpful line towards Liberia; its prime interest has been the defence of its own national security against destabilization efforts by Liberia's President Taylor and his RUF rebel allies. Taylor's departure into exile has now reduced this threat but not entirely removed it. Guinea will probably encourage LURD to cooperate with the peace initiative, but to maintain its military and political influence as far as it can without actively confronting the West African peace-keepers. Given Liberia's history

of instability over the past two decades, Guinea will almost certainly seek to maintain a firm alliance with LURD and to do what it can to encourage the movement's influence in post-Taylor Liberia. Conakry will also be aware of the risk that Taylor himself may well try to influence regional events from his base in exile.

On internal electoral questions, the outlook is less favourable. Conté has no regard for the views of his domestic opponents and it is far from certain that he will be prepared to accede to demands from foreign donors. Members of the Soussou clique around him – whose own positions depend on his – are unlikely to encourage him to think differently.

The overall risks from the regional situation currently appear to be reducing slowly. This report cannot seek to fully assess these, but the main areas of concern are briefly outlined here:

- Liberia remains the greatest cause for concern; even in the most favourable scenario, it will clearly be some time before enduring stability is established there;
- the peace process in Côte d'Ivoire is still fragile; any new violence could provoke further large departures of Guinean nationals and other refugees to Guinea;
- Sierra Leone's political stability has clearly much improved, and the recent death of former RUF leader Foday Sankoh removes one totem of violence from the scene; nevertheless any return to crisis in Sierra Leone would have damaging consequences for Guinea;
- in October Guinea-Bissau will hold delayed legislative elections; any new instability relating to these could generate refugee movements into north-west Guinea.

4.3 Vulnerable Groups

Groups most at risk in a situation of rising tension and possible conflict include both Guineans and refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Malinké populations extend throughout eastern Guinea, from northern areas by the Malian border down to the north-eastern reaches of Guinée Forestière; Peul populations are spread across the north, particularly in the Fouta Djallon massif. Both groups are also heavily represented in the population of Conakry. But protest might not be confined to these groups, as the recent riot in Coyah and Manéah has shown. Protest is likely to be concentrated in Conakry and other urban centres and it is urban populations that are likely to be most affected by repressive security force actions.

Such upheavals would also have consequences for refugee populations resident in Guinea. But the impact on refugees in camp areas would be limited, partly because the Sierra Leoneans – who were established in areas nearer to Conakry – are slowly returning home, while Liberians are increasingly concentrated in the south, away from the main zones of internal political tension. But refugees not registered with UNHCR and mainly living in Conakry and other towns are much more vulnerable. They could be caught up in any popular backlash over poor living conditions, exacerbated by the rising tension related to the election. They are also at direct risk of repressive security force action if they fail to leave Conakry by the 31 August departure deadline set by the government.

Political instability and localized tension or conflict could generate population movements within Guinea, as targeted groups move to safer areas. Such movements may not be on a

large scale unless the country slides into serious conflict, but they could produce local strain on accommodation, resources and land.

Political instability would also disrupt the government's ability to manage policy and services for refugees from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, and for the international organizations trying to care for them. Preoccupied with domestic issues, the government might neglect refugee issues. A breakdown of security force discipline, or a deliberate resort to the harsh use of force, could threaten refugees living in Conakry and other urban centres. Serious instability in Conakry would also jeopardize the city's role as a diplomatic and logistical base for managing the regional refugee situation.

5 Conclusion: Possible Scenarios

Several scenarios can be envisaged, ranging from the benign to the catastrophic.

The *most favourable course of events* would see the government acceding to opposition and donor demands for fair election arrangements. Although there might still be some complaints over the results, this offers the best chance for a peaceful vote. Encouraged by donors, the head of state would re-invigorate economic reform, with a renewed effort to reduce poverty, stimulate job creation and thus enhance political stability. On the external front, renewed crisis in Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire would be averted, while peace was consolidated in Liberia, allowing a gradual return home of the refugees now concentrated in southern Guinea and Conakry. But even a fair election carries risks: if Conté faced election defeat, military hardliners might be tempted to intervene.

A *worst-case disaster scenario* would see the government refuse to make any concession on democratic and electoral conditions, leading to a presidential election victory for Conté that would be bitterly disputed by opposition parties. Resulting protests would be fiercely suppressed, provoking escalating protest and repression and, potentially, a more fundamental breakdown of Guinea's underlying national cohesion and stability. Foreign refugees would be caught up in the backlash and humanitarian efforts to help them would be seriously disrupted as Guinea slid towards generalized violence and even open conflict.

The *most likely scenario* lies between the two extremes: the government would make some concessions on election conditions, but not sufficient to ensure wide national acceptance. Donors may grudgingly agree to maintain aid, but there would be deepening resentment among opposition groups and their supporters. In Conakry and other urban centres there would be significant protest, which would be harshly repressed, leaving the government firmly in control, but with its credibility further undermined. His new mandate in question, the ailing President Conté would struggle to give real leadership and lack the political strength to tackle difficult economic measures. He could become more dependent on Fodé Soumah as his public voice, which might deepen internal disagreements within the PUP. Guinea would be in limbo, failing to regain momentum, its politics embittered. This would avert total disaster for the refugees in camps, but leave those in Conakry itself extremely vulnerable to repeated outbreaks of unrest and repression.

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