

# Political Crisis and ECOWAS-Mediated Transition in Guinea\*

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## Abstract

Between 2005 and 2010, a political crisis besieged the Republic of Guinea, nearly rendering the country ungovernable and posing serious security risks for the already instable West African region. The initial episodes of the crisis consisted of general strikes through which a coalition of trade unions and political parties forced ailing President Lansana Conté to sack his cabinet and appoint a national-consensus prime minister. The next episode began with Capt. Moussa Dadis Camara's coup d'état following Gen. Conté's death and culminated in the massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators by state security forces. This article explores the crisis and attempts to elucidate the contribution of ECOWAS and other major international stakeholders to the political transition that ensued.

## Introduction

This article explores the crisis that marked the recent political history of the Republic of Guinea with a focus on its culmination (2005-2009) and resolution (2010) with the election of a civilian head of state under the aegis of the international community and, most specifically, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The article underscores the conflict prevention and conflict management mechanisms that ECOWAS utilized to help implement a relatively peaceful transition from a highly

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volatile atmosphere, which put the country on the verge of a civil war, to a democratically elected civilian leadership.

The central thesis of the article is that although Guinea had shown much resilience and avoided civil war while all its neighbors experienced various types of intense intrastate conflicts, it is reasonable to argue that the country could have succumbed to the same fate had it not been for the concerted efforts of the international community with the stewardship of ECOWAS. This thesis is amply supported by my findings, a good deal of which were obtained by interviewing individuals closely associated with the events presented herein. Indeed, because the article is a historical study primary-source information is crucial. Furthermore, because it deals with recent history the accounts of persons who lived through it have the potential of being extremely insightful, provided that they are treated appropriately for the oral history material that they are. Most of the interviews were conducted face to face in Guinea during or around the time of the events chronicled here, including in 2005, 2006-2007, 2010 and 2012.<sup>1</sup> Other sources include statements by Guinean officials and activists, as well as those of international stakeholders, and the works of scholars and journalists viewed as experts in Guinean affairs. Follow-up telephone or online communications were had in some cases either as one-on-one conversations or through call-in programs broadcast on web radio outlets owned and operated by members of the Guinean diaspora in North America. My underlying purpose in basing the article on these sources is to generate an accurate understanding of the dynamics of the crisis from the perspective of the Guinean people who lived through it and that of the international stakeholders involved in managing the crisis and the subsequent transition.

The prelude to the crisis examine here dates back to April 1984, when a military junta seized power following the death of Sékou Touré, the country's head of state since independence in 1958. Guineans received the news of the military takeover with mixed feelings. On the one hand the

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<sup>1</sup> I conducted the field research while writing the fifth edition of *Historical Dictionary of Guinea* (2014) and *Political History of Guinea since World War Two* (2014).

bloodless ending of Touré's oppressive rule fostered a sense of relief, especially given the junta's promise to promote freedom and prosperity. On the other hand Africa's experience of brutal military rule was all but reassuring. Furthermore, the regime change happened at a time when Touré was pursuing an open-door policy toward the West, and preparing to host the annual Summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Guinea's standing in West Africa had also been improving within regional organizations like ECOWAS. Thus, while euphoria erupted in military barracks and on the streets, uncertainty grew among farsighted Guineans (Camara 2007: 49ff., 99ff. and 165ff.).<sup>2</sup>

By the end of 1985, the *Comité militaire de redressement national* (CMRN), the junta formed under Col. Lansana Conté, was faced with internal power struggle with ethnic undertones. Conté supporters (mostly of the *Soso* ethnic group) were intent on ridding the regime of what they perceived as *Malinké* threats. In July 1985, the foiling of a coup attempt by *Malinké* officers led by former CMRN Prime Minister Col. Diarra Traoré gave them the opportunity to do so. Along with members of Touré's family and former members of his government, numerous *Malinké* officers arrested in connection with the coup attempt were secretly executed. Reports by international human rights and media organizations would reveal that the death sentences that the regime publicized in May 1987 concerned people who may well have been executed in July 1985 (Vignes 1987: 28; Camara 2014).

Meanwhile, Guinean exiles, consisting of former dissidents to Sékou Touré's regime, returned and, by 1991, began to engage the Conté regime in a struggle for political liberalization.<sup>3</sup> Those "apostles of liberalization"

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<sup>2</sup> Former Information and Ideology Minister Louis Sénainon Béhanzin, former Islamic Affairs Minister and political prisoner Chérif Nabaniou, and former Justice Minister Sikhé Camara were of the view that while changes in domestic policy were long overdue by the time of Sékou Touré's death, the overture that was taking place in the regime's foreign policy should have been carefully implemented. Béhanzin insisted that the government's biggest blunder was allowing a power vacuum to take place in days following Touré's death.

<sup>3</sup> Although the Touré regime singled out the Fulani elite in the mid-1970s in what it termed "*Complot Peuhl*" [Fulani Plot] and contrary to a widespread misconception, Guinean exiles consisted of persons from all ethnic entities and regions of Guinea. There were scholars and professionals like Ibrahima Baba Kaké, Alpha Condé, Lansiné Kaba and Dr. Charles Diané

included former *Jeune Afrique* journalist Siradiou Diallo, activist and former educator Alpha Condé, former World Bank consultant Mamadou Ba, and former International Labor Organization administrator Jean Marie Doré. Since the 1990s across Africa, elected civilian leaderships were replacing entrenched military juntas and one-party regimes. In much of French-speaking Africa, sovereign national conferences were taking place and establishing multiparty politics and civil society activism. Under international pressure and in response to recurring pro-democracy mass protests, the Conté regime produced a new constitution, which was adopted by referendum in December 1990.

Multiparty politics was thus introduced against the backdrop of the Structural Adjustment Programs imposed by the World Bank and the IMF as a foundation for economic reform. Hardly free and fair elections marked the democratization process from 1993 to the end of the Conté regime in 2008. In the process, an oligarchy of Conté cronies formed, virtually taking over the country's banking, financial, and mining industries, as the president's health declined. As corruption and misgovernance engulfed the state an otherwise divided political opposition formed a united front with labor unions for the purpose of further pressuring the regime for meaningful reforms.

Throughout the ordeal, regional, and international organizations applied "stick-and-carrot" diplomacy in efforts to contain the situation, prevent another civil war in the region and, eventually, bring about lasting stability. The involvement of regional and international organizations would prove more vital after President Conté passed away in December 2008 and an unknown army captain by the name of Moussa Dadis Camara led a coup d'état on behalf of a junta called *Conseil national pour la démocratie et le développement* (CNDD) [National Council for Democracy and Development].

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(*Malinké*); Djibril Tamsir Niane, Boubacar Barry and Thierno Monenembo (Fulani); and Ansoumane Doré (*Guerzé*). There were also journalists like Aboubacar Kanté (*Malinké*) and Siradiou Diallo (Fulani); artists like Manfila Kanté "*Doyen*" (*Malinké*) and Sadio Bah (Fulani); diplomats and other technocrats like Nabi Youla and Aboubacar Somparé (Soso), Ba Mamadou (Fulani) and Mansour Kaba (*Malinké*). This list is hardly indicative of the size and diversity of the Guinean exile community who opposed the Touré regime for a variety of reasons.

Later, the CNDD became the target of travel, arms, and economic embargo on the part of the EU, the US, and the UN. Eventually, Guinea was suspended from the African Union (AU), and ECOWAS led efforts to restore constitutional order.

### **Historical Overview of Guinea's Crisis**

As explained in a previous publication, the earliest pro-liberalization challenge that the Conté regime faced came in 1989 in the form of student protests on the campus of the University of Conakry (Camara 2014). From 1989 onward, the hitherto seemingly isolated outbursts became a full-blown student movement and spread to other campuses across the country. Also, what used to be mainly peaceful events turned increasingly violent, even deadly on occasions, as anti-riot police intervened rather forcefully.

Charles-Pascal Tolno (2012), who was the governor of the city of Conakry during that tumultuous period, justified the forceful manner in which his police force handled the protests. According to this former college educator, the anti-riot police were ordered to restore law and order after protesters set cars on fire and nearly killed the rector and other administrators of the University of Conakry. Tolno explained that groups of protesters took the rampage beyond the campus and into Conakry neighborhoods to hunt down fellow students whom they viewed as traitors for not getting involved. Tolno believed that individuals to whom he referred as “agitators masquerading as pro-democracy leaders” were manipulating the protesters.

Former leaders of the student movement emphatically refuted Tolno's account. Diénabou Baldé (1992), a former member of the University of Conakry Student Government Organization, recalled the zealotry with which Tolno went after student protesters: “Governor Tolno became known to students as ‘Uncle Zorro’ because he personally led the invasion of the campus by anti-riot police.” She recalled the day the first student protester was killed: “After the young man fell in the middle of *Terrain Rouge*, dozens of panicky students ran over him followed by anti-riot police armed to the

teeth. Little did we know that over the following weeks, several more would be killed and dozens thrown in jail.”<sup>4</sup>

As the student movement grew, the nascent political opposition and the Conté regime each endeavored to coopt its leadership. In the long term, though, Fanta Oulen Bakary Camara (2012) inferred, what both sides ended up accomplishing was divide and weaken the movement by, among others things, recruiting followers from within the movement. Camara specifically cited the case of students to whom opposition leaders provided scholarships to continue their education abroad after being expelled by Guinea’s Ministry of Higher Education.

The adoption in 1990 of a new constitution reaffirming the will of the Guinean people to achieve national unity, and establish the rule of law raised expectations (IDEA 1990). Guineans anticipated a new beginning toward a bright future after decades of dictatorship. What transpired from the December 1993 presidential elections, instead, was a semi-civilianized military regime under the rule of Gen. Lansana Conté, who was subsequently kept in power through electoral parody.

The military foundation of the regime began to crumble, however, when, in February 1996, a mutiny erupted in Camp Alpha Yaya, in the capital Conakry. According to Sow, one of the leaders of the mutiny, contrary to the government’s official version, the event was not an act of treason. Sow explained that the mutineers’ only goal was to call President Conté’s attention to the demoralizing effects on the national armed forces of the neglect that war veterans faced upon returning from the Liberia and Sierra Leone fronts (Sow 2012).<sup>5</sup> Doumbouya (2012), another leader of the mutiny,

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<sup>4</sup> The name *Terrain Rouge* (Red Field in the French language) refers to a grassless soccer field adjacent to the University of Conakry main campus. According to Diénabou Baldé, the name *Terrain Rouge* came to symbolize the blood of students killed or wounded by police in the course of those events.

<sup>5</sup> Although the notion of treason circulated in government circles due to the humiliating treatment that Gen. Conté underwent in the hands of the mutineers, the official charges brought against them by the special State Security Court activated in June 1996 were murder, threatening state security, destruction of state property, and dereliction of duty. As a result, the some 40 alleged lead-mutineers were given dishonorable discharge and lengthy prison sentenced. No one was executed.

corroborated Sow's account and recalled that by 1996, Conté and most army generals had lost touch with the rank and file. Though not involved in the February 1996 mutiny, Nafa Diallo (2007) concurred that Gen. Conté's credibility eroded between 1995 and 2005, only to plummet thereafter with the growing interference of his family and allies in state affairs.

The last years of the Conté era have been described as some of the most chaotic years in Guinea's recent history. Reflecting on the union-led strikes that profoundly marked the years 2006 and 2007 and the factors that triggered them, Rabiadou Sèrah Diallo (2012), then president of the CNT and former president of the labor union *Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée* (CNTG) [National Confederation of Guinean Workers, deploring what she viewed as the failure of international development partners to take into account one critical factor. That is, although supporting the Conté regime for the sake of regional peace was understandable, the policy contributed to the deepening of the national crisis inside Guinea. Diallo recalled that by 2005, the working conditions and purchasing power of wage earners in the public, private, and mixed sectors alike had severely declined.<sup>6</sup> The nationwide strikes of June 2006 and January-February 2007, in which members of the Guinean labor force and civil society of all walks of life participated, epitomized the dire situation and the resolve to hold the government to account, Diallo explained.

Both she and Abdoulaye Lélouma Diallo (2009) denounced President Conté's irresponsible interference with the national justice in high-profile cases involving two of his most despised business partners. They point out that due to these new occurrences, the January-February 2007 strike

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Most of them had been released by the time of President Conté's death. During the transition, Gen. Konaté, in his capacity as Interim President, issued a decree pardoning and rehabilitating all of them. Many were reintegrated into the military and promoted.

<sup>6</sup>In December 2006, Conté personally demanded the release from prison of Futurelec Holding CEO and former chair of the Employers Guild Mamadou Sylla and former Central Bank Deputy Governor Fodé Soumah. Sylla was arrested for misappropriation of public funds, including by overbilling the state and Soumah was arrested for paying Sylla an excess of \$8,442,985 in a transaction worth about \$23 million. For more information these cases also Kamara (2008), Mas (2008) and Condé (2008).

revolved around nothing short of regime change demands, a substantial escalation from the June 2006 strike, which centered on grievances related to salary, retirement, and the skyrocketing prices of fuel and foodstuff. Guinean scholars espoused the idea of a transition to a “fully democratic and fully civilian system of government,” as transpires from the writings of Bangoura et al. (2006; 2007) and Zegbélémou (2007). In both cases, however, strikers faced violent repression. Nevertheless, Gen. Conté capitulated in February 2007 by sacking his widely decried cabinet and appointing Lansana Kouyaté prime minister from a short list of technocrats drawn by the labor leadership. The outcome was short lived, for Conté dismissed Kouyaté and his cabinet in May 2008, appointed Ahmed Tidiane Souaré and presided over a decaying state until his death.<sup>7</sup>

Arieff and Cook address another facet of the chaotic characteristics of that period, writing: “The final years of Conté’s rule were marked by a decline in average living standards, the cooption of power by members of Conté’s inner circle of businessmen and politicians, and increasing signs of public dissatisfaction” (Arieff/Cook 2010: 4). The authors cited the last military mutiny of the Conté era, indicating that divisions and restiveness permeated the military, often over pay and slow rates of promotion. The Conté government ended the uprising by agreeing to pay salary arrears of \$1,100 to each soldier, sack the defense minister, and grant promotions to junior officers (Arieff/Cook 2010: 5).

Anne Marie Koïvogui (2007), a person close to Claude “Coplan” Pivi, the man who took charge of suppressing a police mutiny in June 2008 and went on to become minister for Presidential Security in Capt. Camara’s CNDD, indicated that President Conté contributed to the structural segmentation of the armed forces that transpired in the last years of his regime. She claimed

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<sup>7</sup>The presidential decree through which Ahmed Tidiane Souaré was appointed prime minister in replacement of Lansana Kouyaté gave particular reason for the latter’s dismissal. It rather followed the typical Conté modus operandi of abrupt cabinet reshufflings. Analysts argued subsequently that the coalition of labor unions and opposition parties made a crucial mistake by failing to initiate a constitutional sanctioning of the process through which they would want henceforth prime ministers to be selected. Without any constitutional foundation, therefore, Kouyaté’s position and that of his cabinet were but ad hoc.



that “Coplan” believed that he was one of a few mid-level army officers (he was a lieutenant at the time) whom Conté had implicitly chosen to keep the generals in check and the rank and file in line while he prepared his son, Capt. Ousmane Conté, for the succession. Nafa Diallo (2007) and Fady Diallo (2010) refuted this account on the ground that any attempt by the ailing president at making his son his successor would have been defeated by 2008. One reason was that Ousmane Conté had no credibility within the armed forces and was widely known to be a drug kingpin. Whatever the truth about Pivi’s and Diallo’s speculations, the deepening of Guinea’s economic decline was having increasingly destabilizing social and political repercussions.

### **The CNDD and the Denouement of the Crisis**

With the passing of President Conté on December 22, 2008, Guinea’s crisis reached new heights due to the failure of National Assembly President Aboubacar Somparé and Supreme Court President Lamine Sidimé to properly discharge their respective constitutional duties as stipulated in Article 34 of the Constitution: “In the case of vacancy of the office of the President of the Republic due to the death or resignation of the President, or any other permanent disability, the President of the National Assembly shall assume the office or, in the case of his inability to assume office, by one of the Vice-Presidents of the National Assembly by order of precedence.” (“Fundamental Law”). Under the prevailing circumstances, this stipulation meant that Prime Minister Ahmed Tidiane Souaré’s cabinet should coordinate the logistics of the transition by ensuring that the vacancy is “constituted by the Supreme Court, convened by the President of the National Assembly.” It also meant that the leaders of the legislature and the judiciary would collaboratively expedite the process and prevent the occurrence of power vacuum.

Instead, inertia prevailed due to the passive resistance that Somparé and Sidimé allegedly adopted toward each other and Souaré’s reported attempt to exploit the impasse in hopes of staying in power. As a result, the

Supreme Court never constituted the vacancy of the office of the president and the president of the National Assembly never assumed the office. Instead, a junta of mostly mid-level army officers seized power on December 24 in a bloodless coup.

On December 25, Capt. Moussa Dadis Camara, the head of the junta, told *Jeune Afrique* that he had no choice other than rescue the country by seizing power. He alleged that had he and his peers allowed Army Head Gen. Diarra Camara to take over, he, Dadis Camara, would have to flee the country or face a certain death, because he had enemies within the upper echelon of the army. Capt. Camara explained that as patriots, he and his peers could not allow the National Assembly, whose term expired months earlier, or the corrupt and factionalized government of Prime Minister Souaré to continue bankrupting the nation. He insisted that the army had to do its duty by ending years of aimless rule (Jeune Afrique 2009a).

It is unclear whether the young captain made the enemies mentioned earlier while serving as head of fuel supplies for the entire Guinean army or during the mutinies, when the rank and file confronted the generals, as explained previously. Also unclear is the role that this personal consideration may have played in the early actions of the junta leader. In effect, on December 28, 2008, a presidential decree announced the retirement of Gen. Diarra Camara and twenty-one more generals.

Regardless, the 2009 episode of the crisis was sparked by the controversy over Capt. Camara's alleged intention to run for president in the elections which international pressure forced him to schedule for December 2010. Although the youth and populist rhetoric of the junta leader, coupled with his government's campaign against corruption and drug trafficking, had earned him growing popularity among the Guinean youth and the rank and file of the armed forces, the country's political class and powerful labor unions were losing patience with him. Impatience turned into resentment when Capt. Camara resorted to tergiversations about whether he would run for president, telling journalists that the decision "hinges exclusively on God's will" (Jeune Afrique 2009b).

Camara's behavior created confusion and led to the rise of a coalition of pro-Dadis fanatics. In Conakry, a group mostly composed of young Guerzé (Camara's ethnic group) formed the *Mouvement Dadis doit rester* (MDDR) [Dadis Must Stay Movement] in support of a Dadis candidacy. Shortly thereafter, another group of youth comprising members of the country's three largest ethnic groups (Fulani, *Malinké*, and *Soso*) created an equally fanatic coalition named *Mouvement Dadis doit partir* (MDDP) [Dadis Must Go Movement]. The two groups clashed with one another during public demonstrations, prompting security forces to arrest demonstrators, disproportionately of MDDP.

Meanwhile, political leaders stepped up their demand for the departure of the junta. Behind the scene, Dadis and CNND die-hard supporters launched a divide-and-conquer strategy by courting top opposition leaders, such as Alpha Condé of the *Rassemblement du peuple guinéen* (RPG) [Rally of the Guinean People], and Sidya Touré of the *Union des forces républicaines* (UFR) [Union of the Republican Forces]. By the same token, the pro-Dadis forces attempted to discredit other prominent opposition leaders like Cellou Dalein Diallo of the *Union des forces démocratiques de Guinée* (UFDG) [Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea]. Nevertheless, a group of opposition parties joined forces in a coalition called *Forum des Forces Vives* [Forum of the Driving Forces] and increased the pressure upon Capt. Camara, demanding that he proclaim once for all his non-candidacy to the presidency in 2010.

It was in this context that, on September 28, 2009, security forces attacked opposition members during a peaceful pro-democracy rally, killing 150 people, injuring more than 1,000 and raping an unknown number of women. Human Rights Watch later reported that members of "the Presidential Guard and some gendarmes working with the Anti-Drug and Anti-Organized Crime unit carried out a massacre that left some 150 people dead, many riddled with bullets and bayonet wounds, and others killed in the ensuing panic. The violence appeared to be premeditated and organized by senior CNDD officials" (Human Rights Watch 2010).

Contrary to Capt. Camara's speculation that the violence was the act of opposition thugs and uncontrolled security forces, Human Rights Watch reported that during the violence, "the Presidential Guard fired directly into the crowd of protesters and carried out widespread rape and sexual violence against dozens of girls and women at the stadium and in the days following the crackdown, often with such extreme brutality that their victims died from the wounds inflicted" (Human Rights Watch 2010). Security forces then removed bodies from the scene of the crime, namely the September 28 National Soccer Stadium where the atrocities were committed and hospital morgues, allegedly burying them in mass graves, in an attempt to hide the evidence, stated Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch 2010).

In the words of Haby Dieng (2012) and Abdourahmane Sikhé Camara (2012), this was the straw that broke the camel's back, in that the incident prompted ECOWAS leaders to impose an arms embargo on Guinea in October. Human Rights Watch concurs, stating that the massacre "led to the imposition of arms embargos by ECOWAS and the EU, and travel bans and asset freezes of CNDD members by the EU, US, and AU, as well as the withdrawal or cancellation of economic and military assistance from the EU, US, and France" (Human Rights Watch 2010). The country had also been barred from taking part in regular ECOWAS activities.

According to the Commission of Inquiry that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed, "crimes against humanity had been committed" and "there were reasonable grounds to allege individual criminal responsibility of key members of the ruling military junta" (United Nations 2015). The UN Department of Political Affairs (UNDPA) indicated that the commission further recommended that the International Criminal Court (ICC) be seized of the cases where such crimes were committed and that an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights be established in Guinea. As a result, the ICC Office of the Prosecutor placed the situation under preliminary examination. The Associate Press later reported that, upon completing a three-day investigation in Conakry, ICC Deputy

Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda concluded that she had the “sentiment that crimes against humanity have been committed” (The Associated Press 2010).

It was not until 2012 that legal actions were taken with the indictments by a Guinean court of Lt. Col. Moussa Tiégboro Camara, the former CNDD minister in charge of the Fight against Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime, and Col. Abdoulaye Chérif Diaby, the former Health minister. Then followed the indictment of former Conakry Governor Major Sékou Rosco Camara in February 2013. Obviously, these actions are no match for the magnitude of the crimes committed on September 28, 2009.

At any rate, as international isolation began to take its toll, junta members began to exchange accusations and counter-accusations. Four members of Prime Minister Kabiné Komara’s civilian cabinet resigned while Capt. Dadis and his closest supporters sought scapegoats. One such potential scapegoat, Presidential Security officer Lt. Aboubacar “Toumba” Diakité, shot and gravely wounded Capt. Camara during an altercation on December 3, 2009. Camara was flown to a military hospital in Morocco. Diakité told RFI in an interview, “I shot him [Camara] because at a certain point, there was a complete betrayal in my view, a total betrayal of democracy. He tried to blame me for all that went wrong during the events of September 28.” To the journalist’s question whether he was prepared to surrender to his country’s justice system or remain in hiding Diakité responded, “I will not turn myself in because they do not want the truth to be known. They’d prefer to kill me” (rougejaunevert.com 2009). In February 2010, Diakité gave another interview on RFI in which he commended Gen. Konaté for his emphasis on national reconciliation and stated that by doing so Konaté was showing integrity and leadership. “I ask General Sékouba Konaté to pardon me for the events of September 28 because we went to the stadium that day but we did so on the orders of the president of the republic [Dadis Camara]. For that I am willing to surrender to the International Criminal Court if need be.” Asked if he trusts the international justice system more than does his own country’s system Diakité stated emphatically, “As far as I am

concerned the Guinean justice system has no credibility at all” (rougejaunevert.com 2010).

### **The ECOWAS-Mediated Political Transition**

The early stages of ECOWAS’s “stick-and-carrot” approach ought to be considered in the context of the general concern for regional peace and security in West Africa. Thus, back in the 1990s, ECOWAS, the OAU and the UN all endeavored to help manage the Guinean crisis with a view to allowing the Conté government to continue playing its critical role in the search for lasting peace in the war-torn neighboring countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and Côte d’Ivoire. As a result, Guinean opposition leaders went as far as to accuse the international community of being complacent with the Conté regime, despite its record of human rights violations and vote rigging. At the time, though, Guinea was viewed as an island of peace in a sea of conflict and was host to hundreds of thousands of refugees from the just-named countries.<sup>8</sup>

The Conté government was not exactly the benevolent player that it often claimed to be in the network of regional conflict, however. Alexis Arieff analyzes the impacts of West Africa’s civil wars on Guinean politics and explains that Conté, just like Sékou Touré before him, leveraged regional conflicts to his own benefit. On the one hand he managed to protect the central structures of the state from the destabilizing effects of “neighbourhood wars”. On the other hand the massive influx of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone “allowed the Conté government to increase, and co-opt, the flow of international humanitarian aid to Guinean territory and improve government presence in remote areas of the country” (Arieff 2009: 331ff.). Overall, Arieff argues, the risky strategy ultimately put Conté on the side of the winners, “leaving the Guinean president surrounded by friendly, or at least neutral, leaders in 2003,” as Arieff aptly underscores (Arieff 2009: 340).

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<sup>8</sup> For more details on the refugee issue see McGovern (2002); Milner (2005); Camara/O’Toole/Baker (2014); as well as reports by Human Rights Watch and the International Refugee Organization.

It must be emphasized, however, that this was a short-term gain with far-reaching medium- and, potentially, long-term political and security repercussions for Guinea, especially when considered in the context of the present study. One immediate cost was that Conté's support for the United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO) and, later, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) against Charles Taylor played a role in inciting the armed attacks that pro-Taylor forces unleashed on southeastern Guinea in 2000 and 2001, as Arieff puts it. Thus, in addition to being involved in the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the Guinean armed forces found themselves fighting rebels in the region.

A repercussion of the wars and Guinea's involvement in them has come in the form of persistent allegations leveled at Alpha Condé according to which, as a member of the opposition leadership, he also secretly supported Guinean rebels bent on overthrowing the Conté government and operating from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire. Proponents claim that these secret activities were among the reasons for Condé's arrest in December 1998 while attempting to flee to Côte d'Ivoire and his subsequent imprisonment (December 1998 until May 2001) on charges of attempting to recruit mercenary to overthrow or destabilize the government. Whether these allegations have any merit is open to debate. What is certain is that they came back to hunt Condé and, to a lesser extent, Blaise Compaoré when the latter was appointed ECOWAS mediator in Guinea's crisis.

Another medium-term repercussion of Conté's involvement in the wars was that once the wars ended, the foreign aid connected to them dried out, and the distraction that they had caused dissipated, both Guinean pro-democracy forces and the international community increased the pressure for democratic change beyond the mere cosmetic "electoralism" that had prevailed since 1993. Lastly, as explained earlier, the central structures of the state that Conté had been able to protect from the destabilizing effects of "neighbourhood wars" began to crumble from within, as the president's health deteriorated and an oligarchy took control of state institutions.

Against this background the crisis in Guinea reached its breaking point (2006-2009) at a time when ECOWAS and the AU were becoming increasingly determined to no longer allow military juntas to take roots in the region. On the domestic level, the denouement of the crisis coincided with the emergence of independent labor unions, the consecration of multiparty politics, the formation of an active civil society, and the rise of an increasingly plural press. The synergetic resolve of these nascent forces created a sociopolitical environment that was less and less amenable to undemocratic governance, least of all military rule.

Considering ECOWAS's mediation in the 2008-2010 episode of Guinea's crisis against the thus summarized context will help the reader better understand the organization's accomplishments in terms of averting a civil war and managing political transition from volatile military rule to an elected civilian leadership. It will also provide a better understanding of the downside of the transition, the consequences of which have prevented the Guinean people's expectations for true national reconciliation and democratic governance from becoming a reality under Alpha Condé's administration.

In the wake of the September 28 massacre, the ECOWAS leadership appointed Burkina Faso's then President Blaise Compaoré as mediator in Guinea's crisis on October 2, 2009 (on the fifty-first anniversary of Guinea's independence). The appointment was consistent with the organization's approach to peace and security which emphasizes conflict prevention through mediation, whenever possible. Nevertheless, the move was received with mixed feelings among the Guinean political class and civil society, even if some political leaders praised ECOWAS in public statements. In the minds of numerous Guineans, Compaoré was the protégé of Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi, who had been allegedly supplying weapons and funding to the CNDD to keep it afloat, in violation of international sanctions and in disregard for the will of Guinea's pro-democracy forces.



Moreover, in the collective psyche of those members of the armed forces who fought off Guinean rebels in 2000-2001 in the town of Gueckédou, Compaoré was nothing short of a super warlord behind warlords Charles Taylor of Liberia and Foday Sankoh of Sierra Leone. Several Gueckédou veterans cited the military support that the enemy received from Taylor in particular as the cause of the disdain they had for Compaoré, the man whom they referred to as *"maudit-ateur"* (a barbarism meaning "the accursed mediator"). In addition, Compaoré's egregious mistreatment of pro-democracy forces and journalists in his own country further tarnished his image in the eyes of numerous Guineans.

Compaoré and his Guinean interlocutors, therefore, entered the mediation with little mutual trust. No wonder, then, the mediation hit a major roadblock from the beginning, as IRIN News reported. In fact, on October 6, 2010, Guinean political and civil society leaders declined to participate in a meeting with the CNDD unless Capt. Camara stepped down. Compaoré proposed the meeting during his first visit to Conakry since being appointed ECOWAS mediator. According to IRIN News, on November 19, 2009, Compaoré submitted to the Guinean leaders a plan calling for Capt. Camara to lead a transitional council that would be tasked with organizing presidential elections within ten months from December 2009. It specified that members of the CNDD and the civilian cabinet would be barred from running in those elections. The coalition of political and civil society leaders rejected the plan, arguing that it still ignored "the fundamental concerns of the Guinean people" and resolutions by the AU, the International Contact Group on Guinea (ICG-G), the EU, ECOWAS and the UN Security Council (IRIN 2009). Among such "fundamental concerns" the coalition cited the growing call for the departure of the junta, the formation of civilian transitional national-unity government that would spearhead the political transition.

It was against this backdrop that Compaoré's diplomatic task slowly took off while Capt. Camara convalesced in the Burkina capital, Ouagadougou, having been flown there from Morocco on January 12, 2010. As cynical as it

may sound, Compaoré's job was made easier, arguably, by Diakité's bullet, which placed Capt. Camara at the mercy of international players, including France, Germany, the EU, and the US, whose views and policies had become increasingly unfavorable to the CNDD regime. Hence, during Camara's hospitalization, top diplomats representing these nations and Morocco sealed his political fate, as the following excerpt from a classified US diplomatic cable later leaked by WikiLeaks shows:

"Following a series of discussions in Rabat on January 5, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson signaled explicit USG [United States Government] support to Guinean Defense Minister Sekouba Konate in his bid to lead the country's transition to civilian rule. A/S Carson, along with French Presidential Advisor for African Affairs Andre Parant and Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri, signed a declaration indicating their commitment to the transition process based on the plan proposed by ECOWAS facilitator Blaise Compaore, President of Burkina Faso. Under the declaration, wounded junta leader Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, who remains hospitalized in Rabat, would be prohibited from returning to Conakry as the signatories pursue his resettlement to a third country" (Wikileaks 2010).

With international sanctions still in place ("stick") and signals of cooperation being sent ("carrots"), negotiations among the various stakeholders resulted in an important agreement, which entered history as the Ouagadougou Accords of January 15, 2010. The following are excerpts from that twelve-point document originally published under the title "Ouagadougou Joint Declaration:"

"Following consultations conducted in Ouagadougou on January 13 and 14, 2010; [...] Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, President of the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD) and President of the Republic of Guinea, General Sékouba Konaté, Vice-President of the CNDD, Defense Minister, and Interim President of the Republic of Guinea, and His Excellency Mr. Blaise Compaoré, President of Burkina Faso and Mediator in the Republic of Guinea's crisis have reached an agreement on the following

measures: [...] (3) The reorganization and reform of the defense and security forces; (4) The creation of a National Transitional Council [Conseil national de transition—CNT], a deliberative political organ headed by a religious leader and comprising 101 members representing all the components of Guinean society; (5) The appointment of a prime minister, president of the Council of Ministers, from within the Forum of *Forces Vives* of Guinea; (6) The formation of a national unity government; [...] (8) The organization within six months of presidential elections in which [the following persons] shall not run [:] the members of the National Transitional Council, the transitional head of state, the members of the CNDD, the prime minister, the members of the national unity government and active members of the Defense and Security Forces; (9) The use of ECOWAS civilian and military observers [...]" (RFI 2010).

As indicated earlier, ECOWAS's diplomatic activities were part and parcel of the concerted efforts of the broader international community, which was still deeply concerned about the future of peace and stability in the conflict-prone West Africa region. From that perspective, UNDPA indicated that the United Nations had been working with regional and international partners to encourage a peaceful return to constitutional order in Guinea. UNDPA explained that the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mohammed Ibn Chambas, were leading UN diplomatic efforts on the ground. Additionally, indicated the report, the UN had been supporting the efforts of ECOWAS to mediate in the crisis, in addition to being an active member of the ICG-G established in January 2009. ICG-G comprised permanent members of the UN Security Council, African states that were serving as non-permanent members of the Security Council, the EU, the *Organisation internationale de la francophonie* (OIF) and the Mano River Union (MRU) (United Nations 2015).

It is fair to suggest that, as the spearhead of the mediation, ECOWAS succeeded in mitigating Compaoré's limited trust and confidence capital with the Guinean leadership and bringing the process to fruition thanks to the strong and steady support that it secured from ICG-G (Diallo 2011:

37ff.). Tolno (2015) also underscores the carefully cultivated international synergy, thanks to which Guinea was able to return to a constitutional order and transition to a civilian leadership through relatively peaceful and free presidential elections. The elections were prepared by a transitional government formed in accordance with the Ouagadougou Accords. General Sékouba Konaté, the second vice president and Defense minister of the CNDD, headed the transitional government as interim head of state. Representing the political opposition, Jean Marie Doré, the leader of the political party *Union pour le progrès de la Guinée* (UPG) [Union for the Progress of Guinea], served as transitional prime minister. Rabiadou Sèrah Diallo, the president of the CNTG, headed the CNT. As the transitional national legislature, the CNT adopted a new constitution and a new electoral code. ECOWAS and OIF attempted to mitigate the flaws of the *Commission électorale nationale indépendante* (CENI) [National Independent Electoral Commission] by having Malian retired army general Siaka Toumani Sangaré appointed as its president.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding sporadic irregularities and ethnic clashes between Fulani supporters of UFDG presidential candidate Cellou Dalein Diallo and *Malinké* supporters of RPG candidate Alpha Condé, twenty-four candidates competed in the first round on June 27 and, on November 7, Diallo and Condé faced each other in a more agitated run off. Although Diallo was the front runner with 43.69 percent against Condé with 18.25 percent, the latter was declared winner of the run off with 52.52 percent over the former with 47.48 percent. Condé was sworn in as president on December 21, 2010. On September 9, 2013, legislative elections were held after multiple delays. As far as ECOWAS and its international partners were concerned, Guinea's political transition was at long last complete.

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<sup>9</sup> For a summative discussion of General Konaté's leadership of the transition see Diallo (2011).

## **Conclusion**

The aim of the present study has been to shed light on the ways in which international diplomatic engagement helped avert civil war in the Republic of Guinea and place the country on the path to democracy and constitutional governance. The process and its outcome exemplify the strengths and weaknesses of intra-African crisis management as well as the uncertainties that often surround the involvement of global stakeholders in the management of crises in Africa.

Considered in conjunction with West Africa's volatile political environment, the management of Guinea's crisis by ECOWAS and the international community at large can be safely categorized as a successful case of crisis diplomacy, whereby methods of conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict prevention were implemented conjointly or alternately as circumstances warranted. Nevertheless, one cannot help but also take into account the concerns of Guinean analysts who the fact that it took so much violence and suffering, much of which could have been prevented, for Guineans to get where they are today. Nor can one hastily dismiss the questions raised by such analysts whether the international community has been more concerned about preventing worst case scenarios and less interested in attaining best case scenarios while managing crises in Africa (Mombeya Diallo 2012).

Whatever the truth, the ECOWAS-mediated crisis management and political transition in Guinea ought to be understood as an international effort involving the African Union and the United Nations system as well as the United States, the European Union as a whole, and individual countries therein. Progress made as a result of that successful effort includes the opportunity that Guinea has had to rebuild its international standing including the reinstatement of full membership in ECOWAS and the African Union, the lifting of the arms embargo and economic sanctions imposed by the international community during the CNDD rule and, quite significantly, the ability to keep the military out of politics for the first time since 1984.

To place this episode in context, it is pertinent to underscore the fact that the level of ECOWAS involvement in Guinean affairs in 2009-2010 is, arguable, unprecedented, although Guinea's participation in ECOWAS activities had been steady until the enactment of the sanctions mentioned earlier. In fact, from its inception in 1975 until Guinea's normalization of diplomatic relations with Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire in 1978, the country's West Africa foreign policy was, more often than not, conducted within the framework of ECOWAS, due to the fact that Guinea was not a member of the major Francophone-centered regional organizations, such as the *Communauté économique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (CEAO) [West African Economic Community]. Even though those relics of Guinea's 1958 chaotic separation with France began to dissipate in the late 1970s and the Guinean government reconnected with Francophone West Africa, ties with non-Francophone ECOWAS heavyweights such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia remained conspicuously strong. In fact, being the only Francophone nation-state non-member of the CFA monetary zone and its multiple institutions, Guinea's position is occasionally viewed as a balancing act between the Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone spheres of ECOWAS.<sup>10</sup>

At present, the progress resulting from the ECOWAS-mediated transition notwithstanding, enormous challenges lie ahead not least making the leap from democratic transition to the consolidation of democratic governance. The leap must entail combating corruption and "political tribalism" as well as developing and implementing a regime of military-civilian relation that is favorable to the sustainment of constitutional order and rule of law. These challenges become all the more conspicuous with the first presidential elections of the post-transition period being slated for November 2015. Indeed, when one weighs the degree of Guineans' disappointment with President Alpha Condé's administration against the struggle and sacrifice that made his election possible, one is also inclined to lend credence to the analogy that this author heard from multiple interlocutors that, all things considered, Guinea's transition is akin to an elephant begetting a mouse.

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<sup>10</sup> On certain aspects of the relations between ECOWAS and CEAO see also Asante (1985).

Though no longer ruled by a volatile military junta, Guineans continue to struggle under a regime plagued by lack of rule of law and government accountability, widespread organized crime and dearth of public safety, the deepening of ethnic division and prevalence of nepotism, the predominance of a Mafia-like culture of corruption and mismanagement of national resources, and continued economic hardship.

The argument has been made that in discussing Guineans' disappointment with Condé's administration one should also consider the fact that nearly all highly anticipated political transitions suffer major drawbacks and that some of the expectations that remain unfulfilled in such situations may have been unrealistic in the first place. That may well be! Nonetheless, the cases of post-genocide Rwanda, post-civil war Angola, and post-apartheid South Africa have demonstrated that although some expectations take time to fulfill, not only do traumatized citizenries hold high expectations as a sense of self-worth and a survival mechanism, but also it is perfectly reasonable to hold post-conflict or post-trauma governments to account for the timely restoration of certain fundamental values and fulfillment of certain basic needs.

Also, the question whether things would have been different had Cellou Dalein Diallo been elected president in 2010 does have some value. Obviously, due to its hypothetical nature any tentative answer to the question could only be a speculation. What can be safely said, though, is that, unlike Alpha Condé who never held a government position until taking office in December 2010, Diallo served in the Conté government as minister of Transport, Telecommunications and Tourism; minister of Infrastructure; minister of Public Works and Transport; Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture; and prime minister, successively. Would this background prove to be an asset or a liability, in the event Diallo accedes to the presidency? Only time will tell. Another thing that can be safely said is that regardless of who Guinea's president is, for Guinea to make sustained progress toward national unity, national development, and democratic governance, Guineans must change their political culture. That must entail, among other things, putting country above ethnic group and accepting the

state as an impersonal institutional system representing the collective sovereign will of the Guinean people.

In the final analysis, it is doubtful whether the international community, including ECOWAS, is to blame for the disastrous outcome of the otherwise highly anticipated political transition. For instance, whether the French government and its alleged surrogate Blaise Compaoré manipulated the process in favor of their so-called mutual protégé Alpha Condé, as widely perceived in Guinea, is debatable. Equally debatable is the allegation that France and Germany had a hand in the physical incapacitation of Capt. Camara and his subsequent political ostracizing. We have learned, though, from confidential diplomatic cables leaked by WikiLeaks that both France and the US were involved in his banishment. If nothing else, the fact that Diakité has yet to be found after shooting Capt. Camara, despite having given interviews to RFI from his “undisclosed location,” remains puzzling, to say the least. Regardless, the Guinean people are ultimately responsible for their destiny and no international efforts can be a viable substitute for the sovereign exercise of that responsibility.

In a broader context, however, the fact that ECOWAS and other international organizations through it, have been involved in conflict prevention, conflict management and/or conflict resolution in virtually every West African country over the past two decades alone speaks to a more profound concern in the age of globalization. That is, whether African states have the ability to promote long-term human security within the framework of the existing nation-states. With human security being understood as the safety and well-being of individuals, families and communities in areas as vital as food, health, environment, political freedom and participation, cultural integrity, and education, the prevailing notion of state security has proved to constitute an obstacle to people-centered security in increasingly more cases. Such was the case in Guinea, for instance, during the CNDD regime. ECOWAS’s record of conflict prevention, conflict management, and conflict resolution lends more and



more credence to the argument that regional integration could be the best approach to West Africa's pursuit of security and lasting peace and stability.

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### *Interviews and Personal Communications*

Abdoulaye Lélouma Diallo is a retired official of the International Labor Organization and a former leader of the CNTG during the Sékou Touré regime. Personal communications with the author. I first had an interview with him in 2006 (Boston,

Massachusetts) and further personal communications in 2009 (Geneva, Switzerland).

Abdoulaye Mombeya Diallo is a Guinean journalist. Personal communications with the author, July 2012 (Conakry).

Abdourahmane Sikhé Camara was the general-secretary of the CNT at the time of our communication in July 2012 (Conakry).

Anne Marie Koïvogui is a civil servant for the Conakry Port Authority and a former member of Claude “Coplan” Pivi’s inner circle. Personal communications with the author, January 2007 (Conakry).

Charles-Pascal Tolno is a professional educator, having worked as college professor and dean of the Donka Faculty of Social Sciences in Conakry. He served as governor of Conakry from 1990 to 1992 and minister of Higher Education from 1992 to 1994. Personal communications with the author, July 2012 (Conakry).

Diénabou Baldé was a sophomore in the Department of Chemistry at the time of the second wave of student protests and a member of the Student Government Organization. Personal communications with the author, 1992 (Conakry).

Fady Diallo (Captain) was a transmission officer of the Presidential Security Services during the Conté presidency. Interview with the author, January 2007 (Conakry).

Fanta Oulen Bakary Camara is a police commissioner in Conakry. At the time of our personal communication (July 2012, Conakry) he was director of the National Agency for the Protection of Women and Children.

Haby Dieng is a justice on Guinea’s Supreme Court. At the time of our communication (July 2012, Conakry), she was also the vice president of the CNT Constitutional Commission and president of the NGO Association of Women Jurists of Guinea.

Kader Doumbouya (Lt. Col.) is a retired paratrooper who served as commandant of the Bataillon Autonome des Troupes Aéroportées (BATA). He co-led the February 1996 mutiny. Personal communications with the author, July 2012 (Conakry).

Nafa Diallo (Captain) served as an artillery officer in 2000 and 2001 during the anti-rebellion campaign in Guinea. Personal communication with the author, June 2010 (Conakry).

Rabiatou Sèrah Diallo is the former general-secretary of the CNTG labor union that co-led the nation-wide strikes of 2006 and 2007. At the time of our latest conversations (July 2012, Conakry), she was serving as president of the CNT.

Yaya Sow (Lt. Col.) is a retired army officer and an ECOMOC veteran. He also was the artillery commander of the Bataillon Spécial de Conakry (BSC) and one of the leaders of the February 1996 military mutiny. Personal communications with the author, July 2012 (Conakry).