

SECURITY BRIEF

GUINEA: TROUBLED TRANSITION?

Over the past year West Africa has witnessed the flaring of a number of conflicts, most notably in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. In these violent crises the figures and policies of individuals have figured large, which is scarcely surprising given the weakness of institutional arrangements that might otherwise have curbed the exercise of arbitrary power.

A local state that features less prominently in the international spotlight, yet which plays a major role in the fortunes of other regional actors, is Guinea. Here again the political stage is dominated by figure of the head of state, General Lansana Conté, or, perhaps more accurately, by his shadow.

That Conté is now seriously ill is not a matter for dispute. In December 2002 he cut short a pilgrimage to Mecca to seek treatment at a military hospital in Rabat, Morocco, returning to Guinea in January 2003 only to repair immediately to his home village, Moussaya. He returned to the presidency only briefly, in mid-March, to warn senior officers against the temptation of meddling in politics. Since then he has held court in his village, leaving the day-to-day affairs of state to his prime minister, Lamine Sidimé.

It was therefore something of a surprise when, in January 2003, the presidential majority group, which is dominated by Conté's *Parti de l'unité et du progrès* (PUP), announced that he would be its candidate in the presidential elections due in December.

Subsequently, a last minute cancellation of an official visit to Japan at the end of March sparked rumours that Conté was indeed dead and that elements of the army had taken control. These stories proved premature but gave a sure sign of what difficulties might be in the offing.

Guinea has seen only one transfer of power since independence. When President Sékou Touré died in 1984, after almost forty years of dominating the Guinean political scene, there was a brief contest for power between his family and the then prime minister. This was brought to an abrupt conclusion three days after Touré's funeral by the intervention of a group of officers led by his chief of staff, Colonel Lansana Conté.

The new regime was welcomed at home and abroad, for despite a modification in ideological direction during Touré's declining years, his regime remained paranoid and brutal. Conté's civil-military government began something of an economic revival with more liberal policies, though these ran into difficulties by the early 1990s, by which time Guinea was also becoming increasingly embroiled in the region's troubles.

Political liberalisation of a sort followed. Conté won the first multiparty presidential contest in 1993, though the results also indicated the presence of an active opposition, organized largely along ethnic lines. While the president's support was channelled largely through the PUP, which enjoys the support of most of the Soussou-dominated coastal regions and has a

significant following in other major towns, all the other leading opposition parties have strong regional bases, but little support elsewhere. Conté retained the presidency in 1998, though few would have called the process free and fair.

President Conté had reinforced his political dominance in the legislative elections of June 1995, in which his PUP took 71 of the 114 parliamentary seats, a position improved in the controversial and frequently delayed elections of 2002, which was boycotted by much of the radical opposition.

For all the shortcomings of the electoral system, there are few indications that Conté would face a formidable contest this December. The opposition is divided along lines of personality and alliances form and fracture again according to the dictates of individual ambition.

The real question now, is what happens if Conté is forced from the scene by his own physical weakness or worse? The constitution is quite clear in this regard: the president of the National Assembly takes over the reins and holds a new presidential election within sixty days. Yet that is easier said than done given the country's administrative weakness. In addition, the current president of the National Assembly, Aboubacar Sompari is at loggerheads with Conté, who firmly resisted his appointment, albeit that he is secretary-general of the ruling party. Sompari's attempts to clear up the electoral system before December 2003 have also met with little but obstruction from government and opposition alike.

Among the opposition, Alpha Condé has announced his candidature already, thus alienating many of his erstwhile allies and effectively wrecking the idea of a united opposition front. Another opposition leader, the veteran Mamadou Bah, has also caused consternation by calling for the army to intervene should a power vacuum develop, to hold the ring while the politicians attempt to work out their compromises.

Whether the army would prove so amenable is a matter for conjecture. Its loyalties are also compromised by issues of personality and regional origin. The chief of staff General Kerfala Camara has been associated with Conté since before the latter came to power, but is now the subject of some suspicion and does

not command universal respect in the armed forces. His deputy, General Ousmane Arafan Camara, is seen to be Conté's personal choice, having been left in charge during the president's absence at the end of 2002. His problem is that he is a Malinké from Sékou Touré's village of Faranah, and is said to be a nephew of the late dictator. Most of the other service chiefs are Soussou, from the coastal regions.

There remains another possibility, that junior officers make their move to by-pass an old failed political class that is seen to have neglected the urban infrastructure to a dangerous degree.

Informed observers are watching developments with some trepidation, given the key role that Guinea has played in regional affairs in recent years. Should Guinea descend into chaos it would create opportunities for mischief makers to unmake the fragile diplomatic gains made in the troubled neighbouring states over the past few months.

LIBERIA: A POST-TAYLOR PEACE?

To what extent may history be repeating itself in Liberia?

After 14 years of sustained hostility and insecurity, Liberians have placed most of their hopes for peace in the necessity of Charles Taylor's removal from power and the subsequent deployment of a US-led stabilisation force. This view, apparently widely held, implies that the two-tiered approach alone would bring about peace. Unfortunately, such a simplistic reading of current events overlooks many of the lessons one could glean from revisiting the early years of the conflict.

First, it overlooks that, in common with the situation that now prevails as rebel forces tighten their hold on Monrovia, countless Liberians also died from war-related disease and starvation when warlords Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson initiated their advances on the besieged capital in 1990. Moreover, its emphasis on the role of third-party military intervention is misplaced given the long-term inability of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to facilitate lasting peace and stability.

Fortunately, Liberian peace delegates in Accra have gradually moved their focus away from shoring up the fledgling 17 June cease-fire agreement between belligerents to the more substantive question of who will lead the war-ravaged nation if and when President Charles Taylor permanently departs the political scene.

ECOWAS-mediated negotiations were intended to bring the government, rebel factions, a host of civil society groups and non-armed political parties together to find consensus on key issues and thereby stave off a military face-off between Taylor's forces and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) rebel groups. Controlling an overwhelming majority of the territory and boosted by the Sierra Leone Special Court's issuance of an international warrant for Taylor's arrest, the rebel groups entered into an agreement to cease hostilities, but then breached their commitment by mounting an offensive against government forces with the hope of taking Monrovia—ostensibly choosing to win the war rather than negotiate a settlement.

It is unclear which party initiated the truce violation but the resumption of violence has resulted in the deaths of hundreds, if not thousands, of Liberians and worsened the already precarious state of internally displaced persons, particular around the capital. As fighting intensified, access to food, water, shelter and proper sanitation became even more difficult as foreign aid workers were evacuated and citizens were left to fend for themselves amid the chaos. International organizations such as *Medecins Sans Frontieres* (MSF) have warned of the potential humanitarian crisis that is brewing if hostilities are not suspended and the delivery of relief goods and services cannot be resumed promptly and consistently.

Currently, no less than 40 names are being touted as potential candidates for president in the wake of Taylor's departure. However, there are three individuals who are of particular interest. First, the Liberian constitution calls for Vice-President Moses Zeh Blah to take over until Taylor's term officially ends in

January. Both the LURD and MODEL reject this because they view this as no transition at all. Their apprehension stands despite recent tension between Blah and Taylor. Before peace talks began, Taylor accused his vice-president of planning a coup, arrested him but then released and reinstated him.

LURD and MODEL have taken very different positions on how to proceed with the negotiations. The LURD has selected its spokesman Kabineh Jan'eh as a possible candidate, while the MODEL leaders have proposed that one interim president be selected from a pool of candidates from civil society and political parties that have not taken part in the conflict. The current peace talk delegates would then select an interim leader from the assembled group. Furthermore, MODEL spokesman Tiah Slinger has suggested that two vice-president positions (having equal powers) be created and held by a representative of both rebel groups. This proposal would require either violating or amending the current constitution, which introduces a new set of challenges to the process.

Finally, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (runner-up candidate in the 1997 election) has expressed interest in running again. Her three-year old Movement for Democratic Change in Liberia (MDCL) was created as an opposition party, the principal object of which was Taylor's removal from power. Mirroring her efforts to remove Doe in the 1980s, Johnson-Sirleaf has dedicated as much time to Liberian politics over the last decade as she has to her remarkable financial career.

However diverse, these candidates often represent groups that were created with the sole purpose of removing Taylor from the country's war-ravaged political landscape. Lacking clear agendas, these presidential hopefuls risk falling into the same pitfalls that plunged the country into war more than a decade ago. Just as the signature of a cease-fire in June has not resulted in the cessation of hostilities (in fact, violence levels have markedly increased) the transitional government negotiations have failed to address the root causes of the conflict and do not factor in regional complicity in Liberia's weak political structures.

So far, transition has tended to be equate getting rid of Taylor. Unfortunately, however, no one has stepped forward yet with a satisfactory framework for governing the country once he has gone.

FOOD SECURITY AND HIV/AIDS IN LESOTHO

Lesotho, like other Southern African countries, now faces its most serious food security crisis since the severe drought of 1992. This problem has been further compounded by the impact of HIV/AIDS. In June 2003, James T Morris (Head of the UN World Food Programme) reported that "the intensity of the crisis is increasing faster than we ever expected." He added that "the deadly combination of widespread food shortages and high prevalence of HIV/AIDS infection meant that humanitarian actors faced an enormous battle."

The problem of food insecurity in Lesotho is so serious that even those districts which were classified as having high agricultural productivity are now amongst the vulnerable ones. Lesotho is ranked 132 out of 173 countries with regard to food availability and about 76,000 people in the country require food aid to survive.

Although the 1992 drought affected the country's food security, the declining capacity of agriculture in providing food has been at the heart of the crisis. A recent agricultural census revealed that about 46% of the households reported "subsistence farming" as their main source of income while agriculture and livestock activities provide the main income for about 60% of households in Lesotho. However, while Lesotho's dependence on agriculture is high, agriculture is not an adequate and reliable source of income, with declines in agricultural production often the result of severe land degradation, lack of proper land and crop husbandry practices.

Nevertheless, the food items index in Lesotho rose by an average of 26.3% during this year compared to an average increase of 6.7 per cent in 2001. This has been largely due to the decline in maize prices in South Africa. According to the South African Futures Exchange (SAFEX), maize prices have declined

from a high of R2,045 per tonne in April 2002 to R782 per tonne in April 2003. Due to this decline, a 12.5 kg bag of maize currently costs about M33.00 (R323.00) in contrast to M38.00 (R38.00) during the same period last year.

While the challenges posed by food shortages in Lesotho remain enormous, humanitarian agencies are involved in efforts to remedy the situation. Intervention has primarily taken the form of food distribution to communities in need. However, the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country has forced humanitarian agencies to move away from general food distribution, to targeted distributions for the most vulnerable: people living with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

Equally important, the World Food Programme (WFP) is currently implementing an emergency operation (EMOP) in Lesotho. This operation is aimed at supporting drought-affected people as well as households of those affected by HIV/AIDS. In addition, there is an ongoing supporting emergency school feeding programme in the Leribe and Berea districts. Significantly, WFP-led humanitarian intervention has distributed a total of 30,000 tonnes of food reaching about 357,000 beneficiaries at the peak of the lean period. Given the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS among the population, food shortages are likely to continue in Lesotho.

The high HIV/AIDS infection rate in Lesotho is likely to exacerbate the country's socio-economic problems. Lesotho has the fourth highest world figure of HIV/AIDS infection. It is estimated that HIV/AIDS prevalence is about 31% and is likely to increase partly because many Basotho continue to view infection as a stigma. The infection rates are particularly high among young adults who form a large proportion of the economically active population.

Consequently, the effects of the HIV pandemic are not only the greatest threat to food security, but affect communities directly by:

- reducing the capacity of households and communities to produce food;
- stripping households and communities of valuable power;
- increasing the expenditure of households on health care for the critically ill as well as funeral expenses;

- increasing the burden of child support by single mothers and grandparents; and
- increasing the number of orphans and child-headed households.
- Impacting negatively on labour supplies; recent research has shown that HIV/AIDS has the potential to reduce institutional capacity to govern and provide basic services, especially at community level.

In spite of these challenges, and in partnership with international agencies, the government has developed initiatives and programmes to address what can, at best, be described as a deteriorating situation. Such efforts received a major boost with the announcement of a \$12.5 million grant from the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. According to Teleko Ramotsoari, Principal Secretary in the Lesotho Ministry of Health, the agreement stipulates the provision of antiretroviral therapy to about 50% of those in need. The agreement is also expected to benefit more than 73,000 AIDS orphans. The Red Cross Society launched another intervention during May 2003, focusing on home-based care and disaster management. The initiative, which has the support of King Letsie III, aims to target affected communities through the provision of community-based health and care interventions.

The message is clear: the longer the country waits, the more difficult it will be to improve the situation. Thus, it is crucial that the government of Lesotho, in partnership with other stakeholders, take robust measures to ameliorate the crisis.

ZIMBABWE: ARE THESE THE CROSSROADS?

The past few months have witnessed a flurry of diplomatic activity apparently geared towards finding a solution to the Zimbabwe crisis. This, in conjunction with public statements by President Robert Mugabe suggesting that he is contemplating retirement, have revived speculation about how and when the aging head of state plans to exit the political scene in Zimbabwe. In addition, recent reports in Zimbabwe's independently-owned *The Daily News* alleged that Mugabe, in a telephone conversation with South Africa's President

Thabo Mbeki, indicated that he favoured Parliamentary Speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa as his successor. It was probably this that prompted Mbeki to make his unguarded remark at the World Economic Forum, concerning Mugabe's likely retirement before the end of his term in 2008.

On the international front, pressure has been mounting for political reform in Zimbabwe, as leaders of the developed world become increasingly impatient at the slow pace of regional initiatives to solve the crisis in that country. This sentiment was recently reflected in an article by United States' Secretary of State Colin Powell published in the *New York Times*. Writing in advance of President George Bush's visit to Africa, and referring to Mugabe and his regime, Powell considered that "their time has come and gone" and that a new leadership, respectful of human rights, is needed.

These developments have led many analysts to think that, after all, the prospects of getting Mugabe out of office are good and, consequently, that a negotiated settlement between the two main parties in Zimbabwe is possible. It now seems that this optimism may have been misplaced, however. In fact, Zimbabwe's president may have never had any serious intention of stepping down and his pronouncements on possible negotiations with the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change), may have just been a ploy designed to win time, and a ruse for his real goal of staying in power indefinitely. Moreover, outside the few occasions (both on television and the print media) that have given rise to the current optimism, Mugabe shows no real evidence of his willingness to step down.

What then are Robert Mugabe's true intentions? How is he plotting to stay in power indefinitely? To guarantee their stay in power, while negotiating with the MDC, Mugabe and ZANU-PF have to amend the constitution so that if the 79-year-old president resigns, is incapacitated, or dies, the constitutional requirement of fresh presidential elections within ninety days is removed. This amendment would allow for the appointment of a successor able to complete Mugabe's current six-year term, and avoid the greatest threat to both Mugabe and

ZANU-PF, a presidential election in the short-term. However, at this stage, the MDC is unlikely to approve any constitutional amendment that may benefit the status quo in any way.

With parliamentary general elections not due until mid-2005, and with the MDC's refusal to compromise, Mugabe is left with the option of calling early elections. This would reduce the MDC's parliamentary representation below the threshold of 50 of the 150 parliamentary seats, eliminating its ability to veto constitutional changes essential to the ruling party's plans to consolidate its hold on power. This has led a number of observers to conclude that Zimbabwe may be headed for a parliamentary election within the next few months. In fact, such a scenario may also be a reflection of the fact that Mugabe has been warning supporters at rallies to prepare for elections, and that these rallies are increasingly beginning to look like pre-election campaigns.

More seriously, as Michael Hartnack recently warned, "in his present devil-may-care mood he may not grasp the risks of calling a third consecutive national ballot", and may even consider "rigging the poll". If the level of rigging and naked intimidation at the June 2000 general election and subsequent by-elections, as well as at the March 2002 presidential election are anything to go by, this would seem eminently possible. If that plan were to succeed, Mugabe would be able to accomplish his aim of amending the constitution, which would include two steps:

First, the creation of the position of non-executive president—a position Mugabe would assume until his term expires in 2008. Although this role would give the president an eminently ceremonial role, he would retain the power to dissolve parliament.

Second, the creation of the position of a prime minister with executive powers. Mugabe would then be able to appoint his chosen successor to this position. Ideally he would select a person he could trust and who had a relatively consistent history of loyalty to him. The successor would also have to have the capacity to provide the protection that Mugabe requires as well as be considered politically astute enough to remain in power long after Mugabe has left

the stage. At the moment, this potential successor is Parliamentary Speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa, who over the years has become a close confidant of President Mugabe.

The plan outlined above may prove to be too attractive for Mugabe—and others who stand to benefit within ZANU-PF's inner circles—to resist. It would not be surprising (with the MDC in such defiant mood) if plans have not been already hatched to implement this strategy. However, such an approach is almost bound to end in disaster for both ZANU-PF and Zimbabwe, which will experience further economic decline. At the moment Zimbabwe faces a desperate situation where the nominal rate of inflation is about 300%; the unemployment rate hovers between 60% and 80%; and 70% of the population are in need of urgent food assistance.

However, in this grandiose plan, Mugabe may not be taking into consideration the interests of ZANU-PF as a whole. In fact, within the party, opposing factions are expected to bar moves that will see Mr Mnangagwa rise to the top position in the country. Therefore, the question arises: what would the power play surrounding Mugabe's exit mean for the internal dynamics of ZANU-PF, in particular the central issue of an eventual presidential succession? Faced with the collapse of the economy and Mugabe's alleged imminent departure from power, some ZANU-PF officials may reconsider their allegiance. After all, a large number of them have a personal interest in the economy. Increased factionalism within ZANU-PF could even lead to its disintegration, creating space for the MDC to take power.

In order to avoid the unimaginable from happening, regional leaders and possible interlocutors in future negotiations must remove all incentives for unilateral initiatives by ZANU-PF or the MDC, making it clear that the only pragmatic way of resolving the crisis in Zimbabwe is by ensuring that all groups, irrespective of political, ethnic or racial affiliation, participate in the resolution process. The increased polarisation of society in Zimbabwe and the growing tendency by the political elite to put individual interests above those of the country could very well see this country taking a wrong turn down the path towards economic collapse and political anarchy.