Destabilizing Guinea:

Diamonds, Charles Taylor and the Potential for Wider Humanitarian Catastrophe

by Lansana Gberie[1]

Guinea claims…that it is facing Liberian-backed rebels and threatens to invade its neighbour. In the making is another regional war akin to that devastating the Congo and Central Africa.
- Editorial, *Guardian Weekly*, March 1-7, 2001

These mines [the diamond mines in southeastern Guinea] hold the greatest interest for the rebels of the RUF from Sierra Leone, supported by Charles Taylor, the President of Liberia. Along with his greed for precious stones, Taylor is also a personal enemy of Guinea's Lansana Conté. Taylor resents Conté particularly for offering asylum over the past several years to ULIMO, a faction of antigovernment Liberians.
- *L'Express*, March 1, 2001

In September 2000, Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attacked a number of Guinean border towns immediately south of the capital, Conakry. The area had become home to tens of thousands of Sierra Leonean refugees, fleeing attacks on civilians inside Sierra Leone, part of the RUF's ten year campaign of terror and destruction in that country. Not long afterwards, the RUF attacked Guinean towns and villages in the 'Parrot's Beak' area of the country, emerging from Sierra Leone and from points along the Liberian border. Here they caused much greater destruction and dislocation, driving Guineans out of their homes along with as many as 75,000 Sierra Leonean refugees who had been living on the Guinean side of the border for several years.

The violence that gripped Guinea between September 2000 and mid-2001 attracted little attention in the world's media, except as a humanitarian footnote to the more notorious conflict in neighbouring Sierra Leone.[2] Confronted, however,

The Study

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the Diamonds and Human Security Project

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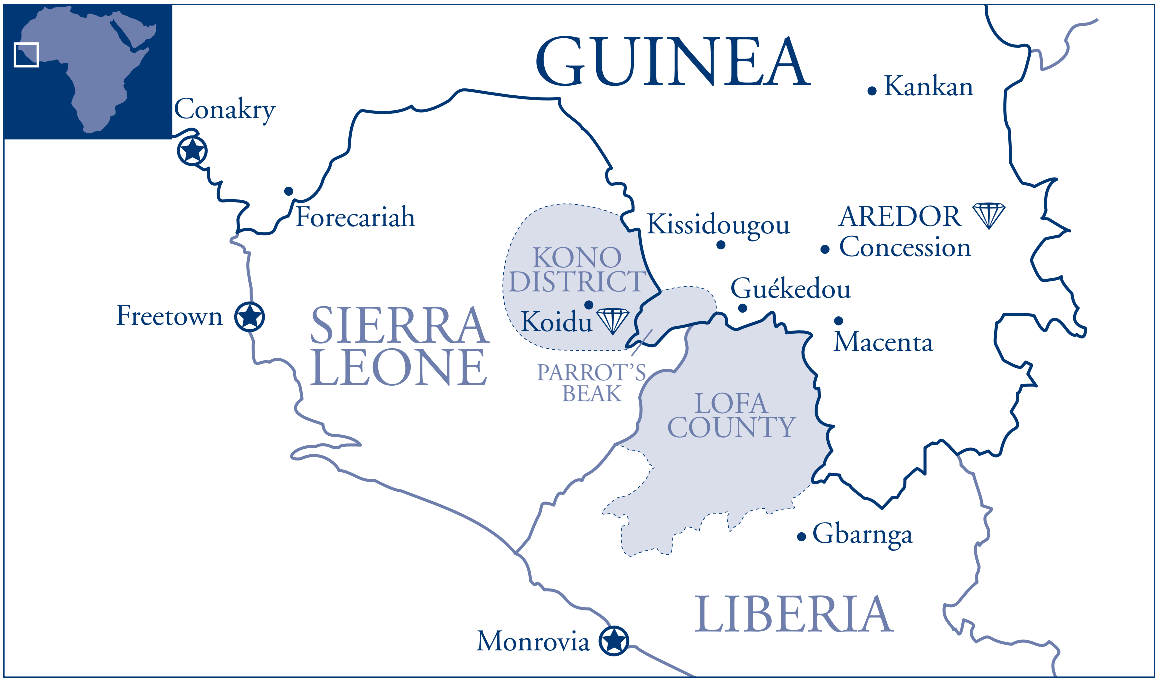

during a February 2001 visit to Guinea, by grim scenes of desperate Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees fleeing the escalating violence, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, called the situation the 'world's worst refugee crisis'. With no hint of irony—only perhaps a certain despair—Lubbers then appealed to what a leading Western newspaper quaintly called 'the humanitarian conscience of Sierra Leone's RUF rebels'[3] who were perpetrating the violence. Not to be outdone, the BBC *Focus on Africa* magazine captioned its coverage of the violence tellingly as 'Guinea: No Refuge,' and concluded: 'with no sign of a political solution to this complex regional conflict, the future for these refugees and for the growing number of Guineans displaced by the conflict remains bleak.'[4] It offered no analysis, however, of what the conflict was all about.

Initially there was panic and confusion about what was going on…

At the start of the violence, Guineans themselves appeared no less confused. Following rebel attacks on Forecariah, less than 100 km from the capital Conakry and home to tens of thousands of refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia, in early September 2000, Guinean President Lansana Conté broadcast an inflammatory statement on state radio and television. He blamed the incursions on the refugees, provoking widespread attacks by Guinean police, soldiers and civilian militias on the already traumatised refugees.[5] The attacks on Forecariah, by RUF rebels operating from Kabala, a Sierra Leonean town close to the Guinean border, were diversionary, and the rebels withdrew without much resistance after Guinean forces counter-attacked. Better planned and more coordinated incursions were soon to follow, however. In January 2001 the RUF moved from Sierra Leone and Liberia into the diamond-rich areas around Macenta (in the so-called Forest Region), Madina Oula (near Kindia) and the important trading city of Guéckedou, which, like Forecariah, was home to tens of thousands of refugees.[6] The attacks on Macenta and the destruction of Guéckedou alarmed and alerted Guineans to the seriousness of the crisis. The attacks quickly spread, threatening to engulf the diamond districts around Bonankoro.

Initially, there was panic and confusion about what was going on, all too apparent in the reaction of Guinean intellectuals and politicians: 'One is obliged to acknowledge that we have a true rebellion,' one writer observed in a leading weekly, 'and that it will be necessary that we resort to dialogue or prepare ourselves for a long war…This dialogue should, first of all, be internal, between the authority and the democratic opposition, then civil society…once this is done, one can then start external dialogue.'[7]

There were good reasons for concern about a possible internal 'rebellion'. Guinea, like Liberia and Sierra Leone before the wars that largely destroyed them, has been governed for years by autocrats, and the country is one of the poorest in the world. Following the 1984 death of Guinea's longtime demagogic President, Sekou Touré, the new president, Lansana Conté, liberalized the economy and initiated new democratic institutions. But the regime quickly reverted to type, rigging elections and turning into what a French newspaper, with some exaggeration, has called 'a kleptocracy benefiting a closed circle of a small number of families…politically bankrupt.'[8] The main opposition leader, Alpha Condé, was kept locked in jail until May 2001, sentenced in September the year before by the State Security Court on trumped-up charges of treason. As a result, in spite of strong Guinean revulsion for the attacking rebels, there was anxiety among the local population and among some of Guinea's foreign backers about what the overall situation might symbolize. As the influential French newsmagazine, *L'Express*, put it, 'the question is being asked: How can we help Guinea without giving the impression that we support the anti-democratic regime of Lansana Conté?'

> The violence in Guinea has had little to do with politics, governance or Lansana Conté. It has much, if not everything to do with Taylor's quest for economic wealth and advantage.

This is the kind of confusion that the main sponsor and beneficiary of a panoply of West African crises, Liberian President Charles Taylor, thrives on. For, in spite of the apparent involvement of some Guinean dissidents, the violence in Guinea has had little to do with politics, governance or Lansana Conté. It has

Ruins of the prefecture in Guékedou, May 2001

Ruins of the hospital in Guékedou, May 2001

much, if not everything to do with Taylor's quest for economic reward and advantage. As *L'Express*, put it, after ravaging Liberia and Sierra Leone, Taylor had now turned his attention to Guinea, mainly the forest lands of the country's southeast, a region 'rich in lumber, papayas and mangoes, [and that] also abounds, sad to say, in diamonds.'[10] This region, in fact, has diamond reserves estimated at 25 million carats, worth well over $2 billion.[11] Partnership Africa Canada's 2000 report, *The Heart of the matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds and Human Security*, made a direct link between the violence in that country, the ability of the RUF to wage war, and its ability to obtain diamonds for its own use and for its Liberian mentor, Charles Taylor. A subsequent United Nations Security Council Expert Panel Report [12] made the connections even more clearly.

Guinea's conflict, like the apparently waning conflict in Sierra Leone, is largely over resources—a rapacious and mercenary campaign for wealth. Because of their small size and high value, diamonds undoubtedly figured prominently in RUF and Liberian thinking, a hoped-for repetition of what they had accomplished in Sierra Leone. This reality has been largely overlooked because, unlike the case in Sierra Leone, diamonds have historically not been a significant factor in either the Guinean economy or Guinean politics. Guinean diamonds, however, are real, and they are a significant magnet for others. This paper will examine the nature of the Guinean diamond industry, its relationship to the recent troubles, and the nature of the forces involved.

Guinea's Diamonds

Guinea is a deceptively large West African state, about the size of the United Kingdom. Its primary export is bauxite, of which Guinea holds one third of the world's known reserves. Guinea also produces gold and iron, and has reserves of nickel, silver, copper and manganese graphite. The country briefly caught the world's attention in 1958 when it rejected the Franco-African Community proposed by Charles De Gaulle, opting instead for complete independence and then slumping into poverty and repression. But the diamond story begins earlier.

Diamonds were first discovered in Guinea in 1932 by an Irish prospector operating in Guéckedou, and commercial mining started in 1936. The prospecting had been done under the British Consolidated African Selection Trust (CAST), which subsequently (1934) discovered huge reserves in the Region Forestière (Forest Region), mainly around Macenta. The majority shareholding in CAST, originally an independent company formed to work two diamond concessions in Ghana in the 1920s, was eventually held by Selection Trust Limited of the UK, one of the largest mining conglomerates of the day.[13]

But Guinea was then a French colony, and French Colonial Mineral Laws stated that exploitation of minerals could be carried out only by French nationals and by French capital. CAST overcame this difficulty by establishing a 'Syndicat', hiring a French business manager, the Vicomte C. de Breteuil, and transmitting funds to Paris and Dakar via a shell company called Mexican Selection Trust Ltd.[14] The 'Syndicat' obtained a general prospecting licence covering the areas of Kissidougou, Macenta and Kankan in 1934, and several other deposits were uncovered in the years that followed. Quality and quantity, however, did not compare with what had been found in Sierra Leone during the 1930s. In March 1934, the 'Syndicat' was liquidated and replaced by another company named Societé Anonyme d'Exploitation Minière en Afrique Occidentale (MINAFRO), with an issued capital of 1.5 million francs, of which CAST held 78.3 per cent. A subsidiary of MINAFRO, SOGUINEX (Societé Guinéenne de Récherches et d'Exploitations Minières) was established in 1936 with a capital of 4 million francs, MINAFRO's capital having increased to 5 million. SOGUINEX began mining operations in 1936 while MINAFRO went ahead with more prospecting in other French colonies. By 1939, the mining area of Guinea had been better developed, with the construction of roads and camps. Four mines, all in about the same area at Baradou, Fenaria, Feredou and Banankoro, were in operation; production between 1935 and 1939 totalled 193,014 carats.[15]

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Then came World War II. The colonial administration in Guinea supported the pro-Nazi Vichy regime, which meant trouble for the British-owned SOGUINEX. The Germans revealed the British connection to the Vichy government, and in 1942 a French majority holding was established to control the company; SOGUINEX assets in Britain were put under the Custodian of Enemy Property. After the war, the company was reorganised, putting together an authorised capital equivalent to £30,000; CAST held a 36.5 per cent share, while the combined interest of the colonial French administration was 36.75 per cent and the Banque de l'Indo-Chine held another 15 per cent. The company's headquarters remained in Paris, and CAST continued as technical manager.

By the 1950s, events in the neighbouring Sierra Leonean diamond fields began to have a profound effect on the diamond industry in Guinea. In 1956, the colonial authorities in Sierra Leone launched a massive operation to expel 'strangers'—the tens of thousands of foreign illicit miners who were at work in the rich diamond fields of Kono. A high proportion of these were from French Guinea, and between 18,000 and 30,000 of them now returned to Guinea, utterly destitute and desperate. Many settled in the Farmorodu area some 30 miles north of SOGUINEX's Fenaria base and immediately began working—illegally—the company's concessions. To evict them was politically undesirable, since the majority were members of the increasingly powerful Parti Democratique de Guinée (PDG), led by Sekou Touré. In any case, the illicit miners were too well organised and even had their own 'police' force.[16]

In 1973, formal diamond mining operations were closed down. Illicit artisanal mining, however, continued.

The Sierra Leonean solution of legalising the activities of African diggers was adopted as a compromise: in January 1957, SOGUINEX accepted the government's proposal to cede part of its concessions to the diggers, in return for compensation of 70 million CFA francs and a formal agreement by the government that the company's remaining concessions would be protected. The authorities then proceeded to organise the diggers into cooperatives, to which they paid an annual membership fee.

In April 1957, after the electoral success of the PDG, the militancy of the diamond diggers rose; they started to invade SOGUINEX's 'protected' concessions, claiming that no foreign company would bar them from exploiting their own land. The invasions were tacitly supported by the PDG leadership, which was receiving substantial contributions from the miners. Attacks on the miners by the colonial 'pelotons mobiles'—the French colonial internal security force, still controlled from French West African headquarters in Dakar—only aggravated tensions. The following year, Guinea opted for independence, and the French withdrew from the country. In an extraordinary act of churlishness and vandalism, the retreating French took with them everything from colonial archives and development plans to light bulbs, dishes from the governor's mansion and telephone receivers. They destroyed what they could not take along. They even emptied pharmacies and burned the medication.[17] And subsequently they campaigned throughout the western world to isolate the new African nation. Newly independent, Guinea adopted socialist economic policies, seeking friends in the Eastern Bloc and among other developing countries. All industries, including diamond mining, were nationalised.

Guinean miners, however, operated more or less the same way they always had. By 1959, an estimated 41,000 diggers were operating, of whom about half were registered. As in Sierra Leone, diamond mining was based on a 'tributor' system, with the miners 'supported' by a 'masta' who provided them with food and simple mining equipment. In 1959, there were over 4000 'mastas'.[18] Although accurate production figures are not available, one writer has suggested that between 1957 and 1961 diggers' production exceeded total company production between 1936 and 1961.[19] In 1956, for which there is official data, informal production totalled 53,500 carats, but this figure is understated, given the fact that smuggling was rampant. A large proportion of Guinean diamonds were smuggled to Koidu in Sierra Leone or to Liberia, as both these places paid for the gems in dollars, much valued in an increasingly economically isolated Guinea.[20]

In 1961, the new government founded a state-owned Entreprise Guinéene d'Exploitation de Diamants (EGED) to take over the assets of SOGUINEX and BEYLA (La Societé Minière de Beyla), another French-owned company established in 1953. The government at this time concentrated more on bauxite production, which soon came to account for 95 per cent of the country's export earnings. By 1964, the government, recognising the moribund state of the diamond industry, relaxed state controls and encouraged resurgent western interest. A CAST consortium held several meetings with the government to discuss mining

Table 1. Rough Diamond Exports and Imports: Guinea, Belgium and UK, 1995-9 (carats × 1000; US$ million)

Year	1995		1996		1997		1998		1999	
	ct	US$	ct	US$	ct	US$	ct	US$	ct	US$
Guinean Exports to Belgium	329	18.2	246	15.8	255	25.7	312	27.6	309	26.2
Belgian Imports from Guinea	780	26.2	440	83.7	533	108.2	596	116.1	554	127.1
Guinean Exports to UK	118	16.2	112	18.5	n.a.	n.a.	39	10.4	35	11.8
UK Imports from Guinea		Nothing in 1995 and 1996; negligible in 1997 (£124,000) and 1998 (£406,000)							84	6.4

Source: Official statistics of Belgium, UK and Guinea

prospecting. But the political situation was still discouraging for potential Western investors, not least because of Soviet technical involvement in the diamond areas. By 1969, political differences between the Soviet Union and Guinea led to a slump in production, and in 1973, formal diamond mining operations were closed down. Illicit artisanal mining, however, continued, particularly around the Banankoro region. Ventures by the American companies Harry Winston Inc. and Diamond Distributors of New York in late 1970s and early 1980s amounted to very little. In 1981, however, exploratory rights were granted to the old, British-controlled, SOGUINEX. This in turn led to the AREDOR venture (Association pour la Recherche et l'Exploitation du Diamant et de l'Or). In its original makeup, AREDOR was a strange set of bedfellows, half owned by the Government of Guinea and half by AREDOR Holdings. AREDOR Holdings, an Australian firm, arranged equity financing from an Australian Oil and Gas Company (79.2%), the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (11.3%), a London Diamond Dealer (Industrial Diamond Company—5%), Banker's Trust and a Swiss wool merchant. It also had debt financing from US and West German banks, most of which was insured by the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, a US government agency. AREDOR operated the main mine in Guinea, located at Banakoro, until 1994, but the mine was finally closed because of persistent attacks by artisanal miners.[21]

Between 1981 and 1994, there was a significant transformation of the business climate in Guinea. The country's longtime dictator, Sekou Touré, died in hospital in 1984, and the military, under Colonel Lansana Conté—a tough, stubborn, taciturn soldier—took power. Conté relaxed state controls and invited

> Smuggling in and out of the country remains a serious challenge for the government, with as much as half the annual production escaping official notice.

private investment, local as well as foreign. The new government issued an investment code which gave preferential treatment to 'businesses that develop natural resources and local raw materials.' Such businesses were to receive 'for the first five fiscal years, beginning with the start-up of operations, a deduction of the earnings that are subject to the tax on industrial and commercial earnings, equal to 20 per cent of the value of intermediate consumer goods of Guinean origin.' And foreign businesses and investors were to be 'entitled to the same treatment as Guinean nationals with respect to rights and obligations,' with some qualifications.[22] By 1999, there were 14 companies holding exploratory licenses in the diamond mining sector alone. AREDOR First City Mining, now 85 per cent owned by a Canadian company, Trivalence, with 15 per cent government ownership, remains the major player. AREDOR's finds in 1998 amounted to 19,000 carats, of which (characteristically) over 70 per cent were of gem quality.[24] In 1999, the company upgraded its three plants and increased production accordingly. In 2000, it conducted eight sales in Conakry (these held by public tender, attended by diamantaires from Europe and elsewhere), selling over 33,000 carats for US$15.3 million, an 89 per cent increase over the previous year. Sales figures during the early part of 2001 were significantly reduced, however.

> The absence of a coordinated international system of certification, or even the most basic of statistical checking between governments, means that almost any kind of diamond fraud is possible.

The other companies, some also Canadian-owned (e.g. Vancouver-based Hymex Diamond Corp.), are small-scale, and are mainly still prospecting. There are eight formal buying offices in Guinea, each paying a fee of $50,000 per annum to the government. De Beers closed down its decades-old Guinean buying offices, Dicorp, late in 1999, after the emergence of the 'conflict diamonds' issue.

Artisanal miners, mostly illicit, continue to operate. Smuggling in and out of the country remains a serious challenge for the government, with as much as half of the annual production escaping official notice. This, in fact, makes it a relatively simple matter for unscrupulous international diamond traders to use Guinea as a conduit for conflict diamonds from Sierra Leone, or for illicit diamonds from other parts of the world. The absence of a coordinated international system of certification, or even the most basic of statistical checking between the governments of importing and exporting countries means that almost any kind of diamond fraud is possible.

Table 1, for example, shows that while Guinea officially exported 1.45 million carats to Belgium between 1995 and 1999, Belgium imported 2.9 million carats. The stated value of the Guinean exports was $113.5 million, while the stated value of Belgian imports from Guinea was $461.3 million. There are similar discrepancies in the trade statistics between Guinea and the UK, the second largest recipient of Guinean rough.

The discrepancies were so marked, in fact, that the United Nations Security Council Panel of Experts on Sierra Leone made the following recommendation in December 2000: 'In the short run, and in the absence of a global system, it is recommended that certification systems similar to that adopted by Sierra Leone [in October 2000], be required of all diamond exporting countries in West Africa, with special and immediate reference to Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, as a protective measure for their indigenous industries and to prevent their exposure to conflict diamonds. If this has not been completed within a period of six months, the Security Council should impose an international embargo on diamonds from these countries.'[25]

Guinea took note of the recommendation and the problem, and in conjunction with Belgium's Diamond High Council, its Bureau National d'Expertise de Diamants et autres Gemmes (BNE) instituted a certification system for Guinean diamond exports. This began operation in June 2001 and it is expected that some of the discrepancies between the Belgian and Guinean figures will disappear. Belgium too has tightened its controls on diamond imports. Until there is an international system of certification, however, the loophole that was being exploited by traders operating between Guinea and Belgium will be available to traders operating between Guinea and other countries that are not part of the certification system.

The Political/Military Front

In the towns, the population has developed the habit of living off the crumbs of society, pilfering and trafficking of all sorts. Production is abandoned; the result is a parallel market, real or created shortages, and price increases. The spirit of initiative is discouraged… Theft and corruption rule.
- President Lansana Conte, speech in 1997 [26]

As noted above, Guinea achieved independence from France in 1958 under its charismatic new leader and former trade unionist, Sekou Touré, who declared defiantly, 'We, for our part, have a first and indispensable need, that of our dignity. Now, there is no dignity without freedom…We prefer freedom in poverty to riches in slavery.'[27] Guineans were soon to realise that poverty was no condition for freedom or human dignity. The French reaction to this act of defiance was swift and extraordinarily brutal: they withdrew immediately from the former colony, leaving behind a population that was over 90 per cent illiterate, with only three university graduates. Newly independent Ghana loaned Guinea £10 million and Eastern Bloc states rushed in to help. But the ravages of the French were such that only sustained assistance could make any difference; there was even talk that the new nation would not survive its first anniversary. It did, but at the cost of both freedom and wealth. Table 2 outlines current economic and social indicators, comparing Guinea with other countries in the region. It is worth noting that while Guinea's GDP per capita is significantly higher than those of its neighbours—a product largely of its successful mining industries—its social indicators are as bad as, or worse than most.

When Lansana Conté took over the bankrupt and impoverished republic in 1984, he tried to liberalize both the politics and the economy. But there were limits.

Sekou Touré imposed an autocratic regime which banned all opposition, made his PDG the dominant factor in the country, directing, in his own words, 'the life of the nation; the political, judicial, administrative, economic and technical' aspects of Guinea.[28] Foreign investment was discouraged; there was hardly any infrastructural development; and shortly after independence, the country suffered from food shortages,


Photo: Ian Smillie

Ruins of United Nations compound (Guékedou) after an RUF attack, May 2001

Table 2. Selected Regional Development Statistics

Country	Life Expectancy at Birth	Adult Literacy	GDP Per Capita (US$)	% of population without access to			Position on the UNDP Human Development Index, 2000
				Health Services	Safe Water	Sanitation	
Burkina Faso	44.7	22.2	870	30	58	63	172
Guinea	46.9	36	1728	55	54	69	162
Liberia	58.2	39.3	150	50	58	17	158
Mali	53.7	38.2	681	80	34	94	165
Niger	48.9	14.7	739	70	39	81	173
Sierra Leone	37.9	31	458	64	66	89	174

Notes: Figures are for 1998, taken from UNDP, *Human Development Report 2000*. Liberian figures are for 1997 and are taken from *Liberia: Development Cooperation Report 1996-7*, UNDP, Monrovia.

high unemployment, inflation and widespread smuggling. Hundreds of thousands of Guineans fled to neighbouring countries and abroad, fearful both of Touré's terror (opponents were jailed and then starved to death) and the escalating economic hardships.[29]

When Lansana Conté took over the bankrupt and impoverished republic in 1984, he tried to liberalise both the politics and economy, but there were limits. In 1993, he conducted presidential and parliamentary elections, widely regarded as having been rigged, and in 1996, he crushed an army pay mutiny. A few of the soldiers involved were condemned to death; others died in jail, and some escaped without leaving tracks, the most prominent of these being one Commandant Gbago Zoumanigui, a former Conté minister.[30] Guineans believe that Zoumanigui fled to Côte d'Ivoire and then to Liberia, where he joined Mohamed Touré, the son of Guinea's first leader who was then living under the protection of Charles Taylor in Monrovia.

Events outside Guinea, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, were soon to impact profoundly on the country. Charles Taylor began his war for power in Liberia in 1989. In an attempt to bring peace to that ravaged country, a West African Peacekeeping force known as ECOMOG was created, thwarting Taylor's efforts several times during the early 1990s. While ECOMOG's main contributor was Nigeria, Guinea and Sierra Leone both contributed troops and staging facilities, earning Taylor's long-standing enmity. In 1997, Taylor—the mastermind of both the Liberian and Sierra Leonean wars—intimidated Liberians into electing him president of the shattered republic. He then proceeded to brutalise the political opposition, murdering some and driving the rest into exile. Almost immediately, ULIMO, one of the factional armies that had fought in the Liberian civil war, and which signed the Abuja Accord in 1996 that ended it, abandoned the agreement because of Taylor's persistent violations, fleeing into Guinea. There, ULIMO fighters were offered sanctuary by Conté, no friend of Taylor. There were an estimated 3,000 of them, based mainly around Mount Nimba, on the Guinea side of border. These ULIMO forces subsequently merged with other opposition groups to found the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD).[31] By mid-2001, LURD boasted of having 10,000 members and of having successfully occupied Lofa County in Liberia, cutting off key road links to Gbarnga, a Taylor stronghold deep inside Liberia.[32]

Earlier, Taylor's forces had launched attacks on Guinean border towns following the 1997 ULIMO flight into Guinea. As a result, President Conté decided to arm ULIMO and to support their incursions into Liberia. The initial incursions were not serious, and ULIMO itself became so unpopular in Guinea that there was talk of asking them to leave the country. Then came the RUF attacks against Forecariah, and the subsequent RUF Taylor-made attacks on Macenta, Kissidougou and Guéckedou. The situation exploded into a near war between Liberia and Guinea, with the Liberians and their RUF allies aiming primarily at the resource-rich forest regions of southeastern Guinea. This overreaching cannot be explained by the presence of ULIMO in Guinea alone; the drive northward, past ULIMO strongholds, had economic goals as well as military and political.

Guinea responded proportionately. After September 2000 when the attacks began, Guinea, with help from the United States (which maintains an annual C-JET training program with the Guinean army) and France, acquired some armoured helicopters and some old MiG fighter bombers which were used to pound rebel bases in both Sierra Leone and Liberia. Guinea also helped to train over 1,000 Donsos (the Kono name for Kamajors or Civil Defence Forces) from Sierra Leone's Kono district, deploying them against the RUF. The British, with an open-ended military commitment to Sierra Leone, sensed the danger that an escalation of the conflict would pose to their position in Sierra Leone, and provided intelligence and other support to the Guinean army.

Both the RUF and its Liberian allies were seriously battered by Guinean forces and LURD; when Sierra Leonean Civil Defence Forces (CDF) launched attacks early in 2001 against RUF-held positions in diamond-rich Kono District, the RUF could only muster 50 fighters in reinforcement, and in an odd twist of irony, appealed to UNAMSIL—created to stop the RUF—to deploy in the area to prevent it being completely overrun by the CDF.[33] Earlier reports stated that Taylor had called up RUF fighters in Sierra Leone to come to Liberia to help defend his position against the LURD; and UN officials in Sierra Leone reported that Mohamed Touré was said to be in Kono recruiting RUF fighters for Taylor, offering up-front payments of US$300 per soldier.[34]

It is hardly surprising that the RUF organized a cease-fire within Sierra Leone starting in November 2000. This gave it the space it needed for its attacks over the next five months on Guinea, which extended from September 2000 through April of 2001. Nor is it surprising that, bloodied by Guinean counter-attacks and facing the logistical nightmare of a long rainy season, that they would sign peace agreements with the Government of Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL and the CDF in May 2001. This may have been prompted as well by Charles Taylor's preoccupation with his own internal problems. These included UN sanctions on Liberian diamond exports and weapons imports, and on travel by Liberian cabinet members and senior officials, which coincidentally came into force in May 2001. By September 2001, RUF demobilization appeared to be in full swing in Sierra Leone's diamond areas. What remains to be seen is how well the peace agreements hold, and what steps will be implemented by UNAMSIL to take control of the diamond mining, controlled up until then by the RUF.

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Conclusions

Guinea is a poor country, but it has taken its independence very seriously and it has generally played a constructive role throughout the wars that have engulfed its neighbours. During the 1990s it provided a safe haven for hundreds of thousands of Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees, unwittingly sowing seeds which resulted in the fighting that overlapped into its territory in 2000 and 2001. Charles Taylor learned during the 1990s that he could operate with relative freedom in his attacks on the Liberian government, operating from safe havens in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. He also learned that he could finance his war by gaining access to natural resources—mainly timber in his own early quest for power—and the means to export them.

Taylor mentored, trained and armed Sierra Leone's RUF, providing them with the same kind of safe haven he once had, and providing them with the conduit for the diamond exports that would fuel their war and his ambitions. Exactly the same approach was applied to Guinea. Rebels—initially thought by some to be Guineans, but in fact mostly Sierra Leonean RUF—attacked across the border, feinting north at Forecariah and then moving more forcefully in the east, reaching within 100 kilometres of the country's diamond areas. As in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the economic objective was twofold: to deprive a legitimate government of the revenue it would need to fight back, and to gain access to resources that would add fuel to the conflict.

A decade ago, military theorist Martin van Creveld predicted the emergence of this kind of 'warlordism'. In *The Transformation of War,* he argues that the traditional notion of war—most famously postulated by Clauswitz as the continuation of politics by other means—will be made meaningless by the emergence of gangsters as politicians—'ragtag bands of ruffians out for their own advantage'. Criminal groups, uniting what passes for military and economic functions, and unconcerned about normal rules or the building of local political support, will turn 'whole societies into bloody chaos.' This in turn will lead to the obliteration of 'national frontiers' as 'rival organizations chase each other across them.'[35]

This paper is about the dangerous adventurism of one such 'group'—led by Charles Taylor—and about the role played by diamonds in the concomitant humanitarian catastrophe. Having almost destroyed Liberia and Sierra Leone, Charles Taylor is now extending his operations elsewhere. Mineral-rich but impoverished Guinea, which shares long borders with Liberia and Sierra Leone, has been a logical target. The Taylor phenomenon—criminal warlord as politician—should not be confused with the colourful 'social bandit' described by Hobsbawm. Instead of acting as a Robin Hood character, resisting 'the encroaching power of outside authority and capital',[36] Taylor has deliberately spread terror and destruction for the simple purpose of accumulating wealth and gaining power. Michael Klare makes a broader argument about the 'new geography of conflict' where the 'fault lines' leading to conflict will not be ethnicity or religion or ideology, but competition over precious minerals and other export commodities. 'Internal warfare over valuable export commodities,' Klare writes, 'have produced a new geography of conflict, a reconfigured cartography in which resource flows rather than political and ideological divisions constitute the major fault lines.'[37]

A few other lessons can be drawn from the incursions into Guinea and related events:

- while Charles Taylor certainly has enemies, many of them based in Guinea, the attacks in late 2000 and early 2001 were as much about economic resources as anything else. Guinea's robust reaction was an effort not to repeat the mistakes of Sierra Leone in its languid response to the RUF incursions of 1991;

- Charles Taylor's frequent talk of a 'Greater Liberia', while incoherent and inconsistent, certainly includes economic as well as political and geographic ambitions;[38]

- the discrepancy between official Guinean diamond exports and the receipt of Guinean diamonds elsewhere is evidence of smuggling and weak regulation in Guinea and in importing countries alike. Weak regulation is an invitation to predatory behaviour;

- diamonds are only one of the natural resources to be exploited in Guinea. Bauxite and gold offer additional opportunities for those who hold the territory where they are mined. But diamonds have proven to be an extremely portable, high value medium of exchange, offering a prominent target for exploitation by economic and political predators.

Some recommendations flow from the findings in this paper:

- Guinea should be encouraged to halt its military support for Liberian dissidents;

- UN sanctions on Liberia should remain in force and tightened wherever possible, until the Government of Liberia halts its support for terror and destabilization in the region;

- Guinea's new diamond certification system should be supported in two ways: with technical assistance to make it as effective as possible, and by recognition among importing countries that nothing except Guinea government-certified diamonds should be imported from Guinea;

- smuggling can be deterred in several ways: through better policing and the creation of disincentives; and by the payment of better prices to artisanal miners and the creation of other incentives for them to behave in a legal manner;

- the broader intergovernmental certification system currently being discussed as part of the 'Kimberley Process' must be concluded as soon as possible, and must include effective international monitoring procedures to ensure that diamonds produced Guinea and countries like Guinea, are not contaminated with conflict diamonds that enter the legitimate system because of porous borders and a lack of regulation elsewhere.

In fighting back against the invaders, the Government of Guinea may have put an end to current conflict inside its borders. Diamonds, however, continue to be both a regional asset and a regional problem. Without national, regional and international diamond controls, the crisis, or the potential for crisis, will continue. Guinea's implementation of a certification scheme like that in Sierra Leone is a step in the right direction. The same needs to be done in Côte d'Ivoire. The UN Security Council sanctions on Liberia are also a step in the right direction, although only time will tell whether they have had the desired effect on the government of Charles Taylor. Bans similar to those on Liberian diamonds need to be placed on diamond exports from neighbouring countries that do not produce diamonds - such as The Gambia, which has become a major entrepot for diamonds smuggled out of Sierra Leone, Guinea and elsewhere.

In the end, however, piecemeal approaches will not suffice. Diamonds are not the cause of West Africa's human tragedy and its growing instability, but they play a major role in fuelling it. Until there is economic opportunity and justice for all, West Africa's vulnerability to predators and war will continue. A small but important part of the solution is the proposed worldwide system of rough diamond certification, one with independent international inspection and monitoring. Until that exists, diamonds will continue to act as a destabilizing element throughout the region.

Notes

[1] This paper results from two field trips by the author to Guinea in March and April 2001, including visits to the scenes of fighting and destruction, and extensive interviews with combatants on all sides, journalists, diplomats, students, refugees, aid workers and civil society activists. A similar trip to Guinea and its Liberian border region was made by series editor Ian Smillie in May 2001.

[2] The incisive UN Expert Panel Report on Sierra Leone *(Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), paragraph 19, in relation to Sierra Leone*, UN Security Council Document S/2000/1195, December 2000) mentions an earlier RUF attack, in mid-2000, on the Guinean border town of Pamelap, which was said to have been in revenge for Guinean military officers cheating RUF rebels who had been trading diamonds for food. This story has a familiar ring: the first RUF incursions in Sierra Leone in March 1991, on the border towns of Bomaru and Sienga, were said to have been the work of Charles Taylor's Liberian rebels who were acting in revenge for being cheated by Sierra Leonean military officers after a one-off deal in looted goods. These attacks may well have been tactical, aimed at testing the resolve and strength of the militaries of these two countries.

[3] *Guardian Weekly*, March 1-7, 2001.

[4] *BBC Focus on Africa,* April-June 2001.

[5] Human Rights Watch, 'Refugee Women in Guinea Raped, Government Incites Attacks on Sierra Leonean and Liberian Refugees; UNHCR must Act,' New York, September 13, 2000.

[6] Impoverished Guinea had, for several years, been hosting at least 400,000 refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia, and also contributed significantly to the West African intervention force, ECOMOG, which fought in both Liberia and Sierra Leone to put down rebel wars.

[7] Kourouma, J.B., 'Attaques rebelles: vers une Congolisation?,' *L'Independant*, 15 March 2001.

[8] *L'Express,* March 1, 2001.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Africa Confidential,* 26 January 2001.

[12] See endnote 2, above

[13] The story of CAST can be found in David E. Koskoff, *The Diamond World*, Harper & Row, New York, 1981; in Peter Greenhalgh, *West African Diamonds 1919-1983: An Economic History,* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985; and Edward Wharton-Tigar, *Burning Bright,* Metal Bulletin Books, Worcester Park, Surrey, 1987. In 1972, Ghana nationalized 55% interest in CAST and the company was reduced to insignificance. Selection Trust was bought by BP in 1980 and the name disappeared.

[14] Greenhalgh, *op cit,* p. 52. This strategy was to become the hallmark of Selection Trust, the parent company of CAST.

[15] *Ibid.,* p. 53.

[16] *Ibid.,* p. 155.

[17] Ungar, Sanford J., *Africa: The People and Politics of an Emerging Continent*. Simon and Schuster Inc., New York, 1989, p. 358. See also Adamolekun, Ladipo, *Sekou Touré's Guinea: An Experiment in Nation Building*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London,1976. The vandalism was made more remarkable by the fact that the French left Guinea, one of its richest African colonies, with only 3 university graduates.

[18] Greenhalgh, *op cit*, p. 157. The term 'masta' suggests that many of the Guinean miners had worked illegally in Sierra Leone, bringing the English expression back with them.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 157

[20] Koskoff, *op cit*. Koskoff explains why Koidu, in this case, was preferred over Liberia: 'Koidu is on a convenient road link to the diamondiferous area of Guinea; it is closer to Guinea than Monrovia, where the Guineans would otherwise go; there are more buyers—and thus more competition—in Koidu than in Monrovia; and the Koidu Lebanese are officially unofficially (or unofficially officially) permitted to pay for Guinean stones in US dollars...Many of the Koidu dealers end up smuggling stones to Monrovia principally to get dollars with which to purchase more Guinean stones.' p. 88-89.

[21] Treitlein, V.A., 'Sector Report: Diamonds, Republic of Guinea,' Conakry, undated (ca. 1999,2000)

[22] Republic of Guinea Investment Code, (Government Publications, Conakry, 1998). For discussion of the impact of Conté's takeover on the business as well political and social climate, see Mylene Remy, *Guinea Today* (Les Editions Du Jaguar, Conakry, 1999), a glossy 88-page publication mainly for tourist consumption but incisive in its treatment of Guinea's history and political system.

[23] According to its website, Trivalence Mining Corporation owns its interest in AREDOR and its Botswana exploration licenses through its wholly-owned subsidiaries, First City Mining Ltd. and Pioneer Mining N.V., which hold 85% of AREDOR FCMC S.A., a Guinean Corporation, which in turn holds 100% of the AREDOR Concession. Wholly-owned subsidiaries of Trivalence include Anglo-Canadian Mining Corporation and Fraser Mining Corporation, which holds a 60% share in North American Mining Corporation (PTY) Ltd. The Chairman and CEO of Trivalence is Lutfur Rahman Khan, who has been involved in a wide variety of firms involved in the oil and gas sector: Constellation Oil and Gas, Pacwest Resources, Larnite Capital Corporation and Arakis Energy Corporation. Arakis was a prominent player in the Sudan until 1998, when its operations there were bought out by Talisman Energy.

[24] Mobbs, Philip M., 'The Mineral Industry of Guinea,' United States Geological Survey, Washington, 1998

[25] *Report of the Panel..., op cit*, p. 9

[26] In *Guineoscope: Guinea at the Dawn of the Third Millenium* Conakry, 1998

[27] Adamolekun, *op cit*, p. 1.

[28] Mazrui, Ali and Tidy, Michael, *Nationalism and New States in Africa from 1935 to the Present* London, Heinemann, 1984, pp. 289-290.

[29] Andrain, Charles F., 'The Political Thought of Sekou Touré' in Rene Lamarchand, Kenneth W. Grundy and Charles Andrain, *African Political Thought: Lumumba, Nkrumah and Touré* Denver, University of Denver Publications, 1968, pp.101-137.

[30] *Africa Confidential*, 26 January 2001.

[31] The United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO) is a Liberian factional army first set up in Sierra Leone in the early 1990s as an anti-Taylor force. It was headed by Alhaji Kromah and Roosevelt Johnson. The two leaders later fell out and the bulk of the force came under Kromah. Kromah is Madingo, as are the majority of the ULIMO fighters, and has strong ties with Guinea and its President, Lansana Conté. After the election of Charles Taylor to the Liberian Presidency in 1997, the force, which had initially submitted to a UN-mandated demobilization program, withdrew into Guinea claiming widespread violations—by Taylor's forces—of the Abuja Accord which had ended the Liberian war. ULIMO has recently reemerged as the Liberian United for Reconciliation and

Development (LURD), drawing widely on the support of many other Liberian opposition movements.

[32] Author's interview with J. Laveli Supuwood, a senior LURD member (Abidjan May 2001) and several journalists who visited Liberia early in 2001.

[33] Author's interview with former British army commander in Sierra Leone, Brigadier Jonathon Riley, Freetown, April 2001.

[34] *Africa Confidential*, 9 March 2001; author's interviews in Freetown and Conakry.

[35] van Creveld, Martin, *The Transformation of War*, Free Press, New York, 1991, p. 225.

[36] Hobsbawm, Eric, *Bandits*, Weidenfield & Nicholson, London, 2000, p. 9.

[37] Klare, Michael, 'The New Geography of Conflict,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 3, May/June 2001, pp. 49-61. See also Klare's recent book, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2001

[38] For a discussion on 'Greater Liberia' see Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, Hurst and Company, London, 1999

the Diamonds and Human Security Project

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