

ARTICLES

State Resilience in Guinea: Mitigating the ‘Bad Neighbourhood Effect’ of Civil War Next Door¹

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Abstract

This article addresses the question of how to sustain domestic peace in a regionalized conflict zone, with special reference to the Republic of Guinea. From 1990-2008, Guinea was surrounded by six countries experiencing political unrest and/or civil war. The outbreak of these wars and the influx of refugees presented a threat to Guinea’s stability. This article explains how the Guinean state, despite these unfavourable conditions, known as the ‘bad neighbourhood effect,’ remained resilient during these decades. It concludes that the measures taken by Guinea and its international partners successfully mitigated the contagion effects of Guinea’s neighbouring conflicts. This is in contrast to findings in recent quantitative studies where the ‘bad neighbourhood effect’ is strongly linked with the onset of large-scale civil conflicts.

Introduction

“Whenever a conflict breaks out within a region, there is good reason to fear that it may spread to neighbouring states... The arms that flow into a country with a civil conflict can also move outward to its neighbours.”²

Recent quantitative studies on theories of contemporary civil war identify several key variables as significant triggers of civil war onset.³ One of

¹ This article omits discussion of recent events in Guinea following the death of President Conté in December, 2008. The author wishes to acknowledge the input of Dr. Alan Simpson from the Department of Political Science and Public Policy at the University of Waikato, Professor Luc Reyckler from the Center of Peace Research and Strategic Studies at the University of Leuven, and Nicole Stanbridge.

² Myron Weiner, “Bad Neighbors, Bad Neighborhoods: An Inquiry into the Causes of Refugee Flows,” *International Security* 21: 1 (1996), 29.

³ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On economic causes of civil war,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, 50: 14 (1998): 563-573; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and grievance in civil war,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56: 4 (2004): 563-596; Paul Collier, “Rebellion as a quasi-criminal activity,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 44: 6 (2000): 839–853; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war,” *American Political Science Review*, 97 (2003): 75-90; Nicholas Sambanis, “Using Case Studies to Expand Economic Models of Civil War,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2: 2 (2004): 259-279; Michael Ross, “Oil, drugs, and diamonds: The varying

these variables is known as the ‘bad neighbourhood effect’, whereby, civil war in one country spreads to neighbouring countries due to their geographic proximity. According to these studies, many recent civil wars in different parts of the world have been triggered by the spread of neighbouring civil conflicts. Specifically, these studies argue that the civil wars in West African nations since the early 1990s contributed to the outbreak of civil wars in neighbouring countries in the sub-region.⁴ In Guinea, however, the state managed to avoid descending into civil war, particularly in the last two decades even as a number of Guinea’s neighbouring countries experienced violent civil conflicts. Why did the ‘bad neighbourhood effect’ over the last two decades fail to instigate civil war onset in Guinea? In fact, were Guinea’s neighbouring civil wars actually an impetus for political order rather than unrest, as much of the existing literature has suggested? Using qualitative data, this study argues that measures taken by the Guinean state and the international community have successfully mitigated the ‘bad neighbourhood effect.’ It will show that the Guinean government constructed a hospitality and stability discourse, for both internal and external use, in order to mobilize support for domestic stability in the face of regional instability. This study will also reveal that there was a positive response to the discourse, which resulted in tangible political, economic and military aid, which contributed to internal stability.

Bad neighbourhood and the spread of conflicts

In the early 1980s, Most and Starr questioned the validity of the “neighbourhood effects” concept.⁵ Their major concern was to highlight the theoretical importance of the ‘diffusion approach’ in a Cold War context. They argued the “notion that an event may alter the probability of subsequent events through diffusion or contagion processes is not new,” but the application to war contagion across borders is perhaps a

roles of natural resources in civil war,” in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, eds. *The political economy of armed conflict: Beyond greed and grievance*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003); William Zartman, “Dynamics and Constraints in Negotiations in Internal Conflicts,” in William Zartman, ed. *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*, (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institute, 1995).

⁴It is argued that the war in Liberia spilled over to both Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire. See for example, International Crisis Group, “Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm,” *Africa Report*, 62 (April, 30, 2003); Morten Bøås, “Liberia and Sierra Leone-dead ringers? The logic of neo-patrimonial rule,” *Third World Quarterly* 22 (2001): 697-723; International Crisis Group, “Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability,” *Africa report*, no.43, (April, 24, 2002).

⁵ Benjamin A. Most and Harvey Starr, “Diffusion, Reinforcement, Geopolitics, and the Spread of War,” *American Political Science Review*, 74: 4 (1980), 932.

new phenomenon. Examining the diffusion approach during the Cold War era, Most and Starr noted that:

each nation's structure of risks and opportunities is likely to be changed once a war is under way and these changes may be most dramatic for those nations which are proximate to the warring nations.⁶

In a later work, Starr emphasised the value of diffusion studies in which, "events external to some social unit have consequences for or effects on those units" meaning that there is "the probability that similar events will or will not occur"⁷ nearby. These studies were able to show that significant events, such as large-scale conflict, cannot be isolated social phenomena. This contends that geographic proximity to violent conflicts increases the probability of subsequent events in nearby societies.⁸ The terms employed by Most such as 'risks and opportunities,' 'will or will not occur,' are particularly significant for the present study. It shows that in its early stage of theoretical development, the 'diffusion approach' was understood in terms of both risks and opportunities as an outcome for neighbouring countries.

However, since these early works, there has been a growing attempt to highlight the various negative effects of civil wars on neighbouring countries. By the early 1990s the debate had narrowed the focus on the negative effects of neighbouring wars. Weiner argued that the close proximity of countries with internal wars raises the question of whether there is a 'bad neighbourhood effect.'⁹ He examined whether there is a high probability that internal conflicts in one country can trigger conflicts in neighbouring countries. Weiner also focused on the growing trend of the post-Cold War era in which conflicts within countries tended to spill across borders. Subsequent studies identify ways in which a civil war can lead to similar conditions in neighbouring states.¹⁰ For example, refugee movements and economic losses are among the major consequences, as these can potentially lead to internal strife.¹¹ They argue that refugee

⁶ Most and Starr, 1980, 932.

⁷ Zaryab Iqbal and Harvey Starr, "Bad Neighbours: Failed States and Their Consequences," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 25: 4 (2008), 318.

⁸ Harvey Starr, "The power of place and the future of spatial analysis in the study of conflict," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 20: 1 (2003): 1-20; Harvey Starr and Benjamin A. Most, "Theoretical and logical issues in the study of international diffusion," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 2: 4 (1990): 391-412

⁹ Weiner, 1996.

¹⁰ Idean Salehyan and K. S. Gleditsch, "Refugees and the spread of civil war," *International Organization*, 60: 2 (2006): 335-366.

¹¹ Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006; Iqbal and Starr, 2008; Starr, 2003.

migration could enable the expansion of rebel networks, as well as demographic alterations within the host nation.¹² Refugee migration can heighten local sentiments among the host country's population. As a result, this can trigger radicalized movements on the basis of defending the interest of what one author describes as the 'sons of the soil.'¹³ Thus, as Brown writes, "the sudden influx of refugees can aggravate ethnic problems and further complicate the picture by changing the domestic balance of power."¹⁴ In addition, recent studies have concluded that the negative impacts of civil war on the economy of neighbouring countries are significant enough to constitute a major threat to their security and stability.¹⁵ According to these studies, civil war can cause financial drain to border nations due to factors like medical or food expenses for refugees, disruption of trade, damage to supply lines and the increased perception of risk by would-be investors.

It is apparent that the 'bad neighbourhood effect' model is centred on the idea that geographic proximity to violent civil conflicts increases vulnerability to an outbreak of civil wars through the 'spill over effects.' This model is the result of research based on quantitative studies which gained prominence in the early 1990s. It is still one of the dominant analytical tools for the recent civil wars in many parts of Africa.¹⁶ However, while the model may contribute to our understanding of civil war onset in some cases, it does little to help us understand why proximal conflicts do not mirror the same effect in other cases. That is, existing methods of analysis tell more about the cases where the spill-over effects took place than about instances where it did not. We still do not understand why some countries do not descend into large-scale civil

¹² Idean and Gleditsch, 2006.

¹³ Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978)

¹⁴ Michael Brown, "The Causes and Regional Dimensions of Internal Conflict," in Michael Brown, ed., *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966).

¹⁵ James C. Murdoch and Todd Sandler, "Economic growth, civil wars, and spatial spillovers," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46: 1 (2002): 91–110; Bryman Daniel L. *Things Fall Apart: Containing The Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007); Collier and Hoeffler, 1998.

¹⁶ For instance, the World Bank recently reported that "The effects of violence in one area can spread to neighboring states and to other parts of the world, hurting development prospects of others and impeding economic prospects for entire regions," *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22883746~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html> (accessed 12 April 2011).

conflicts despite the presence of this high risk variable. This study will address this apparent gap by explaining ways in which domestic political order could coexist with neighbouring conflicts. More specifically, in an attempt to understand political stability in this context, the present study will shift the focus of analysis from the negative effects of neighbouring wars to identifying how they might provide opportunities for consolidating domestic peace.

Mitigating the bad neighbourhood effect: The case of Guinea

Contrary to the 'bad neighbourhood effect' theory, an External Conflict Internal Cohesion approach (ECIC) suggests that states can leverage neighbouring conflicts for internal stability.¹⁷ This model sees external conflict as an opportunity for the state to mobilize the energy of various groups, in order to bring about increased internal cohesion, in the face of external threat. From the perspective of ECIC, countries facing potential spill over effects can adopt conflict management mechanisms that mitigate such negative effects. As such, it is reasonable to argue that a combination of measures taken by concerned states and the international community can significantly minimize the negative effects of a 'bad neighbourhood.' Through the Guinean experience, this study proposes that regional civil wars provide opportunities for: enhancing domestic cohesion and improving external relations; solidifying government control over remote provinces; and strengthening the capacity of national armed forces. These propositions are converted into hypotheses and examined in the remaining discussion.

The outbreak of civil war in countries bordering Guinea, in particular Liberia and Sierra Leone, provided the Guinean government the framework to formulate foreign and domestic policies in a manner that served internal stability. The international community perceived them as interrelated regional wars with the potential to destabilize the entire sub-region. For instance, the Secretary-General of the then Organization of African Union (OAU), Salim Ahmed Salim, described the civil war in Liberia as "a threat to regional peace and security."¹⁸ This view was echoed by the Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida in his speech to the

¹⁷ Arthur A. Stein, "Conflict and Cohesion: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 20: 1 (1976): 143-172; P. Terry Hopmann, "International Conflict and Cohesion in the Communist System," *International Studies Quarterly*, 11: 3 (1967): 212-236.

¹⁸ Ademola Adeleke, "The Politics and Diplomacy of Peacekeeping in West Africa: The ECOWAS Operation in Liberia," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33: 4 (1995), 577.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit in Abuja in November 1992, when he said “today it is Liberia, tomorrow it could be any one of the countries represented here.” Likewise, according to Jawara, the former President of the Gambia, ECOWAS leaders, “could well imagine the implications for sub-regional stability if [the rebel group in Liberia] fought its way to power.”¹⁹ Finally, Admiral Augustus Aikhomu of the Nigerian navy described the Liberian civil war as being “a potential for massive ... destabilization of the sub-region.”²⁰

These civil wars provided the Guinean government the discursive materials with which to present Guinea as an ‘island of stability’ threatened by the conflicts possibly spreading into Guinea itself.²¹ The idea that Guinea was facing a real danger of sliding into civil war was strengthened by the fact that Guinea was hosting thousands of refugees fleeing from these wars. Furthermore, some of Guinea’s border areas were affected by military clashes between government and rebel forces.²² For instance, attacks on Guinean military and civilians in the region near the borders with Liberia and Sierra Leone intensified in 2000. According to official figures, “fighting between armed groups and Guinean soldiers was reported to have led to some 360 deaths between early September and mid-October.”²³ Among these figures are 35 deaths in an attack on the town of Macenta near the Liberian border in mid-September 2000, and 40 deaths in various parts of the southeast of Guinea in early September of the same year. Similarly, an attack on the town of Gueckédou in early December 2000 led to the deaths of 86 people and to massive destruction in the city. Subsequently, an attack on the nearby town of Gueckédou was repelled by the Guinean armed forces who admitted to having killed 150 rebels in the process. Rebel attacks continued throughout the following year as well. A series of attacks around Macenta resulted in more than 130 deaths between late January and early February 2001. According to the Guinean government, this upsurge in violence was attributed to:

¹⁹ Adeleke, 588.

²⁰ Adeleke, 577.

²¹ Sarah Birgitta Kanafani, “Guinea: An Island of Stability?,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 7: 1 (2006): 153-159

²² Lansana Gberie, *Destabilizing Guinea: diamonds, Charles Taylor and the potential for a wider human catastrophe* (Partnership Africa-Canada. The Diamond and Human Security Project, Occasional Paper No. 1, 2001).

²³ Pierre Englebert, “Africa south of the Sahara,” in Katherin Murison, ed. *Regional Surveys of the World*, 32nd Edition, (Europa Publication, 2003), 477.

forces supported by the governments of Liberia and Burkina Faso and to the members of the Sierra Leonean rebel group the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), who [are] acting in alliance with Guinean dissidents.²⁴

Faced with this situation, the government adopted a dual strategy in order to address the issue. On the one hand, the Guinean elites presented Guinea as a 'good neighbour' in a 'bad neighbourhood' region while, on the other hand, they emphasized the value of the country's stability against external and internal threats. This dual strategy can be theoretically expressed as framing a hospitality and stability discourse.

Hospitality discourse

In order to project the image of a hospitable neighbour, the government of Guinea took a series of concrete measures, including participation in regional peacekeeping operations, hosting regional peace negotiations, and adopting an open refugee policy.

The outbreak of civil war in Liberia in December 1989 constituted a major challenge to ECOWAS, which Guinea is a founding member. ECOWAS was established in May 1975 to promote fiscal development within the sub-region. Member-states have largely restricted their interactions to purely economic matters and refrained from interfering in domestic political issues confronting the region.²⁵ However, in 1990 this tradition of non-interference changed dramatically when ECOWAS intervened in the civil war in Liberia. Initially, ECOWAS responded to the situation by appointing a standing mediation committee.²⁶ Later, this committee created an intervention force known as the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), with troops mainly from Nigeria and smaller units from Gambia, Ghana, Guinea and Sierra Leone.²⁷

In order to project the image of a good neighbour, the regime in Guinea decided to participate in these regional peacekeeping operations. This was significant due to the fact that it was the only Francophone state to contribute troops to the first ECOWAS peacekeeping operation in

²⁴ Englebort, 477.

²⁵ ECOWAS member states are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo

²⁶ The committee members constituted The Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Togo as members, and Guinea and Sierra Leone as observers.

²⁷ Adeleke, 571-572.

Liberia.²⁸ Francophone participation was necessary in order to put aside the idea that the intervention was an attempt to shift the regional balance of power in favour of the West African Anglophone states. Historically, both France and Nigeria compete for influence in West Africa.²⁹ In 1970, France sponsored the formation of the Communauté Economique de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (CEAO) which binds together Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal, all of which are French-speaking countries. From Nigeria’s perspective, CEAO was a neo-colonial organisation aimed at intensifying the dependence of the Francophone countries of West Africa on France. As such, Nigeria viewed any French economic and military presence in West Africa as a major threat to the realisation of its own strategic and geo-political goals. Thus, Nigeria promoted ECOWAS as a response to the French sponsored CEAO. From the stand point of Nigeria, ECOWAS was expected to bridge the colonial division of the sub-region in order to enhance the potential for meaningful development. However, the fact that Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso, both strong allies of France, supported the Liberian leader Charles Taylor, explains why Nigeria suspected Parisian influence. Thus, Nigeria’s view was that France could not be allowed to use the rebel movement in Liberia as a vehicle to further its interests in Nigeria’s geo-political sphere of influence.³⁰

However, the Liberian situation presented the Anglophone countries, particularly Nigeria, with a dilemma—how to bring the Francophone countries into this peace operation. Their participation would provide a consensual basis for ECOMOG and ensure that a Nigeria-led initiative did not reinforce the fear of Nigerian domination that is inherent amidst smaller West African countries.³¹ As such, the Guinean elites saw their participation as an opportunity to project the country’s image as a good neighbour in a bad neighbourhood. Accordingly, this participation was highly regarded by Nigeria, the United States and Great Britain. As discussed later, Guinea’s participation turned out to be hugely rewarding for the Guinean elites.

²⁸ Although Senegal joined later, it quickly stepped out again. For an analysis of the Francophone perspective on conflict resolution in the sub-region of West Africa see, Robert A. Mortimer, “Senegal’s Role in ECOMOG: The Francophone Dimension in the Liberian Crisis,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34: 2 (1996): 293-306.

²⁹ Adeleke, 577.

³⁰ Adeleke, 577.

³¹ Adeleke, 580-581.

In addition to providing troops to support the peacekeeping operations in the regional wars, Guinea hosted several peace negotiations aimed at finding solutions to the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 1997 alone, Guinea hosted two ECOWAS Foreign Ministers' meetings aimed at resolving the conflicts in Sierra Leone. Nigeria convened a meeting of ECOWAS Foreign Ministers on 26 June 1997 in Conakry to discuss how the exiled President of Sierra Leone, Ahmad Tidian Kabbah, could be restored to power.³² Although the meeting did not produce a peace agreement, it sent a clear message to the military junta in Sierra Leone that ECOWAS was firmly behind the exiled President Kabbah, a democratically elected leader. The meeting called on the military leader to step down and re-instate Kabbah as President. Following intense shuttle diplomacy between West African capitals, a second ECOWAS Foreign Ministers' meeting was held in Conakry on 22-23 October 1997. On the last day, the ECOWAS Six-Months Peace Plan was signed by Sierra Leone's military junta and ECOWAS foreign ministers. The peace plan became known as the Conakry Peace Accord. The terms of the accord stipulated that the military leadership should step down and reinstate Kabbah by April 1998.³³ Similarly, in June 2003, the World Conference of Religions and Peace (WCRP) sponsored a meeting for the Inter-Religious Councils of Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire.³⁴ Representatives of the Councils met in Guinea and discussed issues of conflict transformation and peace building in the sub-region.

By hosting these regional peace activities, the Guinean government aimed to present itself as “an active player in the process of regional conflict-resolution.”³⁵ For example, when the Conakry Peace Plan was “hailed as a significant breakthrough”³⁶ by the international community, the Guinean elite used this diplomatic achievement to polish its regional

³² Abass Bundu, *Democracy by force?: a study of international military intervention in the civil war in Sierra Leone from 1991-2000* (Universal Publisher, 2001), 92.

³³ Julius Mutwol, *Peace agreements and civil wars in Africa: insurgent motivations, state response, and third party peacemaking in Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone* (Cambria Press, 2009), 252.

³⁴ World Conference of Religion for Peace, 2003. “West Africa sub-region inter-religious coordinating committee”, Conakry communiqué, 24 June 2003. <http://ocha-http://ocha-gwapps1.unog.ch/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/ACOS-64CQN4?OpenDocument>, (accessed on 12 June 2010)

³⁵ Bundu, 100.

³⁶ Bundu, 100.

image and promote Guinea as the “last bastion against instability, defending [...] against rising trans-national warlords.”³⁷

Faced with refugees from neighbouring conflicts, the Guinean government adopted an open policy towards international humanitarian NGOs and the influx of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone, using it to cultivate the image of a ‘hospitable neighbour.’ For example, the government of Guinea did not merely create refugee camps. Rather, refugees were allowed to settle spontaneously within Guinean communities. Furthermore, the Guinean government welcomed a number of international humanitarian NGOs and interstate organizations, such as UNHCR, WFP, and WHO. Guinean officials used this hospitality to cement the country’s image of ‘good neighbour’ in a ‘bad neighbourhood’ region. They used state-owned radio to explain to its international audience that:

Guinea, indeed, more than any other regional country, has been harbouring the greatest number of people displaced as a result of the Liberian crisis and it is doing so with remarkable hospitality.³⁸

The strategy was used by the highest Guinean officials. In 2001, President Conté encouraged visiting French and British officials to support “Guinea’s efforts to restore and consolidate peace and security in the sub-region”³⁹ and he reassured them about Guinea’s determination to assist the refugees.

Stability discourse

The aforementioned West African civil wars also provided Guinean elites the opportunity to emphasize the value of the country’s stability against a region marked by violent conflicts. Unlike the hospitality discourse, which was mainly directed at external audiences, the stability discourse was aimed at both international and domestic audiences. For the international community, the government juxtaposed the country’s stability against the image of a region marked by instability, rogue regimes, and violent warlords. Guinean officials highlighted the “threat posed by transnational networks of domestic opponents, regional warlords, and foreign refugees,”⁴⁰ in order to stress the importance of

³⁷ Cedric Jourde, “The International Relations of Small Neo-authoritarian States: Islamism, Warlordism, and the Framing of Stability,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51: (2007), 493.

³⁸ Radio diffusion nationale de Guinee, March 15, 1993, cited in Jourde, 493.

³⁹ Radio diffusion nationale de Guinee, April 19, 2001, cited in Jourde, 493.

⁴⁰ Jourde, 493.

stability in Guinea. In doing so, Guinean officials hoped to capitalize on Western concerns over the region's stability, in order to mobilize their support for political stability. This was done by constructing a saviour identity where stability in Guinea was promoted as a necessary factor for resolving the sub-region's conflicts. For this purpose, the government was able to project the image of a stable 'good neighbour' in a war-torn region, willing to offer its own national stability for the purpose of regional peace. Emphasizing Guinea's stability as a rare and valuable asset was set against the threats of instability stemming from a loose network of domestic opponents, foreign refugees, and regional warlords. In summary, the hospitality and stability discourse used by the Guinean government was aimed at mobilizing political, military, and economic resources from Western countries, plus harnessing national cohesion.

Enhancing domestic cohesion and improving external relations

Hypothesis 1: The risk of internal instability due to the spill-over effects of neighbouring wars provides governments the opportunity to reinforce the sense of national unity and to mobilize support for political stability.

Externally, the hospitality and stability discourse appears to have found a positive response among Western policy makers. This was evident from the repeated praise of Guinea for its decision to host regional refugees and to act as a good regional neighbour. For instance, after being nominated as the American ambassador to Guinea, Ambassador Barrie Walkley told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that:

despite its security concerns, Guinea has been the primary haven for up to 700,000 refugees fleeing West Africa's brutal wars. Guinea has stood up to Liberia's Charles Taylor and [the Revolutionary United Front] of Sierra Leone, and has forcefully defended its own borders.⁴¹

This endorsement was echoed by a spokesperson from the U.S. State Department who stated, "Guinea is one of Africa's most hospitable nations because it has hosted more than 500,000 refugees over the past decade."⁴² During a visit to Guinea in 2001, General Wilford, the head of an American delegation of military officers, stressed that "Guinea has been playing [sic] in strengthening peace and stability in the sub-region," reaffirming his, "firm willingness to support Guinea's efforts in favour of security in West Africa."⁴³ Similarly, upon her visit to Guinea, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Clare Short, commended:

⁴¹ Jourde, 498.

⁴² Jourde, 498.

⁴³ Radio diffusion nationale de Guinee, August 29, 2001, cited in Jourde, 498.

General Lansana Conte and his government's actions towards the restoration and preservation of peace in the sub-region. Mrs Short paid tribute to the outstanding hospitality displayed by the Guinean people and government, which welcomed and sheltered several hundreds of refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia.⁴⁴

Domestically, the horror stories of civil war in neighbouring countries, narrated by refugees and images of devastation beamed to the population on state controlled mass media, nourished the stability discourse among the Guinean population. This discourse portrayed domestic political opponents as extremists aiming to destabilize the country in collaboration with regional rebel networks. This strategy was called upon frequently in two contexts—the election campaign and domestic unrest.

During the election campaigns of 1993 and 2003, the strategy of linking domestic political opposition with regional rebel networks was employed heavily by the ruling elites. In December 1993, after winning a highly disputed election, President Lansana Conté accused the opposition of working to destabilize the nation and warned Guineans to be vigilant:

Today it is deplorable to note that despite the relentless efforts of well-meaning people who have mobilized for this last stage of the democratic process, the spirit of violence prevails over our country's most sacred values, tolerance and mutual assistance. This unfortunate situation has undermined the entire West African region, where the unbridled race for power with its ethnic hatred and division, succeeded in destabilizing the basis and foundation of [...] societies. This scourge was avoided in the Republic of Guinea, and this is why I call on you for immediate awareness and to assume your responsibilities so that our country continues to be a model in the sub-region.⁴⁵

Similarly, the government used the 2003 campaign, which was boycotted by the opposition, as an opportunity to depict political opponents as destabilizing forces. The President explained to the people that the opposition refused to participate in the electoral process because “they want to take over [power] by other means” and that their aim is “to see disorder in Guinea just like in the neighbouring countries.”⁴⁶ In November 2000, the legislative election was postponed indefinitely by Presidential decree citing “the ongoing state of insecurity affecting the country”⁴⁷ due to the neighbouring civil wars. In addition, in mid-June

⁴⁴ Radio diffusion nationale de Guinee, April 19, 2001, cited in Jourde, 498.

⁴⁵ Radio diffusion nationale de Guinee, December 29, 1993, cited in Jourde, 494.

⁴⁶ Jourde, 495.

⁴⁷ Englebert, 477.

2001 a national referendum on a proposed constitutional amendment that would permit the President longer and limitless term in office was “justified [...] by reference to the ongoing state of instability in the border region of Guinea.”⁴⁸ The referendum proceeded despite strong criticism from opposition and human rights groups.

The Guinean elites have also used the stability discourse to mobilize support by linking domestic unrest to regional rebels and warlords. This was especially the case when a group of poorly paid junior soldiers staged a mutiny in the mid-1990s. In February, 1996 the ruling elite faced their first real challenge when angry soldiers mutinied and demanded back pay, a salary increase and better living conditions. Reports at the time indicated that the soldiers were earning less than a dollar a day.⁴⁹ As a result, the soldiers captured President Conté and forcibly escorted him to the Alpha Yaya Diallo military camp. Some 60 people were killed and another 300 injured.⁵⁰ The rebel soldiers disagreed on whether to instigate a regime change and then officers supportive of Conté settled the argument. In turn, Conté was released and returned to power after agreeing to increase military pay. Following this incident, the government accused the opposition of:

trying to mobilize mercenaries, money, and weapons from regional trans-national warlord networks, to establish training camps in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and to organize a ‘fifth column’ of Guineans and foreigners within Guinea.⁵¹

On another occasion, several armed men shot at President Conté’s motorcade on 19 January 2005 in Conakry wounding a bodyguard. The attackers escaped and the security forces arrested around 100 people from the surrounding neighbourhood. Although the real authors of the attack were never identified and their motives never revealed, the official statement referred to them as “those who receive orders from abroad.”⁵² The Guinean government utilized instances of domestic unrest, such as this, to mobilize support for internal stability by directly accusing the opposition of trying to import instability with the help of regional rebels and warlords. How this strategy translated into increased material

⁴⁸ Englebert, 478.

⁴⁹ *Africa Confidential* (AC), “The war moves north,” 42: 2 (26 January 2001), 3.

⁵⁰ Thomas E. O’Toole, *Historical Dictionary of Guinea* (Lanham: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2005), xIvii.

⁵¹ Jourde, 494.

⁵² International Crisis Group, “Stopping Guinea’s slide,” *Africa Report*, 94 (14 June 2005): 22-23.

benefits in the form of military and economic assistance, as well as its implication for the country's stability, is the subject of the following sections.

Solidifying government's control over remote provinces

Hypothesis 2: Refugees in border regions creates economic activity and the infrastructure necessary to access such activities. This provides an opportunity for the host government to solidify its presence and control over remote provinces, which are usually starting points for rebellions.

In 1994, Guinea was accommodating some 500,000 refugees from civil wars in neighbouring Liberia and Sierra Leone. These refugees settled themselves spontaneously in Guinean communities between 1990 and 1993, an arrangement accepted by both the Guinean authorities and the UNHCR. As such, the government of Guinea did not create refugee camps. Rather, villages that welcomed refugees received support from aid intended for refugees. Most of these spontaneous settlements took place in Guinean villages and towns in regions bordering Liberia and Sierra Leone. Refugees outnumbered the local population considerably in some areas.⁵³ This demographic alteration presented the Guinean authorities and the international community with challenges often associated with refugees, such as pressure on the existing healthcare system and scarcity of economic opportunities in host communities. Faced with these obstacles, the Guinean government and UNHCR took measures to mitigate the negative impact of refugees on the healthcare system and local economy.

One measure was realised through an understanding between Guinea's Ministry of Health and the UNHCR, whereby refugees were permitted to use the countries health facilities, while the UNHCR would pay for the treatment of refugees as "a fee-for-service equivalent to that which Guinean patients pay."⁵⁴ As a result of this policy, the workload in the healthcare facilities increased considerably. As such, more funding from foreign donors was "directed to reinforce existing facilities, with the involvement of non-governmental organizations."⁵⁵ In addition,

⁵³ Nicolette Lawrie, and Wim Van Damme, "The importance of refugee-host relations: Guinea 1990–2003," *Lancet* 362: 9383 (2003), 575.

⁵⁴ Wim Van Damme, Vincent De Brouwere, Marleen Boelaert, and Wim Van Lerberghe, "Effects of a refugee assistance programme on host population in Guinea as measured by obstetric interventions," *Lancet*, 351: 1609-1613 (1998), 1610.

⁵⁵ Wim Van Damme, "Do refugees belong in Camps? Experience from Goma and Guinea," *Lancet* 346: 8971(1995), 61.

“supplementary health posts were created offering free health care to all habitants”⁵⁶ in areas with a high concentration of refugees and distant from existing health facilities.

The Guinean approach to handling refugees was in sharp contrast to more common refugee situations (with parallel health services). This led to two outcomes: an increase in the number of health centres where refugees could settle; and accelerated implementation of health coverage plans from refugee assistance programmes. In the Gueckédou region, for instance, many positive changes were made to the health system. These included repairing the district hospital of Gueckédou, improvements in supplies and equipment, and the training of staff. In the rural areas of Gueckédou, health centres and health posts increased from three in 1990 to 28 in 1995. Similarly, in the heart of the region where a high number of refugees settled, “a 30-bed rural hospital with a full-time doctor was opened in early 1992.”⁵⁷ In addition, permanent ambulance services at hospitals in rural areas with a high concentration of refugees resulted in increased referrals to the district hospital in Gueckédou. This had a positive effect by increasing the availability of health services in the region. Moreover, the accessibility to these services was enhanced as “the ambulance was free of charge for refugees and Guineans alike.”⁵⁸

With respect to the economic dimension, studies have indicated that positive long-term change in the Guinean border regions outweighed the temporary negative effects often associated with large numbers of refugees.⁵⁹ It is apparent that the refugee influx in Guinea, and the relief it attracted, created financial opportunities and assistance that transformed the economies of remote rural areas. This is demonstrated in several examples. Freely settled refugees meant the availability of cheap labour and increased exploitation of agricultural resources. Reports indicate that rice production increased as a result of higher cultivation in the lower swamp areas—a common practice in Liberia, but hardly known in Guinea.⁶⁰ Many refugees participated in the local subsistence economy by exchanging labour for a share in the agricultural harvest. Agencies assisting the refugees employed hundreds of local staff. Some refugees were given land by local authorities on a temporary basis in exchange for

⁵⁶ Van Damme, 1995, 361.

⁵⁷ Van Damme, 1998, 1610.

⁵⁸ Van Damme, 1998, 1611-1612.

⁵⁹ Van Damme, 1998, 1611.

⁶⁰ Van Damme, 1998, 1612.

taxes and other services.⁶¹ Reports indicate that relief food was sometimes resold to the population and that some Guineans registered as refugees and obtained free food. The transportation infrastructure leading to areas in and around the settlements was substantially improved, especially where a high number of refugees settled. Roads and bridges were repaired, mainly to allow food aid to be transported to the refugee settlements.⁶² However minor, the improved infrastructure increased trade in the area and strengthened the local economy and access to cash. In short, it is evident that the liberal refugee approach in Guinea had positive effects on the host population. Refugees were perceived by local people as an economic asset for villages and the population was generally positive towards them. This attitude played an important role in mitigating the negative impacts often associated with refugee influx.

Strengthening the national armed forces' capacity

Hypothesis 3: The risk of internal instability, due to the presence of neighbouring wars, provides an opportunity for governments to attract foreign military assistance and justifies increased spending on training, equipment and armed forces budgets.

In order to defend the Guinean state from internal rebellion and to secure its border against the spread of neighbouring wars, the Guinean armed forces were well trained, equipped and compensated. The international community was concerned that the regional conflict might spread to Guinea, therefore creating another humanitarian crisis in the region. This presented the Guinean government with opportunities to attract military aid from donor countries. The U.S. provided both economic and military aid to the Guinean regime in order to prevent it collapsing from rebellions. The military aid sought by the Guinean government varied from training and equipment to cash flow for covering salary increases often demanded by the security forces. The United States increased economic aid to Guinea from \$22.5 million in 1998 to \$35.6 million in 2002.⁶³ This was considered by some observers as broadening U.S. aid to Guinea, beyond the usual aid often restricted to primary education and healthcare. Although the assistance package at this stage did not include direct budgetary or foreign exchange support, it nevertheless sent a message of moral support for Guinea in the face of a destabilizing threat from neighbouring wars. In 1998 the U.S. State Department and its

⁶¹ Van Damme, 1995, 61-62.

⁶² Van Damme, 1998, 1611-1612.

⁶³ Dane F. Smith Jr., "US-Guinea relations during the rise and fall of Charles Taylor," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 44:3(2006), 434.

Embassy in Guinea requested the U.S. Special Operations Command send “a Joint Combined Exchange Training Program (JCET) team to work with Guinean forces on military activities designed to protect the Guinean border.”⁶⁴ As a result, a resident military attaché was assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Conakry for the first time and the JCET was initiated. The U.S. military sent a second training team in 2000, which provided basic training to Guinean forces in border security, small weapons, and martial arts. The total military training aid increased from \$100,000 in 1998 to \$300,000 in 2001. The U.S. also increased its military support to Guinea in the aftermath of the September 2000 attacks on Guinean frontier villages, launching a programme in 2001 to “train an 800-man ranger battalion over a 6-month period as a rapid reaction force.”⁶⁵ As a result of this programme, the Guinean army received vehicles, communications equipment and uniforms. According to Smith, the composition of the battalion was carefully chosen to include representatives from Guinea’s different ethnic groups, and the Guinean government committed itself to maintain the battalion as an integrated unit.⁶⁶ During the same time period, the Chinese government, for its part, trained several hundred Guinean army commandos.⁶⁷

In addition to economic and military aid, the U.S. provided moral support to Guinea. The support was necessary for political stability in the country, which faced economic stagnation and growing opposition to its autocratic ruler. In this regard, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Conakry during a trip to Sierra Leone in October 1999 and held a meeting with President Conté. This was the first contact of a senior U.S. official since Conté’s visit to Washington, D.C. in 1988. Although the subject of the meeting was the Sierra Leone conflict, it was also a signal that the government of Guinea enjoyed U.S. backing against the threat of rebel groups in the sub-region.⁶⁸ Despite U.S. concerns about human rights practices and political freedom in Guinea, it did not preclude the provision of military assistance. According to some observers, including a former U.S. Ambassador to Guinea, if it weren’t for U.S. concerns over regional stability this type of military cooperation would not have been possible with Guinea.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Smith, 434.

⁶⁵ Smith, 434.

⁶⁶ Smith, 434.

⁶⁷ Alexis Arieff, “Still standing: neighbourhood wars and political stability in Guinea,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 47:3 (2009): 331-348.

⁶⁸ Smith, 434.

⁶⁹ Smith; Arieff.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence presented in this study, it is apparent that the argument in *Hypothesis 1* has been largely confirmed. It was found that the Guinean government constructed a hospitality and stability discourse, through which it was able to mobilize the population behind the government's narrative of what constitutes a threat to internal stability. This narrative included linking domestic political opposition to regional rebel groups, as well as the prospect of the 'spill over effects' of regional instability through domestic political opposition. Based on the available data, it appears that the Guinean population's fear of instability could explain why opposition groups failed to mount a mass mobilization against the regime.

Similarly, *Hypothesis 2* has been confirmed. It is evident that there was a positive response among international donors to the government's narrative on the refugee issue. This resulted in the improvement of infrastructure like roads and healthcare facilities, as well as, the economies of Guinea's border regions where refugees settled. These improvements "increased the [...] administrative presence" of the government in these remote regions therefore, "leading to increased local identification with and allegiance to the Guinean state."⁷⁰ Hence, based on evidence presented in this study, it is apparent that Guinea's troubled remote provinces remained largely stable despite repeated cross-border clashes between rebel groups and government forces. The government was able to maintain stability in these provinces and to prevent the escalation of violence. This finding is significant due to the fact that identification with one's government is widely believed to enhance the perceived legitimacy of the said government among the population. Due to such legitimacy, it can be asserted that the domestic challenges facing governments are less likely to take the form of violence and affect political and social stability. More significantly, previous studies⁷¹ conclude that most civil wars often start from troubled remote regions due to the absence of functioning government institutions.

With regards to *Hypothesis 3*, it was found that military assistance from major powers to Guinea and the increased spending on training, equipment and military funding was justified on the grounds that neighbouring wars might spread to Guinea. Undoubtedly, this assistance increased the capacity of the Guinean military to defend the country

⁷⁰ Arieff, 339.

⁷¹ Collier and Hoeffler 1998; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004.

against regional rebel networks and domestic destabilizing forces. Although the outbreak of civil wars in Guinea's regional neighbours and the influx of refugees fleeing from these wars presented a threat to its stability, I conclude that measures taken by the Guinean state and its international partners successfully mitigated the 'bad neighbourhood effect' on Guinea.

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