



The International Consequences of the Military Coup in Guinea

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On 5 September, the Guinean special forces overthrew President Alpha Condé, who recently entered his third term following controversial constitutional changes. This is the third coup in Africa this year. The uncertainty in the country, which is one of the world's largest bauxite producers, has caused record increases in aluminium prices on world markets and concerns among importers, but mainly Russia and China.

The Coup. President Alpha Condé's rule of the West African, Francophone Guinea, which had endured since 2010, along with economic growth of 5-10% in recent years, did not translate into an improvement in the living standards of the country's inhabitants. This growth came mainly from the development of mining (15% of GDP, 80% of exports by value). Guinea has become one of the world's largest producers of bauxite, a key ore in aluminium production. In 2020, it provided 22% of the supply of the ore on the back of the largest deposits in the world, estimated at 7.4 billion tonnes. In March last year, Condé, then 82, won an unfair and opposition-boycotted referendum approving changes to the constitution that allowed him to run for a third term. Both this process and the elections in October last year in which he was declared the winner were accompanied by mass protests pacified by the army and the police. Tensions also grew in the armed forces—the Ministry of Defence sought to marginalise the elite Special Forces Group (GPS) created in 2018 and led by Col. Mamady Doumbouya, whose loyalty to the ruling camp was unsure. Eventually, shortly after the announcement of plans to cut the wages of the armed forces, he entered the capital of Conakry with his forces and arrested the president. In response to the coup, two regional organisations—the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—announced sanctions. However, Guineans demonstrated their support for the putschists, and the opposition leaders made conciliatory declarations. Doumbouya announced the appointment of a civilian prime minister and an 81-member pluralist council in which parties,

social and religious movements, trade unions and business circles would participate, and whose members, as well as officers from the junta, will not be allowed to run in future elections.

The coup caused a spike in prices on world aluminium markets, rising from \$2,725 to \$3,000 per tonne, the highest level since 2008.

Regional Significance. This is the third successful forcible seizure of power by a military in Africa this year (after Mali and [Chad](#)). This practice in most cases weakens state institutions and perpetuates the use of force as a political tool. It also increases the likelihood of further interventions in the same or neighbouring countries, as evidenced by Doumbouya's previous contacts and affinity for Mali coup leader [Assimi Goita](#). The proliferation of armed political interventions exacerbates the lack of predictability and difficulties in planning long-term development and security activities in West Africa and the Sahel, which are areas vital to [EU interests](#).

Extremist groups may exploit the institutional crises accompanying the overthrow of a government, as seen in Mali (2012) and Burkina Faso (2014). While Guinea has not been the target of jihadist attacks, Al-Qaida networks are active on its territory. Guinea maintains a contingent in Mali as part of [the UN mission \(MINUSMA\)](#), for which it has faced threats from extremists.

Importance for Russia. Condé was one of [Russia's most trusted partners on the continent](#). Rusal, the world's third-

largest producer of aluminium and owned by the Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska has been operating in Guinea since 2001. The company is Guinea's largest foreign investor and exports half of the country's mined bauxite. The connection also helped build up Russia's global image. For example, during the [Ebola epidemic in 2015](#), Rusal established a research and treatment centre in Guinea, and more recently, it has provided medical equipment to help fight COVID-19.

Russia wanted to continue the cooperation, which is why the Russian ambassador to Guinea urged Condé to extend his rule, stating publicly that constitutions are not unchangeable and that one should not be subject to the restrictions imposed by them. Russian President Vladimir Putin was one of the first leaders to congratulate Condé on his election victory. As proof of friendship, Guinea was the first in the world to receive the Sputnik V vaccines against COVID-19 from Russia. In December 2020, it vaccinated top state officials.

After the coup, the Russian MFA strongly condemned Doumbouya, unlike its usual position of claiming not to interfere in the "internal affairs" of a given country. Russia's fear for the future of its strategic partnership with Guinea is related not only to the potential consequences of its uncritical support for Condé but also the [rivalry with France](#) (Guinea is a former French colony), centred on neighbouring Mali.

Importance for China. About 55% of China's demand for bauxite comes from Guinea. In 2017, the Chinese granted Guinea a \$20 billion loan in exchange for the right to exploit this mineral. China also anticipated tapping the potential of Guinean iron ore, which traditionally had been imported from Australia (about 60%) for the Chinese steel industry. However, with Australia distancing itself from China (activity in [QUAD](#), call in April 2020 for an independent investigation into the origin of SARS-CoV-2, and the recent [AUKUS agreement](#)), the Chinese authorities seek to develop alternative sources of supply. Guinea has gained a leading role in this respect. In 2019, the Sino-Singapore-Guinean SMB Winning Consortium obtained a concession to exploit part of the previously untouched *Simandou* field, the largest in Africa. Counting on the extraction of 110 million tonnes of iron ore per year (which would reduce the dependence on Australia by about 10%), it undertook to build almost 680 km of railway and the deep-water port at Conakry. The first works started in March this year. President Xi Jinping met with Condé on several occasions. China was the main lender to his government—the

debt to China has reached 5% of Guinea's GDP. In March 2021, Guinea was one of the first to receive the Chinese Sinovac vaccine. The uncertainty caused by the coup in Guinea may increase the cost of mining investments and force a revision of the Chinese plans in the country.

Conclusions and Perspectives. Although Col. Doumbouya assured that the activities of foreign companies, especially mining companies, would not be disrupted, the uncertainty in security threatens their operations. Rusal and others are considering evacuations in case of a deterioration in security. That could lead to another jump in aluminium prices, which would have an even greater impact on, for example, the prices of automotive, aviation, or metallurgical industry products. It would affect the Chinese economy the most as it is the world's largest aluminium consumer, but also others, including Poland.

The experience in the region shows that despite the initial declarations of political neutrality, those behind a coup often strive to maintain their influence over the civilian authorities in key areas such as foreign policy. It is therefore likely that Doumbouya's decisions will define Guinea's international orientation for years to come. France, feeling its position in Mali threatened, may be inclined to use its ties with Doumbouya, who served in the Foreign Legion and trained at *École de Guerre*, to inspire an anti-Russian turn in the new Guinean authorities. This would affect the direction of changes in international involvement in security in the region in which the EU, including the [Central European countries](#) participating in the *Takuba* military mission, plays an active role.

The new Guinean government may attempt to renegotiate the operating conditions for foreign resource extraction companies to increase the government's share of the profits. The Congolese authorities are doing this in contracts with Chinese mining companies. Other countries are following a similar path, particularly Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, which are changing rules on the export of [agricultural raw materials](#).

The situation in Guinea will be an important reference point for the AU and ECOWAS to regain the initiative in countering coups. It may serve as an impulse to adopt the practice of introducing sanctions not only on the plotters of violent power seizures but also bloodless "constitutional coups" that extend the rule of incumbent leaders, such the one carried out by Condé last year that directly led to the military takeover.