



Armed Conflicts Report

Guinea (2000 – first combat deaths)

Update: January 2004

Summary

Type of Conflict

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Summary:

2003 *There were no reports of fighting in Guinea in 2003 for the second consecutive year. However, civil conflict in neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia resulted in tens of thousands of refugees arriving in Guinea, threatening to destabilize the country. In December, President Lansana Conte was re-elected.*

2002 Media reports suggest that there was a significant decline in violence this year.

2001 The fighting increased in early 2001 when a government offensive against rebel targets involved artillery and helicopter gunships. Hundreds of rebels and civilians were reported killed in indiscriminate government attacks and 250,000 refugees were caught in the middle of the fighting.

2000 From September southern Guinea was subject to fierce cross-border attacks linked to the Rally of Democratic Forces of Guinea (RFDG), a new rebel group reportedly backed by Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and Liberia. Around 1,000 people, including many Guinean civilians and refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia, were killed in the fighting.

Type of Conflict:

State control

Parties to the Conflict:

1) Government:

Led by President Lansana Conte's Party of Unity and Progress (PUP).

"Guinea is a constitutional republic in which effective power is concentrated in a strong presidency. President Lansana Conte has ruled since 1984, when he led the only successful coup d'etat in the country's history, first as head of a military junta, and since 1994 as a civilian president elected in 1993. Guinea held its first multiparty legislative elections in 1995, delivering more than 60 percent of National Assembly seats to President Conte's Party of Unity and Progress (PUP). The PUP is one seat short of the number required to amend the Constitution. Although the PUP continues to dominate all three branches of government, opposition parties have on occasion persuaded PUP Members of Parliament, including the National Assembly leadership, to vote with the opposition on specific legislative matters. Conte won a second 5-year term in a December 1998 election that was marred by violence and civil unrest before and after election day, widespread and diverse irregularities that tended to favor the incumbent, and the arrest and detention of major opposition candidates during the vote-counting process." [US State Department Human Rights Report, February 2000]

"Armed forces consist of 9,700 members." [Military Balance, 2000/2001, p. 272]; "The gendarmerie and the national police share responsibility for internal security and sometimes play an oppressive role in the daily lives of citizens. Members of the elite Presidential Guard are accountable to almost no one except the President. Members of the security forces frequently committed human rights abuses." [US State Department Human Rights Report,

February 2000]

Versus

2) The Rally of Democratic Forces of Guinea (RFDG), reportedly supported by Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and Liberia.

Status of the Fighting:

2003 There were no reports of fighting in Guinea this year. However, civil conflict in neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia resulted in tens of thousands of refugees arriving in Guinea, threatening to destabilize the country.

"More than 14,000 civilians have fled Liberia due to violent clashes between government troops and rebels to neighbouring Guinea..." [*Deutsche Presse Agentur*, April 2, 2003]

"The population displacement caused by a four-month-old conflict in Cote d'Ivoire is putting the absorption capacity of neighbouring Guinea, which already hosted some 92,536 refugees before September 2002, about 55 percent of them Liberian and 45 percent Sierra Leonean." [*IRIN*, February 6, 2003]

2002 There were isolated reports of fighting near the border with Liberia.

"Two incidents have occurred involving the Guinean army and armed assailants in Nzerekore, near the border with Liberia, amid reports that the situation at the border is getting increasingly tense." [*IRIN*, September 27, 2002]

2001 The fighting intensified in January and February 2001, when a government offensive against rebels in the city of Guekedou reportedly killed hundreds of rebels. Aid workers feared for more than 250,000 refugees trapped by the fighting.

"Government troops, backed by heavy artillery and helicopter gunships, have seized the Guinean border town of Guekedou after four days of intense fighting against insurgents from Liberia and Sierra Leone, according to news reports. RUF fighter Bockarie Mus, who surrendered to UNAMSIL troops in Sierra Leone, said only 20 of the 365 fighters mobilized to fight in Guinea survived the recent battle, the UN Mission reported. Government casualties are not known." [*Integrated Regional Information Networks*, February 7, 2001]

"The west African sub-region already in turmoil from civil wars could be further destabilised by the resumption in rebel attacks in Guinea, observers say. Previously thought of as one of western Africa's few oases of peace, Guinea has been the target of rebel attacks during the past five months. Tensions remain high along Guinea's border with Liberia and Sierra Leone, where an armed rebellion has caused many casualties. According to official figures, more than 1,000 people have already died in these attacks. Several dozens more have disappeared. Fighting between the rebel and regular armies have caused property damage estimated at nearly 300 million dollars. An almost one-month lull in the fighting was broken last week by rebel incursions in Guekedou district. At least a dozen people were killed. The identity of the rebels attacking Guinea is unclear. Recently, an unknown group calling themselves the Union of the Democratic Forces of Guinea (RFDG), claimed credit for the attacks. Mohamed Lamine Fofana, the movement's spokesperson, announced they had taken the town of Guekedou, in southern Guinea, located approximately 600 kilometres from the capital, Conakry." [*IPS*, February 4, 2001]

"The government of the West African state of Guinea has begun deploying powerful Russian-built attack helicopters to the front-line in its fight with rebels. This latest military escalation is taking place in an area where about 250 000 refugees are trapped between armed groups. The refugees fled wars in neighbouring Sierra Leone and Liberia, before they became further enmeshed in the fighting in Guinea." [*BBC News*, February 1, 2001]

2000 From September 2000 southern Guinea was subject to border attacks from Sierra Leone and Liberia. A little-known Guinean dissident group, the Rally of Democratic Forces of Guinea (RFDG), claimed responsibility for the attacks, although the group is believed to be backed by Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Liberian government. The fighting threatened thousands of Guinean villagers and nearly 500,000 refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia.

"The refugees cannot return home because of rebel positions behind them and they cannot yet go further into safe areas of Guinea, because the Guinea authorities suspect large population movements might mask rebel manoeuvres. Some of the refugees trapped in the border area have not received food aid for five months and they are increasingly falling prey to armed men from all sides in the conflict." [*BBC News*, 26 January 2001]

"The BBC West Africa Correspondent describes the situation as a catastrophe. He says the rebels appear to be a mixture of Guinean dissidents and mercenaries recruited in neighbouring Sierra Leone and Liberia." [*BBC News*, January 15, 2001]

Number of Deaths:

Total: More than 1,500.

"Major border incursions from Revolutionary United Front combatants from Sierra Leone, dissident Guinean forces, Liberian Army, and mercenaries between September 2000 and March 2001 killed over 1,500 Guinean civilians and military personnel." [*The World Factbook 2002*, US Central Intelligence Agency available from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gv.html>]

2003 There were no reported conflict-related deaths for a second consecutive year.

2002 There were no reported conflict-related deaths. However, the government was accused of using excessive force against political dissidents.

"Each time political opponents or citizens have dared to show their dissatisfaction with the government, the security forces have not hesitated to fire on crowds of demonstrators, disregarding the genuine risk of loss of human life'... According to Amnesty International, the recurrent nature of excessive use of force and the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of these extra judicial executions demonstrated how the highest state authorities cover and encourage these acts in order to stifle political opposition." [*IRIN*, May 17, 2002]

2001 Hundreds of rebels were reported killed, with thousands of civilians and refugees placed at risk due to government operations.

"Guinean troops have killed over 100 dissidents who attacked two border villages. Radio Guinea reported that 75 of the rebels were killed in the village of Condemeye and 60 in Gbeteourameye." [*Integrated Regional Information Networks*, February 5, 2001]

"Guinean security forces have launched indiscriminate attacks on Sierra Leone territory. Although RUF forces are present in areas attacked by Guinean security forces, artillery and helicopter gunship attacks do not appear to have targeted RUF bases with any degree of care and accuracy. Witnesses of some attacks confirm that, while civilians suffered greatly, there were few RUF casualties or damage to its bases or equipment." [*Amnesty International*, May 4, 2001]

2000 An estimated 1,000 people, including many Guinean civilians and refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia, were killed in cross-border raids in 2000.

"Since early September, cross-border clashes resulted in over 900 deaths. For example, on September 3, RUF rebels and Liberian forces attacked the village of Massadou on the Liberian border, killed 47 persons, burned homes, and looted food supplies. On September 6, suspected RUF rebels from Sierra Leone killed 27 persons in a cross-border raid on the village of Pamalap." [*US State Department Human Rights Report*, February 2001]

"At least 10 people were killed in an attack this week by Guinean helicopter gunships on the Liberian border town of Solumba, Defence Minister Daniel Chea said Tuesday." [*AFP*, January 30, 2001]

Political Developments:

2003 Strong evidence linking the Guinean government to the Liberian rebel group, Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), emerged in 2003, straining relations between the two states prior to Liberia's President Taylor stepping down. Although President Lansana Conte was re-elected in December, his deteriorating health led some analysts to question how much longer he would rule.

"The government of Guinea violated the United Nations arms embargo on Liberia and supplied weapons that Liberian rebels used to commit atrocities, Human Rights Watch charged... today.

..."Human Rights Watch investigated the supply of the mortar rounds fired by LURD, which accounted for many of the casualties, and found that the rebel offensive was possible only because fresh arms supplies arrived through Guinea." [*Human Rights Watch*, November 5, 2003]

2002 In April, the leaders of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia agreed to strengthen border security, repatriate refugees, aid displaced persons and reactivate the Mano River Union for economic development. However, the Liberian government claimed that the Liberian rebel group LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy) was recruiting combatants from refugee camps in southeastern Guinea and accused the Guinean government of providing support to LURD.

"Security ministers from the Mano River Union countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone on Wednesday renewed efforts to build peace in the sub-region by making operational decisions taken at a sub-regional meeting in Morocco in April, according to officials. The ministers held a two-day meeting together with other top-level government officials in the Sierra Leonean capital, Freetown. The meeting, which ended on Wednesday, was a follow-up of the Morocco initiative that was convened by King Mohammed VI in Rabat to help mend relations between their countries. President Lansana Conteh of Guinea, Charles Taylor of Liberia and Ahmad Kabbah of Sierra Leone agreed in Morocco to enhance border security, repatriate refugees, aid displaced persons and reactivate the Mano River Union for economic development." [*allAfrica.com*, September 12, 2002]

"... Guinean Foreign Minister Francois Fall has denied claims that rebels from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) may be recruiting from refugee camps in Guinea." [*IRIN*, September 2, 2002]

"Taylor accuses neighboring Guinea of backing the rebels, many of whom — like Taylor — were combatants in Liberia's devastating 1990s civil war. Guinea denies the accusation." [*Washington Post*, September 14, 2002]

2001 By April of 2001 the ECOWAS peacekeeping force had not materialized due to Guinea's position that the force needed a much stronger mandate. In other developments, Guinea's President Lansana Conte proposed a regional summit between Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia to end the conflict on their common borders.

"At the end of last year, ECOWAS decided to deploy 1600 of its troops, known as ECOMOG, to the borders between Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia as an interposing and peacekeeping force. But Guinea is now rejecting the concept of these troops, instead insisting they be called 'an intervention force, to keep the Liberian aggressors away.' The joint visit last week by French Minister of Co-operation, Charles Josselin, and British Secretary of International Development, Clare Short, had little influence on Conakry's position." [*Interpress Third World News Agency*, April 26, 2001]

"Guinean President Lansana Conte is ready to meet his Liberian and Sierra Leonean counterparts to try to end a regional conflict on their common borders. Conte has in the past refused to meet Liberian leader Charles Taylor, whom he accuses of backing dissidents who have killed more than, 1000 people in series of border attacks. Liberia, which is under UN sanctions for fueling Sierra Leone's civil war, says in turn that Guinea harbors rebels who have been battling government troops in the north for more than a year. The sources said Conte had told Taylor's foreign minister, Monie Captan, that he now changed his mind and was prepared to sit at the negotiating table. 'I'm ready to talk to put an end to our current crisis,' Conte was quoted as saying during a meeting with Captan and Sierra Leone Foreign Minister Rahmadan Dumbuya. He described Taylor and President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone as 'intelligent and responsible people,' saying the three West African countries needed no mediators to sort out their differences." [CNW, September 18, 2001]

2000 In response to armed incursions and the associated humanitarian toll, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) decided in December to send 1,600 peacekeepers to the border areas between Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Drawn from Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal, and with an initial six-month term, the peacekeeping force is intended to protect civilians, refugees, and humanitarian operations. Guinea insists a more robust mandate is needed, enabling the peacekeepers to retaliate if under rebel attack.

"Despite their small number, West African troops will be sufficiently equipped to guard the border between Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, ECOWAS executive secretary Lansana Kouyate told reporters on Tuesday. In an attempt to dispel fears that the 1,676 troops will be insufficient for the job, Kouyate said in Ouagadougou that the force would have to rely on good military intelligence and a high degree of mobility to cover a border hundreds of kilometres long that snakes through rough terrain, including mountains and forests.... The decision to secure Guinea's border against the incursions that started in September 2000 was made at the second meeting of the ECOWAS Defence and Security Commission, held on 27 December in Abuja. In addition to protecting the three countries' common border, the force's mandate includes facilitating the free movement of persons and ensuring security for humanitarian agencies and refugees. Kouyate has asked the ECOWAS Security Council to sanction force in response to the incursions, which have placed more than 200,000 refugees and IDPs in a precarious situation. Nigeria will provide 776 of the ECOWAS troops, Mali 500, Senegal and Niger 200 each. They are to be deployed by the end of the month after a force commander has been selected." [IRIN, January 24, 2001]

Background:

The fighting in Guinea began in September 2000, when the Rally of the Democratic Forces of Guinea (RDFG) staged fierce attacks from neighbouring Sierra Leone and Liberia. Representing mostly soldiers who fled the country after 1985 and the 1996 attempted coups, the RDFG is fighting to end President Lansana Conte's rule. Conte gained power in 1984 in a successful military coup and has run Guinea as a civilian president following elections in 1993. In 1998, Conte won a second five-year term in presidential elections marred by violence and public unrest. Conte's ethnic minority, the Soussou, are over-represented in government and opposition figures are dealt with heavy-handedly by the justice system. Coinciding with the rebel incursions in 2000, a Guinean court sentenced Alpha Conde, the leader of the Rally of the Guinean People (RPG), to five years in prison on charges of endangering state security and recruiting foreign mercenaries. Guinean troops also have attacked rebels based in Liberia.

Arms Sources:

The government relies mostly on Soviet-era weapons, and rebels are reportedly supplied through a network involving Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Liberia, and Burkina Faso. In 2001, Guinea's President Lansana Conte negotiated the purchase of arms from Russia to upgrade Guinea's military arsenal. There also were reports that Guinea was using mercenary combat pilots to fly its aircrafts against the rebels.

"Russia has inked military cooperation deals separately with Congo-Brazzaville and Guinea in moves military experts say are driven by Moscow's attempt to recover the dominant position it held in the African arms market during the Soviet era. The pact with Guinea was signed in Moscow by visiting Guinean President Lansana Conte during a meeting at the Kremlin with President Vladimir Putin. Guinea's Conte has been negotiating the purchase of arms and upgrading his country's existing Soviet made weapons, including tanks and aircraft. Guinea has about 40 Soviet made tanks and military vehicles, as well as eight MIG-17 and MIG-21 fighter planes, and an MI-8 helicopter, according to expert estimates. With an annual defense budget of just 55 million dollars, Guinea wants to develop its fleet of combat helicopters." [Agence France-Presse, July 28, 2001]

"Combat pilots from Ukraine, South Africa and France are active in West Africa's border wars. Guinea's powerful attack helicopters are usually flown by Ukrainians. This was confirmed by a senior government official in Guinea." [BBC News, February 28, 2001]

Economic Factors:

Guinean President Lansana Conte accuses Liberia and Burkina Faso of supporting the rebels to exploit his country's mineral wealth. Guinea is rich in mineral resources with main exports of alumina, bauxite, gold, and diamonds. Liberia denies these allegations and accuses Guinea of backing Monrovia's armed opponents in northern Liberia.

"Guinea's president has accused a 'syndicate of African leaders' of supporting armed incursions into his country from neighbouring states. In an address broadcast by state radio and television, President Lansana Conte said that neighbouring leaders had been attracted by his country's mineral wealth. He named President Charles Taylor of Liberia and Blaise Campaore of Burkina Faso, but said others were also involved. President Taylor has rejected similar allegations in the past, and in turn has accused Guinea of backing armed dissidents in northern Liberia and harbouring members of Liberia's Ulimo movement.... 'There is a syndicate of African leaders who are at the base of these rebel attacks along our borders,' President Conte said. The president accused neighbouring countries of seeking to exploit Guinea's natural resources, which include gold, diamonds and bauxite." [BBC News, January 6, 2001]

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