

# **Mass Mobilization, National Identity and Conflict Prevention in Guinea**

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## **Introduction**

In today's world there is a growing recognition that it is cheaper and more advantageous to prevent violence and war before they begin than to try to stop them once they have erupted. However, in the context of the modern international system, the primacy of state sovereignty and a lack of political will to intervene have greatly limited the willingness and ability of external actors to intervene in states at-risk of violent conflict unless such actors perceive that it is in their own national interest to do so. Nowhere are these limiting factors more problematic than in Africa, where state sovereignty is a continued issue of contention and western interest has declined markedly since the end of the Cold War. Yet, according to a 2005 report, "by the end of the 1990s, more people were being killed in sub-Saharan Africa's wars than the rest of the world put together."<sup>1</sup> Given the clear predominance of violent conflict in sub-Saharan Africa, it is increasingly important to examine conflict prevention measures and strategies in this region in order to work for an end to violent conflict on a global scale.

Guinea<sup>2</sup>, a small country in the Mano River basin of West Africa, serves as a particularly interesting case study of conflict prevention in Africa. Unlike a number of its neighbors, namely Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and, more recently, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea has thus far escaped violent conflict on a large scale despite external regional security threats, internal political turmoil and economic decline. The historical legacy of Guinea as the sole former French colony to reject post-independence colonial assistance created a strong national identity and shared sense of struggle that have endured in Guinea. Women have been particularly important in promoting national unity and bridging ethnic and regional divisions among the people of the country. This 'inclusive nationalism' and history of mass mobilization remain salient in Guinea

and have the potential to be a positive force in the prevention of violent conflict in the country.

To understand conflict prevention in Guinea, it is important to examine actions at the international, regional, and local levels in response to both external and internal instability. In this paper, I argue that the attention paid by actors at all levels to preventing spillover of conflict from Sierra Leone and Liberia into Guinea allowed increasing internal instability within Guinea go largely unaddressed; however, the mobilization of Guineans at the national level in response to external threats brought back a sense of nationalism that has helped promote national unity and mobilize masses in the face of political and economic unrest and instability. The capacity to unite the country against government corruption and to promote good governance and democracy will be a critical factor in preventing the outbreak of conflict in Guinea in the coming years. In this context, conflict prevention activities are likely to be most effective at the grassroots level; however, they require significant international and regional support to be successful.

In the following analysis, I begin by establishing a conceptual framework that defines relevant terms and makes the connection between national identity and conflict prevention. The second part of the paper offers an extensive portrait of the historical background of Guinea, paying particular attention to the development of a Guinean national identity and responses to both internal and external instability. In the third part of this paper, I offer an analysis of conflict in Guinea using a 'levels of analysis' approach that examines potential drivers of conflict at the international, regional, national and individual levels. I argue, however, that while it is important to examine potential drivers of conflict, it is even more important to understand capacity to address these factors. Thus, the fourth part of the paper will examine the capacity for action and the different levels the approach of appreciative inquiry. I will show that given that the main drivers of instability are not international or regional, but internal state-level factors, the most important actors for conflict prevention are at the grassroots level. Still, these actors require significant support from the international community and regional organizations.

## **Methodology**

This analysis of conflict prevention in Guinea is the product of a desk study that draws on a variety of primary and secondary sources. Through personal and phone interviews, e-mail exchanges, literature reviews, and internet research, I compiled information regarding the historical development of nationalism in Guinea as well as current peacebuilding efforts within Guinea. Due to communication barriers, only a limited number of interviews were possible, however I attempted to reach out to members of civil society, analysts and international actors in order to gain a fuller perspective on the situation within the country. This study was limited by time and resources and should be supplemented by field research to identify and interview more actors working on conflict prevention around the country.

## **Conceptual Framework**

In order to better understand the potential for conflict prevention in Guinea, it is important to better understand the roots and proximate causes of conflict in the country. To perform this conflict analysis, I will use the levels of analysis framework first set forth by Levy (1996) with regards to interstate war and adapted by Miall *et al.* to explore "the complex and controversial relationships between international, state and societal sources of conflict."<sup>3</sup> In this model, the authors identify the four levels of analysis to be global, regional, state and elite/individual. Within the state level, there are three sub-levels: social, economic and political. This study takes a 'levels of analysis' approach to analyzing the situation in Guinea by looking at factors at the international, regional, state and societal levels that have the potential to drive conflict. However, rather than simply performing a conflict

analysis, I also both identify potential drivers of conflict as well as actors at each of these levels who have the capacity for conflict prevention. Through this process, I attempt to incorporate appreciative inquiry into the analysis by identifying the potential for positive change in Guinea rather than simply focusing on the potential for conflict.

In order to perform this analysis, it is first important to define what I mean by the terms 'conflict' and 'prevention' and how the concept of identity is connected to these ideas. In the broadest sense of the term, conflict can be defined as a perceived divergence of interest.<sup>4</sup> Pruitt and Kim write, "conflict exists when Party sees its own and Other's aspirations as incompatible."<sup>5</sup> In the context of Guinea and in international relations in general, it is prudent to focus on conflict between groups, rather than individuals. Pruitt and Kim define a group "as two or more people who have a common identity and capacity for coordinated action."<sup>6</sup> How and when a group becomes a conflict group depends on the nature of the group, its leaders, and the perception of relative deprivation in comparison to other groups. In order to explore the potential for conflict group formation, however, we must first determine where this common identity comes from and how strong it is. In their discussion of group identity, Pruitt and Kim note,

Even the most superficial and ephemeral groups develop some group identity. This is shown by studies of the minimal group effect that...demonstrate that even a brief encounter between people who have a superficial similarity to each other, in comparison to another group, can give them a sense of group identity. Think of how much stronger group identity should be among people who have historical ethnic or religious ties and perceive that they are being illegitimately deprived.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, group identity can be formed on the basis of any number of shared characteristics, but tends to be stronger when individuals have a shared sense of history, culture or ethnic background. Another characteristic of groups is that they generally have shared aspirations. Therefore, returning to the original definition of conflict, we can see that intergroup conflict exists when a group sees its own aspirations as incompatible with those of another group.

It is important to note that under this definition, conflict is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. Indeed, the notion that conflict can be positive is a key assumption in the field of appreciative inquiry as well. As Miall *et al.* note, "conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change."<sup>8</sup> What is important to understand, however, is that conflict "can lead to either constructive or deconstructive outcomes, depending on the ways in which parties approach the issues in contention and one another."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there are a number of different ways to deal with conflict when it arises, including withdrawal, contending, yielding, problem solving and compromising. Thus, when I refer to conflict prevention, I am specifically focused on preventing the outbreak of violent, armed conflict.

To understand the potential for preventing the outbreak of violent conflict, or transforming conflict into a positive rather than negative force, it is necessary to examine both the potential causes of conflict as well as how groups respond to situations where conflict arises. As we have seen, group identity is a critical factor in the mobilization of conflict groups. In this study, I am interested in examining the development of a Guinean national identity and how it has influenced responses to conflict in the country. To understand the complexities of identity in Guinea, it is useful first to examine the concepts of national and ethnic identity as well as the concepts of the nation and nationalism, more generally.

## Nationalism and National Identity in Africa

Volumes have been written on the significance of nationalism and the development of national identity over the course of history. The concept of nationalism is inseparable from that of the 'nation,' which has been defined and understood differently by scholars across disciplines from philosophy to political science. In general, there are two main trends of thought on what constitutes a nation. The first holds that the nation is a natural, primordial entity in which individuals share a common history, language and territory. Supporters of this view, such as Anthony Smith and Seyoum Hameso, argue that nations cannot be separated from the core ethnic identities that compose them.<sup>10</sup> Under this view, nationalism is rooted in a sense of shared cultural identity, generally referred to as 'cultural nationalism'.<sup>11</sup>

The second view of the nation takes a constructivist approach under which the concepts of the nation and of national identity are socially constructed. This view holds that there is no natural, primordial concept of a nation; rather, a nation exists because a group of people consider themselves a nation. Human agency is at the core of this view of the nation. One line of thought within this constructivist framework argues that nations and nationalism are modern constructions, created to provide identity, meaning and social control in an otherwise alienating social order.<sup>12</sup> Another line of thought within the constructivist approach to national identity has emphasized the role of elites in manipulating identities to serve their own interests. This approach has also been called instrumentalist, however it is in essence constructivist in that it emphasizes the importance of attributing meaning to identities rather than assuming that they are natural or primordial.<sup>13</sup> In general, under the constructivist view, nationalism is rooted in political, rather than cultural, identity and is often referred to as 'civic nationalism.'

### *Nationalism and Conflict*

In discussions of the connection between nationalism and conflict, scholars have had a tendency to negatively associate ethnic or cultural nationalism with conflict, while viewing civic or political nationalism as a "kindler, gentler nationalism associated with tolerance and the overcoming of ethnic divisions."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, a number of studies on nationalism and ethnic conflict point to the trend that conflict is more prevalent when ethnic conceptions of nationalism predominate.<sup>15</sup> For example, Jack Snyder writes,

Civic nationalism normally appears in well-institutionalized democracies. Ethnic nationalism, in contrast, appears spontaneously when an institutional vacuum occurs...it predominates when institutions collapse, when existing institutions are not fulfilling people's basic needs, and when satisfactory alternative structures are not readily available.<sup>16</sup>

Christian Sherrer, too, points to the statistical research showing that the most frequently dominant conflict type is ethnic nationalist (31.8%), followed by inter-ethnic (23.3%).<sup>17</sup> While it is important to acknowledge the potential dangers of ethnic nationalism, it is also important to recognize that the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism is not always as clear as scholars have made it out to be.

The alleged connection between ethnic nationalism and conflict is particularly problematic and complex in Africa, where the concepts of the nation and national identity are inseparable from the history of colonial rule and the artificial drawing of boundaries. Nearly all modern day states in Africa are composed of a number of different ethnic groups<sup>18</sup> and, thus, cannot be seen as primordial nation-states. In this environment, the division between ethnic and civic nationalism is particularly important but also particularly problematic. At the time of independence, African

nationalism was at its peak and many leaders were promoting civic nationalism in order to unite their countries. When the OAU was formed in 1963, the leaders of all the African nations agreed that it would be disastrous to attempt to redraw borders and would, thus, respect the territorial integrity of all the states as they stood at independence.

Given the artificial nature of state boundaries, not all scholars see the development of civic nationalism in Africa as a positive force. For Hameso, civic nationalism is essentially “the post-colonial state’s attempts to rule over colonial territories by creating over-arching identity out of the many nations.”<sup>19</sup> He argues that state-based political nationalism is artificial and contrasts it with what he calls “authentic nationalism,” which is essentially the cultural nationalism described above. For Hameso, the solution is to dissolve the current state system in favor of a return to pre-colonial ethnic nations. While state nationalism in Africa has artificial roots, the alternative he proposes is not only implausible but would also be disastrous in the current political climate of Africa. Unlike Hameso, Crawford Young argues that “a kind of truce between ethnicity and territorial nationalism” has begun to develop in Africa. Rather than promote the redrawing of state boundaries, Young argues that “that the persistence of a kind of territorial attachment, even in the face of state decline or collapse, demonstrates that state nationalism is more deeply implanted than many had believed.”<sup>20</sup> Although civic nationalism is problematic, it has become a salient force in Africa; thus, promoting the dissolution of borders to resolve problems with ethnic nationalism in African states is not only implausible but also increasingly undesirable.

Given the complex relationship between ethnic and civic nationalism in Africa, then, it is useful to step outside this dyad to explore how nationalism has actually been used to either drive or prevent conflict in Africa. In his discussion of national identity, Barrington offers a useful alternative framework for examining nationalism and national identity. While his argument is more closely in line with the constructivist viewpoint, he also acknowledges the importance of the traits considered by primordialists to be central to national identity. In this sense, then, he takes what he calls the ‘middle ground’ between the primordial and constructivist views. For Barrington, the core components of a nation – a shared cultural identity and a sense of right to control territory – are culturally constructed, but they are not constructed from nothing. Rather, he argues, “things such as language, religion, and historical events provide the tools to create nations.”<sup>21</sup> Under this view, the distinction between cultural and political nationalism is artificial because they are often intimately tied together and used for different purposes. With the complexities of African nationalism in mind, Barrington identifies five variants of nationalism: (1) external territory claiming, (2) sovereignty protecting, (3) civic nation-building, (4) ethnic nation-protecting, and (5) co-national protecting. This framework illustrates that nationalism can be inclusionary or exclusionary, internally or externally focused, as well as ethnic or civic in nature. Thus, the type of nationalism promoted within a country and how it is used is a significant factor in whether it is used as a tool to prevent or drive conflict.

### *Nationalism and Conflict Prevention*

Compared to the volumes written on nationalism and conflict, very little has been written on the connection between nationalism and conflict prevention. In recent years, however, leaders, policymakers and scholars have begun to pay more attention to the importance of conflict prevention and the positive potential of building national identity. At a conference held by the Overseas Development Institute in November 2004, participants discussed external attempts at peace and nation building in Africa. During this meeting, Commissioner Tidjane Thiam, from the Commission for Africa, highlighted the connections between national identity and conflict. He stressed the importance of “effective states with a strong and positive relationship with their population and civil society” in preventing violent conflict. In his book, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and*

*Violence*, Christian Scherrer agrees that “the best prevention is prophylactic promotion and institutionalization of constructive relationships between different groups.”<sup>22</sup> Both statements emphasize the importance of building relationships and promoting national unity at an institutional and structural level in order to prevent internal divisions among members of the population. If we accept this assumption, we must then examine both the approaches and actors involved in building and institutionalizing these positive relationships.

### **Conflict Prevention: Structural versus Direct Action**

Conflict prevention is a complex concept in the context of international relations. It is intimately tied to the strategic interests of all actors as well as to the issues of sovereignty and political will. At its most basic, preventive action can take on two distinct forms: structural or “deep” prevention and direct or “light” prevention. Structural prevention refers to development projects and aid directed at building the capacity and infrastructure of weak states. Such efforts can be undertaken at the international, regional, national or local levels and focus on addressing the root causes of conflict. Chandra Siram notes, “implicitly, structural prevention is seen as most effective when deployed ‘early’ and over the ‘long term.’”<sup>23</sup> In reality, however, there is little consensus about how and when such measures should be implemented. Currently, structural prevention efforts emphasize economic development; however they can theoretically also include the promotion of good governance, education, strengthening civil society, and building the capacity and institutions of the state.

Whereas structural conflict prevention efforts are focused on situations of potential conflict, direct prevention efforts are used in more immediate occurrences of violence and tend not to address root causes of conflict. Miall *et al.* emphasize that the aim of light prevention efforts is “to prevent latent or threshold conflicts from becoming severe armed conflicts.”<sup>24</sup> Although direct prevention is most commonly thought of in terms of military intervention, this is only one of the many potential manifestations of direct prevention. Other measures include preventive diplomacy, economic sanctions, or the deployment of unarmed peacekeeping forces.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of building national identity and institutionalizing positive relationships, it is clear that these are long-term processes that cannot simply be undertaken when conflict begins to escalate. However, it is in times of escalating crisis that identity tends to become the most salient. Therefore, while building national identity may require structural prevention and long-term commitment, nationalism itself must be examined within the context of direct prevention when conflict escalates. Given the rising instability in Guinea currently, it is necessary to examine both the structural development of national identity and the salience of nationalism as either a driver of conflict or a tool for conflict prevention.

### **Historical Background**

To fully understand the development of a Guinean national identity as it relates to the potential not just for conflict but also for the prevention of conflict, it is important first to examine the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories of Guinea, and of West Africa more broadly. Guinea is a small country of approximately 8.5 million people located on the Atlantic coast of West Africa and bordered by Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Senegal and Guinea Bissau. Guinea is composed of people from a variety of ethnic groups, the largest being Peul, which comprise around 40% of the population. Other groups include the Malinké, which make up approximately 30%, and the Susu, with approximately 20% of the population. In addition to these major groups, several Forest Tribes including the Tomé, Kissi and Guerzé also inhabit the northern and eastern parts of the country.<sup>26</sup>

### *Pre-Colonial History*

Information about the pre-colonial history of Guinea, like many African nations, is difficult to find and tends to be incomplete. Still, oral narratives do offer information about the arrival of ethnic groups to the area in and around modern-day Guinea and make clear that Guinea's pre-colonial history is largely connected to the three great empires of West Africa – Ghana, Mali and Songhai. To varying degrees, these empires dominated the areas to the north and east of Guinea from 900 to 1550 A.D.

Around 1600, members of the Fulbé tribe, related to the present day majority Peul ethnic group, created a theocratic Muslim state in the Futa Jalon region of Guinea. Much of the coastal areas were brought under European influence from approximately 1650 AD. While Guinea was not a major slave-trading zone, the area was greatly influenced by the slave trade, particularly through the wars and disruption it caused. Although the Futa Jalon state avoided European influence for nearly a century, internal divisions allowed French forces to take control of this area around 1740. Other regions resisted French influence even longer. One notable resistance was seen in a strong Malinké state in southeast Guinea, which remained independent from 1880 until 1898. During this period, the state, under the leadership of Samori Touré, fought off French rule. Touré was captured and exiled in 1899, which ended the most significant challenge to French authority in the region.<sup>27</sup> Small groups continued to fight against European influence over the next several decades, but no unified effort was achieved. Still, these holdouts against French dominance are still cited today as a source of pride and national unity among Guineans.

Oral and written evidence suggests that the social and political system in much of pre-colonial Guinea was strictly hierarchical. Particularly among the Peul and Malinké, a complex hierarchy of hereditary chiefs created a highly centralized and autocratic system. On the coast and in the Forest Region, however, authority of the chief was generally localized and did not reach beyond the village or cluster of villages and the power of the chief tended to be moderated by councils of elders.<sup>28</sup>

### *French Colonial Rule*

Under the system of direct French colonial rule in West Africa, African polities and traditional chiefs were replaced by the colonial bureaucracy and French administrative structures. Still, the French did not entirely wipe out traditional structures. Rather, the colonial administration attempted to co-opt leaders who already enjoyed influence over their people and use them as intermediaries between it and the native people.<sup>29</sup> Given the different organizational structure of the new bureaucracy, however, such a transfer of authority did not always work and the administration removed any chief who opposed colonial power.

Economically, the French administration introduced a market economy in Guinea, as in its other colonies, which undermined traditional trading and significantly changed trade relations in the entire region of West Africa. The new economic, political and social structures created under French rule were almost entirely to the benefit of the French administration. Still, the introduction of a market economy gave rise to new social classes as well as the development of an organized labor movement in Guinea. Claude Rivière writes, “the circulation of men and ideas – thanks to the market economy, the increase of public and private services, and the sending of African soldiers to France – brought about the great political awakening of 1945.”<sup>30</sup>

### *The Development of National Consciousness*

Trade unions were one of the most influential forces in the development of a national consciousness in Guinea. The dominant labor organization in Francophone West Africa during

colonialism was the French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), which was closely aligned with the French communist party. While this alliance initially helped the union grow, it came to be seen by African leaders of the labor movement as a limit to the true unity and independence of the African labor movement. In 1956, leaders of the labor movement in Africa created a uniquely African movement in the Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Africains (CGTA). This split affirmed the African character of the labor movement and led the move towards a unification of all labor organizations in Guinea. According to Rivière, once this unity was achieved, “Guinean trade unionism thenceforth became wholly a political organ.”<sup>31</sup>

The trade unions in Guinea had close ties to the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), a political party with branches in each of the territories in French West Africa. In 1947, the Parti Democratique de Guinée (PDG) was formed and served as the Guinean branch of the RDA. Madéira Kéita was elected secretary-general and the four undersecretaries represented each of the major ethnic associations: Union de Mandé (Malinké); Union de la Basse Guinea (Susu); Amicale Gilbert Viellard (Peul); and Union Forestière (forest peoples).<sup>32</sup> Such a broad representation of ethnic groups allowed the PDG to work towards its goal of uniting Guineans across ethnicity, race, region or religion in the struggle for political and economic liberation from the French colonial administration. Elizabeth Schmidt writes, “more than any other party, the Guinean RDA consciously and successfully shaped a national rather than an ethnic identity.”<sup>33</sup>

Schmidt offers one of the most complete analyses to date about the role of the PDG in promoting Guinean nationalism during this time. She points out that there is a general assumption that anti-colonial nationalist movements were driven by elites, often educated in Europe, and tended to be top-down. In Guinea, however, the movement was largely driven from the bottom up.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Sékou Touré, an active member first of the CTA and a driving force behind the unification and africanization of the labor movement, was not educated in Europe. Rather, he rose through the ranks of the RDA and became the leader of the PDG in 1952.<sup>35</sup> Touré was a charismatic and unifying leader of the party and promoted Guinean nationalism by mobilizing the support of rural populations, youth and women around the country.

Touré recognized that women were one of the most important driving forces behind the nationalist movement in Guinea during the time leading up to independence. Although they were not initially included in the formation of the PDG, under Touré’s leadership, the organization soon began to realize the important role women could play in uniting people across class and ethnic lines. In 1953, the PDG began to actively recruit the support of women by identifying community and family issues that were particularly important to women such as health and sanitation, education, and family allowances for workers.<sup>36</sup> Touré was particularly convinced of the important role women could play in the promotion of a national identity and the success of the party. In her discussion of political parties in Francophone West Africa, Ruth Morganthau quoted Touré as saying, “women are the fire of the RDA. When we want to make a knife we need iron, water and fire. The knife is Africa. We are the blacksmiths. We must use fire to make our knife. Our fire is our women. Our women mold us, carry us.”<sup>37</sup> One of the things that made women so valuable to the PDG was their reliance on established kinship and market networks to mobilize communities and transmit information. They also used song and dance to spread the message of independence and were considered the best sloganeers.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to ensuring representation of all groups within the party structure, the PDG also promoted a unified Guinean national identity by focusing on the shared history of the struggle against colonialism. As we have seen, in the early days of colonial expansion, several Guinean leaders fought against imposition of French rule. Samori Touré is held up as a national hero by Guineans, not just those of Malinké descent. It is important to note that during his rule, Samori Touré was not without enemies, particularly within Futa Jalon.<sup>39</sup> Still, in general the legacy of his anti-colonial

struggle is held up in Guinea as a unifying moment in history and much was made by the PDG of Sékou Touré's ancestral connection to this notable figure in its struggle for independence.

### *African Nationalism and the Road to Independence*

In addition to being an influential leader within Guinea, Touré was also a prominent leader within the African nationalist movement that called for self-rule and equality with colonial powers. There were several different brands of African nationalism that were being promoted by various African leaders in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Leaders like Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal and Aimé Césaire of Martinique promoted the idea of Négritude, which called for a reclaiming of the black African identity. A number of other leaders, like Amilcar Cabral from Guinea-Bissau, turned to Marxism and socialism for their ideology and drew attention to the exploitation of imperialism. A third branch of African nationalism took the form of a pan-African movement that stressed the unification of Africa to overcome racism and empower blacks. W.E.B. DuBois and Cheikh Anta Diop are among the prominent thinkers to promote this pan-Africanism.<sup>40</sup> While these and other movements were rooted in differing ideologies, they shared the common goal of bringing an end to colonial rule and promoting the independence and empowerment of Africans.

Within the context of this growing African nationalism, the French administration began to realize that independence for its African colonies was on the horizon and made efforts to gradually transfer control to local authority without losing much of its influence. In June 1956, the *loi cadre* was passed in France, which provided for the gradual devolution of legislative powers to individual territorial assemblies. Touré worried that this would result in the balkanization of French West Africa, but worked within the system to maintain Guinean initiatives as well as some West African unity.<sup>41</sup> In June 1958, when Charles de Gaulle returned to power in France under the newly established Fifth Republic, he was unwilling to compromise on a federal structure for West Africa within the new constitution. In September, Touré called for a “no” vote on the draft constitution referendum, which effectively meant a rejection of continued French control in the country. Although African nationalism had widespread support within most French West African colonies, only Guinea rejected French control under a centralized constitution. Immediately in response to this “no” vote, French administrative representatives in Guinea were sent to posts elsewhere in West Africa and Guinean independence was formally proclaimed on October 2, 1958.<sup>42</sup> Independence in the other French West African colonies was achieved through negotiation that resulted in continued economic and political ties to France.<sup>43</sup>

### *National Identity in Post-Independence Guinea*

Given its complete rejection of continued colonial influence, Guinea held a unique position in post-independence West Africa. When he cut ties with France, Touré effectively cut Guinea off from other francophone countries in the region, notably Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire. Within the context of the Cold War, Guinea was of particular interest to both sides. In theory, Touré pursued a policy of positive neutrality, which included a rejection of any imported ideology and a refusal to join either of the two power blocs.<sup>44</sup> By 1961, however, US and Soviet interests in Guinea were clearly visible. Overall, Guinea's policies during this time show a closer alignment with Marxist ideology and its external relations tended to be closer to the Eastern Bloc than the Western Bloc.<sup>45</sup> One example of Soviet involvement in Guinea is the presence of over a thousand Soviet technicians in Guinea by the early 1960s, managing a \$100 million aid package.<sup>46</sup> In response to Soviet operations, the US quickly moved to establish a diplomatic presence in Guinea; however, it was clear that the Marxist ideology had taken hold in Guinea and the country had effectively become an autocratic state.

During this time, Touré's focus on building national unity transformed from a political movement to mobilize the masses in the struggle for independence into a national policy of Guinean unity. This policy grew increasingly repressive and resulted in the denunciation of dissidents or members of opposition parties as 'enemies of the nation.' Such dissidents were frequently taken to Camp Boiro in Conakry, where prisoners were often tortured and even executed without trial<sup>47</sup> Still, Touré's policy of repression was based more on political alliances than ethnic identity. Indeed, Touré continued to promote the PDG's policy of building a national identity that cut across ethnic lines. According to Adamolekun, Touré's nation-building strategy focused on promoting national loyalty not by denying or suppressing ethnic groups, but by "making the different ethnic groups accept a common destiny for the future."<sup>48</sup> To achieve this unity, Touré's nation-building strategy relied on three main components: "a mobilization-oriented single party, an inflexible party ideology which serves as the national ideology and a flexible charismatic leader."<sup>49</sup>

One tool used by Touré's government to promote unity was its continued reference to a "permanent plot" against the PDG. Over the course of the 1960s, several alleged plots to overthrow the government were "uncovered" and used as excuses to increase political suppression and promote nationalism within Guinea. The first of these plots was supposedly planned by nationalist French soldiers who planned to overthrow the PDG and replace it with one that would allow Guinea to return to the French community. When Touré's regime uncovered the plot, Touré used it "as an opportunity for appealing to the patriotic sense of Guinean masses."<sup>50</sup> Adamolekun quotes a student doing field work in Guinea at the time as saying, "whether the plot was legitimate or not, its effect was to weld the Guinean people together against what they considered to be a threat to their country. Difference between Soussou [Susu], Foulah [Peul] and Malinké were temporarily forgotten; everyone was a Guinean."<sup>51</sup> The second plot, known as the 'teachers plot,' criticized the regime's policy of neutrality. As a result, many scholars and intellectuals fled the country at this time. Subsequent plots, including the 1965 'Traders Plot' and the 'plot of the military' in 1969, were again said to have been aimed at overthrowing the regime and installing a regime sympathetic to the French. The most genuine threat to the government during this time came in 1970, with a seaborne invasion of Guinea by the Portuguese army. This threat, even more than the others, contributed to Touré's promotion of nationalist zeal. Adamolekun notes, "all this...enabled the Guinean regime to present a self-image of a patriotic and nationalist regime. The masses accept[ed] this image to a great extent."<sup>52</sup>

According to a number of accounts written during the period, Touré's nation-building strategy was largely successful in promoting a sense of national unity in Guinea. For example, in 1977, sociologist Claude Rivière wrote, "in Guinea, the conflict between ethnocentrism and nationalism have been surmounted, on the whole, to the latter's benefit."<sup>53</sup> He attributes this success to the mingling of "tribes" for nearly a century, the PDG's ability to transcend ethnic lines to promote its political agenda and a strong national policy that promoted a sense common history of oppression under the colonial regime and a distrust of outsiders to bring Guinean people together.

Using the framework set forth in the beginning of this paper, it appears that the nationalism promoted by Touré falls under the realm of 'civic nationalism' because it promoted a sense of Guinean identity that cut across ethnic lines. However, using Barrington's more expanded framework, Touré's nationalism falls under the category of 'civic nation-building' and, in some instances, 'sovereignty protecting.' It was not expansionist or exclusionary, rather it tended to be focused on protecting Guinea's territory and sovereignty from outsiders and to build a unified nation based on civic rather than ethnic identity.

Unfortunately, the national unity came at the expense of increasingly repressive policies, which led to the economic stagnation and political repression that placed significant stresses on the infrastructure and people of the country and led to mounting internal instability. Thus, it is

important to recognize that nationalism cannot replace economic development or good governance. As the instability grew over the course of the 1970s, ethnic divisions grew more salient as Touré's accusations began to target ethnically-based opposition groups. In 1976, Touré 'uncovered' the 'complot des Peuls' (or Fulbé plot). This was the first time that a particular ethnic group had been publicly identified as hostile to the government.<sup>54</sup> In the repression which followed, Diallo Telli, former secretary-general of the OAU, and a number of other Fulbé intellectuals, were executed without trial or starved to death in prison. As a result of the increased repression based on ethnicity, a large number of Peuls fled the country and constituted a majority of the two million Guineans who were living in exile by the end of Sékou Touré's life.<sup>55</sup>

In 1977, riots launched by market women in Conakry forced Touré to make radical changes to solve the economic woes of the country. According to Phineas Malinga, "Touré was shaken by this event, as he had always prided himself on the support which he received from the women of Guinea. He responded by a far-reaching 'liberalisation of commerce.'"<sup>56</sup> This event illustrates the power of Guinean women in their ability to unite the people for a common goal. In reality, the uprising of market women posed very little real threat to Touré's regime. Indeed, they were not trying to seize power or overthrow his regime. Rather, their power lay in their ability to unite Guineans under a common cause and Touré recognized their importance and responded with reforms.

In addition to the liberalization of his policies, after the market women's revolt, Touré also began to reach out to his West African neighbors and former allies in the international community. At the Monrovia Conference in 1978, Touré restored full diplomatic relations with Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire. This conference also marked an important step in the reconciliation between Guinea and France.<sup>57</sup> During this time, Touré also made strides to improve his image with his Anglophone neighbors by joining the Mano River Union in 1980, which was originally formed between Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1973. Touré also reached out to international donor countries and aid agencies such as the IMF and World Bank. While these overtures showed an important political and economic step for Guinea, they did not greatly change the internal situation of the country, which remained relatively stable but very still poor, undeveloped and authoritarian.<sup>58</sup>

### *Political Transition*

Sékou Touré died during emergency heart surgery in late March 1984 and within a week, the army had seized power and arrested members of the PDG congress. The military junta then established the Military Committee of National Recovery (CMRN), led by Colonel Lansana Conté, an officer of Susu origin, and Colonel Diarra Traoré, a Malinké officer and PDG insider. Originally the two worked together and Conté served as President with Traoré acting as Prime Minister; however, the cooperation soon ended when Traoré was arrested in July 1985 and accused of attempting a coup. He and a number of other political prisoners of Malinké descent were executed later that year.<sup>59</sup> In response to the increase in political divisions and ethnic tensions, in 1990 the military council created a transitional council for National Recovery and created a new constitution, *La Loi Fondamentale*.

During the late 80s and early 90s, Conté slowly began to increase the democratic nature of Guinean society. Opposition parties, unions and newspapers were allowed to openly criticize the regime. While these strides contributed to the development of civil society, they did not greatly reduce the authoritarian nature of the state or curb corruption within the government. In 1993, the process of democratization in Guinea hit a significant roadblock when the country held its first presidential elections. Through this process, which was widely recognized by the international community as flawed, Conté was reelected President for another five year term. The US government

refrained from sending a congratulatory message to Conté, which infuriated him. As a result, US-Guinea relations were effectively frozen for nearly three years.<sup>60</sup> According to Dane Smith, U.S. Ambassador to Guinea from 1990-93, it became clear after the elections of '93 that Conté was not really interested in democratization and that Guinea had truly become a neo-patrimonial state.<sup>61</sup> As the nineties went on, tensions increased within Guinea, exacerbated by rapid population growth, economic uncertainties and the decline in international market prices for Guinea's main exports. In 1996, several thousand malcontent troops mutinied in Conakry and destroyed a number of Government offices and killed several dozen civilians. As a result of this unrest, the Government made several hundred arrests and made a number of political reforms.<sup>62</sup> Then, in late 1998, Conté was reelected for another five-year term through a process that, while still marred by irregularities, was generally seen as an improvement over the previous elections. Conté proceeded to fill his cabinet with members from within his own Susu ethnic group, which increased cronyism, corruption and a lack of follow-through on reforms.<sup>63</sup>

Political developments under Lansana Conté illustrate the increasingly ethnic nature of divisions within Guinea during this time. The unity built in the early days of independence had been all but lost by the end of Touré reign due to his increasingly repressive policies and mistrust of all opposition parties. While the situation seemed to be improving initially under Conté, he was much less concerned with promoting national unity in Guinea and, thus, made few efforts to reach out to build a broad base of support within the country. Rather, Conté was more focused on building a core group of elite supporters to support his rule and rooting out opposition from within the government.

### *Regional Security Dynamics*

It is important to note that the situation within Guinea during the 90s was by no means happening in isolation from other regional and international events. Rather, the regional question of security in Guinea was particularly salient during this time as regional instability grew due to the Liberian civil war and political instability in Sierra Leone. The regional instability was of great concern to Conté and to the people of Guinea. The legacy of Touré's reign and the unique status of Guinea in West Africa created mistrust of outsiders on the part of Guineans. Conté became engaged in a regional response to the conflict surrounding his country when, in 1991, Guinea joined the Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Importantly, Guinea was the only francophone country to join ECOMOG. By 1992, there were reports coming out of Liberia that United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO) was receiving training and equipment from the Government of Guinea.<sup>64</sup> During this time, accusations were coming from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone that their neighbors were supporting rebel factions in their countries. Mistrust and illicit cross-border activity hindered the ability of ECOMOG to effectively conduct its mission since it was composed of members from the various countries accused of involvement.<sup>65</sup> The 1993 elections in Guinea did not help the situation, particularly when US diplomatic ties were cut off. As Conté grew more authoritarian, his cooperation with regional forces declined and his suspicion grew. In 1997, Conté accused opposition groups of conspiring with rebels and mercenaries in Sierra Leone and Liberia to overthrow his regime.<sup>66</sup> As the conflicts worsened in Liberia and spread to neighboring Sierra Leone, approximately five hundred thousand refugees fled from Sierra Leone to Guinea.<sup>67</sup>

In September 2000, an armed uprising erupted in the southern portion of Guinea. According to official reports by the United States and United Nations, the uprising was a result of an invasion by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), backed by Liberian President Charles Taylor, launched in Guinea from neighboring Sierra Leone.<sup>68</sup> These attacks destroyed several towns along the border

with Sierra Leone and Liberia and led the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to relocate many of the Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees in Guinea. Conté accused Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees of supporting the RUF and rounded up and committed severe human rights abuses against a large number of them.<sup>69</sup> During this time, Guinea continued to support former ULIMO rebels, now calling themselves Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), who themselves were launching attacks into Liberia.<sup>70</sup> Several sources within Guinea and LURD indicate that this support continued through 2003, although the government of Guinea has continued to deny offering any help to the rebels in Liberia.<sup>71</sup> This trans-border support for rebels on both sides illustrates the regional dimension of the conflicts in West Africa and highlights the “interdependence of security in West Africa and the importance of adopting a regional approach to conflict management.”<sup>72</sup>

The effects of this regional instability on the internal dynamics of Guinea also highlights the lingering importance of the nationalism that was such a powerful force in the years leading up to and just after independence. Samuel Gbaydee Doe offers an account of the Guinean response to the border incursions of 2000 that highlights the relatively unified national sentiment during this time. He writes, “in spite of the heightened internal political tension, an insurgency allegedly supported by Liberia and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone instantly reduced the tension at home and unified the country against the military incursion.”<sup>73</sup> He describes how retired military officers returned to defend their country and youth volunteers defended their villages and towns from outside invasion. According to Doe,

Unlike Liberia and Sierra Leone, where during their respective civil wars, the national armies quickly disintegrated, with large sections conniving with the rebels and with businessmen and politicians negotiating profitable business deals with the rebels, the reverse happened in Guinea. The Guinean business class created a war fund. Musical caravans of peace led by the griots, traditional praise singers, chanted old patriotic songs of the Sundiata, Samouro and Sékou Touré eras. It was like the entire nation was in a trance. In less than a month, the Guinean government drove insurgents out of the land.<sup>74</sup>

While this is only one account of the situation, other reports support the sentiment of Doe’s portrayal and indicate that national unity was strong during this time.<sup>75</sup>

As in the past, women were again critical players in building this national unity and working to prevent the spillover of conflict into Guinea. The Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was a cross-border effort by women in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea to mobilize communities in all three countries to resolve the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone and prevent conflict from spilling into Guinea. The structure of MARWOPNET allowed women to work at all levels – local, national and international – to promote conflict prevention and unity in Guinea. To address threats from outside Guinea, MARWOPNET set up several offices along the border with the Cote d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, countries that were judged to be fragile and could easily export violence to Guinea. The offices implemented trainings in project proposal writing, communication techniques, conflict management and resolution, and peace education.<sup>76</sup> In addition to these local initiatives, Saran Daraba Kaba, the leader of MARWOPNET Guinea, and several other network members met with President Conté and a number of ministers within the government to encourage Guinea to enter a dialogue to promote peace in Liberia.<sup>77</sup> Dr. Daraba Kaba also traveled on several regional international missions to promote interstate dialogue and highlight the critical nature of the situation in the Mano River Basin. Thus, in response to regional insecurity, the women of MARWOPNET in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone worked together to

promote conflict resolution and prevent the outbreak of violent at the local, state and international levels.

One of the shortcomings of the unifying efforts to prevent spillover of conflict into Guinea during the border incursions of 2000-01 was that these efforts focused on conflicts outside the borders of Guinea without addressing the problems of governance that exist within the country.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the nationalism described by Doe and others during the border incursions, while a powerful force in preventing spillover from neighboring countries, may actually have been detrimental in that it drew attention away from the internal instability present in Guinea during this time. Gilles Yabi, from the International Crisis Group notes, “Guineans were being impoverished by Conte’s government but they did not want an external intervention to get rid of him. The attacks from Liberia and Sierra Leone just revived Guinean nationalism and offered the possibility for Conte to reaffirm that he was a stabilizing factor in the country and the region.”<sup>79</sup>

### *Internal Political Instability in Guinea*

During the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the political environment in Guinea grew more tense and internal instability continued to grow. In 2001, a nationwide referendum amended the constitution to extend the Presidential term from five to seven years and permit the president to run for an unlimited number of terms. The country’s second legislative elections were held in 2002 and President Conté’s party, the Party of Unity and Progress (PUP), won a large majority of seats. In 2003, President Conté easily won a third term despite his failing health. Opposition parties largely boycotted the elections. In April 2006, Conté fired Prime Minister Cellou Dallein Diallo and restructured the government to have six Ministers of State. His failure to appoint a new Prime Minister increased political instability in the country.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, increasing internal instability also exacerbated the economic woes of the country. Inflation was estimated at 30% for 2006, meaning workers were increasingly unable to support themselves and their families in the face of rising costs of basic goods.<sup>81</sup> In June 2006, the major trade unions, the CNTG and the USTG, led by Rabiadou Serah Diallo and Ibrahima Fofana, called for a general strike to protest against the President’s economic policies, which lasted ten days.<sup>82</sup> In addition to the destabilizing factors of political and economic insecurity during the second half of 2006, violent crime and human rights abuses by security forces were on the rise. Additionally, a cholera epidemic led to hundreds of deaths in the latter part of the 2006 and increased humanitarian pressures in the country.<sup>83</sup>

In late 2006, the European Union (EU) decided to resume aid to the country after suspending it in 2003 due to lack of transparency and accountability in the government. Still, Guinea remains one of the most corrupt countries in the world. In the 2006 Corruption Perception Index put out by Transparency International, Guinea tied for the second to last most corrupt country along with Iraq and Myanmar. Haiti was the only country ranked lower.<sup>84</sup> These continued problems of corruption have led to even greater unrest, instability and violence in 2007. In January of this year, the union leaders again called for a general strike that shut the country down for over a week. These strikes produced unprecedented levels of civic engagement and public protest, but also violence and lawlessness. Due to the violence they produced, the strikes garnered international attention, which added pressure to Conté’s regime to address the problems within the country. In response, the President initially agreed to appoint a new Prime Minister from outside his inner circle. When he failed to deliver on this promise, appointing instead Eugene Camora, a longtime ally of the President, union leaders called for a resumption of the strike and violence again surged. In response to the renewed violence, President Conté declared martial law on February 12, blocking emergency aid organizations from addressing the needs of the population and working to curb the effects of the increase in violence. Finally, on February 27, Conté named Lansana Kouyate as the new Prime

Minister from a list of four candidates proposed by civil society leaders in Guinea. This appointment brought an end to martial law and has increased stability in Conakry; however some African nationalists are unhappy with his appointment, calling him an “imperialist puppet” because of his work with USAID and other international agencies.<sup>85</sup> Prime Minister Kouyate has since established a new government and with it seems to have brought at least temporary stability back to Guinea.

### **Conflict Analysis**

From this overview of the past and present political situation in Guinea, it is clear that the importance of national identity was a significant factor during Touré’s rule and has again gained prominence in light of more recent external instability. During both periods, external threats to Guinean territorial sovereignty were used to fuel an inclusive sense of nationalism that cut across ethnic lines. This nationalism generally falls under Barrington’s civic nation-building and sovereignty-protecting bands of nationalism and was largely based on a sense of shared history of oppression and a high suspicion of outsiders. It was a uniting force because it was not simply driven from the elites, but was a popular movement that enjoyed broad-based support among the masses. This unifying national Guinean identity has limits, however. It is clear that despite relative stability during Touré’s reign, periods of internal instability, particularly in the form of strikes and protests, are not new to the country. Still, over the past sixty years, there has been a surprising lack of violence in the country despite a number of attempted coups, strikes, and regional insecurity in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and more recently, Cote d’Ivoire. Over the past year, however, increased levels of violence and popular discontent indicate that the situation in Guinea is not sustainable unless the political grievances are addressed with an eye towards longer-term solution than appointing a new Prime Minister to appease unions and other civil society members.

By applying Levy’s ‘levels of analysis’ approach to the situation in Guinea, it is possible to identify the different forces driving conflict in the country. At a global level Miall *et al.* identify several potential sources of conflict. First, the global pressures at the end of the Cold War challenged fragile regimes and contributed to crises within weak states. Given that President Touré pursued a policy of positive neutrality, Guinea was not entirely dependent on the support of either the US or USSR during the cold war. Although we have seen that this policy did not mean Guinea had no ties to either country, the end of the Cold War proved to be less destabilizing to Guinea than many other countries where leaders were more closely supported by this global order.

A second potential global source of conflict identified by Miall *et al.* is structural inequality resulting in “the combination of wealth-poverty disparities and limits to growth...likely to lead to a crisis of unsatisfied expectations within an increasingly informed global majority of the disempowered.”<sup>86</sup> Within this framework the authors identify three types of conflict: scarcity conflicts, group-identity conflict, and relative-deprivation conflicts. Out of these three, the current situation in Guinea falls most closely into the category of a relative deprivation conflict in which the gap at the domestic level between expectation and achievement is widening. The disparities are particularly pronounced in relation to neighboring Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire, which, through continued ties with France, enjoyed more economic development. As we have seen, trade unions have been an important force in Guinean politics since before independence. The most recent strikes are largely economically driven, although they have clear political motivations and consequences as well. Still, the decline in standard of living and the growing disparity between rich and poor in the country has led to much more widespread mobilization in Guinea in the past year. While these inequalities are in a large part still present because of structural wealth disparities leftover from colonialism and continued by global capitalism, to say that conflict was driven by these

structural inequalities would be missing a large part of the regional and state level factors that are drivers of conflict in Guinea.

The regional dynamic of the conflict in Guinea has been very powerful in the past and continues to be a relevant force contributing to instability. Miall *et al.* note,

Internal wars have external effects on the region, resulting from the spread of weaponry, economic dislocation, links with terrorism and disruptive floods of refugees and spill over into regional politics when neighboring states are dragged in or when one ethnic group straddles several states. Conversely, regional instability affects the internal politics of states through patterns of clientage, the actions of outside governments, cross-border movements of people and ideas, black market activities, criminal networks and the spread of small arms.<sup>87</sup>

Regional instability has had a significant affect on the situation within Guinea in a number of important ways. As we have seen, in addition to the flow of refugees across the border into Guinea from neighboring Sierra Leone and Liberia, there is also evidence of trans-border support of rebels on both sides of the border. During the late nineties and early part of the twenty-first century, there was a significant effort at all levels – international, national and local – to prevent the spillover of conflict into Guinea. Thus, the concern for conflict prevention was largely geared outward rather than at the internal dynamics within Guinea. This concern over spillover stirred up feelings of nationalism and led to a widespread mobilization to defend the border.

While Sierra Leone and Liberia are still in the very early stages of post-conflict reconstruction, they now pose a much lower threat to the internal stability of Guinea. Côte d'Ivoire's civil war has resulted in some increased regional instability, but does not appear to have threatened the situation within Guinea. Therefore, to a large extent the regional sources of conflict are much less relevant now than they have been in the past. At this point, in 2007, Liberia and Sierra Leone seem to have more to fear from the instability in Guinea than vice versa. Approximately 17,000 Liberian refugees remain in Guinea. Thus, instability in the country could result in massive population movements back to Liberia before the country's infrastructure is ready to handle their return.<sup>88</sup>

These two levels—global and regional—address the external dimensions of conflict. From here, we move to the internal dimensions, starting with state-level factors. At the state level, Miall *et al.* distinguish between social, economic and political factors. The current internal instability in Guinea is influenced by developments in all three of these areas. Compared to many African countries, Guinea's ethnic composition does not seem to be a major source of conflict. Samuel Gbaydee Doe attributes the relative lack of ethnic conflict to several factors: first Guinea has a history of uniting in the face of a common external enemy; second, there are no marital restrictions based on ethnicity, rather intermarriage is encouraged; and third, Guineans place a high value on community-based leadership and find security in strong social relationships rather than individual freedoms.<sup>89</sup> Still, ethnicity does play a role in politics, even if it is not the greatest force. According to Gilles Yabi from the International Crisis Group,

Touré's rule played a particular role in the development of the sense of unity of the country and cross-ethnic nationalism. The result is that we do have real ethnic tensions, a lot of grievances carried from the past, but nobody in Guinea denies to one ethnic group its belonging to the Guinean nation. So there is no state-sponsored exclusion of an entire group, but certainly a

difference of treatment of the various groups depending on the one which holds the political power.<sup>90</sup>

Samuel Doe also notes that although Touré, a Malinké, was known to extend preferential treatment to those of the same ethnicity, he extended patronage to all other ethnic groups as well. Still, Guineans tend to first identify with their ethnic groups rather than their Guinean national identity. Doe argues that this explains, “the loyalty paid to ethnically-based political parties.”<sup>91</sup> Despite this allegiance, we have already seen several occasions where Guinean history books highlight the unity of Guineans in coming together to fend off a common enemy. For example, the leadership of Samori Touré and several other Guinean leaders in the face of French conquest is a source of great pride in Guinean history. In 1960, Sékou Touré used the invasion of Portuguese forces to promote national unity and further promote the vision of Guineans as a ‘valiant’ and ‘heroic’ people.<sup>92</sup> More recently, the border incursions of 2000 were again used to unify the country. These three examples illustrate the importance of a historical vision of a nationally unified Guinea, particularly when faced with an external enemy. More recently, however, Doe reports that the sense of patriotism felt in the past is quickly disappearing as the internal situation has deteriorated and the economic and political situation have grown more oppressive.<sup>93</sup> In the face of increased internal instability, there is a danger that ethnic divisions will become more politically manipulated and national unity will take a back seat to preferential treatment based on ethnicity.

In the economic realm, I have already written about the deteriorating economic situation in Guinea as a major source of the most recent unrest. In 2006, the Economist Intelligence Unit reported, “the high rates of inflation and rapidly depreciating currency, as well as widespread public unrest over the government’s inability to provide basic services indicated that economic governance is not improving.”<sup>94</sup> The EIU attributes much of the macroeconomic problems in the country to poor economic policies that are driven by conservatives that respond to crises with ad hoc measures rather than longer-term reform. Given that the major instances of internal unrest over the past year have taken the form of strikes, called for by the CNTG and USTG trade unions in Guinea, there are clearly powerful economic forces behind the conflict in Guinea. We have seen that union strikes have been powerful drivers of change in the past, for example the 1977 strikes that drive Touré to seek out more regional and international support to improve the economic situation within the country.

The economic and social realms are intimately tied to the political situation, which has grown significantly more strained as the health of President Conté has declined over the past few years and he has restructured the government to include more political allies and close advisors. His initial failure or refusal to appoint a Prime Minister from outside his inner circle was interpreted by his opponents as evidence of his corruption and unwillingness to make changes to improve the deteriorating situation in the country. The most recent appointment seems to have at least temporarily appeased his opponents in civil society; however there remain concerns over his failing health and refusal to name a successor or step down before the next elections in 2010. Still, there is some hope that Prime Minister Kouyate will make strides to curb corruption and increase transparency.

The political situation at the state level is intimately tied to the individual level, particularly due to the highly neo-patrimonial nature of Conté’s regime in Guinea. The lack of transparency in his government and his failure to address group grievances are central issues driving the most recent strikes and instability in the country. Brown argues, “most major conflicts are triggered by internal, elite-level activities – to put it simply, bad leaders.”<sup>95</sup> He establishes a framework for proximate causes of internal conflict with the following diagram:

	<i>Internally driven</i>	<i>Externally driven</i>
<i>Elite-triggered</i>	Bad leaders	Bad neighbors
<i>Mass-triggered</i>	Bad domestic problems	Bad neighborhoods

*Source:* From Brown (cited in Miall 91)

While this model is useful, from the case of Guinea we can see that it is not always easy to distinguish between problems caused by these different factors. While official accounts indicate that the instability and violence experienced in 2000-01 was externally driven, there is significant evidence that internal politics at both the elite and mass level were a contributing factor.<sup>96</sup> Currently, Guinea is experiencing both bad leaders and bad domestic problems, which are interrelated and have the potential to become a significant source of instability and conflict in the future if left unaddressed.

What does this 'levels of analysis' approach tell us about the proximate causes of conflict in Guinea? While global structural inequalities and wealth disparities certainly have not helped the situation in Guinea, they do not seem to be fueling conflict. Still, these structural factors have contributed to instability in Guinea, particularly in the economic realm. Regional factors were a serious concern during the late nineties and drew significant attention as potential drivers of conflict; however these external regional factors are not easily separated from internal politics and instability and indeed may have promoted relative stability in Guinea through causing national unity in the face of outside strife. Still, regional factors cannot be excluded from any conflict analysis in Guinea given the interconnectedness of the regional security apparatus and their ability to mobilize nationalist sentiments within Guinea. Overall, current instability is more internally driven and largely rooted in the state and individual levels, however there continue to be significant regional implications of this instability.

When looking at how nationalism affects conflict prevention efforts in Guinea both in the past and present, it is important to understand how these different factors have been and can be addressed by actors at the international, regional and local levels. Guinea is at a critical junction between the need for structural and direct prevention efforts. At this time, both types of efforts are required. Given that the major driving factors of conflict are internal, much of the capacity for conflict prevention must also be internally driven and focused on structural efforts to build trust and institutionalize positive relationships. These internal efforts require the support of the international community and regional organizations in the form of more direct diplomacy and aid for structural projects to build a culture of peace in the country.

### **Conflict Prevention: Actors and the Potential for Preventive Action in Guinea**

Thus far, this analysis has focused on potential drivers of conflict in Guinea. At this point, I turn to an appreciative inquiry into the capacity for conflict prevention at the international, regional and grassroots levels, taking into account the analysis above as well as the historical context in which conflict prevention activities were developed.

#### *International Capacity for Conflict Prevention*

To understand the capacity for international preventive action in Guinea, it is first necessary to understand the evolution of approaches toward conflict prevention within the broader context of the international system. At the international level, the prevention of violent conflict first began to receive formal attention with the formation of the League of Nations and was institutionalized in the charter of the United Nations after the Second World War. The UN was formed in the context of the end of World War II in order to prevent another large-scale inter-state conflict like the one that had just ended. Conflict prevention, in this context, was largely focused on interstate conflict

between major international players. This focus was due to two phenomena: first, this type of large-scale interstate conflict was seen as more dangerous and destructive than intrastate conflict or conflict between smaller state actors; and second, the mandate of the UN for acting to prevent violent conflict within countries was severely limited by traditional notions of sovereignty, which upheld the rights of leaders to control the internal politics of their own states without threat of external intervention.

During the Cold War, the domino theory gave way to an increasing concern on the part of the US and USSR over internal instability. Both sides worried that internal conflicts could expose fragile regimes to the influence of the other side. In this context, the focus of preventive action was keeping order and preventing state collapse rather than addressing internal grievances or root causes of conflict. State sovereignty was upheld regardless of the ability of leaders to actually control the internal developments of their states. In Africa, the notion of sovereignty was particularly salient and problematic because of the arbitrary nature of the borders drawn during colonialism. At independence, these arbitrary borders were maintained and the sovereignty of these new states was upheld by the international community and the post-independence African leaders who made up the OAU, despite the difficulty many leaders had in extending their authority throughout the state.<sup>97</sup> Conflict prevention during this time meant protecting state sovereignty and promoting stability at all costs rather than investing in long-term stability. There was significant pressure for states and leaders to promote unity and a common national identity during this time, but international actors paid little attention to what kind of nationalism was being promoted or to the repressive tactics used by many leaders in their attempts to unify countries.

The end of the Cold War brought with it a new understanding of sovereignty, which included “conferring responsibilities on governments to assist and protect persons residing in their territories.”<sup>98</sup> It was no longer acceptable for leaders to ignore the rights and needs of their people or repress them in the name of national unity. Nor was it seen as acceptable for the international community to sit by while humanitarian abuses were occurring within sovereign nations. Deng describes the emerging situation well when he asserts, “absolute sovereignty is clearly no longer defensible; it never was. The critical question now is under what circumstances the international community is justified in overriding sovereignty to protect the dispossessed population within state borders.”<sup>99</sup> This question framed the debate over what the appropriate preventive measures would be on the part of international actors, but any answers were intimately tied to strategic interests and political will of these actors, especially the strongest among them, as well as to international law and acceptable forms of intervention.

This new post Cold War world order brought with it two distinct changes. On the one hand, this period of growth in the developed world brought with it a significantly diminished strategic interest on the part of Western countries to intervene in the affairs of African states. Still, they did not want to be seen as sitting back and disregarding the humanitarian crises and instability in so many of these countries. David Shearer confirms this dilemma when he writes,

In the profusion of civil wars, Western powers have little strategic incentive to intervene and run the risk of casualties. Yet for their own domestic audiences presented with another African famine, for example, they cannot also be seen to be doing nothing. Humanitarian assistance, therefore, has filled a convenient gap.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, during the course of the 1990s, humanitarian assistance often became the alternative to direct intervention on the part of major powers in their policy towards Africa.

## United Nations in Conflict Prevention

With the decline in intervention by the major powers at the end of the Cold War in favor of humanitarian assistance, direct intervention by the UN in Africa, and around the world, increased significantly. According to the US Institute of Peace, “between 1948 and 1988 the UN undertook just 15 peacekeeping operations around the world; between 1989 and 1999, that number jumped to 31,”<sup>101</sup> half of which were in sub-Saharan Africa. Still, although direct preventive action became a significant part of UN activity at the end of the century, the UN has also been struggling to clarify its mandate in cases of violence over the past decade.

The movement to develop a more coordinated UN system for conflict prevention began in 1993 when then Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali included a plan for developing an early warning system in his report: *An Agenda for Peace*. The trouble was that the mandate of the UN was still much clearer in post-conflict situations than, for lack of a better term, ‘pre-conflict’ situations. Indeed,

While challenges to sustainable peace and development within a country or sub-region might be evident to international and local observers, they might not constitute a threat to international peace and security that warrants an intervention or other collective action under an explicit mandate given by the Security Council or the General Assembly.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, although understandings of what sovereignty entailed had begun to change during the 1990s, international law and the UN mandate still protected states from outside intervention except under very specific circumstances.

During this period, as the UN was working to develop a comprehensive policy on conflict prevention in the post-Cold War era, it was also faced with a number of immediate challenges that could not wait for a clear system to be developed. Perhaps the most well-documented case of the international community’s failure to prevent violent conflict in Africa is the case of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Volumes have been written about how and why the UN and other international and regional bodies failed to act to prevent the genocide.<sup>103</sup> This failure was remarkable not only because of the scale of the violence but also because of the clear evidence that the international community had prior warning that violence was imminent. Leading up to the genocide, an extreme form of ethnic nationalism was promoted by Hutu elites in Rwanda that was used to fuel the genocide. In the international community, however, this ethnic nationalism was seen as stemming from ancient ethnic hatreds rather than as constructed and manipulated by elites. Given the extensive documentation about the failures of UN and international community’s to prevent the genocide, I will not enter into a detailed analysis of the events surrounding this situation; however, it is important to highlight that attempts to understand and explain what happened in Rwanda contributed to the increased attention conflict prevention received during the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In addition to the situation in Rwanda, the 1990s saw violence and instability brewing in many African countries, including Burundi, Zaire, and Liberia, to name a few. That the UN’s policy on conflict prevention was still unclear led to an uneven application of various preventive measures during this time and a heated debate over what potential means for preventive intervention were appropriate under what circumstances. Still, during this time, most attention seemed to be focused on what Rubin calls “limited peacekeeping operations.”<sup>104</sup>

The result of much debate, confusion and disagreement over the role of the UN in preventive measures during the 90s was the 2001 Prevention Report, which placed the onus for

preventing conflict on member states themselves and designated the UN's role as assisting in capacity building. The report detailed the various activities in which the UN can engage in order to support conflict prevention efforts of member states. In 2003, the Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention was launched to carry out these capacity-building activities. It is important to note that the Joint Programme was "not intended to substitute 'capacity building' initiatives for diplomatic interventions aimed at the resolution of specific disputes," but rather to encourage the peaceful settlement of future disputes by building institutional capacities and promoting negotiation skills and good governance.<sup>105</sup>

### International Prevention Efforts in Guinea

As we have seen, Guinea's relationship with the international community was tenuous during much of President Touré's rule. The relative stability of Guinea also meant that the international community did not have any reason to engage in the internal affairs of the country. It was not until the late 1970s that Touré reached out to the international community for aid and assistance. Given Guinea's general stability over the past several decades, the major focus of international activity has been in the form of economic development. According to the World Bank, "donor assistance to Guinea has focused on investments to reconstruct or expand economic infrastructure (with substantial concentration on rural development) and improve the public administration's management capacity."<sup>106</sup> Despite Touré's initial break with France after Guinea's independence, France is among the largest bilateral donors. In addition, the Bretton Woods institutions have been active since 1986 in promoting economic rehabilitation and reform in Guinea. The World Bank is active in Guinea and supports programs focusd on community development, rural infrastructure, education, transport, electricity, Health/HIV/AIDS and rural electrification. Other donors include the European Union, the African Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Islamic Development Bank, the United States, Canada, Germany and Japan.<sup>107</sup>

These actors have shown some limited willingness to engage in preventive diplomacy in Guinea by putting pressure on the government of Guinea to increase transparency and reduce government corruption in the country. In 2002, the EU froze aid to Guinea over concerns about the state of democracy in the country. In 2003, aid was blocked completely after allegations of mishandled elections that returned President Conté to power despite his ailing health.<sup>108</sup> In late 2006, the EU agreed to restart aid to Guinea despite continued concerns over transparency and economic issues, but quickly froze it again in face of renewed instability in the country.

Bilateral donors, conversely, have tended to use carrots rather than sticks in their approach to Guinea. In late 2006, France gave Guinea US\$11.8 million to fund rice cultivation projects.<sup>109</sup> After President Conté named a new Prime Minister in late February 2007, French Minister for Cooperation, Brigitte Girardin, announced that France would give Guinea an additional US\$1.45million in aid in recognition of its "positive evolution" following the appointment of a new prime minister.<sup>110</sup> The UN has indicated support for this approach of encouraging positive steps towards more political stability in Guinea. After the appointment of Lansana Kouyaté as Prime Minister, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the international community to "enhance its economic cooperation with the new Government with a view to consolidating the consensus reached, which would allow the reform process and the country's efforts on poverty alleviation and the promotion of development, good governance and respect for human rights and the rule of law to take hold."<sup>111</sup>

It is interesting to compare how these most recent actions compare to the reactions of the international community during the regional instability in the late nineties and the early years of the

new century. Guinea has been receiving support from the US military since 1993 to secure its borders and reduce the influx of refugees into the country during the wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and now Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>112</sup> In response to accusations that Guinea was supporting LURD fighters, the International Crisis Group (ICG) pushed for the involvement of the international community to send a clear message to Guinea that this type of support violates the UN Security Council arms embargo of October 2002. It suggested that "the UN sanctions monitoring committee should be empowered to investigate all West African leaders suspected of fuelling conflicts in the region."<sup>113</sup> Extensive UN and international involvement in both Liberia and Sierra Leone contributed to increased attention to the situation within Guinea as well. Still, more attention was paid to Guinea's role in relation to the regional insecurity than to its own internal instability during this time.

To a large extent, the role of the international community in Guinea generally fits the larger trend with a focus on humanitarian aid and preventive diplomacy where political will exists. Certainly, during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the international community was highly engaged in the situation in Guinea in an attempt to prevent spillover; however, as the situation has grown more unstable within Guinea, the capacity for international preventive action is limited by the continued salience of sovereignty and the lack of political will on the part of many donor countries for direct action.

#### *The Emerging Role of Regional Prevention Mechanisms*

Regional efforts have become important in conflict prevention in Africa both because of the limits on international actors as well as the regional dimension of many conflicts around the continent. Barnett Rubin notes, "the regional dimension means that sustainable prevention of conflict will require a comprehensive regional approach."<sup>114</sup> In Africa, this approach began with the formation of the Organization for African Unity (OAU), which established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution in 1993. Like the UN's emerging policy, the Mechanism, as it became known, emphasized conflict prevention over peacekeeping or peace enforcement. Although the mandate of the OAU was more amenable to certain conflict prevention activities than that of the UN, it still experienced difficulties in making recommendations that were actually heeded by leaders.<sup>115</sup> The Mechanism did, however, pave the way for the development of regional early warning systems that have had some measure of success in preventing conflict on a smaller scale.

In 2001, Article 12 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU)<sup>116</sup> provided for the creation of a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), which includes a central observation and monitoring center as well regional units to collect and analyze data. The information collected by CEWS is then used to advise the Peace and Security Council of the AU on the potential for conflict or threats to peace and security in Africa as well as to make recommendations as to the possible action that the AU can take to prevent the conflict from becoming violent. Additionally, article 13 of the AU protocol calls for the establishment of an African Standby Force to be composed of military and civilian components that are ready for deployment when needed.

At the sub-regional level, the Protocol also calls for the establishment of more localized warning and response systems. In West Africa, the ECOWAS Peace and Security Observation System was established to perform early warning analysis at the Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC), which is based at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja. This analysis is supplemented by data collection from four Zonal Offices, which report daily to the OMC. The OMC collects and processes data and analysis, and compiles reports, which are submitted to the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS. The Heads of State of ECOWAS member-states have affirmed their commitment to

implement the system. ECOWAS has also established a partnership with the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP) in the operationalisation of the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN). It has identified 15 Member States monitors and 15 civil society monitors for each country.<sup>117</sup>

While international involvement in Guinea has largely been in the form of humanitarian aid and diplomatic pressure from bilateral donors, the African Union and other sub-regional organizations have been more active in diplomacy and direct intervention in the face of regional instability as well as instability internal to Guinea. In early 2001, in response to the 2000 border incursions and concerns over the security of refugees in the country, the OAU Secretary General, Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, visited Guinea to illustrate the commitment of the OAU “to support all efforts, especially those of ECOWAS, aimed at resolving the current crisis in the Mano River Union. He emphasized that the Region needed peace, security and stability so that its peoples could concentrate on socio-economic development.”<sup>118</sup> Given the complexities of cross-border support for rebel groups, however, regional efforts are both necessary and highly controversial. Guinea’s refusal to acknowledge its support of LURD forces severely strained relations between Guinea and the international community, as well as between Guinea and Liberia.

Even on a regional level, direct preventive action is more acceptable when conflicts have an overt regional characteristic, as was the case of the border incursions of 2000. Regardless of whether the insurgency developed from within Guinea or was brought into the country by rebels from Sierra Leone, it is clear that they conflict had a significant regional dimension. Thus, the participation of regional actors, including the OAU, ECOWAS and neighboring heads of state was seen as more acceptable. In the case of more recent instability within Guinea, however, the participation of regional actors has been restrained because regional mechanisms are still quite new and lack the resources to be an effective force for prevention in the face of internal conflict, particularly due to concerns over sovereignty. Still, given the continued importance of regional security mechanisms in the Mano River basin and the legacy of regional conflict, Guinea’s neighbors and other regional actors have understandably expressed concern over the recent escalation and increase in violence in the country.

In late February of this year, the heads of state of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea met to discuss the situation within Guinea. President Ahmed Tejan Kabba of Sierra Leone and President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia expressed concern over the crisis in Guinea and discussed ways to resolve it within the framework of the Mano River Union.<sup>119</sup> President Johnson-Sirleaf also expressed her concern that ex-combatants in Liberia were being recruited as mercenaries in Guinea.<sup>120</sup> Beyond diplomacy and continued alertness and awareness, however, regional actors, like those in the international community, are limited.

### *Risk Assessment*

One of the major ways that regional and international NGOs engage in conflict prevention is by drawing attention to escalating situations through detailed risk assessments and early warning systems. Early warning systems have two main tasks: “first, identification of the type of conflicts and location of the conflicts that could become violent; second, monitoring and appraising their progress with a view to assessing how close to violence they are.”<sup>121</sup> One such measurement is the Failed States Index, developed by the Fund for Peace (FFP), which charts the progression of twelve indicators over time to assess whether the social, economic and political situation within a country seems to be improving or declining. For example, in 2005, the FFP gave Guinea a score of 94.7 (which placed it at 16, meaning it was the 16<sup>th</sup> most volatile country in the world). In 2006, this score increased to 99 (moving Guinea up to number 11).<sup>122</sup>

At the regional level, other similar indicators and tools have been developed based on this approach of “early warning.” For example, the ECOWARN system developed by ECOWAS relies on the compilation of data that might suggest a potential surge in violence. The West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) has partnered with ECOWAS to implement this warning system and periodically issues policy briefs to highlight potential escalating situations. For example, in July 2006, WANEP issued a brief in which it referred to the situation in Guinea as a “time bomb.”<sup>123</sup> This analysis was meant as a call to action for regional actors and the international community to push for sweeping political reforms to ensure that a power vacuum does not occur when Conté dies. The risk analysis highlights a number of important issues, including the severely deteriorating economic situation, growing security concerns inside Guinea, particularly in the forest region; Conté’s failing health; and the potential for divisions within the military and insecurity along the Guinea-Liberian border as causes for concern.

While numerous approaches to early warning have been developed, some that stress qualitative data and others that use more quantitative data, they are similar in that they look at the potential causes of instability and measure their levels in countries in order to assess their “risk” of violent conflict. These types of analyses are important in that they draw attention to deteriorating situations and try to promote positive policy strategies to address these situations before they further escalate into violence. One of the problems with this type of analytical early warning system, however, is that too often the strategies they offer are too general and tend to ignore the internal capacity for action or change. In his discussion of early warning systems, John Cockell asserts, “political will to act on early warning analysis is, no doubt, at least as important as the analysis itself.”<sup>124</sup> He emphasizes the importance of early warning systems knowing their audiences and targeting their policy proposals or strategies towards specific actors. As we have already seen, the lack of international political will to engage in direct prevention is a particular problem in many African countries.

Given that there are so many different early warning systems and that such sophisticated systems are a relatively new concept, there is little data as to their effectiveness in actually preventing conflict. Indeed, one of the most difficult obstacles to promoting any type of conflict prevention is the difficulty in evaluating whether it was actually successful in preventing conflict. Miall *et al.* address this difficulty with regards to conflict prevention when they write, “we can rarely be sure that a particular cause would have had a particular effect, or that it was the agent for a particular effect.”<sup>125</sup> It is precisely the difficulty of attributing cause and effect that has resulted in such a large number of early warning systems, each with a different set of indicators that their developers have decided through research and investigation are the most likely to trigger violent conflict.

#### *Appreciative Inquiry: An Alternative Framework for Analysis*

As noted previously, appreciative inquiry offers an alternative to conflict analysis by highlighting not simply the potential for conflict but also for peaceful change in a country. Thus, one way to address the shortcomings of early warning systems that perform risk assessments, the lack of political will at the international level to intervene in escalating conflict and the limitations of peacebuilding only at the grassroots level is to focus not just on specific targeted warnings of risk, but on the positive potential for prevention of this risk. This approach was outlined in the volume, *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding*, edited by Sampson *et al.* Within this collection of essays and case studies, Samuel Gbaydee Doe writes about the potential for appreciative inquiry in the case of Guinea. In this article, Doe uses the term “preventive peacebuilding,” which combines the ideas of proactivity and intervention and is offered as an alternative to problem-focused intervention that generally stems from risk assessments or early warning systems. As Doe writes, “contrary to

traditional warning systems, preventive peacebuilding is more oriented to assessing opportunities for peace and social cohesion in order to build on them.”<sup>126</sup>

Like the Fund for Peace and other early warning analysts, Doe was concerned with the situation in Guinea. Unlike other traditional conflict risk assessments or early warning analyses, however, Doe decided to conduct a “strategic opportunities assessment” of the situation in Guinea to examine its “capacity to endure the composite stresses of internal transitions, massive influx of refugees, and regional threats.”<sup>127</sup> From his study, Doe came up with five conditions that he found to be forces for peace and stability in Guinea: history, interethnic coexistence and cohesion, religion, economic growth, and the culture of silence.<sup>128</sup> In his study, he examines how each of these areas has the potential to generate peace and stability in the country if their positive aspects are promoted rather than used to fuel conflict and division.

Several of the factors highlighted by Doe relate to the development of national identity in Guinea and its salience in conflict prevention. In the final section of this paper, I will look at the potential for conflict prevention within Guinea, focusing on the capacity of civil society to promote effective non violent change through the mobilization of Guineans across ethnic and regional lines, as has occurred in the past. Without an external threat to sovereignty, this type of mobilization is more challenging, but the history of Guinean mass mobilization illustrates that the capacity exists, particularly among women’s groups in the country. While international support and regional diplomacy are critical, and early warning is a useful way to draw attention to the need for action at these levels, grassroots prevention in Guinea is the most effective way to build trust and relationships at the national and local levels to address the internal instability and inequalities that persist today. The final section of this analysis will examine the historical role of grassroots preventive action and look at the capacity within Guinea for this type of work.

### *Grassroots Prevention*

Historically, conflict prevention in Africa has tended to focus on the actions of states and international and regional organizations.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, as Ulf Engel notes in his article, *Violent Conflict and Conflict Prevention in Africa*, “conflict prevention is dominated by reactive policies.”<sup>130</sup> Even as Western states and the UN have moved towards humanitarian action and structural prevention efforts, their actions in these areas are limited and under-funded. Furthermore, as conflict escalates and direct prevention becomes necessary, political will is often lacking. Regionally, significant weight has been placed on early warning and early action, and mechanisms have been developed that attempt to draw attention to signs of imminent conflict and promote action by state or international actors to prevent conflict. While important in some situations, these “traditional prevention mechanisms have proved top-heavy and ineffective in addressing the root causes of conflict and problems leading to the escalation of tensions.”<sup>131</sup> Indeed, such approaches ignore the significant contributions that key stakeholders such as youth, women and traditional local leaders can make to both short and long-term prevention efforts.

Over the past several years, however, there has been an increased recognition by policymakers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and donors of the importance of including all stakeholders, particularly those that are traditionally excluded such as women and youth, in conflict prevention efforts. While much of this recognition is token, squeezed in between two commas in policy documents, or focused on intervention rather than active participation in practice, it does illustrate a trend towards more inclusive conflict prevention strategies that take into account not only the importance of long-term structural efforts to prevent conflict, but also the contributions of civil society in this process. In their 2004 publication *People Building Peace II*, the European Center for Conflict Prevention documents a wealth of cases of successful contributions

civil society has made to conflict prevention around the world. In their book, the editors note, “there has...been a growing interest in civilian forms of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, even among governments and international organizations.”<sup>132</sup> In fact, grassroots conflict prevention is nothing new. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have long been active in conflict prevention efforts; however it is only recently that they have gained the recognition of top-level actors and the international community.

Grassroots conflict prevention can take many different forms. CSOs often engage awareness raising or lobbying to bring attention both domestically and internationally to increasing instability or bad governance. In some cases, this type of work results in early warning systems or policy briefs such as those put out by WANEP and the Fund for Peace. Taken further, CSOs can work to develop constituencies for peace within the country to generate public support in the form of media campaigns or other public shows of support for peaceful action. These efforts tend to be in response to escalation or instability and are, therefore, examples of more direct prevention efforts at the grassroots levels.

In addition to this type of direct prevention, CSOs are also important actors in longer-term structural prevention, particularly at the community level. For example, CSOs can undertake a longer-term process of dialogue to transform relationships and reduce misunderstandings between groups to prevent the formation of opposing conflict groups in the first place. They can also engage in trainings to build the capacity of local leaders and peacebuilders to make these programs more sustainable and effective.<sup>133</sup> One of the most commonly used tools in grassroots conflict prevention is the problem-solving workshop, which brings together representatives of conflicting parties for direct interaction in an unofficial, private context, generally with a panel of outside actors or specialists acting as facilitators. This type of workshop is designed to encourage parties to engage in an analytic approach to joint problem solving of a conflict that will be conducive to the emergence of creative mutually satisfactory outcomes.<sup>134</sup>

Despite the critical involvement of civil society in conflict prevention, it is not without limitations. Indeed, as Van Tongaren *et al.* note,

It is rarely possible for CSO initiatives to be able to achieve peace on their own. Governments and other political actors – especially those who make decisions over the deployment of military forces – are often decisive. Intergovernmental and multilateral organizations also have tremendous political, technical, and other resources they can bring to processes of working with conflict.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, it is important in any situation of potential conflict to look at all levels both for sources of conflict as well as for sources of stability and positive contributions to preventing the outbreak of violence.

### Guinean Civil Society’s Role in Conflict Prevention

As we have seen, trade unions have been strong in Guinea since before independence from France. Apart from these unions, which tend to be very political in nature, civil society in Guinea is very new and lacks unity and structure. Saran Daraba Kaba, a prominent leader of civil society and director of the Guinean branch of the Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET), has both emphasized the importance of Guinean civil society in peacebuilding and noted that it is only since 1985 that NGOs were allowed to exist in Guinea; thus, the concept of civil society in Guinea is relatively new.<sup>136</sup> Although formal civil society is relatively new, we have seen that Guinea has a strong history of mass mobilization at the grassroots level. As civil society has become more

developed and institutionalized in recent years, CSOs and NGOs have been increasingly active in building national identity and working to prevent conflict in Guinea. Quentin Kanyasi, country director for Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in Guinea, when asked at what level conflict prevention activities were likely to be most effective, responded that “the most appropriate level is Guinean society itself, which has already woken up and started to initiate conflict prevention activities.”<sup>137</sup> Some of the most active contributions in this regard have been undertaken by grassroots organizations, particularly women and youth-led organizations both in Conakry and in the forest region of Guinea.

Within the most recent WARN policy brief in which WANEP cites a number of potential causes of conflict, it also lists several possible “windows of opportunity.” Within this discussion, WANEP notes, “the recent events in the country have seen the total mobilization of the opposition parties, civil society and human rights activists under the umbrella of a loose structure known as “*Union de Forces Vives*” of Guinea. Joint meetings and joint strategies have resulted into a formidable force.<sup>138</sup> Thus, although there is certainly significant cause for concern in Guinea, the mobilization of Guineans across ethnic, regional and even political lines is a significant sign of hope and source for preventive action. Indeed, according to Gilles Yabi, “Even facing this incredibly repressive government, all leaders of the civil society in Guinea constantly called for non violent actions and for compromise with Conté.”<sup>139</sup>

In general, then, civil society has been largely unified and the most recent strikes have been viewed as a positive development in Guinea by leaders in civil society. However, there is some cause for concern that they have the potential to divide the country. According to one student and active member of civil society, “the strike action in Guinea, on one hand divided the people and on the other hand united them.” He continued by noting that Conté is of Susu origin as is much of the military, which supports the government. He also indicated, “many Susu believe that speaking against the Conté’s government is directly attacking the large Susu community. This has created more tension between mainly the majority Peul and minority Susu of the coastal line of Guinea.”<sup>140</sup> Thus, it is clear that there remains a potential for ethnic divisions in the country, particularly in the face of increasing criticism of the Susu-led government.

Within this context, building trust and relationships across ethnic lines and promoting national unity are particularly important. If we accept that civil society is a critical actor in working to prevent the outbreak of conflict in Guinea, it is important to examine different groups within civil society that are capable of this type of action. Two of the main forces driving unity and change in the country are women’s groups and youth groups.

### *Women’s Groups*

Over the past ten years, the contributions of women in conflict prevention and resolution have begun to gain more recognition. According to a report published by the Initiative for Inclusive Security, “women are at the forefront of nonviolent reform movements for democracy and human rights. They are vocal leaders within grassroots constituencies able to mobilize with little notice. Their networks span ethnicity, political affiliation, class, region and race.”<sup>141</sup> In Guinea, the role of women in building cross-party and inter-ethnic alliances both domestically and regionally has been critical in helping prevent conflict. As we have seen from Schmidt’s account of mass mobilization in the 1950s, women played a significant role in the movement for independence and the building of a Guinean national identity. Again in 2000-01, women played a critical role in unifying the country across ethnic lines in the face of potential spillover of conflict through MARWOPNET.

More recently, in the face of growing instability, women’s groups have grown more active in working to prevent conflict at the community and national levels. Women Actions for Peace and Reconciliation is a women’s organization with over 100 members, which is operating in the

prefecture of Macenta in the forest region of Guinea. Sangoyah Women for Peace and Development is another grassroots women's organization working to promote peace through development. It is composed of over 40 professional women in different sectors, who are trained in conflict resolution and help build alliances and settle disputes between members of their communities. MARWOPNET also continues to be active in Guinea. Through its cross-border support system, MARWOPNET Guinea has been effective in organizing meetings with key decision-makers to encourage them to address issues of security and transparency within the country.<sup>142</sup> These organizations have shown the continued importance of women in working across regions, ethnic lines and borders to promote peace. However, their actions are often severely constrained by a lack of funding and support.

### *Youth Groups*

Within the broader concept of civil society youth have become a very popular target for conflict prevention activities. Still, youth are more often seen as part of the problem than part of the solution. Indeed, as WANEP noted in its 2006 policy group, the youth crisis not just in Guinea, but around West Africa, is of critical concern. It notes, "the violent protest by the students of Guinea and the heavy fisted repression of the security forces is a vivid demonstration of the time bomb that Africa as a whole is sitting on."<sup>143</sup> However, Randolph Carter of Search for Common Ground writes, "while the most visible role of young people in conflict is violent, youth throughout the world are organizing in their own communities and countries in order to protect their own rights and try to have a positive impact on their environment."<sup>144</sup> Indeed, although youth continue to be seen a part of the problem in many cases, they are increasingly being seen also as part of the solution. Conflict prevention programs for and by youth are taking root in Africa, particularly in post-conflict settings but also in countries in conflict-prone regions and those that show evidence of instability.

In Guinea, a number of youth-led organizations have begun to form in response to increasing instability in the country. The Youth Association for the Development of Yanguissa is one youth organization in the Yanguissa-Boffa prefecture of Guinea where youth organized themselves to contribute in the social and economic development of their village. For them, unity is the force behind successful development. Another youth organization active in Guinea is the Association of Youth for the Development of Gueckedou, a local association helping youth become involved in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and development.

Youth are most active in peacebuilding in the forest regions of Guinea, where they have encountered violence and have seen the effects of war on their communities. Unfortunately, these types of peacebuilding organizations are less common in other areas of the country. Gilles Yabi confirmed that youth have been a driving force behind recent protests. He noted, "Under Touré, Guineans paid a high cost in terms of killings and they know what violence means. That's why the recent demonstrations were massively the work of very young people who did not bear the legacy and the trauma of the country's long history of violence. I also think that the atrocious wars of Liberia and Sierra Leone resulted in a great awareness by Guineans of the reality of war. They know that they do want political change but not at the cost of a Liberia-like devastation."<sup>145</sup>

Given the number of statements indicating the danger of youth and the role of youth in recent protests in Guinea, peacebuilding activities that are youth-led or that target youth are critical components of conflict prevention in Guinea. Indeed, given that so much of Guinean national identity is based on a shared history of struggle and mass mobilization, it is all the more important to include youth and teach them about Guinean history and national identity in the face of crisis.

### *International Support for Grassroots Prevention*

In addition to locally-run and organized CSOs and NGOs, international agencies and NGOs are also offering support to build community in Guinea. Search for Common Ground (SFCG) first began working in Guinea in May 2001 to conduct a mass communication campaign focused on easing tensions between Guineans and Sierra Leonean refugees settled along the border in Guinea.<sup>146</sup> While not explicitly meant to prevent spillover, these initial programs of SFCG were designed to address the regional dynamics of conflict by focusing on the refugee situation. Thus, like many of the local and national efforts, SFCG initially began its work not by focusing on internal dynamics but on regional and cross-border issues. More recently, however, SFCG has expanded its programs by focusing on partnership with and empowerment of existing capacities to build community cohesion. More specifically, it supports “the development of alliances and networks within the civil society, at national and sub-regional level, and to link with national and regional advocacy groups like MARWOPNET.”<sup>147</sup>

In addition to SFCG, a number of other international organizations have supported on the ground initiatives in Guinea, however they are more often focused on development than specifically on conflict prevention like Search for Common Ground. Currently, over 200 development organizations and agencies are working on the ground in Guinea, including donor agencies like USAID and international organizations like UNICEF. A number of these organizations offer support to grassroots peacebuilding efforts, however, more often than not they come into Guinea with a program already in mind and do not offer support for grassroots-led initiatives like those mentioned above. From this analysis, it has become clear that the capacity for building relationships and promoting national unity to fight corruption and promote nonviolent change in Guinea is at the grassroots level. International and regional organizations working on conflict prevention in Guinea must find effective ways to support these grassroots efforts. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has supported the recent strikes in Guinea and has helped to bring international attention to the grievances of the Guinean unions.<sup>148</sup> However, support for other grassroots efforts that are more specifically focused on preventing violent conflict and promoting peaceful change and political transitions remain critical.

### **Conclusion**

Scholars, policymakers, analysts and civil society leaders all agree that this is a critical time for Guinea. Rather than just examining all of the factors that have the potential to incite violence conflict in Guinea, this paper has taken the approach of appreciative inquiry to uncover the capacity to respond to these factors at the international, regional and local levels. The recent strikes and rise in violence show that the country has woken up in the face of internal instability and is ready for action. Whether this action will be violent or nonviolent depends on the ability of civil society to promote national unity and mobilize the people to push for change. These efforts require the support of the international community and regional organizations, both through funding and diplomatic pressure on Conté’s regime to respond to the needs and demands of his people for democratization and transparency. Conté’s appointment of a Prime Minister that is widely accepted both within Guinea and in the international community is a positive sign; however long-term stability requires further change. Through mass mobilization around a common national identity, the people of Guinea are best equipped to achieve this change. Specifically, women’s groups have been particularly effective in the past at promoting unity across ethnic, regional and political lines and are a driving force behind conflict prevention efforts in the face of current instability. Youth groups are also a critical force for change in Guinea and have the capacity for both violent and nonviolent action. Numerous youth groups are working to promote conflict prevention in Guinea and must be

nurtured and supported. By no means do I intend to paint a rosy picture of the situation in Guinea. There are significant social, political and economic problems facing the country and the situation in Guinea requires substantial attention at the international and regional levels to prevent the outbreak of violence. However, Guinea's history of nationalism illustrates that sovereignty and civic national unity are very important features of society in Guinea. Within this context, the most important locus for conflict prevention activities must be at the grassroots and must work to cultivate this sense of national unity.

## Notes

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  - <sup>22</sup> Sherrer, 122.
  - <sup>23</sup> Sriram, Chandra Lekha and Karen Wermester (Eds.). 2003. *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening the Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers. Pg.17.
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  - <sup>25</sup> Siram, 18.
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- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 121.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., 122.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 124.
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- <sup>56</sup> Malinga.
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