

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Secret police continue to hold opposition leaders Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah as an early transition to democracy appears unlikely and the risk of a military counter-coup remains high. China-headquartered steelmaker Baoshan Iron & Steel expects the Simandou iron ore project to mine and deliver its first cargo by the end of 2025 rather than 2026. In six years, Simandou will provide a significant boost to the economy and unlock other sectors notably agriculture. Turkish Karpower offshore floating diesel generators provide costly relief from a profound and prolonged energy crisis. France's populist left party, La France Insoumise, claims that France is supporting junta leader Mamadi Doumbouya (2021-present) and calls for an investigation, but the junta has studiously balanced geopolitical relationships with China, Russia and regional body ECOWAS.

Military junta shows no sign of relinquishing control soon

An early transition to democracy in **Guinea** is unlikely and the risk of a military counter-coup remains significant. The double abduction in July of two of Guinea's two main opposition leaders (see *ARC Briefing Guinea Jul 2024*) is a signal that the military junta has no intention of relinquishing power and will resort to violence to suppress opposition activities. Unknown men thought to be operatives of the secret police on 9 July abducted Guinea's two main pro-democracy leaders, **Oumar Sylla** (also known as **Foniké Menguè**) and **Mamadou Billo Bah**; the two have not been seen since.¹ Sylla and Bah lead the **Front national pour la défense de la constitution (FNDC)**, which came into prominence during popular protests against former head of state **Alpha Condé's** (2010-2021) controversial third term bid for the presidency. Following the 5 September 2021 coup that removed Condé, the FNDC initially sided with the junta of Colonel (now General) **Mamadi Doumbouya** (2021-present) but turned against it when Doumbouya became ambiguous about returning Guinea to democracy. The antagonism has increased over the last two years. Human rights organisations have said that since the coup the junta has repressed numerous protests, leading to some 47 deaths.²

To the same end, the junta has announced that there were supposedly more than 200 parties in Guinea, of which it has dissolved or temporarily suspended more than half (107).³ A further 67 parties have been placed under surveillance until they can demonstrate they comply with the junta's rules and regulations – or risk dissolution. Among these parties are the three that have dominated domestic politics until Doumbouya's coup: the former ruling **Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée (RPG)** and two erstwhile opposition parties including the **Union des forces démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG)** and the **Union des forces républicaines (UFR)**.⁴ The leaders of these parties (Alpha Condé for the RPG, **Cellou Dalein Diallo** for the UFDG and **Sidya Touré** of the UFR) remain in exile in **Turkey, Dakar (Senegal)** and **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** respectively. Diallo's return has been announced numerous times but does not seem to be imminent.

UFR leader Sidya Touré responded to the idea that Doumbouya could present himself as a candidate for presidential elections, whenever they take place, as "a joke".⁵ In September, the junta attempted to

¹ RFI, 19 Oct 2024

² Le Monde, 29 Oct 2024

³ VOA Afrique, 29 Oct 2024

⁴ VOA Afrique, 29 Oct 2024

⁵ Guinee Matin, 3 Oct 2024

link former president Condé to an alleged coup plot, a claim that RPG spokesman **Marc Yombouno** dismissed as “*just lies*”.⁶ The allegations came after shots had been heard in central Conakry, near the presidential palace and several ministerial buildings, including the **Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation**, which is supposed to organise elections.⁷ Conakry’s ministerial buildings are clustered in an area near the presidential palace, highlighting the ever-present risk of a military counter coup against Doumbouya.

Simandou iron ore project set to produce first iron ore earlier than anticipated ...

General Mamadi Doumbouya’s significant pressure on companies involved in the **Simandou** iron ore project appears to have had results. **China**’s largest listed steelmaker, **Baoshan Iron & Steel**, expects the Simandou project to complete infrastructure construction and to mine its first cargo by the end of 2025.⁸ With annual production capacity of 120-million metric tons, the project is the world’s largest mine for the highest grade of iron-ore.

However, the Simandou project in Guinea’s south-east has not been without incident. On 28 October, **United Kingdom (UK)**-headquartered **Rio Tinto**, one of the companies involved in exploiting Simandou’s iron ore deposits and contributing to the infrastructure needed to bring the ore to international markets (including a 650-km railway and a deep-sea mineral port at **Morébaya**) reported a fatal accident at its port on 26 October that killed one employee.⁹ The company announced that it had suspended work for the time being but did not give details regarding the nature of the incident.

The Simandou project (which with Rio Tinto includes **Chalco** of China, the Chinese-**Singapore-French Simandou Winning Consortium** and **Baowu Steel**) has worked hard to expedite the preparations for excavating the ore and transporting it to market.¹⁰ The port is the end point of the railway that begins at Simandou and runs through three of Guinea’s four natural regions (**Guinée Forestière, Haute Guinée** and **Guinée Maritime**; it does not touch **Moyenne Guinée**) to reach the coast just south of the capital, Conakry and the site where the iron ore must leave Guinea, mainly to China.¹¹

The junta regards Simandou as the signature project that should boost and transform the economy, as laid out in its Simandou 2040 document.¹² Essentially, the junta is looking to revenue from mining, to grow the economy by 26% in the next six years, and, according to the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**¹³, it will be used to unlock the country’s large agricultural potential. The **World Bank**, among others, regards agriculture, not mining, as the sector that will create the jobs that will pull more Guineans out of poverty, but it considers the revenue accruing from selling the Simandou iron ore as a means to this end.¹⁴

More than anything, the Doumbouya junta wants the completion of the Simandou project and the start of its production to be its legacy. It will go to extraordinary lengths to attain this objective. Ultimately, the determining factor remains the Chinese market, responsible for the uptake of 75% of all seaborne iron ore.¹⁵ General Doumbouya proved himself keenly aware of this fact when he went to China in September for the **Forum On China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)** and visited Baowu Steel in **Shanghai**, now considered the key player in the Simandou project.¹⁶

⁶ Le Lynx, 21 Sep 2024

⁷ Le Monde, 26 Sep 2024

⁸ Reuters 30 Sep 2023

⁹ Agence Ecofin, 29 Oct 2024

¹⁰ Reuters, 27 Mar 2022

¹¹ Engineering News, 30 Oct 2024

¹² Radiodiffusion télévision guinéenne, 23 Oct 2024; Simandou 2040 website www.simandou2040.org

¹³ Agence Ecofin, 29 Oct 2024

¹⁴ Banque Mondiale: note de conjoncture économique de la Guinée, published 19 Sep 2024

¹⁵ Reuters, 11 Jun 2024

¹⁶ Infomine Guinée, 7 Sep 2024; Miningweekly, 21 Jun 2024

... as electricity crisis endures

Guinea continues to struggle with a profound and prolonged energy crisis¹⁷ since a December 2023 explosion that devastated the country's principal oil depot at **Kaloum**, in central Conakry (see *ARC Briefing Guinea Jan 2024*). The blast affected operations at the nearby **Tombo** power station in Kaloum and caused shortages in power stations elsewhere in the country.¹⁸

The arrival of a **Turkish**-run energy ship (114MW) belonging to **Karpower**, owned by the **Karadeniz** holding company, is expected to create a visible change in the energy provision landscape: It arrived after much wrangling over payment of a \$20m guarantee that Karpower demanded of the government, which was reportedly solved by junta leader Doumbouya intervening personally and Karpower being authorised to sell its electricity at a higher price compared to what it was allowed when it last delivered to Guinea under the Condé presidency.¹⁹ The ship arrived off Conakry on 15 August.²⁰

Another factor is climate change. Prior to the arrival of the annual rainy season, the two major Chinese-built dams in the **Kounkouré River**, at **Kaleta** near the capital Conakry and **Souapiti** (further upstream), were in difficulty. The dams, built during Alpha Condé's presidency, can theoretically generate an estimated 770MW but were working at low capacity, owing to the small volumes of water the river carried.²¹ Since then, energy minister **Aboubacar Camara** has been visiting the people living nearby the two dams, reassuring them that the unusually high rainfall this year during the subsequent rainy season does not pose any danger to the population living nearby.²²

Consumer organisations, meanwhile, are worried that as the government of Guinea is considering selling electricity to neighbouring countries, Guinean consumers are going without. **Union pour la défense des consommateurs** (consumers' defence organisation) president **M'Bany Sidibé** told local media:

*"As he [minister Aboubacar Camara] talks about distribution to other countries, our worry is that first of all that [state-owned national utility] **Électricité de Guinée** does not achieve national coverage. It is incomprehensible to think about export while we must do everything we can to assure the transport of electricity to our major cities."*²³

The government is now working on the basis of the assumption that solving Guinea's deep and persistent energy crisis will take up to ten years and will require more intensive participation of private operators.²⁴ The country's hydro-electric potential is situated between 6,000MW and 7,000MW, of which less than 15% is being utilised.²⁵ Electricity generation is perhaps the smaller problem. As the consumer union president suggests, distribution may well be the real issue.

French MPs demand inquiry into relations between French government and Guinea

Members of France's **Assemblée Générale** (Parliament) have demanded a parliamentary inquiry into the existence, scope and depth of relations between the French government and the military junta of General Mamadi Doumbouya.²⁶ The MPs suspect that Doumbouya, a former French legionnaire and married to a French national, is relying on France to support his regime, sanitise its image and justify his prolonged stay in power.²⁷ The note accompanying the resolution says that while the levels of

¹⁷ [Guinee360.com](#), 5 Jul 2025

¹⁸ [Le Monde](#), 18 Dec 2023; [Jeune Afrique](#), 1 Oct 2024

¹⁹ [Jeune Afrique](#), 1 Oct 2024

²⁰ [RFI](#), 17 Aug 2024

²¹ [Jeune Afrique](#), 1 Oct 2024

²² [Mediaguinée](#), 7 Oct 2024

²³ [Mosaïqueguinée](#), 21 Oct 2024

²⁴ [Guinee360.com](#), 5 Jul 2024; [Mosaïqueguinée](#), 21 Oct 2024

²⁵ [Mediaguinée](#), 7 Oct 2024; [Jeune Afrique](#), 1 Oct 2024

²⁶ Proposition de résolution, Assemblée nationale, Paris, France, 27 Sep 2024

²⁷ [Ramatoulaye.com](#), 15 Oct 2024

repression have clearly increased in the course of the existence of the Doumbouya junta, France does not seem to have an opinion on these matters. The abduction of the two pro-democracy leaders Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah (see above) was one of the immediate triggers for launching this enquiry.²⁸ The note reads that the mission of the commission of inquiry will also be

*“to verify whether the cooperation [between France and Guinea] conforms to the principles of international law and the defence of human rights”.*²⁹

Of particular interest is the existence of persistent rumours concerning the presence of French troops on Guinean soil, which would constitute a spectacular reversal of Guinea’s policies since independence in 1958.³⁰

The Guinean junta balances relationships based on its geopolitical, domestic political and business interests. China is the most prominent by far, as it buys most of Guinea’s bauxite through the Chinese-Singapore-French consortium that runs **Société des Mines de Boké (SMB)**, which is also involved in the Simandou project. Of all independent nations on the **African** continent, Guinea has the longest-standing ties with China (since 1959), a relationship that has not been affected by the 5 September 2021 coup. If anything ties have strengthened, as seen by Doumbouya’s meeting with **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** leader, President **Xi Jinping** (2013-present) in September.³¹ **Russia’s** ties with Guinea date back to the days of the former **Soviet Union**, when Guinea found itself firmly in the **Eastern Bloc**. Russia’s **RusAl** has a particular interest in Guinea, were it runs the country’s only alumina smelter. Diplomatic ties appear cordial, as they do with the **United States**, which did not respond favourably to Doumbouya’s coup but did not call for any sanctions.

On the African continent, Guinea was courted by the three military-run and Russia-supported **Sahel** states **Mali**, **Burkina Faso** and **Niger** but it has not responded favourably to invitations to join their **Alliance of Sahel States (AES)**. Prime minister **Bah Oury** made it clear that Guinea will not be part of the AES, and will remain inside the **West African** body **ECOWAS**, which it will seek to reform from within.³² General Doumbouya himself is particularly fond of his blossoming relations with **Rwanda** and its strongman, **Paul Kagame** (2000-present). The two men have met several times in the past two years and intend to intensify and deepen the cooperation between the two countries in various key areas, including agriculture, transport, telecoms and others.³³ At a personal level there appears to be good chemistry between Doumbouya and Kagame, whose methods the Guinean leader may well seek to emulate.³⁴

²⁸ Proposition de resolution, Assemblée nationale, Paris, France, 27 Sep 2024

²⁹ Proposition de resolution, Assemblée nationale, Paris, France, 27 Sep 2024

³⁰ Marianne, 12 Aug 2024; Ramatoulaye.com, 15 Oct 2024

³¹ 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 4 Sep 2024

³² Ouestaf, 10 Oct 2024

³³ New Times Rwanda, 26 Jan 2024, during Doumbouya’s state visit to Rwanda

³⁴ The Africa Report, 18 Sep 2024

Planner

2024 **Guinea** Constitutional referendum expected
 TBC **Guinea** Presidential elections
 2025 **Conakry (Guinea)** Start of exploitation at the **Simandou** iron ore project

Chronology

30 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Engineering News*. **China**-headquartered **Baoshan Iron and Steel** says it expects the **Simandou** iron ore project, whose production capacity of 120 million metric tons makes it the world's largest mine for high grade iron-ore, to complete construction and mine its first cargo by the end of 2025;

29 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Le Monde*. Ruling junta under **Mamadi Doumbouya** has dissolved 53 of Guinea's political parties, suspended 50 for three months, and placed a further 67 under observation in a "national assessment mission" citing the parties' lack of financial transparency and inability to provide documentation;

29 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Energy Capital Power*. **African Development Fund (ADF)** has approved a \$13.15m loan with a 50-year repayment period aimed at strengthening Guinea's industrial development and supporting small and medium sized enterprises.

28 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Mining Review Africa*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered mining company **Rio Tinto** suspends work following the death of a contractor on the **Simandou** iron ore project in **Morebaya**;

23 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Le Monde*. Public Prosecutor's Office has requested a five-year prison sentence for former defence minister **Mohamed Diané**, citing embezzlement of public funds, money laundering and corruption of public officials as reasons for the potential incarceration of the minister;

18 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Vision Guinee*. Mines and territorial administration ministries announce the lifting of the suspension on artisanal gold, diamond and other precious metals mining;

16 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinee*. Prime minister **Bah Oury** meets with the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** mission currently in Guinea;

14 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *AFP*. **Guinean Press Agency (AGP)** reports at least two people died in clashes with security forces at a protest against a **Chinese** mining firm over alleged environmental degradation and destruction of crops;

11 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Le Monde*. Junta leader General **Mamadi Doumbouya** has ordered all ministers travelling abroad to return to the country and barred all ministers from foreign travel unless agreed on by himself, justifying the decision by rationalising public spending;

11 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Bloomberg*. **Emirates Global Aluminum (EGA)** announces a suspension of bauxite exports from its local subsidiary, **Guinea Alumina Corporation (GAC)**, due to customs issues, causing a surge in aluminium prices;

10 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Science News*. **South Africa**-headquartered **AngloGold Ashanti** agrees to a financial settlement with families who were forcibly relocated for its mine in **Siguiri** between 2015 and 2016;

6 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinee*. Prime minister **Bah Oury** confirms Guinea is extraditing people accused of preparing a plot to destabilise Guinea from abroad;

5 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinee*. Foreign affairs minister **Morissanda Kouyaté** denies rumours that there is a **French** military base in Guinea;

5 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinee*. An **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** mission arrives in Guinea to negotiate a new staff-monitored programme;

5 Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Vision Guinee*. **World Bank** signs two agreements worth \$150m with the government aimed at improving the health sector and civil protection;

30 Sep 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Vision Guinee*. The former ruling **Rassemblement du Peuple Guinéen (RPG) Arc-en-ciel** says Guinea has been in ‘*extremely bad shape*’ since the overthrow of former president **Alpha Condé**;

26 Sept Oct 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Le Monde*. Shots are fired in the centre of Conakry next to the presidential palace and several ministries, leading to hypotheses including a clash between two associates of President **Mamadi Doumbouya**, but no clear answer has been given;

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Getting in touch

Please contact us by email info@africariskconsulting.com or call + 44 (0) 20 7078 4080

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