AFRICA IN DEPTH REPORT

Guinea: corruption, coup and the mining Eldorado

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Mediapart published an exclusive document where a former associate of President Condé and a former minister evoke his ouster, accusing him of electoral fraud against the background of briberies and pressure from mining companies. The country is on the verge of a major political crisis, the opposition demanding the annulment of the legislative elections that have just taken place.

This is a friendly conversation. On Sunday, December 2, 2012, two men talk at length. There is talk of corruption, electoral fraud, regime change, the secret services, of commissions of millions of dollars for mining ventures that are worth billions of dollars. The target country? Guinea—headed since November 2010 by Alpha Condé—an untapped mining paradise where are accumulated some of the largest deposits in the world, uranium, diamonds, bauxite, iron ore (also read more details under the links in the bottom of the article).

The meeting takes place in Florida, 166 Palm Avenue, Miami Beach, in an extravagant property to the tunes of Italian palace, now on sale for $16.5 million. The conversation is accurate but still friendly, comely, like the luxurious property which can be seen in preview below. In moments of relaxation, one also discussed women and luxury cars: Bentley, Lamborghini, Rolls Royce. "I am expecting by the way the latest model," said one.

"What do you call a fortune?" He replied to Mediapart when we wondered about whether to count in tens or hundreds of millions of dollars to assess his wealth. Because before being Minister Mahmoud Thiam was an investment banker at Merrill Lynch before making a dramatic shift for UBS. "Yes, I won a lot of money when I transferred with my team to UBS. To give you just an idea, my secretary received $500,000 for the transfer. This money makes me free. I do not need bribery, I, unlike what the Condé clan calim who just want tarnish my...
reputation, ” he insists.

Alpha Condé, president of Guinea, is the sole object of the resentment between the two men. It is about him and to get rid of them that the two men meet today in Miami Beach. This is their first meeting. It will last more than three hours, but the cordiality displayed hides a first huge trap: all their exchanges will be recorded. Mediapart has acquired all of the recording, and authenticated (Link of recordings on the Mediapart website).

Soros, Blair, Kouchner, Conde

Several factors suggest that Mahmoud Thiam is the author of this record. His movements towards the toilet, are clearly audible. But the former minister is a strong advocate. Because if it were him, would he not have immediately seized the American police to denounce the possible offenses as revealed and discussed in Miami? ”It’s not me, we were trapped, look rather on the side of corporate espionage mandated by Conde and George Soros, for example, DLA Piper, who are constantly trying to tarnish me,” he says to Mediapart.

And then the billionaire financier and philanthropist George Soros is targeted in turn. For its massive support for Conde since his election. For his involvement in the cloudy battles over Guinean mining concessions. Soros, like Tony Blair, who also supports Conde, argue a different version. To assist the progress of good governance in Africa, yes, they support Alpha Conde, president derived from the first elections recognized as free and fair by international organizations since the country’s independence in 1958.

© Alpha Condé. (Reuters)

After fifty years of dictatorship, authoritarian regimes, military juntas and massively rigged elections amid violence, Guinea has made a step towards democracy with the election of Condé. Soros then put his team of experts, international lawyers, detectives at the disposal of the man who lived most of his life in exile in France, close to the French Left and the Socialist International, high school friend Bernard Kouchner.

The objective targeted by Soros and Condé immediately after being elected: To review the Guinean Mining Code, review the concessions granted by previous regimes, investigate concession contracts that led to the corruption of the decision makers.

Mahmoud Thiam, the former minister of mines which Conde removes in 2010, is thus in the vizier of Soros’s teams. As in that of the FBI in New York (it will be read in the second part of our report). Here accused of shady deals, receiving suitcases of money for corrupt friendships with some mining giants. But the former investment banker is determined to defend himself. And this recording, which is not his work, would actually serve his purpose, he wants to believe. ”Nobody likes to see stolen his private conversations, he told Mediapart, but ultimately, I have nothing to reproach myself. In what I said that day to Mebiame, there is nothing embarrassing for me.”

Is he so sure? To Samuel Mebiame Mahmoud Thiam told the reasons for his break with Alpha Condé and that he is now engaged in an "open war." "Condé systematically betrayed all those who helped him. I helped him between rounds, twice, I made ’em deliver 3 or 4 million dollars (...) He is of an aggressive petty, and vindictive nature. This guy, he must go, and all those who want to get rid of him, whether democratically or by force, will need me. He is digging his own grave, respects no contract. He started the war with me, well, it will have to bring one of us down, I’m going to go to the end," he says throughout the conversation.

For months, tensions are rising in Guinea amid campaigning for parliamentary elections which were finally held on this September 28th after several postponements. But a week after the legislative elections, the final results were not yet published, leaving the suspicion of rigging grow. The opposition, Friday, October 4th, requested the annulment of the election, calling for a massive fraud (see also here: http://guinee7.com/component/content/article/35-actualite/3746-parlamento-parliament-index-.html, and here http://guineenews.org/2013/10/legislatives-2013-lopposition-exige-linvalidation-du-scrutin-et-promet-des-marches-imminentes/).

Rumors but also Memos from Western services (cited by
Le Canard Enchaine) reported the preparation of a potential coup.

Alpha Condé evokes himself during private conversations the recruitment of mercenaries, especially in South Africa. His opponents accuse him in return of doing the same and thus inflame ethnic rivalries. Mahmoud Thiam finds there is therefore nothing "embarrassing" in his words?

"No, I repeat, what I have explained to Mebiame, I said publicly. Conde is one of the most corrupt individuals, I am a perfectly legitimate, I am not engaged in a political battle and I do not, he assures us have any alliances in Guinea." Why did he, the successful banker of UBS, accept a position as minister of mines while the power was in the hands of military perpetrators of the coup in 2009? "It was not really a coup, there was a transition to quickly organize elections, he defends today. You know, I wanted to help my country, as a good technician, and then I returned to New York where I live with my family and my three daughters."

Dossier against a meeting

Mahmoud Thiam responds willingly to Mediapart as he has for many African newspapers (see here, for example http://guineenews.org/2013/10/mahmoud-thiam-ancien-ministre-des-mines-a-guineenews-je-suis-sous-ecoute-et-espionne-par-certaines-personnes-depuis-un-bon-moment/).

Samuel Mebiame has disappeared from the scenery since that meeting. No interviews, no public statement. Contacted several times through which he presents as a "man of confidence", a real estate operator from Miami, Farouk Gongee http://thegongeeteam.com/12363/dsp_agent_page.php/68403. Samuel Mebiame never returned our calls. Sign of embarrassment? Probably more.

Map of Guinea. © French Ministry of Foreign Affairs

This is because Samuel Mebiame sees today his businesses projected in broad daylight, including his intrigues and his failures. Throughout the explanations given to Mahmoud Thiam, we encounter several South African leaders and the secret services of the country, mining companies, election companies, the entourage of Conde, his relationship with Ali Bongo: in summary, the bleak behind the scenes of a matchmaker role of highest level which he attributes himself to be. His partners probably do not appreciate much being publically exposed like that.

Mebiame invited Thiam to Miami for a very specific purpose. To offer him a dossier presented as damning against Alpha Condé - an alleged massive fraud in the 2010 presidential election - in exchange for a meeting with Benny Steinmetz. And here's another key actor in the Guinean eldorado. Steinmetz, the King of Diamonds, a Franco-Israeli, richest man of Israel is at the heart of the largest mining Battle of the Planet: control of the Simandou iron ore, the largest reserve in the world.

We will discuss in detail in the second part of this investigation, but summarize here the essential: by reviewing the mining code, Alpha Conde has decided to revise the staggering concession to BSGR Benny Steinmetz Group at Simandou. The Subject: tens of billions of dollars. Since the Steinmetz is fighting like a handsome devil.
Simandou, the largest iron ore deposit in the world. © (dr)

- "Your Dossier, says in early December 2012 Mahmoud Thiam to Samuel Mebiame, I can make an atomic bomb from it. This is the end of Alpha Condé."

- "I am convinced of that adds Mebiame, this dossier is my war treasure, my parachute. And even if Alpha does not fall, he will be so ripe that you will control him."

What is it about?

The second round of the 2010 presidential election was heavily rigged to ensure the election of Alpha Condé.

It is Samuel Mebiame, who had by then joined his campaign team and provided significant financial resources, that he affirms himself.

How? By asking the company Waymark, a reputed company close to the South African secret service and who was ensuring the organization and logistics of the election – up to the computerized collection of the results - to "fix" the election. This is at least what Samuel Mebiame affirms.

- "What were the raw data?" Inquired Mahmoud Thiam.

- "You know, everything is negotiable with these computer machines. But I have the documents, agreements between Waymark, Alpha Condé and his son Mohammed. And I have a South African secret service agent that can testify. I also have details of 14 million dollars that was paid by the Guinean central bank to Waymark via a company close to the services," said Samuel Mebiame.

None of these documents has never been made public and no evidence can be provided to date to support the charges of Samuel Mebiame. Both men refer to election results that actually "surprised" to say the least many observers. Not those of the European Union, who had considered reliable and fair the election of Alpha Condé. After them, other international organizations and powerful think tanks, such as the International Crisis Group, had not questioned the fairness of the election.

But there remains this weirdness. Conde gathers at the first round of presidential elections 18% of the vote, his main rival Diallo over 43%. In the second round, and while the other candidates withdraw on behalf of Diallo, Conde won with 52.5% of votes.

"It surprised everyone" said today Antoine Glaser, an expert on Africa. Such a leap, this has been rarely seen...

At the same time, Diallo is Fulani, the majority ethnic group in the country, and there was such an anti-Fulani feeling in the country that ethnic minorities could have perhaps united. Diallo conceded the defeat, which also greatly surprised us...

We were then told that there may have been a compromise between the two men, the loser seeing promised multiple compensations. Another element is the role of the army, which sided with Alpha Condé and also weighed decisively on the ballot.

No comments chez Alpha Conde

For three years, Waymark – the operator of the elections - is under surveillance. The company is also at the heart of clashes between government and opposition on the organization of parliamentary elections after more than two years of successive postponements and finally occurred.

Waymark participated in the organization of the elections, but this time with others (read here another article about Waymark, http://guineenews.org/2013/09/le-neveu-de-zuma-accuse-des-guineens-de-lavoir-escroque-de-5-millions-en-faux-lingots-dor/ regarding a recent conflict with the nephew of South African President Zuma).

When Thiam and Mebiame meet in early December 2012, elections were just being announced for the end of the month. Both men recount. "We must move quickly, pressed Samuel Mebiame, I'll give you the file but I want to see Benny Steinmetz."

"Once I have the file, I need 5-7 days to make the bomb and this must happen 4 or 5 days before the election. The rapprochement with Benny and BSGR, I will take care of it," says Thiam.

Today, Mahmoud Thiam told the rest of the story to Mediapart. "Steinmetz did not want to meet Mebiame. I asked the question, they refused. Mebiame did not send me
the file, only a few documents, but very inadequate parts, I think he wanted to sell the dossier, thinking Steinmetz could buy it. I saw Mebiame once, that's all. But I think that what this gentleman says is very credible, he was as the centre of the system, isn't it? And I have also by the way my own information."

The "bomb" has long fizzled. For now. The role of Samuel Mebiame, for a certain period at the very heart of Alpha Condé team has indeed been proved. It was he who sparked another scandal - the matter called the Palladino Affair - signing in 2011 a loan of $ 25 million awarded through an offshore company, by several South African groups to the new Guinean power ... A Loan secured on huge mining assets of the country and that could hide other much larger financial flows.

Contacted by Mediapart, the team of Alpha Conde took refuge in a prudent silence: too many traps and volatile alliances while the legislative elections can change everything in the country. "No, the president does not comment on all of this and does not want to talk about Mr. Thiam, said a spokesman of the Presidency of the Republic. There are ongoing proceedings, the Presidency will not make public declarations as long as these will not be completed."

Dollars, mining corporations, political power, foreign powers and intelligence: it is in this battle that Guinea, one of the poorest and most corrupt countries in the world, is trying to be built. Mahmoud Thiam and Benny Steinmetz lost the game. So far only for the moment, so much as alliances can untie.

Because the wheel can quickly turn: $ 750 million through a "sweetener" for a mining concession, the Rio Tinto group returned to favor. Russian aluminum giant, Rusal, is still there. The French Bollore, close to Alpha Condé, has re-emerged: first by consolidating its concessions in the port of Conakry, (by site - Bolloré Africa http://www.bolloré-africa-logistics.com//) . And second by picking up the construction of a strategic railway line. One that will be used to transport iron ore from Simandou, the Guinean treasure. When it will be operated.

Look under the Extend tab of this article, the entire record and read the key elements transcribed:

To be followed: the war of mining concessions

BY FRANCIS BONNET

We were able to get this recording about two weeks ago and we have authenticated it. Contacted by Mediapart Mahmoud Thiam does not deny its content and the identity of the speakers. Since then, snippets were used and posted in the Guinean press in support of a particular thesis. But it is all of this long conversation that seems of great interest in understanding what it leaves the involvement of different actors, power games and money and determining weight of large mining companies on the country's political life.

In the second part of our investigation, we will tell the ongoing battles to snatch or maintain the country's largest mining concessions.