

Simon Mann names London tycoon as coup leader

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Simon Mann, the former SAS officer accused of plotting to overthrow the President of Equatorial Guinea, yesterday portrayed a reclusive London-based tycoon as “the Cardinal”, who controlled every aspect of the attempted coup in 2004, and himself as a mere “junior”.



Simon Mann

Mr Mann asserted that Ely Calil, 64, was one of a shadowy group of rich and powerful figures who were still plotting to remove Teodoro Obiang Nguema and seize control of his tiny, oil-rich state. “They’re not going to give up,” the Old Etonian told the judges at his trial in the hot and humid Equatorial Guinean capital.

As if to help his case, the prosecution presented evidence later in the day against six other defendants — all Equatoguineans linked to the exiled opposition leader Severo Moto and accused of participating in a plot against Mr Obiang, 66, this year.

That evidence included seized rifles and pistols, and in a particularly surreal moment, the entire court trooped outside to watch soldiers fire them skywards. Some observers speculated that José Olo Obano, the Attorney-General and lead prosecutor, was repaying Mr Mann, 55, for his performance on Tuesday, when he bluntly accused the Spanish, South African and US governments of complicity in the attempted coup and claimed that Sir Mark Thatcher was one of the chief plotters.

The Obiang Government wants to use Mr Mann’s trial to present Equatorial Guinea, long considered one of the most corrupt and repressive states in Africa, as a victim of international skulduggery. His defence lawyer questioned him for only 45 minutes before resting his case yesterday, but Mr Mann seized every chance to present himself as Mr Calil’s pawn. “Calil was known as the Cardinal and I think that says it all,” he declared.

Sir Mark and other investors were allowed to join the plot only after they had been vetted by Mr Calil and accepted the “Calil rules”, he said. Mr Calil controlled all the money and the flow of information. He had sources inside the Equatorial Guinean Government who knew the President’s every movement. “Calil was very much the boss. Nothing could happen without Calil telling me ‘yes’ or ‘no’ . . . He could certainly act without consulting me and he frequently did.”

He said that Mr Calil met senior plotters in Beirut in 2003 to write a new constitution for his friend Severo Moto, whom he allegedly planned to install in place of Mr Obiang. Mr Mann was not invited. "He didn't have to be. He's just a junior in the organisation," Mr Mann said of himself.

At Mr Calil's behest, Mr Mann assembled a mercenary force, took charge of the logistics of the coup and would have made at least \$15 million (£7.5 million) had the plot succeeded, it was claimed. However, he insisted: "I would have been Moto's security manager . . . but always with the Cardinal controlling."

Mr Calil is a Lebanese-Nigerian who lives in the affluent Bishops Avenue in Hampstead and divides his time between London and Lebanon. He is so reclusive that the only photograph of him in the public domain was taken in 1972. According to Adam Roberts, author of *The Wonga Coup*, a book on the Obiang plot, Mr Calil started by selling goods to the Nigerian Army, invested in property and then traded in oil. By 2004 he had amassed a £100 million fortune. He has strong political connections in Africa, particularly Nigeria.

Mr Calil has previously denied involvement in the coup but has said nothing since the Mann trial began this week. The tycoon gave \$2 million to fund the coup, according to the Attorney-General. Kharim Falahah, a Lebanese business associate of Mr Calil, David Tremain, a British businessman and friend of Mr Mann and Mr Mann himself each allegedly gave \$500,000. Gary Hershman, a London property developer, and Gianfranco Cicogna, a South African telecoms tycoon, are said to have given \$1 million each, and Sir Mark \$300,000.

The trial could end as early as today, but sentencing is not expected until next week.

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