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WIDE ANGLE INVESTIGATES AN INTERNATIONAL PLOT TO CONTROL
WEST AFRICAN OIL IN
ONCE UPON A COUP, AUGUST 26 ON PBS

August 25, 2009 – New York – Start with a failed coup attempt; add a British mercenary in a notorious African prison; throw in a dictator suspicious of Western powers; and beneath it all, discover a spectacular underwater oil reserve. It may sound like the latest John LeCarré bestseller, but it's the real-life intrigue of *Once Upon a Coup*, [Wide Angle's](#) investigation of a 2004 coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea, a tiny West African nation newly rich in oil and infamous for corruption. *Once Upon a Coup* premieres Wednesday, August 26 at 10 p.m. on PBS (check local listings).

Wide Angle is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG – one of America's most prolific and respected public media providers.

Equatorial Guinea supplies the United States with more than 20 million barrels of oil a year, and American companies like ExxonMobil have invested billions there, despite the country's deep corruption and poor human rights record.

But U.S. energy companies are far from the only ones trying to get their hands on Equatorial Guinea's vast oil reserves. In 2004, a group of mercenaries was arrested in Zimbabwe, and among them was a British ex-special forces officer named Simon Mann. Currently sentenced to 34 years in Equatorial Guinea's notorious Black Beach prison, Mann claims to be only one piece of an international plot to gain control of Equatorial Guinea's oil by overthrowing – possibly even assassinating – its president, Teodoro Obiang.

Once Upon a Coup travels the globe to unravel the plot, which stretches from Africa to the United Kingdom, from a prime minister's son to a secretive oil trader, and from South Africa to Spain. As the coup plot plays out, yet another actor is also bidding for a share of the oil: China. Its government has showered the country with glittering new buildings and a new administrative capital in its own vigorous quest for Equatorial Guinea's oil. And when the takeover attempt falls apart, China just might be the biggest winner of them all.

Interviews with Simon Mann, President Obiang, former U.S. ambassadors John Bennett and Frank Ruddy, ex-mercenaries and Manfred Nowak, the U.N.'s special *rapporteur* on torture, among others, help to reveal some of the uncomfortable realities of oil politics in the 21st century.

Visit the ***Wide Angle*** website – www.pbs.org/wideangle – for original reporting, web-exclusive videos, and audio interviews that provide further insight into global affairs. Watch full episodes, download podcasts, and read exclusive commentary from Aaron Brown.

Wide Angle is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG. Tom Casciato is Executive Producer. Nina Chaudry is Senior Producer.

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