

GUINEA-BISSAU: IN NEED OF A STATE

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GUINEA-BISSAU: IN NEED OF A STATE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Guinea-Bissau needs a state. Its political and administrative structures are insufficient to guarantee control of its territory, assure minimum public services or counter-balance the army's political dominance. This core weakness has been at the root of recurrent political crises, coups d'état and the proliferation of criminal networks. However, despite making little progress in 35 years of independence, Guinea-Bissau now appears to have gained new momentum thanks to the signing of a stability pact by the three most important political parties in March 2007. Nevertheless, there is real risk of it becoming a narco-state and a political and administrative no-man's-land, attractive to trafficking and terrorist networks in the Maghreb. The international community should urgently support the government's efforts to consolidate democracy, reform the security sector and construct viable state structures.

In Portuguese Guinea the colonial power never built the political, administrative or bureaucratic systems capable of establishing the foundations from which a true post-colonial state could emerge. Salazar's Portugal refused to grant independence, forcing Guinea-Bissau to fight for self-rule – the only country in the region to gain independence through armed force. No leader since 1974 has tried to establish the necessary structures for a functioning democratic state. Consequently, the country's infrastructure, bureaucracy, administration, political institutions and human- and social-development indicators remain largely unaltered since the first years of independence.

The first coup d'état, after six years of independence, was a direct result of nepotism and a client-based power structure created by the one-party state. This remained the model of reference for future leaders. The first, Bernardo Joao ("Nino") Vieira, kept power for almost twenty years by incorporating the army into his survival strategy. After his fall and subsequent civil war (1998-1999), the transition to democratic rule finally broke down due to the army's influence.

Nino Vieira's elected successor, Kumba Yala, also relied heavily on the army, until it overthrew him in 2003. Vieira's return secured the army's political power. Presently, the movement towards greater reform and democracy, driven by the Stability Pact and promoted by the government of Martinho Ndafo Cabi, faces the same military resistance and is hampered by the continued absence of functioning political and administrative institutions.

The creation of a democratic state is increasingly urgent as the risk of criminalisation is growing. Cocaine trafficking from Latin America has increased tremendously in recent years, and the country has become a pivotal transit point in the route to European markets. Hundreds of kilograms of the drug are estimated to pass through each week. Revenue from the illicit trade has already corrupted military leaders and political personalities, threatening the democratic process.

Fundamental changes to the way in which the country is run are required. Above all, army reform is needed most urgently to free the political system from military interference. The stakes are considerable both for the country and the West African region, already touched by repeated political crises (Guinea) and drawn-out peace-consolidation processes (Sierra Leone, Liberia).

The international community has taken tentative steps to lend its assistance. A program of reforms addressing major security sector and public administration challenges was adopted in 2007 and, at the request of the prime minister, the country was added to the agenda of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). However, for these steps to have tangible results for the people of Guinea-Bissau, foreign partners must galvanise their efforts and seize this real opportunity for success.

Dakar/Brussels, 2 July 2008

GUINEA-BISSAU: IN NEED OF A STATE

I. INTRODUCTION

Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony, was the only country in West Africa to use force to obtain belated independence in 1974. Embryonic institutions created during the struggle against the coloniser were ill-adapted to the post-colonial period. This small country with only 1.3 million inhabitants, the least populated nation in the sub-region with the exception of the Cape Verde islands, remained without a real state.

In the last 30 years Guinea-Bissau has changed very little. Poverty is endemic and its human development indicators are at the bottom of the African league table. Civilian power is suffocated by personal animosity and the role of the armed forces in politics. In the resulting chronic political instability there has thus far been no glimpse of an end to the country's almost permanent state of crisis. The failings of the national administration are practically the same as they were at the beginning of independence and underline the state's lack of institutionalisation. Today there are only 4,400km of roads, compared to 2,771km under colonisation, and only 40km are paved. The rest are still unusable during the rainy season.¹

In the countryside "people live independently of the central state",² as they did at independence, and it is community structures, sometimes supported by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which provide basic services such as education and health care – with vast shortfalls. Nearly 11 per cent of children die during birth.³ Life expectancy is barely 46. Illiteracy affects 60 per cent of people, slow progress even when compared to the 99 per cent illiteracy rate in the final years of Portuguese colonisation. The human development index, which combines measurements on life expectancy, education and purchasing power, ranks Guinea-Bissau in 175th place out of 177 countries,

just above Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone, and below Niger and Mali, all countries in the sub-region. Guinea-Bissau's position reflects the country's inability to move beyond its post-conflict situation following the war of independence in the 1970s and the civil war of 1998-1999.

This background report explains the challenges facing Guinea-Bissau. It is the first in a series of reports which will focus on the national and international policies needed to take the country out of its incessant cycle of political crises and become a point of stability in the region.

¹ Joshua Forrest, *Lineages of State Fragility, Rural Civil Society in Guinea-Bissau* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 171-174.

² Crisis Group interview, NGO, Bissau, March 2008.

³ The infant mortality rate for 2007 was 108.72 for every 1,000 births according to the estimates of the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

II. PORTUGUESE GUINEA

Portuguese Guinea was born out of several centuries of Portuguese determination to establish itself in territory that was strategically useful for its commercial interests. At the start of the 1440s Portuguese navigators were the first Europeans to reach the coast of the future Guinea-Bissau, where they established trade links with the people in the region. Very quickly, they established themselves in the coastal areas running from the future Gambia to the future Sierra Leone to act as intermediaries between Africans and slave traders from Europe and America.

In the seventeenth century European powers fought for control of the area's trade routes and especially the ports of Cacheu and Bissau, the biggest trading posts in the region. Under pressure from rival powers, the Portuguese decided to consolidate their control of at least one port in the region. Eventually they declared Cacheu "too difficult to control" but, after a number of failures, they managed to ensure their presence in Bissau thanks to peace agreements with the local chiefs who dominated the region.⁴

In 1836 a geographical area, including notably Bissau, Cacheu and Ziguinchor, inherited the name Guiné Portugeza and became a colonial district under the authority of the Governor General of Cape Verde. A few years later, in 1870, the UK finally abandoned its claim to the island of Bolama and the southern coast of the territory thanks to the arbitration of the U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant. In 1886, in the division of Africa by Western powers, the borders of Portuguese Guinea were definitively fixed through an agreement with France which controlled the neighbouring territories.

In the meantime the abolition and progressive disappearance of slavery in the nineteenth century altered the commercial importance of the region. The Portuguese engaged in agriculture through private companies but did not put in the investment needed to create a real colonial state with a comprehensive administrative structure. Throughout the colonial period, which lasted until 1974, they created almost no physical,

administrative or social infrastructure which could have been taken over by the colonised elite upon independence. But the most significant sign of Portuguese intransigence was the country's categorical refusal to negotiate the independence of its colonies until the 1970s, eventually provoking the war of independence.

A. COLONIALISM ON THE CHEAP

The colonial presence in Portuguese Guinea was an exercise in economic exploitation at minimal financial and human cost. From the very first years of colonialism the Portuguese found it hard to establish their power and the precarious nature of their military control of the territory prevented them from forming an effective colonial administration. They were unable to establish the basis of colonial control before the end of the "pacification" of the territory in 1930. This precarious position continued throughout the colonial era. Even after they had consolidated control, the Portuguese had neither the ability nor the desire to establish a colonial administration which would necessarily require financial and human investment.

Nor did they have the means. At the start of the twentieth century Portugal had fallen far behind the rest of Europe in terms of economy and industry. Almost all its investment capability had been absorbed by Angola and Mozambique, classed as "colonies of settlement", while Guinea-Bissau (whose mineral wealth was underrated at the time) was given over to a handful of impoverished settlers and a few import/export companies.⁵ But Portugal's under-investment was also about political will. The colonial doctrine, established under the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar in power in Portugal from 1936, advocated economic exploitation: it established separate legal frameworks for settlers and the indigenous people (a system known as *indigénat*) and self-sufficiency in the colony. Without subsequent investment, the income generated from agriculture in the territory was meagre and the profits made by the colonial administration were insufficient for re-investment in the construction of local infrastructure needed for the colony's development.

1. Forced labour and evasion

From the very earliest years of colonisation the Portuguese tried to establish forced labour and annual taxes, introduced in 1899 and 1903 respectively. Officially,

⁴At the time the Papelers dominated the Bissau region. The surrounding territories were occupied by a multitude of mostly very mobile ethnic groups, including the Balanta, the Felupes, the Mandjacks, the Mandinka (present since the thirteenth century), and the Fulas (or Peulhs) who came from migrations from Futa Jallon from the end of the fifth century. For a clear, detailed description of Guinea-Bissau's ethnic groups at the time, cf. Forrest, *Lineages of State Fragility*, op. cit., Chapter 1.

⁵Cf. *ibid*, pp. 23-24; and Patrick Chabal, ed., *A History of Post-colonial Lusophone Africa* (London, 2002), Chapter 1, "Lusophone Africa in Historical and Comparative Perspective", pp. 3-17.

the authorities used forced labour for “all agricultural, commercial and industrial activities” and particularly the construction of roads.⁶ Application of these schemes was impossible before pacification. Even after the end of the wars in 1930 and despite threats of retaliation by the Portuguese, resistance remained very strong. Many Bissau-Guineans fled to the Casamance in southern Senegal to escape conscription raids. In 1935 the desertion rate was such that the colonial authorities seized increasing numbers of women and children to do the work. Emigration continued, hampering infrastructure development: 2,771km of roads were built in the country, of which only 61km were paved and therefore usable throughout the year.⁷

Tax collection was no more successful. It was performed by mobile police brigades who travelled across the country once a year to locate families and take taxes in cash or in kind, using force if necessary. There again the villagers resisted; hiding, emigrating or even burning their huts to pay less tax. So many people evaded tax that the colonial administration’s finances collapsed in 1936.⁸ Portugal balked at providing additional investment with the result that the colonial power continued to lack the infrastructure and financial means needed to create a solid administration for the country.

Even agriculture, the sole mainstay of the economy, did not receive investment. Agricultural production techniques remained under-industrialised and inefficient. Under the monopoly of Portuguese companies the cultivation of some foodstuffs, including cashew nuts, was made compulsory.⁹ The colonial administration’s income remained meagre. Indeed, the commercial deficit grew as the colony was turned into a market for products manufactured in Portugal that were not competitive on the European market. Guinean labourers had to swap these goods for their harvests, which the authorities systematically undervalued. The trafficking which developed on the border with Senegal further restricted colonial income. In the 1950s the authorities

were reportedly only able to acquire between a fifth and a quarter of the colony’s total agricultural production.¹⁰

2. The doctrine of *indigénat*

Beyond this lack of capacity, the Portuguese *indigénat* system was used as a justification for the under-development of public services. The Portuguese founded their colonial regime on the distinction in status between those who were “civilised” (the settlers) and those who were “uncivilised” (the Africans). This regime was introduced in 1917 and was similar to the French code of *indigénat*. In practice, this system allowed the authorities to absolve themselves of any political or social responsibility for the Africans and therefore further limit any investment in public services (health care, education or social services).¹¹

While the Portuguese community and Cape Verdeans enjoyed the same civil and political rights as those living in mainland Portugal, Africans were officially governed by local traditional law and therefore did not have access to the Portuguese administration’s justice system or services. Only infrastructure serving the 8,000 or so “civilised” individuals residing in the colony was developed and modernised. The geographical distribution of this infrastructure mirrored planned racial segregation. In Bissau, civil administration, paved roads, schools, running water and electricity only existed in the “white town” defined by a perimeter inside which the presence of Africans was restricted. The outskirts of the town reserved for them had no modern urban infrastructure. The rest of the country was the same, with the exception of a few roads which connected the main towns occasionally visited by colonial administrators.¹²

Only the Cape Verdeans,¹³ considered by the Portuguese to be a special case because of their mixed European and African heritage, escaped the humiliation of *indigénat* and directly benefited from the status of “assimilated” people.¹⁴ Having settled on the Guinean

⁶Peter Karibe Mendy, “Portugal’s civilizing mission in colonial Guinea-Bissau: rhetoric and reality”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, special edition “Colonial encounters between Africa and Portugal”, p. 43.

⁷The rainy season makes the remaining roads unusable. Forrest, op. cit., pp. 171-174.

⁸Forrest, *Lineages of State Fragility*, op. cit.

⁹Patrick Chabal, “National liberation in Portuguese Guinea, 1956-1974”, *African Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 318 (1981), p. 77.

¹⁰Ilda Lourenço-Lindell, *Walking the tight rope, Informal Livelihoods and Social Networks in a West African City* (Stockholm, 2002), p. 52.

¹¹Ibid, p. 50.

¹²Ibid, pp. 51-54.

¹³The uninhabited Cape Verde islands were discovered between 1460 and 1462 by the Portuguese who settled there and brought in slaves from the West African coast. Such proximity quickly created a mixed-race population and a Creole culture and language unique to the archipelago. Cf. Elisa Silva Andrade, “Cape Verde”, in Chabal, *History*, op. cit., p. 264.

¹⁴Under the *indigénat* system “assimilated people” represented an intermediary category between the civilised and uncivilised groups. It referred to non-Europeans who nevertheless

coast in the sixteenth century to act as intermediaries in the slave and merchandise trade, Cape Verdeans and their mixed-race descendants already formed a local elite well before the effective occupation of Portuguese Guinea.¹⁵ Judged to be superior to Africans, in 1930 they already occupied 27 per cent of the senior posts in the Portuguese administration in Bissau and made up 61 per cent of its junior and middle-ranking civil servants. They then came to dominate the colonial administration because the authorities actively recruited them, apparently to make up for the lack of “assimilated” people on the mainland.¹⁶ In Portuguese Guinea they were practically the only investment made in terms of human resources, and were seen by the African population as “auxiliary settlers”.¹⁷

In Portugal Salazar introduced the authoritarian New State regime in 1933.¹⁸ Intransigent defence of the Portuguese colonial empire became one of the foundations of his national doctrine. Political parties were outlawed on the mainland and in the colonies. The Portuguese state, which wanted to silence dissidents and crush all political activity, was insensitive to the wave of decolonisation sweeping Africa in the 1950s. In addition to *indigénat* and the refusal to invest in the social and economic development of the colony, the Portuguese ruled out any negotiation over independence. However, faced with claims of the right of peoples to self-determination, the Salazar regime tried to improve the image of the colonial system to better hang on to its colonies.

In 1952 Portugal changed the status of all its colonies, making them “provinces” integrated into the mainland. This subsequently enabled it to avoid abiding by the 1960 UN resolution calling for the immediate inde-

fulfilled a number of criteria to be assimilated into the civilised group. These criteria included abandoning local customs, having a regular salary and being able to read, write and speak Portuguese. The very fact that Capverdians benefited from the assimilated status even though 95 per cent were illiterate demonstrates that this category was nevertheless applied in an arbitrary manner. Cf. Karibe Mendy, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁵ However, the Cape Verdeans did not escape under-investment by the Portuguese in the economic and social sectors. The Cape Verde islands were very poor and, despite the assimilated status of their population, the illiteracy rate was 78 per cent in 1950.

¹⁶ Karibe Mendy, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, academic, Bissau, March 2008.

¹⁸ The New State was a Catholic and corporatist regime which ran Portugal until 1974. It was based on the traditional values of the Church and the army, on the cult of the nation and the leader who exercised his absolute power through a one-party system and the systematic repression of opponents by the political police.

pendence of all colonised peoples.¹⁹ But this altered status did nothing to change the lack of rights for colonised peoples who had to fulfil a series of discriminatory criteria before being able to claim the political and civil rights of mainland citizens. In 1961 Portugal continued to refuse to negotiate on independence but, to appease growing anti-colonial feeling, the status of all the inhabitants of the African colonies was raised to the rank of citizens. Nevertheless, their living conditions changed little. Forced labour continued and was only abandoned in 1970 when the new governor of Portuguese Guinea, General Antonio Spínola, introduced a belated development program, known as *Guiné Melhora*, in the areas still under his control.²⁰

This innovative program, implemented between 1968 and 1973, aimed to stem the progress of the anti-colonial movement. In strategic areas still under his control, Spínola launched development programs in the fields of education, healthcare and agriculture which were generally accompanied by financial largesse towards those living in the countryside. But the country had already fallen too far behind in all these sectors.²¹ The situation in the education sector was worse in Guinea than in any other Portuguese colony with an illiteracy rate of 99 per cent. In 1959 only 19 per cent of children received primary school education (only 26 per cent of whom attended the state schools which were only open to Portuguese or “assimilated” children. Africans received their education exclusively from Catholic missionaries in so-called “rudimentary” schools). The colony’s lone secondary school only opened in 1958 in Bissau with just 249 pupils.²²

In addition to the absence of public services, working conditions in the towns were particularly difficult. The salaries of domestic staff and manual or semi-qualified workers were half those received for the same work in neighbouring colonies. Such hardship led to repeated strikes against Portuguese companies. These social demands, seen as attempts to destabilise the status quo, were met with severe repression. In 1959 the dockworkers’ strike at Bissau port was brutally crushed by the colonial police, killing approximately 50 and injuring many. This event, known as the massacre of Pijiguiti, sparked off the armed liberation struggle.²³ Given the failings of the colonial regime and its intransigence at a time when a number of African countries

¹⁹ Resolution 1514 (XV) of the United Nations General Assembly, 14 December 1960.

²⁰ Karibe Mendy, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

²³ Lourenço-Lindell, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

had already begun negotiations for independence, rebellion seemed inevitable.

B. THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE: FOUNDATION OF POST-COLONIAL POWER

In the 1950s, amid a continent-wide wave of anti-colonial nationalism, the independence movement began to take shape in Portuguese Guinea. Amilcar Cabral, who later became the national hero, was one of the movement's leading figures. A Cape Verdean born in Portuguese Guinea, he grew up in Cape Verde before successfully studying agronomics in Portugal. He returned to Bissau in 1952, entrusted by the colonial authorities with studying the state of the colony's agricultural resources.²⁴ Two years later he tried to found the Club Desportivo in an attempt to lead a political movement under cover of a sporting organisation, but the colonial authorities categorically refused permission. In 1956 he and five other Cape Verdeans founded the African Independence Party which later became the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, (Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde, PAIGC), a political group influenced by Marxist ideology, which sought the independence of the two colonies through a shared liberation strategy.

During the war of independence the PAIGC simultaneously embodied the political, military and diplomatic branches of the anti-colonial struggle. As its military campaign progressed it created social, economic and community structures in the liberated areas. In this way it began establishing post-colonial power bases well before it acquired independence. These institutions highlighted the serious failures of the colonial regime and no doubt contributed to the victory of the party which became a de facto state. But its rough institutions and the centralisation of power within the PAIGC, a system which worked during the war, did not lead to the creation of an effective territorial administration after independence.

1. The PAIGC's binational and political/military strategy

According to the vision of Amilcar Cabral, the party's leading thinker, the PAIGC's program was binational and aimed at integrating the struggle for liberation and then independence of both Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde islands. Cabral preached the unity of Africans "from all ethnic groups, all origins and all social classes" against colonialism and highlighted the African iden-

tity of Cap Verde which, despite its privileged status under the Portuguese, was still a very poor and underdeveloped colony.

The integration of Guinean and Cape Verdean nationalism also presented mutual advantages for the two groups. Bissau-Guineans benefited from an educated Cape Verdean leadership which understood how the settlers worked and was able to lead the liberation movement politically, militarily and diplomatically. For Cape Verdeans Guinea provided a more favourable terrain for guerrilla warfare; their bare, rocky islands made an armed struggle against a stubborn and well-equipped coloniser impossible. Moreover, Guinean peasants, with many centuries of experience of resistance against the Portuguese, made useful recruits.²⁵

The PAIGC was first and foremost a political party but it progressively developed into an armed movement. It was only after a final attempt to convince the authorities to negotiate independence failed that Cabral announced on 3 August 1961 that the PAIGC was moving to military action.²⁶ Fleeing the Portuguese secret police, the party took refuge in Conakry, in neighbouring French Guinea, from where it launched its offensive with the blessing of Sékou Touré, that country's first president, in power since independence in 1958. Their refuge was eminently symbolic as French Guinea was the first colony to reject General Charles de Gaulle's offer of integration into French West Africa and thus break all diplomatic ties with France. Sékou Touré became an anti-colonialist figurehead in the region. The real struggle for the independence of Guinea-Bissau was under way.

The party began targeted sabotage in 1962 and the following year guerrilla groups attacked colonial military barracks and trading ports in Portuguese Guinea. The Portuguese response was punitive but the guerrillas were almost immediately successful. At the end of 1963 the PAIGC controlled the territory south of Geba, the Gomo islands and territorial pockets north of Geba. In 1964 the party was able to form the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces (Forças Armadas Revolucionárias do Povo, FARP) which gradually replaced the guerrilla units, thereby separating the political and military wings of the party. In July 1965 the PAIGC claimed control of 40 per cent of the territory of Portuguese

²⁴ Chabal, "National liberation in Portuguese Guinea, 1956-1974", op. cit., p. 81.

²⁵ For a comprehensive presentation of the PAIGC's political and military strategy, cf. Amilcar Cabral, *Amilcar Cabral, Unité et Lutte, volume I, l'Arme de la Théorie* et Amilcar Cabral, *Unité et Lutte, volume II, la Pratique Révolutionnaire*, texts collected by Mario de Andrade (Paris, 1975).

²⁶ Ronald H. Chilcote, "The political thought of Amilcar Cabral", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1968), p. 377.

Guinea. From August 1967, strengthened by its victories, the party announced a restructuring of the armed forces, recentralisation of the military, political and administrative bodies and a series of measures to consolidate the development of the liberated areas.²⁷

2. Party-state in the liberated areas

The PAIGC's strategy in the liberated areas took account of the need to invest in the country's development and legitimise its political power in the eyes of the population. It also sought financial and diplomatic support from other countries. At the end of the 1960s the PAIGC controlled more than 70 per cent of Guinea's territory (representing 50 per cent of the population) and introduced reconstruction programs. Under the supervision of the PAIGC new local administrative bodies were established, such as village committees, around which new economic and social institutions were built.²⁸ The initiative impressed the international community, although it was not an adequate basis for the development of national institutions after independence.

Between 1960 and 1974 nearly 130 schools were built in the liberated areas, hosting nearly 200 teachers and 15,000 students. Nearly 500 of these went to high school or university in friendly countries, mainly the Eastern bloc. A UN special mission which visited the country in April 1972 to assess the situation confirmed that the children were receiving a "comprehensive" school program. In the health-care sector the PAIGC built nine hospitals and 117 clinics, and introduced 23 mobile medical teams in 1969. A new legal system based on the direct participation of villagers began in 1966. "People's courts" judged non-criminal cases and operated at village level with judges elected by the villagers on the basis of traditional law. The economic sector was managed through "people's shops" providing the population with basic commodities in exchange for agricultural production surplus.²⁹

In fact, progress was such that in 1971 the party considered that it was in practice a party-state, ie, a party with all the attributes of a state government except for international legal recognition.³⁰ From that moment on the main strategy was to show the international community that the PAIGC was already running the country in practice. Between 1971 and 1973 the PAIGC

concentrated its efforts on preparing for independence and organising elections to form the National Assembly. Local representatives, elected by universal suffrage, chose the future members of the assembly. During this time the party invited several overseas journalists and representatives to visit the liberated areas.³¹ The strategy was a success. The 1972 UN special mission led the UN special committee to unanimously adopt a resolution stating that the PAIGC was "the sole and authentic representative of the people of this territory".³²

The PAIGC was approaching military and diplomatic victory. But in the end its work was done for it. After years of war, during which the Portuguese systematically bombarded and terrorised the African civilian population including by the use of napalm, Portuguese soldiers had become tired of colonial defeats. In Portugal the Carnation Revolution led by some of these officers, including General Spínola, overthrew Marcelo Caetano in April 1974.³³ In July Lisbon announced that it was ready to accept the independence of Guinea-Bissau and the other Portuguese colonies in Africa. The last colonial troops withdrew from the country and in October of the same year the PAIGC took control of the capital, Bissau.³⁴

Despite its success during the war the party was badly prepared for independence and the difficult tasks ahead. Not only did it need to establish a viable economy and rebuild what little physical infrastructure existed, but also create national institutions and state administration. The country's resources could be measured in natural and human terms: on the one hand, colonial rule had made the country's agricultural economy dependent on mono-cultivations which did not benefit local producers; and on the other, human resources consisted of approximately 600,000 under-educated Bissau Guineans. Almost all those who had received schooling or university education were Capverdian or mixed-race.

The country's future prospects depended entirely on the PAIGC, its legitimacy, its cohesion and its leadership.

²⁷ Lars Rudebeck, "Political mobilisation for development in Guinea Bissau", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1972), p. 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Chabal, "National liberation in Portuguese Guinea, 1956-1974", *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³¹ For an account by one of these overseas visitors, cf. Stephanie Urdang, *Fighting Two Colonialisms, Women in Guinea-Bissau* (London, 1979).

³² Today the UN special committee is still charged with studying application of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Cf. Charles C. Diggs, Jr., "Statement on the Proclamation of Independence of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau", *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1973).

³³ Salazar was forced to give way to his heir, Marcelo Caetano, in 1968 following a stroke.

³⁴ Mustafah Dhada, "The liberation war in Guinea-Bissau reconsidered", *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 62, no. 3 (1998), pp. 592-593.

After independence, however, the party's internal struggles and its neglect of the countryside led directly to the disappearance of the political and administrative infrastructure created in the liberated areas.

III. ESTABLISHMENT OF POLITICAL PATRONAGE, 1974-1980

After the departure of the Portuguese, the PAIGC had the popular and international legitimacy it needed to take the reins of national government. The prevailing mood was hopeful, and the future seemed full of possibilities. But the PAIGC's wartime structure was not suited to this new context. The party's men and women, finding themselves at the head of a state without a real bureaucratic administration, resorted to nepotism and political patronage to satisfy their personal, financial and political interests. Changes to the constitution to eliminate political adversaries became the preferred way to resolve conflicts. The rudimentary community structures which could have become the basis for a solid national bureaucracy were not given the support they needed.

A. PERSONALISED POWER SHARING

At the time of Guinea-Bissau's independence several African countries had already fallen prey to the excesses and failures of one-party states. But for the PAIGC the one-party system was the next logical step after the Marxist-inspired party-state that they proclaimed before independence. Although, unlike Angola and Mozambique, it did not claim to be Marxist but simply "democratic, anti-colonial and anti-imperial", the country adopted a political and economic development policy which was strictly socialist in nature.³⁵ Article Four of the country's first constitution was explicit: "Power is exercised by the working masses in close association with the PAIGC which provides political direction".³⁶ The one-party system was therefore introduced without argument. No one could prevent the new hierarchy from directing efforts away from building the state and towards strengthening its own power and personal interests.

Most of the sixteen new ministerial posts introduced upon independence were taken by party members who were told to find their own sources of finance. This enabled the PAIGC's elite to gradually obtain a monopoly on state resources. The Minister for Economic Planning and Coordination, Vasco Cabral, for example, obtained significant funding from Eastern bloc countries,

³⁵ Peter Karibe Mendy, "The emergence of political pluralism in Guinea-Bissau", in Fafali Koudawo and Peter Karibe Mendy (eds.), *Pluralisme Politique en Guinée-Bissau, Une Transition en Cours* (Bissau, 1996), p. 20.

³⁶ Karibe Mendy, "The emergence of political pluralism in Guinea-Bissau", op. cit., p. 25.

as well as about 100 expatriates to manage local staff. His ministry was in practice financially independent and gave him considerable bureaucratic power without any supervision. With such a method of government, nepotism and political patronage reigned. Ministers such as Fernando Fortes (postal services and telecommunications) were known for rewarding their friends by offering them administrative posts. As well as being hampered by a lack of experience in managing national structures, the party and now state elites were too busy looking for and managing their financial resources to concentrate on introducing a working bureaucracy for the country.³⁷

In the countryside the local administrative structures introduced during the war of independence were brought under the responsibility of the party-state. But in practice the rural population was increasingly detached from the central government. The village committees, the basis of state administrative structure, were either removed from local politics or dominated by traditional village chiefs without ties to the national government. Just as under Portuguese rule when the rural population had had little contact with the colonial administration, so too after independence they had little to do with the PAIGC. The state was therefore kept separate from the social and political fabric of the countryside, limiting its ability to establish an effective government.³⁸ The gulf between the government and the population persisted throughout the independence period. The leading figures were therefore guaranteed an easy ride; they were not accountable before the population and were free to continue to manage the country's affairs on the basis of narrow patronage networks.

B. CAPE VERDEAN DOMINATION: THE REASONS BEHIND THE FIRST COUP D'ÉTAT

Within the PAIGC itself, despite the rapid enrichment of its leadership, the transition from resistance movement to ruling party was not smooth. The death of Amílcar Cabral, assassinated by dissidents in 1973 before Guinea-Bissau was officially declared independent, accelerated the in-fighting. The binational project, already disputed by the party's Bissau-Guineans, began to be seriously contested and Luiz Cabral, Amílcar's half-brother who had taken over the head of the party, struggled to maintain unity. After he became presi-

dent in 1974, he strengthened his networks of personal support to stay in power, with total disregard for institutions. As well as the division between Cape Verdeans and Guineans inherited from the colonial period and maintained by divisions within the PAIGC during the struggle for independence, it was Luiz Cabral's increasingly repressive rule which provoked the first coup d'état, barely six years after independence.

While trying to mobilise support for the war of independence the PAIGC had already had to deal with the negative perception Guineans held of Cape Verdeans. In the countryside in particular they were widely seen as privileged collaborators in the colonial regime. During the war the nature of the collaboration between the two groups entrenched the division. The Cape Verdeans constituted the leadership of the party and the Bissau-Guineans, particularly the Balanta (the majority ethnic group at the time), were recruited in the rural areas to be the "infantrymen of the armed struggle".³⁹ As independence drew closer the party's majority Balanta base began to demonstrate increasing suspicion of the binational project which, according to some, "risked transforming the independent country into a Cape Verdean colony".⁴⁰

Amílcar Cabral, the uncontested leader of the PAIGC, had been able to control the ill-feeling directed against Cape Verdeans within the party. His assassination by dissatisfied Balanta just before independence, although undoubtedly the result of manipulation by the Portuguese secret police, was nonetheless a reminder of this tension and a sign that it could not be contained for much longer. Upon independence resentment of Cape Verdeans, who continued to occupy most of the high-level posts in the party organisation and now the post-colonial government, increased among Bissau-Guineans. The widespread feeling was clear: "Guineans had sacrificed more lives during the struggle so they should have the high-level positions".⁴¹

Dissatisfaction was even stronger within the mainly Balanta army. In an attempt to deal with the anti-Cape Verdean resentment, Luiz Cabral tried to consolidate his existing power by placating those close to him. Between 1977 and 1979 he promoted several Cape Verdean soldiers who were loyal to him but seen in the army as being relatively inexperienced and therefore unworthy of promotion. Then in February 1980 military ranks were introduced for the first time, replacing the guerrilla system which only distinguished between

³⁷ Joshua Forrest, "Guinea Bissau since independence: a decade of domestic power struggles", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1987), pp. 97-100.

³⁸ Cf. Joshua Forrest, "Guinea-Bissau", in Chabal, *History*, op. cit., p. 249.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, academic, Bissau, March 2008.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

commanders and soldiers. The move was seen by the Balanta as yet another way of promoting Cape Verdeans to the detriment of other, more worthy soldiers.⁴²

Gradually the division between the two groups manifested itself through the rivalry between the Cape Verdean president, Luiz Cabral, and the head of the armed forces, Joao Bernardo Vieira, known as Nino, a hero of the war of independence who had distinguished himself by his skill and courage in combat. Nino Vieira was a Papel but his personal and military background gave him significant legitimacy in the eyes of the Balanta. He had been “adopted” by a Balanta family and the two ethnic groups had been allies since leading several joint battles against the Portuguese in the period before effective occupation of the territory. The mainly Balanta army therefore rallied behind Vieira to express its dissatisfaction.

Luiz Cabral had the support of the Cape Verdean party leadership and administration. But his regime met increasing resistance among the population. This growing dissatisfaction became tacit support for Vieira and the Balanta soldiers.⁴³ Cabral launched an unrealistic industrial development policy which led the country into an economic crisis. The state became bankrupt despite new and very unpopular taxes imposed on the peasants. He subsequently changed the constitution, subordinating the new national institutions to his own political interests. He became increasingly dependent on his National Security Minister Antonio Buscardini, a Cape Verdean known for hunting down and executing several alleged Portuguese spies during the struggle for liberation. Arbitrary arrests and summary executions became common practice and opposition was silenced.⁴⁴ Two mass cemeteries containing about 500 bodies executed under Luiz Cabral’s regime were discovered a year after he fell from power, confirming the brutality of his repression.⁴⁵

Cabral tried to neutralise Vieira by manipulating institutional rules. In 1979 he relieved him of his functions as head of the armed forces. Then on 4 November 1980 he changed the constitution to abolish the position of Chief Commissioner, also held by Vieira, thereby automatically making himself supreme head of the armed forces. At the same time some commanders in the army known to be loyal to Vieira were replaced

by those close to Cabral. The non-Cape Verdean body of the army was obviously hostile to these replacements and anger mounted.⁴⁶

In 1980 the PAIGC accepted a clause preventing the president of Cape Verde from being Bissau-Guinean while eligibility for the presidency of Guinea-Bissau, open to Cape Verdeans, did not change.⁴⁷ This was an affront too far for Bissau-Guineans. Nino Vieira, who already had the active support of the army and the population, took advantage of the situation to lead a coup d’état on 14 November 1980. He had apparently learnt just beforehand that Luiz Cabral was preparing an imminent “clean-up” operation to rid himself of his enemies within the army.⁴⁸ The binational experiment immediately ended and Guinea-Bissau’s Cape Verdeans were quickly removed from high-level posts in the administration and the army. Many of them left the country.

At the time, the coup d’état was enthusiastically welcomed by Bissau-Guineans, but they would regret it later. As one source explained, “we had forgotten that we needed an elite”.⁴⁹ By purging Cape Verdeans from the leadership, the country lost most of its technical and administrative skills. Their replacements did not have the training needed to complete construction of the state; their only experience was of the political patronage established by Luiz Cabral.

⁴² Forrest, “Guinea Bissau since independence: a decade of domestic power struggles”, op. cit., pp. 101-102.

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 103-104.

⁴⁵ Karibe Mendy, “The emergence of political pluralism in Guinea-Bissau”, op. cit., p. 32; Patrick Chabal, “Party, state and socialism in Guinea-Bissau”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1983), p. 202.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Forrest, “Guinea-Bissau”, in Chabal, *History*, op. cit., p. 251.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean senior civil servant, Bissau, March 2008.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

IV. THE FIRST REIGN OF NINO VIEIRA

The first coup d'état set the tone. Vieira proceeded to act exactly as his predecessor had done, subordinating state institutions to his personal political priorities and strengthening his networks of support by any means necessary. He also proved as good a strategist at the head of the country as he had been during the resistance and secured a first reign lasting nearly twenty years. This period was peppered with real or imagined attempted coups d'état and power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of the military. To hold on to the presidency, Vieira had to constantly maintain his popularity with the army while eliminating his enemies.

Despite these efforts, he eventually lost the support of the Balanta soldiers. Moves towards a more democratic political system confirmed the emergence of a new rival who was able to gain their confidence. Unable to count on the loyalty of the army, Vieira inadvertently provoked a conflict in his search for overseas support. The subsequent war was certainly destructive for the country but the greatest legacy of Vieira's reign was the institutionalisation of the army as the guarantor of the post-colonial government.

A. THE ARMY AT THE HEART OF POWER

Unlike Luiz Cabral, Nino Vieira drew most of his support from the army. As soon as he came to power he suspended and abolished the State Council and the Council of Ministers which he replaced with a Revolutionary Council presided over by himself. Seven of the nine members were military figures and not Cape Verdean. The Revolutionary Council took decisions concerning the party and country, under the direct authority of Vieira.⁵⁰

Since soldiers had enabled him to take power, he had to do whatever he could to maintain their loyalty. However, governing a country this way is inherently risky. While some of the most experienced soldiers managed to be promoted quickly, many others saw their ambitions frustrated. Only a lucky handful managed to obtain ministerial posts.

In June 1983, frustration peaked when a food shortage forced many soldiers to fall back on their families for food, having received an insufficient rice ration. Anger was beginning to grow and in the same month it became apparent that some young officers were

preparing a coup. To avoid being overthrown Vieira promised new uniforms and granted the army new privileges. Henceforth they had first call on imported rice and had priority over the rest of the population for other basic goods such as oil and butter. At the same time Vieira prepared a demonstration of strength to dissuade possible rebels. He had military barriers installed across the city and authorised a Soviet warship to be stationed at Bissau port for twice as long as originally planned, in case intervention was necessary. A crisis was finally avoided.⁵¹

Shortly afterwards Commander Joao de Silva, one of those responsible for the initial protests, was removed from his post. Vieira then created a National Security Council, whose members he selected and had direct command of, to protect the country (and himself) from other attempts at destabilisation.⁵² Having subdued the putschists, he tackled the rest of the civilian administration. A series of high-level changes in 1983 and 1984 ended with the replacement of ministers and their deputies with senior figures from the PAIGC who were loyal to Vieira. In practice the president retained all decision-making powers. In July 1984 he appointed eleven secretaries of state, all loyal to him, and changed the staff of the Interior Ministry to consolidate his control over territorial administration.⁵³

But these autocratic moves did not eliminate all his rivals. Victor Saude Maria, foreign affairs minister upon independence and then prime minister from March 1982, emerged as an opponent in 1981. Acting as Luiz Cabral did before him, Vieira managed to abolish the post of Deputy Secretary General of the PAIGC which should have gone to Maria and would have granted him considerable power within the party. In March 1984 he organised elections within the National Assembly which voted for the abolition of the post of prime minister and then arrested Maria for an attempted coup d'état. The post of prime minister was replaced by a vice-president of the Revolutionary Council, directly under the authority of Vieira.⁵⁴

After Maria, the next threat to Nino Vieira's hold on power was a Balanta soldier: Paulo Correia. He too had distinguished himself during the struggle for liberation, was widely supported in the army and had already attempted a coup d'état in March 1982. In response to that failed attempt, Vieira executed the commander of the battalion which had supported Correia's offensive. However, he only moved the latter from the post of

⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 108-110.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 107.

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 110-111.

⁵⁰ Forrest, "Guinea Bissau since independence", op. cit., p. 105.

minister of the armed forces to that of rural development to distance him from the army without provoking a hostile reaction in the ranks. But the soldiers were unhappy. To appease them while keeping his rival under his control, he finally appointed him vice-president.

In November 1985 Correia again tried to take power by force. He was arrested before achieving his coup d'état, along with a dozen accomplices, all Balanta. A total of 53 people were subsequently accused. Nine months later Correia and ten others were sentenced to death.⁵⁵ Appeals for clemency were made by the international community, particularly Pope John Paul II, the president of Portugal at the time, Mario Soares, and Amnesty International.⁵⁶ Vieira did not give in to the pressure. On 6 July 1986 Correia and five other accused men, all Balanta, were executed.

Vieira's political strategy, balancing distribution of privileges with repression within the army, enabled him to stay in power for nearly twenty years but it also induced considerable ill-feeling. The execution of the six Balanta was seen as an attempt at ethnic cleansing to prevent Balanta from taking political power and led to a significant loss of support among the military. Fear of coups d'état continued to dominate the country's politics throughout the 1980s.

B. MOVING TOWARDS DEMOCRACY – FAILED RENEWAL

Economic liberalisation, which began in 1983 with the adoption of the economic stabilisation program and continued in 1986 with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) structural adjustment program, opened the door to pressure from international donors.⁵⁷ The country's democratisation became an essential condition for the financial aid on which the country, in structural economic crisis, was totally dependent. Nino Vieira no longer enjoyed solid military and political support and so started to look elsewhere. In January 1990 he freed the 50 or so people sentenced for their participation in the 1985 coup d'état. In January 1991 Guinea-Bissau joined the wave of democratisation that was sweeping the continent as Vieira announced the country's move to a multi-party political system. Despite this, and despite the party's choice of a semi-presidential system, Vieira's regime remained very authoritarian.

The constitution was changed on 8 May 1991. Article Four, which had introduced the one-party system, was abolished. Two years later there were already eleven opposition parties. The first multi-party democratic elections were held in July 1994 without violence, and certainly without surprises. The PAIGC and its president, Vieira, were re-elected to the National Assembly and the presidency. About 100 international observers and more than 30 overseas journalists were present for the vote. The elections were judged to be transparent, fair and free. Most of the 400,000 people registered to vote did so; 88.91 per cent participated in the legislative election and 89.33 per cent in the presidential election.

Nonetheless, the elections did reveal some political changes and particularly the repercussions of repression. In the second round of the presidential election Vieira faced a young Kumba Yala who had reached that stage thanks to the support of Balanta soldiers. The key to attracting them and fostering opposition to Vieira was the 1986 executions. The six victims became the symbol of the persecution of the Balanta.⁵⁸ Vieira counterattacked by basing his campaign on a warning: a Balanta should not be elected head of state because he would run the country on a purely ethnic basis. Vieira won, by a narrow margin, with 52 per cent of the vote but the question of ethnicity had found a permanent home in national politics.

After Vieira's victory nothing changed in the way power was distributed or used. However, the country had made an important institutional choice. The second Extraordinary Congress of the PAIGC in February 1991 had opted for a semi-presidential political system, similar to the Portuguese model. The 1994 Guinea-Bissau constitution mirrored this system and established the right of the president of the republic to dissolve the National Assembly in the event of a serious political crisis. In contrast, the National Assembly could not force the president to resign but could withdraw its confidence in him. The prime minister, head of the government, was to be appointed by the president, taking into account the balance of forces in the National Assembly. Finally, the government was to be responsible before the National Assembly which could pass a vote of no confidence against it. The differences with regard to the authoritarian practices of the Vieira regime were clear.

In practice, the Assembly had been a powerless symbolic institution since its creation in 1973. Until 1991 it had been unable to pass votes of no confidence and could only "influence the policies of the government if

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Karibe Mendy, "The emergence of political pluralism in Guinea-Bissau", *op. cit.*, p. 34; and Crisis Group interview, a Bissau-Guinean diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

⁵⁷ Cf. Karibe Mendy, "The emergence of political pluralism in Guinea-Bissau", *op. cit.*, pp. 49-56.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

the government accepted such influence".⁵⁹ Following the introduction of democracy, the Assembly became a multi-party body, but the PAIGC, Vieira's party, had kept the majority of seats. Opposition parties were still weak. The PAIGC won 62 seats out of 102; the remainder were divided between the new opposition parties, including Kumba Yala's Social Reform Party (Partido para a Renovação Social, PRS). The opposition parties were not strong enough to enable the institution to oppose the power of the president.⁶⁰

Vieira maintained absolute power over the government and continued in his dictatorial ways. He appointed special guards for presidential protection, sent the police to watch or threaten his opponents and increasingly isolated himself from the public and members of his own party.⁶¹ But it was eventually from the ranks of the military rather than political opponents that problems emerged.

After the elections the budgetary crisis continued, as did the accumulation of unpaid salaries for soldiers and civil servants. Despite recent democratic momentum the Vieira regime had been in power for nearly twenty years and popular dissatisfaction was growing. Strikes, which had been illegal under the one-party system but reinstated as democracy was introduced, became an increasingly common means to express social frustration.

C. THE ARMED CONFLICT: 7 JUNE 1998 – 7 MAY 1999

In July 1997 Guinea-Bissau entered the monetary zone of the Communauté Financière d'Afrique and began using the CFA franc as its currency. This economic area incorporates the countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU),⁶² the other members of which are all French-speaking. Immediately afterwards, Vieira, still seeking outside financial and political support, moved closer to Senegal. His dogged determination to look abroad to buttress his position inflamed opposition. His dismissal of the chief of staff finally triggered war.

At the time the government of neighbouring Senegal was confronted with an armed rebellion in the southern Casamance region which was in turn disrupting the country's internal politics. President Abdou Diouf put pressure on Vieira to end the weapons trafficking between some members of the Bissau-Guinean army and Casamance rebels of the Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC).⁶³ In reality, Nino Vieira and his entourage were directly involved in the trafficking. To protect himself from suspicion, he diverted blame to his right-hand man and chief of staff, General Ansumane Mané. Mané was officially accused of negligence, dismissed and placed under house arrest. In an act of flagrant hypocrisy, the president ordered a parliamentary inquiry to look into arms trafficking with the MFDC. Seeking to protect himself against the wrath of the Senegalese, Nino Vieira made a mistake. Several witnesses to the events confirm that "Ansumane Mané would never have led the rebellion if Vieira had not dismissed him".⁶⁴

The conflict began on 7 June 1998 and soon the rebels occupied the capital. Calling themselves the Junta Militar they offered via a radio message to negotiate with the president. Vieira refused and the Junta demanded his resignation and the formation of a transitional government to prepare new elections.⁶⁵ Fighting broke out in the capital between the Junta and loyalist forces. The population had already begun to flee and did not take part in a conflict they considered to be "a quarrel between two old PAIGC colleagues".⁶⁶ Vieira and Mané had indeed been very close. They had fought side by side during the war of independence and together led the coup d'état against Luiz Cabral in 1980. Despite a series of ceasefires and attempts at national reconciliation Vieira still refused to leave power and prolonged the war for nearly a year.

⁵⁹ Patrick Chabal, *Political Domination in Africa. Reflections on the Limits of Power* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 100, quoted in Karibe Mendy, "The emergence of political pluralism in Guinea-Bissau", op. cit., p. 30.

⁶⁰ Carlos Cardoso, "Les spécificités de la transition démocratique", in Johannes Augel and Carlos Cardoso, *Transição Democrática na Guiné-Bissau, Bissau* (Lisbon, 1996), pp. 64-67.

⁶¹ Forrest, "Guinea-Bissau", in Chabal, *History*, op. cit., p. 254.

⁶² The WAEMU now includes eight countries: Benin, Burkina-Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo and Guinea-Bissau.

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Dakar, March 2008. The MFDC is an independence movement which launched an armed rebellion against the Senegalese government in 1982. Casamance borders Gambia and Guinea-Bissau and the various factions of the MFDC have always retained rear bases in these two countries to evade the Senegalese army.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean senior civil servant, confirmed by a diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

⁶⁵ Gérald Gaillard, "La guerre en son contexte ; histoire d'une erreur politique", in *Revista de Estudos Guineenses* (2000), Numéro Especial 7 de Junho, p. 233.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, academic, Bissau, March 2008. Cf. too Gaillard, "La guerre", op. cit., p. 235.

1. Regional intervention, a catalyst of war

On 9 June Lansana Conté, President of Guinea-Conakry⁶⁷ and a personal friend of Vieira, sent helicopters and 400 men to support him. More importantly, Senegal sent its 2,200-strong Senegalese Expeditionary Force to crush the junta.⁶⁸ Officially, a defence agreement between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau provided for military intervention by Senegal in the event of overseas aggression only. The military rebellion did not fall within the scope of this definition but Abdou Diouf wanted to seize the opportunity to clear out the MFDC's rear bases in Guinea-Bissau and resolve the Casamance problem once and for all. For the Bissau-Guinean population, foreign military intervention and, above all, the demonstration of Senegalese force were seen as an aggression, even an invasion.⁶⁹ A large number of former combatants joined the Junta to help it fight the foreign forces.⁷⁰ The conflict had now gone beyond an internal quarrel between factions of the army and had become an all-out war which would last eleven months.

On 11 June the Portuguese government organised a massive evacuation of inhabitants, mainly the elite, from Bissau. Approximately 2,200 people left for Dakar on a merchant ship. On 13 June the Senegalese attacked. The US embassy was hit by a shell and caught fire. Shortly afterwards towns in the interior were overrun with displaced people. After several attempted negotiations, a ceasefire was finally signed on 26 August 1998 in Praia, the Cap Verde capital. It was broken on 9 October and fighting began again a few days later in Bissau. After several appeals for the signature of an agreement Ansumane Mané and Nino Vieira finally met in Banjul on 31 October 1998.⁷¹

The meeting ended with an embrace which was supposed to seal the reconciliation of the two friends. Peace agreements were signed on 1 November 1998. They provided in particular for the withdrawal of Senegalese and Guinean troops, to be replaced by 1,450 soldiers from the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), and the introduction of a government of national unity charged with organising elections. A government of national unity was

indeed formed on 12 January 1999 but Vieira refused to leave office.⁷²

At the same time the peacekeeping force supposed to re-establish order in Bissau was being prepared. It left Dakar on board a French ship, the *Sirocco*, and reached Bissau on the night of 31 January. France had already given its military support to the loyalist and Senegalese forces, having sent a few soldiers and even, according to rumour, several mercenaries.⁷³ This provoked the anger of the Portuguese who considered Guinea-Bissau to be their legitimate sphere of influence and were themselves directly involved in the conflict, supporting General Mané. In July 1998 the Executive Secretary of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had denounced "Portugal's colonial behaviour" and accused the country of supplying logistical support to the Junta rebels.⁷⁴ On 4 February 1999 during an official visit to Lisbon the French president, Jacques Chirac, denied any French involvement in the conflict in Guinea-Bissau. However, while he was addressing the Portuguese parliament a demonstration against "French interference" took place outside the building.⁷⁵

2. The departure of Nino Vieira

Fighting persisted after the arrival of the peacekeeping force. Eventually another meeting took place between Vieira and Mané on 15 February in the presence of the European Union. Before the world's television cameras Vieira embraced his old friend for the second time.⁷⁶ But he still refused to leave office. The Senegalese soldiers left Bissau without resolving either the crisis or the Casamance problem. In Dakar the political opposition, led by Abdoulaye Wade, had been fiercely critical of the Senegalese army's financial and human losses when it was supposed to have "crushed the junta quickly".⁷⁷

One Portuguese diplomat noted perceptively that "the Guineans had managed to oust our 30,000 armed men from Portuguese Guinea so why did the Senegalese think they would be able to subdue them with 2,000

⁶⁷ Former French Guinea is usually known as Guinea. It is referred to as Guinea Conakry in this report simply to avoid confusion with Guinea-Bissau.

⁶⁸ Gaillard "La guerre", op. cit., p. 234.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, academic, Bissau, March 2008.

⁷⁰ Some of the Casamance MFDC joined the fight on the side of the military Junta.

⁷¹ Gaillard, "La guerre", op. cit., pp. 239-241.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 232-251. The presence of French mercenaries in Bissau during the war was also confirmed by several Crisis Group interlocutors in Bissau.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 238; also Adekeye Adebajo, "Building peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau", International Peace Academy occasional paper series, London (2002), p. 122-123.

⁷⁵ Gaillard, "La guerre", op. cit., p. 238.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Dakar, March 2008.

men. Didn't they learn anything from history?"⁷⁸ The Junta, supported by former combatants and many civilians, managed to expel the invaders. But Vieira still refused to leave and ruled alongside the government of national unity while refusing to actually collaborate with it.

On 4 and 5 May 1999 a round table of donor countries for Guinea-Bissau was held in Geneva. The prime minister appointed by the Junta, Francisco Fadul, extracted a promise of \$200 million to rebuild the country and to support preparation of the elections planned for November 1999, on condition that disarmament be completed. Again Vieira resisted, delaying the disarmament of the 600-strong presidential guard. The Junta again declared hostilities on 6 May 1999, essentially to disarm Vieira. He was quickly beaten. The Junta took control of the capital the following day. The presidential palace was taken, pillaged by the crowd and burnt. In the meantime Vieira escaped and was received at the Portuguese embassy. The president had finally been overthrown.⁷⁹

Nino Vieira's twenty-year reign had firmly established the army at the heart of power. His supposed move towards democracy had been enacted in bad faith, and had not provided an opportunity for real change. The authoritarian and personalised model of exercising power remained intact. Vieira's departure therefore brought with it great promises of change. But, following the war, the country's social and financial situation was desperate. The capital's infrastructure was significantly damaged and whole swathes of the country's educated elite had emigrated.

The country now needed major reconstruction as well as long-term economic development. The resources to tackle these problems were practically non-existent. State coffers were empty and competent human resources cruelly lacking. The challenge was enormous and required robust political will, significant financial aid and rigorous management of state affairs to overcome the institutional failings. Kumba Yala won the right to tackle this challenge. But, as with the introduction of democracy, a change at the president's palace did not fundamentally alter the way power was exercised in Guinea-Bissau.

V. THE POLITICAL HANDOVER: A DOUBLE FAILURE

Kumba Yala had little experience of power when he became president. Expectations were nonetheless considerable. The people looked to their new leader to rebuild the country, devastated by the war, and institute major changes relative to Vieira's regime. However, Kumba Yala followed to the letter the political strategy of his predecessors. Just like Vieira at the start of his reign, most of his support came from the army. This time the main Balanta body of the army, which until then had been the power behind the scenes, was pushed to the front of the stage. The military hierarchy was no longer merely the main support base of the civilian government or a tool for political transition. It became directly involved in overseeing politics.

Kumba Yala's rule was a double failure: first, his catastrophic management of the country's affairs prevented any reconstruction; second, it led directly to the return of Nino Vieira. Poor management and growing isolation from the international community drained state finances, and the general deterioration of the country's institutions and infrastructure quickly provoked a popular coup d'état. Longed-for changes never happened, but Balanta control of the army and of politics became more and more evident. General Tagme Na Wai, appointed chief of staff at the request of most soldiers during the transition period, became the country's effective leader.

A. KUMBA YALA IN POWER: THE REVENGE OF THE BALANTA?

The transition government organised elections for 28 November 1999 as planned. The results were historic: for the first time the PAIGC lost control of the assembly in the legislative election. Kumba Yala's PRS won 38 seats out of 102 and became the largest parliamentary party. The PAIGC lost its aura of legitimacy derived from the colonial struggle, and with it any sense of superiority over the new parties which had emerged in the 1990s. The presidential election confirmed the trend. The second round in January 2000 pitted Kumba Yala against Malam Bacai Sanha from the PAIGC.⁸⁰ The latter was a fierce opponent of Vieira within the party but that was not enough. The people wanted radical change and elected Kumba Yala who won with 72 per cent of the vote.

⁷⁸ View reported to Crisis Group, diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

⁷⁹ Cf. Gaillard, "La guerre", op. cit., pp. 248-251.

⁸⁰ Cf. Forrest, "Guinea-Bissau", in Chabal, *History*, op. cit., p. 258.

More than just a change of political leadership, Kumba Yala's victory was seen as a real accomplishment for the Balanta. After being excluded from the highest political posts under Cape Verdean leadership and then under Vieira who had monopolised power despite the importance of the army, Kumba Yala was the first Balanta to lead the country.⁸¹

Although this did not imply that there was a "dream of Balanta hegemony in itself",⁸² Kumba Yala, like his predecessors, proceeded to consolidate his power by strengthening his network of personal support which was first and foremost based on this ethnic group. He immediately appointed a Balanta prime minister. The only bishop in the country, an Italian, killed during the war, was replaced by a Balanta. But above all the majority of the army, whose ranks had swelled during the war, was Balanta. A series of promotions was carried out and many soldiers became generals. Some feared that the "balantisation" of all branches of power could become a source of destabilisation.⁸³ But as the experiences of Nino Vieira and Luiz Cabral showed, the main risk to the country's stability came from the practice of governing outside the country's institutional frameworks.

Despite his solid base among Balanta soldiers, Kumba Yala had a rival in Ansumane Mané who was still a respected figure and feared within the army. Mané did not have personal political ambition and refused to be appointed to the post of Ministerial Advisor, although five other officers from the Junta accepted posts in government. He preferred to remain independent; he said he wanted to keep a supervisory role in politics and that he was ready to intervene militarily to put things right if he considered it necessary. Kumba Yala did not appreciate this threat.⁸⁴

In November 2000 Mané refused the appointment of several Balanta officers and declared himself chief of staff. He was killed before the end of the month by Kumba Yala's men. With the death of Ansumane Mané, a Mandinka, "another layer of the non-Balanta military elite was swept away".⁸⁵ Henceforth, the Balanta ran the army unchallenged.⁸⁶

B. BUDGETARY CRISIS AND CHRONIC INSTABILITY

Having disposed of Ansumane Mané, Kumba Yala was free to manage the affairs of the state as he wished. The results were disastrous. "He acted like a king in his kingdom. Money no longer passed through the country's banking system".⁸⁷ The members of the PRS now at the head of the bureaucracy had no experience of managing a state and few had any technical skills. The few public policies introduced were mostly incoherent and ineffective. Furthermore, the unpredictable behaviour of Kumba Yala, who had previously had a reputation for being a skilled and charismatic orator, increasingly concerned the country's population and international partners.

He made several incoherent speeches on television and, among other eccentricities, proposed, without apparent reason, moving the capital to Buba, a town about 200 km from Bissau. On another occasion he threatened to invade Gambia. His escapades quickly led to a deterioration of relations with the IMF which suspended budgetary assistance to Guinea-Bissau and abandoned efforts to introduce its poverty reduction plan. Without budgetary support, civil servant salary arrears reached unsustainable levels; they went un-paid for ten consecutive months.⁸⁸

This set the scene for a new political crisis. From 2000 the PRS was no longer part of a coalition and was governing alone in the Assembly. Between 2001 and 2003 Yala appointed and fired four prime ministers and several dozen senior civil servants. In November 2002 he dissolved parliament and called early legislative elections. Due to a lack of funds they did not take place within the time limit provided for in the constitution and the country was without a government for several months. During the same period judges at the Supreme Court were dismissed for political reasons and the increasingly unpopular regime endured several attempted coups d'état.⁸⁹

Finally, on 14 September 2003 Kumba Yala was overthrown by a coup d'état led by General Verissimo Correia Seabra. The political crisis and general bewilderment at Yala's method of rule were such that the event was

⁸¹ Crisis Group interviews, Bissau-Guinean and overseas academics and diplomats, Bissau, March 2008.

⁸² Crisis Group interview, academic, Bissau, March 2008.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

⁸⁶ The chief of staff, General Verissimo Seabra Correia, a Papel and former number two in the military junta led by Ansumane Mané, was still there but he also disappeared, assassinated

shortly after overthrowing Kumba Yala. See the section below.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and World Bank, Bissau, March 2008.

⁸⁹ "Guinea-Bissau country profile", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007, p. 6.

welcomed with general enthusiasm in Guinea-Bissau and the international community. The latter condemned the principle of taking power by force but the UN Secretary-General recognised that it “has happened at a time when democratic standards were being seriously flouted and represents the conclusion of a situation which had become untenable”.⁹⁰

For the second time a transition government was formed to prepare elections. Enrique Rosa was named interim president and Artur Sanha, former secretary general of the PRS, was made prime minister. According to some, the Balanta military hierarchy engineered his appointment to keep a minimum of control over the government.⁹¹ General Seabra was killed in October 2004 by a group of rebel soldiers apparently protesting against unpaid salaries and corruption within the military hierarchy. General Tagme Na Wai, a Balanta, was appointed in his place, at the request of most soldiers.

C. THE RETURN OF NINO VIEIRA: THE MILITARY HIERARCHY IN POWER

The legislative elections were held as planned in March 2004. The PAIGC returned as the majority party in the Assembly and a new government was formed under the leadership of Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior. The presidential election was prepared for 2005. The transition charter excluded the candidature of Nino Vieira and Kumba Yala but both of them eventually participated. Yala, despite the recent coup d'état, was still head of a party which represented a third of parliament, and Vieira returned from several years in exile with the financial and logistical support of Guinea-Conakry and, above all, Senegal.⁹²

After the fall of Kumba Yala the army took back the reins of power, a shift symbolically demonstrated by the arrival of Vieira in the country for the election. The PAIGC strongly contested Vieira's candidacy; he had been officially accused of criminal offences by the Assembly shortly before he went into exile. But Vieira had convinced Senegal to support him. He presented himself as a more reliable ally than Kumba Yala, who had isolated himself completely from the international

community, and claimed to be able to control the army.⁹³ General Tagme Na Wai, no doubt with Kumba Yala's agreement, preferred to manage Vieira's return to keep him under his control rather than give him room to manoeuvre and destabilise the country from overseas. Vieira therefore returned to the capital in June 2005, escorted by close protection troops.⁹⁴

At the presidential election held on 19 June of the same year Malam Bacai Sanha from the PAIGC ran for the second time against Kumba Yala,⁹⁵ and for the first time against Vieira who participated as an independent candidate. This time Malam Bacai received the most votes but not enough to avoid a second round. To general surprise, Kumba Yala, who had come third in the first round, supported Vieira and he immediately gained the precious votes of the Balanta. Vieira therefore won against Malam Bacai and became the democratically elected president of Guinea-Bissau for the second time.

International observers declared the election to be free and transparent. But the influence of the soldiers had been decisive. Concerned that victory for the PAIGC candidate could lead to their marginalisation, they struck a deal with Kumba Yala to offer victory to their old enemy, Nino Vieira. But there were conditions attached. As a senior civil servant in the country put it “the soldiers cut a deal with Vieira to spare his life and return him to power but they will never give him a free rein. At present the army is running the country”.⁹⁶

More specifically, the army's Chief of Staff, General Tagme Na Wai, took control. However, the army's support was divided; some soldiers who had fought for Vieira during the Ansumane Mané rebellion in 1999 remained loyal. Even among the Balanta, General Tagme Na Wai and Commander Bubu Natsu, navy chief of staff, both had their own loyalists. But despite these divisions, the numerical domination of the Balanta gave the general considerable power. His strong character and his very direct way of speaking earned him the reputation of being a headstrong but principled man.

Tagme Na Wai quickly gained a high public profile and regularly intervened in affairs of state. But he also, paradoxically, appeared determined to enforce democratic rules. In February 2008, for example, he threatened

⁹⁰ Speech by Kofi Annan to the United Nations on 18 December 2003, quoted in Patrícia Magalhães Ferreira, “Guinea-Bissau, between conflict and democracy”, *African Security Review*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2004).

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean senior civil servant, Bissau, March 2008.

⁹² “Guinea-Bissau country profile”, op. cit., p. 7; and Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean senior civil servant, Bissau, March 2008.

⁹³ Crisis Group interview, a diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Bissau-Guinean senior civil servant, Bissau, March 2008.

⁹⁵ He had already run during the 2003 presidential election won by Kumba Yala.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean senior civil servant, Bissau, March 2008.

to arrest politicians who did not respect the results of future elections.⁹⁷ His relationship with Nino Vieira remains ambiguous. A former victim of the president (the latter allegedly tortured him before imprisoning him after the attempted coup d'état in 1985), he seemed to have reached an agreement with his former persecutor. Vieira was allowed to live and manage affairs of state, as long as he did not make any political decisions which could threaten the army's interests.⁹⁸

This entente with Tagme Na Wai also gave President Vieira sufficient freedom to continue to disrupt politics in the country by settling personal scores. In September 2006 Vieira dismissed the prime minister appointed by the Assembly before the presidential election, Carlos Gomes Junior, for entirely personal reasons. Gomes Junior, a rich businessman, had facilitated business transactions of behalf of Vieira. But when Vieira returned from exile Gomes Junior refused to give back property he had acquired for him.⁹⁹

In a manner which was fairly representative of the way the country was operating, the situation again deteriorated. Shortly after being dismissed, Carlos Gomes Junior mentioned during a radio interview that the president had ordered the assassination of former members of the junta which had deposed him in 1999. An arrest warrant was immediately issued against Gomes Junior for defamation. Gomes Junior, allegedly fearing for his life, took refuge in the premises of UNOGBIS, the UN's peace-building support office established in 2001. The UN Special Representative, Shola Omoregie, undertook mediation and negotiated with the president. Vieira finally withdrew the arrest warrant against Gomes Junior and guaranteed his safety. The latter eventually left UNOGBIS offices more than two weeks after first taking refuge.¹⁰⁰

The crisis demonstrated once again that the institutions in Guinea-Bissau were entirely subject to the individual agendas of the political elite. Donors saw in Vieira's behaviour an unwillingness to consolidate state institutions and assure the country's political stability. Gomes Junior had renewed contact with the IMF but dialogue was again broken.¹⁰¹ Nine years after the end of the war none of the challenges of reconstruction had been met either by Kumba Yala, whose manage-

ment of state finances had proven catastrophic, or by Nino Vieira who at least did not have the excuse of inexperience in power. Vieira's return and his victory in the presidential election appeared to be a logical continuation of several decades of penetration by the army into the structures of civilian power. Henceforth, the military hierarchy openly controlled the political arena and established a president who followed its orders. The country teeters permanently on the brink of further institutional and political crisis.

⁹⁷ Cf. "Evolution of the situation in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of UNOGBIS", Secretary General's report, S/2008/181, 17 March 2008.

⁹⁸ All Crisis Group interlocutors in Bissau agree on this.

⁹⁹ The incident is publicly notorious in Bissau. Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean senior civil servant, Bissau, March 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, UNOGBIS, Bissau, March 2008.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, World Bank, Bissau, March 2008.

VI. NEW MOMENTUM?

In 2007, to general surprise, the National Assembly managed to impose itself in Guinea-Bissau's politics. Parliamentarians formed a majority coalition and signed a political stability pact which enabled them to bring about the departure of Vieira's chosen prime minister. They appointed a replacement, Martinho Ndafo Cabi, established a consensus government and actively worked to regain donors' confidence and to carry through the reform projects drawn up in partnership with them. Despite ongoing fragility the reform process seems to be gathering some momentum. The military hierarchy continues to arbitrate politics, although its actions appear at present to be in the short-term interests of the consensus government and the reform agenda.

A. THE STABILITY PACT

At the beginning of 2007 many parliamentarians refused to accept the unconstitutional dismissal of Carlos Gomes Junior and refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of his replacement, Aristides Gomes, a close ally of Vieira. The new ministers were also all associated with the presidential circle. In the assembly the MPs who supported the president, prime minister and his government held a majority of seats. But tension was increasing between Vieira's supporters and opponents.¹⁰²

After several months of negotiations between the parties, the dissatisfied parliamentarians managed to obtain the support of Kumba Yala's PRS, which thereby broke its alliance with Vieira, to form a majority parliamentary coalition. On 13 March the PAIGC, PRS and former Prime Minister Francisco Fadul's *Partido Unido Social Democrata* (United Social Democrat Party or PUSD), the three largest parties in the assembly, signed a national political stability pact. On 19 March the coalition passed a vote of no confidence in the prime minister. According to the constitution the latter had to resign and the president appoint a new prime minister within 72 hours.

Nino Vieira refused to abide by the rule and clung on to his prime minister. He threatened to dissolve the assembly, but the MPs held firm. Ten days later Aristides Gomes resigned although it was not until 3 April that Vieira agreed to replace him. On 9 April Martinho Ndafo Cabi from the PAIGC was finally appointed to the post of prime minister. This victory for the

¹⁰² Cf. "Evolution of the situation in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of UNOGBIS", Secretary General's report, S/2007/158, 20 March 2007.

assembly over the president through purely democratic means represents a real turning point. By signing the stability pact the MPs had returned political power to the National Assembly, in line with the spirit of the semi-presidential system. Although the parliamentary coalition lacked the direct legitimacy of the ballot box, at least, for the first time in the country's history, the institution now had a role in the balance of power.¹⁰³

The terms of the pact establish a commitment by the three parties to remain united for ten years, whoever wins future elections, which gives hope for political stability in the long term and has reassured donors. The latter have welcomed the parliamentarians' determination.¹⁰⁴ Those close to Vieira were largely removed from ministerial posts and replaced by a consensus government with posts distributed proportionally: the PAIGC obtained nine ministries, the PRS six and the PUSD three. The remaining 29 ministerial portfolios went to other opposition parties and independents. Only two ministries went to people close to the president: Foreign Affairs and, in particular, the Interior Ministry, run by Baciro Dabo, Vieira's former head of security.¹⁰⁵

The finance minister, Issouf Sanha, was the only one to have already served under Aristides Gomes's government. He has an excellent reputation with the donors and quickly proposed a plan to clean up public finances. The prime minister and his government actively sought to repair relations with the IMF and other external partners. Since then, reform projects in the security and public administration sectors, as well as an emergency plan to combat drug trafficking, have received the approval of donors and promises of funding.¹⁰⁶

B. RISK OF A NEW POLITICAL CRISIS

Despite this turning point, the threat of institutional crisis is ever present. The legislative election initially planned for March 2008 could not be held because of a lack of preparation and funds. A consensus between the parties proposed a delay until November 2008, in conformity with the electoral law indicating that elections must take place in October or November of the election year. According to the constitution the parlia-

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, President of the National Assembly, Bissau, March 2008.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Bissau, March 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. "The evolution of the situation in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the UNOGBIS", Secretary General's report, S/2007/401, 3 July 2007.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Finance Minister, UNOGBIS and diplomats, Bissau, March 2008.

mentarians' mandate, which runs for four years, ended on 21 April 2008. Between that date and the November elections there will therefore be an institutional vacuum and differences of interpretation remain concerning the constitutional provisions to fill the void.

The National Assembly coalition suggested the exceptional measure of extending the MPs' mandate and keeping the current government until the November election, so that it can continue to pursue its successful reforms. The constitution provides for the automatic dissolution of the assembly at the end of its mandate and the appointment of an interim government chosen by the president if the legislative election has not yet taken place. In this eventuality elections must be organised within 90 days following the dissolution of parliament. But in the current situation, this deadline is unrealistic given the funding and preparation needed to guarantee credible elections.

The interim government option is attractive for Vieira because it would allow him to replace the prime minister imposed upon him and who, according to several Crisis Group interlocutors, has refused to cede to his financial demands. "When Vieira demands \$10,000 from the prime minister, the response is now that there is no money in the state coffers".¹⁰⁷ On Sunday 23 March the president convoked an extraordinary session at the assembly during which he reminded his audience that he had the powers to dissolve parliament between now and the end of its mandate and appoint an interim government.

Unfortunately for Vieira, the prime minister has the active support of General Tagme Na Wai. Shortly after this declaration the general made his position clear through an MP questioned during a press conference: the army will not accept a change of prime minister before the November elections. In April 2008 parliamentarians voted in favour of extending their mandate until the next legislative election now fixed for 16 November 2008. On 19 May President Vieira officially authorised this extension by decree. Prime Minister Martinho Ndafo Cabi remained in his post.

Respect for the new electoral calendar will confirm or ruin the credibility of the democratic momentum and the future of the reforms already under way. There is no guarantee that the calendar will be followed or that the election will be held under good conditions. The project to introduce biometric cards to identify voters, which was planned for the legislative election with the help of the UN Development Programme (UNDP),

was finally abandoned because of a lack of funds. Financial aid did not cover the arrears due to the national and regional electoral commission for the 2002 election, estimated to be \$1.7 million. The government said it could not pay them and asked for the help of donors. But they were reluctant to pay what they considered to be a sovereign debt.¹⁰⁸ The introduction of biometric identity cards to limit fraud is now planned for the 2010 presidential election. In the meantime, there is much to be done to prepare for the legislative election: the census needs to be updated and most citizens do not have birth certificates.¹⁰⁹

For political parties, preparations for the elections have already started. President Vieira has the support of only a minority of parliamentarians since the PRS joined the parliamentary coalition. However, he is already trying to manoeuvre to reverse this situation. His right-hand man, Aristides Gomes, has just left the PAIGC to create his own party, the Republican Independence Development Party (Partido Republicano para a independência e o desenvolvimento, PRID). If he manages to form an electoral base and win seats in the assembly, he might alter the balance within parliament in favour of Vieira. The PRS has a solid electoral base among the Balanta and is winning increasing numbers of votes from the Fula who recently became the largest ethnic group in the country, just ahead of the Balanta. The Fula are not historically close to the PAIGC and some speak of "bi-ethnic aspirations of association between Balanta and Fula".¹¹⁰

In any event, the result of the legislative election will certainly be an indication of political evolutions in the country. But, despite political campaigning, it is unlikely that one of the parties will obtain an absolute majority in the assembly. In that case, however the seats are redistributed and if the terms of the stability pact are respected, the parliamentary coalition will be maintained and can continue to ensure a minimum of political stability and a continuation of the reforms in collaboration with the government. "Since the formation of the coalition all projects have been passed with an absolute majority. Everyone is convinced of the need for reform".¹¹¹ The real danger comes more from the personal animosity which continues to disrupt politics in the country and threaten stabilisation efforts.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, member of civil society, Bissau, March 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Internal Administration Minister and UNOGBIS, Bissau, March 2008.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, UNOGBIS, Bissau, March 2008.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, academic, Bissau, March 2008.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, international donor, Bissau, March 2008.

Despite progress in institutional terms, personal animosity among the political elite remains very significant. "The peculiarity of politics in Guinea-Bissau lies in the relationships between the men who together led the war of independence. These relations are both very profound and very discordant".¹¹² The guerrilla experience and the subsequent attempt to introduce a post-colonial state have left their mark on the country's political culture, something of which the country's population is all too aware. During the first conflicts between those loyal to Ansumane Mané and those close to Vieira, the population simply waited until the quarrel between the former friends had passed and only rose up against the intervention of overseas soldiers. The political culture has not changed since and there are frequent rumours concerning animosity between politicians. Most are only partly true but they nevertheless reflect the extremely personalised nature of Bissau-Guinean politics.

Rumours concerning the army are obviously the ones which provoke the most panic. In March 2008 a newspaper reported that Tagme Na Wai had abruptly confiscated weapons from the police force and indicated that he might be preparing a coup d'état.¹¹³ The general denied it a few days later and the journalist who wrote the article was arrested. Several reliable sources give contradictory explanations of the event. Some think the general acted in revenge after being humiliated by the police who searched his plane when he returned from a trip to Guinea-Conakry. The incident therefore stemmed from a show of strength by Tagme Na Wai. The other explanation (given by the authorities to overseas diplomats in response to concerns about the rumour) is that the interior minister personally asked the general to dispose of a stock of obsolete war weapons on the ministry's premises. Tagme Na Wai allegedly accepted and the incident was distorted by a journalist.¹¹⁴

Whatever the truth of the matter, the rumours illustrate the dominance of personal relationships over institutional rules. The relations between figures in power are likely to continue being the catalyst or, or obstacle to, the country's stability, until state institutions are powerful enough to regulate politics. But the speed of the head of the army's reaction also shows a shared desire to keep up appearances, if not in the eyes of the population, then at least in the eyes of international donors. This is new and seems to confirm a move away,

at least temporarily, from Kumba Yala's and latterly Vieira's isolationism. But there are still countless challenges in terms of consolidating institutions and putting economic development back on track. The first step is to solve the fundamental problems which make it impossible to envisage any kind of definitive exit strategy from Guinea-Bissau's crisis. The toughest of these lies with the army.

C. DIFFICULT ARMY REFORM

The first stage, and the most delicate given the country's history, is army reform. It must take place within the framework of reform of the whole security sector which also includes the police and the justice system. But the main challenge is restructuring the armed forces which will entail a reduction in strength and the forced retirement of some personnel. Past assessments of the army's numbers have varied from 4,000 to 10,000 men. This large variation is explained in part by the interests of the military hierarchy in inflating the figures to increase assessments of the cost of reform and therefore demands for financial aid, while preserving the image of the army as a numerically important and powerful body. In reality, the operational capabilities of the army and navy are very limited.¹¹⁵

The difference between the various estimates also underlines the crucial problem of former combatants and soldiers of retirement age who periodically take up arms, as during the war of 1998-1999, and who refuse to leave the ranks because the state does not have the means to pay them a pension. If they are included, the Bissau-Guinean army can be counted in tens of thousands of men. In reality, stable numbers in the army are much lower because, due to low and infrequently paid salaries, many of them make a living from other activities and only put on a uniform for census taking.¹¹⁶

The army nevertheless eats up the country's meagre budgetary resources. Security expenditure is estimated at 30 per cent, far beyond the limit recommended by ECOWAS.¹¹⁷ The problem is exacerbated by the large number of officers following the series of promotions within the army, particularly the latest round in 2006.¹¹⁸ The results of the last army census financed by the

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, international NGO, Bissau.

¹¹³ Cf. "La police désarmée par le général Tagme Na Wai", Agence de Presse Africaine, 12 March 2008.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and members of Bissau-Guinean civil society, Bissau, March 2008.

¹¹⁵ Cf. "Guinea-Bissau Country Profile", op. cit., and Crisis Group interviews, Bissau, March 2008.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, UNOGBIS, Bissau, March 2008.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, ECOWAS, Bissau, March 2008.

¹¹⁸ This followed a campaign against the MFDC Casamance rebels aimed at removing them from their base near the border town of Sao Domingos.

international community¹¹⁹ estimated the number of soldiers in Guinea-Bissau at 4,458. There are 3.4 soldiers for every 1,000 inhabitants, the highest rate in West Africa, and more than 40 per cent of them are officers. The timing of army restructuring is crucial because, once the census is over, the demobilisation, reintegration and reinsertion of soldiers, including liberation fighters, inactive soldiers and those of retirement age can begin. This is likely to be the first real obstacle to reform.

Donors are trying to play down concerns. Demobilisation should not involve more than 50 per cent of military personnel, a percentage which still frightens soldiers with no alternative work or sources of income. General Tagme Na Wai, who would like to be seen as a fervent supporter of reform, has already warned that soldiers would only accept the reform if it allowed them to “preserve their dignity”. It is doubtful that the planned compensation packages will do the trick. One of the donors clearly states “I am not optimistic about reform. Dignity has a monetary value that the international community is not prepared to pay”.¹²⁰ Some soldiers already plan to accept reform in principle without letting it be applied in practice. “Several officers have already said that, when the time comes to retire, no one will go”.¹²¹

The main challenge of army reform is the liberation of the political system from the grip of the soldiers so that democratic institutions can begin to operate freely and give full control of the country to civilians for the first time. The Bissau-Guinean government itself is aware that soldiers still do not have a clear understanding of their role in a republican state.¹²² Reform would also have some more long-term advantages, including making posts available in the hierarchy for the younger generation, improving living conditions in the barracks and improving the level and regularity of salaries for the main military body. Army pay currently greatly exceeds the state’s financial resources. Furthermore, if soldiers are convinced that the pensions system is functioning, reforms will no doubt have more chance of working.¹²³

Another obstacle to reform is the possible ethnic re-balancing within the army. This eventuality will not please the Balanta who consider control of the army to be theirs by right. Since the war of independence “the Balanta in particular have placed great value in advancement via the army”.¹²⁴ Tagme Na Wai is the best example of this. He came from a very underprivileged background and learnt to read during the war of independence. Today, he leads the army and has real power in the country. Despite his encouraging words about reform, doubts persist among some partners. “I do not believe that Tagme will give up his influence so easily. Not after achieving what the Balanta have always dreamt about – power”.¹²⁵

D. CRIMINALISATION OF THE STATE

Another obstacle to army reform, and itself a major symptom of the deterioration of the state in Guinea-Bissau, is the spectacular advances of criminal networks using the country as a transit and storage point for smuggling, in particular of cocaine. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that several hundred kilograms of cocaine pass through the country every week, from Latin America en route to European markets. Drugs arrive by boat or plane from Venezuela, Columbia and Brazil to be stored in Guinea-Bissau before being redistributed in small quantities to Europe. The process is relatively easy for the traffickers. The Bissau-Guinean state does not have the logistical ability to control its territory, particularly its 90-odd coastal islands.¹²⁶

But it is, above all, the complicity of some soldiers which facilitates the traffickers’ work. The latter receive local logistical support from soldiers or marines, depending on the transit point. Soldiers have been seen on several occasions unloading packets of drugs from illegal planes on disused landing strips inside the country, and the navy is widely involved in the movement of traffickers and their merchandise in the Bijagos islands.¹²⁷ The army hierarchy is therefore able to acquire part of the vast amounts of money injected into the country through drug trafficking. Soldiers are bound

¹¹⁹ The census was carried out with the participation of international partners including the UN, the EU and Portugal. Crisis Group interview, UNOGBIS, June 2008.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “Restructuring and Modernisation of the Defence and Security Sector, Strategy Document”, Republic of Guinea-Bissau Interministerial Committee for the Restructuring and Modernisation of the Defence and Security Sector, Technical Committee, October 2006.

¹²³ Crisis Group interview, member of the Security Sector Reform Steering Committee, Bissau, March 2008.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interview, academic, Bissau, March 2008.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

¹²⁶ Cf. “Cocaine trafficking in Western Africa, situation report”, UNODC, October 2007; and Crisis Group interview, regional representative from UNODC, Dakar, February 2008. For more details about internal drugs trafficking, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°25, *Latin American Drugs I: Losing the Fight*, 14 March 2008; and N°26, *Latin American Drugs II: Improving Policy and Reducing Harm*, 14 March 2008.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interview, UNODC, Dakar, February 2008.

to oppose any reform which would pension them off and stop them profiting from this illegal trade.¹²⁸

The drugs problem is neither recent nor limited to Guinea-Bissau. But the country is even more vulnerable to traffickers than its West African neighbours.¹²⁹ The authorities' reputation for being unable to combat crime is spread around the world via almost comical anecdotes. Accounts tell of police, without a car or petrol, who are unable to pursue traffickers in four-wheel drives and sometimes have to resort to taxis. Similarly, reports abound of the ease with which the few seizures of cocaine (about 50 in two years, a tiny proportion of the amounts being transited according to estimates) disappear without a trace from police premises.¹³⁰ In September 2006 one of these seizures, 674 kg worth nearly €20 million, vanished.

The justice system is also completely inadequate – not only because there is no real prison in Bissau (another widely known fact) but because endemic corruption and intimidation of judges prevent the justice system from fulfilling its function.¹³¹ Several arrests of alleged drug traffickers, most apparently of Latin American origin, ended in the immediate release of suspects without legal justification. An inquiry into the disappearance of the 674 kg of cocaine in September 2006 is still in progress.¹³²

But it is not just soldiers and marines who facilitate drug trafficking. A significant number of high-ranking politicians are also reputedly involved.¹³³ The role of senior political figures and their proven or alleged involvement in drug trafficking make the spread of criminality into the already very vulnerable state apparatus a very real risk.

Some donors are concerned that “criminality, including drugs, risks infiltrating state structures, even if this is

not yet entirely the case”.¹³⁴ Unfortunately, given the opacity of the system, it may be difficult to judge the degree of criminalisation of the state before it is too late. For the moment it is civil society which is paying the price of the involvement of military figures. In 2007 two Bissau-Guinean journalists had to leave the country after receiving several threats from the army linked to their coverage of drug trafficking in the media.¹³⁵ The problem is clearly attracting the attention of not only the international media but also donors. The emergency plan to combat narcotics trafficking, drawn up by the Bissau-Guinean government in partnership with the UNODC, has already received €8 million from the European Union, a clear sign of international concern.¹³⁶

Another concern is the possibility that terrorist networks are appearing among the criminal groups taking advantage of the country's extreme institutional and operational weakness, with or without the complicity of the authorities. In January 2008 two Mauritians sought for the murder of a family of four French tourists on 24 December 2007 in Mauritania and three of their accomplices were arrested in Bissau. The group was suspected of being linked to the North African terrorist group, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and had been tracked from Mauritania by the French security services.¹³⁷ The men on the run no doubt enjoyed support from inside the Mauritanian community in Guinea Bissau, mainly established in trade. Certainly, “there is no dormant North Africa al-Qaeda cell in Guinea-Bissau”,¹³⁸ but the country is still very attractive in a region where terrorist networks face pressure from initiatives such as the American Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP).¹³⁹

In the meantime, criminalisation of the state is an immediate obstacle to the application of fundamental reforms in Guinea-Bissau. The aim of traffickers and their accomplices is to ensure not so much political

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, member of civil society and an overseas diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interview, regional representative from UNODC, Dakar, February 2008.

¹³⁰ Cf. “La Guinée-Bissau est-elle en train de devenir un narco-Etat?”, Rue89, 24 July 2007.

¹³¹ There is only one prison, in Bafatá, which fulfils the UN's criteria for penitentiary institutions. Cf. “Draft strategic program framework, Guinea-Bissau, 2007-2009”, UNODC, October 2006.

¹³² Crisis Group interviews, the Justice Minister and diplomats, Bissau, March 2008.

¹³³ High-ranking soldiers are also involved in trafficking in neighbouring Guinea. Crisis Group interviews, Bissau and Conakry, March 2008. See too Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°52, *Guinea: Ensuring Continued Democratic Reform*, 24 June 2008.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Bissau, March 2008.

¹³⁵ Cf. “Cocaine et coup d'Etat, fantômes d'une nation baïllonnée”, Reporters sans Frontières, 12 November 2007.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview, UNOGBIS, Bissau, March 2008.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Dakar and Bissau, February-March 2008. “Bissau extradites al-Qaeda suspects to Mauritania”, Reuters, 12 January 2008.

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interview, French Embassy, Bissau, March 2008.

¹³⁹ The TSCTP was launched in 2005 following on from the Pan-Sahel Initiative which already aimed to combat the proliferation of radical Islam and terrorism in the sub-region in partnership with Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad. For an analysis of the anti-terrorist initiative in the sub-region, cf. Crisis Group Africa Report N°92, *Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel, Fact or Fiction?*, 31 March 2005.

instability, which could disrupt their lucrative business, but rather the maintenance of institutional and operational state failure so that they can continue to manage their affairs freely. The civil and military figures involved will therefore try to resist the introduction of planned reforms, even if the latter seem, for the moment at least, to be unanimously accepted within the ruling class.

E. COORDINATION OF FINANCIAL AID

Fundamental reforms can only be achieved with concrete and effective financial aid from donors. The country's main partners, including the EU and the UN, see Guinea-Bissau as an opportunity for success which could have positive repercussions in the region. The country's small size – it covers an area of 36,000 km² and has a population of 1.3 million – improves the chances that investment in reform will have significant impact. Moreover, it is at the heart of a region that contains a number of fragile states. The Casamance in Senegal is still troubled by a low-level rebellion and Guinea-Conakry suffers from serious internal problems. Successful reforms in Guinea-Bissau would make it a point of stability for the region. These potential positive repercussions therefore increase the stakes for the international community, including the regional organisation, ECOWAS.¹⁴⁰

At the last donor round table in Geneva in November 2006 participants were reluctant to promise funds because of the still unstable situation in the country. Since then, enthusiasm from donors has increased particularly thanks to the increased stability and the initiative and communication efforts of the current consensus government.¹⁴¹ As part of these initiatives, in July 2007 the prime minister asked for Guinea-Bissau to be put on the agenda of the UN's Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). The request was successful and the country should receive support from the commission to raise funds and coordinate international aid to strengthen capabilities in the political, institutional, security and economic sectors.¹⁴²

One advantage of the PBC's intervention and integrated approach will be to offer the country a substitute for the more targeted and coherent assistance other crisis affected countries have received from their former colo-

nial powers. The United Kingdom's support for Sierra Leone and that of France for Côte d'Ivoire are two such examples. While the success of these experiences has been uneven, these countries received considerable benefits in terms of sustained interest, financial aid and support for resolving their respective crises.¹⁴³ Recently Brazil seems to have been taking on this role by chairing the PBC configuration for Guinea-Bissau.¹⁴⁴

Given the difficulty and complexity of reform, particularly in the security sector, it is to be hoped that the PBC can play an effective coordinating role by ensuring that the efforts of the various donors do not prove to be inconsistent on the ground. Furthermore, fundamental reforms, particularly within the army, must lead to results as soon as possible to preserve the current domestic dynamism and the interest of donors and political players.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, EU, UNDP, UNOGBIS and ECOWAS, Bissau, March 2008.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, international donors, Bissau, March 2008.

¹⁴² Cf. document from the Peacebuilding Commission, "Guinea Bissau configuration, 1st meeting, 21 January 2008".

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Dakar, February 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Brazil was elected to the head of the PBC configuration on 19 December 2007. Cf. "Guinea-Bissau added to agenda of Peacebuilding commission; Brazil elected chair of country-specific configuration", press document, PBC/26.

VII. CONCLUSION

The roots of the recurrent political crises in Guinea-Bissau lie in its inability to institutionalise solid state structures. Chronic instability, repeated coups d'état and the war in 1998-1999 are only symptoms of the weakness of the democratic institutions and the civilian administration. Upon each change of power since independence, the new leaders have missed the opportunity to establish solid institutions and build the foundations for a real post-colonial state. The military hierarchy now openly rules the country.

The various symptoms of under-institutionalisation of the structures of government, and even their deterioration since the end of the 1998-1999 war, have become entangled, compounding the crisis. There is currently a precarious political stability, but worrying symptoms remain. The country is entirely vulnerable in the face of criminal networks, due to the inability of its institutions to act as a barrier to their activities. The involve-

ment of the military hierarchy and some impoverished and poorly paid civilians in trafficking opens the door to the criminalisation of the state. The persistence of personal animosity within the ruling elite, due to the extreme personalisation of power, could also destabilise the country at any time.

Given the accumulation of these symptoms and the country's regionally strategic location, it is imperative that Guinea-Bissau escapes the cycle of crisis and the deterioration of government structures. Attempts to resolve the problem by addressing its symptoms will not work in the long-term. Only the establishment of real state institutions and regulation of political competition, no longer rooted in the guerrilla mentality of the struggle for liberation, can eventually enable Guinea-Bissau to lift itself out of crisis once and for all. The country must move on from the war of independence and begin to create a real democratic state.

Dakar/Brussels, 2 July 2008

APPENDIX A

MAP OF GUINEA-BISSAU



APPENDIX B

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