

TRANSITION WITH MINIMAL ASSISTANCE: LESSONS FROM GUINEA-BISSAU?

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Table of Content

INTRODUCTION	3
THE CIVIL WAR OF 1998-1999	4
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ABUJA AGREEMENT OF NOVEMBER 1998	7
THE MAY 1999 COUP AND YALA'S REIGN	9
THE SEPTEMBER 2003 COUP	13
THE "PEACEKEEPERS' MUTINY"	14
CONCLUSION	17

INTRODUCTION

The history of West African peacekeeping operations has been fairly well documented, with regard to ECOWAS interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s. Both of these countries have a population of between three and five million, and in both countries over 11,000 ECOMOG² troops were deployed at the peak of operations which lasted several years. However, there is a paucity of literature on the third ECOMOG intervention of the last decade – the one in Guinea-Bissau, which was launched at the end of 1998 and saw less than 1,000 troops deployed in an operation that terminated after five months without many of its objectives being achieved. The reason for the poor coverage of this operation could lie in ECOMOG's limited success, or perhaps it is because Guinea-Bissau is considered less significant in the light of other complex emergencies that emerged to threaten regional stability – in Liberia again, and in Côte d'Ivoire.

Guinea-Bissau is approximately the size of Taiwan, and is ranked 167 out of 173 in the UN's Human Development Index. Gross Domestic product for 2004 is estimated at just over one billion dollars. According to World Bank figures, 88 percent of the 1.3 million population survive on less than a dollar a day. Less than half the people aged 15 and over can read and write. Life expectancy is between 45 and 50 years and food shortages are considered normal. The economy is entirely dependent on cashew nuts, which account for 95 percent of its exports, and on foreign aid.³ In 1998, GDP dropped by 28% due to the outbreak of civil war.

The country gained independence from Portugal in 1974 after a protracted anti-colonial guerrilla war. The independence struggle, led by Amílcar Cabral, was supported by a significant number of citizens of other African states. Cabral was assassinated after unilaterally declaring independence in 1973. Luiz de Almeida Cabral, half brother of Amílcar, became the first president of Guinea-Bissau and head of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC).⁴ In 1980, President Luiz Cabral was overthrown in a coup orchestrated by then Prime Minister João Bernardo Vieira.

From November 1980 to May 1984, power was held by a provisional government responsible to a Revolutionary Council headed by President João Vieira. In 1984, the council was dissolved, and the National Popular Assembly (ANP) was reconstituted. The single-party assembly approved a new constitution, elected President Vieira to a new 5-year term, and elected a Council of State, which was the executive agent of the ANP. Under this system, the president presided over the Council of State and served as head of state and

² ECOMOG is an acronym for the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group. It originated as a non standing military force consisting of land, sea and air components, that was set up by Member States of ECOWAS to deal with the security problem that followed the collapse of the formal state structure in the Republic of Liberia in 1990.

³ The country ranks sixth in cashew production. It also exports fish and seafood as well as small amounts of peanuts, palm kernels, and timber. Rice is the major crop and staple food.

⁴ The PAIGC had organized resistance against Portuguese rule in both colonies. The union of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde was dissolved in 1980.

government. The president also was head of the PAIGC and commander in chief of the armed forces.

For years, no other party was allowed to challenge the PAIGC grip on power. There were alleged coup plots against the Vieira government in 1983, 1985, and 1993. In 1986, first Vice President Paulo Correia and five others were executed for treason following a lengthy trial. It was in 1998, however, that the bitter feuds between different layers within the ruling party came to the surface. The incident that opened the wounds was related to the Casamance secessionist struggle in Senegal, and the unchecked proliferation of illicit light weapons that had plagued the region since the armed struggle for independence.

Under a security agreement between Vieira's government and Senegal, the army had reinforced its presence on the border with Senegal in order to prevent rebels of the Senegalese *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance* (MFDC), or Democratic Forces of Casamance Movement, from using Guinea-Bissau as a rear base. In January 1998, government troops reportedly killed 10 suspected MFDC rebels and arrested dozens of people, including Senegalese, accusing them of vehicle theft and gun-running. In late January, Brigadier General Ansumane Mané, Armed Forces Chief of Staff, was accused of negligence in connection with the arms trafficking and suspended from his post. This led to increased tension within the armed forces, many of whom were already dissatisfied about low wages and poor conditions of service. Mané denied the allegations and publicly accused senior government and military officials of involvement in arms trafficking. He was dismissed on 6 June 1998.⁵

The aim of this paper is to provide a brief chronological account of the ensuing crisis and the regional and international response – starting with the civil war and the peacemaking process that led to the signing of a peace accord in Abuja in November 1998. It highlights the challenges of implementing this agreement, with the assistance of a small, under-equipped regional peacekeeping force, before the implementation plan was derailed by a coup in May 1999 that led to the exit of ECOMOG. With UN assistance, elections were held that saw Kumba Yala installed as president in February 2000. Yala's subsequent misrule led inexorably to a further coup in September 2003, which preceded parliamentary elections and a hand-over to civilian government in March 2004. Guinea-Bissau seemed to be on an uneasy but peaceful track towards presidential elections when a mutiny by a contingent of returning UN peacekeepers, in October 2004, again threw politics into turmoil. The paper concludes by stressing an obvious but unheeded lesson – that democracy cannot take root unless there is an urgent and comprehensive process of security sector reform that targets, as the number one priority, the armed forces.

THE CIVIL WAR OF 1998-1999

Brigadier Ansumane Mané's dismissal ignited a military revolt. On 7 June 1998, rebel soldiers laid an ambush on the road to the airport where President Vieira was due to pass and killed two officials. They seized military bases in Bissau, the capital, cutting it off from the rest of

⁵ Amnesty International, AI report 1999: Guinea-Bissau
<http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aireport/ar99/afr30.htm>

the country. Such was the alienation of the majority from the party that led the war for independence that no movement came forward to prevent the military coup. Some even hailed the end of the Vieira era.⁶

Most of the 5,000-strong armed forces, embittered by long-standing grievances over poor conditions and low pay,⁷ joined the self-styled *Junta Militar* (military junta). The Military Junta was also reinforced by veterans of the armed struggle for national liberation. The minority loyalist element of the FAEP was supported by troops from Senegal and Guinea-Conakry, solicited by Vieira under a security agreement signed between the governments of Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, the Republic of Guinea and the Gambia in October 1997. Over the following weeks some 2,000 Senegalese and 400 Republic of Guinea troops arrived in the country. France supplied the finance and transportation for the intervention.⁸

Fighting centered in the capital, Bissau, sending nearly all of its 300,000 inhabitants upcountry to escape. Enormous material destruction was caused by intense bombardment with heavy artillery during 50 days of confrontation in which the uprising deteriorated into a full-scale civil conflict, and threatened regional conflagration as neighboring countries got involved. The intervening and loyalist forces were unsuccessful in ousting Mané, and there

was a stalemate. With a dwindling food and water supply, a massive internally displaced population, and a rainy season with diseases such as cholera and malaria spreading, Guineans faced the worst humanitarian crisis since the war for independence.



Map courtesy of CIA Faak

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) became involved in negotiations to end the conflict, and established a Committee of Seven in July 1998, to map out a peaceful solution.⁹ The *Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa* (CPLP), Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries¹⁰ also appointed a Contact Group, which negotiated a cease-fire on 26 July.

⁶ Trevor Johnson, New military coup in Guinea-Bissau leaves one hundred dead, WSWS, 19 May 1999 <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/may1999/guin-m19.shtml>

⁷ The People's Revolutionary Armed Force (FARP) includes Army, Navy, and Air Force. Military expenditure for 2003 is estimated at US\$8.4 million, which represents 2.8% of GDP.

⁸ Although a former Portuguese colony, Guinea-Bissau is one of a number of West African states whose currency is the CFA franc, which is pegged to the French franc (others are Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo).

⁹ Consisting of Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, and Senegal

¹⁰ The CPLP includes Portugal, Brazil and the African nations of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe.

At this stage, *Junta Militar* troops controlled most of the northwest of the country. There were an estimated 350,000 internally displaced persons in Guinea-Bissau with a large majority in the town of Bafata, 125 km north east of Bissau. Over 500 metric tons of food aid had been sent from Senegal and Guinea (Conakry) to Bafata for onward distribution, while 500 mt of food stored in Bissau city before the outbreak of the mutiny had been distributed to hospitals, vulnerable groups and internally displaced persons.

On 4 August 1998, West African foreign ministers, meeting in Accra, agreed to travel to Guinea-Bissau to meet President Vieira and the leaders of the military rebellion in a bid to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The foreign ministers of the ECOWAS Committee of Seven reaffirmed their support for Guinea and Senegal, and commended these countries for sending in troops to back pro-government forces in their bid to quell the mutiny. In a statement issued after the meeting, the Foreign Minister of Guinea-Bissau (Delfim da Silva) said the crisis required a regional solution and ECOWAS had to play a key role in the conflict resolution process. He also welcomed the mediation efforts of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP).¹¹

ECOWAS and the CPLP jointly brokered a reaffirmation of the cease-fire, which was signed by the belligerents on 26 August 1998 in Praia, capital of Cape Verde Islands. A broad-based government was to be formed under the agreement, which bound all parties to respect the country's institutions and constitutional legality, while the belligerents were to stick to the military positions they held up to 26 August. Under the accord, the main airport in Guinea-Bissau was reopened so that humanitarian aid could be flown in and logistical support could reach a buffer force that was agreed to monitor the cease-fire. The composition of the force would be defined by the two sides.¹²

Further peace talks between government and rebels were held in Abidjan on 15 and 16 September 1998, during which both the belligerent groups agreed that there was a need for an interposition force in the country. However, they failed to agree on the composition and command arrangements for such a force. Moreover, the Junta demanded the withdrawal of Senegalese and Guinean troops, the presence of which they regarded as interference in the internal affairs of another country. As a result of the discord on these and other issues, the talks were suspended without agreement on a future date and place for further meetings.¹³

Fighting resumed on 18 October 1998, forcing citizens of Bissau to again flee the capital. Mortar and gun fire rocked the city as forces of the Military Junta advanced on the center of Bissau. Outside the capital, Junta forces swept the interior. Only part of the capital of Bissau and the Bijagos Islands remained in the hands of the government. Despite reinforcements of foreign troops supporting the government, the *Junta Militar* forces, reportedly joined by MFDC fighters, took control of most of the country. President Vieira had little option but to announce a unilateral cease-fire, which went into effect on 23 October 1998. The cease-fire

¹¹ IRIN-WA Update 266 of Events in West Africa, 5 August 1998.

¹² El Hadj Youga Ndiaye, Guinea Bissau Takes a Step Towards Peace Inter Press Service, 31 August 1998. http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/sept98/17_17_047.html

¹³ Melvis Dzisah, Guinea Bissau Peace Talks Hit A Snag, Pan African News Agency, 17 September 1998, <http://www.africanews.org/west/guineabissau>

was followed by frantic negotiations to avoid the destruction and loss of life that a final military advance on Bissau would cause.

On 29 October, Junta leader Ansumane Mané and President Vieira met face to face, in the Gambia, for the first time since the conflict began. Their talks continued in Abuja, Nigeria, culminating in the signing under the aegis of ECOWAS of a peace accord on 1 November 1998. The Abuja agreement provided for the formation of a transitional government of national unity, the deployment of an ECOMOG peacekeeping force, the withdrawal of foreign intervention forces, and the organization of legislative and presidential elections by the end of March 1999.¹⁴

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ABUJA AGREEMENT OF NOVEMBER 1998

Implementation of the Abuja accord proved to be slow. By mid-January 1999, the government and the Military Junta had agreed on the composition of a transitional government of national unity. This followed the nomination, in December 1998, of Francisco Fadul, a political advisor of the Military Junta, as transitional Prime Minister. The transitional government was scheduled to take power after troops from Senegal and Guinea-Conakry had withdrawn. The withdrawal of the Senegalese and Guinea armed forces was in turn dependant on the deployment of ECOMOG peacekeepers from Togo, the Gambia, Niger, and Benin.¹⁵ The ECOMOG interposition force was thus the key operational support instrument for peace implementation on the ground. Despite enormous logistical and financial difficulties, an advance ECOMOG contingent of 110 Togolese troops deployed to Bissau between 26 December 1998 and 2 January 1999.

The first 200 Senegalese and Guinean troops (out of approximately 3,000) left in the second week of January 1999. The slowness of the withdrawal of foreign forces led to tension in Bissau, heightened by rumors that the first group of Senegalese to leave Bissau stopped in the Bijagos Islands rather than returning home. The peace process was disrupted early on 31 January 1999, when fighting resumed in Bissau. Four days of intense shelling and small arms battles followed. The International Red Cross initially confirmed 100 civilian dead, but other estimates were closer to 400. The main hospital, short on medicines and basic surgical supplies, was struggling to cope with 300 civilian wounded.¹⁶

This third, and shortest, round of fighting came at a critical juncture in the implementation of the Abuja peace accord. The deployment of the ECOMOG interposition force and the gradual withdrawal of Senegalese and Guinean troops had begun. Just hours before the fighting flared, government and Junta officials had finished outlining the details of the

¹⁴ See Appendix A for the text of this accord.

¹⁵ Nigeria, the most powerful country in West Africa and the lead nation for previous ECOMOG operations, was too preoccupied with its own upcoming elections to send troops.

¹⁶ Numerous sources reported that French troops were also involved in the fighting. There were eye-witness accounts of French soldiers on the ground in Bissau and suggestions that a French ship shelled Junta positions, adding French fire power to the causes of death and destruction in Bissau. The French vehemently denied these accusations, and efforts were made to silence those who spoke out.

ECOMOG deployment and troop withdrawals. The urgency of the situation led to a hastily brokered cease-fire. President Eyadema of Togo, then chairman of ECOWAS, dispatched two envoys to Bissau with an agreement which was signed by President Vieira and General Mané on 3 February. As the fighting slowly subsided, 300 ECOMOG troops from Niger and Benin, whose deployment had been delayed by the hostilities, landed in Bissau on 4 February.

On 14 February 1999, Vieira and Mané met again, on Guinean soil. They called each other "brother" and embraced openly. Only Vieira made a public statement after the meeting, allegedly on behalf of both parties. He said that peace had come to stay. On 17 February, there was another longer meeting between the two rivals in Lomé, hosted by President Eyadema. There they promised never again to resort to arms to solve their differences, and agreed to the need for the disarmament and demobilization of troops.

On 20 February 1999, the Transitional Government of National Unity, led by Prime Minister Francisco Fadul, was at last sworn in at the Presidential Palace in Bissau. The speeches, including fourteen pages from President Vieira, focused on peace and national reconciliation. Prime Minister Fadul and the Military Junta had backed down from their earlier insistence that the transitional government would not take its seat until all troops from Senegal and Guinea-Conakry had left the country.¹⁷ Their decision was motivated by a perceived increased level of trust between the rival factions and the economic stagnation that was due in part to the continuing lack of a functioning government.¹⁸

By 17 March 1999, the strength of ECOMOG stood at 600, with troops from Benin, Gambia, Niger and Togo, while Mali had announced its intention of sending a contingent of 125 soldiers. ECOMOG established its operational and command headquarters at Bissau, from where troops were dispatched for operations farther a field. However, due to a lack of adequate transport and communications equipment, soldiers operating outside of Bissau had to return to Bissau each day, because of the risk of being cut off from contact with Force headquarters. For effective patrol and reconnaissance activities in and beyond Bissau, ECOMOG had indicated that it needed four-wheel drive vehicles, satellite phones, and mobile radios.

ECOMOG therefore concentrated on providing security at the sea and airports, as required by the Abuja Agreement, as well as for the President and Prime Minister. ECOMOG also did whatever it could to help ensure humanitarian access for agencies attempting to assist the many displaced people throughout the country. However, one of the main tasks envisaged for ECOMOG – provision of security along the Guinea-Bissau/Senegal border – proved impossible to pursue. Not only would deployment along the border require a far greater number of troops than were at hand; but divergent views on the issue had also emerged

¹⁷ After the fighting at the end of January, the joint military commission had decided that all foreign troops, except for ECOMOG forces, must leave the country by 28 February 1999. By 14 February, 1,200 troops should have left. Instead, the first movement did not occur until 18 February, when the departure of 700 Senegalese soldiers was announced, although only between 300 and 400 actually left the country.

¹⁸ One of the first acts of the new parliament was to appoint a commission, whose report led to charges being brought against the former administration. Vieira was put on trial for illegal arms dealing and for inviting foreign troops into the country.

among the authorities in Guinea-Bissau. While President Vieira and his supporters continued to advocate the need for expanded ECOMOG deployment, the Prime Minister and representatives of the junta expressed the view that sufficient progress had been made in the peace process to obviate the need for additional deployment.

ECOMOG did attempt to initiate a disarmament process, following the agreement reached between President Vieira and General Mané in Lomé on 17 February 1999, in which they “reiterated the need for the parties to begin the disarmament and encampment of troops”.¹⁹ In order to co-ordinate the disarmament process, a commission comprising representatives of ECOMOG, forces loyal to President Vieira, and the military junta, was established in Bissau. The joint military commission estimated the size of armed forces in the two camps at 10,850, while before the conflict the police and armed forces, not including civilian staff in the ministries of defense and the interior, numbered 5,000. The government prepared a demobilization and social and economic rehabilitation plan, which was to provide an equitable solution for veterans of the war of independence. ECOMOG subsequently oversaw a country-wide process of collecting heavy weapons, which were stored in depots at different locations and guarded by ECOMOG troops. Some progress was also made with the collection of small arms and light weapons, particularly in Bissau.²⁰

The United Nations had hitherto adopted a rather hands-off approach to the crisis in Guinea-Bissau. However, in March 1999, the Security Council established the UN Peace-building Support Office for Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) to coordinate the efforts of the United Nations system to rehabilitate the country. UNOGBIS was headed by the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative, Samuel Nana-Sinkam, who was supported by a staff of only eighteen. In addition, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) sponsored a round-table donor conference in Geneva on 4 May 1999, to assist the government of Guinea-Bissau with its reconciliation and reconstruction efforts. Pledges amounting to some US\$200 million were made to cover, amongst others, the costs of demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, and the reunification of the armed forces.²¹

THE MAY 1999 COUP AND YALA’S REIGN

No sooner had plans been laid and funding solicited for reforming the security sector, than the armed forces again intervened in the political process. On 6 May 1999, Ansumane Mané sent forces to attack Vieira’s presidential guard and remove him from office. Within weeks of vowing never again to resort to arms, the two leaders again brought Guinea-Bissau to the brink of disaster. Troops loyal to Mané rounded up the remnants of Vieira’s men on 8 May, using heavy arms and machine-gun fire, and bringing the number killed in the coup violence

¹⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1216 (1998) Relative to the situation in Guinea-Bissau, S/1999/294, 17 March 1999.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1233 (1999) Relative to the situation in Guinea-Bissau, S/1999/741, 1 July 1999.

to around a hundred soldiers and civilians, with at least 263 injured, many seriously. In one incident alone, forty-six civilians were killed when a shell landed off target.²²

The coup brought the charade of parliamentary democracy to an abrupt end. After the presidential palace was set ablaze, Vieira and his family sought asylum, first in the French Embassy and later in the Portuguese Embassy. On 11 May, Malam Sanha, Speaker of the National Assembly, (*Assembleia Nacional Popular*), was chosen as interim president until new general and presidential elections could be held (the elections promised for March 1999 never took place). Prime Minister Fadul confirmed that legislative and presidential elections would proceed on 28 November 1999, as announced by President Vieira before his removal from office.²³

Meeting in Lome at Ministerial level on 24-25 May 1999, ECOWAS condemned the *coup d'etat* and stressed it was a violation of the Abuja and Lome Agreements. ECOWAS condemned the killings, looting and destruction of property, and requested the new leadership to grant safe passage to President Vieira and his family to any country of their choice. The ECOWAS Ministers also requested the junta to release all political detainees. The meeting expressed its gratitude to the ECOWAS Member States who had contributed troops to ECOMOG, as well as to the foreign countries that had provided logistical support to the force. The ECOWAS Ministers took note of the request made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guinea-Bissau for ECOMOG to remain in Guinea-Bissau until elections were held. However, in view of the latest violations of peace agreements and the continued difficulties in financing operations, they decided that ECOMOG would withdraw from Guinea-Bissau.²⁴

The withdrawal of ECOMOG meant that Guinea-Bissau had to accept responsibility for providing security throughout the country, including implementing the official strategy and programmes for arms collection and disposal, as well as for the reorganization and restructuring of the armed forces.²⁵ However, the disarmament and demobilization programme proved difficult to revive after ECOMOG's departure. Given the uncertainties associated with the transition, the population also did not respond fully to voluntary disarmament. UNOGBIS therefore set about developing a programme of incentives to encourage civilians to surrender voluntarily arms in their possession, whilst also assisting the National Electoral Commission with preparations for the parliamentary elections in November.²⁶ This included a voter registration programme that resulted in a roll of 525,367 voters, about 400,000 of whom actually voted in November.

²² Trevor Johnson, op. cit.

²³ S/1999/741, 1 July 1999, op. cit.

²⁴ Economic Community of West African States, Final Communique of the Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Lome, 24-25 May 1999. <<http://www.sierra-leone.org/ecowas052599.html>>

²⁵ S/1999/741, 1 July 1999, op. cit.

²⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the Activities of the United Nations Peace-Building Support Office in that Country, S/1999/1015, 29 September 1999.

The PAIGC, the country's only legal party from 1974 to 1991 and the majority party in the National Assembly until the 1999 elections, won 24 of the 102 seats in the National Assembly, while opposition parties gained a majority. The Partido de Renovacao Sociat (PRS) won 38 seats, and the Resistencia da Guine Bissau (RGB) won 29 seats, while 4 other parties split the remaining 11 seats. The elections, which included candidates from 13 parties, as well as several independents, were judged to be generally free and fair by international observers, although they reported some irregularities.

The presidential elections, which were eventually scheduled for January 2000, saw PRS leader Koumba Yala and interim President Sanha of the PAIGC leading a field of 12 candidates for president. Neither candidate secured an absolute majority as required by law, so Yala and Sanha faced each other in a second round of voting on 16 January. Yala was elected president with a 72 percent majority in the runoff election. Relatively unknown at the time, Koumba Yala had founded the Social Renovation Party (PRS), whose main support base is the majority Balanta ethnic group,²⁷ in 1998. The victory of the PRS in both elections ended the 26-year domination of the PAIGC, the political group that led the armed struggle against the Portuguese colonial army.²⁸

The UN Security Council welcomed the swearing in of President Yala on 17 February 2000 and the “return to constitutional and democratic order in Guinea-Bissau following the holding of free and fair presidential and legislative elections”. The Security Council affirmed that all concerned, particularly the former military junta, were obligated to recognize and uphold the results of the elections, as part of the Abuja Accord.²⁹

Although General Mané and the junta consistently declared that they would stay out of politics once a new civilian government was elected; it was soon clear that Mané did not accept completely the authority of Yala's Government. President Yala named 16 former junta members as Ministers, creating an uneasy power-sharing arrangement between the military and the civilian government. The resulting coalition government did not fully resolve issues of control over the budget and the military. This uneasy coalition lasted for most of the year, with Mané placing increasing restrictions on the elected civilian government.

In November 2000, Yala nominated 30 members of the armed forces for promotion without consulting Mané. In response, Mané placed the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces under house arrest, declared himself Chief of Staff, and directed his soldiers to disarm the Presidential Guard. The Presidential Guard and other elements of the armed forces refused to take part in the coup, and General Mané and approximately 35 supporters fled the capital. For a week, they hid in the countryside, and on 30 November 2000 in Quinhamel, 40 miles north of Bissau, Mané and 8 of his supporters were killed in an exchange of gunfire with

²⁷ Less than 1% of the population are Europeans or of mixed race. The African population is made up mainly of five ethnic groups: Balanta (30%); Fula (20%); Manjaca (14%); Mandinga (13%); and Papel (7%). 50% of the population adhere to indigenous beliefs; 45% are Muslim; and 5% are Christian.

²⁸ US Department of State, Human Rights Reports for 2000, released in February 2001
<<http://www.humanrights-usa.net/reports/guineabissau.html>>

²⁹ UN Security Council, S/PRST/2000/11, 29 March 2000

government forces. Subsequently, President Yala reshuffled his cabinet in an effort to control the military and move forward with reconstruction.³⁰

The political situation in Guinea-Bissau remained tense and volatile. The Government's report that it foiled a coup on 3 December 2001, persistent calls by the opposition for the President's resignation and the dismissal of Prime Minister Faustino Imbali on 7 December 2001, following the removal of the Foreign Minister, reflected a seemingly deepening institutional and political crisis.³¹ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan continued to explore with ECOWAS effective ways and means of assisting President Yala and his Government to stabilize the political situation. He discussed the situation in Guinea-Bissau with President Alpha Oumar Konaré of Mali, in his capacity as the Chairman of ECOWAS, and with several other heads of State and Government in the region, as well as outside the region. Special envoys from two other ECOWAS member States, Cape Verde and Senegal, also visited Bissau with messages from their respective Heads of State, Presidents Pedro Pires and Abdoulaye Wade. Meanwhile, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and ECOWAS were exploring the possibility of embarking on a joint initiative to contribute to the quest for peace in Guinea-Bissau.

Occasional forays into Guinea-Bissau's territory by armed rebels of the MFDC in the Casamance region continued, as did armed attacks against civilian vehicles. Internally, the military authorities continued to pledge loyalty to the constitutional order, although there were growing indications of concern about the apparent inability of the Government to move the democratic process forward. As the principal employer in the country, the Government's inability to pay civil service salaries on time, including meeting months of accumulated arrears, generated enormous social and economic hardship and tensions in the broader society.³²

By September 2003, Yala's reign had become untenable, with the country bankrupt, public sector salaries unpaid and rumblings of discontent within the military and general population. The austerity measures required by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in order for Guinea-Bissau to continue servicing its debt led Yala to increasingly dictatorial measures, including numerous reshuffles and dismissals of cabinet members, the sacking of high court judges and the attorney general and the appointment and sacking of five prime ministers. The austerity measures required by international finance capital provoked numerous strikes amongst public sector workers, who were owed nine months back pay.

Yala was also accused of favouring his own Balanta ethnic group (who dominated the army) to the detriment of the Muslims who make up almost half of the population. As part of a

³⁰ US Department of State, *op.cit.*

³¹ S/2001/1211, 14 December 2001, *op. cit.*

³² *Ibid.*

general clampdown and silencing of his political opponents Yala suspended the activities of the Ahmadiyya Islamic group, accusing it of destabilising the Muslim population.³³

THE SEPTEMBER 2003 COUP

Matters came to a head on 14 September 2003, when the armed forces toppled the government, accusing Yala of incompetence, nepotism, corruption and favouring the interests of his own ethnic group. The bloodless coup took place in the early hours of Sunday, the day after Yala had postponed elections set for October 2003.³⁴ This was the fourth postponement since he suspended parliament in November 2002, following a vote of no confidence in his presidency.

The coup was led by Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces General Verissimo Correia Seabra, who claimed no intention of remaining in power. “We are in an unusual situation,” he declared. “We are in a country with no constitution, no judiciary, no parliament, a crazy country, in other words.” He insisted that it was not a coup, “but the putting right of a confused, intolerable situation.”³⁵ The junta also cited the ongoing friction between President Yala and Prime Minister Mario Pires as cause for action.

The coup was roundly condemned by ECOWAS leaders. Staged ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections, it was considered ill-timed and ill-advised, depriving the citizens of Guinea-Bissau the freedom to choose their leaders. The coup was also a flagrant violation of both ECOWAS and AU conventions on unconstitutional changes of government.³⁶ However, on 17 September 2003, a delegation of ECOWAS foreign ministers reported that Yala had agreed to step down in the interests of national unity. His resignation came 24 hours after the coup leaders refused to reinstate him and declared that the coup was irreversible, despite official condemnation from ECOWAS, as well as the African Union, the United Nations, the United States, and Portugal. Early objections were soon put aside after it became apparent that the coup was broadly welcomed inside the country. Because Yala had threatened to invade Gambia and break off ties with Portugal (Guinea-Bissau's leading foreign investor and donor) the CPLP lamented the coup, but did not condemn the military action, and accepted Correia de Seabra's promises that early elections would be held.

The junta appointed a 16-member committee headed by Archbishop Jose Comnate to oversee the establishment of a transitional government and plans for parliamentary elections, which were scheduled for March 2004, with presidential elections to follow a year later.³⁷ This committee appointed businessman and ex-head of the National Electoral Commission,

³³ Brian Smith, US and UN give tacit backing to Guinea Bissau coup, 27 September 2003
<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/sep2003/guin-s27.shtml>

³⁴ Despite initially placing the president and prime minister under house arrest, the junta stated that it did not object to Yala personally and that he was free to stay in the country.

³⁵ Brian Smith, op. cit.

³⁶ Agence France-Presse, 17 September 2003.

³⁷ Brian Smith, op. cit.

Henrique Rosa, as interim president³⁸ and Antonio Artur Sanha as prime minister. Rosa, a Balante, was very close to the Catholic hierarchy and Sanha was secretary general of the ruling Social Renovation Party of former president Yala.

De Seabra lived up to his pledge. The PAIGC regained its absolute majority in parliament in the March 2004 elections and named its leader, Carlos Gomes Júnior, as prime minister. General de Seabra (a 53-year-old graduate from the military academy in Kiev, Ukraine) returned to the barracks with a risky mission for an officer from the minority Papel ethnic group: To maintain control over armed forces dominated by Balanta officers and non-commissioned officers, amidst rumours that he was to be assassinated which had been flying around for months.³⁹

THE ‘PEACEKEEPERS’ MUTINY’

On 6 October 2004, a mutiny by army troops and the murders of the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, General Verissimo Correia Seabra, and of the Chief of Human Resources and spokesperson for the armed forces, Colonel Domingos de Barros, highlighted the fragility of Guinea-Bissau’s nascent democratic institutions. The uprising began with soldiers demanding the payment of back wages, and was described by observers as a *coup d’etat*. General Seabra and Colonel Barros were beaten to death by their captors at the navy headquarters on the morning of 6 October.

The following morning (7 October), the mutineers issued their first statement, demanding the payment of back salaries and denying that they were staging a coup. The communique, which was read on the government radio station and did not mention the killings of Seabra and Barros, complained about the “inhuman conditions” and “widespread hunger” in military barracks throughout the country, as well as the “high level of corruption” among the military brass and the armed forces promotion system.⁴⁰

The mutinous soldiers demanded, in particular, pay they were owed for taking part in the ECOWAS and United Nations peace missions in Liberia. Some 650 soldiers from Guinea-Bissau made up a contingent of West African troops sent to Liberia as part of the ECOWAS Operation in Liberia (ECOMIL) in August 2003. The contingent continued to serve for a further six months under the UN flag when the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established in October 2003. They said they had only received their first three months of service payment, and accused army chiefs of pocketing their salaries. However, the leader of the renegade soldiers was the Inspector General of the armed forces, who was not part of the battalion sent to Liberia.⁴¹

³⁸ President Henrique Pereira Rosa (the son of a Portuguese father and Guinean mother) is due to remain in power until the presidential elections in 2005.

³⁹ Mario de Queiroz, Guinea-Bissau: Fragile Democracy Jeopardised by Military Revolt, IPS, Lisbon, 7 October 2004.

⁴⁰ Mario de Queiroz, op.cit.

⁴¹ Guinea Bissau mutineers deny coup plot, BBC News, 7 October 2004

ECOWAS and the CPLP were quick to assist the government, sending delegations to Bissau to express support for the civilian authorities and to condemn the mutiny. They also offered material and technical assistance, and ECOWAS presented the Government of Guinea-Bissau with a cash donation of about US\$500,000 towards the payment of salary arrears due to soldiers. On 10 October 2004, a Memorandum of Understanding between the government and the armed forces was signed in Bissau, and a commission was established to monitor its implementation. Major General Tagme Na Waie, who was nominated by the mutineers and appointed by the government as Chief of Defence Staff, later announced the armed forces' readiness to institute long overdue reform of the military structure. New chiefs of the army, navy and air force were sworn in, along with General Waie, on 11 November 2004. General Waie announced the armed forces' readiness to institute long overdue reforms to the military.⁴²

However, the new appointments to the military top structure were seen as a sign of further erosion of the principle of civil supremacy and the authority of the constitutional government. There was also deep concern about the Government having given a commitment, in the memorandum of understanding signed with the armed forces, to a possible blanket amnesty for all those involved in military interventions since 1980. Fears of impunity have been fuelled by the fact that there has been no official investigation into the mutiny and the circumstances surrounding the deaths of General Seabra and Colonel de Barros.

While ECOWAS acted very rapidly to defuse the crisis, it took nearly a month for the UN Security Council to formally respond to events. It did so by means of a Presidential Statement, issued on 2 November 2004. In this statement, the Council condemned "... in the strongest terms such use of force to settle differences or address grievances and, bearing in mind the position of the African Union on unconstitutional changes of government, as stated in the 1999 Algiers Declaration and the 2000 Lomé Declaration", and called upon the Guinean-Bissau parties "to refrain from attempting to seize power in Guinea-Bissau by force."⁴³ Ironically, the authorities in Guinea-Bissau had said the government was unable to pay the arrears owed to peacekeepers (which sparked the rebellion) due to delays in the UN reimbursement process for the troop contributions to the UN Mission in Liberia.⁴⁴

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3720218.stm>

⁴² Prior to the mutiny, UNOGBIS had assisted the Government in setting up a preparatory commission to initiate the planning process for a forum to discuss reform of the armed forces. The armed forces were reluctant to engage in the work of the commission. See UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding support Office in that country, S/2004/969, 15 December 2004, para. 16.

⁴³ United Nations Security Council, Presidential Statement S/PRST/2004/41, 2 November 2004.

⁴⁴ The UN can only provide payments to Troop Contributing Countries when there is adequate cash available in the mission account, i.e. from assessed contributions from Member States. The financial rules and regulations of the UN do not allow for a payment to be made from one mission's funding to another. The UN Secretariat is introducing a number of measures to try and reduce the time that TCCs wait for payments, while also adhering to acceptable financial principles and practices. See UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Partners in Peacekeeping: Logistics Support Issues of the United Nations and Troop Contributing Countries". Conference Report, Freetown, 3-5 March 2003.

The Security Council also urged all political parties to continue working, in good faith, with national authorities to complete the implementation of the Transitional Charter before the holding of presidential elections by April 2005. Council further appealed to international donors to contribute urgently to the Government of Guinea-Bissau's budget for civil service and military salaries and to contribute to the Emergency Economic Management Fund (EEMF) for Guinea-Bissau. The \$18.3 million EEMF, created by a panel of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and administered by the UNDP, has been used to pay some salary arrears to civil servants and to provide basic social services.

On 22 December 2004, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of UNOGBIS for another year and expanded its work. Citing the Transitional Government's need for help in structuring mechanisms for national reconciliation and reform, the Council added several new initiatives to UNOGBIS' technical work with a view to laying the groundwork for free and transparent presidential elections. The new mandates include supporting political dialogue, promoting national reconciliation and respect for law and human rights, helping ensure a return to constitutional normalcy and helping to mobilize financial aid.

While UNOGBIS had previously been asked to get the Government to commit to voluntary arms collection, disposal and destruction, Resolution 1580 instructs UNOGBIS to "encourage the Government to fully implement the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects."⁴⁵ It also urges the Government to undertake security sector reform and requests the addition of an Emergency Fund to supplement the expiring EEMF. Resolution 1580 states further that UNOGBIS should: "... *actively support efforts of the United Nations system and Guinea-Bissau's other partners towards strengthening state institutions and structures to enable them to uphold the rule of law, the respect of human rights and the unimpeded and independent functioning of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of Government*".⁴⁶ In this regard, the Council cautioned that while addressing amnesty for those involved in military interventions since 1980, the National Assembly should "take account of the principles of justice and fight against impunity."

Although the Transitional Government improved revenue collection and was also able to pay current salaries, the socio-economic situation remains critical. The Government does not have the resources to meet recurrent expenditure and clear the huge backlog of salary arrears inherited from the previous government.⁴⁷ It remains strapped for cash, with the expected budget deficit for 2005 estimated at 42 billion CFA francs, or US\$84 million. The government has therefore appealed to donors to provide \$5 million to help organise presidential elections, which are now scheduled for May 2005. The World Bank has indicated that it is prepared to increase its aid to Guinea-Bissau, but only on condition that

⁴⁵ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1580, 22 December 2004, S/RES/1580 (2004), par. 2 (f).

⁴⁶ Ibid, par. 2 (h).

⁴⁷ UN News Service (New York), Guinea-Bissau Faces Challenges But Donors Must Remain Committed, Annan Says, 20 December 2004.

the presidential elections go ahead as planned, and that a *climate of peace and stability prevails* in the country.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

Guinea-Bissau has never really enjoyed “a climate of peace and stability”, and its leaders have had very little experience in upholding “the rule of law, the respect of human rights and the unimpeded and independent functioning of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of Government”. Born of a protracted anti-colonial guerilla war, the country enjoyed only a brief period of stable constitutional rule under Luiz Cabral and the PAIGC (1974-1980), followed by a 24 year period characterized by the politics of coup, counter-coup, one party rule, political oppression, civil war, and military rebellion. Throughout, it is elements within the military, rather than the broad electorate, who have decided who will govern (or misgovern) the country. In short, there is no tradition of constitutional democracy to build upon, and there is little guarantee that the democratic principle of civilian supremacy over the military will be respected. Indeed, military control over the military is problematic where the members of armed forces fought on opposing sides in a recent civil war, and where ethnicity seems more salient than the other aspects cohesion and compliance that underpin professional military organizations.

The 1998-1999 civil war and ensuing peace process presented a window of opportunity to set Guinea-Bissau on a new course, through the deployment of a multifunctional peace mission that could address a broad spectrum of root and proximate causes of conflict in a co-ordinated manner, and perhaps lay the foundations for a transition to sustainable democracy and rule of law. However, international engagement was at a much lower level than in Sierra Leone, Liberia or Côte d’Ivoire. Whereas regional interventions in these countries were followed by the launching of large multifunctional UN peace operations, only a small UN peace-building support office was established in Guinea-Bissau. The scale of the ECOWAS deployment was also about one tenth of that seen in the other three Member States. In fairness, it was partly because of ECOWAS’ deep involvement in attempts to bring peace to Sierra Leone and Liberia that the Organization lacked the capacity to deploy much more than a token force to Guinea-Bissau at the end of 1998 and beginning of 1999. The ECOWAS Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security had not yet been adopted, and there are certainly limits to the number of crises that the Organisation can handle simultaneously.

A more robust UN response could have made up for the regional deficit, but Guinea-Bissau did not create a very big blip on the Security Council’s radar, and ECOWAS together with the CPLP had taken the lead in the peacemaking process. A major lesson emerging from this is that poor peace agreements make for poor implementation plans and seldom hold. The Abuja agreement of 1 November 1998, for example, is painfully thin on detail, and must compete for first place as the shortest “comprehensive peace agreement” ever brokered to

⁴⁸ IRIN, Donor conference in Lisbon will seek to cover \$84m budget deficit, Bissau, 26 January 2005.

end a civil war. It certainly stands in stark contrast to the GPA which provided the framework for the Mozambican peace process.⁴⁹

Guinea-Bissau is now headed for Presidential elections on 18 June 2005 with only UNOGBIS in place to support the process. UNOGBIS, with a large enough budget and sufficient technical advisors, may play an essential role in co-ordinating efforts to address the underlying, long term, causes of instability and conflict - including those related to poverty, underdevelopment, and a grinding debt burden. However, without a multinational force on the ground, it is difficult to provide the kind of security guarantees needed for free and fair elections and the creation of a climate of peace and security. There are no benchmarks in place for disarmament and demobilization, for a community weapons collection and disposal programme, and for the reform of the security sector.⁵⁰ These are considered essential for war to peace transitions that are supervised and monitored by UN peace operations.

If democracy is to have a fair chance, a transitional government needs comprehensive transitional assistance, of the type the UN provided in Namibia, Mozambique and Sierra Leone. Guinea-Bissau has been left to embark on a critical phase of its troubled political history – the June 2005 elections – with none of the essentials in place. The deployment of regional and international election observers and monitors may help to pronounce a more or less free and fair poll, but the threat of a military veto of the results remains salient. Moreover, the mutiny of 6 October 2004 and the beating to death of the Chief of Staff increased the danger of polarization of Guinea-Bissau along ethnic lines, especially given the widespread perception that the revolt was inspired by Balanta elements in the armed forces, intent on assuming control of the military establishment.

Beyond the ethnic issue, the October mutiny was to some extent foreseeable. When the armed forces of a country, with a recent history of coups and rebellions, continue to express dissatisfaction and resentment over poor living conditions, it is reasonable to predict that more or less violent demands and grievances will emerge. Sadly, but importantly for ECOWAS, it would appear that the challenges to peace and security presented by Guinea-Bissau are far from over. While there is an obvious need for transitional assistance in many sectors, one stands out like a sore thumb – the military.

There is thus a clear and recognized need for an urgent and comprehensive process of security sector reform that targets, as the number one priority, the armed forces.⁵¹ It is too

⁴⁹ The General Peace Agreement (GPA) was signed in Rome on 4 October 1992 by Joaquim Chissano, President of the Republic of Mozambique and Afonso Dhlakama, President of RENAMO. The GPA provided for a firm cease-fire date; the concentration in assembly areas of RENAMO and government forces; the withdrawal of foreign troops (Malawian and Zimbabwean forces guarding transport corridors); the demobilisation of government and RENAMO soldiers who would not serve in a unified national defence force; and finally; the forming of new political parties and the conduct of elections.

⁵⁰ The International Organization for Migration has provided support to a DDR programme, involving 7,182 ex-combatants. However, reintegration activities are behind schedule and the programme will have to be extended to December 2005 – well beyond the elections.

⁵¹ There is also a pressing need for the reform and building up of the police force. The police face a critical shortage of the human and material resources required to fulfill their public security role. For example, there are only two serviceable vehicles available to the police department in Bissau. See S/2004/969, 15 December 2004, *op cit*, par. 17.

late to apply this lesson ahead of the June elections, which will no doubt proceed on a wing and a prayer. Military reform is a long process, that should involve a comprehensive defence review and include a national dialogue among members of the civilian government, the military, and civil society. Assistance with military (and police) reform has best been provided on a bilateral and extended basis (e.g. the UK in Sierra Leone). Moreover, there will always be elements within armed forces that will resist components of reform that they perceive to be to their individual disadvantage or to that of the sub-grouping within the military with which they most closely identify (based on ethnicity, rank, arm of service, etc.). The eve of a presidential election is not the smartest time to begin with such a process.

In terms of future conflict prevention, however, the lesson for ECOWAS is that there would be much utility in forging regional consensus on a comprehensive policy, including guidelines and benchmarks, for security sector management and security sector reform in the region. West Africa has provided the vast majority of cases studies in the literature on African coups and, as recent examples from countries like Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire and even Togo demonstrate, there is no reason to believe that AU and ECOWAS protocols will ensure stable civil-military relations at the national level without a complementary and deliberate process of security sector reform.

APPENDIX A

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF GUINEA-BISSAU AND THE
SELF-PROCLAIMED MILITARY JUNTA⁵²**

The parties to the conflict in Guinea-Bissau meeting in Abuja, Nigeria on 31 October and 1st November 1998 in the context of the efforts of the 21st Summit of the Authority of the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

HEREBY AGREE AS FOLLOWS:

1. Reaffirm the ceasefire agreement signed in Praia on 26 August 1998.
2. Total withdrawal from Guinea-Bissau of all foreign troops. This withdrawal shall be done simultaneously with the deployment of an ECOMOG interposition force which take over from the withdrawn forces.
3. The interposition force will guarantee security along the Guinea-Bissau/Senegal border, keep the warring parties apart and guarantee free access to humanitarian organisations and agencies to reach the affected civilian population. In this regard, the Oswaldo Vieira international airport and the sea-port shall be opened immediately.
4. Immediately put in place a Government of National Unity which will include, among others, representatives of the Self-Proclaimed Junta, in line with the agreement already reached between the parties.
5. General and Presidential Elections shall be held not later than the end of March 1999. These elections will be observed by ECOWAS, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) and the international community.

DONE AT ABUJA, THIS 1ST DAY OF NOVEMBER, 1998

SIGNED BY

President, Jose Bernardo VIEIRA For the Government of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau

General Ansumane MANE For the Self-Proclaimed Military Junta

WITNESSED BY :

⁵² Available at http://www.usip.org/library/pa/gb/gb_11011998.html

His Excellency, General Abdulsalami ABUBAKAR Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria For and on behalf of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS

His Excellency, Yahya A.J.J. JAMMEH President of the Republic of the Gambia

Honourable Koffi Panou Minister of Communications of the Togolese Republic For and on behalf of President of the Togolese Republic and Chairman of ECOWAS

H.E. Lansana KOUYATE ECOWAS Executive Secretary

Professor Ibrahima FALL Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs For and on behalf of the UN Secretary General

Ms Adjoa COLEMAN OAU Representative For and on behalf of the OAU Secretary-General