

21/2012

9 May 2012

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**POLITICAL CRISIS IN BISSAU: NEW
BLOW TO POLITICAL STABILITY IN
THE GULF OF GUINEA**

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**POLITICAL CRISIS IN BISSAU: NEW BLOW TO POLITICAL STABILITY IN
THE GULF OF GUINEA**

Abstract:

Western Africa Region is going through a period of uncertainty, in which the worsening of inner conflicts and institutional instability in some countries are weighing down the democratic advances in others. Guinea-Bissau has witnessed the last attempted coup, just after that perpetrated by Malian soldiers.

Keywords:

Guinea-Bissau, Western Africa, coup, drug dealing, instability.

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INTRODUCTION

Guinea-Bissau has succumbed to the latest West African coup d'état. On April 12, ten days before the scheduled second round of voting in presidential elections, Guinea-Bissau's Prime Minister and presidential candidate Carlos Domingos Gomes Jr. was in army custody along with Raimundo Pereira, the interim president. The military group declared a *de facto* government. The arrest of the two leading politicians —during the first hours it was speculated that both may have been killed in detention—disrupted the presidential campaign, which was supposed to end by April 22 with a second round of voting. The vote counting will determine the name of the new head of government, who is intended to replace President Malam Bacai Sanhá after his death last January at the Paris hospital, where he was undergoing treatment for a long illness.



The first round of voting in the presidential elections was held on March 18 in a relative peaceful atmosphere and Gomes Jr., president of the African Party for the Independence of

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Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGCC), won 49% of the votes cast. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon congratulated the authorities and people of Guinea-Bissau for taking part in a peaceful, orderly and major incident-free polling process during this period of social and political instability. Initially, international observers' reports agreed with the UN's vision and they supported the official results.

	GUINEA-BISSAU
Area	36,125 Km ²
GDP	1,100 billion \$ (2011 estimate)
GDP structure	Agriculture: 55.7% Industry: 12.7% Services: 31.6%
GDP per capita	1,100 \$ (2011 estimate)
GDP growth rate	4.8%
Population	1,628,603 (July 2012 estimate)
Age structure	0-14: 40.4% 15-64: 56.4% 35-64: 3.2% (2011 estimate)
Infant mortality	94.4 for every thousand
Adult literacy rate	42.4% (2003 estimate)
Physicians per thousand population	0.045 (2008)
AIDS rate among adults	2.5% (2009)

However, one violent event led to a political involution, which on the other hand was predictable bearing in mind the traditional instability of the tiny former Portuguese colony. A few hours after the electoral colleges closed, Guinea-Bissau's former head of military intelligence, Colonel Samba Diallo, was shot dead in the streets of the capital Bissau.

Moreover, and despite the appeals of the international community, Gomes' rivals did not accept the results of the first round and they promoted an adjournment of the final voting. They also threatened to boycott elections if the authorities did not offer more guarantees to avoid a fraud during the count.

From then on, the situation deteriorated and led to an atmosphere of instability and insecurity and to the final uprising that disrupted the presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau.

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Mamadou Touré Kuruma, former second Chief of Defence Staff, was named president of the Military Command instead of Pereira. The insurgents, trying to justify their actions, argued that Gomes had signed a secret agreement with the Angolan Government, with presence in Guinea-Bissau through the Angolan Military Mission (MISSANG) with the aim of dismantling the military leadership¹. The week before the coup, thousands of people demonstrated in front of the Angolan embassy in Bissau to protest against the withdrawing of MISSANG in the country. Some observers agree that Gomes intended to reduce the size of the army and to reform the security forces with the aim of limiting its excessive influence within the political game. Thus, some military commands distrusted Gomes because of his strong personality and the firm civilian approach of his political agenda, which was focussed on strengthening the democratic system.

Kumba Yalá, the main alternative to Gomes in the first round, belongs to the Balanta ethnic group, predominant in the army. Yalá, President of Guinea-Bissau from 2000 until 2003, when he was deposed, also in a military coup, is considered among observers and the media as the main instigator of the uprising.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

After the coup, the military junta put into effect a provisional government for two years, until the country was stable enough to hold elections. This proposal was completely rejected by the UN, as well as by the European Union², the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP). Since 26 April 2012, the ECOWAS has held three extraordinary sessions to examine the political situation in Guinea-Bissau.³ At the first summit, ECOWAS gave Guinea-Bissau's junta 72 hours to agree to a return to constitutional order. It was anticipated that, once the meeting was over, the deployment of the peacekeeping contingent, which is supposed to be comprised of 500 officers, will start as a first force to face the former Portuguese colony. However, there were several difficulties within the international community in reaching an agreement and the deployment of regional peacekeeping troops has been delayed.

Although insurgents could have agreed with the presence of international forces, there are no guarantees that the whole army has given its approval. Thus, there is the risk that an

¹See: http://www.portalangop.co.ao/motix/en_us/noticias/politica/2012/3/17/Security-Council-thanks-Missang-effort-Guinea-Bissau,4c1144a9-6cf7-48b6-aec2-3afbc7363953.html

² http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/es/article_12064_es.htm

³ <http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=123&lang=en&annee=2012>

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external military intervention could radicalize the position of those in favour of the coup and even worsen the repression against the political opposition.

In this sense, the ECOWAS has been clear and has highlighted its intention of going to the International Criminal Court to sue those who commit crimes against political representatives or civilians. The last ruling against the former Liberian president, Charles Taylor, has set a precedent and has given more weight and credibility to open a future trial against African politicians or militaries.

Moreover, and following the principle of zero tolerance to coups, promoted by the ECOWAS itself as one of its main pledges, the ECOWAS threatened those who took part in the coup with intensifying political, economic and financial sanctions against the junta.

Paradoxically, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGCC), country's leading political party and led by Gomes until his detention, has expressed its rejection to the intervention. The current party leadership has also announced that it does not intend to designate a new candidate to the Republican presidency.

At the time of writing (Monday, 7 May 2012), some foreign ministers from West African countries, the Junta forces of Guinea-Bissau and leaders of political parties are holding talks in the Gambian capital of Banjul. All parties involved in the Bissau-Guinean crisis, including the regional intervention, will try to schedule a new and agreed calendar to hold new presidential elections and the restoration of constitutional order in Guinea-Bissau. Talks had stalled after political parties fail to agree on who should lead interim government, and the same has occurred to security and defence policies until a democratically elected head of government comes to power.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council has also warned of new sanctions to the coup perpetrators if they reject to ease the development of the suspended electoral process.⁴ The CPLP, at the meeting held along with the Council, has demanded the UN a stronger intervention to put pressure on the coup perpetrators.

On the other hand, the AU has decreed the temporary exclusion until insurgents change their attitude⁵, and it is also considering accompanying measures to put pressure on the junta as well as to prevent negative security consequences in the region because of the coup.⁶

⁴ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41833>

⁵ <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/319th-ministerial-meeting-of-the-peace-and-security-council-on-the-situation-in-guinea-bissau>

⁶ <http://www.au.int/en/content/african-union-rejects-ongoing-unconstitutional-manoeuvres-guinea-bissau>

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While the Security Council puts pressure on those who took part in the coup, the UN entrusts negotiations to the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS). It was established in 2006 to consolidate national reconciliation and strengthen democratic institutions.

The international community must seek reprisals against military insurgents to the extent that it does not worsen citizens' living conditions, highly dependent on foreign aid and prime victims of the food crisis and of the deep economic recession.⁷ Infrastructures remain in poor condition after years of civil war. The capital still suffers from shortage of electricity and poor water supply, which does not help to restore social life and economic activity.

After the international community's threats, the junta seems to show its intentions of seeking a way out of the political internal conflict in a negotiated manner. Some positive data are the implementation of negotiations and the voluntary reduction of the deadline to hold new elections. However, during the next few weeks, these data must be firmly confirmed and open the way for the restoration of democratic institutions.

The day after the ultimatum given by the ECOWAS, during the second extraordinary session to examine the political situation in Guinea-Bissau after the coup, held on 26 April, Pereira and Gomes were released, although they were both forced to leave the country towards Abidjan.

Although no violent incidents were reported, there have been detentions, threats and coercion to opposition leaders. Moreover, trade in the capital is almost at a standstill. The uncertainty of the development of the political situation is having an adverse effect on the economic recovery of recent years, reaching a 5% growth rate in 2011.

Thus, and pending an agreement between the main political leaders in the country, presidential elections' hopes have been disappointed. These elections were the first step for the strengthening of the political stability in Guinea-Bissau after several decades of inner conflicts, political instability and a succession of coups, counterattacks and political persecutions. In 2009, Guinea-Bissau former president Bernardo Vieira was killed in one of the most tragic events in its recent history. The year after another coup took place, which will be very damaging for the immediate future of the former Portuguese colony. It was the

⁷ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41942&Cr=&Cr1=>

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end of the security sector reform mission (EU SSR Guinea-Bissau).⁸ The SSR was directed by General Juan Esteban Verástegui, head of EU mission, who in 2007 carried out a supporting EU policy to strengthen the mechanisms of the rule of law. Some of the main objectives of the mission entrusted to General Verástegui were the restoration of the army and the establishment of an effective defence, as well as the fight against corruption among security forces and inadequate enforcement of the rule of law. The shortage of human resources to develop successfully the mission worsened because of the uprising, removing any possibility of collaboration with the illegitimate authorities of Bissau. This was the end of a short period meant to foster a democratic reform in the country after relatively successful elections. However, the final closure of the mission shows how vulnerable are Guinea-Bissau institutions, victims of coups perpetrators every time they see their political and economic power being threatened. The best evidence can be found in the previous months of the elections scheduled for this year.

Indeed, since the independence of Guinea-Bissau, no elected president has finished his mandate. In 1998 the civil war started, which had a devastating effect on the main production sectors. Shortly before the end of 2011, on 26 December, Bissau's authorities foiled a new attempted coup. At that time, presidential elections' campaign drew near. Unfortunately this success of the government was not a show of the strength and stability of the Bissau-Guinean democratic system but the death throes of its institutions just before a new period of uneasiness. The immediate future of the country is influenced by the excessive role played by the politician leaders, who also face pending issues. Much effort is needed to remove competition between clans, assassinations and overthrows from the political scene in the most northerly Guinea.

A SHELTER FOR DRUG DEALERS IN AFRICA

On the other hand, in the last few years, Guinea-Bissau has become of central importance for the West African security.

Because of Guinea-Bissau's strategic location, relatively close to Europe and with a conducive coast for drug dealing, the country has become one of the main operation centres of the Latin American drug cartels for the shipment of narcotics to the EU.

⁸<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/eu-operations/completed-eu-operations/eu-ssr-guinea-bissau/news-in-brief?lang=en>

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Bijagós, a group of more than 80 islands, and runways that were paved during the colonial period, provide shelter for organised crime. The lack of an air force as well as the scarcity and shortage of navy vessels make surveillance work impossible. Moreover, the more than likely complicity between some members of the security forces and public officials, along with institutional weakness, favours the establishment of international mafia. Its police, poorly endowed and understaffed, cannot face those powerful organizations. In July 2008, a plane coming from Venezuela unloaded several tons of cocaine at the capital's airport with the consent of the army. In economic terms, according to information published in the World Facts Book of the CIA, drug trafficking is by far the main economic activity in the country.⁹ In 2010, the US named two senior army officers in Guinea-Bissau as drug kingpins in West Africa while the country started to be considering as the first "narco-State" of the African continent.

In 2006, on the other hand, Bissau's authorities appealed for international assistance to combat human trafficking, which still goes unpunished in the country.

Thus, the Bissau-Guinean government's major task, once the democratic institutions recover its workings, is to expel drug and human trafficking mafia from the country and to prevent the coasts turning into a new source of insecurity and instability in West Africa. The extremely serious Jihadist threat has also emerged in Sahel and Nigeria and could forge dangerous alliances of convenience with Latin American drug cartels settled in Guinea-Bissau, as happens in Colombia with the FARC guerrillas. In this sense, serious effort is needed to neutralize relationships and connivances with drug dealers inside the administration and the armed forces.

If the relationship between the coup and the defence of the drug trafficking business by senior military officers is confirmed, difficulties to resolve institutional dysfunction would multiply. According to the information recently published by the International Crisis Group, those who took place in the coup in 2010 could be the current leaders of the cocaine dealing business from Latin America to Europe.

CONCLUSIONS

The restoration of political stability in the small neighbouring country of Senegal is conditioned by several factors, not easy to combine: first of all, the strong commitment of the junta to opening a process towards democratic normalization. A good starting point

⁹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pu.html>

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would be to allow Pereira and Gomes to return to the country and to guarantee their physical integrity and their free exercise of their human and political rights, as well as to respect other political leaders and the whole population. If political parties cannot present their next candidates without threats and coercions, it will be difficult to expect a trend towards political stability in Guinea-Bissau in the medium term. Moreover, the restoration of democratic institutions won't be successful if all military officers, police and officials involved in drug trafficking to Europe do not firmly renounce this activity. This will remain a major obstacle for the restoration of stability in Guinea-Bissau and the main threat to security not only in the region but also in the country. International organised crime networks operating in the territory will continue to have influence. It won't be easy to revoke the means that provide impunity to cartels and mafia, especially those linked to military officers and security forces. The third main factor to the restoration of the country is working on the reconstruction of basic infrastructures. There will be no economic activity, at least, until the electricity supply is restored.

Here too, pressure exerted by the international community is decisive in this democratic process. Thus, and according to the UN, a big effort will be needed to coordinate the actions of the different organizations involved. Those organizations of regional scope have new opportunities to assert the pivotal role in mediation and resolution of conflicts in the continent. Therefore, the need to neutralize the Bissau-Guinean source of instability calls for urgent and effective measures. The main objective is now to prevent the strengthening of a narco-State that goes adrift and endangers the West African security.

Finally, because of the political and social situation in Guinea-Bissau, the country urgently needs a negotiating process between the main political forces, as well as the adoption of sincere, clear, stable and firm agreements that allow the restoration of the lost governability and democracy in Guinea-Bissau.

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