

Guinea-Bissau after Vieira: Challenges and Opportunities

On 7 June 1998, an army mutiny led by former Chief of Staff, General Ansumane Mané, plunged the Republic of Guinea-Bissau into a devastating civil war. The *coup* aimed to oust President João Bernardo Vieira, who had come to power in a military *coup* against Luís Cabral in 1980 and had subsequently won the country's first multiparty elections in 1994. The civil war that followed Mané's mutiny changed the framework of the ongoing transformation process in the former socialist-orientated Guinea-Bissau. It also engulfed the subregion drawing Senegal, Guinea and The Gambia into the power struggle in Guinea-Bissau.

In May 1999, after a peace process had already been negotiated and partially implemented, Mané's forces launched another attack on Vieira, and finally succeeded in ousting the incumbent leader. Although this *coup* can be seen as a setback for peace and reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau, the new political situation that resulted from Vieira's overthrow at least provided a chance to end a hitherto paralysing state of 'no peace-no war' — akin to the Angolan situation after the Lusaka Accords. The new power constellation under Mané may well give Vieira's rather disappointing democratisation process fresh impetus. Yet, it is still early days. Guinea Bissau remains unstable and its increasingly paralysed state structures still threaten regional stability.

Motives behind the 1998 mutiny

The suspension of General Mané in February 1998, on charges of smuggling arms to the Senegalese separatist movement, *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques des Casamance* (MFDC), was an underlying reason for the mutiny. Mané had been a comrade of Vieira during the struggle for independence and had supported Vieira in his military *coup* in 1980 with the hope of gaining a significant position of influence. However, his hopes were dashed when he was only awarded the position of Chief of Staff. When even this post was taken away from him by Vieira, and handed to Brigadier Humberto Gomes, Mané launched the June 1998 *coup*.

Mané was able to mobilise 90% of the soldiers formerly under his command and most of the veterans of the independence struggle. Within the military, there already was a strong feeling of betrayal by Vieira after 1980. Although the army's support of him in the overthrow of Luís Cabral had been crucial, Vieira

did not install a military regime after he came to power. With the beginning of democratic transition in 1990, the military lost its remaining privileges and became part of the marginalised population. Major sections of the army started relying on proceeds from illicit arms deals with the Casamance rebels and cannabis sales.

The regional dimension

Given Mané's control over major sections of the army, Vieira had to fight the rebellion with the military assistance of Guinea (400 soldiers) and Senegal (1,200 soldiers). Immediately after the mutiny, Senegal and Guinea sent troops to Guinea-Bissau in accordance with a regional defence pact signed in September 1997. Both countries saw their involvement in the conflict as an opportunity to pursue their own national interests.

Guinea-Bissau's position in the Casamance conflict in Senegal will be crucial for regional stability

Senegal feared that a successful military *coup* in Guinea-Bissau would strengthen the cause of the Casamance rebels, who have close ethnic ties with many Guinea-Bissau soldiers and who stood to benefit from a military regime in Bissau. Guinea has traditionally been a supporter of Vieira and the ruling *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC) in Guinea-Bissau. Its support for the party can be traced back to the anti-colonial struggle. By sending its troops, Guinea also hoped to reduce the Senegalese influence and limit its role in the region.

Although The Gambia had no direct military involvement in the conflict, it cannot be discounted as a key actor in the region. The Gambia would like to be seen as a regional conflict mediator. However, its peace mediation efforts during the first phase of the conflict failed. Neither the government in Guinea-

Bissau nor Senegal considered The Gambia's position as neutral due to the fact that General Mané was born and raised in The Gambia. Moreover, the Gambian government has apparent sympathies with the Casamance separatists in Senegal.

Challenges

Lack of funds for a quick recovery

A major problem affecting both the government and international aid organisations is the paralysed state structure. The only international airport of Guinea-Bissau, located in Bissalanka, was closed down after the June 1998 mutiny until 27 July 1999. Banks have only recently re-opened their doors and state employees have not received their salaries for months. The reconstruction of the country and the re-establishment of political structures will require financial and material input that far exceeds the US\$70 million already promised by the European Union (EU). An additional 2.9 million euros (US\$3.05 million) in humanitarian aid already given by the EU to rebuild and repair the 5,000 homes damaged and destroyed during the fighting in May 1999 seems to be a proverbial drop in the ocean. According to the National Electoral Commission, multiparty elections at the end of this year—crucial for the pacification and democratisation of the country—are threatened by a severe lack of funds.

Structural weaknesses

To establish viable political structures and to move the process of democratisation forward, the capabilities of the existing parties will have to be enhanced. Furthermore, they have to be made more aware of their political responsibilities. Up until now, as was the case in the lead-up to the elections in 1994, the opposition parties are fraught with inter- and intra-party quarrels. Instead of uniting to overthrow the PAIGC government, they perceive their main enemy within their own camps. Neither the attempt to build the coalition *Forum Democrático* (uniting PCD, FDS, PUSD, RGB/MB) nor the *União Democrática da Oposição* (FLING, PCD, PDP, PRS) has been a success.

Internal party splits have fragmented Guinea-Bissau's party system even more. Due to intra-opposition

Chronology

December 1990

Central Committee of the ruling party, the PAIGC, passes a resolution to institute democratic pluralism within two years.

July 1994

First multiparty parliamentary and presidential elections. President Vieira beats Koumba Yala in the second round of the presidential elections with 52% against 48% (Yala).

February 1998 Ansumane Mané is suspended as Chief of Army Staff.

6 June 1998

Vieira deploys Brigadier Humberto Gomes as the new Chief of Army Staff.

7 June 1998

Attempted coup by Mané to oust Vieira. Fighting starts in Bissau, the capital. Senegalese and Guinean troops are dispatched to support Vieira.

July - October 1998

The government of Vieira and the military involved in the coup cannot agree on the contents of a peace treaty.

1 November 1998

Vieira and Mané sign a peace agreement in Abuja, Nigeria. The deal calls for elections in March 1999, an interim government consisting of members from both parties, and the withdrawal of all Guinean and Senegalese troops, replacing them with ECOMOG peacekeeping troops.

December 1998

Although President Vieira and the rebel leader Mané agree during the summit of West African leaders in Lomé on Francisco Fadul as the Premier of the interim government of national unity, the implementation of the Abuja agreement lags behind schedule. An obstacle is the slow withdrawal of foreign troops and the delayed stationing of ECOMOG troops supplied by Benin, The Gambia, Niger and Togo.

February 1999

300 ECOMOG peacekeepers from Benin and Niger land in Bissau.

March 1999

The deadline (1 March 1999) for the departure of Guinean and Senegalese forces is not met. Due to a lack of proper preparations, the elections scheduled for the end of March have to be postponed to November 1999.

6 and 7 May 1999

Mané's forces attack Vieira's forces citing as their reason the refusal of the presidential guards to disarm. Brigadier Gomes announces his surrender to junta forces. Vieira seeks protection in the French and Portuguese Embassies.

July 1999

Government affairs are run by the interim government of national unity consisting of both parties. Head of state is interim-President Sanhá.

22 August 1999

Start of the voters registration process, scheduled until the 2nd of September.

28 November 1999

Rescheduled presidential and legislative elections due.

rivalries, there has never been constructive parliamentary engagement by the opposition—let alone a convincing alternative to the ruling party. Not surprisingly, it was the military *junta* without any party connection, that drove Vieira out of office.

At an early stage, the opposition party *Partido da Renovação Social* (PRS) allied itself with Mané's rebels and supported their demand for new elections. However, the opposition has been rather reluctant to condemn or support the rebellion. It was only after the first ceasefire agreement that they rushed in and demanded a stronger voice in the drafting of a final peace agreement. Most importantly, they forced the retreat of foreign troop contingencies, suspicious that war might flare up again.

The PAIGC, facing elections scheduled for November 1999, has also had to cope with its structural weakness and the division between 'historicos' and 'modernistas'. Above all, after Vieira's overthrow, it has to find a new leadership. Potential candidates

include the acting interim-President, **Malan Bacai Sanhá**, and the Minister of Defence, **Francisco Benante**, representing the '*movimento renovador*' within the PAIGC. Although the party congress was scheduled for the 18-22 August 1999, it was postponed at the very last minute. The driving force behind the postponement has been Benante's group of '*renovadores*' which currently does not feel strong enough to compete with the party wing which supports the interim-party leader, **Manuel Saturnino da Costa**. But nevertheless, Francisco Benante has the back up of his close friend, **General Ansumane Mané**, who helped to nullify Saturnino da Costa's bid for the party leadership. At the end of August, Saturnino da Costa was charged with attempting to buy supporting votes from party congress delegates for his attempt to secure the party presidency.

A fragile interim government

Another burden weighing on the immediate stability of the country is the weak interim government consisting of members named equally by Vieira and the military *junta*. This combination has led to bizarre volte face's: such as sending the then External Trade Minister **Hilia Barber**, formerly named by Vieira, to neighbouring countries in order to explain why Vieira had to be deposed.

Consolidating relations with neighbouring countries
A medium-term challenge for the future government is the consolidation of relations with Senegal and Guinea. Guinea-Bissau's role in the Casamance conflict in Senegal will be crucial and decisive for stability within the subregion.

Scenarios

1. Successful Elections

If elections are held at the end of 1999 or at the beginning of 2000, the PAIGC is expected to lose many votes, as most people have expressed solidarity with the rebels. However, Guinea-Bissau's peculiar electoral system could be an influencing factor. The proportional representation system with a seat distribution à la D'Hondt provides the majority party with an unproportionally high amount of seats. In the 1994 elections the PAIGC only gained 37.92% of the electoral votes, but received 62 of the 100 parliamentary seats. Additionally, the PAIGC still has considerable financial resources and a solid infrastructure which could, especially after getting rid of the baggage of the Vieira era and transforming itself into a PAIGC-*Renovada*, mobilise additional voters. A take-over of power by the opposition seems likely only if a stable party coalition can be established.

2. Balance of Power

Given the precarious financial situation of Guinea-Bissau and other structural problems, the elections may still be postponed indefinitely. The interim government consisting of PAIGC representatives and members of the military *junta* will then remain in office. The best-case scenario is a balance of power between the two factions limiting the government's ability to act. In the worst case, Mané will extend his influence, thus creating a military dictatorship in disguise.

