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# Guinea-Bissau in 2011: Between Stability and Uncertainties

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In recent years Guinea-Bissau has oscillated between stability and uncertainty. After decades of political violence, President Malam Bacai Sanhá had to face a serious challenge to his authority two years into his presidency, when a military plot unfolded on 1 April 2010. The incident had a tremendous impact on the political situation and shaped Bacai Sanhá political action in a significant way.

The political and security situation has remained stable since then, despite the subsequent decisions of President Bacai Sanhá to appoint, much to the dismay and disappointment of the international community, the leaders of the mutiny, General António Indjai and Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto, to top military leadership positions (Army Chief of Staff and Chief of the Navy, respectively.) This move was a key factor in a decision by the European Union (EU) to suspend a portion of its support to the country's reform programme pending a dialogue on governance with the political authorities in line with Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement. The Cotonou Agreement provides for the respect of human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law as essential elements of the EU-ACP Partnership Agreement. These are also crucial for Guinea-Bissau's development towards stability and prosperity.

President Malam Bacai Sanhá has struggled to manage the fragile balance of power between the country's political and military leaderships. His ill-health raised concerns on his ability to complete his mandate. Therefore, the official announcement of his death on 3 January 2012 was seen as another lost opportunity for the much needed reforms in Guinea-Bissau. It also appears that it might provide a fresh opportunity to complete the reform process, build on the fragile stability and consensus provided key local and external actors remain focused, and devise coherent strategies that clearly identify the main challenges and priorities for the normalization of the socio-economic and political situation in one of the most volatile West African countries. It is likely that Bacai Sanhá's succession and the legislative elections in Novem-

ber 2012 will be important milestones in Guinea-Bissau's quest for lasting peace.

This article reviews the past year 2011, highlights key achievements and main challenges and explores the prospects for a lasting peace in Guinea-Bissau. It is divided into five major parts. The first section looks at the various attempts at restoring political normalcy in 2011. The second section deals with the issue of stabilization forces and subsequent controversies it created. The third section discusses the stake of the post-Sanhá succession debate while the fourth section analyses the importance and dynamics of the election particularly the prospects of former Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior being elected as the new President and its implications for the post-conflict reconstruction in Guinea-Bissau. The article ends with a few scenarios to consider by actors involved.

## **Guinea-Bissau difficult path to socio-political recovery**

The events that took place on 1 April 2010 served as a sharp reminder of the cyclical dimensions of some of the threats still hanging over the post-conflict reconstruction project in Guinea-Bissau. Given the fact that the country was still recovering from the double assassinations of President João Bernardo 'Nino' Vieira and his Army Chief of Staff, General Baptista Tagmé na Waie in the previous year, many observers jumped hurriedly on the conclusions that there was a little hope for national peace and stability. The hopes raised by the assassinations of President Nino Vieira and General Tagmé Na Waie that political rivalries would die down were to some extent dashed. Yet, carefully analyzed, it seemed the April 2010 mutiny and subsequent reactions provided a platform for a political dialogue and compromise that created some sense of stability in 2011.

The return in December 2009 of the Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto, accused of being the mastermind of the 2008-foiled coup, cast a further shadow on Guinea-Bissau's political and military future. The April mutiny provided the opportunity for Bubo Na Tchuto as well



as António Indjai who instigated the mutiny to become prominent and influential in the post-Nino Vieira's national political landscape. Indeed, the April mutiny led effectively to the dismissal of Chief of Staff Admiral José Zamora Induta, seen as committed to the long awaited reforms of the army and uncompromising on drug trafficking.<sup>1</sup> Bubo Na Tchuto was rehabilitated, cleared from all charges of coup attempt and drug trafficking, and re-appointed as the Chief of the country's Navy while António Indjai was confirmed as the new Army Chief of Staff. The survival of Bacai Sanhá's regime hinged on the newly found balance among the three centers of power.

Evidently, these developments have had serious implications for the newly elected President Malam Bacai Sanhá. His move to bow to the new army leaders was diversely appreciated with at least two major consequences. First, many pointed to the perpetual fragile base of the civilian power as projected by Bacai Sanhá-led executive in Guinea-Bissau and by extension the inability of the President to ascertain his authority. Second, international partners adopted a radical stance and some, including the European Union, suspended its involvement in the security sector reform (SSR), a key process in the stabilization process of the country. There were some concerns that the withdrawal of the EU and other major donors could compromise the completion of some key reforms, including the SSR, leaving Guinea-Bissau in a constant state of instability. The President himself seemed desperate when he called for a regional stabilization force to be deployed in Guinea-Bissau sparking controversies and resistance from the Armed Forces.

### **Controversies on the stabilization force and the rise of Angola's leadership**

The call by President Bacai Sanhá for a stabilization force in Guinea-Bissau responded to an immediate threat hanging over his rule and the country's security. Yet, key political and military actors in the country did not share his concerns fearing and resenting the deployment of peacekeeping mission in Guinea-Bissau. The opposition of the army coupled with the EU's withdrawal in February 2011 forced the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) to streamline their involvement in the security sector reform process.

In fact since August 2010, ECOWAS and CPLP army chiefs met to work on a new roadmap for the SSR as a key step in the stabilization of the country. In July 2011 the roadmap was adopted. The roadmap did not however innovate but simply drew from the existing EU-SSR strategy without allocating any particular timeframe. In substance Guinea-Bissau's authorities have to renew the military hierarchy with a firm commitment to ridding it of senior leaders or commanders allegedly involved in illegal acts of violence or those who have reached retirement age. This provision could be problematic as it was interpreted as targeting Bubo Na Tchuto and António Indjai.

Meanwhile, the most important development in Guinea-Bissau has been the opportunity created by the EU's decision to withdraw from the SSR allowing other partners to step in to assist the country. Paradoxically, very active diplomatic initiatives by President Bacai Sanhá and Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior helped to mobilize a variety of partners, both in and outside Africa, around the main security and political challenges facing Guinea-Bissau. Angola for example has emerged as one of the most important leading countries in the process. Following the agreement reached in September 2010, Angola committed to send a military team made of 200 members of the Angolan Armed Forces. The main task of the team was to pro-

President Malam Bacai Sanhá has struggled to manage the fragile balance of power between the country's political and military leaderships. His ill health raised concerns on his ability to complete his mandate. His death was seen as another lost opportunity for the much needed reforms in Guinea-Bissau. It also appears that Bacai Sanhá's succession and the legislative elections in November 2012 will be important milestones in Guinea-Bissau's quest for lasting peace.

<sup>1</sup> See Paulo Gorjão, "Guinea-Bissau: The Inescapable Feeling of Déjà Vu" (*IPRIS Policy Brief*, No. 2, April 2010).



vide assistance in restructuring Bissau's national Armed Forces and Police over an initial period of two years. The team was also to provide security to state institutions including the executive and the office of the Prime Minister. Moreover, Angola pledged over US\$30 million for the SSR while moving ahead in renovating the military barracks. While the leading role of Angola in Guinea-Bissau is diversely appreciated, it seems to be approved and accepted by the military hierarchy that has previously threatened to turn the country upside down should there be a peacekeeping force in Guinea-Bissau. Notwithstanding, while some observers criticized the lack of transparency and open communication, others pointed to the hidden agenda of Luanda to increase its influence in the Gulf of Guinea using Guinea-Bissau. Regardless of the interpretation of Angola's role in Guinea-Bissau, its involvement and interest in the country stemmed from historical, political, economic and strategic factors. In addition to a shared Portuguese colonial history and linguistic heritage, Guinea-Bissau offers some great deals of investment opportunities to Angola in the mines (Bauxite) and oil while confirming Angola's ambition to play an increasing continental role.

In spite of its prominent role, Angola is not the only African partner providing assistance to Guinea-Bissau. South Africa has shown interest in both the SSR and a resource driven development relationship with Guinea-Bissau. This has manifested through the state visit of the South Africa's Vice-President Kgalema Motlanthe on 30-31 August 2011. Pretoria, while Guinea-Bissau has few resources that are largely untapped, could see to the development of Guinea-Bissau's oil, bauxite, phosphate, gold, uranium, nickel and other natural resources, as well as development in Bissau's agriculture sector. In that regard the South African government is working closely with Angola in the security field as the two are involved in Guinea-Bissau's security sector reform initiatives, though each is there under bilateral accords with Guinea-Bissau. Many

are of the opinion that the cooperation between Pretoria and Luanda is likely a way for Pretoria to keep an eye on Angola's activities in both Guinea-Bissau and the Gulf of Guinea at large.

There are various stakes for the variety of actors involved and few of them could really remain indifferent to the national

situation of the country. For Senegal the stabilization in Guinea-Bissau could have incidence on the security situation in the Casamance. The regional organization ECOWAS and the CPLP have also been instrumental in assuming some degree of responsibility towards the stabilization of Guinea-Bissau. Indeed, to support Angola's efforts ECOWAS committed to disburse US\$63 million to support the SSR in addition to the sending of a security assistance team (SAT). SAT's mission was to set up a special police unit responsible for the protection of national key institutions. SAT was also to support the national commission of inquiry investigating Guinea-Bissau's coups and the political assassinations of President Nino Vieira and the Army Chief of Staff Tagmé Na Waie.

All Guinea-Bissau's partners are aware that the stability of the country hinges on the successful completion of the SSR. The final objective is to reduce the size of the army to 4.000 men. Close to 1.300 soldiers, mainly those involved in the liberation struggle, were due to retire in July 2011. This, however, is far from being completed. Nevertheless, the partnership between ECOWAS and CPLP offers great hope for the completion of the process if the political environment improves. While the EU has played an important role in the post-conflict reconstruction mainly through the SSR, its decision to withdraw has somehow made it a secondary actor

in Guinea-Bissau. The consultations that took place in Brussels in March 2011 to set the conditions for the return of the EU to the forefront in Guinea-Bissau have not ushered in the return of the EU to the forefront of the SSR process. The EU laid a number of conditions. In a press

The events that took place on 1 April 2010 served as a sharp reminder of the cyclical dimensions of some of the threats still hanging over the post-conflict reconstruction project in Guinea-Bissau. Bubo Na Tchuto was rehabilitated and reappointed as the Chief of the country's navy, while António Indjai was confirmed as the new army Chief of Staff. The survival of Bacai Sanhá's regime hinged on the newly found balance among the three centers of power.



release of January 2011,<sup>2</sup> the EU considered it necessary to open consultations with the authorities in power in Guinea-Bissau in order to examine possible solutions to the crisis which would re-establish democratic order. The main aim of these consultations would be to discuss:

- An end to the illegal detention of Admiral José Zamora Induta and others arrested for alleged involvement with the April 1 coup attempt;
- Carrying out independent investigations into the events that took place between 1 March 2009 and 1 April 2010;
- The appointment of persons of integrity not implicated in acts of violence and unconstitutional conduct to lead Guinea-Bissau's Armed Forces; the acceptance by the authorities of any experts' mission and civil and military support that may be proposed by ECOWAS, the CPLP and/or other partners to supervise and support the reform of the security sector and protect political staff;
- The enactment and publication of the SSR legislative package;
- The Adoption by the government of an operational programme to implement the SSR package;
- Any other undertaking likely to improve the country's democratic governance and security sector reform.

However, it has proven difficult to have all of them kept by Guinea-Bissau's authorities before resuming development aid.

It is true that Guinea-Bissau is still seen by most European countries and the US through the prism of drug trafficking and other transnational crimes, and a firm stance is needed to break the resistance to reforms. While this is important, it will also be appropriate for the EU to join hands with ECOWAS, CPLP and other major partners to support the political stabilization process (democracy, good governance, and fight against impunity) that could lay the foundations for the normalization of the national socio-political and economic situation. The window of opportunity created by the April incident, albeit controversial, should not be missed.

It is this understanding that informs the Bretton Woods Institutions to continue lending their support for the country's economic recovery now showing some positive signs. In September 2011 a mission of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) visited Guinea-Bissau to assess the progress made on structural reforms undertaken by the government. The IMF praised the country for its efforts to stabilize its economy and decided to reopen its office in Bissau. The prospects for growth look encouraging according the IMF, and Guinea-Bissau has been able to meet all its benchmarks and quantitative targets by December 2011.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the events that took place, the sickness of the President, his transfer to the military hospital in Paris, and the attempted coups, appear as constant menaces for sustainable socio-economic stability.

The most important development in Guinea-Bissau in 2011 has been the opportunity created by the EU's decision to withdraw from the SSR to other partners to step in to assist the country. Angola for example has emerged as one of the most important leading countries in the process.

#### **Bacai Sanhá's death and the aborted military coup: What is at stake?**

The official announcement of the death of President Malam Bacai Sanhá reignites the struggle for control among the main political forces in the country. Bacai Sanhá finally succumbed to his ill-health challenges depriving Guinea-Bissau of a leader who, in spite of his personal health and the structural weaknesses of the national political arrangements, was seen by many as a unifier and consensus builder. His death is a further reminder that since 2000 no President has been able to complete his term in office. President Bacai Sanhá somehow struck a deal with the Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior and the Army Chief of Staff António Indjai to create the semblance of stability necessary for the completion

of pending reforms. Though superficial, the renewed understanding between President Bacai Sanhá and the Prime Minister has eased dialogue on some of the main challenges affecting the post-conflict reconstruction of Guinea-Bissau, particularly the SSR and the issue of pension funds, and to seek to mobilize new partners around Guinea-Bissau's challenges. There are now fears and concerns over the transition. Indeed, President Bacai Sanhá demise could either perpetuate the atmosphere of instability or serve as an opportunity to keep the reforms on track through a peaceful transfer of power.

2 "EU Opens Consultations with Guinea-Bissau" (Council of the European Union, 5750/11 Presse 13, 31 January 2011).

3 Guinea-Bissau: Second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IMF, Country Report No. 11/353, December 2011).

Yet, the foiled attempted coup in December 2011 was seen as the manifestation of a continued fight to control the helms of power. While it is not clear what prompted the movement, speculation is rife that the event is an attempt to settle whether the Head of the Navy Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto, or the Army Chief of Staff General António Indjai will be the country's drug kingpin. It could also be a deliberate move to politically neutralize Bubo Na Tchuto, seen as a potential threat to António Indjai's authority, and more broadly to democracy in Guinea-Bissau. It is however important to stress that in the context of Guinea-Bissau the army is hardly interested in the executive power to exert influence. Nevertheless, Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto is an officer with presidential ambitions, and he would not miss an opportunity to take control of the country. In the past he was accused of masterminding plots and remains on the US blacklist as the main support to the narcotics trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. His arrest has, for now, cleared the way for General António Indjai but has not excluded the Nino Vieira-Tagmé Na Waie scenario resulting in the double political assassinations in 2009.

#### **Transitional presidential elections, a test for the PAIGC's hegemony**

In March 2012, for the second time in two years, Guinea-Bissau will go to the poll to elect a new President. Not that the incumbent has completed his term, but because the current President's rule has been interrupted this time around by circumstances beyond national, political and military intrigues. The death of President Malam Bacai Sanhá came at a time when Guinea-Bissau seems to have found a semblance of stability and is gearing towards consolidating the fragile balance between conflicting military and political interests on both domestic and foreign fronts. Persistent internal divisions could be aggravated by the ambitions of potential candidates currently vying to fill Bacai Sanhá's seat, and this could affect the African Party for the Independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC).

Interestingly, Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior indicated his intention to stand for the elections, and he is

likely to win them. The antagonism between leaders with liberation credentials and reformists within the ranks of the party might not play itself out this time as was the case during the transition period after the double political assassinations. Carlos Gomes Júnior has already been endorsed by key structures of the party as its main candidate to the detriment of other two contenders Manuel Serifo Nhamadjo and Francisco Benavente.

He also enjoys quite a significant support among the external actors, including Angola, that have become main players in the national politics of the country. But Gomes Júnior will face nearly 13 other candidates. These include two members of his own party, the PAIGC, notably interim National Speaker Serifo Nhamadjo and Defense Minister Baciro Dja, in addition to Kumba Yalá, candidate for the Party for Social Renovation (PRS), and Henrique Rosa among others.

The timeframe for the transitional elections might not be the appropriate platform to win back power. Commodity prices are high, while the PRS expects to take advantage of the divisions within the PAIGC. And since the 2008 legislative elections that saw the PAIGC win 67 out of 100 seats in the Parliament, the hegemony of the party has been under serious duress even though it had managed to win the previous presidential elections and is likely to win the upcoming electoral contest. In spite of internal contradictions, the PAIGC remains a strong contender because of the weaknesses of the opposition parties. The opposition PRS is still suffering from the absence of a credible socio-economic and political alternative to the PAIGC and the lack of credibility of its leader, former President Kumba Yalá.

While the independent candidates from the PAIGC might undermine the resounding victory of the ruling party, the coalition formed in 2011, the Collective Democratic Opposition (CDO) that brought together 15 parties, could not affect the PAIGC's current hegemony. As it is common with opposition parties in Africa, the vote is likely to be split among the numerous candidates of the opposition already looking forward to standing for the presidential contest. However, the electoral process will not be without challenges given the fact that the review of the

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voter roll could no longer be completed before the vote, and the process could face some serious financial constraints. Nevertheless, Guinea-Bissau has experiences in holding sometimes surprisingly peaceful transitional elections.

#### Scenarios for Guinea-Bissau

Developments in Guinea-Bissau over the past few years alternate between creating hope and anxiety. Meanwhile, the dynamics introduced by the 1 April 2010 mutiny and the opportunity to hold fresh presidential elections well ahead of the legislative elections slated for November 2012 could hold a number of scenarios for Guinea-Bissau.

#### Free, fair and peaceful elections: Opportunity for political stability

This is a call by all actors in Guinea-Bissau and abroad for a peaceful transfer of power through constitutional means. The outcomes of the elections are significant in many ways. If the PAIGC wins through Carlos Gomes Júnior, his personality could be significant in reshaping the executive power in Guinea-Bissau. Tensions between the executive branch and the office of the Prime Minister could be diffused while the reform process is likely to receive a boost. A stable political environment is essential for national reconciliation and economic stability. The idea of holding a national conference, which has been under discussion, could be finalized. It was expected that the conference could take place in December 2011 to ease the prevailing tensions. However, due to the threat by opposition parties to boycott it, the national conference was postponed. Above all it is the opportunity to successfully complete the SSR that makes the outcomes of the transitional elections an important step in the post-conflict reconstruction trajectory of Guinea-Bissau.

#### Successful SSR

An improved political environment could favor the security sector reform. Following the adoption of the roadmap by ECOWAS and CPLP, there seems to be a resurgence of interest in the successful completion of these reforms.

The most important components of the process is the operationalization of the pension funds, the finalization of the list of defense and security personnel selected for retirement, and the preparation of a timeline of activities relating to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). As Prime Minister, Carlos Gomes Júnior has himself promised governmental financial support to the DDR, and his election could provide the opportunity for a more robust engagement. It could also help to improve relations with key partners including the EU while assisting with the coordination among various actors involved in the process.

#### Stagnant political process

This scenario could see a renewed stagnation in the political process with serious implications for the SSR. The election of Carlos Gomes Júnior as President might not usher in a new dispensation if the army and its leadership fail to seize the momentum to diligently complete the reforms. The current relations between Gomes Júnior and António Indjai are seen as being dictated by a mutual realization that collaboration is necessary for national stability.

If these relations deteriorate for reasons owing to divergence on the pace and modalities of the SSR, Guinea-Bissau could once again find itself in a political stagnation. This could be even greater if the various clans within the army continue to be manipulated by political and military actors. The arrest of the Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto might

have removed one of the major threats to both the current political and military leadership and the completion of the reforms. However, if Bubo Na Tchuto finds a way to seek revenge, this could be detrimental for the country. The feud between António Indjai and Bubo Na Tchuto, in addition to the presidential ambitions of the latter, stems from the fight to control the narcotics business in Guinea-Bissau. There are concerns that the deterioration of relations between the two leaders could lead to violence if not political assassinations.

The death of President Malam Bacai Sanhá came at a time when Guinea-Bissau seems to have found a semblance of stability and is gearing towards consolidating the fragile balance between conflicting major military and political interests on both domestic and foreign fronts. Persistent internal divisions could be aggravated by the ambitions of potential candidates currently vying to step in Bacai Sanhá's seat and this could affect the PAIGC.



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