Civil-military relations in Guinea-Bissau: An unresolved issue

Abstract

Following the death of Guinea-Bissau’s President Malam Bacai Sanha in January 2012, Prime Minister Carlos Gomez Júnior was widely expected to win the country’s presidential elections. Gomez Júnior won the first round of the elections by a significant margin, but the voting process was interrupted by a military coup on 12 April 2012. After the coup was condemned by many regional and international actors, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deployed intense diplomatic efforts and brokered an agreement with the country’s new ‘Military Command’. On 23 May 2012, power was transferred to a transitional civilian government that has been given one year to organise new parliamentary and presidential polls. The negotiations leading to this deal were far from inclusive, however, and the arrangement has been strongly criticised, including by the former leading political party, civil society representatives, the UN and the EU. The transitional government has not been recognised internationally, and the EU has issued calls to restore constitutional order and resume the interrupted presidential elections. Yet as time advances, the status quo seems unlikely to be reversed, at least in the near future. The April coup underscores the power of the military in Guinea-Bissau, whose social and economic development has been constantly undermined by political instability since its independence in 1974.
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1. Guinea-Bissau: A country in recurrent crisis

1.1. Background elements

With a population of 1.6 million inhabitants living in only 36 000 km², and a GDP per capita of USD 1 251, Guinea-Bissau is one of the smallest and poorest countries in western Africa. Its socio-economic indicators are discouraging: the country ranked 176th of 187 in the 2011 Human Development Index. Ever since independence in 1974, the country has been prone to political instability, with the military regularly interfering in state affairs. In the last ten years alone, the country has experienced five military coups, and no president has been able to fulfil a complete mandate. Security is greatly affected by drug trafficking, and the country has become a major gateway for drug transit from South America to Europe. It is believed that some senior army officials are directly implicated in drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime.

After independence in 1974, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) established a single-party socialist state, dominated by the figure of President Luis Cabral. In 1980, Prime Minister Joao Bernardo Vieira led a military coup that overthrew President Cabral’s violent regime. President Vieira subsequently governed the country for 19 years and won the first multiparty presidential elections in 1994. In 1999, the President was, in his turn, overthrown by another military coup, this one triggering a civil war and leading to the installation of a transitional military junta. Presidential elections were organised in 2000, but the elected President Kumba Yala was forced out of office in 2003. Following another period of instability, Vieira was again elected President in July 2005. On 2 March 2009, both he and the Army Chief of Staff were murdered, which led to a difficult transition process. Presidential elections in July 2009 finally transferred power to Malam Bacai Sanha of the ruling party (PAIGC).

During his mandate, President Sanha struggled to maintain a balance of power between political and military leaders. He managed to silent divisions within the ruling party and to create a good working relation with his Prime Minister, Carlos Gomes Júnior. There were also attempts to carry out long-expected security sector reforms (SSR), and Prime Minister Gomes Júnior was vocal about downsizing the army and combating drug cartels. Yet this period of relative stability was interrupted by the death of the president in January 2012 after a long and undisclosed illness. His passing sparked fears of renewed instability, especially as a military mutiny had been put down by the army only recently, at the end of December 2011.

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1 World Bank: 2011 data.
1.2. The 2012 presidential elections interrupted by a military coup

Upon the death of the president, the Head of the National Assembly, Raimundo Pereira, became acting president and announced that presidential elections would take place within a 60-day period. Marked by a significant abstention level (45%), the first round of the polling took place peacefully on 18 March 2012. The former Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior (from the PAIGC ruling party) won the first round with 48.97% of the votes, followed by former president Kumba Yala (23%) and Serifo Nhamadjo (15.75%), a dissident PAIGC candidate. However, even before the announcement of the results, five of the eight candidates alleged fraud and requested the elections be annulled. Kumba Yala went so far as to state that he would not participate in the run-off vote, which was to take place at the end of April 2012. On 12 April, the day before the opening of the official campaign for the second round, the military interrupted the electoral process and seized power in bloodless coup. The interim president and Carlos Gomez Júnior were arrested, together with a number of high ranking officials.

The coup constituted a major set back for Carlos Gomez Júnior, who was expected to win the elections. Coup leaders said they had been motivated in part by the presence of a 270-soldier-strong Angolan military contingent (MISSANG) in the country, deployed in early 2011 as part of the roadmap for security sector reforms. The military claimed that Carlos Gomez Júnior had entered into a secret agreement with Angola, which meant they were ‘forced to act to defend themselves against the government’s attempts to annihilate the armed forces of Guinea-Bissau’. Relations between Carlos Gomez Júnior and the army were tense even before the coup, due to Gomez Júnior’s attempts to downsize the army, reform the pension scheme and rebalance the ethnic composition of the military leadership (dominated by the Balante).

The ‘Military Command’ also organised a ‘Forum of political parties on the coup d’état of 12 April 2012’ with representatives of the opposition party (including the Party of Social Renovation, or PRS) and extra-parliamentary opposition parties. These consultations led to the signing, on 18 April, of the ‘Protocol on the establishment and management of constitutional and democratic order’. This Protocol included the establishment of a National Transitional Council for a period of two years, implying the de facto removal of the acting president and the dissolution of Parliament. The former ruling party, the PAIGC, and eight other political parties refused to take part in the negotiations or to sign the protocol.
2. The reactions of the international community and the mediation efforts of ECOWAS

2.1. The coup condemned by the UN and the EU

The military coup in Guinea-Bissau has been internationally condemned. The UN reacted promptly, immediately issuing a press statement to denounce the coup on 13 April. A security country presidential statement was published on 21 April, in which the UN condemned the coup, rejected the unconstitutional creation of the National Transitional Council and demanded the immediate restoration of constitutional order. Intense diplomatic activities led to the adoption, on 18 May 2012, of UN Resolution 2048 imposing individual targeted sanctions on the coup perpetrators. Resolution 2048 imposed a foreign travel ban on the leaders of the Military Command and tasked the sanctions committee with monitoring the implementation of the travel ban.

The EU also reacted swiftly, with statements from Vice President/High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) Catherine Ashton. On 23 April, the European Council adopted conclusions condemning the coup and demanding the reestablishment of the legitimate government and the completion of the democratic process. The EU also warned that ‘self-appointed transitional institutions will not be recognised, nor any kind of arrangement which would allow the armed forces to continue to threaten or control the civil powers’. As a follow-up, the Council adopted a set of sanctions on 3 May against six persons affiliated with the coup. The sanctions included an EU travel ban and the freezing of assets held within the Union. On 31 May 2012, the EU strengthened the set of sanctions and added 15 persons to the travel ban and asset freeze list. The Council also incorporated the provisions of UN Resolution 2048.

2.2. The role of the regional actors and the mediation efforts of ECOWAS

A number of regional actors also immediately denounced the coup, which triggered intense diplomatic efforts. The Council of Ministers of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) held an emergency session on 14 April in Lisbon and adopted a resolution calling for a UN-mandated interposition force for the "defence of peace and security; the guarantee of constitutional order; the protection of institutions; the completion of the electoral process and the concretisation of the reform of the security sector". The African Union Peace and Security Council chose to suspend Guinea-Bissau from the African Union (AU) until the restoration of constitutional order. The AU also initiated consultations with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the CPLP and the UN regarding the possible deployment of a stabilisation mission in the country.

Mediation efforts were carried out by ECOWAS, with President Alpha Condé of Guinea acting as mediator for Guinea-Bissau. During initial talks, ECOWAS reiterated its ‘zero tolerance’ policy for military coups and
Power was transferred to a transitional civilian government on 23 May, but the army will continue to influence the transition process.

demanded the restoration of constitutional order and the release of the interim president and Carlos Gomez Júnior, who were still in prison. Both ECOWAS and the African Union rejected the National Transitional Council, which was perceived as an attempt to legitimise the coup d’état. After initial talks failed, ECOWAS adopted diplomatic, economic and financial sanctions on 29 April 2012. A regional contact group, chaired by Nigeria and composed of Benin, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea, Senegal and Togo, was formed to follow up on the decisions.

Following a series of consultations, a deal was finally brokered between ECOWAS and the Military Command. ECOWAS obtained the release of the detainees and the preservation of the parliament until the holding of new elections. The establishment of a transitional civilian government was announced on 23 May and the junta was dissolved.

The 28-member cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Rui Duarte de Barros, is principally composed of opponents to Carlos Gomez Júnior, with a majority of members from the former opposition party, the Party of Social Renovation (PRS). The interim presidency is held by Manuel Serifo Nhamadjo, who arrived in third position in the March presidential elections. The cabinet also includes members of the military in key ministerial positions (including the Ministry of Defence), which is likely to ensure the ongoing influence of the armed forces on the transition process.

Under the agreement, the transitional government is to organise presidential and parliamentary elections within a one-year period. ECOWAS has deployed a force of 600 soldiers to oversee the political transition until elections are organised. The deployment of the ECOWAS troops has allowed the Angolan Military Mission (MISSANG) to be withdrawn without incident.

ECOWAS’s proclaimed ‘zero tolerance’ policy appears undermined by the rather tolerant agreement, which has been denounced by the former ruling party (PAIGC) and by civil society groups. It has also created a divide with the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) which continues to call for the immediate resumption of the presidential elections. In exile, Carlos Gomes Júnior has called on the international community not to legitimise the transitional arrangement. In fact, neither the former interim president nor the government has been recognised as legitimate by the UN or the EU. However, the appointment of a new interim government represents a further step towards the consolidation of Guinea-Bissau’s altered status quo, which seems, despite international pressure, increasingly unlikely to be reversed in the near future.

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2 The Parliament is composed of 100 members elected for a 4 year mandate. The most recent elections took place in November 2008. With 67 seats, the PAIGC largely dominates the Parliament. Other parties represented include the Party of Social Renovation (28 seats), the Republican Party for Independence and Development (3 seats), the new Democracy Party (1 seat) and the Democratic Alliance (1 seat).
3. The EU position vis-à-vis Guinea-Bissau

3.1. The EU takes measures against Guinea-Bissau

Like the UN, the EU does not recognise the transitional government. The Union insists on the need for inclusiveness, which hardly characterised the negotiations between ECOWAS and the country’s Military Command, as representatives of the country’s former elected government were not included.

EU financial support to Guinea-Bissau had already been partially suspended in 2010 in reaction to the appointment of the perpetrators of the April 2010 military mutiny to senior military positions. In July 2011, following consultations held under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, the Council of the EU adopted appropriate measures and set out a roadmap for gradually resuming development cooperation. During the consultations, authorities from Guinea-Bissau committed to measures to improve democratic governance, reform the armed forces, renew the military hierarchy and tackle impunity and organised crime. Following the latest coup d’état, the Council of the EU extended the period of application of the appropriate measures under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement by one year to 19 July 2013 and announced that it would further review its remaining aid.

The amount provided under the 10th European Development Fund as part of Guinea Bissau’s National Indicative Programme (NIP) for the period 2008-2013 amounts to EUR 100 million from programmable aid (envelope A) and 2.8 million for envelope B (non-programmable). The 10th EDF country strategy paper includes two focal sectors: conflict prevention (EUR 27 million), water and energy (EUR 26 million) as well as budget support (EUR 32 million). EUR 15 million are also reserved for non-focal sectors, to support the EU’s country strategy. However, as a result of the political instability, only EUR 41 million of the NIP have been committed so far. Early May 2012, the EU Head of Delegation has taken over the functions of National Authorising Officer, and most of the EDF activities have been placed on hold. Technical assistance to ministries has been stopped, and the sectoral dialogues have been halted.

About 40 non-EDF projects remain under implementation. Most of these are funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and by thematic programmes in the areas of environment, health care and rural development.

Guinea-Bissau can also benefit from the EDF Millennium Development Goals Initiative. A EUR 5.5 million project to support access to maternal and infant health is currently being formulated.

The EU has also stopped the process of adopting the renewed Fishery Agreement with Guinea-Bissau. The draft agreement amounted to EUR 9.2 million and was intended to cover the period 2012-2015. The Council has currently frozen the adoption process for the new fishery agreement, and fishery activities have been suspended as of 15 June 2012.
3.2. The position of the European Parliament

On 13 June, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the military coup in Guinea-Bissau\(^3\). The resolution condemns the unconstitutional seizure of power in the strongest terms and demands the immediate reinstatement of constitutional order. The Parliament stresses that it does not recognise the transitional institutions and rejects the ECOWAS agreement, which violates the country's constitution and legitimises the coup d'état. The resolution also underlines the importance of establishing a ‘Crisis Contact Group’ under the UN that would include representatives of the AU, ECOWAS and the CPLP. The Parliament welcomes the CPLP’s proposal to constitute a stabilisation force within the UN framework. Finally, the Parliament’s declaration regrets the termination of the EU SSR mission in Guinea-Bissau in 2010, and invites the HR/VP and the Council to explore the possibility of a new SSR mission with a strengthened mandate.

4. Conclusion

The military coup d'état has interrupted the presidential election process in Guinea-Bissau. Following the military coup in Mali on 22 March 2012, the coup in Guinea-Bissau represents another blow to the uneven governance landscape in western Africa. The takeover also illustrates the difficulty of ensuring security sector reforms in the country, where the army remains the strongest force. Given the deal brokered by ECOWAS and the establishment of transitional arrangements, the status quo is unlikely to change in the near future. Any long-term solutions in Guinea-Bissau will have to incorporate an in-depth reform of the security sector, subjugating the military to civil power, and fighting against impunity and organised crime.

5. Sources

- Special report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Guinea-Bissau, 30 April 2012, S/2012/280.
- EIU reports; IRIN news, Africa Confidential, Oxford Analytica, RFI.

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\(^3\) Resolution on Guinea-Bissau, 13 June 2012, P7_TA (2012) 0247
Map of Guinea-Bissau