

Guinea-Bissau

Population: 1.3 million

Life expectancy: 49 years

National capital: Bissau

Independence from Portugal: 24 September 1973 (unilaterally declared by Guinea-Bissau);

10 September 1974 (recognized by Portugal)



Abstract

The Guinea-Bissau civil war, from June to October 1998, was closely related to the long-term separatist conflict in the Casamance region in Senegal. The conflict erupted, when the government, under Senegalese pressure, attempted to interfere in the lucrative cross-border arms trafficking. Despite the use of violence, the rationale of rebellion concerned the distribution of institutional political power in the context of the perceived illegitimacy of President Vieira's authoritarian rule. The rebel leader Mane was supported by 90 per cent of the army and even by the democratically elected political opposition. Finally, Vieira, supported by Senegalese and Guinean troops, only retained the capital Bissau, while the rebels controlled most of the country, including the International airport and many army bases. The ECOMOG's role in the replacement of foreign troops has been important. The international community, including the European Union (EU) and the Community of Portuguese-speaking countries, has encouraged the implementation of the peace agreement, signed in November 1998, and provided humanitarian assistance. The underlying unease, despite the signature of the peace agreement, resulted in sporadic fighting and finally, president Vieira was ousted from power in May 1999. The international community condemned the coup d'état and the EU initiated consultations under 366a of the Lomé Convention. Despite the general and presidential elections, held in November 1999 and January 2000, some concerns remain on the separation of civilian and military rule as well as on unrest in the Senegalese Casamance region.

The Military-Civilian Crisis in Guinea-Bissau

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The five-month long civil war, from June to October 1998, in Guinea-Bissau was closely related to a long-term separatist conflict in the Casamance region in Senegal. Despite the peace agreement in November 1998, the underlying tension remained and re-escalated in sporadic fighting in January 1999. Finally, president Vieira was ousted from power in May 1999 and a new interim president was nominated. The transition process was pursued through general and presidential elections, held in November 1999 and January 2000. However, some concerns remain on the separation of military and civilian rule.

The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) has governed Guinea-Bissau since it gained independence from Portugal in 1974. Longtime President Joao Bernardo “Nino” Vieira, who first seized power in 1980, allowed the introduction of a multiparty political system in the early 1990’s. General elections were held in July 1994 with the PAIGC obtaining the majority of legislative seats and Vieira winning a presidential runoff vote, amid accusations against the ruling party of conducting an intimidatory campaign and abusing state funds. Vieira’s government put down several coup attempts. The civil war broke down when government troops attempted to arrest former army officer Ansumane Mané, accused of supporting the rebels in the Senegalese Casamance region. (See Chronology.)

Actors

Parties in the conflict in Guinea-Bissau are represented in Table 1:

Name	Established	Represents	Affiliation	Support	Conflict with
Guinea-Bissau government (President Vieira)	1974	Party PAICG, Minority of loyalist soldiers in Guinea-Bissau army		Senegal, Guinea (France)	Rebels of Ansumane Mané
Troops of Ansumane Mané	1998	90% Guinea-Bissau armed forces, balanta, biafada and diola/felup ethnic groups	Common aims with the parliamentary opposition parties	<i>Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC)</i> (Portugal)	President Vieira

The alliance between Guinea-Bissau rebels and the Casamançais separatist group *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance* (MFPD) had a strong foundation as both represented Balanta, Biafada and Diola/Felup ethnic groups, and Guinea-Bissau had offered a refuge for Casamançais rebels fighting against the Senegalese government. Ethnic divisions correspond to religious identifications between Muslim and Christian groups, but they did not play a significant role in the Guinea-Bissau war. The border disputes in the Casamance region between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau date back to an agreement of 1886 between Portugal and France, bringing the Casamance region, then under Portuguese rule, under French colonial rule (BBC, 22 October 1998).

Both leaders Nino Vieira and Ansumane Mane were comrades-in-arms against Portuguese colonial rule in the 1970s, though they represented two factions in the struggle for independence¹. The civil war seriously affected different levels of Guinea-Bissau society. In consequence, local Muslim and Christian leaders launched a mediation bid, and the political opposition as well as civil society groups urged conflicting parties to open up a dialogue. Significantly, the deposition of president Vieira did not trigger any

¹ Though both were guerilla leaders, Vieira seized power in the coup of 1970, in which he deposed Luis Cabral, the brother of the legendary Amilcar Cabral. Vieira then confirmed himself in office in the controversial elections of 1994. His opponent Ansumane Mane has been invoking the long socialist tradition of Amilcar Cabral and has been telling that Vieira has been sold out to modern economic reform (Rake 1998).

major popular reaction against unconstitutional measures; instead, some groups expressed their relief and discussed the possibility to put Vieira on trial for corruption (BBC, 10 May 1999). Finally, the National Reconciliation Conference, held in August 1999, brought together some 300 representatives of political and civil society groups, all calling for free and fair elections and for the demobilization of the military (IRIN, 18 August 1999).

France, who welcomed Guinea-Bissau into the CFA franc zone in 1995, has been supportive of the Vieira government and Senegalese troop intervention, whereas Portugal has been more sympathetic to the rebel cause (Rake 1998). Similarly, after the deposition of president Vieira, France imposed economic sanctions on Guinea-Bissau, referring to the attack on its diplomatic installation, whereas Portugal has been very supportive of the new political arrangements. For example, Portugal was opposed to the opening of consultations under article 366a of the Lomé Convention, because these consultations are usually perceived as sanction measure, leading in most cases to the suspension of development cooperation. However, Portugal also provided asylum for president Vieira who was allowed to leave the country.

Immediately after the eruption of violence, the European Union (EU) “strongly condemned” an attempted military coup against “elected democratic institutions” (CFSP 98/54) and called for a rapid reestablishment of constitutional order and security in Guinea-Bissau. The EU also condemned the outbreak of violence leading to the deposition of President Vieira and appealed to the Guinea-Bissau authorities to “renew their efforts to promote national reconciliation, reconstruction and development” (CFSP 51/99). The EU also initiated, partly as a response to Guinea-Bissau government’s appeal for renewing dialogue with the EU in order to normalize the cooperation relations, the consultations under article 366a of the Lomé Convention. The EU decided to continue its support for the electoral process, for the reconstruction efforts and for institutional capacity-building. The EU continues to monitor the transition process, and has expressed its concern at the continued climate of tensions and insecurity in May 2000 despite the successful electoral process (CFSP 8395/00).

Similarly, the UN Security Council condemned the attempted coup and strongly opposed the use of force for non-constitutional purposes. In December 1998, the UN Security Council commended the ECOWAS efforts to restore peace in Guinea-Bissau and appealed to member states to provide financial, technical and logistical support to ECOMOG. (PANA, 22 December 1998) Similarly, the United Nations Peace Building Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) was set up to work for reconciliation efforts², the strengthening of democratic institutions and the development of an integrated approach to peace-building programs. In August 1999, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced the establishment of a Trust Fund in support of UNOGBIS activities (IRIN, 3 August 1999). The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has played a major role in the repatriation of Guinea-Bissau refugees. Also, UNICEF has set up a program to heal children's war trauma (IRIN, 3 August 1999).

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) also condemned the May 7 military coup, demanded for the restoration of constitutional legality and respect for the Abuja agreement and stressed the need for dialogue aimed at ensuring national reconciliation (PANA, 10 May 1999).

The ECOWAS has taken the leading role in the mediation of Guinea-Bissau conflict. The ECOWAS plan for Guinea-Bissau called for a cease-fire, the establishment of a government of the national unity and the withdrawal of all foreign troops to be simultaneously accompanied by the deployment of the West African Peace-monitoring Force, ECOMOG. (PANA December 22, 1998) Also, the Community of Portuguese-speaking countries (*Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa, CPLP*) played an active role in the mediation, together with the ECOWAS, directly representing Western African governments. However, both organizations took a very different stance in the conflict: the ECOWAS stressed the legality of the central government, and supported the Senegalese presence in Guinea-Bissau, whereas the CPLP was more open to rebels'

² For example, The UNOGBIS provided US \$30,000 for the National Reconciliation Conference, held in August 1999 (IRIN, 18 August 1999).

divergent views in attempting to ensure the interests of the Portuguese-speaking community in the process (Rudebeck 1999). The major donors, the European Union and the CPLP have aimed at ensuring humanitarian assistance to the population.

Motivations

Guinea-Bissau is among the 15 poorest countries in the world, with GDP per head of just \$ 230 in 1997. One-third of the population lives in extreme poverty. The war has further weakened the country's economic infrastructure and social and political edifices, and caused a major humanitarian crisis with thousands of refugees (EUI 1998). General poverty, together with the dissatisfaction with Vieira's authoritarian rule, set up the background for the passivity of the population facing the rebellion, which threatened the "democratically elected" president and finally ousted him from power. The public dispute over arms and gunrunning to the Casamance rebels masked a wider unease about President Vieira's rule, accusing him of corruption and incompetence (BBC, 21 February 1999).

The smuggling of arms and cannabis to the Casamance rebels had been going on for decades. The Casamançais had funded their activities by trading cannabis for arms across the Senegal-Guinea-Bissau border. The Guinea-Bissau army, sent to secure the borders, was gradually drawn into the lucrative smuggling racket (Rake 1998; Marut 1998). The strong mobilization of most army troops with Mane had its roots in the changes of Guinea-Bissau's official policy towards the Casamance crisis. Despite his alleged support for Casamançais rebels for several years, President Vieira has committed himself since 1995 to fight the rebellion in the cross-border region in order to be allowed to enter the CFA franc zone in 1995, endangering thus the cross-border traffic in arms, in which many army officers were involved. (Marut 1998) The dispute also concerned the establishment of a buffer zone between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, supposed to be policed by ECOMOG troops (Asemota 1998).

Government troops lost most of their support as an estimated 90 per cent of army officers allied with the rebellion, led by Ansumane Mané, and the government legitimacy eroded as the population perceived its Senegalese and Guinean support as constituting foreign interference in their internal affairs (Ouazani 1998). Vieira was later accused of his involvement in the gunrunning to Casamance rebels and of his invitation of foreign troops to Guinea-Bissau in June 1998.

The main dispute concerned the distribution of political power in Guinea-Bissau. Mané contested President Vieira's authoritarian rule, which, despite his status as a democratically elected president, failed to distribute power resources to elites. Mané demanded the resignation of President Vieira and called for a "transitional government" to be set up and for "free and fair elections". He declared that the government, supported by Guinean and Senegalese troops had no control over fighting. He also accused President Vieira of "repeated violation of the constitution" and denounced the "total impunity of corrupt government officials and their protectors". (AFP, 9 June 1998) There was a fundamental contradiction in the conflicting parties' conception of the nature of the dispute. Vieira's government represented itself as a democratically elected power, and loyalist forces were fighting to restore order, while Mané insisted on the deficit of the government and president's legitimacy and aimed at reorganizing the collapsed state authority³ (Rudebeck 1999).

Significantly, political parties opposed to the mismanagement of Vieira's administration and supported rebels' demands for democratic government (Rudebeck 1999. President Vieira refused to resign referring to his mandate as a democratically elected president and was to remain in power until the presidential and legislative elections, initially scheduled for March 1999, but finally postponed until November 1999. (AFP, November 1998.) The "rebellion" thus enjoyed wide support in major state institutions, namely in the army and the parliament (Rudebeck 1999). The formation of a unity government did not resolve the perceived abuse of power by President Vieira. The perceived flaws in the

³ While Vieira accused Mane of gun-running to separatists in southern Senegal, Mane charged that Vieira had suppressed parliamentary debate of a report implicating himself in such trafficking to the neighboring Casamance province (AFP, 13 February 1999).

implementation of the peace agreement and the lack of genuine reconciliation efforts finally resulted in the unconstitutional deposition of Vieira in May 1999, which, however, opened a window of opportunity for the democratic transition process.

The deployment of the Senegalese troops was officially arranged by a 1975 defense accord, renewed in 1992, but the main motivation behind the Senegalese intervention in Guinea-Bissau was the country's internal problem with the separatist MFDC, which has been fighting for the secession of the Casamance region since 1981⁴. The Senegalese intervention aimed at ensuring that the Guinea-Bissau government's hostility to the Casamance rebels and at "displacing" Casamançais rebels from their Guinea-Bissau refuges. (Marut 1998) Therefore, the war took a regional dimension, when Senegal accused the Guinea-Bissau rebels of being hand in glove with the Casamançais rebels. The MFDC tried to take advantage of the situation by launching an attack on Senegalese troops within a week of the outbreak of the Guinea-Bissau war (Rake 1998). Senegal and the Gambia were also concerned about the flow of refugees, escaping the heavy fighting leading to high figures of civilian casualties. In April 2000, the intensification of the Casamance conflict has led to ethnic tensions and border clashes between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal.

Instruments

The rebel forces confiscated most of the arms, munitions and even the air force base and occupied the Bissau International airport. They even used the communication network of the Guinea-Bissau army, the loyalist troops and their Senegalese and Guinean allies being forced to set up a new communication system. The central authority of President Vieira collapsed as his forces, heavily supported by foreign troops, only managed to control the capital Bissau without any capacity to launch an offensive, whereas rebel troops

⁴ Before 1995, Guinea-Bissau, whose relationship with Senegal was strained by a dispute over a maritime zone rich in oil, was suspected of its support for Casamançais rebels. However, in 1995, President Vieira had signed an accord with Senegal concerning the exploitation of natural resources in the cross-border region in 1995, thus committing himself to fight against the Casamance rebellion. This fight against the Casamançais rebellion alienated part of the army officers, who participated in the cross-border smuggling of arms and drugs. The involvement of the Senegalese army in the internal affairs of the border region increased the anti-Senegalese feeling in Guinea-Bissau. (Marut 1998.)

controlled the rest of the territory and its main strategic spots (Jeune Afrique, 14-20 July, 1998). The ECOMOG and the Disarmament Commission supervised the stockpiling of arms in containers. However, the rebels were dissatisfied with the ECOMOG's failure to disarm President Vieira's presidential guard. Consequently, they ousted Vieira from power and neutralized his presidential guard (BBC, 8 May 1999). This marked the final episode in the conflict opposing Vieira to other political and military forces.

The establishment of a buffer zone between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal by ECOMOG troops constituted one of the key military issues. The proposed intervention force would have been nominally formed by the ECOWAS. It would have relied mainly on 1,500 troops from Senegal, to guard a 20 km deep strip along the Senegalese border, called a "security corridor". Senegal wanted it to block the border to infiltration by the Casamance rebels. (Asemota 1998.)

In the elections in November 1999, the victory of the opposition was confirmed as the Party for Social Renewal (PRS) of Kumba Yalla won 37 seats out of a total of 102. In January 2000, Kumba Yalla was elected president with 72 per cent of the vote. Despite the successful transition process, the international community has been concerned over continued climate of ethnic tensions, insecurity and indiscipline in some sectors of the army. Similarly, some critical journalists were arrested in spring 2000. Also, tensions in the Casamance region have affected regional stability. The international community continues to follow the fragile process of democratic consolidation in Guinea-Bissau.

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Chronology

- **February 1998:** President Vieira dismissed General Ansumane Mane, accusing him of involvement in arms trafficking to separatist groups in the Casamance region of neighboring Senegal.
- **June 1998:** Fighting broke out, when Vieira attempted to arrest Mane. Deployment of Senegalese and Guinean troops (2000 and 1500) to support Vieira’s government against rebel attacks. Evacuation of foreign nationals. The Guinea-Bissau government appeals for ECOMOG intervention aiming at disarming the rebels and destroying their military capacity.
- **August-September 1998:** Signature of Cease-fire agreement.
- **October 1998:** Fighting between loyalist and rebel forces erupted and resulted in the total debacle of the government troops. President Vieira had no other choice but to open dialogue with his rival.
- **1 November 1998:** Signature of Abuja Accord by President Vieira and General Mane. The agreement provided for the full withdrawal of foreign troops, to be carried out simultaneously with the deployment of an ECOMOG buffer force to replace the outgoing troops; the international Airport and the port of Bissau would be opened; the setting up of a government of national unity, which would include representatives of the self-proclaimed junta; and for the organization of general and presidential elections by the end of March 1999. The joint commission set up a national unity government to pave the way for elections in March 1999.
- **December 1998:** The nomination of Prime Minister Francisco Abdul.
- **January 1999:** The withdrawal of first Senegalese troop (200) from Bissau and their replacement by Togolese ECOMOG forces. Sporadic fighting.
- **February 1999:** The formation of a new government of national unity with the cabinet composed of 15 members, half named by Vieira, half by Mane, charged with organizing national elections. Senegalese pulled out 700 of its troops from Guinea-Bissau.
- **March 1999:** The start of landmine removal, disarmament and the barracking of troops and the re-opening of the Bissau airport delivered the first signs of détente between conflicting parties. The withdrawal of the remaining Senegalese troops. Gradual deployment of ECOMOG troops⁵.

⁵ 600 troops come from Togo, Niger, Benin and Gambia (AFP, 13 February 1999).

- **April 1999:** Trial of president Vieira for his involvement in gunrunning to Casamance rebels and the invitation of foreign troops.
- **May 1999:** Donors' round-table on reconstruction and democratization held on 3-5 May in Geneva. President Vieira ousted on May 7, presidential palace and diplomatic installations set ablaze. Death toll around 100. Civilians fled the fighting in the capital. Vieira was granted asylum in Portugal. New interim president Malam Bacai Sanha nominated. New interim president and the unity government reiterate their commitment to reconciliation and to the separation of military and civilian rule through the electoral process. The EU, OAU and UN condemned the coup d'état, the killing of innocent civilians and the attacks on foreign nationals and diplomatic installations and called for national reconciliation and for the organization of free and fair elections. ECOWAS foreign ministers met to discuss the political crisis in the sub-region.
- **July 1999:** Consultations between the EU and Guinea-Bissau under article 366a of the Lomé Convention. Repatriation of refugees from Senegal. 15 former associates of the ousted president Vieira arrested. Reopening of the Bissau international airport. Investigation into responsibilities for the civil war.
- **August 1999:** National Reconciliation Conference gathering together some 300 representatives of political and civil society groups. Plans to sue Senegal and Guinea at the International Court of Justice at The Hague for their military intervention in June 1998. Suspicious death of Nicanda Barreto, former minister in the government of the deposed president Vieira. Census and voter registration for upcoming presidential and general elections. UNOGBIS to provide technical assistance to Electoral Commission and to coordinate elections.
- **November 1999:** Parliamentary elections. The opposition leader Kumba Yalla's Party for Social Renewal (PRS) won 37 seats out of a total of 102.
- **January 2000:** Presidential elections. Kumba Yalla was elected president with 72% of the vote.