



ISS Seminar Report

Title: Double Political Assassinations in Guinea Bissau: What Does the Future Hold?
Place: ISS Conference Room, Pretoria
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Presenter: Dr. David Zounmenou, Senior Researcher, African Security Analysis Programme (ISS)
Chair: Tanana Mpanyane, Researcher, African Security Analysis Programme (ISS)
Rapporteur: Ottilia Anna Maunganidze, Intern, African Security Analysis Programme (ISS)

On Sunday, 1 March 2009, Guinea Bissau's Army Chief of Staff, General Batista Tagme Na Waie was killed by a bomb planted by a group of unknown soldiers at the army Headquarters. Early the following morning, in what looked like vengeance, the country's president Jao Bernado "Nino" Vieira was killed by military elements as he attempted to flee his home following threats by officers loyal to the assassinated Army Chief of Staff. The double assassination has left a political vacuum in the country and seems to have thrown Guinea Bissau and, possibly, the West African region into yet another cycle of instability. The immediate concerns in the country have been that these developments are likely to bring the post-conflict reconstruction process in Guinea-Bissau to a standstill. The question thus becomes: What does the future hold Guinea-Bissau?

On Tuesday 10 March, the African Security Analysis Programme of the ISS hosted a seminar that aimed to unpack possible scenarios that may result following the death of the president and his army chief of staff. Tanana Mpanyane in his introductory remarks noted that the assassinations posed both a challenge and an opportunity in Guinea-Bissau. On the one hand he pointed out the vacuum in leadership that has resulted, while on the other hand he noted that these assassinations offer hope for the future given that both Vieira and Na Waie had polarized the country.

The presenter, Dr. David Zounmenou, began by noting the history of Guinea-Bissau and how that has shaped current events. He argued that the deaths of the president and the chief of staff were merely symptoms of the underlying problems of bad

governance and a weakened state. According to Dr. Zounmenou, violence in Guinea-Bissau is therefore simply a manifestation of the fragility of the state and the collapse and/or failure of state institutions. Dr. Zounmenou further noted that political instability in the country is a combination of both historical and contemporary difficulties that it is facing in its state building process. For him, the double assassinations have thus brought to mind two main issues:

1. How can the perennial use of violence in Guinea-Bissau be explained?
2. How can the country ever achieve sustainable peace?

He noted that, for decades, Guinea-Bissau has been perennially seeking peace and political stability, but that its quest has failed. He highlighted several key elements he believes are the cause of this failure including:

- Dysfunctional and weak State institutions
- Bad and inefficient governance
- Fractured political elite
- Highly interventionist military
- High levels of poverty
- illicit international trafficking networks

According to Dr. Zounmenou the double political assassination, like the politics of the country, was a result of historical and current influences. Vieira was president of Guinea-Bissau from 1980, when he seized power by way of a military coup, until 1998 and again from 2005 until the time of his assassination. In 1994 Vieira won elections thereby legitimizing 14 years of military rule. However, in 1998 a one-year war broke out that effectively ousted Vieira from his seat. This war, despite only lasting a year had a devastating impact on the socio-economic infrastructures of Guinea-Bissau, an impact that is still being felt today. The war ended following the November 1999 Abuja Agreement and on 28 November 1999 a new presidential election was held and Mohamend Ialá Embaló (formerly known as Kumba Yalá) succeeded Vieira as president. On 14 September 2003 Kumba Yalá was ousted by way of a bloodless military coup. The military junta took control of the country until Vieira's return to Guinean politics in 2005 and his reelection as president.

It should be noted the late Batista Tagme Na Waie was part of the military junta that took ousted Vieira in the 1998 – 1999 war. It is clear thus that their rivalry was not a new one.

The United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) which was established in 1999 to facilitate the elections and the implementation of the November 1999 Abuja Agreement is still operating today. The continuous instability according to Dr. Zounmenou is a sign that little progress has been made in rehabilitating Guinea-Bissau and in ensuring peace. The peacebuilding process consists of ensuring that elections take place and that institutional support is given to the Electoral Commission. Furthermore, it involves the rehabilitation of the infrastructure, particularly in the energy sector and other measures to jumpstart the

economy. There is also a need to reform public administration. Central to peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau is a pertinent need to reform the security sector, which currently has an inverted hierarchy with over 40% of the army being officers – most of whom have been in office since 1974 when the country gained independence from Portugal. The completion of the SSR alone require US\$ 184 million of which US\$ 43 million was made available. Dr. Zounmenou also noted the need to strengthening the judicial Sector and to consolidate the rule of law especially with regards to the fight against drug trafficking. There are also social issues critical to peacebuilding that need to be addressed.

Dr. Zounmenou highlighted that the strong resistance to reforms, coupled with the persistence of political instability and the lack of funding was greatly hampering the peacebuilding process in the country. It is from this background and the ongoing political quagmire that the double political assassinations can be best understood. One cannot extricate the political instability in the country from the assassinations.

In November 2008, parliamentary elections were held which saw an overwhelming defeat of Vieira by his former party the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde or PAIGC). The result of this defeat was that Guinea-Bissau now had three centers of power, i.e. the Prime Minister, Carlos Gomez Junior and the PAIGC controlling Parliament and sharing the executive with the President, the army holding the key for political (in)stability and a marginalized presidency. Vieira at the time of his death found himself in a marginal position in which he was president of a country ruled mostly by the opposition and the army. The rivalry between Gen. Na Waie and President Vieira, as Dr. Zounmenou pointed out, was not a new one, but what had developed over time and interests. In addition to the old ethnic resentment caused by Vieira's violence perpetrated against the Balante to reduce their political influence in the 1980s, Dr. Zounmenou alluded to the link between their sour relationship and the drug trafficking cartels operating in the country.

Dr. Zounmenou then turned to answer the question posed at the beginning: What does the future hold for Guinea-Bissau. He indicated three possible scenarios:

1. Constitutional Order and Successful political transition

According to Dr. Zounmenou, the ideal situation would be one in which the acting president, Raimundo Pereira, ensures a peaceful political transition through organizing and conducting free, fair and peaceful elections within the 60days stipulated by the Constitution. Furthermore, he argues that once a democratically elected president comes into power this could provide the government with the legitimacy needed to work towards the improvement of the living conditions of the people and speed up the reform process. It should be noted that the PAIGC stands to win the elections if they are held within 60days as they currently enjoy a strong parliamentary majority. Now that Guinea Bissau has witnessed one of the worst manifestations of political violence and that two key players are neutralized,

political actors mainly the PAIGC has a comparative advantage to manoeuvre without major hindrance.

2. The persistence of the status quo

Dr. Zounmenou argues that it is also possible that the status quo at the time of Vieira's death persists. This status quo ante will stem from internal frictions within dominant political forces, (PAIGC) and Kumba Yala's Social Renovation Party (PRS) and the absence of consensus-building. Though the PAIGC enjoys a strong popular support, it has little hold of the army dominated by the war veterans and drug cartels. Political realignment and compromise might divert this transition from its original purpose and maintains an environment of cosmetic changes that undermines the return to consolidated peace. He also noted that the anti-drug strategies in the country had failed and that if constitutional democracy is not established this could continue.

3. Consolidation of a "Narco-State"

Lastly, Dr. Zounmenou contended that the "narco-state" could be consolidated if no true leadership is established with an aim to end drug-trafficking from South American drug cartels. The army and those protecting drug cartels could easily refine their network and hold the country hostage for many more years. Political forces could still resort to the army to maintain the status quo in terms of government's response to the scourge of drug trafficking. Drug trafficking and the Army offer better opportunities to some generals and political actors than a democratic and well-governed state. If political actors and development partners failed to motivate these reforms to their successful implementation, there is a likelihood that Guinea Bissau remain locked in instability and poverty that favour the activities of Latin American criminals.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Zounmenou pointed out that the double political assassinations offer an opportunity for a new development agenda and political reconstruction. He noted that the renewed concern of the major international players UN, US and EU is justified by the security challenge posed by fragile or failed states. Dr. Zounmenou implored the international community to intervene to ensure that stability is restored and sustained. Thus Dr. Zounmenou concluded by stating that the sustainable peace and development of Guinea-Bissau depends largely on the proper understanding and adequate responses to three key issues:

1. Profound reforms of state institutions
2. Profound reform of the Security Sector
3. Coherent socio-economic programmes

