

## **GUINEA-BISSAU: AVOIDING THE REPUTATION OF BEING A FAILED STATE**

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### **Abstract**

This paper poses and answers the following research question: How may Guinea-Bissau overcome its permanent governance instability and avoid becoming a “failed state”? This question is particularly important, not only in the context of circumventing being exposed to the economic interests of external actors, but also, to understand the state domestic weaknesses. Guinea-Bissau is a partially archipelagic small state, with an interesting portfolio of natural resources, investment opportunities, and business prospects. The country has suffered decades of institutional instability and social fragility, resulting being rated as “failed-state”. Indeed, O’ Regan &Thompson (2013, p. 3) refer Guinea-Bissau as “(...) the first narco-state in Africa”. There are a number of perspectives to categorize a state as failed-state, but we are focused on the institutional approach and in a possible lack of state authority. As such, we assume that “states fail because they do not possess the political, economic and social capabilities to survive as states” (Hill, 2005; Gros, 1996, p. 456; Jackson, 2000, p. 296; Rotberg, 2004, p. 2; Zartman,1995, p. 5). Once the ideological cradle of colonial self-determination, Guinea-Bissau fought valiantly to gain independence (1963–1974), unilaterally proclaiming it on 24 September 1973 (Té, 2015, p. 30). Regrettably, after gaining recognition as a sovereign state, Guinea-Bissau has witnessed four effective coup d’états, 16 different



attempts of coups d'état, one civil war, several parliamentary dissolutions, assassinations of politicians, interference of the militaries in executive functions and frequent change of political executives. Several reasons have contributed to this instability: (1) The interests of neighboring countries as well as an intense international influence; (2) The condition of being a post-colonial state, which is reflected in a number of factors such as poor literacy, health care and security (BTI, 2024); (3) The internal ethnic-religious clashes and the 1980 events, which lead qualified Cabo Verdean personnel to leave the country (Duarte Silva, 2006); (4) The meagre political control of the armed forces associated to a widespread corruption (BTI, 2024); (5) The short minded political culture within a semi-presidential system; (8) and the last but certainly not the least, the under-resourced and sloppy surveillance of borders (US Department of State, 2022, p. 5). All these factors jeopardized its economy, drained its resources, and exposed society to narco-trafficking. A struggle between the President Umaro Sissoco Embaló and the parliament regarding the amendment of the Constitution (among other issues), has further reignited political instability. Apart from the direct competition posed by Senegal, Guinea-Bissau has potential to become a reference economy in the region, and an entry door for the market of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Monetary and Economic Union (WAEMU). However, hardly this will ever happen, without political stability and an urgent need of reform of the defense and security sectors. A transformation not only in its structures but, above all, in mentalities, based on the role of the military in a representative democracy - a semi-presidential political system. This research does not adopt any explicit theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 64). Instead, it employs a descriptive-inductive qualitative methodology based on selected themes to evaluate how Guinea-Bissau can avoid becoming a failed state. The critical discussion of these themes, has been supplemented with interviews with Guinea-Bissau's opinion leaders and representatives of its diaspora, as well as former Portuguese colonial agents. The authors wish to acknowledge that, to mitigate the insufficiency of official and academic qualitative data, we conducted a number of interviews and we used triangulated media sources. The relevant interview transcripts, were freely translated into English language. Finally, this research excludes the last two years (2022-2024) of current political leadership, under the President Embaló. During this period of time President Embaló dissolved the parliament twice, scheduled legislative elections for November 2024 and at the time we write, the presidential election has not been called yet. Therefore, the authors consider important the completion of this sequence of facts, to analyze his political action.

### Keywords

Guinea-Bissau, Failed State, Political Instability, Development, Ethnic-groups, Narco-trafficking.

### Resumo

Este artigo coloca e responde à seguinte questão de investigação: Como poderá a Guiné-Bissau ultrapassar a sua permanente instabilidade governativa e evitar tornar-se num "Estado falhado"? Esta questão é particularmente importante, não só no contexto de evitar a exposição aos interesses económicos de actores externos, mas também, para compreender as fraquezas internas do Estado. A Guiné-Bissau é um pequeno Estado parcialmente arquipelágico, com um interessante portefólio de recursos naturais, oportunidades de investimento e perspetivas de negócio. O país sofreu décadas de instabilidade institucional e fragilidade social, o que o associa à ideia de "Estado falhado". Com efeito, O' Regan & Thompson (2013, p. 3) referem-se à Guiné-Bissau como "(...) o primeiro narco-Estado em África". Existem diversas perspetivas para categorizar um Estado como um Estado falhado. Todavia, neste artigo adaptámos uma abordagem institucional para avaliar da possível falta de autoridade no



exercício das funções públicas. Como tal, assumimos que “os Estados falham porque não possuem as capacidades políticas, económicas e sociais para sobreviver como Estados” (Hill, 2005; Gros, 1996, p. 456; Jackson, 2000, p. 296; Rotberg, 2004, p. 2; Zartman, 1995, p. 5). Outrora berço ideológico da autodeterminação, a Guiné-Bissau lutou corajosamente para conquistar a independência (1963-1974), proclamando-a unilateralmente a 24 de setembro de 1973 (Té, 2015, p. 30). Lamentavelmente, depois de obter o reconhecimento como Estado soberano, a Guiné-Bissau assistiu a quatro golpes de Estado, 16 tentativas de golpe de Estado, uma guerra civil, diversas dissoluções do parlamento, assassinatos de políticos, interferência dos militares nas funções executivas e mudanças frequentes de executivos políticos. Várias razões contribuíram para esta instabilidade: (1) Os interesses dos países vizinhos, bem como uma intensa influência internacional; (2) A condição de ser um Estado pós-colonial, que se reflecte numa série de factores como a fraca literacia, débeis cuidados de saúde e insegurança (BTI, 2024); (3) Os confrontos étnico-religiosos internos e os acontecimentos de 1980, que levaram cidadãos qualificados de origem cabo-verdiana a abandonar o país (Duarte Silva, 2006); (4) O escasso controlo político das forças armadas associado a uma corrupção generalizada (BTI, 2024); (5) A cultura política de curto prazo dentro de um sistema semipresidencialista; (8) e, por último, mas certamente não menos importante, a fraca vigilância das fronteiras (U.S. Department of State, 2022, p. 5). Todos estes factores comprometeram a sua economia, esgotaram os seus recursos e expõem a sociedade ao tráfico de droga. O conflito institucional entre o Presidente Umaro Sissoco Embaló e o parlamento relativamente à alteração da Constituição (entre outras questões) reacendeu ainda mais a instabilidade política. Apesar da concorrência directa colocada pelo Senegal, a Guiné-Bissau tem potencial para se tornar uma economia de referência na região e uma porta de entrada para o mercado da Comunidade Económica dos Estados da África Ocidental (CEDEAO) e da União Monetária e Económica da África Ocidental (UEMOA). No entanto, dificilmente tal acontecerá, sem estabilidade política e sem a reforma dos sectores da defesa e da segurança. Uma transformação não só nas suas estruturas, mas, sobretudo, nas mentalidades, assente no papel dos militares numa democracia representativa – um sistema político semipresidencialista. Esta investigação adopta uma metodologia qualitativa descritiva-indutiva (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 64) e baseia-se na análise de um conjunto de temas seleccionados, para avaliar como a Guiné-Bissau poderá evitar ser um estado falido? Os autores desejam reconhecer que, para mitigar a insuficiência de dados qualitativos oficiais e académicos, realizaram uma série de entrevistas e utilizaram fontes mediáticas devidamente trianguladas. A discussão crítica destes temas foi complementada com entrevistas a líderes de opinião da Guiné-Bissau e a representantes da sua diáspora, bem como a antigos agentes coloniais portugueses. As transcrições das entrevistas relevantes foram traduzidas livremente para a língua inglesa. Por último, esta investigação exclui os últimos dois anos (2022-2024) da actual liderança política, sob o Presidente Embaló. Durante este período, o Presidente Embaló dissolveu o parlamento por duas vezes, marcou eleições legislativas para novembro de 2024 e, à data em que escrevemos, as eleições presidenciais ainda não foram convocadas. Por isso, os autores consideram importante aguardar pelo desenvolvimento desta sequência de factos, antes de analisar os últimos dois anos da sua acção política.

### **Palavras-chave**

Guiné-Bissau, Estado Falhado, Instabilidade Política, Desenvolvimento, Grupos Étnicos, Narcotráfico.



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### **1. Introduction**

Guinea-Bissau is internationally perceived as a country with high political-military instability, a “failed-state”, and a “narco-state” (Clarke, 2017). However, there is more to this African country than meets the eye. Guinea-Bissau is a partially archipelagic small state, covered by lush vegetation, located in the westernmost part of the African continent, halfway between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer. The country is heavily irrigated by rivers and marshy areas, with more than 80 islands and islets, forming the “Bijagós Archipelago”.

In 1956, Amílcar Cabral led the founding of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde [Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde]). He first tried to negotiate a gradual path towards independence, with obvious negative results (Sanca & Có, 2017). In August 1959, sailors and dockworkers at the seaport of Bissau went on strike, demanding better wages and better living conditions (Sanca & Có, 2017). The protestors decided to demonstrate at the harbour, but the police demobilized it using firearms. Allegedly, 50 demonstrators were killed, and more than 100 were wounded (Duarte Silva, 2006 and DW, 2014). The so-called Pidjiguiti massacre, has been perceived as the trigger cause for the PAIGC to abandon their campaign of nonviolent resistance (Roque, 2018). Not having been successful in the dialogue with the colonial authorities, Amílcar Cabral led his party to a liberation armed struggle. In 1963, two years after the beginning of the combats in Angola and the loss of the Portuguese colonies in India, the PAIGC fighters began their armed struggle, against the colonial regime. Out of the so-called by the colonial regime “three overseas theatres of operations” (Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique), Guinea-Bissau was considered the fiercest combat zone, with heavy casualties on both sides. Interviewing Rodrigues (Interview, 2021b), it became clear that, in the early 1970s, after 11 years of fighting, the Portuguese military were feeling that the war outcome, would not favour them. The colonial military only had control of the urban areas, and they lost air supremacy, due to PAIGC use of soviet made surface-to-air missiles. Meanwhile, Cabral managed to engage in diplomatic venues, gaining international recognition – He met with Pope Paulo VI on July 1970, soon after his participation in the international conference



on solidarity with the Peoples of the Portuguese Colonies (*Solidariedade com os Povos das Colónias Portuguesas*), which took place in Rome in June 1970 and gathered 177 organizations from 64 states. PAIGC participated in some United Nations (UN) events, as a representative of the Guinea-Bissau opposition, and managed to invite a UN envoy, to territories under PAIGC control, conveying the idea that Portugal, no longer had the right to represent the people of Guinea-Bissau (GB).

In 1973, Cabral decided to make a smart move: the unilateral declaration of independence. As a result of his diplomatic efforts, that symbolic act, gained immediate recognition from several states friendly to the Bissau-Guinean cause. However, months before making that declaration, Amílcar Cabral was assassinated in Conakry (RTP, 2017) "tragically killed by his own men, as part of a coup against Cape Verdean leadership of PAIGC" (Tomás, 2012). Despite his death, the struggle for self-determination continued, and on 24 September 1973, the new PAIGC leadership, declared unilaterally the independence. In the following months, the independent GB was recognized by several countries (Andrade, 1974), most of whom from the African states aligned with Moscow and by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, 1973). Meanwhile, the fight against Portuguese forces continued, without showing any signs of subsiding. In April 1974, the Portuguese Army staged a coup d'état in Lisbon, overthrowing the dictatorship regime, opening the way to democracy. Soon after that, the new regime decided to recognize the right to self-determination to all so-called "overseas provinces". Guinea-Bissau was the first to be recognized as a sovereign state, on 10 September 1974. This recognition of independence, was followed by most UN member states, and on 17 September 1974, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC RES 356, August 12, 1974), recognized the UN membership to Republic of Guinea-Bissau. Relations between Portugal and GB have ever since become cordial, and there is a significant diaspora of Bissau-Guineans living in Portugal.

During its first 17 years of independence, GB was run by an autocratic, Soviet-inspired, single-party regime. As its name suggests, the PAIGC's political project foresaw that Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde, initially constituted as separate states, would tend towards unification. Although existing as two sovereign states, they were to be governed by the same political party (fact that apparently, was not consensual within the PAIGC). This idealistic concept lasted until 1980. On 14 November 1980, a coup d'état in GB overthrew the first President Luís Cabral (Teixeira, 2010), suspended the constitution, instituting the Council of the Revolution, formed by military and civilians. This coup d'état marked the end of the project of unification of the two countries. Nevertheless, Cabo Verde and Guinea-Bissau after 1981 (when the PAICV - Partido Africano da Independência de Cabo Verde - was born), both states have always maintained good diplomatic relations. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, as most of the states supported by the Soviet Union, GB entered a deep economic crisis. To overcome this crisis, the government resorted to soliciting the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) financing. However, this option implied adherence to the neoliberal development model, which, in turn, resulted in the reform of the political regime and facilitated a multi-party system.

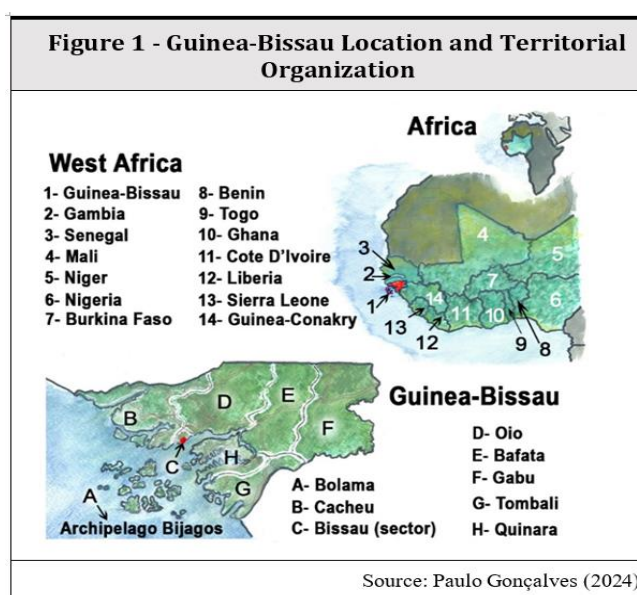
In 1998–1999 there was another coup d'état (Teixeira, 2010), followed by a bloody civil war that ousted President Nino Vieira (who had carried out the 1980 coup d'état). In



2003, a new military coup deposed of President Kumba Ialá, this time without bloodshed. Nino Vieira again assumed power (in the 2005 presidential election as an independent candidate), but he was assassinated in 2009. In 2010, there was a military revolt, which after negotiations, was terminated. In 2011, there was a failed attempt at a coup d'état, and in 2012, halfway through a presidential election, there was a new coup d'état that deposed of the incumbent President Raimundo Pereira, after President Bacai Sanhá died (...) in Paris (Infante, 2016). Since the 1991 presidential election, which opened the country to a multi-party system, only a single Head of State (HoS) has fulfilled a complete term, without being assassinated, or deposed of in a military coup.

## 2. The Notion of National Space

Guinea-Bissau is located on the west coast of Africa, with an area of 36,125 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 22% are alluvial river areas, with numerous islands along a very jagged coast. The country has a maximum length of 300 km and its widest width is about 250 km. The territory is almost flat, with abundant hydrophilic forests, flat swampy regions, mangroves under the influence of large tides, and the inflow of marine waters can go beyond 100 km inside mainland. GB borders Senegal (North), Guinea-Conakry (South & East), and the Atlantic Ocean (West). Administratively speaking, the territory is divided into two distinct parts: a continental part, and an insular part - the Bijagós, which is separated from the mainland by the channels of Geba, Pedro Álvares, Bolama, and Canhabaque. In 1996, UNESCO classified the Bijagós as a World Biosphere Ecological Reserve (UN Food and Agriculture Organization, 2015). Only 17 out of the 80+ Bijagós islands are populated. Guinea-Bissau is a unitary state, comprising eight regions (Figure 1): Bafatá, Biombo, Bolama/Bijagós, Tombali, Cacheu, Gabu, Oio, Quinara, and the autonomous sector of Bissau.





Guinea-Bissau has 280 km of coastline, with a smooth continental shelf, where the shallow waters are habitat to large quantities of fish. In total, the GB exclusive economic zone (EEZ) has 150,000 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 45,000 km<sup>2</sup> are continental shelf (CCIPGB, 2016). The climate is tropical, composed mainly of two seasons: The rainy season (May to October) and the dry season (November to April). Heavy rain falls between July and September (Hikersbay, 2022), offering nine straight months of potential good weather for tourism. A national network of several protected areas, covering approximately 470,000 hectares, has already been established (IBAPGB, 2008). Two thirds of the protected areas are marine and estuarine spaces, containing regulated fishing zones. These areas play a central role in the reproduction and regeneration of fish, shrimp, and mollusk stocks, ensuring sustainability to these resources.

### **3. Population, Ethnicity and Politics**

According to United Nations Population Fund (UNPF, 2024) the GB population is close to 2 million inhabitants. The average life male expectancy is 60 years, and female was 64 (UNPF, 2024). The GB population is characterized by having different African ethnicities (ANEME Report, 2018). Although no ethnic group has the majority, the Balantas constitute the most representative minority, with 27% of the population. They are followed by the Fulas (23%), the Mandingas (12%), Manjacos (around 11%), the Papeis (10%), and the remaining 17% composed of smaller ethnic groups such: Felupes, Baiotes, Mancanhas or Brames, Biafares, Nalus, and Bijagós.

In recent history, there has been no internal conflicts purely based on ethnic issues. Ethnic multiplicity has, in fact, been a source of national pride and anti-colonial sentiment, as the harmonious integration between Bissau-Guinean groups is considered unusual (Teixeira, 2020). However, with deteriorating economic situation and growing levels of corruption and nepotism, allegations of ethnic differentiation among the population have emerged (Baldé, 2021a). The proliferation of political parties, often with regional implementation, where there is an ethnic hegemony, opens the field to interpretations of possible ethnic-based partisanship. This relatively new GB ethno-religious differentiation, is starting to get noticed in, for example, the selection of political leaders, members of the parliament (MP), and state offices. In GB, religion and ethnicity, plays an important role in the political arena. In addition, there is a stark contrast between the legitimacy of state authority and traditional local authorities. Local religious leaders have higher precedence than secular state officials. To complicate things further, population is made up of various ethnic groups representing different religious orientations. The Fulas, Mandingas and Biafares are Muslims, others are animists and Christians. The Animist religion is practiced by 44.9%, Islamic (Sunni) represents 41.9%, Christians are 11.9%, and others (including atheists) are around 1.3% of the population (ANEME Report, 2018). It is the indigenous Animist religious system that has the greatest influence on the country's political culture, with practices that allow state officials to legitimize their authority and overcome the impasse of ethnic heterogeneity, compensating for loose relations between government and citizens. The manipulation of religious (animistic) symbolism, by certain leaders with political ambitions, is characteristic of the so-called "Africanization of Power", something that operates between superstition and the transcendental, and empowers authoritarian organizations. The





official language is Portuguese, but according to Atlas Mundial de Dados (2021), only about 27.1% is fluent. Nevertheless, Portuguese language is used in legal documents, public ceremonies, media, and in local schools. Creole is the lingua franca used by 90.4% of the population (local primary school lectures are taught in Portuguese and Creole, except in the Portuguese and French schools).

With a recent history of coups d'état, attempted coups d'état, assassinations, a civil war and a haughty attitude of the military towards the political rulers, Guinea-Bissau is not progressing as it should be, in terms of human development. In addition, Guinea-Bissau has been characterized as a "failed-state," with nuances of a narco-trafficking-state (King, 2022; Chabal & Toby, 2016). These disparage qualifications are substantiated by international organizations reports. In fact, the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime has characterized Guinea-Bissau as a "landfall" of most cocaine entering Africa from South America, in transit to Europe (UNODC, 2008), and according to the non-governmental organization Transparency International (2023), Guinea-Bissau is considered a "highly corrupted" country, ranking 158 out of 180. Considering that a failed state is defined by the general inability to perform sovereign functions through the three branches of state, delivering responses to fundamental needs of citizens, including basic services and public security, we may say that although GB has serious problems regarding social stability, corruption and poverty, it does not mean that its government has completely lost the ability to cope with basic citizens demands.

In the 1990s, with the opening to a multi-party system and private initiative, private schools began to appear. Due to better salaries and the prestige of private institutions, the best qualified teachers began to abandon the public education system and move to private education. The ongoing economic crisis, led to major cuts in the state budget, dedicated to the education sector. Parents had bear more expenses with education, and school dropouts began to grow significantly (Alves & Rêses, 2021). As a general rule, the level of computer skills of students is less than basic, because access to computer equipment is scarce and the internet network works poorly. All of this, has two negative consequences: on the one hand, in situations of movement restriction or confinement due to pandemics or natural disasters, teaching stops completely, as there is no possibility of taking classes online; on the other hand, as the higher technical education system is deficient and students have to do study abroad, they face extra difficulty because they start from a much lower level of knowledge comparatively to the students in the host nation. In interviews conducted with teachers (2021), there were many criticisms to the current educational system – Salaries, promotions, lack of infrastructures are among the main criticisms. According to members of the teachers' body, access to the education sector requires a partisan posture, because both teachers and support staff, are selected by their political party card, rather than on their merit or curriculum. Likewise, career movement depends more on party position than on profession credits.

In 2017, the UN Mission to Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS, 2020 a) reported that GB had reached a literacy rate of 49.9% among adults, which meant that, if this pace continued, it had reached a total literacy rate of 70% by 2020. To this end, the United Nations Children's Fund worked in partnership with the Ministry of Education and other partners (2016–2020). However, although being a commendable effort, just being able to read



and write, and approximately 44% of children aged 6 to 11 years were out of the education system.

#### 4. Geo-economic Perspectives

Due to its geographical location, the waters of Guinea-Bissau are particularly rich in fish and seafood (shrimp, crab and oysters) in abundance and diversity. The reason for such a wealth of marine life is essentially due to three interrelated factors. First, continental shelf provides large tracts of shallow seabed that are permanently irrigated with sediment brought in by the country's many freshwater courses. Secondly, the GB oceanic waters are covered by very specific currents that, in conjunction with the offshore winds, produce a phenomenon called "upwelling", which generates rising sea currents that bring nutrients deposited on deeper seabed to the surface. Thirdly, the GB coastal areas have the second highest concentration of mangroves in West Africa, and the 12th worldwide (Dias, 2019). Mangroves are plant formations that develop in transition zones between marine and terrestrial environments, where there is great biodiversity. About 90% of marine organisms spend part of their life in this ecosystem, with 80% of the world's fish catches dependent on mangroves (IUFUCN, 2021). It should also be noted that, according to Nieto & Mélin (2017), GB has large concentrations of phytoplankton on the continental shelf - the most extensive in the entire Gulf of Guinea. Given that phytoplankton is the food base for all marine life, it is not surprising that the GB coastline has very considerable fishery resources.

<b>1</b>	Artisanal fishing zone	Inland waters and territorial sea
<b>2</b>	Industrial fishing zones	Beyond 12 miles from coastline baseline
<b>3</b>		Joint Exploration Zone (JEZ), with irregular bottoms, up to 200 meters deep, where there are abundant fishing resources are located.
Source: ANEME, 2018		

Given the high biodiversity of its waters, the extensive area of its continental shelf favourable to fishing activity, as well as the various international agreements in force, the EEZ is frequented by a significant number of industrial fishing vessels. Taken into consideration the type of fishing activity exercised, three fishing zones have been defined in Guinea-Bissau's waters (Table 1). However, although geographical and climatological conditions enhance the replenishment of fish and crustacean stocks, there are serious problems regarding illegal fishing by both industrials and artisanal fleets (Sanca, 2021). In 2020, the Undersecretary of State for Fisheries, Jeremias Intchama, told a newspaper (DN, 2020) that "the annual share of fisheries was 4% of GB GDP and it created direct employment for 6,134 individuals, and indirect for 26,000 people". Paradoxically, due to the predominance of an agricultural tradition in Guinea-Bissau, and because there has never been an industrial high seas fishing fleet, the population eats mainly fruits, rice and river fish.



According to Intchama (2020) "(...) foreign industrial fishing vessels are generally obliged, either through fishing agreements or the legal chartering regime, to disembark and sell part of their catch in national markets" (DN, 2020). This option seeks to solve the food shortage problem. However, post-capture activities are very restricted, and almost all industrial fishing vessels disembark their catch in Dakar (Senegal), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), or Las Palmas (Spain). The fish will then travel from those seaports towards Africa and Europe. The reasons for this situation are related not only to the small size of the Bissau-Guinean market, but also to the fact that there are poor infrastructure and services such as: the absence of an internationally recognized quality certification system, excessive bureaucracy, little port capacity, lack of large refrigerated warehouses and qualified personnel, and poor road connectivity. In addition to the fishery agreement with Senegal, GB has fisheries partnership agreements with the European Union and the People's Republic of China.

The fishery agreement with the EU (renewed in 2024) has a financial contribution "(...) estimated at €85 million over the 5 years, consisting of €17 million per year, of which €4.5 million will be dedicated to promoting Guinea-Bissau's sustainable fisheries management, control and surveillance capacities, and supporting local fishing communities" (European Commission, 2024). The agreement with China provides for several investments, including the construction of a fish processing and conservation unit. The agreement protocol also includes the construction of a warehouse for the sale of artisanal fishing materials, the installation of three ice factories and the expansion and modernization of the artisanal fishing port of Alto Bandim (DN, 2020), which has been concluded in 2023. The fishery agreement with Senegal, was signed under the ECOWAS framework, and provides for the sharing of resources between neighbouring countries. Ship-owners from both countries can carry out activities in the territorial waters of both states. However, this agreement resulted in an "invasion" of Senegalese artisanal fishermen into GB waters and ports, but the reverse did not happen. This occurs not only because GB does not have the same potential as Senegal, but, above all, because the terms of the agreement were not disclosed to GB fishermen. Once again, the GB population criticizes their government for protecting their "northern neighbours" (DN, 2020). As regards monitoring the activities of ships at sea, Guinea-Bissau uses a vessel monitoring system via satellite, bought with the money earmarked for institutional support under previous fishing agreements (DGNRSMS, 2021). Although it is a very precise system, it only works on the basis of the "good faith" of the crews of registered ships, because it requires on-board identification equipment to be switched on (NAFO, 2021). If the crew disconnects it, the ship disappears from the system. With regard to aquaculture, a potentially interesting area of activity within the mangroves zone and its nutrient-rich waters, there is only reference to a success story, funded by FAO, not on the coastline, but in the village of Pitche. A group of young people, managed to carry out a project, where they extract about 22.5 tons of fish annually (FAO, 2021a). Aquaculture is an area of profitable activity, which is being untapped by the local riverside population.

Food security depends on subsistence agriculture. However, access to land has not been a peaceful issue, as only 30% - 40% is farmland, with easy access to abundant water. In 2018, the Director-general of Agriculture (Carlos Amarante) explained that, subsistence agriculture occupies 33% of the 1,200,000 hectares of arable land and, with the increase of the production and export of cashew nuts, disputes over the land are more frequent



(Expresso das Ilhas, 2018). After the independence, all the land was nationalized. This brought up, land disputes among the rural community. In order to solve the situation, in 1998, a "Land Law" was promulgated, aiming to regulate the use of land, and to provide access to property to the most vulnerable. However, the 1998 civil war, and all the instability that followed, prevented its application. In an attempted to apply the "Land Law", in 2018, the EU made an investment of three million euros, in a four-year project, which would be conducted by the FAO, seeking food stability (DN, 2018).

The main agricultural product in Guinea-Bissau is cashew nuts. The country usually exports around 200,000 tonnes of cashew nuts annually, but due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the production dropped to 160,000 in 2020 (BBC News, 2021). Still, the cashew nuts represent 90% of exports, mostly to India, Brazil, Germany, China and Vietnam. Small-scale farmers try to gain their living subsistence not only with the cashew nuts, but also with the wine and other alcoholic beverages they manage to extract out of the cashew apples. Mamadou Djamanca (Cashew Exporters Association of Bissau-Guineans) asserted that, "(...) while cashew products remain popular, Guinea-Bissau's export challenges, over the coming times, will be crucial for farmers and distributors" (BBC News, 2021). As for a population that live along the coastline, it is the mangrove forests that act as a fundamental resource for their respective subsistence. In addition, to fish farming, mangroves are also used for agricultural purposes, namely in the cultivation of mangrove rice, and salt extraction. The country seems to have the necessary agriculture resources for its population, but, in 2021, FAO made an alert that GB needed food assistance for almost 10% of the population (FAO, 2021b). Over 45% of the cereal required is covered by imports. Rice accounts for about 80% of the imports, followed by wheat (15%). Imports in the 2020-2021, were forecasted to be above-average level, which normally was 155.000 tons (FAO, 2021b).

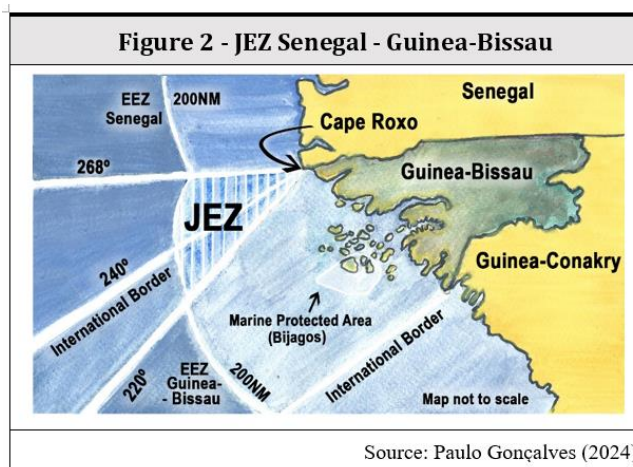
The beauty of Guinea-Bissau islands, forests, the exuberant biodiversity, and the cultural and ethnographic diversity, provide a set of outstanding opportunities in the area of tourism. Paradoxically to its instability, GB has been investing in the conservation of its biodiversity and its ecosystems. The creation of a National System of Protected Areas is proof of this. As a result, the tourism sector has potential for a sustainable economic growth and employment. Culinary, ethnic-cultural events, hunting and sport fishing, spa tourism and ecotourism are, among others, factors that contribute to further enrich the tourist experience. Furthermore, regardless of their internal problems and disputes, the GB population is traditionally sympathetic to foreign visitors. The Bijagós is the ex-libris of tourism, being considered one of the most beautiful places on the African continent, where the weather permits touristic activities approximately 10 months per year. However, here too, the results of the country's instability can be seen, because the tourism sector it is almost unexplored. Bissau and the Bijagós Archipelago have a few hotel-type accommodations, but they are limited in number, size, and service quality. The maritime connections, as well as the road network, are insufficient; there's a lack of medical care facilities; and the internet connectivity is scarce. In 2019, GB participated for the first time in an international fair dedicated to tourism, in Paris. In a media interview the Secretary of State for Tourism (Catarina Taborda) said: "At the moment, we only have 3,000 tourists annually, but we have the ambition to significantly increase that number significantly in the next three years: one million, two million tourists annually. It is very ambitious, but we will work to achieve this goal." (RFI, 2019a).



According to Edmundson (2014), there are two main minerals to be explored: Phosphate and Bauxite. In 1978, the UNDP was the first international organization to investigate the phosphate deposits. However, there was no exploration, simply because there was no mining infrastructure. Later in 1997, the Canadian Champion Resources Inc. made another study and reached the conclusion that GB was rich in phosphate rock - close to 100 million tons of high-quality clay bounded ore, with 30.1% raw phosphate rock (approximately 40 years' worth of mining), plus an additional 400 million tons of lower quality calcium bounded rock (up to 200 years of mining potential). The Canadians stated to explore the mineral but, in 1998, the civil war started and everything was put to a stop. Since then, several other initiatives were taken, but the instability inhibited any solid enterprise. Although phosphate mining could be very interesting for local employment and revenues, it can have dire consequences to the environment, if not handled properly. Phosphate mining and processing requires a substantial amount of water. The resulting clays and sands cannot be discharged untreated, or risks polluting the local rivers (e.g., Cacheu) and the sea, inducing enormous negative impact on the ecosystem and fisheries.

When we think about mineral resources, we cannot ignore that it is estimated that a good percentage of the world-known resources of bauxite and other rare earth elements. Bauxite reserves are estimated at 17 million tons (Da Cruz, 2020). In the Boé area, there are five deposits of bauxite. Bauxite can be refined into aluminium, attracting a much higher price, but at a much greater cost. The Dutch discovered it in the 1950s, but it was the Soviets that made a proper study. Beyond the security and stability risks, the problem in exploring the bauxite in Boé, is that there are no proper roads and to the closest seaport (Buba) is poorly developed. Despite these set-backs, both Angola and the United Arab Emirates, have indicated the possibility of investments in the transportation system, as well as the mining infrastructure. In 2007, a commercial company from Angola had been licensed for bauxite exploration, but with limited results due to the instability. In 2024, President Umaro Embaló's visit to Russia might suggest a potential pivot towards collaborating with Russia for ongoing bauxite exploration.

Agricultural land is by far the greatest source of natural wealth (Edmundson, 2013, p. 1). The second largest component resides in the forests of Guinea-Bissau (...) Fisheries represent the third largest element of natural wealth (Edmundson, 2013, p. 2). The fourth largest component of natural wealth are the Protected Areas (PA) and the biodiversity they contain (...) Finally, minerals could provide Guinea-Bissau with an important revenue stream (...) (Edmundson, 2013, p. 3). "Although sustained studies have not yet been carried out on the potential of the seabed in the GB EEZ, it is well known that there are concentrations of important strategic mineral in the seabed of the Gulf of Guinea" (Abubakar, 2016). Minerals such as cobalt crusts, the poly-metallic nodules (containing nickel, cobalt, copper, and manganese), polymetallic sulphides (containing zinc, silver, copper, and gold), as well as monazite sand (containing significant amounts of uranium), deposits of diamond, gold and phosphorus have been mentioned in different studies of different places in the Atlantic Ocean. Should those minerals exist in Guinea-Bissau's seabed, its mining could be significantly easier than in other latitudes, because the depths of the seabed are lower due to the extensive continental shelf.



The entire Gulf of Guinea is an area of great potential for oil exploration, constituting the second largest concentration of hydrocarbons in the world (CEIRI News, 2019). The GB territory marks precisely the northern limit of the Gulf of Guinea, therefore, it is not surprising that there is interest of large oil companies in exploring the seabed. The maritime border between GB and Senegal was agreed in April 1960, between the French and Portuguese governments (Figure 2). This delimitation was established following a line at azimuth 240 degrees, taken in the coastal zone of the land border between the two territories. To the South of 240 degrees, it is Guinea-Bissau's waters, and to the North of 240 degrees it is Senegalese waters. In 1993, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal signed an agreement to establish a Joint Exploration Zone (JEZ), with approximately 25,000 km<sup>2</sup>, aiming for a joint exploitation of fishery and offshore hydrocarbon resources. The JEZ is defined by azimuths 220 degrees (which is inside Guinea-Bissau's waters) all the way up to azimuth 268 degrees (which is inside Senegalese waters). For this purpose, GB has given 46% of its maritime territory and Senegal 54%. The 1993 agreement provided that fish dividends would be split in equal parts (50%-50%), but for hydrocarbons the sharing is 15% GB and 85% for Senegal. Although there were reasons for this disparity, according to several interviews (Baldé, 2021; Senha, 2021; Gomes, 2021 a, c), the GB population never understood, neither did they agreed, why Bissau's authorities had signed such an agreement. In recent years, several studies and evaluative drilling were carried out in the JEZ, made by different international companies. However, commercial oil exploration has never taken place. In addition, the possibility of having oil in Guinea-Bissau's seabed is not restricted to the JEZ.

In that regard, in August 2019, the GB government announced the granting of rights to carry out prospecting for the China National Offshore Oil Corporation. In statements to the media, the Minister of Natural Resources Issufo Baldé said that he "expected the Chinese to extract 30 to 60 thousand barrels of oil per day" (RFI, 2019b). In addition to Chinese research, there were also oil companies operating in Bissau-Guinean waters from Angola, Dubai, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Norway. In November 2021, the Secretary-General of Guinea-Bissau Agency for Management and Cooperation with Senegal (Inussa Baldé) announced that the newly appointed President Embaló, who was



known to have good relations with the Senegalese Head of State (HoS), would be renegotiating the agreement, in order to have least 30% for Guinea-Bissau and 70% for Senegal (CM/Lusa, 27 Nov 2021). However, in December 2021, the mentioned agreement between the two HoS was severely contested by Prime Minister (HoG) Nuno Gomes Nabiam. Addressing the media, HoG Nabiam explained that "(...) this type of agreements is a government's responsibility, with ratification from the National Assembly and promulgation from the president - not the other way around as it seems to have happened (...) the oil to be explored happens to be on the Guinea-Bissau's part of the JEZ, hence the difference in revenue, if renegotiated, should also be the other way around, with the highest bid for GB, not for Senegal" (DW, 2021).

On 14 December 2021, the National Assembly (NA) voted against the oil-sharing agreement signed between the Presidents, Umaro Embaló (GB), and Macky Sall (Senegal). In January 2022, the NA speaker (Cipriano Cassamá) sent an official letter to his Senegalese counterpart, with a copy of the deliberation approved by the majority of the MP, in which they declared the aforementioned agreement "null and without effect" (DW, 2022). On 20 January 2022, the HoS stated that "(...) he did not sign any oil exploration agreement, rather a cooperation agreement with Senegal, and that the parliament did not have the authority to declare the agreement void" (MSN/Lusa, 2022). When President Embaló explained the situation to journalists, he referred to the HoG and parliament with harsh words, denouncing any potential political instability caused (MSN/Lusa, 2022).

## 5. Key Infrastructure

Approximately 44% of the population lives in urban areas. Approximately, one-fifth lives in Bissau and along the Atlantic coast, and the remaining in rural regions distributed between small and often isolated communities (Index Mundi, 2021). The length of the national road network is 3,455 km, of which 965 km are paved and 2,490 km are unpaved roads. Weather conditions, namely the deterioration associated with the rainy season, require permanent investment in the maintenance. As the territory is mostly crossed by rivers, the transport of goods out of the main access roads relies on the frequent use of unsophisticated boats, which makes the entire transport process difficult. The road infrastructure needs large investments to support the desired development. In this sense, in 2018, China signed a contract with the government of GB, for the construction of an important road in the coastal area providing access to Bissau. This project has a non-reimbursable budget of USD 30 million, and it will be a Chinese donation to Guinea-Bissau (E-Global, 2018).

In addition, the land connectivity between GB and the neighbouring countries need a clear improvement, especially considering the international market. Thus, given that Guinea-Bissau's privileged trade partner is Senegal, the two countries started a project, financed by the ADB, to improve the road between Dakar and Bissau. This project is being carried out within the framework of ECOWAS. This new road between Farim and Dungal, will have the characteristics of the agrarian development corridors ("agro-corridors"), in the context of African Spatial development initiatives. In an interview (1 April 2022) to the Guinean-Bissau diaspora online channel, the Minister Fidelis Forbs said



that when his government took office, 83% of the road system of the country was destroyed, and he had the vision to invert that data by 2024, having 83% of the country's road system renewed. Forbs continued saying that in two years (2020–2022), he managed to rebuild 800 km of roads, and President Embaló, is negotiating with the international and banking community, to get loans at a very low rate (1%), to a push up on the public works. The government vision for his legislature, is to initiate the process to build of a new international airport; renew the construction of the road system; and to build a circular highway around Bissau (Forbs, 2022). Indeed, the only operational airport, with the capacity to receive international flights, is the Bissau Osvaldo Vieira Airport. Its modest terminal and its reduced capacity for handling several commercial aircraft simultaneously limits operations, and GB does not have a national airliner. International connections are carried out by airlines operating from Portugal, Morocco, Cabo Verde, and Senegal.

The Bissau seaport is the largest commercial docking, accounting for 85% of exports and over 90% of imports. Artisanal fishing boats unload their cargoes, in small anchorages, along the estuaries of the various rivers. In November 2021, President Embaló, following his "aggressive and proactive diplomacy", announced the launch of the feasibility study, for the construction of the commercial and mining seaport, on the Grande Buba River. According to President Embaló, this will be the biggest project of civil engineering in the country. The plan envisages a pier 18 meters deep and will allow for the outflow of bauxite from Boé and the simultaneous docking of three ships weighing up to 70 thousand tons (DW/LUSA, 2021). In 2019, the African Development Bank (ADB) had already financed an initial project study, but it never went ahead due to political instability.

The poor coverage of railway is a land transport weakness all over Africa. In terms of international intervention and donors, China is the main driver of rail networks on the African continent. Aware of this deficiency and the potential that the railway has, the African Union (AU) inscribed in its strategic plan (Agenda 2063), that there should be investment in a high-speed rail network to unite all African capitals by 2063. In addition, there is an idea to build a short railway between Buba and Boé to explore mining. However, no steps have been taken in this direction. Currently (2024), Guinea-Bissau does not have a single railroad.

### **5.1. Telecommunications and Energy**

Guinea-Bissau telecommunication are essentially based on mobile telephone network. The mobile network is 3G +/4G in urban areas and the service provider "Orange Bissau" has announced plans to complete the coverage of the rural areas with 2G/3G (APO Group, 2021). In addition, the landline works poorly, since the 1987–2012 instability period (LCA, 2021). Guinea-Bissau possesses a single National TV station, which receives the TV signal from Portugal. There is also the national radio station and several other private and local community stations. Less than 4% of the population uses the internet (CIA, 2021), which has a low coverage, a slow speed and is subjected to frequent cuts (fact that has been verified during our online interviews (2021 c).

A U.S. report mention that Guinea-Bissau is among the 11 countries that have the less consumption of electricity in the World (CIA, 2021). According to a United Nations'





Environment Program (UNEP, 2015) report, only 60% of the population have access to electricity. Fuelwood supplies about 90% of the domestic energy. Guinea-Bissau is heavily dependent of foreigner electricity, and all of the national production is based in fossil fuel (coal and oil). The GB relies strongly on fossil fuels, it has plans to shift into renewable energies, but needs an investment of USD 700 million (UN News, 2018). Wave energy production seems promising, due to the tidal amplitude of 3.4 meters, recorded on the banks of some rivers (UNEP, 2015). The Chinese company Sinohydro began the construction of the first large scale solar plant, with the purpose of selling power to national utility Electricity of Guinea-Bissau. As a matter of fact, one of the greatest potentials is on hydroelectric power, since most of the country does not have the necessary supply of electricity (IEEFA, 2020).

## 6. Economic Activities

The United Nations Development Program - Human Development Report, ranks Guinea-Bissau in 179 out of 193 countries (UNDP/HDR 2024). This means that GB is the 15th last place, belonging to the group considered as having a "low human development." Previously, in January 2016, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) assessed investment risks in the most problematic countries, using a scale from 0 to 7, where 0 equals minimum risk and 7 equals maximum investment risk. In that OECD assessment, GB was classified with a score of 7. Therefore, the investment scenario is indeed unattractive from risk viewpoint. Fortunately, this has not stop investors, especially in the case of a country with "low human development" and interesting natural resources, where all kinds of investment hold the prospective of a high profit. Guinea-Bissau's economy is based on the exploitation of natural resources. In addition to international aid, there are loans, diaspora remittances, fishing licenses and the exports of cashew nuts.

Following the majority of African countries, GB informal economy dominates the nation's workforce, with more than 90% of informal labour employment (ILO, 2020). Although GB is considered to be the fourth world producer of cashew nuts, generating 18% of GDP, 90% of revenues exports and 33% of households' income (Terra Ranka, 2015) and enjoys a great wealth of marine resources, the country has a small participation in the context of geo-economics of Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2015, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) agency presented a document entitled: *Guinea-Bissau 2025 - Strategic and Operational Plan 2015–2020 "Terra Ranka"*. This document, foresaw a diversified economy based on the four growth drivers: agriculture and agro-industry, fishing, tourism, and mining. Once again, due to political instability, most of the steps needed for its success were not taken, but the goals designed in this strategy were absolutely appropriate (UNEP, 2015a).

One of the programmes inserted in the 2025 strategy, was the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) (program 38). Guinea-Bissau is a member of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which attempts to eliminate the border tariffs between African nations. In order to deal not only with this promising pan-African trade, but also worldwide, the country's strategic thinking envisions to implement SEZ, especially in Bissau, which has a seaport facility and it benefits from the Chinese Belt and



Road Initiative. These are integrated economic platforms designed to accelerate private investment, through the incentive of a tax-free zone, offering land, facilities and services with special protection to entrepreneurs (Terra Ranka, 2015). The SEZ program is slowly but steadily being implemented, and it also foresees a Special Tourism Zone, to be established in the Bijagós Archipelago, aiming at projecting this paradisiac tourism destination worldwide.

Foreigner investments are also being made in innovative sectors responding to a fragile, but growing stabilization. Guinea-Bissau is a member of the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa, which legal regime reflects in an additional guarantee for foreign investors. Recently, GB became particularly attractive for those interested and investing in solar plants and generation of electricity. Although some investors perceived GB as unsafe, the reality shows that the current political situation, has a limited negative impact on foreign investment.

In 2022, GB state budget was approximately USD 435 million: USD 320 million were state-generated income and USD 115 million deficit, which would have to be covered by loans and/or donations. More than half of the state budget (56.8%) was committed to payment of salaries to public servants, goods and services, interest and transfers, 29% to investment expenses and 14.2% to public treasury charges (ANGOP, 2022). In 2021, GB external debt represented 79% of the GDP, which depicts a considerable amount of non-returnable international stakeholders' donations, in order to maintain investments, without impacting on state liability (DW, 2020a). In December 2023, the IMF released a report, analyzing the external and overall debt, estimating a debt increase up to 80.4% of GDP, with both the risk of external debt distress and the overall risk of debt distress remaining high (IMF/AD, 2023). Among other factors, such as the State-Owned Enterprises (with a particular focus on the electricity and water supply enterprises), the report highlights external debt service-to-exports ratios, being impacted by the falling prices of cashew. Nonetheless, although the dire economic and financial situation, the report assesses that the country's public debt is "sustainable, contingent on the authorities' commitment to sound policies, in the context of an engagement with the IMF and other development partners" (IMF/AD, 2023). The authors of the report estimate that "Guinea-Bissau's commitment to the fiscal consolidation towards the WAEMU deficit convergence criteria, and the consistent support provided by regional institutions, will help managing its debt (...) Should the convergence criteria be followed, the report estimates a debt of 70% of GDP by 2026 and 65.7% by 2028" (IMF/AD, 2023). Furthermore, they also assessed that GB debt sustainability, depends on sound macroeconomic policies, but there will always be risks that authorities cannot control, such as:

- Disappointing cashew exports due to lower prices or climate events,
- High global food and oil prices,
- The effects of a protracted political security crisis in Europe and the Middle East,
- Climate change-related natural disasters.



If these risks materialize, social tensions could increase, triggering political instability that may constrain the fiscal adjustment and increase debt vulnerabilities.

## 7. Domestic Politics

There is an old saying "If the tongue and the teeth sometimes enter into conflict, imagine different people discussing the same issue!". Teeth and tongue belong to the same mouth and there is no question about living peacefully together, it is the "working together" that, sometimes, becomes a problem. Likewise, in the multi-ethnic Guinea-Bissau there is no problem regarding different religions or cultural backgrounds; but when politics enters the game, things change. After the implementation of the multi-party system (1991), the new political parties pressured the government to carry out state reforms, decentralize power, and privatize public companies. Paradoxically, with the instability, the informal economy proliferated and the state became the country's main employer. Guinea-Bissau's population entered a system of nepotism in the selection of civil servants, where membership of a political party mattered more than a candidate's own credentials. In the last 30 years, Guinea-Bissau has had more than 50 political parties and civic movements, in the context of a population less than two million (DW, 2021b). The problem with having such multiplicity of political parties, is that it raises the suspicion that they do not differentiate between political concepts or doctrines, but rather between personal objectives of their leaders, turning political struggle into ethnic-tribal confrontation. The most representative political parties are PAIGC, Madem G15 (Movement for Democratic Alternation Group of 15 [Movimento para Alternância Democrática, Grupo dos 15] and PRS - Party for Social Renewal [Partido da Renovação Social]. During this research, a group of young GB university students, was questioned about their opinion on their national public administration. The words they used were: "disorganization," "nepotism," "slowness," and "corruption" (Interviews, 2021, c). It became clear that public sector lacks definition of objectives, strategic management and progress indicators. The problem is, regarding the good intentions and the planning processes, the entire structure is partisan and hostage to the ruling party. The frequent government changes, block the normal functioning of public services.

The GB political system is semi-presidential, and therefore, the President is the Head of State, but the highest government body, works under the Prime Minister (HoG) leadership. The President appoints the HoG, after consultation with party leaders represented at the National Assembly. Therefore, the parliamentary majority should present a name to the HoS and that name should appointed HoG. The new HoG would then form a government according to the parliamentary majority. However, the constitutional law has several gaps leaving room for different interpretations of the HoS powers. That fact has given the way to a stronger presidential role, with the HoS steering the government, the foreigner policy and promoting frequent changes of the HoG.

President Embaló (Madem G15) was appointed HoS on 27 February 2020, and as such, he appointed HoG Nuno Nabiam. However, by the end of 2021, the relationship between the HoS and the HoG soured (NMM/Lusa, 2022). Throughout 2021, the situation remained volatile, mostly due to the lack of a developed civil society, with a clear understanding of democratic institutions, and a nationwide consensus on the role of the



military. Meanwhile, President Embaló reformed the armed forces. Although no details of this reform plan have been made public, the President seems to be quite engaged in it, to the point of not authorizing the retirement request of the Joint Chief of General Staff General Biagué Na Ntan. Addressing the media in a ceremony to the falling heroes, the President explained that "(...) General Na Ntan could not retire now, because he is a stabilizing element in the armed forces reform" (Observador & Lusa, 2022a). In the same media opportunity, President Embaló stated that "(...) there was an ongoing process of recruitment of new military personnel, and the goal was to modernize the armed forces, to allow the contribution to international peacekeeping missions" (Observador & Lusa, 2022a). The political control of the armed forces is a paramount condition for a representative democracy to flourish. President Embaló, himself a General, is aware of it and the decision to postpone General Ntan's retirement, seems to be a measure to achieve that control. General Ntan is respected among the ranks and has expressed his loyalty to President Embaló. On the 1 February, 2022 there was an attempt of a coup d'état, which has failed, because the army answered to the political power and not to insurgents. Speaking to the country, the President Embaló conveyed gratitude to the army for preventing a coup d'état, which he said to be an "attack on democracy" (Expresso das Ilhas, 2022).

Guinea-Bissau's National Assembly is a unicameral parliament. It has 102 parliamentary seats, 100 are directly elected through party-list proportional representation, and two are representing citizens living abroad (one for Africa, one for Europe). All MP serve four-year terms. The elections held in 2019 provided the following composition (Observador & Lusa, 2022b): PAIGC (35.2% - 47 seats); Madem G-15 (21.1% - 27 seats); PRS (21.1% - 21 seats); others (22.6% - 7 seats) (13% are female MP). Although PAIGC managed a relative majority, it has lost the absolute majority. Furthermore, a coalition of parties (Madem G15, PRS and APU-PDGB) obtained the majority seats (27 + 21 + 5 (APU/PDGB (United People's Assembly/Democratic Party of Guinea-Bissau))). The two other small parties obtained a single seat each – the PND (Social Renewal Party) and the UpM (Union for Change). Hence, the coalition formed the new government by presenting to President José Mário Vaz (the predecessor of President Embaló), the name of the politician to be appointed as HoG. Later that year, this same political alliance sponsored the presidential run of President Embaló, which downplayed even further the traditional hegemony of PAIGC. However, this new alliance seems to have weaknesses, and there were rumours that PAIGC was negotiating with PRS an agreement, which could block the government.

Throughout the year 2020, relations between the President and the National Assembly became less cordial. President Embaló started to have a direct involvement in the governance, resembling a full presidential style regime. President Embaló, arguing that Guinea-Bissau has to turn its political paradigm, into a more proactive diplomacy, entered into international agreements, without the knowledge or participation of the government.

The need to amend the constitution arose in the wake of the Conakry Agreement (2016), between major GB political forces and mediated by ECOWAS. Bissau's inactivity in this constitutional review, has led ECOWAS to put pressure on the authorities. This pressure, at times, resulted in an internal perception of interference in domestic affairs. Nevertheless, two different proposals to amend the constitution, were put forward: one

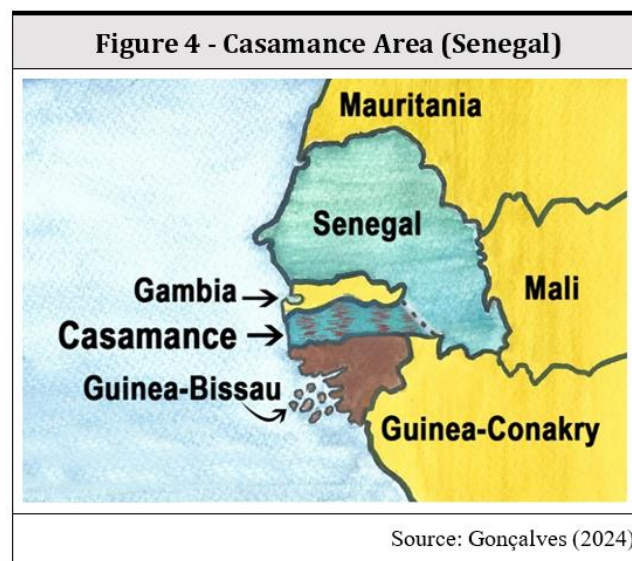


drafted and discussed by the NA, the other by the President. The proposal debated at the NA looked for the reinforcement of semi-presidential system, and outlined the powers of the sovereign bodies, with particular detail the HoS and the HoG. Something that was not clear in the Constitution as of 1996. The proposal of President Embaló, on the contrary, reinforced the powers of the HoS, who would preside over the Council of Ministers, the Superior Council of Defense and the Superior Council of National Security (Observador & Lusa, 2022c).

## 8. Geopolitics

Although geographically Guinea-Bissau is located in the Northern Hemisphere, in geopolitical terms it is considered to be a South Atlantic state, being part of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS) proposed by Brazil and implemented by the UNGA Resolution 41/11 (1986) (Figure 3). Although geopolitically important, Brazil is the ZOPACAS driving force, without any visible major support from other regional power. However, with the foreseen withdrawal of Brazil from other peacekeeping operations around the world, it is feasible to think that ZOPACAS will be revitalized in the near future.

Guinea-Bissau has extremely porous land borders, with the same tribe on either side of the political border. Sometimes, the population has difficulty in recognizing where the international border is. Both sea and land borders are not adequately surveyed due to lack of assets. Guinea-Bissau does not have a direct foreign military threat. However, there are known transnational organized groups that conduct illegal activities, crime, and drug trafficking. The local population has been complaining about animal theft, vandalism of fishery resources, illegal removal of cashew nuts, illegal cutting of trees, even land disputes, all having to do with foreigners.





In this vein, there is a particular situation, involving foreign military forces inside Guinea-Bissau, with potential to drag the country into a proxy war. Independence guerrillas from Senegal regularly cross the northern border into Guinea-Bissau, setting military bases without the consent of Bissau's authorities. The problem stems from Casamance region located between the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. Casamance (Figure 4) was once also a Portuguese colony, but later became a French possession through an agreement between those two European colonial powers. During Guinea-Bissau's war of independence, the PAIGC guerrillas frequently resorted to Casamance to establish second line bases (RTP, 2018). These PAIGC sites beyond the northern border, were used for logistic support and refuge against attacks from the Portuguese forces. Nevertheless, the colonial forces regularly launched military operations across the border into Casamance to eliminate the PAIGC bases. Several of these cross-border operations had consent from Dakar. In 1974, with the GB independence, Casamance was pacified, but it maintained a strong community of Bissau-Guineans. In 1982, Casamance was again, on the local news, due to the emergence of the separatist Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC). As tensions increased between the government of Dakar and the MFDC representatives, a military has be put in place and, in 1990, the armed conflict resumed. Comparatively to colonial times, the situation reversed, with MFDC guerrillas, seeking refuge into Guinea-Bissau, after attacking the positions of the Dakar forces. The presence of the MFDC, as well as the trafficking of drugs, wood, and arms, justified several incursions by Senegalese forces into Bissau-Guinean territory. Over the decades, the Casamance conflict has seen periods of ceasefire and resurgence of fighting, but it has never been resolved and the occasional presence of Senegalese forces in Guinea-Bissau, has been an additional reason for political instability (E-Global, 2021).

During 2020, the conflict of Casamance was dormant. However, with the election of President Embaló, a close ally of President Sall of Senegal, a series of cooperation initiatives began, which included the resolution of the Casamance conflict. In 26 January 2021, a combined operation between the military forces of Senegal and Guinea-Bissau began, with the aim of putting an end to the MFDC presence in Guinea-Bissau. Senegalese forces entered Guinea-Bissau from the north, supported by artillery and aviation, and Guinea-Bissau forces closed the southern flank. The success of this operation was limited, and although greatly weakened, reportedly there were still MFDC positions in Guinea-Bissau (McGregor, 2021). Guinea-Bissau opposition parties, accused President Embaló of authorizing Senegalese forces to enter, without informing the NA (NMM, 2021). The GB population did not appreciate the presence of foreign military, and the opposition parties capitalized on the subject, remembering that one of the motives for the 2012 coup d'état, was the fact of having the Angolan army stationed in Bissau. Once again, the close relations between the two presidents generated, a feeling of distrust, due to the alleged abusive and illegal exploitation of the northern neighbour in relation to Bissau-Guinean resources.

### **8.1. Deforestation**

Guinea-Bissau has a strong stock of highly valuable rosewood, teak, and other hardwoods, which have become scarce worldwide, resulting in the price escalation. This has led to the devastation of forests, especially the regions of Bafatá and Oio (2012 -



2014), to a point that Oio has been left without primary forests. In 2015, the NA passed legislation that outlawed the felling of trees for 5 years. During that time, deforestation eased significantly, but felling for domestic consumption and illegal logging continued. In 2018, the Director-General for Forests and Fauna Mamadu Camará, announced that the government had started to export 1,500 containers of seized illegal wood, which had been left strewn across the country (Ambiente Magazine, 2018). At the end of that five-year ban period, the government reauthorized the felling of trees. In October 2020, Nelvina Barreto (former Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and environmental activist), suggested that the government is contributing to exacerbating the effects of climate change, causing the rainfall regime to change over time, temperatures to rise, and the fresh water levels to drop and become inaccessible. She added that logging decimates more than 625 m<sup>3</sup> of forest each year, reducing it by 30% in the Tombali region and shrinking 57% of the savannah coverage in the Bafatá region, as well as 19% of the mangrove forests in Oio and Gabú (DW, 2020b). In addition to exploiting forests, deforestation is also the result of domestic consumption of firewood as an energy source. The yearly consumption of wood for energy is about 1.29% of the available biomass resource, which is about 48.3 million m<sup>3</sup>, translating into a deforestation rate of 30,000 to 60,000 ha/year (UNEP, 2015b).

## 8.2. Narco-trafficking

“There is a growing risk of some West African States being captured by foreign and local criminal networks colluding with senior officials, or even collapsing. While the situation is most acute in Guinea-Bissau today, it could also develop somewhere else in the region tomorrow unless resolute steps are taken quickly” (UNODC, 2008, p. 5). Due to the vulnerability of its economic and social structures, GB became open to the actions of South American drug cartels, and the country started to be used as a launch pad to take narcotics into Europe. The origins and destinations of narcotics may not be the responsibility of Guinea-Bissau, but there are consequences of this traffic in local society that cannot be ignored. The latest incident took place in September 2024, when an airplane was sized at Bissau airport with 2.6 ton of cocaine on board (Africa Lusófona, 2024). Drug trafficking brings with it, organized crime, such as the trafficking of arms and people, and, above all, it poisons the society as easy money. Criminal activity is no longer a “common crime”, but takes on a higher level of complexity and violence. The highest spheres of decision-making are absorbed in the web of drug traffickers, and often national decisions are made in accordance with their interests. “The Office has warned that the illegal drug trade in the region is threatening stability and development. Guinea-Bissau, one of the hardest hit countries, risks becoming a “narco-State”. In response to the situation, UNODC is providing technical assistance to strengthen institutions and the rule of law and is mobilizing additional international support for Guinea Bissau and the region” (UNODC, 2008, p. 2). For example, in August 2021, the U.S. Department of State Narcotics Rewards Program, offered five million dollars reward, for the arrest of the former head of the Armed Forces (General António Indjai), considered “one of the most destabilizing figures”. General Indjai was Armed Forces Chief of Staff from 2010 to 2014, being one of the leaders of both the 1 April 2010 military uprising and the 2012 coup d’état. He is no longer a military leader, but he was operating freely in West Africa



(Observador & Lusa, 2021a). Even if Bissau-Guineans wanted to fight drug trafficking, they do not have the means to do it. Indeed, drug trafficking is not a problem unique to GB, nor should it be fought in isolation by the small African country. After entering the African continent, the traffickers' network makes "the product" travel overland towards North, to the Mediterranean Sea, towards Europe. It is assessed that over 75% of the "product" manages to reach European shores. On 10 November 2021, the executive secretary of the Observatory for the Fight Against Drugs and Drug Addiction (Abílio Aleluia Có Júnior), declared that drug trafficking had increased in Guinea-Bissau, with the involvement of state agents. In his own words:

*"We've always drawn attention to the increase in drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, so it doesn't surprise us at all. In fact, it is a sad and shameful situation for the country and with each passing day we are seeing the involvement of politicians, the military, defence and security agents, and businessmen in drug trafficking (...)"* (Voice of America, 2021).

The narco-trafficking has also contaminated the armed forces, with high-ranking officers being identified as relevant elements in the drugs' cartels, and low army ranks facilitating and providing security to drug shipments (VoA, 2021). President Embaló has called the fight against drugs cartels one of his administration's major goals. In fact, he has expressed that, as a result of his anti-drugs engagement, the failed attempt of the coup d'état that occurred on 1 February 2022, might have been promoted by the drug cartels, in order to remove him from power (DN, 2022).

### **8.3. Global Warming**

As a country where a simple high tide can make the sea water penetrate about 100 km through the inland rivers, it is easy to see that Guinea-Bissau is strongly threatened by the average rise in sea water, due to global warming. In a number of interviews, it was clear to draw the conclusion that although the seriousness of global warming is acknowledged, climate issues are not yet on the agenda. However, without realizing it, GB has a relevant role to play in the fight against global warming. The extensive mangroves coastal forests, are one of the most effective ways of capturing and fixing carbon, which is why the Guinea-Bissau flora, is extremely important for the global decarbonization. Likewise, the presence of large amounts of phytoplankton in the Atlantic Ocean that bathes the Guinea-Bissau continental shelf is, another extremely effective way of capturing carbon. The more carbon the phytoplankton absorbs; the more phytoplankton reproduces. Since phytoplankton is the essential basis for feeding fish stocks, the captured carbon enters the food chain in a health way.

### **8.4. Illegal or Unreported Fishing**

In a speech to a Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), group of experts in fishing matters, stated that "illegal, non-declared, and non-reglementary fishing is one of the biggest problems facing Guinea-Bissau" (Sanca, 2021). This abusive and unlawful





activity is not only impoverishing the economy, but above all is extinguishing resources, destroying the sea bed, and the mangrove forests. The illegal and excessive fishing that is taking place, inhibits the protection seasons and could deplete irreversibly fish stocks. It should also be noted that trawl fishing is particularly harmful, as it destroys the seabed, brings to the surface species that are returned to the sea dead. Likewise, Senegal's artisanal fleet, fishes indiscriminately in GB territorial waters, without any license and, to make matters worse, destroy considerable amounts of mangroves in order to collect wood to smoke fish. In this way, they contribute to further aggravate the problem by destroying the refuge of species in their juvenile state.

### **8.5. International Organizations**

The United Nations had a mission in Bissau (UNIOGBIS) for 20 years. By decision of the UN Security Council, this mission ended in 2020, due to lack of visible results. According to a report (S/2018/1086), UNIOGBIS faced insurmountable challenges to its mandate due to the "engines of instability". The GB fragility breads from structural problems: "a political class deeply divided; the growing political influence of a shadow economy based on drug trafficking; the absence of the state, particularly in rural areas, and its ineffectiveness when present; human rights violations and widespread impunity; resignation to poverty and lack of access to basic services." Furthermore, it was mentioned that GB did not have the institutional and physical infrastructure, nor the human resources with the necessary training, to absorb the technical and financial support provided by the international community. It concluded that the long presence of "(...) UNIOGBIS may have contributed to a lesser sense of ownership of the political process among the leaders and of their responsibility to advance the country" (UNIOGBIS, 2020 b).

The post-electoral crisis that broke out in early 2020, confirmed all the points of the UNIOGBIS report. The crisis in the system was aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a strong impact on the way UNIOGBIS had planned its redeployment, as well as, on the transfer of mission to other UN funds, agencies and programs, assuring that the UN support would be continued. Furthermore, before withdrawal, UNIOGBIS encouraged ECOWAS, the AU, the CPLP and the European Union (the "Group of Five") to promote aid to Guinea-Bissau (Global Initiative, 2021).

Guinea-Bissau joined the African Union in 1973 and the ultimate goal of AU, is the complete economic integration of all African countries into an African Economic Community. From the 1990s onwards, with the opening to multi-party system, Guinea-Bissau entered a situation of latent internal conflict, with successive coups d'état, a civil war and permanent political instability. Thus, AU placed the country under close surveillance and, when the 2012 coup d'état took place, the Guinea-Bissau's AU membership was suspended, and sanctions were applied.

The democratic elections of 2014 came to mark the return to normality, and the AU reinstated Guinea-Bissau membership. Guinea-Bissau is a founding member of ECOWAS (1975). Following the 2012 coup d'état in Guinea-Bissau, and the withdrawal of the Angolan forces, which were in Bissau under a bilateral military cooperation agreement, ECOWAS deployed a peacekeeping force to GB. The ECOWAS peacekeeping mission was



named ECOMIB. Initially, this international force had an 800-strong military apparatus, with the task to ensure the security of the local sovereign bodies. Later on, the force reduced its contingent to 500 soldiers and police agents. ECOMIB had military personnel from Nigeria, Côte D'Ivoire, Togo, Senegal, and Burkina Faso as well as the police contingent from Nigeria. The peacekeeping force had an initial mandate of six months, agreed with the host nation. However, in 2017 the force was still in Guinea-Bissau, and not much improvement could be seen regarding the violence and instability. The locals claimed that the foreigner military had been "contaminated" by the drug dealers, and were trafficking themselves. Furthermore, the foreigner forces had too much Senegalese military, bringing bad memories of the neighbouring country's participation in Guinea-Bissau's 1998-1999 civil war, questioning the force's neutrality. In addition, ECOMIB compounds were too far away from Bissau, where the violence resided, thus leaving the population unprotected. In September 2017, ECOMIB redeployed to their sending nations, and no other international force substituted it (Global Security, 2017).

In October 2016, ECOWAS made yet another important contribution for the pacification and stability of Guinea-Bissau, by promoting and mediating a reconciliation meeting, in Conakry, with all Bissau-Guinean stakeholders. The result of this meeting was a written agreement between all parties, which became known as the Conakry Agreement. The Agreement provided for the formation of a consensual government comprising all parties represented in the National Assembly, the appointment of the HoG by consensus and far-reaching institutional reforms. In terms of institutional reforms, the UN supported the drafting of a new electoral law, the revision of the constitution law and a law on political parties. However, in the two years following the agreement, none of the provisions revised therein were implemented. Therefore, ECOWAS decided to intervene and applied sanctions on 19 individuals, accused of promoting instability, and political obstructionists. The Chairperson of the UN Commission and the UNSG fully endorsed the decisions of ECOWAS. They reiterate their endorsement of the centrality of the Conakry Agreement as a roadmap for Guinea-Bissau's future (UNSG, 2018). The UE, the EU and the U.S. had imposed sanctions imposed over some military personnel, because of their actions in the 2012 coup d'état. In 2021 several of the sanctioned persons saw their bank accounts frozen by the UN, and the new President Embaló told media representatives he was going to try negotiate with the UN the lifting of such sanctions (Observador & Lusa, 2021b).

In March 2018, the AU promoted the signing of an international agreement among the African States for the creation of an African Free Trade Area (AfCTA). A year later, GB signed the AfCTA Agreement (The instrument of ratification was deposited on 27 September 2022). The main objective of the AfCTA is to create a single market, in which the free movement of people and goods and a future system of a single currency for all signatory countries is established. Another relevant international forum in which Guinea-Bissau has an "equal in-between pairs" seat, is the CPLP. One area of particular emphasis is the cooperation in the defence sector, where GB can profit from the military and security capabilities of its CPLP partners. Especially in the surveillance of the waters under Bissau's jurisdiction. Guinea-Bissau military personnel has been participating regularly in CPLP "Felino" exercises since 2000. In September 2021, the GB HoS expressed the wish to take the (rotate) two years' presidency of CPLP, after São Tomé and Príncipe, which will end in 2025 (Observador & Lusa, 2021c).



## 8.6. Bilateral Relations

In 2012, the Groupe de Recherche et de Realization, sponsored by ECOWAS, mapped the Bissau-Guinean diaspora (RADBG, n.d.). Annually, GB diaspora sends home about USD 47 million, representing 3.1% of national GDP. The results of that research beyond Guinea-Bissau's region were not surprising: most Bissau-Guineans living abroad reside in Europe, with Portugal leading the list. According to the Portuguese Border and Emigration Service (SEF), in 2019, there were approximately 19,000 Bissau-Guinean nationals, which represents 1% of Guinea-Bissau's population (Sangreman et. al., n.d.). Therefore, the bilateral relationship between Portugal and Guinea-Bissau is particularly solid. Portugal operates as a bridge to EU funds for African countries, and as a negotiator/facilitator for EU fishing interests in GB waters.

The Soviet Union had a major role in the independence process of Guinea-Bissau. After its independence, the Soviet support continued. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian support, although effective, became residual. Nowadays, Russia is still an option for GB students wishing to carry on with their superior studies. In October 2021, relations between the two countries entered a new chapter. The Russian Foreign Ministry released a statement announcing the agreement between Russia and Guinea-Bissau regarding visa waiver for diplomatic and service passports, as well as a new technical-military agreement. Quoting Minister Sergey Lavrov "The natural next step must be to intensify trade, economic and investment cooperation in order to bring it to the level of good and credible political dialogue" (Observador & Lusa, 2021d). Russian-Guinea Bissau relations continued to develop after 2021.

The most relevant of Guinea-Bissau's bilateral partner laying "beyond the horizon" seems to be China. Not only do Chinese presence and support to Guinea-Bissau go back to its days fighting for independence, but they also continue until today, with commerce and diplomatic engagement. China is the only country that has an embassy in every African country, which includes Guinea-Bissau. The fishery sector is of particular interest to China, having entered into fishing agreements with Guinea Bissau. China is also a major importer of legal timber from Guinea-Bissau. The forests of Guinea-Bissau, if explored with sustainable methods, can provide good quantities of rosewood, which is coveted for shipbuilding and used in traditional Chinese *hongmu* furniture. Beyond the financial compensation of such commercial exchanges, China has also constructed several facilities in Guinea-Bissau, aiming to provide wellbeing to the population. However, a recent development seems to have brought this bilateral relation to a higher level. In 22 November 2021, Guinea-Bissau joined the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI). The MoU was signed by the Chinese Ambassador to Guinea-Bissau, Guo Ce, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Suzi Carla Barbosa. The admission to B&RI will open the Guinea-Bissau to new Chinese investments, such as a Chinese commitment to build a USD 184 million bio-mass plant, and has undergone several redevelopment projects, including USD 48 million to renovate the antiquated telecommunications system, highway construction, deep-water fisheries and fishery land support facilities, potentially oil exploration and, capitalizing on a future SEZ in Bissau, the installation of more Chinese enterprises (Devonshire-Ellis, 2021). In 2024, Guinea-Bissau signed a strategic partnership with China during the FOCAC, which took place in Beijing.



Casamance became part of Senegal after a border agreement in 1888 transferred control from Portugal to France. Upon Senegal's independence in 1960, Casamance was integrated into the new nation. The Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) created in 1982 and its armed wing "Atika" created in 1995, are leading a conflict that has significantly disrupted tourism in the region, affecting its economic stability. Despite the 2004 peace agreement with the Senegalese government and the 2014 unilateral ceasefire, some factions have continued to engage in sporadic violence. Therefore, Senegal is not interested to have a "failed-State" at its doorstep, where drug and arms dealers' rule, and where Casamance separatist movements can find refuge.

Furthermore, Guinea-Bissau's offshore oil and inland resources, are also interesting businesses for the Senegalese enterprises. Therefore, it is in the best interest of Senegal to have a stable and developed Guinea-Bissau, and that can be seen in recent bilateral partnerships. Angola and South Africa saw their cooperation with Guinea-Bissau interrupted with the 2012 coup d'état. However, there are signs that they are interested in returning, which clearly demonstrates the country potential. This is seen a good indicator of the relevancy that Guinea-Bissau natural resources have in the geoeconomics of sub-Saharan region.

## **9. General Assessment and SWOT Analysis**

Guinea-Bissau is a developing state, with a great wealth in natural resources, where instability and illegal activities flourish. From 1973 to 2024, Guinea-Bissau has had 30 governments, 20 prime ministers (5 of them appointed more than once), 12 presidents, and countless government officials. For example, within the duration of the IX legislature (2014–2018), four HoG were appointed (Teixeira & Tamilton, 2020) and during the X Legislature (2018–2023), there were three different prime ministers. The genesis of the country's instability lies within poor governance, which in turn results in a scarcity of financial resources, capable of providing the population with an acceptable living standards. In the absence of immediately available resources in the public sector, and its authorities defying the rule of law, the population engages in an unrestrained struggle for resources access, engaging in all types of informal and illegal economy. This situation, favours nepotism, increasingly based on the differentiation of ethnicities. This contradicts the successful process of building a unitary state that began with the struggle against the colonizing power, and persisted until the civil war of 1998–1999. The complex process of tribalization mixed with political nepotism, is both motivation and consequence of corruption. Successive coups d'état, that have taken place over the past five decades, have weakened the process of state building and the implementation of a liberal democracy based on the rule of law.

At the international level, efforts have been made to support the country and to avoid the categorization of a "failed state," with state building and conflict prevention measures, but these measures appear not to have contributed to the democratization, with the necessary consequences for the economy, and the gradual disinterest of international stakeholders. Thus, Guinea-Bissau is at the bottom of the world scale in terms of human development. In the last report to the UNSC, the UNIOGBIS head wrote: "There is great fatigue on the part of donors with the cycle of conflict and political



stagnation in Guinea-Bissau” (Global Initiative, 2021). However, the “failed-state” and “narco-state” labels may be simplistic, not having considering the true potential of the country. If the authorities, together with the international entities responsible for fighting narco-trafficking, manage to stop the incoming flow, the involvement in narcotics will also stop.

Should one make a strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, it becomes manifest that, although the negative factors occupy more labels (W, T), the positive aspects (S, O) are far more powerful and sustainable (Table 2). The GB human capital is low and the level of poverty high. The lack of human resources, jeopardizes the good governance, opening the society to all kind of “other solutions” such as corruption, nepotism, and illegal activities. These disrupting actions are significantly increased by the misunderstanding of democratic values by both military apparatus and the posture of the ruling authorities. All these homemade damaging effects are exploited and encouraged by narco-dealers, using GB as a transit platform. In material terms, the GB needs almost everything, much of which will be obtained externally, in the form of both donations and investments. Not only investments benefit stakeholders, they also are the engine for development and for the well-being of the population.

<b>Table 2 – GB SWOT Matrix</b>	
<b>Strengths (S)</b> – Location, climate, natural resources, fauna and flora, biodiversity, multi-ethnicity, young population, tourism, vicinity relations, international organizations membership, tidal energy, mangrove forests, water resources, ZOPACAS membership, diaspora, and existing national plans.	<b>Weakness (W)</b> – HDI, poverty, nepotism, literacy, energy, transportation network, bureaucracy, power transitions, low private investment, donors’ dependency, poor infrastructure, small airport, poor seaports, ethnic conflicts, definition of the political system.
<b>Opportunities (O)</b> – Fisheries, tourism, mining, cashew, access to inner Africa, regional seaports, oil exploration, fishing agreements, China cooperation, EU cooperation, Senegal cooperation, SEZ, JEZ, and AcFTZ.	<b>Threats (W)</b> – Narco-trafficking, democratic control of armed forces, depletion of resources, fishing agreements, Casamance conflict, inter-ethnic conflicts, weak borders control.
Source: Authors	

These putative developing projects, may generate a spinning effect of attracting the diaspora and encouraging the return of highly qualified individuals, as well as their financial savings, that could boost and create small and medium-sized companies. The tourism sector must be further explored, as it offers great potential, especially in the Bijagós, taking advantage of the possibility of establishing a SEZ for tourism. Furthermore, the setting up of a SEZ in Bissau capable of attracting important international investments depends on three factors; (1) political stability and fight against corruption; (2) qualification of human social capital; and (3) ability to attract international businesses.

Improving the cashew industry, as GB main export, and not only from the quality viewpoint, but also all derived products. This would require setting up processing plants, employing more manpower, and augmenting export of that product. If logging is legalized



and sustainability practice can be ensured, there is a significant market awaiting Bissau-Guinean lumber: China is potentially an important importer of its rosewood. Furthermore, should proper investments in the road and seaports systems be made, the country could start exploiting the minerals in its subsoil.

Offshore oil exploration may prove to be an excellent contribution to the economic balance. However, it should be done with the three permanent concerns: It must not be a source of oceanic pollution; it must be done taken into consideration that the World will rely less and less on fossil fuels; and it must avoid absolutely dependency of oil industries. The privileged conditions for the breeding and capture of fish, mollusks, and shrimp are very unique, and the immediate answer for the country to prosper. Further, the ocean floor, is likely to have mineral resources with low exploration costs due to the shallow depth of its extensive continental shelf. Investments in seaports, borders surveillance, systems and services to support and provide maintenance to industrial fishing and merchant operates in the waters under Guinea-Bissau's jurisdiction, have been wasted opportunities.

## 10. Conclusion

Guinea-Bissau is a post-colonial state that fought an armed struggle for its independence, against Portugal. After independence, Guinea-Bissau was ruled as a single party system (1973–1991), which might have framed the culture of the senior elites, prompting adjustment difficulties to a multiparty system. Civil dissatisfaction, due to poor live conditions, and a military apparatus with a political bearing, lead to frequent cases of instability. Guinea-Bissau is labeled internationally, as being one of the poorest countries in the world, with very high levels of corruption and strong drug trafficking involvement. However, the GB has a considerable amount of natural resources, which, together with an outstanding bio-diversity, cultural variety, and unexplored paradisiac locations, could raise the country branding, to the level of a pleasant destination, with good standard of living. To conclude, we are recalling the main research question: How can Guinea-Bissau overcome its permanent governance instability, and avoid becoming a "failed state"?

Although the instability's activities are normally attributed to the defense sector, which seems to have difficulties in complying with the role of the military in a representative democracy, and the weak governance that fail to act according to the law, the real reason for the instability is poverty. The population suffering is best represented by the local saying: "the greater the famine, the greater the protest in the streets." Most of the reasons for Guinea-Bissau's governmental services' malfunctioning are common to other African countries - weak structures and institutions. This happens, because Guinea-Bissau has adopted a political system, incorporating the Western model of structuring the state, without taken into consideration their own culture and way of living. This provoked that the new born country had incompatibilities between different layers of its society, adding an extra motive of instability. Furthermore, this weak governance has been surreptitiously aggravated by transnational malicious actors interested in maintaining instability, in order to use GB as a drug trafficking platform. However, the SWOT analyses clearly demonstrates that the country's weaknesses are, in fact the reverse engine for its opportunities, and it can become a beacon of progress in the region.



Therefore, Guinea-Bissau might have reached the tipping point of its political evolution. It is worth noting that GB is a republic with a democratic semi-presidential regime. However, President Embaló has shown tendency to assume a presidential style of governance, leading foreigner affairs negotiations, presiding over the council of ministers, and exercising tight control over the higher echelons of the armed forces. Although internal criticism of the politically educated people has arisen (VDG, 2021), fearing for the independence of the state institutions, the fact is that the popular support that elected President Embaló with 53.55% of the votes does not seem to have decreased (DW, 2020c). Furthermore, interviewing high-ranking officials, it becomes clear that the presidential initiatives have indeed opened further financial and foreigner diplomat support. This “presidential style” overtakes the role of the HoG, questioning the type of regime (semi-Presidential or Presidential) the country needs.

Guinea-Bissau needs firm, transparent, and consistent political leadership that follows democratic values, exercises fair political tutelage over its armed forces, demands loyalty from the military ranks, but acts in accordance the law and culture values, while striving for the well-being of the population. International investments in Guinea-Bissau’s structures (the so-called State Building) are only relevant if national values (Nation Building) have previously been enshrined. Apparently, in the case of GB, the order of factors has been changed. The constitutional amendment due to take place, will have to clarify the role of the HoS. Only after achieving the political stability, Guinea-Bissau, manage to establish the conditions to engage in a serious campaign against narco-traffic and corruption. Any initiative to project Guinea-Bissau’s economy towards an auspicious future, will require the establishment of partnership agreements, with national and foreigner entities, such as the ECOWAS, UE, AU, China, and private funds, in order to develop win-win projects. These projects can have a development spinning factor, through the planned EEZ, set to be implemented in Bissau and Bijagós.

Only after the stabilization of Guinea-Bissau can the traditional geopolitical question - What has this country to offer to the world? - be answered; and the country has potential for the answer to be: sustainable provision of blue economy resources, a stable and growing economy good for investment connecting Senegal, Guinea and Mali, and a paradisiac leisure and touristic destination.

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