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**UNIOGBIS closes amid
uncertainty in Guinea-Bissau**

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This policy brief is the result of the long-standing work of the GI-TOC in Guinea-Bissau, which draws on civil society networks to provide new data and contextualize trends related to organized-crime networks, illicit trade and state responses to them.

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Cover: The UN Security Council in New York unanimously agrees to extend the mandate of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau until 31 December 2020 © UN Photo/Loey Felipe

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SUMMARY

On 31 December 2020, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) closed its peacebuilding mission in Guinea-Bissau. After more than 20 years of operation, the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) came to a halt. In the years leading up to the closure, there was a shared sense among donors and UN staff that the biggest obstacle to the mission’s success was lack of political will among the West African country politicians. It does not spell the end, however, to a UN response in Guinea-Bissau – responsibilities will shift to the UN Country Team and the regional UN Office for West Africa and Sahel (UNOWAS). As this transition occurs, neither political instability nor its underlying drivers – including in no small part the country’s two-decade-long dalliance with the cocaine transit trade – have resolved themselves ahead of the mission closure, and this will remain a concern for national and regional stability.

This brief examines the role of the UNSC and the steps it has taken in Guinea-Bissau, with a particular focus on its attention to the impact of drug trafficking on political stability, beginning in 1998 and leading up to the mission closure in 2020, with a focus on how transnational organized crime was incorporated into the mandate. The brief is based on research and interviews with current and former UN staff and diplomats based in Guinea-Bissau and New York. It explores key challenges faced by the mission and draws recommendations for the period to follow the transition and end of UNIOGBIS. The brief forms part of a series of publications on Guinea-Bissau and provides a review of the Security Council’s agenda for the country.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ECOMIB	ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FAO	UN Food and Agriculture Organization
PAIGC	Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde
PBC	Peacebuilding Commission
SRSB	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNIOGBIS	UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau
UNOWAS	UN Office for West Africa and Sahel
UNSC	UN Security Council
UNCT	UN Country Team
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization



INTRODUCTION: INSTABILITY SET TO PREVAIL

At the request of the UN Security Council (UNSC), the Secretary-General assessed UNIOGBIS in 2018 and provided recommendations on how to reconfigure the mission to ‘reflect a more coherent, nimble and effective peace and security pillar aligned more closely with the development and human rights pillars’.¹ Ironically, this recommendation would ultimately mark the demise of the mission. It was later decided that UNIOGBIS would plan for the gradual drawing down and transfer of tasks to the UN Country Team, UNOWAS and international partners.² The drawdown was supported by the five permanent members of the UNSC, yet its timing was inopportune, occurring as it did against a backdrop of renewed political turmoil in Guinea-Bissau during 2020.

The withdrawal went ahead despite a failure by the new administration to fulfil a number of conditions stipulated by the UN and the Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS, including the creation of a unity government. Umaro Sissoco Embaló had declared himself president in February 2020 following run-off election results that suggested he had failed to win the closely contested December 2019 election. Following Embaló’s inauguration, the country – long accustomed to political wrangling, military coups and assassinations – was plunged once again into another eerily familiar round of political instability.

Domingos Simões Pereira, the presidential candidate representing the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde³ (PAIGC), remained out of the country from early 2020 until March 2021, for fear of a political witch hunt, only returning in March 2021. A December 2020 request for an international arrest

warrant for Pereira issued by the office of the Attorney General in late 2020 was rejected by INTERPOL. Meanwhile, former prime minister Aristides Gomes, who was dismissed by Embaló, had taken refuge since March 2020 at the UNIOGBIS building, and in February 2020 was given permission to leave the country 'for medical purposes' on a UN chartered flight.⁴ One of his lawyers, José Braima Dafé, said that there is no guarantee that Gomes will be able to return home without 'intimidation and political persecution'.⁵

In the early 2000s, the UNSC began to draw international attention to the cocaine trade in Guinea-Bissau as European states became increasingly concerned about the impact of drug trafficking. It was also becoming clear that the involvement of certain elite political and military figures in the drug trade was a fundamental obstacle to achieving the political stability the country so desperately needed. Although the Security Council repeatedly flagged the impact that drug trafficking has on stability and despite the fact it provided the mission with a mandate to address this, the dynamics of drug trafficking and the involvement of elite Guinea-Bissauan figures in it continue to pose a risk today to Guinea-Bissau and its neighbours.

José Mário Vaz's 2019
presidential election
headquarters.

The mission may have ended, but international and regional actors will continue to monitor both the political instability and one of its key drivers, the international cocaine trade, in Guinea-Bissau.





HOW DRUG TRAFFICKING FACTORS INTO PEACEBUILDING

▲
View of Bissau. The country is a trans-shipment point for cocaine en route mainly to Europe.

Guinea-Bissau, a tiny country that declared independence in 1973 following a protracted war of independence, has experienced more than its fair share of political instability for decades. In the past 16 years, it has gone through a civil war, at least two coups and an attempted coup, and a presidential assassination carried out by the military. More recently, in early 2020, the military came out in a dramatic show of force supporting Embaló's self-declared victory, occupying government ministries, and veteran military figures were present at the president's inauguration in February 2020 – a strong indication that the cycles of political and institutional volatility the country has faced since independence will continue.

Guinea-Bissau is a trans-shipment point for cocaine produced in Latin America en route primarily to Europe. This illicit economy has become interwoven with political and military interests, and has contributed to political instability in the country for some time. Evidence suggests that cartels began to use Guinea-Bissau as a trans-shipment point for drug trafficking in the late 1990s.⁶ After the first democratic elections in 1994, and the ensuing economic crisis, proceeds from cocaine trafficking became 'a useful source of political patronage and a critical resource to support political party campaigns', particularly with a system dependent on clientelism.⁷ In 2005, Guinea-Bissau started receiving media attention for drug trafficking and was infamously dubbed a narco-state.⁸ Anecdotes of fishermen picking up packages of

The UNODC warned that drug traffickers were 'infiltrating state structures and operating with impunity' in Guinea-Bissau.

an unrecognizable substance dumped in the ocean that turned out to be cocaine,⁹ raids on facilities resulting in arrests of Latin Americans involved in the drug trade, and the discovery of 535 kilograms of cocaine found in a shipping container in Bissau bound for Portugal¹⁰ all suggest the cocaine economy had become widespread and transnational groups were operating in the country.

In 2008, the UNODC warned that drug traffickers were 'infiltrating state structures and operating with impunity' in Guinea-Bissau.¹¹ As has been pointed out, 'Over time, this has created a self-reinforcing cycle where drug money bolsters a portion of the political and military elite, who have little interest in the country's normative social, political and economic development.'¹² Not only has control over drug markets been a factor in major disruptive events, such as the 2012 military coup, but it has also become central to how the political system functions. In 2018, the UN Secretary-General lamented how the structural drivers of instability remain relatively unchanged in the country, including 'the growing political influence of a parallel economy based on narcotics trafficking'.¹³ Large cocaine seizures in 2019 suggest that trafficking remains a lucrative business for the military-political elite of the country¹⁴ – and this poses ongoing risks for rule of law and political stability.

Although the Security Council does not normally dictate guidance on illicit markets, it does assess illicit markets within the framework of risks to peace and security. It addresses the nexus between terrorism and transnational organized crime, for instance human trafficking by groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram. And in many conflicts and situations on the Council's agenda, countries' levels of stability are impacted by illicit markets and their proceeds. In the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, the Council addresses illegal mining activity, which fuels conflict. In 2000, the Council called on states to prohibit the direct and indirect import of all rough diamonds from Sierra Leone.¹⁵ And in Afghanistan, the Council continues to draw attention to the role of the illicit opium trade in fuelling the ongoing conflict there. In a similar vein, the Council recognized the impact drug trafficking was having on political instability in Guinea-Bissau and provided the mission with a mandate to address it.



UN SECURITY COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT IN GUINEA-BISSAU, 1998–2009

UN Security Council involvement in Guinea-Bissau began in 1998. A civil war had broken out on 7 June 1998, triggered by a *coup d'état* against President Nino Vieira led by Brigadier General Ansumane Mané.¹⁶ A peace agreement was signed in November 1998, at which point the Security Council moved to address the conflict. In Resolution 1216, the Council called for both parties to implement the peace accord, to hold free and fair elections, withdraw foreign troops, and for the deployment of the interposition force of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). It also set in motion a process that led to the UN's presence in the country for the next 20 years after requesting that the Secretary-General make recommendations to the Council on a possible role of the UN in the process of peace and reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau.¹⁷

This was not the first time the UN had worked with the Guinea-Bissau authorities. Many UN agencies, funds and programmes had established agreements with the government shortly after the country's independence, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UN Development Programme (UNDP), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). These agencies continue to provide humanitarian and development assistance aimed at supporting the most vulnerable populations. There was substantial regional intervention following 1998, with cooperation between ECOMOG and the Security Council set forth in the 1998 resolution, which called for the early establishment of arrangements for liaison between the UN and ECOMOG.¹⁸ ECOWAS has played an important role in fostering

▲ The UN Plaza. The Security Council recognized the effect drug trafficking was having on Guinea-Bissau and provided the mission with a mandate to address it.

© The blowup/Unsplash

stability during the recurring political crises the country has experienced. But, for the Council, the focus on Guinea-Bissau within the international security architecture of the UN was new. In 1999, the UN established a Post-Conflict Peace Building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) under the leadership of a representative of the Secretary-General. The primary function of UNOGBIS, according to its original mandate, was to help create an 'enabling environment for restoring and consolidating peace, democracy and the rule of law and for the organization of free and transparent elections'; to facilitate implementation of the Abuja agreement; to facilitate voluntary arms disposal; and to coordinate UN activity within the country.¹⁹ In 2004, the Council revised the mandate, but the overall objectives remained the same: to support elections, rule of law, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, arms control, security-sector reform and a return to 'constitutional normalcy'.²⁰

In 2007, Guinea-Bissau was also added to the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), an intergovernmental advisory body created in 2005 to provide greater coherence and coordination to the efforts of the various actors involved in peacebuilding processes. After adopting a strategic framework for peacebuilding with the government, Guinea-Bissau began receiving support in 2008.²¹

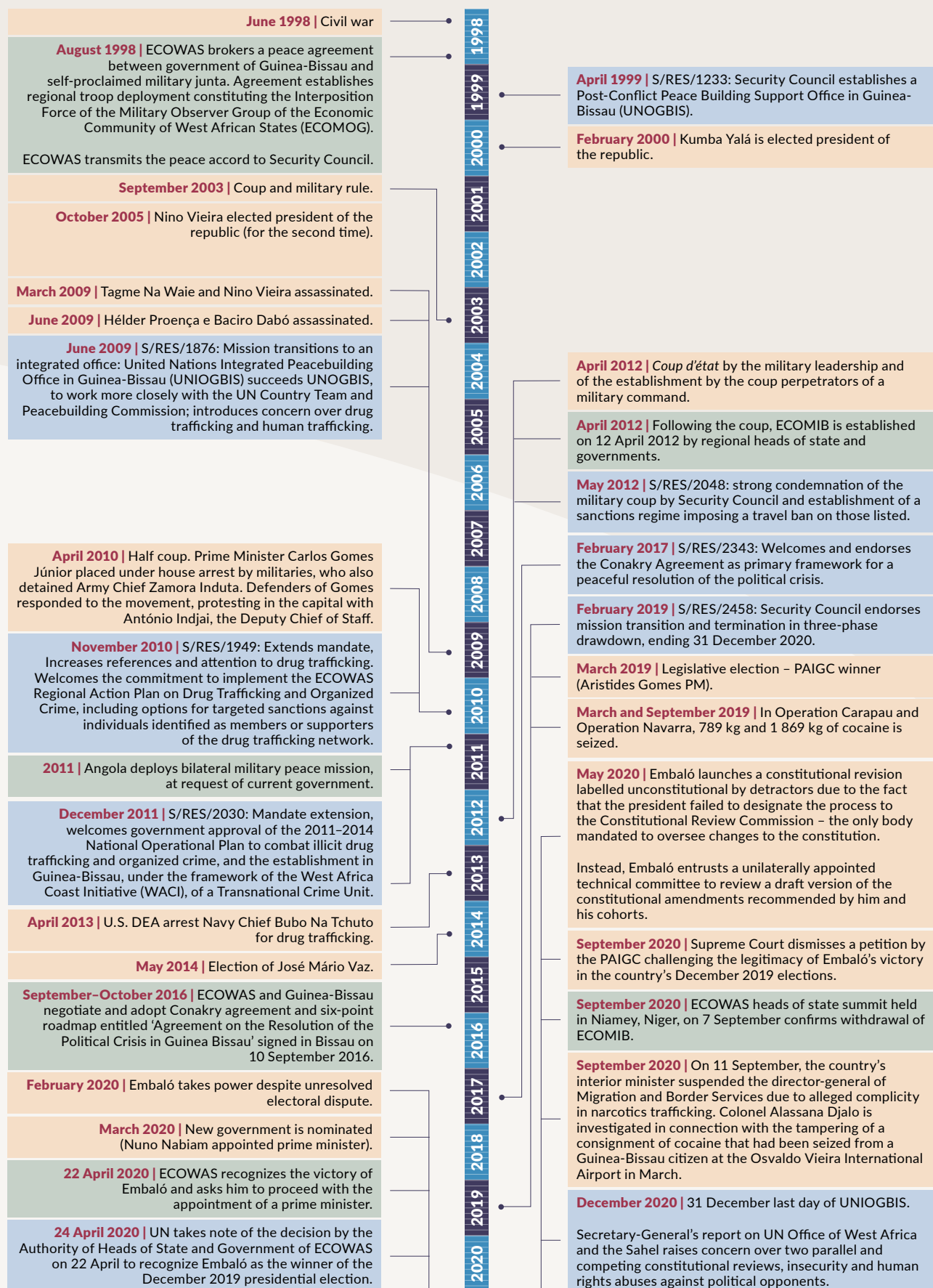
Transnational organized crime introduced into the UN mandate

In 2009, the mission began transitioning as part of wider efforts across the UN to integrate work in countries. Integration proposes that all UN components are merged into one structure. This principle was reflected in the note of guidance issued by the Secretary-General in October 2000, clarifying the relations between Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs), resident coordinators and humanitarian coordinators, and giving the SRSG in residence the mandate to give political guidance to the UN presences on the ground.²² The Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, widely known as the Brahimi Report, proposed coordinating all UN resources to consolidate peace, and support stable and legitimate central governments.²³

In January 2010, UNOGBIS was replaced by the UN Integrated Peace-building Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS). The updated mission in Guinea-Bissau was to respond to a 'serious deterioration [in] the political situation resulting from the assassinations of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Batista Tagme Na Waie, and the president, João Bernardo 'Nino' Vieira, on 1 and 2 March 2009, respectively'.²⁴

The new mandate of the mission was set out in June 2009 by the Security Council; it now included helping national authorities combat drug trafficking and organized crime, and human trafficking, especially child trafficking.²⁵ This followed a 2007 Security Council presidential statement, which raised concerns over drug and human trafficking, and called for national and international support. While welcoming efforts by ECOWAS, it called for 'urgent consideration of how the United Nations system might improve its support for Guinea-Bissau's fight against international drug trafficking and organized crime'.²⁶

KEY EVENTS AND INTERVENTIONS IN GUINEA-BISSAU



■ National
 ■ Regional
 ■ International

Additions to the UN mandate in Guinea-Bissau, 2009

- Assisting the Peacebuilding Commission in its work to address critical peacebuilding needs in Guinea-Bissau.
- Supporting national authorities to establish effective and efficient police, law enforcement and criminal justice systems.
- Assisting national authorities to combat drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as human trafficking, especially child trafficking.
- Undertaking human rights promotion, protection and monitoring activities, and supporting the institutionalization of respect for the rule of law.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective into peacebuilding, in line with Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008).
- Enhancing cooperation with the African Union, ECOWAS, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, the European Union and other partners in their efforts to contribute to the stabilization of Guinea-Bissau.
- Helping in the mobilization of international assistance.

As mentioned previously, since the 2000s it has been acknowledged that the country's political and military actors helped facilitate and engaged in the drug trade. Former president Nino Vieira made the first connections with drug traffickers, and although the dynamics of the protection network shifted over time, a group of political and military elites has helped sustain the drug trade through Guinea-Bissau since then.²⁷ The 2009 Security Council Resolution was the first that raised concerns over transnational organized crime. It noted that fragility in Guinea-Bissau resulted in part from 'increased drug trafficking and organized crime that could pose a threat to regional stability', and it raised concerns over human trafficking.²⁸ The new mandate called for the mission to support the government in combating drug trafficking and human trafficking, as well to help the government establish efficient law enforcement and criminal justice systems.

The added value to be gained by addressing drug trafficking as part of the peacebuilding mission was multifarious: UNIOGBIS played a coordinating role and served a convening function with international and national partners; it had a fundraising role by mobilizing attention and resources to the issue; it encouraged regional organizations to focus more on trafficking; it helped UNODC build up relevant institutions, such as the judiciary and Judicial Police; and it helped national authorities adopt anti-narcotics operational plans in spite of the recurrent political crises. It also had a normative function in the country. The elevation of drug trafficking to the peacebuilding mission helped maintain a spotlight on the phenomenon as part of the political problem faced by the country. As one interviewee noted, to some degree, it de-normalized the use of cocaine proceeds for political enrichment. Other mission successes include interrupting the culture of political assassinations, separating the police from the military, reducing the politicization of criminal justice institutions, and strengthening institutions that uphold the rule of law – together with UN agencies such as the UNODC and UNDP.²⁹

However, within the larger framework, some believe it was excluded as a political-level objective. One former diplomat based in Guinea-Bissau noted that though drug trafficking and human trafficking were added to the mandate, transnational organized crime was neglected as part of the political strategy from the onset. He also noted several strategic challenges that hindered efforts: turf wars between the mission and country team, the fact that the newly integrated mission operated in clusters with poor integration, and that high turnover at the SRSG level created guidance issues at the top.³⁰

During the research for this brief, it was commonly stated that implementing a mandate on drug trafficking required political will – and that was always lacking on the part of the government. Interviewees noted that a key challenge for the mission was continued political turmoil and lack of partners to consistently implement policies at the national political level. Some went further, saying that politicians, the military and organized crime groups follow orders from one another, as opposed to observing the rule of law. As one put it, ‘I do not believe it makes any difference in terms of countering drug trafficking and organized crime, or that any assistance in Guinea-Bissau is useful because they don’t want to be assisted. They just don’t want it.’ Over the years, this lack of political will became clear to donor countries, and funding for the mission began to dry up.³¹

Much of the anti-drug-trafficking work rested with the UNODC. In 2007, the UNODC Regional Office for West and Central Africa established a Guinea-Bissau country office, with a three-pillar programme: enhancing the fight against drug trafficking through supporting national authorities in the elaboration of a national action plan against drug trafficking; administration of justice through the creation of courts and training of judges and prosecutors; and prison reform and a training programme for prison officers. Early efforts included technical assistance to the Ministry of Justice and the Judicial Police; in 2011, the focus became ‘supporting law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and judges in Guinea-Bissau in enhancing their response to drug trafficking, transnational organized crime, trafficking in persons, border control, illicit trafficking, money laundering and counter-terrorism’.³² The UNODC maintained the primary role in combating drug trafficking, but, as noted in the Council’s mandate, this included close cooperation with UNIOBGIS in carrying out its efforts.

In November 2010, the Security Council escalated its rhetoric on drug trafficking through Resolution S/RES/1949, labelling drug trafficking and organized crime in Guinea-Bissau as ‘threats to national and subregional security and stability’, and noting that the ‘fight against impunity and illicit drug trafficking’ was a component of achieving national reconciliation. The resolution called on the government to ensure proper prosecution of assassination and drug trafficking cases, and on regional and international structures, including the PBC, to help counter drug trafficking.³³ This resolution raised the possibility of sanctions for the first time by welcoming ‘the commitment of ECOWAS with the United Nations, the EU and other partners for the immediate implementation of the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan on Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime, including options for targeted sanctions against those individuals identified as members or supporters of the drug trafficking network.’

‘I do not believe that any assistance in Guinea-Bissau is useful because they don’t want to be assisted.’



▲ In September 2019, the government of Guinea-Bissau seized a large consignment of cocaine as part of Operation Navarra.

Photo: Supplied

THE 2012 ‘COCAINE COUP’ AND SANCTIONS

In 2011, the Council was commending progress made in developing national responses, including the 2011–2014 National Operational Plan to combat illicit drug trafficking and organized crime, and the establishment of a Transnational Crime Unit in Guinea-Bissau, under the framework of the West Africa Coast Initiative.³⁴ By May 2012, however, the Council was responding to a new coup led by the military in April, two weeks before presidential elections were due to be held, in which the then Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior was the main candidate. Dubbed the ‘cocaine coup’, the military, led by then army chief of staff General Antonio Indjai, took power in 2012 – ‘in part to achieve control of the rapidly growing lucrative cocaine trade’.³⁵

While the leaders of the coup remained in power, the Security Council condemned the coup, demanded that the military command take immediate steps to restore and respect constitutional order, instituted a travel ban and established a sanctions committee. In Resolution 2048, one listing criteria for sanctioning was providing support to the coup perpetrators through the proceeds of organized crime, including the ‘illicit cultivation, production and trafficking of narcotic drugs and their precursors originating in and transiting through Guinea-Bissau’.³⁶

Eleven individuals were listed under the sanctions criteria as affiliated with the military command that had led the 2012 coup. They were all listed as of 2014, and no names were added during subsequent political crises. There are no specific references to drug trafficking provided as a reason for placing any of them on the sanctions list.³⁷ Furthermore, the Council never established a panel of experts, which exist

for a number of other sanctions regimes, and which would have monitored implementation and provided information to the sanctions committee.

One former diplomat based in Guinea-Bissau noted that the sanctions regime could have been a more dynamic tool over the years – because even though the names of other individuals involved in large-scale organized criminal activity were known, they were never presented as potential additions to the list, perhaps because there were too many directions to point fingers in.³⁸ In 2015, the Council asserted that it would review the sanctions measures established in Resolution 2048. Nevertheless, no changes were made to the existing list of individuals or the listing criteria. The sanctions regime remains in place. The Secretary-General recommends that it continues,³⁹ but countries like Russia are calling for its end.

Following the coup, a West African peacekeeping mission, the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB), was deployed, tasked with a new round of security-sector reform. Regional cooperation had been an integral part of the international response in Guinea-Bissau since 1998, but this was a new configuration that would last for eight years. According to Security Council Resolution S/2018/1086,

ECOWAS engagement with the country has been recurring and multifaceted, through its liaison office in Bissau, the regular deployment of its ministerial follow-up committee and joint and individual initiatives led by the ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea-Bissau and the Chairpersons of the ECOWAS Authority. ECOWAS also continues to contribute to security through its peace operation, the ECOWAS mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB), which protects government institutions and political leaders.⁴⁰

Following a two-year transitional period, legislative and presidential elections were held in 2014, marking the return to constitutional order. However, stability would prove short-lived again. Political turmoil and another institutional crisis ensued after the dismissal of Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira by President Vaz in August 2015. In 2016, ECOWAS

helped broker an agreement to resolve the political stalemate. Regional efforts took the lead in political mediation during this period, resulting in the Conakry Agreement of 14 October 2016 and the ECOWAS six-point road map for resolving Guinea-Bissau's political crisis. These were the new guiding agreements for international efforts in the country. The Conakry Agreement was seen as the most viable framework for overcoming the successive political and institutional crises affecting the country. In February 2017, the Security Council endorsed the Conakry Agreement and the implementation of the road map.⁴¹ While the regional powers drove the mediation, the Council continued to extend the mandate of the mission each year.

Back in 2013, the Council had acknowledged the difficulties faced by UNIOGBIS, and the need to better align UN operations in the country between the mission, the UN Country Team and the Peacebuilding Commission. Interviewees said they had noted tensions between various bodies, which hindered cooperative work. That year, the Secretary-General produced a report recommending adjustments to the mission's mandate and structure. On organized crime, it recommended that the mission no longer needed to support curbing small arms, or assist in tackling human trafficking, since new laws and programmes had been put in place by the government. The resolutions retained references to other criminal markets, but did not set out mandated work on them. For instance, in 2013, the Council reintroduced human trafficking for the first time since 2009, but not as part of the mandate.⁴² In 2013, the mandate on drug trafficking included a reference to coordinating with the UNODC, which was already happening on the ground.⁴³ In 2014, the Council also condemned 'illegal and unauthorized fishing in Guinea-Bissau's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone, as well as illegal exploitation of natural resources'.⁴⁴ In 2016, there was also a strategic review mission, after which the current configuration of UNIOGBIS was established, with the Deputy Special Representative mandated to oversee all UNIOGBIS programmatic peacebuilding activities.



▲
A mural in Bissau.
Despite the UN mission's
interventions, underlying
problems remained in the
country. Mission fatigue
was showing by 2018 and
patience was running out.

THE UN MISSION WINDS DOWN

By 2018, the Council was again re-examining the purpose and configuration of the mission. At the time, UNIOGBIS had 142 positions, including 63 international staff members, in addition to 15 uniformed personnel.⁴⁵ The process had started in 2017 with a technical assessment mission. In 2018, many of the earlier political problems still prevailed – political stalemates, lagging political appointments, lack of implementation of the Conakry Agreement and of constitutional reform. Mission fatigue was beginning to show.

In January 2018, the P-5 (the five permanent Security Council members – Russia, US, UK, France and China) were lamenting the unwillingness of President Vaz to appoint a consensus prime minister. A general frustration and fatigue can be seen in the interventions of P-5 members during Council deliberations. Russia noted its willingness to extend the mandate of UNIOGBIS, but that the mission should work towards constitutional reform: 'If the work of constitutional reform is not completed by the start of the next electoral cycle, the country risks encountering the same problems with the new parliament and President.'⁴⁶ For its part, the US expressed impatience: 'The United Nations cannot operate effectively in environments with unco-operative Governments,' adding, 'our patience has now run out.'⁴⁷



The UN Secretary-General meets with Rosine Sori-Coulibaly, head of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau. © UN/Mark Garten

The Secretary-General's frustration at 'chronic instability'

In a December 2020 report, the Secretary-General expressed frustration following years of cyclical political upheaval in Guinea-Bissau that had stymied the mission:

To succeed in its overall objective of supporting peace consolidation in Guinea-Bissau, UNIOGBIS requires the presence of a political leadership committed to the consolidation of peace and stability, the strengthening of democracy and the delivery of good and effective governance on the basis of the observance of the rule of law and respect for human rights. Such political will appears to be lacking, as the political process in the country has been marked by coups and counter-coups, the targeted assassination of senior political and military figures and institutional crises generated by personal disagreements among leading figures of the executive branch of Government. Thus, although it has avoided widespread violence, gross human rights violations and a humanitarian crisis, Guinea-Bissau is in a state of chronic political instability, primarily afflicted by longstanding disputes among political elites that have been ineffectively litigated by a politicized judiciary in Bissau.

[...]

At its core, the key drivers of instability in Guinea-Bissau have remained largely unchanged since the previous strategic review mission to the country, deployed in 2016. Those drivers boil down to the following structural factors: a profoundly divided political class, driven by narrowly defined and antagonistic group interests; the growing political influence of a parallel economy based on narcotics trafficking; the absence of the State, especially in rural areas, and the fact that, where present, it is largely ineffective; the generalized lack of respect for the rule of law; violations of human rights and widespread impunity; a general atmosphere of resignation with regard to poverty; and lack of access to basic services. In addition, there are increasingly worrisome signs of the presence of operatives of extremist networks from the Sahel and elsewhere in Guinea-Bissau.⁴⁸

In January 2018, and given the political impasse, ECOWAS imposed sanctions on 19 individuals considered to be blocking a solution to the political conflict and holding up implementation of the Conakry Agreement. The sanctions included suspending them from ECOWAS activities, travel bans, denial of visas for them and family members, and freezing of their financial assets and those of their immediate families.⁴⁹ Although the P-5 members of the Security Council have consistently supported regional cooperation in Guinea-Bissau, they took different positions on the imposition of sanctions by ECOWAS. The US and UK supported the sanctions, as did France, which noted the Council could take additional measures through Resolution 2048 (2012).⁵⁰ Russia stated that the only legitimate sanctions are those imposed by the UNSC, and that unilateral sanctions are unhelpful.⁵¹

In April 2018, the country emerged from its crisis with the nomination of a consensus prime minister, Aristides Gomes, and the appointment of a constitutional government, tasked with organizing the 2019 legislative and presidential elections. In August 2018, the Council held a briefing with then recently

appointed Prime Minister Gomes. In the meeting, the P-5 members struck a cautiously optimistic tone, welcoming the political appointment and looking ahead to elections in November 2018. However, by December 2018, the November elections had been postponed until March and the Secretary-General had submitted a strategic review that recommended closing the political mission.

At the request of the Council, in 2018, the Secretary-General assessed the mission and provided recommendations on how to reconfigure it to reflect 'a more coherent, nimble and effective peace and security pillar aligned more closely with the development and human rights pillars'.⁵² The Secretary-General ultimately recommended that UNIOGBIS shut down no later than December 2020. Through a three-phase process, it was decided that the mission would 'implement the transition plan for the gradual drawing down and transfer of tasks to the UN Country Team, the United Nations Office for West Africa and Sahel (UNOWAS) and international partners, with a view toward prospective completion by 31 December, 2020'.⁵³

Drawdown edges forward ahead of 2019 elections

In the meeting to review the Secretary-General's report, both Russia and the US stated that drawdown plans should proceed only after the electoral process had been completed. The UK supported the drawdown without qualification, while China and France took note of the report but did not take a stance. However, ahead of scheduled election in March 2019, the Council approved the process laid out by the Secretary-General in February 2019. The Council established the three phases laid out by the Secretary-General:

- Phase I (electoral phase): prioritize legislative and presidential elections, concentrate support for the mission's overall good offices function, to be focused on national political actors.
- Phase II (post-electoral phase): prepare for the closure of regional offices and begin the transition plan in relation to the United Nations Partnership

Framework and in coordination with the national authorities and international partners.

- Phase III (transition phase): transferral of tasks to the UN Country Team, the UN Office for West Africa and Sahel, and international partners.

The phases were to begin in June 2019, after the legislative elections. Resolution 2458 outlined the key priorities for the streamlined office, which relate to the political process around and holding of upcoming elections, and noted that the office would continue to assist on other mandate items, including providing strategic and technical advice and support for the Government of Guinea-Bissau to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, in close cooperation with the UNODC.⁵⁴

Legislative elections took place in March 2019; the PAIGC won a majority, but with fewer seats than

before. Again, there was infighting over the appointment of prime minister, with President Vaz refusing to appoint Domingos Simões Pereira of the PAIGC, and in June 2019, Aristides Gomes was reappointed prime minister.

In September 2019, authorities carried out the country's largest anti-drug operation, seizing US\$3 million in bank accounts and more than 1.8 tonnes of cocaine hidden in sacks of rice, among other items. The operation resulted in the arrest of 12 people (of Bissau-Guinean, Colombian, Mexican and Portuguese nationality).⁵⁵ One prominent figure was tried and sentenced to 16 years in absentia, though it is alleged he has spent time in Guinea-Bissau over the period he has been missing.⁵⁶ Although a March 2020 judgment by the Regional Court of Cacheu sentenced the perpetrators to hefty sentences, the subsequent Court of Appeal judgment handed down in October of the same year significantly diluted sentences and returned most of the assets previously seized by the state.⁵⁷

Familiar political patterns re-emerge

As the mission's drawdown was under way, by 2020 familiar patterns of political upheaval had re-emerged. The presidential elections had taken place in November 2019, with a second round in December. Embaló was announced the winner in February 2020, even though the results were contested by the PAIGC and they were challenged in the Supreme Court. In March 2020, Nuno Nabiam was sworn in as prime minister, the military had strong-armed politics once again, the president declared a state of emergency and the borders and markets were closed.⁵⁸ In March, Niger, which holds the pen on Guinea-Bissau in the Council, requested a press statement welcoming ECOWAS's mediation role, which was released as a presidential statement on 4 March.⁵⁹

In April, ECOWAS recognized Embaló's victory, and both the EU and the UN supported ECOWAS's role and decisions as mediator.⁶⁰ A local political analyst, pointing to the regional bloc's wavering approach to Guinea-Bissau, said that 'ECOWAS, in its interventions in Guinea-Bissau, is marked by constant advances and setbacks; in one moment, there is zero tolerance for any political or military actions that are an obstacle to democracy and then it quickly shifts to recognizing and legitimizing these same acts, which harms the organization's credibility.'⁶¹

Despite the renewed political turmoil erupting once again in the country, the Council remained determined to complete the closure of the mission. It renewed the mandate until the end of 2020, setting the mission's termination date. In a briefing preceding the resolution, all P-5 countries echoed support for the drawdown, called for stability after the elections – which, as it turned out, did not materialize – and reiterated that drug trafficking required sustained attention.⁶² The subsequent resolution of 28 February 2020 recognized the importance of combating drug trafficking to achieve political and economic stability in Guinea-Bissau. It calls for national authorities and the international community to 'combat transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking, trafficking in persons and money-laundering', including through resourcing and providing political support to its counter-narcotic units. It calls for supporting the UNODC, and encourages the international community to cooperate with Guinea-Bissau 'on air traffic control, surveillance, and

'At its core, the key drivers of instability in Guinea-Bissau have remained largely unchanged.'

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maritime security, within its jurisdiction, in particular to fight drug trafficking, illegal fishing, and illegal exploitation of natural resources'.⁶³

In August 2020, the Council met to discuss Guinea-Bissau, where members raised concerns over military neutrality, calling attention to recent violence against women by members of the security sector and vandalism of Capital Radio FM by unidentified armed men wearing military uniforms. At that time, the Secretary-General recommended maintaining the sanctions from 2012 and continues to recommend establishing a panel of experts for the sanctions committee to identify those 'who meet the designation criteria for targeted measures' and assess 'the capacity of the local authorities to monitor illicit trafficking and transnational criminal activities' given the impact of such activities on peace and stability in the country and the subregion.⁶⁴

As there has never been a panel of experts for this sanctions committee, it is unlikely that one would be established, particularly as Russia pushes to end sanctions as part of the mission termination. In fact, in February 2021, Guinea-Bissau's President Embaló said that he is working with the UN to lift the sanctions imposed on the country's military.

UNIOGBIS officially closed on 31 December 2020. At that point, the UN Country Team became the primary UN configuration in Guinea-Bissau, with a focus on development and humanitarian efforts, as well as governance. The country team is undergoing a strategic planning process for its next phase. UNODC's mandate will continue to address drug trafficking, and UNDP will continue to carry out governance and rule of law work. UNDP will also assume some responsibilities on drug trafficking and organized crime, working in close cooperation with UNODC.

UNOWAS will also assume some of the responsibilities going forward. Reporting to the Council on Guinea-Bissau will now go through the Secretary-

General's report on UNOWAS, and UNOWAS briefings. The most recent UNOWAS report in December 2020 noted there are currently 'two parallel and competing constitutional reviews, led by Parliament and the President's technical commission', which 'risk fuelling further' political tensions in the country. It also highlighted insecurity and human rights abuses against political opponents, including arbitrary arrests and attacks on journalists and bloggers by uniformed personnel.⁶⁵ Yet, in March 2021, the outgoing SRSG and head of UNOWAS, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, met with President Embaló and struck a highly optimistic tone, saying the UN fully supports the president's vision and policies.⁶⁶ As UNOWAS now takes over the good offices function from UNIOGBIS, these are surprising contradictions in tone from the most recent Secretary-General's report, and follows within weeks of multiple violent attacks on journalists.⁶⁷

Drug trafficking continues through Guinea-Bissau. In September 2019, the largest operation against illicit drug trafficking the country (Operation Navarra) confiscated almost two tonnes of cocaine,⁶⁸ which was seen as a success of national and international joint efforts. However, such a large seizure is also a sign that trafficking continues in high volumes across the country. Although drug trafficking remains a driver of political instability at the top of the administrative structures, it has less social impact in communities, since it operates through elites as an export business. Competition for the market has not yet trickled down to multiple smaller groups fighting for a share of control, which could impact basic security. However, the drug business could become a more local, domestic problem and create adverse health and citizen security dynamics in the country. But what is clear is that the drug economy will be used to sustain power among elites, which observers fear will fuel an increasingly autocratic political system.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

▲ Mixed task force patrols
Rubane Island beach.

As the political mission has officially ended in Guinea-Bissau and the next strategic stage for the UN has begun, the following conclusions can be drawn from this research.

Missions cannot succeed without national political will

One of the key challenges for the mission was continued political turmoil and a lack of consistent partners to implement policies at the national political level. There is little belief that the national government will remain stable or become a consistent partner in security-related affairs in the period ahead. Over time, this lack of political commitment to truly engage in policy changes led donors to tire of the situation, resulting in a drying-up of budgetary support. Interviewees echoed this point: extensive investment by the international community has continued to show few results in the political sphere. The closure of the mission could be due to fatigue, as ambassadors and administrations in Bissau are replaced and the ensuing cyclical political crises in Guinea-Bissau make sustained and effective engagement with the government very difficult. As one former diplomat noted, the government simply doesn't want to implement an agenda that will counter the illicit drug trade.⁶⁹

There is a palpable weariness about how to implement effective rule of law and counter organized crime among national partners. For many, the Judicial Police were noted as the best placed national law enforcement agency to work with on organized crime, and drug trafficking in particular. They are well trained and collaborate well with INTERPOL. Despite this competence, they are thwarted in carrying out their work to some degree. A note of caution was sounded, though, that the Judicial Police remain a weak institution, and as the political situation constantly shifts, so does the potential to lose partners within institutions.⁷⁰ One former UN staff member noted that the agency depends on the Prosecutor's Office and some inspectors were removed when trying to pursue sensitive cases.⁷¹

The justice system is seen as both essential to future success and a possible partner, but there are also concerns. After the Judicial Police, prosecutors and judges were noted as viable options for partnership, but some risks and the potential for interference by compromised actors were noted. Reportedly, there are family ties across political parties, government institutions and the military, compromising these institutions. As one official said, other than the Judicial Police, agencies might well be more unhelpful than helpful.⁷²

Notwithstanding the work done by the UN mission, in terms of organized crime it was not able to achieve the political goal of separating politics from criminal economies, in particular the cocaine trade. The mission laid the groundwork for reducing impunity through judicial training, but, in the end, there was never enough national-level political buy-in because the opportunism of financial gain outweighed stability. In fact financial gain provided the wind in the sails propelling individuals towards political power.

The UN will continue to work with a country facing political instability

Among those interviewed during this research, there was a common belief that, over the next two to five years, political instability and uncertainty will continue. At a minimum, it was suggested the political system would shift towards a more presidential system, where parliament's role is diminished and executive powers increased, which risks descent into autocratic rule.⁷³ Most suggested the current situation would evolve into an authoritarian regime or another coup, which will depend on whether the president can please all factions within the army. As one former diplomat stated, 'The next stage of politics in the country seems to be the rule of fist.'⁷⁴ The risks – and some of this is already being seen – include arrests of political opponents, political assassinations, increasing human rights violations, and increased activity by organized criminal groups and their enablers. The transition of the PAIGC to an opposition party for the first time in the country's history is a major political shift for the country, and this will have an impact on how the system functions.

With the UN Country Team and UNOWAS in place, there are opportunities to monitor political developments. Some additional suggestions include the Secretary-General's recommendation for a panel of experts connected to the sanctions regime



or continued reporting within UNOWAS mechanisms. One former diplomat suggested there was a need for a smaller political mission in the country focused on rule of law and security sector reform, with a political affairs capacity and a three-to-four-year window for drawing down and a set of clear goals. Another recommended a similar configuration: a team on the ground or readily deployable to work with international partners, most notably the African Union, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, ECOWAS and the EU, to assist national stakeholders, including political actors, to work towards dialogue and political stability to enable the UN country team to make progress on its agenda.⁷⁵

Following the end of the mission, UN activity in Guinea-Bissau has shifted to the UN Country Team and UNOWAS. © Alexandre Soares/UN Photo

Invest in civil society and the building blocks for political resilience

It was noted that Guinea-Bissau is at a crossroads – the ingredients for progress are present, but they have to be leveraged. The country has a strong social fabric across its ethnically diverse population, and is largely free from street crime. There is a growing civil society landscape, with women and youth noted as strong partners in civil society movements. However, risks to civil society and political actors are growing. The Secretary-General's report on UNOWAS raises continued concern over two parallel and competing constitutional reviews, insecurity and human rights abuses against political opponents. Some of the risks cited were intolerance of press freedom, including attacks on journalists, and of the political opposition, including arbitrary arrests of political opponents. A strong civil society serves a bulwark against autocracy, and international efforts in Guinea-Bissau and the region should continue to support civil society.

Address drug trafficking at the political level

UNIOGBIS and UNODC had different mandates and programming, but shared responsibility for addressing drug trafficking. Certain accomplishments were achieved, including authorities adopting anti-narcotics operational plans. However, the UN mission was unable to sustain efforts against the impact of drug trafficking on politics. Perhaps this was a flaw in the initial uptake when it was added to the mandate. As noted by one interviewee, transnational organized crime was neglected as part of the political strategy from the onset. Or it could have been the high-level roadblocks repeatedly raised in interviews. Either way, donors were not minded to fund continued efforts in Guinea-Bissau.

Several UN staff based in the country recommend that a new, more holistic starting point is needed for anti-drug-trafficking work. They recommend building off existing conflict analysis and common country analyses to design interventions, and note that this new approach must move away from the usual technical interventions (i.e. train and equip), which have not proved successful in effecting structural change.

A subregional approach to drug trafficking is needed

Regional and subregional dynamics were raised as key considerations for the years ahead. As one former diplomat suggested that while not explicitly recognized, UNIOGBIS tended to align with the decisions of ECOWAS in a way that both promoted 'localizing' peace and security efforts, but also allowed them to avoid uncomfortable confrontations.⁷⁶ Now that the UN's mandate on Guinea-Bissau is partially the responsibility of UNOWAS, the UN's own approach should develop from understanding regional dynamics and develop regional responses, not least because instability in Guinea-Bissau has knock-on effects in neighbouring countries. The trafficking networks moving cocaine through the region leverage illicit hubs across Guinea-Bissau and its neighbouring small and vulnerable states.⁷⁷ The known trafficking corridors through the region extend across borders, and are protected by networks of high-level officials implicated in the drug trade.

A subregional focus is therefore needed to ensure that programming is sufficiently tailored to the dynamics of each specific route and criminal ecosystem. Promoting coordination between national agencies combating transnational organized crime should focus on confronting high-level impunity, judicial legitimacy and reinforcing good practices across borders.

However, elevating the issue of drug trafficking to the peacebuilding framework could not itself overcome the key obstacle. The mission helped raise attention to the issue and build infrastructure and attention around a response, but it could not stamp out the personal-political benefits of enabling the drug trade for political and military elites. And this money and power, in turn, continues to function as a destabilizing factor in Guinea-Bissau's politics.

ANNEX

UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS ON GUINEA-BISSAU, 1998 TO PRESENT

RESOLUTION	DATE	EVOLUTION OF UNSC RESOLUTIONS
S/RES/1216	21 December 1998	Following a peace accord, UNSC requests the Secretary-General to make recommendations on possible role of the UN in the process of peace and reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau. ⁷⁸
S/RES/1233	6 April 1999	Supports Secretary-General's decision to establish a Post-Conflict Peace Building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) under the leadership of a Representative of the Secretary-General (S/1999/233).
S/RES/1580	22 December 2004	Revises UNOGBIS's mandate.
S/RES/1876	26 June 2009	Mission transitions to an integrated office: UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) succeeds UNOGBIS, to work more closely with the UN Country Team and Peacebuilding Commission. Introduces concern over drug trafficking and human trafficking. Provides a mandate to assist national authorities to combat drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as human trafficking, especially child trafficking.
S/RES/1949	23 November 2010	Extends mandate; increases references and attention to drug trafficking. No change to mandate. Links commitments to national reconciliation with fight against impunity and drug trafficking. Urges the international community to increase political and financial support to West Africa Coast Initiative to fight transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. Welcomes the commitment to implement the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan on Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime, including options for targeted sanctions against individuals identified as members or supporters of the drug trafficking network, and agrees to keep the situation under active review, and to consider appropriate action.
S/RES/2030	21 December 2011	Mandate extension. Welcomes government approval of the 2011–2014 National Operational Plan to combat illicit drug trafficking and organized crime, and the establishment in Guinea-Bissau, under the framework of the West Africa Coast Initiative, of a Transnational Crime Unit.

RESOLUTION	DATE	EVOLUTION OF UNSC RESOLUTIONS
S/RES/2048	18 May 2012	<p>Strong condemnation of the military coup on 12 April by the military leadership and of the establishment by the coup perpetrators of a 'military command'.</p> <p>Deplores the recurrent illegal interference of the military leadership in the political process in Guinea-Bissau and expressing concern that interference of the military in politics and the impact of illicit drug trafficking and organized crime in Guinea-Bissau have significantly hampered efforts to establish rule of law and good governance and tackle impunity and corruption, evokes article 41 of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, 1. Demands that the military command takes immediate steps to restore and respect constitutional order.</p> <p>Establishes a sanctions regime; a travel ban for those individuals, or those supporting those individuals, who seek to prevent the restoration of the constitutional order or taking action that undermines stability in Guinea-Bissau, in particular those who played a leading role in the <i>coup d'état</i> of 12 April 2012.</p> <p>Support or financing can include the proceeds from organized crime, including the illicit cultivation, production and trafficking of narcotic drugs.</p>
S/RES/2092	22 February 2013	<p>Mandate extension.</p> <p>Expresses its willingness to consider sanctions based on additional information, against those involved in drug trafficking and organized crime in Guinea-Bissau.</p> <p>Urges civilian and military officials in Guinea-Bissau to demonstrate greater commitment to effectively combat drug trafficking, including by ensuring the proper functioning of state agencies responsible for border control and the fight against drug trafficking, and encourages them to further support the efforts of the international community to that end.</p> <p>Reintroduction of human trafficking (since 2009).</p>
S/RES/2103	22 May 2013	<p>Reviews and updates the mandate in line with S-G report.</p> <p>Stresses that the complex situation in Guinea-Bissau has undermined the smooth implementation of the UNIOGBIS mandate and activities of the Peacebuilding Commission.</p> <p>Supports Secretary-General's recommendations related to adjustments to the integrated approach in Guinea-Bissau among UN components: UNIOGBIS, the Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Fund, and the United Nations Country Team.</p> <p>DT unchanged (assisting national authorities to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, in close cooperation with UNODC).</p>
S/RES/2157	29 May 2014	<p>Mandate extension.</p> <p>Welcoming the successful holding of presidential and legislative elections in Guinea-Bissau.</p> <p>Further increased attention to drug trafficking in resolution:</p> <p>'Any lasting solution to instability in Guinea-Bissau should include concrete actions to fight impunity and ensure that those responsible for politically motivated assassinations and other serious crimes such as drug trafficking-related activities.'</p> <p>Introduces IUU and natural resource exploitation:</p> <p>'Condemning cases of illegal and unauthorized fishing in Guinea-Bissau's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone, as well as illegal exploitation of natural resources.'</p>

RESOLUTION	DATE	EVOLUTION OF UNSC RESOLUTIONS
S/RES/2186	25 November 2014	<p>Mandate extension.</p> <p>Welcomes government effort to update the three-year national plan for combating drug trafficking and organized crime prepared in June 2011, and to define new priority areas.</p> <p>Introduces money laundering concerns: calls upon the authorities of Guinea-Bissau to review, adopt and implement national legislations and mechanisms to more effectively combat transnational organized crime, in particular drug trafficking and money laundering, and in this context, to provide additional support to the Transnational Crime Unit established under the West Africa Coast Initiative.</p> <p>Continues to condemn IUU and illegal exploitation of natural resources.</p>
S/RES/2203	18 February 2015	<p>Mandate extension.</p> <p>Updates mandate slightly:</p> <p>Provide strategic and technical advice and support to the government of Guinea-Bissau to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, in close cooperation with UNODC.</p> <p>Takes a decision to review the sanctions measures established pursuant to resolution 2048 (2012): becomes recurring effort.</p>
S/RES/2267	26 February 2016	Mandate extension.
S/RES/2343	23 February 2017	<p>Welcomes and endorses the Conakry Agreement of 14 October 2016, based on the road map, as primary framework for a peaceful resolution of the political crisis.</p> <p>Mandate extension.</p>
S/RES/2404	28 February 2018	<p>Mandate extension.</p> <p>Calls for implementing the recommendations of the strategic review mission regarding the need of UNIOGBIS to refocus towards political capacities in support of the SRSG's good offices and to streamline its management structure, and encourages UNIOGBIS to operate in a more effective and efficient manner.</p> <p>Supports the efforts of ECOWAS to ensure a swift resolution of the crisis and took note of its decision of 4 February 2018 to impose sanctions against those obstructing the implementation of the Conakry Agreement.</p> <p>Stresses the importance of holding legislative elections within the legally mandated timeframe.</p> <p>Expresses the Security Council's readiness to take additional measures to respond to further worsening of the situation in Guinea Bissau.</p>
S/RES/2458	28 February 2019	<p>Endorses Mission transition and termination:</p> <p>Three-phase process to draw down and transfer tasks to UN Country Team (UNCT), the United Nations Office for West Africa and Sahel (UNOWAS) and international partners by 31 December 2020 (from the Secretary-General's recommendations in his UNIOGBIS Strategic Assessment).</p> <p>By June 2019, UNIOGBIS should operate as a streamlined good offices special political mission, led by a Special Representative at the Assistant Secretary-General level.</p> <p>Encouraging national stakeholders to work together for 10 March 2019 legislative elections, as well as 2019 presidential election scheduled by the government of Guinea-Bissau.</p>

RESOLUTION	DATE	EVOLUTION OF UNSC RESOLUTIONS
S/RES/2512	28 February 2020	<p>Welcoming the peaceful holding of legislative and presidential elections within the legally mandated timeframe in 2019.</p> <p>Extends mandate to December 2020.</p> <p>Commends the successful completion of Phase I and the closure of all UNIOGBIS regional offices by the 31 December 2019.</p> <p>Decides that UNIOGBIS should continue to operate as a streamlined good offices special political mission as transition phase continues.</p> <p>Mandate remains:</p> <p>Providing strategic and technical advice and support to the government of Guinea-Bissau to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, in close cooperation with UNODC.</p>

NOTES

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