

Special Briefing – December 2013

# Building Sustainable Peace and Security in the Central African Republic

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## Executive Summary

- **The Central African Republic (CAR) has been unstable throughout its 53 years of independence. In 2013 it is experiencing an acute escalation of conflict across the country that has displaced at least 460,000 and risks mass atrocities as deadly violence divides communities.**
- **No country has experienced more military ‘peace support’ interventions than the CAR in the last two decades, yet none has been successful in restoring sustainable peace and security. The latest UN-mandated, EU- and US-funded, French-supported and African-led intervention may be sufficient to protect civilians in parts of the CAR in the short term. However, a larger, multidimensional force managed directly by the UN is likely to be necessary to disarm the population and build sustainable peace in 2014 and beyond.**
- **The CAR state has never succeeded in establishing much presence beyond the capital, Bangui. Even this limited presence has collapsed in 2013. The task and opportunity beyond 2014 is not just to pacify the territory and elect a new government but to rebuild almost all CAR state institutions and infrastructure in a sustainable and inclusive manner.**
- **The CAR is where the chronic conflict zones of Africa’s Great Lakes and Eastern Sahel (Chad, Sudan and South Sudan) converge. No solution to the CAR crisis is possible without a regional peace process and regional cooperation. Situated between the CAR and Nigeria, northern Cameroon and southwest Chad may be vulnerable to the violent polarisation of communities according to religion underway in both neighbours.**

## Introduction

In order to protect civilians against rising threats of mass atrocities the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2127 on 5 December. This gives a Chapter VII mandate to an African Union-led peace enforcement mission in the CAR and authorises a reinforced French force to use ‘all necessary measures’ in its support. With a mandated strength of 3,652, the International Support Mission to the CAR (MISCA) is due to be fully constituted on 19 December. Under

Operation Sangaris, France had increased its contingent from 410 to about 1,600 by 8 December. The Security Council also imposed an arms embargo on the CAR.

This special briefing analyses the security, humanitarian, political, economic and international dimensions of the CAR’s current crisis in their regional and historical context. It suggests some means by which international actors, not limited to the UN and its agencies, can build sustainable peace and security in this chronically unstable country.

## Security crisis

The acute security crisis in the CAR has arisen since late 2012, when five rebel forces under the Séléka (meaning 'Coalition') movement advanced almost 800km from the remote northeast towards Bangui, in the southwest. Reneging on the Libreville Agreement of 11 January, under which a ceasefire and one-year transitional government of national unity had been established, Séléka forces captured Bangui on 24 March.

The transitional government has rapidly lost control of the administration and the residual armed forces. Transitional President Michel Djotodia formally dissolved Séléka in mid-September, acknowledging that he had lost control of his own combatants. Since March, Séléka combatants have exploited their armed impunity to raid towns, villages and farms across the CAR. Sexual violence and atrocities against civilians and children have been widely reported. In response, local self-defence militia known as 'anti-balaka' have been formed and armed, some with links to the overthrown regime. Inter-communal violence is widely reported, notably between groups identified by religious affiliation.

However, the security crisis in the CAR is of far longer duration than the last year. The northern savannah regions of the CAR geographically and culturally have much in common with southern Chad and have been destabilised since the 1970s by civil wars in Chad and, latterly, Darfur. Central Africans from this zone have fought in southern Chad, and vice versa. Some armed components of Séléka had been present in the north of the CAR since at least 2006.

The CAR has always had one of the world's lowest densities of security forces: about 12,000 troops, gendarmes and police for a country larger than France. They have never had more than a token presence in the north, limited to a few garrison towns. Long distances, meagre infrastructure and a lack of vehicles, aircraft or fuel mean that the army and police have rarely ventured outside regional capitals. Most Central Africans have always relied on their kin rather than the state for security. They have been attacked by the army as much as by rebel forces and bandits. The UN estimates Séléka strength at 15,000 to 20,000, including about 3,500 child combatants. 5,000 Séléka are supposed to integrate with the residual security forces.



FACA personnel in Bangui, April 2008. Source: Brice Blondel for HDPTCAR

The Central African Armed Forces (FACA) ruled the country from 1966 until 1993. The composition of the FACA was heavily skewed in favour of the tiny M'baka and Yakoma ethnic groups of the far south, reflecting the origins of the CAR's first three presidents. However, the army's propensity to attempt coups led even these presidents to starve it of resources. The security situation unravelled in the mid-1990s as elected president Ange-Félix Patassé and his military ally General François Bozizé, both Christians from the northwest, attempted to undermine the influence of southern officers. Patassé relied on his presidential guard, tribal militia and foreign allies. Between 1996 and 2003, several mutinies, coup attempts and purges fragmented the FACA, sending dissident elements into the bush or exile. Bozizé eventually overthrew Patassé in 2003. Bozizé never subsequently succeeded in unifying or developing the FACA or demobilising ex-combatants. Djotodia justified Séléka's 2012 rebellion with Bozizé's failure to integrate or pay-off militia from the 2001-03 and 2006-08 rebellions.

That neither the FACA nor Séléka has strong links to established political parties or much legitimacy as protector or liberator of the nation potentially bodes well for security sector reform. No armed group is a strong enough institution to subvert the transition.

### Policy implications

- Justice and security system reform (JSSR) is critical to addressing the CAR's cycle of insecurity and revolts, ending impunity and protecting civilians. Recurrent efforts at reform

have always failed for lack of resources and political will.

- Comprehensive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants will need to address the legacy of multiple conflicts and peace agreements since 1996. Repatriation and resettlement of foreign combatants is likely to be necessary.
- Reconstituting a police force, judicial infrastructure and security forces that reflect the diversity of the CAR's peoples and regions is essential. Particular attention is needed to addressing the security needs of women and children, including preventing sexual violence and reintegrating child soldiers.

### Humanitarian and social crisis

An estimated 460,000 Central Africans – 10% of the population – have been displaced by insecurity in 2013, including 66,000 as refugees. One-quarter of the population is food insecure, mainly in the north. State health and education provision has all but ceased outside Bangui as hospitals and schools have been looted and staff have fled. Given the history of insecurity and rebellion, these conditions are exaggerated by the current conflict rather than exceptional. Humanitarian access is severely constrained by the violence and lack of clear frontlines or command structures. Although there are few all-weather roads, the dry season has started and should last until May in most of the CAR.

Of the 3,100 African and 650 French troops in the CAR as of 5 December, over three-quarters remained in Bangui. The river port and airport are secure but

the only paved road to a seaport (Douala, Cameroon) crosses the most insecure area of northwest CAR. Reinforced French and Congolese forces began to move into the northwest from 7 December. Eight French helicopters provide air mobility; these and French fighter jets flown from Chad provide reconnaissance and a high impact presence in remoter areas.



*Mbororo (Peul) woman, Mboki, southeast CAR.  
Source: L. Paletta, OCHA*

A particular characteristic of the current conflict is targeting of civilians and violence that polarises Christian and Muslim communities. Identified with Séléka, Muslims comprise about 10-15% of Central Africans. There are Muslim minorities within some of the larger, mainly Christian ethnic groups of the north and centre. Only in the northeast is Islam the main religion. Peoples of Séléka's home region are also distinct physically and linguistically to most Central Africans. Other distinct Muslim groups sometimes resented in the CAR are Chadian traders and Peul (Fulani) pastoralists, who range with

their herds from Nigeria and Cameroon across the CAR and Chad to Sudan and often come into conflict with farming communities. Thus, in the CAR the term 'Muslim' is often conflated with 'foreigner' and disputes over livelihoods. These are among the many smaller, localised grievances activated within the current conflict.

### Policy implications

- Securing humanitarian access outside Bangui is a priority for MISCA, notably the Bangui-Bouar and Bangui-Bossangoa axes to the northwest, where population density and violence are highest.
- Delivering aid to the isolated northeast may reassure Séléka and marginalised population of this region.
- Confidence-building and reconciliation measures are urgently needed between communities, especially Muslims and Christians.

### International dimensions

The CAR is surrounded by chronically unstable countries whose civil wars have spilled onto its territory. Chad, Sudan (Darfur), South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Congo-Brazzaville have all experienced serious conflicts since the 1990s. The CAR has been such a security vacuum that rebel combatants from its neighbours have frequently sought refuge on its territory, often attacking or exploiting its people. The retreat of the Ugandan-origin Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) into eastern CAR in 2009 is one example of this. Only Cameroon has been broadly peaceful, although its northern regions have recently been attacked by Islamist

militants from Nigeria and armed groups from the CAR.

The present conflict is most closely related to armed elements in southeast Chad and Darfur, where Sudan, Chad and South Sudan have waged proxy wars over the last decade. It is unclear what, if any, links the Chadian or Sudanese governments have to the former Séléka movement. Chadian and Darfurian elements are numerous among ex-Séléka combatants but these appear to come largely from ethnic groups historically opposed to N'djamena and Khartoum. Chad facilitated the seizure of power by Bozizé in 2003 but along with other neighbours had been steadily more critical of him. It has also been critical of Djotodia. Chad's three key interests in the CAR are: denying safe havens to Chadian rebel groups on CAR territory; securing its Doba oilfield, 75 km north of the CAR, and export pipeline through adjacent areas of Cameroon; and maintaining flow of its Logone and Chari rivers from headwaters in northern CAR.

MISCA and Sangaris are the latest of many attempts at international intervention in the CAR, including military forces from:

- France (until 1997 and since 2002);
- Francophone African states (MISAB, 1997-98);
- UN (MINURCA, 1998-2000);
- Libya and CEN-SAD (2001-03);
- Central African Economic & Monetary Community (FOMAC, 2002-08);
- South Africa (2007-13);
- joint EU-UN (EUFOR and MINURCAT, 2007-10, Chad/Darfur border);
- Economic Community of Central African States (MICOPAX, 2008-13);
- Chad and Sudan (since 2010, Vakaga prefecture)
- joint AU-UN with US support (RTF, since 2012, in east against LRA);
- AU (MISCA, 2013).

No country has experienced so many peace support operations in the last two decades. All have failed to build sustainable peace. Few have provided any protection beyond Bangui.

### Policy implications

- The UN doubts that, even with French support and EU funding, MISCA will be able to fulfil its mandate and has detailed plans to create its own multipurpose successor force of at least 6,000 personnel. This has been delayed by political sensitivities to allow the AU time to succeed. However, the price of failure is potentially severe and the enlarged MISCA/Sangaris deployment may lack strength to deploy effectively and sustainably outside Bangui. A report on transition from AU to UN command is due by 5 March, making a larger UN mission with a more comprehensive stabilisation and peacebuilding mandate likely in Q2 2014. Such a force might be comparable to the complex UN Missions in Liberia (UNMIL) or Haiti (MINUSTAH), essentially overseeing the reconstruction of CAR state institutions, and would be likely to last many years.
- As with UNMIL, any large peace support operation in the CAR will need to cooperate closely with UN and AU peacekeeping missions in surrounding countries in order to

build regional stability and peace. There are currently large UN Missions in Sudan (UNAMID and UNISFA), South Sudan (UNMISS) and the DRC (MONUSCO). Peace in the CAR can only be achieved as part of a regional peace in the wider Great Lakes and Sudans regions. Such an approach is essential given the potential for conflicts in Darfur, the DRC, and South Sudan/Uganda to spill-over into the CAR. However, this still leaves the CAR vulnerable to instability in Chad, where there is no international presence.

- The potential for the CAR conflict to spill-over into neighbours must also be contained. Southern Chad and northern Cameroon, which have similar political and religious cleavages may be most at risk

### Political dimensions

The CAR is four months into an 18-month political transition that should culminate in democratic elections in February 2015. Séléka leader Djotodia has assumed the role of head of state. Respected human rights lawyer Nicolas Tiangaye, appointed in January, continues as premier over a government of Séléka, unarmed opposition and civil society ministers. Parliament and the constitution have been dissolved. A National Transition Council was appointed in April to serve as an interim legislature and to draft a new constitution. Progress towards these benchmarks has been slow and Djotodia, who is ineligible to seek election as president, is known to favour a prolonged transition. Paris has already questioned publicly whether he should continue to oversee the transition.

In reality, it is former Séléka commanders who rule outside Bangui, 'taxing' local trade and mining. Payment of civil servants beyond the capital has ceased and there is little or no state administrative, judicial or police presence outside the southwest. However, this is only an exacerbation of the CAR state's incapacity to rule much beyond the capital. The old CAR maxim that "the state stops at PK-12" (Bangui city limits) is more relevant than ever.

While most ex-Séléka combatants are reportedly Muslims from the northeast and neighbouring countries, neither Djotodia, nor Séléka nor any of its constituent groups are politically Islamist. Indeed, Séléka has had no political ideology or clear programme other than replacing Bozizé. Parties in the CAR are constituted on largely ethno-regional bases. Bozizé's administration had concentrated power increasingly among his Gbaya group (CAR's largest at about one-third) and his own family. The northeast and Muslim groups have always been politically marginal.

### Policy Implications

- Bad governance is at the core of the CAR's instability, with clans from the southwest (1960-81), south (1981-93) and northwest (1993-2013) excluding most of the country from influence, security and development. The transitional government requires both diplomatic pressure and financial, technical and logistical resources to restore the constitution and organise elections in which Djotodia does not run.
- Restoring a state administrative presence outside Bangui is a much longer term challenge but essential

to providing services and building both state and nation.

- The media and political characterisation of the CAR conflict as primarily a binary Christian-Muslim struggle needs to be countered by a more nuanced representation and conflict-sensitive reporting.

### Economic dimensions

According to the World Bank, the CAR is the world's sixth poorest country and ranks eighth lowest on the UNDP Human Development Index. Most of what wealth there is derives from extractive industries, notably diamonds, gold and timber, mainly from the southwest. Potential wealth in oil and uranium reserves is unexploited, although licenses were issued under Bozizé. The majority of citizens depend on unimproved agriculture to grow foods, cotton and coffee but suffer huge impediments of climate and infrastructure to grow and market crops sustainably.

The CAR is both aid dependent and an 'aid orphan'. Despite its underdevelopment, it has never been a donor priority and its record of misgovernance, coups and corruption has led to regular suspensions of foreign aid. Humanitarian and development agencies have been active across the country but there has never been an effective national development strategy to create sustainable growth and development.

Artisanal production of gold and diamonds is extremely widespread across the CAR, not least in Séléka's centre-northeast heartland, and presents a simple and accessible

means to finance rebellions. Diamond production has always been impossible for the state to control as well as being a major source of official corruption. The CAR has been suspended from the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme but the UN has not yet mandated sanctions on CAR diamond exports. Given the number of ordinary Central Africans dependent on artisanal mining, these could have severe unintended consequences. Smuggling to the two Congos would also be very hard to counter.



*A truck struggles on the road to Birao, the main town in northeast CAR. Source: OCHA*

### Policy Implications

- There are no easy options to the economic underdevelopment of a chronically unstable, landlocked country like the CAR. Governance, including natural resource governance, must be part of the solution as the state is rebuilt, particularly as mineral resources are

the most obvious future source of growth and revenue.

- Major investment in extractive industries is more likely to concentrate wealth than to provide mass employment opportunities. Building an inclusive national economy that provides peaceful and sustainable livelihoods for Central African women and men in all parts of the country is more important than short-term windfalls.
- Infrastructure is key in providing access to markets, internally and externally. Improving connections to the north and east must be part of this, including road links to Chad, Sudan and South Sudan. The CAR could be a continental connector rather than an empty area on the African map.

## Conclusion

While planners in the African Union and France focus on the immediate priority of protecting civilians and disarming militia, they and the UN must not lose sight of the much larger and longer-term tasks of rebuilding the CAR as a functional, sustainable and peaceful state that serves all its citizens. More than a dozen peace support operations

have been deployed since 1996 and none has made any substantive progress in addressing the root causes of the CAR's chronic lack of governance and security. This must not be the outcome of MISCA or any successor UN mission.

Analysing the current manifestations of violence as a single nationwide struggle between Muslim and Christian communities or as a discrete conflict arising from the March 2013 seizure of power by Séléka is likely to be counter-productive. The CAR state has not collapsed suddenly. Its cycle of conflict and decline has fostered many inequalities and grievances within a complex nation and region. Inter-religious violence fits an increasingly familiar and, for some, convenient narrative of conflict in the Sahel but it is not characteristic of the larger and longer cleavages of Central African society and polity. Whatever the shape of the coming transition, the CAR's next generation of politicians will need to reach out to the margins – which is to say, almost anywhere outside Bangui – with opportunities not opprobrium.

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