



## **The Central African Republic**

**Yossef Bodansky**

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### **Executive Summary**

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Operation Sangaris – the French and MISCA military intervention in the Central African Republic (CAR) – is escalating. Operation Sangaris has nothing to do with the oft declared threat of “seeds of genocide” in the CAR. The Hollande administration is driven by the French lust for uranium ores in southeastern CAR. Hollande has been very clear as to the real objective of Paris – to topple the Djotodia administration and restore a French-dominated regime.

The Djotodia Government came into power in spring 2013 promising to drastically reverse the collapse and decay of the people and the state. Consequently, the population expected drastic changes from the new rulers. However, the task has proven to be beyond them and the situation is getting worse. And when the people’s hopes failed to materialize – the grassroots started returning to pre-state socio-economic frameworks and loyalties based on tribal identities and interests. These grassroots dynamics bred intense fratricidal fighting over limited and shrinking resources, infrastructure, food and water. These are not sectarian fighting.

The real challenge lies in addressing the root causes of the myriad of grassroots conflicts and in assisting Bangui to implement a comprehensive long-term national recovery program that will put the CAR on the right track to stability and growth. Ultimately, there is no real need for long-term large-scale foreign aid. The CAR is an extremely rich country. There are huge quantities of oil and diamonds, rare minerals and ores, which can provide immense wealth for funding the most ambitious social, economic and political reforms. The CAR will succeed only if and when African solutions are applied to its distinct African problems.

Djotodia has repeatedly promised to work closely with the international community on both development programs for the CAR’s abundant resources and comprehensive social and economic reforms leading to the turning around of the fortunes of the population. The Djotodia Government remains committed to human rights reforms, democratization and credible, free and fair elections. Alas, Djotodia has never been given a chance to prove his sincerity and commitment; nor was he put to a real test regarding his offers and commitments. Djotodia should first be given the benefit of the doubt and an opportunity to prove his sincerity before the UN marshals the forces and immense resources to both topple Djotodia and assume responsibility the destitute country and the wellbeing of the populace.

Meanwhile, the blatant cynical move by France in Operation Sangaris sends shivers throughout the entire sub-Saharan Africa. African leaders focus on regional development in the context of regional cooperation – thus enabling even poor countries to implement major programs together while jointly reducing threats of spreading cross-border violence and instability. South Sudan’s President Kiir is the most eloquent and clairvoyant proponent of this vision. He stresses that it is imperative for Africans to formulate African solutions for Africa’s unique problems. Kiir invites the industrialized world to be Africa’s PARTNER in implementing these African solutions – namely, to invest in and benefit from the extraction of Africa’s riches, as well as to provide the know-how and expertise required to implement long-term development, self-empowerment and good governance programs for the grassroots populace.



Alas, Hollande's Paris has different objectives and priorities. Thus, until Kiir's clairvoyant vision materializes, France will keep seeking control over African riches by force of arms, in the name of humanitarian concerns, and to the detriment of the vast majority of Africans.

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## About the Author of this Issue

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Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State. He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (*New York Times* No. 1 Bestseller & *Washington Post* No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (*New York Times* Bestseller & *Foreign Affairs Magazine* Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports. Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



Yossef Bodansky



## ANALYSIS

The escalating fuel Operation Sangaris (a local exotic butterfly) – the French and MISCA (the French acronym for the International Support Mission to the Central African Republic) military intervention in the Central African Republic (CAR) – is escalating. The French contingent will now be 1,600-troop strong – rather than the 1,200 agreed upon at the UNSC. The AU’s MISCA force will grow to a total of 6,000 troops from Francophone African states – rather than the original estimate of 3,500 troops. The hasty deployment of these forces only aggravates an already explosive situation in the country and the region, and sparks new fighting where none existed before the international intervention was announced. Most notable is the sudden resumption of fighting in Bangui – a city and region that were completely quiet and secure literally until the day before the arrival of the new French forces.

The French-led Operation Sangaris has nothing to do with the oft declared threat of “seeds of genocide” in the CAR. The Hollande administration is driven by the French lust for uranium ore. Paris is focusing on the uranium deposits in the Bakouma sub-prefecture of the Mbomou prefecture, southeastern CAR. The Bakouma area phosphates are unique by their high uranium content – the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. Feasibility studies showed that there are 41 million pounds of U3O8 with an average grade of 0.27% in the Bakouma area. (This is almost 20 times higher than the resources in Trekkopje, Namibia.)

The primary sources of France’s uranium in southern Algeria and northern Mali and Niger are increasingly threatened by Jihadist terrorism and sabotage, the endemic kidnaping of engineers and technicians, the scaring away of local miners and workers, as well as the destruction of facilities and support infrastructure. Hence, Hollande’s Paris decided to fully control and exploit the alternate resources in the CAR. The failure of Operation Serval (the French-led military intervention in Mali) in early 2013 and the ensuing escalation of Jihadist operations throughout the Sahel added a sense of urgency to the French quest for the uranium resources of the CAR.

By then, however, a revolutionary coalition led by Michel Djotodia seized power in Bangui on 24 March 2013 and overthrew France’s stalwart puppet – President Francois Bozize. Paris panicked. Initially, Michel Djotodia seemed to be an ally of Iran and Sudan. However, in the summer Djotodia emerged as his own man and definitely NOT a puppet of Paris. There begun a campaign led by France and the US to smear and delegitimize Djotodia on the basis that the coup he had led was an unacceptable form of rising to power. Therefore, Paris and Washington argue, power must be returned to the CAR’s legal president – Bozize. However, Bozize is an ex-General who also seized power in a military coup. On 15 March 2003, Bozize’s forces captured Bangui and overthrew then President Ange-Felix Patasse who was out of the country. Soon afterwards, Bozize declared himself a civilian president, won the March-May 2005 presidential election, and then was re-elected in the January 2011 presidential election. The AU harshly criticized both the 2005 and 2011 presidential elections as being manipulated, rigged and plagued with fraud.

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Meanwhile, the ongoing contacts and, at time, negotiations between President Djotodia and Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) terrorist organization, highlighted the profound transformation of President Djotodia since summer 2013. Although Djotodia seized power back in March 2013 with the help of Sudan-based militias and was initially expected by Khartoum to assist both Sudan and Iran in their surge into the heart of Africa – Djotodia quickly realized that such cooperation would not deliver the salvation for the CAR he is still desperately seeking, and for which he had toppled the Francois Bozize government. Hence, Djotodia turned his back on Khartoum and has been reaching out to the West for help in rebuilding his devastated country. Similarly, Djotodia was originally expected to assist the LRA to reach South Sudan and Uganda by using



the territory of the CAR. Instead, Djotodia's Bangui has been pressuring the LRA cadres and commanders to lay down their arms. This initiative already reduced markedly the LRA-led raids and fratricidal fighting in the Oba area near the border with both the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. Moreover, Djotodia's emissaries recently succeeded to convince Kony himself to start negotiating his own "coming out of the bush" and conducting peace talks.

President Djotodia and his allies seized power in the CAR in March 2013 in desperation over the state of affairs in the CAR. Since the coup, the CAR has descended from a long-term crisis of poverty and chronic vulnerability into a complex humanitarian emergency. Senior UN officials consider the CAR "a failed state [that] gets worse" despite international aid efforts. Indeed, almost the CAR's entire population of 4.6 million has been affected by destitute, violence and insecurity. As well, 1.6 million people – a third of the population – are in dire need of assistance as the humanitarian support system keeps collapsing despite the great efforts by various NGOs. However, the current crisis is the aggregate result of decades of abuse, pillage and corruption by previous leaders and regimes that had ruined the country in pursuit of personal ill gains. The diamonds that "Emperor Bokasa" gave French leaders and politicians could have fed and clothed the entire population of the CAR for a few generations.

The Djotodia Government came into power promising to drastically reverse the collapse and decay of the people and the state. Consequently, the population expected drastic changes from the new rulers. However, the task has proven to be beyond them and the situation is getting worse. And when the people's hopes failed to materialize – the grassroots started returning to pre-state socio-economic frameworks and loyalties based on tribal identities and interests. These grassroots dynamics bred intense fratricidal fighting over limited and shrinking resources, infrastructure, food and water.

Meanwhile, newly empowered forces – loyal to both Djotodia's now dismembered Seleka alliance and the previous Bozize regime – are vying for power in the changing tapestry throughout the country through the use of arbitrary force. Their fighting in the Bossangoa area – where pro-Bozize militias arriving from Cameroon are clashing with both local tribal self-defense militias and former-Seleka militias – are conducted on the backs of the local population. It was in this context, that the Anti-Balaka (anti-machetes in local Sango dialects) vigilante groups first appeared in early October in pro-Bozize bastions in northwestern CAR in the direction of the border with Cameroon. The first recorded attack took place in the mining village of Gaga – some 150 miles northwest of Bangui. The Anti-Balaka militants attacked what they called a Seleka position near the main market – killing four ex-rebels. The Anti-Balaka vigilantes then started attacking Muslim civilians indiscriminately. Several women who were in the predominantly Muslim market during the attack were raped and beaten by Anti-Balaka militants. The Anti-Balaka militias stressed their Christian character. They claim to have arisen from the predominantly Christian population in order to defend their communities against Muslim Seleka attacks as well as avenge transgressions. However, the Anti-Balaka have quickly transformed into declaratory Christian vigilante groups who keep committing murderous attacks on Muslim communities even though they have nothing to do with ex-Seleka fighters.

In fall 2013, Bangui attempted to defuse some of these conflicts through the recruitment of some 3,500 former Seleka fighters to the CAR police, gendarmerie and military. This is a major undertaking when examined in the context of grassroots tribal acceptance of state authority above the tribes. In the modern era, tribal authorities have accepted that higher authorities – from the colonies to the independent states – have the right to maintain their own instruments and organs of power. Thus, when integrated into the state system – the former Seleka and other fighters will no longer be in competition with the tribes over local influence and the main reason for the current fratricidal fighting will be eliminated. The new tapestry of power in the localized envi-



rons which the tribes are desperate to sustain will now be shielded with the help of official Bangui. Simply put, President Djotodia is committed to resolving these issues by applying African solutions to African problems.

In the northern CAR, the conflict has taken on a sectarian trend. Presently, these fighting are not yet clear Christians-against-Muslims clashes. To-date, the fighting that escalate along the CAR sector of the sectarian fault line (that runs across Africa from Uganda to Senegal/Gambia) remain the traditional struggle over water and land rights between the predominantly Muslim nomads and the predominantly Christian homesteaders. However, similar conflicts in other parts of Africa have recently evolved and escalated into anti-Christian Jihads. For example, in the Nigerian section of this fault line, a similar historic conflict between nomads and homesteaders has been exacerbated and transformed by the Boko Haram into a vicious Jihad against the entire local Christian population as well as Muslim communities who refuse to abandon modernization and join the Jihad. In the northern parts of the CAR, especially the Birao area, a similar threat comes from Sudanese Jihadist gangs that are prowling the area in quest for loot, young female slaves and rare animals – mainly elephants' tusks. These are the very same Sudanese Jihadist gangs that terrorized most of what is presently South Sudan during the generation-long war of independence and the subsequent five-year autonomy period. Having been denied the freedom of action in South Sudan, these Sudanese Jihadist gangs now strike out further west – in the northern parts of the CAR. Left unaddressed, the Sudanese Jihadists are bound to transform the CAR conflict into a vicious Jihad against both the Christian majority and the peaceful Muslim populace.

The reports about the destitute and violence in the CAR are gut-wrenching indeed. While the fratricidal violence is escalating and spreading – it is not yet anywhere near the “genocide” or “on the verge of genocide” claimed by Western officials and NGOs. Yet, there exists the urgent imperative to reverse the country's slide into chaos and alleviate the suffering of the populace. The international community is focused on providing short-term remedy while demanding the rights for intrusive intervention in every aspect of governance in the CAR. Following the diktat of Paris – the erstwhile guardian of the toppled Bozize government and its predecessors – the Western powers refuse to accept and legitimize the Djotodia administration. However, vitriolic attacks on the Djotodia administration of the kind made by the French and US representatives during the Third Meeting of the International Contact Group on the Central African Republic (ICG-CAR) in Bangui on 8 November would not help alleviate the problem and only aggravate the already dire situation.

Meanwhile, the West keeps wasting tens of millions of Euros and Dollars on short-term band-aids that fail to address root causes. France, that has a sizeable military contingent in Bangui, and the US, that is footing the bills, are encouraging the African Union to deploy additional military forces to the CAR. Officially, these forces are to guard the UN Integrated Peace-building Office – a political mission known as BINUCA. In practice, these forces are to enforce unilaterally what the UN calls “the proper program of Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration” of all local forces – including the government's forces. Putting aside the issue of the legitimacy and legality of this self-anointed mandate – the AU-UN MISCA forces are untrained, too small and too ill equipped to make a difference against the myriad of local forces. All that they will accomplish is to unite the various local militias, including those presently fighting each other, against the foreign forces attempting to impose their own political and economic solutions on the people of the CAR.

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Early December 2013, on the eve of the French-led intervention, saw a sudden marked escalation in the fighting in Bangui. Until then, the entire Bangui area had been completely quiet and stable for a few months. Anti-Djotodia forces launched concentrated attacks aimed to turn incitement into fratricidal violence. The main instruments were well armed Christian vigilante militias – the Anti-Balaka – that arrived in Bangui from neigh-



boring states and pro-Bozize regions of the CAR. They immediately started attacking street markets, Muslim-inhabited neighborhoods, and the city's main mosque. At the time these Anti-Balaka attacks were launched there were no ex-Seleka forces in Bangui itself and in the entire region surrounding Bangui.

The early December attacks by the Anti-Balaka militias in Bangui prompted widespread clashes with Government forces, both Muslim and Christian self-defense militias, as well as former Seleka fighters that now rushed into town. The fighting created an urgent imperative for the French-led intervention and the increase in the size of the French-led contingent. Significantly, the Anti-Balaka Christian militias drove their technicals and trucks into the CAR and Bangui using the same roads used by the French forces driving to Bangui from Gabon via Cameroon, and from the Republic of Congo. Given their superior weaponry, had the French military wanted to stop the Anti-Balaka and prevent them from reaching Bangui – they could have done so easily. Instead, the French forces at the Bangui airport attacked the ex-Seleka and other militias trying to fight and contain the marauding Anti-Balaka vigilantes.

And so there began a completely needless and unwarranted wave of fratricidal violence that is still escalating. As well, the myriad of fighting largely sparked by localized causes and power struggles have suddenly been packaged as Christian-vs-Muslim sectarian clashes – when the vast majority of them are not. By mid-December, these clashes already inflicted some 600 fatalities and a couple of thousand wounded. Outside Bangui, the fratricidal fighting remain primarily bitter clashes between predominantly Christian and animist localized militias and armed groups in quest for consolidating localized power at the expense of both traditional and new contenders.

By now, the majority of the ex-Seleka fighters – much maligned as being responsible for the carnage – had actually departed the contested areas and withdrew into the bush until the French and MISCA forces would have left the area. Beyond Bangui, the French forces started advancing on the Bossangoa area some 180 miles north of Bangui. This is the bastion of the pro-Bozize forces arriving from Cameroon and their Anti-Balaka allies. These newly empowered forces loyal to the previous Bozize regime are vying for power in the changing tapestry throughout the region through the use of arbitrary force. Publicly they insist they are fighting the pro-Djotodia ex-Seleka forces. However, the main fighting in the Bossangoa area remain between pro-Bozize militias arriving from Cameroon and both local tribal self-defense militias and a few ex-Seleka militias. The local civilian population remains the primary victim of the fratricidal fighting.

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Meanwhile, the real challenge lies in addressing the root causes of the myriad of grassroots conflicts and in assisting the Djotodia administration in Bangui to implement a comprehensive long-term national recovery program that will put the CAR on the right track to stability and growth. Ultimately, there is no real need for long-term large-scale foreign aid. The CAR is an extremely rich country. The land is fertile and the water plentiful. The CAR used to export food to its neighbors. There are huge quantities of oil and diamonds, rare minerals and ores, which can provide immense wealth for funding the most ambitious social, economic and political reforms.

And yet, both despite and because of the international intervention, the CAR remains in the midst of a humanitarian crisis. There is no reason for people in such a plentiful and rich country to go hungry and live in fear – but they do. The real challenge is therefore developing the riches of the CAR in a way that will benefit the entire population and, literally, change their lives forever. People will stop fighting over scarce resources once food, services, work and prospects for overall betterment of life are easily available. Stability will be restored once the people of this diverse and tribally-based country are able to live and prosper safely within a system of gov-



ernance that recognizes and respects both their indigenous tribal and sub-state social frameworks as well as state-level good governance. The CAR will succeed only if and when African solutions are applied to its distinct African problems.

For the crisis in the CAR to be genuinely resolved there will have to be a profound change in the attitude and practice of the international community. Presently, the UN strives as much to delegitimize and topple the Djotodia administration as to help the destitute people of the CAR. This approach cannot continue when throughout the CAR there are widespread grassroots expectations from, and support for, President Djotodia as a national savior. Moreover, unlike the current state of foreign aid – effective long-term programs need not burden the tax-payers of the West (who currently fund the UN-led endeavors). Private sector businesses are ready and eager to formulate and invest in comprehensive development programs where revenues from the extraction of the CAR's riches be devoted to the long-term development of the people and the country. These development and reform programs must be thoroughly audited and supervised by the international community to ensure that the people and the country are indeed their prime beneficiaries.

President Djotodia has repeatedly promised to work closely with the international community on both development programs for the CAR's abundant resources and comprehensive social and economic reforms leading to the turning around of the fortunes of the population. The Djotodia Government remains committed to human rights reforms, democratization and credible, free and fair elections. Alas, President Djotodia and his government have never been given a chance by the international community to prove their sincerity and commitment; nor were they put to a real test regarding their offers and commitments. It makes ample sense for the West to give President Djotodia the benefit of the doubt and an opportunity to prove the sincerity of his administration before the international community marshals the forces and immense resources to both topple the Djotodia administration and assume responsibility the destitute country and the wellbeing of the populace.

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Alas, led by Hollande's Paris and Obama's Washington, the international community is aggravating the situation in and around the CAR in pursuit of their own real objectives. The ultimate objective of Paris is political – just like in Operation Serval and other French-led interventions in Africa. The French and Francophone African forces pretend to create stability and ensure safe roads. They do nothing as the majority of rebel forces abandon inhabited areas for the bush until the foreign forces leave. The intervention does create some relief for the population. However, the French-led forces neither address the deep-rooted indigenous causes for the fratricidal violence, nor destroy the main forces threatening local stability. The French will stay and patrol for a few months, and then abandon the area to the hapless, ill-trained and ill-equipped African forces. These will prove incapable of, and unwilling to, meeting the challenges. The escalating Jihadist and tribal-secessionist violence in Mali and Niger already attest to this. The CAR will not be different.

Ultimately, the fratricidal violence against civilians in the CAR is a mere excuse for Paris to intervene and impose its political will over Bangui. President Hollande has been very clear as to the real objective of Paris in Operation Sangaris – to topple the Djotodia administration and restore a French-dominated regime. Hollande stated his objective explicitly. "We can't leave in place a president who hasn't been able to do anything, who let things happen," Hollande said on Djotodia's fate. As for the humanitarian concerns, had France, the US, and the rest of the international community, been genuinely committed to the alleviation of genocidal violence against civilians – they could have long addressed the area's worse crises. For years now there are significantly worse carnage and genocide in Sudan's Darfour and South Kordofan, as well as the multitude of vicious conflicts throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo.



Hollande's Paris has repeatedly stressed that Operation Serval, Operation Sangaris and similar interventions set a precedent for the future involvement of France in Francophone Africa and the rest of the continent. Having gathered in Paris for a summit titled "Peace and Security in Africa", African leaders are increasingly apprehensive about the long-term reverberations and ramifications of the French ambitions in the aftermath of the crisis in the CAR. Flanked by European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Hollande declared the beginning of a new era in Franco-African relations and French humanitarian interventionism. Hollande explained that Franco-African relations "can no longer be what they could be in the past." Therefore, Hollande announced that France would support "the creation of a rapid reaction force controlled by the African Union." He declared that France would provide training for 20,000 African troops over the next five years, as well as contribute the commanders and professional echelons until such time Franco-phonie African armies have their own qualified cadres. The African leaders understood that Hollande means the creation of a French-controlled rapid intervention force for future unilateral interventions and regime changes where and when Paris deem French interests to be threatened.

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The blatant cynical move by France in Operation Sangaris sends shivers throughout the entire sub-Saharan Africa. The reawakening, exploitation and exacerbation of indigenous crises and enmities in order to create excuses for the French-led intervention know no borders. The conflicts and the fratricidal violence they reawaken and engender quickly spread among cross-border ethnic and tribal groupings over vast areas. African governments are already too stretched thin and too economically burdened to be able to meet the new challenges. Urgently needed development programs are postponed in order to restore stability in long-pacified areas in reaction to the new waves of exacerbation originating in French provocations.

African leaders increasingly focus on regional development in the context of regional cooperation – thus enabling even poor countries to implement major programs together while jointly reducing threats of spreading cross-border violence and instability. South Sudan President Salva Kiir Mayardit is the most eloquent and clairvoyant proponent of this vision.

President Kiir argues that the overall situation in Africa is unique and extremely complex. The myriad of crises and fratricidal violence are rooted in Africa's unique history, tapestry of tribes and nations, and unfulfilled decolonization process. Western attention to African crises is selective and frequently at variance with Africa's own priorities. Most foreign military interventions proved to be counterproductive and detrimental to African interests. Therefore, it is imperative for Africans to formulate African solutions for Africa's problems.

The fighting and instability throughout Africa are manifestations of deep-rooted, endemic and indigenous problems. Just fighting the multitude of armed groups will not solve the root-causes of the fratricidal violence. Eliminating armed gangs should take place in the context of launching long-term development, self-empowerment and good governance programs for the grassroots populace – thus addressing grievances and integrating the zones of crisis into the stable states. President Kiir believes that only comprehensive modernization of all aspects of society and economy by the Africans themselves will guarantee the long-term stability and prosperity of Africa.

This is a huge challenge, President Kiir contends. However, Africa is an extremely rich continent. The profits from the extraction of Africa's riches will more than provide for the imperative long-term reforms and development. The industrialized world has both the know-how and resources Africa needs. Hence, President Kiir invites the industrialized world to be Africa's PARTNER in implementing these African solutions – namely, to invest in and benefit from the extraction of Africa's riches, as well as to provide the know-how and expertise





required to implement long-term development, self-empowerment and good governance programs for the grassroots populace. President Kiir emphatically repeated the invitation for the Europeans to partake in the revival of Africa when meeting with President Hollande during the Paris Summit.

Alas, Hollande's Paris has different objectives and priorities. Thus, until President Kiir's vision materializes, France and its allies will keep seeking control over uranium and other African riches by force of arms, in the name of humanitarian concerns, and to the detriment of the vast majority of Africans.

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**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.