Speculating on Crisis

The Progressive Disintegration of the Central African Republic’s Political Economy

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CRU Report

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Summary

The most recent wave of violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) began sweeping across the country in 2012. It started when the Séléka, an alliance of rebel groups operating in the north-east of the country, set off for the capital Bangui. They ousted President François Bozizé in March 2013 and installed their leader, Michel Djotodia, as president. The violence of the Séléka provoked the emergence of a loose coalition of local defence groups, the Anti-balaka. Violence between and among the groups forced Djotodia to step down in January 2014, and a weak transitional government was installed.

However, conflict between numerous armed groups continues, and tensions within communities remain unresolved to this day. The report argues that four interlinking factors shape the CAR’s volatile present: 1) a fractured society; 2) caused by chronic political and armed crises; 3) strongly shaped by external influences on domestic politics and rebellions; and 4) a lack of geopolitical interest in the landlocked and sparsely-populated country.

In examining these factors, the report analyses how self-interested political elites have exacerbated deep historic divisions and stimulated the proliferation of armed groups. External interferences – both formal and informal – in the country’s political economy and security have played part in the violent struggle. The relatively limited international aid and stabilisation efforts in the CAR have been unable to change things for the better. The report shows that current and future international interventions must make strategic and coordinated choices to create stability: Short-term military agendas should be supplanted by long-term civil empowerment, the peripheries deserve more attention, crimes need to be persecuted at the same time as communities need to be reconciled, and regional interests need to be redirected to promote internal stability.
Map Central African Republic

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Executive summary

The most recent wave of violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) began sweeping across the country in 2012. It started when the Séléka, an alliance of rebel groups operating in the north-east of the country, set off to oust President François Bozizé (which they succeeded in doing in March 2013) and install their leader, Michel Djotodia, as president. The violence, looting and abuse they caused provoked the emergence of a loose coalition of local defence groups, the Anti-balaka.

Violence between and among the Séléka and Anti-balaka reached a high point in December 2013, which forced Djotodia to step down in January 2014. While a transitional government has since been established, conflict between numerous armed groups continues, and tensions within local communities remain unresolved to this day. As a result, the current wave of violence has surpassed the protracted crisis that characterised preceding decades. More lives have been lost and more people displaced than ever before. Social cohesion has been shattered and the already weak economy has contracted even further.

Although confessional divides are often cited as a cause for the current violence, the root causes can be traced to a complex mixture of bad governance and profound social inequalities. This report argues that four interlinking factors shape the CAR’s volatile present: 1) a fractured society; 2) caused by chronic political and armed crises; 3) strongly shaped by external influences on domestic politics and rebellions; and 4) a lack of geopolitical interest in the landlocked and sparsely-populated country.

1) The CAR’s fractured society is characterised not only by confessional rifts, but also by divisions between north and south, pastoralists and farmers, the younger and older generations, and between the capital Bangui and the country’s peripheries. These divisions are fuelled by widely-held political and economic grievances that are often expressed along these lines, resulting in fragmented political movements, trade networks and civil society organisations. In a context of widespread poverty and corruption, as well as perceived discrimination against marginalised Muslims and nomads, hope for change and the promise of economic returns is a fruitful strategy for recruitment by rebellion leaders. Rather than broad ideological movements, the country has witnessed and continues to witness fragmented, fluid armed groups and alliances that have often evolved from long lines of historical alliances and provincial support bases.
2) The current civil war is the latest and most serious eruption of violence among recurring waves of conflict in which political leaders have used the state apparatus for personal enrichment and as a means to provide those in their political, social or economic network with positions and benefits. As the state controls access to the country’s most lucrative resource channels (minerals and aid), there has always been fierce competition over the presidency. In this ‘divide-and-conquer’ culture, the state can be characterised as opportunistically negligent: state functions that do not affect regime security – e.g. public services outside Bangui – have been abandoned while those that could pose a threat – the army – are deliberately weakened. Presidents have also outsourced problems and tensions in the peripheries to non-state security actors such as self-defence groups, which for decades – in combination with the weakening of the army – has spawned rebellions and mutinies.

The small political elite concentrated in Bangui competes over access to economic spoils by straddling the lines between armed rebellions, political careers and civil society, plunging the state into chronic crisis. Since few democratic elections have taken place, and stakes in government are gained through military opposition, armed actors rather than civilian parties continue to dominate the country’s political landscape.

3) The CAR has always been heavily influenced by regional power dynamics and experienced direct interferences in its own national politics. The country’s presidents have stayed in power only for as long as they served the interests of its former coloniser, France, and its neighbours – most specifically Chad and Sudan. External intervention varies between direct interference in national politics – such as Chad’s President Idriss Déby supporting various rebellions and coups d’états – and a more indirect and elusive meddling, such as via proxies in the country’s neglected peripheries – e.g. Sudan using the border areas of the CAR as a rear base for Sudanese operations in South Sudan and Chad. In economic terms, the peripheral borderlands continue to provide fertile grounds for cattle and local commodities trade, as well as for businessmen from the region who are active in the diamond and gold trades. Many of these cross-border trade relations are informal and some illicit, but all further the existing divides between centre and periphery, illustrating the incapacity of the government to control its territory.

4) Despite possessing significant natural resources such as minerals, oil and timber, the CAR has generally been of little economic or political interest to Western powers. Even though France has taken advantage of the CAR’s geostrategic position through a strong military presence, neither it nor other foreign powers have ever invested in large-scale development or in exploiting the country’s resource potential at an industrial level. The CAR has also received minimal attention from international development partners. Aid levels have always fluctuated in response to the country’s security and political situation, and international support has often focused on
the central administration in Bangui and on a narrow agenda prioritising security and stability. Of the development assistance that has been provided, very little has ever reached the provinces. The various small-scale peacekeeping operations over the last two decades have focused on short-term stabilisation and have failed to adopt a successful strategy to address the root causes underlying the conflict. The country’s security and judicial sectors remain dysfunctional, barely operate outside the capital and require deep reform.

The deployment of the first full-scale, UN-led peacekeeping operation in September 2014 (MINUSCA) indicates that the international community aims to put increased efforts into stabilising the CAR. However, with seemingly more urgent geopolitical problems and humanitarian needs on the international agenda, the situation in the CAR remains a largely forgotten crisis. To attain the desired political stability and security reforms, without neglecting sectors such as infrastructure and basic services, the international community will need to reassess the design and deliverables of the support structures and aid modalities it offers to the CAR. This assessment should include a thorough analysis of the following dilemmas and trade-offs:

- Supporting short-term political and military solutions can facilitate temporary stability. However, long-term stability is better guaranteed when civilian and political party agendas lead the transformation process of the CAR’s mode of governance.
- Maintaining a focus on strengthening the central state risks amplifying its detachment from the country’s peripheries, which fuels many inequalities. On the other hand, investing in decentralised and local development through local administration, service delivery and justice provision in the provinces could be undermined by a lack of commitment and political will at the national level.
- Only the trial of perpetrators and compensation payments to victims of the last wave of violence can break the cycle of impunity. However, justice and reconciliation mechanisms should avoid brandishing entire communities and thereby reinforcing the framing of the conflict in religious terms.
- Efforts within the CAR form only part of any solution because stability and instability are to a certain extent the product of external interference. International support to the CAR should therefore include a component that stimulates regional actors to promote political dialogue and which restrains them from destabilising the country.
- The limited amount of international aid committed – historically and currently – to the CAR versus its massive needs across every sector call for strategic and coordinated choices to ensure that efforts can have a visible impact.
Introduction

The foundations for today’s turmoil in the Central African Republic (CAR) are the outcome of a steady build-up of reinforcing factors. Over several decades, the small, self-sustaining political elite in the capital, Bangui, has failed to provide basic services, justice and security to its citizens. Grievances within the population have thus gradually mounted, leading to tensions between groups based on their livelihoods or territorial origin, while deepening the divide between the centre of power and the peripheries of the country. Armed actors and politico-military entrepreneurs in pursuit of economic and strategic interests have used these sentiments to turn people against one another or the government (see Annex I for a timeline).

In 2012, lingering conflicts turned into a full-blown crisis when various rebel groups operating in the north-east of the country formed the Séléka alliance and headed south towards the capital, looting and attacking villages on their way. Many young men joined them en route, having been promised rewards once they reached the capital. Others came from neighbouring Sudan and Chad to capitalise on the chaos. Although Séléka’s political objective was accomplished in March 2013 when the leader of their coalition, Michel Djotodia, was installed as the first Muslim president of the CAR, the violence did not end. Séléka men continued to attack, loot, extort and illegally tax people.¹

This provoked an even more loose coalition of local defence groups, the Anti-balaka, to launch an attack on Bangui in early December 2013. Their revenge attacks targeted the Muslim minority (about 10% of the country’s population), who were accused of supporting the Séléka. Both the (ex-)Séléka and the Anti-balaka have merged out of numerous former armed groups that are continuously shifting their loyalties. Thus, while a peace agreement has since been signed between the (ex-)Séléka and Anti-balaka, and a transitional government established, conflicts between numerous successor armed groups continue.

The country now faces the daunting challenge of addressing the devastating impact of nearly three years of turmoil. Tensions between Muslims and Christians remain very high and tens of thousands of Muslims have fled to Chad and Cameroon, while others are trapped in enclaves within the country. Regaining trust among the people, and between

the people and their leaders, has become a pressing matter. However, (re)building viable institutions and reinstating the state in the various provinces will take time, not least because the CAR has consistently ranked in the lowest percentile of the Human Development Index over the last two decades.²

Taking these challenges into account, this report explores the political and economic foundations that underpin the country’s progressive disintegration, so as to identify trade-offs that the international community will need to address when reassessing its support structures and aid modalities.

Box 1. Central African Republic

General information
Population: 4.6 million (2013 estimate)
Area: 622,984 km²
Population density: 7/km²
Official Languages: Sango, French
Faith: About 85% Christians (roughly 50% Protestants and 35% Catholics); 10% Muslims and 5% Animistic beliefs
Ethnic groups / ethnic divisions: Gbaya 33%, Banda 27%, Mandjia 13%, Sara 10%, Mboom 7%, M’Baka 4%, Yakoma 4%, other (e.g. Runga and Gula) 2%

Politics and administration
Government: Transitional government
Acting President: Catherine Samba-Panza
Acting Prime Minister: Mahamat Kamoun
The transitional government initially had a mandate until July 2015. A new election date has not been announced; the mandate of the transitional government has been extended until the end of 2015
Prefectures: 16 administrative; the prefectures are further divided into 71 sub-prefectures

Economy
GDP in 2013 US$1.538
GDP per capita in 2013 US$333
Real GDP growth: 1% estimated in 2014 – 5.4% projected in 2015
(after a downturn of 36% in 2013)
Inflation: 6.6% in 2013 – 11.2% estimated in 2014 – 4.1% projected in 2015
World Bank Doing Business Ranking 2015: 187 out of 189

Impact of the 2012–14 conflict

**Estimated number of deaths:** Around 5,000 as of November 2014  
**Estimated number of internally displaced persons:** at least 25% of the population has been internally displaced since the beginning of the crisis. In September 2015, 378,000 people were still displaced in the CAR.  
**Estimated number of refugees in neighbouring countries:** Around 430,000 people have found refuge in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Chad since December 2013.

Sources: Economist Intelligence Unit (online); OIF (online); Observatoire Pharos; CIA Factbook (online); Jeune Afrique (online); UNDP (online); World Bank Database; Africa Economic Outlook (online); World Bank Doing Business (online); Amnesty International (online); UNCHR (online)

Methodology and structure of the report

The report is based on an extensive review of literature and news reports, and on fieldwork conducted in the CAR in February and March 2015. It not only explains the *internal* interplay between politics, the economy and security in the governance of the country, but also illuminates the role that *external* actors have played and continue to play in the domestic situation. As such, the report explores four interlinking factors that shape the country’s current and recurring state of crisis: a fractured society; caused by chronic political and armed crises; strongly shaped by external influences on domestic politics and rebellions; and a lack of geopolitical interest in the country. By showing the fine lines between continuity and further fragmentation in a volatile regional context, the report offers reflections on the profound economic and political transformations required to restore the social fabric of the country.

The report is structured as follows: Chapter 1 examines how the self-interest of political elites and the lack of a coherent political party system have exacerbated deep historic divisions and enabled political elites and armed groups to seize power until they are toppled by another armed group. Chapter 2 focuses on external interferences – both formal and informal – in the country’s political economy and security, including France’s strategic meddling. Chapter 3 looks at the nature of international aid to the CAR, at past and current peacekeeping operations, at international efforts in the field of justice, and ends by pointing out how the international community could overcome the hurdles that stand in the way of stability and economic development in the CAR.
1 Governance of the CAR: competing interests and self-promotion

Since independence from France in 1960, the successive presidents of the CAR – most of whom have gained power through military force – have used their position to further their own interests, rather than providing strong and unifying leadership. Weak political structures, a lack of economic investment in the country’s peripheries and a fragmented civil society have resulted in the emergence of armed groups and alliances, formed along the lines of historic ties or for short-term gain. By moving across society’s divisions, political entrepreneurs can take advantage of numerous strategies by exploiting formal state power, building on the historic roots of armed groups, or vying for the control of economic resources. The current transitional phase has merely rotated elites from one section of influence to the next in the same manner that has been established in the country for decades.

Presidential power used for personal gain

Power in the CAR is heavily concentrated in the hands of the president through a political system inspired by the former coloniser, France. The president appoints the prime minister and can replace the cabinet, making the latter dependent on the president’s favour. The National Assembly is mostly inactive and has very limited means for budgetary oversight. The presidential seat is thus the most influential position in the country.

From colonial times to today, rulers have, with few exceptions, limited their governance and enforcement to the capital. They have never controlled their sovereign territory and, rather than promoting development, political leaders have used the state apparatus for personal enrichment and to offer compensation and positions to those included in

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their networks. Controlling the state provides exclusive access to resource channels, especially on the international level (aid and business contracts), and guarantees control over economic resources such as the mining sector. The list of embezzlements of government aid is long, and natural resources have provided successive regimes with opportunities to sign lucrative deals.

As state resources have been used to serve private interests, and because there have always been other people eyeing the presidency for themselves, sitting governments have constantly had to fear a violent takeover. These threats could come from outside the capital, but also from within the government. Because the regular armed forces were often remnants of the former regime, governments have deliberately kept them weak and relied instead on parallel structures, such as the presidential guards, which could be newly recruited from the new president’s own ethnic base.

**Negligence as a governance strategy**

In addition to being predatory, the CAR state can be described as ‘opportunistically negligent’. The ties between the centre and its peripheries are sufficiently weak that,

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6 The national army, the Forces Armées Centrafricaines, went from 7,500 members under Bokassa to around 4,000 under President Patassé and to around 1,500 under President Bozizé.

once in power, leaders can ignore their home base. With this disconnection between leaders in the capital and the peripheries, resources and even the forces to stabilise the regime have often come from abroad. The state has been used to take action only against those it perceived as threatening, and even then has often outsourced this to other security actors. Well-known examples are the support to auto-defence groups in the mid-2000s against road robbers in the west and fighting off a rebellion in the north-east through French support in 2006.

Regime and pro-regime security forces have been given free rein to exploit resources and extort people in the peripheries, leading to terrible human rights abuses on a comparable scale to rebel forces, allegedly often singling out Muslims. Negligence has become a strategy in which state functions that do not affect regime security are abandoned. Teachers and large parts of the army often remained unpaid for months, at times years. Rule is thus marked by a self-imposed limitation of reach, so as not to overstretch the limited means of enforcement, and instead is focused on self-enrichment in a potentially short timeframe. Aspiring leaders have time and again used state negligence as a rallying cry for a change in regime. However, no leader upon seizing power has changed the system of state neglect. In line with this trend, the Interim President, Catherine Samba-Panza (see Box 1.1), and the current transitional government continue to delay the deployment of state functionaries to the provinces, and many regions outside of Bangui have no budget to fulfil their tasks.

Box 1.1 Catherine Samba-Panza

Samba-Panza became the interim, and first female, president of the CAR in January 2014. She studied law in Paris and returned to the country in the 1990s to work for the Allianz group. She also worked with human rights groups – the Association des femmes juristes de Centrafrique (AFJC) and Amnesty International. In 2003, she co-chaired the national dialogue that was organised by Bozizé soon after his coup against Patassé and then presided over the follow-up committee. In May 2013 she became Mayor of Bangui under Djotodia. As interim president she initially received the support of both the Séléka and the Anti-balaka. The international community was confident in her ability to lead the transition until serious corruption allegations were made in October 2014.

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9 Mehler, A., *op.cit.*
10 Interviews with Muslim leaders in Bangassou and Obo, Central African Republic, 09.-19.03.2015.
A plethora of political parties but no history of democracy

With the exception of the 1993 presidential election, the CAR has not witnessed free and fair elections. The short democratic interlude in the 1990s was interrupted by attempted coups in 2001 and 2002, and a successful coup d'état in 2003 against the by then highly unpopular President Patassé. Thus, the role of political parties in national politics remains ambiguous. New parties are created frequently, often as the vehicle for a particular individual to gain power, often through violent coup d'états.

Some of these parties were created to accompany rebel movements. Kwa Na Kwa, the ruling party under Bozizé, for example, was founded for the 2003 coup. Ange-Felix Patassé founded the *Mouvement de libération du peuple centrafricain* (MLPC) in 1978 in Paris, four years before he (together with Bozizé) unsuccessfully tried to remove President André Kolingba from power by force. Martin Ziguélé, the current leader of the MLPC (see Box 1.2), stands a chance in the forthcoming elections as, compared to other parties, the MLPC has a well-developed party infrastructure throughout the country.

During the current transitional phase, the most important oppositional parties (the MLPC and six others) have created a platform – the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la transition* (AFDT). However, parties to the AFDT have so far not managed to agree on one presidential candidate for the forthcoming elections. Under the ten-year rule of Bozizé’s undemocratic regime, and with national and international actors focusing on the role of armed movements, the capacities, support bases and ambitions of the various political parties have become unclear.

Box 1.2 Martin Ziguélé

The MLPC’s Martin Ziguélé is seen as a favourite in the forthcoming presidential elections. As the MLPC’s former number two, Ziguélé held the post of prime minister under President Ange-Felix Patassé (2001–2003). He ran for president in 2005 and 2011, but lost against Bozizé in elections that were clearly rigged. He now presides over the AFDT, a regrouping of seven political parties, including the MLPC, calling for democratic change.

The cessation of hostilities agreement that was signed in Brazzaville in July 2014 again brought military groups into the transitional government, which plays to the advantage of politico-military entrepreneurs at the expense of civilian parties. The current transitional government includes many (former) armed actors – ex-Séléléka, Anti-balaka...
and other rebel leaders – as ministers and advisers.\textsuperscript{12} Since anyone, with the exception of members of the transitional government, can register as a presidential candidate in the forthcoming elections, political entrepreneurs can again take their chances.\textsuperscript{13} Former President Bozizé declared his candidacy, for instance, despite being subject to an international arrest warrant.\textsuperscript{14} Even civilian parties are linked to and often dependent on armed actors who continue to dominate the country’s political landscape.

**Evolving trends of armed actors**

The weakness of central state forces has enabled armed groups to evolve as a substitute or in opposition to the government. Most groups operated locally and aimed at economic benefits or economic survival. Some armed groups have been able to establish a larger following in the wake of events such as unfair elections or gross human rights violations by the government by addressing issues such as the socio-economic neglect of their region, lack of political representation, and government mismanagement. Despite the signing of numerous accords over recent decades, such legitimate concerns have never been adequately addressed, let alone resolved. The continued grievances within wide parts of the populace give room for manipulation by mostly opportunistic leaders and militia recruits. The most recent violence resulted from some of these fragmented groups – formed along the lines of historical ties and territorial links – coming together for a short time under the loose umbrellas of the Séléka or the Anti-balaka to collectively pursue their differing objectives.

**Séléka**

Originating in north-east Vakaga province, the Séléka alliance was formed in 2012 by Michel Djotodia’s *Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement* (UFDR) and two breakaway factions of the *Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix* (CPJP) – Moussa Dhaffane’s *Convention patriotique du salut du Kodro* (CPSK) and Noureddine Adam’s *CPJP-fondamentale* (see Box 1.3).\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} An illustration of this trend is the current leader of the *Révolution et Justice* (RJ) rebel movement, Armel Sayo, who was a FACA officer before founding the RJ in 2013. Less than a year later he became a minister in the transitional government.


\textsuperscript{15} Weyns, Y., *op.cit.*, p. 15.
The UFDR and CPJP joining forces is one illustration of how alliances in the CAR are opportunistically formed and dissolved. In 2006, the UFDR seized the opportunity created by the lack of state presence in the north-east to take control of the excavation and trade of the region’s resources, mostly diamonds. Between 2007 and 2008, several accords were signed with President Bozizé in which demobilisation of the UFDR was agreed in return for addressing their grievances – lack of roads, health care, education and clean drinking water. However, the government never implemented its side of the deal, thereby perpetuating this rebellion and others.

The UFDR became increasingly dominated by the Gula ethnic group and forced many local ethnic Runga people to leave their usual mining sites when it reached Bria in 2008. Runga miners and citizens then rioted against the UFDR and created the CPJP after moving north to Ndélé. A few years later it became more opportune for the two groups to work together. While the control of diamond mines and trade networks remained a bone of contention between the UFDR and CPJP, the government became a unifying threat to both their interests when in late 2008 state forces attempted to regain control over resources in the eastern diamond areas. In their struggles over resource control, leaders were therefore able to manipulate and recruit from a divided population with unresolved grievances against the government and between each other.

Although Séléka has often been described as a Muslim alliance, and the recent crisis as a conflict between Christians and Muslims, individuals – including many Christian youths – in each locality the alliance took over joined it to take advantage of looting opportunities. From the beginning, Séléka used Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries and sought tactical alliances with other armed groups within the CAR. More and more groups joined the Séléka alliance, not because of a shared religion, but because of the alliance’s increasing success in taking control over the country’s territory between late 2012 and early 2013.

While president, Séléka’s leader Michel Djotodia (see Box 1.3) was able to accommodate some leaders of the rebel groups that had joined the Séléka alliance, but as soon as Chad and France pushed him out of power in January 2014, he lost influence over the briefly-allied commanders. Although often still referred to as (ex-)Séléka, in August 2014 the movement rebranded itself as the Front populaire pour la renaissance de Centrafrique.

16 Spittaels, S., op.cit., p. 11.
A few months later a further fragmentation occurred when the *Front populaire pour le redressement* (FPR) was formed. This pattern of frequent splits and realignments may continue – and not only in this camp.\(^{21}\)

**Box 1.3 Michel Djotodia**

Djotodia ousted Bozizé on 24 March 2013 to become the CAR’s first Muslim-born president. His rule ended after only ten months, when his Séléka coalition collapsed. Born in 1949 in Vakaga, he studied economics in Soviet Russia in the 1970s and 1980s and, upon his return to the CAR, worked as a civil servant and ran unsuccessfully for parliament twice. In the 1990s, he moved to his ethnic home area around Bria where he got involved in the mining business and married a close relative of Zacharie Damane. When Bozizé seized power in 2003, Djotodia cultivated a relationship with Bozizé’s son and was awarded the consularship of Nyala, Sudan. Together with Damane, in 2006 he founded the *Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement* (UFDR) and was exiled to Benin and soon arrested. After signing a peace agreement with Bozizé, he was released from custody in February 2008. In 2012, together with Damane and Nouredine Adam, he formed the Séléka alliance which successfully toppled Bozizé in March 2013 and installed Djotodia as president. Since his rule ended in January 2014, Djotodia has been living in exile. In April 2015, he signed a peace deal with Bozizé in Nairobi which would allow both of them to return to their country and to power. However, the current President, Catherine Samba-Panza (see Box 1.1), and foreign partners have not recognised the agreement.

**Anti-balaka and local defence groups**

For decades, in the absence of state security, locals have taken matters into their own hands and set up auto-defence groups. The main auto-defence groups were formed in the north-central and north-western areas as early as the 1990s to fight the *Zaraguina* ‘road-cutters’ (robbers) and armed pastoralists. President Bozizé used these self-defence groups to boost his weak regime forces in fighting these security threats. The so-called Anti-balaka groups that emerged in 2013 in response to Séléka violence have their roots in these local vigilante committees.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{21}\) Weyns, Y., *op.cit.*

When Séléka took control of Bangui in March 2013, many ex-members of the Forces armées centrafricaines (FACA) and ex-presidential guards and gendarmes joined the Anti-balaka groups, which could explain increasing levels of coordination between the groups and their improving strategic thought. However, apart from some coordinated attacks, most importantly the one on Bangui on 5 December 2013, the Anti-balaka have remained highly undisciplined and fragmented.

While many people are thankful to the Anti-balaka for removing Séléka from power, there is widespread opposition to their current conduct. Many of the groups have become small-scale, violent bandits, both in the capital Bangui and in rural areas. Although there are a few powerful Anti-balaka leaders, there is growing disconnection between the groups’ leaders and their rank and file, over which they have increasingly less control. Some ex-FACA members who joined the Anti-balaka are demanding to be reintegrated into the army, while others further their political ambitions. The Anti-balaka have now formed the Parti centrafricain pour l’unité et le développement (PCUD), with Patrice Edouard Ngaïssona (see Box 1.4) as one of its leaders.

**Box 1.4 Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona**

Ngaïssona is a self-proclaimed political coordinator of the Anti-balaka. He started his political career as an official working for the Ministry of Water and Forestry during Patassé’s rule, but was prosecuted and sent to prison for embezzlement. When Bozizé took power in 2003, Ngaïssona was rehabilitated, first as an MP and in February 2013 as Minister of Youth and Sports. When Djotodia seized power a month later he issued an arrest warrant for Ngaïssona for alleged crimes against humanity but did not take him into custody. In November 2014, Ngaïssona proclaimed the dissolution of the Anti-balaka and the formation of a new political party, the PCUD.

**Armed Peulh**

The Peulh (or Mbororo), a nomadic cattle-herding people with origins in West Africa, have been a factor in the CAR’s protracted conflicts for many years. Although

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24 Cf. statements made in most prefectures during the popular consultations: ‘Rapport Provisoire De L’atelier De Restitution Des Consultations Populaires À La Base’, 11.03.2015.
26 The Peulh people are also called Fulani. For the Mbororo, various spellings exist. In the South Sudanese context they are often referred to as Ambororo.
references to the Peulh suggest homogeneity, there are in fact numerous pastoralist
groups that traverse CAR territory. In response to the locally-emerging vigilante
groups, many pastoralists armed themselves to defend their livestock. As in other sub- 
Saharan countries, conflict can erupt between farmers and herdsmen and compensation 
mechanisms have been used to prevent violence spiralling out of control. However, in the 
context of the country’s widespread armed conflict, incentives to peacefully negotiate 
access to water and grazing with unarmed sedentary populations became less pressing 
and these non-violent mechanisms are no longer seen as providing reliable guarantees.

In addition, a few rebel leaders, such as the notorious Baba Laddé (see Box 1.5), are 
Peulh. When Séléka was progressing towards Bangui, some of the Peulh rebel leaders 
aligned with the alliance, which contributed to many citizens’ belief that the Muslim 
pastoralists supported the Séléka in toto. As a result, the Anti-balaka targeted Peulh 
camps. Meanwhile, all sides of the conflict trafficked stolen cattle to markets outside 
the country, notably to Sudan, leaving the pastoralists in a destitute situation and willing 
to take up arms on different sides. The nomadic pastoralists and their way of life have 
been part of the CAR for more than a century. However, having never been accepted as 
full members of CAR society, they have also been a key factor in its history of crises.

Box 1.5 Baba Laddé – ‘Father of the bush’

Mahamat Abdelkadir, the Peulh leader known as Babba Laddé, formed the 
Chadian FPR rebel movement in 1998. After being detained for 11 months in 
Chad, he moved abroad, commanding his militia first from Cameroon, then 
from Nigeria and eventually, following a Chadian offensive in 2008, from the 
CAR’s north-western areas. Once there he recruited and organised infamous ‘road-cutters’ (robbers) or Zaraguina. As cattle theft was the rebel group’s main 
source of income, other Peulh groups became their strongest opponents. In 2012, 
an offensive by the CAR and Chadian governments pushed him further east. 
However, after negotiations with both governments, for some months Laddé 
became a Chadian government official while his second-in-command and many 
of his men joined the Séléka. Following a conflict with the prime minister, Laddé 
again left Chad until his return in January 2014, when he was given a prefecture 
for four months. Relieved of this duty, he went into hiding in the CAR, where he 
was arrested by MINUSCA in December 2014. In January 2015, he was extradited 
to Chad.

27 Interview with Peulh leader, Obo, 17 March 2015.
28 Most notably Ali Darassa, successor of the Chadian leader of the Front populaire pour le redressement 
(FPR), Babba Laddé.
Popular violence

The long-term environment of instability and violence and the absence of judicial structures have resulted in the widespread use of violence to settle personal disputes and vendettas. Mobs ransacked government buildings and Muslim neighbourhoods after Séléka departed,\textsuperscript{30} small, violent bandit groups roam the streets of Bangui and rural areas,\textsuperscript{31} alleged sorcerers and witches are publicly persecuted,\textsuperscript{32} and petty thievery has become common. All these factors contribute to the country’s violent landscape, alongside the more organised armed groups mentioned above.

Short-term economic gain for a few versus long-term development for all

The CAR lacks large-scale industrial productive activities and, although much of the land is very fertile, it is used mainly for subsistence agriculture. Lucrative resources, especially diamonds and gold, are accessed through fragmented, often illegal, trading networks. Successive governments have focused on controlling the mining and forestry sectors, at the expense of creating a conducive business environment. Cattle are a source of wealth, but also a potential source of conflict.

These dimensions of the CAR’s economy seem to be both a cause and outcome of the violently contested nature of the country’s political marketplace. Cause, in so far as the neglect of promoting productive economic opportunities creates unemployment and frustration that can be readily tapped by the leaders of aspiring armed groups, who promise economic returns to those who join them. Outcome, in so far as the rebel leaders demonstrate no will to change this unproductive, extractive economic system, and continue this trend once in power.

Rather than pushing through economic reforms to take advantage of the country’s potential – fertile land and extractable resources –, the various governments have focused on reaping short-term benefits. The diamond sector has been the most profitable, with political actors developing measures to make quick money from the sector. President Patassé, for example, openly continued his diamond business while in power, using his position to balance the market in his favour.\textsuperscript{33} In 2008, President Bozizé launched Operation Closing Gate in which government forces, unannounced

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Interview with the Prefect of Mbomou, Bangassou, 9 March 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Focus group discussion with youth, Paoua, 28 February 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Lombard, L. & Batianga-Kinzi, S., ‘Violence, popular punishment and war in the Central African Republic’, \textit{African Affairs}, 114 (454), 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{33} International Crisis Group, 2010, \textit{op.cit.}
\end{itemize}
and overnight, confiscated diamonds, materials and even private goods from eight of the country’s eleven diamond trading bureaux that were accused of not fulfilling government quotas. Loyal followers and family members controlled the remaining and two newly-created trading bureaux.\textsuperscript{34} Some rebel group leaders such as those of the UFDR and CPJP were directly affected and cited the operation as one of their reasons for forming the Séléka alliance a few years later.\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless, upon gaining power, Séléka leader-turned-President Djotodia and his Minister of Mines continued a similar strategy by putting most mines under Séléka control and signing contracts with international firms in which the proceeds remained unaccounted for.\textsuperscript{36}

**Competing over the spoils**

While control of the government is indeed a powerful tool for personal enrichment, non-state actors are also competing for the spoils, often with each other and at times against or by taking over the government.\textsuperscript{37} When the Séléka alliance was formed, all eastern mining areas were in their hands and, upon seizing power in Bangui, Séléka groups also invaded the comparatively stable south-western mining areas. When Anti-balaka dislodged ex-Séléka from that area they too tried to control the mines. However, unable to access buying offices or Muslim collectors and traders, some Anti-balaka leaders tried to persuade buying offices to return to the area in exchange for ‘protection service’ fees.\textsuperscript{38} Because the space between state and non-state actors engaging in resource extraction remains so fluid, individuals continue their economic engagement throughout the numerous phases of their political or military roles. Economic access in the CAR is thus never centrally regulated and always contested between the different powerbrokers.

Many families – especially in the south-west and parts of the centre-east – rely on artisanal mining to earn a precarious living. The lack of security and a regulated framework, coupled with miners’ lack of capital, means that they are dependent on collectors and buying offices. Collectors are often West Africans who smuggle the diamonds to Cameroon as the diamonds from western CAR are virtually indistinguishable from those of eastern Cameroon. The local diggers lack access to these circles, fuelling dependency and resentment.\textsuperscript{39} The current political crisis and

\textsuperscript{34} International Crisis Group, 2010, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{37} The UFDR under Michel Djotodia and Zakaria Damane took up arms in 2006 and soon controlled the eastern diamond zone around Sam Ouandja (see Weyns, Y., \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 81.); The CPJP commanders, such as Adam Nourredine, had extensive mining experience and set up camp in the Ndélé diamond area (see Southward, F., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 4.).
\textsuperscript{38} Southward, F., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 9.
the CAR’s suspension from the Kimberley Process between May 2013 and July 2015 have caused a price drop for diamonds of up to 50%, making the situation for diggers even more precarious.\textsuperscript{40} Although they are only one of the drivers of conflict, diamonds are a key resource in sustaining militias. In a situation of widespread poverty and perceived discrimination, the promise of economic returns has been a fruitful recruitment strategy for armed groups.

\section*{A fractured society with no common national identity}

Forging a national identity is not easy in such a vast and sparsely-populated country. In the face of continuous conflict and power struggles, identities are often formed in opposition to other groups rather than around common interests. Rather than providing a counterweight to the largely self-enriching politico-military entrepreneurs, civil society associations can be used by aspiring leaders as stepping stones into the more lucrative political sphere.

A lack of a common civil identity has had repercussions in the current crisis. For example, it contributed to the mostly poor Christian majority labelling their somewhat wealthier Muslim compatriots as ‘foreigners’. Other divides include the north-south divide; one between pastoralists and farmers; between young and older generations; and between Bangui and the peripheries. What fuels these divides seems to be a combination of widely held grievances – political or economic – caused by the winner-takes-all nature of the country’s politics.

The few exceptions to an otherwise poorly developed civil society include religious organisations, churches being one of the most powerful civilian players (see Box 1.6). They play a role in peace and reconciliation, with key religious leaders – both Christian and Muslim – acting as role models during the current crisis.\textsuperscript{41} The Archbishop, Imam and Chair of the Evangelist churches formed a national peace committee which was replicated in many towns throughout the country, such as Bangassou, Paoua, Obo and Bossangao. Mediation boards comprised of religious leaders and civil society representatives sought to convince armed actors and those seeking revenge to refrain from violence by engaging them in dialogue.\textsuperscript{42}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{41} Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapailanga hosted the head of the Muslim community of Bangui Omar Kobine Layama to protect him from Anti-balaka violence. Kimberley Process, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{42} Discussions with members of the mediation boards of Paoua, Bangassou and Obo, February and March 2015.
\end{flushleft}
Box 1.6 The Bangassou Diocese as a logistical hub

The lack of secure roads, a banking system, mail services and other basic infrastructure means that international agencies rely on the Catholic Church – which has a presence throughout the country – to provide some services. The Diocese of Bangassou, for example, provides office space for NGOs in Bangassou and Obo. The Chinko project, an NGO which aims to combine wildlife conservation, tourism and hunting, is setting up a park and relies on money transfers between the Dioceses to supply its remote camp. The church in Bangui brings the money to the Diocese in Bangassou and a local Muslim trader delivers it to the remote park. In order to deliver aid, the UN Humanitarian Aviation Service uses the Diocese in Bangassou as their kerosene hub. Many of the small planes need to refuel either before they return to Bangui or to proceed further east. On days when planes are landing, the Diocese handles the fuel, drives World Food Programme staff to and from the airstrip, and handles the administration of passengers and the MINUSCA peacekeepers who secure the airstrip.

While national and local mediation boards probably played a key role in preventing larger outbreaks of hostilities in some areas such as Paoua and Bangassou, their track record is not without flaws. All Muslim board members of the Bangassou Committee, which was seen as the model for other regions, collectively resigned in March 2015. Because of its emphasis on ‘forgiveness’, the board was accused of upholding and supporting the status quo, while Muslim citizens sought justice and compensation. Without the creation of firm and equitable security and justice institutions, such mediation boards could risk becoming another means by which impunity is perpetuated.

The few longer-established country-wide organisations, such as the Organisation des femmes centrafricaines (OFCA), and various youth groups have been unable to bridge divides, often including at a local level, where ethnic, economic and religious tensions persist. OFCA local leaders seem to play key political roles – e.g. its chairwoman in Paoua was at the same time the Révolution et Justice (RJ) rebels’ spokesperson for social affairs, and a Muslim board member in Obo also represented local women in the Forum de Bangui.

Young citizens often refer to the chair of their youth organisation as one of the people they turn to with their problems. Other groups, such as those of motorcycle-taxi drivers or truck loaders, at times cooperate to avoid threats from armed groups or to engage in theft as a means of survival. Special interest groups play a somewhat stronger role in the capital, where unions can quickly mobilise demonstrations to address, for example, salary or student stipend arrears.

43 Interviews with Muslim leaders in Bangassou, 9–11 March 2015.
It is hard to determine the reach and impact of the country’s weak press. With most of the population illiterate, radios have fared somewhat better. Nowadays, however, the national radio station does not broadcast outside the capital because Séléka destroyed the antenna in Bimbo, near Bangui.

Local leaders such as chiefs and headmen are trapped between citizens’ high expectations of the state and its low actual performance. Having had their influence reduced by the French colonial administration – which wanted chiefs as local administrators rather than as traditional authorities – they are left to mediate lower-scale disputes, such as fistfights and conflicts within households, or to engage in dialogue with non-violent cattle groups approaching their territory. Higher-scale crimes, such as killings or serious injury, are referred to government agencies, but often remain unresolved. Threats by armed groups – often originating outside the country’s borders – are beyond the mediation abilities of the chiefs and the defence capabilities of state forces. Auto-defence groups have therefore formed within local communities throughout the country to ward off threats.

The transition phase – attempts to steer the country out of crisis

The current transitional government has been tasked with steering the country out of crisis via a three-step process: 1) popular consultations throughout the country from January to March 2015; 2) a national forum in Bangui in May 2015; and 3) presidential and parliamentary elections that continue to be delayed.

1) The grassroots popular consultations (consultations populaires à la base), which were organised to collect information and elect participants for the Bangui Forum, were hampered by the distrust felt towards leaders in the capital among citizens in the regions. While teams were sent to all regions, and even abroad, for security reasons some could not access a wide popular base, which in practice meant that Muslims were not always part of the discussions. However, the consultations did reveal a widely-held demand for disarmament and reconciliation. More ambiguous was the call for a heavy deployment of state forces in the peripheries, especially at the borders. Citizens in the north-eastern areas – where the Séléka alliance originated – did not share this demand. Very worrisome was the often-heard narrative that peace should only be made with ‘real’ Central African Muslims, a categorisation that makes it very hard to repatriate Muslims who fled during the conflict. Also, participants

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44 During our field research in early 2015, we often heard people say that those Muslims who left are all ‘foreign’ Muslims who collaborated with the Séléka. Few non-Muslim citizens suggested that there might also be innocent Muslim civilians who fled Anti-balaka violence.
expressed heavy distrust of Muslim and nomadic people in most consultations, making it unlikely that state discrimination against Muslims – a factor contributing to the continuous tensions – will be overcome.45

2) The international community held high hopes for the national forum in Bangui. Hundreds of local leaders and regional representatives, along with the MLPC and the Rassemblement démocratique centrafricain (RDC) political parties, attended the forum. However, citing irregularities in its preparations and organisation, several key armed actors did not attend, including the Séléka successor, FPRC,46 and Abdoulaye Miskine’s Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (FDPC).47 The participants met in working groups to discuss justice, security, governance and development, and made numerous recommendations: the freeing of child soldiers;48 disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of armed groups;49 installation of a Commission of Inquiry into cross-border crimes and a Transitional Justice Court;50 the recognition of Muslim holidays;51 and the postponement of the national elections.52

51 RFI, 10 May 2015, Ibid.
While international and national voices expressed many positive reactions towards these outcomes, much will depend on implementation of the recommendations and serious questions remain. Do the signatories representing the armed groups have the authority within their group to implement the recommendations? How can it be ensured that the DDR process will be more successful and lasting than the many former ones (see Chapter 3)? How can the cross-border threats from Chad and Sudan (see Chapter 2) be addressed without their involvement? At this early stage there can only be crystal ball predictions. So far, no signs point towards this forum differing positively from similar national conferences organised during Bozizé’s rule. Rather, violent demonstrations outside the forum point to the deep-rooted animosities among citizens and groups that need a more thorough resolution than a one-week conference can bring about.

3) The date for national elections was rescheduled numerous times, most recently for 18 October 2015, but it is unlikely that this next step in the peace process will take place before the end of the year. Current hold-ups are the lack of census data and incomplete voter registration lists, and the huge number of displaced people within the country and abroad. Only around half of potential voters have been registered, with registration rates in the country’s east (the origin of the crisis) and in the refugee camps (the outcome of the crisis) remaining especially low.\(^53\) The elections are being prepared by the *Autorité nationale des élections* (ANE) and so far will be funded almost entirely by the European Union (EU). To prevent the embezzlement of election funds, as happened during the fraudulent 2011 elections, the EU is holding back funding until the ANE shows signs that it is capable of holding fair elections.\(^54\) The EU and UN electoral support programme continues to support the electoral process,\(^55\) despite worrying signs such as the recent exclusion of (mostly Muslim) refugees from the voting lists.\(^56\)

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54 Interview with Chef du Section de Gouvernance, Secteurs Sociaux & Société Civile à la délégation d’UE Henri Got, Bangui, Central African Republic, 06.03.2015.


2 Foreign interference in security, politics and the economy

The chronic instability and eruptions of violence that characterise everyday life in the CAR are to a great extent influenced by external interests at play within the country’s political arena. Both successive presidents and armed groups have relied on military backing from France or neighbouring countries to either stay in power or successfully launch a rebellion. In addition to official arenas, such as the Communauté économique et monétaire de l’Afrique centrale (CEMAC), and the Communauté Économique des États de l’Afrique Centrale (CEEAC), there is great diversity in cross-border, regional and international engagements in the CAR, which are affected by a number of historical factors. These include: personal ties and animosities between presidents, who may support a neighbour’s rebel militias within their own territories; political and economic relations between the former colonial power and CAR’s leadership; connections and distrust between ethnic groups across borders; and the porousness of certain national boundaries which facilitates illicit trade activities. Rough figures estimate that about 30% of the country’s diamonds and up to 95% of its gold leave the territory illegally.

Regional political interference

As scholar Roland Marchal succinctly remarked, the CAR, by virtue of the central state’s extremely weak presence outside the capital and the country’s location on the continent, is only “the sum of its neighbours’ peripheral hinterlands”. Indeed, part of the regional impact on the sovereign territory of the CAR is the by-product of conflict dynamics that extend from Angola to Libya and from Nigeria to Kenya. Although these regional dynamics do not necessarily have an impact on the heart of the CAR’s political economy.

in Bangui, they greatly disrupt daily life in some of the country’s peripheries. In other instances, neighbouring countries have exported their conflicts and combatants to the CAR, and used its hinterland for their operations. Most often, however, neighbouring states have directly intervened in the national political economy of the country.

**Chad**

Chad is the CAR’s most powerful neighbour. Over the past five years, President Idriss Déby’s dictatorial regime, established in 1991, has stabilised, mainly due to the January 2010 peace agreement between Chad and Sudan. The contributions of the Chadian army to the UN mission in Mali and the fight against Boko Haram have improved Déby’s reputation in international circles. Moreover, the support of France, as illustrated by its renewed military partnership with Chad, the important role played by Déby in the CEEAC, and the non-permanent seat occupied by Chad on the UN Security Council, have given diplomatic weight to the Chadian president.

President Déby has had an interest in keeping control over politics in the CAR, especially in the north-east of the country, where opponents could assemble and pose a threat to his regime. Prior to the 2010 peace agreement, relations between Chad and Sudan were tense and both presidents accused each other of supporting the other’s rebel groups, which used the north-east of the CAR as a transit zone while it supported some of the CAR’s rebellious factions. This regional dynamic resulted in two peacekeeping missions to the north-east of the country between 2007 and 2010 (see Annex II).

When animosity between Chad and Sudan ended, the two presidents stopped

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59 The most recent example is the insecurity in northern Nigeria and the international coalition fighting Boko Haram. With confessional dynamics underlying the last waves of violence in the CAR, rumours about the influence of Salafi Islam and jihadist fighters have spread. See for instance Observatoire Pharos., *op.cit.*, p. 40.


supporting each other’s rebellions, which contributed to relative stability in the area and would ultimately enable the formation of the Séléka alliance.

President Déby has played a decisive role in much of the power dynamics that have characterised the CAR since the early 2000s. It is widely acknowledged that Chad helped Bozizé to move ahead with his rebellion and coup against Patassé in March 2003 by providing troops. During Bozizé’s first years in power, Chad firmly supported the presidency, both militarily and politically. Towards the end, however, it was frustrated with Bozizé’s inability to stabilise his power and when Bozizé replaced some of the Chadian members of his presidential guard with more members of his own Gbaya ethnic group and approached the South African president for support, Déby stopped protecting Bozizé’s presidency. 64 None of the Chadian or African Union forces tried to halt the progress of Séléka in late 2012. It had become clear that the regional leaders would not oppose regime change.

Chad subsequently reinforced its grip on some of the Séléka commanders. 65 When Séléka entered Bangui in March 2013, some, including Bozizé, accused Chad of being directly involved in attacks against his presidential protection units. 66 Shortly thereafter, in Chad’s capital, N’Djamena, the CEEAC laid down the terms of the transition that would be led by Michel Djotodia, who became president. In the weeks after Anti-balaka forces entered Bangui in December 2013, it was Chad again that decided to force Djotodia out of power. This did not mean that the Chadian regime ruptured its links with the various Séléka commanders, many of whom returned to the profitable diamond and gold areas around Bambari, Ndélé and Bria. After Chadian peacekeepers opened fire on civilians killing 24 people under the flag of the African Union-led Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine (MISCA) in late March 2014, the interim president announced an investigation into the events, which prompted Chad to withdraw its troops from MISCA in early April. 67

**Sudan**

Unlike Chad, Sudan has had a less strategic and more indirect impact on the politics and economy of the CAR. The Sudanese government often used the north-east of the CAR, especially the Vakaga prefecture, as a rear base to launch attacks against the Sudan
People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in South Sudan or the rebels in Darfur. Khartoum is also believed to have used the CAR’s hinterland for its support to the Chadian rebellion of Mahamat Nour who was preparing an attack against Déby’s regime in N’Djamena between 2005 and 2006. The CAR’s UFDR rebel alliance also received military training and support from Sudan. This assistance was rooted in the relationship established between Khartoum’s intelligence service and Michel Djotodia, when Djotodia was Consul in Nyala, southern Darfur, from 2005 to 2006.

Since the independence of South Sudan in 2011, areas in the CAR close to the borders with Sudan have hosted several military camps of Darfurian armed groups which had to leave the newly independent country. Khartoum saw its support to Djotodia’s regime as a means of ensuring that rebel groups from Darfur would avoid using CAR territory as a safe haven. Sudan’s support to the Séléka alliance came in different forms, including logistical assistance, political support and facilitation of contacts with friendly regimes. While Sudan was far from the sole supplier of military assistance to the Séléka, there seems to be a consensus among Séléka leaders that Khartoum’s support was crucial. During Séléka’s brief period in power, the security and military operations of the Sudanese government and some of its proxies gained prominence in the CAR’s national political scene, but have since retreated.

Republic of the Congo

While Sudan was never deeply involved in politics, the Republic of the Congo has featured more prominently in the CAR’s political arena. Denis Sassou Nguesso, president of the Congo since 1997, actively participated in the overthrow of the CAR’s President Patassé because Patassé had supported Sassou Nguesso’s opponent, President Pascal Lissouba, during the 1997 civil war in the Congo. In return, Sassou Nguesso funded the regional coalition that brought Patassé down in 2003. Relations between Bozizé and Sassou Nguesso are less clear, although both are known to be

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69 Giroux, J., op.cit.
70 Weyns, Y., op.cit.
71 Weyns, Y., op.cit.
72 Weyns, Y., op.cit.
73 Between 1979 and 1992 he had also been president of the Republic of the Congo.
74 Marchal, R., 2009, op.cit.
Freemasons, as is the Chadian president, Idriss Déby. In the current crisis, Nguesso has taken on the role of mediator, appointed by the CEEAC after the Libreville agreements of January 2013. When Séléka entered Bangui in 2013, Bozizé reached out to Sassou Nguesso for help, but in vain.

In his capacity as chief mediator, Sassou Nguesso managed to reach a ceasefire agreement in Brazzaville on 23 July 2014. This agreement marked the official end of hostilities between the different armed groups involved in the crisis. The reality on the ground, however, was rather different as fighting between ex-Séléka and Anti-balaka militias continued. The Séléka coalition had already been dissolved and the Anti-balaka was focused more on banditry, but Sassou Nguesso nevertheless tried to reach a final agreement by bringing Bozizé on behalf of the Anti-balaka and Djotodia on behalf of the ex-Séléka to sign a peace agreement in Nairobi in April 2015. However, Bozizé was never officially leader of the Anti-balaka and Djotodia’s influence among the ex-Séléka had waned. CEEAC member states and the interim president of the CAR, Catherine Samba-Panza, criticised the process, which her interim government had not been involved in and which would grant impunity to the two main culprits in the recent crisis.

**Gabon**

Sassou Nguesso’s regional influence is strengthened by family ties. After some insistence by Sassou Nguesso, former Gabonese president Omar Bongo, who was married to Sassou Nguesso’s daughter, joined the regional coalition against Patassé. After the 2008 rebellions, Omar Bongo had a role in mediating the *dialogue politique inclusif*. When Ali Bongo took office after the death of his father in 2009, he too continued to play a mediating role in the CAR conflicts. In January 2013, and after some insistence by Chad’s President Déby, he hosted another round of negotiations in Libreville. Ali Bongo, together with his grandfather in neighbouring Congo, served as a mediator. In addition to regional mediation, the leaders of the Republic of the Congo

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76 Nguesso was appointed by the CEEAC after peace agreements between the Séléka and Bozizé were signed in Gabon’s capital, Libreville.
79 The negotiations were held outside any official framework involved in preparing the Bangui Forum and the elections, and the agreement only just fell short of providing an amnesty to the signatories by granting them impunity for the crimes they have committed in recent years. Seyes, A., *op.cit.*
and Gabon have also invested in the supply of peacekeepers in the various international missions, as have Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

**Libya**

The CAR’s strategic location in the heart of the continent sustained Muammar Gadhafi’s interest in the country throughout his rule and provided a fertile ground for his politico-military projects in central Africa. Relations between Libya and the CAR have to be understood in the context of the regional power plays between Gadhafi, the Chadian leaders Hissène Habré and later Idriss Déby, and Sudan’s Omar Al-Bashir. Gadhafi supported the CAR’s Jean-Bédel Bokassa and later Patassé in return for economic concessions and a strategic military position. In 2001, Libyan troops were deployed after an alleged assassination attempt on Patassé. One year later, in 2002, Libyan soldiers, together with the Mouvement de libération du Congo (MLC), pushed back Bozizé’s men who in turn were supported by Chadian President Idriss Déby. The Libyan leader also mediated in the conflicts between Bozizé and Miskine’s rebel group, the FDPC, in 2007.

**South Africa**

Political relations between South Africa and the CAR have strengthened in recent years, and were particularly strong between President Jacob Zuma and former President Bozizé. In 2007, the two countries had signed a secret military agreement. In the midst of the Séléka rebellion in December 2012, the then CAR president sent his son, Jean-Francis Bozizé, in his capacity as Minister of Defence, to renegotiate this agreement and ask Zuma to send troops to stop the Séléka advance on Bangui. However, the 200 South African soldiers who were deployed in Bangui in January 2013 were unable to keep the Séléka from taking power. Thirteen of these soldiers died during the overthrow of Bozizé, shortly after which South Africa pulled out of the country. The CAR’s transitional government tried to rebuild diplomatic ties with South

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85 Le Monde., 4 April 2013, op.cit.

86 Le Monde., 4 April 2013, op.cit.
Africa and take relations between the countries to state level rather than based on the friendship between President Zuma and former President Bozizé.87

Cameroon and the DRC

Less involved in the day-to-day politics of the CAR are two other neighbours, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Nevertheless, Cameroon has given refuge both to Patassé in 200388 and to Bozizé ten years later after each was overthrown.89 DRC president, Joseph Kabila, was part of the regional coalition, comprising Chad, the Republic of the Congo and Gabon, to bring Patassé down.90 While their involvement in the CAR’s national politics may be limited, both Cameroon and the DRC have accepted thousands of refugees into their territories since the beginning of the crisis.91 They are both important contributors to peacekeeping operations in the CAR. With their troops deployed just across their borders, they have their own political and economic interests in minimising the spill-over effects of the CAR’s instability.92

French military, political and economic involvement

While France’s economic interest in the CAR never really developed compared with its involvement in other former colonies such as Gabon, Cote d’Ivoire and Senegal, it has maintained a relatively strong military presence in the country. The CAR’s strategic importance to France initially stemmed from the Cold War and the influence of the USSR and Libya over the continent as a whole, which had to be contained and closely


After the end of the Cold War, keen to maintain its influence, France supported the restructuring and training of the FACA and gendarmerie and, at times, also intervened to support the incumbent regime. Well-known examples are its interventions during the mutinies of 1996, and its cooperation with Patassé’s personal security guards, which were established in Bangui after the 1997 uprising. That same year, however, the French decided to start withdrawing troops from the country and when Bozizé was launching his rebellion to dislodge Patassé they did not come to the rescue.\footnote{International Crisis Group, 2007, op.cit., pp. 10–15.} From 2006 onwards, France provided support in the area of rule of law and governance and placed large numbers of technical assistants in the administration and ministerial cabinets.\footnote{In parallel, France’s Development Agency (AFD) began operating in the CAR in 2006. In recent years it has spread its activities across a wide number of areas: sustainable management of forest resources, infrastructure, education, health and urban planning.}

Under Bozizé, the French again became omnipresent\footnote{Operation Boali, which lasted from 2002 to 2013, had the objective to train and reorganise the FACA and to provide assistance to FOMUC forces. See Hyman, H., ‘Intervention en Centrafrique: exit Boali, voici Sangaris’, BFMTV, 7 December 2013, http://www.bfmtv.com/international/intervention-centrafrique-exit-boali-voici-sangaris-662470.html (accessed 24 April 2015).} and many believe that Bozizé managed to stay in power thanks to the French military. Although French soldiers did not officially engage with rebels on the ground in 2008, experts say it is likely that French Special Forces took part in limited but decisive operations.\footnote{Hansen, A., ‘The French Military in Africa’, Council on Foreign Relations, 8 February 2008, http://www.cfr.org/france/french-military-africa/p12578#p5 (accessed 22 April 2015).} The French also played an important diplomatic and military role regionally. The two international missions in the borderland between the CAR and Chad, in response to spill-over effects from the conflict in Darfur, were instigated by the French to stabilise Déby’s regime in Chad and to prevent attacks on Ndjamena from the CAR’s peripheral north-east.

Two important French companies attempted to start exploiting the CAR’s resources on an industrial scale, until they ran into trouble with the CAR government. Total, for instance, was the majority shareholder in the Société de gestion des hydrocarbures (Sogal) until Bozizé nationalised Sogal in 2007.\footnote{A.A., ‘RCA : l’affaire Total embrase la Cour suprême’, Les Afriques, 3 septembre 2009, http://www.lesafriques.com/droit-fisc-douanes/rca-l-affaire-total-embrase-la-cour-supreme-de-ba.html?Itemid=5 (accessed 27 May 2015).} AREVA, a French – mostly state-owned – nuclear power and uranium-mining company, was granted mining rights in
Mbomou’s Bakouma sub-prefecture in 2008. However, negotiations about the exact terms and conditions of the agreement caused tensions between the AREVA group and the Bozizé Government. These moves affected relations between the French government and Bozizé and may have played a role in its lack or support to Bozizé when Séléka was approaching Bangui.

In Dakar in October 2012, French President François Hollande announced the end of the so-called Françafrique, suggesting that France would no longer militarily intervene in its former colonies. In reality, however, operations in Mali, the CAR and, more recently, against Boko Haram have resulted in an ever-stronger presence by the French military in Africa. Opération Sangaris, which started in December 2013, contributed to ending some of the violence in Bangui and to the restoration of minimal government authority in some key peripheries, such as Bambari and Bria.

Citizens have mixed feelings towards the French military operations. In interviews, many said they feel a debt of gratitude towards the French soldiers for helping to pull the country back from the brink. At the same time, people blame the French for not having done more to prevent the chaos, especially considering their heavy involvement in the country’s day-to-day politics. Public perception is that they could have stopped Séléka had they wanted to. There is a general feeling that France, as the former colonial power, could have done more to support the CAR and that the French came to exploit its resources rather than to develop the country.

**Informal, clandestine and violent cross-border connections**

In addition to the thin lines between diplomatic cooperation and outright political interference, there are more elusive economic and security dynamics that have

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100 Welz, M., *op. cit.*


an impact on the CAR’s peripheries. Foreign armed groups settle in the country’s hinterland\textsuperscript{104} and local rebel leaders receive military support from beyond its porous borders.\textsuperscript{105} Some of the regional actors, most importantly Chad and Sudan, developed informal ties with some of the militias in the north, which in some instances grew into full-scale rebellions. In 2006 and 2007, for example, the UFDR, supported by Sudan and Chadian ‘ex-liberators’, launched their rebellion against Bozizé, accusing him of continuing to neglect the north-east.

Since the start of the Séléka rebellion in 2012, Cameroonian authorities have been focusing on minimising the spill-over of conflict into their own territory, not always successfully. On several occasions Séléka fighters have made incursions into eastern Cameroon, killing Cameroonian soldiers and civilians.\textsuperscript{106} FACA soldiers turned Anti-balaka also crossed into Cameroon to prepare their operations against the Séléka, as did the Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (FDPC), led by the former ally of President Patassé, Abdulaye Miskine (see Box 2.1). This led the Cameroonian government to deploy a rapid intervention battalion (BIR) to the eastern part of Cameroon in December 2013. The clashes between the Anti-balaka and Séléka at its borders presented another security risk to Cameroon.\textsuperscript{107}

**Box 2.1 Abdoulaye Miskine**

Miskine founded the FDPC in 2003, after Bozizé took power. Since 2001 he had been the chief of Ange-Felix Patassé’s presidential security guard, which was composed mainly of Chadians trained and armed by Libya. He fought against Bozizé’s ‘liberators’ – also Chadian mercenaries – alongside the DRC militia of Jean-Pierre Bemba. Miskine and his FDPC joined the Séléka in autumn 2012, but left it in March 2013. Subsequently, he was injured in clashes with the Séléka, lost his right arm and fled to Cameroon. He then joined up with anti-Séléka groups and even developed ties with some that favoured a return of Bozizé. In September 2013, Miskine was arrested by the Cameroonian authorities. In return for liberating 26 hostages Miskine’s men had kidnapped in protest at his arrest, he was released in November 2014.

\textsuperscript{104} The Chadian rebel leader Baba Laddé, for instance, operated in the CAR between 2008 and 2012. See Weyns, Y., *op.cit.*, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{105} An early example of this penetration from outside, without any connection to Bangui, was the activities of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) during the 1980s. See Lombard, L., ‘Sudan Issue Brief: A widening war around Sudan. The proliferation of armed groups in the Central African Republic’. *Small arms survey*, report n. 5, January 2007.

\textsuperscript{106} Weyns, Y., *op.cit.*

\textsuperscript{107} Weyns, Y., *op.cit.*, p. 45.
The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), which originated in Uganda, is a prime example of how a foreign non-state security actor can affect the everyday lives of people living at the CAR’s periphery. Since late 2008, the LRA has caused thousands of people in the east of the country to flee to Obo, the capital of Haut-Mbomou prefecture. In response, the Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF) has been stationed in eastern CAR since 2009, and since 2011 the United States (US) has been supporting the UPDF with ‘special advisers’. All three CAR presidents since 2009 – including Djotodia, despite the Ugandan army’s clashes with Séléka – have formally approved the presence of the Ugandan and US armies on their soil, which operate entirely independently of Bangui. Their supplies and travel, etc., are all organised from their bases in Entebbe, Uganda. The Sudanese government is opposed to the presence of US and Ugandan armies across its borders, which has been one of its motivations in supporting not only the LRA but also the Séléka.

Uganda could be interested in joining the current UN mission, MINUSCA, especially since in practice its troops are already involved in protection in the CAR (see Box 2.2). In addition to its search for the LRA and its leader, Joseph Kony, the UPDF is said to be involved in a variety of business activities. For example, it has the monopoly on transport to South Sudan and is involved in trade. This makes people in the east of the CAR dependent on the Ugandan army not only for their security but also for their goods and supplies.


112 Interview with UPDF field commander, Obo, 18 March 2015.
Box 2.2 Sharing sovereignty in ‘L’ancien Centrafrique’

“If you are travelling to Obo, you will see the old Central African Republic,” remarked a Muslim trader in Bangassou during an interview. He was referring to the fact that Obo, and Haut-Mbomou prefecture in general, has remained untouched by the crisis that hit the country in late 2012. Although the Séléka made two attempts to access the far-east of the country, it failed due to the presence of the Ugandan army (UPDF). Muslims and Christians still live peacefully together and share everyday governance of the town. Even FACA, which has been dismantled in Bangui, is still active in Obo, although 250 of its 300 troops have deserted since the Séléka took power and allowances remained unpaid. The only apparent result of Djotodia’s short stay in power has been the appointment of a new prefect.

The notion of ‘l’ancien Centrafrique’ should, however, be treated with some reservation. Since the LRA came to the CAR in 2009, people in the area have lived in fear, with little support from the government. Today, even though state authorities have a greater presence in Obo then elsewhere in the country, they do not have the means to exert effective power and deliver services. The UPDF, which has been present in eastern CAR since 2009, fulfils many of the tasks that should be carried out by the CAR government. As well as providing security, it also enables citizens to use its hospital and facilitates movement between Obo and South Sudan – although at very high prices. Since what remains of the local police and the CAR army have not received their government allowances and provisions for nearly two years, the UPDF provides fuel and food to keep them from illegally taxing civilians. ‘L’ancien Centrafrique’ may still exist in a few institutional remnants of previous and better times, but even in the old days the government left many of its everyday tasks and responsibilities to others.

Economic exploration and exploitation

Due to the weak penetration of government authorities beyond the capital, Bangui, foreign actors can establish military control over certain areas of the CAR or create tactical alliances with nationals involved in the exploitation of the country’s minerals. Businessmen from Chad, Sudan, Nigeria and Senegal are active in the diamond and gold trade – as traders, middlemen and retailers – and trade in cattle and food items. They also control certain border crossings and roads. Muslim traders from the CAR or of foreign descent play an essential role in many of these economic domains.

Rough figures estimate that about 30% of the country’s diamonds and 95% of its gold leave the territory illegally.113 The people involved in these illicit activities originate from

113 Matthysen, K., op.cit., p. 7.
a great variety of places, including France, Lebanon, China, India and Cameroon.\(^{114}\) Some diamonds and gold from the CAR end up in Europe and (Francophone) African capitals,\(^{115}\) while some are exported to Dubai, Mumbai, Beirut or Tel Aviv.\(^{116}\) Overland, they usually cross the western borders into Cameroon or via the north-east into Sudan.\(^{117}\) In July 2015, the CAR’s suspension from the Kimberley Process was lifted, which means that, subject to certain conditions being met, the official export of rough diamonds from particular areas can resume.\(^{118}\)

The CAR’s abundant resources such as minerals and oil have never been exploited on an industrial scale. Industrial development has always been weak, especially beyond the capital where infrastructure, such as roads and power sources, has never been developed. An even greater deterrent to foreign investors has been the country’s chronic political instability.

One attempt of industrial exploration has been aimed at the oil in Vakaga region. Although drilling started in 1979, the first operating licences were not granted until the 1990s, under Ange-Félix Patassé. These licences were later withdrawn by Bozizé and granted to others.\(^{119}\) A similar process started when Djotodia became president. The long-term validity of concessions has thus been called into question. Insecurity too has been a problem. AREVA, the French uranium-mining company, had its plant in Bakouma attacked by a group of armed men, suspected to be from the FPR, in June 2012.\(^{120}\) It suspended operations and has not conducted any exploration or mining


\(^{118}\) Kimberley Process, op.cit.


in the CAR since 2012. So only a few international companies have taken the risk and paid for concessions based on prospects for high returns. However, so far none of these plans have actually materialised or survived.

**External influences on the country’s future**

In summary, situated as it is at the continental crossroads between West African trade and security dynamics, Great Lakes instability and the power plays between the Horn of Africa, Sudan, Libya and Chad, the CAR’s political economy is to a great extent influenced by a variety of regional engagements – political, military and economic. Many of these engagements straddle the lines between official diplomatic relations, unofficial support to armed groups and other security encroachments, and informal and illicit economic activities. Various presidents and their governments only stayed in power for as long as their regional neighbours and France, the former colonial power, allowed them to. Rebellions also relied greatly on support from neighbouring countries, especially Chad and Sudan. The pool of armed young men from Chad, Sudan and the CAR itself who roam the peripheral borderlands can easily be mobilised. Unsurprisingly, CAR citizens may feel they are no longer in charge of their own destiny.

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3 International support for a forgotten crisis

The CAR’s geopolitical interest to outside actors pales in comparison to other armed hot spots on the continent. International aid has fluctuated according to levels of political instability but has always been very low compared with other sub-Saharan African countries. Although there have been a number of DDR and Security sector reform (SSR) programmes, these have failed due to a lack of funding, coordination and the absence of political will. MINUSCA, the UN’s current and first full-scale peacekeeping operation has yet to prove its ability to deter violence between groups and against civilians. While a Special Criminal Court (SCC) is being set up to operate alongside the International Criminal Court (ICC) to try those ‘most responsible’ for the recent wave of violence, it cannot fill the gap left by the country’s dysfunctional justice system. In order to bring about short-term security and support long-term stability, the international community will need to review the design of the support it offers to the CAR.

Fluctuating levels of international aid

Levels of international support and development aid have fluctuated greatly since the CAR gained independence from France in 1960, often linked to periods of instability and conflict. In fact, while aid to sub-Saharan Africa as a whole went up by more than 50% between 1985 and 2005, aid to the CAR fell by almost 60%. This waning interest by international donors coincided with diminishing international engagement in the CAR. This is visible in Bangui, where only a few donor countries and some African neighbours have official representations. Even France closed its permanent military bases in the CAR from 1998 to 2002. Consequently, despite its widespread underdevelopment, turbulent history and frequent conflicts, the CAR never received much international attention or support, and has long been referred to as an ‘aid orphan’.

123 The most important ones are France, the US, the EU, China and Russia.
A temporary shift came in late 2006 when the World Bank and EU helped clear a large proportion of the country’s massive debt arrears, and UN humanitarian actors lobbied for more support for the country because of knock-on effects from the Darfur crisis. The strategy proved successful: in 2007, the number of international humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the country increased from five to 20, and between 2005 and 2007 total foreign assistance doubled. The European Commission (EC) earmarked a substantial amount for budget support, while also focusing on reinstating state authority and driving the local economy in key towns around the country.

The UN also expanded its activities but focused on targeting governance and crisis prevention (including support to rule of law, SSR and DDR), and poverty reduction. In 2007, the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF) financed the Inclusive Political Dialogue (a process similar to the May 2015 Bangui Forum) and provided funds to UN agencies to implement projects essential for consolidating peace.

Nevertheless, and despite the promise of greater donor engagement, levels of humanitarian and development assistance stagnated from 2008 to 2012. Even the CAR’s nomination to the UN Peacebuilding Commission’s agenda in 2008 failed to mobilise greater international support. Since the overthrow of Bozizé in March 2013 and the violent crisis that ensued, many international partners have again suspended their development activities.

There are various reasons why aid has contributed little in terms of improving the CAR’s development indicators and reducing instability and insecurity. On the one hand, aid levels are simply insufficient to meet the country’s extensive needs and, on the other, recurring insecurity has prevented development agencies from establishing a long-term presence. The aid that is provided mostly goes to the central administration and projects in Bangui, and does not reach the rest of the country. This is partly because central governments are unwilling to distribute aid beyond the capital and partly due to the low absorption capacities of provincial administrations. Lastly, and critically, the fact that most development agency staff remain in the capital means that interventions are not

125 Jauer, K., op.cit.
127 CAR’s Peacebuilding Priority Plan identified three priority short-term areas for funding: 1) SSR and DDR; 2) Good governance, decentralisation and public service provision; and 3) Revitalisation of communities affected by conflict.
128 The UN stopped implementing its Development Assistance Framework programmes in 2013 and agricultural development programmes funded by the African Development Bank, the World Bank and the EU also ended.
129 Less than 20% of 2007 development aid was spent on projects outside the capital. See Jauer, K., op.cit.
necessarily designed for, nor adapted to, local realities and therefore lack the buy-in of local people.\textsuperscript{130}

**DDR and SSR programmes**

The disconnection between intended effect and real impact becomes particularly clear in one of the key focus areas of international donors to the CAR: the security sector. Since the early 2000s, DDR and SSR programmes, led by multilateral donors such as the UNPBF and the EU, have been one of the key components of international efforts in the country. Effort had to take place, however, in a context where the government outsourced many of its security problems to other armed actors and deliberately weakened state security forces because they feared internal resistance.

The first DDR phase, which ran from 2004 to 2007, is said to have collected no more than 400 weapons from the 7,556 ex-combatants who went through the demobilisation phase and received reintegration support.\textsuperscript{131} The rebel groups that emerged during the first DDR programme – the Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie (APRD) and UFDR – signed a peace agreement with the government in June 2008 and were supposed to benefit from the second DDR phase between 2008 and 2012.\textsuperscript{132} However, the political dialogue and negotiations had not been finalised by the time DDR programmes began and many critical issues had not been decided upon. For example, the question of integrating ex-combatants into the national defence and security forces had not been resolved, and during 2010 the government dragged its feet waiting for the 2011 elections before demobilising people.\textsuperscript{133}

Ultimately, the 2008 to 2012 DDR process was insufficiently funded and confronted with too many delays. The funds for the DDR programme were not centralised under the management of one donor, thus different international actors were responsible for supporting different parts of the process. Nevertheless, ex-combatants of the APRD were finally demobilised in 2012.\textsuperscript{134} One year later, a new rebel movement, the RJ, emerged from the remnants of the APRD. The group’s leader, Armel Sayo,

\textsuperscript{130} Akasaki, G., op.cit.
has since joined the transitional government and his combatants have turned to armed robbery while they wait for the next DDR programme. Unsurprisingly, local trust in the effectiveness of internationally-led DDR programmes appears low.\footnote{Lombard, L., ‘Making War, Not Peace’, \textit{The New York Times}, 18 January 2013, \url{http://nytimes.com/2013/01/19/opinion/global/making-war-not-peace-in-central-african-republic.html?_r=0} (accessed 24 April 2015).}

In addition to the DDR operations, several of the CAR’s international partners provided support to reform of the security sector.\footnote{Individual donors (France and UN predominantly) had been involved in stand-alone projects in various areas of the security and justice sector prior to 2007. These were fragmented, small-scale projects.} In April 2008, a comprehensive SSR strategy and a two-year action plan covering all pillars of the security and justice sector was launched.\footnote{Security Sector Reform Resource Centre, \textit{Country Profile: Central African Republic}, 2015, \url{http://www.ssrresourcecentre.org/countries/country-profile-central-african-republic} (accessed 22 October 2015).} President Bozizé and his government enthusiastically endorsed the strategy and action plan, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and EU provided a multidisciplinary team of technical assistants in the six ministries responsible for its implementation.\footnote{Defence, Interior, Justice, Water and Forests, Finance, and the General Secretariat of Government (for the Parliament).} By the end of 2009, 70% of the technical reform activities had been initiated.\footnote{Fuior, T., \& Law, D., \textit{Security Sector Reform in the Central African Republic}. \textit{Chronicle of a Death Foretold}, Centre for Security Governance, Nr. 1, October 2014.} Despite initial public endorsements at the political level, the reform process stalled in early 2010. This was predominantly due to a lack of political will on the part of the government, just as with the DDR programme,\footnote{Fuior, T., \textit{op.cit.}} and also to a lack of substantial, coordinated and sustained support from international partners.

SSR is an inherently deeply political process and, in the case of fragile countries like the CAR, requires a total overhaul of personnel, structures, procedures, policies and budgeting. Such transformation processes can meet resistance from those who benefit from the existing, often (purposefully) dysfunctional and opaque system. The absence of any significant improvement in the capacity, effectiveness or moral conduct of the defence and security forces in responding to the 2012–2014 violence as compared with previous years demonstrates the limited impact of the SSR process. DDR programmes in the CAR have also failed to bring a significant increase in human security and did not manage to successfully integrate ex-combatants into security forces or reintegrate them into local communities.\footnote{N’Diaye, B., ‘Security Sector Reform in the Central African Republic’, in Born, H. \& Schnabel, A., \textit{Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments}, 2009.}
One major problem is that the DDR and SSR programmes were developed and planned independently of each other, despite an intimate link between the two processes. For SSR and DDR programmes to be successful, the tradition of violent takeovers and the culture of impunity must be overcome. The incomplete execution and inadequate funding of SSR and DDR programmes thus far, as well as weak political commitment on the part of the CAR governments, may well have contributed to the current crisis. At the same time, the DDR programmes have raised expectations, with young men today deciding to start fighting in the hope of accessing a DDR scheme afterwards. The May 2015 Bangui Forum again included an agreement in which the various armed groups agreed to a DDR programme.

**Peacekeeping missions and their shortcomings**

Since 1997, the CAR has hosted various regional and international peacekeeping missions under different mandates and flags (see Annex II for an overview). These missions were regionally led – with heavy political, financial and logistical involvement by the French – and never very strong. Most focused on short-term stabilisation, such as restoring order by halting rebellions, violence and criminal activities, while failing to address the root causes underlying the conflict. Their mandates have varied from overseeing the electoral process, protecting the government and reforming the FACA to restoring the judiciary system. In the eyes of local people, the various missions have become indistinguishable since they have followed one another in quick succession, often without changing personnel or local command structures. In everyday speech, people still refer as often to FOMUC (*Force multinationale en Centrafrique*), which ended in 2008, and MICOPAX (*Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique*), which ended in 2013, as to the current UN mission, MINUSCA.

MINUSCA is the first full-scale UN-led peacekeeping operation in the CAR, and its establishment suggests renewed international efforts to stabilise the country. While earlier missions had between 200 and 700 troops, MINUSCA is set to have 13,000 and could be the first mission that, at critical times, is not outnumbered by...
rebels. So far, however, MINUSCA is seen as rather weak, with the same leadership as its political predecessor, the Bureau intégré de l’organisation des Nations Unies en Centrafrique (BINUCA), which failed to have much influence over political circles in Bangui. Following reports of sexual abuse by MINUSCA peacekeepers in Bangui in August 2015, the UN Secretary-General requested his Special Representative’s resignation.

Field commanders are critical of their new mission, explaining that MINUSCA’s bureaucracy makes it difficult to make a rapid response when needed. They are also concerned that deployment of the international police and gendarmerie components of the mission, both crucial for the justice system, is taking longer than hoped. Further, although local people see the peacekeepers as contributing to stability, they also complain of soldiers abusing their daughters, smuggling minerals and profiting from small-scale business. In Paoua, for example, the Cameroonian contingent was running a bar where it sold the cheapest beer. Citizens blame soldiers for enjoying the good life in town rather than patrolling the rural areas where people feel most at risk. Local sentiments towards these international missions, including MINUSCA, are therefore mixed.

A lack of justice in the CAR

There has been little effective international assistance to the CAR’s dysfunctional state justice system, which remains severely under-resourced, corrupt and prone to political interference. Indeed, there is no legal system at all in most parts of the country since many prosecutors and judges remain in Bangui rather than working in the towns to which they have been appointed. All parties to the current conflict have committed grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law but remain unpunished. Numerous amnesty laws have enabled political and military actors to continue acting

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146 FOMUC failed to prevent Patassé’s overthrow in 2003, MICOPAX was unable to stop the advance of the Séléka on Bangui in 2012 or 2013, and MISCA could not prevent the violence between ex-Séléka and Anti-balaka spiralling out of control in Bangui in 2013.
147 Interview with a European consul in Bangui, 20 February 2015.
149 Interview with MINUSCA site commander, 1 March 2015 Paoua, and deputy site commander, 9 March 2015, Bangassou.
with impunity\textsuperscript{151} while local people’s needs for reparation and compensation fail to be met.

The early 2015 grassroots citizen consultations organised ahead of the Bangui Forum demonstrated that justice and reparation are priorities for CAR citizens, ahead of reconciliation and pardons. The final report also concluded that France, Chad and Sudan’s roles in the conflict must be explained and crimes punished. With the support of the UN, the CAR’s transitional government launched a national reconciliation strategy in May 2014 accompanied by an emergency action plan.\textsuperscript{152} The strategy’s five themes include mediation, social cohesion and a process of truth, justice and reparations, the latter through a truth and reconciliation commission. Seeking to establish such mechanisms suggests a ‘blue-print’ approach to transitional justice since these mechanisms\textsuperscript{153} appear to be largely copied from other countries.

In April 2015, the overwhelming majority of the Transitional Parliament adopted a draft law to establish a SCC to try those ‘most responsible’ in parallel with the ICC – which, in September 2014, had accepted a request to open an investigation into crimes committed in the CAR since August 2012.\textsuperscript{154} This will be the first time that a hybrid court has been established, with the ICC investigating alongside the SCC.\textsuperscript{155} Once interim President Samba-Panza enacts the law, the SCC will be set up in stages. As the grassroots consultations showed, citizens are concerned about whether foreign nationals who committed crimes in the CAR will face prosecution.\textsuperscript{156} Rights groups are concerned that the National Transitional Council removed a provision against immunity which had been

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\textsuperscript{151} Amnesty laws were adopted on 30 May 1996, 15 March 1997 and 13 October 2008. The 13 October 2008 amnesty law was so broad that it protected all members of the defence and security forces, leaders and members of politico-military groups operating within and outside of the CAR, as well as key political figures for all crimes except those over which the ICC had jurisdiction (war crimes, crimes against humanity, etc.) committed since 15 March 2003.

\textsuperscript{152} The emergency action plan places emphasis on building the capacity of local leaders in peaceful conflict resolution and restoring local authority (\textit{chefs de quartiers et de villages}).

\textsuperscript{153} Except for the Special Criminal Court, which in terms of structure is a novelty.


part of the proposed law. Nevertheless, they are hopeful that the court will speed up justice for victims, and that it will strengthen the national judiciary’s capacity. Whether the SCC will indeed speed up justice remains to be seen. Important questions about the nature of the CAR’s recent conflict, its history and the use of violence need to be posed before determining what objectives to pursue in the field of justice and reconciliation. The CAR’s limited financial resources (both domestic and foreign), the dilapidated state of the formal justice system, and people’s lack of faith in the justice system will further complicate the installation of effective justice measures.

Implications for future engagement

Given the CAR’s fragility due to decades of chronic poverty, violence and lack of governance, international assistance is vital during the current transitional period. To attain the desired political stability and security reforms, without neglecting sectors such as infrastructure and basic services, the international community will need to carefully examine the priorities of its desired impact. The recent deployment of a fully-fledged UN peacekeeping operation could provide an entry point for positive change. However, to attain political stability, difficult reform dilemmas must be tackled head on.

Long-term engagement is needed to shape an environment in which civilian and political party agendas override armed interests in leading the transformation process. Support to credible elections at an appropriate time could be followed by support to political and civil institutions in the capital and also, importantly, in the provinces. Funding should include support to DDR and SSR programmes and be sufficient to ensure that efforts within and between the programmes are well coordinated.

Strengthening the central state risks amplifying the disconnection between Bangui-centred elites and the widely-spread population in the country’s neglected peripheries. There therefore needs to be a shift away from the capital towards decentralised governance and development through local administration, service delivery and justice provision in the provinces. These efforts could, however, be undermined by a lack of commitment and buy in at the national level.

While social cohesion has been strained by former episodes of conflict, this last peak of violence has largely shattered it. Only the trial of perpetrators, including those from Chad and Sudan, and compensation payments to victims of the recent violence can end

157  HRW, 2015, op.cit.
the culture of impunity. Justice and compensation measures should, however, be paired with reconciliation efforts between the country’s profoundly divided groups to avoid framing the conflict in religious terms.

Since the CAR’s instability is also the product of interference by foreign armed groups and governments, efforts within the CAR form only part of any solution. International support to the CAR should therefore include a component that stimulates political dialogue between regional actors and restrains them from destabilising the country and transgressing its borders.

Despite the massive needs across every sector, limited international aid has been committed to the CAR. This calls for strategic and coordinated choices for the donor community to ensure that efforts can have a visible impact.
### Annex I Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Self-government within French Equatorial Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Independence of the CAR with David Dacko as president</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>The CAR becomes a one-party state with Dacko’s <em>Mouvement d’Évolution Sociale de l’Afrique Noire</em> (MESAN) as the only party</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Dacko ousted by army commander Jean-Bédel Bokassa</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Bokassa ousted by Dacko</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Dacko deposed in a coup by army commander André Kolingba</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Amnesty for all political party leaders declared</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Elections with Kolingba as unopposed winner</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Ban on political parties lifted by Kolingba under national and international pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Multiparty presidential and parliamentary elections, later annulled by the supreme court on the grounds of widespread irregularities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Ange-Félix Patassé elected president in elections declared free and fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Patassé re-elected president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Coup attempt by Kolingba and army chief of staff François Bozizé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Coup attempt by Bozizé, subdued with help of Libyan forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Bozizé seizes Bangui, declares himself president and dissolves Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>New Constitution approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Bozizé declared winner of fraudulent presidential elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 February</td>
<td>Abdoulaye Miskine’s rebel group FDPC signs peace accord with President Bozizé in Syrte, Libya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 June</td>
<td>Two of three main rebel groups (UFDR and APRD) sign peace accord which includes DDR provisions with CAR government in Libreville, Gabon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 September</td>
<td>Parliament adopts amnesty law to further peace talks between rebels and government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 December</td>
<td>Government-rebel peace deal with provision of consensus government and elections in March 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 January</td>
<td>National unity government with rebel representatives nominated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 February</td>
<td>Ugandan LRA rebels cross into the CAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 January</td>
<td>Presidential and parliamentary elections, Bozizé declared winner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 August</td>
<td>Rebel group CPJP finally signs the 2008 Libreville peace agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 August</td>
<td>UFDR and break-away CPJP factions form the Séléka rebel alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 January</td>
<td>Ceasefire Agreement between Séléka rebels and government in Libreville, Gabon, lasts for a few days only (Government says Séléka responsible)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 March</td>
<td>Séléka rebels overrun the capital and seize power, Bozizé flees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 May</td>
<td>Diamond trading ban imposed by the Kimberley Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 August</td>
<td>Séléka leader Michel Djotodia sworn in as president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 September</td>
<td>Djotodia dissolves Séléka alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 January</td>
<td>Djotodia forced to resign over criticism that he failed to stop sectarian violence, Samba-Panza takes over as interim president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 January</td>
<td>7 key political parties form the AFDT alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 July</td>
<td>Séléka and Anti-balaka forces agree to a tentative ceasefire at talks in Brazzaville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 August</td>
<td>Prime Minister Mahamat Kamoun tasked with leading the new transitional government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 September</td>
<td>UN formally establishes their peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 January</td>
<td>Interim government rejects ceasefire deal signed in Nairobi by Bozizé and Djotodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Jan-March</td>
<td>Grassroots consultations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 May</td>
<td>Forum de Bangui</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Annex II  Missions in the Central African Republic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Mission</th>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Organised by</th>
<th>Mandate</th>
<th>Nr. of Troops</th>
<th>Origins of Peacekeepers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>International and Regional peacekeeping missions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MISAB</strong> Mission interafricaine de surveillance des accords de Bangui</td>
<td>08.02.1997 – 15.04.1998</td>
<td>Initiated by France; Political authority: Gabon</td>
<td>Restore peace and security after military mutinies; disarmament of former mutineers</td>
<td>600 troops; France supported the operation logistically and financially</td>
<td>Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Mali, Senegal and Togo; after an escalation of violence in June 1997 temporarily French troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEN-SAD Force</strong> Communauté des Etats sahélo-sahariens</td>
<td>03.2001 – 12.2002</td>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Protecting the CAR government</td>
<td>200 troops</td>
<td>Libya, Djibouti, Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOMUC</strong> Force multinationale en Centrafrique</td>
<td>12.2002 – 07.2008</td>
<td>CEMAC; although French initiative</td>
<td>Protecting the CAR government; support FACAs; initially focused on Bangui; as of 2006 deployed to major cities</td>
<td>380 – 500 troops</td>
<td>Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon and Chad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the Mission</td>
<td>Time period</td>
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<td>Mandate</td>
<td>Nr. of Troops</td>
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<tr>
<td>EUFOR CAR</td>
<td>03.2014 – 15.03.2015</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>Stabilising security situation in Bangui; protecting refugees and aid workers</td>
<td>700 troops</td>
<td>Estonia, France, Slovakia, Poland; Czech Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINUSCA Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Centrafrique</td>
<td>15.09.2014 – ongoing</td>
<td>UN Security Council resolution 2149</td>
<td>Protection of civilians, support for accountability measures</td>
<td>13,000 troops (including observers, staff officers, police personnel, etc.)</td>
<td>Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Gabon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUMAM CAR</td>
<td>16.03.2015 – ongoing</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>Supporting the CAR authorities in preparing a reform of the security sector with respect to the FACA</td>
<td>60 staff</td>
<td>France, Romania, Sweden, Netherlands, Austria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**French Military Operations in the Central African Republic**

<p>| Opération Boali | 10.2002 – 12.2013 | France | Training and reconstruction of FACA, assistance to FOMUC | 450 – 500 troops | France |
| Operation Sangaris | 05.12.2013 – ongoing | France | Support of MISCA / MINUSCA, assistance to disarm rebel factions | 1,600 troops; 02.2014 400 troops extra. Downsizing started 03.2015 | France |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Mission</th>
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<th>Nr. of Troops</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Missions on Chad, CAR in response to border crisis with Darfur</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EUFOR Chad/CAR</strong></td>
<td>01.02.2008 – 15.03.2009 (replaced by MINURCAT)</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>In the East of Chad and the North-East of CAR: protection of civilians, facilitate humanitarian aid, contribute to the protection of UN personnel, and premises</td>
<td>3.700 troops deployed, strategic reserve of 600 stationed in Europe</td>
<td>France, Ireland, Poland, Sweden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **MINURCAT**
Abbreviations

AFDT  Alliance des forces démocratiques de la transition
APRD  Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie
CAR  Central African Republic
CEEAC Communaute Économique des États de l’Afrique Centrale
CEMAC Communaute économique et monétaire de l’Afrique centrale
CPJP Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix
DDR Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DRC Democratic Republic of Congo
EC European Commission
EU European Union
FACA Forces armées centrafricaines
FDPC Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain
FOMUC Force multinationale en Centrafricain
FPR Front populaire pour le redressement
FPRC Front populaire pour la renaissance de Centrafricain
GDP Gross domestic product
ICC International Criminal Court
LRA Lord’s Resistance Army
MICOPAX Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafricain
MINUSCA Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Centrafricain
MISCA Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine
MLC Mouvement de libération du Congo
MLPC Mouvement de libération du peuple centrafricain
NGO Non-governmental organisation
OFCA Organisation des femmes centrafricaines
PCUD Parti centrafricain pour l’unité et le développement
RJ Révolution et Justice
SCC Special Criminal Court
SPLA Sudan People’s Liberation Army
SSR Security sector reform
UFDR Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement
UN United Nations
UNPBF United Nations Peace Building Fund
UPDF Ugandan People’s Defence Force
US United States