



# Central African Republic – Trapped in a Cycle of Violence?

Causes, Conflict Dynamics and Prospects for Peace

Gabriella Ingerstad

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## Sammanfattning

Den våldsamma konflikten i Centralafrikanska republiken (CAR) har haft förödande konsekvenser för befolkningen med hundratusentals på flykt och tusentals döda. Trots att konflikten har lett till en polarisering mellan kristna och muslimer så är beskrivningen av konflikten som religiös eller etnisk förenklad och ger begränsad vägledning till det internationella samfundet i dess ansträngningar att ge stöd till en fredlig lösning på konflikten.

Denna rapport belyser de underliggande orsakerna till våldet och visar att orsakerna snarare står att finna i en misslyckad demokratiseringsprocess, avsaknad av utveckling och ekonomiska möjligheter, avsaknaden av en fungerande stat samt maktkamp inom den politiska eliten. En detaljerad beskrivning av konfliktförloppet mellan december 2012 och mars 2014 ger en kronologisk översikt över aktörernas beteenden, de utlösande faktorerna till våldet samt den förändrade konfliktdynamiken.

Resultaten visar att internationella partners kan stödja landet och dess befolkning på en mängd olika sätt på kort, medellång och lång sikt, genom att tillhandahålla säkerhet och stödja utvecklingsinsatser.

Nyckelord: Centralafrikanska republiken, Séléka, Anti-Balaka, Frankrike, MINUSCA, MISCA, EUFOR RCA, Afrika, Centrala Afrika, Tchad, konfliktdynamik, etnisk rensning, våld mot civila, afrikansk säkerhet, humanitär kris

## Summary

The violent conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) has had devastating consequences for the population, with hundreds of thousands displaced and thousands dead. While the violent conflict has resulted in polarisation of Christians and Muslims, description of the conflict as religious or ethnic is simplistic and does little to guide international actors in their efforts to find a peaceful resolution in CAR.

This report shows that the underlying causes of the violence lie instead in the failed democratisation process, the lack of development and economic opportunities for segments of the population, the absence of a functioning state and power struggles within the political elite. A detailed narrative of the events unfolding between December 2012 and March 2014 provides a chronological description of the actors' behaviours, the triggers of violence and the changing conflict dynamics.

The analysis shows that international partners can support CAR and its population in a number of ways in the short, medium and long term by providing security and supporting development efforts.

Keywords: Central African Republic, Séléka, Anti-Balaka, François Bozizé, France, MINUSCA, MISCA, EUFOR RCA, Africa, Central Africa, Chad, conflict dynamics, ethnic cleansing, violence against civilians, African security, humanitarian crisis

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## Abbreviations

AQIM	Al-Qaida in Islamic Maghreb
APRD	Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie
AU	African Union
BINUCA	Bureau intégré des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en République centrafricaine
CAR	Central African Republic
CEMAC	Communauté économique et monétaire de l'Afrique central
CLPC	Combattants pour la libération du peuple centrafricain
CNT	Conseil national de transition
CPJP	Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix
CPSK	Convention patriotique du salut du Kodro
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DDRRR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
EU	European Union
EUFOR -RCA	European Union Force in Central African Republic
FACA	Forces armées centrafricaines
FDPC	Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain
FOI	Swedish Defence Research Agency
FOMUC	Force multinationale en Centrafrique
FPR	Front populaire pour le redressement
FROCCA	Front pour le retour à l'ordre constitutionnel en Centrafrique
FUC	Front uni pour le changement
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICC	International Criminal Court

ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IGO	International Governmental Organisation
IPD	Inclusive Political Dialogue
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MEO	Mutually Enticing Opportunities
MHS	Mutually Hurting Stalemate
MICOPAX	Mission de consolidation de la paix en République centrafricaine
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MISCA	Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique
MLCJ	Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice
MOR	Mutually Obtained Rewards
MSF	Médecins sans frontières
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PK 12	Point kilométrique 12
RFI	Radio France international
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UFR	Union des forces républicaines
UFDR	Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General

# Map of the Central African Republic



Source: UN, (2011), *Central African Republic*, Map No. 4048, Rev.4, United Nations, November 2011, Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section





# 1 Introduction

Over the past year, the Central African Republic (CAR) has experienced an unprecedented humanitarian and security crisis. Since December 2013 more than 700 000 people in a population of 4.6 million have fled their homes.<sup>1</sup> According to humanitarian organisations, thousands of people have been killed and more than half the population is in acute need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup> Insecurity, lawlessness and chaos have spread throughout the country.

Violence and instability are not new features of the CAR landscape. The country has been ravaged by coups, rebellions and violence since it gained its independence from France in 1960. A relatively successful democratic transition took place in CAR in the beginning of the 1990s after three decades of authoritarian rule.<sup>3</sup> However, only a few years later the undemocratic behaviour of democratically elected leaders and the political manipulation of ethnic identities sparked army mutinies, attempted coups and rebellions.<sup>4</sup> Over the last 20 years, the mismanagement of the economy and the personalisation of the state have led to a constant economic decline, and the state has failed to provide the population with the most basic services. Rebels, criminals and armed groups, including the state security forces (or lack thereof), constituted a threat to the population long before the current crisis. This persistent security dilemma has created a cycle of violence, which escalated in 2013 and reached unprecedented levels in the beginning of 2014.

The ongoing violent conflict in CAR has been described in terms of a religious conflict between Christians and Muslims. This simplified narrative does little to provide a deeper understanding of the actors, the causes and the dynamics of the conflict. A struggle for power between political entrepreneurs has transformed into a communal conflict, with certain leaders using xenophobic rhetoric as a way to mobilise segments of the disenfranchised population. The north-eastern parts of CAR have historically been considered to be inhabited by foreigners. With the Séléka coalition coming from the marginalised north-eastern parts of CAR, the deep-rooted fear of foreign, Arab or Chadian invaders from the north was evoked among the population in the south. The crimes committed by Séléka during its time in power led to the emergence of the Anti-Balaka militia. By the beginning of 2014 the violence had turned into ethnic cleansing, with the militia deliberately targeting and killing Muslim civilians, considering them foreigners and accomplices in Séléka abuses. As a result, and with the transitional

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<sup>1</sup> ECHO (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Mehler (2005).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 118, 122.

government and the international community paralysed, a massive exodus has emptied CAR of most of its Muslim population.

## 1.1 Aim, Case and Research Questions

The purpose of this report is to provide an analysis of both the structural causes and the new dynamics of conflict in CAR. The country has been caught in a cycle of violence over recent decades and the ongoing violent conflict must be understood as a continuation of previous conflicts. In that sense, some of the structural causes of the conflict are not new. There is, however, a new dynamic in terms of the scale of violence and the behaviour of actors. This has created a dynamic which needs to be properly understood in order for the international community to be able to support a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

The aim of the report is to improve the understanding of the underlying causes of the ongoing violent conflict, as well as the new conflict dynamic. The report provides an analysis of the underlying causes, as well as a detailed description of the events between December 2012 and March 2014. The chronological description of the events serves two purposes. First, providing an overview of the events unfolding during the above-mentioned period is an objective in itself. Second, it serves as a basis to identify factors that changed the conflict dynamics, which also explain the escalation in violence.

By identifying factors that can explain the outbreak and escalation of violence, the objective is to provide suggestions on entry points and highlight opportunities for international support to a peaceful resolution. The factors analysed are derived from a conceptual framework presented later in this chapter. The report also points out pitfalls and challenges that may hamper a long-term resolution to the current conflict.

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- *What factors can explain the outbreak and escalation of violence in CAR between December 2012 and March 2014?*
- *How did the conflict dynamic change over time between December 2012 and March 2014?*
- *What are the main challenges to a peaceful resolution of the violent conflict?*
- *How can the international community contribute to a long-term solution to the current conflict?*

## 1.2 Scope and Definitions

December 2012 provides a starting point for the analysis of the changing conflict dynamics, since that is when the rebel coalition Séléka first appeared as a formal group, articulated its objectives and challenged the incumbent president. The emergence of a coalition of rebels from the north-east after ten years of rule under President Bozizé created a new dynamic. By March 2014 the power balance had changed and the Anti-Balaka militia was considered the main threat to peace by the CAR government and international partners, as their attacks against Muslim civilians had led to an exodus of the country's Muslim population and continued insecurity throughout the country. In order to understand the current state of insecurity, the evolution of the conflict dynamics from the emergence of Séléka until the recent accusations of ethnic cleansing must be taken into account.

However, to grasp the background reasons and properly understand the violent conflict, it is also necessary to take into account and consider events that took place before December 2012. The structural causes have their roots in events that happened prior to December 2012 and are analysed in Chapter 2, before the analysis of the conflict dynamics.

There is a difference between academic, political and legal definitions of violent conflict. It is important to acknowledge that the way in which a violent conflict is defined may have implications for the response from third parties and may affect the options available. The Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP) makes a distinction between state-based armed conflict, non-state conflict and one-sided violence. The difference lies in the actors who are parties to the conflict, i.e. the presence/absence of government or an organised armed group in the conflict, and in the target group, i.e. the government, an organised armed group or civilians.<sup>5</sup> In the case of CAR, all three types of conflict were active during the period in question, so the terms violent conflict, armed conflict and conflict are used throughout the report. In the detailed narrative, the actors and their behaviour are analysed, which highlights the type of conflict that was going on during that particular time.

## 1.3 Sources

The analysis is mainly based on secondary sources, such as academic articles and reports from NGOs and IGOs. Official documents, statements and press releases from governments and other involved actors were also analysed. In addition, news articles, radio broadcasts, TV shows and posts on social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, were used. Using social media often gives an interesting

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<sup>5</sup> UCDP (2014).

picture of the views of different parties, but the data must be handled with caution. It is not always easy to determine the accuracy of photos and comments posted in social media. For example, live updates from human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) were used here to obtain information on recent events. These organisations report daily through their Twitter accounts.

The media coverage over the last few months has been quite massive, resulting in a substantial amount of news articles, film clips and photos documenting the conflict. There are some difficulties with relying on secondary sources, in particular since there is a risk of disinformation and propaganda coming out in the middle of an ongoing violent conflict. One problem is that many organisations and actors involved in the conflict may have an interest in painting a particular picture of the developments on the ground in order to get attention, funding or political gains. For example, the picture HRW gives of the conflict is significantly different from that France provides on the website of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both actors have their reasons for emphasising certain aspects.

Bearing in mind that the information coming out of a conflict zone is often extremely biased and subjective, the aim in this report was to triangulate the information coming from the ground by comparing the accounts from international and local human rights organisations, local media, international media and organisations such as the United Nations (UN), *Médecins sans frontières* (MSF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). One limitation when it comes to this is that there is a risk of the original source of many reports being the same, in particular since CAR is a country that has largely been forgotten by international actors and media for a long time.

The limitations associated with not being able to conduct research on the ground cannot be fully addressed. However, a number of interviews were conducted, both over the phone and in person, with scholars and practitioners who are experts on CAR or who have recently visited the country. In the report all interviewees are anonymous, but a list of interviews conducted is provided in the references. In addition, research conducted in CAR in 2011 informed the author's understanding of the background and the context in which the conflict is taking place.

## **1.4 Research Method and Design**

This study comprises a within-case analysis of the ongoing violent conflict in CAR. Hence, the focus is on the connection between several independent

variables in one single case.<sup>6</sup> A set of interconnected explanatory factors, which are presented in detail below, are analysed to explain the outbreak of conflict. The variables in this conceptual framework are analysed to identify the structural causes of the conflict and the changing conflict dynamics. The conceptual framework is also used to identify possible solutions to the conflict.

The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part provides an analysis of the structural causes of the conflict to describe the ‘stage’ on which the ongoing violent conflict has unfolded. In this part of the analysis, a number of variables from the conceptual framework are analysed. The second part of the analysis consists of a detailed narrative of the conflict dynamics evolving from December 2012 until March 2014; the events, the issues and the actors’ behaviour and attitudes are examined. This type of process tracing permits the researcher to throw light on how an event came about.<sup>7</sup> Using this method permitted analysis of both the structural causes and the conflict dynamics from a scientific point of departure in this report. The findings are presented in Chapter 4, which in turn forms the basis for the recommendations in Chapter 5.

## 1.5 Conceptual Framework

Wallensteen points out that when conflict is viewed as a dynamic phenomenon, the process of escalation is the focus, although structural features are also part of the analysis.<sup>8</sup> Central issues are the conflict *attitudes*, the conflict *behaviour* and the conflict *issues* (the incompatibility).<sup>9</sup>

In order to explain the changes in attitudes and behaviour of the actors, the analysis in this report is based on a macro-level conceptual framework developed by Ohlson, which is used to identify the factors behind the violent conflict.<sup>10</sup> The conceptual framework does not provide any new theoretical findings; it is based on previous scientific research on causes of war and conflict resolution, with the aim of bringing together these two strands of research. The objective is to explain the outbreak of war, but also the ‘outbreak of peace’, i.e. war cessation and peace building.<sup>11</sup>

The so-called *Triple-R triangle* comprises a set of interconnected explanatory variables for the outbreak of war or the outbreak of peace. Following Ohlson’s argumentation, variations in the *Triple-R triangle* also explain the variations in the so-called *Triple-M triangle*. The *Triple-M triangle* is a concept that entails

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<sup>6</sup> George & Bennett (2004), pp. 178-179.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> Wallensteen Peter (2007), pp. 32-36.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ohlson (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Ohlson (2008), p. 134.

different degrees of peace and the various phases of conflict resolution and peace building. Hence, in order to achieve peace, the factors in the *Triple-R triangle* must be addressed. In addition, during the different phases of the peace building process, the way in which these factors are addressed determines the prospects for successful conflict resolution.

The above framework is used in the present analysis to identify the causes of the violent conflict and describe the conflict dynamics. In addition, the framework is used to identify possible entry points for supporting a conflict resolution process and establishing peace.

### 1.5.1 The Triple-R Triangle – Causes of War and Peace

Ohlson's framework is based on the argument that people take up arms because they have *Reasons* in the form of grievances and goals, they have *Resources* in the form of capabilities and opportunities, and they have *Resolve* because they perceive no other alternative to violence in order to address grievances and achieve goals.<sup>12</sup> These categories constitute three distinct and interacting clusters of variables that explain changes in behaviour and attitudes of conflicting parties, which can explain both outbreaks of war and outbreaks of peace.<sup>13</sup>

#### Reasons – Grievances and Goals<sup>14</sup>

Reasons have to do with cleavages in society generated by one or several specific issues and concern what the conflict is about. There are two types of reasons: background reasons and proximate reasons. Background reasons refer to underlying, structural causes, whereas proximate reasons refer to causes or triggers with a temporal closeness to the outbreak of conflict.<sup>15</sup>

Background reasons constitute long-term enabling conditions. Not addressing them properly may impact negatively on the prospects for durable peace and stability, although these structural causes do not need to be addressed in order to terminate an armed conflict. There are a number of background reasons or structural causes that need to be taken into account when analysing the causes of armed conflict.

Protracted economic and political subordination to a powerful and exploitative external actor contributes to a weak state structure. As a result, the state's capability to govern effectively and deliver public goods to citizens is inadequate, which creates internal systems of governance that become exclusionary, discriminatory or otherwise generate inequality in terms of their

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 134-136.

<sup>14</sup> This section is based on Ohlson (2008), pp. 136-138, 140.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

political, economic or identity dimensions. Often this discriminatory behaviour emerges on the basis of group identity and historical antagonism between groups and is frequently linked to patrimonial rule and high levels of corruption.

Legitimacy is a critical variable when attempting to explain the relative weakness and strength of states. Legitimacy is negatively affected when the expectations of the population do not correspond to reality; the wider the legitimacy gap, the greater the risk of intra-state armed conflict. Vertical legitimacy refers to the population's perception of those in power and their right to rule. When those in power are providing what the population expects legitimacy is high, when not it is low. Horizontal legitimacy refers to the attitudes and practices of individuals and groups within the state towards each other. When the acceptance between groups is as expected, the legitimacy is high, when not it is low.

The above factors relate to what are often called legitimate grievances and goals. Leaders of rebel groups and governments alike can also be motivated by greed in terms of wanting more power or money for personal gain. Although this may be considered immoral, it is a form of grievance.<sup>16</sup> War itself may then represent an alternative order for obtaining and distributing power and profit, which is not possible in peacetime. The objective of winning the war is then replaced by economically driven interests in continued fighting and instrumentalisation of violence.

Proximate reasons, or triggers, are what trigger the outbreak of armed conflict. There has to be a sudden widening in the legitimacy gap, either through a change for the worse with respect to one or more of the background reasons, or through a sudden shock to the whole system, for armed conflict to break out. Proximate reasons are about relative worsening, not absolute levels.

### **Resources – Capabilities and Opportunities<sup>17</sup>**

The resources factor refers to a range of concrete items. First, military capability in the form of soldiers, weapons, supporters and money is necessary to fight a war. Second, organisational capabilities are related to the leaders' mobilisation and networking capabilities. Finally, the opportunity structure, i.e. environmental and contextual constraints and possibilities, determine what resources are available to the conflict parties.<sup>18</sup> Some aspects of the opportunity structure are fixed, such as mountainous terrain, poor road networks or deep jungles, whereas others are dynamic. Sudden political instability at the centre of a weak state, the possibility to loot easily marketable goods or the presence/absence/appearance of diasporas, foreign governments or foreign rebels willing to supply the conflict

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<sup>16</sup> With this definition, Ohlson distances himself from the greed and grievance debate. See Ohlson (2008), p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> This section is based on Ohlson (2008), pp. 138-140.

<sup>18</sup> Ohlson (2008), p. 139.

parties with money, weapons, training, safe havens etc. change the opportunity structure.

### **Resolve – Violence as the Only Solution**<sup>19</sup>

Resolve concerns the range of perceived alternatives and the assessment of costs and benefits of different alternatives. Facts about reasons and resources of both ‘self’ and ‘other’ are filtered through the belief system of the leaders of the conflict party. Then the leader is left with one or more perceived alternatives concerning whether or not to go to war. Finally, the leader mobilises or manipulates followers, turning them into resources willing to make sacrifices to achieve the objective. Resolve is crucial for behavioural and attitudinal change and is a central factor in explaining why a societal conflict escalates into organised large-scale violence.

### **1.5.2 The Triple-M Triangle – The Conflict Resolution Process**

A conflict resolution process is about harmonising the Triple-R triangle of different actors in order for them to choose cooperation instead of conflict, i.e. changing the reasons, the resources and the resolve of the actors involved.<sup>20</sup> Third parties play a significant role in this process. By using their leverage and problem-solving capacities to address the factors in the Triple-R triangle, third parties can change the behaviour of the conflict parties and support the conflict resolution process.<sup>21</sup> Three general phases can be distinguished: the *dialogue phase*, the *implementation phase* and the *consolidation phase*.

#### **The Dialogue Phase – Short Term**<sup>22</sup>

The first or dialogue phase occurs when the belligerents start to perceive continuing the war as too costly and decide to enter dialogue and negotiate. This perception, referred to as a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), is most often the result of power politics, force, coercion and fear, and is not voluntary at the outset. A change in *Resources* may push the actors into an MHS. A third party can exert military, diplomatic or political pressure in order to force the parties into negotiations. However, in order to change the conflict attitudes of the belligerents and reach an agreement, constructive incentives which also address the *Reasons* for the conflict are needed. Factors that provide an attractive outcome, such as a compromise solution, a reduction of the fears of peace and a perception of peace as beneficial, have been termed Mutually Enticing Opportunities (MEO). A third party can support the conflict parties by mediating

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<sup>19</sup> This section is based on Ohlson (2008), pp. 140-142

<sup>20</sup> Ohlson, (2008), p. 144.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>22</sup> This section is based on Ohlson (2008), pp. 146-147.



and providing solutions which address the grievances and goals of the adversaries.

### **The Implementation Phase – Medium Term**<sup>23</sup>

MEO can also produce a genuine change of minds and attitudes. The key relationship to worry about during the implementation phase, in terms of maintaining peace, is the relationship between and within the elite of the conflict parties. During the second phase, the grievances and goals of the conflicting parties must be addressed, i.e. the *Reasons* the parties took up arms and the agreements have to be translated into concrete actions. Because of the lack of trust between the parties, credible guarantees for implementation are needed. External actors can assist by providing third-party security guarantees during the demobilisation phase. Political participation is also a crucial factor, as some kind of power-sharing, proportional representation or decentralisation would provide incentives for the warring parties to lay down arms. With regard to elections, some sort of consensus-seeking exercise on the rules of the political game can create popular legitimacy. On the other hand, early elections could provide an incentive for the elite to lay down arms and compete at the ballot box. However, in cases where the political system means that the winner takes all, there is a risk of early elections resulting in a relapse into war. Short-term fears concerning physical security, political power, economic well-being and recognition of identity may hamper the implementation process. Finally, three factors are proven to be particularly damaging for successful implementation of peace agreements: the presence of spoilers, the actions of neighbouring governments or other actors in supporting these spoilers, and the presence of spoils of war, i.e. easily marketable goods such as diamonds.

### **The Consolidation Phase – Long Term**<sup>24</sup>

During the consolidation phase, the main issue is to prevent a relapse into war. Mutually Obtained Rewards (MOR), such as improvements in political participation, access to political influence, more distributive justice, improved economic conditions, and improvements in security and the rule of law, must be experienced by people. The *Resources* for war must be constrained, and the *Reasons* addressed in order to reduce the legitimacy gap and increase the *Resolve* for peace. A crucial factor as regards this phase is the relationship between the elite and the people. The perception that people are better off when peace has prevailed hinders power-hungry leaders from mobilising support for a return to arms. Manoeuvring space for cultural identity needs to be created through reconciliation and retribution for former enemies to fully accept each other's right to exist.

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<sup>23</sup> This section is based on Ohlson (2008), pp. 147-151.

<sup>24</sup> This section is based on Ohlson (2008), pp. 151-152.

## **1.6 Outline**

Chapter 2 provides an analysis of the background reasons for the violent conflict in CAR in order to enhance the understanding of the political and security context in which the events between December 2012 and March 2014 unfolded. A detailed narrative of these events is given in Chapter 3, where the conflict dynamics (the attitudes, the conflict behaviour and the conflict issues) are analysed. Chapter 4 provides conclusions based on the findings from the analysis highlighting the causes of the conflict. The report concludes with a discussion in Chapter 5 about the main challenges to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and how the international community can support such efforts.

## 2 A Weak State in a Volatile Region

Before getting into the analysis of the conflict dynamics unfolding since December 2012, it is necessary to understand the background reasons and underlying structural conditions. Structural conditions and factors refer to the structure of the society and the relationships within the state and society, as well as with external actors. In this chapter the factors from the three clusters of variables in *Reasons*, *Resources* and *Resolve* are analysed. The following analysis provides an understanding of how structural conditions have laid the foundations for the violent conflict that is currently tearing the country apart. The results show that four structural factors are particularly important to highlight in the case of CAR: the *absence of a state*, the *north-south divide*, the *internal political dynamics* and the *unstable region* in which the country is situated.

### 2.1 The State Stops at PK 12

The state in CAR has always been absent in rural areas and has been described by researchers as an “improbable state”<sup>25</sup> or a “Phantom state”<sup>26</sup>. This absence of state institutions outside the capital is illustrated by the local expression *the state stops at PK12*<sup>27</sup>, i.e. the state does not reach further than 12 kilometres from central Bangui.<sup>28</sup> This goes back to the colonial era, when the French administration was more or less absent in this part of the empire. The French referred to the colony as the “Cinderella of the empire” or the “trashcan colony”.<sup>29</sup> No state structure, administration or infrastructure was built and France leased most of the colony to concessionary companies.<sup>30</sup>

Although formally independent from France in 1960, years of protracted economic and political manipulation by the former colonial power followed.<sup>31</sup> France has been omnipresent in the CAR administration since independence, when French advisers retained the authority for governing.<sup>32</sup> France had full control of the politics in the country and *de facto* ruled CAR between the fall of Bokassa in 1979 until the first democratic elections in 1993.<sup>33</sup> The colonial

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<sup>25</sup> Lombard (2012a), p. 129.

<sup>26</sup> ICG (2007).

<sup>27</sup> PK is short for point kilométrique. PK12 indicates a spot situated 12 kilometres from central Bangui (PK0).

<sup>28</sup> Bierschenk & de Sardan (1997).

<sup>29</sup> Lombard (2012a), p. 129.

<sup>30</sup> Lombard (2014).

<sup>31</sup> ICG (2007); Lombard (2014).

<sup>32</sup> ICG (2007); Lombard (2014), p. 129.

<sup>33</sup> ICG (2007); Marchal (2009).

legacy has contributed to the weakness of the Central African state and its inability to govern effectively.

The weakness of the state and the absence of state institutions in large parts of the country have resulted in a complete failure on behalf of the government to provide the population with the most basic services, such as health care, education and infrastructure.<sup>34</sup> At the end of 2011, MSF reported that CAR was experiencing a chronic medical emergency and had done so for a long time. In most parts of the country there is no existing health system.<sup>35</sup> The population has felt neglected and abandoned by the government and has been left to fend for itself in a situation of permanent insecurity, facing threats from the state security forces, rebel groups and criminals.<sup>36</sup> The state security forces have been neither willing nor able to provide the population with security and the government has shown very little interest in protecting the population from the numerous threats it faces. Rather, the state security forces have themselves constituted one of the main threats to the security of the population.<sup>37</sup> This has created a legitimacy gap, since the state has failed to address the grievances and needs of the population.

However, the absence of the state does not mean that a void exists in its place. Informal actors have instead occupied the public spaces where the state has failed to extend its power.<sup>38</sup> Research shows that in rural CAR, the political arenas have been structured around three so-called “power poles”: the village chiefs, the farmers’ organisations and religious institutions.<sup>39</sup> However, these societies are characterised by segmentation and weak institutionalisation in comparison with other African pre-colonial traditional local structures of political power, chieftainship having never been strongly developed in CAR.<sup>40</sup>

In many parts of the country governance has been exercised by rebels and self-defence groups, which have provided the population with at least a minimum of security.<sup>41</sup> With the absence of state institutions, the only visible option for many people has been to join a rebel group, in order to provide themselves and their families with basic needs such as security.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ingerstad (2010).

<sup>35</sup> MSF (2011).

<sup>36</sup> Lombard (2012b); Spittaels & Hilgert (2007).

<sup>37</sup> Ingerstad (2012b).

<sup>38</sup> Bierschenk & de Sardan (1997); Lombard (2012a).

<sup>39</sup> Bierschenk & de Sardan (1997), p. 443.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 444.

<sup>41</sup> Persson (2008).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.2 The “Foreign” North-East

The main societal cleavage in CAR has for many years been an ethno-regional one, with a clear north-south divide.<sup>43</sup> The north-eastern parts of the country have been particularly marginalised and neglected.<sup>44</sup> The absence of the state and the government’s inability to provide security and public goods to the population in the north-east has been one of the reasons for the emergence of rebel groups.<sup>45</sup> Between 2005 and 2012, a number of rebel groups emerged, merged and split in the northern parts of the country. Rebel fighters interviewed in the north and north-eastern parts of the country mentioned three main reasons for joining the ranks: poverty, that the state security forces had attacked them or their families, and that the state had abandoned them and they wanted to get the attention of the state.<sup>46</sup> Poverty and the lack of employment opportunities, however, seem to have been the main reasons why people joined the rebels, with membership viewed as a job opportunity.<sup>47</sup>

History is important in this regard; the French colonial administration was centralised to the capital, while the north-eastern parts of the country were considered to belong to “*l’Afrique inutile*”, i.e. the useless parts of Africa.<sup>48</sup> The north-east, inhabited mainly by Muslims, was declared an autonomous district and considered populated by “foreigners”.<sup>49</sup> The history of invasion by foreigners is deeply rooted in the Central African collective memory, ranging from the invasions of the Muslim slave traders in the nineteenth century to the exploitation by French concessionary companies during the colonial era.<sup>50</sup>

Today, people from the country’s southern regions frequently refer to people from the remote north-east as foreigners, regardless of their actual citizenship.<sup>51</sup> Recent inflows of Muslim migrants from Cameroon and Chad have created tensions and have evoked a widespread fear that the country is being invaded by foreigners, as it once was by the trans-Saharan raiders and French concessionaires.<sup>52</sup> In addition, hatred of Muslims, who are the main traders in CAR, has grown as a consequence of the lack of economic opportunities. The Muslim traders are perceived as being better off than the rest of the population, including civil servants who often do not even receive their salary.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mehler (2011), p. 119.

<sup>44</sup> ICG (2007).

<sup>45</sup> Berg (2008), p. 24; Spittaels & Hilgert (2007)

<sup>46</sup> Lombard (2012a), pp. 341-342.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 342-346.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> Lombard (2014).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> De Waal (2013).

<sup>52</sup> Lombard (2014).

<sup>53</sup> Seminar ICG, April 2014.

## 2.3 Patronage and Political Entrepreneurs

From the beginning of the 1980s, President André Kolingba started to manipulate tribalism for political ends and politicised ethnic identity.<sup>54</sup> This practice, to favour and give privilege to certain groups on the basis of ethnic affiliation, was passed on to his successors Ange-Felix Patassé and François Bozizé.<sup>55</sup> As a result, a national army has never been established, which is one of the main reasons for the cycle of violence that is still ongoing today.<sup>56</sup> Several attempts to reform the security sector and the army, the *Forces armées centrafricaines* (FACA), have failed. The security sector reform (SSR) process, which was launched in 2008, stalled due to lack of political will, among other things.<sup>57</sup>

Patronage politics and patrimonial rule have created a political system where a small elite engages itself in power struggles, in order to access resources and reward its supporters.<sup>58</sup> Some individuals have decided to take up arms and mobilise parts of the population in order to enrich themselves through illicit trade in diamonds, whereas individuals in power have used the state revenues to enrich themselves and buy political loyalty.<sup>59</sup> The behaviour of the elite, i.e. the practice of exclusionary and privatised politics, has resulted in neither political parties nor rebel groups managing to adequately represent the interests of the population.<sup>60</sup>

Research shows that political parties have been marginalised and that violence has become the established mode of competition in CAR.<sup>61</sup> Taking up arms has been the only way to access power, leading to militarisation of politics. Political entrepreneurs use or create political parties and military organisations interchangeably for their own purposes.<sup>62</sup> Rebellions have been triggered by a combination of grievances among the marginalised population and elite power struggles in the capital.<sup>63</sup> Side-lined politicians, sometimes in exile, proclaim themselves leaders of local self-defence groups, using the legitimate grievances of the population to further their own personal interests. In most cases rebel leaders are disconnected from the rank and file of the movement they are said to represent.<sup>64</sup> Instead, those political entrepreneurs are often linked to the ruling elite through complex informal networks.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> ICG (2007), pp. 7-9.

<sup>55</sup> ICG (2007).

<sup>56</sup> RFI (2014a).

<sup>57</sup> Ingerstad (2012b).

<sup>58</sup> Lombard (2012b).

<sup>59</sup> ICG (2010), pp. 2, 15-19.

<sup>60</sup> Mehler (2011).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ingerstad (2012b).

<sup>64</sup> Lombard (2012a, 2012b).

<sup>65</sup> Lombard (2012b); Persson (2008).

## 2.4 Regional Conflict Complexes

In recent decades, CAR has been ravaged by permanent rebellions, *coups d'état* and instability.<sup>66</sup> Since 2003, when after two years of rebellion the army chief of staff Bozizé ousted the government, numerous rebel groups have challenged him.<sup>67</sup> These rebel groups often comprise foreign fighters, both mercenaries and soldiers from the state security forces of the neighbouring states, notably Chad and Sudan.<sup>68</sup> The fluid loyalties of many foreign combatants have played a significant role, as the fighters provide the rebel movements with resources in terms of armed men.<sup>69</sup>

### Chad

All the neighbouring countries have their own interests in CAR, ranging from economic interests to security concerns.<sup>70</sup> Chad has a particular role in CAR and its president, Idriss Déby, has made sure that the regime in Bangui has acted in accordance with Chadian interests.<sup>71</sup> Chad exerts a strong influence in CAR and the government in N'Djamena has interfered in CAR politics for decades, considering this southern neighbour its backyard.<sup>72</sup> Ever since Bozizé took power with the support of Chad in 2003, he was completely dependent on Déby's support, even for his own security.<sup>73</sup> The Chadian engagement in CAR is connected to both economic and security interests. In addition to the strong economic ties between Chad and the Chadian traders in CAR, many people in the political and military leadership in N'Djamena own cattle that cross the border into CAR.<sup>74</sup>

One particular security concern for N'Djamena has been the presence of Chadian rebel groups on Central African territory, which has constituted a direct threat to the Chadian government.<sup>75</sup> This is somewhat ironic, since many of the problems in CAR are actually a spill-over from the internal problems in Chad, not the other way around.<sup>76</sup> Chad has contributed to the peacekeeping operation led by the regional organisation Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the *Mission de consolidation de la paix en République centrafricaine* (MICOPAX), which has been present in different forms in CAR since 2002. However, Chadian soldiers and police have had a reputation for using excessive

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<sup>66</sup> ICG (2007).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Debos (2008); HRW (2007); ICG (2007); Small Arms Survey (2007).

<sup>69</sup> Debos (2008).

<sup>70</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> ICG (2007).

<sup>73</sup> Africa Confidential (2013a).

<sup>74</sup> Seminar ICG, April 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Africa Confidential (2013a).

force against civilians, and the population in the CAR capital Bangui expressed strong anti-Chadian sentiments during interviews conducted by the author in 2011.<sup>77</sup>

### **Porous Borders and Spill-over**

Goods and people flow freely in the borderlands of Chad, Sudan and CAR, as the governments lack the capacity to control their borders.<sup>78</sup> This has contributed to the destabilisation of the region. The indirect transfer of small arms and light weapons by defeated, demobilised or “visiting” armed forces from neighbouring states is part of the illicit trade. Most of the weapons in CAR have come into the country from Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan.<sup>79</sup> Spill-over effects from the conflicts in those countries have had a negative impact on the security situation in CAR.<sup>80</sup> The government does not control the territory and the absence of the state security forces in large parts of the country has created a safe haven for armed groups of all kinds.<sup>81</sup> The presence of transnational criminal gangs and foreign rebels contributes to the dire security situation. Chadian rebels use CAR as a rear base and in the south-east, the Ugandan rebel group, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), has terrorised the population for more than five years. The Ugandan army operates in south-eastern CAR in cooperation with US Special Forces under a mandate from the African Union (AU).<sup>82</sup> Heavily armed transnational criminal gangs from neighbouring Cameroon and Chad, so called *Zaraguinas*, harass the population in the western parts of the country.<sup>83</sup>

## **2.5 Summary**

The absence of the state outside the capital of CAR, the historical neglect of large parts of the country and the unwillingness and incapacity of the government to address the grievances of the population have eroded the legitimacy of the state. Instead of protecting the population, the state itself has become one of the main threats to people’s security and welfare. The legacy from the colonial era and the protracted exploitation on behalf of the former colonial power have impeded the development of a functioning state.

The absence of state institutions, in particular in the marginalised north-east, generated a number of rebellions between 2008 and 2012. Widespread poverty

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<sup>77</sup> Interviews in Bangui, 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Giroux, Lanz & Sguaitamatti (2009).

<sup>79</sup> Berman & Lombard (2008).

<sup>80</sup> Marchal (2009).

<sup>81</sup> Ingerstad (2012b).

<sup>82</sup> For more on this, see Ingerstad (2012a).

<sup>83</sup> Berg (2008), p. 23.



and lack of economic opportunities, as well as the absence of the state and abuse by the state security forces, have pushed many people into joining the rebels. The north-east has been considered inhabited by foreigners since the colonial era and a clear north-south division has created fear among southerners that foreigners from the north will invade southern CAR.

The self-interest and greed of individuals within the elite, in combination with patronage politics and lack of *de facto* democracy, have also infringed on the legitimacy of the government and the state. The people who are in control of the state apparatus do not represent the interests of the population. The state has become personalised and is used for the benefits of those in power, which has created a predator state. Political entrepreneurs from the excluded elite mobilise parts of the population to forward their own personal agendas. Taking up arms is the only way to obtain political influence and gain control of the state, which provides an opportunity for individuals to enrich themselves and their entourage. Some of these entrepreneurs personally benefit from a continued armed struggle, as it provides them with the opportunity to loot resources.

The situation has been further aggravated by the instability in the region and the uncontrolled border areas. CAR borders other conflict areas, war-torn countries and weak states, such as Chad, DRC, South Sudan and Sudan. As a result, mercenaries, foreign rebels, criminals, weapons and illicit goods are crossing the porous borders in both directions. Some of the governments in the neighbouring countries have also provided direct support to parties to the conflicts which have erupted over the years. This, in combination with the absence of state security forces in most parts of the country, provides an opportunity structure for those who want to take up arms and challenge the government.



## 3 A New Cycle of Violence

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the evolution of the violent conflict between December 2012 and March 2014. The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1 is used to identify the reasons behind the outbreak of violence and to explain changes in behaviour of parties to the conflict. The sections are structured chronologically in order to provide a detailed account of the conflict dynamics.

### 3.1 François Bozizé – Ten Years in Power

The exclusionist politics under the ten years Bozizé was in power created a situation whereby the CAR government became increasingly isolated both internally and in the region as a whole.<sup>84</sup> In 2001 the army chief of staff, General François Bozizé, had launched a rebellion with the aim of ousting the elected President Ange Félix-Patassé, accusing him of corrupt exclusionary politics and of favouring his own ethnic group.<sup>85</sup> In 2003 Bozizé took power with the help of Chad. Following the 2005 presidential elections, which Bozizé won, a series of rebellions<sup>86</sup> emerged in north-western and north-eastern parts of the country.<sup>87</sup> The rebels demanded that the government address the grievances of the population in the marginalised northern parts and include representatives in the government.<sup>88</sup> Peace agreements were reached with most of the armed groups and an Inclusive Political Dialogue (IPD) was initiated in 2008. However, promises to create an inclusive government and address the grievances of the population never materialised. Instead, Bozizé tightened his grip on the financial and security sectors, neglected the poor state of the security forces and was accused of rigging the 2011 presidential elections, while poverty and insecurity were growing throughout the country.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> ICG (2007), Ingerstad (2012b), p. 29.

<sup>86</sup> Those include: Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie (APRD); Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (CPJP); Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (FDPC); Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice (MLCJ); Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (UFDR); and Union des forces républicaines (UFR). See Ingerstad (2012b), pp. 62-63.

<sup>87</sup> ICG (2007).

<sup>88</sup> ICG (2007); Mehler (2011); Spittaels & Hilgert (2007).

<sup>89</sup> ICG (2013a), pp. 1-5.

## 3.2 Old and New Foes

### 3.2.1 Séléka

#### Grievances and Goals

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), the rise of the rebel coalition Séléka in December 2012 was a direct consequence of the government's failure to address the problems in north-eastern parts of CAR.<sup>90</sup> Séléka, which means alliance in the local language Sango, is a heterogeneous alliance made up of dissatisfied armed groups that have been part of the political and security landscape in CAR for a long time.<sup>91</sup>

For example, the *Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement* (UFDR) was created already in 2006 as a reaction to the government's marginalisation of the north-east.<sup>92</sup> Some of the armed groups forming the Séléka coalition had previously been fighting each other; UFDR and the *Convention des patriots pour la justice et la paix* (CPJP) clashed in 2011 over control of diamond areas.<sup>93</sup> The latter was created in 2008 in order to protect the ethnic group Runga from attacks by the Gula-dominated UFDR.<sup>94</sup> Another example of the divisions within Séléka is the *Convention patriotique du salut du Kodro* (CPSK), which is actually a splinter group of the CPJP created in 2012 in protest against the signing of a peace agreement between the rebels and the government.<sup>95</sup>

Ironically, many of those who helped Bozizé take power in 2003, the so-called "liberators", were also part of the Séléka rebellion, as they felt betrayed by Bozizé who had failed to pay them as promised.<sup>96</sup> Many Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries joined the rebels for economic incentives, as did dissatisfied Central African diamond collectors who reportedly helped finance the movement.<sup>97</sup> In addition, many young unemployed Central Africans from the north-east joined Séléka for economic reasons.<sup>98</sup>

On 10 December 2012, Séléka seized three towns in north-eastern CAR: Ndele, Sam Ouandja and Ouadda.<sup>99</sup> On 12 December 2012, Séléka articulated a number

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<sup>90</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Spittaels & Hilgert (2007), p. 10.

<sup>93</sup> Ingerstad (2012b), p. 62.

<sup>94</sup> ICG (2010), pp. 15-19.

<sup>95</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>98</sup> Al-Jazeera (2013b).

<sup>99</sup> ICG (2013c).

of demands and asked the government to respect previous peace accords<sup>100</sup> and implement the recommendations from the IPD in 2008<sup>101</sup>. Other demands included economic compensation for the rebels, requests for inquiries into war crimes and the liberation of political prisoners.<sup>102</sup>

The demands from Séléka show that the source of the rebellion has its roots in the failure of the government to fulfil the commitments from previous peace accords. It is important, however, to keep in mind that Séléka was largely the result of personal ambitions from side-lined politicians who were looking for vengeance and a return to political power. Michel Djotodia, the leader of the rebel coalition, is a case in point; a former civil servant who also worked for the CAR government as the Consul in Darfur, Sudan, following a falling out with the CAR leadership he created the rebel group UFDR.<sup>103</sup>

Within less than a month, Séléka had taken control of most of the CAR territory.<sup>104</sup> By 30 December 2012, the rebels controlled the strategic town of Sibut, situated 160 kilometres from Bangui, and threatened to take the capital.<sup>105</sup> The poor state of the CAR army and the absence of security forces throughout the country facilitated the advancement of the rebels.

## Triggers

After the 2011 elections Bozizé's family members entered politics, strengthening the family's grip on power, in particular over important sectors such as finance, security and mining.<sup>106</sup> At one time, more than 20 of the 105 members of parliament were closely related to Bozizé.<sup>107</sup> The control over finance and security posts gave a certain level of stability for the Bozizé regime, albeit a fragile one. It all fell apart as family members started to fight among themselves.<sup>108</sup> In July 2012, Bozizé fell out with one of his closest allies, Finance and Budget Minister Sylvain Ndongingai, who was dismissed accused of staging

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<sup>100</sup> Between 2007 and 2012, most of the rebel groups in Séléka had signed peace accords with the government. See Ingerstad (2012b), pp. 62-63.

<sup>101</sup> The Inclusive Political Dialogue, IPD, was held on 8-20 December 2008 in Bangui and was the third attempt in two decades to overcome the recurring instability in CAR. Representatives from the presidential majority in the national assembly; four rebel movements (APRD, UFDR, MLJC and UFR); opposition parties; non-aligned political parties; the civil service; and civil society, agreed on a broad set of recommendations that constituted a road map for better governance, improved security, revitalised economic growth and fair legislative and presidential elections in 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Séléka (2012).

<sup>103</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 8.

<sup>104</sup> ICG (2013c).

<sup>105</sup> RFI (2012c).

<sup>106</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> Africa Confidential (2013a).

<sup>108</sup> ICG (2013), p. 5.

a coup.<sup>109</sup> Bozizé became more and more isolated, and the government became increasingly fragile.

In addition to the exclusionary politics of the ruling family, the failure to implement the promised disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes in the north-east triggered the rebellion.<sup>110</sup> Over the last ten years, DDR programmes have either not been implemented at all or have failed to contribute to peace and stability.<sup>111</sup> Paradoxically, these programmes have even contributed to the conflicts. DDR programmes have had unintended consequences, contributing to the instability, as they have given young people an incentive to actually engage in armed struggle for economic benefits.<sup>112</sup> Joining a rebel group has been the only way to benefit from a DDR programme, which in turn has been one of few ways of making a living.

### 3.2.2 External Actors

#### Chad

As a reaction to the Séléka advancement towards Bangui, N'Djamena sent hundreds of troops to CAR on 18 December 2012.<sup>113</sup> Chadian troops intervened but only prevented the rebels from taking the capital, a possible sign that Chad wanted Bozizé to negotiate, not to help him stay in power.<sup>114</sup> Already in May 2012 Déby had visited Bangui to convince his Central African counterpart to negotiate with the opposition.<sup>115</sup> The Chadian President had supported Bozizé since he took power in 2003, but in 2012 tensions between the former allies were rising.<sup>116</sup> Déby was unhappy with Bozizé neglecting his advice and, as a consequence, Déby ordered the Chadian soldiers in Bozizé's presidential guard to return to Chad in October 2012.<sup>117</sup> As described in Chapter 2, the CAR regime was dependent on Chadian support, both politically and in terms of security provision.

#### ECCAS and MICOPAX

The sub-regional organisation ECCAS held an emergency summit in N'Djamena, Chad, on 21 December 2012, where the regional leaders condemned any military solution to the crisis, called for an immediate cessation of hostilities

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<sup>109</sup> Africa Confidential (2013a).

<sup>110</sup> ICG (2013a) p. 6.

<sup>111</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>113</sup> BBC (2012).

<sup>114</sup> RFI (2012b).

<sup>115</sup> Centrafrique-presse (2012).

<sup>116</sup> RFI (2013a).

<sup>117</sup> Africa Confidential (2013b).

and decided to reinforce the regional peace support operation, MICOPAX, with Chadian troops already deployed on the ground.<sup>118</sup> The ECCAS decision was echoed by the African Union (AU), which also called for increased international support in order to solve the crisis.<sup>119</sup>

In 2008, ECCAS had taken over the peacekeeping mission that had been in the country since 2002<sup>120</sup> as it transformed into MICOPAX.<sup>121</sup> By 2012 the mission comprised almost 700 troops, including police and military personnel deployed in the capital and in three towns outside Bangui.<sup>122</sup> The mandate was to protect civilians; secure the territory; contribute to the national reconciliation process; and facilitate political dialogue.<sup>123</sup> However, the number of troops was insufficient to provide security in the vast country and its impact has been limited.<sup>124</sup> Despite these limitations, the deployment of MICOPAX to the town of Damara reportedly stopped further Séléka advancement in December 2012.<sup>125</sup>

## France

Despite several demands from Bozizé, France refused to intervene to save the incumbent regime.<sup>126</sup> In 2010, CAR and its former colonial master revised a defence agreement from 1960.<sup>127</sup> By then France had changed its policy in the former colony from one of actively intervening militarily to focusing on the security of French nationals.<sup>128</sup> As an example, the French contingent in CAR, *Operation Boali*, which had been in place since 2002, has its base at the international airport in Bangui and is mainly concerned with the protection of the French population in CAR.<sup>129</sup> President François Hollande clearly stated that the reinforcement of French troops in December 2012 was aimed at protecting French citizens, not defending the regime.<sup>130</sup> France did not act to stop the Séléka advancement, something that could also be interpreted in light of the ongoing military cooperation between France and Chad in Mali. The relationship between Chad and the regime in Bangui had become increasingly tense and Chad is a close ally to Paris in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel. The close military

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<sup>118</sup> ECCAS (2012).

<sup>119</sup> AU (2012).

<sup>120</sup> In 2002, the *Communauté économique et monétaire de l'Afrique centrale* (CEMAC) deployed the *Force Multinationale en Centrafrique* (FOMUC).

<sup>121</sup> For an overview of all peace support operations in CAR between 2008 and 2012, see Ingerstad (2012b), pp. 64-65.

<sup>122</sup> ICG (2013c); Ingerstad (2012), pp. 64-65.

<sup>123</sup> Europeaid (2012).

<sup>124</sup> Ingerstad (2012b), p. 44.

<sup>125</sup> ICG (2013a), pp. 11-12.

<sup>126</sup> *Le Parisien*, (2012).

<sup>127</sup> Ingerstad, (2012), p.35.

<sup>128</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>129</sup> French Ministry of Defence (2013).

<sup>130</sup> ICG (2013a) p. 10.

cooperation between Chad and France may explain why the latter would act in a way that converged with the policy of N'Djamena.

### South Africa

Left alone by Chad and France, Bozizé turned in desperation to a rather new ally, the South African government. South Africa and CAR had signed a military cooperation agreement in 2007, which was renewed for another five years in December 2012.<sup>131</sup> In early January 2013, South Africa sent 400 troops in order to ensure the security of the regime, something that was criticised by Séléka and ECCAS alike.<sup>132</sup> The South African incentives to intervene outside their normal zone of engagement are not clear.<sup>133</sup> Allegedly, parts of the South African ruling elite had interests in the mining and oil sectors in CAR, which could possibly explain the political engagement.<sup>134</sup>

## 3.3 Libreville II – A Smokescreen Peace Accord

Under pressure from ECCAS, the CAR government signed a peace agreement with Séléka<sup>135</sup>, the non-combatant politico-military movements<sup>136</sup> and the democratic opposition on 11 January 2013.<sup>137</sup> The agreement stipulated that: the President would maintain office until the next elections in 2016, but prevented him from standing a third term; a government of national unity would be instated for a period of 12 months<sup>138</sup>; and the government of national unity would be headed by a prime minister from the democratic opposition. In addition, Séléka would withdraw from occupied areas and disarm, political prisoners would be released and the security of opposition members would be guaranteed.<sup>139</sup>

Although Nicolas Tiangaye from the democratic opposition was nominated prime minister and some of the grievances of the rebel groups were addressed in the peace agreement, neither Séléka nor the government had any intentions of fulfilling their obligations.<sup>140</sup> The situation of the government of transition has

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<sup>131</sup> Irin News (2013).

<sup>132</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 10.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> RFI (2013c).

<sup>135</sup> Séléka comprised UFDR, CPJP, CPSK and UFR, and the coalition was represented by Michel Djotodia in the negotiations.

<sup>136</sup> These comprised the political wing of CPJP and two other politico-military groups, i.e. armed groups that had already signed an agreement with the government, *Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice* (MLCJ) and *Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain* (FDPF).

<sup>137</sup> ICG (2013a), pp. 11-13.

<sup>138</sup> The government had to include the presidential majority, the democratic opposition, the non-combatant politico-military movements, Séléka and civil society.

<sup>139</sup> *Accord politique de Libreville sur la résolution de la crise politico-sécuritaire en RCA*.

<sup>140</sup> ICG (2013a), pp. 13-15.



been described as a permanent power struggle.<sup>141</sup> The peace agreement was just a façade and there was a complete lack of trust between the two parties.<sup>142</sup> In addition, the accord was concluded in only three days and the main guarantors of the peace process, Denis Sassou Nguesso, president of Congo-Brazzaville and Idriss Déby, president of Chad, were not sufficiently engaged. Hence, the implementation of the agreement depended too much on the good will of the belligerents, something that was lacking.<sup>143</sup> To further complicate the situation, Séléka forces on the ground were in conflict with the political leadership.<sup>144</sup>

### 3.4 Séléka Takes Power

#### Triggers

Following the signing of the peace agreement and the establishment of a government of unity in January 2013, the presidential clan had rearmed and Bozizé continued to control the government, despite the promises made.<sup>145</sup> On 15 March 2013 Bozizé announced that he would participate in the elections in 2016 and encouraged Central African youth to oppose Séléka.<sup>146</sup> In addition to these provocations, the presence of South African troops and the fear that the Ugandan army would intervene on the government's side pushed Séléka to resort to violence.<sup>147</sup>

On 24 March 2013, thousands of Séléka fighters entered the capital Bangui and overthrew Bozizé, who fled to neighbouring Cameroun. Ironically, ten years after he took power by force, President Bozizé was ousted in the same way, and partly by the same people who had helped him take power. The Séléka ranks included the so-called "liberators", who had fought alongside Bozizé in 2003.<sup>148</sup>

#### Changes in the Opportunity Structure

One important explanation for why Séléka could seize power was that the countries in the region no longer supported Bozizé and the regional peacekeeping force MICOPAX did not react as the rebels approached Bangui.<sup>149</sup> The relations with neighbouring countries had deteriorated for a number of reasons and Bozizé had lost the support of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville and

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<sup>141</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 15, footnote 100.

<sup>142</sup> RFI (2013d).

<sup>143</sup> Africa Confidential (2013d).

<sup>144</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 14.

<sup>145</sup> ICG (2013a), pp. 14-15.

<sup>146</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 15.

<sup>147</sup> RFI (2013d).

<sup>148</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 7.

<sup>149</sup> ICG (2013), p. 12.

Cameroon.<sup>150</sup> Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon and Cameroon have had strong political and economic influence over CAR for a long time, albeit not to the same extent as Chad.<sup>151</sup>

Chad's President Déby was unhappy with the persistent instability in north-eastern CAR and feared a spill-over into southern Chad.<sup>152</sup> The southern oil belt in Chad is an area where local residents have historically opposed Déby. Chadian armed rebel groups hostile to Déby<sup>153</sup> are said to be using northern CAR as a sanctuary.<sup>154</sup> Bangui had failed to control the northern parts of CAR, which posed a direct threat to Chad's national security.<sup>155</sup> After the presidential elections in 2011, Bozizé became increasingly unpopular and used the Chadian community in CAR as a scapegoat for the economic problems in the country in order to consolidate his own power, which also had a negative impact on the relationship between Bangui and N'Djamena.<sup>156</sup> Another reason for the deteriorating relationship between Déby and Bozizé was the increased military cooperation between CAR and South Africa, something that annoyed N'Djamena.<sup>157</sup>

Although Chadian authorities deny they actively supported Séléka, Déby did nothing to stop the rebels from taking power.<sup>158</sup> Information diverges regarding whether N'Djamena directly supported Séléka, although Chadian mercenaries have been a crucial resource to Séléka.<sup>159</sup> Déby released a number of Séléka prisoners and the Chadian elements of Bozizé's presidential guard were withdrawn (the only well-trained part of the FACA).<sup>160</sup> Some reports imply that Déby armed some of the rebel groups in the Séléka coalition.<sup>161</sup> Good connections with the Sudanese local government in Darfur reportedly enabled Séléka to move people and arms into CAR.<sup>162</sup> Sudanese rebels and mercenaries also provided an important resource of manpower to Séléka, while Khartoum has been accused of supporting the rebellion at the outset.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> ICG (2013), p. 9.

<sup>151</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>152</sup> ICG (2013), p. 9.

<sup>153</sup> Such as the *Front uni pour le changement* (FUC) or elements of the former Chadian rebel leader Abdel Khader Baba Laddé of the *Front populaire pour le redressement* (FPR).

<sup>154</sup> HRW (2013), p. 33.

<sup>155</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>156</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>157</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>158</sup> ICG (2013), p. 9; Interview, 2014.

<sup>159</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>160</sup> ICG (2013), p. 9.

<sup>161</sup> Africa Confidential (2013b).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Interviews, 2014.

France sent hundreds of troops to protect the airport and French citizens, but did not change its policy with regard to intervention. Although France condemned the rebels for taking power by force and encouraged the parties to respect the peace agreement, Paris emphasised that it would no longer intervene to support African leaders militarily.<sup>164</sup> The South African troops deployed in the capital were involved in heavy fighting with Séléka as the rebels reached Bangui, resulting in 14 casualties and the withdrawal of troops.<sup>165</sup> The already weak state security forces either joined Séléka or fled.<sup>166</sup>

### **Another Government of “National Unity”**

Michel Djotodia, the leader of Séléka, proclaimed himself president once the rebels had taken control of Bangui. However, Séléka had no coherent political agenda and many of the warlords in the coalition were not necessarily supportive of Djotodia now that Bozizé was gone.<sup>167</sup> A government of national unity was appointed on 31 March 2013 comprising Séléka members, members of the democratic opposition, civil society representatives and one member of Bozizé’s party. However, the government was in reality controlled by Séléka.<sup>168</sup> Two international summits were organised in N’Djamena in April 2013 and it was decided that Djotodia would act as transitional president until elections could be held. Nicolas Tiangaye from the democratic opposition stayed on as prime minister of the transition government.<sup>169</sup> On 18 August 2013, Djotodia was sworn in as president of the transition government for a period of 18 months, when elections would be held.<sup>170</sup>

## **3.5 Abuses and Atrocities**

### **Séléka Crimes**

After Séléka took power, Bangui turned into chaos, with the rebel coalition pillaging and looting.<sup>171</sup> Séléka members reportedly targeted unarmed civilians, raped girls and women, and executed young men. They also deliberately targeted members of the armed forces, FACA.<sup>172</sup> Rather than a strategy, this behaviour seemed to have resulted from a lack of control over many of the rebel fighters. The UN and international human rights organisations reported grave violations of

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<sup>164</sup> Le Figaro (2013).

<sup>165</sup> Daily Maverick (2014).

<sup>166</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>167</sup> RFI (2013b).

<sup>168</sup> ICG (2013a), pp. 17-18.

<sup>169</sup> ICG (2013a), pp. 16-17.

<sup>170</sup> ICG (2013b).

<sup>171</sup> RFI (2013b).

<sup>172</sup> HRW (2013) pp. 49-63.

human rights and atrocities committed against civilians throughout the country since the Séléka offensive in December 2012.<sup>173</sup> The crimes included arbitrary arrests and detention, sexual violence against women and children, torture, rape, targeted killings, recruitment of child soldiers and other abuses.<sup>174</sup> Indiscriminate acts of violence against civilians were committed by uncontrolled Séléka elements and unidentified armed groups across the country.<sup>175</sup> The leadership could not control the fighters as they looted private companies, NGOs, public buildings and religious establishments.<sup>176</sup> The country plunged into chaos while the regional peacekeepers and France stood by watching neither having the mandate, nor the capacity, to intervene.

### **ECCAS Reactions**

In a regional effort to help to address the crisis, ECCAS held an extraordinary meeting in Libreville on 14-18 May 2013 and agreed to send an additional 1300 troops to CAR and extend the mandate of MICOPAX until 2015.<sup>177</sup> One main problem was however that the population did not have any confidence in MICOPAX.<sup>178</sup> The African peacekeepers have not been able to ensure civilian protection, and the mission has been understaffed and underfunded.<sup>179</sup> The peacekeepers have themselves been accused of committing atrocities against civilians and of participating in looting.<sup>180</sup>

### **AU Reactions**

The AU had suspended CAR from the union following Séléka taking power in March and only recognised Djotodia as a transitional head of state. On 19 July 2013, the AU decided to authorise the deployment of the *Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique* (MISCA) for an initial period of six months with a total strength of 3500 uniformed personnel, the core of which would be constituted by the contingents serving in MICOPAX.<sup>181</sup> MISCA was mandated to contribute to: the protection of civilians and the restoration of security and public order; the stabilisation of the country and the restoration of the authority of the central government; the reform and restructuring of the defence and

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<sup>173</sup> HRW (2013); UNSG S/2013/261 (2013), p. 5.

<sup>174</sup> HRW (2013); UNSG S/2013/261 (2013), p.5.

<sup>175</sup> UNSG S/2013/261 (2013), p. 5.

<sup>176</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 18.

<sup>177</sup> UNSG Report S/2013/470 (2013), p. 4.

<sup>178</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>179</sup> HRW (2013), pp. 76-77.

<sup>180</sup> Africa Confidential (2013c); Interviews, 2014.

<sup>181</sup> AU (2013a).

security sector; and the creation of conditions conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance.<sup>182</sup>

### **Deterioration and Dissolution of Séléka**

By September 2013, the entire population was affected by the crisis and half of it was in need of immediate humanitarian assistance, but the additional AU peacekeeping troops were not yet deployed.<sup>183</sup> The limited presence of peacekeepers was not enough to ensure the security of the population.<sup>184</sup> Djotodia had no control over Séléka factions which were divided around disputes connected to the distribution of the spoils of war.<sup>185</sup> Internal divisions within Séléka were arising and many generals were dissatisfied with the political leadership.<sup>186</sup> Number two in Séléka, Nourredine Adam, had been dismissed as Minister of Security.<sup>187</sup> So-called *Zaraguinas*, transnational criminal networks which have been harassing the population of CAR for many years, reportedly also joined the movement.<sup>188</sup>

Séléka did not seem to have much of a political agenda with Bozizé gone. With internal divisions and criminal elements filling the ranks, President Djotodia had absolutely no control of Séléka. He had to distance himself from the movement because of the serious crimes they had committed and on 13 September 2013, Djotodia officially dissolved the 25 000-strong rebel coalition.<sup>189</sup> President Djotodia tried to re-establish order but the state security forces had evaporated; there was no army, no police and the Séléka forces were out of control.<sup>190</sup> The transitional government had completely failed to provide security for the population.

### **France Reacts – UNSC Resolution 2121**

During summer 2013, the French Catholic Church had already warned that Christians were being targeted by Séléka and started to lobby the French government. This internal pressure, together with humanitarian concerns, may explain why France decided to react.<sup>191</sup> Another explanatory factor is the successful intervention in Mali, which had boosted the popularity of President

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<sup>182</sup> AU (2013a).

<sup>183</sup> Al-Jazeera (2013b).

<sup>184</sup> HRW (2013).

<sup>185</sup> Al-Jazeera (2013b).

<sup>186</sup> ICG (2013a), pp. 19-20.

<sup>187</sup> Al-Jazeera (2013b).

<sup>188</sup> Amnesty International (2013a).

<sup>189</sup> Al-Jazeera (2013c); RFI (2013e).

<sup>190</sup> Al-Jazeera (2013b).

<sup>191</sup> Interviews, 2014.

Hollande.<sup>192</sup> By the end of August 2013, the French president expressed concern that CAR might turn into a new Somalia and stated that something had to be done.<sup>193</sup>

Under pressure from France, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 2121 on 10 October 2013 in which the UN supports the transformation of MICOPAX into MISCA as soon as possible and also tasks the UNSG with reporting on the possibilities to transform MISCA into a UN peacekeeping mission.<sup>194</sup> Resolution 2121 also gives the existing civilian UN integrated mission, the *Bureau intégré des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en République centrafricaine* (BINUCA), a reinforced mandate to support the transition process and contribute to stabilisation.<sup>195</sup>

## 3.6 The Rise of the Anti-Balaka Militia

### Grievances and Goals

As a direct consequence of the atrocities and crimes committed by Séléka and the inability of the new government to provide security for the population, the Anti-Balaka emerged.<sup>196</sup> However, already during the months leading up to the Séléka takeover in March 2013, President Bozizé and his entourage had called on young supporters of the ruling party to mobilise themselves into self-defence groups to counter the advancing Séléka.<sup>197</sup> Bozizé started to turn the people against Muslims, saying that Séléka were Arabs who would come to enforce Islam, encouraging them to take up weapons and hence planting a seed of hatred.<sup>198</sup> Bozizé described the Séléka as terrorists and foreign invaders who had to be stopped.<sup>199</sup> The goal of the Anti-Balaka was to disarm Séléka and make those “Arabs” and “foreigners” leave.<sup>200</sup>

The term Anti-Balaka has two meanings, in a local language it translates into ‘*anti-machete*’, but it also refers to ‘*anti-balle AK*’ in French, indicating that the fighters are “AK (Kalashnikov) bullet-proof”, a reference to the witchcraft many use in order to protect themselves.<sup>201</sup> Often described as a Christian militia in the media, the Anti-Balaka is in fact made up of both Christians and people of indigenous beliefs and does not have any religious agenda. The group is a

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<sup>192</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>193</sup> Le Monde (2013).

<sup>194</sup> UNSCR S/RES/2121 (2013).

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> VoA (2014).

<sup>197</sup> Amnesty International (2013a).

<sup>198</sup> New York Times (2013).

<sup>199</sup> AP (2013).

<sup>200</sup> ICG (2014).

<sup>201</sup> Africa Confidential (2014a).

heterogeneous alliance made up of different groups that were dissatisfied with Séléka and wanted to get rid of Djotodia.<sup>202</sup>

The bulk of the Anti-Balaka forces are illiterate teenagers from rural areas who came to Bangui to take revenge for Séléka atrocities. Many of them had lost everything back in the villages.<sup>203</sup> Most of the fighters carry traditional weapons and home-made guns, and wear *grigri* (magical charms) to protect themselves.<sup>204</sup> The movement also includes an anti-Séléka peasant movement.<sup>205</sup> The origins of the Anti-Balaka can be traced back to the previous rebellions in CAR and the lack of security in the countryside. Self-defence groups were set up by communities to fight bandits, cattle-raiders, rebels and poachers.<sup>206</sup> This was the only way for people to fend for themselves in the absence of state security forces to protect them.<sup>207</sup>

Ex-FACA officers and military personnel loyal to former president Bozizé are also part of the Anti-Balaka.<sup>208</sup> In August 2013, Bozizé formed a political movement in France called *Front pour le retour à l'ordre constitutionnel en Centrafrique* (FROCCA), with the aim of regaining power in Bangui. From Paris, FROCCA has encouraged Central Africans to rise up and support the Anti-Balaka.<sup>209</sup> Bozizé had been in Yaoundé, Cameroon, until June 2013, when he travelled on to East Africa. By the end of July 2013, Bozizé arrived in France and stayed in Paris for almost two months, despite an international arrest warrant, before his visa was annulled.<sup>210</sup> While in Paris the ousted president threatened that he would take back power by force.<sup>211</sup>

## Triggers

Among the population, hatred and anger had been growing as a result of Séléka's exactions and abuses. Although the entire population was affected by violence, Séléka sometimes left Muslim neighbourhoods and houses alone when carrying out attacks, so the non-Muslim population<sup>212</sup> felt particularly targeted.<sup>213</sup> Already in April 2013, the anti-Séléka feelings had taken on anti-Muslim overtones.<sup>214</sup> To add to this feeling of hatred, some of the Muslim nomadic groups in northern

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<sup>202</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 6.

<sup>203</sup> ICG (2014).

<sup>204</sup> ICG (2014).

<sup>205</sup> Think Africa Press (2013a).

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ingerstad (2012b), p. 30.

<sup>208</sup> ICG (2014).

<sup>209</sup> ICG (2013b), p. 5; Think Africa Press (2013a).

<sup>210</sup> Jeune Afrique (2014a).

<sup>211</sup> Al-Jazeera (2013b).

<sup>212</sup> 50% are Christian, 35% of indigenous belief and 15% Muslim.

<sup>213</sup> Amnesty International (2014a) p. 7; ICG (2013a), p. 20, footnote 136; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>214</sup> ICG (2013a), p. 20.

CAR had aligned themselves with Séléka and participated in attacks on civilians as a result of long-standing tensions over grazing rights, migration routes and access to water between local farming communities and pastoralist nomadic tribes from CAR, Chad and Sudan.<sup>215</sup> The crimes committed by Séléka, including elements from Chad and Sudan, most likely evoked memories from 2003-2005 when the so-called liberators, Chadian mercenaries who had helped Bozizé to power, attacked the civilian population.<sup>216</sup>

### **Escalation and Changed Conflict Dynamics**

After the dissolution of Séléka in September 2013, around 15 000 to 20 000 ex-Séléka fighters continued to commit serious violations of human rights with total impunity.<sup>217</sup> The Anti-Balaka conducted coordinated attacks on Muslim neighbourhoods after September 2013 in retaliation for Séléka crimes.<sup>218</sup> The emergence of the Anti-Balaka and the increasing attacks on ex-Séléka combatants and civilian Muslim communities created an escalating cycle of violence. In retaliation for Anti-Balaka attacks, ex-Séléka members deliberately targeted members of the local population perceived to be supporting the Anti-Balaka groups.<sup>219</sup>

Neither MICOPAX nor the evaporated state security forces had the capacity to stop the escalation.<sup>220</sup> As of 31 October 2013, MICOPAX had deployed some 2500 uniformed personnel. Most of the forces were concentrated to Bangui and had contributed to a certain degree of security in the capital. However, the limited capacity of MICOPAX made it challenging to guarantee the safety and security of the civilian population outside the capital against the threat posed by ex-Séléka fighters and other armed elements.<sup>221</sup>

On 5 December 2013, the Anti-Balaka carried out a coordinated attack against Bangui and Bossangoa using heavily armed members, comprising elements with military background, including ex-FACA supporting Bozizé.<sup>222</sup> Ex-Séléka reacted and retaliated, attacking members of the Christian population in Bangui. The clashes left an estimated 1000 people dead.<sup>223</sup>

The attack triggered widespread inter-communal violence in Bangui and across the country, with Muslims targeting Christians and Christians targeting

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<sup>215</sup> Amnesty International (2014a), p. 34.

<sup>216</sup> Debos (2008); Interview, 2014.

<sup>217</sup> UNSG S/2013/677 (2013), p. 2.

<sup>218</sup> HRW (2014a).

<sup>219</sup> UNSG S/2013/677 (2013), p. 2.

<sup>220</sup> UNSG S/2013/677, (2013).

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>222</sup> Africa Confidential (2013e); Interviews, 2014; UNSG S/2014/142 (2014), p. 1.

<sup>223</sup> Amnesty International (2014a), p. 8.



Muslims.<sup>224</sup> Systematic house searches and killings took place in different neighbourhoods. The country descended into chaos with reports of widespread human rights violations, including summary executions, extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, looting, destruction of property, the establishment of illegal checkpoints, extortion, arbitrary arrests, detentions and torture.<sup>225</sup>

## 3.7 France Intervenes

### Risk of Genocide

By the end of November 2013, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Laurent Fabius, had warned that CAR was on the verge of genocide.<sup>226</sup> France, which by then had some 400 troops in the country, decided to reinforce its presence and push for a UNSC mandate to intervene to stop the violence.<sup>227</sup> The use of rhetoric implying the risk of genocide made it possible for France to mobilise international support.

In addition to humanitarian concerns, the deteriorating security situation was becoming a direct threat to the existence of CAR as a state, analysts argued. Implosion of CAR would have transformed into a latent threat to regional stability by providing rebels and militants from neighbouring countries with a safe haven right in the middle of the continent.<sup>228</sup> However, the situation was dire already before France decided to intervene, so the regional dimension may explain the change in policy. Although France has no direct economic interests in CAR, many of the countries in the region, notably Cameroun, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon, are important to France in economic, strategic and military terms. Most likely pressure from the neighbouring countries, in particular Chad, contributed to the French decision.<sup>229</sup>

France had seriously misjudged the situation and the consequences of Séléka taking power, so the former colonial power reconsidered the costs of not intervening and changed its approach in order to contribute to the stabilisation of CAR.<sup>230</sup> The recent French intervention in Mali had been considered a success. With the declining support for President Hollande, CAR was seen as a possibility to repeat the success in Mali at a low cost.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> UNSG S/2013/787 (2013), p. 1.

<sup>225</sup> UNSG S/2013/787 (2013), p. 1.

<sup>226</sup> Reuters (2013a).

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Darracq (2014).

<sup>229</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>230</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>231</sup> Interviews, 2014.

## UNSC Resolution 2127 – Chapter VII Mandate

On 5 December 2013, the UNSC passed resolution 2127 and called for rapid transformation of MICOPAX into MISCA under AU authority. Acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the UNSC authorised the deployment of MISCA for a period of twelve months, to take all necessary measures to contribute to: the protection of civilians and the restoration of security and public order; the stabilisation of the country and the restoration of state authority; the creation of conditions conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance; the DDR or DDRRR<sup>232</sup> process; and the support of national and international efforts to reform and restructure the defence and security sectors.<sup>233</sup> The resolution also calls for member states to impose an arms embargo (weapons and related material), excepting government forces.<sup>234</sup>

## France Deploys – Operation Sangaris

The UNSC also authorised the French forces in CAR, for a temporary period, to take all necessary measures to support MISCA in the discharge of its mandate.<sup>235</sup> France was ready to deploy its troops and intervened just hours after the resolution was passed.<sup>236</sup> On 9 December 2013, France formally launched *Operation Sangaris* and increased the deployment to 1600 troops in order to support the African peacekeepers.<sup>237</sup> The population welcomed the French soldiers, hoping that they would be able to stabilise the situation and stop the cycle of violence and insecurity.<sup>238</sup> Very soon accusations of France being partial and siding with Christians were put forward by the Muslim community as *Sangaris* disarmed Séléka fighters, leaving the Muslim community vulnerable to the Anti-Balaka militia.<sup>239</sup> The French have also been suspected of having special ties with some ex-FACA trained by France, who had joined the Anti-Balaka.<sup>240</sup> This perception has had a negative impact on the population's views on the presence of French forces.

## MISCA

On 13 December 2013, the AU and international partners authorised an increase in MISCA's strength up to 6000 uniformed personnel.<sup>241</sup> The transfer of

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<sup>232</sup> DDRRR stands for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement of foreign armed groups.

<sup>233</sup> UNSC S/RES/2127 (2013).

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Marchal (2014).

<sup>237</sup> UNSG S/2013/787(2013).

<sup>238</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>239</sup> Phillips (2014).

<sup>240</sup> Africa Confidential (2014a).

<sup>241</sup> AU (2014), p. 3.

authority from MICOPAX (ECCAS) to MISCA (AU) took effect on 19 December.<sup>242</sup> In January 2014, MISCA comprised 5305 police and military from countries in the region.<sup>243</sup> To a large extent MISCA inherited the problems MICOPAX had: a lack of equipment, poorly trained soldiers and a poor reputation among the civilian population.<sup>244</sup> In particular, the Chadian contingent has a very tainted reputation due to the abusive behaviour of Chadian soldiers over the years.<sup>245</sup> MISCA has been accused for being corrupt and not undertaking its tasks, leaving civilians defenceless and contributing to the insecurity.<sup>246</sup>

## 3.8 A New Transitional Government

### The Third Transitional Government in a Year

On 10 January 2014, President Djotodia and the prime minister Nicolas Tiangaye were convinced by France and Chad to resign during an ECCAS summit in N'Djamena.<sup>247</sup> Uncontrolled ex-Séléka and the increased instability in CAR posed a serious threat to Chad, so Idriss Déby wanted Djotodia to go.<sup>248</sup>

On 23 January 2014, Catherine Samba Panza, the former mayor of Bangui, was sworn in as president of the transition after being elected by the *Conseil national de transition* (CNT) comprising 135 members of the national assembly.<sup>249</sup> Samba Panza was not the first choice of Chad, Congo-Brazzaville or France, but was finally embraced by everyone as she was an acceptable compromise, not aligned with any of the warring parties.<sup>250</sup> The president has more of a civil society than political background and is a lawyer from the business community.<sup>251</sup>

The new prime minister, André Nzapayéké, is a banker who previously worked as vice-president of the regional *Banque de développement des états de l'Afrique central*.<sup>252</sup> This third transitional government since January 2013, dominated by technocrats, comprises a total of 20 ministers, three of them associated with Séléka, one with Anti-Balaka, something that has raised criticism among the

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<sup>242</sup> AU (2013b).

<sup>243</sup> AU (2014), p. 3. The military component is provided by: Burundi (850), Cameroon (517), the Republic of Congo (864), Gabon (517), Equatorial Guinea (205), Chad (792), and Rwanda (850). The 629 police personnel are provided by Cameroon (320), the Republic of Congo (129), Chad (34), the Democratic Republic of Congo (145) and Gabon (1).

<sup>244</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>245</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>246</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>247</sup> RFI (2014a).

<sup>248</sup> RFI (2014c).

<sup>249</sup> France 24 (2014).

<sup>250</sup> RFI (2014c).

<sup>251</sup> ICG (2014).

<sup>252</sup> Africa Confidential (2014a).

Anti-Balaka.<sup>253</sup> However, given that fact that both groups are divided with no clear leadership, those ministers probably do not accurately represent either movement.

The government has been accused of lacking engagement and criticism is rising as the president has failed to deal with the crisis, despite pronounced intentions to do so.<sup>254</sup> Many ministers lack experience of working in the administration in CAR and the legitimacy of the government has been questioned.<sup>255</sup> One of those interviewed in the present study said that CAR is more or less under *de facto* international tutelage due to the dependence on external actors for everything from payment of salaries to security provision.<sup>256</sup> International representatives regularly meet and advise President Samba Panza on the next steps she should take.<sup>257</sup>

Although the state security forces, FACA, have started to return and some 3000 soldiers now have to register on a daily basis in Bangui,<sup>258</sup> the lack of discipline and respect for human rights manifested itself after a ceremony devoted to the reunification of the FACA on 5 February 2014. Minutes after the president had expressed her pride in the reconstituted army, addressing thousands of regrouped FACA officers, soldiers in uniform started lynching a civilian in front of the international press, accusing him for being a rebel, and then mutilated and burned the body.<sup>259</sup>

## 3.9 Ethnic Cleansing and Escalation

### Changes in the Opportunity Structure

The balance of power changed dramatically with the arrival of the French forces in the beginning of December 2013 and Séléka members found themselves militarily threatened.<sup>260</sup> The French disarmed many Séléka, which reinforced the Anti-Balaka and left the Muslim communities defenceless, a serious miscalculation of the situation on the ground.<sup>261</sup> The Séléka fighters were responsible for atrocities and crimes against civilians, but following the mass killings of Muslims by Anti-Balaka militias in the second half of 2013, they were seen as the sole protector of the Muslim community.<sup>262</sup> In addition, with

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<sup>253</sup> Africa Confidential (2014a); RFI (2014d).

<sup>254</sup> Africa Confidential (2014b).

<sup>255</sup> Africa Confidential (2014a).

<sup>256</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>257</sup> Africa Confidential (2014a).

<sup>258</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>259</sup> HRW (2014b).

<sup>260</sup> Amnesty International (2014a), p. 8.

<sup>261</sup> Debos (2014).

<sup>262</sup> Marchal (2014).

Djotodia's departure in the beginning of January 2014, Séléka became increasingly disarrayed and withdrew from many towns and villages they had previously controlled.<sup>263</sup> Neither the French nor the reinforced MISCA did enough to stop the Anti-Balaka, who filled the power vacuum created by the departure of Séléka.<sup>264</sup>

### **Muslim Exodus**

The Anti-Balaka has deliberately targeted the Muslim community and aims to kill, destroy, loot, steal and force Muslims to leave the country.<sup>265</sup> Mobs have been lynching, mutilating and killing Muslim men, women and children with total impunity.<sup>266</sup> Convoys of thousands of Muslims have left the capital Bangui.<sup>267</sup> In February 2014, Amnesty International published a report labelling the targeted attacks ethnic cleansing and warning that the Muslim population is being wiped out.<sup>268</sup>

In the beginning of February 2014, HRW warned that:

*“At this rate, if the targeted violence continues, there will be no Muslims left in much of the Central African Republic”.*<sup>269</sup>

Many mixed families have been shattered and much of the Muslim population has been forced to flee to neighbouring countries or to north-eastern parts of CAR.<sup>270</sup> In the west of the country, many towns have lost their entire Muslim population in an exodus to the north.<sup>271</sup> An estimated 50 000 Muslims have been flown out the country and tens of thousands have left by road.<sup>272</sup> The Muslim community in CAR used to comprise 15% of the population. As of March 2014, the Muslim population in CAR is estimated to have decreased to 2%.<sup>273</sup> Reportedly, only 900 of 140 000 Muslims remained in the capital at that time and 15 000 Muslims were trapped in 18 different locations in western parts of the country, surrounded by Anti-Balaka militias.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Amnesty International (2014a) , p. 8.

<sup>264</sup> Amnesty International (2014b).

<sup>265</sup> Amnesty International (2014a).

<sup>266</sup> Amnesty International (2014c).

<sup>267</sup> Al-Jazeera (2014d).

<sup>268</sup> Amnesty International (2014a).

<sup>269</sup> HRW (2014a).

<sup>270</sup> Washington Post (2014a).

<sup>271</sup> World Bulletin (2014a).

<sup>272</sup> HRW (2014a).

<sup>273</sup> News 24 (2014).

<sup>274</sup> HRW (2014c); UNHCR Guterres Antonio (2014).

The Muslim exodus has resulted in a complete collapse of the economy. The Muslims have traditionally been the main traders in CAR and with them gone, markets are empty and there is a shortage of basic supplies.<sup>275</sup> As a result of the inter-communal violence, the social and economic fabric of CAR society has been completely destroyed in most parts of the country.<sup>276</sup>

In the CAR conflict, religion should be interpreted in terms of ethnic affiliation. Anti-Balaka and their supporters consider all Muslims to be foreigners, who do not belong in the country and should leave.<sup>277</sup> Muslims are often described as “Chadians” rather than citizens by Anti-Balaka leaders, even though the vast majority of Muslims have CAR citizenship.<sup>278</sup>

Anti-Balaka fighters described their sentiments to HRW in the beginning of 2014 in the following way:

*“We don’t have a need for Arabs in this country – they have to leave and go back to their countries because they killed so many from our families. They are foreigners anyway. [...] We will capture them. We will finish them off today. We will kill them. [...] We don’t want Muslims in the Central African Republic - not Chadians, and not Muslims. We will massacre them, we will kill them.”*<sup>279</sup>

The Anti-Balaka is not a centralised force and has no clear leadership. However, all factions of the militia have a coherent discourse; Muslims must be killed or leave.<sup>280</sup> Whether the Anti-Balaka is pursuing a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing or collectively punishing the Muslim population for Séléka crimes, the result is the same: the disappearance of entire Muslim communities.<sup>281</sup>

### **Political Entrepreneurs**

Religious violence between Christians and Muslims is new in CAR, but political entrepreneurs mobilising people along ethnic lines in order to pursue their own agenda is nothing new. The violence is the consequence of a political failure, not a religious conflict. Behind the scenes, political entrepreneurs are pulling the strings, declaring themselves leaders of groups of disenfranchised youths, using them to try to take power.<sup>282</sup> These individuals are playing on ethnic identity (in

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<sup>275</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>276</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>277</sup> African Arguments (2014); Mariner (2014).

<sup>278</sup> HRW (2014a).

<sup>279</sup> HRW (2014a).

<sup>280</sup> Al-Jazeera (2014a).

<sup>281</sup> HRW (2014a).

<sup>282</sup> Whiting (2014).

this case religion) and fuelling hatred between segments of the marginalised population.<sup>283</sup>

The ousted president Bozizé has been trying to take advantage of the chaos and is actively working with some Anti-Balaka according to some sources.<sup>284</sup> The former president has reportedly been sending supplies to the militia for several months.<sup>285</sup> Publicly, he has referred to the Anti-Balaka as patriots who are trying to make the foreign invaders from Chad and Sudan (Séléka) leave the country.<sup>286</sup> The ex-president is reported to be biding his time in Kampala, Uganda, sheltered by the Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni.<sup>287</sup> The public prosecutor of CAR issued an international arrest warrant for Bozizé already in June 2013.<sup>288</sup> The president of the transition, Samba Panza, has declared that Bozizé would be arrested were he to come back to CAR.<sup>289</sup>

### **Peace Enablers**

In the midst of the ongoing chaos, there are still some forces working for peace. The religious leaders in CAR have not been accomplices in the inter-communal violence, which they blame on politicians using religion to stir up feelings.<sup>290</sup> For months, Catholic Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga and the most senior Muslim cleric, Imam Oumar Kobine Layama, along with the leading Protestant cleric, have travelled around the country to promote peace and non-violence. However, the fear, distrust and hatred have made this a daunting task.<sup>291</sup>

Joint efforts between Muslim and Christian communities on a local level have contained violence in some parts of CAR. One example is the town of Bangassou, where the communities have created a mediation committee comprising members from both communities, which intervenes in order to mitigate tensions.<sup>292</sup> In other cases, religious leaders have intervened and protected members of the other community. Catholic priests and nuns have devoted themselves to protecting Muslims when the international peacekeepers have failed to do so.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Debos (2014).

<sup>284</sup> Reuters (2014b).

<sup>285</sup> Africa Confidential (2014b).

<sup>286</sup> Le Point (2014a).

<sup>287</sup> Jeune Afrique (2014a).

<sup>288</sup> Al-Jazeera (2013a).

<sup>289</sup> Jeune Afrique (2014c).

<sup>290</sup> New York Times (2013).

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> RFI (2014e).

<sup>293</sup> Washington Post (2014b).

In December 2013, Burundi started to deploy troops to reinforce MISCA.<sup>294</sup> A month later Rwanda followed.<sup>295</sup> The contribution from Rwanda and Burundi to MISCA, 850 troops respectively, has reportedly made a real difference on the ground. The troops have actively intervened to stop massacres, looting and lynchings.<sup>296</sup> Perhaps the experiences of ethnic violence and genocide from these two countries have contributed to the active role of the Rwandan and Burundian peacekeepers. Unfortunately, the efforts have not been enough to stop the radical changes in the ethnic and religious demography of CAR.<sup>297</sup>

### 3.10 New Divisions

#### Séléka

Since Djotodia left and the government was dissolved in January 2014, the ex-Séléka movement has become increasingly divided (although the coalition was fractionalised from the outset). Some have followed the leader into exile, others have stayed in Bangui monitored by the MISCA, and others still have regrouped in the north-east, controlling an area from Bria to Birao.<sup>298</sup> The rebels reportedly comprise hundreds of armed troops which do not recognise the new transitional government.<sup>299</sup> Of a force of 25 000 troops, a few thousand remain in the capital, while the rest have left the country, joined the FACA or regrouped in the north-east.<sup>300</sup>

The leadership in the north-east is calling for secession, whereas the leaders in Bangui are denouncing the idea.<sup>301</sup> Already in December 2013, one of the leaders of a Séléka faction, Abakar Sabone, mentioned the possibility of forming an independent state in the north of the country.<sup>302</sup> There are reports that Sabone has created the *Mouvement pour l'indépendance du nord-est de la Centrafrique*.<sup>303</sup> There is already a *de facto* partition between north and south, but the concept of state is not applicable to the CAR context. In the border regions between north-eastern CAR, southern Chad and Sudan, warlords rule and control the territory.<sup>304</sup> One ex-Séléka leader, Nourredine Adam, controls the diamond city Bria with at least 300 loyal troops, and continues the illegal exploitation of

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<sup>294</sup> Reuters (2013b).

<sup>295</sup> Defense News (2014).

<sup>296</sup> AllAfrica (2014); Interviews, 2014; World Bulletin (2014b).

<sup>297</sup> UNSG S/2014/142 (2014).

<sup>298</sup> RFI (2014f).

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>301</sup> RFI (2014f).

<sup>302</sup> Jeune Afrique (2013).

<sup>303</sup> Zone Militaire (2014).

<sup>304</sup> RFI (2014g).



diamonds in the area.<sup>305</sup> It is not clear what is going on in north-eastern parts of the country or how many ex-Séléka fighters are there.<sup>306</sup>

### Anti-Balaka

After the resignation of Djotodia, the Anti-Balaka split into two main factions, one that wanted to negotiate with the international community, one that wanted to keep on fighting with the aim of reinstating former president Bozizé. The latter has formed a movement, the *Combattants pour la libération du peuple centrafricain* (CLPC), which is run by a former politician close to Bozizé and led by former FACA.<sup>307</sup> The other political wing is called *Front Resistance*.<sup>308</sup>

The Anti-Balaka has transformed from *ad hoc* self-defence groups into a movement comprising three types of individuals; vigilantes from the villages, ex-FACA soldiers and criminals.<sup>309</sup> The criminal elements have joined the Anti-Balaka in order to loot, pillage and benefit from the lack of law enforcement agencies and state security forces, but with no ideological agenda.<sup>310</sup> Analysts describe four different phases with regard to the development of the militia: starting out as a self-defence force, the group then experienced a militarisation when ex-FACA joined, a politicisation phase with the emergence of political wings and, by the end of March 2013, the group had entered a criminalisation phase.<sup>311</sup>

There are no exact data on the number of people who are part of the militia, but the Anti-Balaka leaders themselves claim that between 52 000 and 70 000 have joined the group, supported by the majority of the population.<sup>312</sup> According to General Francisco Soriano, the commander of *Sangaris*, the leaders' identity, their chain of command and political programme are unknown.<sup>313</sup> The militia seems to have no organisation and no leadership, which makes it difficult to handle, in particular with regard to disarmament.<sup>314</sup> HRW, on the other hand, suggests that the group is becoming increasingly organised, reporting that on the local level, the leadership is clear and that there is a connection with the

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<sup>305</sup> Jeune Afrique (2014b).

<sup>306</sup> Al-Jazeera (2014b).

<sup>307</sup> ICG (2014).

<sup>308</sup> Seminar ICG, April 2014.

<sup>309</sup> Africa Confidential (2014a); UNSG S/2014/142 (2014), p. 2.

<sup>310</sup> African Arguments (2014); UNSG S/2014/142 (2014), p. 2.

<sup>311</sup> Seminar ICG, April 2014.

<sup>312</sup> Afrik.com (2014).

<sup>313</sup> Reliefweb (2014).

<sup>314</sup> RFI (2014c).

representatives for the movement in Bangui.<sup>315</sup> ICG is currently mapping the different actors and factions within the Anti-Balaka.<sup>316</sup>

In terms of methods and discourse the Anti-Balaka are cohesive, clearly stating their intent to eliminate all Muslims, although this does not make them a coordinated cohesive force.<sup>317</sup> In Bangui alone, there are at least five different Anti-Balaka groups with different leaders, different agendas and different degrees of discipline.<sup>318</sup> Political entrepreneurs are probably trying to organise parts of the militia to pursue their own agenda.

### **New Groups**

In addition to Bozizé's new movement FROCCA and its supporters the CPLC, a new rebel group called *Révolution Justice* was reportedly formed in January 2014. The aim is said to be to fight the "terrorists from neighbouring countries" currently "occupying" CAR, referring to Séléka. The goal is, through a revolution based on justice and discipline, to transform CAR and stop the 'occupation'. It is unclear who the leader is.<sup>319</sup> The rebels have expressed their support for the transitional government.<sup>320</sup> The emergence of new rebel groups is something that has marked the conflict landscape in CAR over the last two decades. Political entrepreneurs see their chance to get a seat at the negotiation table, hence a piece of the cake, by creating new groups. Most likely *Révolution Justice* is just one example of this and there will be more to come.

## **3.11 Regionalisation and Radicalisation**

### **Spill-over**

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, CAR is a part of a broader regional conflict complex. The porous, unmonitored borders of this vast country contribute to flows of arms and people in the region, in particular in the north-east. In addition to massive refugee flows, which strain neighbouring countries and contribute to the humanitarian crisis, the major risks with regard to the current situation are related to the neighbouring regional power Chad, as well as to the risk of radical Islamist groups taking advantage of the conflict.

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<sup>315</sup> HRW, (2014a).

<sup>316</sup> Seminar ICG, April 2014.

<sup>317</sup> African Arguments (2014).

<sup>318</sup> Africa Confidential (2014b).

<sup>319</sup> Youtube (2014a).

<sup>320</sup> Al-Widha (2014).

## Chad

Chadian troops in CAR have acted under different mandates and sometimes their capacity has been difficult to distinguish.<sup>321</sup> Already in 2007, Amnesty International reported abuses and crimes committed by Chadian soldiers and highlighted the complex role of Chad in CAR.<sup>322</sup> During the current crisis, Chadian special forces have been in the country to protect the Muslim population and to escort refugees, in addition to the Chadian forces in the MISCA.<sup>323</sup> Rogue elements from the Chadian army have been accomplices in atrocities committed by Séléka as the rebels headed up north.<sup>324</sup> Chadian peacekeepers have also been accused of helping Séléka to flee and helping the rebels to regroup.<sup>325</sup>

Following an incident on 29 March 2014, where Chadian soldiers killed 30 people and wounded more than 300 in what the UN called “an indiscriminate attack”,<sup>326</sup> N’Djamena announced the withdrawal of its 850 forces from MISCA.<sup>327</sup> This may have serious repercussions, given that Chad is a regional power with significant military capability and with national security concerns closely connected to the situation in CAR. The withdrawal of Chadian forces may have a negative impact on the operational capacity of MISCA, although the decision has been welcomed by the CAR population.

Chad’s president Déby opposes any idea of an independent state in the north-east of CAR and were this to materialise, it could be a reason for Chad to go to war.<sup>328</sup> Chad is a regional force of high importance possessing oil and military capability.<sup>329</sup> Chad is part of the problem in CAR but, with its regional influence and good relations with France, Chad also has to be a part of the solution.

## Risk of Radicalisation

There is a risk that extremist groups such as Al-Qaida in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Nigerian Boko Haram and other radical groups will use this window of opportunity to serve their own interests. Already in September 2013, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius expressed concern that CAR could quickly turn into a breeding ground for extremism and terrorism.<sup>330</sup> The views on the threat from jihadists in CAR diverge, with unconfirmed presence.<sup>331</sup> However, some

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<sup>321</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>322</sup> Amnesty International (2007), pp. 73-74.

<sup>323</sup> Storify (2014).

<sup>324</sup> HRW (2014e); New York Times (2014).

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Al-Jazeera (2014e).

<sup>327</sup> Al-Jazeera (2014f).

<sup>328</sup> Zone Militaire (2014).

<sup>329</sup> Think Africa Press (2013b).

<sup>330</sup> Al-Jazeera (2013c).

<sup>331</sup> RFI (2014i).

sources indicate that Boko Haram has been spotted in the country.<sup>332</sup> What is known is that the Nigerian terrorist group already operates in neighbouring Cameroon.<sup>333</sup>

Moreover, the Somali *Al-Shabab* reportedly sent a small group led by one of its explosives experts to help Muslims in CAR fight ‘the Crusaders’.<sup>334</sup> AQIM has openly threatened France, accusing the French forces of contributing to Muslim genocide.<sup>335</sup> An Afghan Taliban leader has condemned the violence against Muslims, saying it poses a danger to the peaceful life and co-existence of Muslims and Christians throughout Africa.<sup>336</sup> Individual Jihadis are also calling for a holy war in CAR.<sup>337</sup> The threat from Islamists was insignificant until the beginning of 2014, but the failure of the international intervention and the complete collapse of the nation may give these groups new opportunities.<sup>338</sup>

## 3.12 Delayed Reactions

### Far Away From Normalisation

By the end of March 2014, the situation in CAR was still critical, with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis leaving the whole population in an extremely vulnerable situation. The few Muslims left in the country were still under threat, with ethnic cleansing still happening on a large scale.<sup>339</sup> The UN described the Anti-Balaka as the main threat to civilians in March 2014.<sup>340</sup> The militia continued to recruit and expand in south-western parts of the country.<sup>341</sup> Ex-Séléka also continued to attack civilians, burn down villages and commit crimes, joined by the Muslim Peuhl cattle herders.<sup>342</sup> Although the situation in the capital Bangui had improved marginally, with many refugees hiding at the airport being able to return to their homes during the day, the MSF clearly said that the situation was far from normal and extremely tense.<sup>343</sup>

Peter Bouckaert, Emergency Director at HRW, described the situation in the country in March 2014:

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<sup>332</sup> VoA (2013).

<sup>333</sup> CNN (2013).

<sup>334</sup> Africa Confidential (2014a).

<sup>335</sup> RFI (2014i).

<sup>336</sup> Reuters (2014a).

<sup>337</sup> Youtube (2014b).

<sup>338</sup> Africa Confidential (2014a).

<sup>339</sup> BBC (2014).

<sup>340</sup> UNSG S/2014/142 (2014), p. 2.

<sup>341</sup> Peter Bouckaert@bouckap (2014).

<sup>342</sup> HRW (2014d).

<sup>343</sup> RFI (2014h).

*“The French keep trying to say the situation is stabilising, but it actually isn’t. The only areas that are stabilising are areas where all the Muslims are gone.”*<sup>344</sup>

Still, the international community has not acted firmly enough or shown sufficient interest, something that has raised severe criticisms among African and international human rights groups, which are calling for the UNSC to act immediately.<sup>345</sup> The International Criminal Court (ICC) has opened an investigation on CAR, in order to examine whether war crimes have been committed by any party to the conflict.<sup>346</sup> Despite strong indications that war crimes have been committed and proof of continued violence, torture and killings of civilians, the humanitarian interventions suffer from underfunding and limited support for CAR from the international community.<sup>347</sup>

### **MISCA and Operation Sangaris**

By the end of February 2013, MISCA comprised 6032 uniformed personnel, including military, police and a small civilian component.<sup>348</sup> In February 2014, France reinforced Sangaris with an additional 400 troops, raising troop strength to a total of 2000, and the French national assembly approved indefinite prolongation of the mandate.<sup>349</sup> However, human rights groups have criticised MISCA and Sangaris for not intervening when necessary in order to protect civilians and for being unable to confront the Anti-Balaka, accusing the peacekeepers for not being present where events actually unfold.<sup>350</sup> By the end of March 2014, violence escalated once again with the Anti-Balaka attacking MISCA peacekeepers. Subsequently the force commander, Congolese General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko, declared war on the militia by publicly saying that MISCA considered Anti-Balaka enemies.<sup>351</sup>

### **The UNSC**

On 28 January 2014, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2134, which authorises the deployment of EU troops for a period of six months, reinforces and extends the mandate of BINUCA until 31 January 2015, and imposes targeted sanctions<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Washington Post (2014c).

<sup>345</sup> HRW (2014c).

<sup>346</sup> Al-Jazeera (2014c).

<sup>347</sup> Al-Jazeera (2014b).

<sup>348</sup> UNSG S/2014/142 (2014), p. 10.

<sup>349</sup> Le Monde (2014).

<sup>350</sup> African Arguments (2014).

<sup>351</sup> Le Figaro (2014).

<sup>352</sup> France asked the UNSC to put ex-president Bozizé and one of his sons on the sanctions list, together with Anti-Balaka and Séléka leaders. For more on sanctions in CAR, please see Roshdi Safa (2014), *Sanctions in CAR*, forthcoming 2014, FOI.

against individuals who are undermining peace and stability, threatening transitional agreements, or fuelling violence.<sup>353</sup>

Divergent views within the UNSC delayed a decision to support a UN peacekeeping force in CAR. The AU had been reluctant to hand over MISCA to the UN, referring to the need for African solutions to African problems.<sup>354</sup> Chad, one of the members of the UNSC, opposed turning MISCA into a UN force, fearing it would impact on Chad's influence.<sup>355</sup> The US was reluctant due to budget constraints, fearing that a UN operation would be too costly.<sup>356</sup> The UNSG handed in a report on the situation in CAR on 3 March 2014 proposing a UN peacekeeping mission comprising 12 000 troops, including military, police and civilian personnel, to be deployed.<sup>357</sup>

On 10 April 2014, the UNSC decided to establish the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for an initial period until 30 April 2015. As of 15 September 2014, MINUSCA will initially comprise up to 10 000 military personnel and 1800 police personnel and the UN mission will take over the authority of MISCA.<sup>358</sup> Authorised to use all necessary means, MINUSCA is mandated to protect civilians; to support the implementation of the transition process, including efforts in favour of the extension of state authority and preservation of territorial integrity; to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance; to protect the UN; to promote and protect human rights; to support national and international justice and the rule of law; and to support DDR and DDRR.<sup>359</sup>

## **EUFOR RCA**

On 10 February 2014, the Council of the European Union established a military operation, EUFOR RCA, to contribute to a secure environment in CAR, as authorised by the UNSC in resolution 2134.<sup>360</sup> The aim is to contribute to security in Bangui, including the airport, until the UN can deploy its troops. However, the EU has had problems with getting member states to contribute and generate enough troops and logistical support for the envisaged 800-1000 strong force.<sup>361</sup> EUFOR RCA was formally launched on 1 April and the first troops were deployed on 30 April. EUFOR RCA has faced some serious constraints in

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<sup>353</sup> UNSCR S/RES/2134 (2014).

<sup>354</sup> IPS (2014).

<sup>355</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>356</sup> IPS (2014).

<sup>357</sup> UNSG Report S/2014/142 (2014).

<sup>358</sup> UNSCR S/RES/2149 (2014).

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> EEAS (2014).

<sup>361</sup> Le Point (2014b).

terms of resources and contributions from member states, which has forced France to take the bulk of the responsibility.

### **3.13 Summary**

Since Séléka launched a rebellion in CAR in December 2012, new actors, new conflict issues and different behaviours have significantly changed the conflict dynamics over time. At first the conflict mainly concerned control over government, where Séléka challenged President Bozizé. After Séléka took power the new government under Djotodia continued to fight the few remnants of the former state security forces, but was also involved in one-sided violence against the civilian population.

With the rise of the Anti-Balaka, the dynamics changed again. The issue at hand was again government, as the Anti-Balaka wanted Séléka disarmed and Djotodia gone. However, the dissolution of Séléka complicated the dynamics, adding another dimension to the violent conflict as the government and the African and French peacekeepers were also fighting ex-Séléka forces. With the arrival of French troops, the reinforcement of the African troops and Séléka forces partly disarmed, the dynamics changed once more.

The Anti-Balaka intensified the attacks and deliberately targeted the Muslim community, resulting in a massive ethnic cleansing of the Muslim population in CAR. At the same time ex-Séléka regrouped, supported by rogue elements among the Chadian troops, and some fractions started to call for an independent state in the north-east. The transitional government had support from some factions of Anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka, but both movements were extremely divided and several sections aimed to fight the government.

As of April 2014, new actors are on the rise. New rebel groups, splinter groups from Séléka and the Anti-Balaka and the risk of involvement of foreign Islamist groups such as AQIM may once again change the dynamics of the conflict. The withdrawal of the Chadian troops may have an impact on the capacity of MISCA and Déby's security interests in Chad's southern neighbour remain unchanged, which may create a new regional dynamic to the conflict. The deployment of EU troops and a UN peacekeeping operation will impact on future developments.





## 4 Causes of the Conflict in CAR

A number of factors explain the outbreak of conflict in CAR in 2012, which should be understood as a continuation of previous unresolved conflicts. Conclusions from the analysis in Chapters 2 and 3 are summarised below in relation to the conceptual framework and the clusters of factors presented in Chapter 1. The following sections summarise the *Reasons*, *Resources* and *Resolve* which explain the outbreak of the armed conflict, the escalation in violence and the changing conflict dynamics between December 2012 and March 2014.

### 4.1 Reasons

#### Background Reasons

The legacy from the colonial era and the economic and political subordination of CAR to France have contributed to a weak state structure. The state in CAR has never had much presence outside the capital. As a result, the government has failed to provide the population with public services such as security, health care and education. The state's incapacity to deliver public goods created internal systems of governance that became exclusionary, discriminatory and generated economic and political inequality. The state security forces have been neither willing nor able to protect the population. Instead, they have constituted a threat to the security of the people.

The discriminatory behaviour of the Bozizé regime emerged on the basis of group identity. Since he took power by force in 2003, President Bozizé favoured members of his own ethnic group and immediate family, making sure they were given key positions in the military, government and public services. Through a system of patrimonial rule, Bozizé increasingly tightened his grip on power.

Historically, the northern and north-eastern parts of CAR have been particularly marginalised. From 2005 on, a series of rebellions emerged in the northern parts of the country. Séléka, being a coalition of rebel groups from the north-east, accused Bozizé of not implementing previous peace agreements and of failing to fulfil his promises. Elite power struggles and greed marked the policy of the Bozizé regime, but also the agenda of many rebel leaders. Neither political parties nor the rebel groups have properly represented the interests of the population in CAR. Rather, these political entrepreneurs have been driven by personal economic interests and in some cases continued fighting has been beneficial economically for certain individuals, ranging from leaders to mercenaries to youth without other options.

The grievances among the disenfranchised population, in particular youths from rural areas, have created a breeding ground for recruitment. The legitimate

grievances of the population have been used by political entrepreneurs in order to mobilise support. Poverty and lack of economic opportunities have provided incentives for youths to join the rebels. Originally, the bulk of the Anti-Balaka comprised poor young men from rural parts of the country. The absence or abuses of the state security forces left the population to fend for itself for decades, which led to the creation of self-defence groups throughout CAR. These types of self-defence groups were at the core of the Anti-Balaka. Political entrepreneurs from the side-lined elite, motivated by greed, have often used these vigilante groups to take power. By “transforming” the self-defence forces into rebel groups and proclaiming themselves leader of this new movement, political entrepreneurs have been given an opportunity to get a piece of the cake.

### **Triggers**

The Séléka rebellion was triggered by the increasingly corrupt and exclusionary rule of the Bozizé government, the rampant insecurity in the north-east and the failure to implement peace agreements. The failed DDR process was also a main concern for the rebels who still had control of large parts of the territory waiting for implementation of the programmes. Ironically, the DDR programmes even contributed to the instability, as one of few economic opportunities for the disenfranchised young population was joining a rebel group to later benefit from the DDR programme. Bozizé’s way of side-lining individuals from the elite, including the diamond sector, also triggered the rebellion. The president’s unwillingness to implement the peace agreement from January 2013, and his open provocations, explain why Séléka decided to oust the president in March 2013.

During Séléka rule, the structural causes remained, while the security situation deteriorated and the general situation for the population became worse. The legitimacy of the government completely evaporated, with Djotodia taking power. Although the Bozizé regime had been unpopular, the Djotodia regime was worse and the majority non-Muslim population felt discriminated against. Séléka was perceived as consisting of foreigners and the forces committed serious crimes against civilians with complete impunity, something that also led to a sudden widening in the legitimacy gap. Following the dissolution of Séléka and the resignation of Djotodia, the civilian Muslim population was punished for the atrocities committed by Séléka. The rise of the Anti-Balaka was a direct consequence of Séléka abuses, which triggered the self-defence groups to take revenge on ex-Séléka forces and the civilian Muslim population.

## **4.2 Resources**

The Séléka rebels were able to take power in March 2013 due to a change in the opportunity structure. The support from Chad gave the rebel alliance an

opportunity to take power by force. The declining support for Bozizé from neighbouring states and the government in N'djamena gave Séléka an advantage since Chad, the main provider of security in CAR, would not react to an attack. A significant part of Séléka comprised foreign fighters from Chad and Sudan, most of them mercenaries, providing the rebels with manpower, weapons and knowledge. In addition, Séléka had support from the diamond sector, an important source of income. Arms flows in the north-eastern uncontrolled border region provided the rebels with equipment. In addition, the absent and dysfunctional state security forces gave the rebels a safe haven where they could mobilise without being disturbed and loot easily marketable goods, such as diamonds, to enrich themselves.

The Anti-Balaka was joined by ex-FACA soldiers from the state security forces with military training and equipment. Ex-president Bozizé also supported the movement and has allegedly been sending supplies to some Anti-Balaka groups. The failure of the French and African peacekeepers to disarm the Anti-Balaka, in combination with the complete absence of state security and law enforcement agencies in the country, has given the militia a space where they can operate freely with complete impunity. With the French intervention, the power balance changed. Séléka was disarmed and lost control of many towns in large parts of the country, which created a new opportunity structure for the Anti-Balaka.

### **4.3 Resolve**

To explain why actors decided to resort to violence in CAR, three interlinked factors need to be highlighted: the failure to carry out 'normal' politics, the security dilemma and the leaders' manipulation of group identity.

To get access to power or a seat at the negotiating table in CAR, it has been necessary to take up arms. Therefore, violence is perceived as the only way of achieving goals and has become the normal way of pursuing political or personal goals. The failed democratisation and the patrimonial system of rule have left actors with few peaceful options in order to achieve their goals. It is not surprising that Séléka perceived violence as the only solution following Bozizé's reluctance to implement the peace accord. In addition, the rank and file of the rebel movements were in such a dire economic and security situation that it is understandable that they perceived that they would gain more from resorting to violence than from abstaining.

The lack of security and order in CAR also created a security dilemma where not taking up arms would mean being left unprotected. When the security situation deteriorated under Séléka rule, people felt they would have to resort to violence in order to protect themselves, in the absence of state security forces. The perception that the Chadian troops sided with the Muslims and the French with

the Christian community increased the security dilemma, since the peacekeepers were not perceived as a neutral third-party security guarantee.

The anti-Muslim, i.e. anti-Chadian or anti-foreigner, rhetoric has been used by power-hungry individuals in order to mobilise and manipulate followers who are trapped in poverty and lack of economic opportunities. Among the population, the fear of foreign intervention and the memories of the abuses of foreign mercenaries, rebels and soldiers are deeply rooted. In addition, poverty and lack of economic opportunities have resulted in hatred of the Muslim traders, as they have been perceived as being better off than the rest of the population. This has been used by Anti-Balaka leaders to mobilise support and to instil fear in the population, convincing them that the only solution is to take up arms.

## 5 The Way Ahead

This chapter provides recommendations and suggestions on how the international community can support a peaceful resolution of the violent conflict in CAR. As suggested in Chapter 1, third parties can play a significant role in the conflict resolution process. Using the conceptual framework from Chapter 1 and the findings from the analysis, the aim here is to provide recommendations for the short, medium and long term. Previous experiences in CAR are also taken into account, since the country has experienced several failed peacebuilding processes in the past. As a general comment, the international engagement must be firm and long-term, otherwise money and time will be wasted, the population disappointed and it will not take long for the cycle of violence to restart.

### 5.1 Short Term

For the conflict parties in CAR to lay down arms and in order to stabilise the security situation in the short term, the international community can provide support in a number of ways. In the short term, the main issue is to get the parties to feel that they would benefit more from peace than war. It is important to understand how the *Reasons*, *Resources* and *Resolve* impact on this perception in order for third parties to influence the belligerents.

First of all, the security problem must be handled in order to mitigate the humanitarian crisis and establish some foundation for a future political solution to the conflict. The lack of security in the country can only be addressed by reinforcement of peacekeeping forces on the ground. However stabilising the vast country is an impossible endeavour, even with a 12 000-strong UN peacekeeping force. Therefore the CAR government must decide on priorities and ways to handle the acute situation in cooperation with international partners. There are several aspects that must be taken into account to ensure a minimum of security and stabilise the country in the short term.

A military intervention is not a solution to the law and order problem. An international police force that can stop the violence, crimes and lawlessness is needed immediately. In order to protect civilians and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those who need it, military personnel are needed. It is crucial to distinguish between the different short-term needs and determine whether they require a military or law enforcement solution. An international military presence is also necessary to put pressure on the political entrepreneurs in the ex-Séléka and the Anti-Balaka. In the short term, force can be used to get these parties to the negotiation table and lay down their arms. Leaving the control of parts of the territory to ex-Séléka and Anti-Balaka is risky, as it may increase their resources and allow them to re-mobilise. Over the years, rebel groups in CAR have had *de*

*facto* control of parts of the territory and that has not helped in solving the conflicts, rather the opposite.

Neither the ex-Séléka nor the Anti-Balaka are unitary actors with a clear political agenda and leadership. This complexity must be fully understood before any attempts to negotiate are undertaken. The legitimacy of the leadership of factions or different armed groups, or of those who claim leadership, has to be questioned and scrutinised. Ex-Séléka foreign mercenaries and transnational criminals who are part of the factions must be dealt with differently than those fighters who have joined the ranks because of grievances related to poor governance in CAR. The goals, grievances and driving forces differ, and this must be taken into account.

The Anti-Balaka should also be treated as an alliance of groups with different goals and grievances. The criminal elements should be dealt with as such, while the young people from rural areas must be given opportunities to return to their villages. While waiting for a reconstruction process of the armed forces, the ex-FACA should be cantoned and monitored in case they want to be integrated into the army.

The question is whether dialogue with some of these actors is possible, or a good idea, given the fact that some individuals in these groups have spoiled previous peace processes and have committed serious crimes. Targeted UN sanctions may be a way to handle some of those individuals if the sanctions can be implemented. Bringing leaders who have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity to justice is necessary to build peace in the long term, but it is important to keep in mind that such measures make the prospects for a negotiated settlement small in the short term, so the use of force is necessary.

The lack of trust in MISCA and Sangaris among the population of CAR is an obstacle that must be admitted and handled. The departure of the Chadian elements of MISCA may improve the popular perception of the French and African peacekeepers, but more should be done. In addition to ensuring that the soldiers follow established codes of conduct, an increased emphasis on winning hearts and minds is needed. The behaviour of the Burundian and Rwandan peacekeepers could serve as an example, since they are appreciated by the population. This is particularly important since the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSCA to a large extent will comprise re-hatted MISCA personnel.

With the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force, it is important to ensure that the soldiers not only have a mandate to protect civilians, but that they are actually committed and are capable of doing so. Failure to deploy peacekeepers who are willing and able to engage in protecting the civilian population would breach the little trust the population has left.

Neighbouring countries, and in particular Chad, must be part of the solution to the current violent conflict in CAR. With the withdrawal of Chadian troops from

MISCA, it is crucial to continue the dialogue with N'Djamena in order to have Chad on board. Were Chad to be marginalised, there is a risk that it would act as a spoiler or support certain parties to the conflict in order to safeguard its own national security interests.

## 5.2 Medium Term

Once the security situation has stabilised and the peacekeeping forces have enough resources to maintain stability, the most acute grievances need to be addressed to avoid a relapse into war. There is a risk that spoilers will try to derail the peace process if actors feel left out, or if their grievances and demands are not met. This is particularly the case as regards the elite, so other means of competition for political power must be perceived as accessible.

In the medium term, the elite must agree on how they can move their power struggles to the ballot box. Given the ethno-regional dimension of the conflict, some type of decentralisation process or a reform of the political system giving more power to the local authorities could be a possibility. There is a complete lack of trust within the elite, so a system that mitigates these tensions must be put in place.

While there is a need to disarm both the Anti-Balaka and the ex-Séléka, the international DDR template has not worked in CAR in the past, and will not work this time. Previous DDR processes have had a reverse effect on the security situation by providing incentives for youths to join rebel groups for economic benefits. Therefore it is crucial to provide the ranks of the armed groups with other opportunities in the medium term.

The lack of economic opportunities and poverty is a general problem which has provided political entrepreneurs with a recruitment base. By creating opportunities in the medium term, the incentives for people to join armed groups would decrease. Economic development is a long-term process, but medium-term initiatives should not be disregarded but could rather constitute the foundation for future developments. It is important that those initiatives are sustainable and inclusive, as handing out cash or DDR packages to ex-combatants will only have the reverse effect.

It is not possible to get groups to disarm when there are no third-party security guarantees. The conflict parties would not be willing to disarm unless they are guaranteed security. Therefore the international community must ensure a strong long-term presence of international troops (police and military) while trust can be established between the leaders in the warring factions.

In the medium term, the (re)construction of the state security forces should also be a priority, although it is a long-term process. Previous attempts to undertake SSR in CAR have failed, since there has been no political will in the government.

The transitional government may be more willing to undertake such reforms, but lessons from previous SSR in CAR show that the reform agenda should not be too broad. SSR should not be considered a solution to problems that need to be solved by other means. In addition, the security situation must be stable enough for a political process to take place, of which SSR should be a part. When the time is ready, the strategy from 2008 could serve as a point of departure for discussions.

However, with regard to SSR, it would be advisable to focus on a few crucial aspects and sectors in the security system at the outset. A good start may be the (re)construction of the police force and the judiciary, in order to create a CAR capacity that could work together with international personnel in order to provide the population with security. The police force has had a subordinate role to the army traditionally, so the focus should be on the law enforcement agencies before reconstructing the army.

At some point the CAR army needs to be (re)constructed. When doing so, a vetting process must precede any reintegration or integration into the armed forces. Human rights violations have constituted a serious problem in the past and the lack of a national professional army has contributed to the current cycle of violence. In the recruitment process, it is crucial that there is an equal representation of different ethnic groups and that the army comprises soldiers from all the different regions of the country. It could be a good idea to start this process before the presidential elections, but then involve the population through consultation to improve its legitimacy.

The government needs financial support from international partners in order to establish a functioning transitional administration and keep on paying civil servants. The reconstruction of hospitals and schools should also be priorities in the medium term.

Improved management of natural resources such as diamonds, gold, uranium and timber is crucial in the medium term. First of all, the profit from these resources may provide an incentive for actors to continue to wage war or to resort to violence. Secondly, good governance with regard to natural resource management can provide the state with revenues, which in turn can be distributed to the population.

Even if the security situation were to allow for presidential and legislative elections in early 2015, the political climate, as well as logistical and administrative matters, will impede such an endeavour. The electoral registers have been destroyed and the social fabric of CAR society shattered. In addition, the question of the refugees should be taken into account in elections.

One idea would be to hold elections on a local level instead of presidential elections. By doing so, prefectures where the political climate allows could go for local elections, while others could wait. To work on a local level with



religious leaders, village chiefs and communities could also create the seeds of a culture of political participation. This means that the transitional government would have to continue to govern the country. With regard to legitimacy, this is no worse than holding elections where people cannot vote due to administrative and security obstacles.

The political system in CAR also deserves to be analysed in terms of how suitable it is. Centralised power and a system where the winner takes all may constitute an obstacle in war-torn societies. For example, quotas or other power sharing agreements may be discussed. A participatory political process needs the participation of the population. With a weak civil society, other structures such as religious institutions or local associations should have a say in order for reforms not to be based on perceptions in Bangui, or in Brussels or New York for that matter. The rules of the political game must be re-established.

In the medium term, the government must show the population that it will act. In the marginalised parts of CAR, in particular the north-east, development projects should be a priority of the government in order to mitigate tensions and once and for all show people that they are not abandoned. International partners can support such efforts.

## **5.3 Long Term**

In order to consolidate peace and to prevent a relapse into violent conflict like so many times before in CAR, the establishment of a social contract between the state and its citizens is crucial. The population must also perceive peace as beneficial in order to hinder power-hungry leaders from mobilising support to return to arms. The list of things that should be done in CAR may be long, but a few important factors should be prioritised.

Establishing a social contract between the citizens and the state is a long-term process which must spring from internal political developments and societal change. International partners can support the efforts of the government or other actors as long as there is an understanding of how this affects the power relations within society. The discriminatory behaviour of the government and exclusionary politics have triggered violent conflict in CAR for a long period of time. It is crucial to ensure that the political parties represent the interests of the population and that there are other ways to forward political demands rather than taking up arms. To do so, the possibility of political participation and a means for the population to hold its leaders accountable must be established and strengthened.

The personalisation of the state and its institutions and the creation of a predator state have seriously damaged the relationship between citizens and state. The government must show that the state is there for its citizens and that the mismanagement of state institutions and the embezzlement of funds and revenues

lead to repercussions. The creation of independent control mechanisms, a strong independent judiciary and a free press are crucial in this regard. International partners should support such developments in consultation with the government and the population.

For the state to be able to serve its population, it needs revenues and a functioning administration. The administration and the institutions must be rebuilt from scratch in CAR and international support in this regard is crucial in terms of capacity building. This is also important in order to manage the natural resources in the long term, so that the profits can improve the lives of the population.

Security provision and the reconstruction of the security forces should be a priority. However, the implementation of such reforms is dependent on the political will on behalf of the government and must be integrated into a broader political project. If that proves not to be the case, international partners should not engage in such projects but instead strengthen local capacities to increase political participation in order for the population to forward its demands democratically.

Poverty and the lack of economic development is one of the root causes of the conflicts in CAR. While sounding much like a cliché, improvements in health care, education and infrastructure could make an enormous difference and cut off the recruitment base for power-hungry individuals. While the private sector has an important role in developing the economy, state institutions and the ability of the state to regulate are crucial. CAR has been one of the worst places to do business for several years according to the World Bank.<sup>362</sup> Corruption, weak legislation, poor infrastructure and other factors connected to the weakness of the state are at the core of the problems in attracting investors. Hence, strengthening the state structures and autonomy of the state should be a priority.

Following the mass exodus of the Muslim population and the inter-communal violence, reconciliation should be a priority. Justice is important to reconcile societies, and in countries such as Rwanda and Uganda local traditional systems of justice have been used in order to reconcile and move on after war and genocide. It is also important that people are able to create a connection between communities that have previously been enemies, for example through support for inter-communal efforts to reconstruct destroyed infrastructure and institutions such as schools and hospitals.

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<sup>362</sup> IFC (2014).

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## Interviews

Phone interview, Dr. Roland Marchal, Research Fellow CNRS, 17 January 2014

Phone interview, European Diplomat, Central African Republic, 24 January 2014

Phone interview, Dr. Louisa Lombard, 3 February 2014

Phone interview, Dr. Angela Meyer, 4 February 2014

Phone interview, Dr. Marielle Debos, 19 February 2014

Interview, Swedish Aid-worker, Stockholm, 14 March 2014

### **Seminars**

LRA expert seminar, Entebbe, Uganda, 24-25 July 2013

Seminar, ICG, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stockholm, 1 April 2014

### **Maps**

UN, (2011), *Central African Republic*, Map No. 4048, Rev.4, United Nations, November 2011, Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section





In 2013, the Central African Republic (CAR) plunged into a cycle of violence which resulted in hundreds of thousands displaced and thousands dead. While instability, rebellion and violence are nothing new in CAR, the current humanitarian and security crisis is unprecedented. The conflict in CAR is often described as a religious conflict between Muslims and Christians. While there is evidence of ethnic cleansing and the majority of the Muslim population has fled, such a narrative does little to improve understanding of the causes of the conflict.

This report describes the underlying causes of the violent conflict in CAR and provides an analysis that goes beyond the simplistic narrative of a religious or tribal conflict. An examination of the structural causes and a detailed narrative of the events unfolding between December 2012 and March 2014 serve as the basis for recommendations to the international community on how to best support this war-torn country in the short, medium and long term.