

Crisis in the Central African Republic: Is it a religious war in a godforsaken country or something else?

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The Central African Republic is a landlocked country located in the centre of Africa. Bordered by seven other countries in the heart of the African continent, it was ruled for most of the years after independence from France in 1960 by the self-styled “Emperor”, Jean-Bédél Bokassa. A series of coups followed, with power changing hands frequently. With more than 80 different ethnic groups, a mix of Christians, Muslims and followers of indigenous faiths, the country is notoriously difficult to rule, despite having a population of only 4.6 million. Despite significant deposits of gold, diamonds and uranium, and vast troves of timber, it is among the poorest nations on Earth, sitting just seven places from the bottom of the UN’s human development index. Chronic poor governance and lack of an efficient state has denied the wider population the benefits of the country’s potential riches. [1] Chaos in the Central African Republic (CAR) is about power, not religion, this is neither jihad nor crusade. Fighting in CAR is over political power and money, with the capitol city Bangui as the prize.

Keywords: Central African Republic, diamond, gold, poor governance, inefficient state, political power, rebels, anti-rebels, humanitarian crisis;

Introduction

The Central African Republic is a landlocked country in central Africa, with a population of 4.5 million. The Central African Republic is often called a forgotten country, but that not quite right. It has had a long and substantial international presence and sizable foreign investment. It is just that those efforts not made much difference. As the country rapidly descends into greater violence, the difficult truth is that more — and much better — international and regional involvement is its only hope.

The former French colony of Ubangi-Shari became the Central African Republic upon independence in 1960. [2] When the long-running civil war in the Central African Republic (CAR) ended in 2007, observers hoped that peace would usher in a new era of economic recovery and development. Instead the country, already one of the world’s poorest, faces a devastating humanitarian crisis that threatens to plunge the population even deeper into misery. Despite these mineral resources, including gold and diamond, CAR remains one of Africa’s poorest states. The country’s history has been marked by political instability. It has seen five coups and several rebellions since independence from France in 1960. [3] Sadly

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there is nothing new about the atrocities being inflicted against civilians in the Central African Republic. What is new is the scale of the violence and widespread and arbitrary targeting of people solely because of their religion.

Illegal weapons, as Bordas has described in her work, are awash in what many describe as a failed state where weak government authority, pervasive impunity, ethnic tensions, and rebel activity have driven instability and displacement for decades. [4: 312] [5: 10] One of the world's "forgotten" crises has forced its way back into the headlines now that rebels have swept across CAR, overthrowing the Government, forcing the president into exile and sending alarm throughout the international community. In 2013, a major security and humanitarian crisis ravaged the country. The area that is now the Central African Republic has been settled for at least 8,000 years; the earliest inhabitants were the probable ancestors of today's Aka (Pygmy) peoples, who live in the western and southern forested regions of the country. The slave state of Dar al-Kuti occupied the northern reaches until the various regions of the Central African Republic were brought under French colonial rule late in the 19th century. [6] Colonial administrators favoured some ethnic groups over others, resulting in political rivalries that persisted after independence in 1960. Following periods of civil strife and dictatorial government, including the infamous regime of the self-styled Emperor Bokassa I (who renamed the country the Central African Empire), the country embarked on a course of democracy that was threatened, at the end of the 20th century, by interethnic civil war in neighbouring countries as well as by attempted coups d'état.

Weary of social chaos and shifting allegiances among contending elements of the power elite, the country's citizens quote a regional proverb, "When elephants fight, the grass suffers; when elephants make love, the grass still suffers." [7]

Geographical situation of CAR

The Central African Republic is roughly the size of France and is bordered by Chad to the north, Sudan and South Sudan to the north and east, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Congo-Kinshasa) and the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville) to the south, and Cameroon to the west. The capital, Bangui, is situated on the southern border, formed by the Ubangi River, a tributary of the Congo River.

The Central African Republic occupies an immense rolling plateau that forms, along a crest that trends southwest to northeast, the major drainage divide is between the Lake Chad and the Congo River basins. The country is well supplied with waterways. Tributaries of the Chari River occupy the northern third of the country's territory. The remaining two-thirds of the terrain drains southward into the Ubangi River, which forms the Central African Republic's southern border with Congo (Kinshasa).

The vast central plains rise gradually in the northeast to the Bongos (Bongo) Massif, extending to an elevation of 4,360 feet (1,330 meters) at Mount Toussoro, and to the Tondou Massif in the east. In the west they rise toward the high granite range of the Karre Mountains, reaching nearly 4,625 feet (1,410 meters) at Mount Ngaoui, the country's highest point, before declining eastward into sandstone plateaus. In the north the most significant mountains are those of the Dar Challa range, which rise to 4,350 feet (1,326 meters) at Mount Ngaya near the border with Sudan. In the southeast is a plain cut by a number of rivers. [8]

Ethnic groups of CAR

The people of the Central African Republic range from the hunting–and–gathering forest Pygmy peoples, the Aka, to state–forming groups such as the Zande and Nzakara. Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the late 19th century, distinctions between different groups were highly fluid. Many thought of themselves as members of a clan rather than of a broader ethnic group. Interactions with those who spoke different languages and had different cultural practices ranged from peaceful trade and intermarriage to war and enslavement.

The attempts by colonial administrators and ethnographers to divide Central Africans into definite ethnic groups have never been viable. However, French colonizers did promote ethnic and regional distinctions among their Central African subjects. Drawing from populations of such southern riverine people as the Ngbaka (Mbaka), Yakoma, and Ubangi, the French helped to create an elite group, which emerged as an indigenous ruling group for the whole country and has held most political positions since independence. Regional affiliations have increased the complexity of this political terrain. Other, non-riverine Central Africans, who are far more numerous, have tended to resent this situation and have occasionally taken leadership roles themselves. Although people living in the country’s northern regions have gained more political power since independence, southern peoples still remain an important presence in national politics. [9]

A minority of Greek, Portuguese, and Yemeni traders are scattered around the country, and a small French population lives in Bangui. Diamond traders from western Africa and Chad, merchants from various African countries, and refugees from nearby countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, also reside in Bangui and the hinterlands. The people belong to more than 80 ethnic groups, which are classified according to geographic location and each group has its own language. (For the distribution of main language families see next Figure 1.)

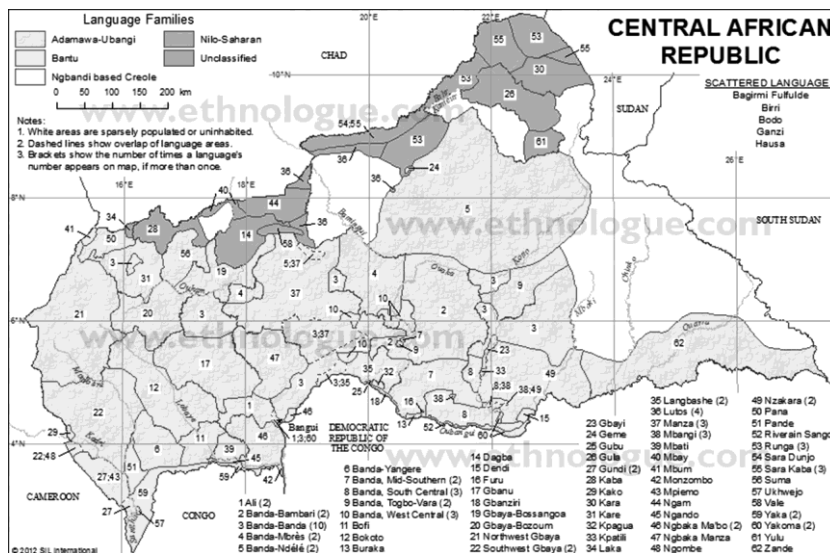


Figure 1. Language families in CAR. [9]

About 75% are Baya–Mandjia and Banda (40% are largely located in the northern and central parts of the country), and 4% are M’Baka (south–western corner of CAR). Sangho, the language of a small group along the Oubangui River, is the national language spoken by the majority of Central Africans. Only a small part of the population has more than an elementary knowledge of French, the official language. [10] The Baya (33%) to the west and the Banda (27%) in the east central region and are estimated to be the most numerous groups. In the savannah live the Mandjia, accounting for 13% of the population, the Sara, accounting for 10%, and the Mboum, accounting for 7%, each with several subgroups. In the forest region are the Pygmies (Binga) and some Bantu groups, including the Mbaka, who account for another 4% of the population. About 4% of the population are Yakoma. (See Figure 2.) There were about 6,500 Europeans in 1998, including 3,600 French. [12] About three–fifths of the population is rural, residing primarily in the southern and western parts of the country.

The eastern and north–eastern sections of the country are less populated. Of the urban population, a significant proportion lives in Bangui. Other major towns are Berbérati, Bossangoa, and Bouar in the west, Bambari and Bria in the central plains, and Bangassou and Mobaye on the Ubangi River. [13]

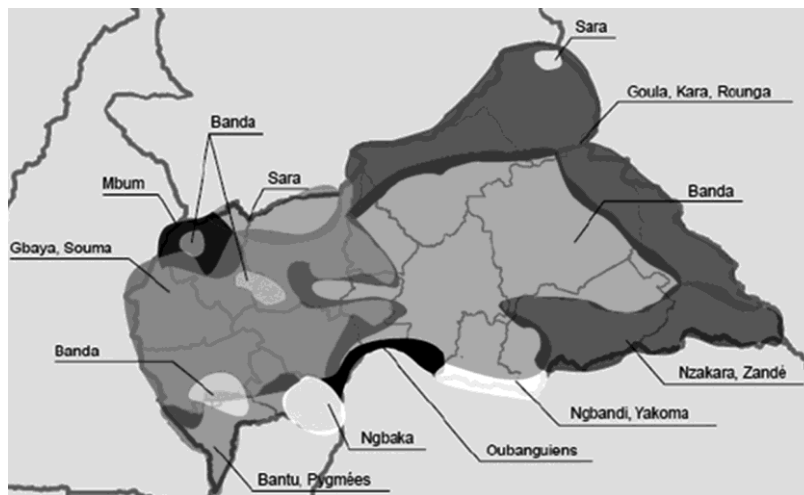


Figure 2. Main ethnic groups in CAR. [11]

There are presently no railways in the Central African Republic. [14] The country has 23,810 km (14,796 mi) of roads, of which only 429 km (267 mi) were paved.

Religion

The country has an area of 242,000 square miles and a population of around 4.3 million. According to the 2003 census, Protestants constitute 51% of the population, Catholics 29%, and Muslims 15%. The remainder practices indigenous beliefs (animism), although many indigenous beliefs are also incorporated into Christian and Islamic practice throughout the country. [15] According to other sources providing more fresh data, the Christian religion represent 71.33% of population and the Muslim part only 13.67%. (See Chart 1.)

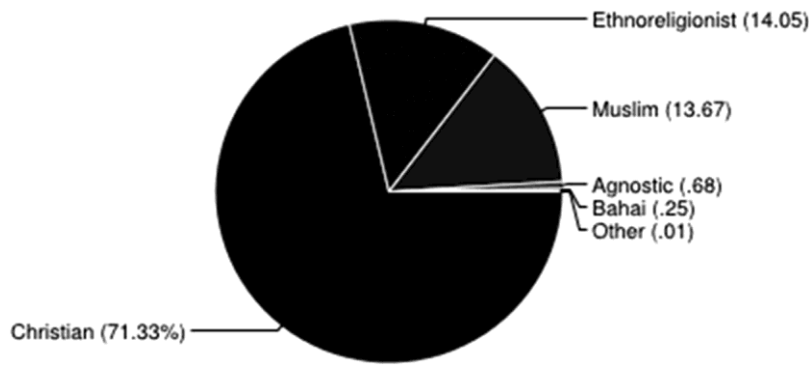


Chart 1. Chart of religion distribution in CAR. [16]

The constitution (suspended since 2003) provides for freedom of religion while prohibiting certain forms of religious fundamentalism. This prohibition is generally considered to be directed toward Muslim fundamentalists. Christian holidays are celebrated as national holidays. All religious groups must be registered through the Ministry of Interior. The Unification Church has been banned since the mid-1980s. The practice of witchcraft is considered a criminal offence; however, prosecution is generally made only in conjunction with other criminal activity, such as murder.

Economy of CAR

Despite diamond and gold mining, agriculture is the largest sector and the basis of the Central African economy, contributing half of the gross domestic product and occupying nearly four-fifths of the workforce; diamonds and timber also contribute to the economy. International (mostly French) capital dominates the economy, but the Central African Republic has tried since independence to attract capital and development monies from other countries, including Libya, Taiwan, China, Germany, and Japan.

Under pressure from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reverse the growth of government spending, liberalize prices, encourage a more open investment code, and provide incentives to agriculture and forestry, the Central African Republic submitted to a structural adjustment program in 1986. In the 1990s the IMF asked for further adjustments, such as devaluing the franc and privatizing various businesses, commercial banks and a petroleum distribution company. As France has reduced its financial commitments to its former colonies in Africa, the Central African Republic's financial standing has deteriorated.

In the 1990s a decline in international prices for cash crops, the inflated cost of imports caused by poor transportation into the country, the continued smuggling of diamonds across the border, and domestic political unrest further strained the economy. Most significant, however, were corruption and financial mismanagement, which left the government unable to pay the salaries for the military and the public sector. The resulting infidelity of police, armed forces and disloyalty of public servants to running government also caused political unrest to continue into the 21st century. CAR is one of the poorest countries in African continent. The

welfare system, as we know in Europe, and it determined by dr Bordas in her essay, based on public law, or based on American mixed system (public law and market) never ever existed in CAR. [45]

Diamonds

Africa is the world’s largest producer of diamonds, producing as much as 50% of global production. To date, Africa has produced over 75%, in value, of the world’s diamonds with more than 1.9 billion carats worth an estimated \$US 158 billion mined. Angola, Botswana and South Africa are leading producers of diamonds. Mining activities are focused on South Central Africa, with diamonds being produced primarily from kimberlitic mines (South Africa, Angola, DRC, Ghana, Tanzania, Lesotho and Botswana), followed by alluvial dredging operations (Angola, CAR, Namibia and South Africa) and offshore marine diamond activities (South Africa and Namibia). [17: 6]

Most of West Africa’s diamond production in the area originates from fluvial placers and only on a minor scale from eluvial deposits or from altered kimberlitic pipes. Virtually all mines are relatively small-scale operations mainly run by artisanal miners, except for the Akwatia mine in Ghana and the Aredor project in Guinea. [18] (The Figure 3 representing the mineral resources of CAR.)

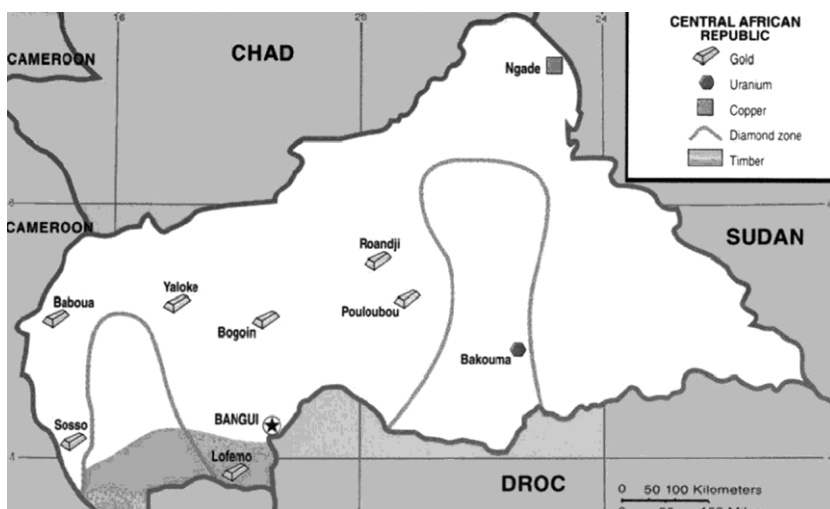


Figure 3. Mineral resources of CAR. [19]

In most cases, the primary sources of these alluvial diamonds have not been traced yet, therefore making CAR an attractive exploration target. Officially, diamonds have contributed 60% to the nation's export earnings. CAR is one of Africa’s major diamond producers, although production is almost entirely produced by artisanal methods. CAR is well known for its good quality diamonds, ranked 5th in the world in terms of quality.

Diamonds were discovered in the early 1900’s and production did increase to a maximum total of about 600,000 ct per year. It has subsequently dropped due to lack of control of the

diamond industry. CAR produces an estimated 620,000 ct each year. Some commercial mining and exploration of alluvial deposits has begun, albeit with difficulties.

The Boungou River is the largest tributary of the Kotto River, which is the eastern CAR's largest river. The Boungou River and its tributaries account for some 25% of CAR's total production, with most production being sourced from three main alluvial prospects: the Djourou, Aigbando and Trouapou–Boungou prospects that are currently being exploited by artisanal miners. Canadian Junior Vaaldiam Resources has begun evaluating this region, and is located approximately 80 km northwest of the town of Bria.

United Reef (CAR) has two exploration permits for diamonds. The permits include two alluvial deposits. Howe Centafrigue has several alluvial projects in CAR, including the Ma-bala mine, which has reported declining grades. Diamond Work's Central African Mining SARL (CAMCO) claims to have the country's largest ground holding with 6 licenses in the northeast that total 11,600 km². Camco intends focusing on the Ouandjia and Nzako permits in the second half of 2011. Similarly, its diamond buying subsidiary CADCO (Central African Diamond Company) will resume operations in CAR. [19]

Gold

Axmin Inc. of Canada continues to explore for gold in the country. A pre-feasibility study for the Passendro Gold Project was completed by GBM Gold Ltd. of the United Kingdom in early 2006. It was followed by a feasibility study conducted by Senet (pty) Ltd. of South Africa, commissioned during the third quarter of 2006. The pre-feasibility study had envisioned an open pit operation with a gravity carbon-in-leach processing plant that would process about 3 million metric tons per year (Mt/yr) of ore with production estimated to be about 6,200 kilograms per year (kg/yr) of gold (reported as 200,000 troy ounces).

Other companies exploring for gold in the country included Prospero Minerals Corp. (formerly Corumel Minerals Corp., before 2006), and Tamija Gold & Diamond Exploration Inc. of the United States, and London-based Pan-African Resources Plc.

Illegal diamond and gold trade

The illegal mining and smuggling of diamond and gold has always been present in CAR. However the creation of Seleka was a turning point for this illegal activity.

Seleka rebels have for several years controlled some of the diamond-producing areas in the north of CAR, allowing them to have ample financial resources for better weaponry. Even more worrisome, the Seleka members are — according to several people who fled Sangha — being aided by armed fighters from neighbouring Sudan known as the Janjaweed, (government backed militia) who were accused of committing atrocities against civilians and responsible for ethnic cleansing in Darfur. Sudan, and whose leader is wanted by the International Criminal Court, needless to say they are not part of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme.

Observers fear many of Central African Republic's illicit diamonds are being funnelled into Sudan. [20] There are several examples that can be quoted where these very same rebel groups are allured by the country's mineral wealth. In September 2011, for example, the *Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix* (CPJP) clashed with the Union des Forc-

es Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement (UFDR) in Bria, over the control of the area's diamond mines. In June 2012, between 70 and 100 armed men, alleged to be LRA rebels or Baba Ladé fighters, attacked AREVA's Bakouma mining project. Baba Ladé, rebel leader of the Chadian Front Populaire pour le Redressement (FPR), which operates in the centre-north of CAR, allegedly also earns income from the sale of gold in Bangui. It is rumoured that he has even bought machinery to increase the effectiveness of his gold extraction activities. Nevertheless, cattle breeding has always been a much more important source of revenues for Baba Ladé. [17: 21–23]

Since September 2012, however, FPR is retreating from CAR after a tripartite agreement was signed between Baba Ladé, Chad and CAR. Another important, if not the biggest, security issue is the presence of bandits throughout the country. These gangs profit from state security services' lack of control outside of the capital and randomly attack traffic on the country's dilapidated road network. [21] Banditry is also a major problem in mining zones and on mineral trading routes, where these bandits demand diamonds and taxes from diggers and diamond traders. Since 2006, because of state inefficiency, the threat of bandits has apparently diminished in the relatively stable southwest. In the east, however, the situation remains precarious. [5: 14] Next to armed violence, including rebellion and banditry, natural resources can also give rise to friction between other, non-armed groups of society. Conflicts might, for example, arise between migrant workers and local communities over access to mining lands, or the migrants' alleged lack of respect of local social norms and customs.

Another actual issue is a tension between artisanal miners and government officials. Non-registered miners are wary of avoiding capture by mining brigade units. Furthermore, artisanal miners are often distrustful of government agents, suspecting them of rent-seeking incentives. Government agents are, indeed, often cited as perpetrators of harassment.

Central African Republic's new government insists that it intends to fully comply with the Kimberley Process, which aims to curb the trade in blood diamonds whose profits have driven some of the bloodiest conflicts in Africa over the past 20 years.

Oil

The Central African Republic did not produce mineral fuels in 2006 and depended upon imports for its energy requirements. United Reef Ltd. of Canada obtained the rights to a petroleum exploration permit in the country through a "farm-in agreement" with Denver-based RSM Production Corp. in 2004. It was unable to continue with its exploration activities in

2006. The company declared *force majeure* following the lack of progress in resolving a contract dispute between RSM and the government. The company's exploration permit was for the Doseo and the Salamat basins in the northern part of the country. In a bid to tap the country's under-exploited mineral wealth, former president Bozize had awarded China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) rights to explore for oil at Boromata, in the country's northeast near the border with Chad. South Africa's DIG oil is also prospecting in the southeast of the country, near the town of Carnot. The new president certainly will review CAR's mining and oil contracts with China, signed by the Bozizé government.

Uranium

The following companies are performing uranium prospection and/or exploration in Central African Republic: Uramin Inc., Uranio AG. (South Africa), Les Mines de Centrafrique (CAR); and interested foreigner countries are: France, UK, South Africa and Switzerland.

A peculiarity of the Bakouma deposit is the great difficulty to extract the uranium. [22] A start-up of the French nuclear giant Areva's project in Bakouma was planned for 2010. According to the plan, at full capacity, the mine will have an output of 2,000 tons per year. [23] The project was to ramp up to full production in 2014–15, but this is now delayed at least two years after an expenditure of EUR 107 million, due to low uranium prices and the need for further research on the metallurgy. Resources have been reported as 32,000 t U by Areva Resources Centrafrique, which holds a 90% interest over ten discrete deposits. [24]

During the last decade China has steadily increased their visibility and influence in CAR, a country rich in untapped natural resources. With French investments moribund and French influence in general decline, the Chinese are likely positioning themselves as CAR's primary benefactor in exchange for access to CAR's ample deposits of uranium, gold, iron, diamonds, and possibly oil. Although Chinese aid and investment was unlikely to come with troublesome caveats regarding democratic practices and economic transparency, they are apparently interested in promoting the pacification of troubled areas in northern CAR in order to protect their own interests and personnel. [25]

Modern History (After the colonial period)

On August 13, 1960 CAR gained complete independence with David Dacko as its first President. In 1966 Col. Jean Bédél Bokassa, Dacko's cousin, seized power. In December 1977

Bokassa made himself Emperor and his rule was extravagant as well as brutal with Amnesty International revealing he had participated in the massacre of 80 school children. The country's name was changed to the Central African Empire. In September 1979 Bokassa was ousted by a coup that was supported by French paratroopers and resulted in the restoration of the republic. In 1981 the country's name was changed back to CAR and in the same year the military led by Gen. Andre Kolingba overthrew Dacko once more, taking control of the government. The new military government banned all political parties and in 1986 Bokassa returned to CAR from exile in France. In 1987 Bokassa was convicted of embezzlement and being an accomplice to several murders. He was sentenced to death, although his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment.

After three tumultuous decades of misrule — mostly by military government — civilian rule was established in 1993 and lasted for one decade. President Ange-Felix Patasse's civilian government was plagued by unrest, and in March 2003 he was deposed in a military coup led by General Francois Bozize, who established a transitional government. Though the government has the tacit support of civil society groups and the main parties, a wide field of candidates contested the municipal, legislative, and presidential elections held in March and May of 2005 in which General Bozize was affirmed as president. The government was unable to have full control the countryside, because of state inefficiency, where pockets of lawlessness persist. [5: 16–17] Unrest in the neighbouring nations of Chad, Sudan, and the DRC has been permanently able to affect stability in the Central African Republic as well. [26: 94–95]

In June 2005, fighting between government and rebel forces in the north caused tens of thousands of people to flee across the border into Chad; this continued in the ensuing years. There were several cease–fire agreements signed between the government and various rebel groups, particularly in 2007 and 2008, but many of the agreements were not completely implemented. The north was also subject to violence that emanated from conflict in the Darfur region of neighbouring Sudan and spilled over the border, while in the south the population was increasingly terrorized by the Lord’s Resistance Army, a Ugandan rebel group that had been using the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a base for operations before a military offensive at the end of 2008 pushed them deeper into the Central African Republic and other countries. [27: 7–11] The next presidential election, initially due in 2010, was repeatedly postponed. When it did take place, on January 23, 2011, Bozizé and Patassé were both among the candidates. Polling did not go smoothly; before the election results were announced, Patassé and other challengers to Bozizé had lodged complaints that the election was rigged. When the results were announced in early February, Bozizé was declared the winner, with 66% of the vote.

Way to the current crisis — Seleka Coup

In late 2012 a coalition of old rebel groups under the new name of Séléka renewed fighting. Two other, previously unknown groups, the Alliance for Revival and Rebuilding (A2R) and the Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country (CPSK) also joined the coalition, as well as the Chadian group FPR. [28] The group, which included factions of former rebel movements, accused Bozizé of not implementing aspects of a previous peace agreement. It demanded his ouster from the presidency and called for him to stand trial at the International Criminal Court. Seleka quickly advanced south but stopped short of Bangui in December and entered into negotiations with the government. In January 2013 Seleka and Bozizé’s administration agreed to a cease–fire and a power–sharing deal that addressed several rebel demands, such as the release of prisoners and the withdrawal of foreign troops in the country. In addition, it provided for the inclusion of some Seleka members in a new unity government and allowed Bozizé to finish his term, with new elections to be held in 2016. Seleka quickly became disenchanted with the implementation of the deal, claiming that Bozizé failed to honour important aspects of the agreement. In mid–March 2013 the group issued an ultimatum for Bozizé and, despite some last–minute concessions from the president, resumed hostilities a few days later. Seleka advanced toward Bangui, seizing the capital on March 24, and Bozizé fled the country. (See Figure 4.)



Figure 4. Rebel advance in CAR. [44]

Seleka then claimed control of the government. Seleka's actions were widely condemned by the international community, and the African Union suspended the country from the organization and imposed sanctions on rebel leaders. One of the rebel leaders, Michel Djotodia, claimed to be the *de facto* head of state and initially promised to uphold the terms of the January power-sharing agreement. He then later announced that he was suspending the constitution and dissolving the National Assembly and the government. Djotodia's first attempt at forming a transitional government was rejected by the opposition as well as by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS; also known by its French acronym, CEEAC) regional body, which called for the formation of a national transitional council that would administer the country until elections could be held. Djotodia accepted ECCAS's recommendations, and in April a council was formed. Soon after, Djotodia was elected president of the interim body, but he was not inaugurated until August 18, 2013. Djotodia and other Seleka leaders launched their uprising to gain access for northern peoples to resource wealth — particularly oil being exploited in their northern homeland by the China National Petroleum Corporation. [29]

The interim government struggled to restore order and perform the normal functions of state. However it was unable to fulfil the requirements of an efficient state. [30: 606–607] Meanwhile, Seleka rebels had been pillaging parts of the country and engaging in horrific acts of violence, rape, and kidnapping. The primarily Christian civilian population began to form militias, known as “*anti-balaka*” (Sango: anti-machete), to protect themselves against the mainly Muslim rebels, which in turn degenerated into a cycle of violent attacks between Christians and Muslims, even civilians, that left hundreds dead and thousands displaced. Analysts warned of the potential for the situation to further degenerate into genocide should nothing be done to stop the violence. [31]

On December 5, 2013 the UN Security Council voted to authorize the deployment of an African-led peacekeeping force that would incorporate ECCAS troops already in the country, as well as the deployment of additional French troops to augment the country's existing military presence there, in an effort to protect the civilian population. Still, the humanitarian situation at the end of 2013 was bleak, with more than 800,000 people displaced and almost half of the country's population in need of aid. In January 2014, ECCAS held a summit to address the worsening situation in the country. At the end of the summit, on January 10, both Djotodia and Tiangaye announced their resignations. Later that month the transitional council elected Catherine Samba-Panza, the mayor of Bangui, to be the new interim president. She was inaugurated on 23 of January 2014.

Parties involved in the armed conflict

There are at least five main armed groups/parties involving to the conflict in CAR:

1. *SELEKA (sometimes written as SÉLÉKA) — the rebels*

Seleka is a reference to fighters from next groups — Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), the Union of Republican Forces (UFR) and the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) — coming together to launch the rebellion. They are called Seleka from

2012 which in the local Sango language means alliance. Currently Seleka consist of following groups:

- Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC);
- Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP);
- Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR);
- Alliance for Revival and Rebuilding (A2R);
- Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country (CPSK).

There are many foreign mercenaries among the predominantly Muslim group, mostly from Chad and Sudan (Darfur). [32] They have been responsible for many human rights abuses and extra judicial killings since last December. The leader of the rebels, Mr Michel Djotodia proclaimed himself transitional president of the Central African Republic on March

25, 2013. Seleka fighters are mostly northerners and they were in power from March 2013 to January 2014. The number of fighters in Seleka is estimated to be around 5,000 troops however according to The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)² the correct number is between 15,000 and 20,000. [33]

2. *Armed forces of CAR*

The Central African Armed Forces [French: *Forces armées centrafricaines (FACA)*] are the armed forces of the Central African Republic, established after independence in 1960. Today they are a rather weak institution, dependent on international support to hold back the enemies in the current civil war. [34] Its disloyalty to the president came to the fore during

2 Note from the author: The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) is a non-governmental federation for human rights organizations. Founded in 1922, FIDH is the oldest international human rights organization worldwide and today brings together 178 member organizations in over 100 countries.

the mutinies in 1996–1997, but ever since then it has faced internal problems. It has been strongly criticized by human rights organizations due to its terror, including killings, torture and sexual violence. When General Kolingba became president in 1981, he implemented an ethnicity-based recruitment policy for the administration. Kolingba was a member of the Yakoma people from the south of the country, which made up approximately 5% of the total population. During his rule, members of Yakoma were granted all key positions in the administration and made up a majority of the military. This later had disastrous consequences, when Kolingba was replaced by a member of a northerner tribe, Ange-Félix Patassé. The army has hence been considered disloyal by the two northerner presidents Patassé and Bozizé, both of whom have equipped and run their own militias outside FACA. The military also proved its disloyalty during the mutinies in 1996–1997. [35]

The forces assisting Bozizé in seizing power in 2003 were not paid what they were promised and started looting, terrorizing and killing ordinary citizens. Summary executions took place with the implicit approval of the government. The situation has deteriorated since early 2006 and the regular army and the presidential guard regularly execute extortion, torture, kill and commit other human rights violations. At the end of 2006, there were an estimated 150,000 internally displaced people. During a UN mission in the northern part of the country in November 2006, the mission had a meeting with a prefect who said that he could not maintain law and order or control over the military and the presidential guards. The FACA conducts summary executions and burn houses. This Army cannot be seen as count as a well-equipped, trained and paid armed forces; consequently the loyalty to a new President is very questionable. Currently the Central African Army has 4,500 troops, mainly equipped with light weapons.

3. Anti-balaka militia (anti-Séléka rebels)

A new rebel group/militia, whose name means “anti-machete” in local Sango and Mandja languages, has been created in response to the Seleka terror against Christians. After Seleka’s overthrow of Bozizé earlier this year, the group looted and attacked many communities. Thousands fled their homes and the humanitarian crisis deepened. At the same time, a motley crew of local self-defence militias and anti-Séléka armed groups, which have come to be known collectively as the anti-balaka, emerged. In retaliation to Seleka’s rampages, these local vigilante peasants, armed with machetes, rifles and other weapons, waged an armed resistance in the north.

The group is predominantly Christian and increasingly involved in atrocities targeting the Muslim community. As Seleka torched villages and massacred entire populations, the “anti-machete”, or “anti-balaka” — initially local militias paid to defend crops and cattle against robbers and highwaymen due to the absence of state security — began seeking re-venge. It became a catch-all for local vigilantes armed with bows and arrows. Most of them have home-made rifles, some have machetes, knives, and clubs. (See Figure 5.) Today’s anti-balaka also includes the Association of Central African Farmers (ACP), an anti-Séléka peasant movement, as well as the Front for the Return to the Constitutional Order in Central Africa (FROCCA). [37]

FROCCA is a militia made up of ex-army officers loyal to the former president as well as local vigilantes fed up with the Seleka’s continued violence; the group was formed in Paris

in August 2013 by former president Bozizé. The number of anti-balaka have approximately 15,000 troops. [36] Another factor often cited in the violence is the issue of religion, with the conflict sometimes framed as pitching the largely Muslim Séléka rebels against the predominantly Christian anti-balaka forces. [38] But while religious tension is an important factor in some instances of violence, this framing is simplistic. For instance, along with Muslims from CAR and abroad, the Séléka also includes many non-religious rebels, other bandits and opportunists who have joined in the looting and vandalism since March 2013. And while the rebels have committed some religiously-motivated atrocities against Christians, they are also driven by non-religious motivations and have attacked Muslim communities on occasion. [39]

4. International military presence in CAR

France

France, practically since independence, has been present militarily in CAR. In 1997, France came to adopt new strategic principles for its presence in Africa. [6] This included a reduced permanent presence on the continent and increased support to multilateral interventions. In Central African Republic, the Bouar base and the Béal Camp (at that time home to 1,400

French soldiers) in Bangui were shut down, as the French concentrated its African presence on Abidjan, Dakar, Djibouti, Libreville and N'Djamena and the deployment of a *Force d'action rapide*, based in France. (See Figure 5.)

However, due to the situation in the country, France has retained a military presence. During the mutinies, 2,400 French soldiers were patrolling the streets of Bangui. Their official task was to evacuate foreign citizens, but this did not prevent direct confrontations with the mutineers (resulting in French and mutineer casualties). The level of French involvement resulted in protests among the local population, since many sided with the mutineers and accused France of defending a dictator against the people's will. Voices were also heard in France where some blamed France for its protection of a discredited ruler, totally incapable of exerting power and managing the country. After the mutinies in 1997, the MISAB was a multilateral force, but it was armed, equipped, trained and managed by France. The Chadian, Gabonese and Congolese soldiers of the current *Force multinationale en Centrafrique (FO-MUC)* mission in the country also enjoys logistical support from French soldiers. In response to the risk of genocide, France has increased its military forces in CAR from November

2013. [40] Currently France has 1,600 troops in CAR. [41]

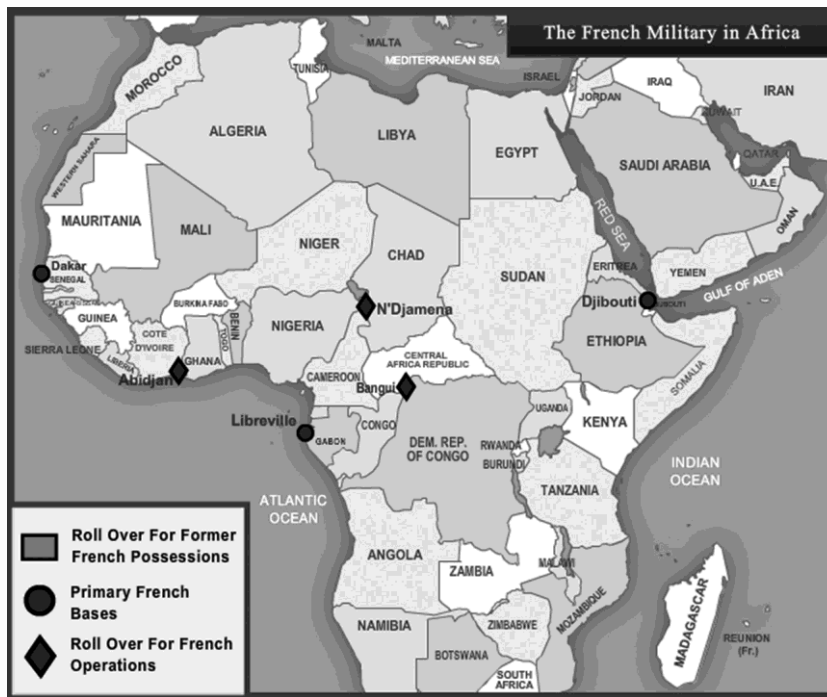


Figure 5. French military in Africa. [36]

5. MISCA (*Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique*)

The African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA, French acronym for *Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine*) is an African Union peacekeeping mission to the Central African Republic. MISCA was established on December 5, 2013 by United Nations Security Council resolution

2127 to stabilise the country as a result of the Central African Republic conflict under the Djotodia administration and following the 2013 Central African Republic coup d'état. The mission, officially backed by France and initially led by the African Union, was deployed on December 19, 2013. The resolution includes the option to transfer it to a larger mission under United Nations authority with peacekeeping forces from more countries — if needed and if appropriate local conditions are met. Troop contributing countries are: Burundi (850), Cameroon (800), Congo (850), RD Congo (850), Gabon (500), Guinea Equatorial (200), and Chad (850).

Chad

In addition to the multilateral forces, there has been bilateral support from other African countries, such as the Libyan and Congolese support for Patassé, mentioned above. Former president Bozizé is in many ways dependent on Chad support. Chad has an interest in CAR, since it needs to ensure calmness close to its oil fields and the pipeline leading to the Cam-

eronian coast, close to the troubled northwest CAR. Before seizing power, Bozizé built up his rebel force in Chad, trained and augmented by the Chadian. President Déby assisted him actively in taking power in March 2003 (his rebel forces included 100 Chadian soldiers). After the coup, another 400 soldiers were sent. Current direct support includes the 150 non-FOMUC Chadian troops that patrol the border area near Goré, the Chadian soldiers patrolling Bangui, but most of all the Chadian soldiers within the presidential lifeguard. The CEMAC Force includes 121 Chadian soldiers. The Chadian troops in CAR are accused of pro-Seleka bias which has led to increasing anger levelled at Chad in CAR. They have been accused by locals of killing civilians as well. In January 2014 the Chadian peacekeepers have been redeployed from Bangui to try to diffuse tension in the capital of CAR.

Current situation

Since the outbreak of this most recent crisis, the situation has remained extremely volatile, with a normalization of violence, widespread human rights violations and lack of state efficiency, at least providing public services on a minimum level, a collapse of state structures, including the official security providers (police, gendarmerie, armed forces). [30: 609–610] The humanitarian situation is dire as the current crisis juxtaposes itself with a chronic underdevelopment persisting throughout the country. The impact on the population is severe and multiple, and includes the lack of access to basic services, in particular to health care, lack of livelihoods and a looming food crisis. State security forces and members of non-state armed entities, including Chadian soldiers and bandits, continue to attack cattle herders, primarily members of the Mbororo ethnic group. Many observers believed Mbororo were targeted primarily because of their perceived foreign origins, relative wealth, and the vulnerability of cattle to theft. French troops are trying to disarm rival groups of vigilantes before Rwanda-style genocide can take hold. But the Central African Republic is the size of France, and there are fewer than 2,000 of these troops currently deployed — along with some 2,500 African peacekeepers. The French intervention has reduced the violence in Bangui, but the long-term danger is that sectarian brutality will perpetuate communal hatred.

While the situation in the capital, Bangui has improved slightly, the security situation outside the capital has continued to deteriorate, with serious human rights violations reportedly being perpetrated by different armed groups. There are currently 4,000 MISCA troops, 1,600

French forces, and the EU announced last week an additional 500 soldiers. But it is clear that the crisis in CAR which almost has the same territory as Texas (or France in Europe) with very poor infrastructure (roads, railway and airports) is requires highly mobile and quite numerous troops. The UN Secretariat has estimated that 10,000 soldiers could be required. [43] In January 2014, there were a number of significant CAR-related developments in Bangui, Brussels and Geneva. The National Transitional Council elected Catherine Samba-Panza, the mayor of Bangui, as the new interim President of CAR. Her election was welcomed by the Secretary-General and the UN Integrated Peace-building Office in CAR (BINUCA). In Brussels, EU foreign ministers approved a peacekeeping force expected to number up to 1,000 troops, while at a conference organised by OCHA and the European Commission, donors pledged nearly \$500 million in international assistance. In Geneva, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held a special session on the human rights situation in CAR. [42]

Conclusion

Despite its wealth in mineral and natural resources, CAR ranks 180 out of 187 countries in the 2012 United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index. Socio-political instability is the main factor hampering development, which is the consequence of rebellions, coups and inter-ethnic fighting during the last three decades. This has resulted in a deterioration of basic social and economic infrastructure, and has forced many school-age children out of school. The national net school enrolment of primary schoolchildren is 63%. Despite vast resources, including gold, timber, diamonds and uranium, it is among the poorest nations in the world.

The Central African Republic has been racked by five coups and numerous rebellions since independence from France in 1960 as different groups fought for control of state resources. That — and spill over from conflicts in neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Chad — have destroyed the rule of law, leaving a phantom state with an ill-disciplined army, corrupt administration and a lawless interior. CAR located in an unstable triangle bordering the DRC, Southern Sudan and Chad, which requires a regional approach to the problem. Combined, these factors breed a cycle of instability which has left Central Africans among the poorest in the world.

The disasters that the Central African Republic endures are not natural or caused by external political forces, but are rather man-made and indigenous. The numerous rebel groups compete with the government and each other not on the basis of ideological differences, but due to the personal ambitions of their leaders and competition over natural resources (diamond mines in particular). With the exception of sporadic LRA activity in the sparsely populated far east, conflict within CAR has caused extensive problems and outward refugee flows towards Chad in the north and Sudan in the northeast.

The international community has reacted as usual to such a situation, that is to say too late. They lacked the momentum to react in time before mass killing took place. However due to the French intervention, up to now they successfully avoided a Rwanda-style genocide.

It is clear that the success of any political route forward hinges on the support of the Economic Community of the Central African States and the African Union, as well as the United Nations. Central African actors need to find common ground and live up to their commitments. And the international community has no small role to play. Political steps should be complemented by boosting security and the rule of law. [30: 602–603] There is no shortage of priorities in this field, starting with strengthening a national army in decay and disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating thousands of rebels. One of the most important challenges on the horizon is to make sure that CAR does not slip back into obscurity at a time when continued international support will be crucial.

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