

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: INSECURITY IN THE REGIONS BORDERING CAMEROON

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Executive Summary

Cameroon, hitherto largely unaffected by instability in the Central African Republic (CAR), suffered attacks on civilians by armed men coming in Adamaoua and East regions from CAR in recent months. Some 10,000-15,000 people fled to safer areas; several thousand Central African civilians, escaping from violence in their own country, sought refuge in Cameroon.

General François Bozizé, heading a rebel movement supported by Chad, took power in CAR on 15 March 2003. Formerly chief of armed forces staff under President Ange-Félix Patassé, he had launched the rebellion in 2002 after fleeing the capital, Bangui, in October 2001 when accused of coup plotting. The war of 2002-2003 was characterized by widespread human rights abuses committed by both sides, mainly in the northwest and centre of the country.

Political conditions in Bangui have remained calm over the last two years and Bozizé has overseen a relatively consensual transition to the restoration of democracy, with two-round presidential and parliamentary elections taking place in March and May 2005.

But conditions in the northwestern regions, bordering Cameroon and Chad, remain highly insecure. Heavily armed bands, including substantial elements of Chadian Zaghawa, are engaged in widespread banditry and terror attacks on rural communities; the armed groups include significant numbers of former Bozizé rebels dissatisfied with their treatment since the general came to power and began to rebuild his links with the official armed forces. Up to now the government has only been able ensure the security of major towns; international humanitarian agencies occasionally operate in protected convoys, but grassroots provision of development support and basic services is severely disrupted.

The Cameroon authorities regard the activities of armed groups as a major threat to the security of their own country as well as the CAR; they believe there is substantial arms trafficking to these groups from Chad.

Humanitarian conditions in north-west CAR remain severe, although most of the 200,000 people displaced internally by the 2002-2003 conflict have returned home; the economy has been weakened by the cotton crisis.

But reform of the CAR armed forces and the country's successful election process offer a reasonable prospect that a stable government that is sufficiently democratic to satisfy major donors will be established before long. With donor support this government may gradually be able to restore security in the north-west, although this will represent a considerable military challenge.

1 Introduction

Cameroon, hitherto largely unaffected by successive upheavals over the past 10 years in the neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR), felt a direct cross-border impact during the the first three months of 2005. There were several incursions from the CAR into the territory of eastern Cameroon, with attacks on civilians by unidentified groups of armed men. A number of schools had to be closed and some 10,000-15,000 people moved away from districts near the border to areas perceived as safer because they are further from the border. Several thousand civilians from the CAR, escaping from violence in their own country, also sought refuge in Cameroon. Although relatively small by comparison with the major security and humanitarian crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Darfur region of Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire, these events were significant. They aroused concern that the instability and violence that has characterized western and northern parts of the CAR might be worsening, despite the country's success in staging a peaceful political transition. They signalled a risk that the crisis could have a wider destabilizing regional impact.

This report seeks to analyse the causes of the current instability in north-west CAR and to assess whether the situation is likely to worsen or to improve – with obvious consequences for the agencies responsible for preparing humanitarian relief. The report also looks at the impact of the crisis in affected areas of Cameroon. The security problems in the CAR/Cameroon border region are significant because they point up the scale of the ongoing problems in the CAR itself and because they signal the wider regional dimension of this crisis. This is not a crisis that is purely Central African either in its causes or its impacts – nor will any effective solution be purely Central African.

1.1 Chronology of Cameroon/CAR Border Security Issues¹

28 January 2005	Attack by an armed gang on vehicles at Fada on the Meiganga-Ngaoui road in Mbéré county of Adamaoua province. About 10 deaths; blamed on <i>zarguina</i> (either mercenaries or bandits).
24-25 March 2005	Attack on Yarmang III (Mbéré); the chief is killed. Some 10,000-15,000 people from the villages of Diel, Ouro Addé, Dewa, Borgop, Ndira, Ngolo and Damissa, near the border with CAR, flee to safer areas deeper in Cameroonian territory.
Late March 2005	Three schools (600 pupils) close because local people have moved away; the chief of Diel pays a ransom of CFA 4 million (US\$ 7,660) to secure the freedom of his son, kidnapped by an armed gang.
Late March-early April 2005	Cameroon national radio reports that three people were killed and 16 kidnapped at Djohong (Mbéré) by bandits who had come from CAR; they demanded a ransom of CFA 40 million (US\$ 76,600). They appeared to be heavily armed and well informed about local conditions.
31 March-4 April 2005	A UNHCR mission to the area finds that 2000-3000 Central Africans have fled into Cameroon, from the violence in their own country. The chief of one group of Bororo farmers from the CAR reports that his two sons were kidnapped a year earlier at Bouri, in CAR; he had to pay a ransom of CFA 2 million (US \$ 3,800) to free them. He and his family now want to settle in Cameroon.

¹ Information provided by UNHCR, Yaoundé, April 2005

2 The Country Context in the CAR

2.1 Political Background²

In May 2001 President Ange-Félix Patassé was almost killed by a coup attempt – for which his predecessor, the 1980s military ruler, General André Kolingba, assumed responsibility. The government embarked on a witch-hunt of suspected plotters.³ The hitherto trusted defence minister, Jean-Jacques Demafouth, was arrested. In October 2001 the government also tried to arrest General François Bozizé, the armed forces chief of staff, but he managed to escape from the capital, Bangui, with a group of followers.

Bozizé was granted refuge by President Idriss Déby of Chad. From there he began to organize a rebellion, with Chadian support, mounting cross border raids into the CAR. On 15 March 2003 Bozizé's advancing forces took control of Bangui, meeting minimal resistance. Patassé retreated to exile in Togo.

2.2 Bozizé's Transitional Regime

Bozizé proclaimed himself transitional president and mobilized consensus support for a broadly based government. Most of the CAR political class were relieved to see Patassé gone; even Patassé's Mouvement pour la Libération du Peuple Centrafricain (MLPC) party reconciled itself to the new state of affairs. Bozizé has not been significantly repressive; a nominated transitional assembly was set up and Bozizé committed himself to a timetable for restoring democratic rule.

Patassé had a weak record of economic management, but his last prime minister, Martin Ziguélé, did make progress in restoring working relations with donors. Bozizé's prime ministers, Abel Goumba and then Célestin Gaombalet, continued this process. In July 2004 the IMF agreed a US\$ 8.2 million package of post-conflict assistance. The strong support of other member governments of the Central African economic and monetary union (Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale - CEMAC) has ensured that Bozizé was not internationally isolated, despite having come to power through a coup. CEMAC maintains a contingent of peacekeeping troops in Bangui.⁴

2.3 Elections

Although he was late in formally declaring his candidacy, it was clear from the outset that Bozizé would stand for election to president. The first round of the presidential and legislative elections were held on 12 March 2005 and deemed by observers to have been free and fair. Despite difficult security conditions in some rural areas, turnout was above 68%.

To no one's surprise, Bozizé – enjoying the advantages of incumbency and a high public profile – got the highest support, 43% of votes, while Ziguélé mobilized the support of the MLPC, hitherto the country's biggest party, to secure 23.5%. Ex-president Kolingba won 16.4% and Jean-Paul Ngoupande, a technocratic former premier, 5%, while former minister Charles Massi won 3%. In the second round of elections, held on 8 May, Bozizé received the

² The narrative in this and following paragraphs, except where otherwise indicated, based on media reporting by Agence France Presse, *Lettre du Continent*, Economist Intelligence Unit, *Africa Confidential*, *Africa Analytica*, 2001-2005

³ CAR specialist at international human rights organization. Telephone interview, April 2005

⁴ Officials of the IMF and the World Bank. Personal interviews, 2003; M. Ziguélé. Personal interview, 2003

support of Ngoupande and Charles Massi. Kolingba opted to remain neutral but his Rassemblement démocratique centrafricain (RDC) party backed Bozizé. Most early returns showed Bozizé in the lead.

As expected, Bozizé achieved a convincing second round victory, when the final results were announced on 24 May, winning 64.67% of the vote, to Ziguélé's 35.32%. Turnout was a healthy 64.6%. Despite complaining of some irregularities, Ziguélé rapidly accepted the result. The successful conduct of the election has been praised by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, France's President Jacques Chirac, and Gabon's President Omar Bongo – the most influential leader in the Central African economic and monetary community, to which the CAR belongs – and the Algerian president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Bozizé – who first took power by force – needed such recognition.⁵

In the legislative elections, a new party set up to support Bozizé, the Convergence nationale Kwa na Kwa, finally took 42 of the 105 seats – more than had been expected after a modest first round performance. This leaves it strongly placed: the next largest parties being the former ruling MLPC (11 seats), and Kolingba's Rassemblement démocratique centrafricain (RDC) eight, with the rest shared among smaller parties and independents. Ngoupande, Mireille Kolingba (wife of the former president), and a Patassé era parliamentary speaker, Luc-Apollinaire Dondon-Konamabaye, all won seats; but the human rights lawyer Nicolas Tiangaye, chairman of the transitional assembly, and the veteran opposition politician Abel Goumba – premier and then vice-president during the 2003-2005 transition – were defeated. In one seat, Boganangone, in Lobaye, the election is being re-run, because of fraud discovered in first round voting.⁶

3 The Country Context in Cameroon

In marked contrast to the CAR, Cameroon has experienced decades of relative political stability, under presidents Ahidjo and Biya (with the exception of some tensions and occasional violent incidents in the Anglophone west of the country). Despite the breakdown of its economic reform agreement with the IMF during 2004, it remains one of the stronger and more diverse economies in west-central Africa, with relatively well developed state structures, public services and security forces.

It has therefore been relatively well equipped to cope with the incursions by armed gangs from the CAR, the arrival of several thousand Central African refugees, and the movement away from the risky border districts of up to 15,000 local people.

But having said that, it should be noted that the affected area of Adamaoua is one of the poorer and less developed regions of the country, far from the main centres of population and economic activity. The Bororo people who inhabit this region live largely by herding and come from a nomadic tradition; they are part of the broad arc of Fulbe societies that stretches across the West African Sahel. The border town of Ngaoui is an important market for cattle

⁵ Investir en Zone Franc (IZF), *L'actualité de la Centrafrique*, 2 June 2005, <http://www.izf.net/izf/Actualite/RDP/rca.htm> [accessed June 2005]

⁶ *Ibid.*

trading. The Bororos are sometimes perceived as relatively isolated from the mainstream of Cameroonian society. While they adhere to Islam, traditional beliefs also remain influential.⁷

Security conditions in northern Cameroon have been troubled for years, because of the activities of the *coupeurs de route*, or bandits; the government has deployed substantial military forces in an effort to curb their activities and the army has sometimes been accused of using excessive force. But there is also strong popular support in much of Cameroon for this tough approach against groups that are widely perceived as ruthless killers, rapists and robbers.

Because of the persistence of conflict and instability in neighbouring countries, there has been considerable overspill circulation of small arms. This has added to the problem of banditry and occasionally ethnic conflict. Recently, however, the Cameroonian authorities have become concerned that there is systematic trafficking of arms from Chad to ex-rebels and other armed groups in the CAR; they see this as a direct threat to Cameroon's own security. Officials believe that individuals with high level connections in Chad may be connected to this traffic, and that some of the gangsters benefit from a degree of complicity from elements in the Chadian military forces. The Cameroon authorities believe that some influential business figures in Chad are behind the car-jacking and vehicle smuggling activities of some *coupeurs de route*.⁸

After seeing its IMF programme run "off track" during the run up to its presidential election last year, jeopardizing its access to HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) debt relief – with severe budgetary consequences – Cameroon is now trying to get the process of economic reform back on track. There have been contacts with the IMF and there is reason to believe agreement will be reached. Should the country face a renewed refugee problem on its border with the CAR, the government could reasonably hope for the necessary international assistance.⁹

Meanwhile, in the first instance, it has already shown that it has the military and government capacity to take initial emergency action without waiting for donor intervention. There is already a strong military presence in the region and, because of the *coupeurs de route* problem, there is widespread popular support for this deployment – and thus potentially, for its reinforcement if necessary.

4 Security Infrastructure and Conditions in the CAR

4.1 Security Conditions

Security in CAR remains fragile and patchy.¹⁰ For many years, banditry – the phenomenon of *coupeurs de route* – has been a problem in rural areas, and difficult to control because of the

⁷ See interview with Msgr Samuel Kleda, Bishop of Batouri, in *L'Effort camerounais* [Yaoundé], 2005

⁸ Senior Cameroonian diplomat. Telephone interview, May 2005

⁹ Officials of the IMF and World Bank. Telephone interviews, April 2005

¹⁰ United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in the Central African Republic, S/2004/1012, 23 December 2004

size of the country and the limited resources of the security forces. But in recent years insecurity has worsened markedly in the north and the west.¹¹

Sporadic cross border raiding has long been a problem in northern rural areas. This has long antecedents; one of the reasons northern CAR is thinly populated is because it was the target of repeated Arab slave raiding even into the nineteenth century. These “traditional” patterns of conflict often relate to land use disputes between nomadic Chadian herders and Central African farmers, or to tribal disputes. On 19 November 2004 the country’s northernmost town, Birao, was attacked by Sudanese raiders seeking to steal fuel; but the local CAR army garrison fought back and 16 attackers were killed; five other people also died. In March 2005 a reconciliation meeting was held in the Sudanese town of Am Dafouk, just across the border; senior CAR and Sudanese officials were present to witness the signature of a tribal peace accord between the CAR’s Kara, Bolo and Fela and Sudan’s Taaïchah, Fallatah and Beni Helbah.¹²

Insecurity also remains a concern in Bangui itself. This is partly a problem of criminality, but it also reflects the culture of politically related violence and the weakness of institutional discipline within the security forces that developed at the time of the 1996-1997 mutinies. It was perpetuated throughout the subsequent ongoing divisions within the security forces, coup attempts, interventions by outside forces and the Patassé government’s tendency to resort to factionalism and ethnicity as political tools. The extent to which incidents in the past continue to stir angry feelings was illustrated by the way Bozizé and Ziguélé have been trading blame for the presence of units of Jean-Pierre Bemba’s Mouvement pour la libération du Congo (MLC) in Bangui back in 2001-2002; the Congolese militia brought in to support Patassé were notorious for their brutality and indiscipline.

Under Bozizé, matters have improved to some extent, and he has not governed in such a partisan style. However, sporadic security force abuses, even in Bangui itself, have continued and the authorities have not given the impression of a determination to control excesses, particularly by fighters who came to the city with his rebellion and often still regard themselves as above the law and normal disciplinary constraints.

In February 2005 the country’s leading human rights group, the Ligue Centrafricaine des Droits de l’Homme (LCDH), published a list of abuses committed by security force members and accused Bozizé of indifference to the problem;¹³ this provoked justice minister Zarambaud Assingambi to order an investigation and legal pursuit of the perpetrators. But immediate results have been limited.

Some harassment has been overtly political. In February 2005 the RDC party complained that its activists were being harassed by the presidential security force, the Garde républicaine. In March, Garde members exchanged fire in central Bangui with the soldiers assigned as bodyguards to the home of ex-president and RDC leader Kolingba. In late March the leader

¹¹ World Health Organization, *Report of a Field Mission to the Central African Republic*, 8 – 16 May 2004, Geneva, May 2004, <http://www.who.int/disasters/repo/14932.pdf> [accessed May 2005]; UN officials and diplomatic sources, Bangui. Telephone interviews, May 2005

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Ligue Centrafricaine des Droits de l’Homme, *Lettre ouverte au Général François Bozizé, Président de la République*, Bangui, 2 February 2005, http://www.fodem.org/la_depeche/200502/050207_EXACTIONS_ARMEE.htm [accessed May 2005]

of a community association for Bangui residents originating from the southern regions of Lobaye and Ombella Mpoko (which surround the city) complained of security worries and the stirring up of ethnic tensions by some political groups. In May the Garde prevented two members of the Ziguélé campaign team from boarding a flight to Paris.

In late May the continuing dribble of abuses provoked the French ambassador, Jean-Pierre Destouesse, to issue a public complaint, reminding the future post-election government that France is helping retrain the armed forces.¹⁴ This was clearly a veiled threat to suspend such aid if the authorities do not curb abuses.

4.2 The Situation in North-west CAR

The north-west is relatively well populated compared with most other rural areas, and its two main regions, Ouham and Ouham Pendé, are the heart of the country's cotton farming belt and thus traditionally of economic importance. This savannah zone is politically important, especially in the current context. It is the heartland of support for the MLPC party, founded by Patassé and now supporting his former premier Martin Ziguélé. But the southern part of the zone, around the important town of Bossangoa, is strongly supportive of Bozizé, who is from the important northwestern Gbaya ethnic group. While Patassé – a Sara from Paoua in Ouham Pendé – was in power, he could command a near monopoly of north-western support; his major opponents, such as the Yakoma André Kolingba, mostly came from the CAR's forested south.¹⁵ But now the two main figures in Central African politics – as shown by their election performance – are both seeking to claim cotton belt support. During the campaign, Bozizé tried to break the MLPC's regional dominance by campaigning in its heartland.

But despite its political importance, the region's recent experience has been traumatic: Kabo, in Ouham, was among the first towns attacked in August 2002 by the Chad-based *boziziste* rebels. Subsequently, the region became one of the main theatres of the sporadic civil war that culminated in the General Bozizé's capture of power. Since then, it has been prey to serious insecurity, with widespread violence by armed gangs. This has disrupted the provision of basic public services. The impact of these security problems have been compounded by the crisis in the cotton sector. This is a problem for much of West Africa, but in the CAR matters are complicated by the security problems and the country's landlocked position, which burdens export sectors with high transport costs.¹⁶ The northwest is therefore exposed to a socio-economic crisis as well as one of security. Indeed, the economic problems may contribute to the violence: when farming offers poor returns and incomes are depressed, the risk that young men will be tempted into banditry is increased.

The activity of gangs *coupeurs de route* bandits (also sometimes known as *zarguina*) and sporadic friction between mainly Chadian pastoralists and local crop farmers have been longstanding features of insecurity in the rural north and west of the CAR. But in recent years these have been supplemented by a third problem – the activity of armed gangs including former *boziziste* rebels. This problem is growing and it appears to be the decisive factor that

¹⁴ Agence France Presse, L'ambassadeur de France dénonce des abus des forces de l'ordre, Bangui, 19 May 2005, http://www.fodem.org/la_depeche/200502/050211_VIOLATIONS_CE.htm - France dénonce [accessed May 2005]

¹⁵ For background on Patassé's earlier history see, e.g., O'Toole, T.E., *The Central African Republic: The Continent's Hidden Heart*, Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1986

¹⁶ Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Reports on the Central African Republic, 1990 to present, *passim*

pushed several thousand people in the far northwest into seeking refuge in Cameroon. *Coupeurs de route* used mainly to attack travellers, but today armed gangs frequently attack villages. They are also much more heavily armed than the bandits of before.¹⁷

A number of factors appear to contribute to this phenomenon:

- The increased supply of weaponry circulating in west-central Africa and the Congo basin, while the depressed state of the cotton sector and war-related disruption to economic activity make it harder to gain a living in civilian life.
- A decade of political and military instability in the CAR has certainly made an impact. Patassé's CAR squandered chances for economic recovery, and donor confidence was minimal.¹⁸ The country thus missed out on the stabilizing effects of growth and job creation; long-term development programmes have ceased to function.
- Patassé's leadership, especially in the 1990s, was marked by ethnic favouritism, a reliance on factional alliances and the breakdown of the coherence of the CAR armed forces. He came to rely to some extent on the southern Chadian militia commander Abdoulaye Miskine, while Bozizé, on fleeing Bangui in October 2001, was joined by elements of the CAR military.
- Bozizé's rebellion of 2002-2003 was reliant on new destabilizing elements. Former members of his rebel force are a significant element in the armed groups now at large in northwest CAR.¹⁹ Besides a core of Central African army soldiers, the rebel force that developed in 2002 and early 2003 attracted local teenage or child recruits who were poorly trained.²⁰

4.3 Chadian Connections to Past and Current Violence

The Bozizé rebellion also, and most significantly, attracted substantial outside elements, many of them apparently Chadian. The rebellion could only have operated with the clear tacit support, both political and practical, of the government in N'djamena. Although full details of how the rebels were supplied have never been confirmed, it appears they were able to obtain weaponry with the tacit approval of senior elements in the Chadian military.

After Bozizé took power forces loyal to Patassé melted away. These had included a small contingent of Libyans sent by Colonel Muammar Qadhafi and 600 MLC fighters sent by the northern DRC rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba. Once Bozizé was in power he sought to re-establish normal military structures. This left the largely Chadian former rebels who had brought him to power without a clear role. The Central African army was now loyal to the new government.

In April 2004 there were clashes on the northern fringes of Bangui as the army confronted recalcitrant former rebels demanding payment for their role in the campaign that had brought Bozizé to power. The CAR government called on Chad to mediate and flew a delegation of

¹⁷ Officials of international organizations, Bangui. Telephone interviews, May 2005

¹⁸ IMF and World Bank officials. Personal interviews, 1993-2003

¹⁹ Officials of international organizations, Bangui. Telephone interviews, May 2005

²⁰ Sica 1: Moussa, un ex libérateur sème la terreur, *Le Citoyen* [Bangui], 7 March 2005

ex-rebels up to meet President Déby in N'djamena: a compromise was brokered offering former rebels a chance to return to civilian life. It is not clear how many former rebels have in fact taken up the civilian option and the status of those who are Chadian is particularly unclear. Despite the announcement of the April 2004 package it seems that significant numbers of ex-rebels melted away into the bush where they have become involved in banditry.

International officials confirm that a large element of the armed groups currently roaming across northwest CAR are members of President Déby's Zaghawa clan, a Nilotic Sudanese ethnic group from the eastern Chad/Sudan border region.²¹ Quite distinct from the southern Chadian pastoralists who occasionally clash with CAR farmers, they have a long history of raiding settled black African communities. It was their force of arms that carried Déby to power in 1990. They have become a disturbing presence around N'djamena, perceived by Déby as a potential threat. They have also been able to get hold of some heavier weapons, notably rocket propelled grenades.²²

There are unconfirmed indications that senior elements in the Chadian power structure may have encouraged Zaghawa groups to look to the CAR for new pickings. This would explain their substantial role in the armed groups. Unofficial Chadian sources resentful of the clan's influence have also claimed that Zaghawa have taken on significant roles in the CAR armed forces, thanks to Chad's influence in Bangui. There have been suggestions that Miskine may have returned to the CAR. But these have not been confirmed. Nor is there clear evidence to suggest that his former forces are involved in the current violence.²³

4.4 The CAR Military

During the Patassé era, the cohesion of the CAR military was profoundly undermined by a deep rift between the main regular forces and the presidential guard, recruited mainly from Patassé's native northwest and supplemented by Chadian militia elements such as those commanded by Abdoulaye Miskine. The UN struggled to pressure Patassé into implementing a military reform programme designed to break down these factional divisions.

Since taking power Bozizé has attempted to revive this reform process, with the French providing training support. A demobilization programme has also been put in place to offer a path back to peaceful civilian life for surplus personnel. The CAR forces are now 6,000-7,000 strong. But the reform programme is still only partially complete and the army is also short of modern equipment, such as helicopters, that would help in hunting down armed bands in rural areas. Elements of the force dominated by Bozizé loyalists, notably the Republican Guard, are regarded by some communities as partisan, although not to the extent seen under Patassé. The CEMAC peace-keeping force remains in the CAR, but is concentrated in Bangui and not equipped to fight a sustained rural campaign against armed gangs. Its effectiveness has been undermined by financial problems and the irregular payment of salaries.²⁴

²¹ UN official, Bangui. Telephone interview, May 2005

²² Information based on interview with Chad risk assessment specialist, May 2005

²³ UN official, Bangui. Telephone interview, May 2005

²⁴ *Ibid.*

4.5 Public Services in the North-west

The restoration of public services in the rural northwest is not helped by the run-down state of rural public services generally. In the present climate of insecurity government employees are vulnerable if they operate outside the main towns, and this insecurity makes it difficult to provide development aid. International humanitarian organizations are able to move in the region in convoys, sometimes with military protection. But the armed forces lack sufficient personnel to provide similar protection for the providers of day to day services, while some NGOs feel they cannot allow themselves to be seen as associated with the security forces. This means that the provision of basic social services and development support has been severely disrupted outside the major towns such as Bossangoa.²⁵

5 Outlook and the Humanitarian Challenge

5.1 Political Aspects

There is a reasonable chance that the success of the peaceful election process in the CAR will be followed, after some political haggling, with the establishment of a government that can command majority support in the national assembly and begin to focus on long term economic reconstruction and the consolidation of stability.

This will be a slow process, and after more than a decade of decay the development challenge is massive: for example, HIV/AIDS incidence is higher than in most other west and central African countries. In one region, Kémo, in the south-central part of the country, 57% of health related agencies had been destroyed.²⁶ The country has been named by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as among the neglected emergencies in Africa;²⁷ but having now held peaceful elections, it may finally get extra assistance. OCHA is organizing a joint donor mission to CAR during June. Provided agreement can be reached with the IMF on long term economic reforms, the CAR will eventually become eligible for HIPC debt relief and substantial new aid from the World Bank, the European Union and France.

Continuation of military reform will be crucial to prospects for re-establishing national forces able to take on the roving armed groups. Bozizé is well placed to oversee this process, because he was, up to 2001, a popular chief of staff who was able to reach out beyond his own natural base of support among the Gbayas, and because he tried to advance the process of military reform, despite President Patassé's lack of interest.²⁸

The pressure on the CAR authorities to tighten up military discipline has been heightened by the fact that the International Human Rights Federation (FIDH – Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme) in early 2005 made a formal submission to the International Criminal Court in The Hague requesting that it enquire into human rights abuses committed by the forces of Bozizé as well as those of Patassé during the 2002-2003 conflict.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ World Health Organization, *Central African Republic: Health Sector Needs Assessment*, Geneva, 2005, <http://www.who.int/disasters/repo/15159.pdf> [accessed June 2005]

²⁷ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks, Africa: Too Little Funding Too Late Costing Millions of Lives, 11 May 2005 (press release)

²⁸ Agence France Presse, 2001, *passim*; CAR researcher at international human rights organization. Telephone interviews 2001-2005

It published a report on these; the report also said Bozizé had admitted to FIDH that extra-judicial executions of suspected criminals had been carried out by the security forces.²⁹

There is no doubt that the security challenge facing the government in seeking to re-establish order will be substantial. Even under the best case scenario, it will have relatively small numbers of troops available to deploy across a large area, in the north-west, and it may take time for them to win the trust of local people, after all the upheavals of recent years.

5.2 Humanitarian Aspects

The humanitarian challenge facing the new government will probably be one of re-establishing security and basic services as much as refugee or IDP resettlement.³⁰

At the height of the 2002-2003 conflict, total IDP numbers were estimated at 200,000. But there are indications that large numbers have since returned home, despite the precarious security conditions currently prevailing in the north west. When armed bands appear, villagers tend to hide or retreat to the fringes of towns until the danger has passed, rather than seeking refuge in another region.³¹

Some 105,000 IDPs had fled from rebel areas to government controlled zones in February 2003; a large number were believed still to be in Bangui in mid-2004. It is not known how many of these have since returned home. Some 40,000 refugees remain in Chad, in the Goré and Danamadji camps; they have told UNHCR they would like to return home when safety conditions permit. However, in October 2004 their relations with local Chadians were still reasonable and UNHCR did not expect them to leave soon; it therefore launched a development programme for the camp inhabitants.³²

The development challenge should not be under-estimated. A joint team from Unicef, WFP and FAO that assessed conditions in Ouham region in May 2003 found that during the war of 2002-2003, four fifths of the population had fled; a counter-attack by Patassé forces had caused widespread damage.³³ Two thirds of the IDPs returned after Bozizé took power, but living conditions were difficult, with food in short supply and significant levels of malnutrition. Marketing of the cotton crop had not taken place for two years and the grassroots economy had largely been demonetized.

Over the subsequent two years, the increase in activity by armed groups has disrupted the local home-grown process of recovery and also largely inhibited the provision of development support by donors and central government.

²⁹ Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme, *République centrafricaine: Fin de la transition politique sur fond d'impunité*, Paris, February 2005, <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rca410tf.pdf> [accessed May 2005]

³⁰ World Health Organization, *Central African Republic: Health Sector...*

³¹ Norwegian Refugee Council, Global IDP Project, *Central African Republic: Compilation of the Information Available...*, Geneva, 4 August 2004, p. 5

³² UNHCR official, Geneva. Telephone interview, October 2004

³³ Unicef, World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization, *République centrafricaine: Evaluation de la sécurité alimentaire dans la préfecture de l'Ouham pour une reprise des activités agricoles*, Bangui, 12 May 2003

A twin track challenge therefore faces the CAR. Firstly, the re-establishment of physical security in the north-west will in itself be a considerable military challenge, and also require close diplomatic coordination with Chad. Fortunately, the attitude of other member countries of CEMAC is strongly supportive, both in military terms – with peacekeepers – and financially; they underwrote a CFA 12 billion (US\$ 23 million) funding advance from the regional central bank which has helped keep the government machine running.³⁴

Provided security can be restored, a major development agenda faces the country and its donor partners. This may require substantial humanitarian aid in its early stages; over the longer term, a major effort will be required to restore key social and administrative services.³⁵ The agenda will also have to encompass economic diversification, because of the global crisis in the market for cotton, the main cash crop produced in the northwest.

If these two challenges can be successfully met, there is reason to believe that populations will remain settled and eventually the refugees in Chad and Cameroon will return home. It is in the CAR that they have land and citizenship. However, if the CAR military is unable to restore physical security, there is clearly a high risk of further destabilization and refugee movements, although the experience of recent months suggest these might be sporadic rather than massive in nature.

6 Conclusion

The security situation in the CAR has continued to worsen over the past year and, particularly in the northwestern regions close to the Cameroon border. Groups of armed men are roving through the area, carrying out random attacks on civilian communities; these include substantial elements of Chadian Zaghawa and they have heavier weapons than those habitually used by the bandits known as *coupeurs de route* or *zarguina* who have posed security problems in rural CAR for many years.

Anecdotal evidence from the region suggests that up to now most civilians have continued to respond to the risk of attacks by seeking refuge locally rather than considering departure to Cameroon or the established refugee camps in Chad; they know that, outside the CAR, they have no land rights or secure sources of livelihood. But unchecked, continued activity by armed bands could produce further sporadic movements of Central African refugees seeking sanctuary in Cameroon, especially if the government in Bangui effectively loses all control over the northwest.

However, there are two reasons to believe that the security situation may improve gradually, reducing the likelihood of further sudden refugee movements. Firstly, a programme of military reform is making steady if slow progress, gradually strengthening the capacity of the CAR armed forces to deal with rural insecurity. Secondly, the election process has passed smoothly in the CAR and relations with key donors are good. It is therefore reasonable to hope that the country will soon have a new and democratically legitimate government that can begin to tackle long term development and security problems and can expect increased international support in doing so. France will be a key partner in both these respects, although it is anxious to be seen operating within the framework of European Union cooperation with Bangui.

³⁴ Western diplomat, Bangui. Telephone interview, May 2005

³⁵ World Food Programme, *Projected 2005 Needs for WFP Projects and Operations*, Rome, 2005, pp 94-6

If these two positive trends can be continued, the likelihood of further sudden refugee movements into Cameroon or sudden Chad should be reduced – although occasional incidents cannot be completely ruled out. Curbing the activity of armed gangs will represent a considerable military challenge to the still relatively under-equipped armed forces of the CAR.

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