

Central African Republic: The Roots of Violence

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Executive Summary

Crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) is long term and characterised by sporadic surges of violence against a backdrop of state disintegration, a survival economy and deep inter-ethnic cleavages. Armed groups (including the anti-balaka and the ex-Seleka) are fragmenting and becoming increasingly criminalised; intercommunal tensions have hampered efforts to promote CAR's national unity and mend its social fabric. Unfortunately, the roadmap to end the crisis, which includes elections before the end of 2015, presents a short-term answer. To avoid pursuing a strategy that would merely postpone addressing critical challenges until after the polls, CAR's transitional authorities and international partners should address them now by implementing a comprehensive disarmament policy, and reaffirming that Muslims belong within the nation. If this does not happen, the elections risk becoming a zero-sum game.

By virtue of its geography and history, CAR is located at the crossroads between two regions and two peoples: in the north, the Sahel with its pastoralist communities and majority Muslim merchants, and in the south, Central Africa with its communities of the savanna, initially animist but now predominantly Christian. The Seleka power grab in March 2013 marked a fundamental reversal of CAR's traditional political landscape. For the first time since independence, a force stemming from the Muslim population of the north and east of the country held the reins of power. The ensuing clashes between Seleka and anti-balaka forces generated strong intercommunal tensions that were exacerbated by the instrumentalisation of religion, societal fractures and collective fears, reviving traumatic memories of the pre-colonial slave trade era.

These tensions, which culminated in the killing and displacement of Muslims from the west, are still very high in the centre of the country, the front line between armed groups. The conflict between anti-balaka and ex-Seleka is thus now compounded by a conflict between armed communities. In areas with frequent intercommunal clashes, the link between armed groups and communities is strong: ex-Seleka combatants are seen as the protectors of Muslims and anti-balaka fighters as the defenders of Christian communities. By contrast, communities in other parts of the country are keeping their distance from armed groups.

The current approach to disarmament, which was formalised by the agreement signed at the Bangui Forum last May, underestimates both the extent to which the conflict is now communal, and the criminalisation and fragmentation of armed groups. In western CAR, following the withdrawal of ex-Seleka fighters and the flight of the region's Muslim communities, the militarily and politically unorganised local armed groups known as the anti-balaka, have begun preying on local communities. The Seleka coalition in turn has splintered into several movements over leadership rivalries, financial squabbles and disagreements about strategies to adopt toward the transitional authorities and international forces. The fragmentation and criminalisation of CAR's armed groups makes negotiations much more difficult.

In this context, the rushed organisation of elections risks exacerbating existing intercommunal tensions, undoing the country's indispensable reconstruction efforts and postponing indefinitely the resolution of crucial issues like the disarmament of militias and communities.

The outstanding issues to be addressed by CAR's transitional authorities and international partners require replacing the current disarmament program with a comprehensive policy that engages not only militiamen but also communities, and which includes real opportunities and effective sanctions. This means maintaining a capacity to restrain armed groups – in other words re-evaluating the planned withdrawal schedule of the French Sangaris forces and reducing armed groups' financing abilities – among other measures. This would lessen the appeal of the militia economy for CAR's youth.

It is also imperative to avoid the electoral process adding fuel to the fire. To do so, the transitional authorities should reaffirm Muslims' equal rights, register them to vote, demonstrate the government's concern for populations in the north east, and diversify recruitment in the public service. The country's international partners and transitional authorities focus too much attention on the electoral process in isolation from other issues: they should prioritise these other issues in their conflict resolution strategy, as elections alone will change very little in a country which today has ceased to function as a state.

Recommendations

To begin the process for the disarmament of combatants and armed communities before elections

To the Central African Republic (CAR) government, the UN and CAR's donors:

1. Implement a disarmament policy which provides effective and sustainable reintegration opportunities by:
 - a) Financing and extending labour-intensive public works projects and supplementing these projects with vocational training programs;
 - b) Linking disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programs and community violence reduction programs to reconstruction and developments projects of the World Bank and the European Union (EU);
 - c) Supporting job creation or internships with the Central African Republic Inter-professional Business Association for young people who have taken part in the training programs.
2. Make DDR credible by:
 - a) Opening up DDR to the combatants of non-signatory armed groups by establishing strict policies regarding the surrender of functioning war weapons as a condition to access the program, and organising short cantonment phases without cash distribution during the demobilisation;
 - b) Entrusting financial execution of the DDR program to the international partners instead of to the CAR government.

To MINUSCA and France:

3. Regain control of the main gold and diamond production sites by deploying international forces and CAR civil servants and revive the Kimberley Process certification scheme for diamonds originating from these controlled areas. An investigative unit addressing diamond, gold and ivory trafficking, as well as militarised poaching should also be integrated into the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).
4. Review the departure date of the French operation Sangaris in order to maintain the capacity for military pressure to induce armed groups to disarm.
5. Arrest those militia leaders who refuse to disarm.

To CAR's transitional authorities:

6. Within the framework of the upcoming constitutional referendum, include a question concerning whether or not the leaders of armed groups should be permitted to enter the civil service and be allowed to participate in the next elections.

To the UN, CAR's donors and CAR's transitional authorities:

7. Secure communities and proceed to their disarmament by:
 - a) Ensuring the selection and the training of the future security forces reflects community diversity;
 - c) Deploying gendarmerie and professional police units representative of different communities in areas where intercommunal tensions remain high;
 - d) Increasing the crowd management capacity of MINUSCA in the cities where intercommunal tensions are high in order to prevent popular protests from escalating;
 - e) Identifying community opinion-makers and setting up awareness campaigns for the disarmament of communities.

To reduce the community divide before elections

To the transitional authorities:

8. Address the representation gap of the Muslim minorities by diversifying recruitment within the public administration on geographical and community basis, but reject religious quota policy.
9. Reestablish dialogue with the populations of the north-eastern part of the country by multiplying visits by government officials in this region and symbolically organising the next National Day celebration there on 1 December.

To the National Elections Authority and the UN High-Commissioner for Refugees:

10. Promote inclusive elections by ensuring that CAR's Muslims living in refugee camps are registered to vote and that the registration procedure is monitored by civil society organisations and political parties.

Nairobi/Brussels, 21 September 2015

Central African Republic: The Roots of Violence

I. Introduction

In March 2013, the ex-Seleka's seizure of power was the final chapter in the gradual but inevitable collapse of the Central African Republic (CAR) state.¹ It plunged the country into a crisis that is likely to take a long time to resolve. Not since independence has CAR experienced such an upsurge of collective violence. Periodic coups were overtaken by a civil war, the disintegration of state institutions, return to a survival economy and intercommunal conflict that has resulted in the de facto division of the country in two. In western CAR, persecution of Muslims by anti-balaka militias has forced them out, provoked a desire for vengeance and prompted talk of partition in eastern CAR. Since the start of 2015, conflict has become the routine and manifests itself in deadly intercommunal reprisals, the establishment of Muslim enclaves in the west of the country, a combat zone in the centre of the country and the emergence of chronic banditry. Moreover, the development of the conflict along communal lines has revived the question about the right to live and own land in CAR.² Muslims are labelled as foreigners, revealing deep social fractures that are expressed in religious terms but cannot simply be reduced to religious differences.

In a context of high intercommunal tension and the lack of national cohesion, the Bangui Forum, held in May 2015, aimed to be the first stage in a genuine process of reconciliation. This initiative sent out a positive call for unity by inviting more than 600 participants from prefectures throughout the country and from followers of different religions, but there is a danger that some of the forum's recommendations are unworkable.³ For example, several armed groups have rejected the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) agreement. The Republican Pact itself, which lays down the principles of a new regime, reads like a catalogue of good intentions.⁴

This report is the product of research conducted in CAR, Kenya, Chad, France, Belgium and the U.S. It analyses the two main protagonists in the CAR crisis (the armed groups and the armed communities) and describes the complex mechanisms and communal nature of the conflict. As CAR seems to be in a "no war no peace" situation, this report proposes a different approach to the task of neutralising these armed groups and avoiding a further increase in intercommunal tension in the run-up to the elections.⁵

¹ Crisis Group Africa Reports N°136, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, 13 December 2007 and N°203, *Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition*, 11 June 2013.

² For more on this question in the CAR, see Andrea Ceriana Maineri, "La Centrafrique, de la rébellion Seleka aux groupes anti-balaka (2012-2014): usages de la violence, schème persécutif et traitement médiatique du conflit", *Politique africaine*, 2014, n°134, pp. 179-193.

³ See the conclusions of "Rapport général du Forum national de Bangui", Central African Republic, Bangui, May 2015.

⁴ See Appendix B for the text of the Republican Pact.

⁵ This report does not deal with the issues of transitional justice and reconciliation, which will be discussed in our next report. See Appendix A for a map showing the towns and regions mentioned in the report and Appendix C for a glossary.

II. Armed Groups in the Central African Republic

A. *The Armed Groups Have a History*

In the Central African Republic (CAR), it is sometimes difficult to differentiate the armed groups, the criminal gangs, the self-defence militias and even sometimes the country's armed forces. However, leaving aside the instinctive opportunism of their leaders, some of whom are past masters of the art of switching sides when it suits them, these groups have a history born out of the marginalisation of rural populations and a tradition of self-defence and resistance.⁶

1. The anti-balaka: a return to the past and the manipulation of the self-defence militias

The emergence of the anti-balaka forms part of a long tradition of resistance by the Gbaya, Banda, Mandjia and Mboum ethnic groups, which supported each other during anticolonial insurrections.⁷ At the end of the 19th century, the Gbaya opposed the Fourneau mission, while the Mandjia rebelled against the Maistre mission and the head tax and portage duties imposed by the colonial authorities.⁸ In 1928, following the murder of Chief Barka Ngainombey, various ethnic groups rebelled against the forced labour imposed by colonial settlers. Their uprising, known as the "War of the Hoe-Handle", became the symbol of anti-colonial resistance in Central Africa. More than 50,000 Central African Republic citizens mobilised before the colonial administration defeated the insurrection in a bloodbath two years later.⁹

Other episodes demonstrated this culture of resistance in western CAR. Several times in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the Gbaya, the Mboum and the Banda formed alliances to repel the much better-armed Fulani Muslim slave-merchants. Nevertheless, these alliances sometimes broke down and some Gbaya groups made peace with the Fulani in order to gain a share in the slave trade.¹⁰

This tradition of self-defence has continued until the present day in the form of village self-defence militias. In the 1980s and 1990s, the French army, which led oper-

⁶ See Appendix C for a non-exhaustive list of armed groups.

⁷ The Gbaya mainly live in the west of the country. In the mountainous north west, the Gbaya are known as the Gbaya Kara, which means "the Gbaya who live up high". The Gbaya Bokoto occupy the south west, toward Carnot and Berberati and some Gbaya Bohoro are settled near Bossangoa. Some of these ethnic groups no longer recognise each other as belonging to the Gbaya, following the example of the Mandjia, who only preserve the identity of their own specific ethnic group. Only a language and common origins unite these tribes. Several tribes have even been on opposite sides in regular clashes, such as in 1903, in the war between the Gbaya from Bouar and the Gbaya from Bozoum. For more on the Gbaya, the Mandjia and the Mboum, see Pierre Kalck, *Histoire de la République centrafricaine* (Paris, 1977); Pierre Vidal, Tazunu, *Nana-Modé, Toala ou: de l'archéologie des cultures africaines et centrafricaines et de leur histoire ancienne*, (Bangui 1982); Paulette Roulon-Doko, *Conception de l'espace et du temps chez les Gbaya de Centrafrique*, (Paris, 1996).

⁸ See Marc Lavergne, "Résoudre un conflit sans en chercher les causes? La RCA entre imposture et amnésie", *Journal International de Victimologie* (2014), p. 4-12.

⁹ The "War of the Hoe-Handle" got its name from the rod of command used by the rebellion's leaders. See Nzabakomada-Yakoma, Raphaël, *L'Afrique centrale insurgée. La guerre du Kongo-wara 1928-1931*, (Paris, 1986).

¹⁰ In Cameroon and the CAR, several Gbaya groups converted to Islam and some joined the Fulani in raids, for example, the Gbaya Bowei-Ndoi of Bocaranga. See Alain Degras, "Akotara, un triptyque consacré aux Gbayas du nord-ouest centrafricain", Bouar, August 2012.

ations against the criminal gangs that robbed people on the roads (road cutters or *zarginas*)¹¹ often encountered these village militias.¹²

The political manipulation of self-defence groups

Politicians have often recruited rural self-defence groups to act as armed support. In the west of the country, many anti-balaka combatants have at some point belonged to village self-defence militias. François Bozizé, CAR president 2003-2013, used them to combat road cutters and contain the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD). Some of them had already received arms from the authorities in the towns of Bossangoa, Bozoum and Bocaranga.¹³

Similarly, the Mbororo archers, mainly Woodabe,¹⁴ who united in the early 1990s to defend their herds and combat hostage taking by road cutters were used by former president Ange-Félix Patassé when he was in power between 1993 and 2003. The authorities provided the Mbororo archers with vehicles, entrusted them with operations and issued duly signed orders.

In urban areas, the government found it easy to mobilise young militiamen. Patassé armed Karako, Sarawi and Balawa militias in the northern districts of Bangui, where many Gbaya, Sara, Mandjia and Mboum lived, to conduct offensives on southern districts mainly inhabited by the Banziri and the Yakoma, the ethnic group to which his enemy and predecessor André Kolingba, belonged. At the end of 2001, after Patassé relieved him of his post as chief of staff of the CAR army, François Bozizé armed young militias in the northern districts of Boy Rabe, Fouh and Gobongo in Bangui.¹⁵

François Bozizé and his entourage relied on this tradition of resistance to mobilise the population against those who they presented as the “external” enemy. In a speech in Sango on 28 December 2012, the former president called on CAR nationals to resist and “to be on their guard and be ready to defend their homes with arrows and machetes”.¹⁶ He followed up words with deeds by distributing machetes in Bangui.¹⁷

¹¹ The name *zargina* or *zaraqina* may have its origins in the word *zarâg*, a Chadian Arabic word for a dark blue indigo fabric. See Christian Seignobos, “La question Mbororo. Réfugiés de la RCA au Cameroun”, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Service de coopération et d’action culturelle français (SCAC), IRD Paris/Yaoundé, 2008. The *zargina* phenomenon emerged in the CAR in the 1980s and shortly after in Cameroon. These groups are of mixed composition. Some are former soldiers who have turned to crime, others are former pastoralists who have had their cattle stolen or simply villagers who have become criminals. Guy-Florent Ankoguy Mpoko, Kedeu Passingring, Boniface Ganota, Kedekoy Tigague, “Insécurité, mobilité et migrations des éleveurs dans les savanes d’Afrique centrale”, Cirad, February 2010. Crisis Group interview, ex-APRD leader, Paoua, August 2015.

¹² Crisis Group interview, former French soldier, Bangui, August 2015.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ For more on the factions within the Mbororo, see Christian Seignobos, “Quel avenir pour les Mbororo?”, *Journal de l’IRD*, no. 47, November-December 2008.

¹⁵ Bozizé was suspected of having coordinated an attempted coup on 28 May 2001. His dismissal by Patassé was followed by clashes in Bangui. “Le Général Bozizé annonce ne plus être autorisé à parler à la presse”, Agence France-Presse (AFP), 29 October 2015.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Chauvin and Christian Seignobos, “L’imbroglio centrafricain, Etat, rebelles et bandits”, op. cit.

¹⁷ See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°96, *Central African Republic: Better Late Than Never*, 2 December 2013.

He went on to use the COCORA militia, a kind of urban anti-balaka, formed and led by Lévi Yakété, to attack the Seleka and Muslims.¹⁸

The Boy Rabe neighbourhood remains an anti-balaka stronghold that supports François Bozizé, as recently shown by the violent action taken by his militants to obtain the release of his party's general secretary.¹⁹ Chosen by his party, the Kwa na Kwa (KNK), as candidate at the forthcoming presidential election, former president François Bozizé, currently in exile in Uganda and subject to an arrest warrant issued by the CAR authorities, could once again mobilise the youth in the northern districts of Bangui to disrupt the electoral process.

The Seleka: Darfurisation of the north east and the recycling of combatants

The emergence of the Seleka in 2012 in north-eastern CAR resulted from the government's abandonment of the region and the growing influence of Chad and Sudan. The CAR government's inability to enforce its authority in outlying regions other than by blind repression or by subcontracting the task of ensuring security to armed groups, turned the north east of the country into an incubator for the rebel groups.

Few people in Vakaga speak Sango, the national language. It has more cultural, ethnic and economic links with the south of Darfur and eastern Chad than with CAR's capital Bangui. The regions of Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran look more toward Abéché in Chad and Nyala in the south of Darfur, two centres of power to which chiefs in north-eastern CAR have traditionally pledged allegiance.²⁰ Separated from the rest of CAR for several months of the year in the rainy season and handicapped by a lack of tarmacked roads, Vakaga is, however, regularly crossed by Sudanese nomads and poachers and also trades with Nyala, the economic centre of southern Darfur. This is why the Sudanese currency is used in Birao, the capital of Vakaga.

These regions have for decades sheltered armed groups, especially Chadian and Sudanese rebels. Before the rapprochement between Sudan and Chad in 2009, Sudan had got into the habit of supporting Chadian rebel groups, some of which, like the United Front for Change (FUC), had set up bases in the north east of the country. Moreover, during the second civil war between the north and what is now South Sudan, many soldiers in the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) fled to CAR. Some of them are still in refugee camps in Mboki in south-eastern CAR. Finally, the arms markets, including the one in Am Dafok, on the border with Darfur, supplied combatants in the CAR groups in the north east.²¹

¹⁸ COCORA, a citizen coalition opposed to armed rebellions, is a militia of young people formed to fight the Seleka and protect the government of former president Bozizé. Its leader, Lévi Yakété, died in a car accident in France in 2014. He was on the United Nations Sanctions Committee list for organising the distribution of machetes to young militiamen. "Centrafrique, personnalités sanctionnées, les raisons d'un choix", Radio France internationale (RFI), 10 May 2014.

¹⁹ "Centrafrique: Bertin Béa libéré de force par les partisans du KNK", Réseau des journalistes pour les droits de l'homme, 20 August 2015.

²⁰ See Crisis Group Report, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, op. cit.

²¹ "Mapping conflict motives: the Central African Republic", International Peace Information Service (IPIS), Antwerp, November 2014. There has always been a lot of arms trafficking in eastern CAR. During the colonial period, the authorities sold significant quantities of arms to sultans like Bangassou. Jean Cantournet, *Des affaires et des hommes: noirs et blancs, commerçants et fonctionnaires dans l'Oubangui du début du siècle*, Vol 10, Recherches oubanguiennes (Paris, 1991).

The ex-Seleka rebellion²² also prospered from the discontent among the people and merchants of the north east. Following a year in which Sudanese nomads committed many atrocities and murdered Yaya Ramadan, an important Gula chief, in 2002, the Sudanese and CAR authorities reached an agreement in March 2003 for payment of compensation for Gula populations in Vakaga and the construction of a monument to commemorate the murdered chief. This agreement was never implemented and the Gula populations suspected the CAR government of pocketing the money paid by the Sudanese authorities.

In 2006, this resentment deepened when Bozizé's presidential guard brutally attacked the Gula civilian population, perceived to be in league with the Chadian rebel groups it was fighting. Some people in Vakaga still harbour a deep resentment toward the government.²³ The diamond collectors who had their diamonds confiscated during Operation Closing Gate in 2008 swelled the ranks of the discontented and were among the Seleka's first supporters.²⁴

Recycling combatants

Ex-Seleka combatants and their leaders have had a long career as rebels. Changing from one movement to another, they never really put down their arms in recent years and have long been part of the political and security landscape in CAR. Created in 2006, the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), one of the pillars of the ex-Seleka coalition, was itself a coalition of existing armed groups: Michel Djotodia's Patriotic Action Group for the Liberation of the Central African Republic (GAPLC); the Democratic Front of the Central African Republic (FDC), led by Hassan Justin, a former member of Patassé's presidential guard; and Abakar Sabone's Movement of Central African Republic Liberators for Justice (MLCJ).

Examination of the profiles of the commanding officers reveals that many "ex-liberators" were former companions of Bozizé and helped him take power in 2003.²⁵ Along with Abakar Sabone, Nourredine Adam and many others, Al Khatim, who controls the entire north-central zone of the country, was a "liberator" in 2003. Unable to either pay the combatants who helped him take power or integrate all of them into his presidential guard, François Bozizé offered some of them positions in the administration.²⁶ Feeling betrayed, many turned to rural banditry. Their resentment against Bozizé fuelled their desire to join the ex-Seleka.²⁷

Other ex-Seleka warlords came from well-known armed groups. For example, Ali Darassa, now leader of the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC)

²² This report uses the term Seleka when referring to its actions in the past and ex-Seleka when referring to the current situation of former members. The Seleka was officially dissolved by Michel Djotodia in 2013.

²³ "State of anarchy: rebellion and abuses against civilians", Human Rights Watch (HRW), September 2007.

²⁴ Crisis Group Africa Report N°167, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, 16 December 2010.

²⁵ "Liberators" is the name given to hundreds of rebels who helped Bozizé to take power in 2003. They included former members of the CAR army who had deserted and many Chadians, former soldiers and combatants, who supported Bozizé's coup with the endorsement of Idriss Déby, the Chadian president. See "State of anarchy: rebellion and abuses against civilians", HRW, op. cit.

²⁶ Colonel Marabout and Colonel Ramadan became advisors at the defence ministry. "Envahissants libérateurs", *Jeune Afrique*, 26 April 2004.

²⁷ "Bozizé n'a pas su gérer ses ex-libérateurs". Crisis Group interview, former prime minister, Bangui, August 2015.

was a long-time right-hand man of Baba Laddé, a Chadian rebel and leader of the Popular Front for Recovery (FPR) since 1998.²⁸ Many of the militiamen in Revolution and Justice (RJ), an armed group that appeared in 2013 in the Paoua region, were in the ex-APRD²⁹. They benefited from a one-year DDR program in 2012 and swore on the Bible never to take up arms again.³⁰

2. Co-opting the rebels: a vicious circle

The persistence of these rebellions is also the result of a government policy that rewards the perpetrators of violence and those who make a living out of insecurity to the detriment of traditional parties.

In a country brought to its knees by military coups, the creation of an armed group often ensures its leaders of a place on the political chessboard.³¹ After the mutinies in 1996,³² the political agreement memorandum gave mutineer representatives places in the government. The Syrte and Libreville 1 and 2 Agreements provided for the appointment of rebels to the administration and the government.³³ These co-option policies at best allowed the government to buy temporary peace because the only ones to gain were the leaders of the armed groups. In this opportunist game of integration played by the entrepreneurs of insecurity, the demands of the communities and militiamen that brought them to prominence were quickly forgotten. Following the Libreville peace agreement in 2008, the UFDR leaders obtained posts in the government and administration, but the government failed to implement a development program for the north east of the country or keep its promises of an inclusive political dialogue on the DDR program for combatants from the north.³⁴

Similarly, although Abdulaye Miskine,³⁵ leader of the Democratic Front for the Central African Republic People (FDPC), signed the Syrte Agreement mediated by Qadhafi in 2007, adhered to the Libreville peace agreement in 2008 and signed the

²⁸ Baba Laddé, a Chadian rebel, led the FPR, an armed group, in 1998, which committed many atrocities in the CAR regions of Ouaka, Nana-Grébizi and Ouham. Denouncing the marginalisation of Fulani pastoralists, Baba Laddé protected many pastoralists but extorted many others. In September 2012, the CAR army and Chadian troops conducted operations against the FPR forcing Baba Laddé to surrender. They attacked the Fulani populations alleged to have supported him. Many Fulani died during these operations. Baba Laddé is currently in prison in Chad. Crisis Group interviews, researcher, Bangui, 5 October 2014; member of the administration, N'Djaména, May 2015.

²⁹ The APRD militia was born in the struggle of the local people against the road cutters and nomadic pastoralists from Chad.

³⁰ Three of the main commanding officers in the RJ are former APRD combatants (Luther, Bilonga and Jean-Bernard). Crisis Group interviews, civil society representative and former APRD leader, Paoua, August 2015.

³¹ Andreas Mehler, "Rebels and parties: the impact of armed insurgency on representation in the Central African Republic", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 49, n° 1, (2011), p. 115-139.

³² For more details on the 1996 and 1997 mutinies, see Jean-Paul Ngoupandé, *Chronique de la crise centrafricaine 1996-1997, le syndrome Barracuda* (Paris, 1997), p. 21-72.

³³ The Syrte Agreement signed in 2007 by the FDPC and the UFDR under the mediation of Qadhafi provided for an end to violence, cantonment and disarmament of the above-mentioned groups and the participation of the leaders of these groups in the management of affairs of state. For more on the Libreville Agreements 1 and 2, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°203, *Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition*, 11 June 2013.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Between 2001 and 2003, Abdulaye Miskine was the leader of Patassé's Presidential Security Unit (USP). He left Bangui and rebelled when François Bozizé took power in 2003.

Libreville Agreement on the resolution of the crisis in the CAR in 2013, his armed group has never stopped committing crimes.³⁶ In November 2014, the FDPC even obtained the release of its leader, who was detained in Cameroon on charges of kidnapping a Polish priest and Cameroonian and CAR citizens.³⁷

The appointment of armed group leaders to government posts generally results in internal tensions. Combatants criticise their former leaders for not distributing the spoils of victory and for “betraying their cause”. Many anti-balaka leaders criticise Patrick Ngaissona, the movement’s coordinator, for pocketing money distributed at the Brazzaville Forum in July 2014.³⁸ Some leaders of the RJ group (neither ex-Seleka nor anti-balaka) also criticised their leader, Armel Sayo, who was appointed as a minister in the transitional government, for not sharing the income derived from his new post.³⁹ The notorious political and financial opportunism of the militia leaders in CAR means they are not trusted by their combatants.

B. *Fratricidal Divisions and Impossible Leadership*

The absence of reliable interlocutors in the armed groups and their fragmentation are some of the biggest problems that face the CAR authorities and the peacekeeping forces in their efforts to resolve the crisis. Aware of this problem, the latter have in vain encouraged some armed groups to form more solid organisational structures.⁴⁰ The situation reflects the sociology and political economy of the armed groups, which contain a multitude of diverging interests and doom to failure any attempts to negotiate.

1. The ex-Seleka implodes

Divisions within the ex-Seleka prevented it from governing effectively after it took Bangui in March 2013. After Djotodia resigned in January 2014, the coalition splintered into several rival movements: the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) led by Ali, the Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic (FPRC) led by Nourredine Adam and supported by Djotodia,⁴¹ the Patriotic Rally for the Renewal of Central African Republic (RPRC) led by Djono Ahaba and Zacharia Damane, the Reformed Seleka for Peace and Justice led by Moussa Dhaffane and the Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic (MPC).⁴² The ex-Seleka’s implosion was caused by a combination of ethnic divisions, leadership rivalries,

³⁶ Since the start of the crisis, the FDPC has marauded along the CAR-Cameroon border. In response, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) organised operations against some of its bases in June. Nevertheless, the movement’s leader, Abdulaye Miskine, denies any involvement in attacks in the west. Crisis Group telephone interview, security expert, Bangui, June 2015. “RCA: ‘Je n’ai pas peur’, l’entretien exclusif avec le chef rebelle Abdoulaye Miskine”, Alwihda Info, 25 July 2015.

³⁷ “Centrafrique: libération d’Abdulaye Miskine contre otages: les arrangements de l’impunité”, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), 8 December 2014.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, anti-balaka leader, Bangui, February 2015.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, APRD member, Paoua, February 2015.

⁴⁰ French forces and the UN assisted with the organisation of the ex-Seleka congress in Ndélé in May 2014. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Bangui, February 2015.

⁴¹ Final communiqué of the first general assembly of FPRC political leaders, Birao, 10 July 2014.

⁴² The last group to emerge from the Seleka’s implosion, the MPC was formed in July 2015 and unites the men loyal to Mahamat Al Khatim. See Appendix C on the armed groups.

financial squabbles and disagreements about strategies to adopt toward the transitional authorities.

The FPRC and the RPRC are composed of Gula, who are in the majority, Runga and Arabs. They are divided on political and financial grounds, with some remaining loyal to former coup leader Djotodia and forming the hardline faction of the ex-Seleka and others in favour of a dialogue with the international forces and the transitional government. Division within the ex-Seleka is not new. On leaving the conference in Brazzaville in July 2014, the Seleka delegation led by Dhaffane, now leader of the Reformed Seleka, was disowned by Nourredine Adam and Michel Djotodia for having signed a ceasefire agreement with the anti-balaka, mediated by President Denis Sassou Nguesso in the presence of the transitional authorities.

These divisions increased in March and April 2015, when the FPRC attended negotiations in Nairobi initiated by the mediator in the CAR crisis, Sassou Nguesso, with the support of the Kenyan government. Nearly everybody else disavowed these negotiations.⁴³ These divisions were also shown by the presence of RPRC and UPC representatives at the Bangui Forum in May 2015 and the rejection of the DDR agreement by Nourredine Adam's FPRC.⁴⁴

Unlike with the FPRC and the RPRC, the ethnic dimension is much more important in the UPC, which has a majority of Fulani combatants.⁴⁵ Ali Darassa is himself a former leader of the FPR led by Baba Laddé, whose political discourse was based on the defence of Fulani pastoralists. A key figure in the ex-Seleka, Ali Darassa came back to Bambari in 2014 at the request of many Fulani who told him they were being extorted not only by the anti-balaka but also by the ex-Seleka. It was at that point that he decided to create the UPC. Setting himself up as protector of the Fulani, he armed many pastoralists who went on to commit their share of atrocities.⁴⁶

Finally, one of the most important factors in the fragmentation of the ex-Seleka concerned the internal fighting for control of natural resources. The many clashes between Joseph Zoundeko's men and those of Ali Darassa for control of road checkpoints and the trade in gold in the Bambari area in 2014 illustrate the fierce competition between the former brothers-in-arms of the ex-Seleka.⁴⁷ Similarly, at the end of 2014, FPRC and RPRC combatants fought for control of Bria, a diamond producing

⁴³ These negotiations between the hardliners of the anti-balaka and the ex-Seleka ended in an agreement between the armed groups and a statement of intent signed by former presidents Bozizé and Djotodia in which they say they will adhere to the Brazzaville Agreement and the transition roadmap. "Accord de Nairobi sur le cessez-le-feu et la cessation des hostilités entre les ex-Seleka (FPRC) et les anti-balaka de la RCA", Nairobi, 8 April 2015.

⁴⁴ Questioned about the absence of other ex-Seleka factions in Nairobi, a senior figure in the FPRC told us "the RPRC people are traitors and represent nobody". Crisis Group interview, FPRC leader, Nairobi, April 2015.

⁴⁵ Certainly one of the communities most affected by the conflict, many young Fulani turned to violence and carried out many attacks on villages in the north west and centre of the CAR. The Fulani often acted with extreme violence and burned villages down on the Batangafo-Bouca road in 2014 and 2015. Crisis Group interview, security expert, June 2015; Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°105, *The Central African Republic's Hidden Conflict*, 12 December 2014.

⁴⁶ Amnesty International described the attacks by armed Fulani groups in the Bambari area. See "Central African Republic: urgent action needed to tackle escalating violence in the central regions", Amnesty International, 6 November 2014.

⁴⁷ In March, Ali Darassa controlled much of the Bambari, Bakala, Ippy, Alindao road. "Zoundeko has only crumbs left", Crisis Group interview, staff of an international organisation, Bambari, March 2015; and "Centrafrique: violents combats entre factions de la Seleka à Bambari", RFI, 26 August 2014.

centre, which is now under the control of international forces (see Appendix C on the armed groups).

A superficial political agenda

Seleka's political agenda changed to fit the circumstances but was never more than a superficial discourse with no practical measures. The Seleka initially formulated demands about developing the north east region but made no attempt to develop the region once in power. The persecution of Muslims in the west and centre of the country then led to the Seleka to speak out in defence of Muslim communities. However, attempts to articulate a political program around the armed struggle finally evaporated. The idea of partitioning the country, put forward by some members of the administration and raised at the Brazzaville summit in July 2014 by the ex-Seleka delegation, misfired.⁴⁸

The Seleka's inability to formulate a political agenda both divided the movement and facilitated its domination by the warlords. Once the Seleka came to power in March 2013, its different components soon came into conflict with each other and Michel Djotodia failed to impose his leadership.

The warlords were dominant within the ex-Seleka and the "policies" it discussed with the international community were nothing more than a presentable façade that held no sway over the movement. Unlike the military leaders, the movement's political representatives were generally poorly informed about changes in the situation in the field and about the intentions of the warlords of which they were the spokesmen. For example, Eric Massi, spokesman for the ex-Seleka in Paris in 2013 was marginalised after the ex-Seleka took power.⁴⁹ Similarly, Nourredine Adam rejected the 2014 Brazzaville Agreement and the disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR) agreement signed at the Bangui Forum in May 2015 and disowned the politicians who had signed it in his name.⁵⁰

2. The impossible leadership of the anti-balaka

The coordinators of the anti-balaka combatants signed an agreement on DDRR principles at the Bangui reconciliation Forum, but the absence of a centralised command structure for the groups immediately compromised implementation of any agreement in the field. Over a period of two years, quarrels between ambitious self-proclaimed leaders, the social profile of the combatants and the fierce ethnic and territorial divisions within the movement made the emergence of a clear leadership impossible, as indicated by the concept of "anti-balaka coordinations" to describe the movement's representatives.

The term "anti-balaka" is used to describe a multitude of groups with distinct profiles, diverse geographical origins and tenuous political affiliations. Some belonged to village self-defence committees created by Bozizé in 2008, while others were mili-

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, member of the ex-Seleka delegation, Brazzaville, July 2014.

⁴⁹ Eric Massi was the voice and face of the Seleka in Paris in his role as the movement's spokesman at the start of the CAR crisis. However, he was appointed to the post of director of civil aviation in Djotodia's government rather than to a ministerial post. He was recently appointed as an advisor in the prime minister's cabinet.

⁵⁰ Abel Balengue was then dismissed from his post. See "Décision portant suspension d'un membre du bureau politique du Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique", communiqué n°0007/FPRC/BEN/P15, Nairobi, 10 May 2015.

tiamen under Patassé.⁵¹ Some were road cutters, like Andilo,⁵² others were anti-road cutter militias. The anti-balaka also brought together many alienated young people who had never participated in political life and were just trying to survive in a rural world plagued by poverty and violence.⁵³

These militia groups emerged in reaction of looting by the Seleka. For most of them, the village, region and ethnic group are the main components of their identity. So the attempts by anti-balaka groups from the provinces of Ouham and Ouham Pende to establish themselves in Sanga Mbaere province in 2014 were seen as an invasion by the local people, who chased them out.⁵⁴ The distinction made by the population between local anti-balaka groups and anti-balaka coming from other regions has been demonstrated countless times, showing that any idea of unifying the movement is illusory.

Failed militarisation and politicisation

In 2013, former members of Bozizé's presidential guard and the FACA and some well-known local chiefs succeeded in forming a federation of local groups to conduct a large-scale attack on 5 December 2013: about one thousand anti-balaka combatants descended on Bangui on foot to fight the Seleka and Michel Djotodia.⁵⁵ These anti-balaka groups were composed of young men commanded by FACA officers and non-commissioned officers. But this involvement of some military officers in the anti-balaka was not enough to create a unified force. Some combatants went back to their villages to resume their usual activities or to devote themselves to local banditry. This territorialisation of the violence explains why, unlike many ex-Seleka combatants, many anti-balaka are currently at home in their own communities. Only a few anti-balaka groups that form a kind of front-line commando in the centre of the country led by former soldiers are involved in fighting far from their own homes and are taking orders from national leaders.

At the national level, attempts to create a political leadership at the start of 2014 came up against the movement's complete lack of cohesion and conflicts between ambitious self-proclaimed leaders. The race to the presidency of the transitional government opened by Djotodia's "voluntary departure"⁵⁶ led the anti-balaka to formulate a joint demand for 25 posts on the National Transitional Council (CNT) but also immediately split the movement between pro- and anti-Bozizé factions.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Jean-Jacques Larma, who demanded control of several districts of the town in 2014, is a former APRD leader. See "Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2127 (2013)", S/2014/762, 29 October 2014.

⁵² Andilo, also known as Angelo, is one of the most feared anti-balaka leaders. He stole a lot of cattle in the Batangafo area over a period of several years. Well-known by the Batangafo authorities and the area's pastoralists, Angelo was arrested but then released in 2012 in circumstances as yet unexplained. Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, Batangafo, December 2012.

⁵³ For more on anti-balaka combatants, see this report <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdlxShpW9bU>.

⁵⁴ In Nola, the anti-balaka who settled in the homes of merchants from Ouham and Ouham Pende to work in forestry in the 1990s were finally forced to leave by the local people. Moreover, in Bayanga, the many anti-balaka led by Mboya Aubain who arrived with orders from Maxime Mokom and Ngaissona were also unpopular and had to leave. Crisis Group interview, senior officer, CAR Armed Forces (FACA), Bangui, February 2015.

⁵⁵ "Centrafrique: ils doivent tous partir ou mourir", FIDH, 24 June 2014.

⁵⁶ "Comment la France a précipité la fin de Djotodia", *Le Monde*, 10 January 2014.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, CNT member, Bangui, January 2014.

Thierry Lébéné, known as “colonel 12 powers” and Patrick Ngaïssona, former youth and sports minister under François Bozizé, formed the “national coordination of the liberators of the Central African Republic people”. Based in Boy Rabe, the movement is seen as a support group for the former president even though Ngaïssona subsequently tried to distance himself from it. Several other ephemeral movements were created around the same time, including the Resistance Front led by Léopold Bara and Captain Kamizoulaye, which were against supporting the former president.⁵⁸

Catherine Samba Panza, who was appointed as head of the transitional government at the start of 2014, co-opted anti-balaka representatives opposed to Bozizé in her first government to the great displeasures of Patrick Ngaïssona, for whom an arrest warrant was issued in May 2013. After a few months hesitation, a modus vivendi was finally found: instead of arresting him, he was placed under court supervision and so there was no anti-balaka uprising.⁵⁹

Since then, the struggle for power has not ceased within the nebulous anti-balaka. The appointment of the anti-balaka general coordinator Sébastien Wenezoui as environment minister in the transitional government in July 2015 and the appointment of Léopold Bara as sports minister were quickly challenged by Ngaïssona. Moreover, the Brazzaville and Bangui forums and the Nairobi negotiations clearly illustrated the internal tensions within the movement, reflected in the profound disagreements on what attitude to adopt toward the authorities. Within the anti-balaka, Maxime Mokom and Kokate, known as the “Nairobians” and who formed their own anti-balaka coordination on 29 May 2015,⁶⁰ partly boycotted the Bangui forum, unlike Ngaïssona and Wenezoui. For the moment, there are not two or three separate anti-balaka leaderships but a galaxy of local chiefs without either a political or stable allegiance and the only thing they have in common is a taste for banditry.

The impossibility of creating an anti-balaka leadership is due to sociological and historical factors, such as the acephalous nature of Western CAR societies. Historically, the Gbaya often joined forces around war leaders, whose leadership did not last beyond the duration of the battle: there were neither village chiefs,⁶¹ nor traditional chiefs, only dignitaries.⁶² French colonisation finally forced people into villages along the roads and appointed village chiefs, whose main task was to collect taxes. These chiefs do not have deep roots in the local culture because they were only established recently.

⁵⁸ See “Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2127 (2013)”, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ In a written statement, Patrick Ngaïssona promised to promote peace. Sworn statement by Patrick Ngaïssona, Bangui, 17 April 2014. Crisis Group interview, justice ministry official, Bangui, August 2015.

⁶⁰ “Confusion au sein du mouvement anti-balaka, une seconde coordination pose problème”, Radio Ndéké Luka, 30 May 2015.

⁶¹ Paulette Roulon-Doko, “La notion de migration dans l’aire Gbaya”, Tourneux Henry and Noé Woïn, *Migrations et mobilité dans le bassin du lac Tchad, colloque de l’Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD)*, pp. 543-553, 2009.

⁶² According to Paulette Roulon-Doko, in Gbaya villages, dignitaries are named according to their specific roles. The Wankao is responsible for making offerings to Ba-So, the great spirit. Nganga is the sorcerer and Wi-Dwimo is the blacksmith. Paulette Roulon-Doko, “La notion de migration dans l’aire Gbaya”, Tourneux Henry and Noé Woïn, *Migrations et mobilité dans le bassin du lac Tchad*, *op. cit.*

C. *The Financial Structure of the Armed Groups*

In June 2014, Crisis Group described the involvement of the armed groups in smuggling and illegal economy networks in CAR.⁶³ Unfortunately, the routine nature of the conflict in some areas of the country has been accompanied by an increase in economic crimes. The effects on the civilian population are less visible but just as dangerous. The deployment of blue helmets in the towns of the west and centre has failed to neutralise the armed groups. It has only pushed them into rural areas and along the main roads.

1. Predatory techniques

The armed groups finance themselves through robbery, abductions, extortion and “the administration of justice”.

The Seleka raised money from car theft when in power and now members of François Bozizé’s ex-presidential guard in anti-balaka groups in the Boy Rabe district are doing the same.⁶⁴ The motor bikes often used by NGO staff are also prized. Although abductions are not new in the CAR, their number greatly increased with the crisis and affects more varied sectors of the population.⁶⁵ The abduction of foreigners and Minister Sayo at the start of 2015 received a lot of publicity but represents only the tip of the iceberg.⁶⁶ There are frequent abductions in the poor neighbourhoods of Bangui, such as the 3rd, 5th and 8th districts, where many militiamen live.

In Kabo, Moyenne Sido and Batangafo in the central area of the north of the country,⁶⁷ the closure of the border with Chad combined with the departure of some foreign merchants and a halt to trade with Bangui, caused a drop in trade and the collapse of an important funding source for the ex-Seleka.⁶⁸ In order to compensate for this loss of income, some ex-Seleka combatants have carried out abductions, with ransoms set at about FCFA 150,000 (about €230).⁶⁹ CAR armed groups have also carried out abductions in the west, notably on the border with Cameroon.⁷⁰ The abductions carried out in the villages around Bossangoa completed the last stage in the descent into crime of the anti-balaka, who now do not hesitate to attack villagers in their own communities.

⁶³ See Crisis Group Report, *The Central African Crisis: from Predation to Stabilisation*, op. cit.; and the report “Warlord business: CAR’s violent armed groups and their criminal operations for profit and power”, Enough, 16 June 2015.

⁶⁴ In Boy Rabe, trafficking is organised in several ways: the owners sometimes buy back their own cars for FCFA 300,000 (about €460). Some cars are taken into Cameroon. Crisis Group interview, security expert, Bangui, March 2015.

⁶⁵ The road cutters generally abduct young pastoralists for a ransom.

⁶⁶ “Quelles sont les motivations des enlèvements en RCA?”, Irin news, 4 February 2015.

⁶⁷ See map in Appendix A to see the locations of the towns mentioned in this chapter.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, merchants, Kabo, October 2014.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, aid worker, Bangui, February 2015.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, aid worker, Bossangoa, February 2015. In the night of 19-20 March, about fifteen Cameroonians were abducted along the border with the CAR. The FDPC is suspected of carrying out these abductions although its leader, Abdulaye Miskine, has formally denied any involvement. “Cameroun: une quinzaine de voyageurs enlevés près de la frontière camerounaise”, AFP, 20 March 2015.

The many types of extortion

A significant proportion of the armed groups' income comes from the extortion of road users and, more recently, on the River Oubangui.⁷¹ Road crime changes quickly in response to traffic patterns and attempts to make them safe. At the start of 2015, the Bangui-Damara-Sibut road, which is the main road through the centre and east of the country, was especially dangerous because the anti-balaka had several temporary bases along the road.⁷² At the moment, road crime is rife on the road between Bouar and Garoua Boulai.⁷³ Economic operators and aid organisations hand over money, fuel and food supplies to criminal gangs and militias in exchange for safe passage.⁷⁴

Taxation of resources is another source of income for the armed groups. Members of the ex-Seleka try to control the trade in diamonds and gold, especially at the Ndassima mines, which form part of the old Axmin concession close to Bakala.⁷⁵ One UPC leader provided "protection" for prospectors in exchange for payment.⁷⁶ The anti-balaka also profit from gold production, especially in the mining villages along the Bozoum Ouham-bak road.⁷⁷ However, minerals are not the only natural resources to be taxed. One UPC leader reportedly appointed a Sudanese trader to organise the taxation of coffee and other staples.⁷⁸ This trader was also given the job of arming combatants with weapons obtained in Sudan.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, ex-Seleka factions compete for control over coffee exports to Sudan.

The most basic form of extortion punishes the poorest, that is, the rural population. As international forces have taken control of towns, young militiamen have begun to extort the people living in neighbouring villages or using rural tracks. In the region of Bossangoa and Paoua, young militiamen often erect barricades on market days and tax villagers who bring their produce to market and the motorcycle taxis that are more numerous on these occasions.⁸⁰ Anti-balaka groups also often

⁷¹ With the rise of the water and the increase in river traffic, the anti-balaka began to intercept boats travelling along the Oubangui between Bangui and Bangassou. The anti-balaka extorted merchants using the port in the 7th district. Crisis Group telephone interview, security expert, Bangui, June 2015. Crisis Group interview, membre of the 7th district peace committee, Bangui, August 2015.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, anti-balaka chief, Bangui, February 2015.

⁷³ Vehicles using the Boali and Damara roads have to pay FCFA 5,000 (nearly €8) and buses FCFA 1,500 (a little more than €2) before they are allowed through the anti-balaka roadblocks. Four anti-balaka factions have been identified on the Bouca to Batangafo road. The situation is the same on the road from Bambari to Bangassou, where there were no less than seventeen ex-Seleka roadblocks in March 2015. Crisis Group email correspondence, security expert, Bangui, July 2015. Crisis Group interview, aid workers, Bangui and Bambari, February, March 2015.

⁷⁴ The ex-Seleka's income from roadblocks is somewhere between \$1.5 and 2.5 million per year. See the report "Warlord Business – CAR's Violent Armed Groups and their Criminal Operations for Profit and Power", Enough, 16 June 2015.

⁷⁵ For more on the looting of Axmin, see "Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2127 (2013)", *op. cit.* Also see "Blood gold flows illegally from Central African Republic", Bloomberg, 9 March 2015.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, security expert, Bambari, March 2015.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, aid worker, Bossangoa, February 2015.

⁷⁸ In the towns of Bambari, UPC officials sell passes to cattle and coffee merchants. If they do not buy passes, they are not allowed to leave the town. See the report "Warlord Business – CAR's Violent Armed Groups and their Criminal Operations for Profit and Power", *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, security expert, Bambari, March 2015.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interviews, aid worker, Bossangoa, February 2015; civil society representative, Paoua, August 2015.

fight for control of trafficking and leadership of the movement, as recently seen in Bambari and Bangui.⁸¹

Paying for justice

Justice is now administered by armed groups who charge a levy for dealing with each case. The anti-balaka and the Revolution and Justice group deal with many cases of alleged sorcery.⁸² In order to avoid execution, people charged with sorcery pay armed groups to avoid execution. Armed groups set up mini-courts here and there, for example, in the displaced people's camps in Batangafo, in the north of the country, where anti-balaka militiamen have become local prosecutors.⁸³

2. The humanitarian and political cost of predation

In addition to its impact on the economy, insecurity on the roads severely hampers the supply of humanitarian aid. Theft of NGO vehicles⁸⁴ and World Food Program (WFP) lorries are a regular occurrence.⁸⁵ In some places, the distribution of food supplies is accompanied by attacks and extortion by armed groups.⁸⁶ This creates a climate of fear among the public to the extent that people sometimes ask for food not to be delivered in order to avoid attacks by the armed groups.⁸⁷ Sharing WFP food in the displaced peoples' camps has become a power game and the anti-balaka sometimes decide on how food should be shared and take advantage while doing so.⁸⁸ The armed groups and bandits are therefore able to live off humanitarian aid.

The declining legitimacy of the anti-balaka

In some towns in the west of the country and in the capital, the population has stopped calling the young anti-balaka "patriots" and now calls them "criminals". The changing public perception and loss of support for the anti-balaka are the result of

⁸¹ In Bambari, anti-balaka groups often clashed because of attempts by former soldiers from the west to take control of the groups. For example, on 9 June, a group of anti-balaka reportedly attacked the home of the new prefecture coordinator of Ouaka, sent by Ngaissona. Violent settling of accounts took place in May 2015 in the Boy Rabe district of Bangui. Crisis Group telephone interview, security expert, June 2015.

⁸² In Paoua, a village chief accused of sorcery was arrested and tortured by Revolution and Justice militiamen. The CAR Penal Code of 2010 makes sorcery illegal. It was a major problem well before the crisis even started. Crisis Group interviews, civil society representatives, Paoua, August 2015. Aleksandra Cimpric, "La violence anti-sorcillaire en Centrafrique", *Afrique contemporaine*, 2009, n°4, pp. 195-208.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview, aid worker, Bangui, February 2015.

⁸⁴ In the first five months of 2015, about 40 NGO and humanitarian vehicles were stolen on the roads and several NGO offices were broken into in Bangui and in the provinces. Crisis Group telephone interview, aid worker, May 2015.

⁸⁵ Theft of lorries transporting food and the looting of food are regular occurrences in the west of the country. On 18 July 2015, a convoy of WFP lorries escorted by the MINUSCA was attacked near Baboua, resulting in the death of one Cameroonian driver. See "Top UN relief official in Central African Republic urgently appeals for halt in attacks on aid workers", UN News Centre, 22 July 2015.

⁸⁶ Seleka or armed Fulani attacked the town of Kouki sixteen times in 2014. Crisis Group interview, aid worker, Bossangoa, February 2015. In 2015, there were many attacks on the Kouki Nana Bakassa road. For example, the anti-balaka stole a consignment of food from an NGO lorry on 4 June 2015. Crisis Group telephone interview, aid worker, June 2015.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, aid worker, Bossangoa, February 2015.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, internally displaced person, Bambari, March 2015.

public exasperation with their criminal activities.⁸⁹ The reduction of crime in Bangui during the first half of 2015 was largely due to public withdrawal of support for the anti-balaka.⁹⁰

In the provinces, this withdrawal of support is shown by the many community reactions against them. For example, the communities living in gold-producing villages along the Bozoum-Ouham Bak road chased away anti-balaka men who robbed a Muslim trader.⁹¹ In Boguila, local people got together to track down an anti-balaka group from another part of the country and killed two militiamen.⁹²

⁸⁹ “Anti-balaka are rejected by the population, people need to rest”. Crisis Group interview, leader anti-balaka, Bangui, February 2015.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, security expert, Bangui, August 2015.

⁹¹ On the road between Bozoum and Ouham Bak, villagers were selling gold to a Muslim trader from Bocaranga. When the trader was robbed of FCFA 15 million (a bit less than €23,000) in the village of Dafara, close to Ouham Bak, the local community reacted by chasing away the anti balaka who were allegedly responsible. Crisis Group interview, security expert, Bossangoa, February 2015.

⁹² Ibid.

III. From Armed Groups to Armed Communities

From 2013 to 2014, the conflict between armed groups was accompanied by a conflict between armed communities divided along religious lines. This emergence of punitive violence at community level took place in the context of a survival economy, animosity toward Muslims and conspiracy theories about alleged attempts to forcibly impose Islam on CAR. This religious pretext reflected the deep fractures in CAR society that have been ignored and even denied for a long time and which took many observers by surprise, starting with the CAR elite itself.⁹³ One year after the outbreak of intercommunal violence, animosity toward Muslims remains strong.

A. *The Consequences of Community Violence*

1. Violence by association

The anti-balaka militia attack on Bangui on 5 December 2013, which drove Seleka out of the capital and the western towns by the start of 2014 was a turning point in the crisis. It was followed by a campaign of persecution against Muslims that lasted for several months.

In the west and in Bangui, public anger led to punitive attacks (mutilations, lynchings, etc.) that aimed to terrorise Muslims, force them to flee and “remove all traces of peaceful coexistence”.⁹⁴ Many Muslim residential areas in mixed neighbourhoods of Bangui, such as the 3rd and 5th districts, and in some provincial towns were not only looted but also demolished or burned down.⁹⁵ Many mosques were also destroyed, including about 30 in Bangui and about 400 in the rest of the country.⁹⁶ This street violence, feared by the Archbishop of Bangui, who described it as the “return match”,⁹⁷ was a response to the Seleka’s violence. Muslims were targeted because they were associated with Seleka.

The anti-balaka and the general public put Muslims, Chadians and the ex-Seleka into the same bag, which led to the intercommunal violence in 2014. Chadian combatants had been disliked by the public for a long time. The Chadian army’s intervention in 1997 as part of the Inter African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Accords (MISAB) to put an end to the mutinies had many civilian victims.⁹⁸ In 2012, the deterioration in relations between Déby and Bozizé and public anger at the atrocities committed by Chadians in the presidential guard strengthened anti-Chadian feeling. This was deepened by the ambiguous behaviour of Chadian

⁹³ What happened in 2013-2014 was said to be impossible in 2008: “The Central African Republic has not witnessed an interfaith massacre since independence and there will be no violent conflict or civil war of a religious nature there for politicians to exploit.” Jean-Pierre Mara, *Oser les changements en Afrique* (Paris, 2008). Most CAR nationals questioned by Crisis Group since the end of 2013 insist that religious differences were not a problem before the current crisis.

⁹⁴ See “Centrafrique: les chemins de la haine”, *Libération*, 20 May 2014. See BFM TV report, “Centrafrique: les musulmans fuient en masse le pays”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYB1xPxW-eE>.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, aid worker, Bangui, February 2015.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, civil society representative, Bangui, August 2015. “US envoy: almost every CAR mosque destroyed in war”, *Al Jazeera*, 18 March 2015.

⁹⁷ See Crisis Group Africa Briefing, *Central African Republic: Better Late than Never*, op. cit. See BFM TV report, “Centrafrique: la revanche des anti-balaka”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWdXAT-abYM>.

⁹⁸ “Centrafrique – Tchad: la déchirure”, *Jeune Afrique*, 9 January 2014.

troops in 2013, when they were accused of colluding with the ex-Seleka.⁹⁹ Merchants at Point Kilométrique 5 (PK5), who included some Chadians,¹⁰⁰ were protected by Chadian forces and perceived to be accomplices in the atrocities.

Moreover, some of the goods looted by the Seleka found their way to the PK5 market, a commercial centre controlled by Muslims and a place where Chadian soldiers were accustomed to socialise. It did not take much for people to arrive at the conclusion that the ex-Seleka were representing the interests of Muslim merchants, especially the Chadian ones. Evidence for this hate by association is provided by the selective character of the persecution of Muslims in Bangui, which targeted African Muslims but spared the Lebanese community.

2. A society permeated by distrust and hostility

The attacks on Seleka, Chadians and Muslims have increased in intensity as the crisis has progressed and this has had a devastating effect on the towns in the west and centre of the country. These towns can be divided into two categories: those permeated by distrust and those where open hostility reigns.

Relatively few Muslims remain in western towns, sometimes in enclaves of about 30,000 people.¹⁰¹ Muslims often seek refuge close to churches in order to make the most of the protection provided by priests. But they were often surrounded by anti-balaka who have sometimes forced them to convert to Christianity.¹⁰² It is dangerous for them to stray outside some neighbourhoods and access to markets is problematic in towns that are divided between Christians and Muslims.¹⁰³

Where there are no enclaves, the Muslim community is ostracised and keeps a low profile.¹⁰⁴ People who have returned to their homes do so in a climate of strong intercommunal distrust. In Paoua, where half the Muslim community left the town in 2014, distrust between the Muslims and the Tale, the indigenous ethnic group, is tangible.¹⁰⁵ In Bangui, public hostility against Muslims is fuelled by the continued presence of a pocket of armed young Muslims in PK5.

Towns in the centre of the country are often divided, with each community forced to stay in their own neighbourhoods. Intercommunal hostility is regularly lethal and is fuelled by the presence of ex-Seleka and anti-balaka members.¹⁰⁶ For example,

⁹⁹ For more on the behaviour of the Chadian army, see Euronews report, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KM8Y5V1eWLo>.

¹⁰⁰ In 2011, following the discovery of two dead children in the boot of a car, Muslim merchants were accused of killing them and being involved in the trafficking of human organs. As a result, merchants at PK5 had to suspend their activities at the central market. A diplomat in post in Bangui believed that the death of the two children provoked “the spark that triggered a settling of accounts with Muslims, especially Chadians”. Angry crowds of young people spread out from PK5 to Boy Rabe, Fohu and as far as Gombongo, districts where the anti-balaka were strongest during the crisis.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, aid worker, Bangui, August 2015.

¹⁰² See “Erased identity: Muslims in ethnically-cleansed areas of the Central African Republic”, Amnesty International, July 2015.

¹⁰³ This division is also found among CAR refugees that fled to Zongo, on the other side of the Congolese border. “RDC: méfiance tenace entre chrétiens et musulmans centrafricains”, AFP, 24 June 2015.

¹⁰⁴ See the Research Brief “Disrupted social cohesion in the Central African Republic: Paoua, Bangassou and Obo”, German Institute of Global and Area Studies, April 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interviews, mayor, president of the Islamic community, district chief, Paoua, August 2015.

¹⁰⁶ The towns of Batangafo, Bambari, Bria, Kobo and others are in this situation. Crisis Group interviews, aid workers and civil society representatives, Bangui, August 2015.

Bambari, capital of Ouaka, remains divided between anti-balaka and ex-Seleka groups and between armed communities, as shown by the recent violence, which claimed many victims, forced the evacuation of some aid workers and led MINUSCA to establish a weapon-free zone in the town.¹⁰⁷

In rural areas, pastoralists in general and the Fulani in particular provoke fear and hostility in other sectors of the population. The conflict has exacerbated existing violent tensions between farmers and pastoralists.¹⁰⁸

B. *A Fractured Society*

1. The revival of a historic divide

By virtue of its geography and history, CAR is located at the crossroads between two regions and two populations: in the north, the Sahel with its pastoralist communities and merchants mainly Muslim and, in the south, central Africa with its communities of the savanna, initially animist but now predominantly Christian. This is where two worlds meet and the CAR has for several decades welcomed Muslim merchants from neighbouring countries (Chad, Sudan, Nigeria) and from as far afield as West Africa (Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, etc.). An open society, the country has been the scene of trade between diverse populations but has also witnessed clashes and rivalry between “western colonisers and Islamic conquerors”.¹⁰⁹ The current crisis has revived memories of this traumatic history, fuelled a sense of victimhood and reopened the dangerous question about who has the right to live in CAR.¹¹⁰

The Seleka power grab in March 2013 marked a fundamental reversal of CAR’s traditional political landscape. Since independence, the struggle for power was the prerogative of military officers drawn from savanna and riverside communities. Previous coups were carried out by senior army officers, sometimes supported by foreign mercenaries, as in 2003.¹¹¹ The auxiliaries in the 2003 coup became the coup leaders this time around and a military force composed of Muslims from the north and east of the country took power for the first time.

This violent emergence on the scene of new protagonists in the CAR power game was literally seen as an “invasion” by the rest of the country and awakened the collective memory of Muslim slaving raids. Well before the forced labour imposed by

¹⁰⁷ On 20 August, the murder of a young Muslim motorcycle taxi driver by the anti-balaka provoked a round of violent reprisals between Christians and Muslims, leaving ten dead and several injured, including two members of the International Red Cross in Central African Republic. The latter were trying to evacuate the bodies and the injured when they were attacked by demonstrators. For more on these revenge attacks in Bambari, see “Central African Republic: urgent action needed to tackle escalating violence in the central regions”, Amnesty International, op. cit. Note d’information, MINUSCA, Bangui, 9 September 2015. “Bambari: a tragic microcosm of the CAR crisis”, International Crisis Group, blogpost, 29 September 2015.

¹⁰⁸ “Les Peuhls Mbororo de Centrafrique, une communauté qui souffre”, Association pour l’intégration et le développement social des Peuhls de Centrafrique, Bangui, June 2015 and Crisis Group Report, *The Security Challenges of Pastoralism in Central Africa*, op. cit. and Crisis Group Briefing, *The Central African Republic’s Hidden Conflict*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ Pierre Kalck, *Histoire de la République centrafricaine*, op. cit., and Jean Cantournet, *Des affaires et des hommes, Noirs et Blancs, commerçants et fonctionnaires dans l’Oubangui du début du siècle*, op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Closed seminar on the CAR crisis, Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI), Paris, 1 June 2015.

¹¹¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition*, op. cit.

colonisation, these raids depopulated entire regions between the 16th and 19th centuries and turned the area into a reservoir of slaves.¹¹² People in the east of the country fled from the slave trader raids led by the Sultan Senoussi, while the people in the north west suffered enslavement at the hands of the Fulani Muslim *lamidos* based in the north of what is now Cameroon.¹¹³ These raids helped to forge a spirit of resistance among the Banda, Gbaya and Mboum peoples.

Although this all happened a long time ago, it left deep marks on the collective consciousness. Politicians have used this to mobilise support. Since the crisis began, the former president and members of the government have played on the fear of “invaders” and Islamist conspiracies. For example, in January 2013, the local government minister, Josué Binoua, highlighted the significant presence among the Seleka of “jihadis preaching Wahhabism”.¹¹⁴ Inversely, Muslim dignitaries in Bria, Bambari and Bangui refer to Senoussi and the Muslim domination that only ended with the colonisation of the country.¹¹⁵ “Without the French, we would be running CAR”, said one member of the Bria administration.¹¹⁶ The pointless proclamation of the independence of Dar el Kouti by some ex-Seleka leaders in 2014 harks back to the history of Muslim penetration into Oubangi territory and to a certain level of dependence on the Chadian sultanates.¹¹⁷ The “invader” rhetoric has also been fuelled by Seleka’s penchant for looting. Ignoring the fact that many young Christians contributed to the lootings along with the Seleka, politicians have established parallels between the slaving raids and the unfortunate events in Bangui in 2013.¹¹⁸

Other commonly told stories refer back to the area’s traumatic history of slavery. For example, some young Bangui residents said, “Muslims are professional killers and keep knives up their sleeves”. An anti-balaka leader, referring to ex-Seleka militia, said “they hit people just like they did in the times of slavery”.¹¹⁹ By promoting rhetoric that stigmatises the other, this crisis has raised the nationality question by

¹¹² In the east, slaves were taken to Arab countries (Egypt, Arabia, Turkey, etc.) through Darfur, while, in the west, they were sold in the kingdoms of north Cameroon and north Nigeria. Local forms of slavery were also practised by the Zandé and the Nzakara, who occupied the south east of the country and enslaved their defeated enemies. “Comprendre la crise centrafricaine: mission de veille, d’étude et de réflexion prospective sur la crise centrafricaine et ses dimensions culturelles et religieuses”, final report of the Pharos Observatory Mission, Paris, 2014.

¹¹³ *Lamidos* are traditional chiefs in Fulani society. In the period 1700-1900, the north west lost 80 per cent of its population. Few people live in the east of the country, which used to be much more densely populated. See Alain Degras, “Akotara, un triptyque consacré aux Gbayas du nord-ouest centrafricain”, op. cit.

¹¹⁴ “RCA: le gouvernement dénonce la présence de jihadistes dans les rangs de la Seleka”, RFI, 4 January 2013.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, member of a Muslim association, Bambari, March 2015; local government official, Bria, March 2014.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, local government official, Bria, March 2014.

¹¹⁷ The Sultanate of Dar el Kouti was founded in the 18th century on the initiative of the Sultan of Ouaddaï and extended as far as the left bank of the River Aouk and to the rivers of Bamingui, Ouaka and Kotto to the east of the current borders of the CAR. Practising slavery, the Sultans of Dar el Kouti paid an annual tribute in kind to the Sultan of Ouaddaï. For more on Dar el Kouti, see Bernard Simiti, *Le Dar-El-Kouti empire oubanguien de Senoussi (1890-1911)*, op. cit.

¹¹⁸ The word “razzia” has been often used by CAR politicians to describe the Seleka’s actions. See “Centrafrique: la dernière interview de François Bozizé avant sa chute”, *Jeune Afrique*, 27 March 2013.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, taxi drivers, Bangui, February 2015; Crisis Group interview, anti-balaka leader, Bangui, January 2014.

associating the Seleka with Muslim invaders. “We welcomed the Muslims but they have betrayed us”.¹²⁰ The public consultations that preceded the Bangui forum showed that this is a recurring issue, notably in Ouham and Ouham Pende, where communities have asked the authorities to review the criteria for granting CAR nationality and “withdraw identity cards from foreigners”.¹²¹ In the same spirit, during the Bangui Forum, anti-balaka representatives demanded “the cancelation of all passports, residence permits and national identity cards” issued under the Seleka government.¹²² In public debate, the conflict is often presented as a confrontation between native peoples and foreign Muslims.¹²³ Yet, the public often distinguishes between good Muslims (CAR citizens) and bad Muslims (foreigners, especially Chadians). There is now a strong consensus against allowing Chadians to return.¹²⁴ Although the concept of “centrafricanité” that emerged in circles close to François Bozizé does not appear in political discourse today, many people are privately willing to admit they are not in favour of allowing foreign Muslims into CAR.¹²⁵

2. The political manipulation of religion

CAR is a secular state but its leaders and politicians have always mixed politics and religion. Ever since the time of Barthélémy Boganda, father of independence and the first CAR Catholic priest, the country’s presidents have played the religious card to promote their own interests. Jean-Bedel Bokassa described himself as the thirteenth apostle after his trial in 1986; Patassé and Bokassa both opportunistically converted to Islam to obtain financial support from Colonel Qadhafi.¹²⁶ Following the example of other presidents like Pierre Nkurunziza (president of Burundi) and Boni Yayi (president of Benin), ex-president François Bozizé made the church to which he belonged, the Celestial Church of Christ,¹²⁷ into a centre of power. “In Bossangoa, you had to attract attention by singing more loudly than the others in order to benefit from the president’s favours” said one member of the Ouham authorities ironically.¹²⁸

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, groups of young people, Bangui, February 2015; politician, Bangui, August 2015.

¹²¹ See “Rapport consolidé des missions des consultations populaires à la base en République centrafricaine”, Bangui, March 2015 and “Analyse à base communautaire des perceptions des dynamiques conflictuelles des populations du PK5”, Danish Refugee Council, Bangui, May 2015.

¹²² See “Recommandations de l’ex-mouvement des patriotes anti-balaka”, Coordination nationale, Bangui, May 2015.

¹²³ During interviews with anti-balaka members in the Boy Rabe district of Bangui, they used the term “Arabs” to describe Seleka members and spoke about chasing out the “Arabs”. Crisis Group interviews, anti-balaka combatants, Bangui, January 2014. Closed seminar on the CAR crisis, Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI), Paris, 1 June 2015.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, civil society representatives, Bangui and Paoua, August 2015.

¹²⁵ Only the Front for the Return of Constitutional Order in the CAR (FROCA), which is a pro-Bozizé organisation, has developed this idea, but only in a vague way. Crisis Group interviews, CAR lawyer, Paris, November 2014; members of the CAR diaspora, Paris, December 2014.

¹²⁶ Bokassa converted to Islam in 1976 but returned to the Christian fold in 1977 while maintaining diplomatic relations with Libya. Thanks to his rapprochement with Qadhafi, he was able to pay salary arrears. Richard Filakota, *Le renouveau islamique en Afrique noire: l'exemple de la Centrafrique* (Paris, 2009).

¹²⁷ The Celestial Church of Christ was founded by pastor Samuel Biléou Joseph Oshoffa on 29 September 1947 in Porto-Novo, Benin. It was the second biggest religious current in Benin after the Catholic Church and is also popular in Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire and many other African countries. See “L’envolée des chrétiens célestes”, *Jeune Afrique*, 5 January 2009.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, membre of the local administration, Ouham region, February 2015.

Many CAR citizens have been rewarded for their loyalty to this church in the form of land or jobs in the administration.¹²⁹ Patassé feared the church's capacity to mobilise the people and, following the failed coup in 2001, he suspended the activities of the "Celestial Church of Christ, the New Jerusalem", on the grounds it was an illegal organisation.¹³⁰

Many politicians are also born again pastors. In CAR, healing souls is a natural platform on which to build a political career: "Many religious leaders are tempted to enter politics".¹³¹ Several CAR politicians involved in the born again churches that have proliferated since the 1990s have maintained shameful relations with the anti-balaka, either by providing them with material aid or by encouraging them. The Alliance of Evangelicals in the Central African Republic (AEC) had to expel two pastors who were notorious for supporting the anti-balaka.¹³² The pre-electoral atmosphere in CAR is ripe for the eruption of religious issues in the electoral competition.

3. A tolerated, rather than accepted, Islam

Although two presidents converted to Islam and the Patassé government created a ministry specifically to develop relations with Arab governments,¹³³ the CAR authorities have for a long time distrusted Islam. This reflects the history and geopolitical situation of a country that is mainly Christian but located on the border of the geographic extension of Islam. Some have been quick to liken this border to a front line. Islam has therefore only gradually won recognition in CAR. Bokassa opposed legalisation of Muslim organisations and the authorities only gradually recognised them in the 1980s and 1990s. The Islamic Community in the Central African Republic (CIRCA) was the first Islamic association to achieve legal registration in 1984, followed by the Central African Islamic Community in 1992.¹³⁴ On the eve of the 1993 elections, the Kolingba government (in power between 1981 and 1993) promoted the reorganisation of the Islamic community in the hope of winning electoral support and compensate criticism from the bishops.¹³⁵ A strong National Islamic Council now has 52 affiliated associations.¹³⁶ The Bangui Forum agreed on official recogni-

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ "Les autorités suspendent les activités d'une église créée par le Général Bozizé", AFP, 28 October 2001.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interview, religious authority, Bangui, February 2015.

¹³² One of them was also an official in Bozizé's party. Crisis Group interview, AEC official, Bangui, February 2015. The anti-balaka leader known as "12 powers" has a brother who is a pastor who exercised great influence on him. Crisis Group interview, CNT membre, Bangui, February 2015. Similarly, in Nola, in the south west, a pastor gave shelter to the anti-balaka. Crisis Group interview, CAR army officer, Bangui, February 2015.

¹³³ Created in 1999, this ministry's aim was to attract funding from Gulf countries. It no longer exists. Jean Paul Ngoupandé, *L'Afrique face à l'Islam* (Paris, 2003), p. 107.

¹³⁴ The problems encountered by the Islamic community when trying to organise also reflected divisions within the Muslim communities themselves. For example, in Bangui, governance of mosques has often brought West Africa and Chadian immigrant groups into conflict with CAR Muslims. The Hausa, Mbororo Fulani, Borno and Fulbe pray in different mosques. Richard Filakota, *Le renouveau islamique en Afrique noire: l'exemple de la Centrafrique*, op. cit.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview, imam, Bangui, February 2015. Richard Filakota, *Le renouveau islamique en Afrique noire: l'exemple de la Centrafrique*, op. cit.

tion of Muslim festivals as national holidays, although this was rejected in the 1990s and at the start of this century.¹³⁷

The gradual acceptance of Islam by the CAR authorities reflected a desire to control it. The interior ministry, which is responsible for religious affairs, organises the pilgrimage to Mecca. In addition to the corruption associated with the government's organisation of the pilgrimage, this is viewed as government interference in Islamic community affairs.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, all sectors of the population express fears about a so-called project of Islamisation of CAR and see it as hostile expansionism.¹³⁹ Many CAR nationals believe that Sudan and Chad are seeking to Islamise the CAR with the support of wealthy Arab countries. The authorities are closely monitoring Islamic associations for proselytisation by foreign sponsors (Libya, Saudi Arab, Gulf countries, Egypt, etc.) that offer CAR students scholarships to study in Al-Ahzar or at the Islamic university of Khartoum. Finally, the government has deported several preachers considered to be too radical.¹⁴⁰

4. Social grievances

Despite the many mixed marriages, relations between Muslims and the rest of the population are often tainted by social jealousy related, in particular, to Muslim control over commerce.¹⁴¹ In several regions of the country, Christians and animists even converted to Islam to make their way in business. But some sectors of the population, notably the Gbaya, are unhappy about the social hierarchy created by Muslim domination of commerce.

Although some accounts describe close relations and even cooperation between the Gbaya and Fulani Mbororo pastoralists, relations between the Gbaya and Arab and Fulbe merchants have been notoriously more problematic.¹⁴² Resentment toward merchants led to the use of pejorative names, such as "long boubous" (*grands boubous*), *Bèngué* and *Toubè*.¹⁴³ Moreover, well before the crisis, the branches of commerce dominated by Muslims were coveted and some non-Muslim merchants, traditionally known as the *Boulanguélé*, were already looking to take control of their stalls. The current crisis facilitated this process and, in Bangui, young merchants now own stalls and shops that were once owned by Muslims.¹⁴⁴

The relative position of people involved in commerce and civil servants in society was also turned upside down. The former do not generally have a good education, while civil servants often have formal qualifications and formed the country's social elite. As the state collapsed, the social standing of civil servants declined in relation to merchants. Holding a university degree is no longer a guarantee of employment, on the contrary. Merchants either became easy prey for the civil servants, notably

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interview, politician, Bangui, August 2015.

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interview, imam, Bangui, February 2015.

¹³⁹ In local consultations, some groups in the prefecture of Mambere Kadei said that Arab rebel groups in the Seleka were conducting a religious war to forcibly convert CAR nationals to Islam. See "Rapport consolidé des missions des consultations populaires à la base en République centrafricaine", op. cit.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, imam, Bangui, February 2015.

¹⁴¹ Muslims controlled 70 per cent of trade. Crisis Group interview, imam, Bangui, February 2015.

¹⁴² Paulette Roulon-Doko, *Conception de l'espace et du temps chez les Gbaya de Centrafrique*, op. cit.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, CAR minister, Bangui, February 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

those in state control services, such as police and customs officers, etc.¹⁴⁵ or their creditors. School fees and access to hospitals are often more expensive for Muslims.¹⁴⁶ This change in social relations caused acute frustration and was responsible for some of the violent settling of accounts in 2014.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, lawyer, PK5 merchants, Bangui, July 2014.

¹⁴⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Muslim associations, Bambari, February 2015; Muslim religious authorities, Bangui, February 2015; researcher, Bangui, February 2015.

¹⁴⁷ See “Analyse à base communautaire des perceptions des dynamiques conflictuelles des populations du PK5”, Danish Refugee Council, Bangui, May 2015.

IV. A New Approach to Neutralise the Armed Groups

A. *Implementing a Disarmament Policy*

With elections scheduled to take place before the end of the year,¹⁴⁸ none of the conditions required for a successful disarmament program exist. In addition to the fact that the previous DDR programs failed,¹⁴⁹ extreme poverty, the absence of a formal economy, the abundance of arms in the region, the loosely organised structure of the armed groups and the prevailing climate of insecurity are major obstacles.¹⁵⁰ The widespread presence of militias in the north and east of the country is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it has been the norm for several decades. Some communities, such as nomadic pastoralists, exchanged their bows and arrows for Kalashnikovs long ago in order to defend themselves.¹⁵¹ The issue is further complicated by the fact that the leaders of armed groups use DDR for political blackmail and for accumulating personal wealth.

However, as DDR forms part of MINUSCA's mandate,¹⁵² everybody is waiting for DDR: combatants and their leaders, politicians and the general public. For the latter two categories, DDR is a miraculous magic solution to the problem posed by the existence of armed groups. Politicians believe it is essential for a free electoral campaign, while communities see it as a way to "hoover up" militiamen as well as a condition for development.¹⁵³ Initially planned to take place before the elections, DDR has been postponed until after the elections. A pre-DDR program is due to begin before the elections.

Although the gradual disarmament of armed groups and communities is essential for a genuine intercommunal dialogue and the reestablishment of an atmosphere of

¹⁴⁸ Aware of the impossibility of organising the elections on 18 October and 22 November as initially planned, the transitional authorities have asked the ANE to propose a new electoral calendar. However, under international pressure, they have insisted that the elections take place before the deadline of 31 December 2015, which is the date the transition is supposed to end.

¹⁴⁹ A retrospective analysis of DDR by the APRD in 2012 highlighted the small number of arms recovered (150 war weapons from 6,000 declared combatants), the low number of militiamen integrated into the army (about 50) and the failure to reintegrate any combatant back into the economy. Crisis Group interview, ex-APRD leader, Paoua, August 2015.

¹⁵⁰ There are many reasons for the failure of previous DDRs: some leaders of political-military groups were not representative of them; the "food ticket concept" of the DDR and the way in which combatants viewed them as a way of getting some money; the lack of political will on the part of the government; the failure of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) to put any pressure on former president Bozizé; and the misappropriation of funds. Finally, rather than reintegrating combatants within their communities, DDR programs have sometimes had the opposite effect, with communities unhappy about the status conferred on combatants. For more on the failure of DDRs in the CAR, see "Rapport RCA: le DDR sans GPS", mission indépendante d'évaluation du programme de réinsertion des ex-combattants et d'appui aux communautés en République centrafricaine, commissioned by the Multi-Country Demobilisation and Reintegration Program (MDRP), December 2007 and "Assessing the reintegration of ex-combatants in the context of instability and informal economies, the cases of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan", World Bank, Washington, 2012.

¹⁵¹ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°215, *The Security Challenges of Pastoralism in Central Africa*, 1 April 2014.

¹⁵² See United Nations Security Council resolution 2149 (2014) article 30.g) on disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation

¹⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, politicians, peace committee members, district chief, civil society representatives, Bangui and Paoua, August 2015.

trust, it would be an illusion to believe that a DDR program alone will be enough to achieve that goal. The authorities need to replace the DDR program with a disarmament policy that reduces the appeal of the militia economy for CAR's youth.

1. DDR and pre-DDR stuck in a dead-end

One of the main objectives of the Bangui Forum for reconciliation in May 2015 was an agreement with the armed groups on disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR). Ten armed groups signed an agreement with the transitional government on DDRR principles.¹⁵⁴ Combatants in the signatory armed groups and in possession of war weapons will be eligible for DDRR if they hand over their "military equipment".¹⁵⁵ As usual with DDR, they must report to specific locations where they will be taken care of by the government, supported by CAR's partners.¹⁵⁶ The agreement allows combatants to reintegrate into their communities or to apply for a job within the security forces in accordance with defined eligibility criteria and the capacity of the security forces to absorb new members. A community violence reduction (CVR) program is added to the DDR and ineligible combatants must return to their communities and participate in community development projects or income generating activities.¹⁵⁷

The agreement lacks credibility and diplomats and members of international organisations are all critical of the lack of vision and strategy for DDR in CAR.¹⁵⁸ The first problem concerns the withdrawal of some of the main armed groups. Abdulaye Miskine's FDPC, which is responsible for the generalised insecurity on the border with Cameroon, has not signed the agreement, while Nourredine Adam's FPRC rejected it just a few days after signing it. The FPRC's rejection of the agreement may encourage others to do the same. It is likely that other armed groups refuse to disarm on these conditions for security reasons and in order to avoid losing control of the territories they occupy.¹⁵⁹

The second main problem with the implementation of a DDRR is that the signatories of the agreement are not very representative of the armed groups and do not have much influence over the commanders and combatants in the field. This reflects the loose structure of these so-called "political-military" organisations, which are neither political nor military. Last but not least, donors are sceptical about the pro-

¹⁵⁴ The following armed groups signed the agreement: RPRC, UPC, Union of Fundamental Republican Forces (UFRF), Renewed Seleka, MLCJ, Democratic Front for Progress in the Central African Republic (FDPRC), the coordinators of ex-anti-balaka combatants, Revolution and Justice and the Union of Republic Forces (UFR). The FPRC signed the agreement but later withdrew.

¹⁵⁵ See article 3 on the DDRR eligibility criteria, "l'Accord sur les principes de désarmement, démobilisation, réintégration et rapatriement (DDRR) et d'intégration dans les corps en uniforme de l'Etat centrafricain entre le gouvernement de transition et les groupes armés", Bangui, 10 May 2015.

¹⁵⁶ See article 4 of the DDRR agreement.

¹⁵⁷ See article 5 of the DDRR agreement. UN Security Council Resolution 2149 included the design and implementation of programs to reduce community violence in MINUSCA's mandate.

¹⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews, CAR donor, Nairobi, June 2015; senior UN official, Washington, June 2015.

¹⁵⁹ "Central African Republic: can a disarmament deal without the main actors work in Bangui", African Argument, 2 June 2015. By mid-June, avoidance of a confrontation between the Sudanese-CAR elements in the former tripartite force and the FPRC showed that the latter still intends to maintain control over some strategic areas. Crisis Group telephone interview, security expert, June 2015.

gram and have not yet agreed to cover the DDR budget, estimated at €28 million.¹⁶⁰ The same is true for the CVR program budget, estimated at €20 million, but only currently funded by the UN (€6 million).¹⁶¹ Unable to implement DDR, MINUSCA has designed a pre-DDR that it intends to fund alone and that consists of occupying the armed groups on public works projects in exchange for storage of their weapons.¹⁶² An awareness raising campaign is under way but there is a question mark over the feasibility of this pre-DDR program.

2. Toward a genuine disarmament policy?

Contrary to mainstream public opinion in CAR, the DDR alone would not be enough to deal with the problems posed by the armed groups. It would have to be part of a disarmament policy that provides combatants with genuine prospects of a return to civilian life and that benefits communities. But it must also be binding in nature.

Integrate the DDR and the CVR components into local economy reconstruction and development programs

Failure of DDR is often due to the failure of the reintegration component, which is often limited to a quick training session and a reintegration kit in a context in which ex-combatants have no way of making a living other than crime. Efforts to reintegrate combatants are in vain if the local economy cannot absorb them. DDR must therefore do more than address the individual situation of ex-combatants. It must also focus on reviving the local economy and remove the conditions in which the anti-balaka and ex-Seleka thrive. Compared to the ex-Seleka, the anti-balaka are weakly structured and have few war weapons. Moreover, unlike most ex-Seleka combatants, most anti-balaka combatants live in their communities and are really armed villagers. Arrangements for their reintegration should also be different (DDR for the former and CVR for the latter). However, in both cases, disarmament policy must combine temporary employment with training and stimulation of the local economy, which neither DDR nor CVR are in a position to deliver.

Social and economic reintegration policies must be adapted to the capacities of ex-combatants but must also take account of the local economic context and the needs of the communities in question. It would therefore be useful to conduct a study to assess the scope for placing combatants in the labour market in the areas dominated by the anti-balaka and the ex-Seleka. Such a study should identify training needs and opportunities for stimulating the creation of permanent local jobs. In order to do this, DDR and CVR should be closely coordinated with World Bank and European Union (EU) reconstruction and development programs, which are based on organising labour intensive public works.¹⁶³ It should be possible for projects to

¹⁶⁰ Crisis Group interviews, donor and UN staff, Bangui, August 2015.

¹⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, UN staff, Bangui, August 2015.

¹⁶² The budget for the pre-DDR is estimated at \$10 million. Combatants would have to deposit their arms in containers. The keys would be jointly held by the militias and the UN. Crisis Group interview, UN staff, Bangui, August 2015.

¹⁶³ The World Bank is lead organisation for the LONDO project, which aims to employ 35,500 workers. "World Bank brings public works jobs to rural families in Central African Republic", World Bank, July 2015. The EU also funds several high-intensity labour programs (Urban Development Support Program and Economic and Social Urban Reconstruction Program). "Ensemble pour la paix, la stabilité et le développement", European Union in the Central African Republic, February 2015. Crisis Group email correspondence, World Bank staff, May 2015.

be quickly replicated in the provinces because the EU already assessed the potential for creating local economic development centres in the country prior to the crisis and planned to support pastoralism, agriculture, commerce and the construction of roads and basic infrastructure.¹⁶⁴

Whether they are members of the anti-balaka, ex-Seleka or any other armed group,¹⁶⁵ each young person recruited for labour intensive public works projects should be offered vocational training that corresponds to the needs of the local economy (agriculture, commerce, etc.) and to their own wishes and capacities. Demobilised combatants should not be paid cash while they are undergoing training. These programs should be funded by the international donors that have traditionally supported CAR, but also in part and symbolically, by CAR authorities. Implementation should be entrusted to local trainers with support from international NGOs.

In order to facilitate the employment prospects of young people, a mechanism should be created for cooperating with the Central African Republic Inter-professional Business Association. Donors should partly fund internships and work experience opportunities. Progress of CVR and DDR program beneficiaries should be monitored.

Coordinating the job creation development programs with DDR and CVR will allow the government to respond to the demand for development that underlies the demand for DDR and to reconnect the various parts of the country with the capital by improving the road network. The MINUSCA, the EU and the World Bank need to meet soon to decide how to coordinate their programs.

Make DDR credible

The problems posed by the withdrawal of signatories to the Bangui agreement and the donors' lack of confidence in the DDR can be resolved.

In order to reassure the donors, who are sceptical because of the past failures, the UN should ask international partners to implement DDR rather than entrust implementation to the CAR authorities as currently envisaged.¹⁶⁶ The DDR's estimated budget will be less than anticipated because the reintegration component will comprise donor-sponsored labour intensive programs. The DDR budget will cover training and other initiatives to revive the local economy. Restructuring the program and coordinating it with EU and World Bank programs should be enough to convince donors to fund DDR and CVR programs. CVR beneficiaries should therefore be more numerous than DDR beneficiaries. Donors should take this into account.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ As part of the 10th European Development Fund (EDF), the EU wants to create development centres in the CAR. For more information on development centres, see "Suivi des principes d'engagement international dans les Etats fragiles et les situations précaires", Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Report N°2 on the CAR, 2010 (an executive summary of this report is available in English, Annex E of "Monitoring the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations: Fragile States Monitoring Survey: Global Report", OECD, 2010); "Document de stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté 2011-2015", gouvernement centrafricain, Bangui, 2011; and "National Indicative Program from the 10th EDF", European Union, 2008.

¹⁶⁵ Labour intensive public works projects should not only target combatants but also vulnerable groups of the population, such as alienated young people. This would facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants by allowing them to blend in with other beneficiaries.

¹⁶⁶ In 2012, DDR was implemented by the UNDP following problems of corruption. Crisis Group telephone interview, DDR expert, June 2015.

¹⁶⁷ For the moment, the estimate for DDR is higher than for CVR.

DDR is eagerly anticipated by the militias, so it is still possible to capitalise on the impetus provided by the Bangui Forum by focusing on combatants rather than armed groups. The CAR authorities and the UN should open the DDR to combatants of non-signatory groups and establish strict policies regarding the surrender of functioning war weapons as a condition to access the program so that DDR remains limited and properly targeted.¹⁶⁸ The UN and the government should undertake an awareness raising and information campaign to publicise changes in the eligibility criteria in the towns where combatants are stationed, notably in the centre and east of the country.

Programs should take account of the failure of previous attempts at cantonment by organising short cantonment phases with no distribution of cash to combatants. The cantonment of ex-Seleka members in Bangui in the military camps at Béal and with the Support and Services Battalion (BSS) and the Territorial Operational Defence Regiment (RDOT) has got bogged down and been counter-productive because it has provided combatants with more leverage against the authorities and created a security problem in the capital.¹⁶⁹

B. *Indispensable sanctions*

Disarmament policy can only be effective if it includes effective sanctions. The planned departure of the international force best placed to impose sanctions, the French mission Sangaris, is therefore problematic. Curiously, its planned withdrawal coincides with implementation of DDR and preparation of the elections. It would be helpful to delay its departure.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, in coordination with the MINUSCA, the CAR authorities should arrest militia leaders who refuse to disarm. The constitutional referendum due to be held by the end of the year should include a question concerning whether or not the leaders of armed groups should be given official positions. Citizens should be given the opportunity to vote on whether the leaders of armed groups should be co-opted into the administration or allowed to stand as candidates at elections.¹⁷¹

In order to proceed to community disarmament, the MINUSCA should increase its contacts with community leaders and work with them to prepare public education campaigns about disarmament in local languages. At the same time, MINUSCA troops should disarm anyone carrying weapons and try to identify the location of arms caches.

Finally, the DDR and development programs will not have much long-term impact if crime remains a more attractive option than employment in the legal economy. In the east, armed groups have long fought each other for control of natural resources,

¹⁶⁸ Several previous DDRs had disappointing results. Although more than 6,000 APRD combatants were demobilised, the program only recovered 100 conventional weapons. Crisis Group telephone interview, DDR expert, 3 March 2013.

¹⁶⁹ Residual elements of the ex-Seleka have remained in military camps in Bangui since the departure of the ex-Seleka in April 2014. They pose a security risk and blackmail the authorities in order to obtain money and promises of integration into the army. Initially fed by international forces, they now receive money from the transitional authorities and have every interest in prolonging the situation. Crisis Group interviews, UN staff, Bangui, August 2015.

¹⁷⁰ "Central African Republic, risk of a hasty exit", Africa Confidential, 26 June 2015.

¹⁷¹ The constitution, which is to be the subject of a referendum, will not apply to the forthcoming elections. Crisis Group interview, member of the Constitutional Court, Bangui, August 2015.

especially minerals, and recruited many young people seeking easy money. The DDR process should therefore be combined with resolute action against these crimes. As highlighted in a previous Crisis Group report,¹⁷² the MINUSCA should take control of the main gold and diamond production sites by deploying international forces and CAR officials and relaunch the Kimberley certification process for diamonds produced in controlled areas.¹⁷³ In addition, a special unit to combat trafficking in diamonds, gold and ivory and militarised poaching should be created in the MINUSCA.

¹⁷² See Crisis Group Report, *The Central African Crisis: from Predation to Stabilisation*, op. cit.

¹⁷³ UN Security Council Resolution 2217, adopted in April 2015, authorises the MINUSCA to “support the CAR authorities to develop a nationally-owned strategy to tackle the illicit exploitation and trafficking networks of natural resources which continue to fund and supply armed groups in the CAR”. See “UN peacekeeping chief wraps up trip to Central African Republic as Mission reaches full strength”, UN, 28 April 2015.

V. Reduce Intercommunal Tensions in the Electoral Period

The crisis in CAR has highlighted strong intercommunal tensions that go back a long way. As the violence in Bambari in August showed, these tensions are still very present.¹⁷⁴ It is urgent in the next few months to stop the electoral process exacerbating these tensions.

A. *Protecting Communities: A Precondition for Disarmament*

In the centre of the country, on the front line between the ex-Seleka and the anti-balaka, the armed groups are often seen as protectors by some communities. Reducing community dependence on the armed groups for security requires the authorities to provide effective protection by ensuring that the police force and gendarmerie deployed in these sensitive areas act in a professional manner and are representative of the communities. In religiously mixed areas, these units should be composed of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Those engaged in training the security forces (EU, UN and CAR authorities) should take this diversity into account.

UN forces deployed in towns that are still divided between Christians and Muslims are insufficient and should be strengthened. Ensuring minimum levels of security to the communities and gradually increasing confidence in security institutions are preconditions for the successful disarmament of communities.

B. *Reaffirm Equal Rights for Muslims*

The task of gradually reestablishing national cohesion requires symbolic, legal and political measures. The armed groups in the north east have thrived on the divorce between the region and central government. The people of the north east feel marginalised by the government in Bangui or, worse still, they fall victim to the presidential guard's activities (see Section II.2). In order to reestablish a connection with the people, the central government should follow the example of President Boganda and make regular trips to the north east and organise the next National Day celebration there on 1 December.¹⁷⁵ The Republican Pact signed by participants in the Bangui Forum affirmed the need to make Muslim festivals official national events.¹⁷⁶ The government should quickly adopt this measure because it responds to an old demand.¹⁷⁷

Diversify public service recruitment

During the last few months, some religious and youth associations have introduced the issue of religion into the political debate by calling for the introduction of quotas in the government and public service.¹⁷⁸ In the same spirit, one of the forum's recommendations was decentralisation of the state.¹⁷⁹ These two proposals, which seek to

¹⁷⁴ The next Crisis Group report will deal specifically with how to improve community relations in the long term.

¹⁷⁵ It is said that the car carrying President Boganda broke down not far from Birao and that the wreck of the car is still there. Crisis Group interview, CAR minister, Bangui, March 2015.

¹⁷⁶ "Pacte républicain pour la paix, la réconciliation nationale et la reconstruction en République centrafricaine", Bangui, May 2015.

¹⁷⁷ Richard Filakota, *Le renouveau islamique en Afrique noire: l'exemple de la Centrafrique*, op. cit.

¹⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, youth association, Bambari, March 2015.

¹⁷⁹ "Pacte républicain pour la paix", op.cit.

give Muslims a greater role in public life, should be rejected. To introduce a policy of quotas would institutionalise religious rivalries and decentralisation only makes sense if there is a centralised state. Moreover, in the absence of the money needed to make it work, decentralisation would give no more than the illusion of power to local communities.

The lack of representation of Muslims should be solved by formulating rules to promote geographic and community diversity in the public services. In June 2014, Crisis Group recommended the creation of a new administrative elite in the public works, finance and security sectors. The government and the CAR's main donors should implement such a program and ensure that Muslims are included in these initiatives.¹⁸⁰

Include CAR Muslims in the electoral process

The elections due to take place by the end of the year are both problematic and dangerous. First, as indicated by the transitional authorities' request to postpone the elections by one month,¹⁸¹ the elections will take place in a difficult context (security problems, reduced accessibility in the rainy season, lack of funding, etc.).¹⁸² Second, there is a danger that the elections will raise the issue of nationality in a country in which most people have no identity papers. One of the points raised during the national consultations at the Bangui Forum concerned the criteria for granting nationality. Some people want to revise these criteria and point out that many Muslims in CAR are foreigners. Moreover, the controversy about whether refugees should vote reveals the political class' concern about the possible creation of a "Muslim electoral bloc".¹⁸³

Muslim electors' right to vote must be rapidly reaffirmed by publicising voter eligibility rules and introducing a robust nationality verification procedure for refugees at the time of their registration by the National Elections Authority. Registration of voters in CAR takes place in the presence of district and village chiefs and several witnesses. The same procedure should be adopted for the registration of CAR refugees. The political parties should be invited to provide observers to monitor this procedure, which should also be monitored by civil society organisations during voter registration operations in the country.

Registration figures for voters in prefectures where Muslims are in the majority should be carefully compared to those in the 2011 elections. Finally, the NGOs responsible for monitoring the electoral process should also monitor the speeches made by candidates for attempts to incite religious and/or ethnic hate. In any case, the quality of electoral preparations should not be sacrificed to the imperatives set by the calendar and, if need be, the elections should be postponed so that these measures can be introduced.

¹⁸⁰ This idea was taken up by the Republican Pact, See Appendix B.

¹⁸¹ "Centrafrique: le gouvernement demande un nouveau calendrier électoral", Centrafrique presse, 3 September 2015.

¹⁸² Crisis Group interview, CAR politicians, diplomats and journalists, Bangui, August 2015.

¹⁸³ The first wave of CAR refugees fled from the Seleka in 2013. A second bigger wave fled anti-balaka persecution in 2014. Therefore, most refugees in the camps in Cameroon and Chad are Muslims. The CNT opposed giving the vote to refugees but backtracked after pressure from the international community and the constitutional court. Some candidates in the next elections question the presumption that refugees have CAR nationality. Crisis Group interviews, candidates in the presidential election, CNT member and UNHCR staff, Bangui, August 2015.

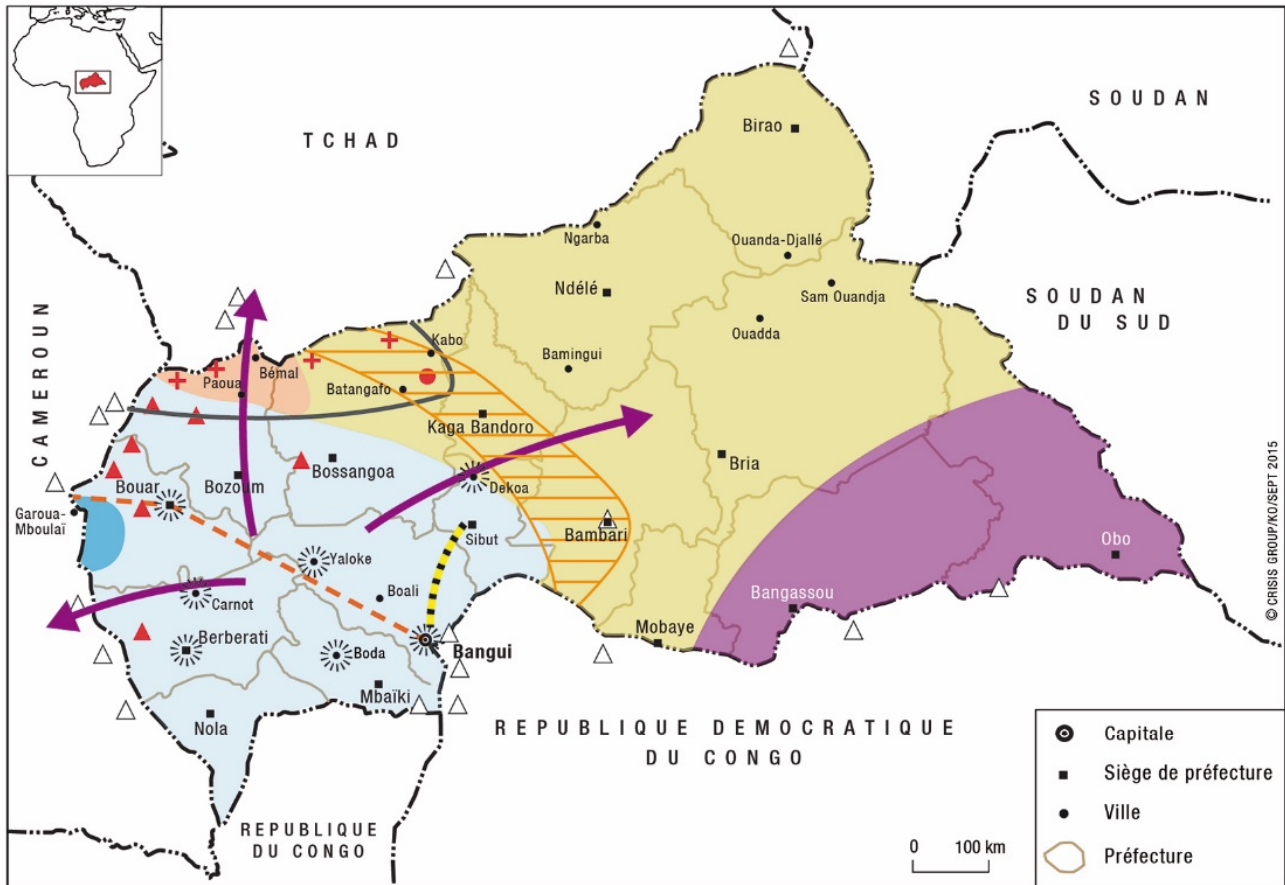
VI. Conclusion

The crisis affecting the Central African Republic is the most serious that the country has known since independence. It is the final act in the gradual disintegration of the state and calls into question the very fabric of CAR society by reviving the nationality question and by portraying Muslims as dangerous foreigners.

It is in this context that the transitional authorities and their international partners are organising quick elections and planning a conventional DDR at a time when the country is in pieces and a long-term response is required to address the crisis. If they continue along the same path, there is a danger that CAR will become a chronically unstable country where boundaries between war and peace are blurred.

Nairobi/Brussels, 21 September 2015

Appendix A: Map of Zones of Influence



Zones d'influence des groupes armés et coupeurs de routes

- LRA : Armée de résistance du Seigneur
- Ex-Seleka
- Anti-balaka
- FDPC : Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain
- RJ : Révolution et justice
- Ex-APRD : Ex Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie (2006-2012)
- Ex base du Front populaire pour le redressement (FPR) de Baba Laddé (2008-2012)
- Bases traditionnelles des coupeurs de routes *zarginas*
- Attaques de groupes de pasteurs tchadiens, bandits et coupeurs de routes
- Axe ayant subi un grand nombre de braquages (2014-2015)

Zones de tensions intercommunautaires

- Ligne de front anti-balaka/Seleka et affrontements communautaires
- Camps de réfugiés
- Enclaves avec présence de minorités
- Principal axe commercial Bangui-Garoua Mboulai
- Déplacements des tensions communautaires

Appendix B: Republican Pact

Republican Pact for Peace, National Reconciliation and Reconstruction in the Central African Republic

We, Participants at the Bangui National Forum

Having in mind the main recommendations of the National Forum's thematic commissions, which have inspired us to produce this Pact;

Representatives of the entire Central African Republic people in their full political, social, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, meeting in Bangui, 4-11 May 2015;

Reaffirming our commitment to comply with the main documents of the transition in the Central African Republic, including the Transition Constitutional Charter of 18 July 2013; the of 23 July 2014 Brazzaville Agreement to cease hostilities between the armed groups in the Central African Republic; the roadmap formulated by transitional bodies and institutions: the agreement signed by the political-military groups on 23 April 2015; and the DDRR Agreement between the government of the Central African Republic and the armed groups of 10 May 2015, attached to this Pact;

Considering all the formal and informal initiatives to promote dialogue and reconciliation formulated prior to the Bangui Forum, including local public consultations, the objective of which was to strengthen national cohesion;

Aware of our duty to represent with dignity the thoughts, hopes and aspirations of our countrymen by taking part in the deliberations at the Bangui National Forum;

Reaffirming our commitment to the unity, sovereignty and indivisibility of our dear country, the Central African Republic;

Deploring the upsurge in violence that has undermined social cohesion and national unity in the Central African Republic;

Reaffirming our deep commitment to dialogue and reconciliation, which is the best way of securing a return to a just and sustainable peace, which forms the foundations of inclusive development in the Central African Republic;

Aware of the significant efforts made by the government and partners of the Central African Republic to end the crisis and reestablish constitutional order and political stability through free and transparent elections;

Resolved to contribute positively to the implementation of the resolutions and recommendations made by the Bangui National Forum through measures and mechanisms able to restore peace and promote reconciliation and good governance;

Convinced that the Bangui National Forum provides a history opportunity to reorganise the Central African Republic on the basis of a National Pact rooted in the principles of democracy, social justice and good governance;

We commit ourselves, through this **National Pact for Peace, Reconciliation and Good Governance (Republican Pact)** to strive diligently to implement the following objectives:

Governance (democratic and financial) and institutional reform

- **We reaffirm the consensus between us, Central African Republic actors, on:**
 - The need to create favourable conditions for the organisation throughout the country at the earliest opportunity of a constitutional referendum and free and transparent general elections to confirm a return to constitutional order in accordance with the provisions of the Constitutional Charter of the Transition and the agreed calendar and procedures and to facilitate the participation of refugees in these elections;
 - The obligation of all of us to scrupulously respect the Constitutional Charter of the Transition;

- The adoption and signature of a code of good conduct by political parties and groups, candidates and the press for elections that should conform to the highest democratic standards in a peaceful environment; and the commitment to use legal means to settle disputes;
- The need to strengthen the participation of citizens and political representation in the regions by quickly organising local elections at the end of the Transition;
- The introduction of a constitutional clause prohibiting any possibility of an amnesty for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide committed in the Central African Republic;
- The promotion of a participatory and inclusive democracy based on the principle of equality between men and women; the strengthening of social cohesion, justice and reconciliation in the Central African Republic; the introduction of a constitutional provision authorising the executive power to organise public consultations on the major issues facing society;
- Consideration of the following during the finalisation and adoption of the new Constitution, secularism; citizenship; the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples; the separation of powers and democratic control of the government; the republican, professional and multi-ethnic nature of the Central African Republic's defence and security forces as well as civilian and democratic control over them;
- The introduction of a constitutional provision that prohibits the obtaining or exercise of power by force, and declares the incompatibility of political activity and military status;
- The introduction of a constitutional provision strengthening national sovereignty and ensuring that the foreign relations of the Central African Republic are conducted with respect for the dignity of the interests of Central Africans, as well as the protection of the country's territorial integrity, and augment this provision with a parliamentary control mechanism;
- The need to put in place transparent mechanisms for the management of government resources and promulgate the law on the fight against corruption; the operationalisation of the National Agency for Financial Investigation (ANIF) and other bodies to establish good governance of the country;
- The inclusion in the new Constitution of a high authority for good governance as an independent body with powers to administer and make proposals; the protection of the national heritage; transparency in the exploitation and management of natural and mineral resources; and the equitable redistribution of profits generated by extractive industries so that they contribute to national development and improve the living conditions of all citizens;
- Cleaning up politics, notably by immediate reform of the legal framework for political parties; the objective determination of modalities for funding political parties in the medium term; adoption of a statute to regulate the opposition; promotion of equitable access to state media; promotion of the election of women and young people to political office, including the introduction of quotas;
- Reform of the legal framework governing the press and revitalisation of the regulatory bodies in the communications and audio-visual sectors; the promotion of and respect for ethics; the immediate implementation of measures to ensure media coverage of the entire national territory; and liberalisation of the audio-visual communications sector;
- Introduction of the status of former head of state.

Restoration of the state's authority; redeployment of the administration and decentralisation

- **We reaffirm the consensus between Central African actors on**
 - The gradual redeployment and strengthening of local government that respects the values of secularism, equity and neutrality, in order to ensure the effective presence of the state throughout the country, notably before, during and after general elections;
 - The implementation of measures to guarantee that redeployment of state structures conforms to the principles of representation, regional balance and inclusion and that it guarantees the provision of basic public services to all the country's citizens;
 - The implementation of rules regulating the functioning of the administration, particularly with regard to appointments to public office, promotion and advancements, so that they take account of the Central African Republic's geographical and community diversity, maintain a regional balance and a balance between men and women, as well as considering the merit of applicants;
 - The implementation of an active and voluntarist policy of decentralisation and regionalisation and the strengthening of the powers of decentralised authorities (regions, departments and communes) in the new Constitution;
 - The strengthening of the role of local, traditional and customary authorities in order to promote social cohesion, inclusion and community dialogue, among other things, by the creation of a Local Government Council with a consultative remit on local government issues;

Justice and reconciliation

- **We reaffirm the consensus between Central African actors on:**
 - The need to strengthen and respect constitutional provisions on the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Central Africans without discrimination on the grounds of age, sex, ethnicity or religion; guarantee free movement throughout the national territory;
 - The need to give Muslim festivals official national holiday status of in the interests of equity and national reconciliation;
 - The creation of a secure social and economic favourable to the return of displaced people and refugees;
 - The strengthening of the role of courts and tribunals in the protection of fundamental rights; the creation of a national human rights Institute (INDH);
 - The creation, with support from the international community, of a Special Criminal Court of the Central African Republic; ensure the strengthening of the technical and operational capacities of local jurisdictions and the creation of mechanisms to protect magistrates, witnesses and victims; and ensure implementation of mutual legal assistance agreements signed within the framework of the CEMAC, the ECCAS and the ECGLR;
 - The need to initiate proceedings against the perpetrators of crimes committed in the Central African Republic and to collaborate in judicial inquiries, proceedings and procedures undertaken by the Special Criminal Court, other national courts, tribunals and the International Criminal Court (ICC);
 - The creation of a Justice, Truth, Reparations and Reconciliation Commission, with local offices, which shall be responsible for listing and examining crimes and atrocities committed in the Central African Republic in order to classify them into two categories:

- ✓ Cases in which the perpetrators should be put on trial;
- ✓ Those where it would be appropriate to provide reparations in the form of compensation or community service in order to promote contrition and intercommunal reconciliation;
- The creation of a transitional justice mechanism, in accordance with a global national reconciliation strategy; the introduction of a day to commemorate victims of crises in the Central African Republic; the promotion of a civic and citizen culture in the Central African Republic;

Peace and security

- **We reaffirm the consensus between Central African actors on:**
 - The requirements/demand for armed groups to fully engage in the democratic consolidation process in the Central African Republic and to express, if need be, that demands through peaceful and democratic channels in peaceful and democratic ways;
 - The implementation without delay of the DDRR agreements adopted by the Bangui National Forum; the creation of a new DDRR program with provision for the redeployment and community reintegration of ex-combatants, assisted by the creation of labour-intensive public works projects, awareness raising and communication;
 - The immediate and spontaneous launch of a voluntary disarmament process by all political-military groups;
 - The immediate implementation of Article 4 of the Brazzaville Cessation of Hostilities Agreement of 23 July 2014 between non-conventional political and military groups in the Central African Republic, regarding the cantonment of armed elements signatory to the said agreement, in order to create conditions favourable to a peaceful electoral environment;
 - The identification of armed groups and the repatriation of all foreign combatants listed in their ranks to their countries of origin, with the support of international partners;
 - The need to take into account the specific needs of women, young people and children in all phases of the DDRR process;
 - The need to implement a strategy for the reform and restructuring of the Central African Republic's defence and security sector, including all components of the defence and security forces (Armed Forces, gendarmerie, police, justice), on the basis of the principles and modalities agreed at the Bangui National Forum.

Economic and social development

- **We reaffirm the consensus between Central African actors on:**
 - The government's acceptance of all the Forum's recommendations regarding the countries revival and reconstruction programs;
 - Urgent humanitarian assistance to the populations who have been the victims of recent crises, including through the creation of a social solidarity fund;
 - The implementation by the government of an integrated economic reconstruction and development strategy that focuses on the most disadvantaged regions of the country and that includes the building of road, energy and telecommunications infrastructure as well as a roadmap for modernising the main growth sectors and providing basic services throughout the country;
 - The implementation of a full employment policy (especially for young people, women and vulnerable people) based on the objectives of increasing investment, with special support for national citizens with the aim of facilitating the emergence of Central African Republic businessmen and women, and increasing incentives for foreign investment through mechanisms to promote the private sector;

- The reestablishment of basic social services throughout the country, notably schools, health centres and hospitals (including taking responsibility for HIV AIDS), access to drinking water and sanitation, as well as access to social housing for all victims of recent Central African Republic crises;
- The establishment of a genuine dialogue between all actors involved in economic and social life, which would guarantee collective discussion about concerted and sustainable solutions to improve collective management of the economic and social problems of their country by Central Africans, including an integrated reconstruction strategy;
- The need to ensure legal and judicial protection for victims, especially the most vulnerable groups;
- The need for rational and transparent exploitation of natural resources, especially oil, diamonds, gold, uranium, etc. in order to contribute to the country's development; re-view all cooperation arrangements.

We ask the transitional authorities to create, without delay, a conceptual framework for monitoring implementation of the conclusions and recommendations of the Forum and of this Pact, the provisions of which involve all sectors of the nation. In this regard, we ask the National Transitional Council to examine the documents produced by this Forum in the course of its deliberations and to take relevant action at the legal and regulatory levels.

We solemnly call on the Transitional Government, the National Transitional Council and the Parliament elected at the forthcoming elections, as well as all the dynamic forces of the Nation, to fully adhere to the current Pact and to ensure implementation and monitoring in a diligent and vigilant manner.

* * *

Appendix C: The Main Armed Groups in CAR

1. Main ex-Seleka factions

FPRC : Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (Popular Front for the Rebirth of the Central African Republic) is led by former president and coup leader Michel Djotodia and Nourredine Adam. The FPRC is the most hardline faction of the ex-Seleka coalition and its area of influence is the north east, in the regions of Bamingui-Bangoran, Vakaga and Haute Kotto. The FPRC has a defiant attitude towards the transitional authorities and international forces and rejected the agreement to disarm the armed groups presented at the Bangui Forum.

RPRC : Formed in Bria in the Haute Kotto region in November 2014, the Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique (Patriotic Rally for the Renewal of the Central African Republic) is led by Djono-Ahaba, former mines and oil minister in the Seleka government. Like the FPRC, the RPRC is composed of Gula but also of Runga and Arab groups. The RPRC distanced itself from the FPRC for financial and political reasons and has a more conciliatory attitude towards the CAR authorities.

UPC : Formed in September 2014 after disagreements with other ex-Seleka factions, the Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (Union for Peace in the Central African Republic) led by Ali Darassa has a strong presence in Bambari and, at the end of 2014, formed an alliance with Al Khatim's men, who control Kabo and Moyenne Sido in the centre of the north of the country. The UPC's combatants are mainly Fulani.

Seleka Rénovée : Ex-2nd vice president of the Seleka coalition, Moussa Dhaffane was water and forestry minister under Djotodia before being arrested and imprisoned by the latter. He then quickly distanced himself from his former allies and founded the Reformed Seleka.

MPC : The Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic) appeared at the end of July 2015 and is mainly composed of ex-Seleka members from the region of Kaga-Bandoro. Its leader, Mohamed Bahar, is of Chadian origin and was head of military intelligence in the defence ministry in Michel Djotodia's government. The MPC executive also includes Brigadier Al Khatim, one of the main leaders of the ex-Seleka coalition who left the Seleka in September 2014.

2. The former armed groups in north east CAR that created the Seleka coalition in 2012

UFDR : Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (Union of Democratic Forces for Unity) is dominated by the Gula and was formed in November 2006 in the prefectures of Vakaga and Haute-Kotto. The UFDR coalition included Michel Djotodia's Groupement d'action patriotique de libération de la Centrafrique, GAPLC (Patriotic Action Group for the Liberation of the Central African Republic), the Front démocratique centrafricain, FDC (Central African Republic Democratic Front) led by Hassan Justin, a former member of Patassé's presidential guard and Abakar Sabone's Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice, MLCJ (Movement of Central African Republic Liberators for Justice). One of the UFDR's political demands was the development of the north east of the country. However, the group focused on fighting for control of natural resources in eastern CAR. The UFDR was a signatory to the Libreville peace agreement of 2008. A large proportion of ex-Seleka leaders came from the UFDR.

CPJP : The Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace) was formed in 2008 in the north east of the country and was led by Abdulaye Hissene. Mainly composed of Runga, the CPJP had CAR nationals in its ranks, as well as Chadian and Sudanese nationals. It often opposed the UFDR along ethnic lines and contested control of natural resources. It has long demanded that the CAR government explains the death of Charles Massi, their former leader. This armed group finally adhered to the global peace agreement of 2008 on 25 August 2012. Some CPJP commanders joined the ex-Seleka.

CPSK : Dissident group of the CPJP formed in June 2012, the Convention patriotique du Salut du Kodro (Wa Kodro Salute Patriotic Convention) was a member of the Seleka coalition. Its leader, Moussa Dhaffane, has since created the Seleka Rénovée.

3. Anti-balaka movements

CNLPC : The Coordination nationale des libérateurs du peuple centrafricain (National Coordination of the Liberators of the Central African Republic People) was formed in 2014 and is led by Ngaïssona. At that time, he had close links with former president Bozizé and was based in Boy Rabe.

Front de résistance : Several other ephemeral movements were formed in 2014, including the Front pour la Résistance (Resistance Front) led by Léopold Bara and Captain Kamizoulaye, who do not support the former president.

Anti-balaka Coordinators : There are currently a multitude of anti-balaka groups and two anti-balaka coordinating bodies that are opposed to each other. Although Edouard Ngaïssona signed the DDR agreement in his capacity as coordinator of anti-balaka ex-combatants, Maxime Mokom and Joachim Kokaté claim that Ngaïssona does not represent the movement and, in May 2015, they proclaimed themselves to be coordinator and assistant coordinator of the “true” coordinating body of anti-balaka combatants.

4. Other armed groups

FDPC: The Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (Democratic Front for the Central African Republic People) was formed by Abdoulaye Miskine, a former close advisor of President Patassé and head of presidential security. Patassé opposed the “liberators” that brought Bozizé to power in 2003. A few years later, he and his group established a base in Ouham. Although they signed several peace agreements, FDPC combatants continued to commit atrocities and since the start of the crisis, they have been responsible for more abductions and robberies close to the border with Cameroon. The group formed an alliance with the ex-Seleka for a brief period in 2013 before clashing with ex-Seleka combatants on several occasions.

RJ: The Revolution and Justice group was formed by Arnel Sayo at the end of 2013 in the north of the Ouham Pende region, with the help of a Belgian mercenary. Sayo, a former military officer close to President Patassé, had formed the Comité national pour la restauration de la démocratie, CNRD (National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy) following the Seleka’s coup. He then formed alliances with Abdoulaye Miskine’s FDPC. RJ recruited many former APRD combatants and villagers near Paoua and Ngaoundaye. In 2014, RJ clashed with ex-Seleka combatants several times and also with Fulani pastoralists from CAR and Chad. Arnel Sayo joined Mahamat Kamoun’s government in August 2014 and became resident minister in Paoua.

APRD: The Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie (Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy) appeared in 2005 in the north west and centre north. It signed the Libreville peace agreement in 2008. Its leader, Jean-Jacques Démafouth, announced the dissolution of the organisation on 17 May 2012 and some combatants joined a DDR program. Other combatants joined anti-balaka militias or Revolution and Justice (see above).

5. Foreign armed groups present on CAR territory

FPR: The Front populaire pour le redressement (Popular Front for Recovery), led by Baba Laddé, was a Chadian group formed in 1998 to oppose the Idriss Déby regime. It claimed to defend the interests of Chadian Fulani pastoralists. In 2008, fleeing an offensive by the Chad army, the group fled into CAR and Baba Laddé announced his intention to overthrow CAR and Chad governments and create a Fulani state. He tried to build links with the governments of neighbouring countries, including South Sudan, but finally reverted to stealing cattle and extorting money from pastoralists in exchange for protection. After a joint offensive by the Chad and CAR armies, during which many Fulani were attacked, Baba Laddé returned to Chad at the end of 2012 with other FPR combatants. Many FPR combatants and commanders stayed in CAR and joined the ex-Seleka coalition or formed international militias.

SPLA: The Armée de libération du peuple soudanais (Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army), was formed in 1983 by John Garang and was the military wing of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the main opposition to the Sudanese government during the civil war. Mainly composed of Dinka, the SPLA united Christian and animist opposition in South Sudan against the Arab and Muslim government in Khartoum. Many SPLA soldiers found refuge in north-eastern CAR during the second Sudanese civil war between the north and south. Some of them are still in the Mboki refugee camps in south-eastern CAR.

FUC: Formed in December 2005 following the failure of the 18 December offensive against the town of Adré, the Front uni pour le changement (United Front for Change) is a Chadian rebel group supported by Sudan. The FUC united several groups under the command of Captain Mahamat Nour Abdelkerim. On 13 April 2006, the FUC launched a lightning strike from the Chad-Sudanese border against the Chad government. Its troops reached N'Djamena before being repelled. The group had several bases in north-eastern CAR before it was officially dissolved in December 2006.

LRA: The Lord's Resistance Army is a rebel Ugandan group formed in 1987. It spread into the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and CAR. The Ugandan army has monitored the LRA in eastern CAR since 2009 and, at the end of 2011, it was reinforced by about 100 U.S. military special forces advisors based at Obo and Djéma. Since 2013, there have been a few clashes between LRA combatants and ex-Seleka rebels in the east of the country.