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Crisis in the Central African Republic

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Summary

This report provides background on the evolving political, security, and humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR), which began when a fractious rebel coalition seized control of the central government in March 2013. The report also describes U.S. policy responses and analyzes possible issues for Congress, including oversight of U.S. humanitarian assistance and support for international stabilization efforts in CAR. Congress may also influence the U.S. position in the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council over whether to authorize a U.N. peacekeeping operation in CAR, which would have cost and policy implications.

The crisis in CAR also has implications for several broader issues in which some Members of Congress have demonstrated an interest in recent years. These include:

- stability in the wider central Africa region;
- the prevention of mass atrocities;
- the status of U.S. efforts to counter the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a small but brutal militia present in CAR and neighboring states; and
- the impact of instability in CAR on wildlife poaching and other cross-border criminal activity in the region.

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Overview

The Central African Republic (CAR)—a landlocked, sparsely inhabited, and extremely underdeveloped country—is in crisis. A fractious rebel coalition known as Seleka (“Alliance” in the local Sango language) seized control of the government in March 2013. Founded by members of CAR’s minority Muslim community from the remote northeast of the country, Seleka capitalized on ethnic and regional tensions in CAR and on widespread frustrations with the previous government. Once in power, Seleka ultimately presided over spiraling ethno-religious and political violence and the collapse of an already weak state. Seleka commanders have overseen apparently systematic attacks against Christian communities, with uncertain motivations. Partly in response, Christian-led militias known as “anti-balaka” (“anti-machete”) have brutally attacked Muslims.¹ Civilians have also taken up arms against each other. Religious differences were not the origin of the crisis, which, rather, reflects a struggle for political power, as well as complex tensions over access to resources, control over trade, and national identity. Yet, many residents now appear to see themselves locked in an existential battle along sectarian lines.

Growing violence has drawn international concern. About 1,600 troops from France—CAR’s former colonial power—and some 5,000 African soldiers and police are attempting to stabilize the country. U.N. Security Council Resolution 2127, adopted on December 5, 2013, authorizes the French military, which has long had a presence in CAR, and the African Union’s (AU) African-led International Support Mission for CAR (MISCA) to “take all necessary measures” to protect civilians, enable humanitarian access, support the disarmament of militias, and contribute to security sector reform.² The Resolution also directs the U.N. Secretary-General to provide “contingency preparations and planning” for the possible transformation of MISCA into a U.N. peacekeeping operation, and to provide recommendations within three months.

As of mid-January 2014, some 900,000 residents (nearly one in five) were internally displaced, while another 86,000 had fled to neighboring countries as refugees.³ U.N. agencies estimate that 2.6 million people, or half the population, require humanitarian aid, and that 60% of households have no available food stocks.⁴ Prior humanitarian conditions were already poor, due to past conflicts and a lack of basic social services. Still, violence has worsened dramatically over the past year, constraining humanitarian access and provoking deep communal tensions.

Plans to hold elections in early 2015 (discussed below) face logistical and security hurdles. Seleka figure Michel Djotodia declared himself president after Seleka unseated President François Bozizé, who had himself come to power in a rebellion in 2003. Djotodia, unable or unwilling to bring an end to violence, ordered Seleka disbanded in September 2013, with little

¹ According to the CIA World Factbook, CAR’s population of 5.2 million is reportedly roughly 15% Muslim, while 85% follow either Christian or indigenous beliefs. CAR is slightly smaller than Texas. On ethno-religious violence, see Human Rights Watch (HRW), *“I Can Still Smell the Dead”: The Forgotten Human Crisis in the Central African Republic*, September 2013; HRW, *They Came To Kill: Escalating Atrocities in the Central African Republic*, December 19, 2013; and Amnesty International, *War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity in Bangui*, December 19, 2013.

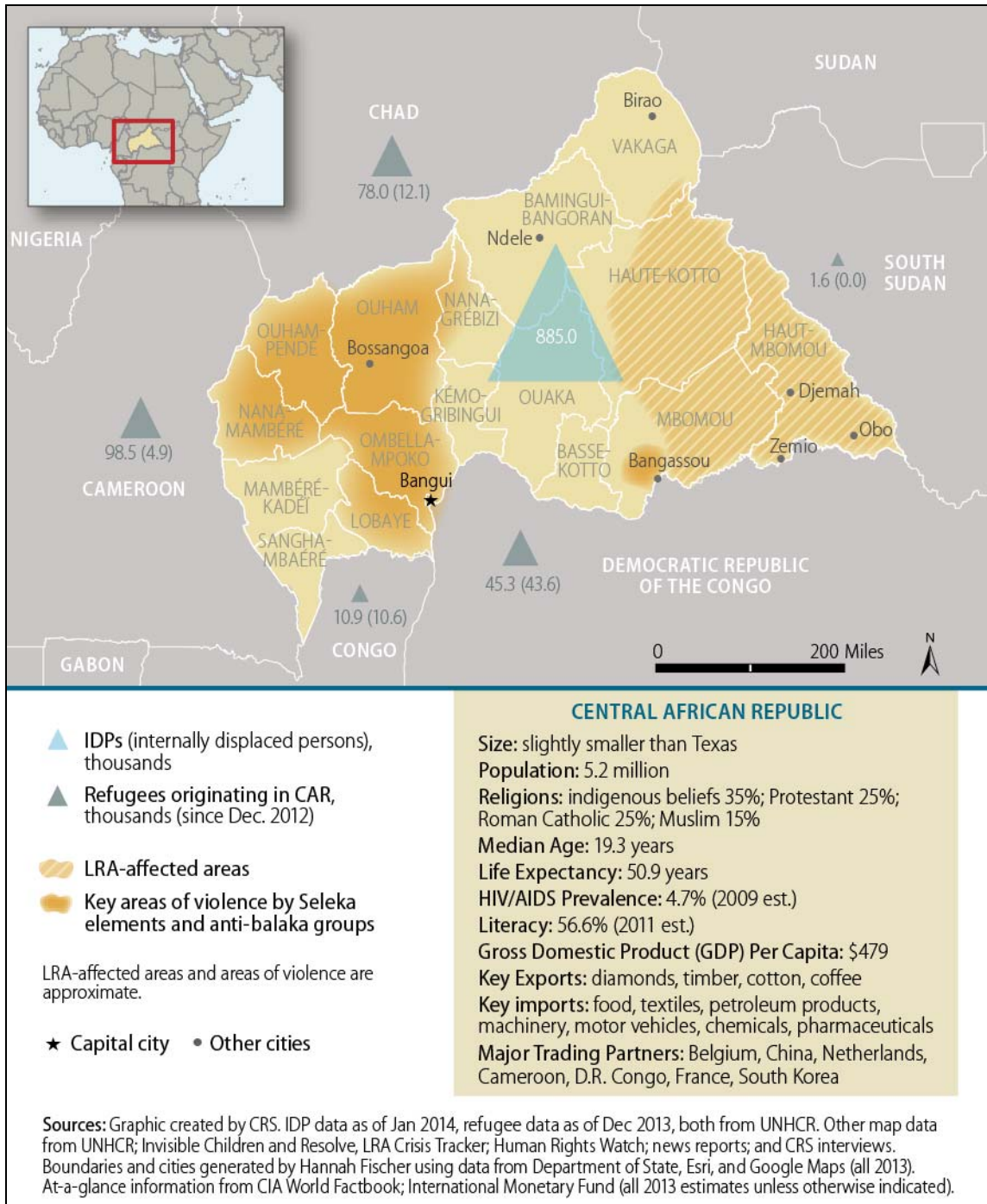
² An existing central African stabilization operation, comprising several hundred troops, was re-hatted as MISCA on December 19, 2013. Troop contributors to MISCA include Burundi, Chad, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Rwanda.

³ USAID, *Central African Republic—Humanitarian Update #21*, January 13, 2014.

⁴ U.N. World Food Program (WFP), “Central African Republic—9 Hunger Facts,” January 17, 2014.

practical impact. On January 10, 2014, Djotodia resigned, following pressure from French and African leaders. CAR's "National Transitional Council" then selected as the new interim president Catherine Samba-Panza, a businesswoman and former mayor of the capital, Bangui.

Figure I. Map, Key Figures



CAR has long been seen as peripheral to core U.S. national interests. However, U.S. policy makers, including in Congress, are now focused on deteriorating humanitarian conditions, ongoing threats to civilians, and the potential impact of the crisis on regional stability. U.S., U.N., and French officials have warned of the potential for mass atrocities and even genocide.⁵ The Obama Administration has allocated new humanitarian aid for CAR and committed over \$100 million in support for African and French stabilization operations. Congress may examine these efforts, as well as the potential for any future U.S. aid, e.g., support for elections, border security, accountability, reconciliation, or efforts to build long-term stability. Congress may also influence the U.S. position in the U.N. Security Council on whether to authorize a U.N. peacekeeping operation in CAR, which would create new U.S. funding requirements and policy considerations.

The crisis in CAR has implications for several issues in which some Members of Congress have demonstrated an interest in recent years. These include stability in conflict-afflicted neighboring states such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where successive U.S. Administrations and Congress have allocated resources to address human rights abuses and promote security. Other areas of potential interest to Congress include the impact of the CAR crisis on wildlife poaching and other cross-border criminal activity, and on U.S. efforts to counter the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a small but vicious militia of Ugandan origin that is active in CAR and neighboring states. The United States supports a Ugandan-led AU military operation against the LRA in CAR, and U.S. military advisors have been deployed in the field since late 2011. Given concurrent crises on the African continent—including in countries such as Mali, where U.S.-designated terrorist groups are active—Congress may also weigh the potential trade-offs and opportunity costs of devoting further attention and resources to CAR.

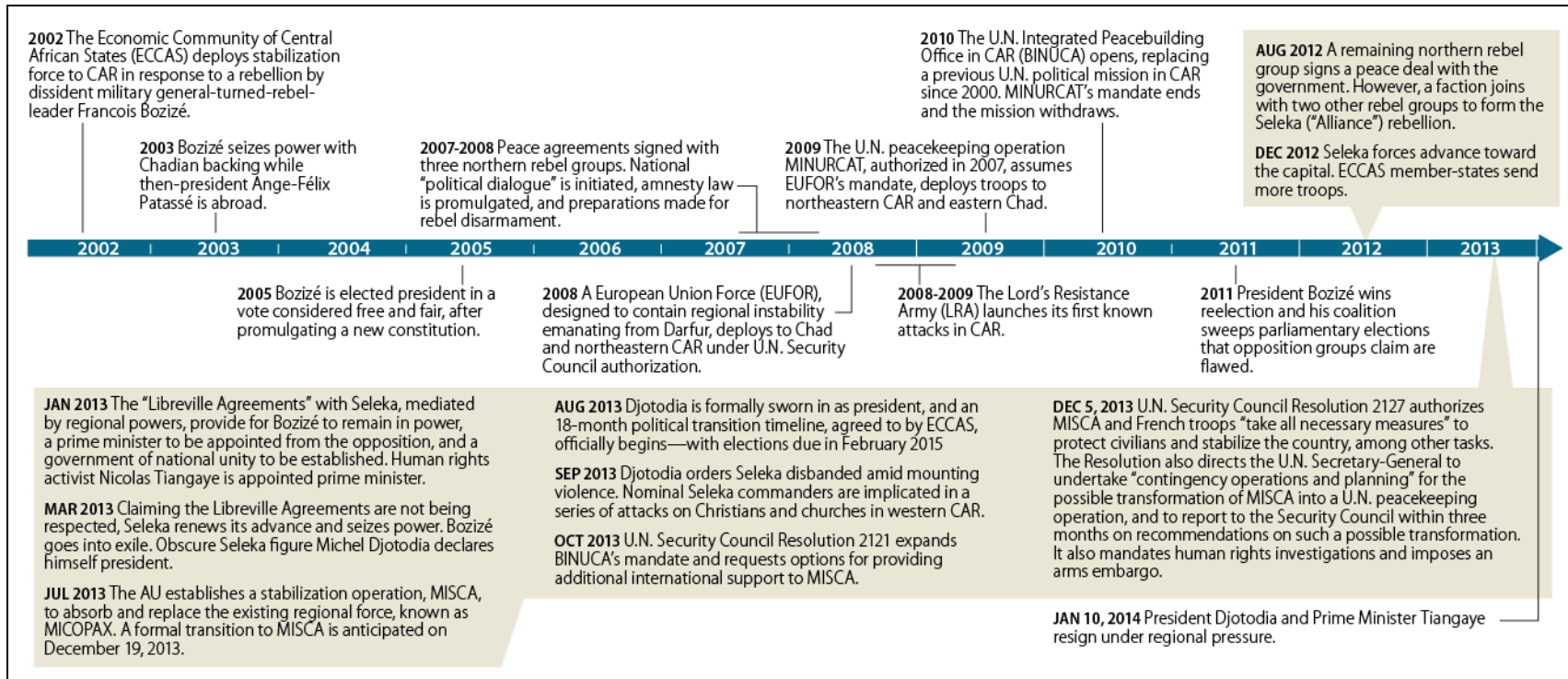
Context

A central government has never fully asserted control over CAR's remote and relatively unpopulated rural areas, including during French colonial rule (1880s-1960). The country has long served as terrain for competition over resources and regional influence among neighboring states and national elites. Chad, Libya, and Sudan have periodically sought to wield influence over CAR governments or insurgents to gain resources and leverage over opponents. Foreign troops, including from France and neighboring states, have been present for decades in various roles. CAR has also been a hinterland for poaching and raiding by non-state actors.⁶ In turn, CAR leaders have regularly appealed to outside forces to protect and advance their interests.

⁵ Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Robert Jackson, testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, "Crisis in the Central African Republic," November 19, 2013; Dow Jones, "France's Fabius Says Central African Republic on Verge of Genocide," November 21, 2013; and U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) official John Ging, quoted in CNN, "'Seeds of Genocide' Sown in Central African Republic, U.N. Official Warns," November 13, 2013, and in UNOCHA, "Time is Running Out to Prevent a Genocide," January 16, 2014. Some observers have criticized warnings of genocide as inaccurate and/or unhelpful; see, e.g., Alex de Waal, "Playing the Genocide Card," *New York Times* [op-ed], December 18, 2013.

⁶ See Louisa Lombard, *Raiding Sovereignty in the Central African Borderlands*, Dissertation, Duke University, 2012.

Figure 2. Timeline: Selected Recent Events From 2002 to 2013



Source: CRS, based on U.N., U.S., and regional organization documents; news reports; and non-governmental organization reports.

CAR had a series of autocratic leaders following independence. The most notorious was Jean-Bédél Bokassa, who styled himself Emperor and was implicated in massive embezzlement and human rights abuses. He was deposed in a coup backed by French troops in 1979. In 1993, CAR held its first multiparty elections, in which Ange-Félix Patassé was elected president. Like previous leaders, Patassé was Christian, but he was the country's first non-southern president, hailing from the northwest. Instability increased under Patassé, and violent army mutinies in 1996-1997 prompted the deployment of a U.N. peacekeeping operation.⁷ In 2002, Patassé allegedly called on a rebel group based in the Democratic Republic of Congo to help fend off domestic insurgents. This led to large-scale abuses against civilians, for which the leader of that group, Jean-Pierre Bemba, is on trial before the International Criminal Court.⁸

François Bozizé, an army general, rebelled against Patassé and, backed by Chad, took power in 2003. Bozizé's tenure brought relative stability to southern CAR for a time, along with modest donor-aided economic improvements. His rule was marked by recurrent insurgencies in the north and northeast, however, including rebellions by groups that had supported him. By 2011, when Bozizé was reelected and many of his family members were voted into parliament, many donors and Central Africans alike appeared to view him as an increasingly autocratic and problematic leader. Furthermore, Bozizé angered his former patron, Chad's President Idriss Déby, by failing to crack down on Chadian rebels who were using CAR territory as a safe haven.

Seleka was formed in 2012 as a loose alliance of rebel factions. It drew on widespread frustrations with the concentration of power among Bozizé's family, close associates, and members of his Gbaya ethnic group; extensive state corruption; and the government's inability to deliver services or development outside of Bangui. Bozizé's neglect of the military and failure to implement peace accords with armed movements contributed to rising insecurity, adding to popular grievances.⁹ Disaffected actors in the diamond sector, reportedly fed up with what they viewed as state extortion under Bozizé, may also have contributed financing to Seleka leaders.¹⁰

Armed Groups, Rising Violence

Violence by Seleka and anti-balaka factions has been particularly high in the northwest—Bozizé's native region, and an area strategically located near the Chadian border—and in Bangui, a melting pot of ethnic groups and the seat of power. Widespread killings, looting, torture, and large-scale destruction of homes and places of worship have been reported. CAR's religious leaders have sought to calm tensions, often at considerable personal risk.¹¹

The Seleka and anti-balaka groups that have engaged in tit-for-tat abuses do not have clearly defined memberships or chains of command. In addition to ethnic and religious animus, their members may be motivated by various factors, such as a desire for communal protection, political ambitions, and criminal intent. For example, while many anti-balaka groups appear to have been

⁷ See footnote on past U.N. peacekeeping operations in CAR in "U.N. Security Council Deliberations," below.

⁸ See International Criminal Court, *Situation in the Central African Republic, The Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, Case n° ICC-01/05-01/08*, Case Information Sheet, at <http://www.icc-cpi.int>.

⁹ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition*, June 2013.

¹⁰ ICG, *Priorities of the Transition*, op. cit.

¹¹ See Dieudonné Nzapalainga and Omar Kabine Layama, "Central African Republic Needs International Help," *Washington Post* [op-ed], December 27, 2013.

formed on an ad-hoc basis, some are led by former military officers, display relatively sophisticated capacities, and have called for reinstating former president Bozizé (an evangelical Christian). This has contributed to perceptions that Bozizé may be supporting them from exile.¹²

Seleka ranks reportedly grew from a few thousand in early 2013 to an estimated 20,000 in late 2013 as new fighters opportunistically joined, including individuals from neighboring states.¹³ They may hope to benefit from government patronage or to profit from looting and access to fertile land. Seleka elements have reportedly asserted control over customs revenues and mining concessions. (CAR is rich in natural resources, including diamonds, uranium, timber, and potential oil and gas deposits.) The balance of power among Seleka figures is uncertain, and factional violence is possible as the fractious coalition comes under new pressures.

Some observers have argued that because many Seleka combatants are apparently from Chad and Sudan, there has been a “de facto foreign occupation” of CAR.¹⁴ This claim is difficult to assess, in part because it is hard to establish the nationality of many Seleka members, given inconsistent distribution of identity papers. The term “foreigner” is also often used by southerners and non-Muslims to refer to northeastern ethnic groups with cross-border family ties (see “Muslim-Christian Tensions”).¹⁵

CAR’s domestic security institutions appear unable or ill-suited to play a lead role in stabilization. The national military, known as the FACA (after the French acronym), reportedly numbered about 7,000 personnel prior to 2013. This was widely considered to be far too few troops, and too lacking in capacity, to fully secure CAR’s vast terrain. AU and U.N. reports suggest that after the Seleka takeover, most FACA members either deserted or were forcibly disarmed.¹⁶ Seleka forces reportedly carried out targeted assassinations of FACA officers in early 2013. Then-President Djotodia reportedly then appointed Seleka figures as regional military commanders and attempted to integrate thousands of ex-rebels into the state security forces. While mostly known for its ineptitude, the FACA has been implicated in abuses—including during a 2005-2008 counterinsurgency in the north that may have laid the groundwork for Seleka’s subsequent mobilization¹⁷—and has exhibited ethnically biased recruitment under successive regimes.

French Intervention

On December 5, 2013, as soon as the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 2127, France rapidly deployed about 1,200 troops to CAR, bolstering its existing military presence to 1,600.

¹² Roland Marchal, “Central African Republic: Back to War Again?” *Global Observatory*, September 12, 2013; *Africa Confidential*, “On the Brink,” December 12, 2013. Bozizé has denied providing support to militias; see Radio France Internationale, “François Bozizé: «C’est la Seleka qui a amené le désordre en Centrafrique»” January 2, 2014.

¹³ Testimony of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jackson, “Crisis in the Central African Republic,” op. cit. Similar figures were reported by the AU in July 2013—see U.N. Security Council, *Letter dated 9 August 2013 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council*, August 9, 2013, U.N. doc. S/2013/476.

¹⁴ Testimony of Nestor-Désiré Nongo Aziagbia, Roman Catholic Bishop of Bossangoa, before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, “Crisis in the Central African Republic,” op. cit.

¹⁵ Lombard, “Is the Central African Republic on the Verge of Genocide?” *Africa is a Country*, December 5, 2013.

¹⁶ U.N. Security Council, *Letter dated 9 August 2013 from the Secretary-General op. cit.*; and *Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic Submitted Pursuant to Paragraph 22 of Security Council Resolution 2121 (2013)*, November 15, 2013, U.N. doc. S/2013/677.

¹⁷ HRW, *State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses Against Civilians*, September 2007.

Several hundred French forces in CAR had previously focused on building the capacity of CAR's military and, during the Seleka advance in 2012, on protecting French citizens and the international airport in Bangui. However, the French government declined to intervene to protect President Bozizé against Seleka in March 2013, or in response to the Seleka-led government's appeal for assistance in stabilizing the country the following month.¹⁸ France's approach to CAR began to shift in August 2013 with reports of rising Seleka-led attacks against civilians. In September, President François Hollande highlighted the growing crisis in his remarks at the U.N. General-Assembly.¹⁹ France was a driving force behind U.N. Security Council Resolutions in October and December, with the latter providing a mandate for French and African troops. France's decision to intervene may have been driven, in part, by concerns that ethno-religious violence in CAR could cause new regional instability.

As CAR's former colonial power, France has a freighted history that includes abuses during colonial rule and support for dictatorial governments in the decades following independence.²⁰ As with France's ongoing military operation in Mali, President Hollande has sought to differentiate France's actions in CAR from earlier, post-colonial French interventions in Africa that were widely viewed as shoring up dictatorial or corrupt regimes in order to preserve French influence and commercial access. Hollande has justified the CAR operation as seeking to "avert a humanitarian catastrophe," adding that France is "helping" its African partners "but is not substituting itself" for African leadership.²¹

Hollande and other French officials have called for assistance from the European Union (EU) and for the transition of MISCA into a U.N.-conducted and -financed peacekeeping operation.²² French officials have also emphasized that elections are needed as soon as possible, potentially earlier than the current deadline of February 2015.²³ These calls may be part of an eventual exit strategy for French troops, as well as an attempt to share the financial and political burden of stabilization efforts. Two French soldiers have died in CAR operations, and French domestic support may be limited. On January 20, the EU approved the concept of deploying troops to CAR, reportedly to secure the airport, if authorized by the U.N. Security Council.²⁴

French troops and their African counterparts face significant challenges on the ground. They are essentially carrying out urban policing functions in a tense and divided environment, attempting to disarm militia factions whose members can melt into the population. France's U.N. ambassador recently acknowledged that France had "underestimated" ethno-religious tensions in CAR, adding that French and African forces are in "nearly an impossible situation" in terms of "what to do, in very practical terms to be effective to prevent people from killing each other when they desperately want to kill each other."²⁵ France has faced accusations that its disarmament of Seleka

¹⁸ Global Insight, "CAR PM Appeals to France for Security Assistance," April 18, 2013.

¹⁹ Hollande remarks at the General-Assembly on September 24, 2013, available at <http://www.franceonu.org>.

²⁰ See ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, December 2007.

²¹ Hollande press conference on January 2014, as reported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CRS translation.

²² Hollande remarks on January 2014; French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius remarks before the National Assembly, January 15, 2014, via the MFA.

²³ Remarks by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius before the French Senate on January 8, 2014.

²⁴ Council of the EU, Press Release, 3288th Council Meeting, Foreign Affairs, Brussels, January 20, 2014. The EU has also provided humanitarian aid to CAR (\$53 million in 2013, in addition to bilateral aid from member states), as well as development assistance, and has allocated \$68 million in assistance for MISCA. See EU, "Factsheet: Central African Republic," January 17, 2014.

²⁵ Reuters, "Central Africa Republic Religious Hatred Was Underestimated: France," January 15, 2014.

members has left Muslim communities vulnerable to attack, and residents of Bangui have, at times, protested French and other foreign forces (see “The Role of Regional Actors”).²⁶

A Difficult Political Transition

Central African leaders and the U.N. Security Council have repeatedly called for adherence to the Libreville Agreements, a peace framework agreed to in January 2013 by Seleka and then-President Bozizé, and to the N’Djamena Declaration, an April 2013 statement by central African heads of state. According to these statements, presidential elections are to take place in February 2015, and neither the transitional president nor prime minister can be candidates. However, ongoing violence is likely to hinder progress toward elections, as will the lack of state capacity and the scale of necessary preparations. For example, a new constitution and electoral law may be needed, along with new voter registration, as many civic records have reportedly been destroyed. Warlords and potential rivals within the Seleka movement are also unlikely to easily agree to a diminution of their power or freedom of action.

Despite their initial condemnation of the Seleka’s seizure of power in March 2013, leaders of central African states agreed to recognize Michel Djotodia as head of state the following month. Djotodia—a previously little-known figure—had apparently out-maneuvered Seleka rivals who had more combat experience. Reportedly, this was because he had leveraged connections to Sudan’s Darfur region to rally Sudanese combatants to join Seleka, thus bolstering the group’s capabilities.²⁷ Yet as president, Djotodia was widely seen as unable, or unwilling, to put an end to Seleka abuses or rising inter-communal violence. He also appeared determined to deepen and prolong his hold on power.²⁸ Central African leaders forced him to step down during a regional summit hosted by Chad on January 10, 2014.

On January 20, the members of CAR’s National Transitional Council (CNT) elected Catherine Samba-Panza as the country’s new transitional president. The CNT is an ad-hoc, 135-member body created in the wake of the Seleka takeover; its members represent various political, civic, and religious interest groups.²⁹ Samba-Panza is not affiliated with Seleka or anti-balaka groups; as a Christian who was appointed mayor of Bangui by the Seleka-led government in 2013, her election may reflect, in part, an effort to appease supporters of each.

Muslim-Christian Tensions

Religious differences are not the primary origin of the crisis in CAR, and local religious leaders—across sectarian lines—have been among the most vocal proponents of peace and reconciliation

²⁶ See, e.g., U.N. Office at Geneva, “United Nations Team Documents Grave Human Rights Violations In The Central African Republic,” January 14, 2014, which refers to “multiple reports that the disarmament of ex-Séléka carried out by the French forces left some Muslim communities vulnerable to anti-balaka retaliatory attacks.” U.N. officials have noted that this was an unintended consequence of French disarmament operations, and that French “tactics have changed since it became apparent that that was happening.” Reuters, “U.N. Points to Chadian Collusion in Central African Republic Killings,” January 14, 2014.

²⁷ On Djotodia’s background and Darfur ties, see Louisa Lombard, “President Michael Djotodia and the Good Little Putschist’s Tool Box,” *African Arguments*, April 2, 2013.

²⁸ Testimony by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, hearing on the Crisis in the Central African Republic, December 17, 2013.

²⁹ See art. 51 of CAR’s “Transitional Charter,” adopted in July 2013.

during the current crisis. Still, inter-communal tensions over access to resources, control over trade, and national identity are being expressed along ethno-religious lines. As elsewhere in Africa, competition for land and other resources has long fueled frictions between herders, many of whom are Muslim, and farmers, who are largely Christian or follow indigenous beliefs. CAR's precolonial history, in which northern and Muslim groups practiced slave-raiding of southerners and non-Muslims, contributed to tensions. After independence, on the other hand, CAR governments were dominated by southerners and Christians, leading to resentment among northerners and Muslims who perceived a pattern of neglect, discrimination, and denial of full citizenship. Meanwhile, Muslim communities, drawing on cross-border mobility and family ties, dominate commercial and trade networks in many areas, provoking frustrations among non-Muslims over Muslims' perceived control over prices and access to capital.

Seleka figure Michel Djotodia was the country's first Muslim head of state and the first from northeastern CAR. The area is culturally and geographically close to parts of neighboring Chad and Sudan, where some of the movement's members and commanders reportedly originate. Non-Muslims often refer to Muslims and northerners as "foreigners."³⁰ For their part, Seleka leaders draw on resentments among northerners that the region is neglected and its residents discriminated against, even in the context of a highly underdeveloped country. At the same time, Seleka leaders do not appear to share any particular ideology or political vision for the country.

The Role of Regional Actors

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), a sub-regional body, has played a front-line role in responding to the crisis in CAR, by mediating peace accords, deploying peacekeeping troops, and influencing the selection of CAR's political leadership.³¹ However, regional rivalries, divergent interests, and a lack of capacity may threaten ECCAS's ability to lead international stabilization efforts. The regional leaders involved are among the longest-serving on the continent, and for the most part they head authoritarian regimes focused on protecting their own interests. The presidents of Chad and Republic of Congo are the key regional mediators on CAR, and they may have divergent security and financial interests there.

Chad's President, Idriss Déby, is widely viewed as a particularly problematic actor in CAR, due to his role in bringing former President Bozizé to power, perceptions that he allowed Seleka to seize power when he became dissatisfied with Bozizé, and the fact that some Seleka commanders are reportedly Chadian nationals or have other ties to Chad.³² Chadian troops have also recently been accused of abetting or participating in Seleka abuses.³³ Bozizé's reliance on a Chadian security detail—and related perceptions that armed Chadians enjoyed impunity for abuses against

³⁰ Lombard, "Is the Central African Republic on the Verge of Genocide?" *Africa is a Country*, December 5, 2013.

³¹ ECCAS member states are: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, and São Tomé & Príncipe.

³² See, among others, Mark Schneider, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at a hearing on the crisis in the Central African Republic, December 17, 2013.

³³ See U.N. Office at Geneva, "United Nations Team Documents Grave Human Rights Violations in the Central African Republic," January 14, 2014. The report cites U.N. Human Rights Office findings that its investigators "received multiple testimonies identifying certain ex-Séléka perpetrators as being Chadian nationals. Witnesses consistently reported that ex-Séléka, wearing the armbands of Chadian FOMAC [MISCA's predecessor operation] peacekeepers, went from house to house searching for anti-Balaka, and shot and killed civilians. The team also said it received credible testimonies of collusion between some Chadian FOMAC elements and ex-Séléka forces."

civilians—reportedly contributed to tensions between Christians and Muslims.³⁴ (Many, but not all, Chadians are Muslim.) These tensions appear to have built on enduring resentment of external plundering of resources. As Muslims, Arabic-speakers, and foreigners have come under attack in recent weeks, neighboring states, including Chad, have evacuated thousands of their citizens.

Cameroon, for its part, hosted former president Bozizé when he first went into exile, and is now contending with an influx of refugees from CAR into its already fragile north. The flood of CAR refugees may add to ongoing concerns about instability emanating from northeastern Nigeria.

As of 2012, South Africa was seen as cultivating growing ties with Bozizé’s government. This included the deployment of South African troops to CAR, ostensibly for bilateral security cooperation and assistance. Some analysts interpreted South Africa’s moves as part of a strategy to pursue and protect potential mineral interests, and more broadly of seeking greater influence in francophone Africa.³⁵ They were therefore seen as a potential challenge to French and Chadian interests. However, South Africa withdrew its troops amid domestic pressures after at least 13 of its soldiers were killed during the early 2013 Seleka assault on Bangui.

Impact on Lord’s Resistance Army Presence

The LRA, a small and decentralized militia, originated in Uganda, but it currently operates in remote regions of nearby countries, periodically brutally assaulting local residents and looting villages.³⁶ The LRA presence in CAR reportedly dates to a series of cross-border raids from Democratic Republic of Congo in early 2008. CAR appears to have been used by LRA commanders as an ideal location for transiting through the region and procuring abductees and supplies, due to its remoteness, lack of an effective military, and location near territory familiar to the LRA in DRC and South Sudan.³⁷ LRA activities in CAR have generally been concentrated in the remote southeast, an area that has not historically been considered of strategic importance to the central government in Bangui. However, the region has received increased international aid and attention since Ugandan troops deployed to the area to pursue LRA leaders in mid-2009.

The population of southeastern CAR, as in much of the country, is largely made up of sedentary farmers, who follow Christian and indigenous beliefs, with a minority, largely Muslim, population of traders and nomadic herders. While nominally drawing on a messianic Christian ideology, the LRA has separate origins from the current ethno-religious violence in CAR.

The Ugandan military has conducted counter-LRA operations in South Sudan, CAR, and the Democratic Republic of Congo for years, with significant U.S. logistical support. In 2011, the Obama Administration deployed U.S. military advisors to assist with this effort. The Ugandan

³⁴ On Chad’s role in Bozizé’s seizure of power, plundering by Chadian soldiers, patterns of impunity for Chadian forces that supported Bozizé, and how anti-Chadian sentiments have fueled past abuses against civilians in CAR, see ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy Of A Phantom State*, December 2007.

³⁵ France24, “South Africa ‘Downplayed’ Casualties in CAR Fighting,” April 4, 2013.

³⁶ For background on the LRA, see CRS Report R42094, *The Lord’s Resistance Army: The U.S. Response*, by Alexis Arieff and Lauren Ploch Blanchard.

³⁷ Enough Project, *On the Heels of Kony: The Untold Tragedy Unfolding in the Central African Republic*, June 2010. In November 2013, then-President Djotodia publicly claimed to be in contact with reclusive LRA leader Joseph Kony. Although the CAR government appears to have communicated by a group of LRA combatants, the claim of talks with Kony appeared to be spurious. See State Department press briefing, November 21, 2013.

military operation to counter the LRA has since expanded into a multi-country, AU-authorized “regional task force,” although operations within CAR continue to be led by Uganda.

Southeastern CAR, where U.S. military advisors are located, has been relatively unaffected by the Seleka violence. However, Ugandan operations and U.S. support activities ceased for about two months after Seleka took power in early 2013, due to security concerns as well as uncertainty over whether the new government would accept foreign military deployments in the area. The operations restarted in August 2013, after the AU garnered support from the Dlotodia government. LRA attacks have decreased in recent years, apparently due to the Ugandan operations and increased multilateral efforts to improve early-warning mechanisms and encourage LRA desertions. However, recent LRA attacks have been reported west and north of the LRA’s previous areas of activities, where Ugandan troops are less able to operate for political and security reasons, with uncertain implications for efforts to counter the group.³⁸

U.S. Responses

U.S. engagement in CAR has historically been limited. The U.S. diplomatic presence prior to the current crisis consisted of a small embassy, with no full-time U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) presence. U.S. military advisors have supported Ugandan-led counter-LRA operations in CAR’s southeast since late 2011, as discussed above. U.S. diplomatic personnel were evacuated from Bangui in late December 2012, due to growing insecurity as Seleka advanced toward Bangui. Then-U.S. Ambassador Lawrence Wohlers continued to fulfill his position outside the country through mid-2013, when he retired. The Obama Administration has not nominated a new ambassador, and a re-staffing of the embassy does not appear imminent. A Washington, DC-based Special Advisor on CAR, David Brown, has been appointed, and several senior U.S. officials have recently visited Bangui, including U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Samantha Power on December 19, 2013.

The Administration condemned Seleka’s 2013 seizure of power and welcomed regional leaders’ efforts to forge a response to the security crisis.³⁹ U.S. officials have also condemned human rights abuses and have called for a “political process that leads to fair and inclusive elections as soon as possible, but not later than February 15.”⁴⁰ U.S. responses to the current crisis have focused on providing humanitarian aid to affected populations, supporting the French and African military deployments to CAR, and encouraging peacebuilding and reconciliation through aid programming and public diplomacy messaging.⁴¹ Officials have portrayed these efforts and statements as part of the Administration’s commitment to preventing and responding to mass atrocities worldwide.⁴²

³⁸ See Invisible Children + Resolve, *LRA Crisis Tracker*, at <http://www.lracrisistracker.com/>.

³⁹ State Department “Situation in the Central African Republic,” March 24, 2013; and press briefings on March 25, 2013, and October 10, 2013.

⁴⁰ State Department, “Violence in the Central African Republic,” December 27, 2013.

⁴¹ According to the State Department, the Administration has “actively reached out to local radio stations and other media to encourage them to transmit messages from Christians as well as from Muslim religious leaders urging peace and reconciliation.” President Obama recorded a statement to the people of CAR on December 9. Testimony by Assistant Secretary of State Thomas-Greenfield before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, op. cit.

⁴² State Department, “Remarks by Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, in Bangui, C.A.R.,” December 24, 2013.

U.S. funding allocations in response to the current crisis include the following:

- The Administration has allocated a total of over \$69 million in humanitarian assistance for CAR in FY2013 (\$24 million) and FY2014 to-date (\$45 million).⁴³ An additional \$6 million has been provided for assistance to CAR refugees.⁴⁴
- The State Department plans to provide \$40 million in support for MISCA troop contributors, including non-lethal equipment and pre-deployment training.⁴⁵ Some MISCA troop-contributing countries, notably Burundi and Rwanda, have received prior U.S. training and equipment, including through the State Department's African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program, which seeks to boost African states' peacekeeping capabilities.
- President Obama has invoked his authority under Section 506(a)(1) of the Foreign Assistance Act to provide up to \$60 million in Defense Department equipment and services to support French and MISCA troops.⁴⁶ Separate emergency Defense Department authorities were invoked to transport the first group of Burundian troops to CAR in mid-December. In January 2014, the Defense Department began airlifting Rwandan troops into CAR.
- Through the Complex Crises Fund and Human Rights Grants Fund, the State Department and USAID intend to provide nearly \$7.5 million to support conflict mitigation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding efforts.⁴⁷

Prior to the current crisis, U.S. aid to CAR had generally been limited to humanitarian assistance, a small International Military Education and Training (IMET) program (\$115,000 in FY2012), and programs administered on a regional or functional basis. The latter included a small USAID property rights project related to artisanal diamond mining in the west, small amounts of non-lethal military aid related to counter-LRA efforts, and State Department assistance to combat human trafficking. According to the State Department, the Seleka seizure of power did not trigger legal provisions restricting certain types of U.S. bilateral aid to countries where a military coup or decree has overthrown an elected government.⁴⁸

U.N. Security Council Deliberations

The Administration continues to consider options for responding to the situation in CAR through its voice and vote in the U.N. Security Council. U.N. Security Council Resolution 2121, adopted in October 2013, expanded the mandate of the existing U.N. Integrated Peacebuilding Office in CAR (BINUCA) and required the U.N. Secretary-General to report on options to provide additional international support to the AU stabilization operation, MISCA, among other

⁴³ USAID, "Additional \$30 Million in Humanitarian Assistance for the People of the Central African Republic," January 20, 2014. U.S. funding figures refer to the year of commitment or obligation, not appropriation.

⁴⁴ State Department, Remarks by Secretary of State John Kerry, "Support for the African Union International Support Mission in the Central African Republic," November 22, 2013.

⁴⁵ White House, "Fact Sheet: U.S. Assistance to the Central African Republic," December 19, 2013.

⁴⁶ White House, "Presidential Memorandum—Central African Republic Drawdown," December 10, 2013.

⁴⁷ White House, "Fact Sheet: U.S. Assistance to the Central African Republic," December 19, 2013.

⁴⁸ State Department press briefing, April 2, 2013. The briefer noted that Seleka forces were not affiliated with the CAR military, but rather were non-state actors. Observers may also debate whether Bozizé was democratically elected.

provisions.⁴⁹ On November 15, the U.N. Secretary-General proposed to the Security Council five possible options for supporting MISCA.⁵⁰ These were the provision of bilateral and multilateral support on a voluntary basis; the creation of a U.N.-administered trust fund; the provision of limited U.N. support through a combination of voluntary and assessed contributions from member-states; the provision of more comprehensive U.N. support through the establishment of a U.N. logistical support operation funded by assessed contributions; and the transformation of MISCA into a U.N.-conducted peacekeeping operation with 6,000-9,000 military personnel.

The U.N. Secretary-General has since publicly urged Security Council members to transform MISCA into a U.N. peacekeeping operation with at least 6,000 troops and 1,700 police.⁵¹ U.N. Security Council Resolution 2127, adopted on December 5, calls for further consideration of doing so. State Department officials have testified before Congress that the Administration does not, “at this time,” support a U.N.-conducted operation in CAR.⁵² They argue that such a transition would be time-intensive and that MISCA, working with French troops, is currently the best international vehicle for ending the violence. Since the United States would be obligated to pay a percentage of any U.N. peacekeeping operation’s budget, U.S. budget considerations may influence the Administration’s policy. Resolution 2127 also imposes an arms embargo on CAR, which could lead the U.N. Security Council to impose sanctions in response to any violations.

Outlook

As Congress continues to monitor the situation in CAR and the U.S. response, Members may consider the immediate crisis, its complex roots, and its longer-term implications. In the short run, Congress may influence the funding levels, duration, and mechanisms of U.S. humanitarian assistance for CAR’s population and of U.S. support for French and African forces that have deployed to the country. Looking ahead, Congress may weigh the relative priority of the CAR crisis in the context of competing stabilization priorities elsewhere in Africa and the globe. Hearings on CAR were held before the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Foreign Affairs Committee in late 2013.

An issue of potential interest to Congress is the effectiveness of the African-led stabilization operation in CAR, MISCA, which is receiving U.S. logistical support. Overall, international forces in CAR face a difficult operating environment. The targets of disarmament efforts—whether Seleka or anti-balaka—do not necessarily wear uniforms and are thus not easily identified; local residents are traumatized and increasingly divided; effective state institutions that might contribute to stabilization efforts are absent; and local authorities may lack popular

⁴⁹ BINUCA is a field office of the U.N. Department of Political Affairs and an initiative of the U.N. Peacebuilding Commission, an intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict.

⁵⁰ *Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic*, November 15, 2013, U.N. doc. S/2013/677. There have been two previous U.N. peacekeeping operations in CAR: MINURCA (1998-2000), which was authorized to help secure Bangui and surrounding areas, assist in rebel disarmament, build the capacity of the national police, and support elections; and MINURCAT (2007-2010), which deployed to CAR and Chad in response to the crisis in Darfur, in order to contribute to the protection of civilians, promote human rights, and promote regional peace. A regional U.N. political mission, the U.N. Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), is also active on CAR and on the LRA issue.

⁵¹ Office of the U.N. Secretary-General, “Deputy Secretary-General’s Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in the Central African Republic,” November 25, 2013.

⁵² Testimony of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jackson, op. cit.; and of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, December 17, 2013.

legitimacy. To date, fewer African troops have deployed to CAR than called for by the African Union or the U.N. Secretary-General, and MISCA contingents exhibit shortfalls of equipment, capacity, interoperability, and financing. Some have provoked backlashes due to their nationality (e.g., association with Chad) and/or abusive behavior. Indeed, Congress has regularly imposed legal restrictions on certain types of U.S. security assistance to several of the African states that have sent troops to CAR, due to human rights concerns. For its part, France is well-placed to lead international stabilization efforts in CAR, given its knowledge of the region and close ties to neighboring states. At the same time, its colonial history and past interventions may render its frontline role fraught in the eyes of many.

More broadly, an international debate regarding the relative merits of African-led versus U.N.-conducted peacekeeping operations is at play in CAR, as it has been in Mali, Somalia, and elsewhere in recent years. Congressional views on the relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach—which may be expressed through the appropriations process, oversight, and other activities—may resonate beyond the situation in CAR, as U.S. policy makers weigh where, to what extent, and under what authorities to provide support to multilateral stabilization efforts. While neighboring states may have greater political commitment to resolving a crisis in their backyard, regional operations in Africa frequently have been hampered by a lack of capacity and handicapped by political rivalries and competing interests. On the other hand, U.N.-conducted peacekeeping operations, while better funded and vetted, can be slow to materialize and, often, risk-averse to a point that can inhibit effectiveness.

This debate has U.S. budgetary implications as well. Much of the U.S. assistance for troop-contributing states has been provided through the State Department’s Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) account, usually used for bilateral security assistance, which is stretched due to its use as a primary vehicle for crisis response, counterterrorism, and security sector reform efforts in Africa. If a U.N. peacekeeping operation were authorized, U.S. contributions would be assessed by the U.N. General Assembly and funded through the State Department’s Contributions to International Peacekeeping (CIPA) account, which is also facing competing priorities and legal constraints. As noted above, French officials have attempted to share the burden of trying to stabilize CAR, including by calling for a U.N. peacekeeping operation and international support for CAR’s electoral process. Such actions could imply larger U.S. budgetary and/or political commitments than have been offered to date.

In the longer term, CAR confronts significant governance and security challenges, and the internal political and military arrangements that could allow for greater future stability may prove elusive. Neighboring states, France, the EU, and U.N. agencies have repeatedly attempted military interventions, peace processes, state-building, and security sector reform efforts in CAR—with mixed results, at best.

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