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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). It includes a map of conflict-affected areas and a timeline of key events (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**). Violence in CAR has displaced hundreds of thousands of people and is placing new strains on global humanitarian and peacekeeping resources. U.S. policy responses to the situation in CAR include:

- humanitarian assistance;
- support to African and French troops that have deployed to CAR;
- anticipated contributions to a U.N. peacekeeping operation in CAR authorized to begin in September 2014;
- aid for conflict mitigation and peacebuilding;
- public diplomacy initiatives; and
- an Executive Order authorizing targeted sanctions.

Possible issues for Congress include the authorization, appropriation, and oversight of U.S. humanitarian assistance and contributions to international stabilization efforts. The crisis in CAR also has implications for several broader issues of potential interest to Congress, including:

- 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.

Congress has monitored the crisis in CAR and the U.S. response, including related fiscal implications. Hearings on CAR have been held before the Africa subcommittees of, respectively, the House Foreign Affairs Committee (November 2013 and April 2014) and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (December 2013). The FY2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 113-76) includes provisions on foreign aid for CAR (see "Legislation"). S.Res. 375 (Senator Coons), "A resolution concerning the crisis in the Central African Republic and supporting United States and international efforts to end the violence, protect civilians, and address root causes of the conflict," was passed by the Senate in March 2014. Draft legislation includes S.Res. 413 (Senator Coons), "A resolution recognizing 20 years since the genocide in Rwanda, and affirming it is in the national interest of the United States to work in close coordination with international partners to help prevent and mitigate acts of genocide and mass atrocities."

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Overview

The Central African Republic (CAR)—a landlocked, sparsely inhabited, and extremely underdeveloped country—is in crisis. CAR has never had an effective central government, and it has struggled with recurrent insurgencies and army mutinies since the late 1990s. In 2012, several primarily Muslim-led rebel groups formed a coalition called “Seleka” (“alliance” in the local lingua franca Sango). In March 2013, Seleka swept into the capital, Bangui, and seized control of the government, deposing President François Bozizé.¹ Once in power, Seleka leaders presided over the collapse of an already fragile state, and they oversaw brutal attacks on rural Christian communities in the northwest, Bozizé’s home region. Seleka fighters also targeted perceived Bozizé supporters in Bangui, including members of the national security forces, which largely disbanded. Mostly Christian-led militias known as “anti-balakas” (anti-machetes) then mobilized and have attacked Muslims.² Civilians have also taken up arms against each other. A transitional government appointed in January 2014 has been unable to stop the violence.

Prior to the current crisis, CAR’s population of 5.2 million was estimated to be 15% Muslim and 85% Christian or followers of indigenous beliefs.³ Religious identity is often closely associated with ethnic identity. In recent months, amid widespread anti-balaka attacks, tens of thousands of Muslims have fled their homes; Muslim-owned properties and businesses have been looted and seized; and mosques have been destroyed. The United Nations (U.N.) Secretary-General reported in March 2014 that “the ethnic and religious demography of the country has changed radically,” with many areas “emptied” of their Muslim populations.⁴ Seleka factions have also continued to attack civilians, in many cases targeting non-Muslims. Religious ideology was not the origin of the crisis, which appears to reflect a complex struggle over access to resources and national identity (see text box, “Muslim-Christian Tensions,” below). Indeed, many CAR religious leaders have sought to calm tensions, often at great personal risk. However, overlapping and often localized sources of tension and mutual fears have coalesced into mass violence, and many residents now appear to see themselves locked in an existential battle along ethno-religious lines.

Over 100,000 residents have fled CAR since December 2013, bringing the total number of CAR refugees in neighboring countries to about 350,000 as of April 2014.⁵ Some 600,000 more people are internally displaced within CAR. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has stated that the situation in CAR is outpacing the agency’s capacity to provide assistance.⁶ Some 2.5 million people in CAR, or at least half the population, are thought to need humanitarian aid. Humanitarian conditions prior to the current crisis were already poor due to past conflicts and a

¹ Bozizé had been in power since 2003, when he seized control in a rebellion.

² On dynamics of Seleka and anti-balaka violence since early 2013, see Human Rights Watch (HRW), “*I Can Still Smell the Dead*”: *The forgotten human rights crisis in the Central African Republic*, September 18, 2013; and HRW, “*They Came to Kill*”: *Escalating Atrocities in the Central African Republic*, December 19, 2013.

³ CIA World Factbook (April 11, 2014). Demographic information on CAR may reflect rough estimations at best. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates CAR’s population at 4.6 million.

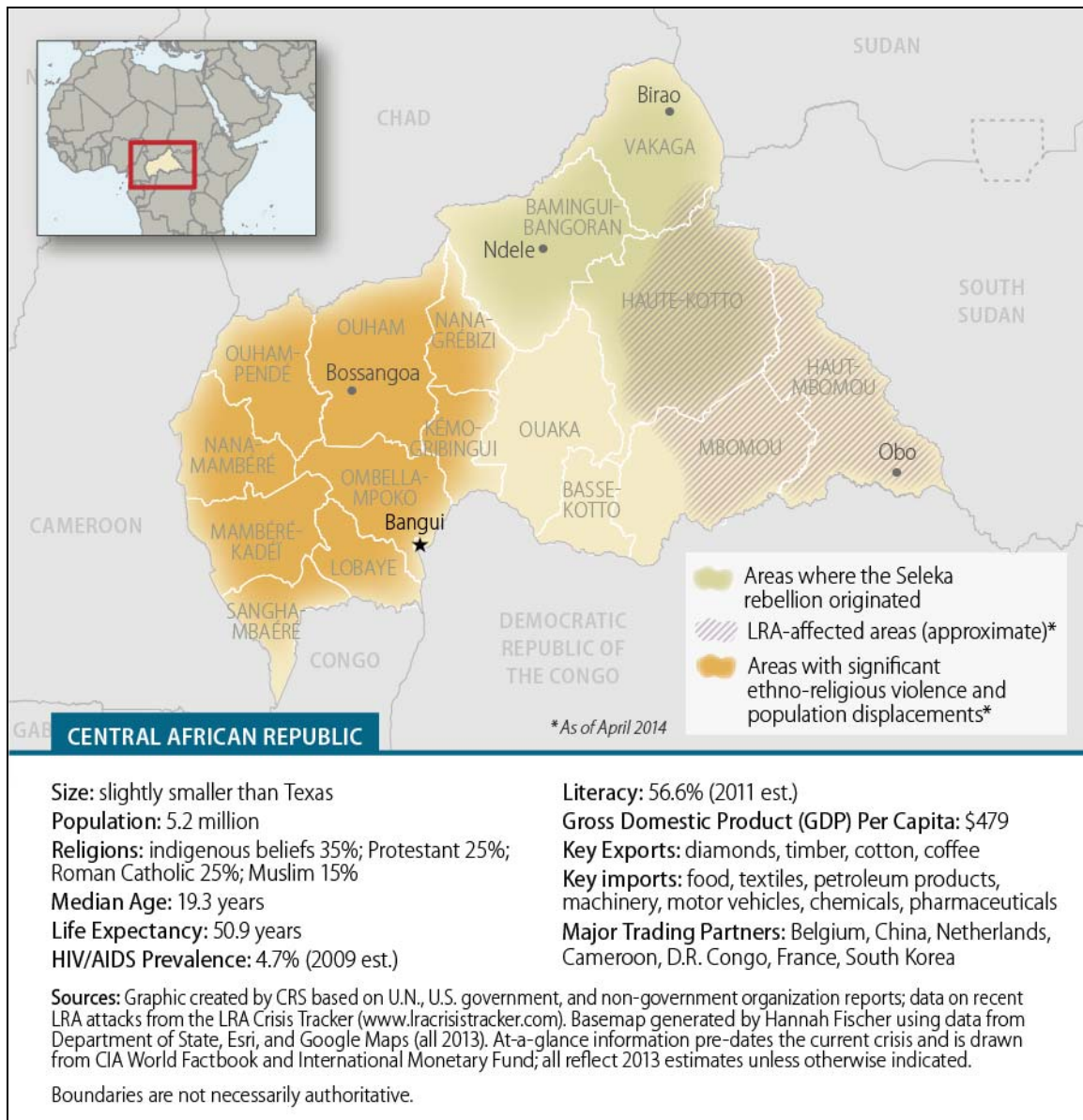
⁴ *Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic*, March 3, 2014, U.N. doc. S/2014/142.

⁵ The latter figure includes CAR refugees who fled before 2012. U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Central African Republic Emergency Situation*, April 17, 2014; UNOCHA, *CAR Situation Report No. 22*, April 23, 2014. Displacement figures have regularly fluctuated with population movements and international registration efforts.

⁶ UNHCR, “UNHCR and Partners Seeking \$US274 Million to Meet Acute Needs of Those Fleeing the Central African Republic,” April 16, 2014.

lack of basic social services. Rising violence since 2012—including attacks on aid workers—has further constrained humanitarian access. Farmers appear unprepared for the mid-year planting season, the flight of Muslim traders has led to severe shortages of basic goods, and many schools appear not to be functioning.⁷ Separate in origin from the current crisis, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a militia of Ugandan origin, continues to attack civilians in southeast CAR, creating additional humanitarian needs (see “Lord’s Resistance Army Presence” below).

Figure 1. Map of CAR and Basic Data



⁷ UN News Service, “WFP Chief Declares ‘The Time Is Now’ for Central African Republic,” April 11, 2014; USAID, *Central African Republic—Complex Emergency*, FY2014, April 25, 2014.

The situation in CAR has drawn international concern. U.N. Security Council Resolution 2127, adopted on December 5, 2013, authorized the French military, which has long had a presence in CAR, and an African Union (AU) operation, the African-led International Support Mission for CAR (MISCA), to protect civilians, enable humanitarian access, support the disarmament of militias, and contribute to security sector reform.⁸ About 2,000 troops from France—the former colonial power—and some 5,500 MISCA soldiers and police are conducting operations under this authorization. The European Union has also pledged to send up to 1,000 troops to secure the airport (thereby relieving French forces), but they have been slow to deploy.⁹ On April 10, 2014, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 2149, authorizing a U.N. peacekeeping operation in CAR with up to 10,000 troops; 1,820 police; and a sizable civilian component. The U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) is authorized to start on September 15, 2014, subsuming MISCA and a U.N. political mission.¹⁰

French and MISCA contingents have been praised for protecting civilians in some areas and securing routes for the delivery of humanitarian aid.¹¹ Still, international troops face enormous challenges on the ground. Militia members can melt into the population; local residents are traumatized and bitterly divided; infrastructure is severely lacking; and effective state institutions that might contribute to stabilization efforts are absent. In January 2014, France's U.N. ambassador stated 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.”¹² Some MISCA contingents have been implicated in human rights abuses, while French troops have faced accusations that their efforts to disarm Seleka combatants have left Muslim communities vulnerable to attack. Coordination among international forces has also been hindered by mutual distrust and varying rules of engagement.¹³

Some observers have expressed concern that violent extremist organizations could seek safe-havens or influence in CAR, particularly as fears have grown of a de facto partition of the country along ethno-religious lines. The U.N. Secretary-General has referred to reports that members of the Nigerian Islamist extremist group Boko Haram are present in CAR, an assertion echoed by French officials.¹⁴ Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a terrorist and criminal network

⁸ MISCA was created in December 2013, subsuming an existing stabilization force deployed by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), which comprised several hundred troops. MISCA troops are from Burundi, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Rwanda.

⁹ Council of the EU, Press Release, 3288th Council Meeting, Foreign Affairs, Brussels, January 20, 2014. The EU has also provided humanitarian aid to CAR, as well as development assistance, and has allocated €50 million (about \$69 million) in assistance for MISCA. See EU External Action, “Central African Republic [fact-sheet],” February 11, 2014.

¹⁰ U.N. Security Council Resolution 2121 (2013) expanded the mandate of the U.N. Integrated Peacebuilding Office in CAR (BINUCA), a field office of the U.N. Department of Political Affairs and an initiative of the U.N. Peacebuilding Commission.

¹¹ *Report of the U.N. Secretary-General on the Central African Republic*, March 3, 2014, op. cit., which states, “Logistical constraints and capability gaps notwithstanding, MISCA has made a significant difference in its areas of deployment in and outside Bangui, including with regard to the protection of civilians. [...] Although some interlocutors have identified the perceived partiality of some MISCA contingents as a challenge... MISCA has prevented near massacres and gross human rights violations and contributed to the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance.”

¹² Reuters, “Central Africa Republic Religious Hatred Was Underestimated: France,” January 15, 2014.

¹³ Graeme Wood, “Hell is an Understatement: A report from the bloody, crumbling Central African Republic,” *New Republic*, April 30, 2014.

¹⁴ *Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic*, March 3, 2014, op. cit.; Associated Press (AP), “France to Keep Troops in Africa Against Extremists,” May 8, 2014.

active in north and west Africa, has expressed solidarity with persecuted CAR Muslims, painting France's actions in CAR as part of a "global Crusade" against the Muslim community.¹⁵

Muslim-Christian Tensions

Complex tensions over access to resources, control over trade and financial networks, and national identity are being expressed in CAR along ethno-religious lines.¹⁶ These tensions appear to be rooted in multiple factors:

- CAR's precolonial history of slave-raiding by northern and Muslim groups.
- Competition between (mostly Muslim) herders and (mostly Christian or animist) farmers over access to land and other resources.
- Christian and southerner dominance of the national government since independence—and corresponding resentment among northerners and Muslims who perceive neglect, discrimination, and a denial of full citizenship.
- Muslim dominance over trade and rudimentary financial networks, often enabled by cross-border mobility and family ties—and corresponding frustrations among Christians over Muslims' perceived control over prices and access to capital.
- The fact that many CAR Muslims trace their family origins (however distant) to neighboring Chad, whose government helped bring to power former President Bozizé and was seen as complicit in Seleka's seizure of power.

Non-Muslims and southerners often refer to Muslims and northerners as "foreigners," while popular anger at perceived foreign raiding of CAR's natural resources appears to have grown over the past decade. Seleka leader Michel Djotodia was the country's first Muslim president and the first from northeastern CAR, which may have led some Muslims to support him and/or to view Seleka as protectors. However, there have also been clashes between combatants identified as Seleka and mostly Muslim Peul/Fulani nomadic herder groups. These clashes highlight the internal diversity of CAR's Muslim community and point to additional potential fracture points ahead.

A Challenging Political Transition

Transitional President Catherine Samba-Panza, a businesswoman and former mayor of the capital, Bangui, was appointed in January 2014 by CAR's National Transition Council, an ad hoc body constituted after the Seleka takeover. She replaced Seleka leader and self-declared President Michel Djotodia, who was forced out of office and into exile on January 10, 2014, following pressure from African and French leaders. Djotodia had ordered Seleka disbanded in September 2013, with little practical impact. Samba-Panza has called for national reconciliation and attempted to reconstitute CAR's national security forces. Yet, progress toward these goals appears to have been minimal to date, and it does not appear that ongoing military recruitment under Samba-Panza includes steps to screen out militia members and ensure ethno-religious balance. Samba-Panza has also come under criticism for alleged nepotism in state appointments.¹⁷

A transitional road map backed by African heads of state and the U.N. Security Council calls for national elections no later than February 2015. Election preparations face stark logistical and security challenges, however, and an electoral campaign could heighten the stakes of ethno-

¹⁵ "AQIM Decries France's 'Crusade' in Central Africa, Promises Revenge," February 22, 2014, via U.S. government Open Source Center. Such statements do not necessarily indicate an AQIM operational presence in CAR.

¹⁶ For background on complex ethnic, regional, and religious dynamics in CAR, see Louisa Lombard, *Raiding Sovereignty in the Central African Borderlands*, Dissertation, Duke University, 2012.

¹⁷ *New York Times*, "In Troubled States, New Governments with the Same Old Problems," April 1, 2014.

religious competition for power. The country may require a new constitution and new legal framework for electoral processes. Any voter registration efforts could raise questions related to legal residency and citizenship, which are at the heart of the current violence.

Armed Groups: Analysis

Anti-balaka groups and Seleka factions do not have clearly defined memberships or effective chains of command that unite all combatants. In addition to ethno-religious animus, their members may be motivated by various factors, such as a desire for communal protection, political ambitions, and criminal intent. For example, many anti-balaka groups appear to have been formed on an ad hoc basis. Some, however, are led by former military officers, display relatively sophisticated capacities, and have voiced political demands, such as the reinstatement of former President Bozizé (an evangelical Christian). Anti-balaka attacks on Muslims and on MISCA troops have led the AU to refer to all anti-balaka groups as “terrorists and enemy combatants.”¹⁸

Seleka combatants mostly hailed from the remote northeast of CAR and from neighboring Chad and Sudan. Seleka leaders initially called for greater state investment in the northeast and for checks-and-balances on executive power; broadly, the movement drew on frustrations with the Bozizé government. Yet Seleka’s actions appeared to reflect a desire for revenge against individuals associated with prior regimes and an attempt to reap the material benefits of power, including through looting, control over mining sites, and access to arable land. (CAR is rich in natural resources, including diamonds, uranium, timber, and potential oil and gas deposits; however, logistical challenges and perceived political risk have inhibited resource extraction and related international investment.) Claims by some CAR Christians that the vast majority of Seleka combatants in 2013 were foreign nationals¹⁹ are difficult to assess, in part because the alliance was a fluid, ad hoc grouping of fighters of diverse origins, and because borders in the region are porous. Moreover, many northeasterners’ stated grievances center around the state’s denial of citizenship rights, including national identity papers. Moreover, southerners and non-Muslims often refer to northeastern ethnic groups with cross-border family ties as “foreigners.”²⁰

Muslim Exodus

The deployment of international troops mandated to counter armed groups and the ousting of Seleka leader Djotodia from the presidency in January 2014 shifted the balance of power in CAR from Seleka factions to anti-balaka groups. The latter vary wildly in capacity and degree of internal organization, but they broadly appear to share a commitment to expelling Muslim communities. As anti-balaka attacks escalated in early 2014, many of CAR’s Muslim inhabitants fled to neighboring Chad and Cameroon, or to northeastern CAR, where some Seleka leaders are now reportedly based. News reports indicate that some Seleka figures and Muslim civilians who have fled to northeastern CAR may seek an independent state.

¹⁸ Reuters, “AU Brands Central African Republic Militia ‘Terrorists’ After Peacekeeper Killed,” March 25, 2014.

¹⁹ For example, testimony of Nestor-Desire Nongo Aziagbia, Roman Catholic Bishop of Bossangoa, House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Africa, “Crisis in the Central African Republic,” November 19, 2013.

²⁰ Louisa Lombard, “Is the Central African Republic on the Verge of Genocide?” *Africa is a Country*, December 5, 2013.

As of early 2014, thousands of Muslims were confined to improvised shelters in Bangui and in the northwest, where they were protected from anti-balaka assault by international troops. U.N. agencies and humanitarian groups initially debated whether to facilitate the evacuation of Muslims from areas where they face imminent threats, with some expressing concern that evacuations could contribute to de facto partition.²¹ In early April 2014, UNHCR stated it was willing to assist in evacuating 19,000 Muslims trapped in Bangui and towns in the northwest, emphasizing that evacuations would be conducted only on a voluntary basis and as a last resort.²² UNHCR has since facilitated several evacuations of Muslims, including of some 1,300 Muslims from Bangui in late April, which was carried out with French and MISCA military escorts. CAR authorities criticized the Bangui evacuation as having been undertaken “unilaterally.”²³

In early 2014, Chadian troops, apparently serving under national (not MISCA) command, escorted thousands of Muslims to northeast CAR, Chad, or Cameroon, protecting many from anti-balaka assault. (Many of CAR’s Muslims trace their family origins, sometimes distantly, to Chad; just over half of Chad’s population is Muslim.) Whether Chad can sustainably absorb this population influx from CAR is uncertain. More broadly, Chad’s motivations with regard to the CAR crisis and relationship with Seleka leaders are uncertain (see “The Role of Regional Actors”).

Warnings of Genocide

International officials have warned of mass atrocities taking place or potentially taking place in CAR, with some pointing to a risk of genocide.²⁴ Such warnings appear prescient in light of anti-balaka attacks against Muslims, often accompanied by anti-balaka assertions that their goal is to forcibly expel or kill all Muslims in CAR. In January 2014, John Ging, director of operations for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), stated after a trip to CAR that, “The elements are there, the seeds are there, for a genocide. There’s no question about that.”²⁵ Also in January, U.N. Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng stated that, “In my assessment, the widespread, unchecked nature of attacks by ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka militia, as well as by armed civilians associated with them, against civilians on the basis of religion or ethnicity constitute crimes against humanity. If not halted, there is a risk of genocide in this country.”²⁶

French Military Deployment

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.

²¹ See, e.g., Peter Bouckaert (HRW), “The Central African Republic Has Become a Nightmare for Muslims [op-ed],” *The Washington Post*, March 16, 2014.

²² UNHCR, “Violence in Bangui Triggers Fresh Displacement in Central African Republic,” April 1, 2014.

²³ *Le Monde*, “En Centrafrique, l’exode des musulmans se poursuit,” April 27, 2014.

²⁴ The text of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which defines the term, is available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=a/res/260\(III\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=a/res/260(III)).

²⁵ U.N. Radio, “UN Warns of Genocide in Central African Republic,” January 16, 2014.

²⁶ U.N., *The statement of Under Secretary-General/Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Mr. Adama Dieng on the human rights and humanitarian dimensions of the crisis in the Central African Republic*, January 22, 2014.

French troop levels have since risen to roughly 2,000. Previously, several hundred French forces in CAR had 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.²⁷ France's approach to CAR began to shift in August 2013 with reports of rising Seleka-led attacks against civilians. In September 2013, French President François Hollande highlighted the growing crisis in his remarks at the U.N. General-Assembly.²⁸ The decision to intervene may have been driven, in part, by concerns that ethno-religious violence in CAR could destabilize neighboring states that maintain close commercial and security ties with France, including Chad, Cameroon, and Republic of Congo (Brazzaville).

France was a key player in U.N. Security Council deliberations that ultimately culminated in the authorization of MINUSCA. The French government may see the transition from MISCA to a U.N. force as part of an eventual exit strategy from CAR, and as a necessary step to share the financial and political burden of stabilization efforts—particularly as French domestic support for CAR operations appears limited.

As CAR's former colonial power, France has a freighted history that includes abuses during colonial rule and support for authoritarian governments in the decades following independence.²⁹ As with France's ongoing military operation in Mali, President Hollande has sought to differentiate France's actions in CAR from earlier 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 stated that the goals of French intervention in CAR are to restore security, prevent further massacres, and permit access to humanitarian aid; and that France intends the operation "to end as soon as possible." He has also stated, "We have no vocation for choosing CAR's leaders. France is helping but is not substituting itself. That time is over."³⁰

The Role of Regional Actors

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), a sub-regional intergovernmental body, initially played a front-line role in responding to the crisis in CAR, mediating peace accords, deploying troops, and influencing the selection of CAR's political leadership.³¹ However, regional rivalries, divergent interests, and a lack of capacity have inhibited ECCAS's ability to channel international stabilization efforts. Although MISCA—an AU force—replaced a preexisting ECCAS stabilization mission in December 2013, ECCAS member-states such as Chad and Republic of Congo have remained key players.

Chad's President, Idriss Déby, is widely viewed as among the most influential leaders in CAR, but also as a problematic actor, due to his role in bringing ex-President Bozizé to power,

²⁷ Global Insight, "CAR PM Appeals to France for Security Assistance," April 18, 2013.

²⁸ Hollande remarks at the General-Assembly on September 24, 2013, available at <http://www.franceonu.org>.

²⁹ See International Crisis Group (ICG), *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, December 2007.

³⁰ New Year's message to military personnel, January 8, 2014, via U.S. government Open Source Center; press conference on January 14, 2014, via the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CRS translation.

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.

allegations that he allowed Seleka to seize power (or even provided support) when he became dissatisfied with Bozizé, and the fact that some key Seleka figures are reportedly Chadian nationals or have other ties to Chad. Bozizé's reliance on a Chadian security detail contributed to perceptions that Chadians enjoyed impunity for abuses committed in CAR, such as looting and banditry, during his presidency.³² Chadian troops were also accused of abetting or participating in Seleka abuses.³³ Though Chad was one of the founding troop contributors to MISCA, it withdrew its roughly 800 troops from the AU force in April 2014 after they were criticized for shooting unarmed civilians.

Many CAR Muslims trace their family origins to Chad (although many Chadians are not Muslim), and many CAR residents appear to associate the two identities, broadly referring to Muslims as "Chadians." These overlapping identities appear to have driven anti-Muslim violence, as anti-balaka groups have broadly targeted Muslim civilians while claiming to target "foreigners... from the Chad and Darfur borderlands, who have looted and attacked their country in conjunction with the last two coups (in 2003 and 2013), and who happen to be Muslim."³⁴ In early 2014, as attacks against Muslims, Arabic-speakers, and foreign nationals increased, neighboring states, including Chad, evacuated thousands of their citizens, with international assistance. In doing so, as mentioned above, Chadian troops facilitated the evacuation of tens of thousands of Muslims to the northeast and to Chad.³⁵ It may be difficult to distinguish Chadian migrants returning to their ancestral home from internationally recognized and protected refugees.

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 refugees from CAR into Cameroon is adding to concerns about instability emanating from northeastern Nigeria, due to the ongoing conflict with Boko Haram.

As of 2012, the government of South Africa was seen as cultivating growing ties with CAR, and South African troops deployed to CAR, ostensibly for bilateral security cooperation. 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.³⁶ During Seleka's assault on Bangui in early 2013, Seleka clashed with South African forces, killing at least 13 South African soldiers. The incident sparked controversy within South Africa about the purpose of South African deployments to CAR, and South Africa withdrew its remaining forces.

³² See ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy Of A Phantom State*, December 2007.

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."

³⁴ Louisa Lombard, "Religious Rhetoric as a Cover [Room for Debate]," *New York Times*, April 20, 2014.

³⁵ See, e.g., UNOCHA, *Chad: Migrants from Central African Republic*, Situation Report No. 3, March 30, 2014.

³⁶ France24, "South Africa 'Downplayed' Casualties in CAR Fighting," April 4, 2013.

Lord's Resistance Army Presence

Separate in origin from the current crisis, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a small militia of Ugandan origin, has operated in CAR's remote southeast since at least 2008 (see map, **Figure 1**).³⁷ LRA attacks on rural communities have displaced hundreds of thousands of people in CAR, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and South Sudan. CAR appears to have attracted LRA commanders due to its remoteness, lack of an effective military, and location near territory familiar to the group.³⁸ In November 2013, then-President Djotodia claimed to be in contact with reclusive LRA leader Joseph Kony, but U.S. officials downplayed the claim.³⁹

The Ugandan military has conducted counter-LRA operations in CAR since 2009, with significant U.S. support, including the deployment of U.S. military advisors to the field since late 2011. Since 2012, Ugandan operations in CAR have been considered part of a Ugandan-led AU Regional Task Force (AU-RTF). Southeast CAR, where U.S. advisors are based, has been relatively unaffected by the ethno-religious crisis in CAR. However, Ugandan operations and U.S. support activities ceased for several months in 2013 after Seleka took power, due to security concerns and political uncertainty. The operations restarted in August 2013, after the AU garnered support from the Djotodia government. The Obama Administration has pointed to decreasing numbers of LRA attacks and levels of displacement as evidence of the success of U.S.-supported operations.⁴⁰ However, LRA leaders could seek to leverage instability in CAR to find new safe-havens. Recent LRA attacks have been reported to the north and west of its previous areas of activity in CAR, beyond where Ugandan troops are able to operate.⁴¹

U.S. Responses

U.S. engagement in CAR has historically been limited. The U.S. diplomatic presence prior to 2013 consisted of a small embassy, with no bilateral U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) mission.⁴² U.S. military advisors have supported Ugandan-led counter-LRA operations in the southeast since 2011, as mentioned above. In December 2012, during the Seleka offensive, U.S. diplomatic personnel were evacuated from Bangui. Then-U.S. Ambassador Lawrence Wohlers continued to fulfill his duties from outside the country through mid-2013, when he retired from the U.S. Foreign Service.⁴³ The Obama Administration then appointed a Washington, DC-based Special Advisor on CAR, David Brown. In April 2014, the Administration appointed Ambassador W. Stuart Symington as a Washington, DC-based Special Representative for CAR.

³⁷ See CRS Report R42094, *The Lord's Resistance Army: The U.S. Response*.

³⁸ Enough Project, *On the Heels of Kony: The Untold Tragedy Unfolding in the Central African Republic*, June 2010.

³⁹ State Department press briefing, November 21, 2013.

⁴⁰ State Department, "U.S. Support to Regional Efforts to Counter the Lord's Resistance Army," March 24, 2014.

⁴¹ See LRA Crisis Tracker, at <http://www.lracrisistracker.com>.

⁴² Prior to the current crisis, U.S. aid to CAR was limited to humanitarian assistance, International Military Education and Training (IMET) (\$115,000 in FY2012), and programs administered on a regional or functional basis. The latter included a USAID property rights project related to artisanal diamond mining, non-lethal military aid related to counter-LRA efforts, and State Department assistance to counter human trafficking.

⁴³ In April 2014, the U.N. Secretary-General appointed Ambassador Wohlers as his Deputy Special Representative for MINUSCA.

Since the Seleka seizure of power in March 2013, U.S. officials have condemned atrocities in CAR, welcomed African leaders' efforts to respond to the crisis, praised the appointment of Transitional President Samba-Panza, and called for "fair and inclusive elections as soon as possible, but not later than February 2015."⁴⁴ Several senior U.S. officials have traveled to CAR since late 2013. Visiting Bangui in April 2014, U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. Samantha Power stated, "the Rwandan genocide taught us the price of delay in responding to mass violence," adding, "We must do more; and we must do it now."⁴⁵

The U.S. response to the crisis includes "up to" \$100 million in logistical support and equipment for MISCA and French forces;⁴⁶ nearly \$67 million in humanitarian assistance in FY2014 to date (in addition to funds provided in FY2013);⁴⁷ and about \$7.5 million to support conflict mitigation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding efforts.⁴⁸ Public diplomacy initiatives, including a recorded message from President Obama to the people of CAR, and a visit to CAR by an interfaith delegation of U.S. religious leaders, have emphasized non-violence and reconciliation. Officials have portrayed these efforts as part of the Administration's commitment to preventing mass atrocities.⁴⁹ The United States also provides substantial financial support for, and influences the decisions of, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, which have each recently pledged new aid for CAR in the form of concessional loans and technical assistance.⁵⁰

On May 13, 2014, President Obama signed an Executive Order declaring that conditions in CAR constituted "an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States," amounting to a national emergency.⁵¹ He identified five individuals—former president François Bozizé, former transitional president Michel Djotodia, Seleka leaders Nourredine Adam and Abdoulaye Miskine, and anti-balaka "political coordinator" Levy Yakite—to be subject to sanctions. The State Department is required to deny the designated individuals entry into the United States; and the Secretary of the Treasury shall block access to their U.S.-based property and interests in property. The Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, is further authorized to designate for sanctions any additional individual who threatens the peace, security, or stability of CAR; threatens CAR's political transition; undermines democratic processes or institutions in CAR; violates international human rights or international humanitarian law; recruits or uses child soldiers; obstructs humanitarian aid; or provides support to designated persons or groups through the illicit trade in natural resources. On May 9, 2014, the

⁴⁴ State Department, "Kerry on Violence in the Central African Republic," December 27, 2013; Nancy Lindborg/USAID, "Standing with the People of the Central African Republic for a Stronger Future," *Huffington Post*, January 31, 2014.

⁴⁵ "Remarks to Troops of the African-Led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic," April 9, 2014.

⁴⁶ U.S. support to MISCA and French forces has been provided through State Department-administered Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds, and through Defense Department equipment and services that the President authorized to be transferred under Section 506(a)(1) of the Foreign Assistance Act, as amended.

⁴⁷ USAID, *Central African Republic—Humanitarian Update #52*, May 9, 2014.

⁴⁸ State Department, "Appointment of U.S. Special Representative for the Central African Republic," April 22, 2014.

⁴⁹ State Department, "Remarks by Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, in Bangui, C.A.R.," December 24, 2013.

⁵⁰ IMF Press Release, "IMF Mission and the Central African Republic Reach Staff-level Agreement on Financial Assistance Under The Rapid Credit Facility," April 3, 2014; World Bank, "World Bank Group Announces US\$100 Million in Crisis Response for the Central African Republic," January 23, 2014.

⁵¹ The President, "Blocking Property of Certain Persons Contributing to the Conflict in the Central African Republic," Executive Order of May 12, 2014; released by the White House on May 13, 2014.

U.N. Security Council sanctions committee on CAR designated Bozizé, Adam, and Yakite under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2134, adopted on January 28, 2014, which imposed a travel ban and asset freeze on individuals designated by a U.N. sanctions committee created under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2127 (2013).⁵²

In the U.N. Security Council, the United States voted in favor of authorizing a U.N. peacekeeping operation in April 2014. Administration officials had earlier appeared reticent to support a U.N. operation in CAR, noting that a transition of MISCA to U.N. control would be time-consuming, and emphasizing that the Administration's first priority was to support MISCA, which—they suggested—could be more aggressive in conducting stabilization operations than U.N. peacekeepers.⁵³ Budgetary considerations may also have played a role in initial Administration deliberations. The State Department's budget request for FY2015 does not include funding to pay anticipated U.S. assessed contributions to the U.N. peacekeeping operation in CAR, as MINUSCA had not been authorized at the time the budget request was released. According to the State Department, the anticipated U.S. share of MINUSCA's budget is estimated at \$283 million to \$340 million per year once the operation reaches full capacity (expected in FY2015), with the initial cost in FY2014 expected to total roughly \$85 million.⁵⁴ In FY2015, the Administration has requested congressional authorization and appropriation of \$150 million for a new "peacekeeping response mechanism" (PKRM), which could be used to pay part of these costs.⁵⁵

Legislation

The FY2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act (**P.L. 113-76**, Division K, §7042 (a)) states that foreign assistance funds for CAR "shall be made available for reconciliation and peacebuilding programs, including activities to promote inter-faith dialogue at the national and local levels, and for programs to prevent crimes against humanity." The act (§7042 (e)) prohibits International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance from being provided to CAR. The appropriators' explanatory statement accompanying the act states that the act provides "additional" funds for CAR under the State Department Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) account, and that these funds are designated as Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO).

In March 2014, the Senate passed S.Res. 375 (Senator Coons), "A resolution concerning the crisis in the Central African Republic and supporting United States and international efforts to end the violence, protect civilians, and address root causes of the conflict." Draft legislation includes

⁵² "Security Council Committee Concerning Central African Republic Lists Three Individuals Subject to Measures Imposed by Resolution 2134 (2014)," May 9, 2014, U.N. doc. SC/11389. Grounds for U.N. sanctions include violating a U.N. arms embargo; planning, directing, or committing acts that violate international human rights law or international humanitarian law; using child soldiers; supporting armed or criminal groups through the illicit exploitation of natural resources; obstructing humanitarian aid; and attacking U.N. missions or international troops. For analysis of the role of natural resource extraction in CAR's conflict, see Enough Project, *Behind the Headlines: Drivers of Violence in the Central African Republic*, May 1, 2014.

⁵³ Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Linda Thomas-Greenfield before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Africa, "Crisis in the Central African Republic," December 17, 2013.

⁵⁴ Congressional notification of intention to vote for a U.N. Security Council Resolution authorizing a U.N. peacekeeping operation in CAR, provided to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 24, 2014.

⁵⁵ Testimony of U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. Samantha Power, "FY2015 Budget Request for the United Nations and International Organizations," House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, April 2, 2014.

S.Res. 413 (Senator Coons), which references CAR while “affirming it is in the national interest of the United States” to help “prevent and mitigate acts of genocide and mass atrocities.”

According to the State Department, the Seleka seizure of power did not trigger a legal provision contained in foreign aid appropriations measures that restricts certain types of U.S. bilateral aid to countries where a military coup or decree has overthrown a “duly elected” head of government.⁵⁶

Outlook and Issues for Congress

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 international stabilization efforts. Looking ahead, Congress may weigh the relative priority of the CAR crisis in the context of competing priorities elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

Some Members have considered how to characterize the nature of the violence in CAR, and what level and kind of response is warranted as a result, including in the context of a commitment by the Obama Administration to seek to prevent “mass atrocities.”⁵⁷ Amid commemorations of the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide on April 7, 2014, some have questioned whether the situation in CAR undermines international declarations of “never again.”⁵⁸ Ultimately, a legal determination of whether or not genocide is taking place in CAR may rest on evidence gathered in the months or years to come. In the meantime, African and French troops, and an eventual U.N. peacekeeping operation, may not be able to contain the violence, while additional intervention options appear limited and could have unintended consequences.

A related issue of potential interest to Congress is the effectiveness of MISCA, which is receiving U.S. support in a difficult operating environment. MISCA contingents have been praised for protecting civilians in some areas and securing routes for the delivery of humanitarian aid.⁵⁹ Still, MISCA troops exhibit shortfalls of equipment, capacity, interoperability, and financing, and some (particularly Chadian troops prior to their withdrawal from MISCA) have been implicated in abuses in CAR. 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.

⁵⁶ State Department press briefing, April 2, 2013. The provision is contained, most recently, in Sec. 7008 of Division K of the FY2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act, P.L. 113-76. 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 “duly elected.”

⁵⁷ For example, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations held a hearing in May 2014 titled “The Central African Republic: From ‘Pre-Genocide’ to Genocide?”

⁵⁸ U.N. News, “At Brussels Conference, Ban Says Genocide Prevention is Global Responsibility,” April 1, 2014.

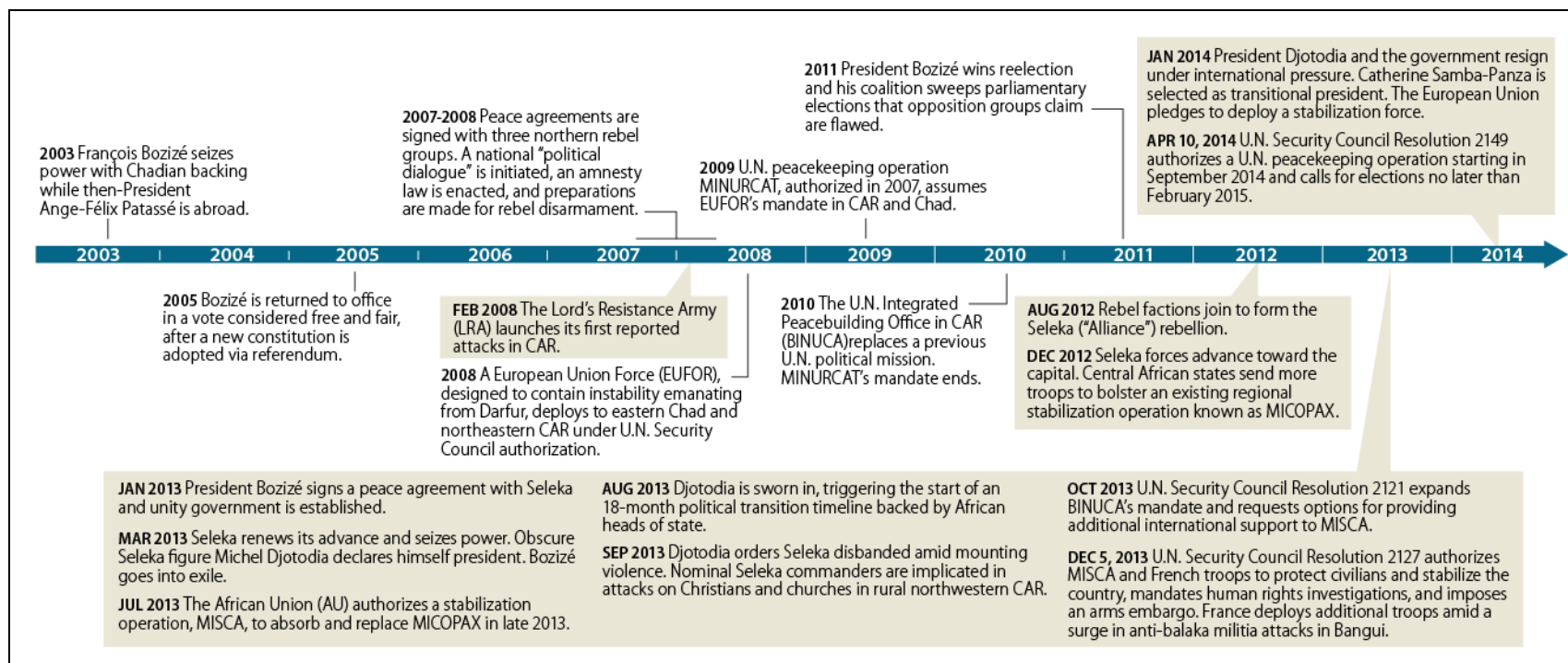
⁵⁹ *Report of the U.N. Secretary-General on the Central African Republic*, March 3, 2014, op. cit., which states, “Logistical constraints and capability gaps notwithstanding, MISCA has made a significant difference in its areas of deployment in and outside Bangui, including with regard to the protection of civilians. [...] Although some interlocutors have identified the perceived partiality of some MISCA contingents as a challenge... MISCA has prevented near massacres and gross human rights violations and contributed to the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance.”

In light of MISCA's mixed performance, observers may assess the U.N. peacekeeping operation in CAR in reference to an ongoing debate regarding the relative merits of AU versus U.N.-conducted peacekeeping operations. This debate has been at play in Mali, Somalia, and elsewhere. While neighboring states may have greater political commitment to resolving a crisis in their backyard, regional operations in Africa are often 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.

In the long term, the internal political and security arrangements that could allow for stability and improved governance in CAR may prove elusive. International actors have repeatedly attempted military interventions, peace processes, state-building, and security sector reform efforts in CAR—with mixed results, at best. At present, prospects for elections by early 2015, as called for in CAR's political transition roadmap, appear bleak. If electoral preparations advance, voter registration and campaigning could further contribute to what is already a violent contestation over political power and the meaning of citizenship. Nonetheless, an electoral process is ultimately likely to be a component of internationally supported state-building efforts. The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of combatants, the investigation and prosecution of human rights abusers, and the creation of functional and representative state security forces in CAR are likely to face severe challenges. A truth and reconciliation process, similar to efforts pursued in other transitional states, may be sought as part of such processes.

Finally, the potential impact of the CAR crisis on regional stability is of concern to U.S. and other policy makers, particularly as conflicts in nearby countries, such as South Sudan and DRC, persist. To date, relatively little violence has been reported among border communities in neighboring states, despite the fact that ethno-religious divisions in CAR are mirrored throughout central Africa and elsewhere on the continent. Still, refugee flows are taxing scarce local resources, while insecurity is hindering cross-border trade and the delivery of humanitarian aid. Neighboring states have limited capacity to respond. These dynamics could inflame local tensions and are likely to test the level of trust among political leaders. A de facto partition of CAR and continued conflict could have far-reaching regional implications. As an imperfect comparison, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and the subsequent flight of Rwandan refugees into neighboring DRC, laid the groundwork for an enduring regional security crisis. Concerns about whether transnational violent extremist organizations could seek safe havens in CAR or radicalize affected groups are also likely to persist among U.S. and other policy makers.

Figure 2. Timeline of Key Events in CAR Since 2003



Source: CRS

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