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# Central African Republic in Crisis

**African Union Mission Needs United Nations Support**

*Annette Weber and Markus Kaim*

On 20 January 2014 the foreign ministers of the EU member-states approved EUFOR RCA Bangui. The six-month mission with about 800 troops is to be deployed as quickly as possible to the Central African Republic. In recent months CAR has witnessed growing inter-religious violence, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians and an ensuing humanitarian disaster. France sent a rapid response force and the African Union expanded its existing mission to 5,400 men. Since the election of the President Catherine Samba-Panza matters appear to be making a tentative turn for the better. But it will be a long time before it becomes apparent whether the decisions of recent weeks have put CAR on the road to solving its elementary structural problems. First of all, tangible successes are required in order to contain the escalating violence. That will require a further increase in AU forces and the deployment of a robust UN mission.

In December 2012 the largely Muslim militias of the Séléka (“Coalition”) advanced from the north on the Central African Republic’s capital Bangui. This alliance led by Michel Djotodia was resisted by the largely Christian anti-balaka (“anti-machete”) militias. The ensuing civil war has had immense humanitarian consequences, with different religious groups conducting tit-for-tat massacres. The conflict is a consequence of the fundamental weakness of the state, which ever since independence has proven largely incapable of providing infrastructure, policing, justice, healthcare or education for its citizens. Despite possessing valuable resources including diamonds, mineral ores and timber, CAR is one of the world’s ten poorest countries. Lack of state

infrastructure forces the population to organise in village and family structures. The ongoing political and economic crises of recent years have led to displacements and a growing security threat from armed gangs, bandits and militias, and further eroded the resilience of society. Thus in CAR the problem of weak statehood is compounded by a weak society.

## The Current Situation

Improving security in Bangui and securing an aid corridor from neighbouring Cameroon are the foremost objectives of the intervening forces. These currently comprise 2,000 French troops and 5,400 soldiers in the MISCA mission (Mission internatio-

nale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine) authorised in December 2013 by the African Union. Inter-religious clashes began when the predominantly Muslim Séléka militias advanced on the capital Bangui. Later, fighting between Séléka and anti-balaka spread beyond Bangui. However, since the fall of Séléka-connected President Michel Djotodia in January 2014, outbreaks of violence have primarily involved the Christian anti-balaka militias acting against Muslim civilians, rather than the two groups fighting one another.

In the absence of a state monopoly of violence, criminal gangs, bandits and other violent actors had proliferated to a disconcerting extent long before the arrival of the Séléka in Bangui. Successive presidents placed little trust in the regular armed forces (FACA, Forces armées centrafricaine), which comprised fewer than 5,000 soldiers, and instead treated the presidential guard as a private militia. Instead of protecting the population, the poorly trained and paid armed forces themselves represented a security threat. Young men armed themselves to protect against attacks, prepared to resist the national army if necessary.

In March 2013 rebels led by Michel Djotodia toppled President Bozizé and took over the government. This also expanded the power of the armed wing of the Séléka, which despite demobilisation and integration programmes was not integrated in the regular national armed forces.

In September 2013, months before he stepped down in January 2014, Séléka leader Michel Djotodia distanced himself from most of his militias. His intention was to legitimise his continuation as president in the eyes of the international community, but in so doing he also relinquished control over the militias.

The leaders of the Christian anti-balaka militias have also long since lost control over their various groupings. The religious militias are increasingly fragmented into small autonomous units obeying no higher command, which further hampers any

outside intervention. Members of FACA were also involved in atrocities in February 2014. So neither President Samba-Panza's new government nor the militia leaders actually have control over the violent actors. Furthermore, Chadian members of the AU mission are accused of liberating and evacuating detained Séléka leaders without authorisation from mission command. Concurrently with the resignation of President Djotodia, Séléka forces began withdrawing from Bangui, and are currently regrouping in the north of the country. There too, observers report, they receive support from Chadian MISCA members.

### **Weak State Structures**

President Djotodia was deposed on 10 January 2014. Ten days later parliament elected the mayor of Bangui, Catherine Samba-Panza, as president. On 25 January Samba-Panza appointed Andre Nzapayeke as prime minister. Nzapayeke, previously Secretary-General of the African Development Bank, was chosen as a "neutral instance". He heads a government of technocrats that includes ministers from both Séléka and the previous government of François Bozizé, designed to continue the transitional process agreed in January 2013 in Gabon's capital Libreville between the then President Bozizé and the Séléka rebels under the patronage of the neighbouring states. At the end of this process, new elections are scheduled for 2015.

Since CAR became independent of French colonial rule in 1960, changes of leadership have generally been accomplished through military coups, and rarely through democratic elections. Especially since the beginning of the 2000s the country has been riven by ongoing internal conflict. Following the logic of clientelism, rulers generally concentrated on satisfying their own clientele, including foreign allies and kingmakers, and were rarely motivated to attend to state penetration or the needs of the country as a whole. The CAR is twice as large as Germany but has only five million inhabitants, who live largely in the

west and in the capital Bangui. Its infrastructure is almost non-existent, further impeding the provision of goods and services to the civilian population at large. In response to the ongoing fighting, many fled the urban centres to the savannah and the rain forest.

Until Michel Djotodia seized power in a coup in March 2013, CAR was governed exclusively by members of the Christian majority from the western and central provinces. Djotodia, like his predecessor Bozizé, was supported by the Chadian government. As the Séléka retreat to north-western CAR and on into Chad, the CAR crisis could acquire a regional dimension.

### **Regional and International Actors**

**Regional conflict mediators** will be decisive for the future of CAR. Both the peace agreement of Libreville and the N'Djamena Declaration signed on 18 April 2013 in the Chadian capital were initiated by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and negotiated under its auspices. ECCAS has also maintained a Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in Central African Republic (MICOPAX) since 2008. ECCAS membership overlaps with that of CEMAC (Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale), a smaller regional organisation that has had a multinational peace mission in CAR since 2002. On 19 December 2013 the MICOPAX mission merged into the AU-led MISCA mission. However, certain states involved in conflict pacification in CAR are also part of the problem. In particular, the roles played by France and Chad are ambivalent.

Of all the Western external actors, France certainly possesses the best knowledge about the country, its political actors and its geographical conditions. But its interest in continuing to operate as the dominant external power makes France ill-suited as a neutral mediator. Ever since independence France has remained the kingmaker in CAR; rarely has a president gained or lost office without direct French influence. So

Paris is not perceived as a neutral broker in the region. Instead, decades of political manipulation have consolidated a form of dependency on French interests. France is, moreover, specifically accused of basing its current engagement on its own economic interests. Although some suggest that France is interested in uranium from CAR as an alternative to existing sources in southern Algeria, northern Mali and Niger, falling uranium prices and the current conflict situation would imply that uranium from CAR is not currently uppermost among French economic interests. In 2012 armed gangs attacked an uranium mine owned by the French AREVA Group in south-eastern CAR, and it later closed.

Neighbouring **Chad** is no less closely involved in CAR politics, in particular jostling with France to direct influencing top political appointments. François Bozizé was supported by N'Djamena, and his troops trained and armed in Chad. Indeed, Chadian troops were directly involved in Bozizé's coup against his predecessor Patassé. One important factor is the closeness of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline to Chad's border with CAR. Since the toppling of Michel Djotodia and the accession of President Samba-Panza, Séléka forces and thousands of Muslim civilians have fled north into Chad. This represents a challenge for Chad's President Déby, whose Chadian troops operate as a MISCA contingent in CAR. Although Déby is regarded as a supporter of the Séléka, he would not want see their fighters remaining in Chad. With ongoing fighting in Darfur and the conflict in South Sudan expanding, there is no shortage of new constellations of violent actors whose conflicts could have negative consequences for the broader region – and for Chad's regional leadership ambitions.

**South Africa** has also exerted influence on CAR politics in recent years. Only after fifteen of its soldiers died when Séléka forces captured Bangui in March 2013 did South Africa withdraw its military contingent from CAR. It is unclear why 200 South

African soldiers were in the country in the first place.

Although **Uganda** and the **United States** are not directly involved in CAR's national politics, their forces have been operating jointly there since 2010. The fighters of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), who are held responsible for human rights violations in northern Uganda, South Sudan and north-eastern DR Congo, have been present in south-eastern CAR for years. Since 2010 the Ugandan army has been operating in the region, together with a small contingent of US marines, to militarily defeat the LRA. However, the mission, which involves 3,000 soldiers from the region and 100 US troops and has been operating under an AU mandate (Operation Monsoon) since August 2013, has remained unsuccessful to date.

### **The Humanitarian Dimension**

All political considerations aside, the current situation in CAR represents a humanitarian emergency of "epic dimensions". That is the formulation UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon chose in his address to the UN Human Rights Council on 20 January 2014. The country, he said, is in "free fall". Public order has collapsed, the state security services have disintegrated, and countless human rights violations were committed during the fighting between Christian and Muslim militias. As a consequence about one million people have been displaced, and more than 2.5 million are reliant on humanitarian aid. As bleak as the situation already is, strong tensions between Christians and Muslims create a danger of the conflict consolidating along religious fracture lines and continuing to be conducted with violence, unless external actors intervene. According to John Ging, Director of the Coordination and Response Division at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, all the elements of violence observed in Rwanda and Bosnia are also present in CAR today. This humanitarian emergency demands

above all funding through the United Nations and corresponding aid from international donors. In view of the poor security situation and the disintegration of public order, however, humanitarian aid will remain ineffective unless external security forces ensure a secure environment. Because German governments have promised to act to prevent ethnic cleansing and genocide, this dimension of the situation in CAR suggests German participation in the EU mission there. According to the latest discussions, Germany will probably contribute a MedEvac Airbus (flying hospital) and staff officers for the headquarters in Larissa and Bangui.

### **The Alliance Dimension**

Two instruments of German security policy have not been used to the extent that would have been desirable in recent years, and both have suffered as a result: bilateral Franco-German cooperation on security and defence, and the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Both could be reinvigorated and strengthened through active German engagement in crisis management in Africa, specifically in CAR.

On 20 January 2014 the foreign ministers of the EU member-states decided to launch military mission EUFOR RCA Bangui. About 800 soldiers will participate in the operation, which is to be deployed as rapidly as possible and remain in CAR for six months. The objective is to restore public order in the capital Bangui and create conditions that allow international organisations to supply humanitarian aid. The EU foreign ministers rejected proposals for a more ambitious mission that would have included areas outside the capital, but did agree that the EU contingent would relieve the 2,000 French troops in the country to an extent that allows them to be deployed outside Bangui. This is a "bridging mission" whose tasks are to be taken over after six months by either a UN mission or the African Union.

When it discussed its role in Mali\* in 2013, the European Union made an incoherent impression. This time, its decision of January 2014 shows the Union determined to tackle crisis management in Africa using military and possibly civilian means in the scope of the CSDP. A German contribution would not only underline Berlin's willingness to do more to satisfy its international responsibilities in this field. It would also send European allies the important message that the German government now attributes greater importance to the CSDP than it has in the past, and is actively seeking to shape it.

In recent years Franco-German security relations have reached an unprecedented nadir. Diverging priorities and widely different foreign policy ambitions, for example in international crisis management or joint procurement projects, have muddied bilateral relations in this policy area. A clear declaration that the German government is again seeking to deepen security policy cooperation with Paris could also give a new boost to the CSDP. The decision of 19 February 2014 to deploy up to 250 German soldiers in Mali, including members of the Franco-German Brigade, demonstrates a reorientation of bilateral relations of the kind that could also occur in CAR.

### **Support from AU and United Nations: The Limits of Enabling and Enhancing**

The UN Security Council authorised RCA Bangui on 28 January 2014, in resolution S/RES/2134 (2014). The resolution fits into the existing legal framework regulating international crisis management in CAR: resolution S/RES/2127 (2013) of 5 December 2013 already noted that the situation in CAR represented a threat to international peace and security. On that basis, under chapter 7 of the UN Charter, the Security Council authorised the African Union's MISCA stabilisation mission in CAR for twelve months and raised the prospect that MISCA could eventually be transformed

into a UN peacekeeping mission with up to 10,000 troops and 1,800 police at the request of the African Union. The resolution also authorised the French armed forces in CAR to take all necessary measures to support MISCA in fulfilling its tasks. The mandate for EUFOR RCA Bangui is similarly doubly subsidiary, referring to support both of MISCA and of the French "Sangaris" contingent. The European Union's support has already found a financial expression, with it providing €75 million for MISCA via the African Peace Facility.

The subsidiary character of the mission dovetails with the latest German and European security concepts, under which national governments and other regional organisations should be empowered to undertake crisis management themselves. If that succeeds there is no need for the European Union or NATO to take on a direct role.

MISCA currently has about 5,400 soldiers in CAR (as of early March 2014), but only the Rwandan contingent is actively going after the rival militias. It is becoming apparent that the African Union lacks the political cohesion necessary for MISCA to be successful, and that the partiality of individual troop providers is endangering the effectiveness of the mission. This problem is likely to persist even if the intervention is transformed into a UN peacekeeping mission, because the troop-contributing nations would in all likelihood remain identical. Other problems arise out of the subsidiary approach: three parallel but intertwined military missions demand a higher level of coordination, and responsibilities become blurred. Against this background UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has called for MISCA, Sangaris and EUFOR RCA forces to be placed under a joint command. The so-called "Enable & Enhance Initiative" encounters clear limits in the case of CAR, when it comes to estimating the expected success of the EU mission.

\* See the SWP-Aktuell on Mali by Markus Kaim (8/2013, German, <http://bit.ly/SWP13A08>) and the Comments by Wolfram Lacher and Denis Tull (7/2013, <http://bit.ly/SWP13C07>).

### **The Functional Dimension: The UN Security Council Mandate**

Anyone who proposes an EU military intervention in CAR (with German participation) must also state what objective the proposed mission is to pursue, what criteria are to be used for assessing success or failure, and what timeframe is foreseen. In the case at hand this is particularly difficult because the UN mandate not only defines ensuring public order as a purpose of the mission, but also lists a complex multidimensional package of tasks for the UN's political representation in CAR since 2010, the Bureau intégré des Nations Unies pour la Consolidation de la Paix en République centrafricaine (BINUCA). Alongside the aforementioned security elements, the package also contains a disarmament component (demonstrating rebel militias and integrating them into the regular armed forces), a humanitarian dimension (protecting human rights and caring for refugees), a rule of law dimension (strengthening police and judicial authorities) and a political component (planning for a transitional government and restoring constitutional order in CAR). Most of these tasks must be fulfilled by the African Union and United Nations rather than the European Union. But whether the EU mission in CAR can achieve more than symbolic success will depend on whether that preparatory work is actually done, and done well. The UN mandate clearly indicates that although comprehensive and lasting regulation of the conflicts in CAR requires a military component, it will be impossible without a parallel civilian dimension.

The circumstances of the EU mission are thus a good deal more complex and demanding than initially expected. In the past comparable missions whose long-term success (measured not against the mandate but against overarching political objectives) depended completely or largely on the cooperation of other international, regional or national actors have been problematic or condemned to failure. Examples in the African context would include EUFOR RD

Congo in 2006 and EUFOR Tchad/RCA in 2008/09. The more coordination is required between participants and the more contributions of others are required in order to achieve a political goal through military engagement, the more questionable it becomes whether the tasks demanded by the UN mandate or the respective German policy can actually be fulfilled. All these concerns apply equally to the planned operation in CAR: what fall-back option would Germany or the EU have in the event of MISCA making no progress in the next six months, if the planned UN mission was dropped and/or the timetable for the political transition process had to be shelved? First criticisms from the French military suggest that Paris has plainly underestimated the dimensions of the challenge in CAR.

Comparably broad UN mandates have in the past led Western capitals to overload their military operations with complex objectives (sometimes extraneous to the mandate), or conversely to equip them with such small capabilities that the mandate could never be fulfilled. The same must be feared in the case of CAR. The focus on the humanitarian dimension illustrates the problem. In this respect the mandate is very clearly defined and comparatively modest: EUFOR RCA Bangui will concentrate on the capital. But according to current reports thousands of internal refugees have gathered not only in Bangui, but also in two areas around Bossangoa (300 km from the capital) and Bangassou (more than 700 km). To protect and supply them would demand considerable transport and security capacities on the part of MISCA and the French contingent. Currently it is unclear how this situation should be dealt with.

A slim German contribution to a small EU mission supporting MISCA is without doubt politically important from the perspective of Germany's international responsibility and strengthening regional security organisations and the United Nations. But it will have little impact in CAR. The worst case would be an appearance of success for

the European Union, with the mandate fulfilled in the sense of securing Bangui, restoring public order there and feeding the population – but the failure of all political and humanitarian efforts in the rest of the country, leaving nothing gained with respect to the overarching political objectives. EUFOR RD Congo was confronted with this problem in 2006: Although it successfully supported the UN mission in holding elections, as per its mandate, it was able to exert very little positive influence on overall political developments in DR Congo.

### **Possible Steps for Germany**

In view of the crumbling state structure, the multitude of violent actors fighting one another and the devastating humanitarian emergency, it would be mistaken to expect a rapid, imminently deployable and effective military mission. Germany and the EU have three options for action in this situation:

#### **The Symbolic Option**

Germany could participate symbolically in the EU mission, for example with an aircraft and a number of staff officers in the operation's headquarters. This would at least demonstrate good will and Germany's intention to accept greater responsibility and strengthen the CSDP. But the success of the European Union and a possible German contingent would remain geographically and functionally restricted, and thus illusory. The restricted mandate could even turn the operation into a burden for German politics, if the impression arose that European military contingents were watching helplessly as massive human rights violations occurred. Decision-makers in Brussels and Berlin should clearly communicate such limits in the interests of expectation management.

#### **The Robust Option**

In this case Germany would contribute a larger contingent of soldiers to a mission in CAR, either directly in the French Operation Sangaris or a few months later in the planned UN mission. Both variants imply a presence across the entire territory of CAR, which is clearly associated with greater challenges and risks and would therefore be correspondingly controversial in Germany. On the other hand there would also be a greater chance of fulfilling the essence of the UN mandate, namely restoring public order throughout the country and enabling displaced persons to be cared for wherever they are located. In view of public promises by Chancellor Angela Merkel and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen, who have ruled out a “combat operation” in CAR, the choice of this option is, however, unlikely.

#### **The Civilian Option**

There are two fundamental requirements for comprehensive conflict management in CAR: rapid military intervention to contain the humanitarian emergency, and beyond that a lasting civilian engagement. The European Union, with the military and civilian components of its crisis management, is especially well-equipped for both tasks. Germany, especially, has repeatedly called for the use of civilian instruments. To that extent it would be only logical if the German government were to supply substantial capacities for fulfilment of the non-military dimension of the UN mandate. These could include financial, material and personnel contributions, for example for feeding and housing refugees, establishing functioning security forces, improving governance, reintegrating militias, supporting elections, prosecuting human rights violations, and much more. This civilian dimension has to date been little discussed in Germany and Europe. But it will play a key role in any medium- and long-term conflict regulation.

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