

# THE *SÉLÉKA* INSURGENCY AND INSECURITY IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, 2012 - 2014

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## Introduction

Many African countries have known armed insurgency, civil unrest and instability for many years. Among these countries are Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the CAR (Joseph 2012, 23-25; Cilliers and Schünemann 2013, 9-10). In sub-Saharan Africa, in general, military power between state and insurgency appears to be shifting often in favour of the latter which has forced African states to deploy forces more frequently beyond their borders (Howe 2001, 1). In the case of Ethiopia, for instance, the government has been at running battles with the Oromo for a long time and in Somalia, the brutalities of the *Al-Shabaab* are well known including also sea piracy which made the Horn of Africa insecure to sea-going vessels. All these have threatened peace and security in the Horn of Africa and beyond. In Nigeria, the *Boko Haram* insurgency in the North East of the country bordering Cameroon and Chad and activities of armed militias in the Niger Delta have threatened the peace and unity of this colossus of Africa. In the Central African sub-region, to which is located the CAR, wars and conflicts like in the DRC and Chad have created unfavourable socio-political and economic conditions. There is also a proliferation of internal and inter-state violence in the sub-region, especially in countries like the CAR, Chad and the DRC. In fact, recurrent political crises and military hostilities have kept the central African sub-region continuously in the headlines in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Mwanasali 1999, 90-91; Frère 2010, 1).

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The Central African Republic (CAR), which is the focus of this study, is a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of the Central African States, known by its French acronym as CEMAC. It is also a member state of the Economic Community of the Central African States (ECCAS). This country is very rich in natural resources, notably in diamond, gold, copper, uranium and timber. The population of the country is estimated at 4.5 million (Miles 2013). In terms of population configuration, the CAR is an amalgamation of various ethnic groups. The Gbaya people sought refuge from the Fulani of Northern Cameroon by migrating into the CAR in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, while the Banda who fled the Muslim Arab slave raids of Sudan followed the Gbaya later in the century. The country generally has over 80 ethnic groups, each with its own language and cultural practices. The largest ethnic groups of the country include the Gbaya 33%, Banda 27%, Mandjia 13%, Sara 10%, Mboum 7%, M'Baka 4% and Yakoma 4%. Other smaller ethnic groups make up the remaining 2% of the population. There are different religious groups in the country. Of these religious groups, 35% of the population is inclined to indigenous beliefs, 25% adhere to Protestantism and another 25% are Catholics while about 15% are profess the Muslim religion (Alusala 2007, 11).

In terms of the standards of living in Africa, the CAR has one of the lowest in spite of its rich natural endowments. In the domain of infrastructure, the road network of the country is not regularly maintained and some communities suffer a chronic shortage of drinking water. The country is also politically unstable, corruption and highway robbery are rife and the economic climate is uncertain, attracting little foreign investment. In a general sense, the CAR has insufficient functioning state institutions, an economy in shambles, an impoverished population and a security apparatus in complete disarray (N'Ddiaye 2007, 1; Central African Republic Country Level Information; Country Profile Central African Republic). These problems combined together have made the country vulnerable to armed insurgency and instability in the Central African sub-region, giving rise to intervention and interference of various forms from gullible and self-seeking neighbouring states.

In this study we examine the road to the *Séléka* overthrow of the government of Bozizé in March 2013 and the departure of Michel Djotodia, who was replaced by Catherine Samba-Panza in January 2014. This is one out of many insurgencies that have taken place in the country since its independence in August 1960. The historical roots of the instability and disintegration in the country are examined to show that CAR, from its creation, had problems and these have manifested themselves in fratricidal war times and again in the territory. The study also examines the grievances

of the *Séléka* insurgents, the challenges of the new *Séléka* led government and that of the present care-taker government of Catherine Samba-Panza. All of these, if not carefully handled, is still likely to plunge the country further into chaos, as was the case before the armed insurrection of March 2013 and subsequent military and counter military reprisals.

This study is significant in several ways. The fact that the CAR has been in the news for its instability, leadership crisis, coups and armed insurrection needs a study to unravel the factors that have been responsible for this. It is a country rich in natural resources, such as timber, gold, copper and diamond, but paradoxically one of the poorest in the world. The saga in the country only confirms the resource curse that has characterised countries with vast natural resources like Nigeria and Angola. A study of this country is a contribution to this theory of resource curse that has characterised many African countries blessed with natural resources. Again, the study is important because the continuous instability of the CAR is an indication of either the failure or inability of ECCAS and CEMAC to establish peace and stability in the country. Rather, the country has been drawn into serious conflicts with two members of these blocs, namely Chad and the DRC. If these regional groupings are unable to tackle this instability it is even more challenging for the African Union (AU) to achieve continental unity, peace and stability in Africa. An understanding of the *Séléka* insurgency in the CAR could be traced from the historical roots of the country.

## Historical roots of instability

The root of crisis and instability in the Central African sub-region as a whole was a result of the French policy of assimilation which became the guiding principle for colonial administration. Forje (2005, 228) argues that the politics of assimilation pursued by the French in the Central African sub-region was seen as a betrayal of national sovereignty. This betrayal of sovereignty was compounded by the governing elite that emerged because they converted this into a new form of hegemony. This manifested itself in the form of the transfer of state property into personal/private property, the ethnicisation of the state and the creation of a family dynasty as the legitimate source of succession. Forje also argues that the sovereignty of the people of this sub-region was greedily hijacked by this few privileged elite. They instituted the politics of exclusion in place of inclusion. The result of this kind of policy after independence plunged the Central African region into turmoil. The creation of the CAR from the period of colonisation to independence, in 1960, witnessed a manifestation of hegemonic tendencies in different ways and at different times.

The numerous crises in the CAR have their roots in the history of the country from the past to its independence on 13 August 1960 from France. French colonial administration and the Arab slave trade in the area contributed negatively to the future stability of the country. The territory was initially organised in 1894 as the colony of Ubangi-Shari and subsequently united administratively with Chad in 1905. In 1910 the territory was incorporated into the French Equatorial Africa (*Afrique Equatoriale Française*, AEF) which was a federation of three colonies namely Gabon, Middle Congo (*Moyen Congo*) and Ubangi-Shari-Chad. Four years later, Chad was separated from the Ubangi-Shari colony and made a separate territory. The Ubangi-Shari as the CAR was called at the time, received less attention and resources from France than the other AEF territories namely present day Republic of Congo, Gabon and Chad. Rather, thousands of its population was forced to work on infrastructure projects elsewhere in AEF and this was of little benefit to the territory. Besides, the Arab slave trade raids from present day Chad and the Sudan resulted in the decline in the population of large areas of the CAR. This eventually had an effect on development and the ethnic and religious tensions in the country today (Alusala 2007, 11; Berman and Lombard 2008, 3).

French colonial administration and the Arab slave trade raids laid the basis of the present mayhem in the CAR with ramifications on neighbouring countries like Chad and Sudan. The administration of the territory as an integral part of the AEF did not make the French to devote resources towards its own separate development. They channelled resources towards the development of other areas especially the Republic of Congo and Gabon at the expense of the people of the CAR. To make matters worse, the population was carted away to work on the infrastructure of other territories while their own infrastructure was unattended to. It remained poor and undeveloped throughout the period of French colonial administration. The joint administration of the CAR with Chad seemingly gave post-independence governments of Chad the justification to meddle in the internal affairs of the country and for armed groups from both countries to operate with impunity across their own borders and destabilise their governments. On the other hand, the Arab slave raids through the territory created a culture of aggression which now manifests itself in the present abductions or kidnappings, a common practice among belligerents in the struggle for the control of the CAR. The aftermath of the slave raids also led to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) that has continued to destabilise the CAR and its neighbours today.

Again, the colonial administration in Ubangi-Shari was underfinanced and mostly poorly trained. It also created a brutal and

authoritarian yet ineffectual regime in the country. This administration laid emphasis on cash-cropping like cotton and used coercive means to levy taxes on the population. Besides, diamond and gold mining which the French initiated in 1927 was a preserve of the Europeans who got the benefits from it (Bauters 2012, 9). At independence, the country was one of the poorest and underdeveloped. Its problems were compounded by the authoritarian governments of David Dacko and his successor Jean-Bedel Bokassa. Dacko and Bokassa who declared himself emperor established an authoritarian regime similar to that of the French during the colonial era. Dacko reinforced his grip on power through constitutional reforms in 1962 and 1964. These reforms concentrated power in the hands of the executive branch of government and effectively removed the idea of political parties competing for power. The president banned independent trade unions in the country and censorship was tightened. On his hand Jean-Bedel Bokassa declared himself as “life President” in 1972 and emperor in 1977 (Polity IV Country 2010, 1; Bauters 2012, 10-12). Acting like the colonial government taxes on cotton farmers were increased making life very difficult for the peasants. The problems of the CAR can be understood against a backdrop of this ineffectual and autocratic administration of the French and the early leaders who ruled the CAR after it gained independence from France on 13 August 1960.

The road to the independence of the CAR in August 1960 from French rule was in itself problematic and sowed seeds of discord for the political leadership of the country. The head of government during the transition period leading to independence Barthélemy Boganda, a former Catholic priest, preferred to lead his party, the Movement for the Social Evolution of Black Africa (MESAN) with his cousin David Dacko, who eventually became the first president of the CAR at independence on 13 August 1960 after the death of Boganda in a plane crash. Another cousin of David Dacko who served under him as Army Chief of Staff Jean-Bedel Bokassa seized power from him through a coup (Alusala 2007, 12; Bauters 2012, 10). The ethnicisation of leadership and governance in the CAR was also pursued by General André Kolingba when he seized power in 1981. During his tenure in office that lasted until 1993, he shamelessly filled the *Forces armées centrafricaines* (FACA) with members of his Yakoma ethnic group, one of the smallest in the country. Ange-Félix Patassé who succeeded Kolingba in 1993 compounded matters further when he created militia groups along ethnic lines to support his regime. These militias were composed of people mostly from the Sara, Kaba and Gbaya groups of his home region. Even General Françoise Bozizé’s administration from 2003 to 2013 was accused of ethnic considerations in the leadership of the country

(A Widening War 2007, 3; Bauters 2012, 14). This was a precedent set by Boganda and energetically pursued by his successors who ruled the country after independence.

## Road to the March 2013 military take-over

The road to the March 2013 *Séléka* seizure of power in the CAR can conveniently be traced from the multiparty elections of 1993. General André Kolingba who had ruled the CAR as private property from 1981 to 1993 finally yielded to the will of the people and the wind of change that blew from the West across Africa. Although this election led to a change at the top of the state, it opened the door to civil unrest, army mutinies, instability and civil war in the country (Frère 2010, 2). His defeat in the general elections of 1993 laid the foundation for numerous coup attempts on the government of Ange-Félix Patassé and eventually to the March 2013 armed insurrection and defeat of the government of General François Bozizé. Between 1993 and 2003 when Ange-Félix Patassé was overthrown by Bozizé and his men, seven coup attempts had been organised against his government. This was not a mere coincidence but a result of an unreliable system of governance that was put in place by leaders namely David Dacko, Jean-Bédél Bokassa and André Kolingba. This situation was also compounded by the very difficult economic situation that the CAR experienced in the 1990s following the world economic slump of the mid-1980s.

When Patassé was democratically elected president of the CAR in 1993, he unfortunately followed the footsteps of André Kolingba by promoting ethnicity in state governance (Forje 2005, 227-228). During his reign Kolingba had embarked on a massive recruitment of the Yakoma, his ethnic group into the army. By the time he was defeated in the elections of 1993, 70 % of the army was made up of the Yakoma who constitute only 4 % of the population of the CAR. Instead of arresting this problem and giving the CAR a truly national character, Patassé rather accentuated it by exploiting his northern heritage for political gain. Ethnicisation of public space has been a common feature of countries of the Central African sub region (Fomin 2005, 167) since their political independence in the 1960s. This ethnicisation of governance compounded problems for the CAR by creating a rift between the *Riverain* and *Savaniers* as the people of the South and North were referred to. President Patassé redeployed the Yakoma and most Presidential Guards were from the Sara-Kaba ethnic group of the North.

The overwhelming presence of the Yakoma in the military became

a source of instability for the government of Patassé between 1993 and 2003 when his government was toppled by Bozizé (Polity IV Country Report 2010, 3; Mehler 2009). In spite of this, the northern part of the CAR remained relatively underdeveloped under the presidency of Patassé who was from the North. The reform initiated by Patassé in the security services created a rift between the FACA, the regular army and the Presidential Guards leading to serious security problems for the country (Bauters 2012, 13). From 1991 to the overthrow of Patassé and Bozizé, the security forces of the CAR were as divided as never before. This is one of the problems that led to the attempt by Kolingba and Bozizé in 2001 and 2002 respectively to topple the Patassé regime and culminated in the defeat of Patassé's forces in 2003.

Although armed groups were in existence in the CAR from the late seventies and early eighties spanning from the government of Bokassa to Kolingba like the *Mouvement centrafricain pour la liberation nationale* (MCLN) of Rudolph Idi Lala, these were hardly considered as a pressing matter because firearms were scarce at the time. After the fall of Bokassa arms were being smuggled in from Chad and the number skyrocketed when the government of Hissène Habré was toppled in 1990. Many more arms were smuggled into the country after the fall of Mobutu in the DRC in 1997. As many arms were smuggled children were co-opted into fighting in the armed groups (Ayike 2005, 192; Organised Crime 2011, 7). President Patassé took over the mantle of leadership in the CAR when the number of arms and armed groups had increased in the country (Bauters 2012, 18). Many more armed groups emerged to challenge existing ones and also government forces creating a situation of insecurity and instability. Some of them were eager to control the natural resources of the different parts of the country. Patassé was therefore faced with the problem of handling the differences between the different military services and to suppress armed groups many of whom operated with foreign support from neighbouring countries like the DRC, Sudan and Chad.

The military crisis in the CAR in 1996 was exacerbated by a serious political crisis which led to widespread public discontent over social and economic problems. Due to the prolonged non-payment of salary arrears of the soldiers, civilians were regularly attacked by the men in uniform (Internal Displacement 2007, 9; Taylor 2005, 241; IFAD Participation in the Debt Initiative 2008, 1). Even civil servants and government workers went through a decade of unpaid wages which compounded the socio-political crises of the country from 1996 onwards (Central African Republic, Country Level Information). To protect himself and continue to lead the CAR, Patassé did not only enlist foreign support from Libya and the DRC but also created a personal armed group known as *karako*, meaning peanut

in the local *Sango* language (Mehler 2009; Bauters 2012, 13). The economic problems of the people were compounded by the devaluation of the franc CFA by 50% due to international pressure which only impoverished the population further (Berman 2008, 6). Their reaction in the mid-1990s was a descent into violence against the state which threatened its very existence and stability and made the government of Patassé vulnerable to several coup attempts throughout the period of his administration in the CAR.

The dismissal of General François Bozizé as Army Chief of Staff by President Patassé in 2001 made the sacked Chief of Staff to escape to Chad and mobilise forces against him with the view of assuming the mantle of leadership in the country. Bozizé escaped to Chad with several hundreds of troops loyal to him. They were all determined to bring the government of Patassé to its knees (War Crimes 2003, 36). While in Chad he enlisted the support of several armed groups in the northern part of the CAR and was also given assistance by the Chadian government for strategic reasons. One of these reasons was to, presumably, secure the oil fields of Chad and make the border with the CAR safe for Chad's economic and other interests. Had Patassé not out rightly dismissed Bozizé, his government might have survived beyond the 2003 military take-over that was commandeered by Bozizé. He might also have successfully organised another election apart of the one of 1999 to ensure a peaceful transfer of power and the consolidation of democracy in the country. Unable to withstand the incessant armed attacks of the Bozizé rebel group, Patassé's men yielded to defeat when they were overpowered by those of Bozizé with assistance from Chadians. The presidential palace fell to Bozizé when President Patassé was in a meeting of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (COMESA) summit in Niger (Mehler 2009). Upon his return from this summit, the president could not land and was forced to fly to Cameroon and finally took exile in Togo.

Other things which led to mounting hatred for the Patassé government included widespread mismanagement and self-enrichment by the ruling elite of the country. There was also the outright buying of members of parliament and exclusion of formerly privileged groups like the Yakoma under the previous government of André Kolingba (Mehler 2009). These grievances of the people formed the basis for the army mutinies of 1996/97, the coup attempts of 2001/2002 and the successful rebellion of 2003 that saw power change hands from Patassé to Bozizé. The common citizen could not understand why public resources could be mismanaged and the privileged enriched themselves when they did not have basic amenities like water and electricity. The government of Patassé could also not have survived an armed insurrection against it because of the policy of exclusion and selective treatment that it adopted. This policy pitted many other groups



from the South against those from the North. This was the first time that someone from the North was the leader of the country (Country Profile 2007, 4) and people from the densely populated North-West impoverished region expected improvements in their region which were not forthcoming.

The northern part of the CAR that expected much from a president who hailed from their region developed misgivings with the Patassé's government. President Patassé had in an attempt to counter the cross-border raids of Bozizé's men in the North and *coupeurs de route* syndrome set up a special force outside the regular army to handle these threats from the North. It was led by Colonel Abdoulaye Miskine, a former commando in Chad. This special force of mercenaries was a mixed bunch with some having links with former President Hissène Habre and others to Goukouni Queiddeye. They committed serious atrocities on the population in the North as was reported by local human rights organisations (Bauters 2012, 13; War Crimes 2003, 36; Ghura 2004, 14). Opponents of the government criticised it for excesses in the North of the country and especially Colonel Miskine who had Chadian connections. It was however a difficult task to tackle the problems of the *coupeurs des routes* and the armed attacks orchestrated by Bozizé and his men because of the porous borders of this region and its numerous armed groups operating across the borders of Sudan and Chad, countries with a very long history of civil wars. Bozizé became president through seizure of power but soon after he ran into problems with his supporters which explain why there was opposition to his administration leading to an insurgency and defeat.

## ***Séléka* insurgency December 2012 to March 2013**

The *Séléka* insurgency of March 24 2013 and change of leadership from François Bozizé to Michel Am Nondroko Djotodia was due to several factors dating back to peace talks with the government in 2007. The word *Séléka* is sango word for union or alliance, that is, a coalition of about five separate rebel groups which include the *Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement* (UFDR), the *Convention des patriots pour la justice et la paix* (CPJP) and the *Convention patriotique pour le salut Wa Kodro* (CSPK). Two other groups joined the ranks of the *Séléka* namely the *Front démocratique du peuple Centrafricain* (FDPC) and a Chadian group called the *Front populaire pour le redressement* (FPR). These groups are mainly from the restive North East of the CAR, a region that is geographically isolated, historically marginalised and almost stateless. Within the ranks of the coalition were also Islamic jihadists from Chad and Sudan. Fighters of the LRA also joined the *Séléka* rebels in the capture of the government of the CAR (Central

African Republic Conflict 2012 to Present; Miles 2013; Vircoulon 2013; Urgent Humanitarian Needs 2013; Looming Food Crisis 2013; Seleka Rebels in the Central African Republic 16 May 2013). Prior to their defeat of the government of Bozizé, they received support from armed fighters from neighbouring Sudan known as the *Janjaweed* which has been accused of committing atrocities against civilians in the Darfur region (Larson 2013).

The road to the *Séléka* rebellion is in fact an effect of the CAR Bush War that lasted from 2004 to 2007. The war started barely one year after Bozizé seized power in a military coup while president Patassé was attending a summit in Niger. This Bush War started with a rebellion organised by the UFDR in North Eastern CAR led by Michel Djotodia. The war soon escalated into a major fighting where the UFDR forces fought against the CAR government together with other rebel groups located in other parts of the CAR. These other rebel groups included the *Groupe d'action patriotique pour la liberation de Centrafrique* (GAPLC), the CPJP, the *L'Armée populaire pour la restauration de la république et la démocratie* (APRD), the *Mouvements des libérateurs Centrafricains pour la justice* (MLCJ) and the *Front démocratique Centrafricain* (FDC). The combined attack on the new government of Bozizé from these groups led to the displacement of thousands of people for about three years (Central African Republic Conflict 2012-Present). In spite of a peace agreement between the Bozizé government and the CPJP to end the Bush War, political violence continued, especially in the Eastern and Central regions of the CAR. It was clear that the legitimacy of the government of Bozizé was seriously challenged by the other armed groups that refused to sign a peace agreement with the government. As long as the government did not suppress these groups nor provided uncontested leadership of the country, it was clear that from its very inception in 2003, it was doomed for failure in the future.

The insurgency of the *Séléka* took on a very militant phase in December 2012. Among the reasons that were advanced by the rebel groups for waging war against the government, it was included the argument that there was no solution to the problem of the armed groups of North Eastern CAR, human rights abuses, the lack of a programme of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) for the fighters as well as a crippled security system in the country. The disarmament of the fighters had been planned since the agreements of Libreville in 2007 and 2008, but this was never implemented due to the lack of political will of the Bozizé regime. For example, the agreements between the government and the rebel groups included financial support and other assistance for insurgents who laid down their arms (Central African Republic Déja-Vu 2008; Urgent Humanitarian Needs 2013; Miles 2013; Boas and Hentz 2013; 2; Seleka Central Africa's 24

March 2013; Central African Republic 10 May 2013; Ngoupana 2013).

The *Séléka* leadership also claimed that they were fighting because of a lack of progress after a peace deal, which ended the 2004-2007 Bush War (Central African Republic Conflict 2012-Present). A Catholic Bishop Mgr. Aguirre Monus, however, argued that the main goal of the *Séléka* coalition was to overthrow the government and to impose a regime of Islamic imprint. He contended that a majority of the people who belonged to the coalition were jihadists who spoke Arabic, killed and raped civilians, looted homes and Christian missions that were not mosques (Africa/Central African Republic <http://www.news.va/thepopeapp/>). Although the bishop saw in the *Séléka* a jihadist group fighting to impose Islam in the CAR, the coalition is more complex in its objectives and membership than simply religion. Whatever the case, only time will tell whether the argument of the bishop and other observers is true. Besides, only 15 % of the population of the CAR is Muslim (Azikiwe 2013). A majority of the population adhere to other religious groups, notably the Protestant, Catholic and indigenous religions. This alone was enough to deter the *Séléka* coalition from imposing a theocratic state in the CAR, and, since the departure of Michel Djotodia, the Muslim/Christian conflict has continued.

In spite of the argument of the *Séléka* to justify the insurrection in the CAR in 2013, there are contrary opinions as to their real motivation. For example, according to Alex Vines of Catham House, a London-based institute that studies international affairs, the actions of the *Séléka* were based purely on ambition. He states that “all accounts of the *Séléka* are that they have no development vision for CAR. It’s exclusively about redistribution of patrimony from having captured the state” (*Associated Press* April 1 2013). This argument could be supported by the attitude of the elite of the country. None of these elite, who have been accused of war crimes or other problems, has ever been killed in the process. The same elite who become government ministers today are rebels tomorrow fighting against the government and the state and going free. It is also difficult to explain the impunity with which successive governments privatise the state and its resources to members of their ethnic group or to a few privileged ones to the extent that, after their defeat, the next government is held hostage by ethnic loyalties and previously privileged groups. With the complex interplay of issues one can only partially agree with Alex Vine’s argument that the *Séléka* coalition wanted participation or complete control of the redistribution of the resources of the country by leading it.

There were other reasons for the emergence of the *Séléka* in the CAR and the war it waged on the government of François Bozizé. For a long time there was a lack of governance in the Vakaga and Haute Kotto

administrative regions of the North; the permeable borders and widespread contraband of weapons and other goods in this region constituted a perfect environment for the emergence of the *Séléka* coalition. Other grievances of the people that led to a *Séléka* insurgency on the government included Bozizé's imposition of his relatives in the transitional government, his rearmament through the purchase of helicopters and his delay in releasing political prisoners as agreed by during the accords with the opposition. *Séléka* militants also demanded the withdrawal of South African troops, which were deployed in Bangui in 2012 due to an agreement between the South African government and that of the CAR. The rebels were also encouraged by the fact that regional peers in Central Africa, during the Libreville peace talks, blamed Bozizé for closing down political space and dialogue with the opposition. Proof of this was seen in the fact that the multinational CEMAC force in the CAR FOMUC did not intervene when the rebels moved towards and took over Bangui (Vircoulon 2013; Central African Republic 12 March 2013). There was therefore a generalised atmosphere of uncertainty considering the non-implementation of the Libreville Accords, with each party blaming the other for failing to implement it. The *Séléka* coalition took advantage of this and other grievances to launch a sustained attack on the government from December 2012, leading to yet another peace deal or cease-fire on 11 January 2013.

The *Séléka* strong showing against the government of Bozizé, from late November 2012, forced the government to the negotiation table once more in January 2013. This was more so because, between December 2012 and January 2013, the war had led to a looming food crisis because of the hike in prices, among other consequences. On 11 January 2013, a ceasefire agreement was signed in Libreville Gabon through the mediation of CEMAC. Following the agreement, the *Séléka* coalition dropped its demand for the resignation of François Bozizé. The president on his part agreed to appoint a Prime Minister from the opposition by 18 January 2013. In keeping with the agreement, Bozizé appointed Nicolas Tiangaye as Prime Minister in replacement of Faustin-Archange Touadéra. Senior *Séléka* leader Michel Djotodia became the Defence Minister. To enforce the ceasefire agreement, foreign troops, including those from South Africa, were deployed to help enforcing the peace deal.

In spite of these appointments and the deployment of foreign troops to assist in bringing back the CAR to the path of peace and stability, the ceasefire was broken barely six days later with each party accusing the other of not respecting it (*BBC News* 21 March 2013). In March, the *Séléka* recalled Djotodia and four other Ministers from the transitional government and asked for the withdrawal of the South African National Defense Forces

(SANDF), which was protecting Bangui, the capital of the CAR. This was a clear indication of the collapse of the January ceasefire agreement and also a challenge to the continuous rule of Bozizé, although the coalition had agreed, during the ceasefire agreement of January 2013, to Bozizé's rule until the 2016 elections. It was also an indication of the misgivings that had developed within the ranks of the *Séléka*. Some military commanders of the coalition felt that Djotodia had negotiated an agreement too quickly with Bozizé to his own private and not the collective interest of the fighters (Vircoulon 2013; Besseling 2013).

The withdrawal of Djotodia and four other coalition Ministers from the government was the beginning of a war of failure for the government of Bozizé and success for the rebel coalition. Things moved on rather fast and not in favour of the government of Bozizé. The coalition multiplied attacks on key towns and cities and brought them under their control. Bangui, the capital of the CAR, finally capitulated on 24 March 2013, and President Bozizé escaped to Cameroon. Later that day, Michel Djotodia declared himself President of the country and the constitution and the national assembly were suspended and dissolved, respectively. He pledged to respect a peace deal that was signed earlier in 2013. Earlier, he had declared that he would rule the country for three years and, thereafter, organise elections. Following the coup, the borders of the CAR were closed with neighbouring countries. The government of Djotodia was condemned by member states of CEMAC (*Global Times* 2013), but paradoxically called for the formation of an inclusive transitional council and the holding of elections in 18 months and not three years as envisioned by Djotodia. The eventual putting in place of a transitional parliament of 105 members, and their election of Djotodia as the only candidate who had earlier declared himself president, led to the tacit recognition of the government by African leaders. Djotodia was the first CAR president from the remote, neglected and largely North East.

In order to stamp his authority on the country after the ouster of the government of Bozizé, the new military leader of the CAR, Djotodia, on 31 March 2013, named a government. This government consisted of nine members of the *Séléka*. There were eight representatives of parties that opposed Bozizé while he was in office and one of the members of government was associated with the government of Bozizé. Sixteen positions were reserved for the representatives of civil society, but the opposition to the *Séléka* government argued that these were actually disguised allies of the *Séléka* (Central African Republic Conflict 2012-Present). The government of Michel Djotodia found the myriad of problems of the country a 'hot potato', which explains why together with pressure from the ECCAS and France his government was forced to resign. The departure of Djotodia on 10 January

2014 has not lessened the conflict in the CAR. It has, instead, exacerbated the fracas between the mostly Muslim *Séléka* and Christian *anti-Balaka* groups. This is partly because, during the reign of Djotodia, many Christians were targeted and, when Samba-Panza took over, Christians are now retaliating (*Deutsche Welle* 2014; *Global Post* 2014; Handy 2014; Krumova 2014; Neill 2014; Ottaro 2014).

Soon after the *Séléka* coalition took over the leadership of the CAR, its fighters went on a rampage, executing opponents, raping women and looting homes. They also recruited children and also kidnapped vulnerable people. The fighters, particularly targeted members of FACA, and many killings, occurred in the urban areas in broad daylight. Commanders of the coalition seemed unable to maintain discipline within the ranks of the *Séléka* fighters (Ngoupana 30 March 2013; Ngoupana 16 April 2013; *Vatican Radio* 16 May 2013; *Reuters* 10 May 2013). Contrary to the Kimberley Process that calls for the origin of diamond sold in the world market to be made known, *Séléka* elements were very deeply solidifying their control of the lucrative diamond industry and were selling some of the stones (Larson 2013; *Seleka Rebels Gain Control* 11 May 2013) rather illegally.

In the midst of outrage against the excesses of the *Séléka* fighters, Djotodia created a National Commission of Inquiry to investigate and report on crimes and human rights abuses committed in the CAR since 2002, including not only the regimes of Patassé, but also that of Bozizé (*Reuters* 10 May 2013). This can be considered as an evasive approach to the blatant human rights abuses of the coalition forces since March 2013. The establishment of a Commission of Inquiry by the Djotodia led-government was a way of buying time and laying the matter to rest. This could have been possible if this Commission of Inquiry succeeded to stamp its authority over the institutions of the state. It was also difficult for a coalition of forces with diverse agendas to work in a coherent manner because each of them wanted to reposition itself in the decision-making process of the country.

Other social problems that emerged from the *Séléka* insurgency in the CAR included insecurity in the health of the people, malnutrition. This was because of food insecurity, souring prices of scarce foodstuff, scarcity of clean and potable water. During the period of tension in Bangui, in April 2013, only two hospitals were functioning. Schools were closed in the whole country and civil servants could not go back to work. The closure of the borders of the country by the new government had a devastating effect on the people because goods could not be imported from the port of Douala, in Cameroon. Douala is the main port for exports and imports of the CAR. One month after the military takeover in the CAR, motorbike taxi and bus drivers went on strike because of insecurity, extortion and violence against them

(Africa/Central Africa Fides.org). These were some of the signals which indicated the enormous challenges that awaited the *Séléka* led government. These and other challenges explain why there is still unfinished business in the CAR, which needs to be addressed by the government of Catherine Samba-Panza, successor of Michel Djotodia.

## Unfinished business and future of the CAR

If one goes by the arguments that were raised by the *Séléka* fighters to justify the armed insurrection against the government of Bozizé, the arguments raised by Catherine Samba-Panza and the still serious socio-political instability in the CAR, there is need to rethink the future of the CAR. The year 2013 ended on a negative note for the CAR and explained why during the Sixth ECCAS Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Chad from 8-11 January 2014, pressure was brought to bear on Michel Djotodia and his Prime Minister, Nicolas Tiangaye, to resign (*Global Post* 2014; Handy 2014). The reins of power in the CAR went to Catherine Samba-Panza in late January 2014. In spite of this, the security situation remains fragile with undisciplined and disgruntled former rebels roaming the capital and smaller towns at night, looting, raping and killing with impunity. Matters are compounded by the fact that people with Islamic sounding names pay more at roadblocks which have been erected in the southern and western parts of the country. People from the North East of the CAR increasingly find it difficult to obtain national identity documents, which is frustrating (Krumova 2014). Another serious security challenge for the transitional government of Samba-Panza is the passivity of the armed forces and police in the face of the violence which has sparked popular frustration and resentment. The concerns that anti-*balaka* elements are infiltrating the army are bad news because this will only further polarise the security situation in this country in this central African sub-region. Arms also continue to circulate thereby, creating fear and tension among warring groups (Chignac 2014).

From 2013, child soldiers roam the streets and communities have lived in distrust and revenge because of past grievances (CAR Chaos 2013). The fractured *Séléka* forces continued to pursue and eliminate former members of the *Forces armées centrafricaines* (FACA) on the basis of their preparing for a return of the former president François Bozizé (Briefing 2013). This might have been strengthened by the attacks on Bangui in early December 2013 by militias and other gunmen loyal to Bozizé. The attack resulted in the death of hundreds of people from gunfire, machete attacks and stoning (Hussain 2013). The security and administrative vacuum caused

by the escape of the remaining FACA troops, police and gendarmerie, as well as judicial and other civil authorities, contributed to the settlement of scores with impunity by members of the *Séléka* led government of Michel Djotodia.

When Catherine Samba-Panza was elected on 20 January 2014 she, therefore, inherited a complex security situation which has continued. Anti-*balaka* fighters today compose of people from rural areas. They carry with them traditional weapons and home-made guns and wear *grigri* (magical charms), convinced that these make them invisible and protected from bullets and rockets. Most of them are illiterate teenagers whose families have been killed and villages burned by the *Séléka* fighters. During the *Séléka* insurrection they virtually lost everything and are in Bangui to revenge. Apart from attacking the *Séléka*, they want them to be disarmed and call them “Arabs” (Vircoulon and Lesueur 2014; Katz 2014). This is just one out of the many human rights abuses in the country.

Other problems that have compromised a functional government in the CAR include the age-old issue of disarming, demobilising and re-integrating *Séléka* combatants and former FACA. The cohesion that existed within the ranks of the *Séléka* coalition, prior to the overthrow of the former president, has dissipated and today there are rival groups even after the departure of Djotodia seeking to continue to control the affairs of the CAR. The *Séléka* is fragmented because its irregular forces have been accused of effectively creating a parallel army and police force in areas under its control. Several of their spokesmen have repeatedly called for the partition of the CAR into two states, namely a Muslim and a Christian state. Concern is also arising from the establishment of the new militia Organisation of the Central African Muslim Resistance (ORMC). This was set up by one of Djotodia’s former aides (Neill 2014). These developments are not aimed at seeking a lasting solution to the insecurity in the CAR, but to entrench positions and continue to plunder state resources under the cover of chaos. The visible cracks in the *Séléka* group have widened and each of the movements within the coalition is fighting more or less as an independent unit. The very tension between loyalists of Bozizé, those of Djotodia and what remains of the national army has only fuelled the Muslim/Christian conflict, leading to killings, destruction and people displaced within their own country (Vircoulon and Lesueur 2014).

In Bangui, over 40,000 people are sheltered around the Bangui airport where the French established a base since 2002. Amnesty International has documented a lot of these problems, which have even hampered humanitarian assistance to people in need (Briefing, 2013; Moshiri 2013). Worst of all, it is clear that the country does not have a



functional government, although power has shifted from Michel Djotodia to Catherine Samba-Panza since January 2014. This was aptly captured by Mossiter (2014) when he described the government as being incapable of controlling anything but its own disbursement of favours. This precarious situation, which started with the overthrow of Bozizé, made the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to argue that “the transitional government is not properly functioning” (Kelemen 2013).

The question of legitimacy and nepotism continues to be a serious issue in the struggle to bring peace to the CAR. Although the election of Samba-Panza was widely acclaimed for her strong personality, among other factors, it has been criticised for some of its actions. She has been accused rightly or wrongly for appointing friends and hang-ons as ministers. The daughter is said to be the Director of Cabinet (Mossiter 2014). The president herself acknowledged that her decision to appoint a majority of Ministers from her own Eastern Region stirred resentment in the country (Chignac 2014). Former Presidents like Andre Kolingba, Ange Félix Patassé and Bozizé were similarly accused of nepotism and favouritism and they took these criticisms lightly only to be overthrown because of this and other factors. The future of the country which Samba-Panza herself acknowledges is in true national reconciliation, but how could this be realised if people who committed reprehensible acts are not pardoned, but punished as clearly stated by Catherine Samba-Panza in the same interview she granted?

The problems of the CAR, which are indications of unresolved issues, have their basis in the history of the country. Since independence, many regulations that have been enacted are not properly enforced by the leaders. High-ranking dignitaries circumvent the rules because of the feeling that they are above the law. While the country has known internal political conflict since independence, there has been factional fighting from the late 1970s to the present. The state, for a long time, has been unable to guarantee the security of its citizens or its borders and armed groups freely move and according to their will across the border. Through the numerous conflicts in the country, over 103,153 people were internally displaced by 2011. It is a common saying in the country that “the state stops at PK 12”, which indicates that the official government reach and control does not extend beyond 12Km radius around Bangui, the capital of the CAR. This has led to the emergence of parallel structures replacing the failing state institutions in different parts of the country (Zafar and Kubota 2003; Unicef Central African Republic 2009; Frère 2010:3-10; Central African Republic November 2011; Bauters 2012) and, today, Bangui itself. Again, in the CAR, the rulers of today are the rebels of yesterday and former inner circle members who fell from grace and escaped to join rebel movements.

It was clear from the beginning that the *Séléka* coalition could not tackle the problems of the CAR when the groups that constitute this coalition had different agendas. Today, after Djotodia, these groups are splintering and compounding the precarious security situation in Cameroon.

Another unfinished issue in the political evolution of the CAR is the differences that have existed over the years among the FACA, a small and ineffective force, made up of several branches which often perceive each other as rivals, the Presidential Guard being the best known and the Gendarmerie which operates on its own. In fact, rather than complementing the army, the gendarmerie has historically competed with it or with other government security agencies all of this for the president's trust and support to the exclusion of the others. Since its creation, shortly after independence, the gendarmerie has at times functioned independently and at other times served under the chief of staff of the armed forces (Berman and Lombard 2008, 15; Bauters 2012, 24). This is compounded by the proliferation of self defense groups. Whenever there has been a change of government, the military is affected.

In the present circumstance, the *Séléka* fighters and anti-*balaka* are locked in battle and this has an impact on the country's security system. Former FACA soldiers and others serving the government of Bozizè were either suppressed or forced to flee with weapons. This is a very serious problem because the security of the country can neither be ethnicised, as was done by Kolingba, Patassè and Bozizè, nor changed at will by those who seize power with a barrel of the gun. Soon after the *Séléka* took over control of Bangui, they began to attack and kill regular forces. The problem for this government is how to demobilise and re-integrate former fighters and former regular forces of the country. This was one of the reasons that led to their attack on the government of Bozizè and may well be 'a bone on the neck' of the new government of Catherine Samba-Panza, especially so because of the continuous fighting between competing forces. Although she vowed during her swearing in ceremony to "safeguard the peace, strengthen national unity, ensure the well-being of the Central African people, and conscientiously fulfil my work without ethnic, regional or religious considerations," (*Global Post* 2014; *The Guardian* 2014) evidence points to a different situation, more complex than before.

The fact that the *Séléka* is a coalition of groups from within and outside the CAR is a problem and is likely to be a source of disagreement between the leaders in the future. Experience shows that Bozizé seizure of power from Patassé was thanks to the support from rebel forces from Chad. When he took over control of the state he made use of Chadian fighters in his security. No sooner had he taken over, did the Bush War of 2004 to 2007

break out. Many of the former fighters were disgruntled with their non-remuneration to the degree that they wanted and took to fighting against the government. Throughout the negotiations between the government and the rebels, the issue of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration became a thorny one. How could people be disarmed, demobilised and reintegrated when there were no safeguards for this to take place? Armed groups that fought against the government accused it of failing to make this happen. It remains a problem today, considering the emergence of different factions of the anti-balaka and the *Séléka* bent on excluding the other from the decision making processes of the CAR.

These problems in the last few months of 2013 resulted in the intervention of different actors. France has increased its troops in the country to provide “a minimum of security to allow for a humanitarian intervention to be put in place” (French Troops 2013). There is also a multinational force that would be led by the African Union to help restoring peace to the CAR and assist in rebuilding its institutions. The United States has authorised up to 100 million dollars in support of the AU forces on the ground. It has also airlifted Burundian forces to the multinational forces in the country. Appeals have been made to the European Union and the UN Security Council to act fast to stem the tide of a catastrophe in the CAR (Pellerin 2013; Kelemen 2013). Today, thousands of troops are in the CAR under the coordination of MISCA, but in spite of their presence, the fracas continues in this country. Many more troops are needed to be redeployed to very volatile areas.

The formation of a government after an insurgency goes with agreements and disagreements within the belligerents and other forces eager to participate in governance. Following the military take-over in March 2013, and the transitional government that was formed, there are already dissenting voices condemning the distribution of positions. Many interpreted the government as an overwhelmingly one that led the *Séléka* regime to the exclusion of others. They are also criticising the government of Catherine Samba-Panza as not inclusive enough to heal wounds of bitterness and unite the people. Other voices argued that the attempt to expand power-sharing might actually end up sharing too much power to the instability of the state (Bekoe 2013). Fears were also expressed against Djotodia, accusing him of wanting to turn the CAR towards an Islamic state. The same could be said of the Christian president Samba-Panza, but the way the government responds to this and the way the ministers serve the population will determine subsequent response to it. The onus is, therefore, on these ministers and the entire cabinet to rise above sectarian interests and serve the country with the aim of bringing lasting peace and stability by working with the AU and the international community.

The way out of some of the problems of the CAR is to prevent disgruntled politicians from using newly formed armed groups; originally addressing local grievances to re-launch themselves into the political scene; and to develop functioning democratic institutions. There is also a need to address local grievances and develop faith in elected representatives of the people while restoring their dignity. It is also important for Catherine Samba-Panza to learn from the mistakes of past leaders and then forge new networks with the existing political elite to appease different ethnic interests and rally the population towards rebuilding a country destroyed by many years of insurgencies. She recognised this when she called on all and sundry to lay arms and help rebuild the country. Talking alone without concrete action will not solve the problem. Bekoe (2013) had argued that if some of these issues were considered, it would staff off a coup and also suggests that a critical partnership is necessary with the citizenry to inspire confidence and support. This can be made possible through earnest reform reconciliation and disarmament, which is, however, a problem, since the state is unable to make its presence felt in all the nooks and crannies of the country. Based on the sources of instability, the CAR government must truly engage in meaningful bilateral relations with neighbouring countries to handle the problems of refugees and other insurgent groups. This can be mutually beneficial if it establishes peace and tries to support these countries to solve their problems, because, by extension, it will be handling some of the complex problems associated with the instability in these neighbouring countries. In short, it will also be a way of solving some of the problems of the CAR.

## Conclusion

In this study, we have attempted to show that some countries in sub-Saharan Africa have a history of insurgency or civil unrest which has been a result of internal and external factors. Examples of these countries have been highlighted. While some of these countries have tried to solve these problems, others are still embroiled in insurgencies, rendering them more or less as failed states. The central African sub-region to which the CAR belongs has had its own fair share of these problems, which have been a source of insecurity and destabilisation, not only within, but also between countries of the region.

The historical roots of the insurgency in the CAR have been traced in this study. The political instability and infighting in the country were introduced by the French and the Arab slave trade raiders in the area prior to the colonisation of the territory by the French. Groups were pitted against

one another and development was unequal, leading to problems for the country when it achieved political independence, in August 1960. The centralisation of the administration in the hands of a few elite followed the independence of the territory. The leaders ethnicised the state apparatus to the exclusion of other competent individuals from other ethnic groups. The result was frequent military coups and the problems of the country remained unattended to by successive regimes in the CAR. The grievances of the people accumulated and boiled over whenever there was an opportunity under the respective governments that ruled the CAR, especially from the late 1970s onwards. The 2012 to 2013 insurgency leading to the overthrow of the government of Bozizé, like other regimes before this, is rooted in the history of the creation and management of the CAR. Michel Djotodia found the potato too hot to handle and was pressured to quit. Now he watches the unfolding melodrama in his country from Benin.

The study discussed the events leading to the *Séléka* seizure of power in the CAR. Several factors were responsible for the rebellion against the government which had their basis in the unfulfilled promises of the Bozizé government and the non-respect of the Libreville accords, among others. Although following a ceasefire agreement in January 2013, which saw the participation of the *Séléka* in the transitional government, they soon pulled out of the government in March 2013 and by 24 March 2013 they had seized power. We examine the context within which the *Séléka* government took over power and showed that there were still many unresolved issues in the CAR which the government of Catherine Samba-Panza must genuinely address before the country can move onto the path of peace, stability and national unity and integration. There must be a sustained and committed attempt to diagnose the problems of the country from the past regimes with a view setting up credible institutions and conducting a decent election in February next year. Anything less than this will be considered a child's play which will only lay another foundation for the insurgency and insecurity that are now the trademarks of the CAR.

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the historical roots of the *Séléka* insurgency in the Central African Republic (CAR), from December 2012 to March 2013, that culminated in the overthrow of Francois Bozizé and the taking over of the mantle of leadership of the country by the *Séléka* union or coalition led by its leader, Michel Am Nondroko Djotodia and then Catherine Samba-Panza. The roots of this insurgency and instability are traced to the past and to French administration in Equatorial Africa. The study specifically examines the internal dynamics that contributed to this insurgency, as well as the consequences for internal peace and stability. The data used for analysis in this study is basically secondary and tertiary in nature. We have reinterpreted and analysed this data in the context of the continuous insurgency, instability and disintegration that this has brought to the CAR and the Central African sub-region in general. The study concludes that the *Séléka* insurgency that led to the leadership change, in March 2013 and January 2014, in the CAR, is a result of a complex interplay of factors that have been and are likely to continue making the CAR a failed state, with repercussions on the people of the country and its neighbours.

## KEYWORDS

*Séléka* insurgency; Central African Republic (CAR); Security.

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