

Central African Republic. Understanding the Séléka Insurrection of March 24 2013

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Abstract. *The Séléka insurrection of March 24, 2013 in the Central African Republic (CAR) did not surprise observers of the chequered history of this country. Since political independence from France in August 1960, the CAR has been unstable for most of its history. The formation of armed groups, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the tussle for leadership among the elite and other forces have rendered the country ungovernable. This paper examines the rationale behind the Séléka insurrection of 2013 against a background of unfulfilled promises and tussle for the leadership of a country that is notorious for internal dissension. This union of different armed groups with diverse agendas seems not to be able to hold this country together, as instability continues in the country.*

Keywords: *Africa, Central African Republic, Séléka, Insurrection, Political Instability.*

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The African continent is known to be a continent of armed insurgency, civil unrest, and instability. Some of the countries that have witnessed internecine conflicts of one kind or another include Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the CAR (Joseph, 2012, p. 23-25; Cilliers and Schünemann, 2013, p. 9-10). In the Sub-Saharan African region, military power between states and insurgency appears to be shifting often in favour of the latter. This has more or less compelled African states to deploy forces beyond their borders more frequently (Howe, 2001, p. 1). In Ethiopia for instance, the govern-

ment has been at war with the Oromo for a long time, and in Somalia, the brutalities of the *Al-Shabaab* are well known including also sea piracy. These conflicts have compromised peace and security in the Horn of Africa and beyond. In Nigeria the *Boko Haram* insurgency and the 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 have created unfavourable socio-political and economic conditions. There is also a proliferation of internal and inter-state violence in the sub-region. In fact, recurrent political crises and military hostilities have kept the central African sub-region continuously in the headlines. (Musifiku, 1999, p. 90-91; Frère, 2010, p. 1).

The Central African Republic (CAR) 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). The country, with an estimated population of over 4.5 million (Miles, 2013) is rich in natural resources, notably diamond, gold, copper, uranium, and timber. Its ethnic configuration indicates that the CAR is an amalgamation of various ethnic groups, like many other African countries. The Gbaya are an important ethnic group in the CAR. They got to the country because they were seeking refuge from the Fulani of Northern Cameroon in the early 19th century. The Banda, who were fleeing the Muslim Arab slave raids of Sudan, also moved into the country later in the 19th century. There are over 80 ethnic groups in the country, each with its own language. The largest ethnic groups in the country include the Gbaya 33%, Banda 27%, Mandjia 13%, Sara 10%, Mboum 7%, M'Baka 4%, and Yakoma 4%. The other smaller groups make up the remaining 2%. The major religious groups to which the people adhere are indigenous and also foreign. While over 35% of the population is of indigenous beliefs, 25% adhere to Protestantism, and another 25% are Catholics, while 15% are Muslims (Alusala, 2007, p. 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 from a chronic shortage of drinking water. The country is also politically unstable, corruption and street mugging are rife, and the economic climate is uncertain, attracting little foreign investment. The CAR has barely functioning state institutions, an economy in shambles, an impoverished population, and a security apparatus in complete disarray (N'Ddiaye, 2007, p.1; Central African Republic Country Level Information; Country Profile Central African Republic). These problems put together have made the country vulnerable to insurgency and instability in the Central African sub-region. This has often resulted in intervention and interference of various forms by gullible and self-seeking neighboring states notably Chad, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Objectives and Significance of the Study

In this study our focus is on the bases of the *Séléka* insurrection, which resulted in the overthrow of the government of General François Bozizé in March 2013. This rebellion was one out of the many that took place in the country since its independence from France in August 1960. The historical roots of the instability and disintegration of the country are examined to show that CAR had problems from its creation and these have manifested themselves in fratricidal wars time and again. The study also examines the grievances of the *Séléka* insurgents and the challenges that await the new *Séléka* led government which, if not carefully handled, is still likely to plunge the country further into greater chaos and pandemonium.

The significance of this study today cannot be over-emphasized. Since the CAR has been in instability, witnessed a leadership crisis, coups, counter-coups and armed insurrections, there is a compelling need to unravel the factors responsible for these events. Although the country is rich in natural resources such as timber, gold, copper and diamond, paradoxically it is one of the poorest in the world. The saga in a country rich in natural endowments only lends credence to the fact that countries with resources like Nigeria and Angola are cursed. While the problems of nation-building in the CAR may not only be attributed to the abundance of natural resources, they have contributed to the present state of affairs. The roots of the instability in the country are not only internal, but more importantly external.

Again, this study is important because continuous instability in the CAR is a clear indication that ECCAS and CEMAC charged with the responsibility of mobilizing the countries of the Central African sub-region have failed to bring peace and stability in this country. Rather, the country has been engaged in serious conflicts with two members of these blocs, namely Chad and the DRC. The failure of these two blocs to seek a lasting solution to the crisis in the CAR makes a mockery of the continental unity preached by the African Union (AU). For Africa to attain this goal, the regional groupings must take the lead and facilitate the task of the AU, otherwise the continent will continue to spend resources for resolving conflicts rather than providing for the daily needs of the people. To better understand the *Séléka* insurgency in the CAR, there is need to resort to the history of the country before and after independence.

Roots of Rebellion in the CAR

The roots of the crisis and instability in the Central African sub-region as a whole are in the French policy of assimilation, which became the guiding principle for colonial administration. Forje (2005, p. 228) argues that the politics of assimilation pursued by the French in the Central African sub-region was a betrayal of national sovereignty. This betrayal of sovereignty was compounded by the emergence of the governing elite.

This class of people converted this into a new form of hegemony. Hegemonic tendencies were expressed in the form of transfer of state property into personal/private property, ethnical cleansing of the state and the creation of a family dynasty as the legitimate source of succession. Forje further argues that the sovereignty of the people of this sub-region was greedily hijacked by this privileged elite few. They instituted the politics of exclusion in place of inclusion. The result of this kind of policy, after the newly gained independence, plunged the Central African region into turmoil. The creation of the CAR, from the period of colonization to independence in 1960, witnessed a manifestation of hegemonic tendencies in different ways by both the French and the local elite.

The numerous crises in the CAR have their roots in the history of the country, from the past to its independence from France, on August 13, 1960. French colonial administration and the Arab slave trade in the area contributed negatively to the future stability of the country. The territory was initially organized 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 up 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 the 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 because its own infrastructure remained poor. Besides, the Arab slave trade raids from present day Chad and the Sudan resulted in decline of the population in large areas of the CAR. This eventually had an effect on the development and the ethnic and religious tensions in the country today (Alusala, 2007, p. 11; Berman and Lombard, 2008, p. 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 encourage the French to devote resources towards its own separate development. Rather, they channeled 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 underdeveloped 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 allowed armed groups from both countries to operate with impunity across their own borders and destabilize their governments. On the other hand, the Arab slave raids across 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 destabilize 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 all the benefits from it (Bauters, 2012, p. 9). When it got its 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 part, Jean-Bedel Bokassa declared himself as "President for life" in 1972 and emperor in 1977 (Polity IV Country, 2010, p. 1; Bauters, 2012, p.10-12). Actions 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 August 13, 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 August 13, 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, p. 12; Bauters, 2012, p. 10). The ethnical cleansing 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, compared to others like the Gbaya. Ange-Félix Patassé, who succeeded Kolingba in 1993 compounded matters further when he created ethnic militia groups 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 leadership from 2003 to 2013 was accused of ethnic considerations in the leadership of the country (A Widening War, 2007, p. 3; Bauters, 2012, p. 14). This was a precedent set by Boganda and pursued by his successors who ruled the country after independence. Such a precedent was bound to lead to resistance in the future.

Bases of the March 2013 Government Overthrow

The path to the March 2013 *Séléka* seizure of power in the CAR can easily be traced to 1993 when multiparty elections were organized in the country. General André Kolingba, who had ruled the CAR as his private property from 1981 to 1993 finally yielded to the will of the people and the wind of change that was blowing from the West by accepting multiparty democracy. This election led to his defeat at the polls and resulted in civil unrest, army mutinies, instability and civil war in the country (Frère, 2010, p. 2). The defeat of General André Kolingba in the general elections of 1993 was an ill omen for the country. It laid the foundation for numerous coup attempts on the government of Ange-Félix Patassé which ended in his overthrow and the overthrow of his successor General François Bozizé in the March 2013 armed insurrection. Between 1993 and 2003, when Ange-Félix Patassé was forced out of power by Bozizé and his men, seven coup attempts were organized against his government. This was not a mere coincidence, but a result of the system of governance that had been put in place by former leaders of the country namely David Dacko, Jean-Bédél Bokassa and André Kolingba. It was also due to the fact that the CAR like other African countries was experiencing a tumultuous economic quagmire and increased armed insurrection against the second elected government in the history of the country.

When Patassé became the democratically elected president of the CAR in 1993, he seemed not to have learnt anything from history. He sought to follow the footsteps of André Kolingba by promoting ethnicity in state governance (Forje, 2005, p. 227-228). Kolingba, while in office, had embarked on a massive recruitment of the Yakoma, his ethnic group, into the army at the expense of other ethnic groups and by the time he left office in 1993, 70 % of the army was in the hands of the Yakoma who are only 4 % of the population of the CAR. Patassé did not arrest this problem rather he 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 including Cameroon (Fomin, 2005, p. 167). By pursuing this policy of ethnicisation of governance the problems of CAR were compounded because a rift was created between the *Riverain* and *Savanners* as the people of the South and North were/are referred to. President Patassé redeployed the Yakoma military recruited by Kolingba and most Presidential Guards during his period of rule were from the Sara-Kaba ethnic group of the North. The overwhelming presence of the Yakoma in the military remained 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, p. 3; Mehler, 2009).

In spite of the ethnic politics of Patassé, the Northern part of the CAR remained relatively underdeveloped under his presidency. The reform he initiated 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, p. 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 with the defeat of Patassé's forces in 2003.

Although armed groups existed 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 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 1997. As many arms were smuggled into the country, children were co-opted into fighting in the armed groups (Ayike, 2005, p. 192; Organized Crime, 2011, p. 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, p. 18). Many more armed groups emerged to challenge existing ones and also government forces created a situation of insecurity and instability. Throughout his reign Patassé was 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 neighboring 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, p. 9; Taylor, 2005, p. 241; IFAD Participation in the Debt Initiative, 2008, p. 1). Civil servants and government workers also went through a decade of unpaid wages which compounded the socio-political crises of the country from 1996 onwards leading to Patassé's overthrow in 2003 (Central African Republic, Country Level Information). To protect himself and continue to rule the people, Patassé enlisted foreign support from Libya and the DRC and also created a personal armed group known as *karako*, meaning "peanut" in the local *Sango* language (Mehler, 2009; Bauters, 2012, p. 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, p. 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 of the CAR.

The dismissal of General François Bozizé as Army Chief of Staff by President Patassé in 2001 helped the sacked Chief of Staff to escape to Chad and mobilize forces against him with a view to 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, p. 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 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 organized another election after that 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 when they were overpowered by those of Bozizé with the assistance of Chadians. The presidential palace fell to Bozizé while President Patassé was out of the country attending a Community of Sahel-Saharan States (COMESA) summit in Niger (Mehler, 2009). Upon his return from this summit, the president could not land in Bangui and was forced to fly to Cameroon and finally took exile in Togo.

Other issues 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 hardly come to terms with mismanagement of state resources. The privileged enriched themselves while the masses wallowed in squalor with no basic amenities like water and electricity. The government of Patassé was bound to crumble like a pack of cards 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 more so because Patassé was the first leader of the country to come from the North (Country Profile, 2007, p. 4) and people from the densely populated North-West impoverished region also expected improvements in their region, which were not forthcoming. Patassé was therefore placed in a dilemma, which was satisfying his kith and kin of the North and other discontented groups in the South of the country.

People of the Northern part of the CAR who expected much from their own began to develop misgivings with Patassé's government. In an attempt to counter the cross-border raids of Bozizé's men in the North and the *coupeur des routes* syndrome, President Patassé had set up a special force outside the regular army. 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 Habré and others to Goukouni Queiddeye. They committed serious atrocities on the population in the North as was reported by local human rights organizations (Bauters, 2012, p. 13; War Crimes, 2003, p. 36; Ghura 2004, p.14). Opponents of the government criticized the excesses of this special force and especially Colonel Miskine who had Chadian connections. It was however difficult to tackle the problems of the *coupeur des routes* and the armed attacks orchestrated by Bozizé and his men because of the porous borders in the North and the 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 explains why there was opposition to his administration leading to an insurgency and defeat in March 2013.

Nature of Séléka Insurgency

The *Séléka* insurgency of March 24, 2013, which led to the 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 a 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 marginalized and almost stateless. Within the ranks of the coalition were also Islamic jihadists from Chad and Sudan. Fighters of the Lord's Resistance Army (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 neighboring Sudan, notably 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 organized by the UFDR in North Eastern CAR led by Michel Djotodia. The war soon escalated into a major fight, where the UFDR forces fought against the CAR government together with other rebel groups located in other parts of the CAR.

The 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 armed groups that refused to sign a peace agreement with the government. As long as the government neither suppressed these groups nor provided uncontested leadership of the country, it was clear that from its inception in 2003, it was doomed for failure.

The insurgency of the *Séléka* took on a very decisive phase in December 2012. The reasons that were advanced by the rebel groups for waging war against the government 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 program of disarmament, demobilization 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 accords 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, p. 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 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 impose a regime of Islamic imprint. He contended that a majority of the people who belonged to the coalition were jihadists who spoke Arabic, and who killed, raped civilians, looted homes and Christian missions, not mosques (The Pope App, 2013). 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 religion. Whatever the case, only time will tell if 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 is likely going to deter the new government from imposing a theocratic state in the CAR, at least in the foreseeable future.

In spite of the argument of the *Séléka* to justify the insurrection in the CAR in 2013, other people have a contrary opinion 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 posited 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, 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 have ever been killed in the process. The same elite who become government ministers today are rebels of tomorrow fighting against the government and the state and going scot free. It is also difficult to explain the impunity with which successive governments privatize the state and its resources to members of their ethnic group or to a privileged few 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 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* insurgence 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 upon during the accords with the opposition. *Séléka* militants also demanded the withdrawal of South African troops 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 Bangui and took it over (Vircoulon, 2013; Central African Republic, 2013). There was therefore a generalized atmosphere of uncertainty considering the non-implementation of the Libreville Accords, with each party blaming the other for failure 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 January 11, 2013.

The *Séléka* acting strongly 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 loom-

ing food crisis because of the hike in prices among other consequences. On January 11, 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 January 18, 2013. In accordance 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 cease-fire agreement and a peace deal, foreign troops including those from South Africa were deployed in the CAR. 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, 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) that 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 to Bozizé's rule until the 2016 elections during the ceasefire agreement of January 2013. 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 favor of the government of Bozizé. The coalition led multiplied attacks on key towns and cities and brought them under their control. Bangui, the capital of the CAR, finally capitulated on March 24, 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. 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 organize elections. Following the coup, the borders of the CAR were closed with neighboring 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 is the first CAR president from the remote, neglected and large North East.

In order to stamp his authority over the country after the ouster of the government of Bozizé, the new military leader of the CAR Djotodia on March 31, 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 argues that these are actually disguised allies of the *Séléka* (Central African Republic Conflict 2012-Present). Whether this government will perform and address the myriad of problems of the people of the CAR or not is yet to be seen. The Djotodia government is barely a few months in office but there are disturbing signals as to whether it will deliver on its promises or not. Fighting by forces loyal to the ousted president continue.

As soon as the *Séléka* coalition took over the CAR, its fighters went on a rampage executing opponents, raping women, and looting homes. The takeover also resulted in recruitment of children, disappearances and kidnappings. The fighters particularly targeted members of FACA and many killings occurred in the urban areas in broad daylight. Commanders of the coalition seemed not to be able to maintain discipline within the ranks of the *Séléka* fighters (Ngoupana, 2013; Ngoupana, 2013; Vatican Radio, 2013; Reuters, 2013). Contrary to the Kimberley Process that claims that the origin of diamonds sold on the world market be made known, *Séléka* elements are strengthening their control of the lucrative diamond industry and have been selling some of the stones (Krista, 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, 2013). This is an evasive approach to the blatant human rights abuses of the coalition forces. The establishment of a Commission of Inquiry by the government is simply a way of buying time and laying the matter to rest. This will only be possible if the government will succeed in stamping its authority over the institutions of the state. It is also difficult for a coalition with different agendas to work in a coherent manner since each group wants to get the best in the redistribution of the resources of the country.

Other social problems that resulted from the *Séléka* insurgency in the CAR included the challenges to good health, nutrition because of souring food prices, clean water and insecurity. In Bangui for example, only two hospitals were functioning by April 2013 and schools were closed in the whole country while civil servants were still to get back to work. The closure of the borders had a devastating effect on the people because there was no movement of commercial goods from Douala in Cameroon to the CAR. Douala is the main port for exports and imports for the CAR. One month after the military

takeover in the CAR, motorbike taxi and bus drivers went on strike to protest because of insecurity, extortion and violence against them (Africa/Central Africa Fides.org). These are signals to the massive challenges that await the *Séléka* led government which if not well handled and on time will contribute to its own failure like other regimes before it.

Lessons and Preoccupations

Going through the arguments that were raised by the *Séléka* fighters to justify the armed insurrection against the government of Bozizé and the continuing socio-political problems of the country borne out of its historic past, there are a number of preoccupations for the *Séléka* led government. Considering the degree of instability and disintegration in the Central African region due to the escalating wars in the CAR and neighboring countries like Sudan, DRC and Chad one may argue that this country may find difficulties in solving its own problems which are inextricably linked to the problems of the neighbors and other countries having influence there. Since independence, many regulations that have been enacted are not properly enforced by the leaders, for their selfish interests. High-ranking dignitaries circumvent the rules because of the feeling that they are above the law that should control and guide everyone.

Today, the *Séléka* are in control of the CAR but the country has known internal schism since independence and factional fighting from the late 1970s to the present. The state has been unable to guarantee the security of its citizens or its borders for a long time, and armed groups freely move and act at will across the border. Through frequent conflicts in the country, over 103,153 people were internally displaced by 2011. There is a common saying among the people of the CAR that “the state stops at PK 12” meaning that the official government reach and control does not extend beyond 12Km radius around Bangui, the capital of the CAR. This is because there is 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, p. 3-10; Central African Republic, 2011; Bauters, 2012). Again, in the CAR the rulers of today are the rebels of yesterday, and former inner circle members who fall from grace escape to join rebel movements and return to power and influence soon after. There are therefore no guarantees that the *Séléka* coalition will successfully and deliberately tackle these problems when the groups that constitute this coalition have different agendas. There is also no guarantee that coming from the North of the country like Patassè the leader of the people Michel Djotodia will improve the lives of the people of this region and control the border with Sudan, the DRC and Chad, where there have been interventions in the past. This is even more compelling for the North East of the country, which is the least developed of all of the regions of the CAR.

Another pending issue in the political evolution of the CAR is the differences that have existed over the years between the FACA, a small and ineffective force, made up of sev-

eral 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, p. 15; Bauters, 2012, p. 24). This is compounded by the proliferation of self-defense groups in different parts of the country. Whenever there has been a change of government, the military has been affected through further polarization. In the present circumstance, the *Séléka* fighters have taken over Bangui and the security of the country. Former FACA soldiers and others serving the government of Bozizé have either been 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, Patassé and Bozizé, nor changed at will by those who seize power with the barrel of a 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 demobilize 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 Bozizé and may well be 'a pain in the neck' of the new government.

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 the Bozizé seizure of power from Patassé was owed to support from rebel forces from Chad. When he took over control over the state he made use of Chadian fighters. No sooner than he took 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, demobilization and reintegration became a thorny one. How could people be disarmed, demobilized 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. Today, some of the armed groups are in power and the problem of sharing the spoils of war will crop up and is likely going to be a subject of disagreement in the very near future. How this is handled today in order not to allow for a repeat of the problem is yet to be seen with the *Séléka* leadership.

The formation of a government after an insurgency goes with agreements and disagreements between 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 have interpreted the government as an overwhelmingly led *Séléka* regime

to the exclusion of others. Other voices argue that the attempt to expand power-sharing might actually end up sharing too much power to the instability of the state (Bekoe, 2013). Fears are already being expressed against Djotodia, accusing him of wanting to turn the CAR in an Islamic state. How the government responds to this and how the ministers serve the population will determine subsequent response to it either through civil unrest or support for its actions. 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.

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 need to address local grievances and develop faith in elected representatives of the people while restoring their dignity. It is also important for Djotodia to 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. Bekoe (2013) argues that if some of these issues are considered, it will staff off a coup; he 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 a problem since state officials are unable to make the presence of the government 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 neighboring countries to handle the problems of refugees and other insurgent groups. This can be mutually beneficial if it is involved in trying to support these countries in solving their problems, because, by extension, it will be handling some of the complex problems associated with the instability in these neighboring countries. In short, it will also be a way of solving some of the problems of the CAR.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have traced the origins of the instability in the CAR leading to the *Séléka* overthrow of President François Bozizé in March 2013. The way the country was created and governed by France within French Equatorial Africa and the leadership of the country at independence laid the foundation for internal division and fighting. Again, the ethnicisation of politics and the military beginning with the government of General André Kolingba through Ange-Félix Patassé to Bozizé infuriated those groups that were excluded from the management of the affairs of the CAR. It was therefore just a matter of time for these governments to be defeated in an election as was the case of Kolingba or be forced out of power as was the case of Patassé and Bozizé. Patassé managed to rule the country for ten years against mounting tension and seven coup attempts.

Several attempts were made to bring discontented parties together following the Bush War of 2004-2007. The Libreville Accords, which were aimed at seeking a lasting so-

lution to the leadership crisis in the CAR eventually failed, as the parties to the talks accused one another of not respecting the terms of the engagement. Things dragged on until December 2012 when about five of the armed groups came together in a union to topple the government of Bozizé. In spite of the January peace talks, which saw the entry into government of members of the *Séléka* group, things soon turned sour when these members of government were recalled and fighting broke out again. The presence of South African troops and those of member countries of the Central African union did not deter the *Séléka* from advancing towards Bangui. In fact, in an attempt to stop the group from advancing on to the capital, South African forces were killed in the process.

Since March 24, the *Séléka* took over control of the CAR as François Bozizé fled the country to Cameroon. Supporters of the former leader were attacked and killed. There is still general insecurity in the country as fighting, killings, and looting continue in several parts of the territory. It is not certain how long this will last and how the present leadership will tackle this. If care is not taken, the same way through which the present leadership came to power will be the same way it will go. The signs are there to show that there is still no peace and assurance of good leadership in this country. What seem to go on are reprisals, which make the present government not different from the previous ones. Sooner, rather than later, destabilizing neighbors like Chad and Sudan will continue to fuel the crisis and benefit from the chaos that characterizes the leadership of the CAR.

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