

**Note:** This is the English translation of an op-ed in French that originally appeared in [Le Monde](#) on February 20, 2017 and was written by Enough Project Researcher, Nathalia Dukhan.

## Stop Rewarding Violence in Central African Republic

“We’ve prevented mass killings, got communities back around the table and restored Central African Republic’s government,” declared Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian as he [announced](#) the successful conclusion of Operation Sangaris—France’s military intervention. Yet the withdrawal of troops in October last year, also saw the waning of international interest in the country, leaving CAR once again out in the cold.

Massacres resumed in late September, placing civilians in CAR’s north-western, central, and eastern regions at the mercy of armed groups, and the fighting in recent months has taken a heavy toll. UN estimates suggest that at least [287 civilians](#) have been killed. But the figure is likely to be much higher as armed groups try to [cover up](#) the scale of their atrocities. As sporadic violence flares up anew in the capital, Bangui, many fear a return to widespread unrest. In 2017, the country is under the control of 14 separate armed groups. Tormentors and victims live side-by-side in the occupied zones, and civilian taxes serve to perpetuate the violence against them.

In a recent [report](#), the UN Secretary-General gave the following, unequivocal summary of the situation: “The tensions were exacerbated by the absence of tangible progress in tackling the root causes of the conflict and the posturing of armed group leaders seeking to strengthen their negotiating positions”.

### Leaders are exploiting sectarian violence

At the height of the crisis in 2014, the conflict in CAR was akin to a civil war between the country’s two main religious groups, with Christians claiming that Muslims were complicit—actively or passively—in the Séléka rebels’ atrocities in 2013. It remains a sectarian conflict today—something that armed group leaders are exploiting to serve their own interests.

Warlords are seeking to justify their existence and garner popular support by [inciting](#) and coordinating acts of violence, encouraging ethnic and religious factions that broadly support their cause to turn on other groups. As civilians look for protection within this climate of terror, young people are once again taking up arms—and then [remaining](#) members of armed groups while the situation is still volatile.

A *coup d'état* is still an ever-present threat, and armed group leaders are doing everything possible to shore up their bargaining positions. Those who wield the most power are most likely to get a seat at the negotiating table, secure top government roles, achieve military integration and, ultimately, maintain divisions in the country. The reality is that these leaders have no intention of disarming or giving up their income streams.

## Legitimising armed groups is a dangerous game

Backed by the international community, President Touadéra has opted for [dialogue](#) with armed group leaders, eschewing a “[witch-hunt](#)” and seeking to encourage voluntary disarmament. Yet this approach plays into the hands of those looking to destabilize the situation. Some warlords have even been rewarded, with the UN’s blessing. Alfred Yékatom, or “Rombhot” as he is known, [employed](#) threats and intimidation to get himself elected to the National Assembly. But at the end of 2016, [Yékatom](#) still wielded significant influence over a number of militias.

There is a widely held view that being a leader of a political and military movement is a ticket to public office, and even to power. And flagrant impunity does nothing to assuage this assumption. A recent UN [investigation report](#) raised “questions about the impartiality of the judicial system and its willingness to investigate serious crimes”—a situation that is ripe for exploitation by instigators of violence.

What’s more, this relentless thirst for power among Séléka leaders has led to calls for [secession](#)—a cause backed chiefly by the group under the command of rebel leader Nourredine Adam and Michel Djotodia, former president and head of the Séléka coalition. An [internal document](#) from October last year sought to rationalize the group’s agenda on the grounds that the Christian population in the south-west and the Muslims in the north-west could no longer co-exist—a strategy founded on nothing more than the principle of “divide and conquer”.

## Calls for a blanket amnesty are growing

Two iconic figures continue to play a front-line role in CAR’s political and military instability. Both François Bozizé, president between 2003 and 2013, and Michel Djotodia, the man who overthrew him in 2013, are seeking to exploit the situation for personal gain by sponsoring armed groups.

Since 2015, the factions behind the two men have made [numerous attempts](#) to secure a blanket amnesty, under the burden of international sanctions. Last December, Nourredine Adam and several other Séléka leaders attended [Angola-backed mediation talks](#) in Luanda, at the behest of President Touadéra. The meeting report, which has been a closely guarded secret until now, reveals two major claims—a “war crimes amnesty as a political and legal solution to help settle disputes”, and “special dispensation for former heads of state, creating an official, ceremonial status and rank that would (allow them) to remain in the country”. The second claim bears all the hallmarks of the two ex-presidents.

## Pulling back from the precipice

With no political solution to the root causes of the conflict on the horizon, there is a real risk of permanent civil war in CAR. The country faces a vicious circle of instability, driven by flagrant impunity, de facto legitimization of the actions of armed group leaders, and rewards for the instigators of violence. The only way to bring CAR’s citizens back from the precipice is to learn lessons from the last three years of French and international intervention and to recognize the failings of the current approach.

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