



# Behind the Headlines

Drivers of Violence in the Central African Republic

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By Kasper Agger    May 2014

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**COVER PHOTO**

A Chadian special forces fighter stands next to a vehicle as thousands of Muslims flee Bangui in a convoy.

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# Summary

The situation in the Central African Republic, or CAR, remains chaotic and violent with public lynchings and daily attacks terrorizing civilians across the country. The United Nations estimates that more than 1 million people—roughly one-quarter of the total population—have been displaced or fled the country.<sup>1</sup> Thousands of people have been killed—at least 2,000 since December alone, although no one knows the exact figure, which is likely much higher.<sup>2</sup> Despite having the largest number of peacekeepers ever deployed to the country, the violence in CAR continues unabated. At least 60 people were killed in the capital city of Bangui over a period of just 10 days in March 2014.<sup>3</sup>

Armed groups in CAR are financing their activities in part with significant revenues from natural resources and looting. When the Séléka rebel alliance captured the capital in March 2013, heavily armed and well-trained wildlife poachers and mercenary fighters from Chad and Sudan—some of whom were members of the Sudanese government-supported Janjaweed militia—backed the group. Séléka rebels and foreign fighters have been plundering, looting, and smuggling diamonds and ivory to pay for arms, fuel, food, and soldiers. Meanwhile, Anti-Balaka militias have been looting and killing in Muslim communities and have taken control of diamond-rich areas in the western part of CAR.

Séléka forces use violence and threats against local populations in CAR to extract diamond revenues through forced mining, theft, and cheap purchases from local traders. The diamonds are then sold to local traders or taken out of the country and sold to intermediaries, mainly in South Darfur, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, or DRC. CAR was suspended in May 2013 from the Kimberley Process, an international certification mechanism designed to prevent conflict diamonds from entering the international market.<sup>4</sup> However, the diamond trade has continued in CAR and conflict diamonds are likely entering markets abroad.

Other countries have pursued political and economic interests that have exacerbated violence in CAR and destabilized the country. Neighboring Chad and Sudan have provided support to the Séléka with the goal of installing a cooperative government that could help protect Chadian oil interests and prevent CAR from becoming a safe haven for rebels that could potentially destabilize the two countries. South Africa deployed up to 400 soldiers to protect South African investments in the oil and diamond sectors when former President François Bozizé was in office.<sup>5</sup> South African soldiers fought to protect the Bozizé government when Séléka fighters attacked Bangui, leading to the

deaths of 13 South African soldiers.<sup>6</sup> The Chadian and French governments, which also sent soldiers to CAR, did not intervene to save President Bozizé, as they had done previously in his decade-long rule. They helped him to capture power in 2003 but gradually withdrew support when he favored South Africa and China for trade and military cooperation arrangements.<sup>7</sup> Bozizé's shift, and that of France and Chad, helped enable Séléka forces to capture power.

Bringing an end to the violence in CAR is no easy task and requires efforts on many fronts by many actors. The National Transitional Council and Interim President Catherine Samba-Panza, who has been in office since January, struggle to drive the political process toward elections, planned for 2015,<sup>8</sup> while armed Anti-Balaka and Séléka groups continue to fight each other and kill civilians. Most of these groups operate without significant central command and have taken control of villages and rural areas across the country. This complicates any national peace process because CAR's leaders are largely unable to exercise direct control of numerous local armed groups. There are, however, promising developments in progress that could begin to strengthen state and security institutions. The peacekeeping mission slated for deployment in September—the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, or MINUSCA—is a welcome step and should play an important role in deterring and arresting armed groups that undermine the peace process. Some of the recently announced \$176 million in aid from international donors to the CAR government<sup>9</sup> should be used to strengthen the state administration and rebuild the justice system, which is largely dysfunctional. The appointment of Ambassador W. Stuart Symington as the U.S. Special Representative for CAR will add momentum to diplomatic efforts.<sup>10</sup> We recommend the international community build on these security and state-building efforts and take the following steps to support a peace process, expand diplomatic engagement, and promote accountability for those most responsible for the violence and for economic criminal activity.

- **The United Nations should deploy experienced mediators to work with U.S. Special Representative Symington and a diverse group of CAR leaders to spur a bottom-up peace process for CAR.** The decentralized nature of the conflict in CAR and the lack of a central command of the armed groups require a bottom-up peace approach that tackles each individual armed group through local negotiations. Such a bottom-up process should include local dialogues across the country and a national peace conference. Top-down negotiations between elites in Bangui fall short of breaking the political deadlock and ending the violence; those leaders are simply not able to control the myriad armed groups. Dialogues should prominently feature the voices of civil society actors, including women, traditional leaders, religious figures, youth, and armed groups. Moreover, the United Nations should work with CAR leaders to ensure that recommendations from the bottom-up peace process and its participants are made an integral part of CAR's transitional political process.

- **The United Nations, European Union, and/or bilateral donors should fund international advisors to support the National Transitional Council and the interim government in CAR.** Immediate support is needed to strengthen the capacity of the transitional government to deliver basic state services such as functional hospitals, schools, police, judges, tax collection, and general state administration. The strategic placement of international advisors, working together with civil servants and political leaders in CAR, could help increase the capacity of the state when used in combination with financial aid from international donors.
- **The United Nations, the World Bank, and other international donors such as the European Union should work closely with the leaders of the CAR transition to rebuild the justice system and prosecute those most responsible for the violence.** Such prosecutions and investigations should include the illicit wildlife and natural resource trade that has helped fund the Séléka and Anti-Balaka.
- **The International Criminal Court, or ICC, should prioritize investigations and prosecute those most responsible for the violence in CAR, including those involved in sexual violence and economic criminal activity.**
- **The U.N. Panel of Experts on CAR and the U.N.-appointed Commission of Inquiry on CAR should investigate and document economic criminal activity and coordinate their efforts.** The Panel of Experts investigates illicit trade, while the Commission of Inquiry investigates violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The Panel of Experts should recommend targeted sanctions for those most responsible for the illicit trade of natural resources. The Commission of Inquiry should investigate international human rights and humanitarian crimes that are associated with looting and pillage, including sexual violence.
- **The AU Peace and Security Council should appoint a special envoy to address transnational security and economic matters that involve CAR, Sudan, and Chad.** The marginalized and underdeveloped border region between Chad, CAR, and Sudan has been a source of instability in Central Africa for decades. Shifting regional alliances, rebel groups, smuggling syndicates, and mercenary networks have the ability to threaten regional stability. The AU special envoy should work with the U.S. special representative and heads of state to identify a common policy approach to the tri-border region and develop measures to prevent the governments of CAR, Sudan, and Chad from meddling in the sovereign affairs of their neighbors.
- **The African Union and United Nations should mediate negotiations between the governments of Chad and CAR on a bilateral agreement for the exploration of the cross-border oilfields between the two states.** Chad is extracting oil from cross-border oilfields along the border with CAR, which may be depleting the oil revenues accessible to CAR in the future. Typically, such disputes are handled in bilateral talks,

but given CAR's weakness, a mediated dialogue is necessary. An agreement that is developed transparently and with international oversight could ensure that the governments and people of both Chad and CAR benefit from the oil wealth.

- **The United States and China should urge the Kimberley Process to send review missions to the United Arab Emirates, Belgium, and India for investigation into the smuggling of conflict diamonds from CAR.** CAR has been suspended from the Kimberley Process, or KP, since May 2013 because of the military coup and the danger of conflict diamonds. Rebel groups in CAR, however, continue to mine and trade conflict diamonds, which are then likely to enter the international diamond trade through the neighboring countries of Cameroon, the DRC, and Sudan. From here, the diamonds go to the main international trading and manufacturing centers for diamonds: Dubai, Antwerp, and India. Review missions and investigations are needed to tighten controls in the trading centers, halt this illegal trade, and identify individuals and companies against whom the United States and the United Nations could issue targeted sanctions.
- **The U.S. government should, if security conditions allow, reopen the embassy in Bangui.** The U.S. Embassy in Bangui is important to support U.S. Special Representative Symington's peacemaking efforts, monitor the drivers of violence, and communicate early warnings. Moreover, it is in the national interest of the United States to prevent CAR from becoming a safe haven or recruitment zone for rebel groups and terrorist networks that can further destabilize an already volatile part of Africa.

# Introduction

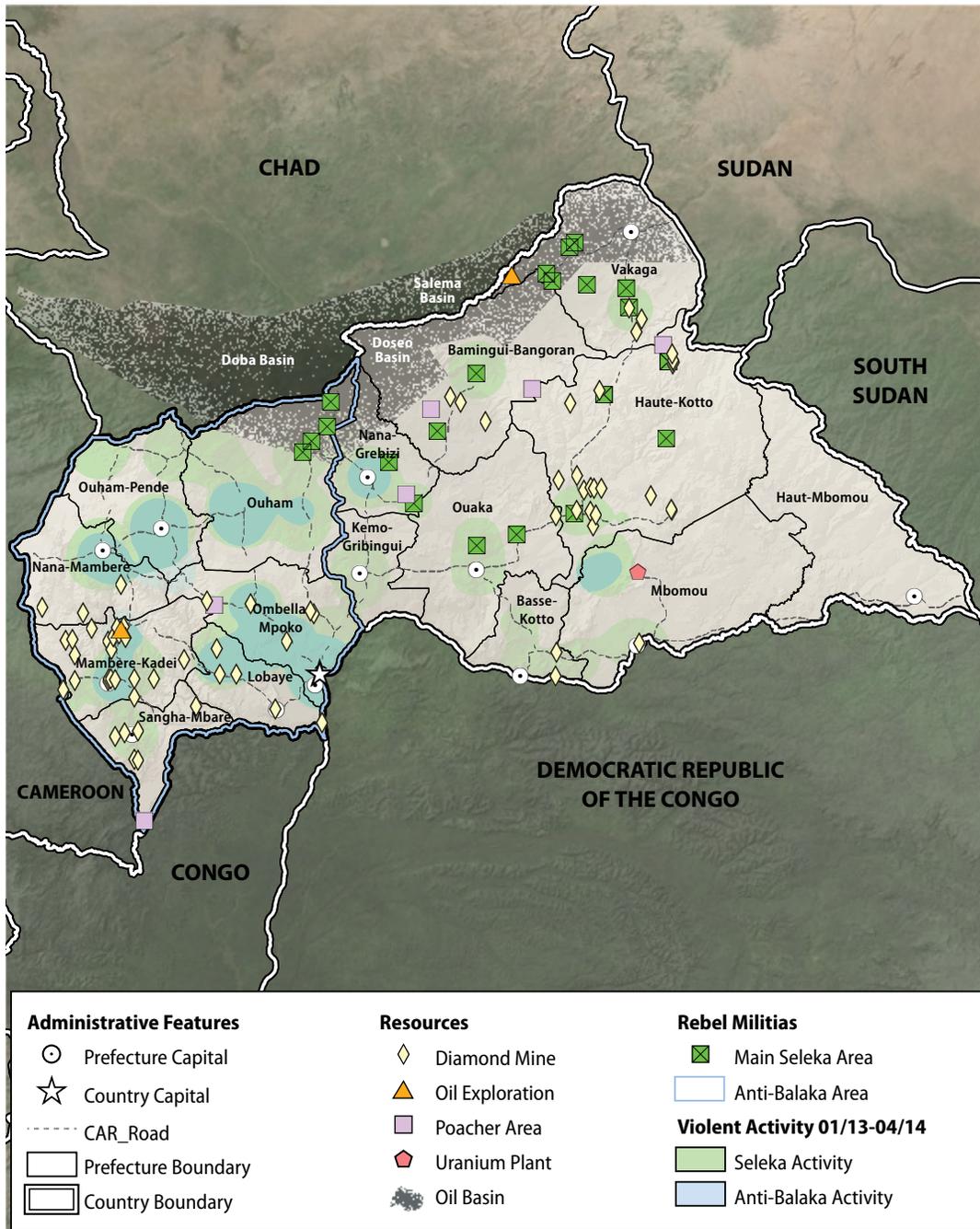
The Central African Republic is an extremely impoverished country that has seen little development since its independence from France in 1960. It is ranked 180 out of 186 countries on the U.N. Human Development Index<sup>11</sup> and is in the Fund for Peace's top 10 failed states, next to Haiti and Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> The latest surge of violence in the country began when the Séléka rebels captured power in March 2013. They were responsible for mass killings, sexual violence, and looting.<sup>13</sup> Left largely without national or international protection, local civilians rose against the Séléka and formed self-defense groups, some of which have coalesced into the Anti-Balaka militias. Similar groups formed during the 1990s to protect the population from armed robbers and rebels.<sup>14</sup> Soldiers from the former army, which had been dissolved when the Séléka captured power, quickly joined the Anti-Balaka fighters. The Anti-Balaka group professionalized, acquired powerful arms, and attacked Bangui in December 2013, weakening the Séléka, who largely left the capital in January.

Since then, state institutions have practically come to a standstill. Civil servants received their first paycheck in six months in March,<sup>15</sup> and universities and most public schools have been closed since December.<sup>16</sup> Hospitals are unable to treat large numbers of patients, despite lifesaving support provided by aid organizations—such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, or ICRC, and Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF—and the dedication of local health care professionals.<sup>17</sup> The government faces a \$70 million deficit on the 2013 budget and a 36 percent drop in expected revenue.<sup>18</sup> The government lacks the cash it needs to fund basic functions of the state.<sup>19</sup> The 135-member National Transitional Council and the 20-member government headed by Interim President Samba-Panza do not have resources or leverage to stem the violence and develop a viable political process. They struggle to keep the country together.<sup>20</sup> Former Interim President Michel Djotodia, the Séléka leader who was ousted from the CAR presidency and reportedly in exile in Benin,<sup>21</sup> is seemingly attempting to split the country in two in order to create an independent state in the northeastern part of the country where the Séléka rebellion originated.<sup>22</sup> Approximately 5,000 international peacekeepers led by the African Union and 2,000 French troops are currently deployed in the country, but they have not been able to contain the violence and struggle to operate outside the capital.<sup>23</sup>

There is a popular perception that the conflict in CAR is an outcome of religious fighting between Muslim Séléka rebels and Christian Anti-Balaka militias, but this perception overlooks the underlying drivers of the conflict and the long-term policies needed to spur peaceful development in the country. Some members of the Séléka are indeed Muslims, and foreign fighters from largely Muslim Chad and Sudan were part of the Séléka. They were, however, united less by religion than by grievances against then-President Bozizé and the promise of opportunity for personal enrichment through looting. Similarly, the Anti-Balaka groups are neither united nor motivated by religion. They formed to protect civilians against Séléka abusers but then imitated their gruesome actions by killing almost exclusively Muslims—who they perceive as Séléka collaborators—and looting property. They too are motivated by revenge and the promise of economic gains. Moreover, the conflict in CAR is part of a broader regional and international conflict system in which direct involvement of outside countries and mercenary rebel networks destabilizes the country as these actors pursue state control, natural resources, economic gains, and influence in Central Africa.

# Central African Republic Crisis, 2013 to 2014

A map developed by DigitalGlobe imagery analysts provides an overview of locations where Anti-Balaka and Séléka forces operate relative to areas with poaching activity and natural resources.



Source: DigitalGlobe/Adrianna Valenti and Joe Ulrich; U.S. Geological Survey; International Peace Information Service; Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, or ACLED; Simba Energy Inc.; and ERHC Energy Inc.

# The Séléka rebel alliance

The Séléka group formed in 2012 when at least four different rebel groups came together to create a united front against then-President Bozizé, who came to power through a military coup in 2003.<sup>24</sup> The total number of fighters in Séléka is unclear, but people in Bangui estimate that the group started with 5,000 fighters but then gradually grew to 20,000 fighters when they captured Bangui.<sup>25</sup> The extended force includes local people from CAR, as well as foreign mercenaries and poachers. Some joined voluntarily, but there have also been reports of forceful recruitment of child soldiers.<sup>26</sup> Séléka seized Bangui and ousted Bozizé in March 2013 but then failed to contain violence across the country.

International pressure forced Interim President Michel Djotodia to step down in January after an emergency parliamentary summit hosted in the Chadian capital of N'Djamena.<sup>27</sup> Following Djotodia's departure, tensions escalated in Bangui, and Séléka fighters and Muslim civilians began to flee toward the north.<sup>28</sup> Senior Séléka leaders fled the country, and the alliance has broken into several smaller armed groups with limited central command. Many of the Séléka fighters have retreated to their stronghold in the central and northeastern part of the country that borders Chad and Sudan. An estimated 3,000 to 4,000 Séléka fighters, however, remain confined to military barracks in Bangui under the control of AU forces.<sup>29</sup>



Séléka fighters walk in front of the Hotel Ledger Plaza Bangui on March 27, 2013, soon after taking control of the capital. AP PHOTO

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## Diamonds

*Séléka needed cash to pay soldiers, to buy food for the soldiers, to get petrol for their vehicles, and to buy arms. The diamond trade helped them to get some of that cash.*  
— Diamond trader, Bangui<sup>30</sup>

From their northern stronghold, Séléka leaders and fighters are consolidating control over natural resources and strengthening their ties with Sudanese and Chadian armed actors who are involved in the violent and illicit resource trade that helped fund the Séléka's rise

to power.<sup>31</sup> The Séléka have considerable influence in the marginalized but resource-rich northeastern provinces of Bamingui-Bangoran, Vakaga, and Haute-Kotto, near the border with Chad and Sudan. The Séléka's influence is particularly strong in the areas around the towns of Birao, N'Délé, Sam-Ouandja, and all the way down to Bria.<sup>32</sup> Séléka leaders claim to be fighting to improve the conditions for the local population of this impoverished region, which has poor schools, bad roads, and limited health care facilities.<sup>33</sup>

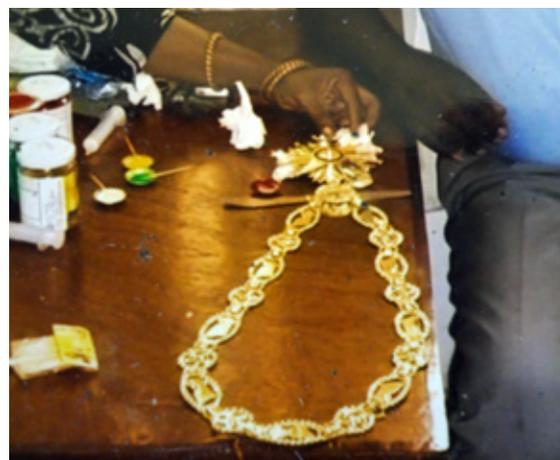
In consolidating control over their stronghold, Séléka leaders were able to acquire food, fuel, vehicles, and weapons with revenue from looting and high-value natural resources, such as diamonds and elephant ivory, acquired through activities coordinated closely with Sudanese and Chadian actors. The official diamond export from CAR was valued at \$61.4 million in 2011.<sup>34</sup> It is estimated, however, that at least 30 percent of CAR's diamonds leave the country illegally; consequently, the total diamond trade could be much higher because the most valuable stones are often smuggled to avoid taxes.<sup>35</sup> Data provided by the Kimberley Process from 2012 places the per-carat value of CAR diamonds at \$170.<sup>36</sup> And much of CAR's diamonds are unmined; a 2010 study by the U.S. Geological Survey estimates that there are 39 million carats of alluvial diamonds in the western and eastern parts of CAR.<sup>37</sup>

*When we started this movement about the exclusion of the north, we brought local communities together, and they gave us some support, but it was not enough. Then slowly we started to trade diamonds, and it became like a business for us.*

— Senior Séléka leader, Bangui<sup>38</sup>

The Séléka's involvement in the diamond trade extends to the group's senior leadership. Former Interim President Michel Djotodia and his close ally Zakaria Damane—who founded the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity, or UFDR, in 2006—have been trading diamonds in Vakaga and Haute-Kotto. They have also sourced diamonds from areas around Sam-Ouandja and N'Délé. Damane frequently travelled to the diamond-rich area of Bria to maintain control of the area and procure diamonds; he was the most senior Séléka commander posted in the area since the March 2013 coup.<sup>39</sup>

Other top Séléka commanders who have held posts in the Séléka-led government and have direct ties to leadership are also involved in the diamond trade. Adam Nouredine and Abdoulaye Hissene—both individually and as leaders of the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace, or CPJP—have controlled diamond-rich areas around Bria, Nzako, and N'Délé at least since 2006.<sup>40</sup> Violence and threats against the local population allowed the group to control the areas and to gather diamonds cheaply, at times through forced labor.<sup>41</sup> A local journalist from Bria reported to the Enough Project that the “CPJP was always about the diamond trade and the money; they never really tried to take power before they joined Séléka.”<sup>42</sup>



A Central African goldsmith showed the Enough Project a photo of an 800-gram gold chain with a five-carat diamond and 22 smaller diamonds that former Interim President Michel Djotodia commissioned for his inauguration in August 2013. Local media reported that the chain was false; the goldsmith, however, told the Enough Project that he personally made a second chain with gold powder provided by then-Minister of Mines Herbert Gotran Djono-Ahaba. The raw diamond from CAR was cut in Dubai and then sent back to Djotodia. ENOUGH PROJECT/KASPER AGGER

Séléka Commander Hissene—the son of Adoum Kette, a wealthy diamond trader based in Bria—spent a number of years in the Belgian city of Antwerp, the world’s diamond capital, trading diamonds for his father. Hissene established a camp in the diamond-rich areas surrounding the village of Nzako in 2011, where he was responsible for sourcing diamonds and control of the area.<sup>43</sup> Hissene was a ministerial advisor on youth and sports under the interim government but reportedly fled to Qatar in March because of a legal dispute with a Congolese businessman over diamond mining rights.<sup>44</sup> Nouredine is believed to have left CAR, and his current location is unknown. Some diplomats in Bangui, however, speculate that he could have joined Djotodia in Benin.<sup>45</sup>

Senior-level Séléka members and their associates sell the diamonds they procure to local traders in CAR or take the diamonds across the border and sell them to intermediaries in Chad, Sudan, Cameroon, and the DRC. Some traders in Bangui claim that considerable amounts of the Séléka diamonds go through Nyala in South Darfur because of the group’s extensive networks in that region.<sup>46</sup> The traders and intermediaries then bring the diamonds to international trade hubs in South Africa, Belgium, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, among others.<sup>47</sup> Diamond traders in Bangui and officials from the CAR Ministry of Mines openly offered to sell diamonds to the author of this report and presented official state documents that could be used to bring diamonds through customs in Bangui’s airport. Moreover, they explained that it is easy to obtain Kimberley Process certificates through forgery in neighboring Cameroon and the DRC, which are members of the KP. Dubai was mentioned by traders and international diamond experts as a place where it is easy to “give illicit diamonds a second lease on life” through forged KP certificates.<sup>48</sup> The extent of such forgery merits further investigation.

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## Ivory poaching

The diamond trade is not the only source of financing and troop support for the Séléka; the mass killings of elephants throughout CAR have also enriched the armed group and expanded its ties to regional armed actors. Park rangers from CAR’s two northern national parks, Bamingui-Bangoran and Manovo-Gounda Saint Floris, reported to the Enough Project that a group of 70 to 75 Séléka fighters, including former park rangers, attacked the ranger post in Sangha on December 12, 2012. They looted 18 pickup trucks, including a fully loaded 13,000-liter petrol truck, and obtained 24 AK-47 machine guns.<sup>49</sup> The Séléka returned to the area in February 2013 and killed a group of 12 fully grown elephants that regularly visited areas around the ranger camp.<sup>50</sup> Séléka forces were also responsible for the slaughter of at least 25 elephants in May 2013 at the Dzanga-Sangha Reserve<sup>51</sup> and for the alleged killing of an unknown number of elephants close to Yaloke in February 2013.<sup>52</sup> Poachers do not only kill elephants; they also exact a heavy toll on local populations. They kill park rangers who struggle to protect elephants, force local people to serve as porters, and loot food and clothes from civilians.<sup>53</sup>

Ivory prices have soared recently due to increased demand from a growing middle class in Asia. The wholesale price for raw ivory varies depending on the quality of the tusk.

On the black market in Asia, elephant tusks are worth an estimated \$1,000 to \$1,300 per pound. With adult male elephant tusks weighing roughly 135 pounds and adult female tusks weighing roughly 20 pounds, a single elephant tusk can sell for \$20,000 to \$175,500 in the Asian market.<sup>54</sup> Further investigation, however, is needed to estimate how much Sudanese poachers and Séléka rebels have been paid per pound.

As with the diamond trade, the responsibility for elephant poaching and revenues from ivory sales extends to top Séléka leaders and involves regional armed groups, including the Janjaweed. According to park rangers and professional hunters, large groups of Sudanese poachers based out of South Darfur regularly cross into CAR, Chad, Cameroon, and neighboring countries to kill elephants for ivory. They bring the ivory back to wealthy Sudanese business people, who organize and equip the poachers with satellite phones, night goggles, and weapons.<sup>55</sup> Reports indicate that some of the poachers are members of the Janjaweed and some are soldiers from the Sudanese army.<sup>56</sup>

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## Mercenaries

High-level connections between the Séléka and Sudanese poachers have developed and grown over time with the help of political connections. Djotodia spent several years as an official counselor for the Bozizé government in the South Darfur regional capital of Nyala, where he built extensive networks with armed mercenaries and poachers who later joined the Séléka.<sup>57</sup> Civil servants from the Ministry of Water, Forest, and Environment, which regulates national parks in CAR, have told the Enough Project that former minister and Séléka leader Moussa Dhaffane authorized Sudanese poachers to kill the elephants in Yaloke and Dzanga-Sangha. Dhaffane has also been connected to the looting of the ministry's warehouse, which housed a stockpile of an estimated 600 kilograms of ivory confiscated from poachers over the past 20 years, worth roughly \$1.5 million in Asia.<sup>58</sup> The stockpile was described as historical and included valuable horns and skins from different wild species.<sup>59</sup> When interviewed by the Enough Project, Dhaffane denied any such involvement, but he did confirm that Sudanese poachers who were affiliated with the Séléka went to Yaloke and Dzanga-Sangha to kill elephants. He explained: "Poachers from Sudan supported some of the Séléka groups with arms; they were also used as mercenaries. Some of these poachers went to Dzanga-Sangha and Yaloke to kill elephants. That was their payment."<sup>60</sup>

Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries are also involved in elephant poaching and the diamond trade. Some of these fighters were also members of the Janjaweed in Darfur and joined the Séléka around the time when they started their first coordinated attacks in late 2012 in the northern part of CAR. The foreign commanders brought heavy weapons and well-trained soldiers in exchange for access to looting, diamonds, and ivory poaching.<sup>61</sup> The Séléka's force size is believed to have quadrupled around the time that the Séléka seized Bangui—some of the additional forces were poachers and mercenaries, while others were local people from CAR.

*Less than a third or maybe a quarter of Séléka were mercenaries, but they were all well armed and know how to fight. ... There is no real difference between poachers and mercenaries; they are all for hire."*

— Senior Séléka leader, Bangui<sup>62</sup>

The most well-known mercenary commander tied to the Séléka is Sudanese self-proclaimed “General” Moussa Assimeh, who is allegedly a high-ranking member of the Janjaweed militia and is closely tied to the Sudanese government.<sup>63</sup> The U.N. Panel of Experts on the Sudan reports that he was part of the group that captured Bangui and that he commanded a group of 2,000 mercenaries from Darfur.<sup>64</sup> Assimeh established a camp in one of the largest military barracks in Bangui, and Djotodia frequently used his forces to fight resistance in Bangui’s pro-Bozizé Boy-Rabe district.<sup>65</sup> As president, Djotodia promoted Assimeh to commander of the national order and awarded him with a *Medaille de la Reconnaissance* for his efforts to disarm and fight Séléka opponents.<sup>66</sup> Assimeh left Bangui in October 2013 and reportedly returned to Sudan.<sup>67</sup>

Sudanese Colonel Abdallah and his entourage of 17 Chadian fighters led another group of mercenaries that joined the Séléka. This group included recently recruited youths from CAR and arrived in Bangassou shortly before the coup in March 2013. An international aid worker reported:

*His troops looted everything in the city. All buildings were emptied, including the barracks, the police station, the jail, schools, government buildings, the only gas station, churches and countless local people fled. All the [looted property was] sent north to Chad and Sudan—cars, chairs, tables, everything. When there was nothing left to loot, they set up checkpoints around town demanding cash for people to pass.*<sup>68</sup>

Abdallah was arrested in October 2013 and brought back to Bangui by his senior Séléka commanders.<sup>69</sup> In April, he was seen in the town of Bambari, walking freely in military fatigues.<sup>70</sup> MINUSCA and the CAR government face a massive task in bringing an end to such obvious cases of impunity.

Valuable diamonds, elephant ivory, and looting have equipped senior Séléka leaders with the money, the forces, and the access—through top political connections—to fund their rebellion with the help of actors from CAR, Chad, and Sudan. If Séléka leaders and fighters continue to build these alliances and consolidate control over diamond mines and natural parks with elephant populations, they will remain a powerful, well-armed, and well-funded force. Séléka fighters and allies, however, face formidable threats from other armed groups in CAR, including local Anti-Balaka militias.

# The Anti-Balaka militias

The Anti-Balaka emerged in mid-2013 as a response to Séléka abuse against civilians. With no one to provide protection, local people started to organize self-defense groups, armed with simple weapons—such as single-shot hunting rifles, machetes, spears, and bows—to fight the Séléka.<sup>71</sup> Similar groups formed during the 1990s to defend villages in the western part of the country from armed robbers and militias from Chad.<sup>72</sup>

*When Djotodia came to power we did not refuse him, there have been many coups in CAR. It was good that he came to change something; Bozizé didn't do anything for us. It's what happened later that made us angry. The Séléka didn't change anything. They only looted, attacked, and killed.*

— Anti-Balaka fighter, Bangui<sup>73</sup>

Members of the former national army—the Forces Armées Centrafricaines, or FACA—some of whom were loyal to former President Bozizé, quickly joined Anti-Balaka groups and brought military skills and weapons. The Anti-Balaka became more organized and continued to acquire more advanced weapons, including AK-47 guns, rocket-propelled grenades, or RPGs, and hand grenades,<sup>74</sup> through both their fights with the Séléka and the general availability of weapons throughout CAR.<sup>75</sup> The Anti-Balaka led their first successful attacks in September and October 2013 on small trade towns and villages outside Bossangoa and other regional capitals in the west.<sup>76</sup> Their primary targets were Muslim communities that they identified as allies or members of the Séléka because some Séléka fighters are Muslim.<sup>77</sup> The Anti-Balaka grew larger and more organized in the second half of 2013. Local people—mostly young men—from other parts of country also joined the group. A group of Anti-Balaka fighters in Bangui explained to the Enough Project that:

*The Anti-Balaka couldn't start the fight in Bangui; the Séléka were too strong. We had to start in the countryside. We walked from Bangui to a small village west of Damara—that's where we meet with a large group of Anti-Balaka. No one called us to join them; we heard on the radio where the fighting was and we moved towards that area.<sup>78</sup>*



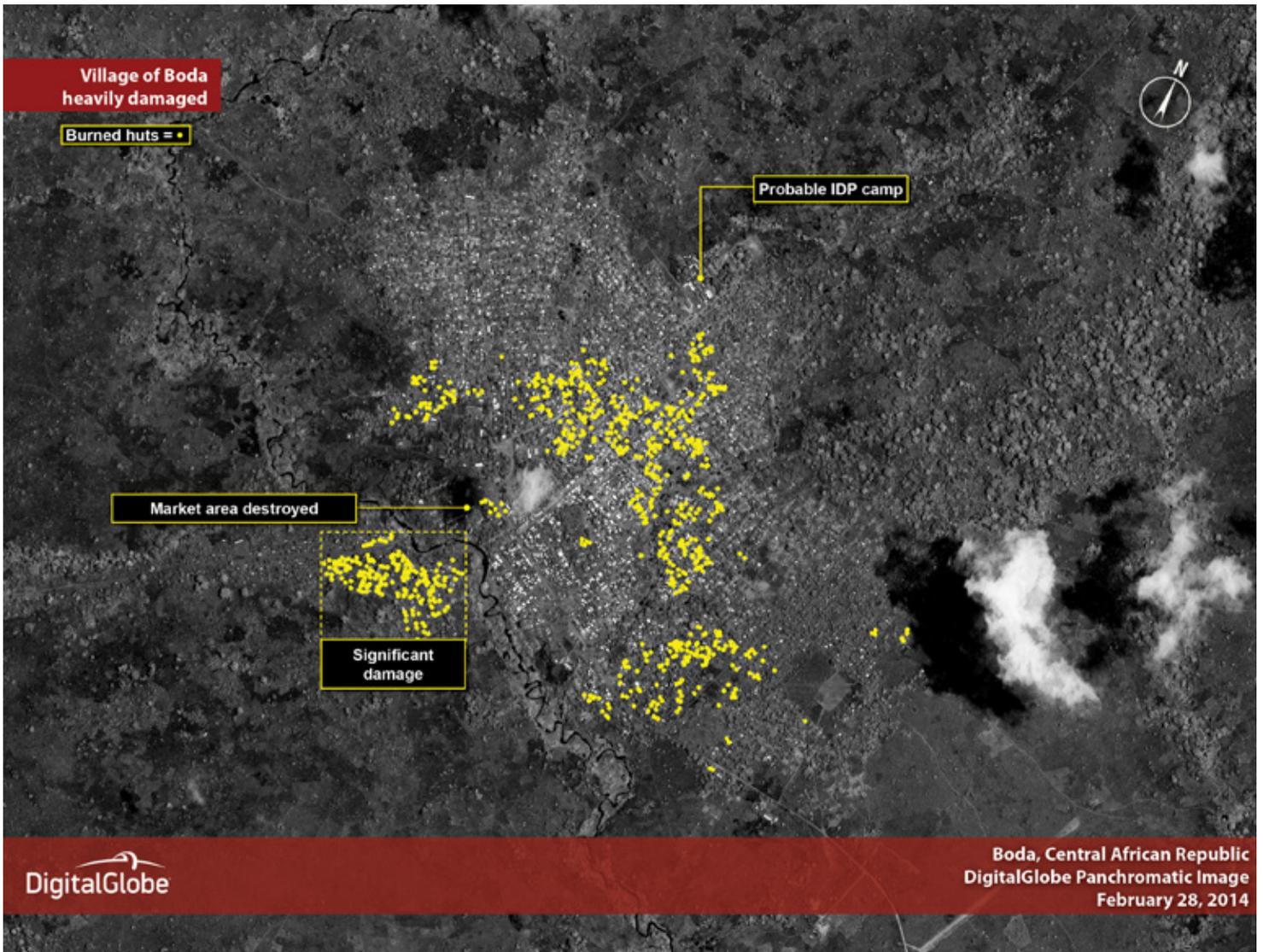
An Anti-Balaka fighter with a bow and arrow stands in the Miskin district of Bangui, where many Muslims have fled and many businesses have been looted. AP PHOTO/JEROME DELAY

The most significant advance for the Anti-Balaka was their December 5, 2013, attack on Bangui, which pushed many Séléka fighters outward to the north as the Anti-Balaka sought to consolidate control as the major militia force in Bangui. The group then undertook a vicious revenge campaign, killing and mutilating Séléka fighters and members of Muslim communities, which led to retaliatory attacks between the two groups. This gradually developed into opportunistic looting for personal gain, often including violence and the murder of civilians.<sup>79</sup> The Anti-Balaka also looted international organizations in Bangui and across the country. Some aid workers have been attacked and wounded by the Anti-Balaka.<sup>80</sup>

The Anti-Balaka's ties to natural resource revenues remain unclear, though they have been tied to clashes and looting incidents in resource-rich areas, including diamond shops in Berbérati.<sup>81</sup> There have been particularly heavy battles around diamond-producing areas in Boda and Goya and in gold-producing areas stretching from Yokole to Angara, which are now under Anti-Balaka control.<sup>82</sup> It is still unclear whether the fighting is directly related to the control of natural resources or the effort to drive out Séléka fighters.<sup>83</sup> The Anti-Balaka groups mainly acquire their resources through looting and road barriers. Some local people also provide the groups with food and small amounts of money.<sup>84</sup> Anti-Balaka involvement in the trade of diamonds and other natural resources seems likely given the group's control of areas with large diamond and gold deposits.

The Anti-Balaka remain decentralized, divided into multiple groups with different and largely unarticulated political claims and without a clear command structure, although there are some exceptions. Criminal gangs and unemployed youth continue to unite and form new Anti-Balaka groups that loot and kill civilians, known as Faux Anti-Balakas.<sup>85</sup> There have been reports of fights between the original Anti-Balaka and the Faux Anti-Balakas. The Anti-Balaka despise the Faux because they tarnish their name.<sup>86</sup>

Some former members of the Bozizé government have returned from exile and are seeking to lead the Anti-Balaka groups. One of them is the former minister of youth and sports, Patrice Edouard Ngaissona, who is known by many as the coordinator of the Anti-Balaka.<sup>87</sup> He returned from exile in January with a group of skilled FACA officers, some of whom went through extensive training in South Africa, and he has rapidly managed to amass a large following.<sup>88</sup> He is now based in the Boy-Rabe district of Bangui, where young armed Anti-Balaka fighters frequent his home.<sup>89</sup> Ngaissona is seeking to unite the Anti-Balaka under a four-part political platform. The Anti-Balaka, he tells the Enough Project, seek compensation for their losses, official recognition as a partner in the transitional political process and seats in the legislature, the removal of all foreign fighters from CAR, and a national reconciliation process.<sup>90</sup>



The diamond-rich town of Boda in southwestern CAR has been subject to recent attacks reportedly led by the Anti-Balaka group. A DigitalGlobe satellite overview image from February 28, 2014, shows that more than 800 structures have been visibly damaged or destroyed since January 29, 2013. The yellow dots on the panchromatic image represent the damaged structures, which appear clustered in specific areas and not spread sporadically throughout town. A probable camp for internally displaced people is located in the northern section of town. DIGITALGLOBE/MICAH FARFOUR AND JOE ULRICH



DigitalGlobe imagery shows significant damage to the probable market area in Boda. The area southeast of the market appears to have an increase in activity with people and cars congregated along a short section of the road.  
DIGITALGLOBE/MICAH FARFOUR AND JOE ULRICH

# Regional and international conflict dynamics

France and Chad—a key regional superpower—closely monitor events in CAR. Currently, both governments pursue common interests in CAR and seek a loyal partner to serve their security and natural resource interests. France has maintained a stronghold on developments in the country since its independence.<sup>91</sup> The French government has also made considerable investments through the state-owned company Areva, which has a uranium plant near the village of Bakouma in eastern CAR.<sup>92</sup> Some diplomats in Bangui argue that France is in CAR to protect its long-term access to natural resources such as oil, uranium, timber, and minerals. Others, however, stress that French policy toward Central Africa is currently driven more by humanitarian motives and international pressure to help protect civilians.<sup>93</sup> Chad's role and interests in CAR have also drawn scrutiny. The Chadian government, led by President Idriss Déby, seeks to prevent rebel attacks from CAR, similar to those that erupted in 2006 when a rebel convoy drove 600 miles through CAR from its base in Sudan before attacking N'Djamena.<sup>94</sup>

Chad is a key military partner for France, and the governments have cooperated militarily, finding mutual interests within CAR and beyond—fighting Tuareg rebels in Mali together, for example.<sup>95</sup> In CAR, Chad and France both backed President Bozizé's bid for power in 2003, and Bozizé was a trusted ally to both countries for a decade. French special forces and attack helicopters provided crucial support for Bozizé against rebel attacks on Bangui in 2006, and French fighter jets defended the northern town of Birao from rebel attacks that same year<sup>96</sup>—some of these rebels later formed the Séléka. President Bozizé's relationship with Chad and France soured when he increasingly began to favor South Africa and China in natural resource trade and security arrangements. For example, as many as 400 South African soldiers have been deployed in CAR since 2007 as part of Operation Vimbezela to train the CAR army.<sup>97</sup>

*[Chad and France] had lost patience with [Bozizé]. He was incompetent, corrupt, and no longer following orders from France and Chad.*

— *International diplomat, Bangui*<sup>98</sup>

The altered balance of power in the relationship between President Bozizé and the French and Chadian governments became increasingly evident. The Chadian president sent a clear sign of his growing fallout with Bozizé by calling the Chadian presidential guard soldiers who had provided personal security for Bozizé back to N'Djamena in October 2012.<sup>99</sup> France also isolated Bozizé and ignored his call for military support

when the Séléka marched toward Bangui in early 2013.<sup>100</sup> Chadian soldiers operating under the former Multinational Force of Central Africa, or FOMAC, who were based at the strategic town of Damara, did not fire a single shot when Séléka took control of the city in March 2013.<sup>101</sup> As France and Chad stood by, South Africa tried to help, but 13 South African soldiers were killed when Bangui fell to the Séléka.<sup>102</sup>

The South African army withdrew from CAR after the incident, but the French government sent soldiers to control the airport and protect French interests.<sup>103</sup> Currently, 2,000 French troops are working closely with the 5,000 soldiers that have deployed as part of the African-led International Support Mission in the CAR, or AFISM-CAR—known by its French acronym, MISCA—to protect civilians and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and disarmament of armed groups,<sup>104</sup> all authorized under a U.N. mandate since December 5, 2013.<sup>105</sup>

Some 850 Chadian soldiers were part of MISCA until April, when Chadian authorities announced they would withdraw their forces.<sup>106</sup> The announcement came after Chadian soldiers fired indiscriminately on civilians in Bangui, killing 30 people and wounding 300, provoking strong international condemnation.<sup>107</sup> Despite their questionable actions, a sudden departure of the Chadian forces will leave a security vacuum in the country. However, Chadian leaders will almost certainly continue to pursue their security interests in CAR for political and economic reasons.

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## Oil investments in CAR and Chad

The oil reserves along the border between Chad and CAR have helped shape Chad's interests in CAR and its history of alliances with CAR's leaders. Two oil basins, Salamat and Doseo, stretch across the border between Chad and CAR, extending into both countries.<sup>108</sup> Chadian President Idriss Déby depends heavily on revenues from oil to maintain patronage relationships in fragile alliances between competing clans. Déby seeks a situation in CAR that denies his opposition a safe haven and allows Chad to retain access to the oil basins on the border. These basins are positioned topographically in such a way that Chad's oil access would decline if CAR began extracting oil as well.<sup>109</sup>

Chad's oil revenues are significant and expected to grow. The most recent audit from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, or EITI, estimates that "Chad gained USD 2.1 billion in oil revenue, around 80% of overall government revenue [in 2011],"<sup>110</sup> and that "the government expects output of crude oil to triple by 2015."<sup>111</sup> Chad awarded oil exploration rights along the border with CAR to the Canadian company Simba Energy Inc. in September 2012, covering a total area of 10,111 square kilometers.<sup>112</sup> Simba Energy states, "each [oil exploration] block is potentially a company maker in its own right."<sup>113</sup> Oil exploration on the CAR side of the border has been ongoing since the 1980s, though no oil has been extracted.<sup>114</sup> The Chadian president has a direct interest in ensuring access to the revenues from the rich oil reserves that lie in the border area.

No oil-sharing agreement has been signed between Chad and CAR,<sup>115</sup> and the Chadian government closely watches the political and security dynamics in CAR, as well as developments with the country's oil exploration rights. Several international companies have held rights to explore oil in key areas. President Bozizé awarded rights for oil exploration at the northeastern village Boromata, near the border with Chad, to Chinese state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation in 2011.<sup>116</sup> The area was previously explored by RSM Production Corporation, a U.S.-based company, however, Bozizé stopped their exploration rights when he came to power in 2003.<sup>117</sup>

South Africa's stake in CAR's security, as well as CAR's oil and other natural resource extraction, is of particular interest to Chadian leaders. South African company DIG Oil has held the rights to oil exploration in the southwestern part of the country close to the city of Carnot since 2011.<sup>118</sup> Former employees of Operation Vimbezela claim that South African soldiers were working closely with employees of DIG Oil: They would share seats on the biweekly military flights from Bangui to South Africa, and moreover, soldiers would bring considerable amounts of diamonds and gold when they left Bangui.<sup>119</sup> The loss of South African soldiers when the Séléka captured Bangui led to a public outcry in South Africa due to speculation in the local press that the ruling African National Congress, or ANC, party used the military as a private security service to protect oil and diamond interests in CAR.<sup>120</sup>

Unstable leadership, sustained involvement in CAR's oil sector by external actors, and President Déby's heavy dependence on oil revenues have all shaped alliances between CAR and Chad and sustained Chad's security and economic interests in CAR. When President Djotodia took power in March 2013, the Chadian leadership was initially confident in him. Djotodia had indicated that he would review and potentially revert the mining and oil concessions previously authorized by Bozizé. During his short nine-month rule, however, no natural resource concessions were changed.<sup>121</sup> Djotodia's inability to bring order to CAR created a security threat for N'Djamena, which was unable to monitor Chadian opposition groups within CAR. Chad exerted considerable pressure on Djotodia during the January N'djamena summit where Djotodia resigned.<sup>122</sup> Since taking office, Interim President Samba-Panza has not made any public statements regarding her plans for the oil sector in CAR. Any developments with exploration or drilling rights could shift alliances among leaders and again destabilize CAR and Chad.

# Conclusion

Séléka rebels, along with Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries who have financed their activities by looting and engaging in elephant poaching and the illegal diamond trade, have split into several smaller groups, and their senior leaders have fled the country or are retreating to their traditional stronghold in northeastern and central CAR. They can evade capture, regroup, and potentially launch a new rebellion when the regional balance of power shifts in their favor. They might not be powerful enough to capture Bangui now, but they can continue to destabilize the north, which has remained a marginalized and volatile region since CAR gained independence in 1960.

Dynamics in the north have the potential to destabilize the entire country. Sustainable peace in CAR relies on stability in southern Chad and South Darfur and vice versa. These interwoven dynamics require a long-term, integrated cross-border response and a common vision for the region. Large-scale investment in sustainable development and transparent regulation of natural resources such as oil and diamonds are crucial to disrupting the revenues that fund the deadly activities of armed groups and corrupt governments. Any oil contracts and extraction policies in CAR and along the border with Chad should be brokered in a transparent process to avoid conflicts over control of shared oil fields.

While long-term solutions are being developed, CAR needs a rapid response to halt violence. The Anti-Balaka have largely defeated the Séléka in Bangui and the western part of the country, but that has not reduced the violence in those areas. CAR needs peacekeepers, but peacekeepers alone cannot resolve the conflict. A well-funded reconciliation process that includes the entire country and all warring parties should accompany the military response. Religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim, are spearheading such efforts, but they need support. Central Africans need dialogues to address the deep feelings of revenge, division, poverty, and marginalization that exist across the country. Only political solutions will be able to deliver long-term peace to the people of the Central African Republic.

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