

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

## The power-hungry are fueling violence in the Central African Republic

By Nathalia Dukhan  
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Fourteen armed factions, a multitude of local militia groups, invasions by mercenaries from neighboring countries, and a [militia](#) army — in August 2017, less than a year after the official retreat of the French military operation, Sangaris, this is the situation confronting the Central African Republic (CAR). More than 80 percent of the country is controlled by or under the influence of armed militia groups.

The security and humanitarian situation has been disastrous for the past 10 months. In recent days, the towns of Bangassou, Gambo and Béma, situated in the east of the country, have been the scene of [massacres](#) and sectarian violence. While the leaders of the armed groups shoulder much of the blame, they are not the only ones responsible for this escalation of violence. [Political actors](#) and their support networks, operating more discretely in the background but equally hungry for power and personal gain, are supporting and perpetuating these crimes.

This political system, based on the manipulation of violence, is fueling trafficking, threatening the stability of the region and leaving the population of an entire country in profound distress. To bring an end to this crisis, there is an urgent need to delegitimize these actors who are perpetrating violence and yet involved in the peace process, to strengthen the implementation of judicial mechanisms and targeted sanctions and to tackle these trafficking networks, in order to pave the way for a peace dialogue.

### An political crisis in need of a sustainable solution

While the United Nations has alerted the international community to noticeable [‘warning signs’](#) of genocide and ethnic cleansing, an assessment of the United Nations’ three-year mission to bring stability to CAR shows that there is still a long way to go. A recent United Nations inquiry [report](#) confirms this, indicating that “little progress has been made in addressing the root causes of the crisis”.

This is compounded by the fact that, since 2014, the number of armed groups has [multiplied](#) at a worrying rate and the power struggle is intensifying. A [report](#) from the Secretary-General of the United

Nations last February confirmed that the leaders of the armed groups are acting out of a desire to strengthen their negotiating power in peace talks that are primarily, but not exclusively, focused on obtaining a general amnesty.

In response to the blockages, 10 months ago the leaders of three armed groups that splintered from the ex-Séléka – Nourredine Adam's *Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique* (Popular Front for the Renaissance in the Central African Republic), Zakaria Damane's *Rassemblement Patriotique pour le Renouveau de la Centrafrique* (Patriotic Rally for the Renewal of the Central African Republic) and Mahamat Al-Khatim's *Mouvement Patriotique Centrafricain* (Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic) – and one group from the anti-Balaka movement (led by Maxime Mokom) formed an opportunistic [coalition](#), adopting a strategy of increased violence and killings. This has resulted in further sectarian violence, the expansion of areas of control, targeted attacks against humanitarian workers, United Nations staff and groups who refuse to join them, and intensified economic predation.

### The dangerous rise of professional violence

The country's security situation has largely deteriorated over the last 15 years. We are witnessing a new type of phenomenon: the rise of professional armed violence with the proliferation of politico-military groups who adopt aggressive tactics to assert their claims. These new-age armed groups epitomize a fast-growing sector, which serves as the principal 'supplier of jobs' for the unemployed rural youth.

Group leaders operate under the guise of nationalism and appropriate 'patriotic' words, such as justice, peace, unity, democracy, in order to legitimize their existence and influence political negotiations. They also propose an [ideology](#) that enables them to legitimize their demands and helps justify their political statements.

At present, the CAR political scene is entirely monopolized by these politico-military groups, and by national and regional political actors for whom violence is a political weapon. Despite becoming secondary actors, political parties do join forces with the armed groups when their interests are aligned.

### The constant threat of a coup reflects the ongoing power struggle

In the country's capital, Bangui, the tension is palpable and the political climate is dangerous. For a long time, the country has endured the ongoing threat, whether real or imaginary, of one or multiple coups. Regime change in CAR has, more often than not, been the result of a military coup, rather than an election process, which goes some way to explaining this climate. François Bozizé and Michel Djotodia were propelled to power to become State leaders in 2003 and 2013 respectively, through the planned actions of armed fighters and with external support. This trend of regime change by force is today entrenched in the country's political culture.

Some political actors, motivated by political interests and private backers, have no reservations about enlisting the help of one of the many politico-military groups to advance their personal agenda. For example, François Bozizé, the president ousted from power in the 2013 coup, continues to manipulate the networks affiliated with his political party, the Kwa Na Kwa, and with the anti-Balaka wing led by his nephew, Maxime Mokom. By exerting influence over these networks and their external backers, the ex-president is attempting a return to power.

According to credible sources, certain political figures who held positions of responsibility during the 2014-2015 political transition would not have hesitated over backing armed militia groups to create problems in Bangui and elsewhere in the country. These same sources say the aim was simple: to prevent elections from being held in order to prolong the transition and remain in power for as long as possible.

This behavior is increasingly present in the current political climate and continues to go unchecked.

### Disband networks perpetuating conflict to open up a peace dialogue

Does the United Nations need to strengthen its efforts to stabilize CAR? Undoubtedly. However, unless it has a strong mandate that aims to address the root causes of the violence, this strategy may well be futile.

The international community must prioritize certain measures to be able to begin a constructive dialogue, namely the firm declaration that any regime instated by force will not be recognized regionally or internationally. Judicial mechanisms and economic sanctions must be strengthened and rapidly implemented to target the perpetrators of the violence, as well as their support networks. Violence must cease to be a profitable business in CAR.

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