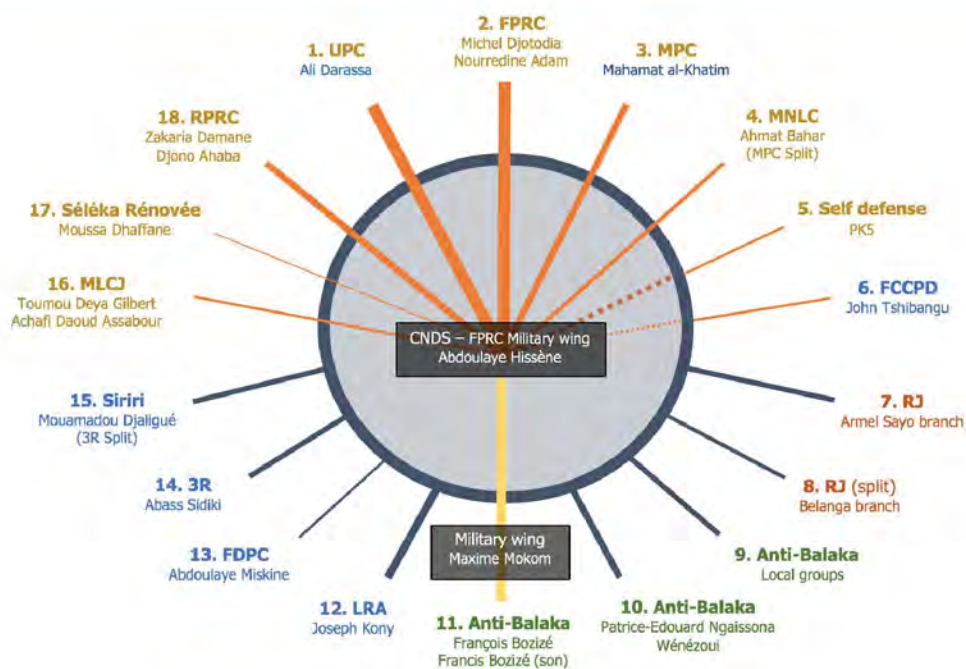


# Splintered Warfare II

How Foreign Interference is Fueling Kleptocracy, Warlordism, and an Escalating Violent Crisis in the Central African Republic



By Nathalia Dukhan  
November 2018



**enough**

The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity

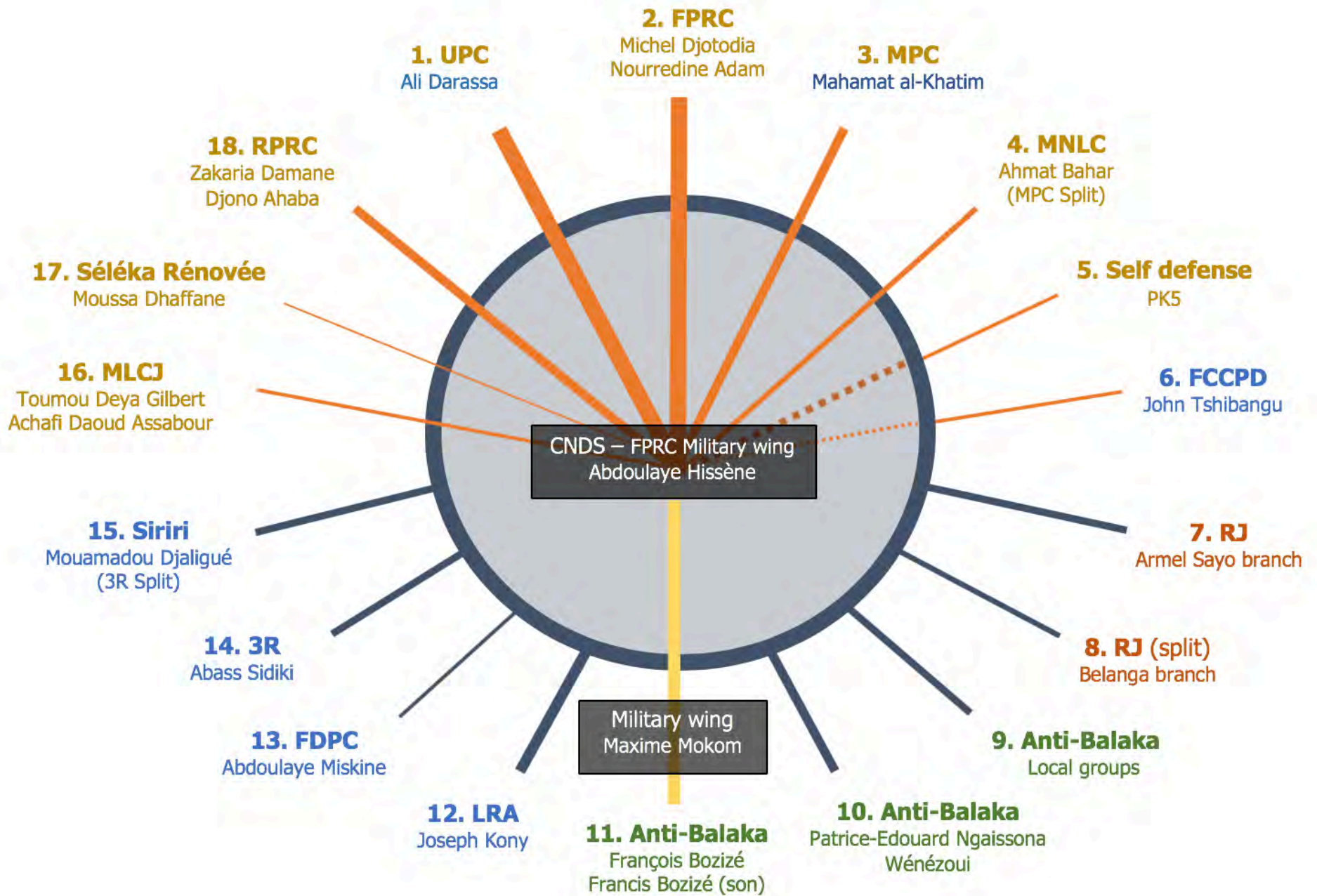
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## Central African Republic: Acronyms of armed factions and politico-military groups

### Situation report - October 2018

No.	French acronyms	Full name (in French, with English translation)	Main military and political leaders	Strongholds
1	UPC	Union pour la paix en Centrafrique / Union for Peace in the Central African Republic	Ali Darassa	Alindao, Bokolobo (eastern CAR)
2	FPRC	Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique / Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic	Michel Djotodia Nourredine Adam	Birao, Ndélé, Bria, Kaga-Bandoro (northern and eastern CAR)
3	MPC	Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique / Central African Patriotic Movement	Mahamat al-Khatim	Kaga-Bandoro (central CAR)
4	MNLC	Mouvement national pour la libération de la Centrafrique / National Movement for the Liberation of the Central African Republic	Ahmat Bahar	Moyenne-Sido (north-central CAR) Bémal (northwestern CAR)
5	N/A	Groupes d'auto-défense – Bangui (PK5) / Self-defense groups – Bangui (PK5)	Group 1: Nimery Matar aka "Force"; Group 2: Djido (aka "5 minutes"); Group 3: Oumarou Amadou (aka "Tola"); Group 4: Moussa Danda; Group 5: Youssouf (aka "You le géant" or "You the giant"); Group 6: Mahamat Apo	PK5 neighborhood- Bangui
6	FCCPD	Front du peuple congolais pour le changement et la démocratie / Congolese people's front for change and democracy	John Tshibangu (arrested in 2018)	Unknown
7	RJ – Sayo	Révolution justice / Revolution Justice	Armel Ningatoloum Sayo	Paoua area (northwestern CAR)
8	RJ - Bélanga	Révolution justice / Revolution Justice	Bertrand Belanga (shot dead)	Paoua area (northwestern CAR)
9	N/A	Groupes anti-Balaka locaux / Local anti-Balaka groups	Several local leaders	Spread across the country, especially in the south
10	Anti-Balaka - Ngaiçsona	Coordination nationale des ex-anti-Balaka / National Coordination of ex-anti-Balaka	Édouard-Patrice Ngaiçsona	Boy-Rabe, Boeing (Bangui)
11	Anti-Balaka – Bozizé	Anti-Balaka	François Bozizé Francis Bozizé (son)	Gobongo, Boy-Rabe, Combattant (Bangui)
12	LRA	Armée de résistance du seigneur / Lord's Resistance Army	Joseph Kony	Obo, Sam-Ouandja, Yalinga area (eastern CAR)
13	FDPC	Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain / Democratic Front of the Central African People	Martin Koumtamadji (aka Abdoulaye Miskine)	Foro, Zoukombo, Nguia-Bouar (western CAR)
14	3R	Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation / Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation	Sidiki Abass	Koui (northwestern CAR)
15	Siriri	Mouvement Siriri / Siriri Movement	Baoro Ndiangue	Amada Gaza, Abba (southwestern CAR)
16	MLCJ	Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice / Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice	Toumou Deya Gilbert Achafi Daoud Assabour (aka "Seigneur de guerre")	Birao, Bria (northeastern and central CAR)
17	Séléka rénovée	Séléka rénovée / Reformed Séléka	Mohamed Moussa Dhaffane	Kaga-Bandoro (central CAR)
18	RPRC	Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique / Union for Central African Renewal	Zakaria Damane Djono Ahaba	Bria, Tiringou (central-eastern CAR)
	CNDS	Commission nationale de défense et de sécurité / National Defense and Security Committee	Abdoulaye Hissène	Ndélé, Bria, Kaga-Bandoro
	Anti-Balaka/Mokom	Anti-Balaka – Pro-Bozizé military branch	Maxime Mokom	Gobongo (north of Bangui)

## Graphic Legend

### Armed groups by affiliation:

- Yellow** → Armed groups related to/derived from the Séléka (formed in late 2012)
- Orange** → Armed groups related to/derived from Ange-Félix Patassé's regime (in power 1993-2003)
- Green** → Armed groups related to/derived from the anti-Balaka movement (formed in 2013)
- Blue** → Armed groups originally/derived from neighboring countries

CNDS – FPRC Military wing  
Abdoulaye Hissène

The National Defense and Security Committee (CNDS) is the FPRC's military wing. Created in October 2016 during the FPRC General Assembly organized in Bria, it is presided by Abdoulaye Hissène.

Military wing  
Maxime Mokom

Since 2015, Maxime Mokom has been the military coordinator of the anti-Balaka still faithful to Francois Bozizé. They are maneuvering with Bozizé's political party, the Kwa Na Kwa, to return him to power and strengthen his political influence.

### Lines in the sand: military and political alliances

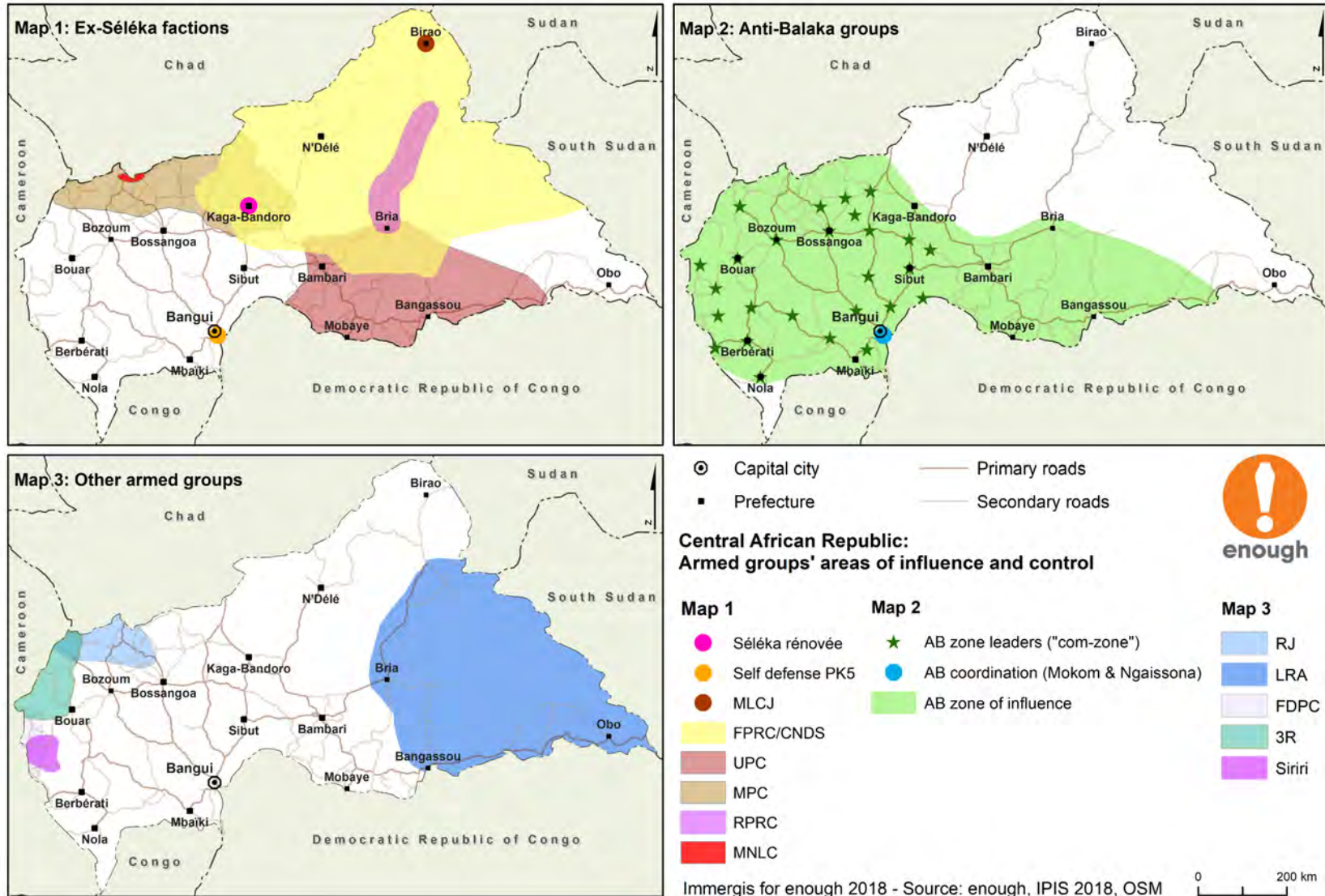
#### Ex-Séléka groups' military alliances

- **UPC-FPRC-MPC:** In October 2017 in Ippy and Maloum, the UPC and FPRC military leaders represented by Ali Darassa and Abdoulaye Hissène respectively signed an agreement ending 12 months of intense fighting between the two groups. The MPC also signed the agreement.
- **UPC-RPRC-FPRC:** On May 2018 in Bria, UPC and RPRC leaders represented by Darassa and Zakaria Damane officially reconciled and announced the end of the fighting between the Fulani and Gula ethnic communities. Despite disagreements between RPRC military leader Damane and CNDS's president Hissène, RPRC and FPRC/CNDS from then on coordinated military operations.
- **MNLC-MPC-FPRC:** On May 2018, the MNLC led by Ahmat Bahar first announced that the group was merging into the MPC command chain led by Mahamat al-Khatim. Bahar also officially announced his rallying to FPRC and CNDS.
- **Reformed Séléka – FPRC coalition:** Despite a non-official alliance with the FPRC and a low number of combatants, Mohamed Moussa Daffhane (the Séléka coalition's former number three, currently based in France) coordinated with FPRC leaders and maneuvered to strengthen his influence in the Séléka movement.
- **Force-MPC-CNDS:** A former PK5 self-defense group now identified as a criminal group led by Force, has developed an informal alliance with CNDS and MPC.
- **MLCJ-FPRC-RPRC-CNDS:** Despite a non-official alliance with the FPRC, Toumoudeya who is also advisor at the CAR presidency coordinated military operations with the FPRC/CNDS and RPRC.

#### The Nairobists alliance

Formed in 2015 between the clans of the two former presidents, Francois Bozizé and Michel Djotodia, this opportunistic political and military alliance between an ex-Séléka faction (FPRC) and an anti-Balaka group led by Mokom is activated whenever the need arises. This alliance now takes the form of concerted military tactics between the CNDS led by Hissène and the anti-Balaka led by Mokom.

# Armed groups' areas of influence and control – October 2018



## Splintered Warfare II: How Foreign Interference is Fueling Kleptocracy, Warlordism, and an Escalating Violent Crisis in the Central African Republic

### Executive Summary

Five years after war broke out in the Central African Republic (CAR), the conflict has no end in sight.<sup>1</sup> The country has become ungovernable over time and is sinking into a structural crisis. Despite being branded a low-intensity conflict, it is brutal and bloody. Entire communities are regularly targeted in carefully orchestrated military operations. Politico-military groups and various armed factions that effectively rule the country are held responsible for the chaos.<sup>2</sup> Since 2014, the proliferation of these armed groups across the country<sup>3</sup> has confirmed how deeply rooted politico-criminal entrepreneurship has become. In fact, it is now a booming business sector. In rural areas, these groups are the main source of employment for disillusioned youths. They also offer outlets for violent mercenaries from neighboring countries, especially Chad and Sudan.<sup>4</sup> The proliferation of these groups, along with the transnational trafficking of weapons and natural resources, presents high stakes for the entire Central African region.

In addition to their predatory ambitions, several armed group leaders readily display their thirst for power, which forms the basis of their often short-lived, opportunistic alliances. While these warlords are applauded when they “reconcile,” their guns don’t fall silent. Military tactics simply change to bring about new centers of power. These shifting tactics conceal an accumulation of national and foreign actors’ hidden, sometimes contradictory agendas. When the stakes change, so do alliances, and the war takes a new turn. These hidden agendas are often unknown to the greater public but are nonetheless at the heart of instability in CAR.

Labeled as a civil war, the CAR conflict presents at first glance all the symptoms of a war between ethnic and religious communities. While armed groups obtain ever-more sophisticated military equipment and mobilize increasingly well-trained forces,<sup>5</sup> local communities also arm themselves and sometimes take part in combat. As United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres indicated in a recent report, insecurity is on the rise. “The security situation in Bangui and other parts of the country has deteriorated since April 2018, amid a resurgence of sectarian rhetoric and intercommunal strife, which has undermined popular trust in the State and in the national defense and security forces,” he wrote.<sup>6</sup> Between April and May 2018, the United Nations stabilization mission in CAR (MINUSCA) counted 39 articles published in 11 national newspapers inciting discrimination and violence.<sup>7</sup> This is hardly a new phenomenon. Since 2005, several ethnic and religious communities have faced targeted discrimination and assassinations (see annex).<sup>8</sup> In 2018, Christians also became targets, in addition to repeated attacks on Muslims.<sup>9</sup>

Brandished as a weapon of war, sectarian violence aims to divide and incite hatred between communities. In the absence of the rule of law, those targeted seek protection from the same actors fueling the rising tensions. Those “protectors” are in fact seeking a popular base for legitimacy. They exploit a sense of ethnic or religious solidarity in order to enlist young fighters and mobilize funding. In this toxic atmosphere, alliances between armed groups proliferate and grow stronger. The more perpetrators of

The more perpetrators  
of mass atrocities  
represent a threat, the  
more their negotiating  
power increases and  
the more they gain.



mass atrocities represent a threat, the more their negotiating power increases and the more they gain. The leader of the FPRC/CNDS armed group, Abdoulaye Hissène, clearly illustrates this system when he declares: “Men must die, and blood must be shed for people (like me) to get rich.”<sup>10</sup>

Considered legitimate political interlocutors with whom peace has to be negotiated, despite being recognized as criminals, armed group leaders exact a high price for their positions of power. Meanwhile, mediation winds its way slowly in CAR, although no sustainable or coherent solution has emerged. In fact, various actors use these political “dialogues” to gain influence. The arms race continues unabated, pursued by both armed groups and the government,<sup>11</sup> assisted in the task by networks of foreign actors in a climate of impunity. This situation is prompting fears of escalating violence bloodier than ever before.

Following a May 2018 attack on the Church of Fatima in the capital, Bangui,<sup>12</sup> the Platform of Religious Confessions (PCRC) criticized in a memorandum “the aims of certain neighboring and foreign countries seeking to impose hidden agendas in CAR in order to occupy it, through armed groups that are guided and maintained by them.”<sup>13</sup> The worst conspiracy theories gain traction in CAR, where the president's team exhibits paranoid fears of a coup. Rumors persist of plots to remove President Faustin-Archange Touadéra from office before the next elections in 2021. In a country that has experienced five successful coups since 1960 – and numerous attempts foiled by allied countries – the threat is taken seriously.

The president has made few allies during his two years in power. Most of the political class in CAR and heads of state in the Central African sub-region share a negative view of his term. France sees him as a threat to its interests in this former colony. Fixated on remaining in power, the presidential clan is focusing on military and economic cooperation with the Sudan – Russia – China axis. Meanwhile, France is making diplomatic efforts and using stratagems to maintain its influence in Africa, under the watchful eye of the United States. Until recently, the CAR conflict had been termed a civil war, but it is now beginning to share characteristics with the war in Syria, thanks to its internationalization.

## Recommendations

A new way of thinking about peace is possible in order to move the country out of its current system of violence and state collapse. These recommendations are intended to provide policymakers with strategies that aim to end the incentives for violence and ultimately encourage accountability and create leverage for more sustainable peace processes.

### I. Peace at the heart of the political process

*To the UN Security Council, EU, AU, ECCAS, France, the United States, China, Russia, Central African regional head of states and the CAR government:*

End the system that rewards violence and war profiteering:

- Stop the legitimization of war criminals as political interlocutors;
- End the attribution of political, economic and financial benefits to actors or entities connected to the system of violence or to spoilers of peace that aim to obtain specific gains in the peace process (notably: political positions, diplomatic status, financial benefits).

Promote a system that rewards peace and define a peace process that integrates a balanced, bottom-up and top-down approach:

- Pre-condition participation in any peace efforts on agreement to a cease-fire and commitment to building peace;

- Ensure the active participation of the legitimate fringes of the population, particularly women and youth, and build around the achievements and the exemplary model of inclusion made during the Bangui Forum in 2015;
- Create and support mechanisms that incentivize peace efforts, particularly those focusing on the root causes of instability and violence.

## **II. Accountability, a central pillar to a lasting peace process**

*To the UN Security Council, EU, AU, ECCAS, France, the United States, China, Russia, Central African regional head of states and the CAR government:*

- Categorically deny amnesty for perpetrators of mass atrocities, spoilers of peace and war profiteers;
- Create consequences through the implementation of financial and other pressures that weaken networks of conflict financing, particularly by:

## **III. Imposing robust financial consequences on war profiteers:**

*To the UN Security Council, EU, AU, ECCAS, France, the United States, China, Russia, Central African regional head of states and the CAR government:*

- Deploy strong diplomatic efforts and mobilize resources for competent authorities in UN Member States to effectively enforce existing sanctions on named individuals and entities, including Hissène. These efforts should focus on effective enforcement by CAR, Central African countries, as well as Kenya and South Africa, and the EU, including Switzerland;
- Impose additional sanctions that target key spoilers and entities or individuals that support CAR's looting. Such sanctions imposed by the UN, US, and EU should provide critical, strengthened financial pressure on those who are engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of the CAR, or support for armed groups or criminal networks through the illicit exploitation or trade of natural resources, including diamonds and gold, as well as wildlife. The United States should also impose network sanctions on key targets and their business partners through the Global Magnitsky sanctions program;
- Employ anti-money laundering measures, including through the issuance of Advisories and other warnings by The United States, European countries, and other governments to banks and others in the private sector, that highlight the significant money laundering risks emanating from the endemic corruption, the trafficking in gold and diamonds, and other issues related to war profiteering. These Advisories can help ensure that the private sector is acting against the transactions and accounts that fuel the ongoing pillaging of CAR's resources currently plaguing the country. These Advisories should refer to key publications of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) focused on money laundering risks related to gold and to diamonds;
- Cancel all passports issued to individuals under sanctions or subject to arrest warrants, as well as any issued to foreign mercenaries or business partners connected to high profile criminals.

*To the banks (regional and international):*

- Close accounts and freeze assets of sanctioned persons or entities and investigate accounts held by Politically Exposed Persons, other high-risk clients, or individuals and entities subject to sanctions.

#### **IV. Ensuring criminal accountability for perpetrators of atrocities, including their commercial actors**

*To the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Special Criminal Court (SCC):*

- Ensure that economic and financial crimes are part of charges against perpetrators of atrocities;
- Prioritize financial investigations, particularly related to the ill-gotten gains of high-level perpetrators of atrocities and their commercial partners;
- Create full investigative teams responsible for investigating networks of conflict financing, in particular business partners responsible for fueling violence and corruption;
- Prioritize victims' reparation and take steps to redirect seized funding towards peace and reconstruction.

**For an in-depth analysis of the Central African conflict financing network systems, read the investigative report published on [www.thesentry.org](http://www.thesentry.org): The Sentry. "Fear Inc. Investigating war profiteering in the Central African Republic and the bloody rise of Abdoulaye Hissène," November 13, 2018.**

## Enemies Yesterday, Allies Today: The Politics of Alliances between Armed Groups

The emergence of armed opposition movements is relatively recent in CAR. Starting in the 1980s and 1990s, growing rural insecurity created conditions ripe for their proliferation. There was political instability at the national and regional level,<sup>14</sup> a series of three mutinies,<sup>15</sup> organized crime perpetrated with the help of roadblocks,<sup>16</sup> the anarchic proliferation of weapons<sup>17</sup> and a phantom state that is corrupt and run by predatory elites.<sup>18</sup> But it was under the repressive and sectarian regime of François Bozizé,<sup>19</sup> who took power following a violent 2003 military coup backed by Chad and France,<sup>20</sup> that the situation worsened. As insecurity increased, many self-defense groups and no fewer than eight armed groups emerged between 2005 and 2012.<sup>21</sup> Some of these groups politicized their struggle and declared openly that their aim was to overthrow the Bozizé regime.

The coup finally took place in March 2013, when four armed groups joined forces to form the Séléka coalition. Once in power, however, Michel Djotodia – the Séléka leader who became the self-proclaimed president – quickly revealed his inability to control the various military leaders, especially mercenaries from Chad and Sudan who had been recruited for the occasion.<sup>22</sup> Worse, the Séléka then embarked on a bloody battle and intense competition to control the country's power and wealth. Meanwhile, Bozizé sought to recover his presidential seat using a number of self-defense groups, jointly known as the “anti-Balaka” movement. These groups were mobilized around a single objective: drive the Séléka out of power.<sup>23</sup> The alliances fell apart with the end of the Séléka reign sought by France and Chad in 2014<sup>24</sup> and the prospect of elections. According to leaders of ex-Séléka factions and anti-Balaka groups, France sought this fragmentation in order to undermine dissident movements at the time its Sangaris military operation

### Change in the main military and political alliances between armed groups

#### October 2017–2018

Military alliances between all ex-Séléka factions (UPC, CNDS/FPRC), RPRC, MPC, MNLC, MLCJ, Séléka rénovée, self-defense groups or Force

The Nairobiists: political and military alliance between ex-Séléka (FPRC/CNDS) and anti-Balaka (Mokom) groups. This alliance is guided by the interests of Djotodia and Bozizé's clans.

#### October 2016–September 2017

Military alliance between the FPRC/CNDS, RPRC, MPC and anti-Balaka wing led by Mokom

#### 2015

Alliance formed between the ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka: the Nairobiists FPRC led by Nourredine Adam and Hissène; and the anti-Balaka led by Mokom

#### 2012–2013

The Séléka coalition: a military alliance between the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement, or UFDR), Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix, or CPJP) and Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country (Convention patriotique pour le salut du Kodro, or CPSK)

was being launched.<sup>25</sup> CAR then experienced its second wave of proliferation of armed groups, following the one in 2005–2012.<sup>26</sup> Since then, politico-military alliances have formed and unraveled as interests shifted and new actors entered the fray.

### The Nairobist Alliance: 2015–present

- Alliance **members:** The crisis reached a major turning point in 2015, when two enemy clans formed a military alliance to defend their common political interests:
  - An ex-Séléka faction (emerging from the core of the Séléka coalition still loyal to Djotodia) and the FPRC, led by Adam and Hissène; and
  - An anti-Balaka branch (loyal to Bozizé), led by Mokom.

Meeting in Nairobi at the instigation of the presidents of Kenya and the Republic of the Congo, former CAR presidents Bozizé and Djotodia officially ended their disputes that begun more than a decade earlier. The military alliance between the FPRC and the anti-Balaka wing led by Mokom – better known as the Nairobists – marked a temporary halt to the hostilities between the two rival clans.<sup>27</sup>

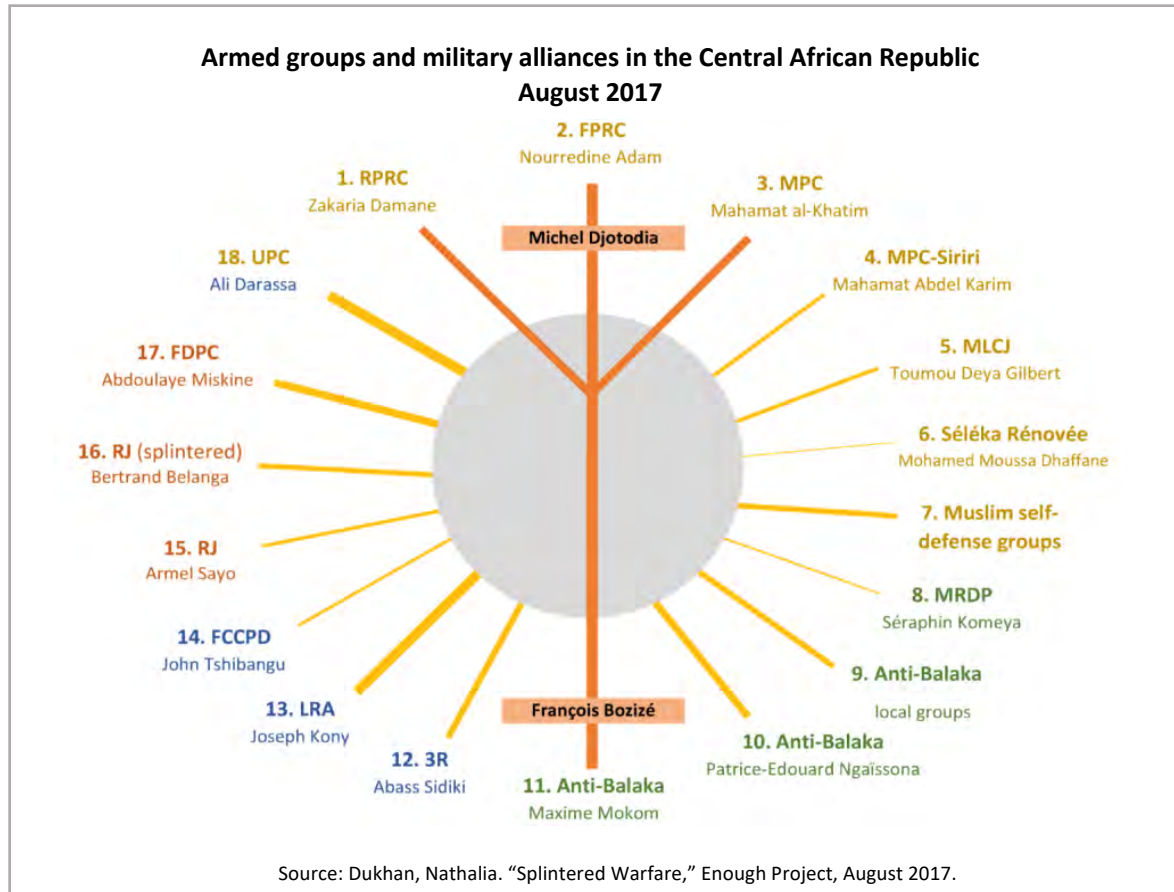
- **Strategy:** The collaboration between military leaders Hissène and Mokom consists of exchanging information, planning violent flareups between religious communities<sup>28</sup> and facilitating the supply of war weapons and ammunition. Although they represent the most violent armed groups threatening the central authorities, the political and military leaders of the FPRC and anti-Balaka have established themselves as essential interlocutors for settling the CAR crisis.
- **Main objective:** “There is no solution in the Central African Republic: Touadéra has to go. We have reached an agreement with the anti-Balaka,” FPRC intelligence chief Fadoul Albachar said in April 2018.<sup>29</sup> This opportunistic alliance aims to increase its members’ political negotiating power, maneuver to secure general amnesty and special status for the former presidents,<sup>30</sup> rejoin the political game and even work together to plan an attempted coup<sup>31</sup> with no intention of sharing power.<sup>32</sup> While it sometimes lies dormant, the alliance is regularly reactivated when the need arises. In October 2017, representatives of the two groups were appointed as government ministers.

### The Anti-UPC Coalition: 2016–2017

In October 2016, a few months after the Touadéra's election, the FPRC sought to reunite the ex-Séléka factions in order to further threaten central authorities and launch a strategic reorganization. However, one faction from the Séléka coalition, the UPC led by Ali Darassa, refused to join the alliance, and war broke out between the erstwhile allies.

- **Alliance members:** The alliance set three ex-Séléka factions against one another: the FPRC with its military branch the CNDS, the MPC and the RPRC – allied to the anti-Balaka groups (led by Mokom) against the UPC, a group made up mainly of Fula combatants.
- **Strategy:** For nearly a year, an anti-Fula and anti-UPC campaign led to the massacre of hundreds or even thousands of Muslim Fula civilians.<sup>33</sup> The UPC responded by executing individuals thought to be affiliated with groups in the rival coalition, including civilians.<sup>34</sup> War broke out unexpectedly, prompting numerous questions about the origins of the conflict. Ex-Séléka factions, allied with anti-Balaka groups, were generally perceived as being mainly Muslim, so their violence openly targeting

Muslim communities was puzzling. Nonetheless, the conflict revealed its predominantly political — not religious — character.



- **Objectives:** This war is widely considered a struggle for control of the country's wealth, especially diamonds, gold, cattle taxes and oil exploration areas.<sup>35</sup> However, economic predation is not the only driver of sectarian violence. Struggles for political influence also drive the instability.

The anti-UPC alliance openly aimed to weaken Darassa in order to chase him from the country, kill him or force him to join forces with the FPRC.<sup>36</sup> The anti-UPC campaign was driven by different motives but shared interests:

- Between 2015 and 2016, the UPC extended its control to strategic areas that had been controlled by other ex-Séléka factions until then, as part of expansionist ambitions. The UPC was therefore perceived as a threat to their existence and interests.
- Ex-Séléka faction leaders were convinced that there was a secret agreement between Darassa and the Bangui regime threatening their existence and economic interests. A leader of the MPC, a mainly Chadian Arab armed group, stated in a late 2016 secret recording that "President Touadéra has given Ali Darassa (head of the UPC) the power to control the territory as far as the border with Sudan. He is going to disarm as far as Ndélé. If Ali Darassa disarms the Gula, he will also disarm the Runga and the Arabs... He has become Touadéra's FACA (the

CAR armed forces). Fula are therefore fighting in place of the FACA. That's why we need to oppose him."<sup>37</sup>

- Since 2014, FPRC leaders have expressed secessionist ambitions and the UPC, which does not share its position, represents an obstacle to its political aspirations.<sup>38</sup>
- Concern over the UPC's growing military power and a possible unwelcome "understanding" with the Bangui regime also unnerves Chad. According to several Séléka leaders, senior figures in the N'Djamena regime have offered their support to the FPRC coalition, convinced that the UPC is welcoming Chadian rebels responsible for attempted coups in Chad in 2006 and 2008.<sup>39</sup> Darassa led a CAR-based armed group also headed by Chadian warlord Baba Laddé, an opponent of Chadian President Idriss Déby, from 2010 to 2012.<sup>40</sup> This explains N'Djamena's mistrust of the UPC.

### The FPRC-UPC-MPC Alliance: Late 2017– Present

- **Alliance members:** In October 2017, Darassa (UPC) and Hissène (FPRC/CNDS) unexpectedly announced their "reconciliation" and signed the Ippy cessation of hostilities agreements.<sup>41</sup> Over the following weeks, Zakaria Damane (RPRC) and Mahamat al-Khatim (MPC) also began to reconcile with the UPC.
- **Strategy:** With this new alliance, the anti-UPC coalition finally put an end to ethnic cleansing of the Fula community. All the ex-Séléka factions have now joined this core group (see graphic) either officially or informally.<sup>42</sup> The FPRC-UPC, backed by the MPC and the RPRC, has since coordinated arms supplies from Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. The agreement also concerns the control of territory, as well as revenue and information sharing, political consultations and harmonization of military and political tactics.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, the Nairobists maintain their agreement. As the ex-Séléka factions have come together and a conflict appears to take place between ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka groups, the violence has morphed into a sectarian conflict between Muslims and Christians, as was the case at the peak of the crisis in 2014.
- **Objectives:** In December 2017, the conflict in CAR took an unexpected turn when Russia announced its intention to supply arms to the country,<sup>44</sup> ultimately leading to a reinforced military cooperation agreement between the Bangui regime and the Kremlin in August 2018.<sup>45</sup> To date, non-lethal Russian weapons and equipment have been delivered to the national army by China, Russia<sup>46</sup> and the United States.<sup>47</sup> National armed forces have also begun deploying in certain areas and sought to carry out military operations in Bangui with support from Russian troops.<sup>48</sup> With their very existence threatened, armed groups are organizing a counteroffensive. The United Nations Panel of Experts has taken note of an arms race since the start of the year, along with a marked increase in the flow of weapons of war, ammunition and vehicles toward armed groups.<sup>49</sup> Videos circulating on social media also show heavily armed vehicle convoys crossing the country.<sup>50</sup>

The new military alliances aim to assert their control over territories rich in natural resources and strengthen their positions in the various consultation and negotiation mechanisms. For several armed group leaders, their ultimate goal is obtaining power. The struggle for influence among regional powers and world powers benefits armed groups seeking political support during leadership changes, whether at the voting booth or via a coup. An FPRC core regularly threatens secession, developing a shadow government in territories it occupies in northeastern CAR. It's no coincidence that this region is abundant in strategic resources (oil and uranium) and minerals (such as gold, diamonds, tantalum and coltan).

## Political Mediation at the Heart of the War for Influence

Since 2017, African Union (AU)-led political mediation has publicly enjoyed unfailing support from the international community, sub-regional states, the CAR government and even armed groups. After months of consultation, AU facilitators communicated around 100 demands from 14 armed groups in August 2018. Twelve of their demands are said to be non-negotiable,<sup>51</sup> including power-sharing, the highly controversial amnesty law and – even more surprisingly – the termination or revision of military cooperation agreements with Russia and South Africa.

But the apparent support for the AU process conceals competing interests. The struggle for influence between the great powers – China, France, Russia and the United States on the one hand and regional powers, notably Chad, South Africa and Sudan on the other – are fueling tensions and instability. “This is no longer a war between people in the Central African Republic,” one source told the Enough Project. “It has become a power struggle. They come and wage war here. We have nothing, but even so, they want to take it from us.”<sup>52</sup>

France and its allies in Central Africa look unfavorably toward the agreement between the CAR government and Russia. Since January 2018, Moscow has expanded its influence in CAR, including via a military cooperation agreement that includes rights historically granted to France by successive regimes.<sup>53</sup> To date, Russian arms have been delivered, Russian military instructors have been deployed, a special adviser to the president – Valery Zakharov – has been put in charge of security issues, Russian special forces comprise the inner circle of the presidential guard and training in Russian military academies is planned.<sup>54</sup> Russia is also actively seeking to gain acceptance among local authorities and the population. Trucks have delivered food supplies, mobile hospitals have been set up in remote areas and Zakharov is organizing roundtables with national<sup>55</sup> and local authorities,<sup>56</sup> especially those keen to offer their support to the presidency.<sup>57</sup>

In return, the CAR presidency is rewarding Russian companies by awarding them mining contracts and concessions.<sup>58</sup> One such case is the firm Lobaye Invest, which secured two permits to mine for gold and diamond deposits in southwestern CAR in June and July 2018.<sup>59</sup> Sewa Security, a Central African legal firm created in 2018,<sup>60</sup> appears to be the Central African foothold of the highly controversial Wagner Group. Sometimes described as Russian President Vladimir Putin's secret army, the Wagner Group is led by influential businessman Evgeny Prigozhin, a close Putin ally.<sup>61</sup> The military contractor is also present in Sudan, Syria and Ukraine. In Syria, the company obtained a contract with the Syrian authorities to free gas and oil exploration zones in exchange for 25 percent of revenues obtained from exploiting gas, oil and mining fields.<sup>62</sup> The Wagner Group is suspected of working behind the scenes to obtain similar agreements in CAR.

Russia has entered into a dialogue with the armed groups and is implementing a mediation process parallel to that of the AU. On August 28, 2018, FPRC leader Nourredine Adam, Hissène (FPRC/CNDS leader), anti-Balaka leader Mokom, MPC leader al-Khatim and the UPC's Darassa accepted an invitation from Zakharov for a meeting in Khartoum, even though they were expected at an AU meeting in the western CAR town of Bouar. By the end of the meeting, they had signed an agreement titled the “Khartoum Declaration of Understanding of the Central African Armed Groups (anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka).” Apart from yet another agreement to call for a halt to the violence, the secret negotiations focused primarily on sharing revenues between the government, armed groups, investors and local communities: however, no agreement seems to have been reached so far.<sup>63</sup> The agreement also demands the participation and involvement of Russia, Sudan and other Central African countries in the AU's mediation process. The AU process is considered to be heavily influenced by France's preferred partner Chad. Several armed group leaders readily acknowledge their ties to French officers, from whom they say they obtained instructions on which strategies to adopt.<sup>64</sup> In October 2018, three of the signatories – CNDS, UPC and MPC – announced their complete withdrawal from the Russian deal, denouncing hidden agendas.<sup>65</sup> They once again stated their commitment their commitment to the AU-led



process. Political mediation efforts thus reflect struggles for influence and the economic war waged between world powers and countries from the Central Africa region.

## The Coup's Political Culture: Driving Violent Kleptocracy

Described as a fragile, failed, phantom or sometimes predatory state, CAR is generally seen as a land of despair. The roots of instability and endemic poverty are well documented. The World Bank has identified six main causes for CAR's fragile state: a lack of social cohesion at all levels of society, power concentrated in a small clan with limited popular legitimacy, socioeconomic disparities between Bangui and the rest of the country, natural resources confiscated by the elites, impunity and persistent insecurity.<sup>66</sup> The Platform of Religious Confessions adds corruption, vote-catching, regionalism, the lack of peaceful transitions of (alternating) power, poverty, a leadership crisis and foreign interference.<sup>67</sup>

While all these causes are real, the ways in which leaders have come to power provide an equally compelling analytical framework for the origins of the frenzied thirst for power in CAR. Since the country's independence in 1960, foreign military interventions have traditionally installed, protected or overturned political or military elites. No fewer than five military-backed coups have successfully removed elites from power. Moreover, numerous foreign military operations have protected elites taking refuge in the capital. France has led numerous military operations long justified by the existence of a defense agreement dating back to 1960 that provided for intervention when "allied" political elites faced challenges.<sup>68</sup> In exchange for protection, the country's strategic raw materials (especially oil and uranium) became French property and the interests of French companies took priority. Once freed by the former colonial power, CAR presidents called on "friendly" foreign troops and mercenaries to try to hold onto power. This was the case with Ange-Félix Patassé in 2002, when he sought help from Gaddafi's Libya and Congolese rebel Jean-Pierre Bemba, and Bozizé in 2013, with South Africa's Jacob Zuma.

*"There were agreements between François Bozizé and his economic interest groups that got him into power. They made a pact and promised each other things, but they concluded that François Bozizé was not a man of his word. As he could no longer guarantee our interests, we let him go. All the rest was made up. It is just an invention, pure and simple."*

Interview with a member of Bozizé's political party, the Kwa Na Kwa

This tradition of regime change through force is now rooted in CAR's political culture, though holding onto power remains a different ballgame altogether. Those seeking a coup form strategic alliances with foreign actors to get the necessary regional and international support. Traditionally, France and, since 2003, Chad, have played a major role in this political game of musical chairs. Once the outgoing regime has been overthrown, a sequence of carefully crafted diplomatic moves takes place, legitimized by regional organizations: establishing transitional authorities, adopting a transition charter, peace agreement or cessation of hostilities agreement, holding elections, adopting a new constitution to guarantee a "return to constitutional order" and disarmament. These moves seek to paper over the violations of international law that got the new clan to power in the first place. Before it is even elected, this group forms an allegiance with the "power brokers."

Faced with chronic vulnerability to foreign interests, successive CAR leaders have developed a system of political survival that includes state-sponsored violence, corruption, ethnic/family control of public affairs and cronyism. Popular legitimacy has never been an essential condition for governing in a political system largely influenced by foreign interests and those of the presidential clan. As a result, government and

armed group leaders alike are more likely to favor foreign interests<sup>69</sup> to satisfy their allies and guarantee the longevity of their position than to respond to the population's interests

### **POLITICAL SURVIVAL IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC 1960-Present**

**Ethnic/family control of power:** Power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals, linked to the president through family ties or belonging to the same ethnic group. The clan in power places loyalists in strategic positions, particularly in areas such as defense, security, finance, mines, forestry, telecommunications, customs, etc.

**Privatization of natural resources:** Public resources are viewed as the property of the ruling clan for as long as they hold the reins of power, triggering systemic corruption, cronyism and mercantilism.

**Presidential guards as militias:** Soldiers are recruited on the basis of membership of a particular ethnic group and family ties (close to the president). They are trained abroad, armed and used to serve the private interests of the presidential clan.

**Weakening of the army:** Perceived as a structural threat to the regime in place, the army is deliberately kept weak, with an emphasis instead on the presidential guards and foreign armed forces. The result is a breakdown in trust between the population and the defense forces, who are likelier to engage in racketeering than protecting the population. The clan in power supports self-defense groups in rural areas, sometimes rehabilitating them for their own security needs. Sometimes these groups become criminals.

**Suppression and exclusion of political opponents from the political process:** The loyalty of political opponents is sometimes bought. Appointing them to positions of political responsibility is, in reality, a way of ensuring greater control over them. In other cases, they are hunted down, forced into exile and sometimes eliminated.

**Reward system for armed groups:** For those that represent the greatest threat to central power, the presidency negotiates a system of benefits, particularly ministerial positions, amnesty, financial support, bringing combatants into the army, etc.

**Manipulation and control of the courts and media:** The clan in power politicizes these sectors to gain greater control over them.

**Entering into military agreements with regional and international actors/powers:** Recruitment of mercenaries from the region and defense agreements with foreign allied countries. These agreements include training the presidential guards and the army, deploying foreign commanders to ensure the protection of the president and intervening if there is a threat to the clan in power.

**Granting oil and mining concessions:** Granted to political and economic actors who are viewed as allies, sponsors and protectors of the regime. Raw materials and natural resources in demand on international markets are owned by powers capable of protecting the regime in place.

**Awarding of contracts to "friends" of the regime:** Contracts and agreements are awarded as a priority to political and/or economic actors who sponsor the regime (in practice, actors who are mainly foreign and provide military, political and/or financial support to the clan in power).

## Conclusion: Rethinking the Peace Process in the CAR

Political and military players dominate politics in CAR. Along with their foreign allies, they use force to defend their political and economic interests, forming a true violent kleptocracy. Traditional political actors face two options: move away from the political realm or participate in the violence. The arms race seen in 2018 offers the most tangible evidence of this phenomenon. The politicization of violence, and the profits this system yield to interest groups, is a reality pervasive beyond national borders. This violent kleptocracy fuels growing transnational crime, anarchic weapons and mercenary flows, natural resource and human trafficking, as well as terror network financing. These growing threats to peace affect civilians across Central Africa. Extremely vulnerable, the population faces humanitarian crises, poverty and insecurity. They are stripped of all sense of belonging, of being citizens of their own country.

Like its neighbors in Central Africa, CAR is at a crossroads. All signs point to a sharp deterioration of security. A radically different approach is thus critical, an approach that would place peace and the respect for human rights at the heart of political negotiations. The peace process that perpetuates war and rewards criminals and their networks must come to an end. This systemic violence helps divide Central African populations and exposes them to further hardship. The permanent members of the UN Security Council and regional powers have a key role to play in resolving the CAR conflict by prioritizing a political compromise. Any relaunch of the peace process must focus on humanizing politics and restoring a sense of citizenship in Central Africa. The international community has a responsibility to combat crime and international networks that finance the violence through the use of network-focused sanctions, anti-money laundering measures, and prosecutions. As long as violence reaps profits for mafia networks, political and security instability will deepen.

**ANNEX: Sectarian violence, a weapon of war**  
**Main targeted communities, 2005-2018**

Period	Main targeted communities:	Apparent affiliations:	Groups responsible for sectarian violence:
2005-2012	Runga Gula  Sara-Kaba	Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (CPJP) Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (UFDR) → Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie (APRD - Ange-Félix Patassé)	<b>Presidential clan</b> (François Bozizé, gbaya ethnic group)
2013	Gbaya	<b>Presidential clan</b> (François Bozizé)	→ <b>Séléka coalition</b> (Merging of: UFDR, CPJP fundamental, CPSK)
2014	<b>Communautés de confession musulmane</b> (tous groupes ethniques confondus)	<b>Coalition Séléka</b> (UFDR, CPSK, CPJP fondamental)	→ <b>Anti-Balaka movement</b>
2015-2016	<b>Muslim communities</b> <b>Non-Muslim communities</b>	<b>Ex-Séléka factions</b> (FPRC, UPC, MPC, RPRC) <b>Anti-Balaka groups</b>	→ <b>Anti-Balaka groups</b> <b>Ex-Séléka factions</b>
2016-2017	<b>Fula communities</b>	UPC  3R	→ <b>FPRC/CNDS, RPRC, MPC, anti-Balaka pro-Bozizé</b> <b>RJ</b>
2018	<b>Christians</b> <b>Muslims</b>	<b>Anti-Balaka groups</b> <b>Ex-Séléka factions</b>	→ <b>Ex-Séléka factions</b> <b>anti-Balaka groups</b>

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