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**TOWARDS OPEN CONFLICT: NEW
EPISODE OF WIDESPREAD
VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AFRICAN
REPUBLIC**

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**TOWARDS OPEN CONFLICT: NEW EPISODE OF WIDESPREAD
VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

Abstract:

In the last two months, the civil conflict in the Central African Republic has broken out again, intensifying the tension between different population groups. The international community faces a disjunctive to draw a viable solution to the crisis: to reissue an intervention as made in Mali or to allow African organizations or UN the starring role, with an action similar to the developed by the UN brigade in Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Keywords:

Central African Republic, State coup, ethnic conflict, Seleka, France.

Escriba el autor.

The year 2013 was expected to be tumultuous in Central African Republic, a country that says goodbye to the Sahel on the path that, from that arid belt, initiates black Africa into the southern region.

Michel Djotodia is the rebel leader from the Muslim north. From that region, which has consolidated as the epicenter of the uprising, he released, leading the militias grouped under the name of Seleka (Coalition in Sango language, the majority language in the country together with the French), a challenge¹ to the authorities of Bangui, resulting in a coup d'état. It took place in March, and after a short and timid peace agreement, which was violated soon after been approved, it resulted in the overthrow of President Bozizé. After coming to power through a military uprising, a method that has become routine over the five decades of Central African history as an independent State, Bozizé won the elections of 2005, which bestowed him a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens and the international community. The elections also fueled in part the later crises because of suspicions of fraud and irregularities accompanied the appointment and mandate of the former president until he was overthrown.

In 2006, French troops had to intervene to protect him because he was threatened by a new armed uprising against him, with which they managed to take from the government forces some regions of the northeast of the country.²

In the shaping of Seleka's militias, three groups confronted against Bozizé (Democratic Front of the Central African People, Union of Democratic Forces for Unity) have gathered. They reproached the president an alleged failure to fulfill the peace accords signed in 2007³; mainly in all aspects concerning combatants' integration in State security forces or their reinsertion into civilian life. Many of them remained isolated, without resources and stubborn in their maximalist positions, that is violence remained their main reason and source of livelihood.

Yakomas and gbayas (the latter are majority) have engaged in civil confrontation at its various stages. At the last stage, started by the end of August, the religious aspect is gradually becoming the main reason the perpetrators put forward to harass the enemy⁴.

However, during the religious and ethnic crisis, which became more pronounced in August, many of the previous constants remained: indiscriminate killings whenever there is occasion; attacks designed to cause maximum damage to life and property, followed by equally violent

¹ Please refer to the previous document about this conflict
http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_informativos/2013/DIEEEI04-2013_RepublicaCentroafricana_JBM.pdf

² Among other online resources available <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13150044>

³ The full text can be found at the following web page <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/accord-rca-fdpc-ufd-02-02-2007.pdf>

⁴ Please refer to <http://allafrica.com/stories/201309120514.html>

Escriba el autor.

revenge actions. Where appropriate, wherever its deterrent and repressive effect is taken serious, security agents stay in profile in the evening and they take shelter in their homes. This happens all over the country with almost the single exception of the capital, Bangui.

Over the last weeks, the violence has spread to other cities, such as Bossangoa, located in the Northwest, where at least 100 people were killed. In early September Benzambé was also taken, the birthplace of former President Bozizé, near Bossangoa⁵.

Riots broke out in a district of Bangui inhabited by supporters of the deposed president, mostly populated by supporters of Bozizé. Many houses set on fire that forced the displacement of its residents to the area under French control. But the 400 European soldiers were intended to provide supply and logistical support to the troops sent by the African organizations.

Therefore the consequences are inevitable as it usually happens in situations of this nature. The entire country goes into chaos, sometimes with accelerations that could threaten its own existence. This is what has been happening in the last year, particularly since the most radical and violent Seleka members took advantage of the coup d'état to take effective control of the country. Either due to lack of commitment or of human and material resources, Djotodia's government has not been able to contain or redirect the militias that brought him into power, in spite of the dissolution ordered by Djotodia⁶. Within the sectors that were attacked by the militias, some groups took up arms against them. In fact, there is evidence that a new armed group operates in several areas of the country, formed by supporters of Bozizé and former army soldiers.

Moreover, among the religious support of Bozizé, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Southern Sudan stand out, while the Sudanese president is the principal advocate of the coup leader Djotodia.

The implication or the extension of the Central African crisis to Sudan and Chad is the biggest risk of the new episode of the political and social crisis that reigns there. The Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir is finally being called into question in his country. Mass demonstrations have called for reforms and for an end of the authoritarian government of the controversial president. The delicate internal situation with multiple and intractable open conflict inside the country, and the perennial war on the splinter south border is a temptation for al-Bashir to raise the Islam banner, which would be shown as the persecuted religion in the neighboring republic.

⁵ CAR expert Roland Marchal's article can be read at <http://theglobalobservatory.org/analysis/577-central-african-republic-back-to-war-again.html>

⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24088995>

Meanwhile, the old president of Chad, Idriss Déby, will see the unleashed crisis across its southern border to try to strengthen its position as an influential government in Africa.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN THE CONFLICT

It is then the turn of the international community to prevent it and, presumably, rescue it from a certain shipwreck. But the complexity of the conflicts that the international contingent has to cope with hampers from, in more cases than we would like, that this breakthrough is preventing their arrival on the scene from achieving anything, with the pacification and stabilization of the conflict zone. The demands to the Central African Republic come from the United Nations, humanitarian organizations and even from any European government.

In the first instance, the multilateral organization has drawn attention to the dire need that affects, perhaps at optimistic estimations, a rate exceeding one-third of the inhabitants of this quasi failed State. In these terms, Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, developed the reasons of its warning in a report released in mid-August, anticipating half a month to the resurgence of violence⁷. Amos used as a main argument the derivation of a chronic state of extreme poverty to a more complex one that she describes as national emergency, together with the protection of the lives of the citizens as a priority. Therefore she justifies the need of an external intervention that would try to establish a floor to avoid the race to the bottom that is occurring in this country.

With regard to humanitarian organizations, Doctors Without Borders and Human Rights Watch are those who have raised their voices to provide more data on the reality of IDPs and refugees that is causing this recently initiated phase of the conflict. UNHCR's latest estimates stand at around a quarter of a million⁸.

For its part, Human Rights Watch insists on denouncing the impunity with which armed groups act against defenseless civilian population⁹.

It is clear that the control of revenue brought by trade and traffic of gold, uranium and diamonds, and the resulting financial gain for the rebels remain powerful incentives to gain control of power in Bangui and to tame and subdue anyone who tries to stop it or claim a portion of that wealth.

⁷ The following link is a summary of the report.

http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45621#.UkBH9z8_re4

⁸ Can be found on <http://www.unhcr.org/523c1ef09.html>

⁹ In a report available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/18/central-african-republic-horrific-abuses-new-rulers>

It was at that point when the European Union proceeded to the deployment of EUFOR, the Special Forces contingent to Chad and Central African Republic¹⁰.

FRANCE FACING A NEW INTERVENTION IN AFRICA

Moreover, the French government announced that it will increase the number of troops deployed in the Central African Republic to help reduce the insecurity and the level of violence entrenched in the country, encouraged by what it is considered a relatively successful intervention in Mali. However, France must combine its efforts with the presence of the African organizations, around the missions called (MISCA and MICOPAX) deployed by the African Union and the Community of Central African States respectively. It seems necessary to strengthen both contingents so they can carry out their peacekeeping and mediation tasks with any hope of real success. And to claim the importance of continental organizations taking responsibility and ownership in conflict resolution. France also advises of the conflict expansion to neighboring countries, especially Chad and Cameroon.

The United Nations could also envisage the deployment of a brigade similar to the one that operates in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has adopted initiative to attack armed groups positions that remain active.

Intervention runs the risk of pushing the conflict into an impasse and causing the positions of the warring factions to become entrenched. Furthermore, uncomfortable position after the multiple human rights violations, in which fast, energetic and decisive action is needed.

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¹⁰ <http://www.eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eufor-tchad-rca/>