

A Taxonomy of Non-State Armed Actors in the Central African Republic

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Front cover image: Ambulance at Sam Ouandja refugee camp (IPIS, 2008)

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Abstract

The Central African Republic (CAR) is listed 159th out of 169 on the 2010 UN Human Development Index and its political history since independence has been tainted by a series of coups and political violence. Just like some of the other countries surrounding the CAR, the country contrasts extreme poverty and political instability with an abundance of natural resources.

The absence of state institutions in the outer regions of the country has allowed organisations, often easily labelled as mere rebel groups, to proliferate in the margins of the state and develop parallel structures replacing the failing state institutions. These groups are often considered to be only interested in looting the country's natural resources for their own gain or they are – in case of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) for example – just considered to be a violent and irrational bunch. This process of state failure, and the accompanying proliferation of armed groups, is often cited as a major roadblock to development for countries in the south.

This report hopes to provide an overview of how the Central African Republic got to where it is now, as well as to present the means to further our understanding of the current situation. First a genealogy of the current situation is provided, which is presented in the form of a narrative literature overview encompassing the postcolonial period. This is followed by a brief account on the main conflict actors active at the time of writing. The third part of the analysis studies what motivates the behaviour of the armed groups in the country, using data gathered for the period between January and December 2010, which have been visualised on a GIS map.

The report builds upon earlier research conducted by IPIS in its Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic report. Though insecurity is still rampant across the country, the situation has changed a lot since. In 2008, the conflict zones within the CAR were concentrated in Ouham and Vakaga, with respectively the APRD and UFDR as main insurgency movement and the FACA as their main opponent. In 2010, on the contrary, the CPJP and LRA are easily noticed as the most active armed groups. Although this is seemingly a complete reversal of the situation, closer analysis reveals how present and past situations are still intrinsically linked to each other.

List of acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ANECA	Association nationale des étudiants centrafricains
ASM	Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining
CAR	Central African Republic
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
CPJP	Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DGSE	Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure
FDC	Front démocratique centrafricain
FDPC	Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain
FLO	Front de libération des Oubanguiens
FPO	Front patriotique oubanguien
GAPLC	Groupe d'action patriotique pour la libération de la Centrafrique
GIS	Geographic Information System
HDPT CAR	Humanitarian and Development Partnership Team Central African Republic
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HSBA	(Sudan) Human Security Baseline Assessment
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPIS	International Peace Information Service
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MCLN	Mouvement centrafricain pour la libération nationale
MESAN	Mouvement pour l'évolution sociale de l'Afrique noire
MINURCAT	Mission des Nations unies en République centrafricaine et au Tchad
MLCJ	Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice
MLPC	Mouvement de libération du peuple centrafricain
SPLM/A	Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UFDR	Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force

1. Introduction

1.1. General Introduction

If it were not for its obvious name, most people would find it difficult to locate the Central African Republic (CAR) on the map. Those who assume that this is because the CAR has been comparatively well-off in contrast to its more (in)famous neighbours such as the Democratic Republic of Congo or Sudan, which have left a lasting impression on our minds, are, however, jumping to conclusions.

Much like those people living on the other side of its borders, the inhabitants of the CAR have not had much reason to rejoice. The country is listed 159th out of 169 on the 2010 UN Human Development Index¹ and its political history since independence has been tainted by a series of coups and political violence. The most grotesque emanation of this pattern of shifting power might be the regime of the self-proclaimed emperor Jean-Bédél Bokassa.

Again, just like some of the other countries surrounding the CAR, the country contrasts extreme poverty and political instability with an abundance of natural resources. Although arguments can be made for CAR's landlocked position preventing it from fully capitalising on its natural resources, it should be remembered that, as Kalck noted, the Ubangi-Shari territory, the colonial predecessor of what is now CAR, produced more diamonds than any other part of the French Union, even the parts that had a geographical advantage.²

At first glance and, once again, similar to other states in its vicinity, the Central African Republic too has been confronted with state influence retreating towards the capital. An often heard statement is that "[t]he state stops at PK 12", which indicates that the official government's reach is said not to extend beyond a 12 km radius around Bangui.³ This absence of state institutions in the outer regions has allowed organisations, often easily labelled as mere rebel groups, to proliferate in the margins of the state⁴ and develop parallel structures replacing the failing state institutions.⁵ These groups, some of which are hardly documented, are often considered to be only interested in looting the country's natural resources for their own gain or they are – in case of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) for example – just considered to be a violent and irrational bunch. This process of state failure and the accompanying proliferation of armed groups is often cited as a major roadblock to development for countries in the south.

Although we have stressed the similarities between the Central African Republic and its more mediatised neighbours, one should however heed Debos' warning not to consider CAR's problems as a mere spill-over from conflicts in its vicinity, as has been the case especially with the Darfur crisis.⁶ Historically, transnational linkages with Chad and to a lesser degree Sudan, have played an important role in the CAR's political history, but this does not mean we should lose sight of the particularities of politico-historical developments in CAR itself.⁷

¹ See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics> for the current ranking.

² The Ubangi-Shari (Fr. *Oubangui-Chari*) territory, the CAR's colonial predecessor within the French colonial empire, was known to produce even more diamonds than Guinea or Côte d'Ivoire, see ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, Africa Report N°136, 2007, p. 1; Kalck, P., *Réalités ousanguiennes*, Paris, Éditions Berger-Levrault, 1959, pp. 189-190.

³ Bierschenk, T., Olivier De Sardan, J.-P., Local powers and a distant state in rural Central African Republic, in: *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1997, p. 441.

⁴ In CAR these "margins" are to be interpreted as the larger part of the territory. It is important not to conceive this delineation between "government-controlled" and "rebel-controlled" territory as static and rigidly separated from each other.

⁵ For a short overview of the state failure debate and some of its criticisms, see amongst others: Gentili, A. M., Failed States or Failed Concept?, in: *Studia Diplomatica*, vol. LXII, no. 3, 2009; Hagmann, T., Hoehne, M., Failures of the State Failure Debate: Evidence From the Somali Territories, in: *Journal of International Development*, vol. 21, 2009; Hoebeke, H., Fragile Statehood in Africa: A Useful Concept for Action?, in: *Studia Diplomatica*, vol. LXII, no. 3, 2009; Raeymaekers, T., Collapse or Order: Questioning State Collapse in Africa, in: *CRG Working Papers*, vol. 1, 2005.

⁶ Debos, M., Fluid Loyalties in a Regional Crisis: Chadian 'Ex-Liberators' in the Central African Republic, in: *African Affairs*, vol. 107, no. 427, 2008, pp. 225-226.

⁷ Marchal, R., *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...*, Centre d'études et de recherches internationales - Sciences Po, Les Études du CERI, March 2009.

1.2. Background and goals of this report

We hope to provide an overview of how the CAR got to where it is now, as well as to present the means to further our understanding of the current situation. First we will provide a genealogy of the current situation, which we present in the form of a narrative literature overview encompassing the postcolonial period. This will be followed by a brief account on the main conflict actors active at the time of writing. For the third part of our analysis we will use data gathered for the period between January and December 2010, which have been visualised on a GIS-map, to study what motivates the behaviour of the armed groups in the CAR.

The choice of subject in this paper can be traced back to the author's interest in the functioning of non-state armed actors as a sociological unit within the context of a retreating state. The CAR was chosen because, as an under-researched case, it provides an opportunity to contribute to the understanding of the socio-political dynamics and non-state armed actors in general. Research for this paper was conducted within the frame of an internship with the Internal Peace Information Service (IPIS). I am indebted to IPIS, not just for the guidance I received, but also for the opportunity to use their GIS-data in the analysis.

This report amongst others builds upon earlier research conducted by IPIS in its *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic* report.⁸ We will provide an in-depth analysis of the main non-state armed actors, while other, smaller armed groups will be discussed less extensively, except when necessary to provide a better understanding of our main actors.

Our first two units of analysis are the *Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement* (Union of Democratic Forces for Unity, henceforth UFDR) and the *Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix* (Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace, CPJP from hereon). These two organisations are the ones operating within some important diamond mining zones of the CAR, which makes them ideal cases to assess whether they are driven solely by the opportunity to loot natural resources (i.c. diamonds) or if there are other reasons motivating them. Related to this question is the fact that the CPJP is often assumed to have been founded by youth of the Runga ethnic group in reaction to UFDR brutality against non Gula groups.⁹ This point is interesting not just because it would mean that this "rebel" group was not started as a reaction against the state, as could commonly be assumed, but against another group. The particular relation between these actors and the way it influences the conduct of the peace process is interesting in itself (because of the CPJP threat, UFDR refuses to fully comply with the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process, effectively delaying the envisaged transition to peace). Apart from that, it also provides us with an opportunity to study the process of co-optation by government institutions in a comparative perspective: whereas UFDR has been part of the peace agreements and the Inclusive Political Dialogue (*Dialogue politique inclusive*, see §2.5) and seems to be in the process of being co-opted by CAR political elite, CPJP at the time of writing has been denied access to any of the negotiations and remains outside the system, as evidenced by their denunciation of the latest elections.¹⁰

The third main conflict actor in the Central African Republic, the LRA, will also be discussed. Since this organisation covers (or has covered) an area incorporating parts of Uganda, Sudan and DR Congo, it would be wrong to analyse them using only data from CAR. We will, however, compare the current data with earlier accounts on LRA activity within CAR. This may not be enough to comprehend the LRA as an organisation *an sich*; yet we hope our data (and its spatial visualisation) may help us to shed some light on dynamics within the LRA, especially its increasing activity on Central African soil.

⁸ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, IPIS, 2009. The *Mapping Conflict Motives* series is not limited to the Central African Republic. Several provinces of DR Congo have been analysed within its framework. More information can be found on IPIS' website. <http://ipisresearch.be/mapping.php>.

⁹ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, Africa Report N°167, 2010, pp. 18-19. *Runga* and *Gula* are but a few of the ethnic groups one can identify within CAR territory. For an overview of CAR's most important ethnic groups and their spatial distribution throughout the CAR, see IPIS' CAR map: <http://www.ipisresearch.be/maps/CAR/WEB/INDEX.HTML>

¹⁰ See <http://cpjp.centrafrique.over-blog.org/article-simulacre-electoral-en-centrafrique-65635014.html>; Meanwhile CPJP and government representatives have agreed on declaring peace. In 2010, the period treated in this paper, peace agreements were not yet deemed an option.

Before moving on, some *caveats* are in order: This report was confined to desk research and thus to the evaluation and reinterpretation of what others have written. Furthermore it is important to be aware of CAR's underreported position in both media and research. When one starts working on the CAR, it soon becomes clear that sources are rather scarce, especially in contrast with the much mediatised crises in Sudan or DR Congo. On an international level not much is being reported about CAR, except for a few French media channels and some specialised research reports. This means that our information will rely for a substantial part on the local media and actors somehow involved in the CAR. It is important to keep in mind that most of these "information brokers" are also part of the political field – they too have their own interests and preferences. When possible we have tried to identify these interests and - as much as possible – taken them into account when using the information they provide.

2. Politics, conflict and violence: A historical overview

2.1. A history of violence?

The following paragraphs will outline the historical precedents we deem important to better comprehend the current situation. Since the aim is not to write a comprehensive history of the CAR, we will focus on the allocation of resources and power relations within which the allocation process is always embedded, as well as on the use of violence as a tool in politics. Although colonial structures had (and still have) a profound impact upon CAR society, we will mainly focus on the post-colonial period, except for the short summary below.¹¹

Since the French had no real established trade or mineral interests in what was then labelled as the Ubangi-Shari, governance of this “backwater” region was mostly left to concessionary companies.¹² The underfinanced and mostly poorly trained colonial administration created a brutal and authoritarian, yet ineffectual regime.¹³ By the mid-1930s the French government was so embarrassed by the economic malperformance in French Equatorial Africa in general and Ubangi-Shari in particular that they decided to promote the growing of cotton. These measures were modelled on more “successful” policies of the Belgian Congo. Notwithstanding the opposition from experts who feared the ecological consequences and the impact on food production, cotton production was systematically increased through coercion. A similar increase in coffee production was also attempted, but failed because of diseases which destroyed the new plantations. The emphasis on cash-cropping, through coercive means, allowed the administration to levy taxes on the population, which until today still influence the local population’s perception of these commercial crops. Diamond and gold mining, initiated by the French in 1927, remained firmly in the hands of Europeans and profits never benefited Central Africans themselves.¹⁴

During the Second World War production increased, but at the same time European control over Ubangi-Shari’s resources became even tighter – thus once again not yielding much profit to the Central Africans themselves. This economic recovery, unfortunately, was only temporary, as decreasing demands and rising transport costs led to lower profits.¹⁵

With Barthélemy Boganda, an MP from Ubangi-Shari in the French *Assemblée* and a former Catholic priest, and his MESAN party as a rallying point, Ubangi-Shari moved towards its independence. Acknowledging CAR’s disadvantageous position, his hope was to realise a Francophone/Latin Central African Union, including amongst others Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon and Chad. For a number of reasons, this idea never came to fruition – his initial intentions, however, live on in both CAR’s name and in its constitution, which still allows CAR to become part of a bigger union.¹⁶

On the eve of achieving independence, however, the plane carrying Boganda from Berberati to Bangui crashed, often attributed – but never proven - to French sabotage. This left the CAR, on the brink of its independence, without the only politically experienced leader it had.¹⁷

After Boganda’s death, Abel Goumba, a left-leaning teacher of medicine who was considered to be his political heir, would not be the one to become CAR’s first president. When the territory became independent on 13th August 1960, David Dacko, then serving as the Interior minister, surrounded the Parliament with a band of supporters with poisoned arrows and forced the deputies to elect him as CAR’s first president.¹⁸

¹¹ For a comprehensive account of Central African history, Kalck’s (1973) *Histoire centrafricaine des origines à nos jours* remains the best option. In English Thomas O’Toole (1986) published a more general overview.

¹² In 1989 more than half of the territory was leased to seventeen concessionary companies that were virtually given free rein to exploit labour and natural resources within the domains allotted to them: ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 2; O’Toole, T., *The Central African Republic: the continent’s hidden heart*, Boulder (Colo.), Westview press, 1986, p. 23.

¹³ O’Toole, T., *The continent’s hidden heart*, pp. 23-4.

¹⁴ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 1; O’Toole, T., *The continent’s hidden heart*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁵ O’Toole, T., *The continent’s hidden heart*, pp. 28-30.

¹⁶ Once again, the works of Kalck and O’Toole are recommended for those who wish to further explore this issue.

¹⁷ O’Toole, T., *The continent’s hidden heart*, p. 4; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁸ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 3; O’Toole, T., *The continent’s hidden heart*, p. 41.

Under Dacko, government structures took on a more authoritarian form. The constitutional reforms in 1962 and 1964 concentrated power in the executive branch of government and effectively removed the idea of political parties competing for power. Apart from political parties, independent trade unions were also banned and censorship became harsher. In 1964, Dacko managed to be re-elected for the presidential office by collecting every eligible vote.¹⁹

Despite a French-imposed economic recovery plan launched in 1961, little revenue flowed back to the national treasury. Government officials indulged in escalating spending sprees. Furthermore, the agricultural reforms only succeeded in enlarging this parasitic caste living on development aid funds and on the backs of the peasants.²⁰ Taxes imposed upon the peasants became ever higher, especially for those planting cotton – the main cash crop.²¹ The uncontrolled rush of former farmers and labourers towards the diamond mining areas further disrupted coffee and cotton production.²²

Dacko, confronted with this stockpiling of troubles, soon saw himself making desperate pleas for assistance to donor countries – as evidenced in his sudden decision to make a grand tour of European capitals in May 1964. His earlier efforts to double or triple taxes had had little effect on the spiralling national debt.²³ As these schemes also failed to provide solutions to the pressing matters, Dacko soon slipped into a depression – going as far as to offer his resignation, only to be refused by his ministers.²⁴ Faced with the threat of a general strike – not the least dreaded by the French, who feared a leftist outcome as had happened earlier in Congo-Brazzaville – plans were being made for a coup to transfer power to Colonel Jean Izamo.²⁵

Things turned out differently: having been alerted to the fact that he was to be arrested (or even assassinated) during the coup, Jean-Bédél Bokassa, a young army officer who claimed to be Boganda's nephew and would later arguably become the most infamous Central African ever, made plans of his own. Luring Izamo to one of the military camps under his control on New Year's Eve, he ambushed and arrested the colonel. According to the plan set out by Bokassa's aide, Alexandre Banza, Bokassa made sure the army controlled strategic positions – seizing the airport so French troops could not be flown in – and subdued the gendarmerie.²⁶

Despite the bloody execution of Bokassa's coup – considering his repeatedly stabbing Izamo with his sword before leaving him to die a slow death, and the murder of several members of Dacko's entourage – most Central Africans welcomed the change of leadership. He set up several projects, amongst others involving the improvement of the peasant populations' lives, urban reconstruction plans and some more populist measures.²⁷ He also promised to "eradicate corruption and get the country back to work". In this way his regime managed to retain its popularity up until 1970.²⁸

It took the French patrons a bit longer to warm up to Bokassa – he had after all fooled their attempts to install Izembo as their CAR marionette. But even though De Gaulle had called him "a bloody idiot" in 1966,²⁹ Bokassa soon regained the friendship of the respective French presidents and their representatives in the Republic, and cultivated a special relationship with them – notwithstanding the occasional fallouts.³⁰

¹⁹ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 5; O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 46; Sebahara, P., Frère, M.-S., *Centrafrique*, in: M.-S. Frère (ed.), *Afrique centrale. Médias et conflits. Vecteurs de guerre ou acteurs de paix*, Paris, Institut Panos, 2001, p. 198.

²⁰ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, pp. 4-5; O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 45.

²¹ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 5.

²² O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 45.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 5; O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 45.

²⁶ O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 49.

²⁷ According to O'Toole "many of Bokassa's decisions in the early months [of his rule, J.B.] directly improved the lives of the majority of the country's citizens. He started construction of a large concrete central market in Bangui. To establish a public transport system, he ordered buses from France. Donated his first month's salary as president to the main hospital in Bangui, subsidized two national dance orchestras, and paid in cash the debts that Central African butchers owed Chadian cattle breeders so that meat would be available once more in the markets. Such acts, though seemingly unimportant to outsiders, did create for the first time the sense for most Central Africans that the government could actually act in their interests." *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁸ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 5; O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, pp. 49-50.

²⁹ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 5.

³⁰ O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 50.

Despite Bokassa's antics, such as converting to Islam in the hope of obtaining funds from Libya's Gaddafi and – his best-known feat – proclaiming himself Emperor Bokassa 1st of the Central African Empire, the French never questioned their “enduring friendship with the Central African Republic and its President for life” and any quirks in their relationship were sooner or later resolved with a present of reconciliation donated by the French.³¹ After all, it was still them Bokassa relied on for propping up his regime, which increasingly fell into the same pitfalls as its predecessors. Both in private and public sectors, Bokassa remained dependent on French support and his mission to combat corruption and internal strife was not as successful as he had hoped for. Furthermore Bokassa had to pay off his debts to the army, which had helped him to take power, by promotions and salary increases.³²

The increasing strain on Bokassa's finances further dissolved the public/private distinction between the funds at his disposal. The execution of his former fellow traveller and then Minister of Finance Alexandre Banza – who was then still fighting government corruption – especially removed the last obstacle.³³ This privatisation of the CAR state structure led to outright plundering of the country – unquestioned by the French patrons.³⁴

Bokassa's undoing would be his decision to order high school students to wear uniforms made by one of the companies his wife owned. Students who could not afford these were barred from entering classes and soon took to the streets. The “down with the uniforms” cries soon became “down with Bokassa” and soon the demonstration evolved into widespread looting. Bokassa had no choice but to let the army intervene, blaming Soviet and Libyan interferences as sources of the unrest, while abolishing “the government's order” to wear the uniforms and, with French aid, raising student scholarships and civil servants salaries.³⁵ This however, made it clear that through (violent) protest, changes could actually be achieved and soon political opposition began to organise itself, such as in the MLPC of Ange-Félix Patassé, who had only a few years earlier been the one to organise Bokassa's coronation ceremony.³⁶

The Ngaragba incident, named after the prison where it took place, was the final blow for Bokassa's reign. About 250 young people were beaten up and thrown into prison cells that were too small to hold them all, which resulted in a lot of them dying – mostly by suffocation.³⁷ When Amnesty International made public what had happened, outrage broke loose. Bokassa ceased to be a “respectable” partner.³⁸ Even though several opposition movements had been formed,³⁹ none of them seemed ready to take the stage because of internal disputes.⁴⁰

When Bokassa, after losing every bit of French backing he still had by then, was getting too close to Libya's Gaddafi, the French decided he had gone too far and toppled the Emperor's rule, using David Dacko, the former president, as a scapegoat to give the whole thing a Central African feel – while firmly keeping the real control in Paris.⁴¹

³¹ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, pp. 5-6.

³² O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 51.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, pp. 5-6.

³⁵ O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 53; Saulnier, P., *Le Centrafrique : entre mythe et réalité*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998, pp. 109-110.

³⁶ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 6; O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 54.

³⁷ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 6; O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 54; Saulnier, P., *Le Centrafrique : entre mythe et réalité*, p. 110.

³⁸ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 6; O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, p. 54.

³⁹ According to O'Toole “[b]y July 1979 a number of very different opposition groups existed outside the country. The four main ones were: (1) the Association Nationale des Etudiants Centrafricains (ANECA), composed of students who had fled to Brazzaville after the April crackdown; (2) the Front Patriotique Oubanguien (FPO) directed by Abel Goumba, the only major opponent who had never participated in power under Bokassa, at the time serving in Cotonou, Benin, with the World Health Organization; (3) the Mouvement de Libération du Peuple Centrafricain (MLPC), created by Ange Patassé in Paris; and (4) finally the Front de Libération des Oubangiens (FLO), founded by the former ambassador in Paris, Sylvestre Bangui, after a spectacular protest resignation. Personality and political differences kept [.. them] from becoming an effective counterforce”. O'Toole, T., *The continent's hidden heart*, pp. 54-55.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, pp. 6-7.; Jean-Claude Manton, an agent of the DGSE, was instrumental in keeping the CAR leaders within the boundaries defined by Paris.

Dacko found it increasingly difficult to govern and in 1981 decided to inform his French backers that he would once again relinquish control to the military.⁴² With the advent of the FACA Chief of Staff André Kolingba as Dacko's successor, linkages to the current situation are becoming increasingly clear and we will address them in the next chapter.

Looking at CAR's early political history one might first be tempted to think of a war-torn country, where a series of bloody coups shifted power back and forth. A closer look however reveals that only a small elite is involved in these power plays and often an external actor is the prime mover. Up until Kolingba, no large-scale fighting or civil war took place in CAR. Fighting was most often limited to what might be described as palace coups. Ascribing the country's current situation to assumed "ancient tribal hatreds" thus seems quite inappropriate. In the next chapter, we will take a look at the genealogy and reasons why armed groups and the government are openly fighting each other in the CAR and why distinctions between warring parties are often based on ethnic or regional cleavages.

2.2. From Kolingba to Patassé: the ethnicisation of politics

At first sight the period under Kolingba did not seem that different from any of the earlier periods. However, under Kolingba's rule, the links with the current situation become increasingly clear. In the following paragraphs we will explore how, during the Kolingba period, ethnic differences became increasingly important in the conduct of politics.

Just like most of his predecessors, Kolingba had to satisfy both the French and his own people, in this case the Yakoma – an ethnic minority of about 4%. While leaving most of the governing to French advisors, Kolingba began a massive recruitment of Yakoma for the army – about 70% of the army at the time of his resignation as head of state were Yakoma.⁴³

Kobinga foiled a coup attempt; Berg argues it was started because non-Yakoma officers perceived the increasing presence of Yakoma in the army as detrimental to their own careers.⁴⁴ The coup had been instigated by Ange-Félix Patassé, François Bozizé and Alphonse Mbaïkoua. As a result Kolingba sent the army to their respective home regions in the north-west for punitive expeditions.⁴⁵ Both ICG and Berg identify this as a turning point in ethnicity becoming a political factor⁴⁶ – clearly demarcating a southern "riverain" identity as opposed to a northern "savanier" identity.⁴⁷

Another major event that occurred while Kolingba served as head of state in the CAR, was the fall of the Berlin wall. As is well known, this reduced the need for "puppet states" in the global periphery. France too withdrew much of its support and felt the need to advocate democratic reform. Although Kolingba resisted democratic reform until the end, he could not escape this process and in 1991 had to yield to multi-party elections.⁴⁸

Ange-Félix Patassé, former minister in the Bokassa government and MLPC opposition leader, would be the one to win these open and fair elections. Besting the left-leaning Abel Goumba in the second round of the elections with a 52.5% score, he was also the first politician from the north to become CAR's head of state.⁴⁹ Patassé himself did not pass the opportunity to exploit his northern heritage for political gain, in effect further politicising the presumed ethnic cleavage between *Riverains* and *Savaniers*.⁵⁰

⁴² Ibid.; Saulnier, P., *Le Centrafrique : entre mythe et réalité*, p. 112.

⁴³ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Country conflict-analysis studies, pp. 19-20; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 20.

⁴⁵ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 20; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Mehler, A., Reshaping Political Space? The Impact of the Armed Insurgency in the Central African Republic on Political Parties and Representation, in: *GIGA Working Papers*, vol. 116, 2009, p. 9; Marchal, R., *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 20; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Mehler, A., Reshaping Political Space?, p. 8.

Considering Kolingba's punitive expeditions against his home region, he also understandably felt threatened by the fact that the Presidential Guard was composed almost entirely of Yakoma – his predecessor's ethnic group.⁵¹ However, he chose the same path himself, transferring the Yakoma majority within the Presidential guards' ranks to the regular army battalions, while filling the Presidential Guard with Sara-Kaba from the north.⁵²

While in this way sparking resentment between FACA (*Forces armées centrafricaines*, the regular army) and the Presidential Guard – especially considering the pay cuts and sub-par equipment allotted to the FACA, resulting in discontent amongst their ranks – Patassé's reign did not bring much change to the relative neglect of the northern areas either.⁵³ This led to a series of mutinies and coup attempts by the FACA, mostly put down by French troops stationed in Bangui: Mehler claims that by rehabilitating certain of these rebel leaders in roles entailing government responsibility, another precedent was set that encouraged the use of violence for material rewards.⁵⁴ Patassé however did not only include "former threats" into government positions, but also removed "perceived threats" from his ranks: future rebel leaders, such as Jean-Jacques Demafouth and François Bozizé lost grace. They were army officers who had been targeted for arrest because of their presumed role in one of these failed coup attempts. The first was eventually cleared from suspicion, the latter was forced to flee to his home area in the north and eventually went into exile in neighbouring Chad.⁵⁵

From then on, the northern area of the Republic, already plagued by *coupeurs de route*⁵⁶, became increasingly insecure because of cross-border raids by Bozizé's men.⁵⁷ To combat this phenomenon Patassé created a special force, outside the regular army, to pacify the northern part of the country. This organisation, led by colonel Abdoulaye Miskine, a former commando in Chad, was accused of serious atrocities by various local human rights organisations.⁵⁸

Even though Mehler indicates Bozizé's revolt against Patassé as the end of the "northern alliance" in CAR politics, one can trace the roots of non-Sara discontent with the Patassé regime to earlier origins, such as the continued feeling of relative neglect mentioned earlier in the text.⁵⁹ This however did not keep Patassé from organising a personal militia in the capital, named the *Karako* or "peanuts" in Sango – a crop only grown in the north, thus further estranging the "river-people" of the south, who already felt targeted.⁶⁰

Feeling increasingly threatened and no longer able to draw solely upon French support – they had downsized their presence in former colonies – Patassé turned towards Libyan troops (under the guise of a CEN-SAD peacekeeping force) and the MLC, a rebel group from DR Congo.⁶¹ MLC's leader, Jean-Pierre Bemba is currently on trial before the ICC in The Hague for human rights violations by his troops during their time in the Central African Republic.⁶²

⁵¹ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 10.

⁵² Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*; Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 14.

⁵⁵ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ *Coupeurs de route* (often called "road cutters" in anglophone literature or *zaraguinas* locally) are bands of bandits who operate in the border areas. They attack or racket transport on the roads they control. As they are highly mobile, they have the habit of retreating to the other side of the border when action is being taken against them. Berg attributes their increasing presence in the region at that time to the actions of the Cameroonian army against them on their side of the border. For an account of their practices, see Abé, C., *Pratique et productivité de la criminalité transfrontalière en Afrique centrale : l'exemple des Zargina*, in: *Bulletin de L' A.P.A.D.*, vol. 25, 2003; Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 23.

⁵⁷ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, pp. 22-23; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 14.

⁵⁸ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Although Patassé was of Suma descent, he was most often identified with Sara; Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 11.

⁶¹ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 21; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 14; Marchal, R., *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...*, p. 14.

⁶² On the ICC in the CAR see Gladius, M., "We Ourselves, We Are Part of the Functioning": The ICC, Victims, and Civil Society in the Central African Republic, in: *African Affairs.*, vol. 108, no. 430, 2009.

Drawing upon the support of these two groups, Patassé was for a while able to fend off Bozizé's attempts to fight his way towards power and even drive him back north to Chad. This new alliance did not please the French, who wanted Patassé to negotiate with Bozizé, as well as the neighbouring countries (Chad, DR Congo, Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon).⁶³ According to Berg these viewed this new alliance as undesirable meddling in their sphere of influence, but Marchal identifies several motivations on different levels (Chad's Déby was worried about his oil operations being endangered, while Nguesso for instance still remembered how Patassé had supported a rival of his).⁶⁴ With these respective actors rallying behind Bozizé, providing logistical and financial support, Bozizé was quickly able to gather the necessary supporters and equipment to lead his troops, four fifths of which were of Chadian descent, victoriously through the streets of Bangui on the 15th of March 2003.⁶⁵ This was, however, accompanied by widespread looting by the same troops.⁶⁶

2.3. The advent of the Bozizé regime

When Bozizé came to power, he soon pledged to organise a national dialogue, also including civil society actors – which had been a longstanding demand in the CAR.⁶⁷ These initiatives however did not hide that Bozizé too was inserting his own kin, the Gbaya, into government structures and that he was attempting to centralise political power in the presidential office.⁶⁸

Apart from the longstanding French involvement in the Republic, the new regime also had an important liaison with one of its neighbours: Chad. Chadian influence, both in Bozizé's military campaign and afterwards was never a secret and he himself never attempted to hide it.⁶⁹ The fact that the soldiers who conquered Bangui for Bozizé came from Chad had the downside that they were neither personally loyal to Bozizé, nor felt any connection to the more abstract notion of "the Central African Republic" (or even one of its [ethno-]regional subdivisions). Thus, when disgruntled over the pay check they received, they easily started plundering which quickly undermined the population's faith in its new head of state.⁷⁰

When Bozizé realised this, he took action and (again with support from Chadian soldiers provided by Déby) managed to drive his former troops from the city.⁷¹ These former "liberators", as they had been called during Bozizé's campaign (most of them were Chadian or from Chadian descent, but had lived in northern CAR all their lives; they had joined the Bozizé-rebellion often after their home villages had been ravaged by Miskine's pro-Patassé militia), started drifting towards the north of the country where they "resettled" and started harassing and looting the local population, often joining the ranks of the *coupeurs de route* in that area, thus further increasing the insecurity in the northern prefectures.⁷²

Although Bozizé attempted to legitimise himself during the 2005 Presidential elections and, with his *Kwa na Kwa* party that had won a majority of the parliamentary seats (but not an absolute majority), started to work towards stabilisation of the security situation.⁷³ However, he too did not escape the trap his predecessors had not been able to avoid (personalising power, ethnic bias), which tarnished his image as a reformer that he himself had created.⁷⁴ The fact that he had excluded Patassé from the 2005 poll sparked resentment and led to a first rebellion in the latter's home region in the north-west of the country.⁷⁵ Soon a second insurrection would occur in the insecurity-plagued north-east of the country,

⁶³ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 15.

⁶⁴ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 21; Marchal, R., *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...*, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 15; Marchal, R., *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁶ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁷ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 22.

⁶⁸ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 18.

⁶⁹ In a Crisis Group report Bozizé is quoted saying "I took power with Chad's help". Ibid.

⁷⁰ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 22.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Debos, M., *Fluid Loyalties in a Regional Crisis*, 2008, pp. 229-230; Mehler, A., *Central African Republic*, in: A. Mehler, H. Melber and K. Van Walraven (eds.), *Africa Yearbook*, Leiden, Brill, 2005.

⁷³ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 22; Mehler, A., *Central African Republic*, in: A. Mehler, H. Melber and K. Van Walraven (eds.), *Africa Yearbook*, Leiden, Brill, 2006.

⁷⁴ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 22; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 18.

⁷⁵ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 21.

where local civil service representatives had fled and FACA soldiers remained as the only government representatives.⁷⁶

2.4. The politics of permanent rebellion

Although the Bozizé regime in name had been promoting western style “democratic” politics, one can also notice a decline in “party politics” in the CAR. In a gradual process, the traditional legal opposition seemed to have lost most of its former appeal. As had been evidenced before, violence and protests often seemed much more fruitful than parliamentary opposition, a fact which has not been lost on the CAR population, rich and poor alike.

Seeing how most of the former heads of state had won power or perhaps just growing weary of not being able to realise anything, traditional opposition members such as Abel Goumba had increasingly opted for co-optation in government structures, virtually leaving Martin Zinguéle and his MLPC as some sort of *last Mohican* in the field of parliamentary opposition.⁷⁷

Of course, not anyone who wanted to could gain entrance into the political system. Increasingly those who did not receive invitations to join in, decided to force their own entry into the system and took up arms either to replace the former government or - mostly under auspices of the international community - to bargain their own entry in the existing political structure in exchange for laying down their weapons. In the course of this process they often lost track of any political agenda, becoming purely driven by the desire to acquire control over the state to advance their own personal goals.⁷⁸ The adage that in CAR “the rulers of today are the rebels of yesterday” should however be expanded. Quite often indeed we can see the opposite happening as well: former “inner circle” people who have fallen from grace often flock to existing rebel movements or hope to start one themselves. Drawing upon the reservoir of disenfranchised youth and the former combatants now spread throughout the country - FACA members, Chadian liberators, *Zaraguinas* and even those who had gained combat experience by organising themselves in self-defence groups - gaining a following was not that hard. The rank and file too did not have too many hesitations in crossing over from legal to illegal armed forces. This blurring of boundaries between military and combatants can be evidenced by a quote elicited by Debos from an *ex-libérateur* that “*army and rebellion are the same. In both cases you are with your brothers*”⁷⁹ and by the fact that the idea of combining a regular job in the army with banditry did not at all appear ludicrous to them. This evokes images almost similar to the “no peace, no war” concept of Richards and the associated *sobels* in Sierra Leone.⁸⁰

Considering these contextual factors, it was not surprising that soon new major rebel groups would pop up to challenge Bozizé, especially in the northern regions where the state was often wholly absent and distrusted by the population.⁸¹ By 2006 two major rebellions had fermented in the north-west and the north-east (APRD and UFDR) who accompanied the ever present *coupeurs de route*, as well as the smaller insurgencies and regular armed forces, in stirring up chaos in the country.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Marchal, R., *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...*, p. 31.

⁷⁸ ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 22.

⁷⁹ Debos, M., *Fluid Loyalties in a Regional Crisis*, pp. 230-231.

⁸⁰ Richards, P., *Fighting for the rain forest: war, youth & resources in Sierra Leone*, Portsmouth, N.H., Heinemann, 1996.

⁸¹ Bierschenk, T., Olivier De Sardan, J.-P., *Local powers and a distant state in rural Central African Republic*, p. 461; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 34.

2.5. Towards the Inclusive Political Dialogue

When by 2005 it became clear that the regime would not be able to defeat the rebels militarily, openings were made to deal with the situation diplomatically.⁸² Although UFDR had long since asked for negotiations under international mediation, Bozizé was not very eager to organise such a dialogue. Yet, under pressure from international donors, he eventually had no choice but to cave in.⁸³ In his 2006 New Year's Eve speech Bozizé announced the commencement of a direct dialogue.⁸⁴

In 2007 Bozizé met Abdoulaye Miskine, who was at that time said to be linked to all the rebel movements (especially FDPC and UFDR), under Gaddafi's watchful eye in the town of Sirte.⁸⁵ These "Sirte Agreements" however only contained a few vague references to UFDR and FDPC participation in state affairs and excluded the APRD. Miskine was afterward also offered a position as presidential advisor, which he later declined.⁸⁶

The Sirte agreements did not bear much fruit: UFDR almost immediately distanced itself from the treaty and renewed its attacks on Birao. Mehler sees this as an attempt to make clear to everyone that Miskine was not to be considered an UFDR representative. This provoked a French intervention on the government's behalf and eventually led to a separate peace agreement.⁸⁷ Civil society actors too, were not very thrilled about the agreement and had ample criticism about the amnesty provided for Miskine.⁸⁸

The APRD too, having been excluded from the agreements altogether, kept on fighting and called for an inclusive dialogue – a separate ceasefire agreement was eventually conducted with them on the 9th of May 2008.⁸⁹

When most of the major actors were recognised by the government, politicians seemed ready to jump on the bandwagon (or revealed their earlier connections). Jean-Jacques Demafouth, former Defence Minister and presidential candidate, was for instance appointed as coordinator of the APRD. Whereas Demafouth actually originated from the region the APRD claimed to represent, stranger alliances were formed as well. Charles Massi, an exiled army officer who had also run in one of the presidential elections, decided to serve as a representative for the UFDR (and would later also serve as a spokesman for the CPJP movement). In this way an alliance was created that allowed Massi re-entrance into the political scene, whereas UFDR could benefit from his networks and credentials.⁹⁰

In 2008 an *accord global de paix* was drafted on the 21st of June in the Gabonese capital Libreville. Both APRD, represented by Demafouth, and UFDR, with Zacharia Damane as representative, signed the agreement with the government. The FDPC, Miskine's movement, was present at the meetings, but chose not to sign the document.⁹¹ Soon after however, in August, fighting re-erupted after disagreement about the amnesty laws. Under the tutelage of Gabon's Omar Bongo, an agreement was reached and the amnesty laws were drafted by the *Assemblée nationale*.⁹² When eventually the MLCJ, an offshoot of the UFDR under command of Abakar Sabone, signed the Libreville agreements as well, the way towards the start of an "inclusive political dialogue" seemed open.⁹³

⁸² Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 17.

⁸³ Mehler, A., Central African Republic, in: A. Mehler, H. Melber and K. Van Walraven (eds.), *Africa Yearbook*, Leiden, Brill, 2007.

⁸⁴ Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 17.

⁸⁵ Mehler, A., Central African Republic, in: A. Mehler, H. Melber and K. Van Walraven (eds.), *Africa Yearbook*, Leiden, Brill, 2008.

⁸⁶ Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 17.

⁸⁷ Mehler, A., Not Always in the People's Interest: Power-sharing Arrangements in African Peace Agreements, in: *GIGA Working Papers* vol. 83, 2008, p. 36; Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 17.

⁸⁸ Mehler, A., Not Always in the People's Interest, p. 36.

⁸⁹ Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, pp. 17-18.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹¹ Mehler, A., Central African Republic, in: A. Mehler, H. Melber and K. Van Walraven (eds.), *Africa Yearbook*, Leiden, Brill, 2009.

⁹² Mehler, A., Not Always in the People's Interest, p. 18.

⁹³ Mehler, A., Central African Republic; Mehler, A., Rebels and parties: the impact of armed insurgency on representation in the Central African Republic, in: *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2011, p. 128; Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 20.

The long awaited *dialogue politique inclusive* did not provide all the solutions at once.⁹⁴ First of all there was obstruction. Bozizé feared the dialogue would be used by his enemies as a trick to topple him without upsetting the international community. On the other hand, on several occasions, he himself tried to use the dialogue as an instrument to legitimise himself and strengthen his position for the 2010 presidential elections.⁹⁵ Secondly there was the opposition's stance: the increasing combination of military and political ambitions, as evidenced in the cases of Massi and Demafouth, did not assuage Bozizé's fears. Although security sector reforms (SSR) were carried out, mostly under Belgian supervision⁹⁶ and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) was endorsed in the agreements, the security situation itself did not improve as much as was hoped for.⁹⁷

The newly found position of the UFDR in the north, authorised by the government, has sparked resentment in other parts of the northern population. Both Runga and Kara groups have been actively defying UFDR control over the region.⁹⁸ In the south-east, LRA presence has been increasing and, although it is claimed that their military capacity has been noticeably reduced, their presence has had a very disruptive effect. Their recurrent pillaging and kidnapping of villagers has had the effect of villagers fearing to work in their fields, endangering their food supply, or just making them flee the insecure region, resulting in large numbers of IDPs as well as increased presence of Congolese refugees hoping to escape the LRA violence in their own country.⁹⁹

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter attempted to introduce the situation in the CAR in the form of a literature review. While illustrating the socio-political dynamics, it also introduced some of the actors that are still calling the shots in the Republic at present and served to illustrate the economic situation and ethnic cleavages that define the social fabric in the CAR.

What has been written above will form a background and basis for our further explorations into the contemporary actors, which are covered in the third chapter. Afterwards we will present our methodological approach and use it to assess how the Central African armed actors actually behave on the ground.

⁹⁴ We have limited ourselves to but a few points we deem important for this overview. A more comprehensive account can be found in the 2008 and 2010 International Crisis Group briefings on the dialogue. ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, Africa Briefing N° 69, 2010; ICG, *Central African Republic: Untangling the Political Dialogue*, Africa Briefing N° 55, 2008.

⁹⁵ Mehler, A., Not Always in the People's Interest, p. 3.

⁹⁶ On the SSR and the Belgian role in the process see Martinelli, M., Klimis, E., *La réforme du secteur de la sécurité en République centrafricaine : Quelques réflexions sur la contribution belge à une expérience originale*, GRIP, Les rapports du GRIP, 2009.

⁹⁷ ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, p. 1; ICG, *Central African Republic: Untangling the Political Dialogue*, pp. 4-5.

⁹⁸ ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, p. 14; Mehler, A., Central African Republic, in: A. Mehler, H. Melber and K. Van Walraven (eds.), *Africa Yearbook*, Leiden, Brill, 2010.

⁹⁹ ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, pp. 14-15.

3. Conflict actors

Armed groups have been around in the CAR since the late seventies/early eighties under Bokassa's reign. The mostly Libyan-supported armed groups such as the *Mouvement centrafricain pour la libération nationale* (MCLN) of Rudolph Idi Lala may have been involved in a few actions against the regime, but were hardly considered a pressing matter as firearms were rather scarce at the time.¹⁰⁰ After the Bokassa regime was brought down, there is some indication that arms were being smuggled in from Chad – with a marked increase after the Hissène Habré regime broke down in 1990.¹⁰¹

While this allowed several non-state groups to start arming themselves, the influx of arms became problematic after Mobutu was brought down from power in Zaïre by Kabila, and members of his Gbadolite-based Presidential Battalions started crossing over into CAR territory while selling their guns.¹⁰² Ange-Félix Patassé is one of the politicians of whom it is said that he started arming his MPLC-followers as early as 1981. He also armed several militias after he was elected president, among which the organisation led by Abdoulaye Miskine.¹⁰³ Government stockpiles too were often sacked, either during *coup d'états* or the several mutinies within the armed forces, thus even further allowing the proliferation of small arms in the country.¹⁰⁴

The availability of arms alone is of course not the decisive factor for the creation of armed groups, but it does provide the means for them to take to the stage. This led to the situation in 2006, when despite the presence of several peacekeeping missions in the country armed groups such as the UFDR, APRD and several others were active in the country.¹⁰⁵ While these “previous generation” armed groups have now either ceased to operate or have been included in the 2008 *accord de paix global* and *the dialogue politique inclusive* and have in effect been transformed into government allies, some of them still play important roles in both the conduct of politics and armed conflict.¹⁰⁶ These groups may have ceased to openly defy the government forces, but new ones have arisen, confronting both the “old” armed groups and government forces. In the following paragraphs we look into the origins and backgrounds of the groups that have been encountered in the data we gathered. New groups have arisen, but several older ones already mentioned above are still in some way active.

3.1. Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (UFDR)

UFDR roots lie in the north-eastern part of CAR. The Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran prefectures located in this part of the country are in many ways cut off from the rest of CAR. Especially during the rainy seasons, it is almost impossible to reach these regions by road from the southern areas and from Bangui, the capital. On top of that, northerners in this region are perceived as culturally different: contrary to the Christian-dominated south, most of them are Muslim, and not Sango, but a variant of Arabic is used as *lingua franca* throughout the region.¹⁰⁷ As a consequence, inhabitants of the region often feel that their region is (purposely) underdeveloped compared to the rest of the country.¹⁰⁸ The fact that both Chad and Sudan, whose populations are often related to those on the Central African side of the border, are nearby, also makes this region interesting for armed groups, as a border can be very useful to avoid being caught. This borderland position also provides armed groups with a reservoir of young combatants whose “fluid loyalties” make them easy to recruit. These (mostly Chadian) “liberators” have

¹⁰⁰ Marchal, R., *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...*, p. 35; Berman, E. G., Lombard, L., *The Central African Republic and Small Arms: A Regional Tinderbox*, Small Arms Survey, 2008, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰¹ Marchal, R., *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...*, p. 36.

¹⁰² Berman, E. G., Lombard, L., *The Central African Republic and Small Arms: A Regional Tinderbox*, p. 28.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ For an overview see Lombard, L., *A widening war around Sudan: The proliferation of armed groups in the Central African Republic*, Human Security Baseline Assessment / Small Arms Survey, Sudan Issue Brief, 2007, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ See Sguaitamatti, D., Central African Republic, Inclusive Political Dialog (Pre-talks only), in: S. J. A. Mason (ed.), *Unpacking the Mystery of Mediation in African Peace Processes*, Zürich, Mediation Support Project, 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, p. 24; ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, p. 15; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ HRW, *State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians*, Human Rights Watch, 2007, p. 6.

played an important role in CAR's recent political history (see previous chapter) and, as we will see, they have been working with or within the UFDR.¹⁰⁹

Most sources situate the founding of the UFDR somewhere around September 2006 under the leadership of chairman Michel Am Nondroko Djotodia and spokesman Abakar Sabone.¹¹⁰ It was a fusion of three earlier groups operating in the north-eastern region¹¹¹: the *Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice* (MLCJ, led by Abakar Sabone, which quit the alliance later and went on independently¹¹²), the *Groupe d'action patriotique pour la libération de la Centrafrique* (GAPLC; Djotodia's movement) and the *Front démocratique centrafricain* (FDC, led by Justin Hasan).¹¹³ Human Rights Watch states it is composed mostly of ethnic Gula, who have been trained as park rangers to combat Sudanese poachers, and former Chadian liberators who turned against their previous patron, president Bozizé.¹¹⁴ The movement claimed to take up arms in protest against the comparative underdevelopment in the north-eastern part of the country. They soon won international attention by gaining military control over the Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran prefectures. This sparked reaction and led to a French intervention on behalf of the government, which soon ousted UFDR from most cities.¹¹⁵ This intervention also led to the incarceration of both leaders, which paved the way for 'General' Zacharia Damane to claim leadership, while both Sabone and Djotodia – even after they had been released – were effectively side-tracked and remained outside the movement.¹¹⁶

Although the Gula, who are largest ethnic group in Vakaga, have always formed the core of the UFDR, other parts of the population were present in the group. Under Damane's leadership, however, an ethnic shift occurred and membership has become almost exclusively Gula.¹¹⁷ This has caused the UFDR, which has been known to target non-Gula specifically ever since, to lose legitimacy and the support of a large part of the population.¹¹⁸

Meanwhile UFDR signed peace agreements with the government in April 2007 and June 2008. Even though disarmament was an envisaged part of this process, UFDR still has not laid down its weapons.¹¹⁹ Because of its behaviour towards other ethnic groups, UFDR has been confronted by disgruntled Runga and Kara youth. These form a constant threat to them and for that reason UFDR refuses to lay down its weapons.¹²⁰ Runga in particular have become visible in their struggle with UFDR and the government through the CPJP, which often clashes with UFDR.¹²¹ Furthermore, UFDR in its current position has worked out a *modus vivendi* with the government in which they in effect are to fulfil certain functions in the territories under their control. This acceptance of the UFDR as a partner becomes clear in the rumour that the CAR government has at times even provided the UFDR with weaponry to combat the LRA.

3.2. Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (CPJP)

Clashes between Runga and Gula groups have been reported since 2008.¹²² Whereas Runga had been present in the earlier incarnations of the UFDR, the movement has been shifting towards becoming a mono-ethnic Gula militia since Damane took over leadership. Their harassment of other ethnic groups, Runga in particular, led to the establishment of the CPJP, or *Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix* in the Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture somewhere in 2008.¹²³

¹⁰⁹ Debos, M., Fluid Loyalties in a Regional Crisis.

¹¹⁰ ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, p. 15; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 10.

¹¹¹ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 10.

¹¹² Mehler, A., *Reshaping Political Space?*, p. 22.

¹¹³ HRW, *State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians*, p. 75.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.; On Chadian liberators and their role in CAR's history, see Debos, M., Fluid Loyalties in a Regional Crisis.

¹¹⁵ HRW, *State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians*, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, p. 15.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ For more on CPJP see §4.2.

¹²² Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 26.

¹²³ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, p. 15.

Although they are amongst the youngest non-state armed actors in the CAR, they were described as one of the most active rebel groups during the period for which data were collected. Because of the fact that the organisation is fairly new to the game, they have not yet been thoroughly investigated. Their online blog¹²⁴ mentions they fight to “[r]endre à la République centrafricaine ses Valeurs de ‘Zo Kwe Zo’ et son ‘Unité-Dignité-Travail’¹²⁵ but they have mostly been active in the mining zones in the northern and central parts of the country. Most of their alleged leaders also have backgrounds in the mining business.¹²⁶

Charles Massi, who had been UFDR coordinator only a year before, was appointed as spokesman for the movement.¹²⁷ During 2010 the CPJP stayed outside any formal peace talks, and kept attacking towns and villages in the north – with Ndélé as best known case. Only since April 2011, which is outside the scope of the data used in this report, have the CPJP and the government been tending towards peace talks.

3.3. Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA)

The history of the LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army) can be traced back to 1988 in Acholiland (Northern Uganda), when Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) was defeated and several of her followers joined Joseph Kony, one of the “mystics” who himself had been inspired by Alice Lakwena.¹²⁸ Although the movement was at first aimed against Museveni’s regime, fighting a war of attrition in Northern Uganda, the group soon became embroiled in a wider regional conflict when the Sudanese government started to provide aid to the LRA in exchange for military action against the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in Southern Sudan.¹²⁹

Contrary to what was hoped for by most observers, the LRA did not wither away when Uganda and Sudan signed their peace agreement in 1999, nor did extensive military operations by the Ugandan forces, which were then allowed to root out the LRA bases in Southern Sudan, solve the LRA problem.¹³⁰ “Operation Iron Fist”, as the offensive had been named, and subsequent military actions did cause LRA troops to disperse to DR Congo, where they set up camp in the Garamba national park during 2005.¹³¹

Until 2008 the LRA in DR Congo was not challenged militarily and laid low for a while, probably because of the peace talks going on at that time.¹³² When violence re-erupted, a full-scale assault was decided on. The Ugandan army, in cooperation with a few of the neighbouring Great Lakes states as well as Sudan, launched “Operation Lightning Thunder” in the hope of finally flushing out the LRA. The plan, which consisted of an extensive air bombardment of the Garamba park followed by an assault by ground troops, did not succeed, and the LRA was able to split up in smaller groups to avoid detection.¹³³ Afterwards the LRA increased its offensives and started spreading out, both within DR Congo and to the north, into CAR territory, where they had already been conducting raids earlier on.¹³⁴

¹²⁴ It is not known how the blog’s author “Askabiol” is related to the CPJP. The blog itself claims to be a legitimate channel through which the CPJP communicates.

¹²⁵ <http://cpjp.centrafrique.over-blog.org/>; Zo Kwe Zo is a Sango phrase ascribed to Barthélemy Boganda. It roughly translates to “Every human being is a person”.

¹²⁶ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, pp. 18-19.

¹²⁷ Mehler, A., Central African Republic.

¹²⁸ Allen, T., Vlassenroot, K., Introduction, in: T. Allen and K. Vlassenroot (eds.), *The Lord’s Resistance Army: myth and reality*, London/ New York, Zed/Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 7. On the “pre-history” of the LRA, see Doom, R., Vlassenroot, K., Kony’s message: A new koine? The Lord’s Resistance Army in northern Uganda, in: *African Affairs*, vol. 98, no. 390, 1999, pp. 5-20.

¹²⁹ Dunn, K. C., Uganda: The Lord’s Resistance Army, in: M. Bøås and K. C. Dunn (eds.), *African guerrillas: raging against the machine*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2007, p. 135.

¹³⁰ Ibid. Since 2003 the ICC had become involved in the LRA question as well. This further complicated matters, as it was feared that this would result in a harsher stance by the LRA, because they feared being persecuted themselves as well as the fact that released hostages could be used as witnesses during trials. On the ICC and the LRA see Allen, T., *Trial justice: the international criminal court and the Lord’s Resistance Army*, London, Zed, 2006.

¹³¹ Dunn, K. C., Uganda: The Lord’s Resistance Army, p. 136; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Province Orientale (DRC)*, IPIS, 2010, p. 7.

¹³² Allen, T., Vlassenroot, K., Introduction, p. 18; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Province Orientale (DRC)*, p. 7.

¹³³ Allen, T., Vlassenroot, K., Introduction, p. 19; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Province Orientale (DRC)*, p. 7.

¹³⁴ Allen, T., Vlassenroot, K., Introduction, p. 19; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 29. For an account of one of the LRA’s most discussed human rights violations, see Human Rights Watch, *The Christmas Massacres*, Human Rights Watch, 2009.

Ever since then, the LRA has been operating in the border regions between CAR, DR Congo, South Sudan and Darfur, where they prey on villages. The relative security they enjoy because of the impotence of national security forces to stop them, is only limited by the scattered presence of the Ugandan army in these regions and self-defence groups created by the villagers themselves.¹³⁵

Because of the importance of rituals and spirituality within the movement, LRA are often portrayed as “a bunch of religious fanatics”.¹³⁶ In their depiction in western media, these features are often exaggerated, evoking Conradesque images of a savage Africa where irrationality reigns.¹³⁷ A sociologically more functionalist approach does however reveal that there is more to it.¹³⁸ The seemingly erratic rituals often serve as a way of structuring the movement and the lives of its rank and file, strengthening internal cohesion as well as serving a plethora of other functions.¹³⁹ Just like the LRA itself, the rituals too have been restructured to serve the specific needs of the situation and have, for instance, been subject to different interpretations at times when the movement was more fragmented and individual commanders had a bigger influence.¹⁴⁰

The Tongo-Tongo, or “the people who cut off lips and ears”, as the LRA is known by the CAR populace in the south, have mostly been scouring for supplies and have abducted youth to initiate them in their ranks.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile they attempt to outrun the Ugandan army, which has been allowed to intervene on CAR soil to engage the LRA.¹⁴² While ICG identifies the Ugandan army as the main opponent for the LRA in the CAR and acknowledges the role of self-defence groups, our data seem to suggest the UFDR too has recently become an important player in the struggle against the LRA.¹⁴³

During the compilation of this report the Obama administration passed the “Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act”. This resolution allows the US army to take action against the LRA. Only after the report was finished did the US authorise such action. Researchers have however been critical about the choices made by the US military in regard to the form of action taken.¹⁴⁴ As these actions took place outside the time scope of this paper, we will not elaborate on their results here.

3.4. Other

The aforementioned actors have been the ones who were, according to our data, involved in the lion’s share of the incidents in 2010. Yet, they are hardly the only ones that have been active on Central African soil. Several other groups were reported as having taken part in either harassing the civilian population or in confrontations with other armed groups. To simply describe them as “other” is doing injustice to their wide range of diversity. That is why in what follows, our goal is to describe the backgrounds of these actors, who can be classified in categories as different as national armies, international peacekeeping forces, co-opted rebel groups, bandits and transhumant pastoralists.

¹³⁵ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, Africa Report N° 157, 2010, p. 5.

¹³⁶ Titeca, K., The Spiritual Order of the LRA, in: T. Allen and K. Vlassenroot (eds.), *The Lord’s Resistance Army: myth and reality*, London/New York, Zed/Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 59.

¹³⁷ Ibid. For some examples, see Finnström, S., An African hell of colonial imagination? The Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, another story, *ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

¹³⁸ Titeca, K., Een zootje ongeregeld of een strikt georganiseerde beweging? Het LRA en het strategisch gebruik van spiritualiteit en religie, in: R. Doom (ed.), *Conflict en ontwikkeling: Overleven in de grensgebieden van de globalisering*, Ghent, Academia Press, 2008; Titeca, K., The Spiritual Order of the LRA.

¹³⁹ Titeca, K., Een zootje ongeregeld, p. 266.

¹⁴⁰ Titeca, K., The Spiritual Order of the LRA, pp. 72-73.

¹⁴¹ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 9; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 30; Wood, G., Joseph Kony’s Long Walk To, and From, Hell, in: The Atlantic, 9 April 2010, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/04/joseph-konys-long-walk-to-and-from-hell/69005/#bio.

¹⁴² See Appendix 1 for information gathered on LRA activity in 2010.

¹⁴³ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, pp. 10-12.

¹⁴⁴ See Schomerus, M., Allen, T., Vlassenroot, K., Obama takes on the LRA: Why Washington sent troops to Central Africa, in: *Foreign Affairs*, 15 November 2011.

3.4.1. APRD

The *Armée populaire pour la restauration de la république et la démocratie* (APRD) might at first sight not seem that important, as they appear in just one incident we listed. Yet, it could easily be said that it was an important – if not the most important - insurgency movement before the Inclusive Political Dialogue.

Its origins can be traced back to 2005, when Bozizé was elected President while his rival Patassé, whom he had overthrown in 2003, was barred from competing in the elections.¹⁴⁵ This sparked resentment in the latter's home region, around Paoua in the north-west, where former members of his Presidential Guard started the APRD.¹⁴⁶ While originally its core members were said to have been composed of a small number of people (some sources citing as few as fifteen), the APRD soon saw its ranks swelling due to indiscriminate military response by the government troops, which caused the local population to seek safety with the APRD, the lesser evil.¹⁴⁷ Others say the movement has its origins in the indiscriminate mistreatment of civilians after a cigarette-transporting truck guarded by FACA forces was attacked by unknown assailants, which resulted in self-defence groups banding together, later being co-opted by political entrepreneurs.¹⁴⁸ Either story does however mention actions by the military as the main reason for their growth.

Apart from those hailing from the Patassé-era Presidential Guard, its membership comprises FACA deserters, Chadian and Central African "ex-liberators", as well as local self-defence groups and even converted road bandits.¹⁴⁹ While the Parisian-based Jean-Jacques Demafouth was considered its political chief, its leadership structures in the field were less transparent. The appointment of Demafouth did however make clear that the earlier reported influence exerted by Patassé on the movement had waned.¹⁵⁰

The 2008 peace agreements provided the APRD with the option to end their fight with the government forces in the region. Another added benefit was having a representative in the government: François Naoyama, Minister of Environment, is considered an APRD representative. While in 2009 several incidents involving the APRD were still reported, their quarrel with the armed forces is now nowhere near as prominent as in the past. In this new situation, the APRD is in control of its north-western fiefdom. While this has of course led to some excesses on behalf of the armed group, action has at times been taken against those commanders that committed violations against the populace.¹⁵¹

3.4.2. Chadian Pastoralists

Large scale cattle breeding is quite uncommon in the CAR, with most of the consumed meat being the product of hunting. While some of the Mbororo minority traditionally reared cattle, this too seems to be declining as more and more of them become sedentary. Most herds seen in the north-western part of the Republic are indigenous to Chad. The transhumant pastoralists living there often cross the border with the CAR in search of pasture for their herds. This process started somewhere around 1970 and has recently intensified - some blame the increasingly common droughts in Chad, whereas others highlight the instability in the region -, with more and more cattle breeders crossing the border into the CAR to let them graze on the nutritious "bourgou"-grass that is common in the area. The herdsmen themselves are often highly armed to protect their herds. While some claim the *coupeurs de route* to be their main concern, others claim that the *coupeurs* can often be found within the ranks of the pastoralists. Because of their increasing presence and their impact on local resources, it is not uncommon for locals to have conflicting interests which may escalate. On the other hand, the herds themselves are valued property

¹⁴⁵ HRW, *State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians*, p. 6; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Vinck, P., Pham, P., *Building Peace, Seeking Justice: A Population-based Survey on Attitudes About Accountability and Social Reconstruction in the Central African Republic*, Human Rights Center, University of California, Initiative for Vulnerable Populations, 2010, p. 7; HRW, *State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians*, p. 6; ICG, *Central African Republic: Untangling the Political Dialogue*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁷ Berman, E. G., Lombard, L., *The Central African Republic and Small Arms: A Regional Tinderbox*, p. 113.

¹⁴⁸ Lombard, L., *Central African Republic: Peacebuilding without Peace*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, 2011, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.; ICG, *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, p. 24.

¹⁵¹ Mehler, A., Central African Republic.

and are prone to being stolen by others. This has often led these nomad herdsmen to clash with their temporary neighbours.¹⁵²

3.4.3. *Coupeurs de route* / Zaraguinas

The *coupeurs de route* in the CAR are an example of highway banditry as it occurs in areas where the state's monopoly on violence is not (or no longer) viable. They are a common phenomenon not just in the CAR, but also in most border areas of the surrounding states (Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad) and they have a long history.¹⁵³

The *coupeurs de route* (lit.: road-cutters), or Zar(a)guinas as they are called locally, have been especially active in the CAR in the last decade or two. Marchal attributes their resurgence to the cotton crisis of the 1990s, while Berg points out their increased presence after Cameroonian authorities took a harder stance against them somewhere around 2000.¹⁵⁴ While the earliest *coupeurs* were mostly of foreign descent, nowadays Central Africans seem to have joined in as well.¹⁵⁵

Although the *coupeurs de route* backgrounds are quite diverse, some categories can be discerned: a first group are the "occasional bandits", such as Central African soldiers or policemen using their service arms for criminal activities on other days.¹⁵⁶ Another group are Bozizé's ex-liberators, who have been mentioned earlier. When chased out of Bangui, they needed another way to earn their living. Being experienced combatants, turning to a life of armed crime was only a small step for them. When they moved north it was only logical that they would join the ranks of the *coupeurs*.¹⁵⁷ The armed escorts of foreign transhumant cattle breeders (§3.4.2) are said to be involved as well. Even though their main goal would be to protect their herds, it would not be surprising if some of them used their weapons to gain something on the side as well. As we have mentioned earlier, these bands of pastoralists are an ideal way of blending in and getting in and out of the country.¹⁵⁸ A fourth category are those belonging to the Mbororo ethnic minority. These traditionally cattle rearing groups have known a long history of marginalisation, and some of them have lost or been forced to sell their herds. This has led some of them to search for other ways to generate an income.¹⁵⁹

While the *coupeurs* do not wear an easily identifiable garb as most of the military actors do, they are most often identified as wearing traditional clothing which covers their faces.¹⁶⁰ The *modus operandi* of these groups is however as diverse as is their composition. They are known to perform organised nightly raids on villages (raiders are often said to have intimate knowledge about the villages they attack, some might even live there). While their main goal is money, they have been known to sometimes abduct girls and infants and collect ransom money later.¹⁶¹ Their signature way of working however, is the use of roadblocks: making use of the poor road quality in the CAR, they can easily erect roadblocks. While hiding in the nearby grassy areas or forests, they wait until a driver falls into their trap and lock him in. They then proceed to relieve any passengers of their possessions and are known to whip those that do not carry anything of value as well as those who try to hide their possessions from the *coupeurs*. Rape of female passengers too, is not unheard of.¹⁶² While some roads are only occasionally targeted – mostly between 4 to 8 and 16 to 20 o'clock -, other roads are considered to be completely controlled by the *coupeurs*.¹⁶³

¹⁵² Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁵³ A recent publication by Saïbou Issa examines the historical trajectory of the *coupeurs* in this part of Africa. See Issa, S., *Les coupeurs de route : histoire du banditisme rural et transfrontalier dans le bassin du lac Tchad*, Paris, Karthala, 2010.

¹⁵⁴ Marchal, R., *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...*, p. 20; Berg, P., *The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁵⁵ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Issa, S., La prise d'otages aux confins du Cameroun, de la Centrafrique et du Tchad : une nouvelle modalité du banditisme transfrontalier, in: *Polis*, vol. 13, no. 1-2, 2006, p. 138.

¹⁵⁸ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁹ Issa, S., La prise d'otages, pp. 123-5.

¹⁶⁰ Abé, C., *Pratique et productivité*, 2003, p. 4.

¹⁶¹ Abé reconstructs how these raids happen. Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

These *coupeurs de route* have no outspoken goals, as they are all but a unified homogenous group. Because major former insurgency movements recently became government allies and started targeting the *coupeurs*, they have been less active lately. While this might be heralded as a positive change, it does not provide a final solution to the problem: as everyone owning firearms can at some point decide to start free-lancing as a *coupeur*, the combat experience and weapons provided by armed groups (the military included) also possibly forms the next generation of *coupeurs de route*. As soon as insurgency is no longer a viable means of surviving, and no other possibilities are around, former combatants might decide to start using their acquired skills in this way – in some cases this may even happen when they are still part of one of the groups. Combating the *zaraguina* phenomenon would require not just a rigorous DDR-programme for former combatants, but also changes in the current security situation in the CAR.

3.4.4. FACA

The *Forces armées centrafricaines* or FACA are the CAR's national army. It is considered a small and ineffective force. It is made up of several branches which often perceive each other as rivals, the Presidential Guard being the best known. The respective presidents have tended to distrust the FACA, as they are mostly made up of ethnic Yakoma since the Kolingba presidency, and tended to favour the Presidential Guard, which they filled with their own kinsmen. While the FACA have a strong presence in Bangui, their influence outside the capital is limited. Battalions are often sent to fight armed groups that have taken over towns in the other parts of the country, but they have nowhere near the necessary numbers to control the situation on the ground.

Mutinies and coups have been common and officers are often suspected of harbouring malicious intents towards the President, resulting in them being targeted for arrest or worse, which they tend to escape by seeking support with one of the armed groups.

While the FACA have in the past often been identified as the most important violators of human rights, our current data seem to suggest they nowadays tend to focus their energy on the armed groups opposing them.¹⁶⁴ Whether this is the result of the security sector reforms which have been implemented with the help of French, European and South African officials, or due to the fact that their clashes with APRD in which they often implicated the population are now over, or just because our sources tended not to report these kinds of incidents, is not yet clear.

3.4.5. MINURCAT

MINURCAT was a United Nations mission stationed in Chad and the Central African Republic until 31st December 2010.¹⁶⁵ It was “intended to help create the security conditions conducive to a voluntary, secure and sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons, inter alia by contributing to the protection of refugees, displaced persons and civilians in danger, by facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance.”¹⁶⁶

3.4.6. MLCJ

The *Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice* (MLCJ) was one of the armed groups that originally formed the UFDR. When Abakar Sabone, MLCJ leader and then important figure within the UFDR, was imprisoned in Benin in 2006, the UFDR leadership was taken over by Zacharia Damane. Sabone himself never recognised Damane nor the peace agreements with the government and, when he got back to the CAR, decided to relaunch the MLCJ. Eventually he too opted for a separate agreement with the government.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, pp. 11-13; HRW, *State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians*, pp. 6-10.

¹⁶⁵ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1923%282010%29

¹⁶⁶ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1778%282007%29

¹⁶⁷ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, p. 16.

3.4.7. Self-defence groups

In an environment where insecurity reigns, the proliferation of self-defence groups is not surprising. Having been confronted with road bandits and, more recently, non-state armed groups, and expecting no help from the state, villagers have often banded together in local self-defence groups to protect themselves and their families from harm. While this resilience of people in the context of state failure could at first sight be applauded, it also has its downsides. In the past and in other parts of the world, similar groups have often been co-opted in the bigger conflict, when one or the other actor starts to try and “buy them out”, for instance by providing weapons shipments. These co-opted self-defence groups often proved disloyal to those who armed them, thus becoming unstable factors. Actions of similar groups have often complicated further peace talks in similar situations. In some cases networks of local armed forces even became major conflict actors later on. Those self-defence groups that are better armed might also be seduced to attack neighbouring (or even their own) villages in search of personal gains.

The self-defence groups do, however, often form the only line of defence against marauders such as the LRA or the *coupeurs de route*. While they sometimes operate with other groups, it is hard to see any discernible pattern here, because even though some networks connecting the disparate self-defence groups have been founded in certain regions, most of them still work autonomously. For instance they are often seen collaborating with the “accepted” armed groups against LRA raids on their villages, but may as well clash with them if a local commander is deemed to have taken unfair decisions or if soldiers misbehave against villagers.

3.4.8. Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF)

The Ugandan army has made it its mission, with American financial and logistical support, to combat the LRA. As early as 2008 Ugandan military officials visited the region around Obo in the CAR to warn the locals.¹⁶⁸ After operation Lightning Thunder against the LRA in the DR Congo, anticipating a further incursion of Kony’s troops into CAR territory, the weakest link in the Central African chain, the Ugandan army was forced to overextend itself further and move into the Republic as well. The Ugandan forces have tackled the LRA with a two-pronged approach, engaging them militarily with the aim of capturing or killing them, as well as with a communications campaign to encourage LRA fighters to defect.¹⁶⁹ The vast geographical distances over which the LRA is now spread do however make it difficult for the Ugandans to effectively tackle them, especially since coordination with other involved actors is often lacking.¹⁷⁰

The south-eastern part of the CAR, where the bulk of LRA attacks have taken place, was also one of the parts with the least military presence. While in 2009 several international contingents were working the CAR, they were all stationed in the northern and western parts of the country. The FACA presence in the region was hardly a threat anymore to the LRA raiders. The CAR government quickly allowed the Ugandans to intervene and set up camp in Obo.¹⁷¹ Their initial successes, capturing a few higher ranked LRA members, did however cause the LRA to scatter further north, which forced the Ugandans to establish bases in Djéma and Sam-Ouandja as well. Even though they reportedly failed to stop Kony from crossing over to Darfur, he did not find the support he had hoped for with the Khartoum government and is said to have crossed back over into CAR territory.¹⁷²

The Ugandan presence in the CAR is said to maintain friendly relations with the FACA troops and civilians. Yet, discontent has arisen with the Ugandan policy on LRA fighters: because of their involvements in the Karamoja and Somalia requiring their troops, Uganda is trying to reintegrate former LRA soldiers into

¹⁶⁸ Wood, G., Joseph Kony’s Long Walk.

¹⁶⁹ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Wood, G., Joseph Kony’s Long Walk; ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 9.

the ranks of the army. This has resulted in victims sometimes recognising the perpetrators, who now wear the garb of the Ugandan army.¹⁷³

3.4.9. Unknown

Several perpetrators of incidents have been labelled as unknown, because our sources did not succeed in identifying their allegiances. In most cases they probably are *coupeurs de route*, especially when involved in stealing property. However, nothing excludes them from being freelancing members of one of the armed groups or even FACA. The context of the incidents they are involved in should at some level allow us to identify their allegiance, though it is hard to be certain about them.

¹⁷³ Cakaj, L., *Too Far from Home: Demobilizing the Lord's Resistance Army*, Enough Project, LRA report, 2011, pp. 8-9.

4. Methodological Approach

To conduct our analysis of the situation in the CAR, we use a methodological approach developed by IPIS to map the motives of the respective actors in a conflict. In this chapter we will present the underlying model for the qualitative geographical analysis, as has been elaborated in IPIS' conflict mapping handbook.¹⁷⁴ Apart from the model itself we will also elaborate on the way in which data was gathered and on the use of maps as a tool of analysis.

4.1. Model

After it has been established that a war or armed conflict is taking place, we want to know why it erupted. To assess its reasons, the armed conflict is seen as a method employed by actors to achieve certain goals. These objectives are then determined by certain motivations. For instance: a minority might start an insurrection against the state with hopes of seceding from it (objective); this secession in its turn can be motivated by persistent socio-economic neglect and discrimination against this minority (motive).¹⁷⁵ While these motives do shape the objectives, which in their turn define the outbreak of war and the way in which it is fought, this is not a one-on-one relation, as other situational factors might influence either of these variables as well.

To discover the motivation for war, and why they lead to war breaking out, we need to turn the model round: the method to discover the motives behind war is to start from the situation as it exists in the field. The military actions and decisions taken by the actors can then be traced back to the objectives and (subsequently) motives from which they originated.¹⁷⁶

Warfare is considered the dependant variable in this model. Questions such as by whom, why and where wars are fought (or not fought) can help us discover the underlying objectives and subsequent motives.¹⁷⁷ The model distinguishes between four different motives as drivers of conflict:¹⁷⁸

- Profit: "Greed" scholars have long stressed the economic motivations for war and, indeed, conflict does provide opportunities to enrich oneself. There are plenty of possibilities to do so: pillaging, racketeering, organisation of traffic in illegal substances or just plain taxation can all be used to make a profit from a war situation.
- Grievance: As has been stressed by the opposing "camp" in the "greed versus grievance"-debate, socio-economic and political situations too can be a cause for certain groups to take up arms. Continued economic neglect of regions and/or peoples in one nation might entice them to try and change the situation through conflict, as can continuing discrimination or structural political underrepresentation. Especially when there is no hope of addressing their problems through legitimate political channels, people will be tempted to seek other ways to achieve these goals.
- Survival: A third reason for the conduct of violence by an armed actor is to ensure his survival. While the model mentions "access to food, access to water, physical security, shelter, living space and outlet possibilities" as possibilities, one can in certain cases also include the survival of the movement as a sociological unit within this category.
- Power: Wars have always been used as a means to achieve power. While these have in the past mostly been equated with wars of conquest, it could be interesting to analyse how (externally imposed) power-sharing agreements fit into this motive. Do some insurgents start conflicts with the aim of joining the political elite through this kind of agreements?¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., Handbook: Mapping Conflict Motives in War Areas, Antwerp, IPIS, 2008.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., Are Congo's mines the main target of the armed groups on its soil?, in: *Economics of Peace and Security*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2009, p. 56.

¹⁷⁷ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., Handbook: Mapping Conflict Motives in War Areas, p. 23.

¹⁷⁸ Spittaels, S., Cuvelier, J., A Research NGO Operating in the Shadows, in: T. Vircoulon (ed.), *Les coulisses de l'aide internationale en République démocratique du Congo*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, p. 157.

¹⁷⁹ On power-sharing agreements, see Mehler, A., Peace and Power Sharing in Africa: A Not So Obvious Relationship, in: *African Affairs*, vol. 108, no. 432, 2009. When viewed in another light, waging war to gain access to government politics might be

In some cases a fifth motivation might be added:¹⁸⁰

- Humanitarian considerations: Certain actors might be tempted to intervene to protect (parts of) the civilian population. This mostly happens when humanitarian disasters take place.

As we have mentioned, these motivations in their turn shape the objectives of the warring parties. The objectives are what they hope to achieve militarily to realise their initial motivations for starting the conflict. Situational factors and military logic do however have their own dynamics and might influence the objectives.¹⁸¹ Neither objectives nor motivations are static: throughout the conflict actors may develop new motivations and objectives, for instance through a change in leadership.

The objectives identified in the mapping conflict motives model are (1) military control, (2) territorial change, (3) political change and (4) absence of state of law.¹⁸² These objectives are related to the motivations. Some can be combined, while others exclude each other.¹⁸³

4.2. Maps and data

4.2.1. Static maps

To study the behaviour of armed groups and uncover their motives, we visualise them on a map. Using GIS-software, a number of maps are made indicating one or more possible motivational factors and targets. These maps, which can show possibilities to make a profit (resources), reasons for political grievances, power bases or means of survival, are called *static maps* because they show relatively fixed geographic features (mines, arable land, cities).

The static maps this study uses have been described at length in the 2009 CAR mapping report. The data used to compile these has been gathered by IPIS from a myriad of different sources, which are described in the report.¹⁸⁴ Because they were covered earlier, we will only shortly describe them here.

The collection first of all comprises a map showing possible greed factors: natural resources and mineral wealth. While natural resources are important greed targets, they are not the only ones. There are other possibilities, which we unfortunately could not include. A map could for instance show the most important trade routes. As he who controls the routes also controls taxation (or might rob transports passing), these routes have the potential to generate revenue as well.

A socio-economic map can show possible grievance-based factors by indicating poverty rates, the presence of health care centres and factors relating to education. This can help to see if rebel groups originate in those parts of the country that have been relatively neglected. Another possible grievance scenario is related to (perceived) discrimination against specific ethnic groups. Although there are some important caveats when using this sort of maps, a map depicting the different ethnic groups in the CAR is included as well.¹⁸⁵ It might be able to reveal the possible targeting of specific groups by one of the actors.

One of the goals for armed actors that wish to gain power, will be administrative capitals. Different regional capitals or important power centres have been visualised on the map. Another strategically important goal would be the important military power centres, as well as strategically important places. These too are indicated on the maps.

considered a “profit” strategy, as being a politician allows to steer some of the government revenue towards supporters and themselves.

¹⁸⁰ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., Handbook: Mapping Conflict Motives in War Areas, p. 24.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁸⁵ One should always exercise caution when using this kind of maps. They tend to reduce the situation to a multi-mono-ethnic one (where one region is subdivided into several areas dominated by one or the other ethnic group). In reality however, the situation is often much more complicated and minority groups are present in areas where other groups are dominant. Maps like these, although useful, might, when misinterpreted, serve as legitimisation for territorial claims by groups emphasising autochthony.

A last motivation is that of survival. Maps indicating basic needs are one factor in visualising survival motives. Another factor is physical security, which can be visualised as those places where refuge can be sought (mountainous terrain, forested areas). These zones will mostly be situated further away from the (regional) capital(s) or important cities, as those are most likely the ones being patrolled by groups who are a threat to the survival of the movement.

4.2.2. Dynamic maps

Contrary to most of the geographic features shown on the static maps, the actions by armed groups are not fixed. They constantly evolve and change places. The validity of these maps is therefore only temporary. Although it is interesting to compare current data with the older dynamic maps, we had to compile a new dynamic layer. Ideally, such data would comprise detailed positions of each of the armed actors present, as well as their clashes with other groups and their abuses against the populace. Because of constraints imposed by our sources and the limited time frame in which this research report had to be compiled and because of the impossibility to conduct fieldwork, we unfortunately could only gather sufficient data on clashes between armed groups and incidents of armed groups acting against the people. Contrary to the 2009 report, we will have to use indirect data from which to deduce the positions of the armed groups.¹⁸⁶

The data we used to compile our map was gathered by scanning CAR media on reports of actions by armed groups. Two providers of information in particular were selected, due to time restraints as well as to the credibility of their information: the HDPT CAR Info Bulletins and the *actualités* provided by Radio Ndeke Luka on its website. In an ideal situation this information would of course be complemented with data gathered from the other CAR media channels, such as the newspaper *Le Confident* or the *Agence Centrafrique Presse*.

The Humanitarian and Development Partner Team (HDPT) in the CAR is a platform that unites the different organisations that are active in humanitarian assistance and development areas. It has a network that extends throughout most of the country.¹⁸⁷ About three times per month an info bulletin is published with information regarding the sectors the HDPT CAR is involved in. Information about armed groups provided within these bulletins between January and December 2010 was entered in our database.

Our second source, Radio Ndeke Luka, is a project funded through the Swiss foundation *Hirondelle* and is supported by several other NGOs as well. It was launched to follow in the footsteps of Radio MINURCAT as a radio station to complement the peace process in the country. Its goal is to contribute “à la consolidation de la paix, à la reconstruction et au développement économique et social en République centrafricaine et dans la sous-région, en diffusant une information impartiale, utile et professionnelle”.¹⁸⁸ Apart from its broadcasts in French and Sango, the station also maintains a website which publishes *actualités* that cover newsworthy facts throughout the CAR on a daily basis. These *actualités* too were scanned for news on the armed groups and the conflict and often served to complement or verify the information provided by HDPT CAR.

The data gathered in this way were then plotted on a map of the CAR, resulting in two layers that can be used in our analysis: one layer showing the clashes between the different armed groups, called ‘Confrontations’, and one visualising the incidents where armed groups ill-treated the population (called ‘Human rights abuses’)¹⁸⁹. Combining these dynamic map layers, detailing activity of the armed group, with the geographic data from static maps, allows us to deduce their intentions and subsequently, their motives.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 22.

¹⁸⁷ HDPT, About HDPT CAR, last update on 11 August 2011, (<http://hdptcar.net/blog/humanitarian-development-partnership-team-central-african-republic-hdpt-car/>).

¹⁸⁸ Sebahara, P., Frère, M.-S., *Centrafrique*, 2001, p. 204.

¹⁸⁹ The web map containing these two layers is available at www.ipisresearch.be/maps/CAR/2010/web/index.html. It can be viewed at three different scales: 1:5,000,000 (initial view), 1:2,500,000 and 1:1,000,000. See www.ipisresearch.be/mapping_car.php for instructions on how to use the web map.

¹⁹⁰ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Handbook: Mapping Conflict Motives in War Areas*, p. 29.

5. Conflict Analysis

5.1. South-eastern region

5.1.1. Actors and background

The south-eastern part of the CAR has evolved from a relatively quiet part of the country in 2008 to a region plagued by conflict (in this report the “south-eastern region” covers the Haut-Mbomou and Mbomou prefectures, as well as a small part of Haute-Kotto).¹⁹¹ The main culprit for this situation is the LRA, which seems to have increased its presence in the CAR.

Southern CAR, inhabited by the Azandé/Zandé people, was first visited by the LRA in 2008 when they carried out several raids in the region and abducted about 110 people.¹⁹² Since most international peacekeeping forces present in the CAR were stationed in the northern and northwestern regions and the FACA did not have the means to oppose them, the LRA did not meet any serious opposition. When pressured by military action against them in neighbouring countries during February 2009, Kony and his troops once again entered the CAR to regroup and also in the hope of finding passage towards Sudan.¹⁹³ Ever since then, they have been hiding out in the border area between CAR, DR Congo and Sudan. To survive they prey on civilians, which provides for physical necessities as well as ensures a steady flow of new recruits.¹⁹⁴

The Uganda People’s Defence Force has for a while been the only serious opponent to the LRA. Supported by funding and intelligence from the United States, the UPDF has been on the hunt for the LRA and, especially, for Joseph Kony himself. Although some measures have been taken to ensure cooperation from other regional armed forces, political problems and the inability to coordinate have proven detrimental to the formation of a full-fledged regional framework to combat the LRA.¹⁹⁵ The CAR government, considering the weakness of its defensive forces, was quickly convinced to welcome the Ugandans into the country after the LRA entered the CAR in May 2009.¹⁹⁶ The Ugandans, who had been anticipating the fact that the LRA might move into the CAR as early as 2008, quickly set up camp in Obo in south-eastern CAR.¹⁹⁷ Moving further north, the LRA forced the UPDF to further stretch their supply lines and erect a second base of operations in Djéma.¹⁹⁸ Although relations between Ugandan forces and both the CAR populace and army were reported to be positive, somewhere during 2010 President Bozizé requested the UPDF to retreat to its bases – possibly in the hope of securing US funding by engaging the LRA with Central African forces. By now, only small units tracking the LRA combatants are still active.¹⁹⁹

5.1.2. Presence of the LRA

Because the LRA is highly mobile and tends to retreat into the bush, rather than capture towns or cities, it is difficult to pinpoint exact locations for their presence. Apart from the attacks in the northern prefectures, which we will treat later, the incidents in which these groups were involved, almost always seem to take place near CAR’s border with DR Congo – their attack on Yalinga around 27 February being the main exception. While their main presence south of the border seems to be situated more towards the east, the area on both sides of the border is well suited to hide because of forest vegetation or the

¹⁹¹ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁹³ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁴ Hemmer, J., *The Lord’s Resistance Army: In Search for a New Approach*, Conflict Research Unit - Clingendael Institute, Expert Meeting Report, 2010, p. 1.

¹⁹⁵ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, pp. 1-4.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; Wood, G., *Joseph Kony’s Long Walk*.

¹⁹⁸ Another UPDF base was located near Sam-Ouandja to the North, but the Ugandans left before September 2010. ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 26; ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, p. 17.

¹⁹⁹ HSBA, *Lord’s Resistance Army, Small Arms Survey, Facts & Figures*, 2011, p. 1; ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 9.

presence of protected areas (the Bangassou Forest Reserve for instance).²⁰⁰ Although LRA incidents near Obo, where the Ugandans are stationed, were common in the last months of 2009, they seem to have significantly diminished during 2010.²⁰¹ It seems likely that they try to avoid Ugandan patrols by moving westward (and possibly further north in more desolate mountain areas where their presence would go largely unnoticed). They are however still present near Djéma. If indeed Ugandan troops decrease their presence in these areas, it seems possible that the LRA returns.

5.1.3. Motives of the LRA

When the LRA brought forth its grievances in the past, these were always directed against the Ugandan state – against which it said it was protecting the Acholi people. Since they have been driven from Uganda, they have fought on Congolese, Central African and Sudanese soil, but never have advanced a specific agenda against these states.

Their presence close to forested areas and other hiding spots as well as their tactics, indeed seem to confirm that their main goal is to survive. Their raids focus on equipment and provisions, to ensure the physical survival of their fighters on the one hand, and the abduction of youth, who are then initiated into their ranks to ensure the survival of the movement on the other. Kony's attempts to travel towards Sudan to liaison with the Khartoum government to ensure help, which is said to be one of the reasons for entering the CAR, also seems to suggest that the main goal is to survive. Furthermore, because the ICC has issued warrants against them, the LRA leadership fears it will be tried even when a peaceful resolution could be found through negotiations.²⁰²

While the LRA have in the past attacked Yalinga and Mbroutchou (Lahou), towns located near diamond mines, and have been spotted near Djéma (where gold is mined), their attacks on these towns have always followed their regular *modus operandi* and focused on abducting people and supplying themselves. Attempting to control and exploit the mines never seems to be an option for them, possibly because this would make them an easy target.

Even though most LRA attacks in southern CAR take place within the area populated by the Azandé, ethnic bias is probably no motive, as the LRA uses the same method in parts populated by different ethnic groups. The fact that these attacks mostly take place within Zandé territory is probably coincidental, as the Azandé are the ones living in the areas most suitable for the LRA.

5.1.4. Presence of the UPDF

The Uganda People's Defence Force has since 2009 established several bases on Central African soil. Expecting Kony and his followers to move westward, the Ugandans established a presence near Obo, the region where the LRA had entered the CAR and started search and destroy operations.²⁰³ After a few successes for the Ugandan troops, capturing or killing LRA officers, Kony's troops started moving north. They first attacked the town of Djéma, where the Ugandans decided to establish a presence, before moving further north to reach Sudan. Attempting to stop Kony from reaching Darfur, where neither they nor their Southern Sudanese allies would be able to catch him, they put up another base near Sam-Ouandja. This however failed to stop Kony from reaching his destination. Although Kony subsequently returned to DR Congo, the CAR itself remains an important battleground for the Ugandans in their fight with the LRA. The bases they established remain the focal points for their fight against the LRA, but they have travelled as far westward as Dembia to confront the LRA troops.

²⁰⁰ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Province Orientale (DRC)*.

²⁰¹ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 26.

²⁰² See: Allen, T., *Trial justice*; Ochan, C., *Assessing Uganda's cross-border pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army*, Feinstein International Center, February 2009, p. 8.

²⁰³ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 8.

5.1.5. Motives of the UPDF

The UPDF's main reason to be active in CAR territory is the presence of the LRA. Supported by funding provided by the US within the framework of its war on terrorism, they are currently waging a regional war against the LRA.²⁰⁴ Yet, several factors – both internal and external – might influence (or have already done so) the conduct of this battle with the LRA on the ground.

As we have mentioned, CAR president Bozizé asked the UPDF to retreat to their bases. Some have speculated that he wanted the FACA to fight the LRA to obtain funding from the United States.²⁰⁵ Others have stressed the fact that, whereas earlier the LRA was not considered a domestic issue in CAR politics, the CPJP denunciation of the government's inability to stop the "Tongo-Tongo" might have triggered the latter's rise to prominence on the political scene, thus forcing Bozizé to take a firmer stance against the intruders, especially with elections coming up, as was the case in 2010.²⁰⁶ Being re-elected and with new European- and African Union-funded initiatives for regional cooperation in prospect, Bozizé might however have enough possibilities to profit from action against the LRA without curtailing the Ugandan efforts.²⁰⁷

Other dangers to the operation however stem from Uganda itself. With the LRA having been removed from Ugandan territory, Museveni might decide to prioritise other matters. The Ugandan engagements with AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) and the need for troops in the volatile Karamoja region for instance, might be considered bigger priorities.²⁰⁸ The increasing use of former LRA combatants as soldiers by the UPDF may also be interpreted in this light. While providing extra combatants and additional intelligence for the operation, this strategy however also has its downsides: locals are already getting more distrustful of the Ugandan forces, especially when confronted with former assailants.²⁰⁹ The increasing presence of "untrained" or rather "alternatively trained" soldiers who have often been exposed to extreme violence, might also lead to increasingly violent behaviour against (uncooperative) civilians.

5.2. North-eastern and central regions

5.2.1. Actors and background

This part of our analysis comprises the prefectures of Bamingui-Bangoran, Vakaga, Ouaka and to a lesser degree Basse- and Haute-Kotto. The foremost link between them, is that in 2010 the CPJP was active in these respective prefectures. However, a multitude of other actors have been active as well: the UFDR, one of the main insurgency groups in 2008, has been a government ally since the global peace talks were conducted with the Central African State. However, this has not led them to disarm their fighters and they remain active in Vakaga, sometimes cooperating with the FACA. The MLCJ, a UFDR offshoot, is in a similar position. In the north too, the LRA has been active, especially in the vicinity of the border with Sudan. Most actors active in this region have been reported to fight the LRA, often supporting/supported by local self-defence groups. Until December 2010, the MINURCAT UN mission retained a presence in the region. The continuing insecurity has also made sure that *coupeurs de route* have remained active.

While in 2008 Bamingui-Bangoran and the regions to its south were only scarcely plagued by the conflict, with UFDR and APRD active respectively in Vakaga and Ouham, the rise of the CPJP seems to have made them a primary battlefield.²¹⁰ While the UFDR now seems more or less the most important force in Vakaga, its clashes with government troops have now been replaced by LRA incursions into their territory. The UPDF based near Sam-Ouandja are not reported to have been involved in any of the struggles, probably because they left before September.

²⁰⁴ See *ibid.*; van Puijenbroek, J., Plooijer, N., *How EnLightning is the Thunder? Study on the Lord's Resistance Army in the border region of DR Congo, Sudan and Uganda*, IKV Pax Christi, February 2009.

²⁰⁵ HSBA, *Lord's Resistance Army*, p. 1.

²⁰⁶ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 16.

²⁰⁷ HSBA, *Lord's Resistance Army*, p. 2.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Wood, G., *Joseph Kony's Long Walk*.

²¹⁰ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*.

5.2.2. Presence of the CPJP

The CPJP established its operational headquarters at Akoursoubak, north of Ndélé, close to where the movement was founded. Several groups who claim to be CPJP have since turned up in most of the central and north-eastern parts of the CAR. Abdoulaye Hissène, who calls himself the group's president and commands ground operations, is based at Sikikédé, in the Vakaga prefecture. Around May 2010, the group tried to move to Bria (Haute-Kotto), where Runga miners had been chased out by the UFDR earlier, which is believed to have sparked their protest. They were reported to have taken over mine sites near Sangba, 90 km south of Ndélé. A group of youth, who had been raiding villages in the Bakouma area before, claimed to be CPJP after their attack on Nzako. The same group, under the leadership of Mahatmat Sallé, also stayed in Yalinga between 18 September and 4 October. ICG also reports that, in cooperation with a Chadian rebel group, they occupied Birao (Vakaga) for a short time but were soon after chased by the Chadian armed forces, who are allowed to chase Chadian rebel groups on CAR territory.²¹¹

The attacks by CPJP and conflicts in which they have been involved, seem to indicate that they are present in the diamond mining zones between Ndélé and Yalinga. They have, however, also been spotted both north and south of these zones, in Birao and Mingala (border Basse-Kotto/Mbomou) respectively.

5.2.3. Motives of the CPJP

The CPJP at first called for the removal of Damane, responsible for the targeting of Runga miners, as leader of the UFDR. ICG states that they have since been joined by former army and Presidential Guard members who have brought new goals with them, moving beyond provincial ambitions. After being attacked by the FACA in January 2009, they proclaimed their goal was to bring down Bozizé.²¹²

Indeed, when we look at the confrontations between the CPJP and other armed groups, we notice they almost exclusively seem to fight the FACA, even when inside "UFDR territory". They have expanded to the south and not eastwards towards Vakaga, the UFDR stronghold (except for their attack on Birao on 24 September). The map seems to suggest that by doing this the CPJP has effectively moved outside Runga territory (and even outside the area normally associated with the ethnic "Northern group", to which both Runga and Gula are considered to belong) and into areas inhabited by Banda. It would be worth investigating whether Runga miners were already working in this area before the CPJP arrived. If they were, the relation between the CPJP and these migrant groups, especially when it comes to recruitment, would be an interesting topic for further inquiry.

Furthermore, this could add an additional dimension to the observation that the CPJP is mostly active in and around mining areas and towns. As most of the CPJP's leadership and rank and file have in the past been associated with mining activities, it is no surprise that the movement is in the mining business. Whether or not it is their main objective, is hard to tell and might differ between the different leadership figures. The troops do seem to target government institutions in the towns they attack and the CPJP has, in 2011, been trying to negotiate a truce. This could mean that elements within the CPJP aim to be included in the DDR process or to receive positions within the government. Bozizé is, however, said to be determined to pursue a military solution – possibly to discourage future insurgents.²¹³

5.2.4. Presence of the UFDR

The UFDR first gained notoriety when it occupied Birao and Ndélé in 2006. From there they subsequently moved south towards Sam-Ouandja (November 2006) and Bria (early 2007).²¹⁴ Their main stronghold is said to be situated in the southern part of the Vakaga prefecture.²¹⁵ Before Damane opened the negotiations that led to the ceasefire and peace agreements, the UFDR was halted by a French-Central African coalition near Mouka and at the same time forced out of Birao. The Birao Accords, as the

²¹¹ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, pp. 18-19.

²¹² ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, p. 14.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, p. 16.

²¹⁵ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 35.

agreement between the UFDR and the Central African government was called, did not only allow for a presidential adviser's salary for Damane, but also gave the UFDR control over the area they occupied, including Sam-Ouandja.²¹⁶ Being the government's ally in Vakaga and Haute-Kotto, some of its fighters are officially recognised and receive a soldier's salary. Others have taken up diamond mining or farming, but can easily become active again when needed.²¹⁷

Our data for 2010 indeed seem to confirm the UFDR presence in the border area of the Vakaga and Haute-Kotto prefectures, but they are also active in Birao. They do not seem to frequent anymore the area further west, Ndélé and the Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture, where they had been active in their early years. Contrary to Birao or Sam-Ouandja, where they are extensively involved in fighting intruding armed groups, the UFDR seem to have left the fight with the CPJP in Bamingui-Bangoran to the FACA. Incursions of the LRA in the north, possibly originating from Sudanese territory, have forced the UFDR to respond militarily, especially after the Ugandans left their base in Sam-Ouandja in August. For this task they even have some type of tacit government approval, as they have received ammunition shipments to fight the Tongo-Tongo.²¹⁸

5.2.5. Motives of the UFDR

Although the UFDR have agreed on paper to partake in DDR, in reality they have hesitated to lay down their weapons and have often found excuses to postpone this. Several factors could explain this: while the UFDR is the most powerful actor in the north, the movement is not unchallenged. Apart from the aforementioned CPJP, the Kara ethnic group too has no intentions to acquiesce to Gula dominance in their home region around Birao.²¹⁹ Incursions by the LRA have only strengthened the UFDR's resolve that, to retain their dominance both locally and on a national scale, they must remain vigilant.

The UFDR have presented a list of demands, mostly relating to the relative underdevelopment of the northern areas of the CAR.²²⁰ While their rank and file might have taken up the cause because of this inequality, their representatives at the table are said to be more interested in personal gain. Damane, even though he is known to have walked out of meetings when other representatives refused to acknowledge the marginalisation of CAR Muslims, is reported to be mostly interested in trading diamonds.²²¹

The UFDR "core region" is indeed located close to the diamond mines around Sam-Ouandja, which they are known to control, and from which they have chased non-Gula miners.²²² However, there have not been any reported incidents of the UFDR moving into the mining zones to the south. If the mines they control now offer a steady stream of sufficient revenue, it stands to reason that they would attempt to solidify their dominance in the region they control, as they are not unquestioned there, instead of stretching themselves too thinly by fighting the CPJP further to the south – happily leaving that task to the FACA troops.

Since Damane's ascent to power, the UFDR has favoured the Gula, who now are its only members. Former membership had also included other groups, such as the Kara and Runga, who have now organised themselves for protection against the UFDR brutalities or have struck out on their own, forming the CPJP. As the UFDR tries its best to avoid having to disarm its troops, they probably expect or even prepare to clash with these groups to assert their dominance over the region.

Despite attacks mentioned in earlier reports, no real incidents against the population involving the UFDR have been reported in our data. The Central African government might not be too keen to expose its ally as a human rights violator and the region is also very distant from the heartland and not much regular communication is possible, so some incidents might not have been reported. The presence of

²¹⁶ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, p. 16.

²¹⁷ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*, p. 35; ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, p. 14.

²¹⁸ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, p. 17.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, p. 5.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² There are many accounts of UFDR practices in relation to diamond mining. See ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*; Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*.

the UPDF in the region, who had a base near Sam-Ouandja until August, also had a restrictive influence on the UFDR's ability to exert control over the mines and conduct violence against civilians.²²³

The main motivation for the UFDR thus seems to solidify their dominance over "their area", presumably in the hope of strengthening their position in the Bangui-based political scene, as well as in local politics and business. Because the UFDR are no longer fighting the government, the gems originating from the mines they control are not considered conflict diamonds under the Kimberly Process definition. These do however perpetuate violence, as they allow the UFDR to fund itself without having to take public opinion into account. As long as other groups remain a threat to them, the UFDR is unlikely to lay down its weapons. However, the longer the UFDR abuses continue, the more likely it is that other groups might attempt to take matters into their own hands, possibly duplicating the CPJP scenario. While the government has tried to organise a reconciliation dialogue in the past, its influence in the region is not strong enough to truly enforce it.²²⁴

5.2.6. Presence and motives of the LRA

Apart from the attacks in the south-eastern prefectures of the CAR, the LRA has been active in Vakaga and Haute-Kotto as well. During October and September several incursions were noted along the Sudanese border. As Kony is thought to have stayed in Darfur between January and April before returning to the CAR, these could have been remnants of his group still operating in this area.²²⁵ Other sources claim Kony might still have resided in Darfur in the period between September and November, and that his forces were present in Am-Dafock, a border town between the CAR and Darfur.²²⁶ The dates of the incidents reported seem to lend further credibility to an LRA presence in Darfur in this period. The Ugandan base near Sam-Ouandja, which had been established precisely to prevent Kony from crossing over into Darfur, was left in August, before the attacks were reported.²²⁷ It is possible that the absence of the Ugandans was one of the reasons the LRA troops resumed action on northern Central African soil.

The LRA presence in the region is thought to be closely related to their presence in Darfur, where they attempted to contact the Khartoum government in the hope of receiving support. Although meetings have probably taken place between representatives of both parties, no aid is thought to have been provided to the LRA. While Sudanese officials continue to deny any LRA presence, JEM (Justice and Equality Movement, an armed group in Darfur) members and Ugandan intelligence claim Kony's troops have resided in Darfur.²²⁸ Because food supplies in Darfur were probably too scarce for the LRA to survive, and because no support was forthcoming, the LRA moved back into the CAR.²²⁹

5.2.7. Presence and motives of the FACA

Even though the FACA were the most reported human rights violators during the 2008 conflict, in our data they do not figure prominently at all.²³⁰ While one could be tempted to applaud the success of the SSR programs, it should be noted that the majority of FACA troops is stationed in the areas surrounding Bangui, the areas that are now no longer heavily involved in conflict. Since FACA violations were mostly known to be reprisals against the populace for actions conducted by the rebels, FACA may now simply have less use for such reprisals.²³¹

In Vakaga the weakness of their presence is clear, as one can easily notice that they only seem to operate in this region when fighting side-by-side with one of the armed groups that they have agreements with (MLCJ or UFDR).

²²³ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, p. 17.

²²⁴ ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, p. 14.

²²⁵ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 9.

²²⁶ HSBA, *Lord's Resistance Army*, p. 6.

²²⁷ ICG, *Dangerous Little Stones: Diamonds in the Central African Republic*, p. 17.

²²⁸ HSBA, *Lord's Resistance Army*, pp. 6-7.

²²⁹ ICG, *LRA: A regional strategy beyond killing Kony*, p. 9.

²³⁰ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*.

²³¹ HRW, *State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians*, p. 6.

Against the CPJP, however, FACA seem to be on their own. As this group operates in Bamingui-Bangoran and other regions closer to FACA's "core regions", this probably makes it easier for them to engage the CPJP. On the other hand, Bozizé is said to strive for a military solution for the CPJP insurgency, possibly to discourage any further military entrepreneurs from attempting to start their own insurgency to bargain for government positions.²³²

5.2.8. Others

Several other actors have been active in this region as well. Because only a few of their actions have been reported it is hard to draw meaningful conclusions from the data.

MLCJ (Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice)

The MLCJ is an UFDR offshoot, led by its former leader Sabone. It has also concluded an agreement with the government. They probably remain armed so Sabone can assure his place at the table in Bangui. They have been involved in defending Birao against the LRA, working with the FACA and local self-defence groups. In another incident, one of their contingents, whose colonel was in Bangui at the time, was involved in the looting of Kamoun, a village near Birao.

MINURCAT

While not really involved in any confrontations, the UN peacekeeping mission irked the UFDR when they refused to use their helicopters to transport one of their wounded. The UFDR subsequently forbade them to patrol the area under their control. While this is not a real conflict, it is testament to the power the UFDR (thinks it) wields over the region, as well as the weakness of the mission. As the mission's mandate ended in December, they no longer play an active role in the CAR.

Unknown

For several incidents the perpetrators have been labelled as unknown. While in some cases these can be attributed to parts of the armed groups who had not been identified properly during the fighting, in most cases they can be ascribed to so-called *coupeurs de route* that use the climate of insecurity for personal gain.

5.2.9. North-western region

While some incidents are still being reported there, the Ouham prefecture is nowhere near the "conflict hot zone" it used to be when the APRD rebellion was still actively fighting the government. Just like the UFDR, the APRD have reached an agreement with the government and now take care of security matters in their part of the country. FACA troops are still active in the region, but contrary to 2008 no more human rights violations have been reported, presumably because they no longer feel the need for reprisals against the population now that the APRD are no longer attacking them. Bordering Chad, the region is often visited by Chadian pastoralists and their cattle, with whom the locals often clash when disputes occur. These groups were involved at least on two occasions, fighting with the local population or getting involved in conflict with the APRD. *Coupeurs* too are still active in the region. However, to add a more meaningful analysis to the actions of the actors in this region, more data would be required.

²³² ICG, *Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive*, p. 14.

Conclusion

Though insecurity is still rampant across the Central African Republic, the situation has changed a lot since the last mapping report.²³³ In 2008 the conflict zones within the CAR were concentrated in Ouham and Vakaga, with respectively the APRD and UFDR as main insurgency movement and the FACA as their main opponent – although the latter was no less guilty of human rights violations than the first two. In 2010 on the contrary, the CPJP and LRA are easily noticed as the most active armed groups. Although this is seemingly a complete reversal of the situation, closer analysis reveals how present and past situations are still intrinsically linked to each other.

Rather than being a complete turnover of the situation, the rise to prominence by CPJP and LRA are logical consequences of respectively local and regional dynamics. The agreements concluded with the APRD and the UFDR have not resulted in these groups becoming less important for the security situation of the CAR. In the case of the UFDR, it even played part in the genesis of a new armed insurgency, the CPJP. The increasing LRA presence on Central African soil too, can be attributed to the combination of the local institutional weakness of the CAR government and its armed forces, in combination with the conflict that, while originally involving only the UPDF and the LRA, has spread throughout the region and forced other regional actors to become involved as well.

The absence of a well-managed, coordinated and inclusive regional answer to tackle the LRA problem will cause the problem to keep expanding or just move to another area. If an adequate answer is to be found, it will require close regional cooperation and strengthening of the security situation in Central Africa, especially in the CAR, which is the weakest link in the regional security chain. An inclusive regional platform could simultaneously allow the UPDF to keep fighting the LRA while closely working with other national armies, thus providing the opportunity for all actors involved to share in the possible prestige emanating from eliminating the LRA. The United States, having recently passed the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, could coordinate the effort and provide training to the different armed forces in the region.²³⁴ When national armies are not sufficiently equipped to protect the inhabitants of their country against the LRA during such an operation, international peacekeeping forces could alleviate the need and perform their responsibility to protect the population from reprisal.

To solve the internal problems within the CAR, both the insecurity as well as the grievances of the population should be addressed. Continually delegating the provision of security to armed groups in their home regions is no long-term solution. International missions could play an important role in helping to solve this problem, their presence bridging the time needed to properly train and equip local security forces to tackle the issue.

In the Vakaga prefecture especially, mediation is required to defuse the volatile situation and prevent reprisals (and the resulting cycle of mutual hate and violence) between the different ethnic groups living in the region. A mission composed of civil society actors, experienced in local mechanisms for conflict mediation, possibly combined with international experts on the matter, might guide the process towards reconciliation. To prevent co-opted armed groups from misusing their position and ignore the population and force them to take responsibility for their actions, their means of financing themselves should be closely monitored. The ASM (Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining) sector in particular needs to be closely monitored, so it can not be used by armed groups to finance themselves without having to take into account the population's wishes.

To prevent disgruntled politicians from using newly formed armed groups, originally addressing local grievances, to relaunch themselves into the political scene, the functioning of democratic institutions needs to be assured. Channels to address local grievances need to function and faith in elected representatives needs to be restored.

²³³ Spittaels, S., Hilgert, F., *Mapping Conflict Motives: Central African Republic*.

²³⁴ Since the compilation of this report, American troops have entered into action. Researchers, however, are critical about their goals and tactics. See: Schomerus, M., Allen, T., Vlassenroot, K., Obama takes on the LRA: Why Washington sent troops to Central Africa, in: *Foreign Affairs*, 15 November 2011.