

Security Council

The Ongoing Conflict in the Central African Republic

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Model United Nations 2024

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Introduction

The Central African Republic (CAR) has been a battleground of conflict and violence for decades. The conflict is a burning issue that demands urgent attention. The recent attacks serve as a stark reminder of the atrocities committed by armed rebel groups; the millions of displaced citizens facing life-threatening issues underscore the immediate need for support; and the lack of aid for the CAR highlights the critical necessity for solutions.

Definition of Key Terms

Rebel Groups

Rebel groups are non-state armed entities that oppose or challenge the established government or authority, often engaging in armed conflict to advance their political, social, or ideological objectives.

Sectarian Violence

Sectarian violence refers to conflicts, hostilities, or any acts of violence that occur between different religious, ethnic, or sectarian groups within a society. Sectarian violence typically occurs between groups that have a long history of hatred.

Coup

A coup, short for "coup d'état," is a sudden and often violent seizure of power or overthrow of a government or ruling authority. It is most typically carried out by a faction within the existing political establishment, such as military officers or a rebel group.

Boycotting

Boycotting refers to the act of intentionally refusing to engage with a person, organization, or entity as a form of protest or to bring about change.

Humanitarian Crisis

A humanitarian crisis refers to a situation where there is a widespread threat to the well-being and basic survival of many people. It is typically caused by a significant disruption in the status quo, such as armed conflict, natural disasters, or political instability, leading to severe humanitarian needs. These needs may include access to food, clean water, healthcare, shelter, and protection.

Militia

A militia is a non-professional armed group that operates outside the regular military or law enforcement structures. Militias are typically composed of civilians who organize themselves for various purposes, such as self-defense, political objectives, or to advance specific interests.

Peacekeepers

Peacekeepers are individuals or groups of military personnel, police officers, or civilians deployed by international or regional organizations to help maintain peace, stability, and security.

Background Information

Since gaining independence in 1960, the CAR has experienced at least 11 military coups. With each successive conflict, more rebel groups form, exacerbating the challenges to peace and stability in the region. This constant violence caused civilians to rebel in the form of rebel groups. These rebel groups are a group of armed rebels often associated with a specific location or religion who engage in military operations with the CAR in hopes of change. The conflict in the CAR is a complex struggle between these armed rebel groups and the fragile government for power, resources, and ultimately, control. This idea of rebel groups fighting against the government is part of a vicious cycle of violence and rebellions in which most of the violence is rooted from.

The formation of rebel groups is not new in the CAR. This idea can be first noticed when Francois Bozize successfully overthrew ex-president Patasse in 2003. However, Bozize then also fell victim to a military coup in 2013 by a rebel group “Seleka” ran by Micheal Djotodia. Djotodia resigned in 2014 and was replaced with a transitional president, Catherine Samba-Panza, as part of a peace deal signed between the rebel groups and the CAR government. This transitional period lasted until 2018 when current president Faustin-Archange Touadéra was elected. However, to establish order and stability, he left out the two biggest rebel groups in the region in his government formation, which basically meant the CAR government didn’t acknowledge the rebel groups. This led to the rebel groups joining forces under the name “CPC,” who boycotted the government’s claim over the CAR region in late 2020.

Current Situation

Currently, most of the country is controlled by the CPC, with just the capital, Bangui, being held by the Government. The CPC is still active, organizing attacks in the region with the hope of ex-president Bozize returning to power. This decades-long cycle of violence of course had a devastating impact on their economy and standards of living. Currently, the CAR is ranked the 4th worst in the Human Development Index (HDI) and is dealing with the grueling fact that 70% of civilians are living off less than \$2 a day. It has resulted in the displacement of over 1.3 million people, both internally and as refugees in neighboring countries. The violence has led to the loss of many lives, with civilians being caught in the crossfire and even sometimes specifically targeted by armed rebel groups. The humanitarian crisis in the CAR has disrupted access to basic services such as healthcare, clean water, and education. Children and women are particularly vulnerable, facing disruptions in education and an increase in gender-based violence including sexual assault and more.

Recently in 2023, CPC rebels launched coordinated attacks aimed at strategic economic regions in the CAR. The rebels targeted the CAR's vital trade artery to Cameroon, aiming to disrupt the supply chain that runs to the capital, and a land of rich soil where most of their agriculture takes place.

With an economy that is not getting any better, and constant fighting in cities throughout the country, a complete collapse of the government is inevitable unless proper action is taken. Furthermore, the recent violence highlights the severity of the ongoing conflict in the CAR.

Major Parties Involved

France

As the former colonial power of the CAR, France has been actively involved in ongoing conflict in the CAR. Specifically, France supported the CAR government during the CAR bush wars by providing air support against their opposition.

European Union

A prominent actor in humanitarian and development efforts, the EU has poured over €545 million into the CAR since 2014. Their focus encompasses healthcare, food security, education, and conflict prevention, laying the groundwork for long-term stability. The EU also emphasizes governance reforms and human rights protection, tackling the root causes of the conflict. However, concerns about the effectiveness of aid and potential corruption within the system remain.

United Nations

At the forefront of peacekeeping efforts, the UN is responsible for deploying the MINUSCA mission that includes over 18,000 peacekeepers. Through its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN coordinates the delivery of aid to vulnerable populations and champions their protection. Additionally, the UN Human Rights Council monitors and reports on human rights violations, ensuring accountability amidst the chaos. However, MINUSCA faces its own challenges, with allegations of abuse by peacekeepers, limited effectiveness in protecting civilians, and overall negligence in their work.

CPC (Coalition des Patriotes pour le Changement)

CPC stands for the Coalition of Patriots for Change (Coalition des Patriotes pour le Changement). The CPC emerged in late 2020 as a loose coalition of Ex-Seleka and Anti-Balaka factions. Former President Bozizé, disqualified from running in elections, created the CPC, aiming to destabilize the government, seize power, and aims to be the president of the CAR again. Their offensive in late 2020 was repulsed by government forces and allied international troops, but the CPC retains influence in border regions, posing a potential threat to stability and hindering peacebuilding efforts.

Seleka

Originating from northern CAR in 2012, the Seleka rebel coalition seized power through a swift offensive in a coup in 2013. Their reign was marked by brutality and widespread human rights abuses against Christian communities. This triggered the formation of self-defense militias in response, forever twisting the conflict into a sectarian dimension. While officially disbanded in 2013, fragments of the Seleka remain active, controlling territories and engaging in violence, particularly in the northeast.

Ex-Seleka

The remnants of the Seleka coalition after their leader was pressured into disbanding the original Seleka. They continue to hold significant influence in the east and southeast, often clashing with government forces and rival groups like the Anti-Balaka.

Anti-Balaka

Primarily Christian self-defense militias born in response to Seleka atrocities, the Anti-Balaka transformed into a powerful armed force. Their brutal retaliation against Muslim communities caused a vicious cycle of violence, drawing accusations of war crimes and human rights violations. While some factions have demobilized, others remain active, especially in the west and southwest, posing a security threat to other rebel groups and the CAR government.

Russian Federation

Russia exerts significant influence through its close ties with the CAR government. They provide military training, weapons, and advisors, solidifying their presence in the region. However, this involvement comes with a dark side, as reports link Russia-backed Wagner Group mercenaries to human rights abuses and fueling tensions. Furthermore, Russia's strategic interest in the CAR as a foothold in Africa for resource access and influence expansion raises concerns from the West, who fear escalation and the undermining of peace efforts.

United States of America

Previously more involved, the US has scaled back its direct engagement in recent years. Their current role primarily focuses on financial and logistical support for MINUSCA, ensuring the peacekeeping mission has the necessary resources to operate. Additionally, the US conducts targeted counterterrorism operations against extremist groups posing security threats. Although they provide humanitarian aid through, the assistance they provide is far less to the contributions of the EU or UN.

African Union

The African Union has assumed a prominent role in peacekeeping initiatives in the CAR. Notably, missions like the MISCA, though constrained by resources and over-shadowed by the UN's MINUSCA, played a pivotal role in curbing the escalating violence in the CAR.

Timeline of Relevant Events

Date	Description
2001	<p>Failed coup attempt, 2001</p> <p>In 2001, Gabonese official Francois Bozize attempted to stage a coup against the government of Ange-Felix Patasse. The coup aimed to gain control of the capital forcefully using military forces, but was ultimately unsuccessful as Libyan and Congolese soldiers intervened. Bozize then fled to neighboring country Chad as a result.</p>
2003	<p>2003 coup</p> <p>Bozize returned to the CAR in 2003 and staged another coup while the president was out of the country. He was able to defeat the Libyan and Congolese soldiers and took power as the president of the CAR. However, many civilians didn't approve of the unlawful takeover by Bozize, and many distrusted the official.</p>
2004-2007	<p>Central African Republic Bush Wars</p> <p>The Central African Republic Bush War, also known as the Central African Republic conflict, took place from 2004 to 2007. The war highlighted deep-rooted issues such as corruption, economic inequality, and ethnic tensions, and was also the first time the idea of rebel groups was shown in the CAR. The rebellion served as a message to President François Bozizé that governments were not free to stage coups to their pleasing.</p> <p>The conflict began in October 2004 when the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), led by Michel Djotodia, launched an armed rebellion against the government of Francois Bozize. The UFDR accused the government of marginalizing and neglecting the country's northeastern regions. The rebellion quickly escalated into a full-scale conflict, with other rebel groups such as the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD) and the Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (MLCJ) joining the action. The CAR government, with the support of international forces including troops from Chad and Libya as well as air support from France, launched counteroffensives against the rebel groups.</p>

<p>2004-2007</p>	<p>This back and forth fighting between the two sides resulted in widespread violence all through the CAR, including attacks on civilians in the hundreds, over 10,000 homes burned, and an estimated 212,000 displaced civilians between. However, these numbers were only recorded from 2005 to September of 2007, and the real effect of the Bush Wars could be more substantial.</p> <p>A peace agreement, known as the Global Peace Agreement, was signed in 2007.</p>
<p>2011-2013</p>	<p>Rebel force action against Bozize</p> <p>The relative peace would be ended in 2011, when Bozize’s reelection was accused of being fraudulent, and rebel forces formed again in the form of Seleka. Seleka then launched an offensive against the CAR government in December 2012. They quickly took control of the north and center of the country before seizing the capital city of Bangui. They wanted more than this however, and later staged a coup in March of 2013, kicking out Bozize and replacing him with their leader, Michel Djotodia.</p> <p>An important dynamic to note is that religion very much had an impact on the conflict. This was because Michel Djotodia was a Muslim, and so were the Seleka who were notorious for their violent religious persecution of Christians, and with much of the country being Christian, this led to a distrust of the government. The persecutions were so bad in fact, that a group, Anti-Balaka, was formed to protect Christian civilians. However, what started as a group aiming to protect their kind, the Anti-Balaska later went on to persecute Muslim institutions themselves, just like they were persecuted in the past when Seleka had the upper hand. This Sectarian violence highlights the importance of religion in the conflict of the CAR.</p>
<p>2014</p>	<p>Intervention of the UN’s MINUSCA</p> <p>Responding to escalating violence in the CAR, the United Nations Security Council authorized the deployment of the MINUSCA peacekeeping mission in 2014. Initially focused on civilian protection, MINUSCA aimed to mediate tensions and facilitate disarmament among armed groups, including the predominantly Muslim Ex-Séléka and the Christian Anti-Balaka. Disarming efforts yielded mixed results.</p>

2014	While some Ex-Séléka groups were successfully disarmed, Anti-Balaka disarmament proved challenging, leaving some Christian communities with weapons. This imbalance caused further violence in the CAR in the form of Christian revenge attacks against Muslim communities.
2019	<p>2019 peace agreement</p> <p>In 2019, the CAR witnessed a pivotal moment with the signing of the 'Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation', the first peace accord signed within the country. While the agreement faced some criticism and reservations from certain rebel groups, it included key provisions for an immediate cease-fire, prioritizing civilian protection, and establishing an inclusive government. Though several rebel groups participated in the peace process, not all fully adhered to the terms, with continued violence in some areas. Despite these challenges, the 2019 agreement remains a significant step towards peace in the CAR.</p>
2020	<p>Boycotting of 2020 Elections</p> <p>In December of 2020, the CPC, frustrated by the government's handling of security concerns, boycotted the CAR election. The CPC denounced the elections as unfair and accused the president of rigging the elections. Following through on their threats, they launched attacks on polling stations in several regions, preventing voting in certain regions of the CAR. These actions significantly impacted the elections, with a mere 38% participation rate despite international efforts to ensure security and encourage participation in the CAR.</p>

Related UN Treaties and Events

- **United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA):**

MINUSCA is a UN peacekeeping mission established in 2014 to help bring stability to the CAR, protect civilians, support political processes, and promote human rights.

- **The Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation:**

Signed in February 2019, the agreement encompasses various crucial provisions specifically designed to bring an end to the violence in the region.

- **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT):**

Signed in 2013 and ratified in 2016, this treaty regulates the international trade in conventional weapons, aiming to prevent their use for human rights abuses and violence.

- **Bangui Agreements (2003 and 2008):**

Early efforts focused on ceasefires and addressing underlying issues in the CAR. The 2003 version laid the groundwork for dialogue, while the 2008 iteration focused on power-sharing and development, but both ultimately faltered due to insufficient resources, weak implementation, and renewed violence.

- **Meetings of the UN Security Council:**

The UN Security Council has held several discussions on the CAR conflict, passing resolutions that aimed to provide humanitarian assistance and a peaceful resolution to the crisis such as the implementation of MINUSCA.

Previous Attempts

MINURCA, 1998

Established by the United Nations Security Council in April 1998, the MINURCA (United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic) was a United Nations peacekeeping force deployed in the CAR to support peace and stability in the country. Its mandate was to assist in maintaining and enhancing security and stability in Bangui. The MINURCA was tasked with supervising and controlling the storage and disposition of weapons retrieved during disarmament exercises. The MINURCA mission in 1998 successfully contributed to restoring stability, security, and dialogue among political actors in the CAR. The mission played a crucial role in facilitating the re-launch of fair elections in the nation. The mission ended in February 2000 as a success.

African Union, 2013

The African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) was a peacekeeping mission established in 2013 by the African Union. The MISCA's primary objective was to stabilize the country after the coup d'état and subsequent escalation of violence. The MISCA provided security for the civilians from the rebel groups and humanitarian aid such as food, water, and shelter. Although it had its limitations in funding, the MISCA and the African Union made significant contributions to halt the rebel groups.

MINUSCA, 2014

In response to the violence in the CAR, the UN security council established the MINUSCA, whose aim at the time was to protect civilian lives. The MINUSCA came after the MISCA mission and took over as the primary peacekeeping mission in the CAR. The MINUSCA intervened by sending thousands of soldiers into the CAR to help mediate tensions. Their main aim was to disarm troops and militia in the rebel groups. This, in theory, would result in the Central African Republic militia gaining control over the region again, and peace may have been restored. However, although the Muslim militias of the Ex-Seleka were disarmed, the UN peacekeepers failed to disarm the Christian Anti-Balaka, meaning the Christian armies still had their weapons, and quickly went on a ravage revenge spree against the weak and disarmed Muslims. In an attempt to mediate tensions and prevent the loss of life, they only ended up creating more violence and more deaths for innocent civilians. Furthermore, an estimated 417 of the 436 CAR mosques were destroyed during the fighting. The MINUSCA is still active in the CAR, and as of February 2023, 18,000 total personnel have been deployed in the region. They have been fighting alongside the CAR militia against the attacks of the rebel groups.

2019 peace agreement

Although various peace agreements were held and signed in the past, the 2019 “Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation,” is special in that it was the first peace agreement that was signed inside of the CAR. The 2019 agreement was also built on the failures of the previous attempts, listening to both the rebel groups and CAR government to create the agreement. Among these provisions is a mandate for an immediate, complete, and irrevocable cessation of hostilities by all involved parties. The accord places a strong emphasis on the protection of civilians, urging parties to refrain from engaging in acts of destruction, illegal occupation of public buildings, pillaging, and violations against civilians, including instances of sexual and gender-based violence. An equally crucial facet of the agreement is its commitment to establishing an inclusive government, ensuring greater representation for armed groups. In addressing the humanitarian consequences of the crisis, the agreement calls for increased support and assistance to affected populations. It places a particular emphasis on promoting genuine national reconciliation based on a social contract among the people of the CAR. Simultaneously, the accord recognizes the vital role of regional actors, such as the African Union and neighboring countries, in supporting the peace process and calls for continued cooperation. Collectively, these provisions work together to tackle the root causes of the conflict while also prioritizing the protection of civilians.

Possible Solutions

A potential solution to the CAR crisis will have to be one that focuses on certain key aspects:

First will be strengthening security through a robust and well-equipped UN peacekeeping mission to protect civilians, disarm the local armed groups, and restore stability in the region. This will help minimize civilian deaths and weaken the rebel groups.

Second, promoting inclusiveness during negotiations that involve all relevant stakeholders, including government officials, opposition groups, and representatives from different ethnic and religious communities, to have an equal say during negotiations. This is because previous negotiations lacked a sufficient variety of viewpoints

Third, investing in long-term development programs that prioritize infrastructure reconstruction, job creation, education, healthcare, and the provision of basic services to alleviate poverty and promote economic stability.

Lastly, international actors like the UN should provide sustained diplomatic support, financial assistance, and coordination to facilitate the implementation of these mentioned measures that will ensure a lasting and sustainable peace in the CAR.

Suggested Reading

The following is an article published by the Human Rights Watch detailing the various breaches of human rights laws broken during the mentioned Central African Republic Bush Wars: https://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/car0907/2.htm#_Toc176766508

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) ratified various resolutions regarding the conflict in the CAR, including Resolution 2127, which authorized the African-led International Support Mission in the CAR (MISCA), and Resolution 2281, which extended the mandate of MINUSCA. The following is a list of said documents:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/security-council-resolutions/?ctype=Central%20African%20Republic&cbtype=central-african-republic

The following is a PDF that provides more information on the previously mentioned Multiannual Indicative Programme:

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eud_mip_brochure_eng_compressed1_0.pdf

The following article highlights the various other harmful events that took place in 2022 in the CAR:

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/central-african-republic>

The following article highlights the various other harmful events that took place in 2019 in the CAR: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/central-african-republic>

The following article is a deeper dive into the recent CPC attacks on Hinterland:

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/dix-ans-apres-le-coup-detat-la-republique>

The following is a YouTube video that goes into some of the history regarding the CAR including when it was established, how it became established, and other events before 2001 not mentioned in this report: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLn1VGKP5Ho>

The following is the official report of the MINUSCA support group in the CAR including its strength and aims: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minusca>

The following is a CAR article detailing the conflict that emerged prior to the 2020 elections: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20201225-central-african-republic-rebel-groups-call-off-three-day-ceasefire-as-election-looms>

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