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Crisis in the Central African Republic

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August 17, 2015

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

R43377

Summary

This report provides background on the evolving political, security, and humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR), a landlocked, sparsely inhabited, and extremely under-developed country. Violence in CAR since 2013 has displaced hundreds of thousands of people and placed strains on global humanitarian and peacekeeping resources. U.S. responses include:

- humanitarian assistance;
- diplomatic and financial support for a U.N. peacekeeping operation, MINUSCA;
- additional bilateral support for African peacekeepers and French troops that have deployed to CAR;
- foreign aid for conflict mitigation and peacebuilding activities;
- public diplomacy initiatives; and
- an Executive Order authorizing targeted sanctions.

Possible issues for Congress include the authorization, appropriation, and oversight of U.S. humanitarian assistance and contributions to international stabilization efforts. The crisis in CAR also has implications for several broader issues of potential interest to Congress, including:

- stability in the surrounding region;
- the prevention of “mass atrocities”;
- U.S. efforts to counter the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a small but brutal militia active in CAR and neighboring states; and
- the impact of the conflict in CAR on wildlife poaching and other cross-border criminal activity in the region.

Congress has monitored the crisis in CAR and the U.S. response, including related fiscal implications. The 113th Congress held hearings on CAR before the Africa subcommittees of the House Foreign Affairs Committee (November 2013 and April 2014) and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (December 2013). The FY2015 Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act (P.L. 113-235) states that “funds made available by this Act for [CAR] shall be made available for reconciliation and peacebuilding programs.” A similar provision is included in FY2016 foreign aid appropriations bills (H.R. 2772 and S. 1725).

Other relevant legislation introduced in the 114th Congress includes H.R. 2494 (Global Anti-Poaching Act), H.Res. 310 and S.Res. 211 (regarding genocide and mass atrocities), S.Res. 237 and H.Res. 394 (on the LRA), and S.Res. 204 (on “World Refugee Day”).

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Overview

The Central African Republic (CAR) has never had an effective central government, and it has struggled with recurrent insurgencies and army mutinies since the 1990s. In March 2013, a rebel movement known as the Seleka seized control of the capital, Bangui, ousting President François Bozizé, who had himself come to power in an armed rebellion 10 years earlier. The ensuing conflict has featured high levels of violence against civilians, often along ethno-religious lines, and large population displacements. A donor-backed transitional government replaced the Seleka-led regime in January 2014 but it has struggled to lead an effective response to the crisis. A range of CAR militia commanders and political and civic leaders participated in national consultations known as the “Bangui Forum” in May 2015, which culminated in agreements on disarmament, governance reforms, and reconciliation. However, implementation and oversight remain in question. Elections have been repeatedly delayed. The United Nations (U.N.) has appealed for \$613 million in humanitarian aid for CAR in 2015, on top of additional assistance for refugees.¹

The Seleka was founded in northeastern CAR and drew on grievances among members of the minority Muslim community—many of whom hail from the northeast—stemming from perceived exclusion and persecution by successive governments led by Christians from the south or northwest. (Prior to the conflict, CAR’s population of 4-5 million was estimated at 15% Muslim and 85% Christian or followers of indigenous beliefs. There are no reliable figures on the current breakdown.) Once in power, Seleka leaders oversaw attacks on Christian communities, prompting the formation of largely Christian- and animist-led “anti-balaka” militias (often translated as anti-bullets or anti-machetes) that have targeted Muslims and northerners. A U.N. commission of inquiry reported in December 2014 that all parties to the conflict were responsible for “war crimes and crimes against humanity” and that abuses by anti-balaka groups amounted to “ethnic cleansing” of CAR’s Muslim community.² Some anti-balaka groups have reportedly received support from former military officers and other networks sympathetic to ex-President Bozizé.

Over 207,000 CAR nationals have fled to neighboring countries since December 2013 alone, bringing the total number of refugees to about 462,000 as of June 2015.³ Tens of thousands of third-party nationals, many of them Muslim traders and shopkeepers, have also fled since 2013. Some 369,000 more people are internally displaced within CAR. About 2.7 million people, or at least half of CAR’s population, reportedly need humanitarian aid.⁴ The death toll in the conflict is unknown. Humanitarian conditions prior to the current crisis were already poor due to the legacy of past conflicts and a lack of basic social services. Harvests have decreased by nearly 58% from pre-conflict levels and food aid is routinely pillaged.⁵ Insecurity and repeated attacks on aid workers have further constrained humanitarian access, on top of logistical constraints.⁶ Separate

¹ Donors have provided about 32% of the U.N. appeal to date. U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA), Financial Tracking Service, consulted August 7, 2015.

² *Final Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic*, December 22, 2014, U.N. doc. S/2014/928.

³ The latter figure includes CAR refugees who fled before 2012. U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Central African Republic Emergency Situation*, June 25, 2015.

⁴ UNOCHA, “Central African Republic”; figure as of June 2015.

⁵ International Rescue Committee, *Too Soon to Turn Away: Security, Governance and Humanitarian Need in the Central African Republic*, July 2015.

⁶ At least 18 humanitarian workers were killed in CAR in 2014, and more than 130 “security incidents” reportedly targeted humanitarian activities. USAID, *Central African Republic—Humanitarian Update #81*, January 21, 2015.

in origin from the current crisis, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a militia of Ugandan origin, continues to attack civilians in southeast CAR, creating additional humanitarian needs.

Compared to 2014, violence has decreased in Bangui and much of the northwest amid international efforts to protect civilians, strengthen state institutions, and broker an inclusive peace process and political transition. However, clashes have increased in other parts of the country as militia groups have relocated, with the front-line receding from the northwest and south toward the center and east.⁷ Some observers have expressed concern that violent extremist organizations could seek safe-havens in CAR, given a potential de facto partition of the country along ethno-religious lines between Seleka- and anti-balaka-controlled areas (see **Figure 1**).⁸

International troops have deployed to CAR in an effort to stabilize the country, as has happened during past crises in CAR (see **Figure A-1**). There is also a U.N. arms embargo and sanctions regime, first imposed under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2134 (2014).⁹ A French military intervention known as Operation Sangaris began in December 2013 with the aim of disarming militias and securing Bangui. In September 2014, a U.N. peacekeeping operation, MINUSCA, replaced and largely absorbed a previous African Union (AU) stabilization force known as MISCA. U.N. Security Council Resolution 2217 (2015) authorizes MINUSCA through April 2016 to protect civilians, support the political transition process and extension of state authority, facilitate humanitarian aid delivery, and in some situations implement “urgent temporary measures ... to arrest and detain in order to maintain basic law and order and fight impunity.” The European Union (EU) deployed some 700 soldiers between April 2014 and March 2015 to help secure Bangui, and has established an advisory mission to support military reform.¹⁰

In August 2015, the head of MINUSCA resigned on the request of the U.N. Secretary-General, following a string of incidents involving MINUSCA peacekeepers that have drawn international concern—in particular, severe sexual abuse allegations (see “Allegations of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation by Foreign Troops,” below). Also in August 2015, a Rwandan peacekeeper killed four colleagues and injured eight more at the Rwandan contingent's base in Bangui, for unknown reasons, before being shot and killed.¹¹ MINUSCA also faces logistical and security challenges that have undermined its ability to establish an operational presence in conflict zones.¹² Total troop deployment, which reached 10,800 uniformed personnel as of June 2015, out of a total authorized level of 12,870 (or 84%), is slightly behind schedule: the operation was previously expected to reach 90% of its full authorized strength by the end of April.¹³

⁷ Refugees International, *Central African Republic: The spotlight is gone, the crisis continues*, July 1, 2015.

⁸ See, e.g., Associated Press (AP), “France to Keep Troops in Africa Against Extremists,” May 8, 2014.

⁹ Grounds for U.N. sanctions include violating the arms embargo; involvement in acts that violate international human rights law or international humanitarian law; using child soldiers; supporting armed or criminal groups via the illicit exploitation of natural resources; obstructing humanitarian aid; and attacking U.N. missions or international troops.

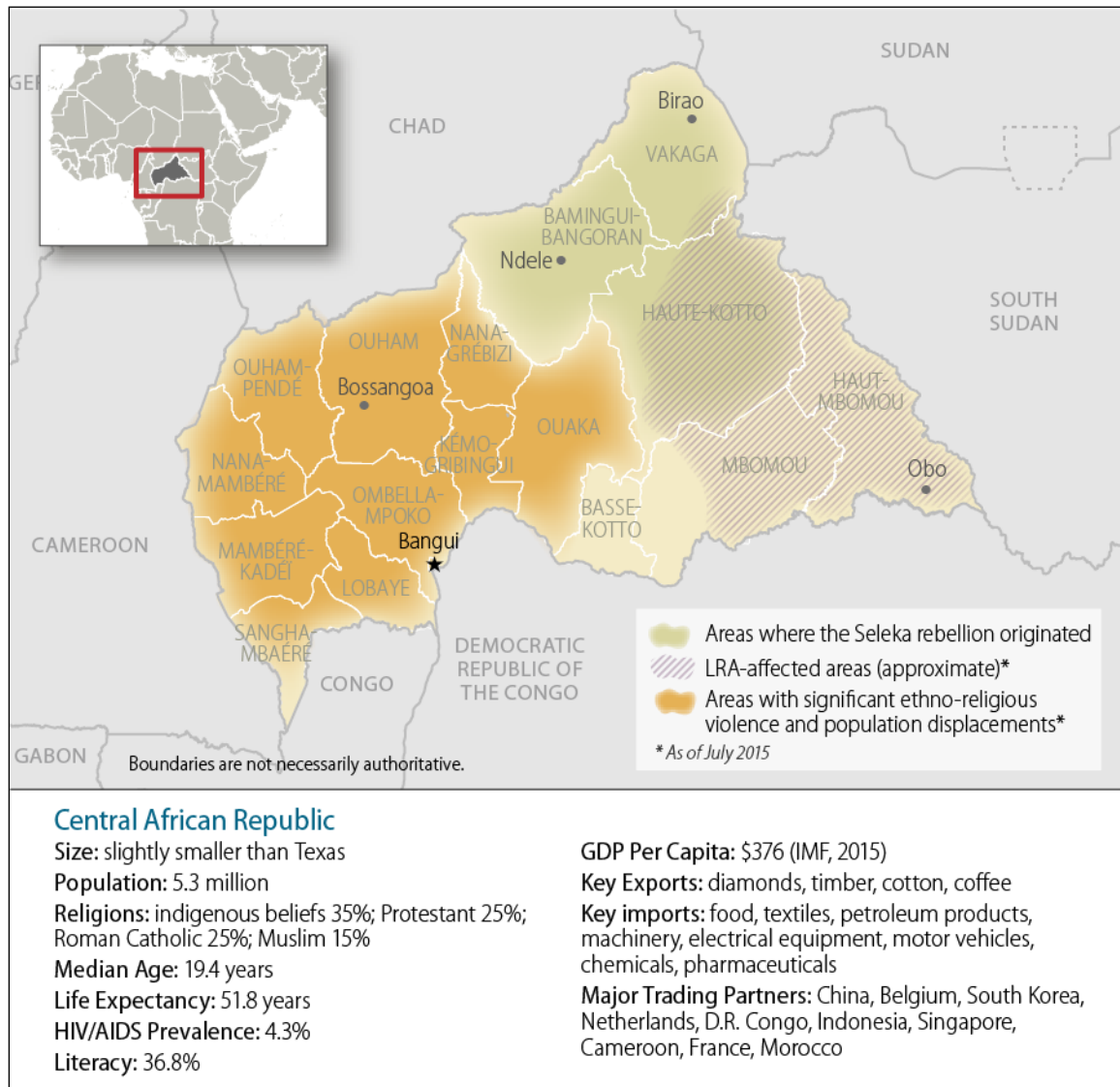
¹⁰ European Union, “The EU Engagement with the Central African Republic,” May 26, 2015.

¹¹ An investigation is underway. *Reuters*, “Rwandan peacekeeper kills four colleagues in Central African Republic,” August 8, 2015.

¹² As of April 2015, MINUSCA's effectiveness was hindered by “insufficient deployment in eastern CAR and a shortage of helicopters”; outside of Bangui, MINUSCA's presence was reportedly “sparse.” Security Council Report, “Central African Republic: April 2015 Monthly Forecast,” March 31, 2015.

¹³ *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic*, April 1, 2015, U.N. doc. S/2015/227; MINUSCA Facts and Figures, as of June 30, 2015. The operation's troop ceiling was increased from 11,820 total uniformed personnel to 12,870 under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2212 of March 26, 2015.

Figure I. CAR at a Glance



Muslim Exodus

Widespread anti-balaka attacks have forced tens of thousands of Muslims to flee their homes. Muslim-owned properties and businesses have been looted and seized, and mosques have been destroyed. In some locations, Muslims are confined to precarious enclaves where their survival depends on the protection of international troops.¹⁴ In 2014, thousands were evacuated, with international assistance, toward the northeast or to neighboring countries.¹⁵ The U.N. Secretary

¹⁴ See Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Central African Republic: Muslims Trapped in Enclaves,” December 22, 2014.

¹⁵ U.N. agencies and humanitarian groups initially debated whether to facilitate the evacuation of Muslims from areas (continued...)

General reported in April 2015 that “the security and humanitarian situations remained critical in and around Muslim community enclaves,” and Amnesty International has reported on the forcible suppression of Muslim religious practice, including through forced conversions.¹⁶

Violent attacks along ethnic and religious lines reflect, in part, complex tensions over access to resources, control over trade and financial networks, and national identity.¹⁷ Many non-Muslims and southerners refer to Muslims and northerners—who often maintain cross-border family and economic ties—as “foreigners,” even if they were born in CAR and consider the country their home. Politicization of religious identity also rose under Bozizé, who headed an evangelical church.¹⁸ So did popular anger at the perceived raiding of CAR’s natural wealth by foreign actors, including mostly Muslim Chadian and Sudanese merchants and mineral traders. Neighboring Chad helped bring Bozizé to power in 2003, and the impunity enjoyed by Chadian soldiers in CAR may have fed these sentiments.¹⁹ The result has been brutal collective punishment.

Muslim-Christian Tensions

Multiple factors appear to have contributed to ethno-religious tensions in CAR. These include:

- CAR's precolonial history of slave-raiding by northern and Muslim groups.
- Resentment among northerners and Muslims who perceive neglect, discrimination, and a denial of full citizenship by successive governments led by Christian southerners or northwesterners.
- Muslim dominance over trade and rudimentary financial networks, often enabled by cross-border mobility and family ties—and corresponding frustrations over Muslims' perceived control over prices and access to capital.
- The fact that many Muslims trace their family origins (however distant) to neighboring Chad, whose government helped bring to power former President Bozizé and was seen as complicit in Seleka's seizure of power.

Claims by some CAR Christians that the vast majority of Seleka combatants in 2013 were foreign nationals²⁰ are difficult to assess, in part because the alliance was a fluid, ad hoc grouping of fighters of diverse origins, and because borders in the region are porous and identities fluid. Moreover, many northerners' stated grievances center around the state's denial of citizenship rights, including national identity papers. Seleka leader Michel Djotodia was the country's first Muslim president and the first from northeastern CAR, which may have led some Muslims to support him and/or to view Seleka as protectors. However, there have also been clashes between combatants identified as Seleka and mostly Muslim Peul/Fulani nomadic herder groups, pointing to the diversity of CAR's Muslim community.

A Challenging Political Transition

Interim President Catherine Samba-Panza, a former businesswoman, civil society activist, and mayor of Bangui, was appointed in January 2014 by CAR's National Transition Council, an ad-hoc body constituted after the Seleka takeover. She replaced Seleka leader and self-declared President Michel Djotodia, who was forced out of office and into exile under pressure from

(...continued)

where they face imminent threats, with some expressing concern that evacuations could contribute to de facto partition. The decision to assist evacuations was publicly opposed by CAR's transitional government. See Peter Bouckaert (HRW), "The Central African Republic Has Become a Nightmare for Muslims," *Washington Post*, March 16, 2014.

¹⁶ *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in [CAR]*, April 1, 2015, U.N. doc S/2015/227; Amnesty International, *Erased Identity: Muslims in Ethnically-Cleansed Areas of the Central African Republic*, July 2015.

¹⁷ For background on ethnic, regional, and religious dynamics in CAR, see Louisa Lombard, *Raiding Sovereignty in the Central African Borderlands*, Dissertation, Duke University, 2012.

¹⁸ Louisa Lombard, "Pervasive Mistrust Fuels C.A.R. Crisis," Al Jazeera online, April 11, 2014.

¹⁹ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State*, December 2007.

²⁰ For example, testimony of Nestor-Desire Nongo Aziagbia, Roman Catholic Bishop of Bossangoa, House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Africa, "Crisis in the Central African Republic," November 19, 2013.

African and French leaders. Samba-Panza has called for national reconciliation, appealed for international financial support, and attempted to reconstitute CAR's security forces—including by calling for exemption from the U.N. arms embargo to reequip the military.²¹ Progress toward stabilization and reconciliation has been limited, however, and Samba-Panza's credibility has been undermined by nepotism and a series of corruption scandals.²²

As mentioned above, the May 2015 Bangui Forum produced agreements on disarmament, reforms, and reconciliation that could, if implemented, provide a way forward to greater peace. Previous attempts by regional leaders to broker political and security agreements among various CAR factions did not appear to have a significant impact on conflict dynamics. Talks convened outside of CAR have also been criticized for either excluding CAR civilians or for appearing to be aimed primarily at paving the way for the reentry of exiled former presidents Bozizé and Djotodia into CAR politics, despite the fact that Bozizé is under U.N. sanctions and Djotodia is additionally subject to U.S. sanctions. (See “Regional Actors” below).

Presidential and parliamentary elections, initially scheduled for February 2015, have been repeatedly delayed amid signs of growing domestic and donor frustration with the Samba-Panza government. The current deadline for elections, December 2015, has been set by the designated regional mediator for CAR, President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville). Accordingly, the transitional government has scheduled elections for October 2015 and indicated that they will be preceded by a constitutional referendum.²³ Election preparations face stark logistical and security challenges, however, and it does not appear that a new draft constitution has been finalized. Electoral campaigning and unequal access to voting also could heighten the stakes of ethno-religious competition for power.

Voter registration was nominally completed in July 2015 despite ongoing disputes about legal residency and citizenship, which are arguably at the heart of the conflict. U.N. officials and donors have also criticized the government's decision to deny refugees the right to vote, although there are indications the decision could be reversed.²⁴ Although significant logistical challenges would need to be overcome to allow refugees to vote, U.N. Security Council Resolution 2217 (2015) calls for the transitional authorities to hold “inclusive” elections, “ensuring the full, effective and equal participation of women, IDPs and CAR refugees, the return of whom should be an important objective.”

Allegations of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation by Foreign Troops

French, African Union, and U.N. troops have been implicated in sexual abuse in CAR. U.N. human rights investigators documented the sexual abuse and exploitation of boys as young as nine by French soldiers in 2014.²⁵ In May 2015, France launched a criminal investigation into the allegations, and French President Francois Hollande has vowed to “show no mercy” towards the

²¹ For example, Brookings Institution, “Peace and Development in the Central African Republic: A Conversation with Her Excellency Catherine Samba-Panza,” September 19, 2014.

²² *New York Times*, “In Troubled States, New Governments with the Same Old Problems,” April 1, 2014; *Africa Confidential*, “Allies Lose Faith,” August 29, 2014.

²³ Reuters, “Central African Republic Says to Hold Elections on Oct 18,” June 19, 2015.

²⁴ AP, “UN envoy confident Central African Republic will reverse ban on refugees voting in election,” August 5, 2015.

²⁵ According to the *Guardian*, the report “details the rape and sodomy of starving and homeless young boys by French peacekeeping troops,” who, in some cases, promised food to victims in exchange for sexual acts. Sandra Laville, “UN aid worker suspended for leaking report on child abuse by French troops,” *The Guardian*, April 29, 2015.

troops if they are found guilty.²⁶ The Paris prosecutor's office has accused the U.N. of being uncooperative in its investigation, and the U.N. has received widespread criticism for its response to the scandal, which included the suspension of Anders Kompass, the director of field operations for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, for breach of protocol after he reportedly provided the investigators' findings directly to French officials.²⁷

The U.N. report also accused soldiers from Chad and Equatorial Guinea who were serving in the AU operation in CAR of sexual abuse in 2014.²⁸ It is not clear whether those countries have initiated their own investigations into the alleged conduct, or whether any of the troops who were implicated were re-hatted as U.N. peacekeepers. In June 2015, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon established an independent panel to "review the United Nations response to the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of children by foreign military forces not under United Nations command and assess the adequacy of the procedures in place."²⁹

Separately, U.N. peacekeepers from an unnamed African country have been accused of sexually abusing homeless children in Bangui.³⁰ According to the U.N. Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), five MINUSCA soldiers and one MINUSCA police officer have been implicated in abuses in 2015.³¹ (Prosecution and punishment are the duty of the troop-contributing country or countries.) This number is among the highest for U.N. peacekeeping operations in 2015 to date, though comparable to those in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Haiti. In new allegations made in August 2015, Amnesty International accused MINUSCO troops of raping a 12-year-old girl and killing two civilians in separate incidents in Bangui.³²

The Economy

CAR is one of the world's least developed countries. Agriculture, forestry, and mining are the most important economic sectors, but all are in disarray. Population displacements have severely disrupted the farming cycle and other livelihoods, leading to "crisis"-level food insecurity throughout the country.³³ The flight since 2013 of Muslim communities, who had previously dominated trade networks in much of the country, has contributed to economic collapse.

CAR produces diamonds, but in 2013 was suspended from exporting them under the Kimberley Process—an international certification initiative aimed at preventing "conflict diamonds" from entering legitimate international trade. Armed groups reportedly control mining sites in central CAR, and U.N. sanctions monitors reported that over \$24 million worth of diamonds were smuggled out of the country between May 2013 and October 2014.³⁴ In July 2015, citing

²⁶ Al Jazeera, "French soldiers accused of raping CAR children," April 30, 2015.

²⁷ An appeal tribunal subsequently overruled the suspension and Kompass was apparently reinstated. Sandra Laville, "UN suspension of sexual abuse report whistleblower is unlawful, tribunal rules," *The Guardian*, May 6, 2015.

²⁸ AFP, "Chad, E. Guinea troops also accused in C. Africa child sex abuse: NGO," April 30, 2015.

²⁹ UNSG, "Secretary-General Appoints Independent Review Panel on UN Response to Allegations of Sexual Abuse by Foreign Military Forces in Central African Republic," June 22, 2015.

³⁰ *Al Jazeera*, "UN peacekeepers face new sex abuse claims in CAR," June 24, 2015.

³¹ U.N. Conduct and Discipline Unit, allegations by category of personnel per mission (sexual exploitation and abuse), as of June 2015.

³² Amnesty International, "CAR: UN troops implicated in rape of girl and indiscriminate killings must be investigated," August 11, 2015.

³³ U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS-NET), "Fresh Waves of Violence in the CAR Trigger New Population Displacements," February 2015.

³⁴ *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic*, October 29, 2014, U.N. doc. S/2014/762.

“progress made to date” by CAR, the Kimberley Process established a framework for the resumption of trade in rough diamonds from “compliant zones” that meet the provisions of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS).³⁵ Criteria include sufficient state presence in mining zones and the absence of armed group activity affecting diamond production or trade processes. Efforts to create a monitoring team to determine compliant zones are underway.

Illicit economic networks have flourished in many areas, leading some to describe CAR as a “warlord” economy. According to a June 2015 report by the Enough Project, armed groups in CAR profit “from forceful taxation and illicit trade with gold and diamonds that are smuggled across international borders or sold to Central African diamond companies. Moreover, armed groups use violence, attacks, and threats to collect revenue from civilians, businesses, and public institutions and to conduct widespread looting.”³⁶ Poaching of elephant ivory is reportedly another lucrative source of revenue for armed groups. Seleka fighters reportedly participated in several large-scale elephant killings in 2013, and while in control of Bangui in 2013, the Seleka reportedly looted the Ministry of Water and Forests for weapons and previously confiscated ivory tusks.³⁷ As Seleka forces have departed from parts of CAR, poachers previously active in those areas may have returned. According to non-government reports, the LRA smuggles ivory poached from the Democratic Republic of Congo through eastern CAR to Kafia Kingi, a Sudanese enclave where the LRA has reportedly established a presence, for trafficking onward to Asia.³⁸

Since 2013, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved \$31.5 million in financial assistance in support of the transitional government’s emergency economic recovery program, which aims to improve macroeconomic stability and government capacity.³⁹ The IMF stated in a March 2015 press release that security conditions had held back the recovery, but projected growth in 2015 if the political transition is completed, security improves, and donor support increases. The World Bank has also committed at least \$100 million in grants and loans to help restore key government services in CAR. In the meantime, humanitarian organizations remain the country’s primary providers of basic services.

Regional Actors

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), a sub-regional intergovernmental body, has played a front-line role in responding to the crisis in CAR, mediating peace accords, deploying troops, and influencing the selection of CAR’s political leadership.⁴⁰ However, its internal rivalries, divergent interests among regional heads of state, and a lack of capacity have also undermined some international stabilization efforts.

³⁵ Kimberley Process, *Operational Framework for Resumption of Exports of Rough Diamonds from the Central African Republic*, July 2015.

³⁶ Enough Project, *Warlord Business: CAR’s Violent Armed Groups and their Criminal Operations for Profit and Power*, June 2015.

³⁷ Enough Project, *Behind the Headlines: Drivers of Violence in the Central African Republic*, May 2014; *Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2127 (2013)*, July 1, 2014, U.N. doc. S/2014/452.

³⁸ The Resolve, *The Kony Crossroads*, August 2015.

³⁹ IMF, “IMF and the Central African Republic Reach Staff-level Agreement on Financial Assistance under the Rapid Credit Facility,” June 22, 2015.

⁴⁰ ECCAS member states are: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, and São Tomé & Príncipe.

Republic of Congo President Denis Sassou-Nguesso has served as the primary regional mediator in the CAR conflict. In July 2014, he facilitated peace talks in Brazzaville that culminated in a “Cessation of Hostilities Agreement” signed by Seleka and anti-balaka representatives, as well as some politicians and civil society representatives. However, armed groups violated the agreement almost immediately, and it was criticized for having been brokered outside the country and without sufficient participation of CAR civilian leaders. In February 2015, Sassou-Nguesso convened new peace negotiations between Seleka and anti-balaka leaders in Nairobi, which included former President Bozizé—who is under U.N. sanctions and reportedly subject to an arrest warrant in CAR—and, notably, excluded representatives of the transitional government in Bangui.⁴¹ The Nairobi talks drew strong criticism from the U.N. Secretary General’s Special Representative for Central Africa, Abdoulaye Bathily, who warned that they violated resolutions by the U.N. Security Council and risked harming reconciliation efforts.⁴²

Chad’s President, Idriss Déby, is widely viewed as wielding influence over CAR’s politics and security arrangements. He is also viewed as a problematic actor, due to his role in bringing ex-President Bozizé to power, allegations that he allowed Seleka to seize power (or even provided support) once he became dissatisfied with Bozizé, and the fact that some key Seleka figures are reportedly Chadian nationals or have other ties to Chad. Chadian troops, who served in the AU operation, MISCA, in 2013 and also deployed to CAR under national command, were accused of abetting or participating in Seleka abuses.⁴³ Though Chad was one of the founding troop contributors to MISCA, it withdrew its roughly 800 troops from the AU force in April 2014 after they were criticized for shooting unarmed civilians.

Many CAR Muslims trace their family origins to Chad, and these overlapping identities appear to have motivated some anti-Muslim violence, as discussed above. In early 2014, as attacks against Muslims, Arabic-speakers, and foreign nationals increased, neighboring states, including Chad, evacuated thousands of their own citizens with international assistance. In doing so, Chadian troops facilitated the evacuation of tens of thousands of CAR Muslims who faced the threat of violence, allowing them to travel to Seleka strongholds in the northeast or into Chad. As of July 2015, Chad housed over 90,000 refugees from CAR (i.e., individuals considered to be CAR nationals who have fled across an international border).⁴⁴ Tens of thousands more who fled to Chad from CAR are considered by the Chadian government to be Chadian migrants returning to their ancestral home, rather than internationally recognized and protected refugees.⁴⁵

Cameroon, for its part, hosted former President Bozizé when he first went into exile⁴⁶ and is contending with an influx of refugees from CAR into its already fragile north. The flood of refugees from CAR into Cameroon—UNHCR estimates there are nearly 250,000 CAR refugees in Cameroon, 128,000 of whom arrived since December 2013—is adding to Cameroonian concerns about regional security threats, including an expanding conflict with Boko Haram, a Nigerian-origin violent Islamist extremist group.

⁴¹ *Reuters*, “Former Central African presidents sign peace deal in Kenya,” April 14, 2015.

⁴² *Africa Confidential*, “The friendless mediator,” February 19, 2015.

⁴³ See U.N. Office at Geneva, “United Nations Team Documents Grave Human Rights Violations in the Central African Republic,” January 14, 2014.

⁴⁴ UNHCR, “Réponse Régionale à la crise des Réfugiés en République centrafricaine,” July 22, 2015.

⁴⁵ U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), *Chad: Impact of CAR Crisis*, May 27, 2014.

⁴⁶ The U.N. Security Council sanctions list, to which Bozizé was added in 2014, now states that he resides in Uganda.

Lord's Resistance Army Presence⁴⁷

Separate in origin from the current crisis, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a small militia of Ugandan origin, has operated in CAR's remote southeast since at least 2008 (see **Figure 1** above). LRA attacks on rural communities have displaced hundreds of thousands of people in CAR, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and South Sudan. CAR appears to have attracted LRA commanders due to its remoteness, lack of an effective military, and location near territory previously familiar to the group.⁴⁸ In 2013, then-President Djotodia claimed to be in contact with reclusive LRA leader Joseph Kony, but U.S. officials downplayed the claim.⁴⁹

The Ugandan military has conducted counter-LRA operations in CAR since 2009, with significant U.S. support, including logistical and intelligence assistance and the deployment of U.S. military advisors to the field since late 2011.⁵⁰ Since 2012, these operations have been considered part of a Ugandan-led AU Regional Task Force (AU-RTF). The United States has also provided non-military aid for humanitarian assistance, early warning efforts, and reconciliation programs in LRA-affected areas, including in CAR.⁵¹

Southeastern CAR, where U.S. military advisors are based, has been comparatively unaffected by the larger conflict sparked by the Seleka rebellion. However, LRA fighters appear to have taken advantage of instability in CAR to evade regional military operations. They have also reportedly leveraged opportunistic relationships with Seleka fighters and others to expand their involvement in illicit trafficking of gold and diamonds from CAR through parts of Sudan, and to garner food supplies and other assistance.⁵²

In January 2015, Dominic Ongwen, a top LRA commander, surrendered to U.S. forces in CAR—reportedly after making contact with Seleka forces. He has since been delivered to The Hague, where he faces seven counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Court (ICC). In April, remains exhumed from a grave in southeastern CAR were confirmed to be those of LRA second-in-command Okot Odhiambo. Of the five LRA commanders sought by the ICC in 2005, only Kony remains active.⁵³ Recent non-government estimates put the LRA's strength at about 200-300 fighters.⁵⁴ Advocates of a continuing U.S. role in efforts to counter the LRA nevertheless warn that the group continues to pose a threat and could rebound, reporting that attacks and abductions attributed to the group increased in 2014, a trend that has continued into 2015, reversing a decline in 2011-2013.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ See CRS Report R42094, *The Lord's Resistance Army: The U.S. Response*, by Alexis Arieff and Lauren Ploch Blanchard

⁴⁸ Enough Project, *On the Heels of Kony: The Untold Tragedy Unfolding in the Central African Republic*, June 2010.

⁴⁹ State Department press briefing, November 21, 2013. It does appear that Seleka officers were in touch with an LRA faction in CAR in 2013, with Djotodia's approval, but the group reportedly did not include Kony. The Resolve, *The Kony Crossroads*, August 2015.

⁵⁰ Defense Department-funded logistical support for Ugandan-led counter-LRA operations is currently authorized through FY2017 under the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2014 (P.L. 113-66). The FY2015 Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act (P.L. 113-235) provided funding for intelligence support, as have previous appropriations measures.

⁵¹ Funding for such programs is provided under the FY2015 foreign aid appropriations act (Division J of P.L. 113-235) and under previous appropriations measures.

⁵² The Resolve, *The Kony Crossroads*, August 2015.

⁵³ LRA Army Commander Raska Lukwiya and Vice Chairman Vincent Otti were killed in 2006 and 2007, respectively.

⁵⁴ Samuel Okiror, "How goes the hunt for Joseph Kony and the LRA?" *IRIN*, June 23, 2015.

⁵⁵ See The Resolve and Invisible Children, LRA Crisis Tracker, at lra-crisistracker.com.

U.S. Responses

U.S. engagement in CAR has historically been limited. However, the Obama Administration significantly scaled up U.S. humanitarian aid and diplomatic efforts in 2013 as part of its effort to elevate the prevention of “mass atrocities” as a core tenet of U.S. foreign policy. Visiting Bangui in April 2014, U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. Samantha Power stated, “the Rwandan genocide taught us the price of delay in responding to mass violence,” adding, “We must do more; and we must do it now.”⁵⁶

In April 2015, the Administration nominated career diplomat Jeffrey J. Hawkins to be ambassador to CAR. If confirmed, he would be the first U.S. ambassador since 2013. The U.S. Embassy in Bangui was evacuated in December 2012 as the Seleka rebellion reached the outskirts of Bangui. Then-Ambassador Lawrence Wohlens continued to fulfill his duties outside of the country until mid-2013, when he retired from the U.S. Foreign Service. In April 2014, the Administration appointed Ambassador W. Stuart Symington as a Washington, DC-based Special Representative for CAR. In September 2014, the Administration resumed diplomatic operations in Bangui, headed by a Chargé d’Affaires, David Brown.

The United States is now the leading bilateral humanitarian donor to CAR, having provided \$150 million in FY2014 and over \$92 million in FY2015 to date.⁵⁷ U.S. targeted financial and travel sanctions are authorized under Executive Order 13667 (2014) and have been brought against five individuals—three more than have been designated by the U.N. sanctions committee.⁵⁸ The United States has provided diplomatic support to the transitional government and to the Bangui Forum (national consultations) in May 2015. The United States is also providing financial support to the U.N. peacekeeping operation, MINUSCA, through assessed contributions;⁵⁹ additional voluntary assistance to African peacekeeping troop contributors and logistical support to French forces;⁶⁰ and funding for aid programs to promote peace and stability, justice sector capacity, and the electoral process.⁶¹ The Administration has also engaged in public diplomacy initiatives to halt the violence, including a recorded message from President Obama to the people of CAR in December 2013 and a visit to CAR by an interfaith delegation of U.S. religious leaders. The

⁵⁶ “Remarks to Troops of the African-Led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic,” April 9, 2014. On the Administration’s atrocity-prevention policy, see <http://www.humanrights.gov/dyn/issues/atrocity-prevention.html>.

⁵⁷ USAID, *Central African Republic—Humanitarian Update #74*, October 15, 2014 [on FY2014], and *Central African Republic—Complex Emergency*, Fact Sheet #16, FY2015, June 12, 2015.

⁵⁸ President Obama has identified five individuals as subject to the CAR sanctions: former president François Bozizé, former transitional president Michel Djotodia, Seleka commander Nourredine Adam, armed group commander Abdoulaye Miskine, and anti-balaka “political coordinator” Levy Yakite (alt: Yakete). Yakite reportedly died in November 2014. Bozizé, Adam, and Yakite have been designated for U.N. sanctions.

⁵⁹ U.S. contributions to MINUSCA are provided through the State Department’s Contributions to International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) account. FY2014 obligations totaled \$85 million. State Department, “Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities: Summary as of June 2015,” as provided to congressional staff.

⁶⁰ As of January 2015, the Administration had allocated about \$74 million in State Department-administered Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds for bilateral support to African troop contributors to MISCA (African Union) and MINUSCA. (State Department responses to CRS queries, December 2014-January 2015; MINUSCA absorbed most MISCA troops when it began operations in September 2014.) In addition, President Obama has authorized “up to” \$60 million in Defense Department logistical support and equipment for African troop contributors and French forces under Operation Sangaris, under Section 506(a)(1) of the Foreign Assistance Act.

⁶¹ CRS analysis of congressional notifications in FY2014-FY2015; USAID, “USAID Sustains Commitment to Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic,” November 10, 2014. Funding for U.S. aid programming has been allocated from multiple accounts and fiscal years.

United States wields influence within, and provides funding to, the international financial institutions that have provided assistance to the Samba-Panza government (see “The Economy”).

In FY2016, the Administration is requesting \$14.7 million in bilateral aid for CAR: \$10 million in State Department Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds for continuing support to African troop contributors to MINUSCA and for bilateral support to security sector reform in CAR; \$2 million in Economic Support Fund (ESF) for peacebuilding programs; \$2.5 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) to continue efforts to help reestablish a functioning criminal justice system in CAR; and \$150,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) for military professionalization and to promote bilateral military ties.⁶² Emergency humanitarian assistance is not requested on a country-specific basis but is allocated during the year according to need.

Recent Legislation

The FY2015 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act (Division J of P.L. 113-235, §7042[a]) stated that funds “shall be made available for reconciliation and peacebuilding programs” in CAR, “including activities to promote inter-faith dialogue at the national and local levels, and for programs to prevent crimes against humanity.” A similar provision was contained in the FY2014 foreign aid appropriations act (P.L. 113-76, Division K, §7042[a]). Similar provisions are included in FY2016 foreign aid appropriations bills (H.R. 2772 and S. 1725).

Other legislation introduced in the 114th Congress with implications for CAR includes H.R. 2494 (Global Anti-Poaching Act), H.Res. 310 and S.Res. 211 (regarding genocide and mass atrocities), S.Res. 237 and H.Res. 394 (on the Lord’s Resistance Army), and S.Res. 204 (on “World Refugee Day”). In the 113th Congress, S.Res. 375, concerning the crisis in CAR and international efforts to address it, passed the Senate.

The Senate report accompanying the FY2015 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill (S.Rept. 113-195, accompanying S. 2499) expressed concern that violence between Christians and Muslims in CAR “could result in genocide” and required the Secretary of State to report “on an interagency strategy to help promote stability” in the country, including funding estimates. The State Department submitted a strategy document in April 2015 that defined U.S. “national interests” in CAR as “first, to prevent mass atrocities and genocide,” and “second, to help CAR become a stable regional partner able to exercise effective governance throughout its territory, thereby preventing the use of CAR territory for international criminal or terrorist networks.”⁶³ It also outlined U.S. diplomatic and aid efforts.

Outlook and Issues for Congress

Some observers assert that U.S. and other international responses to the conflict in CAR since late 2013 have helped avert a much larger crisis.⁶⁴ The situation nonetheless remains extremely challenging, leading others to characterize it as an example of the limits of international

⁶² State Department, FY2016 *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*.

⁶³ State Department, *U.S. Strategy to Support Stability in the Central African Republic*, April 14, 2015.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Hayes Brown, “The Inside Story of How the U.S. Acted to Prevent Another Rwanda,” *ThinkProgress*, December 20, 2013.

commitments to protect civilians.⁶⁵ Despite international troop deployments, aid, and diplomatic engagement, residents of CAR continue to suffer armed attacks by militias. Few root causes of the conflict have been successfully addressed, and the prospects for a peaceful democratic transition in the near term appear slim. Looking ahead, Congress may influence the funding levels, duration, and mechanisms of U.S. humanitarian assistance and U.S. support for international stabilization efforts. Congress may also weigh the relative priority of the CAR crisis in the context of competing priorities elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

Given the transition from an African-led operation to a U.N. peacekeeping operation in 2014, some observers have examined MINUSCA's performance in reference to an ongoing debate regarding the relative merits of African Union versus U.N.-conducted stabilization missions. This debate has been at play in Mali, Somalia, and elsewhere. In CAR, as elsewhere, neighboring states may have greater political commitment to resolving a crisis in their backyard, but regional operations are often hampered by a lack of capacity and handicapped by political rivalries and competing interests. On the other hand, U.N. peacekeeping operations, while better funded and vetted, can be slow to fully deploy and, often, risk-averse to a point that can inhibit effectiveness. Some observers have called for U.N. peacekeeping operations in places like CAR to broaden their scope of activities to include a "partnership" with local authorities aimed at strengthening public governance and boosting the economy.⁶⁶ Broad recognition of CAR's institutional dysfunctions notwithstanding, the appetite within Africa for arrangements that arguably verge on trusteeship may nonetheless be limited.

In the long term, the internal political and security arrangements that could allow for stability and improved governance in CAR may prove elusive. International actors have repeatedly attempted military interventions, peace processes, state-building, and security sector reform efforts in CAR—with mixed results, at best. Despite some achievements by CAR's transitional authorities and agreements at the 2015 Bangui Forum, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of combatants, the investigation and prosecution of human rights abusers, and the creation of functional and representative state security forces in CAR face severe challenges and have not significantly advanced. The conflict has also created new, harmful dynamics among communities at the grassroots level that may prove durable and difficult to contain.⁶⁷

The potential impact of the CAR crisis on regional stability is of concern to U.S. policymakers, particularly as conflicts in nearby countries, such as South Sudan and DRC, persist. (In addition, new instability in Burundi—a top troop contributor to MINUSCA—could undermine stabilization efforts in CAR if it leads Burundi to withdraw its peacekeeping troops.)⁶⁸ To date, little violence has been reported among border communities in neighboring states, despite the fact that CAR's demographics are mirrored throughout Central Africa and elsewhere on the continent. Still, refugee flows are taxing scarce local resources, while insecurity is hindering cross-border trade and the delivery of humanitarian aid. Neighboring states have limited capacity to respond to these problems or to contain violence should it erupt. As an imperfect comparison, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and the subsequent flight of Rwandan refugees into neighboring DRC (then Zaire), laid the groundwork for an enduring regional security crisis. Concerns about whether

⁶⁵ Roland Paris, "Is it possible to meet the 'Responsibility to Protect'?" *Washington Post*, Monkey Cage blog, December 9, 2014.

⁶⁶ Thierry Vircoulon and Thibaud Lesueur/ICG, "The CAR Crisis: Thinking beyond traditional peacekeeping," AllAfrica.com, June 17, 2014.

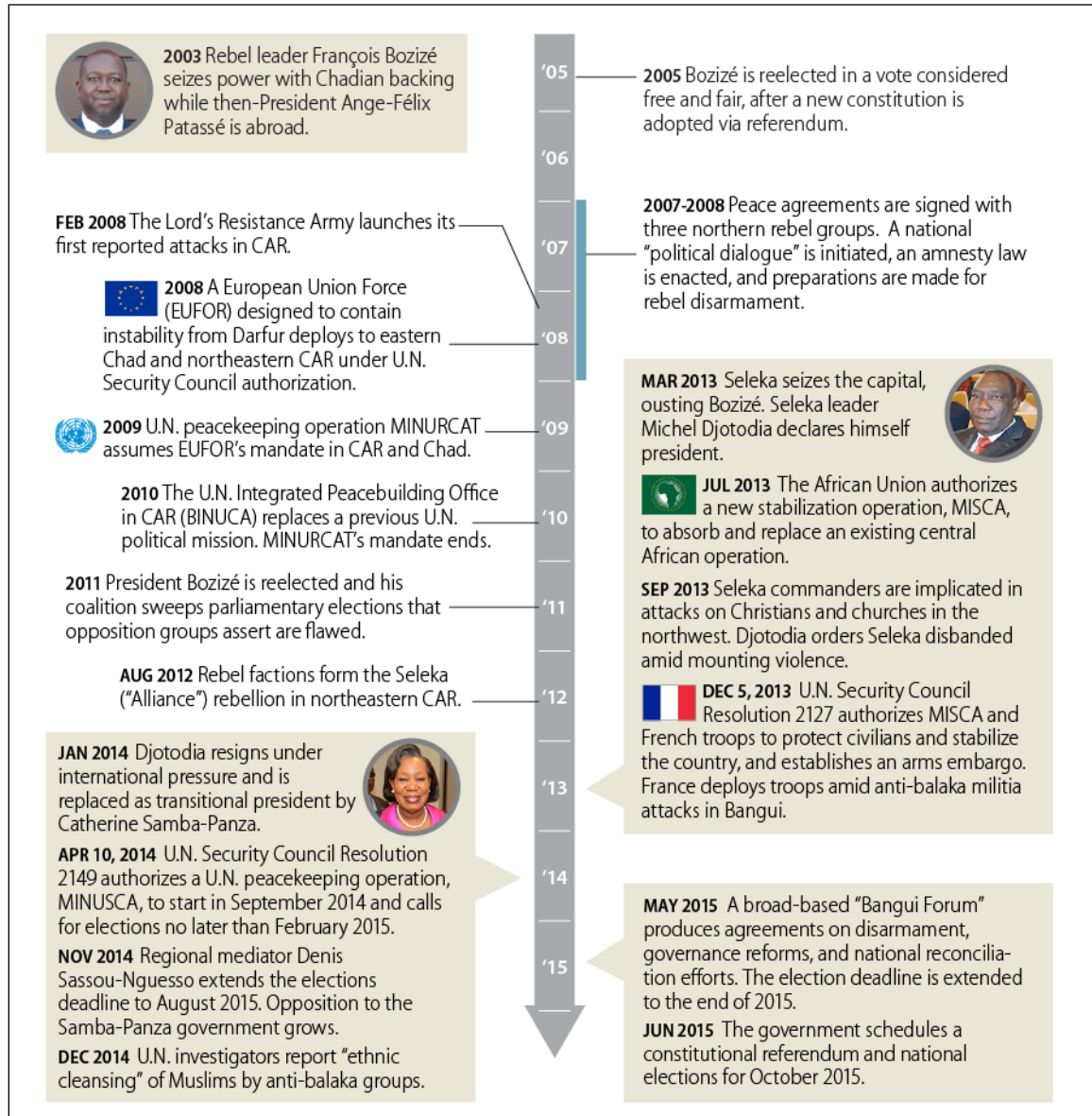
⁶⁷ See, e.g., ICG, *The Central African Republic's Hidden Conflict*, December 2014.

⁶⁸ See CRS Report R44018, *Burundi's Political Crisis: In Brief*, by Alexis Arieff,

transnational violent extremist organizations could seek safe havens in CAR or radicalize local populations affected by the conflict are also likely to persist.

Appendix.

Figure A-I. CAR Timeline



Source: CRS graphic drawn from U.N. and African Union documents, non-governmental organization reports, and news sources. Profile photographs from Africa Center (Bozize), www.allvoices.com (Djotodia), and State Department (Samba-Panza).

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