Peace by Pieces? Local Mediation and Sustainable Peace in the Central African Republic

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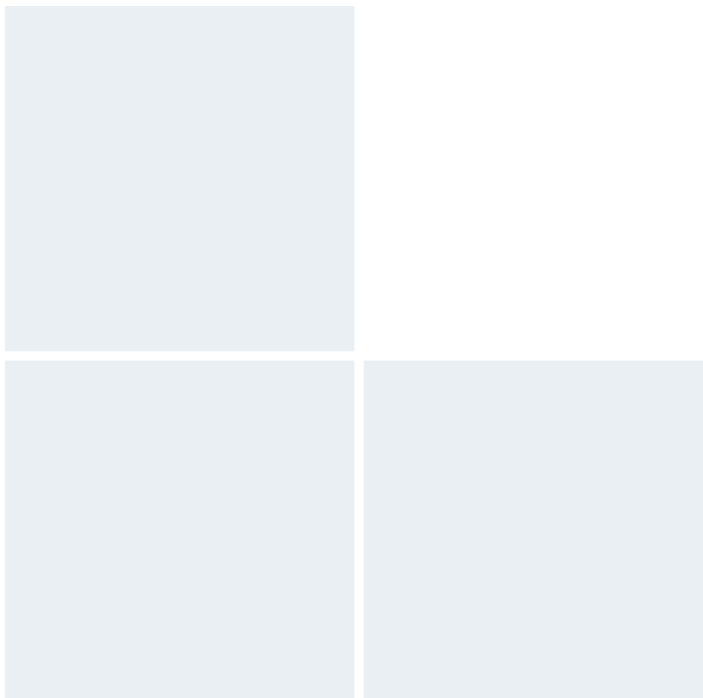Email: marie-joelle.zahar@umontreal.ca

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Abbreviations

APRD	Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (*Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie*)
AU	African Union
BINUCA	UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic
BONUCA	UN Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic
CAR	Central African Republic
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
FDPC	Democratic Front of the Central African People (*Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain*)
FPRC	Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic (*Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique*)
IDP	Internally displaced person
MINURCA	UN Mission in the Central African Republic
MINURCAT	UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad
MINUSCA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MLC	Movement for the Liberation of Congo (*Mouvement de libération du Congo*)
MPC	Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic (*Mouvement patriotique centrafricain*)
UFDR	Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (*Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement*)
UPC	Union for Peace for the Central African Republic (*Union pour la paix en Centrafrique*)
UNDP	UN Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

The Central African Republic (CAR) has earned an undesirable reputation as one of the most troubled spots on earth. Since independence, the country has gone through coups, counter-coups, and armed rebellions and seen the deployment of more than a dozen peace operations intended to restore security and build peace. During the most recent episode of armed conflict, in 2012, Muslim rebels in the north—coming together as the Séléka—launched a coup d'état against then-President François Bozizé. The spiraling violence reached an apex when local Christian self-defense groups known as the anti-Balaka emerged in response to the Séléka.

Many international and regional mediation efforts have attempted to resolve the conflict in CAR. The history of these past attempts is rich in lessons. Most attempts have focused on short-term objectives through a mix of demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) and limited power sharing, and none of the agreements lasted. The agreements also failed to address the general sense of exclusion, creating fertile ground for mobilization of armed groups, particularly in the northeast of the country.

Since 2012, local mediation is increasingly being deployed to address intercommunal violence and the religious dimensions of the conflict at the local level. Though less visible and therefore less discussed, local initiatives aim to bring about tangible immediate change. From local nonaggression pacts between armed groups to deals regarding access to specific areas to community violence-reduction agreements, these initiatives reflect the particularities of the situation in many locales across the country. They can involve a range of actors, including informal local mediation committees, government-established local peace and reconciliation committees, religious actors, NGOs, and the UN.

While these local mediation initiatives can provide a respite from violence, they are vulnerable to changes in the security context, leadership struggles between the local, regional, and national representatives of already fragmented armed groups, and financial challenges that prevent the implementation of supporting activities such as social cohesion and joint economic programs. In addition, they are not devoid of risks, including the risks of displacing violence, legitimizing otherwise illegitimate actors, and heightening competition among actors involved in and supporting mediation efforts. Local mediation efforts are also generally ad hoc and have serious difficulty achieving results in terms of coexistence and reconciliation. Rather than being connected as part of an overarching strategy, local- and national-level mediation efforts are at best on parallel tracks; at worst, they undermine each other.

What role can the UN play in supporting or conducting mediation efforts in CAR? The approach of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) to local mediation has been mainly reactive, trying to seize opportunities as they arise. The development of a strategic vision would assist MINUSCA in better leveraging its assets, working to mitigate risks, and ensuring that it brings added value to the table. This would also ensure that MINUSCA's engagement in local mediation achieves the objectives set out in its mandate. As such, MINUSCA's strategy to support local and national mediation could become a pilot project for similar engagements in other contexts. With this in mind, the following recommendations are addressed to the mission, the UN Secretariat, and the Security Council.

1. **Explicitly make mediation support a priority:** In MINUSCA's mandate, the UN Security Council defines the mission's strategic objective as "to support the creation of conditions conducive to the sustainable reduction of the presence of, and threat posed by, armed groups." Although the UN is considering adding 900 troops to MINUSCA, the most sustainable way to create this conducive environment remains through local and national efforts to reduce community violence, establish weapon-free zones, negotiate and implement a DDR program, and address the root causes of the violence in CAR. The Security Council should therefore mandate MINUSCA to direct all the necessary resources to support local and national mediation initiatives. Other tasks that do not have the same urgency or impact ought to be sequenced and postponed to a later date.

2. **Develop a mission-wide mediation support strategy:** For mediation support to contribute to MINUSCA's mandate, its various support

activities and engagements must not be ad hoc and reactive. They must be part of a mission-wide strategy of support to local and national mediation initiatives, developed with the support of UN headquarters. The strategy should explicitly connect MINUSCA's support to local initiatives with its support to efforts at the national level. The strategy should guide the mediation support activities of various divisions, ensure coherence, and promote a whole-of-mission approach.

3. **Better leverage existing MINUSCA assets:** Based on the above two recommendations, the UN leadership ought to leverage existing MINUSCA assets in support of local mediation initiatives, including the mission's presence across the country, its military, and its logistical capabilities. Field offices should identify mediation actors, assess the support required, monitor the implementation of agreements, and provide early warning. Military capabilities should be leveraged to deter spoilers, and logistical means should continue to be used to support the engagement of government representatives with the population.

4. **Build up appropriate human resources and skill sets:** Support for local mediation efforts is human-resources-intensive but not necessarily costly. Effective support requires sustained engagement with local dynamics and local actors. To engage in this way, the mission must have the human resources and skill sets necessary to implement this mandate. This includes enhanced technical mediation expertise, mediation training for relevant MINUSCA staff, and increased resources for the joint mission analysis center to deepen the mission's ability to analyze local dynamics and actors.

5. **Urge the government of CAR to take the lead in mediation and reconciliation efforts:** While local agreements are possible and have tangible short-term impacts, and while MINUSCA can do much to support local mediation initiatives, these are unsustainable without a national dynamic. Likewise, no national agreement can survive if it is not firmly rooted in local

agreements and dynamics. The Security Council should encourage the government of CAR to shoulder its responsibilities and lead on reconciliation. The international community should also bring collective pressure and support to bear to this end.

6. **Compel armed groups to shoulder responsibility:** Armed groups responsible for the continuing violence, for the violation of agreements resulting from local initiatives, and for the subsequent grave threat to civilians must be held accountable for their actions. The Security Council should act upon the recommendations of the Panel of Experts on CAR and the reports of the secretary-general, effectively implement sanctions, and possibly impose new ones against armed group leaders responsible for fomenting violence.

Introduction

Ranked consistently amongst the bottom five countries in the Fragile States Index, the Central African Republic (CAR) has earned an undesirable reputation as one of the most troubled spots on earth. Since independence, the country has gone through coups, counter-coups, and armed rebellions and seen the deployment of more than a dozen peace operations intended to restore security and build peace.[1] During the most recent episode of armed conflict, in 2012, Muslim rebels in the north—coming together as the Séléka ("alliance" in Sango, the local language)—launched a coup d'état against then-President François Bozizé and installed Michel Djotodia as head of state in March 2013 (see Annex for a timeline of events). The spiraling violence reached an apex when local self-defense groups known as the anti-Balaka ("anti-machete") emerged in response to the exactions and violations of Séléka against CAR's majority Christian population and began to target the country's Muslim population. Unable to stem the violence, Djotodia resigned, making room for a government of transition charged with steering the country out of the crisis.

Organized at the behest of the government of transition, the Bangui Forum of May 2015 was

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1   For an overview of these peace operations, see Jocelyn Coulon and Damien Larramendy (with the collaboration of Marie-Joëlle Zahar), *Consolidation de la paix et fragilité étatique: L'ONU en République centrafricaine* (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2015), pp. 59–80.

hailed as a turning point for the country. The forum held the promise of a new social contract between citizens and the state, resulted in a new disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) agreement with the Séléka and the anti-Balaka; established national and local mechanisms for justice and reconciliation, and paved the way for presidential and legislative elections in late 2015 and early 2016. The forum's concluding document, the *Pacte républicain pour la paix, la reconciliation, et la reconstruction en République centrafricaine*, captured the hopes of participants that the Bangui Forum was a "historic opportunity to reestablish the Central African Republic on the basis of a National Pact anchored in the principles of democracy, social justice and good governance."[2]

However, the forum and the subsequent elections did not fulfill this promise. Initially, armed groups adopted a wait-and-see attitude to the new state authorities. President Faustin-Archange Touadéra insisted that they lay down their weapons before entering into dialogue.[3] In the tug-of-war that ensued between the president and the armed groups, violence resumed throughout the country's prefectures, accompanied by massive displacement and mounting civilian casualties. Many observers have warned of the damaging consequences of the crisis. The International Crisis Group, for instance, has noted that "the links between rebel groups and local communities is reinforced, the number of local militias is rising and, above all, a resurgence of targeted attacks against Muslim minorities is driving ethnic and religious exclusion, reminiscent of the most tragic events of the country's recent crisis."[4]

Over the last year, a flurry of international and regional mediation efforts has sought to address the deteriorating situation in CAR. These include, inter alia, efforts by neighboring countries such as Angola and Chad, by regional organizations including the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the African Union (AU), and by the Catholic community Sant'Egidio,

which brokered a "political peace agreement" with the armed groups in June 2017, only for it to be overtaken by developments on the ground. These various mediation efforts have often proposed contradictory solutions.[5] The resumption of wide-scale violence, however, has at least temporarily rallied support for an AU initiative, the Roadmap for Peace and National Reconciliation in CAR, which was announced in Libreville, Gabon, in July 2017.

Less discussed are the multiplicity of local mediation efforts undertaken in CAR by a variety of local, national, and international actors. These efforts are particularly important in light of the recommendations of the Bangui Forum on the need for increased participation by citizens, accountability of national actors to the population, and bridging the long-standing gap between Bangui and the rest of the country—or, as locals and foreign observers often put it, "extending the state beyond PK 12."[6]

Local mediation efforts are the focus of this report. What do these mediation efforts entail? Who is involved? To what extent do these efforts contribute to conflict resolution and sustainable peace? What relation, if any, is there between local efforts and regional or international efforts? What role should the UN play in local mediation?

We begin by thematically surveying past efforts at conflict resolution. The survey focuses on three recurring characteristics that have contributed to the lack of sustainable results: (1) they are pacts among elites, (2) they favor DDR as the main mechanism for conflict resolution, and (3) they are outsider-driven. We then review local mediation efforts. We try to ascertain who is involved, the nature of the deals, and their prospects. We also ask whether these constitute new approaches to conflict resolution and discuss the links (or lack thereof) between the various mediation tracks in CAR. Lastly, the report addresses the role that the UN, particularly the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African

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2 For the full pact in French, see www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Republican-Pact-May-2015.pdf .

3 A senior international civil servant told us that it was difficult to convince the legitimately elected Touadéra government of the need to negotiate with armed groups, even though the electoral process had not settled any of the pending issues in the country. Interview, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

4 International Crisis Group, "Avoiding the Worst in Central African Republic," Africa Report no. 253, September 28, 2017, available at www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/253-avoiding-worst-central-african-republic .

5 These contradictions revolve around three main issues: amnesty for rebel leaders, the integration of combatants into the army, and the return of former presidents.

6 PK 12 is the last borough of Bangui, and the expression is intended to highlight the absence of the state outside of the capital. Interview with NGO representative, Bangui, September 14, 2017.
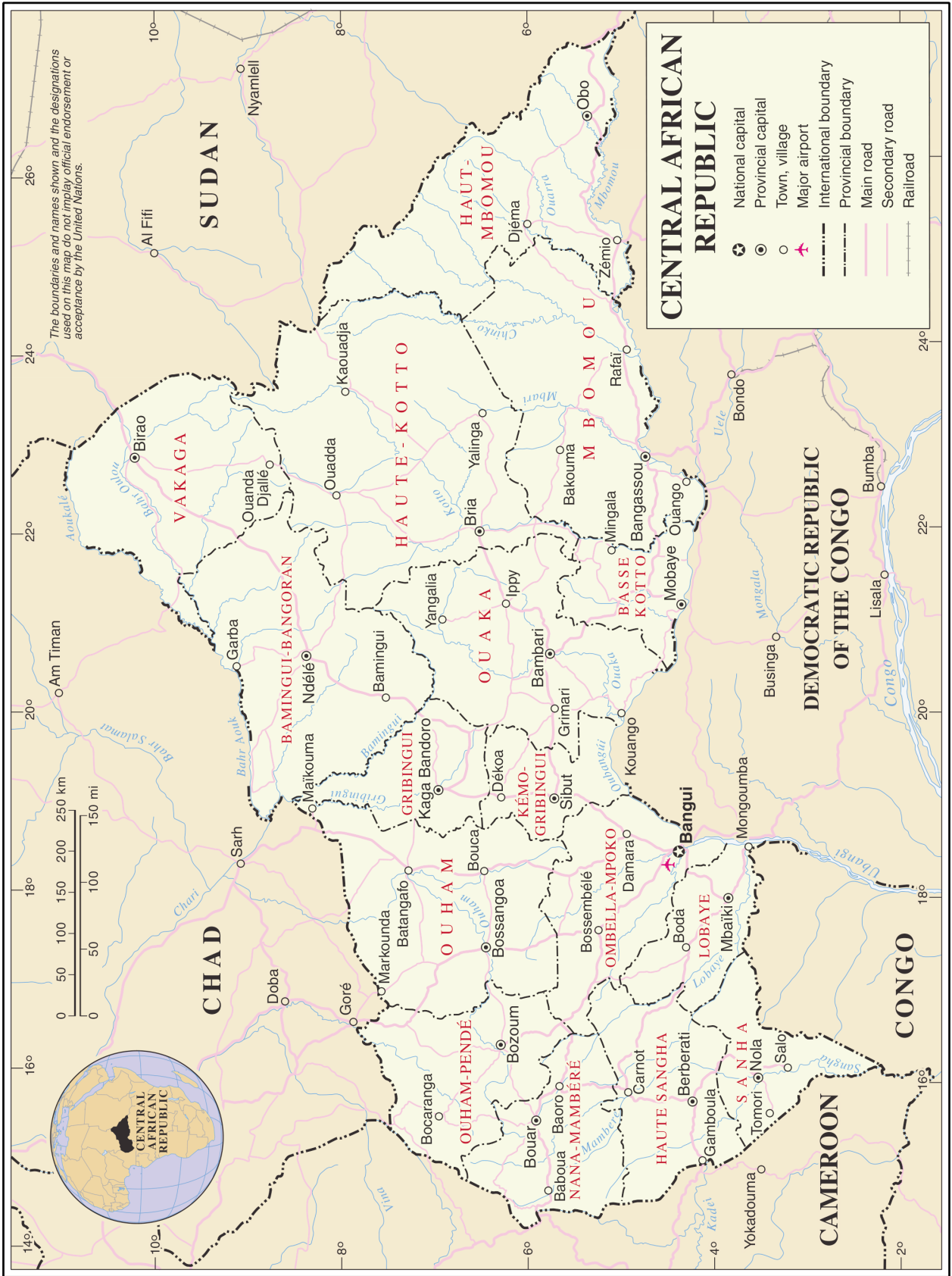
Figure 1. Map of the Central African Republic

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

- ✪ National capital
- ◉ Provincial capital
- ○ Town, village
- ✈ Major airport
- International boundary
- Provincial boundary
- Main road
- Secondary road
- Railroad

Republic (MINUSCA), ought to play in supporting or conducting mediation efforts in CAR.

Learning from the Past: Mediation and Sustainable Conflict Resolution in CAR

The recent crisis and subsequent conflict-resolution efforts are not the first of their kind. In the first few decades after independence, political instability resulted primarily from a series of coups d'état and military rebellions. While not mediations, the conflict-resolution efforts associated with these episodes often took the form of French intervention under the terms of a quadripartite defense agreement signed between France and the newly independent countries of Chad, CAR, and the Republic of the Congo in 1960.[7]

The end of the Cold War prompted France to reassess its commitments in Africa. In this context, the French government decided to stop intervening to tame military rebellions in CAR, passing the baton to regional and international organizations. In the words of then-Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, the defense pact that linked Paris and Bangui was not a police agreement, and French armed forces were not to be transformed into an internal security force or a presidential guard for then-President Ange-Félix Patassé (Patassé's government had been the target of three military mutinies in 1996, all of which were put down with the help of France).[8] In 1997 the French decided to close their military bases in Bangui and Bouar. This contributed to growing insecurity, with northern CAR becoming a largely ungoverned territory.[9]

Beginning with the arrival of President Bozizé to power, conflict-resolution efforts became mostly focused on the many armed rebellions that destabilized CAR, most of which took root in the north of the country.[10] The first such peace deal, the Sirte Agreement of 2007, was negotiated with the Democratic Front of the Central African People (*Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain*, or FDPC), led by Abdoulaye Miskine.[11] A year later, another such peace deal was struck between the government and an additional two rebel groups, the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (*Union de forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement*, or UFDR) and the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (*Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie*, or APRD), which provided for the disarmament and demobilization of rebel forces. Negotiations also revolved around the creation of a government of national unity and the holding of elections. Meanwhile, parliament passed an amnesty law, seen as the last obstacle to peace.

In spite of the fact that two rebel leaders joined the government of national unity in 2009, rebel attacks continued through 2009 and into 2010. After its leader was killed in 2010, the last rebel group, the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (*Convention des patriotes pour la justice et pour la paix*, or CPJP), signed a peace deal with the government in August 2012. In November of that same year, the newly established Séléka rebel coalition overtook the north and the east of CAR, and in March 2013 Séléka troops entered Bangui and deposed Bozizé, replacing him with Djotodia, the country's first Muslim president.

It is striking that, in spite of the multiple conflict-resolution attempts, many of which were supported by regional and international peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions (see Table 1), agreements have seldom lasted. This has led observers to argue that the country's political and military elites do not put much weight in the commitments they make and that the various pacts that were negotiated were worth little more than the paper they were drafted on.[12] In drawing lessons

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7　Coulon and Larramendy (with Zahar), Consolidation de la paix et fragilité étatique, pp. 60–62.

8　Ibid, p. 62. Patassé would ultimately be overthrown in 2003 by Bozizé, the former chief-of-staff of the Central African armed forces.

9　See Jennifer Giroux, David Lanz, and Damiano Sguaitamatti, "The Tormented Triangle: The Regionalisation of Conflict in Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic," Working Paper no. 47, Crisis States Research Centre, April 2009, p. 7, available at www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/The-Tormented-Triangle.pdf ; International Crisis Group, "Tchad: Vers le retour de la guerre?" Africa Report no. 111, June 1, 2006, p. 11, available at www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/central-africa/chad/chad-back-towards-war ; Jérôme Tubiana, *The Chad-Sudan Proxy War and the "Darfurization" of Chad: Myths and Reality* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2008).

10　Numerous mediation processes have been initiated (1997, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2013, and 2015) in an effort to find solutions to the series of coups and armed conflicts plaguing the country.

11　The agreement was named after the Libyan city of Sirte where the negotiations took place.

12　Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 21, 2017.

Table 1: List of peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions in the Central African Republic

Acronym	Official name	Date authorized[13]	Mandating organization
MISAB	Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements (*Mission interafricaine de surveillance des accords de Bangui*)	January 1997	AU
MINURCA	UN Mission in the Central African Republic (*Mission des Nations Unies en République centrafricaine*)	April 1998	UN
BONUCA	UN Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (*Bureau des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en République centrafricaine*)	December 1999	UN
	CEN-SAD Peacekeeping and Security Force in the Central African Republic (*Force de maintien de la paix et de la sécurité de la CEN-SAD en Centrafrique*)	December 2001	Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) (subsequently endorsed by the AU)
FOMUC	Multinational Force in the Central African Republic (*Force multinationale en Centrafrique*)	October 2002	Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC)
MINURCAT	UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (*Mission des Nations Unies en République Centrafricaine et au Tchad*)	September 2007	UN
EUFOR Chad/CAR	EU Force in Chad and the Central African Republic (*Mission de l'Union européenne au Tchad et en République centrafricaine*)	October 2007	UN
MICOPAX	Peace Consolidation Mission in the Central African Republic (*Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique*)	June 2008	Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
BINUCA	UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (*Bureau Intégré de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en Centrafrique*)	April 2009	UN
ICR-LRA	Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (*Initiative de coopération régionale contrel'Armée de résistance du Seigneur*)	November 2011	AU

13 The date the mission was authorized, not the date it was deployed. The time lag between authorization and deployment varies.

Acronym	Official name	Date authorized	Mandating organization
MISCA	African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (*Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine*)	December 2013	AU
MINUSCA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (*Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République centrafricaine*)	April 2014	UN

from past conflict-resolution efforts, three main sets of recurring problems emerge: the nature of the "elites" involved in pact making, the nature of the agreements they negotiated, and the role played by external actors.

ELITES AND PACT MAKING IN CAR

In CAR, conflict resolution initiatives have historically been deals forged between political elites and rebel leaders. To understand why such deals do not last requires considering elites' commitment to them, without which these deals, negotiated in an atmosphere of heightened distrust, are unlikely to hold.[14]

Historically, CAR's political elite has had a predatory relationship to the state. As noted by Ned Dalby, "Since independence, the political elite have sought to benefit from their privileged position and have therefore concentrated power and resources in Bangui while largely neglecting and excluding those in the hinterland."[15] Many presidents surrounded themselves with members of their respective tribes for security purposes,[16]

"privatize[d] the state for their own benefit," and repressed opponents in order to prosper.[17] In other words, elites are less committed to the public or national interest than they are to their own private interests and hold on power.

CAR's political elites also lack a strong national identity, as does the rest of the country's population. Before independence "two competing centralization processes were at work in the country, one trans-Saharan and Muslim, the other French-led, Christian, and directed toward the Atlantic."[18] As Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard put it, the French "won." Thus Central African nationalism is "strongly-coded Christian, and non-north-eastern. The North-East is associated with Islam and foreignness."[19] Between 1990 and 2003, Chadian and Sudanese armed groups transited through northern and eastern CAR, respectively, contributing to the emergence of what Jennifer Giroux, David Lanz, and Damiano Sguaitamatti call a "tormented triangle" where regional and internal politics became fused.[20] This further

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14 This argument has been made forcefully by Barbara Walter, who identifies the commitment problem as one of the primary causes of the fragility of peace agreements. Barbara F. Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

15 Ned Dalby, "A Multifaceted Business: Diamonds in the Central African Republic," in Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard, eds., *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2015), p. 135.

16 Such was the case with President André Kolingba's reliance on his Yakoma tribe and with President Patassé's preferential inclusion of the Kaba. However, Laurence Wohlers makes the point that ethnicity did not generally play a role in how leaders rose to power; instead, leaders tended to exploit ethnicity to stay in power. See Laurence D. Wohlers, "A Central African Elite Perspective on the Struggles of the Central African Republic," in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, Carayannis and Lombard, eds., p. 314.

17 International Crisis Group, "Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State," Africa Report no. 135, December 13, 2007, available at www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-anatomy-phantom-state .

18 Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard, "A Concluding Note on the Failure and Future of Peacebuilding in CAR," in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, Carayannis and Lombard, eds., p. 322.

19 Louisa Lombard, "The Autonomous Zone Conundrum: Armed Conservation and Rebellion in Northeastern CAR," in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, Carayannis and Lombard, eds., p. 147.

20 Giroux, Lanz, and Sguaitamatti, "The Tormented Triangle," p. 7. See also International Crisis Group, "Tchad: Vers le retour de la guerre?"; Tubiana, *The Chad-Sudan Proxy War and the 'Darfurization' of Chad*.

conflated Muslims and foreigners in the minds of CAR's majority Christian population. A member of the diplomatic corps captured this by saying that Central African citizens have little awareness of belonging to the same nation.[21]

The attitudes of armed group leaders do not differ much from those of their state counterparts. They also seek access to power and resources. Rebellions taking root in CAR's marginalized hinterland have often been used by entrepreneurs to either "replace the government entirely or, more often, to demonstrate that the government must offer a higher price to buy [the armed rebels'] loyalty."[22] Dalby recounts how the UFDR's control over diamond mines contributed to its rise so that, when it advanced southwest toward Bangui, it posed enough of a threat to warrant a seat at the negotiating table:

> [Bozizé] gave [the UFDR's operational leader Zakaria] Damane the salary of a presidential adviser and licence to remain in control of Sam Ouandja and its diamonds until a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program should start. The government even sent them ammunition. Thus to keep Damane compliant, Bozizé offered access to diamonds and the opportunity to tax the production chain. This arrangement suited Bozizé well as it kept the rebel force anchored far from his seat of power in Bangui.[23]

In other words, not only are state elites and rebel leaders primarily driven by access to resources and power, but they also have a long history of interaction. Indeed, the rebellions that have destabilized CAR during the Bozizé era have "formed in marginalized areas of the hinterland and been led by politicians sidelined by the Bozizé régime."[24]

State elites and rebel leaders also share a common predicament. Neither have full control over their followers. The weakness of vertical ties further heightens these leaders' commitment problem. They cannot credibly deliver their fighters in case they make a deal. As one UN official remarked, "This increases their incentive to negotiate in bad faith as it is the only way for them to cut deals and secure short-term personal benefits."[25]

Lastly, state elites and rebel leaders have also become masters at political survival, inventing and reinventing themselves as they adapt to changing circumstances. For instance, the UFDR's Djotodia signed the February 2007 Birao Agreement and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of June 2008 (neither of which was implemented due, in part, to a lack of political will).[26] His UFDR became one of the founding groups of the Séléka, he participated in the 2015 negotiations in Nairobi,[27] and he was briefly the transitional president. Similarly, FPDC leader Martin Koumtamadji (aka Abdouleye Miskine, a former confident of Patassé), was a signatory of the Sirte Agreement in April 2007 and the 2008 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. He is currently directing activities from his base in Brazzaville and briefly joined the Séléka coalition in 2013.[28]

While CAR's leaders have often reduced armed rebellion to "banditry," when their position in power has been threatened, they have used all the means at their disposal—including legal and illegal financial rewards and political appointments—to buy the loyalty of potential rivals.

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21 Interview with member of diplomatic corps, Bangui, September 15, 2017.

22 Dalby, "A Multifaceted Business," p. 135.

23 Ibid., pp. 136–137.

24 Ibid., p. 135.

25 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 15, 2017.

26 Numerous deals were signed in 2007 and 2008 between the government of President Bozizé (2003–2013) and three active rebel groups, each signing separate accords with the government: the Democratic Front of the Central African People (*Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain*, or FDPC) in Sirte in February 2007; the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (*Union de forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement*, or UFDR) in Birao in April 2007; and the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (*Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie*, or APRD) in Libreville in May 2008. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement was then signed between the government of CAR and the different rebel groups on June 21, 2008, in Libreville under the auspices of the Gabonese President Omar Bongo. The agreements were never implemented.

27 "Former CAR Leaders Sign 'Meaningless' Peace Agreement," Al Jazeera, April 14, 2015, available at www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/car-leaders-sign-meaningless-peace-agreement-150414131041917.html .

28 Many ex-Séléka warlords were previously part of armed groups. For example, Ali Darassa, now the head of the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (*Union pour la paix en Centrafrique*, or UPC), was the right arm of Baba Laddé, a Chadian rebel and leader of the Popular Front for Recovery (FPR) since 1998. Many anti-Balaka groups are rebranded rural self-defense groups that were often used by Bozizé in his fight against road-blockers (zarginas) and to contain other groups. See Nathalia Dukhan, "Splintered Warfare: Alliances, Affiliations, and Agendas of Armed Factions and Politico-Military Groups in the Central African Republic," Enough Project, August 2017, available at https://enoughproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SplinteredWarfare_August2017_Enough_final.pdf . See also UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 26 July 2017 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2339 (2017) Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2017/639, July 26, 2017.

THE DDR "PANACEA"

Understanding the lack of sustainability of previous peace agreements also requires considering their nature. An overwhelming majority of the conflict-resolution deals struck under President Bozizé have privileged security arrangements, specifically DDR schemes, rather than addressing socioeconomic issues, feelings of marginalization, and problems of governance. Most also provided for limited participation by rebel leaders in government and included clauses on the protection of civilians.

CAR's experience with DDR began in 1997 when its armed forces tried to recover light and heavy weapons that had disappeared from its armories during mutinies earlier that year. An effort led by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in 1998 to demobilize 1,000 Central African soldiers failed. In 2002 and 2003 a national demobilization and reconversion program (*Programme national de démobilisation et de reconversion*) supported by the Multinational Force in the Central African Republic (*Force multinationale en Centrafrique*, or FOMUC) was disappointing, only gathering 11,000 light weapons and reintegrating 212 former combatants. In 2004 UNDP supported the Reintegration and Community Support Project (*Projet de réinsertion et d'appui aux communautés*), a government-led project of reintegration and support to the communities. While the project claims to have demobilized 7,500 combatants and to have financed forty micro-projects, it was marred by its inability to recover weapons and by accusations of fraud. The last DDR program began in 2009 on the heels of the Libreville Agreement. While this iteration succeeded in disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating approximately 4,800 APRD and UFDR forces in the northwest and center-west of the country, it completely ignored demands to the same effect from groups in the northeast of the country.[29]

Resorting to DDR as the preferred means of resolving conflict reflects the convergence of multiple factors, including the demands of rebels and the priorities and calculations of state leaders. International actors also relied on DDR as a standard instrument in their conflict-resolution toolkit.[30] However, none of these programs succeeded in providing a long-term, sustainable, and inclusive political solution.

The geography of CAR, the porousness of its borders with Sudan and Chad, the absence of the state from the hinterland, and a history of exclusion have fueled the emergence of armed groups seeking entitlements from the state. Armed rebels often take up arms to demand inclusion in a country where, as Lombard aptly puts it, "Unlike rights, these entitlements are won, not held, and when not made good on there are greater possibilities of forcing the issue."[31] In the search for entitlements, groups have an incentive to be recognized as rebels. This gives them access to DDR programs through which they can receive such entitlements. The importance of the daily food allowances (*prime journalière d'alimentation*), the details of which were discussed for six months by the DDR Steering Committee, are but one illustration of this reality.[32] Integration into the Central African armed forces also provides stable entitlements in the form of salaried state employment.

DDR has been beneficial to rebel leaders and state officials alike. It provided them with political leverage and personal benefits, and they attempted to use it as they would any other tool for their own purposes. President Bozizé attempted to negotiate membership for CAR in the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (a repository of DDR funding for the Great Lakes region) so that he could "gain largess he could distribute both to the eventual members of the National DDR Commission as well as to the people who had once mobilized against him or might otherwise be hostile toward him."[33] His efforts yielded the UNDP-supported Reintegration and Community Support Project (2004–2007). Citing UNDP officers, the International Crisis Group claimed that $40 million allocated to this project was embezzled by the Central African authorities.[34]

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29 For a review of the various DDR programs, see Coulon and Larramendy (with Zahar), *Consolidation de la paix et fragilité étatique*, pp. 128–131.

30 A wave of critical scholarship and practitioner-led lessons learned exercises have since identified the problems with DDR, and a new generation of practice has attempted to address some of them.

31 Louisa Lombard, *State of Rebellion: Violence and Intervention in the Central African Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 121.

32 Ibid., pp. 164–165.

33 Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, p. 153.

This has led policy analysts and scholars to identify a lack of political will to implement DDR in CAR. For instance, Laurence Wohlers reports interviewees saying that Bozizé obstructed the process for years, "apparently hoping that he could buy off the rebel groups' leaders rather than spend the larger sums of DDR funds allocated for the rank and file."[35]

Rebel leaders have also exploited DDR programs for personal gain. When asked about the fate of daily food allowances that had not been distributed, APRD fighters in Kaga Bandoro told Lombard that "group leaders had 'gobbled' (*bouffé*) [them up] and pointed to the stories that Colonel Lakué of the APRD was building not just a house but a full-on villa in Chad as proof."[36] In a similar vein, Jocelyn Coulon and Damien Larramendy quote a member of the Peacebuilding Commission as saying that DDR is a "machine to create rebel groups."[37] This is also confirmed by Lombard, according to whom the DDR process was instrumental in helping the APRD and the UFDR to expand.[38] Even when rebels were reintegrated into national forces, they did not hesitate to go back to the bush. For instance, the rebels who helped Bozizé take power in 2003 are the same people who in 2005 started the rebellion in northeastern CAR.

(UN)HELPFUL FOREIGN INTERVENTIONS AND MEDIATION EFFORTS

Despite receiving extensive bilateral support and hosting more than a dozen peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives, CAR has periodically relapsed into conflict. An overview of the role of external actors is therefore key to understanding the limits of past efforts by outsiders to build sustainable peace in the country, particularly since the early 2000s.

Regional leaders have regularly been involved in mediation initiatives in CAR: Mali's General Amadou Toumani Touré participated in the Bangui Accords in 1997, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi shepherded the Sirte Agreement of 2007, Gabon's President Omar Bongo was central to the Libreville agreements of 2008, and the Republic of the Congo's Denis Sassou Nguesso was named ECCAS mediator in 2014. Chad has also been a key player, initially positioning ECCAS—of which it held the presidency—as the lead on mediation in 2014 and hence reaffirming its central role in the political process. Chad has been a central player in CAR's political and security situation since the 1990s. Its support of Bozizé during the 2003 coup that removed Patassé as head of state earned it some degree of allegiance from CAR's elite and hence political influence on decision making.[39] Many analysts agree, however, that "Chadian involvement in [the] CAR crisis has been more harmful than beneficial."[40]

The intervention of outsiders in the politics of CAR can be traced back to the role France, the former colonial power, has played since independence. As highlighted by Roland Marchal, "There is a historical tendency for CAR's leaders to look to Paris, N'Djamena, or Brazzaville for protection and guidance rather than trying to build any kind of social contract with the Central African population."[41] As bilateral military support from France became increasingly short-term, both the French and the Central African government turned to the region. France tried to get regional parties involved in stabilizing CAR in its stead, while politicians in Bangui started looking for alternate sources of protection and support.[42]

Regional powers, heads of state, and even rebel leaders who heeded politicians' calls for support all

34 International Crisis Group, "Central African Republic: Keeping the Dialogue Alive," Africa Briefing no. 69, January 12, 2010, p. 12, available at www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-keeping-dialogue-alive .

35 Wohlers, "A Central African Elite Perspective on the Struggles of the Central African Republic," pp. 311–312.

36 Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, p. 165.

37 Coulon and Larramendy (with Zahar), *Consolidation de la paix et fragilité étatique*, p. 145.

38 Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, p. 166.

39 Nathalia Dukhan, "The Central African Republic Crisis," Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, March 2016, p. 30, available at www.gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/CAR_Jan2016.pdf .

40 Ibid., p. 25.

41 Roland Marchal, "CAR and the Regional (Dis)order," in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, Carayannis and Lombard, eds., p. 335.

42 Coulon and Larramendy (with Zahar), *Consolidation de la paix et fragilité étatique*, pp. 60–65. While Patassé sought the financial and military support of Gaddafi and Jean-Pierre Bemba (a rebel leader from the DRC), Bozizé has been famous in his employment of Chadian mercenaries and in an interview with the International Crisis Group explained that he "took power with Chad's help." International Crisis Group, "Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State, p. 17.

had their own agendas. For instance, when Libyan troops and the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (*Mouvement de libération du Congo*, or MLC) intervened in 2002 to shore up Patassé's government, Libya's objective was "to maintain a friendly government in CAR to allow Tripoli a rear base of operations against Chad's President [Idriss] Déby and his French supporters."[43] MLC leader Jean-Pierre Bemba was motivated by the need to maintain a friendly regime in Bangui, as CAR was a main line for the cheap supply of commodities, material, and gasoline to his movement in the DRC.[44]

Regional interventions in support of peacekeeping and peacebuilding have not fared much better. Various regional operations meant to stabilize the country have tended to focus exclusively on Bangui and the CAR-Chad border. Most were in large part "creations of interested powers—namely France and Libya—that are able to bring together a number of countries whose interests, often contradictory, converge on a cyclical basis."[45] While they may thus have had a short-term stabilizing impact, these operations were also drawn into political games and used to push forward the interests of certain regional powers. In 2003, for example, Bozizé carried out a coup d'état while President Patassé was away at a summit of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States.[46] Neither the Central African armed forces nor the forces of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States deployed in

Bangui intervened to stop the coup, as they "had received instructions to not oppose Bozizé's supporters' entry into the city."[47]

Thus CAR's neighbors sent the signal "that the international community was not committed to CAR's democratic institutions—a sufficiently credible threat to the regime could win international support, a lesson the Séléka exploited years later."[48] Reviewing the history of regional interventions in peacekeeping and peacemaking, Carayannis and Lombard conclude that this was a "continued reliance on an assortment of conceivably dishonest brokers…who strive to extract diplomatic advantages out of their involvement in CAR, rather than truly assist its leaders in a peacebuilding process."[49] For Ned Olin, this calls into question the credibility of the region "to take the lead on long term efforts in CAR."[50]

UN interventions have equally failed to stabilize CAR. According to Coulon, Larramendy, and Zahar, the failure of peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations in CAR can be explained by three categories of problems: (1) short deployments with limited mandates; (2) capacity problems that affected the mobility and efficiency of contingents; and (3) the absence of real political will to engage in a durable solution.[51] The two peacekeeping operations, the UN Mission in CAR (MINURCA) and the UN Mission in CAR and Chad (MINURCAT), were arguably successful on the security front, though mainly in Bangui.[52] Progress on the security front, however, "was not

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43 Tatiana Carayannis, "CAR's Southern Identity: Congo, CAR, and International Justice," in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, Carayannis and Lombard, eds., p. 258.

44 Christian Dietrich, "Diamonds in the Central African Republic: Trading, Valuing and Laundering," Occasional Paper no. 8, Partnership Africa Canada, January 2003, available at www.ddiglobal.org/login/resources/diamonds-in-central-africa-republic.pdf .

45 Coulon and Larramendy (with Zahar), *Consolidation de la paix et fragilité étatique*, p. 81.

46 After winning contentious elections, Patassé attempted to arrest Bozizé, then chief of staff of the Central African armed forces. While Bozizé fled to Chad, Patassé reached out to neighboring states for military assistance. Burkina Faso, Dijbouti, Libya, and Sudan deployed 300 soldiers to Bangui through the Community of Sahel-Saharan States. These were soon replaced by troops from the Multinational Force in the Central African Republic (FOMUC), which was mandated to ensure the president's safety and to monitor the Chadian border. However, in order "to force Bangui into a national dialogue without preconditions, France and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States weakened the government and encouraged its opponents, including those who had taken up arms." International Crisis Group, "Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State," p. 15.

47 Ibid. The UN Peacebuilding Support Office in CAR (BONUCA) could only condemn the "non-constitutional assumption of power." UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Central African Republic and Activities of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in the Central African Republic* (BONUCA), UN Doc. S/2003/661, June 20, 2003.

48 Nathaniel Olin, "Pathologies of Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in CAR," in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, Carayannis and Lombard, eds., p. 196. Unsurprisingly, Bozizé's fall echoes that of Patassé. The Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States required that Bozizé engage in negotiations but, when the Libreville agreements broke down, it tacitly revoked its support for Bozizé.

49 Carayannis and Lombard, "A Concluding Note on the Failure and Future of Peacebuilding in CAR," p. 335.

50 Olin, "Pathologies of Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in CAR," p. 215.

51 Most operations only counted between 500 and 1,500 military and police to cover a territory as big as France. Coulon and Larramendy (with Zahar), *Consolidation de la paix et fragilité*, pp. 75–80.

52 The UN Mission in CAR and Chad (MINURCAT) was a re-hatting of the EU Force in Chad and CAR operating in Chad and northeastern CAR in coordination with the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA).

matched by political progress, or longer-term [security sector reform]. MINURCA lacked the political clout to pressure the government, while MINURCAT explicitly lacked a political mandate."[53]

Peacebuilding efforts also faced serious limitations.[54] In particular, they often lacked the leverage points necessary to encourage successive governments to commit to reforms or work with opposing groups.[55] They also appear, according to certain analysts, to have pursued quick solutions rather than adjusting their objectives to realities, something that Carayannis and Lombard describe as the failure of imagination of the international community.[56] Ultimately, peacebuilding efforts "came to mirror CAR institutions: existing more in name than in substance."[57] Moreover, "much like the Central African state, these initiatives have been a kind of public theatre that provides rents, yet without ever delving into the kinds of substantive political or institutional reforms that would be necessary to definitively put violent politics in the past."[58]

Most foreign interventions and mediation efforts have thus pursued short-term objectives, mainly focusing on security- and election-focused activities that have not helped CAR resolve its underlying problems. They have also prioritized foreign or organizational interests over CAR's national interests.

LESSONS FROM PAST MEDIATION EFFORTS

The history of past attempts at conflict resolution in CAR is rich in lessons. Most attempts have been designed with short-term objectives foremost in mind. In their effort to bring peace to CAR, the various peace agreements used the same formula: a mix of DDR and limited power sharing. Most were able to achieve short-term security gains, but they were vulnerable to political manipulation and regional developments, and none were able to last. Many of their provisions remained mere ink on paper. For instance, following the 2008 Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the UFDR was awarded positions in government and in the administration, but there was no movement on implementing a development program in the northeast of the country or on holding an inclusive political dialogue on DDR.[59] The agreements also failed to address the general sense of exclusion, creating fertile ground for mobilization of armed groups, particularly in the northeast of the country.

Mediation Initiatives since the Onset of the 2012 Crisis

Since the latest crisis broke out in CAR in 2012, a flurry of (mostly regional) mediation initiatives have been deployed (see Annex for a timeline). Following the emergence of the Séléka rebellion, the ECCAS mediator, President Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of the Congo, summoned the various Central African parties to Libreville. His efforts resulted in the signing, on January 11, 2013, of the short-lived Libreville agreement, a deal between the rebel armed groups and president Bozizé to contain the rebellion and define the modalities for power sharing and a political transition.

A little over two months later, the Séléka had descended on Bangui, deposed Bozizé, and installed Djotodia in his stead. Djotodia, as it turned out, would not last very long in power. His inability to stem the Séléka's aggressions against CAR's (mostly Christian) citizens contributed to the emergence of the anti-Balaka and the bloody

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53 Olin, "Pathologies of Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in CAR," p. 214. MINURCA, created in 1998, was limited in its mandate to maintaining security in the capital and supporting the legislative elections of 1998 and, later, the presidential elections of 1999. Although the mission was able to secure Bangui, it was much less successful in making real progress in the political sphere or in addressing the government's financial problems. When the elections proved contentious, MINURCA was unable to exert real leverage to enforce cooperation and eventually started planning for its withdrawal only fifteen days after the election.

54 These efforts mainly included those of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in CAR (BONUCA), the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in CAR (BINUCA), and the decision to put CAR on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission.

55 One explanation is that they lacked a force component to use as leverage.

56 As argued by Carayannis and Lombard, "This begs for a bespoke peacebuilding approach rather than one size fits all and for solutions that avoid the default setting which is to work to 'restore' the CAR national army, without any accounting for the fact that the army has been a source of predation and insecurity for decades." "A Concluding Note on the Failure and Future of Peacebuilding in CAR," p. 346.

57 Olin, "Pathologies of Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in CAR," p.210.

58 Carayannis and Lombard, "A Concluding Note on the Failure and Future of Peacebuilding in CAR," p. 327.

59 International Crisis Group, "Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition," Africa Report, no. 203, June 11, 2013, available at www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-priorities-transition ; Andreas Mehler, "Reshaping Political Space? The Impact of the Armed Insurgency in the Central African Republic on Political Parties and Representation," German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Working Paper no. 116, December 2009, available at http://repec.giga-hamburg.de/pdf/giga_09_wp116_mehler.pdf .

events of December 2013 that resulted in widespread killings and displacement of CAR's Muslim communities.

On January 10, 2014, a conference in N'Djamena brought about the end of the regime of Djotodia, paving the way for a political transition. A cessation of hostilities agreement, signed on July 23, 2014, in Brazzaville under the auspices of Sassou Nguesso initiated a new political process that included nationwide popular consultations and the Bangui Forum. Parallel mediation initiatives took place. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, under the leadership of Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, was briefly involved in 2015 in mediating a cease-fire agreement with Nourredine Adam's Popular Front for the Renaissance of CAR (*Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique*, or FPRC) at the border with Chad, a deal that Bangui rejected.[60] Sassou Nguesso also organized a conference in Nairobi that led to an agreement between the ex-Séléka and the anti-Balaka, represented respectively by Michel Djotodia and François Bozizé. Signed on January 22, 2015, the deal was rejected by both international partners and the government of transition.[61]

With the end of the transition and, with it, of the ECCAS mediation effort, the lack of progress on the DDR file and the absence of political dialogue between the newly elected Touadéra government and CAR's armed groups prompted a number of regional actors to launch new mediation initiatives.[62] Indeed, a foreign diplomat argued that the latest mediation initiatives were "borne of the government's hesitations to implement the deal reached with the armed groups at the Bangui Forum.[63] The first such effort emanated from the government of Angola on behalf of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. Representatives of the government and armed groups were invited to Luanda for a series of meetings at the end of 2016. The Angolan initiative drew widespread condemnation in Bangui for proposing an amnesty for past wrongs.

In February 2016, the AU appointed Mohamed El Hacen Lebatt as its special representative. Lebatt launched an African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation with the support of Angola, Chad, the DRC, and ECCAS. Initially modelled after the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation efforts of 2015, the initiative met with widespread resistance in Bangui where, in the words of a UN official, proposals related to amnesty and power sharing were perceived as a "threat to the post-election political order."[64] In explaining negative reactions to the first AU attempt, other interviewees highlighted the fact that the initiative would have seen the return of Presidents Bozizé and Djotodia. One interviewee concluded that, in light of the reactions, the AU had to "go back to the drawing board."[65]

While the AU was assessing its options, in March 2017 the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio—which had mediated the Republican Pact between President Djotodia, Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye, and the transitional parliament (Conseil national de la transition, or CNT) in November 2013—launched a new mediation initiative. This resulted in the signing of a political accord for peace in CAR between the government and thirteen politico-military groups on June 20th.[66] The agreement, which included an immediate country-wide cessation of hostilities, was short-lived; the following day, widespread violence and clashes erupted between armed groups in the Bria area.[67]

An overview of mediation efforts since the 2012 crisis can only conclude that these have been rather

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60 The agreement was rejected in part because it was not inclusive and also because it was perceived as "giving the opportunity for armed groups to develop maximalist positions." Interview with UN officers, New York, July 24, 2017. "Le FPRC renonce aux hostilités et à la partition de la Centrafrique suite à la médiation de l'OCI," Pan-African News Agency, December 22, 2015, available at www.panapress.com/Le-FPRC-renonce-aux-hostilites-et-a-la-partition-de-la-Centrafrique-suite-a-la-mediation-de-l-OCi--12-630464041-134-lang4-index.html .

61 The conference was organized without any consultations with key stakeholders. Penelope Chester, "Mediation Fail in the Central African Republic," UN Dispatch, February 24, 2015, available at www.undispatch.com/mediation-fail-central-african-republic/ .

62 It is important to note that the Consultative Follow-up Committee (*Comité consultatif de suivi*) provided a narrower framework for dialogue between the government of CAR and the armed groups. Focused on DDR issues, this committee was the only available forum where all armed groups met with the government. Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 21, 2017.

63 Interview with senior international diplomat, Bangui, September 15, 2017.

64 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

65 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017; interview with international diplomat, Bangui, September 22, 2017.

66 For the full accord in French, see www.santegidio.org/pageID/1165/langID/en/itemID/960/--Entente-de-Sant-Egidio---Political-Agreement-for-Peace-in-the-Central-African-Republic.html .

67 "CAR Violence: Deadly Clashes in Bria despite Ceasefire," BBC, June 21, 2017, available at www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40350057 .

disjointed. The initiatives reflect divergent external agendas, institutional rivalries, and even different cultures of mediation.[68] As highlighted by David Lanz and Rachel Gasser, "As states try to enhance their political influence, wealth and geopolitical position, they compete with other states. Such competition plays out in mediation processes."[69] To bring order to the multitude of parallel, overlapping, and competing initiatives, a June meeting organized in Brussels brought together many of the actors in an unofficial "mediation between mediators."[70]

Shortly thereafter, on July 17, 2017, the AU presented its new "roadmap for peace and reconciliation" in Libreville.[71] The new roadmap, which draws on the various initiatives that preceded it, provides for a disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and reinsertion process and rejects impunity for the most serious crimes. Presented as a consensus document, the Libreville roadmap has obtained the support of many international and national actors, including the UN.[72] Meeting in Bangui on September 11th and 12th, the African Panel of Facilitators entrusted with implementing the initiative facilitated the first meeting to discuss implementation modalities. Panel members include the AU, the Government of CAR, ECCAS, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Angola, Chad, the Republic of Congo, and Gabon, with MINUSCA granted observer status. The roadmap highlights that the UN has pledged to "provide political, technical and logistical support" to this mediation initiative by deploying a senior expert on mediation through the Mediation Support Unit of its Department of Political Affairs.[73] At the meeting, the Panel Coordinator announced that MINUSCA would be a privileged partner in the panel's work which would be led on a day to day basis by a Technical Committee including the AU, ECCAS, the government of CAR and MINUSCA.[74]

In addition, armed group leaders appear to be playing on various sides: they participate in meetings in Bangui and abroad and sign series of agreements mainly to see the benefits of DDR and receive per diems.[75] Often when leaders gain political responsibilities, internal tensions result: their fighters accuse their former leaders of not redistributing the dividends of victory and of "betraying their cause."[76] Poor command and control within groups have exacerbated the impact any national deal can have at the local level. This supports the idea that unrepresentative elites have been negotiating successive conflict-resolution agreements for their own interests rather than those of the country and in complete disconnect from most of the country's population.

In that regard, many practitioners and analysts recognize the need for community-level mediation initiatives and dialogues that feature the voices of civil society actors—including women, traditional leaders, religious figures, and youth—and local armed leaders. These could, in theory, better account for local subtleties and realities and allow for further engagement aiming to improve security and facilitate the return of Muslim populations, which are still largely displaced within or outside of the country. Such initiatives would also imply that political actors and civil society at all levels share the responsibility

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68 Thierry Vircoulon, *À la recherche de la paix en Centrafrique: Médiations communautaires, religieuses et politiques*, Institute français des relations internationales, June 19, 2017, available at
www.ifri.org/fr/publications/notes-de-lifri/recherche-de-paix-centrafrique-mediations-communautaires-religieuses#sthash.nbiRbVJF.dpbs .

69 David Lanz and Rachel Gasser, "A Crowded Field: Competition and Coordination in International Peace Mediation," Center for Mediation in Africa/University of Pretoria, February 2013, available at
www.up.ac.za/media/shared/237/PDFs/International%20conference%202015/2.-lanz-gasser-mediation-crowded-field_pretoria-conference-ju.zp58695.pdf .

70 Interviews with UN officers, New York, July 24, 2017, and with UN official in Bangui, September 14, 2017; phone interview with expert, New York, September 11, 2017.

71 African Union, Feuille de route pour la paix et la réconciliation en République centrafricaine, July 17, 2017, available at
http://rjdh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/FEUILLE-DE-ROUTE-POUR-LA-PAIX-ET-LA-RECONCILIATION-EN-RCA.pdf .

72 UN Secretary-General, "Note to Correspondents: Meeting on the Central African Republic at UN General Assembly," September 19, 2017, available at
www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2017-09-19/note-correspondents-meeting-central-african-republic-un .

73 "Les Nations Unies ont déclaré leur ferme soutien politique, technique et logistique à l'Initiative." African Union, *Feuille de route pour la paix et la réconciliation en République centrafricaine*, para. 1.8.

74 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 15, 2015.

75 Interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 21, 2017, and UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017; phone interview with expert, New York, September 11, 2017.

76 During the ministerial reshuffle of September 2017, several ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka leaders were appointed to ministerial posts. The ex-Séléka did not get the position of prime minister that their leader Noureddine Adam hoped they would get; however, Gontran Djono Ahaba (former minister of mines during the transition and nephew of Djotodia), Ahamed Senoussi, and Lambert Mokove Lissane, an FPRC leader close to Adam, were integrated into the new government and appointed to strategic portfolios such as waters and forests. Anti-Balaka leaders Jean-Alexandre Dedet and Jacob Mokpem Bionli also joined the government.

for reconciliation. Many local mediation efforts and conflict-resolution mechanisms are already ongoing throughout CAR to address issues relating to security and reconciliation.

Local Mediation Efforts: Doing Things Differently?

If there is one gap that emerges from past conflict-resolution efforts in CAR, it is the absence of the population as both an actor in and a beneficiary of these initiatives. Only two consultation processes have been held in CAR since independence. President Bozizé's 2008 national dialogue on peace and security was limited to the political and armed opposition. Organized by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, it overlapped with a separate national forum on security organized by international donors. As a result, many national dialogue participants were not included in discussions on reforming the army, which diminished both processes.[77]

Although more inclusive and regarded as "the illustration that things could get better and especially [differently] in the CAR."[78] the 2015 Bangui Forum was held hurriedly, which did not allow participants time to address issues at length.[79] Pre-forum consultations in CAR's regions "were rushed in the interest of pushing the process forward as quickly as possible," and "while a report was drafted, a framework for grassroots participation was not included."[80] Crucially, implementation of the forum's resolutions has lagged behind,[81] which has led some analysts to argue that it "failed to adequately address the much-needed national reconciliation process."[82]

The legislative and presidential elections called for by the forum and held, respectively, at the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016 generated strong enthusiasm among Central Africans and raised many expectations. However, deteriorating security and lack of progress in the redeployment of the administration have diminished the government's credibility to deliver on its promises, as well as the president's political capital.[83]

This is the context in which two types of mediation—local or community-based and national—are increasingly being deployed to address intercommunity dynamics and the religious dimensions of the conflict at the local level.[84] Though less visible and therefore less discussed, local initiatives aim to bring about tangible immediate change, for example in security dynamics and in the daily lives of citizens, as well as longer-term shifts in issues such as social cohesion and reconciliation. This section attempts to paint a picture of the spectrum of local initiatives by focusing on the types of actors involved, the diverse purposes of local deals, and the wide range of third-party actors supporting these efforts.[85]

A MULTIPLICITY OF ACTORS AND OBJECTIVES

Any overview of the multiplicity of local mediation initiatives must begin by acknowledging their diversity. From local nonaggression pacts between armed groups to deals regarding access to specific areas to community violence-reduction agreements, these reflect the particularities of the

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77 Olin, "Pathologies of Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in CAR," p. 208.

78 Roland Marchal, "Brève histoire d'une transition singulière: La République centrafricaine de janvier 2014 à mars 2016," Réseau des organisations de la société civile de Centrafrique pour la gouvernance et le développement, September 2016, available at https://ccfd-terresolidaire.org/IMG/pdf/breve_histoire_de_la_transition_en_rca.pdf .

79 The preparatory committee started its work in January, and the forum, originally planned for December 2014, was not held until May 2015. However, with more than 700 delegates, the three-day event was deemed too short to address issues at length.

80 The local consultations were completed over a six-week period despite initial pressure from the international community to complete them in two weeks. Tatiana Carayannis and Mignonne Fowlis, "Lessons from African Union–United Nations Cooperation in Peace Operations in the Central African Republic," *African Security Review* 26, no. 2 (2017), p. 227.

81 According to one interviewee, several factors accounted for the failure in implementation, including the inertia of the government of transition as elections approached, poor leadership of the follow-up committee, and lack of ownership by the new government, many of whose members did not participate in the forum. Interview with UN official, Bangui, 13 September 2017.

82 Ibid.; interviews with UN officers, New York, July 24 and August 3, 2017, and UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

83 Interviews with UN officers, New York, July 24, 2017, and Bangui, September 13 and 19, 2017. See also International Crisis Group, "Avoiding the Worst in Central African Republic," Africa Report no 253, September 28, 2017, available at www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/253-avoiding-worst-central-african-republic .

84 Vircoulon, *À la recherche de la paix en Centrafrique*, p. 8.

85 It is particularly challenging to reconstruct in detail the chain of events that has led to specific local deals. The information is often fragmentary, and access to the parties is limited. Some of our interviewees had personally participated in mediation initiatives; others only relayed second-hand information. And while the resulting deals may be quite significant for the localities in which they are signed, their importance remains relatively limited at the national level, and media coverage could therefore not fill in the gaps.

Table 2: List of all armed groups active in CAR (August 2012–2017)

Acronym	Full name	Date established	Main leader (previous affiliation)
RPRC	Rally for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic *Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique*	November 2014	Zakaria Damane (ex-Séléka)
FPRC	Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic *Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique*	July/August 2014[86]	Nourredine Adam (ex-Séléka)
MPC	Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic *Mouvement patriotique centrafricain*	July 2015	Mahamat al-Khatim (ex-Séléka)
MPC-Siriri	Central African Patriotic Movement *Mouvement patriotique centrafricain*	June 2017	Mahamat Abdel Karim (ex-Séléka)
MLCJ	Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice *Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice*	2008	Toumou Deya Gilbert (ex-Séléka)
	Renovated Séléka *Séléka rénovée*	August/September 2014	Mohamed Moussa Dhaffan (ex-Séléka)
	Muslim self-defense groups in Bangui	December 2013	Multiple Leaders
UPC	Union for Peace for the Central African Republic *Union pour la paix en Centrafrique*	September/October 2014	Ali Darassa (ex-Séléka)
FDPC	Democratic Front of the Central African People *Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain*	2003/2004[87]	Martin Koumtamadji (aka Abdoulaye Miskine) (ex-Séléka, briefly)
MRDP	Resistance Movement for the Defense of the Fatherland *Mouvement de résistance pour la défense de la patrie*	August 2016	Séraphin Komeya (anti-Balaka)
	Local anti-Balaka groups	1980–1990	Multiple leaders (anti-Balaka)
Anti-Balaka Ngaïssona	National Coordination of ex-anti-Balaka	2014	Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona

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86   These dates are generally based on Dukhan in "Splintered Warfare" and reports of the UN secretary-general. This date differs depending on the source: August 2014 in Dukhan, "Splintered Warfare," but July 2014 in Dukhan, "The Central African Republic Crisis," and International Crisis Group, "Central African Republic: The Roots of Violence," Africa Report no. 230, September 21, 2015, available at www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-roots-violence .

87   Dukhan states 2004 in "The Central African Republic Crisis" but 2003 in "Splintered Warfare."

Acronym	Full name	Date established	Main leader (previous affiliation)
	Coordination nationale des ex-anti-Balaka		
Anti-Balaka Mokom	Anti-Balaka/Mokom wing	2015	Maxime Mokom
RJ	Revolution and Justice *Révolution et justice*	Late 2013	Armel Ningatoloum Sayo
RJ splintered	Revolution and Justice–Belanga (splinter group) *Belanga révolution et justice*	2016	Raymond Belanga
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army *Armée de résistance du Seigneur*	1987 (in CAR since 2008/2009)[88]	Joseph Kony
3R	Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation *Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation*	Late 2015	Sidiki Abass
FCCPD	Congolese People's Front for Change and Democracy–John Tshibangu *Front du peuple congolais pour le changement et la démocratie John Tshibangu*	In CAR since 2013	John Tshibangu

situation in many locales across the country.

Local nonaggression pacts or agreements have been signed across the country, including in Batangafo and Kouki (Ouham), Kaga-Bandoro (Nana-Grebizi), Bambari (Ouaka), Bria (Haute-Kotto), and, most recently, Ippy (Ouaka) (see Box 1 on the pact in Bambari). Negotiated and signed between armed groups (see Table 2 and Figure 2), these pacts have a direct impact on the daily lives of local populations. For instance, according to the UN field office in Bossangoa, the local deal hammered out in Kouki resulted in a "clear improvement in the movement of people and goods from Kouki to the Nana Bakassa market."[89] Although the exact language and scope of the commitments vary from one place to another, armed groups have committed, inter alia, to cessations of hostilities, weapon-free zones, free movement of persons and goods, noninterference in the activities of public services including schools and health facilities, and protection of private property. Some have even put

mechanisms in place for the peaceful settlement of disagreements, such as resorting to local authorities or local peace committees.

The mediation initiative in Kouki illustrates the manner in which local mediation initiatives unfold. This effort began following an incident in February 2016 during which an alleged group of ex-Séléka fighters attacked the village of Kaboro, burning approximately 300 houses. In response, a local strongman nicknamed "Omega" organized an anti-Balaka counterattack. This chain of events triggered concerns that the ex-Séléka might move into Nana-Bakassa. At this juncture, a local anti-Balaka leader, Charlin-Chabardo Momokam (also known as "Charly") expressed an interest in calming things down; his local counterpart from the Patriotic Movement for CAR (Mouvement patriotique centrafricain, or MPC) expressed a similar interest, saying he was "sick of fighting" and wanted to access the local market in Nana Bakassa.[90] Local state officials engaged in shuttle

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88 2008 in Dukhan, "Splintered Warfare," and 2009 in International Crisis Group, "The Roots of Violence."
89 Interview with UN field office staff, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017.
90 Interview with military analyst, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

diplomacy between the two leaders with the support of MINUSCA. After a few rounds of meetings, they agreed to meet face-to-face in Kouki. The delegations consisted of five persons on each side and included senior local leaders from the groups. Chaired by the head of MINUSCA's Bossangoa office and by the prefect, the meetings alternated between Kouki and Nana-Bakassa. Although they could not resolve all issues (including, notably, checkpoints and taxation), the two parties signed an Act of Commitment to Nonviolence and Peace (Acte d'engagement de non-violence et de paix) on June 15, 2017.[91]

Two weeks after the signature of the pact, local authorities and MINUSCA's field office in Bossangoa organized two days of sensitization and public information in the two localities. A joint local mediation committee of notables from Kouki, Nana Bakassa, and Bossangoa was established to follow up on and monitor implementation of the pact with the support of local authorities and MINUSCA. The World Bank also started a cash-for-work program in Kouki to address the lack of alternative livelihoods for ex-Séléka fighters. According to MINUSCA, the pact resulted in a clear improvement in the movement of goods and persons from Kouki to the Nana Bakassa market.[92]

Not all mediation initiatives have focused on

Figure 2. Current armed factions and politico-military groups in the Central African
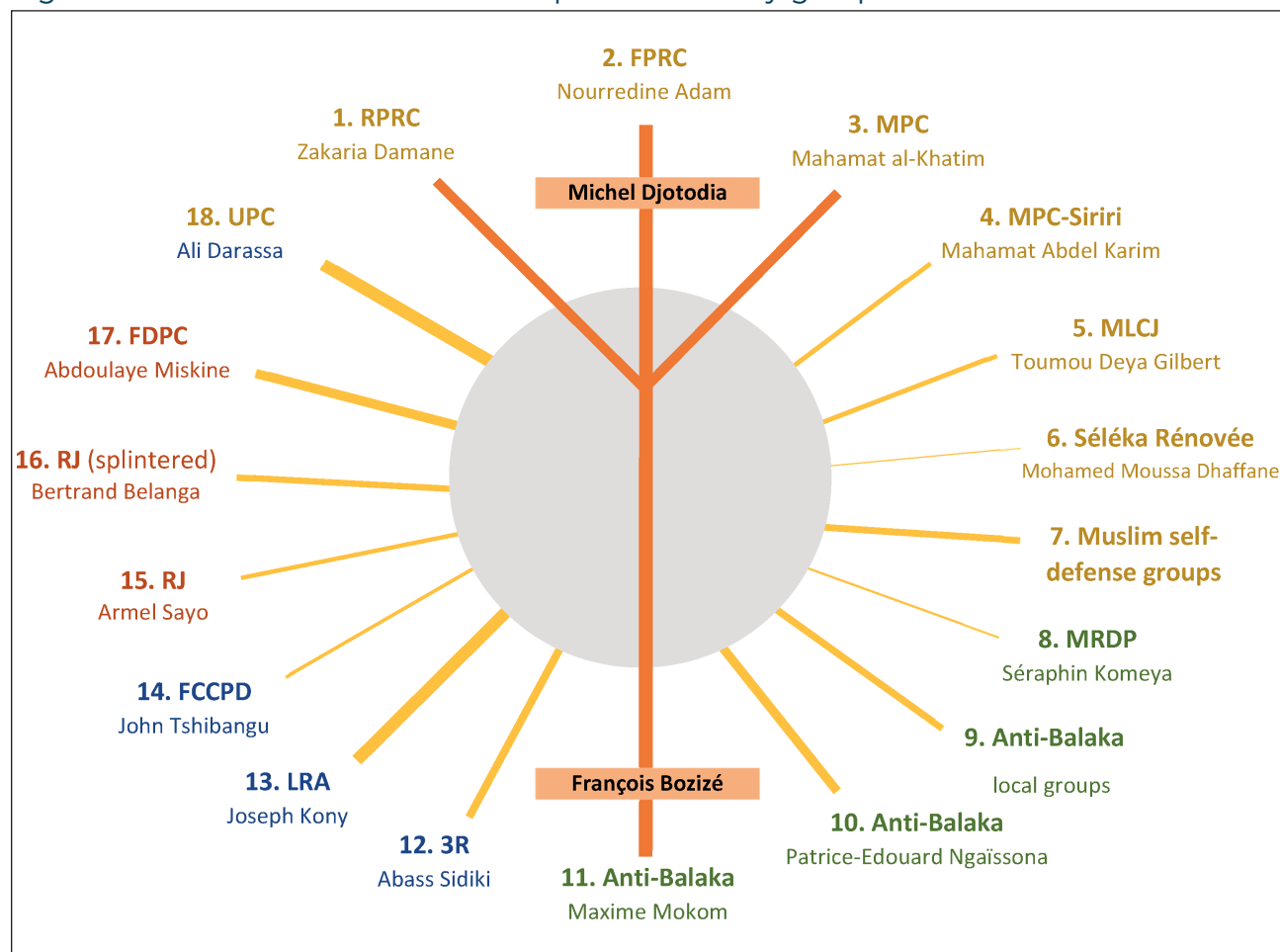
Source: Nathalia Dukhan, "Splintered Warfare: Alliances, Affiliations, and Agendas of Armed Factions and Politico-Military Groups in the Central African Republic," Enough Project, August 2017, available at https://enoughproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SplinteredWarfare_August2017_Enough_final.pdf

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91 For more detail, see MINUSCA, "Les ex-Séléka de Kouki et les ex-anti-Balaka de Nana-Bakassa signent un acte d'engagement de non-violence et de paix," June 16, 2017, available at
     https://minusca.unmissions.org/les-ex-Séléka-de-kouki-et-les-ex-anti-bakala-de-nana-bakassa-signent-un-acte-d%E2%80%99engagement-de-non .

92 Interview with UN field office staff, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017.

Box 1. The nonaggression pact in Bambari

In Bambari, the capital of Ouaka prefecture, the ex-Séléka and various anti-Balaka groups operated in close proximity to one another. Most of the ex-Séléka belonged to the Union for Peace for CAR (*Union pour la paix en Centrafrique*, or UPC) led by Ali Darassa, while the anti-Balaka were either aligned with Edouard Ngaïssona or Maxime Mokom, and some operated independently under the command of a local strongman, "Fally."[93] Regular outbursts of armed violence in late 2015 resulted as much from tensions among anti-Balaka forces as from confrontations between the UPC and the anti-Balaka. This violence threatened to disrupt the planned electoral process. Efforts to quell the violence resulted in a nonaggression pact, signed on January 27, 2016, between Ali Darassa from the UPC and Edouard Ngaïssona from the anti-Balaka.

Entitled the Memorandum of Understanding on Nonaggression and Coexistence (*Protocole d'accord de non-agression et de bonne cohabitation*), the pact was initially intended as an agreement to calm the situation during the electoral period. However, the document indicated that commitments could extend beyond the initial time period. Darassa and Ngaïssona committed to suspend violent actions, including against the population and the international forces deployed in Bambari, to allow for the free movement of persons and goods, and to mutually respect the cultural, religious, and ethnic specificities of each community. They also agreed to favor, encourage, and promote initiatives intended to establish lasting peace and development. Lastly, they pledged not to resort to using weapons except in cases of force majeure and legitimate self-defense.[94] The two leaders pledged to educate their men in order to stop the abuses, and the parties committed to putting in place a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of their differences.

While the pact initially restored stability to Bambari, the situation deteriorated over the course of 2016 and 2017. This time, the fighting pitted the UPC against another ex-Séléka group, the FPRC. The rift between both groups dated back to 2014 when the FPRC called for the establishment of an independent state in northern CAR, something the UPC rejected. Darassa's steadfast refusal to reunite the ex-Séléka has threatened the FPRC's hegemony over the movement and its control of resource-rich territories. The first armed clashes between the UPC and the FPRC erupted around a gold mine in Ndassima in late 2016 before morphing into a full-blown war.[95] This situation prompted MINUSCA to intervene to restore stability in Bambari.

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bringing armed groups together. There have also been efforts to rebuild ties between communities. While many of these efforts incentivize communities by dangling the carrot of access to markets, places of worship, or other locales, the longer-term objective remains to foster coexistence. The most vivid illustration of such efforts is the initiative that led to the reopening of the Boeing cemetery in Bangui (see Box 2). Other such efforts have included the work of the Catholic Church in the town of Markounda on the border with Chad, which has seen the return of many Muslim families that had left the country to Chad in 2013 and 2014.

There, the local abbot has mobilized local scouts and legionary brotherhoods and established a social cohesion committee.[96]

Mediation initiatives have also extended to the resolution of traditional conflicts, particularly tensions around transhumance (the seasonal movement of livestock), one of the drivers fueling agro-pastoral conflicts in CAR. As noted by the International Crisis Group, these rivalries have been exacerbated by the current conflict: pastoralists are often associated with the ex-Séléka, while both ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka have been involved in cattle theft.[97] For instance, in June 2016 agro-

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93 UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 9 August 2016 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2262 (2016) Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S2016/694, August 11, 2016.

94 Part of the pact is publicly available in French at https://afriquenewsinfo.wordpress.com/2016/01/28/centrafrique-un-pacte-de-non-agression-anti-Balakaupc/ .

95 See Philip Kleinfeld, "Central African Republic Rebels Turn on Each Other as Violence Flares," IRIN News, May 18, 2017, available at www.irinnews.org/feature/2017/05/18/central-african-republic-rebels-turn-each-other-violence-flares .

96 Interview with Central African politician, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

97 International Crisis Group, "The Central African Republic's Hidden Conflict," Africa Briefing no. 105, December 12, 2014, available at www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-s-hidden-conflict?utm_source=central-african-republic-

Box 2. Reopening of the Boeing cemetery: A step toward coexistence

In December 2013, the Boeing cemetery—the largest Muslim cemetery in CAR located 25 kilometers outside of Bangui in the Christian commune of Bimbo 3, at the time an anti-Balaka stronghold—was closed. This followed a series of violent clashes between Muslim inhabitants of PK 5—a mainly Muslim borough of Bangui and the epicenter of violence in the capital in 2013 and 2014—and Christian inhabitants of Bimbo 3, through which Muslims transited to get to the cemetery. Following the closure, tensions between the two communities subsided, as Muslims were forced to bury their dead in PK 5 (inside concessions, on vacant lots, or on state-owned or private land), while many residents of Bimbo 3 fled the violence to take refuge in internally displaced person (IDP) camps in Bangui.

Following a months-long effort led by the government of CAR and supported by various partners working in the realm of social cohesion and development, both communities eventually agreed to participate in a labor-intensive project (*travail à haute intensité de main d'œuvre*) to help reopen the cemetery. In August 2015, 200 youth (100 Christians and 100 Muslims) were mobilized and started working together to weed the grounds of the cemetery, an estimated 70,000 square meters. These efforts were short-lived; violence resumed in September 2015, and Muslims were once again prevented from accessing the cemetery.[98]

On February 11, 2016, following a series of dialogue sessions, a pact of "nonaggression and community reconciliation" was signed by the two communities.[99] Signatories included anti-Balaka forces, religious leaders, women, youth, and civil society representatives, alongside the mayors of the two localities. The pact guaranteed the Muslims free access to their burial grounds. The two communities also prohibited behaviors likely to ignite intercommunity tensions. In addition, the PK 5 community committed to not carrying weapons when accompanying funeral processions, while the community of Boeing committed to guarantee the security of the processions.[100] Local organizations organized further activities to build social cohesion such as dances and comedy sketches to accompany the signing ceremony.[101]

As part of its work on peace initiatives, the United Nations supported the initiative by launching three quick-impact projects (QIPs) in Boeing: the construction of the market and of the police station and the rehabilitation of the municipality.[102] The pact's signing sent a strong signal to Bangui's citizens, serving as "a pivotal tool which worked to appease tensions during the troubled year of 2016 in Bangui."[103]

pastoral conflicts resulted in a severe deterioration of the situation in Ngaoundaye (Ouham-Pende). The fighting caused significant displacement of civilians, with some crossing the border into Cameroon. Houses were burned and looted, and MINUSCA interposed itself between the belligerents in an attempt to calm the situation.[104]

Starting in early 2016, MINUSCA's civil affairs division conducted several conflict-resolution trainings for agro-pastoral communities in conjunction with the government of CAR. In April 2017 in Bria "civil affairs organized a workshop which sought to define strategies for respecting transhumance corridors as well and draft a concrete proposal for the establishment of a waiting area for transiting cattle destined to the market."[105] Several transhumance mediation committees were established throughout the country. According to MINUSCA's civil affairs division, "These committees have been pivotal in

98   MINUSCA, "Le Pacte de non-agression, le fruit d'un engagement communautaire," February 13, 2017, available at
     https://minusca.unmissions.org/le-pacte-de-non-agression-le-fruit-d%E2%80%99un-engagement-communautaire ; interview with UN officers, Bangui,
     September 19, 2017.

99   For the full pact in French, see
     https://minusca.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/160211-copie_signee_du_pacte_de_non_agression_et_de_reconciliation_communautairepdf_0.pdf .

100 Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

101 Judicael Yongo, "La COMUC annonce la réouverture prochaine du cimetière de Boeing," Réseau des journalistes pour les droits de l'homme, February 10, 2016,
     available at http://rjdh.org/la-comuc-annonce-la-reouverture-prochaine-du-cimetiere-de-boeing/ .

102 MINUSCA, *Civil Affairs Activity Report*, September 2014–May 2017, May 2017, p. 36.

103 Ibid., p. 32; interviews with UN humanitarian officer, Bangui, September 21, 2017, and UN official, Bangui, September 13, 2017.

104 MINUSCA, "MINUSCA Condemns the Escalation of Violence in Ngaoundaye," press communiqué, June 17, 2016, available at
     https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/minusca-condemns-escalation-violence-ngaoundaye .

105 MINUSCA, *Civil Affairs Activity Report*, p. 35.

ensuring the peaceful resolution of conflicts."[106]

Not all initiatives have led to the signing of a formal pact. In parallel to the mediation initiatives described above, a multiplicity of "softer" confidence-building activities have sought to lay the ground for reconciliation between communities or between communities and armed groups. This is the case with efforts to reopen Bambari's central market, which closed with the arrival of the Séléka in 2014. From December 2016 to May 2017, a multiplicity of efforts was conducted at the initiative of the market's management committee, the local peace committee, the municipality, and MINUSCA. These focused on increasing the community's confidence to access the market. As the issue of unexploded devices was a paramount concern of market-goers, the civil affairs division "worked with UNMAS [the UN Mine Action Service] to ensure the locality would be mine-free."[107] Additional efforts sought to implement a fair and transparent process for allocating space to petty traders. Following these multiple interventions, the market was finally reopened on May 25, 2017.[108]

Other initiatives worth nothing have been undertaken in Berberati, Carnot, and Yaloke.[109] In Berberati, this was led by the local community and the Catholic Church, supported by the MINUSCA field office. The Muslim quarter had been deserted, but gradually Muslims were able to return. Work there ensured that the region was certified by the Kimberley Process as a green zone for diamond production and export. In Carnot, the last Muslim enclave in CAR was able to return to normal life following church and community-led initiatives supported by the Berberati field office. In Yaloke, the efforts of MINUSCA and the UN country team paid off after the Bangui Forum when the prime minister visited and announced that all of the Fulani who had been held there against their will could leave freely.

While the discussion above is by no means comprehensive, the majority of mediation initiatives surveyed have had extremely local impulses. With the exception of initiatives in Bangui and Bambari, a town that both the government of CAR and the United Nations have sought to transform into an exemplar, these efforts to resolve conflicts have been driven by local considerations and local needs. They endeavor to resolve concrete issues such as access, security, and freedom of movement. Before assessing the impact of these mediation initiatives, it is important to look at which actors were involved and why they decided to engage in or support local mediation initiatives.

WHO'S WHO IN LOCAL MEDIATION INITIATIVES?

Although local in their geographic scope, most of the mediation initiatives discussed in the preceding section involve a cast of supporting actors, governmental and nongovernmental, and national and international. This section presents an overview of the main actors involved in local mediation initiatives with a view to understanding their roles, motivations, strengths, and weaknesses.[110]

Local Mediation Committees

Since the beginning of the latest crisis, and unlike previous conflicts in the country, CAR has seen an explosion of community mediation efforts.[111] Responding to a perceived immediate need, these efforts, which started at the height of intercommunal violence in December 2013 and January 2014, were often initiated by local notables including state officials (neighborhood leaders, or chefs de quartiers, municipal employees, gendarmes, prefects), religious authorities, traditional authorities (particularly sultans), respected elders, traders, school headmasters, youth and women leaders, and the like.

The mediation committees, variously referred to as local peace committees or social cohesion committees (comités de cohésion sociale), performed several functions such as serving as go-betweens in interactions between armed groups and communities, negotiating community violence-reduction deals, and performing early-warning functions. Not all committees fared equally, but some, such as the local mediation

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106 Ibid., p. 10.

107 Ibid., p. 35.

108 Ibid.

109 Skype interview with UN official, New York, August 22, 2017.

110 Left out of this account are traditional leaders (particularly sultans) and state officials (mayors, prefects, deputy prefects, and parliamentarians). These actors have until now been involved in a personal capacity rather than as organized groups.

111 Vircoulon, À la recherche de la paix en Centrafrique, pp. 6–9.

committee of Bangassou, were credited with sparing their communities the worst of the violence.[112] With the beginning of the transition, international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) identified these local mediation committees as suitable partners, and several supported existing and helped establish new committees.

Today, local mediation committees are present in all the neighborhoods of Bangui and in many towns in the prefectures.[113] They are involved in facilitating intercommunal dialogue or dialogues with armed groups; promoting reconstruction and reconciliation initiatives; monitoring security and crime in neighborhoods or villages; and working as an early-warning system and alerting the various bodies responsible for security about imminent risks. In Kouki and Nana-Bakassa, for example, the local peace committee participated in the mediation initiative alongside the UN and the bishop of Bossangoa. The efforts and pressure exerted by local representatives were instrumental in the signing of the Act of Commitment to Nonviolence and Peace (Acte d'engagement de non-violence et de paix) on June 15, 2017.[114]

The local peace committees are a key link in the early-warning chain. Because they are composed of persons with an intimate knowledge of the localities in which they are set up, they—more than any other actor—can spot events on the ground, identify strangers in the midst of the community, and monitor changes before these get on the radar of international actors such as MINUSCA. Our interviews confirmed that the committees are playing this role. For instance, working with religious leaders, members of the local peace

committee of Bangassou claimed to have provided information in "real time" both to MINUSCA and to the Central African authorities in Bangui. In spite of weekly security meetings between the UN mission, the prefect, and his deputy, they claimed that nothing was done to prepare for the escalation of the security situation in the city and its surroundings. However, they contend that their efforts to convince local armed groups not to use violence contributed to delaying the "invasion" of the city by the FPRC.[115] In May 2017 anti-Balaka youths attacked the Muslim district of Tokoyo in the city of Bangassou upon hearing that the FPRC was moving toward the city and had taken hold of the nearby town of Bakouma.[116]

Local Peace and Reconciliation Committees

Not to be confused with local mediation or social cohesion committees, the local peace and reconciliation committees are an official structure established by the government of CAR as part of its strategy of national reconciliation. On December 21, 2016, after many delays, President Touadéra officially launched the national program for the establishment of a network of local peace and reconciliation committees.[117] Under the leadership of the Ministry of National Reconciliation, these committees are expected to play a crucial role in the peace infrastructure envisioned by the National Reconciliation Strategy and National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan (*Plan national de relèvement et de consolidation de la paix*).[118] Elected by local communities, the seven-member committees are expected to solve local conflicts and promote peace through mediation and dialogue.[119] Thus far, the

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112 Established by the local abbot, Father Alain-Blaise Bissialo, the committee, which included Christian and Muslim notables, defused a number of incidents in the town of Bangassou and protected it from some of the worst violence. The abbot, who happened to have been trained on mediation during his studies in France, also established a network of local mediators who traveled to other parts of Mbomou prefecture on motorbikes to provide mediation services. Interview with Bangassou notables, Bangassou, March 2014.

113 Conciliation Resources, "Analysis of Conflict and Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic," November 2015, p. 23.

114 Interviews with UN field office staff, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017; interview with Central African politician, Bangui, September 19, 2017; interview with NGO representatives, Bangui, September 20, 2017.

115 Interview with Bangassou notables, Bangui, September 16, 2017.

116 A UN official suggested that there was no proof that the FPRC had ever gone south of Bakouma. This person contended that this may have been a rumor intended to encourage the local anti-Balaka to attack the Muslim population. Skype interview with UN official, New York, August 22, 2017. For further details on the situation in Bangassou, see Azad Essa and Sorin Furcoi, "CAR: Church Shelters Muslims Fleeing Anti-Balaka," Al Jazeera, June 17, 2017, available at www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/car-church-shelters-muslims-fleeing-anti-Balaka-rebels-170616203130769.html .

117 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic*, UN Doc. S/2017/94, February 1, 2017.

118 See Pillar 1 of the Plan national de relèvement et de consolidation de la paix 2017–2021: "Un réseau de comités locaux pour la paix et la réconciliation sera créé aux échelons local, régional et national," available at https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/car_main_report-a4-french-web.pdf .

119 These include a general coordinator, a secretary, a finance and logistics officer, a communication and mobilization officer, a women's representative, a youth representative, and a notable or representative of traditional or customary authorities. The elected members must fulfill a number of criteria: they must live in the community, belong to a civil society organization, demonstrate moral probity, display availability and be willing to volunteer, and must exclude any ethnic, regional, confessional, or gender-related consideration from their practice. Committee members serve two-year mandates. See, "Centrafrique: Prélude à la mise

government has established local peace and reconciliation committees in all the boroughs of Bangui;[120] it plans to complete establishing the remaining provincial committees by the end of 2017. According to MINUSCA's Bangui field office, the local peace and reconciliation committees are collaborating with the mission in the framework of awareness campaigns intended to pave the way for the return of Bangui's displaced Muslim communities.[121]

Religious Actors

Religion is not the cause of the conflict in CAR, but the violence unleashed since 2012 has taken on religious dimensions. While some religious leaders have been accused of fanning the flames of conflict, others have been central to mediation and conflict-resolution efforts. In December 2013, when anti-Balaka groups began targeting Muslim communities across the country, churches opened their doors, providing asylum to terrified Muslim civilians, something they continue to do, as recently illustrated during the May 2017 violence in Bangassou. The Central African Religious Platform (*Plateforme des confessions religieuses de Centrafrique*), established in 2012 by the leaders of the three main religious communities, has now been replicated in twelve of the sixteen provincial capitals.[122]

These provincial platforms, and local Christian and Muslim religious leaders, often participate in mediation initiatives, as already illustrated by the involvement of the bishop of Bossangoa in the efforts that led to the pact in Nana-Bakassa and Kouki or the involvement of religious figures in Bangassou in recent efforts to reduce violence in the town. Religious actors are supported in their efforts by a number of NGOs, particularly Catholic Relief Services, which recently launched the CAR Interfaith Peacebuilding Partnership project funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The project—a partnership between Catholic Relief Services, the Central African Religious Platform, Islamic Relief Worldwide, World Vision, and Aegis Trust—seeks to "lay a foundation for social cohesion and peacebuilding." It does this by promoting livelihood security as a foundation for peace, providing trauma healing and peace education training as vectors of social cohesion, and fully integrating Central African civil society, particularly youth and women, into program activities.[123]

Nongovernmental Organizations

As already discussed, a number of international and national NGOs operate in CAR. The main international NGOs include Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Conciliation Resources, Cordaid, the Danish Refugee Council, Finn Church Aid, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Mercy Corps, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Norwegian Refugee Council, Search for Common Ground, and World Vision.

Most of these NGOs have been involved in the development and implementation of social-cohesion programs based on the principle of building trust between communities by bringing them together in joint activities of common interest. These often include the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure in a community, the building or rebuilding of youth centers, municipalities, or police offices, and sporting, musical, and cultural events. According to Conciliation Resources, "These social cohesion initiatives can serve as important confidence-building opportunities for communities."[124] Several NGOs have also developed capacity-building and vocational-training programs for youth (considered primary perpetrators of violence) to incentivize them to move away from violence and to distance themselves from

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en place des comités locaux de paix et de réconciliation nationale dans la zone minière conforme de Berbérati," *Afrique News Info*, July 26, 2016, available at https://afriquenewsinfo.wordpress.com/2017/07/26/centrafriqueprelude-a-la-mise-en-place-des-comites-locaux-de-paix-et-de-reconciliation-nationale-dans-la-zone-miniere-conforme-de-berberati/ ; Conciliation Resources, "Analysis of Conflict and Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic."

120 Lingyun Xu Wan, "Centrafrique : Démarrage des comités locaux de paix et réconciliation, cas du 7ème à Bangui," *La Nouvelle Centrafrique*, December 2016, available at www.lanouvellecentrafrique.info/2016/12/29/centrafrique-demarrage-des-comites-locaux-de-paix-et-reconciliation-cas-du-7eme-a-bangui/ .

121 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 21, 2017.

122 These three leaders were the Catholic archbishop (now cardinal) of Bangui, Mgr. Dieudonné Nzapalainga; the president of the Islamic Community in CAR, Imam Oumar Kobine Layama; and the president of the Evangelical Alliance of CAR, Pastor Nicolas Guerekoyame-Gbangou. Marc Morrison, *Central African Republic, Governance and Political Conflict: Political Instability and Crises* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017).

123 Catholic Relief Services, "Emergency & Humanitarian Response: Central African Republic," available at https://www.crs.org/get-involved/advocate/public-policy/emergency-humanitarian-response-central-african-republic .

124 Conciliation Resources, "Analysis of Conflict and Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic," p. 23.

armed groups. The vocational-training programs aim to provide basic skills and equipment to teach youth a trade, while the capacity-building programs focus on nonviolent conflict-management skills.

United Nations

MINUSCA and UN agencies are the actors with the most reach in CAR.[125] MINUSCA, whose current mandate identifies support for the reconciliation and stabilization processes as the first core priority task, has established field offices in all provincial capitals.[126] Although different parts of the mission are involved in mediation efforts at the national level (deputy special representatives of the secretary-general, the DDR, protection of civilians, and gender units, etc.), local mediation is primarily the domain of field offices. The civil affairs division, in particular, has the primary responsibility for conducting local peacebuilding interventions and social-cohesion activities.[127]

As was the case in Kouki and Nana-Bakassa, MINUSCA's heads of offices and their staff are sometimes directly involved as mediators or in support of local mediation initiatives conducted by peace committees or religious leaders. The civil affairs division also conducts trainings, workshops, and sensitization activities "aimed at strengthening the capacity of local leaders in becoming promotors of peace and social cohesion."[128] For example, in Kaga Bandoro, "civil affairs worked closely with the religious platform to improve the skills in conflict analysis and resolution of religious leaders of every faith."[129] In Bambari in late 2016 "a joint initiative with the local peace committee trained 65 women leaders on the importance of women in the resolution of local conflicts and in peacebuilding. The same women who were trained,

were subsequently involved in the preparation of the reopening of Bambari's central market."[130] The appointment of community liaison assistants, national staff tasked with identifying reconciliation initiatives that the UN could support, has furthered the link between the mission and communities and enabled the latter to have direct access to and a presence in an increasing number of remote communities.

UNDP, alongside MINUSCA, is involved in implementing quick-impact projects (small-scale, low-cost projects that are planned and carried out within a short timeframe) and cash-for-work programs to promote joint activities and help reestablish trust between communities.[131] UNDP also developed a number of income-generating activities and social-cohesion projects to help sustain the Boeing cemetery agreement and strengthen the relationship between the communities of PK 5 and Bimbo 3 in Bangui (see Box 2).

LOCAL MEDIATION AND THE PROSPECT OF SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN CAR

Are bottom-up mediation efforts likely to contribute to sustainable peace in CAR? In attempting to assess the impact of such local initiatives, we first assess their ability to reduce community violence, provide alternatives for youth, steer them away from armed groups, and contribute to coexistence between communities. We then discuss some of the risks associated with bottom-up mediation efforts. Finally, we ask whether these initiatives last and whether they amount to more than the sum of their parts, and we probe their linkages with national, regional, and international top-down mediation efforts.

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125 Nevertheless, MINUSCA has little presence in remote areas beyond provincial capitals.

126 As part of its current mandate, and as stated in Resolution 2301 (2016), MINUSCA's first core priority task is to provide "support for the reconciliation and stabilization political processes, the extension of State authority and the preservation of territorial integrity." It is mandated in particular (1) "to provide good offices and technical expertise in support of efforts to address the root causes of conflict, in particular in mediation and reconciliation processes, inclusive national dialogue, transitional justice and conflict resolution mechanisms" and (2) "to support efforts of the CAR authorities to address marginalization and local grievances, including through dialogue with the armed groups, civil society leaders including women and youth representatives, and by assisting national, prefectural and local authorities to foster confidence among communities." UN Security Council Resolution 2301 (July 26, 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2301.

127 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

128 MINUSCA, *Civil Affairs Activity Report*, p. 30.

129 Ibid., p. 28.

130 Ibid., p. 30.

131 These projects are short-term, and the UN "counts on others to pass the baton to them in the longer term." This has proved difficult due to budget cycles, among other issues. There have been some successes, as in Kaga Bandoro or Bouar. Interviews with UNDP official, Bangui, September 13, 2017, and UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

What Has Been the Impact of Local Mediation Initiatives?

The first step in any assessment of local mediation initiatives is to ask whether they are making a difference on the ground. The general sense among our interviewees was that the agreements resulting from these initiatives can and do make a difference for communities and armed groups. When they hold, local deals improve the security situation. According to an NGO representative, the result is immediate in that the deals halt conflicts between armed groups.[132] Several UN officials confirmed that the local peace committees were instrumental in quelling tensions, particularly during the demonstrations in Bangui in 2016 and 2017.[133] Even in hot spots such as Bangassou, local notables acknowledged that efforts to defuse tensions had achieved results, though they hastened to question the sustainability of these results.[134] Reflecting on efforts in Paoua and Bangui, other sources asserted that community violence-reduction activities reduced the risk of recurring violence by contributing to cutting ties between youth and armed groups. As in the case of the Boeing cemetery (see Box 2), local mediation initiatives can not only improve the security situation but also in some instances lay the ground for further dialogue and activities aimed at building social cohesion.

If successful mediation initiatives make a difference, their geographic scope is nonetheless limited. In Kaga Bandoro, the capital of Nana-Grébizi prefecture, tensions broke out between the FPRC-MPC coalition and the UPC, both ex-Séléka groups. An agreement brokered to suspend hostilities focused on restoring freedom of movement between Kaga Bandoro and Mbrès. In Batangafo, the nonaggression pact did not involve the town's outskirts. A UN official reported that a member of parliament for Batangafo's second electoral district characterized local deals as "problematic," adding that the parties "feel no sense of accountability beyond the area of the agreement."[135] And while a senior UN official in Bossangoa was said to be "betting on the expansion of zones of peace," this remains wishful thinking for the moment.[136]

Not only do mediation initiatives have a limited scope, but their outcomes are also vulnerable to reversals in the security situation, of which there are many examples. In Batangafo, Christians and Muslims signed a nonaggression pact on March 29, 2016, committing to allow free movement. At the signing ceremony, the deputy prefect, Ngozila Deo-Bafounga, praised the initiative and guaranteed that the pact would last because it was accompanied by the establishment of a number of committees working for social cohesion and because MINUSCA was involved in bringing it about.[137] Yet only a few days later, a young man was kidnapped on his way to the market, heightening tensions.[138] Despite subsequent community dialogues, including the establishment of a local peace committee, a committee of the wise, and a committee of religious leaders all working toward social cohesion, violent fighting resumed in July 2017, leading to renewed displacement.[139]

This phenomenon is not limited to local mediation initiatives; serious security incidents occurring immediately following the signing of major peace pacts have also cast doubt on the sustainability of these pacts and on the degree of commitment of the signatory parties. The most flagrant illustration remains the abrupt deterioration of the situation in Bangassou almost immediately following the suspension of the first African initiative.[140]

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132 Interview with representative of mediation NGO, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

133 Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 14 and 15, 2017.

134 Interviews with Bangassou notables, Bangui, September 16, 2017.

135 Interview with UN field office staff, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017.

136 Ibid.

137 Samson Andjoukara, "Centrafrique : Les communautés de Batangafo s'engagent pour la paix," Réseau des journalistes pour les droits de l'homme, March 31, 2016, available at http://rjdh.org/centrafrique-communautes-de-batangafo-sengagent-paix/ .

138 "Batangafo: L'enlèvement d'un jeune entraîne des tensions," Journal de Bangui, April 4, 2016, available at www.journaldebangui.com/article.php?aid=9817 .

139 See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, République Centrafricaine: Aperçu humanitaire (au 31 juillet 2017), available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/rca_ocha_170731_apercu_humanitaire.pdf ; Médecins Sans Frontières, "Central African Republic: 10,000 People Sleep in Batangafo Hospital after Camp Is Looted and Burned," August 10, 2017, available at www.msf.org/en/article/central-african-republic-10000-people-sleep-batangafo-hospital-after-camp-looted-and-burned .

140 Interview with senior diplomat, Bangui, September 15, 2017.

A number of factors contribute to the fragility of mediation outcomes. Wider security dynamics are the most obvious culprit, with violence spreading from one locality to another. Agreements are also threatened by competition among local leaders. For instance, a UN official reported that, when local anti-Balaka leader Charly signed the Nana Bakassa-Kouki nonaggression pact, he was pressured by anti-Balaka leaders in Bangui not to abide by the deal.[141] In Batangafo, efforts to transform the town into a weapon-free zone broke down when anti-Balaka leader Dieudonné Ngaïbona (also known as "Colonel Djié") relocated to Batangafo and demoted the local anti-Balaka leader, René Ninga.

Similar competition among individual leaders exists between ex-Séléka factions. For instance, much of the violence that threatened stability in Bambari was related to the struggle between the FPRC and MPC, on the one hand, and the UPC, on the other. The violence reached such levels that it prompted the UN Security Council to issue a presidential statement expressing "concern at the ongoing clashes between armed groups, in partic-ular around Bambari in the Ouaka prefecture…, which have caused heavy civilian losses and signif-icant population displacement."[142] MINUSCA later demanded that the UPC leave Bambari to avoid further bloodshed.

Interviewees underlined that the armed groups are not the only culprits. A number of politicians and traditional leaders are said to have supported violence in an attempt to regain political relevance and position themselves as useful intermediaries to deescalate the situation in the hope that they could "enter the state" (or gain a steady rent as a state official). Several interviewees suggested that the sultan of Bangassou would have played such a role.[143]

Follow-up on and implementation of most agreements depends on the existence and active engagement of local, community-based peace structures. Pacts also need to be complemented by continuous dialogue with armed groups and communities. Describing the efforts that led to the reopening of the Boeing cemetery (see Box 2), one MINUSCA officer considered activities conducted prior to the signing of the pact to increase awareness about social cohesion to have been crucial to the pact's success. The official expressed concerns about the difficulties of identifying partners willing to take over the quick-impact projects developed as a means of strengthening the Boeing pact (for instance, the rehabilitation of the market).[144] Given the short-term nature of quick-impact projects, there was a danger that, if they were not taken over once completed, the initiatives and the underlying pact would not be sustained.[145] In listing other factors of success, interviewees underlined the need for the presence and active involvement of state representatives.[146] While several sources stressed the importance of follow-up,[147] many also highlighted two factors that limit the ability of local structures to fulfill their role: (1) the lack of financial resources and (2) the risk of competition among various local actors.

For the moment, funding is a key limitation of structures and initiatives aiming to build local peace and social cohesion.[148] Most local actors and representatives of NGOs and MINUSCA who were interviewed pointed to financial limitations to explain the inability of local peace committees (both informal local mediation committees and the formal local peace and reconciliation committees), parliamentarians, and religious leaders to sustain their efforts in the medium to long term.[149] Describing local peace committees as "the

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141 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 13, 2017.

142 UN, "Security Council Presidential Statement Condemns Violence by Armed Groups in the Central African Republic," meetings coverage, UN Doc. SC/12776, April 4, 2017, available at www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12776.doc.htm .

143 Interview with senior diplomat, Bangui, September 15, 2017; interviews with Bangassou notables, Bangui, September 16, 2017; interview with UN official, Bangui, September 21, 2017.

144 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

145 Interview with UNDP officer, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

146 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 14, 2017; interview with NGO representatives, Bangui September 14, 2017.

147 Interview with religious leader, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017; interview with UN humanitarian officer, Bangui, September 20, 2017; interview with NGO representatives, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

148 However, going ahead, funding should be available through the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan's (RCPCA) pillar on peace and security. According to one of our interviewees, this plan is funded at around 87 percent, with an approximate 21 percent implementation rate due to capacity constraints and political inertia. Interview with UN official, Bangui, 13 September 2017.

149 Interview with religious leader, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017; interviews with NGO representatives, Bangui, September 19 and 20, 2017; interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 19 and 21, 2017.

implementing arms of NGOs," one UN official stressed that these structures were "not self-sustaining,"[150] while another argued that it was paramount to protect their independence.[151] Dependence on NGO support and funding creates vulnerabilities for two reasons. First, donor funding cycles tend to be short-term and relatively inflexible, making it difficult for committees to adapt to developments on the ground or to use these funds for institutional support.[152] Second, the receding presence of NGOs in CAR's hinterland, itself a result of increasing violence, weakens their partnerships with local actors.[153]

In addition to funding limitations, a second source of vulnerability is the potential for competition among different local structures. For instance, whereas in Bangui most local mediation committees have either been subsumed into local peace and reconciliation committees or dismantled, both types of committees often coexist in the prefectures.[154] In a country where resources are scarce and access to stable entitlements is paramount, this is a recipe for incipient rivalries.

Finally, another important factor accounting for the resilience or fragility of local mediation outcomes is the ability to provide youth with alternatives to joining armed groups. This raises the broader issue of the lack of connection between efforts on the security and development fronts. In order to address this problem, several NGOs working on social cohesion have developed programming that involves an income-generation dimension.

For instance, Mercy Corps is attempting to promote social cohesion via economic means, encouraging economic cooperation and financially supporting projects that bring former adversaries into joint ventures. In Bouar, its Advancing Solutions for Peace through Intercommunity Reconciliation and Engagement (ASPIRE) program proposed an approach based on inclusive, community-led processes to mitigate current and future conflicts, increase economic cooperation across lines of division, and work on changing attitudes toward tolerance and nonviolence. Similarly, the Stabilizing Vulnerable Communities through the Promotion of Intercommunity Dialogue and Economic Cooperation program sought to address violence and rebuild community cohesion in Bangui and Bouar by "providing mechanisms for peaceful resolution of intercommunity conflicts together with longer-term activities to rebuild trust and cooperation between affected communities."[155] Among other objectives, the program focused on "enabling Christian and Muslim communities to find mutually beneficial community restoration and livelihoods activities to rebuild their communities."[156] In Bouar, where Mercy Corps supported the implementation of ninety-one socioeconomic projects, this program facilitated the dismantling of illegal checkpoints where armed group levy taxes in Bouar, the return of more than 200 refugees from Garoua Boulai to Bouar, the free circulation of young Muslim moto-taxi drivers, the reopening of Muslim traders' stores, and the reopening of the Haoussa market to both Muslims and Christians.

In brief, local mediation initiatives can provide a respite from violence. However, this respite's duration and ability to withstand challenges are usually limited. Local mediation initiatives are vulnerable to changes in the security context, to leadership struggles, and to financial challenges. Furthermore, the empirical record suggests that these initiatives would not get off the ground in the absence of local will. At the same time, however, to quote one UN representative, the stability of their outcomes also "depends on the presence and involvement of external actors in support of local mediation activities: they are the ones carrying out pre-DDR activities, they are the ones implementing social cohesion programs, and they are also the ones providing labor-intensive…projects to give the youths hope."[157]

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150 Interview with UN officer, New York, August 17, 2017.

151 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

152 Interview with UN officer, New York, August 17, 2017, and Bangui, September 19, 2017; interview with NGO representatives, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

153 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 13, 2017.

154 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 21, 2017.

155 Mercy Corps, "Stabilizing Vulnerable Communities in the Central African Republic through the Promotion of Intercommunity Dialogue and Economic Cooperation (SVC): Final Program Report," January 31, 2016, p. 2, available at http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KXGV.pdf .

156 Ibid., p. 3.

157 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

Identifying the Risks Associated with Local Mediation Initiatives

The impulse behind local mediation initiatives is laudable and, as discussed earlier, their short-term results provide communities with much-needed temporary relief from violence. However, it is important to acknowledge that these initiatives are not devoid of risks. Three such risks emerged from our interviews and discussions with mediation actors in CAR: (1) the displacement of violence, (2) the risk of legitimizing otherwise illegitimate actors, and (3) the danger of heightening competition among actors involved in and supporting mediation efforts.

The risk of displacing violence from one locality to another is best illustrated by the case of Bambari. Much of the recent violence in the town resulted from the struggle between two ex-Séléka factions: the UPC (dominated by the Fulani/Peulhs) and the FPRC (at the helm of a coalition including anti-Balaka elements).[158] When fighting clustered around Bambari, a UPC stronghold, the UN sought to prevent it from engulfing the city, which is home to tens of thousands of IDPs. In its attempt to stop FPRC rebels from advancing, MINUSCA deployed attack helicopters while simultaneously negotiating the UPC's exit from Bambari. Evan Cinq-Mars from the Center for Civilians in Conflict is quoted as saying that "there was a willingness by MINUSCA to use much more robust force to deter attacks."[159] However, as an uneasy calm descended on Bambari,[160] the UPC went in search of new territory, resulting in the displacement of violence to towns and localities south of Bambari, including Goubali 2, Bakouma, Nzako, and, more recently, Alindao.[161] A number of interviewees thus considered it necessary to reconsider the description of Bambari's stabilization as a success in light of the

unintended consequence this has had on other localities.[162]

Local mediation initiatives typically involve multiple local actors. Like all negotiations, these initiatives, when successful, empower these actors, increasing their reputation and influence. During the crisis in CAR, local peace committees emerged spontaneously as town notables sought to defuse tense situations in their localities. However, because some areas of the country lack community structures, this may lead to a somewhat artificial creation of local peace committees. One should therefore be cautious in engaging with such groupings.[163]

Furthermore, not all local actors are equally legitimate, nor are they all legitimate in the eyes of the same people. The local peace and reconciliation committees are a case in point. These committees are the main interlocutors of international actors, including the UN. At the same time, they are also perceived by the state as one of its organs and a means by which it can frame, conduct, and (some would say) control reconciliation efforts throughout the country.[164] In Bangui, these committees include the district mayors, neighborhood leaders (*chefs de quartier*), religious notables, and representatives of civil society, women, and youth.[165] Yet participants in a workshop organized by Conciliation Resources highlighted that neighborhood and religious leaders were not all accepted by the population; many were perceived as tainted and partial, having fanned the flames of conflict by their acts or their words.[166] A good case in point is the president of the Islamic Community of CAR and member of the Central African Religious Platform, Imam Omar Kobine Layama: "Layama courageously spoke against Séléka attacks on non-Muslims but he has lost support within his

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158 The rift between the FPRC and UPC emerged in 2014 "when the former called for an independent state in northern CAR, a proposal rejected by the latter... UPC leader Ali Darassa has since rebuffed multiple FPRC calls to reunify the Séléka, threatening the FPRC's hegemony over CAR's rebel movement and resource-rich territory. Clashes between the groups erupted around a gold mine in Ndassima in late 2016 and have since morphed into a full-blown bush war." Kleinfeld, "Central African Republic Rebels Turn on Each Other as Violence Flares."

159 Ibid.

160 See Médecins Sans Frontières, "Fear Grips Central African Republic's Second City as Conflict and Renewed Violence Draw Closer to Bambari," June 8, 2017, available at www.msf.ca/en/article/fear-grips-central-african-republic-s-second-city-as-conflict-and-renewed-violence-draw .

161 Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Zeid Alarmed by Increased Violence, Killings, in Central African Republic," Reliefweb, May 16, 2017, available at https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/zeid-alarmed-increasing-violence-killings-central-african-republic .

162 Interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 15 and 19, 2017.

163 Vircoulon, *À la recherche de la paix en Centrafrique*, p. 15.

164 Interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

165 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 21, 2017.

166 Telephone interview with analyst, September 11, 2017. See also Conciliation Resources, "Analysis of Conflict and Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic."

own Muslim community. During a visit to the only remaining mixed neighbourhood of Bangui, PK-5, in March 2014, local notables were angry that Imam Kobine had not visited or called them since the anti-Balaka attacks of December 2013."[167] Because the legitimacy of local mediation actors is an important component of the success of mediation initiatives, it is important to keep this issue foremost in mind.

Lastly, local mediation initiatives have the potential to heighten competition among actors involved in and supporting mediation efforts. These dynamics are the result of working in an environment characterized by resource scarcity. This is illustrated by the sometimes difficult relations between the Ministry of Reconciliation and international actors providing mediation support. The ministry, which lacks resources and capacity, nevertheless wants to play the central role in implementing its reconciliation strategy.[168] While understandable and laudable, this attempt to maintain control of the process has produced dysfunctional outcomes. It has created tensions between the UN and the ministry, which some attribute to the fact that the UN's capabilities allow it to maintain autonomy of thought, finance, and action and thus to escape control.[169] This tension has also complicated cooperation between the UN and local peace and reconciliation committees, which, although elected, fall under the purview of the ministry and therefore allegedly cannot work with international actors.[170] A number of international NGOs have expressed similar concerns, describing their relations with the ministry as extremely tense.[171] While acknowledging the competition for resources between the ministry and NGOs, some respondents have nevertheless stated that they experienced no difficulty sharing information with the ministry on their activities.[172] This highlights the importance of coordination as a key ingredient of success.

Local Mediation Initiatives: More than the Sum of Their Parts?

Do local mediation initiatives amount to more than the sum of their parts? This is an important question when considering the ability of such efforts to contribute to the broader objective of restoring sustainable peace in CAR. To answer the question, we query the origins of local mediation initiatives and assess their impact in terms of broader peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. We also evaluate their contribution to the creation and institutionalization of a network of actors working to create the conditions for sustainable peace in CAR.

Interview data suggests that the majority of local mediation initiatives are mainly driven by timely opportunities, local dynamics, and individual actors. Rather than being the local expression of an organized overarching strategy, mediation is an ad hoc response to local security dynamics. Describing MINUSCA's involvement in mediation efforts, a UN official talked about "field offices with creative staff trying to put out fires."[173] Another informant described the approach as taking advantage of windows of opportunity.[174] A church official described the involvement of religious leaders in mediation efforts as "a response to needs."[175] Although CAR's Ministry of Reconciliation conceived of the establishment of local peace and reconciliation committees as one of the instruments of a broader national reconciliation strategy, its lack of capacity and resources has impeded the rollout of such a strategy and instead favored the committees' timely involvement in local mediation efforts. Furthermore, as already discussed, many mediation initiatives happen at the behest of an individual, whether a community or group leader, as was the case in Kouki and Nana Bakassa. As such, these are clearly piecemeal rather than part of a broader, government-led strategy.

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167 Michael J. Brown and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic and Beyond," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 10, no. 1 (2015), p. 19.

168 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

169 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

170 Interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

171 Interviews with NGO representatives, September 19–21, 2017.

172 Interviews with NGO representatives, September 14 and 21, 2017.

173 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 13, 2017.

174 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

175 Interview with religious leader, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017.

Poor information flows are another indication of the ad hoc nature of local mediation processes. An overwhelming majority of interviewees underlined the fact that the Touadéra government, much as the government of transition before it, does not have a comprehensive strategy to communicate with the population. For instance, although the government of CAR had committed to disseminate the outcomes of the Bangui Forum, one NGO representative highlighted that restitution activities had stopped at the outskirts of Bangui and that many mayors outside of the capital did not receive a copy of the conclusions.[176] A UN official surmised that the government may fear paying a high political price for differences of opinion between it and the general population.[177] Another UN interviewee elaborated that, while the population supports the government—a reference to its support for President Touadéra at the polls—it is not supportive of the government's efforts to "stimulate peace dynamics."[178]

Poor information flows have an impact on local mediation efforts. They contribute to heightening the perception of these efforts as local dynamics that do not contribute to a broader effort or strategy. The lack of national public messages in support of efforts to reduce violence and rebuild social cohesion also deprives local actors engaged in mediation efforts of the political blessing of the government, a blessing that could have strengthened their hand vis-à-vis would-be spoilers.[179]

Not only are local mediation initiatives ad hoc, but most also have serious difficulty achieving results in terms of coexistence and reconciliation. This speaks to the fact that they are not part of a larger peacebuilding strategy. In most of the cases discussed in this report, with the notable exception of the pact that resulted in the reopening of the Boeing cemetery, the deals struck between the

various parties have focused on mechanisms to meet short-term needs and interests: access to a market, reduction of community violence, greater freedom of movement, and the like. Of its own admission, Mercy Corps' program on Stabilizing Vulnerable Communities through the Promotion of Intercommunity Dialogue and Economic Cooperation—which was designed to rebuild community cohesion—ran into challenges as it attempted to foster socioeconomic cooperation between communities. While the program "gave preference to joint projects that would bring together divided communities, this became a challenge due to the massive displacement after the 2013/2014 conflict that changed the overall demographics of target communities. As a result, the majority of projects that were submitted did not explicitly involve both Christian and Muslim community members,"[180] though Mercy Corps contends that the benefits extended to the communities as a whole.

While dialogue and confidence-building activities should theoretically pave the way for the return of displaced populations, this remains an elusive goal. Indeed, it continues to be extremely difficult (and even premature) to speak of "reconciliation" when most refugees have yet to return and when tensions are still high in most of the country.[181] In Bossangoa, in spite of the pact signed between the armed groups, Muslims who come into town are often victims of looting and kidnapping.[182] In Carnot, two years after the events of 2014, approximately 500 persons—mostly Muslim traders and their families—still lived at the IDP site at the cathedral.[183] According to a UN official, in Berberati, where refugees had been able to return prior to 2017, they are now being prevented from doing so.[184] In Bambari, held up as a showcase,[185] attempts to promote social cohesion and reconcili-

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176 Interview with NGO representative, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

177 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

178 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 15, 2017.

179 Interviews with UN officers in Bangui, September 15, 2017; interview with UN official, Bangui, September 15, 2017; interview with NGO representative, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

180 Mercy Corps, "Stabilizing Vulnerable Communities in the Central African Republic," p. 3.

181 Interview with NGO representatives, Bangui, September 19, 2017, and UN officer, Bangui, September 15, 2017.

182 Interview with UN field office staff, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017.

183 Médecins Sans Frontières, "En République centrafricaine, les déplacés de Carnot ne peuvent pas rentrer chez eux," March 3, 2016, available at www.msf.fr/actualite/articles/en-republique-centrafricaine-deplaces-carnot-ne-peuvent-pas-rentrer-chez-eux .

184 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 15, 2017.

185 "Une vitrine," in the original. Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

ation are limited.[186] According to Médecins Sans Frontières, as of mid-August 2017 there were about 500,000 IDPs in CAR, as well as approximately as many refugees in neighboring countries, out of a population of approximately 4 million.[187]

Nothing illustrates the challenge as well as a quote from a parliamentarian actively engaged in mediation initiatives; referring to ex-Séléka combatants who are not allowed to return to their villages, this person reflected a common attitude in CAR, saying, "If people do not want you today, go and you will come back later."[188] This, in a nutshell, summarizes the attitude of the majority Christian population to the return of Muslim IDPs and refugees.

Never the Twain Shall Meet? Local- and National-Level Mediation Initiatives

What connection, if any, is there between local mediation efforts and the plethora of national-level mediation initiatives reviewed at the beginning of this report? Much like the question of the horizontal linkages among the various local mediation initiatives, the vertical linkages between these efforts and national initiatives underwritten by regional and international actors can tell us a lot about the contribution of local efforts to the sustainability of peace in CAR. To answer the question, we need to investigate the ties between the two levels and to probe local actors' perceptions of national-level conflict-resolution efforts and national actors' awareness of local efforts.

In identifying potential connections between local and national mediation initiatives, several actors come to mind: armed groups, religious leaders, parliamentarians, NGOs, and MINUSCA. Each of these actors has a presence at both the local and national levels. Our interviews, however, made clear that the first two actors—armed groups and religious leaders—face severe limitations in connecting local- and national-level efforts. As for NGOs and MINUSCA, multiple factors have

prevented them from fulfilling their full potential as connectors. Of all the actors identified above, parliamentarians are the most promising.[189]

When it comes to armed groups, two factors militate against them serving as connectors between local and national mediation initiatives. First, most groups have weak chains of command and control. Described by a UN official as the "multiplication of cancerous groups," the fragmentation of CAR's armed groups means that leaders cannot pressure their followers to respect the commitments made in the name of the group and that their representativeness is, at best, limited.[190] According to a representative of an NGO, members of armed groups acknowledge command-and-control hierarchies and see their national leaders as representing their interests. However, because the leaders cannot guarantee the survival of the groups' members, they do not have full control over them.[191] There are also tensions between senior leaders interested in engagement and operational leaders less keen on giving up their weapons.[192] While these lines of fracture are deeper among the anti-Balaka, internecine struggles for control of mines and disagreements over political tactics and objectives have also affected the unity of ex-Séléka groups and the ability of their leaders to deliver to their followers.

For their part, religious leaders could play a role in connecting local and national mediation initiatives. After all, the Central African Religious Platform was established as a national-level actor engaged in efforts to rebuild social cohesion. The platform worked with a number of NGOs on establishing local social cohesion committees. It also encouraged local religious leaders to form interfaith structures to assist in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts.[193] While still active, the platform has lost its momentum. Its financial support for local mediation committees has ceased (a victim, like many other activities, of funding cycles). In addition, there are many disparities

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186 Interviews with UN field office staff, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017, and NGO representatives, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

187 Médecins Sans Frontières, "10,000 People Sleep in Batangafo Hospital after Camp Is Looted and Burned."

188 Interview with Central African politician, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

189 Of course, not all parliamentarians are equally promising connectors between local and national mediation initiatives. Some, notably those associated with the anti-Balaka, have publicly stoked conflict.

190 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 13, 2017; interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

191 Interview with NGO representative, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

192 Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

193 Interview with religious authority, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017.

between the platform and religious authorities in the prefectures, some of whom have been implicated in fanning the flames of conflict.[194]

Among actors supporting mediation efforts, international NGOs and MINUSCA are present and active both in Bangui and across the country. However, for these actors to be able to serve as connectors between the various levels, they need to be involved in the national-level mediation initiatives. While some NGOs, particularly the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, were involved in planning and implementing the Bangui Forum, none seem to have been involved with the African initiative or with the efforts of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. And while Sant'Egidio is an NGO, the pact it hammered out did not seem to be more inclusive of other mediation actors than other initiatives. For its part, MINUSCA was also not directly involved in the initiatives. While MINUSCA officials suggested that the mission had used its good offices to provide advice and support whenever possible, others within the mission indicated that they had not been consulted, even though the outcomes of some of these initiatives posed a challenge to their work on the ground, and MINUSCA's technical support was necessary to implement them.[195] While President Touadéra created a follow-up committee to oversee implementation of the Sant'Egidio pact, the UN was only granted observer status in this body.[196]

The new parliament, in which approximately 70 percent of the members hail from the constituency they represent, could serve as a link between the local and national levels.[197] Parliamentarians have been involved in a number of local mediation initiatives. Most recently, a parliamentary mission to Bria managed to convince the leaders of armed groups to sign a communiqué in which they committed to preserve the peace, observe a cease-fire, and facili-

tate the return of all IDPs. Bria had witnessed escalating violence since November 2016 as rival groups fought with one another.[198] However, parliamentarians have not been equally active in all instances. When violence escalated in Bangassou in May 2017, its parliamentarians were relatively shy. According to one respondent, they considered the situation outside of their remit and felt that they did not have the appropriate means to intervene.[199]

For the time being, local and national mediation and conflict-resolution dynamics are at best on parallel tracks; at worst, they undermine each other. This was reflected by interviewees, who variously asserted that local dynamics do not reflect national decisions, that local tensions are exploited at the national level, that these are two different worlds, that there is no relation between local pacts and national dynamics, that the population is ill-informed and unconcerned with political agreements, and that discussions in Bangui and outside of CAR lag behind discussions at the local level.[200]

The Missing Link

Local mediation efforts have endeavored to reduce community violence and rebuild social cohesion. While often yielding results in the short term, these initiatives have run into a number of hurdles. Their most important limitations, however, signal that there is a missing link.

On the one hand, mediation efforts have been extremely localized. As Roland Marchal has noted with respect to micro-projects to rebuild social cohesion, their success has never been leveraged to foster a national discourse on reconciliation.[201] The initiatives are valuable, but they remain small steps in the overall scheme of building sustainable peace in CAR. On the other hand, several UN officials noted that, without a credible national process, the results of these local initiatives will be limited.[202]

194 For example, the imams of PK 5 and Imam Kobine replicate a certain cleavage between "Central African imams and foreign imams." See Vircoulon, *À la recherche de la paix en Centrafrique*; Conciliation Resources, "Analysis of Conflict and Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic."

195 Interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 14 and 21, 2017.

196 Interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 21, 2017.

197 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

198 The ex-Séléka faction of Abdoulaye Hissène controls the commercial downtown and the outskirts of the airport. The Azor faction controls the Bornou neighborhood. UPC fighters control the Peulh district east of the city. For their part, the anti-Balaka control the IDP camp in PK 3. "Centrafrique: La mission parlementaire de Bria recommande au président de consolider les acquis de l'initiative," Xinhua, September 29, 2017, available at http://fr.africatime.com/republique_centrafricaine/articles/centrafrique-la-mission-parlementaire-de-bria-recommande-au-president-de-consolider-les .

199 Interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 19, 2017; interviews with Bangassou notables, Bangui, September 16, 2017.

200 Interviews with UN officials and officers, Bangui, September 14, 15, 19, and 21, 2017; interview with senior diplomat, Bangui, September 22, 2017.

201 Roland Marchal, *Brève histoire d'une transition singulière*, p. 62.

202 Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

Nor has anyone attempted to coordinate the multitude of mediation initiatives to ensure that they amount to more than the sum of their parts. Given the importance of local ownership of peacebuilding processes for the sustainability of their outcomes, the only actor that could legitimately fulfill this function is the Central African state. The deployment of state authority and the state's stewardship of initiatives to reduce violence and build social cohesion and peace are essential to making outcomes of mediation initiatives sustainable.[203] This was well understood by the parliamentary delegation that hammered out the Bria agreement. Upon returning to Bangui, the member of parliament for Bamingui, Jean-Michel Mandaba, the sultan of Ndele, Ibrahim Sénoussi, and the sultan of Birao, Ahmat Moustapha Am-Ngabo, called upon the state authorities to take over and consolidate the outcomes of their mission.[204]

MINUSCA and Local Mediation: Political, Strategic, and Operational Considerations

This report has analyzed local mediation efforts in CAR. In assessing the potential for these initiatives to contribute to sustainable peace, we have looked at their characteristics and at the range of actors involved. We have also assessed the sustainability of their outcomes, underlined some of their unintended consequences, asked whether they amount to more than the sum of their parts, and examined the linkages between local efforts and national-level political deals hammered out with the support of regional and international actors. This final section focuses on the role MINUSCA plays in local mediation and on the mission's comparative advantages and liabilities in undertaking such efforts.

In MINUSCA's mandate, the UN Security Council defines the mission's strategic objective as "to support the creation of conditions conducive to the sustainable reduction of the presence of, and threat posed by, armed groups."[205] To do so, the mandate requires the mission to focus on "support for the reconciliation and stabilization political processes, the extension of State authority and the preservation of territorial integrity." In particular, MINUSCA is mandated (1) "to provide good offices and technical expertise in support of efforts to address the root causes of conflict, in particular in mediation and reconciliation processes, inclusive national dialogue, transitional justice and conflict-resolution mechanisms, working with relevant regional and local bodies and religious leaders"; and (2) "to support efforts of the CAR authorities to address marginalization and local grievances, including through dialogue with the armed groups, civil society leaders including women and youth representatives, and by assisting national, prefectoral and local authorities to foster confidence among communities."[206] Local mediation is one of the most important and effective tools to achieve these objectives and, by so doing, contribute to the protection of civilians.[207]

As this report has documented, MINUSCA is currently undertaking a wide variety of tasks linked to mediation, mainly in support of local actors. Its field offices back local peace committees, NGOs, and religious leaders as they broker agreements to reduce violence, improve access and freedom of movement, and rebuild social cohesion. With the help of MINUSCA's presence on the ground through thirteen field offices,[208] heads of offices and political and civil affairs officers have relations with a number of local actors, including armed groups, local notables, traditional chiefs, and government officials. MINUSCA- and UNDP-funded labor-intensive and quick-impact projects have contributed to addressing a number of pressing and urgent issues and provided "concrete improvements that address often simple and quite specific local demands."[209] MINUSCA has also provided

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203 Interviews with Bangassou notables, September 16, 2017; interviews with UN officers, September 19 and 21, 2017.

204 "Centrafrique: La mission parlementaire de Bria recommande au président de consolider les acquis de l'initiative," Xinhua, September 29, 2017.

205 Ibid., p.10.

206 UN Security Council Resolution 2301 (July 26, 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2301, p.10.

207 Indeed, mediation contributes to political dialogue and to the establishment of a protective environment, both of which are defined as key pillars in the concept of the protection of civilians. DPKO/DFS, "The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping," April 2015 (reviewed June 2017).

208 MINUSCA has offices in the west (Bouar, Paoua, Bossangoa, and Berberati), center (Kaga Bandoro, Bambari, Ndele, and Bangui), and east (Bria, Bangassou, Birao, Obo, and Zemio).

209 Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017. Other important actors in this area include the World Bank, specifically its Londo project.

logistical support to facilitate the return of parliamentarians to their constituencies, thus empowering them to serve as a link between local and national conflict-resolution initiatives.[210] Taken together, these efforts sustain an environment conducive to the respect and implementation of mediation outcomes, be they cease-fires, weapon-free zones, access to markets, or unrestricted movement.

In spite of all of this, there are diverse and sometimes conflicting opinions within the mission regarding local mediation in CAR and MINUSCA's role in it. There is little consensus regarding what counts as mediation, what its objectives are, how the mission could engage strategically, and where it is best placed to intervene and make a difference. Regarding local mediation, some interviewees identified the main purpose of local mediation efforts as the creation of spaces for people to raise the real issues.[211] For others, "dialogue was the process and reconciliation the goal." Others still thought that the main objective ought to be "to prepare the terrain for the state to continue [with social cohesion and reconciliation efforts]."[212]

There was no more consensus on the role MINUSCA should play in this realm. Several interviewees were of the view that MINUSCA should focus its approach to mediation on the local level "where it has comparative advantages" and that, in parallel, it should continue "leading from behind" at the national level.[213] Others lamented MINUSCA's lack of sophistication and of an overall vision for mediation. One interviewee referred to the difficulty the UN has had in finding "its place" in the field of mediation in CAR.[214] There were also those who underlined the risk of portraying mediation as the solution and hence engaging in every opportunity that arises, when this is but one tool in MINUSCA's toolbox.[215]

Although mediation efforts are supported by many UN divisions, these divisions often conduct their activities in silos, and various sections have

conflicting perceptions about each other's work and about the mission's assets and liabilities. Some respondents consider that their colleagues misunderstand mediation as a matter of hurt feelings rather than interests and needs. Others suggest that the mission is associated with the peacekeepers and that this is its main liability in local mediation efforts given local perceptions of blue helmets as partial. Others still identify the lack of a common political strategy and frame as the main weakness of these local initiatives.[216]

As it elaborates a strategic vision to underpin its engagement with local mediation efforts and sets the parameters for its involvement in local mediation initiatives, MINUSCA will have to take a number of political, strategic, and operational matters into consideration; it will have to consider options and weigh in trade-offs. On the political front, MINUSCA's local mediation efforts will need to take account of the mission's relationship with the population of CAR and with state authorities. Strategically, the vision will need to determine areas of intervention with an eye on priorities, assets, and added value. It will also need to establish mechanisms to link local mediation initiatives with developments in the national political sphere and to close the gap between Bangui and the hinterland. Operationally, the mission will have to assess the requirements that would make it fit for purpose. This requires evaluating the human and financial resources required. It also requires thinking about the mission's ability to engage in such a resource-intensive activity as local mediation while at the same time carrying out a long list of other tasks. If local mediation is defined as a priority, what does that entail in terms of mandate redefinition, prioritization of tasks, division of labor, and partnerships, including in the face of diminishing peacekeeping resources?

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

No planning exercise is possible without an analysis of the overall political context, and MINUSCA's development of a strategy for support

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210 Interview with UN officers, New York, August 17, 2017.

211 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

212 Interview with religious representative and local authorities of Bangassou, Bangui, September 16, 2017.

213 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 15, 2017.

214 Telephone interview with expert, New York, September 11, 2017.

215 Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

216 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

to local mediation is no exception. In this regard, two issues emerge as particularly relevant: (1) popular perceptions of MINUSCA as a partial actor with credibility problems and (2) competition with Central African authorities over leadership of the local mediation file.

Addressing Perceptions of Partiality

MINUSCA suffers from a lack of legitimacy and credibility with the general population of CAR. Central Africans expect MINUSCA to take a robust stance on its protection of civilians mandate and have held the mission partly responsible for the impact of the new wave of violence on individuals and communities.[217] Christian citizens of CAR, in particular, accuse the mission of partiality, and it is widely believed that MINUSCA has been deployed to CAR to defend Muslims.[218] Indeed, "anti-Muslim discourse in the country has been increasingly coupled with campaigns against MINUSCA, leading to rumors of a Muslim conspiracy to take over the country with the support of the UN mission."[219] For example, protests were organized in Bria and Bambari to denounce the partiality of certain contingents perceived either as passively biased (e.g., allowing ex-Séléka or Chadians to attack civilians) or as actively working with armed groups by distributing arms.[220] The UN arms embargo feeds into this narrative because it is seen "as stalling deployment of CAR's national army, which is mostly composed of Christians."[221]

That the population of CAR does not feel adequately protected was cogently illustrated during a recent protest when demonstrators unfurled a banner that read "MINUSCA, you have the capacities to ensure the security of the civilian population. Use them instead of 'philosophizing' all the time."[222] This undercurrent of hostility, together with accusations of partiality, undermines MINUSCA's legitimacy to engage in mediation efforts at the local level.[223] As one UN official aptly put it, "Does it matter whether [this perception] is instrumentalized if it is felt? This is fueling violence."[224]

Recalibrating the Relationship with the State

As previously discussed, and although they collaborate in many different realms, relations between MINUSCA and the government of CAR are tense with regard to the local mediation file. The Ministry of Reconciliation oversees local reconciliation efforts and has recently begun deploying its local peace and reconciliation committees. The ministry's lack of financial resources, however, has heightened competition, which, according to some interviewees, has translated into hostility toward MINUSCA's civil affairs division, which leads the mission's local mediation efforts. This raises the question of whether expanding the reach and increasing the tempo of MINUSCA's involvement in local mediation, as sought by some within the mission,[227] is compatible with its mandate to support state authorities. This is all the more important because Central Africans have been demanding that the state reinvest at the local level, including through the deployment of civil servants and the armed forces.[228]

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217 Interview with NGO representative, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

218 As a number of our interviewees pointed out, blaming the mission also deflects attention from those perpetrating the violence. Interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 13, 2017.

219 Namie Di Razza, "How Can the UN Curb CAR's Spiral of Violence and Ethnic Cleansing?" *IPI Global Observatory*, August 21, 2017, available at https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/08/central-african-republic-united-nations-minusca/ .

220 In Bambari, MINUSCA's efforts to remove threats to civilians and its negotiation of the departure of Ali Darassa, led to the displacement of violent activities. This "created the perception among the population that MINUSCA is biased and has sparked false but widespread rumors that the mission is actively supporting armed groups." See Stimson Center and Better World Campaign, "An Exit Strategy for MINUSCA: Progress and Obstacles," August 2017. Available at https://betterworldcampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/An-Exit-Strategy-For-MINUSCA-Progress-and-Obstacles.pdf .

221 Namie Di Razza, "How Can the UN Curb CAR's Spiral of Violence and Ethnic Cleansing?"

222 In French, "MINUSCA, tu as tous les moyens pour assurer la sécurité de la population civile. Emploie-les au lieu de 'philosopher' tout le temps." Photograph in "Centrafrique: Manifestations contre la MINUSCA," African Press Agency, July 6, 2017, available at http://fr.africatime.com/republique_centrafricaine/articles/centrafrique-manifestations-contre-la-minusca .

223 As explained by one interviewee, there is a culture of "speaking softly" in the country, which also implies that rumors and alternative narratives spread easily. Interview with UNDP officer, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

224 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

225 Ibid.

226 Interviews with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

227 Interview with UN officials, Bangui, September 14 and 15, 2017; interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 15 and 19, 2017.

228 Skype interview with UN official, New York, August 22, 2017; interview with NGO representative, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

For MINUSCA to move away from its current reactive approach and develop a purposeful and well-designed strategy of support for local mediation initiatives, it is incumbent upon the mission leadership to be able to identify areas of intervention based on the mission's analysis of its own priorities, of the assets it can leverage, and of the value it can add. A strategic engagement also requires MINUSCA to address the current disconnect between local mediation initiatives and national-level mediation and conflict-resolution efforts and to develop mechanisms to link them more systematically.

Identifying Areas of Intervention

The success of local mediation efforts depends fundamentally on the security situation in the area of intervention. In Bambari, and in spite of an earlier pact between the ex-Séléka and the anti-Balaka (see Box 1), the security situation deteriorated as fighting resumed, this time between the FPRC and the UPC. It took MINUSCA's robust intervention to stop the FPRC from entering Bambari and to convince the UPC to leave the city for it to return to relative stability. The work of peacekeepers carrying out "area domination operations" was identified as crucial to creating the environment for the Bangui field office to conduct its own social-cohesion and reconciliation activities.[229] This raises the question of the risks associated with the militarization of mediation in a context where populations do not perceive the "blue helmets" as benign.

Instead, some argued that the mission ought to identify priority zones that it would work to link up.[230] UNDP has identified priority zones and divided the country into three zones based on the acuity of security, humanitarian, and developmental needs.[231] However, such an identification

may not be operational. It not only "recreates the very divisions at the root cause of the crisis"[232] but is also very susceptible to rapid changes given the extreme fluidity of the context.[233] Care must also be taken to manage the risk of unintended consequences, such as the displacement of violence discussed earlier in the report. Finally, defining areas of intervention requires a sustained effort and consideration of the risk of creating "intervention orphans," or areas unable to access funding based on their relative stability rather than on any measure of need.

Linking the Local to the National

How the mission conceives of mediation has implications for the manner in which it can contribute to linking national and local mediation activities and engagement. Most interviewees were of the opinion that the mission was best placed to support rather than lead national processes and local initiatives.[234]

However, MINUSCA has not determined whether to prioritize top-down or bottom-up efforts—though it could be surmised that it would prefer to focus on bottom-up efforts given that regional bodies, notably the AU, have decided to lead national-level mediation efforts. One interviewee actually thought that this was not a question of prioritizing but that the mission ought to "leverage its strengths, in Bangui and in the field."[235] Little consideration also seems to have been given to the manner in which national-level efforts would trickle down to the local level or in which local efforts would feed into national discussions.[236] Some interviewees believed that MINUSCA has comparative advantages at the local level, whereas at the national level its "hands-off approach"[237] and decision to "lead from behind"[238] have provided it with little leverage on the negotiations, on the parties around the table, and in the

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229 Interview with UN officer, September 21, 2017.

230 Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017, and with UN field staff, Bossangoa, September 18, 2017.

231 UN, *Plan cadre des Nations Unies pour l'assistance au développement (UNDAF+) 2018–2021*, available at www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/RCA-UNDAF-2018-2021.pdf .

232 Interview with UNDP officer, September 14, 2017.

233 Ibid.

234 Interviews with UN officials and UN officers, Bangui, September 13–15 and 18, 2017.

235 Interview with UN official, Bangui, 13 September 2017.

236 Interviews with UN officials and UN officers, Bangui, September 13, 15, and 19, 2017.

237 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

238 Interviews with UN officers in New York, July 24, and August 3, 2017, and with UN official in Bangui, September 13, 2017.

drafting of agreements.[239] Others argued that supporting the initiatives of the government of CAR and the AU was "the only way forward and consistent with the UN-AU partnership."[240] Others still argued that, as the only actor with the necessary capacities to be present across the country, MINUSCA (like many other UN missions) might eventually find itself in the position of implementing decisions it had not negotiated. At the same time, this could also provide the mission with an opportunity to leverage its capacities to enhance links between the local and national levels.

OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

To develop a coherent strategy to support local mediation initiatives, MINUSCA has to reflect on how to be fit for this purpose. There are two facets to this question. First, the mission needs to reflect on its priorities. In a context of shrinking budgets, when missions are being asked to do more with less, and given the demands of MINUSCA's protection of civilians mandate, what can the mission do, and what does it have to let go, in order to sustain support for local mediation efforts? What does this mean more broadly in terms of the division of labor and strategic partnerships? Second, and a bit more straightforward, the mission needs to analyze its expertise and staffing needs. What internal capacity is required for the mission to carry out its designated tasks and achieve its objectives?

Prioritizing Tasks and Building Partnerships

Sustained engagement in support of local mediation initiatives is time- and resource-intensive. The review of recent initiatives underlined that their success hinges on maintaining a secure and relatively stable environment. It also depends on the ability to maintain the support of outside actors in the medium to long term, often in the form of economic development and infrastructure projects bringing together previously feuding communities. While peace-keeping missions are appropriately tooled to help with security, they are not usually designed to provide longer-term economic or developmental support. Missions, therefore, may need to reconsider their priorities and tasks under their current mandate to allow them to provide resource-intensive support to local mediation efforts. They also need to determine the division of labor with outside actors and to develop partnerships with UN country teams, NGOs, bilateral donors, and regional and international financial organizations.

In CAR, MINUSCA works in partnership with several other actors, including UNDP and the World Bank, that implement programs intended to increase the sustainability of local mediation outcomes. However, the mission's relationship with NGOs is complicated, as NGOs have tried keep their distance from the UN to avoid being associated with the military part of the mission; they have also tried to distance themselves due to the mission's perceived partiality and lack credibility.[241] NGO workers in Bangui said that there was currently "no real coordination nationwide between NGOs and the UN"[242] and that, at the local level, relations tended to be both personality-based and vulnerable to the high turnover of personnel. Meanwhile, while some MINUSCA staff expressed willingness to pass the baton to other actors such as NGOs or the UNDP after the mission undertakes initial efforts, others expressed more skepticism that the mission could develop a smooth working relationship with NGO actors they describe as the weak link because of their fundamentally different operating principles.[243]

Nonetheless, such partnerships are essential to the sustainability of the results achieved by mediation initiatives; while MINUSCA may decide to systematically support local mediation initiatives, it is unlikely to have the funding necessary to sustain these efforts on its own or to anchor their outcomes in the long term.[244]

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239 Interview with UN officers, New York, July 24, 2017; telephone interview with expert, New York, September 11, 2017; interview with UN official, Bangui, September 13, 2017.

240 Ibid.

241 Interview with NGO representatives, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

242 Ibid.

243 Interview with UN official, Bangui, September 13 and 19, 2017; interview with UN officer, Bangui, September 14, 2017.

244 Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

245 The Mediation Support Unit has also deployed experts in process design on an ad hoc basis to help shape the AU initiative.

Building Internal Capacity

Is MINUSCA "fit for purpose"? Are its internal capacities and resources allocated so as to optimize the chances of success were it to decide to broadly engage in local mediation? At the national level, the special representative of the secretary-general, as head of mission, and his deputies are the main political interlocutors, supported by various divisions. Until recently, however, the mission had no dedicated mediation capacities. In July 2017 the UN deployed a senior mediation expert (with DPKO funding and for an initial period of three months) to assist the mission's political affairs division in its mediation efforts.[245] The development and implementation of a mediation strategy would require the mission to beef up its mediation expertise and capacities, including through the creation of dedicated senior positions within the mission.

Furthermore, different skill sets are needed to engage in top-down political processes or bottom-up local initiatives. Should the mission decide to focus on local mediation efforts, it would need staff with the right skills and capacities to identify, interact with, and support local interlocutors. Currently, the civil affairs division can rely on thirty-three community liaison officers whose knowledge of local dynamics and fluency in Sango allow them to be embedded outside of the main prefecture capitals.[246] Sustained involvement in local mediation would require MINUSCA to substantially increase the number of these officers, which can only happen through wide-scale recruitment of national staff.[247]

Recommendations and Options for the United Nations

To date, MINUSCA's approach to local mediation has been mainly ad hoc, reacting to developments on the ground and seizing opportunities as they arise. While the mission cannot, for the time being, foresee windows of opportunity in advance, the development of a strategic vision would assist MINUSCA in leveraging its assets, working to

mitigate risks, and ensuring that it brings added value to the table. This would also ensure that MINUSCA's engagement in local mediation achieves the objectives set out in its mandate, including support to reconciliation and political processes, provision of good offices, support to mediation efforts, and support to the Central African authorities' efforts to foster confidence and address long-standing grievances. As such, MINUSCA's strategy to support local and national mediation could become a pilot project for similar engagements in other contexts.

With this in mind, the following recommendations are addressed to the mission, the UN Secretariat, and the Security Council.

1. **Explicitly make mediation support a priority:** In MINUSCA's mandate, the UN Security Council defines the mission's strategic objective as "to support the creation of conditions conducive to the sustainable reduction of the presence of, and threat posed by, armed groups." The creation of such an environment is the best means to protect civilians. The current focus on securing an additional 900 troops should not obscure the fact that the most sustainable way to create this conducive environment remains through local and national efforts to reduce community violence, establish weapon-free zones, negotiate and implement a DDR program, and address the root causes of the violence in CAR.

- The UN Security Council should therefore mandate MINUSCA to direct all the necessary resources to support local and national mediation initiatives that seek to achieve these objectives.

- Should budgetary constraints require it to adjust the scope of MINUSCA's mandate, the Security Council must make hard choices to sequence or postpone other mission tasks that do not have the same urgency or impact as local mediation.

2. **Develop a mission-wide mediation support strategy:** For mediation support to contribute to MINUSCA's mandate, its various support activities and engagements must not be ad hoc

246 Interview with UN officers, Bangui, September 19, 2017.

247 It is nevertheless important to consider the potential "brain drain" of national mediation capacities that could result from such wide-scale recruitment.

and reactive. They must be part of a mission-wide strategy of support to local and national mediation initiatives, developed with the support of UN headquarters.

- The strategy should connect MINUSCA's support to local and national mediation initiatives. While these initiatives are carried out at two different levels—the local and the national—they are intimately connected and should be treated as two faces of the same coin. MINUSCA has several options for connecting local- and national-level efforts. It could: (1) use its communication capacities to disseminate information about local mediation initiatives and increase national political awareness of these efforts; (2) use its logistical capacities to assist the government of CAR in participating in local mediation initiatives; or (3) assist the government in better integrating local- and national-level initiatives as part of a comprehensive, nationally owned strategy.

- The strategy should guide the mediation support activities of various divisions, ensure coherence, and promote a whole-of-mission approach.

- Strategy development could benefit from a retreat facilitated by the Mediation Support Unit.

3. **Better leverage existing MINUSCA assets:** Based on the above two recommendations, the UN leadership ought to leverage existing MINUSCA assets in support of local mediation initiatives. These include the mission's presence across the country, its military, and its logistical capabilities.

- MINUSCA has field offices across CAR and, as such, is one of the very few actors, if not the only one, with a presence in the entire territory. MINUSCA field offices should therefore pay particular attention to nascent local mediation initiatives, identifying the actors involved and assessing the kind of support that may be required. They should also monitor the implementation and evolution of agreements resulting from local mediation initiatives, provide early warning in cases of deterioration, and either intervene themselves or alert relevant local, national,

and international partners to prevent the situation from worsening.

- MINUSCA should leverage its military capabilities to support local mediation initiatives. While this carries the risk of militarizing mediation support and should therefore be used sparingly, the mission's ability to deter spoilers could give the resulting local agreements an opportunity to take root.

- MINUSCA should continue to capitalize on its logistical infrastructure to support the engagement of parliamentarians in their constituencies and to help them, as well as members of government, heed the calls of citizens asking for the government of CAR to become more involved with and provide more support for local mediation initiatives.

4. **Build up appropriate human resources and skill sets:** Support for local mediation efforts is human-resources-intensive but not necessarily costly. Effective support requires sustained engagement with local dynamics and local actors. To engage in this way, the mission must be "fit for purpose"; it must have the human resources and skill sets necessary to implement this mandate.

- MINUSCA will require enhanced technical mediation expertise. A permanent mid- to senior-level mediation expert should be appointed to support the mission leadership in shaping the mission's work in this area, linking it to the mission's objectives, and ensuring an integrated all-of-mission response.

- Political affairs, civil affairs, and community liaison officers at MINUSCA headquarters and in field offices should be trained on mediation and facilitation.

- The mission's joint mission analysis center will need additional resources, particularly in field offices, in order to deepen its analysis of local dynamics and actors.

5. **Urge the government of CAR to take the lead in mediation and reconciliation efforts:** While local agreements are possible and have tangible short-term impacts, and while MINUSCA can do much to support local mediation initiatives, these are unsustainable without a national agreement. Likewise, no national agreement can

survive if it is not firmly rooted in local agreements and dynamics.

- A comprehensive approach to local and national mediation requires the government of CAR to engage with the process of reconciliation. The government must be encouraged to do so in word and deed. The government must develop an inclusive discourse on Central African citizenship and belonging. It must also lead by example and include representatives of all Central African citizens in government and positions of authority.

- This is not something that MINUSCA can do on its own. It is the responsibility of the UN Security Council to remind the government of its obligations in this respect, and it is incumbent upon the international community to bring collective pressure and support to bear for progress to be achieved in this realm.

6. **Compel armed groups to shoulder responsibility:** Armed groups responsible for the continuing violence, for the violation of agreements resulting from local initiatives, and for the subsequent grave threat to civilians must be held accountable for their actions.

- MINUSCA should identify and engage with those group leaders who have a real capacity to exert influence on the ground, implement the commitments they make, and show willingness to shoulder responsibility.

- The secretary-general should direct MINUSCA's senior leadership to identify spoilers and to keep a record of their actions.

- The Security Council should act upon the recommendations of the Panel of Experts on CAR and the reports of the secretary-general, effectively implement sanctions, and possibly impose new ones against armed group leaders responsible for fomenting violence.

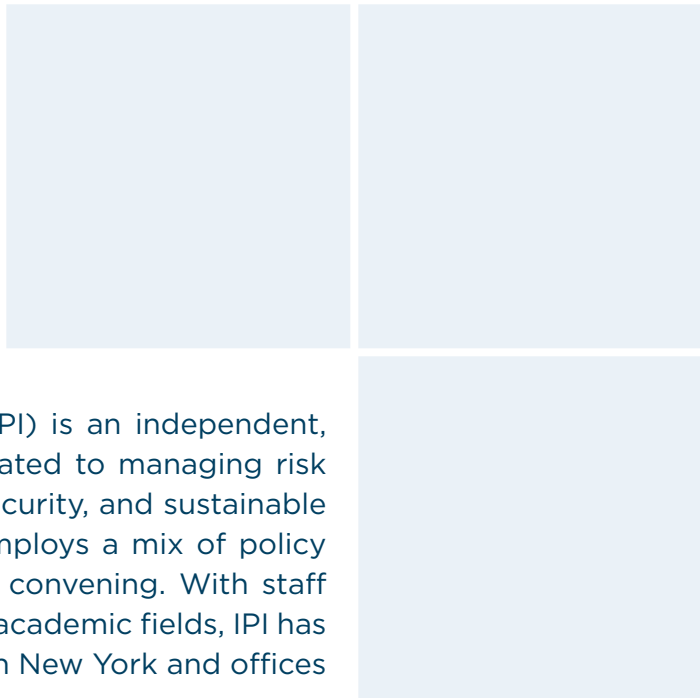## Annex: Timeline of Political and Security Developments in CAR

		Political Developments	Security Developments
2012	**November**		Central African and Chadian troops clash in Vakaga.
	December	ECCAS calls upon Séléka rebels to halt their advance on Bangui and agrees on the need for a cease-fire and immediate negotiations.	Séléka overruns northern and central CAR.
		France increases its military force in Bangui to nearly 600 troops.	Séléka begins rapid offensive southward.
2013	**January**	Séléka and President Bozizé sign a peace agreement in Libreville, Gabon, under the aegis of newly selected ECCAS mediator Denis Sassou-Nguesso. The agreement provides for a transitional government.	
		South Africa announces it will deploy 400 peacekeepers.	
		Cameroon, Gabon, and Rep. of Congo agree to deploy 120 peacekeepers in CAR under the auspices of FOMAC (to support MICOPAX troops).	
	March	French forces deploy to protect Bangui airport as Séléka advance into capital.	Séléka overruns Bangui, leaving over 200 civilians and 13 peacekeepers dead.
		Séléka suspends the constitution and dissolves parliament.	Bozizé flees the country.
			Séléka clashes with anti-Balaka in and around Bangui (through April).
	April	UNHCR expresses grave concern over alleged human rights violations.	
		ECCAS holds a high-level meeting in N'Djamena and declares an 18-month timeframe for the National Transitional Council (NTC) and a political roadmap.	
	August	Séléka leader Michel Djotodia is sworn in as president.	
	September	President Djotodia dissolves Séléka, which splinters into "ex-Séléka" groups.	
	November	UN expresses concern about the conscription of child soldiers.	Ex-Séléka murder a magistrate, leading to widespread protests in Bangui.
			Ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka clash, including reprisal attacks on civilians, in Bossangoa and Bouca (through December).
	December	France increases its force to 1,600 troops.	Ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka clash in Bangui, triggering violence that kills nearly 2,000 civilians and 11 peacekeepers and numerous others throughout the country.
		AU deploys MISCA, as authorized in July.	
2014	**January**	EU deploys EUFOR RCA under Security Council Res. 2134.	Numerous mass graves are discovered in and around Bangui. Djotodia's resignation prompts many ex-Séléka to leave Bangui and set up strongholds in Kaga Bandoro, Ndélé, Bambari, and Bangassou.
		President Djotodia resigns and is replaced by Catherine Samba-Panza as interim president.	

248 This timeline highlights the main political and security developments in CAR beginning in November 2012. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list of events.

Month		
March	UN-mandated investigators launch a probe into human rights violations, including genocide and ethnic cleansing.	Chadian peacekeepers are accused of killing 32 civilians in Bangui when they open fire on protesters.
April	Security Council authorizes MINUSCA under Res. 2149.	Ex-Séléka kill 22 civilians, including 3 MSF aid workers in Naga-Boguila.
May		Ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka clash in Galo.
June		Clashes between ex-Séléka factions, and between anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka intensify, leading to massacres in Bambari. Anti-Balaka and MISCA and Sangaris clash in Bambari.
July	Ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka sign cessation of hostilities agreement in Brazzaville under the auspices of Sassou-Nguesso. This paves the way for a new political process including nationwide popular consultations and the Bangui Forum.	
October		Anti-Balaka and Muslim community militias clash in Bangui, including reprisal attacks on civilians.
November		FPRC takes over Bria from RPRC following clashes.
December	UN establishes its first CAR field offices in Bouar, Bria, and Kaga Bandoro.	Anti-Balaka clash with armed Fulani herdsmen in Kouango.
	Ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka represented respectively by Djotodia and Bozizé sign an agreement in Nairobi under the auspices of Sassou-Nguesso. President Samba-Panza rejects the agreement in January.	Inter-communal tensions and clashes linked to seasonal migration occur in Nana-Mambere and Ounam prefectures, prompting an estimated 20,000 civilians to flee to DRC.
2015 January	UN-mandated investigators warn that war crimes are being committed and could spiral into genocide.	
February		MINUSCA and French forces launch an operation in Bria and expel ex-Séléka.
		Continued violence displaces tens of thousands, particularly in Bambari, Batangafo, and Kaga Bandoro.
April	French peacekeepers are implicated in allegations of sexual abuse of children.	
May	Bangui Forum results in the adoption of a Republican Pact and an agreement on a DDRR program.	Anti-Balaka clash with Fulani herdsmen in Gamboula-Amada Gaza, leading MINUSCA to heighten security.
July		MINUSCA is attacked while escorting a WHO convoy in Deba.
		Clashes between ex-Séléka factions in central and northeastern CAR continue.
September		Anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka clash in and around Bangui, ending a period of relative calm and leaving over 100 dead.

	Date	Political/Diplomatic	Security
	October	FPRC, MPC, and RPRC sign a cease-fire mediated by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in Sido, Chad. President Samba-Panza rejects the agreement.	
	December	A new constitution is approved by referendum.	
2016	January		Clashes become less frequent and lethal, though sporadic incidents continue, with increased LRA activity in the southeast.
	February	Faustin-Archange Touadéra wins presidential election.	
	March	ECCAS-led mediation effort ends with little progress on key issues.	Fulani herdsmen, anti-Balaka, and ex-Séléka clash in Bambari and Kaga Bandoro, displacing many (through May).
	July	Security Council renews MINUSCA mandate (Res. 2301) through November 2017.	
	August		Ex-Séléka men (many of whom subject of arrest warrants) attempt to leave Bangui in an armed convoy but are intercepted by MINUSCA.
	September		FPRC and UPC clash in Bria, and ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka clash in Kaga Bandoro, displacing 50,000 (through November).
	October	Angola invites ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka to Luanda under International Conference on the Great Lakes Region initiative, drawing international condemnation for proposing amnesty.	Security situation in Bangui begins to deteriorate after months of relative calm. Anti-Balaka clash with 3R near Bocaranga, Koui, and Ndim and attack MINUSCA in Makounzi Wali. UPC and FPRC clash throughout Ouaka province.
	November	National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan (RCPCA) is adopted by Touadéra government in Brussels, Belgium. Donors pledge €2 billion at a Brussels donor conference on CAR.	MINUSCA intervenes in Bambari, expelling the FPRC. This follows months of clashes between FPRC and UPC. FPRC attack UPC in Bria. FPRC forges alliances with MPC and anti-Balaka elements to attack UPC position close to Bambari.
	December	President Touadéra officially launches the government's local peace and reconciliation committees.	Clashes between FPRC and UPC in Bakala result in massacres and massive displacement.
2017	February	AU appoints Mohamed El Hacen Lebatt as special representative and launches an African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation with the support of Angola, Chad, DRC, and ECCAS.	
	March	Sant'Egidio begins mediation initiative in Rome.	

Month	Political/diplomatic developments	Conflict developments
May		Anti-Balaka attack civilians in Bangassou and MINUSCA base, killing 1 peacekeeper.
		Ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka clash in Bria, Alindao, Bangassou, and Mobaye, with civilian casualties.
June	Government and representatives of 13 armed groups sign a political accord for peace in Rome under the aegis of Sant'Egidio.	FPRC and anti-Balaka clash in Bria and on the Bria-Yalinga axis (through August).
	EU organizes a roundtable of mediators in Brussels, where all agree to adopt a single mediation roadmap.	Clashes between anti-Balaka and armed Muslim groups erupt in Zemio, temporarily displacing 5,000 people. All aid organizations withdraw from Zemio.
July	AU adopts its roadmap for peace and reconciliation in Libreville.	Several aid organizations withdraw from the country due to ongoing conflict.
		Anti-Balaka attack MINUSCA water convoy in Bangassou, killing 3 peacekeepers.
August	AU Commission appoints Bedializoum Moussa Nébié as its new special representative for CAR.	More than 1 million people, out of a population of 4.4 million, are displaced as a result of the conflict.
September	African Panel of Facilitators meets to discuss implementation of AU roadmap.	Clashes in Bria between FPRC and anti-Balaka continue.
	UN notes that the conflict exhibits early warning signs of genocide.	3R attacks Bocaranga, leading to wide-scale displacement. MINUSCA intervenes to retake the town.
	President Touadéra reshuffles his cabinet, appointing 16 new ministers including anti-Balaka and former ex-Séléka representatives, including a prominent former FPRC leader.	
	Government adopts a national reconciliation program and national strategy for the restoration of state authority. Touadéra appoints new prefects to all 16 prefectures.	
	High-level meeting on the situation in CAR takes places in the margin of the 72nd UN General Assembly.	
October	UN secretary-general calls for increase of MINUSCA's troop ceiling.	MINUSCA reports that more than 133 civilians have been killed by armed groups in Bria and Bakala between November 2016 and February 2017.
		Clashes between ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka increase in Batangafo.

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