Protection of civilians in practice – emerging lessons from the Central African Republic

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English summary

In December 2013, the rapid escalation of violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) led the African Union (AU) and France to deploy military forces in order to stabilise the country. Both deployments came as a direct result of the violence perpetrated against civilians in preceding months. This intervention represents the latest example a military operation where the protection of civilians is seen as a central objective and challenge for military forces.

The purpose of this report is two-fold. First, it provides a deeper understanding of the motivations and actions of the two main perpetrators in the conflict (the Séléka rebel alliance and the anti-balaka militias). In doing so, the report uses a scenario-based framework developed by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) to understand the particular types of threat civilians have faced during various phases of the conflict and in different geographical areas. Second, the report assesses how the AU and French military efforts to protect civilians have fared against existing guidance on how civilians can be protected in each of the scenarios identified.

The report finds that the conflict can be divided into four phases involving three, increasingly overlapping scenarios. During the first phase (August 2012 to September 2013), the conflict was primarily characterised by PREDATORY VIOLENCE conducted by the largely Muslim Séléka rebel alliance against the Christian population in particular. This violence prompted the emergence of the Christian anti-balaka self-defence militias. As a result, COMMUNAL CONFLICT erupted between Christian and animist communities on the one hand and Muslim communities on the other (September 2013–January 2014). The military intervention during this second phase largely served to contain this violence, but the initial focus on disarming the Séléka enabled the ETHNIC CLEANSING of Muslims by anti-balaka in western CAR in early 2014. At the same time, this third phase was also characterised by continuing COMMUNAL CONFLICT on smaller, but more geographically limited scale, as well as growing PREDATORY VIOLENCE now also amongst the anti-balaka. Since the spring of 2014, the fourth and present phase of the conflict has seen a shift of COMMUNAL CONFLICT towards the country's central regions together with its resurgence in parts of the northwest. This has occurred simultaneously with more widespread PREDATORY VIOLENCE on all sides, in line with a greater fragmentation of the Séléka and anti-balaka militias.

The report shows how the deployment of international forces to CAR has had a significant impact on the nature of threat against civilians, both positively and negatively. It illustrates how disarmament efforts required to contain COMMUNAL CONFLICT can make the situation worse, if it is done by disarming one of the parties first. Yet, many efforts to protect civilians have also had significant positive impacts. Although the situation remains fragile, COMMUNAL CONFLICT appears to have been largely contained in many parts of the country, including central areas that have seen more fighting recently. The protection of Muslim enclaves in western CAR and increased focus on confronting the anti-balaka, have effectively prevented the complete expulsion of Muslims from these areas. The greatest challenge facing the new UN peacekeeping operation in CAR lies in managing the dual task of containing further COMMUNAL VIOLENCE, whilst confronting the growing threat of PREDATORY VIOLENCE against civilians on all sides.

Sammendrag

Som følge av den eskalerende konflikten i den Sentralafrikanske Republikk (SAR), besluttet den Afrikanske Union (AU) og Frankrike å iverksette en stabiliseringsoperasjon i desember 2013. Denne intervensjonen kom som et direkte resultat av en økende vold mot sivile og representerer det siste eksempelet på militære operasjoner hvor beskyttelse av sivile er et sentralt mål.

Denne rapporten har to formål. For det første skal den gi en dypere forståelse av rasjonale bak voldshandlingene til de to viktigste aktørene i konflikten (den muslimske opprørsalliansen Séléka og de kristne anti-balaka militsene). Denne analysen gjøres ved hjelp av et scenario-basert rammeverk utviklet av Forsvarets forskningsinstitutt (FFI) for å kunne skille mellom ulike typer trusler sivile kan stå overfor i ulike faser av en konflikt og i geografiske områder. Videre vurderes den afrikanske og franske operasjonene opp mot retningslinjer FFI tidligere har utviklet for hvordan militærmakt kan brukes til å beskytte sivile mest effektivt i ulike situasjoner.

Rapporten viser at konflikten kan deles inn i fire ulike faser basert på voldstrusselen mot de sivile. I den første fasen (august 2012–september 2013) kan volden best beskrives som PREDATORY VIOLENCE, betegnet av opportunistisk vold og plyndring begått av Séléka-opprørere mot den kristne sivilbefolkningen spesielt. Denne volden ledet til dannelsen av såkalte anti-balaka selvforsvars-militser, hovedsakelig rekruttert fra den kristne befolkingen. Trefninger dem imellom utløste en full-skala COMMUNAL CONFLICT (september 2013–januar 2014) mellom den kristne og animistiske befolkningen på den ene siden, og den muslimske befolkningen på den andre. Til tross for at den franske og afrikanske intervensjonen bidro til å begrense hevnangrep befolkningsgruppene imellom, viste det seg at ved å avvæpne Séléka først gjorde de det også mulig for anti-balaka militser å initiere ETHNIC CLEANSING av muslimer i vestlige deler av landet (fra begynnelsen av 2014). Denne tredje fasen var i tillegg preget av fortsatt sekterisk vold i visse områder, samt økt PREDATORY VIOLENCE også blant anti-balaka militsene. Siden våren 2014 har konflikten gått inn i en fjerde fase, der COMMUNAL CONFLICT mellom kristne og muslimer blusset opp igjen med fornyet styrke i nordvestre SAR og spredde seg til sentrale deler av landet. I tillegg har forekomsten av PREDATORY VIOLENCE økt kraftig blant alle parter i tråd med fragmenteringen av Séléka og anti-balaka militsene.

Rapporten viser at den militære intervensjonen i SAR har påvirket trusselen mot de sivile i både positiv og negativ retning. Mens de franske og afrikanske styrkenes operasjoner i stor grad har lykkes med å redusere konflikten mellom befolkningsgruppene gjennom tilstedeværelse og atskillelse, illustrerer måten de gjennomførte avvæpningen på faren ved å rette innsatsen mot en av partene først i denne typen COMMUNAL CONFLICT. Samtidig har beskyttelsen av de resterende muslimske enklavene i vest-SAR, samt et større fokus på også å avvæpne anti-balaka militser, forhindret en fullstendig ETHNIC CLEANSING av muslimene i disse områdene. Den største utfordringen den nye FN-operasjonen i SAR står overfor i dag er å forhindre ytterligere gjengjeldelsesangrep mellom befolkningsgruppene, samtidig som man vil måtte konfrontere de opportunistiske militsene som stadig bedriver PREDATORY VIOLENCE mot sivile på alle sider.

Contents

Preface

This report is the fourth publication on the protection of civilians from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) in 2014. It builds on two earlier FFI-reports in particular:

1) The academic report 'Protection of civilians – military planning scenarios and implications', which identifies seven generic scenarios that describes situations where military forces may be expected to protect civilians from fundamentally different types of physical threats;[1] and,

2) The more practical 'Military planning and assessment guide for the protection of civilians', which is intended for any military staffs involved in the planning of operations where the protection of civilians is an important objective.[2]

Whilst the first report provides a theoretical break-down of the range of different threats civilians may be faced with – GENOCIDE, ETHNIC CLEANSING, REGIME CRACKDOWN, POST-CONFLICT REVENGE, COMMUNAL CONFLICT, PREDATORY VIOLENCE, and INSURGENCY – the second report provides concrete guidance on *how* military forces can be used to protect civilians in each of these scenarios. All of the guidance provided is based on lessons from previous operations, as well as in-depth case-studies of previous perpetrators of violence.[3]

The purpose of this report is to apply these theoretical scenarios used to identify threats against civilians and the military guidance on how they can be protected most effectively on the African and French military intervention in the Central African Republic (CAR). In doing so, the report provides a deeper understanding of the violence perpetrated against civilians during the last two years of conflict, as well as identifying new lessons that can be drawn from this most recent effort to protect civilians on the ground. As such, the report is part of the continuous revision of advice in light of new attempts at protecting civilians, upon which all of FFI's guidance on the protection of civilians is based. It also provides a starting point for understanding the potential of violence facing the newly deployed UN peacekeeping operation to CAR, which has protection of civilians as its highest priority.

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[1] Beadle, Alexander William (2014), 'Protection of civilians – military planning scenarios and implications', *FFI-rapport 2014/00519* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment).
[2] Beadle, Alexander William and Kjeksrud, Stian (2014), 'Military planning and assessment guide for the protection of civilians', *FFI-rapport 2014/00965* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment).
[3] See e.g. Våge, Anders Skeibrok (2014), 'Violence against civilians – case-studies of perpetrators', *FFI-rapport 2014/00520* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment).

1   Introduction

Protection of civilians has become a key objective in many of today's military operations. However, it is no longer simply about avoiding causing civilian casualties or assisting with the delivery of humanitarian aid. Military forces are increasingly expected to protect civilians from perpetrators who deliberately target them and are responsible for the vast majority of deaths. Yet, military operations have often failed to protect civilians under threat, which can partly be attributed to a lack of available guidance on *how* military forces can be used to protect civilians. Understanding how military force can be used more effectively to protect civilians ultimately relies on a thorough understanding of the particular threat they are faced with in the first place. However, civilians are attacked in many different ways and by various actors in today's conflicts.

In early December 2013, the rapid escalation of violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) prompted France to deploy military forces in order to support the already planned African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) to stabilise the situation. Both deployments came as a direct result of the violence perpetrated against civilians in preceding months. Whilst the conflict has largely been portrayed as a sectarian conflict between Muslim and Christian militias, the particular nature of threat to civilians – and how it has changed over time – has often escaped analyses of the situation. Assessing the French and African efforts to protect civilians so far requires a deeper analysis of the threat facing civilians in the first place.

The purpose of this report is therefore two-fold. First, it provides a deeper understanding of the motivations and actions of the two main perpetrators, namely the Séléka rebel alliance and the anti-balaka militias. In doing so, the report uses a scenario-based framework developed by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) to understand the particular nature of threat civilians have been faced with at different times and in different areas. It is found that the conflict can be divided into four phases characterised by three main scenarios: starting with PREDATORY VIOLENCE by Séléka forces from August 2012; followed by full-scale COMMUNAL CONFLICT between Christian and Muslim communities during the latter half of 2013, escalating into ETHNIC CLEANSING of Muslims in western parts of the country during the first half of 2014, whilst the current phase has seen a resurgence of COMMUNAL CONFLICT in central parts of the country together with PREDATORY VIOLENCE becoming more common on all sides. Secondly, the report assesses the French and AU efforts to protect civilians so far, based on what existing guidance says about the best way to protect in each of these scenarios. Overall, the report highlights the potential and limitations of what military forces can and cannot do to protect civilians, which holds lessons for the newly deployed UN peacekeeping mission to CAR (MINUSCA).

The report begins by briefly explaining the scenario-based methodology developed by FFI, which is used to distinguish between different types of physical threats civilians may be under in today's conflicts. Next, the background to the most recent conflict in CAR is briefly summarised. The following four chapters describe each of the conflict's four phases, based on the particular type of physical threat posed by different perpetrators against various segments of the civilian population, with an assessment of the military operations undertaken to protect civilians during each phase. In the concluding chapter, some thoughts are shared on the potential for further violence.

2   Methodology

A key trend in conflicts today is that civilians are often deliberately targeted by many different types of armed actors. As a result, physical protection of civilians from these actors has become an increasingly important objective for military forces in all types of military operations. Such protection is only achieved, however, if one is able to reduce the current level of threat, without causing more harm. As such, the basic question of what military forces can and cannot do to protect civilians, ultimately depends on the particular type of threat they are faced with. Thus, a principal recommendation on improving the protection of civilians has been to acquire a better understanding of why and how perpetrators attack civilians in the first place.[4] Yet, civilians are attacked in so many very different ways and by different types of perpetrators, even within the same armed conflict. Thus, in order to assess the utility of various military actions, it is necessary to break down the vast scope of threats civilians may be faced with into different categories.

The methodological starting point for this report is the seven military planning scenarios previously developed by FFI (summarised in Table 2.1 on the right), which describe fundamentally different types of physical threats one may be expected to protect civilians from.[5] These scenarios have been identified on basis of five parameters, which describe various aspects of perpetrators: 1) the types of actors usually responsible; 2) their rationale for targeting civilians; 3) the strategies and tactics used; 4) the capabilities they are likely to require; and 5) the expected outcome if they succeed. Together, these scenarios seek to capture the scope of different threats civilians may be faced with, ranging from the most serious threat of extermination (GENOCIDE) to limited violence by rebels who only seek to undermine a government's credibility (INSURGENCY). Importantly, several scenarios may unfold simultaneously within the same area of operations, in certain geographic areas, or during different phases of a conflict. The scenarios therefore provide a way of distinguishing between threats that will require different military responses.

This report uses this scenario-methodology to identify and distinguish between different types of threats civilians have been faced with during the last two years of conflict in CAR. In doing so, the analysis is based on open sources of information that are typically available in the midst of a crisis, such as news reports, human rights reports, and military situation reports. Based on the scenarios identified, the military actions undertaken by the African and French are then assessed against existing guidance on what military forces can and cannot do to protect civilians in each of the scenarios in theory.[6] A key finding of this report is how intervening military forces can successfully contain violence by doing many of the right things, but conducting them in the wrong manner can also enable the escalation of violence from one scenario to another.

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[4] Sewall, Sarah, Raymond, Dwight and Chin, Sally (2010), *MARO: Mass Atrocity Response Operations: A Military Planning Handbook* (Harvard Kennedy School: Carr Center for Human Rights Policy); Beadle, Alexander William (2011), 'Finding the 'Utility of Force to Protect' – towards a Theory on Protection of Civilians', *FFI-rapport 2011/01889* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment); Kelly, Max (2011), *Military Planning to Protect Civilians: Proposed Guidance for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, September 2011 (Washington DC: The Henry L. Stimson Center); Mahony, Liam (2013), *Non-military strategies for civilian protection in the DRC*, Fieldview Solutions, March, 2013.

[5] Beadle (2014), p. 24.

[6] Beadle and Kjeksrud (2014).

Generic scenario	1. Type of actor	2. Rationale	3. Strategies and tactics	4. Relevant mil. capabilities	5. Expected outcome
GENOCIDE Halabja ('88) Rwanda ('94) Srebrenica ('95)	States, or the militarily superior actor	To exterminate a certain group	Destroy existence of a group through several, simultaneous mass killings, deportation, camps, systematic rape to prevent reproduction	Command and control, freedom of movement for special or irregular units, sufficient small arms	Majority of targeted civilians killed (>50%), in relatively short time
ETHNIC CLEANSING Bosnia ('92–95) Kosovo ('99) Kyrgyzstan ('10)	States, or the militarily superior actor	To expel a certain group from a specific territory	Force targeted group to leave through threats, demonstrative killings, brutality, mass-rape, destruction of property	Command and control, freedom of movement for special or irregular units	Only a few per cent killed, but vast majority of victims expelled (~90%); destruction of victim homes and cultural buildings
REGIME CRACKDOWN Iraq ('86-89) Darfur ('03–) Libya ('11) Syria ('11–) Islamic State in Iraq and Syria ('13–)	Authoritarian regimes, or de facto authorities in an area	To control restless populations, on basis of real or perceived affiliation with opposition	Violently repress the population at large, through selective and indiscriminate violence, threats, mass-detention, rape as terror, massive destruction, occasional massacres	Command and control from regime, freedom of movement for regular forces, heavy weapons, special/irregular units in support	Mostly combatant deaths, gradual increase in civilian deaths due to heavy weapons and in accordance with intensity of fighting; large-scale displacement; widespread destruction of population centres
POST-CONFLICT REVENGE Kosovo (post 99) Iraq (post 03)	Individuals or mobs	To avenge past crimes on a personal basis	Tit-for-tat score-settling through criminal acts of violence, such as murder, arson, kidnapping, looting	Freedom of movement for individuals and small groups to access victims	Only a few killed (dozens, hundreds), but groups associated with perpetrator may flee following relatively little violence
COMMUNAL CONFLICT Ituri ('99–03) Iraq ('06–07) Jonglei ('09–)	Whole tribal, ethnic or sectarian communities (possibly with outside support)	To avenge a previous attack and to deter further retribution in order to protect themselves	Attempts to coerce other community into submission through massacres, abductions, raids, destruction of homes and means of survival, often seeking to maximise violence	Freedom of movement to reach other communities, access to deadlier weapons and means of communication is associated with higher lethality	Relatively high number of people killed and abducted, especially women and children; livelihoods stolen or killed; temporary displacement in homogenous areas, more gradual withdrawal to 'their own' in mixed areas
PREDATORY VIOLENCE Renamo ('75–92) RUF ('91–'02) LRA ('94–)	Rebel groups (predatory behaviour)	To survive or make a profit by exploiting civilians	Coerce civilians into compliance through plunder, taxation, forced recruitment, opportunistic rape, brutality, especially against 'easy targets'	Freedom of movement to pick time and place of attack, operational secrecy, outside support, possibly central command	Temporary, but large-scale displacement in affected areas and disproportionately many relative to the number of people actually attacked; many abductions, especially of young adolescents
INSURGENCY FARC ('64–) Taliban ('06–) al-Shabaab ('06–)	Rebel groups (classic insurgents with political or ideological objectives)	To control populations upon which they depend and undermine trust in their rivals	Selective and indiscriminate violence, through threats, targeted killings, bombings, retribution, depending on their level of control	Freedom of movement to pick time and place of attack, access to indiscriminate and explosive weapons	Fewer killed and injured than in other scenarios, most due to indiscriminate weapons; gradual displacement from areas of heavy fighting

Table 2.1   Generic military planning scenarios for the protection of civilians

3   Background to the recent conflict in CAR

CAR has a long history of internal conflict, *coups d'état* and civil unrest dating back to the country's independence from France in 1960. Yet, the more immediate backdrop to the current crisis can be traced back to the rule of President Francois Boizizé, who came to power in a coup in 2003. The recent conflict is closely interlinked with the historical marginalisation of large parts of the country's geographically remote northern regions, especially the northeast.[7] The decision of three consecutive Presidents – Kolingba (1981–1993), Patassé (1993–2003) and Bozizé (2003–2013) to ignore these areas can be explained by the fact that the incumbents had no vested interests in the relevant regions. All three regimes were characterised by a principal concern with their own survival, which was primarily ensured through the politicisation of ethnicity. For example, President Bozizé consolidated his regime by giving preferential treatment to his own ethnic group, the Gbaya, which resides in the northwest. Consequently, throughout the 2000s, Bozizé failed to alleviate the security situation in the north, which at the time faced challenges from rebels supporting the ousted President Patassé as well as incursions by other armed groups, especially from neighbouring Chad.[8] In short, a pattern of ethnic favouritism, regional neglect and foreign interference left large parts of the north largely void of state security and social services.

Soon, Bozizé's regime confronted various rebel movements in the north, which represented a variety of actors and interests, including discontented former members of the Bozizé regime, various long-standing political opponents of Bozizé, including supporters of former President Patassé, and numerous community defence groups and militias from the north (mostly northeast) fighting to end the marginalisation of their respective ethnic groups. By 2006, fighting between CAR armed forces and these rebel groups had intensified to the extent that French and Chadian troops intervened in support of the regime and forced the rebel groups to the negotiating table. In 2007 and 2008, the government signed peace agreements with the main rebel actors, which included an amnesty, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), and participation in the management of state affairs. Later in 2008, an Inclusive Political Dialogue agreed to set up a government of unity, hold legislative and presidential elections in 2011, create a truth and reconciliation commission, and reform the security sector.

Meanwhile, CAR saw another round of international intervention, aimed at stabilizing the very north-eastern regions from which a large portion of the anti-Bozizé rebel groups emerged. The European Union Force (EUFOR) Tchad/RCA was launched in January 2008 to protect Sudanese refugees and Chadian and Central African local populations from an upsurge of cross-border raids by Sudanese rebels. According to its own reports, the presence of EUFOR Tchad/RCA contributed positively to a greater sense of security in its area of operation.[9] However, the mission

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[7] International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition', *Africa Report №203*, (11 June 2013), http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/203-central-african-republic-priorities-of-the-transition.pdf, p. 6.

[8] Burchard, S., 'The Central African Conflict is about far more than religion', *Think Africa Press*, 26 February 2013, http://thinkafricapress.com/central-african-republic/identity-politics-coding-religion.

[9] European Union External Action, 'EUFOR Tchad/RCA Mission Description', http://www.eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eufor-tchad-rca/mission-description/index_en.htm.

was only authorised to stay for one year, before it was replaced by the UN Mission in CAR and Chad (MINURCAT) in March 2009. From the very beginning, MINURCAT suffered from insufficient troops and operational and logistical shortcomings. These constraints were largely due to reservations on part of the government in Chad with regard to the mandate and deployment of the mission.[10] As a result, MINURCAT's ability to establish security in north-eastern CAR was limited at best, and in December 2010 it withdrew. Subsequent developments at the national political level in CAR did not alleviate the country's security situation either.

Bozizé largely failed to fulfil the commitments of the 2008 Inclusive Political Dialogue. While the 2011 elections did take place, they were marred by accusations of fraud, notably because they saw a large influx of Bozize´s family members and other close associates into parliament. The agreed reforms of the security sector were not implemented, development assistance from Bangui to the north remained absent, and the attitude of both the government and the rebel groups meant that the DDR program never was implemented in any meaningful way.[11] Additionally, previous human rights violations committed by Bozizé's Republican Guard were seen to go unpunished, as the state judiciary failed to hold the perpetrators accountable.[12] On top of all this, suspicions were raised that Bozizé planned constitutional changes that would allow him a third term in office.

Map 3.1   Map of the Central African Republic[13]

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[10] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad', S/2010/611, 1 December 2010, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/611, pp. 11–13.

[11] ICG, 'Priorities of the transition', pp. 1–2.

[12] Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'I Can Still Smell the Dead', September 2013, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/car0913_ForUpload.pdf, p. 32.

[13] Reproduced with permission from UN (2011), *Central African Republic*, Map No. 4048, Rev. 4, United Nations, (November 2011), Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section.

4 First phase – the Séléka rebel alliance seizes power

The most recent round of fighting in CAR can be traced back to the emergence of the Séléka rebel alliance, their eventual overthrow of Bozizé, and the subsequent intensification of violence against civilians. Throughout this first phase of the conflict – from August 2012 to September 2013 – the main perpetrators of violence against civilians were mostly Séléka rebels. Their motivations can best be understood in terms of PREDATORY VIOLENCE, which was evident in how violence only intensified after they had seized power. There was no military effort aimed specifically at protecting civilians during this phase. In its absence, the Séléka violence, which primarily was aimed at the Christian population, sowed the seeds of a deep antagonism against the Muslim population at large.

4.1 The formation of the Séléka rebel alliance

The grievances against Bozizé's regime eventually led to the formation of the Séléka alliance in August 2012, which united rebel factions from several well-known political-military groupings, including the rebel units that had signed the 2007 and 2008 peace agreements. The Séléka was nevertheless an alliance of convenience, as several of its member factions were former rivals that represented opposing ethnic groups.[14] The alliance was held together by the common objective of forcing the regime to respect and implement the 2007 and 2008 peace agreements.[15] Specifically, they sought to implement the recommendations of the Inclusive Political Dialogue, financial compensation for the rebels, the release of political prisoners, and the opening of investigations into past crimes committed against the populations in the north by Bozizé's troops.[16] At the same time, one of the driving forces behind the alliance's formation was the personal ambitions of side-lined politicians and former opponents of the president who were looking for a way to return to power.[17]

In addition to the collection of community-based rebel groups and political opponents of Bozizé, the Séléka also attracted a significant number of mercenaries and fighters from various militias and rebel groups in neighbouring South-Sudan and Chad.[18] The trade-off involved foreign commanders bringing heavy weapons and well-trained soldiers to the alliance, in exchange for access to the country's diamond resources as well as looting and ivory poaching.[19]

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[14] FIDH, 'Central African Republic: They Must all Leave or Die', *Investigative Report №636a*, (June 2014), http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_rca_2014-uk-04.pdf, p. 64.

[15] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 63.

[16] HRW, 'I Can Still Smell the Dead', p. 30.

[17] Ingerstad, G., 'Central African Republic – Trapped in a Cycle of Violence? Causes, Conflict Dynamic and Prospects for Peace', *FOI-R--3877--SE*, (May 2014), (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency), p. 31.

[18] Wood, G., 'Hell is an Understatement: A report from the bloody, crumbling Central African Republic, *New Republic*, 30 April 2014, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117519/central-african-republic-conflict-africas-bloodiest-fight.

[19] Agger, K., 'Behind the Headlines: Drivers of Violence in Central African Republic', *The Enough Project*, (May 2014), http://www.enoughproject.org/files/CAR%20Report%20-%20Behind%20the%20Headlines%205.1.14.pdf, p. 11.

Following early victories on the battlefield, the rebels gained confidence and thus increased their demands, radicalised their discourse, and called for Bozizé's departure. Moreover, the movement gathered support as it advanced on Bangui, its ranks filling with people from the centre of the country.[20] The haphazard band of unlikely allies was thus gradually transformed into a genuine rebellion aimed at overthrowing the president. In December 2012, Séléka launched a major offensive and rapidly occupied three main cities and several towns in the north and centre, and took up position in the strategic central town of Sibut.[21] The road to Bangui seemed wide open.

At this point the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) stepped in and deployed the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic (MICOPAX), which halted the rebel advance. Subsequently, ECCAS masterminded the so-called Libreville Agreement of 11 January 2013, which required Bozizé to hold legislative elections within one year, set up a transitional government for twelve months with a prime minister from the opposition, demanded that both parties signed a ceasefire agreement, and lastly stipulated that Bozizé would remain in power until 2016.[22]
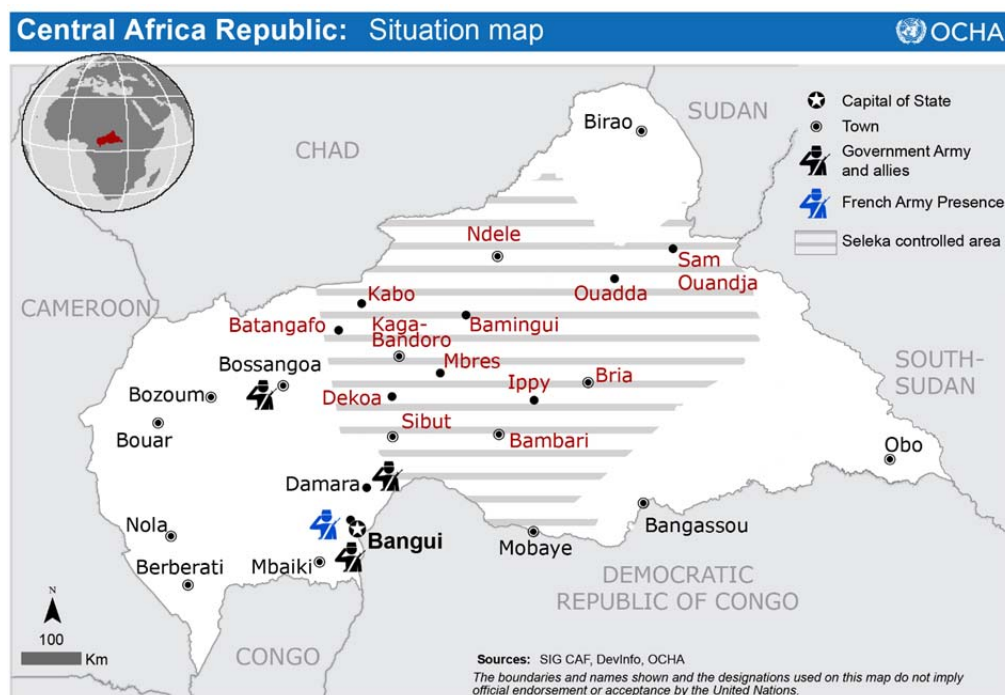
Map 4.1   *Areas controlled by the Séléka as of 17 January 2014, following their initial advance[23]*

For all intents and purposes, the consent given by both Bozizé and Séléka was only a façade. Dissatisfaction within Séléka immediately became apparent, when one of its leaders denounced

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[20] ICG, 'Priorities of the Transition', p. 6.

[21] FIDH, 'Central African Republic: A Country in the Hands of Seleka War Criminals', *Investigative Report №616a*, (September 2013), http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rca616a2013basdef.pdf, p. 9.

[22] Ibid. p. 10.

[23] Map courtesy of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Central African Republic Situation Map (as of 17 Jan 2013)', *Reliefweb*, 18 January 2013, http://reliefweb.int/map/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-situation-map-17-jan-2013.

the agreement and broke the ceasefire in a number of towns.[24] Other military commanders blamed the emerging Séléka leader, Michel Djotodia, for signing the agreement too fast and for considering his own interests rather that of the fighters. Moreover, the common feeling in the Central African political class was that Bozizé would not respect the Libreville commitments.[25] Such suspicions were confirmed by actions on part of the regime, such as its request to South Africa for military aid, delaying releasing political prisoners, and the positioning of members of Bozizé's clan in the government of national unity.[26] On 23 March 2013, the Séléka once against advanced on Bangui and this time seized the city. The following day, Bozizé fled the country and Djotodia set himself up as President of transition awaiting new elections.[27] This state of affairs was *de facto* recognised by the international community during two regional summits held in N'Djamena, Chad.

4.2   Predatory violence at the hands of the Séléka

While the Séléka always claimed to be liberators, bringing peace and security to the people, civilian populations were targeted from the very beginning of their offensive. Situations where rebel groups are the main perpetrators of violence against civilians can in theory be divided into two different categories – or scenarios – based on their motivations for targeting civilians, their modus operandi, type of organisation, and the expected outcome in terms of civilian suffering. The first scenario is INSURGENCY, where the perpetrators are rebel groups motivated by a political or ideological objective and violence against civilians is intended to serve a strategic purpose. In this scenario, attacks on civilians are both used as a way of controlling the population to gain support and supplies, and to undermine the authority of their rivals through indiscriminate attacks in areas controlled by their opponent. The other scenario is PREDATORY VIOLENCE, where the perpetrators are rebel groups who primarily exploit civilians to ensure their own survival or to profit economically. These perpetrators have few incentives to limit their violence against civilians as they do not seek their support, and are prone to exert brutal violence to suppress any resistance, loot, tax, and forcibly recruit civilians.

As the Séléka alliance moved down towards Bangui from the north-east, the civilian population was subjected to widespread looting and indiscriminate violence – comparable to that of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone during the 1990s.[28] Those who resisted were threatened, injured or killed. In the process, thousands of homes were destroyed and whole communities forced to flee into the bush. The violence was primarily, but not exclusively, aimed at non-Muslim populations.[29] Although these early abuses against civilians can be understood within the framework of the INSURGENCY scenario (motivated by a desire to control the

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[24] ICG, 'Priorities of the transition', p. 14.

[25] Vircoulon, T., 'Failure has Many Fathers: The Coup in the Central African Republic', *Think Africa Press*, 28 March 2013, http://thinkafricapress.com/central-african-republic/failure-has-many-fathers-coup-central-african-republic.

[26] ICG, 'Priorities of the transition', pp. 10, 14–15.

[27] FIDH, 'A country in hands of Seleka war criminals', p. 10.

[28] For an account of the RUF's predatory violence, see e.g. Gberie, L. (2005), *A dirty war in West Africa: the RUF and the destruction of Sierra Leone* (Indiana University Press)

[29] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', pp. 14–15.

population), the targeting of violence soon took on a distinctive PREDATORY character. In fact, the actual behaviour of the Séléka did not appear to limit violence as they gained control, but rather to the contrary.

Firstly, there was little or no popular resistance against the rebellion *per se*. The central government was already absent from large parts of the country, and had failed to provide security for the population for years. In fact, the Republican Guard of Bozizé and the Central African army had been one of the main perpetrators of human rights violations in the north, being responsible for summary executions, unlawful killings and village burnings.[30] In other words, attacking civilians in order to incite insecurity and thus win their support as the only true guarantor of security seems meaningless. Secondly, it was not until *after* the Séléka took power that violence against civilians really intensified. There is consensus among humanitarian organisations on the ground that the abuses in fact escalated after the Séléka coup. In December 2013, the International Crisis Group stated that the Séléka was carrying out a 'countrywide, criminal operation that has no other motive than personal gain'.[31] This suggests that violence against civilians during the months of Séléka dominance, from the coup in March until the tide started turning in the fall of 2013, is best described as PREDATORY VIOLENCE.

When Séléka took control of Bangui, the rebels reportedly went on a looting spree, killing civilians, raping women and settling scores with members of the Central African army. During looting, it was common for the rebels to shoot randomly to make civilians leave their houses. Summary executions were also reported as a normalcy in connection with looting and raids.[32] Men believed to be members of the army were also summarily executed. Violence also escalated in the countryside, where the additional practice of burning villages became customary.[33] Evidence indicates that the Séléka forces' targeting of small communities and civilians was used as a means to quell resistance in order to facilitate plundering. In particular, the practice of destroying villages can be explained as a policy of submission in that every village that resisted looting is burned to the ground. An example of this occurred on 14 April 2013 in the area of Mbres-Kaga-Bandoro, where Séléka set fire to 272 homes and killed six persons in six villages in retribution for the murder of one of its fighters by a villager.[34] Similar examples of retaliatory killings and arson are abundant in reports from the ground.[35] Even though the Séléka did not

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[30] HRW, 'State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians', *Human Rights Watch Report*, (September 2007), http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/car0907webwcover_0.pdf.

[31] ICG, 'Central African Republic: Better Late than Never', *Crisis Group Africa Briefing №96*, 2 December 2013, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/central-africa/B096-central-african-republic-better-late-than-never.pdf, p. 3.

[32] HRW, 'Central African Republic: Rampant Abuses After Coup', *News Release*, 10 May 2013, http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/central-african-republic-rampant-abuses-after-coup.

[33] See HRW, 'Central African Republic: Seleka Forces Kill Scores, Burn Villages', *News Release*, 27 June 2013, http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/27/central-african-republic-seleka-forces-kill-scores-burn-villages

[34] FIDH, 'A country in the hands of Seleka war criminals', p. 33.

[35] See for example HRW, 'I can still smell the dead'.

always spare Muslim communities and house-holds, Christian communities were targeted with particular viciousness.[36]

Based on eye-witness accounts and reports from the ground, a clear *modus operandi* for Séléka attacks on civilians during the year of 2013 can be identified: the Séléka forces would typically arrive in villages by car or motorcycle and start shooting indiscriminately. People would flee towards the bush, often being shot in the back as they were running. Once the village was empty, the Séléka forces would loot the houses, often setting several of them on fire.[37] Another well-documented strategy of the Séléka was to plunder CAR's natural resources. Violence and threats against local populations were used to extract diamond revenue through forced labour, theft and cheap purchases from local traders.[38] In Kouango, an area where coffee is grown, the Séléka reportedly demanded coffee bags by the ton from local traders, which they would then sell on themselves. In the gold-rich Bakala region, civilians were forced to work the mines.[39] Again violence was commonly used to coerce them into obedience.

The upsurge in attacks on the civilian population after the Séléka seized power can largely be explained by the evolution of the alliance's organisation. Starting with approximately 5,000 men in August 2012, the rebel organisation had grown to an estimated 20,000 fighters by May 2013. Most of the new 'recruits' were idle and unemployed men from CAR, Sudan, South Sudan and Chad, who were attracted by the prospects of pillaging and racketeering.[40] Many of these were reported to be former criminals, including robbers and poachers.[41] The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the majority of the foreign elements in the coalition were Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries. By March 2013, some sources professed that such elements made up as much as 80 percent of the organisation.[42] This image is confirmed by witness interviews conducted by Human Right Watch, in which most witnesses said they believed the majority of Séléka came from Chad or Sudan, largely because most of the fighters did not seem to speak the local language Sango.[43] As already mentioned, the participation of these elements was motivated by the prospect of profit, either through plundering or illegal extraction of resources. It is thus not surprising that Amnesty, civil society organisations, diplomats, and senior government officials all profess that the Chadian and Sudanese elements of the Séléka had been responsible for the majority of Séléka's human rights violations.[44]

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[36] Bolopion, P., 'Crisis in the Central African Republic: Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, 19 November 2013', in Human Rights Watch, *Central African Republic: Materials Published by Human Rights Watch since the March 2013 Seleka Coup*, (March 2014), http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/car0314compendium_web.pdf, p. 96.

[37] HRW, 'I can still smell dead', pp. 39–45.

[38] Agger, 'Behind the headlines', p. 1.

[39] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', pp. 14–15.

[40] FIDH, 'A country in the hands of Seleka war criminals', p. 47.

[41] Ibid. p. 12.

[42] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 4.

[43] HRW, 'I can still smell the dead', p. 33.

[44] Amnesty, 'Human rights crisis spiraling out of control', pp. 11–12.

The Séléka leadership also found that the state coffers had been emptied by the Bozizé regime.[45] Consequently, the new Séléka government found themselves in a situation where they did not have the means to equip, feed, clothe and pay all of their fighters.[46] Moreover, they soon discovered that they neither had the capacity to control them. The heterogeneity of the Séléka alliance emerged as a dividing factor as the only unifying goal had been achieved. From the very beginning, different armed groups had been accountable to their own hierarchies and as the rebels started operating in smaller groups to control various towns and villages, one saw the emergence of zone commanders, who wielded exclusive control of their men and controlled their regions with complete impunity.[47]

Seleka President Djotodia and his ministers were often blatantly ignored by their local commanders, who reportedly rejected and forced the governors Djotodia had appointed to run the provinces in July 2013 back to Bangui.[48] Consequently, even though the Djotodia government understood the counter-productive effects of wide-scale human rights violations and looting – government officials in fact repeatedly denied that attacks on civilians were carried out by the Séléka[49] – efforts to limit these activities were futile. Calls for Séléka fighters to return to their barracks and attempts to disarm them by MICOPAX and the few police resources available, were largely ineffective.[50] Even when the new president officially dissolved the rebel coalition in September 2013, Séléka combatants continued to terrorise the population.[51] The result was that Séléka sucked the country dry of its public and privately-owned possessions, and local businesses, public buildings, private homes and churches were looted. Customs, border crossings and extraction sites of natural resources were all controlled by Séléka fighters.[52]

4.3   Assessment of military operations to protect civilians

During this first phase of the conflict, no international force was deployed specifically to protect civilians from the Séléka. The forces that did intervene were deployed out of concern for the country's stability. Notably, ECCAS, alarmed by Séléka's lightening offensive in December 2012, re-deployed and reinforced MICOPAX – a small stabilizing mission that had been in operation since 2008 to follow up on the implementation of the 2007 and 2008 peace accords – in order to prevent the state's collapse. As the Séléka's advanced, the mission was re-tasked with halting the rebellion. MICOPAX forces were primarily concentrated around Damara, the final strategic town on the road to Bangui. Arguably, it was the presence of this 700-strong multinational African force and warnings by ECCAS that an attack on Damara would be a

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[45] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 11.
[46] Amnesty International, 'Central African Republic: Human Rights Crisis Spiraling out of Control', *Amnesty International Publications*, (October 2013), http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR19/003/2013/en/7cb18014-e52a-4ab6-a879-4ac73d98c8af/afr190032013en.pdf, p. 12.
[47] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 70.
[48] Amnesty, 'Human rights crisis spiraling out of control', pp. 12–13.
[49] HRW, 'Seleka forces kill scores, burn villages'.
[50] ICG, 'Better late than never', p. 6,
[51] Ibid. p. 3.
[52] FIDH, 'A country in the hands of Seleka war criminals', p. 35.

declaration of war against the organisation's member states, which persuaded the Séléka to enter into the negotiations that culminated in the Libreville peace accords.[53] Conversely, when the Séléka advanced on Bangui for a second time in March 2013, MICOPAX failed to react.[54] This can largely be explained by the fact that the ECCAS countries no longer supported Bozizé.[55]

Originally a peace-building mission of limited scope, MICOPAX was further unprepared to respond to the new circumstances following the Séléka coup and the widespread presence of heavily armed militias throughout the country. Consequently, it remained overwhelmed in the face of Séléka violence and plundering. During this first phase of the present conflict in CAR, MICOPAX was only found in three locations outside the capital and these deployments rarely conducted patrols beyond 20 km of their bases.[56] Efforts were made to assist the transitional authorities in restoring law and order, notably through the disarmament and cantonment of Séléka fighters, yet the joint efforts were largely futile.

At the same time, various states that had been engaged in CAR during previous rebellions against Bozizé still maintained military presences. The long-term ally and security guarantor of the Bozizé regime, Chad, promised to mobilise 2,000 soldiers in December 2012, and contributed significantly to the defence of Damara. The remaining troops were meant to assist the CAR army during a counteroffensive to retake the cities that had fallen into the hands of rebels.[57] However, as the Libreville agreement crumbled, the Chadian president and regional power-broker Déby withdrew his support for Bozizé and allegedly tacitly approved the Séléka's second push on the capital in March.[58] Chad's withdrawal of support can in part be explained by Bozizé's new military partnership with South Africa, which deployed 200 troops in Bangui in January 2013. The South African contingent was installed to support and train the ill-equipped forces of Bozizé in a bid to become the regime's new security guarantor. However, a Séléka attack on their base in Bangui at the time of the coup left 13 South-African soldiers dead and caused an outcry at home, eventually forcing President Zuma to withdraw the contingent. In its aftermath, questions have also been raised as to why the deployment remained so passive when the rebels started gaining ground.[59] Finally, there was a French military presence under the name of Opération Boali, which had an even more limited objective. Although these forces were reinforced after the coup, they

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[53] Sayara, S., 'Central Africa on the Brink, Rebels Halt Their Advance', *The New York Times*, 2 January 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/03/world/africa/central-africa-on-the-brink-rebels-halt-their-advance.html.
[54] ICG, 'Priorities of the transition', p. 12.
[55] Ingerstad, 'Trapped in a cycle of violence?', p. 35.
[56] FIDH, 'A country in hands of Seleka war criminals', p. 19.
[57] Marboua, H., '2,000 troops from Chad to fight CAR rebels', *Associated Press for Yahoo News*, 19 December 2012, http://news.yahoo.com/2-000-troops-chad-fight-car-rebels-114923546.html.
[58] Hicks, C., 'Chad: Déby's Misstep in the Central African Republic', *Think Africa Press*, 27 January 2014, http://thinkafricapress.com/chad/deby-overstretch-car-central-african-republic-seleka-djotodia.
[59] BBC News, 'Jacob Zuma: 13 South African soldiers killed in CAR', 25 March 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-21923624.

were only tasked with protecting French nationals in the country and securing French strategic interests, notably the Bangui airport.[60]

To conclude, none of the international military involvements during the first phase of the conflict attempted to protect civilians, but rather to bolster the regime or securing national interests and citizens. The UN had an Integrated Peacebuilding Office (BINUCA) present, but it was not a peacekeeping operation. All it could do was to call upon the parties to respect the law of armed conflict and monitor abuses. Ultimately, none of the military actors present were willing to do what it would take to pacify the Séléka and safeguard the regime – and after the coup they seemed indifferent to the predation of the rebels as long as the country did not collapse completely.

Faced with the kind of PREDATORY VIOLENCE perpetrated by Séléka, a key lesson from previous cases is that civilian protection requires direct confrontation with the perpetrators to deter attacks and eventually coerce them into stopping.[61] These types of perpetrators are possible to deter, precisely because they are driven by opportunity and only attack civilians because they are 'easy targets'. In the absence of any confrontation, PREDATORY VIOLENCE is likely to endure as long as the perpetrators have the opportunity to continue. Consequently, a permanent reduction in the threat posed by the Séléka during this phase is likely to have required offensive operations to coerce them to disarm and demobilise, as was eventually done with the RUF in Sierra Leone. This did not become an option in CAR until the second phase of the conflict.

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[60] Ministère de la Défense (France), 'Centrafrique: Opération Boali', http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/operation-boali/l-operation-boali.
[61] Beadle and Kjeksrud (2014), pp. 21–22, p. 35.

5 Second phase – rise of the anti-balaka and sectarian strife

A second phase of the recent conflict in CAR began with the rise of the mainly Christian anti-balaka self-defence movement, which was accompanied by full-scale sectarian conflict between Christians and animists on one side and Muslims on the other. This period between September 2013 and January 2014 can best be understood as COMMUNAL CONFLICT, where the primary motivation of both parties was a combination of revenge and self-protection. The resulting cycles of revenge attacks prompted outside intervention by African and French forces to protect civilians and restore security. Although these forces largely succeeded in containing cycles of killings, the disarmament of the Séléka alliance before other militias enabled further escalation of violence against the minority Muslim population.

5.1 Outbreak of full-scale communal conflict

> The anti-balaka is not a political party. It is a group of people who rose up against the massacres committed by the Séléka and the mercenaries from Sudan and Chad.[62]
>
> *Lieutenant Yvan Konaté, anti-balaka Chief of Staff*

As the quote by the anti-balaka's chief of staff indicates, the emergence of anti-balaka militias was directly linked to the abuses committed by Séléka in Bangui and the western prefectures from March 2013 onwards. The movement originated from the Bossangoa and Bocaranga regions in the north-western prefectures of Ouham and Ouham-Pende, the traditional strongholds of former presidents Patassé and Bozizé, which had been particularly subjected to Séléka abuses. Gradually their ranks swelled as young people flocked to join, which in turn allowed them to expand their area of operations and influence to include most of the northwest. A key feature of their rapid success and advance has been identified as their ability to include thousands of hapless youths – the majority of whom were unemployed, had lost family members at the hands of Séléka, or both.[63] The anti-balaka was also boosted by former members of the CAR army who were now hunted down by the Séléka, and who typically originated from the same areas as the anti-balaka. Bringing with them military expertise, the anti-balaka movement was mainly composed of former army officers and reports suggest that each faction had at least one army officer as its leader or member of the military board.[64]

While the anti-balaka began as a self-defence movement, its operations soon came to be defined along sectarian lines. More precisely, the large-scale human rights violations committed during the Séléka's rule fostered a strong anti-foreign and anti-Chadian discourse, which quickly took on religious undertones.[65] As outlined above, the victimised populations had already identified large elements of foreign fighters from Chad and Sudan within the Séléka. Most Central Africans thus

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[62] Quoted in FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 60.

[63] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', pp. 58–59.

[64] See FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', pp. 58–61; IRIN News, 'Briefing: Who are the anti-balaka of CAR?', 12 February 2014, http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=99634.

[65] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2127 (2013)', 1 July 2014, S/2014/452, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/452, p. 10.

perceived the rebel alliance as a foreign group subjugating the native majority population.[66] Soon, the Séléka became conflated with all Chadians living in CAR, which if one traces a person's family line one or two generations back represents a significant minority. What is more, because most of the Séléka rank and file and the majority of 'Chadians' residing in CAR were Muslims, the jump to associating all Muslims with the Séléka and Chadian 'foreigners' was a short one.[67] The religious make-up of the Séléka is a result of the alliance's origin in the north-eastern parts of the country, which are predominantly Muslim.[68] The association of Muslims with Séléka was also spurred on by the Bozizé regime's attempts to demonise the Séléka as foreign, Muslim terrorists, and incite sectarian anger in a last effort to hold on to power.[69]

The crucial fact that gave the sectarian dimension a certain basis in reality, was the general opinion among the victimised populations that Muslims had been spared from Séléka's violence and looting, whilst the majority of reported attacks on civilians targeted Christians and Christian institutions.[70] Where many churches were systematically looted, Mosques were generally spared. In Bangui for example, the anti-Séléka feeling became intensely anti-Muslim as the Muslim districts were not looted,[71] and certain Muslim merchants were seen as cooperating closely with the Séléka.[72] In other words, the discriminatory nature of the Séléka's PREDATORY VIOLENCE laid the foundation for an even more violent COMMUNAL CONFLICT between the Christian and Muslim communities as a whole.

The first reports of COMMUNAL CONFLICT appeared in September–October 2013. On 9 September 2013, anti-balaka attacked a Muslim neighbourhood in the town of Bouca in the north-western prefecture of Ouham, killing over 40 Muslims and burning 150-250 houses belonging to Muslims. On the same day, Séléka carried out reprisal attacks on Christians, killing at least 30 Christians and burning around 300 houses belonging to Christians.[73] The same pattern was repeated in Bossangoa, the capital of Ouham, where a series of attacks and reprisals between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, spearheaded by the Séléka and anti-balaka, left 100 dead.[74] Since these early incidents and through the fall of 2013, civilians in the north-western provinces were soon caught in a cycle of retribution and vengeance.[75]

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[66] Ibid. p. 11.

[67] Amnesty, 'Human rights crisis spiraling out of control', p. 24.

[68] Arieff, A., 'Crisis in the Central African Republic', *Congressional Research Service*, 14 May 2014, http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43377.pdf, p. 34.

[69] Amnesty International, 'Ethnic Cleansing and Sectarian Killings in the Central African Republic, *Amnesty International Publications*, (February 2014), https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/alfrescotemporary/AI_CAR+report_Feb2014.pdf, p. 7.

[70] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', pp. 9–10.

[71] ICG, 'Priorities of the transition', pp. 20–21.

[72] Vircoulon, 'The Central African crisis', p. 5.

[73] Amnesty, 'Human rights crisis spiraling out of control', p. 25.

[74] Jeune Afrique, 'Centrafrique: le bilan des affrontements de Garga attaint prés de 50 morts', 10 October 2013, http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20131010084233/.

[75] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', pp. 11–14.

During the scenario COMMUNAL CONFLICT, violence against civilians is typically driven by two motivating factors: revenge and self-protection.[76] The road leading to such full-scale communal violence may differ for each party. On the one hand, the continued PREDATORY VIOLENCE by the Séléka had created both a growing desire for revenge and a need for self-protection for the Christian community at large, because if left unattended it would only invite further attacks. This explains both the emergence of the anti-balaka and their attacks against 'Chadian' and Muslim civilians, which they deemed to belong to or support the Séléka. From the anti-balaka's perspective and the Christians and animists joining them, the perception was clearly one of a COMMUNAL CONFLICT in which their existence was threatened and survival was a defining motivation from the very start.

Conversely, while Séléka attacks were retaliatory in nature, their rationale cannot be placed as easily within the framework of COMMUNAL CONFLICT at first. Because the alliance's activities throughout 2013 were of a PREDATORY nature, the same communal logic that constituted the anti-balaka's rationale was probably not the driving force behind the Séléka's reprisals. That is, they did not necessarily fight on behalf of the Muslim communities in order to protect them, as they were not under any existential threat at the time. Their attacks against non-Muslims were not conducted because they were non-Muslim, but rather to avoid alienating their own. In addition, an element of self-protection is clearly present as the increasing strength of the anti-balaka movement and the mobilisation of local non-Muslim populations against the Séléka threatened their hold on power. The Séléka's response increasingly took on a communal character, because the anti-balaka threatening their control over CAR came from a distinct communal group and the distinctions between anti-balaka and civilians were blurred. When for example local Christian vigilante groups attacked a Séléka base in a mining zone in north-western CAR in October 2013, the Séléka launched a very violent retaliatory attack that killed 50 civilians.[77] This effectively consolidated the conflict as a COMMUNAL CONFLICT in which both sides were driven by revenge and self-protection to target the enemy community as a whole.

This second phase of the conflict culminated in particularly bloody events in December 2013, which marked a watershed in the conflict. On 5 December, the anti-balaka launched a surprisingly well-planned, well-coordinated and large-scaled attack on Bangui. It revealed that the anti-balaka now had a significant potential for exacting organised violence.[78] This was first and foremost because the movement had grown larger as the militias gained control over the north-western regions, and its ranks swelled with bandits, opportunistic rebels and 'everyone else seeking revenge, food or any other benefit'.[79] Secondly, the army elements had introduced a new level of organisation and strategic thinking in the movement. They also brought with them more

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[76] Beadle (2014), p. 44.

[77] Jeune Afrique, 'Le bilan des affrontements de Garga'.

[78] Amnesty International, 'Central African Republic: Time for Accountability', *Amnesty International Publications*, (July 2014), http://www.amnesty.ch/de/laender/afrika/zentralafrikanische-republik/dok/2014/verantwortliche-duerfen-der-justiz-nicht-entkommen/bericht-central-african-republic-time-for-accountability.-62-seiten.-juli-2014, p. 16.

[79] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 11.

deadly weapons such as AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades and hand grenades.[80] In short, the anti-balaka had become capable of challenging the Séléka militarily on more equal terms.

The attack was, however, not merely a strategic offensive to seize the capital. In some of the poorer districts, anti-balaka fighters went door to door executing everyone thought to be Séléka. The attack thus triggered a cycle of unprecedented inter-communal violence across the country, during which anti-balaka and Séléka revenged their losses by attacking the Muslim and Christian civilian populations respectively. In Bangui, the Séléka went on a killing spree, executing Christian male civilians and firing on fleeing crowds of civilians.[81] Worryingly, the lines between the organised armed groups and civilians were increasingly blurred due to the armed parties' perception of the enemy as a community. This was reinforced by the fact that many local civilians advocated violent acts of revenge, and even participated in them.[82]

This brutality of violence between Christians and Muslims eventually prompted outside intervention, this time with a strong protection mandate and a robust military force. Crucially, the arrival of international forces reversed a key driver of the conflict in phase two, namely the relative parity between the two communities. Until December, neither the Séléka nor the anti-balaka had the means or resources required to defeat their opponent, which is a defining feature of COMMUNAL CONFLICTS in general. This is what prevents either party from exacting a decisive solution to the conflict and instead spurs the endless cycles of revenge killings. Although communal violence still persisted after the Bangui offensive, the international intervention soon brought about a temporary weakening and collapse of the Séléka alliance.

5.2   Assessment of military operations to protect civilians

The African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) (former MICOPAX) was authorised by the United Nations Security Council on the same day as the anti-balaka's Bangui offensive. The mission was deployed on the 19 December with a mandate to protect civilians and restore security, public order and state authority.[83] The same resolution also authorised French forces as part of Opération Sangaris to prepare the ground for MISCA and subsequently support the mission in the implementation of its mandate.[84]

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[80] Agger, 'Behind the headlines', p.13 and UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary General on the Central African Republic submitted pursuant to paragraph 48 of Security Council resolution 2127 (2013)', S/2014/142, 3 March 2014, http://www.refworld.org/docid/531ef4204.html, p. 2.

[81] UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Monitoring Mission the Central African Republic, 'Preliminary Findings', *UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 14 January 2014, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CF/CARPreliminaryFindingsasof13.01.14.docx, p. 2.

[82] Amnesty International, 'Central African Republic: War crimes and crimes against humanity in Bangui', *Press Release*, 19 December 2013, http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/central-african-republic-war-crimes-and-crimes-against-humanity-bangui-2013-12-19.

[83] UN Security Council, 7072nd meeting, 'Resolution 2127', S/RES/2127, 5 December 2013, http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2127, p. 7.

[84] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary General', 3 March 2014, p. 10.

A central part of the MISCA and French strategy was to enforce confidence-building measures, which involved the disarmament of all armed elements not wearing the uniforms and distinctive formal signs of the CAR gendarmerie and police. Furthermore, all militia members were to report to specific cantonment sites.[85] During the period in question, the French forces were reinforced in two rounds; from an initial strength of 800 soldiers at the beginning of December to 1,600 by the end of the month, and the deployment of an additional 400 in February. The initial strength of MISCA was 4,500 soldiers, but was reinforced with an additional 1,500 personnel by the end of January.

In line with its mandate, the French forces were deployed first to pave the way for MISCA. They arrived in Bangui and the north-western town of Bossangoa in the early days of December and found their areas of operations marred by inter-communal clashes. MICOPAX had managed to separate the Christian and Muslim communities in Bossangoa to some extent, but the situation remained highly volatile. Both in Bangui and Bossangoa, the French began by carrying out area control operations.[86]

In Bangui, the city was divided into sectors, each with its own mobile contingents complemented with static control points in volatile areas. These hotspots were often areas where Muslims were still sheltering, as well as entry points into the city.[87] At the time, protection of these volatile Muslim neighbourhoods alone required the continued presence of 600 French soldiers, backed up by the Burundian MISCA contingent consisting of around 850 soldiers.[88] Patrols were conducted to deter the armed militias from engaging in violent actives in certain control zones, to more directly disarm them, and respond to attacks on civilians and looting.[89] In order to respond to events, the phone numbers of static military posts were provided to local inhabitants in order to arrange for early warning.[90] Larger disarmament operations were also carried out, such as in the Miskine neighbourhood where French forces first enclosed the entire area before going in to disarm anyone suspected of hiding weapons.[91]

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[85] Ministère de la Défense (France), 'Sangaris: Point du situation du 9 décembre', *Point sur les opérations de la force Sangaris en Centreafrique*, 9 December 2013, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-9-decembre.
[86] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point du situation du 10 décembre', 10 December 2013, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-10-decembre.
[87] African Union (AU), '1st Progress Report of the Commission of the African Union on the Situation in the Central African Republic and the Activities of the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic', 7 March 2014, http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/1-st-auc-progress-report-misca-06-03-2014-2-.pdf, pp. 7–9.
[88] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point du situation du 27 décembre', 27 December 2013, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-27-decembre-2013; Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point du situation du 10 janvier', 10 January 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-10-janvier-2014.
[89] Cantonment involves the assignment of fighters to temporary quarters.
[90] AU, '1st Progress Report', pp. 7–9.
[91] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: opération de sécurisation dans les quartiers de Bangui', 4 February 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-operation-de-securisation-dans-les-quartiers-de-bangui.

At the same time, the intervening forces were deployed to western provinces to begin phase two of the operation plan. Initially, the majority of area control operations in the provinces were carried out by 1,000 MISCA soldiers, deployed in 12 different towns. By mid-February, however, the majority of French forces were also engaged in the countryside outside Bossangoa and Bangui. The international deployments in the provinces were both of a mobile and static nature. The overarching objectives were to establish a minimum level of security, implement the confidence-building measures and prevent atrocities against civilians. The forces were also tasked with securing a corridor from Cameroon to Bangui (the main supply road) to allow for the transportation of humanitarian aid and refugees.

According to French official reports, the mobile detachments achieved a decrease in atrocities committed against civilians in relevant areas. On several occasions, the French forces opened fire to stop attacks still in progress. A 100-men strong French reconnaissance mission sent out on the road between Bangui and Bossangoa represented a typical example of such mobile detachments.[92] In other cases, international forces had to conduct large-scale operations to gain control over areas that were occupied by armed groups. The joint operation of 400 French and MISCA forces to retake the Séléka-held city of Sibut (population of 24,500) at the end of January is illustrative in this regard.[93]

French operations in the provinces also relied heavily on deterring further violence. When reports of numerous instances of pillage in the town of Berberati reached Sangaris forces, they accelerated reconnaissance which led the armed groups present to evacuate the city.[94] Airmobile units were also deployed for this purpose on reports of militia activity. The utilisation of helicopters helped ensure the safety of civilians and enabled a rapid response to discourage rebel activity in remote villages.

The French and MISCA forces were largely able to quell attacks on civilians and contain communal violence in their areas of operation. In fact, their actions largely reflected what has been identified as necessary to protect civilians during COMMUNAL CONFLICTS: defending population centres, pre-emptive deployments to deter or prevent attackers from reaching their targets, responding quickly when they do, and separating the communities until both parties are disarmed.[95] However, the *way* in which disarmament was conducted overlooked a key consideration. Instead of disarming both sides simultaneously, in order to reduce the perception of existential threat that prompted attacks in the first place, military disarmament efforts were mainly directed at the Séléka. While the disarmament of armed groups was meant to be conducted without prejudice to which side the fighters belonged to, the first progress report of

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[92] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point du situation sur les opérations de la force Sangaris du 18 au 23 janvier', 24 January 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/point-de-situation-sur-les-operations-de-la-force-sangaris-du-18-au-23-janvier-2014.

[93] AU, '1st Progress Report', p. 9.

[94] Ministère de la Défense, 'Point sur les opérations de la force Sangaris engagée en République de Centrafrique, du 15 au 21 février 2014', 21 February 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/point-sur-les-operations-de-la-force-sangaris-engagee-en-republique-de-centrafrique-du-15-au-21-fevrier-2014.

[95] Beadle and Kjeksrud (2014), p. 21, pp. 34–35.

MISCA indicates that especially Séléka combatants were disarmed.[96] Similarly, many analysts have criticised the French strategy for being planned solely on the premise of the Séléka threat to civilians. The argument goes that the French military likened Séléka to the rebels in northern Mali and thus assumed that a quick defeat of an easily defined enemy would solve the situation.[97] In hindsight, it has emerged that the challenge of containing the anti-balaka and protecting the Muslim minority was seriously underestimated by both the French and MISCA forces.

There are practical explanations for the primary focus on the Séléka. First of all, the assessment of the Séléka as the main threat to civilians can be explained by the fact that it for more than a year had been just that. Secondly, Séléka militias were more easily identifiable as they had been a formalised force that for several months had served as the government's *de facto* military.[98] By contrast, identifying the anti-balaka militias proved more difficult, given their lack of any identifiable control and command.[99] However, by the time disarmament commenced, the conflict had already developed from one-sided PREDATORY VIOLENCE perpetrated by the Séléka to a full-blown COMMUNAL CONFLICT, with the roles of perpetrators and victims constantly shifting and with both sides more equally armed. Human Rights Watch had in fact cautioned about such a scenario in mid-January, arguing that in trying to disarm the Séléka, the French forces ran the risk of giving a military advantage to the anti-balaka.[100]

That is also largely what happened. Séléka forces in Bangui and several other towns in the west were relieved of their heavy weapons and cantoned, which gave the anti-balaka military superiority on the ground. Coincidentally, President Djotodia resigned under international pressure at a regional summit in Chad.[101] The resignation and Djotodia's subsequent flight to Benin prompted the disintegration of the Séléka military command and the retreat of its combatants from the heavily contested western parts of the country.[102] These developments enabled the anti-balaka to acquire the military superiority necessary to conduct ETHNIC CLEANSING of Muslims in these areas.

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[96] AU, '1st progress report', pp. 12–14.

[97] Marchal, R. 'As Violence Persists, International Intervention in CAR Falls Short', *Global Observatory*, 5 February 2014, http://theglobalobservatory.org/analysis/672-as-violence-persists-international-intervention-in-car-falls-short.html; Darracq, V. 'France in Central Africa: The Reluctant Interventionist', *Aljazeera*, 11 February 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/02/france-central-africa-reluctant--20142975859862140.html.

[98] AU, '1st progress report', pp. 12–14.

[99] Le Parisien, 'L'opération en Centrafrique "plus difficle" qu'au Mali, admet Le Drian', 11 December 2013, http://www.leparisien.fr/international/centrafrique-le-drian-s-attend-a-six-mois-d-operation-militaire-11-12-2013-3398621.php; AU, '1st progress report', p. 14.

[100] Mudge, L., 'This Time, the UN Can't Let African Fail', *Bloomberg*, 7 January 2014, http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-01-07/this-time-the-un-can-t-let-africa-fail

[101] BBC News, 'CAR interim President Michel Djotodia resigns', http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25683279.

[102] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary General', 3 March 2014, p. 2.

6 Third phase – the Muslim exodus

The third phase of the conflict – from January to the spring of 2014 – was mostly characterised by the diversification of threats to civilians on both sides. The most serious situation involved the successful ETHNIC CLEANSING of Muslims by anti-balaka in western parts of the country. At the same time, COMMUNAL CONFLICT continued on a smaller, more geographically limited scale in certain areas of the north-west, while growing evidence of PREDATORY VIOLENCE could be found within certain anti-balaka militias. The international military efforts to protect civilians during this phase were marred by inability to understand that the threat to civilians had qualitatively changed as the anti-balaka acquired the military superiority necessary to expel most of the Muslim population in western CAR. That said; the military forces available to protect Muslims from such expulsion were already limited by previous commitments to contain the communal violence. The end result was the emergence of large Muslims enclaves that to this day remain critically dependent on military presence for their physical protection.

6.1 The ethnic cleansing of Muslims in western CAR

As the COMMUNAL CONFLICT was gradually contained by outside military intervention, the conflict dynamics changed and along with it the nature of threat facing civilians on the ground. As the Séléka began to retreat from western CAR, the remaining Muslim population was left largely unprotected at the mercy of the anti-balaka and a traumatised Christian majority population.[103] Despite the fact that the existential threat to the non-Muslim population was virtually eliminated with the fall of the Séléka, repeated and well-coordinated anti-balaka attacks on Muslim civilians continued unabated in a string of towns in the western parts of the country.[104] Remaining doubts about the anti-balaka's intentions of persecuting the Muslim communities were gradually removed.

The anti-balaka increasingly used language and rhetoric that indicated a clear intent to eliminate Muslims from CAR.[105] Fighters on the ground were reported to be making statements to the effect that Muslims do not belong in the country and therefore have to leave.[106] One anti-balaka element told the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) in February that 'they must all leave, or die. We will eliminate them all if they don't leave immediately. That's how it is'.[107] At least from their stated intentions, it is clear that the anti-balaka's objective was the expulsion rather than physical extermination of Muslims in CAR. If extermination had been the objective, it would have been counter-productive to announce their intention in advance, as it would enable their prospective victims to flee. Rather, the belligerent rhetoric served to speed up the Muslim exodus.

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[103] HRW, 'Muslims Forced to Flee', *Press Release*, 12 February 2014, http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/12/central-african-republic-muslims-forced-flee.
[104] Amnesty, 'Ethnic Cleansing and Sectarian Killings', pp. 5–8.
[105] HRW, 'Muslims Forced to Flee'.
[106] BBC News, 'Central African Republic: Massive scale ethnic cleansing', 19 March 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26641152.
[107] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 12.

Although displacement of the Muslim population had continued throughout the fall of 2013, it was the anti-balaka's assault on Bangui and the revelation of their newfound strength that forced Muslim civilians to flee western CAR in large numbers. Beginning in December, populations targeted by the anti-balaka organised convoys northwards to Chad, and some to Cameroon.[108] In light of the escalating violence, the Chadian government simultaneously decided to repatriate all its 'nationals', even those who were second, sometimes third, generation Chadian immigrants in CAR. Within the space of one month, 41,700 'Chadians' were successfully brought to Chad.[109] Throughout January and February 2014, thousands of Muslim families continued to flee towns with sizeable Muslim populations in western CAR. For example, when Human Rights Watch visited Bossembélé in February, less than 500 of the pre-war Muslim population of 30,000 remained.[110]

The point is that this exodus was most certainly forced, as the refugees were fleeing an unprecedented wave of violence, usually having witnessed the gravest atrocities and lost multiple family members. In a survey of nearly 33,000 Central African refugees in Chad, it emerged that a third of 3,449 families had lost at least one member to the violence, whilst a quarter had lost two, between November 2013 and April 2014.[111] In many cases, Muslims left along with the Séléka, as the absence of international forces in rural towns meant that the civilians would be left defenceless after the Séléka's retreat.[112]

The numbers ultimately speak for themselves. Already as of 23 April, it was estimated that 80–85 per cent of the 250,000 strong Muslim community that used to live in Bangui had left; mostly to Chad, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the north-eastern part of the country. Outside Bangui, entire population centres such as Bozoum (population before crisis: 22,284) and Mbaïki (population before crisis: 25,140) were reportedly emptied of Muslim residents.[113] Overall, in late June 2014, Medicines Sans Frontiers concluded that more than 90 per cent of western CAR's Muslim inhabitants had fled violence over the past months.[114] This number is highly characteristic of previous cases of ETHNIC CLEANSING and represents the expected outcome of such a scenario.[115]

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[108] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 11.

[109] UNICEF, 'Les retournés tchadiens de la Centrafrique', *Bulletin Periodique de l'UNICEF sur la Situation des Femmes et des Enfants au Tchad*, (January 2014), http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FINAL%20LOW-RES%20SPECIAL%20EDITION%20-%20RETURNEES%20JAN%202014.pdf, p. 7.

[110] HRW, 'Muslims Forced to Flee'.

[111] Reuters, 'Refugee survey suggests higher death toll in Central African Republic', 16 July 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/16/us-centralafrica-toll-idUSKBN0FL18120140716.

[112] See for example the case of Bouali in Amnesty, 'Ethnic Cleansing and Sectarian Killings', pp. 14–16.

[113] UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Central African Republic: Situation Report No.15 (as of 5 March 2014)', *Reliefweb*, 5 March 2014, http://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-car-situation-report-no15-5-march-2014.

[114] Medecins Sans Frontieres, 'Central African Republic: Humanitarian impasse in a Muslim enclave', 24 June 2014, http://www.msf.org/article/central-african-republic-humanitarian-impasse-muslim-enclave

[115] See Beadle (2014), p. 33.

While the anti-balaka tactics during this phase remained consistent with those employed during the previous phase of COMMUNAL CONFLICT, some elements were new, or became more pronounced. Firstly, the anti-balaka went a long way to permanently prevent the return of the victimised Muslim population, which is a common feature during ETHNIC CLEANSING.[116] In this case, the anti-balaka sought to wipe out the Muslim community's physical and historical presence by systematically attacking Muslim places of worship and burning down Muslim houses and villages.[117] Secondly, the Muslims that were unable or unwilling to flee western CAR (mostly poorer Fulani herders) were subjected to brutal attacks, which made it impossible for them to stay. The February attack on the village of Guen is illustrative of a more general narrative. When the attack began, hundreds of the remaining Muslims sought refuge in communal buildings. When the anti-balaka discovered this site, they attacked and subsequently led 45 men out of the compound where they were forced to lie down and then executed.[118] Such incidents echo the kind of occasional massacres and demonstrative acts of violence intended to make people flee, which are often seen in cases of ETHNIC CLEANSING.

Two caveats with regards to the conflict dynamic should be made. Firstly, a closer examination of several anti-balaka attacks in western CAR in January and February reveal that they were executed as part of a cycle of retaliatory attacks between the conflict's two military parties.[119] Furthermore, the Séléka attack on the village of Bowai on 26 February marked the Séléka's gradual return to the Bossangoa region after their initial defeat, which was accompanied by a series of new brutal attacks on the local non-Muslim population. This development was underscored by reports from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in late April, according to which atrocities again were committed against both Christian and Muslim civilians, by Séléka and anti-balaka militias respectively, in the north-western prefectures of Ouham and Ouham-Pende.[120] What these attacks suggest is a continued pattern of COMMUNAL CONFLICT in some parts of north-western CAR simultaneous with the ETHNIC CLEANSING of Muslims. This is not to argue that cleansing did not take place, but it serves as a reminder that also non-Muslim civilians were under attack after the Séléka withdrew from the west, and that isolated incidents of COMMUNAL CONFLICT continued.

Secondly, evidence suggests that while the anti-balaka violence was aimed at driving the Muslim population out of western CAR, several anti-balaka elements engaged in activities that resembled more PREDATORY VIOLENCE. It is important to realise that the anti-balaka in many ways is more

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[116] Beadle (2014), p. 31.
[117] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 45.
[118] HRW, 'Central African Republic: Massacres in Remote Villages', *Press Release*, 3 April 2014, http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/03/central-african-republic-massacres-remote-villages.
[119] See examples of Bossemptélé and Boyali in Amnesty, 'Ethnic Cleansing and Sectarian Killings', pp. 11–13.
[120] UN OCHA, 'Central African Republic: Situation Report No.22 (as of 23 April 2014)', *Reliefweb*, 23 April 2014, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA_CAR%20Sitrep%20No%2022%2023%20Apr%202014.pdf; UN OCHA, 'Central African Republic: Situation Report No.23 (as of 1 May 2014)', *Reliefweb*, 1 May 2014, http://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-situation-report-no-23-1-may-2014.

of a movement than a unified group. A UN Panel of Experts has defined it as a 'myriad of different militias that either identify themselves as part of the movement or are or were associated to it by default'.[121] Local anti-balaka groupings have in many places repeated the sins of the Séléka, having developed into extortionists that mainly ensure their own survival by acquiring resources though looting and erecting road barriers.[122] As Amnesty notes in a separate report, while sectarian divisions are one motivation for violence, financial incentives also appear to play an important role. There are countless witness-accounts from NGOs and journalists of the forced displacement of Muslims being accompanied by widespread looting. The threat of attack has also been reported as a way to extort money and goods from Muslim communities.[123]

The predatory nature of local anti-balaka chapters can partly be explained by these militias' need to ensure their own survival. However, it has in all likelihood been reinforced by the swelling ranks of anti-balaka with criminal elements and opportunistic rebels, and, as previously mentioned, poor and unemployed youth seeking both revenge and a means of sustaining themselves.[124] It is particularly worrying that such elements form new anti-balaka groups, often known as *faux* (false) *anti-balakas*, which loot and kill Muslim civilians seemingly for the purpose of profit alone. It is revealing that there have been reports of fighting between the *faux* anti-balaka and the more established Christian militias, allegedly because the former are seen to undermine the authority of the anti-balaka proper.[125] Lastly, it should be noted that similarly to the origins of Séléka's formation, many of the anti-balaka's leaders are political entrepreneurs who are exploiting the communal conflict and fuelling sectarian hatred in order to create a chaotic environment in which they can launch a bid for political power.[126]

In other words, the CAR conflict shows how multiple scenarios may play out within the same area of operations. While ETHNIC CLEANSING of Muslims was the most serious scenario unfolding during this phase, the situation was complicated by the fact that both COMMUNAL CONFLICT and PREDATORY VIOLENCE occurred at the same time, albeit on a smaller and more geographically limited scale.

6.2 Assessment of military operations to protect civilians

In its first progress report from March 2014, MISCA concluded that the security situation had improved significantly in Bangui and in the country's interior parts since the beginning of February.[127] Similarly, in a situation report from the end of April, the French emphasised that

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[121] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Panel of Experts', p. 14.
[122] Agger, 'Behind headlines', p. 14.
[123] Amnesty, 'Ethnic Cleansing and Sectarian Killings', pp. 8–9. For specific examples see p. 20, and Amnesty, 'Time for Accountability', p. 21.
[124] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 11.
[125] Agger, 'Behind the headlines', p. 14.
[126] Ingerstad, 'Trapped in a cycle of violence?', pp. 48–49.
[127] AU, '1st Progress Report', p. 13.

calm had returned to Bangui and that the situation in the western interior remained stable.[128] Specifically, the French reported that a total of 40 schools and nearly 90 per cent of the capital's markets had been reopened by the end of March.[129] However, these observations and measures of success reflect a failure to understand the real nature of threat facing the Muslim population at the time.

A striking feature of these military reports is the lack of emphasis on the then on-going ETHNIC CLEANSING. In February, Amnesty accused the international forces of being too slow in filling the power-vacuum created in mid-January when the Séléka began to withdraw. Their failure to do so allowed the anti-balaka to move into town after town, launching violent attacks on Muslims. This occurred for example in the town of Boali in late January, where the arrival of French forces prompted the Séléka elements that held the town to surrender or flee into the bush. As the Séléka position was neutralised, a large anti-balaka force entered town, systematically looted and ransacked three mosques and killed at least a dozen Muslim civilians.[130]

This criticism is partly warranted. As an official source in Paris told Le Monde, the French operation planners did not assess the anti-balaka's capability to harm and the level of hatred adequately.[131] Faced with an actor such as the anti-balaka, which was both determined and capable of ethnically cleansing another community, protection of civilians will require confronting the mobile units executing the violence on the ground in order to deny them military superiority and freedom of movement to attack their victims.[132] In order to reduce the threat of expulsion more permanently, it also requires offensive operations to coerce the perpetrator into abandoning ethnic cleansing as a strategy. The means to pursue either of these objectives, however, were not available to the intervening forces at the time.

Importantly, there was a pronounced lack of soldiers. On paper, the French forces consisted of 2,000 men, while the MISCA deployment numbered between 5,800 and 6,000. However, persistent tensions in Bangui tied French troops up in the capital for a longer time period than initially planned for.[133] Similarly, in population centres across the west the French and MISCA forces found a situation that prevented mobility, of which the town of Boda is a good example. When the Séléka fled the town on 29 January, 11,000 Muslims were left to face nearly twice as many Christians. Clashes broke out killing more than a hundred people within a few days. Upon receiving information of impending atrocities, the French deployed a nearby area control mission

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[128] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation de situation du 30 avril 2014, 30 April 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/operation-sangaris-point-de-situation-du-30-avril-2014.

[129] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation du 21 mars', 21 March 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/operation-sangaris-point-de-situation-du-21-mars-2014.

[130] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', pp. 21–22.

[131] Bensimon, C., 'Le bilan mitigé de six mois d'opération Sangaris', *Le Monde*, 7 June 2014, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/06/07/le-bilan-mitige-de-six-mois-d-operation-sangaris_4434055_3212.html.

[132] Beadle and Kjeksrud (2014), pp. 19–20; 32–33.

[133] Darracq, 'The reluctant interventionist'.

to the town, consisting of 100 soldiers.[134] While the situation was calm when the French arrived, tension has since remained at a level that necessitates the continued presence of international forces as a buffer between the communities, especially in order to protect the remaining Muslims.

Crucially, the military superiority the anti-balaka achieved after the Séléka retreated from the west was effectively ended in the relevant population centres after French and MISCA troops were deployed. Consequently, the remaining Muslims in western CAR increasingly sought refuge in population centres under the protection of international forces. During the culmination of the Muslim exodus from the beginning of December to the end of March, nearly all Muslim communities that were unable to leave CAR were grouped together in these enclaves. At that time, 15,000–20,000 Muslims were estimated to have taken refuge in 18 enclaves in the northwest and southwest. The problem was that these enclaves also represented a principal target for the anti-balaka, which rapidly besieged the areas.

The pattern of violence in these enclaves is important, as it represents an anomaly in the conflict at large, due to the heavy presence of international peacekeepers. While the deployment of international forces put an end to large-scale killings, it did not establish an environment of real security for the besieged Muslim populations. These populations were – and still are – gradually dying from disease and lack of food as the anti-balaka are cutting off food and medical supplies.[135] In Boda, where around 5,700 Muslims still remain at the time of writing, French forces are unable to end the anti-balaka's food blockade.[136]

The failure of the French forces to completely disarm the Séléka and anti-balaka has left the remaining communities highly vulnerable to attacks, mostly in the form of isolated violent incidents around the Muslim enclaves.[137] The international forces' protective barrier is easily circumvented by the anti-balaka, by launching grenades into the enclaves or through sporadic sniper-fire from outside the enclaves.[138] The bottom line is that the continued presence of international forces in the enclaves is absolutely paramount to the security of the Muslim civilians still there. This does, however, hamper the mobility required to save others by tying up a significant amount of troops in static protection.

The conflict dynamics around these enclaves also highlight another problem that makes all efforts to protect civilians difficult in practise, namely the blending of armed elements with civilians. After the Séléka regime collapsed, some fighters escaped into Muslim neighbourhoods. From these enclaves they have since formed smaller 'hit squads' that have performed targeted killings

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[134] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Opération de la Force à Boda', 8 February 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-operation-de-la-force-a-boda.
[135] Nichols, M., 'Minorities trapped in 16 sites in the Central African Republic – U.N.', *Reuters*, 24 June 2014, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/06/24/uk-centralafrica-un-idUKKBN0EZ2SA20140624.
[136] HRW, 'Central African Republic: Muslim Communities Emptied', *Press* Release, 7 March 2014, http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/06/central-african-republic-muslim-communities-emptied.
[137] Amnesty, 'Ethnic cleansing and sectarian killings', p. 18.
[138] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 35.

in Christian areas and engaged in reprisals.[139] Moreover, the brutality against the Muslim communities in Bangui have contributed to the formation of Muslim youth self-defence groups that engage in violent action targeting the anti-balaka and their positions, as well as non-Muslim communities.[140]

Similarly, the threat to Muslims comes not only from anti-balaka militias, but also Christian and animist civilian populations. There have been numerous reported cases of lynching where it is unclear whether the anti-balaka or armed civilian mobs were responsible.[141] There has in other words been an increasing blurring of armed groups and vigilante crowds since early 2014.[142] This appears to indicate that a POST-CONFLICT REVENGE-scenario, where the principal threat of violence comes from individuals seeking to settle personal scores on a tit-for-tat-basis, is playing out in the enclaves where full-scale COMMUNAL CONFLICT has largely been contained by the French.[143] This type of scenario also requires a mobile, dispersed presence and policing to prevent what is essentially criminal rather than strategically motivated violence.[144]

In sum, while French and MISCA forces have managed to separate the two communities in the enclaves, there remains a potential for escalation back into full-scale COMMUNAL CONFLICT. A reminder of this came in May 2014, when the brutal killing of three Muslim youth by suspected anti-balaka elements triggered one of the worst attacks on any refugee site in Bangui since Séléka were removed from power.[145] MISCA Commander-in-Chief, General Mokoko, later said in an interview that the international forces at the time had been 'lulled into a false sense of calm due to measures of reconciliation', which explains their failure to prevent the attack.[146]

One of the main dilemmas facing the international community and humanitarian actors present in CAR is therefore what to do with the remaining besieged Muslim enclaves. One could either encourage people to stay, which would entail enduring horrible living-conditions and living under the constant threat of attack; or assist them in fleeing, thereby indirectly contributing to the sectarian division of the country.[147] In early April 2014, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees stated its willingness to assist in evacuating 19,000 Muslims and has since facilitated the evacuation of several thousand civilians, with French and MISCA forces providing escorts.[148]

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[139] Ibid.; Marchal, 'As Violence Persists, International Intervention in CAR Falls Short'.
[140] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic', S/2014/562, 1 August 2014, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/562, p. 2.
[141] Vircoulon, T. 'The Central African Crisis', *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*, 30 April 2014, http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2014/4/30/201443010224563580The%20Central%20African%20Crisis.pdf, p. 6.
[142] Amnesty, 'Ethnic cleansing and sectarian killings', p. 8.
[143] Beadle (2014), p. 41.
[144] Beadle and Kjeksrud (2014), pp. 20–21, p. 34.
[145] UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 'UNHCR condemns deadly attack on displaced people in CAR church', *Press Release*, 30 May 2014, http://www.unhcr.org/5388681c6.html.
[146] Duhem, V., 'Centrafrique – Général Mokoko: Les anti-balaka se transforment en des bandes de malfrats', *Jeune Afrique*, 26 June 2014, http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20140626155145/.
[147] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary General', 3 March 2014, p. 7.
[148] Arieff, 'Crisis in the Central African Republic', p. 34.

Nonetheless, at the time of writing the enclaves still persist. The latest numbers available indicates that approximately 20,000 Muslims remain at risk in nine enclaves under the protection of international military forces.[149]

This situation merely confirms the old lesson of safe havens that, even if successfully defended, the threat against these enclaves will persist as long as the perpetrators have the intention to establish an ethnically pure territory. The imminent threat may be reduced by the presence of military forces, but it may also simply shift elsewhere to other less-defended areas where the targeted group can be found. In order to reduce the threat of expulsion permanently, shows of force or limited offensive operations have in the past been required to coerce the perpetrators to abandon ethnic cleansing as a strategy.

Finally, there is one anomaly with regards to the ETHNIC CLEANSING in western CAR that should be noted here because it seems to run contrary to the anti balaka's rationale of ridding the country of Muslims. Surprisingly, anti-balaka militias have on numerous occasions tried to prevent Muslims from fleeing the country, most commonly by attacking refugee convoys taking Muslims to Cameroon and Chad. Anti-balaka forces have also attacked armed convoys, despite the great risk this poses for the militias. Whether one survives one of these attacks or not seems completely random; sometimes men and women and children are killed, sometimes just the men. Often the trucks are looted, but incidents have also been recorded where the militia just set fire to the Muslims' belongings.[150]

If the anti-balaka militias' objective is simply to expel the Muslims from CAR, many of these attacks seem completely irrational, as most of the convoys that came under attack were clearly heading for the border. Arguably, the convoy attacks are best explained as evidence of PREDATORY VIOLENCE. There might not be any strategic rationale behind these acts of violence other than exacting brutal violence on Muslims, coupled with looting. Terrorizing the Muslim population may be another motive as it is characteristic of the conflict in general; attacks on Muslim communities have often involved shocking and unusual levels of violence.[151] Incidents of mutilation of corpses, public lynching, rapes, massacres of children (even infants), and general excessive use of violence, such as decapitation and throat cutting, are so frequently reported that they seem the norm rather isolated incidents.[152]

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[149] UN OCHA, 'Central African Republic (CAR) Situation Report No. 32 (as of 1 July 2014)', *Reliefweb*, 1 July 2014, http://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-car-situation-report-no-32-1-july-2014.

[150] For eye witness accounts, see Medecins Sans Frontieres, 'Central African Refugees in Chad and Cameroon: Suitcase or Coffin', *Press Report*, (July 2014), http://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/suitcase_or_coffin_-_dp_eng.pdf, p. 13; Amnesty, 'Ethnic cleansing and sectarian killings', p. 14.

[151] MSF, 'Suitcase or coffin', p. 12.

[152] Documented in HRW, 'Muslims Forced to Flee', p. 20; Amnesty, 'Ethnic cleansing and sectarian killings', pp. 13, 14, 18.

7 Fourth phase – the conflict spreads eastwards

The fourth and most recent phase of the CAR crisis – from the spring of 2014 until today – has witnessed a resurgence of COMMUNAL CONFLICT in central parts of the country in parallel with a rise in PREDATORY VIOLENCE on all sides. The threats emanating from these two unfolding scenarios, in combination with the possible threat against Muslim enclaves, represent the greatest threats of physical violence against civilians in CAR today. However, reducing the threats emanating from these scenarios may require different military responses that are not necessarily compatible with each other.

7.1 The resurgence of communal conflict in the central regions

After the Séléka retreated from western CAR, fighters began regrouping in north-eastern parts of the country. While the alliance initially fragmented into several smaller armed groups following the fall of Djotodia, Séléka forces retook the strategically important central town of Sibut on 30 January and reportedly announced that this marked a first step toward establishing a line of demarcation between a Muslim east and a Christian west.[153] The Séléka has since followed-up with a gradual westwards push into the country's central regions; a movement characterised by significant surges in violence, leaving a string of villages destroyed and civilians killed.[154] Crucially, Séléka's regrouping has evened out the balance of power between the two parties, allowing COMMUNAL CONFLICT to resurge with full force.

Firstly, confrontations between the two communities have increased in the north-western parts of the country. In these areas, the anti-balaka most commonly fight armed Fulani herders, not Séléka proper, which have been radicalised by anti-balaka violence and are carrying out reprisal attacks.[155] During the summer of 2014, however, the UN has recorded a resurgence of attacks on villages by Séléka and affiliated armed Fulani along the border with Chad.[156] At the time of writing, reports from French troops stationed in the western provinces also reflect increased militia activities that threaten the local populations.[157] The increasing presence of the Séléka in the north-western regions has in turn prompted the anti-balaka to reinforce their positions in these areas, leading to a number of clashes between the two armed parties.[158] However, it is the central regions that now represent the main stage for COMMUNAL CONFLICT and fighting between Séléka and anti-balaka militias.

As a consequence of the Muslim exodus from the western parts of CAR, the conflict can be said to have led to a *de facto* partition of CAR. A dividing line can be drawn from the north-western

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[153] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary General', 3 March 2014, p. 3.

[154] Amnesty, 'Time for accountability', pp. 26, 32.

[155] Vircoulon, 'The Central African crisis', p. 6.

[156] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary', 1 August 2014, p. 3,

[157] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: reconnaissance offensive au nord-ouest de la RCA', 19 June 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-reconnaissance-offensive-au-nord-ouest-de-la-rca.

[158] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary', 1 August 2014, p. 3.

regions down through the centre to the areas south-east of Bambari. In the vast areas that run along this trajectory, violence is flaring up, especially in and around population centres.[159]

The map below is illustrative of this situation. The areas marked with orange horizontal lines are under Séléka influence, while those marked with blue diagonal lines are controlled by the anti-balaka. The red diamonds mark flashpoints along the line of demarcation.[160]
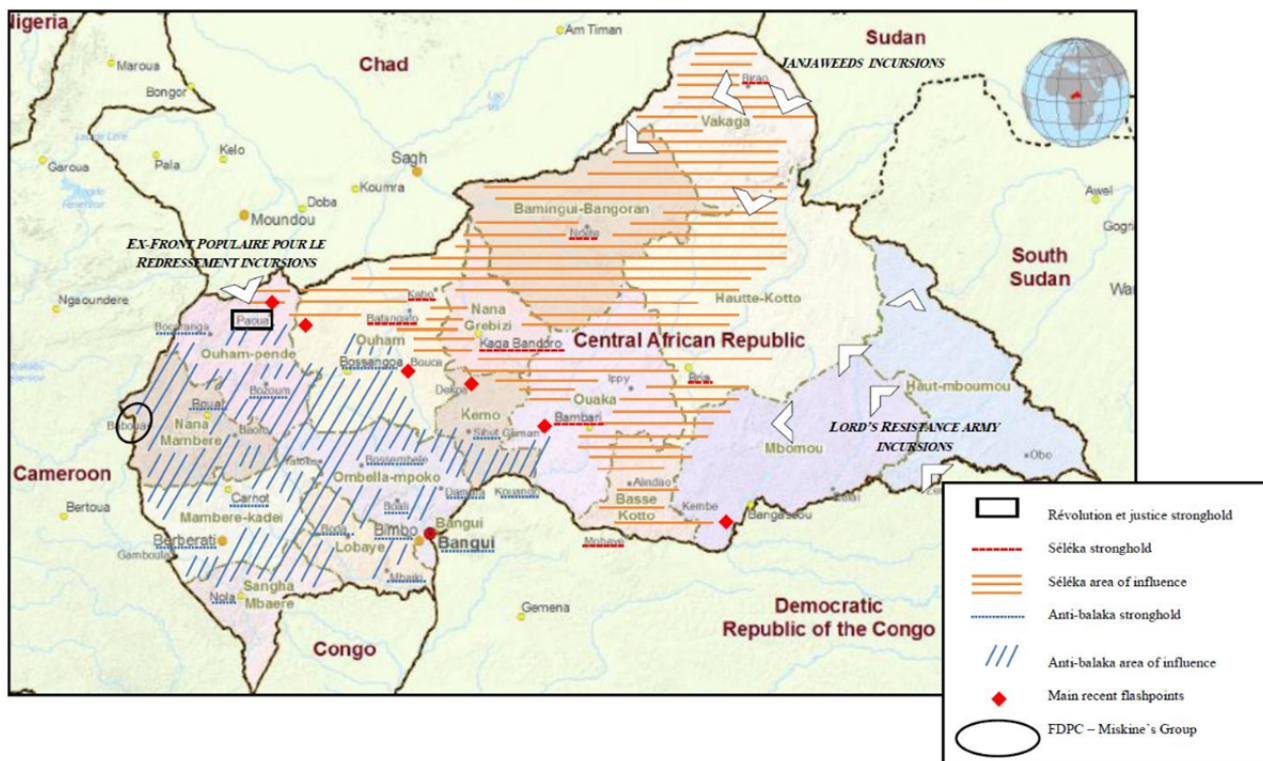
Map 7.1   Areas of control and influence of armed groups as of 25 May 2014[161]

What makes this new development particularly precarious in terms of the civilian situation is that central towns, such as Bambari and Kaga-Bandoro, have Christian majorities or a 50/50 religious split.[162] Moreover, people in surrounding villages have repeated the pattern of flocking to the regions' population centres, which means that the propensity for large-scale civilian suffering is high. These conflict dynamics largely replicate the violence that gripped western regions of the country from the fall of 2013 through the first month of 2014 (phase two). In other words, there is little new about the conflict dynamics themselves, other than that the conflict has shifted eastwards geographically.[163]

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[159] UN OCHA, 'Situation Report No. 22 (as of 23 April 2014)'; UN OCHA, 'Situation Report No. 23 (as of 1 May 2014)'.

[160] Map taken from UN, 'Report of the panel of experts', p. 13.

[161] Reproduced with permission from the Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic, 26 June 2014, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1441518.pdf.

[162] Ourdan, R., 'Centrafrique: victoire de la purification ethnique contre les musulmans', *Le Monde*, 5 March 2014, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/03/05/centrafrique-sangaris-ou-la-chronique-d-un-echec-annonce_4377735_3212.html.

[163] HRW, 'Central African Republic: Sectarian Violence Escalating', *Press Release*, 15 July 2014, http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/15/central-african-republic-sectarian-violence-escalating.

In order to illustrate the conflict dynamic now playing out, Bambari and its surrounding regions serve as a good example because the pattern of violence here is representative of the conflict dynamic at large and because it has experienced the most wide-ranging fighting in the fourth phase of the conflict.[164] In mid-May 2014, Bambari was made home to Séléka's new headquarters and beginning in June 2014, a cycle of sectarian violence started to escalate in the surrounding area, with reports of reprisal attacks between the Muslim and Christian communities.[165] Allegedly, the cycle of violence was set off when local sources reported that members of the ethnic Fulani nomadic community had been killed by anti-balaka in rural areas south of Bambari.

The attacks began on 9 June when Séléka fighters together with members of the Fulani ethnic group retaliated by attacking the largely Christian village of Liwa. Between 10 and 22 civilians (estimates vary) were killed when attackers arrived on motorcycles and opened fire on the residents. The entire village was then burned to the ground. The revenge attack came on 23 June when anti-balaka forces attacked a neighbouring Fulani community, killing at least 20, including women and children. Later that day, armed Muslim civilians and Séléka rebels in Bambari attacked the town's Christian neighbourhoods.[166] Fighting has since continued. A doctor working for Medecins Sans Frontieres has said that levels of violence are mounting and that reports of villages being burned come in almost daily.[167] The attacks appear to be carried out by a combination of armed militias and civilians, in particular youths.

7.2   Rise in predatory violence in general

In July, the BBC reported that it was hard to discern any strategy or pattern behind the recent violence, other than the logic of retaliation and an increasing tendency towards banditry on part of the militias.[168] The reference to retaliation clearly denotes the on-going COMMUNAL CONFLICT, but the allusion to banditry is equally important. The fact is that the current phase of conflict in CAR has seen a solidification of PREDATORY VIOLENCE at new levels, exacerbated by growing factionalism within both the Séléka and the anti-balaka movements. It is for example telling that it later emerged that the initial attack on the Fulani cattle herders, which marked the beginning of violence in the Bambari region, was in fact carried out by an unruly fringe of the Séléka that were after their cattle.[169] The chaotic picture has been confirmed in the aftermath of the cease-fire agreement that was signed by representatives of the Séléka and anti-balaka in Brazzaville on

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[164] Bensimon, C., 'La Centrafrique, livrée aux chefs de guerre, s'enfonce dans le chaos', *Le Monde*, 7 June 2014, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/06/07/la-centrafrique-livree-aux-chefs-de-guerre-s-enfonce-dans-le-chaos_4434054_3212.html.

[165] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation du 10 julliet 2014', 10 July 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-10-juillet-2014; Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: fortes tensions à Bambari', 2 July 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-fortes-tensions-a-bambari.

[166] HRW, 'Sectarian Violence Escalating' and Le Monde, 'Regain de violences intercommunautaires en Centrafrique', 8 July 2014, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/07/08/regain-de-violences-intercommunautaires-en-centrafrique_4453351_3212.html.

[167] Harding, A., 'Central African Republic crisis: Silent majority held hostage', *BBC News*, 28 July 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28515663.

[168] Harding, 'Silent majority held hostage'.

[169] Duhem, 'Général Mokoko: Les anti-balaka se transforment en des bandes de malfrats'.

29 July. While the agreement stipulates that all parties will abstain from all forms of violence, violence has continued unabated in the provinces. Much of this violence can be explained with reference to predatory motivations.

Firstly, it is doubtful whether General Mohamed Moussa Dhaffane and Patrice Edouard Ngaïssona, who represented the Séléka and anti-balaka at the conference respectively, can be said to be speaking on behalf of all factions and militias. Both sides have been marked by powers struggles over the last months, pointing to a situation where political entrepreneurs are competing to represent and speak on behalf of armed groups, in all likelihood with the aim of boosting their own political careers and securing government positions.[170] In the case of the Séléka, the group reorganised in May in order to consolidate central control of the many militias. While they agreed on a new political and military leadership, disagreements still remain over the question of partition. Calls for partition have intensified within throughout 2014, especially amongst the alliance's military elements. During Séléka's reorganisation, the military branch of the coordination structure was highly sceptical of dropping the demand for partition, as was advocated by the political leadership.[171] Consequently, when the political leadership decided to give up on partition during the ceasefire negotiations, military elements of the movement boycotted the talks. When the BBC met with the head of the military structure after the ceasefire talks were ended, Brigadier-General Joseph Zoundeko, read out an official statement saying the ceasefire would not be respected by the Séléka military, which had not been consulted properly.[172]

While the possibility of partitioning CAR along religious lines has much popular traction, the extent to which this is a serious suggestion has never been clear. This raises the question of whether it is merely a bargaining ploy on part of the likes of Zoundeko to keep the conflict going until they have positioned themselves in a manner that makes them indispensable to achieve a peaceful resolution, thereby allowing them a central place in future peace talks.[173] Divisions within the Séléka have also led to armed confrontations between various components of the movement.[174] The segmentation is often a result of disagreements between moderate and hard-line elements, where the former are prone to accept disarmament and a political solution to the crisis, probably with a view to be integrated into the future CAR army, and the latter advocate partition and resist cantonment measures.[175] The latter camp also includes factions that seemingly operate independently of the Séléka's central command.[176] It is highly probable that the commanders of such rogue factions are unwilling to give up the wealth and power the conflict has

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[170] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Panel of Experts', p. 14.

[171] Ibid. p. 60.

[172] Harding, A., 'CAR crisis: Meeting the rebel army chief', *BBC News*, 29 July 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28526362.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation du 26 juin', 26 June 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-26-juin.

[175] Bensimon, C. 'Francais voleurs!: en Centrafrique, la position délicate des soldats de l'opération Sangaris', *Le Monde*, 23 May 2014, http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/05/23/francais-voleurs-en-centrafrique-la-position-delicate-des-soldats-francais_4424195_3212.html.

[176] Duhem, 'Général Mokoko: Les anti-balaka se transforment en des bandes de malfrats'.

brought them. A good example is the Séléka leader Nourredine Adam, who runs a highly profitable diamond mining operation in the city of Bria with the help of 300 troops.[177]

The same pattern of factionalism and power play can be found within the anti-balaka. From its inception, the anti-balaka has only been a loose group of local militias. Despite the fact that a political leadership was present at the ceasefire negotiations, its actual authority is disputed. While it is true that local anti-balaka leaders say they meet the orders of their political or military figure-heads, reports say fighters on the ground often are left to their own devices.[178] Moreover, the predatory nature of the anti-balaka militias has only grown more pronounced after the main phase of the Muslim exodus was completed. Analysts now suggest that the movement has entered into a distinct criminalisation phase.[179] According to the French, violence and harassment of civilians is increasingly of a predatory nature in Bangui and most operations are now carried out against elements associated with banditry.[180] This point is underlined by reports that anti-balaka fighters also have attacked Christians for economic reasons, including ransom.[181] Moreover, there is evidence that anti-balaka militias have been exploiting the country's natural resources. Besides operating as miners or collectors, they offer protection in return for payments from diamond traders.[182] The local militias associated with such predatory activity, particularly the aforementioned *faux* anti-balaka along with their counterparts of rogue Séléka factions, are likely to undermine a political settlement as they benefit economically from a continuation of the cycle of violence. Those who seemingly are looking for a political solution, including those who partook in the negotiations, also may have their own personal agendas. Rebel group leaders have learned that if you take up arms, you can secure a seat at the negotiating table, which in turn can be leveraged into a government position.[183]

This is nothing new, but an ingrained part of CAR's political culture. Since gaining impendence, a long string of successive and attempted coups has created a political culture characterised by violence and economic predation. The development and support of armed groups has thus been the prevailing method to access political power and economic wealth.[184] The UN Panel of Experts believes that armed groups on both sides have been manipulated and incited by political spoilers to commit acts of violence against civilians with the aim of destabilizing the country so as to strengthening those leaders' influence in the national transition process or promoting the partition of the country.[185] For all the COMMUNAL CONFLICT of the last two years, one should keep in mind that the sectarian dimension has few historic precedents. Bambari is illustrative: just a few weeks before violence broke out in late June, Bambari was one of the few towns that had escaped the

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[177] Ingerstad, 'Trapped in a cycle of violence?', pp. 50–51.
[178] Bensimon, 'La Centrafrique, livrée aux chefs de guerre, s'enfonce dans le chaos'.
[179] Ingerstad, 'Trapped in a cycle of violence?', p. 51.
[180] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation du 26 juin'; Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation du 3 juillet', 3 July 2014,
http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-3-juillet.
[181] Amnesty International, 'Time for accountability', p. 25.
[182] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Panel of Experts', p. 17.
[183] Ibid., p. 17.
[184] Ibid. p. 9.
[185] Ibid. p. 14.

cycle of sectarian strife. This changed when the Séléka decided to install its new headquarters in town.[186] When interviewed by Le Monde, both Christian and Muslim inhabitants asserted that they saw the conflict as political.[187]

In the end, while the threats facing civilians on the ground may be described as COMMUNAL CONFLICT and ETHNIC CLEANSING, the underlying causes may be leaders seeking to instil 'politically expedient chaos'.[188] Some groups, particularly within the leadership, may be benefiting both economically and politically from a chaotic and ungoverned CAR. In other words, the gradual assertion of control over western CAR by the anti-balaka or the Séléka military's talk of partition, might just as well be chips in a political power play carried out by the organisation's leaders.

7.3 Assessment of military operations to protect civilians

During this current phase of conflict in CAR, the intervening forces have faced the dual problem of containing conflict in existing hotspots, whilst dealing with conflict in new areas. The general security situation in the initially most volatile western areas has remained stable, although it is continuously disrupted by the activities of various armed groups. The French have responded with a combination of offensive reconnaissance missions, area control missions, and confidence-building measures. The area control missions are often carried out with helicopters and intended to have a preventive function.[189] By contrast, reconnaissance missions are deployed based on intelligence about the activities of militias threatening the civilian population, with the objective of tracking down the perpetrators and disarming them. Occasionally, such missions involve heavy fighting. On 7 May 2014, French forces deployed to the areas surrounding Bossangoa following reports of numerous atrocities against civilians. Upon confronting the perpetrators, the fighting became so fierce that the French troops had to use heavy weapons and call for air support.[190] Meanwhile, international troops continue to provide a buffer between communities in the enclaves in Bangui and the western interior.

As violence in the west has been reduced, the French deployed its first task force to eastern CAR in early April to prepare for the arrival of MISCA. Operations in the east began with offensive actions, including airmobile units, to demonstrate their determination.[191] The effects of such shows of force have varied from town to town. In Bria, security was established relatively easily

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[186] Le Monde, 'Regain de violences intercommunautaires en Centrafrique'.

[187] Bensimon, C., 'Centrafrique: à Bambari, la politique à tombeau ouvert', *Le Monde*, 27 May 2014, http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/05/27/centrafrique-a-bambari-la-politique-a-tombeau-ouvert_4426730_3210.html.

[188] FIDH, 'They must all leave or die', p. 11.

[189] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation du situation du 30 avril 2014'.

[190] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation du situation du 7 mai 2014', 7 May 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-7-mai-2014.

[191] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation du situation du 11 avril 2014', 11 April 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/operation-sangaris-point-de-situation-du-11-avril-2014.

as disarmament was accepted without resistance.[192] This can partly be attributed to emphasis on consultation and dialogue with local actors and authorities during their gradual expansion of the eastern zone of operation to ensure that stability measures can be implemented unopposed.[193] In Bambari, however, there was significant fighting as Séléka elements refused to disarm. A French command post was attacked by a mob and armed individuals before another static position was attacked by Séléka two days later. The attacks can be said to have had popular support in the Muslim community, which sees the Séléka as their only security guarantee in the face of the anti-balaka. Subsequently, MISCA and French forces launched a disarmament operation directed at the anti-balaka to show the civilian population that the international forces oppose all armed groups.[194] The resistance the French forces met when disarming Muslim militias in and around Bambari underscores how important it is that disarmament operations are not perceived to single out one community. It also attests to the possible risks that troops enforcing the disarmament face, if they are opposed, even against relatively lightly armed opponents.

High levels of COMMUNAL CONFLICT in population centres have also made it necessary to once again establish a permanent presence that physically separates the Muslim and non-Muslim communities.[195] Despite these measures, however, the cycle of reprisals between the two communities has continued, notably in Bambari. This has led French forces to fight various armed elements. At one point in early July in Bambari, the French even had to use armed helicopters to hold off armed groups threatening civilians.[196] Such fighting poses a risk of 'collateral damage', if civilians are caught in the crossfire.

The main problem facing international forces during this phase is arguably the high level of fractions and increasing PREDATORY VIOLENCE common to both the anti-balaka and Séléka. French forces have tried to engage with and support the more moderate figures in each camp (the Séléka who reject partition and the anti-balaka who advocate a cessation of violence), but the influence of moderates on the ground is disputed.[197] Enforcing confidence-building measures and conducting disarmament operations, whether in the west or the east, is proving increasingly difficult as the militias have also melted with the population and there is a lack of clearly defined leaderships to engage with.[198]

Furthermore, the lack of troops is particularly evident in the provinces. In one interview, the commander of the French forces in Bambari said that: 'Each day we have attacks. This is a big place. It is difficult to reach everywhere. Sometimes we have information about burning villages.

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[192] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: point de situation du 25 avril 2014', 25 April 2014, http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/operation-sangaris-point-de-situation-du-25-avril-2014.
[193] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: point de situation du 19 juin 2014', 19 June 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-19-juin-2014.
[194] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: point de situation du 12 juin 2014', 12 June 2014, http://www.defence.gouv.fr/operations/centrafrique/actualites/sangaris-point-de-situation-du-12-juin-2014.
[195] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: fortes tensions à Bambari'.
[196] Ministère de la Défense, 'Sangaris: Point de situation du situation du 10 julliet 2014'.
[197] Bensimon, 'Le bilan mitigé de six mois d'opération Sangaris'.
[198] Bensimon, 'La Centrafrique, livrée aux chefs de guerre, s'enfonce dans le chaos'.

But too late. Some villages are impossible to reach'.[199] With civilians under threat in both the west and the east and a significant number of troops engaged in the protection of refugee sites and Muslim enclaves, protecting civilians in the short term will continue to pose a huge challenge regardless of longer-term efforts to find a political solution. Although the record has been mixed, the presence of international forces has in all likelihood reduced the death toll of civilians and prevented large massacres so far.

Yet, stabilising the country will also depend on protecting civilians on a more permanent basis. Doing so will require a reduction in the threat of ETHNIC CLEANSING facing remaining Muslims in the west, containing COMMUNAL CONFLICT between communities in mixed areas where the balance of power is more evenly distributed, and addressing the PREDATORY VIOLENCE perpetrated by militias on all sides. Neither of these threats can be reduced without a more mobile and decisive use of military force than is presently available, precisely due to their efforts to keep the imminent threats to civilians in check.

This dilemma may be the greatest protection-related challenge facing the newly established United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), which took over from the African Union-led MISCA on 15 September 2014. This UN peacekeeping operation has protection of civilians as its utmost priority and will have up to 10,000 military personnel and 1,820 police personnel available, most of which are African Union forces 'rehatted' to UN peacekeepers. It will mark a beginning of new protection efforts, but it remains to be seen exactly how their presence and actions will influence the threat to civilians in CAR.

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[199] Harding, A., 'Central African Republic: Where rumours can kill in seconds', *BBC News*, 26 July 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28498667.

8   Conclusion

This report has analysed the violence perpetrated against civilians during the most recent conflict in the CAR between August 2012 and August 2014. Using the generic scenarios developed by FFI to distinguish between different types of physical threats to civilians, the report has found that the conflict can be divided into four different phases, which have experienced three, increasingly overlapping scenarios where civilians have been targeted in different ways. In fact, the longer the conflict has gone on, the harder it has become to distinguish between them.

During the first phase – from August 2012 to September 2013 – the conflict was largely characterised by PREDATORY VIOLENCE perpetrated by the Séléka rebel alliance against the Christian population in particular. Largely as a direct result of this violence, the emergence of anti-balaka self-defence militias prompted a full-scale COMMUNAL CONFLICT from September 2013 to January 2014 between Christian and animist communities on the one hand and Muslim communities on the other. The French intervention during this second phase largely served to contain the resulting cycles of violence, but by disarming the Séléka first also facilitated the military superiority of the anti-balaka in the capital and western areas. This enabled the ETHNIC CLEANSING of Muslims by anti-balaka in many mixed population centres during the third phase from early 2014. However, the same period was saw continued COMMUNAL CONFLICT on a smaller, more geographical limited scale, as well as growing PREDATORY VIOLENCE amongst anti-balaka militias. Since the spring of 2014, the fourth and present phase of the conflict has seen the emergence of more intense COMMUNAL CONFLICT in the country's central regions, as well as its resurgence in parts of the north-west – accompanied by more widespread PREDATORY VIOLENCE in line with a greater fragmentation of the actors.

When faced with limited resources and multiple scenarios at the same time, military planners will be well-advised to focus on the scenarios that constitute the biggest threat to civilians in the future. In the current situation, the biggest threats facing civilians in CAR come from possible further ETHNIC CLEANSING of remaining Muslim enclaves in the west, renewed COMMUNAL CONFLICT in areas wrecked by continued fighting between Séléka and anti-balaka forces, and growing exploitation and plunder against civilians in the form of PREDATORY VIOLENCE perpetrated by militias on all sides.

The basic problem facing the newly deployed UN peacekeeping mission to CAR (MINUSCA) is that neither of these types of threats are likely to be permanently reduced without a more mobile and decisive use of military forces. Continued static protection of civilians in population centres will be necessary to avoid renewed ETHNIC CLEANSING of the remaining Muslims in western enclaves. Yet, the threat of expulsion will not disappear until ethnic cleansing is abandoned as a strategy, which historically has only been achieved through military coercion of the perpetrators by denying them the military superiority necessary. It is hard to imagine that the anti-balaka will lose this in Christian-dominated areas. There is also a possibility of escalation into ETHNIC CLEANSING in central regions, as a method of cementing the partition of the country into a non-Muslim west and a Muslim east. In other words, the central regions that make up the *de facto* demarcation line is most likely to see continued high levels of COMMUNAL VIOLENCE that may

lead to ETHNIC CLEANSING by either party, depending on their genuine desire to create an ethnically pure territory and their relative military strength in the area. At worst, these contested border areas and remaining enclaves may experience isolated acts of GENOCIDE, if one party gains a clear military superiority, including over intervening forces. Thus, the legacy of failing to prevent the ETHNIC CLEANSING of most Muslims in the west has made it harder to contain the spread of COMMUNAL CONFLICT and PREDATORY VIOLENCE due to the forces tied up in protecting the remaining enclaves. Paradoxically, more civilian lives may be saved across the country if these enclaves were to be evacuated.

However, even if one had the forces available, the responses required to deal with the threats posed by COMMUNAL CONFLICT and PREDATORY VIOLENCE are not necessarily compatible with each other. In order to contain COMMUNAL CONFLICT in the west and east alike, the perception of threat within both communities must be lowered simultaneously. The failure to do so did not only enable the ETHNIC CLEANSING of Muslims, but has also prompted greater resistance against disarmament in many Muslim communities in the central regions. Rebuilding trust in the international forces' impartiality is thus key to successfully containing the communal violence. At the same time, the situation is complicated by the predatory nature of various militias. Even though the perception of threat amongst conflicting communities may be reduced, the threat of PREDATORY VIOLENCE is likely to endure as long as these actors are able to operate. Reducing the threat of PREDATORY VIOLENCE is therefore likely to require confronting these perpetrators directly, much like international forces managed to temporarily weaken the Séléka during the second phase of the conflict. However, doing so may precisely create the impression of being biased towards the community from which the rebels are recruited and spur further COMMUNAL CONFLICT.

Out of the two scenarios currently defining the violence in CAR, most attention should be given to the COMMUNAL CONFLICT, because it carries the greatest potential for further escalation. This is because communities that perceive themselves to be under existential threat often come to view expulsion or extermination of the other community as the only viable solution – but they lack the means to do so, which is what prevents escalation into ETHNIC CLEANSING or GENOCIDE. Preventing retaliatory attacks on a communal basis should therefore be the primary focus of intervening parties. This may in turn, however, involve tacitly accepting a certain level of PREDATORY VIOLENCE by communal militias.

Abbreviations

BINUCA	UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic
CAR	The Central African Republic
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
EUFOR Tchad/RCA	European Union Force in Chad and the Central African Republic
FFI	The Norwegian Defence Research Establishment
MICOPAX	Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic
MINURCAT	United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MISCA	African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UN	United Nations

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