

The Central African Republic's Conflict and Its Impact on Cameroon, 2002 – 2016

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Abstract: - The African continent holds an unenviable record of being one of the most conflict prone continents of the world. This trend began immediately after most of the countries in the continent attained independence in the 1960s. These conflicts necessitated the involvement of sub – regional, regional and international organisations and come with consequences for the particular country as well as its neighbours. The main aim of this paper is to present the conflict in the Central African Republic and to examine its consequences on the neighbouring Cameroon. The aim here is to expose the spill over potential of African conflicts that are otherwise considered as internal. The paper is divided into three parts. Part one deals with a synoptic overview of the conflict drivers and its main protagonists. Part two deals with efforts towards its resolution while part three dwells on the consequences of the conflict on Cameroon.

The paper argues that internal conflicts in African states have spillover effects on neighbouring countries and have the potential of turning latent grievances in those neighbouring countries into full bloom conflicts. This was done through the use of primary and secondary sources in the form of interviews, documents, journals and conference resolutions. These were carefully examined to arrive at the findings of the paper which attest to the spillover quality of African conflicts.

I. INTRODUCTION

The African continent has been bedeviled by conflicts since independence. An effective response to these conflicts requires agreement on and understanding of its causes. Past responses to conflicts have often failed to understand the context within which the conflicts operated or to address its causes. Fragile and conflict affected states present unique and complex challenges to achieving effective development. While the range of issues can vary depending on the country or region of fragility, some key issues are common to all of them. These include chronic poverty; government and state structures lacking the capacity or will to provide public safety, security and basic services to the population; low levels of state accountability to citizens; challenges relating to natural resource management; a private sector which may be largely informal and opportunistic; low levels of foreign direct investment; and a high risk of further state decline.¹

The conflict in the Central African Republic from 2002 – 2016 falls within this category of conflicts in Africa. It came with consequences for neighbouring countries such as Cameroon. The consequences include spill overs of the conflict into Cameroon, displacement of the country's population that became refugees in Cameroon and disruptions in the trading patterns between Cameroon and the CAR.

From the onset of the conflict, the sub-regional organisations, the Economic and Monetary Union of Central African States (CEMAC) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) got involved in efforts at resolving the conflict. These regional bodies by so doing gained experience in conflict resolution at sub-regional level and witnessed challenges and strains that impacted on member states. The focus of this paper is to examine the consequences of the CAR conflict on Cameroon.

The period of the study is between 2002 and 2016. The rationale for the period is because the current conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) became glaring from 2002. By 2012, it turned into an all-out war that raged on amidst indigenous, sub-regional, regional and international efforts towards its being resolved. This went on till 2016, when a post conflict President Faustin Touadera Archange was sworn into consolidate the conflict resolution and reconciliation process.

II. CAUSES OF THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC'S CONFLICT

The history of the Central African Republic whose conflict is the focus of this study is divided into four periods. The earliest period began about 10,000 years ago when nomadic people first began to settle, farm and fish in the region. While the herdsmen settled mainly in the north, those whose primary occupation was fishing settled along the riverine areas of the south.² The next period began around 1000-3000 years when several non-indigenous groups began to migrate into the region from other parts of the continent. The third period involved the colonial conquest and rule of the country by France and Germany which spanned from the late

¹MthuliNcube et al, "Drivers and Dynamics of Fragility" In Africa Economic Brief, Abidjan: ADB Group, Vol. 4 Issue 5, 2013), 1

² Amy Mckenna, The History of Central and Eastern Africa (Chicago: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2011),10

1800s until 1960 when the CAR became independent. The final period is the era of Independent Central African Republic.³

The CAR has been unstable since its independence from France in 1960 and has had just a single peaceful transfer of power, in 1993. The legacy of *Coup* and past conflicts in the CAR are the roots of the conflict in the country between 2002 and 2016. Some progress towards stabilizing the country was made between 2008 and 2012.⁴ However in March 2013, a coalition of rebel groups known as the *Séléka* led a violent *Coup* in CAR, ousting the former President François Bozizé from ten years in power. The rebel alliance then installed Michel Djotodia as the President. The CAR thence relapsed into a deepening humanitarian and economic crisis compounded by violence and widespread human rights violation.⁵ Linked to the history of *Coups* is the weakness of state capacity and authority in many parts of CAR and especially in the northern regions and outside the capital Bangui. Internal problems were compounded by the destabilizing effects of regional politics. Given its history and geography, CAR is particularly vulnerable to fluctuating regional developments. This section of the paper will thus examine the causes of the Central African Republic's Conflict.

Following the *Séléka Coup*, the disintegration of the state exacerbated local conflicts and banditry giving rise to constant insecurity in Bangui and the provinces. This violence perpetuated the crisis as bloodshed feed mistrust, fear and desire to revenge.⁶ Given the breakdown of law and order, the crisis became a combination of conflicts with national and local dimensions as well as violent crime. Some drivers were identified to be the key to sustaining fragility and conflict in the CAR within the period. To understand the drivers of the conflict in the CAR it is important to appreciate the role of "trigger factors" as intervening variables between the existence of conditions necessary for the occurrence of conflict and the outbreak of conflict. These triggers include the politicisation of existing issues, contested elections outcomes and readiness of an entity or group to resort to the use of violence as an option.

In the CAR example, three categories of drivers of its conflict can be identified, primary, secondary and tertiary which are deeply enmeshed with each other and mutually reinforcing. The main primary drivers to the conflict in the CAR which are core to the conflict and immediately preceded

its occurrence includes; persistent poor governance,⁷ economic and social exclusion that involved the practice of the politics, of ethnicity and exclusion. The largely clientist nature of politics, economic collapse and worsening forms of poverty as well as state weaknesses and collapse.⁸ Also amongst the primary drivers to the conflict included religious extremism which was exploited to sustain the conflict as well as ideological exclusion that stemmed from the ideological pretensions of such leaders as the Monarchists. Jean Bédél Bokassa.⁹ These ideological divisions became rife in the politics of the CAR. The inability of the different ideological divides to find a common ground for operationalizing their search for national development provided the basis for polarisation of the political landscape with weakening impact on the state.¹⁰

The secondary drivers of the conflict in the CAR, dictated the dynamics of the conflict. These include the unofficial access to natural resources. The CAR's significant minerals such as diamonds and other exports that included timber and animal resources became key commodities in the illicit war economy.¹¹ Also associated with secondary drivers to this conflict was the proliferation of small arms and light weapons that were easily available to the various armed groups,¹² as well as youth bulge and democratic stresses. A "youth bulge" is a situation in which there is a large proportion of the youth population relative to the total adult populations.¹³ This demographic issue in the CAR contributed to the conflict due to lack of employment opportunities as the youths were easily mobilized to sustain it.

The tertiary drivers of the conflict are remotely related to the primary causes of the conflict and are key to understanding and unraveling latent factors in the conflict. States do not operate in isolation, so they are often affected by events in neighbouring countries. This is to the extent that conflicts in one country have the potential of spilling over to neighbouring countries.¹⁴ The link of the northeast of the CAR with the conflicts of Darfur and Chad deepened its own

³Ibid.

⁴MthuliNcube et al, "Drivers and Dynamics of Fragility" in Africa, in *Africa Economic Brief*, Abidjan African Development Bank Group, Volume H, Issue 5 2013), 5

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Conciliation Resources, "Analysis of the conflict and Peace building in the Central African Republic" In *Conciliation Resources, working together for peace*, (London: Conciliation Resources, November 2015), 7

⁷Louisa Lombard. "Cultural Anthropology: A Brief Political History of the Central African Republic" in the Central African Republic (CAR) in a Hot Spot (Washington DC: IPIS, June 2014), 3

⁸NathaliaDukhan, *The Central African Crisis...*, 4

⁹ Central African Republic, International Religious Freedom Report 2010, (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/r/ir/2010/14867/.htm>, Accessed October 2017

¹⁰ The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Central African Republic..., 1106

¹¹Amadou, Sy et al, *Emerging from Crisis: The role of Economic Recovery in Creating a durable Peace for the Central African Republic*, (Washington DC: Global View, No 4, Oct. 2015), 14

¹² Conciliation Resources, "Analysis of Conflict and Peace building in the Central African Republic" in conciliation Resources, *Working together for peace* (London: Conciliation Resources, November 2015), 7-8

¹³MthuliNcube et al, "Drivers and Dynamics of Fragility" In *Africa Economic Brief*, Abidjan: ADB Group, Vol.

¹⁴ Tamara Lynn et al, *Central African Republic Culture, History and People* (New York: EncyclopaediaBritannica:<http://www.Britannica.Com/place/CAR>, 2014, 600

conflict. This added to the fact that there was widespread neglect in the rural areas of the country, to explain why the crisis with its attendant violence flared up in many parts of the country almost simultaneously.¹⁵

From the above therefore, it is clear that the conflict in the Central African Republic was multifaceted as no single issue could solely be seen to be responsible for it. The conflict therefore was the outcome of a combination of accumulated grievances that spanned from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs in the history of the Central African Republic. Based on the neighborhood effects, the conflict in the CAR had implications for neighbouring countries including Cameroon.

III. PRINCIPAL PROTAGONISTS OF THE CONFLICT

The recent crisis, which became more serious after the Djotodia led *Coup*, occurred against the backdrop of a phantom state and a collapsed economy. Sectarian tensions quietly rose, fuelled by the interference of foreign mercenaries, leading to attempts at the ethnic cleansing of Muslims.¹⁶ The conflict initially started as a contest between two well defined rival groups namely, the *Séléka* and the *Anti-Balaka*. These groups later became fragmented with competing agendas and interests, thereby complicating and perpetuating the conflict. The number of actors in the conflict were therefore ever on the increase.

IV. MAIN ARMED GROUPS IN THE CAR CONFLICT

Table 1: The *Séléka* Coalition and ex-*Séléka* factions

Group	Year of Formation	Leader(s)	Area of influence
Popular Front for the Rebirth of the Central African Republic (FPRC)	2013	Michel Djotodia and Nourredine Adams	Bamingui-Bangoran, Vokaga and the Haute Kotto in the North East of CAR
Patriotic Rally for the Renewal of the Central African Republic (PRRC)	November 2014	Djono – Ahaba	Gula, Runga and Arab communities in the North East of the CAR
Union for Peace in the Central African Republic UPC	September 2014	Ali Darassa	Bambari in the North of the CAR
Reformed <i>Séléka</i> (SR)	2015	Moussa Dhaffane	Bambari, North of CAR
Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic (MPC)	July 2015	Mohamed Bahar	KagaBandoro, North East of CAR
Union of Democratic	November 2006	Michel Djotodia,	Vokaga, Haute Kotto. Eastern CAR

¹⁵ Peter Knoope et al, Central African Republic: A Conflict Misunderstood” (Cape Town: The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, IJR, 2015), 9.

¹⁶ Faustin Archange, Central African Republic: National Recovery and Peace building Plan, (Bangui: World Bank Group, 2016), 17

Forces for Unity (UFDR)		Hassan Justin, Abakar Sabone	
Convection of patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP)	2008	Abdulaye Hissene	Runga in the North East of the country.
WaKodro Salute Patriotic Convection	June	Moussa Dhaffane	Bambari North CAR

Source: Developed by the Researcher

Table 2: ANTI – BALAKA MOVEMENTS

Group	Year of Formation	Leader(s)	Area of influence
National Coordination of the Liberators of the Central African Republic people (CNLPC)	2014	Patrice Edouard Ngaissona	Boy Rabe, and areas around Bangui
Resistance Front (FR)	2014	Léopold Bara and Captain kani	Bangui

Source: Developed by the Researcher

Table 4: Other Armed Groups

Group	Year of Formation	Leader(s)	Area of influence
Democratic Front for the Central African Republic People (FDPC)	2003	Abdoulaye Miskine	Ouham and the area close to the border with Cameroon
Revolution and Justice (RJ)	2013	Armel Sayo	Ouham Pende
Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD)	2005	Jean-Jacques Démafourth	Ouham Pende

Source: Developed by the Researcher

Table 1: Foreign Armed Groups

Group	Year of Formation	Leader(s)	Area of influence	Area
Popular Front for Recovery (FPR)	1998	Baba Laddè	Chad	Amongst the Patoralists in the CAR Chad Border
Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA)	1983	John Garang	Dinka group in South Sudan opposed to the Khartoum government	Mboki refugee Camps in South Eastern CAR.
United Front for Change (FUC)	December 2005	Mahamat Nour Abdelkarim	Chadian Rebel group	Had Besses in North –Eastern CAR – It was officially dissolved in December 2006
Lord's Resistance Army	1987	Joseph Kony	A rebel Ugandan Group	Obo and Djéma

Source: Developed by the Researcher.

Some other protagonists in the conflict included the African Union (AU), the United Nations Organisation (UNO) as well as International and indigenous NGOs. Individual countries whose roles were prominent in the conflict included as Republic of Chad, the Republic of Cameroon, Gabon, Congo countries as Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, the Republic of South Africa, Angola and France.

Efforts towards resolutions

The earliest external effort to mediate in the CAR Conflict was that of the Sub-regional grouping CEMAC. CEMAC is a relatively young organization, but with old roots. It is the successor of the Central African Customs Union, *Union Donanieré des Etats de L'Afrique Centrale* (UDEAC), that was created in 1966 by Cameroon, Gabon, Chad, the Republic of Congo and the CAR to maintain the Colonial era economic ties amongst them.¹ This body was joined by Equatorial Guinea (an ex-Spanish colony) in 1984. It was revived by the N'Djamena Treaty of 1999 and assumed the new appellation of CEMAC².

Although CEMAC initially had purely economic objectives, its scope was with time progressively widened to include peace and security issues. This is evident in its role in the CAR conflict. In 2002, CEMAC formed the *Force Multinationale en Centrafricaine* (FOMUC), as a peacekeeping mission deployed into the country by members of the organization and tried to keep peace in the CAR from 2002 – 2008.³ It functioned in that capacity till it was taken over in July 2008 and transformed into the *Mission de Consolidation de la Paix en République Centrafricaine* (MICOPAX) by a wider sub-regional grouping, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

The treaty establishing ECCAS was ratified by eleven original members in 1983.⁴ The organization is presently composed of ten countries.⁵ Rwanda that was a founding member quit the community in 2007 for the reason that she was facing difficulties in maintaining multiple memberships in four regional communities.⁶ The organization established a Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX), in February 1999 to promote, maintain and consolidate peace and security in the Central African Sub-region.⁷ In response to the conflict in the CAR, MICOPAX

was constituted to subsume the CEMAC force FOMUC in efforts to ensure a return to peace and security in the CAR. This took place in 2008 and it continued in this effort in tandem with those of the African Union (AU) that came up with its own force the African-Led International support Mission in the Central African Republic (AFISM-CAR), constituted in August 2013. It also worked alongside the United Nations force, Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), constituted in April 2014, the European Union, France as well as other countries and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations. These efforts resulted in the election of a post conflict president in 2016 to continue with the reconciliation process in the country.

V. CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONFLICT ON CAMEROON

The crisis resulted in the movement of displaced persons into neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Sudan, and South Sudan among others. According to the UNHCR Global Appeal 2014-2015, the CAR Revised Regional Refugee Response Plan indicated that by June 2014, 102,795 were registered.⁸ The refugees from the CAR were by far the largest number of refugees in Cameroon. These refugees started entering Cameroon in 2005/2006 due to high banditry and other security threats in the northwest region of CAR. The numbers increased as from 2013 following increased political instability and violence. These CAR refugees settled in the East and Adamawa regions as well as in Yaoundé. These refugees live in 308 camps in Cameroon except for those scattered in Yaoundé. Most of these refugee camps are in the East Region of Cameroon and in the Adamawa region.⁹ These refugees are largely from the Mbororo ethnic group and is predominantly Muslim. Because of their frequent movement as nomadic pastoralists, they had developed long established ties with their host communities, especially in the East Region.

Table 6:– Central African Refugees in Neighbouring Countries

Country	CAR refugees
Chad	69,436
Cameroon	275,835
Congo	23,623
Democratic Republic of Congo	95,606
South Sudan	1,879
Sudan	1,582

Source UNHCR, Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2017-2019.

¹Angela Meyer, Peace and security Co-operation in Central Africa: Developments, challenges and Prospects (Uppsala: NordiskaAfrikainstitutet, 2011), 13.

² Ibid

³ Ibid,9

⁴ See treaty Establishing the Economic community of Central African StatesECCAS

⁵ The current member states of ECCAS includes Cameroon, Gabon, CAR, Tchad, The Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Burundi, Angola and Sao Tome and Principe

⁶ Ibid

⁷ COPAX Protocol. Art 4, February 1999

⁸US Department of State,“Field Evaluation of local Integration of Central African Refugees in Cameroon: Final Field Report (Washington DC U.S. Department of state No SAWMMAI3F2592, September 22, 2014), 5

⁹ Ibid.

The refugees were given land by the village chiefs to farm and rear cattle. This rearing of cattle at times created conflicts between them and the farmers in some instances as the cattle of the refugees destroyed the crops of some farmers. These problems were often resolved peacefully in ways that were mutually agreeable to the farmers and the agro-pastoralists. Some however used the lands they acquired to construct houses for themselves and their families. For the most part these refugees were not employed in the formal sector. Farming and herding remained their main forms of livelihood in Cameroon. Some however became involved in such activities as small animal husbandry, tailoring or trading.¹⁰

The CAR refugees in Cameroon attested to the fact that they are lived in peace, their children are given the opportunity to continue their education and the people are welcoming and understanding. The refugees acquired land and some even got married to the indigenes meaning that amongst the people, there were no social barriers between the CAR refugees and their Cameroonian host. This social integration with ease thus impacted positively on the CAR refugees in Cameroon. The impact on these refugee settlements on Cameroon could be explained in terms of pressure on land for both farming and grazing as the refugees are reducing the stock of land available to the indigenes. Also, minor cases of farmer-grazier problems emerged within the period and could still be coming up in future. However this could easily be rationalized and peacefully resolved by using this maxim of a Cameroonian farmer. "The refugees' cattle destroy our crops and our cattle destroy their crops. We cannot just blame them".¹¹ The increased number of refugees in Cameroon from the CAR also resulted in increased promiscuity in the host communities in Cameroon as desperate girls and women easily fell prey to unscrupulous men in order to have a means to survive. However, the two benefit from each other in terms of the economic upliftment. Some of the areas in Cameroon that host these refugees include Borgop, Meiganga, Girwa, Gado Badzere, Garoua-Bulai, Kete, and Kentzou amongst others.¹²

The crisis increased the security spending of Cameroon evident in the fact that since the outbreak of hostilities, the Cameroonian authorities started making efforts to minimize the possibility of the hostilities spilling over the border. This risk of spill over was caused by the activities of *Séléka* fighters, who staged several incursions into the eastern region of Cameroon resulting in the killing of Cameroonian soldiers and civilians.¹³ In some cases, these incursions were intended to loot while in other cases, they were aimed at refugee camps, where several former members of the CAR armed forces (FACA) and members of the defunct

Presidential Guard had taken refuge. The presence of these FACA soldiers constituted a major security risk for Cameroon as they crossed the border with their arms and were organizing themselves in Cameroon to launch an offensive against the *Séléka*. This led to the decision by the Cameroon government to carry out several disarmament operations throughout April and May 2013 in refugee camps along the border and to dispatch a Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) to the eastern part of the country in early December 2013. All these came with huge costs for Cameroon as it stretched its defense budget¹⁴.

The security risks caused by the incursions of rebels into Cameroon made the government to expel former president François Bozizé from the country on the 4th of February 2014 and to arrest Abdoulaye Miskine the leader of the FDPC. This arrest increased the security risk in the country as the FDPC fighters staged several incursions into Cameroonian territory, taking civilian hostages in an effort to force the authorities into liberating their leader. To deal with this additional security threat in the Eastern region of Cameroon, Abdoulaye Miskine was released and exiled to Gabon¹⁵.

The conflict in the CAR negatively affected the export and transit of goods from Cameroon into the CAR. In 2013, the value of goods exported by Cameroon to the CAR decreased by 49 percent compared to the figures of 2012. The crisis also had a similar impact on the transit of goods from third countries through Cameroon to the CAR as the quantity of transit goods in tons decreased in 2013 by 33% compared to 2012.¹⁶ The crisis thus had a negative impact on the Cameroons economy as revenues from transport, trade, agriculture, tourism and pastoralism with the CAR declined.

Cameroon had both diamond and gold mines, which are located in the east of the country. Some of these are linked to the mines in the CAR. Before and during the conflict, there were reports of diamond and gold smuggling from the country into Cameroon. Central African diamonds smuggled into Cameroon during the conflict were sold in such localities as Garoua Boulai, Kentzou, and West of Berbérati.¹⁷ This trafficking in diamonds into Cameroon became rampant when the CAR was suspended from the Kimberley process and went a long way to tarnish the image of Cameroon as it was accused of dealing in "blood diamonds".

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper opines that conflicts are rife in the African continent as is evident in the CAR example. These conflicts are the outcome of a myriad of issues that arise basically from the fluidity of inherited boundaries. This is coupled with

¹⁰ Ibid., 8

¹¹ Ibid., 7

¹² Interview with Bozangue Bambe Sandra. CAR Refugee in Yaounde

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 74

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Amy Mekenna, The History of Central and Eastern Africa... 15.

economic, social and political alienation of some sections of the society as well as an over exaggerated sense of greed. These conflicts come with serious consequences for the belligerents as they result in the collapse of governments and the economy in affected nations. It results in internal displacements, the production of refugees that become a burden to neighbouring countries, the disruption of regional economic and social cohesion as well as the exportation of insecurity. This is made evident as conflicts have the potential of spillover into neighbouring countries. This ends up aggravating the security situation of the affected region or sub-region. The Central African Republic's Conflict and its impact on Cameroon is an indication of such spill over potential of conflicts in Africa.

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