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Shifting the Political Strategy of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in the Central African Republic

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Violence against civilians in the Central African Republic (CAR) is complex, driven by numerous conflicts at different levels. A national-level peace agreement may contribute to stability, but cannot fully address these diverse conflict drivers. Efforts by the UN peacekeeping mission in CAR, MINUSCA, to support a political solution to the conflict have so far been undermined by armed groups' competing economic interests; the CAR government's lack of commitment; the persistence of diverse local conflicts; and the mission's own weaknesses. In order to protect civilians from violence and promote stability, MINUSCA must shift its political strategy to navigate these challenges.

Recommendations:

- MINUSCA should place greater focus on local-level conflict response and on intercommunal reconciliation at the local and national levels. Member states should provide financial and political support to complement and advance these initiatives, including at the Brussels donor conference in November.

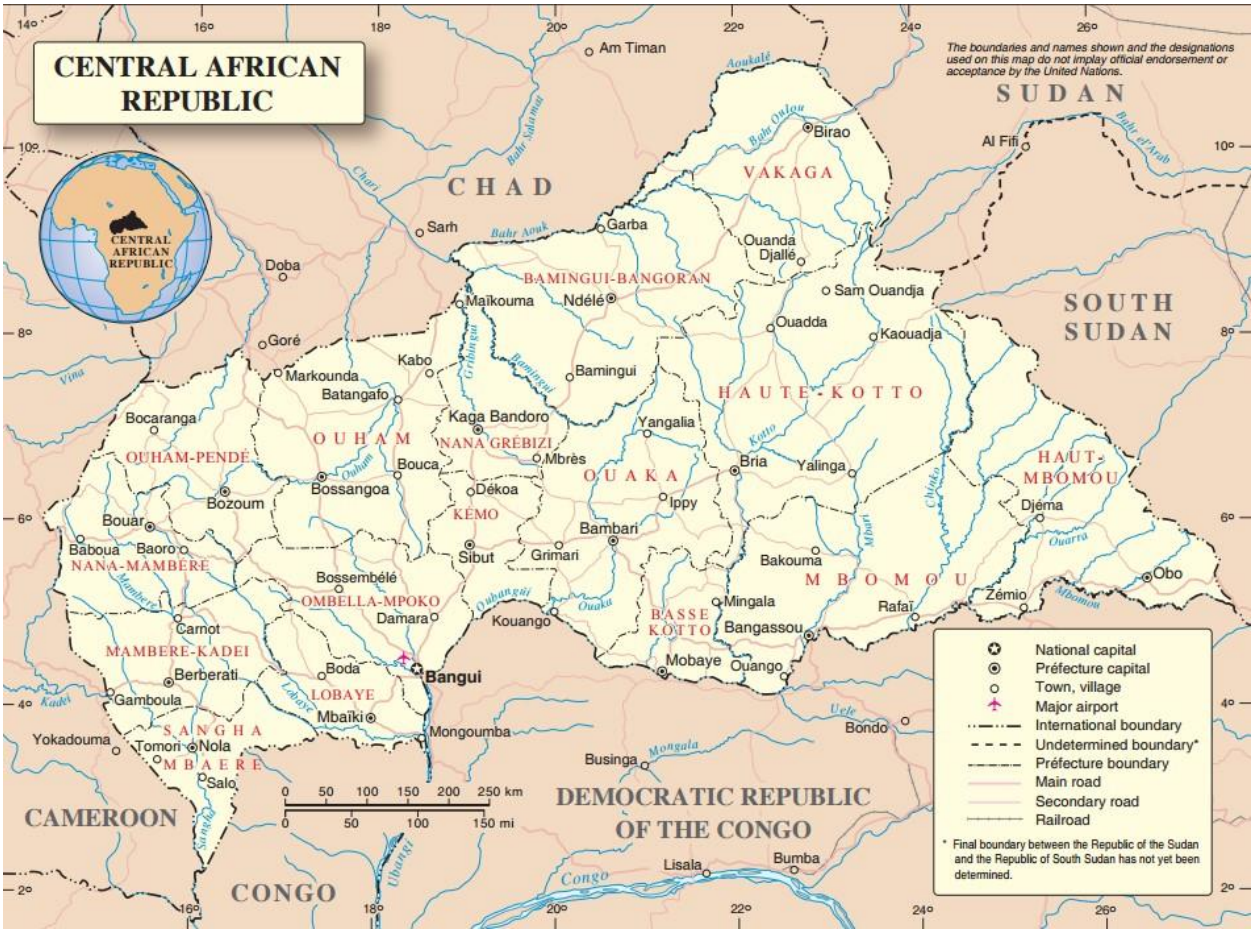
- The relationship between MINUSCA and the CAR government is beginning to show signs of strain. Member states should monitor the situation and take diplomatic action if necessary to prevent a pattern of improper obstruction by the CAR government.

- MINUSCA should improve its early warning and early response capabilities, including by setting up Joint Operations Centers in its field offices.

- MINUSCA should step up its efforts to arrest suspected perpetrators of serious crimes to put pressure on armed groups and to bring them back to the negotiating table.

- MINUSCA's military protection of civilians approach aims to enforce "weapons-free zones" to restrict armed group movements. The mission should establish a compliance monitoring mechanism and report regularly to the UN Secretariat on troops' performance in implementing this strategy.

- MINUSCA should continue efforts to implement a more victim-sensitive approach to combat sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. The UN Secretariat should review options for accelerating the preliminary investigation process.



Map produced by the United Nations Department of Field Support, http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/car.pdf.

MINUSCA's Mandate

On July 26, 2016, Security Council Resolution 2301 renewed MINUSCA's mandate until November 2017. Unlike its predecessor, Resolution 2301 distinguishes between "immediate" and "core" priority tasks. MINUSCA's immediate priority tasks include 1) protection of civilians (POC), 2) the promotion and protection of human rights, 3) the facilitation of a secure environment conducive to the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance, and 4) the protection of UN personnel and assets. The new mandate has expanded MINUSCA's POC activities to include maintaining a "proactive deployment [and] a mobile and flexible posture."[1]

Resolution 2301 then identifies four core priority tasks: 1) support for the reconciliation and stabilization political processes, the extension of state authority, and the preservation of territorial integrity, 2) security sector reform (SSR), 3) disarmament,

[1] United Nations Security Council Resolution 2301, S/RES/2301, July 26, 2016, para. 33 (a)(i).

demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR), and 4) assistance to advance the rule of law and combat impunity.

Resolution 2301 instructs MINUSCA to address not only the symptoms, but also the underlying drivers of CAR's conflict. For example, the mandate instructs MINUSCA to use its good offices and technical expertise in support of efforts to address the root causes of the conflict, as well as to assist the CAR authorities in addressing marginalization and local grievances.[2] Similarly, it mandates support under DDRR to an inclusive dialogue on community security with a view to addressing the root causes of conflict.[3]

Challenges to the Implementation of Peace Agreements

In May 2015, at the Bangui National Forum, representatives from ten armed groups and the CAR transitional government signed the Republican Pact for Peace, National Reconciliation, and Reconstruction as well as agreements on the principles for DDRR, SSR, and justice and reconciliation. But implementation of these agreements has encountered significant challenges. Armed actors, driven by primarily economic motivations, have reneged on commitments. The newly elected government has delayed on critical agendas such as DDRR and intercommunal reconciliation. And persistent local-level conflicts have presented roadblocks to the national peace process.

Armed Group Economic Interests

The ex-Séléka, a majority-Muslim group of armed actors, has splintered into multiple factions. Former elements of the anti-balaka, a majority-Christian movement that formed as a community self-protection mechanism in response to attacks by the Séléka, are organized in loosely aligned groups with relatively weak command and control structures. Analysts with whom the research team spoke largely agreed that these armed groups are mainly acting for personal gain rather than truly political objectives.

A few analysts did cite some potential political agendas. Some ex-Séléka fighters may be aiming for the partition of CAR into two independent states. Analysts identified the Front Patriotique pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) in particular as pushing for the partition of CAR into two countries. Other ex-Séléka factions may be pursuing a decentralized arrangement in which the northeast of the country is effectively self-governing. There is speculation that some of the main ex-Séléka factions, feeling marginalized and ignored by the new government, are trying to regroup. In May, Joseph Zoundeko, the chief of the Rassemblement Patriotique pour le Renouveau de la

[2] Ibid, paras. 34 (a)(i)-(ii).
[3] Ibid, para. 34 (c)(ii).

Centrafrique (RPRC), announced that four ex-Séléka factions were planning a meeting to reconcile and formalize a single chain of command among them.[4]

But most analysts viewed these groups' ostensible political agendas as superficial, and told the research team that many armed groups were motivated mainly by economic interests. For example, the transhumance corridor between Chad and Sudan represents a significant opportunity for income generation. Upon seizing control of this corridor in 2012, armed groups raided and imposed taxes on cattle, demanded payment for the settling of disputes, and instituted arbitrary fines for a range of "infractions."[5] In the west of the country, armed ex-Séléka offer security to herders, imposing taxes in exchange for their services.[6]

Similarly, armed groups vie for control over areas with valuable mineral resources. When the Séléka took control of the east in 2012, they implemented an organized system of mine extortion, levying parallel taxes, selling parallel authorizations, and investing in mining operations.[7] The Unité pour la Centrafrique (UPC) took control of many of the county's gold mines, while the FPRC acquired a monopoly over CAR's diamond mines in the far north.[8] In the west, the Séléka targeted diamond mines in Abba sub-prefecture, just south of Bouar, and collaborated with or extorted from diamond traders and collectors there.[9] Retaliatory anti-balaka violence drove the Séléka out of mines in the west and intimidated the predominantly Muslim diamond collectors in the region into leaving as well. Anti-balaka continue to charge money to protect the gold and diamond mines in the west.[10]

Finally, armed actors, particularly the ex-Séléka, may be interested in securing gains from the forthcoming DDRR program. Many may view DDRR as a way to find income opportunities for themselves and their community members in the face of high unemployment. Additionally, several ex-Séléka leaders have expressed the desire to negotiate government positions as a part of a disarmament arrangement, though President Touadera refuses to discuss potential political positions for the opposition until the armed groups have disarmed. Armed groups thus have significant economic motivations for perpetuating violence in violation of the peace agreement.

[4] Sylvestre Sokambi, "Centrafrique : Quatre branches de l'ex-Séléka envisagent mettre en place une seule chaine de commandement," Réseau des Journalistes Pour les Droits de l'Homme, 24 Mai 2016, http://rjdh.org/centrafrique-quatre-branches-de-lex-seleka-envisagent-mettre-place-seule-chaine-de-commandement.
[5] Yannick Weyns, Lotte Hoex, Filip Hilgert and Steven Spittaels, *Mapping Conflict Motives: The Central African Republic*, International Peace Information Service, 2014.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

Lack of Government Commitment

Despite several delays and the continued presence of armed groups, CAR succeeded in holding free and fair general elections in February and March of this year. This achievement remains a source of great pride for Central Africans, and a huge accomplishment for the mission, which provided support for the development and dissemination of a code of good conduct, trained political party election monitors, organized information sessions for presidential candidates, and held informal meetings with presidential and legislative candidates throughout the country to impress on them the importance of issue-based campaigns responding to the aspirations of Central Africans.[11]

The newly elected government inherited the terms and responsibilities of the accords signed in May 2015. While mission personnel said that President Touadera has tried to engage respectfully with armed groups and other conflict stakeholders, the government as a whole has not played a strong role in advancing the Bangui Forum agreements. For example, many analysts with whom the research team met expressed concern that the government has made very little progress on DDRR. Some also suggested that while the government has publicly supported the creation of the Special Criminal Court, it is working to undermine its implementation behind the scenes.

The government has notably struggled to demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and reconciliation. The responsibility for developing strong reconciliation messages, a national reconciliation process, and adequate coordination mechanisms is spread across three government offices, which allows each office to shift responsibility to the others and has led to very little progress. Many government officials still hold deeply-rooted anti-Muslim sentiments, and the government and armed forces remain overwhelmingly Christian. A number of analysts observed that the government has given no indication that it will change the situation for CAR's marginalized populations. The lack of government attention to refugee return and inter-religious cooperation has raised concerns among the general population.

MINUSCA has recently taken steps to shift more focus to community reconciliation and engagement. For example, the mission previously allocated significantly more funds to the restoration of state authority than to social cohesion in its delivery of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). However, MINUSCA now budgets roughly equal QIP funds to each stream of work. The mission will also shortly roll out a new community engagement strategy. But the research team heard that the mission's efforts to promote reconciliation have been undermined by the government's unwillingness to advance this agenda.

[11] Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Central African Republic, S/2016/305, April 1, 2016.

Local Conflict Dynamics

The peace agreement aims to address the conflict dynamics between the government, the ex-Séléka, and the anti-balaka that culminated in the 2012-2013 crisis, but these represent only a small fraction of the overall conflict dynamics in CAR. Local conflicts pose major threats to civilians, and these local conflicts have the potential to derail the implementation of the peace agreement.

Many analysts identified clashes between pastoralists and agriculturalists as a predominant source of local conflict. According to the Protection Cluster, approximately 60 percent of protection incidents that take place in the transhumance corridor are linked to clashes between herders and armed groups or bandits.[12] In the northwest of the country, the Sandiki herders from Cameroon coming to graze their cattle have clashed with the local agricultural populations living there. In Bossangoa, Fulani herders have clashed with local farmers over water access. The southeast of the country is also home to a longstanding conflict between herders and farmers that has been aggravated by an influx of refugees from South Sudan.

These local conflicts are often linked in complex ways to the national-level conflict. Throughout the country, pastoralists are perceived to be affiliated with ex-Séléka communities and are therefore targeted by anti-balaka elements. Herders in turn arm themselves in self-defense. This is the case for the Fulani herders in Bossangoa and Bria. Herders have also aligned themselves with armed ex-Séléka factions for protection. In June, a group of herders that were being escorted by a coalition of Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) and Révolution Justice (RJ) ex-Séléka soldiers stopped in Ngaoundaye and sent emissaries into town to pay the requested taxes to the local authorities. Anti-balaka elements reportedly attacked both the emissaries and the herders in an altercation that resulted in the death of six people and the theft of a hundred cows.[13]

Local clashes between Christian and Muslim communities persist; these clashes are both a product and a driver of the national-level conflict. Several areas became enclaves for Muslims fleeing anti-balaka violence in 2014, and many enclaves persisted after the violence subsided.[14] In Bouar, the center of which is controlled by anti-balaka elements, there are some quarters of the city that Muslims are unable to access.

Local actors also clash over control of natural resources and areas with substantial mineral wealth. Legal diamond mining has resumed in Berbérati, Carnot, Boda, and Bouar after these areas were declared green zones under the Kimberly Process. Clashes are expected between populations who used to control the diamond business and

[12] UNHCR, "Volatile situation in CAR from 11 June 2016," http://data.unhcr.org/car/download.php?id=763.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Amnesty International, "Erased Identity: Muslims in Ethnically-cleansed Areas of the Central African Republic," July 2015, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr19/2165/2015/en/ , p. 8.

local armed elements trying to assert control.[15] Furthermore, perpetual instability has yielded massive displacement – at the peak of the crisis, nearly one million people had been internally displaced or had fled to neighboring countries[16] and the Muslim population in Bangui dropped from up to 145,000 to just 900.[17] The phenomenon of IDPs and refugees returning to find their land, homes, and businesses occupied has sparked a number of violent clashes.

Challenges for MINUSCA

MINUSCA faces very high expectations from both the CAR government and the population. Many people expect MINUSCA to be neutralizing armed groups as the French Sangaris intervention did, and have expressed frustration with the mission's seeming unwillingness to take a more robust and offensive posture against armed actors. Many in the government consider it MINUSCA's responsibility to restore and maintain security throughout the country until the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) can redeploy, especially since the capacity of the FACA is severely limited by a UN Security Council arms embargo. Some analysts with whom the research team met predicted that hostility towards the mission, both from the government and the population, would increase in the near future if MINUSCA is not able to meet or manage these expectations.

Obstacles to Physical Protection

MINUSCA's military POC strategy centers around containing armed groups. The mission has adopted a "red line" approach to restrict armed group movements. Under this approach, peacekeepers protect the boundaries of "weapons-free zones" and establish checkpoints to ensure that armed groups do not enter. Bambari was declared a weapons-free zone in September 2015, although ex-Séléka and anti-balaka in the neighborhood remain armed and peacekeepers in the area were able to prevent 12 people dying in intercommunal clashes in the city December that same year.[18] On September 16, 2016, armed clashes between ex-Séléka and anti-balaka fighters in Kaga-Bandoro, another weapons-free zone, resulted in the deaths of at least six people.[19]

One MINUSCA representative said they hoped that this approach would help to measure troops' performance on POC, as it would be relatively easy to know whether an armed group had crossed a red line. However, a civil society representative told the research team that ex-Séléka fighters routinely crossed MINUSCA checkpoints in Kaga-

[15] BBC, "La RCA reprend le commerce de diamant," June 7, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/afrique/region/2016/06/160607_car_diamond.
[16] Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, "Central African Republic IDP Figures Analysis," August 21, 2015, http://www.internal-displacement.org/sub-saharan-africa/central-african-republic/figures-analysis.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Reuters, "Armed Men Kill 12 in Central African Republic," March 6, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-violence-idUSKCN0W80K1.
[19] UN News Center, "UN mission in Central African Republic condemns attack on villages, reinforces presence in affected areas," September 19, 2016, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54955#.V-U2-yErIdU.

Bandoro without repercussions. Many people inside and outside the mission with whom the research team met said that many Central Africans have been frustrated by what they see as inadequate protection by some troops.

One of the greatest challenges for MINUSCA's physical protection efforts is the mission's weak capabilities for early warning and early response. The mission struggles with intelligence gathering that allows them to identify developing situations and plan a rapid response, in part because of communications infrastructure weaknesses that cause information delays. The development of a Community Alert Network has strengthened the mission's early warning capabilities. Decentralizing the mission's Joint Operations Center (JOC), which produces analysis of urgent threats, so that the mission has JOCs in regional offices as well as in Bangui, could also help improve early warning. But timely deployment of troops in response to alerts remains a major challenge.

Other challenges identified by mission personnel include a lack of mobility – the mission has a shortage of air assets, and particularly helicopters with night flying capability. This problem is compounded by logistics challenges. For example, the mission is forced to send fuel by road to resupply helicopters based in remote areas. Because of the poor roads, it has taken the mission as long as three weeks to drive from Bangui to Obo in the southeast. Mission personnel and civil society representatives expressed frustration about some troops' unwillingness to confront armed groups. Some troops also have difficulty communicating with the local population; since many troops cannot speak French, they may have difficulty communicating even with elites and government representatives. This problem persists despite the fact that MINUSCA has recruited 52 community liaison assistants (CLAs) – national staff intended to improve communication between the mission and location. MINUSCA is considering deploying mixed troops of different nationalities and with different language skills in Kaga-Bandoro in a further effort to address the language challenge.

Perception of Partiality

The mission's legitimacy and operational capacity are undermined by perceptions that it does not act impartially. Some ex-Séléka claim that MINUSCA is biased in favor of the anti-balaka, pointing to its mandated support for the national security forces, which are almost exclusively Christian and have incorporated some former anti-balaka elements. Others accuse MINUSCA of favoring the ex-Séléka elements or Muslims. The mission has a much stronger footprint in former anti-balaka regions and has therefore arrested far more former anti-balaka than ex-Séléka elements. Some Christian Central Africans assume that MINUSCA troops from Muslim-majority countries are inherently biased in favor of Muslims.

The government has also publicly accused MINUSCA of favoring the ex-Séléka. For example, MINUSCA conducted an operation against a group of ex-Séléka fighters near the town of Sibut in August. The mission managed to detain 35 fighters, but the leaders

of the convoy reportedly fled into the bush.[20] One analyst told the research team that the government privately thanked the mission for its efforts, but publicly implied that the mission deliberately let some of the fighters escape.

Relationship with the Government

MINUSCA enjoys a relatively cooperative relationship with some parts of the host state government, particularly with President Touadera. However, several analysts with whom the research team met reported an increasingly difficult relationship between the mission and many representatives of the CAR government at different levels. Mission personnel noted that their relationships with the newly elected government were strong at first but said that cooperation began to deteriorate quickly. Several said they thought the government's lack of cooperativeness was related to a desire to assert national sovereignty. Some also said that the government's negative attitude toward the mission was related to general frustration at the international community over the continued UN Security Council arms embargo on CAR that prevents the FACA from developing into a stronger force. Very recent initiatives by MINUSCA and the FACA to jointly patrol and guard checkpoints might help to improve the mission's relationship with the security and defense sectors.

In some cases, MINUSCA personnel said they weren't sure whether government actions were deliberate attempts to impede the mission's work; for example, in the wake of the Sibut operation described previously, a FACA checkpoint at the perimeter of Bangui reportedly prevented a MINUSCA convoy from leaving the city to pursue the perpetrators who remained at large. The government claimed the people who disrupted this operation were impersonating FACA soldiers and not operating under the control of the state authorities. Similarly, one analyst observed that MINUSCA has repeatedly been asked to pay fees to enter and leave the airport, in violation of the mission's status of forces agreement with the government. So far there is not cause for serious concern, but member states and mission leadership should be prepared to push back swiftly against attempts at obstruction by the CAR government if these problems escalate.

Urgent Temporary Measures

Uniquely among UN peacekeeping missions, MINUSCA has been authorized to use urgent temporary measures (UTMs) to "maintain basic law and order and fight impunity."[21] This mandate allows the mission to arrest or temporarily detain armed actors "at the formal request of the CAR Authorities and in areas where national security forces are not present or operational."[22]

[20] MINUSCA Press Release, "MINUSCA Detains a Convoy of Armed Men Near Sibut," 14 August 2016, http://minusca.unmissions.org/en/minusca-detains-convoy-armed-men-near-sibut.

[21] United Nations Security Council Resolution 2149, S/RES/2149. April 10, 2014.

[22] United Nations Security Council Resolution 2301, S/RES/2301, July 26, 2016.

Some mission personnel and outside experts believe that MINUSCA is not taking full advantage of its UTM mandate and has been too cautious on conducting arrests. Several analysts expressed concern to the research team about rising threats of armed group activity, including the risk that ex- Séléka elements may regroup. Strategic arrests of senior armed group members could help to put pressure on armed groups and bring them to the negotiating table. By arresting those accused of serious violations against civilians, the mission may also be able to deter further violence against civilians by armed groups.

Exercising the UTMs mandate comes with its own challenges. In most areas of the country where UTMs apply – i.e. where national authorities are not operational – MINUSCA has only military and no police personnel deployed. Yet UN troops (unlike UN police) are not trained on arrest and detention protocols. Moreover, when peacekeepers detain armed actors in the northeast of the country, far from any semblance of state authority, then they have no legitimate authorities to whom they can transfer those detainees. This has sometimes forced MINUSCA troops to release detainees when they were unable to transfer custody to national authorities.

Several MINUSCA personnel were also troubled by the fact that the UTM mandate allows MINUSCA to participate in only one part of the criminal justice process. CAR's law enforcement and justice systems remain weak and corrupt. MINUSCA is asked to assist with arrests of individuals without having any influence over or insight into the investigation processes that produced their arrest warrants. The mission is also required to hand detainees over to a trial process that many doubt will uphold the rights of the accused. Despite these limitations, MINUSCA's UTM mandate provides significant added value to the mission's activities and could be exploited further.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Over the past two years, MINUSCA has been at the center of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by peacekeepers. Incidents of SEA by peacekeepers cause great harm to civilians and undermine the population's and the international community's trust in the mission. MINUSCA's Conduct and Discipline Team (CDT) is undertaking a number of activities aimed at ensuring justice for victims and preventing further SEA. CDT organizes induction trainings for military and civilian personnel, refresher trainings, and trainer trainings to build awareness on SEA issues, although the effectiveness of these initiatives has not yet been evaluated. MINUSCA is also in the process of establishing SEA focal points in all 12 regional offices. The mission has been doing outreach to inform local communities of MINUSCA's mandate, SEA policy, the disciplinary process, and opportunities for legal recourse. So far this outreach has been in done in Bangui, Bambari, Bouar, and Bria.

The CDT is working to encourage a more victim-sensitive process when SEA allegations are received. For example, it is trying to eliminate interviews of alleged victims by

MINUSCA military personnel or other individuals without the appropriate training. It is also trying to ensure that victims are not needlessly interviewed multiple times by different personnel from MINUSCA or UN agencies as a result of insufficient coordination.

The research team heard criticism that the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), responsible for conducting preliminary investigations into allegations of SEA by peacekeepers, has been overwhelmed by the number of cases reported. Investigations can take more than three months. These investigations and new policy guidance from headquarters and the Force Commander may have caused peacekeepers to be overly cautious of engaging with communities. Community engagement is critical for effective protection, and troops should not perceive that they are prevented from speaking with community members because of SEA guidelines.

Political Strategy Moving Forward

To navigate the challenges identified above, MINUSCA should shift its political strategy in two key areas.

First, the mission as a whole must place greater emphasis on addressing conflict at the local level. With many offices and bases spread across the country, MINUSCA is opportunely situated to analyze and address local conflict drivers. The mission's widespread presence gives it a comparative advantage on addressing local-level conflict compared to many other international actors working to support peace in CAR. MINUSCA should of course continue to support the implementation of the Bangui Forum peace accords, but must pay proportionate attention to the local conflicts that drive the bulk of violence against civilians, including intercommunal and resource conflicts.

This shift may require MINUSCA to further decentralize in order to better analyze and respond to local conflict – for example, by setting up JOCs in field offices and perhaps deploying formed police units to more towns. It will also require the mission to develop tailored solutions to address the factors that drive and sustain local conflicts. For example, MINUSCA, with the support of donors, could support the development and build the capacity of state security forces that are specialized in securing mines or livestock. MINUSCA could also consider prioritizing the deployment of state authorities to areas near mines to disrupt armed group access. These types of initiatives could reduce tensions that lead to local violence and also diminish armed groups' funding. However, they would need to be based on thorough analysis of local dynamics and accompanied by methods of holding state forces or authorities accountable for their behavior.

Local conflicts may be linked to actors at the national or regional level. Serious efforts to address local conflict will therefore also require greater coordination between different sections of the mission at different levels. A number of MINUSCA personnel identified a need to improve the link between local field offices and Bangui headquarters. MINUSCA representatives identified a few instances where cooperation between different sections of the mission, as well as with other actors, has yielded success in addressing local-level conflict. For example, personnel from Civil Affairs, Political Affairs, and the French embassy, among others, cooperated and engaged with different stakeholders to reopen access to a Muslim cemetery in the PK5 neighborhood of Bangui. Yet overall, field offices continue to feel isolated from the national headquarters, and cooperation between sections still needs improvement. In some cases, local conflict may also require MINUSCA to facilitate dialogue with neighboring country stakeholders, for example to deal with land disputes, cross-border cattle herding conflicts, and armed group movements across national boundaries.

Second, MINUSCA must invest more in mediation, reconciliation, and social cohesion efforts at the local and national levels. Continued tensions between different communities, particularly between Christian and Muslim populations, have undermined the peace process and confidence in the government. Despite its importance, this agenda is clearly not a priority for the CAR government, and thus requires greater attention by MINUSCA and the rest of the international community. Mediation efforts by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the town of Boda demonstrate that, if approached correctly, mediation has the potential to deter violence in very volatile areas and to improve intercommunal relations.

The mission's reconciliation efforts are at present ad hoc and uncoordinated. MINUSCA's Political Affairs Division has taken the lead on the dialogue with the government to finalize a joint reconciliation strategy. The Civil Affairs section has implemented a number of QIPs focused on reconciliation and social cohesion, including workshops, roundtables, and local committees for managing conflicts between herders and farmers. Pre-DDRR activities include community engagement and sensitization components to encourage the acceptance and reintegration of former combatants. Yet the different sections are not formally cooperating on reconciliation measures as a part of a larger mission-wide and nation-wide social cohesion strategy. The mission should improve cooperation and pursue social cohesion and reconciliation at the local and national levels in CAR as a high priority.

Member states should also put pressure on the CAR government to prioritize reconciliation and social cohesion. In particular, donors should ensure that the reconciliation agenda is prioritized at the November 17th donor conference in Brussels,

despite the government's apparent interest in focusing the discussion on DDRR and livelihoods support.[23]

If MINUSCA is to engage in intercommunal reconciliation and social cohesion initiatives, it will need to improve community outreach, including by addressing concerns that the mission is not impartial. One MINUSCA representative observed that this will require the mission to communicate with the host state government more often and with more clarity. It must also equip its personnel with the necessary technical expertise – the mission's CLAs are already receiving one-week mediation trainings, but trainings should be more comprehensive and reach a wider group of MINUSCA personnel. Without greater focus on reconciliation, other critical lines of effort will be undermined. For example, MINUSCA's efforts to support the restoration of state authority by deploying government representatives to remote areas is an important agenda, but these authorities cannot be seen as legitimate nor provide effective governance in areas with serious and unaddressed intercommunal conflicts.

Acknowledgements

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[23] H.E. Faustin-Archange Touadéra, "Reconciliation and recovery in the Central African Republic: A conversation with His Excellency President Faustin-Archange Touadéra," Brookings Institute, Washington, DC, September 27, 2016; "Central African Republic has 'turned its back on past dark days,' President tells UN," UN News Centre, September 23, 2016, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=55066#.V_QZbCErIdV.