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History, External Influence and Political Volatility in the Central African Republic (CAR)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex involvement of neighbors and other states in the leadership or political crisis in the CAR through a content analysis. It further discusses the repercussions of this on the unity and leadership of the country. The CAR has, for a long time, been embroiled in a crisis that has impeded the unity of the country. It is a failed state in Africa to say the least, and the involvement of neighboring and other states in the crisis in one way or the other has compounded the multifarious problems of this country. Some of these states have operated on double standards and have rather advanced their own agendas. These agendas have been at variance with the need to bring lasting peace to this war-torn country. Through a historical analysis of the situation, this paper x-rays this negative role of some of these states which has kept the CAR a politically volatile country with consequences for the stability of the Central African region as a whole.

1 INTRODUCTION

The African continent is notorious for armed insurgency, civil unrest and instability. Several countries of the continent have known war at one time in their history or the other, prior-to and after independence. Some of the countries with a history of civil unrest or armed insurrection include Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Ivory Coast in West Africa Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), Burundi, Rwanda in Central/Southern Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia in East Africa Sudan, Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia in North Africa (Joseph, 2012: 23-25; Cilliers and Schünemann, 2013:9-10; Unuoha, 2013; Nkwi, 2013a and 2013b; Kah 2013; Okereke, 2013; Abderrahmane, 2013). While some were embroiled in a civil war lasting many years, others fought with neighbors over boundaries or over the control of natural resources - such as Sudan and South Sudan, a newly created state in Africa.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the exercise of military power between states and insurgency appears to be shifting often in favor of the latter. This has over the last few decades compelled some African states to deploy forces beyond their borders more frequently (Howe, 2001:1). In Ethiopia, for instance, the government has fought with the separatist Oromo for a long time and in Somalia, the brutalities of the Al-Shabaab terrorist group with links to Al Qaeda are well known including also sea piracy and organized attacks in neighboring countries. The recent attack on the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, leading to death of over 67 people in

September 2013, was attributed to Al-Shabaab, whose militants are angry about the presence of Kenyan troops as part of multinational effort to create a stable government in Somalia. The numerous conflicts in Africa have compromised peace and security, such as in the Horn of Africa where Somalia is a clear case of a failed state since the overthrow of President Siad Barre in 1991. For a long time, governance has been in the hands of competing warlords. In spite of the support of the African Union (with a standby force) and the United Nations (for a functional government), the country has yet to come under uncontested leadership.

In the Sierra Leone and Liberian civil wars, the West African forces deployed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), ECOMOG played an important role in bringing about peace in spite of the criticisms that followed this intervention. Within Nigeria the Boko Haram insurgency and activities of armed militias in the Niger Delta such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF), Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Niger Delta Volunteer Front (NDVF) (Olonisakin, 2004; Kiipoye, 2005; Owolabi and Okwechime, 2007; Halleon, 2009:54; Souare, 2010:13; Aghalino, 2011:4; Nkwi, 2013) have threatened the peace and unity of this colossus of Africa - including the neighbors of Nigeria notably Niger and Cameroon. In the Central African sub-region to which is located the CAR, wars and conflicts have created unfavorable socio-political and economic conditions. There is also a proliferation of internal and inter-state violence in the sub-region. Truthfully, recurrent political crises and military hostilities have kept the central African sub-region continuously in the headlines (Mwanasali, 1999:90-91; Vehnämäki, 2002; Shekhawat, 2009; Frère, 2010:1; Dagne, 2011).

The CAR is a country rich in natural resources - notably diamond, gold, copper, uranium and timber. Its ethnic configuration indicates an amalgamation of various ethnic groups typical of any African country. The Gbaya is an important ethnic group in the CAR and also straddle the Cameroon-CAR border. This significant ethnic group of the country settled historically after escaping from the Fulani raids in early 19th century North Cameroon. The Banda, on their part, fled the Muslim Arab slave raids of Sudan into the CAR in the 19th century and, today, Sudan contributes to the instability in the country. There are over 80 ethnic groups in the country, each with its own language. The largest ethnic groups include the Gbaya 33 percent, Banda 27 percent, Mandjia 13 percent, Sara 10 percent, Mboum 7 percent, M'Baka 4 percent and Yakoma 4 percent. The other smaller groups make up the remaining 2 percent. The major religious groups to which the people adhere are both indigenous and foreign. While over 35 percent of the population is inclined to indigenous beliefs, 25 percent adhere to Protestantism and another 25 percent are Catholics while 15 percent are Muslims (Alusala, 2007:11).

The CAR is a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of the Central African States known by its French acronym as CEMAC. It is also a member state of the Economic Community of the Central African States (ECCAS). The CAR is also a signatory to the Charters of the African Union and the United Nations Organization that explains the interest of these organizations in bringing about peace and security in this country. The neighboring states, especially Chad, the DRC and Sudan, belong to some or all of these international groupings. As

members of international organizations, they are expected to respect the mission of these groupings, but this has not been the case considering their activities in the CAR (Alusala, 2007; Bauters, 2012: 14; Organized Crime, 2011; War Crimes 2003). The objectives of CEMAC include the promotion of economic, social and military cooperation between the six states of the Central African sub-region. It also promotes free movement for the purpose of economic and social progress. The ECCAS also aims at developing capacities to maintain peace, security and stability for economic and social development. By supporting different factions in the crisis in the CAR, some of the neighboring countries to the CAR have failed to cooperate and this has sacrificed regional integration. The country is also a former colony of France, whose stakes in the country are as high as those of any capitalist country eager to exploit its resources. The country has an estimated population of over 4.5 million (Miles, 2013).

In terms of the standards of living in Africa, the CAR has one of the lowest in spite of its rich natural endowments. In the domain of infrastructure, the road network of the country is not regularly maintained and some communities suffer a chronic shortage of drinking water. The country is also politically unstable, corruption and highway robbery are rife, and the economic climate is uncertain attracting little foreign investment. The coupeurs de routes or the zaraguinas are a regular menace to traders and other travelers in the northern part of the country. In a general sense, the CAR has barely functioning state institutions, an economy in shambles, an impoverished population and a security apparatus in complete disarray (N'Ddiaye, 2007:1; Central African Republic Country Level Information; Country Profile Central African Republic). These problems, put together, have made the country vulnerable to insurgency and instability in the Central African sub-region. This has often resulted in intervention and interference of various forms by gullible and self-seeking groups in neighboring states notably Chad, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

This study is important because continuous instability in the CAR is a clear indication that ECCAS and CEMAC charged with the responsibility of mobilizing the countries of the Central African sub-region have failed to bring peace and stability in this country. Rather, the country has been engaged in serious conflicts with two members of these blocs - namely Chad and the DRC. The failure of these two blocs to seek a lasting solution to the crisis in the CAR makes a mockery of continental unity preached by the African Union (AU). If Africa must attain this goal, the regional groupings must take the lead and facilitate the task of the AU, failing which the continent will continue to spend resources in resolving conflicts than providing for the daily needs of the people. To better understand the political volatility in the CAR there is need to discuss the role neighboring and other states have played in compounding the problems of this country.

2 NEIGHBOURS IN THE CAR CRISIS

The CAR is surrounded by several African countries, some of which are themselves very unstable politically. These countries include Chad, Cameroon, Congo Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Sudan. These countries, in one way or another,

have influenced politics and governance in the CAR. While these are direct neighbors to the CAR, there are other countries which do not share boundary with the CAR but which have contributed to the leadership and political crises in this country. Among these countries are the former colonial master France, Libya, Uganda and Benin. While some countries have fought to bring peace and justice in the CAR others are specialized in double standards. They have fueled the crisis while at the same time pretending to contribute to the search for durable peace and unity in the country.

Some of the neighbors of the CAR are war-torn. Among these warring neighbors are Chad, Sudan and the DRC. This is quite unfortunate for the CAR, which is already saddled with numerous internal dissensions of a socio-political and economic nature. The direct and indirect participation of other countries like Uganda, South Africa, Gabon, Togo, Benin, France, China and the United States with different agendas has contributed to instability and disintegration of the CAR and the entire Central African sub-region with ripple effects on other areas outside of it (Forje, 2005:228; Central African Republic Conflict, 2012- Present; Central African Republic November, 2011;

Bauters, 2012: 21; War Crimes, 2003:6 and 10; Alusala, 2007:13). The LRA of Joseph Kony in Uganda has terrorized innocent citizens in the eastern part of the CAR. The involvement of South African troops in support of Francois Bozizé and to defend South African mining interests in the country led to a standoff between these forces and the Séléka insurgents during their march unto Bangui, the capital of the CAR. At one time or the other, Benin has hosted rebel leaders who have often caused havoc in the CAR. Meanwhile, France has been accused by people of the CAR for either double standards or pursuing only their vital interests to the detriment of political stability in the CAR (Arieff, 2014: 7).

One country with a multiple-pronged agenda in the CAR from the past to the present is Chad. Successive regimes of the country, and especially that of Idriss Déby Itno, have 'soiled their hands' so to speak, in the political crisis in the CAR officially and otherwise. Chad has participated in the crisis as a member of CEMAC in terms of its national and strategic interests and at the level of antigovernment groups operating at will across the borders with the CAR and also Sudan and today South Sudan. The complex and contradictory involvement of Chad in the crisis in the CAR shows that she cannot claim to have genuinely contributed towards seeking for lasting peace in this country. As a member of CEMAC, Chad has participated in the resolution of the political crisis in the CAR but this happen to create other forms of crises in the country. Chad contributed 121 soldiers to the Multinational Force or the Forces multinationals de la CEMAC (FOMUC) with the aim of helping to solve the country's internal problems. She has also contributed forces to the La Mission Internationale de Soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite Africaine (MISCA), but from time to time these forces come under attack due to the hatred the Christian anti-balaka militia have for Chad's support for Michel Djotodia to overthrow Francois Bozizé in 2013.

In spite of this involvement of Chad at the multinational level to seek a lasting solution to crisis ridden CAR, she has also played a crucial role in the overthrow and accession to the throne of several presidents of this country. This is for its national interest or the personal interest of President Idriss Déby Itno. Déby like Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of Congo provided logistical and financial support to Françoise Bozizé when he fled to Chad after his dismissal by Ange-Félix Patassé as his Army Chief of Staff in 2001. Four-fifth of the fighters that Bozizé used to topple the government of Patassé on March 15 2003 was of Chadian descent. Chad offered this support to Bozizé because she was eager to secure oil operations and Nguesso supported the coup because Patassé had supported his rival when there was a leadership tussle in the Republic of Congo (Internal Displacement, 2007:10; Bauters, 2012:14).

Bauters (2012) also argues that the soldiers from Chad who conquered Bangui for Bozizé were neither personally loyal to him nor felt any connection to the more abstract notion of the CAR. This explains why when they became disgruntled with the pay check they received after helping Bozizé to overthrow Patassé, they plundered and undermined the faith of the population in the new head of state soon after he assumed power. In fact, these forces through their plundering activities contributed to the socio-political volatility of the country rather than stabilize it. Meanwhile after the failed coups d'état of May 28 and November 2 2001 against Patassé with the backing of Chad, Patassé in an address to his compatriots in Sango, the local language openly accused Déby saying that the President of Chad wanted to become the President of the CAR (War Crimes, 2003:6). The open criticism of Chadian President Déby was an indication of the degree to which Chad had committed itself in the CAR not to help resolve the crisis but to accentuate it. How else could this destabilizing role of Chadian president be graphically president than to show that he was interested in ruling or destabilizing the CAR to the benefit of Chad?

The open support for Bozizé against Patassé in 2003 followed a rupture in friendship between Déby and Patassé after the May 2001 attempted coup against the latter's government. During that failed coup, Patassé had asked for bilateral aid in the form of military troops and material from the government of Chad to ensure his security against the rebel forces led by former president André Kolingba in 2001. Chad refused to support Patassé on the excuse that she could only provide bilateral aid to the CAR within a UN international framework (War Crimes, 2003:36). One may argue that this was a logical argument on the part of Chad considering that during the 1996 and 1997 army mutinies and civil unrest against Patassé's government, Chadian government forces sent troops to reinforce the security of the regime of President Patassé at his request only within the mission of the UN and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). However, if one were to go by this argument, then Chad should not have offered support to Bozizé to topple Patassé because this was not within the framework of the UN and the AU. It was neither within any recognized international framework. The assistance to Bozizé against Patassé was merely to secure Chadian oil fields and installations. These had become an important income earner for the government of Idriss Déby and by extension gave him reason to want to use it to entrench his stay on power. Chad was therefore guided by its strategic and vital

interests than by the need to assist Patassé in times of need and to assist in solving the leadership crisis in the country.

After Chad had secured its own interest in influencing the internal affairs of the CAR, it treated Bozizé the shabby way it had treated Patassé. The support for Bozizé and the change of government in 2003 among other things had been to rid the North of the CAR of rebel movements that were threatening to Chad. When the Séléka mobilized against the government of Bozizé especially from December 2012 onwards, Chad sent peacekeeping troops into the country as the rebels advanced towards the political capital of the country Bangui. She also mediated in the failed peace deal between the government of the CAR and the Séléka coalition by hosting a summit of the CEMAC states (Séléka, 2013: 24 March). What has however remained a puzzle to keen observers of political developments in the Central African sub-region is that the Chadian military did not stop the rebel's advance on the capital of the CAR Bangui. This rebel advance finally culminated in the overthrow of an old ally of Chad in the person of Bozizé who was aided by Chad to successfully topple the government of Patassé. The alacrity with which the government of Chad supported and dumped successive governments of the CAR shows that Idriss Déby's government share in the continuous instability that has taken place in the CAR in the past two decades or so. At the official level therefore, Chad has played a hide and seek game. This has only helped to plunge the CAR deeper and deeper into conflict especially in its northern portion where both countries have a fluid border. It would appear that the deliberate weakening of successive governments of the CAR is also to give Chad a way of playing its own game in the Darfur region of Sudan and to forestall the activities of armed groups against the government of Idriss Déby. It was from the Sudan that Déby rallied forces to overthrow the government of Hissène Habré and become the President of Chad.

Chadian influence in the CAR is also seen in the proliferation of independent armed and rebel groups, which freely operate across the border into the CAR and also Sudan. Incursions by Chadian mercenaries and Sudanese rebel groups have led to the displacement of civilians in the CAR in spite of the creation of a CAR/Cameroon/Chad tripartite initiative in December 2005 aimed at arresting this phenomenon. The initiative gave regular armies of these countries the authority to cross their common borders in pursuit of rebels or armed groups blocking roads and preventing the movement of people and goods. This was to fully restore security by preventing rebel and bandit activities in the North-Western CAR (Internal Displacement, 2007:11; Multidisciplinary Mission, 2006:4; Debos, 2008). This is especially so because the northern provinces or administrative units of the CAR bordering Cameroon, Chad and Darfur in Sudan notably Ouham-Pendé, Ouham, Bamingui-Bangora and Vakaga have remained volatile because of the presence of former Chadian troops and Chadian rebels among others who are involved in killing, looting and kidnapping civilians. The intervention of Chad has however been compounded by the fact that a Chadian rebel movement, the Front Unique pour le Changement Démocratique au Tchad (FUCD) launched an attack on N'Djamena in April 2006 from its bases in Darfur and the CAR. This movement wanted to oust President Déby before the presidential elections of May 2006 (Alusala, 2007:10; A Widening War, 2007:2). The involvement of these

armed groups from Chad or of Chadian origin into the CAR and Chad has had a devastating impact on the population in deaths, kidnappings, burning and looting.

Apart from the destabilizing influence of Chad in the politics of the CAR, Sudan has also contributed to this destabilization partly because of the political instability in that country and the leadership style of its President Omar El Bashir. Even before the Darfur conflict exploded into public view in 2003, the CAR territory was an important staging ground during the North-South Sudanese civil war of 1983 to 2005. During this period, thousands of soldiers of the Sudanese People Liberation Army (SPLA) allegedly crossed the Sudan-CAR border seeking food and safe haven when there was drought or heavy military offensives against it. In western El-Ghazal in the CAR the Sudanese armed forces stationed there and launched attacks against the SPLA in the early 1990s. The fighting led to the settlement of over 36, 000 Sudanese in Mboki in South-Eastern CAR. Of this number about 50 percent were combatants who had with them more than 5,000 weapons (A Widening War, 2007:1; Sudan Issue Brief, 2007:1). These weapons became a source of running battles between rival groups within the CAR and also in Sudan.

Other heavily armed poachers from Sudan have often plundered the wildlife resources of the CAR and other armed groups of cattle herders cross the borders to pasture their herds. The poachers have often taken advantage of the rich fauna of the CAR to menace those groups that have tried to prevent them from getting elephant tusks and other animal parts which are in high demand in Asian markets. Besides, Sudanese militias who crossed into the CAR in 2007 alone took up to 2000 elephants because of a good market offered by Chinese and Vietnamese traffickers and brokers (Organized Crime, 2011:17). An additional threat to their destabilizing role is the presence of the coupeurs de routes or zaraguinas who disturb traffic, take hostages from the CAR, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria (Spittaels, 2009:3). These movements of different groups for their vested interests including also the challenges of movement have contributed to division and instability in the North and North-Eastern parts of the CAR for a very long time. It has made the population of these regions of this country to flee to the bush when faced with the threat of heavily armed militias from Sudan. They have benefitted from the proliferation of small and light weapons (SALW) due to the escalating war in the Darfur region and the deadly reprisals of the Janjaweed militias from Sudan. Today, the war of who is who in South Sudan marshalled by Salva Kiir and Riek Machar also has a high possibility of destabilizing the CAR because of the proliferation of arms.

In spite of the fact that Sudan contributed soldiers within the framework of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) for peacekeeping in the CAR in 2001-02, Sudanese negative influence in the country has continued to be a problem to the political stability of the CAR. A planned visit of former president François Bozizé to Khartoum in December 2006 was cancelled at the last moment because of this negative role that Sudan has and continue to play in the country. It was also partly because President Idriss Déby Itono of Chad threatened the government of Bozizé to withdraw its 150 non-FOMUC Chadian troops that had been stationed to patrol the CAR border region around the Gore (A Widening War, 2007:2). FOMUC was a multinational force stationed in the CAR to help in the restoration of peace for the eventual establishment of a

government acceptable to the people of that country. Déby also threatened to withdraw the Chadian personal security unit for President Bozizé if he paid a visit to Khartoum (A Widening War, 2007:2). Bozizé was conscious of the support the Chadian government gave him seize power after his dismissal as Army Chief of Staff of Ange-Félix Patassé. Even as president of the CAR, his personal security rested not on the regular FACA of the CAR but on a Chadian unit in the CAR.

Conscious of the likely repercussions of paying a visit to Khartoum, President Bozizé certainly opted not to deliberately bite the finger that fed him so to speak. In doing this, Bozizé seemed not to have learned from history. Earlier, Patassé was supported by Chad but eventually dumped him for Bozizé. Why did he not understand that the same fate that befell Patassé could befall him? The Séléka insurgency against his government six years after his refusal to visit Khartoum because of the threat of President Déby had a Chadian contribution. This was a clear pointer to the fact that Chad has always opted for permanent interests and not permanent friends in the political impasse in the CAR. Chad and Sudan, though enemies have been key players in the political crisis in the CAR. The crisis in the CAR has been compounded by the crisis in the Darfur region and Chad because it has revealed the existence of transnational armed movements that endure and reorganize in the fringes created by state dynamics in the region (Multidisciplinary Mission, 2006:4; The Failed States Index, 2007; Marchal, 2009:2). The Sudanese government has trans-nationalized the war in Darfur as a way of using it to wage proxy wars in Chad and the CAR. This has resulted in successive regimes of Sudan, Chad and the CAR supporting and arming rebel groups to pursue their wider political objectives and military goals (Alusala, 2007:5; De Maio, 2010:25). The more this has taken place the more the CAR like Chad and Sudan has become even more vulnerable to enemies of the state.

In addition, the DRC's stake in the CAR has not helped the country to solve its socio-political problems. The crisis in the DRC since independence in 1960 has had ripple effects on the CAR. The rebel groups in that country have been solicited by successive regimes of the CAR for their survival although this has often been at the cost of the ordinary citizens. Following the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Sekou of Zaire (present day DRC) in 1997, thousands of weapons from that country flooded the CAR. The influx of arms from a volatile DRC into the CAR after the fall of Mobutu became a source of instability for the country because armed groups began to terrorize the population. There was also cross-border trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW) not only between the CAR and the DRC but also with Chad and Sudan (Internal Displacement, 2007:12). This was because members of Mobutu's Gbadolite based presidential battalions began crossing over into the CAR and selling their guns to armed groups that emerged there.

Again, the Mouvement de Liberation du Congo (MLC) of Jean-Pierre Bemba was at war with Laurent-Désire Kabila, the successor of Mobutu and sent thousands of MLC soldiers to the CAR in 2001. These soldiers assisted Patassé against the coup attempt against him by former president André Kolingba in that year. While the men of Jean-Pierre Bemba supported the government of Patassé against Kolingba's men, he paradoxically assisted Kolingba, the brain behind the coup to flee his country and the punishment that would have been meted at him. This was a clear

incidence of double standards on the part of the leadership of the MLC. Patassé had received the support of the Banyamulengues troops or mercenaries against his leadership in exchange for a reported 5 billion FCFA which was to be possibly paid in diamond. This was because Patassé had lost confidence in his own country's FACA most of whom were Yakoma, the ethnic group of coup leader and former president Kolingba.

The general interest that has been developed on the CAR by the "Big Men of the Equator" (Equateur) region of the DRC is because of its economic significance. They have used Bangui to export the natural resources of the DRC notably diamonds, wood, copper among others (War Crimes, 2003:21; Ghura, 2004:14; Alusala, 2007:9-10). The movement of arms into the CAR via Chad between 2002 and 2003 increased. This was because of the support for Bozizé's war against the government of Patassé and the assistance for his leadership of the country (Multidisciplinary Mission, 2006:4; Berman, 2008:5; Bauters, 2012:18). In a way therefore, the crisis in the DRC and the competition for influence as well as the use of the CAR as safe corridor to have resources exported for more money to fight the regime in Kinshasa have not helped the CAR to solve its numerous internal social and political problems but have rather compounded them. Apart from the immediate neighbors of the CAR, other African states have been involved in the political crisis in the country for different reasons and with different results.

3 OTHER STATES IN THE CRISIS

Other countries and forces that have intervened in the CAR and compounded its leadership problems are Uganda and Libya. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) formed to fight against the government of Yoweri Museveni of Uganda has been present in the CAR since March 2008 attacking villages, killing, raping, abducting and burning houses. Initially, the rebel group received support from the Sudanese government in exchange for military action against the SPLA in Southern Sudan (today South Sudan). As the Ugandan government increased its war against the LRA, it broke up into smaller groups to avoid being detected. It also increased its offensives and began spreading out both into the DRC and to the north into the CAR territory where the group had been conducting raids earlier on. The result has been massive displacement of over 19,000 people in administrative units such as Haut Mbomou. The health care system was affected because health workers in the villages fled and medical supplies were restricted while the nutritional levels worsened due to reduced food security in the CAR (Central African Republic November, 2011).

People in the regions occupied by the LRA in the CAR call its fighters as Tongo-Tongo meaning "the people who cut off lips and ears" (Bauters, 2012:21). This description of the LRA fighters shows the degree of havoc that they have wrecked on the population. This has also led to the emergence of armed groups from within the country in self-defense. The more these groups have emerged in self-defense, the more arms have been imported and the more children have been drawn into war with consequences such as human rights abuse and massive killings. This has also given the Ugandan army reason to justify intervention on CAR soil to engage the groups

that have escaped into the country. Such intervention, self-defense and counter intervention have only intensified war and instability in the CAR.

In spite of the destabilizing influence of the LRA in the CAR, reports indicate that a battalion of the Ugandan rebels of the LRA fought alongside with the Séléka rebels to overthrow the government of Bozizé in March 2013. This is the reason why when the Séléka assumed the mantle of leadership in the CAR it demanded an immediate withdrawal of the Ugandan regular troops and of the American Special Forces from the CAR. Uganda had earlier sent in 2000 troops and the US 100 Special Forces into the CAR. The aim of these troops was to hunt down and capture the leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony, and stop his rebels from attacking civilians in the CAR and Uganda. It is reported that Kony is hiding in the Darfur region of Sudan but his men are roaming freely, killing and abducting civilians added to the raping of women and girls, looting of property and burning of villages in the CAR and also in the DRC and South Sudan (Seleka Rebels, 16 May 2013). If the LRA supported the present regime in the CAR in spite of the havoc its forces have created in the country since 2008 then, the regime has already entangled itself in the political instability in the country. This is seen in the on-going war in the country and attacks across the border with its neighbors, notably Cameroon in the last months of 2013 and early months of 2014. As long as Kony's men stay in the CAR for whatever reason, the stability of this country is not guaranteed. Their activities will continue to traumatize the local population. It will also most likely continue to attract Ugandan forces into the country in pursuit of these rebels.

The influence of Libya has also been felt in the political rivalry in the CAR. Following two failed military coups in the country against the government of Patassé in 2001, he solicited the support of the MLC forces of Jean-Pierre Bemba of the Equateur region of the DRC and also enlisted the protection of a small number of well-armed Libyans (War Crimes, 2003:6). The private army from Libya was under the leadership of a rebel commander from the DRC. The Libyan government also basing its action on the unreliable relationship with Chad assured the CAR that it would maintain its military presence in Bangui to protect the regime (War Crimes, 2003:10). It also together with the Gabonese government tried to pressure President Patassé to grant amnesty to the May 2001 coup leaders as a major step towards durable peace in the CAR but this was rejected. If Patassé survived seven coup attempts during his presidency it was partly due to support from Libyan troops and the MLC of Bemba of the DRC. It only postponed a political problem because regular units of the FACA, a force that Patassé did not have confidence in, contributed significantly to his downfall in 2003. A leadership that relies on foreign troops and security for its survival can only survive for a short while because disenchantment from within the country will eventually lead to its over-throw foreign support notwithstanding. This was the case with the Séléka seizure of power in March 2013. They inflicted a heavy casualty on the South African forces that had been brought in to protect the president and also defend South African mining concessions in the CAR. Even the presence of French and FOMUC forces could not stop disgruntled rebel groups from advancing towards and taking over the capital of the CAR Bangui and the presidential palace.

Other actors have been blamed for their role in the debacle in the CAR and include France, the United States of America and China. Since independence, France has been accused of meddling in the politics of the CAR. From the colonial period to independence, the French policy of Assimilation was described as a betrayal of national sovereignty which was imitated by the governing elite once they took over control of the country (Forje, 2005:228). They were accused of a delay in intervention when Bokassa plundered the country and privatized the state structure with impunity (Bauters, 2012:12). French troops later intervened to defend their vested interest when Dacko was brought back to power only to be overthrown in a coup by André Kolingba, the Army Chief of Staff in 1981. During the tenure of office of Ange Félix Patassé and especially after the 1993 elections, France withdrew its support in the payment of salaries of civil servants and this led to strikes by education and health professionals and multiple army mutinies (Alusala, 2007:13).

In the heat of the Séléka insurgency, hundreds of protesters who were angered by the rebel advance on Bangui surrounded the French embassy in the capital hurling stones, burning tires and tearing down the French flag. They accused France for failing to help the army fight off rebel forces. (Central African Republic Conflict, 2012- Present). This was a show of discontent about the noninvolvement of France in resolving the problems of their country. Even when the Séléka made successful advances and finally overran Bangui, the French sent in additional troops not to assist the government but to secure the Bangui airport for possible evacuation of foreign nationals. This has been considered as politics of double standards because Bozizé had relied on the French during his tenure in office to rule the CAR. To have remained indifferent at a time that the government was being attacked by a coalition of armed rebel groups showed that the French were consistently inconsistent in their policy in the CAR political problems since the independence of the country in 1960.

The reaction of the people of Bangui to the role that the US has played in the region shows that the ordinary citizens needed more from the US government. The US was involved in the crisis in the CAR when together with the Ugandan government they sent Special Forces into the CAR to help the local soldiers hunt down the LRA leader Joseph Kony, a group with roots from Uganda that has killed thousands of civilians across four countries. This operation was against a backdrop of local armed groups also operating in the country some of them opposed to their presence in the country because they have been working in close collaboration with Joseph Kony, leader of the LRA. The US Special Forces could not stay longer in the CAR because power changed hands from Bozizé to Djotodia. They quickly suspended their operations once the Séléka fighters took over government in March 2013. This was somehow expected because within the ranks of the Séléka fighters were also LRA supporters. One can however observe that the activities of the US advisers and Special Forces were actually not to assist the CAR fight insurgency but to secure its trade and other strategic interests in Africa. This is the more reason why during the Séléka march onto Bangui, the capital of the CAR, a group of protesters were at the US embassy throwing stones at cars carrying white passengers. Through this they were expressing their discontent with the US for not doing enough to contribute to seeking a political solution to the problems of the CAR.

Chinese influence and contribution to the multiple problems of the CAR, like other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, has also been discussed in literature. China was involved in double standards from the administration of Ange Félix Patassé to that of General François Bozizé. In the first place, she supported President Patassé against the insurgency that was mounted by the dissident Bozizé and other armed groups in the country. Interestingly, when General Bozizé finally seized power in 2003 China quickly normalized relations with the country (Holstag, 2011:4-5). This incident shows that China has essentially been interested in its own trade and other economic interests than in helping to solve the problems of the country. This episode shows that China was interested only in getting the backing of the government in place to exploit the resources it needs for its industries like timber, diamond, gold and copper. Elephant poaching, which has become rampant in the CAR carried out by Sudanese militia, has been blamed on Chinese traffickers and brokers in the area. In 2007 alone poachers killed over 2000 elephants in the CAR (Organized Crime, 2011:17) and the tusk sold to Europe, the Middle East or South Asia. The Chinese are therefore involved in this business for their benefit to the disadvantage of the people of the CAR who simply keep the wildlife and benefit nothing from it.

4 SOLVING THE CRISIS IN THE CAR

Considering the problems associated with the involvement of different countries in the crisis in the CAR, there is need for an end to the political volatility in this country. One way out of this is for good governance and the establishment of strong democratic institutions in the countries that border the CAR. Countries like Chad, Sudan, South Sudan and the DRC should create an enabling environment for national dialogue that will address the grievances of discontented people within their borders. This can be possible if the leadership of these countries are genuinely engaged in moving their countries forward. The leadership also needs to establish viable institutions that lead to power alternation. What obtains is a stifling of opposition and the loss of confidence on the part of the electorate (Mbemba 2010). The more opponents of regimes that border the CAR are targeted; they will continue to escape into the CAR as safe terrain. From here they will launch attacks to cripple their home governments. This has been the case with opposition groups in the DRC, which have used the CAR as a base to create instability in their country. Chad should also desist from acting like king maker in the CAR. The involvement of this country in the political squabbles of the CAR has been to say the least destabilizing. Chad and the DRC should join forces with other countries of the Economic Community of Central Africa States (ECCAS) to bring lasting peace to the war-torn CAR and promote economic integration, which is the goal of ECCAS.

Since political independence in August 1960, the CAR has remained under the imperialist wings of France. As former colonial master, France has cooperated with any corrupt regime in the CAR as long as it has control of the mineral wealth of the country. The presence of French troops in the country following the signing of a defense pact after independence has been considered to be a source of problem. France should be able to intervene earlier when there is a crisis. The delay in intervention has often not helped solve the political crisis of this country in the heart of the Central African region. Similarly, the United States should not intervene in the Central African

region simply because of the need to track down Joseph Kony, leader of the LRA but to be engaged in the CAR to eventually bring about lasting peace in the country.

Within the CAR itself, there is need for a local truly all-encompassing security arrangement because at the present there a serious security lapse in the country. This should include good governance, free elections for political legitimacy (Mbemba 2010). For most part of the history of the country there has hardly been an election. The first democratically elected president of the country was Ange-Felix Patassé in 1993. His administration was however challenged by sectarian violence and army mutinies. When Bozizé seized power in 2003, he eventually organized elections and was in the process of modifying the constitution to stand for another election when he was toppled by the Séléka coalition in March 2013. To bring about peace in this war-torn country therefore, it is important to establish a system of governance that should inspire confidence in the citizens. In this way, the country will be able to muster its forces against any gullible neighbors that are wreaking havoc there.

The complex nature of the political crisis in the CAR calls for long measures to end it. If domestic revenue is mobilized it will help to pay the salaries of employees that has been irregular for several decades now. The revenue will also contribute to the provision of basic social services. This can contribute towards lowering the probability of coups, a frequent phenomenon in the CAR. There is also need for economic diversification because it can minimize the adverse effects trade shocks which creates an enabling environment for coups. Besides, if neighboring countries make efforts to resolve conflicts within their countries and achieve sustained growth, this will benefit CAR economic performance (Ghura and Mercereau 2004:1). It takes great political will to put all these conditions in place. Without a firm commitment to improving on the lives of the population through the right political and economic choices, the political atmosphere will remain volatile and give room for different actors to reap where they did not save.

Above all, CEMAC, ECCAS and the AU should condemn and take action against any country that decides to foment problems in the CAR. This has the possibility of deterring overzealous neighbors and other stakeholders in the crisis in the CAR. At the moment, these organizations are still to take a tough stand against countries that have supported different factions in the crisis in the CAR. Such action should include economic sanctions and political isolation. People from different countries will certainly not want to be starved-off because of the irresponsible acts of their leaders and using this approach is likely to yield positive dividends and save the CAR from complete dismemberment.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The CAR is a country that has not known peace for a long time especially from the 1990s when Ange Félex Patassé won an election against André Kolingba. Throughout the ten years of his role from 1993 to 2003, he witnessed several army mutinies and civil unrest. His ouster from power by his former Chief of Staff François Bozizé was thanks to support from Chadian forces.

Again, the overthrow of Bozizé in March 2013 was also with Chadian backing. The country has however remained politically volatile since its independence from France in August 1960.

In this paper, we have shown that some neighbors of the CAR and other states have influenced the politics of the CAR and by extension compounded the crisis in this country. Among the several countries with a stake in the CAR are Chad, the DRC, Sudan, Uganda, France, China and the United States of America. For any lasting peace to take place in this country there is need for some of these countries to avoid double standards. They must also develop solid democratic institutions based on the will of the people. The failure to handle even internal conflicts in some of these countries has contributed to the political volatility of the CAR and by extension the entire Central African sub-region. There is therefore need for the forces in the CAR and in the other countries to find common ground and settle the crisis in the CAR forever or else this might snowball into a major crisis in the region. The signs are already there now with several incursions already into Cameroonian territory. There is even fear that if urgent measures are not taken, the Boko Haram in Nigeria will cease the opportunity to break through the Cameroon territory and offer assistance to the Séléka in the CAR with all the consequences thereof within the Central/ Western and Northern African sub-regions.

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