

Testimony by Mark L. Schneider, Senior Vice President, International Crisis Group, to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing “Responding to the Humanitarian, Security, and Governance Crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR)”

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I would like to express my appreciation to the Chairman Senator Christopher Coons, Ranking member Senator Jeff Flake, and members of the Africa Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the opportunity to testify for the International Crisis Group this afternoon and for focusing attention on the humanitarian and political disaster in the Central African Republic.

Crisis Group analysts have reported regularly on the Central African Republic identifying the underlying causes of conflict in that country stemming from corrupt governance, discriminatory distribution of public services, plundering of diamond, gold and other mines and abusive and often brutal security forces. Our analyst left Bangui this weekend.

The Situation Today in the Central African Republic

The Central African Republic is a collapsed state today, with more than 613,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), including close to a quarter of the capital city’s population, and another 230,000, who also have fled their homes and now are refugees in neighboring countries, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Virtually none of those displaced are in secure or controlled sanctuaries. Instead they are hiding in the bush or in make-shift quarters with no one fully responsible for their safety. In fact, they are easy targets in the still chaotic security situation in Bangui and many other cities as the French Sangaris rescue operation is just being deployed. Sangaris has yet to be tightly coordinated with the African Union peacekeeping operation MISCA, authorized under Chapter VII by the Security Council, which only comes into being this Thursday (19 December).

Despite the best efforts of senior religious figures such as the Archbishop Dieudonne Nzapalainga and Imam Oumar Kobine Layama, the evidence of sectarian atrocities and the potential for further killing demands that we ask what more can be done, how can it be done faster, and who can do it.

While we can thank the French government for quickly deploying a force of 1600 into the CAR, the reality is that the international community was woefully slow to respond to the signs of rising insecurity, growing religious tensions between the Christian and Muslim communities, a stalled political transition and mounting evidence of armed groups under little control. In June, Crisis Group raised concerns of a new dangerous turn toward anarchy following last December’s Seleka military offensive, the March coup by the same Seleka rebel force that deposed former President Bozizé and installed its new government under President Michel Djotodia, and the clear lack of commitment, control and capacity of that transitional government to carry out the emergency measures that were required to restore stability and security. We also criticized the failure of the international community to mount a support effort that might prompt the needed actions by that transitional government.

Instead the last six months have seen a state collapse of historical proportion. Before this coup, a popular joke in CAR was that the state ends at PK12, the last Bangui suburb. Now the state has also vanished in the capital city with ministries, police stations, and courts looted in the city and across the country. Several Ministers recently fled the crisis in Bangui and some of them were fired last Sunday (Finance, Public Security and Livestock Ministers). Schools also remain closed and many have been sacked, homes have been trashed and at least several thousand burned to the ground and hospitals and clinics have come under attack. Atrocities have taken place in many communities. In Bangui, Seleka forces have also gone door-to-door in neighbourhoods such as Boeing, Boy Rabe, and PK12 to seize men over the age of fifteen — often to execute them. A vicious cycle of retaliation has started and civilian Muslims suspected of being close to the Seleka are now targeted and some have been massacred. Residents of Bangui have fled en masse to sites where they hope to find some protection: the airport, the community of Don Bosco, the orphanage Saint Joseph Mukassa in Cattin area, the church St Jean de Gabaladja in Gobongo, the church in the Castor neighbourhood, the monastery of Boy Rabe, the St. Paul parish in Ouango or, for Muslims, the mosque of Ali Baboulo near the neighbourhood of Miskine and the Islamic school, next to PK5 are now sanctuaries for a battered population.

Seleka fighters also have targeted those they suspect of supporting the anti-balaka groups, self defense groups that largely formed in response to the Seleka violence but also were led, in many cases, by former members of the Bozizé security forces. It is clear the objective of the anti-balaka groups coming into Bangui is not self-protection but the ousting of the Seleka fighters and the transitional government. However, recent contacts between a group of anti-balaka and Djotodia indicate that there could be a small room for negotiations. Djotodia said last Sunday that he is willing to release some prisoners and to offer several seats in the government to Gbaya people close to the anti-balaka.

Bangui's residents have been arming themselves on both sides of the religious divide and every day new revenge killings are committed. In the last few weeks, groups of Peul (Fulani) pastoralists, who are generally Muslim and have been targets for the anti-balaka, have killed Christians in Bangui in retaliation.

Three potential immediate security scenarios

First is a continuation of urban war and religious massacres despite the presence of French forces and a fully deployed MISCA. This scenario would be prompted in part by the belief that the French will change the balance of power by disarming the Seleka fighters and provide an avenue for more anti-balaka to come to the capital and help launch a new offensive against the transitional government, hoping for support from many Bangui residents. Even more religiously based massacres would take place with neither the French nor the MISCA able to contain widespread violence.

Second would be a stalemate in which the anti-balaka forces remain outside Bangui and the major threat in the city would come from Seleka forces whom the French and MISCA together would ultimately neutralize allowing for the restoration of peace and security in the city.

Third would be a decision by the anti-balaka forces to leave Bangui and return to the provinces and a parallel decision by the Seleka fighters to return to the barracks and to participate in a renewed program of DDRR.

Each of these scenarios will affect the prospects for ending the current crisis. However, we believe that the following three immediate security actions are required under all three.

Immediate security steps required

First, restore law and order (or initially at least stability and order) in Bangui.

- a. French forces, MISCA and the returning CAR police gendarmerie need to carry out joint patrols in Bangui and disarm anyone--Muslim or Christian--in possession of a weapon and require that any armed group return to barracks. Patrols should include judicial police officers able to make arrests. Policing Bangui to prevent revenge attacks is now essential.
- b. Along with the street patrols in the center of Bangui, the French and international forces must prioritize the estimated 40 IDP informal centers around Bangui, along with hospitals and medical centers, and ensure humanitarian access in conjunction with OCHA in the city.
- c. Immediate control needs to be established along the key roads into and out of Bangui.

Second, re-establish law and order in the tense communities where inter-religious clashes have been reported, particularly in Bangui and the northwest and secure the main economic corridors from Bangui to the Cameroon Border and from Bangui to Bossembele-Bossangoa to the Chad border. Again a priority must be to provide security and humanitarian assistance in the hotspots, particularly among IDP camps in the provinces. Opening major roads not only will mean faster, more sustainable relief to those communities but it will permit some economic reactivation along those corridors and seek to prevent further spill-over to neighbouring countries.

Third, steps need to be taken to ensure that those responsible for international peace enforcement and peacekeeping forces are tightly coordinated, fully resourced, rapidly deployed and complemented by a rapid installation of combined international and CAR police forces. Militarily the French are in the lead and their robust capabilities are the best hope to halt more atrocities in Bangui. However, they cannot be everywhere and do everything and therefore it is essential that the US not only cooperate fully with the French but also speed its own support to the MISCA peacekeeping mission and encourage the right balance of forces in terms of national troop contributors and religious balance and the right skill sets—such as police, engineers and medical units—in addition to combat troops.

Support needed for AU military deployment and UN planning

The US announcements of a \$40 million support package for MISCA, followed by the President's authorizing of an additional \$60 million to support the French and to help provide logistics and lift to the African Union troop contributing countries are extremely welcome. We would hope that those funds are quickly moved through the bureaucratic process so that they can be available as early as the troop contributors are ready to move. We understand that DoD also has moved separately on emergency authority to bring some of the promised 850 Burundian soldiers into the country. It would be essential to use some of the DoD assistance to provide mobility (including armoured vehicles) and communication to the deployed African contingents. We also would urge the US to encourage the UN and the AU to make good on the commitment to assure that some 1000 of the first 3600 contingent of MISCA forces are a mix of gendarmerie and street cops. It also is clear to all that a far

larger peacekeeping force, at least at the level of an additional 2400 MISCA forces, as agreed by the French, the AU, CAR neighbours, the EU and UN representatives in the last summit held in Paris on CAR two weeks ago, is going to be required. And at least an equal portion of them should be police, capable of working side by side with suitably trained CAR police in communities across the country.

Yet at the moment, the number of international police is a fraction of what is needed. Nor is there a clear indication that steps have been taken to identify French-speaking police who can make up the difference. We would urge everyone involved to make this a major priority. No one in the AU or the UN is able to answer the question of who is ready to provide civilian police or when. Policing Bangui and the other CAR cities is going to be key to avoid further revenge attacks and to re-establish state authority.

There is a separate issue which relates to whether and when MISCA will need to be transformed into a follow-on UN peacekeeping mission. MISCA needs to get on the ground at its full size and the French will need to work closely with them to achieve initial military control. It also is clear that the UN should accelerate its current timeline for assessing conditions on the ground and the adequacy of the existing peacekeeping force and make recommendations to the Security Council on the need for a UNPKO, the mandate for that PKO, how it will build on and incorporate appropriate MISCA forces and how the strength of the Africa Union commitment can be harnessed even as the troops shift to wearing blue helmets in what could be a new hybrid mission.

Clearly one of those elements is a robust police and justice capacity able to help CAR re-establish its own justice system first in Bangui and at a later stage in the provinces.

The UN Secretary-General was requested to “undertake expeditiously contingency preparations and planning for the possible transformation of MISCA into a United Nations Peacekeeping operation.” We would urge the Committee to press the Administration to request that the planning be accelerated and that clear recommendations for that follow-on PKO be available as early as next month so that the detailed planning for Troop Contributing Countries and their financing can be placed on a fast track.

One real doubt about any proposal to establish a new UN peacekeeping mission is to recall that there already have been two previous UN peacekeeping missions, the last one, MINURCAT, ended in 2010. Much of the criticism of MINURCAT related to its not having the resources to carry out its mandate.

The current UN political mission in CAR, BINUCA, has a recently expanded mandate, yet remains vastly under-resourced. As one example, despite its role in supporting DDR, it was reported as having only two officials dedicated to defining a DDR strategy. Similarly, to carry out its role in investigating and documenting human rights abuses, BINUCA only has four or five officials for the entire country. Without the promised security as well, BINUCA staff are unable to move beyond their compounds, let alone open the provincial offices as planned.

Medium-term concerns

There are additional steps that need to be taken to maintain security over the medium term and they all have to begin now and the US should support them all:

- 1.) Disarmament, demobilization, “repatriation” and reintegration (DDRR). In CAR, the DDR program has to incorporate a significant element of repatriation since a major portion of the Seleka group leaders are foreign fighters, mostly from Chad and Sudan. So in the planning for this fifth DDR process in some 15 years in CAR, new thinking is required. First the diplomatic component needs to be in place for those foreign fighters to be repatriated to their own country. Similarly the Seleka fighters need to be pressed to re-enter cantonments and a process begun for their demobilization and access to some form of civilian employment or re-training. Some might be able to qualify for reintegration into community policing in the provinces but simply to incorporate them into a reconstructed army is a bad idea.

Disarmament of the newly armed population also must begin once the Seleka have gone back to barracks and been disarmed. Such disarmament will lessen the likelihood of revenge killings. In Bangui, we already have seen some of those ex-Seleka being lynched.

- 2.) Interfaith reconciliation, community-level social cohesion and peacebuilding activities need to be promoted in Bangui first and throughout the country as soon as possible. Radio messaging from inter-religious representatives, along with neighborhood-level peacebuilding activities, is essential given the present high level of religious violence in Bangui. Religious youth associations need to be incorporated into these neighbourhood-level mediations and dialogues. International religious leaders also might need to be brought into the effort to help reduce tension between the two religions.
- 3.) Investigation, documentation of atrocities and holding accountable those responsible was a role laid out clearly for BINUCA. Yet the capacity of the relevant BINUCA unit is simply inadequate to that task. In other instances, the US has actually funded NGOs to document those atrocities and then to submit that information to local judicial authorities. These kinds of efforts should be considered.
- 4.) An inquiry into the plunder of natural resources (ivory, gold, diamonds, etc.) is essential as a way to understand who benefits from the present disorder and to reduce financing of illicit militias. The CAR is suspended from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and the Kimberley Process. Such an investigation can help formulate a roadmap for the reintegration of CAR into these international bodies. In other instances, the US has also funded NGOs to do this kind of inquiry.
- 5.) Kick-starting the economic recovery: In a country where near 50 per cent live in extreme poverty and the bulk of the militias on either side are young, unemployed and unhappy, a major focus should be attempted on promoting reconstruction of public infrastructure with labour intensive rebuilding efforts that reach those young people. Also to the extent possible, community based reconstruction should be attempted.

The US can support all of these efforts directly, through the World Bank, the African Development Bank (ADB), and the UN as well as bilaterally through USAID and the State Department.

The US also should examine what more humanitarian relief can be made available immediately and respond quickly to OCHA requests in this regard.

Let me suggest one additional step for the US to take immediately: determine what level of protection is needed to permit the reopening of the CAR embassy and the assignment of a new Ambassador. US political engagement is much more likely to succeed when you are in-country.

The Seleka coup and the subsequent inability of the transitional authorities to function contributed to the final implosion of the CAR state. While there now is a need for emergency response, we also need to avoid the usual quick fixes. The CAR collapse has been twenty years in the making with flawed development, corrupt governance and constant socioeconomic regression at its root. The country's socioeconomic indicators are among the worst in Africa. Resuscitating CAR will require a focus on economics, particularly prioritizing job creation for the country's large pool of unemployed youth. If we want to break this historical and long-term decline, the USG should urge the donor community to undertake an honest review of the development, statebuilding and governance failures of the last 10 years. This review should be a mandatory preparation for the donors' conference scheduled for next February. It also is directly relevant to any hopes for a successful political transition. The timeline for the proposed electoral element of that transition also has to be reviewed in light of recent events along with a hard look at security sector reform and a recognition that CAR's major security threat is internal and resides in the failure of economic development to benefit all but a small minority who controlled state power.

About International Crisis Group

Crisis Group is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that provides field-based analysis, policy advice and recommendations to governments, the United Nations, the European Union and other multilateral organizations on the prevention and resolution of deadly conflict. Crisis Group was founded in 1995 by distinguished statesmen and opinion leaders including Career Ambassador Mort Abramowitz, Nobel Prize winner and former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, the late Congressman Stephen Solarz, and former UN and British diplomat Lord Mark Malloch-Brown.

Ambassador Thomas Pickering and Lord Malloch-Brown are our current co-chairmen. Louise Arbour, former chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and for the former Yugoslavia, and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, is our current president. In 2011, Crisis Group was awarded the Eisenhower Medal for Leadership and Service.

Crisis Group publishes some 80 reports, briefing papers and policy statements annually, as well as a monthly CrisisWatch bulletin. Our staff is located on the ground in ten regional offices, and sixteen other locations, covering between them over 60 countries and focused on conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding. In Africa, our regional program headquarters is in Nairobi and we have subregional projects on Central Africa, including the Central African Republic; West Africa; the Horn and Southern Africa. We maintain advocacy and research offices in Brussels (our global headquarters), Washington and New York. We have liaison offices in London, Beijing and Moscow.