SECURING LEGITIMATE STABILITY IN CAR: EXTERNAL ASSUMPTIONS AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

Policy Study
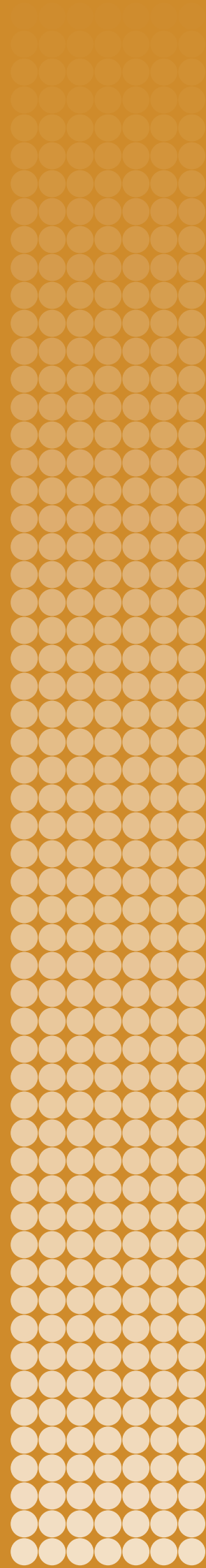
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Authors' note

This paper is one of three in a collection comprising two policy studies and a policy report that synthesizes the two studies. In addition to this paper, the other two in this collection are the policy study *Securing Legitimate Stability in DRC: External Assumptions and Local Perspectives* and the policy report *Towards Legitimate Stability in CAR and the DRC: External Assumptions and Local Perspectives*.

The research for this work was done in cooperation with Cordaid, a development and humanitarian organization, working to end poverty and exclusion. Cordaid does this in the world's most fragile and conflict-affected areas, including the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Cordaid's Security and Justice program focuses on improving access to effective, accountable and inclusive security and justice services (through result-based financing approaches), ensuring that women and youth can participate meaningfully in peace and governance processes, and strengthening civil society capacity to lobby and advocate for positive change.

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Abbreviations

CAR	Central African Republic
EUTM	Military training mission
FACA	Forces Armées Centrafricaines (Armed Forces of the Central African Republic)
FPRC	Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique
IDP	Internally displaced person
INGO	International non-governmental organization
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MISCA	African Union-led support mission
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UPC	Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique

I. Introduction

After 10 days of negotiations, the Khartoum Agreement or Political Accord for Peace and Reconciliation was signed between the Government of the Central African Republic (CAR) and 14 armed groups in Khartoum on 6 February 2019. This marked the eighth attempt to resolve the violent crisis in the country following the failure of every earlier agreement. Repeated violations of the February accord as well as growing demonstrations against peacekeepers, however, suggest that a pathway out of conflict has yet to be found.[1] External stabilization interventions often have unforeseen impacts on local dynamics, state legitimacy and inclusivity, which in turn influence the prospects for achieving stability. This research explores the assumptions that underpin such interventions by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and UN peace operations on the provision of security and justice, and compares these with the perceptions and experiences of local populations, public authorities and other key stakeholders.

A leading assumption in the international policy discourse is that strengthening a state's capacity to provide security and justice will lead to a stronger, more inclusive social contract through which governments gain popular legitimacy, which in turn contributes to increased stability.[2] However, stakeholders have different views on what constitutes a social contract following a crisis. It is, therefore, useful to understand the assumptions of international donors and NGOs with regard to the provision of security and justice, and to contrast these with the views of the local population. The analysis shows that even when both sides use similar terms, such as the primacy of the 'return of the state', intervenors and local populations often mean different things, which can create false expectations and ultimately disappointment on both sides.

For the purpose of this study, 22 interviews were conducted in January and June 2019 with senior members of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and various INGOs. In addition, Central African research teams questioned more than 240 residents and 33 local stakeholders in four localities in CAR in February and March 2019. Finally, the preliminary results were discussed with key stakeholders in Bangui and in focus group discussions and interviews in three of the four localities from May to July 2019.[3] The report highlights key discrepancies and develops guidance on how best to account for and navigate the risks and identify opportunities for achieving legitimacy and stability.[4]

II. Methodology

Case studies in Bambari, Bangassou, Mbaïki and Ndélé

Four localities were selected for study based on their diverse contexts in relation to conflict and the level of state presence (see table 1.1). While not representative of the e

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[1] The Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic reports 50–70 violations per week. United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic, S/PV.8558, 20 June 2019.

[2] United Nations, General Assembly, Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Resolution A/RES/70/1, 21 Oct. 2015; and United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council, Peacebuilding and sustaining peace: Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/707-S/2018/4318, Jan. 2018.

[3] Similar discussions in the remaining locality, Ndélé, are planned for Sep. 2019.

[4] The term 'stability' is often used in policymaking but has also been criticized for its militarizing effect on peace- and state-building on the ground. It is also contrasted with 'fragility'. See the criticism in Glawion, T., De Vries, L. and Mehler, A., 'Handle with care! A qualitative comparison of the Fragile States Index's bottom three countries: Central African Republic, Somalia and South Sudan', *Development and Change*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2019), pp. 277–300; and Karlsrud, J., 'From liberal peacebuilding to stabilization and counterterrorism', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2019), pp. 1–21.

Table 1.1. Overview of study localities in the Central African Republic

	Bangassou	Bambari	Mbaïki	Ndélé
Inhabitants (estimate)	35 000	40 000	25 000	20 000
Distance to capital by road	730 km	380 km	110 km	640 km
Security actors	MINUSCA FACA Gendarmerie Anti-balaka	MINUSCA FACA UPC Gendarmerie Police Anti-balaka	MINUSCA Gendarmerie Police	FPRC MINUSCA
Security concerns	Safe return of displaced Muslims	Rebel extortion	Witchcraft, crime	Rebel control bars state from returning
Security perceptions	Fairly secure	Highly insecure	Highly secure	Average level of security

FACA = Forces Armées Centrafricaines (Armed Forces of the Central African Republic); FPRC = Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique; km = kilometre; MINUSCA = United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic; UPC = Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique.

ntire country, they contain a wide range of the lived experience of the current crisis. Mbaïki was not directly affected by the fighting during the crisis and is currently under government control. Ndélé, on the other hand, has been controlled by rebels since the beginning of the crisis in 2012, currently by the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC). Bangassou was relatively calm for much of the crisis but witnessed a peak of violence in 2017. The town has seen little violence since mid-2018 but remains tense and the army has been deployed. Bambari is still contested. MINUSCA and the government control one side of the town but the other has been heavily infiltrated by the rebel group Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC).

III. Ongoing international efforts

A number of external efforts are helping to rejuvenate the security and justice sector in CAR. The most important are MINUSCA and the European Union (EU) training mission (EUTM-RCA). These are complemented by bilateral security cooperation and efforts by INGOs to reinforce social cohesion.

MINUSCA took over from the African Union-led support mission (MISCA) in September 2014. It currently has 11 500 military, 2000 police and 1200 civilian personnel and is deployed in all 16 prefectures of the country. Its largest contributors of uniformed personnel are Rwanda, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Egypt. MINUSCA has a mandate to protect civilians, support the peace process and help to extend state authority.[5]

The EU set up a military training mission (EUTM) as a follow-up to its earlier training mission (EUMAM) and short intervention mission of 2014–15 (EUFOR CAR). The EUTM's 180 staff have so far trained 4000 soldiers of the Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA, Armed Forces of the Central African Republic). During their six-month training period, FACA soldiers attend weapons manipulation courses and

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[5] The mandate is set out in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2448 of 13 Dec. 2018. For an analysis of UN intervention efforts in CAR see Karlsrud, J., 'The UN at war: Examining the consequences of peace-enforcement mandates for the UN Peacekeeping operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2015), pp. 40–54; Maiangwa, B. and Suleiman, M. D., 'Liberal peace intervention in the Central African Republic: Limitations and reworking a "hybrid" order', *African Security*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2017), pp. 1–24; and Welz, M., 'Multi-actor peace operations and inter-organizational relations: Insights from the Central African Republic', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2016), pp. 568–91.

undergo human rights sensitization. However, the EUTM has no measures in place for follow-up with the soldiers once the training has ended.[6]

Individual states have offered CAR security support. Russia has sent weapons and military trainers to the country. It has military advisers close to the president and a Russian company, Lobaye Invest, has gained resource extraction rights. In July 2018 three Russian journalists who were investigating allegations of militia activity by the Russian paramilitary Wagner Group were killed in suspicious circumstances. China has donated several dozen military vehicles.[7] France and the United States have also made significant donations of arms and vehicles, respectively.[8]

INGOs often partner with national NGOs and local civil society to provide human rights sensitization training and have organized inter-communal dialogues to enable the return of over 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. They also support and partly substitute for the state in the provision of public services, such as in the areas of education and health, and of infrastructure.

IV. The state as the least bad option

The population of CAR was disenchanted with the state under the rule of President François Bozizé (2003–13) and his predecessor Ange-Félix Patassé (1993–2003). Under both, the state further retrenched the provision of public services and accumulated massive salary arrears. Bozizé violently repressed dissident voices. The Séléka rebellion, which began at the end of 2012, raised a number of legitimate grievances that were shared by people living in remote areas in particular. Many in CAR projected their hopes for better governance on to the rebellion and thousands joined its ranks. However, the brutal behaviour and organized theft of the Séléka having first taken towns and then on assuming power in Bangui rapidly turned the population against the rebellion. This increased popular support for the localized auto-defence groups that were resisting Séléka rule, which were broadly labelled 'Anti-balaka'. Again, however, the Anti-balaka groups used extortion against the population, collecting fees at their checkpoints and using xenophobic violence against anyone accused of being 'foreign'.[9] Popular support for these groups has therefore waned. In the interviews, few respondents expressed any positive views on the Séléka or Anti-balaka groups— even in the areas supposedly under their respective control.

In Ndélé, where the Séléka rebellion began in 2012, few violent incidents were recorded during the crisis period. This is often attributed to the fact that the FPRC rebels had undisputed control of the area. The FPRC has called for the protection of

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[6] On army reconstruction see Vircoulon, T., 'La reconstitution de l'armée Centrafricaine: Un enjeu à hauts risques' [The reconstitution of the Central African army: A high-risk challenge], *IRSEM: Note de recherche*, vol. 36, Apr. 2017. On Security Sector Reform in CAR more generally, see N'diaye, B., 'Security sector reform in the Central African Republic', eds H. Born and A. Schnabel, *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (LIT: Münster, 2009), pp. 39–68.

[7] AFP, 'CAR asks UN to approve China arms deliveries', News24, 11 June 2018.

[8] On France see Baxter, P., *France in Centrafrique: From Bokassa and Operation Barracuda to the Days of EUFOR* (Helion & Co., 30° South Publishers: Pinetown, West Midlands, 2011). Several regional states also have unofficial interests and influence in CAR. See De Vries, L. and Glawion, T., 'Speculating on crisis: The progressive disintegration of the Central African Republic's political economy', *Clingendael CRU Report*, Oct. 2015; Marchal, R., 'CAR and the regional (dis)order', eds T. Carayannis and L. Lombard, *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (Zed Books: London, 2015), pp. 166–93; Palmateer, G. and Clark, J. F., 'The uses (and abuses) of the Economic Community of Central African States: The hidden functions of regional economic community membership for African regimes', eds J. Warner and T. M. Shaw, *African Foreign Policies in International Institutions* (Palgrave Macmillan USA: New York, 2018), pp. 127–48; and Plank, F., 'The effectiveness of interregional security cooperation: Evaluating the joint engagement of the EU and the AU in response to the 2013 crisis in the Central African Republic', *European Security*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Oct. 2017), pp. 1–22.

[9] Succinct overviews and analyses of the crisis in CAR can be found in Carayannis, T. and Lombard, L. (eds), *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (Zed Books: London, 2015); Glawion, T. and De Vries, L., 'Ruptures revoked: Why the Central African Republic's unprecedented crisis has not altered deep-seated patterns of governance', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 56, no. 3 (2018), pp. 421–42; and Lombard, L., *State of Rebellion: Violence and Intervention in the Central African Republic* (Zed Books: London, 2016).

the north-eastern population against state abuse and for greater development in the marginalized region. The initial popularity of the FPRC rebellion can be explained by comparing the group's demands with popular opinion. A female shopkeeper expressed her demands of the state as follows: *The classic roles of the state are to protect the security of the population, and to facilitate development and the well-being of the population, but it is obvious that we are not seen as members of this state insofar as the state has left us in out of the loop.*[10]

Despite the seeming overlap between rebel and popular demands, few respondents said that they felt secure in Ndélé and its surroundings. The vast majority expressed little confidence in the rebels. The same shopkeeper attributed the main cause of insecurity to the rebel groups: *Creating security and justice in this city can be the ideal once the DDR programme has been implemented and solutions are found for the rebel groups who are the root cause of our local security problem.*[11]

In Bangassou, where Anti-balaka groups staged a massive attack in May 2017, allegedly to protect the town against an imminent UPC attack and against MINUSCA, which they accused of supporting the rebels, only one respondent voiced any confidence in the auto-defence groups. All the others said that they had no confidence in them at all. A male farmer explained his views on security and justice: *Without justice nothing can work: no one is above the law. Selekas and Anti-Balakas should be punishable by law.*[12]

Among the respondents, the vast majority called for a return of the state. However, this should not be misinterpreted as turning the clock back to 2012. Instead, they described three key characteristics of a renewed state.[13] First, it should be as *strong* as people perceived it to be under former president and emperor Jean-Bédel Bokassa (1966–79), when the state was said to be able to control its frontiers and suppress rebellion. Second, it should be *accountable* to the needs of the people, using taxes and resource revenues in a traceable manner for the provision of education, health services and infrastructure. Third, it should be *decentralized* through elections and significant budgeting powers at the local level, such as the village or quarter, and group chiefs and mayors. While citizens therefore have high expectations of the state, they are not oblivious to its striking ongoing deficiencies. Nonetheless, even in its depleted state, they see a redeployed government as the lesser of two evils compared to the rebel or Anti-balaka forces, which extort money from the population while providing little in return.

This assessment of the state resembles international respondents' statements on how the state should be. However, it differs markedly from ongoing international actions in connection with the restoration of state authority. The Khartoum Accord seeks to co-opt the leaders of the armed groups into the state, thereby legalizing their de facto power and status, rather than, as the population desires, stripping armed groups of their influence and taking them before the courts. While many international stakeholders in Bangui are unhappy with the provisions of the Khartoum Accord, they are willing to support it as they see it as the outcome of a legitimate negotiation process at the national and regional levels. International actors also emphasize state accountability but, contrary to the desires of the local population, much of this accountability is directed towards external donors. As one high-ranking MINUSCA official explained: *The government is not really a government that operates, or operates*

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[10] Female shopkeeper aged 35–44, a Muslim and Runga, translation by the authors. Most of the interviews were conducted in Sango or a local language and then transcribed into French. All the interviews have been anonymized. All the interviews with the local population took place between Feb. and Apr. 2019. The dates are not given to avoid identification of specific respondents.

[11] Translation by the authors.

[12] Male farmer aged 25–34, a protestant and a Zande, translation by the authors.

[13] These three characteristic descriptions were debated with the population during focus group discussions and individual interviews in Bambari and Mbaiki in June 2019 and received almost unanimous support.

as we want it to. It has no control over territory, supports the interests of some groups more than others and is more preoccupied with position and power. Frankly, the state is non-existent: MINUSCA is running the place. We are trying to push them in the right direction.[14]

V. Explaining the emphasis on the armed forces for reining in security

The respondents desired robust enforcement of security. In their view, MINUSCA does not appear to be prepared to intervene in their key security concerns, which emanate from armed groups. Interestingly, many INGOs shared the assessment of locals that MINUSCA's response to attacks is often too little and too late.[15] Many local respondents describe their own armed forces, the FACA, as the only institution that is currently willing and able to protect them against violent threats. The focus group discussions and stakeholder interviews asked respondents *why* they put such an emphasis on the FACA, *how* they wanted it and other entities to provide security and *what role* international actors ascribe to the FACA.

While the law and ongoing international training divide security responsibilities by task among several institutions, the populace divides responsibilities not by task, but by the level of gravity of the case at hand. In principle, the police should take care of crime in towns while the Gendarmerie secures rural roads and the army protects borders and fights organized armed groups. In reality, all three institutions are confined to a limited number of key towns and lack the means to visit secondary towns and villages on a regular basis. A leading member of the EUTM explained: *We cannot really want to change the roles of the Central African Army and mix everything up. The FACA must respect the roles of the gendarme and the police. [...] They cannot prosecute criminals or arrest people, otherwise we will have this confusion with checkpoints where they take money.*[16]

It is likely that the emphasis that the locals put on the FACA rather than the police and Gendarmerie stems from the militarized context in which they live. This is backed up by the data. The emphasis on the FACA is highest in contested Bangassou and Bambari, where almost all respondents expressed full confidence in it. In relatively calm Ndélé and Mbaïki, however, most said that there was no FACA presence and expressed a less clear need for its deployment. The populace is not opposed to the police and the Gendarmerie, but feels that they should be responsible for smaller incidents in more peaceful times. An unemployed man from Bambari described his expectations of the FACA: *Only the FACA can ensure security in Bambari but since they arrived they have not intervened throughout the city. The government must authorize the FACA to go everywhere, including the areas occupied by the Seléka to dislodge them and remove them from the city.*[17]

In a war context, the emphasis on the army comes with a militarized interpretation of security. Few respondents mentioned the importance of complex judicial processes or the presumption of innocence. Rather, the army is believed to be able to provide quick fixes against armed groups, theft and road blocks through forceful arrests or even through active combat. State institutions are also expected to tackle issues of alleged witchcraft, whereas INGOs and UN institutions push for it to no longer be considered a crime. Such contradictory demands put the state institutions under stress. Respondents were supportive of human rights principles but did not want international considerations to impede robust security interventions that bend official rules. Their

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[14] Interview with MINUSCA official, Bangui, Jan. 2019.
[15] Interviews with leading staff of INGOs in Bangui, Jan. and June 2019.
[16] Interview with EUTM official, Bangui, June 2019.
[17] Unemployed male from Bambari aged 25–34, a Catholic and Gbanziri, translation by the authors.

lived reality is one of total impunity for violent perpetrators. One woman living in a pastoralist area explained: *May the FACA come and provide us with protection so that all Muslims, Fulani and Christians can return to their usual occupations as before. [...] For there to be security, it is necessary to disarm the armed groups and bring the perpetrators of crimes to justice. They move around with impunity and taunt their victims.*[18]

The population desires robust action from its state even within its limited means, while international actors demand adherence to complex rules and regulations even where the state's resources hardly permit it. The return of the state for respondents in the international community means institutions that adhere to international standards and the rule of law, while to the local population it signifies a flexible, robust actor spearheaded by the FACA.

VI. Reconstituting the social contract

The conflict is often described as a religious conflict but many respondents expressed a willingness to live peacefully among all ethnicities and religions. Many evoked an unspecified 'former time' when relations between different communities were unproblematic and wished for this situation to return. The vast majority of respondents were optimistic about the feasibility of a return by the many IDPs. A Christian woman farmer from Mbaïki told how: *We are awaiting those who have left with open arms; they should return to the village so that we might live in harmony as before.*[19]

Certain preconditions were mentioned for a successful return of IDPs and for inter-communal peace. First, those who have lost their livelihoods due to violence (e.g. their cattle, housing or shops) should be *compensated* to enable them to restart their businesses.[20] In addition, those now illegally occupying the houses and shops of displaced people should be compensated for vacating them. These demands for compensation are directed almost exclusively at the international community, rather than at perpetrators or the state. INGOs are responding to such demands by organizing dialogue forums between those who remained during the crisis and the representatives of those who wish to return.[21] Some INGOs have even stepped in to provide compensation to those who are illegally occupying shops and houses, or by constructing or reconstructing buildings for those who have been displaced. Intriguingly, almost no local respondent mentioned state responsibility for managing the return of IDPs.[22]

Second, many respondents mentioned the desire for *justice* targeted at the worst perpetrators of violence during the crisis. Some respondents perceived an imbalance in prosecutions, whereby Anti-balaka leaders have been sentenced nationally and even internationally, while ex-Séléka leaders have assumed government posts under the Khartoum Agreement. As one woman farmer in Bambari noted: *My position is this—that the Peulh herders should remain with us; but that those who possess the weapons of war that [Ali] Daras[sa] has brought to Bambari—go home. I am very angry.*[23]

International agencies are well aware of this imbalance and that the Khartoum Agreement is recompensing some of the perpetrators of the worst violence. In private, many leading figures in MINUSCA have been heavily critical of the decision to award rebel leaders government posts. In public, however, they defend the deal and attempt

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[18] Woman in her mid-50s, a Muslim and Peulh, translation by the authors.

[19] Christian woman farmer from Mbaïki aged between 25 and 34, translation by the authors.

[20] See also Lombard, L. and Picco, E., 'Distributive justice at war: Displacement and its afterlives in the Central African Republic', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 4 Mar. 2019.

[21] Interviews with leading staff of INGOs in Bangui, Jan. 2019.

[22] While many of the 240 respondents mentioned the international role in aiding displaced people, only one person mentioned the state's role in doing so without being asked about it specifically.

[23] Woman farmer in Bambari aged between 45 and 54, a Catholic and a Banda, translation by the authors.

to implement it. INGOs face a similar dilemma in that they are highly critical of armed groups in private but cannot voice their opinion openly without putting their staff at risk. The head of the CAR bureau of a large INGO couched his approach to armed groups pragmatically: *Ideally, of course, the government would take over the territory. If aid workers shared this discourse, however, the militias on the ground would kill them*.[24]

Third, many respondents—even among the Muslim community—mention a category of 'foreigners' that should not be able to return to their former homes as citizens. These alleged foreigners share certain characteristics: (*a*) most importantly, they cannot speak Sango, which for a vast majority is a foolproof indicator of their lack of 'Central Africanness'; (*b*) they seem to have Arab roots; and (*c*) they are alleged to have caused the recent crisis. Muslims are thus broadly categorized into three groups: (*a*) converts from local or indigenous ethnic groups who stayed put during the crisis; (*b*) those with indigenous roots who were displaced during the crisis; and (*c*) those, labelled as foreigners, who allegedly collaborated with the Séléka and cannot be allowed to return. While the reintegration of the first two groups seems entirely possible given more peaceful conditions and a heightened level of state responsibility, the latter poses a genuine dilemma for a neutral approach to the right of return. Speaking of the militia leader Al-Katim, who is for many locals, with Ali Darassa, the epitome of a 'bad foreigner', a senior official in MINUSCA noted that: *Al-Katim was in the FACA for 10 years. Most courts would recognize his nationality even if both his parents are Chadians and he does not speak French or Sango*.[25]

This statement does not mean that the interviewee has an opinion on whether Al-Katim should be able to remain in CAR. It merely exemplifies the way that many internationals approach the matter: as a legal and pragmatic issue, where everyone principally has the right to remain—and an issue that must not be used as a tool for manipulation during elections. For many Central Africans, however, this issue is absolutely crucial and highly emotional. Many responses on the matter were categorical and demonstrative: no Sango, not Central African.[26] However, in a calmer setting that allowed an more in-depth discussion to delve into grey areas on the matter, respondents acknowledged the rights of legal foreigners to stay in their towns under certain conditions, such as if they report to the local mayor and adhere to the law.[27]

VIII. Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the findings on the discrepancies between and commonalities in the top-down international and bottom-up local views of the social contract. First, who should form part of the social contract is not a technical matter of organizing returns and paying compensation to illegal occupants, as it is perceived by international entities. Nor are there easy answers, such as the local view that Sango is the main marker of nationality and that people of Arab descent were the main perpetrators of violence. Eschewing the issue of national identity means ignoring a key underlying cause of the conflict. A properly implemented strategy coordinated between government, local communities and international organizations to enable the return of over one million people together with a grassroots debate on who should be entitled to citizenship and how it should be obtained must now progress hand in hand in order to build national unity. The two are already fusing in small-scale, exemplary projects such as those on the outskirts of Mbaiki.

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[24] Interview with head of bureau of a large INGO, Bangui, Jan. 2019, translation by the authors.
[25] Interview with MINUSCA official, Bangui, June 2019.
[26] Group discussion in Bambari, June 2019.
[27] Group discussion in Boubouar, near Mbaiki, June 2019.

However, this requires some level of stability, which raises a second question: Who should provide security and justice? Non-state armed groups—both the former Séléka and the Anti-balaka—possess extremely limited legitimacy among the population. The Khartoum Agreement, which treats them as key representatives of the disenfranchised population and thus accedes to many of their demands for state positions and control over resources, goes against the wishes of a population that wants armed groups disarmed and either to leave or to be forced to leave—and a return of the state. Both international and local entities seem to have adopted a wait and see approach to the agreement for the time being, but have no clear plan B in the likely event that it fails. MINUSCA is often accused not only of not responding quickly enough to security concerns, but even of collaborating with rebels by providing them with weapons and transporting them in their vehicles. Some even allege that France and other nations have deliberately supported armed groups to legitimize their continued presence on the ground in order to extract the country's riches.[28] While these allegations are not supported by credible evidence, they circulate widely among the population. Senior MINUSCA staff say that such rumours and complaints from among the population can be found in many missions around the world, and see no need to significantly change their intervention. However, this has led to a rupture between INGOs and MINUSCA. In addition, these allegations are very real to local respondents and leave some people ready to disrupt the efforts of MINUSCA. Few local respondents expressed themselves in favour of a MINUSCA presence continuing beyond the immediate future. Surprisingly, it was in the contested town of Bambari that people favoured MINUSCA staying in place the shortest time—none said more than three years—while in the relatively calm areas of Mbaïki and Ndélé significantly more respondents would welcome MINUSCA staying for 10 years. Many instead called for a return of the state as the sole legitimate provider of security and justice.

This raises a third question: How should the state provide security and justice? To the local population state redeployment in the security and justice sector often means a forceful state represented by the FACA that combats rebel groups and forcefully counters criminal activity. International representatives, however, seek a more gradual redeployment and a strict adherence to international standards and the rule of law. These different interpretations of what the return of the state means pose a dilemma for intervenors. MINUSCA staff are unsure about whether to take primary responsibility for key domains such as security, repatriation, compensation and service provision, and risk being used as a scapegoat by politicians while also becoming the key target of people's frustrations. Alternatively, it could step back to demonstrate that it is state incapacity—especially in the FACA—more than international intervention that is falling short of people's expectations for a rapid solution to the crisis.

There is immense belief in the FACA both at the local level and in national politics, where expectations are being raised—of attacking and defeating rebel forces and gaining control over all territory—that go far beyond the army's capacity. However, because this huge support for the FACA can also be read as holding on to a last ray of hope, if the FACA now blatantly fails—as the rebels, the Anti-balaka and MINUSCA have in the eyes of the population—new armed movements could claim to be seeking redress for people's widespread ongoing grievances. MINUSCA and the EUTM believe they can bring the FACA up to capacity and the required levels of behaviour within the next five to ten years, which would enable it to meet many of the expectations of the population. While they therefore appear to be heeding local demand, many respondents believe that the FACA is already capable enough but being held back by international entities for political reasons. At the same time, INGOs are warning of the abuses a

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[28] Focus group discussion in Bangassou, July 2019; and focus group discussion in Bambari, June 2019.

reinforced FACA might commit against the population. The situation in CAR is therefore potentially grave and the many worrying discourses and misunderstandings investigated during this extensive study show that, if viewpoints are not aligned and expectations transparently managed, worse could yet be ahead.

IX. Recommendations

The people of CAR and its civil society must continue dialogue on how return can best be achieved and how to live peacefully together. They should also continue the peaceful resistance against those who want to bring violence, and hold their leaders accountable. It is highly laudable that most respondents were willing to countenance and even optimistic about the return of fellow citizens who had been displaced by conflict. In addition, many courageous inhabitants are boycotting illegal taxation by rebels, telling the Anti-balaka to take road barriers down and demanding that MINUSCA intervene more swiftly when the population is threatened. Many respondents expressed a wish that corruption would end, officials would resume their positions and the state provide services beyond Bangui.

The Government of CAR must set in motion an extensive, public grassroots discussion on CAR citizenship; strengthen local levels of power and accountability and improve accountability to the people; and create a strong state in terms of the provision of security and justice. The Government of CAR must focus the discussion on what brings the nation together. The process for gaining CAR nationality must be transparent. State representatives and government politicians who brand entire population groups as foreigners should face penalties.

Most mayors and chiefs are nominated rather than elected and therefore lack legitimacy. Local elections should be held before presidential and parliamentary elections. Local budgets need to be increased and the use of these funds monitored.

Respondents expressed clear opposition to the ongoing embezzlement of the funds that are required to provide people with urgently needed education and health services and infrastructure. Such services must be provided as far as possible under current conditions to prove that the state is willing to alleviate the grievances of its citizens.

Before moving to heavily arm the FACA, the government must prove it can independently sustain the limited number of soldiers already deployed, in terms of communications, logistics and salaries, and will be able to prevent abuses of power.

MINUSCA must penalize contingents that fail to react immediately to grave security events; become more accountable to the population; increase its joint operations with the FACA, the Gendarmerie and the police, and continue to report abuses to the hierarchy in Bangui; and start providing limited services to the population. MINUSCA must act swiftly to win back hearts and minds. Failure to do so could put the safety of peacekeepers and civilian staff at risk. Priorities must focus on training and the operational quality of contingents, including CAR-specific linguistic and cultural competencies.

Contingents that fail to establish a positive rapport with the population should be redeployed to less-contested areas or excluded from the mission. Their low level of effectiveness compromises the entire mission by fuelling rumours that MINUSCA wants the conflict to persist.

A greater number of senior staff must be encouraged to interact directly and regularly with the population and its local leaders, rather than working only through an often inefficient state. The most pressing security concerns must receive a response, even

where they seem unfounded—rumours are best combated through verification, and allegations of occult powers by unearthing the mundane interests behind them.

MINUSCA must continue to carry out joint operations with the FACA, the Gendarmerie and the police, and continue to report abuses to the hierarchy in Bangui. There should be public discussion of the support currently provided to the security forces to encourage a transfer of responsibility to the government and a reduction in false expectations of the FACA.

While acknowledging conflict sensitivity and respecting the domains of the state and NGOs, the mission could establish a positive rapport by providing simple remedies to sanitary or infrastructural needs. Such activities would also allow communication with the population, which would dissipate rumours of alleged hidden agendas.[29]

The European Union and the EUTM must train FACA personnel for the activities they actually carry out and the environment they will face, put in place follow-up mechanisms for FACA soldiers once trained and set up control mechanisms to prevent military coups d'état. It might not be official policy for the FACA to substitute for the work of the police or to live close to the population, but this is nonetheless the reality in CAR. Soldiers must be trained on how to engage with criminal activity and how to transfer cases quickly to the appropriate institutions. The EUTM should help to set up sanctions and incentive regimes to limit bad behaviour towards the population, even where the state fails to make basic provision.

While the EUTM training is up to international standards, FACA personnel returning from the field need to be followed up to address any deficiencies identified there. The training of future cohorts should be adapted to the lived experience.

Strengthening the military might encourage army commanders to question and undermine democratic institutions, as has happened in the past. Civilian control of the army must be reinforced.

International entities must do no harm, put pressure on but support the state and continue intercommunal dialogue. The level of need in CAR is huge and until recently the number of INGOs was limited. The crisis has led to increased funds being made available for huge projects. This should not be allowed to limit the scope for local ownership of aid projects or to substitute for state responsibilities in CAR. Projects are often beyond the absorption capacities of state and civil institutions. They should be adapted and if necessary scaled down to the local context and emphasize pressuring the state to take on its responsibilities rather than substitute for it.

While not a solution to the crisis in itself, areas that witnessed intercommunal dialogue alongside concrete security action have achieved surprising successes on return and reconciliation.

All interested parties must prioritize local elections; penalize hate speech, put pressure on the state to take responsibility for its people, help to control illegal cross-border flows and support the return of IDP and refugee populations. All interested parties must prioritize local elections as the populace perceives the closest state levels to be the most important. Holding presidential elections first risks the local elections being postponed indefinitely as a new president might wish to reward local supporters by nominating them to positions as chiefs and mayors.

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[29] On the dangers of conflating military and civilian roles see Hammond, L., 'The power of holding humanitarianism hostage and the myth of protective principles', eds M. Barnett and T. G. Weiss, *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2008), pp. 172–95.

Presidential and legislative elections are currently planned for 2020, and municipal elections in 2021. Religious and inter-community opposition can be subject to political manipulation in the run-up to elections. Hate speech must be penalized.

The root cause of the years of crisis in CAR is the state failing to heed its people's legitimate demands. International pressure to co-opt armed group leaders who are regarded as illegitimate by the local population is likely to fuel tensions in the medium term.

The Khartoum Agreement calls for the involvement of neighbouring countries in controlling illegal cross-border flows and supporting the return of refugee populations.

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