

## Central African Republic (CAR)

After landmark elections in 2005, the UN Secretary-General observed that for the first time in years, “the conditions for peacebuilding are in place” in the Central African Republic (CAR). But these hopes receded in 2006, as post-election violence escalated into a full-scale rebellion in the north, gruesomely entangled with the tensions between Chad and Sudan. Neither the CAR military nor the Force Multinationale de la Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l’Afrique Centrale (FOMUC) was in a position to restore order. A fragmented country once again risked being a victim of the regional dynamics involving its immediate neighbors.

Decades of political instability in CAR reached a peak in 1996, when protests over unpaid salaries triggered multiple mutinies by the armed forces against the elected government of President Ange-Félix Patassé. Fighting was fueled by regional and ethnic tensions, as Patassé’s supporters, mainly from the north and west of CAR, were pitted against the mainly southern elites dominant under the former president, General André Kolingba. The conflict in the former French colony has also been driven by the struggle to control the lucrative timber and diamond industries.

Regional mediators brokered the Bangui peace agreement in January 1997, which was monitored first by an 800-strong African regional force, the Inter-African Mission to Monitor Implementation of the Bangui Agreements (MISAB), and subsequently by the UN Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA). The peacekeepers provided security in and around Bangui, enabling the conduct of elections that saw Patassé returned as president in September 1999. But as MINURCA drew down, security in CAR remained fragile. A successor political mission, the Office of the

UN in Central Africa (BONUCA), was established in February 2000 to help consolidate peace and promote security sector reform. However, President Patassé remained beleaguered by opposition inside and outside the army, becoming reliant on military aid from Libya and Congolese mercenaries for his own survival. FOMUC was created in 2002 to stabilize the government as it battled a growing insurgency led by the former army chief of staff, General François Bozizé.

FOMUC was established by the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), with endorsement from the UN Security Council. It is composed of troops from Gabon, Congo, and Chad, and is financed by France, the European Union, and CEMAC member states. Initially conceived as a 200-strong “observer” mission—later expanded to 380 troops—the force has a broad mandate to monitor security in Bangui and along the Chadian border, and to contribute to the transitional process. Until recently, its main operational focus was Bangui, particularly to secure the president’s residence and the national airport. This assistance was not enough to prevent the 2003 coup in which General Bozizé ousted Patassé; however, the force remained in place under the new regime. Bozizé established the broad-based National Transition Council, restored constitutional rule, and was formally elected president in May 2005.

Following the elections, it was hoped that 2006 would mark a period of consolidation. FOMUC reduced its presence in Bangui in order to help extend government authority across the troubled northern provinces. On 30 November 2005, Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced his intention to extend BONUCA and to promote its head to “Special

Representative.” While it seemed that conditions conducive to peacebuilding had been in place, with some progress made in building state institutions, there has been a sharp deterioration in the security situation. Escalating violence in the northwest is attributed to at least four armed groups, all dedicated to overthrowing the Bozizé government: the Union des Forces Républicaines (UFR), the Armée pour la Restauration de la République et la Démocratie (APRD), the Mouvement Patriotique pour la Restauration de la République Centrafricaine (MPRC), and the Front Démocratique du Peuple Centrafricaine (FPDC). On 29 January 2006, government and FOMUC clashes with armed rebels in the northern town of Paoua resulted in over twenty civilian deaths. Fighting intensified in February and March, accompanied by accusations of human rights violations by government forces. A lull in March saw the launch of a “national dialogue on peace and security,” but by June, according to UN estimates, 50,000 people had been internally displaced, with a further 20,000 seeking refuge in Chad.

Internal conflict in the CAR has been fueled by rising tensions between Chad and Sudan. In April, armed men and military equipment were reportedly delivered by air to northeastern CAR. In response, the CAR government closed its border with Sudan. The same month, forces hostile to the regime in N’djamená allegedly used the CAR as a base for attacks into Chad. On 26 June, rebels attacked a government camp at Gordil, near the Chad border, clashing with the Chadian contingent of FOMUC. President Bozizé, concerned about links between the CAR and Chad rebel groups, called for international assistance against “armed groups in the pay of foreign powers.” Separately, Annan warned Security Council members that the CAR’s armed forces and FOMUC were not in a position to secure the territory. France then stepped up military support to the CAR’s armed forces, including aerial patrols of the northern areas. The European Commission’s recommendation to the EU for the continued funding of FOMUC until 30 June 2007, was a positive development, pre-

#### **Force Multinationale de la Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l’Afrique Centrale (FOMUC)**

• Authorization date	2 October 2002 (Libreville Summit) 21 March 2003 (Libreville Summit, Amended)
• Start date	December 2002
• Head of mission	Brigadier-General Auguste Roger Bibaye Itandas (Gabon)
• Budget	\$9.7 million (October 2005–September 2006)
• Strength as of 30 September 2006	Troops: 380 Local civilian staff: 54

#### **Office of the UN in Central Africa (BONUCA)**

• Authorization date	10 February 2000
• Start date	15 February 2000
• SRSG and head of office	General Lamine Cissé (Senegal)
• Budget	\$6.5 million (2006)
• Strength as of 30 June 2006	Military advisers: 5 Police advisers: 6 International civilian staff: 25 Local civilian staff: 44 UN volunteers: 3

empting an untimely withdrawal of the mission.

As 2006 drew to a close, fighting in the north displaced an estimated quarter of a million civilians, including refugees to neighboring Chad and Cameroon, despite the unstable security situation in the former. This prompted the UN to call for international action to respond to what was quickly becoming a regional humanitarian crisis. Consequently, in November, the UN dispatched an assessment mission to the country (and Chad) with a view to considering deployment of a multidimensional UN mission to both countries for the purpose of monitoring the border and possibly protecting civilians. While FOMUC and BONUCA might have helped to prevent Central Africa from degenerating into total chaos, the escalation of fighting in the north exposed the limits of both missions, and the need for greater international involvement.

