Hopes that the 2005 elections in the Central African Republic (CAR) would provide conditions for peacebuilding continued to dwindle in 2007 as renewed violence in the northern provinces of the country overwhelmed the republic’s military and the Force Multinational de la Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l’Afrique Centrale (FOMUC). EU and UN preparations for a multidimensional mission in Chad and the Central African Republic made some progress in 2007 with the authorization of UN police and EU military missions. But tenuous peace agreements with rebel groups reached earlier in the year were disrupted by flows of refugees from Darfur and a dramatic increase in internally displaced persons.

Background

Decades of political instability in CAR reached a peak in 1996, when protests over unpaid salaries erupted into insurrections by the armed forces against the elected government of President Ange-Félix Patassé. Fighting was fueled by regional and ethnic tensions, as well as a struggle to control the timber and diamond industries.

Regional mediators brokered the Bangui Peace Agreement in January 1997, which was monitored first by the 800-strong Inter-African Mission to Monitor the 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 elections that saw Patassé returned as president in September 1999. The UN Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA) was created in February 2000, following the withdrawal of MINURCA.

Established in 2002, FOMUC was originally conceived as a small observer mission mandated to monitor the security in Bangui and along the Chadian border. The force is composed of troops from Gabon, the Congo, and Chad. Despite being unable to prevent a 2003 coup in which General François Bozizé ousted Patassé, the mission has continued operating. During 2006, FOMUC refocused
its efforts toward the unstable northern provinces of the country, where violence continued throughout the year in review. The Security Council adopted 1778 (2007) authorizing the deployment of the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT). For its part, the European Union authorized the deployment of the EU Force in the Republic of Chad and the Central African Republic (EUFOR TCHAD/RCA) on 15 October 2007. Among other things, MINURCAT was mandated to liaise with the security services such as the army, the gendarmerie, and judicial officials in order to contribute to building sustainable peace in the Central African Republic. MINURCAT’s mandate also includes cooperating with BONUCA and FOMUC to deal with existing and potential developments that would have negative consequences on the humanitarian situation in the area. In addition to providing security to the thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons, the EU Force will also provide security to UN personnel and facilities.

Meanwhile, diplomatic channels between the government of the Central African Republic and some rebel groups were opened at the end of 2006 and early 2007, with the assistance of a Central African civil society organization, Group of the Wise. In February, the government signed cease-fire agreements with two rebel groups, the Front Démocratique pour le Peuple Centrafricain (FDPC) and the Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement (UFDR). However, the relative calm that followed these agreements was soon disrupted by the arrival of approximately 3,000 Sudanese nationals fleeing heavy fighting in Darfur in May 2007. Over 26,000 Central African Republic refugees also spilled over into neighboring Cameroon during the year, highlighting the wider threat to the region posed by the continuing conflict, and the urgency of the coordinated UN-EU deployments.