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## Central African Republic's Coup D'état: Underlying Causes and the Resulting Future Prospects for the State

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### Introduction

Coup d'états have been occurring across the world for a number of years. There are a number of different reasons for their occurrence across the world and these reasons as well as the resulting consequences may vary from state to state depending on the geographical location, the economic prospects, demographic stress, the resource trap as well as the presence of ethnic and religious differences.

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provide members of the  
policy community with  
concise but trenchant  
analyses of topical  
issues. Comments and  
suggestions are invited.*

Coup d'états have proven to be a common occurrence on the African continent since the end of colonialism. A coup d'état can be explained as a violent challenge to the state, similar to a rebellion or it can be explained as the sudden and forcible takeover of government exercised by a small or large group of rebel movements that resides within the targeted state's borders (external parties may also be involved) and is typically carried out through violent and/or illegal means with the goal of installing their own leadership into power, coups are staged in order to capture the state by force and sometimes a coup that fails to oust the government results in a rebellion.

Coups do not necessarily need financial resources because the coup leaders tend to use the government's own resources against it. Over the years, historically successful coups have been more than likely to result in authoritarian regimes seizing power such as in Chile when Pinochet took power or Suharto in Indonesia and 80 per cent of leaders who came into power through a coup were able to hold on to that power for at least a period of five years (Dr Moore, 2012).

## **2. THE ROAD TO THE 2013 CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC COUP**

On the 23 March 2013, the Central African Republic was officially sent into turmoil when Seleka rebels took over the capital, Bangui, in a violent coup that saw former President Francois Bozize and those loyal to him flee the country into neighbouring Cameroon and eventually seeking refuge in France (Stephan Hofstatter and Pearlie Joubert, 2008).

After staging a successful coup in 2003, Bozize was in office for ten years, during which he did not promote democracy nor did he contribute positively to the state's development. During the Bozize regime, the government did not promote development; the life expectancy remained what it was during the 30 years prior to the Bozize regime, national gross per capita income declined and the average number of schooling years per person became less than seven years therefore inflating poverty levels (CAR Report No: June 11, 2013). There was a lack of governance in the Vakaga and Haute Koto regions which led to structural insecurity while the north-east of the state formed a 'Darfurised' periphery where foreign rebels, local armed groups and traffickers fought for control of diamond producing areas; the state's grey area for several years (CAR Report June 11, 2013).

Bozize fell into the power trap during his second term and did not want to leave the office at the end of his term; instead he wanted to amend the constitution so he could run for president in the 2016 elections.

Instead of breaking the ten year coup cycle that the C.A.R seems to find itself in, former President Francois Bozize ensured that the cycle was kept alive and chaos was released onto the state, his actions ensured that the C.A.R was home to citizens who were unhappy with their government and its methods, felt marginalised and exploited for the benefit of the president's family, close allies and ethnic community; breeding conditions for a coup d'état in a state that has a rich history of violent power transitions (CAR Report No: 203 June 11, 2013).

## **3. THE C.A.R POST THE 2013 COUP**

The coup had unleashed a grave humanitarian and financial crisis upon the state and its population; a number of events had occurred making the state even more vulnerable; increasing the security risks, creating political, economical and social instability, as well as the possibility of a violent political transition and leaving an estimated 2.6 million people in need of humanitarian aid, more than 460 000 internally displaced people and 452 000 refugees in neighbouring countries (Doctors Without Borders, July 9 2013).

Michel Djotodia, who had led the Seleka rebels to their victory, was elected as interim president on 13 April 2013 by the National Transitional Council, which he had established himself. However, the leader was unable to control the rebel movement as they continued to terrorise civilians and create further instability resulting in the international community putting pressure on him to resign. Michel Djotodia resigned from office and was subsequently replaced by Catherine Samba-Panza, former mayor of Bangui.

The Seleka rebels withdrew from the south of the country after their leader resigned from office and moved to their northern enclave where they continued with their crimes; imposing taxes on gold mining, coffee, livestock and diamonds to fund their operations. There was further instability as the Seleka rebels began fighting among themselves for control of territory and ministerial positions.

The emergence of the anti-Balaka rebels (Christian militia fighters) further deteriorated the efforts to stabilize the country, with their acts of retaliation against Muslims.

The transitional government showed a determination to end the conflict by holding a referendum on December 2013 for a new Constitution, which was seen as a rehearsal for the elections that were scheduled for later that month. A new Constitution was adopted, however, the Constitutional Court ruled that the elections held on 30 December 2015 were invalid due to a number of irregularities and scheduled a second round for 14 February 2016. The new president, Faustin-Archange Touadera who won with a 63 per cent majority, was sworn into office on 30 March 2016 (news24, March 30 2016).

Economic activity had picked up in 2014 and grown by 1.01 per cent, although the agricultural sector, the country's chief contributor to GDP, continued to lose ground due to the slow return of displaced people and the lingering threat of insecurity. The African Development Bank had expected the economy to strengthen in 2015 and 2016 due to the improving situation and the successful presidential and legislative elections: the Bank of Central African States reported that the economy grew by 4.9 per cent between 2015 and March 2016.

#### **4. FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR THE C.A.R**

It is hard to look at the C.A.R and be optimistic regarding the state's future prospects because this is a state that has had a discouraging past; a past filled with what seems to be a ten year coup cycle, low levels of development and not being able to get the attention of the major role players in the international political landscape.

Civil society has traditionally been weak in the C.A.R but this crisis should act as an incentive for civil society to join forces with their government and external institutions and play a constructive role in

bringing about necessary political and social change (Guus Meijer, August 2013).

The necessary disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of Seleka rebels and former FACA members as well as the deportation of foreign Seleka rebels can better be achieved by a strong and professional foreign military force that will have a neutral background regarding the C.A.R and not be biased towards any particular side (Guus Meijer, August 2013), a challenge the African Union would have to heed. This would require the African Union to assume a leading position in assisting the C.A.R with its stabilization and rebuilding efforts. The United Nations would play a supporting role, working with the African Union and the people of the C.A.R. through the continuation of their peacekeeping efforts and strengthening the rule of law under the newly adopted constitution.

The newly elected president is faced with rebuilding and reconciling a nation that is shattered and divided and he has promised to deliver on this. It remains to be seen if he will follow in the steps of his predecessors and keep the ten-year coup cycle going or break it and start a new cycle of legitimate rule.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE C.A.R**

The C.A.R seems to be on a path to peace and stability shown by the adoption of a new Constitution and the election of a new president. In order to ensure the sustainability of this path, the policy brief proposes a number of measures that can be explored. Firstly, the civilians of the state would need to change their submissive approach and take charge, instead of letting outsiders decide what is best for them and which way is best suitable for them to rebuild their lives and state post the coup. The civilians would also have to start taking an interest in the running of their state and insisting on being governed by leaders who will be accountable only to them and respect the tenets of a democratic state.

Secondly, the political leaders of the state would also have to change their mind-set and work hand in hand with the civilians in order to ensure that their state is able to live up to its full potential and moves away from the ten-year coup cycle, they can make this possible by adopting practices that would be to the benefit of the entire state and do away with their spirit of entitlement and enrichment.

Lastly, multilateral institutions on the African continent need to take up a leading role in the rebuilding and recuperation of the C.A.R. while sending a clear message that authoritative regimes, coup attempts or successful coup missions have no place on the African continent and perpetrators will not go unpunished. The prevention of the outbreak of violence or conflict whether it be a coup, rebellion, intra-state war or civil war by intervening in states that present the underlying causes of such events instead of adopting a wait and see approach will be vital in future because small crises are easier to overcome than major ones that have been going on for some time, is something that leaders need to look into.

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