

## Central African Republic: Sitrep



<b>Date of Production:</b> June 07 2025	The Central African Republic (CAR) remains a nation deeply mired in protracted conflict, characterized by weak state authority, persistent armed groups, and significant external influence.
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## Subject Details

### Overview of CAR conflict:

President Faustin-Archange Touadéra's government, facing domestic insurgencies and an ongoing humanitarian crisis, has increasingly relied on Russian private military companies (PMCs) like the Wagner Group (now largely rebranded as Africa Corps) and Rwandan troops for security, often at the expense of national sovereignty and amidst accusations of human rights abuses. This reliance has shifted geopolitical alignments, diminishing traditional Western influence (particularly France's) and enabling Russia to secure lucrative natural resource concessions.

The humanitarian situation remains dire, with millions in need of assistance, exacerbated by insecurity, displacement, and underfunding.

Political instability is further fueled by efforts to remove presidential term limits and postpone local elections, leading to concerns about democratic backsliding and potential for renewed widespread violence.

### The Protracted Conflict and Evolving Security Landscape

The CAR has been plagued by instability since its independence in 1960, marked by coups, political upheavals, and a deeply "ethnicized" security sector. The current civil war, which began in 2013, initially saw the Séléka rebel coalition (predominantly Muslim) take control, leading to widespread human rights abuses and the formation of Christian and animist Anti-Balaka militias. These cycles of violence have created deep religious and ethnic divisions, leading to a de facto partition of the country into government-held (south and west) and rebel-held (north and east) areas.

### Key Facts/Ideas:

**Historical Instability:** "The CAR gained independence from France in 1960 but was soon beset by coups and political upheavals." The security sector has historically been "instrumentalized to secure power and wealth for the ruling regime," leading to a dysfunctional relationship with the populace.

**2013 Civil War:** Began with the Séléka rebel coalition, followed by the Anti-Balaka. Religious tensions had not previously been a major source of division in CAR, but the cycles of revenge attacks have created deeper divisions within the population, increasing the likelihood of continued violence on the basis of identity.

**Current State of Control:** The government's control outside the capital, Bangui, remains limited, with armed groups still holding large rural areas. However, as of July 2021 the government controls more territory than at any point since the war began.

**Ongoing Rebel Activity:** The Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), formed in 2020 by former president François Bozizé, opposes the current government and has attempted to seize the capital. Rebel groups have not been eliminated, the CPC has been more active this dry season than last, and they are recruiting mercenaries from Sudan.

**Fragmented Security:** CAR is home to more than 14 armed factions, a multitude of local militia groups, groups of regional mercenaries, and a national army that is in disarray. All are responsible for widespread atrocities committed against civilians and are engaged in fratricidal struggles for control of the country's resources.

### **Russian and Rwandan Influence: A Shifting Geopolitical Landscape**

Since 2017, the CAR government has developed increasingly close ties with Russia, which has filled a security vacuum

left by Western and UN failures. This partnership, primarily through the Wagner Group, has been instrumental in supporting the Touadéra government regain territory and maintain control. However, it has also led to accusations of exploitation and human rights abuses, and a significant shift in CAR's international alliances.

#### **Key Facts/Ideas:**

**Wagner's Arrival and Role:** In 2017, Touadéra's government was struggling. The UN kept the embargo but also approved a Russian offer to donate weapons and send advisers. Russia then formally allied with the CAR government and began deploying forces, including the Wagner Group in 2018.

**Operations in CAR:** Wagner, backed by Rwandan troops, saw the government retake more territory than it had held in years. Most major urban centers are back in government hands.

**Human Rights Concerns:** Human rights violations by "state agents account for 58 percent" of abuses, a reversal from before the CPC coup attempt Human Rights Watch and UN experts have documented "killings, torture of civilians" and "extrajudicial executions" by "Russia-linked forces" and "private security companies" in conjunction with or independently of the FACA

**Exploitation of Resources:** Russia has leveraged its capture of the Touadéra government to gain control of CAR's natural resources, including gold, diamond, and logging concessions. This has involved attacks on artisanal miners and evicting local communities from their villages. Wagner's activities in the Ndassima gold mine are totally opaque, and no one knows how many tonnes of gold they are taking out.

**Shifting Influence (Post-Prigozhin):** Following Yevgeny Prigozhin's death, Russia quickly moved to integrate Wagner's operations under state control, primarily through the "Africa Corps." This rebrands and formalizes Russian military



engagement, with more ambitious strategic objectives beyond just security assistance, including "expanding" its presence in new countries like Chad, Niger, and Burkina Faso

**Rwandan Role:** Rwanda has also deployed troops to CAR since 2020 and has a long history of its own deployments in the CAR. Rwanda is now competing with Russia for local influence, expanding its economic interests (mining and agriculture) alongside security assistance.

Touadéra is also leveraging Rwanda for training, with the newly formed Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) trained by Rwanda to hedge his bets and ensure that no single security partner has too much power.

**Diminished Western Influence:** France, the former colonial power, has lost most of the military and economic influence it wielded in the Central African Republic since independence in 1960, to Moscow. The U.S. has attempted to counter Russian influence by offering security alternatives (e.g., Bancroft), but Wagner has vigorously guarded its turf through threats and obstruction.

### **Political Centralization and Democratic Backsliding**

President Touadéra has systematically consolidated power, undermining democratic institutions and civil liberties, largely with the backing of Russia. This trend raises significant concerns about the legitimacy of future elections and the rule of law.

#### **Key Facts/Ideas:**

**Term Limit Removal:** A constitutional referendum in August 2023, widely denounced as a farce by the opposition, removed presidential term limits and extended the presidential mandate from five to seven years, paving the way for Touadéra to run for a third term in 2025.

**Suppression of Opposition:** Critics, including politicians, media, and civil society actors, are barred from holding rallies, intimidated, and detained. Opposition parties are discredited via organized disinformation campaigns and subject to surveillance, online intimidation, and physical violence by youth militia associated with the ruling Mouvement des cœurs unis (MCU) party.

**Controlled Judiciary:** When the Constitutional Court ruled against the referendum, Touadéra replaced her.

**Shrinking Media Space:** Journalists and media outlets who raise concerns over ongoing insecurity or undue influence of Russia are subject to threats, arrests, or closures. Russian-sponsored media engages in aggressive social media campaigns to intimidate government critics.

**Local Elections:** The first local elections in over 35 years were postponed from 2023 to October 2024 (now 2025 as per VOA source), with opposition and civil society groups calling for a boycott due to fragile security and accusations of rigging.

### **Humanitarian Crisis and Development Challenges**

The conflict has devastated CAR's infrastructure and services, leading to a profound humanitarian crisis with widespread displacement and acute needs, compounded by inadequate funding and access challenges for aid organizations.

#### **Key Facts/Ideas:**

**Scale of Crisis:** More than 1.1 million people have fled their homes in a country of about 5 million people, the highest ever recorded in the country. As of June 2025, 2.4 million people - or 37.5 per cent of the population - are extremely vulnerable" and in need of assistance ("Situation Update, March 2025 | ReliefWeb Response").

**Displacement:** One in five Central African remains displaced either within the country or abroad, mainly in neighbouring

countries. The war in Sudan has also caused an influx of over 31,000 refugees to CAR since April 2023.

**Limited Access to Services:** The country has limited access to basic services, particularly for those living in rural areas and displacement camps. Hospitals and schools are "essentially nonfunctional," affecting health and education outcomes. Roadblocks and taxation by armed groups stifle trade and hinder movement.

**Food Insecurity:** Some 2.29 million people were without enough food as of mid-2021. The northern region faces acute food insecurity exacerbated by disruptions to traffic from Sudan and resulting price increases.

**Funding Shortfalls:** Humanitarian programs in CAR are severely underfunded. 2025 began with the suspension of the US foreign aid, which supported around 50 per cent of the humanitarian response in CAR in 2024. In 2025, only 19.4% of the required \$326.1 million for humanitarian needs has been funded.

**Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** GBV is at alarming proportions due to socio-cultural norms and the ongoing crisis, with limited support and medical care available for survivors.

**Explosive Devices:** Landmines and other explosive devices remain a significant concern, particularly in the western region, hindering humanitarian access and socio-economic activities.

### **Economic Drivers of Conflict and Exploitation**

Control over high-value natural resources like diamonds, gold, and timber has been a persistent driver of conflict and a significant source of revenue for both the government and armed groups, contributing to illicit economies and deepening the cycle of violence.

**Key Facts/Ideas:**

**Resource-Rich, Poverty-Stricken:** According to the UN support to SSR in peacekeeping contexts: A case study of the Central African Republic, despite abundant natural resources, CAR is among the world's poorest countries.

**Diamonds and Gold:** Many sources have identified control over high-value natural resources, such as diamonds, gold, and timber, as part of the dynamics of conflict in CAR. The Séléka rebel coalition began taking over diamond mines in 2012, and the Kimberley Process suspended CAR's diamond exports in 2013.

**Wagner's Economic Interests:** Russian firms have taken control of several CAR mines in compliant zones and, reportedly, in non-compliant areas controlled by rebel groups. Wagner's activities include industrial-scale smuggling of gold, diamonds, and timber.

**Informal Taxation and Looting:** Armed groups operate roadblocks and levy taxes on goods in transit, leading to price inflation. Widespread looting of crops and livestock in the early stages of the civil war eroded purchasing power and increased poverty.

**Resource Curse vs. Livelihoods:** While profits from resources finance violence, some argue the primary motivation of rebels is to seize state control. The "conflict resources school" focuses on elite control and war financing, while the "livelihoods and conflict argument" emphasizes the role of basic resources for the general population, where erosion of resources exacerbates poverty and forces people into militias for survival.

**Illicit Trade Routes:** Sudanese arms traffickers are accused of supplying small arms to rebel groups in CAR, highlighting porous borders that facilitate illicit flows.

**Outlook and Implications**



The current trajectory suggests continued instability and a deepening of external influence in CAR. While the government, backed by Russia and Rwanda, has made gains in territorial control, this has come at the cost of democratic principles and amidst ongoing human rights concerns. The humanitarian crisis remains severe, with critical needs unmet.

#### **Key Implications:**

**Regime Survival and External Reliance:** President Touadéra's survival and relative success in retaking territory are heavily dependent on Russian and Rwandan support. A sudden withdrawal of Wagner would likely lead to a resurgence of armed groups and severe consequences for civilians.

**Consolidated Russian Influence:** Russia's presence is becoming more formal and ambitious, with the Africa Corps aiming for a larger footprint and exploiting existing "Wagner toolkit" of military and political influence, and illicit economic activities.

**Democratic Erosion:** The moves to eliminate presidential term limits and suppress opposition indicate a clear trend towards authoritarianism, making fair and inclusive elections highly unlikely in the near future.

**Persistent Humanitarian Emergency:** Despite some localized improvements in security, the overall humanitarian situation remains critical due to ongoing violence, displacement, and significant funding gaps.

**Complex Security Sector Reform:** Past attempts at Security Sector Reform (SSR) have been hindered by a lack of political will, uncoordinated international support, and the "ethnicization" of the armed forces. While MINUSCA has expanded its SSR support, the drive to "operationalize" the FACA risks reducing SSR to military functionality only, potentially overlooking broader governance and human rights concerns.

**International Dilemma:** Western nations face a challenge in countering Russian influence without further destabilizing a fragile state that perceives traditional international support as insufficient or conditional. Engagement with host states should prioritize countering illicit economies and supporting state stability.

**This report was produced by the AI Salon consortium. Lead contributors: Mwende Mukwanyaga, Okari M., and Hesbon Ombati, with pattern identification support from Notebook LM. Edited by Lilian Mutinda. Cover image by Sora.**

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