

ANTI-BALAKA

Who are the Anti-Balaka Militia Groups?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxJSqkOH0sg>

BBC Video: CAR Crisis Explained in 60 seconds

Anti-balaka (meaning "anti-machete") is an umbrella term referring to various vigilante groups currently engaged in armed resistance against Seleka rebels, in the north of the CAR. Anti-Balaka was formed during August 2013 and at best can be described as disjointed organised vigilante groups, with no recognized structures and leadership.

The anti-balaka was purportedly created by the former President Bozizé to fight banditry and include some soldiers who served under Bozizé in the Central African Armed Forces (FACA). Currently the anti-balaka is inter alia comprised of the Association of Central African Farmers (ACP), an anti-Séléka peasant movement, as well as the Front for the Return to the Constitutional Order in Central Africa (FROCCA). FROCCA is a militia made up of ex-army officers loyal to the former president as well as local vigilantes annoyed with Séléka's continued violence.

The group is predominantly Christian and is involved in atrocities targeting Muslim communities in the northern areas of Cameroon.¹

ANTI-BALAKA BACKGROUND

During CAR's 2004-2007 war, militias, currently co-opted in Anti-Balaka, opposed the abuses of CAR's main rebel formation, the Armée Populaire pour la Restauration de la Démocratie (APRD). Militias in collaboration with the Union des Forces Démocratiques pour la Rassemblement (UFDR), a collective of dissident groups led by the current transitional president and then rebel leader Michel Djotodia, launched offensives in the north, seizing key towns but also committing atrocities including summary executions, abductions and forcible recruitment of child soldiers.²

Since the Séléka's insurgency in December 2012, the northwest regions were marred with persistent raids, kidnappings and killings. This culminated in numerous militias made up of former soldiers, some breakaway Séléka rebels, and certain groups of Christian vigilante farmers to combine the highly fragmented anti-balaka militias.

The current violent conflict in the CAR is primarily between the Séléka rebels, the group that deposed President François Bozizé and replaced him with Michel Djotodia in March 2013 and forces known as the anti-balaka.³ In retaliation to Séléka's violence against communities, the Anti-Balaka initiated resistance in the northern areas of the CAR, marred by atrocities not only against Seleka supporters but also Muslim communities.⁴

¹ Central African Republic: War Crimes by Ex-Seleka Rebels, 2013, www.hrw.org

² Rebels, Anti-Rebels and Refugees in the Central African Republic, 2013, thinkafricapress.com

³ Rebels, Anti-Rebels and Refugees in the Central African Republic, 2013, thinkafricapress.com

⁴ Rebels, Anti-Rebels and Refugees in the Central African Republic, 2013, thinkafricapress.com

Recently, violence and insecurity in the Central African Republic gained a sectarian dimension, as the Anti-Balaka specifically attacked Muslim civilians in response to ex-Seleka abuses. Séléka forces, who are predominantly Muslim, have committed human rights abuses against communities throughout the CAR, including executions, torture, indiscriminate shelling, widespread rape and conscription of child soldiers. They have especially targeted the majority Christian population. In response, the Anti-Balaka' militias, have committed retaliatory violence against Muslim communities.

BANGUI ATTACK: ANTI-BALAKA CAPABILITIES IMPROVING

Video: CAR crisis: Anti-Balaka group vows to defend civil populace

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n43POmH94Cw>

An attack on the CAR capital, Bangui, on 05 December 2013 is the first indication of an Anti-Balaka coordinating attacks using more sophisticated weapons such as rockets and grenades. Amnesty International estimates that between 800 and 1,200 people were killed in and around Bangui on 5 and 6 December. In attacks prior to Bangui Anti Balaka fighters relied on weapons such as, poisoned arrows, artisanal hunting rifles and AK-47s stolen from Seleka fighters. A better equipped Anti-Balaka, though still inadequate, is seen in the following two photos:

Photo 1

Photo: Seleka fighters stand guard as their commander, General Yaya, meets with Multinational Force of Central Africa (FOMAC) peacekeepers at the FOMAC camp in Bossangoa, Central African Republic, November 25, 2013.

URL: <http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?233143-Operation-Sangaris-French-intervention-in-Central-Africa/page2>



Photo 2: Militia fighters known as anti-balaka pose for a photograph in Mbakate village, Central African Republic November 25, 2013. The group say they are protecting their village from Seleka fighters.

URL: <http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?233143-Operation-Sangaris-French-intervention-in-Central-Africa/page2>



Since 10 December 2013, various reports reflected the targeted killings of Muslims by Anti-Balaka elements, including at least 11 people killed in the Boro district of Bossangoa. Attacks against civilians have also been reported in Bozoum, Bocarango and Berberati, but death tolls and displacement figures remain unconfirmed.

Video: Central African Republic Militia's Committed War Crimes

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njU63oTI5g>

Religion

CAR is geographically as large as France, but with a population of only 4.5 million (similar to Lebanon or Costa Rica). It consists roughly of 25% Muslim, 25% Protestant Christian, 25% Catholic Christian, and 25% adherents of African faiths. Anti-Balaka groups are from Bozize's northwest home region, while Seleka is from a Muslim dominated region. The Selekas have been officially disbanded and some of them integrated into the army, but correspondents say it is often not clear who is in charge, even in the capital.⁵

In recent weeks, violence and insecurity in the Central African Republic have ascertained a sectarian dimension, as the Anti-Balaka attack Muslim civilians in response to ex-Seleka abuses. Hence, the conflict is generally framed as conflict between the largely Muslim Séléka rebels against the

⁵ 'Hundreds dead' in Central African Republic violence, 2013, www.bbc.co.uk

predominantly Christian Anti-Balaka forces.⁶ The salience of a sectarian attribute to the CAR conflict is evident in several statements, such as: Khadija Umani one of the only survivors of an Anti-Balaka attack on a truck carrying people from Bossangoa to Bangui in October 2013:⁷

"The anti-machete [fighters] came and got us all off, then they told the Muslims to stand to one side. They threw me into the bush but I watched them kill the men," Umani says. "They slit all seven of their throats. We had to bury them ourselves."

An Amnesty report on the Bangui attack also stated that an Amnesty International team witnessed the destruction of the mosque in the Fouh neighbourhood, as well as the burning of the house of the local imam. Ex-Seleka forces continue to loot Christian homes in several neighbourhoods.⁸

Though religion is an important determinant in some instances of violence, this frame is simplistic. For instance the Séléka also includes many non-religious rebels, bandits and opportunists who have joined in the looting and vandalism since March 2013. And while the rebels have committed some religiously-motivated atrocities against Christians, they are also driven by non-religious motivations and have attacked Muslim communities on occasion.⁹ Anti-Balaka fighters are for example often motivated by vengeance due to relatives that have been killed by Seleka forces.¹⁰ An Anti-Balaka fighter commented that:¹¹

"The rebels killed my parents and my wife — now it's my turn to kill them"

Christian community concerns against French soldiers related to only targeting Seleka fighter also indicates that Anti-Balaka does not represent all Christian communities in the CAR, with the latter stating that such sided intervention leaves them vulnerable to attacks by the Anti-Balaka.¹²

Areas of Operation

⁶ Central African Republic: War Crimes by Ex-Seleka Rebels, 2013, www.hrw.org

⁷ Violence Escalates In Central African Republic; U.N. OKs Troops, 2013, www.ideastream.org

⁸ "None of us are safe": War Crimes and Crimes against humanity in the Central African Republic, 2013, www.amnesty.org

⁹ Rebels, Anti-Rebels and Refugees in the Central African Republic, 2013, thinkafricapress.com

¹⁰ Sectarian tensions mount in C. African Rep. town, 2012, news.yahoo.com

¹¹ Sectarian tensions mount in C. African Rep. town, 2012, news.yahoo.com

¹² Muslims, Christians trapped by fear, 2013, www.japantimes.co.jp



Photo: URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25273681>

Anti-Balaka militia areas of operation are largely regional due to armed attacks that not yet fully coordinated or capability to challenge the Séléka in full-blown combat.¹³ The northwest of CAR, regarded as the home of Bozizé's traditional support base and ex-members of the Presidential Guard, the core of Bozizé's fighting force, is remains the locus of violent incidents, more specifically in the Bossangoa, Bouca and Bouar areas.¹⁴

¹³ Rebels, Anti-Rebels and Refugees in the Central African Republic, 2013, thinkafricapress.com

¹⁴ Rebels, Anti-Rebels and Refugees in the Central African Republic, 2013, thinkafricapress.com