THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE GENEVA

INSTITUT DE HAUTES ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT

GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Localizing Regime Complexity in the Central African Republic
An Ecosystem of Interveners

THESIS

submitted at the Graduate Institute
in fulfillment of the requirements of the
PhD in Political Science/International Relations

by

Juliette Ganne

Thesis N° 1567

Geneva
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Sur le préavis de Stephanie HOFMANN, professeure à l'Institut et directrice de thèse, d'Annabelle LITTOZ-MONNET, professeure à l'Institut et membre interne du jury, et de Jean-Frédéric MORIN, Professor, Department of Political Science, Université Laval, Québec, Canada et expert externe, la directrice de l'Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement autorise l'impression de la présente thèse sans exprimer par là d'opinion sur son contenu.

Le dépôt officiel du manuscrit, en 4 exemplaires, doit avoir lieu au plus tard le 12 mai 2025.

Genève, le 10 avril 2025

Marie-Laure Salles
Directrice

Thèse N° 1567

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Abstract

Au cours des dernières décennies, un nombre croissant d'organisations internationales et régionales ont déployé du personnel dans diverses régions du monde pour prévenir ou mettre fin à des conflits. Cette multiplication d'acteurs et d'interventions conduit presque mécaniquement à des intérêts croisés, combinés et concurrents dans les sites d'opérations. Cette thèse pose la question : Comment ces acteurs interagissent-ils lorsqu'ils interviennent simultanément? Pour étudier ce phénomène, je conceptualise le terme de complexe de régimes localisé (CRL). Les CRLs sont l'extension géographiquement délimitée de complexes de régimes. Ils englobent les acteurs internationaux, régionaux et bilatéraux qui interviennent avec des ressources humaines et (im)matérielles dans un même espace ainsi que les accords formels et informels qui les lient entre eux. Il est crucial d'examiner comment les intervenants évoluent dans cet environnement complexe, tentent d'atteindre leurs objectifs et d'investir des ressources pour comprendre comment leurs stratégies affectent les populations, qui sont profondément touchées mais ont également tendance à avoir peu d'influence sur les affaires internationales. Empiriquement, ce projet examine trois itérations des CRLs qui ont émergé des interactions entre intervenants à Bangui, République Centrafricaine.

In recent decades, a growing number of international and regional organizations have sent personnel and resources, in various parts of the world, to prevent, halt conflicts, or to rebuild institutions afterwards. This multiplication of actors and interventions almost mechanically leads to intersecting, combining, and competing interests in sites of operations. This dissertation asks: How do external actors interact when they intervene simultaneously in the same sites? To study this phenomenon, I coin the term localized regime complex (LRC). LRCs are the geographically bounded extension of regime complexes that develop around a specific subject matter. They encompass the international, regional, and bilateral actors that intervene with staff and material resources in the same space, as well as the formal and informal agreements that link them together. Examining how interveners navigate this complex environment, attempt to achieve their goals, and invest material and immaterial resources is crucial in understanding how their strategies affect populations, which are deeply impacted but also tend to have little influence over international affairs. Empirically, this project looks at three iterations of the LRCs, which emerged from the interactions among external interveners in Bangui, the Central African Republic.

Dedication

In Loving Memory of
Pierre Bourguignon

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my thesis director, Stephanie Hofmann, who has the qualities of the best advisors. I always left her office more confident and motivated about my work than when I came in. Her comments were always to the benefit of the argument I wanted to make. She offered caring and gracious support, in particular in the most challenging times.

This Ph.D. was generously funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, University Association for Contemporary European Studies, and the International Relations & Political Science department of IHEID. I want to thank all faculty members, with special mentions to Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, David Sylvan, and James Hollway who have been in their own ways excellent mentors and employers.

The fieldwork necessary for this dissertation could not have been done without the dozens of people who agreed to answer my questions. I can only hope that the arguments made here are fair to the experiences, ideas, and opinions they charitably shared with me. I also need to thank Lorenzo Pomarico, Daphné Desrochers, Rebecca Annear, Tim Glawion, Mathilde Tarif, the late Igor Ačko, Gino Vlavonou, Alexis Bitaudeau, and many others who all helped me to get prepared and situated in Bangui. Very special thanks go to Leon, who safely drove me around Bangui.

Throughout my Ph.D., I was lucky to be invited to participate in various study groups who helped form and confront my ideas: the GING meetings, the Global Governance group, and many others. Louisa Lombard has welcomed me as an equal during my time at the Macmillan centre. Her research on the Central African Republic was a major inspiration. The EPI chair, its director Prof. Morin, and its members at Laval University have been university away from university during my redaction in Québec city.

I greatly benefited from conversations on academia, research, career prospects, and life in general with Audrey Mackay, Vanessa Gauthier-Vela, Bálint Pintér, Sobhi Mohanty, Stephanie Perrazone, Mira Fey, Umut Yüksel, Rebecca Tapscott, Maral Sabeti, Ueli Staeger, Erna Burai, and Moritz Neubert.

The Ph.D. is often described as a solitary and isolating experience, mine was nothing but a collective and spirited journey, where I met the best companions imaginable: Janine Bressmer, Mirko Reul, and Eliza Urwin. The unicorns became a clan for life. The chalet week-ends, lake hangouts, and Swiss day celebrations helped me get through the days and years.

My father, Pierre-Jean, sister, Lucille, and brother, Benjamin have been by my side with encouragement and comfort. I thank them wholeheartedly. Isabelle, my mom, cannot be witness to this phase of my life, but I hope she knew that my curiosity and perseverance come from her.

Jonathan Richard deserves all the accolades for the completion of this thesis. 'Through thick and thin' does not start to describe what we faced together. I want to praise your resilience and courage. You survived one of the most difficult experiences one can imagine and came out of it the same kind and considerate human you always were. I also want to thank Jonathan's rehabilitation and medical teams at Hôtel-Dieu and IRDPQ and all our friends and family who were by our side. Thanks to them, I am able to continue to tell him 'I love you' everyday.

Finally, Louis, my favourite human being on the planet, you gave me the strength and motivation to finish this thesis. I hope that you find a path in life as fulfilling as this dissertation was for me. I am the happiest *Maman* to be able to accompany you along the way.

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Acronyms

3R *Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation* or Return, Reclamation and Rehabilitation.

ANE *Autorité nationale des elections* or the national authority for the elections.

APPR *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation* or Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation.

APRD *Armée pour la restauration de la démocratie* or People's Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy.

APSA African Peace and Security Architecture.

AU African Union.

BiH Bosnia and Herzegovina.

BINUCA *Bureau intégré de l'organisation des Nations Unies en Centrafrique* or United Nations Integrated Office in the Central African Republic.

BONUCA *Bureau d'appui des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en République centrafricaine* or United Nations Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic.

CAR Central African Republic.

CEMAC *Communauté économique et monétaire de l'Afrique centrale* or Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa.

CEN-SAD Community of Sahel–Saharan States.

COD-2020 *Coalition de l'opposition démocratique* or Democratic Opposition Coalition.

COPAX *Conseil de paix et de sécurité de l'Afrique centrale* or Peace and Security council for Central Africa.

CPC *Coalition des Patriotes pour le Changement* or Coalitions of the Patriots for Change.

DDR Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.

DRC Democratic Republic of the Congo.

ECCAS Economic Community of Central African States.

ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States.

EEAS European External Action Service.

EU European Union.

EUAM European Union Advisory Mission.

EULEX Kosovo European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo.

EUTM European Union Training Mission.

FACA *Forces armées centrafricaines* or Central African Armed Forces.

FDPC *Front démocratique du peuple Centrafricain* or Democratic Front of the Central African People.

FDS *Fondation suisse de déminage* or Swiss Demining Foundation.

FOMAC *Force multinationale de l'Afrique centrale* or Multinational Force for Central Africa.

FOMUC *Force multinationale en Centrafrique* or Multinational Force in the Central African Republic.

FPRC *Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique* or Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic.

FSI *Forces de sécurité intérieure* or interior security forces.

GDP Gross domestic product.

GST general system theory.

ICG International Crisis Group.

ICGLR International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross.

IO International Organization.

IOM International Organisation for Migration.

IR International Relations.

LRC localized regime complex.

MCU *Mouvement cœurs unis* or United Hearts Movement.

MICOPAX *Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique* or Mission for the consolidation of peace in Central African Republic.

MINURCA *Mission des Nations unies en République centrafricaine* or United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic.

MINURCAT *Mission des Nations unies en République centrafricaine et au Tchad* or United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad.

MINUSCA United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic.

MINUSMA United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

MISAB *Mission Internationale de Surveillance des Accords de Bangui* or International mission on the monitoring of the Bangui accords.

MISCA *Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine* or African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic.

MLC *Mouvement de Libération du Congo* or Movement for the Liberation of the Congo.

MoU memorandum of understanding.

MOUACA African Union Observer Mission in the Central African Republic.

MP member of parliament.

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

NGO Non-governmental organization.

OAU Organisation of African Unity.

OCHA Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

OHR Office of the High Representative.

OIC Organisation of Islamic Cooperation formerly Organization of the Islamic Conference.

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

PAPEC *Projet d'Appui au Processus Électoral en Centrafrique* or Support Project for the Electoral Process in the Central African Republic.

PBF peacebuilding fund.

PSC Peace and Security Council.

RFI Radio France Internationale.

RO regional organization.

SNSF Swiss National Science Foundation.

SRSG Special representative of the Secretary-General.

SSR security sector reforms.

TAA Turn Around Allocation.

UACES University Association for Contemporary European Studies.

UEPNDDRR *Unité d'exécution du Programme national de désarmement, démobilisation, réintégration et rapatriement* or Program Execution Unit national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation.

UFDR *Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement* or Union of Democratic Forces for Unity.

UN United Nations.

UNDP United Nations Development Programme.

UNMIK United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

UNSC United Nations Security Council.

US United States of America.

USIP United States Institute of Peace.

USMS *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units.

WB World Bank.

WTO World Trade Organization.

Introduction

One afternoon in the summer of 2021, I was drinking a beer looking over the Ubangi river at *La Tourangelle*, a popular spot for journalists and politicians. The flow of the stream was slow and the midday heat was gradually lifting, but the quiet atmosphere was interrupted by the sound of a chopper. All the patrons stopped their conversations and looked at what was a rare scene, a black military helicopter grazing the water then lifting up toward the city centre. When I asked around I was told that it belonged to Russian operatives, probably associated with Wagner, a private military company.[1] Indeed, since my landing in Bangui a few days prior, I had noticed in the streets, in grocery stores, and restaurants, the presence of hooded men speaking Russian[2] as well as the apprehension they inspired in cab drivers and street vendors.

The growing presence of these mercenaries is one of the most striking differences between the two rounds of fieldwork I conducted in the winter of 2020 and summer of 2021. This new actor plays a key role in the CAR. Officially acting as military instructors, Wagner has been closely operating with the *Forces armées centrafricaines* or Central African Armed Forces as well as ensuring the personal protection of the President, Faustin-Archange Touadéra (Le Monde 06.2023). The terms of the agreement between the CAR government and Wagner are unknown, but the granting of mining licenses to companies linked to Wagner suggests that access to natural resources is how the government pays for Wagner' services (Sentry 06.2023, p.27).

Wagner, in conjunction with the national security forces, has helped the state (re)gain control over a major part of the territory (Le Monde 06.2024). This was done at the cost of major abuses and human rights violations. A panel of UN experts in 2021 reports "mass summary executions, arbitrary detentions, torture during interrogations, forced disappearances, forced displacement of the civilian population, indiscriminate targeting of civilian facilities, violations of the right to health, and increasing attacks on humanitarian actors" (UNHR 04.2021).

These methods are, undoubtedly, unavailable to United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic which is governed by peacekeeping's principles that include that force can only be used in self-defence and defence of the mandate. This mission was launched in 2014 and has been unable to ensure the redeployment of state' services in large parts of the hinterlands. The co-existence of Wagner and MINUSCA has led to incidents; Wagner has been accused of "obstruct[ing] mandate delivery and pos[ing] grave risks to the safety and security of peacekeepers" (UNSC 06.2021, p.16).

This illustrates quite an extreme case of conflict between regimes. These two actors are acting under antagonistic "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures" (Krasner, 1982:p. 186). The idea that international regimes are cohabiting, reinforcing each other, but also conflicting in sites where international and regional organizations are sending their resources is at

[1] Formerly headed by a close acquaintance of Vladimir Putin, Yevgeny Prigozhin, this company has been acting in war zones like Ukraine and Libya. Prigozhin died in 2023 in a plane crash two months after he launched a short-lived rebellion against the Russian military.

[2] Wagner mercenaries with the exception of their leaders are "nameless, hiding their faces behind military scarves and sunglasses and making it difficult to identify the commanders leading operations in the field" (Sentry 06.2023, p.14)

the core of this dissertation. Contrarily to the way regimes interact at the global level where Wagner and the blue helmets can operate in parallel in two different worlds, in these sites, they come into direct contact, and their exchanges are face-to-face.

Examining how these actors navigate this complex environment, attempt to achieve their goals and invest material and immaterial resources is crucial in understanding how these strategies affect populations, which are deeply impacted but also tend to have little influence over international affairs. The Central African Republic ranks consistently in the lowest countries on indices of GDP, human development, connectivity, gender equality, etc. The country has a long history of dependency on external support (WB 08.2020). "Almost half the population is dependent on some kind of humanitarian assistance, while 33 per cent face acute food insecurity" (ICG 10.2024) I would argue that the responsibility of those external actors is even greater to populations that are so vulnerable. Putting under scrutiny their involvement and how they are interlocking is the objective of this thesis.

1.1. Research Questions

The leading question of the thesis is: **How do international and regional actors interact when they intervene simultaneously in the same sites?** This entails a few sub-questions: What are the roles and means of the different actors? What are the features of these interactions? How does change occur? These questions target the complex system of interactions that emerge among interveners, their strategies, and the means of coordination, competition, and conflict. They also address the dynamics of the system; this idea of change over time in the system is central to this thesis. To tackle it, I need to understand the way it operates.

1.2. Argument

To answer these questions, I frame those interactions as a complex system which emerges among international interveners. I argue that what cannot be explained solely by chance or actors' rational choice is actually the result of these complex system's emergent properties, underlying patterns, and dynamics of order and disorder among interveners. These interactions give rise to an ecosystem; I refer to it as a localized regime complex (LRC). LRCs are the local extension of traditional regime complexes, which are "set[s] of international institutions that operate in a common issue area and the (formal and informal) mechanisms that coordinate them" (Henning and Pratt, 2023:p. 2181). When multiple international institutions direct resources (material and immaterial) and personnel to an operational site and coordinate efforts around a shared subject matter, such as implementing a program or conducting elections, a LRC is formed.

Importantly, the outcomes of these interactions go beyond the results of the negotiations and deals among actors; the dynamics always escape them. Even though there are powerful actors in the system with considerable resources and personnel, they are unable to control the outcomes. Each of the LRC studied here ends up at a point that is not what the actors expected or wished for.

Complex systems offer an interesting perspective on sites where multiple actors are intervening. These actors have often been studied in isolation, providing a rich and detailed analysis of their mandates, activities, and impact (Hultman et al., 2015). However, I contend that it is crucial to look at them in their environment and as part of a larger intervention of the international community. They are part of

a whole that includes all the actors intervening in the same space,

> "[they] are mutually influencing their own ambitions, decision-making processes, financing procedures, command and control arrangements, operational practices, and reporting mechanisms. Such relations display cooperation, coordination, and division of labour among different actors, but also competition and hierarchical tensions between institutions whose political clout and operational capacity can vary a lot from one to the other." (Tardy, 2015:p. 11)

In order to understand how these LRCs change and how actors find their place in these systems, I mobilize concepts from ecology, in particular niches, succession, tipping points, and snowball effect. The work done in this thesis consists of identifying the goals and strategies (adaptation, niche construction, etc.) of the different actors and how these interact (amplified or dampened) with the other parts of the system.

1.3. Definitions

In order to establish a clear and consistent understanding of the key terms, it is essential to provide precise definitions. The following section outlines the definitions that are used throughout the study. By clarifying these terms, I aim to eliminate ambiguity and ensure that readers share a common understanding of the terminology that underpins the analysis and arguments presented.

In line with the ecological approach of this dissertation, I want to present three terms: sites of operations, institution-building, and interveners. These broadly overlap with the concepts of environment, meaning the context in which LRCs emerge, the type of subject matter that those LRCes revolve around, and finally, the interveners are the actors or species that act in the LRCs. [3]

1.3.1. Sites of operations

The sites of operations[4] are the context in which the localized regime complexes take place. The term refers to a geographical area in which an organization or entity conducts its core functions. The location where activities are being carried out, such as security missions, refugee camps, or medical field hospitals. This covers the relations between national actors, the landscape and its resources and problems.

In this thesis, the site of operations stays in large part the same throughout each LRC explored. Although the foci change slightly, for example, the importance of political parties is more salient in the chapter about elections and hinterland's resources are more important for the creation of security units deployed in those areas.

[3] Each empirical chapter starts with a quick overview of these categories to highlight the relevant features to the topic at hand.

[4] I also use the term site of implementation, they are analogous.

1.3.2. Institution-building and roles

This dissertation tackles a range of topics that fall under the umbrella of institution-building. It refers to the process of (re)establishing and strengthening institutions (government bodies, legal systems, democratic processes, security forces, and civil society organizations) that are essential for maintaining peace, governance, and development in a society emerging from conflict. This process aims to create institutions that can sustain long-term peace, promote good governance, and address the underlying causes of conflict.

Importantly, the definition of this building defines the boundaries of the ecosystem. Each institution-building process includes a range of potential roles or niches which interveners can play. These niches can be filled, modified, extended, and left vacant by the actors. They are at the intersection of the context and actors.

1.3.3. Interveners

I use the terms interveners or actors interchangeably throughout the thesis. These all refer to the group of International Organizations, regional organizations, embassies, Non-governmental organizations, etc. who play a role in the LRCs. They are defined by their undertaking of civilian and/or military actions in the sites of operations through personnel and resources.

Again the relevant interveners change depending on which institutions-building, I am focusing on. Of course, the United Nations is consistently an important player, but more minor interveners might specialize and develop skills that are more suited to the participation in one LRC rather than the other.

1.4. Scope Conditions

Although this dissertation focuses on institution-building and the case of the CAR, I contend that the model developed can be applied to other issue-areas. With the condition that they display a key characteristic: sites of operations. This includes the global health regime complex when dealing with an epidemic like Ebola or the migration regime complex and the refugee camps where multiple organizations are sharing the organization of the refugee camps.

Building on Gehring and Faude (2013) distinction between regulatory and operational regime complexes, I argue that operational regime complexes exhibit a characteristic extension not found in regulatory regimes. Regulatory regimes influence international politics primarily through long-term regulation; operational regime complexes operate through executive actions, having more immediate and direct impacts. I would further describe operational regime complexes as those capable of deploying resources—both material and immaterial—as well as personnel—military and civilian—to specific locations.

In this regard, geography can serve as a shorthand for differentiating the two types of regimes. Regulatory complexes typically function within established regulatory hubs, such as headquarters in New York, Brussels, Addis Ababa, or Geneva, whereas operational complexes are not only based in these headquarters but also extend into the field, particularly during the implementation of multinational policies or in active operational sites. The arguments made in this dissertation apply to a limited set of cases: the regime complexes that have this operational component.

Another way of understanding the range of cases to which the arguments could apply, one can also look at spaces where multiple interventions are occurring at the same time. In a recent book, Balas (2022) demonstrates the prevalence of those cases. His concept of "[m]ultiple simultaneous peace operations" is defined as two or more peace operations deployed at the same time (simultaneous), in the same conflicts (multiple)."(Balas, 2022:p. 63) He finds that:

> "[t]he majority (60%) of all peace operations are deployed in conflicts in which the peace operations of other international organizations are already present. This has been an increasing trend in the decades since the end of the Cold War. Improving the mechanisms of cooperation between international organizations is an issue of global concern, given the need to optimize the use of their financial and human resources."(Balas, 2022:p. 145)

1.5. Significance

This dissertation has theoretical, empirical, and normative implications. First, while much of the existing literature on international regimes and interventions has concentrated on the institutional mechanisms, normative frameworks, and power dynamics between states and international organizations, this study explores a crucial, yet largely under-explored, dimension: the implementation. This phase represents a major part of what operational regimes are 'doing' in the world.

In a regime complex, multiple institutions are imbricated over an issue-area; rules and norms that can be conflicting, reinforcing, and undermining each other. International and regional organizations are also taking on implementation roles as the increasing number, size, and activities of interventions are demonstrating. It is important to assess how these interactions play out. Without a central authority, regime complex provides opportunities but also complications to the organizations part of this regime complex. By focusing on the organizational structures and procedures of international and regional organizations involved in conflict and post-conflict interventions, this research provides a unique lens through which to analyze the practical, real-world consequences of international decision-making on affected communities. Specifically, it investigates how these global and regional entities, often with divergent priorities and approaches, shape local realities and affect populations that are deeply impacted by conflict yet have limited influence over the course of international decisions.

Additionally, this work seeks to bridge a gap in the academic literature by offering a comprehensive framework for studying the intersection of international regimes and local actors in conflict zones. It synthesizes theoretical perspectives from international relations and conflict studies, offering a holistic view of how power, resources, and agency are distributed in a specific context. This study adds to the existing body of research by offering an empirical examination of the ways in which these actors—through their strategies and interactions—alter or reinforce local dynamics, either intentionally or inadvertently.

In sum, this thesis not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between international/regional organizations and local populations in conflict-affected areas but also provides a critical perspective on the real-world implications of international interventions. The findings of this research are valuable for policymakers, international organizations, and scholars interested in the intersection of global governance and local dynamics, offering new insights into the mechanisms through which international interventions can either support or undermine sustainable peace and development.

1.6. Outline of the Dissertation

This outline will guide the reader through the systematic exploration of the research question, culminating in a detailed discussion of the findings and their broader significance. Each section of the thesis is designed to build on the preceding chapter, ensuring a coherent and structured examination of the topic at hand.

1.6.1. Primary Chapters

The first three chapters lay the foundations by going over the research choices, contributions, and strategies. It traces the inspirations and objectives of the dissertation.

Literature Review
The review of the literature is organized around the idea that multiple literatures in global governance have been interested in the linkages among institutions. The first cut at this idea is done through the presentation of a map which visually illustrates the evolution of literature on institutional interactions. I then highlight the relationships between various contributions and concepts.

Next, I focus on the regime complexity literature, categorizing the studies along two dimensions: causes and consequences, and actors and structure, to show the breadth of research in this area. The chapter concludes on the contributions this thesis seeks to make to the literature, with a primary emphasis on the implementation of international policies within a regime complex. It sets the stage for the theoretical framework which puts forward the notion of localized regime complex.

Theoretical Approach
The theory chapter expounds on the notion of localized regime complex. To do so, I discuss the features of complex systems in general and how they link to uncertainty. This characteristic of complex systems is especially relevant to this dissertation, since it corresponds to the ambivalence that the actors I study face when they are making choices. Uncertainty is expressed through interdependence, diversity, and non-linearity.

Research Design
The research design is influenced by one key attribute of the pool of interviewees: its limited size. This provided many opportunities to find interlocutors and special attention to confidentiality issues to prevent the fact that my interlocutors could be recognized. Along these lines, the empirical material is coming in majority from interviews with individuals who are part of organizations such as embassies, multinational organizations, etc. I supplemented this material with reports, press, official releases, etc. This chapter also goes through the coding procedures, the fieldwork plan and conduct, and the ethical considerations.

1.6.2. Empirical Chapters

The empirical chapters are arranged by concentric circles from the regional to the national to the territorial. These layers describe different but connected localized regime complexes. Each issue tells a

Table 1.1. Chapters' Breakdown

Chapter #	**Subject Matter**	**Ecological Dynamics**
Chapter 5	Peace Agreements	Ecological Succession
Chapter 6	Elections	Tipping Point
Chapter 7	USMS	Snowball Effect

different but complementary story about the interactions among actors within the sites of operations.

To illustrate these dynamics, I use three cases in the interactions among international interveners. These dynamics are observed in various forms and degrees through three main subject matters (and three corresponding chapters) for the international and regional interventions in the Central African Republic.

The involvement of international regional actors to peace negotiations and the agreements
This first empirical chapter looks at the interplay among multiple actors in trying to negotiate agreement between the CAR government and the armed groups. This shows the cycles of multiplication and merger of agreements signed, which are akin to ecological succession. Preceding agreements set the stage for the next ones until the ecosystem reaches an equilibrium in the form of a larger agreement that includes the major warring parties.

This chapter also aims at understanding interventions in their regional context. I look at the forces that have been sent to ensure the respect of these agreements. I examine how these interventions adapted to the evolving security situation in the CAR and broader international climate. When there is a discrepancy between the capability of an actor to fill a niche or a role and the perceptions of the threats, mandates were changed, troop numbers were increased, and even the mission changed hands.

I take a larger view and look how the conflicts in the CAR are linked to transborder dynamics. I highlight the role of African regional organizations and neighbouring states as peace brokers, but also as destabilizing factors. The holding and fall from power of the administration has been intimately linked to the support of regional allies.

The last section of this chapter describes the most recent attempts to broker peace in the Central African Republic: the Luanda roadmap and the republican dialogue. I conclude that while the specific actors involved do vary, the roles they play (enforcer and mediator) remain stable over time.

The preparation and conduct of the presidential and legislative elections
This chapter looks at a precipitous change in the ecosystem formed by external actors in the CAR. The elections were a tipping point in the ecosystem that considerably altered the roles that the interveners occupied in that space.

Less than two years after the signature of the *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation* or Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, in December of 2020, parliamentary and presidential elections took place in the Central African Republic. Elections are often seen as a panacea to create a social contract between the elite and the populations, especially after the signature of a peace agreement.

The interveners' unison on the holding of the elections in a timely fashion was quite exceptional as it included members that usually do not participate (e.i. Russian embassy). Even more surprising, this

unanimity held in the face of many challenges coming from the political parties and the armed groups. The pressures applied through this process took this ecosystem over a tipping point.

By reviewing the international and regional efforts to conduct elections in the CAR, this chapter shows how it unearthed major disagreements over the *raison d'être* of these interventions and the ecosystem had to reorganize. Organized temporally, I present three phases: before, during and after, and show how the interveners had to renegotiate their involvement following the arrival in larger numbers of Wagner mercenaries. I end this chapter with some insights on the organization of the new round of elections, municipal ones. This next democratic deadline will take place in this reformed ecosystem with actors filling new niches.

The creation of joint military units

This third chapter accounts for the debates and discussions regarding the *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units, joint military units which include 40% of official armed forces members and 60% of former members of the armed groups created by the APPR. The creation of these units demonstrated the issues linked with coordinating the work of various actors and how minor disagreements can escalate and what kinds of tools are used to ensure the continuation of the program.

On paper, the relationship among multinational organizations on this program seemed symbiotic. The EU is funding the project through the AU and training the trainers, while the United Nations is accompanying the government in the vetting process of the armed groups' members and is in charge of the logistics.

However, the picture at the implementation level is more nuanced; the visions of the EU, the AU and the UN on the role and deployment of those units were diametrically opposed. Establishing camps and generating the force to work in those camps present numerous challenges for the implementers, especially in a terrain as remote as these regions of the CAR.

Given these difficulties, it seems practical and reasonable to divide the task according to the capabilities and strengths of each actor. This is what was done to a certain extent on the USMS, international organizations volunteered or were contracted to take on some specific tasks that suited their abilities and available resources. However, instead of setting a general orientation, the choice of the sites did not move the course for the many actors implementing this program, and the division of labour allowed each organization to continue operationalizing the USMS according to its interpretation of the place they should have in the security apparatus.

Following the elections, Russian mercenaries working for Wagner worked closely with FACA to regain control over parts of the territory. Interestingly, the FACA and Wagner have been recruiting former combatants to join them, creating de facto mixed units. Of course, this is not as structured and formal as the program that is described in this paper, but the outcomes of having former combatants working alongside the national forces are still there. This is an unexpected development for such a policy, and observers of the CAR politics will see if it competes with the formal USMS program. This chapter examines how mundane disagreements regarding the implementation of this program blossom into major antagonisms. It draws the focus toward the snowball effect.

1.6.3. Discussion and Conclusion

This final chapter brings together the dynamics and features of complex systems discussed in the theoretical and empirical chapters. It argues that ecological mechanisms can be mobilized to understand interactions among international and regional organizations. It shows how issue-areas are influencing each other and that the policies implemented by the international actors are never done in isolation and that the actions of one are impacting the performance of the others.

I also share more personal considerations about the process of crafting this dissertation. Telling staffers who work in those organizations that their jobs are complex and that there are multiple interveners along them is not going to be a surprise. This thesis rather aims at understanding why avoiding or missing to consider the intersecting nature of multinational and multiorganizational interventions is mistaken and all endeavor should at its core reckon with the potential overlaps.

Literature Review
Institutional Interactions in Global Governance

2.1. Introduction

Nowadays, no arena in global governance is immune to the multiplication of actors involved. No policy domain is under the authority of a single organization or institution (Zelli and van Asselt, 2013:p. 3). This leads to contested jurisdictions, overlapping responsibilities, but also collaboration among institutions connected by a single issue-area. "Institutional complexity is not a hypothesis—it is a fact and reality of governance, and the policy sciences sorely need a theoretical approach and empirical research to analyze the structure, process, evolution, and outcomes of such complex adaptive systems" (Lubell, 2013:p. 537). In recent decades, an ever-growing body of literature has sought to understand the relations among actors on the international stage (states, international organizations, firms, and NGOs).

These literatures agree on two premises: one pertaining to the important actors and the other on the links among them. First, all these strands of the literature recognize that states are not the only important actors in global governance. This academic awareness is in many ways catching up with a well-established empirical trend. Over the last decades, non-state actors have gained and asserted their influence on the international stage. Multinational enterprises have become more powerful and can avoid and dampen environmental rules to continue their business (Liliana B. Andonova and R. B. Mitchell, 2010:p. 261). Regional and international organizations, in part through their secretariats (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004), have asserted their expertise to edict rules (Littoz-Monnet, 2020) and develop their own procedures and resources to conduct actions within and outside of their geographical space (Wolff and Dursun-Özkanca, 2012). Some Non-governmental organizations have also been able to influence the standards and international norms (Boström and Hallström, 2010).

Second, the scholarship agrees that there are important linkages that exist among those entities.

> "Although regime complex theory is still at an early stage of its development, it is growing exponentially. Its appeal arises from the recognition that regimes are not created in an institutional vacuum and do not develop in isolation from other institutions, as initially assumed by several early regime theory scholars. Building on this insight, numerous cases of regime complexes have been documented in every field of world politics." (J.-F. Morin, Louafi, et al., 2017:p. 546)

Those linkages can take many forms. They can be hierarchical, vertical, horizontal, etc. (Aggarwal, 1998). They can be formal through the joint signing of treaties (Ward, 2006), membership patterns (S. S. Rowan, 2021), or mentions in the written records of an IO (Pratt, 2018:p. 570). The linkages can also be informal contacts between secretariats, learning from each other, co-attendance of conferences, or following the same norms (Mérand et al., 2011; Oberthür, 2001; Pahl-Wostl, 2009).

Beyond these consensual assumptions, the strands of the literature have developed in very different

directions. They take inspiration from various disciplines and academic traditions from domestic inter-organizational relations to network analysis, through EU studies, political economy, and complexity theory. Despite these differences, I argue that these literatures are more connected than they appear. They are often using different terms to refer to similar phenomena. They inspired each other and many authors navigate between these streams (Abbott, 2012; Kim, 2020).

This chapter presents this argument through three main sections. The first section brings forth visually the evolution of the literature on institutional interactions, showing the connections between the different contributions and concepts. Second, I zoom in on the regime complexity literature and organize the literature along two axes: causes and consequences, and actors and structures, showing the range of studies that have been produced under that label. Third, I outline the contributions that this thesis aims to make to the literature: primarily a focus on the implementation of international policies within a regime complex.

2.2. Institutional Interactions in Global Governance: a Mapping Exercise

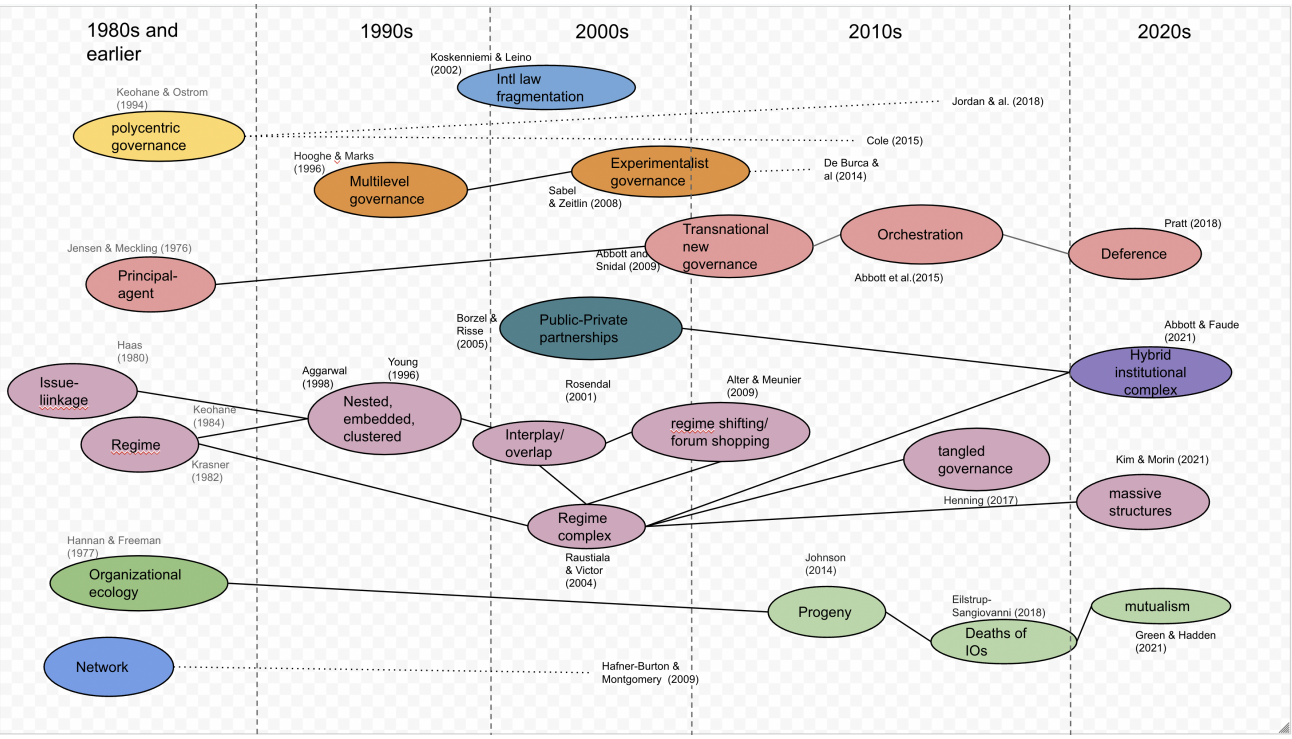
Many have used visual aids to represent the proliferation of actors in global governance (examples include: Alter and Meunier (2009) and Gómez-Mera (2015)). These illustrate the overlaps of IOs or of states in a given issue-area; similarly, I believe it is useful to present the proliferation of the literatures visually. This exercise helps to see how the literatures have influenced each other, what kinds of concepts have emerged around the same time, and the relative importance of one stream compared to the others.

In collaboration with Professor Jean-Frédéric Morin, we created a map of the evolution of the literatures on institutional interactions (see Figure 2.1). This map identifies the main literatures that emerged over the last 40 years that seek to describe and explain the interactions in global governance. To create this map, we compiled a list of references that addressed the questions of institutional linkages from international law, international relations, EU studies, environmental studies, etc.

We then classified those contributions by key topics (environment, migrations and human rights, security and economic issues including trade and finances) and by streams of the literature: fragmentation in international law, polycentric governance, multilevel governance, regimes, network, complexity systems, public-private partnerships, organizational ecology, and principal-agent theories or orchestration. The different strands were then placed on a timeline based on their emergence and particularly relevant contributions are added in grey if they are fundamental texts outside of global governance and in black if they speak directly to international interactions. The decades are indicated at the top of the map. The full lines connect concepts together, while the dotted lines are associating major contributions. The next paragraphs will go over each of the streams, associated concepts, and the main contributions.

The **fragmentation** literature appeared with authors such as Koskenniemi and Leino (2002) whose article responded to the growing fears regarding the effects of fragmentation by the International Court of Justice judge. These authors rather conceptualize this multiplication of the judicial venues as an expression of pluralism. This concept was quite popular in the early 2000s because it aptly described the situation of the proliferation of courts to represent diverse interests. Greenhill and Lupu (2017:p. 181) define fragmentation in global governance "as the extent to which a system can be divided into distinct clusters" which can be regional or sectorial. Pauwelyn (2004) and Hafner (2004) also employed the concept and applied it to the World Trade Organization and diverse issues (human rights, broadcasting,

Figure 2.1. Map of the literature on institutional interactions in global governance



maritime law, etc.) respectively. They both put scope conditions on the problems and opportunities presented by fragmentation, which has put more focus on potential conflict between clusters than synergies (Kim, 2020:p. 905).

Later, Biermann et al. (2009) and Zelli and van Asselt (2013) connected it to the concepts of regime complex and polycentricity. Biermann et al. (2009:p. 16) define fragmentation as:

> "[a] patchwork of international institutions that are different in their character (organizations, regimes, and implicit norms), their constituencies (public and private), their spatial scope (from bilateral to global), and their subject matter (from specific policy fields to universal concerns)."

This definition clearly echoes some of the definitions given to regime complexes. It contains the same elements: institutions, interactions and overlaps and common subject-matter or issue-area. The authors propose a typology of the fragmentation from synergistic to cooperative to conflictive, in line with previous uses of fragmentation concerned with its positive and negative effects. Zelli and van Asselt (2013:p. 7), in their special issue, advocate for a single research agenda for polycentric governance, regime complexes, institutional fragmentation and experimental governance as "the literatures under each of these headings have insufficiently built on each other to date." The connections among those headings are indeed fundamental, since the types of relations studied are similar and the distinctions often seem semantic or disciplinary. This might explain why fragmentation remained largely limited to the international law literature.

Another group of scholars coalesced around the term of **polycentric governance** (Ostrom, 2010). In International Relations, this trend was inspired by a seminal book by R. O. Keohane and Ostrom (1994). Rather than focusing solely on the proliferation, polycentricity takes into account how it results in the

autonomous, but interrelated decision-making centres of multiple jurisdictions. Polycentric governance is opposed to monocentric systems "where governmental units at higher levels make all collective-choice decisions, and units at lower levels simply follow commands from above" (Cole, 2015:p. 114).

This notion of delegation between higher and lower levels is also applied by the principal-agent theories and then was amended by the orchestration literature. Almost exclusively focuses on environmental issues Jordan et al. (2018); Morrison et al. (2019), polycentricity interestingly ties in the concept of hierarchy and multiple centres of power in global governance. Polycentricity proposed a form of governance that "entails a greater number of discrete policy experiments from which policymakers at various levels of governance might learn valuable lessons, including about designing monitoring systems to ensure policy compliance" (Cole, 2015:p. 117). Hence, polycentric governance is both proposing a perspective on today's governance and offering solutions for a more effective management of complex and multilevel issues (Baykov and Shakleina, 2023). This attention to the management and governance has left this literature somewhat unclear on the distinction between the features and effects of a polycentric world.

This interest for scales is connected to another stream: **the multilevel governance** (Liesbeth Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Pahl-Wostl, 2009). The multilevel governance emerged from the observation that polities are decentralizing authority and those local, sub-national, regional, national and supranational governments should be included in our analysis. Liesbet Hooghe and Marks (2003) distinguish between two types of multilevel governance. The first one is inspired by federalism and reminiscent of the monocentric system described by polycentric governance: "every citizen is located in a Russian Doll set of nested jurisdictions, where there is one and only one relevant jurisdiction at any particular territorial scale" (Liesbet Hooghe and Marks, 2003:p. 236). In the second type of governance, jurisdictions are overlapping and operate at multiple territorial scales. As a result, this type II generates less stability and more flexibility and the jurisdictions specialize on some tasks rather than being general-purpose. This explains the proximity with EU studies which have made extensive use of these theories (Börzel and Heard-Lauréote, 2009; Lavenex, 2015).

Zürn (2020) proposed an amended conceptualization of those two types and encourages us to consider vertical (scale) and horizontal (scope) dimensions as independent. He draws a two-by-two that encompasses more ideal-types and more closely aligns with the empirical findings.

> "[These four types] can allow for a general-purpose organisation on the global level. While the United Nations and the G20 summits fulfil the function of a political centre in a rudimentary sense, they are weak central organisations – not mainly because of the limited number of issues under their control, but because of a lack of competences to coordinate different task-specific organisations on the global level and dominance over lower level political organisations. Second, the EU has a much stronger political centre, but not because the number of general-purpose organisations in the EU is higher than it is on the global level. The decisive difference is rather in the competences of the political centre to coordinate as well as in its relationship to lower levels." (Zürn, 2020:p. 790)

As indicated in the map (Figure 2.1), there is a lineage between multilevel governance and experimentalist governance (De Búrca et al., 2014; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2008). De Búrca et al. (2014:p. 477) define this experimentalist governance as

> "[an] institutionalized process of participatory and multilevel collective problem solving, in which the problems (and the means of addressing them) are framed in an open-ended way,

> and subjected to periodic revision by various forms of peer review in the light of locally generated knowledge."

According to De Búrca et al. (2014:p. 323), experimentalist governance can be applied to other polities than the European Union and propose the US and the international regimes. Authors represented in other streams have been engaging with experimentalist governance questioning its legitimacy and link with the democratic deficit of the EU (Börzel, 2012; Fossum, 2012).

Principal-agent theories emerged in the 1970s; they shed light on the information asymmetry between two parties and the demand from principals to monitor the work done on their behalf by agents. The integration and advance in principal-agent theories in global governance (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Elsig, 2010) led the way to different mechanisms when discussing relationships among regimes, like orchestration. Orchestration is a softer version of principal-agent relation (Abbott, Genschel, et al., 2015); it "applies when a focal actor (the orchestrator) enlists and supports third-party actors (the intermediary) to address the target in pursuit of shared governance objectives" (Pegram, 2015:p. 619). This is voluntary on the part of the intermediary, and the control of the orchestrator is limited (Abbott, Genschel, et al., 2015:p. 722). It can explain the performance of IOs "by reaching out to private actors and institutions, collaborating with them, and supporting and shaping their activities" (Abbott and Snidal, 2010:p. 316). This is closely linked to the transnational new governance (Bulkeley et al., 2014) which is characterized by limited state orchestration, decentralization, dispersed expertise, and reliance on soft law (Abbott and Snidal, 2009:p. 541).

There have been several more recent additions to this literature. First, deference is looking closely at coordination from the other side of the equation, meaning the agents; "[w]hen the potential for rule conflict arises, IOs engage in deference, defined as the acceptance of another IO's exercise of authority"(Pratt, 2018:p. 567). Second, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann (2024:p. 104) proposes to rethink accountability in a densely institutionalized context.

> "Most existing notions of accountability focus on the formal rights by some actor(s) to hold others accountable to set standards or obligations through retrospective sanctioning. In contrast, we focus on a more forward-looking, interactive, and dynamic form of accountability suitable for densely institutionalized governance spaces."

Many of the previously discussed streams and concepts (multilevel governance, polycentric governance) mention the role of private actors in global politics, without making them the centre of the analysis. There is a literature exclusively interested in the partnerships between **public-private** entities. This literature comes from domestic politics to analyze this tool of joint ventures between public services and private enterprises. The edited volume *Who Governs the Globe?* by Avant et al. (2010) is one of the major contributions to this literature. Addressing a wide range of topics (criminal justice, conflict spaces, education, etc.), this book discusses the governors exercising their authority: NGOs, private firms, IOs.

LIliana B. Andonova (2010) explains how fragmentation of regimes and the responses from IOs to facilitate collaborations with private entities (LIliana B. Andonova, 2010:p. 26). This contribution also ties in with other literature as notions of fragmentation and regime are addressed. In other works, Liliana B. Andonova and R. B. Mitchell (2010) also discusses the horizontal and vertical rescaling of environmental politics and the latter is closely related to the multilevel governance literature.

Organizational ecology is inspired by environmental and demographic insights applied to social sciences. In global governance, it took two variants: ecology of games and ecosystems or life-cycle

metaphors. Ecology of games is "governance involves multiple policy games operating simultaneously within a geographically defined policy arena, where a policy game consists of a set of policy actors participating in a rule-governed collective decision making process called a 'policy institution"' (Lubell, 2013:p. 538). This definition is again bringing up similar ideas to other streams of multiple actors participating in decision-making in a common issue-area. This literature brings also metaphors of ecosystems such as mutualism (Green and Hadden, 2021) as well as life-cycle analogies of life/progeny (Johnson, 2014) and death of the IOs (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2018; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020). This literature has paved the way for some of the choices made in this thesis to compare localized regime complex to ecosystems and to apply the mechanisms that describe the change in these environments to the study of international and regional interveners.

Political science and International Relations have been catching up with **network analysis** for some years (Hollway et al., 2020). Some applications of these concepts to the study of IOs and international relations include Hafner-Burton and Montgomery (2006), Milewicz et al. (2016), and Murdie (2013). This literature is taking advantage of the associated methodological and theoretical insights, such as centrality, dependencies, triads, etc. (Ward et al., 2011). In global governance and especially the study of the interactions among actors involved, a lot of phenomena that can be studied as networks; common examples include shared memberships, treaties, etc. But, also vertices that can be drawn among individuals through surveys. Mérand et al. (2011:p. 133) find evidence using network analysis for the multilevel governance literature's argument that European Union security politics is both transnational and intergovernmental. Network analysis can be used to underpin research in all the other streams, and there are still many applications that remain to be explored.

Finally, a large group of scholars have used the concept of **regime complexity** or regime complex to describe intersecting regimes over an issue-area. This literature originates in the liberalism paradigm as an extension of the concept of regime (Robert O. Keohane, 1984; Krasner, 1982). It takes into account the intricate ways in which regimes are connected. This literature spurred a wealth of research both in understanding the structure and architecture of the complexes themselves (nested, embedded, clustered, tangled governance) as well as the mechanisms and strategies employed by actors navigating it (regime shifting, forum shopping, interplay)(see next section Section 2.3). More recently, other concepts of global governance complex (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter, 2021), hybrid institutional complex (Abbott and Faude, 2022), and massive structures (Kim and J.-F. Morin, 2021) have been put forward to describe larger structures in global governance.

Regime complexity seems less interested than the others in the different levels where global governance operates. Although, scholars have been pushing back against the traditional definitions of regime complexes and advocate to more explicitly include ordering principles. Along those lines, Green (2022):p. 2 defines regime complexes as "emergent patterns of authority among state and non-state actors, which vary in their degree of hierarchy". This thesis builds on this idea by looking at how regime complexes operate in sites of operations. This local level has been overlooked by the literature on regime complex. This is why I propose the term localized regime complex (LRC), which investigates this level.

Using the term institutional complex, rather than regime complex, Gehring and Faude (2014) look at power differentials to find some systemic effects of overlap among institutions. They bring our attention to an important aspect that is part of the explanation in this dissertation, evolution of complexes over time.

> "Processes of institutional adaptation that drive the elemental institutions of a complex toward specialization and gradually produce a division of labor among them are frequently not harmonious, because actors tend to struggle over the most convenient institutional

> arrangement. A settlement will reflect, by and large, the prevailing constellation of interests and distribution of power among the actors involved." (Gehring and Faude, 2014:p. 493)

2.2.1. Lessons from the Map

There are many lessons that can be drawn from this map, here I will focus on two of them that are especially relevant to this dissertation: the expansion and interlinkages of the vocabulary and the relative importance of the regime complexity literature. First, this map shows that parallel concepts have been developed by different disciplines. While there are nuances between hybrid institutional complex, regime complex, global governance architecture; they all refer to institutional arrangements where multiple stakeholders interact on a subject-matter and where rules and forums are overlapping and sometimes conflicting (Kim, 2020). Hence, I conclude that one should not, while conducting an analysis, limit themselves too closely to one terminology and get inspiration from several strands. There are many opportunities to incorporate findings and concepts from these other streams of the literature, as this dissertation tries to do.

Second, this map shows the importance of the regime complexity literature and its related concepts. It seems to have made connections with all the other major strands of the literature through some authors such as Kenneth Abbott (Abbott, 2012; Abbott and Faude, 2020; Abbott, Green, et al., 2016; Abbott and Snidal, 2009) who has written on organizational ecology, orchestration, etc. It has reached many issues-areas, although some are more represented than others, namely trade and environment and many regions in the world (Brosig, 2015; Gómez-Mera, 2015; Okabe, 2021). It is also the streams that created the most concepts, partially curtailing the recurring critique that regime complexity is too sterile in terms of testable hypotheses. There are still a lot of avenues to explore to understand the conditions, mechanisms, and structures within and across regime complexes, but there is already a substantial basis to build on.

In this dissertation, I adopted the term regime complex, because it more closely reflected my use of complexity theories and its mechanism to describe what is happening among interveners in the CAR. Regime complex can also encompass various kinds of actors without assigning a strict ordering of influence. This is especially important to the object of study of this thesis as depending on the topic different actors are significant in a logic that is not replicating the one on the international stage. Regime complexity is apt to describe different scales of interactions from massive structures (Kim and J.-F. Morin, 2021) to localized regime complexes.

This thesis coins the term localized regime complex: regime complexes which arise in sites of implementation (see Chapter 3 for a longer presentation of this concept). LRC are the local or geographically bounded counterparts of global regime complexes that develop around specific issue areas. localized regime complex encompass the international, regional, and bilateral actors that intervene with staff and material resources in the same space as well as the formal and informal agreements that link them together.

2.3. Zooming on Regime Complexity

Developed during the inter-war period, the concept of regime was updated in the 1970s notably by Stephen D. Krasner and Robert O. Keohane. Krasner (1982:p. 186) defines international regimes as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which

actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations." In *After Hegemony*, Robert O. Keohane (1984) explains how international regimes can promote cooperation through information, reduced transaction costs, and shared expectations. While recognizing the importance of the concept of international regime for understanding a single issue-area, Young (1996:p. 1) and Aggarwal (1998) have underlined the necessity to include in the analysis the linkages with other institutional arrangements.

Following this idea of linkages among regimes, the term regime complex was coined by [279]Raustiala2004 as "an array of partially overlapping and nonhierarchical institutions governing a particular issue-area". This definition was later amended and expanded by Orsini, J.-F. Morin, et al. (2013:p. 29) "as a network of three or more international regimes that relate to a common subject matter; exhibit overlapping membership; and generate substantive, normative, or operative interactions recognized as potentially problematic whether or not they are managed effectively." This thesis uses this last definition as it most closely aligns with the different elements of the phenomenon I analyze.[1].

First, there are multiple regimes present that are represented by different organizations, treaties, and conventions. Regimes, in a complex, do not share the same norms or principles (Orsini, J.-F. Morin, et al., 2013:p. 29). Second, they are connected by a common subject-matter, in this case the state-building efforts and intervention in the Central African Republic. This term is "often narrower in scope than an issue area" (Orsini, J.-F. Morin, et al., 2013:p. 30). Subject-matters constitute the empirical basis of the regime complex and can be as diverse as refugee policies, preferential agreements, maritime piracy, and genetically-modified food. These are at the intersections between broader issues: migration, trade, security, and agriculture. This means that regimes can partake in multiple complexes. Third, many of the regimes share members; for example, member-states of the UN are also members of the EU and AU. I would add that overlaps can also be in terms of mandates and resources (Hofmann, 2011). Fourth and importantly, the potential for problematic interactions is substantiated by the experience of practitioners who face those problems of regime clashing and intermingling (Orsini, J.-F. Morin, et al., 2013:p. 31).

The regime complexity literature makes two major contributions to the academic discussions regarding institutional interactions in international relations. First, it recognizes that the international regimes do not emerge and develop out of a void, but in relation with each other (Aggarwal, 1998; Gomez-Mera et al., 2020). There is no doubt that there can be problematic interaction within a single international regime, but one of the main contentions of the proponents of regime complexes is "that regime complexes evolve in ways that are distinct from decomposable single regimes" (Raustiala and Victor, 2004:p. 279). This proposition echoes an idea that is central to complexity theories that will be reviewed in the Chapter 3. This also is close to the experience of practitioners; people working in international organizations, NGOs, multinationals, etc. designate as their main interlocutors other individuals in that complex.

Second and relatedly, the proliferation of regimes in global politics results in more than their mere addition; it produces intended and unintended effects arising from the interactions among regimes (Alter and Meunier, 2009; Green and Auld, 2017; Moynihan et al., 2010). This observation directly comes from the complexity literature, which assumes that the sum is more or less than the addition of the parts (E. Morin, 2005).

To give an example coming from this thesis, when multiple interveners (MINUSCA, the American embassy, ICRC, etc.) are all providing human rights training to the Central African military and police units. The training sessions are not adding up or complementing each other. As they all provide an introduction to human rights and the treatment of armed group members and civilians, they are

[1]Although, in the case studied here there are more than three regimes interacting, I am not fully convinced that dyads of regimes cannot produce the same effects and cannot be described as regime complexes (Hofmann, 2013; Huigens, 2015)

amounting to one training. In this example, organizations are working in parallel and what their work amounts to is less than what is actually produced.

2.3.1. The Role of Collective Contributions

The evolution of this research agenda has been confirmed by special issues, forums, and symposiums. Starting more than ten years ago, these collections of articles have pointed out the challenges and opportunities within this literature and allow us to understand the growth of this literature. I see the recent acceleration in these publications, four since 2019, as a sign of significant legitimacy and health. These 15 years saw the creation of a community of scholars who contribute with their own research interests, methodological bents, and theoretical lenses to this research agenda.

The first forum was directed by Alter and Meunier (2009) and spurred other studies on regime complexes in various issue-areas (trade, human rights, intellectual property, etc.). The contributions propose potential effects of this complexity on the actors' rationality, on group dynamics, and on the implementation of policies and agreements. Building on previous works, this symposium clearly directed its attention to the consequences of regime complexity and aims at deriving mechanisms for assessing its influence on actors.

The editors also traced the next steps for the research on regime complexity, one of which is particularly relevant to this dissertation. They point to the importance of the implementation of international politics and expect that:

> "because states can select which rules to follow and because each international venue allows a different set of actors to be part of the political process, implementation politics will end up defining which international agreements become salient, and the meaning of international agreements." (Alter and Meunier, 2009:p. 16)

This spurs questions about the selection of the frame of interpretation for the implementation as well as which actors decide to impose their own interpretation. This dissertation addresses those questions that have seldom been approached in the literature. The conclusion of this special issue about the role of power politics in regime complexes by Drezner (2009) synthesizes one of the recurrent debates among scholars. The negative and beneficial impacts of a more complex and fragmented institutional landscape remind us that those arrangements might also be (re)producing and heightening the existing power disparities among states.

In 2013, Brosig2013a put together an issue of African Security that focuses on regime complexes in the continent. More targeted in terms of geographical area and issue-area, Brosig and his colleagues are discussing, *inter alia*, the role of former colonial powers (Chafer, 2013), the similarities and differences between the European Union's and African Union's peacekeeping (Schott and Dembinski, 2013), and maritime security (Bueger, 2013). This overview of the security regime complex in Africa is especially relevant to this thesis as it provides the first account of the overlapping loyalties among regional organizations and a detailed analysis of the idea of subsidiarity that underpins the security architecture of the continent.

In the same year, 2013, Global Governance published a special issue on regime complexity. This collection of contributions tackled the notion of changes in regime complexes through macro and micro dynamics (Gehring and Faude, 2013), model of co-adjustments (J.-F. Morin and Orsini, 2013), and

conflicting interests and perspectives (Struett et al., 2013). It is also in this forum that Orsini, J.-F. Morin, et al. (2013) redefined regime complex, a definition that is widely accepted now and that is used in this thesis.

More recently, in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2023, four special issues were compiled, respectively, in International Studies Review, Complexity, Governance, and Networks, the Review of International Organizations, and the Review of International Political Economy. All of those issues agree with the necessity of giving a greater place to complexity in the study of global governance. I will review these four fora and tease out the most relevant contributions for this thesis.

Orsini, Le Prestre, et al. (2019) tackle seriously the idea of complexity and complex systems and its applications to global governance. They identify three properties of complexity: self-organization, emergence, and adaptation. In the introductory piece, the authors point out the paradoxical trends that are intrinsically part of these systems, which go through phases of stability and upheavals. These trends echo the dynamics described here including tipping points, stable states, path dependency (see Chapter 7).

Malte Brosig's contribution proposes a middle ground approach in restricted complexity. His approach situates restricted complexity in between two opposite poles of linear and complex systems. Interestingly, he shows how insights from both can be combined with restricted complexity and serve to understand global governance. For example, the concept of hierarchy, he states that

> "[i]ssues of global order are neither confronted with a world without authority nor with a central managing body. Authority is dispersed in wide spaces in cases in which it is overlapping (e.g., regime complexes) and in which hierarchies are not immediately clear" (Orsini, Le Prestre, et al., 2019:p. 10).

Although, I do not use this exact terminology, I do agree that complex systems ought to be understood as including a limited number of potential actors (Orsini, Le Prestre, et al., 2019:p. 9). I would rather conceptualize the two types of complexity as Cilliers (2001) or Page (2011) do (see Chapter 3) and distinguish between disorganized and organized complexity. Disorganized complexity relates to chaos theory and is often exemplified using the behaviour of molecules of gas in a container, what Brosig defines as complex systems. Individual parts behaving randomly. This is associated to entropy "which is the ability of a system to move toward a chaotic or random state where there is no further potential for energy transformation" (Amagoh, 2016:p. 4).

Organized complexity, on the other hand, appears in cases where there are differentiated patterns and some coordination although without centralized control. This is the equivalent of Brosig's restricted complexity. Organized complexity describes more aptly the system at hand when observing interactions among international organizations. First, relations are not characterized by complete chaos; rather we see different types of relationships based on power differentials which cut across the system. Second, those systems are embedded in larger ones of global governance.

Importantly, Malte Brosig also makes an argument that is central to this thesis, the idea that "[t]he international response to larger scale armed conflicts, especially in Africa, can be understood as constituting a regime complex that often leads to the deployment of international peacekeeping" (Orsini, Le Prestre, et al., 2019:p. 11). He demonstrates that

> "The constellation of actors varies from context to context but usually involves a mix of regional and global IOs. Before a conflict breaks out, it is not fully clear which IO will

> take what particular action. For example, the UN has deployed missions following regional organizations, together with them, or separate from them. However, the multiplicity of actors and the absence of clearly structured hierarchies or commonly accepted scripts for action does not mean the international response is random or unstructured. In fact, we can observe a division of labor following functional conditions in line with what population ecology has formulated." (Orsini, Le Prestre, et al., 2019:p. 11)

In 2020, Zelli, Gerrits, et al. (2020) set out to integrate the insights from complexity science into global governance. Reviewing the numerous examples of such integration over the last 20 years, the introduction also identifies the challenges and opportunities associated with these integrations. They advocate for a collaborative, rigorous, and creative research that broaches disciplines, theoretical lenses, and methodologies (Zelli, Gerrits, et al., 2020:p. 10).

Schapper (2020) examines the groups of individuals which promoted the linkage between climate change and human rights. She looks at how actors navigate complexity and, in particular, the development and influence of a super-network that "works across a number of issue areas, including organizations concerned with intergenerational equity, land issues, environmental problems, the situation of indigenous peoples, workers' concerns, gender aspects, and human rights" (Schapper, 2020:p. 42). She shows how these issues can be investigated using qualitative interviews.

Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter (2021) put together a collection of contributions that shows the diversity among regime complexes. They show the variation in institutional complexity, in terms of scale, diversity, and density and the ordering that emerges among constituent parts (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter, 2021:p. 234). They introduce the term global governance complex "as a system of governance composed of at least three international or transnational institutions or actors whose mandates, functions and memberships overlap, and that jointly address a specific policy problem" (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter, 2021:p. 238). This new concept is meant to offer a meta-term that would encompass regime, hybrid, and institutional complexes, and polycentric governance systems. I do not ascribe to their characterization of the regime complexity literature as focused on states and to think about regimes' linkages to be mostly non-hierarchical. First, there are several authors who used organizations, norms, and NGOs as starting points for regime complex analysis. Second, the first uses of this term also offer a way to think about different arrangements including nested and overlapping regimes (Aggarwal, 2005) which points to hierarchical links.

However, they point out important dimensions of vertical and horizontal differentiation which resonate with the arguments made here, in particular the use of ecological dynamics to understand global governance. For example, they explain how "many organizations will deliberately modify their goals in response to environmental stimuli, such as growing resource competition, and seek protected niches in which they can avoid direct competition with peers" (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter, 2021:p. 245). This specialization behaviour also appears among interveners in the CAR. Moreover, they conclude on the importance of the time dimension; I would again concur that studying over time is crucial to understand the drivers of change (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter, 2021:p. 255).

The most recent forum comes from Henning and Pratt (2023). They propose a theoretical framework based on two structural features: authority relations and institutional differentiation. This framework tackles one of the major criticisms thrown at the regime complexity literature: the lack of generalizability. This forum takes the purview of the states and how they navigate this complexity.

Pratt (2023) looks at electoral monitoring as a high-value differentiation.

> "The benefit they provide is a signal to domestic and international actors that an election was free and fair. Election monitoring institutions with high standards for compliance, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), can provide a stronger signal than institutions with weaker standards, like the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The value of complying with OSCE election standards should therefore be greater than the SADC, making the regime complex value-differentiated."(Pratt, 2023:p. 2215)

This correlates with the idea of niche used in this thesis. The roles can be the same, but the way in which an organization fills that niche is not necessarily analogous to how another one would.

These numerous collective issues have developed a community with scholars contributing in various respects to the research agendas. Like other areas of research, there is a tension between the development of a new terminology and the inflation of concepts that have similar meanings. The community is trying to find the words to describe the phenomena it observes (super-network (Schapper, 2020), global governance complex (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter, 2021)), but "a proliferation of parallel terms and a conceptual and theoretical lock-in that characterized some of the above-mentioned research traditions on polycentricity, interlinkages, fragmentation, and regime complexes" (Zelli, Gerrits, et al., 2020:p. 5). Collaboration, like these issues and the prior symposiums and workshops, can help to develop a common language as researchers are presenting, debating, and ultimately borrowing from each other. This thesis opted to firmly anchor in existing literature and its concepts, namely regime complexes, while trying to amend and extend it to fit to the reality it aims at explaining, i.e. localized regime complex (LRC).

2.3.2. Regime Complexity along Two Axes

I think that those discussions over the vocabulary can be partly resolved by parsing out the literature and understanding the literature along two axes (Table 2.1): structure vs agent and cause vs consequences. The distinction between the structural- and the agent-centric literatures is based on the ontological choice of the author as well as the research question tackled. On the one hand, structure-oriented contributions are focusing on the characteristics of the whole regime complex, on the constraints and opportunities that these systems create, and on how shifts can occur. Empirically, they examine mostly formal linkages in regime complexes (common memberships, joint treaties, etc.) and try to classify regime complexes based on their fragmentation. On the other, the actor-centric literature is rather interested in the ways actors (states, NGOs, IOs) create, maintain, and navigate the regime complexes. This literature analyzes the strategies and characteristics of these elemental parts of the regime complex.

The literature is also divided among those interested in the causes of complexity and the types of complexity in the international system, while others focus on the consequences of the regime complexes on issues-areas and actors. These inquiries complement each other; they offer a fuller picture of the interactions among international actors and the overall structure of the international system. Of course, there are other ways to classify and understand this body of research. This two-by-two table cannot capture all the nuances of a growing literature, and some authors navigate in between cells either in different works or within a single article or book (Alter and Meunier, 2006; Gehring and Faude, 2013; Muzaka, 2010; Okabe, 2021).

Causes and Structure
The regime complexity literature started in the upper-left cell with authors establishing the claim that regimes were proliferating and that international relations were, in fact, presenting increasingly

Table 2.1. Typology of the Regime Complexity Literature

	Cause of complexity	**Consequence of complexity**
Structure and its characteristics	Abbott and Snidal (2009) Robert O. Keohane and Victor (2011) Green (2022)	Bernstein and Cashore (2012) Kuyper (2013) Gómez-Mera (2015)
Actors and their strategies	Colgan et al. (2012) Johnson and Urpelainen (2012) Pratt (2021) Carneiro and Wegmann (2017)	Margulis (2020) Pratt (2018) Gehring and Faude (2014) Henning (2019)

complex arrangements. Scholars in this research agenda discuss what drives the characteristics of regime complexes. Aggarwal (2005) differentiates among nested, horizontal, overlapping, and independent institutions, while Robert O. Keohane and Victor (2011) classifies the climate change regime complex on a continuum from very integrated regimes to most fragmented ones as well as identifies the factors causing these arrangements (interest, uncertainty, and linkages). Many regime complexes could be explored by this research agenda, but interestingly it has mostly been restricted to climate research (Abbott, 2012; Robert O. Keohane and Victor, 2011; Stoddard, 2012) and even more specifically on polar regions (Green, 2022; Young, 1999).

In recent years, a number of studies have extended this research agenda. Moving away from the concept of regime complex and proposing instead hybrid institutional complex, Abbott and Faude (2022:p. 265) suggests that those arrangements are constituted of more functionally differentiated institutions and exhibit greater informal hierarchy. Kim2021 observes the aggregation of regime complexes into massive institutional structures. They analyze the nexus between trade and environment complexes through time using network.

> "We expect the nexus boundaries to have become blurred in recent years to the extent that endogenous processes taking place in the trade supercluster have a significant impact on what is happening in the environment supercluster, and vice versa. Such exogenous, cross-domain processes are expected to have a nontrivial degree of influence on the structure and evolution of both superclusters, as well as their collective dynamics, such as coordination and synchronization between the two."(Kim and J.-F. Morin, 2021:p. 31)

Consequences and Structure

The upper-right cell includes contributions that are answering questions about the effects of complexity. This means articles as the one by Bernstein and Cashore (2012) who propose four pathways through which transnational institutions influence domestic politics. In that category, I also include proposals like the one made by Kuyper (2013) on the vertical and horizontal aspects of democratization in regime complexes. He shows how the core values associated with democratization (participation, accountability, and revisability) can be applied to regime complexes (Kuyper, 2013:p. 639). Along the same veins, Gómez-Mera (2015) examines the negative impacts of proliferation on cooperation among Latin American countries. She points out the role of legal fragmentation and rule ambiguity, the facilitated self-seeking cross-institutional strategies, exploited by powerful states, and competitive dynamics that undermine regional cohesion (Gómez-Mera, 2015:p. 20).

Causes and Actor
Another part of the literature (lower-left cell) strives to describe and explain how and why regime and organization complexes are created and how they evolve through time. Colgan et al. (2012) look at the cycles of stability and change driven by the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of states in the oil energy complex. This literature identifies different types of actors that can be responsible for regime complexes' creation. Some authors focus on states as the main impulse for regimes and regime complexes' creation (Carneiro and Wegmann, 2017; Johnson and Urpelainen, 2012).

The main idea behind this strand of the literature is to disentangle and trace responsibilities for emergence and changes in regime complexes. Pratt (2021:p. 97) argues that "state competition over bargaining power, rather than an attempt to maximize gains from cooperation, often drives states to construct new IOs." His empirical evidence comes from the development lending regime and he concludes that "[p]ower misalignment in existing IOs is one important pathway through which states decide to build multiple, overlapping institutions" (Pratt, 2021:p. 106).

Consequences and Actor
In the next cell, the questions asked are about how can actors benefit and take advantage of an environment where multiple forums exist to voice their concerns and meet their needs. This lower-right category focuses on the consequences of regime complexity and looks at actors' strategies to cooperate and navigate within this increasingly intricate system (Quack, 2013). Margulis (2020) conceptualizes 'intervention' when one IO's secretariat purposefully influences the decision-making in another IO.

Oberthür and Pożarowska (2013) examine how some actors are able to manage a regime complex and therefore divide labor. Hofmann (2018) contributes to the literature by fleshing out the three main strategies used by states: forum-shopping (selecting a venue to serve their interests), hostage-taking (using veto to influence one IO relations to another), and brokering (countries acting on behalf of a group through one IO). More recently, Bahr et al. (2021) has contributed to this agenda by proposing a practice lens. They find that

> "interorganizational practices structure how IOs interact in the social field of global health, as they provide the repertoire of acceptable health IO doings and thus have a productive and constitutive effect on IO–IO relations. We concluded from this that an absence of hierarchy within a regime complex does not imply an absence of order among social actors within it. However, practices are not immutable, as was evident in the changing trends in practice shares." (Bahr et al., 2021:p. 88)

2.4. Contributions

Based on previous sections, I want to highlight the three main gaps that this thesis tries to address. The regime complexity literature, similar to the object of its study, is prolific. There has been a move toward more and more 'zooming out' and studying massive structures, complex of regime complexes, hybrid institutional complexes (Abbott and Faude, 2022; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter, 2021; Kim and J.-F. Morin, 2021). This dissertation takes the opposite approach and zooms in on one extension of the regime complex: its existence in sites of operations. It is from this focus that the main contributions come.

First, regardless of the strands of the literature we look at, one major step has not yet been taken to

open the black box and look at the implementation level. Most of the research has concentrated on the relations among headquarters or on the global interactions, and it misses important consequences of regime complexity by overlooking what is happening in operational sites. Sites where multiple organizations are intervening with resources and personnel are not the exception (Balas, 2022). In those sites, regimes are interlinked by subject-matters that have to do with peacekeeping, peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian aid, provision of health care, etc. This implies the interactions among norms, standards, and practices of regimes such as security, health, trade, etc.

Second, the regime complexity literature has taken the major step of shifting our attention from a single regime to multiple ones, but the literature on regime complex is only starting to take seriously the complexity qualifier (Orsini, Le Prestre, et al., 2019; Papin, 2020). Complex can be understood as a noun, and it refers to a building or an assembly made up of different things, but complex is also an adjective that can characterize the systems that this literature explores. Using concepts and mechanisms that have been identified by the research on complex systems and applying them to the phenomenon can be fruitful.

The regime complexity literature makes some use of complex system theories (Gehring and Faude, 2013; Lubell, 2013; Pratt, 2018). In that vein, shifting our lenses toward complexity theories and borrowing from computer sciences, biological dynamics, and ecological studies can be beneficial as complex system research has already theorized and suggested tools to explore holistically the outputs of the systems rather than focusing on individual outcomes. I agree with Papin (2020:p. 87)'s assessment:

> "[T]he institutional complexity literature has not truly engaged with complexity science. In addition to often using a different vocabulary, it has tended to ignore some core tenets of complexity highlighted by complexity science, such as nonlinearity or the emergence of new properties. 'Precising' the concept of institutional complexity through a complexity science lens appears relevant. It could lead to several benefits, including differentiating institutional complexity from other notions and clarifying the meaning of related concepts, avoiding concept-stretching, and helping answer remaining questions in the literature."

Third, despite some notable exceptions (Brosig, 2013a; Hofmann, 20180), the literature is heavily focused on issue-areas related to the environment, finances, and trade. This thesis looks at institution-building after conflict, an issue-area that has been a blind spot for regime complexity research. This subject matter exhibits interesting tensions. On the one hand, there are strong incentives for cooperation and information sharing due to expensive and limited resources. Some actors are receiving resources from the same sources to conduct their operations, making pooling them sensible. On the other, this issue-area is also shrouded in a desire for autonomy and secrecy. The actors want to be able to conduct their missions and operations on their own.

2.5. Conclusion

In recent decades, observers of global politics have drawn attention to the proliferation of actors(Alter and Meunier, 2009; Held and McGrew, 2002; Raustiala and Victor, 2004). This multiplication of actors and interventions almost mechanically leads to intersecting, combining, and competing interests in sites of operations(Balas, 2011). As those interventions overlap in duration, geographical location, and scope of activities, this creates unclear rules, shared areas of competency and conflict over precedence, as well as opportunities for synergies and common efforts.

This chapter has taken a funnel approach to this research agenda. Starting from the broader idea of institutional interactions, I reviewed the different literatures which have spoken to this empirical trend (fragmentation in international law, polycentric governance, multilevel governance, regimes, networks, complexity systems, public-private partnerships, organizational ecology, and principal-agent theories). I represent the connections between these literatures through a chronological map.

Then, I focus on the ever-expanding literature on regime complexity, which provides a great basis for this dissertation. First, it fits with the empirical phenomenon I observe, where there is a growing number, depth, and span of international regimes that have the potential for synergies and conflicts. This literature, as this thesis, investigates different types of linkages. This is especially important here, as the regimes at play do intersect in various ways.

Along those lines, interactions among international organizations and their intended and unintended effects share commonalities with complex systems. These systems encompass groups of units interacting with multiple organizing principles, dependency relationships, feedback effects, adaptation and that "display organization without any external organizing principle being applied"(Amaral and Ottino, 2004:p. 159).

Since its inception, the regime complexity literature (Aggarwal, 1998; Estevadeordal et al., 2005; Raustiala and Victor, 2004; Young, 1999) has been using ecological and demographic metaphors to conceptualize groups of IOs as ecosystems and populations where some members thrive, adapt, or die, inspired by Aldrich and Pfeffer (1976) and Michael Thomas Hannan and Freeman (1993). From this, we can see the advantages of using the principles of complexity and ecosystem to disentangle the international efforts, especially considering the overlaps in mandates, unclear hierarchical relations, and the lack of able or empowered coordination bodies, as the next chapter on theory will do.

Theoretical Framework
Complexity, Ecosystems, and Dynamics

3.1. Introduction

Newton's laws of motion state that an object will rest unless acted on by a net external force, that changes are proportional to the force applied to produce them, and that all forces between two objects exist in equal magnitude and opposite direction. Those laws have been applied literally and metaphorically to a range of disciplines including in social sciences. Large and arguably dominant strands of the social sciences, including in political science and IR, rely on the idea that researchers can make causal claims based on mechanistic systems where the impact of one unit of x on a number of units y is measured controlling for a, b, c, and d. This equality of cause and effect has been interrogated since the 1950s and 60s and we saw a growing interest in complexity, unpredictability, and even chaos.

Coming from physics, researchers realized that while the Newtonian logic holds when we are talking about interactions among bigger objects (planets, apples, cars, etc.), on the atomic and subatomic levels, new kinds of interactions seem to appear.[1] Particles behave like waves and the other way around, blurring the lines between object and movement and thus putting to the fore more holistic explanations. This revolution in physical sciences has slowly seeped into social sciences, including international relations and political science (Kavalski, 2007; Wendt, 2015). Under the complexity science label, new literatures emerged ranging from Bruno Latour's actor-network theories to fractal geometry.

3.1.1. Questions

The previous chapter provided a review of the literature and led me to situate my research as part of the discussions on regime complexes and complexity. However, the phenomenon studied does not pertain to the whole regime complex; I rather focus on a specific materialization of those complexes, namely their reality when organizations intervene in the same space and at the same time. Therefore I ask: **How do actors interact when they intervene simultaneously in the same sites?** My main answer is that what emerges is a system that is distinct from the sum of its parts. This system, I call a localized regime complex (LRC). LRCs are the local counterpart of traditional regime complexes that have been discussed in the literature "regime complex as a set of international institutions that operate in a common issue area and the informal mechanisms that coordinate them" (Henning, 2017:p. 19). I am zooming in on a particular aspect of these complexes. When multiple international institutions send resources to an operational site and organize around an issue such as the implementation of a program or the conduct of elections, they produce a LRC.

To understand this phenomenon, I also tackle a few sub-questions: What are the roles and means of the different actors? What are the features of these interactions? How does change occur? These questions target the complex system of interactions that emerge among interveners, their strategies, and the

[1] Isaac Newton himself saw that his apparently immutable laws as variable and contingent (Biener and Schliesser, 2017).

means of coordination, competition, and conflict. They also address the dynamics of the system.

In this chapter, I will argue that LRCs can be akin to ecosystems. Ecosystems are a canonical example of a complex system. The classical definition comes from Tansley (1935:p. 303); he posits that an ecosystem is "a biological assemblage interacting with its associated physical environment and located in a specific place." The use of ecosystem puts at our disposal a range of conceptual tools to think about the dynamics, interactions, and boundaries of the system. Ecosystems have been conceptualized as a collection of niches.

One of the main objectives of this thesis, as shown by the research questions, is to explain changes in the ecosystem. This thesis moves the lens back and forth between agent and structure. Starting from the decisions made by the actor, it details the effects of the complexity on those decisions. In order to do that, I make use of three main mechanisms: ecological succession, tipping point, and snowball effect. These are not the only types of change that exist, but they are the three that most closely align with the evolution of the empirical topics at hand and thus give the most explanatory leverage.

I also need to manage expectations about what is and what is not possible to do with complexity theories tools. Complexity implies a major shift in focus. It will not help to discover the 'truth out there', identify unidirectional causality, or even provide definitive answers. However, it will be able to provide the tools to understand processes and strategies of actors in dealing with often unexpected outcomes and patterns (Woermann, 2016). I also do not think that what this thesis will be able to provide is a complete mapping of relationships within the international community in the Central African Republic, but rather it will identify and understand some of the localized patterns and help to interpret the interdependence of the actors.

This chapter takes a larger view and while I am not attempting to review the depth and width of the complexity theory literatures, I am rather teasing out how this thesis will be using the insights from complexity theories to approach relations among interveners in a localized regime complex. First, I briefly review complexity and its origins and I break down systems into two main components: nodes and ties. This leads to a discussion on the features of complex systems. Second, I dive into the idea of localized regime complex in relation to ecosystems and regime complexes. Third, I propose three mechanisms for change: ecological succession, tipping point, and snowball effect.

3.2. Complexity Theories: a Quick Review

In its early days, complexity science was mainly influenced by general system theory (GST) (Bertalanffy, 1950) and cybernetics (Wiener, 1961). The impetus for the development of these research agendas was in large part the recognition that by studying elements in isolation researchers were unable to account for large classes of phenomena observed in the world. Advocating for a holistic rather than reductionist focus (Goergen, 2010), they both revolutionized our worldview by stating clearly that we should understand many social, physical, and biological phenomena as systems where interactions among units should be studied alongside their characteristics. From the start, social sciences have been actively involved in the development of those new theories with anthropologists and economists like Margaret Mead and Herbert Simon.

GST developed core concepts applicable to social and natural systems crossing disciplinary boundaries and created typologies to characterize systems (static vs dynamic, open vs closed, etc.). However, GST focuses on the system at equilibrium and "it fails to provide a way forward when constituents of a

system are in conflict with each other" (Amagoh, 2016:p. 3). I would add that GST has trouble even identifying conflicting trends, because most of the efforts are devoted to studying homeostasis as it is interested in systems built by humans like electrical grids and quality assurance processes.

Another research project was called cybernetics (Wiener, 1961) and put to the forefront the idea of feedback, communications, and control, as mechanisms that regulate neural networks, ecological hubs, and policy-making in organizations (Coning, 2012:p. 112). Cybernetics has provided major improvements in our understanding of monitoring and controlling systems. In the end, interests for GST and cybernetics faded and the offshoot disciplines, like chaos theory or complex adaptive systems, have overshadowed them (M. Mitchell, 2011:p. 298). Complexity theories took the next step departing more significantly from both GST and cybernetics and started to look at non-linear dynamics (Willy et al., 2003).

3.2.1. Systems Components

Systems come in different shapes and forms, but they share some commonalities among those operating in the physical, biological, and social worlds (Herbert Alexander Simon, 1962). The aim is not to develop a single model or theory that can encompass all the systems, but to provide a space of cross-fertilization among disciplines that have to deal with systems which share some characteristics (Emmeche, 1997:p. 44). One thing that most scholars agree on is the elemental building blocks of a system: agents or nodes and the links among them (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011:p. 1169).

The first constituent part of a system is **agents**. They can be a variety of things: cells, trees, scientific articles, individuals, States, cities, or asteroids (Kuyper, 2013:p. 628). These nodes have a range of possible actions. In the simplest sense, they can form or break off ties and they can survive or die (Axelrod et al., 2006). With a system made out of more sophisticated agents like animals, the potential strategies become more elaborated and deliberate. The actors can pick a path and make predictions, although in a complex system, often inaccurate, about the effects of their decisions.

In the study at hand, organizations or institutions[2] are the acting agents. This category includes IOs and ROs, but also other entities, such as the embassies and NGOs. I treated them as boundedly rational actors, meaning that they take decisions based on the costs and benefits calculations (Herbert A. Simon, 1990). These calculations can be based on material and ideational considerations like effectiveness, reputation, resources, etc. But, this rationality is limited as they are choosing according to the limited information they have about the system and the intentions of the others.

These organizations are made up of individuals who work for them; these people have their own agendas, values, and ideas.[3] The agency of the organizations is not a straightforward addition of their reinforcing, undermining and contradicting objectives (Abdelnour et al., 2017; J. W. Meyer and B. Rowan, 1977). A system could be described within each of the organizations that I am looking at and even within each of their subdivisions (units, departments, etc.), but as I am interested in the inter- rather than the intra-organization interactions, the goal is to settle on an agency at the organizational level.

I contend that although the positions of the different organizations are the result of complex and ongoing negotiations among and within various agents, they can be deciphered and analyzed. This is reflected in

[2] In general, I use organizations when I refer to the brick and mortar entity and institutions to mean the greater sets of rules, norms and roles (Young, 1989).

[3] Individuals themselves have multiple roles and they are the result of an assemblage, it is agency all the way down (Kallinikos, 2003).

the many interviews where my interlocutors told me sentences that started with 'EU wants X...' and 'the AU thinks y...' They were able to disentangle their own views from those of the organizations, to critically think about these differences, and assign or presume the stances and motives of other actors. These acronyms served as a shortcut to manifest the collective agency of these organizations, which is formed by a myriad of factors (headquarters, culture, mandates, etc.)

The second elemental part of a system is **relationships** among the agents, also called ties or links. "Complexity tends to be identified by its relationships rather than by its constituent parts" (Kavalski, 2007:p. 438). Through those conduits, information, assets, and energy circulate (Cilliers, 2001:p. 7). "[T]ies between nodes can be channels for transmission of both material -for example, weapons, money, or disease, and nonmaterial products -for example, information, beliefs, and norms" (Hafner-Burton, Kahler, et al., 2009:p. 562). The transactions happening in the systems are leading to changes (Bousquet and Curtis, 2011:p. 49). The quantity and quality of the resources, immaterial and material exchanges, are a construct that we use to put together all the elements that allow actors to have an impact on its environment. A system might foster exchanges of certain goods and information by making those exchanges more rewarding to the agents.

The types of links investigated here are two-fold: direct and indirect (Papin, 2020:p. 89). First, direct interactions and communications among organizations constitute the main ties examined. The data collection, in particular the interviews, was focused on the exchanges and perceptions among the participants in the LRC. They can take many forms: meetings, phone calls, written communications, joint visits, etc. Second, indirect interactions include functional overlaps and membership sharing. Organizations are connected by their activities in the same subject-matter or by the fact that they have members in common (Hofmann, 2011).

3.2.2. Complexity Features

I now want to move from systems in general to complex ones. This move is essentially about the introduction of uncertainty. While simple and complicated systems can be predicted using the right variables, in complex ones "the elements are interconnected, and thus changes to one will directly affect some while indirectly affecting—even if to almost imperceptible degrees—others" (Brusset et al., 2016:p. 9). "[C]omplexity neither denies an autonomous existence to the parts composing the system nor seeks to dissolve them into an overarching determining structure" (Bousquet and Curtis, 2011:p. 45). There are several ways in which uncertainty is introduced in the system:the absence of central control, diversity and redundancy, and non-linearity.

Complexity scholars emphasize different aspects of complexity. Edgar Morin focuses on the role of uncertainty (E. Morin, 2005:p. 49), while Scott Page (2011) argues that complexity lies in diversity, Clemens (2013) highlights the notion of fitness, inspired by evolutionary science, and M. Mitchell (2011) underlines the adaptive quality of these complex systems. Although we find different foci "[w]hen comparing the different characteristics that this group of Complexity thinkers has generated, it is clear that there is a great degree of convergence among them about the core characteristics that constitute complex systems" (Coning, 2012:p. 116).

Independence and Interdependence

Complex systems are situated in between two extremes; agents are neither acting completely randomly nor according to fixed orders or rules from an authority (Page, 2011). Agents can respond and adapt to the conditions that arise locally without having to refer to a commanding entity. Linked to this idea,

effects are difficult to predict in complex systems, hence there is no simple correlation between an action and its effects. Even if one actor is able to some extent to influence the others, it could not control the output of the system as a whole. This is partly what makes them complex,

> "[e]ach element of the system is ignorant of the behaviour of the system as a whole; it responds only to information that is available locally. [...] If each element 'knew' what was happening to the system as a whole, all of the complexity would have to be present in that element. Complexity is the result of a rich interaction of simple elements that only respond to the limited information each of them are presented with."(Cilliers, 1998:pp. 4–5)

"A system is said to be complex if its parts are neither arranged completely randomly nor completely ordered" (Kappeler, 2019:p. 13). On the one hand of the spectrum, we have controlled situations with few elements; these issues can be explained by Newtonian science. On the other extreme, we have a large number of components; these problems can be tackled by thermodynamics and statistical means. With complex systems, we encounter what is called a middle number problem. This has been aptly described by Kay and Schneider (1995:pp. 52–53)

> "Middle number problems involve many things interacting in ways that are not random (e.g. most real world problems). This area of inquiry is the domain of system theorists. There are two important lessons to be learned from the study of middle number systems. First, such systems can only be understood from a hierarchical perspective. Neither a reductionist nor a holistic approach is sufficient. One must look at the system (e.g. a wetland or a woodlot) as a whole and as something composed of subsystems and their components. One must also look at the system in the context of its being a subsystem of a bigger system, which in turn is part of a wider environment. So, study of an animal population without reference to the individuals that make it up, the community it belongs to, and the environment it lives in, is not sufficient. This is not to say that population ecology is useless, but on its own, it cannot explain ecological phenomena. Another property of these middle number systems is that everything is connected (at least weakly) to everything else. An analyst, in identifying the system to be studied, decides what to include and what to leave out. These decisions, about scale and extent and the hierarchical units to be studied, may be done in a systematic and consistent way, but they are necessarily subjective, and to some extent arbitrary. They reflect the viewpoint of the analyst about which connections are important to the study at hand, and which can be ignored. Thus the notion of a pristine objective scientific observer, is not applicable to the study of self-organizing systems."

It is important to underline there are still power dynamics at play. These power dynamics often manifest through network effects, where relationships and positions determine the agents' relative influence. Agents with more connections may wield greater power by virtue of their ability to control information flow or coordinate among different parts of the system. Power can also be derived from control over resources, such as capital, assets, or knowledge. Agents who possess valuable resources may exert influence over others by leveraging their control to shape outcomes or enforce compliance with certain norms or rules.

One could assume that complex systems are chaotic and anarchical and that power cannot be deciphered, but this would be misleading. Out of the non-linear patterns and self-organization, nested hierarchies can form and are often associated with scales or levels in the system. This notion of multiple poles of authority allows to integrate the idea of power. Power in complex systems is not a zero-sum

game (Parsons). Those hierarchies create redundancies, establish routes of communication and take advantage of evolutionary possibilities(Herbert Alexander Simon, 1962). "The cross-communications between hierarchies are not accidental, but part of the adaptability of the system. Alternative routes of communication are vital in order to subvert hierarchies that may have become too dominant or obsolete. Cross connections may appear to be dormant for long, but in the right context may suddenly play a vital role" (Cilliers, 2001:p. 7).

Diversity

Diversity is also a defining feature of complex systems. Page (2011:p. 16) tells us that diversity "can mean variation in some attribute, such as differences in the length of finches' beaks. They can mean diversity of types, such as different types of stores in a mall. Or they can mean differences in configuration, such as different connections between atoms in a molecule." Diversity contributes to uncertainty, because with different characteristics, the agents tend to also act differently. Hence, the agents pursue various strategies that can counteract or reinforce the other strategies. Actors cannot know or predict precisely what others will do and the impact this is going to have on their own plans and on the system in general.

There are many advantages to diversity in complex systems. First, the presence of various types of agents contributes to the productivity of the system. With different roles filled by different actors, these agents develop the aptitudes to respond to challenges. They can specialize, they become more efficient, developing physical features depending on the food available and the other species present in the system (Gerbault et al., 2011; Moldenke, 1975). For example, in the competition over light, the height of the plant, size of the leaf, other plants growing in the surroundings, need for direct sunlight are all important factors that differentiate between a variety of plants (Devictor et al., 2010:p. 21). "Members of the same species exhibit variation in wing size and beak length, and those differences allow them to occupy distinct niches. Not only can the differences produce a fitness or survivability advantage for some members of that species, they also allow the species to adapt to a changing environment" (Page, 2011:p. 22). Diversity is linked to the development of novelty, with agents coming from different experiences adding new elements (Hollway et al., 2020:p. 75). However, if a threat targets specific types of actors, their place or tasks cannot easily be taken upon by the others.

Diversity depends on the categories created by the researcher. It relies on the level of aggregation or disaggregation.

> "The agents are endowed with behaviors, situated in social space, and set loose. The aggregate behavior of the system might be an equilibrium, a pattern, near randomness, or complexity. Think of dropping off a child at camp, arranging said child's gear in a cabin, and then driving off and letting whatever happens happen. [...] At a given instance in time, a set of micro-level agents (these could be people or organizations) takes actions. [...] These actions aggregate to produce phenomena at higher levels [...]. People create groups, groups produce society, and so on." (Page, 2015:p. 26).

In the case at hand, one could look at the system and label all the entities as interveners. But there are also many ways to distinguish among them: humanitarian, development, and security actors, bilateral and multinational organizations, etc. Interveners have different mandates and abilities or resources to conduct those objectives, and these shape how they (can) act in specific subject-matter.

Complexity is not necessarily about reaching a certain number of nodes or ties, it is rather a lens that one can apply to a problem (Manson, 2001). There can be a system with a large number of agents but which behaves all the same way like gas molecules in a closed tank. Hence, even though there is a

relatively limited number of actors, I believe that the LRCs that form in the CAR can benefit from being considered as complex systems. The concerns over the nesting of subsystems and the environment are central to this thesis.

The pendant of diversity is redundancy. "[T]he property of a system to have distinct, heterogeneous components capable of performing the same function in the system" (Randles et al., 2011:p. 295). Redundancy can enhance system reliability and stability. It offers resistance to failures in the system in case a link or an agent disappears. Excessive redundancy may lead to increased costs or decreased adaptability.

Non-linearity

Non-linear interdependence is a third characteristic of complex systems, I want to highlight. The links between the components create interdependence, meaning that agents have 'reciprocal effects' on the others (Robert O. Keohane and Nye, 1987:p. 7). However, these effects are not necessarily proportional and do not follow linear trends. Simply put, non-linearity applies to models where the inputs are not proportional to the output. The non-linearity is responsible for equifinality, meaning that multiple causal pathways can be found for the same output, preventing the researchers from tracking independent causal paths and making complex systems incompressible (Cilliers, 2001). Non-linearity "does not follow a pre-determinable cause-and-effect path that can assist us to predict or replicate its behaviour in the future, and that it is not reducible to a formula or rule that can assist us to manage or control it" (Brusset et al., 2016:p. 22).

There is a cost to this interdependence; agents are surrendering part of their autonomy. Some decisions must be made collectively. With the development of specialization, some agents need the others to be able to achieve the same goals. The interdependence is not necessarily mutually beneficial. Although it can lead to cooperation with some actors becoming more apt to take on specific tasks and increased efficiency, interdependence also means that failure in one can result in the incapacity of others to perform their duties. A classical illustration of interdependence in international relations is international trade (Kroll, 1993).

Agents rely upon the other to achieve their goals and the whole becomes more or less than the sum of its parts. This means that features of the system are highlighted while others are concealed. E. Morin (2005) pointedly highlights that systems can inhibit properties of the individual parts. Complex systems have the capacity to display qualities that are not present at the individual level or that cannot be inferred by the addition of those (Kavalski, 2007:p. 439). Ho2 molecules that aggregate become wet and can flow.[4]

This is linked to emergence which is in a way simplifying the interactions or at least helps to express them. Emergence consists in the possibility of new properties and output at the systemic level that appears out of the interactions of the components and that could not be predicted by adding of those components (Emmeche et al., 1997:p. 85). In the international system, certain dynamics appear at the local level and make their way to the global level. "[R]he capitalist system has emergent features (such as a propensity to crisis) which result from the interactions of innumerable individual actors, but which can't be traced back to those actors. Nor are they controlled by those actors, and they are potentially inimical to their interests" (Cudworth and Hodben, 2011:p. 64).

[4]Other examples of emergence include human consciousness, crowds of people, corporal membranes, and English grammar.

3.2.3. Alternative Approaches

Complexity theories help explain patterns that do not fit the expectations of mechanical, linear and reductionist understandings of the world. As a result, the counterpart of this complexity lens in political science would be rational choice theories. By reducing the explanation to strategic components, rational theories, especially game theory approaches, provide less explanatory power than using ecosystem as the level of analysis. Since the mechanisms that drive the state of the ecosystem are decidedly not strategically planned. These theories are obscuring and in the end cannot explain the majority of what is happening in the empirical material examined here; the unintended and unpredictable effects.

> "Alert to the interactions among all levels of action, complexity science looks beyond every form of dichotomous thinking. Complexity challenges several favorite theories of political scientists. It questions the 'rational choice' theory that political decisions represent calculations designed to maximize private or group utility. [...] Instead, complexity weighs the interactions of both material and intangible forces. It analyzes the broad context in which decisions take place as well as the idiosyncrasies of human choice. It studies patterns and trends but also 'chance' events and rare but transforming 'Black Swans' such as 'fifty-year floods' (recognizing that the old 'fifty' may be the new 'five' or 'ten'). It grants that world affairs are often shaped by exceptions to accustomed patterns—not by the mean or steady drip, but by unprecedented catastrophes such as the scope and destruction of World War I." (Clemens, 2013:p. 22)

Rational choice theories posit that actors, such as states or organizations, make decisions based on a calculated assessment of costs and benefits to maximize their interests. These models suggest that individuals or entities engage in a systematic analysis of available options, taking into account their preferences and the potential outcomes of their choices. The core assumption is that actors are rational, meaning they will select the course of action that is most likely to achieve their objectives, whether those are security, economic gain, or ideological goals.

One key aspect of rational choice theories, which connects to the complexity perspective adopted here, is the emphasis on strategic interaction among agents. In this context, the decisions of one actor depend not only on its own preferences but also on the anticipated actions and reactions of others. This interdependence leads to a focus on game-theoretic models, where the outcomes of a decision are influenced by the decisions of others. For instance, the security dilemma illustrates how one state's efforts to increase its security can inadvertently provoke insecurity in others, leading to an arms race. Such models help explain phenomena like alliances, conflict escalation, and negotiation dynamics, as actors weigh their options based on the expected behaviours of their counterparts.

Rational choice theories often oversimplify these interactions and overstate the capacity of the actors to make these predictions. I would add that they overlook the role of uncertainty, and that under uncertainty, the assumption of perfect information is unrealistic. Despite these critiques, rational choice theories remain influential in international relations, providing valuable insights into the decision-making processes of states and the strategic calculations that underlie global interactions. They offer a structured approach to understanding how actors navigate the intricacies of international politics, highlighting the importance of incentives and strategic thinking in shaping global affairs.

The complexity approach espoused by this thesis differs from rational choice theories in the assumption that actors can, with some degree of certainty, predict the impact of their actions. Complexity theories

add a layer to this analysis. While keeping the assumption that actors are making rational decisions, it rejects the idea that their prediction can be accurate. One might wonder why agents continue to behave according to rational calculations in the absence of evidence that the outcomes are reached time and time again. I would argue that the decision-making process is more important than the actual outcomes. By sticking to rational choice, actors are justifying their decisions and can find ways, in hindsight, to explain why the processes did not go as planned.

3.3. Localized Regime Complex

The previous chapter mentioned the idea of localized regime complex. I will now expand on the concept which is an extension of the regime complex. The term was coined by Raustiala and Victor (2004:p. 279) as "an array of partially overlapping and nonhierarchical institutions governing a particular issue-area." This definition was amended and expanded by Orsini, J.-F. Morin, et al. (2013:p. 29) "as a network of three or more international regimes that relate to a common subject matter; exhibit overlapping membership; and generate substantive, normative, or operative interactions recognized as potentially problematic whether or not they are managed effectively." These regime complexes have an impact on global governance and many of the effects have been studied (forum-shopping, regime shifting, contestations). However, I argued that one of the blind spots has been the examination of the effect of regime complexes in sites of operations, basically zooming in on a local version of regime complexes.

Adopting Gehring and Faude (2013)'s distinction between regulatory and operational regime complexes, I argue that operational regime complexes exhibit an extension that regulatory regimes do not display. Operational regime complexes "affect international politics primarily through their own executive action, rather than through long-term regulation" (Gehring and Faude, 2013:p. 124). I would further characterize this type of regime as the ones which are capable of sending resources (immaterial and/or material) as well as personnel (military and/or civilian) to a specific location. One could use geography as a short-hand discriminatory factor. Regulatory complexes are happening in and among regulatory sites e.i. headquarters (New York, Brussels, Addis-Ababa, Geneva, etc.), while operational complexes are occurring partly in headquarters but also during the implementation of multinational policies or in operational sites.

Hence, the phenomenon studied does not pertain to the whole regime complex, I rather focus on a specific materialization of those complexes, namely their existence in operational sites. There are three main elements to specify when looking at a localized regime complex: the environment, the subject matter, and the actors. First, the environment includes the context in which the LRC arises. The sites of operations are part of this environment, for example the relations between central and local governments, the geography, the conflict dynamics, etc.

Second, LRCs are also characterized by a common subject matter. The definition provided by Orsini, J.-F. Morin, et al. (2013:p. 29) emphasizes the shared and limited topic in which numerous actors are involved in various capacities. These can be broad themes like peacebuilding or security sector reforms, but also more specific issues like elections or the USMS programs. The important thing is that all participants in the complex are participating in some fashion in the framing, regulation, implementation, and design of this subject matter.

Third, localized regime complexes encompass the international, regional and bilateral actors that intervene with staff and material resources in the same space as well as the formal and informal agreements that link them together (MoU, agreements, etc.). Similarly to regime complexes, LRCs

contain multiple institutions, hence I would not be considering sites where only one organization intervenes. Integrated and joint interventions have been becoming more common (Brosig, 2010). [5]

Like regime complexes in their own rights, this phenomenon can be understood using the concepts and mechanisms of complex systems (Kim, 2020). As the definition by Orsini, J.-F. Morin, et al. (2013:p. 29) suggests, there are potentially problematic interactions which can lead to unintended consequences. As the previous section on uncertainty has shown, these inadvertent effects are a hallmark of complex systems.

3.3.1. Ecosystems

I focus on a specific type of complex system namely ecosystems. Ecosystems offer the toolbox to think about the features and dynamics of the complex systems (Michael Thomas Hannan and Freeman, 1993). Simply put, ecosystems are sets formed by a community of species interacting with their environment. Ecology has an extensive inventory of descriptions of how and when an ecosystem changes and these connections between the environment and the inhabitants. Although it can seem perplexing to compare natural and social systems, I argue that the LRCs share some key characteristics with ecosystems.

First, LRC and ecosystem are both set in a particular habitat or geographical area. Ecosystems grow out of a specific bounded location: a pond, a forest, a desert, etc. LRCs are also bounded geographically by the space where international regimes agree to send resources. This is usually a country or a region, but can also be a maritime or border zone. The parallel interventions by NATO's and EU's ships in the Gulf of Aden are a good example of these naval regime complexes (Muratore, 2010).

Second, as detailed earlier, complex systems differ from simple or complicated ones by their key characteristics of interdependence, diversity, and non-linearity. Food chains and predation-prey relations create power dynamics among species. "Ecosystems are diverse because they contain multiple types of flora and fauna" (Page, 2011:p. 16) and LRCs are diverse through their different types of actors (embassies, IOs, etc.) Ecosystems are interdependent in the way energy is exchanged and the cycles this exchange produces.

Third, and I will come back to this in greater detail, ecosystems are deeply tied to the notion of niches and their construction. Niches refer to the role that an organism plays in its environment and among the other organisms. They are "[s]pecies position in a functional space defined by a set of functional traits" (Devictor et al., 2010:p. 20). This makes sense to think about the bilateral, international, and regional actors in the CAR through the role they play in the system. If one thinks about niche-like roles, there are many typical roles that natural ecosystems will develop: decomposer or scavenger, producer, consumer. The same goes in the ecosystem of the LRC.

Boundaries

The boundaries of the system serve both as an entrance and frontier. It is essential to conceptualize those boundaries as creating the limits of the systems but also as the point of contact of the system with its environment and that they are porous and shifting (Bousquet and Curtis, 2011:p. 47). Boundaries are not completely defined by the researcher nor purely natural and static. The boundaries constitute the system, give it substance, and they are defined to aid the analysis. In this case, what unites this system is the common participation in the intervention in CAR. It is not about a common role, it is about the partaking in a common subject-matter. Thus, I did not limit it to a specific type of organizations. To

[5] For a more throughout discussion of the prevalence of LRCs see Chapter 4.

illustrate, if the discussion on the *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units did not include the participation of Non-governmental organizations, a large part of how this program was implemented would be amiss.

Complex systems are usually conceptualized "as open systems —that is, exchanging information with their environment—" (Orsini, Le Prestre, et al., 2019:p. 3) both vertically and horizontally. They are bounded, but can contain subsystems and are embedded in larger ones, but also overlap with other comparable systems. This applies very aptly to the cases of this thesis as in the international system, interventions by external actors are open at both ends. The local context in which they are embedded and the global level where power struggles are fought on the sake, resources, necessity, timelines, etc. of those interventions (Coning, 2012:p. 174).

Ecosystems should be understood as nested. The microbial ecosystem that developed in the mouth of a beaver is part of the ecosystem among the family of beavers living in their lodges; in turn, this family is contributing to the formation of a network of dams, rivers, and lakes, which itself belongs to the greater boreal forest ecosystem (Brazier et al., 2021). The same goes for the systems described in this thesis. This thesis considers organization as the main level of analysis. One could open up each organization and find complexity in how each decision was reached. The neural pathways in the current head of the Political Affairs unit, Bertrand Njanja Fassu, constitute a complex system (Orlando, 2020; Scharfen and Memmert, 2024). One level up, this brain is part of discussions among the members of the political affairs unit of the MINUSCA. In turn, this unit is part of a larger system of interactions among departments in the peacekeeping mission. The MINUSCA is part of the ecosystem of interveners in the CAR. All these systems are ultimately nested into the global states' system.

> "To understand human societies and their interactions we must examine the complex interactions of actors on many levels—individuals, clans, regions, classes, societies, governments, states, civilizations, the international system of states, international organizations, and transnational organizations and movements (from IBM and Greenpeace to al-Qaeda). Beyond these levels on which humans strut and fret, the entire biosphere is another crucial level that shapes and is shaped by politics." (Clemens, 2013:p. 21)

Ecological Niches

In line with the use of ecosystem as the main comparison point, one central concept I want to describe is that of ecological niche (Michael T. Hannan et al., 2003). Here, I use the eltonian definition: "The 'niche' of an animal means its place in the biotic environment, its relations to food and enemies" (Elton et al., 2001:p. 64). Charles Elton focuses on the organism's response to the environment on the local scale (Rosado et al., 2016:p. 1034), but also to the corollary relationship: the construction or selection of a niche influencing the environment. An Eltonian niche emphasizes the fact that a specie not only grows in and responds to an environment, it may also change the environment as it grows. We can think about beavers and how their dams change the water network around them by creating ponds. By intervening and amending their mandates, regional and international organizations are changing the conditions in which they act. They impact the conflict dynamics, but also the state capacity. In a context, like the Central African one, with decades of interventions and the external actors (NGOs, peacekeeping operations, religious communities, etc.) performing the duties of the state, the abilities of the government to offer these services have been atrophied or even never developed (Coning, 2020:p. 4).

Since niches are at the intersection of the actor and the system and can be understood as a range of available roles that actors can take in the environment. Actors may take on roles that are filled by other actors, in which case they occupy the same or overlapping niches, leading to competition or

cooperation. On the contrary, niches that can remain unoccupied for some time may affect the stability of the ecosystem. A localized regime complex is made out of the collections of niches available.

The concept of niche also allows us to think in terms of width, which aptly fits with the roles that organizations can take upon in a site of operations. On the one hand, as explained by Fu et al. (2015):

> "[s]pecies with a wider niche breadth are referred to as generalist species, while species with a narrower niche breadth are considered specialist species. In general, generalist species have broad environmental tolerance and are able to use a wider range of resources that enable them to survive in more places and, hence, over a larger area than other species."

The same can be said about organizations intervening from Bangui, MINUSCA can be presented as the ultimate generalist with a broad mandate and activities ranging from well-digging to peace negotiations between armed groups (Peter, 2015). The EU and in particular its missions can be characterized as much more specialized with niche capabilities (Tardy, 2015).

Conceptually and empirically, one can also expect the disappearance of a species that is no longer adapted to the conditions and gives way to the rise of new ones. For example, the failure or inability of some agents to perform the functions that are assigned to them in peace agreements by default creates some vacant niches, which can be fulfilled by other actors. In ecosystems, this can arise due to a shock: a wildfire or a drought or through a gradual change, like the move from aquatic to terrestrial life.

> "The species that adapted to the corresponding habitats broadened their niches, whereas other species not adapting to their corresponding habitats gradually narrowed their niches. These results demonstrate the co-evolutionary relationship between plants and environmental conditions from the aspects of niche."(Fu et al., 2015:p. 47).

The central idea is that the groups present in the ecosystem no longer fit into the environment. There is a discrepancy between the capabilities of the actors present and the conditions in the ecosystem. Humans are especially apt to do so, the classical example is the development of tolerance to lactose into adulthood. "The availability of fresh milk to some human groups has challenged their niche, thereby creating a potential genetic feedback for a need of continuous lactase expression throughout adult life" (Gerbault et al., 2011:p. 866).

The actors in the system must recognize the need for a new adaptation. There can be specialization, stretching of the niche, development of new physical features, emergence of a new specie, etc. (Leibold and McPeek, 2006). In natural ecosystems, changes can occur randomly and are selected over time based on their evolutionary advantages; changes in social systems are dependent on the choices made by actors. Niche selection is based both on the perception of the situation and the roles taken by the other actors. The ability of the actors in the system to take upon the new situation is crucial to the choice made by the other organizations. If the interventions in place are unable to react, they might be replaced by others with more executive powers. Niche selection, i.e. who is going to conduct the lead interventions in the CAR, is based both on the perception of the situation and the roles taken by the other actors. The ability of the actors in the system to take upon the new situation is crucial to the choice made by the other organizations.

The security situation can be difficult to evaluate; as situations can seem volatile and no violence erupts. It can also be the other way around, the circumstances can be calm, and unexpectedly flare up. These perceptions are critical to the way organizations decide to act and the mandates they negotiate for

themselves. As pointed out by (Zahar and Mechoulan, 2017), organizations often do not share the same assessment of the situation, and this underlines the importance of joint visits and collective assessment.

In a context like CAR, this can happen when security concerns arise or fall. The transhumance [6] cycle is a good example of that as this seasonal move corresponds to heightened and lowered tensions between nomadic and sedentary groups. One can also think about more drastic shocks, such as attempted coups or the coalescence of armed groups that can foster the growth of concerns, as can the absence of security and welfare provisions by the government.

This selection process is where one of the important differences between ecological and social niches is situated. Ecological niches are determined by the trials and errors of evolution, with some features appearing randomly due to genetic divergence being selected over time. Species are able to lean into their comparative advantage by exploiting a niche or to actively change their conditions by building a niche. The bird beak is the canonical example used by Charles Darwin to embody this idea. By having differently shaped beaks and hence consuming different food, species are able to live in the same site and not compete over the same resources. Conversely, in social systems, niche construction is the result of sensible choices made by the actors.

"Using the concept of the niche allows researchers to go beyond classifying entities to understanding (a) their life chances under different and changing environmental conditions and (b) how they interact under the competitive conditions induced by a finite environment." (Popielarz and Neal, 2007) These advantages, as presented by Popielarz et al. apply to this project. On the one hand, the empirical cases studied here look at how international, regional, and bilateral organizations are adapting to the evolution of conditions, especially in terms of security in the CAR. On the other, just like in natural ecosystems, the ones made out of organizations, there is competition [7] and the available resources are limited.

3.4. Mechanisms of a Localized Regime Complex

One of the main research questions driving this thesis is the issue of change in a system.[8] Complex systems are notoriously dynamic, not static (Holland, 1996; O'Sullivan, 2009). Again, complexity theories and the study of ecosystems offer us some pointers. There are many ways in which complex systems change (external stressors, adaptation behaviors, interactions among groups, feedback effects, etc.)

As mentioned earlier, in complex systems, unlike simple ones, the dynamics do not follow linear lines. Nonlinearity, often described as disproportional causality. Small actions can have a major impact and follow an exponential trend; conversely, sometimes considerable work provokes limited reactions. The dynamics outlined here are impulsed by the agents, and they are the vectors of change in the system. Agents with relatively limited power can have a great influence based on their position in the system or the comparative advantage they hold. Along the same veins, a major player will be unable to predict the ramifications of its actions on the overall system and the potential feedback effects. Moreover, these effects can be direct or indirect; they can be mediated (reinforced or dampened) by other factors.

[6] Transhumance is the seasonal moving of livestock. In Central Africa, herders, mostly Peulh, from Chad and South Sudan move south during the dry season to provide pasture to the zebus.

[7] I would add cooperation, coordination, dismissal, etc.

[8] How does change occur?

Each of these dynamics is illustrated by an issue tackled in the empirical section. They include: ecological succession, tipping point, and snowball effect. The first and third are rather slow-moving. The second one, tipping point, is a rather quick shift in the system. Out of all the potential dynamics, these were selected because they most closely fit the narratives described in the empirical chapters.[9]

3.4.1. Ecological Succession

Ecological succession is one of the first theories proposed by naturalists and it is still debated and employed today (Anyomi et al., 2022; S. Smith and Mark, 2009). It is "the study of how biological communities re-assemble following natural or anthropogenic disturbance" (Chang and Turner, 2019:p. 503). A prime example of ecological succession is how plants colonize a new area or regrow after a fire. Despite initial failures or setbacks, certain groups of plants eventually succeed in establishing themselves and contributing to the development of the ecological community. Through ecological succession, each community can establish conditions that enable the next group to emerge and flourish. "The concept of succession, like all ideas of plant community dynamics, is an attempt to explain how communities change despite competition for the same basic resources of light, water, and nutrients"(Anyomi et al., 2022:p. 566).

This literature on ecological succession focuses on phases; three of them are usually identified: pioneers, intermediate, and climax community. The pioneer phase is the move from bare land to fungi to grass. These species, such as moss and fungi, may require several tries before they can establish themselves permanently, but they ultimately enrich the soil, making it more suitable for the growth of more substantial plants. Consequently, in the intermediate phase, larger plants can thrive, providing shade and shelter that allow new plant species to take root. This process can be brought to a close when an equilibrium (climax) is achieved, but a new disturbance might prompt the ecosystem to adapt once more.

Importantly, "[s]uccession is rarely predictable at the level of species composition but is sometimes predictable at the level of functional groups of species" (Prach and Walker, 2011:p. 120). This unpredictability links with complex systems, but the functional role of the species or niche is consistently present, yet the exact species or type of plants which will fill that spot is difficult to anticipate.

> "While also considering the niche as a property of the environment, Elton explained similarities among widely separated communities using ecological equivalents [...]. Species with similar food relations would occupy similar niches (e.g. the Arctic fox feeding on eggs of guillemots; and the spotted hyena Crocuta crocuta on eggs of ostriches Struthio camelus). The same niche could, therefore, be filled by entirely different species in separated regions of the world." (Sales et al., 2021:p. 2)

This also resonates with the explanations of this thesis; a host of factors determines which specific actors will take on a role or a niche in the system.

3.4.2. Tipping Point

One of the most dramatic ways for change to occur is tipping points. Tipping points are defined as "the abrupt shift between contrasting ecosystem states when environmental conditions cross specific

[9]For a more detailed discussion on the link between theory and empirics, see Chapter 4.

thresholds" (Dakos et al., 2019:p. 355). This definition underlines the paradoxical nature of tipping points. They are sudden and dramatic but are underpinned by slow-moving dynamics that accumulate and lead to a different equilibrium. Hence, the crossing of this threshold and the new system are not disconnected from the previous one. In fact, with hindsight, one can identify how the fault lines in the new system follow some growing fractures that preexisted this moment of rupture.

Numerous examples exist in ecosystems, such as a lake transitioning from clear to murky due to algae. Some aquatic plants help absorb phosphorus, which prevents algae from growing and keeps the water clear. However, as phosphorus levels rise, these plants can no longer control it, leading to algae growth and murky water. This triggers a positive feedback loop: the cloudy water hinders plant growth and promotes further algae proliferation (Dakos et al., 2019).

There are four primary conditions for identifying the presence of a tipping point. First, there must be at least two stable states: one existing before the threshold is crossed and another afterwards. These states must be qualitatively distinct, indicating a significant change and a structural reconfiguration of the system. The duration between these states can differ; some can happen in the matter of seconds and others in a few months. When the transition period is longer, tipping points may trigger turbulent periods that "can provide opportunities to reform institutional arrangements that would be out of the question during normal times" (Young, 2012:p. 78).

Second, the change is abrupt and non-linear. The process of change occurs rapidly compared to the system's usual pace. The transition from one equilibrium to another can be surprising for those observing or involved in the system. For a time, the initial state can persist despite increasing stressors. This resilience to disturbances makes the sudden shift difficult to foresee. A clear example is seen in lakes, where phosphorus levels can accumulate over weeks or months while the water remains clear. Suddenly, once a threshold is reached, algae growth surges, resulting in murky water. This illustrates that there is no direct proportionality between cause and effect.

Finally, the change is largely irreversible. Once a new stable system is established, reverting to the previous state is typically impossible. While further changes, including new tipping points, may occur, they will lead to the emergence of a different system. This new version may share some characteristics with the original, but it will not revert entirely to the initial state.

3.4.3. Snowball Effect

There are many types of effect in complex systems: butterfly effect, domino effect, ripple effect, contagion, etc. All these chain reactions unfold in a different way. With the snowball effect, a thing is put into motion, gets bigger and faster until it no longer can be controlled. It describes how small actions or decisions can accumulate and lead to significant results, much like a snowball gaining size as it rolls down a hill. Initial conditions are especially important in these kinds of effects. In complex systems, even tiny variations in initial conditions can lead to vastly different outcomes. The snowball effect amplifies the influence of initial conditions. If the starting point is slightly favorable or unfavorable, it can result in increasingly larger advantages or disadvantages over time. In this case, a small discrepancy can lead to larger and larger divergent views on the program at hand. Initial conditions set the stage for the snowball effect to take place, and small changes can lead to large, often unpredictable consequences.

As the other types of effects, snowball effects are sensitive to initial conditions. To understand the patterns of a complex system, one must first pay close attention to initial conditions, the conditions that were present when the system was set up or appeared (Cilliers, 2001). The choices made by the

actors that form the complex at the start influence the realm of possibilities for the future, but do not completely determine the subsequent paths. As Byrne and Callaghan (2014:p. 176) points out "complex systems produce multiple but limited sets of possible futures". We can think of "[w]eather systems with slightly differing initial conditions might not repeat the same behavior over time but they do demonstrate similar patterns. Even if the weather is notoriously fickle in England, it does not bring severe drought, or monsoon, or frequent hurricanes"(Jackson, 2019:p. 113).

In IR, the concept of path dependency is often used in reference to this characteristic of complex systems, and it helps to understand how, with increasing returns, over time certain behaviours or patterns become more and more entrenched, making it increasingly difficult to move away from those routines (Cairney, 2012:p. 348). They become hardened and accepted as they get repeated over time. "as relatively small events or actions can have a huge and enduring effect on policy change, which is very difficult to reverse [...] the unpredictability of events and initial choices followed by subsequent inflexibility when the rules governing systemic behavior become established and difficult (but not impossible) to change" (Cairney, 2012:p. 350).

The contradictory trends fuel the system with great indeterminacy of outcomes. But this uncertainty of processes characterized by contingencies and path dependency "does not mean that generalizations [are] generally impossible. The goal rather becomes to identify regularities in terms of process patterns and to take them as a starting point for analysis focused primarily on the 'how' question and descriptive inference" (Brachthäuser, 2011:p. 225). In cases where we have multiple international and regional interventions acting simultaneously in a country, it is the formal distribution of tasks and responsibilities and the resources and material provided at the beginning that largely influence some of the patterns that we are going to observe later. A minor coordination problem around niche occupation might lead to more severe cooperation problems and ultimately to an unoccupied niche, destabilizing the system. This echoes the idea that in complex systems, effects are non-linear. In short, small inconsistencies can lead to considerable results. The implementation of this program started with a small discrepancy between the main partners. This small disagreement grew into a larger and larger divergence.

3.5. Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to demonstrate that complex systems provide a solid, although flexible, basis to anchor the arguments made in this thesis.

> "It is a central tenet of complexity theory that in spite of their diversity, complex systems share common characteristics and behaviors due to their similar structural features, and that these characteristics apply regardless of the particular details of the complex system in question. Thus, structural similarities between the Internet, the global economy, and the human brain in terms of interactions between the constituent elements of each – whether web servers, corporations, firms and governments, or neurons – matter as much, or even more, than obvious differences between those elements for understanding the systems and their behaviors." (O'Sullivan, 2009:p. 240)

This chapter has presented some of those characteristics (interdependence, diversity, and non-linear dynamics) in particular in relation to uncertainty.

> "This uncertainty is an intrinsic quality of complex systems, not a result of imperfect

> knowledge or inadequate analysis, planning, or implementation. Recognizing this uncertainty when attempting to influence complex social systems has significant implications for the way we think about peace and conflict and undertake conflict resolution and peacebuilding." (Coning, 2020:p. 2)

I then propose the concept of localized regime complex. This highlights a particular aspect of traditional regime complexes: the reality of multiple organizations intervening in the same space at the same time. The localized regime complexes are the local or geographically bounded counterparts of global regime complexes that develop around a specific subject matter. They are distinct but connected to these regime complexes that exist among headquarters. I show how an LRC can be akin to ecosystems. This is why ecological niche becomes an important concept. This is the way actors find their places in the ecosystem and allows us to think about the interaction between the agents and the environment.

Finally, I bring out three dynamics that can occur in localized regime complexes, in particular, those pertaining to ecosystems. Ecological succession is the process by which biological communities recover and develop after disturbances, progressing through phases from pioneers (e.g., moss and fungi) to intermediate stages (larger plants) and ultimately reaching a climax community. While the specific species involved are unpredictable, functional roles or niches are consistent, with similar ecological functions being filled by different species in different environments.

Tipping points are sudden shifts between contrasting ecosystem states that occur when environmental conditions cross specific thresholds, underpinned by slow, accumulating dynamics. These changes are abrupt, often irreversible, and can lead to a new equilibrium. Tipping points are characterized by distinct stable states, rapid, non-linear transitions, and irreversible changes, with the possibility of triggering reforms during turbulent periods.

The snowball effect describes how small actions or decisions in complex systems can accumulate and grow, leading to significant, often uncontrollable outcomes. Sensitive to initial conditions, these systems can result in divergent or unpredictable consequences over time, where small early differences can lead to larger, entrenched patterns or behaviours, making them increasingly difficult to reverse. This pattern is illustrated in both natural systems, like weather, and social systems, such as policy changes, where initial choices and path dependencies shape future outcomes. This sets the stage for the three empirical chapters which present these dynamics along with issues faced by interveners in the Central African Republic.

Complexity is a lens (Allen et al., 2018; Manson, 2001) that allows the researcher to see more clearly the interactions and blurs the focus on the agents and their properties into a more holistic view of the system. These theories help explain patterns that do not fit the expectations of mechanical, linear and reductionist understandings of the world. It suggests that the object of study has to be analyzed as a whole with moving actors and interactions among them. With other approaches, "[i]n 'cutting up' a system, the analytical method destroys what it seeks to understand" (Cilliers, 1998:p. 2) and we obscure rather than clarify (Cederman, 1997:p. 20). I adhere to (Orsini, Le Prestre, et al., 2019:p. 4)'s idea that "[r]elationships are key to understanding (unexpected) behavior." It is only by tracing the processes that one can understand how the international and regional organizations are interacting, and why we observe such discrepancies between the official delegation of powers and lessons-learned documents and actual interactions and their unintended consequences.

Research Design
Researching in a Small Pond

4.1. Introduction

The empirical material for this dissertation is in majority coming from Bangui, in the Central African Republic. The Central African Republic is a 620,000 square kilometre country and located in the centre of the African continent with borders with seven countries. [1] Although the Central African Republic has endured a string of political and social crises since its independence, it has attracted relatively little academic attention (Lombard, 2012; Lombard, 2016; Lombard, 2020; Lombard and Carayannis, 2015). Given the limited information available, I opted to explore this site of research in person. I travelled to the CAR twice in 2020 and 2021, staying a month and a half each time. During these fieldwork trips, I had the opportunity to observe the intricate professional and social relations that develop in this city among expatriates.

The key specificity of this research process is the size and interconnectedness of the pool of the material. As the subtitle of this chapter indicates, there is a relatively small group of individuals working in and around the peace- and institution-building in the CAR. The decisions made from the selection of the issue-area to the choice of the fieldwork were based on research objectives but also practical realities. Balancing between a rigorous research process and adapting to the events in the CAR and the world was challenging but it also provided opportunities. For example, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to delay the second fieldwork trip to Bangui by a few months. In the end, this postponed trip allowed me to have a comparison between the LRC before and after the elections, a comparison that became the basis for one empirical chapter (Chapter 6).

Most of the data on the country and its developments are to be found in IO's, RO's and NGO's reports and records. As a result, some interviewees are also the authors or the colleagues of the authors of the documents analyzed. These intertwining connections lend themselves to particular standards and methods for establishing contact, anonymizing the data, drafting the thesis and connecting the material gathered through the documents and interviews.

In this chapter, I outline the research design employed in this study, focusing on the dual methodologies of interviews and document analysis as primary data sources. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions, facilitating a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation. By integrating interviews with the analysis of relevant documents, I aim to triangulate data and enhance the validity of the findings. Interviews provided rich and sometimes conflicting insights, capturing the perspectives and experiences of participants, while document analysis offers an additional layer of depth, enabling the examination of the historical, social, and organizational contexts (Natow, 2020). Together, these methods contribute to a nuanced understanding of the localized regime complexes in the Central African Republic.

[1] Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, and Cameroon.

This chapter is organized along the main questions that arose as I was designing my research. First, I discuss the case selection in two parts, looking at the distribution and amplitude of the phenomenon, and the potential sites of research to explain the decisions that led to the selection of Bangui as the main fieldwork site. Second, I review the data collection strategies for two sources: interviews and documents. Finally, I discuss the normative and ethical choices that underpin the research process.

4.2. How Many Cases in this Universe?

The first task associated with this research design is measuring the amplitude of the phenomenon and finding one that would represent the diversity of potential cases. I opted for the localized regime complexes in Central African Republic. This country has a long history with a plethora of multilateral arrangements governing international interventions. To systematize this comparison, I created a dataset listing missions and operations conducted by international and regional organizations with a security component since the end of the Cold War. The mechanisms found in Central African Republic are comparable, though not necessarily generalizable, to similarly multiple and prolonged interventions, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and so on.

First, I needed to identify what is an instance of localized regime complex. lrc involves a multitude of international actors with formal and informal arrangements between them, and not all of these actors and arrangements are covered by my data. While I recognize that regime complexes are made up of more informal arrangements as well. making an inventory of all those arrangements is more difficult as they do not have the same presence compared to organizations with brick-and-mortar headquarters.

Following Gehring and Faude (2013:p. 124)'s distinction between operational and regulatory institutions, I focused on organizations which "affect international politics primarily through their own executive action, rather than through long-term regulation." This involves institutions committing resources to act in the world, rather than emitting proscriptions and prescriptions. I used as a proxy the intervention of multiple international and regional organizations at the same time and in the same geographical space. With this, I limit the scope of this research to organizations with institution-building capabilities and specifically those which had sent personnel and materiel to sites of interventions. I included six major regional and international organizations: the African Union, Economic Community of West African States, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the United Nations. Those six were selected because they represent the main international and regional organizations which conduct missions and operations.

I created a dataset that compiles a list of missions and operations conducted by international and regional organizations with a security component since the end of the Cold War. I went on the websites of these organizations to list the interventions and then used books and articles to supplement this information. The basic data points are the name, responsible organization, location, duration, and time-frame of the intervention. When I could, I also collected information about the budget, heads of missions, size of troops, etc. for a total of 24 data points. I also added some major multinational force missions such as the Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands and the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to have a more complete picture of each recipient country.

However, for the purpose of the dataset, I decided not to include interventions led by a single state, like the French operations in Mali (Serval and Barkhane). Those missions do not go through the same decision-making and implementation process than multinational interventions sent by ad hoc groups of states, international and regional organizations. This does not mean that bilateral relations are not

influential and they are arguably part of the localized regime complexes that I describe in the CAR. Indeed, the empirical work revealed that the role and inputs of the embassies and bilateral partners are crucial to the policies and programs of the international interveners in Bangui. For the purposes of this dataset, the inclusion of the multinational organizations was enough to see the importance of the phenomenon and demonstrate that these contexts where multiple organizations are intervening in the same space are not an anomaly.

This is in line with the findings of Balas (2011), who proposed the concept of multiple simultaneous peace operations. He used different criteria, but also proposed that multiple interventions at the same time are not an epiphenomenon. In his recent book, Balas points out that

> "The majority, 65% (41 out of 63), of the global peace operations are conducted in some form of inter-organizational partnership. A number of intergovernmental organizations, besides the United Nations (UN), such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), have their own peace operations departments and deploy their own civilian and military peacekeepers in various conflicts around the world" (Balas, 2022:p. 1).

4.2.1. Where to Go?

Using this dataset, I identified 24 geographical areas where multiple organizations intervened: Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burundi, Central African Republic, Croatia, Darfur, Congo, Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, the Aden Sea and the Indian Ocean, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Liberia, Libya, Macedonia, Mali, Mediterranean Sea, Moldova, Palestinian territories, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, and Ukraine (see Appendix A). The first discriminatory criterion to be in presence of a local regime complex is that missions and operations have to be held at least partly simultaneously. If we had this condition, we end up with 20 countries and naval regions, removing Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, and Liberia. Those 20 instances then constituted the cases that I could select from to conduct my research.

A second important consideration was to focus on a currently active situation. I therefore removed all the missions that are not currently ongoing. This contributes to the relevance of the project as it will be discussing current conflict. It also allows me to speak with people who are currently working for those missions and operations, thus facilitating fieldwork. A few cases are eliminated and remain: Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Central African Republic, Kosovo, Libya, Mali, Mediterranean Sea, Moldova, Palestinian territories, Somalia, South Sudan, and Ukraine.

Then, I explore each region individually, in order to make the most sensible choice to conduct my research. In Central Asia, Afghanistan is an interesting case with the presence of North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Since the EU and NATO share part of their member-states, disagreements among the international interveners on the conduct of the operations played out through the interplay between those organizations (Saideman and Auerswald, 2012:p. 79). However, Afghanistan posed major logistical problems to conduct fieldwork. I would have needed the support of an organization present in Kabul to be embedded in some way to be able to circulate and stay in the country.

Europe also presents some interesting cases: in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe. In the former Yugoslavia, two cases are present: Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo. Bosnia and Herzegovina was the case-study for my master thesis. The dynamics in BiH are defined by the presence of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), an internationally appointed official who oversees and has veto

powers over political decisions, elections, and judicial rulings (Chandler, 2006b). Although fascinating, this can hardly be generalized as cases of countries steered by international administrations are relatively rare (Berdal and Caplan, 2004). In Kosovo, the interventions also include an interesting assemblage of organizations: UN, EU, OSCE, and NATO. But similarly to BiH, it has had international administrations in the form of United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo) (Beha and Hajrullahu, 2020).

In Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Moldova meet the criteria listed. Ukraine has active EU and OSCE missions. When I started this Ph.D., those missions seemed rather small in terms of size and mandate. Recent developments in the country would have made it a good case to observe how a localized regime complex reacts to a major crisis situation. Since the beginning of the war, international partners have gradually increased their support to the Ukrainian armed forces. In Moldova, the same regional organizations are present and the EU border mission is shared with Ukraine.

The naval missions (Gulf of Aden and Mediterranean sea) would have offered compelling cases, as described by Gebhard and S. J. Smith (2014:p. 116), personnel in those ships have developed informal practices outside of the formal relations of their respective organizations. Muratore (2010:p. 96) give the example of their communication system:

> "Both NATO and the EU lack a common C3 [command, control, communications] architecture; that is, there is no single piece of equipment that can be installed across all NATO or EU ships to ensure a fully interoperable communications system for ships of that operation. Workaround solutions are plentiful [...]. There are [...] two systems in use in the Gulf of Aden that are enabling communication both within EU and NATO operations and across them."

But, the questions of access to the ships were too difficult to solve to conduct the fieldwork and be able to collect enough information to write a thesis.

In the Middle East and North Africa, there are two cases: Palestine and Libya. Palestine has two EU missions and a UN one. The Israel-Palestine conflict has been taken up politically in ways that other conflicts have not been in the world. This explosive and politically charged situation did not seem ideal to conduct my research. Libya, like many other cases, was impossible to reach for safety reasons.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the remaining cases were: Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia, and South Sudan. Somalia and South Sudan are difficult to access without proper protection. This would have implied finding an internship or a consultancy for an organization or a NGO. After weighing the advantages and disadvantages of working and researching in the same environment, I decided that the ethical considerations and the confusion that could stem from wearing those two hats would make the distinction between work chatter and research material blurry.

Mali is a very interesting case with the presence of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and EUTM Mali, along with initiatives like the G5 Sahel, which seek to coordinate among the five countries in the region to develop security policies with the support of the US, UN, and EU (Tull, 2017). The Central African Republic also constitutes a representative case, because of the presence for a long time of international organizations and cycles of interventions that correspond to the multiple political and security crises. One of the comparative advantages of the CAR case is that, unlike other cases in sub-Saharan Africa, there are two regional organizations that are guarantors of the peace agreement (AU and ECCAS), which gives them more influence over the implementation of the peace process. Moreover, as of more recently, another regional

organization, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region has also been active to develop the following steps to the *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation* or Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation. This involvement of the regional organizations tipped the scale in favour of CAR against Mali.

4.3. What Kind of Data?

Data collection started in 2018 with the first preliminary interviews and ended in fall 2024 with the last round of documents collection to provide an up-to-date picture of the recent developments in the CAR. The sources used in this dissertation can be classified under two broad categories: interviews and documents. One of the most important objectives during the data collection was to look beyond the official organs and agreements of cooperation that exist among those organizations. I integrate in the analysis the choices and strategies pursued by the actors, and the interviews were an interesting way to ask the justifications for some decisions. This was also a way to contrast the stated objectives of the actors and the outcomes. It shows how complexity thwarts the straightforward link between means and ends.

Only focusing on official links and structures would mean missing a large part of the interactions. This is in line with the arguments made by Hardt (2018:pp. 79, 203) and Stone (2013); official structures are not necessarily where one can observe what is really going on, be it learning, co-evolving, or cooperation. Informality flourishes when formal arrangements fall short of providing the necessary tools for individuals in the organization. This is why during the interviews I asked about both informal and formal relations they created and maintain with their counterparts in other organizations. Meanwhile, the official documents served in part to confirm the timelines and to verify the information that was given in interviews.

4.3.1. How to Interview?

Interviewing is the first and major pillar of the data collection. The main characteristics of the population that I studied are its limited size. Moreover, a lot of them knew each other either directly or indirectly. This has an impact on access, on the perspectives I collected, on the conduct of the interview, etc.

The 67 interviews I conducted can be classified into three broad groups. First, I interviewed people in headquarters: Geneva, New York, and Brussels. Second, 45 of the interviews took place in Bangui with personnel working in embassies, multinational organizations, etc. Finally, I also interviewed experts, consultants, and journalists that offered an outside perspective on the cooperation and disputes among the organizations studied in Bangui and elsewhere.

Table 4.1 presents the interviews based on different categories. As mentioned earlier, I conducted interviews throughout the Ph.D. process years; this allows me to see the evolution of the situation in the CAR, especially with the two field trips from January and February 2020 and July and August 2021. [2] During interviews conducted in the later years, many referenced the earlier curfew, the criticisms targeting their organizations, etc. I should also note that some interviewees were met several times over the years, and this was counted as one interview. As time went on, I was also able to ask more pointed

[2]Each empirical chapter tackles a different type of change in complex systems, hence having a overtime perspective was essential to observe these changes. One of the most noticeable transformations was the increased tensions in the CAR.

questions [3] as previous interviews had broadened and deepened my understanding of the sticking points. The bulk of the interviews were conducted during two fieldwork trips to Bangui; in addition, I travelled to Brussels, Paris, and New York to interview other informants.

Bangui is the base for many international and regional interveners, which have their offices dispersed throughout the capital city. Though perhaps not as systematically as the interviews, several ethnographic observations made during visits to Bangui informed my understanding of the interactions among interveners. Being able to walk in the same streets [4], drink coffee in the same cafés, and see with my own eyes the places where these people interact informed my understanding in a way that online interviews could never match. I realized how small this microcosm actually is as I encounter the same people again and again in various settings (press conferences, restaurants, hotel pool, grocery shops, etc.). I discover where some fault lines appear including by noticing who was invited to which parties. I also could feel the nervousness of many Central Africans (taxi drivers, waitresses, pedestrians) around the trucks driven by Wagner operatives.

Being able to conduct interviews in French and English was a major advantage in Bangui. Since many external interveners and national staff are more comfortable in French than English, it also helps to make my daily life easier as I can communicate with people. I translated the interviews from French to English.

The distinction between civilian and military staff is central to the conduct of the interviews. From the initial contact (using proper military rank and more formal greetings) to the attitude during the interview [5], the interviews with military personnel are in general both more formal but also more open and forthcoming with sensitive information. The use of props (maps, etc.) was also common among military interviewees. They used them to explain their points, but also were more candid about the situation and the motivations behind the disagreements among interveners and offered less diplomatic answers.

(Non)access

The organizations to which the interviewees belong also played a major role in contacting potential interviewees. As observed by EU scholars such as Mérand (2021), the EU is in general quite open and I had at my disposal a literal phone book with the emails of potential interviewees, while the United Nations, especially in headquarters, demanded painstaking research on LinkedIn and many dead ends. With both the African Union and ECCAS, I would sometimes have to go in person to the office in Bangui to get an appointment through the secretary (Morse, 2019). Interviews with RO's officials would not have been possible without being present in Bangui.

Access is first of all a question of identifying the potential interviewees who can share their expertise and experience. The fact that I was interested in a relatively small group had two main impacts on access (Riese, 2019). On the one hand, it was easier to understand the different subgroups and to make sure that I gathered the perspective from each organization. On the other, it also limited the number of potential interviewees as some organizations (EU, AU, ECCAS) in Bangui have few employees.

I chose a snowball sampling technique with a broad selection of starting points to find willing interviewees, including members of the selected organizations in Bangui, Brussels, Paris, Geneva, and New York.

[3] For example, I had identify the building of the camps for the *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units as a stumbling block.

[4] Although, I must admit I was one of the only Caucasians walking in the streets, the vast majority of people working for those organizations drive to move around Bangui due to security rules.

[5] I adopted a much more pupil approach as I discover that it elicited more earnest answers

Table 4.1. Interviews per Category

Years	2019	10
	2020	28
	2021	22
	2022	7
Location	Bangui	49
	Brussels	8
	New York	2
	Others	9
Language	French	45
	English	15
	Both	7
Civilian-military	Civilian	58
	Military	11
Organizations	United Nations	22
	ECCAS and AU	7
	Embassies	7
	European Union	17
	NGOs, experts, and journalists	14

This included cold calls and emails based on organizational charts, networks of acquaintances, snowball, social media, and in person at social gatherings. The snowball technique worked quite well for the most part, except for one caveat. Some interviewees do not want you to contact other people from their organization so that their voice ends up the only one on the record. This can happen for multiple reasons; some assume that I would get the same information by asking one of their colleagues, some are genuinely worried that I would get wrong or incorrect information, and others do not want to be contradicted by colleagues who do not share their views.

Another blind spot of this research was people who were unreachable, who never replied or were not interested in participating in the research. However, those seem quite evenly distributed among organizations and therefore did not represent a systematic issue. One exception is the Russian embassy and nationals present in the CAR. During my first round of fieldwork, I did not try to reach out. Wagner mercenaries were presumably involved in the death of three journalists who were investigating Russian activities in the country (TV5 08.2018). Following the advice of people who had been in the CAR prior, I decided that I did not feel comfortable trying to get an interview. A few weeks into my second fieldwork, I obtained the email and number of a member of the Russian diplomatic corps; I tried to reach out but, unfortunately, to no avail.

As the empirical chapters demonstrate, the Russian involvement has greatly impacted the other external interveners and it is therefore challenging to speak about their motives without having collected their perspective. I somewhat compensated for this lacuna by asking interviewees about their interpretation of the decisions and behaviours of the Russian officials and operatives and by using media and NGOs' reports which were able to access these perspectives directly.

Keeping Confidentiality
This small pond characteristic made recognizing interviewees possible by people who worked in or around these organizations. Many interviewees expressed concern over being identified. In Bangui, with the exception of the MINUSCA, the organizations and embassies have few employees. For example, in 2020, the EU delegation had three expatriates including the head of delegation. In the end, the identification of the sources in the manuscript was a question of balance between the intelligibility for the reader to understand from which point of observation the interviewee is speaking but also to ensure that the confidentiality of the people who trusted me with their opinions and who often reminded me that they did not align with the institutions for which they work. I opted for a more careful approach and to only use a randomly selected two- (for headquarters) or three-letter (for Bangui) identifier (see Appendix B).

Interviewing
One of the most fascinating aspects of the interviewing process (for more detail on the interview framework see Appendix C) was the ease with which my interviewees could convince me of the merit and validity of their position. At first, I was a bit baffled, thinking I should stick to some kind of academic neutrality or that I should even be interrogating them in a journalistic way that seeks to find the incongruities and the flawed logic. I do not mean to say that I was completely gullible, but that I afforded credibility to the perspective of my interviewees and I think that in many instances it helped them to share more than they would have if they had felt like I was interrogating them or hostile to their views.

What emerged was that everyone seems to be acting and reacting logically, offering reasonable arguments to explain their choices. To give an example that was commented on in local and international press, it was the spat between the French ambassador and diplomats and the Central African authorities regarding the presence of Russian nationals. In an interview for the French media, the head of French diplomacy accused Russia of confiscating the power of the state. In response, the foreign affairs minister asked France to stop infantilizing CAR which could make decisions on its own (TV5 20.2021). The French position is logical and valid just like the response by the Touadéra administration is legitimate and understandable.

In turn, this influenced the empirical analysis and the theoretical perspective as from one point of the system the purview is different from others. This is in line with one of the main conclusions of the thesis that rational actors' plans are not sufficient to explain the dynamics in the CAR. It is only by adding the effects of complex systems do we get more analytical leverage.

I recorded a few interviews at the beginning of the thesis, but circumstances and ease convinced me to use notes from the interviews. Many of the interviews took place in embassies and organizations' compounds and recording devices and cell phones were not allowed in for security reasons; I had to leave them at the gate. For interviews taking place in coffee shops and restaurants, ambient noise made the recording difficult to hear afterwards. I also found that the interviewees were generally more relaxed and open to sharing personal views when I did not record.

Since I did not record most of my interviews, I diligently took notes by hand and transcribed them into a note-taking app. I reorganized the handwritten notes into broad categories, added comments, and completed the information where I could. When a phrase or an expression really struck me or came back more than once, I would indicate it in quotation so I could confirm that this was said verbatim by the interviewee. I added my own interpretations and comments in square brackets. When interviews were conducted in French, I translated the interview notes into English, but kept some expressions that were difficult to translate.

I also should add that I took copious notes during fieldwork. Every day, I reported what I did, observed, and reflected on while I stayed in Bangui. These notes also informed the analysis, as they attest to the unstable and sometimes confusing state of affairs in the country.

4.3.2. What to Read?

A lot has been written on the issues raised in this thesis from the mining practices in Ouham-Pendé (Western préfecture of the CAR) to the role of International Organizations and regional organizations in post-conflict spaces. I consulted a wealth of documents coming from different sources: press, NGOs, legal documents, and reports. I distinguish them from the academic sources that I use (see Appendix D), as they are not employed in the same way. I treated those documents as data that I compiled, coded, and analyzed. Much like my interviews, I examined these documents critically, considering the vantage point of the authors and their involvement in the ecosystem's dynamics. For example, one can hardly be surprised that the UNDP report on the elections is quite positive, knowing that this organization was at the heart of the electoral process, polling the money from many donors. This type of evidence complemented, nuanced, and contradicted the data I gathered through my interviewees.

These documents were helpful at every stage of the research project. They prepared me for the fieldwork by identifying possible tensions among interveners, to map Bangui, to understand the formal distribution of roles. They helped to build the foundations to create my interview framework (see Appendix C). During the writing process, I often needed to corroborate or verify factual information and dates; these documents could provide them. I also dug into issues I did not cover in my interviews, including transhumance, the timeline of negotiations for previous peace agreements, etc.

IOs and ROs Documentation
I used press releases and reports as the official voice of IOs, individually or collectively as in the case of a G5 meeting and an informal weekly group meeting among major partners of the CAR government. Some of the language used in these documents closely resembles the one used in interviews. For example, the MINUSCA's reports are often couched in a more politically correct and careful speech, as were most UN interviewees. By contrast, the WB's reports and interviewees both use frank and direct language.

In some cases, the documents complemented what was said in interviews. At times, they confirmed the trend set by interviews. For instance, the changing name of the G5 in their own press releases fairly illustrated the strengthening and then fragmentation of the shared views in interviews within the international community. The press releases in combination with the interviews showed a nice congruence. Other times, documents would contradict information that the interviewees gave, providing evidence of conflicting narratives. One example of this is the discrepancy between the African Union electoral mission's report that claimed that the electoral observers did travel in the country while many interviewees dispelled that information.

Newspapers and other Media
Bangui has an animated media environment with many local daily papers and radio stations (Oubangui medias, le Corbeau, Radio Guira, etc.). Some interviewees warned me against the trustworthiness of those sources of information (interviews IKM and QAY). Indeed, there can be misinformation circulating and media campaigns were waged against some members of the international community including France and the MINUSCA (EEAS 11.2021 and AU-UN-ECCAS-EU 06.2021). However, some newspapers provide a unique view in daily politics in the CAR, which rarely are discussed in the global

news cycle. They also have insights about what is happening outside of Bangui, a perspective that can be difficult to obtain as most of the other journalists do not have access to this network of informants. They are helping to keep up with the indictments made by the supreme court, the political parties, the armed groups' activities as well as having the pulse on the position of part of the population on the international and regional actors intervening in the CAR.

Typically, there are between two and five foreign journalists present in Bangui, mostly working for French newspapers and television (RFI, Agence France-Presse, TV5 Monde). Their reporting has been especially useful when I want to keep up with what is happening in the CAR and to confirm the dates and figures given by interviewees. They filled many of the gaps in order to create an intelligible narrative of the evolution of the international community in Bangui since 2019.

NGOs
Think tanks and NGOs like the International Crisis Group (ICG) and the Sentry have been monitoring the politics and social situation in the Central African Republic. Their analysis contributes to this thesis both to provide background knowledge, but also to sharpen the arguments by investigating the actions of some of the bilateral actors. [6] United States Institute of Peace has also been following the developments in Central Africa and has produced a number of reports that deal with a range of topics including the peace processes, elections, and major industries like coffee and poaching (USIP).

4.3.3. Coding

The coding process was inductive. I came up with large categories, some identifying the institutions that are discussed in this specific range of the text (embassies, regional organizations, interactions, etc.) as well as more analytic codes labeling the types (cooperation, dismissal, etc.) of interactions among the actors and the topics (elections, USMS, vulnerable populations, etc.) at hand. As I read through the transcripts of the interviews and the documents, I created new categories reflecting what was said about specific institutions, like the IOM and the Chinese embassy (see Appendix E).

The redaction process started with the combination and confrontation of the excerpts from the relevant categories. This was a chaotic step, as there were multiple and contradictory views on the same events. This step also inspired a lot of the arguments. I selected the three themes that seem to be more recurrent in interviews. [7]

I then verify the information and this is when the large majority of the documents were added to the data. I then wrote somewhat coherent stories about each of the three empirical topics. This is when the features and dynamics of ecosystems really came to light. I already had a complex system approach, but I was able to narrow in on specific mechanisms. Once I had a draft of the narrative for each chapter, I came back to the raw material and re-read it in light of this refined theoretical framework. This greatly facilitated the next steps as I also clarified the coding, and hence excerpts were easier to retrieve when needed.

[6] The French and Russian competition that was revealed by a 2020 Sentry report (Sentry 10.2020).

[7] Other themes had been brought up in interviews (sanctions, unrest in PK5, etc.), but they were not as widely mentioned in interviews.

4.4. How to Conduct my Research?

As for every study including interactions with human subjects, there are potential ethical issues. The population of interest can be considered as elite; hence I do not expect to have the problems usually associated with more vulnerable populations (power imbalance, uninformed consent, etc.). Elites are people "who exercise disproportionately high influence on the outcome of events or policies in [a specific] research areas" (Pierce, 2008:p. 119).

Even though this population is elite, this does not mean that they are immune to any harm coming from this research. I am being especially vigilant regarding anonymity, confidentiality and protection of personal data, as mentioned earlier in Section 4.3.1. I read of instances where reports and academic research were used by headquarters to chastise implementers (Azinovic et al., 2011:p. 63) and this could not be further from the objective of this dissertation. Similarly to Autesserre (2014)'s perspective, I believe that the people I have met believe in the work they do and try to do it at its best. Aligned with the main argument of the thesis, it is not really in isolation that one intervention is creating harm, although they can, but it is mostly the system that is developing that produces adverse effects.

4.4.1. Policy Recommendations

Many consider the interventions studied in this thesis as reminiscences of the colonial system (Chafer and Charbonneau, 2014; Chandler, 2006a). When we look at the distribution of interventions and the involvement of former colonial powers in their launch, there is support for that argument. It is difficult to make practical contributions while at the same time refraining from legitimizing the intervention system that perpetuates colonial ideals.

I came to the conclusion that one of the main contributions that this thesis can provide to the study is that, in line with Coning (2020:p. 5)'s conclusion:

> "[n]o party can claim moral superiority based on predetermined models or lessons learned elsewhere, nor can anyone hide behind ignorance, because it is known that complex systems are non-linear and dynamic. Therefore, peacebuilders need to be careful, cautious, and self-critical when considering and reflecting on the choices they make, because their actions may have negative consequences for the people affected by those decisions and actions."

4.5. Conclusion

This dissertation is the result of an abductive process between theorizing and empirical work. This research design chapter reflects this dynamic. Once data collection started, the pre-analysis revealed patterns and themes that informed the theoretical foundations of the study. For example, the interviewees often mentioned the contributions of embassies and bilateral partners of the CAR, it helped to reframe the definition of localized regime complex and ultimately include more types of actors than previous conceptualizations I had proposed.

The conduct of the two field trips is at the core of this design and required a lot of preparation to prepare the necessary approval and visa, ensure my safety, find accommodations, and orient myself

in the city. Since I travelled to Bangui without the guidance of an organization, I had to devise my own security rules. I opted for more relaxed rules than those of IOs (I used taxis and walked in the streets) but more stringent than journalists (I did not use moto-taxis and did not leave the capital). This allowed me to discover and experience the city with an eye that did not solely align with the people I interviewed. This offset perspective has been crucial to analyze the role they play in the CAR.

This chapter went through the many methodological choices that underpin this research. These choices were informed by the key characteristics of the group of interveners in the CAR, namely the limited size of this community. The main guiding principle was to conserve balance between limiting harm by keeping the interviewees' anonymity and obtaining and conveying information, between ensuring my own safety and being able to observe the interactions in the field as closely as possible, and between paradigms that rarely discuss directly.

International and Regional Involvement Cycles of Peace Agreements and Interventions

Plus ça change, plus c'est pareil

Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr

5.1. Introduction

In the mid-1990s, three consecutive rebellions destabilized the Central African Republic. These instabilities triggered greater diplomatic and military involvement at the request of the national authorities (Claude, 2007:p. 910; Mbadinga, 2001:p. 22). Many attempts to negotiate a truce were undertaken, but failed. In 1996, *Mission Internationale de Surveillance des Accords de Bangui* or International mission on the monitoring of the Bangui accords (MISAB) was launched with a limited mandate by a coalition of African countries [1] and France. However, "due to widespread organised crime and rampant insecurity, and at the request of local authorities, the mission became involved in the maintenance of security in Bangui" (Aboagye, 2016:p. 185). MISAB was able to bring calm to the capital, in part by participating in joint patrols across the city with national armed forces and former armed groups. As the elections were approaching and tensions were mounting, staying in Bangui was still too restrictive and the need for "the presence of international troops in the CAR" felt more urgent (Hentz, 2014:p. 234).

The decade ended with the signature of the 1997 Bangui accords bringing a temporary close to a cycle of violence and hostilities between the Patassé government and its opponents. These accords called for a national union government, amnesty, disarming the armed groups and revising the electoral code to include the municipal elections (Azou-Passonda et al., 2019:p. 475). To monitor the respect of this agreement and considering the volatile security situation, we saw the replacement of the inter-African force *Mission Internationale de Surveillance des Accords de Bangui* or International mission on the monitoring of the Bangui accords (MISAB) by a more extensive peacekeeping mission *Mission des Nations unies en République centrafricaine* or United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic headed by the UN. The number of troops was increased from 800 to 1,350; the mandate was also widened to include support of FACA, free movement in the capital, elections monitoring, rule of law, etc. (A. Meyer, 2009:p. 160). This transition from MISAB to UN over concerns about its capabilities to maintain order, especially in times of increased tensions like elections, would repeat itself in the 21st century. This mission ended in 2000 after the re-elections of Patassé the previous year. It was replaced by the much-smaller and more politically-oriented bureau, *Bureau d'appui des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en République centrafricaine* or United Nations Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA).

[1] Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Mali, Senegal and Togo.

These fluctuations in terms of lead organization, size, and mandate are common with interventions. This brief description of the events of the 1990s contains all the features that will be repeated many times in the CAR. A succession of negotiations that sporadically leads to the signature of a more encompassing peace accord supported by a more powerful international force. This force and its mandate are heavily influenced by regional and international circumstances and strategies. This set of features echoes the functioning of an ecosystem where actors adapt their role to the evolving situation to find their niche and the constitution of a viable equilibrium takes multiple attempts.

This chapter takes a regional perspective and analyses the role of those interveners as an ecosystem through its temporal dimension. This ecosystem develops through successive waves, in which actors adapt to the changing conditions, and in turn impact the ecosystem. In the CAR, consecutive and overlapping interventions by different actors are the result of a combination of agreements that can contradict or reinforce each other. In turn, actors find niches fitting their capabilities and aspirations to respond to the context and the activities accomplished by the others.

This chapter is more historically-oriented as it sets the scene for the subsequent ones which respectively argue that the elections preparation and the creation of the USMS follow other dynamics that are also akin to ecosystems, but where change occurs at a different rate. Starting in the early 2000s, I show a repeated cycle of limited agreements becoming more and more encompassing, followed by another crisis, and draw a parallel with ecological succession. I also examine the interventions by the different regional and international organizations and use the concept of niche construction to understand the evolution of mandates. The conclusion discusses the two latest major initiatives for peace, the Luanda Roadmap and the Republican Dialogue. It ties together the two first parts by showing that the dynamics described are still present nowadays.

5.1.1. Argument

Regional and international actors have often been called to intervene in the CAR, although their impact has been inadequate, to say the least.

> "Various regional operations meant to stabilize the country have tended to focus exclusively on Bangui and the CAR-Chad border. Most were in large part 'creations of interested powers—namely France and Libya—that are able to bring together a number of countries whose interests, often contradictory, converge on a cyclical basis.' While they may thus have had a short-term stabilizing impact, these operations were also drawn into political games and used to push forward the interests of certain regional powers." (Zahar and Mechoulan, 2017:p. 11)

Along the same lines, Kewir (2020:p. 15) deplores the statist approach of these interventions, which have favored regime maintenance (or change), rather than the interest of the populations. Meanwhile, Lombard and Carayannis (2015:p. 2) tells us that these interventions are too often designed in a vacuum rather than taking into account the long history of interposition.

> "Again and again, interventions in CAR have failed, in part because those spearheading them have operated as if the crisis of the moment was the first of its kind. That is, they have failed to address the longer-running dynamics that have grown out of CAR's position in the world. The [...] CAR's history of turmoil and instability can only be understood in

> the context of its violent history of colonization, limited political institutionalization and centralization, and position (geographic as well as geopolitical) in the region."

This series of failures to address the issues of the CAR, despite the enormous sums spent and efforts deployed, prompted the main argument for this chapter. These dynamics of recurring peace negotiations and agreements and the ensuing regional and international interventions are analogous to an ecosystem dynamic: ecological succession. As ecosystems go through cycles of development, evolution, and collapse, the CAR ends up with the same cycle of negotiations, fragile peace, and return to turmoil over and over again. This chapter looks at this dynamic by providing a curated timeline of the recent decades in the Central African Republic (CAR).

If we zoom out and look at the pattern drawn by these agreements rather than each of them individually; a series of smaller piece-meal agreements followed by more comprehensive accords that include more stakeholders both in and out of the CAR is appearing. This cycle has been repeated several times in the recent past. Succession in ecology is the process where despite initial failures or setbacks, certain groups eventually succeed in establishing themselves and contributing to the development of the ecological community (Anyomi et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2015). With succession, each community may create the conditions that allow the following group to emerge and thrive. One of the examples of ecological succession is the colonization of a new area by plants. While pioneer species might need multiple attempts before they can more permanently adhere to a new area, they can end up transforming the soil to make it more arable. The following groups can therefore be bigger plants and in turn they can provide shade and cover to allow new species of plants to settle. This process is temporarily interrupted by reaching an equilibrium until a new disturbance forces the ecosystem to adapt again.

After the height of a crisis, the process of bringing all the players to the negotiation table is an arduous one. The first steps usually consist of finding some common denominator among a selected portion of the parties. The early agreements are in general more limited in that they include fewer national stakeholders or focus on one specific community. Despite those challenges, parties do come to negotiate, but to prosper it needs the support of external actors. This support can also be difficult to mobilize. This is to be expected as regional organizations' interests rarely align and competitions over influence are legion (Glawion et al., 2018:p. 293). These initial smaller agreements originate generally from one or two organizations without involving others and tend to break down quite quickly. But they prepare the ground for larger ones. Like the lichen and grass, which change ever so slightly the composition of the ground to pave the way for larger plants; smaller agreements acclimate actors to sit together and sign more and more ambitious accords and gather more and more support from external actors.

Then, for a myriad of factors, there is an alignment of the international, regional, and national actors and a larger agreement is ratified. These more encompassing agreements are usually similar to the others in terms of content with clauses about power-sharing and the reintegration in societies for the former armed groups' members. One caveat is important: those larger agreements are not a panacea and do not result in a long-lasting equilibrium. They often hold the same flaws that the previous one had. This cycle echoes dynamics of successions, where the ecosystem climaxes and finds a temporary equilibrium until the next major disruption, in this case the next crisis or coup.

This process is succinctly described by Rusch (2021:p. 47):

> "[t]he adoption of the four major peace deals – the Libreville agreement, the Brazzaville cessation of hostilities, the DDRR agreement at the Bangui Forum, and the APPR – were generally followed by periods of relative stability. When the momentum created by peace talks wore off, renewed fighting broke out, with the armed groups voicing frustration over

> the same grievances they had presented to the government in each round of talks. Although the APPR includes power-sharing provisions and takes a new approach to tackling security and state weakness, it was signed after seven failed mediation initiatives and leaves key questions such as resource management unanswered. Armed groups have therefore continued their illicit extraction activities and committed violent acts against civilians."

5.1.2. Environment

The environment in which the system takes place is embedded in the conflict in the CAR. The two main drivers in this cycle are the state's limited power and the marginalization of the armed groups. A common phrase taunts the state capacity and declares that "the state stops at PK12, on the outskirts of Bangui" (Brown and Zahar, 2015:p. 16). Tim Glawion et al. (2018:p. 288) expands on this idea of state' weakness outside of the capital.

> "The country's recurrent conflict is often instigated in its peripheries, as the central government neither controls its fringes, nor is willing to provide those citizens with security or services. Despite the democratic change of government in the capital, elites from the peripheries are trapped between a lack of peaceful ways to gain a voice in the central state and the difficulty of staying connected to their original support bases. To put it bluntly, elites cooperate more closely with one another in the capital than they do with the people they allegedly represent in the peripheries."

The Central African state is often described by its weakness; scholars refer to it as fragile (Pacific, 2020), phantomatic (ICG 12.2007), or even failed (Lizak, 2016).

The CAR political system is based on the French model with high centralization. Most of the decisions are taken in the capital and are to be circulated throughout the country. This model has many drawbacks, especially in a context where the services of the state (justice, transport, education, health care) are unable to reach most of the hinterlands, in particular in the rainy season when roads are cut off (Glawion et al., 2018:p. 287).

Through peace negotiations, the government wants to be able to gain control over the country's territory with as few concessions (autonomy, resources, decentralization) to other groups (armed groups, militia, local or traditional authorities) as possible. Although the government is constrained as it also needs to secure the funding and resources provided by international actors, which is often dependent on some power-sharing arrangements (Mayneri, 2014:p. 185). Indeed, the Central African Republic government needs the support of external actors to deploy outside of Bangui.

The marginalization of armed groups' grievances also participates in this landscape. Several groups have merged, split, and reformed over the decades with changing acronyms and representing different constituencies WB 04.2022, p.21. In recent years, two main banners emerged: Séléka and anti-Balaka. On the one hand, the Séléka is a loose alliance of mostly Muslim groups coming from the North and East of the country.

> "[T]he coalition was a mutually beneficial, but circumstantial and heterogeneous, alliance. The two groups forming the coalition were former enemies and had always fought against each other in the northern part of the CAR. In fact, the armed groups in the CAR have never really been organised and their claims have never been clearly articulated. There were

> also other experienced Chadian soldiers whose history illustrates the multiple conversions and fluid loyalties of armed men in the region. The Séléka is, therefore, a heterogeneous coalition whose common denominator is that the men who make up the coalition are mostly of the Muslim faith." (Vlavonou, 2014:p. 321)

On the other hand, anti-Balaka are self-defence militias. They formed "loosely-organised gangs, with the most brutal and well equipped drawn largely from Bozizé supporters and Pentecostal church movements" (Carayannis and Fowlis, 2017:p. 224). Their name apparently comes from their immunity to AK-47 bullets (in French, *balles AK*), because they believe in witchcraft protection against gunfire (Mayneri, 2014:p. 191). This group is the result of the failure of the government to protect and provide for the populations (Vlavonou, 2014:p. 326).

Despite their differences in terms of ethnic groups, origins, and composition, armed groups share some commonalities in their objectives and strategies in the context of peace negotiations. Their concerns have been marginalized and therefore they would wish to be heard. "To launch a rebellion in CAR is to claim a place at the negotiating table"(Lombard and Carayannis, 2015:p. 135). Hence, one of the major aims of the armed groups is the role they would be able to play in society post-conflict. First, this is usually expressed as immunity to perpetrators. In CAR, there is a tradition of immunity with the amnesty laws of 1996 and 1997, calls for amnesty in peace processes of 2007, 2008, and 2017.

> "[I]nclusive policies towards rioters and armed opposition have created 'a dangerous precedent', legitimizing the use of violence and weapons as a means of negotiation and pressure to obtain national visibility, parley with political actors (claim rarely obtained by representatives of civil society) and, more prosaically, to obtain material compensation, including from international actors." (Mayneri, 2014:p. 185)

Second, it can mean positions in the local or central governments,[2] or access to employment in the military and police forces or in society in general is an incentive to give up their weapons.[3]

One difficulty of painting armed groups with such a broad stroke is their own complexity. Loyalty is fluid; it can be difficult to know if a representative will be followed by the other members. This leads to many agreements being signed and not implemented.

> "In addition, armed group leaders appear to be playing on various sides: they participate in meetings in Bangui and abroad and sign series of agreements mainly to see the benefits of DDR and receive per diems. Often when leaders gain political responsibilities, internal tensions result: their fighters accuse their former leaders of not redistributing the dividends of victory and of "betraying their cause." Poor command and control within groups have exacerbated the impact any national deal can have at the local level. This supports the idea that unrepresentative elites have been negotiating successive conflict-resolution agreements for their own interests rather than those of the country and in complete disconnect from most of the country's population." (Zahar and Mechoulan, 2017:p. 14)

Ultimately, I am relegating these elements of state weakness and armed groups' marginalization to context. They serve to set the stage for the issue-area that links together this LRC. A government

[2] It was the case in December of 2008, pursuant to the Libreville agreement, Bozizé created two new ministerial positions: environment and housing, they were granted to armed groups' leaders (Lombard, 2012:pp. 205–206).

[3] This is especially focusing on the DDR programs in order to convince the armed groups that they will reap the benefits of this peace agreement (interview CXY).

wanting to gain territorial control and fluid armed groups wanting better inclusion, in one form or another, are present in all the negotiated agreements over the last few decades.

5.1.3. Subject Matter and its Niches

The CAR has moved in and out of the global list of priorities depending on what was happening in the country itself but also elsewhere in the world. Nonetheless, as conflict and violence erupted, other countries in the region and internationally have interceded and tried to bring opponents together to negotiate cease-fires, truces, peace, etc. Azou-Passonda et al. (2019), in their study of peace agreements brokered between the government and the armed groups, counted 13 agreements between 1997 and 2019. This list does not include the agreements signed among armed groups themselves or instances when discussions aborted before the signature of an agreement.

Amid these agreements and often mentioned as part of the negotiated conditions, there has been a revolving door of international, regional, and national interventions. These interventions are put in place in order to monitor, enforce, and implement the compromise reached by the government and its challengers. Interventions and peace negotiations are deeply linked in the CAR as interventions are often launched to monitor these agreements, and they constitute the subject matter at the center of this localized regime complex.

There are two typical niches that can be filled in this LRC: the role of broker and that of enforcer. The former is mostly happening before an agreement, while the other is more geared toward the post-agreement period. [4] Obviously, these roles can also be overlapping as UN peacekeeping missions have had both responsibilities.

The role of broker involves bringing together the warring parties; it implies having ties and trust from them. This has been developed by some regional powers, but also religious organizations. This role is somewhat paradoxical, as it entails being close enough to the parties in order to be able to convince them to come to the negotiating table, but also being perceived as impartial to be able to find a consensus among them.

The enforcer has at its disposal personnel (civilian and military) as well as materiel. These resources enable the enforcer to coerce parties to respect their engagements either through the threat of using them or their actual use.

To identify the holder of the niche, it is important to go beyond the formal role assigned to actors. For example, if one was looking only at the role it would overlook the UN's involvement. While ECCAS and AU are formally entrusted with the guarantor of the *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation* or Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation. But, the limited resources in Bangui of these organizations make them reliant on others, like the MINUSCA, to conduct their operations. In this LRC, the roles are quite stable throughout time. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, although the exact actor involved may vary, the functional niches remain consistent, with different actors fulfilling similar functions across time.

[4] As peace negotiations have been consistently happening in the CAR, it can be difficult to distinguish between pre- and post-agreement periods.

5.1.4. Actors

Studying peace agreements and negotiations "show[s] us both how outside actors are creating standards and practices for ending conflict and how they are promoting norms and roles for themselves" (Coe and Nash, 2020:p. 2). There are three types of actors in this localized regime complex: African regional organizations, religious organizations, and UN peacekeeping.

Regional organizations
The African continent counts numerous regional organizations, which are organized along three principles: subsidiarity, complementarity, and comparative advantage (Engel, 2020:p. 226). The general idea is that the organizations closest to the conflict are the best suited to intervene, while coordinating their efforts with the larger ROs. However, there is ambiguity in how those principles are applied in practice.

> "The CAR process from 2007 through today represents organisational overlap – resulting in both competition and cooperation between [Regional Economic Communities] and the AU – as well as a shift in authority from ECCAS to the AU for the most recent 2019 peace agreement, which is outside the scope of our quantitative data set. This 'scaling up' was in large part due to capacity shortcomings within ECCAS, and such limitations at lower levels undergird calls for 'functional subsidiarity' in multilevel security governance. However, there were also significant normative differences in approaches to the change in government in this case. While organisational capacity and political will are concerns to be addressed in Africa's evolving peace and security regime, issues of norm contestation and policy disagreements also present themselves." (Coe and Nash, 2020:p. 19)

The African Union is the main continental organization. It has 55 member-states and was created in 2002 to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in order to better respond to violence and conflict in Africa and to find 'African solutions to African problems' (Fafore, 2016). This transition was marked by "a shift in the founding principles, from non-intervention to non-indifference, which was pivotal for the expansion and strengthening of African responses to conflicts in Africa" (Desmidt and Lamont, 2019:p. 81). This shift came with the creation and development of institutions, including the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) that were able to implement these interventions.

The AU has memorandum of understanding (MoU) with seven economic communities including ECCAS that contribute to the APSA (Hentz, 2014:p. 231). The AU following the principles of the African Peace and Security Architecture, had let the regional organizations take the lead with their own operations (i.e. MISAB), but stepped in from time to time. The involvement of the AU in the CAR evolved throughout the years, depending on the willingness and availability of other regional organizations, in particular, those geographically closer, like ECCAS and CEN-SAD.

Economic Community of Central African States was established in 1983 as an extension of the Central African Customs and Economic Union. It includes eleven countries.[5] At the end of the 1990s, ECCAS established several organs to prevent, detect, and respond to crises. One of the key channels for security and violence prevention in the region is the *Conseil de paix et de sécurité de l'Afrique centrale* or Peace and Security council for Central Africa (COPAX). This system is based on mutual assistance

[5] Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Príncipe

and solidarity among states (COPAX 12.2019). It became a key part of the regional organization as it "continues to allocate most of its resources and time in maintaining peace and stability in the individual countries as opposed to promoting economic integration"(Darku and Appau, 2015:p. 49).

Many of its member-states have vested interests in the conflict in the CAR due to overlapping trade routes, ethnic groups, armed groups, and transhumance paths. For instance, Chad has always been an important member-state and its influence is perceivable in many of the decisions of ECCAS to intervene or not in the CAR.

Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN-SAD) aims at creating a free trade area, it was established in 1998 and now comprises 29 states, including the CAR. It intersects with many other regional organizations, which has arguably undermined its efforts toward free trade. CEN-SAD developed security and mediation organs that had varying levels of success (Bah et al., 2014:p. 44). "The only real common ground that many of these member states appear to share is the patronage of Libya" (Sturman, 2003:p. 111). CEN-SAD has been the vehicle of choice for Libya and its late dictator Muammar Gaddafi to intervene militarily in the CAR.[6]

There are also organizations which are not part of the APSA framework, but still are important to the peace agreements and interventions in the Central African Republic. First, *Communauté économique et monétaire de l'Afrique centrale* or Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), like ECCAS is an emanation of the Central African Customs and Economic Union. Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea are member-states and incidentally also former French colonies. Although CEMAC is oriented toward economic integration and monetary policies linked to the CFA franc, it intervened in the CAR while ECCAS was undergoing reforms (A. Meyer, 2009:p. 161).

Second, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) was created in 2004 following the *Dar es Salaam* declaration, with the goal of transforming "this region from an arena of war into a space of sustainable peace, security and development for its people" (ICGLR 11.2004, p.3). It includes twelve Central and Eastern African states: Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, South Sudan and Zambia. Its headquarters are located in Bujumbura, Burundi. This organization was created on the impulse of the external actors in order to ease tensions and promote stability in a region that suffered from intra- and interstate conflict. As a result of this externally-driven creation, there is still today a mismatch between the programs that the member-states are expecting and those funded by the so-called 'Group of Friends'.[7]

Nickson Bondo Museka explains the origins of this organization in Bach et al. (2020)

> "During the early stages of its establishment, international donors displayed more enthusiasm about the idea of funding the icglr. However, they wanted the icglr to focus mainly on peace and security whereas member states preferred a broader mandate combining peace and security with other foci such as democracy and good governance, economic development

[6]Remnants of this influence are still visible in Bangui where the most luxurious hotel was built by Gaddafi. " Like the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo [...], the Ledger attracts a varied clientele: European consuls rub shoulders with sinister businessmen just a stone's throw from an interview between a journalist and development actor; advisers to the presidency dine there with rebel leaders while humanitarian workers and UN staff lounge by the swimming pool, a favorite stopover for diplomats staying in Bangui" (Mondafrique 03.2022).

[7]Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, the Holy See, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the US.

> and regional integration, humanitarian and environmental issues."

The ICGLR has more recently taken an interest in the conflict in the CAR by discussing with the armed groups and trying to provide a framework for discussions.

Two more minor players are faith-based organizations, they both took a broker role at different times, helped by their links with some religious communities. First, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation formerly Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was founded in 1969 and includes 57 member states, most of which are Muslim-majority countries. The organization aims to be "the collective voice of the Muslim world" and works to "safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony." (OIC 09.1969) Second, the community Sant'Egidio is a network association doing social work in 73 countries. It is involved in many peace negotiations as facilitator or observer all around the world, including in the CAR.

UN
The United Nations plays a major role in this localized regime complex. The Department of Peace Operations [8] has deployed several interventions to the CAR.[9]

> "the United Nations peacekeeping mission in CAR, has played a multi-faceted role in the country. The mission has helped to facilitate local peace agreements and figures critically in raising awareness of the agreement's details among the general public and the armed groups' rank-and-file." (USIP 10.2019, p.3)

Balas (2022) notes that UN operations in Africa often are launched after the intervention of a regional organization. 'In Africa, less experienced regional IOs intervene first, and then transfer the responsibilities to more experienced IOs' (Balas, 2022:p. 77).

5.2. The Alphabet Soup of Interventions as an Ecosystem

This story starts in the early 2000s, these years were characterized by an opposition between two major political figures in the CAR: Ange-Félix Patassé and François Bozizé.[10] After the Presidential reelection of Patassé in 1999, the withdrawal of the substantial UN mission (MINURCA), which had become a political bureau called BONUCA, left a security vacuum. The enforcer niche was available. Thus, "Patassé – similar to [other CAR Presidents] – lobbied for Libyan support" (Giroux et al., 2009:p. 5). At first, CEN-SAD, e.i. Gaddafi, opted to send some troops to support Patassé's administration. But, this organization was not prepared for large-scale and long-term operations, like the one needed in the CAR. It was unable to fulfill that role.

5.2.1. The Phantom FOMUC

With that inadequate enforcer and the Patassé's administration under constant threats, another organization stepped in, creating *Force multinationale en Centrafrique* or Multinational Force in the

[8] Formerly, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).
[9] MINURCA, MINURCAT, and MINUSCA.
[10] The latter was the former chief of staff of the armed forces.

Central African Republic (FOMUC). This initial configuration would also show its inadequacy with the mounting security issues e.i. the coups attempted by Bozizé. Thus, there was a move from a narrow mandate focusing almost exclusively on the survival of the administration in place to a more extensive intervention after the fall of the regime. FOMUC's evolution demonstrates how in times of need, the functions of an organization can be reshaped to respond to security assessments and the interests of the member-states.

FOMUC was created under the auspices of CEMAC supported by France and the EU. The fact that FOMUC was created by the CEMAC can be surprising since this organization is mostly economic in nature. Whereas ECCAS, one of the other regional organizations, had been developing its peace and security since the 1990s. ECCAS and CEMAC overlap in terms of member-states and mandates; they both had legitimate claims to intervene in CAR (Coe and Nash, 2020:p. 18). But ECCAS was being restructured at the time and therefore CEMAC took the lead. This arrangement shows the importance of launching an intervention to understand the inner politics of the other actors in the ecosystem.

This force was initiated by Gabon, in order to ensure the security of the President and secure the airport (Kewir, 2020). The creation of FOMUC is indeed deeply linked to the interests of Gabon, who kept the command of the mission throughout its duration. For Kewir (2020), there are also signs that the participation by some neighbouring states was motivated by concerns over conflict spill-overs into their own territory. He gives as an example the stationing of Cameroonian troops in Paoua close to the border with Cameroon. Ulterior motives underpinned the creation of FOMUC. "A glance at informal agendas and actors can clarify the hidden motives of intervention. In the CAR, several states pursued their geostrategic interests by getting involved in the country's power struggles. At times, they cloaked their ambitions under an official mandate, such as in successive peacekeeping missions since 1998" (Glawion et al., 2018:p. 293). This mission had under 400 troops and concentrated in Bangui. It was larger than the few troops sent by CEN-SAD but still quite limited in size and range of action.

During FOMUC's term, François Bozizé and his allies attempted two coups d'État. After being a major supporter of the Patassé regime, "General Bozizé began stoking rebel violence to destabilize the government of President Ange-Félix Patassé. In October 2001, after Bozizé refused to cooperate with investigations into the violence, Patassé dismissed him from office" (translated from French (USIP 11.2021 p.21). Bozizé fled to Chad with some troops loyal to him. From Chad, Bozizé coalesced more supporters with the intention of coming back to Bangui. At first, Patassé, supported by Libyan troops and the presence of FOMUC, was unfazed by the incursions into CAR territory by Bozizé and his men. But in 2002, Bozizé made a first decisive move, which failed since Patassé received the backing of the *Mouvement de Libération du Congo* or Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), a militia active in DRC conflict. Again the regional dimension of the power struggles between Central African politicians is obvious. The President is backed by militia and military coming from some African nations, while another neighbouring state is harbouring his rival.

As Bozizé's efforts at toppling the regime were ramping up, the already strained relationship between Chad and Central African Republic soured even more. Patassé asked for the help of France, which declined to support the regime; he would soon also lose the support of the region. The second coup took place while Patassé was in Niger for a heads of states' meeting, and it was successful. At the time, many regional allies of Patassé had lost patience with him. Bozizé's takeover was aided by "President Idriss Déby of Chad, the Franco–African forces of France, Chad, the Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo" (Carayannis and Fowlis, 2017:p. 222). This was a joint effort by France and African states.

"The ensuing Franco-African division of labour that brought down Patassé was exemplary:

> without hindrance, General Bozizé evaded his police escort in France and made his way to Chad; in N'Djamena, President Déby placed personnel from his Presidential Guard at Bozizé's disposal; Congo-Kinshasa's head of state, Joseph Kabila, supplied the necessary armaments; his neighbour on the other bank of the River Congo, President Denis Sassou Nguesso, funded the operation to the tune of 3 billion CFA francs (over 6 million US dollars); and President Omar Bongo of Gabon, the most senior figure in the region who had long harboured doubts about Bozizé's capacity to govern CAR, finally gave his blessing. Thereafter, events moved quickly. With only a handful of CAR officers and mostly Chadian troops General Bozizé took CAR's power in Bangui. On 15 March 2003, two rebel columns joined forces to seize the capital. They encountered no organized resistance. In the absence of President Patassé, who had left the country to attend a CEN-SAD summit meeting, the Central African army did not lift a finger. CEMAC forces had received instructions to not oppose Bozizé's entry into the city. France flatly dismissed President Patassé's formal request to apply the defence agreement between the two countries. However, Paris did send 300 soldiers, officially to protect the French community and foreign nationals in Bangui. In fact, Operation Boali helped stabilize the new regime." (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015:pp. 36–7)

Patassé, in turn, fled in exile to Cameroon and then Togo. After taking control over Bangui, Bozizé sought further support from his Chadian ally, Déby, to help restore order. Bozizé proposed a plan for a political transition aimed at legitimizing his administration ((USIP 11.2021 p.21). This plan included a national dialogue, a constitutional referendum, and general elections by the end of 2004. [11]

FOMUC with its limited force, was unable and unwilling to prevent this outcome. After some hesitations, CEMAC opted to recognize the new administration ((USIP 11.2021 p.21). Its mission, which had been launched to protect the regime, was witness to a putsch; its role had to be reformulated. This mismatch fosters a redefinition of the role of this mission. FOMUC's mandate became larger and aimed at supporting the electoral process, restructuring the armed forces, i.e. preventing further coups, and arresting and disarming armed groups' leaders. "Also, the initial focus on the capital was widened and contingents sent to the periphery" (Hentz, 2014:p. 234). Interventions showed their ability to adapt after a change in leadership. By supporting a challenger, Bozizé, and ousting Patassé, regional powers proved again their influence over domestic politics in the CAR. This also underlines that the regional actors are not necessarily committed to a specific leader for the CAR and can be swayed and convinced by challengers.

After this turbulent period, the time for new negotiations had come. "Bozizé's transitional government organized a national dialogue that brought together 350 delegates in Bangui from September 15 to October 27, 2003" (translated from French (USIP 11.2021 p.21). Multiple peace agreements and cease-fires were signed between some armed groups and the government: Sirte and Birao Agreements in 2007 and a first Libreville cease-fire in 2008 (Sirte 02.2007), Birao 04.2007, and Libreville 06.2008) Their preambles all include provisions of political dialogue, power-sharing, some forms of amnesty, and DDR (Zahar and Mechoulan, 2017:p. 1). These agreements only mention one of the regional organizations (either Community of Sahel–Saharan States or *Communauté économique et monétaire de l'Afrique centrale* or Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa). Moreover, the agreements between 2003 and 2008 were signed by one or two armed groups, never the three of them (APRD, FDPC, and UFDR). As a result, those agreements were unable to ensure peace throughout the country. Regardless of their implementation, the fact that only certain armed groups were willing to sign ensured that peace could not be achieved as other armed groups unbound by the agreement remained active.

[11] The dialogue ended with promises of reconciliation, but shortly after "the former Director-General of President Patassé's special security unit, who was accused of murder, attacks against State security, and other crimes" (UNSC 12.2003, p.3).

In 2005, François Bozizé had won the Presidential elections The FOMUC was supposed to end with these elections that 'confirmed' Bozizé's legitimacy. However, these results were contested, did not ease the tensions, and the mission was extended until 2008. As the mission tenure drew to an end, a new and larger agreement was found.

Indeed, it is only in June 2008, the Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement superseded all those agreements. It included three main armed groups: *Armée pour la restauration de la démocratie* or People's Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy (APRD), *Front démocratique du peuple Centrafricain* or Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC), and *Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement* or Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR). Compared to the previous ones, the preamble of this agreement mentioned two regional organizations: CEMAC and CEN-SAD rather than one. It is clear even in the provisions of this agreement that the previous accords were instrumental in the signature of this latest one (Libreville 06.2008).

With this comprehensive peace agreement, "we see a coalescing of the sub-regional organizations. Both Bongo, in his capacity as President of the CEMAC Ad Hoc Committee on the Central African Question, and [Gaddafi], in his capacity as the Permanent High Mediator for Peace in CEN-SAD, offer mediation support" (Coe and Nash, 2020:p. 17). The role of these regional organizations was to convince the armed groups to take part in this negotiation and ultimately to sign the resulting document. In this instance, the CEMAC is both an enforcer and broker. Through the Gabonese administration, it negotiated the peace and with the FOMUC it ensured the respect of the terms signed in Libreville.

In addition, the monitoring committee proposed by the agreement is potentially open to representatives of numerous organizations: ECCAS, CEMAC, AU, EU, CEN-SAD, and the Francophonie. This 2008 agreement shows that the collective of regional organizations has been able to persuade armed groups to sit together at the same table with the government. Again, it is a succession of smaller agreements in 2007 and 2008 that prepared actors to sign a more comprehensive agreement later that year.

Pursuant to this Libreville agreement, Bozizé created two new ministerial positions: environment and housing. They were granted to armed groups' leaders. But this had little effect on inclusivity (Lombard, 2012:pp. 205–206). The rest of his cabinet was packed with family members and close allies in key positions, and Bozizé still ruled the country as he pleased (Marchal, 2015b:p. 125). With these little efforts by the government, the respect of the Libreville accords was fragile. Bozizé's tenure was increasingly corrupted and plagued with nepotism and neopatrimonialism. State funds were used for personal reasons; in 2010, Bozizé even took control over the ministry of treasury's committee, hence directly deciding on states' expenses (Ngovon, 2015:p. 506)

5.2.2. MICOPAX's Awakens

The restructuring of ECCAS had run its course and it was decided that CEMAC would hand over the leadership to ECCAS. Hence, along with the second Libreville agreement came the launch of the *Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique* or Mission for the consolidation of peace in Central African Republic (MICOPAX) headed by ECCAS's *Force multinationale de l'Afrique centrale* or Multinational Force for Central Africa (Welz, 2014) with the support of the African Union. "In contrast to its predecessor [FOMUC], MICOPAX's mandate is larger and multidimensional" (Hentz, 2014:p. 234). It was tasked with supporting the peace process by protecting the population, ensuring respect for human rights, and organizing the elections. "The mission started with 400 troops and increased to 680 by 2012" (Brosig, 2017:p. 464).

After a few years of rather calm equilibrium, to use the ecology parlance, another major disturbance grew. Still deeply linked with regional politics, Bozizé's reign came to an end, in a similar way in which he came to power. As Déby, the Chadian President, was getting closer to the armed groups active in the CAR (Käihkö and Utas, 2014:p. 72), Bozizé became more isolated from the other state leaders in Central Africa. "In 2011, an armed rebellion in response to fraudulent presidential and legislative elections – fuelled by growing frustration outside Bangui with the slow and failed DDR process – cemented the region's concerns and laid the foundations for the overthrowing of the leader they had originally put in place" (Carayannis and Fowlis, 2017:p. 223).

The Séléka formed mainly in reaction to a shared set of unresolved issues related to the previous peace agreements. It also attracted opportunistic fighters from Chad and Darfur. They began their advance toward Bangui from the northeast but were halted just before reaching the capital by MICOPAX. In January 2013, peace talks took place in Libreville, Gabon, between the government and the Séléka. These discussions led to a power-sharing agreement that dissolved the existing National Assembly in favour of a national unity government. By February, Bozizé initiated the implementation of this agreement by appointing opposition leader Nicolas Tiangaye as prime minister and Séléka leader Michel Djotodia as deputy prime minister responsible for defence.

However, this arrangement was short-lived. Despite efforts to establish a unity government, Bozizé began distributing weapons for a 'popular defense' of Bangui (USIP 11.2021, p.22). Bozizé also relied on military support from South Africa to protect his regime.[12] South Africa sent 200 paratroopers as part of a bilateral agreement between the two countries (Dudley, 2013).

Still, the Séléka, 5,000 men strong, marched over Bangui in March of 2013.

> "The coalition was a direct consequence of Bozizé's rule. The coalition accused President Bozizé of not complying with commitments from the 2007 bilateral peace agreement, the 2008 Inclusive National Dialogue, or DDR programmes for armed groups in the northeast. This includes the payment of 15 million CFA francs per fighter according to the agreement, unconditional payment of a million CFA francs per fighter, the unconditional return of diamonds, gold, cash and other property expropriated by the government in 2008, and the release of all political prisoners in both Central Africa and abroad. The coalition became radicalised during their march to seize power, demanding that the President should step down, after their success in seizing several towns resulted in the feeling that they had military leverage over the government." (Vlavonou, 2014:p. 321)

In this plot against Bozizé's regime, South African military personnel were killed and harmed (Käihkö and Utas, 2014:p. 72). The other forces present in Bangui were the French, the FACA, and MICOPAX. The French mandate was limited to the airport and the MICOPAX troops were unable to support the rapidly collapsing national army (Kewir, 2020:p. 12). As we will see, the failure of the enforcer, MICOPAX led to the stepping in of another force, MISCA.

To this day, observers of CAR politics bring up the rapid collapse of the FACA as evidence that the armed forces are not determined to protect the state and that under attack they will fold (SIPRI 02.2021 p.3). This logic justifies the continuous need for a multinational force able to repel armed groups from the capital.

> "The Seleka victory was not celebrated in all capitals of the region. Despite poor relations

[12] This move was seen as a distancing from relying on France.

> with [Bozizé] mainly due to strong disagreements on allocating positions at the CEMAC, President Paul Biya of Cameroon was extremely concerned by the Seleka Islamic dimension and provided hospitality for months to François Bozizé and his followers as an expression of his bitterness towards Idriss Déby, who had gone too far and too fast."(Marchal, 2015a:p. 186)

Indeed, Bozizé fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and then Cameroon. Michel Djotodia quickly disbanded the Séléka, becoming interim President. However, he had no real control over his men (Brown and Zahar, 2015:p. 15) and various factions of the Séléka continue to exist to this day. Just like in Patassé's case, the region was influential in the demise of Bozizé. "[S]ome ECCAS states were pleased to see a new leader coming to power, not least because the ousted president did not seem fully committed to an earlier peace agreement with the rebels" (Welz, 2016:p. 580).

With the growing power of the Séléka and the absence of protection from government's forces, anti-Balakas factions formed with the support of now-ousted President François Bozizé (Carayannis and Fowlis, 2017:p. 224). The AU which initially had let the regional organizations take the lead, observing the Séléka advances, enforced the measures of the accords signed in Libreville in January 2013 (travel bans, assets freeze, etc.) and opposed the power grab by the Séléka. Until this point, the ECCAS and especially some of its members Chad and Congo had firmly held control (Marchal, 2015b:p. 126). But, after Djotodia's accession to power, the AU suspended CAR as a member. ECCAS, conversely, opted to recognize Djotodia. "This disagreement not only centred around a normative difference but resistance from ECCAS to perceived AU dominance. Instead of following AU protocol, ECCAS sought to assert its own dominance in its sub-region" (Coe and Nash, 2020:p. 25).

The most influential members in the AU and in ECCAS guided those decisions. In ECCAS, Chad managed to convince its fellow member-states to support Djotodia and his new regime, while "AU was perceived as biased because of the role played by South Africa and President Jacob Zuma in supporting Bozizé" (Carayannis and Fowlis, 2017:p. 224). These diverging opinions came to a clash at an ECCAS summit in April, ECCAS member-states asked for assistance from the African Union. "Effectively, this request opened the door for further, hitherto unforeseen, engagement on the part of the AU" (Welz, 2014:p. 604). This opened door was used only a few months later.

Indeed, on 19 July 2013, a AU-led mission *Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine* or African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) was established. This configuration of two organizations (AU and ECCAS) with different allies and their interests in the region led to tensions and made the transition out of MICOPAX and into MISCA arduous. MICOPAX's transformation into MISCA began on 1 August 2013; this transition took some time. "The tense relations between the AU and ECCAS had dramatic consequences. They delayed the MICOPAX–MISCA transformation, thus leaving a political vacuum. That in turn led to (or at least failed to halt) the deterioration of the security situation" (Welz, 2016:p. 580).

In late 2013, the UNSC authorized the deployment of MISCA along with Sangaris, a French military operation. MISCA, largely funded by the EU, had 6000 men deployed, an increase that reflected the assessment of the declining security situation. Together Sangaris and MISCA "secured a corridor from Cameroon to Bangui and the border to Congo" (Plank, 2017:p. 495). But the friction between AU and ECCAS continued into the deployment of MISCA. As described by Carayannis and Fowlis (2017),

> "AU's engagement was met with pushback from ECCAS whose continuous micromanagement of CAR was threatened by a broadening of the intervention under the AU. Déby and the Republic of Congo's Sassou Nguesso saw the AU's newfound interest as more about the money available for the mission than any concern for the region. Furthermore, the appointment

> of General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko – a political opponent of Sassou Nguesso's – to head up the AU intervention led to Sassou's refusal to support a handover to the AU. He reportedly even dispatched Léonard Essongo, his personal envoy, to sideline Mokoko and the handover process. MISCA's deployment was thus slow, with no corresponding improvement in MICOPAX's logistical capacity." (Carayannis and Fowlis, 2017:p. 225)

MISCA was not therefore off to a good start. The negotiations were conflictual over who was supposed to lead in the crisis management in the CAR:

> "Significantly, the December 2013 [memorandum of understanding (MoU)] was the culmination of a long process of negotiation where ECCAS sought to retain control over the crisis management and peace process in the CAR. In effect, although the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) replaced MICOPAX, the leadership and composition of the mission remained largely that of ECCAS countries. This was reflected in the MOU. The passing of the baton from MICOPAX to MISCA came with its own hiccups, with reports that the transfer of funds to troops did not occur swiftly enough, leading to soldiers' lacking the most basic of necessities for some time. At the same time, ECCAS prevailed over the political process. The organisation held a summit in January 2014 in N'djamena that saw the forced resignation of transitional president Michel Djotodia and his prime minister, Nicolas Tiangaye. In July 2014, the International Contact Group on the CAR, under the leadership of ECCAS mediator and president of the Republic of Congo Denis Sassou Nguesso, convened the Brazzaville forum for peace and reconciliation in the CAR. A battle was thus being waged between ECCAS and the AU on who would have the upper hand in the management of the CAR conflict. There was, at that moment, a clear reluctance on the part of ECCAS to abandon the CAR to an AU it deemed removed from the reality of the conflict. Some of the leaders in the region also wanted to keep control over the protagonists in the CAR for the sake of their countries – and for their own personal interests." (ISS 05.2019 p.4)

5.2.3. The rise of MINUSCA

In 2014, Catherine Samba-Panza, former mayor of Bangui, became interim President after the downfall of Michel Djotodia. His regime was characterized by instabilities and turmoil. It also saw the rise of violence between communities (Maiangwa and Suleiman, 2017:p. 2) through former Séléka's groups and anti-Balaka. As well as a strengthening of interventions with the creation of MISCA and Sangaris.

The patience of regional powers and the African Union regarding Djotodia's administration had run its course. During an ECCAS meeting in N'Djamena, heads of state, especially Chad, forcefully convinced Djotodia to submit his resignation (Käihkö and Utas, 2014:p. 73). Djotodia's resignation in January 2014 and his exile to Benin (USIP 11.2021 p.22) fueled the feeling in the Central African populations and elite that the fate of the Central African Republic was once again decided abroad (Mayneri, 2014:p. 190). ECCAS member-states demonstrated their political control over national politics "even the AU ended up recognizing ECCAS's political leadership in managing the CAR crisis" (Welz, 2014:p. 580).

The decisions which led to the launch of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic are an interesting demonstration of the phenomenon of ecological niche. Initially, there was a common acknowledgment of the tense situation. Internationally, observers were wary about the waves of violence and some mobilized action by warning about the risks of genocide.

Scholars have expressed doubts that those claims were really founded (Käihkö and Utas, 2014:p. 71), but the motivated parties achieved their advocacy role (Lombard and Batianga-Kinzi, 2014) by convincing, especially the United States of America, to accept the launch of the UN mission. "In addition to providing a stabilizing force, MINUSCA would also support the Central African government in completing its transition, including a national dialogue and reconciliation process" (translated from French, USIP 11.2021 , p.23).

There was a discrepancy between the assessment of the situation and the capabilities of the intervener in place, MISCA. The AU did not have the resources to face such a situation. MINUSCA was meant to replace MISCA as well as the small UN bureau called *Bureau intégré de l'organisation des Nations Unies en Centrafrique* or United Nations Integrated Office in the Central African Republic. The launch of this mission was done carefully and slowly as Carayannis and Fowlis (2017:p. 226) indicates "the UNSC or the UN Secretariat wanted to be seen as 'piling onto' the AU's failures." This is reinforced by the analysis by Welz (2016:p. 581) who compares the transition from MICOPAX to MISCA to the one from MISCA to MINUSCA and characterizes the latter as 'less problematic'. He adds that "[i]t seems obvious both to UN and AU officials that the AU did not have the capabilities to maintain a multi-dimensional and long-term mission" (Welz, 2016:p. 581).

Although this transition was less problematic than the previous one, it still created frictions between the UN and AU officials. AU did not feel like MISCA was given the time and the support by the UN to deploy properly. Nevertheless,

> "because the AU did not have the means, they never made a strong push to stop the transition to MINUSCA. Overall, while there were three forces present (the AU, France, and the EU), none 'had the numerical spread across the country or depth to do the military, police, and civilian work', and none of them could integrate everything together – something which some in the UN Secretariat thought the UN was better placed to do. Overall, the handover process was smooth; there was good chemistry between the heads of MISCA and MINUSCA, and there was already a UN team working within MISCA, which helped to smooth out the UN's involvement." (Carayannis and Fowlis, 2017:p. 227)

The fact that UN and AU jointly assess the situation, this helped to smooth the transition process. "MISCA and MINUSCA personnel met in Brazzaville and CAR on a weekly basis to develop a political dialogue strategy, particularly to convince various CAR actors to participate in the dialogue" (Carayannis and Fowlis, 2017:pp. 226–7).

Once the Samba-Panza's transition administration was put in place, numerous attempts at negotiations were launched. The first phase started with the Brazzaville negotiations leading to the Brazzaville agreement. In July of 2014, the Congolese President, Sassou Nguesso, convinced the Séléka and anti-Balaka to sign a cease-fire called a 'Cessation of Hostilities Agreement' (Maiangwa and Suleiman, 2017:pp. 16–7). "The agreement symbolized the end of the hostilities and was expected to allow free movement of goods and people in order to continue negotiations which led to disarmament and national reconciliation" (Abdullahi, 2020:p. 269). However, the fragmented nature of those armed groups put into question the legitimacy of the representatives who signed that cease-fire, which was violated almost immediately and confrontations continued in many parts of the country (USIP 11.2021 p.20). The observers at the time saw this agreement as a first step but also expressed their skepticism (TNH 07.2014). These negotiations had two main shortcomings: the absence of aDDR plan and the implementation was unclear at best. The possibility to be (re)integrated in society is an important condition for armed groups; this explains the focus put on DDR.

Sassou Nguesso continued his leadership in the negotiations by organizing meetings in Nairobi between the FPRC, a splinter group from the disbanded Séléka, and an anti-balaka faction led by Maxime Mokom. The resulting agreement called for general amnesty, a change of government, and a new transitional phase. These talks led to a ceasefire on January 22, 2015, but this reprieve was short-lived. The government was not included in the talks and hence, the agreement was heavily criticized.

> "Several diplomats said this was a simple catalog of claims advanced by supporters of the two former presidents, Michel Djotodia (by Séléka, delegation headed by Nourredine Adam) and François Bozizé (by Anti-balaka), and could not be validated, as highlighted by the official vice-mediator Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, former Malian Minister of Defense. [...] The government rejected the whole proposal and felt that it was only a maneuver to block the upcoming elections and allow some people to evade justice." (EC 06.2016 p.15)

In addition to the government disavowing these negotiations, the UN also refused to endorse them and ended up favoring the Bangui National Forum (IPIS 08.2018 p.7). In general,

> "[t]he involvement of President Sassou-Nguesso as an external mediator for the crisis in the CAR raises a few concerns. First is the issue of legitimacy and local acceptance of externally brokered peace. There can hardly be any meaningful local ownership if the relevant local actors view the activities carried out in the name of peacebuilding, as well as the agents who carry out such activities, as illegitimate. [C]onfronting this legitimacy gap becomes a central challenge for outsiders seeking to facilitate locally owned peacebuilding processes. The second issue is that of the geostrategic interest of a third party intervener. The role of President Nguesso as an external mediator in the CAR excited accusations of diplomatic hypocrisy and highlighted the repercussions of excluding local populations who have genuine grievances and are in a much better position to offer concrete ideas about how their political environment is to be organized." (Maiangwa and Suleiman, 2017:pp. 16–7)

Later, in 2015, a bigger initiative took shape: the Bangui National Forum (Zahar and Mechoulan, 2017). It took into account the criticisms that had been leveraged at Sassou-Nguesso's efforts, by being locally anchored. This underlines the sequential nature of these agreements, as latter ones can try to correct the course of the formers. This forum included town-halls and consultations throughout the country; it gathered more than 600 participants from civil society, religious organizations, government, armed groups, etc. Contrary to the previous attempts, this one took root in the CAR rather than in capitals in the region. It was presided by the UN's Special representative of the Secretary-General and organized by the transitional government. This forum is seen as an important milestone for the peace process and was "largely considered a success, as it created the opportunity for wide-ranging citizen participation" (Carayannis and Fowlis, 2017:p. 227). Still today, many politicians refer to the Bangui forum as an example of civil and community engagement (interview OL).

However, the discussions were not as constructive and peaceful as remembered by many. On the last day of the forum,

> "disorder broke out as some members of the anti-balaka expressed their dissatisfaction with the forum's final recommendations by walking out during the closing ceremony. Two hundred to 300 anti-balaka and Séléka protesters gathered outside the forum to voice frustrations over the fact that several of their members have been put under house arrest and will face criminal trials for crimes that they committed during the conflict. As the ceremony ended,

> shots sounded in the street, demonstrating the fragile security situation the country still faces." (Brookings 05.2015)

In the end, one of the armed groups out of the ten, FDPC, refused to sign. The rest of them were cautiously observing the development of the DDR programs and the other promises that this new inclusivity (positions, reconciliation) was supposed to bring to the CAR politics. While the government was insisting that the armed groups cease all violence before starting the discussions. "In the tug-of-war that ensued between the president and the armed groups, violence resumed throughout the country's prefectures, accompanied by massive displacement and mounting civilian casualties" (Zahar and Mechoulan, 2017:p. 3).

This proliferation of negotiations is the first stage of the succession cycle. These small agreements are all led by regional states and regional organizations and often correspond to specific interests of those brokers, like Sassou Nguesso. Moreover, they catered to some armed groups rather than others. Large consultations of all groups in the CAR like the Bangui forum gather the demands of all communities, creating a long list of contradictory requests. Although a huge effort was made to consolidate these demands, it did not lead to the appeasement expected. These negotiations are either partial or too large, but they lay the foundations for more and more comprehensive dialogue. Just like the moss and fungi prepared the soil for bigger plants, the smaller agreements are preparing the ground for bigger ones.

In 2015, the political transition headed by Samba-Panza led to national elections. Presidential and legislative elections were held in December 2015. The second round of the elections saw Faustin-Archange Touadéra, former prime minister under Bozizé, win with 63% of the vote. Counter to many observers' expectations that elections would be able to offer an exit to the crisis by establishing a legitimate government. The newly elected government was not successful at easing the tensions again, and the hostilities with the armed groups persisted.

In response, again numerous attempts were conducted to come to an agreement by different groups and countries. In 2016 and 2017, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation formerly Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) secretariat reacted and voiced its concern to the attacks on the Muslim communities by anti-balaka groups (OIC 10.2017). OIC unsuccessfully attempted to coalesce some elements of the Séléka in order to facilitate a dialogue between the government and the armed groups. Again, those efforts were impeded by the fragmented nature of the Séléka which "had only ever been united for a mere three months, the time it took to capture power" (ICG 09.2017 p.8). This loose coalition collapsed right after their successful coup (OIC 12.2017). OIC also sent a representative to Bangui (Olin, 2015) and organized a round table on inter-religious dialogue in Dakar with community, religious government representatives as well as officials from the UN and AU. While the conflict is often presented with religious drivers, the motives and access to resources and territorial claims are major contention points. Hence, discussions taking solely the religious angle miss some of the demands of the communities.

The Muslim community was not the only religious community to try to devise an agreement. the Entente of Sant'Egidio was signed under the auspices of the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio in Rome, and the European Union also served as a mediator of the mediators(Olin, 2015). "The Sant'Egidio agreement was broken in the first few hours after it was signed and was considered a 'non-event' in Bangui" (Rusch, 2021:p. 89). Another bordering country, Angola, tried to open negotiations with the anti-balaka and Séléka factions by hosting talks.

> "Angola's late involvement in the CAR crisis does not seem to have been so natural. Many of CAR's political elites believe that Luanda got involved at the request of Paris to find a

> middle ground between Sassou Nguesso and Idriss Déby who were divided on the newly appointed CAR President Samba-Panza's qualities, and also to provide some funds to the CAR government at a time negotiations with the IMF were stalled because of the misbehaviour of some of her entourage." (Marchal, 2015a:p. 187)

Hence, for five years prior to the signature of the APPR, efforts from different actors tried to bring conflicting parties together to negotiate a reduction of the hostilities. These efforts targeted specific armed groups or communities and were led by groups who had particular relationships with one part or another of the CAR society.

It is only in July of 2017, that the AU presented its new 'roadmap for peace and reconciliation' in Libreville. This new roadmap, based on the various initiatives that preceded it, provided for a disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and reinsertion process and rejected impunity for the most serious crimes. The dialogue and attempts continued, some were signed, some were not, the AU took the initiative to propose a pilot dialogue and to collect and assemble a list of demands of the armed groups. In August 2018, the demands were harmonized and classified during a workshop into various themes: security, humanitarian, cultural, political, etc. Presented as a consensus document, the Libreville roadmap obtained the support of many international and national actors, including the UN and led to the next step, namely the APPR.

5.2.4. A New APPR

The *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation* or Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation is the most recently signed peace agreement in the CAR. It was ratified in February 2019 between 14 armed groups' leaders and the CAR government. It aims to offer a framework to peace through reconciliation and justice.

> "With violence peaking in 2017, African governments and organizations decided to launch the APPR to encourage a resumption of the dialogue between the armed groups and the government. It was led by the African Union, ECCAS, and the ICGLR, with the support of Angola, Chad, and the Republic of Congo. The initiative reoriented the design of the mediation process, relative to former agreements, by focusing on what could realistically be achieved and changing the role of the armed groups in the peace process. Its goal was to achieve the groups' disarmament in return for political commitments. [It] contains three main elements: (1) power-sharing with armed groups through the appointment of an inclusive government; (2) the possibility of sanctions against those who continue to use violence; (3) the establishment of "special mixed security units" under FACA command, and composed of national security and defense forces and vetted and trained members of armed groups that have disarmed and demobilized. The agreement also established a full-fledged monitoring and implementation mechanism, which includes conflict resolution mechanisms at the local and national levels. At the local level (préféctures), technical security committees, including members of armed groups and representatives of the FACA and national security forces, were established to address local-level obstacles and conflicts resulting from the implementation of the agreement's provisions. Implementation of the agreement was at first hindered by the parties' hesitance to adhere to its provisions, as well as a lack of clarity on how to sequence key provisions related to the newly established mechanisms with already existing programs. Implementation of the provisions regarding the special mixed security units proved difficult because of the resistance of the FACA and confusion among the conflict

> parties and the international community on how to fund and sequence them with the DDR program." (Rusch, 2021:p. 89)

The *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation* or Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation was negotiated in large parts in Khartoum and signed in Bangui. It took years in the making (interview IKM) and was based on years of consultations by various actors, but was signed relatively quickly over a few days in Bangui. Unlike the previous efforts, the involved actors and the regional and international organizations supporting the APPR are much more diverse and larger. Building on the failures of previous agreements, the agreement that was signed reflected "what was feasible at the time" (interview OL). Many provisions were purposely vague, leaving space for interpretation during the implementation and creating a document that all felt they could sign. Supported by a large array of actors in and outside of the CAR, the APPR remains to this day the main project for peace.

MINUSCA was granted observer status. However, the role of the MINUSCA grew into more than simply an observer. The UN put some effort into pledging to provide political, technical, and logistical support to this mediation initiative by deploying a senior expert on mediation through the Mediation Support Unit of its Department of Political Affairs (Zahar and Mechoulan, 2017). MINUSCA became a privileged partner that led the day-to-day operations.

> "The AU has an office across the street from MINUSCA headquarters, but neither the AU nor ECCAS have large enough forces or civilian actors on the ground who might be capable of actually guaranteeing implementation. MINUSCA does, however, have such capabilities, as well as the mandate to 'coordinate international support and assistance to the peace process,' which falls short of an official 'guarantor' mandate." (Howard et al., 2020:p. 164)

ECCAS and AU were entrusted with the role of guarantors of the peace agreement. Technically, this role entails monitoring, evaluating, and taking action accordingly to ensure the respect of the APPR. "Guarantors are like the police that make sure that the agreement is respected" (Interview IKM). This involvement of the closest regional organization, ECCAS, seems important with regards to the principle of subsidiarity that underpins the relation between the AU and the regional organizations. It was important that the comparative advantage and expertise of the organization in the region to solve the crisis (Welz, 2016:p. 573). The African-led nature of the initiative was celebrated by some interviewees, and they underlined that the United Nations took a back seat and had a support role (logistical, political, and technical) (interview SRF).

But in fact, both ECCAS and AU lack the resources to be able to monitor appropriately the various provisions of the agreements. "Neither the AU nor ECCAS have forces on the ground that might be capable of guaranteeing or enforcing adherence" (Howard et al., 2020:p. 81). Hence, like in an ecosystem where a function is not filled by the agents. The role of MINUSCA grew to fill the gap left by the others. "Therefore, despite the absence of such a mandate, the task essentially fell on MINUSCA" (Howard et al., 2020:p. 81). In fact, the MINUSCA has been taking measures and sanctions against the factions of armed groups that do not respect the APPR (interview VBN).

The role of the UN and its MINUSCA grew out of necessity as the other actors who were assigned the role were unable to do so but informally regarding the APPR. There are instances where mandates themselves were adjusted to fit the requirements of the security situation. It is not only the agents which are able to shape into a role that are not officially assigned to them in order for the system to continue to function. The mandates of the missions and operations themselves were adapted to respond

to the evolving situation. These missions and operations changed to respond to the needs in two ways: first, increasing the mandate; second, changing the mission operator.

5.3. Conclusion: the Negotiations Strike Back

The APPR is recognized still today, despite the numerous violations of the agreements, privately and publicly as the touchstone for the peace process (interviews ZYL, UHN, and ESX). Over the past few years, there have been multiple efforts to (re)inforce the peace process in the CAR. The two main ones are the Luanda roadmap and the Republican Dialogue. These processes were presented by interviewees as different ways to 'revitalize', 'harmonize', 'redynamize the APPR' (AU-UN-ECCAS-EU 06.2021), or 'put back on track' (interviews POI, CXY and IKM). Those efforts could technically work on different aspects of the development of peace, regional, national dialogue, DDR, etc. In fact, they rather seem to work as parallel initiatives, and the government is able to use them in order to show commitment to different audiences (international interveners, regional actors, and bilateral partners). I construe these new initiatives as a start of a new cycle that sees the proliferation of negotiations. New actors are emerging to take the niche of broker like President Lourenço from Angola, which is replacing the spot formerly occupied by Nguesso from Congo or Bongo from Gabon.

The Luanda roadmap is an initiative that comes from the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) under the Presidency of the Angolan President, João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço. During a mini-summit of the ICGLR on the situation in the CAR in January 2021, the representatives of the member states decided to create a framework of dialogue with the involved actors (armed groups, government) (interview RF) to foster discussions among them. The foreign ministers of Angola and Rwanda, conjointly with CAR authorities, constitute the working group in charge of implementing this roadmap.

> "On 15 October 2021, President Touadera declared a unilateral ceasefire for the entire territory of CAR for national security forces and their bilateral support. Accepted after intense lobbying by the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the ceasefire is part of the roadmap established during the 16 September 2021 summit in Luanda. This includes the cessation of offensive operations against Armed Groups that accepted the Luanda-roadmap. FACA and ISF will however continue to maintain public security and order and act against non-compliant [armed groups]." (EEAS 11.2021, p.5)

Officially, the Luanda process is presenting the APPR as the only peace process framework. The Luanda roadmap is meant as a tool to implement the APPR. The roadmap initiative has attracted various reactions in the CAR. Part of the interviewees expressed skepticism and doubt about the motives behind this initiative. They point to the fact that the Luanda roadmap has been shrouded in mystery as the actual roadmap is not available, although parts of it were released in private WhatsApp groups. The summit's declarations, which are available to the public, are rather vague, referencing identified issues of concern and finding appropriate solutions. These interviewees also suspect that this initiative is not disinterested since Angola and Rwanda, the members of the implementation committee of the Luanda roadmap, "have their views on the natural resources as well" (interview HGF). Later, the same interviewee added that "the model of management of mining and natural resources that is being applied [in the CAR] is similar to Angolan and Rwandan models; based on joint ventures between the state and private companies who are put in charge of exploitation and exportation" (interview HGF). This points to the fact that, as in other instances presented earlier, interest in the CAR is not disinterested.

Other observers still fear that the Luanda efforts are made unilaterally without being coordinated with other regional efforts (interview IKM). This apprehension is also driven by the fact that unlike ECCAS, the ICGLR does not have this subsidiarity relationship with the AU.

This roadmap also has supporters in Bangui who see the involvement of regional actors as a key part in solving the issues in CAR (interview RF). These interlocutors recognize that some countries in the region are better brokers, which are able to reach out to some armed groups and convince them to sit at the table. As violence grew, Luanda "was thought of as a way to bring back the CPC in the peace process" (interview RF). According to some interviewees, part of the Luanda process was proposing to offer exile CPC fighters (interview CXY). This exile would solve in part the government problems, since they would not have to integrate them into politics or military or society in general. According to some interviews, this is why the roadmap has the support of the President (interview IKM). In addition, it has other aspects like the lifting of the embargo (interview IKM) that align with the President's objectives. As detailed earlier, the government is willing to go along with these negotiations if it does not require too many concessions and the potential to regain territory.

The Luanda roadmap can be either seen as a competitor or as a pathway toward the APPR. The CAR government has leveraged this roadmap to be close to its main proponent, Angola. What we see with the Luanda roadmap is reminiscent of the smaller agreements that were signed before the APPR and that targeted specific armed groups that are especially close to the organization or its members.

Another political effort to open discussions between the CAR actors is called the Republican Dialogue. This is supported by the UN and its agencies which are in favour of "an inclusive dialogue with all the ethnic groups and the armed groups" (interview XYL). It includes social and political actors: "youth, unions, women, the religious institutions, government, employers" (interview TBG). These discussions are seen as a process that could foster "good governance, transparency, fight against corruption, and political tolerance"(interview TBG).

This was launched in 2020 by the President, following his controversial reelection as a way to engage with both the opposition and the armed groups. This dialogue was preceded by consultations with various stakeholders excluding armed groups affiliated with the *Coalition des Patriotes pour le Changement* or Coalitions of the Patriots for Change. Other armed groups were invited but decided not to participate, "claiming that the consultations were not inclusive and were therefore unlikely to achieve peace, national reconciliation and stability" (UNSC 06.2021). The republican dialogue is a temporary measure but "the idea is to create a forum and a platform with the state council, including the former presidents, the prime minister, the National Assembly president, civilian representatives" (interview IKM). The discussions on the format delayed the beginning of this dialogue (interview IKM).

This dialogue is supposed to lead to a change in the cabinet, that would be more inclusive with women and other political parties for example. Rehashing the idea present in many negotiations of power-sharing. The interveners going to "make sure that this revision of the government happens after the dialogue" (interview CXY). The republican dialogue is seen as more promising by some than the two others, as it is a more internal process and not instigated by the regional actors. "There are major signs that the majority of actors are willing to return to this dialogue and to get to discuss a political solution rather than the military one that is sought after right now by the govt and others at this stage" (interview ZH). A similar argument is made by another interviewee: "[m]y hope is more in the republican dialogue, which should lead to some appeasement, but this not happening yet. This is big work, but for now not a lot of results" (interview RF). This dialogue was ended in March 2022; it made 217 recommendations (UN 08.2023). It remains to be seen if these recommendations will be followed by concrete actions.

These two initiatives plant the seeds of dialogue among groups. Even though there are little signs that these efforts are yielding results, they might be preparing the ground for the next bigger countrywide agreement. As pointed out by one interviewee "the CAR has been in many cycles of instabilities with Bozizé and Patassé before and now with Touadéra. It will take time to settle things" (QAY). Touadéra seems to follow in the path of its predecessors, Bozizé and Patassé, who were ousted in collaboration with regional leaders (Lallau, 2015:pp. 191–2).

> "Since his election, relations between Touadéra and many of his counterparts in the sub-region have deteriorated. This is particularly true with his direct neighbors in the [CEMAC], who have enjoyed significant influence on Central African issues for decades. Touadéra rarely visits them, and none of the heads of state from the CEMAC zone have paid him an official visit. He thus gives the impression to his counterparts that he prefers visits to Western capitals or more distant African countries. Two relationships have particularly suffered. First, with Idriss Déby, the Chadian president and a close ally of Paris, who criticizes Touadéra for bringing in Russians to the sub-region and condemns his handling of transhumance between the two countries and the insecurity at their border. Touadéra, for his part, believes that Chad supports armed groups stemming from the former Seleka; while this may have been the case in the past, it is likely no longer true, or significantly less so, in recent years. Secondly, Touadéra has a complex relationship with President Denis Sassou Nguesso of Congo-Brazzaville, who has long been involved in Central African affairs. Touadéra suspects him of supporting the warlord Martin Koumtamadji, arrested in January 2020 in Chad, as well as the opposition, notably Dologuélé, Meckassoua, and Bozizé. In July, Sassou Nguesso hosted Bozizé and Meckassoua with the declared aim of 'calming the political climate' before the elections." (Translated from French, ICG 12.2020 p.30)

5.3.1. Final remarks

The Central African Republic has experienced many political and social crises since its independence from the French colonial empire in 1960. These crises are centred around competitions over the natural resources and state power (Ngovon, 2015). As a result, there has been a succession of multinational (UN,CEN-SAD, CEMAC, ECCAS, EU, AU) and bilateral (Libya, South Africa, Chad, and France) interventions ranging from small-scale advisory good offices to full-fledged multidimensional military operations (Glawion et al., 2018; Lombard and Carayannis, 2015).

These organizations have intervened in different capacities in the CAR: mediators among parties, securing specific zones (borders, trade routes, capital, and airports), peacekeeping, support to a government or to the security and defense forces, etc. This chapter examined the role of regional and international organizations in the peace processes in the Central African Republic. These organizations have been involved in many aspects of these processes: agreements brokers, peacekeepers, friends of the regime, allies to some armed groups, etc. By looking at the influence of the regional and international actors using ecological succession, we see the cyclical pattern. The actors change but the niches stay the same. I examine the strategies of regional actors, in particular, in engaging in peace negotiations and interventions in contexts where multiple actors compete and cooperate to broker these agreements and have claims to undertake actions.

Another interesting manifestation of ecosystem qualities of the interventions of regional and international actors in the CAR is visible in the way roles and mandates evolve, in particular when the responsible organization changes. In ecosystem, one of the main mechanisms that foster change comes from species

specializing to respond to environmental pressures and in turn changing their surroundings. I also sketched out the long-dated involvement of regional organizations and it showed that when other international actors felt like some actors were unable or willing to deal with the growing violence in CAR,other interventions like MINUSCA or MINURCA were launched. Similar to an ecosystem, agreements have been emerging and unable to take hold and mandates and agents are able to adapt to the changing situation and broaden or shrink their role and function in the system. I use the concept of succession to explain how negotiations have multiplied and finally, temporarily, worked.

Elections as Tipping Points
Changes in the Interveners' Ecosystem

Qui change la Constitution gagne les élections

African proverb

6.1. Introduction

Elections are often seen as a way to (re)create a social contract between the elite and the populations they govern, especially after a conflict (Hellsten, 2009). They are held as a key avenue toward peace that renews the representation of popular political preferences, which are assumed to have changed during conflict (e.g. due to displacement/population composition changes). However, elections are no panacea; scholars and practitioners alike have recognized the non-linear nature of peacebuilding (Coning et al., 2018). "[P]eacebuilding, in response to violence, must be viewed as entailing continuous negotiations, and re-negotiations, of the social and political contract of a society and polity, with pathways to peace marked by opportunities, setbacks, catalysts, friction and resistance" (Paffenholz, 2021:p. 368). These pathways can lead to moments of major shifts in the ecosystem of interveners.

This chapter looks at one of those moments of change: a tipping point. Slow-moving rifts accumulated, and the influx of a new actor in an existing niche led the ecosystem toward a peak during this electoral cycle. It forced a reconfiguration of the system, where actors' roles changed, and the reasons behind the interventions themselves were questioned. By reviewing the international and regional efforts to support the conduct of elections in the CAR, this chapter shows that the process unearthed larger disagreements over the *raison d'être* of these interventions.

After the signature of the most recent peace treaty, (APPR), the imperative of holding elections opened a new chapter in CAR peace process. "In both the CAR and Libya, a track one approach was chosen to negotiate an agreement that would then be implemented. The agreements contain a logic that prioritizes the election of a government. According to standard practice, following the elections, the government will take the lead in rebuilding state institutions, becoming the key partner of the international community"(Rusch, 2021:pp. 61–2) This was seen by many as the logical next step "to build on the accomplishments of the APPR" (interview UHN). The World Bank expresses the same idea in its Country Partnership Framework:

> "[t]he upcoming Presidential and General Elections, to be held before April 2021, and local elections in 2022, will constitute a major test for CAR. If held as scheduled, these elections hold the promise of putting the country on a long-term trajectory towards democratic governance and stabilization. Yet, there is also the risk that elections will not take place as planned, which could plunge CAR back into conflict and violence and wipe out the

> hard-earned gains of the past five years. Continued strong support from partners, including the [World Bank Group], is critical during this period."(WB 08.2020)

This excerpt illustrates how the interveners saw this electoral deadline as a major stepping stone as well as their fear that failure could lead to catastrophic consequences. It also underlines the central role taken by the interveners in this process. These elections and the surrounding events are used in this chapter to present the national dimensions of interventions in the country.

The LRC had to go through a major transformation during this election cycle. I describe this transformation as the advent of a tipping point that brought the system into a new state. Despite aligned goals and coordinated strategies that characterized the months leading up to the election, the few weeks that followed quickly deteriorated. This new state altered permanently the relations among the interveners and spilled into antagonistic interactions that moved to other topics and programs. There was a clear change of equilibrium around the elections and the events that came with it, which led to a major political realignment.

Compared to the previous chapter which looks at the regional dynamics, this one is focusing on the ecosystem in Bangui. It delves more into relations among interveners, and discusses the transformation of roles they took before and after this deadline, the stressors that contributed to the tipping, and the variation in the attendance of the G5, an informal group of interveners meeting regularly in Bangui. Tipping points materialize sequentially: an ex-ante situation, a crisis or a cleavage (mostly depending on the span of the shift), and an ex post situation when the legacies of the junctures are reinforced and solidified (R. B. Collier and D. Collier, 1991). This chapter is organized accordingly into these three phases. I conclude with some comments on the organization of the new round of elections, municipal ones.

6.1.1. Argument

There are many ways in which complex system change (external stressors, adaptation, interactions among groups, feedback effects, etc.) One of the most dramatic ways for change to occur is tipping points. They are defined as "the abrupt shift between contrasting ecosystem states when environmental conditions cross specific thresholds" (Dakos et al., 2019:p. 355). This definition underlines the paradoxical nature of tipping points. They are sudden and dramatic but are underpinned by slow-moving dynamics that accumulate and lead to a different equilibrium. Hence, the crossing of a tipping point does not necessitate that slow-moving dynamics disappear: the fault lines of the new system may predate the rupture of the old system. In fact, in hindsight, one can identify how the fault lines in the new system follow some growing fractures that preexisted this moment of rupture.

'Regime shift', 'critical juncture', and 'tipping points' have been used interchangeably to refer to these sudden changes in a system. Originally used by mathematics with bifurcation theory, the term 'tipping point' was popularized by Malcolm Gladwell's book which describes many examples (shoes sales, crime rates, etc.) (Gladwell, 2006). There seems to be a growing consensus to keep a broader definition that includes internal and external factors in the advent of the tipping point (Van Nes et al., 2016) as well as includes social and economic trends.

There are three main conditions to ascertain the presence of a tipping point (Milkoreit et al., 2018). First, at least two stable states: one before and one after the passing of a threshold. These two states have to be qualitatively different and this implies "a certain magnitude of change and a structural reconfiguration of the system" (Milkoreit et al., 2018:p. 9). The interval between these two states can vary, as some tipping

points are followed by periods of turbulence which "can provide opportunities to reform institutional arrangements that would be out of the question during normal times" (Young, 2012:p. 78).

Second, the change is sudden and non-linear. "[T]he change process unfolds rapidly compared to a general background speed of the system. Nonlinearity is also referred to as disproportional causality—small causes can have large effects and vice versa" (Milkoreit, 2023:p. 2). The flip from one equilibrium to the other can be surprising and unexpected to the observers and participants in the ecosystem. For a length of time, the first state is able to be maintained despite the growth of stressors. This resilience to the addition of disturbances is what makes the precipitous shift difficult to predict. This is obvious in the lake example; the phosphorus levels build up for weeks or months while the water stays clear. In a relatively short period, the level reaches a certain point and the growth of algae explodes, leading to darker water. It also means that there is no automatic proportionality between the cause and the effect; the accumulation of small incremental changes leads to major shifts.

Third and finally, the change is almost irreversible, at least on the human timescale. Once this new stable system is established, there is no way to revert back to the previous state. There can be further changes, including new tipping points to the system, but they will bring the advent of another system. This third version can share some characteristics with the first system, but there is no complete reversal to the original system.

While tipping points have been widely used to describe processes in ecology, this term also has been adopted to talk about societal transformation. Polarization (Macy et al., 2021), human rights practices (Cao et al., 2013), and Arctic governance (Young, 2012) are a few examples of the use of the term. These articles all point in one form or another to the three conditions described earlier with attention to the type of factors that lead to the shift. Indeed, the identification of the chain of events that precede the tipping point can be more difficult to decipher in social systems compared to natural ones. Along this line, Lamberson (2012) distinguishes between direct and contextual tips. Direct tips refer to situations where small changes in one variable lead to major changes in the same variable. A contextual tip "occurs when a gradual change in a variable $y_t causes a discontinuous jump in future values of some other variable x''_t (Lamberson, 2012 : P.196). This is closer to the$

Elections have also been analyzed as tipping points in political science (Vertier et al., 2023). They are moments of reconfiguration of the political landscape. It can disrupt long-standing dynamics of left-right alternance or reconfigure the coalition-making process (Conradt, 2006). Interestingly, this 2020-2021 elections cycle did not alter the political landscape of the CAR. Indeed, the President kept his position and the majority remained in the hands of the Presidential party. The system that went through a tipping point is rather in the group of international and regional interveners. This period of a few months (December 2020 to May 2021) saw the relations among international and regional interveners being restructured, with roles being redefined and the fundamental reasons underpinning their interventions being questioned.

The international community invested a lot of money and effort to coordinate its activities and to speak with one voice to the Central African political actors including armed group members (interview WER) and the government (interview APO). The main interveners shared the burden to ensure that the elections were held within the allotted time-frame. Many factors contributed to the reach of this tipping point: the arrival of Wagner, the decisions from the constitutional court, the government approach and even the pressures put on by the international and regional interveners. Rapidly after the elections, the outcomes of this strong-arming by the interveners backlashed with a growing distrust from the population and the political elites. Diverging views appeared, and the interveners disagreed on the next steps and even the role of the international community in CAR. It resulted in a reorganization of the

roles in the system, including for example, the Russian-led Wagner group of mercenaries taking more and more space and the revision and downsizing of the EU missions. Even the interviewees described this period as a new chapter, a new environment for CAR (interview SAP), many of them mentioned the unexpected consequences of those elections (interview KJH).

6.1.2. Environment

Elections were rarely undisputed in the Central African Republic. They have often been a way to legitimize administrations that came to power through force. To give an example, in the early 2010s, the electoral observers reported irregularities, intimidation, and fraud on a great scale.

> "The opposition criticized the conduct of the elections. [The] appeal to the Constitutional Court, led by Bozizé's cousin, however, did not go far. Election observers from the African Union and the European Union noted a host of irregularities including, in the words of Guy Samzun, head of the EU delegation, 'massive fraud' and 'attempts to intimidate voters by certain party representatives"' (Lombard, 2012:p. 191) [1]

The political landscape is also characterized by an elite that is mostly oriented toward Bangui (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015:p. 135). "Vertical inequality separates the capital city of Bangui (located in the south) from the rural periphery (particularly the northern prefectures of Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran). [...] Inequality is most evident in the area of government expenditure: Bangui, home of 30% of the Central African population, exhausts nearly 90% of state spending."(Brown and Zahar, 2015:p. 16)

The electoral cycle saw a polarization between two main forces (EISA 12.2021, p.13). On the Presidential side, the *Mouvement cœurs unis* or United Hearts Movement was the majority in favour of Touadéra. Faustin-Archange Touadéra was elected a first time in February 2016, following the transitional government led by Samba-Panza. Prior to his inauguration, he had been Prime Minister under Bozizé and vice-chancellor of the University of Bangui. Coming to power without a solid political apparatus and without a parliamentary majority, Touadéra had to find allies and form a parliamentary majority to govern. "This crumbled between 2017 and 2018 due to political differences between the president and some of his former allies, such as former president of the National Assembly Karim Meckassoua and former president of the National Transitional Council Alexandre-Ferdinand Nguendet who today criticize him for an 'authoritarian drift"' (ICG 12.2020, p. 16).

Still, in 2020, Touadéra announced his intention to run again for the Presidency. Despite the lack of allies, Touadéra's party had some advantages, notably the means of the state at his disposal. The observers noted an upsurge in state activities outside of Bangui, including political figures from the Presidential majority.

> "In October and November 2020, the President of the Republic [...] and the Prime Minister, candidate for the legislative elections in Boali, made several official visits to the hinterlands where they carried out inaugurations and made donations to the populations and local structures of the State. During these events, they did not fail to praise the achievements of the party and the outgoing President. These government activities which served as a framework for the propaganda of candidates close to the ruling party undoubtedly lead to a breakdown in equality between them and the opposition. The Prime Minister's activism on

[1] Translated from French.

> social networks (Facebook in particular) and in the constituency where he intended to run left no room for doubt as to their campaign nature ahead of time." (Translated from French EISA 12.2021, p.27)

The opposition consolidated around the COD-2020 made out of 16 political parties. They mostly united in their opposition to the incumbent government whom they view as treasonous. "The opposition and part of civil society criticize Touadéra for having sold off the country's sovereignty by signing the peace agreement with armed groups" (translated from French, ICG 12.2020, p. 16). Although it is provided for in the agreement, the opposition saw the appointment of leaders of armed groups to the government as an arrangement motivated by electoral considerations.

The main organ managing and organizing the elections in CAR is the *Autorité nationale des elections* or the national authority for the elections. This permanent office is tasked to "preserve achievements and institutional memory from one electoral process to another, thus promoting the constant improvement of the electoral system" (EISA 12.2021, p.18). The ANE includes 11 members for the central committee and regional divisions over 7 years. The composition of these committees has been the centre of tensions between the government and the opposition (ICG 12.2020, p. 19). "The opposition constantly denounced the institution, whose commissioners it considered close to the ruling party and whose divisions it considered itself excluded from"(translated from French, EISA 12.2021, p.21).

6.1.3. Subject Matter and its Niches

The subject matter that defines this LRC is the organization of the presidential and parliamentary elections. Studying the regime complex of electoral monitoring, Kelley (2009) finds that the presence of various organizations can enable actions that might otherwise be hindered by political obstacles, enhance individual legitimacy, and reinforce the international norms they advocate. However, it can also foster detrimental inter-organizational dynamics. The differing biases, capabilities, and standards among these organizations can sometimes result in outright conflicting efforts. Although the boundaries of the subject matter are slightly different here, I find similar results. I included all parties who participated in the preparing, monitoring, and securing of the elections. Their common efforts did help to overcome the challenges faced during the elections, but afterwards, these efforts backfired.

The APPR, signed in February 2019 by the Central African authorities and 14 of the armed groups, included an engagement by the government to allow groups and individuals to organize themselves into political parties and participate in elections (APPR 02.2019 art.4-d). As the first elections since the signing, this milestone made it all the more important for the international and regional interveners.

> "Under the renewed prospect for longer-term stabilization and peace, the upcoming double electoral cycle represents a critical inflection point for the country. [...] A democratically elected government that succeeds another would set an important precedent in CAR's history and bring the country a step closer to establishing democratic hand-overs as part of its DNA. This in turn would strengthen the chances of the APPR surviving and reaping the peace dividend" (WB 08.2020).

Elections in the CAR have always involved some degree of outside influence. Regional and international powers have been supporting and undermining incumbents. In this election cycle, Russia has been a clear supporter of the incumbent administration (EEAS 11.2021, P. 21-3). Some interviewees also

jokingly admitted the role that France, as a former colonial power, still plays in the maintenance of the administrations (interview GFD).[2]

The range of possible niches is slightly larger than the previous chapter. There are four niches that developed in this LRC:lobbyist, sponsor, protector, and logistician. The first one pertains to the advocacy role. It entails convincing the government, political parties, and other social groups to conduct and participate in the elections. This niche can be coupled with the others one; this addition might even strengthen the impact of the lobbying. This role is done through public and private means, the public conduits include press releases and conferences, advertisement, etc. while the private one is done in more confidential settings, usually through conversation with relevant politicians and their advisors.

The second role, sponsor, is that of providing the financial resources to pay for the organization of the elections: registration, awareness campaign, polling stations, etc. One of the main advantages of the interveners is their ability to put their money in the balance to encourage certain behaviors. The budget in the CAR is heavily reliant on external funding, and interveners have in the past suspended funding for some initiatives to force the government to hold elections.

> "The entire recent history of CAR has been marked by a dependence on foreign aid. Either coming from bilateral cooperation (France, Germany, Japan, China, USA) or from the Bretton Woods institutions (International Monetary Fund – IMF, World Bank), international financial support was vital for the country. In 1991, foreign aid was estimated to cover 61 per cent of the state budget, a percentage that increased to 76 per cent in 1999. This dependence was made evident for instance in 1992–1993, when the suspension of contributions due to the refusal to carry out presidential elections had heavy social and economic consequences." (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015:p. 221)

The third one, protector of the elections, instead of employing money as an incentive tends to use its military power symbolically or not. This can be used to support the national troops or to intimidate some groups which might disturb the elections, like non-state armed groups. Protectors can either be already present on the territory (MINUSCA) or sporadically sent only for the period of the elections (Rwandan troops).

The fourth role is that of logistician, this niche is filled by the intervener which makes the election happen. This means transporting the ballot, creating the voter rolls, etc. The CAR was a vast territory that is not accessible throughout the year (see Figure 7.1a). This logistician must have the resources (planes, personnel) to carry out these tasks.

6.1.4. Actors

The actors in this localized regime complex shared or at least did not oppose an interventionist approach toward the Central African national political actors in view of the elections. During this period preceding the elections, international and regional actors divided work based on their expertise, qualifications, and resources. Even though the international and regional organizations in Bangui have different approaches on many of the areas on which they overlap, regarding the elections they seem to have congregated behind an interventionist line. Slowly but inextricably, the members of the international community got behind this strategy until it became unthinkable to postpone the elections. The invested funds, reputation,

[2]The French government has supported the Bozizé's administration during the 2000s and experienced disagreements with the Touadéra's presidency including on the end of the Sangaris military operation.

and efforts made the costs of derogating from the firm stance of the group inconceivable. They all contributed with different resources: advocacy, electoral material, security, etc. Each organization found its niche to contribute to the overall goal of holding timely elections.

These actors meet through a contact group called the G5. The G5 is a semi-formal group at the ambassadorial level meeting every Monday in Bangui. It includes MINUSCA, the EU, the AU and ECCAS, the US, Russia, and the WB, while China is invited but does not participate (WB 08.2020, p.50). "The G5 is there to find some kind of political arrangement. Then this has to be translated into strategic and tactical operations" (interview KLZ). According to the first and second hand accounts of these meetings, they serve as a forum of discussions between the ambassadors and mission's heads. "[C]haired by the Special Representative of the Secretary General and head of MINUSCA, [the G5] brings together on a weekly basis the most influential interveners across the political, security, development and humanitarian sectors to share information and coordinate positions" (WB 08.2020). One participant summarized: "this is the voice of the international community. We communicate once every 6 weeks, 2 months. It serves to send a clear message" (interview KJH). The membership and label of this group has changed throughout the months reflecting the level of consensus and the willingness to compromise.

UN family

The United Nations (UN) and its agencies, as the largest set of organizations in terms of personnel and geographical reach, invested a lot of time, effort, and resources into this electoral cycle. In November 2019, the MINUSCA received an official mandate from the UNSC to secure the elections (interview PAS) and to ensure the transport of the candidates to campaign (interview WER). Hence formally, becoming both a protector and logistician.

The UNSC resolution gave a quite large and vague mandate to the MINUSCA, comprised of "providing good offices, security, operational, logistical and, as appropriate, technical support, in particular to facilitate access to remote areas, and by coordinating international electoral assistance" (UNSC 11.2019). As a logistician, this mandate was interpreted in a more interventionist lens. MINUSCA has adopted a more proactive approach with the deployment of more units along the FACA (ICG 12.2020, p. 13). The MINUSCA used resources from many of its departments and units to contribute to the electoral process. Of course, its electoral assistance unit with 71 staff all around the country (interview VCX) participated heavily in discussions with the ANE and the CAR political actors and in multi-agency meetings (UNDP 05.2020).

It also had a role as a protector. However, other actors ended up moving into that niche. Although MINUSCA participated massively in the elections with its personnel, "the mission's approximately 14,000 uniformed personnel [were] simply unable to respond to the scale of violence in CAR, particularly during the recent spike" (USIP 01.2021). As a result, France, Russia, and Rwanda all, in their own ways, participated.

Along with MINUSCA, United Nations Development Programme was a major logistician in these elections (interview IKM). It pooled the money from various actors (Central African government, EU, France, US, Germany, Italy, Morocco, etc.) to put the resources in common (interview WER) through a basket fund, which was spent through a program called *Projet d'Appui au Processus Électoral en Centrafrique* or Support Project for the Electoral Process in the Central African Republic (PAPEC).

According to the interviewees, the UNDP was the designated organization because of "its expertise and the partners felt comfortable with having the UNDP managing fund. They know the management of the funds is appropriate. There is trust in the UNDP"(interview VCX). This task for UNDP seems to suit its abilities and capabilities as

> "[t]he effective management of the electoral Basket Fund and support to the National Elections Authority (ANE) were key contributions of UNDP to the country's effort to undertake a credible nationwide voter-registration process and hold national elections within the constitutional timeline, with a relatively high voter turnout, despite the challenging environment. UNDP efforts focused on ensuring that key parts of the electoral process (voter registration, polling, and results tabulation)."(UNDP 05.2022, p.24)

Another logistical challenge was the voter rolls, especially considering the gap between this election cycle and the previous one; a lot of data had to be recovered.

> "UNDP technical support resulted in the development of a reliable and updatable electoral list. A total of 1.85 million voters were registered of a target 2.3-2.5 million. This was fewer than the 1.95 million registered in 2015, but registration was not possible in all areas of the country because of insecurity. People in the country and the Diaspora in 14 countries were registered in 2020, but no refugees were registered due to the lack of legislation prescribing their inclusion, a politically motivated decision." (UNDP 05.2022, p.25)

EU

The European Union delegation and its two missions (EUTM and EUAM) also contributed to this common effort as a lobbyist and a sponsor. It filled those two roles in conjunction, meaning that the financial resources were put in the balance to achieve the desired advocacy goals. The heads of delegation Samuela Isopi and later Douglas Darius Carpenter have always been active participants in the G5 in all its versions. It also co-signed many appeals with other multinational organizations to the political groups in CAR to hold peaceful and legitimate elections as well as partake in joint visits (AU-UN-EU 10.2019).

The EU is one of the main funding partners in the CAR and it contributed to the basket fund, amounting to almost 60% of the total funding of PAPEC (UNDP 05.2022). This capacity to bankroll many projects in the CAR was recognized by many interviewees as a specificity of the EU (interviews YH, KJH, and APO).

The EU missions were only indirectly involved, but their presence and activities were later used to demonstrate the disapproval of the direction that the government took. EUTM, the training mission, prepared the FACAs for their mission of securing the electoral process. The EUAM came into existence during those months, and it took some time to be fully staffed and to get its activities running. Its work regarding the elections mostly pertains to supporting the police and gendarmerie in their assessment after the facts (interview DSA).

AU

The AU and ECCAS played an important advocacy-oriented role toward the political parties and government. One of the comparative advantages of these regional organizations is closer relations with political actors in CAR and the capacity to mediate among them.

> "In the event of further escalation, CAR's neighbors, ECCAS, and the AU will be best positioned to play a more direct role in convening dialogue between Touadéra and the political opposition. The involvement of the region will also be critical in securing an immediate cease-fire from the armed groups and in reinvigorating a peace process."(USIP 01.2021, p.2-3)

AU and ECCAS also partook in the joint visits with the EU and UNfor the preparation of the elections (interviews ZH and RF). Moreover, "[a]n extraordinary summit of ECCAS was organized a few days before elections in CAR, showing the engagement of the region" (EEAS 11.2021) This influence of these two African organizations is also emphasized in the ICG's report which points out that the AU's "validation or questioning of these elections will weigh heavily on the degree of international recognition of the next leader, and the AU will be on the front line if mediation proves necessary" (ICG 12.2020, p.29).

World Bank

The World Bank's first loans in the CAR date to the 1960s and the resident mission was established in the 1980s. Nowadays, WB focuses on strengthening human capital, infrastructure, and improving economic governance. It funds programs in agriculture, water, electricity, education, natural resource management, social protection, and budget reform. Currently, the portfolio of ongoing projects amounts to nearly $1.2 billion.

In the past, the World Bank has suspended its funding in reaction to slow or stalling progress. "Because of the chronic instability, neither economic transformation nor democratic political transition has been realised. The World Bank suspended its budget support in late 2010" (Vlavonou, 2014:p. 319). In this electoral cycle, it did not suspend its funding; rather, along with its co-members of the G5, it was mainly a lobbyist.

Embassies

The major embassies were also involved in the preparation for the elections. Bangui has a relatively small pool of foreign representations as many countries do not have permanent ambassadors present in the capital. The French and US embassies chiefly supported the common effort through the G5, as lobbyists, with France acting sporadically as a protector. France tried to maintain a very neutral discourse in order to avoid fueling the suspicion that it had a favored candidate as happened in previous electoral cycles. In the critical days around the elections, France sent aircraft to fly over the capital. The role of the US was complementary to other actors, as was recommended by USIP "[i]n the immediate term, the U.S. should prioritize efforts to hold parties to the terms of the peace agreement, reform the security sector to better represent and be held accountable to CAR citizens, and provide logistical support to ensure credible and accessible national elections"(USIP 12.2019).

During this electoral period, the Russian involvement in CAR evolved: diplomatically, economically, but also militarily.

> "[T]he Russian Federation has been returning there since 2017. It is rapidly gaining political, security, and diplomatic influence thanks to close ties with Touadéra [...] A few hundred Russian soldiers are present in the CAR and have trained more than 4,700 Central African soldiers and police. Russia also donates small arms to the CAR and, since the partial lifting of the embargo, twenty armored vehicles."(translated from French, ICG 12.2020 p.32)

One interviewee described their involvement, prior to the elections, as followed: "[t]he Russians have found niches, important niches, but they are not stepping on anyone's territory. With the mining projects and the training of the green berets as well as the weapons training they are doing a job that nobody else is doing. There is no cooperation going on with the Russians [and other interveners]"(Interview PAS). Before the elections, the activities of the Russians did not seem to interfere nor overlap with the activities of the other members of the international community. Although "privately, Russia

unequivocally supports Touadéra's candidacy" (translated from French, ICG 12.2020 p.32), the fact that they did not publicly support the incumbent is a show of restraint and support for the impartiality supported by the other interveners.

One of the other features of the Russian involvement is the arrival in larger contingents of the Wagner group throughout the campaign and afterwards. This private paramilitary enterprise, at the time headed by the late Yevgeny Prigozhin, has taken part in many conflicts around the world. The group is staffed with Russian nationals, but also Syrians and Libyans. Wagner has often been conflated with Russian presence in CAR, this is understandable since, despite the denial from the CAR and Russian authorities alike, it is quite obvious that Wagner participates in the Russian state's strategy in the region (USIP 07.2020, p.14). During this period, the contribution of Wagner in fighting alongside the FACA in securing and regaining control over parts of the country that had been under armed groups' control.[3]

6.2. Equilibrium before the elections: A United Front

The first condition of a tipping point is the presence of multiple stable states. This section will establish the state of the system before the transformation. This equilibrium is paradoxical. At the same time, it showed a strong stance in favor of the elections, but it also contains the seeds of underlying stressors that would add up.

The electoral deadline was warily anticipated, but favorably perceived by most of the actors. International and regional interveners largely shared the conviction that they needed to present a united front regarding the elections. They decided to speak with one voice to the government. The words used by interviewees to describe this period and the discussions on the elections refer to both unity and resolve. Along this line, a year and a half later, in summer 2021, one interviewee remembered that the international community 'demonstrated an iron will' (interview APO) and another considered that a strong and united group of interveners wanted elections 'at all costs' (interview HGF).

6.2.1. the G5

Before the elections, the group was at its largest attendance in a long time. The presence of the Russian and Chinese ambassadors or their representatives was unexpected because they had been invited for a long time, but rarely joined. The Russian even co-signed some of the joint press releases. While the Russian embassy in Bangui was hesitant to participate in the G5 meetings in January 2020 (interview NMQ), by the eve of the elections they were not only coming to those meetings. Vladimir Titorenko, the Russian ambassador, was also willing to sign some of the common declarations with his counterparts.

One of those was officially issued on November 23, 2020 and the signatories were: the European Union, Russia, the United States of America, France, the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the United Nations, and World Bank. It was strongly worded and showed the concord among these members: "We reaffirm the commitment of each of our countries and organizations to fully support the holding of free, fair, transparent and credible elections in the Central African Republic. [...] The G5 does not take positions on individual candidates or political platforms and observes the strictest

[3]The details of the agreement between the CAR government and Wagner remain unclear, according to report, the government compensates Wagner through access to natural resources including mines (Sentry 06.2023, p.27).

impartiality" (G5 11.2020).

Indeed, as the months progressed and the G5 sent several press releases underlining the resolve of the international community regarding the electoral deadlines. In this declaration, they condemned violence and disinformation against members of the G5; they also reaffirmed their impartiality and firm support for the electoral process (G5 11.2020). This signals a willingness from the diplomatic corps in Bangui to set aside their divergences and denounce the attacks against some members. This common stance made sure that the political actors from the government and the opposition knew that they would have difficulties influencing the international actors into competing or undermining each other.

6.2.2. A Common Approach

The determination of the international and regional interveners was focused on keeping the calendar intact. A year before the elections, the embassies and the multinational organizations present in Bangui confirmed that they were on the same page on having the elections take place by the agreed upon date, December 2020. In an interview in January 2020, a year before the elections, one interviewee described the communications among the European Union delegation and French and American embassies: "they are speaking with one voice and categorically against the postponement of the elections" (interview WER).

This coordination among interveners on keeping the date was led by a main fear at the time: the onset of a new transition period or another cycle of violence (ICG 12.2020 p.7). The consequences of these elections or lack thereof were carefully considered by the international community. They worried that if the elections were not held as planned by the peace agreement, another provisional government would be put in place. This is illustrated by the fact that a new transition was presented as unconstitutional by the G5 (G5 12.2020). These concerns were made clear in official documents as well, the WB unequivocally stated that postponing the elections "would put an end to the peace process"(WB 08.2020).

One interviewee summarized what many apprehended, "the big question will be the elections in December, if they don't happen we might be going toward a new transition and if so will there be a tutelage of the international community? This is why the position of the international community is so firm. The consequences of an election that would not go well, could mean a lot of destabilization" (interview WAY. The fear of losing the fragile gains made since the signature of the APPR, a return to a more rigid form of international control over CAR, and the spillover effects it could have on the broader region convinced many of the actors to coordinate their actions and deliver the same message of determination to hold an election within schedule (interview VBN).

To support their stance, some actors opted to condition their funding on the conduct of the elections. To illustrate, the WB's Turn Around Allocation (TAA) is earmarked for countries emerging from a period of crisis and where there is a window of opportunity for the World Bank to either re-engage or intensify support to pursue reforms that can accelerate a transition out of fragility and build resilience.

> "A critical milestone will be holding the General and Presidential Elections, to be completed before April 2021. If they are not held in accordance with the Constitution, as ruled by the Constitutional Court, CAR will not seek further TAA eligibility. If they do take place and a new government is formed, CAR will have the opportunity, with two additional years of TAA and depending on further progress made, to accelerate the peace dividend and solidify the country's stabilization. By then, CAR will have had access to seven years of [...] TAA resources, and the time will have come for the country to transition to [another allocation

system based on performance]." (WB 08.2020)

Despite the relatively smooth division of tasks among international interveners, this is not to say that there were no differences in the attitude of the multinational actors and the collaboration. This is noted in this report that the partnership between MINUSCA and UNDP was somewhat strained.

> "UNDP and MINUSCA often faced challenges in effectively coordinating their actions in certain areas of their work. For example, United Nations policy requires integrated electoral support from the outset in a mission context, even if the mission and United Nations country team are not structurally integrated. UNDP election assistance was thus conceptualized as an integrated effort with the electoral division of MINUSCA in its design, as recommended by the 2018 Needs Assessment Mission and United Nations policy. This was not reflected in implementation, however, and coordination remained problematic throughout much of the process." (UNDP 05.2022 p.35)[4]

Also importantly, the level of confidence in the elections varied. While some people were convinced that the elections were on the right track and that the CAR authorities would not ask for a delay, others were more cautious, "there is no sign for the moment that the elections are at risk, but we never know" (interview UIO). But even the most skeptical interviewees were willing to give a chance to this unity strategy and to holding the elections, in particular because the other alternatives (delays, another national dialogue, change to the constitution) seemed even more risky at the time than elections.

This is confirmed by a report of the African Union on their electoral observation mission. This report describes the effort of the international community as "a crucial leverage in the stabilization and securitization of CAR through bilateral and multilateral cooperation to ensure the technical, material, logistical, financial and human organization of the first and second rounds of the elections." Interestingly, this report also mentions and praises the 'determining support' on the ground of the Russian and Rwandan allied forces, which allowed the FACA to repel the attacks against Bangui in January and, with the support of the MINUSCA contributed to regaining control over some localities. This indicates that even in March 2021, a few months after the elections, the relations in the international community had not completely soured and that many still hoped that the allied forces, especially those associated with Wagner, would leave at the end of the electoral process (interview APO). As the next section will show, the participation of Russia through Wagner became increasingly uncomfortable for other members of the international community.

6.2.3. Challenges to the Common Approach

What is even more surprising is that this equilibrium and ecosystem with the niche distribution remained strong despite numerous obstacles. Indeed, this ecosystem was put through multiple stressors during the electoral campaign. Of course, these stressors combined with already existing fractures among the interveners led to the advent of the tipping point and the reconfiguration of the system. This unity among international interveners throughout the months faced multiple difficulties coming from both the opposition and the government as well as the worsening security and sanitary situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Magbe et al., 2022).

Those challenges make the consistency and determination of the international community even more

[4]Similar implementation issues will be explored in greater details in the next chapter

remarkable. At many turns, one could have expected one or more members to break the consensus and to side with actors who argued for the postponement of the elections coming from the government and the opposition. In the period that preceded the elections, the international community showed unity behind a more hands-on involvement in the preparation of the elections than in other areas of intervention, as well as a resolve to hold elections in due time, even in the face of many obstacles coming from the opposition and the government.

Already in January 2019, part of the opposition advocated postponing the elections (interview IOP) citing security concerns and the difficulties of conducting a campaign logistically. This desire grew as their prospects of making significant gains in the parliament or toward the Presidency decreased. The demands of parts of the opposition to delay the elections were hinging on the conduct of national dialogue as a prerequisite for the elections (MINUSCA-DHH 06.2021 p.9).

In this pre-electoral period, there were multiple attempts at creating an opposition coalition. First, the pro-French movement *Ë Zîngo Bîanî* was created (Dukhan, 2020). This platform included 24 signatories from political parties and civil society organizations which shared aversion toward the APPR which is seen as a pact with the armed groups (ICG 12.2020 p.17). Members of this group "lead public marches in Bangui to protest government corruption, poor governance and concessions to armed groups within the framework of the Khartoum Agreement, which the group has publicly declared as 'high treason"' (Knoope et al., 2020). Active mostly in the summer of 2019, this movement did not last until the elections, it was disbanded in April 2020 (Ë Zîngo Bîanî 04.2020). These efforts to postpone were the early signs of the opposition's resistance toward the elections.

Another platform had coalesced in December 2019 under the label of COD-2020 and some members of *Ë Zîngo Bîanî* joined. This coalition was headed by the former Prime Minister and runner-up in the 2016 Presidential elections Anicet-Georges Dologuélé (ICG 12.2020 p.17). Consisting of 16 political parties, it united many political figures who have led the country at the highest level (EISA 12.2021 p.13). COD-2020 has "repeatedly asked President Touadéra to postpone the organization of elections in order to organize this national consultation"(MINUSCA-DHH 06.2021 p.10).

Another important opposition member is the former President, François Bozizé. At first, he granted his support to the COD-2020, but then turned to a growing armed group, the CPC. His strategy during the electoral cycle increased tensions (USIP 12.2020, p.2). He came back to CAR secretly in December 2019 (interview WER) after six years in exile. This was a risky endeavour since he is facing an international arrest warrant issued by the Central African Justice. He is accused of crimes against humanity and genocide, assassinations, arrests, sequestrations, arbitrary detentions, executions, and destruction of homes during his mandate as a President and after the 2013 coup which overthrew him. Despite those serious indictments, a few weeks after his return, he was able to meet with the current President, Faustin-Archange Touadéra. At that point, Touadéra was willing to make concessions and compromises. He seemingly wanted to please at least some parts of the opposition and some armed groups to ward off against one of his main purported fears: another coup (interview LZX).

The MINUSCA, ECCAS and African Union reacted with an official press release to this meeting (AU-ECCAS-UN 01.2020). This communiqué underlined that this meeting as well as others that the President had with former CAR heads of state (Michel Djotodia, Catherine Samba-Panza and Alexandre Nguendet) were part of the peace and reconciliation process. This stance was controversial considering Bozizé's charges. Even within these organizations, there were debates on whether MINUSCA should act upon the international arrest mandate and seek out Bozizé. In the end, it was decided to be too risky as it might cast doubt on the impartiality of MINUSCA. The fact that either a coalition with the opposition or a win by the main opposition leaders could be seen as detrimental to the peace process

made the UN especially careful of not appearing partial.

Faustin-Archange Touadéra's willingness to meet with former heads of state and in particular those like Bozizé who could be part of the opposition during the electoral campaign was applauded and lobbied for by the MINUSCA's Special representative of the Secretary-General. This is why "the joint statement was made, [...] politically that is exactly what we [the international community] want. Of course, legally, it is not ideal, since Bozizé has national and international arrest mandates against him"(interview YXC). This tension between the desire to see the government being inclusive and open the political landscape to the opposition and the problematic records of some of the most preeminent members of the opposition could have torn the international community. However, even though not everyone in the international community shared the enthusiasm of the guarantors and facilitator of the APPR (UN, ECCAS, and AU) as shown by their joint statement, there was no official disavowal of their position by other international and regional actors.

Indeed, a UN-led arrest of Bozizé could be considered as the UN authorities putting their thumb on the balance in favour of the incumbent government. Touadéra could easily have appeared as the less disruptive candidate for the international community as he would be expected to continue business as usual. Experts warned about these scenarios in 2020, ahead of the elections.

> "Both Bozizé and Djotodia have been implicated in serious human rights violations for their roles in the 2013-2015 violence. Should President Touadéra choose to ally with either to consolidate support ahead of the elections, this could damage the legitimacy of the government and impact upon efforts to fight impunity in the country, as called for in the peace agreement. Should Bozizé or Djotodia take power, the implications for the peace agreement and its implementation would likely be profound." (Knoope et al., 2020:p. 6)

The opposition was not the only political force that tried to delay the electoral process. On the government side as well, the support for the elections was not unwavering. "The government tried to postpone by changing the constitution and the opposition tried to postpone and was looking for an excuse to have another transition" (interview HGF). In general, the government and the Touadéra administration participated with the international actors in the preparations of the elections: list, material, personnel etc. especially through the ANE. However, in September 2020, serious discussions about postponing the elections were held between the facilitators and guarantors of the peace agreement and the main parties. Euphemistically called a *glissement* or a sliding of the elections, the government tried to change the constitution to make this postponement legal (interview HGF).

These demands took the form of a bill put forward in April of 2020 by the parties aligned with the President to change the Constitution to insert a disposition allowing for the postponement of the elections in case of *force majeure*. The COVID-19 pandemic was presented as a potential *force majeure*. The Constitutional Court rejected this bill.

> " [It] ruled, on June 5, 2020, that the modification would lead to a transition contrary to the spirit of the Constitution and rejected the bill voted by the deputies. In its decision, the Court also clarified that the impossibility of conducting the elections on time would create a legal vacuum which could only be remedied by holding a national consultation likely to produce a consensual solution to the 'glissement' in the calendar." (translated from French, MINUSCA-DHH 06.2021 p.10)

Just like the opposition, the government knew that a postponement would probably transform into

another political transition. This could align with Touadéra's plans to remain in power as indicated by one interviewee "Touadéra already tried to postpone the elections because of COVID and this idea was clearly rejected by the actors like France, US, Russia"(interview OL).

The armed groups and parts of the opposition used this bill to justify their claims to the delays. According to an interviewee, who was closely involved in the electoral process, some opposition candidates also saw more potential benefits in another political transition (interview VCX). Moreover,

> "part of the opposition hoped that a postponement would give Bozizé time to meet all the criteria to be eligible. Indeed, according to the electoral code, to be a presidential candidate, you must have resided in the CAR without interruption for at least twelve months before the election. Arriving in Bangui in December 2019, Bozizé would have been in the country only eleven months when he submitted his candidacy on November 10."(Translated from French, ICG 12.2020 p.26)

A few months later, the problems with Bozizé's candidacy with the Kwa na Kwa party, which was announced officially in July 2020, came rolling when the constitutional court ended up rejecting it on the basis of the sanctions and accusations against him by the United Nations. There was some confusion over why his candidacy was rejected; some would say that he did not meet the one-year residency criteria set by the electoral code (interview VCX), but the official decision of the constitutional court only mentions the morality argument (MINUSCA-DHH 06 2021, p.10). It is not only Bozizé who pushed for a delay and was dismissed by the constitutional court. In total, "[s]ix of the presidential candidates were unable to campaign and petitioned the Constitutional Court to delay the election, but were denied, and the election went ahead on the December 27" (USIP 01.2021, p.2-3).

At the time, there was ambivalence in the international community; some were relieved that this problematic candidate was no longer in the running to become President. They would praise the courage of the constitutional court to take this decision (interviews IKM and GFD) But others inferred that the elections would be dubbed biased against the opposition and were wary about Bozizé's next moves.

> "The invalidation of his candidacy has done little to reduce his destabilizing influence for one key reason. Although he is a deeply divisive figure, he has broad popular support among his ethnic group as well as with current and former military officers and political elites. As he continues to rally his supporters, it's clear he seeks power by other means."(USIP 12.2020, p.2)

In the end, "[t]his invalidation undoubtedly precipitated the creation of the CPC, of which François Bozizé probably became the coordinator, on February 18, 2021" (translated from French, MINUSCA-DHH 06 2021, p.10) which in turn also precipitated the tipping point.

The opposition also underscored the irregularities in the voter registration process: duplicates, more registration in parts of the country favorable to the Presidential party. In view of these dysfunctions, the government and the ANE extended the registration period, but kept the voting day calendar.

In reaction to these demands for postponement, "[t]he international community repeatedly expressed its commitment to respect for the constitutional order and its support for the holding of free, credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections within constitutional deadlines in order to allow the democratic process to run smoothly" (translated from French, MINUSCA-DHH 06.2021 p.10) These

difficulties did not, at first, alter the consensus among international interveners. But as the election days came, the pressure became more intense; this led to the tipping point.

Despite all the manoeuvring by the government and the opposition groups and in particular former President François Bozizé, the union of the international interveners held strong. Looking back on the year preceding the elections, one interviewee was convinced that it is the "resolve of the international community that persuaded politicians, like Bozizé and others, that the international community had one plan and no plan B. This plan was that the elections had to be held in December 2020" (interview VCX). The story of Bozizé and his attempt to participate in the elections first as a candidate then as a supporter of a coalition which tried to destabilize and stall the electoral process is indicative of the willingness of the international community to stick together. Despite the challenging and potentially controversial decisions on this case, the international community did not undercut each other publicly and presented a united front that supported the constitutional court and the government in moving forward with the elections.

6.3. The Days of the Elections: Tipping Point

The turning point happened rather quickly over the span of a few months between the two rounds of the elections from December 2020 to May 2021. As Gaël Grilhot, press correspondent in Bangui, writes in *Le Monde* a few days before the elections: "[t]he prospect of elections served as a detonator for an explosive situation" (translation from French, Le Monde 12.2020). The World Bank insists in its report about the importance of this 'inflection point' between the APPR and the electoral cycle.

> "There is only one way forward for CAR: to seize this inflection point and continue its journey towards recovery and stabilization, with urgent and unwavering commitment of the international community. In this critical moment, CAR, more than ever, needs strong support. The UN set the example by expanding MINUSCA's mandate to include implementation of the Peace Accord and organization of the elections. The UN Peace-building Commission has increased its engagement in the run-up to the elections. A high-level troika of the European Union, UN and the African Union carefully guides and monitors the peace process. Development actors – including the [World Bank] – need to maintain their strong response."(WB 08.2020, p.9)

This critical period would end up breaking up the unity and concord that were described in the previous section.

At first, tensions increased and the risk to the elections escalated as armed groups approached the capital. In reaction, some interveners took firm stances by sending military personnel and aircraft to dissuade disturbances to the elections days. Yet, this period was marked by growing dissensus among members of the international community which became more and more visible. It is the combination between stressors (armed groups gaining ground) and the response to these stressors (arrival of Wagner, stiffening of the positions) that would inextricably add up and lead to the tipping point. This ended up fracturing the system and forming a new one that is described as 'more complex' (EEAS 11.2021).

6.3.1. The G5+

One of the signs that the dissensus is growing is again found in the G5 and its press releases. During this period the name of the group changed slightly. Although interveners kept on the same discourse of determination regarding the elections, there was one noticeable difference (G5 + 01.2021). In December compared to the previous months, in the press declarations, they started using G5+ instead of G5 (G5 + 12.2020). Although the attendance of the Russian and Chinese embassies seemed to remain unchanged as the elections were approaching, the change of name reflects the growing splinter in the group. It underlined the presence in the group of more than the five traditional members, and already indicated a slight distancing from Russia.

6.3.2. Show of Force

In the days leading to the first round, with the advances of the CPC around Bangui, the interveners reacted with a show of force. In a similar vein to the previous period, the niches that each actor had occupied became more pronounced and new actors moved in the protector niche with French military planes, Wagner operatives, and Rwandan military personnel. The two latter would work alongside the CAR's armed forces.

MINUSCA was on alert since late November, multiplying patrols in sensitive neighborhoods, trying to fulfill its securing role. The actual campaign started two weeks before the election day and ended 24 hours before, hence from December 13 to December 26 2020. In mid-December, some candidates in Kaga Bandoro, Mbrès, Markounda, and Bangassou were assaulted by armed groups' members later affiliated with the CPC (EISA 12.2021, p.28). These groups also conducted raids in Ouham, Ouham Pendé, Ombella M'poko, Nana Mambéré, Mambéré kadéî, Lobaye and Ouaka (EISA 12.2021, p.28). The pattern of these attacks shows that the CPC was getting closer to Bangui. As a result, the COD-2020 officially withdrew its candidates from the campaign that had started two days earlier.

On December 19, The CPC was officially created and incorporated six armed groups coming from the traditionally opposed umbrella groups that are the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka. This group opposed the APPR and wanted the postponement of the elections claiming that the conditions were not met to hold them "and a new round of peace talks initiated"(USIP 01.2021, p.2). Charlotte Cosset, the RFI correspondent in Bangui, described in an article the rise of this coalition of the most powerful armed groups in the country.

> "This coalition of armed groups, some rivals and with different interests, seems to have found common ground to pursue its objectives. Some could use this opportunity to negotiate thanks to this new balance of power; others could have more bellicose intentions" (translated from French, RFI 12.2020).

This was the most intense and almost successful effort to derail the elections.

> "François Bozizé officially became the coordinator on February 18, 2021. In a declaration of December 19, 2020, the CPC announced 'to the Central African population, the great inexorable march of its columns towards total control of the territory'. Faced with the increased security risk, the Central African Government announced on December 21, 2020, three days after a CPC offensive described as an 'attempted coup d'état', the imminent

> arrival of 'Russian instructors' and soldiers from the Rwandan bilateral force intended to support the FACA and the ISF in managing the security crisis and support the Rwandan contingent of MINUSCA. These deployments, carried out within the framework of bilateral agreements with the Ministries of Defense of the respective countries, enabled the deployment in the country of these new actors notified to the United Nations Sanctions Committee." (Translated from French, (MINUSCA-DHH 06.2021, p.10)

On December 22nd, Jean-Serge Bokassa [5] also withdrew all the candidates from his party. These withdrawals from the main opposition movements benefited the independents (many of which are close with the MCU) and Presidential party (EISA 12.2021, p.28). The CPC released a communiqué announcing a cease-fire of 72 hours and asking the President to suspend the elections.

> "The CPC began attacking civilians, seizing strategic locales, and threatening to march on the capital, Bangui. Over 55,000 were displaced as a result. The CAR government accused Bozizé of attempting a coup through the CPC, and international partners stepped in to secure the elections. The violence caused significant disruption."(USIP 01.2021, p.2)

On the same day, Wagner confirmed that it sent 300 military instructors to the Central African Republic. These operatives fought alongside the FACA against the CPC. (RFI 12.2020) Rwanda also sent military personnel and France escalated its involvement. The day after the arrival of Wagner, the French military flew *mirage* planes over the cities where the armed groups are active, emptying the streets, to officially "demonstrate the condemnation by France of the destabilization attempts" (translated from French, Franceinfo 12.2020).

This rapid sequence between the Russian and French reactions already denotes the competition that will grow to (re)establish the influence of the two UNSC members over the CAR. The MINUSCA and the ANE continued with the distribution of electoral material as planned. At that time, the presence of Russian and Rwandan troops contributing to the safety of the provinces and Bangui was still welcomed by many international interveners. It was in this situation of heightened tensions that the elections took place.

The instability brought by the elections took some members of the international community by surprise. The stress that these elections and the associated events put on the system was beyond what was expected by many members of the international community. The choices made and the positions adopted during this time were particularly influential in the new equilibrium of the CAR ecosystem that emerged after the elections. This surprise is in line with the second condition of the tipping point: a precipitous change. This is in line with what is expected in the literature from tipping points. They "are hard to anticipate; their occurrence more often than not takes key actors by surprise"(Young, 2012).

6.3.3. First Round

The first round of the presidential and parliamentary elections took place on December 27th, 2020. This day was anticipated with some apprehension as "political tensions significantly increased around these elections as a result of the trust deficit between the Government and the opposition over the electoral process"(UNDP 05.2022, p. 5).

[5] Fifteenth son of the late dictator, Jean-Bedel Bokassa

In the end, the first election day happened without major security events, although many polling stations were unable to open (UNDP 05.2022, p. 5).

> "According to the National Election Authority, voting was carried out successfully in 2,560 out of 5,448 polling stations. In other polling stations, violence prevented polls from opening or ballots were destroyed by armed groups. Furthermore, thousands of displaced persons were unable to participate." (USIP 01.2021, p.2-3)

This is in line with the assessment by the EU, which states that "around 50% of polling stations could not open and others only partially. Overall, the estimate is that only 37% of the registered voters were actually able to vote"(EEAS 11.2021). "A total of 695,019 voters cast their ballots"(UNDP 05.2022, p. 6).

> "[T]he city of Bangui and its outskirts have remained calm. There was an atmosphere of a ghost town, with no motorbike taxi transport (banned by the government the day before) and no shops opened. The vote took place peacefully (97% of cases). However, a few very isolated incidents have been reported. These are the Yangato School (5th District) where there were stampedes linked to the crowds and the impatience to vote and the Benz-vi School (5th District) where a person was apprehended with several voter cards. Outside of Bangui, the security situation remained unstable." (translated from French, EISA 12.2021, p.30)

On a more mundane perspective, in Bangui, on that night of the first round of the elections, the French ambassador held a small reception at his residence. Some members of the international community, including the Russian ambassador, attended in order to follow the elections together (interview GFD). This social activity reinforces the idea that, at this point, there was still a sense of community among the international interveners.

Multiple electoral monitoring missions were conducted by the African Union with 20 observers, by ECCAS with 31 observers coming from 10 different states in the sub-region (translated from French EISA , P. 34). The violence perpetrated by armed groups concentrated mainly in the north-west and south-east "had an impact on voter participation and the number of polling stations that could open"(UNDP 05.2022, p. 5).

In early January, President Faustin-Archange Touadéra was reelected with 53.16% of the vote as announced by the president of the *Autorité nationale des elections* or the national authority for the elections. With this score, there was no need for a second round, as the threshold of 50% was surpassed. His reelection was not particularly surprising when considering the disorganization of the opposition (interview KJH). The means at Touadéra's disposal were considerable compared to the opposition.

> "This imbalance could also be noted in the financial resources committed by the candidates for the electoral campaign. Indeed, if the new law on political parties provides for a capping of campaign expenses (Article 59) and the reimbursement of ten percent of the authorized ceiling, these provisions have not been implemented on the occasion of the 2020 elections. Such a situation increased inequalities in favour of the MCU, which recorded, in addition to the presidential candidacy of its leader, President [Touadéra], those for the deputation of at least five (5) ministers of the government, including the Prime Minister." (Translated from French, EISA 12.2021, p.28)

In the same month, the CPC pursued its advance toward Bangui, despite the efforts to repel them from the FACA and its partners (Rwandan, Russian, and MINUSCA).

> "On January 13, 2021, for the first time, armed groups launched two simultaneous attacks, at the entrance to the southern and northern districts of Bangui, before being pushed back. This situation justified the establishment, by the government, of exceptional measures throughout the national territory (curfew and state of emergency) in order to restore tranquility and facilitate the action of regular forces. The deterioration of the security framework has led to a greater weakening of the humanitarian situation as well as that of human rights. Numerous allegations of persecution of opponents and attacks on human rights and the lives of citizens, perpetrated by CPC forces and government forces, in their areas of influence, were highlighted during this period. The operations to reconquer the territory launched, from February 2021, by the Central African Army and its Russian and Rwandan allies enabled the recapture, by government forces, of all the localities previously occupied by the armed groups of the CPC."(Translated from French, EISA 12.2021, p.14)

Later in January, the Presidential elections were validated by the Constitutional Court led by Chief Judge Daniele Darlan. This news was also relayed by the G5+ which officially offered its congratulations to Faustin-Archange Touadéra on January 21st (G5+ 01.2021). According to an official who witnessed the process, the members of the Constitutional Court

> "had little choice... if elections were not validated what would we have done? this would have led to another crisis." He continues: "We all know it in the diplomatic circles that the elections were not really fair but we avoid talking about it. This was a highly political validation, not a technical one. The constitutional court has a double role of protecting the law and the constitution in CAR but it is also there to ensure the good functioning of the state and the stability. It had to do the balance between those two obligations and it was wiser to validate the elections." (interview UHN)

In general, the costs of not validating the elections were seen as too high in terms of funds and efforts invested, security of the region, and reputation for the actors involved. This was obvious in the comments of the interviewees regarding these elections. One of them underlined that there was a lot on the ballot "it was not only about the Touadéra's administration, the APPR was on the ballot" (interview OL). These elections were the next step after the signature of the APPR. It was a way to continue to turn the page on the conflict and normalize politics in the CAR. By offering a possibility for the armed groups' leaders to get elected, this might be an incentive to get involved in politics without bearing arms. In another interview, involved in the funding process admitted that "[w]ith that much funding and donations it was not going to be a failed elections"(interview APO).

This was not only a question of investment, there were also a "lot of concerns regarding the stability of the country and the region surrounding the elections"(interview APO). If the court had not validated the elections, the fears of another transition could have materialized, leaving the CAR in a vacuum. As seen in the previous section, the international community has applied a lot of pressure to make sure that those elections happened; if they would not have been validated, it could be considered as a failure of these members and their activities in CAR since the outset of the crisis in 2013. The fears of destabilization and the need for another political transition that had led the international community to unite in the previous period were dissipating. However, the arrival of new actors would create new motives for instabilities among the international interveners.

6.3.4. Second Round

In parallel to the presidential elections, parliamentary ones were held, but the process of voting in all the representatives was much longer. The first round of the elections only confirmed the elections of 22 of the 140 seats to be filled in the national assembly. On March 14th, 2020, partial elections were held in 68 districts where security concerns prevented the elections in the first round, and a second round was organized on the same day for 50 districts where no candidate had a majority vote.

This voting day was conducted in a calmer situation, "particularly because the positions and numbers of the CPC were significantly affected by the offensives carried out by the FACA and other security personnel" (MINUSCA-DHH 06.2021, p.12). [6] Residual elections were then held until late July 2021 to confirm all the remaining member of parliaments. For those remaining rounds of elections, only the AU sent observers. This observer mission had to rely on the logistical support of the MINUSCA. The report by the AU is contradicted by many interviewees who told me that the electoral mission could not travel outside of Bangui (interviews UHN and CXY).

Right after the elections, the switch to another state of the system was still not seen as inexorable. Although this period was quite tense, a lot of members of the international community were hoping that they could put that turbulent time behind them. Some also hoped that after this period the Russian and Rwandan troops were going to leave the country. Rwandan troops left in June 2021 EEAS 11.2021, however, Wagner continued its partnership with the FACA. The niche they had moved in as a protector would not be left empty. By entering the country at a time they were arguably needed in view of the CPC's advances, Wagner changed the ecosystem and found their place as close partners of the armed forces. A space that had been reserved for other actors previously (MINUSCA and EUTM). A campaign including FACA and Wagner to regain territory from the armed group started.

Many interveners already recognized the fracture that the elections created and saw negatively the arrival of Wagner. A few 100 Wagner operatives were the last straw that broke the camel's back. This is where the concept of tipping point is especially helpful as it is a rather small increment that tips over the system. But this small change comes at the end and as a result of a long chain of events that slowly accumulated.

But as the next section will explore, this was not the case and this presence and the tensions that emerged during the elections. Quite cynically, a member of the diplomatic corps expressed that "in the CAR when there are elections, everyone applauds, but we know that it is as rigged as everywhere else. Sometimes, it goes our way and other times it does not, so we can't complain either way"(interview GFD).

6.4. Legacies of the Elections

This last section discusses the legacies of this crisis period and describes the new equilibrium that formed after the elections. The system tips over, the roles were reshuffled, the basis for the system were shaken, and it is almost impossible to revert back to the previous state. Even though they wanted to move past it, the relations among members of the international community were deeply affected. Fractures appeared between members that already had tense relations. Even between close partners, it put a strain on the relationships.

[6] This expression of 'other security personnel' encompasses the Wagner and Rwanda.

The transformations that were operated by the tipping point are concisely summarized by one quote collected in July 2021:

> "The problem is that now the international community is no longer speaking the same language. Before the elections, we were using the same language, we were on the same line to make the election a success and we were all mobilized toward that goal. We put our resources and our work toward that goal. Just before the beginning of the elections in December, it began to change and it got even worse after the elections. And it got even worse when the Russians and Rwandans arrived. This alliance [of the CAR authorities] with Russia has just set the whole thing on fire."(interview UHN)

This interviewee's observations account for the basic narrative of this chapter: an irreversible change from one state to another among this LRC.

6.4.1. Monday's Friends

As for the other periods, the G5 evolved to reflect the new system that emerged. The Russian and Chinese representatives were no longer invited and the meetings changed location. The reasons evoked to explain those changes were that ambassadors were only there to take notes and report back to their capitals; they did not engage in the discussions (interviews KJH and HGF). Previously held in MINUSCA headquarters, the meetings were then moved to the residencies of the French and American ambassadors. This relocation did not please everyone in the attendees of the G5, in particular African regional organizations (UHN) who saw this new meeting point as less neutral.

The G5 also changed its name again to become colloquially, but not officially: the Monday's friends. But even in this smaller forum, the consensus does not seem to be easy. One evidence of that is the reducing pace of release of common communiqués by the G5. Even if some were published, the topic they tackled was relatively uncontroversial, i.e. food shortage and the risk of malnutrition. The more sensitive issues are not approached, much to the dismay of some members of the international community. They see the important violations of human rights committed by Wagner, the FACA, and armed groups and the resulting degradation of the living conditions of the population that have been detailed by the UN (UNHR 04.2021). The absence of reaction of the G5 seems shocking (interview DSA), especially since many of the organizations and embassies still participating in the G5 are involved in the training of the strategic advising of the ministry of defence and *Forces armées centrafricaines* or Central African Armed Forcess.

6.4.2. How Full is the Glass?

The interveners do not retell the same story when discussing what happened during this tipping point period. The roles evolved to adapt to this new situation and the growing presence of new actors like Wagner. MINUSCA forces were replaced in some instances and in some regions by Wagner operatives. EU missions modified their mandates significantly. This culminated in a complete reorganization of the system in terms of functions and structure, which called into question the presence of the international actors in CAR.

Members of the LRC cannot even share a common assessment of the successes and failures of the elections. One illustration of this is the diverging narratives that emerged about the elections. Using the

same figures, interviewees told very different stories about the elections' results and aftermaths. Those stories can be categorized into two main camps: the glass half-empty and the glass half-full perspectives.

In the first camp, people saw the elections as a failure on the part of the international interveners; they would argue that "all the wrong indications went up including violence" (interview APO). They question the merits of the elections 'at all cost' strategy. "With a little hindsight now ,we can ask whether it was wise to do so [pursuing this strategy], because it created the impression in the population that we were the ones managing the country" (interview HGF). Along the same lines, another interviewee admitted: "The international community underestimated the destabilization brought about by the elections. In part by the CPC and Bozizé. We saw elections as an absolute good, but it can also create a lot of problems. There is this narrative about the magical power of election, but that does not work" (interview KJH).

The issues linked with Bozizé's ruling were a recurrent theme in the interviews when discussing the legitimacy and impact of the elections.

> "I see why [Bozizé] was not allowed to run, it made sense, but it also gave ammunition to the idea that the elections were not fair. In the end, we had a worst-case scenario. It was hard to watch the CPC attacks. It was a bad sign, so close to the elections. We can understand why people were frustrated with seeing the elections going forward despite all that insecurity. The population and opposition feel disenfranchised and that the elections happened in a less than adequate climate." (interview OL)

Other actors saw the elections as rather successful, citing the participation rate, "[w]e had a good participation rate with overall 66%-65% of participation. In some regions we got a participation of 98% and some with 38% in places where armed groups are active" (interview VCX). The same interviewee underlined that there is no perfect timing to hold the elections and that they could not be delayed: "I admit that the context is not ideal, but we cannot let perfect be the enemy of the good" (interview VCX).

The UNDP's assessment of the electoral cycle unsurprisingly also falls in that category. The considerable investment of this organization as a logistician in this election left little space for self-criticism.

> "Voter turnout was high for these elections, demonstrating popular interest in the electoral process and selecting representatives. The turnout for those December 2020 polling stations able to open was 76 percent, but this was only 32.25 percent of all registered voters due to the number of polling stations that were not able to open.92 Turnout declined slightly for subsequent rounds, but was still 73 percent for March 2021 and 62 percent for May 2021. Data for July 2021 remains unavailable. With DPC strengthened through the IT support provided by UNDP, ANE was able to tabulate and announce the election results within the legal timeframe. This also increased the transparency of the efforts, as ANE was able to provide parties and candidates with copies of the results by polling station, enabling them to compare the official results with the information collected by their party agents, and increasing the credibility and acceptance of the results, as well as voter confidence. Big-picture data available through the Varieties of Democracy Index nonetheless show relatively little change in ANE capacity from the 2015-2016 process to 2020-2021, with improvements notable in voter registration and election irregularities, but a dramatic decline in the broader electoral environment. [..] The DPC was notably equipped with two servers (one main server and one off-site backup server to safeguard the voters' list) as well as with other IT equipment such as printers (to produce voter IDs), generators, etc." (UNDP 05.2022, p.24-30)

One interviewee highlighted the idea that the money invested was crucial to the retrospective assessment, "the objective was to ensure that the funding partner (mostly EU and WB) did not see their contribution wither away [7], that the money they invested provided correct elections" APO.

Another transition period seemed unbearable to many in the international organizations and embassies. They also made the argument by comparing CAR to its neighbouring countries. Mentioning that contrarily to other countries in the region which are dictatorships, at least CAR has elections that are mostly free and fair. Those points of comparison, the lack of alternatives, and the fear of the destabilization that it could bring. This camp also underlines the more lasting legacies of the support offered during this electoral cycle, namely the creation of a voting registration process (UNDP 05.2022, p.vii). Those two narratives are at odds and point to two very different conclusions on the role of the international interveners in the CAR.

6.4.3. New Niches

Wagner increased its presence after the elections, helping the FACA to regain more territories. The Central African government continues relying more heavily on Russian help for security and defence, including regarding border control. It is still unclear the exact provisions of the agreement between the CAR and Russia, especially on how Wagner is compensated for its services.[8]

Facing this growing presence of this relatively new actor, multinational organizations had to adapt their activities. According to Erica Picco from the International Crisis Group, the MINUSCA retreated to the protection of civilians' portion of its mandate. This is also confirmed by an interviewee: "[m]aybe as long as the Russians are there, we should concentrate on a few key sectors and with task force of a few countries" (interview GFD). This reshuffling and refocusing of the mandate prevailed among many actors.

The assessments, especially in terms of human rights violations and violence, of the electoral period also shed a new light on this year. The MINUSCA documented 526 cases of human and humanitarian right violations and abuses amounting to more than 1,221 victims, including 144 civilian deaths. "As a result of its investigations, the [Human Right Division] was able to establish that armed groups affiliated with the CPC were responsible for 286 (54%) of the incidents and 730 (60%) of the victims. FACA, ISF and other security personnel were responsible for 240 (46%) incidents affecting 491 (40%) victims"(MINUSCA-DHH 06.2021, p.6).

These numbers underline that the armed groups and the government forces are in similar proportions responsible for the attacks on the civilian population. This realization was revelatory for many working for international and regional organizations, who became reluctant to continue programs that supported, trained, and equipped the FACA and other state forces (interview DSA).

The French and American embassies have followed the same logic, but not to the same degree. They both halted their military cooperation and direct budgetary aid. The EU delegation has been more reticent to voice its disagreement, trying to keep the conversation with CAR authorities going. However, the two missions (EUTM and EUAM) have halted significant parts of their mandate.

> "In 2020, the Council of the European Union extended the mandate of the EU Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM CAR). However, in December

[7] The exact French expression used is *'réduite à peau de chagrin'*.

[8] Rumours are talking about an agreement on the monopoly over exports of mining resources.

> 2021, it suspended its specific mission to train Central African soldiers after it was found that some FACA operating together with bilaterally deployed security personnel and other security personnel were involved in violations of international humanitarian and human rights law." (UNIDIR 04.2022)

The language used in the communications of some actor also changed. For example, the EEAS report on the CAR situation became much more direct. An open discourse that was more diplomatic and subdued before the elections. There is a recognition that the presence of Russian and Wagner changed the environment and made it more complex.

> "The establishment of a strong [Russian/Wagner] presence in CAR, with increased influence on decision makers in Bangui, has placed international actors like MINUSCA, but also the EU CSDP Missions, in a more complex environment. It will now be necessary to support the CAR government in finding options to weaken this influence, propose viable alternatives and to monitor if this will lead into concrete actions. The future positioning of the CAR government related to [Wagner/FACA] operations, including their [human rights] and [International Humanitarian Law] violations; the implementation of the commonly defined objectives of the National Defence Plan (NDP); and [Russian] influence on the ISF will need to be closely monitored and assessed, as will the predation of the economic sector. This analysis will determine the future EU CSDP footprint in CAR, which will be recommended in the upcoming holistic Strategic Review of EUTM and EUAM." (EEAS 11.2021, p.6)

6.5. Conclusion: Another Electoral Cycle

In this new ecosystem, the international community is now turning toward a new project: the organization of the first municipal elections in more than 30 years. Some actors see those elections as an opportunity to have members of the armed groups get involved in politics (interview YQ). As an interviewee confirmed, participation of the armed group officers in the elections is one of the objectives of the peace agreement (interview XYL). Some think that it will help to decentralize and bring local development (interview XYL) as well as "co-opting the illegality" by having armed group officers running for mayoral and city councillor positions. He added that the armed groups are already collecting a form of taxes with their roadblock; being involved in local politics would allow them to have a legal way to collect revenues and put them toward the communities (interview HGF). This goes along with the recommendations that "the armed groups play a more positive role as local representatives, without letting everything they do pass" (interview YQ).

Another encouraging sign is the existence of an electoral management organ.

> "ANE is now in a better position to support the local elections expected for 2022, in terms of the equipment and infrastructure funded by the Basket Fund, as well as work with the UNDP, MINUSCA and other experts on policies and procedures for voter registration and elections, public communications, logistics and operations. In addition, ANE has the fully-equipped DPC and voters list, which according to experts, with periodic updating, can be reused for up to three electoral cycles. Institutional capacity-building is becoming more of a focus since the national elections, to help ANE develop its strategic plan." (UNDP 05.2022)

Others are even skeptical about the fact that those elections would be able to be held at all, arguing that the international interveners cannot wait to have the municipal elections that the 'things' need to evolve positively before that (interview CXY). But again, this could backfire, since for the last three decades people in these positions have been appointed by the central government, losing this reservoir of positions to foster allegiance to the government in place in Bangui would vanish and this might create more tensions. This was also confirmed by some of the interviewees who started in 2021 questioning the democracy and elections at all cost axiom of the international intervention.

There are two major ground work projects that need to be opened before the municipal elections can move forward. First, populations have been displaced during the last years and therefore the electoral list needs to be updated, and secondly, the electoral district needs to be delineated. This new electoral process is already the space of debates:

> "The EU ambassador was again on her own in wanting to pass the electoral bill in one round, while the UN and WB want to cut it into parts to make it more digestible by the assembly. As one of the main donors, it is normal that the EU wants to tell how they feel about how the money they spend should be allocated, but the EU cannot make those decisions alone; it should consult the rest of the international community."(interview FGH)

6.5.1. Final Remarks

This section presented the elections as a tipping point in the development of the LRC in Central African Republic. Before the elections, the international community gradually ended up on the same page and was able to put pressure on the Central African political actors in order to hold the elections despite the security concerns. The months during which the elections took place created a reaction in this community that ended up dislocating itself. Some viewed the elections as a temporary hectic period, but others saw it as a more consequential event that would force them to reassess their partnership with the Touadéra administration.

Wagner has been present on the Central African territory for a few years when the elections happened, but the destabilization brought by this critical period became an opportunity to move into a niche and to take more space. As this new actor took more and more space in the ecosystem, others suspended their activities or are thinking about limiting their actions to fewer niches. In conjunction with other areas of intervention, I argue that the evolution of the international community is characterized by technical or operational disagreement before the elections. They centred around questions of where and how to deploy the programs put in place by the international community. Meanwhile, the debates after the elections are much broader; they involve the role and even the presence of the international community in CAR.

Implementation of a Program
Feedback Effects in the Creation of Security Units

La nature a horreur du vide

Aristotle

7.1. Introduction

A common element of the post-conflict processes is the dismantlement of the armed groups which took part in the conflict. This usually comes as a result of lengthy negotiations between the national authorities and the armed groups' leaders. There are several avenues that can be employed towards this objective: (re)integration into civilian communities, power-sharing through geographical division, participation in local or national government, etc. They can be particularly sensitive as they involve removing the tools of warfare and rest upon the willingness of groups and individuals to change paths. These efforts usually involve the participation of international and regional interveners who have the resources and expertise to implement them as they have done so in other sites of operations.

The Central African Republic is no exception, as one of the most debated provisions of the APPR was the creation of *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units. This hybrid form of military integration brings together in the same camp: security forces personnel and former armed groups members. They are based on the blueprints of mixed military groups which were part of peace agreements elsewhere (Baaz and Verweijen, 2013; Verjee, 2022).

As for many of the security-related issues in the CAR, these units are implemented in partnership between the host government and external interveners. Many actors involved in this program believed in its potential to jump-start a positive dynamic of trust-building between the armed groups and the Central African state authorities (interview XCV). The international and regional organizations saw it as an opportunity to tie the armed groups to the peace agreement process and to ensure security in rather inaccessible parts of the Central African Republic territory for the state authorities (interview YXC).

The niches that each organization picked seemed quite sensible as it both corresponded to their capabilities and requirements of the program. But in fact, the implementation of this program was much more complex, "training, vetting, and funding issues, in addition to disagreements around their span and area of control, have continued" (Knoope et al., 2020:p. 4). This is not unexpected to see international programming encounter glitches and delays, but in this case, a form of complex dynamic emerged: a snowball effect. Without a lead institution taking the main decisions and giving a general orientation to the program, the USMS went forward based on small discrepancies which turned into diverging views from international and regional interveners.

Again with this chapter, we change the focus, this LRC takes place at the sub-national level. The first empirical chapter was concerned with the creation of peace agreements, the negotiations surrounding these agreements, and the missions and operations launched to monitor and enforce these agreements. It illuminated in particular the regional dynamics. The second one told the story of the last major electoral cycle in the CAR and describes it as a tipping point between two systems. As these elections were held throughout the country, and the second one's focus is national. This third one focuses on a program that targeted certain parts of the Central African territories. Its level is sub-national focus and moves away from the capital.

7.1.1. Argument

The *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units program is representative of the dynamics that can be found in an environment where multiple organizations interact. Like many other programs implemented in part by international interveners, multiple stakeholders participate in different capacities without a clear hierarchical structure or even a main project manager. There is an entanglement of interveners from planning, to implementation and monitoring. This creates a localized regime complex which revolves around the creation of these units.

As explained in the theoretical framework, localized regime complex's dynamics are akin to complex system' ones. Unlike simple system, in complex ones relationships are non-linear. Simply put, cause and effect are not necessarily proportionally correlated. "[S]mall changes can have striking and unanticipated effects, whereas great stimuli will not always lead to drastic changes in a system's behavior" (Willy et al., 2003:p. 12). This is also connected to the outputs produced by the system, in this case the program, which can amount to less or more than the sums of efforts put in. Non-linear dynamics are one of the ways in which complex systems change.

This is where the snowball effect comes into play. With this type of effect: a thing is put into motion, gets bigger and faster until it longer can be controlled. It describes how small actions or decisions can accumulate over time and lead to significant results, much like a snowball gaining size as it rolls down a hill. Initial conditions are especially important in these kinds of effects. In complex systems, even tiny variations in initial conditions can lead to vastly different outcomes. The snowball effect amplifies the influence of initial conditions. If the starting point is slightly favorable or unfavorable, it can result in increasingly larger advantages or disadvantages over time. In this case, a small discrepancy can lead to larger and larger divergent views on the program at hand. Initial conditions set the stage for the snowball effect to take place, and small changes can lead to large, often unpredictable consequences.

This effect is characterized by its accelerating pace, where early actions build upon themselves, eventually reaching a point of rapid and exponential growth. The first phase of the snowball effect is the initial discrepancy, which marks the beginning of the process. This is typically a small action, event, or decision that, on its own, may seem insignificant but has the potential to set off a much larger chain of events. At this stage, the effects are still relatively minor but carry the potential to grow.

Once the trigger is set in motion, the process enters the early growth phase, where the initial action begins to gain traction. At this stage, the momentum starts to build, but the effects are still noticeable only in small, incremental ways. As the momentum increases, the process moves into the acceleration phase, where the snowball effect truly takes off. This is when the growth starts to compound rapidly, and the impact becomes much larger than the initial spark. Events begin to multiply, and the process gains speed, with earlier actions snowballing into more significant outcomes. Eventually, the snowball reaches a critical mass. At this stage, its impact on the surrounding environment becomes much broader

and effects can spill over.

7.1.2. Environment

The Central African Republic extends 620,000 square kilometres for a population a little over 5 million. The capital is situated in the South along the Ubangi river which delimits the border with Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Central African Republic is one of the least developed countries in the world in terms of transportation (Müller-Crepon et al., 2021; Pacific, 2020). The country is landlocked, there are no railways, one river port in the capital, and three paved airports. There are two trans-African highways going through CAR and they are in large parts unpaved (Mbouombouo Ngapouth et al., 2022). The main trade route is connecting Douala in Cameroon to Bangui. Almost all of the importation and exportation coming from ground transportation travel along this road (Minfegue, 2023).

There are huge disparities in the density of roadways, as evidenced by this map of the roads. The western part of the country has a network of roads connecting it to the neighbouring countries (Chad and Cameroon) and the south is partially connected to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Meanwhile, in the eastern and northern regions, more sparsely populated, roads are also more sparse. Hence, the villages and towns in those *préfectures* are more insulated from the rest of the country.

> "CAR's mostly Muslim northeast is described as the most extreme hinterland in north-central Africa, with completely inaccessible overland contact with the capital for half the year and a local population that does not speak the national language"(Giroux et al., 2009:p. 10).

A popular saying states that "the state stops at PK12" at the outskirts of Bangui (Brown and Zahar, 2015:p. 16). The government has been accused of having little interest in controlling the territory and only being involved in some strategic areas (specific towns, roads, and territories with natural resources) (Lombard, 2018; Lombard and Carayannis, 2015). The figures are disputed, but in general, observers of CAR politics agree that prior to Wagner's arrival, the central government controlled around 30% of the territory. The rest of the territory is controlled by various armed groups, militias, and self-defense groups, in particular in the northeast, northwest, and the southeast (Rusch, 2021; Schouten, 2022). This vast hinterland is where the natural resources are found and activities like mining, transhumance, conservation, and lumbering are taking place.

Under these geographical and governance conditions, the armed forces of the CAR have always been a sensitive topic in the CAR.

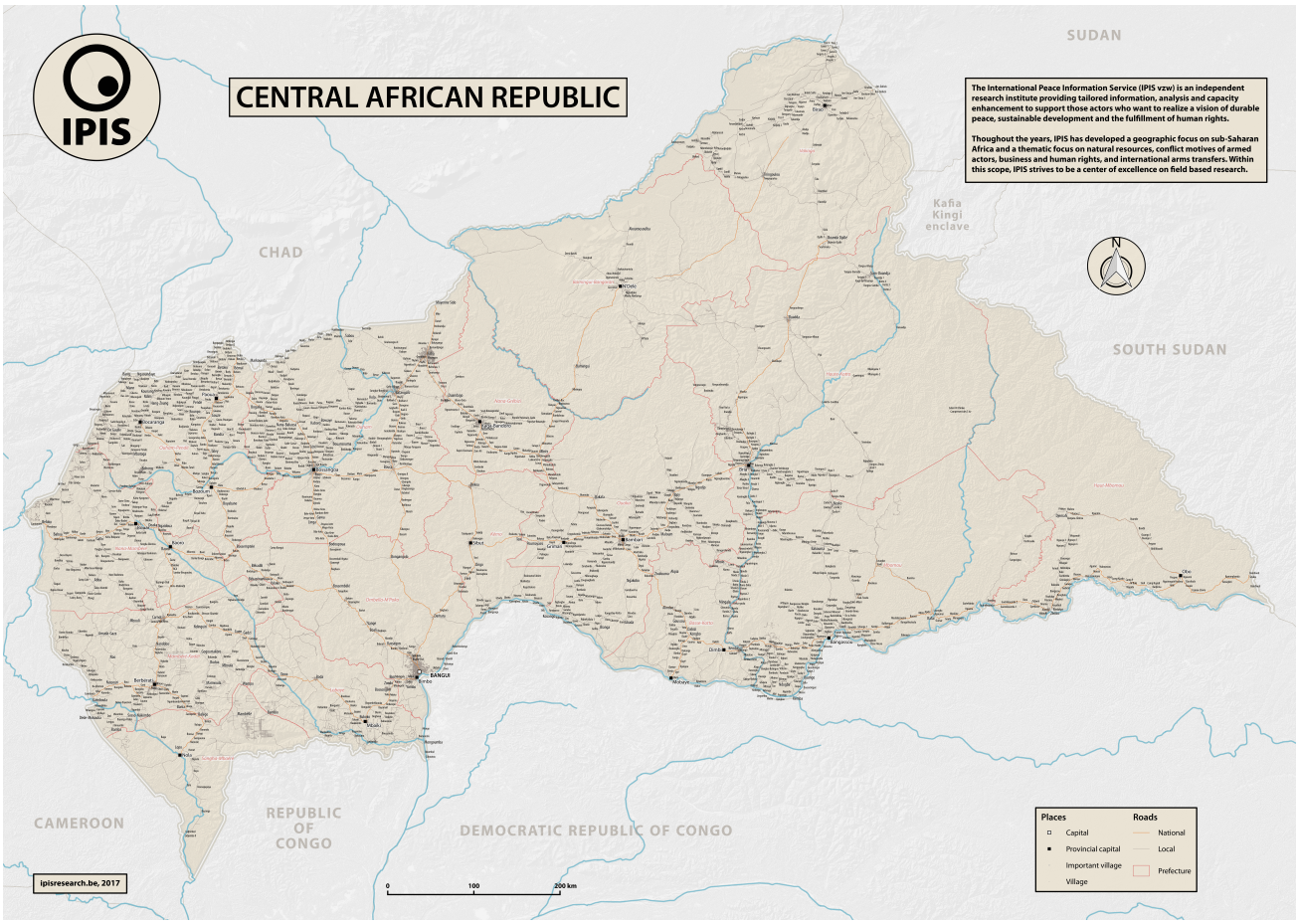
> "Successive presidents have used the FACA to increase the wealth of the ruling elites and enhance and consolidate presidential authority. This has been done by instrumentalizing and ethnicizing the FACA. Over the years, they have created a 'lasagna army' by building their own layer of loyalists on top of previous ones." (Hickendorff and Acko, 2021:p. 3)

However, the CAR has never had a substantial army in terms of size (Glawion et al., 2018:p. 282). In the late 2010s, the estimates were around 2000 active members, and 7000 enrolled members (Glawion et al., 2018:p. 283). As other state's assets, they are mostly confined to the capital. It famously folded in front of threats to the capital (Vircoulon, 2017:pp. 2–3).[1]

[1]For example, when the Séléka took over Bangui, only the South African troops offered resistance.

Figure 7.1. Map of the roads

(a) Alexandre Jaillon and Milan Nublat (2017) *Conflict Mapping in the CAR*, IPIS.



All these elements together leave quite a large territory both physically and conceptually for the establishment of the USMS. The virtual absence of state security forces outside of Bangui concedes a large space for the establishment of units. Moreover, as the next sections will detail, the size and scope of activities of the FACA also leave an opportunity for the development of an integrated force.

7.1.3. Subject Matter and its Niches

This LRC falls within the larger security regime complex. Brosig (2013b:p. 175) outlines the emergence of this regime complex and links it to the security threats on the continent (coups, SSR, piracy, etc). The creation of the USMS is one of the security reforms that the CAR government has undertaken. This LRC is built around the participation in the *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units (USMS). As one of the main provisions of the peace agreement (APPR), *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units (USMS) are joint military units that include 40% of defense and interior forces members and 60% of former members of the armed groups. These units were meant to partake in the state security apparatus in securing the transhumance paths, the mines, protecting the local population and participating in state restoration.

They were to be deployed in the three main regions (West, East and Centre) away from the capital. They constitute a substantial portion of the armed forces of the CAR. Each unit has 662 troops, in total this amounts to a force of almost 2000 people (Hickendorff and Acko, 2021:p. 7), "equivalent to more than a quarter of the size of CAR's national military, [...], which, as of 2019, had an estimated strength of 7–8 000 personnel" (Verjee, 2022:p. 100).

Coming from the 14 armed groups which signed the APPR, the parties negotiated intricate calculations to fit former armed groups' members and units. Verjee details these tallies:

> "As each group is not represented equally within each unit, the sequencing of implementation risks rewarding some groups before others. In theory, the asymmetric dilution of rebel groups sees a group's smaller contingent in one unit offset by a larger presence in another unit. The Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC), for example, is scheduled to have only 40 troops in the northeast USMS, but 200 in the southeast USMS." (Verjee, 2022:p. 101)

After the signature of the APPR, USMS were to be operational within 60 days, thus by April 2019. USMS were designed as a temporary measure lasting two years. Afterwards, the ex-combatants were to be reintegrated in other corps habillés or law-enforcement agencies (military, gendarmerie, police and forest guards) (Debos and Glasman, 2012) or be integrated into civilian life (interview KLZ].[2]

One of the main idiosyncrasies of this LRC is a sense that there was potential lost in reputation that could happen as a result of failure. Organizing elections and negotiating peace agreements can be extremely difficult, but there were real concerns that if these units were to fail e.i. the armed groups' members would rejoin their former groups with the weapons provided in this program, the reputational costs nationally and internationally would be high. The concerns over a scandal were often expressed by my interlocutors (interviews RF, MV, PAS and TH). The concept of ecological niche is again elemental to understand this LRC. The number of niches is again expanding compared to the two previous chapters. The main niches to have the realization of this program are logistician, sponsor, trainer, monitoring, and builder.

[2]This ambiguity would participate in the snowball effect.

The logistician is making sure that the technical aspects of the program are executed. This includes vetting the personnel, bringing the personnel and material to the location, etc. Contrary to the elections and the peace agreements, there were more subcontractors involved in this project. Builder' role is specific to this ecosystem, since the creation of the USMS meant building brick and mortar infrastructures to house them. The sponsor role, like in the previous LRC, is to provide the funding for the implementation of the program. In this instance, the funding scheme was quite complex as the EU's money was funnelled through the African Union Observer Mission in the Central African Republic. The trainer role was only indirectly filled by members of the LRC ICG 06.2019. External interveners did not train the USMS themselves; they rather trained the trainers who would then interact with the units. The monitoring niche is to ensure that the program is unfolding as planned. Similar to the monitor's role in the elections, this means sending observers to account for the realities in the field. Observers have conducted interviews, reviewed the troops, conducting audits, etc.

7.1.4. Actors

The main interveners of the CAR participated in the USMS in various capacities. These roles appeared quite complementary and corresponded to the strengths and abilities of the interveners. Formally, there was a match between the actors' roles and the environmental conditions.

African Union
As discussed previously, the AU spearheaded the negotiations that led to the signature of the APPR. This involvement resulted in the African Union along with another regional organization,Economic Community of Central African States, becoming guarantors of this peace agreement. This role entails responsibilities regarding the implementation of this peace agreement and its provisions.

The many accomplishments that those regional organizations made toward peace and the relationships that they had developed with armed groups' leaders and the CAR government made them especially suited to be also involved with the USMS and their implementation (interview TH). Two major tasks were taken upon by the African Union: the compensations to be received by ex-combatants and the monitoring of the training and activities in the camps. The African Union took charge of sending military observers to the camps to monitor the training and operations of the USMS and to compensate the former armed groups' members who are part of the units. The African Union Observer Mission in the Central African Republic has 40 military observers dedicated to this monitoring (EEAS 11.2021 p.18).

European Union
The EU took on two main tasks. One through its delegation and the other through its training mission. Similarly to the electoral process, the main role of the EU was to contribute financially (EEAS 11.2021 p.18). The funding earmarked for this program was funneled through the AU's mission in Bangui. [3]

In collaboration with MINUSCA, the EUTM trained 34 military officers and 19 interior security forces officers, as part of a program called: 'train the trainers' (Hickendorff and Acko, 2021:p. 7). These 53 officers went on to become the instructors for the *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units.

[3]This funding scheme would complicate some of the distribution of the money to the participants.

United Nations
The UN is a key implementing partner for the post-conflict provisions all around the world. These efforts are costly, hence few organizations outside of the UN have the capabilities to implement them ((Rusch, 2021:p. 18)). In the CAR, the United Nations through the MINUSCA is involved in many of the aspects of the USMS (MINUSCA 08.2021). It supported technically and logistically the national unit in charge of the USMS by deploying disarmament and demobilization teams. The UN is one of the only actors in CAR with the material resources to travel to remote locations. "For example, there are areas that are inaccessible by road so MINUSCA takes care to transport [the] teams by aircraft"(MINUSCA 08.2021).

Subcontractors
Other important actors in the deployment of these units were the subcontractors, which were hired to build the camps. This role changed hands between the International Organisation for Migration and the *Fondation suisse de déminage* or Swiss Demining Foundation. Both of those organizations' mandates traditionally do not involve building military camps, but they were selected because of their expertise with engineering and constructing in remote and difficult-to-access locations.

This chapter is organized chronologically around the main questions that arose while implementing this program. This string of questions shows how, from a rather small issue, larger and larger disagreements emerge, ultimately leading to the collapse of the program and its resumption by other actors (i.e. Wagner).

7.2. Initial State: To be or not to be DDR?

The first small disagreement that appeared regarding this program is the tension on whether it belongs in larger Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration efforts (interview PAS) or if it is a separate program in its own right that only shares some features of the demobilization and disarmament parts of the DDR. This was the initial decision that the members of the LRC had to take under which headings would this program fall, in terms of budget, human resources, and reporting.

One the one side, some at United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic wanted to separate this issue from the rest of its DDR activities, while other actors including the EU delegation viewed it as one of the reintegration options for former armed groups' members. Relatedly, there were no real discussions on the exit strategy, basically what would happen to participants after the end of the two-year program. Basically, if it was not a DDR program per se, one could expect that the USMS trained forces would integrate into another military, police or security corps. On the contrary, if the USMS was ultimately a DDR effort, we would see the participants find a place in civilian society. International and regional interveners diverged on those questions and although they can seem quite mundane, in a complex system, small rifts can become major strife.

First of all, it is necessary to quickly discuss what Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration entails.

> "DDR is a political process and a critical component of transition processes from violence to peace. It seeks to contribute to the transformation of ex-combatants into peaceful citizens, either reintegrated into communities from their communities of origin, or communities that they would choose to move into, to begin their new lives" (Bangura et al., 2024:p. 5).

These changes of life trajectories can be hard to achieve, as it is required simultaneously: co-occurring processes, multiple stakeholders, and a swift pace. International and regional interveners devise projects that need to balance between lengthy multi-stakeholder consultations and decision-making processes, and a timely process that encourages ex-group members to sever ties and begin their 'new lives'.

DDR being such an important issue in the CAR politics that there is a ministry devoted to this issue. There are also several national entities that have been created to work on DDR. The central one is the *Unité d'exécution du Programme national de désarmement, démobilisation, réintégration et rapatriement* or Program Execution Unit national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation (UEPNDDRR). This unit is in charge of the implementation of the DDR. This unit was set up in collaboration with international interveners.

Discussing DDR in the Central African Republic and Libya, Rusch (2021:p. 12) describes those contexts as extremely fragile.

> "[They] are characterized by an asymmetry of power between the non-state armed groups and the state. Power is a fuzzy concept, but in certain situations, nonstate actors are arguably more powerful than the state. They may hold a larger proportion of territory, control more natural resources, or have a greater arsenal of weapons at their disposal. Furthermore, the state's governance capacity may be absent, weak, or seen as illegitimate and thus a threat to large parts of the population. In addition, outside actors often back the armed groups or the state, leading to a situation of rapidly changing power dynamics and proxy war."

These challenges of balance of power identified by Rusch2021 would complicate the tasks of this LRC. After the signature of the APPR, Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units were to be launched quickly and almost simultaneously. After the disarmament and demobilization, there were three main options for the reintegration of former armed groups' members. They can "integration in the national armed forces (FACA, police or gendarmerie), integration into civilian life through socioeconomic training and resources, finally integration into the USMS" (MINUSCA 08.2021). However, two of those three options are separated from the conventional logic of DDR. Since entering the FSI or USMS is not really reintegrating civilian life, it is still being part of the *corps habillés* or security forces. Those that emphasized this inconsistency viewed the USMS more as an security sector reforms-related program.

> "[SSR] is the political and technical process of improving state and human security by making security provision, management and oversight more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, the rule of law and respect for human rights."(DCAF 11.2022)

The hope was that this program would build trust between FACA and armed groups (interview NH), provide operational elements to the security apparatus, and offer incentives to the armed groups to partake.

> "[M]ilitary integration provides rebels with a security assurance: that the otherwise rival, state security force will not turn against them if they, or their affiliates, are a part of it. Integration also allows the rebel force to practically and financially maintain its personnel, on the state's payroll, and perhaps offer them additional advantages, such as the prospects of promotion. Integrated forces may allow rebels to maintain their group identity, and

> perhaps offer to them an early warning should the agreement start to break down. Over time, integration may promote a new sense of military identity, reduce fear and mistrust between antagonists, and contribute to a decline of a party's self-perceived vulnerability, thus making future violent conflict less likely. From the perspective of the state, integration has apparent advantages, too. Including former rebels in the military may provide a clearer sense of rebel intentions, grievances, and aspirations, whether individual, tactical, or strategic. Inclusion may break down divisions between mistrustful personnel and allow the state to gain or regain control over arms, ammunition, and other military capabilities and facilities, or offer the chance to put such assets beyond use. To the wider population, integration can signal the conversion of potentially destabilizing forces into support for new structures and institutions." (Verjee, 2022:p. 93)

Many argued that the USMS was a better option for former armed members in terms of career prospects. The trade and job prospects offered by civilian DDR were not tempting for people who used to bear arms and control part of their community or territory.

> "There is quite a lot of resistance on the part of former soldiers of the armed group to become a moto-taxi driver or to learn mechanics or agriculture. For guys whose only ability has been to hold a gun, there are not the most exciting career options." (interview CXY)

For many in the LRC, since it was people from the same groups that would either go through the USMS or through vocational training, it should still be considered under the umbrella. Although the USMS program did not meet the criteria to belong in the DDR, it was still discussed and placed under the same headlines in reports and in discussions (interview CXY).

Offering these options as part of DDR was not widely shared by the other interlocutors. Many interviewees underlined this inconsistency (interviews ESX, WER, YH, and MV). This led to a widespread concern that the USMS would "freeze the DDR process" (interview ESX). Basically, the idea is that providing weapons to former armed groups' members does not allow them to pursue the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process properly.

Both of those opinions are defensible. In addition, this distinction between DDR or not was also driven by considerations, such as organizational structure and size. For instance, the DDR section of the MINUSCA alone has more employees than the entire EU delegation. This first decision contained the seed that would sprout into two different and antagonistic visions of the USMS.

In the planning, USMS was meant a temporary measure that was meant to end with the second anniversary of the peace agreement. However, there was no clear exit strategy; this foreshadowed some of the later issues. It was a concern that the provisional nature of this program was not to provide a permanent solution for the ex-combatants. An interviewee admitted:

> "[w]e are quite good at pulling [armed groups' members] away from their groups, but then we have to offer them a project to sever these links permanently. As the period of time increases between demobilization and reinsertion, they feel abandoned and are tempted to go back to the armed groups. We need to synchronize temporally the steps better." (interview IKM)[4]

[4] A similar argument was made by QAY.

Some envisioned that they would be integrated in other DDR program and follow another type of training, circling back to the issue that former armed groups' members are not necessarily motivated or interested in civilian jobs (interviews CXY, KLZ). Others ponder whether they would be "fully integrated into the FACA and Central African police? Should this question be answered in the affirmative, it may provide some rationale for USMS elements already in place to cohere a bit longer; the complete formation of the other two units remains a distant prospect" (Verjee, 2022:pp. 102–3).

This ambiguity of the USMS situated in-between DDR and SSR had major implications and led to ineffective and inconclusive decisions regarding the program.

> "it was widely accepted that the most urgent activities were related to DDR, as they were required to support reconciliation and peace consolidation. At the same time, SSR needed to be carried out according to the timetable agreed on by stakeholders. The limited resources available, and the differences in the opinion of local and international actors as to how the two programs could be sequenced, led to the actors resorting to ad hoc and ineffective initiatives." (Bangura et al., 2024:p. 11)

What and Who to Protect?
From this ambiguity over DDR, another slightly larger confusion emerged about the role that the USMS plays in the Central African security apparatus. As mentioned earlier, the state is not currently fulfilling its security imperatives in many regions and sectors in the CAR.

The APPR provisions regarding the USMS are rather vague. "[The USMS] are to contribute to the protection of the civilian population, reinforce public order, secure transhumance corridors, and any other tasks assigned to them in relation to the agreement's security arrangements" (APPR 02.2019). Later on, a presidential decree added the securing of mining sites (Verjee, 2022:p. 102). In the Central African context, these missions can mean many things.

Transhumance is the seasonal moving of livestock. This traditional lifestyle where people and herds travel together to find greener pastures takes place all over the world (Alps, Zagros mountains, Appalachia, etc.). In Central Africa, herders, mostly Peulh, from Chad and South Sudan move south during the dry season to provide pasture to the zebus. These 'transhumant pastoralists' constitute almost 10% of the CAR population. "Their routes follow seasonal variance in rainfall and respect neither national borders, claims to political authority nor, often, claims to land by sedentary populations" (Schouten, 2019:p. 928).

As a result of this movement of population and livestock into regions where villagers are cultivating the land, clashes are erupting. The destruction of cultures that results from the passage of herds has led to attacks against herders. Peulhs started to arm themselves, and this is considered a threat by villagers that triggered a chain reaction of lethal disputes (de Vries, 2020).

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in its report on transhumance in the region explains:

> "In the Central African Republic, transhumance is characterized by peaks of tension between different groups of transhumant herders. These tensions also extend to conflicts between armed groups and transhumant herders, and between transhumant herders and local communities. Such conflicts have reached a level where they result in internal displacements on a national scale. These issues are linked to the presence of armed groups on the territory, but also to a lack of knowledge of traditional transhumance corridors by some new transhumant herders, to a lack of control over the boundaries of agricultural zones located

> near the corridors (insufficiently marked markings), to a lack of water points dedicated to transhumant herders or their livestock, but also to a context of urbanization, extension of agricultural fields and increased competition for natural resources."IOM 01.2024, p.17

Many interviewees, even those closely involved in the process, had questions about the role that the USMS were supposed to have in avoiding those disputes (interviews YHN and ZUI). Indeed, under these tense conditions, securing of transhumance corridors can mean preventing this movement of people and cattle by stopping them at the border.

> "Others saw this mandate as task-based and inter-positional, so that when a violent incident occurred between farmers and herders, the USMS could be a quick reaction force. Neither conception acknowledged the reality that it was the rebels whom many transhumants previously feared as security risks, and thus it was unlikely they would have confidence in these former poachers now becoming the proverbial gamekeepers." (Verjee, 2022:p. 101).

One interlocutor speculated about which side the USMS would stand on:

> "[o]ne of the considered options was to have USMS be responsible for the transhumance paths. But this is still quite vague because it could mean protecting the cattle and Peulhs that accompany it or protecting the population and their cultivated lands from the cattle." (interview YHN)

Along the same lines, another interviewee wondered, "their job is unclear, are they there to protect and accompany the Peulhs? Are they supposed to create a corridor? If so, they have not reached out and gained the trust of the herders" (interview ZUI). Indeed, as the IOM underlines, the armed groups were parties in the conflicts, hence having them a few months later being the referees can make many doubtful of the viability of these units (interview NH).

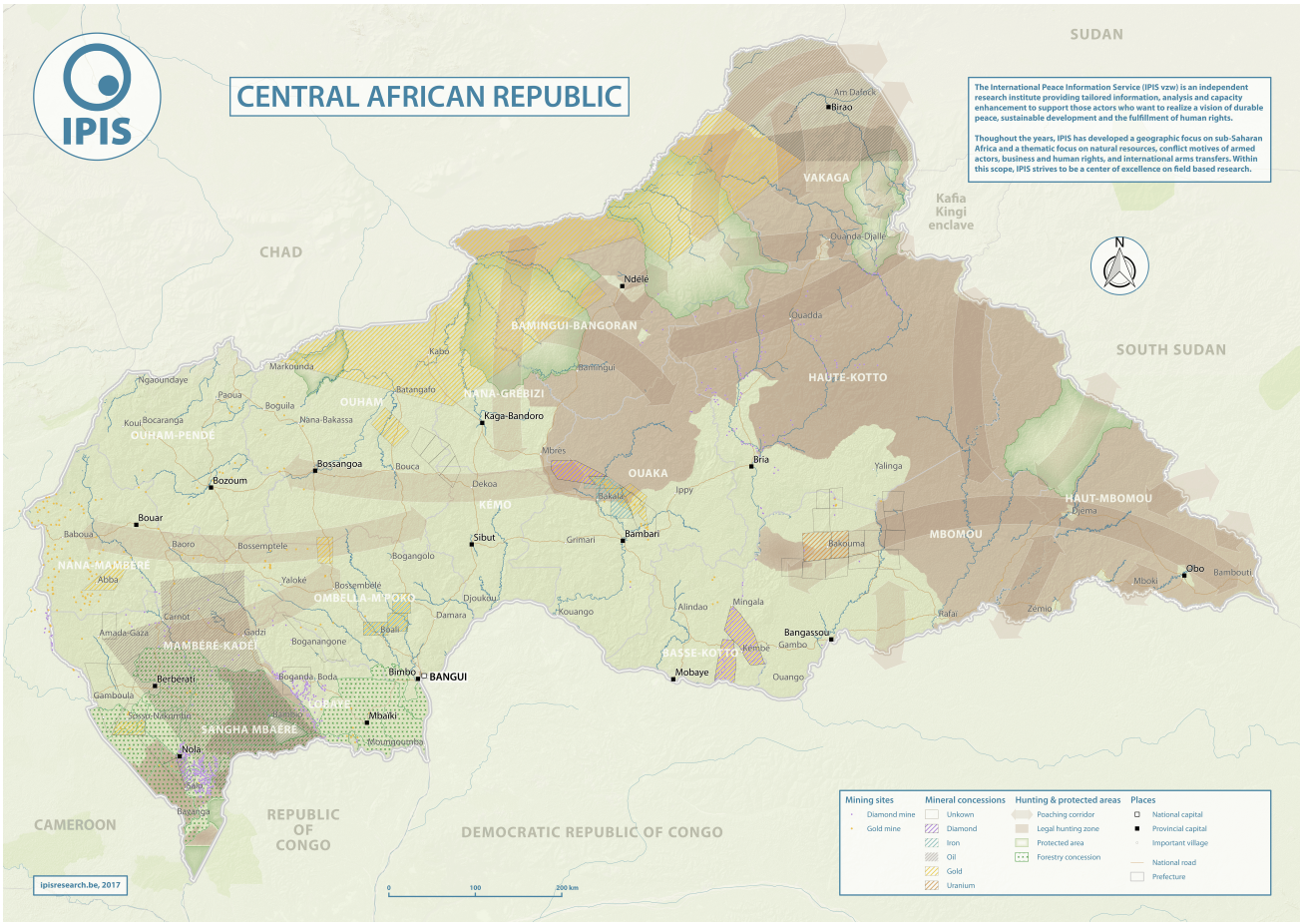
The same logic applies for the protection of the mining regions. The mining industry is a very sensitive area of the CAR economy. The main minerals found in the CAR are diamonds and gold; the majority of the production remains artisanal and controlled by armed groups (3R and others) and foreign firms (Chinese and Russian). The seldom industrial mines are also the basis for control struggles between foreign companies. For example, Wagner took over two of the main industrial mines that used to be exploited by a Canadian company (Globe and Mail 02.2024).

There was a major overhaul of the natural resources laws started in the early 2020s (RFI 06.2024). Some speculated that these reforms were dictated by Russian consultants and granted mining titles in exchange for the assistance that Wagner offered to the FACA. The International Crisis Group describes this relationship between the CAR government and the Russian interest:

> "Conflict over CAR's mineral resources could also intensify amid fears that the government may compensate Wagner or associated companies by handing them control of mining zones. Wagner arrived in 2018, around the same time that the government granted gold and diamond mining licences to the Russian-owned company Lobaye Invest SARLU. The UN says the two companies are "interconnected". Russian media have linked Lobaye directly to Prigozhin. In 2019, the government cancelled a Canadian company's licences for the Ndassima gold mine in order to hand them to a Malagasy company that reportedly has links to Russian interests. The International Arbitration Chamber of Paris is mediating the case." (ICG 12.2021, p.8)

Figure 7.2. Map of the natural resources

(a) Alexandre Jaillon and Milan Nublat (2017) *Mapping artisanal small-scale mining in the Central African Republic*, IPIS.



If the USMS were put in charge of protecting these zones, it could mean protecting the mining industry or protecting the population, and these missions can be at odds. On the one hand, the protection of the mining industry could be at the detriment of the populations that live in proximity to those infrastructures. The environmental consequences of this industry are well-documented.

Letting this industry continue to grow in the way it has been doing means putting at risk populations. "Indeed, on 78% offsite, the color or smell of the water has changed because of exploitation of the site, and on 98%, wholesale deforestation is practiced for the purposes of extending the site (on 308 sites), heating (167 sites) or supporting mine tunnels (153 sites)" IPIS 11.2019, p. 62 Moreover, under the current regulatory conditions, the profits made through the exploitation of these minerals are not benefiting the populations or even the CAR at large, since they are going to foreign companies.

> "Mining in the CAR continues to be characterized by informality and fraud. Over a third (116 sites) of all the sites visited as part of the present sample cited Cameroon as the main destination for their minerals production. The quantity of minerals produced and exported is especially difficult to monitor as production is only recorded on 33.5% of sites (both formally or informally). The absence of mining administration representatives and purchasing offices near mine sites is cited as the main reason for the export of minerals to Cameroon, with no benefit to Central African communities." IPIS 11.2019, p. 8

On the other hand, restricting and prohibiting the development of these artisanal mines could also benefit the interests of some armed groups and businesses rather than others and prevent workers from making a living. One of the ways armed groups and FACA alike have controlled this industry is through the creation of roadblocks. The USMS have resorted to the same kind of measures, which can be disruptive to the daily activities and movements of the populations. "Aggressive and predatory behavior by USMS elements was routinely reported, and in November, USMS elements again blocked the country's main supply road in a dispute over pay, cutting off imports" (Verjee, 2022:p. 102).

This tension of who are the USMS supposed to protect and from what stems from a large and unclear mandate, which itself emerged from the vague linked with the DDR and SSR efforts. As the interveners working on the USMS left unanswered the question of whether they fit in the DDR efforts, it was ambiguous the role they were to play in the stats security apparatus. This left the interveners, armed groups, and government leeway to interpret what should be done with these units and the prospects that they would benefit their interests. This contributed to the snowball effect; now the relatively benign issue of belonging to the DDR efforts or not later gets slightly larger. The mandate can be interpreted in various ways depending on the position held on the DDR issue. These stances consolidated over two poles: these units were to be either symbolic or operational. These poles became even more apparent in the second phase of the snowball effect, the early growth.

7.3. Where to Deploy?

Subsequently, one of the first operational decisions of the implementation was to determine where to deploy these units. Again, the small discrepancy at the inception impacted these operational choices. The snowball keeps growing as disagreement kept adding up. The fact that the responsibility of this program lay with multiple organizations and the absence of the leading organization on the program meant that strife became more and more apparent. The different opinions among international interveners were visible to the CAR government and armed groups. The main issue crystallized over the symbolic and operational value of the units in the CAR security apparatus. The seeds of this distinction were already present in the inclusion or not into the larger DDR.

The initial plan in the APPR foresaw one unit in each of the regions (West, East and Centre). It became quickly apparent that it was impossible to start all the constructions simultaneously. Logistically, it would have been quite difficult to ship the raw material and to transport the manpower to build the camps to house the USMS in multiple locations at the same time.

It was decided that the western part of the country was the easiest to create a first or pilot camp as it is the most accessible [5] from the capital. It is a region where there are several gold and diamond mines but that is also most connected through roads with the capital and the neighbouring states of Chad and Cameroon (see the map of the natural resources). There is a great variability in the conflict intensity in that vast western region.

There were four options to settle the USMS in the western part of the country: Koui, Berberati, Paoua, and Bouar. These locations are indicated by yellow stars on the map (see the map of the Central African Republic). Even though it is in the more 'stable part' of CAR, there is great variability in the armed groups present and the violence in these towns (interview WER).

Logically flowing from these stances on where to set up the pilot camp was the aim with the program.

[5] This is where the Douala-Bangui road goes through.

Figure 7.3. Map of the Central African Republic

The group including the AU, ECCAS, EU and some of the embassies favored an approach where the partially functional units are put in relatively safe areas. Hence, ticking the box by showing that this part of the peace agreement is in progress and building confidence in the process with armed groups in other regions. This part of the localized regime complex conceptualized these mixed units as more symbolic.

This meant putting the first camp in Berberati or Paoua, where armed groups were not as active. Both of those towns are situated in the western part of the country, but not along the main road or the border (like Koui and Bouar). The main concern was that if USMS were stationed in a region where the armed groups were still active, there would be a greater temptation to defect and re-join the armed groups. "As 60% of former rebels compose the USMS, if they are in a region where 3R are active, it would be easier to return to them, and the EU would have a scandal on its hands" (interview PAS).

This concern for negative press on the program was both linked to the reputational cost and to the damage it could do to other peacebuilding efforts. On the one hand, if some members would leave to re-join the armed groups with the weapons that were provided, it could cause a severe blow to the reputation of the organizations involved in the USMS abroad. It was a concern that if an incident was to happen, it would have a detrimental impact on the donors and member-states and their confidence in the process (interview XCV). On the other, scandals also ran the risk of jeopardizing the larger efforts in favor of the peace process both for national actors in the CAR i.e. the government and armed groups. Some described this approach as banking on "a quick win to please the headquarters and prove that they are doing their job" (interview FGH) or that the EU was just looking for a 'success story'(interviews PAS and XCV).

On the contrary, the position of some at the MINUSCA was to let USMS act in riskier regions. In the MINUSCA, both its civilian and military representatives and the headquarters in New York "were all in favour of having an impact on the ground and therefore putting them in more dangerous areas. For example, in Koui, where the 3R is active" (interview XCV). The logic was that the next units would inevitably be put in a region where security was not as good; it seemed more sensible to test them already (interview FGH).

Both in Koui and Bouar, the USMS would be in contact with armed groups and as Bouar is situated on the main supply road connecting Bangui with Cameroon "where 90 to 95% of the imports enter the country"(interview EDC). They would be able to prevent or dismantle the setting up of roadblocks by armed groups. An interviewee defended this strategy saying: "If we look at the current situation Bouar would be the best place because this is where there are problems, security problems. We need to put them somewhere where they are useful and needed" (interview SRF).

An interviewee summarized this debate between interveners:

> "With the USMS, there is a great deal of tension. On the one side of this debate, there are many of the diplomatic corps, the French and US embassies, but also the EU representatives with delegation and mission, as well as the two regional organizations ECCAS and AU, who agree that they are not there to do security but rather to be a political tool to convince the armed groups to disarm. On the other side, there is the MINUSCA, which wishes to be unloaded of some of its security-related tasks and sees the USMS as an opportunity to do so. MINUSCA sees in the USMS an opportunity to decrease violence in some hotspots." (interview KLZ)

The UN wanted to see the USMS be an additional instrument providing security in the regions in CAR.

Central African Republic has a large territory and parts of it can be difficult to access and therefore control. The UN saw no benefit in building those units if they are not going to protect the transhumance paths and the mining regions that are generally situated in these remote regions. Moreover, as the main and in many places the only operational external actors, MINUSCA want the CAR defence and security forces to share that duty. If those units are somewhat effective in providing security, it will enable MINUSCA to slowly disengage from these parts of the country and focus on more dire and troubled areas. In that logic, USMS could be a partner in doing so. A partner that would know and belong in these regions and that would pull away from illegality ex-combatants.

For other actors in the regime complex, this vision of the UN was too strict. Concerned with the trust-building between the government and the armed groups and expecting DDR to be part of it, for example, the EU wanted the USMS to be a stepping-stone that did not need to have any real operational value. In that view, the USMS is not really there to provide security, but rather a temporary measure that is there to show that the peace agreement's measures are working not only for the local actors in CAR, government and armed groups, but also to the funding partners. One interviewee characterized the UN approach as "detrimental to the overall political objective because if [the USMS pilot in Bouar] fails, no one from the armed groups will be convinced to join anymore. If their missions are too difficult, this will be a political failure on the part of the government and international community" (interview KLZ) She continues arguing that the UN approach aimed at providing more security, but only on a limited territory, while the trust-building exercise would bring down violence overall in the CAR (interview KLZ).

Again, both visions are defensible and seemingly logical. One argues that these units are a stepping stone for other gains in the peacebuilding process that might gain the trust of the armed groups in the APPR, which is still shaky, to say the least. The other sees the USMS as a real contribution to the state security apparatus.

Even though the MINUSCA was isolated in its position, the rest of the LRC could not act without it. The MINUSCA was providing vital functions of transporting the other members and vetting the participants as well as a multitude of other logistical tasks to ensure the good running of the program. The core characteristics of the LRC and ecosystem are their interdependence. The reverse is also true: since the funds were coming from the EU and official responsibility and monitoring were assigned to the AU, the MINUSCA could not on its own force the decision to put the USMS where it pleased.

The Central African government has been swayed on one side and the other of this debate. The final decision was made by the government after backtracking and dithering. "The president sided with UN and overruled the EU" (interview FGH). [6]

The question of the site for the pilot camp was an important one that could finally give a general orientation to the USMS. However, despite the fact that the UN vision prevailed in this round, the USMS did not become operational units that would ensure the security of transhumance paths, local population, and mining regions. Finally, in October 2019, the camp in Bouar was inaugurated, but the program took much longer to be somewhat operational. Indeed, the training of the USMS was meant to last two months in order to give time to the former opposing fighters to create a 'group spirit'. The USMS stayed in a rather grey zone, never fully active nor just a symbol or a bridge toward demobilization.

[6] Some impute this decisions on trivialities: like who is absent for a meeting away on vacations or who has the direct phone of the Prime Minister. There is, unfortunately, no way for me to know what in the end convince the government to make that choice.

7.3.1. How to Build the Camps?

Building camps and generating the force to participate in those camps present a host of challenges: logistically and technically. Given these difficulties, it seems practical and reasonable to contract some of the tasks according to the capabilities and strengths of some implementation partners. This is what was done to a certain extent on the USMS, international organizations volunteered or were contracted to take on some specific tasks that suited their abilities and available resources.

However, instead of setting a general orientation, the choice of the sites did not move the course the many actors implementing this program, and the division of labour allowed each organization to continue to conceptualize the USMS according to its interpretation of the role they should have and whether or not they were DDR's participants.

An unlikely contractor was hired to build the camps for the USMS: the International Organisation for Migration. The IOM's mission statement is to "help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration." A mandate that is arguably far from building camps for a new form of integrated military units. Many indicated that the IOM was the aptest actor as it had the logistical resources to construct those camps (interview PAS). However, this first contract ended in disarray.

An interviewee retells how this decision was made and identifies the EU as the main proponent of this choice: "[IOM as a] contractor was pushed by the EU delegation letting little choice to the regional actors in charge of the USMS, AU and ECCAS" (interview BNM). While IOM, indeed, is able to quickly build a compound with limited needs for logistical support from other organizations, according to some interviewees "it lacked durability" (interview EDC).

The requirements to build a camp for refugees and one for soldiers are quite different. To give an example, there was the need for securing the weapons in a protected area, which would not be necessary in a camp for displaced populations. Moreover, the living conditions were seemingly quite harsh and not conducive to the building of an *esprit de corps*. As a result, both 3R former members and even *Forces armées centrafricaines* or Central African Armed Forces defected from the camps.

> "The first and only battalion that was created and deployed is already experiencing difficulties: at the beginning of June, Sidiki Abbas – leader of the 3R, the largest group in the northwest and the battalion – announced his withdrawal from the agreement monitoring mechanisms. Dozens of fighters from the group immediately attacked the base of the mixed units in Bouar, leaving several injured. Other attacks were perpetrated by the 3R against the FACA and Minusca over the following weeks." (ICG 12.2020, p.14)

The importance of this defection and the related damages that were done to the camp are disputed among the actors in the LRC. The European Union reported that:

> "[t]he participation of ex-[armed groups] members in the [USMS] is progressing under questionable conditions. The first (partly) established [USMS] in Bouar has been confronted with cases of desertion and strikes and the [USMS], after revitalization, will still have to show their operational effectiveness, if becoming operational at all." (EEAS 11.2021, p.18)

While some euphemistically refer to the incidents in the camps caused by bad weather conditions (interview GFD), others use words like ransacking and destruction of the camps (interview UHN).

After these events and discussions within the IOM and between the IOM and the other organizations involved, it was decided that the *Fondation suisse de déminage* or Swiss Demining Foundation (FDS) would take over the construction task. The FDS renovated the camp in Bouar and started the construction of the two next compounds in Paoua, Bria, Kaga-Bandoro and Ndélé, Centre and Eastern parts of the country (interviews QAY and UHN). Again, this is a surprising choice, since the FDS's main mandate in other countries is mine clearance. In the CAR, the FDS's office has been involved in a range of projects targeted toward vulnerable communities, including former armed groups' members.

The disappointing outputs that resulted from the IOM contract led the actors in the system to use this evidence to inform the next decisions, allowing the USMS to continue and even expand eventually to other parts of the country.

7.4. Who to Vet?

While the pilot camp was being built, another important task was taking place: finding the former armed groups' members that would be part of the units. As mentioned earlier, the composition of each unit was the result of complex calculations. 14 armed groups signed the APPR and a different proportion of each armed group's members was allocated to the units depending on their location.

> "In theory, the asymmetric dilution of rebel groups sees a group's smaller contingent in one unit offset by a larger presence in another unit. The Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC), for example, is scheduled to have only 40 troops in the northeast USMS, but 200 in the southeast USMS" (Verjee, 2022:p. 101).

The MINUSCA took charge of an important logistical aspect, the vetting process. It is the organization with capabilities to create databases on the participation and actions of the armed groups. To take part in the vetting process, one must meet two criteria: being a member of an armed group that signed the APPR and providing a functioning or repairable weapon.

As for other issues previously, the vetting process became the epicentre of disagreements among the international interveners. There were conflicts on the rigorousness with which the vetting process should be followed. Some actors favoured a strict adherence to the criteria, meaning a check of the criminal past of the candidates and a weapon that can be used. For instance, some embassies heavily advocated for disarmament that would be thorough and comprehensive. "We noticed that sometimes armed groups are sending people who were not former combatants and with weapons that were too old and not functioning. Normally, we need 90% of real combatants but in CAR it was only 52%; there was a lot of fraud" (interview XCV).

But other interviews underlined that a strict adherence to rules and criteria would result in the stalling of the process. Another interviewee admitted that "the rules of the DDR were relaxed to make some progress. People were bringing back old and useless weapons and probably keeping their real weapons at home. There were less than 10% of real weapons recovered" (interview PAS).

Even with those relaxed criteria, it was difficult to find enough ex-combatants to join the USMS. According to a report by a panel of experts appointed by the UN:

> "The operationalization of the first joint security unit – in the west – was delayed for several reasons, including the failure to meet the quota for demobilized, disarmed and vetted

> combatants to join the unit, mostly as a result of reluctance on the part of 3R to provide more fighters. Therefore, it was decided that 95 demobilized and disarmed ex-combatants eligible for integration into the uniformed security forces (FACA, police and gendarmes, customs, and the water and forest service) would instead join the unit for a period of two years. The training was finally launched, although the actual number of ex-combatants for the unit remained below the initial objective (273 instead of 400)." (UNSC 12.2019, p.10)

Many obstructions, on the part of the armed groups, slowed down the process. In September 2019, the three special military advisers, leaders of armed groups, resigned out of dissatisfaction with the process: "They claimed that their appointments were empty shells and lacked official prerogatives and funding" (UNSC 12.2019, p.11). Some armed groups prefer to continue to generate revenues from illegal activities (roadblocks, taxation, mineral resources traffics) or are unable to implement the agreement because they do not have control over their members (Knoope et al., 2020:p. 4).

This wary interest on the part of the former armed groups' members for the USMS dovetailed their persistent ties to their former groups. There were multiple instances when the camps' training or stationing were attacked by armed groups. Those groups were able to steal the weapons stored in the compounds (Corbeau 07.2020). This ties back to the building of the compounds by subcontractors who are more apt to build for vulnerable populations than for military units.

7.4.1. How to Pay them?

As for many international programs, money is the lifeblood to have the buy-in of hesitant participants. This was the case for the USMS, where the armed groups' members were to be compensated when the USMS officially were launched. Tensions ran high at that moment; the delays in the construction had already slowed down the program. As mentioned earlier, compensation was funded by the European Union (EU) but through the African Union.

This can seem like a complicated arrangement which was explained by an interviewee as "the EU's will to remain in the background on this project. [The EU] wants to be involved but is not wishing to take the credit for it"(interview TH). This is a generous assessment of the EU's strategy. There is no doubt that the EU would generally recognize the added value of involving and channeling its funds through an organization that is credible and legitimate for the national actors (armed groups and government) like the AU (interview VBN). But, one might also surmise that it was also a way to avoid being too directly implicated in case the program ended up funding and arming people who would return to armed groups. This fear was quite widespread among interviewees: "we have to be careful with the weapons because we don't want if there are defections that they leave with the materiel" (interview EDC). These concerns are detailed in a report, which concludes: "The potential of the EU strategy for conflict prevention has been limited, with, in certain aspects, the risk of harm: risk of fuelling rebellion by supporting the USMS, risk of accentuating the marginalization of regions occupied by armed groups by concentrating efforts in Bangui and the west of the country" (translated from French, EC 09.2021).

The release of the funds by the EU took longer than expected. At first, to ensure that the USMS participants did not have to stay in the camps without any resources, the UN peacebuilding fund (PBF) contributed. "Denise Brown, head of OCHA in CAR, is the one that has shown flexibility in deciding that the PBF could be spent on USMS" (interview XCV). But those were temporary fixes that stabilized the program and allowed it to start; but once the EU funds were released and transferred to the AU, delays continued. This is an illustration of how the LRC can find solutions and organize to allow the program to continue.

At first, the IOM was also contracted by the AU to take charge of the delivery and distribution compensation due to the ex-combatants. Yet, ten days before the inauguration of the camps and the official arrival of the USMS, they informed the other partners that they could not do it based on OCHA's rules to remunerate directly or indirectly 'people bearing arms' (interview BNM). This unexpected backpedalling put the AU in a difficult position as the mission in Bangui did not have the means to distribute the money. There is no extensive banking system in CAR, the money has to be carried in cash by the road or planes (especially during the wet season) and be distributed by hand to each ex-combatant. Once the deal with the IOM fell through, the African Union picked up the task and started to pay the USMS directly. Since the USMS were not compensated timely, there was unrest and it became less and less safe for the AU officials to come and deliver the compensation (interview CXY). The delayed payment was seen as a concern, because "[i]f the soldiers are not paid their allegiance would be hard to maintain" (interview PAS).[7]

Beside the delivery of compensation, the other major task undertaken by the AU was the monitoring of the program. The monitoring role was also difficult to conduct since the AU observers would have to be housed in the USMS camp and their safety is difficult to ensure in these conditions. In the summer of 2021, there were negotiations between the AU and the MINUSCA to have the military observers lodged in the UN compound in Bouar (interview UHN). It is unclear whether the military observers that have to monitor the USMS don't have access or did not go to Bouar. Access to the camp was not always granted to international interveners and sometimes by FACA themselves.

But some interviewees also mention that the military observers never left Bangui (interview XCV). The tasks of the AU were in close relations with the USMS themselves and the delays in paying them and the deficient monitoring contributed to the camp disarray; "there have been demonstrations and roadblocks by the USMS to protest against the absence of the compensation" (interview QAY).

Without a clear orientation and a central institution, the USMS went forward, but the supervision was uneven and the problems of retribution persisted and became more important until the USMS camp was dismantled by its own personnel. The USMS went on strike over the absence of pay. Some, near Bouar, even blocked the main trade road. (Corbeau 11.2020).

7.5. Conclusion: USMS by another Name

To conclude, I want to mention a recent turn of events in the creation of these mixed units in CAR. Russian mercenaries working for Wagner have been present in various capacities in CAR for a few years. Following the elections, they worked closely with FACA to regain control over parts of the territory (interview POI). Interestingly, the FACA and Wagner have been recruiting former combatants to join them, creating de facto mixed units (interview YH).

> "Refusing to lose their advantage and cede the reconquered territories, in particular the country's major towns and strategic mines, Wagner and Touadéra's close circle have continued to sponsor the recruitment of thousands of militiamen, including ex-CPC combatants, and young people to compensate for the lack of men capable of countering the persistent CPC threat. The UN Secretary-General confirmed the recruitment of militiamen in a report, indicating that 'national defence forces and other security personnel continued their military operations in the west and east, recruiting anti-balaka elements and dissident Unité pour la

[7] This is what happened a bit later when the camp was destroyed and looted.

> paix en Centrafrique combatants as proxies.' Although some of these militiamen have been formally integrated into the newly created military units, other combatants have not and therefore do not hold any official military ranks."(Sentry 06.2023, p.12)

Of course, this is not as structured and formal as the program that is described in this chapter, but the outcomes of having former combatants working alongside the national forces are still there. This is an unexpected development for such a policy, and observers of CAR politics will see if it competes with the formal USMS program. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, among interviewees, there is a lot of pause about this military advance as its stability is uncertain.

7.5.1. Final Remarks

What started as a rather mundane question of which headings to put over the program and from which budget line it can be funded grew into a much larger issue. As the program was implemented, this small discrepancy spiralled and others were associated with it. In the end, the main stakeholders of the program had diametrically opposed views on the purpose and work for these units. However, this echoes the idea that in complex systems, effects are non-linear. Small inconsistencies can lead to considerable results.

An observer of the CAR politics explained that USMS had become "the object of political and symbolic disagreements. This program is too minor in terms of personnel and cannot change the demography of the country and it is now a way for the government and the armed groups to put pressure and advance their agenda" (interview XCV). In a similar vein, the World Bank's report describes the deployment of the *Unité Spéciale mixtes de sécurité* or special mixed security units.

> "[It] has been extremely difficult. USMS are designed to be armed units, composed of select demobilized members of armed groups and security forces, deployed to resolve conflicts (e.g., pastoralists clashing with farmers). Low capacity and lack of unity within the Government, reluctance of armed groups to play by the rules, and demands of risk-conscious donors all make it difficult to achieve rapid progress with the national [DDR] program." WB 08.2020.

The trust that those units were supposed to build between the FACA and armed groups never materialized. In an interview to the newspaper, *Le Corbeau*, General Ludovic Ngaïfet criticized the program:

> "Now another mission has been added to the military programming law. I don't know if it will come true within the framework of the Khartoum agreement, the USMS. There, I say it very clearly as a general officer, I am at odds with the USMS and the rebels. It does not fall within the military missions which are defined by law. We have what is called the employment framework for our forces. Let's not bring our army back to such a level of subjugation" (le Corbeau 04.2020)

This brief summary encapsulates the main obstacles to the implementation of the USMS and in doing so distributes the responsibilities among the main interveners. The government was skeptical from the beginning of this program, as it granted former armed groups' members access to be part of the security apparatus. The armed groups dragged their feet, lacking trust in the process and wanting to preserve their option to opt out. There was a rift between the international interveners who disagreed on the level of risks they were willing to bear on this program. The initial distinction over DDR continued to

grow into a proper disagreement between two groups in the localized regime complex. Their opposition crystallized on the potential of the security units and the role they should play in the security provision in CAR.

Conclusion

This thesis started from an interest in International Organizations' politics. When I read Barnett and Finnemore (2004)'s *Rules for the World*, during my bachelor, I remember being fascinated by the arguments presented. It seemed so intuitive but also eye-opening, that these rules' adherence, inefficiencies, unexpected results, and power-grab strategies could form a persuasive narrative on how the world works. During my master, I travelled for fieldwork in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I met and interviewed numerous expatriates in Sarajevo. Coming back, it was difficult for me to make sense of the diverging stories they provided on their work in the Balkans. My advisor, at the time, Professor Frédéric Mérand, suggested that I look into regime complexity. This use of regime complex coupled with my interest in security organizations led me to Professor Hofmann and the Graduate Institute. A choice I never regretted.

Over the years, there has been a plethora of versions of this dissertation.[1] Some that emphasized the security components of IOs, others that gave more space to think about the role of the EU in the world. Later versions used the notion of feedback effects between sites of operations and headquarters front and centre, while earlier ones did not even mention complexity.

In the end, I decided to ask: How do external actors interact when they intervene simultaneously in the same sites? The main answer brings together the empirical and theoretical aspects of this thesis: localized regime complex. This term refers to the ecosystem of interveners that emerges around a specific institution-building subject. LRCs are characterized by complex system dynamics which interveners need to divide responsibilities without central coordination. This leads to unintended duplications, conflicts over precedence, and potential for synergies. Similarly to Barnett and Finnemore's argument, the results of these dynamics cannot be anticipated by the actors.

One of the most challenging but also rewarding parts of this thesis was the formulation of the review of the literature. In hindsight, the confusion I experienced trying to organize this ever-growing body of works into coherent categories mostly stemmed from what some have called a vocabulary inflation. There are more overlaps than one might think between polycentricity, regime complexity, institutional complexes, etc. I think that this constant creation of new terminologies is a sign of the vitality of the field. Although it might make summarizing the literature more difficult, it also offers great potential for cross-fertilization and comparison.

I realize that this thesis is participating in this proliferation of concepts by introducing the term localized regime complex. As the object of my dissertation is a blind spot of the regime complexity literature, I could not do the economy of specifying that I am not looking at the entire regime complexes, but rather their local extensions. It seems unfair and could eventually lead to more criticisms to just use the term regime complex.

While I knew from the start of the Ph.D. that I wanted to participate in the academic conversations on regime complexity, the process that led to the use of complex systems came through other channels. At the beginning of 2018, Mirko Reul and I started a reading group in the Political Science and International

[1] I hope that the revision process has created a coherent whole without too many relics of these previous versions.

Table 8.1. Chapters' Summary

Chapter #	**Subject Matter**	**Ecosystem Dynamics**	**Niches**
Chapter 5	Peace Agreements	Ecological Succession	Broker & Enforcer
Chapter 6	Elections	Tipping Point	Lobbyist, Sponsor, Protector, & Logistician.
Chapter 7	USMS	Snowball Effect	Logistician, Sponsor, Trainer, Monitoring, & Builder

Relations department at the Graduate Institute with the objective of exposing ourselves to academic work outside of the social sciences. We invited participants to read and suggest chapters and articles coming from disciplines like biology, literature, mathematics, and architecture. As we read iconic and cutting-edge pieces from various disciplines, I reflected on the artificiality of some disciplinary divides.

This reading group inspired my theoretical approach tremendously as it opened the gates for a more fluid understanding of concepts and theories. It also encouraged my reflection on the similarities one can observe in the behaviours of cells, forests, human society, light conduction, etc. This thesis is an endeavour in exploring those similarities and looking at the relations among interveners in the Central African Republic through the lenses of complexity. These lenses illuminated some patterns: advent of tipping points, niches, ecosystems, etc.

The adoption of this complex system perspective was a way to link actor and structure in a creative way. This is an attempt to understand these complex, nuanced, and contradictory relations. These pages are offering one interpretation of what I observed in the CAR. I think about complexity as a lens, which made more salient some aspects of the system, among other things, the importance of interactions and the unintended impact of their decisions. It also blurs the multi-faceted nature of the actors and the role of national actors.

Although this is only one interpretation, I believe it is one worth telling, as it highlights part of the experience of many of the people who work for IOs and ROs. They are sent to places with fixed mandates, enduring conflicts, and limited scope of activities. At the end of the day, many of them quickly realize that the actions of other organizations are crucial to the conduct of their activities. Some of this coordination is done by secretariats, headquarters to headquarters, but a lot of it is left to the people working in sites of operation's own devices.

In my opinion, studying the CAR is one of the judicious choices I made. There are relatively limited academic works on this country, except for the exceptional work done by Lombard (2018) and Lombard and Carayannis (2015). The Central African Republic has a varied community of interveners (peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, development agencies, etc.), but this community is quite limited in terms of numbers and concentrated in the capital. This means that with two fieldwork trips totalling three months, I was able to reach many, if not most, of the potential interviewees.

In this conclusion, I do not wish to rehash the arguments made in the empirical section; I would rather show the comparisons among the LRCs described (see Table 8.1).

First, in the chapter on regional involvement, I identified two niches that have been filled by different

actors: broker and enforcer. The series of enforcers is quite striking with interventions succeeding each other, from FOMUC to MICOPAX to MISCA to MINUSCA. Balas (2022:p. 77) makes an interesting finding regarding this sequence.

> "[M]ore complex and bloody conflicts of Africa are left to inexperienced regional organizations until enough political support is gathered within the U.N. to send a peace operation there. This approach could also represent a way to gain experience for such IOs as the African Union and ECOWAS regarding peace operations deployments, by allowing them some action before the experienced IOs step in."

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic had been stepping in since 2014 as an enforcer. There has been no violent change of administration since then and "without [it], many more civilians would die and that the state would have less capacity" (Howard et al., 2020:p. 87). However, one can wonder about the outputs of this peacekeeping operation, in a country where "advances remain tenuous, and setbacks are numerous. The Central African Republic remains among the lowest-ranked countries on the Human Development Index, with weak governing institutions, limited civil liberties and political rights, and a fragile political economy" (Howard et al., 2020:p. 22). This might account for the search for other enforcers/protectors during the electoral period and the influx of Russian mercenaries.

The broker roles have often been taken upon by regional organizations. Many acknowledge that the APPR would never have been signed without the input of the African Union (Howard et al., 2020:p. 25). But this first empirical chapter has also shown that regional actors have been destabilizing factors in the CAR. Hence, brokers are not impartial parties; they serve as agents connecting the different warring parties, but they also have their own agendas.

The two following chapters highlight the importance of the implementation of peace agreements discussed in the first one. The USMS are a provision of the APPR, while national elections were to be convened according to article 20 APPR 02.2019. Peace agreements are often the result of what is feasible at the time, but there can be a disconnect between "the mediation process, content of a peace agreement, and the implementation phase" (Rusch, 2021:p. 12).

The chapter on the elections demonstrates the impact of a new actor moving into existing niches and how actors present in the ecosystem react to this newcomer. The protection niche was occupied by the MINUSCA who was also taking on many other roles as logistician. As the tensions grew and opposition parties, armed groups, and even the government proposed to delay this deadline, the interveners did not oppose the support of bilateral actors (France, Rwanda, Russia) to help 'secure' the elections. While France flew *mirage* planes over the capital and Rwanda sent troops which left after a few months, Wagner seized the opportunity to move in more permanently as an ally to the state security forces. This shift sidelined the MINUSCA as the regimes under which it operates conflict with the one of Wagner. The other members of the localized regime complex also had to reposition themselves, many like the EU, opted to suspend part of their activities, in particular those with the *Forces armées centrafricaines* or Central African Armed Forces (FACA). The advent of Wagner and Russia as a close partner of the Touadéra's regime decisively changed the dynamics in the LRC.

All the LRCs described participate in the (re)building of institutions in the CAR. However, there is an inherent tension in that work, as the interveners take on more space and responsibilities in the conduct of elections, the SSR, and push the signing of peace agreements, the state capacities withered. These fundamental questions were recurrent among my interlocutors; they wondered where to put the cursor to help without crippling. The budget of the MINUSCA is three times that of the CAR government

(Howard et al., 2020:p. 23). This disproportion creates adverse effects; populations and governments have adapted to this reliance on external actors.

> "Humanitarian actors have been present in the CAR for the last 45 years. Two adult generations have therefore integrated the humanitarian presence in their social landscape and normalized reliance on relief as part of their coping strategies. Beyond the logistic challenges of inaccessibility and insecurity, as well as the lack of basic infrastructure and qualified human resources, there is fatigue in the international humanitarian sector. The recurrent crisis often results in international humanitarian actors restarting the same projects over and over again. For example, local and international interviewed humanitarian workers reported that schools or dispensaries were looted after being rehabilitated and seed and agricultural inputs stolen by rebel groups just after being distributed. There is no feeling of long-term impact and of possible end-of-crisis." (Piquard, 2021:p. 89)

The chapter on the implementation of the USMS shows the impact of a vacant niche. None of the actors would or could take responsibility for this program; hence, each participating organization could interpret the implementation as it pleased. This led to ever more major disagreements among the interveners.

A program where niches seem assigned in a sensible way, ended in disarray with camps being looted and destroyed by their occupants. The logic being the USMS can appear sound, if trust was established between FACA and armed groups' members, the latter would not rejoin their former groups. This, in turn, would lead to decreasing levels of violence making the peace agreement persist. Ultimately, it would create the appropriate conditions to hold elections, including municipal ones. These elections would then grant positions to some former armed groups' leaders which would create even more adherence to the peace process. This virtuous logic has yet to materialize in the CAR.

On the contrary, failure in one localized regime complex can also trickle down to other LRCs. This is clear with the end of the USMS, a national newspaper apprehended the impact on the APPR process.

> "The consequences of this failure are being felt on peace and stability in the Central African Republic. Transhumance corridors remain hotspots of conflict, compromising coexistence peacefully between breeders and farmers. The APPR-RCA, supposed to bring peace, seems distant from its primary mission, calling into question the credibility of the entire process." (Le Corbeau 02.2024, p. 2)

A similar observation is made by United States Institute of Peace's experts:

> "The Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR (APPR-CAR) has had mixed results since its signing in February 2019, with repeated violations of the agreement and armed groups continuing to control much of the country. However, the formation of the CPC and its recent attacks on major towns represent the gravest threat to date to the peace agreement. It remains to be seen whether the CPC coalition will hold, particularly as it includes several rebel groups who were previously rivals. But Bozizé's backing of the coalition—and its members' claim that the elections were held illegitimately—may serve to hold the group together. In the lead-up to the election, prominent opposition candidates criticized the agreement itself and Touadéra's failure to make more progress implementing it. These critiques resonate with many Central Africans, particularly outside of Bangui, who

> have seen few improvements in their living conditions. Although armed groups have little support among the public, pervasive insecurity and unemployment mean that they are still able to recruit. President Touadéra has removed several armed group leaders from their government posts to sanction them for their roles in the CPC coalition and has brought charges against Bozizé for inciting rebellion, moves that will exacerbate existing tensions. The announcement of Touadéra's victory in the first round has been rejected by the CPC and may fuel further violence. If the current violence continues apace, it is possible that the agreement will collapse altogether." USIP 01.2021

It is clear from these excerpts that the fate of the peace agreement is closely linked to the elections and their legitimacy, as well as the results from the USMS and both of those come from the signature of the *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation* or Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation.

I want to devote my last sentences to the Central Africans and people working in the organizations I studied. In the introduction, I mentioned the vulnerability of Central African populations and their powerlessness regarding the decisions that affect their day-to-day conditions. The choices to launch or close a mission, to send or withdraw troops, to deliver or to suspend aid, are rarely done in consultation with the communities directly impacted by this international and regional support. Nonetheless, this dissertation did not focus on the impact the decisions had on Central African citizens. Other researchers would describe, understand, and render much better than I could ever do the struggles, desires, and strategies of the people living in the Central African Republic.

I rather focus my attention on the group of interveners. Each empirical case has shown the unpredictable impacts of their decisions. Implementers are well-aware of the moral and ethical ramifications of their presence or absence in Bangui or in other operational sites. My findings give some perspective on how, despite their good intentions and no matter how much they plan, prepare, and design their intervention, inadvertent effects tend to thwart their projects. Even when staff working in those organizations spend major parts of their working hours in coordination meetings and reach unanimity on the course of action, there can be unforeseen events that bring the system to a tipping point or small issues can grow into larger disagreements. The path toward peace is always piecemeal, progress is tentative, success temporary, and the risk of return to violence present (Coning, 2020; Paffenholz, 2021). The Central African Republic is one of the most beautiful countries I visited with unique sunsets and vibrant nature, and it is where I met exceptional people. I truly hope that the next decades will be different than the previous ones.

Case-selection

Missions	Organization	Targeted cou	Acronym	Start date	End date
European Union Police	European Union	Afghanistan	EUPOL Afgha	2007	2016
International Security	North Atlantic Tre	Afghanistan	ISAF	2003	2014
United Nations Assist	United Nations	Afghanistan	UNAMA	2002	ongoing
European Union Police	European Union	Bosnia and H	EUPM BiH	2003	2012
European Union Force	European Union	Bosnia and H	Althea BiH	02-12-2004	ongoing
Maritime Monitor	North Atlantic Tre	Bosnia and H	.	1992	1992
Sky Monitor	North Atlantic Tre	Bosnia and H	.	1992	1993
Maritime Guard	North Atlantic Tre	Bosnia and H	.	1992	1993
Deny Flight	North Atlantic Tre	Bosnia and H	.	1993	1995
Sharp Guard	North Atlantic Tre	Bosnia and H	.	1993	1996
Deliberate Force	North Atlantic Tre	Bosnia and H	.	1995	1995
Implementation Force	North Atlantic Tre	Bosnia and H	IFOR	1995	1996
Stabilization Force-Joi	North Atlantic Tre	Bosnia and H	SFOR	1996	1998
Stabilization Force- Jc	North Atlantic Tre	Bosnia and H	SFOR	1998	2004
Personal Representati	OSCE	Bosnia and H	.	1995	2015
OSCE Mission to Bosn	OSCE	Bosnia and H	.	1996	ongoing
United Nations Missic	United Nations	Bosnia and H	UNMIBH	1995	2002
African Union Missior	African Union	Burundi	AMIB	2003	2004
Special Task Force Bu	African Union	Burundi	.	2007	2009
United Nations Opera	United Nations	Burundi	ONUB	2005	2007
EU force in RCA	European Union	Central Afric	EUFOR RCA	2014	2015
EU Military Advisory M	European Union	Central Afric	EUMAM RCA	2015	2016
EU Training Mission R	European Union	Central Afric	EUTM RCA	2016	ongoing
EU advisory Mission R	European Union	Central Afric	EUAM RCA	2020	ongoing
United Nations Missic	United Nations	Central Afric	MINURCA	1998	2000
United Nations Multic	United Nations	Central Afric	MINUSCA	2014	ongoing
Bureau Intégré de l'O	United Nations	Central Afric	BINUCA	2010	2014
United Nations Peace	United Nations	Central Afric	BONUCA	2000	2010
United Nations Missic	United Nations	Central Afric	MINURCAT	2007	2010
OSCE Mission to Croa	OSCE	Croatia		00-07-1996	31-12-2007
United Nations Confic	United Nations	Croatia	UNCRO	00-05-1995	00-01-1996
United Nations Transi	United Nations	Croatia	UNTAES	00-01-1996	00-01-1998
United Nations Missic	United Nations	Croatia	UNMOP	00-01-1996	00-12-2002
United Nations Civilia	United Nations	Croatia	UNCPSG	00-01-1998	00-10-1998
African Union in Suda	African Union	Darfur	AMIS	00-00-2004	00-00-2007
African Union-United	African Union/Uni	Darfur	UNAMID	00-07-2007	ongoing
EUFOR RD Congo	European Union	Democratic F	.	12-06-2006	30-11-2006
EUPOL RD Congo	European Union	Democratic F	.	01-07-2007	30-09-2014
EUPOL Kinshasa (DRC	European Union	Democratic F	.	00-04-2005	00-05-2007
EUSEC RD Congo	European Union	Democratic F	.	08-06-2005	30-06-2016
European Union Force	European Union	Democratic F	Artemis	30-05-2003	01-09-2003
United Nations Organ	United Nations	Democratic F	MONUC	00-11-1999	00-06-2010
United Nations Orgni	United Nations	Democratic F	MONUSCO	00-07-2010	ongoing
United Nations Opera	United Nations	Democratic F	ONUC	00-07-1960	00-06-1964

EU Rule of Law Missic	European Union	Georgia	EUJUST Ther	16.07.2004	22.07.2005
EUMM Georgia	European Union	Georgia	.	01-10-2008	ongoing
OSCE Mission to Geor	OSCE	Georgia		00-11-1992	31-12-2008
United Nations Obser	United Nations	Georgia	UNOMIG	00-09-1993	00-06-2009
Guinea-Bissau	ECOWAS	Guinea-Bissau		00.00.1998	00.00.1999
Guinea-Bissau	ECOWAS	Guinea-Bissau		00.00.2012	00.00.2013
EU SSR Guinea-Bissau	European Union	Guinea-Bissa	.	00-06-2008	30-01-2010
EUNAVFOR Somalia	European Union	Indian Ocear	.	00-00-2008	ongoing
Allied Provider	North Atlantic Tre	Indian Ocean		00-10-2008	00-12-2008
Allied Protector	North Atlantic Tre	Indian Ocean		00-04-2009	00-08-2009
Ocean Shield	North Atlantic Tre	Indian Ocean		00-08-2009	24-11-2016
EUJUST LEX-Iraq	European Union	Iraq	.	01-07-2005	31-12-2013
United Nations Iraq-K	United Nations	Iraq-Kuwait	UNIKOM	00-04-1991	00-10-2003
ECOMICI Ivory Coast	ECOWAS	Ivory Coast		00.00.2003	00.00.2004
United Nations Missic	United Nations	Ivory Coast	MINUCI	00-05-2003	00-04-2004
United Nations Opera	United Nations	Ivory Coast	UNOCI	00-04-2004	00-05-2017
EULEX-Kosovo	European Union	Kosovo	.	04-02-2008	ongoing
Allied Force	North Atlantic Tre	Kosovo		00-04-1999	00-06-1999
KFOR	North Atlantic Tre	Kosovo		00-06-1999	ongoing
OSCE Missions of Lon	OSCE	Kosovo		08-09-1992	00-17-1993
OSCE Kosovo Verificat	OSCE	Kosovo		00-10-1998	00-06-1999
OSCE Mission to Koso	OSCE	Kosovo			ongoing
United Nations Interir	United Nations	Kosovo	UNMIK	00-06-1999	ongoing
ECOMIL I Liberia	ECOWAS	Liberia		00.00.1990	00.00.1997
ECOMIL II Liberia	ECOWAS	Liberia		00.00.2003	00.00.2003
United Nations Obser	United Nations	Liberia	UNOMIL	00-09-1993	00-09-1997
United Nations Missic	United Nations	Liberia	UNMIL	00-09-2003	00-03-2018
EUBAM Libya	European Union	Libya	.	22-05-2013	ongoing
Unified Protector	North Atlantic Tre	Libya		00-04-2011	ongoing
EUPAT	European Union	Macedonia	.	14-12-2005	15-12-2003
EUPOL PROXIMA/FYR	European Union	Macedonia	.	15-12-2003	09-12-2005
force européenne EUF	European Union	Macedonia	Concordia/FY	31-04-2003	15-12-2003
Essential Harvest	North Atlantic Tre	Macedonia		00-08-2001	00-06-2001
Amber Fox	North Atlantic Tre	Macedonia		00-09-2001	00-12-2002
Allied Harmony	North Atlantic Tre	Macedonia		00-12-2002	00-03-2003
OSCE Mission to Skop	OSCE	Macedonia			ongoing
United Nations Prever	United Nations	Macedonia	UNPREDEP	00-04-1995	00-02-1999
European Union Train	European Union	Mali	EUTM Mali	17-01-2013	ongoing
United Nations Multic	United Nations	Mali	MINUSMA	00-04-2013	ongoing
EUNAVFOR MED	European Union	Mediterrane	.	07-10-2015	ongoing
Agile Genie	North Atlantic Tre	Mediterranean Sea		01-05-1992	19-05-1992
Operation Sea Guardi	North Atlantic Tre	Mediterranean Sea		00-11-2016	ongoing
Active Endeavour	North Atlantic Tre	Mediterranean Sea		00-10-2001	00-11-2016
OSCE Mission to Molc	OSCE	Moldova			ongoing
EUBAM Moldova and	European Union	Moldova and	.	00-00-2005	ongoing

EUBAM Rafah	European Union	Palestinian T	.	24-11-2005	ongoing
EU Police COPPS/Pale	European Union	Palestinian T	.	01-01-2006	ongoing
United Nations Truce	United Nations	Palestinian T	UNTSO	00-00-1948	ongoing
Sierra Leone	ECOWAS	Sierra Leone		00.00.1997	00.00.1999
United Nations Obser	United Nations	Sierra Leone	UNOMSIL	00-07-1998	00-10-1999
United Nations Missic	United Nations	Sierra Leone	UNAMSIL	00-10-1999	00-12-2005
African Union Missior	African Union	Somalia	AMISOM	19-01-2007	ongoing
EU Training Mission S	European Union	Somalia	EUTM Somal	10-04-2010	ongoing
EUCAP Somalia	European Union	Somalia	.	00-12-2016	ongoing
United Nations Opera	United Nations	Somalia	UNSOSOM I	00-04-1992	00-03-1993
United Nations Opera	United Nations	Somalia	UNSOSOM II	00-04-1993	00-04-1995
EUAVSEC South Sudar	European Union	South Sudan	.	18-06-2012	17-01-2014
United Nations Missic	United Nations	South Sudan	UNMISS	00-07-2011	ongoing
EUFOR Tchad/RCA	European Union	Tchad and Ce	.	00-01-2008	15-03-2009
EUAM Ukraine	European Union	Ukraine	.	01-12-2014	ongoing
OSCE Mission to Ukra	OSCE	Ukraine		24-11-1994	30-04-1999
OSCE Project Co-ordin	OSCE	Ukraine			ongoing
OSCE Special Monitor	OSCE	Ukraine		21-03-2014	ongoing

List of interviewees

1. YQ, 2019, Online
2. KN, 2019, Geneva
3. TH, 2019, Brussels
4. TD, 2019, Brussels
5. SZ, 2019, Geneva
6. OV, 2019, Brussels
7. MV, 2019, Brussels
8. JK, 2019, Brussels
9. GP, 2019, Brussels
10. TF, 2019, Paris
11. ESX, 2020, Bangui
12. ZUI, 2020, Bangui
13. WER, 2020, Bangui
14. UIO, 2020, Bangui
15. TZU, 2020, Bangui
16. SRF, 2020, Bangui
17. RTZ, 2020, Bangui
18. QWE, 2020, Bangui
19. PAS, 2020, Bangui
20. OPA, 2020, Bangui
21. JKL, 2020, Bangui
22. HJK, 2020, Bangui
23. GHJ, 2020, Bangui
24. FGH, 2020, Bangui
25. ERT, 2020, Bangui
26. DFG, 2020, Bangui

27. ASD, 2020, Bangui
28. RT, 2020, Online
29. NMQ, 2020, Bangui
30. BNM, 2020, Bangui
31. ZXC, 2020, Bangui
32. YXC, 2020, Bangui
33. XCV, 2020, Bangui
34. WAY, 2020, Bangui
35. VBN, 2020, Bangui
36. LZX, 2020, Bangui
37. KLZ, 2020, Bangui
38. IOP, 2020, Bangui
39. QAY, 2021, Bangui
40. WSX, 2021, Bangui
41. TBG, 2021, Bangui
42. EDC, 2021, Bangui
43. IKM, 2021, Bangui
44. CXY, 2021, Bangui
45. XYL, 2021, Bangui
46. VCX, 2021, Bangui
47. NBV, 2021, Bangui
48. BVC, 2021, Bangui
49. LKJ, 2021, Bangui
50. KJH, 2021, Bangui
51. JHG, 2021, Bangui
52. GFD, 2021, Bangui
53. MNB, 2021, Bangui
54. YTR, 2021, Bangui
55. SAP, 2021, Bangui
56. POI, 2021, Bangui

57. HGF, 2021, Bangui
58. UHN, 2021, Bangui
59. DSA, 2021, Bangui
60. APO, 2021, Bangui
61. NH, 2022, New York
62. GT, 2022, New York
63. YH, 2022, Online
64. MJ, 2022, Brussels
65. RF, 2022, Online
66. ZH, 2022, Brussels
67. OL, 2022, Online

Interview framework

Intro: presentation, thanks, topic, confidentiality, recording

Section A: Mandate

1. Could you tell me briefly about your mandate? a. What do you think about the involvement of your organization abroad, especially in terms of peacekeeping/peacebuilding/crisis management?

Section B: Relationships among international institutions ***To be adapted to the interviewee and her expertise and function***

2. Who are your main partners in the international community? 3. What are the main differences between your organization's approach toward peacekeeping/peacebuilding/crisis management and your partner organization's approach? 4. Would you consider your and their strengths and weaknesses as complementarity? Are you rather in competition? Or do you work in isolation from each other? Why? 5. Could you tell me about your last communication with your main partners? 6. Would you consider that you work well together? a. Could you give me an example/illustration of a project that you were involved with your cooperation went well with your partners? b. Can you tell about one of the instances when your cooperation went badly with your partners?

7. Discuss the other organizations that were not brought up.

Section C: Future of the International Community

8. What are your predictions for the future of the international community institutions peacekeeping/-peacebuilding/crisis management in the next few years?

Thanks and contacts

List of documents

These documents can be viewed via this link.

Agreements

- APPR 02.2019
- Birao 04.2007
- Brazzaville 06.2014
- COPAX 12.2019
- Libreville 06.2008
- Republican Dialogue
- Sirte 02.2007

ICGLR

- ICGLR 11.2004
- ICGLR 09.2021
- ICGLR 06.2023

Press articles

- Le Corbeau 02.2024
- Le Corbeau 06.2020
- Le Corbeau 11.2020
- Franceinfo 12.2020
- Globe and Mail 02.2024
- Guardian 06.2019
- Jeune Afrique 04.2013
- Le Monde 06.2023
- Le Monde 06.2024

- Le Monde 12.2020
- RFI 06.2024
- RFI 12.2020
- The New Humanitarian 07.2014
- TV5 08.2018
- TV5 10.2021
- Mondafrique 03.2022

Press releases

- AU-ECCAS-UN 01.2020
- AU-ECCAS-UN 01.2020a
- AU-ECCAS-UN-EU 01.2021
- AU-ECCAS-UN-EU 01.2021a
- AU-ECCAS-UN-EU 04.2021
- AU-ECCAS-UN-EU 06.2021
- AU-ECCAS-UN-EU 06.2020
- AU-ECCAS-UN-EU 12.2020
- AU-UN 07.2020
- AU-UN-EU 10.2019
- ECCAS-UN 01.2021
- G5 02.2020
- G5 08.2020
- G5 04.2020
- G5 11.2020
- G5+ 01.2021
- G5+ 12.2020
- G5+ 12.2020a
- G5+ 12.2020b
- G5+ 09.2021
- UN 03.2021

- UN 03.2021a
- UN-ICGLR 04.2021
- US-France-EU 09.2019
- Ë Zîngo Bîanî 04.2020

IOM

- IOM 01.2024
- IOM 01.2021

African Union

- AU 01.2022

OIC

- OIC 09.1969
- OIC 10.2017
- OIC 12.2017

European Union

- EC 09.2021
- EUAM 01.2018
- EEAS 11.2021
- EEAS 11.2021

World Bank

- WB 08.2020
- WB 10.2020
- WB 04.2022

UN and agencies

- IDDRS 05.2014
- MINUSCA 01.2016

- MINUSCA 08.2021
- MINUSCA-DHH 06.2021
- UNSC 06.2021
- UNSC 06.2021a
- UNSC 12.2003
- UNSC 11.2019
- UNSC 12.2019
- UNDP 01.2020
- UNDP 04.2019
- UNDP 05.2022
- UNDP 12.2022
- UNDP 06.2017
- UNHR 04.2021
- UNIDIR 04.2022
- UN 08.2023

Reports

- Brookings 05.2015
- EISA 12.2021
- EF 05.2019
- DCAF 11.2022
- ISS 05.2019
- ISS 09.2018
- Sentry 06.2023
- Sentry 10.2020
- Sentry 08.2021
- ICG 12.2007
- ICG 12.2021
- ICG 12.2020
- ICG 09.2017

- ICG 06.2019
- ICG 10.2024
- IPIS 08.2018
- IPIS 11.2019
- USIP 07.2020
- USIP 04.2018
- USIP 12.2019
- USIP 12.2006
- USIP 12.2020
- USIP 04.2019
- USIP 10.2019
- USIP 06.2018
- USIP 01.2021
- USIP 11.2021
- USIP 05.2017

Coding Schema

MAXQDA 24 Aperçu des codes

Couleur	Code supérieur	Code	Segments codés (tous les documents)	Segments codés (docu
	UN family	Minusca	96	0
		CAR	15	0
	Govt	budget/economy	3	0
		Fault lines	0	0
	Regional Organizations	OIC	2	0
	Regional Organizations	ECCAS	31	0
	Bilateral partners	Russia	104	0
	Bilateral partners	US	19	0
	Work in IOs	Reporting, monitoring, evaluation	5	0
	Relations among IOs	UN-ECCAS	2	0
	EU	Battlegroups	1	0
	UN	UN women	1	0
	UN family	UNDP	10	0
	Armed organizations	armed groups and others	61	0
	Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	Crisis group	2	0
	Embassies	Rwanda	2	0
	year	2020	27	0
		Work in IOs	1	0
	EU	CSDP	4	0
	Work in IOs	staffing	2	0
	UN	Unicef	1	0
	National defense plan and other policies	embargo	9	0
	Bilateral partners	African embassies	24	0
	CAR	NGOs	14	0
	Types of interactions among IOs	expertise	2	0
	Mil-Civ	Military	11	0
	APPR	Republican dialogue	11	0
	Organizations	UN	0	0
	EU	EUTM	5	0
	Regional Organizations	ICRGL	19	0
	Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	consultant	1	0
	Location	Brussels	8	0
	Mil-Civ	Civilian	52	0
	interviewee table	Location	0	0
	UN family	Unicef	1	0
	Organizations	Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	0	0
	Fault lines	HQ FIELD	23	0
	Security entrances	French embassy	1	0
	Embassies	US embassy	2	0
	interviewee table	Mil-Civ	0	0
	African regional organizations	ECCAS	2	0
	CAR	mining	7	0
	Relations among IOs	UN-AU	9	0
	Relations among IOs	EU-NATO	1	0
	CAR	PK5	18	0
	year	2021	19	0
	Relations among IOs	G5	3	0
	EU	INTPA	1	0
	Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	World Bank	1	0

	year	2022	10	0
	Regional Organizations	AU	39	0
	CAR	violations and populations	23	0
	UN family	UN	16	0
	EU	DGECHO	1	0
	Types of interactions among IOs	failure	3	0
	SSR	National defense plan and other policies	3	0
	HQ FIELD	field-field	5	0
	Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	Entrepeneur	1	0
	Organizations	EU	0	0
	year	2019	9	0
	Role of the EU	in CAR	56	0
	G5	G5 after May 2021	20	0
		interviewee table	0	0
		Regional Organizations	12	0
	Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	CIVIC	1	0
		Types of interactions among IOs	0	0
	Relations among IOs	UN-EU	30	0
	Types of interactions among IOs	Leadership and hierarchy	7	0
	Fault lines	civilian-military	2	0
		Security entrances	14	0
	CAR	courts	9	0
	Role of the EU	in the world	4	0
	Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	USIP	1	0
	Work in IOs	small pound	7	0
	Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	DCAF	2	0
	UN family	UN women	6	0
	CAR	Govt	95	0
	Language	Both	2	0
	UN family	IOM	4	0
	Armed organizations	USMS	61	0
	Embassies	Cameroon embassy	1	0
	CAR	decentralization	4	0
	interviewee table	Language	0	0
		EU	5	0
	Location	Online	12	0
	Types of interactions among IOs	Conflict	14	0
		UN family	11	0
	APPR	forum de bangui	3	0
	Relations among IOs	ECCAS-AU	5	0
	Govt	coups	1	0
	EU	EUAM	1	0
	EU	EU delegation	2	0
	media	disinformation	5	0
	Organizations	Embassies	0	0
	SSR	DDR	19	0
	Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	PhD	1	0
	Relations among IOs	joined visits	5	0
	Language	English	15	0
	CAR	Elections	120	0
	EU	Role of the EU	0	0

Location	Geneva	2	0
UN family	OCHA	6	0
CAR	religion	1	0
CAR	opposition	15	0
Work in IOs	Communication and information sharing	11	0
APPR	Brazzaville agreement	3	0
Types of interactions among IOs	Duplication	2	0
	Bilateral partners	14	0
Regional Organizations	CEMAC	2	0
Types of interactions among IOs	Subordination	1	0
interviewee table	Organizations	0	0
mining	transhumance	3	0
Relations among IOs	EU-UN-AU-ECCAS and others	57	0
Types of interactions among IOs	Cooperation	21	0
Bilateral partners	WB	20	0
Organizations	African regional organizations	1	0
Location	New York	2	0
Work in IOs	Personalities	6	0
Types of interactions among IOs	Dismissal	1	0
religion	pope	2	0
African regional organizations	African Union	4	0
Relations among IOs	AU-EU	12	0
CAR	SSR	13	0
EU	DEVCO	1	0
New York	others	1	0
APPR	Luanda roadmap	3	0
UN family	UNSC P5	5	0
CAR	APPR	71	0
Language	French	48	0
Bilateral partners	Lebanon	2	0
Armed organizations	FACA and others	46	0
Types of interactions among IOs	credit	1	0
EU	Member-states	9	0
G5	G5 before May 2021	18	0
Bilateral partners	France	50	0
EU	EEAS	2	0
Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	FSD	1	0
	Relations among IOs	0	0
in CAR	Delegation and other EU entities (TM, FOR, ECHO)	74	0
UN	Minusca	21	0
Others (NGOs, experts, journalists)	Journalist	5	0
CAR	cessez-le-feu	2	0
Location	Bangui	45	0
CAR	media	2	0
EU	Funding	15	0
interviewee table	year	0	0
SSR	Armed organizations	6	0
Bilateral partners	China	1	0
Embassies	French embassy	2	0

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