

# Mass Protests Grow Against French-backed Regime in the Central African Republic

Occupations by foreign forces has failed to stabilize troubled state

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*Discontent among the people with the French-imposed government in the capital of Bangui in the Central African Republic (CAR) has erupted in demonstrations by both the Muslim and Christian communities.*

*These developments are taking place amid the increasing deployment of foreign military forces mandated for peacekeeping operations by United Nations Security Council and other regional bodies.*

The number of troops now occupying the CAR include a bolstered French force of 2,000 along with 6,000 personnel from regional African states (MISCA), European Union Forces (EUFOR) of 1,000 and the impending intervention of some 12,000 other soldiers under the rubric of the Security Council. Nonetheless, the minority Muslim community is still facing organized violence while more people are being forced out of Bangui and other cities across the country.

Interim President Catherine Samba-Panza was appointed after the forced removal at the aegis of Paris of the previous transitional leader Michel Djotodia in January. A Muslim, Djotodia came to power in March 2013 when Seleka Coalition rebels entered Bangui without any real opposition from French troops that were already maintaining a presence in the CAR.

Subsequent human rights violations against the Christian community during the rule of Seleka prompted reprisal attacks by the Anti-Balaka forces composed of armed youth who have been accused of attacking Muslim residents, their homes, mosques and businesses.

On May 30 people took to the streets of the capital protesting the deteriorating security situation. Earlier in the same week 17 people were killed in a church that was attacked while people were taking refuge in the building.

According to CNN,

“Hundreds also came out in the streets to protest against the international peacekeeping forces — French troops and the MISCA forces — whom they accuse of doing too little to protect the people. The unrest continued Friday. (May 30) The International Red Cross described the situation in Bangui as ‘fluid and somewhat chaotic.’ Its teams on the ground have received reports of injured people in the demonstrations but are still assessing the number of casualties, it said.” (May 30)

Foreign troops in efforts to control the demonstrations, which other sources report to have involved thousands of people, opened fire resulting in three demonstrators being killed by gunshot wounds. Rather than calming the situation, the deaths of the three people fueled anger and further unrest throughout the following week.

### **Text Messages Banned Amid Call for General Strike**

Tensions escalated through June 6 when the current government issued a ban on text messaging. The blocking of the technology was done to minimize the impact of a call for a general strike in opposition to the government and the role of so-called peacekeepers.

In an article published by the London-based Guardian newspaper, it reports that “Mobile phone users in the CAR who try to send texts get the response:

‘SMS not allowed.’ Abdallah Assan Kadre, the communications minister issued a statement saying ‘On the instruction of the prime minister ... in order to contribute to the restoration of security in the country, the use of SMS by all mobile-phone subscribers is suspended.’” (June 6)

Moreover, the Guardian continued by noting

“The clampdown came after a mass SMS (text message) was circulated urging a general strike in response to more than a year of conflict between Christian and Muslim militias that has killed thousands of people. An organization called Collectif Centrafrique Debout sent out the texts last weekend urging people to stay at home and demanding complete disarmament, especially of the PK5 Muslim neighborhood in the capital, Bangui.” (June 6)

Anti-French sentiment is growing both among the Christian and Muslim populations who have been bitterly divided by the present neo-colonial system of governance. France and other imperialist countries maintain mining interests in the diamond, gold and uranium sectors.

On June 1 Prime Minister André Nzapayeke urged people to end the strike and mass demonstrations in order to return to work in the capital after several days of unrest that had virtually shut down Bangui. Nzapayeke also appealed for a voluntary national disarmament campaign where all residents were requested to hand in their weapons by June 8.

French troops were heckled by residents on June 7 and 8 in Miskine, a Christian-dominated area of Bangui. In Muslim neighborhoods chants of “No to France!” and anti-French insults are commonly shouted at the occupying forces. (AFP, June 6)

Noël Ngoulo, the Secretary General of Bangui University, was quoted by the AFP as saying that

“When they arrived, (French troops) we had hope that they were going to disarm the country. But as time has gone on, the population noticed that the disarmament was delayed. People are angry at the French because they have the impression that the mission objective has changed, from a mission of disarmament to one of simple intervention.” (June 6)

Recent events in the CAR illustrate that the deployment of troops from former colonial and present imperialist countries will only further destabilize the political situation in Africa. The United States has provided logistical and intelligence support to the French-led occupation of the CAR.

These foreign policy initiatives are being headed by the Pentagon through the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) whose presence and influence is being strengthened and enhanced by the administration of President Barack Obama. African workers, farmers and youth will inevitably escalate their opposition to the western military interventions being carried out across the continent.

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