

The Protracted Conflict in the CAR; Wrong Narratives, Wrong Perceptions and Wrong Execution of Response Strategies

Ikiri, Abraham Joe* & Dr. Eddy F obomanu*

Ikiri Abraham Joe is a Ph.D Candidate and Research Assistant Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt.

Dr. Eddy Obomanu is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt.

ABSTRACT

The conflict in the Central African Republic has lingered for too long and it is still raging. Some analysts say the conflict has lasted for 54 years and yet no end is in sight for its resolution and this is a challenge to scholars in the continent. The cause(s) of this protracted conflict has been attributed to several factors and the United Nations has also applied several response strategies to it but failed. This paper thinks that this failure to achieve peace in the protracted conflict in the Central African Republic is because the execution or implementation of the well thought-out response strategies suffered from grave ineptitude. Measures were taken and implemented at the wrong time. For example, why would the world body jump into organizing an election when the warring parties armed to the teeth are not disarmed and more than half of the population of that country are refugees in neighbouring countries and displaced in various camps inside the country? Why would the UN Jump into implementing peace building measures and institutions when peace has not been enforced in that country? This paper is of the view that the United Nations commanding and approving the various response strategies in that conflict does not have the correct perception of what is going on in the CAR. It is obvious that the UN depended so much on the neo-liberal narratives being churned out by organizations, institutions, media, NGOs and others. These bodies in turn may not be on the ground and depended on second or third hand sources. Using textual critique and trend analysis as methods of data analysis in a descriptive, qualitative/secondary research methodology and data collection, and perceptive and imperceptive theory as theoretical framework, this paper concludes that the situation would continue to remain the same or even dwindle if the narratives, pictures, misperceptions about the war in the CAR and response strategies are not changed. It is on this standpoint that this paper recommends that the present neo-liberal analysis and specifically Marxist analysis. This will help to establish that the war in the CAR is a class struggle in which the warring parties want to entrench themselves in the mismanagement of the natural resource endowment of the CAR.

KEY WORDS: Protracted, Conflict, centre African republic, Narratives, Wrong, Perceptions, Execution, Response Strategies

Date of Submission: 29-08-2020

Date of Acceptance: 14-09-2020

I. INTRODUCTION

The conflict in the Central African Republic could be traced to the August, 1966 military coup led by Col. Jean Bokassa, the then chief of Army staff. He ousted his master, the independence president of that country, President David Dacko. Armyssa Bellal (2014:10) stated that this first coup was at the instance of France, the colonial master of the CAR because President David Dacko was leaning towards China for international relations.

But since then, the Central African Republic's crisis deepened with several other military intervention in the political affairs of the country. In addition to this is the consistent compliant of neglect, abandonment and marginalization from the North-East of the country by successive administrations in Bangui.

The first sign of trouble was the formation of rebel groups in the North-East. These were, convention des patriots Poulra Justice et Paix (CPJP, 2008) Armee populaire pour la restauration de la republique et la democratic (APRD, 2006) front populaire pour la redressement (FRP – 1998) and mouvement des liberateurs centrafricains pour la Justice (MLCJ, 2008).

These groups started rebellious campaigns in the North-East especially in the prefecture headquarters of Kaga-Bandoro with the motive of drawing the attention of the various regimes of the country to their economic and socio-political woes but to no avail. This prompted the match to overthrow the government of Ange-Felix Patasse in 1998 but was pacified by both sub regional and regional leaders. Between 2007 and 2008,

the rebels resumed and intensified their interest and marched towards Bangui the seat of power ostensibly to overthrow the government but were stopped at a city called Bambari about 15km from Bangui by multinational force. A peace conference was held in Libreville where the formation of a unity government in the CAR, local elections in 2009, Parliamentary and presidential elections in 2010, recognition of the rebel groups as political party, conversion of the mutineers/rebels into the government army and release of political prisoners were discussed and agreed (International Crisis Group Report, 2008).

In 2011, the rebel groups united to form the Seleka rebel group headed by Michel Djotodia. Seleka in Sango language means Unity/Union. In 2012, the Seleka composed mainly of Moslem extraction resumed the invasion of the country, sacked the government in Bangui and assumed the leadership of the country with their leader, Michel Djotodia, as the president of the Central African Republic. But with monumental destruction of lives and properties targeted against the Christians and the Animist during the invasion by the Muslim groups, the Christians and the Animists jointly responded by the formation of the unorganized Anti-Balaka which means anti-Machete and AK47 in the Sango and Mandja language (IRIN, 2014a). The aim of the anti Balaka is to revenge and retaliate these destructions.

Since then, the war has been raging between the Muslim Seleka and Christian anti-Balaka groups. Both are well armed. However, the anti-Balaka was said to have successfully flushed out the Seleka Muslims from Bangui and cities in the South of the country. So, CAR is balkanised into Muslim rebels in the northern part and Animists/Christian rebels in the southern part of the country, the central government in the capital, Bangui is not in control of the country except some few kilometers around the presidential palace in the capital.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE CAR

The importance of any research on the protracted conflict in the Central African Republic is hinged on the strategic location of that country as the “heart and center of the continent of Africa” with strategic natural resources like uranium, gold, Diamond oil and gas, Iron ore, copper, Graphite, Umenite, Kaoline, Kyanite, Lignite, limestone, manganese, monazite Quartz, Rutile, salt and Tin. The agricultural resources are Timber, Tea, Coffee, yellow weak, cattles and elephant tusks (ivory) (Bermudez-lugo, omayra, 2002) U.S geological survey (the mineral industries of CAR 2005 mineral year book).

The point here is that the assumption of Michel Djotodia as President of that country was vehemently opposed by the leadership of the African Union because the mode of ascension to the presidency of that country by the Seleka is opposed to the African charter and principles of Democracy and election in the continent. This led to the denouncement of Djotodia and his regime and the pressure mounted on him to abdicate his throne and he did on January 20, 2015 but before he left, he declared the Seleka group illegal and under proscription. This is why in some of the narratives, the term “Ex-Seleka” is used.

RESPONSE STRATEGIES BY THE UNITED NATIONS TO THE CONFLICT

As enshrined in the charter of the United Nations, it is the executive responsibility of the Security Council to maintain international peace and security (chapter vi). It is on this provision that the United Nations through its various organs and agencies intervened and controlled the activities of other willing organizations that intends to work for peace in the protracted conflict in the Central African Republic.

The United Nations in consonance with Articles 52 – 54 of the charter has deployed the following measures:

- a) Ban on persons implicated in aiding or abetting the conflict in the CAR.
- b) Confiscation of properties, investments and Bank account of persons implicated in the conflict.
- c) Arm embargo on all groups in the conflict including the government.
- d) Travel ban on persons implicated to be aiding and abetting the conflict.
- e) Sanctions on the trading of diamonds and other minerals in the international market including the kimberly process decertification.
- f) Appointment of international contact group on the conflict.
- g) Appointment of international group of experts on the conflict.
- h) Appointment of the representative of the UN Secretary-General on children in armed conflict.
- i) Appointment of representative of the UN Secretary-General on women and sexual violence in the conflict.
- j) Trial of persons or groups implicated to have committed crimes against humanity in the conflict at the international criminal court (ICC).
- k) Deployment of Peace-keeping Forces to CAR.
- l) Deployment of peace building groups to CAR
- m) Deployment of its organs and agencies to the CAR to undertake humanitarian activities.
- n) Mobilization of funds from Member States to finance various measures taken by the world body in the conflict.

- o) Adoption of resolutions praising, supporting or condemning acts, policies and actions of parties to the conflict.
- p) Making official statements, releases or Declarations by the organs or agencies of the UN.
- q) Organizing, supporting fora, peace conferences, meetings etc on the conflict at the local, national and international levels aim at resolving the conflict.

These strategic responses enumerated above are of international standard and have been applied in similar conflict situations and were successful. But in the Central African Republic's conflict, they did not work, they were not efficient and effective hence they failed. The proof of this failure is the continued conflict in that country. The surprising aspect of the scenario is that in spite of the presence of over 12,000 peacekeepers deployed in the present "mission multidimensionnelle integree de Nations unies pour la stabilization en republic centrafricaine (MLNURCA), war is still raging. This is exemplified on the event of December 22, 2019 where more than 35 persons were killed at a community PK5 located near the international airport in Bangui. This is the statement of the problem for this paper.

International Peace-Keeping Forces in CAR

These are forces authorized by the United Nations Security Council by virtue of articles 52,53 and 54 of the charter of the United Nations. They are shown on the table 4.2.5 below

| S/n | Abbreviation | Name | Formed by | Date | Strength |
|-----|----------------------|--|---|------|----------|
| 1 | FOMUC | Force multinationale en centrafrique | Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) | 1996 | 800 |
| 2. | MISAB | Mission interafricaine de surveillance des Accords de Bangui | Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) | 1997 | 800 |
| 3. | MICOPAX | Mission de consolidation de la paix en centrafrique | ECCAS) | 2003 | 1,050 |
| 4. | EUROFORCE - CAR | Eur force in the Central African Republic | European union | 2015 | 800 |
| 5. | MISCA | Mission internationale de soutien a la centrafrique sous conduit africaine | African union | 2013 | 6,000 |
| 6. | MINURCA | United nations mission in Central Africa Republic (mission multidimensionnelle integree des nations unies pour la stablisation en République centrafricaine) | United Nations | 1998 | 1,350 |
| 7. | BINUCA | United Nation Integrated Peace Building Office in the Central Africa Republic | United Nations | 2000 | 1,350 |
| 8. | BONUCA | United Nations Peace building Support Office in the CAR | United Nations (S/RES/2121) | 2013 | 5,000 |
| 9. | MINUSCA | United Nations Mission for Stabilization in the CAR | United Nations (S/RES/2149) | 2014 | 12,000 |
| 10. | France of Sangari | France operation Sangaris | France | 2013 | 1,200 |
| 11. | South African troops | South African Army | South Africa | 2007 | 400 |

Table 4.2.5.1: Showing the international forces in the CAR

Source: prepared by the researcher from various sources

THE RESEARCH GOALS AND INTERROGATORIES

Therefore, this article has as its objectives, to re-examine the narratives from a neo-liberal to political economy/Marxist genre. To establish the relations between the narratives, perception or misperception of the UN about the CAR and conflict resolution (response strategies) to the conflict. In the same vein, this interrogates whether the various narratives in the conflict in the CAR is responsible for prolonging the war in that country? Does the narratives have an effect on the perception or misperception of the United Nations on the CAR? Whether the perception or misperception has effect on the formulation of the response strategies and its execution by the UN.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper employed the qualitative research methodology and secondary techniques to collect the data from reports, newspapers, data base on violence in the CAR, journals, magazines, speeches, commentaries, internet materials etc. to analyse the data for this paper, trend analysis and textual critique were used. The theoretical framework for this paper is the theory of perception or misperception by Roberts Jervis (1976). Various articles, reports and books were reviewed with astounding and astonishing gaps in the literature found.

GAPS IDENTIFIED IN LITERATURE

Some of these gaps are, that various report, literature and explanations about the conflict in the CAR are too general or neo-liberal. That no literature reviewed touched on the vital issue of the interests of the armed groups, in other words to establish that the conflict in that country is a class struggle by some members of the armed groups to entrench themselves in the foray to loot and mismanage the central African Republic using arm struggles to achieve their objectives. That no analyst in the various works reviewed touched on the thorny issue of selfishness and greed driving the protracted conflict whereby the parties intend to decimate the country by creating fiefdoms for themselves. That no literature established the link between the narratives or explanations and the misperception of the UN and the ineffective strategies used by it to execute the conflict resolutions strategies mapped out for the CAR.

Perhaps, an explanation on the theory of perception and misperception will suffice to explain the picture of members of the United Nations in taking decisions on the conflict of discourse.

Roberts Jervis (1976) in his two books, “perception and misperception in the United Nations” and “How statesmen think: the psychology of United Nations’ politics”, explained that

Perception plays important and fundamental role in decision making process and this could be positive or negative in individuals, groups, authorities, states and organizations’ quest to influence the actions of another.

He defined perception as “the act or power of discernment, perceiving, apprehension, understanding of any modification of the senses or consciousness, the combination of sensations into recognition of an object”.

According to him, the mental picture or image, understanding and discernment of a situation, place or thing helps the reaction whether positive or not, in which such place, situation or thing may receive during the consideration for decision on it. And this mental image perception to a large extent is influenced by inferences drawn from information available.

In decision-making in the United Nations, Jervis explains that:

The images, pictures and understanding of another actor, situation, place etc. in the United Nations system is contingent upon emotional, wishful thinking, defense mechanism and other motivational distortion of reality.

If this grim picture is juxtaposed to the situation in the Central African Republic’s situation, one can conclude that the decisions taken by the United Nations variously on the conflict in the CAR is highly influenced by the misperception of that country, the situation on ground and the people generally. If so, how can it be explained that the world body has intervened in this protracted conflict for about fourteen (14) times and yet the conflict still persists (ICG: 2016).

The Geneva peace-building platform (2015: paper no 12) published some of the opinions expressed by some people about the picture, understanding, discernment of the international community about the CAR as follows:

A scholar from CAR said

The perception of the international community about the CAR is that the government of the CAR has never had never had much presence outside of Bangui and regions outside of the capital exists as stateless societies.

Another scholar states as follows of the international community’s thinking of the CAR:

Not only is the CAR externally landlocked, it is also internally landlocked.

A country’s Ambassador to the CAR stated as follows:

The Central African Republic matters to the international community only to the extent that its internal problems affect the stability of the region.

As NGO Humanitarian Co-coordinator stated his view of the international community's perception of the CAR this way:

Car is generally regarded as a fragile state, with poor governance, dysfunctional services and a chronic conflict.

In a question, "how is the CAR perceived at the international level?" A UN delegate answered thus:

Car is wild jungle. CAR is a desert. Bangui is a big village.

A former higher level UN officer in the CAR stated his perception of that country thus:

You can't ignore something unless you know it exists. Very few people know CAR is a country and even fewer have time to worry about it.

A participant in a Geneva peace talk said:

Local complexities and dynamics which continue to drive the crisis in that country are poorly understood and not well manage and presented in Bangui, much less at regional summits.

The Geneva Peace Building Platform concluded its report (2015) on the perception index of the Car by the international community this way:

The international community's overarching perception, namely, the cynisim towards, lack of interest in, and misunderstanding of the CAR, shapes in turn the types and the modalities of engagement in that country

EFFECTS OF WRONG PERCEPTION OF THE CONFLICTBY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

These modalities of engagement by the United Nations in the protracted conflict in the Central African Republic manifested itself in the inconsistent and lackadaisical execution of the response strategies in that country. For instance, while the conflict is still raging and armed groups were still with their weapons, thousands of the people have left their homes to find refuge in other countries and others dumped in displaced camps, an election was organized. The question is who voted? In the midst of obvious violence in that country, did that election and the processes that led to it meet any democratic and electoral criteria for a free and fair election? This is a clear case of wrong perception of the decision makers in which different pictures and mental images of the situation in the CAR exists. This wrong perception or misperception of the real situation in the Central African Republic, this paper argues, is caused by wrong analysis, explanations and narratives. (Ikiri, 2019:85.

The policy and decision makers in far away New York depends so much on these distorted accounts, hence the wrong execution of these response strategies. If real or circumspective analysis, explanations or narratives which depicts a the correct picture, using Realist. Marxists and/or structural theories, the picture would have been different today.

If these alternative analytical tools listed above were since put to use, we argue, it would since have been discovered that armed groups and bandits, whether the anti-Balakas and ex-seleka, are merely classes who are struggling to capture power using arm/weapons to entrench themselves in the arrays of looters to mismanage the proceeds of that country's natural resources.

It would have been discovered that the current class struggles called protracted conflict, lacked nationalism and patriotism but is engendered by greed, selfishness and personal aggrandizement with the objective of balkanizing that country into fiefdoms to strengthen their controls.

It would have also been discovered that any struggle or conflict that is powered by greed, selfishness and other personal psychological motivations, is usually fierce, bloody and lasts longer. If the policy and decision makers have these pictures at the back of their minds, then they would apply a more realistic and stringent methods of executing their response strategies instead of the present method of persuasion, diplomacy and the use of minimum force (UN Security Council's final Report (2015).

The establishment of the United Nations integrated Peace Building office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) and the United Nations Peace-Building Support Office in the Car (BONUCA) at a time peace has not been enforced and kept, is also a pointer to the litany of misperception of the real situation on the ground in the CAR.

Below is a table of the many peace-keeping and peace-building interventions made by the United Nations at different times in the protracted conflict in the CAR. The table is prepared by the writers from various sources.

International Peace-Keeping Forces in CAR

These are forces authorized by the United Nations Security Council by virtue of articles 52,53 and 54 of the charter of the United Nations. They are shown on the table 4.2.5 below

| S/n | Abbreviation | Name | Formed by | Date | Strength |
|-----|----------------------|--|---|------|----------|
| 1 | FOMUC | Force multinationale en centrafrique | Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) | 1996 | 800 |
| 2. | MISAB | Mission interafricaine de surveillance des Accords de Bangui | Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) | 1997 | 800 |
| 3. | MICOPAX | Mission de consolidation de la paix en centrafrique | ECCAS) | 2003 | 1,050 |
| 4. | EUROFORCE-CAR | Eur force in the Central African Republic | European union | 2015 | 800 |
| 5. | MISCA | Mission internationale de soutien a la centrafrique sous conduit africaine | African union | 2013 | 6,000 |
| 6. | MINURCA | United nations mission in Central Africa Republic (mission multidimensionnelle integree des nations unies pour la stablisation en République centrafricaine) | United Nations | 1998 | 1,350 |
| 7. | BINUCA | United Nation Integrated Peace Building Office in the Central Africa Republic | United Nations | 2000 | 1,350 |
| 8. | BONUCA | United Nations Peace building Support Office in the CAR | United Nations (S/RES/2121) | 2013 | 5,000 |
| 9. | MINUSCA | United Nations Mission for Stabilization in the CAR | United Nations (S/RES/2149) | 2014 | 12,000 |
| 10. | France of Sangari | France operation Sangaris | France | 2013 | 1,200 |
| 11. | South African troops | South African Army | South Africa | 2007 | 400 |

Table 4.2.5.1: Showing the international forces in the CAR

Source: prepared by the researcher from various sources

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is on this pedestal that this paper recommends as follows:

That the present analyses, explanations or narratives of the protracted conflict in the CAR, is too neo-liberal, fluid, superficial and superfluous to result in any tangible tool that could assist policy and decision makers. The rythme of the dance must change in order to create a more realistic and tangible mental pictures in the mind of policy and decision makers who may not have visited the conflict scene.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper thinks that a more appropriate analytical tool in this situation should be realist, Marxists and structural theories. This will help policy and decision-makers change their approach from the present persuasion, minimum force and diplomacy to the use of force, which is the language recalcitrant, selfish, greedy, unpatriotic bandits hears easily and quickly.

Analysts, researchers and writers of conflict situations especially in Africa should, *ab initio*, recognize the responsibility they carry in being agents creating mental reality of a hazy theoretical abstract. A fluid and superficial analysis would result in a decision that may be ineffective while a circumspective and deeply articulated narrative would in mutatis mutandis, result in world real mental pictures which will push and goad decision takers to take actions that is relative, simultaneous and corresponding to the actual situation on ground.

For now in the central African Republic Protracted conflict, it is a matter of wrong narratives, wrong perception and wrong execution of response strategies.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Adebayo, A. (1999). *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts: The search for sustainable peace and good governance* (ed). London: Zed Books Ltd.
- [2]. Geneva Peace Building Platform (2015). Annual Report on the CAR, paper No. 12.
- [3]. Ikiri, A.J. (2019). *The protracted conflict in the CAR and UN Response strategies*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Dept. of Political and administrative studies (Int'l Relations), University of Port Harcourt.
- [4]. International Crisis Group (2014). *Annual Report on the conflict in the CAR*.
- [5]. Jervis, R. (1976). *Perception and misperception in the United Nations*, Princeton University, Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- [6]. Jervis, R. (1976). *How statesmen think: The Psychology of United Nations' Politics*, written under the auspices of the international affairs, Princeton University press.

Ikiri, Abraham Joe, et. al. "The Protracted Conflict in the CAR; Wrong Narratives, Wrong Perceptions and Wrong Execution of Response Strategies." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(9), 2020, pp. 56-62.