

**Deconstructing African ownership in peace operations:
The case of the Central African Republic, from MISAB to MICOPAX (1997 till today)¹**

In 2000, Roland Paris called for a “broadening of the study of peace operations”. He considered that the literature on this issue had produced plethora of ‘microtheory’ aimed at solving problems but very little ‘macrotheory’ that charted the broader relationships between peace operations, world politics and ideology.² At that time, it is true that most scholarship on the issue fell in the category of what Robert Cox has called “problem-solving theories”.³ As Edward Newman has defined it, “problem-solving approaches take prevailing social relationships, and the institutions into which they are organized, as the inevitable framework for action. They accept the assumptions that underpin existing policy and focus upon optimum effectiveness and performance”.⁴ The research undertaken until then mainly dealt with practical and “policy-relevant” issues such as the categorization of missions, the identification of their strengths and weaknesses, or the debates on the appropriateness of the use of force.

Today, Roland Paris’s claim would no longer be valid. “Critical theories” have contributed to the emergence of a better understanding of peace operations and of the role they play in the maintaining of world order. As defined by Newman, these approaches, in contrast with the “problem-solving” theories, “question how institutions emerge and are maintained, and do not accept existing policy parameters as a given or as necessarily legitimate. A critical approach questions –and if necessary challenges- prevailing structures of power and power relations, prevailing discourses or ways of thinking, and the interests they serve”.⁵ In this way, Critical scholars have helped recovering both the political and ideological contexts that underpin peace operations. The greatest contribution of Critical scholarship certainly concerns the study of peace operations’ ideological foundations. Among others, Roland Paris, François Debrix and Mark Duffield have demonstrated how the

¹ This paper is based on research done in the context of a PhD on the “africanisation of peace operations”. It is based on three case studies: the operations in Chad (1979-1982), in CAR and in Darfur (AMIS and UNAMID, 2004 to today)

² Roland Paris, "Broadening the study of peace operations", *International Studies Review*, 2000, vol.2, n°3, p.30.

³ Robert Cox, "Social forces, states, and world orders: beyond international relations theory", *Millenium*, 1981, vol.10, n°2, p.126-155.

⁴ Edward Newman, "Liberal peacebuilding debates", in Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver Richmond (ed.), *New perspectives on liberal peacebuilding*, New York, United Nations University, 2009, p.38.

⁵ *Ibid.*

evolution of international interventions, and particularly the emergence of peacebuilding operations, has been framed by a specific ideology, i.e. (neo)liberalism.⁶

This paper will be concerned with the other dimension of the Critical project as applied to peace operations, meaning the global politics that shapes the phenomenon. Authors who have addressed this issue include Philip Cunliffe, Andrea Sola-Martin and David Chandler.⁷ For instance, the latter argues that the emergence of the *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) concept does not reveal the appearance of a global humanitarian conscience but results from the new post-cold war balance of power and more precisely the desire of Western countries to have an eye upon the developments inside countries from the South.⁸

Since the early 1990's, the practice of peace operations has been widely regionalized. In Africa, in particular, where the UN has been unable (and reluctant) to carry alone the "burden" of peacekeeping, regional actors have been increasingly active. According to our account, African organizations, whether they are subregional, like the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) or continental, like the African Union (AU), have intervened in no less than 16 times since the end of the cold war.⁹

Our project is to assess to which extent the growth in African participation translates into greater power and responsibility for them. Who is actually pushing for "African solutions to African problems"? Who is behind the creation of African peace operations? Who is ruling those interventions? Who makes this possible through political and material support? In a previous publication, we established the distinction between two key concepts: *africanisation*, i.e. the increasing participation of African actors in a particular field, and *ownership*, i.e. the de facto political control over an issue (meaning the control over decision-making processes).¹⁰ Through this conceptual framework, we were able to highlight that Ali Mazrui's dream of a "Pax Africana that is protected and maintained by Africa herself" is far from being

⁶ Among others, we can mention François Debrix, *Re-envisioning peacekeeping: The United Nations and the mobilization of ideology*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999; Mark Duffield, *Global governance and the new wars: The merging of development and security*, Londres, Zed Books, 2001; Roland Paris, "International peacebuilding and the 'mission civilisatrice'", *Review of International Studies*, 2002, vol.28, n°4, p.637-656 ; Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper et Mandy Turner, *Whose peace ? Critical perspectives on the political economy of peacebuilding*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

⁷ Philip Cunliffe, "The politics of global governance in UN peacekeeping", *International Peacekeeping*, 2009, vol.16, n°3, p.323-336; Andreu Sola-Martin, "Lessons from MINURSO: a contribution to new thinking", *International Peacekeeping*, 2006, vol.13, n°3, p.366-380; David Chandler, "The responsibility to protect? Imposing the 'Liberal Peace'", *International Peacekeeping*, 2004, vol.11, n°1, p.59-81.

⁸ *Ibidem*

⁹ The four ECOWAS operations (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire); the three OAU observer missions (Rwanda, Burundi, Comoros); the four operations in the Central African Republic; the SADC operation in Lesotho; and the five operations of the AU (Burundi, Darfur, Somalia, and Comoros twice).

¹⁰ Benedikt Franke and Romain Esmenjaud, "Who owns African ownership? The Africanisation of security and its limits", *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 2008, vol.15, n°2, p.137-158; see also Romain Esmenjaud, *Peace and Security, external actors and the African Union: Africanisation without African ownership*, Papier presented during the 3rd European Conference on African Studies, Leipzig, 4-7 June 2009

realized.¹¹ While an *africanisation* of security has unquestionably taken place, there are reasons to think that this process has not translated into real *African ownership*. Among other things, the under-representation of Africans in institutions ruling peace operations, including the UN Security Council, as well as their financial and material dependence over external actors create the conditions for the maintaining of a strong non-African influence over regional initiatives.

The peculiarity and strength of a Critical approach is to address critically all notions around which the study of International Relations is organized. We will then need to carefully deconstruct not only the power relations between African and external actors, but also the interactions within these categories. African peace operations are indeed the result of action by sub-groups or even individual states, rather than of the continent as a whole. Thinking exclusively in terms of opposition between Africans and non-Africans would then lead us to a mistaken view of the reality. Underlining the artificial nature of such classifications could however lead us to consider that the question we are asking is misguided. However, in the common sense, the “responsabilization” of local actors, seen as better informed and thereby as being in a better position to solve crises, is considered a positive trend. It is then relevant to check whether their increasing participation in conflict management actually entails such empowerment. In addition, though interactions in decision-making processes always break the frontier between these two categories, it is possible for us to deal specifically with the interaction between Africans and external actors in a sense that it relates two different kinds of actors: put it bluntly, the providers of soldiers VS. the providers of materials and funding.

In this paper, we will apply this framework to a specific case study: the Central African Republic (CAR) where no less than four African peace operations have been deployed since 1997:¹² the *Mission de Surveillance des Accords de Bangui* (MISAB; 1997-1998), the operation by the *Community of Sahel-Saharan states* (COMESSA, 2001-2002), the *Force Multinationale en Centrafrique* (FOMUC; 2002-2008) and the *Mission de Consolidation de la Paix et Centrafrique* (MICOPAX; 2008 -).

¹¹ Ali Mazrui, *Towards a Pax Africana: a study of ideology and ambition*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

¹² The notion of *peace operations* has been chosen in this work, instead of the widely used *peacekeeping* term, because the latter refers to a more specific type of missions. On the contrary, the concept of peace operations covers the entire range of existing missions, including observer missions, peacekeeping *per se*, peace enforcement or peacebuilding. Peace operations will be defined as a deployment of military or police personnel, generally multinational, that has received international support through the mandate of an intergovernmental organization. This broad definition, which largely leaves to international organizations the role of defining the mandate of operations, allows us to consider the CEN-SAD intervention as a peace operation. To our knowledge, outside Terry Mays, no author has actually considered this initiative in these terms; Terry Mays, "African solutions for african problems: The changing face of african-mandated peace operations", *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, Spring 2003, vol.23, n°1, p.115.

Two basic interpretations, inspired by two different schools of thought, can be referred to in order to make sense of the *africanisation* of peace operations. In Pan-african thinking, this process is the result of the assertion of African actors. Thabo Mbeki and Alpha Oumar Konare are among leaders who have insisted on Africa's willingness to replace external actors as providers of security on the continent. Others, inspired by neo-colonial thinking, consider that the *africanisation* is not challenging the domination external actors have exerted over African states since independence. For instance, Michael Pugh argues that the regionalization of peace operations is the reaction of the "New York orthodoxy" to the overburdening of the UN. Regional actors would be called upon to implement the agenda of Great Powers through the promotion of a global liberal order.¹³ Likewise, Raphaël Granvaud from *Survie*, a civil society organization, considers that *Recamp*, a program that aims at building African capacities in the field of peacekeeping, is merely a way for the former colonial power to subcontract its interventions to its close allies on the continent.¹⁴

This paper, which is part of ongoing research and presents preliminary conclusions, argues that the reality differs from these simplistic explanations in that peace operations in CAR result from the constitution of a coalition which includes both African and non-African actors. These two categories are actually in a situation of mutual dependence which creates the conditions for *shared ownership* of peace operations. We will make sense of the functioning of this coalition by assessing the power of each of its members and describing the mechanisms through which they exert their influence. We will see that external actors, in particular France, which can be described as the "lead nation" in the EU but also, to a lesser extent, within the coalition, maintain a strong influence, though far from absolute, over peace operations in the country.

Through the deconstruction of the categories of Africa and external actors, we will demonstrate that external actors may display different attitudes towards African peace operations, including towards the validity of "African solutions", while operations do not result from the action of the continent as a whole, but only from parts of it. In reality, in some circumstances, the divisions of Africa may even constitute the main factor for the *africanisation*.

¹³ Michael Pugh, "The World Order politics of regionalization", in Michael Pugh and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu (ed.), *The United Nations and regional security*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, p.33; Michael Pugh, "Peacekeeping and critical theory", *International Peacekeeping*, 2004, vol.11, n°1, p.44-45.

¹⁴ Raphaël Granvaud, *Que fait l'armée française en Afrique ?*, Marseille, Agone, *Survie*, Dossiers Noirs n°23, 2009, p.276.

In the realisation of this project, the collection of data has been a difficult task. Decision-making processes, where informal exchanges are more important than formal formats, are difficult to recover in a way that is conform to the reality. Many decisions are actually taken through discussions in the corridors or phone calls between leaders, which leave no trace in official records. This obstacle is all the more difficult to overcome in the context of CAR, which receives very little attention from scholars and the media. In addition to using the press, we have then proceeded through interviews of observers and officials, either in Paris, by phone or e-mail. This project involves the study of a long list of decisions (who decided to create the mission? Why has an “African solution” been picked? How have the details of the operation, including its mandate and composition, been defined? Why was it put to an end?) Dealing with these questions separately is not possible since most of them are actually interconnected.¹⁵ Rather, we are analysing each operation in a chronological way, which allows us to highlight the evolution of power relations within the lifetime of each mission.

First, we will first give an historical account of the four operations that have been deployed in the Central African Republic while putting the emphasis on the evolution of the political context in which they developed. We will offer a narrative (certainly simplified given the space available) that focuses on the dynamic nature of the coalition at the head of the mission, which started as a Franco-Gabonese tandem and today takes the shape of a larger Euro-African group. Secondly, we will put together our findings around three issues: the power relations among external actors; the power relations among African actors; and the interaction between these two categories.

I. An historical account: the power relations governing African peace operation from MISAB to MICOPAX

Since its independence, the history of CAR has been marked by political instability and military coups. In 1976, Jean-Bedel Bokassa, who ten years earlier overthrew the first president of the country David Dacko, shortly brought international attention to the Central

¹⁵ For instance, the decision to mandate a mission is often dependant on the acceptance by some states to deploy troops on the ground.

African Republic by proclaiming himself Emperor.¹⁶ During the 1980's, another military regime was established by general Kolingba who had to leave his position in 1993 after elections brought Ange-Felix Patasse to power.

The rule of the first democratically-elected president in CAR suffers from a catastrophic economic situation as well as social troubles. In 1996, three successive mutinies, in April, May and December, take place within the army. The third one brings heavy fighting in the capital and is ended by the signing on January 25th 1997 of the *Bangui Accords* which, among other things, prescribe the sending of an African peace force, the MISAB.

The MISAB: a French initiative and the constitution of a Franco-Gabonese tandem

The creation of MISAB is to be understood as part of a shift in French policy towards Africa in general, and in CAR in particular. Since independence, the political situation in the country has largely remained under the control of the former colonial power. All leaders have benefitted from the support of France and when Bokassa tried to sever those ties by getting closer to Libya, he was toppled by a coup fomented in Paris (the famous *opération Barracuda*).¹⁷ In the context of the 1996 mutinies, France plays the role of the arbitrator thanks to its military presence in the country.¹⁸ Through interventions officially aimed at protecting nationals, it restores stability and puts an end to the first two uprisings. The third mutiny leads Paris to think that it has lost control over the situation. In early December, in Ouagadougou, which hosts the *Sommet France–Afrique*, president Chirac induces four of his closest allies, the heads of state from Gabon, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso, to establish a Committee to address the crisis in CAR (the *Comité International de Suivi*, CIS). On January 4th 1997, after two French soldiers are killed by the mutineers, their colleagues wage a severe counter-attack that leaves many victims among rebels, but also among civilians. This event definitely ends France's hopes to act as a neutral actor in CAR and transforms this crisis into an internal political issue.¹⁹ Paris is more than ever willing to transfer the “burden” to its

¹⁶ Didier Bigo, *Pouvoir et obéissance en Centrafrique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1988 ; Géraldine Faes et Stephen Smith, *Bokassa Ier: Un empereur français*, Paris, Calmann-lévy, 2000 ; Brian Titley, *Dark age: The political odyssey of Emperor Bokassa*, Montreal and London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997.

¹⁷ International Crisis Group (ICG), *République centrafricaine: Anatomie d'un Etat fantôme*, Rapport Afrique n°136, Décembre 2007, p.4-9. French influence under Kolingba's rule is embodied by general André Manton, adviser to the president but named the “proconsul” given the extent of his influence (*ibid.*, p.7)

¹⁸ Two military bases are established in CAR, more precisely in Bangui and Bouar.

¹⁹ A few days after the event, the head of the main opposition group, the *Socialist Party*, made the following comments: « L'armée française n'a pas à être transformée en force de sûreté intérieure ni en garde présidentielle pour le président Patassé. [...] Force est de constater que le président Patassé, certes choisi par des élections, ne se comporte pas démocratiquement et

allies, all the more so since such an initiative would give credit to the general shift proclaimed in French policy and which is to bring the reduction of its military presence on the continent.²⁰

The *Bangui Accord*, signed on January 25th thanks to the mediation efforts of the CIS, led by Malian general Amani Amadou Touré, plans the sending of an African peace force comprising soldiers from the four countries participating in the *Comité*, plus Senegal and Togo. These countries have never voiced any critics regarding French interventions in CAR, including its violent action in January,²¹ and actually have no intention to replace the former colonial power. Rather, their action is a response to the call made by Paris which is accompanied by a promise of military, logistical and financial support to those ready to send soldiers.²² The influence of France in this operation is such that some consider it as the “pivotal state” of MISAB, as Nigeria was in ECOWAS interventions or Russia in the Community of Independent States.²³

In this endeavour, France receives strong political support from Mali, but also from Gabon. Many crucial decisions regarding the situation in CAR are indeed taken by a tandem made up with presidents Chirac and Bongo. Discussions between the two men for instance preceded the French interventions in May 1996 and January 1997.²⁴ The special role played by the Gabonese president is recognized in the structure ruling the operation. He is made the political authority at the head of the mission and is to appoint the commander of the operation.²⁵

The mandate of the mission is “to help restore peace and security by monitoring the implementation of the agreements signed on 25 January 1997 in Bangui. [...] In order to attain this objective, MISAB shall conduct operations to disarm the ex-rebels, the militia and

ne parvient pas à stabiliser la situation dans son pays. » ; « Lionel Jospin : il ne faut pas « combiner en Centrafrique ingérence et impuissance » », *AFP*, 16 Janvier 1997.

²⁰ Roland Marchal, "France and Africa: The Emergence of Essential Reforms?", *International Affairs*, 1998, vol.74, n°2, p.355-372; Rachel Utley, "Not to do less but to do better... : French military policy in Africa", *International Affairs*, 2002, vol.78, n°1, p.129-146.

²¹ « Réactions officielles du Gabon et du Congo », *AFP*, 22 Mai 1996 ; « Réactions officielles au Cameroun, au Mali et au Tchad », *AFP*, 22 Mai 1996 ; « Diouf approuve l'intervention française à Bangui », *Reuters*, 6 Juin 1996 ; « Les partenaires africains et Washington ont approuvé l'opération de Bangui, selon Paris », *Dépêche AFP*, 6 Janvier 1997 ; « La Coopération dans le sang », *Jeune Afrique*, 8 Janvier 1997.

²² For the details of this support, see Comité internationale de suivi (CIS), *Premier rapport au Conseil de sécurité suite à l'adoption de la résolution 1125 (1997) relative à la situation en République centrafricaine*, 21 Août 1997, para 19 (Available in UN,S/1997/652).

²³ Alex J. Bellamy et Paul D. Williams, *Understanding Peacekeeping*, Malden, Blackwell Publishing, 2nd edition, 2010, p.44.

²⁴ « Paris sauve Patassé », *La Lettre du Continent*, 25 Avril 1996 ; François-Xavier Verschave, *Noir silence*, Paris, Editions des Arenes, 2000, p.228.

²⁵ *Mandate of the Inter-African force to monitor the implementation of the Bangui Agreements*, art. 6 and 9. (available in UN, S/1997/561, Appendix I).

all other unlawfully armed individuals”.²⁶ Until June, regular fighting occurs between African contingents, in particular the Chadian soldiers, and the (ex-)rebels. While Paris is increasingly sceptical about the willingness of President Patasse to achieve real peace, african troop contributors seem to interpret their mission in a sense that is more favourable to the head of state. Out of fear that it puts their neutrality at risk, Paris even refuses some request of support expressed by members of the force.²⁷ This shows that controlling the implementation of the mandate is not an easy task for the donor.

However, in early June, when tensions reach a new high, the French troops joined their Senegalese and Tchadian counterparts to “teach the mutinees a lesson”. The decision directly comes from the presidency, after consultations with... Omar Bongo.²⁸ French authorities have then decided to close down their military bases in the country and this can only be done only once peace is back in the country. Leaving in the midst of instability would create the impression that France is leaving CAR to its sad fate and, despite strong reservations about Patasse, the *Elysée* still considers him as the best “card” to play. After this event, the ambitions of mutineers are strongly cut down and the authority of the president is no longer seriously challenged.

In March 1998, the African troops move under the control of the United Nations to wear “blue helmets”. Their mission is to ensure stability in the country until the elections are organized. This shift, which corresponds to the end of MISAB *per se*, is again decided under the pressure of France which is no longer willing to carry alone the financial burden of the international presence in CAR. While UN soldiers have not been sent to African for about four years, France has the difficult task to convince UNSC members to “blue-helmet” the soldiers in CAR. After long bilateral discussions with the United States, during which Paris makes significant concessions aiming at reducing the costs and the level of ambitions of the mission,²⁹ the creation of the *Mission des Nations Unies en République Centrafricaine* (MINURCA) is decided on March 27th 1998 (UNSCR 1159).

²⁶ *Ibidem*, art. 2-3.

²⁷ « Des lettres confidentielles », *La Lettre du Continent*, 22 Mai 1997.

²⁸ « Bangui, sens dessus dessous », *L'Autre Afrique*, 25 Juin 1997, p.16 ; « Chirac et Bongo pour une MISAB musclée », *L'Autre Afrique*, 25 Juin 1997, p .17.

²⁹ Contrary to MISAB, authorized by the UNSC in August 1997 under Chapter VII of the Charter, MINURCA is deployed under Chapter VI. Among other things, France accepts to bring logistical support to the troops, as it did under MISAB, and to proceed to the repatriation of troops in case of conflict. 200 French troops are maintained in the country for that purpose; « Centrafrique : de la MISAB à la MINURCA », *Jeune Afrique*, 24 Mars 1998; « Les barracudas désertent Bangui », *Libération*, 7 Mars 1998 ; « Adieu ‘Barracuda’, bonjour la ‘Cigogne’ », *La Lettre du Continent*, 12 Mars 1998 ; Voir aussi S/1998/148, para 22.

France has then successfully brought its African allies and then the UN to CAR, allowing itself to discreetly withdraw from the country (there is no more French troops as of February 1999). In conformity with its overall policy of retreat from the continent, consolidated under the Socialist Government of Lionel Jospin, it has therefore transferred the responsibility of addressing this non-ending crisis to the international community.³⁰

The COMESSA “force to keep the peace, ensure security and achieve stability”: a Libyan initiative that provokes the reconstitution of the Franco-African coalition

MINURCA leaves CAR in February 2000 after the holding of elections in 1998-99 which consolidate Patasse’s grip on power. A UN presence is maintained through the creation of the *Bureau d’appui des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en République centrafricaine* (BONUCA). Exclusively made up of civilians, its modest role is to help consolidate peace in the country through the support to the reform of the CAR security forces or the promotion of Human Rights. These efforts barely have any effects on the stability of the country. As soon as May 2001, general Kolingba initiates a military coup against Patassé. His regime is saved only thanks to the intervention of the Congolese rebellion led by Jean-Pierre Mbemba, the *Mouvement de Libération du Congo* (MLC), but also about hundred Libyan troops. In early November, the attempt by loyalist forces to arrest general Bozize, accused of participation in the coup, triggers new fighting in the capital and the arrival of 80 additional troops from Tripoli.

Colonel Khadafy, anxious to get international support for his action in CAR, initiates a meeting of COMESSA on December 3rd.³¹ Held in Khartoum, the Conference decides “to establish, for an interim period, a force to keep the peace” in CAR.³² While initially, the Libyan presence is to be reinforced by troops from Sudan, Djibouti, Mali and Burkina Faso, only about 100-150 Sudanese and 50 Djiboutians are actually deployed, bringing the total amount of soldiers to about 400.³³ It seems the participation of Sudan mainly responds to

³⁰ Géraldine Faës et Stephen Smith, "République centrafricaine: La solitude et le chaos", *Politique Internationale*, Eté 2000, n°88, p.284 ; Moussounga Itsouhou Mbadinga, "The Inter-African mission to monitor the implementation of the Bangui agreements (MISAB)", *International Peacekeeping*, 2001, vol.8, n°4, p.32.

³¹ In 2001, COMESSA (created in 1998) included, 16 members: Burkina Faso, Libye, Mali, Niger, Soudan, Tchad, Centrafrique, Djibouti, Egypte, Erythrée, Gambie, Maroc, Nigeria, Sénégal, Somalie, Tunisie (the first six are the founders of the organization). There are today 29 member states.

³² COMESSA, *Final communiqué of the African mini-summit on peace and stability in the Central African Republic*, Khartoum, 3 December 2001, para 1 (available in UN/2001/1148)

³³ 200 to 300 Libyans are already on the ground ; ONU, *Rapport du Secrétaire général sur la situation en République centrafricaine*, S/2002/671, 14 Juin 2002, para 9 ; « Villepin à Bangui ? », *La Lettre du Continent*, 17 Septembre 2002 ; *Africa Research Bulletin (ARB)*, May 2002, p.14852 ; Jonathan Derrick, « CAR : Prolonged crisis worsens with coup

internal security concerns. It intends to take advantage of its presence in CAR to surround the secessionist forces in Southern Sudan (the Sudan People's Liberation Army). While the force is funded by Libya through COMESSA,³⁴ the prevalence of Tripoli and Khartoum is reflected in the structure of the operation which is put under the political authority of "President Omer Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir, current Chairman of CEN-SAD [COMESSA], and of Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi by virtue of his responsibility for the achievement of security and peace within the Community".³⁵

This operation presents two elements common to many other African operations but pushed to the extremes in that context: the vagueness of the mandate and the decentralisation of command. The role of the force is never made more precise than the mandate which assigns the soldiers the role to "keep peace, ensure security and achieve stability".³⁶ This leaves Libya and Sudan with great leverage to follow their own objectives. Beyond police action in the capital, it seems the troops have mainly participated in the defence of the regime. Like in May 2001, in November 2002 while confronted to a new coup attempt, this time led by general Bozize, Patasse's power is defended by *MLC* and Libyan troops. Another aspect of the mission, the absence of centralized command, also leads some to question its belonging to the category of peace operations. Multinational in theory only, the force was made up of contingents which certainly exchanged information, but acted autonomously and possessed their own commander.

The sending of African troops is realized in a context of indifference from the former "policeman" of region. In the context of the November 2001 fighting, the spokesman for French Foreign Affairs Ministry, argues that sovereign countries have the right to call for help by any other country.³⁷ Regional leaders express their dissatisfaction with Libya's presence in CAR through the *Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale* (CEMAC) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The former creates its own political committee to address the crisis,³⁸ while the latter refuses to adopt the CAR-Libya's proposal to endorse

attempts », in *Africa Contemporary Record*, Vol. 28, 2001-2002, B256 ; « Arrivée d'une cinquantaine de soldats soudanais », *Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens (MTM)*, 1^{er} Mars 2002, p.482.

³⁴ « Bongo in, Kadhafi out ? », *La Lettre du Continent*, 14 Novembre 2002; *ARB*, April 2002, p.14806.

³⁵ COMESSA, *op. cit.*, para 1.

³⁶ In some circumstances, the presence of foreign troops in CAR is also justified on the basis of bilateral agreements or the mutual defense pact agreed in the framework of COMESSA ; « Le premier ministre centrafricain, M. Ziguèle, rencontre les partis politiques », *Panapress*, 24 Novembre 2001 ; « Une garde libyo-soudanaise », *La Lettre du Continent*, 21 Février 2002.

³⁷ « En Centrafrique, M. Patassé opère son rétablissement avec l'aide des Libyens », *Le Monde*, 9 Novembre 2001.

³⁸ « Idriss Deby: Le sommet de Libreville a été "concret" », *AFP*, 5 Décembre 2001 ; « Entre une solution politique et militaire à la crise », *MTM*, 14 Décembre 2001, p.2601. CEMAC includes Cameroun, CAR, Chad, Congo(-Brazzaville), Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

the COMESSA mission and instead calls for the sending of a UN operation.³⁹ But the “counter-attack” by regional leaders really takes shape only once France comes back to the front. In June 2002, the victory of the right-wing party in presidential and legislative elections creates the conditions for the reengagement of the former colonial power in Africa. Such a move is obvious in Côte d’Ivoire but also in CAR where the new Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, encourages his African counterparts not to consider the Libyan presence as a *fait accompli*. The reconstitution of a coalition with its regional allies leads to the decision by CEMAC on October 2nd to send a new peace operation, whose main objective is to replace the Libyan presence there. Colonel Kaddafi is in no position to oppose this initiative and he is in fact not willing to do so. The cost of its presence is certainly prohibitive and Tripoli is engaged in a “seduction offensive” on both the African and the international arenas. Kaddafi is decided to break his reputation as an international “pariah” and he is pushing for the creation of the United States of Africa (he will finally get the African Union). Such a context is obviously not conducive to any initiative that could create discontent. By the end of December 2002, all COMESSA troops have then left the Central African Republic.

This operation therefore demonstrates the possibility of real *African ownership* in peace operations, but also the difficulty to sustain it. The operation has been short-lived (Libyans stayed only 19 months, Sudanese and Djiboutians only 10) and it triggered a reaction by France which reclaimed ownership of the situation, in partnership with its regional allies.

The FOMUC : From a Franco-African to a Euro-African coalition

FOMUC is longest operation ever deployed in CAR. It has been through several changes in its mandate and composition. These reflect alterations of the situation on the ground, but also of the political context in which it has been developing.

FOMUC before François Bozizé’s coup:

As we have seen, the impulse for the creation of the force came from the former colonial power which immediately received support from regional actors, including Congo, Gabon, but also Chad, which since then has been playing a growing role. Among African

³⁹ OAU, *Communique of the Eight ordinary session of the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism at Ministerial level*, Tripoli, 26th January 2002, para 9-10 (Disponible dans ONU, S/2002/136, 31 January 2002); “Sudan Peace mission or plot to destabilise Sudanese rebels?”, *Africanews*, March 2002. Disponible à http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_7887.html ; accès le 21 mars 2011

heads of state, Idriss Deby is certainly the most worried by the Libyan influence which is present at its doors both in the north (in Libya itself and in the Aouzou strip) and in the south (in CAR). N'Djamena, though not initially participating in the operation has greatly strongly supported its creation, certainly encouraging the return of France as a counterweight to Libya. The role assigned to the force is to ensure the safety of the CAR head of state, participate in the restructuring of the Central African armed forces, and observe the border between Chad and CAR, where bi-national patrols by the two neighbours are to be organized.⁴⁰

In 2002, internal troubles in the Central African Republic have indeed turned into a crisis between CAR and its neighbour. Bozizé and his troops, now the “number one enemy” in Bangui, have established their bases in southern Chad, while Patassé has sent a militia in the northern part of the country, which is led by a former opponent to Idriss Deby, Abdoulaye Miskine. But in November 2002, the coup attempt in Bangui redraws the attention of regional leaders towards the capital. African contingents, sent between December 2002 and January 2003, and coming at this stage from Gabon, Congo(-Brazaville) and Equatorial Guinea, are then deployed exclusively in Bangui.⁴¹

The force is entirely dependant on French support both in terms of funding and transportation. However, the first significant (non) action by the force, i.e. its passivity during the March 2003 coup d'état, is entirely the result of a regional plan. For different reasons, heads of state of the zone have indeed all come to offer their support to the opponent François Bozizé.⁴² His attack on Bangui receives the support of the DRC (through arms), the Rep. of Congo (through funding) and Chad (through soldiers, including members of the Presidential Guard). President Bongo agrees with the scheme at the last minute while France observes the events passively.⁴³ The FOMUC soldiers receive orders not to react to the offensive of pro-Bozizé forces. Only Congolese troops, who have not been reached by the instructions, exchange fire with the rebels.⁴⁴

FOMUC as a “stabilisation force”: France’s influence over the maintaining of the force and the growing role of Chad

⁴⁰ CEMAC, Final Communiqué of the Libreville meeting, October 2nd 2002 (Available in UN, S/2002/1113).

⁴¹ ONU, *Rapport du SG sur la situation en RCA et les activités du BONUCA*, 3 Janvier 2003, S/2003/5, para 10 ; *ARB*, November 2002, p.15084 ; *ARB*, 1-31 January 2003, p.15155 ; “Le MLC va-t-il partir ?”, *RFI*, 13 Février 2002. Disponible à http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/038/article_20048.asp (accès le 28 Janvier 2011).

⁴² Among other things, Denis Sassou Nguesso and Joseph Kaila resent Patasse’s close relations with their opponents, respectively Pascal Lissouba and Jean-Pierre Mbemba.

⁴³ ICG, *op. cit.*, 2007, p.16 ; Roland Marchal, *Aux marges du monde, en Afrique centrale...* Les Etudes du CERI, n°153-154, Mars 2009, p.12.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

After the coup, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea consider the presence of the force is no longer justified. While the latter withdraws its soldiers, president Bongo is persuaded by Paris to remain in the country.⁴⁵ The French authorities insist it is necessary to create the conditions for stability on the long-run. In the aftermath of the coup, Paris sends about 300 troops to protect nationals and restore order. 200 of them remain and constitute the *opération Boali* to offer logistical support to FOMUC, a move that should help convincing African leaders to maintain the force. Another argument Paris puts forward is the necessity to “multilateralise” the presence of Chad whose military influence in the country makes it the new “protector” of Bangui’s regime. In addition to the troops having participated in Bozize’s taking over, Ndjamenas has indeed deployed about 500 troops in Bangui. Some are included in the peace force, whereas others constitute Bozize’s presidential Guard.

This Fomuc “new look” is assigned the following task: contribute to the securisation of CAR; contribute to the restructuration of the armed forces; support the transition process for national reconciliation, the return to constitutional order and the restoration of a durable peace.⁴⁶ In theory, Libreville still holds the lead in the mission with Omar Bongo at the head of the *ad hoc* Committee for CAR created by CEMAC and all successive Commanders coming from Gabon. In reality however, Chadians soldiers act as an independent contingent obeying orders only after they have been approved by N’Djamena.⁴⁷ Their presence in CAR actually forms part of Chad’s overall strategy in the country which aims at defending their territory and the regime of Deby. CAR has indeed always been a place where Chadian rebels have established their bases.

The arrival of the EU and the regionalization of the FOMUC mandate

In late 2004, the political context surrounding the operation is modified by the arrival of the European Union (EU). In the framework of the Europa-africa dialogue launched in 2000, the EU established in July 2003 the Africa Peace Facility (APF). This tool gives Europeans the possibility to fund both the development of African security institutions and the deployment of peace operations. After Darfur, CAR offers another opportunity for the EU to demonstrate its commitment to support “African solutions” and emerge as a global security actor. The European support, which reaches about 30 millions euros under FOMUC (Nov

⁴⁵ « Bongo défié par les nouveaux « émirs » », *La Lettre du Continent*, 27 Mars 2003 ; « En Centrafrique, tous les partis affirment vouloir collaborer avec le nouveau régime », *Le Monde*, 26 Mars 2003 ; « Le Parlement équato-guinéen demande le retrait de son contingent de RCA », *AFP*, 21 Mars 2003.

⁴⁶ CEMAC, *Rapport d’activités de la première étape du processus d’intégration économique de la CEMAC (1999-2004)*, p.20 ; CEMAC, *Déclaration de la Conférence des Chefs d’Etat et de Délégations*, Libreville, 2-3 Juin 2003.

⁴⁷ Interview with a French official, Paris, May 2009; ICG, *op. cit.*, 2007, p.17.

2004- July 2008) covers expenses related to fuel, food, contingents rotation as well as soldiers allowances.⁴⁸ This action is complemented by those of bilateral donors, Germany but especially France. A French diplomat estimated that, if one takes all expenses into account, including the logistical support offered by *Boali*, the former colonial power still covered 60% of the budget of the mission in 2008.⁴⁹ As of late 2004, any decisions regarding the operation is therefore to be approved not only by France, but the EU as a whole. In reality, despite some suspicion about its intentions on the part of Europeans, France's say remains preponderant in all decisions of the organization. Its influence goes through different factors and mechanisms that we will describe in the second part.

In July 2005, the mandate of FOMUC moves in the direction of state-building, though in a very careful fashion. The most significant change is the deployment of troops in several regional bases (Bria, Bozoum and Kaga-Bandoro initially). In reality, the redefinition of the role assigned to the force is largely the result of plans conceived by external actors. First, the regionalisation of the mandate participates in the EU *development poles strategy*, which in fact has been conceived in Paris and then "sold" to European partners.⁵⁰ Secondly, the constitution of regional bases, whose control on the long run is to be transferred to the national armed forces, represents a contribution to the SSR process whose guidelines have been drafted by a French official assigned to assist the Central African Defence Minister.⁵¹

The participation of FOMUC troops to the fighting in the Vakaga

Ironically, the "regionalisation" of the FOMUC mandate corresponds to a period of greater insecurity in the peripheries of the country, and in particular in the north where several rebellion movements have established their bases. In November 2006, in the north-east, the *Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement* (UFDR) takes control of Birao, the main city of the Vakaga region. France plays the leading role in repealing the offensive. Outside Chad which also dispatches its national army in the area, African leaders are reluctant to ask their soldiers to take part in the fighting. In November, FOMUC troops finally assist French troops in their action, but according to a French diplomat, only after Paris "twisted the

⁴⁸ 2,8 millions in 2004, 7,5 in 2005, 7,1 in 2006, 11,8 in 2007, and 7,9 in 2008. Source : Commission Européenne, *Facilité de soutien à la paix : Rapport annuel 2009, 2010*, p.12-13. In 2007, France offered 7 millions euros, CEMAC 2 millions and CAR 270 000 euros ; ICG, *op. cit.*, 2007, p.32.

⁴⁹ Interview with a French official, Paris, May 2009.

⁵⁰ Interview with a French official, June 2009, Paris. For information on this project, <http://www.minplan-rca.org/dsrp/pole-de-developpement> (access on 5 April 2011).

⁵¹ ICG, 2007, p.32.

arm” of the President of the *ad hoc* Committee on CAR, Omar Bongo.⁵² The participation of FOMUC, though it played no role in practice, offers the former colonial power regional support for its action, which was largely criticized both in CAR and in France.⁵³

More generally, the behaviour of African troops gives rise to criticism among donors who consider them as much too passive. In some circumstances, French officials report they were able to induce them to increase their number of patrols but, as a whole, their judgement remains severe. “Outside Chad, the military value of African contingents is nil”, explains one of them. This demonstrates the limits of their capacity to manipulate the force according to their wish. They however still support the operation, as a way to replace the CAR security forces, considered far from operational at this stage, and to create confidence among protagonists of the crisis. In March 2008, the EU, through its financial support, and France, through its insistence on Cameroun to participate in the regional effort,⁵⁴ even make possible the opening of a new basis in Paoua.

MICOPAX : a failed attempt of African emancipation

The political conditions for the creation of MICOPAX

In October 2007, the *Communauté Economique des Etats d’Afrique Centrale* (CEEAC)⁵⁵ decides to take over the operation. The new force, named the *Mission de Consolidation de la Paix en Centrafrique* (MICOPAX),⁵⁶ approved by the head of state of the organization on June 12th 2008, has a more political role. Beyond tasks like consolidating peace and participating to the DDR and SSR processes, the peace mission shall promote the respect for Human Rights, coordinate humanitarian efforts, protect civilians, participate in the fight against HIV/Aids, or support “democratic governance”.⁵⁷ The operation then increasingly resembles a UN peacebuilding mission. The number of soldiers however remains far below, even if MICOPAX is to be reinforced by Civilian and Police components.

⁵² Interview with a French official, May 2009, Paris

⁵³ « Paris retrouve ses vieux réflexes africains », *Libération*, 14 Décembre 2006 ; « Un petit air de Françafrique », *Jeune Afrique*, 10-16 Décembre 2006. The UFDR led another attack in March 2007 and the counter-offensive by France and the CAR national forces triggered heavy criticism, including accusations of war crimes ; « L’armée française accusée de « crimes de guerre » en Centrafrique », *Panapress*, 19 Avril 2007.

⁵⁴ Marchal, *op. cit.*, p.31.

⁵⁵ The CEEAC includes all CEMAC members, plus Angola, Burundi, Cameroun, DRC and Sao Tome and Principe.

⁵⁶ The operation is also called *Mission de Consolidation de la Paix du COPAX* (named for *Conseil de Paix et de Sécurité d’Afrique Centrale*).

⁵⁷ CEEAC, *Décision portant mandat de la Mission de Paix du 12 juillet au 31 décembre et Mission de Consolidation de la Paix du 1^{er} Janvier 2009 aux environs de l’année 2013 du COPAX en RCA*, 13^e Session ord. de la Conf. des Chefs d’Etat et de Gouvernement, Kinshasa, 12 Juin 2008, art.4.

This new mandate is however only partly implemented. In particular, the Civilian component is much less developed than expected since, rather than dealing with Human Rights or HIV/Aids issues, it is made up of a Special Representative of the operation, the Gabonese Ambassador Albert Akendengue, and a few advisers. Regional actors have actually overestimated their capacity to impose their decision to the financial backers of the mission, who see these decisions as a “unilateral move” and who are not enthusiastic about these proposals.⁵⁸ They first request a transition period before the changes be implemented.⁵⁹ They also limit the ambitions of their African partners in terms of number of troops. More precisely, France limits its logistical support to 500 soldiers. It is certainly no accident if this level has not been exceeded by MICOPAX.⁶⁰ The mission today includes about 500 soldiers (from Chad Gabon and the two Congos) and about 150 soldiers (mainly from Cameroun). At the end, the main evolution in the role of African actors is the participation of the CEEAC in DDR through the deployment of about 30 observers. For the rest, the role of the African forces remains unchanged. Today MICOPAX contingents are deployed in Bangui, Paoua, Kaga-Bandoro, Bozoum and Ndélé. Ndélé hosts a basis since February 2011 while the CAR armed forces should shortly take over in Bozoum.⁶¹ The EU has accepted to cover the cost for the construction of the new basis, as well as for the deployment of DDR observers.

The second reason for the partial implementation of the mandate is that the proposals have been made by a part of the CEEAC bureaucracy, the *Commission de Défense et de Sécurité du COPAX*. “If there has been African ownership in this event, this is ownership by a sub-group”, explains an observer of the organization.⁶² In these conditions, it is not surprising that political leaders who have not been seriously engaged in the drafting of the mandate, have not committed the required resources to implement it, nor have they tried to convince the external actors to make additional financial efforts. Finally, the CAR authorities have not been consulted either in the context of the creation of MICOPAX. They were certainly not enthusiastic about the changes proposed which meant growing infringement in their internal affairs.

MICOPAX through an existential crisis

⁵⁸ Interview of French and European officials, May-June 2009, May 2011.

⁵⁹ The mandate indicates the changes will be implemented only as of January 2009.

⁶⁰ According to some officials questioned, it was envisaged to raise the number of troops to 1000 or even more ; Interview with French official, Paris, May 2009.

⁶¹ Electronic communication with a French official, May 2011.

⁶² Phone interview with an EU official, May 2011.

At the end of 2010, at the request of Chadian authorities, *the Mission des Nations Unies en Centrafrique et au Tchad* (MINURCAT) had to leave the two countries.⁶³ Under a UN mandate, EU troops and later Togolese soldiers had been deployed in North-Eastern CAR since October 2007. In 2010, the sending of MICOPAX in this area has been envisaged as a solution to replace them, but it was rapidly dropped. Neither the funders, nor the CEEAC were actually interested in involving the African operation in such a difficult (both militarily and logistically) environment.⁶⁴ Finally, the deployment of CAR armed forces, supported by international cooperation efforts, has been preferred to the MICOPAX option, as well as to the creation of a new UN operation.⁶⁵

This episode shows the lack of enthusiasm for any reinforcement of the role of the mission, including from the point of view of the regime in Bangui. For instance, the latter did not see positively the decision by CEEAC to reinforce its presence to observe the elections in January 2011.⁶⁶ The African operation is actually going through an existential crisis. With little visibility on the time needed to make the CAR security forces operational and with enduring political tensions in the country, MICOPAX may look like a mission without end. At the same time, regional leaders are less and less eager to engage resources in CAR, especially given the behaviour of the regime in Bangui, which, in their view, does not display any real commitment for durable peace.⁶⁷ The disappearing of several billions of CFA Francs, made available in 2009 by CEMAC for the DDR process, certainly contributed to their exasperation.⁶⁸ In particular, Ali Bongo, who succeeded his father in August 2009 and whose main concern is to consolidate its position in Gabon, is much less interested in the situation in CAR, leaving “orphan” the civilian component of MICOPAX.⁶⁹

External actors are also quite unhappy about the attitude of Bozize’s regime, especially since the 2011 elections, during which the EU reported “flaws” and “various defects”.⁷⁰ From their point of view, a withdrawal of MICOPAX is however not desirable given the

⁶³ The logistical support to troops deployed in North-eastern CAR was dependant on the presence of troops in Chad.

⁶⁴ Phone interview with French officials, May 2011; Interview with a UN official, October 2010, New York.

⁶⁵ ONU, *Rapport du Secrétaire Général sur la MINURCAT*, S/2010/409, 30 Juillet 2010, para 72-74..

⁶⁶ In the context of the elections, MICOPAX was to be reinforced by policemen from Cameroun and a few helicopters. Only helicopters were finally sent; « Des élections qui portent les germes de la contestation », *Le Potentiel*, 22 Janvier 2011; Electronic communication with a French official, May 2011.

⁶⁷ Phone interview with French and EU officials, May 2011.

⁶⁸ Some sources refer to 8 millions CFA francs, or even more ; « Que sont les huit milliards alloués par la CEMAC pour le DDR en RCA devenus ? », *Centrafrique-Presse*, 7 Août 2009 ; « Bozizé sommé de reverser 15 milliards de FCFA au programme DDR », *Afrique Avenir*, 9 Novembre 2009.

⁶⁹ The Civilian component is indeed under the authority of the President of Gabon and has no formal link with ECCAS; Phone interview with an EU official, May 2011.

⁷⁰ European Union, *Statement by the spokesperson of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the electoral process in CAR*, Brussels, 28 January 2011.

confidence-building role it plays in the country. France is particularly concerned since the presence of *Boali* is justified as a measure to support the African operation. Their capacity and willingness to convince regional leaders to stay in CAR is however open to doubt. A French official recognizes that, at this stage, no one is considering extending the mandate of the mission beyond 2013, when a political Bureau may replace the operation.⁷¹

2. Analytical account : Making sense of the power relations shaping African peace operations

This historical account makes it clear that no single actor is in a position to impose its wish over all other actors. The model of a coalition in which members take decisions through negotiations and compromises seems the closest to reality. The following part accounts for the functioning of this coalition.

Power relations among external actors: France as the “lead nation”

The number of external actors involved in CAR has significantly increased since 1997, in part because of the Darfur conflict which has shed light on crises in the region. The EU has emerged as a major actor, the international financial institutions, kicked out in 1994, have found their way back to the country, the UN is also present, through the BONUCA,⁷² but also the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In 2008, CAR has been added to the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, but this has not seriously affected the strategy of the international community in the country.⁷³ International organizations are involved in technical programmes like DDR and SSR,⁷⁴ but, if one looks at the peace operations *per se*, the influence of France, though diluted, remains strong. In fact, the overall evolution of the *africanisation* process in CAR is in line with the developments in French policy towards the country and Africa in general. The very creation of MISAB forms part of a retreat from the continent and its transformation in a UN operation corresponds to the acceleration of this

⁷¹ Electronic Communication with a French official, May 2011.

⁷² In 2009, the BONUCA has become the *Bureau Intégré des Nations Unies pour la Consolidation de la Paix en RCA* (BINUCA).

⁷³ The strategy adopted by the Commission simply endorses programs that have been running in the country, in the fields of DDR, SSR, development poles and reinforcement of the rule of law. Its main role is to give visibility to the crisis and help gathering funds; UN, *Strategic framework for peacebuilding in the CAR 2009-2011*, Peacebuilding Commission, PBC/3/CAF/7, 9 June 2009, para 20-40.

⁷⁴ Marta Martinelli et Emmanuel Klimis, *La réforme du secteur de la sécurité en République centrafricaine: Quelques réflexions sur la contribution belge à une expérience originale*, Bruxelles, Les rapport du GRIP, 2009/5.

process under the Socialist Government of Lionel Jospin. In 2002, the return to power in Paris of leaders with a more interventionist mindset but anxious not to act unilaterally,⁷⁵ corresponds to the creation of FOMUC. Finally, the implication of the EU forms part the overall “Europeanization” of French policy in Africa.

Within the EU, France certainly plays the role of “lead nation”. First, the EU is often represented by French individuals, including the head of the delegation between 2005 and 2009 and, since 2008, the official in charge of SSR reform in CAR.⁷⁶ Secondly, France still possesses the strongest diplomatic and military presence in the country, plus an adviser in the headquarters of the African operation. Until the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, it permanently held the presidency of the EU. Thirdly, its long-established networks and (presumed ?) expertise give Paris comparative advantages to have the greatest say.⁷⁷ Even more than in Chad or DRC, where France has managed to attract the EU through peace operations, it has managed to “multilateralise” its presence, thereby saving money, without losing too much of its influence.

To our knowledge, the relation between France and the EU, taken as an independent actor, is not marked by strong differences of positions, partly due to the presence of French nationals or officials sympathetic to French interests in the EU apparatus. One can however note that the civilian nature of the European support and more generally, its penchant for “soft power”, makes it an “objective ally” of African leaders in their preference for non-participation of the force in fighting. It seems France, as it was the case in late 2006, would prefer more proactiveness on the part of regional actors.⁷⁸ The nature of EU support, exclusively of civilian kind, also contributes to limit the influence of the organization. These restrictions indeed make it necessary that other actors support the operation in the military field. The preponderance of France finally stems from the fact that the EU and France are different kinds of “animals”. Without strong interests to defend, the European Union, like any other multilateral organization, is less eager to impose its opinion, especially compared to

⁷⁵ Hewane Serequeberhan, "La politique de la France à l'égard des conflits en Afrique depuis 2002: Une politique à tâtons", *Annuaire Français de Relations Internationales*, 2006, vol.VII.

⁷⁶ ICG, *République centrafricaine: Débloquent le Dialogue Politique Inclusif*, Nairobi/Bruxelles, Briefing Afrique n°55, 9 Décembre 2008, p.12-13.

⁷⁷ The immaterial dimension of France's enduring influence is described by Roland Marchal the following way : « Pour Paris, d'une part, la communauté internationale doit prendre ses responsabilités et la France ne peut ou ne veut plus porter à bout de bras un Etat centrafricain réduit aux acquêts ; d'autre part, les choix français doivent rester centraux du fait de l'assurance hexagonale de « savoir faire dans ce pays » (une assurance dont les résultats restent pourtant à démontrer) et d'une attitude de ladite communauté internationale qui sait se tourner, dès que la tension monte, vers la « nation cadre » (l'ancienne puissance coloniale) pour gérer au mieux ses affaires. » ; Marchal, *op. cit.*, p.9.

⁷⁸ In late 2006, the discussions between France and FOMUC which ended up in the symbolic participation of african troops in the fighting against rebels were held without consultations of the EU ; interview with French officials, May 2009.

bilateral actors operating in what they consider their own “backyard”. From the point of view of Africans, the EU therefore appears as less “benign”, and more respectful towards the principle of African ownership.⁷⁹

Power relations among African actors: the dilution of the Gabonese leadership and the myth of Africa as a unitary actor

Like in most crises, subregional actors have taken the lead for the management of the crisis in CAR. MISAB and FOMUC have received support from the continental organization, respectively from the OAU and the AU.⁸⁰ Under MICOPAX, the African Union has even displayed growing interest for the country through participation in most forums established to manage the crisis, including the DDR and elections Steering Committee. An office of the organization was also established in Bangui in March 2010. The implication of the AU participates in the attempt by the organization to assert itself as the ultimate source of legitimacy on the continent. As in most cases when subregional organizations have taken the lead, its role has however not gone beyond observation and supervision.

Operations in CAR have been realized through different formats: an *ad hoc* initiative (MISAB) and three operations ruled by three different subregional organizations (COMESSA, CEMAC and CEEAC). These frameworks of action do not seem to have seriously affected the level of African ownership and the power relations governing the interventions. Institutions of the continent remain weakly institutionalized, which leaves strong leverage to individuals and leaders of the member states. For instance, it is interesting to underline that the political leader of MICOPAX, Ambassador Akendengue, is under the responsibility of the Gabonese president and not the CEEAC *per se*.

Since 1997, the political interplay between subregional actors has been more and more complex. The death of Omar Bongo is the last event that participates in a gradual undermining of the Gabonese leadership. Contrary to what happened under MISAB and FOMUC, the military commander of the operation now rotates among contributors, while Chad still acts largely autonomously. This situation actually reflects a larger struggle for

⁷⁹ Our research in the context of the peace operation leads us to the same conclusion, which is also shared by ICG; ICG, *The EU/AU partnership in Darfur: Not yet a wimming combination*, Nairobi/Brussels, Africa Report, n°99, 10 October 2005.

⁸⁰ The OAU has expressed its support to MISAB through a 100 000 dollars gift and an official visit in Bangui ; « Fin d’une mission de l’OUA à Bangui », *Dépêche AFP*, 10 Février 1997; CIS, *Deuxième rapport au Conseil de sécurité suite à l’adoption de la résolution 1125 (1997) relative à la situation en République centrafricaine*, 1^{er} Sept. 1997, para 27 (disponible dans ONU, S/1997/684). For FOMUC, the AU did so through a communiqué of the PSC ; UA, *Communiqué de la 86^e session ordinaire de l’Organe central du Mécanisme pour la prévention, la gestion et le règlement des conflits au niveau des ambassadeurs*, 29 Octobre 2002, H3 (Disponible dans ONU, S/2002/1219, 31 Octobre 2002).

influence in the region, in which Gabon, Congo, Chad and Cameroun are in competition. With the implication of MICOPAX, it was thought that Angola, which was to send policemen in CAR, would come in as the new main regional actor. This has not come true.⁸¹ In any case, this context is obviously not favourable for the empowerment of Africans since external actors can play with those divisions.

African peace missions therefore operate in a divisive or even polarized context. They are not the result of action by the continent as a unitary actor, but rather of specific groups within it. In some circumstances, division among Africans, rather than unity, is even the main factor to understand their action. The principal motivation for the creation of FOMUC was indeed to replace the Libyan troops whose presence in CAR was seen as a threat to most regional leaders. This fundamentally contradicts the Pan-African rhetoric which describes the growing role of Africans as a demonstration of solidarity and unity by actors of the continent.

The interaction within the coalition: how shared ownership works

The main factor behind the influence of external actors is the material and financial support they give to the Africans, which put the latter in a situation of dependence. It is clear that even today, any proposals by Africans must receive the approval of their partners, which obviously makes the probability for them to have complete ownership over the operation close to 0. The case of the COMESSA operation shows that African ownership can exist, though on a short period of time. It shows that Africans, at least some of them, can act on their own. It is interesting to note that in March 2003, in the context of the “regional plan” to topple Patassé, the leaders of Central Africa have been able to raise both money and arms.⁸² This shows that receiving aid from external donors is partly the result of a choice on the part of African actors rather than a simple fatality. Since they consider that security is the responsibility of all UN members (especially UNSC members which keep claiming their primacy in the management of conflict), they also find it normal that the international community participates in the effort through funding. Moreover, receiving material and equipment in exchange of their deployment is sometimes the main motivation for troops contributing countries. In many ways, regional actors are then consciously putting themselves in a situation of dependence and they do it all the more willingly since they know external

⁸¹ « Un nouveau parrain angolais ? », *La Lettre du Continent*, 22 Mai 2008.

⁸² According to the ICG, the Rep of Congo has made available no less than 3 CFA milliards (4,6 millions euros) for this initiative. In contrast, in 2007 the CEEAC participated to the budget of FOMUC with only 2 millions euros; ICG, *op. cit.*, 2007, p.16 and 32.

actors are in no position to manipulate them. They could impose their view by using “sticks” or threats only if they had other options to play with. But external actors are not willing to intervene themselves. Insofar as they are not willing to put an end to the operation – in reality, the existence of the operation is more important in their eyes than to those of regional leaders - one can even argue that the fulfilment of their foreign policy interests also depend on the goodwill of African actors. In the end, African and non-african actors are in a situation of mutual dependence. In these conditions, where no one is in a position to impose its preferences, it seems appropriate to talk about *shared ownership*, rather than African ownership or any kind of imperial subcontracting.

Any actors making a proposal will have to convince its partners to adopt it, which is not an easy task since, for some, it will apply additional costs, and for others, a new commitment on the part of their soldiers. The mechanisms that govern decision-making process cannot be summarized in any simple way all the more so since decisions may be taken for reasons that are disconnected from the crisis itself. However, it is possible for us to list a number of factors that play a significant role in such situations and in CAR in particular. Here we will mention five of them. First, personal affinities help some leaders to have a greater say in the discussions. For instance, Chirac and Bongo have often acted as a tandem in the context of MISAB. Second, the level of interests of the different actors is to be considered. States with strong interests in the country, like Chad and to a lesser extent France,⁸³ insist on their positions to be taken into account. Third, the expertise and savoir-faire of each protagonist is another significant element. For a long time, it seems African actors have left the initiative to their external counterpart given their greater experience in the field of peace operations. More generally, a tendency exists among francophone states to rely on France for many decisions, in particular those regarding security. The case of MICOPAX however shows that African actors now feel legitimate to take the lead. One can surely see with this episode the effect of their participation to peacekeeping trainings and to UN operations. The fact that the mandate drafted by the CEEAC is very similar to the international standards developed by the UN or other Western actors consolidates this impression.

Fourth, and most importantly in the case of CAR, the interaction within the coalition is based on the confidence that is (or is not) built between the different actors. Each member of the coalition is indeed expected to fulfil its part of the contract and in case it fails (or is expected) to do so, he is likely to obtain a bad reputation which would be detrimental to its

⁸³ France’s involvement in CAR participates to the preservation of its position of great power on the continent. Stability in CAR is also for the preservation of its economic interests in the country.

influence. For instance, when France promises its African allies some support if they decide on the creation of a peace operation, it would better be up to its commitments. In other peace operations, like the African Mission in Sudan (AMIS, Darfur) or the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the actors of the continent have been criticizing their international partners for sending them to the field while not giving the means to solve the crisis. This creates resentment and deteriorates relations within the coalition. To our knowledge, there is no such disappointment on the part of African actors in CAR.⁸⁴ However, on the other hand, external actors are not convinced about the capacities and, more importantly, the willingness of their regional allies to bring peace in the country. On many issues, they remain of the view that other actors, like BINUCA or UNDP, are more able to fulfil technical tasks like SSR or DDR. Their severe judgement on the “uselessness” of most contingents (see above) is important to take into account if one wants to understand why donors have been reluctant to enlarge the mandate of the force under MICOPAX. They also have a perception of African actors as “predators”, who would only be interested in the money and equipment that participating in an operation brings. “From the point of view of Africans, peacekeeping is a business”, most western officials argue. Whether this is true or not, this helps explaining their somewhat paternalistic approach to the *africanisation* process. Under FOMUC, significant amounts of money aimed at the soldiers never reached the contingents, which certainly participated to the emergence of such feelings.⁸⁵

To our view, there is no conscious attempt by external actors to take advantage of their dominant position and manipulate local actors. In principle, they all recognize the legitimacy and benefits of African ownership. However, when they consider the capacities and willingness of African actors to bring peace, this is inevitably involves some kind of subjective assessment based on their priorities, including on their vision of peace and on what the objective of the mission should be. Implicitly therefore, this hides an attempt to make troops contributing countries act according to their wish. In CAR however, there is no strong discrepancy between the approaches of regional and international actors (contrary to other fields like Darfur for instance). When external actors did not support the extension of MICOPAX’s mandate, it is not because they were unhappy about the proposals made. On the contrary, they had good reasons to receive the approval of donors since they aimed at reinforcing Human Rights and Good Governance. In reality, if this was not the case, it is

⁸⁴ We have to recognize we have not been in a position to interrogate as many African officials as hoped.

⁸⁵ « Des euros « évaporés » par millions au Darfour », *Libération*, 16 Juillet 2007. This article refers to the situation under AMIS in Darfur, but also FOMUC.

because they considered the additional costs involved were too high given the expected results.

Finally, one shall note bargains and power relations are not the same depending on the kind of decisions concerned. In CAR, external actors, France in particular, still hold a strong influence over most decisions, including those of an existential nature (creation, maintenance and end of the operation), and those related to the features of the force (drafting of the mandate, composition, number of troops). However, their influence is more limited when it is about the implementation of the mandate. African leaders are of course particularly worried to maintain control over the tasks fulfilled by their soldiers. Their passivity during the 2003 coup by Bozizé (most likely approved by France at “the last minute”), and later in front of the rebellions in the north (most likely to the discontent of France) show the autonomy African leaders possess.

Conclusion

To conclude, we will come back to two of our main conclusions and see how they fit with our research on other peace operations (mainly the OAU in Chad, 1979-1982; and the AU in Darfur, 2004-2007).

1) The africanisation, in most cases, is operated in a context of mutual dependence and shared ownership.

In all cases, the coalition model is indeed the most relevant to understand power relations in peace missions. The configuration of power in CAR, in which external actors, mainly through France, holds such strong influence, can however be found in very few other instances. In fact, only in Chad, another former French colony, can one find such a situation. The AU operation in Darfur, for instance, offers a much more complex picture with a larger number of actors.

2) African power relations are marked by divisions and competition so that the africanisation is mostly the result of action by small groups or individual countries or may even be directly targeted against states of the continent.

The existence of such sub-groupings and tensions is common to all operations. These are often the result of action by “pivotal states”, *hegemon* or a specific group of country. The AU operation in Darfur was initially supported by all but it quickly gave raise to divisions between states from Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa (to put it bluntly). Again, the situation

in CAR is very similar to the one in Chad since the different operations deployed in the latter country have been supported by different groups that were opposed to each other. Like FOMUC, the most important operation (the third one) was even deployed as a way to replace Libyan soldiers, already considered as a threat by regional leaders...