

# French-led peacekeepers shoot protesters in Central African Republic

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Yesterday, at least two people were killed and several others wounded by peacekeepers in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), amid mounting sectarian clashes stoked by the US and French intervention in the country.

Thousands marched yesterday in protests demanding the resignation of interim President Catherine Samba-Panza and the withdrawal of African Union peacekeepers operating in CAR under US and French control. Protesters burnt tyres and erected barricades on the main streets of Bangui, denouncing foreign intervention for failing to end over a year of sectarian violence.

The African Union peacekeeping mission (MISCA) blamed the protesters for firing on its troops. MISCA spokesman Francis Che said: "There were some armed demonstrators and they attacked the Burundian base. The Burundians responded with live fire and there were two people killed and two wounded amongst the assailants."

However, the protesters denounced the claim, saying that they were unarmed and had come to hold talks with the head of the UN mission in Bangui. They gathered outside the headquarters, which is close to the Burundian base, early Friday morning, demanding the withdrawal of Burundian troops, which they accused of favouring Muslims.

Eric Sako, a businessman, told Reuters TV: "We gathered here this morning, with women and children and with no weapons, and the Burundians have killed five people ... We were in the UN offices trying to explain things, and they opened fire on us."

The killing of protesters came after escalating sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians led to the deaths of over a dozen people in Bangui this week. On Wednesday, Muslim insurgents of the Seleka militia raided Notre Dame of Fatima church in Bangui, where as many as 6,000 people took refuge for safety. They killed at least 11 people, including the priest, with grenades and

machine gun fire, while abducting others. Dozens were wounded.

Katie Harrison, an official of the British aid agency Tearfund who visited the church after the attack, said: "There was some quite horrific shooting and a number of people died ... We're still waiting to hear about the other people we serve. We don't know what happened to them."

The attack on the church followed violence in the capital earlier in the week, during which three Muslim youths were brutally killed. Suspicion fell on Christian anti-Balaka militias who were on their way to an inter-communal reconciliation football match.

After the church attack, anti-Balaka militias attacked a mosque in Bangui's Lakouanga neighbourhood. A spokesman for Bangui's Muslim community, Ousmane Abakar, told AP: "For six months, we have been the ones subjected to violence and the destruction of our mosques."

Samba-Panza, who took power with US and French support in January to try to curb sectarian violence, accused armed groups of seeking to destabilise her government. She said, "Inter-community hatred is being exploited shamelessly by the enemies of peace who want to trigger another transition government and who are sparing no effort to undermine the actions of current transitional authorities to reconcile Christians and Muslims."

In fact, responsibility for the escalating sectarian violence in CAR lies not with popular opposition to the US-French intervention in CAR, but rather with the intervention itself. With the support of the United States, France backed the Muslim Seleka in an attempt to topple President François Bozizé, seize the country, and expel China's growing economic influence in the CAR, including in its oil industry.

Proclaiming its intention to end the humanitarian crisis

in the CAR, the Socialist Party (PS) government of French President François Hollande launched military intervention last December, deploying 2000 French troops supported by 6000 African troops. The attempt to use a Muslim militia to rule the religiously divided former French colony, including the majority-Christian capital of Bangui, soon led to an explosion of sectarian violence, however.

The imperialist powers ultimately decided to back the removal of the head of state installed by the Seleka militia, President Michel Djotodia, amid the deepening violence, and replace him with the so-called “transition” regime of Samba-Panza.

Under the cynical guise of launching humanitarian mission, Paris has been launching wars, including in Ivory Coast and Mali, to carve up and recolonize the African continent, ever since France worked with the US to attack Libya in 2011. Washington is also expanding its military presence, including deploying its special forces to train military units across northern and western Africa.

The CAR stands at the center of an escalating series of imperialist interventions, civil wars and ethno-sectarian conflicts across northern and central Africa—from Libya, Niger and Mali through Nigeria to CAR and South Sudan. The United States, France and Britain are closely coordinating a military intervention in oil-rich Nigeria against the Islamist militant group Boko Haram.

The result of these interventions has been a disaster for the people of CAR. Since Paris backed coup, there has been human rights violations and clashes that have left 2.2 million of country’s 4.5 million population in need of humanitarian aid.

According to UNHCR, “over 400,000 people are estimated to be internally displaced, compared to some 94,000 in early 2012. Some 65,000 individuals have fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Republic of the Congo, Chad and Cameroon, bringing the global number of Central African refugees close to 220,000.”



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