The Effectiveness of an Arms Embargo for Containing Armed Conflict: A Case Study of the Central African Republic

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I. Introduction:

In 2012, while the Western media's attention was mainly focused on the conflicts in the Middle East and the Sahel, a civil war broke out in Central African Republic that has resulted in thousands of people dead and more than a million displaced (Benn 2016). In response to the conflict, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2127 in December 2013, calling for an arms embargo on the Central African Republic (UNSC 2013). Since the end of the Cold war, arms embargoes have been repeatedly used by the UN Security Council. Most of these arms embargoes were imposed with the intended goal of containing civil war and were often imposed on Africa states. Of the 26 UN mandatory arms embargoes, only the arms embargoes on Southern Rhodesia (1966-1979) and South Africa (1977-1994) were imposed before 1990 (Hufbauer et al. 2009, 132). Yet, despite the recent popularity of arms embargoes, 'previous studies have found that nearly every UN arms embargo have been systematically violated' (Moore 2010, 594). The question thus arises: *Can a UN arms embargo contain armed conflict in the Central African Republic?*

The purpose of this research is two-fold. First, it tries to clarify the challenges to the arms embargo on the Central African Republic. Second, it tries to indicate the factors that influence the effectiveness of arms embargoes in Africa in general. Examining the factors that undermine the arms embargoes is not only essential for understanding the prospects of the arms embargo in the Central African Republic, but also for the rest of Africa. As the UN continues to impose arms embargoes not only on the Central African Republic, but also on Sudan (Darfur region), Somalia, Libya, Liberia, DR Congo, Cote d'Ivoire and Eritrea (SIPRI 2015).

II. Literature review:

Arms embargoes have usually been discussed in the context of a wider debate on the effectiveness of economic sanctions. Yet, the end of the Cold War saw a sharp increase of arms embargoes imposed by the UN, and with it, an increase in academic research on the effectiveness of arms embargoes. This increase of imposed arms embargoes came as a result of several political developments in the 1990s. First, the end of the Cold War gave new impetus to the UN Security Council to play a more active role in relation to international security threats now that the Soviet Union no longer blocked every proposed UN Security Council Resolution (Hufbauer et al. 2009, 132). Second, the international community was confronted with new challenges such as ethnic strife and genocide in Africa and the Balkans (Elliot and Hufbauer 1999, 405). These new conflicts called for new measures to contain

violence and reduce the flow of weapons into conflict zones (Hufbauer et al. 2009, 139). Lastly, the increase of arms embargoes came as a result of the growing unease of the international community with imposing total embargoes and trade restrictions, as these often inflicted severe collateral damage on civilians in the target state – Iraq being an infamous example (Peksen 2009, 62; Tostesen and Bull 2002, 373-374). Furthermore, broader trade restrictions brought high costs to the sender states as well (Hufbauer et al. 2009, 138). Although arms embargoes have been employed for centuries, it is due to their recent multilateral imposition as an alternative to broader trade sanctions that has received renewed attention from scholars. Yet, despite the recent popularity of arms embargoes, the frequent imposition of the embargoes did not come without controversy.

A first problem is that while arms embargoes might seem to be theoretically justifiable, they are often extremely hard to implement effectively. Arms embargoes often require an extensive amount of knowledge about the targeted persons, groups and country (Hufbauer et al. 2009, 141). Additionally, the operational challenges such as budgetary and staff scarcities and legal loopholes are often too enormous to make arms embargoes work (Tostesen and Bull 2002, 402). Furthermore, arms embargoes are often imposed too late, and effectively exclude the permanent members of the UN Security Council (Tostesen and Bull 2002, 383-384). Moreover, Security Council members often have taken steps to undermine the effectiveness of the embargoes (Moore 2010, 594). Arms embargoes in general, and in Africa in particular, are doomed to fail according to Vines due to the weakness of African states and the porosity of their borders. This makes it very easy to for states and traffickers to violate arms embargoes (Vines 2007, 1121). Vines argues that the continued efforts of the UN Security Council to impose arms embargoes, and the failure to effectively implement them, only undermines the credibility of the UN. Tierney offers an even harsher critique by arguing that UN arms embargoes are not only irrelevant, but also potentially malevolent. During civil war, arms embargoes could have unintended effects by changing the balance of power between fighting parties. The side that can more easily undermine the arms embargo normally benefits from the arms embargo, but “due to a wide range of economic, geographic and political factors, this relative impact can be difficult to predict” (Tierney 2005, 657-658).

Another problem with arms embargoes is that they can unintentionally lead to the criminalization of the state, economy and society (Andreas 2005). When confronted with an arms embargo and a security threat, targeted governmental or nongovernmental forces may turn to illicit trade and make use of transnational criminal networks in order to procure arms (Wallensteen, Staibano and Ericsson 2003, 104-105). These criminal links may persist even

when the embargo has been lifted, and may undermine the promotion of the rule of law in post-conflict situations (Andreas 2005, 356-358). Moreover, arms embargoes make the procurement of arms more expensive for the targeted state. These increased costs for the target state may direct funds away from social services and welfare. Hence, arms embargoes can still have a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of the local population (Drezner 2003, 108).

In addition, arms embargoes can fail as they may attract sanction-busters. The imposition of a sanction or arms embargo can potentially prompt support from allies of the target country, hereby offsetting the potential benefits of policy alternation of the targeted country (Hufbauer et al. 2009, 8). A famous example was the aid that the Soviet Union provided to Cuba after the US sanctions (Early 2011, 381). Aside from the politically motivated sanction-busters, third parties may also violate a sanction out of commercial interest. Nevertheless, arms embargoes violations by exporting states can rarely be explained from economic explanations alone (Moore 2010, 609-609). By examining all the arms embargoes and corresponding violations in the period 1978-2002, Moore found that prior arms import dependence and alignment of political interests are the variables that best predict the likelihood of an arms embargo violation (2010, 607). Furthermore, arms embargoes can actually create a perverse incentive to start trading arms with the embargoed state. The resulting arms import dependence – when other states adhere to the embargo - can then be used by the exporting state to gain leverage for gaining political concessions from the target state (Moore 2010, 609).

Overall, there are several grounds on which the likelihood of an effective arms embargo can be questioned. Nevertheless, most critics of arms embargoes may have set too high standards for determining the success of sanctions, namely the complete stop of arms flow to the target state and a change of the targeted policy (Brzoska 2008, 1-3). Brzoska argues that while arms embargoes often do not completely stop the trade of arms or result in policy change, they still have had an significant effect on the import of arms (2008, 23). Brzoska also found that arms embargoes without any other form sanction or interventionist measures are unlikely to succeed in changing targeted policy. This should not, however, mean that arms embargoes should be disregarded as being ineffective. According to Elliot, when assessing the effectiveness of the sanctions, the question is not whether sanctions could be an alternative to interventionist measures, rather the question should be under what circumstance economic leverage can be useful for settling foreign policy disputes (Elliot 1998, 51-52). The set goal of arms embargo is thus a crucial factor that determines the effectiveness of sanctions.

Another reason to be cautiously optimistic about arms embargoes is provided by Escriba-Folch. By using the often-used Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions (TIES) dataset, Escriba-Folch argues that sanctions, including arms embargoes, had a significant impact in shortening the duration of civil war (2010, 140). According to Collier, Hoefler and Rohner, rebellions occur when they are financially and militarily feasible. Large-scale organized violence is a very costly and is also a dangerous enterprise. Hence, civil war only occurs in a weak state where potential rebels have a chance of military victory and where these rebels can get the means to finance the arms needed for large-scale organized violence (Collier et al. 2009, 3). Moreover, civil wars can endure even when military victory and the perceived benefits from this outcome are out of sight. Rebellion can in itself still be a rewarding enterprise for armed groups through extortion and the illicit trade in natural resources (Collier et al 2004, 254). Collier et al. have been part of a wider debate over the motivations - greed or grievances - for civil war. Collier et al. present a greed-based explanation of civil war and faced serious criticism from proponents of the grievance-based theory of civil war. These proponents found that Collier's theory of civil war overestimates the economic motivations and neglects the political grievances that cause and prolong civil war (Keen 2012, 758-760). While the debate on the motivations for rebellion is relevant, it is not the goal of this research to get involved in this debate. Nevertheless, Escriba-Folch argues that even when a civil war contains some greed component, economic sanctions can shorten civil war as the costs imposed can outweigh the benefits obtained from continuing civil war, and make rebellion financially and military less feasible. Moreover, multilateral arms embargoes have a positive effect on the likelihood of conflict settlement as they decrease the uncertainty of each fighting party's military capabilities (Escriba-Folch 2010, 139).

Lastly, the length of the sanction period is a variable that influences the effectiveness of sanctions. Longer sanctions may result in increased costs for the sender state. Over time these costs may trigger domestic pressures that undermine the imposed sanction. Longer sanctions also correlate with the presence of third-party sanction busters (Hufbauer et al. 2009, 172). Longer sanctions can also become less effective as the targeted country learns to adapt to the sanction regime. Over time, the South African government was able to effectively undermine the UN arms embargo (1977-1994) by developing its own high-quality defense industry (Tierney 2005, 651). However, not all embargoed states in Africa that are confronted with civil war will likely have the capacity to build such defense industry. Moreover, sometimes sanctions take time before the targeted state starts to feel the burden of the sanction regime. Targeted armed groups often have stockpiles of arms and ammunition that need to be depleted

before concerns over military capabilities creates a willingness among the armed groups to change their policy and settle for peace (Brzoska 2008, 23).

Overall, the literature on arms embargoes demonstrates that the imposition of an effective arms embargo on the Central African Republic is likely to face some serious challenges. Arms embargoes fail as they are often hard to implement and enforce or because the unintended consequences of an arms embargo may offset the potential benefits received from the imposition of the arms embargo. Furthermore, arms embargoes can fail as they attract third parties that have an incentive to violate the arms embargo. On the other hand, arms embargoes can make it harder and more expensive for armed groups to continue fighting.

III. Method:

The analytical approach taken in this study is that of a case study. Case studies have a distinctive advantage over other research strategies when 'a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control' (Yin 1987, 20). This is particularly true for an ongoing arms embargo. Moreover, armed conflicts are often very complex situations in which a wide range of factors influence conflict dynamics. Therefore, a case study is often more suitable for the study of conflicts as it allows more variables to be incorporated than large-n studies (Keen 2012, 765-766).

One limitation the study of an arms embargoes in a conflict area is that exact numbers and data on arms embargo violations are often lacking. The UN Panel of Experts committee, the prime organ tasked with monitoring the arms embargo, for example, was unable to do research in 2014 in the large parts of the Central African Republic due to security threats (UN Panel of Experts 2014). Another explanation for the limited availability of data on arms embargoes can be found by looking at the nature of arms embargo. The act of imposing an arms embargo turns the trade in arms to the targeted state into an illegal act. Therefore, it provides incentives to arms traders to hide their trade in arms from those reporting on arms embargo violations. Consequently, 'successful' arms embargo violations may occur without outsiders knowing about it. The emphasis of this research is more on the structural factors that influence the effectiveness of the arms embargo for containing armed conflict in the Central African Republic rather than focusing on the specific instances of arms embargo violations. These factors will be discussed through the examination of academic literature on arms embargoes and the Central African Republic. Other important sources of information, especially in relation to recent developments, are reports by the UN and NGOs such as International Crisis Group.

IV. Background to the conflict in the Central African Republic:

A. History of the Conflict:

Since its independence from France in 1960, the Central African Republic has witnessed an almost constant cycle of civil war, military coups and misrule. Yet, the almost-genocidal forms of brutal killings that characterized the most recent civil war has set it apart from the previous ones. This civil war started in 2012 when Islamic rebel groups from the northeast of the Central African Republic rose up against the government as a result of years of marginalization under the rule of Francois Bozizé. During the decade that Bozizé ruled, fewer people went to school, life expectancy remained at the age of 30, and the national gross income declined (International Crisis Group 2014, 2). Many of the grievances of the people in the northeast of the country were about the absence of the state capable of building roads, schools and hospitals (Lombard 2015, 143). In fact, the Central African state was in essence never really an institution that provided public goods. Instead, the Central African state was rather a tool used by the country's elite to enhance their own interests (Smith 2015, 102-103). The northeast of the country was especially neglected due to its distance from the capital. In contrast to the south of the Central African Republic, the majority of the people in the northeast of the Central African Republic are Muslim, whereas Muslims comprise only fifteen per cent of the total population (Smith 2015, 40). Moreover, only few people in this area are able to speak the national language Sango (Smith 2015, 39).

The Islamic rebel groups who rose up against Bozizé organized themselves under the name Seleka, meaning "alliance", and in March 2013 they took power of the capital Bangui and forced Bozizé to seek asylum in the Democratic Republic Congo. The Seleka armed groups soon spread throughout the Central African Republic and started to rule villages, towns and crossroads as their own fiefdoms (Carayannis and Lombard 2015, 6). The atrocities committed by Seleka combatants triggered resistance from local self-defense groups. The Central African Republic has a long tradition of self-defense groups. The resistance against Seleka was based on these self-defense groups, albeit this time the network of self-defense groups was more organized and became known under the name Anti-Balaka, meaning anti-Machete (Carayannis and Lombard 2015, 7). Initially, these Anti-Balaka militias acted on the basis of self-defense. Nevertheless, their motives soon changed and Anti-Balaka started to extort, brutalize and repress Muslim and non-Muslim communities, fueling an endless cycle of violence and revengeful killings (Weyns et al., 2014, 51-52).

Both Seleka and Anti-Balaka disintegrated into smaller rebel factions in 2014, but the violence went on. Seleka was only a loosely formed alliance of different rebel groups, unable to exercise effective governance in a predominantly Christian country and disintegrated due to internal struggles over leadership (International Crisis Group 2015, 6-8). The Anti-Balaka militias for their part, while sharing a commitment to keep Seleka out of power, consists of very different groups with different objectives and interests (International Crisis Group 2015, 9). For example, Anti-Balaka were divided over the question whether Bozizé should be in power again (Carayannis and Lombard 2015, 7-8). As the Seleka combatants were Muslims, and Anti-Balaka were predominantly Christians, the conflict transformed into localized sectarian communal conflict (International Crisis Group 2015, 16-18).

In 2015 the violence ebbed a little due to the presence of a large peacekeeping force that was installed in late 2014. During this violence a transitional government was set-up and in February 2016, former prime minister under Bozizé, Faustin Touadéra was elected as the new president of the Central African Republic (Benn 2016). In May 2015, a peace agreement was signed by ten armed groups that included a disarmament, demobilization, reintegration program for the rebels (Lamba 2015). Nevertheless, the armed conflict is far from over.[1] Although Seleka has disintegrated, the rebel groups that formed the Seleka alliance are still active and are in control of large parts of the country where they have set up their own administrations (UNSC 2016). Moreover, these rebel factions stated that the election results were unrepresentative as none of the Seleka or Anti-Balaka have been included in the new government (Moody 2016). Furthermore, the disarmament program has been completely ineffective as all the major rebel groups have so far refused to disarm (Lesueur 2016). Lastly, reports from mid-April 2016 found that ex-Seleka armed groups were again amassing troops in the north of the Central African Republic (Moody 2016). Unfortunately, human rights abuses are still widespread and violence is likely to continue in the near future. Moreover, there is a serious threat of a relapse of the conflict to the situation in 2013 (Lesueur 2016).

[1] This research refers to crisis in the Central African Republic to the concept ‘armed conflict’ instead of civil war. Civil war is often defined as a violent conflict between two political organizations with at least 1,000 battle-related deaths with no more than 95 per cent of the casualties imposed on one side (Tierney 2005, 646). It is unclear whether the Central African Republic in 2016 can still be defined as a civil war as the annual casualties are probably lower 1,000. Nonetheless, the threshold for ‘armed conflict’, which is at least 25 battle-related deaths, is surpassed (UCDP 2014). Moreover, strict definitions of civil war can be misleading. The crisis in the Central African Republic has arguably still a relative larger impact on its society than some other civil wars due to the relative small population size of the Central African Republic.

B. Proliferation and trade of arms prior to the emergence of Seleka:

In order to examine the effectiveness of an arms embargo in this conflict, it is important to first understand the proliferation and trade in arms prior to the conflict. If weapons were already prevalent in country, it may be harder to contain the conflict by imposing an arms embargo as the combatants have to rely less on the supply of arms from abroad. Furthermore, according to Moore, prior arms import dependence is the best predictor of arms embargo violations in the future (2010, 607). Africa is often infamous for the prevalence of arms that circulate throughout the continent. However, this has not always been the case. The Central African Republic has not always been flooded with arms. Before the 1980s there were relatively few weapons in the country (Berman and Lombard 2008). From the 1980s on, several civil wars in the region brought in vast quantities of small and light weapons to the region.[2] These arms came into the Central African Republic through refugees and rebels escaping the civil war in Chad in the 1980s, Sudan in the 1990s, the Democratic Republic between 1997-2003 and the Darfur crisis since 2003 (Berman and Lombard 2008, 42). The influx of rebels from the Democratic Republic Congo alone has arguably resulted in more than 10,000 small arms coming into the Central African Republic (Berman and Lombard 2008, 60-61). Nowadays, arms are prevalent among civilians in the Central African Republic due to the arms brought in by refugees and rebels from region. Arms are most prevalent in the north of the Central African Republic, where in 2003 almost every household was armed with an assault rifle (Berman and Lombard 2008, 22).

This inflow of weapons from armed forces from neighboring states was probably more important than the direct transfer of arms from government to government (Berman and Lombard 2008, 42). Direct transfers of weapons to the Central African Republic has been rather limited. The Central African Republic unlike, for example, Angola, did not play a major role in the Cold War competition. Furthermore, the armed forces were always deliberately kept relatively small and poorly equipped by the Central African governments (Berman and Lombard 2015, 41). This fits in a tradition of 'concessionary politics', a form of outsourced governance rooted in colonial practices (Smith 2015, 102). During colonial times, France was not willing to invest in the Central African Republic. Instead, similar to its southern neighbor, Belgian-Congo, the Central African Republic was subcontracted to private

[2] Small and light arms are usually arms that one or two people can carry. Pistols, shotguns and assault rifles are classified as small arms while rocket propelled grenade launchers and mortars are usually classified as light weapons (Stohl 2005, 60).

actors. This practice has been engrained in post-independence period. Central African rulers have not been willing to engage in a social contract with its population (Smith 2015, 103-104). Instead, they have outsourced Central African sovereignty and natural resources to foreign companies and states in order to enrich themselves. In return, these foreign actors have provided them with the support needed to stay in power. The first Central African presidents have mostly relied on French forces to stay in power (Berman and Lombard 2008, 12-13). More recently, when president Patassé was faced with rebellion by Bozizé in 2002-2003, he tried to stay in power with support of Libyan forces and the Congolese rebel group Movement for the Liberation of Congo (Marchal 2015, 178). Similarly, president Bozizé came to power with the help of Chadian forces, who were later incorporated in the presidential guard.

This 'tradition' of relying on foreign actors to stay in power - whether through the support of French, Chadian, international peacekeeping or even rebel forces – has resulted in a weak Central African army. Nevertheless, this has also resulted in limited direct government-to-government transfer of arms, which may be positive for the likelihood of an effective arms embargo. On the other hand, the misrule of Central African leaders through concessionary politics has resulted in the involved of foreign actors who brought arms into the Central African Republic.

V. Challenges to the arms embargo in the Central African Republic:

A. Implementation of the arms embargo:

In response to the conflict, after a long period of condemning the actions on both sides, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2127 in December 2013 calling for the deployment of an African-led stabilization mission alongside a French intervention force (UNSC 2013). In addition, resolution 2127 called for a mandatory arms embargoes on the Central African Republic. The sanction regime was further extended with resolution 2134 calling for a travel ban and an asset freeze of several politicians and military commanders (UNSC 2014). While there have been several peacekeeping missions and French interventions in the Central African Republic (Olin 2015, 196-198), it was the first time that UN sanctions were imposed on the Central African Republic. In January 2016, the UN Security Council extended the arms embargo and acknowledged 'the important contribution the Council-mandated arms embargo can make to countering the illicit transfer of arms and related materiel in the CAR and its region, and in supporting post-conflict peace-building' (UNSC 2016, 3)

The adaptation of resolution 2127 on December 5 2013, may initially confirm the often-heard critique that arms embargoes are imposed too late,[3] as Seleka started their rebellion already in 2012. Nevertheless, this embargo was imposed earlier than most arms embargoes in Africa. In Angola, for example, the arms embargo was only imposed 1993 while the civil war already broke out in 1975. Moreover, in contrast to the embargo on Angola, this embargo has a large peacekeeping force that could potentially monitor and enforce compliance with the arms embargo. In April 2014, after the African-led mission was unable to stop the violence in the Central African Republic, the UN Security decided to replace the African mission with a UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA). MINUSCA, supported by French and European Union (EUFOR) forces comprises over 12,000 military personal in total. Yet, despite the size of the peacekeeping forces, their presence is mostly limited to the surrounding of the capital Bangui and some other major towns while the armed groups mainly operate in the rural areas (Carayannis and Lombard 2015, 324). In fact, 'the northern region of the Central African Republic is characterized by the total absence of State authority and international forces' (UN Panel of Experts 2015, 33). Moreover, the forces that are most capable of enforcing the sanctions, the French, have announced their withdrawal in end-2016 (International Crisis Group 2015, 28). However, perhaps the lack of monitoring is not the real problem of UN embargoes. According to Hoogendoorn, it is rather that the UN Security Council is incapable of coercing unwilling states to abide by the arms embargo (2008, 58-59). Chad and Sudan supplied armed groups in the Darfur region. Similarly, Eritrea and Ethiopia have undermined the arms embargo on Somalia. Nevertheless, these states have never been sanctioned by the UN for violating the arms embargo (Hoogendoorn 2008, 12-13).

B. Regional instability as a breeding ground for non-state sanction busters

The effectiveness of an arms embargo is not only dependent on the situation in the targeted state, but also on the situation in neighboring states. Weak enforcement on both sides of the border has been a prime driver of cross-border circulation of weapons in Africa (Vines 2007, 1117). The porosity of borders in the Central African Republic, in particular, may be exacerbated not only due to the lack of state authority in the Central African Republic, but also in de border regions of neighboring states. Moreover, the arms embargo may be especially prone to events in neighboring states as the people living in the northeastern region tend to be more gravitated towards the people living in southern Chad and South-Darfur in

[3] See for example Tierney (2005); Vines (2007) and Tostesen and Bull (2002)

Sudan (Smith 2015, 40). These people in the northeast are ethnically, economic and culture-wise more connected to these regions through the existence of ancient trading networks. Moreover, local chiefs in the northeast of the Central African Republic have traditionally pledged allegiance to the centers of power in eastern Chad and South-Darfur (International Crisis Group 2015, 4).

Both Sudan and Chad have been in a constant state of crisis since their independence. In 2003, the escalation of the Darfur crisis was added to long list of tragedies in the violent history of Sudan. The escalation of violence in Darfur resulted in millions of civilians displaced and 300,000 people dead (Berg 2008, 72). In 2005, civil war also broke out again in Chad as a result of internal dissent by members of the ruling elite (Giroux et al. 2009, 4). During these conflicts Chad and Sudan started to support and supply arms to rebel groups in each other's conflict. The northeast of the Central African Republic got caught up in these conflicts as rebel groups transferred through the northeast of the Central African Republic due to the absence of the Central African state in this region. In addition, Chadian and Sudanese rebel groups such as the Sudan People's Liberation Movements used the northeast of the Central African Republic as a refuge from governmental forces (Berg 2008, 78). Moreover, a major assault by rebels against the Chadian President Idriss Déby in 2008 was prepared in the Central African Republic (Giroux et al. 2009, 1). The conflicts in Chad, Darfur and the north of the Central African Republic, while having their own root causes, have become increasingly intertwined. As a result, these conflicts are no longer only complex crises, but they have also developed in a regional crisis-complex (Berg 2008, 72).

Another important aspect of this intertwined conflict is the emergence of combatants with fluid loyalties. These combatants have fluid loyalties as they that can be mobilized for any military project in the region. For example, the combatants who helped Bozizé to gain power in 2003 came from the border area of Chad, Sudan and the Central African Republic. Some of these rebels were later recruited for the Darfur conflict and then again, these combatants instigated rebellion in the northeast of the Central African Republic against Bozizé (Giroux et al. 2009, 13). These combatants continue to switch sides as their social identity and livelihood depends on their status as combatants (Giroux et al. 2009, 12). Moreover, these combatants are often unable to return to their homes because they are often stigmatized by the violence they have perpetrated. The conceptualization of the crises as a regional conflict system by Berg and Giroux et al. probably still applies to the emergence of Seleka. Arguably, most of the armed groups of Seleka were recruited from this pool of combatants. It is hard to get by the exact number of Seleka combatants and estimations range

from 3,500 up to 10-20,000 combatants. Yet, this high estimation assumes that up to 10,000 combatants were foreign mercenaries (Weyns et al. 2014, 15-16). In fact, most of the combatants were from these borderlands in Chad and Darfur, and it was only after the initial successes of Seleka that the Central African rebel groups joined in (Carayannis and Lombard 2015, 6). Moreover, Seleka's leader, Michael Djotodia has lived for years in South-Darfur as a Central African consul where he gained support from several warlords for the Seleka rebellion (Lombard 2015, 142). Furthermore, widespread looting and plundering suggests that a large part of the Seleka combatants were predominantly motivated out of economic interests.

The regional dimension of the conflict in the Central African Republic is at least problematic for the effectiveness of the arms embargo. The combatants with 'fluid loyalties' have participated in several conflicts in this region and are still able to freely cross borders. For example, two splinter groups of Seleka, 'the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) and FPRC, are in control of around 800 km of border between the Central African Republic and Chad' (UN Panel of Experts 2015, 33). Hence, the absence of state authority in this region creates a situation in which armed groups are able to trade illicitly across borders. Seleka armed groups, for example, have bought many of their weapons and ammunition in Am Dafaq, a town in Sudan at the border of the Central African Republic and a major clandestine arms market in the region (Weyns et al. 2014, 70). In addition, the UN Panel of Experts Committee of the Central African Republic, for instance, found that leaders of armed groups were able to travel to Chad and Sudan even though these leaders were designated to the list of travel bans in correspondence of resolution 2127. 'This underlines the shortcomings of the peacekeepers' presence and the inability or negligence of neighboring states when it comes to monitoring their own borders and implementing Security Council resolutions and sanctions' (UN Panel of Experts 2015, 4).

Instead, the arms embargo would be more likely to contain conflict in the Central Africa when it is imposed as a comprehensive arms embargo on the whole north-central African region. While the UN has imposed an arms embargo on the Darfur region, is has not done so on Chad or South Sudan. Moreover, the arms embargo on Darfur is also largely ineffective as the conflict there is connected to other conflicts in the south and east of Sudan from which weapons flow into the Darfur region (Berg 2008, 75-76). According to Berg, one central deficiency of international efforts in this region is the isolated view on individual hotspots (2008, 84). Therefore, the 'attempts by the international community to contribute to resolving the crises in the region were fairly unsuccessful, particularly after the outbreak of

the rebellion in Darfur' (Berg 2008, 83). Similarly, Marchal argues that the international response to the Seleka crisis has been seriously flawed as it takes a state-centered approach to contain the armed conflict in the Central African Republic. Instead, Marchal argues that 'if such a challenge to the social fabric were to take place in the Central Africa Republic, it should therefore also happen in those neighboring areas' (Marchal 2015, 166).

C. State actors as potential sanction busters:

Aside from non-state actors and the lack of state authority in this fragile region, state actors can also actively act as arms embargo violators. Yet, despite the lack of force able to enforce the tri-border area, the UN Panel of Experts committee on the Central African Republic found 'there is no evidence that significant quantities of weapons and ammunition have been brought into the Central African Republic since the imposition of the arms embargo' (UN Panel of Experts 2015, 15). Nevertheless, state actors – Chad and France in particular - have a history of getting involved in the domestic affairs of the Central African Republic. In fact, the Seleka insurgency would never have been able to successfully oust Bozizé without the support of state actors.

France, as the former colonizer of French Equatorial Africa, has exerted its influence long after most of Francophone Africa gained independence in 1960. The military intervention in December 2012 was then the seventh time that France intervened in order to restore peace in the Central African Republic. Nevertheless, French interventions have a track record of being controversial. France has, for example, supported authoritarian regimes such Mobotu in Zaire. Furthermore, France has been highly criticized for its military support in Rwanda to the Hutu-regime prior and during the genocide in 1990s (Powell 2014, 1). Despite the controversial record of France in Africa, the military intervention in 2012 is probably a genuine effort to bring peace in this country. France, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has been a driving force behind the resolutions concerning Central African Republic, including the imposition of the arms embargo. Moreover, the French forces have proven to be the most capable forces to enforce the sanction regime (International Crisis Group 2016, 28). Therefore it is less likely that France will violate the arms embargo.

Chad, another authoritarian regime supported by France, has also gained substantial influence over the Central African Republic in past two decades. This started when Chad supported Bozizé to seize and retain power in 2003. Over time Déby became disgruntled with Bozizé because the latter was not able to impose authority over the northern region where Chadian opposition prepared their attacks against the Chadian government (Weyns et al 2014,

66). Déby became even more discontented when Bozizé tried to offset his reliance on Chadian military support by requesting support from South Africa. Consequently, Déby withdrew his troops from the Central African Republic and started to support Seleka. While Déby played a crucial role in the downfall of Bozizé, it is unclear in what exact form Chad was involved (Smith 2015, 42). Déby denies any involvement, but Chadian officers were present in the rank and file of Seleka and have probably acted as military advisers. Furthermore, Chad has allegedly provided Seleka rebels with arms and ammunition prior to the imposition of the arms embargo (Weyns et al., 2014, 65). Even if Chad did provide arms, it is questionable whether Chad still has an interest in doing so. First, the short-term goal of regime change by supporting Seleka has clearly succeeded, as demonstrated by the friendly visit of Central African president Touadéra to Déby. Second, the strategy of retaining security in border area against Chadian opposition troops by supporting Seleka may have backfired. The conflict in the Central African Republic resulted in an inflow refugees and returning mercenaries fueling the instability in the border area which Déby intended to minimize (Weyns et al. 2014, 68).

Another major supporter of the Seleka rebellion has been Sudan. Sudan has provided support to Seleka's leaders through 'assistance to travel, political support and facilitation of contacts with other friendly regimes (including in particular Egypt, Iran and Turkey)' (Weyns et al. 2014, 69). Moreover, Sudan is known to have supplied and resupplied Seleka in 2012/2013. Arms were brought in by Sudanese mercenaries and through direct airlifting of arms, ammunition and vehicles on at least two occasions in early 2013 before the imposition of the arms embargo (Conflict Armament Research 2015, 25). Part of these arms were domestically produced. Yet, Conflict Armament Research found that non-state actors were in possession of arms and ammunition exported from Iran and China to Sudan. Normally, an end-user certificate is needed for the export of military equipment or dual-use materials. That is a license that guarantees that the exported materials are only used by the importing state and only used for ends agreed upon by the exporting and importing state. End-user certificates are required by most states with the intended goal of preventing arms to be diverted to conflicts zones and embargoed states (Bromley and Griffiths 2010, 1). Nonetheless, end-user certificates are often not enough as documents can be forged easily or provided with false or misleading information on the end-use or end-user (Bromley and Griffiths 2010, 7).

Legal loopholes can further undermine the effectiveness of both end-user certificates and arms embargoes. This was clearly demonstrated by the Seleka's possession of military trucks that were originally exported from the Netherlands to Sudan. These trucks were

initially bought from Germany by a Dutch company (Brummelman 2015). No special permit was needed as the trucks were exported to an EU member state. This company, then again in 2012 exported the trucks to Sudan, on which an EU arms embargo is imposed. The trucks were allowed to be exported legally to Sudan because the company stripped the trucks of their military specifications. Moreover, no special permit was needed as the arms embargo excluded the trade of non-military equipment. Nevertheless, these trucks have ended up in the hands of Seleka, either directly delivered by Sudan or through illicit networks, and used for military ends (Conflict Armament Research 2015, 6).

The goal of supporting Seleka was regime change as well. Similar to Chad, Sudanese support for Seleka was motivated as a guarantee that the north of the Central African Republic would not be used as a rear basis for Sudanese opposition groups (Weyns et al. 2014). Another consideration was Bozizé's support to anti-Lord's Resistance Army operations in the east of the Central African Republic by Ugandan and US troops. The presence of these troops close to the border of Sudan, both considered enemies of Sudan, arguably was considered a grave security threat for Sudan (Weyns et al. 2014, 70). Moreover, Sudan was further incentivized to support Seleka when Bozizé started to seek support from South Sudan (Weyns et al. 2014, 71). Since the imposition of the arms embargo, there is no strong evidence that Sudan or Chad have provided Seleka directly with arms and ammunitions. Nevertheless, Sudan and Chad have proven to be willing to interfere with Central African Republic's domestic affairs, which make them more susceptible to act as potential arms embargo violators in the future.

D. The Finance of Arms:

In order to undermine an arms embargo, armed groups often need to get the financial means to procure arms. This may be especially true for the Central African Republic as it is the third poorest country in the world after Malawi and Burundi (World Bank 2015). Nevertheless, the Central African Republic is rich in natural resources such as timber, oil, uranium, gold and diamonds (CIA 2016). It is these natural resources that have become a source of income for armed groups in the Central African Republic (Agger 2015, 13). The trade and taxation of diamonds, in particular, has become a prime source of finance for armed groups in the Central African Republic. Diamonds, more so then other natural resources, have become an important source of income for these armed groups due to the geographic location and nature of the diamond industry in the Central African Republic.

Diamonds have been the single largest source of revenue in the Central African Republic, averaging 55 million dollar annually from 2004-2012 (Agger 2015, 17). Nevertheless, diamond mining in the Central African Republic has never occurred on an industrial scale. This is because the diamond reserves are spread-out sparsely over the country, which make them unprofitable for large mining companies (International Crisis Group 2010, 1). Yet, as the diamonds are close to the surface, they are widely mined by artisanal miners. An estimated 80,000-100,000 people work in the diamond fields in the Central African Republic (Dalby 2015, 127). Diamonds are mainly found in two diamond fields. One in the northeast of the Central Republic and under control of armed groups previously belonging to Seleka. The other, less lucrative diamond field is in the southwest of the Central African Republic, and predominantly under control of Anti-Balaka. Not only the geographic location, but also the way diamonds are mined, make them interesting for rebel groups (Dalby 2015, 135). In contrast to the other resources – oil and uranium – diamonds do not require sophisticated technology to be extracted. Moreover, in contrast to for example timber and oil, the quantities are relatively low, making them comparatively easy to smuggle.

Aside from the UN arms embargo, the Kimberly Process is another multilateral institution that tries to prevent violence caused by rebel groups.[4] Nevertheless, the impact of the Kimberley Process on the conflict in the Central African Republic is rather limited (Agger 2015, 17). First, the Kimberley Process does not include the trade of diamonds within the Central African Republic. Second, diamonds stemming from conflict zones in the Central African Republic can be smuggled to neighboring countries from which they are easily mixed with other diamonds and sold on the licit market. Armed groups in the Central African Republic have earned an estimated 3.87 to 5.8 million dollars annually over the past years in the illicit trade and taxation of diamonds (Agger 2015, 18). This is may only be a small share of a multibillion-dollar industry. Yet, in a region were assault rifles can be bought on the black market for just eighty dollars and grenades are even cheaper than a coke (Agger 2015, 10), this means that armed groups are able to finance thousands of weapons. “As one Seleka leader explained, ‘when we started this movement about the exclusion of the north, and they gave us some support, but it was not enough. The slowly we started to trade diamonds, and it became like a business for us’ (Dalby 2015, 134-135).

[4] The Kimberly Process, consisting of diamond-producing states, tries to deprive armed groups from their income raised through the trade of diamonds by implementing a certification scheme that prohibits the sale of diamonds from conflict zones (Kimberly Process 2013).

VI. Weapons and Conflict:

The type of weapons used in the conflict is important for the impact of an arms embargo for containing civil war. The outcome of some civil wars, such as the civil war in Syria, are partly determined by the balance of power, measured in the quantity of major conventional weapons such as tanks, fighter jets and heavy artillery. Other 'new wars' are often fought with predominantly small and light arms. The latter sort of conflict is less prone to an arms embargo as they are considerbly easier to be produced and smuggled across borders than major conventional weapons (Moore 2010, 599). The conflict in the Central African Republic is predominantly fought with these small and light weapons. Rebel groups in the Central African Republic are armed with assault rifles, rocket launchers and they have been provided by Sudan with some trucks and light vehicles (Conflict Armament Research). Yet, they have not fought with any of the aforementioned major conventional weapons.

Another question is whether a decrease in the availability of arms because of an embargo would also lead to less conflict. This might seem logical, as an effective arms embargo denies arms to the fighting parties, or at least makes it more expensive to procure the means to commit violence. Nevertheless, according to Hogendoorn, this logic is flawed (2008). The Rwandan genocide, for example, demonstrates that heavy armaments are not a requirement for large-scale violence. In addition, Hogendoorn finds that modern wars, especially in fragile states, are less likely to be influenced by arms embargoes. Modernity has made it easier to start and continue rebellion with only few weapons as modern communication technology and transportation provides rebel groups the capability to avoid large-scale confrontations with government or international forces (Hoogendoorn 2008, 44-46). Hence, armed groups are less dependent on armament supplies to continue their insurgency. Even very small and badly organized rebel groups are able to destabilize vast areas. In Darfur, for example, the well-equipped Sudanese government forces were unable to suppress a poor and ill-equipped rebel group of several thousand fighters, resulting 400,000 deaths and more than four million displaced (Hoogendoorn 2008, 39). Similarly, an area as large as Belgium in the northeast of the Central African Republic is under full control of an estimated 500 armed man belonging to the FPRC, a fraction of ex-Seleka fighters (UN Panel of Experts 2015, 32).

The changing nature of the conflict in the Central African Republic further decreases the potential influence of an arms embargo for containing violence. When the Seleka and Anti-Balaka alliances disintegrated into smaller rebel factions, the conflict grew increasingly sectarian and localized and violence became even less dependent on the prevalence of

military equipment. Anti-Balaka armed groups, in particular, have been fighting mainly with artisanal weapons and hunting rifles (Conflict Armament Research 2015, 8). Moreover, civilians became increasingly more victim of brutal killings such as public beating, which do not require military equipment. Overall, even when an arms embargo may reduce the availability of weapons in the Central African Republic, it is thus not self-evident that this will automatically lead to less violence.

VII. Conclusion:

Whether a UN arms embargo on the Central African Republic can contain armed conflict depends broadly on two questions. First, whether an arms embargo can reduce the inflow of weapons. Second, whether this will also lead to less conflict. In conclusion, this effect will be rather limited. Despite, the presence of a large peacekeeping force, there are vast areas where no governmental or international forces are in control. The lack of state authority, both in the Central African Republic and in the borderlands of neighboring states, makes it extremely hard to prevent the illicit trade in arms across borders. Legal loopholes with end-user certificates further exacerbate the difficulties of constraining the inflow of weapons in to the Central African Republic. Moreover, armed groups currently have the financial means as well to procure arms in the illicit market through the trade in diamonds. While there is no evidence yet that the arms embargo has been violated on a large-scale, the current sociopolitical situation does create an environment in which the embargo can be undermined quite easily. The absence of significant arms embargo violations should therefore rather be explained by the lack interest to provide arms than due to the imposition of the arms embargo. Furthermore, the absence of gross arms embargoes may be explained by the fact that Central African society is already flooded with weapons.

Even when the arms embargo reduces the availability of arms, it is uncertain whether this would lead to less conflict, violence and disruption. The mode of warfare, characterized by a reliance on merely small and light weapons, is generally less prone to arms embargoes. Moreover, when the conflict became increasingly localized and sectarian in the course of the conflict, violence became even less dependent on the prevalence of arms. Lastly, the interlinkage with other regional conflicts and the consequent involvement of foreign state and non-state actors is problematic for containing the conflict. These actors bring their arms from neighboring states that are not targeted by an arms embargo. In a wider context on the debate on the effectiveness of arms embargoes, the case of the Central Africa Republic confirms the study done by Vines who argues that arms embargoes are extremely hard to implement due to

the porosity of African borders. This does not mean, however, that the conflict cannot be contained. Often a whole toolkit that includes disarmament, mediation, economic development and more political inclusion is needed to bring lasting peace. However, this research finds that the contribution of the current arms embargo to this process is likely to be small.

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