



## Armed Conflict

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### CAR Analysis: Rebel activity to continue on western, eastern fronts despite President Touadera's declaration of ceasefire

#### Executive Summary

- President Faustin-Archange Touadera declared a unilateral ceasefire in October, though this was in name alone as security forces continued military operations and major armed groups declined to participate.
- Conflict has continued among armed groups, Central African security forces, and Russian private military forces. In the western prefectures, rebels have increasingly used IEDs and targeted logistical corridors, while in the eastern prefectures, violence has centered on control of key mining sites.
- The government announced that armed groups would be excluded from an upcoming national dialogue, while major opposition parties have also withdrawn. This overall signifies a lack of credibility and legitimacy in the process, leading to further delays.
- The government renegotiated its customs agreement with Russia after a temporary suspension, underscoring the Touadera administration's broad alignment with the Russian state and security agencies. This could also raise domestic tensions due to negative perceptions of Touadera's goals and relations with Russia.
- **Avoid all travel to outlying areas of CAR given the ongoing armed conflict and high levels of sectarian violence and criminality.**

#### National Dialogue to lack credibility without opposition, rebel groups

##### Current Situation

- On October 15, President Faustin-Archange Touadera declared an "immediate ceasefire" in the ongoing conflict against rebel forces. The government later clarified that the ceasefire would only concern rebels willing to surrender and lay down arms, though Touadera claimed that all parties under the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) umbrella with the exception of the Union for Peace in CAR (UPC) and the Popular Front for the Renaissance of CAR (FPRC) were signatory to the agreement.
- However, subsequent CPC communications released only acknowledged Touadera's announcement without clearly revealing whether constituent rebel groups had committed themselves to the agreement. Meanwhile, both government and rebel forces have accused each other of violating the conditions of the ceasefire.
- Separately, the government revealed that armed groups would not be included in the planned national dialogue, which is slated to take place at the end of 2021. Additionally, major opposition political coalitions, including the Movement for the Liberation of the Central Africa People (MLPC), Coalition of the Democratic Opposition 2020 (COD-2020), and PATRIE have reportedly withdrawn

their representatives from the national dialogue process.

- Reports from November 5 indicate that the Civil Society Working Group (GTSC) threatened to quit the national dialogue organizing committee if representatives of opposition political parties do not return to the committee.

## Assessments & Forecast

1. While President Touadera announced the ceasefire on October 15, Russian private military forces immediately violated it the following day by continuing to lead security operations against suspected rebel positions in Ouham Prefecture, which led to multiple civilian deaths. These operations have continued, with the ceasefire having no particular impact on the military campaign. The Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) responded with a non-committal stance on the matter, which could have also been influenced by perceptions of the government's superficial commitment to reducing hostilities. Repeated instances of rebel violence and clashes between security forces and rebel forces in eastern and western prefectures have also continued to occur unabated. Consequently, the government is likely to portray the rebel forces as the primary instigators undermining government-led peace efforts. **FORECAST:** With the clear ineffectiveness of this ceasefire, and given the trust deficit between government and rebel forces, future de-escalation initiatives announced by the government are also unlikely to have any real impact on the security landscape.
2. At the same time, the government had announced plans for a national dialogue shortly after President Touadera was re-elected in January, meant to represent an inclusive platform to facilitate political reconciliation between the government and the opposition and establish a political roadmap for the future. However, in recent months, Touadera's rhetoric had suggested that rebel groups would be excluded in the dialogue, and thus it was expected when the government said in October that they would not be participating. The government's position on the issue may also be motivated by the experience of the 2019 Khartoum Peace Agreement, after which several signatory rebel groups maintained their military activity nationwide. As seen in 2019, these armed groups have been interested in participating in the political process, likely due to the fact that it gives them some political legitimacy. Their exclusion then is expected to further exacerbate already volatile relations between these groups and the government.
3. Along with the exclusion of armed groups, the political opposition's withdrawal of their representatives from the national dialogue organizing committee is likely to significantly damage the prospects for a legitimate and credible national dialogue. Without the participation of the MLPC, COD-2020, and PATRIE, a dialogue would mainly involve pro-government political stakeholders. The opposition withdrawal highlights the existing political tensions around the government's management of the process, including efforts to limit participation by excluding the armed groups. More significantly, the government's attempts to waive the parliamentary immunity of prominent opposition leaders, intending to target or suppress the opposition figures, increases the distrust of the process.
4. **FORECAST:** As long as the government continues these efforts, any attempt to demonstrate a commitment to an inclusive and transparent dialogue is unlikely to be successful, as evidenced by the delays to the organization of the process already seen. The disagreements over these key issues will likely translate to limited opposition participation at the national dialogue and potentially further delays to the process. The political landscape is expected to remain fragile as tensions may escalate if the dialogue goes ahead without the support of the major opposition parties.

## Russian military, commercial engagements become increasingly divisive

### Current Situation

- Reports indicate that the government on October 26 signed a new agreement with a Russian company over the management of CAR's customs offices. The government had earlier suspended a technical assistance mission signed in May, which facilitated the deployment of a Russian company to manage various customs posts across the country. The company concerned is reportedly linked to the Russian private military company (PMC) that has been operating in CAR.
- The political opposition and several civil society groups reportedly voiced concerns over the potential adoption of a new mining code, with its draft currently in the National Assembly. The code allegedly allows for certain Russian companies to acquire lucrative mining contracts.
- Reports from October 21 indicate that National Assembly members accused the Justice Minister of "selling the country to enemies". This came in response to the Justice Minister releasing statements acknowledging Russian human rights violations earlier in October. Other sources allege that the Justice Minister subsequently received death threats from Russian operatives, forcing him to relocate his family to Cameroon.
- Reports from October 24 indicate that Russian PMC forces arrested several army and security officials, including several senior personnel over involvement in alleged coup plots and linkages with rebel groups.

## Assessments & Forecast

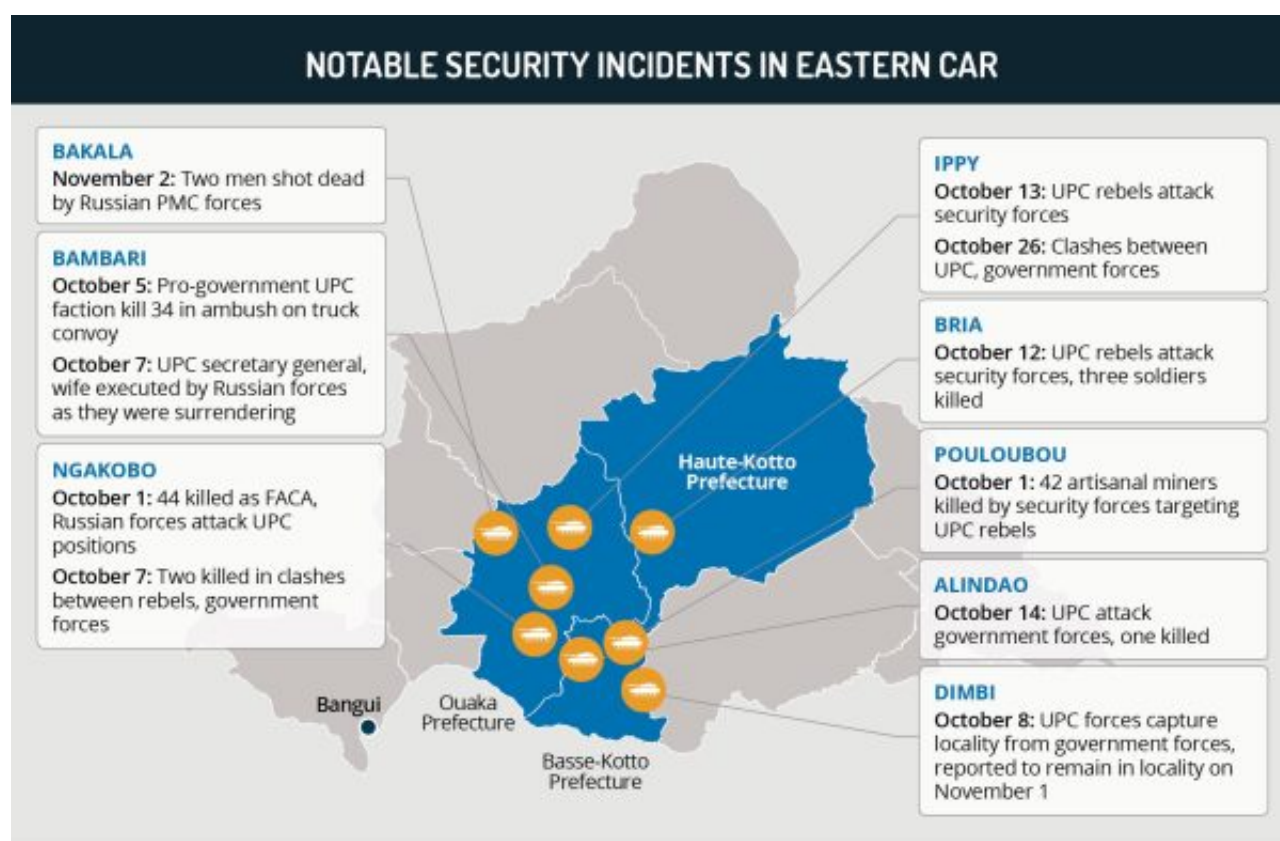
1. The government's renegotiation of the customs agreement with Russia after initially suspending it was significant in following the Justice Minister's acknowledgement of the Russian PMC forces' involvement in human rights abuses. This initially suggested the emergence of a degree of political opposition from within the government towards Russian engagement. However, the suspension was reportedly to allow for mandated quarterly evaluation, indicating that the suspension was likely a procedural requirement rather than a change in policy. That said, reports from local communities and regional stakeholders criticizing the Russian presence over arbitrary regulations and allegations of customs fraud also indicate an increase in public disgruntlement over the Russian customs operations. This could also indicate potential diplomatic maneuvering from within the government to balance the general anti-French sentiment, given that bilateral relations have significantly deteriorated under President Touadera, as a possible attempt to restore France's budgetary aid program, which was suspended in June.
2. However, the government's subsequent reversal on the customs agreement as well as reports that the new draft mining code reportedly favors certain Russian companies linked with Russian private military efforts underscores the Russian influence over President Touadera and his government, which is derived from the Russian PMC's dominant role in securitization efforts nationwide. Moreover, Touadera's alignment with the Russian forces is evident through his own presidential guard, which have reportedly been trained by the Russians and even includes Russian PMC forces, and has been observed to operate independently of the purview of government military authorities.
3. Revision of mining legislation favoring Russian companies also underscores the Russian influence over the national government. Additionally, the government may look to incentivize its Russian partners through granting mining assets to Russian companies as part of a tacit exchange for continued military support. However, reports of Russian elements operating mining sites, some without government authorization, across the country have been a point of contention among local communities and rebel forces, who accuse the Russian forces of targeting local communities involved in small-scale mining activities.
4. **FORECAST:** An increase in Russian involvement in mining could heighten public distrust in the government, and in turn, increase public support for rebel forces in these areas. It may also adversely impact the security situation given that civilians have repeatedly come under the crossfire in the Russian forces' security operations around mining localities, particularly in eastern prefectures where the UPC maintains a strong presence. Tensions between Russian elements and locals could lead to increased violations against civilians. Reports of Russian forces arresting several senior military personnel could also become an increasingly contentious issue, and even

lead to the distant potential of a mutiny taking place by some disgruntled military contingents, further deteriorating the already complex security situation.

5. **FORECAST:** Despite sustained international criticism and the reported emergence of internal government opposition, the deep involvement of the Russian state and private institutions in CAR's internal affairs is likely to continue. However, the issue could represent an increasingly divisive political issue over the medium to long-term over perceptions of Touadera's government favoring Russian partners at the expense of government partners and local communities. This could potentially alienate some of his own political networks perceived to not benefit financially from the engagement. This in turn could lead to some aggrieved pro-government elements joining forces with the opposition. An increase in Russian influence in CAR is also expected to lead to a further deterioration in CAR's relations with France, with France unlikely to reverse its policy on budgetary aid after suspending it in June.

## Insecurity in eastern prefectures over mining sites, UPC internal dispute

The following notable incidents have been reported in recent weeks:



## Assessments & Forecast

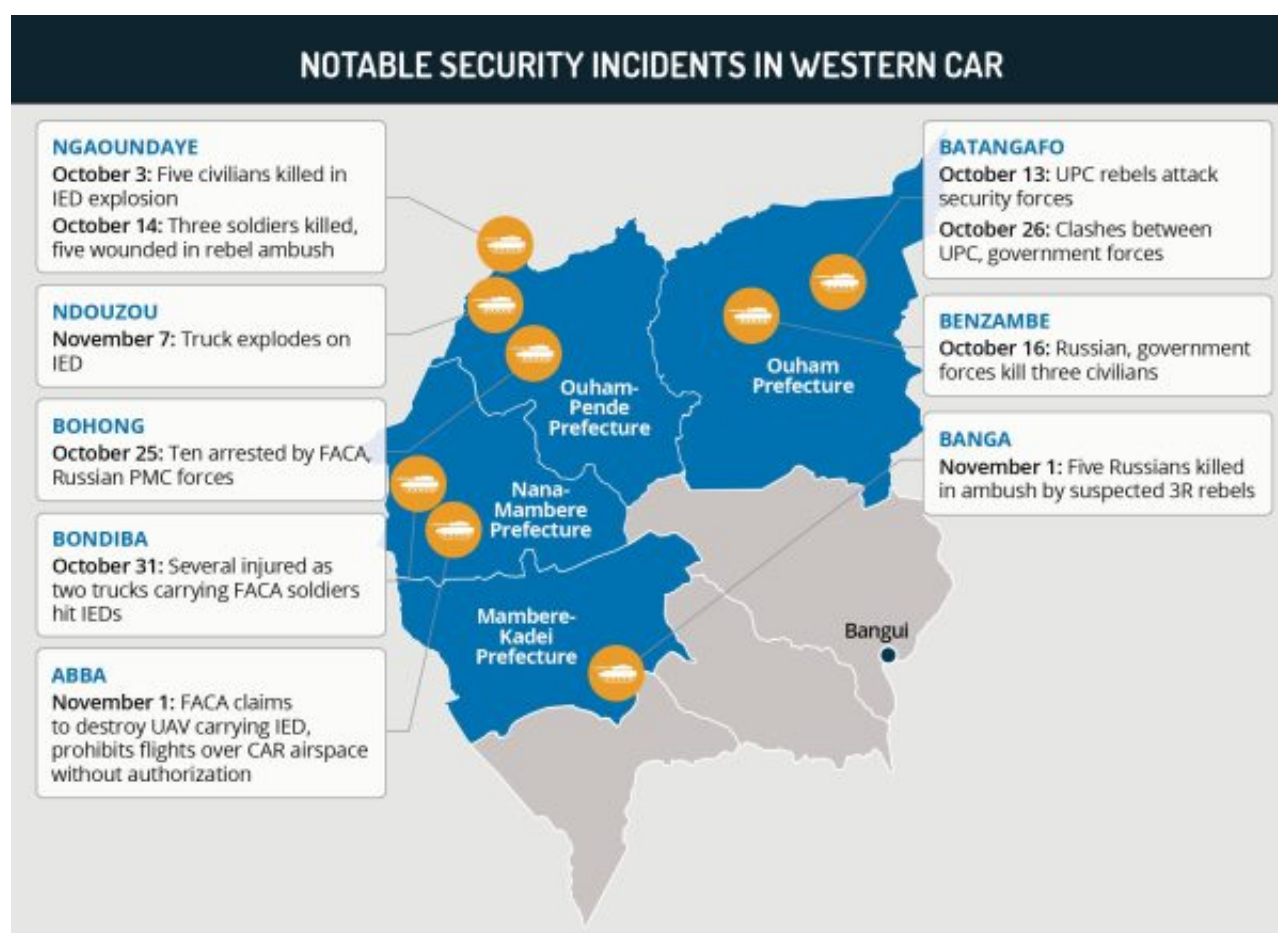
1. Continued clashes and insecurity across mining areas in Ouaka and Basse-Kotto prefectures over the past month highlight the entrenched insecurity, as the UPC continues to maintain a significant military presence despite repeated security operations against them. These areas are host to lucrative artisanal mining sites, which have continuously attracted the UPC's attention. More

recently, they have become the focus of the Russian PMC forces, who have been accused of illegally occupying and operating these sites. The Russian presence in these areas has also increasingly antagonized local communities, which have been caught in the crossfire of their operations. **FORECAST:** In this regard, given the UPC's demonstrated resilience to security operations, Russian forces as well as the Central African military are likely to continue their efforts to dislodge the rebel group from this area. Confrontations are particularly likely to be triggered in the vicinity of mining areas.

2. The internal dispute over the control of the UPC has persisted between the rivaling UPC leader Ali Darassa and the pro-government Minister of Livestock Hassan Bouba. **FORECAST:** This dispute is expected to further destabilize the security situation in the eastern prefectures where the group operates. This was already seen in the reported security incident on October 6 in Matchika, where UPC forces affiliated with Bouba's pro-government faction have been accused of killing 34 civilians. Such incidents could increase public sympathy for factions aligned with Darassa, especially among communities who have also been adversely affected by the Russian PMC forces and other government-aligned forces in conflict-affected areas.

### 3R rebel activity remains primary security concern along western front

The following notable incidents have been reported in recent weeks:



## Assessments & Forecast

1. On the western front, the reported rebel activity in Ouham, Ouham-Pende, Nana-Mambere, and Mambere-Kadei prefectures highlights the continued insecurity in areas where the 3R and other CPC-affiliated rebel groups are known to maintain an extensive presence. One significant development was the Central African forces' claim that they intercepted an IED attached to an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), which is the first time that rebel groups in CAR have been said to possess or deploy UAVs. It is possible that the rebels acquired such capabilities through raids on Russian forces, who are known to use UAVs for surveillance, or through access to foreign markets in neighboring countries.
2. Rebel forces in the western prefectures have been fairly successful in using IEDs planted along highways and other main roads, meant to target security forces as well as disrupt logistics toward Bangui. This is also a notable evolution in the modus operandi of only rebels in western CAR, whereas armed groups in the east have not used IEDs. This could also be attributed to the specific rebel strategy to disrupt the Bangui-Beloko logistics corridor, which is a critical economic lifeline for the capital, as compared to the eastern road networks, which are not as strategically important for Bangui.
3. The acquisition of UAV capabilities, while uncertain at this stage, would nevertheless significantly improve rebel intelligence and surveillance capabilities, increasing the effectiveness of their ambushes against security forces and supply raids. **FORECAST:** Regardless, rebel attacks in these prefectures are likely to recur, which are expected to manifest in the form of road ambushes on security positions and land-deployed IED attacks aimed at disrupting logistics along the Beloko-Bangui corridor.

## Recommendations

1. Travel to Bangui should be restricted to essential purposes only given the volatile security situation, while avoiding all travel to Bangui's PK5 area.
2. Avoid all travel to outlying areas of CAR given the ongoing armed conflict and high levels of sectarian violence and criminality.