

The Central African Republic (CAR) New Political Landscape: A Turning Point in the Country Political Development

By Simon P. Alain Handy

SALO Closed **Lunch Meeting** - *on the Recent Elections in Central African Republic and Prospects for The Future.*

Date: Tuesday, 19 April 2016

Time: (11H30 Registration) 12H00 – 14H00, including lunch

Venue: Burgers Park Hotel, Lilian Ngoyi Street (Van der Walt), Pretoria, South Africa

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Invitees,

I am tired of the never-ending apocalyptic view of Africa in general and the associated chronology of political violence; I have also grown tired of all the negative tirades on the Central African Republic's ills, deficiencies and dysfunctions. This is a widespread unchallenged narrative that has taken solid hold in the face of an insufficiently valued autonomous and indigenous intellectual capital. It is self-defeating, redundant and does not serve any useful purpose other than to maintain the country in its sorry state.

By all accounts, the peaceful transition from Catherine Samba-Panza to Faustin Archange Touadera, inaugurated on 30 March 2016, is a giant leap forward towards stabilizing the Central African Republic, which has enjoyed relative stability since Pope Francis' landmark visit in November 2015. Indeed, Catherine Samba-Panza's Administration, for all its ills and shortcomings against the backdrop of unspeakable atrocities, has delivered on the two fundamental promises of any political transition: i) to generate conditions for a gradual and cohesive reconciliation process, and; ii) to return to constitutional legality through free, fair transparent elections resulting in a new legitimate administration that can begin the hard task of rebuilding the country, and embark on a robust and bold reform agenda.

If the new President will face daunting challenges, his rise to power is a powerful and stern rebuke of the century-long "doom and gloom" school of thought on

Africa political development. For the first time in a long time CAR has a shot at myriad positive prospects. All the challenges it faces can be overcome. First, it can and must build a State that is a hierarchical, centralized organization holding the monopoly of legitimate force over its territory. The current ungoverned spaces in the country's hinterland need an unequivocal strong, single and central source of authority to keep the peace and enforce the law, ensuring that citizens enjoy security and providing conditions for individuals to flourish. Hence, the development of a modern state in CAR is the most pressing concern for the newly elected President.

Symbolically, CAR is the heart of the African continent and as long as that heart is unsettled, at war with itself and continuing to bleed, the nefarious effect will continue to reverberate on the rest of the African continent.

The "African Denmark"

Francis Fukuyama in his latest book "Political Order and Political Decay" (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2014) dedicates a segment entitled "Getting to Denmark". The analogy with CAR is simple: its political system faces the need to transition from a patrimonial to a modern state. Let me explain, *"in the former rulers are supported by networks of friends and family who receive material benefits in return for political loyalty; in the latter, government officials are supposed to be servants or custodians of a broader public interest and are legally prohibited from using their offices for private gains."*

To become the African Denmark, the new CAR needs the following characteristics: a competent state with strong rule of law, democratic accountability, prosperous, democratic, secure, well governed and low levels of corruption. CAR can only count on the country's own resolve, resources, and strengths, despite numerous structural vulnerabilities.

The above task warrants the synergistic coming together of all the main stakeholders to:

- Establish principled leadership, the State must prevent past corrupt practices and stop maintaining the same old kleptocracy of political elites. (Already we see that five of the 23 members of the new "lean and mean" government have served under former President Bozize's tenure, calling into question the new President's commitment to genuine reforms.)
- Foster a parliament (National Assembly) that does more than rubber stamp presidential decisions;
- Tame pervasive continued instability in the country's hinterland, perpetrated by non-state actors hell bent on armed violence;
- Ultimately conduct meaningful DDR and SSR and curtail the illicit

- circulation of small arms and light weapons.
- Reform the justice system together with the extension of the state authority.

A state claiming monopoly of force exists on paper, but it remains weak. As radical Islamist groups continue to set up shop in countries with weak government in Africa, CAR is no exception.

“Suitcase expressions” that are beginning to sound hollow must be based on job creation and improved livelihoods for citizens. To maximize the chances for success, CAR’s leadership must address, among others, the challenges facing the mining sector and mismanagement of the country's natural resources. Resources are needed to fund all of the above and the surest way for CAR to secure healthy public finance is by transforming a resource curse into a resource blessing. This can be done by implementing: a) a regulatory system to manage the sustainable development of the country's wealth of natural resources; b) a tax and royalty regime that ensures the revenues generated from the exploitation of minerals serve as an effective development catalyst and; c) a Mining Code and National Security force that reduces smuggling activities, building on the Kimberly framework and preventing conflict diamonds from further fanning tensions in the country and across its border.

For the international community to become an effective development partner, it must revisit its patronizing meddling into the country’s internal affairs -- because for the time being the international community does not have the slightest idea of how to help the many Africans trapped by poverty in extricating themselves from that predicament.

As a frequent visitor to South Africa, I have never ceased to impress upon the intellectual elite and the political leadership the unique role South Africa is called to play at the continental level. That leadership is wanted but remains wanting. I have a few recommendations. In CAR, South African should open an embassy without further delay. And as a visible expression of soft power South Africa should throw its support behind an income generating and job creation pilot project that has considerable impact, for example something in the mining sector, which affects approximately one million people in CAR. There are many opportunities for South Africa to play a positive role in CAR’s future, and I’d be happy to expand at a future conference.

I thank you for your attention.