CAR suffers from decades of conflict and political instability, resulting in half of the country’s population needing humanitarian assistance for basic needs. The government only controls about a fifth of the country, while numerous militia groups control, and often spar, over the rest. The government is heavily reliant on support from the international community for security, which funds the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA). A peaceful presidential election was held in 2016, but violent clashes continue in the interior. The World Bank has cautioned that “Fragility and the potential for renewed conflict continue to pose a serious risk throughout the country.”

The CAR Government and 14 armed groups reached a peace deal in February 2019, but continued international engagement remains critical. Seven previous peace agreements have failed since 2012. If this agreement takes hold, there may even be increased need to accommodate the return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

One in four people in CAR are displaced due to conflict.

CAR rates 188th of 189 countries on the Human Development Index.

CAR ranks second in the world for both maternal and infant mortality. One woman in 25 dies from complications linked to pregnancy or giving birth.

Approximately a third of healthcare facilities in the country have been damaged or destroyed during the conflict.

Selection Indicators

General Statistics: World Bank 2017

- GDP: $1.95bn
- Per Capita Income: $390
- Population: 4.66m

Ranking on Recognized Fragility Lists

- OECD States of Fragility: 3
- Fund for Peace Fragile States Index: 5
- World Bank Harmonized List: 5
- IEP Global Peace Index: 9
- Early Warning Risk Assessment: -

Levels of Violence

- Committed by Armed Groups: 86.13
- Gender-Based Violence per 100k: 1470.73
- Violence against Children/Youth per 100k: 124.46

Capacity and Commitment

- Capacity Score: 0.2

Geographic Region

Africa (sub-Saharan)
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

Current U.S. Priorities and Foreign Assistance

According to the State Department, “U.S. priorities include helping CAR re-establish a justice system; investing in local-level conflict mitigation efforts; supporting disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration; providing assistance for security sector reform; and making targeted investments to support the economic revitalization and governance improvements that are necessary for long-term development and recovery.

Unfortunately, implementing this strategy has been a challenge. While funds have been appropriated for the aforementioned priorities, spending – or implementing programs to support these priorities – have stagnated, in large part due to security constraints. However, the international community, the World Bank, the UN and the democratically elected government all agreed to a plan to address the crisis, but the United States can’t support it due to funding restrictions. The U.S. government will continue to coordinate efforts closely with other donors in CAR, including the UN, the European Union, France, the World Bank, African Development Bank, and International Monetary Fund.

A review of the U.S. response to the crisis in 2012-2014 found a variety of impediments to a strategic and timely response. Despite increasing signs of violence and potential atrocities, the Administration did not move fast enough to respond, engage allies sufficiently, nor were they able to quickly access most funding for programmatic interventions for even small amounts of peacebuilding or other needed interventions. U.S. Chargé d'Affaires David Brownstein reissued a disaster declaration for the complex emergency in CAR for FY 2019.

Some targeted efforts in CAR have been successful. The Complex Crises Fund (CCF) has been used in CAR to help improve access to timely and accurate information and lay the framework for a peaceful political transition by working to prevent further atrocities and rebuilding social cohesion through community peacebuilding. A review of a CCF program found that “[t]he social situation would have been much graver and peace would have been sorely tested had it not been for this intervention,” and it documented cases of fighters voluntarily disarming after participating in the program.

Potential Global Fragility Act Reforms

Provide sustained high-level diplomatic engagement to support resolving its fragility crisis.

Work across agencies to resolve how to better implement foreign assistance programs. Funding to address the root causes of the conflict, including Peace & Security and Democracy and Governance funding, was requested by the Administration and appropriated by Congress, but barely any of these funds were spent (in large part due to security concerns). Humanitarian aid instead has consumed the bulk of funding spent in CAR, and while it has provided lifesaving assistance, it cannot and does not address structural causes of the violence.

Improve international coordination. The GFA will require the U.S. Government –across all relevant agencies – to clarify how it plans to coordinate with other actors in CAR, especially the French and the UN. There has been consistent and widespread need for strategy and coordination in the Central African Republic. Going back at least five years, Congress warned that the United States needed a coordinated strategy. Each year in appropriations, Congress asks for a focus on peace and reconciliation in the country, yet the State Department doesn’t focus on these issues. The lack of strategy does not speak to a wider vision in a country where the U.S. is spending a quarter-billion dollars on humanitarian and peacekeeping aid.

The Global Fragility Act of 2019 would require the U.S. government to select at least 5-6 candidate countries or regions based on a set of evidenced-based criteria. This document serves as an example of a country that could, but will not necessarily be, selected in the “Stabilization” category.