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AFRICA/CENTRAL AFRICA- The Ministry of Defence and the Chief of Staff substituted

Bangui (Agenzia Fides) - The Central African Republic President François Bozizé destituted the Defense Minister, his son Jean-Francis Bozizé, and the Chief of Staff, General Guillaume Lapo. The Head of State, who has assumed the role of ad interim defense Minister, had recently criticized the lack of discipline and the accumulated losses of the armed forces of the advancing coalition of the Seleka rebels, 160 km from Bangui. Bozizé's decision to resume directly the leadership of the military operation is interpreted by the press linked to the opposition as a sign that the President intends to pursue the military option to retake the rebel-held territory, despite negotiations that should start in Gabon on January 8 between the government and representatives of Seleka. According to the rebellion, the local armed forces have recently received large quantities of weapons from South Africa, along with reinforcements of South African mercenaries.
On the ground the situation has reached a deadlock. The rebels stopped their offensive in the direction of Bangui, while the soldiers of the Multinational Force of Central Africa (FOMAC) are placed in Damara, 75 km from the capital. "Damara is an impassable red line on both sides," warned President Idriss Deby, whose soldiers are an important component of FOMAC, consisting of about 400 soldiers from Chad, to which are added 360 soldiers from Gabon, Cameroon and Congo . The FOMAC officially has the task of standing between the two contenders, while the 600 French troops sent from Paris have the mission to protect French citizens in the Central African Republic, without interfering in the internal affairs of the Country, as in the past. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 03/01/2013)

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