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AFRICA/CENTRAL AFRICA - Pending the start of negotiations with the rebels, South Africa sends troops to Bangui

Bangui (Agenzia Fides) - South Africa has sent about 200 soldiers to support the security of the capital of the Central African Republic, Bangui, under threat from Seleka rebels. Despite the peace talks that open on January 8 in Libreville, capital of Gabon, the rebels captured Alindao and Kouango on January 5, two cities near Bambari, the main town in the center of the Country. The men of Seleka, according to the Central African authorities, are situated 12 km from Damara which is 75 km from Bangui, defined as an " unsurpassed red line " from both sides by Chadian President Idriss Deby, whose soldiers are an important component of the Multinational Force of Central Africa (FOMAC), consisting of about 400 soldiers from Chad, to whom are added 360 soldiers from Gabon, Cameroon and Congo.
South African President Jacob Zuma said that the South African military (the number will be increased to 400 in a short time) were sent to the Central African Republic in accordance with the agreements previously signed by the two Countries (in Bangui a South African military mission with tasks of training the local army was already present). The mandate of the South African soldiers (whose mission will end March 31), explained that Zuma is to help the local army and start the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the rebels.
Representatives of Seleka have criticized the South African decision, saying that mercenaries and South African arms have already been sent to the Country (see Fides 03/01/2013), suspecting the existence of agreements for the exploitation of mineral resources by local South African corporations. Independent observers also point out that Zuma's wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, is President of the African Union, and that this could influence decisions concerning the Central African crisis on behalf of the maximum inter-African body.
Appealing to the South African troops and other Countries, President François Bozizé intends to prepare himself to regain the lost territory in the event of failure of the talks, but also, according to some, to control the soldiers sent in the FOMAC by neighboring states.
In Central Africa there are finally some 600 French soldiers and men of the U.S. Special Forces engaged in the south-east of the country that are hunting for Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a group of Ugandan origin that has expanded its reach to other Countries. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 07/01/2013)

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