

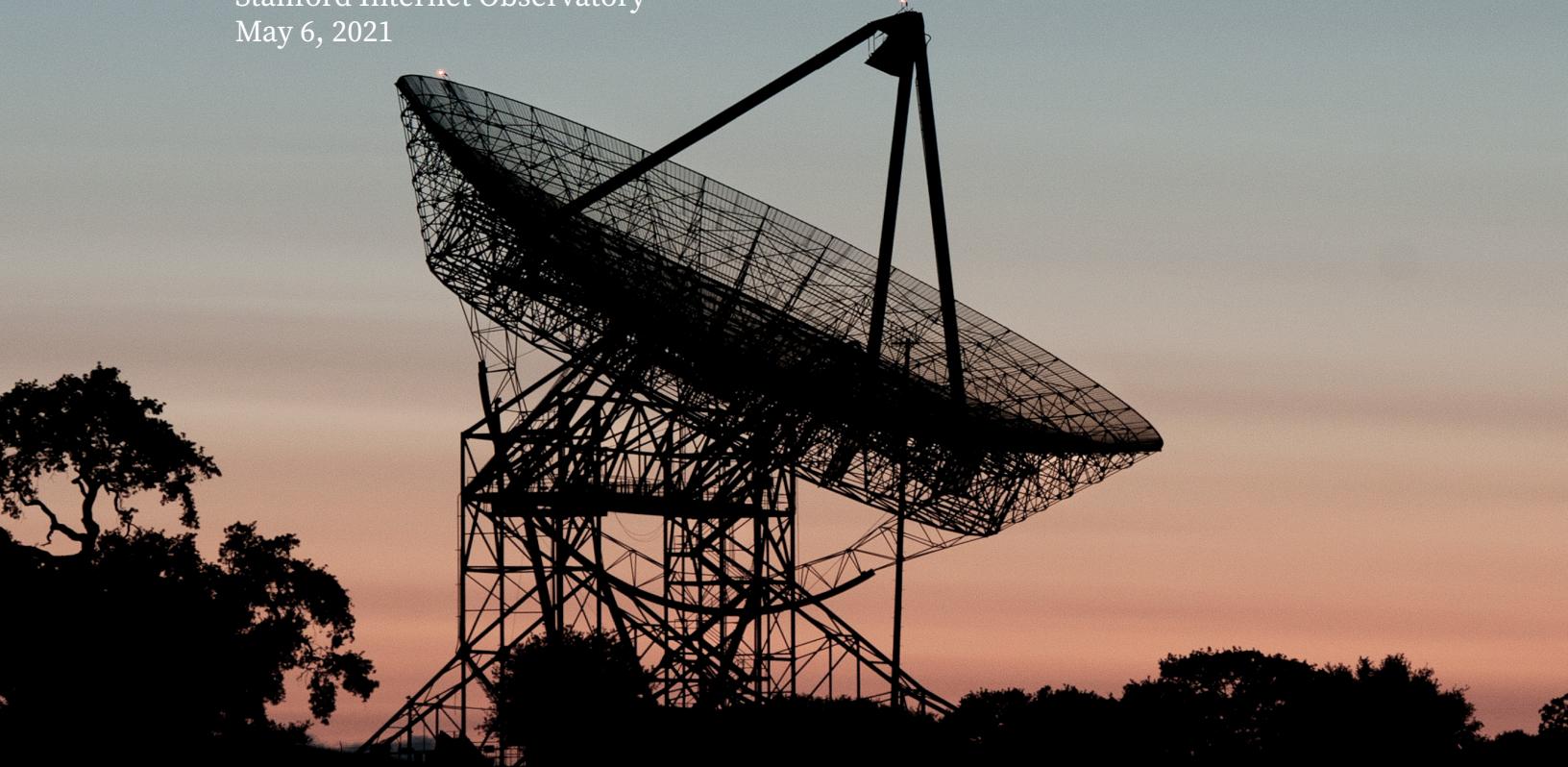


One Face, Many Names: An Investigation into Fake NGOs and Media Outlets Linked to Harouna Douamba on and off Facebook

Lindsay Hundley, Renée DiResta, Josh A. Goldstein, Shelby Grossman, Cooper Reed, Adriana Stephan, and Julia Thompson

Editorial support from Eden Beck

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1 Introduction

On May 6, 2021, Facebook announced the takedown of 32 Pages, 46 Profiles, and six Instagram accounts operated by individuals in the Central African Republic (CAR) whose activities targeted audiences in CAR. Facebook shared this network with the Stanford Internet Observatory (SIO) on April 26, 2021. This network was suspended not due to the content of its posts, but rather for coordinated inauthentic behavior. SIO found significant indications both on and off platform that many of the assets removed in this takedown were aliases for the same entity.

The suspended network exhibited strong ties to Harouna Douamba, a pseudonym for an allegedly Burkinabe individual who has gained notoriety in CAR for the information campaigns he wages on social media. Douamba claims to be the president of three non-governmental organizations (NGOs): Aimons Notre Afrique (ANA), Coalition Afrique Engagée (CAE), and Fédération Nationale des Ivoiriens d'Origine Étrangères (FENIOE). Facebook Pages for these organizations were included in the suspended network, in addition to Pages for several other NGOs and media companies with ties to Douamba. We also found some evidence that one of the suspended Profiles may be the individual behind the Harouna Douamba pseudonym. Facebook attributes the network to ANA.

Suspended Pages consistently disparaged France's involvement with CAR, but praised President Faustin-Archange Touadéra and Russia. They also published slanted stories on other west and central African countries.

We also investigated Douamba's connections to a disinformation campaign that claimed four officials associated with the UN peacekeeping mission in CAR (the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, known as MINUSCA) trafficked arms to rebels operating in a neighborhood in Bangui, the CAR capitol. One of the suspended Pages was deeply involved in this effort and posted what might qualify as incitements to violence.

Key takeaways:

- The suspended network centered around the activities of Harouna Douamba. Nearly all of the suspended Pages have connections to Douamba and/or frequently published content featuring Douamba and the activities of his NGOs. Several of the suspended Profiles and Instagram accounts also appear to have direct ties to Douamba, his NGOs, or affiliated media companies.
- Many of the suspended Pages claimed to be NGOs that seek to advance Pan-African causes. However, these NGOs largely appear to be thinly veiled aliases for Douamba's ANA and CAE NGOs. Pages for these organizations demonstrated significant coordinated behavior. For instance, they frequently shared duplicated content from ANA and CAE, usually within 10 to 15 minutes of the original posts.

- One of the suspended Pages was a coordinating force around a disinformation campaign in 2020 alleging that UN peacekeepers in CAR trafficked weapons to rebel groups and calling for revolt at the peacekeeping operation. This is strong evidence that Douamba is linked to that disinformation campaign.
- Eighteen domains, largely French-language news sites covering central and west Africa, were linked to the network. There is substantial evidence that the sites are linked to each other and to Douamba. The ANA website, for instance, lists nearly all of the news sites as part of their media group, ANA-COM.
- Topically, the network largely pushed content critical of France and supportive of the Touadéra regime and Russia. They also published slanted stories on other west and central African countries.
- The network also attempted to build its audience across platforms. One post that was shared widely by suspended Pages called for Pan-Africanists to include their WhatsApp numbers in the comments. However, few users shared this information.

2 Background on CAR and Harouna Douamba

Since 2013, the Central African Republic has been engulfed in a civil war. Currently, government forces exercise tenuous control over areas in the south and western regions of CAR, while various rebel groups exercise control over other parts of the country. President Faustin-Archange Touadéra has led CAR since his election in 2016; he won the first round of CAR’s December 2020 general elections with 54% of the vote, although political violence prevented voting from taking place in several areas of the country. The UN implemented an arms embargo in 2013 that had the potential to expire in January 2019, but the ban was extended until July 2021. A UN peacekeeping mission, known as MINUSCA, has operated in CAR since September 2014.

The ongoing political conflict, coupled with CAR’s resource wealth, has made the country a frequent target of disinformation campaigns. In October 2019, SIO [reported](#) on an information operation removed by Facebook linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin and the Wagner Group that sought to publicize and praise a wide range of Russian government activities in CAR. In December 2020, Graphika and SIO published a [joint report](#) analyzing dueling [influence operations](#)—one linked to Prigozhin and another to individuals with ties to the French military—that targeted CAR audiences and sought to expose each other’s activities. Recently, the UN [reported](#) that MINUSCA was targeted by a social media disinformation campaign purportedly led by the Mouvement des Patriotes Centrafricains pour la Paix (MPCP).

At the center of the network analyzed in this report lies Harouna Douamba, a pseudonym for an individual [allegedly](#) born in Burkina Faso and raised in Côte d’Ivoire before he

began operating in CAR. He is president of the NGOs Aimons Notre Afrique (ANA, or “Love Our Africa”)—which he founded in 2011—Coalition Afrique Engagée (CAE, or “Engaged Africa Coalition”), and Fédération Nationale des Ivoiriens d’Origine Étrangères (FENIOE, or “National Federation of Ivorians of Foreign and Ethnic Origin”). Reports suggest Douamba’s activities rely heavily on the use of fictitious NGOs and media accounts—a strategy we confirm here. We additionally found significant evidence of offline connections between Douamba and the MPCP.

It is also suspected that Douamba’s activities are sponsored by the Touadéra regime and/or Russian advisors. Douamba claims that he is an advisor to President Touadéra. Meanwhile, a local CAR news agency and an Atlantic Council report claim Douamba is funded by Russian sources. It should be noted that links between Russia and the Touadéra regime are well documented: Prigozhin’s Wagner Group, for instance, provides Touadéra’s personal security detail.

3 Summary Statistics

Facebook shared with the Stanford Internet Observatory 32 Pages, 46 Profiles, and six Instagram accounts. While we do not know when the Profiles and Instagram accounts were created, the earliest Page removed in the takedown was created in February 2016. Several Pages claiming to be NGOs were subsequently created and began posting over the summer and into the fall of 2016. The next batch of Pages, which typically claimed to be media outlets, were created in October and November 2018. The figure below shows a leveling off of posting activity by the Pages around the time of the first round of the CAR general elections in December 2020. Pages created a total of 2,142 posts before their removal.

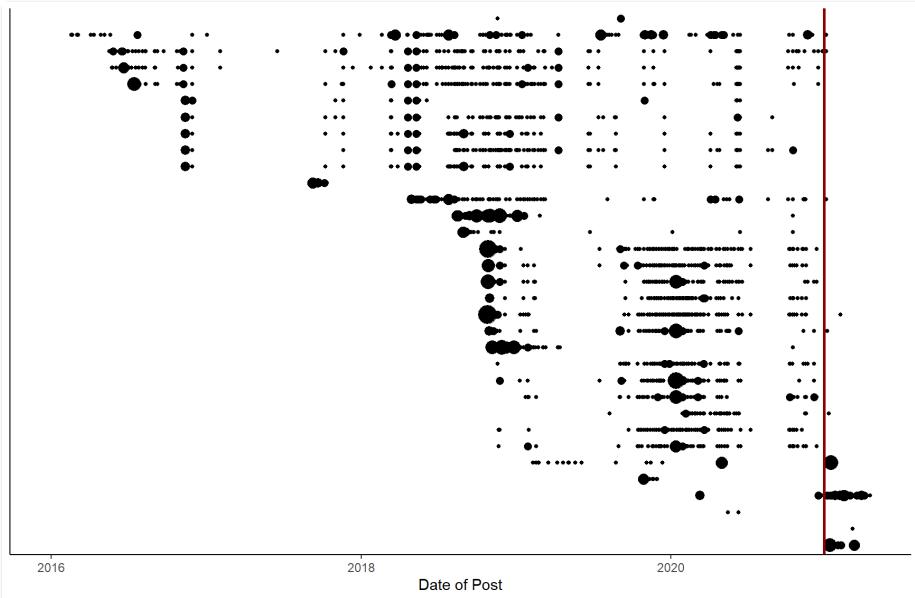


Figure 1: Posting activity over time by the removed Pages. The red vertical line corresponds with the first round of the CAR general elections on December 27, 2020. Data from CrowdTangle, a public insights tool owned and operated by Facebook.

Pages, Profiles, and Instagram accounts varied in their number of followers; while a few had many followers and interactions, most had a smaller footprint. The Page for ANA (titled ONG ANA) attracted the largest following, with 56,212 followers. Seven other Pages amassed over 10,000 followers, but the median number of followers per page was only 1,778 followers. Likewise, while a handful of posts from the removed Pages garnered between 10,000 and 15,000 interactions (defined as the sum of likes, comments, shares, etc.), the median number of interactions for posts from the suspended Pages was seven. Further, the median number of friends for suspended Profiles was 560 friends. The median number of followers for suspended Instagram accounts was 123 followers, and only two accounts had more than 10 posts.

Further, suspended Pages were typically managed by entities located within CAR and Côte d'Ivoire. Suspended Profiles typically listed their locations as either Bangui, CAR or Brazzaville, Congo.

This network also included 18 linked domains. Most of these are news sites, covering west and central Africa. There is substantial evidence that the sites are linked to each other:

- Eleven of the domains were created in September 2018.
- Fifteen listed the same organization in their registration.

- Five had the same email address listed in historic domain registration data. One of these five was a website for ANA, while the rest were for news sites, providing further evidence of links between this NGO and the news sites.
- Five had been registered, at least at some point in time, to individuals in Côte d'Ivoire.
- Several of the individual Profiles suspended in this network were listed as authors of articles on these websites. For example, one name was the byline for articles on eight of these domains.

Substantively, the articles on the websites pushed narratives consistent with the Facebook Pages. They were extremely slanted, usually to support the governments of CAR, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Nigeria. Some articles presented Douamba in a favorable light. Several articles presented Russia favorably and criticized France.

The unique email address linked to several of the domains belongs to an individual who is a web developer in Cote d'Ivoire. The email address also appears on the website <https://dtigestion.com/>, which claims to provide “the world’s first, most powerful and comprehensive facebook messaging marketing software.” It offers, among other services, automatic commenting on Facebook posts. We suspect the web developer is closely linked to this network, as his Facebook Profile was included in the takedown.

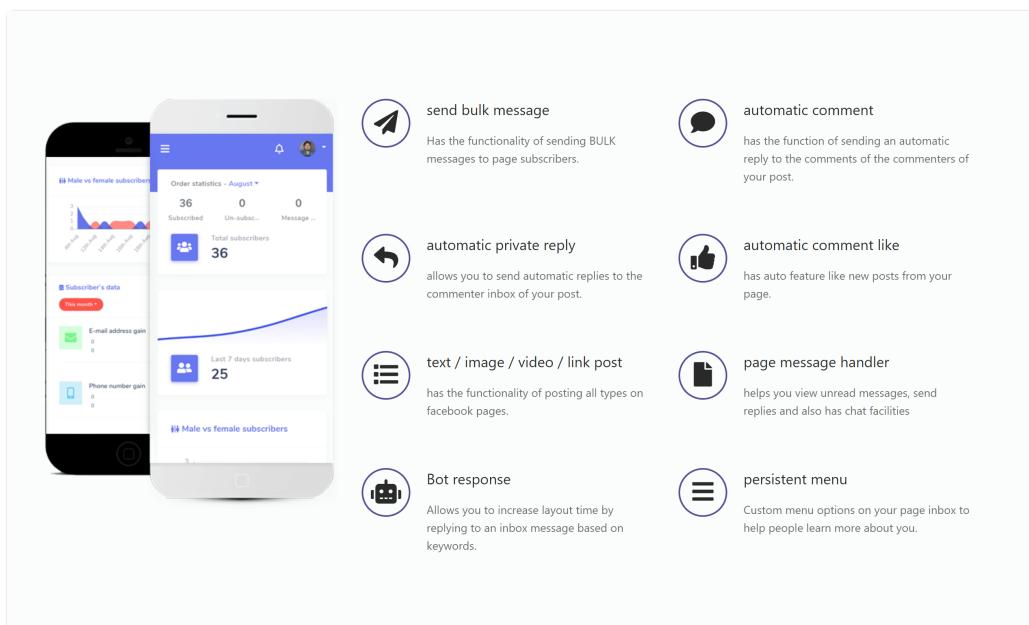


Figure 2: Services listed on dtigestion.com.

3 SUMMARY STATISTICS

Domain	Site Description	Link to Network	Live/Down	Registration Date	Identifiers in Domain Registration
lafrique.info	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	1/21/15	-Endurance International Group -Unique email address A
Ong-ana.org	NGO site	Associated Page suspended	Live	10/4/15	-Endurance International Group -Unique email address A
paixetstabilite.org	Unclear	Associated Page suspended	Down	7/13/16	-Endurance International Group -Unique email address A
alter-nanceafricaine.org	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Down	7/13/16	-Unique email address A
ong-lcdf.org	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Down	9/18/16	-Unique email address A
afriqueengagee.com	Unclear	Associated Page suspended	Down	5/5/18	-No identifiers
afriqueactualite.info	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	9/23/18	-Endurance International Group
lepanafricanisme.info	Unclear	A Page linked to articles from this site	Down	9/23/18	-Endurance International Group
miroirdafrique.info	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	9/23/18	-Endurance International Group
lemondeactualite.info	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	9/25/18	-Endurance International Group
leuropeafrique.info	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	9/25/18	-Endurance International Group
locdident.info	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	9/25/18	-Endurance International Group
lepotentield-afrique.net	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	9/27/18	-Endurance International Group
lavoxdaffrique.info	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	9/27/18	-Endurance International Group
lequotidiendafrigue.net	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	9/27/18	-Endurance International Group
lanouvelleducontinent.info	Unclear	Associated Page suspended	Down	9/27/18	-Endurance International Group
lemondeenrvrai.net	News site, with stories on west and central Africa	Associated Page suspended	Live	9/27/18	-Endurance International Group
lereveilafricain.info	Unclear	Associated Page suspended	Down	11/28/18	-Endurance International Group

Table 1: Domains linked to the suspended Facebook network.

4 The Assets and Evidence of Coordination

The Pages, Profiles and Instagram accounts in this takedown appear to be part of an information campaign driven by pseudo-NGOs and pseudo-media outlets linked to Harouna Douamba. In addition to Douamba's personal accounts and Pages, the network included Pages of several Pan-African NGOs headed by or with apparent ties to Douamba, Pages for media entities that published content featuring Douamba and his various NGOs, and Profiles and Instagram accounts for individuals affiliated with these NGOs or media companies.

4.1 Harouna Douamba Accounts and Pages

Three of the removed Pages and one of the removed Instagram accounts purported to belong to Harouna Douamba. These accounts were not central to the activity of the network: the Instagram account had only one post, and the three Pages produced only 83 posts combined. Douamba's prominence in the network instead stems from the amount of content shared that featured him directly and his ties to the NGOs and media companies that made up nearly all of the Pages removed by Facebook.

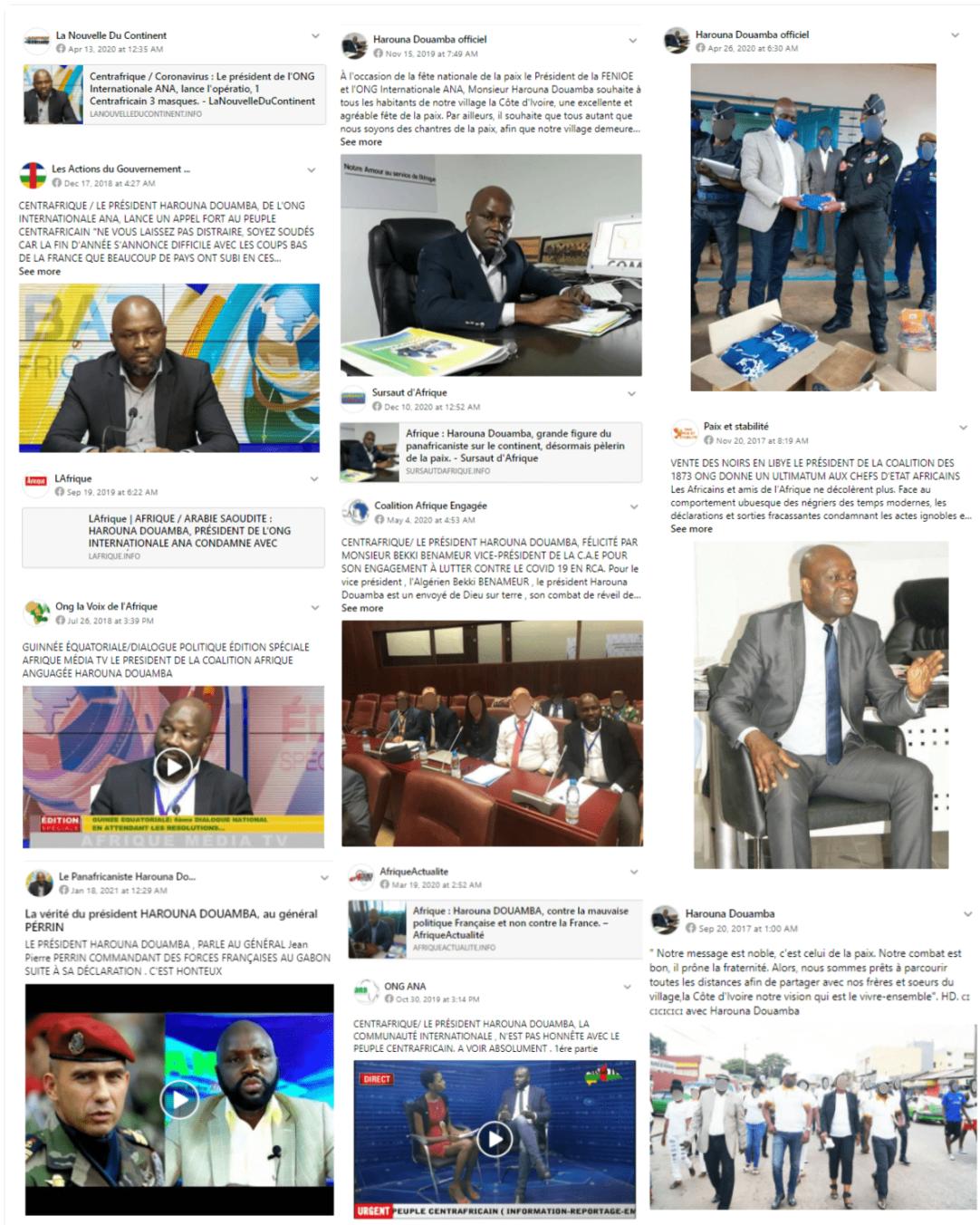


Figure 3: A sample of posts from suspended Pages featuring Harouna Douamba.

In addition, we believe that one of the removed Profiles may be the real individual behind the Harouna Douamba pseudonym. A September 2017 post from the Harouna Douamba Page linked to the Profile, whose username is harouna.douamba.1. Several of the photos from the Profile appear to be Douamba, and the Profiles' subtitle is "Pan-Africanist, Defender of the Rights of Africans" ("Panafricaniste, Defenesseur des Droits des Africains"). Further, the Profile indicates ties to both Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, where **it is believed** that Douamba was born and raised, respectively. The Profile itself lists its location as Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, while a different post by the Profile claimed to have been the owner of a restaurant in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. If you are interested in investigating this individual further, please contact the Stanford Internet Observatory.

4.2 Pan-African Unity NGOs and Media Companies

Nearly all of the Pages shared with SIO claimed to be NGOs (11 Pages) or media companies (17 Pages), and these Pages were unified in themes relating to Pan-African Unity. For instance, the media company Pages included names such as Le Panafricanisme ("Pan-Africanism"), Le Reveil Africain ("The African Awakening"), and Le Potentiel d'Afrique ("Africa's Potential"). Likewise, the About sections of the NGO Pages typically stated that the organizations' purpose was to advance Pan-African causes. Examples of the NGO Pages' About descriptions include:

- Ong Afrique Unie est une Organisation Non Gouvernementale créée dans le but de militer pour une Afrique Unie et indivisible. ("Ong Afrique Unie is a Non-Governmental Organization created with the aim of campaigning for a United and indivisible Africa.")
- ANA "Aimons Notre Afrique" est une ONG panafricaine basée en Côte d'Ivoire. Crée en août 2011, elle promeut le fair-play électoral en Afrique. (ANA "Aimons Notre Afrique" is a Pan-African NGO based in Côte d'Ivoire. Created in August 2011, it promotes electoral fair play in Africa.)
- L'objectif de la Coalition Afrique Engagée est de défendre les droits des Africains et de leurs Dirigeants. Faire de la DENONCIATION. ("The objective of the Engaged Africa Coalition is to defend the rights of Africans and their leaders. Make the DENUNCIATION.")



Figure 4: Top, the logos of several NGOs whose Pages were removed by Facebook. Bottom, the logos of media companies whose Pages were removed.

Harouna Douamba is the president of three of the NGOs whose Pages were removed by Facebook: Aimons Notre Afrique (ANA), the Coalition Afrique Engagée (CAE), and the Fédération Nationale des Ivoiriens d'Origine Étrangères et de Souche (FENIOE). FENIOE and ANA even have the same physical addresses, located in Côte d'Ivoire, listed on their respective Pages.

According to its website, ANA provides both on-the-ground activity and communication services. For example, the ANA website describes various actions by the non-profit—such as donating water wells in northern Niger and Burkina Faso. It also lists media services, in cooperation with CAE (the other Douamba-led NGO referenced above). Under a section labeled “Our Values,” the ANA organization writes that countries where politicians have a partnership with CAE will be safe from external attacks and interference. “The leader who is a victim of media harassment or of any organization that will tarnish his image or the image of the country will have all of Africa at his defense” (translated).

Under a tab labeled ANA-COM (Aimons Notre Afrique-COMmunication), the organization describes ANA-COM as a media group that gives African leaders a vehicle to spread their ideas to the international community. Many of the media companies whose Pages Facebook removed are listed on the ANA-COM website as part of the network, as shown in Figure X. The website goes on to list prices for online advertising, indicating at least some of their services are for sale. It is unclear whether ANA was paid for any of the content propagated by the suspended network.



Figure 5: A flyer ANA's website listing the media group. Many of the Facebook Pages of the media sites were removed by Facebook.

The other NGOs whose Pages were removed by Facebook largely appear to be thinly veiled aliases for Douamba's ANA and CAE. These supposedly "independent" NGOs not only frequently published open letters from and other content that featured Douamba; they also published exact copies of posts from the ANA and CAE Pages. In one example, the CAE Page shared a story about Douamba and the CAE condemning terrorist plots against the President of Burkina Faso, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. About 15 minutes later, the ANA Page posted the exact same story. Within the next seven minutes, seven additional NGO Pages also posted the duplicated story.

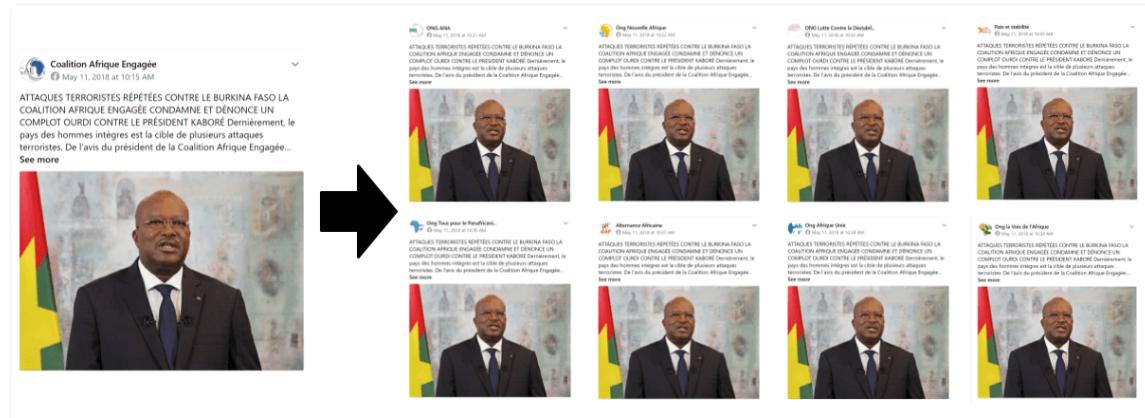


Figure 6: A story about Harouna Douamba denouncing acts of terrorism in Burkina Faso was posted to the CAE Page and then quickly shared by other NGOs without direct connections to Douamba.

The suspended Pages for the media companies displayed similar signs of coordinated behavior. Twelve out of the 17 media Pages shared with SIO were created within a month of each other; 10 listed the same phone numbers in the About section of their Pages. Moreover, like the NGO Pages, the media Pages frequently published content from Douamba or about the activities of ANA and CAE. They also shared links to copy/pasta stories across their different web domains, often within 24 hours of one another.



Figure 7: Suspended media company Pages published identical stories with links to different domains on the same day.

For the most part, Pages avoided directly resharing each others' posts. We identified only 26 posts that Pages reshared from another Page in the network, and many of these posts were shared between the Harouna Douamba Officiel Page and the Le Panafricaniste Harouna Douamba Page (which claims to be the official blog of Harouna Douamba). The other Pages may have avoided resharing posts from each other in a thinly veiled attempt to disguise their coordinated behavior and/or to artificially make each NGO appear more productive.

The major exception to this pattern was a post originally published by the CAE Page on June 12, 2020. The post called for all Pan-Africanists on the African continent and around the world to leave a comment on its post with their WhatsApp numbers. Again, within the span of seven minutes, the CAE post was reshared by nine other Pages in the network. Further, another Profile in the takedown reshared the post into seven Groups, none of which were removed by Facebook. This shows a clear attempt at cross-platform audience building, and it builds on a **trend** of disinformation actors pushing followers to encrypted apps.



Figure 8: A post in which the Vice President of CAE, Bekki Benameur, calls for Pan-Africanists to comment with their WhatsApp numbers. The post was reshared by nine other removed Pages and one removed Profile that shared it into seven Groups.

However, despite the network's efforts to promote the post, it garnered limited interactions. The post was reshared only an additional 27 times. Further, it received 37 comments—only 11 of which contained individuals' WhatsApp numbers.

4.3 Other Individuals Associated with the NGOs and Media Companies

Facebook shared with SIO 46 Profiles that were removed in the takedown. Several of the accounts displayed clear signs of inauthenticity. One account had a Profile picture with a Getty Images watermark on it; another had a Profile picture and cover photo of two different women—a reverse-image search reveals that both photos are widely used on the Internet.

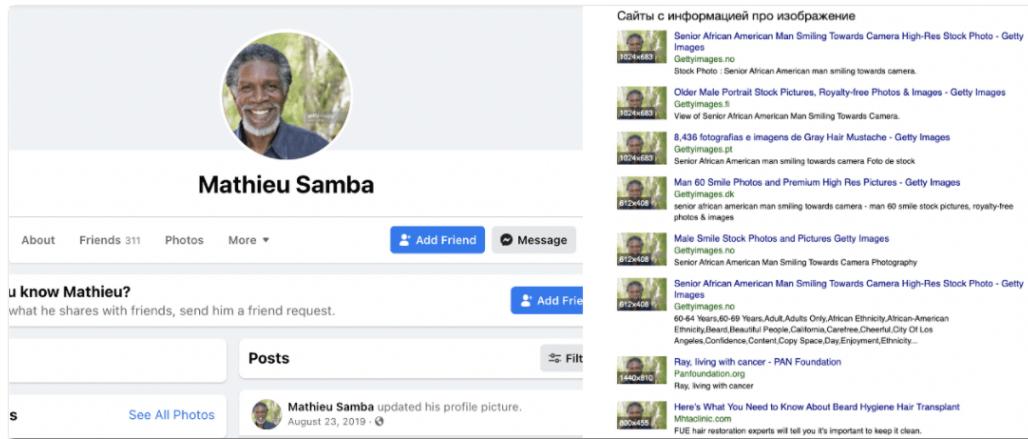


Figure 9: An account from the network using a stock photo from Getty Images as a Profile picture.

Other Profiles, however, appear to be of individuals affiliated with the Pan-African Unity NGOs and media companies described above. For example, two suspended Profiles listed the same name as ANA's Director of Marketing. Another Profile appears to be the web developer for the many domains linked to by this network, discussed in Section 3.

There were also connections between Profiles in the takedown and the media entities. We searched for the names of the Profiles on the media websites and found that at least five Profiles removed in the takedown shared names with authors from the media websites. The Profile with the Getty Images photo above, for example, authored articles on Miroir d'Afrique, Le Potentiel d'Afrique, and L'Afrique. Another one of these Profiles, which appears to be of a real person, authored at least 36 articles across the various sites.

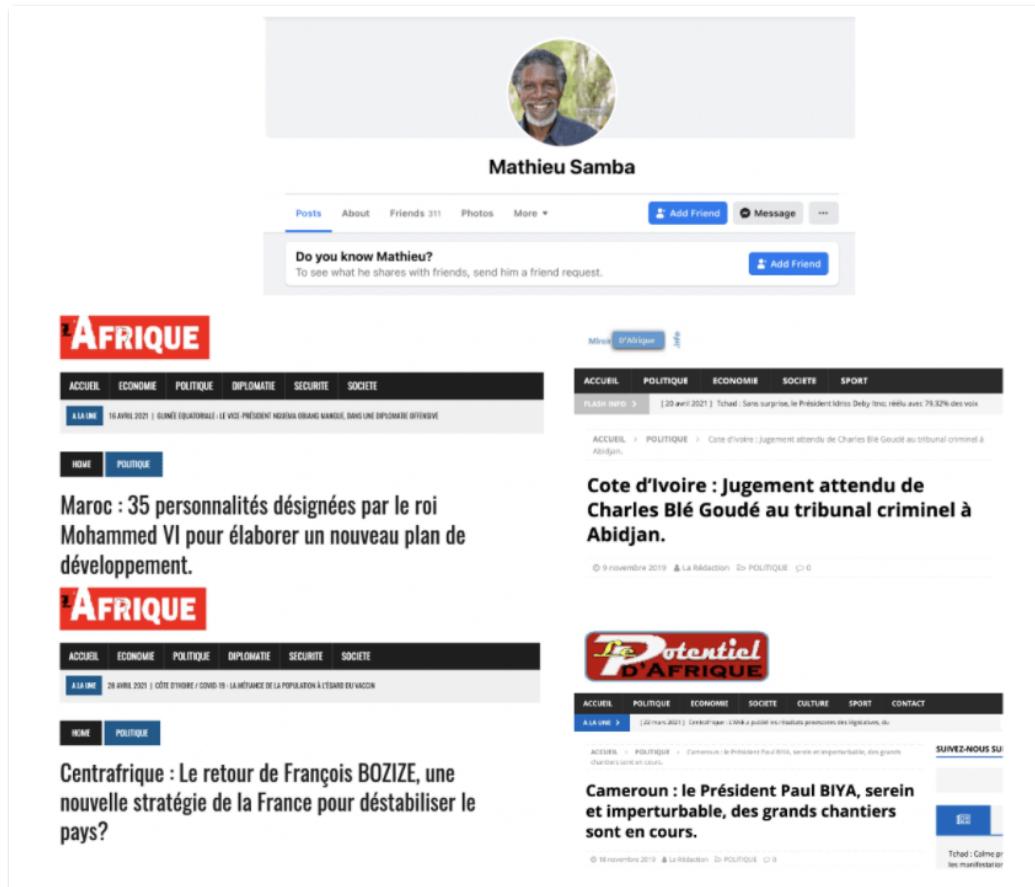


Figure 10: Top, the Mathieu Samba Profile with a picture from Getty Images. Bottom, four articles by Mathieu Samba from media properties that Facebook removed from its platform in the takedown.

5 Narratives

Suspended Pages and Profiles shared content that aligned closely with each other: posts heavily criticized France, extolled CAR President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, and praised Russia for its military support. Similar narratives have been found in other information campaigns targeting CAR, including those with links to Yevgeny Prigozhin.

In addition, while suspended Pages largely did not reference the United States, there appears to have been some effort to promote a story about a small U.S. donation of non-military supplies to CAR. Further, suspended NGO and media Pages also frequently commented on other west and central African countries.

5.1 Criticism of French Involvement in CAR

Criticism of France was the most prominent theme in content shared by the network. Of the 2,142 posts from Pages shared with SIO, 585 (roughly 27%) included the word France (France) or French (Français). Much of the content critical of France focused on its activities in CAR, but we note that anti-French sentiment often intersected with other narratives also advanced by the network.

Perhaps the most common allegation in posts critical of France was that France's involvement in CAR was a ruse used to plunder the country's natural resources. For example, in August 2018, the ANA Page shared an open letter from Harouna Douamba to President Emmanuel Macron in which he claimed that France had turned CAR into a wild west ("hommes politiques Français aviez transformés en un far west"). He denounced the number of French NGOs operating in the country and claimed that France had set itself up as "an occupying and invading force to gain control of the country's resources" ("la France s'érite en force d'occupation et d'invasion pour avoir la main mise sur les ressources de ce pays"). The ANA post of Douamba's open letter garnered some of the most significant engagement in the network, receiving over 9,000 reactions and nearly 300 comments. It was also reshared over 800 times.



Figure 11: An open letter from Harouna Douamba published on the suspended ANA Page. Douamba criticizes France for destabilizing CAR and plundering its resources.

Several posts also claimed that France sought to keep CAR unstable by financing anti-government rebel groups or providing them with arms. One post, by Ong Nouvelle Afrique, started with the headline “France is preparing a genocide” (“La France en préparation d’un génocide”) and went on to claim that France had begun training rebel groups in southern Chad to destabilize the Touadéra regime. Others claimed that the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSCA was involved in France’s destabilization efforts. Importantly, while narratively similar, these claims, which circulated between August 2018 and February 2019, are distinct from those that circulated in February 2020 claiming that four specific MINUSCA officials were involved in weapons trafficking, which we discuss in more detail below.



Figure 12: Left, a suspended Page sharing a story claiming that France is preparing a genocide in CAR. Right, a story accusing France and MINUSCA were seeking to destabilize CAR.

There was also a flurry of anti-France posts published in January 2019 that corresponded with the [potential expiration](#) of the UN arms embargo on CAR that had been in force since December 2013. These posts suggested that the other UN Security Council permanent members were prepared or eager to let the embargo expire, while France was determined to veto lifting the ban. Posts around this time were particularly critical of the French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. One post, for instance, suggested Drian had “a stone in place of his heart” (“une pierre à la place de son cœur”). Another open letter from Harouna Douamba also called for Pan-Africanists to mobilize in protest of France’s refusal to lift the arms embargo.



Figure 13: Left, a suspended Page sharing a story about comments by the ANA Secretary General, claiming that the French foreign minister has a “a stone in place of his heart” (“une pierre à la place de son cœur”). Right, an open letter from Douamba calling on Pan-Africanists to mobilize against France for refusing to allow the lifting of the arms embargo on CAR.

5.2 Praise of CAR President Touadéra

The network also lent strong support to CAR President Touadéra. About 18% of Page posts referenced Touadéra by name. These posts included generic praise of the CAR president as well as content that inflated his (or his regime’s) accomplishments. For example, one post exalted Touadéra for teaching a mathematics course at the University of Bangui, while another hailed him as a visionary for his efforts to revitalize a local military training center. In another post that garnered some of the most significant interactions from the platform, an NGO Page claimed that Touadéra’s finance minister gave a “lesson in good governance” to other countries in the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) based on CAR’s 4% growth rate. For reference, the World Bank [acknowledges](#) that CAR’s economic growth has outpaced other CEMAC countries, but CAR also ranked 188 out of 189 countries on the UN Human Development Index in 2018.



Figure 14: A suspended Page sharings a story with the headline, “France officially involved in the massacre of Alinao and Bambari” (“La France Officiellement Impliqué Dans le Massacre de Alindao et Bambari”).

Pages also sought to use antipathy for France to deflect opposition to Touadéra. Several posts claimed that France opposed Touadéra because the CAR president was good for the country. Others used this alleged opposition as an explicit reason why the people must unite behind Touadéra. Still others claimed that France sought to manipulate CAR audiences to oppose Touadéra. For example, one post alleged that France had orchestrated the **massacre** of nearly 100 civilians in the town of Alindao in an effort to destabilize Touadéra’s regime.



Figure 15: Left, a suspended Page sharing a story claiming that France is preparing a genocide in CAR. Right, a story accusing France and MINUSCA were seeking to destabilize CAR.

It does not appear that the network dedicated much of its effort to criticizing Touadéra's electoral rivals, even in the lead-up to the first round of the CAR general elections in December 2020. We identified only three Page posts referencing Anicet-Georges Dologué and four posts referencing Martin Ziguélé—the candidates that received the second- and third-largest vote share in the first round, respectively. There were slightly more posts from suspended Pages referencing François Bozizé (32 total), the former CAR president who was forced to flee to Cameroon when rebels seized the capital in 2013. Bozizé returned to CAR in 2019 and announced his run in the 2020 presidential elections, but the courts **rejected** his candidacy in December 2020 on the grounds that he did not meet a morality requirement required for office.

5.3 Praise of Russia's Support for CAR

While less prominent than posts critical of France or expressing support for Touadéra, suspended Pages also generated a nontrivial amount of content praising Russia's support for CAR. Roughly 8% of posts generated by the suspended Pages referenced "Russia" ("Russie") or "Russian" ("russe"). These typically focused on Russia's military cooperation with CAR, frequently thanking them for providing arms to help the government's campaign against various rebel groups throughout the country.

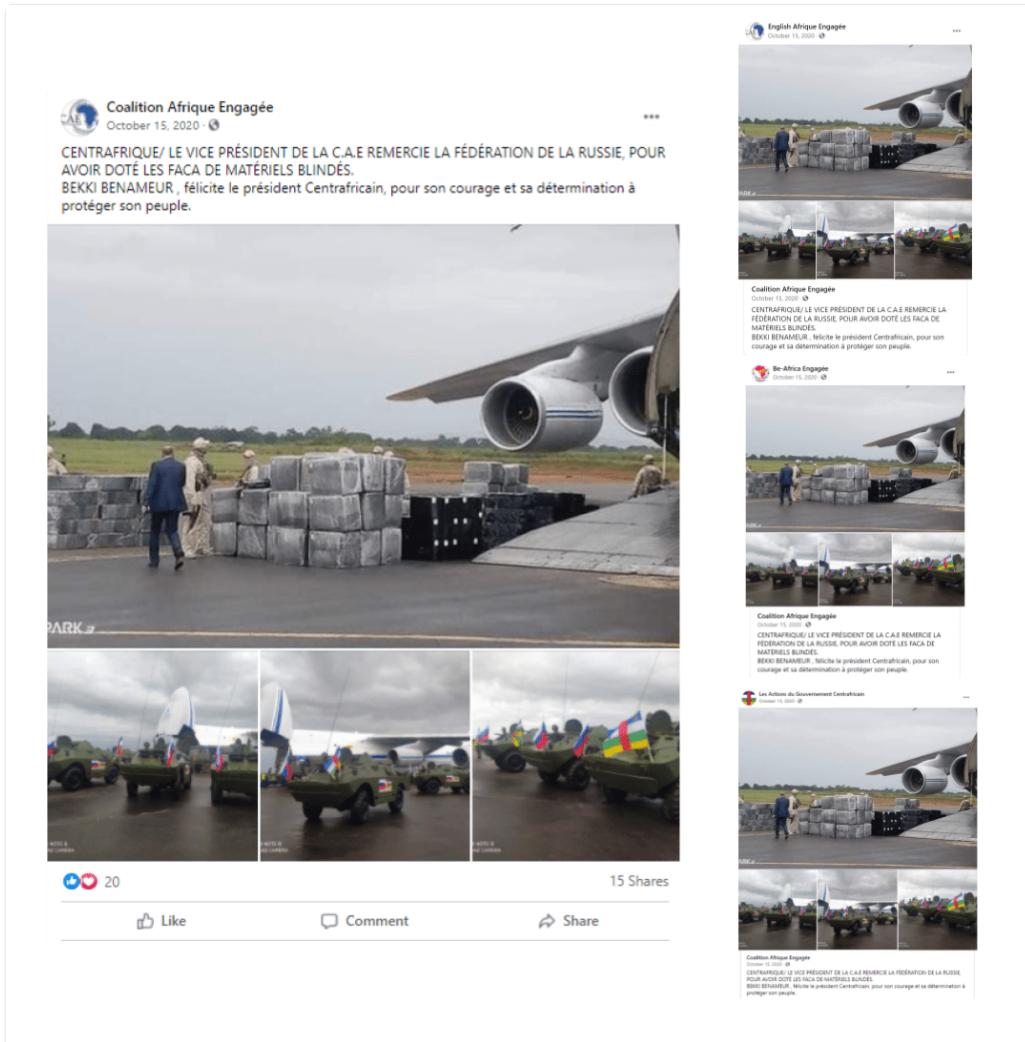


Figure 16: Several suspended Pages reshared a post thanking Russia for its military support.

Further, pro-Russian content often intersected with narratives critical of France. In particular, several posts claimed that France sought to block—and sometimes to seek revenge for—CAR’s cooperation with Russia. One post, for example, alleged that France and MINUSCA distributed ammunition to rebels in the city of Bambari to shift public opinion against Russia by showing its inability to restore peace to the country. Another claimed that France planned to veto lifting the UN arms embargo on CAR to retaliate for CAR’s defense agreement with Russia.

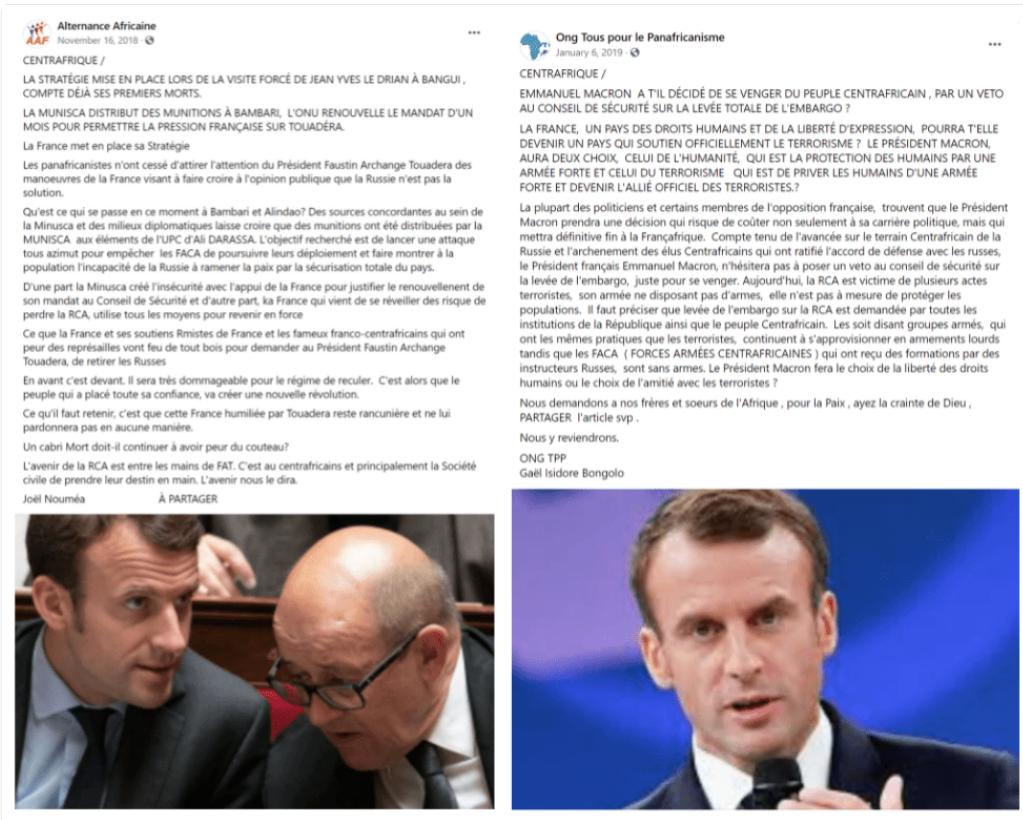


Figure 17: Left, a post from a suspended Page claimed that France sought to turn public opinion against Russia (“L’objectif recherché est... faire montrer à la population l’incapacité de la Russie à ramener la paix par la sécurisation totale du pays”). Right, a post from a suspended Page claimed that France refused to allow UNSC to lift its arms embargo on CAR as a revenge against the Russia-CAR defense agreement (“Compte tenu de l’avancée sur le terrain Centrafricain de la Russie et l’archenement des élus Centrafricains qui ont ratifié l’accord de défense avec les russes, le Président français Emmanuel Macron, n’hésitera pas à poser un veto au conseil de sécurité sur la levée de l’embargo, juste pour se venger”).

5.4 Praise of U.S. Support for CAR

The network largely refrained from commenting on the United States, with one notable exception. In January 2019, when the UN arms embargo on CAR was nearing its expiration date, a number of Pages created similar posts thanking the United States for a donation of (non-military) supplies CAR had received from the U.S. Embassy in Bangui. It is unclear whether this transaction occurred, but the post also references [a small gift of 57 vehicles](#) that the United States did send in August 2018. Broadly, the post framed the donation as a signal of U.S. support for the CAR government and desire to see the reconstruction of CAR's military.

These posts are noteworthy because they generated by far the most engagement of the posts by the suspended Pages analyzed by SIO. The version of the post shared by the CAE Page received over 13,000 reactions—more than any other post from the Pages we analyzed. In fact, posts with the highest interactions on four of the 10 suspended Page were versions of this post. While we suspect the Pages may have published these posts to help portray France as unilaterally against lifting the arms embargo on CAR, we remain unclear why these posts garnered so much attention.

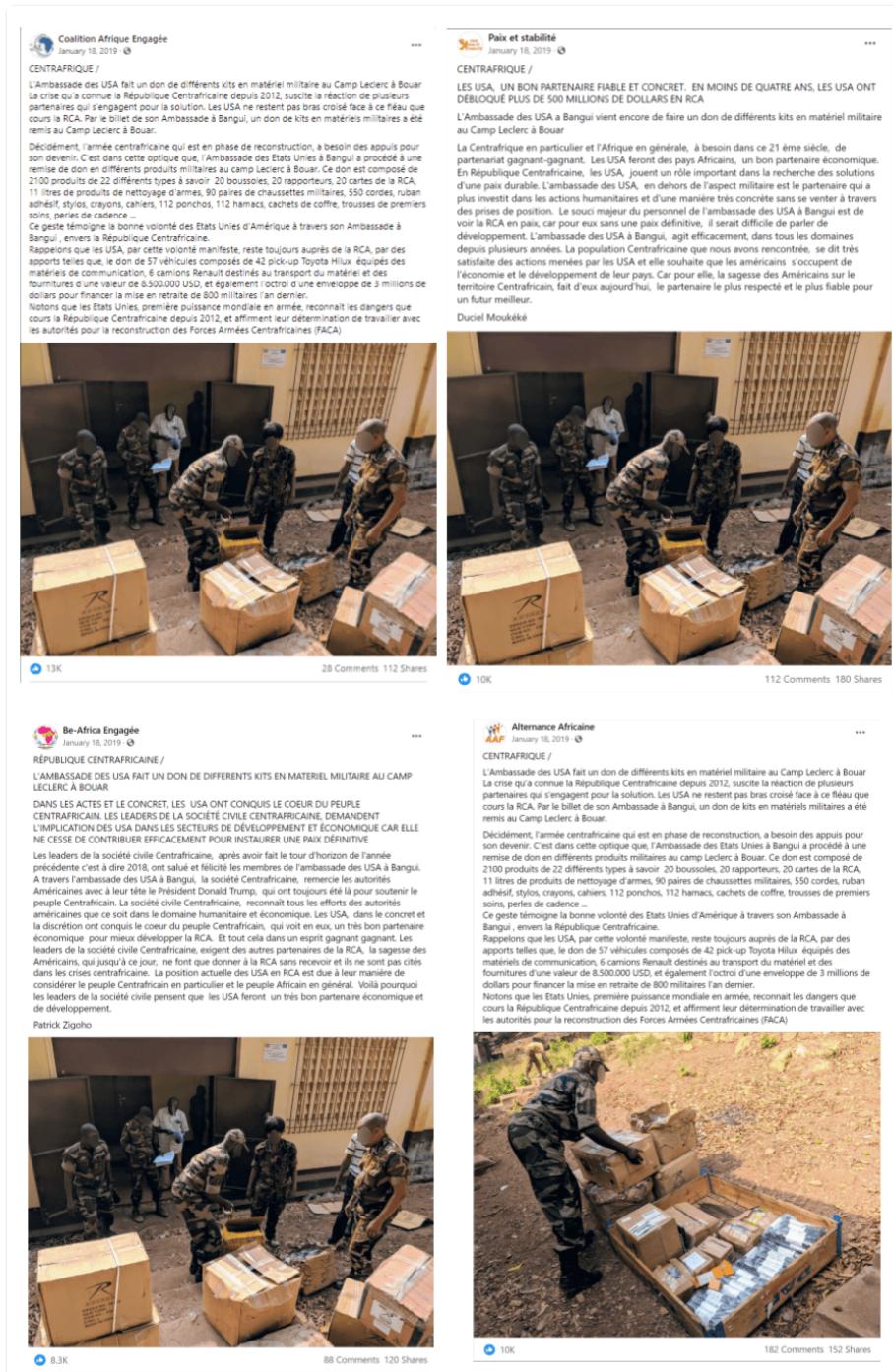


Figure 18: Posts by four suspended Pages describing a U.S. donation of non-military supplies in January 2019. Unlike other cases, these stories are copy-pasted across Pages.

5.5 Coverage of Other African Countries

Finally, suspended Pages also shared slanted stories about the politics of other African countries. In many cases, these stories sought to bolster the rule of friendly politicians by, for example, praising their actions or sharing stories about their popularity. In other cases, Pages shared Douamba's explicit calls for foreign citizens to mobilize in support of his preferred politicians. Several stories also attacked former Chad President Idriss Déby for his support for rebel groups operating in northern CAR.

Example headlines from these types of stories shared by the suspended Pages include:

- Has the opposition ordered the massacre of citizens in order to win the next elections? (Burkina Faso)
- Paul Biya strengthens his cabinet by nominating a man of experience (Cameroon)
- Idriss Déby is the shame of Africa (Chad)
- Three decades in power, here is the face of the President that the West refuses to show (Equatorial Guinea)
- President Harouna Douamba calls on Nigerian youth to vote for Pan-Africanist Mohamed Bazoum (Nigeria)
- The Malian people are a model for African Youth (Mali)
- Harouna Douamba calls for Pan-Africanists to support Morocco (Morocco)

Further, like many of the other narratives advanced by the network, criticisms of France were frequently interspersed among these stories.



Figure 19: Left, a post from a suspended Page with the headline “Libyan NGOs reveal the deal with Nicolas Sarkozy that sealed the fate of Kadhafi and Laurent Gbagbo.” Right, a post from a suspended Page with the headline “Did France Finance Acts of Terrorism in Equatorial Guinea?”

6 Connections to 2020 Anti-MINUSCA Campaign

One of the suspended Pages in the network is the Mouvement des Patriotes Centrafricains pour la Paix-MPCP (“Movement of Central African Patriots for Peace-MPCP”).¹ The UN reports the MPCP was the visible face behind a targeted disinformation campaign attacking MINUSCA. This campaign, which began in early February 2020, spread rumors that four MINUSCA officials were engaged in arms trafficking to rebels in the PK5 neighborhood of Bangui, and on February 17, the CAR Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded that the four officials be relocated outside of CAR. Two sources—a [UN report](#) and a story published by [Corbeau News Centrafrique \(CNC\)](#)—claimed Harouna Douamba was involved. The UN report said that many sources alleged Douamba “played a key coordination role behind

¹On May 4, 2021, the MPCP Page shared a letter from ANA that included allegations that the suspension of the ANA Page and other affiliated accounts was the work of a “Ms. Brown, Deputy Special Representative of MINUSCA,” who the letter claims began her role the same day other accounts in the network were suspended. The MPCP Page was suspended on May 6 after Facebook determined the MPCP and larger network was connected following a tip from our research. We shared the connections between MPCP and Douamba that we document in the report on May 3, prior to the MPCP sharing the allegations against Ms. Brown.

the scenes.” We believe that the link between the MPCP Page and the network of Pages to which Douamba is central is further evidence that Douamba was linked to the 2020 disinformation campaign.

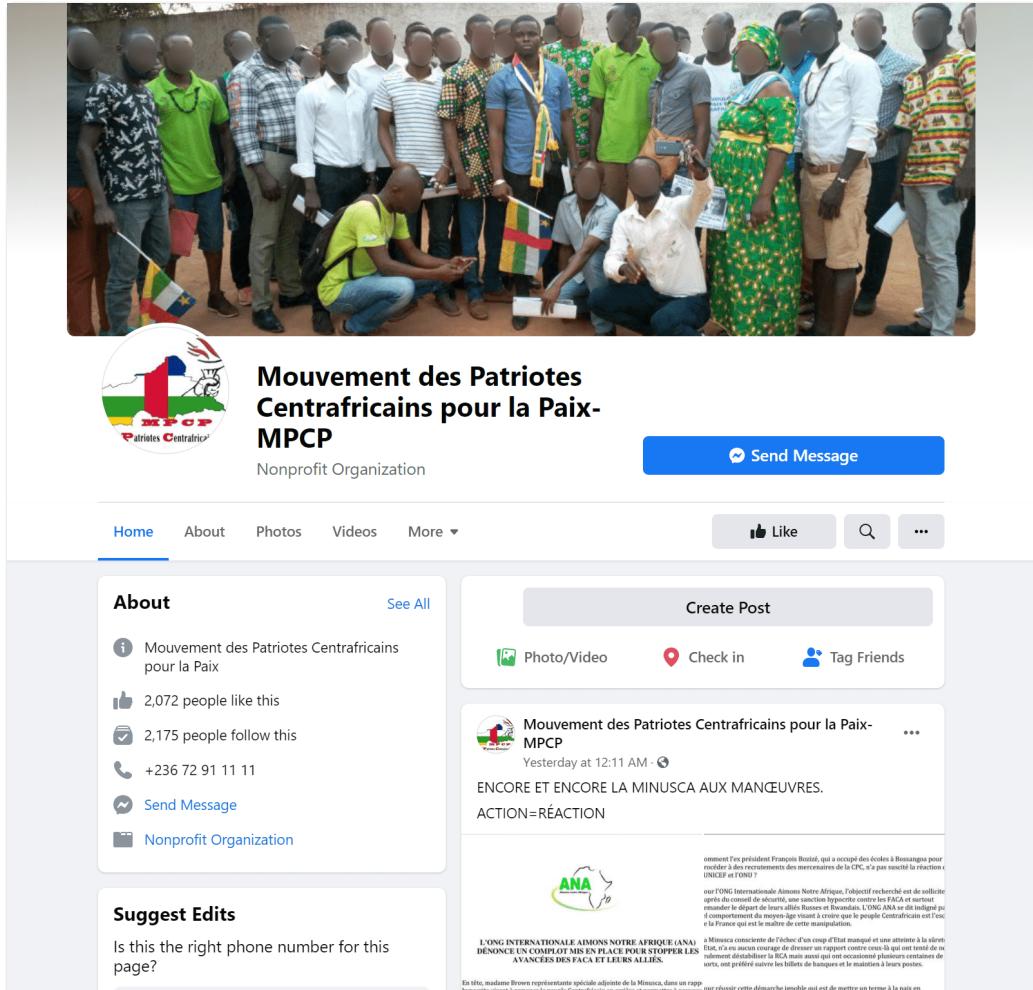


Figure 20: The MPCP Page. The MPCP was central to a disinformation campaign targeting UN peacekeepers in CAR.

6.1 Operation David vs Goliath

In February and March 2020, MPCP posts made extensive efforts to mobilize Central Africans against MINUSCA, which the MPCP referred to as “Operation David versus Goliath.” The Page not only shared allegations against the four MINUSCA officials; it also shared flyers with an explicit call for a mass rally at the MINUSCA headquarters on March 4,

2020. These flyers included pictures of three of the accused MINUSCA officials, referred to them as “mercenaries” who had “crumbled our flag” and “destabilized our country,” and demanded they leave the country.



Figure 21: Left, a flyer shared on the MPCP Page on February 28, 2020, calling for a mass rally at the MINUSCA headquarters on March 4. Right, an MPCP post referring to the MINUSCA officials as “drinkers of the blood of Central Africans” (“des buveurs du sang du peuple centrafricain”).

These types of posts, which might qualify as incitement to violence, were common on the MPCP Page. One post from March 12, 2020, said:

Chers compatriotes les preuves dont nous disposons sont inhumaines, très graves et nécessitent la révolte populaire contre l’ensemble de la Minusca. Nous avons donné la chance au gouvernement et à la Minusca de prendre leurs responsabilités mais hélas la Minusca qui se dit être là a décidé d’écraser la population et le gouvernement. A PARTAGER POUR LA PAIX DANS NOTRE BIEN COMMUN. LA PATRIE OU LA MORT, NOUS VAINCRONS

(“Dear compatriots, the evidence at our disposal is inhuman, very serious and requires a popular revolt against the whole of Minusca. We gave the government

and Minusca the chance to take their responsibilities, but unfortunately the Minusca, which claims to be there, has decided to crush the population and the government.

TO SHARE FOR PEACE IN OUR COMMON GOOD.

HOME OR DEATH, WE WILL WIN”)

Another post, on March 18, 2020, called for no MINUSCA vehicle movement on March 20, 2020. It also concluded by saying “Homeland or death, we will win.”

Interestingly, besides the MPCP Page, the network we analyzed did not appear to make a coordinated effort to propagate the allegations against the MINUSCA officials or MPCP’s calls to action on Facebook: there were only a few posts from other suspended Pages that referenced the allegations or MPCP’s activities. This may have been an effort by Douamba to distance himself from the allegations. However, we did find evidence of real-world links between Douamba’s ANA and the MPCP, which we describe below.

6.2 Online Evidence of Offline Connections between Douamba and the MPCP

We found additional evidence that Douamba was affiliated offline with the MPCP campaign. First, posts from the MPCP’s Page show their frequent use of a banner with the ANA logo on it, including at conferences about the MINUSCA allegations. The banner, which also features the MPCP’s title at the top, says “The Central African youth says no to manipulation, yes to unity and solidarity, peace goes through us.”



Figure 22: Left, a post shared by the MPCP Page on February 26, 2020, documenting a press conference about Operation David versus Goliath. Right, one of the shared photos showing the banner with the ANA logo in the top right corner.

Second, as noted in the [UN report](#), Douamba himself appeared to admit to some involvement with the allegations against the MINUSCA officials in an interview in April 2020. Transcripts of the interview were posted to the suspended ANA and CAE Pages. In it, the interviewer asks Douamba about his involvement in the MINUSCA scandal, to which he replies “In CAR, there is not a problem with MINUSCA but rather certain individuals within MINUSCA that not only tarnish the image of the institution but contribute to the continuation of the crisis in CAR. Their practices caused many deaths. You know why there were so many deaths in Km5 in the month of December when many months before the Km5 had found calm. With ONG Internationale ANA, we succeeded in doing in two months what MINUSCA has not been able to do since 2013. But I will keep the details for another occasion.” (Km5 refers to a large market in the PK5 neighborhood.)

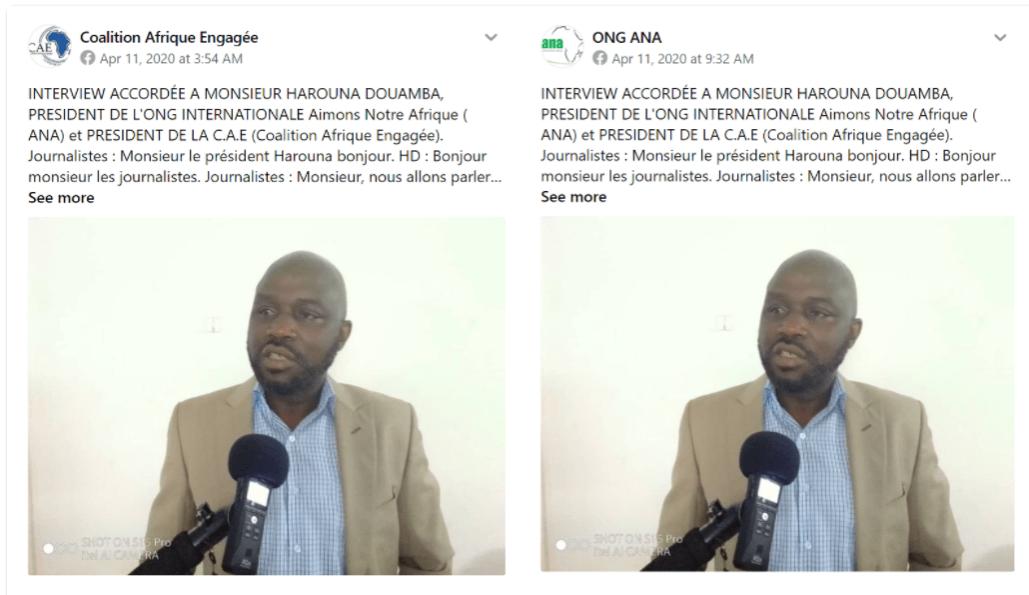


Figure 23: Two suspended Pages posted an interview with Douamba in which he appeared to suggest some involvement with the MINUSCA weapons trafficking allegations. The full transcript of the interview can be found in Annex 5.5 of the [UN report](#).

Finally, we found photos that indicated a link between Douamba and the MINUSCA allegations. Posts from both the MPCP Page and the ANA website featured pictures of Harouna Douamba, other associates of ANA, and members of the MPCP together at the Km5 in December 2019; Douamba insinuated in the interview above that in December 2019 the MINUSCA officials’ activities caused many deaths in the neighborhood. One post from the suspended ANA Page described Douamba’s thanks to the MPCP for their commitment and presence on the ground. The ANA website also included the photo featured in this post, along with another photo showing Douamba with the President of MPCP, Bethsaïda Djopop

Mbongo. Another post from the MPCP Page showed pictures of Mbongo speaking to a group of individuals, including those wearing shirts with the ANA logo on them. The photos also pictured a dedicated banner for ANA. We additionally note that Douamba may be one of the individuals in a photo shared by the MPCP Page that was posted alongside a press release claiming another organization, Réseau National pour la Sauvegarde des Acquis de la Paix (RNSAP), would join the MPCP in mobilizing against the MINUSCA officials. However, we cannot verify the individual's identity.

6.2 Offline Douamba-MPCP Ties 6 CONNECTIONS TO 2020 ANTI-MINUSCA CAMPAIGN

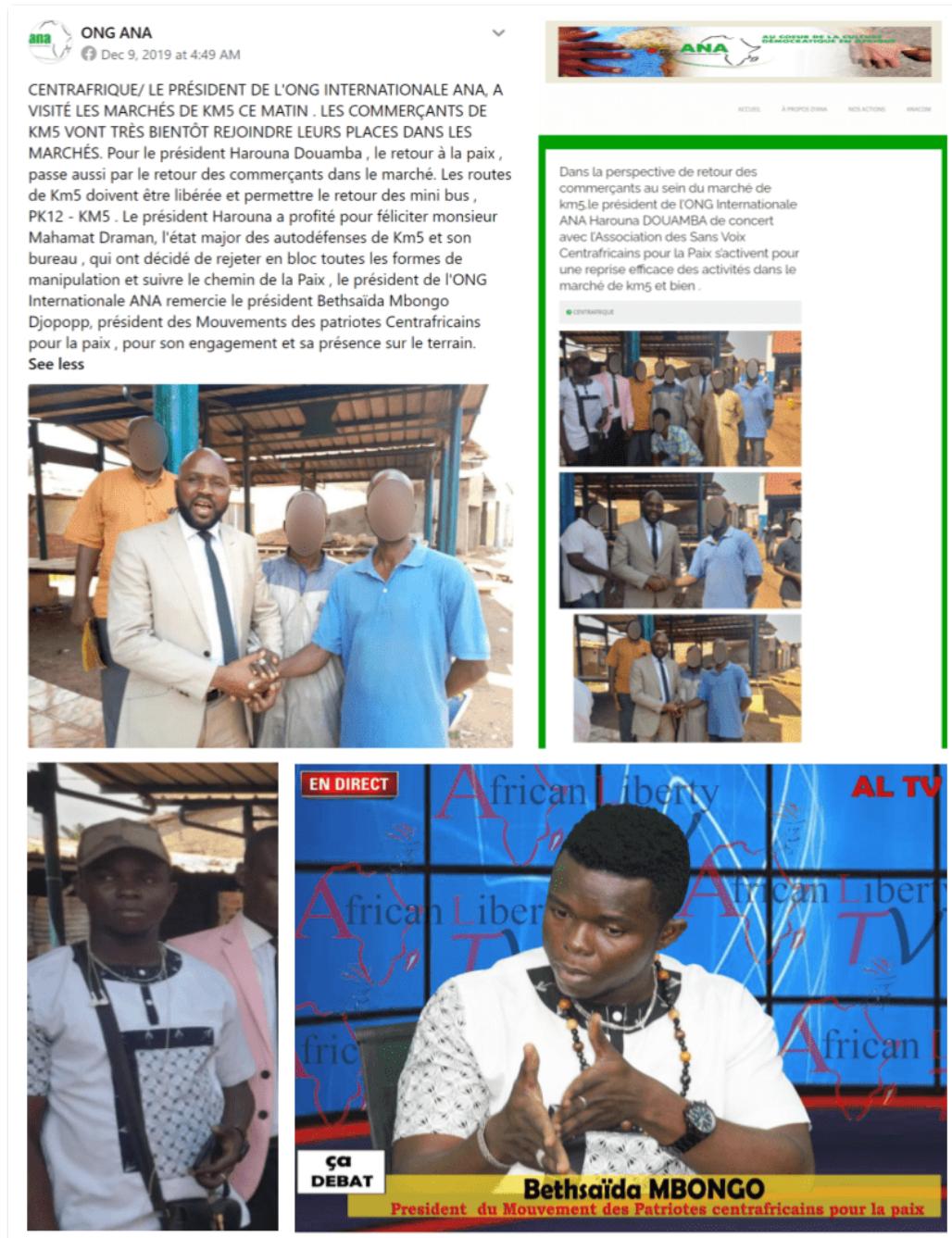


Figure 24: Top left, a post by the suspended ANA Page in which Douamba thanks Mbongo for MPCP's work in the Km5 area. Top right, a screenshot from the ANA website that includes the same photo of Douamba as well as a photo of Douamba with Mbongo. Bottom left, an enlarged image of Mbongo in the photo on the ANA website. Bottom right, a picture of Mbongo on a news show wearing the same T-shirt as in the previous photos.

6.2 Offline Douamba-MPCP Ties 6 CONNECTIONS TO 2020 ANTI-MINUSCA CAMPAIGN



Figure 25: Left, a post shared by the MPCP page on December 19 showing Mbongo speaking to a group of individuals affiliated with ANA. Top right, a close-up of the photo showing the ANA logo on the shirts of the individuals behind Mbongo. Bottom right, another picture included with the post showing a separate banner for ANA.

Mouvement des Patriotes Centrafricains pour la Paix-MPCP
 March 15, 2020 · 

COMMUNIQUÉ

APPEL A LA MOBILISATION

Le Réseau National pour la Sauvegarde des Acquis de la Paix (RNSAP), Après avoir pris connaissance des preuves concernant les 4 fonctionnaires de la Minusca, dont les faits sont très graves et qui non seulement visent à déstabiliser notre pays mais aussi à beaucoup contribuer au massacre de nos concitoyens. Le RNSAP, se joint au mouvement des patriotes centrafricains pour la paix et lance un appel à l'ensemble de la population Centrafricaine à participer à la mobilisation du 18 Mars devant la base de la Minusca.

Le RNSAP, lance un avertissement au gouvernement qui jusque là est resté sans action concernant le départ des quatres individus du territoire national. La mobilisation du 18 ne sera pas annulée tant que les mercenaires seront encore présents sur le territoire Centrafricain.

Le RNSAP prendra pour premier responsable le gouvernement, car le gouvernement doit être du côté du peuple et non contre le peuple. Les preuves étant d'une extrême gravité ; une plainte sera déposée à la cour spéciale de justice et à la cour pénale internationale (CPI).

Le RNSAP prend à témoin l'opinion nationale et internationale du comportement criminel des 4 agents de la Minusca soutenus par l'institution elle même et l'ambassade de France à Bangui.



Figure 26: A post shared by the suspended MPCP page. The individual pictured in the center appears to be Harouna Douamba, but we did not find additional sources to verify the individuals' identity.

7 Conclusion

In identifying this network, Facebook has uncovered some portion of a large, sprawling influence apparatus linked to Harouna Douamba. Although Douamba's activities appear to be **well-known locally**, we believe this is the first network linked to him to be suspended by a large social media platform. Two of the more striking features of the network were its use of pseudo-NGOs to propagate slanted narratives and the explicit advertisement

of the network's services to other African politicians. While this is only the **latest example** of disinformation campaigns using entities claiming to be NGOs, this trend is troubling. Masquerading influence operations under the guise of NGOs will further empower bad actors who want to slander legitimate organizations. We encourage reporters and researchers to further investigate the organizations and media entities tied to this network to help uncover the full extent of Douamba's activities.



The Stanford Internet Observatory is a cross-disciplinary program of research, teaching and policy engagement for the study of abuse in current information technologies, with a focus on social media. The Stanford Internet Observatory was founded in 2019 to research the misuse of the internet to cause harm, formulate technical and policy responses, and teach the next generation how to avoid the mistakes of the past.

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