

# The New York Times

## Blurring the Typical Boundaries

By Doug Bandow

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Sectarian violence is spreading ominously across Africa. The only good news is that so far the conflicts appear to be national rather than regional.

Sudan has long suffered from a complicated religious-ethnic conflict. In Mali, [France was drawn into a religious-infused civil war](#). Nigeria is a divided nation where long-standing sectarian antagonisms increasingly have been [amplified by the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram](#), which kills moderate Muslims as well as Christians. Thankfully, fighting in the first two has ebbed. But Nigeria's battle remains intense, albeit contained within its national boundaries.

However, [rising violence within the Central African Republic](#) threatens to swamp the other conflicts in regional impact. Attacks on Christians following a takeover by the rebel Islamic Seleka coalition triggered retaliation by Christian militias. Not only is the violence creating a host of angry victims, but the outward flow of refugees is planting seeds of conflict in surrounding nations.

The flow of refugees from the Central African Republic is planting seeds of conflict in surrounding nations.

Central Africa increasingly looks like a region aflame, but in the continent tribal politics usually dominate and in this case geography helps separate the major religious battlegrounds. Of course, addressing even largely distinct national conflicts is not easy, as we have seen in Sudan and Nigeria.

Unfortunately, religion is one force capable of transcending normal political and ethnic differences. For instance, Boko Haram so far has focused its murderous activities within Nigeria. But the exodus from C.A.R. creates an increased possibility of cooperation among various militants acting as friends if not quite allies. The implications of a truly regional conflict are frightening. All of C.A.R.'s neighbors share an interest in ending the sectarian killing. Not just for humanitarian reasons, but also as a matter of basic self-interest.

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