



AFRICA POLICY BRIEF

Chad and the West: Shifting the Security Burden?

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Chad's decision in January 2015 to send troops into northern Nigeria to fight the militant Islamist group Boko Haram brought the country into the international spotlight. Early successes in regaining territory from the group raised important questions about why Chad was seemingly able to do a better job than Nigeria's own army, which had failed to protect lives and contain the insurgency for several years. Chad's campaign followed two other military interventions in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR), which had varying levels of success. This policy brief will discuss how such a poor country has managed to improve its armed forces to the point of being able to launch numerous adventures abroad, and the risks and opportunities associated with the current intervention in north-eastern Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2008, a Chadian rebel group, the 'Union of Forces for Democracy and Development' (UFDD), launched a lightning assault against the capital N'Djamena. Armed mostly with machine guns and rocket launchers, they crossed 1000 kilometres of semi-desert in

4x4 vehicles in a matter of days. After a series of confrontations with the Chadian army (Armée Nationale du Tchad, ANT), a small rebel column was able to break through the capital's defences and arrived within a few kilometres of the presidential palace where they clashed with the presidential guard. Hundreds were killed and thousands displaced by the fighting. According to contemporary accounts, President Idriss Déby Itno was within hours of being unseated, and was only saved by aerial intelligence support from France and divisions within the rebels at the decisive moment.

This was the second such attack on N'Djamena in two years, and the rebels had also briefly occupied the eastern town of Abeche. President Déby's position seemed precarious. The Chadian rebellion began over domestic power struggles after Déby made his intention clear to change the constitution to allow him to stand for re-election in 2006. It was further exacerbated by the crisis in Darfur, which sent some 250,000 Sudanese refugees, rebels and weapons flooding into eastern Chad. Frustrated at Chad's tacit support of the Darfur rebel groups (several prominent leaders of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) were from the same Zaghawa clan, although from a different sub-clan, as President Déby), Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir retaliated by sponsoring a motley collection of Chadian rebel groups, including the UFDD, many of them

former Déby allies who opposed his plans to change the constitution. This dangerous spiral of proxy war ended only when the Chadian rebels suffered a catastrophic defeat at the battle of Am Dam in May 2009 and Chad and Sudan agreed to a rapprochement.

Up until 2009, Chad's army, which on paper numbered some 17,000 soldiers, had been woefully unequipped and was characterised by disloyalty and power struggles. One of the leading generals of the UFDD rebel group Mahamat Nouri was a former army officer and a series of defections had been crucial to the rebels' success. The ANT was also accused of human rights abuses and using child soldiers. It was barely better equipped than the rebel forces mostly fighting with 4x4 'technical' vehicles with machine guns mounted on the back, and soldiers' salaries were often late or not paid at all. President Déby had long feared the greatest threat to his position would come from the army – there were many rival Zaghawas within its ranks and other groups such as the Gorane vying for power and influence and who felt the ANT had been neglected during the 2000s – and there were regular clampdowns on purported 'coup plotters'. However by the battle of Am Dam in 2009 the ANT was well on the way to being transformed and reorganised into an effective and well-equipped fighting force. As the vulnerabilities of the ANT and its inability to protect the president became obvious during the war, President Déby became determined to ensure that such a crisis would not occur again. Thanks to the start of the exploitation of Chad's oil deposits in 2003, he now had unprecedented amounts of cash at his disposal to achieve this.

CHAD'S OIL

When Chad became an oil producer in 2003, elaborate plans were laid to help the country avoid the so-called 'resource curse' and to

ensure that oil revenues would be spent on development and not pocketed by unscrupulous officials. This unique plan was sponsored by the World Bank and provided that all royalty payments from the developing Consortium (Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Petronas) would be transferred through a transparent off-shore escrow account where payments could be monitored, and that around 80% of that money would be spent on five 'priority' development sectors, including health and education.¹

However from the very beginning money was diverted towards military spending. A significant proportion of an initial \$25m signature bonus on oil contracts was spent on weapons. In 2006 as the rebel threat from the UFDD increased, Chad ripped up the original agreement with the World Bank allowing it to change the list of 'development priorities' to include 'national security' which in reality meant arms. From 2006-9 Chad spent an estimated \$600m on six reconditioned Sukhoi fighter jets, attack helicopters and armoured personnel carriers. A systematic review of the armed forces was also launched, ensuring salaries were paid and 'ghost' soldiers and those who had shown disloyalty in the past (particularly those from troublesome clans such as the Gorane) were purged.

This increased spending with oil money which should have been put towards development was a crucial factor in the ANT's decisive victory against the rebels in 2009 at Am Dam. This defeat effectively signalled the end of the face-to-face combat in lightly armed 4x4 vehicles which had characterised Chadian military strategy for decades.

The volte face on the development spending priorities made the World Bank's position untenable and in 2008 the loans were repaid and the project closed. However Chad's military spending continued. By 2013 it had reached an

estimated \$4bn of just over \$10bn known to have been earned from oil, according to figures from the IMF. Much of this spending – particularly in the crisis years from 2006-11 – was approved by extraordinary budgetary procedures known as DAO (*dépense avant ordonnancement*), effectively a presidential decree which bypassed parliamentary approval. And as Chad's oil continues to be developed, the opportunities for military spending are still present. In 2011 the Ronier field owned by the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) was brought into production, and other fields owned by the commodities giant Glencore also began to export in 2014. National production increased from around 100,000bpd in 2010 to 140,000bpd today.ⁱⁱ Although Chad is a member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and a number of revenue management provisions still remain from the original World Bank project, around 75% of what the country earns is spent without effective civil society or parliamentary scrutiny. It is largely due to this increased spending that Chad has been able to transform its armed forces into the outfit scoring victories in northern Mali, and now against Boko Haram.ⁱⁱⁱ

CHAD'S REGIONAL INTERVENTIONISM

As Chad's military strength increased, President Déby committed the country to a series of regional military interventions which served to both project the image of a strong and stable country in the heart of a dangerous neighbourhood, and to bolster Déby's own position by attracting the support of international players who seemed unwilling or unable to comprehensively tackle complex Sahelian security questions alone.

In early 2013, France announced the launch of Operation Serval, a lightning offensive against a coalition of Tuareg and jihadist rebels which had

over-run large swathes of northern Mali and was now making direct threats against the capital, Bamako. As the UN, African Union and neighbouring African countries stalled on plans to implement a peacekeeping force to protect the civilian population from daily exactions, Chad sent about 2000 troops to join Serval. Within weeks Operation Serval chased the jihadists out of the northern town of Timbuktu, and made good initial progress in securing Gao.^{iv} Chadian troops with their vast experience in desert warfare were able to fight the jihadists in Mali's Adrar des Ifoghas mountain range, and even killed one of their top commanders.

A partial withdrawal of Chadian troops from Mali was announced soon after – perhaps a canny appreciation from Déby of the importance of not getting bogged down in an essentially unwinnable war against jihadist groups in such a vast, unpoliced region – but Chad had already turned its attention to the Central African Republic. Chad's long involvement in its troublesome southern neighbour - driven principally by self-interest as CAR's northern provinces which border Chad are essentially out of the control of the Bangui government and are often used as safe havens by various Chadian rebel groups - was typified in its support for General Francois Bozizé's coup in 2003. However in late 2012 as the 'Seleka' coalition of rebel groups threatened the capital Bangui, the Chadian leadership appears to have decided not to help their former ally. Bozizé was overthrown by the rebels in March 2013. The precise nature of Chad's involvement in this murky story is hard to know, but the country has long had groups of 'irregular' soldiers operating in CAR. These troops' role has been to patrol the border region, and to chase out Chadian rebel groups which were often infiltrating displaced and refugee populations. Chadian troops were certainly already present in the country when a new AU peacekeeping force

MISCA was announced in late 2013, and once again Chad seemed to jump at the chance to show its commitment to regional peacekeeping by authorising 850 troops to join the mission. However this time Chad's involvement was not so benign – a hasty withdrawal was announced in April 2014 after accusations that soldiers were involved in human rights abuses, including the deaths in a Bangui market of at least 30 of the very civilians they were supposedly protecting.^v

Finally in January 2015, Chad took the opportunity to lance a particularly problematic boil that had been festering just over the border in north-eastern Nigeria since 2009. Boko Haram started life as a local group with specific grievances in north-eastern Nigeria however its objectives morphed in recent years seemingly in response to the Nigerian authorities' tactics. By 2014 the group had emerged as a regional security threat, as exemplified by its attacks against Nigerien soldiers in Diffa in the country's south-east, and kidnappings and attacks on army posts in northern Cameroon. Although Chad was at first not directly targeted, during 2014, as refugees from attacks on Nigerian villages began arriving in western Chad around the shores of Lake Chad – an area particularly difficult to access or defend because the shrinking lake has created a series of islands surrounded by shallow marshy areas – Chad became concerned that Boko Haram may be able to infiltrate the displaced people's camps.

The trigger for Chad's intervention against Boko Haram was the group's attack on the Nigerian army post of Baga, on the shores of Lake Chad, in early January 2015. The group was able to completely over-run the town and according to some reports killed up to 2000 people^{vi}. This appears to have been the last straw for Chad and Niger who withdrew their troops from the Multinational Joint Taskforce, whose headquarters had been based at Baga. Although

initially the frustrations were not made public, the Chadian and Nigerien governments were both disappointed that the Nigerian army had seemed unable or unwilling to stop the rebels' advance.^{vii} The situation was already tense – behind the scenes efforts by Chad to negotiate the release of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls in late 2014 (which led to accusations of Chadian complicity in Boko Haram's activities in some sections of the Nigerian press) had led nowhere and may have even inflamed the Islamists. With Baga over-run, Chad's western flank was dangerously exposed at a time when the country was also increasingly concerned about its northern frontier – with the collapse of state authority in Libya, groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) and Toubou rebels were able to act with impunity in Libya's southern deserts.

However it was not just about the perceived threat from Boko Haram. It is vital to read these military adventures with an appreciation of Déby's keen understanding of how to stay in power. Despite elections in 2011 being described by the EU as 'free and fair', there is deep political discontent in the country. From late 2014 onwards, the dramatic drop in the world oil price has been having a serious impact on Chad's financial position. Boko Haram's presence in northern Cameroon has disrupted important import routes, raising prices, and a series of protests about the rising cost of living, and particularly the cost of fuel, broke out mostly in the populous south of the country in late 2014.

Despite confident claims that Chad's oil output would 'triple' by 2015,^{viii} serious delays have occurred in increasing output from the Chinese National Petroleum Company's (CNPC) Ronier fields because of a dispute over environmental damage. The kind of economic transformation people expected after twelve years of oil

production has not occurred – Chad remains almost of the bottom of the UN’s Human Development Index and a large section of the population continues to live in poverty and food insecurity. Having come to power himself through means of a military rebellion from the east, and having survived the 2005-9 crisis, Déby knows only too well that the failure to share wealth and power can create serious grievances, and that the trigger could come from within the ANT. Increased military spending can be seen as a way of rewarding loyalty. Sending the troops to participate in active campaigns abroad can also be seen as a chance to deflect attention away from failures at home, while simultaneously bolstering Chad’s image with international players.

IS CHAD A RELIABLE SECURITY PARTNER?

The poor behaviour of Chadian troops in CAR has done little to dent the enthusiasm of western powers for engaging the country to solve regional security dilemmas; and here it is vital to realise how strong and committed Chad’s armed forces appear in comparison to the national armies of many other regional players. Despite the questionable human rights and democracy record described above, it seems that international players such as France and the US have realised that they simply don’t have much of a choice. In April 2014, the US announced it was deploying 80 ‘military advisors’ to Chad to help in the search for the missing Chibok schoolgirls, kidnapped by Boko Haram. In July 2014 France announced the re-organisation of its West Africa presence under the auspices of ‘Operation Barkhane’, which would see personnel and equipment based in Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and, importantly, a much smaller contingent in Mali. French President François Hollande named N’Djamena as the

new headquarters for Barkhane during a visit with his defence minister in July 2014.

From a logistical perspective the decision made sense – Chad has good runways and France already had equipment and intelligence networks based in the country, but the new deployment marked an interesting re-alignment in relations with France, which until the Serval intervention had been somewhat complicated. AS recently as 2010, with characteristic anti-colonial rhetoric, Chad had been threatening to expel about 900 French soldiers (Operation Epervier), based in Chad since the end of the war with Libya in the 1980s. In 2008 when the European EUFOR mission launched with a mandate to protect Darfur refugees in eastern Chad, France had a conspicuously low profile, with former Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner openly advocating for other European countries to take the lead. However with Serval and the announcement of Barkhane, Chad seems to have for now turned its back on that policy and decided that its interests lie in trying to help France achieve its policy aims in the Sahel.

Moreover, Chad’s intervention in north-eastern Nigeria, with the support of a contingent of Nigerien troops, has had a degree of success. Within weeks of launching the offensive, Nigeria announced that the towns of Dikwa, Malam Fatori and Gwoza – all Boko Haram strongholds – had been recaptured. The apparent improvement in the security situation allowed the Nigerian presidential election in late March to pass off without incident. Chad thus has demonstrated its effectiveness as a security partner for international players to contain the Boko Haram crisis.

However Chad cannot remain engaged in northern Nigeria forever, and nor does it want to. While there are hopes that the new Nigerian president Muhammadu Buhari will take a firmer

hand in tackling Boko Haram and improve cooperation with neighbouring countries, Chad's relations with Nigeria have taken a battering. In a typically forthright manner, on the day before the vote, Déby asked the question that had been on the lips of many - "The whole world is asking why the Nigerian army, which is a big army... is not in a position to stand up to untrained kids armed with Kalashnikovs," he told French magazine *Le Point*.^{ix} The longer Chad stays entangled in its neighbour's problem, the greater the danger of retaliatory suicide or guerrilla-style attacks on Chadian soil - as illustrated by the twin bombings in N'Djamena on 15 June. Boko Haram has shown that it is still capable of launching devastating attacks and may retreat to safe havens before regrouping. As we have seen in CAR, there is also an ever-present threat of indiscipline within the ranks of the ANT, stationed far from home.

As the low global oil price continues to pressure the Chadian economy, which is also crippled by corruption and mismanagement, the country can ill-afford to stay in northern Nigeria. So far the gamble is paying off - in a sign that Chad's willingness to play the role of regional peacekeeper has led to dividends from western donors, the country recently qualified for \$1.1bn in debt relief from the IMF after reaching its HIPC completion point.^x The Chadian parliament voted in mid-May to extend the mission's mandate. However if the ANT becomes over-stretched in north-eastern Nigeria and the Chadian economy does not improve, domestic concerns could undo some of the gains. Although the Chadian population seems until now broadly supportive of the fight against Boko Haram, large numbers of deaths of soldiers could undermine the popularity of the campaign and raise questions about why Chad is fighting its much richer neighbour's war. Civil society will not take kindly to an ongoing choice

to spend precious oil revenues - which are not increasing as fast as expected - on weapons and not social development.

Furthermore, the next year holds dangers for Déby in the upcoming trial in Dakar, Senegal, of his oppressive predecessor, Hissène Habré. The rapid jailing of a number of Habré's cohorts in trials in N'Djamena earlier this year - after they had remained at liberty for nearly 25 years - indicates that Déby may fear that damaging details on his own record under Habré could emerge at the court.^{xi} Although no-one seriously doubts that Déby will win the 2016 elections - so far as with every other election no credible opposition candidate has emerged - the dangers to stable internal poof over-staying the welcome in northern Nigeria are clear. Chad needs to extricate itself as soon as possible, confident that Nigeria is willing and able to finish the job properly.

CONCLUSION

Chad has had some success in recent years in projecting itself as a regional power-broker. The country's close relationship with international players is clear to see - it is hard to imagine how French and US policy regarding Boko Haram and AQMI could have been implemented without the support of the Chadian authorities. However the threats are far from eliminated and the ANT's past use of child soldiers, its abuse of human rights and killing of civilians in CAR is a serious blot on its record. Despite more than \$11bn earned in oil revenues, Chad's authorities have consistently failed to provide inclusive and equitable growth for all. Chad has shown time and again that it can perform policy volte face at a moment's notice. If the democratic process fails to deliver for ordinary Chadians or a new threat (such as Libya) presents itself, there is no reason to believe that President Déby will feel a deep enough sense of loyalty to France or the

international community to put his own survival at risk.

Pipelines, and Future Fortunes', published with Zed Books.

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Endnotes

- ⁱ Gary, I. and Reisch N. (2005) *Chad's Oil; Miracle or Mirage? Following the Money in Africa's Newest Petro-state*, Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services, 2. Available at: http://www.crs.org/publications/showpdf.cfm?pdf_id=187.
- ⁱⁱ Author's phone interview with IMF official, 14th January 2015.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hicks, C. (2015) *Africa's New Oil: Power, Pipelines and Future Fortunes*, London: Zed Books, 70.
- ^{iv} Although this victory has been seriously compromised by the failure to fully re-conquer all of Mali's vast north, especially the town of Kidal which still remains in the hands of a loose grouping of predominantly Tuareg rebels.
- ^v Somini, S. and Cowell, A. (2004) Chad, amid criticism, will pull troops from Central African Republic. *New York Times*, 3 April. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/04/world/africa/as-leaders-meet-report-describes-chaos-in-central-african-republic.html?_r=0.
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- ^{vii} Author's conversations with Nigerien Minister, London, June 12th 2014.
- ^{viii} Oil output is currently 140,000 bpd (author's phone interview with IMF official, 14th Jan 2015).
- ^{ix} *Naija* (2015) Idriss Deby, Chad's president, Unhappy with Nigerian military. 27 March. Available at: <http://www.naija.io/blogs/p/1516797/idriss-deby-chads-president-unhappy-with-nigerias-military>.
- ^x Gridneff I. (2015) Chad sees higher fees from CNPC offsetting oil price drop. *Bloomberg*, 30 April. Available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-29/chad-sees-higher-fees-from-cnpc-oil-deal-offsetting-price-drop>.
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