



# Situation Report

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Author: Paul-Simon Handy<sup>1</sup>  
Distribution: General  
Contact: [charry@issafrica.org](mailto:charry@issafrica.org)

## Chad: wading through a domestic political crisis in a turbulent region

### Introduction

On 27 November 2007, heavy fighting erupted between the Chadian army and the *Union des Forces pour la Démocratie et le Développement* (UFDD) that lasted for three days and claimed more than a thousand lives. This fighting took place when the international community was preparing to deploy a UN-EU peacekeeping mission in Eastern Chad. This force of about 3000 troops, authorised on 25 September 2007 through UN Security Council resolution 1778, is supposed to protect refugees and internally displaced persons who are scattered along the Chad-Sudanese border and victimised by rebel or bandit groups and the national army in that region. These clashes have highlighted the volatility of the country in which the mission is going to be deployed and prompted those watching the region to wonder whether the presence of foreign soldiers would exacerbate or contain the situation. In fact, there is a real danger that the mission might be caught in a crossfire between government troops and rebels, or might be considered by the latter as supporting the regime of President Idriss Deby Itno. This paper highlights the structural causes of conflict in Chad, and argues that the success of any external intervention in the region will depend on the capacity of the international community to look beyond the narrow lens of the Darfur question and to focus on the entire conflict system in the Chad, Sudan and the CAR triangle.

### Overview of Chad's domestic political crisis

In recent years, the Darfur conflict and its effects on the stability of the Central African region have been high on the international diplomatic agenda. The massive influx of Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad has shaped the belief that the Darfur conflict is destabilising the whole region. This view has not only been suggested by humanitarian organisations concerned about the worsening conditions of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in eastern Chad, but has also been voiced by President Deby Itno in an attempt to divert international attention away from the domestic political crisis his country faces. Even if there is little doubt about the devastating effects which the Darfur conflict has on neighbouring countries and the existence of what can be called a conflict system in the Chad, CAR (Central African Republic) and Sudan triangle<sup>2</sup>, it is a common mistake to consider the Darfur crisis and the Chad-CAR-Sudan conflict system as independent from the domestic crisis in Chad. The socio-political turbulences in Chad, CAR and Sudan are clearly interconnected; each conflict impacts the other, in terms of refugee flows, circulation of light weapons and the various ways rebel groups and government troops make use of neighbouring territory<sup>3</sup>. But the transnational character of these crises shouldn't hide the fact that the turbulences in each

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country have their own history, dynamic, trajectories and actors. This paper aims to highlight the home-grown facet of the Chadian crisis, which should be taken into account in the framework of international intervention if sustainable peace is to be enforced. In so doing, it attempts to shed light on the nuanced dynamics of Chad's unstable political landscape, which is so often wrongly perceived as a spill-over from Darfur.

Chad's political landscape is fragmented along multi-faceted lines, which reflect both the cultural and ethnic diversity of the country. This fragmentation is deeply rooted in the country's pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history which provides some indications about the current political instability. In the last decades, politics in Chad have dramatically evolved into politics of generalised armed factionalism, in which most actors resort to either access or keep on power. The result is the normalisation of militarism as a means of expressing political grievances. This has become a culture influenced by a tendency to factionalism, as well as by external linkages that have significantly influenced Chad's political history. However, the endless complexity of the Chadian crisis cannot be reduced to a single explanation. Ethnicity, factionalism and foreign involvement intrude at different junctures and with varying salience<sup>4</sup>, paving way to endemic political instability. After a brief historical review of the construction of social identities in colonial Chad, this paper outlines how the socio-political crisis has exacerbated old social antagonisms through an increasingly authoritarian and patrimonial ruling style which is facilitated by the new oil wealth and the constant intervention of external powers pursuing different goals. It concludes with a series of considerations centred on the idea that only a concerted international action, going beyond the immediate humanitarian character of the Darfur crisis and focusing on enabling a favourable political environment will end armed factionalism and political instability in Chad.

The 5<sup>th</sup> largest country in Africa, Chad is a landlocked nation that reflects the north-south and east-west ethnic and climatological lines of the continent, stretching from the Sahara desert to the tropical rain forest of the equatorial belt (Decalo 1980). The country's position at the crossroads between Black Africa and Maghreb has led many observers of Chad to the ignorance of its ethnic diversity (with more than 100 spoken languages) and the concentration of a dichotomy between North and South whose analytical interest has proven ambivalent (Lemarchand 1986). As a result of Chad's ethnic and religious mosaic, due to the cultural interpenetration following historical migration movements in the region, North and South are characterised by different religious practices<sup>5</sup>. Whereas Islamic penetration is recorded in the North since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the rather animist south was Christianised in the course of French colonisation around 1900. Historically, the North was composed of centrally organised great empires (like Kanem-Bornou, Baguirmi and Ouaddai) whose history can partly be traced back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. These empires played a significant role in the centuries long Trans-Saharan trade of precious commodities like gold, ivory, salt and spices. However, one of the most important aspects of this trade was certainly the slave trade that deeply transformed the region and especially the South's cultural, political and social settings<sup>6</sup>. Bands of slave traders from the North spread panic among groups in the South and East, whose less hierarchically structured village communities gave them a decisive weakness in resisting the assaults of the Northerners. Chadian territory was completely integrated in the Saharan space whose religions, culture and modes of social organisation were transformed over the centuries.

French colonisation stopped the slave trade but rapidly replaced it with another system of exploitation that exacerbated old antagonisms. The characterisation of the South as *Tchad utile* (useful Chad), because of the fertility of its land compared to the aridity of the semi-desert North, introduced a new socio-political cartography of a country in which the Southerners, once more bore the brunt of political oppression. Because of its non-centralised political organisation, the South was easier for the French to control and they built a very rudimentary political and economic infrastructure reflecting their – in that region rather sparsely available economic – needs<sup>7</sup>.

The French also attempted to reconstruct the North-South dichotomy by creating social categories according to spatial frameworks. Characterising the South as *utile* implicitly meant that the North was *inutile* (useless). This schematisation had a tremendous impact on the development patterns of both parts of the country to the disadvantage of the North. It created socio-economic disparities between the regions<sup>8</sup> and generated processes of social change that exacerbated the North-South polarities. Although introduced by force (under the forced labour regime in 1928) the culture of cotton provided the south with the crucial elements of a modern economy (credit, technical progress and insurance). Moreover, the construction of public infrastructure like schools, dispensaries and a road network had positive spillovers on the local economy of the south (Azam and Djimtoingar 2002). Although the first school was created in the North, the introduction of a standardised education system met less cultural resistance in the South, where it could rapidly expand. In conformity with the French colonial policy of *divide et impera*, an embryo of national political elite emerged out of the southern population and claimed control over political and administrative structures of the country after independence.

It was then no surprise that a Southerner, Francois Tombalbaye, became the first President after the country's independence in August 1960. Like the majority of urban Chadian political elite at that time, he was a member of the south-based Sara ethnic group, the biggest in the country. Due to the colonial policy that favoured the Southerners, the Chadian State and administration was largely dominated by Sara elements. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Sara domination was a crystallisation point for the mostly Muslim northern rebellion rallied by *Frolinat (Front de Liberation National Tchadien)*. Although this might confirm the permanence of the North-South dichotomy, it should be noted that the profound fractiousness of both the Southern and Northern entities requires a re-evaluation according to political contingencies.<sup>9</sup> In fact, discontent against Tombalbaye's government also emerged out of the Sara elite (both military and civilian) and led to the multiplication of opposing Sara factions. To maintain his contested power, Tombalbaye resorted to a system of patronage that further undermined early efforts to build viable state institutions (Nolutshungu 1996). After 14 years of an authoritarianly rule dominated by security concerns, President Tombalbaye was overthrown in 1975 by Colonel Felix Malloum, another Sara. But insurgency in the North and East had already reached the stage of a full-scale war. Goukouni Oueddeye's rise to power on 23 March 1979<sup>10</sup> marked the end of the Sara's domination of Chad's political life and opened an era of Northern omnipotence that is still prevailing today. Since then, Hissène Habré and Idriss Deby, two other Northerners, have also ruled Chad. The rule of Hissène Habré (1982–90) was especially characterised by widespread repression of political opponents, both in the South and North, which was considered in the South as Northern revenge<sup>11</sup>.

As mentioned above, the North-South dialectic still remains an important feature of Chad's political life although it doesn't really lie on clearly identified and verifiable empirical realities. In fact, the persistence on this oversimplifying dichotomy hides the sheer complexity of Chad's fragmented society, where boundaries of conflict shift and alter according to specific events and changes in the political arena<sup>12</sup>. However, as academic research has amply shown, the reality of a dichotomy doesn't have to be sociologically enshrined in order to gain importance. In many conflict cases, perception matters at least as much as other considerations. This is the reason why political entrepreneurs spend so much time in framing and constructing identities. For that reason, rather than trying to identify the precise nature of conflicting interactions between North and South, it appears more important to understand why and how conflict constellations emerge and which factors fuel them. Observers of Chad's socio-political life have long agreed on the importance of factionalism in Chadian society as well as its repercussions in the political system. As Lemarchand puts it, factionalism, rather than ethnicity, is the propelling force behind ever shifting power configurations in Chad<sup>13</sup>. As well as factionalism undermining the state capacity to regulate social order, the inability of the state to provide basic needs for the population also triggers ethnic cleavages, which, in turn, lead to factionalism.

During colonialism and after independence from France in August 1960, political processes in Chad have been subject to an ethno-regional logic which is regularly expressed by violent means. As a mode of social organisation, it has never been the aim of the Chadian state to provide security for the country's population. Instead, the state in Chad was conceived and constructed as an instrument of domination of one or more groups over the rest (Decalo 1980). In the post-colonial era, the multiplication of external involvements (especially France, Libya and Sudan) has revived and exacerbated ethnic rivalries for control of state's resources. Until today, and despite the "democratisation process" in the 1990s, power has never changed hands peacefully in the country. Apart from the first President, Francois Tombalbaye, no other leader has been elected through a free and fair process. On the other side, armed rebellion appears to be the anti-chamber of power since every president used to be a former warlord who understood how to build successful networks aiming at toppling the ruling president. This indicates the centrality of force as norm rather than exception in Chad's political processes, where a culture of non-violent crisis management is still to be established (Charlton and May 1989, 17). Force is not just instrumental in seizing power but also appears to be the most important means to maintain it. Against this backdrop, access to power has been determined, neither by the legitimacy of a political program nor the capacity of the leadership to mobilise on social themes, but rather by the capacity to resort to violence as a first, rather than a last, resort. As a result, politics in Chad lies on tacit and informal agreements reached between factions on power sharing and access to economic resources. The factionalist logic cannot be understood without reference to the weakness or fragility of state institutions, which are *de facto*, replaced by informal networks for resource distribution and job allocation.

Generally, a faction can be defined as 'a range of political groupings, from the least solidarity to the most corporate' (Bujra 1973). It is an informal organisation consisting of a network of individuals bound by real or fictive kinship. Political factions usually have at least two characteristics; they are based on personal relations (genealogic, matrimonial or clientelism and allegiance) and claim a regional, rather than ethnic, sociological basis. In addition to that, a constant feature of factions is their non-static character, their ability to transform and adapt to the constraints of political life. Therefore, a political faction cannot be considered as a traditional society within the bureaucratic apparatus of the State but rather as the re-composition of traditional networks in a modified political environment.

In view of the Chadian experience, it should be noted that a specific feature of its political factionalism is its militaristic component. The propensity to resort to force has exacerbated the militarisation of political confrontation, which is itself the combined result of long and severe civil strife and social segmentation in Chad. In fact, it is argued that the militarization of Chad's social and political system is sustained by the permanence of the social status of the armed man, whatever function he has – customs officer, soldier, gendarme, policeman, customs fighter, highwayman, freedom fighter at large as well as small-scale bandit<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, understanding the demarcation lines of faction building and rebuilding in the government, as well as in the armed opposition, has proven to be a difficult task due to the fluidity of alliances. Especially since Deby's decision to change constitutional provisions in order to run for a third term (in 2005), massive defections from his inner circle have led to an adjustment of his entourage. Consequently, the configuration of armed opposition groups has dramatically changed because of the arrival of the president's former collaborators, who formed their own rebel movements<sup>15</sup>, and also because of the policy of co-optation used by president Deby to weaken opposition groups.

Even though politics is perceived in Chad as a North-South antagonism, the reality of factional alliances reveals a more complex game. A regional reading of the government's composition and Deby's entourage shows that he basically recruits in large parts of the society even though the Zaghawa representation is proportionally higher than their population share (2 per cent<sup>16</sup>). Many

positions within the government, in the army (especially at officer's level) and in the administration belong to people from the B.E.T., an acronym for the three northern and central regions of the country (Borkou, Ennedi, Tibesti) known as *le grand Nord*. Local newspapers regularly report that the Zaghawa and affiliated clans regularly hold meetings aimed at securing their solidarity against internal rival factions, as do the Southerners. An argument regularly used to this effect presents Deby as the lesser evil compared to what might happen to Northerners if a Southerner came to power. On the other hand, rebellion movements are mostly composed of Northerners, which confirms doubts against the analytical value of the North-South dialectic. It shows that regional and ethnic solidarity is not homogenous. This is due to the fact that divisions between different clans within an ethnic group might even be stronger than cleavages between different ethnic groups. In fact, many of Chad's rebel groups appear to be led by former government officials such as Timane Erdimi (of the *Mouvement des Forces pour le Changement* MFC) and former army officers such as Mahamat Nouri (a former army commander under Habré and ambassador to Sudan). As far as the Zaghawas are concerned, their support for Deby is far from secure. In fact, many of them are critical of Deby's handling of the oil issue, which he has allegedly kept within his own family<sup>17</sup>. The sub-divisions within the Zaghawa groups and old grievances between them, originating from the reformulation of power structures and chieftaincies during colonisation, partly explain this antagonism.<sup>18</sup>

The militarization of Chadian politics is fuelled by high degrees of violence tolerated in the name of ethnic or regional solidarity. When a political leader comes to power, he mobilises his ethnic group as well as the leaders of other population groups for support. In return, members of the group consider that "they" are in power and therefore rule over the other groups. The Zaghawas enjoy an almost complete impunity for illegal acts of self-justice and, since the beginning of oil exploitation, illicit enrichment<sup>19</sup>. Perceived hegemonic behaviour of Zaghawas (particularly in urban centres) has revived old traditions and customs that seem to have gained prominence over legal and constitutional arrangements<sup>20</sup>. This illustrates the non-existence or the institutional weakness of Chad's State, which is also evident in the structure and the functioning of security forces (especially army and police) whose primary aim seems to be regime maintenance, rather than human security<sup>21</sup>.

Another important aspect of state fragility in Chad is the economy and its structural deficits. Before the country's membership in the oil club, Chad's economy was essentially dependant on agricultural production. Cotton and cattle were the backbone of the economy and the biggest providers of export revenues. Up to the year 2000, about 72 per cent of the population was employed in agriculture whereas industry just employed around 7 per cent of the population<sup>22</sup>. Agriculture accounted for more than 80 per cent of the country's revenues, which exposed Chad's budget to the fluctuation of commodity prices in the world market. Since the beginning of oil exploitation, the picture has dramatically changed, with oil accounting for more than 50 per cent of the state budget in 2005 (World Bank 2006). Oil production is estimated to have accounted for almost 47 per cent of GDP in 2006, going from 12.2 per cent of GDP in 2003 and 39.2 per cent of GDP in 2004 (EIU 2007). Structural changes to the economy induced by oil have also impacted the political scene. Oil discovery and exploitation certainly played an important role in Deby's decision in 2005 to remain in power despite previous statements to the contrary. The perspective of heading a country with newly discovered oil wealth, which significantly enlarges his possibilities for patronage and his ability to co-opt opposition leaders by offering them government positions in exchange for their collaboration, was tempting enough to manipulate constitutional arrangements in 1996.

The extent to which factional rivalries and state fragility exacerbate each other indicates that the biggest challenge facing the country is the establishment and stabilisation of institutions whose role will be to set rules in the political, economic and social arenas.

Some of the most important factors contributing to Chad's political crisis are the unaddressed democratisation challenges that give grounds to the militarization of both the government and the opposition. The current political crisis can be considered a the direct consequence of a 17-year authoritarian and patrimonial rule that has been incapable of renegotiating the social contract and denying opposition groups full participation in the country's political life. The militarisation of a significant section of the opposition can partly be traced back to this lack of political life and the concentration of all powers in the hands of President Deby and his allies. The main conflicts between the parties basically derive from the autocratic ruling style of the President, a lack of political space for opposition groups and the electoral system, which is largely under the control of the President and his allies. President Deby Itno seized power in 1990, at a rather favourable time for political pluralism over the world. His first steps towards an opening of the political landscape were rather promising in a country still traumatised by Hissène Habré's tyrannical rule, which Deby was also prominently associated with, as a former Chief of Staff. Deby reintroduced a multi-party system, authorised the emergence of pluralist media, and allowed for the adoption of a new constitution in 1996. But the first pluralist elections in 1996 (presidential) and 1997 (legislative) clearly indicated that the ruling party, MPS (*Mouvement Patriotique du Salut*), and its leader were still caught in the logic of the one-party-system. In fact, Deby's apparent conversion to democratisation was an authoritarian restoration under the façade of pluralism<sup>23</sup>. The second set of elections (2001 and 2002) confirmed the MPS' grip on power and was even more chaotic in terms of organisation and popular participation. Beyond his record on elections, Deby's rule also turned increasingly authoritative, relying on patronage to ensure support from a wide range of actors. This not only revived old antagonisms and defections within the president's inner circle but also exacerbated armed opposition. In response to the mostly negative reactions to his re-election in 2001, the president publicly made the promise that he will abide by constitutional dispositions and not run for a third mandate. The perspective of his departure and the possible renewal of Chad's political landscape, contributed towards easing the temporary tensions previously generated within both the ruling party and the opposition. But Deby's change of mind, his subsequent decision to change the constitution instead of stepping down and his re-election for a third mandate (in 2006) did not only constitute the heaviest grievances expressed by his opponents; they also exacerbated the radicalisation of armed opposition which is mostly supported by Sudan<sup>24</sup>. In fact, the contested legitimacy emerging out of this constitutional amendment remains the issue that most antagonised Chad's political society (May and Massey 2007).

Since then, registered political parties and as well as rebel movements – whose number has grown due to defections from the president's circles – have vainly tried to defy Deby's legitimacy. If France has been critical to ensure military support against rebel groups, the inability of opposition parties to challenge Deby has been equally critical in fostering factionalism and the formation of opposition groups. Indeed, armed factionalism in Chad has always undermined the emergence of a party system with the ability to cope with the democratic challenges that the country is facing. Civilian opposition has been generally marginalised both by the government's unwillingness to open the political system and by competing rebellious activities, which are far more dangerous for the government. Deby's reluctance to fully comply to the democratic agenda he announced while acceding to power in 1990 and the constant militarization of his regime have confirmed the idea that the only grievances that are taken into account are those expressed with weapons. The weakness of civilian opposition parties makes them vulnerable to Deby's co-optation politics (May and Massey 2002), which have, so far, proven extremely successful. More generally, their vulnerability to government manoeuvres is due to a profound structural weakness, their inability to build constituencies beyond the ethnic and territorial fiefs of their respective leaders and, of course, the numerous legal, administrative and political obstacles put up by the government (Buijtenhuijs 1998). There are currently about 70 political parties in Chad, of which, some were created by the regime to divide the opposition. The large number and factionalist character of the opposition parties

have always been obstacles to the development of broadly organised, enduring platforms that could challenge the ruling party on the basis of programmes. But on the other side, it is indeed difficult for a poor political leader to resist an offer for a position in government or administration because of the absence of viable alternatives in the country. Deby and his party have constantly benefited from the opposition's weaknesses, which they engineered by following a two-fold strategy; formal negotiations with parties and some armed groups, on the one hand, and enhancing their grip on power by using both repressive and legal means, on the other (Kovana 1994). The president mostly uses this tactic after a contested poll in order to signal to his opponents and to the international community his willingness to engage in dialogue. However, if the co-optation strategy appears to serve the strategic purposes of both Deby and the appointed opponents, it clearly contributes to a further erosion of the otherwise fragile foundations of a civilian and democratic political culture in Chad.

However, recent developments might contribute to a reconsideration of the opposition's role and a review of electoral arrangements in Chad. Under the pressure of the international community, President Deby has recently accepted to engage in a much-awaited political dialogue with opposition parties (rallied in a coalition called Coordination for the Defence of the Constitution). The talks held between April and July 2007, under the supervision of the EU, resulted in an agreement signed on 13 August in N'Djamena, which is centred on the re-organisation of the country's electoral system<sup>25</sup>. Despite the wide-range of changes contained in the agreement and the perceptible improvements it has brought to the political climate, its impact will be measured in its implementation. Given the multi-faceted character of Chad's crisis and the fact that the agreement only addressed its electoral aspect, cautious doubts remain regarding the capacity of this agreement to engineer a profound re-formulation of Deby's regime architecture. The exclusion of the whole armed opposition from these talks, according to the President's will to dialogue separately with armed and civilian opposition groups, also casts some doubt on the prospects of this agreement. However, it has the advantage of bringing opposition parties back in the country's political scene.

The military contestation of Deby's legitimacy as well as the consolidation of his power through authoritarian ruling style suggest that Chad's politics is likely to remain unstable, even though the crisis in Darfur is resolved in the near future. This is due to the constant involvement of external actors who pursue different agendas in the country, adding to the volatility of the political situation.

As far as the crises in Darfur and the CAR cannot be fully understood without the role of Chad, it would be incomplete to make sense of the Chadian crisis without highlighting the role of several external actors, who have often had a decisive impact on the country's political history. The diverging interests of these actors in Chad fuel the political instability and the tendency to fragmentation and factionalism. It is interesting to note how the international attention accorded to the Darfur conflict has contributed to the positioning of the Chadian leader as the stability factor in the eyes of the international community. Since diplomatic links and international dynamics are more crucial for Deby's hold on power than internal reform processes, he is investing much energy in framing the idea that Chad is a victim of the Darfur crisis without which, it would have been a peaceful country. The reality indicates a complex network of external interests that either collide or match with those of internal actors' in the government or the opposition.

### *Sudan*

As indicated earlier in this paper, Sudan and Chad are linked by a long history which took a significant turn with the colonial invasion. The border demarcation introduced by European colonial rivals certainly put an end to the former territorial continuity of eastern Chad and western Sudan but, evidently didn't stop the complex web of cultural and commercial ties or the political affinities of population groups living on both sides. During the 1960s, Darfur (in western Sudan) became a retreat

for Chadian rebel groups<sup>27</sup>. Most Chadian military coups (except Libya-backed Goukouni Oueddeye's accession to power in 1980, whose defeated government took refuge in that region in 1982) have been staged from Darfur with the logistic support of the Sudanese governments. Deby arrived in Darfur in April 1989 after attempting a coup in N'Djamena against then president Hissène Habré, himself previously supported by Sudan when seizing power in 1982. He succeeded in creating a military force with the support of Sudanese Zaghawa and the Arab militia of the Revolutionary Democratic Council (Marchal 2006). In engineering political changes in Chad, Sudan affirms its strategic position in the country, which is now contested in the Darfur crisis. In fact, Deby allegedly supported some of the militia groups fighting against the Sudanese government in retaliation for Khartoum's assistance to rebel groups trying to overthrow him. In reality, many Sudanese Zaghawa served and continue to serve in different corps of Chad's armed forces (nomad guard, republican guard and army). It appears, however, that Khartoum's support for Chadian rebel groups has recently been tempered due to the international pressure regarding Darfur and the sheer lack of professionalism of the hopelessly divided armed groups. The exploitation of the Darfur crisis for domestic political purposes by both regimes constitutes a favourable ground for violent political entrepreneurs in the region. Despite numerous diplomatic attempts to ease the tensions between the two countries, Chad-Sudan relations will certainly remain characterised by mutual mistrust.

### *Libya*

Like Sudan, Libya is a neighbour of Chad and can look back on a long-standing tradition of interference with Chadian affairs. Generally, Libya's role in Chad has evolved along the fundamental lines of its own foreign policy. During the time of Pan-Arabism, launched with the coming to power of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi in 1969, Libya (who regarded the N'Djamena regime in Tripoli as neo-colonial<sup>28</sup>) was backing rebel forces in northern Chad. However, except for the short period of Goukouni Oueddeye's rule at the beginning of the 1980s, Libya never exerted a direct influence on Chad's government policy. On the contrary, Libya even fought a violent war against Chadian (and French) troops over the sovereignty of the northern Aouzou strip (spanning an area of 104 000 km<sup>2</sup>) between 1978 and 1987 (Otayek 1984), when it was defeated by Chadian troops with the decisive support of French and US military. Libya's sovereignty claim over the Aouzou strip was both historically and strategically motivated<sup>29</sup>. Today, after moving from Pan-Arabism to Pan-Africanism, Qaddafi's role is more that of a mediator among Chadian warring parties. The negotiation round between eastern rebels and the Chadian government that began on 22 June 2007 in Tripoli is an example of Qaddafi's mediating role. However, the agreement reached under Libyan supervision in October 2007 turned out to have been a futile effort, as the recent fighting between the signatories inevitably nullified it. Fundamental to Libya's position on Chad is the prevention of an internationalisation of the Darfur conflict, which would necessitate the deployment of non-African troops on Libya's border. So far, the deployment of the UN-EU peacekeeping mission in eastern Chad is treated with caution by Tripoli.

### *France*

As a former colonial power, the role of France in Chad is an inextricable part of the recent history of the country. More so than Libya and Sudan, France has been instrumental in regime change and/or survival in Chad since independence. The dominant position of France is underlined by the presence of a military base (1200 troops and six Mirage fighter planes), which forms part of the 1960 defence agreement France signed with the first government of Chad. Since then, France has intervened practically uninterruptedly in Chad, adapting its military presence to the changing security threats and showing a great sense of realism in its support of the various regimes (D'Abzac and De Lespinois 2004). Although France helped Hissène Habré seize power from Libyan-backed Goukouni Oueddeye in 1982, the French did not intervene on his behalf when his former army chief, Idriss Deby, launched a *coup d'état* in 1990. French support has been essential to the survival



of Deby's regime, especially with regard to regional stability, but moments of tension between the two countries do arise from time to time (ICG 2006). Although French diplomats were pressing Deby to enter into dialogue with opposition parties, they did not endorse Sudan's plans of a regime change in N'Djamena. In addition, French authorities are of the opinion that the destabilisation of Deby's regime would exacerbate the conflict in Darfur and might lead to the constitution of an Islamist regime in N'Djamena. Deby's acceptance of a humanitarian corridor in the east as well as his endorsement of French plans of peacekeeping mission has to be understood as a manifestation of goodwill towards the new French government under President Nicolas Sarkozy. France's plan was at the origin of Resolution 1778 issued on 25 September 2007, whose aim is to focus on Darfur rather than on Chad itself. In sum, France's position in Chad remains militarily, strategically and politically strong, but not necessarily hegemonic, as the country's relations with the USA and China indicate.

#### *USA*

As far as the USA is concerned, its first engagement in the country, in the 1980s, formed part of US opposition to Qaddafi's Libya, perceived both as a communist and a terrorist threat. In this regard, the USA was supporting France's war against Libya in Chad by providing military equipment to Chad's army<sup>30</sup>. Following the normalisation of relations with Libya, the USA built stronger economic ties with Chad, as characterised by its strong involvement in the exploitation of Chad's oil resources. In fact, the consortium exploiting Chad's oil comprises the US companies Esso and Chevron, together with Malaysia's Petronas. However, the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001 in the US and the crisis in Darfur induced a slight change in US involvement in Chad shifting a greater interest towards security issues. Within the framework of the Pan-Sahelian Initiative of 2002, replaced in 2005 by the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorist Initiative (TSCTI), the Chadian army has received increased logistical and training support from the US, aimed at enhancing their counter-terrorist skills in the wide and remote Sahelian region in the north. The stability of Deby's regime, therefore, appears to be central to American involvement in the region since it is also interested in securing future oil supplies in Chad<sup>31</sup>. From this perspective, the USA is unlikely to approve a regime change in N'Djamena engineered with the support of Sudan, a country Washington is trying to isolate internationally because of Darfur.

#### *China*

The growing geo-political and economic strength of China in the world and Africa doesn't stop before Chad's doors. As one of the last remaining countries in the continent that maintained diplomatic ties with Taiwan, Chad quickly realised that Sudan's good relations with China may negatively impact on its own stability. Precisely, President Deby was concerned about the possibility of Chadian rebel groups being directly or indirectly supported by China through Sudan. The brutal decision of switching diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China in August 2006<sup>32</sup> was certainly motivated by strategic and economic objectives. From a strategic point of view, Chad's move was informed by a cost-utility-calculation in which Taiwan appeared as less important despite its financial generosity.

China's growing importance in Africa and its massive presence in Sudan, considered in N'Djamena as an unfriendly regime, influenced the "look-China" move of Deby. From an economic perspective, Chad has a great deal of interest in Beijing's traditional investment approach that – unlike western donors – doesn't pay attention to political conditionality. Additionally, China has an eye towards a further market for its household goods, machinery and high-tech goods, which tend to be more affordable to African consumers. Since the resumption of cooperation between the two countries a series of economic agreements have been signed in the oil, mines and energy sectors with values estimated in hundreds of millions of US dollars<sup>33</sup>. China has gained greater participation in Chad's oil sector by securing concessions for the China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) that will build a refinery near N'Djamena<sup>34</sup>.

Conclusion: Will UN Resolution 1778 bring about peace?

In a nutshell, with the exception of Sudan whose hostility to Deby's regime also has internal motivations, the Chadian government is enjoying wide – albeit differently motivated – external support from various actors, which reinforces the president's grip on power and augments the risk of an enduring authoritarian regime.

This paper has attempted to analyse the most important aspects of the domestic conflict dynamic in Chad, which appears to be: a deeply rooted armed factionalism; a growing authoritarian regime that blocks the emergence of a democratic transition and the viable process of state formation; a diplomatic exploitation of the Darfur crisis for internal purposes; and a complex network of diverging external interests that consolidate the power of the president. In view of this, it appears that a resolution of the Darfur conflict alone would not necessarily have a beneficial impact on the internal political crisis in Chad, even though it would deprive Mr Deby of a crucial diplomatic tool.

This raises the question of the usefulness of the UN-EU deployment in eastern Chad and the Central African Republic. The vote of the UN Resolution 1778 on 25 September providing for the deployment of the EU-UN peacekeeping force in Chad and the CAR certainly constitutes an important step forward in the inextricable conflict system in the region. In view of the deteriorating situation of growing numbers of refugees and IDP's, the UN peace mission will allow humanitarian organisations better access to refugee camps in the east. The presence of well equipped European troops led by French elements already present in the country, will also have an impact on the military activities of Chadian rebel groups, who also operate in that region. Beyond the humanitarian aspect of the mission, the political process accompanying it will be crucial for the establishment of peace in Chad and the region.

In recent months, active diplomatic overtures have seen President Deby finally engaging in dialogue with his political opponents and signing agreements to lessen political tensions. Prior to the electoral changes accord with registered opposition parties in August 2007, President Deby also held historical talks with opposition movements in exile around ex-president Goukouni Oueddei in July 2007<sup>35</sup>. The most recent and maybe the most important agreement was signed on 25 October between the government and the most active rebel groups in Sirte (Libya). The agreement provided for an immediate ceasefire and a general amnesty for members of the armed movements. It further made provision for an integration of rebel forces in the over-stretched national army in the near future. More importantly, the signatories engage themselves to a full respect of the country's constitution. Besides the fact that the agreement was signed in a general atmosphere of mistrust (with much Libyan pressure on both parties),<sup>36</sup> there were many reasons to be doubtful about these developments.

First, this seems to be an old tactic of President Deby, namely attempting to ward off military dissent by providing large cash bonuses and promotions in the army or government. This strategy was used in December 2006 with the spectacular co-optation of Mahamat Nour (ex-leader of one of the most important rebel groups and of the rebel alliance, FUC, which attacked N'Djamena in 2006 and almost toppled Deby) as Defence Minister in February 2007 after an agreement between Nour's forces and President Deby. Preliminary expectations about eventual positive consequences of this rapprochement were disappointed, as it appeared that both leaders followed personal rather than national strategies with this step. Recurrent violent clashes (especially in October 2007) around the town of Goz Beida, in the East, between the army and Nour's troops that were not integrated after 10 months indicate that an agreement alone is not enough<sup>37</sup>. From this perspective, his recent dismissal from the government is a logical step. Even if the cooptation strategy has proven efficient for Deby's in the short term, it is likely to accelerate the army's ineffectiveness and lack of cohesion in the long run. Secondly, Deby's obstinate refusal to hold talks with all opposition groups at the same time and on a broad set of issues indicates that he is not ready to revise the culture of politico-military factions that constitute the building blocks of Chad's political economy since independence. This is confirmed by the engagement to respect a constitution that he recently changed in order to allow himself enlarged and exorbitant powers.

The recent eruption of armed violence in the East not only nullifies the peace agreements signed in October but it also underlines the necessity of a political agenda alongside the humanitarian mission undertaken by EU troops. Military confrontation is part of the political culture in Chad and is fuelled by the monopolisation of power by Deby, whose legitimacy is widely contested partly because of his tendency to constantly change the rules of the political game. What is much needed today, as recently expressed in a civil society memorandum<sup>38</sup>, is a harmonisation of peace initiatives into a coherent strategy that will allow all political and civil society actors to create a national consensus on fundamental issues, like the reform of the security sector, the national reconciliation and the sensitive issue of Deby's succession. The international community, especially the EU, which has been instrumental in pressuring Deby for a political dialogue, should look beyond the humanitarian facet of the Darfur crisis and enable Chad's political actors to renegotiate the social contract that has produced chronic instability in their country. Otherwise, the EU-UN peacekeeping mission will be no more than a gesture.

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## Notes

- 1 Paul-Simon Handy is a research associate in the African Security Analysis Programme at the Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, South Africa.
- 2 The notion of conflict system refers to the regional dimension of a conflict formation, which rarely stops at a country's borders. It underlines the view that every conflict has intimate (diplomatic, political, economic, military and environmental) relationships at the regional level and that most individualized conflicts are in fact part of a broader pattern of complex regional conflicts that mutually feed each other. Considering conflict within a system does also have serious implications for their management, as it provides for a broader and more nuanced understanding of conflict dynamics. For the interrelations of the crises in Sudan and Chad, see Roland Marchal 2006.
- 3 An informative overview of interrelated activities of armed groups in Sudan, Chad and the CAR is given in: 'A Widening War around Sudan. The Proliferation of Armed Groups in the Central African Republic'. *Sudan Issue Brief* Nr. 5, January 2007.
- 4 See René Lemarchand, 'Chad: The Misadventures of the North-South Dialectic', in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 29, Nr 3, Sept. 1986, pp 27–41.
- 5 Even though the North-South dichotomy is perceived by many Chadians as an important feature of the country's socio-political life, many observers question its pertinence in making sense of the structural causes of Chad's political instability. Especially the existence of a great group of population in the Centre (33 per cent) of the country is usually mentioned to disqualify the heuristic value of the North-South divide. Chad's North-South divide appears to be an over-simplification, when it refers to the opposition between a presumably Arabised North and a Non-Arab South. The existence of two clearly defined, separable entities can in fact be hardly sustained given the fragmented and fissiparous character of both entities. For an interesting overview of this question, see: International Crisis Group, 'Tchad: Vers le retour de la guerre?' *Rapport Afrique* Nr 111, 1st June 2006, Annex 2, pp 25–31.
- 6 Unlike the Trans-Atlantic slave trade that has been more or less studied by historians, the Trans-Saharan slave trade, although longer and more costly in human lives, has not yet generated a particular research interest, and this neither South nor North of the Sahara and the Mediterranean. Though, this historical period appears to be central to the understanding of the dynamics between both parts of Africa. See Elikia M'Bokolo (dir.) 2004, especially: 'De la Méditerranée au Soudan, le commerce transsaharien', Document 37, p. 93.
- 7 Chad has never played an important economic role in the French African strategy. The colonisation of the Chadian territory rather followed strategic objectives, especially the ambition to ensure territorial continuity between Equatorial and Sahelian and North Africa. An in-depth analysis of French colonial occupation of Chad's territory is given in: Jacques Le Cornec 1963.
- 8 The development of cotton cultivation, the only notable capitalistic activity in colonial times and the most important post-colonial source of foreign currency was made in the south.
- 9 Like many other ethnic groups in Chad, the *Saras* are divided into several fractious clans and sub-clans. Frictions usually arise around hierarchical structures like the organisation of chieftaincies. They can feud on one occasion and unite against a perceived common enemy on another occasion. For a concise insight into the ethnic composition of Chad's society, see ICG 2006
- 10 The then rebel movement, *Front de Liberation Nationale du Tchad* (Frolinat), led by Goukouni Oueddei, was the first guerrilla movement to fight its way to power in post-colonial Africa.
- 11 Interviews with civil society and opposition leaders in N'Djamena on the 28<sup>th</sup> and the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2007. Ethno-regional mobilisation is in fact a constant feature used by political leaders in Chad.
- 12 To the North/South configuration one could also add the Sara vs. non-Sara, Arabs vs. Toubou, Toubou vs. Toubou, Arab vs. Arab.
- 13 René Lemarchand, op.cit. (1986), p. 28. See also Roy May and Massey (2007).
- 14 Marielle Debos' ongoing research, cited by Marchal, 2006, p. 474.
- 15 Particularly the Erdimi twins (Tom and Timane) who are also Zaghawa like Deby and used to hold important positions at the presidency and in state companies. Tom used to be Deby's head of cabinet and in that function he supervised the oil project. Timane was the director of Cotontchad, the country's biggest parastatal company active in the cotton sector.
- 16 The exact number of generals in the Chadian army is not officially known, partly because of the surrealistic number of officers and under-officers, which is as roughly equivalent to the number of soldiers. See Roland Marchal (2006a).
- 17 A company headed by the president's elder brother, Daoussa Deby, in partnership with a foreign contractor has been awarded road construction projects worth more than US\$50 million.
- 18 For an excellent anthropological work on the Zaghawa, see Tubiana (1977).
- 19 Author's interview with members of human rights organisations in N'Djamena on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2007.
- 20 Being involved in a traffic accident in N'Djamena with a Zaghawa motorcyclist is not only a dangerous but also a costly thing. The system of *Dia*, which involves a payment to the family of a murder victim or a victim of a crime based on the decision of local leaders, is widely practiced particularly by Muslim communities, less impressed by its extra-legal nature. Although the use of this system is incompatible with the Chadian Constitution, the government seems if not to support, then to tolerate *Dia* practices. Most worrisome is the increasingly economic character made of this practice by the communities with the aim to terrify and rip off other communities.

- 21 Insights to the militia-like management of the Chadian army are given by a Human Rights Watch report, describing the use of child-soldiers in the national army. See *Early to War-Child soldiers in the Chad conflict*, HRW-report July 2007, Vol. 19 Nr 9 (A).
- 22 Economic Intelligence Unit, Country Profile Chad 2006, p.20.
- 23 For an excellent analysis of the first elections under Deby, see: Robert Buijtenhuijs 1998.
- 24 The constitutional changes of 2005, in particular, underlined the *raison d'être* of Deby's rule, namely personal survival on power. The amendments did not only eradicate the two-term limit, but they also provided the presidential function with a series of additional prerogatives that enabled Deby to further centralise the political decision-making process by abolishing the senate (which was never formed although established in the 1996 constitution) and the stipulation that future constitutional changes should be a presidential prerogative. With 80 per cent of the parliament dominated by his party and its allies, an almost total control of government and administrative positions, and less transparent management of oil revenues Deby succeeded in strengthening his own grip on power quite significantly.
- 25 The agreement makes provision for the creation of an independent electoral commission, the establishment of electronic voter lists and fraud-proof biometric voting cards. Negotiating parties also agreed on the postponement of legislative elections to 2009.
- 26 This section is partly drawn from another paper of the author entitled 'Chad: Democratisation challenges and implications for regional security', *African Security Review*, vol. 16, no. 4, December 2007.
- 27 The FROLINAT (*Front de Liberation Nationale du Tchad*), the first attempt to unify several rebel groups in the middle of the 1960s was created in June 1966 in the Sudanese town of Nyala.
- 28 Some sources (Burr and Collins 1999) argue that Libya and Sudan would hardly tolerate a non-Arabic speaking Chadian at the top of the country.
- 29 Libya annexed the Aouzou strip in 1973 and based its claims on a (never ratified) treaty, signed between Italy and France in 1935, which granted this territory to Italy. Strategically, the Pan-Arabic foreign policy of Libya saw Chad as part of an eventual Central African Islamic Empire extending to Sudan, and from which Western influence should be expunged. Furthermore reported mineral reserves in the region accentuated Libya's ambitions.
- 30 See James Brooke 1987, Chad's and Libya's War of Waiting. *The New York Times*, October 1987. Available at: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B0DE4DF153FF93AA35753C1A961948260> (accessed 12 November 2007).
- 31 However, US's confidence in Deby has recently weakened due to disputes with Esso Chad and Chevron over oil tax payments and with the World Bank over the management of oil revenues.
- 32 The time chosen to announce the resumption of China-Chad relations was evidently not neutral. Taiwan's Premier Su Tseng-Chan was en route to Chad in order to attend President Deby's inauguration when the announcement was made. He was finally obliged to cancel his trip.
- 33 See 'Chad: China Signs Deals Worth \$80 Million With New Ally', *Reuters*, 5 January 2007.
- 34 See Airault P. 'Déby Itno se met au chinois', in *Jeune Afrique*, 23 Septembre 2007. Available at: [http://www.jeuneafrique.com/jeune\\_afrique/article\\_jeune\\_afrique.asp?art\\_cle=LIN23097dbyitsionih0](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/jeune_afrique/article_jeune_afrique.asp?art_cle=LIN23097dbyitsionih0) (accessed on 18 October 2007).
- 35 Talks with opposition leaders in exile were brokered by President Bongo of Gabon, hence their labelling as the "Libreville group".
- 36 See: 'Libye/Tchad: Un accord de paix teinté de méfiance', 25 Oct. 2007. Available at: [http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/094/article\\_58241.asp](http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/094/article_58241.asp) (accessed on 26th October 2007).
- 37 Nour's troops officially estimated at 4 000 have not gone through the DDR process, ten months after his incorporation in the government. Article 7 of the Sirte Agreement stipulated that cantonment and disarmament of rebel troops should be realised within one month, which was rather unrealistic.
- 38 See Comité de Suivi de l'Appel à la Paix et à la Réconciliation, *Mémoire pour l'harmonisation des accords et initiatives de paix au Tchad*. N'Djamena, 15 Novembre 2007