

CHAD | THE EMERGENCE OF A REGIONAL POWER?



Now a day, Chad is a major actor that goes against terrorism in Central and West Africa. He is a key ally of France, he is also an essential contributor into the fight against some armed Islamist groups. The Chadian troops are engaged in several countries in the area. These deployments were complemented by a demand of a status as a regional power or as a continental power. But what are the expectations, the result and mostly the consequences? Even if the leadership of Chad is recognized, he has some limits and risks.

On 11 July 2015, the market of N'Djamena was struck by a suicide bomber. One month before, on 15 June, two attacks targeted the police academy and the central police station. Attributed to Boko Haram by the authorities, these last actions had been feared for several months. Although, in early February, two women in possession of grenades and anti-personnel mines concealed in cans that had been cut and re-sealed with wire were arrested in Toubia, a village close to N'Djamena, after crossing Cameroon from Nigeria (1).

In recent years, Chad has indeed engaged its soldiers against the armed Islamist groups. During the first months of 2013, in the name of peace and stability in its neighbourhood and borders, nearly 2,000 Chadian soldiers contributed to regaining territories in northern Mali. Under the command of general Oumar Bikomo, assisted by one of the president's sons, Mahamat Déby, this contingent composed of elite troops was directly involved in the fighting, in the Adrar des Ifoghas (2), before securing the far north of the country. Two years later, more than 2,000 Chadian soldiers crossed into Cameroon to assist the Cameroonian forces against Boko Haram, followed by another contingent sent to south-eastern Niger and military operations on Nigerian soil.

The regional ambitions of N'Djamena are not new. Already in the 1980s Chadian leaders played a crucial role in the ascension and eviction of the various heads of States who have come and gone in Central African Republic. More recently, the Seleka rebels gained power thanks to the passivity of the Chadian forces from the Central African Republic peace-building Mission (MICOPAX), which allowed them to progress towards Bangui without interference while three months before, in December 2012, N'Djamena had announced that the rebels couldn't go beyond the city of Damara, about 70 km from the capital. But the involvement of Chad in the Mali crisis, a country beyond its traditional environment, represents a major shift towards a more active regional policy and the desire to impose the state as an imperative player on the regional stage and even at continental level.

Behind the discourse and important role played today by Chad in the fight against terrorist groups in the Sahel-Saharan Strip, the ambitions of its leaders and the consequences of the current commitment invite, however, to examine the expectations and limitations of the Chadian leadership, but also the impact of military commitments. Indeed, if they appear as a tool for the rulers, they are expensive and they are not without risks.

(1) Xinhua, "Boko Haram: 2 female suicide bombers arrested in Chad", 3 February 2015.

(2) Tanguy Berthemet, "Le Tchad, précieux allié de la France au Mali", *Le Figaro*, 3 March 2013.

1 | Between ambition and pragmatism

With a presence in Mali, Cameroon and Niger, Chadian soldiers appear today as the guarantors of stability in their sub-region, the builders of a long-awaited regional cooperation. But if Chad is on the front line in the fight against armed Islamist groups, with a real fear among the authorities of seeing these groups expand, this positioning comes in a context marked by a dual call for fresh inputs and comes with high expectations.

1 | In the name of security

When Chadian troops crossed the Cameroonian border to fight the Nigerian group Boko Haram, the danger was clearly identified. With the capture of the Nigerian town of Baga by the sect's fighters in early January, the Chadian capital, 70 km from the border, was clearly threatened. Furthermore, Boko Haram's actions directly affect the country's economy. Already suffering from dwindling trade with northeast Nigeria and the obligation to pass through Niger (3), insecurity in the North of Cameroon has closed the Douala-Maroua-N'Djamena trade route. Trucks are forced to detour via Moundou and Bongor, lengthening the journey from 4 to 6 days and increasing the price of food commodities on Chadian markets.

Regarding the Mali interventions, Idriss Déby's motives have been more than discussed, while the impact of the rebellion and the offensive of the Islamist groups are less obvious (4). That being so, the argument according that Chad is contributing to strengthening its security, or at least curtailing a situation that could potentially have an impact on its territory, cannot be entirely discarded (5).

(3) Christophe Châtelot, "Pourquoi le Tchad s'engage dans la lutte contre Boko Haram", *Le Monde*, 6 February 2015. Livestock, representing 40% of the country's exports and 90% of which went to Nigeria, is particularly affected (Gaëlle Laleix, "Chad: the economy swamped by insecurity", RFI, 10 March 2015. After oil, livestock exports represent Chad's second source of trade revenue).

(4) Géraud Magrin, "Les ressorts de l'intervention militaire tchadienne au Mali (2013)", *EchoGéo*, Sur le Vif, 28 June 2013, <http://echogeo.revues.org/13444>.

(5) Gilbert Maoundonodji, "L'intervention militaire tchadienne au Mali : enjeux et limites d'une volonté de puissance régionale", CERI, July 2013, <http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/fr/content/dossiersduceri/lintervention-militaire-tchadienne-au-mali-enjeux-et-limites-dune-volonte-de-puissance-regio>.

Chad | Some dates

11 August 1960: independence of Chad

22 June 1966: creation in Sudan of FROLINAT

1969-1971: Limousin French military operation

1973: Libyan soldiers enter Chad to occupy the Aouzou Strip

1978-1980: Tacaoud French military operation

1982: Hissène Habré overthrows the president in office

1983-1984: Manta French military operation

1986-2014: Épervier French military operation

1987: Chadian victory against Libyan elements in the north

2 December 1990: Idriss Déby takes power

2002-2013: MICOPAX deployment in CAR

2006: attack by the United Front for Change (FUC) to overthrow Idriss Déby

February 2008: attack by rebels who besiege the Presidency in N'Djamena for several hours

January 2010: agreement for normalisation of relations signed between Chad and Sudan

October 20, 2011: death of Muammar Gaddafi

January 2013: launch of the Serval operation. Chad sends 2 000 soldiers in Mali

January 2015: a Chadian contingent joined the Cameroon to assist the Cameroonian army against Boko Haram

February 2015: Chadian soldiers take place in eastern Niger. First foray into the territory of Nigeria to the Chadian army

For the leaders of a land-locked State that depends on the stability of its neighbours, crossed by lines of all kinds and repeatedly shaken by rebellions that have rear bases outside national territory, operated by currents of Islam emerging from the Middle East, the Malian crisis could have a major impact. Indeed, at the beginning of the 2000s, Abdelrazak El Para, one of the leaders of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) was captured close to the Tibesti mountain range. Similarly, while Niger remains fragile despite the absence of new rebellions, the chaos in Libya, the situation in Darfur and in the Central African Republic (CAR), and the activities of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria all paint a picture of an environment that is already particularly menacing, imposing the need to act to stop the spread of armed Islamic groups (6).

Whatever their nature, these commitments are accompanied by a willingness to place Chad on the African stage, as evidenced by the President's written message delivered in January 2013 to the Chadian National Assembly regarding the deployment of Chadian Forces to intervene in Mali (FATIM) Without doubt, Idriss Déby is seeking to legitimise this decision. But at the same time, he reveals a plan. *"The attention given in this way to our country is [...] the expression of a sign of consideration for the efforts for peace and stability in Africa, but at the same time it commands us to demonstrate the many responsibilities we have as a nation located in the heart of the continent. In addition, since 11 January 2013, attention has been constantly turned towards us to detect the slightest reaction with regard to the launch, by France, of the Serval operation in Mali. As a result, Chad cannot continue to remain silent. It cannot evade its duty of solidarity towards the people of Mali"* (7). Specifically, for Idriss Déby, two elements intermingle to justify the regional engagement by Chad. The first is the expectation of its external partners. Chad is called upon to act, it must therefore respond. The second refers to a moral obligation. Because of its situation within the African continent and the actions it has already undertaken, it has a responsibility to Malians and even to the entire sub-region. It must act, for the common good and for Africans in general.

2 | One legacy, two calls for fresh input

In the context of Chad, the export of military power is inextricably linked to the place occupied in the country by the *"profession of soldiery"* (8). Despite a formal democratisation process in the 1990s, weapons in fact remain the foundation for the power of leaders whose sustainability lies in their ability to organise and channel an unstable political and military scenario. Thus, *"the participation of Chadians in sub-regional conflicts is part of this logic, sometimes within the strategies of the State, sometimes in those of individuals, marking the overflow of Chadian factionalism on a wider regional scene"*. Whether it was yesterday in Libya, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the CAR or in Darfur, or today in Mali, Cameroon and Niger, *"the export of fighters, mobilised under various guises (via the regular army, serving a warlord, or through more individual strategies), constitutes one of the forms of insertion of Chad"* in its environment (9).

(6) Interview, international consultant, Paris, June 2015.

(7) Message from Idriss Déby to the National Assembly on the Malian Crisis (read by the President of the National Assembly), 16 January 2013, http://www.presidencetchad.org/affichage_news.php?id=498&titre=%20Crise%20MALIENNE.

(8) Marielle Debos, *Le métier des armes au Tchad. Le gouvernement de l'entre-guerres*, Paris, Éditions Karthala, 2013.

(9) Géraud Magrin, *art. cit.*

In addition to this heritage, Idriss Déby also took advantage, after the end of the proxy war with Sudan between 2005 and 2010, of a twofold call for fresh input. The fall of Gaddafi, by upsetting the sub-regional balance and by increasing the capacity for action of armed groups (10), first propelled several issues – already present – to the forefront, associated with strengthening security and the regionalisation of forces. With its army and its military power, Chad appeared in France as one of the pivotal states in the sub-region, with a perception fed by the strength of the relations between the two countries in the military field since independence (11), the image of Chad's fighters, and the operational limitations of the armed forces of the other countries. Moreover, even before the launch of the Serval operation and the subsequent deterioration of the situation in Mali, the French military pleaded to receive the support of Chadian troops, who were considered to be the only force with sufficient troops trained for combat in desert terrain (12).

Then, Chad benefits from the absence of real competitors in Central Africa (13). Indeed, this deficit in leadership has long characterised the dynamics of the region, marked by the limited ambition of States that either cannot exert influence – owing to their size, their reduced diplomatic capacity or the conflicts disrupting them – or that do not want to become involved. Even at the scale of sub-Saharan Africa, the natural candidates that are South Africa and Nigeria are struggling to be convincing. "*The first practices noisy diplomacy, but is not always coherent*" (14). The second, despite its claims to sub-regional hegemony, has been hampered by the policies of president Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015), coupled with widespread corruption and the ineffectiveness of the Nigerian military against Boko Haram. As for Algeria, in 2013, it became overwhelmed by events in the Sahel while Libya and Egypt remain entangled with internal issues (15).

3 | An investment

This commitment, if it responds to the desire to stop the spread of terrorist groups, is also an investment, and not just by occupying elite troops sent to earn money and honours. By imposing itself as the first ally of the external partners in the fight against terrorism in the sub-region, the Chadian authorities are erasing the memory of their responsibility in central African conflicts as well as the issues of poverty, social movements, and aid money spent for the army rather than health centres and education (16).

Better still, by spilling Chadian blood on Malian soil, Idriss Déby has ensured that France is in his debt. "*We are supporting a regime in Chad whose armed forces became known for their brutality and yet we are now their debtors as a result of their help in Mali*", stated Noël Mamère in February

(10) Vincent Fournier, "Tchad: Idriss Déby Itno, le boss du Sahel », *Jeune Afrique*, 9 Mach 2015.

(11) Roland Marchal, *Petites et grandes controverses de la politique française et européenne au Tchad*, Comité de Suivi de l'Appel à la Paix et à la Réconciliation, April 2015, first part, http://ccfd-terresolidaire.org/IMG/pdf/etudepolitiquefrancaiseautchad_bd.pdf.

(12) Tanguy Berthemet, *art. cit.*.

(13) Michel Luntumbue and Simon Massock, "Afrique centrale : risques et revers de la pax Tchadiana", *GRIP*, note d'analyse, 27 February 2014, p. 7, http://www.grip.org/sites/grip.org/files/NOTES_ANALYSE/2014/NA_2014-02-27_FR_M-LUNTUMBUE.pdf.

(14) Vincent Rouget, "Paix et sécurité en Afrique en 2013 : quel bilan ?", *L'Afrique des idées*, 19 December 2013, <http://terangaweb.com/paix-et-securite-en-afrique-en-2013-quel-bilan/>.

(15) *Ibid.*

(16) Interview with Marielle Debos, RTL, 8 February 2015, 12:45.

2015 (17). Not without foundation: as was reminded by MPs Yves Fromion and Gwendal Rouillard, in a report published in 2014 on the future of French military operations in Africa, there is in Chad a sensation that the country is not obtaining " *as many advantages as could be expected*" from its foreign policy. " *France has provided material support but no financial assistance to this operation [in Mali], and the benefits to Chad from the donors' conference which was held in Addis Ababa may rightly be viewed as very modest, with only six to seven million euros in troop premiums, compared to EUR 50 million for ECOWAS countries; its posture in the Central African crisis has been challenged [...], the televised images of attacks on mosques have unfavourably marked public opinion towards the Chadian president [...]; Chad's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund in the framework of reducing the debt of poor countries are not progressing fast enough*" (18).

Since then, after Laurent Fabius argued Chad's case to Christine Lagarde, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Development Association of the World Bank agreed to grant \$1.1 billion in debt relief under the initiative for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) (19). That said, the comments of Yves Fromion and Gwendal Rouillard reveal the expectations of Chadian leaders after sending troops to Mali. This participation, which has been costly, must involve counterparties, and it is recalled. So much so that, verging on the unspoken, the security of the Chadian regime is based *ultimately* on the support of French soldiers as recalled by the rebellion of 2008. As the rebel columns advanced on the capital, French officers contributed to the protection of the Presidency and planned the counter-offensive, while in parallel the Épervier troops guarded the airport, allowing the Libyans to supply ammunition – carried by French aircraft – for Chadian tanks (20).

(17) Compte rendu du déplacement au Cameroun de Philippe Baumelet et Pierre Lellouche, Commission des affaires étrangères (Assemblée nationale), Report No. 48, session of 11 February 2015, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/cr-cafe/14-15/c1415048.asp>. This sentiment is shared by other French actors, the Chadian authorities do not hesitate to recall that they have shed the blood in Mali.

(18) Yves Fromion and Gwendal Rouillard, *Rapport d'information en conclusion des travaux d'une mission d'information sur l'évolution du dispositif militaire français en Afrique et sur le suivi des opérations en cours*, Assemblée nationale, 9 July 2014, pp. 128-129, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/pdf/rap-info/i2114.pdf>.

(19) " IMF and World Bank Announce US\$1.1 billion Debt Relief for Chad", Press release No. 15/183, 29 April 2015, <http://www.imf.org/external/french/np/sec/pr/2015/pr15183f.htm>.

(20) Roland Marchal, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

2 | Recognised, but limited, leadership

Stemming from its military commitment, Chad has become an indispensable partner for its neighbours and external actors fighting against terrorism. "*In the region, only Chad has an army capable of confronting Boko Haram*," stressed Niger Foreign Minister Mohammed Bazoum after the announcement of the entry of Chadian soldiers into Cameroon (21). However, the Chadian regime's political influence and ability to federate are still reduced.

1 | Key role of the army

Chad's main asset is its army. In northern Cameroon and southern Niger, nearly 5,000 Chadian soldiers have been deployed against Boko Haram. As for Northern Mali, Chadian troops are the backbone of a MINUSMA force whose commanding general recently deplored serious shortcomings in elementary knowledge and skills (22). The Chadian army has indeed been considerably modernised in recent years. After the fighting of February 2008 in N'Djamena, the military parade was a show of force by a victorious President with new financial possibilities thanks to high oil prices. That year Chad spent 50% of its oil revenues to purchase weapons (23), with an estimated budget of XAF 274 billion (EUR 417 million) reaching 7.1% of the GDP. The armed forces have tracked and wheeled armoured vehicles, T-55 tanks, artillery, several Sukhoi-25 and MIG-29 fighters, a number of transport aircraft and helicopter gunships. Similarly, compared to the 5-7,000 troops of the Central African Republic or the 7,800 Malian soldiers (24), a force of 30,000 Chadian soldiers makes this country a military power.

Furthermore, beyond the scale of its equipment or its staff (25), the Chadian army is command by skilled officers who fight in front of their soldiers and live with them, has strong combat experience gained during operations against Libya, internal rebellions or other foreign deployments, and a relative ethnic homogeneity. Since the arrival in power of Hissène Habré in 1982, the Zaghawa have indeed acquired an increasingly prominent place in the Chadian army, and particularly as part of the Directorate General for the Security of State Institutions (DGSSIE), the former presidential guard, which has nearly 14,000 very well equipped soldiers (26). In 2014, for example, the DGSSIE received a budget of more than XAF 42 billion (EUR 64 million), while the army's budget stood at XAF 9 billion (less than EUR 14 million).

Seen more as a force of warriors than as modern army, Chadian troops, at least the National Army (ANT), has been implementing reforms backed by French cooperation. On 22 October 2011 a reorganisation program was launched. The aim was to "*streamline*" the units, mainly formed by the aggregation of former rebel groups and clan members rallied to power. "*The ranks of the*

(21) Quoted by Tanguy Berthemet, "Le Tchad engage la lutte armée contre Boko Haram", *Le Figaro*, 16 January 2015.

(22) AFP, "La force de l'ONU au Mali a des lacunes, dénonce son chef", 17 June 2015.

(23) Gilbert Maoundonodji, quoted by Géraud Magrin, *art. cit.*

(24) Gaël Grilhot, "Les forces tchadiennes au Mali : mythe et réalités", *RFI*, 20 January 2013.

(25) On the importance of skills in conflict and an explanation of victories and defeats, see Stephen Biddle, *Military Power. Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.

(26) Yves Fromion and Gwendal Rouillard, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

Chadian national army are made up of students, farmers, women and even the deceased", explained at the time a collaborator to the head of State, *"Recruited by senior ranking officers and commanders of military regions, they were illegally and fraudulently promoted to similar high ranking positions, i.e. from lieutenant to colonel"* (27) With three missions: to limit personnel fraud; to facilitate the insertion of combat units in financially and politically beneficial international forces; and, to reduce accusations of violence committed by soldiers and their officers (28).

However, the results of this reform remain limited (29). In addition to cultural and structural obstacles, the commitment against Boko Haram has chased away any prospect of change, by definition a source of discontentment among the ranks, which could weaken the regime. While a year ago, the organisation of the armed forces was still largely guided by ethnic considerations with the maintenance of a strong presence of the ethnic groups close to the president (30), the reduction of troops now belongs to the past, with the Finance Act 2015 providing for the recruitment of 8,000 new soldiers (31).

2 | A reduced influence

Since the projection capacity of the military alone is not sufficient to gain the status as a regional power, the Chadian authorities are also engaged in diplomatic activities to position themselves as a partner of reference. In 2013, the country was appointed headquarters for the African Union (AU) Commission for Trade and in February hosted an extraordinary summit of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), which had fallen into lethargy after the death of its promoter, Muammar Gadhafi. Within the economic community of the Central African States, in addition to the appointment of a Chadian official to the position of Secretary-General, N'Djamena held the chairmanship of the Organisation at the time where the crisis Central African was fully underway. Finally, in 2014, Chad was voted onto the United Nations Security Council but also onto the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (32).

Two years after the failure of the Chadian authorities to obtain the command of the MINUSMA operations (33), the victory of Nigerian Akinwumi Adesina in the elections for the Presidency of the African Development Bank (AfDB), where Chad presented the candidature of the Minister of Finance and Budgets Kordjé Bedoumra, who was runner up (34), nevertheless reflects the

(27) Tshitenge Lubabu M.K., "Tchad : l'opération "nettoyage" de l'armée a commencé", *Jeune Afrique*, 10 November 2011.

(28) On several occasions, assaults by the Chadian army against civilian populations, in particular in the north-west of the Central African Republic, were reported.

(29) The restructuring of the Chadian army is not a new topic. Since the seizure of power by Idriss Déby, this reform has been presented as a priority to reduce military expenditure in the context of structural adjustment programs and to transform the ANT into a disciplined army. Even if from a statistical point of view the program is a success, it is however marred by high corruption, the refusal by demobilized troops to abandon their weapons, and even a reintegration of former troops (Marielle Debos, *Le métier des armes au Tchad*, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-186).

(30) Yves Fromion and Gwendal Rouillard, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

(31) Law No. 001/PR/2015, <http://finances.gouv.td/images/Loi%20odes%20Finances/LF2015.pdf>. It should be noted that the finance bills of 2013 and 2014 do not mention the recruitment of soldiers (provision was made in 2014 for 1,750 police officers).

(32) Michel Luntumbue, *art. cit.*

(33) "Mali : les dessous de la nomination du commandant rwandais de la Minusma", *RFI*, 11 June 2013. A Nigerian general was finally chosen.

(34) The Chadian candidate garnered 31.26% of the vote in the sixth and final round (editorial, "BAD, entre Hollande et Déby le torchon brûle", *Mondafrique*, 29 May 2015).

difficulty of the country's leaders to transform their military voluntarism into political influence. "We intervened militarily in Mali, there was a Malian candidate; we intervened militarily in Nigeria, there was a Nigerian candidate [...]; we also intervened in Cameroon, Cameroon voted against the Chadian candidate and to top it all our French 'friends' also voted against the Chadian candidate", summed up Chadian opposition leader, Saleh Kebzabo (35), not without causing ripples, in an editorial in the newspaper *Le Progrès*. "It is [...] logical and legitimate for West Africa or any other sub-region of the continent to support another candidate. What would be [...] illogical is that a country like Mali, for which Chadians are right now giving even their lives for its survival, to present and maintain a candidate, until the end, for a post coveted by Chad. [...] Instead, this should be an opportunity for Malians to send, out of African dignity, a sign of recognition to the Chadians who are still struggling for the existence of their State against a terrorist onslaught, at the price of the supreme sacrifice" (36).

The election of the Nigerian candidate makes sense, albeit in the country's post-election context. Even if it cannot be reduced to such a reading, it is a way to support the new Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari, from whom much is expected with regard to Boko Haram and without whom no decisive action against the sect can practically be carried out. The resolution of the crisis is based on Abuja's stated commitment, and Nigeria's neighbours cannot alone compensate for the latter's failures. However, as pointed out by Saleh Kebzabo, there was no lobbying in favour of Chad's candidate of Chad by the representatives of the states in which Chadian troops are engaged. The reason, notes Michel Luntumbue, is that ambitions of the Chadian regime run into structural boundaries. "Recently, Chad was considered - in the same way as the CAR - as the sick child of Central Africa. Even though the country has been able to stabilise [...], this stability is not based on sufficiently solid foundations to make the country a model for other countries to follow". Despite its oil revenues, its human development index (HDI) remains very low. Its political operation prevents it from shining on the continent. It has no political influence. Finally, it has not established itself as a cultural hub capable of attracting the African elites of tomorrow and to establish with links with them (37).

3 | Has Chad got the ability to federate?

Behind this question of influence, lies the ability of Chadian leaders to unite around a common goal that has finally emerged. If in Niger the involvement of Chadian is warmly appreciated by the population, unlike elsewhere with the French presence (38), the image of the country and of Idriss Déby remains ambivalent, with the feeling that N'Djamena is playing a double game. In Cameroon, the arrival of Chadian troops sparked, particularly in the South, a knee-jerk reaction of rejection in public opinion based on conspiracy theories (39). In Nigeria, civil society organisations, like *Every Nigerian Do Something* (ENDS) and *BringBackOurGirls* (BBOG), claimed that the Chadian

(35) Florence Morice, "Saleh Kebzabo : 'Déby doit revoir vraiment toute sa diplomatie' ", *RFI*, Invité Afrique, 8 June 2015.

(36) "Candidature à la tête de la BAD : Le Tchad mécontent du Mali", taken from *Mali actu info*, 29 May 2015, <http://maliactu.info/afrique/candidature-a-la-tete-de-la-bad-le-tchad-mecontent-du-mali>.

(37) Michel Luntumbue *art. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

(38) Interviews, members of civil society, Niamey, May 2015.

(39) Vincent Fournier, *art. cit.*

authorities were accomplices of Boko Haram (40). In early December 2014, a rally in the name of BBOG was therefore organised outside the Embassy of Chad in Abuja in order to demand clarifications on the allegations that Boko Haram would be armed by Chad, while the failure of the negotiations aimed at achieving a cease-fire was seen as having helped the sect to regroup and launch an offensive (41).

Among the arguments put forward to accredit the thesis of collusion between Boko Haram and the Chad government, the protesters cited the arrest of Mahamat Bichara Gnoti, considered close to Idriss Déby, in Sudan with anti-air missiles, or even the relationship between Idriss Déby and Ali Modu Sheriff, the Governor of Borno state between 2003 and 2011, who had notably used Boko Haram to eliminate his opponents and win the regional elections. In exchange, the father-in-law of Mohammed Yusuf, the founder of the movement, assassinated in 2009, had been appointed Commissioner for Religious Affairs of his government. However Sheriff moved to N'Djamena and created a corporation, SAS Petroleum, headed by former Chadian Oil Minister, Eugene Tabe. And although he is on Boko Haram's blacklist as being responsible for the extrajudicial execution of Mohamed Yusuf, Ali Modu Sheriff nevertheless fuels speculation. So much so that "*the contacts with some fighters of the sect in order to win the elections enabled him to [...] appear as one of the key intermediates of Chad to contain the advance of the jihadists*" (42).

The ability of Idriss Déby to take advantage of the regional and international dynamics for his regime is not alien to the discourse that tends to reduce Boko Haram to a threat created and manipulated – according to a common interpretative doctrine in the sub-region – by foreign powers. But beyond their limits, these points are indicative of Chad's image and the tension which cannot be limited to a quarrel of leadership with Nigeria or a legacy of ancient conflicts (43). Certainly, Chadian soldiers are in the front line against Boko Haram and, through their actions, contribute to the development of regional cooperation dynamics. Also certainly, the discourse about an Africa that "*can rely on itself*" (44) is capable of seducing a fringe of the African population. But Idriss Déby is suspected of wanting to control the border regions and destabilise them to better exploit new oil fields near Chad (45). The violence of Chadian soldiers is feared as much as it is appreciated. The exile of opposition leaders has resulted in "*a negative influence on the symbolic perception of the Chadian political system and society.*" Finally, Chad's current and political stability are too closely linked to the figure of the President and the benefits he gains from a politic of power (46).

(40) GBGB, "Boko Haram : le double jeu du Président Déby ? ", *LAMenparle*, 24 March 2015, http://lamenparle.hypotheses.org/217#footnote_9_217.

(41) « Nigeria takes protests to Chadian Embassy », *NewsRescue*, 3 December 2014, <http://newsrescue.com/bringbackourgirls-takes-boko-haram-protest-chad-embassy/#axzz3ds3ygnvM>.

(42) Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, *Boko Haram. Les enjeux régionaux de l'insurrection*, Fondation Jean Jaurès, note 246, 11 February 2015, p. 4.

(43) Vincent Duhem, "Lutte contre Boko Haram : les couacs de la coopération entre le Tchad et le Nigeria", *Jeune Afrique*, 27 March 2015. On the border conflicts around Lake Chad, see Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

(44) Hissein Bragim Taha (Ambassador of Chad to France), "Ça vous regarde", LCP, 13 March 2015.

(45) Fanny Pigeaud, « Dans la lutte contre Boko Haram, le Tchad est jugé trop ambigu », *Médiapart*, 16 February 2015.

(46) Michel Luntumbue, *art. cit.*, p. 9.

3 | A strengthened regime?

The commitment of Chadian soldiers in the sub-region is usually considered as an income for the government, allowing him to forget his failures in development and to increase its visibility on the regional scene. However, it is not without also generating some fragility. First, this policy is expensive and weighs on finances already strained by the drop in oil resources. Second, the export of Chadian soldiers carries risks.

1 | Security as a resource

For the opposition, bringing Boko Haram to the forefront is a resource for power. *"Clearly put, Idriss Déby is using Boko Haram to tighten its control over the population. Through roadblocks, searches and security operations, he exudes the fear of the Islamist group among the minds of Chadians. And it works"*, estimated Saleh Kebzabo in late February (47). Two weeks after the attack by the sect's fighters in the Ngouboua peninsula on 13 February 2015, the military, police and gendarmerie have effectively increased their surveillance on the streets of the Chadian capital. Every person or vehicle passing over the N'Djamena bridge is searched. Raids are organised in blocks to identify potential supporters or members of the sect. Papers must be in order, under the penalty of police custody while checks are conducted, with as a consequence queues to apply for identity cards. As for the river between Chad and Cameroon, canoe traffic has been prohibited (48).

The show of strength is not limited however to the deployment of security forces. In mid-January, tens of thousands of people marched in N'Djamena in support of the Chadian army, at the call of the Government and members of the ruling party (49). Six months later, after the two attacks in June in the capital, Idriss Déby called for unity in his *"message to the Nation"*. *"I invite [...] my countrymen, regardless of class, to remain calm and serene and above all to redouble their vigilance and cooperate effectively with the security services in order to neutralise any attempt to destabilise our country"* (50). Faced with the threat of Boko Haram, there must be unity and a rejection of divisions to maintain stability in the country. Even if *"the evocation of 'public order' can be instrumental and enable all kinds of social intervention, starting with political repression"* (51), there is nonetheless a *"quest for order"* in the aspirations of the population, with corollary a demand for a *"strong State"*. Indeed, one of the sources of legitimacy of Idriss Déby is that he has managed to put an end to the rebellions and to keep the peace after the 2008 clashes.

(47) Quoted by Laurent Larcher, "Au Tchad, la lutte contre Boko Haram favorise l'autoritarisme du pouvoir", *La Croix*, 23 February 2015.

(48) Willy Bracciano and Adel Castel, "Avec les militaires tchadiens en guerre contre Boko Haram" report broadcast on *France 24*, 8 March 2015.

(49) AFP, « Tchad : importante manifestation de soutien à l'armée contre Boko Haram », 17 January 2015.

(50) Message to the Nation by Idriss Déby, 16 juin 2015, <http://tchadinfos.com/tchad/message-nation-de-sem-president-de-rpubliquechef-de-letat/>.

(51) Béatrice Hibou, *Anatomie politique de la domination*, Paris, La Découverte, 2011, p. 84.

Better still, by becoming a key player for foreign states involved in the fight against terrorism in the region, the Chadian regime has ensured certain tranquillity in its relationship with France. Although the Franco-Chadian partnership is old, the arrival of François Hollande could indeed have led to a rupture, when the incumbent announced his wish to introduce a more ethical approach to his African relations. Hence the French president has, on several occasions at the Francophonie Summit, shown his hostility to Joseph Désiré Kabila. As for Idriss Déby an appointment had been repeatedly postponed, finally taking place in early December 2012 in Paris (52). The reason for accepting the meeting, a few weeks before resolution 2085 of the Security Council authorising military intervention in Mali and at a time when West African countries were divided on the appropriateness of an operation on their neighbour's soil, was the French President's full commitment to the Malian case whose success depended on the mobilisation of Africans within the framework of an international force.

2 | Costly operations

On 15 April 2013, the Chadian Prime Minister responded to questions from members of the National Assembly on the deployment of the FATIM. In his letter, he clearly stressed the financial cost of the intervention, totalling XAF 57 billion (around EUR 90 million). The operations against Boko Haram also weigh on the budget. At the end of January, two weeks after sending Chadian soldiers to Cameroon and a few days before the deployment of another contingent in Niger, their cost amounted to EUR 9 million. According to other sources, this amount could then reach, on average, EUR 7 million per month (53), even though uncertainty surrounds the perimeter of this estimate: does it take into account only the intervention in Cameroon, does it include those in Niger even the incursions in Nigeria?

In general, it is difficult to know the exact cost of the operations against Boko Haram, even if the evolution of the defence budget allows certain clarifications to be made. After a very strong increase in 2013 linked to the war in Mali, the Minister of National Defence and Veterans Affairs saw the allocation drop in 2014, from XAF 282 to 98 billion (respectively EUR 430 and 149 million), partly because of the creation of the MINUSMA and the resulting coverage of the Chadian contingent by the United Nations budget (54). As for the 2015 budget, voted on 30 December 2014, it allocates XAF 100 billion (EUR 152 million) to Defence, but does not take into account additional costs inherent to the deployments within the framework of the fight against Boko Haram, which arose after the budget bill was voted. Two certainties remain. First, military interventions are costly. "*We are obliged to allocate additional resources*", explained Finance Minister Bédouma Kordjé on 5 May, "*I can't give precise figures, but the State budget is a public*

(52) Salim Chena and Antonin Tisseron, "Rupture d'équilibres au Mali", *Afrique contemporaine*, No. 245, 1st Quarter 2013, pp. 71-84.

(53) Madjiasra Nako, « Combien coûte au Tchad la guerre contre Boko Haram ? », *Jeune Afrique*, 10 March 2015.

(54) General budget of the Chadian State for the years 2014 (p. 87) and 2015 (p. 52). The figures quoted correspond to the years n-1 and incorporate the amendment to the finance laws of the years (<http://finances.gouv.td/index.php/fr/documents-d-informations-generales/budget-et-loi-de-finances>). Note that SIPRI estimated military expenditure in Chad for 2010-2011 at slightly more than XAF 100 billion.

budget which is posted on the website of the Ministry of Finance' (55). Specifically, under the amendment bill passed in April 2015, current expenditure was increased from XAF 720 to 770 billion (EUR 1.1 to 1.2 billion) (56). Secondly, this cost is framed in a context marked by a decline in revenues, stemming from the fall in the price per barrel of oil, representing in early 2014 nearly 30% of GDP and 70% of tax revenues (57).

To compensate for the deficit resulting from this situation, several measures have been decided – an increase in oil production, the mobilisation of budgetary support from financial institutions, issuance of Treasury bonds... – and the Government has renounced the organisation of the African Union Summit planned for July. Meanwhile, the fight against Boko Haram and the decline in the State's resources are creating a "difficult situation", by deepening the feeling of discontent. Hence, during the first half of 2015, officials complained of delays in the payment of wages, adding to social tensions fuelled by the attitude of the President's allies who "lack the old-fashioned bashfulness and do not hesitate to control the State's financial authorities or to privatise the most profitable functions", and the creation of the collective "Trop c'est trop (Enough is enough)", based on the model of "Yen a marre" in Senegal or "Balais citoyen" in Burkina (58). As summarised by the former Minister Acheikh ibn Oumar, "there is a feeling of being fed up among the population [...]. The slightest spark could trigger a major outburst. We had an example in November [2014]. [...] The police only mastered the situation by shooting live ammunition and killing five people" (59).

3 | Two risks

At last, the commitment of Chadian soldiers outside the country carries two risks. On 1 May 2013, Chadian authorities denounced a conspiracy organised by civil figures and some former rebels (60). If this conspiracy case can be analysed as a way for the Government to get rid of actual or potential opponents, as a scare tactic, or even to forge the power structure around Idriss Déby through the reaffirmation of the possibility of a reversal, for Roland Marchal this event mirrors new internal weaknesses in the circles of power resulting from the "rise of Chad to the status as a power", either as a result of the oil revenue windfall or the regime's foreign intervention policies (61).

(55) "Invité Afrique. État des lieux économique du Tchad avec le ministre des Finances Bédouma Kordjé », *RFI*, 5 May 2015.

(56) Law No. 022/PR/2015, amending Law No. 001/PR/2015 of 5 January 2015, on the General State Budget 2015, 1 June 2015, pp. 3-4, <http://finances.gouv.td/images/Loi%20des%20Finances/LFR2015.pdf>.

(57) Geoffroy Touroubaye, "Tchad. Les nouveaux défis", *Le Magazine de l'Afrique*, May-June 2015, pp. 44-47, p. 46.

(58) « Journée de colère au Tchad », *RFI*, 12 November 2014 ; « Tchad : interrogations autour des pénuries d'essence », *RFI*, 14 November 2014.

(59) Acheikh ibn Oumar, « Tchad : les enjeux électoraux, analyse », *Afrique-Asie*, 16 February 2015, <http://www.afrique-asie.fr/menu/afrique/8868-tchad-les-enjeux-electoraux-analyse.html>.

(60) In the following week, several people were arrested, including members of the National Assembly, journalists, a university professor, army officers and a group of young men. All were accused of belonging to a group formed to destabilise national institutions, with their name appearing on a list which was found in possession of Moussa Mahamat Tao, a former leader of the opposition considered by the Chadian authorities as the instigator of the alleged coup d'état attempt (" Au nom de la sécurité ? Arrestations, détention et restrictions à la liberté d'expression au Tchad », *Amnesty International*, October 2013, p. 22).

(61) Roland Marchal, *art. cit.*, p. 214.

After the general elections of 2011, a growing proportion of revenues from the export of oil were destined for civil use, and the same year, an agreement signed with the China's Eximbank opened a line of credit pledged against Chad's future oil resources. However these cash flows, controlled or managed directly by the Presidency, generated tensions: firstly between many Zaghawa and one of Déby's wives, Hinda Mahamat Abderahim, who managed to build an influential network within the State apparatus; and additionally, the awarding of contracts has led to the emergence of a class of entrepreneurs for the most part composed of government cronies, overwhelmingly Zaghawa, who have aroused discontent in other business circles, including the Goranes, who played a major role in the survival of the regime in the 2000s (62).

Furthermore, the intervention in Mali has aroused "*deep acrimony*" (63) among the clans, mostly the Zaghawa but even from the Bideyat sub-clan to which Déby belongs, because of the role granted by Chadian official media Idriss Déby's son, Mahamat, who is accused of displaying a weak presence at the front. A second source of discontent is linked to the payment of bonuses and premiums or the embezzlement of some of the payments which resulted, in November 2014, in the departure of 100 Chadian soldiers from the Aguelhok army base, protesting against payment problems (64). In this context, the intervention in Mali has awakened old tensions among the Bideyat against Déby, concerning the appointment in the early 2000s of his brother Timan as the chief sultan of the canton, or the local administrative reforms in the Zaghawa region after the election victory of 2011 (65). In doing so, the president's regional ambitions have created a field of confrontation, that too many casualties within the Chadian contingent could continue to heighten if they are accompanied by discontent with the command and the Presidency, which may in part explain the allegations backed by government against the treatment of Chadian soldiers in Mali in late 2014 (66).

A second risk is linked, in the context of a war which will be long, to repercussions of regular bombings on the regime and his capacity to assume Chadian's security. If, on one side, they reinforce it, on the other they could contain the seeds of internal divisions and cracks about the fight against Boko Haram in the hypothesis of growing speeches presenting the conflict as useless and wanted by foreign actors. The expulsion of the RFI reporter Laurent Correau, on the evening of 23 June, can be regarded in this perspective, as a message directed to France (67) but also to Chadians. While Idriss Déby is sometimes depicted by opposition members as one of "France's '*subcontractors*' [...] and more generally of the *international community*" (68), he stresses the country's independence from the former colonial power. And, in doing so, he reinforces his image as leader, whether this serves to flatter him or, to the contrary, to remind that he remains sovereign in his territory, that no one will dictate his behaviour, and that he remains the primary defender of the Chadian people.

(62) *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

(63) *Ibid.*, p. 221.

(64) "Mali : défection de soldats tchadiens de la base d'Aguelhok", *RFI*, 27 November 2014.

(65) Roland Marchal, *art. cit.*, p. 221.

(66) AFP, "Mali : le Tchad accuse l'ONU de se servir de ses soldats comme "bouclier" ", 20 September 2014.

(67) Jean-Louis Le Touzet, "Expulsion d'un journaliste de RFI, le message du Tchad à la France", *Libération*, 24 June 2015.

(68) Théophile Kouamouo, "Et si l'activisme militaire du Tchad ne lui profitait pas diplomatiquement ? ", Blog of Théophile Kouamouo, undated post, <http://mondafrique.com/ivoire-blog/?p=18>.

| Conclusion

In recent years, the Chadian regime has rolled out policies to boost its continental ambitions by mobilising rhetoric of the common good and the fight against insecurity. Its commitments are towards Africans and Africa, and the continent's future. If Chadian authorities have successfully exported their fighters, their ambitions, however, have until now been hampered by a limited ability to exert influence and federate the stakeholders. These lines of force are perhaps moving. Nothing remains frozen and the recent activism will not be without consequences. But the image of the country and its leader, the constrained financial resources, or the acknowledged importance of Nigeria, are all obstacles to the emergence of a sustainable Chadian political leadership beyond the military sphere and that can only be compared to that of Muammar Gadhafi.

However, the impacts are already real. The operational headquarters of the Joint Multinational Force (69) has been relocated from Baga to N'Djamena. With France, while the election of François Hollande could have announced a change in Franco-Chadian relations, Chad has become an essential and indispensable ally against terrorist groups. Finally internally, and even if more bombings could weaken Idriss Déby, his engagement against terrorism represents also a means to strengthen his power, both in terms of legitimation and pressure on opposition players who cannot argue against the strengthening of national security, or as a way to detract from the absence of tangible results in terms of development, living conditions, access to State services and even the declining business climate despite government efforts to develop the economy and the private sector.

In the medium term, two questions remain about the future of the Chadian influence. First, despite the attempted settlement in October 2014 between the Nigerian government and Boko Haram under the personal mediation of Idriss Déby or the talks between Toubou and Tuareg in southern Libya a few months later, Chad does not constitute a model of dialogue and compromise (70) in a region faced with threats that require policy responses alongside military ones. The growth of Boko Haram in Nigeria follows the failure of an approach centred on force alone which, instead of reducing the movement, has helped to reinforce and arouse the hostility of a large part of the population in Borno State (71). Then, since the current stability of Chad is inseparable from the figure of its current president, who is omnipresent, a post-Déby future remains uncertain. And not just because of the instability on the borders: since his arrival as head of State, Chadian society and the relationship with power have not changed. Chad remains, to borrow the title of the book by Marielle Debos "*between wars*".

In this respect, if Chad is now a leading contributor in the fight against terrorist groups, this commitment should not allow to forget the deployment limits of its soldiers. The security provided by military power, national or not, is before all an opportunity to implement measures to reduce

(69) This force is composed of troops from the Member States of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (Cameroon, Libya, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, CAR) and Benin.

(70) Roland Marchal, *art. cit.*, pp. 222-223.

(71) Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "Nigeria's Interminable Insurgency? Addressing the Boko Haram Crisis", *Chatham House*, September 2014, pp. 7-8.

internal sources of instability, whether political, economic, social or religious. And this is not the least of the challenges, for N'Djamena's neighbours and external partners.



Antonin TISSERON | Research Fellow at the Thomas More Institute, holder of a Masters in Defense (Paris 2 University) and a Phd in the History of International Relations (Paris 1 University), Antonin TISSERON developed an expertise on geopolitical, defense and security issues of in the Maghreb-Sahel area. He worked also for the French Department of Defense for several years on the problems relating to the modernization of the armed forces and counter-insurrection.

**With the
support of**

