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WHAT SECURITY THREATS IN CHAD?

Roland Marchal
CNRS/CERI/Sciences Po, Paris

rolmarchal@yahoo.fr

Chad made a point to send 2,000 of its best soldiers to northern Mali to support French troops. Idriss Déby, at the difference of his West African colleagues, did not wait for external funding to move troops and equipment. At least at the beginning the whole logistics of the Chadian contingent was under full Chadian control. The fact that those troops fought their battle with determination increased the respect and admiration Idriss Déby enjoys among French officers and even diplomats. How this is going to back fire internally is not yet clear, especially in the balance within the inner circle of the regime, the Zaghawa/Bideyat clan.¹

Idriss Déby also can pretend to have foreseen many of the problems facing the region. Early 2011, he was adamantly opposed to the attempt to overthrow Qaddafi because a regime change in Libya would destabilize the whole region. At that time, people thought that as the chair of the SEN-SAD he was protecting his best ally and funder (which could be also true) but he was right against his best international allies, France and the USA. Chad President also in 2012 did not mince his words to blame his Western African colleagues for their procrastination on Mali. From spring 2013, Idriss Déby has several times claimed that an armed opposition was going to emerge and that Islamists were planning an attack against his regime. Although Chad provides asylum to many Nigerian refugees who escaped the battles between Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces, Chad head of state alluded to people who were involved in a previous episode of rebellion from 2005 to 2009 and Libya. This really is difficult to believe.

Boko Haram has some ethnic and ideological connexions in Western Chad (Lake region and Kanem): either because ethnic groups cross border with Nigeria or because the Kreda (Goranes) are nowadays more sensitive to Wahhabi beliefs. N'djamena being the capital city and close to the Cameroon city of Kousséri is also a possible place for Boko Haram activities. In this

¹ Roland Marchal, « Le Tchad entre deux guerres ? Remarques sur un présumé complot », *Politique africaine*, juin 2013.

zone (as well as in northern and Eastern Chad), arms' trafficking is usual for a long time and became vibrant because of the Darfur conflict and the Libyan upheaval against Qaddafi. No violent attack has yet taken place in Chad, either because no one was interested in doing that or because Chadian, French and US security services stopped any attempt to do so.

Idriss Déby seems to play again a tactic he used in the mid-2000s when he claimed that he was fighting al-Qaida in Eastern Chad when actually he was confronting his own fellow comrades who wanted him to leave power and give them a chance to rule Chad. None of those opposition leaders was known for his Islamic inclination that was reduced to the fact that Sudan was used as a sanctuary.

Some of his opponents today are refugees in Libya mostly because Sudan used them as a surrogate force to support the Transition National Council that defeated Mu'ammarr Qaddafi. Because one of their leaders, Timane Erdimi, is nowadays settled in Doha and claimed that Idriss Déby time was over (a statement he made recurrently over the last 8 years), suddenly there is an Islamist conspiracy allegedly funded by Qatar and aimed at installing an Islamic State in N'Djamena...

Idriss Déby behaviour can be understood two different ways. On the one hand he may overstate the threat against his regime to attract more foreign assistance in security and financial terms. This may be a dangerous bet in the sense that his poor governance and patrimonial management of oil revenues may eventually be more exposed to foreign public opinions and be seen as responsible for the (alleged) threat because he misrules his country.

On the other hand, Idriss Déby, who can be a smart operator, may rightly feel that the region is changing and that a long established (at least from 1990) regional order is collapsing and that a new one is not yet emerging. This would explain why he is so aggressively deploying

troops in Sudan (far beyond the Darfur border), CAR (up to Bangui, since Chadian soldiers are the main component of the MICOPAX), Mali (Kidal region) and also why he is helping Tubu militias in Sabha and Kuffra.

By doing so, he obtains two major results. The first one is that he keeps the Tubu rights to control a segment of the informal trade road that crosses Libya to Niger and Mali and strengthen them against Arab tribes (Zwai and Oulad Suleiman) that would like to obtain the monopoly on this protection economy. Eastern Chad and Zaghawa ethnic groups (to which Idriss Déby belongs to) benefit from this situation. The second is that Idriss Déby makes sure that the Qorane (an ethnic group “settled between” Tubu and Zaghawa) won't have much room to launch an opposition movement.

If one looks the current situation in Chad, there are potentially three groups (though not homogenous) that could be interested in a rebellion. In South Chad (where most oil is produced) the situation is getting from bad to worse because the state does not keep its commitments in terms of investments and public goods. But the prospect of an armed rebellion there is the most unlikely for many reasons. In Eastern Chad, Arabs and Waddaï people are staunch opponents to Déby for more than a decade but miss leaders and a sanctuary to launch again a rebellion. The previous attempt failed dramatically in the 2000s and new faces are required.

The Qorane are better candidates for a rebellion. From the beginning they were associated with Idriss Déby regime but lost many important positions in the economic realm and in the security apparatus after 2009 when Idriss Déby promoted his kinsmen at all occasions. Some of them settled in Libya were forced to leave and went back to Kanem where reintegration is difficult. Some also are in Niger, since they sided Habré and never endorsed Idriss Déby.

There is a further argument today that may move them against Idriss Déby: the Habré case. Hissène Habré who ruled Chad from 1982 to 1990 is prosecuted for huge human rights violations (about 40,000 people killed under his regime) and over the last months steps were taken to get the case ready for the court in Senegal. Many Qorane in Chad may feel that Idriss Déby (who up to 1989 was very close to Habré) uses this opportunity to get rid of another batch of Qorane officials in order to promote his own ethnic group.

If this description has any validity, one should raise an obvious question: why do French and US governments keep silent on Idriss Déby's misgivings? Paris and Washington may answer that there is no alternative and that anyway Chad's army is the best of the region. It is interesting to analyse this schizophrenic diplomacy, by which Western chancelleries explain that Islamic radicalisation is rooted in poor governance and economic marginalisation but yet by which Idriss Déby is the best possible ruler in Chad because he is secular and gets to fight alongside French and US forces in northern Mali.