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Chad and its Conflicts with Neighboring Countries

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Since its independence in 1960, the Sahelian country Chad has experienced various political ideologies from different regimes of governments established primarily through power struggle. Since the independence of the country, only the first Chadian President, François Tombalbaye, was elected democratically by Chadians from 1960 to 1975, the year of his assassination. His regime was focused on “Retour à l’authenticité” (Cultural Revolution, lit: Return to Authenticity). The other presidents took power through a coup d’état up to the sitting president, General Idriss Déby Itno, who took office in 1990. These power struggles affect many conflicts within the country and with neighboring countries.

Conflicts within Chad are often caused by tribal, ethnic, religious and pastoral confrontations, which will be explained below. One of the first clashes in the south of the country was termed Black September in 1985, where many Christians were massacred and killed.¹ This was followed by a struggle against the central government, which until today lies at the root of several different rebellions, civil wars, and efforts

¹ Alex Rondos, “Civil War and Foreign Intervention in Chad”, *Current History*, Vol. 84, May 1985, pp. 209-232.

to gain power. When one ethnic group attains a monopoly of power, there is an increase in social and political tension throughout the country.

Chad's conflicts with its neighboring countries in the Lake Chad Region revolve around political instability in these countries, and poorly managed or under-exploited cross-border issues that have spillover effects including the onset of a rising tide of terrorism. These conflicts are interwoven with social and political struggles based on ethnic divisions, escalation of pastoral conflicts, land distribution, unequal access to wealth and opportunities, and the control of raw materials by one ethnic group. These factors exacerbate insecurity at both local and regional levels.

The regional crisis in Lake Chad is seen as a consequence of a long accumulation of complex and interdependent problems, such as poor governance, the absence of democracy, exclusionary politics, and violations of the fundamental human rights, along with general corruption and economic misery in the sub-region. States face difficult challenges in preventing inter-communal conflicts, such as pastoral conflicts in the case of Chad. At the same time, conflicts are often maintained by certain political actors, who in turn have a complex relationship with whatever leadership heads the state at a given time. This paper will try to map the interrelations between internal and regional conflicts in Chad.

Conflicts between Pastoral and Settled Communities

One of the main conflicts within Chad is a pastoral conflict which involves agriculturalists and cattle ranchers. This conflict occurs every single day in rural areas competing over natural resources such as land grazing and water points. Pastoral conflicts are complex and difficult to solve. They occur often in arid and semi-arid areas where there is lack of access to natural resources, which must be shared between farmers involved in agriculture and those which herd livestock. These often-violent conflicts hinder the sustainable food security in pastoral communities. According to Scoones and Graham, pastoralist communities are forced to adapt to the harsh environmental conditions of the arid and semi-arid areas they inhabit.² This difficult environment causes pastoral communities in Africa to face many problems in order to

² Ian Scoones and Olivia Graham, "New Directions for Pastoral Development in Africa," *Development in Practice*, Vol. 4 (3), January 1, 1994, pp. 188-198.

sustain their livestock in their own delay lives. Moreover, the pastoralist use of land resources in the struggle for the survival of their people and livestock makes it difficult for peaceful cohabitation alongside farmers. As Mkutu argued, the scarcity of natural resources creates inter-communal violence among pastoral communities.³ This scarcity is also caused by ecological degradation, which contributes to armed conflict in the pastoral areas. Therefore, farmers and herders are the most directly affected by the scarcity of resources amid climate changes and loss of usable land.

During the movement of livestock for pasture, the animals end up entering the farms of agriculturalists and in the process of feeding the animals, they destroy the farms. From there the conflict bursts out and communities ally according to their ethnic identity. Pastoral conflict is the motor of other conflicts in Chad as it breeds ethno-political rivalry and insecurity. Pastoral conflicts are complicated to resolve because of the lack of political will to deal objectively with inter-ethnic conflict.

Pastoral conflicts are also related to cross border and boundary conflicts, especially in areas between agricultural farming and pastoral grazing that have been established without considering the resource needs of pastoralists.⁴ Therefore, the conflict continues to escalate because of competition over scarce resources such as water and land available for animals and farmers.

Regional conflicts and relations with neighboring countries

As mentioned earlier, internal conflicts in Chad are interwoven. As for Libya, the longtime dispute over the border between the two states was thought to have been solved after the intervention of International Court of Justice for solutions to the territorial dispute, which ultimately gave Chad control of the land it had claimed all along.⁵ This conflict lasted from 1973 to 1990. The main aspiration behind the occupation of Chadian land by Libya was to transform the country into an Islamic-majority state and to enslave the southern population, who are mainly Christians. The

³ Mkutu Kennedy, *Guns and Governance in the Rift Valley, Pastoralist Conflict and Small Arms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

⁴ Teshome Mekonnen, "Conflict of Frontiers between Oromia and Somalia; The Case Study of Moyale Woreda," *Proceeding of the First National Conference on Federalism, Conflict and Peace Building*, Addis Ababa, May 5-7, 2003.

⁵ Robert McKoeon, "The Aouzou Strip: Adjudication of Competing Territorial Claims in Africa by the International Court of Justice," *Journal of International Law*, Vol. 23 (1), 1991, pp. 147-170.

border between Chad and Libya is still complex and it experiences many incidents of insurgency, human and drug traffic, as well as other factors that continue to create instability in this area. For these reasons, Chad decided to close its border with Libya in 2018.⁶

Chad is known as for its interference in the political and military affairs of neighboring countries. Chad interferes politically and militarily in Sudan and in Central Africa, for example. In Sudan, Chad supported rebel group of Janjaweed against the regime of Omar al-Bashir in 2003. Thus, in retaliation, between 2005 and 2010, Sudan also supported a rebel group inside Chad against the regime of Idriss Déby.⁷ The proxy wars between the two countries has complicated the conflicts in both countries and rendered them difficult to understand since 2003.

In the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad interfered with its military to overthrow the regime of Ange Patassé in 2003, and in 2012 Chad supported a coalition of rebels (séléka) against the regime of Bozizé.⁸ This led to an attack of the predominantly Christian anti-balaka militias of CAR in 2015, which targeted Chadian Muslims living in CAR. However, the interference of Chad in CAR in internal affairs had created many Chadian refugees, and it increased the level of food insecurity. As a result of this interference, today Chad and CAR see themselves as enemies, although they were good neighbors in the past and the populations in both countries used to identify themselves as one people.

Chad against Boko Haram- internal and regional dimensions

The intervention of Chad in fighting Boko Haram, an extremist movement that originated in Nigeria under Salafist Mohamed Yusuf in 2002 (and later developed under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau from 2009) has caused immense insecurity in Chad. After Yusuf was killed in 2009, followed by Abubakar Shekau taking over the leadership of the organization, the organization carried out attacks against targets in Nigeria (such as the kidnapping of hundreds the Chibok girls) and also in neighboring

⁶ *The Libya Observer*, "[Chad Shuts Border with Libya](#)," March 4, 2019.

⁷ Colin Thomas-Jensen, 2008: *Nasty Neighbors: Resolving the Chad-Sudan Proxy War*. Reports

⁸ Stephanie Duckstein, "[Chad's Role Behind the Scenes in the Central African Republic](#)," *DW*, February 12, 2014.

countries such as Chad, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, and Niger.⁹ The spread of Boko Haram activities sparked regional concerns that started pushing governments to form a military cooperation, called the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). This force was originally created in 1998 by Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) for handling cross-border security issues that predated the rise of the Islamist terrorist group. In 2012, MNJTF was assigned to fight against the expansion of Boko Haram and transfers of weapons within the region. This leads each country of the region to agree to deploy a battalion of at least 700 troops within its own national boundaries, in addition to troops of MNJTF, to control the Lake Chad region, and to defend against the expansion of terrorism.¹⁰

Since 2009, Chad has become the main actor in the MNJTF and plays key role in combating Boko Haram in the region. It also claims that Abubakar was killed by Chadian troops. The intervention of Chad in fighting against terrorism in the region has made it the target of terrorism, including various attacks in N'Djamena, the capital of Chad. For example, in 2018, Boko Haram attacks began to increase by targeting public areas such as markets and police stations which were attacked on the same day in the capital of Chad.¹¹

Today, with the infiltration of Boko Haram in Chad, the country is facing economic and social consequences. The recruitment of young boys to join the terrorist group is increasing, for example. This has cost the country and escalating insecurity within the country. In the north of the country, Boko Haram caused as many as 30,000 deaths, and the displacement of around 2 million people throughout the country. The issues of insecurity are threatening Chadian communities, and they are afraid to travel about for their daily jobs. Thus, economic security and stability are under threat. This has created food insecurity which has affected more than one million people.¹²

⁹ International Crisis Group, "[Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures](#)," *Africa Report*, No. 246, March 8, 2017.

¹⁰ See Rina Bassist, "[The 'G5 Sahel' Joint Force: A Marriage of Security and Development?](#)" *Ifriqiya*, Vol. 4, No. 13, Dec. 24, 2019.

¹¹ See, for example: "[Secretary-General Repeats call for support to Lake Chad countries after latest Boko Haram attack](#)," *Peace and Security*, August 21, 2018.

¹² International Crisis Group, "[Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures](#)," *Africa Report*, No. 246, March 8, 2017.

The revenue of Chadian oil is used for fighting Boko Haram instead of dealing with humanitarian issues within the country. This has impoverished civilian populations and leads to easy recruitment of young people to actual join Boko Haram, which in turn contributes to escalating conflict around the country. Boko Haram has aggravated food insecurity leading to starvation particularly in rural areas of the country.

In fact, last year in December 2019, Chad was greatly disturbed by the terrorist group, which carried out several attacks in a village near Lake Chad. The attacks of Boko Haram killed around 14 people and many others were reported to be missing. A month later, this year in January 2020, the Chadian government decided to bring back about 1200 soldiers who were sent to provide support for Nigeria to fight against Boko Haram.¹³ In the regional context, one might wonder whether the returning of the soldiers is it to secure the border between Nigeria and Chad, or whether it is supposed to exchange places with another Chadian group which would be deployed again to Nigeria for the fight against the terrorist group.

Conclusion

It seems that stability in Chad depends on finding solutions to neighbouring conflicts and improving relations with neighbouring countries in order to foster stable peace and justice. Therefore, Chad needs to stop supporting rebels against neighbouring countries and interfering in their internal affairs. However, by helping neighboring countries fight against the terrorist group of Boko Haram, Chad seems like it is working to find solution to the regional conflicts. The case of the oil revenues could serve as an example. Instead of using these revenues to interfere with the internal conflicts of its neighbors, Chad could use it both for fighting for Boko Haram and deal with the severe humanitarian crisis facing the population. Conflicts related to internal social unrests and political struggle within the country have combined with neighbouring conflicts situating Chad in a cycle of endless conflicts with devastating impacts. Instead of leaving Chad as the saviour of the region, countries need to coordinate strategies as they contend with their vulnerabilities, and work to stop the expansion of the terrorism in the region, and to try to find viable solutions to their common problems.

¹³ *Ouest-France*, "[La Lutte Contre Boko Haram](#)," [French] January 2020.

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