



CRS Report for Congress

Instability in Chad

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Summary

The political and security situation in Chad is volatile. Ethnic clashes, banditry, and fighting between government forces and rebel groups, both Chadian and Sudanese, have contributed to a fragile security situation in the east. The instability has forced over 180,000 Chadians from their homes in the past three years. An additional 30,000 fled to neighboring Cameroon during a February 2008 rebel attack on the capital city. In addition to the internal displacement, over 300,000 refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan's Darfur region have fled violence in their own countries and now live in refugee camps in eastern Chad. With Chadian security forces stretched thin, the threat of bandit attacks on the camps and on aid workers has escalated. The instability has also impacted some 700,000 Chadians whose communities have been disrupted by fighting and strained by the presence of the displaced. The United Nations and the European Union have deployed a multidimensional presence in Chad and the CAR to improve regional security so as to facilitate the safe and sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons. This report will be updated as events warrant.

Chad, a landlocked country roughly twice the size of Texas, has had a turbulent history of religious and ethnic conflict and intermittent civil war in its 40 years of independence. Bordered by Libya to the north and Sudan to the east, it is considered to be among the world's ten poorest countries, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Index. Persistent conflict has hindered the country's development, despite significant oil reserves. One in five children dies before the age of five. Chad also is perceived to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world.¹ *Foreign Policy* magazine has ranked Chad fourth on its index of failed states.²

¹ According to Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index, which measures the perceptions of business people and country analysts regarding the degree of corruption among public officials and politicians, Chad ranks 172 out of 180 countries.

² The Washington-based magazine uses economic, social, political, and military indicators to rank countries by their "vulnerability to violent internal conflict and social dysfunction." Only Somalia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe are considered to be more unstable.

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Political Instability. Chad gained its independence from France in 1960. The country has been politically unstable since 1965, when a tax protest led northern, Islamic tribes to rebel against the southern, Christian-dominated government. Years of authoritarian rule and civil war followed, interspersed with international diplomacy and armed interventions. Chad's current president, Idriss Déby Itno, a former general, took power by force when he launched a rebellion against then-President Hissein Habre from Sudan in 1989. Déby's forces, reportedly aided by Libya and Sudan and largely unopposed by French troops stationed in Chad, seized the capital, N'Djamena, in 1990, forcing Habre into exile. Habre is slated to be tried in Senegal for human rights abuses committed under his regime. Déby, named president in 1991, pledged to create a democratic multi-party political system.

Chad at a Glance

Population: 10.1 million
Population Growth Rate: 2.195%
Gross National Income (GNI): \$5.2 billion
GNI per Capita: \$450
Key Exports: Oil, cotton, cattle, gum arabic
Religions: Muslim 51%, Christian 35%, indigenous beliefs 14%
Language: French and Arabic (official), Sara, and more than 120 indigenous languages and dialects
Infant Mortality Rate: 100.36 deaths per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy: 47.43 years
HIV/AIDS Adult Prevalence: 3.3%
Literacy: 48%
Sources: CIA; UNAIDS; UNICEF; World Bank

Chad's first multi-party presidential elections were held in 1996; legislative elections followed in 1997. Déby won reelection in 2001, and his party won a majority of seats in the 2002 legislative elections. According to the State Department's annual human rights reports, Chad's elections have all been marked by irregularities and fraud. The opposition boycotted the most recent elections, held in 2006 after the constitution was amended to allow Déby a third term. The government initiated a dialogue with the political opposition in 2007; in August, the parties agreed to postpone the 2007 legislative elections to 2009 to allow a new census and the creation of a more representative electoral commission. The 2008 arrest of several opposition and civic leaders has led some to question Déby's commitment to the dialogue.³ His appointment of a new prime minister in April 2008, however, and the subsequent appointment of four former political opponents to high-level cabinet positions, are seen by some Chadians as an effort toward more inclusive governance. Others view the appointments as an attempt to divide the opposition.

President Déby's perceived lack of legitimacy among the opposition has contributed to political tensions. He has faced several coup attempts, and diverse armed political and regional factions have been active since the 1990s. Shifting rebel alliances, which include defectors from the government, gained strength in the east in 2005-2006 and launched a series of raids on strategic government positions. Inter-communal violence not directly related to the rebellion also increased. Déby declared a state of emergency in November 2006. Critics charge that he has used the state of emergency, which prohibits public rallies and campaigning and allows the government to censor the press, to silence opposition.⁴

³ The whereabouts of Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh, the spokesman of the opposition coalition, the Coordination des partis politiques pour la défense de la Constitution (CPDC), remain unknown.

⁴ The 2006 state of emergency lasted four months and applied to N'Djamena and select regions in the east, north and south. It was reissued in October 2007 for 3 regions in the east and north.

In October 2007, the government signed a peace agreement in Sirte, Libya with the main rebel groups based in eastern Chad. However, the agreement has not been fully implemented, and the fighting has continued. The Sirte agreement is the latest in a series of failed negotiations to bring a peaceful settlement to the rebellion.⁵ In early February 2008, rebel forces advanced on the capital in an unsuccessful attempt to force Déby from power.⁶ Hundreds of civilians were reportedly killed in the fighting, and an estimated 30,000 Chadians fled across the Cameroon border, ten miles from N'Djamena. Rebel groups later attacked and briefly held several towns in eastern Chad in June 2008.

Ethnic Conflict. Chad's ethnic rivalries are complex and fluid, and they have been compounded by conflict over land and limited natural resources such as water. Ethnic violence between President Déby's ethnic group, the Zaghawa, and the Tama, and both non-Arab, has become an increasing focus of concern. Conflict within the factionalized Zaghawa tribe also is a factor. The Zaghawa, who compose less than 3% of Chad's population, control a majority of government positions. Both Chad and the Darfur region of Sudan are home to the Zaghawa, elements of which have played key roles in Chad's complex inter-ethnic alliances and conflicts and in the Darfur conflict.

Regional Conflict.⁷ The current conflict in Darfur has displaced more than two million Sudanese and led large numbers to flee into Chad, generating a humanitarian crisis in the east. Refugee inflows from Darfur and the CAR have also increased social tensions linked to increasing demand on local resources, despite the provision of aid to the refugees by international aid groups. The conflict has also heightened political instability in Chad. Chad and Sudan have periodically accused one another of sponsoring rebellions against their respective governments. Despite a May 2007 peace agreement signed by the two countries in Saudi Arabia and another agreement signed in Dakar, Senegal in March 2008, the accusations continue. Chad alleges that Sudan backed the February 2008 assault on N'Djamena and the June advance in the east. Reports suggest that one of the Darfur rebel groups may have provided support to the Chadian army during the attack. Sudan has in turn accused Chad of backing Sudanese rebels involved in a May 2008 attack on Omdurman, a suburb of the Sudanese capitol.⁸

The United Nations currently maintains 12 refugee camps in eastern Chad and five in the south. In addition to the estimated 250,000 Sudanese refugees, the camps provide shelter for some 56,000 refugees from the CAR and as many as 180,000 displaced Chadians. The number of Sudanese refugees continues to rise; heavy fighting in Darfur

⁵ For example, in December 2006, Déby signed a peace agreement with Mahamat Nour, then-leader of a coalition of 13 rebel groups. Nour was appointed Minister of Defense in March 2007. Fighting between his forces and the national army resumed in November 2007, and Nour, who was subsequently dismissed from the government, reportedly fled to Sudan.

⁶ The U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted a statement drafted by France that condemned the attack and expressed support for African Union mediation efforts. The Security Council did not agree on a French proposal to use "all means necessary" to halt the rebellion.

⁷ Also see CRS Report RL33574, *Sudan: The Crisis in Darfur and the Status of the North-South Peace Agreement* and CRS Report RS22751, *The Central African Republic* by Ted Dagne.

⁸ Other accusations have been addressed by the respective governments in letters to the President of the U.N. Security Council. See, for example, S/2008/212, S/2008/222, and S/2008/325.

early 2008 forced an additional 13,500 across the Chadian border.⁹ The camps, and the host communities, struggle with shortages of water and firewood. As a result of a 2007 incident involving French aid workers,¹⁰ Chad has reportedly tightened its oversight of non-governmental organizations working in the country and increased travel restrictions. Aid agencies contend that these new restrictions impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The region where the camps in the east are located has also been plagued by insecurity and violence, and some international humanitarian aid compounds have been looted and aid workers threatened or attacked. The director of the humanitarian group Save the Children, a French national, was killed in May 2008. The U.N. had repeatedly pressed the government to allow an peacekeeping force to secure the borders with Sudan and the CAR. President Déby opposed the proposals until June 2007, when the European Union offered to provide an EU peacekeeping force (primarily from France, which has been Chad's strongest military ally and one of its largest bilateral donors).

U.N. Presence and EU Peacekeepers. On September 25, 2007, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 1778, approving the establishment of a multinational presence in Chad and the Central African Republic to (1) contribute to the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and civilians in danger; (2) facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance; and (3) create favorable conditions for reconstruction and economic and social development. Based on Resolution 1778, two multinational bodies, a U.N. mission and a European Union (EU) military force, have been created under a single mandate.¹¹ The U.N. presence, known as the U.N. Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), is responsible for police training and reinforcing judicial infrastructure, and will work with Chadian forces to reinforce safety for refugees, IDPs, and aid agencies in the camps in the east. The EU force, known as EUFOR Chad/CAR (hereafter EUFOR), is expected to provide general security for civilians and facilitate the free movement of humanitarian assistance and personnel, and is authorized to use military force, whereas MINURCAT is not.

Some humanitarian officials have expressed concern that having two separate international missions in Chad may prove confusing for the local population and aid workers, as well for the region's various rebel groups. At least one rebel group warned that it would consider the EU force a "foreign occupation army," because it includes French forces, whom the rebels do not see as neutral. MINURCAT, which is expected to ultimately include some 300 police and 50 military liaison officers, as well as civilian personnel, is training a special local police unit to assume security responsibilities for the camps, but logistical challenges impede their deployment.¹² EUFOR's deployment of

⁹ Refugee and IDP figures provided by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

¹⁰ In October 2007, six French aid workers from the charity Zoe's Ark were arrested in Chad on charges of abduction and fraud after they attempted to fly 103 Chadian children to Europe. The majority of the children, whom the aid workers claimed were Darfur orphans, were, in fact, native Chadians, many of whom still had at least one living parent or guardian. The aid workers were repatriated to France to serve eight-year sentences. Déby later pardoned them.

¹¹ This "dual-mission system," with a combined U.N.-EU mandate, is the first of its kind. "Chad: Dual Peacekeeping Mission Seeks to Dispel Confusion," *IRIN*, January 11, 2008.

¹² As of early July 2008, MINURCAT had recruited 211 U.N. police officers, 175 of whom have (continued...)

3,700 troops, originally expected in November 2007, has been delayed by funding and logistical challenges. The rebel advance on N'Djamena in early February 2008 further delayed deployment, but the force reached initial operating capacity, with almost half its full force deployed, in March. Déby criticized EUFOR in June for not engaging the rebel advance, and some aid groups charge that the force has failed to protect them.

Child Soldiers. According to U.N. estimates, there may be as many as 10,000 children used in combat and non-combat roles by Chadian rebel groups, paramilitary forces, and the national army. The government denied the existence of child soldiers in its army until May 2007, when it signed an agreement with UNICEF to end recruitment of persons under age 18 and begin demobilization of those already within the security forces. According to Human Rights Watch the government has continued to limit access by international child protection officials to military installations to verify demobilization.¹³ Humanitarian officials also express concern regarding the recruitment of children by rebel groups and local self-defense militias in and around refugee camps.¹⁴

Oil and the Economy. Eighty percent of Chad's population is dependent on subsistence farming and herding, and droughts and locust infestations continue to affect food production and contribute to a high malnutrition rate. When Chad began oil production in 2003, Chadians had high expectations that oil revenues might serve as a catalyst for economic growth and development.¹⁵ Corruption, weak state institutions, and chronic instability, however, threaten to undermine advances made in the oil sector and could deter future high capital investment projects elsewhere in the region. The Chad-Cameroon Petroleum Development and Pipeline Project is a \$4 billion World Bank-backed initiative to develop oil fields in southern Chad and export the oil through a 665-mile pipeline to offshore oil loading facilities on Cameroon's coast.¹⁶ World Bank funding for the project was conditional on a portion of the oil revenues being held in a British bank account from which the Chadian government could only draw for poverty-reduction projects. In 2006, the World Bank suspended loans to Chad and froze oil revenue accounts after the government changed its revenue management law and significantly increased military spending. Chad and the World Bank reached a compromise in June 2006, allowing the government to use 30% (formerly 20%) of oil revenues for its own purposes, while the remainder would continue to be used for development programs.

U.S.-Chadian Relations. The United States has provided over \$378 million in humanitarian assistance to eastern Chad since the onset of the humanitarian crisis in FY2004. According to the Administration's FY2009 Foreign Operations Congressional Budget Justification, U.S. foreign policy priorities in Chad include 1) advancing stability

¹² (...continued)

been deployed. In addition, 24 military liaison officers have deployed.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, *Early to War: Child Soldiers in the Chad Conflict*, July 2007.

¹⁴ U.N. Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Chad," S/2007/400, July 3, 2007.

¹⁵ According to the Bank of Central African States, Chad received \$340 million in oil revenues in 2005, and \$953 million in 2006. "Chad: Weapons Instead of ARVs," IRIN, June 30, 2008.

¹⁶ In addition to the World Bank, sponsors include ExxonMobile (with 40% of the private equity), Malaysia's Petronas (35%), and Chevron-Texaco (25%).

and resolving the refugee crisis; 2) promoting democracy and respect for human rights; 3) supporting health and agriculture programs; and 4) strengthening Chadian counterterrorism capabilities and professionalizing the military. The U.S. Agency for International Development's Mission in Chad closed in 1995 due to declining funding and security concerns; USAID assistance, much of which consists of monetized food aid to support health and agriculture initiatives, is coordinated through its regional office in Kenya. The U.S. Treasury Department has provided technical assistance to the country's oil revenue management oversight body to promote transparency.

Despite concerns regarding poor governance, the Bush Administration considers the Déby government an ally in the war on terror. In 2004, elements of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) (now known as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) entered Chadian territory and met resistance from Chadian forces. Chad is a part of the Trans-Saharan Counter-terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a U.S. interagency effort that aims to increase Chad's border protection and regional counter-terrorism capabilities, as well as "to promote democratic governance as a means to discredit terrorist ideology."¹⁷ The United States has also provided security assistance to Chad although the FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act limits some of this training to that which promotes "democratic values" and respect for human rights.¹⁸ The Administration has discontinued demining assistance due to "institutional weakness and a lack of political will to address the problem." Landmines continue to kill hundreds of Chadians annually, and approximately 80% of the victims are children, according to U.N. Mine Action. The 110th Congress has expressed concern for the ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis in the region through various legislation. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on the impact of the Darfur crisis on Chad and the CAR in March 2007.

Prospects. Persistent conflict with rebels in the north and east; refugee inflows and instability from the conflict in Darfur; and ethnic tensions all contribute to concerns for Chad's future. Some analysts have also expressed concern that the Tuareg rebellion in Mali and Niger could merge with the ongoing conflict in Chad, the CAR, and Sudan to create a much wider regional war.¹⁹ Under President Déby, Chad has made limited progress toward democracy. Human rights conditions remain notably poor, in part due to the actions of state security forces; freedom of expression is often curtailed; and many critics and observers see the government as lacking in transparency, accountability, and functional capacities. Reports of human right abuses, including sexual violence against women, are particularly high in the country's conflict zones. Prospective increases in state oil revenues — coupled with mandatory development provisions governing their use — and multifaceted international assistance to bolster political and economic reform may result in more participatory governance and economic growth in Chad. However, if the Déby government does not embrace political and economic reforms, popular resentment against those in power may perpetuate the current instability.

¹⁷ Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs James Swann at the Senate Foreign Relations Africa Subcommittee hearing on Chad and the CAR, March 20, 2007.

¹⁸ S. 2135, the Child Soldiers Accountability Act of 2007, could make Chad ineligible for military assistance if passed into law, unless such assistance supports demobilization efforts or promotes military professionalization.

¹⁹ Colin Thomas-Jensen and Maggie Fick, "Foreign Assistance Follies in Niger," *Online Africa Policy Forum*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 4, 2007.