

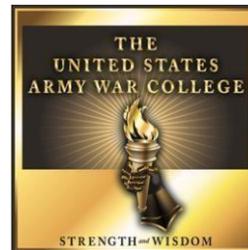
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Combatting the Political-Military Rebellion in Chad (2005-2010)

by

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Abstract

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Combatting the Political-Military Rebellion in Chad (2005-2010)

Power comes out of the barrel of a gun.

—Mao Zedong¹

All the regimes that have ruled post-independent Chad have faced some kind of political-military rebellion. The root causes of these violent uprisings are always the same: weak state institutions, lack of national unity, patrimonialism, social injustice, and political manipulations that have resulted in ethnic, regional or religious divides. All but one of these regimes have been overthrown due to the political instability triggered by this violence. Why and how has President Idriss Deby's regime, in power since 1990, been successful in its fight against the various rebel groups that sought to overthrow it between 2005 and 2010? These questions are the thread of this paper in its attempt to make intelligible the conflict-ridden Chadian political system and the subsequent insurgency it unleashed during this period of time.

President Deby's long reign has been contested by many political actors who deem it undemocratic and heavily centered on his own Zaghawa tribe. Thus, as early as 1992 the Movement for Democracy and Development (MDD)'s rebellion, which was composed of the followers of Hissene Habre – President Deby's predecessor in power – threatened to topple the regime but failed due to French and Nigerian assistance to the government. Several years later, on April 6, 2006, the Front Uni pour le Changement (FUC)'s rebellion led by Captain Mahamat Nour Abdelkerim reached the outskirts of N'Djamena, the capital city, before being driven out by the governmental forces. Subsequently, in 2008, different groups including the FUC, the Union des Forces pour la Democratie and le Developpement (UFDD), and the Rassemblement des Forces Democratiques (RFD) joined hands in their attempt to overthrow the regime. Between

February 2 and 4, 2008, they laid siege to N'Djamena, but eventually failed to seize power due to internecine disputes and French and Libyan military assistance to the government.

This paper will focus primarily on the last rebellion that took place in Chad between 2005 and 2010. The main rebel groups were the UFDD, the RFD, the UDFDD-F (Fundamental) and other smaller groups. Though comprising many different groups, the rebellion or insurgency (these terms will be used interchangeably throughout the paper) is treated as one group for many reasons. First, the different groups' motivation was the same: political or ethnic grievances. Second, their modus operandi was identical: they waged and lost a conventional war. Third, there is a unity of time and space in terms of the rebel groups' struggle and subsequent demise. Fourth, they were all supported and funded by the Sudanese government and led by Deby's former subordinates or relatives. For instance, UFDD's president, General Mahamat Nouri, was an ex-Secretary of Defense; and Timan Erdimi, RFD's leader, is Deby's nephew and ex-Chief of Staff. Many of their troops (officers, NCOs and privates alike) were government defectors.

The government's efforts to stem the insurgency shed light on the dysfunctional nature of the state institutions and denote a concentration of power within the hands of the President on whose whims the nation's future rests. Hence, decision-making in policy and strategy is informal. Moreover, the lack of a clear strategic formulation and execution process integrating all elements of national power at all levels explains the government's inability to contain and defeat the rebellion at its inception or during the earliest stages of its formation. However, as the rebellion unfolds the regime's

management of it evolves for the better due to the overhaul of the military, diplomatic success, and economic wealth. Lastly, the rebels' own inability to use guerrilla tactics and focus on their primary center of gravity, coupled with their disunity of effort and lack of strong leadership, have helped the government to carry the day for the time being. Yet the peace remains to be won because the lack of a proper conflict termination process impedes national reconciliation and the social reintegration of the ex-rebels. Further, though the rebel leaders' political ambitions and Deby's desire to stay in power are the proximate causes of the last rebellion in Chad, the root causes of political instability run deep into the country's collective conscience and may break up its national unity at any moment.

Attempting to Decipher the Chadian Conundrum

To make sense of Chad's checkered past and uncertain path to the future as a viable nation-state, it is important to take account of the perceived deep-seated unruliness of some its tribes, its patrimonial political system, the ethnic and religious divide as well as the congenital instability of the state to fulfill its citizens' basic needs. This explosive combination led many Chadians to seek political change through interminable insurgencies, creating thus an unending vicious circle.

Inborn Insubordination?

It is hard to understand modern Chad without understanding why violence features heavily in its politics. One of the main reasons is that patrimonialism constitutes the heart of its political system. Although patrimonialism is pervasive all over Africa, there are local underlying factors, such as a poorly-educated political class, warlord culture, ethnic and religious divides, and strong tribal allegiance, that make it extremely inflammable in Chad. Tribal loyalty hinders allegiance to the central state and thus

supersedes citizenship. Many northern tribes are notably rebellious; their cast of mind repudiates submission to any external authority. Since time immemorial they roam freely about the Sahara and the Sahel, and their strict code of honor equates any sort of external allegiance with slavery. Consequently, they have striven hard so as not to yield to any political constraints other than the ones imposed upon them by their own age-old traditions.

Therefore, how to appeal to their unruly mindset has been the most important challenge that faced the colonialists and the Chadian state alike. Mostly herdsmen by trade and erstwhile slave dealers by opportunity, these northern tribesmen are heirs to a civilization that even Islam has not profoundly transmuted; masters of the desert, they have always behaved as the masters of their own destinies. They seem to carry the seeds of rebellion ingrained in them. Across northern Chad, some of these “constantly split up [tribes] created a kind of territorial mosaic characterized not only by an apparent incapacity to form a state but also by an extraordinary capacity of resistance to all central domination.”² Hence, notwithstanding the colonialists’ attempt to govern their space, they failed to subdue them; the Chadians remained faithful only to the authority of their own kinship. Modern Chad has inherited this deep-rooted cultural insubordination. The outbreak of rebellion in 1966 found them ready to reverse the course of history whose unfairness they blamed on the colonialists and their French-educated heirs – Chadian Southerners - who took over the state at independence.

Power as Private Property

Since patrimonialism equates state power with private property, Chadian rulers cling to power. In such a system it is “the ruler’s personal interests that called the shots inasmuch as formal bureaucratic procedures would rarely stand in the way of the

wishes of the president and senior political elites.”³ More than half a century of statehood has taught Chadian politicians that power is not to be willingly transmitted or shared. This peculiar sentiment feeds to this day the way politics is done in most African countries. Therefore, political engagement is less motivated by patriotism than by greed and the urge to serve loyalties other than citizenship. This idea has been ingrained in Chadian minds by the multiple rebellions and explains why a regime change has never occurred but through a military coup.

The relatively democratic system inherited from the French was rapidly transformed into a dictatorship with a one-party system warranting power for life to President Francois Tombalbaye. As elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, a patrimonial system took over the Western-style of power according to which power belongs to the people who elect their representatives to the highest posts in the land. More in keeping with African traditions, the patrimonial conception of power holds that the rulers’ omnipotence should not be challenged in any way. Therefore, power must rest indefinitely within their hands. It becomes the President’s personal property, allowing him to run the country’s interests as best he sees fit. Such rulers appoint to official positions whom they please and remove them from office according to their own whims. Parliaments are mostly echo chambers and constitutions are customizable. Therefore, patrimonial power is tantamount to power without restraint or control of any kind. It is what the French scholar Jean-Francois Bayard has called the “Politics of the Belly”⁴ and which pervades African public life to this day.

The Religious Equation

The Chadian civil war has been dubbed a religious war by many. Actually, religion has been used for political purposes in order to rally followers and field the

militias. At a time when the state had totally collapsed, people depended on the warlords for their security and supported them willy-nilly, but religious intolerance was not the primal source of conflict. Therefore, owing to political manipulations, religious violence did occur; however, it never reached the scale of a religious cleansing. Instead, it was employed as a means to seize and/or keep power.

Chadians practice Islam, Christianity, and paganism. Muslims mostly populate the northern part of the country and Christians and pagans the southern part. Due to migration and conversions, all these faiths are now found everywhere in the country. The Islamization of northern Chad began well before the arrival of the colonialists at the onset of the twentieth century.⁵ Thus, apart from the central province of Guera, the rest of the North was terra incognita to Christianity until the end of the colonization. Like elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, Chadian Islam and Christianity are very tolerant. Most of the time Christianization was introduced through colonization, while according to a popular epic Islam may have begun to spread from the 11th century onwards.⁶ Despite unavoidable misunderstandings arising from the conflation between Christianity as faith and southerners acting as power brokers, it is not evidenced that the last Chadian insurgency (or any other) was motivated by religious fanaticism. In fact, even the 1966 uprising in Mangalme (central Chad) “was due partly to discontent of a local nature and partly to more general grievances which many people from the northern prefectures shared – grievances against southern civil servants, many of whom despised the local populations and their Muslim culture, and others of whom were dishonest and greedy.”⁷ As aforementioned, religion would be used later to fuel political demagoguery. Even today the notion that North means Muslim and South means Christian is in the minds of

some Chadians. Nonetheless, Chadians seem to have understood now that religion, whatever its importance in one's personal life, should remain a private matter and be treated as separate from public life. Though the fallouts of the political manipulations to which they fell prey would take some time to die down, divisions along religious lines are waning in Chad. As with patrimonialism, religion did thus also play a role in the Chadian drama, but the primary factor seems to be the congenital weakness of the Chadian state.

Failure of the State

If the modern state's rationale is to blend people of various cultures and backgrounds and knit them into a harmonious society through the provision of security and other services, the Chadian state has failed in many ways. First of all, by grafting the concept of nation-state onto a multitude of societies whose conceptions of power were utterly divergent, the colonialists may well have inadvertently opened a Pandora box. Thenceforth, the state's plight has been to find the right way to form a coherent polity out of people who have never conceived themselves as one nation. The French colonizers purposefully failed to do so. They were known for having arbitrarily divided their Chadian colony between a northern part deemed as worthless and a southern part called fertile Chad.⁸ As mentioned earlier, this geographic divide corresponded at that time with the religious divide of the country – Muslims in the North and Christians and pagans in the South. Second, colonization did not provide proper education, especially in the North. As Alex de Waal argues, "All these Muslim groups were neglected by the colonial authorities: few gained an education and their lands were poor and underdeveloped even by the standards of the desert-edge."⁹ At independence power was naturally transmitted to the better-educated southern elite. Third, as President

Tombalbaye took over the colonial power, he advocated an authoritarian rule and an “avowedly ‘Africanist’ ideology that further alienated the northerners, who rebelled, starting what was to become Africa’s longest war and creating its first ‘failed state.’”¹⁰ Tombalbaye’s repressive legacy permeates Chadian politics to this day.¹¹ Since independence, all regime changes were orchestrated only through a violent overthrow of preceding regimes. As described by Patrick Berg, each new Chadian president takes over and

...concentrates government power in his own hands and members of his own ethnic group while paying no heed whatsoever to notions like separation of powers. The exploitation of state resources for private purposes goes hand in hand with the neglect of public services. Criticism of the regime is brushed aside or suppressed, and in lieu of any democratic or other legal channels, the opposition ultimately turns into an armed resistance, for its part also organized along ethnic lines. The regime takes repressive measures, leading to the further erosion of its backing among the population and a continuously escalating vicious cycle of resistance and repression.¹²

To resist Tombalbaye’s autocracy, the first political-military organization – the Front for the Liberation of Chad, known under its French acronym of FROLINAT – was founded in 1966 at Nyala, Sudan. Despite the cover of a Marxist ideology, its leaders would divide themselves along ethnic and regional lines.¹³ FROLINAT’s grievances were not religious but political, such as underrepresentation of northerners in governmental institutions, corruption, favoritism, etc. The rebel group railed against the many shortcomings of the new government and its tribalization of power. During the mid-1960s, the regime had become more autocratic and committed massive repressions in the North where the rebellion was making inroads, thus disrupting the government’s control of entire provinces. This incessant unrest led to the 1975 military coup that resulted in the assassination of Francois Tombalbaye. He was succeeded by

a junta regime also dominated by southerners and led by the previously jailed general Felix Malloum. However, the coup did not solve the conflict with FROLINAT. In fact, notwithstanding Malloum's will to make peace, he could not prevent the intransigence of his rival and Prime Minister, Hissene Habre, to derail the transition government, bring forth the collapse of the state, and provoke the outbreak of civil war on February 2, 1979.¹⁴

From then up to now, the fledgling state has been almost constantly afire with civil war. Between 1979 and 1982 Chad's demise was brought about by the failure of the multiple warring factions to "successfully uphold the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order"¹⁵ over a sizeable portion of the national territory. Even today, the French political elite caricatures Chad as a state defined by its neighboring countries' borders. There is a kernel of truth to this assertion, but historically this is also true of many other African states.

The lack of viable institutions in Chad has been compensated by the emergence of warlords, which in turn has given way to an autocratic patrimonialism. As Patrick Berg has argued,

Each regime is characterized by a concentration of power in the person of the president and a small, usually ethnically homogenous leadership clique which seeks to defend its privilege by any and all means. The result: not only does the country lack any nationally oriented social and economic policy – it is also ruled by a repressive state apparatus which crushes any form of opposition.¹⁶

Although state instability has played a major role in Chad's troubled past, this situation has been compounded by the manipulation of ethnicity by politicians.

Ethnicity

If ethnic diversity does not necessarily account for political violence, it does play a disrupting role on the socio-political arena when it is manipulated for political gains. Chad is a multiethnic country; more than two hundred ethnic groups coexist within its 495,755 square miles area. Some ethnic groups are composed of several thousand members while the smallest ones comprise only a few thousand or less. If an ethnic divide should motivate electors' votes, an endless mess would ensue from any electoral contest. Such a system would yield disheartening outcomes for the minorities who could hardly gain any seats in the Parliament, let alone in the presidential contest. If there is no ideology rallying people of all heritages toward the candidates, if behind every candidate is seen the will of one ethnic group to dominate the other groups, how would such a system function without bringing forth violence? Democracy's rule of thumb being majority rule, minorities would never hold enough political power in the polity to enable them to fulfill their aspirations. How then would the system work unless it is open and flexible enough to let people of all backgrounds have a secured access to the political arena and have their say in the management of their lives and of the country at large? It is a fact that ethnic vote is pervasive in Africa. As Stephen Nathanson has argued, "In countries with weak central governments and civil strife, people seeking peace and stability often lament the fact that no sense of national unity exists and that people are willing to kill on behalf of their sect, clan, or tribe. ...Patriotism is weak and other loyalties are strong enough to motivate violent acts and insurgent warfare."¹⁷ Unless the progress of education brings people to put their citizenship above ethnic loyalties and their ideas and interests above kinship, the advent of true democracy, meaning a democracy without violence, will remain a pipe dream for a long time to

come. In Chad this is even more so because, as Ketil F. Hansen has contended, “The fluidity of loyalties, blurred boundaries and the changing values of elite members at the patrimonial marketplace in Chad are central to the understanding of politics in Chad.”¹⁸ And democracy is worthless as long as patriotism is not strong enough to supersede other loyalties.

Dangerous Combination

Ignorance, political manipulations, colonial neglect, ethnic, religious and regional divides, and a weak state are the ingredients of the explosive combination that has plagued the country for the better part of its post-independence era. The state whose purpose was to uphold the nation fell itself victim to these demons. Autocratic rule, rule of the gun, and patrimonial power set the fire to a stillborn country. So the writing was on the wall right at the outset. The early African leaders did not build their countries upon solid institutions, they built them on ego. In some countries this is still true. Consequently, when strong men fall, the country also falls apart. In Africa the self-styled nation-builders are thus most of the time the root cause of state failing because they have failed “to find and insist upon means of living together by strategies less primitive and destructive than rival kinship networks, whether of ‘ethnic’ clientelism or its camouflage in no less clientelist ‘multiparty systems’.”¹⁹

Rebellion as Last Resort?

Insurgencies are not a new phenomenon; they are actually part and parcel of human history.²⁰ Certain political practices and the nature of control they generate end up invariably in insurgencies because “in most cases, there was no alternative to the dissolution of political links other than through violence, especially because that dissolution entailed the renunciation of obedience in pursuit of a different identity for

legitimacy.”²¹ Whatever their root causes, insurgencies are a major concern when they take place in inchoate states like the newly independent African states. In 1966 Chad was just a nascent state when a popular uprising over the raising of taxes spread throughout the country. Since then this contest over legitimacy and legality has never ended. An uncountable number of Chadians have lost their lives and the state’s foundations are still shaky. To restore its disputed legitimacy, the patrimonial state often resorts to violence. Unfortunately, the use of force to cow people into submission feeds a vicious circle. That is why, more than 60 years after its independence, Chad is still on the brink of falling apart. Though the 2005-2010 insurgency has failed to restore the broken political contract between Chadians and their state, there is almost no doubt others will break out in the future because, unless a sudden political maturity dawns on this desolate land, the question of political legitimacy will remain unsolved. So are the grievances that provoked these insurgencies in the first place. As Thucydides argued, the famous trio of honor, fear, and interest accounts for the outbreak of rebellions in Africa.²²

Why the Chadian Insurgencies Failed

A careful study of the last Chadian insurgency reveals that its defeat may be due as much to its own shortcomings as to the national armed forces’ strategical ability. Actually, the insurgents lacked effective leadership, strategic vision, discipline, unity of effort, and adequate military equipment and training. The rebel leaders consistently showed a real want of leadership qualities necessary to act as effective political and military leaders. At the same time, the insurgency was gangrened by the same defects afflicting the government as a whole: ethnic divisions, factionalism, and inability to lead large organizations. Moreover, it waged a conventional warfare to its own detriment.

Lastly, its lack of unity of action and its logistical errors on the battleground only compounded its quest for legitimacy while waging a war deemed by many a proxy war on behalf of the Sudan.

Lack of Strategic Vision

Many of the Chadian rebel leaders had held high positions in the present regime. While the motives behind their personal decision to join the rebellion may slightly differ, all of them nursed basically the same grievances and had set themselves the objective to topple the government. So the overall political objective was clear. But the ways chosen, that is, waging an insurgency through conventional tactics, were not aligned with their means and objective. First of all, as previous collaborators of the president, the rebel leaders did not have the moral probity to implement this strategic objective. In what way was their purported vision for the country different from the President's? In truth, many of them (especially the two paramount leaders, Mahamat Nouri and Timan Erdimi) should have been held accountable to the Chadian people for their own deeds while in government. If they failed to change the regime from within, could they really change it if they succeeded in overthrowing it through violence? Many people had the feeling that the rebellion was motivated by personal grievances rather than patriotism or a sound political agenda.

Second, all the rebel chiefs showed a lack of strategic leadership. Strategy is the art of calibrating one's efforts and methods to one's objectives. In other words, strategic leaders should thoroughly ponder the goals they pursue and carefully assess their capabilities and procedures to attain them. The Chadian rebels thought they could achieve quick success over the government. Some of them wanted absolute victory. Eventually, such an end state was out of their reach, even if their courage on the

battleground was remarkable, because in military matters victory is problematic; it is not how much ground you gain or what amount of damage you inflict to the enemy. “In winning a war...what matters most is the ultimate perception of the situation, not the facts.”²³ The Chadian rebels achieved many military feats, yet almost a decade after the end of the conflict the regime is still in place while they have been disbanded. Owing to miscalculations, the rebel leaders did not capitalize on their military achievements at the right moment. They forgot Clausewitz, if they ever read him: War is just another way to achieve political goals.²⁴

Third, the insurgents also showed a lack of organizational discipline: divisions along regional or ethnic lines within their units precluded an efficient management of resources and personnel, hindered the unity of effort required to win, and withered their willpower to fight. This lack of unity resulted in internecine disputes that led to the creation of multiple splinter groups. For instance, the division within the UFDD generated the UFDD-F, mostly dominated by Arabs; subsequently, the UFDD and the UFDD-F, as well as other small groups, were forced to merge into one movement called the Alliance Nationale pour la Democratie (AND) by the Sudanese government. The AND would also soon splinter into many different groups, especially after the policy of rapprochement with Chad was put forth by the Sudan in late 2009. These shifting rebel alliances and the leadership changes they entailed precluded the rebellion from effectively functioning as an efficient organization and generating unity of effort to wage the war against the government.

Fourth, want of motivation among the combatants, especially among the rank-and-files, was noticeable. To rejoin the rebellion, most of them were motivated by pride,

the prospect of material gains, the desire to redress political unfairness, or some other personal motive. Many were former governmental soldiers who either were taken prisoner or chose to defect to the enemy for one reason or another. In other words, most of them were not diehard rebels. Therefore, to make an army out of these combatants without proper motivation was hard. The leaders failed to provide an effective and broadly-shared motive. As Ketil F. Hansen has argued,

Their only common goal was to oust president Deby. The various movements' troops were predominantly young drifters with shifting allegiance and the goal to make a living and improve their social status. Thus, anyone who offered them such opportunities had a good chance of obtaining their support.²⁵

The Chadian rebels were thus devoid of strategic leadership skills and their troops were mostly a rabble of disgruntled youths. Moreover, their strategic communication was also deficient; no organization can be successful without an effective communication strategy, which in this case would have boosted the combatants' morale. The organizational behavior and outcome would have been more effective on the battleground and towards other stakeholders like the local population, the Sudanese government or the international community. The rebels contented themselves with pompous slogans that were not credible enough to convince as to the desirability of their overall objective and its feasibility. Hence for the entire duration of their struggle, the rebel leaders had to fight on two fronts: against the government on the battlefield and against their own combatants in their ranks due to a want of appropriate motivation and communication.

Another critical actor the rebels failed to seduce was the local population, which was their center of gravity. Communication with the Chadian population was not easy despite the advent of cellular and satellite phones. Difficulties related to physical

distance and potential tapping compounded the unsophistication of their overall strategic communication. But what ruined their image were the lootings and other violence exerted against the population. They thus squandered all moral ground to claim the population's precious support. This problem was compounded by the rebel's relationship with the last and perhaps most important actor, their host government, which was also inarguably the rebels' second center of gravity.

A Proxy War

To be perceived as Sudanese surrogates was a double-edged sword for the insurgents: without the support of the Sudanese, the rebels did not stand a chance to win the fight; at the same time, to be perceived as Sudanese "mercenaries" as they were caricatured by the government took a lot of wind out of their sails. For an insurgent movement vying for legitimacy with the government, such characterization was a serious stain. Actually, the international community construed the Sudanese support as an attempt to export the Darfur conflict to Chad. In reality, from 2005 to 2010 each government was supporting the other's rebels through the provision of material support.²⁶ At that time the Sudan was facing a serious charge of crimes against humanity or even genocide in the Darfur crisis. This strong dependence upon the Sudanese regime was therefore also a burden for the rebels inasmuch as it precluded any support from the international community, especially from France without whose support almost no insurgency ever succeeded in Chad.

The Sudanese government's constant interferences in the inner workings of the rebellion had a massive negative effect in terms of leadership effectiveness, organizational behavior, and strategic communication, and blurred the rebels' overall strategic objective. Typically, every few months changes in leadership occurred,

provoking an instant change in organizational structure as well as operational and tactical dispositions on the ground. Due to the resulting disgruntlement defections ensued, splinter groups emerged, and the subsequent functional disorganization ruined years of efforts. To understand the complexity of the constant structural dysfunction of the rebellion, it has to be borne in mind that for the Sudanese government the insurgency represented only a mere tool at its disposal to hassle the Chadian authorities.

A Want of Legitimacy

By accepting Sudanese support, the rebels had thus put themselves in a difficult situation: on the one hand they are deemed by the Chadian regime to be the Sudanese Government's mercenaries, and on the other hand their quest for legitimacy was compromised by their lack of interest towards their real center of gravity. Actually the two things were not mutually exclusive; the Sudanese government did not prevent the rebels from focusing on their center of gravity. It was the rebels themselves who lacked the acumen necessary to correctly assess their strategy. It may be argued that they had no choice but to accept Sudanese aid even if it entailed negative consequences; they needed equipment, training, logistics, and finance, without all of which they could not wage the war at all. At the same time, if being perceived as mercenaries by the external world was pretty damaging to their credibility and precluded international support, their Chadian supporters did not mind their being affiliated to the Sudanese government because it was obvious to them that no rebellion could succeed in Chad without any external assistance of some sort. Their recent history had edified them on the matter. Had it not been for French, Libyan, and Sudanese strong support to its cause, the current regime itself could not have overthrown Habre's regime. So the issue of the

Sudanese support was understandable to their base. However, the aforementioned overall lack of leadership became evident when the rebel troops began to commit atrocities against the Chadian populace, such as pillage, rape, or abductions. In a way, the rebels shot themselves in the foot when such ill-behavior spread.

The Rebels' Operational Flaws: Why a Conventional War?

The recent rebel groups that sought to overthrow the Chadian government obviously did not apply guerilla warfare tactics. Whatever the name they used to define themselves, they were waging a conventional warfare, not an asymmetrical one. As Dennis M. Drew and Donald M. Snow have defined it,

Asymmetrical warfare is the opposite of symmetrical warfare. In this kind of combat, one side fights conventionally while the other side organizes itself differently, may or may not share the same objectives as its opponent, may or may not represent a government or a movement aspiring to become a government, and rejects the conventions or laws of warfare propounded by the conventional side. Asymmetrical warfare is as old as armed conflict itself, and it is a methodology adopted when one side cannot possibly prevail while adhering to the accepted standards of warfare of the time and thus seeks to change the rules to give it a chance. The conventional (symmetrical) side will always view deviation from the rules as treacherous and illegal or immoral (or both) and will decry the deviation. From the vantage point of the asymmetrical warrior, it is the only way possible to avoid defeat.²⁷

Although these authors argue that asymmetrical warfare is not a strategy as such but an approach to wage a war while at a disadvantage, they also assert that once this option has been made a strategy should be adopted to align ends, ways, and means.²⁸ Curiously, the Chadian rebels probably lost the fight because they almost completely ignored guerilla warfare tactics. Having failed to correctly assess their adversary's strengths and weaknesses as well as the strategic environment as a whole, they fought a conventional war manifestly out of sync with their military capabilities. That was a serious mistake because it is inarguable that knowing against whom forces would be

used is absolutely critical in strategy. “To know the enemy is to know the nature of the threat. If strategists know the enemy, they will understand how the enemy is armed and with how much, in what manner the enemy might use his forces, and ultimately, what is required to counter the threat.”²⁹ Though many of the combatants of the three major groups (FUC, UFDD, RFD) were ex-government soldiers, they were not capable of assessing the government’s military weaknesses and strengths, not least because the Chadian armed forces had acquired a lot of new equipment since they left. It became obvious to the insurgents, especially after 2009, that they were no match to the government troops. From that year on, they stood no chance and were routed by superior governmental firepower.

Moreover, the unconventionality of their struggle should have taught the rebels the virtue of forbearance, which is a strategic asset if properly handled. Their lack thereof going into the February 2008 attack against N’Djamena was ominous. They wanted to seize power as soon as possible instead of preparing themselves to fight at their own advantage. They fought the way the regime wanted them to fight. At that game defeat was unavoidable because, though the governmental forces were also disorganized and deprived of strategic acumen, they were known for their efficacy in expeditionary warfare. Moreover, unsurprisingly they possessed a much stronger fire power. Even by Chadian metrics, there was no way for an insurgency to succeed while waging a conventional war against an enemy that was obviously superior in terms of weaponry, logistics, and motivation, let alone the newly acquired air power. Instead of crafting an effective strategy based on clear political objectives, popular support, guerilla warfare, intelligence gathering, and forbearance, they fought and lost a conventional

war whose political goals were too ambitious, thus too risky in view of their means. The insurgent strategists should have correctly assessed their adversary's strengths and weaknesses and their own, as well as the whole strategic environment, and aligned their objectives, ways, and means. They should have transformed their weaknesses into strengths and used time more competently.

Lack of Unity of Action

As mentioned before, the rebel groups were loosely organized, mainly along ethnic lines, and devoid of a coherent strategic vision that could have helped them achieve their objectives. As Jerome Tubiana has argued, "The Chadian rebels' failure to create an integrated force going into the February 2008 attack also contributed to their failure."³⁰ The three main groups that launched the blitzkrieg-style offensive were the UFDD led by Mahamat Nouri, a Goran; the RFC led by Timan Erdimi, a Zaghawa; and the UFDD-F led by Abdul Wahid Aboud Makaye, an Arab. With a total force of 3,000 combatants, the rebels departed from the Sudanese borders on January 28 and arrived in N'Djamena on February 2, 2008. They made speedy progress through the town and were on the verge of capturing it, having conquered the whole city save the presidential palace, when divergences between them began to emerge relating to the issue of power sharing. When the paramount leader, Mahamat Nouri, rejected the other leaders' proposals, the troops under the latter's control refused to fight.³¹ This misunderstanding between rebel groups had an unforeseen consequence that decided the fate of the battle as well as that of the war in general. While the French had reportedly decided not to take a side if the rebels were able to unite, this quarrel "helped [them] decide whom they would support... They eventually swung behind the government, concluding that if the rebels were unable to fight together for a greater cause, they would not be able to

govern effectively.”³² Thereafter, French troops intervened to defend the presidential palace and provided Chadian forces with Libyan ammunition.³³

The Rebels’ Logistical Failure

One last point underlining the rebel groups’ shortcoming in strategy was their logistical incompetence. While the blitzkrieg in itself might be deemed a brilliant operational insight, it made clear that the rebels lacked logistical acumen. Competent military commanders would not have taken such incalculable risk by overstretching their lines of communication over one thousand miles without any certainty of supply. Yet the rebels took that risk. And had it not been for their decisive victory over the government force at Massaguet, 60 miles to the northeast of N’Djamena, they could have run out of supply earlier. Actually, despite Massaguet, they did run out of ammunition in the middle of the fight in N’Djamena.

Did the Government Really Win?

It is arguable whether the last Chadian civil conflict has yielded a clear victor. For one thing, though the regime has claimed victory, it is at best an incomplete triumph because most of the fiercest rebel leaders and countless of their combatants – wherever they are today- are still mad with grievances and eager to resume the old conflict. Moreover, strategically speaking, can the government be said to have achieved its end state, which is the restoration of peace and security over the entire territory? The system in place still bears the seeds of violence, and the prospect of a peaceful and democratic political process promised by President Deby a quarter of a century ago is still a figment of the imagination. If strategy is the harmonious alignment of ends, ways, and means, the risk of failure seems still great in the long run.

Unwritten Strategy

A formal formulation of Chad's military, national, or grand strategy is to be found nowhere. No document whatsoever, classified or unclassified, exists relating to this important matter of policy. So this attempt at providing a hint in this domain is derived from official practices and constant national behavior rather than from a formal document. To find Chad's strategic vision of itself and of the world, one must refer to its Constitution whose preamble depicts the country as committed to the pursuit of peace, freedom, national independence and unity, territorial integrity, regional integration, and a pacifistic coexistence within the international community. As in many other African countries strategy is less conceptualized than empirically enacted. Whether a country is at war or not it nonetheless needs to craft a military strategy to defend its national interests and ensure its survival. As Richard Hooker argues,

Strategy matters. In the domain of armed conflict... the price of failure can be high. The extreme for failed strategy can be the fall of governments, loss of territory, even the destruction of the state itself. But lesser penalties are exacted as well in the loss of power or influence, in economic collapse or distress, in less capable or credible political and military institutions, and in a failure of national confidence and will. Strategists must bear in mind that in taking the state to war, victory becomes an end in itself. Even apart from the aims of the war, defeat can shatter or debilitate the state for years to come, possibly leading to permanent and irrevocable decline. Put another way, avoiding defeat can become the overarching aim – independent of the original strategic objective.³⁴

Informal Decision-Making Process

Because strategy is so critical, a country needs a systematic decision-making process to maximize the defense of its national interests on the battlefield or elsewhere. In the case of Chad, such a process does not exist; rather, decision-making is informal and situated at the level of the commander-in-chief. This intrudes on the strategic planning process at the military level. Chad being a power distant state, its decision-

making process is exclusively top-down. The President, who is also a former five-star general, is the ultimate decision-maker. The most important strategic decisions are deliberated within his inner circle comprising mainly war-tested clansmen, generals in their own rights who have garnered their strategic skills on the battlefield rather than in war colleges. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is involved at a lesser level, when the decision to go to war has already been taken. The Parliament's role in the process is to validate the presidential decisions. Normally,

The laborious study, assessment, and analysis that goes into a detailed plan provides context, understanding, and much useful preparatory work, particularly in the logistical and administrative preparations needed to move large forces to remote locations and keep them there. Good planning provides a foundation from which to "flex" according to the situation at hand.³⁵

In the case at hand, decisions are made, not discussed or assessed. The downside of such a process is heavy casualties. Even if a deliberate planning process existed, its implementation on the battleground would have been problematic because most of the time the commanders could not execute the plans by the book. Hence, if sometimes effective, the conduct of operations is basically a "gut" matter rather than based on strategic, operational, or tactical knowledge. Despite this somewhat ineffectual decision-making process, the Chadian armed forces demonstrated a relative efficacy on the battlefield since the rebels themselves did not have a better decision-making process.

A Very Unequal Dialog

The President and Commander-in-chief of the armed forces is also the Secretary of Defense. This concentration of power allows him to make the most important strategic, operational, and, sometimes, tactical decisions. No bureaucratic procedures

get in his way, and he can rapidly mobilize the adequate financial and logistical means. He conducts operations on the ground or monitors them closely through the planning center of the presidency. There is no “natural division of labor”³⁶ between the Commander-in-chief and the military commanders. These unorthodox civil-military relations are not always effective. The Commander-in-chief’s presence on the battlefield may be a strong incentive to fight, but may also impede the theater commander’s initiative in the conduct of operations. It is risky but unavoidable in a political system inherited from guerilla warfare in which the head of the state is at the same time the theater commander. It certainly denotes a lack of confidence in the military leadership.

The Chadian Rising Firepower

Despite the inexistence of formal strategy and the lack of a rationalized decision-making process, the Chadian government was able to overcome its operational inertia through superior firepower. Its war chest full with oil money, Chad needed to tailor its military instrument to the necessities of a more efficient war strategy against the rebels. After the near defeat of N’Djamena in 2008, the government had but no choice to spend large sums to purchase military equipment from France and Ukraine.³⁷ According to Ketil F. Hansen, “The annual military budget in constant dollars grew more than eightfold from the beginning of the century to 2008.”³⁸ In 2008 alone, US\$611 million were spent, reaching a whopping 7.1% of GDP.³⁹ The biggest African purchaser of French military equipment, Chad also bought many aircraft, tanks, and rifles from Ukraine, becoming thus “much better equipped to combat rebel attacks than it was in February 2008.”⁴⁰

Diplomacy

To the extent that Chadian diplomacy was successful in its dealing with the rebellion, it was largely due to the fact that unconditional international support to Chad brought the Sudan to the table of negotiations after a series of failed peace agreements between the two countries. Another critical dimension to Chad's success was France's unwavering support to the Chadian regime.

International Support to Chad's Narrative

The Chadian government deployed very effective diplomatic efforts during the five years of internecine conflict (2005-2010). Along with the economy and the military, diplomacy was one of the main drivers of Chadian politics. Owing to the open Sudanese support to the rebels, the President "skillfully played on Sudan's pariah status to secure international support. He depicted the rebels as 'mercenaries,' with an agenda to Arabize and Islamize Chad. The international community, receptive to his hyperbole, preferred to focus on Darfur rather than on Chad's internal conflict."⁴¹ According to Jerome Tubiana, this incorrect international assessment of the problem, while useful to Chad and France, did not help stem the risks of conflict in either Sudan, Chad, or the Central African Republic because Chad's problems were not a simple spillover of the Sudanese conflict.⁴² The selling of the Chadian narrative of the conflict to the international community was the first success of Chadian diplomacy.

The Long March towards Chad-Sudan Rapprochement

The second success was direct diplomacy. After failing to implement many agreements signed between the Sudan and Chad under the auspices of the international community (the February 2006 agreement in Tripoli; the August 2006 agreement in Khartoum; the February 2007 declaration in Cannes, France; the March

2007 talks in Tehran, Iran; the May 2007 agreement in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; the March 2008 agreement in Dakar, Senegal; and the May 2009 agreement in Doha, Qatar), the N'Djamena Accord was finally signed in the Chadian capital city on January 15, 2010.⁴³ This final agreement normalized the diplomatic relationship between the two countries and created the Chad-Sudan joint border taskforce. This agreement was to become the last nail in the rebellion's coffin.

This new peace agreement began to bear its fruits when the two governments agreed to expel their respective rebel leaders on July 2010. This accord stipulated that all rebels should be disarmed and given the option to return to their respective country or remain where they were as civilians. As for the rebel leaders, they should be expelled to a country of their choice. The two principal Chadian rebel leaders – Mahamat Nouri and Timan Erdimi – were deported to Qatar. As Tubiana has asserted, upon the weakening of their leadership, the rebel groups further disaggregated and tried to negotiate their repatriation “in increasingly personalized ways.”⁴⁴

The French Factor

As explained before, without French intervention the regime could have lost the N'Djamena battle in February 2008. As elsewhere in the ex-French Africa, Chad's politics remains under heavy French influence. An agreement of military cooperation, signed in 1976 and amended in the 1990s, ties the two countries, stipulating mainly that France would protect the sovereignty of Chad in case of an aggression from a foreign country.⁴⁵ Although the agreement does not stipulate that France should intervene in Chadian internal conflict as it did in 1990, 2008, and before, it seems that its shadowy contours allow France to act at will. However, this pervasive influence is a double-edged sword for France itself: if it allows the French government to have its say – or the last

word as contend some critics – on important policy issues in these colonies and aggrandize French diplomacy around the world, it might also entail unpopular military involvement in some of these weak states.

France's relationship with Chad has been one of the most tumultuous; it has been marked by many military interventions that further muddied the waters. Franco-Chadian relations turned utterly sour during the first years of Chad's independence, when Tombalbaye expelled all French citizens. These tensions eased only with Tombalbaye's assassination during the 1975 military coup. Relations then stabilized until the end of the military regime in 1979 when the civil war began. Since the early 1980s France has maintained a permanent military base in Chad. It is a common view in Chad that no regime change can occur without French approval.

Economy: The Oil Factor

The importance of economics, the 'E' of the DIME elements of power, grew after 2003 when Chad became an oil exporting country. After an epic standoff with France through its national oil company – Elf – the Chadian government finally found an agreement with a consortium of three major oil companies led by the American Exxon Corporation. The rebels knew that more money for the government meant more weapons, well-equipped armed forces, and a regime hell-bent on crushing them at all costs. Therefore, the time factor became critical. The urgency of an overthrow of the government became paramount for the rebels and their Sudanese masters, although the level of urgency was not the same for the Sudan as it was for the rebels. For the latter it was now a matter of life and death, whereas for the Sudanese government it was more about containing its own Darfuri rebels and obtaining the withdrawal of Chad's support to them. Entangled in the Darfur crisis, Al Bashir's regime was under a

huge international pressure; almost a pariah to the Western powers, Al Bashir knew better than to create more annoyance for himself. In the middle of this trauma, the Chadian rebels would only buy him some time, but the survival of his regime was not so much at stake.

Conversely, for the Chadian regime survival was at stake. Incapable of finding a political settlement to the Darfur rebellion with the Sudan, the Chadian President was under intense internal and external pressure to put this issue at rest. Part of his inner circle was leveling pressure at him so that he might aid more efficiently their Darfuri tribesmen facing Al Bashir's fire. At the same time, friendly countries were urging him to end his support to the Darfuri rebels and sign a peace agreement with the Sudan. The Chadian rebels were trying to make the better of the whole situation. For them also the countdown was ticking: if they really wanted to overthrow the regime, it would be better before the regime's war chest was full. As stated by Stephen Reyna, this money was needed "to wage the regime's wars against its opponents."⁴⁶ For this purpose, "competition for power between the rebel groups and Deby's government began to escalate shortly after the oil began to flow in the World Bank-financed pipeline."⁴⁷ The government did not hide that it needed the oil revenue to finance "bullets and guns," even though the initial agreement with the Bank stipulated that the bulk of this money would serve to reduce poverty in the country. With the extraction of oil and the new oil revenue, the government was able to equip its armed forces with modern weaponry and aircraft. Despite this bonanza, it seems that the use of the economic statecraft until 2008 was nonetheless somewhat ineffectual as the rebels would demonstrate in February of that year, when they laid siege to the capital city. It was after this serious

threat that the government began to heavily invest in the complete overhaul of the military instrument of power.

The Conflict Termination Program

To win the peace after a war an effective conflict termination is necessary. Owing to the disrupting effects of civil war on society as a whole, the need of such a measure is obviously greater lest unattended grievances further compromise the nation's healing process. In view of the unfinished conflict termination in Chad, it is reasonable to contend that the personalized peace deals signed by the protagonists and the process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration put in place might lead to a lasting truce rather than to true peace.

Personalized Peace Deals

By mid-2009 the end of the war was nearing; the rebels' fate seemed sealed. After their humiliating retreat from N'djamena, the morale of their combatants was at its lowest ebb; the idea that victory was at arm's length and that they were not smart enough to grab it was demoralizing indeed. Worse, the N'Djamena agreement dried up Sudanese assistance. Moreover, after the deportation of the paramount leaders, the rebel groups witnessed breakaways amidst their ranks and this phenomenon fed the rallying of whole rebel movements that began to negotiate separate peace deals. At that moment, the regime became more reluctant to the whole process. As Jerome asserts, "After the rapprochement, the Chadian government was in a stronger position than ever, making the prospect of return very unattractive."⁴⁸ While beginning in August 2009, the government offered US\$700 to each combatant willing to shift allegiance and US\$25,000 for each vehicle brought back from the rebellion, by the end of 2010 the government was only willing to grant amnesty.⁴⁹

From 2010 onwards, no bullet has been fired, but if the last Chadian civil strife ended in a seeming victory for the regime, it may be argued that it will not be the last conflict of its kind in Chad. In a country devoid of institutional culture for peace and where violence has been the last resort to broker political change, a country so poorly-skilled in terms of collective organization where people wounded by decades of violence are nurturing their grievances while eagerly anticipating the next opportunity to seek vengeance, the outcome of the conflict will always be unacceptable for many inasmuch as proper measures would not be implemented to soothe their old wounds. This the government failed to do with the conflict termination program it initiated. Basking in an unexpected victory, the regime may well have missed the opportunity to win the peace. So many grievances remain unattended; they are still simmering under a semblance of peace and stability until the time comes for them to burst out, triggering violence anew. Basically three kinds of conflict termination measures were proposed: Disarmament – Demobilization - Reintegration (DDR), political appointments, and financial stipends.

Demobilization – Disarmament – Reintegration

In most cases, the splinter rebel groups signed personalized peace deals granting their members material benefits in exchange for complete allegiance to the government. Typically these deals came down to an appointment to political positions for the leaders and/or their reintegration into the national armed forces; the reintegration into the forces of the cadre and rank-and-file and/or the payment of financial bonuses. Disarmament seemed to be the easiest part of the deal. Generally, the combatants handed over their weapons at the crossing of the Sudanese frontier into Chad. Then occurred demobilization whose implementation was dependent upon the stipulations of the peace deals. In some cases, the combatants were selected in accordance with the

drafting regulations. If their age and health made them fit for military service, they were drafted or reintegrated into the ranks of the national forces. If not, they were dismissed with the payment of a small financial allowance. Finally, reintegration happened. Two categories of reintegration were possible: when physically and mentally fit ex-combatants are either redrafted into the ranks with the benefits of all the years of service lost in rebellion; when found unfit they were – at least theoretically - trained to take civilian jobs. The idea was to rid them of the temptation to go back to rebellion by finding them a new purpose in life. The idea was great, at least in theory. In reality, the process has remained incomplete. The government did not have the will or the means to implement such onerous and costly measures. What mattered most was the disarmament phase. When that was done the rest of the process was usually carried out with much less speed and effectiveness. The onslaught of this incomplete process of conflict termination is likely to feed into the vicious cycle of insurgency later on.

Peace or Lasting Truce?

The outcome of this incomplete execution of the measures was that thousands of ex-combatants were left out. The disarmament of the mind has not happened yet. It should be borne in mind that these folks will not miss the next opportunity to fire the gun of anger against the government. They were mostly young and battle-tested. Together with the many other downtrodden of the system, also “young and mad with grievance,”⁵⁰ they might well “become the backbone”⁵¹ of future rebellions. As Patrick Berg has argued,

The strategy of concluding several parallel agreements instead of one single accord...clearly demonstrates that the regime’s aim was not a lasting peace accommodating the interests of the various actors involved, but rather the consolidation of its own control. This is also highlighted by a review of the agreements themselves, which instead of trying to solve the

country's structural problems exclusively deal with the issues of an amnesty for the rebels and their reintegration into the government and army. The lack of any specific arrangements with respect to these endeavors, where the details pose considerable difficulties, is an indication of the disinclination to actually implement the arrangements.⁵²

Recommendations:

From the U.S. perspective, the Chadian crisis should teach a lesson or a two about how to deal with a chronic weak state. Although the United States may not have vital interests in this country, it nonetheless wants political stability in Chad for at least three reasons.⁵³ During the last decade, Exxon and Chevron invested more than 5 billion dollars in the extraction of Chadian oil, of which 90% is exported to the United States.⁵⁴ Moreover, Chad has been one of the axis of the United States–led efforts to fight Islamic terrorism in the Sahel region. Through AFRICOM this country receives a lot of military aid in terms of training or equipment.⁵⁵ Lastly, the United States has been vocal in the Darfur crisis and instrumental in the resolution of North/South Sudan crisis, donating more than 10 billion dollars in humanitarian assistance to relieve the refugees' plight in Darfur and eastern Chad as well as attempting “to minimize Sudanese influence over Chad.”⁵⁶

Furthermore, though not solely related to Chad, the American efforts to promote democracy and human rights around the world (NSS 2015) applies perfectly to the Chadian situation. Democracy cannot thrive amidst violence and patrimonialism. Unless meaningful changes in values and practices occur, every democratization effort would be sewn on barren soil. The question is then whether the United States and other Western countries (especially France) are willing to apply pressure on the regime to obtain these indispensable changes at the risk of compromising whatever interests they might have in this country. At any rate, unless a profound change in the political system

takes place, there is no reason why political violence should stop since it remains the only viable way for political actors to make their voices heard or get their share of the national wealth. Although such a destructive practice further compounds the chronic weakness of the state, it will remain common currency as long as a genuine and legitimate democratic political system is not implemented in this war-torn country.

To bring about change in Chad, the United States and its Western allies and partners should leverage diplomacy and economic statecraft in order to convince President Deby to enhance democracy and good governance, promote national reconciliation and implement a comprehensive conflict termination process, which will dry up the rebels' unaddressed grievances. Perhaps the best way to do this is to convene another National Conference (the first one was held in 1993) whose role will be to reshape the national institutions, the Constitution, the armed forces and the electoral process, and to redefine the social contract between the citizens and the state. As long as the power system is not built on legality and legitimacy through transparent and democratic elections but on the will of the strongest warlords of the moment, there will always be people eager to violently contest any established government in Chad.

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