

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Academy for Genocide Prevention

**Monitoring Roundtable: Chad**

**7 February 2006**

*In a meeting at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, three leading non-governmental experts briefed USG officials from the State Department (S/CRS, INR, and AF), USAID, and CIA, as well as officials from the UN and NGOs, concerning threats of atrocities and crimes against humanity stemming from political instability in Chad. The speakers noted that President Idriss Déby's recent revision of the Chadian constitution, allowing him to run for a third term in May 2006, has sparked a growing rebellion involving factions of the army and the president's inner circle, including members of his own family.*

*The influx of 220,000 refugees from Darfur and 47,000 refugees from Central African Republic (CAR) has further aggravated racial and ethnic animosities in Eastern and Southern Chad. Cross-border attacks by rebel and paramilitary groups along the Chad-Darfur border may be evolving into a proxy war between Chad and Sudan. Participants in the roundtable warned that the hostilities will likely imperil Darfurian refugees and IDP's, as well as international humanitarian aid workers in the region, unless a more robust peacekeeping force is deployed to prevent cross-border attacks and concerted international pressure is brought to bear on Chad's Déby and Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir. If the current military skirmishes in Chad were to escalate into civil war, the violence could disrupt oil production and destabilize other regions of Central and West Africa, including CAR, Cameroon, and Nigeria.*

*This report summarizes opinions expressed by participants in the roundtable and does not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.*

**Conflict Drivers**

Chad has possessed an exceptionally weak and fragmented state apparatus since independence in 1960. Unlike neighboring Sudan, which has been ruled continuously since the 1950s by the Arab elite of the Nile River Valley, Chad's rulers have come from a succession of minority ethnic groups in the country's south (François Tombalbaye, 1960-1975; Félix Malloum, 1975-1979), northwest (Hissène Habré and Goukouni

Oueddei, 1978-1990), and northeast (Idriss Déby, 1990-present) – all of whose regimes have in turn been riven by internecine fighting among the ruling elite. The country's instability has long been aggravated by the predations of neighboring Libya (which fought during the 1970s and 1980s to annex the Aouzou Strip along Chad's northern border) and Sudan, which backed Déby's coup against Habré—but which, since the 1990s, has also provided a support base for dissident factions and radical Islamist groups seeking a foothold in Chad.

Several factors have exacerbated the political instability in recent months:

- Growing disillusionment and anger over the failure of the democratic transition promised by the Sovereign National Conference (CNS) of 1993. Déby's victories in the presidential elections of both 1996 and 2001 were marred by serious electoral irregularities, as well as by human rights abuses against opposition leaders. Déby's 2005 revision of the Chadian constitution permitting him to run for a third term in May 2006 "has created among Chadians a furor whose intensity the Western media does not seem to grasp," according to one presenter.
- Increasing oil revenues to the Chadian government (more than \$300 million since the opening of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline in 2003) that "make state capture more attractive," and exacerbate preexisting internal conflicts. Given that the oil deposits are largely in the South, while the revenues are controlled by a small clique of Northerners, oil is exacerbating North-South tensions. The absence of tight security around oil facilities makes them vulnerable to attacks. Grievances over the distribution of oil revenues have also contributed to the splintering of the ruling Zaghawa elite, instigating defections to rebel groups by members of Déby's family.
- Anger among Chadians—as well as isolation from donor nations—as a result of Déby's suspension of the oil revenue management law in January 2006, allowing him to direct oil revenues to security spending rather than poverty reduction. Although France continues to support Déby, other patron states have become more equivocal and the World Bank has suspended \$124 million in loans to Chad and frozen an oil revenue escrow account in London.
- Stresses from Sudan's genocidal campaign in Darfur and the resulting refugee crisis in Eastern Chad, which has caused resource shortages and tensions between refugees and local host communities. With the growing threat of famine in the region, banditry and violent attacks are on the rise.
- Déby's vacillating stance toward Khartoum. His initial reluctance to confront Bashir over the genocide in Darfur infuriated many fellow members of the Zaghawa clan and provided a further motive for their defections. Déby has since reversed course, declaring a "state of belligerency" against Sudan in December 2005, and hosting meetings of Darfurian rebel groups in N'Djamena. Cross-border clashes involving militias and paramilitary groups

in Darfur and Eastern Chad have contributed to the violence and generalized lawlessness in the region. The security vacuum has also facilitated *janjaweed* raids on civilian populations, as Déby has withdrawn troops from border posts in order to consolidate his control of key positions such as Adré.

In the face of these challenges, Déby possesses diminishing capacity to exercise authority outside of the capital—indeed, one Chad expert at the session asserted that “the regime is dying.” Yet Déby benefits from the continuing support of France and the U.S., as well as from the absence of a clear alternative for future political leadership. The nominal alliance of nine Chadian rebel groups established in January 2006, the United Front for Democratic Change (FUC), possesses an opaque leadership structure and political program. The FUC may already be fragmenting along ethnic lines between Mahamat Nour’s Rally for Democracy and Liberty (RDL)—a predominantly Tama group—and the Zaghawa defectors from the Déby regime.

## **Road Signs**

Several potential developments in Chad and Sudan warrant close attention over the coming months, according to participants in the session:

- The May presidential election could trigger an expansion of violent unrest, particularly if Déby prevails in a vote that most Chadians perceive as tainted. Protests by disaffected southerners and other aggrieved groups, such as government employees in N’Djamena whose salary payments are in arrears, along with the existing rebel movement, might overwhelm the capacity of the state security forces to maintain order.
- Déby’s declining health could require him to leave Chad for an extended period to seek medical care in Paris, leaving him vulnerable to a coup attempt; even if his health improves, other factors may force him from power in the near future. No clear plan of succession exists, because Déby has vigorously suppressed potential rivals. The Zaghawa, who dominate Chad both politically and economically, represent only 1% of the population. The Sara of Southern Chad are the largest of Chad’s 200 ethnic groups (roughly 33% of the population), but have not controlled the government since the 1970s, and it is unclear whether they could consolidate political power at the national level.
- The escalation of a proxy war between Chad and Sudan could have catastrophic effects on civilians in Eastern Chad and Darfur. Déby seeks to maintain his tenuous grip on power by uniting Chadians against a “common enemy” in the East. Meanwhile, Sudan’s Bashir confronts pressure from hardliners in his government who fault him for making excessive concessions to Southern Sudan in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Accord. Thus, both leaders are motivated to escalate hostilities, which could place IDPs and refugees in both Chad and Darfur in the crossfire, as well as further disrupt humanitarian aid deliveries and threaten international humanitarian workers in the region.

## **Opportunities for Engagement**

Participants in the session emphasized the need for concerted international pressure on both Déby and Bashir to end any support for paramilitary groups engaged in the emerging proxy war. They also stressed the importance of deploying a robust, well-equipped international peacekeeping force capable of monitoring and deterring cross-border incursions between Chad and Sudan.

Several participants also suggested that the U.S., France, and other donor nations should move away from a perspective focused on backing or not backing particular leaders, but rather mobilize increased support for democratization and strengthening civil society organizations. Such a program might involve initiatives such as:

- Credible international monitoring of the upcoming presidential elections, in order to make a legitimate outcome more likely;
- Support for local NGOs, which the Chadian government has denounced as “enemies of the state”;
- Support for the new office of the “national mediator,” an institution for conflict resolution established by the Chadian government;
- Measures to expand civilians’ access to impartial information, e.g. through radio broadcasting by international organizations.