

Perspectives on Development in the Middle East
and North Africa (MENA) Region

János Besenyő
Leonid Issaev
Andrey Korotayev *Editors*

Terrorism and Political Contention

New Perspectives on North Africa and
the Sahel Region

 Springer

Perspectives on Development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region

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János Besenyő · Leonid Issaev · Andrey Korotayev
Editors

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Foreword

The recent release of the Global Terrorism Index/Database makes for very sober reading. From the perspective of the number of terrorist incidents and the growing lethality of such attacks, the Sahel has been transformed into the global epicentre of terrorism. In attempting to understand why this is the case, Besenyo, Issaev and Korotayev have put together a publication which is erudite, theoretically well-informed, empirically strong and comprehensive. From this perspective, there is absolutely no book on the Sahel which is as comprehensive as this book which examines the factors of political contention in North Africa and the Sahel after the Arab Spring.

Whilst there are publications covering the Sahel, this compelling book is the first that connects North Africa and the Sahel so explicitly. This is crucial since there is a regional conflict system existing throughout North West Africa. A regional conflict system is one in which sources of insecurity are so intertwined between countries, that one cannot resolve sources of national insecurity without also seeking to ameliorate regional sources of insecurity. One example of this was what followed the collapse of the Gaddafi regime. Weapons flooded into the Sahel from Libyan armouries and fighters in Gaddafi's Islamic Legion went on to join Islamist insurgents and Tuareg nationalist rebel in northern Mali.

Equally original in this volume is the gender dimensions of insecurity plaguing the region. This was covered with superb nuance by the respective authors of chapters in this volume. Women often are confronted with unique vulnerabilities in conflict terrains. At the same time, the volume acknowledges women's unique agency as seen in their participation in effective decision making at the local level in Ghana. Three other unique areas this book explores which no previous book on the region covers given how contemporaneous these developments are—is the impact of the coups on overall security in the region, the impact of the war in Ukraine in North Africa and the Sahel as well as the renewed great power rivalry and its impact on such a fragile state system as is only too apparent across the Sahel.

Regarding the latter issue of external actors, we need to accept a simple truism—these actors' interventions are not always altruistic. France, for instance, extracts thousands of tons of uranium from Niger each year to run its nuclear plants whilst ordinary Nigeriens live in abject poverty, and without the benefit of electricity. The

US, meanwhile, has its second largest military base in Agadez. China's engagement in the region is intimately related to its Belt and Road initiative and its attempt to protect its infrastructure. Moscow's involvement is seen through the prism of a renewed Cold War between the West and Russia, following Russia's intervention in Ukraine. Underlying all these foreign interests, of course, is the vast natural resources of the region. The Taoudeni Basin, according to the 2015 US Geological Survey, which runs across Mali and Mauritania happens to possess: 160 million barrels of conventional oil, 1880 billion cubic feet of conventional gas, 602 million barrels of shale oil, and 6395 billion feet of shale gas. For the region's people, sustainable peace is only possible if steps are taken to end the war economy fueling insecurity. It is imperative that all who reside in the region should be more circumspect about the motivations of external actors. The Sahel's long-suffering people need to work together to minimize foreign interventions and influence as they set their own agenda to ensure that the living conditions of the Sahel's citizens take centre stage. For the latter to happen, the era of rapacious, corrupt governments in the Sahel needs to end. People-centred development, responsive governance and human security needs to become the norms across the region.

The greatest strength of this book lay in how the editors have succeeded in providing a wide-angle lens to examine security along thematic lines for instance issues of migration and terrorism, the role of great powers in the region, civil-military relations, and terrorist financing, whilst at the same time providing indepth country case studies as on Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Guinea. This, quite frankly, is the most comprehensive book on the Sahel and will be of great use to scholars and policy-makers in the years to come.

December 2023

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This monograph is the result of the authors' study of the problems of terrorism and political contention in North Africa and the Sahel region over the last years. First of all, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to HSE University in Moscow and African Research Institute of Óbuda University in Budapest, which the authors belong to. Through our academic and educational work at these institutions, we have had the opportunity to deepen our understanding of the political processes in North Africa and the Sahel region through discussions with colleagues and students. A great contribution to the preparation of the publication was made by the materials of field research undertaken by authors in Egypt, Mali, Niger, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Somalia and other countries in the 2010s and 2020s.

Finally, the completion of work on this monograph was possible thanks to the support of the Russian Science Foundation [Project # 21-18-00123].

Budapest and Moscow

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About This Book

The book analyzes factors of political contention in North Africa and the Sahel after the Arab Spring. The sharp increase in the terrorist activity in the Sahel after the Arab Spring led to serious destabilization, as well as the emergence of new and re-actualization of old conflicts in the region. A number of terrorist groups have emerged and/or intensified their activities, including ones associated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (AQIM, DNIM, ISGS, ISWAP, etc.). In a number of cases, full-scale Islamist insurgencies emerged and provoked increased external interference in the affairs of the region. The aforementioned processes led to the fact that the position of some of the great powers and countries present in North Africa and the Sahel region weakened or even strengthened, so they had to reevaluate their previous policies. The effect of this is even less visible now, but in the long term it will clearly affect the security of the region and the processes taking place there. This is also true for the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the effects of which are already visible in the countries of the African continent and whose impact on the security of the region will entail serious challenges. The book proposes to analyze and generalize organization forms and dynamics of the terrorism and conflict in North Africa and the Sahel region.

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Terrorism and Chad: Ethnicism, Mismanagement, and Great Power Influence



David Vogel 

1 Prelude

On 3 December 1990—overshadowed by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait four months before and the upcoming Gulf War in the following month, *The New York Times* published a short article of only a few lines on Page 9, titled “*Rebels in control of Chad’s capital*” (Riding, 1990). The world has changed significantly since then. That time, more than three decades ago, it was just another one of the many armed conflicts in Africa, and the world did not really pay attention to the arrival of General *Idriss Déby*, who—we know by now—would stay in power for more than 30 years. It is just a mere accident that at the age of 37, Déby started a military campaign that few months later succeeded in ousting President *Hissène Habré* and his son, General *Mahamat Idriss Déby* seized power also unconstitutionally—at the age of 37 as well—by being named interim president by the Transitional Military Council on 20 April 2021. This latter event though made front-page news all over the world.

After a short introductory chapter to Chad, where I will highlight some important facts and factors that have been influencing the country’s life, then the study will examine the reasons behind this significant difference illustrated by the example above, as well as the present situation in the country before reaching conclusions and finally offering suggestions in the ending part for a more stable, more just, and more sustainable Chad.

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2 A Country Profile: Iron Fist, Turmoil, Poverty

As the largest of the sixteen landlocked¹ countries in Africa, Chad is situated at the crossroads of Islamic North Africa, the more developed West Africa, and the less advanced and less stable Central Africa, in the turbulent neighbourhood of Libya, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger.

The vast area of 1,284,000 km² has a population of an estimated 17,963,211 people from more than 200 different ethnic and linguistic groups, with the highest density around Lake Chad, in the southwest. The main ethnic groups—around and above 10%—of the majority Islamic population (55.1% Islamic, 41.1% Christian) are the Sara (Ngambaye/Sara/Madjingaye/Mbaye) with 30.5%, the Kanembu/Bornu/Buduma (9.8%), and the Arab 9.7%, followed by the smaller but more influential group of Toubou (aka Daza, Gorane,² Tubu, Tabu, Tebu, Tebou, Teda, Tibu, Tibbu, Toda, Todga, Todaga, Tubu, Tuda, Tudaga) with 5.8%, and Idriss Déby's ethnic group, the Zaghawa (aka Zakhawa/Borogat/Kobe/Wogi/Beri/Kegi/Bertis/Bideyat, this latter one favoured by Idriss Déby) being only the seventeenth in size, with a modest 1.1% (CIA, 2023b; McGregor, 2010) (Fig. 1).

An important fact about the population is that due to the total fertility rate of 5.46 children born/mother—with a population growth rate of 3.09%—the median age is 16.1 years (the fifth lowest), however, due to the poor livelihoods in the country reflected by the second lowest (190th) Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.394 (only after South Sudan),³—one place worse than the year before—, life expectancy at birth is only 59.15 years (sixth lowest score).

The low HDI in itself reflects the struggles of everyday life in Chad, but looking into the numbers about poverty, both the World Bank and the UN World Food Programme estimate that 42% of the population lives below the poverty line of 2.15 USD per person per day (The World Bank, 2022; WFP, 2023), and with only 22.3% of the Chadians able to read and write, there is not much of a chance to change this in the short term. This is a significant circumstance when talking about the stability, sustainability, and security of a country where more than two thirds of the population (67.2%) is under the age of 24 (CIA, 2023b).

Earlier formations of today's Chad—named after Lake Chad that got its name from the word “lake” in the Kanuri language—started to emerge in the Sahelian belt around the ninth century fighting their way throughout the centuries for the control of resources (such as freshwater) and for the control of the trans-Saharan trade

¹ The country is not only landlocked but its major cities are located at a great distance from the ocean/sea: N'Djamena, in geographical distance, is located approximately 1,100 kms northeast of the Atlantic; Moundou, the second largest city slightly less than 900 kms, Sarh, the third most populous town, more than 1,100 kms, while Abéché, a major city in the east, lies a bit less than 1,900 kms from the Red Sea; and Faya-Largeau, a small but strategically important location in the middle of the Sahara Desert, is slightly more than 1,400 kms south from the Mediterranean Sea. Distances were measured by Distance.to (<https://www.distance.to>).

² In fact, Gorane comes from the Arabic name of the group, Gura'an (McGregor, 2017).

³ Two neighbouring countries, the Central African Republic and Niger are taking the places just before Chad with scores 0.404 and 0.400, respectively (UNDP, 2021).

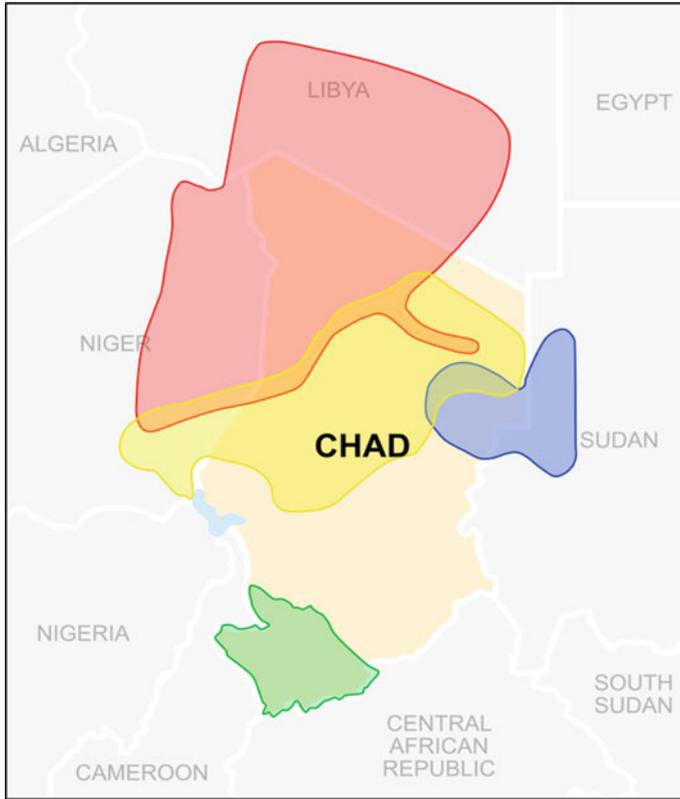


Fig. 1 Main ethnic groups of Chad: red—Toubou (Tedda), yellow—Goran (Daza), blue—Zaghava (Beri, Bideyat), green—Sara⁴

routes, profiting from taxing and trading (livestock, slaves, etc.). It started during this period that certain ethnic groups and even clans were competing with each other for territory, for power. This mentality and driving force can still be seen behind the events of today. During the 63 years of Chad’s independence, seven presidents led the country,⁵ although none of them were elected by the Chadians when they first entered this position. Additionally, also none of the former presidents ended their time in office of their own volition, or reached the end of their term: they either got killed by opposing forces, like *Ngarta Tombalbaye* (11 August 1960–13 April 1975) and *Idriss Déby* (2 December 1990–20 April 2021) or were ousted or forced to leave office as in the cases of *Félix Malloum* (15 April 1975–23 March 1979), *Lol Mahamat Choua* (29 April 1979–3 September 1979), *Goukouni Oueddei* (3 September 1979–7

⁴ Author’s own graph made with assistance by Ngo Quoc Huy.

⁵ Not counting *Noël Milarew Odingar* serving only 2 days in office as interim head of state.

June 1982)⁶ as well as Hissène Habré (7 June 1982–2 December 1990). Most of these and many other failed attempts have been usually led by a strongman (or a coalition of more) who meanwhile serves as a high-ranking member of the government or as a member of the military's high command.

In case of Chad, these events were often supported by external forces (military or political) of neighbouring countries either from the highest levels or from the members of the same Chadian ethnic groups on the other side of the border. For these reasons, the military—besides the often complicated and contradictory system of allies—has been playing a very important role in Chad. The previous President Idriss Déby himself being a general—later on marshal—who seized power in a military coup d'état, realised this central role and made several steps in order to secure the funds to pay the troops and to have technically more developed armed forces. The funding for this enterprise was made possible by the more exact mapping of Chad's oil reserves then the realisation of the infrastructure and the logistical background of the petroleum industry. Thanks to the agreement with the World Bank to secure a loan and other financial sources from foreign governments and international investors, the GDP of the country jumped by 33.6% in 2004, the first full year of oil production (after 14.7% in the previous year), from a raw cotton dominated export (generally 60–70%) to a crude oil-driven economy (with an average of 86% of the export).⁷ Another major source of income appeared in 2012, from the gold mining industry that grew from a modest 1.15% to 14.2% (reaching its height at 21% in 2019) (Simoes & Hidalgo, 2021). Regarding the oil revenues and their importance in financing the armed forces, a few years later, Déby even sacrificed the agreements with the World Bank⁸ and some other donors in order to spend more on the military, as opposed to the conditions of the loans that required the majority of the income to be spent on development projects and to address the needs of the Chadians (Fig. 2).

At the beginning of his presidency, Idriss Déby knew that he needed a strong and capable military for two reasons. Firstly, in order to keep his power, he needed to tackle and defeat rebel groups as well as to fight back coup attempts, secondly, he needed to bring enduring peace and stability at least at the locations of the country's immature petroleum industry. Knowing that after gaining independence, Conoco—then later on other international companies—arrived in the country as early as 1969,

⁶ Goukouni Oueddei served as interim head of state as President of the Transitional Government of National Unity between 23 March 1979 and 29 April 1979.

⁷ The share of crude petroleum grew from 5.3% in 2003 to 79% in 2020. The oil revenue surpassed 1 billion USD in 2004 (1.01Bn USD), 2 billion in 2007 (2.09Bn USD), while reaching its peak in 2011 with 3.22 billion USD, making up for 95% of the export. This being said, it needs to be highlighted that although it is a widely accepted argument that the country is likely to have an estimated 4.0 billion barrels oil reserves as opposed to the 1.5 billion barrels proven reserves, the daily production of petroleum reached only 87,900 barrels in 2021, down from also not too high 126,200 in 2010 (CIA, 2023b; Simoes & Hidalgo, 2021; USEIA, 2013).

⁸ According to the agreement with the World Bank, 80% of the revenues was supposed to be channelled to fund development projects in the fields of healthcare and education, but the majority of the income was spent on the military during the civil war (Hicks, 2015).

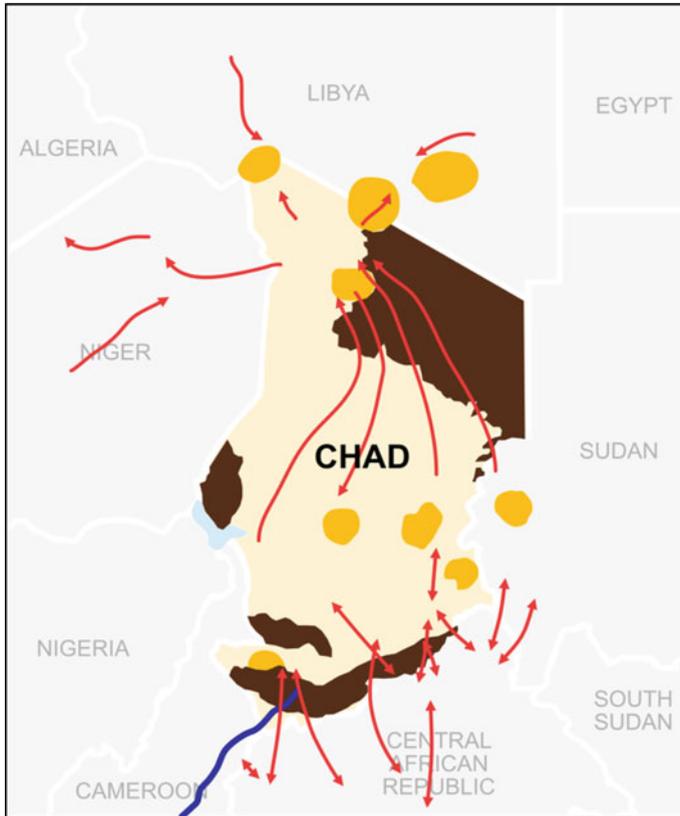


Fig. 2 Sources of security risk: natural resources: brown: oil/natural gas field, dark blue: oil pipeline, yellow: goldfield, and transhumance routes (red) in and around Chad⁹

only minor drilling activities could start in 1974 (Aremu, 1999), and oil did not make any significant income for the country despite the massive size of proven oil reserves.

However, the real push for the armed forces came from abroad: the attacks of 9/11 in the United States, then the forthcoming reaction, the Global War on Terror (GWOT), and the multiple (military) campaigns, coalitions, and aid programs promised a wide variety of significant funding possibilities.

Last but not least, in order to make sure that the armed forces are not only strong and capable but loyal as well—possibly learning from previous experience—, Déby reformed the military several times, including the total dissolution of the elite Presidential Guard (Sécurité Présidentielle, SP)¹⁰ at the end of October 2005, after

⁹ Author’s own graph made by Ngo Quoc Huy.

¹⁰ The presidential decree was very brief, without giving any explanations: “*The Republican Guard is dissolved. All persons and equipment of the Republican Guard are to be reverted to the army*” (The New Humanitarian, 2005).