

## FLUID LOYALTIES IN A REGIONAL CRISIS: CHADIAN ‘EX-LIBERATORS’ IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines a neglected pattern of the regional crisis in Darfur, Chad, and the Central African Republic: the cross-border activities of combatants with fluid loyalties. The trajectories of Chadian ‘ex-liberators’ in CAR, which have been little documented, are used to illustrate the regional movements of armed men. The article explains how unemployed Chadian soldiers were recruited to fight with François Bozizé in CAR and why many of them joined other armed groups after Bozizé’s takeover. The reconversions of armed combatants, who may easily shift allegiance and cross borders to carry on with their ‘politico-military careers’, is thus a structural characteristic of the current conflict, which has major implications both at the local and transnational levels. The article concludes that freelance military entrepreneurs’ trajectories are crucial in understanding the unfolding of this regional crisis.

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THE UNFOLDING OF A REGIONAL CRISIS IN DARFUR, CHAD AND THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, which has long been feared, is now a reality.<sup>1</sup> While it is widely acknowledged that a regional approach to these conflicts is required, the complex logics behind this system of conflicts have not received

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1. On the unfolding of a regional crisis see Millard J. Burr and Robert O. Collins, *The Long Road to Disaster in Darfur* (Markus Wiener, Princeton, NJ, 2006); Roland Marchal, ‘Chad/Darfur: how two crises merge’, *Review of African Political Economy* 33, 109 (September 2006), pp. 467–82; Roland Marchal, ‘The unseen regional implications of the crisis in Darfur’ in Alex de Waal (ed.), *War in Darfur and the Search for Peace* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA; Global Equity Justice, Cambridge, MA; and Justice Africa, London, 2007), pp. 173–98. On the conflict in Darfur see Alex de Waal (ed.), *War in Darfur and the Search for Peace*; Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur: A short history of a long war* (Zed Books, London, 2005). On the conflict in Chad see International Crisis Group, ‘Chad: back towards war?’ (ICG Africa report No. 111, 2006).

adequate attention. The situation in the region has been deteriorating for the past few years, and is compounded by the destabilizing effects of the Darfur conflict. However, the crises in Chad and CAR cannot be considered as the mere spill-over of the conflict in western Sudan. The degree of linkage with the war in Darfur differs in Chad and CAR: while Chadian and Sudanese state and non-state actors are interconnected by cross-border alliances, there is no significant Sudanese involvement in CAR.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the conflicts in Chad and CAR have their own historicity: their root causes are to be found in internal problems specific to each country.

Rather than offering an exhaustive depiction of the regional crisis, this article sheds light on a specific and hitherto neglected issue that links conflicts in the region: the formation of a large cohort of unemployed Chadian soldiers who have become regional warriors. Historically rooted Chadian factionalism, and the movements of armed men in the tri-border zone, have been little documented. Most analysts attempt to understand and foresee the political strategies of rebel leaders and governmental actors in the region as well as the interventions by foreign powers such as Libya, the United States, or France. A better understanding of the interplay of the most prominent actors' interests and actions is clearly fundamental. But the social and political dynamics which fuel the ongoing violence should also be taken into account. Without this pool of fighters to draw upon, the rebel leaders and politicians would find it less easy to mobilize fighting forces.

The protagonists of the Chadian and Central African crises began their political and military 'careers' long before these conflicts gained international attention. Many of the combatants had already fought in several wars in the region, either as rebels or soldiers. In Chad, the trajectory of 'rebellion-reintegration-defection' is very common. Most regular soldiers are ex-combatants, while many combatants are defectors from the military. Combatants' loyalties are extremely fluid. The examination of these freelance military entrepreneurs' trajectories is crucial in grasping the social dimensions of these crises. The reconversion of armed combatants, who may easily shift allegiance, is a structural pattern of the current conflict, which has major implications at both the local and transnational levels.

Chadian combatants and civilians have always been numerous in Sudan. Since the 1970s, migrations and armed groups' movements have contributed to the exacerbation and militarization of local tensions and conflicts.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, the conflict in Darfur has been fuelled in part by Chad.<sup>4</sup> With the unfolding of the regional crisis, movements of armed

2. Human Rights Watch, 'State of anarchy: rebellion and abuses against civilians' (Human Rights Watch report, 19, 14 (a), September 2007).

3. During the 1970s and 1980s armed groups supported by Libya used Darfur as a rear base from which to launch attacks in Chad. Idriss Déby himself used Darfur as a refuge before he launched his successful attempt to overthrow Hisssein Habré in 1990.

4. Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur*.

men have increased. A significant number of Chadian Arabs were recruited into the Sudanese pro-government *Janjawiid* militias, Darfurian insurgent groups are supported by N'Djamena, and Chadian rebels are sponsored by Khartoum. While little research has been carried out on the circulation of armed men across the Sudanese-Chadian border, combatants' movements between Chad and CAR are even less documented.<sup>5</sup>

This analysis focuses on the cross-border activities of Chadian fighters in CAR and aims to fill a gap in empirical description. It is now well-known that François Bozizé and his followers were supported by troops from Chad when they overthrew Ange-Félix Patassé in 2003, but the role of Chadian combatants in Bozizé's rebellion remains an issue worth investigating. The case study of Chadian ex-liberators is also interesting for another reason: it is an illustration of a structural pattern which has affected Chad since the 1970s, and which has had critical consequences for the region as well – combatants' nomadism. This article first analyses Chadian ex-liberators' trajectories in CAR. Then it formulates hypotheses on the long-term and medium-term dynamics that contribute to the formation of a large cohort of freelance military entrepreneurs in Chad.

### *Chadian combatants' tumultuous trajectories in CAR*

The involvement of Chadian armed men in CAR is widespread. As a recent report by Human Rights Watch outlines, 'Chadian elements can be found on all sides of the various conflicts.'<sup>6</sup> First, they ply their trade in the transnational networks of road bandits, the infamous *coupeurs de routes* or *zaraguinas*, which have a long history in the subregion and have proliferated with the worsening of the conflict and the increase in arms flow.<sup>7</sup> Second, Chadian soldiers participate in the Multinational Force of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (FOMUC).<sup>8</sup> Third, since Bozizé's takeover, Chadian soldiers have secured his stay in power: they

5. On the involvement of Chadian combatants in Darfur, see Ali Haggag, 'The origins and organization of the Janjawiid in Darfur' in Alex de Waal (ed.), *War in Darfur and the Search for Peace*, pp. 113–39; and, in the same book, Julie Flint, 'Darfur's armed movements', pp. 140–72.

6. Human Rights Watch, 'State of anarchy', p. 73. On conflicts in CAR refer also to Amnesty International, 'Central African Republic: civilians in peril in the wild north' (Amnesty International Index, AFR 19/003/2007); International Crisis Group, 'République Centrafricaine: anatomie d'un état fantôme' (Africa Report No. 136, ICG, Brussels and Nairobi, 13 December 2007); Eric Berman, 'La République Centrafricaine: une étude de cas sur les armes légères et les conflits' (special report, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, 2006); Louisa Lombard, 'A widening war around Sudan' (Sudan Issue Brief 5, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, January 2007).

7. Saïbou Issa, 'La prise d'otages aux confins du Cameroun, de la Centrafrique et du Tchad: une nouvelle modalité du banditisme transfrontalier', *Polis* 13, 1–2 (2006), pp. 119–46. On the historicity of road banditry, see Janet Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience: An anthropology of economic regulation in Central Africa* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2005).

8. The Central African Economic and Monetary Community has deployed a small military unit in CAR since 2002. About 800 soldiers are drawn from Chad, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo.

form a significant part of Bozizé's personal security and Presidential Guard. Fourth, Chadian rebel forces have used northeast CAR as a rear base.<sup>9</sup> Fifth, Chadian regular forces have conducted raids in CAR to fight Chadian armed groups and assist Central African armed forces. Finally, Chadian combatants have joined the loose rebel coalition based in the northeast of CAR: the *Union des forces pour la démocratie et le rassemblement* (UFDR).<sup>10</sup>

I will focus here on the tumultuous trajectories of those Chadian combatants, commonly known as 'ex-liberators'. 'Liberators' (or *libérateurs* in French) is the name given to the combatants who helped put François Bozizé in power in 2003. While their role in the current conflicts should not be overestimated (they are only one of the many armed groups active in Chad and CAR), their history illustrates the multiple conversions and fluid loyalties of armed men in the region.

**Chadian liberators and other regional warriors in CAR:** Why did Chadian combatants fight with François Bozizé? Why did they carry on with their 'politico-military careers' in CAR or in Chad after Bozizé's takeover? To understand their trajectories, the history of Bozizé's rebellion is pertinent. In May 2001, former President André Kolingba sponsored an unsuccessful coup attempt against Ange-Félix Patassé, the President of CAR.<sup>11</sup> One of the main consequences of the coup attempt was the dismissal of the army's Chief of Staff, François Bozizé, who was accused of involvement. Bozizé took refuge in Chad, where he received crucial support to prepare his rebellion. A high-ranking Chadian military officer helped him to recruit combatants with Idriss Déby's blessing. Bozizé recruited ex-combatants who had experience from previous Chadian wars as well as impoverished youth who had expectations of upward social mobility. For reasons that will be explained below, it is not difficult to find volunteers in Chad to embark on the high-risk strategy of seizing power in a neighbouring country.

In the Central African Republic, Bozizé recruited combatants of various ethnic and religious origins. Among these recruits were the Chadian-Central Africans. The recruitment of Chadian migrants (or their sons) in CAR reminds us that regional conflicts can also be seen in the context of regional migrations, a phenomenon which is even more relevant at the Chad-Sudan border.

9. In April 2006, the *Front uni pour le changement démocratique* fought its way across eastern Chad and through CAR to launch an attack on the Chadian capital, N'Djamena.

10. Union of Democratic Forces for Unity.

11. On the 2001 Bokassa's regime, see Oscar Leaba, 'La crise centrafricaine de l'été 2001', *Politique africaine* 84 (December 2001), pp. 162-75; Laurence Porgès, 'Le coup d'état de mai 2001 au Centrafrique: un événement presque ignoré', *Afrique contemporaine* 200 (October-December 2001), pp. 34-49. On Jean-Bédél Bokassa's regime, see Didier Bigo, *Pouvoir et obéissance en Centrafrique* (Karthala, Paris, 1988); Géraldine Faes, Stephen Smith, *Bokassa: Un empereur français* (Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 2000).

The history of the dual-nationality ex-liberators whom I met in September 2006 in the refugee camp of Amboko (near Goré, in southwest Chad) is not necessarily representative of all ex-liberators' paths, but it does shed light on processes of violent mobilization. These young men, who are Arabs from Salamat (a region in southeast Chad), were born in CAR. Before their recruitment into the rebellion, some of them used to sell cows or run small businesses with relatives; others were marginalized youth. Most of them were unmarried. Their accounts reveal that high bonuses were promised to combatants who joined Bozizé's rebellion. They were promised up to CFA15 million (about €22,867) as well as full integration into the regular forces after the victory. They were also told that local commanders would get a four-wheel-drive car. However, money was not their sole motivation: many of them joined the rebellion to avenge relatives who had been assassinated by Abdoulaye Miskine's militia.

Abdoulaye Miskine (or Martin Koumtamadji, his real name), who was born in a Chadian village close to the Central African border, was then the commander of a pro-Patassé militia. In fact, while Bozizé recruited combatants in Chad and CAR, Ange-Félix Patassé, whose army was weakened by internal divisions, sought the support of militias. Abdoulaye Miskine's militia, which was supposed to be a special anti-highwaymen unit, attacked and killed civilians in the north of CAR.<sup>12</sup> In the south, the Congolese rebels led by Jean-Pierre Bemba, who constituted another pro-Patassé militia, committed gross violations of human rights. In addition, Patassé was supported by a contingent of Libyan government forces. Notwithstanding this foreign support, Patassé's demise could not be avoided.

**Ex-liberators' shifting allegiances:** After a failed attempt to overthrow Patassé in October 2002, Bozizé, who was supported by France, staged his successful coup on 15 March 2003.<sup>13</sup> A large number of his combatants were then from Chad.<sup>14</sup> The relationships between Bozizé and the ex-liberators deteriorated rapidly after the takeover. The ex-rebels who had been promised high bonuses during recruitment pressed for payment. In

12. On the crimes perpetrated against civilians during the conflict between Bozizé's liberators and Patassé's loyalists from October 2002 to March 2003, see Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), 'Central African Republic: forgotten, stigmatised – the double suffering of victims of international crimes' (report, FIDH, Paris, October 2006). The International Criminal Court opened an investigation into these crimes in May 2007.

13. After the coup, François Bozizé announced that he would lead a transitional government and hand power to an elected government. However, he was a presidential candidate at the 2005 elections. After two rounds of voting, he was elected. Ex-President Patassé was excluded from these elections, which triggered discontent. Patassé's loyalists are numerous in the APRD rebellion, which is based in the northwest of the country (Patassé's home area), as well as in the UFDR coalition.

14. A recent ICG report assumes that four-fifths of his troop were Chadian: ICG, 'République Centrafricaine: anatomie d'un état fantôme', p. 16.

April 2004, a group of former Bozizé supporters engaged in a skirmish with government forces in Bangui. Their leaders were transferred to the Chadian capital N'Djamena, where Idriss Déby was supposed to provide mediation in talks between the Central African authorities and the ex-liberators. The CAR authorities claimed that a compromise had been reached but the dispute has not been settled. Ex-liberators were then not only unwelcome in CAR, where they looted with total impunity, but also in Chad, where those in power feared the frustrated, unemployed men in arms might take up arms against the regime.

A disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme was undertaken in CAR in 2004. However, this programme did not reach all ex-liberators; in particular, the Chadians were not included. Some ex-liberators nevertheless received money, although under very different circumstances. In 2004 ceremonies were organized to hand them 'their' money in Chadian towns where they were known to live. Little information is available on this issue. However, my interviews with ex-liberators in Amboko revealed that they received CFA1 million (about €1,524).<sup>15</sup> For obvious reasons, such discharge payments cannot replace DDR programmes: after a few months and a big party, there was no money left. When I met them in the refugee camp – a place where enforced idleness and despair constitute breeding grounds for re-recruitment – almost all the ex-liberators were ready to join government forces or to take up arms again in an armed group, as if there were no real differences between rebellion and regular forces. They were clearly waiting either for a demobilization programme or for an opportunity to be remobilized into another armed group.

Other ex-liberators did not wait as long before taking up arms again. After breaking ties with François Bozizé, they drifted to the northwest of the country, where they continued to harass and loot the local population. They joined the road bandits, whose attacks have increased dramatically since 2003. In addition, some ex-liberators came back to Chad after their Central African experience to join Chadian rebel movements like the one which was led by Mahamat Nour. Since the peace deal of mid-December 2006 between Nour and Déby, the fate of the ex-liberators who allied themselves with Nour is uncertain. But bearing in mind the highly fluid loyalties of these combatants, their possible return to the government fold does not imply that they will remain in the government forces forever.

Furthermore, a section of ex-liberators joined the UFDR. This coalition, which operates in the northeast of CAR, is a conglomeration of armed groups with different agendas and of combatants who took up arms for

15. According to other sources, Chadian ex-liberators were granted the sum of US\$1,000 in return for their repatriation to Chad under the guidance of the Central African armed forces. Ex-liberators based in different locations may have received different amounts. See FIDH, 'Central African Republic'.

different reasons.<sup>16</sup> Ex-enemies are part of the same coalition: former Bozizé followers and Patassé supporters are now found on the same side.<sup>17</sup> The *Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice* (MLCJ),<sup>18</sup> which belongs to the coalition, is led by Abakar Sabone. Once a well-known army captain who served in Bozizé's rebellion, he was one of the leaders of the April 2004 mutiny.<sup>19</sup> After the failed attempt at finding a settlement, he joined the UFDR. In November 2006, Abakar Sabone and Michel Djotodia, the coalition leader, were arrested by the Benin authorities at the request of the CAR government and detained in Cotonou, where they had taken refuge. One of the UFDR leaders, Damané Zakaria, signed an agreement in mid-April 2007 with the government. The security situation has since improved in the northeast of the country. However, together with other leaders of the coalition, Sabone rejected the agreement; their fighters have continued their sporadic attacks.

*Armed factionalism and combatants' nomadism: structural aspects of the crisis*

The Darfur-Chad-CAR region is not the only African region characterized by fluid loyalties on the part of combatants. Since the late 1980s, regional warriors from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire have crossed the porous borders of West Africa.<sup>20</sup> Transnational flows of combatants have also had disastrous consequences in the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>21</sup> While such regional systems of conflicts are structured by the alliances forged among regional state and non-state actors, they are fuelled by long-term and medium-term social and political dynamics which are often overlooked. One way to make up for this neglect is to analyse wars from below. Such a perspective requires that we pay attention to the historicity of rebel movements and analyse violence within its social setting.<sup>22</sup>

16. The UFDR attracted international media in 2006 when it was able to seize military control of some major towns in the remote northeastern regions of the country. In December 2006, these towns were retaken by government forces after a coordinated attack by Central African and French troops. The French Army, which invoked a defence treaty with CAR, used aerial bombardment in 2007.

17. Abdoulaye Miskine, leader of the *Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain* (FDPC), claimed to be part of the coalition, although this was denied by other UFDR armed groups. He signed a peace agreement with François Bozizé under the mediation of Muammar Gaddafi in February 2007.

18. Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice.

19. For details on Sabone's trajectory, see ICG, 'République Centrafricaine: anatomie d'un Etat fantôme', pp. 26–7.

20. Human Rights Watch, 'Youth, poverty and blood: the lethal legacy of West Africa's regional warriors', (Human Rights Watch report 17, 5 (a), March 2005).

21. Ian Taylor, 'The logic of disorder: 'malignant regionalisation' in Central Africa' in Morten Boås, Marianne H. Marchand and Timothy M. Shaw (eds), *The Political Economy of Regions and Regionalisms* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2005), pp. 147–66.

22. Paul Richards, 'New war: an ethnographic approach' in P. Richards (ed.), *No Peace No War: An anthropology of contemporary armed conflict* (Ohio University Press, Athens, OH, 2005), pp. 1–21.

**Armed factionalism and flawed peace negotiations:** As a starting point, it is crucial to take on board the full implications of the persistence of armed factionalism. In Chad, armed rebellions have proliferated since the division of the *Frolinat* in the 1960s; alliances among factions are usually fluid.<sup>23</sup> The fragmentation of armed oppositions is the result of a combination of elements which play different roles depending on the rebel group: decentralized political economies<sup>24</sup> of movements which grew out of self-defence groups; power struggles between leaders; and the enmeshment of movements in local rivalries and historically built ethnic and sub-ethnic cleavages.<sup>25</sup> Factionalism also owes a debt to state 'divide and rule' policies and to the strategies of foreign supporters such as Libya or Sudan, which have often played off one faction against another.

The rebel movements' lack of coherence creates major obstacles for peace negotiations. In Darfur, the division among rebel movements and the partial signing of the May 2006 Peace Agreement have had disastrous consequences.<sup>26</sup> This problem is indeed very common in Chad – armed groups were numerous at the Kano and Lagos conferences at the beginning of the civil war in 1979, as they were at the 'reconciliation conference' held in Franceville in 1996 or at the peace negotiations held in Syrte in October 2007. Insurgent movements have never been able to forge lasting coalitions or to coalesce into large blocs at the negotiation table. The failure of the movements to unite is the norm rather than an exception.

In addition, when a peace agreement is signed, factions of the armed movement often reject it. The factions which continue the armed struggle are sometimes so small and weak that almost no-one remembers them. While these groups seem harmless, they can play a renewed role in the factional game when they are able to forge a new alliance and/or to find an external sponsor. The movements led by leaders who appear temporarily marginalized can thus re-emerge as critical actors. For example the *Conseil*

23. The *Front de libération nationale du Tchad* (National Liberation Front of Chad) was created in 1966 in Nyala (South Darfur).

24. For an analysis of the impact of decentralized war economies on rebel movements, see Vincent Foucher, 'Senegal: the resilient weakness of Casamançais separatists' in Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn (eds), *African Guerrillas: Raging against the machine* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2007), pp. 171–97.

25. For an analysis of armed factionalism and its relations to social transformations based on the case of the Touareg Kel Adagh rebellion in Mali, see Pierre Boilley, *Les Touaregs Kel Adagh. Dépendances et révoltes: du Soudan français au Mali contemporain* (Karthala, Paris, 1999).

26. The Darfur Peace Agreement was signed in the Nigerian capital of Abuja on 5 May 2006 by the Sudan government and one rebel faction, headed by Minni Minawi. Two major armed groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement of Abdel Wahid al Nur and the Justice and Equality Movement, refused to sign. Darfuriian armed groups have since undergone a dramatic process of fragmentation. Alex de Waal, 'Darfur Peace Agreement: so near, so far' (Open Democracy, <[www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)>, 29 September 2006); Alex de Waal, 'I will not sign', *London Review of Books* 28, 23 (30 November 2006), pp. 17–20.

*démocratique révolutionnaire*<sup>27</sup> of Acheikh Ibn Omar remained dormant during the exile of its leader in France; it belongs now to one of the three main rebel groups. In this respect, it is worth noting that dormant groups are often based in neighbouring countries. Between two wars, combatants may transform into road bandits or, more often, live as farmers or cattle herders with relatives or kinsmen – especially if they belong to an ethnic group which straddles the border. Chadian armed factionalism thus has a transnational dimension.

While armed factionalism is a decisive impediment to peace negotiations, it is not the only reason for their failure. Negotiations are usually asymmetric: they start when rebel movements are seriously weakened by a loss of internal and/or external support. Mahamat Nour signed a peace deal when he was left with no choice, like other rebel leaders before him: Abbas Koty<sup>28</sup> (who was later assassinated in N'Djamena); Dr Bachar Idriss;<sup>29</sup> federalist leaders Moïse Kette Nodji and Laokein Bardé Frisson<sup>30</sup> (who were both killed, although in different circumstances); and Adoum Togoï, who led a faction of the MDJT after Youssouf Togoïmi's death.<sup>31</sup>

Another obstacle to peace in Chad is that peace agreements are reduced to political bargaining among prominent actors for lucrative political or military positions in the government. Indeed, peace deals do not provide mechanisms for regime transformation or for the delivery of better services to the people. Substantive political issues – such as fair elections, weeding out impunity and corruption, restructuring of the security forces – have never been dealt with in the realm of such negotiations. In effect, the signing of a peace deal does not imply that the war is over.

Furthermore, peace deals are never properly implemented. For instance, the peace deals signed under Déby's rule provided that rebel movements would transform into political parties, but such a shift did not occur. While

27. Revolutionary Democratic Council. Acheikh Ibn Omar made an alliance with Mahamat Nouri and joined the *Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement* (UFDD). However, they split before the opening of the October 2007 peace negotiations. Acheikh Ibn Omar is now one of the leaders of the UFDD-*Fondamentale* headed by Abdel Wahid Aboud Mackaye. This rebel group was part of the coalition which launched an attack on N'Djamena in February 2008.

28. Abbas Kotty, a Zaghawa, led the *Comité national de redressement*. He was assassinated in 1993, a few months after the signing of a peace agreement with Idriss Déby.

29. A peace deal was signed in 1992 between the *Front national du Tchad* and the government. Badly implemented, it did not end the conflict.

30. Laokein Bardé was the leader of a Southerners' movement called *Forces armées pour la république fédérale* (Armed Forces for a Federal Republic). He was killed during peace negotiations in 1998. Ketté Moïse, who led the *Comité national de sursaut pour la paix et la démocratie* (National Revival Committee for Peace and Democracy), joined the government in 1994. He was killed six years later when he took up arms again.

31. The *Mouvement pour la démocratie et la justice au Tchad* (Movement for Democracy and Justice in Chad), based in the northern region of Tibesti, was significantly weakened by Youssouf Togoïmi's death in 2002. Other leaders like Adoum Togoï negotiated peace agreements when they realized their movement had reached a dead-end.

the lack of political will on the part of the regime is obvious, rebel leaders usually have neither the means nor the commitment required to join the non-violent political opposition. Instead, they join the ruling party and enjoy comfortable positions, following the example of Mahamat Nour, who was appointed Minister of Defence in early March 2007 (although he was sacked in December when he was unable to control his former combatants). Peace agreements in Chad have never addressed the root causes of the conflicts, and quite obviously, have failed to ensure a lasting peace.

**Resilience of combatants' social networks:** However, the analysis should not only consider the implications of armed factionalism but also fighters' trajectories. While several scholars have pointed out the rules of the factional game in Chad, combatants' trajectories have never been fully addressed.<sup>32</sup> Sam Nolutshungu compares the rules of factional politics to the rules of a balance of power system in an anarchic world.<sup>33</sup> His analysis outlines well the instability of alliances but the question of combatants' shifting allegiances is omitted. The issue is however crucial, since wars are not only made by rebel leaders and heads of states but also by men in arms, who do not always follow their leaders when they broker a deal.

Indeed, the hiatus between combatants' and leaders' interests generally widens during peace processes.<sup>34</sup> When Chadian rebel Mahamat Garfa, the leader of the *Alliance nationale de résistance*,<sup>35</sup> rallied to Idriss Déby in 2003, Mahamat Nour dissociated himself from his uncle and relocated in Sudan. A large number of Garfa's fighters remained in the rebellion; they were remobilized by Nour when Khartoum supported him. Now that Nour has re-allied himself with Déby, history repeats itself; a section of Nour's fighters have already defected.

Combatants' horizontal links with fellow men in arms make their mobility easier. These social networks may be forged in previous wars but they are often linked to patronage networks, which were central institutions before the war. As Danny Hoffman points out in the case of the Civil Defence Forces in Sierra Leone, DDR programmes which do not recognize the

32. On armed factionalism, see Robert Buijtenhuijs, *Le Frolinat et les guerres civiles du Tchad, 1977-1984: La révolution introuvable* (Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden, and Karthala, Paris, 1987); René Lemarchand, 'Chad: the misadventures of the north-south dialectic', *African Studies Review* 29, 3 (September 1986), pp. 27-41. On warlords, see Roger Charlton and Roy May, 'Warlords and militarism in Chad', *Review of African Political Economy* 16, 45-46 (1989), pp. 12-25.

33. Sam C. Nolutshungu, *Limits of Anarchy: Intervention and state formation in Chad* (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, 1996), pp. 16-23.

34. Béatrice Pouligny, 'The politics and anti-politics of contemporary "disarmament, demobilization and reintegration" programs' (Centre d'études et de recherches internationales and Secrétariat général pour la défense nationale, Paris, 2004; and Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies, Geneva, 2004).

35. National Alliance for Resistance.

social logics pre-dating the war are doomed to fail. They may even later play a role in creating ‘a class of highly mobile young men who can be “deployed” to the various disarmament proceedings by their patrons in an effort to capitalize on the ever increasing benefits packages’.<sup>36</sup> In Chad, history shows that combatants who have had long ‘careers’ as rebels and/or soldiers have the resources – combatants’ knowledge and know-how – and social capital – kin-based and war-based social networks – to once again commence war-like activities on their home turf or abroad.

Thus, while armed factionalism significantly hampers peace negotiations, ex-combatants’ readiness to resort to violence after a peace agreement is signed further hinders the establishment of peace. If the conditions that led to war are maintained or reproduced after the official end of the conflict, fighters are likely to carry on with the armed struggle. Furthermore, ex-combatants constitute a threat to stability not only in their region or their country of origin but also in the neighbouring countries. Flawed peace negotiations and the resilience of combatants’ social networks are indeed crucial factors in the formation of cohorts of armed men, which may be hired by military chiefs from neighbouring countries, as was the case with Chadian liberators in CAR.

**Blurred boundaries – combatants, soldiers, road bandits:** A long history of armed factionalism has generated a large cohort of disgruntled combatants. However, the number of ready conscripts to rebellions has also increased with the failure of the 1992–7 DDR programmes.<sup>37</sup> One of the many problems faced by these programmes – which left a large cohort of 27,000 soldiers unemployed – was political instrumentalization by the regime to exclude undesirable soldiers and officers. Moreover, demobilized soldiers who had stayed in touch with high-ranking officers were recruited again into the security forces: ‘They left through the door and came back through the window’, as Chadians put it.

Indeed, as far as reintegration is concerned, the expectations raised by these programmes were soon belied. After the pilot reintegration programme conducted by the World Bank and the GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) yielded mixed results, international donors decided not to launch any such programme on a large scale.<sup>38</sup> The restructuring of the army, which was supposed to take place alongside DDR, has not achieved

36. Danny Hoffman, ‘The meaning of a militia: understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone’, *African Affairs* 106, 425 (2007), pp. 639–62.

37. Republic of Chad, National Committee for Reinsertion, ‘Document de cadrage macro-économique et stratégique de démobilisation et de réinsertion en république du Tchad’ (report, Republic of Chad, N’Djamena, 2004).

38. Only a small number of the 27,000 demobilized soldiers received reintegration support through the Pilot Project for Reinsertion of Demobilised Military personnel, which was implemented in 1999–2000.

any significant result – a failure largely due to lack of political will on the part of the inner circle of the Chadian regime. The security forces reform was, however, said to be a major issue during the sovereign national conference held in 1993. The army, police, gendarmerie, customs, and other paramilitary groups primarily comprise ex-combatants who were reintegrated after peace agreements. The extortion and looting practices, ranging from daily corruption to highly organized gang-based banditry, have been routinized. The spread of violence as well as the informalization of state coercion have increased the opportunities to continue warlike activities even after the signature of peace deals. Regular forces have thus become a good place to wait for the next war.

Under such circumstances, the boundary between the status of military and combatant is blurred, reflecting simply different phases in the lives of men in arms. Interestingly, servicemen, who are former rebels, do not talk about their reintegration into the regular army as a radical change but rather as a new episode in their trajectory marked by violence. One of them, a young demobilized soldier who was about to be recruited again into the Chadian National and Nomadic Guard expressed it straightforwardly: ‘Army and rebellion are the same. In both cases, you are with your brothers.’<sup>39</sup> I asked another demobilized soldier, who had served both as a rebel and a soldier, what happened to the youth who had been demobilized like him. He answered: ‘Half are in the garrisons, half are in the rebellions, half are road bandits.’<sup>40</sup> This spontaneous response suggests that experience in soldiering is usefully recycled to work in the army, the rebellion, or road banditry. The interviewee does not refuse to combine one activity with another, suggesting that finding a job in the army does not prevent one from practising road banditry.

Combatants’ tumultuous trajectories are to be understood in relation to a ‘no peace, no war’<sup>41</sup> situation. The history of Chad may be best analysed by thinking of war and peace in terms of a continuum: periods of uneasy peace are interrupted by sudden outbreaks of violence. In this situation of permanent crisis, political and military actors are continuously reconsidering their tactical loyalty to the regime. Their decision to join a rebellion or not depends on political calculations based on their perception of the situation and on their own ambition to achieve a better position within the security forces. Combatants’ nomadism is thus a double-edged sword. Because rebels may agree to join the regular army or other security forces if they are given the appropriate incentives, it may be easier to

39. Interview, demobilized soldier waiting for re-recruitment, N’Djamena, 18 December 2005.

40. Interview, demobilized soldier, N’Djamena, 18 December 2005.

41. Paul Richards, ‘New war’. See also Roland Marchal, ‘Les frontières de la paix et de la guerre’, *Politix* 15, 58, (2002), pp. 39–59.

reach an agreement. But there is no guarantee that the agreement will be respected. In such a context, rebel leaders, Chadian or otherwise, may quite easily attract unemployed ex-combatants and marginalized soldiers.

**Armed mobilisations – a non-strategic, non-utilitarian perspective:**

Appraising combatants' vulnerability for re-recruitment after the signing of a peace agreement is critical to foreseeing the fragility or reliability of a peace process. In addition to the political context and state policies, the process of demobilization depends heavily on the structures of opportunities within which it takes place. However, not all ex-combatants face the same kind of problems. Before going into further detail, it is critical to note that men in arms cannot be viewed as a single unified category. In Chad, a fundamental distinction should be made between the most powerful men in arms, known as the 'untouchables' (*intouchables*), and the unemployed and frustrated youth who may resort to violence to find a way out of poverty.<sup>42</sup> In a context of strong politicization of ethnicity or of 'political tribalism', a group of armed men – among whom a large majority are Zaghawa – has gained considerable power and wealth.<sup>43</sup> This does not imply that Déby's kinsmen, who have benefited from his regime, cannot rebel against it. As a matter of fact, a section of them defected to create a new rebellion.<sup>44</sup> But, while disagreements within the inner circle of the regime may be a source of instability, rebel leaders are more likely to find ready conscripts for rebellions among the unemployed youth.

Indeed, the economic and social context in Chad and in the CAR does not make ex-combatants' reinsertion into civilian life easy. With the downsizing of state institutions and the conditions of extreme poverty that prevail in rural areas, the social context is not conducive to reinsertion. On the contrary, opportunities to live from the gun are numerous. Moreover, when war has become an ordinary condition, illegal and violent activities are not exceptional anymore: they belong to the range of possible options. As Janet Roitman showed, in the midst of economic austerity, wealth generated in economic activities related to banditry and war may become 'licit'.<sup>45</sup> The blurred boundary between illicit and licit, as well as the

42. Marielle Debos, 'Les limites de l'accumulation par les armes: itinéraires d'ex-combattants au Tchad', *Politique africaine*, forthcoming.

43. 'Political tribalism' refers to the use of ethnic identities in political competition with other groups. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley, Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (vol. 1, *State and class*; vol. 2, *Violence and ethnicity*) (James Currey, Heinemann Kenya, and Ohio University Press, London, Nairobi, and Athens, OH, 1992).

44. Timane Erdimi, the leader of the *Rassemblement des forces du changement*, is Déby's nephew. The RFC is one of the key groups in the alliance which assaulted N'Djamena in February 2008. On the fusion and fission among the Chadian and Sudanese Zaghawa, see Roland Marchal, 'The unseen regional implications of the crisis in Darfur'.

45. Janet Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience*.

changes in the figures of social success,<sup>46</sup> should be taken into account. The socialization of combatants before the war is often as crucial as the experience of war itself to understand their tumultuous trajectories.

The accounts of the ex-liberators I met in the refugee camp of Amboko show that even in cases where combatants expect money and material benefit from war, the process of violent mobilization is highly complex. As mentioned above, some joined the rebellion to avenge relatives, while others hoped to achieve social advancement through war. For instance, an interviewee, 'Abderrahmane'<sup>47</sup> (an Arab with Chadian and Sudanese relatives) had a long career as a *débrouillard* (a 'savvy' youth who does petty jobs to earn a living) in both Sudan and CAR before he took up arms. While he was looking for a means to earn some money in Bangui, he was recruited for CFA300,000 (€457) by a pro-Patassé armed group which aimed to plot against Bozizé. After the attempt to stop Bozizé failed, this small armed group shifted allegiance: combatants joined Bozizé's insurgency because they were promised bonuses. He explained: 'people [combatants] said "What we want is work, what we want is money. There was money there [with Patassé], there is money here [with Bozizé], that's all)".<sup>48</sup> Interestingly enough, he told me his personal path without using the pronoun 'I'. Instead, he put forward the collective history of his armed group. This unusual way of telling an individual experience may be linked to the fact that he did not feel at ease explaining a mercenary's life to a foreign female researcher. But it may also reveal that he felt that he has been buffeted by events and that, as a foot soldier in a resourceless war, he has not had much room for manoeuvre. Considering Michel de Certeau's distinction between tactic and strategy, this case of resorting to violence resembles more a tactic elaborated in extreme economic conditions than a strategy.<sup>49</sup> These regional warriors, one may conclude, are not military entrepreneurs moved by greed, who design well-thought-out, long-term strategies to benefit from war.

Aberrahmane and his friends from Amboko have considered armed struggle as a personal failure. Nevertheless, they regard taking up arms again as a viable option. Their accounts reveal that social (re)marginalization is a major factor in violent mobilizations, as several analysts have pointed out in other African regions.<sup>50</sup> In such situations, discharge payments and vocational training may have significant impact, of course. But money is obviously

46. Richard Banégas and Jean-Pierre Warnier, "Nouvelles figures de la réussite et du pouvoir", *Politique africaine* 82 (June 2001), pp. 5–21.

47. Not his real name.

48. Interview, ex-liberator, Amboko, 16 September 2006.

49. Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, Vol. 1: *Arts de faire* (Gallimard, Paris, 1980).

50. Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, youth and resources in Sierra Leone* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, 1996); Mats Utas, 'Building a future? The reintegration and remarginalisation of youth in Liberia' in Paul Richards (ed.), *No Peace No War*, pp. 137–54; Morten Bøås, 'Marginalized youth' in M. Bøås, K. C. Dunn (eds), *African Guerrillas*, pp. 35–53.

not enough. In just a few months, the Amboko ex-liberators had spent the CFA1 million bonus they were given after the war. They were eager to make a public show of their wealth in an attempt to improve their social position in the camp. Yet they remained stigmatized by people who held them responsible for past violence. Their very bad reputation in the refugee camp is a major constraint on any attempt to participate in the refugee camp's economy. Moreover, their relatives do not want them to participate in the family's business anymore. Even if they wanted to resume the activities they had before the war, they would be unable to do so. Under such circumstances, they consider their combatants' experience as their sole capital and will do anything to take advantage of it. Their history shows that war creates new strategies of survival and of social mobility.

The processes leading ex-combatants to continue their fighting careers after the war is declared to be over are thus highly complex. This question is by no means reducible to single-factor explanations such as those promoted by the greed-based approach to civil conflicts.<sup>51</sup> While impoverished youth who joined armed groups may expect upward social mobility, one may reject Paul Collier's contention that greed is the principal motor of mobilization. Strategic-utilitarian interpretations can only fail to grasp the complexity of armed mobilizations and reconversions. Hence, an analysis of combatants' trajectories should not only emphasize the material benefits that accrue as a result of the war but also the socialization of combatants in the process of the war, the will to avenge humiliations, and the social marginalization they experience in the aftermath of war.

Stressing the social dynamics of conflicts does not mean depoliticizing conflicts and violence or neglecting the role of the state. On the contrary, as this case study shows, social and political aspects of conflicts are inextricably linked. Indeed, to make sense of transboundary combatants' fluid loyalties, several issues have to be considered: historically rooted armed factionalism, flawed peace talks that are mere bargaining among prominent actors, poorly implemented peace agreements, and the social dynamics that lead ex-combatants to consider the recourse to violence as a viable, if not attractive option.

### *Conclusion*

Observers who hold to the hypothesis of the spill-over from Darfur are eager to insist on the transnational dimensions of the conflicts in Chad and

51. Paul Collier, *The Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy* (World Bank, Washington, DC, 2000); Mats R. Berdal and David M. Malone (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic agendas in civil wars* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, and International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, 2000). For a critique of the greed-based approach, see Roland Marchal and Christine Messiant, 'De l'avidité des rebelles: l'analyse économique de la guerre civile selon Paul Collier', *Critique internationale* 16 (July 2002), pp. 58–69; P. Richards, 'New war: an ethnographic approach'.

CAR. However, the historically rooted formation of regional warriors has hitherto been neglected. To stress the linkage with Darfur is obviously a more efficient marketing strategy than to advocate a better understanding of the complex local and national logics of the crises, especially when it comes to securing acceptance for a multinational intervention.<sup>52</sup>

The unfolding of a regional crisis in the Darfur-Chad-CAR area cannot be reduced, of course, to a simple question of combatants' nomadism: armed men have carried on with their politico-military careers because war was organized by military entrepreneurs who happen to be both heads of states and rebel leaders. Combatants' fluid loyalties and tumultuous trajectories do not provide a causal explanation for the outbreak of conflicts,<sup>53</sup> but they can certainly play a significant and dangerous role in conflicts and their aftermath. While all the structural patterns and local factors that contribute to conflicts cannot be addressed in the realm of peace agreements and DDR programmes, a better understanding of the processes of armed mobilization is critical if past mistakes are not to be repeated. It is all the more important because, as this case study shows, the maintenance of war institutions in a country may also have damaging consequences on neighbouring countries.

### *Post-script*

After this article was completed, a newly formed rebel alliance launched an unsuccessful attack on N'Djamena to overthrow Idriss Déby. The fighting started in the capital on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2008, shortly before the deployment of the European Union protection force (EUFOR) was due to start. The rebel coalition, which was backed by Sudan, was composed of three major rebel groups: the Rally of Forces for Change (RFC) of Timan Erdimi, a Bedeyat nephew of Déby and one of the former pillars of his regime, the United Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD) headed by Mahamat Nouri, a Goran former defence minister and ambassador under Déby's rule, and a breakaway faction from Nouri's group led by an Arab, Abdel Wahid Aboud Mackaye. Idriss Déby, whose army was weakened by defections, was able to repel the uprising with French support. The rebel attack is the second on the capital in less than two years. Déby's victory does not solve any problem and the crisis is definitely not over.

The February 2008 events, like the previous outbreaks of violence in Chad, cannot be seen as the result of a 'darfurization' of the region. Chadian

52. A 'multi-dimensional' international presence authorized by the United Nations is being deployed in eastern Chad and northeastern CAR. France is the largest single contributor of troops to the joint UN-European Union military operation (Eufor). Interestingly, the mission focuses only on the region of CAR bordering Darfur, even though the northwest area is also affected by ongoing violence.

53. M. Bøås and K. C. Dunn, 'African guerrilla politics: raging against the machine' in M. Bøås and K. C. Dunn (eds), *African Guerrillas*, p. 31.

rebels, although supported by Sudan, are not mere mercenaries - as the Chadian government often claims. While seeing the current conflict only through the lenses of Darfur is misleading, it is crucial to take into account the complex regional dynamics. Sudan supports Chadian rebels and Darfurian rebels (especially the Justice and Equality Movement) back Déby. The Sudanese-backed rebel coalition, which attacked N'Djamena in April 2006, had reached the capital through eastern Chad and north eastern CAR and had allegedly involved a significant number of Chadian and Central African ex-liberators. The 2008 rebel coalition had also established rear base in Darfur with al-Bachir's blessing. Men in arms of various origins have thus crossed borders more than once for the past few years. Recent events, as the previous ones, show that combatants' nomadism is a critical dimension of entangled conflicts. The 'regionalisation thesis' should be complexified.