



Chad: Defusing Tensions in the Sahel

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Headquarters

International Crisis Group

Avenue Louise 149 • 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 502 90 38 • Fax: +32 2 502 50 38

brussels@crisisgroup.org

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Principal Findings

What's new? Anger at the state is rising among youth in Chad's Sahel regions of Bahr el-Ghazal and Kanem. Impunity for abuses committed against locals and the authorities' treatment of all young people leaving for Libya – many of whom simply seek economic opportunity – as potential rebels are fuelling discontent.

Why does it matter? Worsening relations between young people in those regions and the authorities, combined with the economic downturn, risk aggravating the very trend that authorities fear – the reinforcement of rebels in neighbouring countries, particularly southern Libya.

What should be done? To rebuild trust with youth from these regions, Chadian authorities should avoid conflating migrants with those joining rebels. This requires maintaining security controls but ensuring they do not curtail people's freedom of movement. They should also hold accountable those guilty of abuses, irrespective of their political ties.

Executive Summary

Since 2016, tensions have risen between young people in Chad's central regions of Bahr el-Ghazal (BEG) and Kanem and the government. Friction is fuelled by Chad's economic crisis and a series of abuses perpetrated against citizens in these regions by individuals close to the inner circles of power. The perceived impunity of those responsible has left many young people deeply humiliated. Restrictions on the movement of people from those regions, many of whom travel north and to Libya to find jobs, also exacerbate resentment. Growing anger at the state could empower rebel movements in neighbouring countries. To regain the trust of young people in BEG and Kanem, Chad's authorities should demonstrate they can prosecute and punish those guilty of abuses, even those with powerful connections. They should avoid treating all migrants as potential rebels and ease restrictions on people's movement. With donors' help, the government should work to revive the economy of a region haemorrhaging young people who seek opportunities elsewhere.

With international attention in Chad focused on Boko Haram and ongoing conflicts in the northern Tibesti mountains between the Chadian army and Tebu (Teda) militias, the country's central regions, including the semi-desert BEG and Kanem in the Sahel, have largely been ignored. The history of those regions diverges from that of other parts of Chad. While no local rebellion has ever gathered momentum there, those regions did contribute many fighters to different armed groups during the civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s. Even today, rebel Chadian forces based in southern Libya include several thousand combatants from Kanem and BEG. For some youth, joining such groups is less about gaining power than about improving their status in acutely unequal societies.

Following colonial practice, successive governments in N'Djamena have long supported local elites to maintain control over volatile regions. In BEG, economic and political elites from the Kreda – the region's largest ethnic group – enjoy a privileged relationship with the state and actively promote or represent the ruling party. But over recent years, mounting discontent among young people increasingly drowns out their leaders' appeals for calm.

BEG and Kanem citizens have recently been targeted in serious incidents involving individuals perceived to well-connected. These included the widely reported rape of a Kanem girl by sons of Chadian dignitaries and an armed assault on a convoy of prisoners from these regions by forces from the president's Zaghawa ethnic group. While some of those responsible were prosecuted, some failed to serve their sentences and others face no repercussions. For a segment of youth in BEG and Kanem, this impunity is a source of humiliation.

The central regions are also among the poorest in Chad. Indicators of malnutrition and maternal and child health in BEG and Kanem have steadily worsened over the past twenty years and now rank among the lowest in the country. Chad's financial crisis since 2014 has hit the populations of these areas especially hard. Falling oil prices and poor agro-pastoral production in 2017 and 2018, combined with deteriorating security, are hitting the local economy hard. In areas that are both isolated and highly dependent on trade with neighbouring countries, regional instability,

a closed border with Nigeria since 2014 and intermittent closures of crossings to Libya, relaxed since early 2017, and Sudan have severely eroded the local population's income.

BEG and Kanem have long had high emigration rates, but the political tensions and economic slump, combined with a gold rush since 2012 in Tibesti, Niger and Algeria, have driven increasing numbers of young men out of the Sahel into northern parts of Chad and neighbouring countries. Against a backdrop of insecurity in Tibesti since August 2018 and growing Chadian rebel movements in southern Libya, the government has a somewhat exaggerated fear that the high numbers of young men leaving the Sahel represent mass enlistment in rebel forces. State and local authorities have opted for a military response that involves tightening and increasing the number of checkpoints in the country's far north and Sahel. But these measures have serious limitations: while the state's fears are partly justified, local authorities too often conflate the majority of young people leaving to find employment with aspiring rebels, further widening the rift between those people and the state.

As in Chad's other Sahelian regions, BEG and Kanem suffer deep-seated structural problems that are largely intractable in the short term. However, Chad's authorities could take steps to help defuse tensions before they trigger a crisis. In particular, they should:

Ensure that those who commit crimes, especially those with alleged powerful connections, cannot exploit communal solidarity or political ties to avoid prison sentences, as has happened in the past. This requires implementing a recommendation from the November 2017 final report of the committee on reform of the Chadian state: namely, that although *diyya* (blood money) and other traditional methods can be used to resolve certain disputes, "they should not interfere with public prosecutions, and that criminal responsibility is an individual rather than a collective matter".

Adopt a more measured tone in public statements to avoid conflating economic migrants with potential rebels. Authorities should also replace current policies restricting the movement of a traditionally mobile Sahel population with a framework that permits such movement while retaining monitoring mechanisms, in particular checks of identity documents and vehicle searches to ensure travellers are not carrying weapons.

To help the population affected by the economic crisis, donors in Chad should:

- ❑ Rebalance and expand their project portfolios to avoid concentrating aid exclusively around the Lake Chad basin and extend support to neighbouring regions such as BEG and Kanem.
- ❑ Provide extra resources to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and others to better understand migratory movements in Chad and the needs of those tempted to emigrate, including young people from the Sahel, and better manage those who have returned. Despite significant international (and particularly European) interest in migrants heading to Europe, and considerable funds granted to Niger and Sudan, few studies have focused on Chadian migration into neighbouring countries.

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Chad: Defusing Tensions in the Sahel

I. Introduction

Located in the heart of the ancient empires of Kanem and Kanem-Bornou, which lasted from the eighth to the nineteenth century, Kanem still has a sultan with real administrative and traditional power. Alifa Mouta Ali Zezerti succeeded his deceased father in 2010 and became the 40th Sultan of Kanem. He is based in Mao, the region's capital, 5km from Ndjimi, the Kanem Empire's former capital.¹ But the sultanate is the last vestige of past grandeur. With the region's economy now in a critical condition, many locals have a strong feeling of social decline and see Mao as a town frozen in time.

In 2008, Kanem was separated from Bahr el-Ghazal, which became an administrative region in its own right with Moussoro as capital city. Sparsely inhabited, Kanem and BEG are respectively home to 354,603 and 260,865 inhabitants, according to the 2009 census. The livelihoods of these sedentary and nomadic communities, almost exclusively Muslim, are essentially agricultural, with crops in the sand dunes and low-lying areas (wadis), livestock farming and nomadic herding. Bahr el-Ghazal is one of Chad's main animal production regions.²

The largest ethnic groups are the Dazagada ("those who speak the Daza language"), the Kanembu ("people from the South") and Arabs. While the Kanembu outnumber any other ethnic group in Kanem and hold senior positions there, the Dazagada are more numerous in BEG.³ In this report, we often mention the Kreda ethnic group, a subgroup of the Dazagada, with a strong presence in Moussoro. Their influence has increased significantly over the last twenty years in BEG and in Chad's capital, N'Djamena.⁴ The turbulent history of the Kanem and Kanem-Bornou empires contributed to the emergence of a clear division of labour and the hierarchy of social groups that is still present today. For example, the Haddad, literally "the blacksmiths", long used as slaves, are still to some extent looked down on.

The location of this pivotal region between the Maghreb, and sub-Saharan Africa, and between western and eastern Sahel has made it a strategically important although largely neglected zone. This report, which continues Crisis Group's coverage of unsta-

¹ The new sultan holds an advanced economics diploma from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and was a bank manager in N'Djamena and adviser to the prime minister. The size of the crowd attending his inauguration ceremony in Mao in 2010 showed the importance of the sultan's role in Kanem. The sultanate has a court of ten executive members in Mao and 76 tribal chiefs from all over Kanem are subject to the sultan's authority.

² The "bahr" ("river" in Arabic) and today's BEG "were originally part of the great wadi that crossed the region and flowed through the Ennedi plains and into Lake Chad". "La résilience des pasteurs aux sécheresses, entre traditions et bouleversement, les ONG au défi des transhumances", Urgence, réhabilitation, développement (URD), February 2011.

³ The Dazagada are a subgroup of the Goran and are sometimes called the Tebu of the south as opposed to the Tebu of the north, most of whom live in Tibesti and speak the Teda language.

⁴ Nine of BEG's fifteen cantons are under Kreda control, three are led by the Daza, one by a Kanembu and one by a Haddad.

ble regions in the Sahel, tries to cast light on a politically sensitive area and to better understand local dynamics.⁵ Following Crisis Group's report published in March 2017 on the threat posed by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad area, it makes recommendations designed to ease tensions in the Sahel that could spark violence locally or fuel rebellions on Chad's borders.⁶ This study is based on many interviews conducted between February and November 2018 with residents of these regions, in Moussoro (BEG), Mao (Kanem) and N'Djamena, as well as in Paris with members of the Chadian diaspora.

⁵ See Crisis Group Africa Reports N°261, *The Niger-Mali Border: Subordinating Military Action to a Political Strategy*, 12 June 2018; N°258, *Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force*, 12 December 2017; N°254, *The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North*, 12 October 2017; and N°238, *Central Mali: an Uprising in the Making?*, 6 July 2016. Also see "Forced out of Towns in the Sahel, Africa's Jihadists Go Rural", Crisis Group Commentary, 11 January 2017.

⁶ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°246, *Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures*, 8 March 2017.

II. Ambivalent Relations with N’Djamena

Inhabitants of central Chad have ambivalent and sometimes conflictual relations with N’Djamena. Although these regions form a solid electoral base for the governing party, there is also strong and growing social discontent that is not reflected in voting patterns and rarely spills over into the street.⁷

Although the results of the 2016 presidential election do not exactly indicate how people actually voted, they showed that President Idriss Déby enjoyed a lot of support in Kanem and BEG.⁸ His party, the Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS), is well established there and the only other consequential parties in the area – Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) and the Movement for Peace and Development in Chad (MPDT) – in a position of weakness, have once again made deals with the government to ensure their political survival. During the 2016 election campaign, many people marched under the banner of the MPS at large rallies in Moussoro, Chadra (southern BEG) and Salal (northern BEG).⁹

However, anger is mounting in these regions. Since 2016, Kanem and BEG citizens have been the victims of assaults by people connected to circles of power in N’Djamena who have enjoyed a degree of impunity, leaving locals deeply humiliated. Inhabitants also believe they do not receive their share of the country’s wealth even though the local elite’s income has increased dramatically since the oil boom. In this context, there is a widening gap between the elite and local people who see the latter as too close to the government.

A. *Relations between the Sahel Regions and Central Government since the 1990s*

The overthrow of President Hissène Habré and Déby’s rise to power in 1990 reshuffled the cards and provided a host of opportunities for the Sahel regions’ inhabitants. Some took advantage of these new circumstances more than others. In the 1990s, the Kreda economic elite from BEG built on its hostility toward former President Habré to move nearer to the new government. In contrast, Kanembu businessmen in Kanem, perceived to be close to Habré, feel that they have not benefited as much from the new political situation and have become to some extent resentful toward Déby.

1. Kanem

In Kanem, the start of the Déby era was marked by distrust between the Kanembu and the Gorans on the one hand and the new government on the other. Following the introduction of a multi-party system in 1990, many political movements appeared

⁷ A demonstration against austerity measures took place in Mao before the 2016 presidential election. In addition, a “ghost town” operation was organised on 24 February 2016 in Mao, N’Djamena and Moundou in the country’s south, during which shops and schools remained closed and the local administration did not function. “Opération ‘ville morte’ au Tchad”, Deutsche Welle, 24 February 2016.

⁸ For more on the elections, see “Tchad : une nouvelle République sans Etat de droit ?”, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, 20 June 2018.

⁹ Crisis Group interview, young resident of BEG, Moussoro, March 2018.

– close to 160 parties have been formed and legally recognised since then.¹⁰ For example, former Chadian President Lol Mahamat Choua (29 April-29 August 1979) formed the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) in 1991. Although many Chadians associate it with Kanem, it succeeded in mobilising many supporters outside the region in the 1990s.

The RDP quickly became one of the most important opposition parties in Chadian politics, sparking suspicion on the part of the authorities. According to RDP members, Idriss Déby considered the party to be an electoral threat and a political movement capable of attracting Habré's supporters.¹¹ N'Djamena also suspected Kanem's business elite, close to the RDP, of funding the enemies of the governing party. Skilfully using a mixture of co-optation and repression, a well-tested scheme in Chad, the authorities arrested several party members and supporters, while others went into exile, in some cases forming their own armed groups.¹²

After several decades of Déby's rule, the context has radically changed and the RDP, like many opposition political parties, has migrated between different political positions, for more than ten years, mounting timid challenges to the government one moment and providing strong support the next. Shortly after criticising the changes to the constitution made in 2005, which removed the limit on the number of presidential terms of office, and after refusing to participate in the 2006 presidential election, the party negotiated an alliance with the MPS to secure positions in the government and seats in the National Assembly and ensure its political survival. In 2011, it joined the coalition formed by the MPS, "the Alliance for the Rebirth of Chad", and supported the governing majority for the presidential election. In April 2018, its MPs voted for the new constitution, which has greatly reduced the role and power of parliament and removed other checks and balances.¹³

But this opportunistic political rapprochement between Kanem's historic political party and the MPS does not hide the local population's discontent. The Kanembu, the region's largest ethnic group, believe they have not benefited from advantageous business positions as much as their Kreda neighbours since Déby took power. They feel they are losing economic and social status and are voicing their bitterness toward the Chadian government.¹⁴ The economic crisis that has hit Kanem so hard in recent years reinforces this sense of decline in the region, which used to be at the heart of the powerful Kanem-Bornou Empire.

¹⁰ Marielle Debos, Jérôme Tubiana, "Deby's Chad, Political Manipulation at Home, Military Intervention Abroad, Challenging Times Ahead", U.S. Institute for Peace, 12 December 2017.

¹¹ Bichara Idriss Hagggar, *Les partis politiques et les mouvements d'oppositions armés de 1990 à 2012* (Paris, 2014).

¹² In the Sahel, as elsewhere in the country, the boom in the number of political parties at the start of the 1990s went hand in hand with the creation of many armed groups. For example, the National Council of Chadian Recovery (CNR) was formed in 1992 by Colonel Abbas Koty Yacoub and Bichara Idriss Hagggar, leader of the RDP.

¹³ "Le Tchad adopte une nouvelle constitution renforçant le pouvoir du président", *Le Monde*, 1 May 2018. For an analysis of the constitution, see "Tchad: une nouvelle République sans Etat de droit?", *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, young people and economic actors in Kanem, Mao; politician from Kanem, N'Djamena, March 2018.

The current Sédigui oil project and Rig-Rig gas project in northern Kanem have raised expectations and prompted a certain amount of hope among the population.¹⁵ Representatives of youth and women's associations said they had been consulted during regional action committees chaired by the governor, while the companies involved in these projects announced a wave of local recruitment for the end of 2018.¹⁶ Although work has begun on these projects, the timetable is uncertain and doubts persist about their feasibility, especially given the security threats in the area.

2. Bahr el-Ghazal (BEG)

Since 1990, some elites from BEG's largest ethnic group, the Kreda, have made common cause with President Déby. The participation of many Kreda in the rebellion led by the Transitional Government of National Unity (GUNT), under or alongside former Chadian President Goukouni Weddeye (1979-1982) and their open hostility toward Habré at the end of his rule naturally led them to maintain good relations with the person who overthrew him, Idriss Déby.¹⁷ The new political situation quickly opened up new economic perspectives for the Kreda and allowed the government to keep some level of control over a region that had reputedly been politically sensitive ever since the colonial period.

Some Kreda benefited from business projects in N'Djamena and their activities prospered in the 1990s. Taking advantage of interest-free credit and their political connections, successful merchants took over much of the hardware trade.¹⁸ From 2007 onward, the region's major economic operators, specialising in the construction, fuel distribution and service sectors, also benefited from the oil boom and the launch of a major public works program. They obtained many public sector contracts and import licences.

The relationship is also political. Almost all Bahr el-Ghazal's deputies are members of the MPS. Meanwhile, the BEG elites that live in N'Djamena promote support for the MPS at home, as in the last presidential election. "In Moussoro, as elsewhere, people fight to get a prominent position in the MPS", said one young person.¹⁹ In fact, the MPS has more clients than genuine militants and being chosen to represent the party locally is often the start of a political career.²⁰

The Movement for Peace and Development in Chad (MPDT), formed in 1993 by Mahamat Abdulaye Mahamat and supported by BEG's Kreda business elite, has never had much political influence and quickly allied itself with the government. In 2005, it was one of the only parties not to oppose the constitutional changes introduced by the MPS. Arrested in 2009 following telephone conversations with Chadian

¹⁵ "Idriss veut faire du Kanem un nouveau centre pétrolier", Africa Energy Intelligence, 7 November 2017.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, diplomat, representatives of Mao youth association, N'Djamena, September 2018. The regional action committee is responsible for formulating and monitoring social development policies in the region.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, politician, N'Djamena, February 2018.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, politician and economic actor, N'Djamena, March 2018.

¹⁹ Crisis Group, BEG resident, Moussoro, March 2018.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, economic actor, N'Djamena, November 2017.

rebels in Libya, Mahamat Abdulaye Mahamat went into exile in Senegal but returned in 2016 and is again a government ally.²¹

But Déby's good relations with the Kreda elite have also served his aim to maintain control over the people of BEG, considered to be recalcitrant ever since the colonial period.²² Moussoro's military base is one of Chad's largest and has turned Moussoro into a garrison town with many checkpoints. To contain insecurity in the region and manage the sharp tensions between the National and Nomadic Guard of Chad (GNNT) and the rest of the population, the president has several times dispatched his uncle there – General Mahamat Saleh Brahim, head of the GNNT until 2009 and nicknamed “proconsul” in Moussoro.²³ Moreover, as explain below, the close relationship between BEG's elite and the government can be deceptive: sectors of BEG's youth living in Moussoro, Salal and neighbouring villages are angry with their leaders and tempted by various forms of resistance.

B. *Co-option: A Flawed Strategy*

Although power in Chad is in practice concentrated in the hands of the Zaghawa, the president's ethnic group, the government has been able to broaden its support base by co-opting elites from a range of ethnic groups and regions.²⁴ Of the Sahel groups, the Kreda have played their cards well. The most striking case is undoubtedly that of Abakar Tahir Moussa, Chief Executive Officer of the Almann group, with interests in construction, oil services and commerce.²⁵ This Kreda businessman who returned from Saudi Arabia in 1996 is now one of the most important figures in Chad's economy. An early member of the MPS, he became its treasurer and is said to have used his own money to support Idriss Déby's presidential campaign in his region in 2016.²⁶

BEG's Kreda have also won political space and are well represented in the country's most important ministries and key institutions. For example, foreign Minister Cherif Mahamat Zene, reappointed to the fourth republic's first government (formed in May 2018), Mahamat Ahmat Choukou, former president of the Constitutional Council and Ali Kouloutou Chaini, president of the MPS's parliamentary group are all Kreda from BEG.²⁷

But the Kreda's influence is greatest in the security sector. Ali Souleymane Bachar and Kedallah Younouss Hamidi served as ministers of Territorial Administration several times between 2010 and 2017 and the former was director-general of the police in 2010. In the last few years, the changing situation in Libya has become a

²¹ Crisis Group interview, former civil servant originally from BEG, N'Djamena, March 2018.

²² Letter from Colonel Ducarre to the district commander, dated 1920 and reproduced in Joubert Georges, “le Faki Naïm”, *Bulletin de la société des recherches congolaises*, n°24, November 1937.

²³ Crisis Group interview, BEG resident, N'Djamena, March 2018. The GNNT's main mission is to provide security in rural areas, particularly by safeguarding transit along transhumance corridors for herders, stopping cattle theft and patrolling national parks.

²⁴ “Deby's Chad, Political Manipulation at Home, Military Intervention Abroad, Challenging Times Ahead», op. cit.

²⁵ “Tchad: trois patrons en béton”, *Jeune Afrique*, 28 April 2014.

²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, civil society, Moussoro and N'Djamena, March 2018.

²⁷ “Le Tchad promulgue sa nouvelle constitution et passe à la 4^{ème} République”, Radio France Internationale (RFI), 5 May 2018.

priority for N'Djamena and Déby has surrounded himself with men who know that country and the rebels based there. For example, Jiddi Saleh, who spent time in exile in Libya and Algeria in the 1980s at the side of former Chadian President Goukouni Weddeye, led the National Security Agency (ANS) between 2012 and 2016. Sometimes nicknamed Déby's "securocrat", he currently holds the strategic position of national security adviser to the president.²⁸ Issa Ali Taher, who also comes from BEG, was director of the president's civilian cabinet, before being dismissed in May 2018.²⁹ His contacts with rebels in southern Libya and his great knowledge of the country, where he used to live, have made him a key adviser for the government.

The Chadian government uses these elites to keep these regions under its indirect control.³⁰ With weak local government in BEG, as it is in many other regions in the country's interior, the government relies on those who offer loyalty to extend its control.³¹ In the case of Moussoro, this particularly means business people, who intervene regularly to resolve local conflicts, sometimes at the request of the local authorities, whose legitimacy is often challenged. They also have the power to demand the departure of governors or prefects when these are criticised by the population.

In Chad, there are frequent ministerial reshuffles and governorships are "short-term" contracts. This instability is used deliberately and politically to remain in control but also reflects disagreements between the local authorities and the population. This is particularly true of the region of Bahr el-Ghazal, which since its creation in 2008, has had thirteen governors, who have often been forced out following complaints by local people and pressures from local elites. A former governor privately stated: "we are supposed to be the guardians of public authority but in reality, that is not the case. People call their relatives [in the administration] in N'Djamena to put pressure on us".³²

The BEG and Kanem elites maintain a relationship with the government that allows them to have a voice in local disputes. But they also attract criticism from the population, which accuses them of supporting the Zaghawa against local people and acting dishonourably in order to "get rich".³³ The youth in BEG is increasingly deaf when the elite tries to persuade them that "we are in the regime's good books, do not spoil this opportunity", and their relationship with central government is creating palpable tension.

²⁸ "Deby's Chad, Political Manipulation at Home, Military Intervention Abroad, Challenging Times Ahead", op. cit.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, BEG resident, N'Djamena, February 2018.

³⁰ See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°78, *Chad's North West: The Next High-risk Area?*, 17 February 2011.

³¹ Marielle Debos, *Le métier des armes au Tchad. Le gouvernement de l'entre-guerres* (Paris, 2013).

³² Crisis Group interview, N'Djamena, March 2018.

³³ Crisis Group interview, BEG resident, N'Djamena, February 2018.

III. Mounting Tensions in the Region

A. Abuses against BEG and Kanem Citizens

Since 2016, tension between the government and the populations of Kanem and BEG has been rising, fuelled by a series of abuses by individuals close to the inner circles of power.

The case of Zouhouira, a sixteen year-old girl from Kanem, raped by the sons of government dignitaries in N'Djamena in February 2016 caused deep shock and great anger in the country.³⁴ The girl publicly asked for the perpetrators of the assault to be punished. Thousands of people called for “justice for Zouhouira” at demonstrations in several cities, including N'Djamena and Mao, and the affair became politically important in the middle of the electoral period. In response to the popular protest, just a few weeks before the presidential election, the president was forced to speak out and condemn the assault; he reassured “the country’s girls and mothers that justice will be done”.³⁵ On 30 June 2016, Chad’s criminal court sentenced several culprits to ten years in prison.³⁶

For the people of Kanem and BEG, this was not an isolated incident. In November 2016, several people died in intercommunal clashes between Zaghawa, the president’s ethnic group, and Kreda in Ngueli, in N'Djamena’s 9th district, after a fight broke out between two adolescents at the end of a football match. Two days later, armed men, allegedly Zaghawa, opened fire on a crowd that had come to pay their respects at the funeral, killing five people.³⁷

In April 2017, another incident added to the list of Kreda grievances against the Zaghawa. Armed men attacked a convoy of prisoners at Massaguet on the way to Koro Toro, killing a dozen detainees, mainly Kreda. Their target was a Kreda colonel and his bodyguards, accused of killing the Zaghawa General Adam Touba, their commanding officer in the joint Chad-Sudan force.³⁸ Many young Kreda felt deeply humiliated and reacted angrily to the ambush.³⁹ The perpetrators of the armed assault were sentenced to life imprisonment at the end of June 2018 but the people who ordered the attack reportedly remain free.⁴⁰

In this context, the Kreda elite’s efforts to calm down young people in BEG have been less and less successful. For example, after the clashes in Ngueli, young Kreda, against the advice of their elders, asked the victims’ families to refuse the *diya* (a

³⁴ “Tchad: quand un viol devient une affaire d’Etat”, *Libération*, 23 February 2016.

³⁵ “Viol d’une jeune fille au Tchad, un acte ignoble, selon Idriss Déby”, RFI, 16 February 2016.

³⁶ “Tchad: dix ans de prison pour les violeurs de Zouhouira”, *Le Monde*, 1 July 2016.

³⁷ “5 morts à Nguéli dans un affrontement intercommunautaire”, Tchad infos, 26 November 2016.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, politicians and members of civil society, N'Djamena, March 2018. Composed of several thousand troops deployed on the Chad-Sudan border, the joint force was created after Chad and Sudan normalised relations and signed an agreement on the security of their joint border in January 2010.

³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, young Kanem and BEG residents, Moussoro, Mao, March 2018.

⁴⁰ “Tchad: les auteurs de la tuerie de Massaguet condamnés à perpétuité”, Tchad infos, 25 June 2018.

standard way of settling accounts in the Sahel) proposed by the Zaghawa families.⁴¹ They preferred to raise money themselves to support the grieving families. Refusal of the *diyya* is unusual, especially among the Kreda. After the attack on the convoy, young Kreda also dissuaded the victims' families from organising a ceremony of remembrance and suggested that they refuse to accept the condolences offered by government representatives.⁴²

In the past, violence in Chad has often been triggered by one-off local events.⁴³ Seemingly unrelated to the political debate in N'Djamena, these events reflect, however, the balance of forces and who holds power in Chadian society. The perpetrators of some attacks feel protected by their connections with the country's leaders. In this context, attacks against people from BEG and Kanem by individuals close to the inner circles of power crystallise resentment and fuel a simplistic popular anti-Zaghawa discourse. Following these attacks, messages calling on young Kreda to join the rebellion in Libya circulated widely on social media. According to several senior government officials originally from BEG and Kanem, these incidents and the impunity enjoyed by some of the perpetrators and planners have led to growing local support for rebel groups in southern Libya.⁴⁴ One such person was Zouhouira's uncle, who left for Libya set on "avenging his niece".⁴⁵

B. *A Regional Economy in the Red*

The BEG and Kanem regions suffer the constraints associated with the Sahelian environment; deep-rooted gender inequalities, lack of public investment in basic services and the relative absence of humanitarian and development organisations.⁴⁶ Although close to N'Djamena, these regions are difficult to access. The lack of infrastructure and the long distances between the villages and administrative centres make travelling difficult. In Mao, Kanem's capital, historic inertias linked to the role of the Sultanin decision-making also discourages investments.

The Sahel regions are among the poorest in the country and every year register alarming malnutrition rates and maternal and child health indicators.⁴⁷ This discourages international donors, who humanitarian actors say, no longer want to

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, Kreda economic actors and politicians, N'Djamena, February 2018. The *diyya* is the sum of money due in compensation for a crime or accident. It aims to settle disputes between the parties and avoid vendettas.

⁴² At a community meeting organised after the Ngueli incident, young Kreda called Zouhouira's father a traitor and refused to allow him to speak because of his support for Idriss Déby in the 2016 presidential election. Crisis Group interviews, politicians and members of civil society from BEG, N'Djamena, March 2018.

⁴³ *Le métier des armes au Tchad. Le gouvernement de l'entre-guerres*, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interviews, government officials originally from BEG and Kanem, N'Djamena and Moussoro, March 2018.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, young man, Moussoro, March 2018.

⁴⁶ "Analyse qualitative des causes de la malnutrition, Grand Kanem, Tchad", Action against Hunger (Action contre la faim), May 2012.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

heavily fund NGOs for regions like Kanem and BEG “because these indicators have not improved for the last fifteen years and there is a chronic malnutrition crisis”.⁴⁸

In addition to these deep-rooted structural problems, the difficulties faced by BEG and Kanem residents also have more proximate causes: the financial crisis affecting Chad since 2014, caused by the drop in oil prices; poor agro-pastoral production in 2017/2018; a fall in cereal production (minus 27 per cent in Kanem, 20 per cent in BEG) in the same period; and, most importantly, the growing regional insecurity. Closure of Chad’s borders with Nigeria, the Central African Republic (CAR) and, intermittently, with Libya and Sudan, has hindered economic activities in these remote areas, which are very dependent on trade with neighbouring countries.

In a previous report, Crisis Group described the impact of Boko Haram’s activities on the populations around Lake Chad and on Sahel herders, including the closure of the border between Chad and Nigeria in 2014 and the implementation of a state of emergency, which, although not officially renewed, has in reality been maintained on the ground.⁴⁹ In a country where 80 per cent of exported cattle is traditionally sold in Nigeria, restrictions on movements on the lake and the interruption of trade with neighbouring Bornou has had a considerable effect on the trade of livestock, which are traditionally transported on foot, and has caused a major pastoral crisis. Herders take longer routes to go to neighbouring countries or are forced to sell their animals in Chad at a very low price, up to 50 per cent less in the case of cattle.⁵⁰

Herders’ income has fallen drastically, and their main assets cattle, are threatened. In response, several humanitarian donors, including the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), have funded animal stock reduction projects by buying animals at the usual market price for re-selling as dry meat. Although these projects are very useful, they are limited in scale and account for only a few thousand head of cattle.⁵¹

The intermittent and only partially effective closure of the border between Chad and Libya and the establishment of a military operations zone in northern Chad in January 2017 have also hindered trade and increased the cost of imported food and manufactured goods in BEG and Kanem. Indeed, these regions, although they are close to N’Djamena, traditionally have close links with Libya for supplies and trade. In Moussoro and Mao, the largest markets are known as “Libyan markets” and these towns act as a trading link between southern Libya and the Chadian capital.⁵² Many retail traders from N’Djamena regularly visit Mao and Moussoro to buy products imported from Libya. The reduction in trade with Libya has therefore had an impact on the income of residents of these trading towns.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N’Djamena, February 2018. “La résilience des pasteurs aux sécheresses, entre traditions et bouleversement, les ONG au défi des transhumances”, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group Report, *Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures*, op. cit.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N’Djamena, February 2018.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Karine Bennafla, *Le commerce frontalier en Afrique centrale, acteurs, espaces, pratiques*, (Paris, 2002).

C. *Intra-religious Divides*

Unlike neighbouring countries such as Nigeria, the Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan, Chad, where Muslims account for about 55 per cent of the population and Christians for about 40 per cent, has not been affected by sectarian violence. But Chad attracts a large number of missionaries, for example evangelical churches in the south of the country and Wahhabi movements, a term roughly referring to those who support a strict interpretation of Islam in Chad.

The strong presence of Wahhabism in BEG sometimes generates low-level local tensions and forms part of a wider struggle for influence among the country's Muslim communities.⁵³ Since the 1990s, national authorities and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (CSAI), the official body representing Muslims in Chad, traditionally led by a Sufi, have voiced their fears about the strong growth in these regions of Wahhabi groups sponsored by the Islamic organisation Ansar al-Sunna.⁵⁴ They are particularly successful among the Kreda, who have a long history of trade with Saudi Arabia and are well represented in the Chadian diaspora in the country's capital N'Djamena.⁵⁵

While visiting Moussoro several years ago, President Déby reportedly urged members of Ansar al-Sunna "not to beg the Arabs [Saudis] for money with which to destabilise Chad".⁵⁶ Sheikh Hissein Hassan Abakar, a former CSAI president who died in January 2018, had acrimonious relations with Wahhabis and reportedly alerted the American embassy in Chad as early as 2007 about the religious activism of Ansar al-Sunna representatives in the Gulf countries and the propaganda messages broadcast on their radio station, Al-Bayane.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, "Wahhabis" have long criticised official Islamic bodies in Chad and viewed the CSAI as a Sufi organisation that seeks to contain their growth.

Since the 2015 N'Djamena bombings, Chadian authorities have been trying to strengthen their control over the religious landscape by banning burqas and turbans, keeping a watch on some neighbourhood mosques, Friday sermons, Quranic teachings and radio broadcasts.⁵⁸ Several associations led by citizens of Moussoro, such as

⁵³ Wahhabism is a doctrine founded in the eighteenth century in the Arabian peninsula by Muhammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahhab. It is based on the "uniqueness of God" and "a critique of the cult of saints and Sufism". In central Africa, the word "Wahhabism" has taken on a generic meaning and is used to describe all tendencies of Islam that preach a return to a pure version of the religion, stripped of traditional practices deemed unacceptable. This report uses the expression "Wahhabi" in this sense, common in Chad. But those who are described as "Wahhabis" generally prefer to be called "Sunnis" because they say that they represent the only true Islam.

⁵⁴ Ansar al-Sunna is an Islamic organisation with a presence in Egypt, Sudan and Chad, which says it is inspired by Wahhabism. The Sufi majority in Chad is hostile toward their proselytising, but Wahhabis have never used violence to extend their support base. "Deby's Chad, Political Manipulation at Home, Military Intervention Abroad, Challenging Times Ahead", op. cit.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, religious leaders, politicians, civil society actors, N'Djamena, February 2018.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, member of the Kreda elite, July 2018.

⁵⁷ "Grand Imam voices concern over extremists' 'new strategy' in Chad", U.S. embassy N'Djamena cable, 4 June 2007, as published by WikiLeaks, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07NDJAMENA455_a.html.

⁵⁸ For more information on these attacks and the response of the Chadian state to tighten security, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°233, *Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, 30 March 2016.

Ansar al-Sunna al-Mohamadiya, have been dissolved or suspended because they allegedly “posed a threat to public order”.⁵⁹ A number of mosques have also been closed in BEG and public officials have been appointed on Moussoro’s community radio in order to tackle sectarian excesses.⁶⁰ State authorities have also been promoting “Chadian Islam”, that they see as represented by various forms of Sufism. Many Kreda supporters of Ansar al-Sunna consider that these messages and actions have stigmatised their community.⁶¹

In Moussoro, Salal and N’Djamena’s Diguel neighbourhood, where many Kreda live, people have instigated forms of passive resistance to these measures: mosques are built without CSAI’s authorisation, and therefore illegally;⁶² many women defy the full veil’s ban; and dissolved associations re-form under different names in order to continue as before.⁶³ However, Idriss Déby de-escalated tensions by calling for calm in his statements made in 2017, and by asking the CSAI to resume dialogue with those representing different branches of Islam. The CSAI’s new leadership, appointed in April 2018 after the death of Sheikh Hissein Hassan Abakar, includes members of Ansar al-Sunna.⁶⁴

Unlike in Sudan, where members of Ansar al-Sunna occupy government positions and influence the political agenda, in Chad, this current’s growing influence has been relatively harmless politically. But advances made by movements espousing stricter interpretations of Islam have had repercussions on society. Sufi students in N’Djamena told Crisis Group: “people don’t talk to each other as much as they used to, they greet each other less”; “they think we’re bad Muslims”.⁶⁵ Antagonism between Sufis and Wahhabis has created tensions in Moussoro. The stricter currents also reject the Sufi-organised prayers for rain and celebrations of the prophet’s anniversary. On a local level, however, these differences have not led to conflict.

In terms of security, intra-religious tensions have not been the driving force of Chad’s armed opposition based in neighbouring countries, even though some rebels have occasionally used religious references to add weight to their criticism of the authorities. Before his arrest in 2017 in Niger, the former leader of the Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic (CCMSR), Mahamat Hassane Boulmaye, originally from BEG, criticised Idriss Déby and BEG officials close to the inner circles of power for being bad Muslims, based on the Suras in the Quran and

⁵⁹ Website of the U.S. embassy in Chad, consulted in September 2015, http://french.chad.usembassy.gov/rapport_sur_la_libert_de_religion.html.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, former local official in Moussoro, N’Djamena, February 2018.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interviews, Moussoro residents, citizens from BEG, Moussoro and N’Djamena, March 2018.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, former BEG local official, N’Djamena, February 2018.

⁶³ The government has previously introduced similar measures. In 1997, 30 religious associations were dissolved for allegedly posing a threat to public order. In May 2006, Chad banned or suspended the activities of the following associations: Mountada al-Islamia, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), the charitable foundation Moukarrama de la Mecque and the Haramain, another charity, accusing them of promoting violence for religious purposes. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, N’Djamena, August 2015. See Ladiba Gondeu, *L’émergence des organisations islamiques au Tchad. Enjeux, acteurs et territoires* (Paris, 2011).

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, former political actor from Moussoro, N’Djamena, March 2018.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, N’Djamena, March 2018.

on the Hadiths.⁶⁶ Several sources who were close to Boulmaye admit privately that the former leader was not a devout Muslim and that he used religious references simply as a means of mobilising support.⁶⁷

Young men and intellectuals close to Ansar al-Sunna, sometimes from BEG, have joined rebels in Libya.⁶⁸ Abderaman Issa, a former Kreda parliamentarian from the Movement for Peace and Development in Chad (MPDT), and also a professor and researcher in contemporary history at the N'Djamena University and the King Faisal University, reportedly joined the rebels before being arrested with Boulmaye in Niger in 2017.⁶⁹

The strong presence of so-called Wahhabi currents in BEG is certainly a cause for concern among Sufi religious leaders in Chad, but is also straining relationships between local and national authorities and movements with close ties to Ansar al-Sunna.⁷⁰ Locally, however, tensions between Sufis and Wahhabis are still at a low level and a large majority of those interviewed in Moussoro and N'Djamena say that they have not yet seen the potential for religious conflict in the Sahel.⁷¹

⁶⁶ “Cadres musulmans du Tchad, avez-vous posé la question : qu’est-ce que le Dajjal ?” and “Le despote Idriss Déby, peut-il être un démon ?”, Python-News blog (python-news.over-blog.com), 29 and 30 September 2015. “Le Niger s’apprête à extraditer le rebelle tchadien Mahamat Hassan Boulmaye”, RFI, 19 October 2017.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interviews, former rebels, N'Djamena, March 2018 and Paris, October 2018.

⁶⁸ According to a former Chadian rebel who tried unsuccessfully to play a leading role in the CCMSR rebellion in Libya, unlike other Chadian armed groups based in southern Libya, the religious angle is an important way of gaining access to this group, allowing combatants to form alliances in southern Libya. Crisis Group interviews, religious leader, N'Djamena, March 2018; former Chadian rebel, Paris, October 2018.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, religious leader, N'Djamena, March 2018.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, senior Chadian civil servant and religious leader, N'Djamena, September 2015 and March 2018.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, youth associations, officials, economic actors, teachers, students, members of humanitarian NGOs, Moussoro and N'Djamena, March 2018.

IV. The Sahel's Itinerant Youth

To a far greater extent than intra-religious tensions, the economic crisis combined with the strained political and security situation currently affecting the Kanem and BEG regions are driving young men to leave for the north and neighbouring countries, in particular Libya. Unlike the few Chadians departing from the south, east and N'Djamena who sometimes aim to reach Europe, most of the young people from Kanem and BEG who go to Libya choose to stay there.⁷²

The Chadian state broadly conflates migrations from Kanem and BEG to Libya with mass enlistment in rebel forces. Actions taken by local and national authorities to curtail emigration primarily aim to reduce the number of young men joining the Chadian armed groups based in southern Libya. But the government's fears are exaggerated and the reality is more complex. Many Chadians traditionally leave for Libya to find work and send remittances to their families in Chad. For many households in the Sahel area of Chad, these money transfers constitute the main source of income. Most of the young men interviewed by Crisis Group in Moussoro and Mao express their wish to leave for Libya to find work, often with the help of other family members already living there.⁷³ Migration therefore serves to redistribute resources.⁷⁴

A. Increasing Migration

Both the Kanem and BEG regions have historically had some of the highest emigration rates in Chad. Initially, people left for political or security-related reasons, but since the 1970s economic and environmental factors have become the main drivers. Due to the severe droughts of 1973 and 1984, many families left for large cities such as N'Djamena or for southern Chad, or alternatively headed to Saudi Arabia (via Sudan), Nigeria and Libya. Among Chadians in Riyadh, the Kreda and the Kanembu probably are the most numerous. Most of them are reportedly employed in odd jobs. More than 80,000 Chadians, mostly men, are believed to be living in Libya and mainly work as farmers and traders.⁷⁵

⁷² In the Western discourse on migration, Chad is presented as a linchpin in curtailing African migration toward Europe. Idriss Déby's participation in various international (particularly European) summits on migration indicates the wish to involve N'Djamena in the strategy to bring migration flows under control. But although other Africans pass through Chad on their way to Europe via Libya, and increasingly so after the tightening of controls in Agadez in Niger, the country is not – unlike Niger or Sudan – located on a busy migration route. Europeans spend far more money on efforts to control migration in Niger and Sudan than in Chad, where very few projects related to migration have materialised. See “Chad: the unexpected migration debate”, Deutsche Welle, 27 November 2017 and “Multilateral Damage: The Impact of EU Migration Policies on Central Saharan Routes”, Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of International Relations), September 2018.

⁷³ Crisis Group interviews, young people from BEG and Kanem, Mao, Moussoro, March 2018.

⁷⁴ “Analyse qualitative des causes de la malnutrition, Grand Kanem, Tchad”, op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, BEG and Kanem citizens, N'Djamena, March 2018.

⁷⁵ “Mobilités au Tchad, infographie des mobilités sur le territoire tchadien”, International Organization for Migration (IOM), May 2018.

1. Drivers of migration over the past decade

The discovery of gold deposits from 2012 onward in Tibesti (northern Chad), Niger, North Darfur (Sudan), southern Algeria and southern Libya, and in 2015 in the Batha region (central Chad), has triggered a gold rush and led more people to migrate. In Algeria, where artisanal gold mining is prohibited, many Chadian gold miners – some of whom came from BEG and Kanem – were even arrested some years ago. At that time, the Chadian justice minister intervened personally to request their release, but by then some had already died in prison.⁷⁶

Despite being banned, gold mining in the Tibesti region continues to attract large numbers of Chadians as well as foreigners, some of whom arrive via clandestine people-smuggling networks.⁷⁷ The shift of some migration routes toward the Tibesti gold mines shows the importance of these new crossing points during migrants' journeys toward Fezzan in Libya.⁷⁸ However, the extreme tensions in Tibesti since October 2018 and the confrontations between the army, heavily deployed in the country's north, and the Teda self-defence groups near the gold-mining areas, could have a strong impact on these migrations.

Recent security developments have also affected these dynamics. Chadians flocked back to their country of origin after the start of the Libyan civil war in 2011; many have lost everything they had acquired over decades in Libya. According to humanitarian organisations supporting their reinsertion, tens of thousands of people fled the violence and resettled in Kanem or BEG in 2011.⁷⁹ These returnees who had previously sent considerable sums of money back home became a burden for their families. Faced with a drastic fall in living standards and the difficulty in adapting from a modern, urban lifestyle to an arid, rural environment, many decided to head back to Libya despite the continued insecurity.⁸⁰

In times of economic crisis, migration becomes the most effective way for people to improve their standard of living.⁸¹ Most of the young unemployed population from the BEG and Kanem regions make these journeys to become economically self-sufficient, to get married or to improve their social status. Migrating abroad is considered a better financial move than relocating to a different part of Chad. For young people engaged in trade between Chad's Sahelian regions and Libya, the aftermath of the overthrow of Qadhafi has even opened up new opportunities. "I work in the car trade between Sebha and Moussoro. Since 2011, there has been more cars for sale. I can now find a Hilux for FCFA3 or 4 million (\$5,260 to \$7,014) in southern

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interviews, BEG citizens, N'Djamena, March 2018.

⁷⁷ "Mobilités au Tchad, infographie des mobilités sur le territoire tchadien", op. cit.

⁷⁸ There are various migration routes in Chad. To the west, migrants take the N'Djamena-Faya-Largeau route to reach Zouarké; others pass through Mao and head directly for Zouarké along the Chad-Niger; finally, since 2013, Chadians as well as Sudanese pass through Kalait and Faya-Largeau before reaching the mining area of Kouri Bougoudi, and then continuing toward Libya. Potential migrants sometimes delay their onward journeys due to the money to be made in the mines. "Multi-lateral Damage: The Impact of EU Migration Policies on Central Saharan Routes", op. cit., and "Migrations mixtes au Tchad", Altaï Consulting for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), January 2018.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian actors, N'Djamena, March 2018.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Analyse qualitative des causes de la malnutrition, Grand Kanem, Tchad", op. cit.

Libya”, said a young retail trader from Moussoro, adding: “To protect myself, I buy a weapon as soon as I cross the border into Libya because there are no security checks over there”.⁸²

2. An upward trend in 2017 and 2018

Emigration from Kanem, BEG and the neighbouring Batha region intensified in 2017-2018.⁸³ Humanitarian NGOs have confirmed this trend and reported ever more households impacted by migration in these areas: “When we ask women if we can give them a medicine, many say that they first need to call their husbands who are abroad”.⁸⁴

Highly conservative estimates by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which has set up two monitoring posts to assess the flow of migrants in Zouarké and Faya-Largeau in northern Chad, more than 2,000 people crossed into Libya via Zouarké just in March 2018. Chadians are also travelling in the opposite direction back to Chad, driven by the insecurity in Libya.⁸⁵ The conflict between the Tebu and Awlad Suleiman groups for control over the southern Libyan town of Sebha in 2018 has undoubtedly reinforced this trend.⁸⁶

Chadians are not the only people increasingly on the move. Although Chad is not located on one of the main migratory routes toward Europe and the flows of people there are limited, tighter controls in recent years in Niger (particularly in Agadez) and Sudan – two traditional routes – have encouraged some migrants from West and East Africa to take their chances via Chad. Senegalese, Liberians, Somalians, Eritreans, Malians and Sudanese en route to Libya are now making detours via Chad.⁸⁷ Unlike most young Chadians from the Sahel who are not aiming to reach Europe, these other nationalities – as well as Chadians from the south, N’Djamena and eastern parts of the country – often want to cross the Mediterranean.

Mao is in fact known as a crossing point for southern Chadians who are trying to reach the Mediterranean coast:

People smugglers make contact with the Chadians who want to go to Europe. When they arrive in Mao, these people are told to leave the town on their own to get round the checkpoints, and then they regroup at a meeting point a few kilometres out of town. Once there, people pile into cars and set off northward.⁸⁸

The roads from Mao to Zouarké in the north are dangerous and the lack of available water en route makes these journeys very perilous.

⁸² Crisis Group interview, young retail trader, Moussoro, March 2018.

⁸³ “Mobilités au Tchad, infographie des mobilités sur le territoire tchadien”, op. cit.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian actors, N’Djamena, March 2018.

⁸⁵ The IOM recorded 3,600 Chadians who have returned from Libya during this same month. “Mobilités au Tchad, infographie des mobilités sur le territoire tchadien”, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group telephone interviews, Chadian civil society actors, researcher, July 2018. Members of Awlad Suleiman, sometimes supported by the national Libyan army led by Khalifa Haftar, regularly accuse the Tebu of participating actively in Chadian rebel movements in Libya.

⁸⁷ “Multilateral Damage: The Impact of EU Migration Policies on Central Saharan Routes”, op. cit.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Mao residents, Mao and N’Djamena, April and September 2018.

B. *The Temptation to Join the Rebellion*

In a minority of cases, young men travelling from the Sahel to Libya – in addition to subsistence activities – engage as mercenaries in rebel movements, mainly to save up money. Qadhafi's overthrow in 2011 created a new regional conflict system and saw a market for fighters emerge, attracting people from Chad Sahel regions. For some youth from these regions, joining rebel movements is not necessarily about gaining power but more about improving their status in acutely unequal societies. Currently, between 2,000 and 4,000 Chadian fighters are reportedly based in southern Libya.⁸⁹

It would be a mistake, however, to focus purely on economic motivations or to see these rebels as simply going through a rite of passage. Problems of governance are also a motivating factor. The large numbers of Dazagada from Kanem and BEG (particularly Kreda and Kercheda) in the armed groups in Libya reflect, in addition to the obvious financial incentive of joining the rebels, the frustration felt by the youth in the Sahel. Many young people in Moussoro and Mao say that they feel humiliated and want to take revenge; they say that some of their brothers and friends have left to join the rebel forces to seek vengeance after the Zouhouira affair and the attacks in Massaguet and Ngueli.⁹⁰

Some rebel Chadian leaders in southern Libya are originally from these regions and find it easy to attract new recruits. Ali Mahadi Mahamat, a Goran (Daza Kecherda) from Salal currently leads the Front for Change and Unity in Chad (FACT), a political and military group that emerged from a schism in Mahamat Nouri's Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD).⁹¹ Undoubtedly one of Chad's most well-endowed armed opposition forces in southern Libya in terms of its number of fighters, this group is particularly active in the Joufra region.⁹² According to several men interviewed in Moussoro and Mao, social media amplifies messages and plays an important role in these mobilisations.⁹³ The leaders of the rebel movements are well aware of this trend: "the world has changed. Today's hyperconnected youth no longer wait passively to be told what to do" said Ali Mahadi Mahamat.⁹⁴

Several hundred predominantly Kreda combatants also formed their own armed faction in 2016, the Military Command Council for Saving the Republic (CCMSR). They split from FACT due to internal rifts after tensions flared up in the leadership, another in the long line of divisions within Chadian rebel movements. CCMSR's former head, Mahamat Hassan Boulmaye, a Kreda from Moussoro, often referred in his writings to leading figures from Bahr el-Ghazal in order to mobilise support and justify rebellion. He criticised citizens from his region who had close political

⁸⁹ Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher, October 2018.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, young BEG and Kanem residents, Moussoro and Mao, March 2018.

⁹¹ FACT and UFDD are two Chadian rebel groups with forces in southern Libya. "Communiqué de presse constitutif", FACT, 8 April 2016.

⁹² "Deby's Chad: Political Manipulation at Home, Military Intervention Abroad, Challenging Times Ahead", op. cit.

⁹³ Crisis Group interviews, young men, Moussoro, March 2018.

⁹⁴ "Mahamat Mahadi Ali, la rose et le glaive", *Libération*, 29 May 2017.

ties to Déby, presenting them as traitors “to the cause of BEG”.⁹⁵ In Moussoro and Mao, many young people welcome such messages.⁹⁶

In an attack in the Chadian Tibesti region near Libya in August 2018, the CCMSR killed several dozen Chadian soldiers and seized other military personnel, proving once again its capacity to cause damage.⁹⁷ Furthermore, as tension mounts between the Teda and the army in Tibesti, CCMSR’s spokesperson, Kingabé Ogouzemi de Tapol, has tried to tap the Tedas’ anger to form opportunistic alliances with discontented Tibesti. This strategy has largely failed and the coordinator of Miski’s self-defence groups, Molly Sougui, quickly condemned CCMSR’s attempts to seize upon the conflict in Tibesti.⁹⁸

As in the past in BEG and Kanem, Resistance movements are not formed locally but elsewhere. Unlike northern Chad, the central Sahelian regions are not so much a fertile ground for rebel movements but a source of combatants. Chadian traders and families in Libya are frequently approached by recruiters of locally active groups. “They drop by and see my relatives every month to say hello and ask after me”, said a young trader from Moussoro whose family lives in Libya, adding “they say that I can join them if I want to; many of my friends have already done so”.⁹⁹ Recruiters are allegedly also operating in the Kanem, BEG and Batha regions, according to the Chadian authorities, although this has not been independently confirmed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ “Djiddi Bichara Hassan, partisan du démon, exploiteur du peuple”, Boulmaye’s blog, Python News, 12 November 2015.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, young men, Moussoro, March 2018.

⁹⁷ The CCMSR claimed responsibility for this attack and demanded the release of Boulmaye and two of its senior officials arrested in 2017. The Chadian army retaliated in September 2018 with a “clean-up” operation around Kouri Bougoudi, and the country’s air force launched strikes in the area, killing a number of civilians, according to a local parliamentarian. Tensions have since been mounting in Tibesti and Borkou, as evidenced in the recent fighting in November 2018 between the army and the local population organised into self-defence groups near the Miski gold mines. “Tchad: le CCMSR affirme détenir prisonniers trois officiers de l’armée”, RFI, 17 August 2018. “Au Tchad, des bombardements de l’armée dans le Tibesti”, *Le Monde*, 14 September 2018. Crisis Group interviews, politicians and Tebu (Teda) civil society actors from Tibesti, N’Djamena, November 2018.

⁹⁸ “Tchad : le comité d’auto-défense de Miski accuse le CCMSR de bavures contre des civils”, Alwihda, 16 November 2018.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, young retail trader, Moussoro, March 2018.

¹⁰⁰ In 2017, a network recruiting young men to join the rebellion was reported in north Kanem, near the Lake Chad region, and a police mission allegedly was swiftly dispatched from N’Djamena to investigate. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian actor and residents of Mao, Mao and N’Djamena, April and September 2018.

V. State Responses

Against a backdrop of rebel movements in southern Libya, the Chadian state has a somewhat exaggerated fear that the increasing numbers of young men leaving the Sahel represent mass enlistment in these rebel forces. “The gold rush in Tibesti hides other realities. It’s common knowledge. These young people are going to join the rebels”, said a senior official from the Territorial Administration Ministry posted to Mao.¹⁰¹ In Moussoro, the authorities added: “no motorbike taxis are left, they’re all going north to join the rebel movements”.¹⁰² In August 2018, the public security Minister Ahmat Mahamat Bachir said that the gold miners were colluding with the rebels.¹⁰³

By taking measures to stem the flow of migrants, the authorities are seeking above all to prevent young people from joining the armed groups operating in Libya. To this end, they have tightened and increased the number of checkpoints in the country’s far north and Sahel regions and have carried out awareness-raising initiatives as a means of dissuading potential emigrants.¹⁰⁴

A. Tightened Controls

In 2016, Ahmat Mahamat Bachir recalled that “clandestine emigration of Chadians to Libya is forbidden”; he called on governors and security forces in these regions to “track down anyone found to be defying this ban”, adding that individuals from various regions, including BEG and Kanem, used people smugglers in order to reach Libya.¹⁰⁵ The governors have since issued several decrees to prevent people departing for the country’s north and to Libya. In Moussoro, the governor set up a joint security committee made up of the gendarmerie and the National Nomadic Guard to patrol the buffer zones, particularly between Faya-Largeau and Moussoro. Before leaving Moussoro for the north, all vehicles must be checked by state officials and members of the National Security Agency (ANS) in order to report the destination, purpose of travel and identity of those making the journey. Several barriers have been set up along the main roads leading to Libya.¹⁰⁶

These measures have led to the arrest of several hundred people from the Sahel. On the border between BEG and the Borkou region, “some friends of mine have been arrested while they were inflating their tyres”, said a young driver from the town.¹⁰⁷ Local authorities said that when the vehicles are pulled over, they are impounded

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, local official in Kanem, Mao, March 2018.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, local official in BEG, Moussoro, March 2018.

¹⁰³ “Le gouvernement tchadien chasse les orpailleurs artisanaux”, BBC, 13 août 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, in order to complete this series of local measures, President Idriss Déby has recently proposed a general amnesty for Chadians “who have left the country for one reason or another”. But this announcement has already been turned down by the leaders of major Chadian rebel groups in southern Libya, such as the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD) and the Union of Resistance Forces (UFR).

¹⁰⁵ Chad’s presidency website, https://presidence.td/fr-synth-255-Mardi_le_27_decembre_2016.html, 27 December 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, BEG authorities, Moussoro, March 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, Moussoro, March 2018.

and their passengers are either jailed or their names taken.¹⁰⁸ In April 2018, 372 people were stopped in Faya-Largeau.¹⁰⁹ Some inhabitants of Mao and Moussoro told Crisis Group that they had been subjected to extortion by security forces during checks.¹¹⁰ This suspicious attitude is worsening relations between the authorities and youth who want to migrate from the Sahel regions.

In any case, these security measures and checkpoints have serious weaknesses and are sometimes ineffective; many young people get round them simply by leaving at night or taking other routes.¹¹¹ In Zouarké, in northern Chad, witnesses claim to have seen convoys of dozens of vehicles passing close to checkpoints without the soldiers being able to stop them.¹¹² Military officers themselves reportedly bemoan their lack of resources to pursue vehicles bypassing their checkpoints.¹¹³ This lack of results has previously led to the replacement of certain governors (as in Faya-Largeau).¹¹⁴

B. *Opportune but Inefficient Awareness-raising Initiatives*

In a bid to dissuade young people from leaving the country, authorities have also carried out awareness-raising initiatives. They have asked imams, during their Friday prayers, to alert people to the risks of gold mining and to try to discourage the faithful from joining the rebels. During official ceremonies, state authorities remind potential emigrants that they risk sanctions by leaving.¹¹⁵ Members of civil society, such as young people's associations or teachers, have also been used to deter the undecided from travelling north, particularly through community radio stations (Ndjimi in Mao, FM Wadi Bissam in Mondo and Al Bissary in Nokou).

However, these communication and awareness-raising campaigns face serious difficulties: it is hard to reach villagers living far away from administrative centres, and radio stations have limited coverage. But most importantly, these efforts are not enough to counteract the ripple effect of young people returning with money, expensive cars or other visible signs of wealth.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interviews, BEG authorities, Moussoro, March 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N'Djamena, March 2018.

¹¹⁰ "Multilateral Damage: The Impact of EU Migration Policies on Central Saharan Routes", op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, young men, Mao and Moussoro, March 2018.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, young retail trader and driver, Moussoro, March 2018.

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N'Djamena, March 2018.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Chadian political actor, N'Djamena, February 2018.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, BEG authorities, journalist and teacher, Moussoro, March 2018.

VI. Defusing Tensions and Regaining Trust

Discontent and tensions observed in Kanem and even more in Bahr el-Ghazal have been mounting since 2016. Firstly, the Sahel regions – already facing deep-seated structural problems – are mired in a severe economic slump, making the local people’s lives very difficult. Distrust between the state authorities and the populations of Kanem and BEG has been exacerbated by a series of abuses perpetrated against citizens in these regions by individuals close to the inner circles of power. These economic, political and identity-based tensions have so far remained latent but have resulted, among other things, in the departure of growing numbers of young men, most often headed for northern Chad and Libya.

Although any significant short- or medium-term improvement in the living conditions of these populations remains unlikely, the state can still make some limited progress in certain areas to regain their trust, including by tackling impunity and by not automatically assuming that young people who emigrate intend to join armed groups. International donors must strengthen their aid strategy in this reputedly “unliveable” area where development indicators have long ranked among the lowest in the continent.

A. Putting an End to Impunity

On the eve of the 2016 presidential election, the government faced strong protests, particularly in the capital N’Djamena, during which the impunity enjoyed by individuals perceived to be close to power was an important theme.¹¹⁶ At a more local level, most people interviewed by Crisis Group in Kanem and Barh el-Ghazal said they felt humiliated by the rape of Zouhouira and the murders of citizens from the area.¹¹⁷ The impunity enjoyed by some of the culprits is leading people to take up arms, which some describe “as the only means of defending their rights and their honour”.¹¹⁸

In addition, the Kreda youth’s refusal of the *diya* after the attacks in Ngueli clearly shows their rejection of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, which they consider only benefit those in power. The final report of the committee on reform of the Chadian state, presented in 2017 ahead of the national forum on institutional reform that opened on 19 March 2018,¹¹⁹ describes the implementation of the *diya*, now a subject of political debate, as an unevenly applied practice that “is likely to encourage a discriminatory treatment of citizens, and this fuels the sense of injus-

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group Report, *Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, op. cit.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, members of civil society, teachers, journalists, youths, Mao and Moussoro, March 2018.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, young men, Moussoro, March 2018.

¹¹⁹ The institutional reform committee in Chad released a report in November 2017 listing dozens of proposals, for the most part relating to the reform of institutions ahead of the debate on the new Chadian constitution. For more information about the forum, see “Le Tchad lance son forum sur la réforme des institutions”, RFI, 19 March 2018.

“...”.¹²⁰ It emphasises that the *diyya* should not interfere with public prosecutions and that “criminal responsibility is an individual rather than a collective matter”.¹²¹

This recommendation was adopted neither at the forum on institutional reform nor in the new constitution. In order to restore trust between the BEG and Kanem citizens and the state, the government should now implement it, particularly in cases of homicide. While traditional conflict resolution mechanisms can be useful, notably to prevent spiralling community violence, they should not allow those guilty of crimes to exploit communal solidarity or political ties to avoid prison sentences. By prioritising the fight against impunity, especially for individuals with powerful connections, the Chadian government could lay the foundations for a healthier relationship with the people from BEG and Kanem.

B. *Avoiding the Conflation between Migrants and Armed Combatants*

The authorities are attempting to stop the flow of young Chadians leaving for Libya, particularly from the Sahel regions, fearing mass enlistment in rebel forces. N’Djamena understandably sees the anarchy in Libya as a major security threat to Chad. In particular, the government fears it will lose control of Saharan routes and will be unable to counter the proliferation of weapons on its territory, given that southern Libya is now home to several thousand Chadian rebels. But contrary to the discourse of local authorities in the Sahel, only a minority of young men leaving for Libya do enlist in armed groups. These migrations to Libya are not new and represent for people from BEG and Kanem the most effective way to improve their standard of living. By conflating potential migrants with potential rebels, authorities risk worsening their relations with the youth from these regions.¹²²

To avoid widening the rift between the state and the Sahelian youth, the authorities should adopt a more measured tone in public statements that avoid conflating migrants with future rebels. Furthermore, the increase in arrests and the seizure of vehicles reinforces the idea among sections of the youth that the state is hostile to them. The current policies restricting the movement of a traditionally mobile population should therefore be replaced with a framework that retains monitoring mechanisms, in particular identity checks and vehicle searches to ensure travellers are not carrying weapons.

C. *Investing in Development in BEG and Kanem*

Few international organisations are present in the BEG and Kanem regions. Several development actors, including the European Union (EU) with its trust fund for the Sahel and the European Development Fund, the World Bank and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation fund some projects in Mao and Moussoro but only on a limited scale. Only a handful of NGOs (including two international organisa-

¹²⁰ “Rapport final du comité d’appui aux réformes institutionnelles au Tchad”, November 2017.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² An agreement signed in May 2018 to tighten security on the borders between Chad, Sudan, Libya and Niger has added to this confusion by bundling together the problems of terrorism, trafficking and clandestine emigration.

tions, one in Moussoro and the other in Mao) are active in the region. The lack of any tangible improvements in humanitarian indicators after several decades of support has deterred other donors from engaging. In Kanem, BEG and Chad's wider Sahel region, malnutrition rates are among the highest on the continent. The focus on the humanitarian fallout of Boko Haram's activities in the Lake Chad area entails a real risk of concentrating aid there to the detriment of other regions. Donors should rebalance and expand their project portfolios to extend support to neglected regions which could otherwise become fertile ground for various violent actors.

Furthermore, the lack of awareness about migratory patterns in Chad calls for extra resources to be channelled to international organisations specialising in migration, such as the IOM, to better understand these dynamics and give insights into the needs of the populations tempted to emigrate, including the Sahel youth, and to organise better support for people returning to Chad.

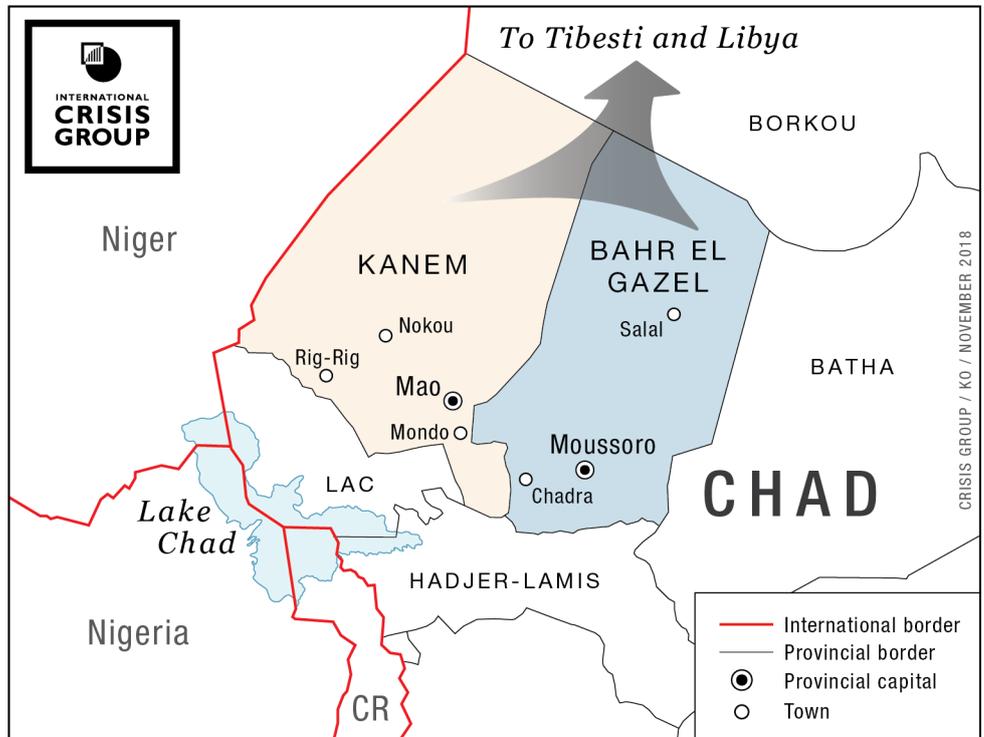
VII. Conclusion

Although the prospect of destabilisation in Kanem and BEG can be ruled out in the immediate future, young people's discontent is palpable and gaining ground. It is essential to make sure that instability does not emerge in this strategic area linking Sudan and Niger and the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Given the growing anger at the perceived unequal treatment between the group in power and the rest of the population, the Chadian authorities should demonstrate to local populations that they can change their way of governing, in order to prevent these regions from developing into conflict zones.

Brussels/Nairobi, 5 December 2018

Appendix A: Central Regions in Chad: Kanem and Bahr el-Ghazal



Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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December 2018

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