

# Stability and vulnerability in the Sahel: the regional roles and internal dynamics of Chad and Niger

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## ■ Executive summary

Chad and Niger are among the world's least developed countries – and deprivation and institutional weakness are potential drivers of instability. So it is important that external partners do not allow security imperatives to obscure the long-term necessity of a sustained focus on poverty reduction and good governance.

For Chad in particular the value of the current regime as a willing and capable partner in tackling security challenges will remain important, but it is vital for President Déby's key external allies – notably France and the U.S. – to recognise the need for domestic progress towards a political system that would permit peaceful transfers of power. Security threats are likely to last beyond the short term, and without robust institutions, a strong civil society and respect for democratic process, Chad's status as a beacon of stability may not be sustained.

Niger's international partners need to help the country sustain a coherent development strategy that strengthens food and income security, and fosters the emergence of more diverse livelihoods. Urgent targeted support for regions under severe pressure are valuable. However, the fragility of Niger's socioeconomic model and the near certainty that pressures will increase as the population continues to grow and the environment comes under further strain call for a particularly strong, nationwide, long-term engagement by external partners.

With particular reference to Boko Haram, concerted and coherent regional action – notably transforming the Multinational Joint Task Force from a light-touch framework for bilateral coordination into an effective multilateral force – will require high-level diplomatic attention and operational support. Political tensions among regional blocs and between Nigeria and its neighbours are likely to remain real. The key players have to date shown a willingness to work together, but have not fully resolved the challenges of a crisis that straddles geopolitical frontiers and rival economic communities. These challenges can be overcome, but doing so will need continued, coordinated and active engagement from the international community.

## Introduction

Vulnerable to vast and volatile regions, from Mali to Sudan, Libya, the Central African Republic (CAR) and northern Nigeria, much of the territory of both Chad and Niger has historically been overlooked and underdeveloped by national governments and regional organisations alike. Powerful cross-border links – through ethnic kinship, migration, or formal and informal trade – tie these zones into multiple and overlapping crises, from the Lake Chad region, where Boko Haram is active, east to Darfur and

west into the central Sahel. Both states are exposed to three of Africa's established sociopolitical and economic zones – West, Central and North Africa – but are peripheral to all of them.

But an interlocked series of crises and geopolitical shifts, from the fall of Qaddafi to the rise of Boko Haram, have now combined to move Chad and Niger towards centre stage, albeit in slightly different ways. In part, these dynamics have played out in regional terms. Both countries are

shaping – and are shaped by – new attempts to tackle the range of pressing security threats experienced by all the states in the region; these threats include Boko Haram in Nigeria, Islamist extremism in the Sahel and state collapse in the CAR.

A range of security and economic frameworks have been established across the wider Sahel crisis zone, often with overlapping memberships and mandates (see Box 1). The geographical zone covering both Chad and Niger lacks a clear division of responsibilities between capable regional economic communities able to take a political and diplomatic lead in responding to crises (Koepef et al., 2014). Partly as a result, attempts at finding formal collective responses to security problems have been undermined by institutional incoherence, political competition and underfunding.

Informally, however, the region has in recent years proved able to set aside political and institutional tensions to address imminent and serious threats, at least temporarily. Such informal security cooperation has been seen in response to crises in Mali and the CAR, and more recently in response to Boko Haram. Each has seen Chad and Niger playing central roles.

The West and Central African Sahel regional crises and responses that Chad and Niger have either inserted themselves into or found themselves drawn into are explored in the first section of this report. The second section examines the domestic dynamics of Chad and Niger, exploring the challenges and potential of each and how this may affect their regional roles or positions.

## Responding to regional crises: Chad and Niger in leading roles

A pattern of institutional weakness and ad hoc crisis response in the West and Central African Sahel region has in part allowed increased space for Chad and Niger to both shape regional responses and pursue their own agendas. Both countries had become increasingly concerned over the past decade about the persistence of jihadist activity in the Malian Sahara and the reluctance or inability of Mali's own government to effectively tackle the problem. The 2011 collapse of the Qaddafi regime transformed southern Libya, with its long frontier with both Niger and Chad, into a jihadist safe haven and exacerbated the perceived threat. When jihadist groups took over the whole of northern Mali in early 2012, Niger and Chad shared the general regional consensus that this was an existential threat to stability in the Sahel region, and West Africa more widely.

When a regional military force was organised in early 2013 to partner the French in intervening in Mali to end the jihadist control of the north, Chad and Niger were among the most strongly committed participants. Although not a

member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Chad played a frontline role alongside the French in hunting down jihadist combat groups in the central Sahara, with its tough troops already experienced in desert warfare. Nigérien forces were deployed mostly in eastern Mali, where they were well suited to local conditions and best placed to help reinforce the protection of Niger's own territory.

This active interventionist role was to some extent also the case in the response to Boko Haram. Nigeria's former president, Goodluck Jonathan, was regarded by Niger, Chad and Cameroon as dangerously complacent about the threat that the militant group posed both to his own country and its neighbours. Chad in particular was unwilling to wait for a coherent Nigerian response, launching large-scale operations in Nigerian territory in early 2015 (with Abuja's consent). Troops from Chad and Niger have helped the Nigerian army retake territory that had been under the control of Islamist insurgents, while Chadian troops have also helped protect Cameroonian territory. Delays in officially creating a joint regional force to tackle the jihadists did not impede self-interested practical military collaboration on a more informal basis.

Chad was likewise able to pursue bilateral goals in intervening in the crisis in the CAR, taking advantage of the relative political and institutional weakness of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to ensure continued influence over the evolution of events in a state it views as part of its sphere of influence.<sup>1</sup>

## Formalisation of responses

Informal security arrangements have significant downsides, however. Without formal ground rules, clear command structures, or overt and collective agreement on overall strategic goals, cooperation can easily break down at moments of tension, when intergovernmental trust is lacking or when doubt hangs over the motivations of some participants.

Thus the management of Chad's role in the international intervention in the CAR proved much more controversial than in Mali, because the Chadian president, Idriss Déby, was viewed as having his own national interests to promote or protect in the CAR. By contrast, Niger's engagement in the Mali intervention has been relatively uncontentious – because the administration of President Mahamadou Issoufou has not been viewed as promoting national interests or having aspirations to wider regional influence or leadership.

In both the CAR and Mali, emerging fractures in the temporary coalitions that drove the initial crisis response have been healed by the gradual transition from informal, ad hoc efforts to increasingly formalised mission struc-

<sup>1</sup> Author interviews, N'Djamena, October 2014.

### Box 1: Regional frameworks for security cooperation

#### *ECOWAS and ECCAS*

The 16-member ECOWAS has a developed culture of political and security cooperation, and a tradition of intervention, from acting to protect civilians during the Liberian civil war of the 1990s to restoring democracy to Niger after the coup against President Mamadou Tandja in 2010. In Mali, political pressure from the bloc persuaded the UN to endorse military intervention.

In Central Africa the picture has historically been more confused. Initially, the six-member Central African Economic and Monetary Community played a role in the CAR, deploying peacekeepers in 2002. But security and political issues were eventually taken over by the overall regional umbrella, the 11-member ECCAS, which began peacekeeping operations in the CAR in 2008. But ECCAS lacks the culture of cooperation that has been developed in ECOWAS and remains institutionally weak.

#### *Sahel/Sahara networks*

Under the Nouakchott Process, which was launched in March 2013, some 11 states and a range of regional and international organisations coordinate intelligence and action against terrorism and trafficking, supported by the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL), the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa, and the African Union (AU) Commission.<sup>2</sup>

In 2009 Algeria led the formation of an Alliance of Sahel Chiefs of Staff with Mali, Niger and Mauritania. This was upgraded in 2010 to a Joint Military Command headquartered in Tamanrasset, with a Joint Military Staff Committee (CEMOC) and a central intelligence cell (the UFL). Supporting analysis is entrusted to the ACSRT in Algiers. But there are doubts over the extent to which CEMOC

has become operational to any significant degree: a proposed joint military force has yet to be formed.<sup>3</sup>

The G5 was set up in February 2014 by Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Niger, and Burkina Faso to coordinate security and regional development projects that might enhance stability by easing socioeconomic strains. The grouping plans to establish a small permanent secretariat in Nouakchott and has announced plans to develop a joint military force. International partners, and the EU in particular, see the G5 as less unwieldy and more pragmatic than some other Sahelian structures;<sup>4</sup> Brussels is prioritising collaboration with the group.

Under the Permanent Interstates Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel some 13 states collaborate on desertification, environmental protection and food security in the region.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Multinational Joint Task Force and Lake Chad Basin Commission framework*

The first Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) for the Lake Chad region was set up in 1994 to tackle insecurity. The MNJTF's effectiveness was limited by political tensions, and rapidly became largely moribund. Its headquarters in Baga, Borno State, Nigeria, was overrun by Boko Haram in early 2015.

In 2014 the Lake Chad Basin Commission states (Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin) decided to create a new 7,500-strong MNJTF to combat Boko Haram.<sup>6</sup> The AU approved the plan in January 2015. By May 2015 a new joint headquarters in N'Djamena had been established. On the ground some coordinated military operations have been under way since March 2015, retaking many towns from Boko Haram.

tures. Initially ECOWAS drove responses to the crises in Mali. But shared regional and international concern about the Saharan jihadist threat led to the coalition forces' transition to an AU military intervention, the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), subsequently upgraded to a full UN peacekeeping operation, the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in mid-2013.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, initial peacekeeping efforts in the CAR were under the aegis of ECCAS, then AU authorised, and finally given a full UN mandate as the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation

Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in September 2014.<sup>8</sup>

### The Boko Haram challenge

However, Boko Haram may expose both the weaknesses of this organic model of regional conflict management and the limitations of Chad's and Niger's influence. Each had pressing bilateral needs to see effective action taken and both were initially able to make headway in shaping regional responses. During 2014, as Boko Haram gained the capacity to threaten the wider region, Nigeria came

2 Author interviews and workshop briefings, Paris and Brussels, September 2013-June 2014.

3 Seminar briefings to author, Paris, December 2014.

4 Author interviews with EU officials, Brussels, September 2015.

5 Author interviews, Ouagadougou and Niamey, March-April 2012.

6 The AU initially authorised a troop ceiling of 7,500, since increased to 8,700, then 10,000.

7 Troops from Chad and Niger have played a key role, with the former contributing more than 2,000 troops at operational peak and the latter deploying 500.

8 Engagement in the CAR has to some extent strengthened ECCAS's self-confidence in regional crisis management. It showed itself to be decisive in forcing the departure of transitional president Michel Djotodia, a former rebel chief, and member states have been willing to commit troops, restoring a fragile peace and reducing the influence of sectarian local militias. It has worked harmoniously alongside French and EU troops.

under pressure from its neighbours – and the West – to accept a more coordinated multinational response.<sup>9</sup>

Niger faced a flurry of militant attacks on some south-eastern towns in 2015 and significant civilian displacement. The late founder of Boko Haram, Mohamed Yusuf, had personal connections to Niger, and a large, shared ethnic population straddles the remote border regions. Even before Boko Haram actually attacked Nigérien territory, fear of domestic radicalisation and regional unrest had led the Issoufou government to press for regional action.

Chad too had long been concerned over the rise of Boko Haram, notably in the context of protecting vital trade routes. Chad's livestock trade, its second largest export earner after oil<sup>10</sup> and the source of livelihoods for huge numbers of its people, has long depended on overland access to Nigeria's markets. Although less worried than Niger over domestic radicalisation, Chad was concerned about the poor and disenfranchised communities of the Lake Chad basin, where Boko Haram support networks were reportedly operating.<sup>11</sup>

At a regional summit in Paris in May 2014 President Jonathan agreed to enhance the coordination of intelligence and military patrols, with Western technical support. July 2014 brought agreement on the creation of the new multinational force, the MNJTF, which was confirmed at further talks in Niamey in October and approved by the AU in early 2015.

With Abuja's consent, Nigérien and Chadian forces pushed south over the border into Nigerian territory, timed to coincide with offensives by the Nigerian army and by other Chadian units advancing westwards from Cameroon. During March and April 2015 Boko Haram was forced to pull out of most of the localities it had occupied. The MNJTF headquarters in N'Djamena was officially inaugurated in May 2015 and troops were nominally deployed under MNJTF command through 2015, with the overwhelming majority drawn from Chad and Nigeria.

### Geopolitical realities

However, these initial successes have not translated either into long-term regional stability or coherent cross-border cooperation. Rather, Boko Haram's loss of territory is reported to have pushed it into a change of tactics, carrying out suicide attacks on urban centres, while it undertakes a campaign of violence against soft targets in rural areas. On April 25th 2015 the militants attacked a Nigérien army position on an island in Lake Chad, and attacks have continued since in the Lake Chad region. Boko Haram attacks in N'Djamena in June 2015 were followed by a campaign of bombings in the Lake Chad region that led to a state of emergency being declared in November.

Early indications suggested that Nigeria's newly elected president, Muhammadu Buhari, was serious in his promises to effectively tackle Boko Haram. He recognised the importance of rebuilding the trust of his regional partners: Niger and Chad were the first countries he visited

### Box 2: International interventions

In 2014 France converted its initial emergency intervention in Mali (Operation Serval, 2013) into a long-term deployment of 3,000 troops as Operation Barkhane, which has major bases at Gao (Mali), Niamey and N'Djamena. Operation Barkhane's ground forces are supported by helicopters, surveillance drones, and strike aircraft based at N'Djamena and Niamey. The French collaborate closely with Sahel states' national military forces and with MINUSMA in Mali.

France is also present in the CAR, having deployed Operation Sangaris to avert a potential intercommunal genocide. At its peak Operation Sangaris was 2,000-strong, complemented in Bangui by the 700-strong EU Force RCA (EUFOR RCA). But as the UN's MINUSCA extended its scope, EUFOR RCA was ended, while Operation Sangaris is being gradually wound down. In contrast to Operation Barkhane, it is not intended as a long-term presence.

Many EU countries have contributed to the EU Training Mission in Mali, which is retraining the Malian army, while in the CAR the EU temporarily deployed EUFOR RCA force to help secure Bangui in 2014–15. On a bilateral basis, in 2014 Britain temporarily deployed surveillance capacity to the Boko Haram-affected region, based at N'Djamena, and it is now training Nigerian forces.

The U.S. provides intelligence and surveillance support for governments across the Sahel, including drones – originally to Niamey, but reportedly now also based in Agadez – and special forces, and it carried out exercise "Flintlock 2015" in Chad, a Special Operations Command training operation. This was the latest in a series of Flintlock exercises staged in various Sahel states over recent years. The U.S. also provided limited logistical support for the African force that preceded MINUSCA in the CAR.

9 In addition, Boko Haram was purported to be receiving training and funds from jihadist groups in the Sahel, while weapons were allegedly trafficked into Nigeria from southern Libya. Boko Haram's April 2014 abduction of 200 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok further increased the international pressure on Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan to collaborate more effectively with his neighbours.

10 In 2006 the World Trade Organisation assessed the value of Chad's cattle trade at €200 million (WTO, 2006).

11 Author interviews, N'Djamena, October 2014.

after taking office in May 2015, and trips to Cameroon and Benin followed weeks later. He overhauled the command of the Nigerian military and appointed a native of Borno State, the epicentre of the Boko Haram crisis, as chief of the defence staff. But Buhari faces deep challenges in ramping up much-criticised military performance. There is likely to be a significant lag between political intentions and changes in military outcomes.

It is in any case unclear how far President Buhari is willing to work within a formal multinational command structure. While Chad and Niger have proved willing to meaningfully cooperate, including hosting permanent deployments of foreign soldiers, Nigeria remains reluctant to allow the forces of regional neighbours to routinely operate in its territory. Nigeria has insisted on retaining permanent command of the MNJTF, and the multinational force's unified command structure, joint concept of operations and mission strategy remain aspirational documents rather than operational realities. Unlike in Mali or the CAR, there are no indications that the MNJTF will ultimately transition to a UN peacekeeping operation – cracks in regional diplomatic coherence are unlikely to be papered over by a move to institutionalising the force.

Thus, despite the moves that both Chad and Niger have made away from the periphery and towards the centre stage of crisis management and how this is perceived both across the region and in Western capitals, they are likely to reach a limit on the extent to which they are able to shape regional responses to future crises: they will find it difficult to counterbalance Nigeria's economic and geographical weight. Unrest, violence and threat will continue to flow both from Nigeria's poorly controlled hinterlands and the wider Sahel crisis zone, and will remain a significant stress on the internal dynamics of both Chad and Niger.

## The internal dynamics of Chad and Niger and their impacts on regional roles

### Chad

*Short term: a growing regional power*

Presidential elections that took place in April 2016 saw President Déby win a fifth term in office. The rebels who once opposed him are scattered and outclassed by the Chadian military, the largest beneficiary of Chad's oil wealth. Political opposition is fractured and cowed. Déby has also placed himself at the forefront of tackling regional security threats, from Mali to northern Nigeria, and is an increasingly important partner of the international community – Chad is widely seen as a beacon of stability in a turbulent region.

N'Djamena hosts the headquarters of Operation Barkhane and the MNJTF. Although economic growth has been hit by low oil prices and the government faces a complex challenge of balancing spending cuts against a wide variety of pressing needs – from elections, to military operations and domestic protests over rising costs of living – it is unlikely that this stress will translate into fractures in the regime or significant unrest. In the short term Chad will remain proof against regional shocks.

Although Boko Haram carried out its first attacks in Chad in 2015 that were sufficiently serious for a state of emergency to be declared in the Lake Chad region in November 2015 (Al Jazeera, 2015), there have been few signs of domestic radicalism taking root. The Islam of the majority is closely related to the Islamic brotherhoods of Senegal, and neither al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb nor Boko Haram has gained any real foothold. Nor are there signs of sectarian tensions between Chad's Christian and Muslim populations, in contrast to the CAR.<sup>12</sup>

President Déby dominates Chad's domestic politics. He was re-elected for the fourth time in early 2011, having removed term limits in 2005.<sup>13</sup> Despite more than 20 years of multi-party politics and an estimated 70 political parties, Déby's Movement Patriotique du Salut (MPS) dominates all levels of politics.<sup>14</sup> Although a range of opposition candidates contested the presidential elections April 2016 they lack the national organisation, access to patronage, state power and financial clout of the MPS, and seem extremely unlikely to unseat Déby.<sup>15</sup>

Although there are limited attempts to reflect Chad's geographic diversity in government – the prime minister, for example, is traditionally from the south, as are a number of other ministers – real power is widely understood to rest in the hands of an elite group around the president, drawn from his north-eastern Zaghawa ethnic group.<sup>16</sup> The Zaghawa, a semi-nomadic group from both sides of the border with Sudan, represent just 2% of Chad's population and are reported to hold a vastly disproportionate number of senior positions in the government, parastatals and the military.<sup>17</sup> Resentment of Zaghawa privilege is widespread.<sup>18</sup>

Chad's economy has been hit hard by reduced revenues from falling oil prices, which have only partially been offset by predicted production increases.<sup>19</sup> Many construction sites in N'Djamena are now reported to be silent (Touroumbaye, 2015) as the government's ambitious building programme has fallen victim to austerity. Freezes

12 According to the 2009 census, approximately 58% of the population is Muslim and 34% Christian. Successive iterations of the U.S. government's International Religious Freedom Report document almost no incidents of discrimination, abuse or intercommunity tension on religious grounds.

13 In 2011 Déby received nearly 83% of the vote in polls boycotted by the three most significant opposition candidates.

14 The MPS won 133 of 188 seats in the National Assembly and gained more than 80% of seats at the local elections of January 2012.

15 In part this is due to the fact that the majority of presidential hopefuls are likely to be from the south, making resistance to their successful election from the northern-dominated state apparatus even more likely [author interview, N'Djamena, October 2014].

16 Author interviews, N'Djamena, October 2014.

17 Author interviews, N'Djamena, October 2014.

18 Author interviews, N'Djamena, October 2014.

19 Falling world oil prices are forecast to see GDP growth drop to less than 4% in 2015 and the non-oil economy is forecast to have contracted by 1.5% in 2015, through a combination of reduced trade volumes – a victim of regional insecurity – and a sharp contraction of government spending.

to civil service recruitment and allowances for officials, and departmental cost cutting were also implemented in the last quarter of 2015.<sup>20</sup>

But while these grievances are widely felt, the political temperature in N'Djamena remains low, despite demonstrations over access to fuel, wages, rising food prices and the cost of education.<sup>21</sup> Opposition parties are poorly organised, and their leaders keep a low profile and are cautious.<sup>22</sup> The government tolerates limited internal dissent, but cracks down brutally on perceived threats.<sup>23</sup> The state is reported to have protected its albeit-limited spending on development despite falling revenues.<sup>24</sup> And, despite Chad's historically frosty relationship with international financial institutions,<sup>25</sup> it currently benefits from strong international support. Foreign direct investment increased by nearly three times between 2011 and 2015,<sup>26</sup> inflation has remained relatively low, and Chad's external economic partners are reported to have disbursed approximately \$177 million in budget support in 2015.<sup>27</sup> The Chadian government also received debt relief under the HIPC process worth some \$1.1 billion (IMF, 2015b). Although the short-term cash crisis will continue, and even deepen, the foundations of Déby's regime remain relatively strong.

Chad's relationships with its immediate neighbours are likewise broadly positive, despite the variety of crises affecting the region. Overspill into Chad from Libya has thus far been contained. Peace deals struck with Sudan in 2009 and 2010 are holding. Nigeria has thus far grudgingly welcomed Chad's active military role against Boko Haram, with President Buhari making N'Djamena one of his first ports of call on taking office. Chad is also cooperating with the Nouakchott Process, and continues to exercise significant influence over events in the CAR, long seen in N'Djamena as part of Chad's "near abroad".<sup>28</sup> Déby has particularly strong relations with both France and the U.S.<sup>29</sup>

A combination of internal stability and generally good external relations means that Chad will continue to be prominent in responding to regional crises. In the past

Déby has shown no hesitation in imposing his will on external partners, withdrawing troops from the CAR following allegations of human rights abuses and threatening to pull out of the UN mission to Mali. In the short term Chad's role in the region is likely to be prominent – and to remain very much on Déby's terms.

#### *Medium term: structural weakness*

But despite its current stability, Chad's hard carapace hides medium-term structural weakness. Factors include deep poverty, huge economic inequalities, a factionalised ethnic clique around the president, a history of intercommunity violence, abundant small arms availability, endemic corruption, and an oil-dominated, rentier economy that may well prove resistant to reform. A drop in oil revenues may result in development again being side-lined in favour of military spending – allowing Chad to continue to play a prominent regional role, but storing up resentment at home. Any dissent would be met by a heavy-handed response, further intensifying tensions and demanding yet more security-related spending.

Chad's stability is acutely personalised, founded on the rule of President Déby and backed by the military. There are no indications that a succession plan is in place. Déby has proved adept at managing clan and family factions, and personally intervenes to put out the fires of local ethnic conflict.<sup>30</sup> But this is often via the ad hoc distribution of state resources,<sup>31</sup> consuming money that could be better spent addressing deep development needs.

The external military deployments that have gained him so much recent diplomatic capital are also expensive, adding to the long-term pattern of heavy investment in the military that accompanied the arrival of oil revenues.<sup>32</sup> Spending on the military already constitutes a significant percentage of Chad's gross domestic product (GDP),<sup>33</sup> and the country faces an ongoing balance-of-payments problem, running a 6.4% budget deficit in 2013 as oil revenues fell and the regional security environment demanded increased resources. The official budget deficit was 412 billion CFA franc – or just under half a billion British pounds – in 2015.

20 An emergency action plan was elaborated in late 2015 to include action to reduce transfers and subsidies to public entities, and an audit of the government payroll, removing tax exemptions, streamlining administration and expanding the coverage of the informal sector in the tax network. Public financial management remains a medium-term priority. See IMF (2015a).

21 There were repeated trade union strikes in 2015 over salary payments and pensions, and protests by students in December 2015 resulted in clashes with police.

22 The 2008 arrest and subsequent disappearance of Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh, then-leader of the key opposition coalition, still looms large. See, for instance, Kibangula (2013).

23 One observer commented, "the dogs bark, but the caravan passes"; opposition voices are simply ignored, as long as they do not threaten the core activities of the regime (author interview, N'Djamena, October 2014).

24 Spending on primary and secondary education, health, community-organised development, water and sanitation, agriculture, and rural development was CFA 145 billion – or roughly \$240 million – to June 2015, surpassing its IMF target – a benchmark that was missed in 2014 (IMF, 2015a).

25 Déby rejected the World Bank blueprint for spending oil revenues, part of the landmark Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline project, choosing to invest in the military rather than the agreed "future generations" fund.

26 From \$281.9 million in 2011 to \$760.5 million in 2015 (World Bank, 2016).

27 IMF (2015a). The IMF, World Bank and African Development Bank all announced additional financing in December 2015.

28 There were unconfirmed reports that Chad had been requested to supply bodyguards to transitional CAR president Samba-Panza (author interviews, N'Djamena).

29 Author interviews, N'Djamena, October 2014.

30 He is reported to personally visit areas of local conflict, even in remote areas of the country, often bringing substantial cash payments to help resolve disputes (author interviews, N'Djamena).

31 As one expert observer of Chad put it, "oil lubricates personal politics" (author interview).

32 Military expenditure rose by 663% between 2000 and 2006 (Perlo-Freeman & Brauner, 2012: 15).

33 According to SIPRI (2014), Chad spent more than 6% of its GDP on the military in 2014, resulting in the fourth highest ratio of military spending to GDP in the world. Given that there are significant levels of off-book military spending, the actual level may be higher.

Chad remains one of the poorest countries in the world. It was ranked 185th of 188 countries in the most recent UN Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (UNDP, 2014), and nearly a million people will be affected by a food security crisis by mid-2016 (UNICEF, 2015). It is young, too, with 46% of the population under 14 years of age, and remains overwhelmingly rural and dependent on agriculture.<sup>34</sup> Rural poverty is assessed at 87%. The key long-term goal of economic diversification remains distant. Business growth is hampered by significant bottlenecks in infrastructure, labour quality and access to finance.<sup>35</sup>

Some steps are being taken to address these challenges.<sup>36</sup> The government has launched an ambitious programme of improving domestic revenue collection and controlling spending,<sup>37</sup> and is reported to have a relatively functional state apparatus to call on, at least at mid-to-low level.<sup>38</sup> Headline economic restructuring remains on track, for now. However, lower revenue from oil is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, further curtailing the government's ability to spend its way out of trouble. Domestic unrest may grow as austerity bites.<sup>39</sup> And there will be strong pressure to remain militarily engaged. Chad's dependence on trade via Nigeria and Cameroon means that Déby cannot afford to allow regional security to deteriorate further, and his international relationships are based on Chad's willingness and ability to intervene. Déby also has manifested ambitions to regional – even continental – leadership. He is unlikely to step back from regional challenges.

But this brings risks – financial, reputational and diplomatic. Chad's armed forces have proved extremely effective in short-term offensive operations, but are not a natural fit for stabilisation – risking the kind of human rights abuses alleged to have taken place when Chadian soldiers last tried to act as peacekeepers in the CAR (BBC, 2014). There is limited Nigerian political will to allow genuine regional cooperation against Boko Haram or Chadian deployments outside a tightly defined border area, limiting the on-the-ground effectiveness of the MNJTF.<sup>40</sup> And, perhaps most importantly, continued military operations will be hugely expensive. Déby may find that acting as a regional enforcer,

however welcomed by neighbours and the international community, may not bring the level of financial support that would allow his wider ambitions to be made real.<sup>41</sup>

Thus far Déby has proved able to balance this delicate equation. Chad's economic squeeze is in its early stages, its diplomatic credit is still good, and Déby retains a clear personal control over the military. Key donors have understood the urgency of resolving Chad's short-term cash crisis, notably in the context of its central role in regional security responses. But it is not at all clear how this could continue after he leaves office. There is no tradition of peaceful, democratic transfer of power in Chad. Institutions are weak. Power struggles within Déby's group could quickly translate to fractures within the security services and military, creating space for long-dormant intergroup tensions to erupt. Risks of violence are acute.

#### *Long term: deep challenges, tentative hope?*

Chad lives in a dangerous neighbourhood. Boko Haram presents the most difficult challenge today, but sources of future threats are numerous. Libya remains chaotic. Any resumption of proxy war fighting with Sudan would fracture both the elite of Chadian politics and its military harmony. Pressures on disenfranchised and largely Christian communities in the south of Chad could increase markedly as Muslim communities take refuge from the chaos of the CAR.

Chad's internal cohesion will continue to be tested by oil-price volatility, deep poverty and widespread corruption. While the Toubou people of the north currently provide something of a buffer for Chad against overspill from Libya and the wider Maghreb, they also constitute a deep reservoir of potential militants.<sup>42</sup> The centre of the country will remain exposed to regional drought and famine, and the south – home to Chad's oil production and subject to significant social, economic and environmental impact from the industry – is underdeveloped, politically marginalised and host to more than 200,000 refugees from the CAR (UNOCHA, 2015). Divisions among factions in the military may be reopened by the trial of former president Hissani Habré,<sup>43</sup> as old accusations, grievances and allegations are brought back into the light.

34 Eighty per cent work in subsistence agriculture, herding or hunting.

35 Although Chad has improved from last place in the 2012 World Bank Doing Business survey, in 2014 it was still assessed as the fifth most difficult place in the world to operate, reflecting the continuing administrative and financial burden of opening and operating a business. It was also placed 154th of 175 states in the Transparency International Index of Perceived Corruption in 2014, a slight improvement on immediately preceding years, but still reflecting a state that is widely seen as militarised, unaccountable and dependent on patronage networks.

36 The government has invested heavily in infrastructure, agreeing a \$7.5 billion railways project with China in early 2011 and rehabilitating roads. It has brought new power-generation capacity on line and is attempting to increase national connectivity – only some 4% of the population currently has access to electricity.

37 According to the World Bank (2015: 2), "Particular attention is accorded to policies and actions aimed at broadening the tax base, improving payroll management, strengthening public procurement, reinforcing budget transparency and improving new business registration".

38 Author interviews, N'Djamena, October 2015.

39 A civil service strike over pay in late 2014 was settled with a 40% wage increase. It is extremely unlikely that the government would be able to repeat such a step.

40 See, for instance, UNSC (2016) or Waddington (2016). Chad may face a difficult choice between taking on Boko Haram and protecting good relations with the Nigerian government.

41 This dilemma was well illustrated by the decision not to host the 2015 AU summit in N'Djamena, as had been planned, over fears that the necessary facilities for hosting the continent's heads of state would not be completed in time – Chad's diplomatic ambitions could not be matched by its economic or administrative capacities. President Déby's appointment as AU chairperson for 2016 suggests that these ambitions remain undiminished by straitened economic circumstances.

42 The Toubou are the ethnic group of former president Habré and were widely assessed as the one ethnic group in Chad that could mount a challenge to the current regime (author interviews, N'Djamena). Recent unrest has been reported over access to gold mines (AFP, 2015).

43 The trial of former Chadian president Habré started in Senegal in July 2015 for international crimes committed in Chad between 1982 and 1990. A verdict is expected in early 2016.

But there are also tentative reasons for hope. Chad has retained good intercommunity relations, and has few religious tensions and a relatively robust civil society. Although oil has not been a panacea, it does offer some hope for the future, particularly if Chad's newly strengthened relationship with the international community moves beyond simple security cooperation into significantly intensified development programmes, including economic diversification, infrastructure and agriculture. In contrast to most of its neighbours, Chad is for the moment neither riven by conflict, collapsed, nor endemically resource poor.

But Chad's politics must evolve too. Chad and its international partners should not sacrifice the country's future on the altar of short-term expedience, regardless of how pressing immediate security threats appear to be. Equal attention must be paid to its institutions, good governance and a robust democratic process. Chad is today perhaps more engaged in the region, with regional organisations and the international community, than at any point in its post-independence history. If medium-term political and economic challenges can be overcome, such linkages can provide the foundation for attracting the necessary assistance to build a sustainable, peaceful future.

## Niger

### *Short term: elections highlight pressures*

Jihadist militant activity poses threats to Niger's stability at home and across the region. But internally, tensions are also surfacing in a political system that is democratic and plural, but marked by deep rivalries, governance flaws and repeated bouts of violent protest. These strains are compounded by intense social and economic pressures (UNOCHA, 2014). Niger has Africa's second highest rate of population growth and is ranked bottom of the 187 countries in UNDP's Human Development Index.

Constitutional state institutions have demonstrated resilience, weathering severe partisan crises, and Niger has strong relationships with international partners, particularly France, the U.S. and the EU.<sup>44</sup> President Mahamadou Issoufou has prioritised a coherent strategy for poverty reduction. However, the country is exposed to a permanent risk of drought. Food insecurity and poverty are constants. Environmental degradation and the shortage of viable livelihoods combine to fuel social and political pressures. Corruption reaches to the upper levels of the state.<sup>45</sup> For a disenchanted minority of Nigériens this could enhance the attraction of extremist religious rhetoric.

The aftermath of the early 2016 presidential and legislative elections could be marred by tension, urban protests, and violent clashes between demonstrators and the security forces. The buildup to the February 21st first round contest

has been marked by an increasingly confrontational political climate and growing public disenchantment – inspired by the spread of high-level corruption and the slow pace of development progress. A significant minority of public opinion has been uncomfortable with the President Mahamadou Issoufou's close alignment with France and the U.S., despite his argument that there is little alternative, given the threats posed by jihadists operating from Mali, Libya and north-east Nigeria.

Niger was one of many francophone African countries to adopt a multi-party democratic system in the early 1990s, and many of today's generation of political leaders, including Issoufou, became engaged in activism and public life during this democratic awakening.<sup>46</sup> The subsequent two decades saw democracy interrupted by a military takeover and, later, by President Mamadou Tandja's attempts to dismantle constitutional safeguards. But both episodes were ended by further short-term interventions by the military to restore democratic structures. After deposing Tandja, the military led a one-year transition, culminating in the early 2011 two-round presidential election that brought Issoufou to power.

That contest saw Issoufou gain almost 58% of the vote in a calm and credible March 2011 final runoff, defeating Seyni Oumarou, the candidate of Tandja's Mouvement National pour la Société de Développement (MNSD). Issoufou owed his comfortable victory to the support of Hama Amadou, leader of the Mouvement Démocratique Nigérien pour une Fédération Africaine – Lumana Africa (Moden-Fa) – who had come a strong third in the first round. And in the 113-seat National Assembly the alliance between Issoufou's Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme – Tarayya (PNDS-Tarayya), with 39 seats, and Moden-Fa, with 23, provided the core parliamentary support for the new president's administration. Amadou's reward was to become speaker of the National Assembly.

However, this partnership began to break down two years later, when it became clear that Amadou had his own ambitions to challenge Issoufou directly in the 2016 presidential contest. In May 2014 Amadou's son Ismaël and about 40 close supporters were arrested after alleged violence. Moreover, Amadou and one of his wives became caught up in an official probe into wealthy Nigérien couples' acquisition of infant children from Nigeria-based baby traffickers.<sup>47</sup> The National Assembly speaker saw this case as politically motivated and fled to France, while his wife and other suspects were detained for several months before being released on bail. When Amadou flew back to Niamey on November 14th 2015 to prepare for the coming presidential election he was immediately jailed. The Constitutional Court still validated his presidential candi-

<sup>44</sup> Author interviews, diplomatic sources, Niamey, September 2014 and March 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Author interviews, governance specialist, Niamey, September 2014, and Nigérien political economist, Niamey, March 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Author interviews, senior PNDS-Tarayya figure, Niamey, September 2014 and March 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Author interview, senior political media source, Niamey, September 2014.



dacy, but his initial requests for release on bail were turned down because he was a fugitive who had not yet appeared before a judge.

This paradoxical situation fostered a tense mood in a complex race, with Oumarou, Amadou and former president Mahamane Ousmane all challenging Issoufou. Even though he was forced to campaign from his jail cell, Amadou is a large character who retained the capacity to mobilise considerable support on the street. There was a serious risk of tension and street violence around the election.

The parliamentary outlook is inevitably uncertain. Aided by splits in Moden-Fa, Issoufou did cobble together a re-vamped pro-government majority to see out the 2011–16 legislature. But past history shows that it is never easy for a president to sustain a secure majority in the National Assembly over the full course of a legislative term.

Issoufou's 2011 election programme and his early years in office were marked by innovation in food security, rural development and help for the poor. But the implementation of these impressive programmes has inevitably taken longer than had been hoped and Niger approached the crucial 2016 elections amid popular disenchantment with economic pressures and elite corruption. Plans to expand the National Assembly, although logical, given Niger's rapidly rising population, were in fact widely viewed as an exercise in patronage.

The year 2015 brought signs of some resentment at Issoufou's close partnership with France and the U.S.<sup>48</sup> Riots broke out in mid-January 2015 after Issoufou gave high-profile support to France following the jihadist attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*, a Jewish supermarket and Paris police. Although the mid-February 2015 Boko Haram attacks on south-east Niger gave the president a chance to reassert his popular credentials, the underlying sense of dissatisfaction and unease has not entirely faded – as fresh demonstrations showed in June 2015. Human rights campaigners were perturbed by the brief detention of civil society activist Moussa Tchangari after he complained about humanitarian conditions in the south-east, where the army was fighting Boko Haram.

#### *Medium term: a need for political renewal in a challenging environment*

Looking beyond the 2016 elections, whoever governs Niger over the next five years will face a daunting challenge in seeking to maintain stability at a time of social change, economic fragility and persistent security threats, mainly from external jihadist groups. Yet politics continues to be dominated by the generation who came to the fore in public life with the advent of democracy in the early 1990s. Immediate security threats to Niger's stability have come

mostly from radical Islamist groups based in neighbouring countries. Jihadists strike from northern Mali and the Sahara, and Boko Haram has raided across the border from north-east Nigeria, while the jihadist safe haven of ungoverned southern Libya compounds the dangers facing all of West Africa's Sahelian states.

But looking to the medium term, it would be naïve to view these stability risks as purely external. Nigérien society itself is subject to severe internal strains that could see more locals drawn into radical militant activity. Moreover, the country has yet to see the emergence of new governing talent sensitive to the evolving trends in Nigérien society and perhaps better equipped to sustain popular engagement with the democratic system. Almost as important as the actual outcome of elections is the need to achieve high levels of turnout, particularly among younger citizens: in neighbouring Mali it is now possible to see low levels of popular participation in politics as a pointer to the fragilities that left the country vulnerable to crisis in 2011–12.

#### **Islam: an increasing influence on public attitudes**

Most Nigériens are Muslim and religion exerts a powerful influence on society. Mainstream Nigérien Islam is moderate and tolerant, influenced by Sufi traditions, and religious leaders have mostly refrained from pursuing overtly political or partisan agendas. Niger remains a secular state and the main political groups are secular – with the MNSD rooted in governing and military traditions, while the PNDS springs from an intellectual and social-democratic background. Many women occupy senior roles in public life; prominent names include Abdoulaye Diouri Kadidiatou Ly, president of the Constitutional Court, and Aïchatou Kané Boulama, who was governor of Niamey from 2011 to 2015 – when she was appointed foreign minister.

But Islam is a major influence on issues of social policy. For example, pressure from religious leaders constrains the government's room to assertively promote family planning. Conservative attitudes have become increasingly influential: dress codes in Niamey are visibly more restrained than in other Sahelian capitals such as Ouagadougou or Bamako, and a growing number of girl children wear headscarves.

Religious institutions may fill gaps where the state falls short.<sup>49</sup> The government struggles to provide sufficient school places, so many children must rely mainly on what they learn in traditional Koran classes. Disillusion with corruption and bureaucracy in the legal system leads many Nigériens to turn to sharia authorities for the resolution of disputes. The officially approved Association Islamique du Niger lost its former monopoly role with the advent of democracy in 1990/91, and the subsequent 25 years have seen the emergence of a wide diversity of religious associations. These have gained many adherents – often female

<sup>48</sup> Author interviews and seminar briefings, Paris, December 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Author interviews, NGO development specialists, Niamey, September 2014 and March 2015.

– among the elite, civil servants and in educational circles; many join informal religious study groups (*makaranta*), particularly in urban centres such as Niamey, Maradi and Zinder (Sounaye, 2010).

Salafi or Wahhabi interpretations of the faith do not yet predominate. But the deeply conservative Nigerian *izala* strand of Islam has certainly gained in influence, and fundamentalist preachers now run many local mosques and Koran schools – where the government has no say over what is taught. Preachers do not generally advocate violence, and campaigners for Niger to become an Islamic republic insist this should be achieved through democratic choice.

Adherence to militant ideology remains extremely limited (Pérouse de Monclos, 2015). But senior figures in the Muslim establishment fear that some *talibé* – youthful Koran school pupils – could fall prey to extremist recruiters. A few individuals have joined Saharan jihadist militant factions active in Mali, while others are thought to have joined Boko Haram or become sympathisers, notably in some eastern towns just over the border from the group's main area of activity in north-east Nigeria.

### Social and economic pressures: a major risk driver

Headline economic data for Niger looks positive. Real GDP growth was 4.6% in 2013 and 6.9% in 2014. The International Monetary Fund projected only 4.3% for 2015, but expects real growth to average 7% per annum over 2016–18. Inflation was actually negative in 2014, with consumer prices falling by 0.9% (IMF, 2015c: 81–84). But such statistics must be set in context: Niger remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Its long-standing social model is under severe strain in an era of climate change, with a highly fragile Sahelian natural environment and rural economy struggling to support a population – 19.9 million in 2015 – that grows by 4% a year, one of the highest rates in the world and far ahead of neighbouring countries (UNFPA, 2015).

Most households live from small-scale farming and pastoralism, exposed to severe climatic risk and dependent on land and grazing resources that are under ever-greater pressure as the population continues to increase. Desert forms the northern two-thirds of Niger and most people live in the Sahelian south – but even this region has just one main rainy season, from July to September, and if this fails villagers must wait until the next year before they can plant a new cereals crop. When drought depresses indigenous output, Nigeria is an important reserve supplier. Farmers mainly grow cereals and vegetables for home consumption and local sale, and export potatoes and

onions to Nigeria and Benin. In more arid areas pastoralism predominates. Niger is one of the main livestock producers in West Africa, exporting to Nigeria and other coastal markets.<sup>50</sup>

### The development response

In Niger's fragile socioeconomic structure, and with the population increasing rapidly, malnutrition is chronic, even in good years. Research by NGOs has found that the poorest 10–20% of rural families frequently do not even own a single goat or sheep.<sup>51</sup> The state has developed a coherent policy response to these challenges.

Since the 1990s it has operated a food crisis early warning system (*Système d'alerte précoce*) that is more detailed and rigorous than those of most other Sahelian countries.<sup>52</sup> Issoufou's core political platform has been built around a detailed food security and rural development strategy – the “3N” initiative (*Nigériens Nourissent Nigériens*) – which seeks to build up resilience through local community projects.<sup>53</sup> The administration operates a food aid programme that mitigates price rises at times of pressure on food supplies. Under Issoufou, the government launched a national programme of cash transfer support for the poorest 20–40% of families in each village.<sup>54</sup> International partners are encouraged by the seriousness of this policy approach, although they have become dismayed by governance shortcomings and patchy implementation.

Yet impressive as the development strategy may be, it can only make a gradual impact, particularly because implementation has been patchy. Moreover, economic and security problems constantly threaten to undermine the prospects for sustained progress. Boko Haram activity in north-eastern Nigeria has seriously disrupted the annual cross-border transhumance that is a key part of Niger's livestock economy, threatening to impose additional stress on the limited domestic stocks of grazing in the Saharan fringe. It has also disrupted local agricultural trade in products such as peppers that are an important source of income for farming communities in eastern Niger.

Meanwhile, many rural communities had also suffered a major blow with the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in Libya – where many thousands of Nigérien migrant workers were employed. Remittances from family members working in Libya accounted for 80% of household income in Niger's central Tchir Tchabarden district.<sup>55</sup> In the face of violence and xenophobia, huge numbers of Nigériens fled home and there is little early prospect of a return to more favourable conditions that would see Libya once again become a major source of work and remittance income.

50 Author interviews, livestock sector policymakers and livestock traders, Niamey, September 2015, Niamey and Torodi, March 2015.

51 Author interview, NGO senior household welfare analyst, Niamey, March–April 2012.

52 Author interviews, senior government sources, Niamey, March–April 2012; author field research, Tillabéri and Sakoyra, March–April 2012.

53 Author interview, senior government policymaker, Niamey, March 2015.

54 Author interview, senior administration source, Niamey, September 2015.

55 Author interview, development social economist, Niamey, March–April 2015.

In addition, the economy of north-western Niger has been affected by the downturn in the world market for uranium – the country's main formal export earner. After the Fukushima disaster in Japan world uranium prices plunged from \$73 per pound in January 2011 to just \$28 in 2014, and the expected persistence of low oil prices will not help in restoring the appeal of nuclear energy. Niger accounts for 7.5% of global uranium output (World Nuclear Association, 2015), with major mines operated by Cominak and Somair, offshoots of the French nuclear company Areva. Somina, established by China's CNNC, began operations in 2010. After prolonged negotiations, Areva signed a new contract in May 2014 that offers Niger improved terms, but in the difficult state of the world market the French company put the development of a planned new mine at Imouraren on hold, while Somina has experienced financial pressures. However, in January 2016 the government announced that the Canada-based GoviEx Uranium had agreed to invest \$676 million in a project at Madaouela.

#### *Long term: a daunting development challenge*

Projections for population and economic growth are necessarily uncertain and subject to a fair degree of speculation. But whatever the exact numbers, there is no doubt of the fundamental message: looking ahead, Niger will face an enormous challenge to sustain development progress – and this raises major questions about the prospects for future stability. The country's natural resources are limited, and are vulnerable to the normal fluctuations of the drought-prone Sahelian climate and the long-term impacts of global warming. Yet these resources of land, water and production potential must support an ever-expanding population. On average, each Nigérien woman has 7.6 children – the world's highest fertility rate.

The constitutional democratic system appears sustainable in itself, having survived the interruption of occasional coups, as well as routine partisan squabbles and manoeuvres. But the socioeconomic outlook must raise questions about the future prospects for maintaining national stability, a tolerant religious and social climate, social resistance to extremism, and consensual support for the current open democratic and pluralistic political model.

Generating the long-term economic growth and livelihoods required to sustain living standards and employment will remain a constant – and potentially ever more difficult – challenge. Moreover, the state will struggle even to maintain a level of basic health and education provision that is already inadequate, with many families forced to scrape together the cash to educate their children privately or rely solely on the traditional limited education provided by local Koran schools.

Alternative options for economic activity and income generation are limited. Niger's landlocked location is a severe competitive disincentive to foreign investors, although transport costs should fall with the expected

opening in 2020–24 of a rail link from Niamey to the port of Cotonou in Benin (and, eventually, also to Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso). The French group Bolloré has begun construction in partnership with national governments, and work has been advancing rapidly, although a legal dispute has caused a temporary pause.

Rejuvenated efforts by both Niger itself and Nigeria to promote bilateral trade – for example, through improved roads and border markets – will make an equally important contribution, particularly for the viability of the rural economy. Oil has been produced on a small scale since 2011, with CNPC pumping around 20,000 barrels per day, which is refined in Niger itself for sale locally and in neighbouring countries. However, the fundamental development pressures will remain intense – and therefore represent a major risk for the long-term sustainability of living standards and political and social stability in Niger.

## Conclusion

The move of Chad and Niger away from the periphery may bring some of their long-marginalised areas the attention and help that they greatly need. But the extent of this realignment will be limited. Today both Chad and Niger face serious challenges to their physical security, political stability and socioeconomic viability. The threat posed by jihadist militant activity at home and spilling over the borders from Nigeria, Mali and Libya understandably attracts the most international attention. Yet both countries are home to some of the world's poorest people, and face ongoing threats from climate, famine and volatility in natural resource revenues.

Each also experiences important internal tensions. Niger struggles with deep sociopolitical rivalries, governance flaws, and intense social and economic pressures. It may face large-scale protests and widespread radicalisation. But it also has significant strengths that could help it navigate these pressures. Constitutional state institutions have demonstrated resilience, weathering severe partisan crises, while the army operates in a professional manner and most commanders respect democratic republican principles. In Chad, a strong centralised and authoritarian state is able to protect short-term stability, in spite of a burgeoning economic crisis, by controlling protest and Islamist radicalisation alike. But it lacks the institutions able to manage a peaceful transition – there is no pattern of democratic transition of power, the army is acutely politicised, and deep social and political rivalries have been kept hidden by strong central control.

So in the short term Chad is likely to remain stable, and peaceful – if relatively unrepresentative. This contrasts with the situation in Niger, where elections are seriously contested: the early 2016 presidential and legislative polls, and subsequent political manoeuvring, could spark increased tension and unrest.

In the medium term Chad is less likely to find a peaceful answer to its internal contradictions, while Niger should be able to maintain its long-term democratic consolidation.

But looking further ahead, the trajectories of both states will converge on a difficult and uncertain future. Both face extreme development needs, including an acute climate crisis in the arid Sahel. Both are landlocked and dependent on volatile world markets for their primary natural resources. And both will remain vulnerable to the vicissitudes of a dangerous neighbourhood.

There are positive prospects: the severity of the security crisis in the Lake Chad region has forced countries on either side of the formal West-Central African regional divide to develop pragmatic ways of working together, and in the longer term this may enhance their capacity to cooperate in tackling future challenges, notably security threats, and developing cross-regional partnerships. But for both Chad and Niger, overcoming the intractable long-term imperatives of poverty, poor governance and isolation will devolve to national governments. Circumstances may have pushed both into the glare of regional and international attention; sustaining a positive evolution will demand long-term domestic reform.

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