

HOW TO PROTECT CIVILIANS IN EASTERN CHAD



On the Ground in Chad

While international efforts remain focused on resolving the conflagration in Darfur, a less publicized but equally urgent crisis across Darfur's borders in eastern Chad is finally receiving attention and – possibly – action. Half a million internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and other conflict-affected civilians are vulnerable to the steadily escalating violence in eastern Chad. The regional contagion that is Darfur – which is fueling instability throughout the region – requires a comprehensive strategy, of which a crucial component is protecting civilians in these neighboring countries.

Attention and action

France, Britain, and the EU

The leadership emerging from Paris – and the alliance on Darfur being forged between French President Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Brown – to ensure the deployment of a European Union (EU) force to eastern Chad is crucial in this regard, but it must be seen as a bridging element to a larger UN operation. In the meantime, the **military** and **non-military components** of the international peacekeeping presence must be sufficiently mandated and resourced to:

- (1) effectively protect civilian populations**
- (2) stabilize the region**
- (3) promote political solutions**
- (4) support the return of displaced populations to their homes**

Chad

In most cases, the Chadian government has proven unable or unwilling to protect both its own citizens and the refugees within its borders as deepening violence poses a grave threat to regional stability. However, in an important recent development, Chadian President Idriss Deby has accepted in principle a force for eastern Chad and the half million people that have been uprooted or impacted, and the UN and EU have begun planning to quickly deploy civilian police and peacekeepers.

The Plan

According to the plan currently under discussion, the UN would train and support Chadian police while the EU force would help protect civilians and the UN operation. France, a former colonial ruler in Chad and a country with large air and ground assets stationed in country, is spearheading the current effort to get troops deployed in tandem with the prospective hybrid AU/UN force in Darfur.

The Role of the United States

Although France and the EU are spearheading current efforts to deploy a force to eastern Chad, the U.S. has an important role to play. To support current plans, the U.S. should work closely with France to ensure a robust UNSC Chapter VII authorization of the EU force; be prepared to respond to any requests from the EU for logistical support regarding the mobility and effectiveness of the force; support UN police elements as requested; and contribute strategically to the non-military elements of a comprehensive civilian protection plan.

Essentials of the Operation

This movement toward the deployment of a force in eastern Chad is long overdue. Now that the necessity for such a force is broadly understood and accepted, the core issues to be focused on are how to maximize the protection of civilian populations in eastern Chad, foster stabilization and reconciliation, and support the safe return of displaced civilians back to their areas of origin.

Adequate provisions for the **military** and **non-military components** of the EU force will largely dictate whether civilians will indeed be protected and the crisis eventually resolved.

Military and police components:

- rapid UN Security Council authorization of a robust Chapter VII operation aimed at protecting vulnerable civilians.
 - This will require a force with the manpower and mobility to protect the two principal target of violence – refugees and the internally displaced in camps and vulnerable Chadian populations in villages and towns;
- the mandate and resources for the EU force to focus on monitoring the movement of armed groups and reporting to the UN Security Council and the EU on major human rights violation and their perpetrators;
- support from international police forces to have a round-the-clock presence in the camps and conduct road patrols, as currently envisioned, while working to train the Chadian police force; and
- efforts to fully coordinate the EU force with the deployment of the AU/UN hybrid force in Darfur.

Non-military components:

- the deployment of human rights monitors and civil affairs officers to collect information on the sources and targets of violence, provide real-time early warnings, document human rights violations, support local level mediation, and work to restore traditional conflict resolution mechanisms;
- a concerted diplomatic effort to reinvigorate political talks between the Chadian government, rebel factions, and broader civil society within Chad;
- a dialogue between Chad and Sudan on bilateral issues, including the right of voluntary return for their respective refugees;
- significant investments in development programs and reconstruction initiatives to reintegrate ex-combatants and ensure the safe return of the displaced to their areas of origin; and
- substantially increased assistance for humanitarian operations in the region.

How this force is deployed in eastern Chad, with what mandate, and in the context of what supportive civilian and diplomatic components will largely dictate whether civilians will indeed be protected and the crisis eventually reversed. Ultimately, however, without a resolution across the border in neighboring Darfur, efforts to staunch the bleeding in Chad will remain threatened by the destabilizing policies of the regime in Khartoum.