

After Battle in Capital, Chad Threatens to Expel Sudanese

The New York Times

April 15, 2006

By [MARC LACEY](#)

NDJAMENA, [Chad](#), April 14 — With the unrest in [Sudan's](#) Darfur region spreading into neighboring countries, Chad broke off relations with Sudan on Friday and threatened to oust 200,000 Sudanese refugees after staving off a rebel incursion into this sand-strewn capital.

The embattled government of President Idriss Déby of Chad described the rebels as little more than mercenaries acting on behalf of Sudan. Eager to show it has defeated them, his government paraded several hundred captured fighters, some of whom appeared to be children, in a central square. The corpses of some fallen rebels and an array of seized armaments were also on display.

"The international community has been totally deaf and dumb on the situation between Sudan and Chad," Mr. Déby said, declaring, "Enough is enough."

Chad and Sudan share a long, porous border that has turned increasingly violent as the three-year-old war in the Darfur region has played out. Rebels battling the Sudanese government seek cover in Chad. Those intent on toppling Mr. Déby, in turn, use Sudan as a base.

But while Mr. Déby looks across the desert to Sudan for the architects of the movement to oust him, many Chadians see deep domestic roots for the rebel incursion. Mr. Déby's popularity has plummeted in recent years as he has pushed to scrap constitutional term limits on his tenure.

"The situation in Darfur is having negative consequences in Chad, but the big problem is dictatorship," said Ahmat Soubiane, who was Chad's ambassador to the United States until he broke with the government three years ago. "The rebellion is growing because Mr. Déby wants to remain president for life."

The war in Darfur provides just enough fog over the region to allow the armed rebellions to flourish, and gives both Sudan and Chad room to deny that they are seeking to destabilize each other.

Now the crisis appears to have spread even farther. On Friday, the Central African Republic said it was closing its border with Sudan because the rebels had crossed through it on their way to attack Ndjamen, The Associated Press reported.

In an outdoor rally, Mr. Déby gave the international community until June to negotiate an end to the Darfur crisis before he ordered the 200,000 Sudanese seeking refuge in Chad to move elsewhere. "If after June we can't guarantee the security of our citizens and the refugees, then it is up to the international community to find another country to shelter these refugees," he declared.

The [United Nations](#) refugee agency expressed alarm at the announcement, but attributed it to the tensions stirred up by the rebel offensive on the capital.

"I think it's something said in the heat of the moment," Matthew Conway, a spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said in a telephone interview from Abéché, in the east. "When tensions calm, reason will prevail."

But Darfur's spillover effect has only grown in recent months. Weapons used in the Darfur conflict have been traced to Libya, Chad and the Central Africa Republic, while its refugees have spread far and wide across central Africa.

Beyond that, the janjaweed militias that have been supported by the Sudanese government and have set fire to so many villages in Darfur are now extending their reign of terror into Chad, displacing Chadians from their homes. Attacks by janjaweed gunmen have even been launched on some of the refugee camps in Chad.

"It's impossible to comprehend that the innocent victims of the violence and abuse in Darfur could yet again suffer as a result of this situation," said Ron Redmond, the spokesman for the United Nations refugee agency in Geneva.

The streets of Ndjamen appeared closer to normal on Friday after a tense day Thursday, during which most people hid in their homes. But damage was evident, particularly

around the National Assembly building, where people scooped up bullet casings and gawked at shelling damage.

"We don't know if it will happen again but this one is over," said Sébastien Bes, the food and beverage manager of a hotel caught on the front lines of the battle between rebels and government soldiers.

Mr. Bes huddled with guests in the basement of the Karpinski Hotel for several hours Thursday morning waiting for the shelling to stop. When he emerged, there were bodies in the streets outside the hotel and bullet holes in some windows, he said.

The government said 350 people were killed in the assault on Ndjamená; it did not say how many of them were soldiers, rebels or civilians.

Aid workers who visited hospitals described many wounded people, some of them civilians caught in the crossfire.

"I was shocked by the seriousness of the injuries, like shredded limbs and very large open wounds," said Pierre Gielis, a surgeon with Doctors Without Borders who treated the wounded at a main hospital. Dr. Gielis added that doctors had already performed a number of double amputations. "Most of the wounded are quite young. We've been treating girls and even a 3-year-old baby."

Government hospitals received the bodies of 10 civilians, but many more were believed to have been killed, aid workers said. The International Committee of the Red Cross urged the authorities to ensure that adequate health care was offered to wounded rebels.

Some of the rebels who were lined up before the public Friday told reporters that they were Sudanese and had been conscripted by the Chadian rebels, who call themselves the United Front for Democratic Change. The captured rebels said their commanders had told them that they would not meet any resistance during their predawn raid.

That did not prove to be the case, as the Chadian Army successfully repelled them, using tanks, artillery and attack helicopters.

The fighting comes as the presidential elections, scheduled for May 3, draw near. Mr. Déby is widely favored to win. He seized power in a coup in 1990, taking the same route from Darfur to Ndjamená that the rebels used this week. He subsequently won two

disputed presidential elections and then pushed through changes in Chad's Constitution to allow him to run for a third term.

The latest coup attempt was the second effort in a month to unseat him. On March 14, army officers sought to take power while Mr. Déby was out of the country. He has also faced an array of defections of army officers disillusioned with his rule.

Even as the African Union condemned the rebel attack on Mr. Déby's government Friday, it acknowledged the homegrown nature of the crisis and called on Mr. Déby to begin a dialogue with government opponents "with a view to finding a consensual solution to the problems facing Chad and to consolidating the democratic process in the country."

[Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company](#)