



# Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures

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## *Executive Summary*

Since early 2015, attacks in Chad by the Nigerian jihadist group Boko Haram have killed hundreds, displaced more than 100,000 and damaged the regional economy of the Lake Chad basin. Violence peaked in 2015 with suicide bombings in the capital and in the Lake region, and has since declined. Chad's military engagements and its role in the fight against terrorism – around Lake Chad and elsewhere in the region – have brought significant diplomatic gains, most recently the appointment of Foreign Minister Moussa Faki as chairperson of the African Union Commission. But the security risk hasn't disappeared. To counter the ongoing threat while responding to the immediate and longer-term needs of the population, Chadian authorities need to build on the relatively successful regional security cooperation, start to move away from their highly militarised response to include a more significant civilian component, elaborate a more coherent economic development plan and deal more effectively with former Boko Haram members.

Boko Haram's presence in Chad has been most strongly felt around Lake Chad, which lies primarily within Chadian territory. The area combines rich agriculture, pastoralism and fishing and is a magnet for migrants from all over the Sahel, leading to tensions over control of resources. Boko Haram has taken advantage of the geography of the lake seeking refuge on its many islands. The cultural and religious influence of Nigeria's Borno state facilitated the penetration of the Borno-born jihadist group, which has also taken advantage of longstanding communal tensions in the area.

Initially, Boko Haram's presence on the Chadian side of the lake was limited. But violence rapidly escalated in 2015, partly in reaction to the intervention by Chadian forces in neighbouring states. Two suicide bombings in the capital N'Djamena and multiple attacks on villages and army posts followed. Attacks diminished at the start of 2016, having never reached the levels seen in Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger. This was accompanied by a wave of surrenders of Boko Haram members in the second half of the year, but which seemingly included few if any of the hard core. Attacks continued, however, throughout 2016, as the jihadist group showed repeated resilience and adaptability.

The violence Boko Haram unleashed has led to over 100,000 displaced and 7,000 refugees on Chadian territory by the beginning of 2017. In 2015, this heightened longstanding antagonisms between communities and made community-level conflict management more challenging. Some community chiefs have been caught in the violent crossfire. Some have been pressured by the national authorities, while others have been accused of complicity or targeted by Boko Haram and one has even been killed. Stigmatisation of some of the Buduma ethnic group, suspected of colluding with Boko Haram, was acute but has lessened since violence decreased.

The reaction of the Chadian authorities has been primarily military, both in the Lake region and through interventions in neighbouring countries. A state of emergency was imposed in November 2015 and has been renewed several times since, and administration has been partly militarised. Many suspected Boko Haram members captured on Chadian soil have been imprisoned for long periods without trial. Local defence militias have been created and have played a significant role against the

jihadist group. But the heavy security response has come at a cost, especially in restrictions of movement imposed on a traditionally highly mobile population heavily dependent on cross-border trade.

As the first phase of a new military offensive by armies in the region has just been launched (Operation Rawan Kada), the risks of infiltration and a rise in attacks on the Chadian territory are real. A large-scale attack could act as a trigger and, as in 2015, lead to stigmatisation, particularly of the Buduma population. Until now, national authorities have failed to articulate any longer-term plan for the area, and there is little sense of how the impact of Boko Haram is dealt with at a civilian level. A clear new development strategy is needed, which should be driven by the needs of the population in the Lake Chad area and not tied too closely to the fight against the jihadist group.

The reduction of the Boko Haram threat largely depends on actions taken in neighbouring countries, primarily Nigeria. However, measures can be taken to contain it in Chad and in particular in the lake area:

- ❑ Chadian authorities are ill-prepared to deal with suspected Boko Haram members who have surrendered or been captured. A screening process must be initiated to distinguish between real members and those who were either at the periphery or even not associated to the group at all. The latter should be released and integrated in broad community development projects targeting the youth. Following the recent initiative of the interior ministry in neighbouring Niger, Chadian authorities should elaborate a framework document for the treatment of surrendeers and communicate it to its international partners.
- ❑ To encourage surrenders, counter violent radical messages, improve communication by the authorities and allow local people to express their concerns, community radio stations should be supported and expanded. Most of these will necessarily operate at local level, but consideration should be given to developing community radio stations with a remit to cover the whole lake area, to reflect the diversity and integration of the populations. Such radio stations, which could be based on existing initiatives in neighbouring countries, should broadcast in a wide and balanced range of local and national languages, and should include messages of peace, calls for surrender directed at Boko Haram members and information on other issues of lakewide interest such as cattle prices.

To balance the heavily militarised response to the Boko Haram threat in the lake area and to avoid its militarisation, and to address the needs of the population suffering from violence and displacement, including through better and more sustainable development strategies:

- ❑ Far more civilian capacity must be gradually brought in. This should include a stronger involvement of local authorities in strategic decision-making and a better administrative presence to rebuild social services and ensure civilian needs are taken into account. To encourage civil servants to work in the region, a system of temporary bonuses could be considered. Measures should also include support for community-level initiatives concerning social cohesion.

- ❑ Chadian authorities should propose clear political options for the future of the lake. They should elaborate a medium- and longer-term plan for the development of the Lake region, together with the development donors and in consultation with the local population. It should be sensitive to the needs of a highly mobile population.
- ❑ The risk of concentrating financial resources on the lake to the detriment of other regions should not be neglected. Chad is a very poor country with many areas in a precarious situation. It is therefore necessary to rebalance the portfolio of projects so as not to neglect the pressing needs of other regions.
- ❑ The welcome efforts of donors to set up projects in the region must take account of risks of injecting large amounts of development funding so to avoid reinforcing some conflict drivers. As a first step, development agencies should finance a socio-anthropological study into the livelihoods and mobility of the population, and consider how to involve local communities in development programs.
- ❑ Chadian authorities should review their current policies, which restrict economic activities on the lake, and take measures to support, protect and relaunch the regional economy. A protected trade corridor between Chad and Nigeria would facilitate trade and improve the living conditions of the population.

**Nairobi/Brussels, 8 March 2017**



# Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures

## I. Introduction

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In the aftermath of the April 2016 presidential election, which saw Idriss Déby win a fifth term, Chad became central to the struggle against terrorism in Africa. With the election on 31 January 2017 of the country's foreign minister, Moussa Faki, as head of the African Union Commission, the Chadian regime is reaping the benefits of an active military diplomacy which has seen it intervene in many foreign countries and notably, since early 2015, against the jihadist group Boko Haram.<sup>1</sup>

Even so, it still faces massive challenges: a major economic and financial crisis resulting from both the slump in oil prices and the disruption of trade with Nigeria and Cameroon; the absence of any change in power and the risk of a future succession crisis; and resurgent security threats beyond Chad's borders – the prevailing anarchy in southern Libya recently led the Chadian authorities to close their northern frontier, while conditions are worsening in the Central African Republic (CAR) and problems persist in Darfur.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, following the interventions of its army against Boko Haram in neighbouring countries, Chad has found itself exposed to attacks by the jihadist group on its own soil, causing many civilian deaths both in N'Djamena and on the islands and shore of Lake Chad, as well as large-scale displacements. Although the number of attacks in Chad dropped sharply in 2016, the threat posed by Boko Haram is continually evolving and will most probably persist over the long term. The growth of the terrorist group drew on deep structural problems in Nigeria. To solve them will take time, and regions that neighbour Borno state will long remain vulnerable.

This Crisis Group report makes no attempt to analyse Boko Haram's structure, leadership or resources. Instead, it seeks to understand the factors that facilitated the extension of the jihadist group's activities into Chad – particularly through an analysis of the historical, cultural and economic features of the Lake Chad area – and how the group's activity and the state's response to it have affected the communities living there.<sup>3</sup> Finally, it makes recommendations to replace a predominantly military response with a stabilisation strategy. Based on research carried out during

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<sup>1</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Report N°233, *Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, 30 March 2016.

<sup>2</sup> "Le Tchad annonce la fermeture de sa frontière avec la Libye", Radio France internationale (RFI), 6 January 2017.

<sup>3</sup> For more information about Boko Haram, see "Comprendre Boko Haram", *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 255 (2015/3); Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "A Sectarian Jihad in Nigeria: The Case of Boko Haram", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 27, no. 5 (2016), pp. 878-895; Andrew Walker, "Eat the Heart of the Infidel": *The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram* (London, 2016); and Crisis Group Africa Reports N°s 216, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, 3 April 2014; and N°168, *Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict*, 20 December 2010.

visits to the Lake Chad region and N'Djamena in 2015 and 2016, this report is one of a series of Crisis Group publications on the jihadist threat in the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°120, *Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, 4 May 2016; and Crisis Group Africa Reports N°s 241, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, 16 November 2016; N°s 242, *Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency*, 5 December 2016; N°s 244, *Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram*, 23 February 2017; and N°s 245, *Le Niger face à Boko Haram: au-delà de la contre-insurrection*, 27 February 2017.



## II. Lake Chad: Fertile Ground for Boko Haram

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Except for two spectacular bombings in N’Djamena in 2015, Boko Haram’s attacks and recruitment in Chad have mainly targeted the Lake region. The jihadist group has exploited the history, the physical and human geography and the economic dynamism of this distinctive lake environment, finding – like others before – both a refuge from the pressure exerted by the region’s national armies and a financial windfall. Boko Haram has also been able to draw on support, albeit often sporadic, among local communities that are sometimes competing with each other and have a history of resisting external attempts to impose a political authority.<sup>5</sup> The geographical, linguistic, religious and cultural proximity of Nigeria’s Borno state – which each year attracts large numbers of Chadian immigrants – has facilitated its recruitment and the extension of the conflict to the Chadian shores of the lake. However, subsequent chapters will show how the military response by states in the region and, above all, the absence of a broad-based social constituency for Boko Haram in Chad, limited this expansion.

### A. *A Complex History of Human Settlement*

Lake Chad, whose shrinking, allegedly caused by global warming, is already under scrutiny, now faces a new threat, having become the arena for a conflict between the bordering states and Boko Haram – with the local population caught in the middle. The history of human settlement in this area helps to explain how the jihadist group established itself.<sup>6</sup> Once subjected to military conquests, the Lake region has found itself accommodating economic and environmental migrants, and armed insurrections have sometimes developed there.

Historically, the Lake Chad basin, in its broad multi-country sense, has endured numerous invasions, motivated by a mix of religious ambitions, desire to impose political authority and to forcibly take control of the local economy. In this situation, the islands in the lake were places to both live and take refuge for populations subordinate to political authorities, such as the Kouri and the Buduma (also known as Yédina), who account for the majority of island residents.<sup>7</sup> Although they were willing to accept the arrival of new population groups, they persistently resisted the external influence of the Kanem, Kanem-Bornou and Baguirmi pre-colonial empires. During the colonial era, these populations often refused to merge their villages to facilitate tax collection.<sup>8</sup>

Even today, this desire for autonomy persists. Islanders fall under the authority of neither the “Alifa” of Mao – whose purview ends at the shores of the lake – nor

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<sup>5</sup> Christian Seignobos, “Boko Haram et le lac Tchad. Extension ou sanctuarisation?”, *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 255 (2015/3).

<sup>6</sup> On 28 January 2017, Ségolène Royal, French environment minister, signed an agreement on the rehabilitation and restoration of the Lake Chad ecosystems and announced €1 million in aid for the reforestation of the surrounding areas. “Tchad : une convention pour la sauvegarde du lac Tchad”, RFI, 29 January 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Géraud Magrin, Jacques Lemoalle, Roland Pourtier, “Atlas du lac Tchad”, *Passages*, no. 183, 2015; and Christian Bouquet, *Insulaires et riverains du lac Tchad*, PhD thesis, vol. 1 & 2 (Paris, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Crisis Group interview, Buduma parliamentarian, N’Djamena, September 2016.

the emir of Maiduguri, capital of the Nigerian federal state of Borno; their sense of belonging to a nation state is weak.<sup>9</sup> Having long resisted forcible conversion, the Buduma only adopted Islam at the beginning of the twentieth century, eight centuries after the Kanem Empire had built its own political project around this religion. They are regarded by neighbouring communities as having an inauthentic practice of Islam, but sometimes accused of complicity with Boko Haram and stigmatised for that reason.

The lake's recent history is characterised by population mixing. In the twentieth century, its resources attracted new settlers – which fuelled economic growth but also sparked competition for control of the islands and the areas subject to seasonal flooding, a tendency that has been exacerbated by the current conflict. From Hausa migration to the Nigerian shores of the lake in the early twentieth century to the arrival of fishermen from southern Chad or West Africa some decades later, many communities were drawn to the lake, transforming it into an ethnic and cultural mosaic.

Starting with the great drought of the 1970s and the process of contraction into the “small lake”, the region found itself hosting new economic refugees. These included farmers and Chadian, Arab, Fulani and Kreda and even Nigerian Toubous livestock herders, who altered their transhumance routes in search of grazing.<sup>10</sup> With the water level sinking, new islands have appeared and seasonal fishing camps have become villages, inhabited by local people but also government officials and soldiers.<sup>11</sup> Over the past 40 years, due to this “race to the lake”, the net migration rate has been strongly positive in the region. The small lake, which had 700,000 inhabitants in 1976, is today home to about 2.2 million – 13 million with the surrounding countryside – set to reach three million in 2025.<sup>12</sup>

Successive armed opposition groups have chosen to base themselves in Chad's Lake region, even though the area is barely politicised and has little history of dissent. In 1978, the “third army” (or “*Forces armées occidentales*”) – a strand of the National Liberation Front of Chad (Front de libération nationale du Tchad, FROLINAT) – and later the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Chad (Mouvement populaire pour la libération du Tchad, MPLT) established itself in the area, supported by rear bases on the Nigerian shore.<sup>13</sup> Some of their senior figures, native to the area, recruited numerous fighters from lakeside communities and from the Kanem region. After Déby took power in 1990, supporters of the former president, Hissène Habré, grouped in the Movement for the Defence of Democracy (Mouvement pour la défense

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<sup>9</sup> The Alifa is the sultan of Mao, the capital of the Kanem region, which is adjacent to the Lake region; nearby is Njimi, formerly the capital of the Kanem kingdom. Crisis Group interviews, Buduma and Kouri inhabitants, Baga Sola and Bol, April 2016.

<sup>10</sup> The “big lake” became the “medium-sized lake” in the 1950s and eventually, in 1973, the “small lake”, made up of several expanses of water separated by shallows, including the Grande Barrière (“Big Divider”) between the two geographical basins. “Boko Haram et le lac Tchad. Extension ou sanctuarisation ?”, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> This factor played a role in the 1980s frontier disputes between Cameroon and Nigeria over the island of Darak, and between Nigeria and Chad near Baga Kawa. Abdouraman Halirou, “Le conflit frontalier Cameroun-Nigeria dans le lac Tchad: les enjeux de l'île de Darak, disputée et partagée”, *Cultures & Conflits*, no. 72 (2008). In 2000, Chadian soldiers also temporarily occupied Cameroonian islands north of Darak.

<sup>12</sup> “Atlas du lac Tchad”, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Marielle Debos, *Le métier des armes au Tchad. Le gouvernement de l'entre-guerres* (Paris, 2013).

de la démocratie, MDD), also tried to establish a foothold in the marshy areas of the lake, beyond the Grande Barrière.<sup>14</sup> Finally defeated by the Chadian army in the mid-1990s, some of its fighters were absorbed into the Chadian army, while others fled to Nigeria. Today the leaders of the successive rebellions that developed around the lake are no longer a threat to the regime.<sup>15</sup>

### B. *Trafficking and Violent Raiding*

In part basing itself on the smuggling networks that operate across the lake, Boko Haram has repeatedly raided local communities and traders. This is just the latest episode in the region's long history of such attacks – which have not only made their perpetrators rich but also boosted their social status.<sup>16</sup> And even today, such kudos, which earns its holders the chance to choose a wife, is certainly one of the factors that encourage people to join Boko Haram or ally themselves with it.<sup>17</sup> A number of sources report that, during their rest breaks, fighters often talk about marriage.<sup>18</sup>

Until the end of the nineteenth century, some local communities took refuge on the lake's islands to escape raiding by sultanates and empires in the region, particularly those seeking to capture slaves. Arms traders also led military expeditions into the area, sometimes combined with religious proselytisation.<sup>19</sup> The last few decades have seen smaller scale attacks staged by islanders, concealed in the reedbeds, mainly seeking to steal livestock or fishing boats. Such activities have been facilitated by the way some island communities have organised themselves around local warlords, called *kella*, who are able to agree on a carve-up of areas to target in raids.<sup>20</sup>

At the end of the colonial era, the dynamism of the economy and the limited local presence of the state, encouraged trafficking in fuel, medicines, drugs, weapons, identity documents and people. Customs officials were sometimes complicit, thus fostering the emergence of alternative illicit sources of authority.<sup>21</sup> The lake's topography, its distinctive vegetation and the difficulty of navigating its labyrinth of islands also helped smuggling to flourish.

Moreover, the past 30 years have seen an intense growth in the activity of highway robbers (*zarginas*) – a reflection of the fact that pastoralists have become poorer, due to the drought, while successive Chadian civil wars have flooded the region with

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<sup>14</sup> Anne-Charlotte Goupil, "Etude sur le contexte social, économique, historique de la région du Lac au Tchad", UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, February 2016. Crisis Group interview, former senior figure in a rebellion in the lake area, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Some figures, such as the leader of the MDD, Moussa Medela, obtained positions of responsibility. Crisis Group interview, former senior figure in a rebellion in the lake area, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>16</sup> In past times, praise-songs in the Kanem-Bornou Empire glorified looters, who were regarded as heroic figures. *Le métier des armes au Tchad*, op. cit., p. 50-51.

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group Briefing, *Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interviews, refugees and a former hostage held by Boko Haram, Minawao and Yaoundé (Cameroon), March, April 2016. Crisis Group Briefing, *Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> This is exemplified by Arab businessmen such as the Awlad Suleyman, who moved from Libya to the northern shore of the lake, seeking to get control of the local economy. *Le métier des armes au Tchad*, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> "Boko Haram et le lac Tchad. Extension ou sanctuarisation?", op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

weapons. Many former Chadian rebels or soldiers – sometimes both simultaneously – became highway bandits before making their skills available to Boko Haram. Among them is Mustapha Chad, presumed to be a former Chadian soldier, whom some sources believe led the Boko Haram attack on Gwoza in Borno state in August 2014.<sup>22</sup> Some Chadian prisoners suspected of being members of the sect say that they had also served in the Chad National Army (ANT).<sup>23</sup> Boko Haram has managed to associate with or even incorporate some trafficking or bandit groups in order to get supplies or sell off what it seizes.<sup>24</sup>

### C. *Economic Attractiveness but Political Neglect*

Boko Haram's success in establishing itself on the lake and its recruitment of youths with few prospects despite the area's economic dynamism cast a harsh light on the shortcomings of the region's states in dealing with their peripheral areas. The economic attractiveness of the lake and its resources have created a trading hub, contrasting with the inadequacy and unreliability of the lakeshore national governments' public policies.

In Nigeria, the development policies of the 1970s and 1980s, such as major irrigation schemes like the old Baga Polder Project, created many jobs, particularly for Chadian migrants, yet had only limited success.<sup>25</sup> In Niger, and even more in Cameroon, the lake was regarded as a remote border area until the 1990s. In Niger, despite the construction of a road linking Diffa and N'Guigmi in 1975, it was not until the end of the 1990s that the state reestablished a serious presence in the Komadougou area – a result both of its proximity to Agadem oil fields and the accession to power of Mamadou Tandja, Niger's president from 1999 to 2010, who has a stronghold near Diffa.<sup>26</sup> Today, although Diffa is much better equipped and richer than many other towns in Niger, the Nigerien villages near the lake remain marginalised. In Cameroon, the Far North region became a focus of attention only recently, particularly because of the growth in highway banditry.<sup>27</sup>

The Lake Chad area is not, in geographical terms, a remote border area for N'Djamena, as is the case in neighbouring countries – and more than half of the lake's surface area lies within Chad's territorial frontiers.<sup>28</sup> Often known as "N'Djamena's garden", the lake and its polders (agricultural fringes) supply the city with fish and agricultural products. The headquarters of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), which has official responsibility for managing the lake's resources, are in N'Djamena. And yet, the lake has some characteristics of a peripheral area, far from the centres

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<sup>22</sup> "A Sectarian Jihad in Nigeria", op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Crisis Group interview, prison staff, Maroua (Cameroon), March 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Crisis Group Briefing, *Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> *Insulaires et riverains du lac Tchad*, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Lemoalle, Géraud Magrin (eds.), *Le développement du lac Tchad : situation actuelle et futurs possibles* (Marseille, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> N'Djamena is about 100km away from the lake and less than 350km away from Bol, the regional capital.

of power. It was not until October 2015, after the attacks on Baga Sola, on the lakeshore, that Chad's president visited the lake for the first time in his life.<sup>29</sup>

Having not been greatly affected by the civil wars, being little politicised and having produced few members of the Chadian elites, Lake Chad has largely stayed off the radar of successive regimes. While the Rally for Democracy and Progress (*Rassemblement pour la démocratie et le progrès*, RDP) of former President Lol Mahamat Choua still wins the votes of many Kanembu in Mao and on the shores of the lake, it is not regarded as a political threat by the central government and it allied itself with President Déby's party, the Patriotic Salvation Movement (*Mouvement patriotique du Salut*, MPS), in the last presidential election. Moreover, two of the six members of the National Assembly from the Lake region are affiliated to the RDP and the other four to the MPS. Local elites from the lake area do not have much representation in N'Djamena.<sup>30</sup>

The extent to which the Chadian state has shown interest in the lake has fluctuated considerably. In the 1960s, it made a serious commitment, creating the Lake Chad Development Company (*Société de développement du lac Tchad*, Sodelac) and building polders.<sup>31</sup> But the 1970s civil wars, combined with the impact of structural adjustment programs, substantially reduced available project funding and just a few donors continued to fund the Sodelac, notably its work on irrigation.<sup>32</sup> In the 1980s, with the help of the UN, Hissène Habré launched an integrated project to develop road infrastructure and a seed farm, but these initiatives once again came to nothing due to security problems.

The growth in oil revenues from 2007 onwards brought about change. While the state poured resources into infrastructure development in N'Djamena, Abéché and other major cities, some places around the lake also benefitted, albeit to a modest degree. Thus, to accompany an unfulfilled devolution scheme, infrastructure projects (such as a secondary school and a hospital) were launched in Ngouri, which had been made the centre of local administration, Bol and Guitté.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the area's economic dynamism, access to public services is poor, and far below the national average. The gross school enrolment rate in the Chadian lake area is below 30 per cent and "community teachers" – in other words, the parents of pupils – generally have to stand in, in place of trained teachers.<sup>34</sup> There is only one doctor

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<sup>29</sup> Crisis Group interview, diplomat, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>30</sup> The fisheries minister, the representative in Chad of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (Cemac) and the Action for the Republic, Democracy and Development (*Action pour la République, la démocratie et le développement*, ARD) party's leader and former presidential candidate all come from the region but have little influence over regime decision-making. Bol district's leader has held a number of ministerial and ambassador posts, but his relations with the administration have not always been smooth and he has reportedly been removed from his post. Crisis Group interviews, Buduma member of the National Assembly, N'Djamena, September 2016; traditional authorities in the lake area and Chadian military intelligence official, April 2016.

<sup>31</sup> The Sodelac is a state enterprise which since 1967 has been involved in the development of farmland and irrigation projects in the Lake region.

<sup>32</sup> Christian Bouquet, "Le lac Tchad, un indicateur plus complexe qu'il n'y paraît", *The Conversation*, 11 December 2015.

<sup>33</sup> *Le développement du lac Tchad : situation actuelle et futurs possibles*, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interview, development officer, N'Djamena, September 2016.

for every 140,000 inhabitants, which is only a quarter of the national average.<sup>35</sup> As a border area politically divided between four distinct states, the lake has not become an integrated whole for the purpose of providing the inhabitants with services – and this partly explains why local people pay little heed to their national capitals.

Island populations' distant, even mistrustful, relationship to the states, and very low rates of literacy, have certainly helped Boko Haram to recruit and indoctrinate in the lake area. In these regions deprived of public services, the group has managed to appear attractive. According to a recent study carried out in Nigeria, many young people, including women, felt that the group offers "unique opportunities" in providing access to Islamic education and a degree of social power.<sup>36</sup>

D. *The Lake in the Orbit of Nigeria's Borno State:  
Emigration, Trade and Influence*

The porous nature of borders in a region that has long been in Nigeria's orbit facilitated the extension of the Boko Haram threat to the Chadian shores of the lake.<sup>37</sup> In cultural terms, the lake forms part of what used to be the Kanem-Bornou Empire and the political organisation, language and customs of the Kanembu in Chad are very similar to those of the Nigerian Kanuri.<sup>38</sup> The Chadian lakeshores and islands' economy is heavily oriented toward Maiduguri – the epicentre of Boko Haram in Nigeria; the city serves as both a commercial hub and a religious and cultural centre for many Chadian migrants.

1. Economic emigration and trade relations

For many years, inhabitants on the Chadian shore of the lake have looked more to Maiduguri than to N'Djamena. Islanders use the Naira, Nigeria's currency. Many Buduma, Kouri and Kanembu have a limited sense of national identity – and only express it on rare occasions.<sup>39</sup> They are used to moving across the border freely, in response to climate hazards or economic opportunities and they often possess identity documents from several lakeshore states. For many young Chadians in the region, the journey to Nigeria is crucial to build up savings and a marriage dowry. Numerous Chadian Buduma have worked as cattle herders on the Nigerian side of the lake, earning money to buy their own animals before returning home to get married.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> This is much less than in Cameroon's Far North region (1/52,000) or Niger's Diffa region (1/24,500), both close to the lake. *Le développement du lac Tchad : situation actuelle et futurs possibles*, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> "Motivations and empty promises. Voices of former Boko Haram combatants and Nigerian youth", Mercy Corps, April 2016. Crisis Group Report, *Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency*, op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> "All the countries of French influence in central Africa will inevitably find themselves dragged into the orbit of Bornu and Benue, a true commercial pathway that imports will inevitably take". D'Huart, "Le Tchad et ses habitants. Notes de géographie physique et humaine," *La Géographie*, vol. 9, 15 March 1904, pp. 161-176.

<sup>38</sup> "Boko Haram et le lac Tchad. Extension ou sanctuarisation?", op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> An exception was in 1983, when the island populations did express a sense of national identity during clashes between Chadian and Nigerian soldiers on the lake.

<sup>40</sup> Crisis Group interviews, inhabitants of Lake Chad, Baga Sola, Bol, September 2015, April 2016.

Climatic and economic migration reached peak levels during the great droughts of the 1970s. In search of grazing land, many Chadian pastoralists crossed the lake's northern basin to reach the Nigeria-Niger borderlands. In this same period, some Buduma fishermen settled for several months of the year in Baga Kawa on the Nigerian shore to fish and sell their catches, adapting to fluctuations in water levels. And many Kanembu from the Chadian shore sought work in the ports or landing points – *baga* in Kanembu or Kanuri – in Nigeria: Baga Kawa, Malam-Fatori and Woulgo.<sup>41</sup>

The clashes between Boko Haram and the region's armies have caused serious damage to these ports, which were revenue collection points for the jihadist group and demonstrations of its territorial control.<sup>42</sup> In January 2015, its attack on Baga Kawa – one of the main Borno lakeside markets that it had previously controlled – left 2,000 dead and forced many Chadians and Nigerians to flee across the lake.<sup>43</sup> More generally, the Islamist group's attacks on the Nigerian shore, and the sometimes violent counter-insurgency strikes by the region's armies, have led to massive population displacement, thus helping the conflict spread across the lake and on to the Chadian shore.

## 2. Borno state, a “boarding school” for many Chadians

Religious education has also been a factor behind the migration of many young Chadians to Borno state. For many years, Chadian children and young men have gone to study in Maiduguri, the cultural and religious centre of the region. This trend has been particularly marked among the communities that live on the shores or islands of Lake Chad.

From the 1960s onwards, Quran schools attracted more pupils – even for classes in the open air, sometimes sitting on the ground – than public schools, which were few in number and tended to be headed by Christians from the country's south. Young Kanembu learnt the Quran from a *mallum* – a teacher or spiritual guide – in the island towns of Nguéléa, near Baga Sola, Liwa in the north east of the lake, in many small villages or even further afield, in Mao.<sup>44</sup>

Many of these youths subsequently set off for Maiduguri or Monguno – also in Borno – to continue the next stage of their studies in *changai*, higher Quran schools.<sup>45</sup> They thus spent several years in Nigeria on a journey that often resembled a rite of passage: “You have to study far from home and then come back later”, said a Baga Sola resident.<sup>46</sup> These paths often combined religious learning with survival economics, particularly begging. In Baga Sola and Bol, recollections of childhood departure to Quran schools in Borno are legion: “When I was younger, a Chadian religious teacher collected us; we were 40 Chadian children, and we went to spend

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<sup>41</sup> Between 1973 and 1975, many young men from Bol arrived in Baga Kawa seeking jobs. Information about this phenomenon was collected at the time by “*fatoma*” – hoteliers of Chadian origin who accommodate fishermen. *Insulaires et riverains du lac Tchad*, op. cit.

<sup>42</sup> Crisis Group interview, military expert, N'Djamena, April 2016.

<sup>43</sup> “Nigéria : un raid de Boko Haram fait plus de 2000 morts”, *La Dépêche* (ladepeche.fr), 10 January 2015.

<sup>44</sup> *Insulaires et riverains du lac Tchad*, op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Crisis Group interviews, young Chadian who had gone to study in Maiduguri, Baga Sola, April 2016.

three years studying in Maiduguri. We had to beg people for money and food. Then my teacher wanted to come home so we came back”.<sup>47</sup>

The population explosion that got underway in the 1970s in the Lake region and the absence of government policies to deal with the impact of this demographic growth fuelled the pace of departures to Nigeria. While the vast majority of children who left to study in Borno returned to Chad without incident, some were exposed to the preaching of *ulema* close to Boko Haram, either within or outside Quran schools. Others had to flee or were repatriated when the Nigerian army intervened. In 2009 and 2012, hundreds of Chadian children fled to Ngouboua in Chad, having been expelled from Quran schools in Borno state, or because their villages had been “burnt down by Nigerian soldiers”.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “Des centaines de migrants tchadiens fuient le Nigéria”, RFI, 29 February 2012.



### III. Evolution of the Boko Haram Threat in Chad

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For many years, Boko Haram's activity was mainly concentrated in Nigeria's Borno state, its historic stronghold. But since early 2014, the threat has become regional, and attacks on civilians and military positions have multiplied in northern Cameroon since March 2014 and in southern Niger and western Chad since early 2015.

The arrival of Boko Haram in Chad is often dated back to 12 February 2015, the day of the terrorist group's first attack on Ngouboua, on the shore of Lake Chad. But this statement should be nuanced. Chad had not been specifically targeted until the country decided to join the war in January 2015, in alliance with its neighbours (see the following chapter). This *casus belli* brought an end to the tacit non-aggression pact between Boko Haram and Chad and was very quickly followed by Shekau's declarations of war: "Kings of Africa, I challenge you to attack me now; I am ready".<sup>49</sup> However, Boko Haram's strategy of establishing itself on Lake Chad was not new. Since 2013, its fighters had been moving around the lake using Baga Kawa as a support base, helped by outboard motorboat operators familiar with the lake waters.

#### A. Early Signs of Boko Haram's Presence in Chad

Before 2010, the growth of Boko Haram in Maiduguri did not affect N'Djamena or the other big cities in northern and eastern Chad, characterised by very different cultures and the predominant use of Arabic. Thus, right up to today, neither the "classic" Chadian armed opposition nor the fundamentalist or purist Islamic associations – whose relations with the state are far from easy – have sought to politicise the phenomenon or take advantage of it.<sup>50</sup>

Yet, from the early 2000's onwards, Kanuri and Bornouan living in N'Djamena were listening to the sermons of Boko Haram's founder, Mohamed Yusuf, on audio cassettes. Some even posted stickers of his image on their cars. And his Chadian disciples regularly preached in the capital.<sup>51</sup> Yusuf was violently critical of the Nigerian state, sometimes even calling for armed struggle.<sup>52</sup> But in N'Djamena, his listeners were also seeking a linguistic echo: "It did us good to hear the word of God in our own language", said a Kanuri religious leader.<sup>53</sup> Religion has communal and linguistic hooks that help get a hearing in wider society.

Boko Haram's change of course, embarking on armed struggle – which helped to bring about Yusuf's death in 2009 and continued afterwards – had a fundamental impact on the attitude of its followers in Chad. Many Bornouans in N'Djamena threw away their cassettes, fearing arrest. "When you mention Yusuf's name today people

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<sup>49</sup> "Boko Haram : Shekau menace Déby, Biya et Issoufou", *Jeune Afrique*, 21 January 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, reputedly Wahhabi associations like Ansar al Suna Muhamadiya – which still has a presence on the Chadian shore of the lake, despite being suspended by the authorities – have taken clear positions against Boko Haram, an attitude that echoes the wider condemnatory stance of other Chadian fundamentalist groups. Crisis Group Report, *Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, op. cit.

<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group interviews, religious leaders, university academics, N'Djamena, April 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Elodie Apard, "Les mots de Boko Haram. Décryptages de discours de Mohammed Yusuf et d'Abubakar Shekau", *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 255 (2015).

<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group interview, Kanuri religious leader, N'Djamena, April 2016.

are afraid”, a Kanuri academic recently admitted, adding: “And as for Shekau [who became the leader of Boko Haram] no one has ever listened to him; he’s a blood-thirsty brute”.<sup>54</sup> After Boko Haram’s attacks on N’Djamena in June and July 2015, there was a surge in the searches and arrests targeting Kanuri, Hausa and Bornouans, which created a deep sense of exclusion. Some individuals are still in jail, while others have been released only recently.<sup>55</sup>

Witness accounts, sometimes second hand, mention religious proselytising, telephone ringtones that quote radical sermons and the sale of videos on Chadian island markets even before 2014–2015.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Boko Haram has long had Chadian members. For several years, some Chadians have been monitored by neighbouring countries’ intelligence services and, since 2011, some have been jailed, particularly in Maroua prison.<sup>57</sup> More recently, in June 2016, many Chadian fighters reportedly took part in the offensive against Bosso in Niger.

### B. *From an Active Conflict in Chad to a more Diffuse Threat*

Accustomed to rebellions fuelled by ethno-regional factors, Chad has had to confront a new kind of security threat since 2015. The first jihadist attacks on its soil took place just days after the Chadian army launched its intervention against Boko Haram in neighbouring countries (see the following Section). Throughout 2015, the group staged repeated raids on lakeshore villages; it carried out suicide attacks in N’Djamena in June and July 2015 and in Baga Sola in October 2015, killing several hundred civilians over the course of that year. Many islanders were abducted, as in Litri and Kaoudjiram in September 2015. Around 100 soldiers were killed in ambushes and in fighting against Boko Haram in the Lake region.<sup>58</sup>

But 2016 saw a major improvement in the security situation on the Chadian shore of the lake. The country suffered less than its neighbours from Boko Haram’s activities, which is explained both by the military’s strategy of containment and by the relatively recent and weaker nature of the jihadist group’s influence on local society in Chad. It has never controlled any territory in the country, nor established a real social base, and it has not carried out any spectacular attacks there since those in Guitté and Mitteriné in early 2016.<sup>59</sup> The deployment of both substantial military assets from the Chadian contingent of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) near the frontiers in the lake area, and the Chadian National Army (ANT) on the lakeshore significantly curbed the expansion of the conflict. However, the closure of the border, combined with the implementation of the state of emergency, has restricted trade –

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Although the atmosphere of suspicion has since dissipated, youths feel frustrated and complain that people are jumping to conclusions: “What happens in Nigeria is nothing to do with us”, said one. In 2015, religious leaders launched awareness campaigns to defuse these tensions. Crisis Group interviews, Kanuri youths, N’Djamena, April 2016.

<sup>56</sup> Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian actors and lake residents, Baga Sola, Bol, April 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> Crisis Group interviews, security experts, N’Djamena, April 2016.

<sup>59</sup> “Des attentats-suicides meurtriers attribués à Boko Haram ont frappé le Tchad et le Nigéria”, France 24, 1 February 2016.

and this has had a major impact on the population (see Section V.A., below). Moreover, the group frequently infiltrates Chad and local people continue to pay the price.

Despite recent improvements, the threat posed by Boko Haram is not fully under control. While attacks in Chad mainly affected the southern basin of the lake in 2015 and early 2016, since mid-2016 they have been concentrated in an area encompassing Kaiga Kindjiria, Bohoma and Tchoukoutalia in the northern basin, targeting both civilians and the military.<sup>60</sup> From July until September 2016, they even increased slightly, mainly as a result of the MNJTF Operation *Gama Aiki*. Feeling the heat of the offensives mounted by the region's armies in Nigeria and Niger, groups of individuals fled to Chad. Suspected members of Boko Haram arrested in the town of Liwa in September 2016 said they had fled from Nigerian army bombardments on the other side of the frontier.<sup>61</sup> Operation *Rawan Kada* (dance of the crocodile) has just been launched as a follow up to Operation *Gama Aiki*, so one can expect more Boko Haram fighters infiltrating into Chad and therefore an upsurge in incidents in the coming weeks.<sup>62</sup>

In 2016, there was also a sharp increase in livestock thefts around the lakeshore, particularly between Liwa and Daboua. Several thousand heads of cattle were stolen in the past six months, some of which may have been sold off on markets in Nigeria and Niger, where prices are higher.<sup>63</sup> This represents considerable economic capital. To combat this trafficking, the authorities in Daboua have reportedly asked Chadian traders to monitor and control the arrival of herds from Chad on Niger's border markets.<sup>64</sup> Although Boko Haram was soon blamed for these thefts, some are probably the result of normal criminality or activities that blend the two.

The possibility of head-on conventional clashes between the Chadian army and Boko Haram – like those experienced by Niger and Nigeria – is limited at present. Even so, the risk of suicide attacks on the lake and even in N'Djamena is still taken seriously by the authorities. Rumours of planned attacks during national day festivities and the swearing in of President Déby, on 8 August 2016, caused widespread fear and security arrangements were strengthened. While a number of Boko Haram sleeper cells in the capital have been dismantled, it remains possible that members of the sect, or sympathisers, have “gone underground”.<sup>65</sup>

In the aftermath of the major offensive carried out by Nigerian forces in late 2016 in the Sambisa forest – one of Boko Haram's traditional bastions –<sup>66</sup> and with the governments of the region launching a new joint military operation around Lake Chad, the jihadist group is in retreat. Yet it has hitherto demonstrated an ability to adjust to the changing nature of state response, alternating asymmetric combat, suicide attacks and larger scale assaults – like the June 2016 offensive against Bosso,

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<sup>60</sup> The last armed incursions were carried out in January 2017 in Todoubia and Djinjalla, not far from Bohoma and Tchoukoutalia, causing several deaths. Crisis Group telephone interview, humanitarian actor, September 2016.

<sup>61</sup> Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, humanitarian actor, N'Djamena, February 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> A similar initiative was launched by the government, this time in the Cameroonian border markets neighbouring CAR, where many Chadian cattle stolen by the Anti-Balaka militia were being sold.

<sup>65</sup> Crisis Group interview, military expert, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>66</sup> “Nigéria : Boko Haram délogé de Sambisa”, BBC Afrique, 24 December 2016.

in Niger. The much greater coherence of the response by governments in the region has certainly taken its toll on Boko Haram, but experience shows that the group – like other jihadist movements – is highly adaptable. With a network that extends across a vast area, it would not be destroyed by an ultimate military battle. At the very least, Boko Haram still has the ability to sustain a guerrilla campaign and carry out one-off attacks.

But the reverses the movement suffered in 2015 and 2016 have thrown light on latent internal divisions. Two main factions have developed, one led by Abubakar Shekau and the other backing Mohamed Yusuf's own son, Abu Musab al-Barnawi – who seems to enjoy a privileged relationship with the Islamic State (ISIS). These two factions are tussling for the allegiance and control of the key hubs in the jihadist network, a rivalry that can turn violent. Al-Barnawi appears to have imposed his influence in the area of the lake where the three frontiers converge as well as on the Chadian shore, even though some groups continue to operate autonomously there.<sup>67</sup> He has allegedly received some resources from ISIS and he is trying to overhaul the way Boko Haram functions. For the past few months, he has been toning down and curbing the use of violence against civilians; recently, he has concentrated his attacks – which are on a smaller scale than in the past – on military targets, attacking security force convoys in an attempt to capture equipment and weapons.<sup>68</sup>

### C. *Surrender and Return to the Chadian Shore*

Since 2016, the states of the Lake Chad region have reconquered some areas that Boko Haram had had a hold on and the number of its members who surrender has increased. In Chad, some elements of the group had already given themselves up to the authorities between January and March 2016, but since the end of July 2016, this trend has gathered pace, with the surrender of more than 1,000 people, of whom a majority are women and children.

At present, around 300 men are still thought to be in the internment camps near Baga Sola, while the women and children, who formed the majority of the inmates, have been sent back to their home communities without incident and under the supervision of district administrators. To facilitate their social reintegration, the governor of the Lake region has called on all communities to welcome these women – several of whom have said their husbands are still on the front line.<sup>69</sup> The people concerned are mainly Chadians who crossed the borders from Niger and Nigeria to turn themselves in at the advance command posts of the Chadian MNJTF force on the lake, including Kaiga Ngouboua and Kaiga Kindjiria, and at Madai in Nigeria; the majority is thought to have returned to Bol district. “What matters here is to recuperate the broad mass of people who periodically give a hand to Boko Haram or

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<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interview, military expert, N'Djamena, September 2016; and Crisis Group Africa Report, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, op. cit.

<sup>68</sup> Some groups close to al-Barnawi are reported to have recently switched their focus to the Alagarno forest in Borno state and the surroundings of the Komadougou river. Security document consulted by Crisis Group, February 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group interview, researcher, N'Djamena, September 2016.

who have been sucked into the vortex in spite of their better instincts”, said a military expert.<sup>70</sup>

Several sources believe the explanation for these movements of people lies in the success of the region’s armies in “retaking control of some islands” – which sparked a retreat by Boko Haram and enabled these populations to take flight and hand themselves in. Others suggest that this military pressure affected the flow of supplies to the group and pushed it to release civilians and helpers who had become too much of a burden.<sup>71</sup> Whatever the real reason, one should remain extremely cautious about these explanations and the reasons why people have returned and surrendered. Unicef, the Lake Region Office for Social Programs (*Délégation régionale de l’action sociale au lac*) and NGOs have registered some of those who have arrived, carried out awareness campaigns and transferred some children to a centre for transit and guidance in Bol.<sup>72</sup> However, the next Section shows that so far, Chadian authorities have struggled to develop a real strategy to deal with these new arrivals, and particularly the men.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group interviews, researchers, security expert, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, humanitarian actor, February 2017.

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## IV. The Government's Response across the Lake

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The presence of armed Islamist groups like Boko Haram is relatively new to Chad, although for a time the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat*, GSPC) had its eye on the north of the country.<sup>73</sup> In the report *Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, Crisis Group described both the state response to this unprecedented threat – reinforced security measures, updated intelligence techniques, new legal arsenal and tighter controls over religious activity – and the risks associated with this counter-terrorism policy. In this Section, Crisis Group seeks to analyse Chad's rather tardy military engagement in the struggle against Boko Haram and its limits, as well as the use of community security techniques to deal with this new type of threat.

### A. An Initial Neutral Stance

In 2010, Chad expressed concern about the expansion of Boko Haram activities on its territory.<sup>74</sup> However, until early 2015, the country held back in military terms; it was more worried about other threats and the consequences of the chaos in Libya.<sup>75</sup>

Although they formed part of the LCBC regional force in 2012 as the conflict developed in Nigeria, Chadian troops, few in number on the lake, were not actually involved.<sup>76</sup> Absent from the military arena, Déby was asked by Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan to make use of his good offices to organise a meeting between senior Nigerian officials and representatives of Boko Haram in N'Djamena, in October 2014.<sup>77</sup> Everyone expected that it would lead to the release of the Chibok girls – the Nigerian authorities even announced it prematurely.<sup>78</sup> In the end, Chinese hostages were released in northern Cameroon, but it is not clear whether this was as a result of the Chadian mediation. The talks were made public by the media, causing the de facto breakdown of this channel of communication. Shekau declared that those who had negotiated in Boko Haram's name were not its legitimate representatives. Déby

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<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, op. cit.

<sup>74</sup> "Nigeria exports many members of the Boko Haram sect to Chad, fleeing army repression". Crisis Group telephone interview, officer of the Directorate of Territorial Surveillance (Direction de surveillance du territoire, the security service), January 2011. In the early 2000s, Islamist preachers from Borno, accompanied by an Italian imam, had already aroused Chadian authorities' mistrust; eventually they were arrested in Chad and extradited. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Idriss Déby's first acts after his investiture for a fifth term in August 2016 – a visit to the Tibesti region adjacent to the Libyan border, receiving a visit from the Libyan General Haftar and the expulsion of Libyan embassy staff – show that the Libya issue remains high on his list of priorities. For more information about General Haftar, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°170, *The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset*, 4 November 2016.

<sup>76</sup> In Yaoundé in April 2014, the region's defence ministers and military chiefs of staff decided to establish a multinational joint task force in the lake area.

<sup>77</sup> Crisis Group interview, diplomat, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>78</sup> "Accord entre Boko Haram et le Nigéria", BBC, 17 October 2014.

felt bitter about this and subsequently told the press: “I had advised President Goodluck against opening negotiations with a terrorist group”.<sup>79</sup>

The failure of the negotiations and Chad’s initial wait-and-see stance toward Boko Haram engendered mistrust among senior Nigerian officers and politicians, with some accusing the country of indulgence. The construction, in central N’Djamena, of the house of the former governor of Borno state, Ali Modu Sheriff, and his relationships with the former Chadian transport minister and various dignitaries, which were not well regarded by neighbouring countries, fuelled this mistrust. Sheriff became an embarrassment for the government and was finally expelled from Chad in 2015.<sup>80</sup>

### B. *A Gradual Involvement as Neighbours Ask for the Support of the Chadian Military Machine*

In January 2015, a week after Cameroon’s President Paul Biya appealed for “international solidarity”, a large number of Chadian troops entered Cameroon, while others went to Niger, signalling a major shift in Chad’s stance toward Boko Haram. These interventions, which heavily altered the balance of military strength in neighbouring countries, probably dispelled Nigerian doubts.

Several factors lay behind this change in Chadian attitudes. On the security front, Boko Haram’s October 2014 seizure of Baga Kawa, a Nigerian border settlement, served as an electric shock, warning that danger was near. But above all, the group’s activities were seriously disrupting economic relations with Nigeria and Cameroon, and fuelling Chad’s underlying fear that its routes to the sea could be cut, hurting its ability to export and, above all, to import food and manufactures.<sup>81</sup> Its intervention against Boko Haram also helped N’Djamena consolidate alliances with Western powers and secure additional international funding. In a situation of serious economic crisis, Chad once again played the military diplomacy card.<sup>82</sup>

In late January 2015, Chadian soldiers based in Fotokol, Maltam and Mora in Cameroon’s Far North staged a first offensive on Nigerian territory, in Gambaru. While neighbouring states were doing no more than hold Boko Haram at bay at their borders, Chad was the only one to have a right of hot pursuit into Nigeria. A few days later, other Chadian troops set off for Bosso, in Niger, where they confronted Boko

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<sup>79</sup> “Tchad – Idriss Déby : ‘Il faut mettre en place la force multinationale’”, *Le Point*, 26 March 2015. Yet researchers say that a year later, Déby presented Mahamat Daoud – then regarded as the leader of a Boko Haram faction, a rival to Shekau and someone ready to negotiate – to Nigeria’s new President Buhari. But his name does not appear in Boko Haram’s “Shura” (executive council). “A Sectarian Jihad in Nigeria”, op. cit.

<sup>80</sup> For more information on Sheriff and his relations with Boko Haram, see Crisis Group Report, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, op. cit. Crisis Group interview, former adviser at the Chadian presidency, September 2016.

<sup>81</sup> Saïbou Issa, *Ethnicité, frontières et stabilité aux confins du Cameroun, du Nigéria et du Tchad* (Paris, 2012).

<sup>82</sup> Chad reached the completion point of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) in 2015, after a decision by the Bretton Woods institutions that was a lot more political than economic. The country also benefitted from debt cancellation and budget aid accorded by its main multilateral donors and, recently, France. Moreover, Saudi Arabia provided substantial financial support after Chad joined the Saudi coalition in Yemen. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, N’Djamena, May 2016.

Haram before moving into Nigerian territory, this time alongside the Nigerien forces, for a “clean-up operation” in the north of Borno state.

The Nigerian army’s inability to control the “liberated” areas, particularly the towns of Damasak and Malam Fatori, and the lack of joint military operations and intelligence cooperation frustrated Chadian authorities, who were highly critical of their neighbour and of President Goodluck Jonathan. The May 2015 election of Muhammadu Buhari as president of Nigeria changed the political context and, by extension, the degree of military cooperation between the two countries. According to Chadian diplomats, the two presidents get on much better and it has become much easier to share intelligence.<sup>83</sup>

Since pulling out of Niger and Cameroon in November 2015, Chadians have offered their services to neighbouring countries on several occasions. After Boko Haram’s attack on Bosso on 3 June 2016, the Nigerien president, Mahamadou Issoufou, asked for Chad’s help. Déby agreed to send soldiers to Niger and Operation *Gama Aiki* was launched in mid-June. Just as they had done a year earlier, the first Chadian troops arrived in Bosso and together with Nigerien forces, mounted joint offensives along the banks of the River Komadougou.<sup>84</sup>

Although they have sometimes been criticised by local people, some military personnel and parliamentarians in neighbouring countries, Chad’s interventions against Boko Haram have reinforced its standing as the region’s gendarme. In 2015, the MNJTF headquarters was transferred to N’Djamena, which is also the command centre for France’s Operation Barkhane, thus reinforcing the role of Chad as a strategic military hub.<sup>85</sup> The common threat and the share of resources has facilitated a diplomatic rapprochement with the governments of neighbouring countries. While Niamey was already regarded as an ally, Biya had been dismayed by Chad’s dabbling in the CAR and relations between Goodluck Jonathan and Déby had been notoriously difficult. The reaction to Boko Haram has changed the mood and improved regional perceptions of Chad and its president.

More broadly, Chad’s military interventionism was paralleled by important diplomatic advances. The late January 2017 election of Moussa Faki as head of the African Union Commission is only the most recent illustration of a steady progress toward regional domination which has seen Chad obtain strategic posts in numerous regional and international structures over the past few years.<sup>86</sup>

### C. *New Threat, Old Strategy: Community Security Arrangements*

For many years, Idriss Déby has relied on traditional authorities to guard against unrest in areas where military presence is weak. As it happens, the armed forces have had a strong presence in the Lake region since 2015, but the lake environment

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<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group interview, Chadian diplomat, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Crisis Group interview, military expert, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Launched on 1 August 2014, to take over from the Operation Serval intervention against armed terrorist groups in Mali, the French Barkhane military force aims to sustain this campaign on a regional basis right across the breadth of the Sahel-Saharan area – and to encourage the countries of the G5 Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) to take responsibility for it.

<sup>86</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, op. cit.



and the nature of the terrorist threat – hitherto unknown in Chad – undermine the deployment’s effectiveness. Aware of these realities, the government, and the president have called on traditional chiefs and local people to take steps to strengthen security. N’Djamena has pursued a twin track approach toward the traditional authorities in the lake area, combining pressure and incentives, and calling for “vigilance” and cooperation with the state.<sup>87</sup> During the president’s visit to Baga Sola in October 2015, national and local authorities pressed for the establishment of a vigilante group in each village. This strategy has made it possible to collect intelligence and avoid attacks, but it does present some risks.

#### 1. Traditional chiefs caught between a rock and a hard place

In 2015, traditional authorities were sandwiched between repeated threats from the Boko Haram leadership and pressure from the Chadian government administration and security forces; these pressures have since markedly eased off. In February 2015, for instance, the chief of Ngouboua district was targeted and killed when Boko Haram attacked the town.<sup>88</sup> Others, such as the chief of Bol district, have received a number of telephone death threats from callers accusing them of “collaboration with the authorities”.<sup>89</sup>

Relationships between lake-area traditional authorities and N’Djamena have often been tinged with mutual suspicion.<sup>90</sup> After the attacks of early 2015, the former were accused of incompetence or complicity in failing to control their communities. Military authorities and the former governor of the Lake region put pressure on the chief of Bol district, who had reportedly housed a pregnant young woman suspected of having belonged to Boko Haram.<sup>91</sup> Recently, he was even removed from his post, only to be reintegrated into society shortly afterwards.<sup>92</sup>

To avoid being viewed by the army as suspects, some lake area traditional chiefs and religious leaders told the local government administration they were ready to swear on the Quran that they had no links with Boko Haram.<sup>93</sup> Finally, in some places in a region that has become highly militarised, traditional chiefs who have customary responsibility for oversight of the fishing activity and land rights surrendered this role to the military. The latter adopt a distinctly parsimonious approach to the allocation of useful economic rights on the lake. The appointment of colonels from the president’s ethnic group, the Zaghawa, as sub-prefects for Ngouboua and Tchoukoutalia could further complicate the cohabitation with traditional authorities.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Lake region inhabitants, Lake Chad, April 2016; Chadian politician, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Boko Haram reportedly searched for the chief of Ngouboua district in the gendarmerie and finally killed him. Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Crisis Group interviews, lake area local authorities, Lake Chad, April 2016.

<sup>90</sup> As early as 1991, several traditional chiefs in Kanem and the lake area were accused of paying taxes to the MDD and arrested. These arrests and the fear of a ferocious crackdown pushed community leaders in the region, led by the Sultan of Kanem, to declare their allegiance to the government.

<sup>91</sup> Crisis Group interviews, local notables, Lake Chad, April and October 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Chadian researcher, February 2017.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Many members of the Zaghawa ethnic group, sometimes even from Déby’s bideyat sub-group, the Bilia, hold senior posts in the military hierarchy. *Le métier des armes au Tchad*, op. cit.

In 2016, relations between traditional chiefs and the state administration noticeably improved. In November 2015, at the president's behest, a forum was organised, bringing together traditional community leaders, political and religious authorities, with the aim of clarifying the role that each should play. Traditional chiefs have become de facto state informers – a role that is often far from comfortable but which they say they are willing to take on.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, the arrival at the end of 2015 of a new governor (*Liwa*), a native of the region who does not belong to the military, has reestablished a degree of confidence. Subsequently, district chiefs have even been closely involved in the process of bringing women and children who have surrendered back to their communities.

## 2. The creation of vigilante groups

The authorities have also encouraged the establishment of vigilante groups. In many villages in the area, these groups carry out searches at the entrance to markets, mosques and points of aid distribution, and inform the authorities about the presence of suspect individuals. Women carry out searches of other women.<sup>96</sup> These volunteers, often armed only with whips, machetes and knives, have on several occasions managed to identify suspected members of Boko Haram planning attacks, like in January 2016 in Koukilmé or late 2016 in Kaiga Kindjiria.<sup>97</sup> They also allegedly arrested and disarmed suspected members of the group in the villages of Tchoukoudoum and Koroum in December 2015.<sup>98</sup>

In contrast to their Nigerian counterparts, they do not carry out joint patrols with the security forces or receive vehicles; they are not paid much and they play little role in collective discussions and decision-making at community level. But the members of these groups gain social capital, through ceremonies when suspects are arrested and in reports by the Chadian media. The levels of remuneration they receive – which vary from place to place – are funded through collections from local residents and traders on market days and by the local authorities. Awareness of the role they play in the piecing together of intelligence has led to demands for better treatment; some have thus gone “on strike”, as in Bol in 2016, to secure more pay.<sup>99</sup>

This community-based approach to security and vigilance is very widely accepted by the population of the Lake Chad area, but it does present long-term risks – notably that inter-communal tensions could fuel the emergence of local militias, as happened in the past in Nigeria and Niger, or the development of criminal activity, as in the Far North of Cameroon on several occasions. On the Chadian shore of the lake, the military authorities have reported a few instances in 2015 where members of the committees accused some people falsely, to settle personal scores.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Crisis Group interview, traditional authority, Lake Chad region, October 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Crisis Group observations, markets in the villages of Andja and Lia 1 and 2, April 2016.

<sup>97</sup> Crisis Group interviews, members of vigilante groups, Lake Chad, April 2016; humanitarian actor, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> In Niger, these ethnically homogenous groups sometimes sit alongside or even overlap with tribal militias. In Cameroon, some set up barriers at the entrance to villages to impose levies and are sometimes suspected of facilitating the theft of stolen cattle. Crisis Group Reports, *Cameroon*:

#### D. *The Strategic Weaknesses of the Chadian Intervention*

The smaller number of victims on the Chadian side of the lake could suggest that the strategy of containment is working. However, these operations also led to numerous abuses and evident weaknesses – which in 2015 caused substantial army losses and, against the context of serious economic problems, represent a considerable financial cost. Recently, the failure to pay bonuses to soldiers posted to the area reportedly led a few to defect.<sup>101</sup> And although counter-insurgency campaigns by the region’s national armies – including Chadian operations in neighbouring countries – have weakened Boko Haram, they have sometimes been marred by extra-judicial killings and collateral damage. That has certainly pushed some civilians into joining the group to seek revenge or to protect themselves.<sup>102</sup>

Moreover, the initial strategy – emptying the lake islands in order to track the fighters – has gone as far as it can, because it not only affects the economy but also undermines the structure of local societies by threatening their livelihood, which is based on activities related to the lake. Similar “clear-out” operations have also been carried out in the other countries fringing the lake, such as near the Komadougou river in Niger. And this brings risks:<sup>103</sup> in 2015 and 2016, confusion was caused by the numerous arrests of fishermen and livestock herders moving around in areas that had been declared off-limits in Chad.<sup>104</sup> As aerial surveillance has shown, many civilians continue to visit the islands regularly to look after their livestock and crops.<sup>105</sup> A new operation has just been launched and it needs to be drawn up in a way that avoids leaving civilian victims.

The other strategic flaw is that Chad has difficulty in combining military and civil approaches and putting in place a civil administration. In the Lake region, the allocation of tasks has proved awkward: while several thousand troops are deployed there, the involvement of the civil authorities remains limited. The army’s reluctance to reveal its movements and its assessment of the real threats posed by Boko Haram obstructs humanitarian action. For as long as the lake remains a militarised zone and the restrictions of the state of emergency – not formally extended but de facto still in force – continue to affect the movements of local inhabitants and their production economy, it will remain difficult for the state to really gain their confidence. Yet, it is only by gaining their trust that the threat posed by Boko Haram can be completely eliminated over the long term.

The Chadian authorities find themselves unprepared for the aforementioned wave of surrenders and people returning home; they struggle to determine the status of men who have been detained, whether Boko Haram fighters, helpers, prisoners or civilians. This hinders their ability to make appropriate provision for them or to define meaningful programs of reintegration. On 17 February 2017, Chad’s minister of public security and immigration, Ahmat Mahamat Bachir, met the peace and

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*Confronting Boko Haram*, op. cit.; N°244, *Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram*, 23 February 2017.

<sup>101</sup> Crisis Group interview, researcher, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>102</sup> “A Sectarian Jihad in Nigeria”, op. cit.

<sup>103</sup> “Le Niger et ses alliés face à Boko Haram”, *Le Monde Afrique* (lemonde.fr/afrique), 16 June 2016.

<sup>104</sup> Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>105</sup> Crisis Group interview, soldier, N’Djamena, September 2016.

security commissioner of the African Union to draw up a strategy for managing these returns home.<sup>106</sup> Yet, so far the authorities are struggling to cope. The absence of a clear policy on the conditions for rehabilitation, reintegration or trial of Boko Haram's former members or helpers is probably hindering the scope for a further acceleration in the pace of surrenders.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, in a broader perspective, the greatest threat to the stability of Chad over the long term is not Boko Haram – although it is necessary to fight this group with determination – but a national political crisis that would create fertile conditions for the emergence of all kinds of violent actors, particularly in the regions where the state is almost absent. For now, the populations of the Lake region suffer the most from the impact of Boko Haram.

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<sup>106</sup> “Communiqué conjoint du Ministre de la Sécurité Publique et de l’Immigration du Tchad et du Commissaire à la Paix et à la Sécurité de L’Union Africaine sur la gestion des repentis de Boko Haram”, 17 February 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Some local notables question the Chadian military's ability to deal with these problems: “Our military forces know how to fight, but they don't know how to do that”. Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, Lake Chad, October 2016.

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## V. The Impact of the Crisis on the Populations

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The extension of the Boko Haram phenomenon across the lake and the Chadian shore still carries security risks and could potentially destabilise this cosmopolitan region where cohabitation remains fragile. Besides the seasonal movements of people, the successive influxes of displaced civilians, refugees or repatriated people to the shores of the lake since January 2015 have sometimes affected social cohesion. In January 2017, humanitarian agencies reported that there were 100,765 registered displaced people in the region, together with almost 21,000 who had been displaced but were not yet registered and close to 7,000 mainly Nigerian refugees.<sup>108</sup> For the most part, these populations had fled to escape Boko Haram abuses or come under pressure from national armies to leave the islands.

While networks of support within communities – or between them – softened the impact of these shocks, these stabilisers are fragile; host communities have only a limited capacity to absorb arrivals. The majority of displaced people, particularly the Buduma, have been accommodated on sites that sprang up unplanned, with only a minority finding refuge in declared “host villages”.<sup>109</sup> Against a background of economic difficulties, and with the region becoming militarised, the population’s resilience has been put under huge strain.

### A. *The Impact on the Lake’s Economy*

As in Niger, where restrictions and bans have been even more draconian, trade on the Chadian islands and shore of the lake has been severely affected by Boko Haram’s activity, while the state of emergency, renewed on several occasions, remains unofficially in effect, even though it has not been formally prolonged since October 2016.<sup>110</sup> Although the rules governing motorbike travel and even fishing have recently been relaxed, there are still circulation constraints, curfews remain in place and economic activity is sluggish.

The border with Nigeria, the main outlet for trade, remains officially closed, even though some activity, particularly livestock movements, seems to have resumed informally.<sup>111</sup> In this context, occasional large concentrations of livestock cause local epidemics of disease and consequent heavy losses for herders. Some, therefore, take their herds via alternative routes through Niger to sell them in Nigerien border markets where prices are higher. Agriculture and fishing have also been affected,

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<sup>108</sup> “Bulletin Humanitarian Tchad N°01”, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), January 2017 and “Chad: Situation in the Lac region and Impact of the Nigerian Crisis”, Situation Report no. 18, OCHA, 10 October 2016. Some displaced people from the lake are believed to have left the region and made their way to Foyo, in Kanem.

<sup>109</sup> Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>110</sup> The Lake authorities called on members of the national assembly to prolong the state of emergency. Crisis Group telephone interview, humanitarian actor in Chad, February 2017. See Crisis Group Report N°245, *Le Niger face à Boko Haram : au-delà de la contre-insurrection*, 27 February 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, humanitarian actor in Chad, November 2016.

although the last farming season was much better than 2015, slightly improving food security indicators in Chad, particularly in the lake area.<sup>112</sup>

Increased economic fragility certainly affects Boko Haram finances, but it also leaves the populations of the islands, the lakeshores and the wider Lake Chad basin in a more vulnerable position. Many displaced people are now dependent on food aid and want to resume their normal activities.<sup>113</sup> New demographic pressures and economic insecurity combine with old rivalries and demands over indigenous community rights.<sup>114</sup> The latter pose no problem for the most part; they relate to the Buduma and Kouri, who establish their camps in the northern basin, sometimes far from villages or public services, insisting that: “our ancestors and our parents used to live here”.<sup>115</sup> But in more populated areas, the management of land rights is more complicated and, in the wake of Boko Haram attacks, there have been some cases of confrontation between communities, particularly over access to resources.

An example is the December 2015 attack on Koufoua that left many victims, and was the result of tensions between Kanembu and Buduma over access to a source of water supply. And there have been many reports of lakeshore villagers attacking displaced Buduma women looking for firewood on the edge of Baga Sola.<sup>116</sup> There have been no direct clashes over access to polders, but the issue has stirred frustration among some communities who feel excluded from using those lands.<sup>117</sup> And finally, conflicts between traditional chiefs have sparked the break-up of some camps for displaced people.<sup>118</sup> Since early 2016, with the number of Boko Haram attacks in Chad much reduced, there has been a sharp decline in inter-communal tensions, although many remain.

## B. *The Risk of Community Tensions and Stigmatisation*

Boko Haram has certainly tried to exploit tensions over inter-communal or identity issues, in a bid to attract support. Such strains are not new in this area and they have various causes. They are above all the consequence of competition over the resources of a lake that has become very attractive in economic terms. Constant variations in the levels of wet season flooding have produced significant population movements – and disputes between interest groups and communities for control of the constantly shifting fringe development areas. Before the crisis, there were tensions both within and between ethnic groups. For instance, the different Buduma clans – the Guriya in Bol, the May Bulwa around Kriska, the Majigoyiya or the Bujiya in Niger – engaged in internecine struggles.<sup>119</sup> The presence of Boko Haram has certainly contributed to

<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the Nigerian currency has been in free fall since the beginning of the crisis.

<sup>113</sup> Crisis Group interviews, displaced people, Lake Chad, April 2016.

<sup>114</sup> “Etude sur le contexte social, économique, historique de la région du Lac au Tchad”, op. cit.

<sup>115</sup> Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>116</sup> “Etude sur le contexte social, économique, historique de la région du Lac au Tchad”, op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, lake local authorities, Lake region, October 2016.

<sup>117</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sodelac official, N’Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>118</sup> “Bulletin humanitaire Tchad N°01”, op. cit.

<sup>119</sup> “Boko Haram et le lac Tchad. Extension ou sanctuarisation?”, op. cit.

the increasingly ethnicised nature of these tensions and the emergence of new ethnic stigmatisation.

There is also intense rivalry over the control of commercial activities. To the west of the lake, Arabs and Hausa have long tussled over the livestock trade. On the lake itself, fishing areas and the market for transport in canoes and outboard-powered boats have often been the subject of tension, as has the ownership of dry farmland.<sup>120</sup> On the Chadian shore, mid-twentieth century rivalries between the Kanembu and the Buduma, notably over the status of Bol, remain in the collective memory. Over time, social domination has emerged, with the Kanembu taking over some of the towns of the southern basin of the lake, securing control of property and trade and establishing a near-monopoly on the sale of specific products in local markets: young goats, rush mats, bundles of firewood, etc.

More recently, the various Buduma clans – which, with the Kouri, claim the ownership of many islands and impose levies on other fishermen and herders – have expressed concerns that their control of the islands could be challenged, particularly by Fulani and Arab pastoralists from both Niger and Chad. They have reportedly organised themselves to resist or contain movements by the main migratory pastoralist groups across the lake: “They blocked the Arabs’ path, so that they did not come,” said a researcher.<sup>121</sup> This competition over land is certainly connected to the repeated confrontations between pastoralist communities in Niger, particularly in the tri-border area, over the past six months. This complex local reality has sometimes been characterised in simplistic terms: “The Buduma have reportedly allied with Boko Haram in order to keep control of the lake”.<sup>122</sup>

As so often in the context of terrorism, the finger of guilt is pointed at a particular community – with the scapegoating of the Kanuri in Nigeria and Cameroon and at one point, the Buduma in Chad and Niger. “They are the Boko Haram guys,” a refugee said of them in 2015 in the Baga Sola camp.<sup>123</sup> In the wake of the attack on Baga Sola market in October 2015 – in which one of the suicide bombers was the daughter of a well-known local notable – some Buduma women were beaten up and, in some cases, excluded from the market; others were allegedly refused access to health centres. Collective perceptions and prejudices that had developed over time fuelled these deep inter-communal mistrusts. Talk of the Buduma as “naïve and ready to embrace any cause out of opportunism” is widespread among lakeshore communities.<sup>124</sup>

The authorities certainly played a role in this stigmatisation in 2015, before taking steps to correct course. The replacement of the former governor by Adoum Forteye, a native of the region, helped the administration to reconnect with local people. Other sensible moves have been efforts to integrate Buduma into the army – which led to a call for applications in July 2016 – and Déby’s request for the preparation of a program to recruit young people from the region into the public service, which has yet to be

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<sup>120</sup> An individual known as Abdel Aziz reportedly tried to manipulate the tensions between Buduma and Hausa, to attract Buduma recruits from the lake area in 2014-2015. “A Sectarian Jihad in Nigeria”, *op. cit.*

<sup>121</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Paris, July 2016.

<sup>122</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Lake residents, Lake Chad, May 2016.

<sup>123</sup> Crisis Group interviews, refugees, Baga Sola, September 2015.

<sup>124</sup> Crisis Group interviews, residents of Bol and Baga Sola, September 2015.

implemented.<sup>125</sup> By early 2017, tensions seem to have eased, probably because of the improvement in security conditions on the Chadian shore of the lake. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between the number of attacks carried out by Boko Haram and the stigmatising of particular communities. Any new attack, whether in N'Djamena or on the lakeshore, could generate further cycles of inter-communal reprisals, thus triggering or accelerating the emergence of a crisis.

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<sup>125</sup> Several sources report that 300 individuals from the lake area were recruited and trained in Moussoro. Crisis Group interviews, researcher, parliamentarian, N'Djamena, September 2016.



## **VI. Preparing for Stabilisation and Relaunching Development**

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### *A. From Emergency to Development: Local Conditions Informing Appropriate Policies*

Nigeria's north east is the scene of a humanitarian disaster almost unprecedented in the region, becoming one of the main emergencies for the UN.<sup>126</sup> The situation is different on the Chadian side of the lake, where the impact of Boko Haram has been less severe than in neighbouring countries. After a very troubled initial response in 2015, humanitarian provision is much better today, albeit still insufficient. Levels of vulnerability among the host populations and displaced people remain significant and the security risks hinder access for NGOs to areas such as Tchoukoutalia and Kaiga Kindjiria.<sup>127</sup> At times, humanitarian aid has even been delivered by government services.<sup>128</sup>

Chad is currently considering how to coordinate the emergency response with development projects around the lake, to strengthen the long-term resilience of local communities. Numerous donors such as the World Bank, the European Union – through its Trust Fund, its stability instrument and the European Commission service for humanitarian aid (ECHO) – and both the French Development Agency and the African Development Bank, have already confirmed or signalled their intention to invest in such projects. But their timetables differ and the projects that will mobilise the greatest funding volumes are set to begin in 2018 or 2019.<sup>129</sup>

The allocation of large sums to the lake's development, although necessary, is not without risk. In line with the Do No Harm policy, a prior evaluation of the impact of each dollar spent is required to avoid inadvertently reinforcing any of the factors that fuel the crisis. In this highly distinctive region, characterised by high population growth and constant fluctuations in the water level of the lake, mobility has been key to maintaining a balance between the communities.<sup>130</sup>

Yet today, the large military deployment and the presence of Boko Haram compromise mobility and disrupt traditional means of settling conflicts, land management, fishing campaigns and livestock transhumance. Development actors should finance a socio-anthropological study to get an understanding of the factors that shape the structure of households, lead people to move and activity to become increasingly concentrated, and, above all, to identify priorities together with local people so that they can take ownership of this agenda.

The question of project scale should also be addressed. For example, some researchers press the case for prioritising numerous small developments to avoid reviving fierce competition between communities.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, while these projects may be essential, the relation between underdevelopment and radicalisation is not

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<sup>126</sup> "Boko Haram blamed in looming humanitarian crisis in Nigeria's northeast", CNN, 26 July 2016.

<sup>127</sup> Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Crisis Group interviews, development actors, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>130</sup> Crisis Group interview, development actor, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>131</sup> "Etude sur le contexte social, économique, historique de la région du Lac au Tchad", op. cit.

always obvious. Development projects need to have much broader objectives than “deradicalisation” or “the prevention of extremist violence” to avoid the risk of local people regarding development activity and security measures as inextricably linked.<sup>132</sup>

To make a success of the transition from emergency support to development, it is essential that the government gives more attention to the question of Lake Chad’s future. The FCFA3 billion in public investment for the area promised by President Déby in early 2016 is an unrealistic figure and, so far, the lake issue has served as a tool for attracting international aid. N’Djamena gives few details about its “plan for the lake”. Will it remain a militarised area? Does the government recommend to return displaced populations to the islands or, alternatively, settling them on the lakeshore? National authorities should put forward clear options for the future evolution of the lake area and multiply the number of field visits. Finally, in partnership with the donors and in consultation with local communities and their representatives, it should put forward a plan outlining these scenarios over a period of time – for example, one year and five years.

Finally, the risk that financial resources will be concentrated on the lake, to the detriment of other regions, should not be dismissed. Chad is a very poor country with many communities in a precarious situation. It is also – at least until 2015 – the country with the seventh highest refugee population in the world.<sup>133</sup> The refugees who arrived from Darfur between 2003 and 2005 are still living in camps along the Sudanese border, while large numbers of Central Africans are gathered in the south. In both cases, the prospects for returning are limited, yet humanitarian assistance has fallen sharply. Levels of malnutrition remain very high right across the Sahelian belt, while in the north of the country public services are almost inexistent. It would make sense to rebalance the project agenda of the government and Chad’s main partners to avoid neglecting other disregarded regions – which could also become fertile ground for various violent groups.

#### **B. *Rebuilding a Positive Relationship with the State***

While the response to Boko Haram will necessarily include development actions, the relaunch of the local production economy and trade with neighbouring countries, it should also encompass the consolidation of links between the Chadian state and a region that has long been in the orbit of Borno state, in Nigeria. A purely military approach cannot reestablish confidence between N’Djamena and this outlying area. Although the current governor does exercise considerable control over his administration, the military operation against Boko Haram carries the risk of creating a permanent state of crisis around the lake, subjecting the region to de facto military rule over the long term.

Boko Haram constitutes a long-term threat, but it is necessary to move on from the purely military stage into a phase of political stabilisation. Devolution currently underway and the redrawing of administrative boundaries have not bolstered public

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<sup>132</sup> See Crisis Group Special Report, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, 14 March 2016; and Crisis Group Briefing, *Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, op. cit.

<sup>133</sup> “Aid community must scale up support to troubled Lake Chad region, urges senior UN official”, UN News Centre, 27 August 2015.

service provision. The first response, therefore, must be the development of better administrative coverage which, besides creating new sub-prefectures, would envisage the deployment of public servants to revive social services. Under such a scheme, temporary bonuses could be paid to officials who agree to be posted to this area.

The presence of Zaghawa colonels among the new sub-prefects and the arrests of livestock herders and fishermen do not help to reestablish confidence. Furthermore, under the state of emergency, the military only permit access to farmland where they consider that security is adequate. A new approach is needed, which would see military sub-prefects quickly replaced by civilians and a relaxation of the state of emergency rules to encourage mobility and the resumption of economic activity. In the same vein, while trade, particularly the movement of livestock between Chad and Nigeria, appears to be slowly resuming, the reopening of a protected channel could encourage trade between the two shores of the lake and thus improve living conditions for local people.

Furthermore, to avoid the long-term militarisation of the region, it is necessary to build a genuine civilian component into the operation now underway. The state should facilitate the recruitment of local civilians and establish strict disciplinary procedures for dealing with soldiers who commit abuses against the civilian population. And finally, as the countries of the region have just launched a new major operation, it is essential to reduce the human cost of military manoeuvres by drawing the sharpest possible distinction between insurgents and local inhabitants who have returned to the islands to cultivate their fields, go fishing or graze their animals.

### *C. Dealing with Prisoners and Deserters*

With more and more surrenders, arrangements should be put in place to look after prisoners and deserters, in the hope that this will encourage further desertions.

At present, the deeply flawed Chadian judicial system fails to deal with the Boko Haram issue: since the start of the conflict only one – much criticised – trial has been organised, resulting in the imposition of death sentences on ten suspected members of the group.<sup>134</sup> Today, between 500 and 1,000 suspected Boko Haram members are reportedly detained at Koro Toro, a prison located in the desert, near Faya Largeau, and dubbed the “Chadian Guantanamo”.<sup>135</sup> The prisoners, drawn from various ethnic groups (Kanuri, Hausa, Buduma) and nationalities (including Sudanese and Nigerians), have one thing in common: they have all been locked up without prior judgement and for indefinite periods. Some might be active members of Boko Haram but others are business people, including some SIM card vendors.<sup>136</sup> This situation carries risks. In Nigeria, the lack of transparency about judicial procedures has created resentment among affected families and thus become a driver for Boko Haram recruitment.

While the prospect of organising fair trials still appears remote, it is crucial that the authorities develop the capacity to distinguish between the most hardline elements of Boko Haram and those who give it occasional help. Appropriate arrangements for

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<sup>134</sup> “Le Tchad exécute dix membres présumés de Boko Haram”, RFI, 29 août 2015.

<sup>135</sup> Crisis Group interview, prison staff, N'Djamena, September 2016.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

each category would represent a first step toward preventing new recruitments. It is therefore essential to define a clear policy on the conditions attached to rehabilitating former Boko Haram members or putting them on trial – and the outline of a serious program of rehabilitation for deserters, as part of wider programs of support for community recovery, targeted at youth in particular. Chadian authorities should draw up a document setting out the framework for dealing with the surrender of Boko Haram members – like the one recently produced by Niger’s interior ministry – and communicate it to their international partners.

And finally, besides awareness campaigns already underway, a major focus on communications is needed to improve the relationship between the government and the population, and to persuade undecided members of Boko Haram to turn themselves in and provide reassurance about the fate that awaits them if they do so. This could take the form of a mass text message campaign setting out the conditions for surrender. Another tool could be support for community radio stations, or the creation of such stations, to broadcast awareness messages about conflict prevention in local languages. Talk shows, vox pop reporting and interviews could help local people express their views. Such efforts need to be carried out both at the very local level, with appropriate and sustainable tools, and at the regional level, given the degree of integration and mobility among the lake populations. The Chadian side of the lake is particularly short of community radio provision.<sup>137</sup> But a number of projects, particularly those being developed in Nigeria, could be extended to cover the linguistic diversity of the region.

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<sup>137</sup> Crisis Group email correspondence, NGO representative working in the local radio sector, December 2016.

## **VII. Conclusion**

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Boko Haram has lost ground and the security situation today is much better than in 2015 on the Chadian islands and lakeshore. But the jihadist insurgency's resilience is well proven. The threat that it poses to local people will not diminish until the structural problems in Nigeria's Borno state are tackled. In light of this reality, a strategic change is required. The military interventions by countries in the Lake region – certainly necessary to curb Boko Haram's progression – and the restrictions imposed on mobility and trade have an obvious impact on the everyday life of local people.

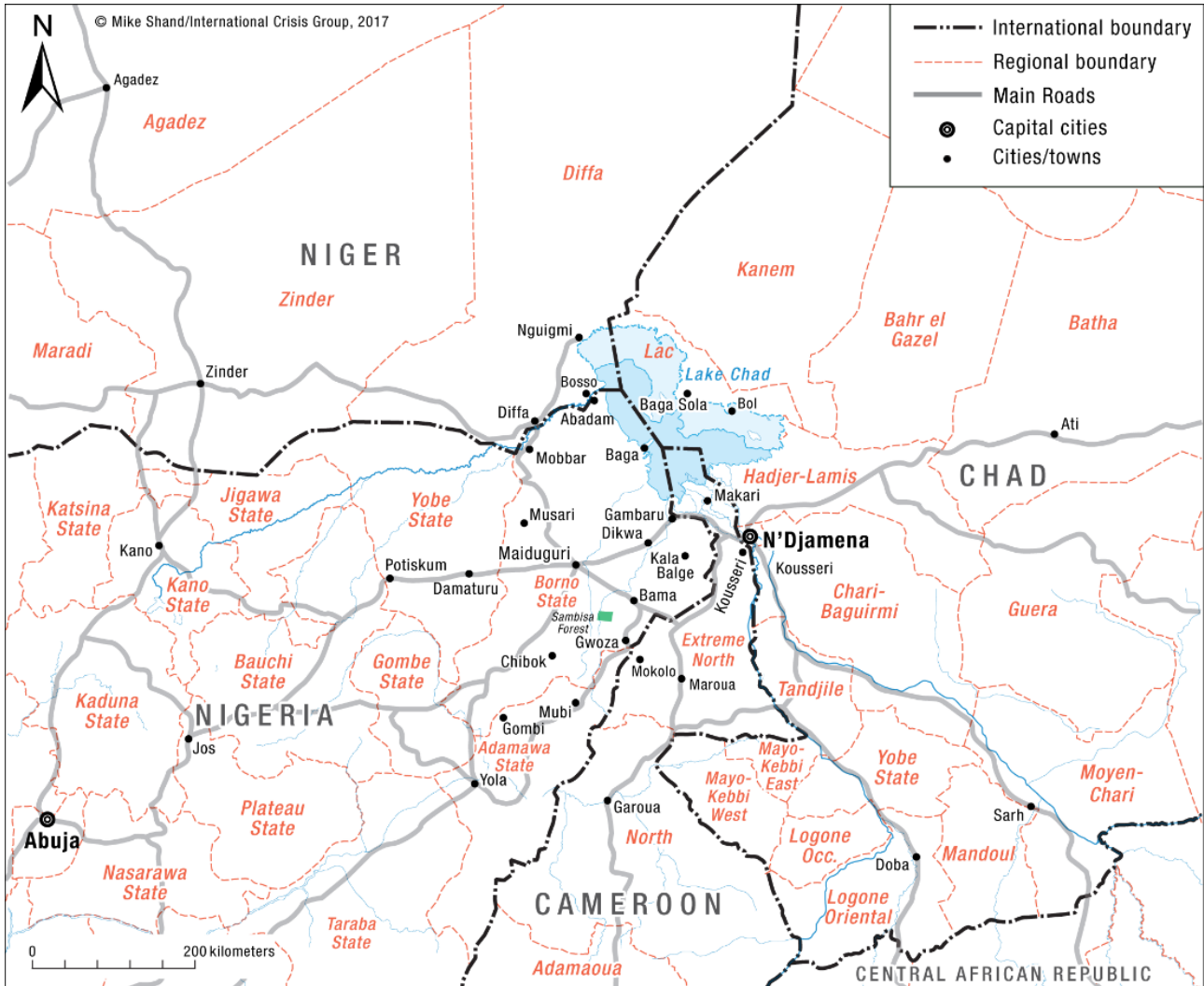
This situation is not sustainable over the long term. The Chadian state, like its neighbours, now needs to replace its purely military management of the crisis with the indispensable relaunch of trade and production activity and set out clear programs for the reinsertion into society of former Boko Haram fighters. It also needs to fight against all the ways in which particular communities are stigmatised; and a strong political effort is required to rebuild a relationship between N'Djamena and outlying areas.

**Nairobi/Brussels, 8 March 2017**

Appendix A: Map of Chad



Appendix B: Map of the Lake Chad Basin



## Appendix C: About the International Crisis Group

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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.

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**March 2017**



## Appendix D: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2014

### Special Reports

*Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic).

*Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

*Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid*, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

### Central Africa

*Fields of Bitterness (I): Land Reform in Burundi*, Africa Report N°213, 12 February 2014 (only available in French).

*Fields of Bitterness (II): Restitution and Reconciliation in Burundi*, Africa Report N°214, 17 February 2014 (only available in French).

*The Security Challenges of Pastoralism in Central Africa*, Africa Report N°215, 1 April 2014 (also available in French).

*The Central African Crisis: From Predation to Stabilisation*, Africa Report N°219, 17 June 2014 (also available in French).

*Cameroon: Prevention Is Better than Cure*, Africa Briefing N°101, 4 September 2014 (only available in French).

*The Central African Republic's Hidden Conflict*, Africa Briefing N°105, 12 December 2014 (also available in French).

*Congo: Ending the Status Quo*, Africa Briefing N°107, 17 December 2014.

*Elections in Burundi: Moment of Truth*, Africa Report N°224, 17 April 2015 (also available in French).

*Congo: Is Democratic Change Possible?* Africa Report N°225, 5 May 2015.

*Burundi: Peace Sacrificed?* Africa Briefing N°111, 29 May 2015 (also available in French).

*Cameroon: The Threat of Religious Radicalism*, Africa Report N°229, 3 September 2015 (also available in French).

*Central African Republic: The roots of violence*, Africa Report N°230, 21 September 2015 (also available in French).

*Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, Africa Report N°233, 30 March 2016 (also available in French).

*Burundi : anatomie du troisième mandat*, Africa Report N°235, 20 May 2016 (also available in French).

*Katanga: Tensions in DRC's Mineral Heartland*, Africa Report N°239, 3 August 2016.

*The African Union and the Burundi Crisis: Ambition versus Reality*, Africa Briefing N°122, 28 September 2016 (also available in French).

*Boulevard of Broken Dreams: The "Street" and Politics in DR Congo*, Africa Briefing N°123, 13 October 2016.

*Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, Africa Report N°241, 16 November 2016 (also available in French).

*Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures*, Africa Report N°246, 8 March 2017 (only available in French).

### Horn of Africa

*Sudan's Spreading Conflict (III): The Limits of Darfur's Peace Process*, Africa Report N°211, 27 January 2014.

*South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name*, Africa Report N°217, 10 April 2014.

*Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War*, Africa Briefing N°99, 26 June 2014.

*Eritrea: Ending the Exodus?*, Africa Briefing N°100, 8 August 2014.

*Kenya: Al-Shabaab – Closer to Home*, Africa Briefing N°102, 25 September 2014.

*South Sudan: Jonglei – "We Have Always Been at War"*, Africa Report N°221, 22 December 2014.

*Sudan and South Sudan's Merging Conflicts*, Africa Report N°223, 29 January 2015.

*Sudan: The Prospects for "National Dialogue"*, Africa Briefing N°108, 11 March 2015.

*The Chaos in Darfur*, Africa Briefing N°110, 22 April 2015.

*South Sudan: Keeping Faith with the IGAD Peace Process*, Africa Report N°228, 27 July 2015.

*Somaliland: The Strains of Success*, Africa Briefing N°113, 5 October 2015.

*Kenya's Somali North East: Devolution and Security*, Africa Briefing N°114, 17 November 2015.

*Ethiopia: Governing the Faithful*, Africa Briefing N°117, 22 February 2016.

*Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, Africa Briefing N°119, 21 March 2016.

*South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias*, Africa Report N°236, 25 May 2016.

*Kenya's Coast: Devolution Disappointed*, Africa Briefing N°121, 13 July 2016.

*South Sudan: Rearranging the Chessboard*, Africa Report N°243, 20 December 2016.

### Southern Africa

*A Cosmetic End to Madagascar's Crisis?*, Africa Report N°218 (also available in French), 19 May 2014.

*Zimbabwe: Waiting for the Future*, Africa Briefing N°103, 29 September 2014.

*Zimbabwe: Stranded in Stasis*, Africa Briefing N°118, 29 February 2016.

**West Africa**

*Mali: Reform or Relapse*, Africa Report N°210, 10 January 2014 (also available in French).

*Côte d'Ivoire's Great West: Key to Reconciliation*, Africa Report N°212, 28 January 2014 (also available in French).

*Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, Africa Report N°216, 3 April 2014.

*Guinea Bissau: Elections, But Then What?*, Africa Briefing N°98, 8 April 2014 (only available in French).

*Mali: Last Chance in Algiers*, Africa Briefing N°104, 18 November 2014 (also available in French).

*Nigeria's Dangerous 2015 Elections: Limiting the Violence*, Africa Report N°220, 21 November 2014.

*Guinea's Other Emergency: Organising Elections*, Africa Briefing N°106, 15 December 2014 (also available in French).

*Burkina Faso: Nine Months to Complete the Transition*, Africa Report N°222, 28 January 2015.

*Security Sector Reform in Guinea-Bissau: An Opportunity Not to Be Missed*, Africa Briefing N°109, 19 March 2015 (only available in French).

*Mali: An Imposed Peace?* Africa Report N°226, 22 May 2015 (only available in French).

*Burkina Faso: Meeting the October Target*, Africa Briefing N°112, 24 June 2015 (only available in French).

*The Central Sahel: A Perfect Sandstorm*, Africa Report N°227, 25 June 2015 (also available in French).

*Curbing Violence in Nigeria (III): Revisiting the Niger Delta*, Africa Report N°231, 29 September 2015.

*The Politics Behind the Ebola Crisis*, Africa Report N°232, 28 October 2015.

*Mali: Peace from Below?*, Africa Briefing N°115, 14 December 2015 (only available in French).

*Burkina Faso: Transition, Act II*, Africa Briefing N°116, 7 January 2016 (only available in French).

*Implementing Peace and Security Architecture (III): West Africa*, Africa Report N°234, 14 April 2016 (also available in French).

*Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, Africa Briefing N°120, 4 May 2016 (also available in French).

*Nigeria: The Challenge of Military Reform*, Africa Report N°237, 6 June 2016.

*Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?*, Africa Report N°238, 6 July 2016 (also available in French).

*Burkina Faso: Preserving the Religious Balance*, Africa Report N°240, 6 September 2016 (also available in French).

*Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency*, Africa Report N°242, 5 December 2016 (also available in French).

*Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram*, Africa Report N°244, 23 February 2017.

*Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-insurgency*, Africa Report N°245, 27 February 2017 (only available in French).

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