

An Honourable Exit for MINURCAT?

John Karlsrud and Randi Solhjell

Summary

After only two years of deployment, the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) will, at the request of the Government of Chad, start its drawdown and exit by 31 December this year. MINURCAT will hand over its main tasks to Chad and the UN agencies present. These responsibilities include security of refugees, IDPs and humanitarian workers in eastern Chad, and continued support to the 850-strong Chadian police/gendarme force, the *Détachement Intégré de Sécurité* (DIS), established to provide physical protection in eastern Chad, so far trained and mentored by MINURCAT.

Will Chad be able to provide necessary security and take on the wider responsibility of protection, to prevent relapse into conflict and, most crucially, enable IDPs to return? On the whole, the new mandate would seem to be a bad deal for the international community. It will continue to finance MINURCAT with 1900 troops in Chad who mostly stay in their camps and civilian sections without access to IDP returnee areas, due to the limited capacity for escorts and patrols of the host government. There is a high risk that eastern Chad, which was on its way to early recovery, may again become a humanitarian crisis. The key benchmark – the return of a critical mass of IDPs – had been within striking distance. It now seems an elusive goal.

While the enduring conflict in Darfur has received extensive international attention, the conflicts and political crisis in neighbouring Chad have attracted far less notice. Since 2005, however, it has become evident that the government in Sudan and Chad have been fighting proxy wars and backing opposing rebel groups in each other's countries. Refugees from Darfur have sought protection in neighbouring Chad, and the internal turmoil in Chad has caused an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

MINURCAT was deployed together with a European force (EUFOR) in 2008. In March 2009, MINURCAT also took on responsibility for the military component. The mission has been ridden with slow deployment of troops and construction of infrastructure, but has managed to improve the security situation to some degree. By the end of 2009, MINURCAT had achieved acceptable levels of deployment and could show reasonably good results – not only in the area of security, but also in support to strengthening the justice and corrective system, local administration, gender sensitivity, intercommunity dialogue and human rights.

In all, an estimated 249,242 refugees from Sudan and 62,019 from the Central African Republic are living in eastern Chad, and a further 168,000 Chadians have been displaced. The international community is providing assistance to approximately 150,000 people in host communities.¹ During 2008/09, an initial return of approximately 20,000 IDPs was witnessed. The UN expected that a much larger return would take place in the course of 2010 as the mis-

¹ All figures are from UN (2010) S/2010/217: *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and in Chad (MINURCAT)*, 29 April 2010, United Nations, New York.

sion became fully deployed in the field and could better provide area security, and escorts where needed.

Integral part to the provision of security has been the 850-strong Chadian police/gendarme force, *Détachement Intégré de Sécurité* (DIS), trained and mentored by MINURCAT. The DIS are deployed to maintain law and order in refugee and IDP camps and key towns in neighbouring areas within a 10 km radius, as well as securing humanitarian activities and maintaining the humanitarian space in eastern Chad together with the MINURCAT Force. The significant number of female officers in the DIS represents a positive development. These female officers have made significant contributions to reaching civilian women who would otherwise not initiate direct contact with male officers. That in turn means improved access for female victims to report sensitive cases involving sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Notwithstanding the important advances, the Chadian government, weary of repeated promises of construction of airport aprons and hard-wall commissariats for the DIS, early this year asked the mission to leave. President Déby announced that the mission had been a failure, unable to fulfil its promises, and that the Government of Chad was ready to take over responsibility for the security of refugees, IDPs and humanitarian workers. The government wants to increase the DIS from 850 to 1000, but also deploying to Doha and Haraze in southeastern Chad, and Gore and Danamadji in southern Chad. Thus, although the DIS may be increased in numbers, capacity in the east will remain the same.

UNSC Resolution 1926 of 26 May 2010 outlines how Chad will assume responsibility for the protection of civilians. Indeed, the commitment that Chad is showing through the detailed plan is unprecedented. The Government of Chad has committed to:

- (i) ensure the security and protection of civilians in danger, particularly refugees and internally displaced persons;
- (ii) facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel by improving security in eastern Chad;
- (iii) ensure the security and freedom of movement of MINURCAT staff and United Nations and associated personnel.

This is a laudable step on the part of the Chadian government. There have been far too many instances where host governments feel no obligation to present their plans for the protection of civilians to the international community. However, the extent of the tasks given to the DIS is worrisome: ‘... to provide security inside and around refugee camps and IDP sites, security escorts and area security, in coordination with the Gendarmerie and the Nomad Guard.’ Firstly, this expands the


area of DIS operations from refugee camps to include IDP sites in general. Secondly, it gives the DIS responsibility for area security as well, in coordination with the *Gendarmerie* and the *Garde Nationale et Nomade du Tchad* (GNNT) – who are sorely lacking in capacity and are ill-informed as to how to execute a protection mandate. While the plan is praiseworthy, what is less clear is whether it is realistic. Lacking are arrangements for how the other protection measures, such as strengthening of the judicial apparatus, human rights monitoring and intercommunity dialogue efforts – currently undertaken by MINURCAT should be transferred to the Government of Chad, UN agencies and NGOs.

The resolution stipulates the establishment of a High-Level Working Group composed of members from the United Nations and Chad, to assess progress towards implementation of the mandate and to deal with any issues that may arise. This group should be set up immediately. The resolution also welcomes the intention to establish a forum to foster dialogue and collaboration to reach a common understanding on roles and responsibilities in issues of protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and safety and security arrangements for humanitarian-sector actors. Participation by the humanitarian sector will be crucial here, as the forum will be very important for operationalising the mandate around commonly understood goals and methods.

The DIS – key to security sector reform, or highly trained and equipped bandits?

An uneasy feeling prevails in the humanitarian sector in Chad and among many of those working for MINURCAT. They are sceptical of whether the Government of Chad has the capacity to assume full responsibility for the protection of civilians in all its facets. ‘The DIS is on life-support and will collapse the day MINURCAT leaves’, was one representative opinion encountered. It was argued that the Government of Chad will be neither able nor willing to keep the vehicles operating, fuel in the tanks, and all the other operational costs associated with the DIS.

The DIS has in many ways become an elite force. Its members have performed their job reasonably well, which is very positive; but they stand apart. The access to material resources and the benefits they receive are unmatched by any other existing security force in Chad, and envy has been strong. Several attacks – seven of them lethal – against the DIS by both official and non-official armed elements in Chad underscore this point. During such incidents, MINURCAT has provided both physical and medical support, in turn boosting the moral commitment within the DIS to continue its work. Some thus fear that the DIS may splinter into its constituent parts when MINURCAT leaves, and that the spoils will be shared – in a worst case scenario the DIS could become a force of ‘highly trained and equipped bandits’. Conversely, there is hope that the DIS could provide



the seed for a wider Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Chad. The DIS today has trainers with capacity to carry on the training of new staff. But this capacity transformation from MINURCAT to the DIS cannot remain viable if there are no incentives to continue the risky job of protecting vulnerable populations and securing humanitarian space. Inevitably, any SSR initiative would require further funding from the international community – particularly its main donor, the European Union – and adjusting the support to sustainable levels reasonable for a scalable SSR programme. However, the EU and other donors are understandably reluctant to provide funding to one of countries that ranks lowest on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (175 out of 180 in 2009).

Improved relations with Sudan, distancing from JEM

Undoubtedly, the regional situation has changed. Chad has established a joint border force with Sudan; three border crossings have been opened for commerce; and the number of security incidents has decreased drastically. This is due in part to the improved control of the previously extremely porous border, and to informal intelligence-sharing between Sudan and Chad. The result has been a dramatic reduction in cross-border banditry activities. The re-establishment of diplomatic relations between N'Djamena and Khartoum also shows a commitment towards peace and stability between the two neighbours. On 27 May, President Déby of Chad attended the inauguration of the re-elected President Al-Bashir of Sudan.

Chad also seems to be fulfilling its promise to Sudan with regard to the rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Chad have taken a much tougher stance in the refugee camps in the north, considered to be JEM strongholds, and routinely perform weapons searches. Today, armed JEM elements are rarely seen in the camps or on the Chadian side of the border. On 19 May, JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim, formerly a frequent (albeit informal) visitor and even resident in Chad, was refused entry at N'Djamena International Airport.

From humanitarian response to early recovery?

The focus now should be on re-gearing support towards early recovery activities. While the initial response had to tackle the humanitarian crisis sparked by the fighting in Darfur and intercommunity conflict in eastern Chad, the task now should be to make it possible for IDPs to return. Unfortunately, the exit of MINURCAT is likely to provide an impetus in the opposite direction. In the Assounga region, the MINURCAT Force stopped escorting humanitarians, UN agencies and MINURCAT civilian officers immediately after UNSC Res. 1923 was passed. Left to do the job are 119 DIS elements with only seven vehicles at their disposal.

That will jeopardise the frail gains made so far in terms of intercommunity dialogue and conflict resolution; human rights and SGBV monitoring; sup-

port to capacity development for local administrators; strengthening of justice and other key activities. Protection is more than physical protection. Tremendously important is the emphasis on community dialogue encouraging more equal and sustainable sharing of land, water and other valuable resources. Cases of SGBV, armed attacks and other reported incidents are often rooted in disputes over scarce resources and envy of refugees who seem to receive more support than the host community. Among the success stories have been initiatives such as drilling water wells combined with a strengthening of the local administration to dialogue and sharing of wells as in Iriba.

Some further points to note: It is likely that the number of attacks and security incidents will remain low. This will be a consequence of the improved border control limiting cross-border banditry; strict rules imposed on the humanitarian community, UN agencies and MINURCAT civilian staff to use escorts at all times in designated areas (despite promises of free movement in UNSC Res. 1923); and the new protection model implemented by the Government of Chad. Taking into account the lack of means, this seems certain to result in at least a temporary sharp drop in protection activities for the humanitarian sector, UN agencies and MINURCAT civilian sections alike. Humanitarian considerations and activities will take priority, whereas the essential re-focusing on the return of IDPs, strengthening local administration, rule of law, human rights and other early recovery activities will suffer and be further postponed. Furthermore, we must never forget that long-term civilian protection requires a political solution.

A key task should be to further strengthen and improve the responsiveness and capacity of local administration to adjudicate conflicts in a fair manner. Moreover, the local administration should be supported and made responsible for providing basic social services that in turn can create the foundation for long-term development in eastern Chad. The positive initiatives by the Chadian government towards peace in the region should be welcomed by the remaining UN agencies and the international actors present in the country. Further support for capacity development is needed for civil society, including women's organizations for peace and political participation. Only by addressing poverty, developing state capacities, extending basic services and supporting income-generating efforts can a sustainable foundation be established for long-term peace and development.

An honourable exit?

There is little that Chad and the international community can do to change the predicted drop of humanitarian and early recovery activities in the short term, but some steps can be taken:

1. Press the Government of Chad for a detailed plan for the provision of area security, sector by sector (in addition to an increase in escort capacity), as well as other forms of protection measures.
2. Put equal pressure on MINURCAT, UN agencies, and the Government of Chad, to present, without further delay, their handover plan of MINURCAT tasks, including the activities undertaken by all civilian sections, such as human rights, justice, corrections, political and civil affairs, gender, and mine action. Essential here will be the early recovery activities led by UNDP.
3. Immediately start a close dialogue between the UN Department for Safety and Security (DSS) and the Government of Chad to agree on local-level security classification of zones in eastern Chad. This can make it easier to focus on areas where the need is greatest, thus increasing escort and patrol capacity of DIS, Gendarmerie and GNNT.
4. Urgent establishment of the High-Level Working Group and the Forum for dialogue on the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, safety and security arrangements, to ensure common understanding among all parties about roles and responsibilities, with special emphasis on the inclusion of humanitarian-sector actors.
5. Develop an SSR programme for Chad, including demilitarization of camps, in close cooperation with the Government of Chad, the EU and UN agencies.
6. Urgent deployment of staff by UN agencies to eastern Chad, to ensure the handover of key tasks.
7. Resource mobilization for UN agencies, to enable them to implement an early recovery programme for eastern Chad. An Early Recovery Donor Roundtable should be held in the third quarter of 2010. Here it should be noted that the Judicial Affairs and Corrections units of MINURCAT could be transferred in its entirety to UNDP.

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Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
P.O. Box 8159 Dep, N-0033 Oslo, Norway
www.nupi.no

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About the Author(s)

John Karlsrud is a Research Fellow at NUPI. Until February 2009, he worked as the Special Assistant to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of MINURCAT, and currently on leave from the UN, (noting that views expressed in this brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the UN). **Randi Solhjell** is a Research Fellow at the Department of Security and Conflict Management at NUPI.