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FROM COUNTERINSURGENCY TO COUNTERTERRORISM: TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHADIAN ARMY

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Abstract

The study considers the processes of transformation of the army of one of the poorest and most unstable countries in Africa, Chad, from an army aimed at suppressing numerous armed anti-government movements into a powerful – in African parameters – military force and the West's main partner in the fight against terrorism on the Black Continent. Until the early 2010s, Chad was regarded as a repressive state with an underdeveloped economy and complete dependence on external financial assistance and military-political support from Western countries, primarily the former colonial metropolis – France. Chad army, most of its soldiers and officers were recruited from recent insurgents and tribal militias, was split along regional and ethnic lines into constantly warring factions; irregularly paid soldiers deserted or defected to the enemy to join anti-government movements; during clashes the rebels were found to be equipped better than the soldiers of the government army, etc. The situation changed in the early 2010s, when oil export revenues grew and it allowed reform of the army and acquisition of modern weapons and military equipment, as well as funding of the Chadian contingent as part of the peacekeeping mission in Mali by France in 2013 and deployment of the base of the anti-terrorist operation 'Barkhan' in the capital of Chad N'Djamene. The United States has also provided significant logistical support to Chad in recent years. As a result, the Chadian army has turned into a powerful military force.

1. Introduction

After gaining independence on August 11, 1960, the country was in a state of permanent military-political crisis – after the end of one conflict and before the start of another. Political instability impeded economic development and provided a 'favorable' basis for 'emergence of armed groups and regular protest demonstrations by the civilian opposition, which were suppressed by units of the Ground Army, National (Presidential) Guard and other security forces (security service, Air Force, gendarmerie and police), which make up the Forces Armées du Tchad (FAT). To date, the number of military units reaches about 30 thousand soldiers and officers, which is much larger than the size of the army, for example, of neighboring Niger (5,300 privates and officers) with a population of 21 million people versus 15 million in Chad (IISS, 2020).

It should be noted that in 1960–1970 the Chadian conflicts were a pronounced manifestation of interethnic and interregional disagreements that resulted in armed clashes, and in the 1980s they was a struggle for power and influence between individual military-political factions, primarily supporters of Hissen Habré (president of Chad in 1982–1990) and Idris Deby (head of the state since 1990). However, since the 1990s, 'anti-government' activities in Chad have taken on a completely different character. The study of the motives of the leaders and fighters of armed groups shows that, with rare exceptions, their main goal was not to overthrow the regime, but to induce the government to enter into negotiations with the rebels, when field commanders could bargain a high and well-paid position in the government, state apparatus or army. The military-political history of independent Chad is a history of endless threats posed by the rebels, who did not set ideological and political goals, and concessions from the authorities, who brought around the opponents through bribery and had relatively loyal fighters who know how to handle weapons.

It was the recent combatants – illiterate peasants and urban unemployed integrated into the regular army that have been recruited for decades by the Chadian army. This can partly explain a low professional level of soldiers and commanders; frequent desertions; indiscipline; disrespect for the command hierarchy; tendency to violence and readiness to 'change sides' at any moment, if there is an opportunity to earn something more than the typical soldier's salary. Moreover, the market for military services in Chad and throughout the Central African region is very extensive (Carmody, 2009).

Thus, the Chadian army rather quickly turned not into an organization to protect state interests, but into an institution to provide jobs and offer sinecure, i.e. positions that provide income with no need to work. The rules adopted in the Chadian army have nothing to do with those recorded in official documents and in written manuals for military schools. Moreover, the boundaries between the security forces are blurred: today's soldier can easily go tomorrow, for example, to the police or customs service (Debos, 2016).

However, in the 2000s, in addition to internal instability, the emergence of troubled zones on the borders of Chad with the Sudanese region of Darfur, the Central African Republic, Libya and in the Lake Chad basin necessitated restructuring and professionalization of the army. Implementation of the military reform in the early 2010s and participation in peacekeeping and anti-terrorist operations side by side with international contingents noticeably transformed the Chadian army.

2. Problem Statement

On the one hand, preservation of a large number of former rebels, who often fought against each other during past conflicts, in the Chadian army; continuing desertions (including those from peacekeeping contingents); interpersonal conflicts and severe splits along ethnic lines do not allow the government of I. Deby to use the army as a united, cohesive force in operations against internal and external enemies; this in part can explain participation in international peacekeeping missions only of the elite units of the Chadian Presidential Guard. On the other hand, equipping the army with modern weapons; military training provided by French, American and other instructors; large-scale military-technical and financial assistance from Western countries under various agreements and joint participation in military missions contributed to the transformation of the Chadian army into a major military force.

3. Research Questions

The study is supposed to answer the following questions:

- What is the negative effect of the 'militianization' of the Chadian army on its transformation into a 'reliable' partner of the Western countries in the fight against terrorism?
- What are the prospects for Chad to acquire the status of a regional military-political leader through participation in peacekeeping and anti-terrorist operations?

4. Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- Consider how the rebel past of Chadian soldiers affected their behavior as international peacekeepers;
- Analyze the nature of the relationship between the Chadian regime and its African and Western allies in the fight against terrorism;
- Analyze the prospects for Chad's transformation into a regional military-political leader.

5. Research Methods

The authors used various methods of scientific knowledge: analysis, concretization, generalization and grouping of statistical data, functional and comparative analyzes. The research is interdisciplinary, comparative-analytical in character. It is based on an integrated approach to the processes and phenomena under consideration, and critical assessment of information.

6. Findings

Since the time Deby came to power, army restructuring was a priority for the government. In the early 1990s, reform of the army started with a twofold goal: to reduce the cost of soldiers' salaries and to transform the army into a disciplined organization. From July 1992 to February 1997, 27,000 people were released from military service, just over half of the total number of personnel. The program was successful

from a quantitative point of view, however during its implementation, corruption affected all levels: some demobilized received double and triple compensation and soon returned to the army again under a different name.

In terms of quality, the reform suffered a crushing defeat. Many demobilized soldiers joined the insurgency, which increased markedly in the 1990s due in part to the reform. Others turned to highway robbery or became mercenaries in various armed groups outside Chad. For example, François Bozizet recruited a large number of Chadians when preparing an uprising that resulted in the overthrow of the President of the Central African Republic (CAR) A.-F. Patassé (Berman & Lombard, 2008).

The 'professionalization' process was unsuccessful in other respects as well: with the exception of highly paid soldiers and officers of the elite corps, who later were sent to hot spots by Deby, the 'regular' military personnel were not retrained and were inactive in the time between clashes with rebels. Indiscipline and insubordination reached a level when soldiers could ignore service with impunity, and in 2005, 15 % of the General Staff of the Ground Forces, whose headquarters was transferred to Mussoro, 300 km north-east of the capital, refused to leave N'Djamena, remained in it and continued to receive salaries (Debos, 2016). Corruption, embezzlement, 'trade' in posts and ranks were widespread in the army; misappropriation of salary funds for non-existent or deserted soldiers not deleted from payrolls; levies at customs posts, border and other checkpoints.

In April 2005, 500 people – military, government officials and representatives of public organizations – discussed the issues of army reformation for six days. However, the only addition to the previous reforms was the definition of a salary scale that would make it possible to pay salaries in accordance with rank and seniority. However, the biggest problem was the lack of personnel lists. Only in 2011 a 'census' of the army was organized. As a result, 14 thousand 'imaginary soldiers' were 'fired' from the army, and then another 5 thousand 'real' ones, but many were reinstated in the army in 2013, when military campaigns began in the Sahel zone (Marchal, 2016).

In the early 2010s, command positions were redistributed in the Chadian army: the composition of the officer corps became more multi-ethnic, although key posts were mainly held by persons related to the president by ties of personal union and obedience, regardless of the level of military training and experience. However, many commanders received military education in France and other Western countries, which contributed to the active 'professionalization' of the army. The structural changes, which were supposed to serve as a demonstration of I. Deby's good faith to the world community, did not have the desired effect. The army was 'professionalized' in the sense intended by international military experts, but it was not the result of reforms, it was due to the income from oil exports and financial support from outside.

Deby argued that security is crucial for socio-economic development; however, after the start of large-scale oil production in 2003, he sharply increased the import of weapons, which in 2004–2008 exceeded 5-fold the import volume in 1999–2003 (Wezeman, 2009). At the same time, military expenditures also increased, and in 2010 they amounted to $ 590 million, although in 2019, due to the drop in oil prices, they decreased to $ 206 million (IISS, 2020). Meanwhile, military planes, combat helicopters, tanks and rocket launchers were acquired. At the turn of the 2000s–2010s, the Chadian army was among the most equipped on the continent.

In addition to revenues from oil exports, there were other sources of financing for the Chadian army: the budgets of the French anti-terrorist operations Serval, launched in Mali in 2013, and Barkhan, the military operation of the French army in Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger, which was so named in 2014.

In 2013, the Chadian army played a decisive role in the French military operation in Mali. The authority gained by the Chadian army in the battles against armed groups in the Sahel zone in 2014 allowed the launch of the anti-terrorist mission G5 Sahel with the participation of Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. In the same year, I. Deby agreed with the French President François Hollande on the deployment of the headquarters of Barkhan operation (3.5 thousand soldiers and officers) in the Chadian capital N'Djamena. Having located the base in the capital of Chad, France recognized Chad as its ally in the Sahel zone.

In recent years, the US presence in the Sahara-Sahel zone has noticeably expanded: numerous military camps and outposts are being created, and local army is being equipped, although it has not yet been possible to turn the region into a 'stronghold of stability' (Kostelyanets & Okeke, 2018). The 'cooperation' of the United States with Chad is manifested, in particular, in the creation of a new military base near N'Djamena. However, the United States has previously used the Chadian capital as a center for air operations, although for many years the US argued that they had only one base in Africa – Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti.

In 2009–2013, Chad received from the United States $ 13 million from emergency funds of the Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) program launched in 2005 and renamed in the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) in 2007 (Nickels & Shorey, 2015). Gradually, Chad became the main partner in the US strategy in the Sahel as part of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) program.

In 2015, as part of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which also includes contingents of Benin, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria, the Chadian army successfully participated in operations against the Boko Haram terrorist group in the Lake Chad basin, providing MNJTF with 3,000 soldiers out of 8,700 soldiers, police officers and support personnel (Assanvo et al., 2016).

In early 2016, the Chadians formed the first contingent of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), contributing 1,500 soldiers (Gorman, 2020). Western partners appreciate this 'desert army' for its 'effectiveness' and 'reliability', i.e. for the qualities that often successfully mask the indiscipline and cruelty inherent in Chadian soldiers – former combatants. The effectiveness of the Chadians in Mali prompted the West to 'forget' about their behavior in the CAR in 2014, when the Chadian army to establish the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA, was withdrawn from operation for murdering 30 civilians. In addition, financial and military support from the Deby's regime to one of the parties to the conflict, the Central African rebel group Seleka, was reported (Denisova & Kostelyanets, 2019). In Mali, Chadian soldiers were accused of robbery and sexual violence.

In the literature devoted to the Chadian army, the apparent disorder in the army of the country is often attributed to the independent character inherent in the Sahel and Saharan soldiers, as well as the rebel past of the regular army soldiers who do not abandon their violent practice after gaining a different status (Debos, 2016) As noted earlier, the Chadian army formed by wars and conflicts transformed through

politicizing the ethnicity of soldiers and officers and encouraging their impunity, as well as due to petrodollars and opportunities associated with activities in peacekeeping operations.

Meanwhile, positive combat experience of the Chadian army was manifested in fighting with Boko Haram militant groups (Obamamoye, 2019). On March 23, 2020, after the terrorist attack on the position of the Chadian army near the village of Boma in the Lake Chad basin, when 98 Chadian soldiers were killed and about 50 people, including civilians, were wounded, lightning-fast operation Bohoma Anger was launched from March 31 to April 9, and President Deby personally participated in planning and implementation of the operation. Deby spent 17 days in the field camp to give orders. The Chadian army carried out a security sweep of its territory and adjacent territories of Nigeria and Niger and destroyed several hundred terrorists, their bases on the lake islands and 50 motor boats belonging to Boko Haram militants. In this military operation, 52 Chadian soldiers were killed, 196 were wounded. During this operation, Chad demonstrated that its military capabilities far exceed those of other Sahelian countries.

However, on April 9, 2020, Deby promised that Bohoma Anger was the last military mission of the Chadian army, and then they will focus on the fight against terrorism and other crimes – drug, arms and human trafficking that have spread in the country in recent years, but participation in the G5 Sahel and MNJTF missions will continue. First of all, the Chadian leader fears that in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, France, as the main sponsor of the G5 Sahel, will not be able to support anti-terrorist operations, and Chad, amid falling oil prices, will be unable to maintain its contingents abroad, since soldiers complain about late payment (Gorman, 2020). In addition, dissatisfaction with the death of Chadians during military operations outside the country is growing in the country, and Deby needs to concentrate armed forces in Chad in order to stabilize the internal political situation before the election campaign in 2021. Moreover, the success in the fight against Boko Haram militants allows for Deby's sixth participation in the presidential election.

7. Conclusion

Numerous wars and conflicts, in which the Chadian army was involved, has endowed it with experience to more successfully fight the threats of terrorism in the Sahel zone compared to the army of other states – Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Cameroon and even Nigeria. Strengthening of the army is a priority of the policy of the Deby's regime, and the country can gain the status of the most powerful military power in the region.

In 2010, the value of the political regime of Chad in the eyes of its Western partners increased markedly. President Idris Deby Itno, who has held the highest government post for 30 years, is now viewed by the European Union, primarily France and the United States, as a reliable partner in the fight against Islamic terrorism in Africa.

At the same time, the Chadian army has already gained a reputation of being 'irreconcilable and unsurpassed' African fighter against terrorism. However, the Chadian army can in no way serve as a 'symbol of national unity', as they are experiencing increasing internal tensions that may lead to further factionalism, weakening of the command hierarchy and, ultimately, further growth of regional instability.

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