

Security Update - Chad

Over the past several days, several foreign embassies have issued updated travel advice and warnings for Chad in response to the deteriorating security situation in the country. The warnings follow the movement of a rebel group into northern Chad from Libya on 11 April. On 17 April, local officials issued a statement claiming to have repulsed militants in the Kanem Region, located 350 km (217 miles) north of the capital N'Djamena. The heightened tensions in Chad come as the country held its presidential elections on 11 April, with incumbent Idriss Deby likely to win a sixth term in office.

Foreign Embassy Advisories

On 17 April, the US Embassy in Chad issued a security alert, ordering the departure of family members of US government employees from the embassy in N'Djamena. The embassy cited civil unrest and armed violence as the reason. It further elaborated that armed groups in the northern region of the country had moved south and were appearing to move towards the capital. The Embassy added that any US citizens currently in Chad wishing to depart should take advantage of commercial flights. It further warned that the authorities may impose movement restriction measures at short notice and could block communication channels.

The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) meanwhile updated its travel advisory on 17 April, advising British nationals to leave Chad by commercial means as soon as possible in response to the same threat. The FCDO added that its position had been prompted by the movement of rebels past the town of Faya towards the capital city. The FCDO had previously indicated on 11 April that a rebel group, Le Front pour L'alternance et la Concorde au Tchad (FACT) had crossed into Chad from Libya and had engaged Chadian security forces. In addition to its approach past Faya, another rebel convoy has been sighted approaching the town of Mao.

On 17 April, the French and Canadian governments also issued separate advisories. The Embassy of France in Chad issued a warning noting that armed groups from Libya had entered Chad on 11 April and were moving southward, adding that military operations were underway. It advised French nationals to avoid travel outside the capital city. The Government of Canada meanwhile updated its advisory to highlight the same threats as above, and advised Canadian nationals to limit movements, avoid large gatherings, and to follow the directives of the authorities.

Heightened Tensions

The rebel advance comes as early election results indicate that President Idriss Deby is on course to win his sixth term in office.

While the Chadian military has reported that it had halted an advance by rebels coming from Libya, the rebel group disclosed on 18 April that it was pressing ahead. Army spokesman Azim Bermandoa Agouna disclosed that clashes had taken place late on 17 April in the northern province of Kanem and that the rebel column from Libya had been "totally decimated." It was not immediately possible to independently verify the claims given the remote location where the fighting occurred, though on Sunday, the rebel group FACT issued a statement on its Facebook page, stating that its forces had begun "the liberation of Kanem region." The statement, issued by spokesman Kingabe Ogouzeimi de Tabul, went on to say, "we assure all residents of the city of N'Djamena, including diplomatic staff, United Nations agents, organizations, partners, and expats working in Chad to stay calm and avoid unnecessary travel outside the city of N'Djamena."

The rebels are believed to have crossed into Chad on 11 April, the same day that Chad held its presidential election, with President Deby seeking to extend his three-decade-long grip on power. While it is all but certain that the incumbent will win another term in office, official results have not yet been released. The Independent National Election Commission (CENI) indicated on 17 April that Deby won a majority in all but one of the 51 departments announced so far, and secured a plurality in the other. Results from 61 departments are yet to be announced, with Kilmapone Larme, head of logistics at CENI, stating that they had yet to receive more than 30% of the results.

FACT Rebel Group

Le Front pour L'alternance et la Concorde au Tchad (FACT) is based in Libya, where it has a non-aggression pact with renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar who controls much of the eastern region of the country. FACT, which is mainly made up of the Saharan Goran people, has regularly clashed with the Chadian army.

Advisory

Heightened security is likely across N'Djamena in the coming days and authorities are likely to bolster security force presence on access points to the capital city. Heightened security is also likely at strategic points across the capital, including in major government buildings, and N'Djamena International Airport. Should the security situation in the capital deteriorate, officials may implement restrictions, including the closure of land borders and airspace. Curfews and telecommunication suspensions could also be enforced. Opponents of the current regime, either aligned or unaligned with the rebels, could seek to initiate protests in the capital and elsewhere. In the event of any protests taking place, the threat of violence is likely to be elevated. Business and state office operations may be disrupted.

Anyone currently in Chad, including the capital city, is advised to maintain contact with their diplomatic representation and should update and review contingency plans. You should reconfirm the status of public transport before departure and you should prepare for possible transportation and communications disruptions. Avoid all concentrations of security personnel and avoid all travel at night. Heed the instructions of the local authorities and travel with identity documents at all times to facilitate passage through checkpoints. Avoid all protests and large public gatherings as they may turn violent with little notice.

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