Porous Borders and the Insecurity of Civilians: Cross-border Violence in Darfur and Eastern Chad

by Daniel S. Carik

SUMMARY:

This is the fourth in a series of policy briefs published by the Ford Institute examining the role of peacekeepers in enhancing the security of civilian populations displaced by conflict in Africa. This brief will explore the relationship between increased border security and the impact of peacekeepers on civilian security in Darfur and Eastern Chad. In it, Daniel Carik argues that 1. although mandated to do so, the UNAMID force in Darfur has been unable to control the border region; 2. the unsecured border has led to a dramatic increase in the size of the population of displaced persons in Chad; and 3. the unsecured border between Darfur and Chad has facilitated the spread of violence.

Cross-border violence carried out against civilians is a common problem in African conflicts. A March 2004 Security Council report states that “although cross-border problems[...]are important contributory causes of conflict in West Africa, their relationship with the endless cycle of violence and instability is primarily symptomatic, not causal.” (1) Yet, research conducted by Daniel Carik at the Ford Institute suggests that cross-border violence may be a driver for, and not merely symptomatic of, protracted conflicts. When national governments are unable or unwilling to secure their borders, outside parties may arrive to fill the security vacuum (2). There are several historical examples of UN peacekeeping operations monitoring and securing borders in an effort to deter criminal activity and cross-border attacks (3). Although Ford Institute researchers fully recognize that borders in Africa are often tenuous and difficult to guard and patrol, peacekeepers nonetheless have done so successfully in the past. One particular instance of successful monitoring by a UN peacekeeping mission is the UNOMUR mission to Uganda that was credited by the Secretary-General as having been “a factor of stability in the area [...] playing a useful role as a confidence-building mechanism.” (4)

In contrast, the conflict in Darfur underscores the human security challenge posed by porous, unsecured borders in the context of African civil conflicts. The arbitrary nature of African borders is problematic from both a geostrategic and humanitarian perspective. When ethnic groups are divided by national borders, the likelihood that an “internal” or “civil” conflict will become a regional security
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problem increases. Unsecured borders allow for the free movement of not only refugee populations but also militants and criminal actors who spread violence and insecurity from state to state. The governments of Chad and Sudan do not have the means or capacity to adequately secure their common boundary. In this environment, the only actor potentially capable of regulating the border region is the UNAMID peacekeeping force. Yet insufficient forces and lack of a coherent strategy have sabotaged this effort.

Daniel Carik has compiled a database of violent incidents, cross-referenced with IDP/refugee camp populations and geo-coordinates for the Darfur conflict. Map 1 above illustrates the shift in the center of violence in the region for the years 2004-2008. As illustrated by the map, the center of violence in the region has gradually moved westward, closer to the Chad/Sudan border, as the conflict has unfolded. This movement towards the border reflects the fact that the percentage of the camp attacks, rapes, child abductions, and skirmishes between government forces and rebel groups is increasingly located in the western sector of the conflict region. Table 1 illustrates that violent incidents on the Chadian side of the border have grown from 3.87 percent to 33.33 percent of all violence recorded by Carik over the last four years. The westward movement of the conflict has, therefore, created greater insecurity for civilians fleeing the violence and has led to increased numbers of displaced persons in eastern Chad.

A defining characteristic of violent conflict in Africa has been the massive displacement of civilians and non-combatants. Table 2 illustrates the trend that the percentage of internally displaced persons (IDP) and refugee camps located in Chad as a percentage of the total camps in the conflict region has steadily increased from four percent in 2005 to over 31 percent as of July 2008. However, the growth of the displaced population has not resulted in a proportionate increase in the size of the peacekeeping operation in eastern Chad. Nor has
ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Daniel S. Carik graduated cum laude from Allegheny College in 2007. He is currently continuing his studies at the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and began working at the Ford Institute in the fall of 2007. He is currently leading a research team focusing on the conflict in Darfur and eastern Chad. Daniel may be contacted at dsc17@pitt.edu.

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Map 2: Cross-border Attacks in Chad and Sudan (January 2004 - July 2008)

Map created by Cathleen Marcks
The preliminary findings of this policy brief therefore suggest that:

- The UNAMID peacekeeping operation, though specifically mandated to secure the borders of the Darfur region, has thus far been unable to fulfill this aspect of its mission. This is most likely a function of troop over-extension induced by severe understaffing.
- A porous, unsecured border has facilitated the spread of violent conflict from Darfur into areas of eastern Chad.
- The rise in cross-border violence corresponds with the rapid increase in the total displaced population in eastern Chad.

The next policy brief published in this series will address a peacekeeping mission’s role in the implementation of disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation (DDR) programs.

The Ford Institute’s full analysis on the issues described in each of the policy briefs will be published in a report available in winter 2009.