

# DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Jan Smuts House/Huis  
1 Jan Smuts Avenue/Laan 1  
Braamfontein, Johannesburg  
☎ 339-2021



✉ 31596  
2017 Braamfontein  
South Africa/Suid-Afrika  
☎ 'Insintaff' Johannesburg  
✉ 427291 SA

## BRIEF REPORT No. 62

For SAIIA Members only.  
Not for publication without  
prior permission.

### THE CHADIAN DILEMMA

This Brief Report deals with the civil war in Chad and the growing external intervention in that conflict. It has been prepared for the SAIIA by Laura Feldman, a graduate student in the Dept of International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand.

#### BASIC DATA:

Official name	: Republic of Chad
Capital	: N'djamena
Head of State & Govt	: President & Head of State - Hissene Habre
Ruling Party	: National Union for Independence & Revolution (UNIR)
Date of Independence	: 11 August 1960
Population	: 5,1 million (49% Muslim; 6% Christian; 45% Animist)
Surface Area	: 1,284,634 sq km
Armed Forces	: 12,200 armed forces & 11,400 paramilitary forces
GNP per capita	: US\$ 220 (1984)
Currency	: CFA - franc de la Coopération Financiere en Afrique Centrale
Exchange rate	: 357,75 francs CFA = US\$ 1
Foreign Debt	: 7,94 billion francs
Major Imports	: cement, petroleum, foodstuffs, machinery, textiles
Major Exports	: cotton (50%), livestock & animal products
Trading Partners	: Mainly France; Customs & Economic Union of central Africa
Resources	: salt

## INTRODUCTION:

International attention has focused on Chad because that country's civil war has increasingly involved outside intervention. Politically the African country could ultimately become part of the Soviet sphere of influence, if Libya effected total annexation. Economically, Chad is reported to have substantial reserves of platinum and uranium in the Aozou Strip. France's military involvement has also led to African and Eastern bloc fears of heightened French interest in the region. A struggle, almost three decades old, over leadership in Chad has yet to be resolved and the country will remain an international flashpoint for some time to come.

The Republic of Chad is a seemingly unimportant state considered to be economically unviable. Since France gave Chad its independence in 1960, the country has been dogged by civil war. Chronic disorder within the country has meant that it has been sustained largely by foreign economic and military assistance. Being a former French possession, it has also prompted continued French interest in maintaining this portion of its African sphere of influence. French involvement in the Chadian dispute has shown considerable resilience. Other Western powers have been reluctant to shoulder some of the burden, in spite of the French preference for disengagement. Conflict in Chad has become a war by proxy, with France and Libya playing the main roles.

## OVERVIEW:

The Chadian problem is best understood on two levels: domestic and international, with considerable overlap between the two.

The domestic Chadian dispute has been essentially a struggle for leadership since 1960, yet it was grounded in a conflict between Islamic north and Christian south. The latter problem, however, has largely disappeared from the forefront of Chadian politics. The struggle today is between two leaders who both originate from the north. Internationally, Chad's domestic instabilities have led to intervention by Libya and France. Libyan involvement has been prompted mainly by the desire to totally annex the Aozou Strip in the north, which is reported to be rich in platinum and uranium and which has been occupied by Libya since 1973. Gaddafi's more idealistic goal is for a Chad-Libyan merger into a joint Islamic republic. French involvement has been a response to a desire for internal unity and a legitimate government in Chad, but more recently a logistic reaction in answer to Libyan aggression in penetrating Chadian territory.

## THE DOMESTIC DIMENSION:

Since 1960, no government in power has been universally recognised as legitimate, because of the many factions within the country. This has made it impossible for any one leader to emerge with a clear majority. Since independence Chad has had four different leaders, but considering the number of times each leader has been in and out of power and how frequently they have all changed sides, it is hardly surprising that instability has become inherent. Chad became a one party state in January 1962, under Francois Tombalbaye (a leader from the south), thereby gaining complete control of government. His harsh fiscal and monetary measures made him unpopular with much of the population and his policy of 'authenticity' (which included a purging of the party and the bureaucracy in an attempt to restructure Chadian society), became intolerable. As a result of these developments, a rebel group emerged in the north - the Front de libération Nationale de Tchad (FROLINAT).

FROLINAT's leaders stayed abroad but rebel insurgents occupied a large portion of the northern region known as the BET (Borkou, Ennedi and Tibesti). In 1975 many skirmishes took place between north and south and Tombalbaye was killed during a military coup organised by young officers from the army and the gendarmerie.

Thereafter, struggles and divisions within FROLINAT surfaced as two men, Goukouni Oueddi and Hissene Habré, both vied for control of the group. General Felix Malloum, who succeeded Tombalbaye as President of Chad, in April 1975, was faced with opposition from Oueddi and Habré, who both questioned his legitimacy. A further power struggle within FROLINAT, between Oueddi and Habré, ensued, which led to Habré's ousting from the group. Nevertheless, Habré went on to form a coalition government with Malloum, in April 1978, with himself as Prime Minister.

By February 1979, however, that accord had crumbled and so too had the government. In August 1979 the 'Lagos Accord' took effect, which instituted Oueddi as interim President of a transitional government, to be replaced eventually by a twenty-two member Gouvernement d'Union Nationale de Transition (GUNT). Habré remained openly defiant of Oueddi's authority and, in a series of subsequent battles, Habré's FAN (Forces armées du nord) forces succeeded in capturing N'djamena on 7 June 1982. This reversal of authority was largely due to the military superiority of the FAN and because of political in-fighting within the GUNT. Habré has ruled Chad since 1982 but there has not been a sustained return to stability.

#### THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION:

Persistent Libyan and French intervention dominate any assessment of external influences on Chad's politics. The first instance of external involvement in Chad was in 1968, when France was called to assist Tombalbaye in quelling the northern insurgent threat. The French role in support of Habré remained fairly limited until 1980, when Oueddi signed an agreement with Gaddafi providing for Libyan troop deployment in Chad when the need arose (i.e. when Oueddi needed assistance). Gaddafi held that the Aozou Strip belonged to Libya - a doubtful claim, given that it was based on an unratified agreement between two discredited regimes, both of which were fascist and colonial: Vichy France (Pierre Laval) and Italy (Mussolini). He also desired a complete merger of Libya and Chad.

While France has tried to circumscribe its role as 'a helper of last resort', Gaddafi has taken advantage of repeated requests for assistance from Oueddi. For instance, France only intervened in 1983, after Oueddi's troops crossed the critical sixteenth parallel (at which point, further penetration would not be tolerated by France). Gaddafi, on the other hand, extended long-term, formal military assistance to Oueddi, although Oueddi has claimed that a merger with Libya would be impossible.

Gaddafi's break with Oueddi in late 1986 led most of the Chadian rebels to shift their loyalties from Gaddafi to Habré, thereby fundamentally altering the political role of the Libyan forces in Chad. As a Western diplomat commented then: 'What you have now is an invasion of Chad by Libya.' This situation has in fact enhanced the role of France because it seeks to protect Chad's territorial integrity. Nevertheless, Libya and France have both backed down on occasions, hoping to avoid a direct confrontation.

Although France has maintained, since independence, close contact with and indeed almost total domination of the bureaucratic infrastructures of its former African colonial empire, direct involvement in the Chad crisis owes almost as much to the paralysis of the OAU as an effective instrument in regulating pan-African affairs - a result of financial bankruptcy and political factionalism: supporting pro and anti-Arab, Islamic, Marxist, Anglophone and Francophone cliques. The OAU has been unable to negotiate a ceasefire or institute a peacekeeping force. It has proved ineffectual in upholding the notions of sovereignty and territorial integrity and its support for Habré has been confined to rhetoric.

Resolution of the conflict almost inevitably involved the United States, not loath to assist in the political and psychological humiliation of Gaddafi. Before 1981 there had been little US interest in Chad, which argued that it was solely a French responsibility, due to its historic ties. It was only when the situation deteriorated in Libya's favour that Washington became actively involved. Wishing to protect its allies, Egypt and Sudan, from the implied threat of Libyan expansionism, the Reagan

Administration saw in Habré's strong anti-Libyan stance and military skill an instrument for turning Chad into a buffer state. The US discreetly channelled finance and arms through Cairo and Khartoum to Habré in late 1981, when he was preparing for his westward march to recapture N'djamena from Oueddi. This exercise was completed swiftly and, in June 1982, Oueddi fled the capital. In 1983, when Libya was fast advancing south, the US offered a further US\$ 10 million, prompting Habré to think of the US as the more generous and effective of his Western allies in the common fight against the Libyans.

The Soviet Union has up to now had a limited involvement in the Chad-Libyan imbroglio. Tactically, they support Oueddi as the rightful and legitimate leader of Chad and endorse Libya's claim to sovereignty over the Aozou Strip. (An ironic stance, in view of the openly 'fascist' credentials of both Pierre Laval and Mussolini.) Generally speaking, the Soviet Union has left strategic planning à propos Chad to its African allies, especially Libya's Gaddafi and Ethiopia's Colonel Mengistu.

#### PROSPECTS:

In January this year, some Libyans were captured at Fada, a town in Northern Chad. Gaddafi responded by bombing the towns of Arada and Oum Chalouba. The raid did little damage but it was important because it once again crossed the crucial sixteenth parallel. Three days later French fighter bombers struck the air base at Oueddi Doum. The Libyans were in effect 'caught with their eyes closed' and could not offer much resistance. This victory for Habré has initially ended a three and a half year occupation of the north and is evidence of their biggest triumph since the latest round of fighting began in 1982. In spite of the victory, Habré still has problems to solve. Principally, he must enter into an accord with Oueddi, but as yet all meetings between them have been unproductive. France has been trying to dissuade Habre and his forces from attempting to retake the Aozou Strip from Gaddafi. However, if Gaddafi is not stopped here, the consequences for Africa could still be devastating. If Chad were to fall to Libya, Gaddafi's intentions of drawing all the weaker sub-Saharan Islamic states into a Libyan-led Islamic empire, could then be realised. Further, the chances of the West and other African states ever benefitting from the reported uranium and platinum reserves in the Aozou Strip would lessen considerably. The US, therefore, has been encouraging Habre to recover the territory. Given the Chadian lack of air cover, France would be obliged to support Habre even in an assault on the Aozou Strip. A major battle for the territory seems probable in the near future.

French policy in Chad has been geared towards an eventual French military withdrawal from the territory once stability has been achieved. With the arrival of the Chirac government, there has been a shift in policy. Chirac is a strong advocate of Western influence and supports a military solution. This policy implies that France will remain enmeshed in the conflict for the next few years, despite the economic burden of maintaining Chad. On a wider scale, France could look increasingly to the US to share the responsibility, provided the US 1988 elections do not result in a renewed vacillation in US foreign policy, which may preclude any possible military intervention 'offshore'.