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Chad: Origins and Impact of Factional Strife (U)

A Research Paper

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A Research Paper

*Information available as of 28 December 1981
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The author of this paper is
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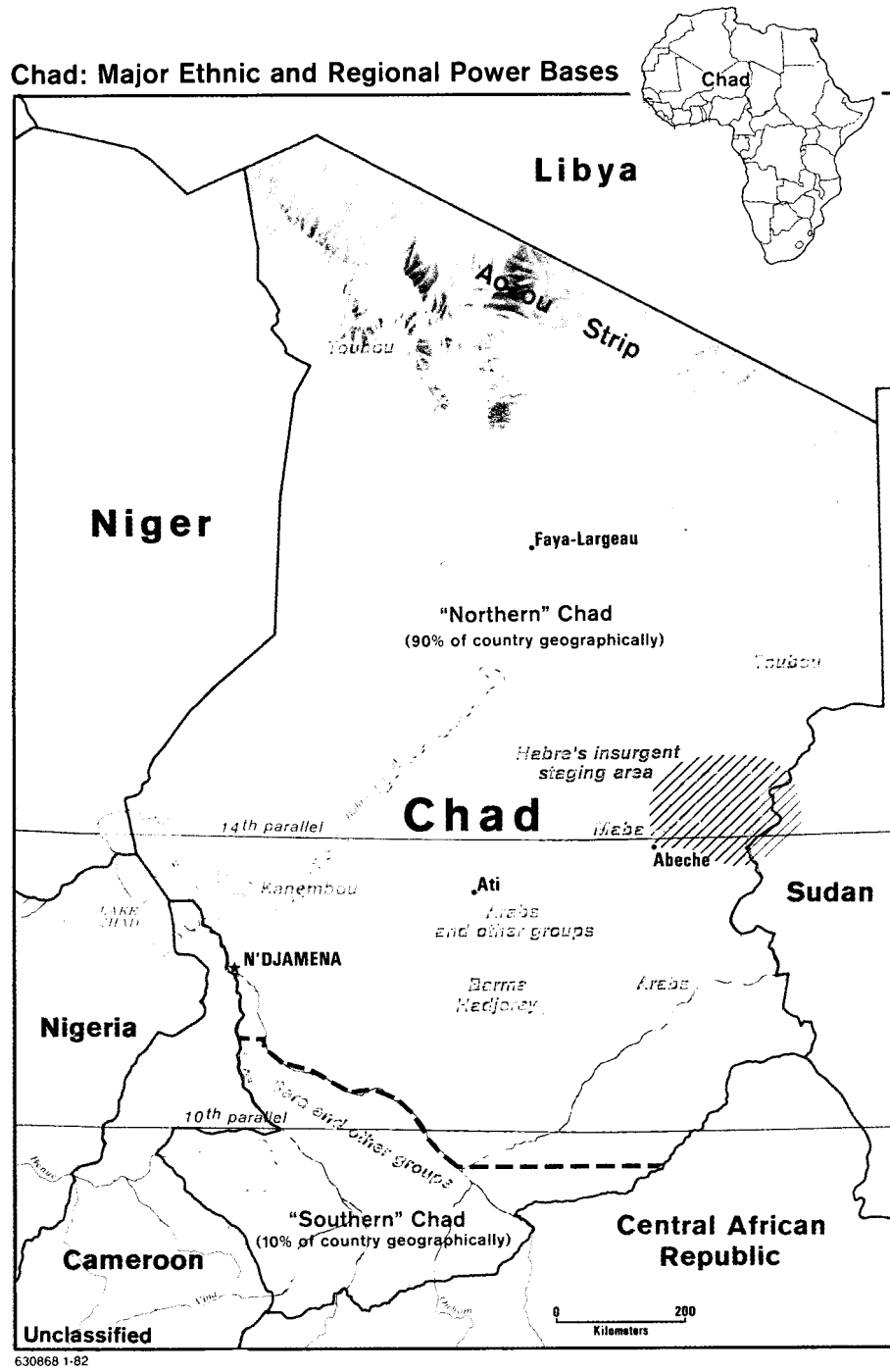
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**Chad:
Origins and Impact of
Factional Strife**

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Overview

Chad's factional strife has made the country an exploitable target for Libyan adventurism that threatens neighboring states and Western interests in the region. Although Libyan troops left Chad in late 1981, longstanding ethnic, regional, and social tensions continue to fuel bitter factional rivalries and political instability. Prospects for preventing new turmoil and for limiting opportunities for foreign meddling seem poor.

More than two years after coming to power, President Goukouni's feeble coalition government has had little success in containing the quarrels among competing groups and is showing new signs of unraveling as a result of personal rivalries. Chad is less a nation than a convenient geographic expression for an arena where hostile armed bands wage an age-old power struggle with few if any ideological pretensions.

Chad in modern times has known relative stability only during periods of foreign military occupation—first by France and for the past year by the Libyans, who entered in force in October 1980 to reverse the Goukouni regime's waning military fortunes against rebel Defense Minister Habre. Peacekeeping forces that have been sent to Chad by the Organization of African Unity are an uncertain substitute for the Libyan troops who maintained relative calm. In any event, no occupying power has been able to do more than postpone a new upheaval.

Another round of major fighting in Chad's 16-year-old civil war could soon erupt and might ultimately lead to a formal partition between the Muslim north and the Christian and animist south. The south is more cohesive ethnically and on a firmer footing economically than the north and probably could make a go of it alone. The north, however, would remain torn by factional feuding and probably would be subject to heavy Libyan influence.



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Again on the Brink

As 1982 begins, Chad's factional struggle is intensifying. President Goukouni's beleaguered coalition government faces an increasingly serious threat in central Chad from insurgent leader Habre, whose forces in recent weeks have moved west from their eastern stronghold in a series of successes that could cause the regime to split apart and full-fledged civil war to resume. OAU troops could soon face their first test as a neutral buffer intended to separate Chad's feuding factions. The peacekeeping force is reluctant to fight the insurgents, however, and it might stand aside if there is a major confrontation. []

Habre probably still hopes to trade on his growing strength to regain a government role, but the relative ease of his recent victories could embolden him to try again to seize power. Meanwhile, President Goukouni faces mounting criticism from other government factional leaders for his decision last November to dispense with Libyan troops. He seems increasingly desperate and might ask Libya to return if his position deteriorates much more. The Libyans pulled out of Chad partly to show Goukouni that he could not survive his country's chronic factional strife without them, and Tripoli probably would come to his aid again if his government were to make a formal request. []

Civil War: A Way of Life

Political factionalism is the single biggest obstacle to stability and centralized rule in Chad. At least 16 prominent leaders—some with sizable armed followings—command varying degrees of support among the country's 4.5 million people and 200 distinct ethnic groups. Disputes are frequent and are seldom settled peacefully. Some groups try from time to time to reconcile their differences and work together—such as the current effort by the larger factions to form an integrated national army to keep order—but resentments are so deep that agreements invariably collapse. []

Chad's factions are largely the result of geography and sociology, and they illustrate the problems caused by territorial boundaries arbitrarily established during the French colonial era. The country stretches from the heart of the Sahara Desert in the Arab-influenced north to the savannas of equatorial black Africa in the south and is at the crossroads of powerful competing cultural and religious influences. Chad—like many African countries—is less a political entity than an awkward patchwork of countless small and unintegrated ethnic groups, many with sharply different traditions, lifestyles, and beliefs. []

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Four broad groups of peoples predominate in Chad. The largest grouping—the black Sara—is a culturally cohesive people who reside in the south below the 10th parallel and account for a quarter of Chad's population. North of the Sara belt, in an arc stretching from Nigeria to Sudan, live a number of fragmented Arab clans which together total 14 percent of the population and form the second-largest group. Cohabiting the central and eastern regions are a jumbled assortment of Islamized non-Arab peoples—especially the Maba, a collection of strong-willed and xenophobic mountain tribes which have long made eastern Chad a hotbed of resistance to central rule. Finally, in the sparsely populated desert and mountain wastelands above the 14th parallel live the fiercely independent Toubou, a loose network of mutually feuding, semino-madic, non-Arab warrior clans that make up less than 4 percent of the population but have been in the forefront of the country's civil war since 1968. []

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Chad's history since the 14th century has been marked by a bitter struggle for dominance between its northern and southern groups. The Maba and other Muslim peoples held sway during the precolonial period and terrorized the Sara-dominated south with frequent slave raids. After France began to colonize Chad in the late 19th century, the Sara quickly adapted to French culture and exploited opportunities for education and advancement, while the northerners spent their energies in armed resistance to the French. []

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Although the north was never fully subdued, France by the 1950s had brought the region under some semblance of control, setting the stage for the south's rise to political dominance shortly before Chad gained independence in 1960. [redacted]

French colonial rule did not, however, result in national integration or foster a sense of national identity. Although the French fought hard to conquer Chad, once it was theirs they largely neglected it. Chad consequently stagnated during some 60 years as a French colony, with its internal cleavages essentially "frozen" while French troops maintained the peace. The economy—outside the south, which became a center of cotton cultivation for export—remained undeveloped, and traditional ethnic and regional animosities continued to fester even as new ones emerged. [redacted]

When the postcolonial Sara-government of Francois Tombalbaye took power in 1960 and cracked down harshly on Muslim leaders accused of subversive activities, the illusion of national unity was shattered. Resentment and discord culminated five years later in a spontaneous peasant uprising in the east that marked the beginning of major conflict. By 1968, the Muslim rebellion had spread west and then north. The Toubous—loosely allied with several other Muslim groups in a guerrilla movement called the Front for the National Liberation of Chad (FROLINAT)—nearly toppled Tombalbaye before French troops, which withdrew from Chad in 1964, returned in 1969 to push them back to isolated desert outposts. [redacted]

For a time it seemed the south would finally impose its will on the north, but the FROLINAT factions regrouped and again set their sights on the capital, N'Djamena. After French domestic pressure forced Paris to withdraw most of its forces from Chad in 1970, fighting resumed and gradually helped fan discontent among southern military officers. Meanwhile, Libya began to provide arms and funds to northern insurgent groups and in 1973 took advantage of Chad's political paralysis to occupy the Aozou strip, a narrow band of purportedly mineral-rich territory along the Chad-Libya border. [redacted]

In 1975, young southern officers seized power, installed General Malloum—a weak and uninspiring Sara leader—as President, and tried unsuccessfully to make peace with the insurgents. In March 1979—after a desperate attempt by the Malloum regime to divide the rebels by bringing some of them into the government—N'Djamena fell to Toubou forces loyal to guerrilla leader Goukouni, bringing full circle the age-old struggle between north and south. [redacted]

After months of political infighting among the victorious Muslim factions, Goukouni became head of the Transitional Government of National Unity (GUNT), a provisional regime that grew out of OAU efforts to reconcile the ever-growing number of northern splinter groups with others that had begun to emerge in the south. Quarrels quickly paralyzed the coalition, however, and led to new fighting in March 1980 when Defense Minister Habre—a brilliant but ruthless Toubou factional leader and at one time Goukouni's right-hand man—tried to defeat the other leaders militarily and take control. [redacted]

Goukouni and other government forces suffered substantial casualties, and after Habre—outnumbered 4 to 1—began to gain the upper hand, the Chadian President was forced to ask Libya for direct help. Libyan troops intervened in force in October 1980, and two months later finally pushed Habre's rebels out of N'Djamena and key population centers in the northern half of Chad. The Libyans kept order until Goukouni asked them to leave, and Tripoli—motivated in part by international pressure—ordered its forces to withdraw in late 1981. [redacted]

The Major Contenders

As Chad teeters once more on the brink of civil war, four major factional leaders—three of them high-ranking government officials—seem to hold the key to the country's future: President Goukouni, Vice President Kamougue, Foreign Minister Acyl, and rebel leader Habre. [redacted]

Goukouni. Chad's figurehead President controls the People's Armed Forces (FAP), a once powerful faction drawn from the Teda, who form the larger of the two branches of the Toubou people. Goukouni's armed following has weakened considerably in the last two years—FAP now has only about 500 troops—and he

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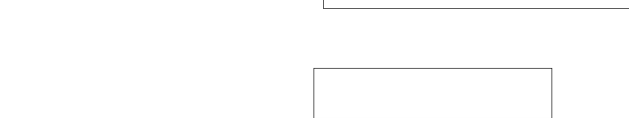
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probably could not stay in power without the continued political and military support of Vice President Kamougue. [redacted]

Goukouni has long had a record of close Libyan ties, but since last summer he has moved toward the West—especially France. Paris began to send him military aid in November 1981 following his call for Libyan troops to withdraw from Chad by the end of the year. The Chadian President considers himself a nationalist and has often urged other factional leaders to set aside their differences and help rebuild the war-ravaged country. In reality, however, he still refuses, like the other principal government factional leaders, to come to terms with rebel leader Habre. [redacted]

Kamougue. Colonel Kamougue—the brains and brawn behind the palace coup that toppled President Tombalbaye in 1975—heads the Armed Forces of Chad (FAT), which he formed when fellow Sara members of Malloum's shattered National Army regrouped to protect the south after N'Djamena fell to FROLINAT insurgents in 1979. FAT is Chad's second-largest faction with some 3,500 men under arms, but they are poorly trained and equipped and are not inclined to fight outside the south. [redacted]

As Vice President, Kamougue maintains an uneasy alliance with GUNT's northern Muslim factions and faces some political opposition in the south. He has long opposed Libyan influence in Chad, but was unwilling to set aside his hatred for Habre and join the rebel leader in an anti-Libyan insurgency before Tripoli withdrew its troops. [redacted]



Kamougue appears to be backing Goukouni for now against Foreign Minister Acyl's behind-the-scenes efforts to undercut the President's influence, but the southern factional leader is reluctant to get involved in the north's fratricidal feuding. He might decide to sit on his hands if Acyl tries to seize power in N'Djamena or if Habre's insurgency makes dramatic gains and threatens to topple Goukouni. [redacted]



Figure 1. President Goukouni (l) and Vice President Kamougue (r): How long will their alliance last? [redacted]

Acyl. Chad's pro-Libyan Foreign Minister is an ethnic Arab who draws his support from the various Arab clans in the central regions. He controls the Democratic Revolutionary Council (CDR), Chad's second-largest armed faction—about 2,500 troops—and the biggest northern Muslim group. Acyl probably could not have assembled so large a fighting force without Libyan help to recruit and train followers. [redacted]

Acyl has limited leadership skills and only nominal control of Chad's foreign policy, but he hopes eventually to become president with Libya's help and may be planning a power grab. During the last year his men in eastern Chad took the brunt of the fighting against Habre—whom he hates bitterly and sees as his only obstacle to dominating the north—and CDR troops presently comprise most of the government force trying to stem new rebel forays toward the central regions. The latest fighting thus continues to lock Chad's two most ambitious and powerful northern factional leaders in an increasingly tense struggle that ironically buys Goukouni some time and allows Kamougue to postpone the decision he inevitably must make about his role in the growing crisis. [redacted]

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Figure 2. Foreign Minister Acyl: Planning a power grab?

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Figure 3. Rebel leader Habre: Brilliant but ruthless

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Habre. Chad's tenacious guerrilla leader heads the Northern Armed Forces (FAN), which he formed in 1977 after breaking with Goukouni, his Toubou brother and former mentor. Habre draws his support largely from the Daza branch of the Toubous—especially the Anakaza clan, a small but fierce group of nomadic warriors. His forces have consistently been better organized and disciplined than those of other factions, and in the closing weeks of 1981 they have made a strong showing in eastern Chad, where they continue to advance westward against government troops.

Habre has many bitter enemies and will not be able to unite Chad politically. In recent years he has displayed pro-Western sympathies, but the decision last November by Egypt and Sudan—his last remaining foreign benefactors—to cut off military aid will probably force him to look elsewhere for support. He might even turn back to Libya. Tripoli gave Habre and other northern guerrilla leaders some aid in the 1970s during their struggle against the south and might see some advantage to having him keep Chad in turmoil and thus vulnerable to new Libyan meddling.

Bleak Prospects for Stability

After a year of relative calm, Chad again threatens to become the scene of a violent, free-for-all power struggle. Habre is on the move, Goukouni is struggling to survive, Acyl is working against both, and Kamougue is carefully weighing his next decision. Meanwhile, numerous lesser leaders (see chart) are jockeying for position and looking for ways to weather the coming storm.

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OAU peacekeeping forces in Chad have slowly started to take up positions outside N'Djamena, but they are reluctant to engage Habre's rebels or to get involved in quarrels between government factions. The OAU units thus are likely to prove ineffective if major fighting continues to spread westward. Similarly, there seems to be little that France or other Western nations can do through diplomatic pressure or economic enticements to halt Chad's latest drift toward renewed widespread fighting.

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A return to full-fledged civil war could set the stage for formal partition. The south is politically and ethnically more cohesive than the north and its agricultural-based economy could enable it to survive without the rest of the country. The north, however, would remain inherently unstable and the deep resentments among the various Muslim groups would make

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it an attractive target for new meddling by Libyan leader Qadhafi, who clearly still has designs on the area.

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What hope there is of containing factional tensions and preventing another upheaval rests largely on how the Chadian Government handles Habre. Goukouni, Kamougue, and Acyl—despite their professed unwillingness to negotiate with the rebel leader—know that if they cannot stop him militarily, they will have to try to accommodate him politically. Bringing Habre back into the government, however, could be as dangerous as keeping him out. He probably would not sit still in a subordinate position for long if he concluded once again that his prospects for seizing control of the government were good.

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If the Goukouni regime were somehow to defuse the threat of renewed civil war by making peace with Habre, its next order of business would be to try to integrate all the various factional forces into a truly impartial national army. Following that, the Chadian factions would have to focus on devising a more effective form of central government. One option might be a federal structure, featuring regional administrators with considerable authority over local affairs, which could help mollify separatist sentiments and preserve some semblance of national unity. Prospects for such developments seem remote, however, and factional violence is likely to remain Chad's preferred method of political discourse for some time to come.

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Political Functions in Chad

Organization: Front for the National Liberation of Chad (FROLINAT)
Leaders: Abba Sahli (Chairman), Abdou Maloum (President)
Ethnic and regional power base: Sahelian regions among north and south-western Chad
Annual strength: none

1971: FROLINAT was formed in 1971 as a result of the merger of the Front for the Liberation of Chad (FLC) and the Front for the National Liberation of Chad (FROLINAT).
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1982: FROLINAT was formed in 1982 as a result of the merger of the Front for the Liberation of Chad (FLC) and the Front for the National Liberation of Chad (FROLINAT).

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