

WHAT'S AT STAKE IN CHAD

by I. William Zartman

Now that Chad is partitioned and a fragile truce holds along an artificial line, it is worth taking stock of Chad and other Chad-like situations to see what lessons they may teach. For Chad's problems are not solved. Worse, there is nothing unique about its situation; it merely offers a particularly sharp example of what is taking place in a number of Third World nations.

Chad offers, first, a case of political collapse—an unusually complete case—not just of the overthrow of a government but of the total destruction of the state and its legitimate authority. Part of this has been the work of nature, part the work of the Chadians themselves. The basic fact of Chad is poverty. It has one of the smallest per capita incomes in the world, \$120, which is declining at the annual rate of 5 per cent. It has no mineral resources and few of any other kind. One crop—cotton—provides almost its entire export income. Poverty means not only a primitive and precarious life for the Chadians, but also that the political system has few resources out of which to reward followers, create incentives, stimulate energies, and solve problems. When the trough is small, groups fight hard for their turn at it—and they fight for keeps.

The Chadians themselves have perfected this state of nature. They began with a government dominated by the south, following the not unwise practice of their former French rulers of turning over governance to the more modernized, *évolué* segments of society. However, the men around President François Tombalbaye kept all the small benefits of government in their own hands, treating the Muslim north first with neglect and then with oppressive attention. The north rebelled, beginning in 1965. But as the rebellion grew, it divided, and the National Liberation Front of Chad (FroLiNaT) was soon united only in opposing the government. As a result, attempts either to coopt parts of FroLiNaT or to put it in charge of government have all foundered on the factious nature of the movement.

Tombalbaye fell to his army in 1975. The French, seeking an end to the war, thought they had found one in a coalition between General Félix Malloum as president and

Hissene Habré as premier in 1978. But Habré did not represent the entire north, nor were the two leaders able to share power. When civil war broke out again, the French and the Organization of African Unity, led by Nigeria, helped put together a Transition Government of National Unity (GUNT) in 1979, with Goukouni Oueddei in the chairman's seat and leaders of the other ten factions in ministerial positions. But again there was no agreement to work together and civil war soon broke out once more. Various factions called on outside support. Goukouni was first, inviting Libyan intervention without consulting the other members of GUNT. That round ended in 1982 with the victory of Habré over Goukouni.

Now Chad would be unimportant if it were merely a constellation of factional vendettas, an unending cockfight in an enclosed pit. And for the most part it does exist in something of a political vacuum. Because of the limited ends and means of African states and because of the effectiveness of African norms of international relations, most of Chad's neighbors are uninterested in extending their influence or their sovereignty over the country. What is more, Chad has nothing any of them wants and would be a burden on their economies.

The exception is Libya. Libya has three interests in making a Chadian politician beholden to it or submissive to its will—interests that are frequently expressed by Guide of the Revolution Muammar Qaddafi. A recent and clear example came in early June in a speech addressed to the leaders of neighboring Tunisia and Algeria. Qaddafi called on his neighbors to unite with Libya, "or else we will be obliged to use force to obtain unity.... That means that we should go over the heads [of these leaders] to touch the popular masses and set up revolutionary committees and peoples congresses, both openly and clandestinely. We should set up such committees everywhere in every Arab country. No one can stop us. Brothers, that is our right."

The most Libya can expect is to revive its union with Chad proclaimed in 1981 and suspended because of the African states' outcry. The least Libya can gain is an admission by Chad of Libya's claim to the Aozou Strip, the 150 km.-deep band of territory along the northern border that might contain uranium. In between, Libya could gain frontiers from which to subvert vulnerable regimes, such as Niger (which does have uranium), Sudan (whose regime Qaddafi has vowed to overthrow), and the Central African Republic (in whose politics and economy Qaddafi occasionally meddles), as well as two larger and more

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important states with histories of instability in their northern regions, Nigeria and Cameroon. Although Libyan domination of Chad would bring a tenth of Africa's land surface under Qaddafi's control. Libya's interest in Chad has less to do with the land itself than with the fact that Chad is on the way to more interesting places and a stepping stone to Libyan expansion.

PANDORA'S BOX

Commentators frequently forget that it is this element of foreign intervention with intent to subvert and annex that makes Chad an international issue. From the point of view of domestic political considerations, Habré is not much different from Goukouni. True, Habré seems a stronger personality, a more ruthless warrior, and a better politician, but it is the fact that Goukouni is marching at the head of a *Libyan* armored column that makes the matter of grave concern.

This is a more serious problem for the region than for East-West relations. Although Libya has advisors from Communist countries to help operate its Soviet arms, there is no indication that Qaddafi is acting as a Soviet agent or that the Soviets have any interest per se in the fall of Chad to Libyan forces. To be sure, the interests of the two countries, while not coincident, are sometimes parallel. But what is unsettling is the longer term effects of Libyan conquest on the region and beyond.

The Libyan invasion is extremely serious on the African level because it is the first clear and conscious violation of two important principles of African international relations that give the continent some basic stability. The first norm is the recognition of colonial boundaries. Libyan claims over the Aozou Strip, based on an unratified and explicitly denounced and superceded treaty between France and Italy in 1935, is a contravention of the principle of *uti possidetis* that has lasted since the Libyan occupation of the area began in 1973. The issue of boundary claims has been referred to many times as the Pandora's Box of African relations; if the principle were destroyed, turmoil in African relations would surely follow.

The second principle bars armed intervention in the internal affairs of other African states. Here, Chad offers another first—a case of intervention in which the invader seeks to incorporate the invaded state. The norm had its first serious challenge in Tanzania's invasion of Uganda. Though this was justified as an exceptional measure to overthrow the egregious dictatorship of Idi Amin, it was still widely condemned in Africa.

The evoking of both principles is not a reflection of some idealistic attachment to pretty phrases or a notion that African states should be more moral than others but, rather, of their very practical restraining effect on the conduct of African relations themselves—and a way of lessening the continent's attractiveness to cold warriors. It is thus in the interest of the United States and France as well as African nations to reinforce these norms and the respect for them. But principles will not defend themselves, and some action is required.

Beyond principles, there is the danger of continued and improved destabilization by Libya if the attempted conquest of Chad, or even part of it, is successful. The current partition line itself puts Libyans 500 kms. closer to the more populated areas of Sudan and gives it 750 kms. more

of common frontier with Niger. The threat of increased and improved forms of subversion is no mere prediction: In 1982 Libya sent groups to infiltrate Mali and Niger, and in the decade that it has occupied the Aozou Strip it has built up military installations there, including a long airstrip.

France has an additional interest in the Chad affair—again, one that goes beyond Chad itself. Acceptance of a predominant French interest in its "active zone" of Africa (the arc from Mauritania to Zaire) depends on France's fulfilling its protective role in emergencies. Since no one else can play this role—neither Africans (individually or collectively) nor Americans—the exchange is a worthy deal.

INTERESTS AND CONSTRAINTS

If principles and interests are so clear, what is there to debate? Well, some say, if Chad's basic problem is lack of resources, why not give it to Libya to become an integral part of the "People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya" and benefit from its oil revenues? Unfortunately, this not only bypasses the problem, it is not even a sure solution. Libya would be likely both to reverse the pattern of neglect and oppression of the Tombalbaye regime, favoring only the Muslim north, but even there facing revolt because of the unsubmitive character of the population. Others, continuing this reasoning, suggest that there is nothing to worry about, since Libya cannot control Chad anyway. And that may be true in the long run, but for the present there is a lot of mischief to be done.

If interests are as clear as presented, why haven't the parties acted as clearly? As often happens in international relations, each of the parties is also subject to specific constraints. France is torn between its historic role and its new Socialist regime's aversion to intervention, reinforced by a memory of nearly two decades of being bogged down in an unwinnable war in the inhospitable terrain of northern Chad. There are differences between the two periods—for one thing, the Chadian government is now in the hands of a northerner who knows the terrain—but these conflicting considerations have brought to French policy the hesitations that were so evident in August.

The United States is limited in the actions it can take because its interests are not at such a level as to justify direct intervention. Furthermore, too forward a role would begin to destroy the primacy of French interests and responsibility, leaving no possibility of Western cooperation or intermediate exercise of power between African insufficiency and American overkill. Above all, the U.S. cannot intervene directly, lest the Soviet Union be provided with an excuse to make it an East-West conflict. An American presence on three sides of Libya—Chad to the south, Egypt and Sudan to the east, and the Mediterranean to the north—could trigger the signing of a Soviet-Libyan Friendship Treaty that has been discussed so often in the past.

As for the African states, none has the arms, let alone the inclination, to engage an overarmed Libya in a continental war. And just as France is restrained by its commercial ties with Libya, so some African states are restrained from political action by their political ties with Qaddafi. As one delegate to the OAU put it recently: "Since the Libyans are our objective allies for the moment, we do not condemn them."

Yet despite varying interests and constraints, each of the three main actors headed in the right direction, if imperfectly, this summer. The French response was enough too late; the American response too much too early; the African response too little too late. These imperfections are worth some comment but are only auxiliary to the main point that all three responses were generally appropriate.

The French response—some two thousand troops in forward positions in an essentially tripwire role, backed by Mirages, Jaguars, and SAMs—was appropriate to the situation following the fall of Faya Largeau for the second time on August 10. France originally claimed that such a response was excluded by the 1976 Franco-Chadian Treaty. Now, in addition to having had its credibility undermined, its troops are the guarantors of a situation that solves none of the problems of governance, sovereignty, or national integrity. Rather than a surgical intervention, assuring quick victory and rapid withdrawal, it moved into Chad in August, 1983, in such a way as to guarantee its being stuck there for a while. But the worst aspect of the French response was its petulant scapegoating, its attempt to excuse its own bumbling by huffing about American pressure when the U.S. was trying to provide the coordination and consultation required for a smooth operation.

African states have been equally indecisive. In the fall of 1982 they all joined in admitting Habré to Chad's seat at the United Nations and in devising the Addis Ababa formula that seated Habré's government at the nineteenth summit of the OAU. Yet when Qaddafi, upon being denied the OAU chairmanship at Addis, left in a huff and relaunched his armed invasion of Chad in support of Goukouni, Africa was once again timid in advancing its own



principles and interests. The broadest-based statement, a call for the withdrawal of foreign troops, came from a meeting of eleven Central and West African states in August. Personal pressure was applied on President Mitterrand of France by the presidents of Senegal and Ivory Coast and possibly others—probably a more effective move than that of President Mobutu of Zaire, who sent in two thousand of his own troops to cover the Chadian backfield. An OAU committee has proven ineffectual, since it seeks to offend no member, and Algeria risked charges of naiveté in signing a declaration with Libya in July that called for the withdrawal of foreign troops amidst claims by Qaddafi that none of his were in Chad.

There is more to criticize in the *form* of the American position than in its *content*—and, if nothing else, the U.S. should get some points for patience in the face of French petulance. Yet the U.S. is vulnerable to the charge of exacerbating the situation by caricaturing Qaddafi, dramatizing his evil and magnifying his threat; there is something legitimizing and glorifying to a Third World leader when he is called “subhuman” by one U.S. president, “the most dangerous man in the world” by the present one, and someone “we should have taken out long ago” by a former secretary of state. The actual moves reflected the same overzealousness: Both the real and symbolic importance of an AWACS plane is devalued when there are no airplanes for it to control.

ALTERNATIVES

There are several possible outcomes to these events, with partition and war the most likely. But partition as a peaceful solution requires negotiation and assent of the parties—above all Habré and Goukouni—and is likely to founder on the issue of the presidency, if nothing else, since that is what the civil war is about. Offering Goukouni regional autonomy and lordship over the north under a government headed by Habré is unlikely to be attractive to a man who has been president himself and who is somewhat threatened by rivals for Libyan support within his own entourage. And there should be no illusions about a bipartite federation. The history of Africa and other continents has shown that two-unit federations without a balancer and a possibility for coalition never work. If the units are roughly equal, one or the other tends to split; if the units are unequal, one of the parties moves to exert its dominance. Chadian history itself shows that Goukouni and Habré, rivals from the same region, would not accept cooperation as a term of leadership. Nor is stability to be achieved by de facto partition in the hope that the problem will go away—a frequent response to annoying situations in foreign relations.

Continued war is a likelihood, but the internationalization of the situation makes it even less likely than before that the problem can be tied up in a bag and left to ferment on its own. Libya and France, it is true, have an interest in maintaining the cease-fire: Libya already has much of what it wants and France has no interest in combat. But both Goukouni and Habré have an interest in creating an incident that breaks the cease-fire. If warfare is seen by either party as the means of solving the Chadian “problem,” war will continue until there is a winner, whether by victory of one or exhaustion of the other.

Other than outright conquest by one party, what remain

are confederation and a strongman. There is much to say for confederation, and surprisingly little effort has been put into urging it. Chad was an informal confederation, off and on, between 1979 and 1981 and might have been able to formalize that structure. A confederation would divide the country into roughly equal baronies (perhaps seven of them) with local autonomy, a weak central executive, and a guarantee of neutrality by the neighboring states. However, such an outcome would depend upon a stalemate among a number of warring factions and an absence of direct external intervention—two conditions that do not obtain today.

The remaining possibility is a centralized government of reconstruction and reconciliation organized about a strong leader. Whatever one's preferences for political forms in the abstract, Chad's condition is such that a strongman government is the most appropriate for rebuilding state authority out of a political vacuum. Effective strongmen are rare and their power is easily misused; but if one such strongman appears, he is probably worth the risk. Chad's problem at present is not overly strong state power but overly *weak* state power. The strongman, however, must also coopt lieutenants from throughout the country if his government is to be effective, stable, and durable. In his first year in power Habré has done many of the right things in this regard, pulling together a broad national coalition behind his leadership. For all the theoretical risks inherent in this form of government, and all the imperfections of Habré, it seems better to stick with someone who has made a strong and determined attempt to rebuild the state and will fight for the job than to start looking for a new way to bring irreconcilables together for some hoped-for collective leadership.

PARALLELS

But to identify the most stable outcome does not tell us how to get there. In fact, Chad is at the "lower" end of a range of problems that the West faces in the Third World. Lebanon—at a "higher level" because the stakes are greater and the cold war is closer—is another place where the best alternative seems to be a stronghanded leader who can cope with a combination of internal dissidence and direct foreign attack, where overthrowing a government is easier than governing, where support is needed to protect efforts to reconstruct the state, and where a stable outcome requires not only establishing a government but removing the neighbors' troops. Somalia may be somewhere in between the Chadian and Lebanese cases, and the Central American cases are related, even if not the same.

Three general policy guidelines seem appropriate to such situations, and they can be illustrated by application to Chad in particular. First, Western cooperation is necessary both for giving military protection to the incumbent government and holding back the Libyan invasion. The U.S. doubtless could solve the problem of the Libyan presence with some precise military action, but it would suffer greatly on the larger political stage. The French contributions to the creation of a better outcome are important, particularly because they run the gamut from effective military hardware to manipulable commercial ties. Neither the OAU nor the United Nations can play that kind of role, and their machinery could not be set in motion in time, even should they wish to. At this point, little more need be done mil-

itarily until an incident ruptures the cease-fire. At such time, the 15th parallel should *not* be reaffirmed as a partition line and military means should be used to extend the government's control over its full territory.

Second, diplomatic efforts should be expended to obtain African support for a stable outcome, African legitimization for a process, and an African formula consistent with established continental norms. This not only means gathering as much backing from African countries as possible, but avoiding a patchwork solution that offends no one and solves nothing. The African states have already recognized Habré's government and called for the withdrawal of all foreign troops. These are the essential elements of an African formula for solution, although a reaffirmation of the territorial integrity and national unity of Chad might also be desirable.

Optimally, it is the Africans who should come up with the diplomatic solution. The diplomatic aspect of the Western military force is its availability as a bargaining element to buy off military withdrawal by the other side. This bargain can be made by the French and Americans themselves, but it is better done by Africans, acting as third-party mediator.

Third—and perhaps most difficult—is to involve Libya, for without it, no outcome can be a stable one. However illegitimate its claims over Aozou, however ill-motivated its hoped-for tutelage over Ndjamená, Libya, like any country, has a legitimate interest in seeing a friendly, or at least nonhostile, government next door. Nothing indicates that Habré will be able to be hostile to Libya once the invasion and annexation issues are settled; and indeed Habré has offered negotiations with Libya, though not with Goukouni. Meanwhile, there are ways to bridge the gap. The mutual withdrawal of troops can be offered as an excuse for Libyan withdrawal. The offer to take the Aozou issue to the International Court of Justice is one that may satisfy the Libyan need for recognition of its claim's standing. Once before Libya agreed to go to the Court, in its maritime dispute with Tunisia; here it received a favorable judgment, and its willingness to go to court showed that Qaddafi was not a madman and an outlaw. In the Aozou case the Libyan claim has no legal justification at all, but recourse to the Court gives Libya a way out and has useful side effects for its leader. Perhaps even a good neighbor treaty would complete the package that meets Libyan concerns. In any case, a solution to the conflict will be obtained either by separating Goukouni from Libya or Libya from Goukouni. The latter course seems easier and promises greater stability.

The lessons of the Chadian conflict are straightforward, if not easy to apply. Such conflicts are, in fact, likely to arise more frequently in the future as some Third World states grow stronger while neighboring ones lose the means to hold their polity together. The beginnings of reconstruction are usually to be found in a leader strong and skillful enough to reconstitute a national coalition. To aid such an effort when it is under attack, external assistance must have three arms: a military contribution of the smallest possible size; defensible norms and principles to guide a solution; and creative diplomatic activities to involve all parties to the conflict in a political solution. In short, there must be teeth behind the diplomatic efforts and diplomacy as an alternative to military efforts. 'WV'