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INSTITUT DE HAUTES
ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES
ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT
GRADUATE INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AND
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

France's African Wars, 1974-1981

THESIS

submitted at the Graduate Institute
in fulfilment of the requirements of the
Ph.D. degree in International History

by

Nathaniel Kinsey Powell
(United States)

Thesis N° 1027

Geneva
2013

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Sur le préavis de M. Jussi HANHIMÄKI, professeur à l'Institut et directeur de thèse, de M. Gareth AUSTIN, professeur à l'Institut et membre interne du jury, et de Ms Sue ONSLOW, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, UK et expert extérieur, le directeur de l'Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement autorise l'impression de la présente thèse sans exprimer par là d'opinion sur son contenu.

Genève, le 5 décembre 2013

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RESUME / ABSTRACT
(1700 caractères maximum espaces compris)

Titre de la thèse / Title of thesis : France's African Wars, 1974-1981

This dissertation focuses on French military interventions in Subsaharan Africa during the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. It is principally based upon two case studies: the French interventions in Zaire in 1977 and 1978, and in Chad between 1974 and 1980. In studying these interventions, as well as conducting a broader analysis of French Africa policy, this dissertation makes four arguments. First, strategic considerations, strongly linked to ideological concerns relating to security, prestige, and credibility, were the principle factors behind French decisions to intervene. Second, economic interests only played a secondary role in the reasoning of French decisionmakers. Instead, these interests were indirect and were mostly concerned with protecting the economic bases of client or allied regimes. Third, allied African elites exercised a great deal of influence over French policymaking on the continent, including military interventions. The success of French policy greatly depended upon the agreement and cooperation of local elites. Finally, the outcomes of French interventions demonstrated the ultimate limits of military force as a method for building sustainable political order.

Cette thèse se focalise sur les interventions militaires françaises en Afrique subsaharienne pendant la présidence de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Elle se base principalement sur deux études de cas: les interventions françaises au Zaïre en 1977/1978, et au Tchad entre 1974 et 1980. En étudiant ces interventions, ainsi qu'en faisant une analyse plus globale de la politique africaine française de l'époque, la thèse élabore quatre arguments. Premièrement, les considérations stratégiques, fortement liées aux conceptions idéologiques de sécurité, de prestige et de crédibilité étaient les facteurs principaux derrière les prises de décision françaises pour un engagement militaire dans les pays étudiés. Deuxièmement, les intérêts économiques ne jouaient qu'un rôle secondaire dans les raisonnements des décideurs politiques français. Ces intérêts étaient indirects et se concentraient surtout sur la protection des bases économiques des régimes alliés auxquels la France portait secours. Troisièmement, les élites des pays africains alliés ont eu beaucoup d'influence sur les orientations de la politique française en Afrique, y compris au niveau des interventions militaires. La réussite de la politique française dépendait essentiellement de l'assentiment et la coopération des élites locales. Finalement, les résultats des interventions militaires françaises montraient les limites de l'outil militaire comme méthode pour bâtir des règlements politiques durables.

Contents

Acknowledgements	9
Acronyms	11
Introduction.....	12
Sources and Methodology	17
Giscard.....	26
French Interventionism.....	34
Part I: The “Cuba of the West”? France, the Shaba Crises, and Mobutu’s Zaire.....	44
Chapter I: Introduction and Background	45
Historiography and Sources.....	47
France and Zaire: 1975-1977.....	54
The Origins of the Shaba Crises	66
Chapter II: The First Shaba Crisis.....	76
Between the Wars	95
Chapter III: The Second Invasion of the Gendarmes.....	107
The Kolwezi Killings.....	121
The Cubans	132
Chapter IV: After Kolwezi	149
The Inter-African Force.....	157
African Diplomacy	171
Conclusions: The “Cuba of the West”?.....	176
Part II: Kidnappings, Rebellions, and War: France in Chad, 1974-1981	180
Chapter I: Introduction and Background	181
Historiography and Sources.....	185
France and Chad: 1900-1974.....	192
Chapter II: The Claustre Affair	205
Early Negotiations	206
Galopin’s Mission.....	211
Regime Change in N’Djamena.....	219
The Libyan Backdoor	226
Chapter III: The Empire Strikes Back: French Intervention and Return to War....	232
France Intervenes.....	248
Chapter IV: Habré Returns	260
The “Fundamental Charter”	265

State Collapse	269
Chapter V: Nigeria Enters the Scene	280
Indecision and Stalemate	293
Chapter VI: Imperial Interlude	315
Bokassa and Giscard.....	319
A Massacre and a Commission	323
Operation Barracuda.....	326
Chapter VII: The Road to Withdrawal.....	332
Return to Civil War	341
Conclusions	358
Concluding Remarks	366
Bibliography	374
Annexes	386

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European and African sources on the Shaba Crises. In the same vein, I would like to thank Dr. Romain Esmenjaud for a fruitful exchange of documents on Chad and interesting discussions on France's role there and elsewhere. Thanks also go to Irina du Bois and the *Fondation Pierre du Bois pour l'histoire du temps present* who have also provided helpful moral and financial support.

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Acronyms

2 nd REP	2 nd Régiment étranger de parachutistes
BEAC	Banque des Etats de l'Afrique centrale
BET	Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti region of Northern Chad
CCFAN	Conseil de commandement des Forces armées du Nord
CDR	Conseil démocratique révolutionnaire
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CMIAP	Comité militaire inter-armées provisoire
CSM	Conseil supérieur militaire
DAM	Direction des affaires africaines et malgaches
FAN	Forces armées du Nord
FAO	Forces armées occidentales
FAP	Forces armées populaires
FAT	Forces armées tchadiennes
FAZ	Forces armées zaïroises
FCMGT	Fonds des chargés de mission géographique au Tchad
FLNC	Front de libération nationale du Congo
FNLA	National Front for the Liberation of Angola
Frolinat	Front de Liberation Nationale du Tchad
GECAMINES	Générale des Carrières et des Mines
GUNT	Gouvernement d'Union Nationale de Transition
IAF	Inter-African Force
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MAE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
MPLT	Mouvement populaire pour la libération du Tchad
MRA	Mission de réforme administrative
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PPT	Parti progressiste tchadien
SAM	Surface-to-air missile
SCC	Special Coordinating Committee of the National Security Council
SDECE	Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionnage
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

Introduction

"L'Afrique est le seul continent qui soit encore à la mesure de la France, à la portée de ses moyens. Le seul où elle peut encore, avec 500 hommes, changer le cours de l'Histoire."---

Louis de Guiringaud, French Foreign Minister 1976-1978¹

Controversy has long surrounded France's relationship with Africa. From the first permanently established French presence in Algeria in 1830 to the independences of the majority of its colonies in the 1960s, economic exploitation, administrative development, and violence helped to define this relationship. At the same time, the development of economic and cultural links, especially among the elite in France's colonies, helped to reinforce and nourish an ideological attachment to France's African "pré-carré" within France itself. Certain French politicians, notably Charles de Gaulle, became emotionally attached to parts of the continent due to its important role in providing a base to Free French forces during the Second World War.² These economic, political, cultural, ideological, and emotional ties to "Francophone" Africa on the part of French political leadership persisted after formal decolonization.³

Due to this multitude of links, French interest in its former African colonies has a great deal of complex and sometimes contradictory aspects. In some respects, particularly in the decades following decolonization, one can describe the French presence in its former possessions as a "permanent intervention" in many domains.⁴ However, in certain cases, French leaders have gone a step above this and used the ultimate political tool of the state, military force, to safeguard their perceived interests.

From 1960 to the present, French Presidents have ordered over 50 overt military interventions in Africa, most of which occurred in France's former colonies.⁵ Many of the

¹ Cited in, "Giscard l'Africain," *L'Express*, 15.12.1979.

² Claude Warthier. *Quatre Présidents et l'Afrique: de Gaulle, Pompidou, Giscard d'Estaing, Mitterrand*. Paris, France: Seuil, 1995, p. 162-163.

³ For a self-described "intellectual history" of this way of thinking, see: John Chipman. *French Power in Africa*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1989. For a solid and well-researched overview of the history of Francophone Africa, see: Patrick Manning. *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, 1880-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

⁴ Robin Luckham. "French Militarism in Africa." *Review of African Political Economy*, No.24, (May-Aug., 1982), p. 56.

⁵ For an approximate list, see Appendix A in Christopher Griffin. *French Grand Strategy in Africa in the Fifth Republic*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2009, pp. 394-398.

most recent have occurred within the context of international peacekeeping operations or in coordination with other multilateral efforts. While the first decade of the independences saw relatively little French military activity, the 1970s saw a marked uptick in French interventionism. As détente faltered later in the decade, and the collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire revived the hopes of liberation movements in Southern Africa, French policymakers increasingly saw their position in Africa under threat. This view, shared by France's "moderate" francophone African allies, contributed to a forceful effort to contain perceived instability menacing their former empire.

Nevertheless, the evolution of regional and global politics did not draw French interest into the continent, as ties there already ran deep. France's past history in Africa meant that many of its policymakers had long experiences there either as colonial officials, soldiers, or in other capacities. The attachments these men (nearly always men) felt to various countries on the continent, as well as their personal relationships with African elites, helped to form the affective foundations of their collective view that France had a special responsibility to its former colonies on the continent. This feeling of responsibility, however, led to "une certaine idée de l'Afrique" which consisted of colonial-type mindsets concerning France's special duty. This shaped thinking about concepts such as "security" and "stability" in a way which privileged authoritarian forms of rule as a backstop against chaos. In the process, French policy may have contributed to the very processes of political and social decomposition which France's policymakers had hoped to prevent.

This study focuses on the renewed level of French military intervention in Africa undertaken during the *septennat* (the seven year presidential term) of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing from 1974 to 1981. Giscard's presidency saw a substantial increase in the frequency of French military and political interventionism in relation to the previous decade and a half of the Fifth Republic. By "intervention," I simply mean the use of diplomatic and political initiatives coupled with military force by France to affect the internal politics of the targeted states.⁶ Particularly I will examine the two countries where France introduced significant levels of ground troops and other forms of military aid in support of its aims, Zaire and Chad.

I have multiple reasons for wanting to focus on this period. First, while historians have begun to explore Franco-African relations during De Gaulle and Pompidou's presidencies, Giscard's administration has not received nearly as much recent attention.⁷ Second, the current

⁶ For an overview of the concept of "intervention" during this time period, see S.N. McFarlane. "Intervention and Security in Africa." *International Affairs*, Vol.60, No.1, Winter 1983-1984, p. 53.

⁷ See below.

opening of archives has made it much easier to access information relating to the diplomacy and decision-making behind these interventions. Third, Giscard's presidency saw the fall of the Portuguese colonial empire, the Ethiopian revolution, and the concurrent massive increase in Soviet and Cuban intervention on the African continent. At the same time, France faced Libyan expansion into its sphere of interest in Chad. The Rhodesian and Namibian conflicts, along with the implementation of "Total Strategy" in South Africa also challenged traditional French Africa policy as liberation movements gained international legitimacy and threatened France's relationships with its African clients. During this critical period in contemporary African history, France had more troops on the continent than any other external power except Cuba.⁸ However, few historians have examined this presence in any depth.⁹ Study of the French experience will help to add a layer of complexity to Cold War-inspired analyses and interpretations of interventionism and conflict in Africa during this time.

Finally, although these interventions took place more than three decades ago, their consequences can be felt today. Through rapid action, France twice saved the regime of Zairian dictator Mobutu Sese Seko from possible overthrow. He remained in power until finally driven out of Zaire in 1997 during a bloody conflict that has since cost the lives of millions of people.¹⁰ In Chad, France's interventions contributed to state collapse and political fragmentation. Its increasingly ineffective efforts at influencing the country's politics in line with its own interests contributed to reconfigured power balances and prolonged the civil war. The aftermath of Chad's conflicts has molded Chadian and regional politics ever since.¹¹

This dissertation focuses primarily upon the diplomatic and security-driven aspects of France's African policy during this timeframe. This does not represent an attempt to downplay other aspects of Franco-African relations in the economic and cultural spheres. Indeed, the debates surrounding the intimate relationships between French and African elites, their impact on policymaking, corruption, and human rights abuses are pertinent to the central questions addressed here. The case studies presented in the dissertation will also address some of these

⁸ Pierre Lellouche and Dominique Moisi. "French Policy in Africa: A Lonely Battle against Destabilization." *International Security*, 3:1 (Spring, 1979), p. 108

⁹ The role of the Cubans and the Soviets in Africa during this time period is best described in Piero Gleijeses *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, and *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991*. 2013. Vladimir Shubin. *Southern Africa: The Hot Cold War*. Pluto Pr, 2008, and Odd Arne Westad. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

¹⁰ See particularly Gérard Prunier. *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

¹¹ For instance, see Alexander De Waal. *War in Darfur and the Search for Peace*. [Cambridge, MA]: Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University, 2007.

influences and their importance. However, a lack of reliable sources in much of this domain makes it very difficult to address these questions in a way that steers clear of polemic. Without access to much of the personal correspondence of Giscard, his immediate advisors, and their African interlocutors it becomes difficult to both accurately map personal connections and to analyze the influence these relationships had on particular decisions except in some specific and important cases.

Additionally, this dissertation will skirt around questions relating to the role of domestic politics on France's African interventions. First, while certainly not completely absent, the French executive branch faces significantly less institutional constraints in foreign policymaking than the American equivalent. This was even truer in the 1970s. A French version of the Tunney and Clark Amendments which curtailed the Ford Administration from meddling in the Angolan Civil War would have been virtually unthinkable. In fact, French policymakers were often incredulous at the kinds of legislative constraints on spending and action faced by their American counterparts. Second, and more importantly, the available sources make it difficult to effectively evaluate the influence of domestic politics on Giscard's decision-making calculus. The Foreign and Cooperation Ministry records simply do not address these kinds of questions, as it was not the job of diplomats or ministry officials to work on domestic issues.

Though this study focuses on French military interventions, it is not a military history. It will only address the operational details of the interventions in outline, except where necessity requires a more detailed examination. Instead, I intend to focus on the different, sometimes contradictory interests and levels of decision-making and implementation of French interventionist policies. Thus, my central research question will be: What principal factors led to a forward and interventionist African policy during Giscard's presidency?

In this vein I want to address several issue areas:

- A) What kind of African worldview informed Giscard, his advisors, and other French policymakers?
- B) How did these groups interact in their formulation of African policy, specifically with respect to France's military interventions?
- C) How essential was African "collaboration" to France's overall project?
- D) To what extent did Cold War "East-West" logic affect French decision-making?

This study's principal contribution to existing literature is as a first attempt by an historian to examine France's military activism of the 1970s in Africa through extensive use of primary

sources. To address these questions, this dissertation will examine two case studies of French military and diplomatic engagement in conflicts on the continent. The first will examine the growing role of France in Zaire from 1975 to 1979. The second will examine French involvement in Chad and, to a lesser extent the Central African Republic/Empire from 1974 to 1981.

French policymakers saw Zaire as a “frontline state” in their efforts to contain apparent Soviet and Cuban advances in Africa. As Western powers and their African allies had failed in their efforts to prevent an MPLA victory in Angola’s first post-colonial civil war, Mobutu managed to skillfully present himself as one of the most important pillars of stability and Western interests on the continent. By making himself indispensable to his multitude of interlocutors, Mobutu could extract enormous amounts of assistance for his regime, particularly from France. Despite later American reticence during the Carter administration, Mobutu acquired a French security umbrella, ensuring that his disastrous economic policies could continue unchecked. This culminated during and after the 1977 and 1978 Shaba invasions, in which supposedly Cuban and Soviet-backed rebels invaded Zairian territory and seriously threatened to unseat Mobutu. Both interventions were repelled with direct and indirect French military interventions. These were followed by French efforts to mobilize a large international African coalition to secure the Zairian border in what became the first African peacekeeping force.

In Chad, French involvement long pre-dated Giscard’s presidency. As a former French colony the character of its state, as well as the political and economic imbalances in the country had origins in French colonial policy. Chad was deeply dependent upon France for economic aid, market access, and military assistance. French aid also played a crucial role in helping the dictatorship of François Tombalbaye crush parts of a major rebellion from 1969-1972. However, divisions and political fragmentation grew even worse during this time. Giscard’s tenure saw a major military intervention aimed at protecting the Chadian regime from defeat. Though militarily successful, the French operation failed to achieve its political goals as the Chadian state collapsed in early 1979. As the year progressed, the French increasingly lost the ability to influence the conflict while suspicions about their presence undermined their credibility as good-faith mediators. Their ultimate incapacity led to a full French military and administrative retreat from the country amidst a bloody war of attrition in early 1980. This fighting only ended late in the year as a major Libyan invasion force entered the country, thus dealing a considerable blow to French foreign policy objectives.

From the evidence of these case studies and a broader evaluation of French African policy, this dissertation makes several observations. First, strategic considerations, strongly grounded in ideologically framed concepts of security, prestige, and credibility constituted the main factors behind French interventionist policies during Giscard's presidency. These primarily revolved around the aim of securing stable states and regimes, predicated on the fear that instability in one country would quickly spread to others. In some cases strong anti-communist sentiments linked to the Cold War reinforced this worldview and amplified geopolitical fears.

Secondly, France's African interventions were not principally aimed at protecting French investments and economic interests. For the timeframe under discussion, these considerations remained in the background and only played secondary and indirect roles in French decision-making. Usually this was limited to the extent to which rebellions and invasions threatened the economic bases of client regimes.

Third, African political elites exerted substantial influence on French policymaking. By playing on French officials' security anxieties, some of which they certainly shared, African leaders often played pivotal roles in shaping French thinking. Mobutu especially excelled at this game.

Finally, the ultimate ability of France to successfully influence the politics of its former colonies and target states was limited. Despite the material and technological superiority of French military forces, these were often insufficient to achieve political outcomes favorable to French interests. Even when apparently successful, such as in Zaire or in the Central African Republic, French action helped to reinforce longer-term political and economic imbalances rather than build the foundations for sustainable peace and economic development.

Sources and Methodology

Writing about any aspect of Franco-African relations poses significant challenges for the historian. The political sensitivity of these relations, particularly in the domain of security policy at first seems intimidating. This may help to explain why the historical literature on the subject is so sparse. Indeed, apart from an exceptional study on France's bloody war in Cameroon in the years preceding and following its independence, there exists no substantive historical study based on primary sources of France's post-colonial military interventions.¹²

¹² Thomas Deltombe, Jacob Tatsitsa, and Manuel Domergue. *Kamerun!: une guerre cachée aux origines de la Françafrique (1948-1971)*. Paris: La Découverte, 2011. France's role in Rwanda is something of an exception to

Partly this results from the state of French archival material. Only recently have records from the 1970s and early 1980s become available to researchers. However the broader question of Franco-African relations has provoked significant debate within French civil society.

The existence of deep linkages between French and African politicians and the continuation of French interventionist policies long after decolonization led French activists to found *Survie-France* in 1984.¹³ *Survie's* founders aimed at ending the perceived unequal relationships derived from “la françafrique” and its nefarious effects on various African societies and aspects of economic development. They have since become the foremost organization dedicated to this particular question. *Survie* became better known in the mid-1990s with the writings of François-Xavier Verschave. Verschave helped to re-coin the term “françafrique,” originally formulated by Ivoirian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny as a positive expression of Franco-African solidarity. Verschave on the other hand, described it in the following terms:

La Françafrique, c'est comme un iceberg. Vous avez la face du dessus, la partie émergée de l'iceberg : la France meilleure amie de l'Afrique, patrie des droits de l'homme, etc. Et puis ensuite, vous avez 90% de la relation qui est immergée : l'ensemble des mécanismes de maintien de la domination française en Afrique avec des alliés africains.¹⁴

Verschave published two major books on the subject, *La Françafrique: le plus long scandale de la République* in 1998,¹⁵ and *Noir Silence: Qui arrêtera la Françafrique?* in 2000.¹⁶ The first volume attracted the ire Charles Pasqua, former Interior Minister under the governments of Jacques Chirac and Eduard Balladur. Verschave accused Pasqua of playing an important role in the corrupt networks linking French and African politicians. Pasqua sued *Survie* for defamation and the organization was forced to pay a symbolic 1 franc in compensation. Verschave's second book provoked more of a firestorm when three African presidents, Omar Bongo of Gabon, Denis Sassou-Nguesso of Congo, and Idriss Déby of Chad sued *Survie* for “offense aux chefs d'Etat étranger.” Their case was thrown out in the courts. For Verschave and *Survie*, however the high-profile nature of these court battles seemed to legitimize their arguments.¹⁷

this rule, and has been the object of numerous studies by journalists and some historians. However, the vast majority of official records remain classified.

¹³ <http://survie.org/qui-sommes-nous/presentation/article/survie-en-quelques-dates> (accessed on 19.09.2012).

¹⁴ Cited at <http://survie.org/francafrique/?lang=fr> (accessed on 19.09.2012).

¹⁵ François-Xavier Verschave. *La Françafrique: Le plus long scandale de la République*. Paris: Stock, 1998.

¹⁶ François-Xavier Verschave. *Noir silence: Qui arrêtera la Françafrique ?* Paris: Arènes, 2000.

¹⁷ Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 33-36.

Although Verschave died in 2005, *Survie* and sister organizations, particularly *Oxfam-France* have continued to publish, lobby, and raise awareness over the excesses inherent in the Franco-African relationship. Issues of particular concern include, “l’immigration, le soutien de la France aux dictatures, la responsabilité des entreprises françaises en Afrique, le financement du développement, les nouveaux espaces de coopération France-Afrique, etc.”¹⁸

Though important, Verschave’s work and that of *Survie* often suffers from a lack of academic rigor and sufficient documentation. While it has framed the debate on “la françafrique,” only in the past decade have historians begun to examine the origins and nature of this post-colonial relationship.¹⁹ In part this has been made possible by the opening of large parts of the “Fonds Foccart,” which contain the records for the *Secrétariat général des Affaires africaines et malgaches* and its director, Jacques Foccart. Foccart was the chief African affairs advisor to both Presidents Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou from 1958 until Giscard’s election in 1974. Most high-level policymaking concerning African politics and Franco-African relations passed through his office. While the availability of much of the Fonds Foccart provides a rare opportunity for researchers to delve into the depths of French Africa policy in the years following decolonization, the second half of the 1970s remain relatively unexplored.²⁰

Unfortunately, given the sensitivity of African affairs in France, the relevant materials from French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s presidential papers are still largely closed to researchers. This includes the records of his chief African affairs advisors René Journiac and Martin Kirsch.²¹ However, the wealth of material available in both the Foreign and Cooperation Ministry archives, as well records from other countries, is ample enough to begin a thorough investigation of French policy during this time period. As little research has yet fully exploited these sources, this dissertation attempts to fill a gap in contemporary French and African historiography.

Although this study will demonstrate the ultimate suitability of these sources, questions remain. For instance, some commentators and historians have questioned the importance of

¹⁸ Oxfam-France, Invitation Presse, “Sommet citoyen France-Afrique: Colloque international à Paris les 12 et 13 février,” 06.02.2007, found at http://www.oxfamfrance.org/IMG/pdf/cp_sfa2007-2.pdf, (accessed on 19.09.2012).

¹⁹ See particularly Pierre-Michel Durand. *L’Afrique et les relations franco-américaines des années soixante: Aux origines de l’obsession américaine*. Paris, France : l’Harmattan, 2007, Guia Migani. *La France et l’Afrique subsaharienne, 1957-1963: histoire d’une décolonisation entre idéaux eurafricains et politique de puissance*. Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2008, and Frédéric Turpin. *De Gaulle, Pompidou et l’Afrique, 1958-1974 décoloniser et coopérer*. Paris: les Indes savantes, 2010.

²⁰ For a partial exception, see Jean-Pierre Bat. *Le syndrome Foccart: la politique française en Afrique, de 1959 à nos jours*. [Paris]: Gallimard, 2012.

²¹ See: Archives nationales (France), Pascal Geneste, Violaine Chatelain, and Gabrielle Vitali. *Archives de la présidence de la République Valéry Giscard d’Estaing: 1974-1981*. Paris: Archives nationales, 2007.

the Foreign Ministry's role in policymaking during this time. Political scientist Samy Cohen remarks that "La principale victime de la V^e République est sans conteste le ministre des Affaires étrangères."²² Diplomatic historian Marice Vaïsse adds that Giscard conducted "une diplomatie personnelle, faites d'initiatives souvent prises et menées en secret, à la mesure de la méfiance qu'il nourrit pour le Quai d'Orsay [the Foreign Ministry]."²³ The role of the French diplomatic corps then, poses an interesting question. With Giscard and his advisors conducting much of high-level French diplomacy, combined with overlapping and sometimes redundant ministerial responsibilities sidelining the Foreign Ministry, did the Quai play an important role in French policymaking? If not, can the archives of the Foreign Ministry provide much help in understanding the broader issues of French policy in Africa? One finds little more than hints of certain spicy details in the diplomatic archives, such as the use of mercenaries, covert operations, aid to insurgent groups, the nature and extent of personal networks, and backdoor business relationships. These represent some of the issues at the heart of current controversies surrounding "la françafrique."

Fortunately, evidence from the archives and a number of secondary sources offer a great deal of nuance to this picture. For instance, reports and analyses from embassies provided much of the information that Giscard and his advisors relied upon in evaluating the political situation in places like Chad and Zaire, and significantly contributed towards shaping ongoing negotiations.²⁴ Despite his apparent disdain for the Quai d'Orsay itself, Giscard did, in fact, work to reinforce the stature and powers of French Ambassadors. This culminated in a 1979 decree defining the responsibilities of ambassadors as:

[...] le dépositaire de l'autorité de l'Etat dans le pays où il est accrédité; il est chargé, sous l'autorité du ministre des Affaires étrangères, de la mise en œuvre de la politique extérieure de la France; il représente le président de la République, le gouvernement, et chacun de ses ministres; il informe le gouvernement, négocie en son nom, assure la protection des intérêts de l'Etat et celle des ressortissants français."²⁵

In fact, as discussed below, the diplomatic apparatus and the bureaucracy of the Foreign Ministry also played vital roles in Giscard's appreciation of any given situation. The Quai d'Orsay, in many respects, represented a major filter of information, interpretation, and

²²Samy Cohen. *La monarchie nucléaire: les coulisses de la politique étrangère sous la Ve République*. [Paris]: Hachette, 1986 p. 33.

²³ Maurice Vaïsse. *La puissance ou l'influence ? La France dans le monde depuis 1958*. Paris: Fayard, 2009 p. 23

²⁴ Samy Cohen. "La politique extérieure de la France de 1974 à 1981: Un seul homme ? Un homme seul ?" in Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.). *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*. Paris, France: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 28.

²⁵ Quoted in Vaïsse, *La puissance ou l'influence*, 59.

analysis for Giscard's decision-making.²⁶ High-level civil servants in both the Quai and in the Cooperation Ministry also served as important negotiators in French mediation efforts during the Chadian conflict. They also played vital roles in rallying regional diplomatic support for French initiatives. As illustrated below, the Shaba crises provide a good demonstration of how this process worked.

Much of the material found in the archives, both the Embassy files in Nantes, and the central files in La Courneuve, seconds this assessment. It suggests that French diplomats on the ground, especially ambassadors, were important actors in shaping Africa policy. This role was particularly important in Zaire. The French Ambassador, André Ross, and the head of the French military assistance program, Colonel Yves Gras, were crucial in persuading Giscard to intervene, managing the interventions, and influencing the French policy debate on the country.²⁷ Not only do the Foreign Ministry archives contain the correspondence and reports that informed the policy debate on Zaire, they also contain a number of important records from other concerned ministries and departments. For instance, they include intelligence assessments and analyses from the Defense Ministry, notes from the Cooperation and Finance Ministries, as well as a number of important records from the Presidency. From this material, one can paint a picture of the broader policymaking process, including general sense of decision-making at the top.

In Chad, Quai officials and ambassadors played essential roles in attempting to manage regional diplomatic efforts, as well as negotiations with different rebel factions. The Quai's records confirm the important role played by ambassadors and higher-level ministry officials as both representatives and executors of French authority. Combined with records from the Cooperation Ministry, one can thus glean a fairly comprehensive view of the nature and direction of French policymaking.

Material from the Cooperation Ministry found at Fontainebleau go far in filling gaps left elsewhere. These records are those of the rather oddly-named "chargé de mission géographique." This position, though rarely referenced in other records, had a coordinating role for the country within the Cooperation Ministry. According to the records guide for the material, this official served as a:

²⁶ Cohen, *La monarchie nucléaire*, 178.

²⁷ Intervention of Yves Gras in Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.). *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*. Paris, France : Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 321.

[...] homme-orchestre pour tout ce qui concerne le pays dont il est chargé. Ceci implique qu'il n'ignore rien: de fait, il reçoit toute la documentation le concernant et s'y rend assez souvent en mission [...] il est l'interlocuteur à Paris de la mission de coopération dans le pays concerné, l'intermédiaire entre elle et les services du ministère.²⁸

Practically, this translates into a very diverse collection of reports, telegrams, analyses, letters, meeting minutes, and the like from a number of high-level personalities and concerned ministries, all of which transited through the chargé's office. Additionally, several major negotiations took place through Cooperation Ministry officials (notably during the Claustre Affair), and the Ministry oversaw French military assistance. Consequently, these records prove illuminating on a number of points and help to clarify certain policy decisions and events. Finally, both ministries' archives also document relations between each other and with other ministries. Many of these officials did not always see eye to eye, and the resulting policy debates open fruitful insights into the mechanisms of policy formulation.

In addition to French records, a number of other archives help to fill gaps and reveal other sides of French diplomacy. This is particularly the case for Zaire where the crisis engendered by the Shaba invasions quickly became internationalized. Material from the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta and the CIA database in College Park, provide a broader view of these crises and French intervention. The US played an important logistical role in supporting French and African contingents in Shaba. They also provided some military aid to Mobutu, and financial support for the Inter-African Force which replaced French and Belgian troops in the immediate aftermath of the second Shaba crisis. These records, mostly from Carter's National Security Council, furnish important information on high-level negotiations, as well as an outside perspective on French policy in Zaire.

Other sources complement this material. Documents from the archives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provide an interesting perspective on international attempts to pressure Mobutu into making significant economic and political reforms. The French, Belgian, and American governments used the IMF in order to protect their political and economic interests in the country. They also give an interesting insight into the regime's economic difficulties, and the massive corruption which pervaded the Zairian state. Furthermore, they constitute supplementary evidence of Mobutu's astonishing ability to manipulate donors and outside powers in order to achieve his own ends.

Some material, also fragmentary, from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), contributes a small human dimension to the story. The

²⁸MC Archives Fontainebleau, Versement 840224, Fonds des chargés de mission géographique au Tchad, Versement (from now on FCMGT), Analyse des articles, date : 11.04.1984, p.2.

Shaba conflicts and regime repression resulted in substantial population displacements as people fled their homes in the face of dreadful fighting. The UNHCR played a limited role in aiding Zairian refugees in Angola, and their repatriation to Zaire after the conflict. The observations and reports made by some of their officials provide a glimpse of the amplitude of the problem.

Small amounts of material from the Rwandan Foreign Ministry archives contribute to understanding the wider African dimension of the Shaba crises and their aftermath. Rwanda hosted the 1979 Franco-African summit which brought together heads of state and governments across Francophone Africa. The Rwandans were thus privileged observers of French efforts to mobilize African allies. Although fragmentary and incomplete, these documents help paint a picture of the way that African policymaking elites perceived the issue of collective security at the time, and how they attempted to deal with it. Furthermore, these records also illuminate broader aspects of French African policy, particularly French efforts to expand the “*pré-carré*” to countries outside their “traditional” sphere of influence.

In addition to these records, some material from the personal papers of Nigerian General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua, Vice-President of the Nigerian military government until October 1979, sheds some interesting light on the Nigerian role in Chadian peace negotiations. Yar’Adua was in charge of mediating between various Chadian factions during major negotiations in Kano and Lagos in 1979. His papers, found at the Shehu Musa Yar’Adua Centre in Abuja, provide useful insights into the way that Nigeria and other African states worked to sideline France from the Chadian scene.

Other primary sources, principally memoirs of participants in the events of this period also contribute in important ways. First and foremost, the first two volumes of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s memoirs, *Le Pouvoir et la Vie* serves as an important reference.²⁹ Although this dissertation has no pretention to any kind of psychoanalytic rigor, Giscard’s memoirs contain many fascinating gaps or elisions that give some insight into areas of particular sensibility. Furthermore, Giscard’s both romantic and often essentialist portrayals of Africa as a whole furnish interesting clues as to his worldview. Unfortunately, no one from Giscard’s inner circle has written memoirs pertaining to French African policy. Luckily, as the case studies will illustrate, numerous other officials and eyewitnesses have written accounts of their experiences in Zaire and Chad. The case studies on those countries will discuss their work.

²⁹ Valéry Giscard d’Estaing. *Le Pouvoir et la Vie*. Paris : Le Livre de Poche, 1988.

Unfortunately, I was unable to access many pertinent Zairian and Chadian official records from this period. Although this does leave an important gap in the narrative, this dissertation focuses upon French policymaking, which largely depended upon the experiences, worldviews, and perceptions that French policymakers and diplomats accumulated during this time. Thus, most of the narrative and subsequent analysis is necessarily based upon French records. I do this in full knowledge of the potential pitfalls of such an approach, particularly the dangers of unconsciously appropriating concepts, perceptions, and language from the subjects under study. That said, I do hope that the combination of over three decades of distance, other records, and acknowledgement of the often blinkered views of French officials, allows me to assign a good deal of agency to France's interlocutors.

Otherwise, there is no substantial and comprehensive study of either French interventionism or French Africa policy during Giscard's presidency.³⁰ Instead, the existing literature covers various aspects of Franco-African relations. Despite the limited material available, two broad themes seem to emerge in discussions of French security policy on the continent.

On one hand, several authors identify a sharp break in France's previous, Gaullist, African policies, and Giscard's administration. Principally, these authors see these differences as threefold. First, Giscard aimed to expand French influence beyond the traditional sphere of the former colonies into Anglophone African countries as well as Belgium and Portugal's former possessions.³¹ The annual Franco-African summits increasingly also included African leaders from countries outside of France's traditional sphere of influence.³² Secondly, France resorted to military intervention to achieve its policy aims at a much higher frequency than in the past. Between 1964 and 1974, France only embarked upon two major overt military interventions, albeit in Chad this intervention had a somewhat continuous character.³³ However, during Giscard's presidency, France overtly intervened in at least four different countries, sometimes multiple times.³⁴ This does not count the numerous covert interventions. Although these interventions occurred in a changed African political climate, Giscard seemed much less reticent about exercising force than his predecessors.

³⁰ For a very brief treatment, see Daniel Bach. "La France en Afrique subsaharienne: contraintes historiques et nouveaux espaces économiques," in Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed). *La Politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985.

³¹ Louis de Guiringaud. "La politique africaine de la France" *Politique étrangère*, 47:2, 1982, p. 445

³² Bach, "La France en Afrique," 300.

³³ Christopher Griffin. "French Military Interventions in Africa: Realism vs. Ideology in French Defense Policy and Grand Strategy," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association 48th Annual Convention, Hilton Chicago, CHICAGO, IL, USA, Feb 28, 2007, p. 36.

³⁴ Ibid.

Third, both French official discourse as well as policymaking took the East-West Cold War logic much more seriously than in the past. The massive and influential Cuban and Soviet presence in Ethiopia and Angola, apparently threatening French interests in her former colony of Djibouti (independent in 1977), and new francophone ally Zaire, dominated thinking in French security circles.³⁵ The public re-emergence of Cold War rhetoric among high-level French policymakers led many critics in France on both the Right and the Left to criticize Giscard for turning France into “NATO’s policeman,” or the “Cuba of the West.”³⁶ This criticism became widespread internationally in Africa as French interventionism increased in frequency.³⁷

Another strand of the existing literature tends to highlight the continuities rather than differences with past French African policy. Although French interventionism increased, this had more to do with changing political circumstances on the African continent rather than a real change in French priorities. The goals of the interventions aimed at shoring up France’s traditional *pré carré* and sphere of influence delineated by Giscard’s predecessors against external threats.³⁸ Through this lens, even French attempts at expanding influence to other African countries fits within de Gaulle’s aims of *rayonnement*. Pierre Lellouche and Dominique Moisi conclude that France did not become a pawn of NATO and the West, but rather the introduction of Soviet forces in Africa created a situation in which French interests simply happened to coincide with those of the Western alliance.³⁹

Hence, the Gaullist push for distance between the two superpowers had less meaning in the new context of the late 1970s. Even Giscard’s rhetoric followed many of the same patterns as the Gaullists. Giscard reprised the Gaullist theme of the importance of “true” African independence.⁴⁰ True to Gaullist tradition, this independence implied a “non-alignment” of a limited variety. In this view, African states could only achieve independence from the two superpowers through reliance upon France.⁴¹

These two views on Giscardian African policy are not irreconcilable. They depend more upon the perspective of the analyst than on any broader criteria. Nevertheless, the continuity versus change theme pervades much of the literature. Much of this, however, dates

³⁵ Luckham, “French Militarism,” in Africa,” 68.

³⁶ Ibid. 74.

³⁷ Vaïsse, *La puissance ou l’influence*, 321.

³⁸ Lellouche and Moisi, “French Policy in Africa,” 133.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Jean-Luc Dagut, “L’Afrique, la France et le monde dans le discours giscardien,” *Politique Africaine*, n°5, Mars 1982, p. 21.

⁴¹ Ibid.

from either the time of Giscard's presidency or shortly thereafter. While useful in many respects, none of these writings benefit from a temporal distance from these events, nor from pertinent archival material. Due to the general paucity of research on French military interventionism during this time, I will integrate the rest of the literature review into the case studies that follow.

Giscard

On May 19 1974, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing became the third President of the French Fifth Republic. His electoral victory over François Mitterrand followed the untimely death of President Georges Pompidou from a rare blood cancer on April 2 of that year. Giscard led a center-right coalition of non-Gaullist political parties, defeating Jacques Chaban-Delmas, one of Pompidou's former Prime Ministers and leader of the Gaullist faction in the first round of the election on May 5. At 48 years of age, Giscard's youth helped him to project a more modern image of leadership which appealed to much of the electorate. In fact he had had a long experience in government, serving as Finance minister under de Gaulle from 1962-1966, and again from 1969 until taking office as President in 1974.⁴²

When he took office Giscard was no stranger to African affairs. His family had deep roots in the French colonial and post-colonial economy. His grandfather and father were major shareholders in the *Compagnie forestière de Sangha-Oubangui*, one of the infamous colonial concessionary firms operating out of what is now the Central African Republic.⁴³ His father also held important shares and sat on the boards of a number of companies with financial and banking interests in various parts of the French colonial empire. Giscard's cousin, François Giscard d'Estaing became President of the *Banque centrale des Etats de l'Afrique équatoriale et du Cameroun* in 1959. Ten years later he became an economic advisor to Chadian President François Tombalbaye, and soon thereafter he became director of the *Banque française du commerce extérieur* (BFCE), which played a major role in financing African imports.⁴⁴ Another cousin, Philippe Giscard d'Estaing, headed the French telecommunications giant, Thomson-CSF, which had substantial ambitions for expansion in Africa, particularly in Zaire.⁴⁵

⁴² For Giscard's life and presidency, see: Jean Bothorel. *Un si jeune Président*. Paris: B. Grasset, 1995. For a brief survey of French politics during this time, see: Jean-Jacques Becker. *Histoire politique de la France depuis 1945*. Paris: Colin, 2003, pp. 164-184.

⁴³ Geraldine Faes and Stephen Smith. *Bokassa 1^{er}, un empereur français*. Paris, France: Calmann-Lévy, 2000, p. 16. For a history of concessionary companies in French Equatorial Africa, see: Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch. *Le Congo au temps des grandes compagnies concessionnaires, 1898-1930*. Paris: Mouton, 1972.

⁴⁴ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 16.

⁴⁵ See pages 59-60 below.

Giscard himself had frequently travelled to Africa as Finance Minister. He had also, on several occasions taken vacations on the continent, principally for big game hunting in the Central African Republic.⁴⁶ His memoirs serve as an interesting window into his views on Africa and France's relationship with the continent. He felt that what he perceived as the positive legacies of colonialism needed to be preserved. Although he had not played any particular role during the Algerian war, Algerian independence left a bitter taste for Giscard. While he had agreed with de Gaulle's eventual decision to end the war, he later noted that, "je ne m'étais pas résigné, au fond de moi, au départ de la France d'Algérie."⁴⁷ Perhaps due to his family connections to the former empire, Giscard saw colonialism, at least the French variety, as a positive development in African history. He wrote about it in glowing terms, characterizing French colonization as:

Une colonisation qui n'a laissé derrière elle ni rancœur, ni antagonisme, qui s'est accompagnée d'une exploitation économique très réduite, et qui a permis la rencontre entre deux civilisations qui se sentaient à la fois totalement différentes, curieuses de se découvrir l'une l'autre, et humainement compatibles.⁴⁸

On many occasions, he professed to love Africa and Africans. In his memoirs, he declared, "J'aime l'Afrique. Les Africains, je crois, le savent."⁴⁹ As the pages that follow may indicate, some apparently did not.

Today, many of Giscard's views could be interpreted as reflecting an overly romanticized and paternalistic view of Africans and of France's role on the continent. His accounts of his visits are filled with picturesque descriptions. For instance, on March 5 and 6 1975, Giscard made his first official visit to Africa, visiting the Central African Republic on the occasion of the annual Franco-African Summit. He later wrote of his fascination with the public displays of welcome put on by Bokassa's regime. He wrote excitedly about the dancing crowds which, "respiraient, transpiraient l'authenticité africaine." He recalled that he particularly appreciated the groups of pygmies brought to the celebration, writing that, "il y avait longtemps que je rêvais de voir des Pygmées."⁵⁰

Reductionist perspectives were not limited to Giscard. His closest advisor on African affairs and Giscard's personal representative and envoy to many African leaders, René Journiac shared some of these views. For instance, in early 1976 as both France and the United States reassessed their approaches to the Angolan Civil War, Journiac told his American interlocutors

⁴⁶ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 603-606.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 361.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 344.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 587.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 610.

that it was important to understand that “black Africans react emotionally, and base their policy on passions.”⁵¹ Similar views on “Bantu diplomacy” or “African disorder” pervade French correspondence.⁵²

Journiac would become a major player throughout most of Giscard’s *septennat* regarding Africa policy. When Giscard became President, one of his first acts was to dissolve the *Secrétariat général des Affaires africaines et malgaches* and to remove its director, Jacques Foccart. Foccart’s *Secrétariat* and its large staff had served as the nucleus of Franco-African relations during the presidencies of de Gaulle and Pompidou. With Foccart out of the way, he nominated Journiac, Foccart’s former lieutenant, as a “conseiller technique pour les affaires africaines et malgaches.” Instead of the large *Secrétariat*, Journiac no longer had a bureaucracy behind him, but rather two assistants.⁵³ In addition to an apparent break with past practice, this change in structure also fitted closely with Giscard’s penchant for a more personal involvement in foreign relations. The dissolution of the *Secrétariat* also made some sense given the number of officials, institutions, and ministries with overlapping responsibilities in African affairs. While removing the *Secrétariat* and Foccart along with it did remove an object of interdepartmental jealousy, its most important significance was symbolic.

Foccart himself represented in the eyes of many the very manifestation of the Franco-African special relationship which played such an important role in Gaullist foreign policy. By the end of de Gaulle’s presidency, the *Secrétariat* had begun to come under attack by officials within the Quai d’Orsay who saw its role, as well as the role of the Cooperation Ministry, as interfering with the proper competencies of the Foreign Ministry. Indeed, de Gaulle had created the Cooperation Ministry in early 1961 as way of institutionalizing the special relationship between France and its former African colonies.⁵⁴ Then-Prime Minister Michel Debré described its role as aiming to, “d’éviter de donner à nos États [africains] le sentiment qu’ils ne sont pas traités comme les autres États étrangers.”⁵⁵ While the Cooperation Ministry dealt with economic and military assistance to France’s former colonies, the Quai d’Orsay was meant to handle more traditional “political” responsibilities.

⁵¹ NARA Access to Archival Databases (AAD), <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-list.jsp?cat=WR43>, Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-1976. Telegram from US Embassy Paris to Washington, Subject : Angola, 05.01.1976, p. 4. Document number: 1976PARIS00150.

⁵² See FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, Cooperation Ministry Note, «A/S: Une solution pour le Tchad?» 09.11.1979, p. 3, and MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram 282-85 from Ross to Paris, “Mercenaires en provenance de l’Angola,” 12.03.1977, p. 1-2.

⁵³ Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 360 and 774n.

⁵⁴ Turpin, *De Gaulle, Pompidou, et l’Afrique*, 57.

⁵⁵ Cited in Ibid. 58.

However Foccart's organization dealt with both domains at the same time. His office served in a coordinating role, but also in many respects superseded the mandate of the two ministries. Foccart's close relationship with both de Gaulle and numerous African leaders meant that he in fact held the reins of policymaking on African affairs. This administrative confusion is best exemplified in a 1965 note written by then-Prime Minister Georges Pompidou to Maurice Delauney, the new French Ambassador to Gabon. Pompidou warned Delauney that:

[...] vous aurez plusieurs "patrons" ... D'abord le Général [de Gaulle] qui, comme vous le savez s'intéresse de très près à l'Afrique; M. Foccart, bien entendu, le ministère des Affaires étrangères et son secrétaire d'Etat, le ministère de la Coopération avec lequel vous devrez avoir les rapports les plus étroits; moi-même, enfin, qui ne peux me désintéresser; de tout ce qui, de près ou de loin, concerne la politique étrangère de la France. Tachez, mon cher Ambassadeur, de rechercher et de trouver celui ou ceux de ces patrons qui, au moment opportun, sauront vous comprendre, vous aider, et vous donner les instructions que vous solliciterez. Mais bonne chance quand même!⁵⁶

Giscard's decision to remove Foccart may have streamlined the bureaucracy, but it also meant the loss of one of the crucial components of Franco-African diplomacy. Under de Gaulle and Pompidou, Foccart had served as the agent of day-to-day relations between the French presidency and its African counterparts. In historian Jean-Pierre Bat's analysis:

De Gaulle et Foccart, qui pratiquaient une évidente intimité avec les responsables africains, avaient soigneusement prévenu toute dérive en établissant un protocole rigoureux: au président la dimension officielle des relations avec les "amis de la France," à Foccart les rapports quotidiens de confiance---quitte à devoir, au besoin, jouer le rôle de fusible pour protéger le président.⁵⁷

Giscard did not let Journiac fill this role in the same way. Instead Giscard placed himself in the "rôle d'interface entre sphère publique et sphère privée."⁵⁸ Although Journiac conducted numerous missions on Giscard's behalf, he never had Foccart's stature or autonomy, meaning that Giscard himself would have to play Foccart's role. This meant that in case of serious crisis, no one could "jouer le rôle de fusible" and take the fall for the President. This vulnerability ultimately helped to sink Giscard's presidency.

Nevertheless, Giscard would come to rely heavily upon Journiac for advice. The latter, a former colonial magistrate, had worked closely with Foccart throughout his tenure at the *Secrétariat*. He knew a number of African leaders and did not suffer from the same reputation as Foccart. Journiac's untimely death in an airplane accident on February 6 1980 after a mission in Chad would hit Giscard deeply. At Foccart's suggestion, he appointed another one of Foccart's former protégés, Martin Kirsch to replace Journiac. Kirsch however lacked

⁵⁶ Cited in Ibid. 70.

⁵⁷ Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 373.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Journiac's contacts and was never able to establish the kinds of relationships that helped to grease the wheels of Giscard's policymaking.⁵⁹

Giscard's tenure saw three different Foreign Ministers.⁶⁰ Having served under de Gaulle as Finance Minister, Giscard observed the close working relationship between de Gaulle and his long-serving Foreign Minister, Maurice Couve de Murville. According to Samy Cohen, Giscard wanted to emulate this relationship, but failed miserably because he misunderstood its nature. Although de Gaulle dominated foreign policymaking, he left Couve de Murville substantial autonomy and would listen to his views when they differed from his own. Giscard had exactly the opposite reputation.

His first choice at the Quai was Jean Sauvagnargues, a career diplomat with extensive experience in both Europe and Africa. Giscard however left him little initiative of his own and Sauvagnargues would rarely attempt to change the President's opinion. When Giscard replaced Jacques Chirac with Raymond Barre as Prime Minister in August 1976, he unceremoniously dumped Sauvagnargues. He replaced him with the then-UN Ambassador Louis de Guiringaud. Also a career diplomat, Guiringaud had had significant experience in the UN system and on international economic issues. However, his personality was quite the opposite of Sauvagnargues and he often clashed with Giscard on a number of subjects. Nonetheless, while not a major figure in Africa policymaking, he did forcefully push, rather successfully, for a broader French diplomatic engagement with African countries laying outside France's former colonial empire. His personality clashes with Giscard were too much for the French President however. In November 1978 Giscard replaced Guiringaud with his chief of staff, Jean François-Poncet. Cohen describes François-Poncet as a pure Giscard loyalist who strived to become a complete "copy" of his boss.⁶¹ This justified Giscard's private assertion that, "je suis le vrai ministre des Affaires étrangères."⁶²

However, Giscard's Africa policy was not simply built around personalities and interpersonal relationships. His dissolution of Foccart's *Secrétariat* brought renewed importance to the Cooperation Ministry in the policymaking apparatus. As a result of turf wars, for the previous eight years, the latter had been subsumed under the Quai d'Orsay and its minister reduced to the position of a mere Secretary of State. Giscard restored the Cooperation Ministry to its former position, and assigned to it many of the former competencies of Foccart's

⁵⁹ Cohen, *Monarchie nucléaire*, 73-74.

⁶⁰ For this section, see Ibid. 113-126.

⁶¹ Ibid. 125.

⁶² Ibid. 118.

Secrétariat.⁶³ It, like the Foreign Ministry would see three different ministers during Giscard's *septennat*. However, Robert Galley, the longest serving of these, from 1976 to 1980, would play an important role on occasion as Giscard's personal emissary, and contribute to important decisions regarding economic development policy.

The *Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionnage* (SDECE), France's main foreign intelligence agency, also experienced a change in its African role during Giscard's tenure in office. During the 1960s, the SDECE had a strong presence on the continent. It helped to create the intelligence agencies of a number of African regimes, and former officers went on to serve in African governments. It was also closely linked to various covert or semi-covert actions employing mercenaries such as support for Biafra, the mercenary uprisings in Congo-Léopoldville, and efforts at overthrowing Guinea's President Sékou Touré.⁶⁴ Maurice Robert, the head of SDECE's African operations in the 1960s, and one of Foccart's closest collaborators, later described how this system worked:

Lorsque des initiatives allaient dans le sens souhaité par le pouvoir et qu'il ne pouvait ouvertement les assumer, la plupart du temps pour des raisons diplomatiques, il ne disait ni oui, ni non. C'était ce que l'on appelait le feu orange qui signifiait : "Allez-y. Faites comme bon vous semble mais nous ne sommes pas au courant." Sous-entendu : "En cas de pépin, on ne vous couvre pas."⁶⁵

Once a powerful part of Foccart's network of influence and presence in France's former African colonies, Giscard substantially reduced its prominence. In fact this process had already begun before Giscard's tenure.

In October 1970, Pompidou named Alexandre de Marenches to head the SDECE following a number of scandals in the late 1960s. Pompidou charged Marenches with substantially restructuring the organization and bringing some of its more autonomous elements under control. This included removing or marginalizing a number of officials and agents close to Foccart and his office who had played active roles in some of France's covert actions in Africa. Marenches wanted to prioritize the East-West struggle and cut the budget and personnel from SDECE's African operations. Unsurprisingly, Foccart did not enjoy good relations with Marenches, and by the end of Foccart's tenure he no longer received intelligence reports from the spy agency.⁶⁶

Marenches was a hardline anticommunist who prided himself on his apparently advanced understanding of geopolitics. This sentiment comes out strongly in his 1986

⁶³ Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 358.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of SDECE activities in Africa during the 1960s, see Ibid. 151-212.

⁶⁵ Maurice Robert and André Renault. *Maurice Robert, "Ministre" de l'Afrique: entretiens avec André Renault*. [Paris]: Éd. du Seuil, 2004, pp. 109-110. Also cited in Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 163-164.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 355- 356.

memoirs, a series of interviews conducted with French journalist Christine Ockrent.⁶⁷ Marenches' singular focus on communism and supposed Soviet aims led him to extremely mechanistic interpretations of African politics. As his memoirs suggest, these more or less overlooked local agency in preference for conspiracy-oriented theories which linked developments, particularly in Southern Africa, to deeper Soviet-inspired designs.⁶⁸ As discussed later, deep-seated anti-communism and fears of Soviet aims in Southern Africa were widespread within French policymaking circles. However for most French officials, their anti-communist fears were generally limited to Southern Africa, at least insofar as French interests were concerned. Marenches and his subordinates in the SDECE on the other hand, seem to have taken this view to an extreme. Neither Giscard nor his close advisors took Marenches and the SDECE very seriously.

Jean François-Poncet was particularly harsh in his criticisms. He later noted that SDECE's reports were, "sans intérêt."⁶⁹ He complained that, "il y avait beaucoup à faire pour rendre ce service réellement utile à l'état."⁷⁰ This attitude was widespread in French official circles.⁷¹ He also disdainfully recalled that SDECE's reporting was not only, in "99 cas sur 100," completely useless, but "il en va tout autrement avec les informations transmises par nos ambassadeurs à l'étranger sous forme de télégrammes."⁷² Giscard himself later described Marenches as, "un incapable, un homme vaniteux."⁷³ Incidentally, this represents a supplemental argument in favor of the utility of French diplomatic archives in examining the sources of France's African policies. Giscard's contempt for the SDECE's intelligence arm meant that he relied heavily upon diplomatic sources for information. This was also true during periods of crisis such as in Kolwezi in 1978.

Disastrous SDECE operations in Angola and Benin in 1976 and 1977 may have reinforced this opinion. The available documentary record makes it very difficult to trace in detail the character and extent of the SDECE's activities in Africa during the 1970s. However, in the previous decade many of its operations were designed to maximize plausible deniability at the highest levels of French policymaking.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ Alexandre de Marenches, and Christine Ockrent. *Dans le secret des princes*. [Paris]: Stock, 1986.

⁶⁸ For examples of his worldview, see Ibid. 181-194, 319-332.

⁶⁹ Cited in Eric Denécé. *Les services secrets français sont-ils nuls ?* Paris: Ellipses, 2012, p. 107.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Pierre Péan. *Secret d'Etat: la France du secret, les secrets de la France*. Paris: Fayard, 1986, p. 199.

⁷³ Cited in Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 222.

⁷⁴ Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 164.

The system of “feu oranges” (or, in English, “yellow lights”) described above by Robert very likely continued into Giscard’s presidency. Marenches preferred using mercenaries in clandestine operations, notably using the services of notorious mercenary “Colonel” Bob Denard on several occasions. During Giscard’s presidency, Denard was involved in several operations with the apparent benediction of the Elysée, or at least Journiac.

In late 1975 and early 1976, at the height of the Angolan Civil War, the SDECE and the CIA both charged Denard with organizing a small mercenary force to assist UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi in his war against the Cuban and Soviet-supported MPLA.⁷⁵ This operation failed disastrously as the MPLA repulsed a botched effort to invade the Angolan enclave of Cabinda, and Cuban air attacks forced mercenaries operating in Southern Angola to beat an ignominious retreat. Two mercenaries were killed and the rest returned to France with three months remaining on their contracts.⁷⁶

The following year, Denard led a mercenary effort to overthrow Mathieu Kérékou, the socialist leader of Benin. France’s African allies such as Ivorian leader Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Gabon’s Omar Bongo, Togo’s Gnassingbé Eyadéma, and Morocco’s King Hassan II worried that Kérékou’s Benin represented a possible bridgehead for communist subversion in West Africa. With Journiac’s agreement, the SDECE gave Denard the “feu orange” to organize a coup attempt.⁷⁷ On the morning of January 16, Denard landed in Benin’s capital, Cotonou with a planeload of some 100 French-speaking European and African mercenaries. Their plans to assault the presidential palace failed however when they clashed with Beninese security forces and the armed guards of a North Korean delegation. Denard and his men were routed and only just managed make it back to Cotonou’s airport and re-board their aircraft. However, they left much of their equipment behind, including a substantial number of documents outlining their plans and their links to authorities in France and a number of African countries.⁷⁸

These fiascos probably contributed to Giscard’s disdain for the SDECE. When Marenches suggested the use of mercenaries to overthrow Emperor Bokassa in 1979, Giscard refused. Instead, regular French forces under SDECE’s supervision led the vanguard of the operation.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ This is discussed in more detail below.

⁷⁶ John Stockwell. *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story*. New York: Norton, 1978, pp. 164, and 242-243. See the next section for more details on the French role in Angola.

⁷⁷ Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 399-400.

⁷⁸ “Publication des archives oubliées des mercenaires de Bob Denard sur l’opération de janvier 1977 au Bénin voulue par Journiac,” *Afrique-Asie*, n. 128, 27 juin 1977. Also see documents and UN investigation published in Pierre Péan, *Affaires africaines*. [Paris]: Fayard, 1983, pp. 172-175 and 295-300, and Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 400-401.

⁷⁹ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 222.

French Interventionism

During Giscard's presidency, France embarked upon five major overt military interventions in Africa.⁸⁰ The case studies in the sections that follow will address the most substantial ones in Zaire, Chad, and to a lesser extent, the Central African Republic/Empire. However Giscard also ordered the use of Jaguar ground-attack aircraft against Polisario rebels in Mauritania in late 1977 and early 1978. This operation, *Opération Lamantin*, contained many elements which characterized France's military engagement in other parts of the continent.

Shortly before the November 1975 death of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, some 350,000 Moroccans surged across the border of the Spanish Sahara colony in the famous "Green March," demanding the territory's attachment to Morocco. Mauritania however also claimed the territory, and on November 14, both countries signed an agreement with Spain to determine the future of the colony. The Madrid Accords set February 28 1976 as the date at which the Spanish would withdraw. The newly "independent" Western Saharan territory would be governed by an interim Moroccan and Mauritanian administration, dividing the country in two. This decision understandably provoked the anti-colonial liberation movement, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro, otherwise known as Polisario, to launch attacks against the territory's new administrators. Mauritania, as the weakest power, was the movement's principal target.

By 1977, Polisario increased the scale and tempo of its attacks, targeting the 650 kilometer long Zouerate-Nouadhibou railway linking the Mauritanian coast with important iron mines in the interior. This seriously threatened the regime of Mokhtar Ould Daddah, as iron ore exports constituted Mauritania's most important source of foreign exchange earnings and was vital to the country's economy. Polisario attacks consisted of highly mobile columns of pickup trucks and Land Rovers striking both the trains themselves, and various towns and villages along the path of the railroad. The Mauritanian army was completely incapable of detecting, intercepting, and defeating these columns. During these attacks several French workers were killed, and others captured. The Mauritanian army's incapacity to deal with these attacks, combined with the threat of economic collapse, led Ould Daddah to request French military assistance. General Michel Forget, who commanded the French intervention force, later describe French motives in intervening on Ould Daddah's behalf:

La France pouvait difficilement rester indifférente à cet appel, non seulement parce que la sécurité de ses ressortissants était en cause---assistants techniques, civils et militaires---mais aussi parce qu'un effondrement de

⁸⁰ Mauritania, Chad, the Central African Republic/Empire, and twice in Zaire.

la Mauritanie comme celui qui se dessinait risquait de déclencher une instabilité généralisée dans cette corne occidentale de l'Afrique, aucun des états limitrophes ne pouvant rester sans réagir face à un tel événement, qu'il s'agisse du Maroc, de l'Algérie, du Mali ou du Sénégal. Là se situe sans doute la raison profonde de l'intervention française, l'enjeu stratégique était de taille!⁸¹

Using a combination of surveillance aircraft and Jaguar ground-attack aircraft based as far away as Dakar, the French Air Force launched several devastating attacks on Polisario columns in late 1977 and into the early months of 1978. French military officials later hailed these operation as a major success.⁸²

However, in reality these airstrikes did little more than confirm the immense operational and technological capacity of French airpower. *Lamantin* only temporarily managed to dissuade Polisario columns from attacking Mauritanian targets. The December 1977 airstrikes briefly deterred Polisario operations, but they resumed attacks in the following months. In early May 1978 French Jaguars again struck a Polisario column, this time in support of a Mauritanian ground force. However, the small number of French airstrikes compared with the large number of Polisario actions hardly leads one to conclude that the French intervention was decisive in any way. Instead on July 10 1978, Ould Daddah was overthrown in a coup d'état by officers frustrated with the lack of progress with Polisario. The military junta which replaced him opened negotiations with movement. In October they signed a ceasefire agreement, followed the next year by a renunciation of all Mauritanian territorial claims on the Western Sahara.⁸³

The Mauritanian case illustrates several important characteristics of French military interventions during Giscard's tenure. For instance, it seems likely that French intervention on Ould Daddah's behalf encouraged his intransigence towards Polisario, thus merely delaying the inevitable Mauritanian disengagement from the Western Sahara. As the case studies will show, on several other occasions, French support for sitting regimes empowered them to continue destructive policies by removing incentives for change. In Zaire, France provided a virtual security umbrella to Mobutu's regime. This enabled and encouraged official corruption, reckless borrowing, and ruthless domestic policies. Similarly French support for General, then Marshal, then Emperor Bokassa in the Central African Republic, then Empire, encouraged the

⁸¹ Michel Forget. "Mauritanie 1977: Lamantin une intervention extérieure à dominante air," *Revue historique des armées*. Janvier 1992 found at http://www.cesa.air.defense.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/RHA1_1992.pdf (accessed on 11.07.2012), pp. 4-5.

⁸² Ibid. and Nicole Grimaud. "L'introuvable équilibre magrébin," in Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.). *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*. Paris, France : Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 339.

⁸³ Ibid.

excesses of a brutal regime. In Chad, nearly unmitigated support for Tombalbaye's dictatorship prolonged and worsened an ongoing civil war. After the latter's overthrow, a French military intervention on behalf of the military junta which replaced Tombalbaye discouraged the same junta from undertaking serious reforms. Although French policymakers eventually realized the necessity for negotiations, this realization came too late to facilitate peace in the country. French policies thus bear at least some responsibility for the long years of civil war which afflicted Chad for over thirty years.

This is a harsh assessment, but it is important to understand the sources of French conduct. Giscard later explained his military interventionism as a response to three factors. First, the external threats to the continent had increased, with both Soviet and Libyan expansionism threatening power balances throughout Africa. Second, Giscard complained about American disengagement with the continent following the Vietnam War and their debacle in Angola, thus encouraging further instability. Third, as moderate African leaders came increasingly under threat, many implored French officials for stronger signals of support. Giscard wrote that many African leaders had warned him, "Quand nous sommes du côté des Occidentaux, nous recevons des crédits financiers, et encore en petites quantités. Si nous nous rangeons du côté des Soviétiques, nous recevons des armes."⁸⁴ According to Giscard, this pressure, combined with the number of defense agreements France had signed with many former colonies, forced him to protect his allies from danger. In many ways this conforms to the story told by Lellouche and Moisi of France's "lonely battle against destabilization."⁸⁵

French policymakers viewed their special relationship to former African colonies, as well as associated states like Zaire, as an important element in France's position in the international community. This relationship justified, in official thinking, France's claim to great, or at least middle, power status.⁸⁶ However maintenance of this position depended to a certain extent on the acquiescence of African elites. Thus the question of prestige became intricately linked to French views on France's appropriate role on the continent. In security policy, this inevitably led to "domino theories" in some circles. In January 1976, René Journiac elaborated this point of view during a meeting with Henry Kissinger about the war in Angola. He told Kissinger that, "Most of the moderate African regimes are not ideologically motivated, and they tend to favor the west because they see us as their traditional friends and as stronger

⁸⁴ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 208-209.

⁸⁵ Lellouche and Moisi, "French Policy in Africa," 132-133.

⁸⁶ Chipman, *French Power in Africa*, 11.

than the Communists. Whether this state of things will last will depend on the military outcome [in Angola].”⁸⁷

Giscard himself subscribed to this, later writing that, “la moindre défaillance dans l’application de nos accords de défense, amplifiée par la rumeur africaine, risquait de faire basculait l’ensemble.”⁸⁸ It therefore became extremely important to reassure France’s African allies, particularly long-standing pillars of the Franco-African relationship such as Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor, Ivoirian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and Gabon’s President, Omar Bongo, that France stood by their side and would protect them if necessary. Incidentally, this also gave certain African leaders substantial influence over French policymaking decisions.

This was true in other domains as well, particularly in the field of development assistance. Understandably, African policymakers actively adopted strategies aimed at maximizing the benefits they could draw from various forms of aid. This is well illustrated in a circular telegram sent by the Rwandan Foreign Ministry to its ambassadors in the field. The telegram urges ambassadors to :

[...] rencontrer les personnalités qui ont à intervenir dans la fixation du programme de coopération [...] il faudra suivre régulièrement, auprès des services qui en sont chargés, l’exécution du programme arrêté de commun accord. Ce travail de contact en vue d’assurer que l’exécution des projets se fait normalement est d’autant plus important que la gestion proprement dite de l’aide est assurée par les services du Pays dispensateur d’aide souvent, faut-il le souligner, d’une manière qui relève davantage de l’ésotérisme que d’une procédure normale de cogestion.⁸⁹

In order to encourage a proper “cogestion” of the aid, “les contacts avec les différentes autorités du Pays concerné revêtent une importance toute particulière,” and the role of the Ambassador, “doit être dynamique.”⁹⁰

These efforts were exercised by African officials in a way which corresponded well to their strategies of “extraversion” as described by French political scientist Jean-François Bayart, “whereby sovereignty in Africa is exercised through the creation and management of dependence.”⁹¹ While dependent upon France for all manner of economic, diplomatic, and military assistance, dependency was, in some respects, a two-way street. Dependency also tied French policymakers to specific leaders and African elites. In the eyes of many French

⁸⁷ FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Southern Africa, Doc. 172. Memorandum of Conversation between Kissinger and Jouniac, 24.01.1976, p. 427.

⁸⁸ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 209.

⁸⁹ Archives Minaffet Rwanda: Cote 3.2.4.0076 Coopération Franco-Rwandaise --- Réunions de la Commission Mixte Franco-Rwandaise, 1974-1982, Circular telegram to Rwandan Diplomatic Posts from Foreign Minister, « Suivre la coopération, » 15.11.1979, p.1.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Jean-François Bayart. 2000. "Africa in the World: a History of Extraversion". *African Affairs: the Journal of the Royal African Society*. 99, no. 395, p. 228.

policymakers during this period, the positions of their most valued African partners needed to be maintained. This was necessary for the continued presence of French influence and for the protection of French geopolitical interests. This made French policymakers especially vulnerable to African elites eager to exploit their insecurities.

As in Mauritania, this meant that the need for “stability” led to strong French backing for established governments against forces threatening their existence. More often than not, French policymakers backed authoritarian or dictatorial “big men” under the assumption that they were bulwarks against certain chaos. This clearly meant that human rights concerns were often marginalized in French thinking. While humanitarian motives were used as a pretext for French engagement in Zaire and the Central African Empire, human rights were of secondary importance for French policymakers. Giscard himself later expressed his empathy for certain leaders who faced constant threats of overthrow. For instance, in 1976 after gently chiding the Shah of Iran for the activities of his political police, he realized that his entreaties were useless. Giscard wrote:

Il vit dans un autre système. Je sais qu’il n’est ni violent, ni cruel. Mais il est pris dans l’engrenage. Comment réagirais-je vis-à-vis d’adversaires dont le seul objectif serait de m’abattre? Que ressent-on quand on trouve, glissé dans le rapport qu’on vous communique, un tract qui proclame ‘Abattez-le ! Il faut le tuer !’ Je pense que je m’en tiendrais à mes règles, à mes principes. Je le pense, mais je ne suis pas à sa place.⁹²

This passage tellingly alludes to Giscard’s ability to relativize, particularly on thorny questions on the abuses of, “un autre système.” His paternalistic views on African culture combined with his personal relationships with a number of African leaders may have also reinforced this view. He was not alone. Many other French policymakers seemed to share this general perspective, and felt that too much of a focus on human rights questions could have potentially destabilizing effects.

Indeed, many French officials derided the human rights rhetoric of newly-elected American President Jimmy Carter. In April 1977, Carter’s Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance met with Giscard in Paris. Giscard’s talking points warned of the dangers of Carter’s new human rights focus, particularly in Southern Africa. A severe condemnation of apartheid represented a “dangerous precedent” by interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. French officials warned the Americans to distinguish between “colonial” type situations in Namibia and Rhodesia from the purely internal matter of South African apartheid.⁹³ Quai officials urged Giscard to encourage Vance to veto any efforts at the UN to establish a

⁹² Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 102-103.

⁹³ Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (henceforth MAE) La Courneuve, DAM Généralités, Carton 724, “Entretien du Président de la République avec Monsieur Vance,” 02.04.1977, Fiche 2, p. 1.

mandatory arms embargo on South Africa. Such an embargo and any accompanying economic sanctions would be, “préjudiciables aux intérêts occidentaux.”⁹⁴

Dominique Decherf, a French diplomat posted in South Africa in the late 1970s, later wrote that the French experience in Algeria led them to expect a bloody end to apartheid. They felt that any kind of internal evolution that did not involve mass expulsion of the white population was unthinkable. For this reason, as well as growing fears of communist expansion in Southern Africa, many French policymakers felt little obligation to push for a change in the system.⁹⁵

Indeed, French concerns with communism paralleled those of apartheid South Africa whose policymakers viewed the increased tempo of the liberation struggles following the fall of the Portuguese empire with anxiety. Thus, French officials were reluctant to contribute to international efforts at sanctioning South Africa. France sold arms, nuclear technology, and other material to South Africa until forced to cave to international pressure in late 1977.⁹⁶

This policy helped to sabotage French efforts at extending their influence with non-francophone states. This was one of Louis de Guiringaud’s signature policy initiatives. In 1977 he visited Tanzania but was met at the airport with angry protesters and immediately left the country. Still, during his visits to Zambia and Mozambique, he met Zimbabwean rebel leaders Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe, even professing admiration for the latter. He also supported efforts at the UN to organize free elections in Namibia, including with SWAPO’s participation.⁹⁷ This apparently contradictory policy resulted from a relative official lack of interest in Southern Africa in French policymaking circles, hence the leeway given to Guiringaud. Also, it placated France’s African friends to show some interest in the liberation struggles. However, by not insisting on human rights and ending apartheid with the South African government, France remained in good standing with potential allies in the fight against communism.

Compared to the above factors, economic concerns only played a secondary role in the evolution of French interventionism. The case studies below cover this question in more depth. However, the economic importance of the two African franc zones had declined from 6.3 percent of French exports and 6.7 percent of French imports in 1960, to 3.1 percent and 2.1

⁹⁴ Ibid. 2.

⁹⁵ Dominique Decherf. *Couleurs: mémoires d'un ambassadeur de France en Afrique*. Saint-Malo: Galodé, 2012, p. 27.

⁹⁶ Warthier, *Quatre presidents*, 397-406.

⁹⁷ Cohen, *Monarchie nucléaire*, 125.

percent respectively by 1979.⁹⁸ French trade with Sub-Saharan Africa averaged only 6.5 percent of total French trade between the years 1974 and 1980.⁹⁹ France's largest African trading partners, Nigeria and South Africa were not even former colonies. During Giscard's *septennat*, Nigeria's share of France's African trade reached 22.3 percent, and South Africa reached 11 percent.¹⁰⁰ By contrast, French trade and investments in Mauritania, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Zaire were miniscule. In the latter country, French investments only totaled some 20 million dollars at the time of France's military interventions.¹⁰¹

Indeed, French economic policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa during Giscard's tenure in office aimed at multilateralizing trade and aid to its former colonies. The first Lomé Convention (Lomé I) was signed in 1975 between the European Community and a number of "African, Caribbean, and Pacific" (ACP) countries. For France, this convention, and its successors in 1979, 1984, and 1989, meant an integration of its bilateral aid to its former colonies into a broader European aid framework. It also opened European markets to certain African agricultural products. France became a vocal advocate in European fora for Senegalese peanut oil, Ivoirian cocoa, and bananas from Upper-Volta/Burkina Faso, as well as other exports from its former colonies. The European Development Fund and the European Investment Bank became important contributors to foreign investment and economic development projects in France's former colonies during the 1970s. This came at the expense of French dominance in these domains in the previous decade.¹⁰²

Instead, French economic interests were principally strategic in nature. The stability of sitting regimes required functioning economies. Thus threats to Zaire's copper mines and Mauritania's iron ore exports influenced French decisions to intervene. However Mauritania had nationalized its iron mines years before¹⁰³ and the French presence in Zaire's mining sector was negligible.¹⁰⁴ In this sense, France's armed interventions were hardly operations aimed at protecting French investments.

⁹⁸ Philippe Hugon. "L'Afrique noire francophone: L'enjeu économique pour la France." *Politique Africaine* : N. 5, Mars, 1984, p. 79.

⁹⁹ Daniel Bach, "La France en Afrique subsaharienne : contraintes historiques et nouveaux espaces économiques," in Cohen, Samy and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.). *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*. Paris, France : Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 305.

¹⁰⁰ Bach, "Dynamique et contradictions," 64.

¹⁰¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, Note "A/S : Zaïre," 27.12.1978, p. 3.

¹⁰² Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 366-369.

¹⁰³ Grimaud. "L'introuvable équilibre magrébin," 337.

¹⁰⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le cabinet du ministre, "A/S : Présence économique française dans le Shaba," 23.03.1977.

One further, though perhaps prosaic, element played a role in French military activism during Giscard's presidency. Put simply, France had the means to do it. For instance, in July 1978 the CIA estimated that France had some 12,130 military personnel and 1,180 military "advisors" in Africa.¹⁰⁵ These troops mostly outclassed every possible opponent on the continent in terms of weapons, training, and projection of force.¹⁰⁶ This led Foreign Minister Louis de Guiringaud to giddily proclaim that, "l'Afrique est le seul continent qui soit encore à la mesure de la France, à la portée de ses moyens. Le seul où elle peut encore, avec 500 hommes, changer le cours de l'Histoire."¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, for the French, this kind of hubris would get them into trouble in Chad where military superiority could not translate into a favorable political settlement.

Giscard's presidency marked a time of transition in French military doctrine. After the end of the Algerian War in 1962, Charles de Gaulle reallocated resources into the newly developed nuclear *force de frappe*. This served several objectives. First, it would provide deterrence against the Soviet Union as the largest land threat to France. Second, status as a nuclear power helped to replace the colonies as a prestige component of French *grandeur*. Third, it aimed at reducing the potential political role of the army, as components of the latter had brought him to power in 1958, and threatened to overthrow him in 1961.¹⁰⁸

Giscard, strongly backed by French Army Chief-of-Staff, General Guy Méry, felt that France relied too much upon its nuclear capabilities to the detriment of the modernization of its conventional forces. Both Gaullists and Communists reacted negatively to this doctrinal shift, claiming that it represented a clear identification with the goals of NATO and would signal the effective reintegration of French defense policy within the NATO framework.¹⁰⁹ However Giscard saw this shift differently. For him French security was inextricably bound up in the nature of North-South relations. In language reminiscent of security discourse thirty years later, he summarized this in a 1976 speech:

Our world is an over-armed world in a case of an East-West conflict and a world which is looking for a North-South balance. On the other hand, it is a very unstable world regionally for a series of reasons ranging from ideology to under-development, which explains that everywhere we witness a general destabilization of security.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ JCL: CREST Database document NLC-17-124-6-5-5, "French Presence in Africa," slide presentation, 25.7.1978.

¹⁰⁶ This includes troops stationed on the islands of Réunion and Mayotte in the Indian Ocean.

¹⁰⁷ "Giscard l'Africain," *L'Express*, 15.12.1979.

¹⁰⁸ Lellouche and Moisi, "French Policy in Africa," 117.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 120.

¹¹⁰ Cited in an English translation in Ibid. 121.

This “general destabilization” led Giscard to order the reorganization of the French *forces d'intervention extérieures*. These consisted principally of the 2nd Airborne and 9th Marine Infantry Divisions, based in Corsica and Brittany respectively. These forces totaled some 23,000 troops. However even reorganized, French policymakers faced considerable constraints on their employment.

Only half of these troops were professional “engagés,” i.e. non-conscripted troops.¹¹¹ Only the “engagés” could be sent overseas for combat operations without parliamentary approval. French involvement in Mauritania, Chad, Zaire, and Lebanon meant that, by 1978, these forces were stretched to their limit. Furthermore, the main French troop and equipment transport aircraft, the C-160 Transall only had a limited range of some 3,000 kilometers. This resulted from a Franco-German compromise in the development of the aircraft during the previous decade, with the Germans demanding shorter ranges due to more geographically compact operational requirements. This meant that long-range deployments, such as to Zaire or elsewhere, would require logistical assistance from French allies, particularly the United States.¹¹² These limitations contributed to a certain reticence among French military officials towards Giscard’s interventionism.

Political scientist Samy Cohen describes this as a “military allergy.”¹¹³ In Cohen’s view, this “allergy” stemmed from a feeling among higher-level military officials that these kinds of interventions did not encompass pure “military” objectives involving the defeat of an enemy. Their use as pawns in a larger political game in apparent geopolitically marginal spaces did not fit their image of their role as defenders of France’s vital interests. Furthermore, they remained skeptical of what they often considered as too much civilian interference in operational details, particularly in politically charged situations such as Chad. The possible confusion caused by assertive micro-management of military operations by civilian authorities created a potential for costly missteps. Additionally, French military officials often worried that their civilian leadership often overestimated the capabilities of the military and its ability to achieve specific political goals.¹¹⁴ In Chad, these fears would come to fruition as Giscard employed the military as a crisis management tool in his quest for an acceptable political outcome in the country.

¹¹¹ François de Rose. “La politique de défense du président Giscard d’Estaing,” in Cohen, Samy and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.). *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d’Estaing*. Paris, France : Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, pp. 190-191.

¹¹² Ibid. 191.

¹¹³ Samy Cohen. *La défaite des généraux : Le pouvoir politique et l’armée sous la Ve République*. Paris, France : Fayard, 1994, p. 135.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 135-144.

The ultimate tragedy of French military activism was that its aim of “stability” usually implied the defense of political systems which generated long-term instability. Tombalbaye’s policies worsened regional divisions in Chad, Bokassa’s predator state undermined future possibilities for effective institutional development in the CAR, and Mobutu’s rule laid the groundwork for the most destructive war in recent world history. French policymakers never really imagined a workable alternative to the strongman option.

**Part I: The “Cuba of the West”? France, the Shaba Crises, and
Mobutu’s Zaire, 1975-1979**

Chapter I: Introduction and Background

In March 1977 and again in May 1978, rebels known as the “Katangan Gendarmes” based in Northern Angola invaded Zaire’s Shaba province and seriously threatened the survival of Mobutu Sese Seko’s regime. On both occasions, France responded by providing essential military support including, in 1978, a direct airborne assault on the city of Kolwezi. Following these interventions, France took the lead in assembling an “Inter-African Force” to provide security along the Zairian-Angolan border until Zaire’s own military could improve its readiness. This was the first time that African countries collaborated in such a military operation.¹¹⁵ Joint Franco-Zairian military exercises in Shaba following the evacuation of the Inter-African Force in 1979 further confirmed France’s commitment to Mobutu’s security. This concrete military support provided a solid political basis from which Mobutu negotiated a significant reduction in tensions with Angola. Consequently, French assistance also bolstered Mobutu’s political position in both Zaire and the region.

This story is important for a number of reasons. Despite its systematic human rights abuses and pervasive corruption, French policymakers considered the survival of Mobutu’s regime as an important foreign policy priority. They expended significant resources, and worked with a broad coalition of Western and African countries, as well as international finance and development institutions to both rescue and strengthen Mobutu’s regime in a time of existential crisis. They invested in the Zairian military, a major pillar of Mobutu’s regime, and essentially agreed to protect the regime against external threats. This policy, backed by much of the Western bloc, substantially contributed to Mobutu’s longevity. Even as the Cold War ended, and Mobutu’s other international backers such as the United States withdrew much of their support, France remained. In 1997, as the shell of the Zairian state disintegrated during the Rwandan-backed invasion which resulted in Mobutu’s downfall, the French government again attempted to save him. After a failed attempt to organize an international “humanitarian intervention” to stem the advancing rebels, officials close to French President Jacques Chirac facilitated the recruitment of Serbian mercenaries, complete with helicopter gunships, to shore up Mobutu’s failing defenses.¹¹⁶ As Mobutu fell, the years of regressive economic policies,

¹¹⁵ I. William Zartman. *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa*. New York: Oxford Univ. 1989, p. 162.

¹¹⁶ see Simon Massey, “Operation Assurance: The Greatest Intervention that Never Happened,” *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, 15.02.1998 and Filip Reyntjens. *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996-2006*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 115-117.

endemic corruption, internal fragmentation, and a large, underpaid military, contributed towards fueling a multi-national conflict dubbed by some as “Africa’s World War” which cost millions of lives.¹¹⁷

One cannot attribute this outcome directly to the actions of French policymakers. However, beginning in the mid-1970s, France actively and consciously acted as an enabler of a destructive regime. On at least two occasions, France probably saved Mobutu’s regime from collapse, and demonstrated a solid commitment to the existence of a putrid political environment. This section not only asks why, but also places this support within the context of the broader worldview of French policymaking elites.

The section principally draws upon the Embassy archives of the French Foreign Ministry in Nantes, and the Ministry’s *Direction des affaires africaines et malgaches* (DAM) archives in La Courneuve. It also uses archival material from the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta, as well as limited material from the IMF archives in Washington DC, the CIA electronic database at National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, the UNHCR archives in Geneva, and the archives of the Rwandan Foreign Ministry in Kigali.

After a discussion of the principal sources and their limitations, this section will chronicle and explain the evolution of France’s role in Zaire during and after the Shaba Crises. First, it examines the nature of French ties to Zaire during this period. It argues that, while economic interests played a role in the French decision to build a close relationship with Mobutu, broader strategic issues predominated. Then, it describes the March 1977 invasion of Zaire by the “Katangan Gendarmes.” This triggered fears of a possible collapse of Mobutu’s regime, and the French responded by helping to plan and organize a Moroccan military intervention to repel the invaders. These events also led to French efforts in the international arena to bolster Zaire’s economic position through debt consolidation, while at the same time pressuring Mobutu to make political and economic reforms. Meanwhile the French contributed money, equipment, and military advisors in an attempt to rebuild and reinforce the capacities of the Zairian military. The major reason behind this commitment lay in strong fears of French policymakers that the Cubans and Soviets, present in Angola, would try to take advantage of Zaire’s internal problems to destabilize the country or even break it apart. The section then analyzes the French decision to intervene militarily in response to the seizure of the mining town of Kolwezi by the Katangan Gendarmes in May 1978. It also examines the intelligence

¹¹⁷ see Gérard Prunier. *Africa’s World War: Congo, The Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

reports which informed French decision-making and suggests that Mobutu and other Zairian officials managed to effectively manipulate French perceptions for their own ends. Finally, the section will examine French efforts at internationalizing the response to the Shaba Crises via the deployment of an Inter-African security force, and concomitant attempts at propping up the Zairian economy enough to maintain Mobutu's hold on power.

Using a broad range of available primary source material, this section makes several arguments. First, French policymakers saw the stability of Mobutu's regime as essential to their broader vision of African security and were willing to take substantial risks to defend it. Second, perceptions of a wide-ranging and serious threat to Zaire from Soviet and Cuban supported armed groups and regimes drove much of French security thinking at the time. Third, Mobutu himself appears to have played a masterful role in manipulating intelligence, as well as facts on the ground, to appeal to French sensibilities and to acquire French and other international assistance. Fourth, French security policy in Zaire and elsewhere on the continent heavily depended upon a veneer of African legitimacy from "client" regimes in order to function. Without political support from African allies, the French were virtually powerless. Finally, the French treated the Shaba Crises as events whose origins lay outside Zaire. This logic led them to believe in the necessity of a strong Mobutu who could hold the country together against threats from the outside. They willfully ignored many of the exactions occurring within Zaire, and thus in some respects abetted them.

Historiography and Sources

Although considered dramatic events at the time, particularly the May 1978 spectacular surprise French and Belgian air assaults on Kolwezi, the Shaba Crises have yet received little attention from historians. Partly this stems from the current underdeveloped state of contemporary African diplomatic history, as well as African Cold War history. To some extent, this has to do with a lack of good primary source documentation. Although there exists some possibly fruitful African archives which could shed a great deal of light on this timeframe, few scholars have explored these opportunities. This partly results from a lack of funding and an appropriate bureaucracy to handle and organize these kinds of records. Sometimes, records have also disappeared or been destroyed due to disorganization, conflicts, or lack of proper facilities. Nonetheless, resources of this kind do exist and, as I have found in the Rwandan diplomatic archives, they can provide important perspectives on the politics of this time.

Fortunately, in recent years, many American, Soviet, and Cuban records on Central and Southern Africa have become declassified. The initial scholarship integrating these resources has helped to lay the groundwork for this section by elucidating the dynamics of foreign intervention in the Angolan Civil War, as well as the broader picture of foreign engagement and intervention in Southern Africa as a whole.¹¹⁸ No substantial scholarship using archival sources yet exists, however, on the French role in the region at this time. This section aims at filling part of that gap.

Pierre Sergent's *La légion saute sur Kolwezi* constitutes the most substantial, and sensational, work written about the Second Shaba Crisis (Shaba II).¹¹⁹ Based on dozens of interviews conducted in the days and weeks following Shaba II, Sergent skillfully presents a colorful narrative of the events leading up to the French airborne operation on Kolwezi. The book's temporal proximity to the events and the author's close access to many of the principal actors involved combine to ensure its importance. Producer and director Raoul Coutard even turned the book into a movie of the same name in 1980.

However, Sergent's book contains a number of flaws. It aims at providing a dramatic account of the week of May 13- 20 1978. It celebrates the bravery and mettle of the Foreign Legionnaires, deplores the savagery of the Katangan Gendarmes, and laments the sufferings of the European population of Kolwezi subject to captivity and massacre by their occupiers. In good journalistic style, Sergent emphasizes the dramatic, while wasting few words on political analysis.

Furthermore, Sergent's own history with the Legion sometimes colors his narrative. In April 1961, as a Captain in the 1st *Régiment étranger de parachutistes* (1st REP), he participated in the *putsch d'Alger* in which several French military units, government officials, and high-ranking officers attempted to overthrow the government of President Charles de Gaulle in order to maintain Algeria as a French possession.¹²⁰ After the failure of the putsch, he went into hiding and became a prominent leader in the right-wing terrorist organization, the

¹¹⁸See: Piero Gleijeses. *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, Piero Gleijeses. 2006. "Moscow's Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988". *Journal of Cold War Studies*. 8, no. 4: 98-146, Edward George. *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965-1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale*. London: Frank Cass, 2005, Sue Onslow (ed). *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation*. London: Routledge, 2009, and Vladimir Shubin. *The Hot "Cold War": The USSR in Southern Africa*. London: Pluto Press, 2008.

¹¹⁹Pierre Sergent. *La Légion saute sur Kolwezi: opération Léopard : le 2e R.E.P. au Zaïre, mai-juin 1978*. Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1978.

¹²⁰ For more on this dramatic episode, see Maurice Vaïsse. *Comment de Gaulle fit échouer le putsch d'Alger*. Bruxelles: A. Versailles, 2011. On Sergent's role, see Pierre Sergent. *"Je ne regrette rien": la poignante histoire des légionnaires-parachutistes du 1er REP / Pierre Sergent. - 2e éd.* Paris: Fayard, 1983, and Alistair Horne. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962*. New York: Viking Press, 1978.

Organisation armée secrète (OAS). Sentenced to death in absentia, he and other members of the OAS finally received amnesty in 1968.¹²¹

Sergent benefited from his contacts as a former legionnaire to gain privileged access to many of the high ranking diplomatic and military officials involved in the Kolwezi operation. In many respects, his account of the May 1978 Kolwezi operation, a brilliantly executed military action, served as a sort of official history for popular consumption. The Foreign Legion, publically disgraced after the involvement of some its units in the 1961 Generals' Putsch and some of its members' involvements in the OAS, found its image heroically rehabilitated. Indeed, the book paints Colonel Philippe Erulin, the commanding officer of the airborne assault on Kolwezi, as one of the real heroes of the story. Erulin, however, had already gained notoriety during the Algerian War as a *tortionnaire*. His most famous victim, journalist Henri Alleg, wrote a book about it, which became the first widely read revelation of French methods in Algeria.¹²² Thus, Sergent's narrative, though useful and informative in many respects, must be understood through this lens.

Three other accounts also serve as important background material in understanding the Shaba Crises and French involvement. In 1981, Major Malutama di Malu of the Zairian army wrote a thesis on the Shaba Wars for the US Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.¹²³ This document's interest lies in Malu's experience as an intelligence officer serving in Shaba on the Zairian General Staff, and thus reflects some of his first-hand experience of the two conflicts. Furthermore, Malu partly bases his work on Zairian documentation difficult to find elsewhere. His thesis also helps to clarify some questions concerning the military evolution of Shaba I, and some of the strategies employed by the Zairian army, the *Forces armées zaïroises* (FAZ). His account also contains one of the few attempts in the existing literature at a detailed reconstruction of Shaba I.

Unfortunately, as Malu principally focuses on the military aspects of the Shaba Crises, he only treats the broader political and economic dimensions in a cursory manner. He also seems to downplay, or even outright ignore the deficiencies of Mobutu's regime which contributed to the crises. Nonetheless, although his account is mostly descriptive, it does highlight the inability or incompetence of a number of mid and higher-ranking Zairian military officials in the failure of the FAZ to effectively counter the Katangan invasion. That said, it

¹²¹ Horne, *Savage War*, 552.

¹²² Henri Alleg. *La question*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1958.

¹²³ Malutama di Malu. *The Shaba Invasions*. Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 1981.

probably would not have benefited a serving mid-ranking Zairian officer to spend too much time discussing these issues more broadly if he had any hope of a future career.

In 1993, Lt. Colonel Thomas Odom of the American Army also wrote a thesis for the Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth with a specific focus on the French and Belgian interventions in Kolwezi in May 1978.¹²⁴ Although not benefiting from personal experience like Malu, Odom had access to some U.S. State Department documentation, as well as the “*journaux de marche*” of the French Military Mission and after-action reports written by Colonel Erulin. With these resources, Odom’s thesis constitutes the most comprehensive and objective analysis of the intervention in Kolwezi. The primary interest of his account for this section lies in its analysis of the complicated relationships between the Zairians, French, Belgians, and Americans in their attempts to resolve the crisis. He also poses interesting questions about the nature of the Zairian response to the Kolwezi crisis, and suggests the possibility that the massacres of the Europeans may have resulted from provocations on the part of Mobutu. This section will explore this question later. Nonetheless, like Malu, Odom focuses on the military dimension of the conflict, particularly for its possible implications for future crisis planning. Furthermore, on occasion he seems to rely too heavily upon Sergeant’s account of events.

In a similar vein, an unpublished thesis written at the Belgian military academy, the *Ecole Royale Militaire*, by Second Lieutenant Serge Brabant, provides a detailed analysis of the political and diplomatic aspects of the Kolwezi crisis, particularly concerning the important Franco-Belgian political dynamic and its effect on decision-making.¹²⁵ Like Odom, Brabant had access to some diplomatic correspondence, and managed to obtain accounts, both written and oral, from a number of the principal military and civilian decision-makers in both France and Belgium. Brabant provides particular insight into the Belgian perspective on Shaba II, which other accounts either ignore or minimize.

Several more academic treatments of various aspects of the Shaba Crises add a broader and more critical dimension. Writing shortly after Shaba II, Belgian scholar Jean-Claude Willame wrote the only somewhat lengthy study to date of the rebel group which invaded Zaire and sparked the Shaba Crises.¹²⁶ His article on the *Front de libération nationale du Congo*

¹²⁴ Thomas P. Odom. *Shaba II The French and Belgian Intervention in Zaire in 1978*. Fort Leavenworth, Kan: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Combat Studies Institute, 1993.

¹²⁵ Serge Brabant. *Aspects politiques et diplomatiques de l'intervention de Kolwezi en 1978 : réalité-information*. Travail de fin d'études, Ecole Royale Militaire, 1984. [Provided to the author by Erik Kennes]

¹²⁶ Jean-Claude Willame. *Contribution à l'étude des mouvements d'opposition au Zaïre: le F.L.N.C.* Bruxelles: Centre d'étude et de documentation africaines, 1980.

(FLNC), the official name of the Gendarmes political organization, provides a needed analytical corrective to some of the other literature. Willame bases his account on a number of FLNC documents, interviews, and press sources. If anything, he puts to rest the confusion surrounding the actual name of the organization. For instance, both Odom and Sergeant get the acronym wrong (FNLC), as do a number of French officials in their correspondence. Documents in the archives switch the acronym around quite frequently. Though perhaps unimportant, this does partially highlight a substantial lack of French knowledge about the organization they intended to fight. In any case, Willame's work challenges the "official" narrative to some extent by highlighting the weakness of ethnic-centered explanations of the movement's political behavior. This particularly applies to its relationship to different population groups living in its "liberated" zones. Willame also questions the official narrative of the massacres at Kolwezi during Shaba II. Particularly, he highlights the possibility that the FAZ played a key role in provoking the massacres, as well as questioning the extent and nature of the killings.

Historians Miles Larmer and Erik Kennes are currently working on a book-length history of the Katangan Gendarmes due to appear in late 2013 or early 2014. Larmer has also recently published a brief article on the role of the Gendarmes during the Shaba wars.¹²⁷ His article and broader work focuses principally upon the Gendarmes as a movement in the broader context of regional politics and the Cold War at the time. He argues that a better knowledge of local forces and actors is essential for a better understanding of the Cold War in Africa. His examination of the nature and motivations of the Gendarmes during the two invasions aims to demonstrate the failures of Western powers to analyze correctly the character of the invasions. This gap in understanding local dimensions of internationalized conflicts has only begun to become an important component in the historiography of the Cold War in Africa, and is a consistent theme in this study.

The scholarship of Piero Gleijeses on the Cuban role in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s has contributed to a significant reinterpretation of the history of this period. Through substantive work in the Cuban archives, he has also managed to demonstrate the lack of Cuban involvement in the Shaba Crises.¹²⁸ This contradicts a mass of French and American intelligence reports and public statements during the period which suggested that the Katangan

¹²⁷ Miles Larmer . 2013. "Local Conflicts in a Transnational War: The Katangese Gendarmes and the Shaba Wars of 1977-78". *Cold War History*. 13, no. 1: 89-108. (The author provided some of the material used Larmer's article).

¹²⁸ Piero Gleijeses. 1996. "Truth or Credibility: Castro, Carter, and the Invasions of Shaba". *The International History Review*. 18, no. 1: 70. p. 97

invasions constituted some kind of Cuban-inspired plot to spread communism in Africa. Although Gleijeses' writing on Cuba betrays a strong moral bias in favor of its foreign policy, his evidence seems conclusive. Later, this section will demonstrate the holes in French information gathering which contributed to their assumptions, shared with the Americans, that the Katangan Gendarmes functioned as little more than Cuban proxies. This belief, however, had broad implications for French African policy.

As indicated above, most of the literature that does exist focuses on Shaba II and the military interventions that ended it. Apart from cursory overviews or brief references, the "Eighty Days War," which constituted Shaba I has received very little attention. Furthermore, no substantial treatment has examined the Inter-African Force deployed in the year following Shaba II, which allowed for the neutralization of many of the outstanding disputes between Zaire and Angola.

Due to the spectacular and dramatic nature of the French and Belgian interventions, the military dimension tends to take the center stage in this literature. Sergent glorifies it, while Odom and Malu both attempt to analyze its more technical aspects. Odom does try to take a broader and more critical approach of the political and economic dimensions of the crises, and even has a rather level-headed view of the supposed Cuban involvement of the invasions. Nonetheless, for Odom, Malu, Brabant and Sergent, the necessity of a military intervention in Kolwezi seems self-evident. They make little attempt to analyze ideologies or worldviews which conditioned Western policies in Zaire, and the role that the latter may have played in exacerbating the crises. In Malu's case, this is perhaps understandable, as Mobutu did not always treat critics kindly. Gleijeses and Willame on the other hand try to treat these crises in their broader contexts. They attack the basic assumptions of Western policymakers regarding the nature of the threat to Zaire, and the appropriate responses to it. Nonetheless, as of yet, not enough serious literature exists on the Shaba Crises to justify a more extended review of its historiography.

Several firsthand accounts complement this literature. First, Giscard's memoirs provide a brief, yet useful narrative of his decision-making process during Shaba II.¹²⁹ However, his account contains a number of gaps, glosses over the political context, and often obscures issues, particularly relating to the complicated Franco-Belgian relationship during the crisis. Several years after Shaba II, General Yves Gras, the former head of the French Military Mission in Kinshasa, and overall commander of French military activities in Zaire, gave an

¹²⁹ Giscard. *Le Pouvoir et la Vie*, p.220-239.

account of his experience of Shaba II to a conference held by the journal *Mondes et Cultures*, which the journal later published.¹³⁰ Although relatively short, he offers an important glimpse into the mindset prevalent among many French policymakers at the time, as well as a fairly reliable narrative of the Shaba II events from his own point of view. French journalist, Euloge Boissonnade's account of Mobutu's Zaire includes extensive excerpts from Colonel Erulin's "journal de marche" and letters to his wife. Although the rest of Boissonnade's account of Shaba II, though relatively extensive, contains a number of errors, the Erulin material provides a useful account of the French attack on Kolwezi and its immediate aftermath.¹³¹

Additionally, several accounts by FAZ officers provide a compelling taste of the political and cultural climate within the army, as well as the nature of its military failures. Pierre Yambuya, one of the few qualified helicopter pilots in the FAZ, was present in Shaba during both invasions. His account supplies interesting anecdotal details on the structural nature of corruption within the army, as well its failure to effectively combat the Katangans alone. He also furnishes important details as an eyewitness to the fighting in Kolwezi during Shaba II.¹³² A Colonel Yemo, chief of staff and, briefly, commander of the FAZ 14th Brigade of the Kamanyola Division, charged with the defense of Kolwezi during Shaba II, wrote a fascinating memoir of his experience in Kolwezi. This unpublished manuscript constitutes the most comprehensive account of the battle for Kolwezi before the arrival of French paratroopers on May 19 1978. It includes a well-reasoned analysis of the political failures which resulted in the dispersion and defeat of the FAZ. It also represents a more objective effort at assigning responsibility for the debacle than most accounts, and Yemo does not spare himself from some of the blame.¹³³ Another manuscript, also unpublished, written by Colonel Maurice Bendera, extensively covers the bureaucratic politics and political culture of the FAZ.¹³⁴ Imprisoned during both Shaba Wars, principally due to his Shaba ethnic origins, Bendera was not an eyewitness to events. However, he shared imprisonment with some who were, and was involved in training many of the FAZ units who fought in the Shaba Wars. He also knew their officers and provides a number of insights into the personalities involved and the nature of Mobutu's regime.

Taken together, these accounts give the lie to the notion that incompetence in the FAZ was uniform. They also show us an oft-ignored but vital human dimension behind the images

¹³⁰ Général Yves Gras. "L'Opération Kolwezi," *Mondes et Cultures*. Vol. 45. N. 4. 1985, pp. 691-702, 711-715.

¹³¹ Euloge Boissonnade. *Le mal zaïrois*. Paris: Hermé, 1990.

¹³² Pierre Yambuya. *Zaire, l'abattoir: Pierre Yambuya, un pilote de Mobutu, parle*. Bruxelles: EPO, 1991.

¹³³ Colonel Yemo, undated, untitled manuscript. [Provided to the author by Erik Kennes]

¹³⁴ Colonel Maurice Bendera, undated, untitled manuscript.[Provide to the Author by Erik Kennes]

of fleeing troops, looting and burning everything in their path. They contain a wealth of information, full of observations on Zaire's army and politics which perhaps remain valid in today's Congo. They include vivid illustrations of the lively personalities involved in the FAZ at the time. Unfortunately, as this study focuses on French activities, this gold mine of historical interest will remain somewhat unexploited.

One of the pitfalls of diplomatic history is that it necessarily emphasizes elite perceptions, interests, decisions, and influence. One should not forget, however, that policymakers' concerns for "security," "stability," "sovereignty," and "independence," often hide the fact that their definitions of these concepts generally rest upon narrow foundations. In practical terms, at least for the events covered here, this generally translated into concern for the security, stability, sovereignty, and independence of their own political power or that of their allies. Political scientist and Zaire observer, Crawford Young, writing in the Fall 1978 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, outlined the consequences of these concerns:

This episode was in every respect a tragedy: thousands of Zairians perished, either in the short-lived FNLC [sic] occupation, the Foreign Legion reconquest, or Zairian "pacification" operations. Nearly all the 2,000 European residents fled, and at least 130 were killed. The mining industry accounting for 75-80 percent of copperbelt output, was crippled for months. In the short-to-middle run, full operations would only be possible under the protection of non-Zairian security forces, adding Zaire to the depressing list of African states whose survival depends on foreign troops [...]¹³⁵

This section aims to describe how this came to pass.

France and Zaire: 1975-1977

Why did French policymakers begin to exhibit a strong interest in Zaire during Giscard's presidency? Although a former Belgian, not French, colonial possession, Zaire's importance to France grew substantially during Giscard's administration. Part of his broader African policy aimed to extend France's sphere of influence beyond its traditional former colonial domain.¹³⁶ Zaire, as the "second largest francophone country in the world," thus had a privileged position.¹³⁷

The Zaire of the mid-1970s appeared to hold enormous economic potential. Mobutu seemed to bring a modicum of political stability to the country since his 1965 coup d'état. As late as the end of 1976, some officials in the French Foreign Ministry seemed as if they had succumbed to these siren calls. A series of notes from the Ministry's *Direction des affaires*

¹³⁵ Crawford Young. "Critical Countries: Zaire: The Unending Crisis." *Foreign Affairs*, Fall, 1978, p.1.

¹³⁶ John Chipman, *French Power in Africa*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 244.

¹³⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 22, "Visites de personnalités françaises : M. V. Giscard d'Estaing," Dossier 'Note économique,' Letter from André Ross to René Journiac, 16.5.1975.

africaines et malgaches (DAM) outline their general thinking on Zaire. One note from late 1976, representative of the general tenor of the department's analyses from the time, described Mobutu's rule:

Cette monarchie sans couronne a donné au pays la stabilité intérieure et l'unité. Ravagé par des troubles sanglants et menacé d'éclatement pendant les premières années de son existence le Zaïre est aujourd'hui, politiquement du moins, un pays solide, à l'intérieur duquel, depuis plusieurs années ne se manifeste plus aucune opposition.¹³⁸

The note also describes the country's economic possibilities in glowing terms. It explains that Zaire's economic and human potential approximated nearly half that of all the OCAM (the *Organisation commune africaine et malgache*) states combined.¹³⁹ It describes Zaire's vast mineral wealth; it was the largest global producer of cobalt and industrial diamonds, the world's sixth largest copper supplier, and it possessed vast quantities of manganese and tin, as well as zinc, iron, gold, and other minerals. Furthermore, the country had enormous agricultural potential, and its timber reserves amounted to nearly half that of the entire continent. Zaire's hydroelectric potential received particular attention. The note estimated this at twice that of the United States. Alone, the site of the large Inga-Shaba hydroelectric dam complex could potentially produce the equivalent of 1.7 times the amount of electricity consumed in France at the time.¹⁴⁰ To add to this, French officials believed that oil found off of Zaire's coast would eliminate Zaire's issue of foreign oil dependence.¹⁴¹

In a 1975 letter to Giscard's chief Africa Affairs advisor, René Journiac, André Ross, the French Ambassador to Zaire, described the broader French interest in the country:

[...] nos intérêts eux ne se situent pas à court terme mais à moyen et à long terme. Il est essentiel d'assurer pour l'avenir notre ravitaillement direct en cuivre et en métaux non ferreux dont ce pays a les gisements les plus riches en teneur. Nos intérêts consistent aussi à préparer de longue main la participation de la France à la construction et à l'exploitation du Grand Inga qui constitue la plus importante source d'énergie hydro-électrique du monde.

Pour nous c'est cela le Zaïre mais aussi le deuxième pays francophone du monde qui, par son poids, exerce nécessairement une attraction sur les pays de notre ancienne Afrique noire, et nous devons veiller à nos positions. Les Américains qui ont aidé le Zaïre dans une période difficile en ont conservé des positions essentielles. Notre action doit tendre aujourd'hui à nous servir de la situation actuelle pour nous placer de façon comparable.¹⁴²

Nonetheless, this somewhat rosy picture glossed over the harsh economic realities which had begun to seriously corrode the possibilities for sustainable and profitable development. In late 1973, Mobutu announced a series of "Zairianization" measures designed to expropriate

¹³⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, Dossier "Notes du département, 1976-1978," "A/s. Le Zaïre," 21.12.1976, pp. 2-3.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 2.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 3.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 4.

¹⁴² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 22, "Visites de personnalités françaises : M. V. Giscard d'Estaing," Dossier 'Note économique,' Letter from André Ross to René Journiac, 16.05.1975.

foreign-held property in the commercial, agricultural, construction and transportation sectors, as well as small industries. The following year, he reacted to the economic disruption caused by these measures with further “radicalization” which nationalized more foreign-owned businesses and redistributed some of the gains made by some Zairian officials during “Zairianization” to other parts of the elite. While Mobutu began to reverse some of these policies in 1975, much damage had already been done.¹⁴³

Furthermore, the 1973 oil shock severely reduced global demand for the raw materials whose exploitation remained the backbone of the Zairian economy. The resulting drop in prices, particularly copper, hammered Zaire’s mining sector. Thus, analysts in the French Finance Ministry took a much dimmer view of recent developments. They noted that, given the overwhelming role that copper mining and its related products played in Zaire’s economy, the country’s fiscal situation depended enormously upon price fluctuations.¹⁴⁴ The downward trend in the price of raw materials contributed to Zaire’s growing current account deficit and accumulation of arrears on its foreign debt. According to the IMF, the former reached an unprecedented 537 million dollars in 1975, the equivalent of 55 percent of the exports of goods and services that year and 16.5 percent of its GDP.¹⁴⁵ This situation led to high inflation, reduced government revenue, and growing budget deficits.¹⁴⁶ Between 1970 and 1975, Zaire’s total external public debt increased from less than 500 million dollars to over 2.7 billion dollars.¹⁴⁷ By early 1976, this level of indebtedness had become unsustainable.

Zairian officials, reacting to pressures generated from the country’s increasingly perilous balance of payments position, stopped most service payments and requested a major renegotiation of the external debt.¹⁴⁸ After approaching private bank officials, notably from Citibank, Mobutu came to the conclusion that he would have to resort to IMF assistance in order to find a way out of his troubling fiscal situation.¹⁴⁹ However, such recourse came with a price. As part of the “stabilization” package, Mobutu agreed to devalue the Zaire, then pegged to the US dollar at 1 Z = \$2 in an effort to boost productivity and improve the country’s

¹⁴³ see Crawford Young, and Thomas Turner. *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*. Madison, Wis: Univ. of Wisconsin Pr, 1985, p. 326-362.

¹⁴⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, Dossier “Notes du département, 1976-1978,” Note du Ministère de l’économie et des finances, Direction du trésor, Service des affaires internationales, “Note sur le Zaïre,” 04.1977, p.1.

¹⁴⁵ IMF Archives, Database files, “Zaire—Recent Economic Developments,” 13.05.1977, p. 38.

¹⁴⁶ IMF Archives, Database files, “Zaire-- Staff Report for the 1976 Article XIV Consultation,” 20.04.1977, p. 1-2.

¹⁴⁷ IMF Archives, Database files, “Zaire—Recent Economic Developments,” 13.05.1977, p. 51.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 55-56.

¹⁴⁹ Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 379-380.

balance of payments. In March 1976, he pegged the currency to the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDR) at a rate of 1 to 1.¹⁵⁰ This represented a 42 percent devaluation.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Mobutu promised to limit wage increases of government employees to 20 percent, and his government attempted to limit imports and reduce government spending. This allowed Zaire to benefit from a first "tranche" of credit from the IMF of 40.96 million SDR.¹⁵²

French officials thought these measures too harsh, as they threatened to massively increase prices, particularly for consumers in urban areas. Thus, they agreed to provide an extension on Zairian debt repayments, and encouraged other countries to do the same.¹⁵³ Partly, a feeling that Zaire's economic difficulties mainly resulted from exogenous economic factors motivated these policies. Indeed, the previous year, André Ross criticized the attitude of those, particularly in Belgium, who held pessimistic views as to the future of the regime. He emphasized the short-term nature of Zaire's financial difficulties and that this hardly translated into a possible threat to Mobutu. Ross asserted that Mobutu's position depended much more upon the army than on public opinion. Since no significant threat seemed yet to emerge from the army, Mobutu appeared reasonably safe as long as the situation did not worsen.¹⁵⁴ A year later, this attitude had barely changed, even after the restructuring requested by the IMF. A Foreign Ministry note from late April 1976 suggests that Zaire's economy could evolve favorably, particularly if a momentary increase in copper prices continued, adding that, "on peut estimer à six mois le début de cette reprise mais il faudra deux ans au Zaïre pour retrouver son régime de croisière."¹⁵⁵

Economic difficulties were not Mobutu's only worry, however. With the overthrow of the Portuguese dictatorship in April 1974, Lisbon rapidly began granting independence to its colonies. As the Portuguese started withdrawing from Angola, Zaire's large Southern neighbor, its three principal liberation movements began fighting each other for power. Shortly before its formal independence on November 11 1975 a massive Cuban military intervention helped to tip the balance of forces definitively in the direction of the Popular Movement for the

¹⁵⁰ While not a currency in itself, the SDR represents a claim upon currency held by member countries of the IMF. Its value is determined by a "currency basket" of major currencies which aims to limit the effects of exchange rate fluctuations.

¹⁵¹ IMF Archives, Database files, "Zaire---Use of Fund Resources---Compensatory Financing Facility," 20.04.1977, p. 1-2.

¹⁵² Ibid. 2.

¹⁵³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, Dossier "Notes du département, 1976-1978," Conférence des chefs d'Etats africains, Paris mai 1976, "Note : A/s. le Zaïre," 30.04.1976, p.8-9.

¹⁵⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 22, "Visites de personnalités françaises : M. V. Giscard d'Estaing," Dossier 'Note économique,' Letter from André Ross to René Journiac, 16.5.1975, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, Dossier "Notes du département, 1976-1978," Conférence des chefs d'Etats africains, Paris mai 1976, "Note : A/s. le Zaïre," 30.04.1976, p.7.

Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Cuba's "Operation Carlota" helped the MPLA defeat both a South African invasion force and the Zaire and US-backed National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA). By early 1976, the MPLA controlled most of the major cities in the country, although the civil war continued, particularly against Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

The MPLA and its Cuban allies had practically destroyed the FNLA. Although Zaire more or less stopped giving the movement substantial aid after a February 1976 agreement between Angola and Zaire, both states continued to support armed opposition groups.¹⁵⁶ Massive refugee flows and the presence of armed groups along Zaire's long borders combined to threaten Mobutu's position. Furthermore, the fighting in Angola had closed the vital Benguela railway linking Zaire's landlocked Shaba region to the Atlantic Ocean through Angolan territory. Thus, exports of Zaire's mineral wealth became more difficult.

During this time, relations with the Americans had briefly cooled as well. In June 1975, Mobutu accused American Ambassador Deane Hinton of playing a role in an alleged CIA plot to overthrow him and expelled Hinton from the country. No evidence supports Mobutu's allegations, and they even surprised American Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger.¹⁵⁷ Although the reasons behind Mobutu's accusations remain vague, they eventually resulted in increased US attention and military assistance as the Angolan crisis intensified in the following months.¹⁵⁸ French observers felt that Mobutu's accusations and subsequent arrest of a number of military officers and government officials allowed him to strengthen his regime in a time of growing economic and regional difficulties.¹⁵⁹ It also may have been a ploy to attract more American support and attention.

The combination of Zaire's precarious economic situation, regional tensions, and growing French interest in the country formed the backdrop for French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's state visit to Kinshasa in early August 1975. This visit provided an

¹⁵⁶ For more on the Angolan Civil War and foreign intervention during this time, see John A. Marcum. *The Angolan Revolution Volume II: Exile Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (1962-1976)* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1978, pp. 241-281, Piero Gleijeses, Piero. *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, pp. 246-346, Odd Arne Westad. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 207-249.

¹⁵⁷ For more on this bizarre mini-crisis in US-Zairian relations, see *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1969-1976, Vol. E-6, Documents on Africa, 1973-1976, Docs. 272-278; found at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve06/ch9> (accessed on 26.11.2011).

¹⁵⁸ FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. E-6: 280. Memorandum from Secretary of State Kissinger to President Ford, Washington, 17.07.1976.

¹⁵⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, Dossier "Notes du département, 1976-1978," "L'Année 1975 au Zaïre, Note de l'Ambassadeur" 23.01.1976, p. 3.

enormous political and psychological boost to Mobutu. Officials at the Quai d'Orsay proclaimed that the visit constituted the most important political event of the year in Zaire, and significantly contributed to reinforcing French prestige and economic interests in the country.¹⁶⁰ Mobutu treated Giscard, a lover of adoring crowds, to a grand welcome at Kinshasa's May 21st Stadium.¹⁶¹ Giscard remembered the scene fondly, of a stadium, "bourré jusqu'à la cime d'une foule aussi enthousiaste que pour une finale de la coupe du monde de football."¹⁶² Giscard and Mobutu both made much of the fact that no other French head of state had previously visited Zaire.¹⁶³ To Giscard's apparent chagrin, Mobutu even managed to get him to don a Mobutu-style leopard-skin hat. Giscard later claimed that fortunately only a single photo of this existed.¹⁶⁴ Material found in the French Embassy archives in Nantes, however, indicate that this did not prevent the Zairian media from happily publishing it.¹⁶⁵ At the end of his visit, he and Mobutu held a press conference. Giscard, in a theme he would repeat often, declared that he loved Africa. As he later wrote, "Les journalistes noirs ont levé leurs stylos, pour me regarder. Ils ont pris brusquement conscience que c'était mon cœur qui parlait. C'est vrai que j'aime l'Afrique. Cet amour a eu des conséquences sur le cours de ma présidence."¹⁶⁶ He might have singled out Zaire as an example.

Giscard's visit signaled an important affirmation of French interests. One of the principal objects of discussions between Giscard and Mobutu lay in the modalities of a major telecommunications contract involving the French electronics and defense firm Thomson-CSF.¹⁶⁷ This regime prestige project involved the installation of satellite telecommunications infrastructure to establish direct links between Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, as well as a national television network.¹⁶⁸ Giscard agreed to a financing scheme which included a 59.3 million franc treasury loan for the acquisition of necessary building materials in France.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, Dossier "Notes du département, 1976-1978," "L'Année 1975 au Zaïre, Note de l'Ambassadeur" 23.01.1976, p. 6.

¹⁶¹ He frequently writes about this obsession in his memoirs. He even once complained to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev about the nature of the crowds greeting him in Red Square, see Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. *Le pouvoir et la vie*, p.43.

¹⁶² Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 587.

¹⁶³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 22, "Visites de personnalités françaises : M. V. Giscard d'Estaing," «Conférence de Presse de M. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Président de la République," 09.08.1975, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 587.

¹⁶⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 22, "Visites de personnalités françaises : M. V. Giscard d'Estaing," *Zaïre : Hebdomadaire de l'Afrique Centrale*, No. 367, 18.08.1975.

¹⁶⁶ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 588.

¹⁶⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note de la Coopération, "La politique française d'aide au Zaïre," undated, 1977, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note, "A/S : Présence économique française dans le Shaba," 23.03.1977, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note de la Coopération, "La politique française d'aide au Zaïre," undated, 1977, p. 3.

Interestingly, the head of Thomson-CSF was none other than Philippe Giscard d'Estaing, the President's cousin. Furthermore, the Director of the *Banque française du commerce extérieur* (BFCE) was François Giscard d'Estaing, another cousin. This bank provided special financing for French firms trading overseas, including for Thomson-CSF's contract in Zaire.¹⁷⁰ Its directorship was directly appointed by the French Finance Minister, Giscard's position before he became President the previous year. Mobutu's regime clearly did not have a monopoly on nepotism.

French economic interests in Zaire were principally concentrated in Shaba. They mostly focused around the activities of the large French parastatal, the *Bureau de recherches géologiques et minières* (BRGM), one of the largest mine operators in Africa.¹⁷¹ The BRGM, whose presence in Zaire dated to 1965, had shares in a number of mining consortiums. The BRGM held a 3.5 percent stake in the *Société Minière de Tenke-Fungurume* which mined copper and cobalt¹⁷² and which held the mining rights to one of the richest copper veins in the world.¹⁷³ The French Bank, Paribas, also held a 3.5 percent stake in the consortium, thus French interests held a 7 percent stake on the board of directors.¹⁷⁴ The BRGM also had a 100 percent stake in a company which had the rights to an estimated 3,000 ton deposit of tin, as well as copper and lead deposits in North Shaba.¹⁷⁵ As noted above, Thomson-CSF also had a significant presence in the construction of telecommunications infrastructure. Otherwise, a few other French companies were also present in Shaba, principally involved in small road-building projects and the construction of meteorological stations.¹⁷⁶ Additionally, France imported around a third of its total copper supply from Zaire. In 1975, this amounted to some 179 million tons, with a value of around 1 billion French Francs.¹⁷⁷

Ultimately though, France had comparatively limited economic interests in Zaire. Compared to other Western countries, France had a miniscule amount of private investment in the country. In 1978, for instance, Belgium had some 800 million dollars of private investment, followed by the United States with 200 million, West Germany with 80 million, and Great

¹⁷⁰ Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 375.

¹⁷¹ Jean-Claude Willame, "La France au Zaïre : Le grand 'safari technologique'" in Maspero, François (ed.). *La France contre l'Afrique*. Paris: F. Maspero, 1981. p 225.

¹⁷² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le cabinet du ministre, "A/S : Présence économique française dans le Shaba," 23.03.1977, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷³ Willame "La France au Zaïre," 226.

¹⁷⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le cabinet du ministre, "A/S : Présence économique française dans le Shaba," 23.03.1977 pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 3-4.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 5.

Britain with 60 million. France on the other hand, lagged far behind the rest at a mere 20 million dollars.¹⁷⁸ Overall, French trade with Zaïre actually declined during the course of Giscard's presidential term. In 1974, it represented a mere 3.4 percent of the value of France's total trade with Sub-Saharan Africa. By 1981, this figure had declined to 1.7 percent.¹⁷⁹ When one considers that the total value of French trade with Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole averaged only 6.5 percent of total French trade between the years 1974 and 1980, the economic value of Zaïre to French interests seemed unimportant.¹⁸⁰

Despite Zaïre's fabulous mineral wealth, particularly in Shaba province, French and Belgian business elites with significant mining interests seemed surprisingly unconcerned about the combined impacts of Zaïre's economic crisis and the disruption caused by the First Shaba invasion (see below). Polled by French intelligence officials, these investors felt strongly that Zaïre had relatively limited importance as a mineral exporter, given the current state of the market, particularly for copper, which remained dominated by buyers. The fact that copper prices declined even further as the first Shaba invasion progressed into the heart of the country's copper belt, seemed to confirm this view.¹⁸¹

Additionally COFACE, the French state investment insurance agency, stopped guaranteeing medium and long-term investments in Zaïre with the first invasion of the Katangan Gendarmes. COFACE officials informed French authorities that this had less to do with the invasion itself than Zaïre's precarious overall financial situation.¹⁸² This dealt a harsh blow to future French private investment projects, a prospect that Ross protested vigorously.¹⁸³

After Mobutu's acceptance of the IMF's initial conditions in March 1976, French observers in the Foreign Ministry concluded that the most important means of both ensuring future economic prosperity in Zaïre, and securing growing French interests, lay in the continued stability of the regime.¹⁸⁴ Much of France's Zaïre policy had this goal in mind. This was

¹⁷⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, Note "A/S : Zaïre," 27.12.1978, p. 3.

¹⁷⁹ Daniel Bach, "La France en Afrique subsaharienne : contraintes historiques et nouveaux espaces économiques," in Cohen, Samy and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.). *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*. Paris, France : Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 289.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 305.

¹⁸¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Fiche du Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, No. 21/CER/B/CD, "Evolution de la situation au Zaïre," 07.04.1977, Annexe.

¹⁸² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note from the Direction des affaires économiques et financières to DAM, "A.s. Attitude de la COFACE à l'égard du Zaïre," 25.05.1977.

¹⁸³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, untitled, 19.05.1977.

¹⁸⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, Dossier "Notes du département, 1976-1978," Conférence des chefs d'Etats africains, Paris mai 1976, "Note : A/s. le Zaïre," 30.04.1976, p.7-8.

particularly the case when it came to the fragile regional political situation, which gave Zaire a strategic significance to French policymakers which far surpassed its economic importance.

The 1975 Cuban military intervention in support of the MPLA in Angola led French policymakers to see a growing communist threat in the region. American policymakers shared these fears and both countries began to provide military assistance to UNITA and the FNLA to prevent an MPLA victory. Unfortunately, the lack of available French government records make it difficult to assess the nature and extent of French assistance to the two movements.

Based on American records however, it seems clear that French involvement lagged far behind that of the US and South Africa. However, Kissinger did tell French Foreign Minister Jean Sauvagnargues that he wanted to, “thank France for having done more than any other European country,” in Angola.¹⁸⁵ Nonetheless, often even American intelligence officials had little knowledge of the full extent of French activities. The CIA and the SDECE had established communications channels to discuss the Angolan issue. The head of the CIA’s Angola Task Force, John Stockwell, later complained that information seemed to only flow one way, as the French shared very little of their activities with their American colleagues.¹⁸⁶ SDECE’s head, Alexandre de Marenches, later explained this lack of reciprocity as resulting from fears among French intelligence officials that anything they said to the CIA would leak to the American press, as had recently occurred in other circumstances.¹⁸⁷ This fear was perhaps justified since, two years later Stockwell published his own tell-all memoir of the covert war in Angola.

According to American sources, French involvement in Angola consisted of supplying Mobutu with ammunition and supplies destined for FNLA and UNITA fighters on the ground, as well as with Alouette helicopter gunships meant for the South African invasion force in Southern Angola.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, French intelligence officials organized the recruitment of a handful of mercenaries to provide assistance for UNITA’s fighters and to help organize an invasion of the oil-rich Angolan enclave of Cabinda.

However, most of the French activities described in American sources were funded by the CIA. For instance, the CIA paid for the Alouette helicopters and transported them to Zaire in an American C-130.¹⁸⁹ The CIA also paid for the French mercenaries. The CIA felt that the

¹⁸⁵ FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Southern Africa, Doc. 176. Telegram from Secretary of State Kissinger to the Embassy in France, “France Plans to Recognize MPLA,” 14.02.1976, pp. 445.

¹⁸⁶ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 192.

¹⁸⁷ Marenches, *Dans le secret des princes*, 188.

¹⁸⁸ See FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Southern Africa, Doc. 155. Message from Kissinger to Giscard, 20.12.1975, p. 398, and Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 192, 218.

¹⁸⁹ See FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Southern Africa, Doc. 155. Message from Kissinger to Giscard, 20.12.1975, p. 398, and Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 192, 218.

FNLA and UNITA needed strengthening by “foreign military advisors.” These could not be American for reasons of plausible deniability. The SDECE put CIA case officers into contact with Bob Denard who offered to provide 20 mercenaries on a 500,000 dollar short term contract to assist Savimbi. Denard demanded this payment in advance. The CIA codename for Denard was UNROBIN/1 and the mercenary operation was codenamed UNHOOD. CIA officials nicknamed them “Robin’s Hoods” or the “French Hoods.”¹⁹⁰

French authorities also added several “military advisors” to assist a Mobutu-backed invasion of Cabinda. In October 1975 Mobutu requested American support for his effort to defeat the MPLA in Cabinda. The CIA provided small arms for 1,000 men to support the Cabindan secessionist group, the FLEC. Stockwell mentions that some half-dozen French mercenaries were also involved in the operation, which the MPLA soon managed to repulse.¹⁹¹

The “advisors” in Southern Angola did not fare much better. On January 10 (as the FNLA was collapsing), 11 of the mercenaries arrived in Kinshasa where CIA operatives spent two days training them on the use of SA-7 surface-to-air missiles. They then flew to Southern Angola where the rest of the mercenaries joined them.¹⁹²

In late February 1976, the Kinshasa CIA station chief organized the airlift of 220,000 dollars’ worth of combat rations from Rhodesia to UNITA forces. The Fokker F-27 plane carrying the rations was attacked on the ground by Cuban MIG-21s on March 13. They damaged the plane on the first pass. On the second pass, one of the French mercenaries tried to shoot it down with an SA-7, but it malfunctioned and hit the ground. A second shot missed as well and the MIGs managed to destroy the F-27. After their attack on the landing strip at Gago Coutinho, the MIGs strafed retreating convoys. The mercenaries escaped with UNITA elements into Namibia and eventually back to France. Out of 22 mercenaries, 2 were killed.¹⁹³ With three months remaining on their contracts, Savimbi was furious that the mercenaries had seemingly fled the scene. The mercenaries however blamed UNITA forces for lack of discipline in the face of air attacks.¹⁹⁴

However, French policymakers were extremely concerned about the effects of the Tunney and Clark amendments prohibiting further American covert financing of armed groups in Angola. In a January 1976 meeting, René Journiac raised this issue with Kissinger, saying:

¹⁹⁰ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 184.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 164.

¹⁹² Ibid. 222.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 242-243.

¹⁹⁴ FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Southern Africa, Doc. 186. Report Prepared by the Working Group on Angola, 02.04.1976, p. 469.

What the US does in Angola will have an impact on African attitudes throughout the continent. Not just in Zaire, but among our other friends as well. The present US position is inconceivable to me, and I believe that the African “fence-sitters” will assess the consequences of US inaction and shift from our camp to the other one. In addition, it is our real friends like Houphouët and Senghor who are threatened.¹⁹⁵

French fears about American commitment to Angola forced Giscard to make a hard choice about continued French engagement. In early February a number of Francophone African allies including Presidents Bongo and Houphouët-Boigny informed Giscard that they would soon officially recognize the MPLA as Angola’s legitimate government. This triggered a dramatic reversal in France’s stance.

On February 12, Giscard wrote to American President Gerald Ford announcing France’s decision to recognize the MPLA as well. Giscard justified this decision by arguing that A) the MPLA controlled most of Angolan territory and B) France needed to follow the example of its “moderate African friends” in order to avoid the appearance of a last-minute recognition forced by the pressure of the situation.¹⁹⁶

American officials argued that recognition deprived Western powers of leverage which they could use to detach the MPLA from its Soviet and Cuban protectors. Kissinger felt there was an “inherent contradiction” between French assertions that they attached great importance to Soviet and Cuban withdrawal from Angola, and their willingness to unconditionally recognize the MPLA.¹⁹⁷ However, French officials had come to different conclusions. Foreign Minister Jean Sauvagnargues forcefully argued that the MPLA victory meant that Western powers had limited options. Supporting a continued guerilla war would only prolong the fighting and intensify Soviet involvement by making the MPLA even more dependent upon foreign assistance. Sauvagnargues argued that recognition did not constitute the kind of real leverage that Kissinger claimed. In his view, the MPLA were well aware that both France and the United States supported UNITA and the FNLA. Refusing to recognize would change nothing and simply encourage continued dependence upon the Soviets.¹⁹⁸

The new position of the “moderate” African states constituted an even more central argument for Sauvagnargues. He told American Ambassador Kenneth Rush that “The African moderates supported us when we needed them. We cannot let them down now. We must stay

¹⁹⁵ FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Southern Africa, Doc. 172. Memorandum of Conversation between Kissinger and Journiac, 24.01.1976, p. 427-428.

¹⁹⁶ FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Southern Africa, Doc. 174. Letter from French President Giscard d’Estaing to President Ford, 12.02.1976, p. 437.

¹⁹⁷ FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Southern Africa, Doc. 176. Telegram from Secretary of State Kissinger to the Embassy in France, “France Plans to Recognize MPLA,” 14.02.1976, pp. 443-444.

¹⁹⁸ FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Southern Africa, Doc. 177. Telegram the Embassy in France to the Department of State, “France Plans to Recognize MPLA,” 16.02.1976, p. 447.

with them.”¹⁹⁹ Even Mobutu apparently offered no objections to French recognition of the MPLA. However, he wanted a guarantee that the movement would not “unleash” the Katangan Gendarmes onto Zairian territory.²⁰⁰

Despite Sauvagnargues’ contention that continued support for Angolan guerillas would prove counterproductive, the French did provide a small level of assistance to UNITA following their recognition of the MPLA in early 1976. Alexandre de Marenches was especially drawn to UNITA’s leader, Jonas Savimbi. He later spoke in glowing terms about Savimbi, describing him as a, “géant de l’histoire, non seulement un géant physique, mais un géant intellectuel et moral.”²⁰¹ He explained to journalist Christine Ockrent that he felt, “une admiration et une affection sans bornes pour Savimbi.”²⁰² In Marenches’ view, Savimbi’s presence over much of the interior meant that Savimbi was the “real” head of Angola, “comme de Gaulle était celui de la France qui ne voulait pas se soumettre.”²⁰³ For Marenches, Savimbi’s struggle later represented one of the great struggles of the Free World against the evils of “Soviet colonialism.”²⁰⁴

Marenches helped to organize low-levels of assistance to UNITA through trusted allies, particularly Morocco’s King Hassan II. This included training camps for UNITA fighters in Morocco and low-levels of economic aid.²⁰⁵ In 1977, Savimbi secretly visited Paris to meet with Marenches.²⁰⁶ Marenches reciprocated and visited Savimbi’s headquarters in Angola, later claiming that he did so without Giscard’s knowledge or permission.²⁰⁷

In mid-1978, probably as a response to the rapprochement between the Zairian and Angolan regimes following the second Shaba invasion, Giscard decided to end military assistance to UNITA.²⁰⁸ In July 1978, Journiac met with American Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Richard Moose. He told Moose that Savimbi should not be “dropped” by the West, but that aid should be reduced and become more discreet. In September however, Moose met with Guiringaud who told him that France had ceased military aid to Savimbi and that France would soon expel UNITA representatives.²⁰⁹ Marenches strongly disagreed with

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Marenches, *Dans le secret des princes*, 188.

²⁰² Ibid. 189.

²⁰³ Ibid. 187.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 181.

²⁰⁵ Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 392.

²⁰⁶ Warthier, *Quatre présidents et l’Afrique*, 362.

²⁰⁷ Marenches, *Dans le secret des princes*, 188-189.

²⁰⁸ Warthier, *Quatre présidents et l’Afrique*, 362.

²⁰⁹ JCL: CREST Database Document NLC-16-114-1-42-1, Telegram from Secretary of State Vance to Paris Embassy, “French Policy Toward Angola,” 12.11.1978.

this decision and it seems possible that the SDECE continued to assist UNITA at some level anyway.²¹⁰

At any rate, the failure of the United States and France in Angola reinforced Mobutu's importance in the eyes of French policymakers. The American inability to shape the outcome in the Angolan conflict enhanced French concerns over credibility and the defense of France's position in Africa. In French eyes, allowing Mobutu to fall would irreparably damage not only French prestige on the continent, but that of the West as well. Shortly before the first Shaba invasion, in March 1977, an Embassy analysis articulated this by emphasizing that rather than Zaire's economic importance:

[...] son intérêt politique est capital. L'influence que lui confère sa position centrale jointe à ses dimensions exceptionnelles est considérable. Un changement qui installerait à Kinshasa un régime progressiste rendrait 1. La survie des régimes modérés dans les pays proches ou voisins (Gabon-Cameroun-RCA-Rwanda-Burundi) extrêmement aléatoire et surtout 2. Compromettrait gravement les chances d'une solution pacifique des problèmes d'Afrique australe, augmentant du même coup les possibilités de pénétration offertes aux influences extérieures hostiles à l'Occident.²¹¹

Indeed, Zaire, with a surface area of over 2 million square kilometers and a population of over 25 million people, bordered nine other countries, many with shared cross-border linguistic and cultural communities.²¹² Any major political disturbances would almost automatically have significant repercussions in the region. In March 1977, these fears would crystallize with the outbreak of the "Eighty Day War."

The Origins of the Shaba Crises

On March 8 1977, roughly two thousand "Katangan Gendarmes" entered Zaire's Shaba province from Angola.²¹³ Over the next few weeks, they expanded their control over a large portion of Shaba as FAZ formations disintegrated, many without firing a shot. Over the next days and weeks, French policymaker struggled to develop a response to this clear threat to Mobutu's regime. The location of the invasion, and the identity of the invaders, made a forceful response necessary in the eyes of French officials.

Shaba province constituted the primary repository of Zaire's mineral riches. It hosted thousands of European expatriate workers and their families, mostly tied to the Zairian

²¹⁰ Marenches, *Dans le secret des princes*, 186-187, Warthier, *Quatre présidents et l'Afrique*, 362, and Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 392.

²¹¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Handwritten note, "Signification du Zaïre pour les intérêts occidentaux," undated, most likely early March, 1977.

²¹² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, "Fiche pays : Zaïre," undated 1977.

²¹³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, "A/s : Etude de M. BERGER, stagiaire de l'E.N.A. sur la guerre du Shaba," the Embassy report on Shaba I, 15.09.1977, p. 2.

parastatal *Générale des Carrières et des Mines* (GECAMINES) which completely dominated the local economy. Shaba contained 80 percent of Zaire's natural resources, principally copper. Copper exports from Shaba provided some 70 percent of the regime's foreign exchange earnings and budget.²¹⁴ The province's economic potential also meant that it became the focal point of foreign interest. Days after the country's independence from Belgium at the end of June 1960, separatists in Shaba (then, as now, called Katanga), led by Moïse Tshombe, supported by Belgium and foreign mercenaries, declared independence. Although UN forces helped to end the rebellion by 1963, the province's relationship to the rest of the country remained tense.

André Ross summarized the legacy of the secession attempt in the following terms:

Politiquement, les blessures de la tentative de sécession sont mal cicatrisées. Le pouvoir central se défie du SHABA et y envoie ses hommes les plus fidèles mais aussi les plus rigoureux : certains d'entre les commissaires de région ont eu une réputation détestable du fait de leur corruption et de leur brutalité.²¹⁵

Shaba's population became even more alienated from Kinshasa as a result of the severe economic difficulties affecting Zaire at the time. The crisis engendered by the sharp drop in the price of copper considerably affected the province. With a population that Ross described as somewhat "proletarianized" due to the massive presence of extractive industries, the development of "chronic unemployment" resulted in frequent strikes and riots.²¹⁶ In addition, the region lacked access to basic supplies. Its remote location, isolated and without direct contact with the sea, combined with very limited transportation infrastructure, only aggravated its economic difficulties. Fuel supply shortages constantly marred the daily life of the province, and even food availability had become a major problem.²¹⁷

On top of this, unlike much of the rest of Zaire, a country of over 200 ethnicities, Shaba possessed a comparatively homogenous population. Although divided into several communities, they shared Swahili as a lingua franca.²¹⁸ Of the major communities, the Lunda had formed the main constituency for Tshombe's secession.²¹⁹ Thus, Mobutu tended to exclude them from significant forms of political participation.²²⁰ As described later, they were also the

²¹⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le Secrétaire Général N. 36 DAM/1, "A/S : Situation au SHABA (Zaïre)," 26.01.1976, p. 1.

²¹⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1977," Dépêche d'actualité, N.3/DA-DAM, "A/S: le SHABA et les survivances du sécessionnisme katangais," from Ross to Journiac and Ministry, 18.03.1977, p. 2.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 3

²¹⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier, "1978," N. 353/DAM Rapport, "A/S Situation au SHABA à la veille de l'attaque de KOLWEZI," Embassy study, 18.05.1978, p. 3-4.

²¹⁸ Malu, *The Shaba Invasions*, 19.

²¹⁹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier, "1978," N. 353/DAM Rapport, "A/S Situation au SHABA à la veille de l'attaque de KOLWEZI," Embassy study, 18.05.1978, p. 8.

²²⁰ Ibid, 8.

major constituency for the rebels invading Shaba in 1977 and 1978. In the years preceding the first Shaba invasion, Mobutu had also done much to alienate the Luba, the other major community in Shaba. In the recent past, the Luba had generally remained loyal to Kinshasa in local conflicts. However, due to Mobutu's perceived abandonment of their region, many had begun to increasingly feel themselves victims of Kinshasa's ingratitude.²²¹

Mobutu made things worse through his regime's consistent mismanagement of the local administration. According a French Embassy report, most of the administrators had no knowledge of local languages. Those at the top echelons benefited from their positions in the form of corruption, thus reinforcing the regime's unpopularity. Local citizens often viewed them as foreigners. The report notes that Mobutu's only "reliable" support in Shaba came from the army. However, locals detested the army for similar reasons. Most of its soldiers also came from other parts of Zaïre. They received irregular pay and made up for it with exactions upon local communities. Confrontations often took place between soldiers and civilians, forcing frequent transfers of units from one location to another. Following the first Shaba invasion, the army itself provided a significant source of conflict as purges, combined with unequal conditions, encouraged and reinforced inter-unit enmities.²²²

Another consular report provided a stark illustration of the problem. In January 1976, before the first major currency devaluation, a sack of flour in Shaba cost around 6.5 Zaires, the equivalent of 13 dollars at the time. The monthly salary of the FAZ rank and file was 18 Zaires per month, whereas appeals court judges made 220 Z, and a government minister made between 1200 and 1800 Z in convertible currency.²²³ By early 1978, after a major currency devaluation and the First Shaba War, a sack of flour sold for around 35 Zaires in the cities.²²⁴

These conflicting dynamics, combined with the worsening economic and political crisis in Shaba, threatened to bring the "traditionally" rival ethnic communities together in opposition to the regime.²²⁵ As the first Shaba invasion began in March 1977, André Ross remarked:

Toutes ces raisons font évidemment du SHABA une poudrière. Le niveau et la vigueur de la subversion peuvent donner lieu en cas d'échec de l'armée zaïroise à la résurrection de certains espoirs sécessionnistes. Le risque est d'autant plus grand que le réveil de ce foyer de troubles ne manquera pas d'en susciter dans d'autres provinces.²²⁶

²²¹ Ibid, 9.

²²² Ibid. 10- 11.

²²³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le Secrétaire Général N. 36 DAM/1, "A/S : Situation au SHABA (Zaïre)," 26.01.1976, p. 3.

²²⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier, "1978," N. 353/DAM Rapport, "A/S Situation au SHABA à la veille de l'attaque de KOLWEZI," Embassy study, 18.05.1978, p. 4.

²²⁵ Ibid. p. 10.

²²⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1977," Dépêche d'actualité, N.3/DA-DAM, "A/S: le SHABA et les survivances du sécessionnisme katangais," from Ross to Journiac and Ministry, 18.03.1977, p. 4.

Thus, one major cause of French anxiety lay in Shaba's precarious situation. Any kind of major uprising or breakdown in political order could inspire aftershocks in other regions. This could have resulted in an unacceptable destabilization of Zaire. As town after town fell to the advance of the Katangan Gendarmes in March 1977, these fears threatened to become reality.

Who were the Katangan Gendarmes, and what were their objectives? The dearth of literature on the group, as well as the existence of only fragmentary documentary material, makes it difficult to paint a detailed picture of the organization. This lack of information made it easy for Mobutu to shape their image to his own ends in his discussions with his Western backers. The Katangan Gendarmes, sometimes called the "ex-Katangan Gendarmes," or the *Tigres*, represented the political and military descendants of Tshombe's secessionist Katangan regime, which had fled into Angola in the previous decade.

At the outbreak of the Katangan secession in July 1960 Moïse Tshombe hastily began to assemble a military force, many from former Belgian-officered security units of the *Force Publique* (hence the name "Gendarmes"). These Katangan "Gendarmes" formed the backbone of secessionist Katanga's military force. As UN and Congolese forces crushed the secession in early 1963, many of these troops fled to neighboring Angola, then under Portuguese control. There, strong local ethnic affinities and the at least tacit support of the Portuguese, allowed Tshombe to maintain the Gendarmes as a viable military force and thus, a negotiating tool.²²⁷

The following year, a growing rebellion in eastern Congo,²²⁸ known as the Simba revolt, threatened the incumbent Congolese regime. In June 1964, in a policy turnaround, Congolese President Joseph Kasavubu called upon Tshombe to become Prime Minister of the Congo. Tshombe's Gendarmes promised to be a useful asset to counter the eastern insurgents, and Tshombe's presence in Leopoldville also meant that Katanga would not try to reassert its independence as the last UN peacekeeping troops left the country.²²⁹

Although the Gendarmes played an important role in defeating the rebellion, Kasavubu forced Tshombe to resign. Shortly thereafter, Mobutu, the head of the Congolese army, seized power in a coup d'état in November 1965. This left the Gendarme units, then officially integrated into the Congolese army, effectively isolated and threatened by a new regime which

²²⁷ Willame, *FLNC*, 4-5.

²²⁸ In order to avoid anachronism (but possibly contribute to confusion), pre-1971 Zaire is referred to as "the Congo" and Kinshasa as "Leopoldville" pre-1966.

²²⁹ Pierre-Michel Durand. *L'Afrique et les relations franco-américaines des années soixante: Aux origines de l'obsession américaine*. Paris, France : l'Harmattan, 2007, p. 275

viewed them as dangerous.²³⁰ The first indication of Mobutu's plans for the Gendarmes came in Katanga early the following year when he appointed a new governor for the province, J.F. Manzikala.

Tshombe, while Prime Minister, only committed some of his Gendarmes to the fight against the Simba rebels, others joined the ranks of the Katangan police. After Tshombe's fall, the Katangan police force consisted of nearly 6,000 well-armed men. Manzikala's mission aimed at ruthlessly purging the police and provincial administration. This involved an enormous level of brutality, including savage beatings and threats which forced thousands of refugees across the Angolan border, including many of the Katangan Gendarmes. This added to the ranks of the Gendarmes who had already fled to Angola.²³¹ One of those arrested in Manizakala's purges was the Kolwezi chief of police, Nathanaël Mbumba. In early 1968, Mbumba managed to escape and make his way to Angola where he became a leading figure among the burgeoning Congolese exile political formations.²³²

Other Katangan units located elsewhere in the country took note of this treatment. Several of these units, numbering some 2,000 soldiers located in Kisangani (formerly Stanleyville), angry at mistreatment, lack of pay, and fearful of their prospects under Mobutu's regime, launched a mutiny in July 1966. The rebellion lasted until September when Congolese army units, led by white mercenaries under their notorious leaders Bob Denard and Jean Schramme, crushed the revolt.²³³ As a reward for his contribution in defeating the uprising, Mobutu awarded Denard, a French national, the Order of Zaire and proclaimed him the "Savior of the Republic."²³⁴ He promoted Denard to the rank of Colonel in the Congolese Army and promised him the command of a mixed brigade of Congolese troops and European mercenaries. For the next few months, Denard held a privileged position as a close advisor to Mobutu.²³⁵

However, in Mobutu's quest to build up his domestic and international legitimacy, the substantial presence of white mercenaries in his armed forces constituted a formidable obstacle. Their experience and relative combat effectiveness often provided a necessary fillip to the fighting capacities of the Congolese army. However, they also represented a major political liability, for they opened Mobutu to attacks on his Pan-African and anti-colonial credentials, as well as questions concerning his own grip on power. In discussions with other African heads

²³⁰ Willame, *FLNC*, 5.

²³¹ Ibid. 8.

²³² Ibid. 13.

²³³ Ibid. 5.

²³⁴ Durand, *L'Afrique et les relations franco-américaines*, 458.

²³⁵ Ibid. 464.

of state, Mobutu decided to end the mercenary presence in Congo in exchange for an agreement to hold the 1967 annual OAU Summit Meeting in Kinshasa.²³⁶

Another potential obstacle lay in the remaining units of the Katangan Gendarmes in the Congo, whom Mobutu had not yet attempted to disarm or dissolve, despite the recent mutiny. Their presumed loyalty to the ousted Tshombe, along with the history of Katangan secession and the recent uprising, made them a potential threat. Indeed, in the months following the Kisangani mutiny, Mobutu launched a ferocious propaganda campaign against Tshombe, accusing him of having instigated the uprising, and of conspiring to bring down the regime. In March 1967, his regime tried Tshombe, then in exile in Spain, and sentenced him to death in absentia.

At the same time, Mobutu began spreading rumors of a mercenary plot, fomented by Tshombe's supporters. This became a self-fulfilling prophecy when, responding to fears of an imminent crackdown in early July 1967, Bob Denard and Jean Schramme led a mercenary uprising against Mobutu in alliance with a few defecting elements of the Congolese army, and, crucially, the Katangan Gendarmes.²³⁷ This revolt, also beginning in Kisangani, quickly ran into unexpectedly fierce resistance from Congolese army units. Within a month, lack of success on the ground forced the mutineers to withdrawal to Bukavu on the Rwandan border. There, after a two month-long siege, they retreated to Rwandan territory and were disarmed.²³⁸

The presence of the Katangans and mercenaries on Rwandan soil quickly became embarrassing for President Grégoire Kayibanda's regime, which had little choice in the matter of accepting over 1,000 well-armed troops onto its territory. Mobutu broke relations with Rwanda and put pressure on the regime to extradite the mutineers back to the Congo. He also managed to build a coalition of African countries to refuse overflight rights to any aircraft carrying the mercenaries out of Rwanda. Belgium and France tried to pressure Mobutu to agree to an evacuation of the mercenaries, but to little avail until April 1968. The situation became so desperate that Kayibanda, with Belgian connivance, even envisaged smuggling them out of the country.²³⁹ While Western pressure resulted in the repatriation of the mercenaries to their home countries, the Gendarmes had less luck.

²³⁶ Ibid. 463.

²³⁷ Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 251.

²³⁸ Ibid. 252.

²³⁹ Archives Minaffet Rwanda Cote 3.3.4.0021 Coopération en matière judiciaire 1968-1981 : (Dossier des mercenaires congolais de SCHRAMME), Mémorandum from Rwandan Ambassador in Brussels, A. MUNYANEZA to Son Excellence Monsieur le Ministre de la Coopération Internationale et du Plan, "Evacuation des mercenaires," 05.01.1968.

A special OAU commission acted as a mediator in the negotiations between the Rwandan government, the Katangans, and Mobutu. The Congolese leader eventually agreed to offer amnesty to the Katangans and other Congolese troops who had joined them. Accepting the offer, they returned to the Congo in early 1968. However, afterwards they disappeared and Mobutu seems to have had them killed.²⁴⁰ This had consequences as the Gendarmes later rejected a number of amnesty offers for this very reason.²⁴¹

Despite the defeat of the Gendarmes in the Congo, the presence of large numbers of Katangan refugees in neighboring Angola combined with armed elements of the remaining Gendarmes, posed a potential long-term threat to Mobutu. Meanwhile, the Portuguese authorities in Angola had other plans. In the midst of a bloody conflict against the anti-colonial national liberation movements, the Portuguese intelligence service, PIDE, saw the Gendarmes as a potentially useful tool against the MPLA and FNLA which operated in the region. Thus, beginning in the late 1960s, Katangan Gendarme units known as the “Flèches Noires,” or “*Flechas*” became valuable allies to the Portuguese counter-guerilla campaigns.²⁴²

The political organization of the *Flechas* and Katangan refugees during this period remains murky. At some point before or during 1975, elements of the Gendarmes established the *Front de Libération Nationale du Congo* (FLNC). In fact, the varying political and ideological tendencies within the front claimed different dates of origin, ranging from 1967 to 1976.²⁴³ In any event, the FLNC became the umbrella opposition political party under whose banner the Gendarmes fought during the Shaba invasions.

The transitional Portuguese authorities began the process of formal decolonization after the coup d'état of the “Carnation Revolution” in April 1974. Mobutu, cognizant of the potential threat from the FLNC, quickly moved to neutralize the organization. On September 14, Mobutu met Portuguese President Antonio de Spínola on the Cape-Verdean island of Sal. In addition to discussing the future of the Angolan enclave of Cabinda and the role of the FNLA, Mobutu wanted Portuguese cooperation on the *Flechas*.²⁴⁴ Mobutu hoped that the Portuguese authorities, no longer in need of the *Flechas*, would help to repatriate the Katangan refugees and thus defuse the FLNC threat. To this end, he offered an amnesty to Katangan political

²⁴⁰ Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 255.

²⁴¹ Willame, *FLNC*, 9.

²⁴² Willame, *FLNC*, 9-10.

²⁴³ Ibid. 11.

²⁴⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Généralités Carton 469, “Territoires portugais 1959-1979,” Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Rencontre Spínola-Mobutu,” 16.09.1974.

exiles and the Katangan Gendarmes. Perhaps recalling the fate of those accepting the previous amnesty offer, the Gendarmes refused.²⁴⁵

In March 1975, Mobutu changed tactics and sent Kabwit Tshombe, the younger brother of the late Moïse Tshombe, as an official emissary to negotiate with the FLNC's leadership. According to Kabwit Tshombe, he even managed to reach an agreement with the Gendarmes for repatriation. However, he claimed that Mobutu's entourage refused, believing in the inevitability of an FNLA and UNITA victory in the struggle to control Angola at independence.²⁴⁶

At this time, the FLNC and the MPLA came to an agreement on their future relationship. The evolution of the situation in Angola led to a convergence of interests. Whereas the Katangan Gendarme *Flechas* had previously fought the MPLA on behalf of the Portuguese, they now had a common enemy in the form of Zaire and the FNLA. Mobutu provided the latter with bases and other material support. The Gendarmes' combat experience became a valuable addition to the MPLA before the Cuban intervention began shortly before formal independence on November 11 1975. They even played an important role in defending the Angolan capital, Luanda, against a major FNLA advance before the Cubans' arrival.²⁴⁷

The MPLA and FLNC formalized this arrangement as early as 1974 when they signed the Cossa Accords on December 17. In exchange for their support, the MPLA, under President Agostinho Neto agreed to allow the FLNC, led by Nathanaël Mbumba, a substantial degree of political and military control over parts of Northern Angola bordering Shaba province with the goal of eventually "liberating" Katanga.²⁴⁸ There, they concentrated their activities around the towns of Chicapa and Saurimo. The MPLA leadership also agreed to continue the subsidy that the Portuguese had paid to the Gendarmes and Katangan refugees.²⁴⁹

However, one should note that the majority of the ex-*Flechas* and other Gendarme units no longer consisted of veterans of Tshombe's original Gendarmes. In fact, the original "Katangan Gendarmes" only refer to the nucleus which fled to Angola after the mercenary mutinies in 1966 and 1967. Most of the former *Flechas* were younger fighters who had never served in the Katangan gendarmerie, although they originally came from the same regions.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, although the majority of the FLNC fighters seemed to come from Lunda

²⁴⁵ Willame, *FLNC*, 9.

²⁴⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Lettre adressée par M. Thomas TSCHOMBE [sic] à diverses ambassades," 05.07.1978, p. 3.

²⁴⁷ Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 71.

²⁴⁸ Larmer, "Local conflicts," 93.

²⁴⁹ Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 72.

²⁵⁰ Willame, *FLNC*, 10.

communities, many elements within the organization had roots in other ethnic communities elsewhere in Shaba and Zaire.²⁵¹

This justified, in some respects, the FLNC's claims of representing a fully nationalist organization. Indeed, their 1976 action program explicitly called for "une lutte de libération nationale contre la dictature fasciste actuellement au pouvoir à Kinshasa," and the formation of "un Gouvernement national et démocratique," as well as a desire to "œuvrer pour la reconstruction de l'Unité nationale, condition indispensable pour réaliser l'Indépendance nationale et la Liberté du peuple congolais."²⁵² Nonetheless, proclamations of this kind did not calm French fears of secessionist tendencies within the organization.

In February 1976, Mobutu met with Neto in an attempt to adapt to the new regional political alignment. He wanted Neto to help him organize the return of the Katangan refugees, including the Gendarmes, to Zaire. Failing that, he hoped that Neto would at least agree to disarm the FLNC and remove them from the border region. Mobutu agreed, in principle, to recognize the new Angolan regime, a significant signal of his apparent willingness to accept the new status quo. Meanwhile though, UNITA attacks on the Benguela railway increased and Mobutu continued to provide refuge for fighters from the FNLA, UNITA, and the Cabindan separatist movement, FLEC.²⁵³

Early the following year, tensions between the two countries increased enormously. On February 24 1977 Neto summoned the representatives of the diplomatic corps in Luanda to a press conference. There, he and the colorfully named Commander Monstro Imortal (who months later would participate in a bloody coup attempt against Neto)²⁵⁴ detailed the existence of a number of alleged Zairian, rebel, and mercenary bases along the Angolan border. Neto accused Zaire and its allies of planning a "large-scale operation [against Angola], with the participation of aircraft, armored cars and seaborne forces."²⁵⁵ He rattled off a list of American officers allegedly involved in planning and leading the attack, codenamed "Cobra-77."²⁵⁶ Whether or not Neto or his entourage had invented this plot, it clearly signaled the state of

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² *Programme d'action du F.L.N.C.*, cited in Comité Zaïre. *Zaïre: le dossier de la recolonisation*. Paris: Ed. L'Harmattan, 1978, p. 247-248.

²⁵³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, "Bulletin de situation," from Colonel Bommier, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 18.03.1977, p. 2.

²⁵⁴ George, *The Cuban Intervention*, 129-130.

²⁵⁵ UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 2, Box 41, 100.ANG.GEN, Refugees in Angola—General [Vol.9] 1977-1980, Doc. 444 Neto Press Conference, 24.02.1977, p. 5.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. Some of the names he lists do not check out, e.g. as far as I have discovered, no "Colonel William Thompson" ever commanded the American 82nd Airborne Division, nor did a "Colonel Johnson" command American Green Berets in Bolivia in the 1960s.

relations between the MPLA and Mobutu's regime. This quickly scuttled any immediate possibilities of Angolan cooperation.

With the consolidation of the MPLA's authority over much of Angolan territory and the defeat of the FNLA, it became clear to Mobutu that he would not realize his ambitions in Angola in the immediate term. This situation also meant that the FLNC now represented a more formidable threat than before. Whereas Mobutu could count upon the Portuguese to keep the Gendarmes in check, the MPLA offered no such assurances. This threat to Zaire certainly appeared more menacing when combined with Zaire's fragile internal situation. When inserted into the Cold War context, the situation could become particularly inflammatory.

Chapter II: The First Shaba Crisis

As the first Shaba invasion began on March 8 1977, neither the French, nor anyone else seemed to have a clear idea of the nature of the FLNC, or even its proper name. When Mobutu publically confirmed the invasion on March 10, he initially accused “mercenaries” from Angola as the culprits. Although French observers knew that these “mercenaries” were, in fact the Gendarmes, French Ambassador André Ross felt that Mobutu invented the mercenary story to highlight the external nature of the threat. The Zairian leader knew that if he referred the invasion to the OAU or the United Nations Security Council, he would face allegations that the invasion constituted an internal affair. At this point, however, Ross felt that Angola had simply armed the Gendarmes, “pour les aider sans doute à revenir dans leur pays.”²⁵⁷ Meanwhile, he assumed that Mobutu would attempt to nip the invasion in the bud through backdoor “Bantu negotiations” with Angola.²⁵⁸

By March 12, the Gendarmes had captured a number of towns along the railway leading from the Angolan border towards Kolwezi, including Dilolo near the border, and Kasaji over 100 kilometers further east. Elements of the Gendarmes had also appeared some 250 kilometers north near Kapanga. By now, Zairian officials no longer spoke of invading “mercenaries” to their Western interlocutors. FAZ Chief of Staff, General Babia, told Colonel Yves Gras, the head of the French “Mission militaire,” France’s military assistance program that the Katangans did not aim for a simple hit and run operation, but a long-term campaign. In his estimation, the situation would only worsen.²⁵⁹

However, the initial assessment of French military intelligence tended to downplay the threat. First, they (correctly) observed that the number of invaders was far less than the Zairians had claimed, and that they lacked air support and armored vehicles. Also, at this stage, they asserted that the invasion seemed an “affaire...purement zaïroise.” Following Ross’s earlier judgment, the invasion represented little more than an attempt by some of the Katangan Gendarmes to return home.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram 282-85 from Ross to Paris, “Mercenaires en provenance de l’Angola,” 12.03.1977, p. 1-2.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram 286-88 from Ross to Paris, “Situation militaire au Shaba,” 12.05.1977, p.1-2.

²⁶⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Fiche de situation, Etat-Major des Armées, Centre d’Exploitation du Renseignement Militaire (henceforth CERM), “Situation au Zaïre à la date du 14 mars 1977,” 14.03.1977, p. 1-2.

On March 16, Ross met Mobutu, who did everything he could to convince the French Ambassador of the external nature of the attack. He claimed that some 5,000 Gendarmes had crossed the border, supported by a number of “mulatto” Cubans. Mobutu asserted that Neto had nothing to do with this, as he had completely lost control over his country to the Soviets and Cubans. The only question, according to Mobutu, was whether the Katangans had launched the invasion on Cuban, or Soviet initiative.²⁶¹ Reports from FAZ officers in the field supported Mobutu’s accusations of Cuban participation. In a briefing to members of the French military mission, Colonel Mampa Ngakwe Salamayi, the initial commander of FAZ operations in Shaba, stated that some of his subordinates had observed some 60 Cubans accompanying the FLNC invasion.²⁶² Three days later, Mobutu had Mampa arrested for “complicity with the enemy,” probably in response to the lack of resistance offered to the Gendarmes’ advance.²⁶³

By March 18, however, Mobutu’s western backers became seriously concerned that this invasion might in fact represent a major threat to the regime. French military intelligence (incorrectly) reported that the FLNC column heading east from Dilolo had nearly reached Kolwezi, the mining capital of Shaba and home to some 2,000 Europeans, including some 600 French expatriate workers and their families. FAZ forces seemed incapable of halting the FLNC offensive as the Gendarmes routed several FAZ units along their line of advance. Furthermore, the loyalty of some of the Zairian troops appeared questionable and French military officials now felt that without substantial external assistance, a FAZ victory had become impossible.²⁶⁴ Lt. Colonel Bommier, the French military attaché in Kinshasa, concluded that, “C’est l’unité ou l’intégrité du territoire zaïrois qui est en cause, avec une sécession possible du Shaba, notamment sous la protection de l’Angola marxiste, ainsi que la stabilité du régime et l’unité du Zaïre, qui aurait les plus grandes difficultés à survivre à un pareil échec.”²⁶⁵

The fear of secession now began to rear its ugly head. Nonetheless, at this point neither the French, nor anyone else, seemed quite clear on the FLNC’s ultimate aims. The FLNC itself did not make many public statements during the crisis. Mbumba himself only vaguely declared

²⁶¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram 310-13 from Ross to Paris, “Entretien avec le Général Mobutu,” 16.03.1977, p. 1-2.

²⁶² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Mission Militaire Française au Zaïre, “Fiche concernant le conflit au Shaba,” 15.03.1977, p. 1.

²⁶³ MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 49, “Guerre du Shaba,” “Opérations du Shaba: Déroulement sommaire,” 20.05.1977, p.1.

²⁶⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, “Bulletin particulier de situation, ‘Situation au Zaïre,’” 18.03.1977, p. 1.

²⁶⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, “Bulletin de situation,” from Colonel Bommier, to Paris, 18.03.1977, p. 4.

that he aimed to overthrow Mobutu. The FLNC's spokespersons in Europe made a number of contradictory statements that did little to clarify the organization's political program.²⁶⁶ Contrary to what some Zairian opposition parties had claimed, the FLNC attack seemed to neither represent, nor provoke, a popular uprising against Mobutu in Shaba province.²⁶⁷ However, the FLNC's aims during Shaba I remain unclear. Larmer suggests that the slow rate of advance and subsequent increase in numbers indicates that the invasion was largely a recruiting mission more than anything else.²⁶⁸ French officials however narrowed it down to three possibilities:

- 1) The invasion represented an attempt by Neto to force Mobutu to end his support to the FNLA, UNITA, and FLEC.
- 2) The invasion represented a renewed effort at obtaining the independence of Shaba, particularly as a means of creating a base from which to overthrow Mobutu.
- 3) The most likely scenario, according to French officials, consisted of a Soviet or Cuban policy aimed at striking Zaire. In this view, Zaire constituted a "perfect target" for the Soviets who could, "sans grand risque [peuvent] un peu plus miner la confiance des pays africains modérés à l'égard de la protection occidentale et tester la volonté américain de riposte."²⁶⁹ Furthermore, the new American administration of President Jimmy Carter seemed badly positioned to counter the supposed communist threat, thus creating an opening for a Soviet-inspired offensive.²⁷⁰

In other words, from the French perspective, the agency of the FLNC themselves appeared largely circumscribed by the designs of other actors. This particular bias would affect French political analyses throughout the course of the Shaba crises. Perceptions of American weakness were closer to the truth though. On March 11 Mobutu had already requested help from his African and Western allies to provide logistical assistance for his army as well as diplomatic support.²⁷¹ France reacted quickly by dispatching small arms and ammunition to

²⁶⁶ Larmer, "Local conflicts," 96.

²⁶⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Note pour le cabinet du ministre, "A/s. Situation au Zaïre," 18.03.1977, p. 3.

²⁶⁸ Larmer, "Local conflicts," 96, 98.

²⁶⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Note pour le cabinet du ministre, "A/s. Situation au Zaïre," 18.03.1977, p. 3.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/2, Fiche "Situation au Shaba. Les événements de 1977 et la situation du début de 1978," Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, 05.06.1978.

Kinshasa.²⁷² The Belgians also responded by dispatching spare ammunition on a C-130.²⁷³ The Americans, however, hesitated.

Like the French, the brand new Carter Administration felt that the invasion posed a serious threat to Mobutu, and that his overthrow could have catastrophic consequences. In the assessment of Admiral Stansfield Turner, the newly-appointed Director of the CIA, Mobutu's downfall "could not fail to be perceived as a major 'loss' for the US in Africa [...] if not [an] actual 'gain' for the USSR, Cuba, and the radical socialist club in Africa."²⁷⁴

Unlike the French however, the Carter Administration had serious reservations about Mobutu's regime. Officials in Carter's National Security Council (NSC) met in mid-March to discuss the situation as it unfolded. From their perspective, the Katangan invasion put American policymakers in a difficult situation. This working group concluded that:

The dilemma is a simple and traditional one. How far do we go to support a regime that is very imperfect but is friendly to us, with which we have been deeply involved, and which is seen to be our 'ally'? To what extent is our credibility at stake? Will our help have any real chance of success in making the FAZ a capable instrument?²⁷⁵

This dilemma would plague American policy towards Zaire during the entire period of the Carter Administration. Throughout this first Shaba Crisis, American officials wished to keep as low a profile as possible while hoping, justifiably as it turned out, that the Europeans and Africans would carry the burden of Mobutu's defense.

Meanwhile, Mobutu had already hinted to American Ambassador Walter Cutler that he might look for mercenaries if he could not obtain sufficient help from elsewhere.²⁷⁶ Some in the NSC even seemed hopeful that the Belgians, who, after all, had important economic interests in Shaba, could organize the deployment of "a hundred or so" mercenary officers to take charge of FAZ operations. The NSC concluded however that such a deployment "is not our business."²⁷⁷

²⁷² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le cabinet du ministre, "A/s. Situation au Zaïre," 18.03.1977, p. 3.

²⁷³ MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 49, "Guerre du Shaba," "Opérations du Shaba : Déroulement sommaire," 20.05.1977, p.1.

²⁷⁴ CIA CREST Database Document NLC-17-77-8-5-6, "Implications of the Collapse of the Government of Zaire," 17.03.1977, p.2.

²⁷⁵ JCL: CREST Database Document NLC-12-61-1-8-2, Memorandum for the File from Thomas P. Thornton, "Zaire Situation," 16.03.1977, p. 1.

²⁷⁶ JCL: National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material 12, Box 61 [General Odom File : Zaire 3/77 through Zaire 5-8/78] Folder: [Zaire, 3/77], Document 30, Telegram from Cutler to Vance, forwarded to Brzezinski, "Shaba Invasions: Consultations with Mobutu," 23.3.1977, p. 3

²⁷⁷ JCL: CREST Database Document NLC-12-61-1-8-2, Memorandum for the File from Thomas P. Thornton, "Zaire Situation," 16.03.1977, p. 3.

Indeed, during Shaba I, the US did little to support Mobutu apart from providing 15 million dollars' worth of supplementary "non-lethal" military assistance.²⁷⁸ The US Congress also had many concerns about Mobutu's human rights record. Shortly after the first Shaba crisis, it even cut the ceiling for its annual security assistance to Zaire in half, from 20 million dollars in 1977 to 10 million for 1978.²⁷⁹ The early Carter administration's emphasis on human rights goes a long way in explaining the tepid nature of US support to Mobutu during this crisis.

Additionally, in the first months of the Carter administration, détente with the Soviet Union had not yet found itself "buried under the sands of the Ogaden."²⁸⁰ The administration consciously avoided making Shaba I into a Cold War issue.²⁸¹ In the first weeks of the war, Carter administration officials even put pressure on Mobutu to lower the tone of his accusations against the Soviets and Cubans. These admonitions had little effect as his verbal attacks against the Eastern bloc increased in intensity as the days went by and as the FAZ continued its retreat. He continually cited FAZ radio intercepts of Spanish and Portuguese speakers communicating with the attacking forces. Cutler viewed this as an attempt by Mobutu to force the hand of his western backers into increasing their support. He felt that Mobutu's effort "carries obvious risks [...] in that a tepid or no response from us could be viewed by his enemies and domestic opponents alike as a signal that the West will not in fact back up his regime. But given Zaire's vulnerable position and Mobutu's real uncertainty as to whether he can count on any further help from us, he probably feels it is a risk worth taking."²⁸² Mobutu's efforts to pin the invasion on the Cubans and Soviets may not have worked on the Americans, but it did help to push the French into thinking about broader options.

The American attitude irked French authorities. Foreign Ministry officials mocked the mediocre level of American aid. They noted that the Americans would have a hard time protecting Zaire "en se contentant d'y expédier des gourdes, des couvertures et des

²⁷⁸ JCL: White House Central File, Box CO-67: Zaire, Folder: [CO 177 Confidential 1/20/77-1/20/81], Document (number unknown), Memorandum from Christine Dodson to Denis Clift, "Vice President Mondale's Meeting with Zairian Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Nguza Karl-I-Bond" 26.7.1977, p. 2

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ For this phrase, see Zbigniew Brzezinski. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981*, New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983, p. 189.

²⁸¹ JCL: National Security Affairs, 15, Box 2 [Brzezinski Office File Country Chron, Africa: 1-5/78 through Angola: 1979-1980], Folder: [Africa 10-12/1978], Document 3, Memorandum from Thomas Thornton to David Aaron, "African Chiefs of Mission Panel," 10.10.1978.

²⁸² JCL: National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material 12, Box 61 [General Odom File: Zaire 3/77 through Zaire 5-8/78] Folder: [Zaire, 3/77], Document 30, Telegram from Cutler to Vance, forwarded to Brzezinski, "Shaba Invasions: Consultations with Mobutu," 23.3.1977, p. 2.

medicaments...”²⁸³ However, they soon began to fear that no amount of material military aid could save the situation because, “quelles que soient les quantités d’armement dont disposera le Zaïre, les hommes pour le servir font défaut.”²⁸⁴

The situation on the ground became even more serious when the Gendarmes captured Mutshatsha on March 25. The capture of this important rail depot gave the FLNC control over the main route leading to Kolwezi, a little over 100 kilometers away.²⁸⁵ FAZ units retreated without a fight. Worried French observers noted that FAZ performance in the war to date consisted in nothing but “une suite de replis et d’abandons, depuis la region de KISENGE jusqu’à MUTSHATSHA inclusivement.”²⁸⁶ The only resistance that FAZ forces appeared to have given against the Katangan advance came from elements of a FAZ airborne battalion and a few companies of the supposedly elite, North Korean-trained Kamanyola division. These troops had suffered significant casualties though and the Gendarmes managed to push them and other fleeing FAZ units almost as far back as Kolwezi.²⁸⁷

According to French observers, the FLNC employed classic guerrilla tactics during their advance. Jean François, the French Ambassador in neighboring Zambia, identified these tactics as “Vietcong-style” and undoubtedly proof of some kind of “communist training”:

Les envahisseurs regagnent d’abord en civil leur village ou ils sont accueillis en libérateurs. Ils s’emparent ainsi de l’administration et ne commencent à effectuer des coups de main, puis à opérer en uniforme que dans les endroits propices. Ils ont la réputation d’être intègres, de ne pas piller, de bien traiter les populations tant noires que blanches, de disposer de beaucoup d’argent et de procéder à des achats et à des distributions de vivres. Ils se présentent enfin comme les libérateurs du Katanga. Leur succès est d’autant mieux assuré que leur comportement contraste avec la brutalité et la corruption des forces de l’ordre zaïroises. Une telle technique porte la marque de ceux qui les ont formées et armées dans le cadre d’une stratégie à long terme qui exploite un fait tribal à des fins marxistes-léninistes.²⁸⁸

Later evidence suggests that the FLNC benefited from a substantial degree of collaboration by the local populations. Although not amounting to a broad-based popular uprising as the FLNC probably hoped and Mobutu certainly feared, local assistance contributed greatly to the Gendarmes’ logistical support. In general, the Gendarmes appeared to act as a disciplined force, committing few exactions upon local communities and even leaving the local elite who had collaborated with Mobutu’s regime relatively unmolested. Compared to the notorious

²⁸³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Note pour le cabinet du ministre, “A/s. Situation au Zaïre,” 18.03.1977, p. 3.

²⁸⁴ Ibid. 4.

²⁸⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, “Bulletin particulier de situation, ‘Situation militaire au Shaba le 28 mars,’” 28.03.1977, p. 2.

²⁸⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2 “Rapport de renseignement bimestriel février-mars 1977” from Colonel Bommier to le Général d’Armée Chef d’état-major des armées, 08.04.1977, p. 1.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. 2.

²⁸⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/4, Dossier “La Belgique,” Telegram from French Embassy in Zambia to Paris, “A/S: Analyse belge de la situation au Shaba,” 24.03.1977, pp. 1-2.

behavior of the FAZ towards civilians, this conduct represented a quick way to win friends. Furthermore, the FLNC also began to establish civilian administrative structures throughout their occupied zone. In a number of captured localities, the FLNC even organized elective councils to run local affairs.²⁸⁹

One should note, however, that the brief FLNC presence in Shaba was not entirely idyllic. Although they seem to have left local elites alone, the French later discovered that they executed a number of Zairians not originally from Shaba, particularly government officials. Also, they apparently executed an American missionary accused of helping to direct Zairian Air Force bombing raids via radio.²⁹⁰

The capture of Mutshatsha opened the route to Kolwezi, Shaba's mining capital and home to over two thousand expatriate workers and their families, including some 600 French. French diplomats and military officials in Kinshasa became increasingly concerned that Kolwezi might soon fall. Ross now thought that Kolwezi represented the FLNC's main objective. By capturing this city, he wrote that they would create a provisional government of a newly declared Democratic Republic of the Congo, and force negotiations upon Mobutu for both the establishment of a federal state and his departure from power. Ross further feared that a Katangan success would embolden and empower other opposition groups both inside and outside of Zaire. Such an increase in pressure could possibly spell the end of the regime.²⁹¹ The danger that this would entail, from the French perspective, encouraged a more forceful response from Paris to support their Zairian ally.

First, apparently in response to French pressure,²⁹² Mobutu reorganized his defense plan. He transferred General Bumba from Kolwezi to the former Belgian airbase at Kamina, and replaced him and the local operational commander, Colonel Eluki, with the more competent General Singa.²⁹³ Second, on March 29, the French also agreed to send military advisors to Zaire.²⁹⁴ Additionally, according to Belgian officials, in late March and early April, Giscard began to entertain the option of hiring some 300 mercenaries to Kolwezi disguised as

²⁸⁹ Willame, *FLNC*, pp. 30-32.

²⁹⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Situation militaire après la fin des opérations principales," 04.06.1977, p. 1-2.

²⁹¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, *Dépeche d'actualité*, "A/s : Le temps des oppositions ?," 31.03.1977.

²⁹² MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 49, "Rapport de renseignement bimestriel avril-mai 1977" from Colonel Bommier to le Général d'Armée Chef d'état-major des armées, 08.04.1977, p. 6.

²⁹³ *Ibid.* 2 and 8.

²⁹⁴ MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 49, "Opérations du Shaba (Déroulement sommaire)," 8.6.1977

GECAMINES security guards to beef up local defenses.²⁹⁵ This time-honored tradition in the country also reflected earlier hints by Mobutu, noted above, that he might look for mercenaries himself in the absence of substantial external assistance.

The situation seemed all the more troubling as the Gendarmes' control of territory spread like a "tache d'huile" in the areas surrounding the main rail axis linking Mutshatsha to Dilolo on the Angolan border.²⁹⁶ FAZ units, plagued by internal unit and leadership rivalries, gave an "impression [d'une] absence totale [de] combativité et motivation."²⁹⁷ Ross requested that the French Air Force begin to put together an evacuation plan for the French expatriates living in Kolwezi.²⁹⁸

In early April, American Secretary of State Cyrus Vance met with Giscard to discuss, in part, the situation in Zaïre. Giscard did his best to convince Vance of the French perspective of the broader implications of the Katangan invasion. His view, colored with fanciful stereotypes and an active imagination, bears a lengthy citation:

Le seul homme capable, c'est Mobutu [...]. S'il disparaît, le pays retombera dans l'anarchie, et l'on sait qu'actuellement l'anarchie mène plutôt à une situation comme l'Angola qu'à une situation comme le Kenya ou la Côte d'Ivoire. Il faut donc uniquement abandonner Mobutu s'il apparaît qu'il n'a aucune chance de s'en sortir. Or je ne crois pas qu'il en soit là. Il a pris certaines mesures militaires. Les Katangais sont, pour l'instant, dans la forêt, qui est très dense, et une fois qu'ils sortiront de la forêt et qu'ils voudront prendre une ville, il suffirait que les autres fassent du bruit avec des mitrailleuses et des roquettes pour que les Katangais arrêtent [...] Il faut bien savoir que les Africains n'aiment pas se battre, ils ne se sont pas battus dans le passé et ils ne se battront jamais [...] Les Katangais non plus. Actuellement, ils traversent la forêt et, s'ils rencontrent quelqu'un, cela se passera comme à la chasse au gorille : c'est celui qui avance qui fait peur à l'autre.²⁹⁹

Despite Giscard's lengthy anthropological lecture, Vance agreed to nothing. Giscard's appreciation of the Gendarmes' situation also did not quite conform to reality.

The head of the French *Mission militaire*, Colonel Yves Gras, flew to Kolwezi to get a better understanding of the evolution of the military situation and to prepare the ground for the arrival of French military advisors. Gras found that the appointment of General Singa to the Kolwezi command seemed to have had a somewhat positive effect on local FAZ morale. Nonetheless, the state of complete disintegration of the FAZ units that had fled before the

²⁹⁵ JCL: CREST Database Document NLC-16-22-1-52-2, Telegram from Embassy Brussels to Washington, 01.04.1977, p. 2

²⁹⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, "Bulletin particulier de situation, 'Situation militaire au Shaba le 28 mars,'" 28.03.1977, p. 1.

²⁹⁷ Ibid. 2.

²⁹⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, No subject, 29.03.1977.

²⁹⁹ Entretien entre le président Valéry Giscard d'Estaing et Cyrus Vance, 02.04.1977, archives de la présidence de la République, 5AG3-984, Archives nationales, cited in Vincent Nouzille. *Des secrets si bien gardés. Les dossiers de la Maison-Blanche et de la CIA sur la France et ses présidents, 1958-1981*. Paris: Fayard, 2009, p. 442-443.

Katangan advance would take time to repair. Worse, the local FAZ commander seemed to have no intelligence from the “front.” Since the FAZ units had fled without even making contact with their adversaries, neither Singa, nor anyone else knew anything about FLNC unit positions, armament, or intentions.³⁰⁰ Ultimately, Gras felt that only a foreign military intervention could really improve the situation for the FAZ.³⁰¹ In the meantime, Ross again approached Mobutu and convinced him to transfer units from the “Northern front” at Kamina in Northern Shaba, to Kolwezi to buy time in case of a strong Katangan attack against the city.³⁰²

Colonel Michel Franceschi, the head of the initial French military advisory mission, also visited General Singa in Kolwezi. There, he seconded Gras’s analysis. Franceschi observed a level of total disarray in the communications, resupply, and basic organization of the FAZ units at Kolwezi. These problems manifested themselves through units fleeing from forward posts and pillaging the local population at night. He concluded that in their current state, the FAZ could not mount a coherent defense of the city. If the FLNC renewed their offensive in the coming days, the situation could become catastrophic. The European expatriate population would then risk serious danger not so much from the Gendarmes, but from the “débris incontrôlés des forces zaïroises.”³⁰³ Echoing Gras, he felt that even a company-strength deployment of a French rapid-reaction force would suffice to prevent the capture of the city and to protect the expatriates. Also, such an intervention would, in his mind, provide an invaluable morale boost to the FAZ forces on the ground.³⁰⁴

Fortunately for Mobutu and the FAZ, after the capture of Mutshatsha, the FLNC advance slowed considerably. André Ross visited General Singa at his headquarters in Kolwezi on April 5. Singa told him that the FLNC had appeared to halt their offensive, although the FAZ had no idea of their location. Lack of adequate rations and a pay stoppage contributed to the continued disorganization of the FAZ at Kolwezi. This meant that Singa could not even organize proper reconnaissance of the area in front of him. Estimates put the Katangans at anywhere between 38 and 80 kilometers away.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Mission militaire to Paris, “Appréciation de la situation à Kolwezi le 3 avril à 11 heures,” 04.04.1977.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Mission militaire to Paris, “Situation Shaba,” 04.04.1977.

³⁰³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Mission militaire to Paris, “Appréciation de la situation à Kolwezi le quatre avril à 18 heures locales,” 04.04.1977.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Situation militaire à Kolwezi,” 06.04.1977, pp. 1-2.

In fact, the front had begun to stabilize around 80 kilometers to the west of Kolwezi. The French monitoring the situation did not know why, although they noted that the area under FLNC control seemed to more or less correspond with the territory of the rural Lunda communities. French military intelligence officials thought that this might relate to the lack of a general uprising among the Lunda in response to their invasion, and thus represented an effort to build their administrative apparatus to reinforce their control over the territory. Otherwise, they theorized that the halt might represent a change in tactics as the Gendarmes began to realize the increasing difficulty of capturing Kolwezi.³⁰⁶

In early April the Mwant Yav, the customary leader or “Emperor of the Lunda” paid a visit to the French consulate in Lubumbashi, Shaba’s capital. Perhaps cautiously speaking on behalf of the FLNC, the Mwant Yav insisted that the FLNC neither represented a purely Lunda movement, nor did it aim for the secession of Shaba. He declared that the FLNC units, led by General Nathanaël Mbumba had halted their advance in the expectation that their success to date would provoke a coup d’état against Mobutu, thus apparently obviating the necessity for further military action. He also indicated that the FLNC aimed to establish a federal state, possibly with noted opposition figure Antoine Gizenga at its head.³⁰⁷

Indeed, one of Gizenga’s representatives had presented French officials in Belgium with a letter from Gizenga in late March. Gizenga insisted that the conflict was purely internal and that foreign powers should not intervene. Gizenga claimed that he had “agreed” to the FLNC invasion with the goal of testing, “par l’envoi d’un premier contingent de mille hommes, les réactions de l’armée zaïroise.”³⁰⁸ Gizenga’s representative also insisted that Gizenga’s own guerilla movement did not take orders from Moscow. However, substantial Western action in Zaire would provide, “aux russes le pretexte d’une intervention dont il [Gizenga] serait prisonnier.”³⁰⁹

French intelligence officials took the broader opposition threat seriously and began to imagine a number of sinister conspiracies that might lay behind the FLNC’s behavior. According to a report compiled by the French *Police Nationale* on opponents of Mobutu’s regime, Antoine Gizenga, Paul-Roger Mokede, and Laurent Kabila had combined guerrilla

³⁰⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Fiche du Groupe d’Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, No. 21/CER/B/CD, “Evolution de la situation au Zaïre,” 07.04.1977, p. 1-3.

³⁰⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1977,” “Entretien avec l’empereur Lunda,” 07.04.1977, pp. 1-3. (In reality Mbumba did not actually participate in the invasion, instead the *Tigres* were led by Grégoire Mulombo).

³⁰⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/4, Telegram from French Embassy Brussels to Paris, “A/S: La France et le Zaïre,” 25.0.3.1977, p. 2.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. 2.

forces of some 10,000-20,000 in the East and North-East of Zaïre, ready to join the Gendarmes. Mokede had even apparently tried to solicit the services of Bob Denard to help train his forces. Another opponent, Anicet Kashamura, looked for help from the French Communist Party to infiltrate French communist activists into development assistance teams to help train rebel leadership cadres. Furthermore, the report asserted that several high-ranking officials close to Mobutu were planning a coup d'état, possibly to limit the effectiveness of the FLNC's initiative. The halt in the FLNC advance would somehow facilitate all of these plots.³¹⁰ A more prosaic but perhaps more likely possibility was that their relative numerical weakness, combined with the distance from their rear bases, prevented the FLNC from taking Kolwezi, especially since they had not yet consolidated all of the territory between Dilolo and Mutshatsha.³¹¹

By early April, officials in the French Defense Ministry felt that, "on est arrivé à ce moment très court où peu de chose suffit pour faire pencher la balance dans un sens ou dans l'autre."³¹² In this context of fear and quasi-paranoia regarding Mobutu's enemies and a nebulous communist threat, Colonel Yves Gras formally recommended a military intervention, thinking that a battalion of French paratroopers would quickly "régler la question."³¹³ However, according to Gras, Ross felt that, due to the potential negative political implications of a French intervention, Africans themselves should resolve the problem if possible.³¹⁴ An intervention from a fellow African country had the advantage of avoiding possible diplomatic repercussions on a continent in which Cuban and Soviet military interventions had made the question of foreign involvement politically sensitive. Perhaps more importantly from the French point of view, a French intervention could conceivably escalate and internationalize the invasion in a way favorable to the Soviets, Cubans, and their African allies by undermining Mobutu's already shaky legitimacy. The problem lay in finding an appropriate country willing to mount such an intervention. Mobutu needed a friendly African state which had some kind of rapid intervention capacity.³¹⁵

³¹⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note de la Police Nationale, "La situation au Zaïre," début avril, 1977, pp. 1-4. The 10,000 + figure is absurdly large.

³¹¹ Willame, *FLNC*, 27.

³¹² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Fiche du Groupe d'Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, No. 21/CER/B/CD, "Evolution de la situation au Zaïre," 07.04.1977, p. 4.

³¹³ Intervention of Yves Gras in Cohen, Samy and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.). *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*. Paris, France : Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 320.

³¹⁴ Ibid, 320.

³¹⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, N.603/DAM "A/s : Etude de M. BERGER, stagiaire de l'E.N.A sur la guerre du Shaba," Sent by Ross to Paris, 15.09.1977, p.8-9.

With this in mind, Mobutu launched a major diplomatic offensive. He directly accused the Soviet Union and Cuba of playing an important role in the invasion. Angola, in his view, represented little more than a communist “pawn.” Concurrent visits by Fidel Castro in Angola and Nikolai Podgorny in Southern Africa helped to lend credit to these accusations. Furthermore, Mobutu could point to the Katangan invaders as threatening to revive the former secessionist Katangan regime of the early 1960s. This played to the fears of a number of African leaders on a continent where the principle of territorial integrity constituted a pillar of inter-state relations. This even led the Nigerian government, rarely favorable to Mobutu but with clear memories of the attempted secession of Biafra, to offer its services as a mediator.³¹⁶ Other states, such as Tanzania and Guinea, traditionally hostile to Mobutu, remained silent.³¹⁷ Quickly, Angola, whose leaders had claimed that the Shaba invasion represented a purely internal affair for Zaïre, found itself diplomatically isolated on the continent.³¹⁸

The Elysée agreed with Ross’s push for an African intervention. With its sanction, Ross, along with Giscard’s African affairs advisor René Journiac, began putting pressure on Mobutu to ask Morocco’s King Hassan II to send troops.³¹⁹ Hassan and the Moroccan regime sympathized with Mobutu’s position from the beginning of the crisis. Pro-government newspapers quickly compared the Katangan invasion to Morocco’s struggle against Polisario guerrillas in the Western Sahara, who aimed at securing an independent state within territory claimed by Morocco.³²⁰ Polisario received significant support from neighboring Algeria, a state often supportive of revolutionary and socialist causes and, according to French intelligence, had also supported attempted coups against Mobutu.³²¹ Hassan had also in the past frequently and vocally criticized the supposedly increased level of communist aggression in Africa. Thus, in the first week of April, he agreed to Mobutu’s request for assistance with a rapid deployment of some 1,500 elite troops.³²² The French agreed to provide significant logistical and transportation support for this troop deployment.

³¹⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, N.138/DAM, “a/s : Zaïre-action diplomatique,” 09.06.1977, p.1-2

³¹⁷ Ibid. 1

³¹⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, N.603/DAM “A/s : Etude de M. BERGER, stagiaire de l’E.N.A sur la guerre du Shaba,” Sent by Ross to Paris, 15.09.1977, p. 7.

³¹⁹ Intervention of Yves Gras in Cohen, Samy and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.). *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d’Estaing*. Paris, France : Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 320.

³²⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/1, Telegram from French Embassy Morocco to Paris, “A/S: Evénements du Zaïre.,” 21.03.1977.

³²¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note de la Police Nationale, “La situation au Zaïre,” début avril, 1977, p. 2.

³²² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, Fiche de situation, “bilan de la situation militaire au Shaba depuis le 09 mars 1977,” 20.04.1977, p. 1.

Officially, the French only participated minimally in the intervention. Foreign Ministry talking points for its diplomats emphasized that, “Cette aide est strictement limitée à un complément de transport aérien parfaitement circonscrite dans sa nature et dans le temps. Nous avons prêté une dizaine d’avions Transall et un DC 8 pour aider à l’acheminement de matériel et d’équipement marocain, à l’exclusion du transport de troupes marocaines.”³²³ Furthermore, this assistance, “ne comporte aucune participation aux activités militaires dans les zones d’opérations éventuelles des forces marocaines ou zaïroises, ni aucune substitution de responsabilité.”³²⁴

At the outset, the French kept even this support for the Moroccan mission a secret. As the 11 French C-160 “Transall” military transport left for Morocco on April 7, they had orders to paint Moroccan insignia on their aircraft. Although the French military transport command, COTAM, countermanded these orders the following day, they were indicative of the general atmosphere.³²⁵ Ultimately, this operation, dubbed *Opération Verveine* (Operation Verbena) transported some 125 vehicles and 36 tons of freight to Zaïre for the Moroccan expeditionary force during the course of a week.³²⁶ Although finished by April 16, the French support mission had provided a vital service in defense of Mobutu’s regime. Only on April 12 did Giscard publically announce the dispatch of *Opération Verveine* to the general public, specifying that “il n’y a pas de français qui sont, ou seraient engagés au Zaïre. C’est une opération d’assistance, de coopération pour un transport entre le Maroc et le Zaïre.”³²⁷

This kind of affirmation made sense politically, but it bore little relationship to reality. In fact, Giscard had already actively committed a substantial military advisory mission to Zaïre. While no evidence suggests that any French troops or advisors participated in combat, their presence nonetheless seems to have had a decisive effect on the eventual outcome of the war. First, the French advisory mission included an air and a ground detachment to help maintain FAZ equipment.³²⁸ Secondly, soon after the invasion began, French officers took up key posts in the Zairian Defense Ministry to help with war planning. Furthermore, the French established

³²³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note, “A/s. Transport d’éléments militaires marocains vers le Zaïre,” 28.04.1977, p. 1-2

³²⁴ Ibid. 2

³²⁵ Levitte Laurent (CDT) “L’opération *Verveine* en 1977 : maîtrise de la projection de force et diplomatie aérienne”, *Penser les Ailes françaises*, n°24, décembre 2010, p. 67. Found at http://www.cesa.air.defense.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/PLAF_No24_Levitte.pdf (consulted on 08.03.2012)

³²⁶ Ibid. 68.

³²⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note, “A/s. Transport d’éléments militaires marocains vers le Zaïre,” 28.04.1977, p.2.

³²⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note, “A/S : Le Zaïre à l’épreuve,” 04.04.1977, p. 3.

a major logistics base at Kolwezi and managed the entirety of the FAZ supply train.³²⁹ French advisors also worked to train a Zairian mortar unit and an airborne company.³³⁰ Finally, in late April the French flew a secret photoreconnaissance mission, codenamed “*Opération Libellule*” (Operation Dragonfly) in support of Moroccan and FAZ forces.³³¹ Publically, the French tried to downplay these roles. French advisors in Kolwezi even received orders to remove insignia that made them readily identifiable as military personnel.³³² This did not change the fact that France’s active participation in war planning and execution combined with their essential logistical support played a fundamental role in the deployment of the Moroccan forces, the recovery of the FAZ, and the eventual expulsion of the Katangans.

In early April as the Moroccans began to organize the deployment of their expeditionary force, the situation in Shaba remained frantic for the FAZ. As General Singa desperately tried to reorganize Kolwezi’s defenses, on April 7, Mobutu sent two battalions of his “elite” Kamanyola Division to reinforce Kolwezi and Kamina. The French also dispatched more advisors to Kolwezi and supplied replacement parts for the Zairian Air Force’s Mirage fighter jets.³³³ The gradual reinforcement of Kolwezi, combined with the imminent arrival of the Moroccans soon meant an end to the immediate threat to the city by the Gendarmes.³³⁴

By April 11, some 500 Moroccan troops had deployed to Kolwezi to reinforce the six FAZ battalions now stationed there. However, apart from an airborne battalion and the Kamanyola battalion, the other FAZ units consisted of soldiers hastily brought together from diverse origins and a muddled command structure. With this disparate force, the FAZ-Moroccan coalition planned to move onto the offensive.³³⁵

Over the next month and a half, the combined Moroccan-FAZ forces slowly recaptured the towns held by the FLNC and pushed the organized Gendarme units back across the Angolan border. However, the nature of the counteroffensive illustrated both the stark difference

³²⁹ MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 49, “Rapport de renseignement bimestriel avril-mai 1977” from Colonel Bommier to le Général d’Armée Chef d’état-major des armées, 08.04.1977, p. 7.

³³⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre, Carton 27, 27/2 “Rapport de renseignement bimestriel juin-juillet 1977” from Colonel Bommier to le Général d’Armée Chef d’état-major des armées, 03.08.1977, p. 4.

³³¹ MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 49, “Operations du Shaba (Déroulement sommaire),” 08.06.1977

³³² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Telegram from Paris to Kinshasa, No subject, 14.04.1977.

³³³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Mission militaire to Paris, “Situation au Shaba,” 07.04.1977.

³³⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, BPS, “Situation au Zaïre à la date du 08 avril 77,” 08.04.1977.

³³⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, BPS, “Situation militaire au Shaba le 12 avril 77,” 12.04.1977.

between the FAZ and their FLNC counterparts, as well as the extent of the problems that Mobutu would continue to face over the coming months and years.

The initial FAZ attack on the Lufupa river line held by the Gendarmes to the east of Mutshatsha suffered a bloody reverse, and the combined FAZ-Moroccan forces did not recapture Mutshatsha itself until April 25.³³⁶ After this, the FLNC seemed to be in full-fledged retreat. The French congratulated themselves on the crucial role played by their logistical detachments in supplying the advancing FAZ units. This support, according to Ross, finally encouraged the FAZ to take the kind of initiative that they had previously lacked. Furthermore, the presence of Moroccan forces seems to have given confidence to FAZ units and their commanders. However, at this point, the Moroccans only acted in a secondary role, occasionally providing supporting mortar fire. Perhaps more importantly, the presence of a disciplined foreign army seems to have encouraged the FLNC to begin its withdrawal, as the recapture of Mutshatsha took place without any fighting.³³⁷

The FLNC withdrawal also encouraged friendly African leaders to offer assistance. In the first weeks of the invasion, Field Marshal Idi Amin Dada, Uganda's dictator, had repeatedly changed his public position on the conflict. Initially offering Mobutu his "moral support," he then changed his mind and declared that the invasion constituted an "internal affair," and then began to express fears that Western aid to Mobutu had made Zaire a threat to Uganda and Africa.³³⁸ He proclaimed that such assistance could, "easily destroy the entire population of Central Africa."³³⁹ The French saw this change of attitude as a result of the influence of Soviet diplomatic and military personnel in Kampala. Amin even moved a number of troops towards the Zairian border.³⁴⁰

However, on March 24, following a visit by Mobutu's Foreign Minister Nguza Karl-I-Bond, Amin made a complete public turnaround and declared his full support to Mobutu.³⁴¹ Amin paid a surprise visit to Mobutu on April 22. He was the only head of state to visit Mobutu

³³⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Reprise Mutshasha[sic]," 25.04.1977.

³³⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Après la reprise de Mutshatsha [sic]," 29.04.1977, p.1.

³³⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/1, Telegram from Embassy Kampala to Paris, "A/S: Événements du Zaïre," 24.03.1977, p. 1-2.

³³⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/1, Telegram from Embassy Kampala to Paris, "A/S: Événements du Zaïre," 19.03.1977, p. 1.

³⁴⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/1, Telegram from Embassy Kampala to Paris, "A/S: Événements du Zaïre," 24.03.1977, p. 2-3.

³⁴¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/1, Telegram from Embassy Kampala to Paris, "A/S: Événements du Zaïre," 26.03.1977, p. 1.

during the war, a fact whose symbolism had some propaganda value.³⁴² Amin later released a communiqué stating that, “Mobutu had really appreciated the President’s recent visit to Zaïre and particularly the advice the Field Marshal gave his brother which advice President Mobutu followed and which contributed a lot to the recapture of Mutshatsha by the Zairian forces.”³⁴³ In a move prefiguring Monty Python’s *The Life of Brian*, Amin made a second visit the following week. While the FLNC had already begun to retreat, he flew a special 30-man “suicide squad” in a C-130 transport aircraft to Kolwezi to “assist” FAZ operations.³⁴⁴ Although the unit returned to Kampala shortly after its arrival in Shaba, Mobutu apparently accepted the principle of Ugandan military assistance if the situation worsened.³⁴⁵ Needless to say, the FLNC retreat and presence of the Moroccan army made this latter possibility unlikely.

French military officials observed that a number of abuses characterized the FAZ advance. Even before the capture of Mutshatsha, and in the absence of any combat, FAZ troops burned a number of villages to the ground.³⁴⁶ The Moroccans loudly complained about the FAZ’s “scorched earth” tactics.³⁴⁷ After the recapture of Mutshatsha, unrest in Kolwezi intensified in the form of strikes protesting against an increase in prices, the lack of basic necessities, and the abuses committed by Zairian forces against the local population.³⁴⁸ That the French dutifully facilitated FAZ activities by ensuring their resupply and maintaining worn-out equipment contributed to accusations against the French for allegedly providing napalm to the Zairian Air Force.³⁴⁹

The French took these charges seriously. They could not confirm the accusations of FAZ napalm use, and noted that only the Zairian Macchi light attack aircraft could employ it.³⁵⁰ Nonetheless, both Gras and Ross met with Zairian military officials to insist that they not use napalm under any circumstances. Gras informed the Zairian chief of staff, General Babia

³⁴² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/1, Telegram from Embassy Kampala to Paris, “A/S: Visite du Président Amin à Kinshasa,” 25.04.1977, p. 1.

³⁴³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/1, Note from Embassy Kampala to Paris, Ugandan government communiqué, 26.04.1977, p. 1.

³⁴⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/1, Telegram from Embassy Kampala to Paris, “A/S: Aide militaire au Zaïre,” 29.04.1977.

³⁴⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/1, Telegram from Embassy Kampala to Paris, “Deuxième visite du Président Amin Dada au Zaïre,” 02.05.1977.

³⁴⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, BPS, “Situation au Shaba le 21 avril 1977,” 21.04.1977, p.1.

³⁴⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, Fiche de situation, “point de la situation militaire au Shaba le 25 avril 1977,” 26.04.1977, p. 2.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, BPS, “Situation au Shaba le 21 avril 1977,” 21.04.1977, p.2

³⁵⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, BPS, “Situation au Shaba le 22 avril 1977,” 22.04.1977, p.2.

that the French strongly advised against the use of napalm, which had, according to Gras, little military utility, and could result in potentially dangerous political consequences.³⁵¹

Indeed, the FAZ's use of airpower often appeared rather indiscriminate. One secondary school teacher in Kapanga, in Northern Shaba near the Angolan border, recounted that:

[...] quand [the FAZ aircraft] sont arrivés la première fois sur Kapanga, le 17 mai, tout le monde voulait sortir pour les voir. Alors, ils ont mitraillé la foule. Ensuite, en suivant l'alignement des maisons, ils ont lancés des bombes [...] Les bombardements des villages n'ont pas provoqué beaucoup de victimes car les gens se cachaient. Mais, dès qu'ils ont commencé à bombarder les champs le long des rivières et la brousse, où la population se réfugiait, alors là il y a eu de nombreux morts.³⁵²

In early May, André Ross noted ironically that the Zairian Air Force had “réalisé leur exploit le plus mémorable en bombardant le QG du Colonel Loubaris [the Moroccan commander] au moment même où le général Singa s'y trouvait.”³⁵³ At other times during the campaign, FAZ aircraft also bombarded, possibly by mistake, targets in Zambia and Angola, causing a number of casualties.³⁵⁴ The French, fearing that cross-border attacks into Angola could escalate the conflict, wanted Mobutu to publically state that while Zaire would do everything to repel the FLNC invaders, it would not seek to transgress internationally recognized borders and carry the conflict into Angola. This also aimed at reducing frictions with Mobutu's allies who worried about a regionalization of the conflict.³⁵⁵ Mobutu agreed, but this kind of “advice” annoyed him, as he seemed to chafe at the French assumption that in the absence of their benevolent restraining influence he would mount some kind of hot-headed policy. Mobutu exclaimed to Ross, “Comment pourrais-je laisser faire pareille chose avec les risques que cela suppose et tous les problèmes que j'ai à résoudre ?”³⁵⁶

By the first week in May, the situation seemed to have stabilized in Mobutu's favor. The President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, agreed to send Egyptian pilots to help fill gaps in the Zairian Air Force, as well as a few Antonov transport planes to facilitate the transfer of men and supplies.³⁵⁷ Mobutu, now based in Kolwezi to oversee military operations, issued clear

³⁵¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, No subject, 28.04.1977.

³⁵² Cited in Willame, *FLNC*, 29.

³⁵³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Entretien à Kolwezi avec le Général Mobutu (suite)—IV. Atmosphère générale,” 06.05.1977, p. 2.

³⁵⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/3, Telegram from Embassy Zambia to Paris, “A/S: Relations Zaïre-Zambie,” 29.04.1977, p. 1.

³⁵⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 25, 25/3, Telegram from Paris to Kinshasa, “Relations zaïro-angolaises,” 29.04.1977, p. 2.

³⁵⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Entretien avec le Président à Kolwezi (Suite)—II. Relations avec l'Angola,” 06.05.1977, p. 1.

³⁵⁷ MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 49, “Rapport de renseignement bimestriel avril-mai 1977” from Colonel Bommier to le Général d'Armée Chef d'état-major des armées, 08.06.1977, p. 7.

orders against pillaging the local population or exacting revenge on local Lunda.³⁵⁸ He also now personally assured Giscard that he would not use napalm.³⁵⁹ Whether or not these declarations had any real effect or sincerity, the French seemed reasonably satisfied.

Ross, on a visit to Mobutu's headquarters in Kolwezi on May 6, noted that the situation had markedly improved. Mobutu himself could move around the city in complete safety, and his ruling party, the *Mouvement populaire de la révolution* (MPR) even managed to mobilize enough people for a mass meeting.³⁶⁰ Although Mobutu had never enjoyed much popularity among Kolwezi's inhabitants, the changed atmosphere seemed to indicate at least a degree of resignation among the local communities that the regime had reasserted itself. Ross observed that many of the Lunda who had fled from the fighting and the FAZ advance had begun to return to their communities. Gras felt that discipline had also improved and that some degree of normality, "du moins, pour l'Afrique," had returned to the functioning of the military.³⁶¹

By this time, the "front" had now advanced to some 200km to the west of the city. For political reasons, the Moroccans remained in a supporting role while the FAZ led the advance, mostly without any resistance. This arrangement meant that the combined FAZ-Moroccan forces advanced little more than ten kilometers a day. Nonetheless, at this rate, Ross felt that the entirety of Zairian territory would fall into the hands of the FAZ within a few weeks' time.³⁶²

Since the capture of Mutshatsha on April 25, the FAZ, with supporting Moroccan troops, mounted their principal attack along the railway heading west from Mutshatsha in the direction of Dilolo on the Angolan border. Two secondary FAZ offensives moved from Kamina towards Sandoa, and from Kasai towards Kapanga in Northern Shaba. Overall, the FLNC conducted a rather orderly withdrawal. Most of the FAZ advance occurred without resistance as the Gendarmes withdrew more rapidly than the FAZ offensive moved forward. However, on a few occasions they mounted fierce rearguard actions which delayed the FAZ advance. For instance, on May 1, FLNC units ambushed a combined FAZ-Moroccan force around 40 km east of Kasaji. In this, one of the bloodier engagements of the war, the Gendarmes caused some 60 casualties among both the FAZ and Moroccan troops. Otherwise,

³⁵⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Déclaration du Général Mobutu au sujet des Lundas," 29.04.1977.

³⁵⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, No subject, 06.05.1977. Interestingly, Ross's report describes Mobutu's declaration using the future tense, leaving open the question of whether or not the Zairian Air Force had actually employed it.

³⁶⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Entretien à Kolwezi avec le Général Mobutu (suite)—IV. Atmosphère générale," 06.05.1977, p. 1.

³⁶¹ Ibid. 2.

³⁶² Ibid. 3.

the Gendarmes managed to slow the counteroffensive by damaging or destroying bridges along the line of their retreat and laying mines, while otherwise avoiding combat.³⁶³ Although the FAZ-Moroccan coalition encountered little resistance during the rest of the campaign, FAZ forces on the Sandoa front continued to burn villages in their path of advance.³⁶⁴

By the end of May, Mobutu had retaken Dilolo and most of the FLNC forces seem to have retreated to Angola. On May 27, Mobutu returned to Kinshasa in triumph. In a speech delivered in Kinshasa's May 21st Stadium, he declared that although Zaire had suffered a "grave défaite morale" before the successful counteroffensive, Zaire had finally carried the day with a significant military and diplomatic victory.³⁶⁵ With this declaration, the "80 Day War" had come to an end.

The French saw Mobutu's victory as their own. Officials in the Foreign Ministry felt that the support given to Mobutu reinforced their credibility among their "moderate" African allies by signaling a French commitment to "security and solidarity." This allowed these states to hold the line more firmly against those "progressive" countries solidly backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba within the OAU. The French also saw their support to Mobutu as a signal to the progressive African states and their communist allies that repeating such attempts at "destabilization" would inevitably lead to the region becoming a "théâtre d'affrontements entre grandes puissances."³⁶⁶ Ironically, a note from the Foreign Ministry on the consequences of French intervention during the Eighty Day War concluded that "Notre intervention a donc fait reculer la tentation de la subversion par sa vertu persuasive, plus durable que l'effet dissuasive, limité par notre volonté, connue, de ne pas nous ériger en gendarmes de l'Afrique."³⁶⁷

A French Embassy report written two years later and reflecting upon the growth of French influence in Zaire, summarized the consequences of the French role during the First Shaba Crisis:

Le résultat en fut donc bénéfique: une impulsion fut donnée à notre influence au Zaïre ; cet Etat se liait plus étroitement avec les autres Etats de l'Afrique francophone ; un profond sentiment de satisfaction animait les capitales africaines modérées, convaincues dès lors, qu'en dépit de l'immobilisme de l'administration américaine, notre détermination pouvait les protéger de l'expansionnisme soviétique.³⁶⁸

³⁶³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, Fiche de situation, "point de la situation militaire au Shaba à la date du 13 mai 1977," 23.05.1977, p.1.

³⁶⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, CERM, BPS, "Situation militaire au Shaba le 16 mai 1977," 16.05.1977.

³⁶⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, Telegram from Ivan Bastouil, Kinshasa Embassy political councilor, to Paris, "Retour à Kinshasa du Président Mobutu," 30.05.1977, p. 2.

³⁶⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/2, DAM Note, "a/s : Conséquences de l'intervention française en faveur du Zaïre," 08.07.1977, p. 3.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba--bilan" Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 6.9.1979, p.2

France's "well known" desire to avoid becoming Africa's Gendarme did little to prevent them from intervening again. Indeed, the centrality of the French role in winning Mobutu's war set the stage for a deeper commitment to come.

Between the Wars

Now more than ever, Mobutu's survival had become important for French interests. Although some officials at the Quai privately blamed Mobutu for Zaire's state of decay and the failure of its army, they felt that "l'avenir du Zaïre est lié à celui du Président Mobutu." The need to continue supporting him stemmed from "une double raison negative." First, none in his entourage or in the opposition could succeed him while maintaining the country's stability. Second, they judged the potential risks of anarchy arising from his departure too great to contemplate.³⁶⁹ Of course, Mobutu did little to dispel these illusions himself. He confided to Ross that he had "senti le vent du boulet," and that his two priorities were fixing the army and stabilizing the economy.³⁷⁰

The conduct of this war came as something of a shock to the French. The FAZ had a disastrous record. In spite of the 65,000 troops in the army, often provided with modern weaponry, they suffered greatly in terms of training, organization, pay, and maintenance. FAZ columns did not know how to take proper security measures, sometimes resulting in deadly ambushes. This combined with massive shortages of communications equipment and transport encouraged a general loss of morale. This manifested itself in the FAZ's initial headlong retreat over 200 kilometers, barely firing a shot.³⁷¹ In a post-war assessment, Lt. Colonel Bommier, the French military attaché in Kinshasa, described the FLNC's battlefield superiority as "s'exprimant plus par la crainte qu'il inspire que par les coups qu'il porte."³⁷² Bommier also observed that, apart from the fighting in the first days of the invasion, the FAZ had only engaged the FLNC three times in substantial combat.³⁷³

Bommier concluded with the following warning:

Cette crise a en outre permis de prendre la mesure de l'importance de la tâche qui s'impose pour donner plus de consistance aux Force Armées Zaïroises : non que leur nullité soit totale mais les éléments positifs qui s'y trouvent

³⁶⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le ministre, signed by Guy Georgy, "a/s : Que faut-il faire pour le Zaïre ?," 27.05.1977, pp. 1-2.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. 2.

³⁷¹ MAE Nantes, Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 49, "Rapport de renseignement bimestriel avril-mai 1977" from Colonel Bommier to le Général d'Armée Chef d'état-major des armées, 08.06.1977, p.5.

³⁷² Ibid.4.

³⁷³ Ibid.

sont noyés dans une telle gangue d'incohérence, d'irresponsabilité, de favoritisme et de pratiques plus regrettables encore, que l'efficacité en est réduite à néant.

Le redressement de cette situation constitue l'un des soucis majeurs du Président MOBUTU [...] Car si la position du Zaïre se trouve aujourd'hui renforcée [...] tout danger n'est pas écarté à terme dans cette partie du monde où les problèmes sont nombreux et où les visées soviétiques et cubaines sont de plus en plus claires.³⁷⁴

The ineffectiveness of the Zairian army posed a serious problem to both the survival of Mobutu's regime and the future stability of Zaire. Mobutu had also, apparently, come to the same conclusion. In early May, he confided to André Ross that one of his biggest mistakes lay in allowing the North Koreans to train his supposedly elite Kamanyola Division. The high hopes he placed in these units came to naught during the fighting as they crumbled in the face of the Katangan advance. According to Mobutu, North Korean training had only prepared his elite division for parades, and not for fighting.³⁷⁵ He highlighted the need to restructure the entire military. According to Mobutu, the excessive size of his army, combined with its incapacity in handling sophisticated military equipment, had represented a major cause of its disorganization and incompetence. He thus began to formulate requests for more effective and appropriate training of his units by Western militaries, particularly France, Belgium, and the United States.³⁷⁶

The French concurred that fixing the army had become a critical task. In a note which Foreign Minister Louis de Guiringaud forwarded to the Elysée, Quai officials in the DAM expressed their concern that:

L'affaire du Shaba a montré que le Zaïre qui disposait de soldats et de matériel, était néanmoins dépourvu de moyens de défense. La constitution d'une force militaire efficace est devenue une priorité absolue. Les risques d'un coup d'état militaire sont moins grands que l'absence de toute défense.³⁷⁷

In their view, the French should work to coordinate Western efforts to simplify the Zairian logistical chain, encourage the use of less sophisticated but more robust military equipment, and improve unit mobility. To this end, the French agreed to train an airborne unit in addition to their assistance in maintaining the Zairian Air Force and armored units.³⁷⁸ The French also wanted to simplify and improve the payment of Zairian troops, whose irregular situation had often contributed to a lack of discipline, low morale, and tendency to commit various exactions upon civilian communities. The French suggested that an expatriate team working in the Zairian treasury could bring this about.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁴ Ibid. 9.

³⁷⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Entretien avec le Président à Kolwezi (Suite)—III. Questions militaires," 06.05.1977, p. 2.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. 1-2.

³⁷⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le ministre, signed by Guy Georgy, "a/s : Que faut-il faire pour le Zaïre ?," 27.05.1977, p. 6.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. 5.

Mobutu appeared to move swiftly to jump-start the reform of the army. Shortly after the war, he fired thirty generals and other high ranking officers accused of corruption and/or incompetence. He assumed the title of Army Chief of Staff and established a unified logistics command to simplify and coordinate supply and communications among the military branches and the gendarmerie. French observers also felt that his new army appointments, particularly at the top of the military leadership and in Shaba had gone to more capable and experienced officers.³⁸⁰

Mobutu's purge of the army went dangerously far, however. In the months preceding the second Shaba Crisis in May 1978, Mobutu had purged between 100 and 200 officers in an army which only numbered 800. He also executed some 14 officers accused of various abuses, and condemned others to death or imprisonment, perhaps *pour encourager les autres*. French observers began to fear that the extent of these "reforms" had lowered army morale still further and threatened to cause more problems for Mobutu in the future.³⁸¹

Nonetheless, the French responded to Mobutu's requests with a significant level of assistance. By March 1978, the French had deployed 16 officers and 45 noncoms to help the FAZ in a number of different domains. The French attached several high-level advisors to the FAZ General Staff and the Presidency, as well as advisors and maintenance personnel to FAZ light armor units and the Air Force. Another group of advisors worked on training a FAZ airborne battalion. However, the French Military Mission reported mixed results. Of the 14 Mirage III fighter aircraft in Zairian services, only three to five were operational at any one time. The French also ran into problems training Air Force personnel, which they blamed on their general lack of quality. French advisors seemed to have more success with the airborne training, as the advisors initially deployed during Shaba I managed to effectively train a company, and their replacements seemed to make progress training a battalion-sized unit. Furthermore, the SDECE helped to train a reconnaissance detachment in order to improve FAZ intelligence gathering capabilities. Advisors also managed to make serviceable some 90 light armored vehicles which constituted some two-thirds of FAZ's total arsenal.³⁸²

The French coupled this with substantial material aid. They provided the FAZ with 1.3 million francs worth of munitions, including rockets and bombs for the air force, 900,000

³⁸⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note, "a/s : Le Zaïre après la crise du Shaba," 07.10.1977, p. 2.

³⁸¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, "Compte rendu de la réunion tenue le 27 Avril par le Groupe d'Examen de Situation, sous la présidence de Monsieur Jean-Claude PAYE," 02.05.1977, p.1.

³⁸² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/1, Fiche du Groupe d'Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, "Aide apportée au Zaïre depuis la crise de mars 1977," 09.03.1978, pp. 1-2.

7.62mm cartridges, 3,000 81mm mortar shells, a number of wire-guided MILAN and ENTAC anti-tank missiles, eighteen heavy machine guns, twelve 120mm mortars, and four million francs worth of equipment for the newly-formed airborne brigade.³⁸³ By way of comparison, the Belgians provided the FAZ with some advisors for the General Staff, as well as training for an infantry brigade and the newly established logistics command. The Americans had greatly limited their aid, as noted above, but did provide the FAZ with a C-130 transport aircraft.³⁸⁴

Nonetheless, in early March 1978, French intelligence concluded:

La valeur opérationnelle des forces terrestres zaïroises est pratiquement nulle [...] On peut penser, que sans soutien extérieur, elles ne pourraient faire face à des incursions limitées du type Shaba 1977, et ne sauraient résister longtemps à une attaque importante avec des moyens classiques.³⁸⁵

Unfortunately for Mobutu and his backers, the massive failure of the Zairian army did not represent the only problem. Despite the fact that the Shaba invasion had little or no impact on GECAMINES production, Zaire's dire economic straits only worsened.³⁸⁶ GECAMINES, the parastatal responsible for the bulk of Zaire's copper mining, experienced enormous difficulties. In March 1978, its representatives travelled to Washington DC to try to acquire funding from the IBRD, Eximbank, and private sources. With the low level of copper prices, the company already found itself in over 15 million dollars' worth of arrears of payment, with large losses expected in the near future.³⁸⁷ Their catastrophic situation both reinforced and was worsened by Zaire's deteriorating economy.

The stabilization program agreed with the IMF in 1976 had not succeeded in stopping Zaire's economic downturn; production continued to decline, inflation increased, and the country accumulated external payment arrears. The following year, in the middle of the Shaba crisis, Zaire received more financing from the IMF which had, by that point, totaled over 200 million SDR since 1975. Due to a combination of bad management, corruption, decrepit transport infrastructure, the geographical isolation imposed by Angola's closure of the Benguela railroad, and low copper prices amongst other factors, the Zairian state had acquired a budget deficit amounting to 50 percent of revenues, and a current account deficit of almost 300 million dollars. The government could only finance this by accumulating arrears in

³⁸³ Ibid. 2.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. 2.

³⁸⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/1, Fiche du Groupe d'Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, "Les Forces armées zaïroises," 09.03.1977, p. 1.

³⁸⁶ IMF Archives, AFR Division Country Desk Files, Box 72: Zaire—831—Gécamines—1977-1979, World Bank Office Memo from M. Haug to Massimo. Russo, "Zaire—GECAMINES Expansion Project Latest Financial Results and Financial Projections," 24.06.1977, p. 2.

³⁸⁷ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds AFRAI Country Files, Box 141, Zaire—Correspondence, 1971-1978, Memo from Massimo Russo to Mr. Guenther, "Zaïre," 31.03.1978.

payments to foreign creditors.³⁸⁸ Meanwhile, the IMF estimated that between 1974 and 1977, Zaire's real GDP had declined by 13 percent.³⁸⁹

The French well understood the seriousness of the situation. In their view, Zaire's debt constituted its biggest problem. The country's long term debt stood at between 2.5 and 3 billion dollars, with nearly 800 million dollars immediately demandable by creditors. Although they persisted in their belief that Mobutu still represented the only hope for Zaire, DAM officials at the Quai noted that one of the chief obstacles to needed economic reform was....Mobutu. Any effort at reform seemed to "se heurte à la personnalisation excessive du pouvoir, à la faiblesse ou l'inexistence de structures administrative valables, au bas niveau de trop nombreux responsables"³⁹⁰ To help overcome this, the Foreign Ministry suggested that France exercise pressure, as the head of the Paris Club of foreign government creditors to Zaire, to convince Zaire's creditors to agree to reschedule Zaire's repayments. Furthermore, the French officials thought that they could use their newfound influence in Zaire to persuade Mobutu to follow a program of "financial orthodoxy" and to implement the recommendations of the IMF. Although French policymakers felt that some of the Fund's suggestions, such as the recent devaluation of the Zaire, had been ill-prepared, in general they believed that the IMF recommendations were "saines mais demanderont un grand courage politique pour rentrer dans le faits."³⁹¹ The IMF conditions consisted of a number of policies aimed at reducing inflation and substantially limiting the country's current account deficit.³⁹²

In order to do this, Zaire needed to drastically cut government spending to reduce domestic demand. However, the IMF noted that Mobutu had discovered an "interesting" way of meeting deficit reduction targets. First, by not paying significant portions of his debt service obligations, he managed to lower the official deficit figures. The biggest areas of spending overruns lay in government wages and, of course, the Office of the President. Meanwhile, to cover for this, he cut spending on a number of different government departments, "reportedly sometimes to the point of impairing normal functioning."³⁹³ This policy of deficit reduction also included a commitment to the Fund not to raise salaries in the public sector, and to maintain

³⁸⁸ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds AFRAI Country Files, Box 141, Zaire—Correspondence, 1971-1978, "Note on the Economic and Financial Situation of Zaire," undated, June, 1978, pp.1-2.

³⁸⁹ IMF Archives, Database files, "Zaire—Recent Economic Developments,"04.04.1979, p. 1.

³⁹⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaire 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note pour le ministre, signed by Guy Georgy, "a/s : Que faut-il faire pour le Zaïre ?," 27.05.1977, p. 4.

³⁹¹ Ibid. 4-5.

³⁹² IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Country Files : Zaire, Box 7, 1-23, 810(1967-78), Conclusions Préliminaires de la Mission du Fonds Monétaire International, 04.11.1977, p.1.

³⁹³ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Country Files : Zaire, Box 7, 1-23, 810(1967-78), Zaire: Briefing Paper—Review of Stand-By Arrangement, Prepared by the African Department, 18.10.1977, p.4.

the minimum wage in the private sector at its then-current level. However, and perhaps not surprisingly, continued inflation led to increasingly widespread demands for wage increases. Major strikes erupted in Kinshasa and, crucially, in Shaba where employees of the mining sector in the isolated province particularly suffered from the rise in prices. The IMF lamented that this forced Mobutu to lift the ban on collective bargaining that he had instituted the previous year. Consequently, wages in parts of the private sector increased 15-20 percent, and the government made it clear to the IMF that similar increases in public sector wages would soon become inevitable.³⁹⁴ This deteriorating situation ultimately led the Fund to conclude, at the end of 1977, that “jusqu’ici les clauses contraignantes les plus importantes de l’accord de stand-by n’ont pas été observées, et que l’esprit même du programme de stabilisation n’a pas été respecté.”³⁹⁵

Despite the failure of Zaire to abide by international demands, Mobutu continued to receive support. In fact, his position and importance in the eyes of the West, particularly France, enabled him to pull the strings a bit in promising reforms that he either had no desire, or no capacity, to implement himself. The IMF wittingly collaborated in this endeavor. Despite their extremely negative internal assessment of the Zairian government’s role in worsening the crisis, they agreed to help cover Mobutu’s efforts to reassure creditors in the private banking sector. Regarding a query from commercial bank creditors about the IMF’s relationship with Zaire, the Fund informed the Zairians that they would respond by simply stating that Zaire had “in some respects [...] fallen short” of the goals of the stabilization, but this had partly to do with factors outside of Zaire’s control.³⁹⁶ In other words, along with the French, they helped to cover for Mobutu.

Meanwhile, to ostensibly improve their overall credibility with donors, as well as to streamline their governance of the banking sector, Zaire requested that the IMF help to procure foreign expert technical advisors for the Central Bank. The French Central Bank had already provided advisors to help the Zairian Central Bank establish a list of technical requirements. The Zairians wished to formalize this via an arrangement with the IMF.³⁹⁷ As illustrated later with the experience of Erwin Blumenthal, Mobutu seemed to have little desire to truly

³⁹⁴ Ibid. 5.

³⁹⁵ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Country Files : Zaire, Box 7, 1-23, 810(1967-78), Conclusions Préliminaires de la Mission du Fonds Monétaire International, 04.11.1977, p.4.

³⁹⁶ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Country Files : Zaire, Box 7, 1-23, 810(1967-78), Office Memo from Jack Guenther to the Deputy Managing Director, “Zaire,” 15.11.1977.

³⁹⁷ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Country Files : Zaire, Box 7, 1-23, 810(1967-78), Cable from J.B. Zulu to Bofossa W’amb’ea Nkoso, Governor of the Zairian Central Bank, 23.11.1977, pp. 3-4.

cooperate in this endeavor, although he certainly hoped to reap the benefits that such a presence would have on his credibility with donors.

Along with declared economic reforms, Mobutu also made apparent changes in the political arena. In a July 1 speech, he outlined plans to appoint a Prime Minister, conduct direct elections for 18 of the 30 members of the Political Bureau of the ruling MPR party, the creation of autonomous economic zones out of the provinces, the establishment of a national audit system, and a promise to respect human rights.³⁹⁸ French observers noted, however, that these changes appeared mostly cosmetic. For instance, although Mobutu generously offered a sort of presidential election, his name was the only one on the ballot. Many of the candidates who already held the posts in the MPR's Political Bureau were "elected,"³⁹⁹ and the new Prime Minister, Kasenda Mpinga, had few clearly enumerated responsibilities.⁴⁰⁰ Furthermore, Mobutu's arrest of his widely respected Foreign Minister, Nguza Karl-I-Bond (a Lunda and a relative of Moïse Tshombe) on trumped-up charges of treason, threw some doubt on the Zairian President's devotion to democracy.⁴⁰¹

Mobutu's commitment to human rights should have also raised questions about the nature of the regime and the capacity of its army to provide true security for its people and the economy. In February 1977, Ross reported on a small "subversive movement" focused around some members of a local Christian religious community in Kwilu province near Kikwit, some 400km east of Kinshasa. Small armed groups attacked local businesses, government offices and missions and killed several people. In reprisal, troops from Kikwit attacked and burned the religious community in the village of Mulembe, the center of the revolt. They took some prisoners, but killed many of the villagers, and then proceeded to conduct executions of fleeing civilians. According to Ross:

Arrivèrent ensuite en renfort des parachutistes de Kinshasa qui se livrèrent aux pires excès : détention dans les conditions les plus dégradantes, jugements sommaires, assassinats en masse. Mais c'est la pendaison, en public, à Idiofa, le 25 Janvier, de Kasongo, le Chef de la rébellion, avec une douzaine de ses complices, qui a constitué le sommet de la répression.⁴⁰²

Ross derived this from an account by Belgian missionaries who witnessed the events and counted the victims of the FAZ massacre at some 500 people.⁴⁰³ Although not explicitly stated

³⁹⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 16, Note, "A/s. Le Zaïre," 23.02.1978, pp.1-2.

³⁹⁹ Ibid. 2.

⁴⁰⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Note, "a/s : Le Zaïre après la crise du Shaba," 07.10.1977, p. 2.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/3, Note from Ross to Foreign Minister Louis de GUIRINGAUD, "A/S répression des troubles de la région de KIKWIT," 24.02.1978, p.2.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

in Ross's report, the airborne unit which took part in the massacres could only have belonged to the brigade which the French had begun to train, since only one such brigade existed in the FAZ.⁴⁰⁴ This event distressed Ross enough that he attempted to address the question of the central government's direct role in the massacres. He felt that this was hard to evaluate, but that Mobutu, then on a trip abroad, had:

[...] ordonné la fermeté pour que l'ordre règne durant son absence dans une région particulièrement sensible. Cependant, sur le terrain, cette consigne a été largement dépassée par des exécutants, chez lesquels la psychose de complot et de révolte demeure, depuis la guerre du Shaba, extrêmement vive.⁴⁰⁵

This uprising took place in a village and region with close links to former Congolese politician and associate of Lumumba, Pierre Mulele. Mulele had led a revolt in Kwilu province in 1963 until its defeat forced him into exile. In 1968, along with other regime opponents like the Katangan Gendarmes, Mobutu offered him amnesty which he duly accepted. Upon his arrival in Kinshasa, Mobutu had him arrested, tried for treason, tortured, and executed.⁴⁰⁶ Ross's indication above that Mobutu considered this region "particulièrement sensible" must be viewed in this context. The resentment which Mobutu's regime had generated among the population in this part of Kwilu, combined with the worsening economy and the aftereffects of Shaba I, had apparently made stability in Kwilu a matter of particular concern to Mobutu. Given the state of disarray and indiscipline in the FAZ, Mobutu's orders for "fermeté" and "ordre" could easily result in massacres. Memories of the villages burned by the FAZ during Shaba I should have alerted the French to such future possibilities. Thus Ross's attempt to pass off the massacres as "excess" or "going beyond" the orders of an absent Mobutu seem like a rather disingenuous way of clearing the French of responsibility. One should note that the following year they used a smaller-scale massacre of schoolchildren as a pretext to remove Jean-Bedel Bokassa from power in the Central African Empire. Similar massacres in Zaïre the following year, however, did not affect the decision of French policymakers to support Mobutu, an apparent paragon of stability.⁴⁰⁷

Like Kwilu province, the country's economic situation and its concomitant fiscal crisis only served to increase political tensions in Shaba, whose situation had deteriorated since the onset of Shaba I. Indeed, French observers seemed to have had a fairly good idea of the corrupt

⁴⁰⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/1, Fiche du Groupe d'Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, "Les Forces armées zaïroises," 09.03.1977, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/3, Note from Ross to Foreign Minister Louis de GUIRINGAUD, "A/S répression des troubles de la région de KIKWIT," 24.02.1978, p.3.

⁴⁰⁶ Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 427 n.11.

⁴⁰⁷ On the 1979 massacres, see : 1982. "Les massacres de Katekelayi et de Luamuela (Kasai Oriental)". *Politique Africaine*. 2, no. 6: 72-106.

and disorganized nature of the regime's local administrative apparatus, as well as the level of popular discontent.

At the end of 1977, the French Consul in Lubumbashi, Shaba's capital, Marcel Thauvin, recounted a litany of troubles in the province. He noted that the cost of food had grown enormously, with a sack of corn flour selling at between 25 to 30 Zaires, which put it far out of the reach of the vast majority of locals. Thauvin noted that this translated into a level of undernourishment which had become painfully visible among much of the population. This also apparently resulted in the growth of open and publicly expressed resentment against the regime throughout the province, something which people had refrained from just six months previously. The regime's relative brief "liberalization" of politics certainly contributed to this. Widespread fraud in the recent elections contributed to the public airing of discontent. More seriously for the regime, a wave of strikes by teachers and professors in Shaba's secondary schools and the university in Lubumbashi was bolstered by threatened strike action among GECAMINES employees.⁴⁰⁸ Thauvin concluded that the growing troubles in Shaba lent an air of credibility to rumors he had heard from his Zairian contacts that :

[...] les rebelles qui auraient emmené 6.000 hommes ou jeunes gens, lors de leur repli, profiteraient du mécontentement généralisé et matérialisé par des grèves, plus ou moins fomentées par des gens à eux, pour envahir le Zaïre en différents points et plus seulement au Shaba, afin d'obliger les FAZ à faire face à divers fronts.⁴⁰⁹

An Embassy report on Shaba province, compiled just days before the outbreak of Shaba II, in May 1978, painted an even darker picture. The province's geographical isolation made fuel imports difficult and expensive, and this impeded the functioning of Shaba's major mining operations. The impact of the economic crisis and the political climate affected different sectors in Shaba in different ways. The GECAMINES workforce represented something of an industrialized working class and, from that standpoint, received some of the best pay and benefits of any group in Shaba. According to the report, its 32,000 workers financially supported a population of some 175,000.⁴¹⁰ The company's problems, as with the rest of the mining sector, led it to lay off large numbers of employees, which consequently affected the economic circumstances of large numbers of other people. Public sector officials suffered from lower rates of pay and no benefits, which translated into high rates of corruption to help to make ends meet. Additionally, with less than 15 percent of the urban population employed in

⁴⁰⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1977," Note from Thauvin to Ross, "A:s.:Situation au Shaba," 21.12.1977, pp. 2-4.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. 4.

⁴¹⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," Note from Ross to Paris, "A/S: Situation au Shaba à la veille de l'attaque de Kolwezi," 18.05.1978, p. 5.

some kind of official activity, most people lived on the edges of survival or off the informal economy.⁴¹¹

Furthermore, the resentment that Mobutu's corrupt and brutal governance generated, combined with the bad infrastructure, meant that large regions of the province escaped from direct government control.⁴¹² The army exacerbated this problem. The report particularly singled out Mobutu's favorite, the Kamanyola division for its abuses.⁴¹³ The outgoing French military attaché in Kinshasa, Lt. Colonel Bommier, also observed that FAZ troops guarding Shaba's vital railway between Mutshatsha and Dilolo suffered from terrible living conditions and bad pay. This contributed to thefts from local farmers, and "frequent" instances of rape and pillaging. Additionally, generalized insecurity, often in the form of armed banditry, plagued the entire province, which the military and police did little to counter.⁴¹⁴

These exactions, combined with the fact that many of the officers purged from the FAZ by Mobutu were from Shaba,⁴¹⁵ resulted in a near unanimous antipathy of Shaba's population towards the army.⁴¹⁶ The Embassy's report concluded that, "Si l'opposition n'est pas homogène elle est majoritaire dans les esprits. Un objectif peut la rassembler : abattre le pouvoir en place. Les dangers présentés par cette situation sont bien perçus par les dirigeants de Kinshasa."⁴¹⁷

To make matters worse, the regional situation had not improved. Shaba I and its aftereffects forced some 220,000 people to flee Shaba province into neighboring Angola.⁴¹⁸ The UNHCR estimated that most, though not all, the refugees came from rural areas, and desperately lacked, "food, medicines, clothing, shelter and other basic domestic articles."⁴¹⁹ Most of the refugees could not bring any personal belongings with them during their flight, such as extra clothing or cooking utensils. This resulted in a situation where "the overwhelming majority have [sic] no clothes, or blankets to protect themselves against the severe climatic conditions of Moxico and Lunda [provinces]."⁴²⁰ Particularly, a concentration of some 50,000

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid. 10.

⁴¹³ Ibid. 11

⁴¹⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, "Bulletin de situation," from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 02.05.1978, p. 2.

⁴¹⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," Note from Ross to Paris, "A/S: Situation au Shaba à la veille de l'attaque de Kolwezi," 18.05.1978, p. 9.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. 11.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. 11.

⁴¹⁸ UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 2, Box 239, 110.ANG.GEN, Programming--Angola [Vol.1] 1976-1977, "Assistance to Zairian Refugees, 1977-1978," p. 1.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid. 5.

refugees in Angola's Lunda province suffered from a "very critical" state of affairs, with a number of daily recorded deaths due to lack of food and medical care.⁴²¹

This situation was compounded by the fact that Northern Angola had recently seen a massive influx of several hundred thousand refugee returnees from Zaire, following Angola's independence in 1975. This region, which the UNHCR described as "vastly underpopulated," lacked the kinds of infrastructure and administrative apparatus to handle such a large population increase. The resulting strain on local government and communities forced the Angolan government to divert significant resources to alleviate the immediate problems. It also requested massive assistance from the UNHCR, UNICEF, the Red Cross, and other international agencies to help handle this latest inflow.⁴²² However, by mid-October 1977, the French chargé and head of mission in Angola, Jean-Jacques Peyronnet, reported that international aid was insufficient. He met with the UNDP representative in Angola, Jaime Balcazar-Aranibar, who passed on a UNDP assessment of the condition of the refugees.⁴²³ Balcazar gave a vivid account of the refugees, which he described as:

[...] effroyable : après leur longue marche depuis le Zaire [sic], sans alimentation, se nourrissant de champignons, sans soin médical pour leurs blessures, en haillons, habitant de petites huttes de feuilles de palmier, sans outils pour travailler et sous le coup de l'émotion suscitée par leur tragédie, ils présentent une image pénible [...] un fort pourcentage des réfugiés zairois [...] est constitué par des femmes, des enfants, et des vieillards.⁴²⁴

Regardless of the level and effectiveness of aid provided to the refugees, only a political resolution of the conflict between Zaire and Angola could provide a durable solution. Unfortunately for them, they would have to wait another year before this opportunity would arise.

Although successful in repelling the Katangan invasion in 1977, the FAZ and its Moroccan allies had not particularly damaged the FLNC's military capabilities. Reports from numerous sources placed Katangan units along the Zairian border. On March 20 1978, a company sized unit of the FLNC made a substantial incursion, crossing Zambian territory⁴²⁵ to attack the Mutshatsha rail depot. Fortunately for the FAZ, two companies defending Mutshatsha managed to repel the Katangans after some light skirmishing. The Katangans, falling back towards the Angolan border, ran up against another FAZ unit patrolling the frontier

⁴²¹ Ibid. 1.

⁴²² Ibid. 2.

⁴²³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, Note from Peyronnet to Paris, "A/S. Réfugiés Zaïrois," 19.10.1977, p. 1.

⁴²⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, "Extrait d'un rapport du Représentant du PNUD d'Angola," October, 1977, p. 1.

⁴²⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, "Bulletin de situation," from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 02.05.1978, p. 1.

and lost some twenty men. The FAZ units pursued the retreating Katangans across the Angolan border towards the town of Caianda where the unfortunate Gendarmes ran into UNITA forces who tore them to pieces⁴²⁶ and burned down the town.⁴²⁷ The Gendarmes apparently lost another forty men.⁴²⁸ Despite the FAZ's success, French military advisors worried that their cross-border pursuit and the destruction of Caianda might encourage the Angolan government to retaliate.⁴²⁹ Furthermore, the commander of the Shaba Military Region, General Ikuku, died in an accidental helicopter crash while attempting to organize the pursuit.⁴³⁰ The French saw Ikuku as one of the most competent FAZ officers.⁴³¹ During Shaba I, he helped to lead the FAZ counteroffensive by moving light armor along the Shaba railway, apparently surprising Katangan opponents along the way, earning him the sobriquet "le serpent des rails" among the FAZ troops.⁴³² His loss could only have a negative impact on FAZ's discipline and effectiveness.

The activity of the FLNC along the border, combined with the deteriorating political situation in Shaba, led French military intelligence to evaluate the possibility of a renewed Katangan offensive. However, it judged this rather improbable. French intelligence officials felt a new offensive unlikely because it "[...] ne bénéficierait plus de l'effet de surprise et se heurterait au dispositif en place le long de la frontière. L'existence à Kolwezi d'un dépôt de matériel lourd marocain jouerait aussi un rôle dissuasif."⁴³³

Unfortunately for the French and their Zairian allies, the presence of the FAZ along the Angolan border had rather the opposite effect than that intended. It opened the way for the FLNC to outflank them by traversing "neutral" Zambian territory and thus directly attacking Kolwezi.

⁴²⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Echec d'une infiltration katangaise," 30.03.1978.

⁴²⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, "Bulletin de situation," from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 02.05.1978, p. 1.

⁴²⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Echec d'une infiltration katangaise," 30.03.1978.

⁴²⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, "Bulletin de situation," from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 02.05.1978, p. 1.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Fiche, "Evaluation de la situation au Shaba le 15 mai à 10 heures," Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, 15.05.1978, p.1.

⁴³² Malu, *The Shaba Invasions*, 45.

⁴³³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/1, Fiche, "Evaluation de la situation au Zaïre," Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, 08.03.1978, p. 2.

Chapter III: The Second Invasion of the Gendarmes

On Saturday, May 13 1978, this is exactly what happened. 2,000-2,500 Katangan Gendarmes bypassed Zairian army units stationed on the Angolan border via a flanking movement through Zambia.⁴³⁴ Gras later asserted that this had come as a complete surprise. Due to major shake-ups in FAZ's intelligence services, he claimed that the French only learned that the Katangans had passed through Zambian territory after the fall of Kolwezi. He stated defensively, "Vous pensez bien que si nous avions su que les Katangais étaient entrés en territoire zambien, nous nous serions méfiés. Mais nous ne l'avons pas su."⁴³⁵

Oddly, French military intelligence knew that the FLNC had crossed Zambian territory in the past. As noted above, according to the new French military attaché in Kinshasa, Colonel Robert Larzul, the FLNC had conducted their March raid against Mutshatsha through Zambia.⁴³⁶ Furthermore, late in the previous year, the Zambian government had informed both Zairian and French government officials that the Katangans had increased their recruitment in Zambia, in preparation for a possible offensive. Zambian authorities even claimed that the FLNC had asked permission to cross Zambian territory to attack Lubumbashi. Zambian President, Kenneth Kaunda, refused.⁴³⁷

In Zambia, the FLNC benefited from traversing an area predominantly inhabited by Lunda. The FAZ had left the Zambian border practically unguarded, expecting any new FLNC attack to come from Angola again.⁴³⁸ The Gendarmes split into two columns, one headed towards Mutshatsha to capture the important rail depot, and another headed to capture Kolwezi. Kolwezi, as the most important mining center in the province, constituted one of the principal objectives of the Katangan invasion the previous year. The threat they posed to it precipitated the French intervention during Shaba I. This time, however, they captured it on the first day. Kolwezi not only represented the most important mining center in Shaba, but at the time of the invasion, some 2,500 Belgian, over 400 French, and 75 Americans lived and worked there.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 5.

⁴³⁵ Intervention of Yves Gras in "Compte rendu de la séance du 8 novembre 1985," *Mondes et Cultures*. Vol. 45. N.4. 1985, p. 714.

⁴³⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, "Bulletin de situation," from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 02.05.1978, p. 1.

⁴³⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, Telegram from French Ambassador Zambia, Jean François to Paris, "A/S : Shaba, Zambie, Zaïre," 06.10.1977, p. 2.

⁴³⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," Note from Ross to Paris, "A/S : Le mois de Mai 1978 au Zaïre," 08.06.1978, p. 3.

⁴³⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Situation militaire au Shaba," 14.05.1978.

The rebels quickly gained control over most of the city, including the airport where they destroyed a few of the aircraft.⁴⁴⁰ They met very little resistance since the FAZ had moved much of Kolwezi's garrison to counter the supposed FLNC threat along the Angolan border.⁴⁴¹

At first, French policymakers only had a sketchy idea of the situation. The first news apparently trickled in from GECAMINES headquarters in Kolwezi, which could still send telephone messages to its offices in Lubumbashi. Mobutu convened the French, Belgian, and American, British, and Chinese Ambassadors and heads of missions later in the day. He briefly explained to them that the Gendarmes had attacked Kolwezi, but indicated that the FAZ had the situation under control.⁴⁴² The next day, the situation seemed to deteriorate. Ross cabled Paris that the attack no longer seemed to be a simple "coup de poing" but, "l'opération initiale d'un vaste mouvement préparé par la présence de Gendarmes katangais, encadrés par des angolais et d'autre étrangers."⁴⁴³ Mobutu officially announced the invasion and accused Angola, Cuba, the Soviet Union, Libya, and Algeria of involvement.⁴⁴⁴ On the afternoon of May 14, the Zairian government requested "une aide de n'importe quelle nature" from the American, Chinese, Moroccans, Belgians, and French.⁴⁴⁵ Later in the evening, Mobutu made a personal appeal to Ross for any kind of assistance that France could offer.⁴⁴⁶

At this point, the French Embassy began to lobby its government for decisive action. Colonel Yves Gras, with Ross's approval, began to search for a military solution. He telephoned the *Etat-major particulier*, Giscard's personal military staff, to request the immediate deployment of an airborne battalion to Kolwezi to secure the city and repel the Gendarmes.⁴⁴⁷ However, René Journiac, told Ross that Giscard wanted to wait to see what the Belgians would do, presumably since most of the expatriates living in Kolwezi were Belgian nationals.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," Dépêche d'actualité, «A/S : Le mois de Mai 1978 au Zaïre» from Ross to Paris, 08.06.1978, p. 7.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid. 6.

⁴⁴² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Commando katangais à Kolwezi, situation militaire," 13.05.1978.

⁴⁴³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Situation militaire au Shaba," 14.05.1978.

⁴⁴⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Communiqué du gouvernement zaïrois," 14.05.1978, p. 1.

⁴⁴⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Shaba," 14.05.1978.

⁴⁴⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Message oral du Général Mobutu," 14.05.1978.

⁴⁴⁷ Gras, "L'Opération Kolwezi," 694.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

At the same time, General du Peyrat of the French General Staff telephoned Colonel Leroy of the Belgian General Staff, to request official cooperation between the French and Belgians on the burgeoning crisis. Leroy suggested that du Peyrat call back the following day, but according to Leroy, the French never followed through.⁴⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Colonel Larzul met with his Belgian counterpart, Colonel Planard, to sound out Belgian intentions. According to Gras, Planard responded that the Belgians hoped to wait and see how the situation would unfold, and perhaps open negotiations with the FLNC, who had representatives in Brussels.⁴⁵⁰ At the prospect of a French intervention, Planard apparently told Larzul that Belgium would consider it “inopportune et inamicale.”⁴⁵¹ This marked the beginning of tensions between French and Belgian policymakers which would plague both countries’ decision-making during the crisis.

The next day, Monday May 15, French military intelligence, based on information provided by the Embassy, felt that the surprise incursion could have serious consequences for Mobutu. In their estimation, the Gendarmes could move east towards Lubumbashi, thus threatening Shaba’s administrative capital. They also worried that the remaining Gendarme units in Angola could attack along the Zairian border further west and north, thus pinning the FAZ along that front, far away from Kolwezi and the heart of Shaba’s vital economic centers. Mobutu only had some 6,000 troops in the Shaba region, a number which the French judged roughly equivalent to the FLNC in the area. FAZ reserves consisted of badly trained units, mostly concentrated around Kinshasa and the Cabinda enclave. French intelligence noted that the only measures that Mobutu had taken so far, deploying a few companies to Mutshatsha and sending the 311th Airborne Battalion to Lubumbashi (which Gras later claimed was his own idea),⁴⁵² would not suffice to confront the expected FLNC advance. Given this situation, French intelligence judged that “seule une aide extérieure peut permettre au président MOBUTU de se rétablir assez rapidement et lui éviter une crise grave.”⁴⁵³ However, the same report judged that any direct aid from African allies, including covert aid from South Africa, would be insufficient.⁴⁵⁴ The logical consequences of this point of view led to only one

⁴⁴⁹ Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 12.

⁴⁵⁰ Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” 694.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. However, Planard later claimed that this response was only in reference to Gras’s initial plan involving a few companies dropped over Kolwezi with the unique aim of repulsing the rebels, rather than rescuing the expatriate population. (see Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 12).

⁴⁵² Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” 694.

⁴⁵³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/1, Fiche du Groupe d’Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, “Evaluation de la situation au Shaba le 15 mai à 10 heures,” 15.05.1978, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

conclusion: that the French would have to intervene themselves. Interestingly, this report made absolutely no mention of the potential threat to the expatriate community.

To make matters worse, on the same day, the French Embassy also began receiving disturbing reports that the Katangans had killed several European expatriates.⁴⁵⁵ Additionally, they had no news from six French military advisors in Kolwezi, originally sent there to maintain FAZ helicopters and armored vehicles in the city.⁴⁵⁶ Later that day, André Ross met with Norbert Rocher, the Financial Director of GECAMINES in Lubumbashi and a French national. Rocher passed on to Ross what he had learned from the GECAMINES office in Kolwezi via the still-functioning telephone connection. According to him, the Katangans had killed eight Belgians and one Italian, and had begun to commit, “toutes sortes d’exactions, pillant les magasins, mitraillant les passants dans les rues, tirant au mortier sur les maisons des européens.”⁴⁵⁷

The Belgian Embassy received similarly disturbing reports, particularly from missionaries who had previously hesitated in reporting information regarding the FLNC to Belgian authorities for fear of compromising themselves as informers or Mobutu’s collaborators.⁴⁵⁸ This prompted Planard to cable Brussels requesting a military intervention to rescue the expatriate population.⁴⁵⁹ Several hours later, the Embassy’s chargé d’affaires, in the absence of the Belgian Ambassador then on leave, followed this plea with a request to coordinate military action with the French.⁴⁶⁰

Meanwhile Gras tried to assemble a small group of one Belgian and three French officers to begin planning for a possible airborne attack on Kolwezi, with or without Belgian support.⁴⁶¹ However, mutual suspicion and distrust began to mount between the French and Belgians posted in Kinshasa. Planard suspected Gras’s plans for an immediate intervention as seemingly motivated by personal ambitions and guided by someone else or a political ideology. He thus decided to cut off all contacts with him. Instead, informal contacts continued between Gras and Colonel Bleus, the head of Belgian military cooperation.⁴⁶² This contributed to

⁴⁵⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Embassy Brussels to Paris, “Situation au Zaïre,” 15.05.1978, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/1, Fiche du Groupe d’Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, “Evaluation de la situation au Shaba le 15 mai à 10 heures,” 15.05.1978, p. 1.

⁴⁵⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, No subject, 16.05.1978.

⁴⁵⁸ Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 17.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. 18.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. 19.

⁴⁶¹ Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” 695.

⁴⁶² Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 21.

widening the communications gap between the French and the Belgians. Part of the problem lay in the fact that Gras had direct communication with the French General Staff and the Elysée, whereas Brussels cut their officers in Kinshasa almost completely out of the decision-making loop.⁴⁶³

The following day, Tuesday May 16, André Ross cabled Paris that according to his sources, the number of Europeans killed was greater than originally reported, and the city “était livrée au pillage.”⁴⁶⁴ On the same day, the French Embassy had received reports that the FAZ 311th Airborne Battalion had dropped two companies on the headquarters of the Shaba Military Region in Kolwezi to reinforce troops who had not yet fled. Ross reported that the operation had succeeded.⁴⁶⁵ However, his evaluation of the evolution of the situation led him to formally request a military intervention.

Ross argued that the nearly 3,000 Europeans in Kolwezi had effectively become hostages. The attitude of the Katangans had rapidly changed and they had apparently lost discipline, making it likely that the situation would worsen. Negotiations with the FLNC in this situation would run more risks than their “dégagement par la force.”⁴⁶⁶ Despite the presumed success of the FAZ airborne attack, Ross warned that even this elite FAZ unit was, “trop novices et trop proches des traditions militaires africaines pour qu’on puisse se reposer sur elles du soin de sauver des étrangers.”⁴⁶⁷ Thus, “C’est pourquoi seule une opération aéroportée dans les 48 heures permettrait de sauver le maximum de vies humaines.”⁴⁶⁸ According to Gras’s retrospective and rather reductionist logic, the necessity of an airborne operation stemmed from the nature of the Katangan units who:

[...] constituaient une force importante dans une guerre de type africain. Une guerre où l’on ne connaît que deux modes d’action : l’attaque par surprise et le massacre, ou bien la fuite devant un adversaire trop fort. C’est pourquoi je pensais que, surpris par un assaut de parachutistes, ils n’offriraient au pire, que des résistances sporadiques, mais sans manœuvre défensive cohérente. Il était plus probable qu’ils se replieraient rapidement en laissant derrière eux des éléments retardateurs.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶³ Ibid. 23.

⁴⁶⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Situation à Kolwezi,” 16.05.1978.

⁴⁶⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Opération aéroportée zaïroise,” 16.05.1978.

⁴⁶⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 29, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Situation des étrangers de Kolwezi,” 16.05.1978, p. 1.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. 2.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. 2.

⁴⁶⁹ Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” 697.

The same day, Mobutu made a call to Giscard, personally requesting a French military intervention to repel the Katangan invaders.⁴⁷⁰ Meanwhile, American President Jimmy Carter also ordered the 82nd Airborne Division to alert status, in case the 75 employees of the Morris-Knudsen construction firm could not find a way to evacuate.⁴⁷¹

On the evening of May 16, the Belgian government's crisis committee decided to order the Defense Ministry to prepare a large-scale evacuation plan for the Belgian (and European) expatriates in Kolwezi. Late that night and early the next morning, the Belgian military planning staff developed a plan to secure the Kolwezi airport with a battalion of airborne troops, while another battalion would gather the Europeans in town and evacuate them by air.⁴⁷² Early on the morning of Wednesday May 17, the Belgian cabinet ordered Colonel Rik Depoorter's Paracommando Regiment to alert status in preparation for "Operation Red Bean."⁴⁷³

That morning, Giscard also ordered the 2nd REP (*Régiment étranger de parachutistes*) of the French Foreign Legion placed on alert from their base in Corsica.⁴⁷⁴ In Brussels, the French military attaché met the Belgian Defense Ministry's Chief of Staff, who outlined the Belgian plan. The Belgian officer noted that it would take at least three days before the troops could reach Kolwezi.⁴⁷⁵ He also provided him with a copy of the provisional plan of the proposed operation.⁴⁷⁶

The news that Giscard had placed the 2nd REP on alert pleased Ross and Gras. It indicated that the French government had begun seriously considering an armed intervention.⁴⁷⁷ Gras also received authorization to allow French instructors to pilot the FAZ Mirage jets in airstrikes against the FLNC.⁴⁷⁸ However, neither he nor Ross had received official word that Giscard had yet given the green light for an intervention. Furthermore, later in the day, Gras received news that elements of the FAZ 311th Airborne Battalion and the 133rd Infantry Battalion under Major Mahele, had managed to retake the Kolwezi airport after an advance overland from the bridge at Lake Lualaba.

⁴⁷⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier 1978, "Chronologie détaillée de l'affaire de Kolwezi du 13 au 31 mai 1978," Kinshasa Embassy report to Paris.

⁴⁷¹ JCL: National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material 6, Box 87 [Country File Yugoslavia : 3-5/80 through Zaire 1/79-1/81], Folder: [Zaire 1-5/1978], Zaire decision log, undated.

⁴⁷² Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 35.

⁴⁷³ Ibid. 35-36.

⁴⁷⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978, p. 9.

⁴⁷⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ambassador Francis Huré in Brussels to Paris, "Événements du Shaba," 17.05.1978.

⁴⁷⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Huré to Paris, "A/S Les événements du Shaba," 17.05.1978.

⁴⁷⁷ Gras, "L'Opération Kolwezi," 696.

⁴⁷⁸ Odom, *Shaba II*, 50.

This worried Gras. He had earlier suggested to General Babia, the FAZ Chief of Staff, the deployment of these units to Lubumbashi. From there, they could move by road to Lake Lualaba bridge, a mere thirty kilometers from Kolwezi. This position would block any Katangan advance in the direction of Likasi and Lubumbashi, both of which contained large numbers of expatriate Europeans. It could also provide a springboard for an eventual FAZ counterattack to retake Kolwezi, particularly in the absence of any Western intervention.⁴⁷⁹ Although they had apparently retaken the airport, these troops remained vulnerable to a substantial FLNC counterattack, while the main route to Lubumbashi lay wide open.⁴⁸⁰

Meanwhile, at midday on May 17, Giscard ordered Army Chief Staff, General Guy Méry, to begin planning for an intervention as soon as possible, preferably by Friday, May 19.⁴⁸¹ Ross may have encouraged this process by cabling Paris the contents of an urgent plea from the Belgian consul in Lubumbashi who “begged” his government to intervene within twenty-four hours to “arrêter le massacre.”⁴⁸² At midnight, local time, André Ross finally received news from Paris that Giscard authorized a military intervention by the 2nd REP aiming to repel the FLNC, secure Kolwezi, and protect its European inhabitants.⁴⁸³ Ten minutes later, Gras received a call from General du Peyrat from the General Staff. Gras learned that he now had command of the intervention force, and should submit his plan of operations as soon as possible.⁴⁸⁴

However, neither the French nor the Belgians had the capacity to rapidly intervene using their own airlift capacity. The standard French troop and equipment transport aircraft, the C-160 Transall only had a medium range and would require several layovers before it could reach its destination. To quickly transport troops to Zaire, both the French and the Belgians had to requisition civilian passenger aircraft. However, to ferry the heavy supplies that their units would need on the ground, including fuel for the C-130 and C-160 aircraft carrying the paratroopers to their destinations, they needed longer range American C-141 transport aircraft. Thus, as early as May 16, the Belgians requested American airlift support to transport extra fuel to the airbase at Kamina, a little over 200 kilometers north of Kolwezi.⁴⁸⁵ Over the following two days the Belgians also requested an ammunition lift, and the French requested

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. 694.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. 696.

⁴⁸¹ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 221.

⁴⁸² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1978,” “Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi,” Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 9.

⁴⁸³ Sergent, *La Légion*, 116.

⁴⁸⁴ Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” 696.

⁴⁸⁵ JCL: National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material 6, Box 87 [Country File Yugoslavia : 3-5/80 through Zaire 1/79-1/81], Folder: [Zaire 1-5/1978], Zaire decision log, undated.

help to transport supplies and equipment for the 2nd REP.⁴⁸⁶ The Carter Administration authorized all of these requests, provided that the aircraft did not enter the combat zone.⁴⁸⁷ Overall, 10 C-141s carried French equipment to Zaïre, and 8 C-141s carried ammunition and other supplies for the Belgians.⁴⁸⁸

One of the reasons behind the time lag between Ross's and Gras's pleas for military intervention and Giscard's final decision to intervene late on May 17, resulted from Giscard's initial desire to see what the Belgians would do. The French Army Chief of Staff, General Guy Méry, later explained this attitude, writing:

Nos autorités politiques responsables, estimant qu'il s'agissait d'une ancienne colonie belge, qu'aucun accord de défense ne nous liait au Zaïre et que la plupart des Européens présents à Kolwezi étaient d'origine belge, avaient subordonné toute décision d'intervention à une action belge [...] C'est ce qui explique que la décision française a été prise dans la nuit du mercredi 17 au 18, après qu'ait été connue la décision belge d'intervention.⁴⁸⁹

It soon became clear, however, that the French and Belgians had significantly different plans. The operational plan that the Belgian Defense Ministry provided to the French made this relatively clear. The Belgian orders stipulated that the 1,200 men of their Paracommando Regiment would take and hold the Kolwezi airfield for a maximum of 72 hours while they evacuated the Europeans from the city.⁴⁹⁰ The French vigorously opposed this idea. The Kolwezi airfield lay several kilometers from Kolwezi. A landing there followed by an advance on the city could give the FLNC considerable time to organize and resist, which could pose grave risks to the Europeans in the city.⁴⁹¹ The French, on the other hand, wanted to launch a direct assault on the city itself by dropping troops onto an open area in the middle of town. This would allow them to quickly disorganize and disorient the FLNC, forcing them to surrender or flee, hopefully minimizing the risk to the European residents.⁴⁹² This contributed to a decision by the French General Staff not to coordinate their intervention with the Belgians.⁴⁹³

Politics played another role in this decision. The Europeans working in Kolwezi were crucial for GECAMINES' operations. A full-scale evacuation would potentially have

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. and JCL: National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material 6, Box 87 [Country File Yugoslavia : 3-5/80 through Zaïre 1/79-1/81], Folder: [Zaïre 1-5/1978], Doc. 44, Chronology, undated.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ JCL: Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 [Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78], Folder [Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978], Doc. 1B Memo from William Odom to David Aaron, "SCC Working Group Meeting on Zaïre—Friday, May 19, 1978," 19.5.1978.

⁴⁸⁹ Letter written by General Guy Méry, cited in Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 58-59.

⁴⁹⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Huré to Paris, "A/S Les événements du Shaba," 17.05.1978, p. 2.

⁴⁹¹ Letter written by General Guy Méry, cited in Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 59.

⁴⁹² Ibid. 60.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

disastrous economic consequences for the company and hence, for Zaire. French policymakers deemed such a risk unacceptable. Thus, the 2nd REP's mission aimed to secure Kolwezi so that the expatriate community could return to their occupations.⁴⁹⁴ The Belgian diplomatic staff in Zaire felt the same way. According to Rittweger de Moor, the Belgian Ambassador who had returned to Zaire early on May 18, the Belgian evacuation plan signaled to Mobutu that, "la Belgique se désolidarisait complètement du problème auquel il était confronté. On lui retirait tous les cadres qui faisaient fonctionner ses industries minières et autres services."⁴⁹⁵ Colonel Planard, the Belgian Military attaché, lamented, "autant fermer les mines."⁴⁹⁶ However, unlike the French government, Brussels was less concerned with saving Mobutu.

Fear of Belgian intentions seemed to encourage the French to accelerate their planning. Gras had initially decided to drop the 700 men of the 2nd REP on Kolwezi early on the morning of Saturday May 20. This would give the unit enough time to rest after their long flight from Corsica, and allow them to potentially coordinate with the Belgians in a joint action. Early on May 18, as the 2nd REP had already gotten underway, Gras received a message from Paris asking him to move the operation up to the following day, Friday May 19. Initially he balked at the request, which came with no explanation.⁴⁹⁷ He called Journiac to explain that he felt an attack on May 19 was premature;⁴⁹⁸ that the lack of sufficient air transport meant that the 2nd REP had to jump in two waves, and that such an attack would not provide enough time for both waves to deploy before nightfall. Furthermore, he could not support an earlier attack with airstrikes, as the FAZ pilots had used up all of their ammunition. It would take time to deliver more from the French airbase in Chad.⁴⁹⁹ While Gras's intransigence apparently infuriated the Defense Ministry,⁵⁰⁰ Journiac deferred to his judgment.⁵⁰¹

Soon several events apparently led Gras to change his mind. Mobutu, in a propaganda coup, took the controls of a C-130 full of journalists and landed for an hour at Kolwezi airfield, then lightly defended by the FAZ troops who had managed to take it the previous day. This news was accompanied by information suggesting that the FLNC had killed up to 25 Europeans

⁴⁹⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier Consulat Lubumbabshi, 1978, «Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi», 9.8.1978 p. 11-12.

⁴⁹⁵ Interview with Rittweger, cited in Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 56.

⁴⁹⁶ Interview with Planard, cited in Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 56.

⁴⁹⁷ Gras, "L'Opération Kolwezi," 698.

⁴⁹⁸ Sergent, *La Légion*, 129

⁴⁹⁹ Odom, *Shaba II*, 57.

⁵⁰⁰ Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 81.

⁵⁰¹ Gras, "L'Opération Kolwezi," 698.

and held 12 as hostages.⁵⁰² Gras now thought that with the 2nd REP en route, the attention that Mobutu had now given to the airfield gave the French a potential advantage, as the FLNC would now likely suspect any intervention to come in the form of combat landings there rather than an airborne attack in town.⁵⁰³

Furthermore, in his discussions with his Belgian counterpart, Colonel Bleus, he realized that Bleus had no authority to coordinate an operation, and in fact, Brussels had failed to keep him fully informed. Gras did learn that the Belgians planned to fly their three airborne battalions directly to Kamina airbase, rather than passing through Kinshasa. This meant that unless the Belgian commander, Colonel Rik Depoorter could come to Kinshasa in person to coordinate the attack with Gras, a joint intervention would become extremely hard to implement.⁵⁰⁴

Also, in the afternoon of May 18, a number of European radio stations began broadcasting news reports indicating that Belgian and French interventions could be soon underway. Whatever the source of the leak, this seriously undermined the element of surprise that Gras considered critical to the success of the mission.⁵⁰⁵ Finally, in the early evening, FAZ Chief of Staff, General Babia, called Gras into his office. He presented him with a “radio intercept” from Mbumba ordering the Katangans to prepare to retreat after executing “tous les prisonniers,” and sabotaging GECAMINES mining installations.⁵⁰⁶ This led Gras to decide to move the operation up to the following day, Friday May 19.

Meanwhile, it seemed that the French General Staff in Paris wanted to stall the Belgians to prevent a Belgian operation before the French. According to Belgian sources, American General and NATO commander, Alexander Haig, held a coordination meeting at the American headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany in the late morning of May 18, as both Belgian and French planes carrying their airborne troops began to take off. According to Colonel Leroy, the Belgian representative at the meeting, he asked the (unnamed) French representative the nature of the French operation. The French representative responded, “je ne sais pas, c’est un problème politique. Nous ne sommes pas au courant d’une opération française au Zaïre.”⁵⁰⁷ At the same time, the French refused to authorize the planes carrying the Belgian troops

⁵⁰² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Kolwezi-Voyage de Mobutu, Situation des étrangers,” 18.05.1978.

⁵⁰³ Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” 699.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Sergent, *La Légion*, 130.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid. 131, also see Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” 699.

⁵⁰⁷ Cited in Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 75.

permission to cross French airspace, citing an air traffic control problem.⁵⁰⁸ This situation lasted for nearly four hours, while the French planes leaving from Corsica were already well underway since late morning.⁵⁰⁹

Furthermore, the French government had not yet informed the Belgians that they had officially decided on an intervention and that the 2nd REP was underway. The Belgian government received this news indirectly via a Belgian Air Force officer stationed in Corsica who noticed that the legionnaires had boarded aircraft and that the airbase at Solanzara soon expected a number of American C-141s to arrive. Indeed, the Belgian government only received official news of the French request for C-141s from the Americans themselves.⁵¹⁰

Interestingly, the overall French attitude towards the Belgian intervention was rather confused. Méry seems to have ordered Gras to accelerate the timing of the intervention because of disagreements with the Belgians, and was apparently furious at Gras for his initial refusal to do so.⁵¹¹ The French General Staff and Defense Ministry also refused to communicate important details to the Belgians, and even possibly tried to deliberately delay the arrival of the Belgian Paracommando Regiment in Zaire through a refusal to grant permission to fly over French territory. However, Gras did, on several occasions, appear to try to coordinate with Belgian officers on the ground, but the lack of authority among Belgium's military representatives in Kinshasa made this impossible.⁵¹² As noted above, this partly contributed to his decision to move up the timing of the air assault to May 19, as initially requested by Méry. However, the role of the "decider" himself, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, in this process remains unclear.

Political scientist, Samy Cohen, in his overview of Giscard's foreign policy, claims that Giscard told Méry late on the night of May 17, to intervene, "si possible avant les belges."⁵¹³ This conforms to the general trend examined above of the French efforts to sabotage Belgian plans. However, Giscard's own account of the Kolwezi intervention does seem to indicate a lack of agreement within the French government over the question of coordination with the Belgians. Somewhat contrary to Cohen's claim, according to Giscard, late on the night of May 18, he told his Foreign Minister, Louis de Guiringaud, to inform the Belgians of the French

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid. 76.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. 77

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. 78.

⁵¹¹ Ibid. 98.

⁵¹² Ibid. 83. and Gras, "L'Opération Kolwezi," 699.

⁵¹³ Samy Cohen, "La politique extérieure de la France de 1974 à 1981: Un seul homme ? Un homme seul ?" in Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.). *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*. Paris, France : Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 32.

plan to attack the following day. He wanted Guiringaud to see if the Belgians wanted to coordinate, although with the warning that the French could not delay their assault.⁵¹⁴ Over the course of the night, Guiringaud and his Belgian counterpart, Henri Simonet, had several telephone conversations. Simonet apparently desperately wanted the French to delay their assault. Early on the morning of May 19, he told Guiringaud that if the French postponed their take-off from Kinshasa for a few hours, the Belgians could join the attack. Méry informed Giscard that it was already too late to do anything, but Giscard decided to halt the operation anyway. In fact, none of the planes had yet taken off,⁵¹⁵ so Méry may have simply said this to convince Giscard to let the operation go ahead as planned. Nonetheless, by 8:00 AM, Simonet called Guiringaud to inform him that the Belgians were not yet ready to participate in time. Giscard quickly called Méry to authorize take-off as soon as possible.⁵¹⁶

Possibly, Gras's initial reasons for opposing an attack on May 19 were the reason for Giscard's hesitation and apparent desire to associate the Belgians with the intervention. Guiringaud had also constantly advocated a joint mission with the Belgians. It seems that most of the opposition to cooperation with Belgium came from the French General Staff and Defense Ministry,⁵¹⁷ who had apparently done the most to keep the Belgians uninformed of French plans, and to impede their deployment.

This confused relationship with the Belgians generated a great deal of suspicion among Belgian officials regarding French intentions. Simonet's late-night efforts to postpone a French intervention long enough to bring the Belgian Paracommando Regiment into action resulted from a series of urgent telegrams from the Belgian Ambassador in Kinshasa and his military attaché. As soon as Rittweger learned from Ross that the French would intervene on May 19, he cabled Brussels with an urgent warning. According to the Belgian Ambassador, Gras's justification for the accelerated attack timing, namely General Babia's intelligence report, could not explain the real reason for an attack on May 19. Rittweger explained that the Belgians had received similar information well before that, and that this news was, in fact, nothing new. Instead, he suspected that Gras's decision "pourrait reposer sur d'autres mobiles." Both Planard and Bleus worried that a French operation alone carried great risks. Rittweger summarized these fears, noting :

[...] si les moyens français sont suffisants pour une opération de prise de Kolwezi, ils sont insuffisants pour une opération de sauvetage qui devrait coiffer toute la ville d'un seul coup de manière précisément à éviter la

⁵¹⁴ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 226.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid. 231, and Gras, "L'Opération Kolwezi," 700.

⁵¹⁶ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 232.

⁵¹⁷ Brabant, *Aspects politiques*, 100.

possibilité de massacres et de nouvelles prises d'otages. Si les français croient que la situation est aujourd'hui plus dramatique, ce devrait être une raison supplémentaire pour ne pas agir seuls.⁵¹⁸

Rittweger continued, asserting that Gras's decision, "est une décision politique unilatérale de la France [...] au surplus elle nous exclut de l'opération." He thus urged Simonet to do everything in his power to pressure Giscard to delay the operation long enough for the Belgians to arrive.⁵¹⁹ Fortunately for Rittweger and the Belgians, fears that an earlier French attack might provoke a larger loss of European life proved unfounded. As discussed later, however, his fears of unspoken political motivations were not as far-fetched.

In any event, a combination of fog, late arrivals, Giscard's vacillating orders, and technical problems in some of the transport aircraft meant that the first wave of the 2nd REP did not take off from Kinshasa until late morning.⁵²⁰ Due to breakdowns of two planes, the regiment's commander, Colonel Philippe Erulin, decided to overload the remaining aircraft in order to have enough men for the first wave. Over four hours later, at 1530 on May 19, the first wave of the 2nd REP, some 400 troops, jumped into Kolwezi aboard four FAZ C-130 and one C-160 Transall. "*Opération Léopard*" had begun.⁵²¹ By jumping directly into an open space within the city, they effectively managed to take the Katangans by surprise, who probably expected any landing to take place at the airfield recently retaken by FAZ troops. This gave the paratroopers a greater opportunity to secure the European quarter and protect the lives of many of the expatriates.⁵²² Within a few hours, the French managed to secure much of the town with few losses. Partly, the ease of the initial operation resulted from the fact that the FLNC had already begun to retreat. According to Willame, citing eyewitness accounts, the Gendarmes had begun to withdrawal after news of an impending airborne intervention reached them on May 18.⁵²³ FAZ Colonel Yemo later wrote that the retreat began after they lost the airport on May 17, with most of the Katangans having left by the following day.⁵²⁴ Gras also suggests that by the time the French troops began their attack, the Katangans had already begun

⁵¹⁸ Belgian Diplomatic Files, Zaïre Boîte 209/2 Shaba II Red Bean SGR I (05/78-07/78) Telegram from Rittweger to Brussels, "Opération aéroportée de sauvetage à Kolwezi," 18.05.1978. [Provided to the author by Erik Kennes]

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Gras, "L'Opération Kolwezi," 700.

⁵²¹ Gras named the operation "*Léopard*," but its official designation by the French military is "*Opération Bonite*" following its pattern of naming operations in Africa during this time after fish.

⁵²² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 6.

⁵²³ Willame, *FLNC*, 40.

⁵²⁴ Yemo, 80.

their withdrawal. He further asserted that, according to the report of the Belgian medical mission, all of the killings, at least of Europeans, had occurred by May 17.⁵²⁵

Despite the relative ease in securing the European quarters of Kolwezi and the apparent retreat of the Gendarmes, a number of armed militia and some FLNC “regulars” remained, particularly on the outskirts of the city, probably acting as rearguards. Indeed, part of Colonel Erulin’s plan consisted of forcing the Katangans to flee, rather than trapping them inside the city where they would only have, “deux attitudes possibles: soit se battre jusqu’au dernier, sur place, soit se battre tout en tuant les Européens qui se trouvaient parmi eux.”⁵²⁶ This accomplished, Erulin’s men began to look for Europeans in hiding, and managed to free some whom the FLNC had detained. According to Erulin, his troops even prevented a probable execution of some 35 Europeans.⁵²⁷

Early the next morning, the second wave of 230 paratroopers landed, as well as the Belgian Paracommando Regiment. The French began to conduct search and destroy missions outside of town. The bloodiest of these actions took place at the Metal-Shaba factory, four kilometers north of Kolwezi’s “Old Town.” There, the Legion ran into a position defended by some 300 heavily armed Katangans.⁵²⁸ After nearly three hours of intense combat, the French managed to force the Katangans to retreat, leaving some 80 dead behind them, although the French lost two of their own.⁵²⁹ Over the next several days, French forces fought a number of skirmishes against FLNC troops, although the Katangans’ numbers grew smaller as their main body made their way out of the country. Erulin noted :

Au départ, lors de la première opération, je suis tombé sur la valeur de deux compagnies, puis d’une compagnie, puis ensuite c’était des éléments de la valeur des sections, puis de groupes, pour finalement ne plus trouver que des fuyards. Si bien qu’au moment où j’ai dû quitter Kolwezi, dans la nuit du 27 au 28, nous pouvions considérer que la mission était non seulement remplie, mais bien remplie et qu’il n’y avait plus d’unités militaires katangaises dans la ville et sur une frange, mettons de 30 à 40 kilomètres.⁵³⁰

The combination of the French airborne attack and the following search and destroy missions, resulted in 5 French dead and 20 wounded.⁵³¹ The operation represented an impressive feat of arms for the French military. The French troops managed to accomplish a difficult mission, thousands of kilometers from their base, and with little backup in a very short period of time.

⁵²⁵ Intervention of Yves Gras in “Compte rendu de la séance du 8 novembre 1985,” *Mondes et Cultures*. Vol. 45. N.4. 1985, p. 715.

⁵²⁶ Erulin, cited in Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 417.

⁵²⁷ Erulin, *Ibid*, 427.

⁵²⁸ Gras, “L’Opération Kolwezi,” 702.

⁵²⁹ Erulin, cited in Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 431 and Sergent, *La Légion*, 200-207.

⁵³⁰ Erulin, *Ibid*, 431.

⁵³¹ see list in Sergent, *La Légion*, 227.

However, the 2nd REP counted 131 European civilians killed.⁵³² This included some 15 French citizens.⁵³³ Additionally, the Katangans had executed the six French military advisors present in Kolwezi when the FLNC attacked.⁵³⁴ The French also counted some 250 dead FLNC troops and captured a large amount of weapons and equipment.⁵³⁵ The African civilian population suffered the most, however. A combination of the Katangans, FAZ troop activity and, to a lesser extent, the French intervention, had killed hundreds of civilians. Erulin observed that some 700 corpses had been found, mostly people from the Kasais, whom the Katangans and their local accomplices had particularly singled out.⁵³⁶ André Ross evaluated the number at nearly 1,000.⁵³⁷ The French had not come to save their lives however.

The Kolwezi Killings

The FLNC almost certainly did not come to Kolwezi in order to kill off its European inhabitants or even to take them hostage. French troops even found orders from Mbumba instructing the FLNC cadres not to harm anyone, European or African.⁵³⁸ This contradicted theories that the FLNC had preplanned the coming massacres as an attempt to provoke a mass exodus of expatriates working in the mining sector.⁵³⁹ The FLNC troops in Kolwezi had instructions to maintain order and basic economic activity.⁵⁴⁰ Instead, other documents found on a dead Katangan officer indicated that the FLNC attacked Kolwezi as a staging point for a move against Likasi and Lubumbashi further east. The May 14 attack on Mutshatsha aimed at protecting Kolwezi from any FAZ movements to reinforce it from the west. The FLNC also meant to accompany this with an attack on Kasaji even further to the west, although this never occurred. The movement through Zambia not only allowed the FLNC to outflank most of the FAZ units deployed along the Angolan border further west, but also, in the French view, represented an effort to minimize accusations of Angolan government culpability in the attack.⁵⁴¹

⁵³² Sergent, *La Légion*, 228.

⁵³³ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 29, Note, "Français disparus et décédés : Situation au 22 juin 1978," 22.06.1978.

⁵³⁴ Sergent, *La Légion*, 229 and Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 318-319.

⁵³⁵ Gras, "L'Opération Kolwezi," 702n, and Sergent, *La Légion*, 228.

⁵³⁶ Erulin in Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 441.

⁵³⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," Dépêche d'actualité, «A/S : Le mois de Mai 1978 au Zaïre» from Ross to Paris, 08.06.1978, p. 8.

⁵³⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 5.

⁵³⁹ Ibid, 5.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid. 2-3.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid. 2-3.

How then, did this occupation turn into a “chasse aux blancs” which served as a pretext for the French intervention? The FLNC demonstrated much more discipline and unit cohesion than their FAZ opponents did during the first Shaba war. During Shaba II, they managed to expertly maneuver their way past the FAZ main body, and infiltrate over 2,000 men undetected to the outskirts of Kolwezi through Zambian territory. What could have led these experienced and relatively disciplined units to lose control and apparently go on a killing spree? Reconstructing what happened in Kolwezi during the week of May 13 -20 is difficult due to the nature of existing sources. However, enough evidence seems to point to a rather ambiguous role played by the FAZ in either instigating or contributing to the outbreak of the violence.

The narrative accepted by most French officials, and reflected in French records suggests that at the beginning of the FLNC occupation, they more or less left the expatriate population alone. They even apparently tried to establish a kind of local administrative apparatus, which included several European expatriates, particularly GECAMINES employees. However, soon looting of shops and general pillaging began to take hold, and Katangan behavior completely changed.⁵⁴² Sergent dates this to May 14 when the FLNC apparently began to execute some of the Europeans. Particularly, they accused some of those without families of being military advisors or “mercenaries.” The Katangans set up a “popular tribunal” and began condemning offenders to death, including for the crime of “economic collaboration.”⁵⁴³

French official records date the beginning of the anti-European violence to May 15, with a peak in the killings between May 16 and 17. French observers attributed this to several factors. First, the FLNC units had just finished a tiring forced march of over several days. As they rapidly took most of Kolwezi, they soon began to drink the abundant alcohol available in the town, and began smoking marijuana and perhaps other “African drugs.”⁵⁴⁴ This contributed to a complete breakdown of group discipline, a tendency reinforced by numbers of local youth who joined the invaders. The FLNC had apparently distributed weapons to the populace, which significantly worsened the problem. The fact that most of the population seemed reticent to welcome the invaders as liberators may have contributed to built-up frustration.⁵⁴⁵ The apparent ensuing “chasse aux blancs,” or even “chasse aux français” led most of the French political

⁵⁴² Ibid. 6.

⁵⁴³ Sergent, *La Légion*, pp. 49-59.

⁵⁴⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Déclarations des réfugiés de Kolwezi,” 22.05.1978.

⁵⁴⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1978,” “Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi,” Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 6-7.

establishment, including the highly critical Socialist opposition, to conclude that, “L’intervention aéroportée était indispensable et a été accueillie avec un immense soulagement par l’ensemble de la population étrangère, aucune différence n’existait à cet égard entre les réactions des belges et des français.”⁵⁴⁶

Nonetheless, some interesting evidence, including some indications from French archival sources, hints at a more complicated story. The dates given by the French for the peak of the massacres, May 16 -17, correspond to a marked uptick in FAZ activity, as well as increasing rumors of an outside intervention. May 16 corresponded to an early morning airborne attack by one company of the 311th Airborne Battalion, dropped near the headquarters of the 1st Military Region, still held by a handful of FAZ staff officers, administrative personnel, and a random assortment of routed FAZ troops. French reports from that day suggested that the attack, which aimed at reinforcing the headquarters, had succeeded.⁵⁴⁷

According to Sergeant however, late on May 15, Mobutu summoned to his office Major Mahele Lieko Bokungu, the commander of the 311th. He ordered Mahele to choose a single company to drop over Kolwezi the next day in support of the few defenders of the headquarters position.⁵⁴⁸ Meanwhile, he ordered the other two companies of the battalion, under Mahele’s personal command, to make their way overland from Lubumbashi to reinforce the troops organizing the recapture of the city.⁵⁴⁹ Both French and Belgian diplomats told the American Embassy that they feared that the small-scale attack on Kolwezi ordered by Mobutu, “could fail disastrously” and could increase the threat to the European community there.⁵⁵⁰

Both Sergeant and Odom describe the attack as an unmitigated calamity. According to Sergeant, Mahele, stunned by the apparently suicidal nature of Mobutu’s orders, had to choose between the three companies that made up his battalion. The French had only fully trained one of his companies, and another one had not yet even seen the inside of an airplane, let alone a parachute. He designated the remaining half-trained company of just 120 men to make the jump.⁵⁵¹ On the morning of May 16, these ill-fated troops jumped in two waves, two and a half hours apart from a single Zairian C-130 transport aircraft. Their small numbers, lack of training,

⁵⁴⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Déclarations des réfugiés de Kolwezi,” 22.05.1978. For Socialist party leader François Mitterrand’s views, see: Carton 21, 21/2, “Club de la presse d’Europe, François MITTERAND [sic],” Interview, 11.06.1978.

⁵⁴⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Opération aéroportée zaïroise,” 16.05.1978. Ross reports that two companies dropped.

⁵⁴⁸ Odom, *Shaba II*, 43, Also see Sergeant, *La Légion*, pp. 80-83.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ CIA: CREST Database Document, CIA-RDP79T00975A030700010010-9, “Zaire: Military Situation Report,” in National Intelligence Daily Cable, 17.05.1978, p. 1.

⁵⁵¹ Sergeant, *La Légion*, 81.

and the French refusal to allow its advisors to accompany the unit,⁵⁵² contributed to a bloodbath. The FLNC managed to kill most of the paratroopers, many before they even landed. A few others managed to escape and join the HQ and scattered FAZ elements attempting to flee the city.⁵⁵³

Sergent explains that this massacre of the airborne troops precipitated a panic among those FAZ troops still holding the nearby headquarters of the 1st Military Region. According to Sergent's account, the defenders of the HQ, afraid that the paratroopers were Cuban, panicked and fled into the bush. Supposedly, this led directly to the massacre of some 39 Europeans taking refuge nearby, nominally under FAZ protection. Sergent, in an account followed by Odom, claims that the victorious Katangans, drunk with victory after having annihilated the paratroopers and routed the defenders of the FAZ HQ, came across the Europeans and slaughtered them in cold blood.⁵⁵⁴ This, the so-called "P2 massacre" after the name of the neighborhood, represented the largest of the massacres of European expatriates and seems to have encouraged the murders of other Europeans in the city over the following days.⁵⁵⁵

However, this story is flawed. While French and American records, as well as all secondary sources agree on the date of the attack of the company of the 311th Airborne Battalion, only Sergent and Odom claim that the FLNC managed to wipe it out and that the FAZ HQ fell on the same day. French records make no mention of the supposed annihilation of the unit, and suggest that the HQ actually fell on the following day, May 17.⁵⁵⁶ Colonel Yemo, the Chief of Staff (and briefly commander) of the 14th Brigade of the Kamanyola Division, the FAZ unit charged with the defense of the Kolwezi sector, claims that the 2nd Company of the 311th reached the ground without incident. According to his account, they landed in an open area out of range of most of the FLNC positions.⁵⁵⁷ However, their lack of training and experience provided limited added value to the FAZ defenders, and it took them nearly half a day to regroup. Malu's casualty numbers, citing official figures for the 311th Battalion as a whole, which includes the two companies advancing overland from Lubumbashi, amount to 26 killed and 40 wounded.⁵⁵⁸ This was not enough to account for the destruction

⁵⁵² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 7.

⁵⁵³ Odom, *Shaba II*, 43, also see Sergent, *La Légion*, pp. 80-83

⁵⁵⁴ Sergent, *La Légion*, 85-87, also see Odom, *Shaba II*, 43.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier 1978, "Chronologie détaillée de l'affaire de Kolwezi du 13 au 31 mai 1978," Kinshasa Embassy report to Paris.

⁵⁵⁷ Colonel Yemo, undated, untitled manuscript, p. 71.

⁵⁵⁸ Malu, *The Shaba Invasions*, 70.

of an entire company. Yemo cynically commented however, that in any other country or against any other foe, the unit would surely have been wiped out.⁵⁵⁹

This attack seemed to reinforce FLNC fears about an impending foreign intervention, and they may have even thought the French involved, especially since they knew that French advisors trained the FAZ airborne brigade.⁵⁶⁰ Indeed, FLNC “representatives” in Brussels released a communiqué the following day, claiming that, “Parmi les deux mille parachutistes largués, trois cent étaient de nationalité française. Tous les parachutistes français ont perdu la vie au cours des accrochages qui ont suivi leur largage.”⁵⁶¹ This claim, picked up on radios, certainly percolated to the Katangan rank and file, most of whom were kilometers away from the drop zone and thus would not have witnessed the actual landing. The rumor of a French attack spread, and this may have contributed to some of the “chasse aux blancs,” accusing some of being “mercenaries” working for the French and Belgians. André Ross reported as much after interviewing a number of European survivors on May 21.⁵⁶² Though apparently without foundation, these accusations may have also stemmed from the fact that the previous year, the French military advisors working in Kolwezi did so without insignia, and possibly in civilian attire, to avoid drawing attention.⁵⁶³ Fears of undercover French officers milling about the city could have certainly contributed to a kind of paranoia towards some of the European expatriates.

The largest single massacre of Europeans, in the P2 neighborhood, apparently took place shortly after the fall of the FAZ HQ. As French and other accounts make clear, this happened on May 17. According to André Ross, who visited the scene shortly after the recapture of the city, the Europeans had taken refuge in an office building next to the HQ. The FAZ defenders had promised to look after their safety, but the FLNC drove these troops out of their defensive positions. Several of the fleeing Zairians made their way towards the office building, where the FLNC gunned them down outside. Subsequently, they killed (“froidement abbatu”), most of the occupants of the building as they tried to take cover inside. Many AK-

⁵⁵⁹ Yemo, 73.

⁵⁶⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1978,” “Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi,” Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 10n.

⁵⁶¹ “Fantômes à vendre,” *Le Matin*, 18.05.1978.

⁵⁶² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Déclarations des réfugiés de Kolwezi,” 22.05.1978.

⁵⁶³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 27, 27/1, Telegram from Paris to Kinshasa, No subject, 14.04.1977.

47 rounds, “de fabrication soviétique,” were found in and around the building, as well as a dead FAZ soldier outside the door.⁵⁶⁴ Lots of controversy surrounds this incident however.

While all sources agree that between 30 and 40 Europeans were killed in the P2 massacre, no clear consensus exists as to who actually killed them. Belgian journalist Colette Braeckman, cites the account of an apparent survivor of the massacre who claims that on May 13, as the fighting began, FAZ soldiers gathered Europeans near their HQ for “protection.” She said that the FAZ locked the doors and windows of the villa the Europeans occupied from the outside. Then, late the following day, someone, she did not know whom or from which side, cried “nettoyage!” and began machine-gunning the Europeans crouched on the floor for protection, killing most of them.⁵⁶⁵ Willame cites another European (nationality not specified), to the effect that the FAZ gathered a number of Europeans at their HQ for “identity checks,” and then stole their money and other belongings and detained them as human shields. During a rebel attack, a number apparently managed to flee and hide in a nearby building. FAZ troops looking for them later fired at random into the building they occupied. He also claimed that after the P2 massacre, which occurred not far from his own location, the rebels took two survivors to a local hospital.⁵⁶⁶

More damning evidence for the behavior of the FAZ comes from a FAZ helicopter pilot, Pierre Yambuya. Yambuya found himself at FAZ HQ at the time due to the destruction of the FAZ aircraft sitting at the airport on May 13. Like the European witness reports, Yambuya recounts that the FAZ gathered a number of Europeans together and locked them in the Baron Leveque office building next to the P2 HQ. Yambuya claims that this occurred under the orders of Colonel Bosange, the Chief of Staff of the 1st Shaba Military Region, and effective commander of the HQ. Bosange claimed that the Gendarmes had the support of European mercenaries disguised as GECAMINES employees. In consequence, he ordered his troops to detain as many as possible. Yambuya notes that none of the expatriates resisted, thinking that it was a protective measure.⁵⁶⁷

According to his account, on the following day, May 14, Bosange ordered the execution of the Europeans in the P2 villa. He cited their supposed collaboration with the Katangans as a pretext. Yambuya describes how Bosange ordered the intelligence chief of the 14th Brigade, Lieutenant Mutuale, to lead a squad of three men to the villa, fifty meters away. There they

⁵⁶⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Kolwezi,” 22.05.1978.

⁵⁶⁵ Colette Braeckman. *Le dinosaure: le Zaïre de Mobutu*. Paris: Fayard, 1992, p. 67.

⁵⁶⁶ Willame, *FLNC*, 38-39.

⁵⁶⁷ Pierre Yambuya. *Zaire, l'abattoir: Pierre Yambuya, un pilote de Mobutu, parle*. Bruxelles: EPO, 1991, p. 54.

riddled the building and its occupants with automatic weapons fire. After verifying that Mutuale had killed the expatriates, Bosange ordered the defenders of the HQ to abandon the post and make their escape to a nearby landing strip to which they hoped reinforcements would soon arrive from Kinshasa or Kamina.⁵⁶⁸ Yambuya then claims that Bosange and a few men turned back to headquarters after receiving word that there was no sign of an imminent Katangan threat. However, Yambuya and a few others, including the nominal commander of the 14th Brigade, General Tshikeva, slipped out of the city.⁵⁶⁹

Yemo's account closely parallels that of Yambuya, although he follows most other sources in situating the P2 massacre along with the fall of the HQ on May 17.⁵⁷⁰ Yemo recounts that on the evening of May 13, Bosange radioed the FAZ base at Nzilo, 30 kilometers north of Kolwezi. Bosange claimed that he had received orders from Kinshasa to regroup Europeans near his HQ as a protective measure pending evacuation from the nearby landing strip, and requested reinforcements in order to secure it.⁵⁷¹ Like Yambuya, he also mentions that Bosange made an abortive attempt to move from the HQ to the airstrip, but turned back while General Tshikeva moved on, and apparently fled.⁵⁷² However, over the next four days, no FAZ aircraft flew in either to evacuate the expatriates or to bring reinforcements, despite the fact that a FAZ platoon managed to secure the airstrip on May 14.⁵⁷³ He noted however, that Bosange had at his disposal several military trucks available with which he could have evacuated the Europeans out of the city. The FLNC had apparently left the road leading from the HQ to the airstrip near the Mutoshi neighborhood undefended. From there, the FAZ could have escorted the expatriates to Nzilo further north. In fact, this route remained open the entire time that the FAZ held their position at the HQ. When the Katangans made their final attack on May 17, Bosange and his men managed to take this route and retreat in good order.⁵⁷⁴ Yemo criticizes Bosange for not bothering to take the expatriates with him, or for providing for their evacuation.

At the very least :

[...] décider un repli sans songer en priorité à l'évacuation des civils se trouvant dans l'aire de défense relève d'une préméditation ou d'une négligence [ce qui] constitue un manquement grave à ses responsabilités [...] il les abandonne à leur triste sort tout en sachant pertinemment bien que le seul fait d'avoir trouvé refuge auprès de l'armée régulière condamnait ipso facto ces expatriés à une mort certain !⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid. 57.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. 58.

⁵⁷⁰ Yemo, 60. Also see French records cited above.

⁵⁷¹ Yemo, 43.

⁵⁷² Ibid. 48.

⁵⁷³ Ibid. 68.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. 71.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. 71-72.

Despite this apparently serious lack of professionalism, both Yambuya and Yemo mention that Bosange was decorated for his actions in defending the HQ and shortly thereafter promoted to the rank of General.⁵⁷⁶ For Yemo, this indicates that Bosange had acted on direct orders. He also claimed that a member of the Zairian *Conseil Supérieur de Défense* told him several months later that Bosange had, in fact, massacred the Europeans himself, on orders from “Kinshasa” in order to precipitate a French intervention. Yemo cynically summarized this logic: “On ne fait pas d’omelette sans casser des œufs.”⁵⁷⁷

Another FAZ officer, Colonel Maurice Bendera, also addressed this issue. Bendera was imprisoned by Mobutu during the Shaba conflicts, most likely due to his Shaba ethnic origins. However, having worked as a key figure in the FAZ bureaucracy before the wars, he had a good deal of personal knowledge about the FAZ units and officers stationed in Shaba. He criticized one piece of key evidence proffered by the regime to indicate that the Katangans had committed the P2 massacre, namely the large number of AK-47 rounds found on the site.⁵⁷⁸ Bendera noted that these could have also originated from the FAZ. Most of the troops defending Kolwezi came from the Kamanyola Division. As one of the officers involved in arranging for the North Koreans to train the newly-formed Kamanyola Division in 1975, Bendera asserted that many in this unit were armed with Kalashnikovs.⁵⁷⁹ By way of comparison, French after-action analyses describe the FLNC’s armament as “[...] très hétéroclite. Les armes individuelles comprennent des fusils G3, FAL, Mauser et AKA 21 [sic ?] ainsi que des lance-roquettes RPG7.”⁵⁸⁰

Bendera also refers to Yambuya’s account and observes that he personally knew all of the officers whose presence Yambuya mentions at the FAZ HQ right before the massacre. He knew Bosange particularly well, as they had studied at the *Ecole Royale de Cadets* in Brussels together.⁵⁸¹ He gives an interesting insight into the military culture prevalent in the FAZ at the time. Bendera’s analysis emphasizes the role that ethnicity played in the actions of these officers, based on Yambuya’s account.

Bosange was the only officer present from Equateur province, Mobutu’s home region. Yemo and Bendera both describe in detail Mobutu’s attempts to stack the officer corps,

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. 72 and Yambuya, 57, see also : Colonel Maurice Bendera, undated, untitled manuscript, p. 165.

⁵⁷⁷ Yemo, 72.

⁵⁷⁸ see also : MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Kolwezi,” 22.05.1978.

⁵⁷⁹ Colonel Maurice Bendera, undated, untitled manuscript, p. 165.

⁵⁸⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/2, “Les Forces armées populaires du Congo (F.A.P.C.) [the official designation of the FLNC armed wing], Annexe, “Dossier Zaïre,” Groupe Permanent d’Evaluation de Situations, Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, 05.06.1978, p. 1.

⁵⁸¹ Bendera, 167.

particularly of the Kamanyola Division, with officers from Equateur. This followed a general policy of marginalizing higher-ranking officers from other regions and ethnic groups.⁵⁸² Furthermore, Bosange's wife was Mobutu's niece. This gave him a lot more authority than his rank of Colonel would imply. In Bendera's view, this helps to explain why General Tshikeva, nominally Bosange's superior officer, remained silent as Bosange gave orders to his men. Bendera suggests that if Bosange actually ordered the killing of the Europeans, the order must have come from above:

[...] je connais aussi très bien notre armée. L'initiative n'y est pas une qualité appréciée. Tout le monde attend les ordres. Je soutiens qu'aucun de ces officiers ne pouvait prendre de lui-même la décision d'exécuter les Blancs regroupés au quartier général. Elle était odieuse et suicidaire. Ils connaissaient trop bien leur armée pour s'exposer en endossant une telle responsabilité. Quelqu'un d'autre a ordonné le massacre des Européens. Qui? Sûrement le guide [Mobutu].⁵⁸³

One should note, however, that all three of the officers writing these accounts had suffered varying injustices under Mobutu's rule, and thus write critically of his regime. Yemo was forced out of the army weeks after Shaba II, Bendera was imprisoned for 18 months after Shaba I, and Yambuya was later arrested, tortured, then escaped and fled the country. Bendera was not even at Kolwezi at the time of the invasion. Thus, one must examine these accounts with some caution. Nonetheless, the points of agreement in their accounts, along with those of European eyewitnesses, at least attests to a level of gross negligence on the part of Bosange, and FAZ mistreatment of their European wards.

Although ultimately the role of the FAZ in the P2 massacre remains unclear, FAZ violence before and during the Kolwezi crisis certainly rivaled, if not surpassed that of the Katangans. French military intelligence noted that, "A KOLWEZI, une partie de la garnison semble s'être ralliée aux Katangais et avoir pris part au massacre de la population et au pillage."⁵⁸⁴ French reports also suggest that indiscriminate air attacks by FAZ aircraft probably helped to provoke anti-European and anti-French violence.⁵⁸⁵ Many Zairians thought that French pilots flew the Mirage fighter jets.⁵⁸⁶ Indeed, as described above, French mechanics helped to maintain the jets in flyable condition, and beginning on May 17, French pilots did apparently take over from their Zairian counterparts.⁵⁸⁷ Additionally, a number of FAZ troops,

⁵⁸² Yemo, 10 and Bendera, 68-74.

⁵⁸³ Bendera, 167.

⁵⁸⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, CERM, Fiche de situation, "situation au Zaïre le 23 mai 1978," 23.05.1978, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 7.

⁵⁸⁶ Willame, *FLNC*, 38.

⁵⁸⁷ Odom, *Shaba II*, 50.

scattered by the initial attack, seem to have taken refuge in villas owned by Europeans, thus making the latter look guilty by association.⁵⁸⁸ Furthermore, on May 17, the same day that the FAZ HQ in Kolwezi fell to the Katangans, Major Mahele managed to recapture Kolwezi's airport after an epic overland advance from Lubumbashi. This event, followed by Mobutu's stunning propaganda coup the following day, flying a planeload of journalists onto the Kolwezi airstrip, seems to have also provoked a degree of panic among the Katangans. This corresponded well to the strategy adopted by Colonel Yemo, then in effective command of the few hundred FAZ troops of the 14th Brigade that had regrouped on the outskirts of Kolwezi. Yemo described one of the series of small-scale attacks that he began to order against FLNC positions as not aiming to :

[...] détruire l'ennemi et de s'emparer de ses positions, chose impossible du fait de rapport inégal de force en notre défaveur, mais s'insérerait plutôt dans la stratégie globale arrêtée de commun accord par le colonel Bosange et moi, celle de créer chez les rebelles un psychose d'encerclement total, de faire peser sur l'ennemi notre présence et de susciter la panique dans ses rangs.⁵⁸⁹

To prepare these attacks, Yemo used a rather random assortment of mortars, converted anti-aircraft guns, and available cannons to bombard city neighborhoods along the line of attack.⁵⁹⁰ While probably militarily a sound tactical plan, the combination of small scale attacks, artillery and aerial bombardments, and the retaking of the airport could only have increased tension within Katangan ranks. According to reports from European expatriates, this reached a culminating point in the evening of May 17, as radio news broadcasts told of the imminence of a Belgian or French military intervention.⁵⁹¹ This corresponded with Major Mahele's recapture of the airport, which represented the probable point of landing for reinforcements or a European intervention force.

Thus, the increasing threat posed by continued FAZ counterattacks and rumors of foreign intervention probably contributed significantly to Katangan violence against both Europeans and other civilians, particularly those not originally from Shaba. However, as Willame points out, the FLNC and some of the local population also had real grievances against the European expatriates, as well as Mobutu's regime, which certainly translated into massacres.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁸ Willame, *FLNC*, 36.

⁵⁸⁹ Yemo, 42.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. 54.

⁵⁹¹ "Le calme est revenu à Kolwezi," *Journal de Genève*, 22.05.1978.

⁵⁹² Willame, *FLNC*, 37.

As noted above, Shaba's economic difficulties, compounded by political marginalization and repression, as well as its landlocked status, contributed to a major crisis in the availability of important goods, particularly fuel and food. This meant that tens of thousands of people in Kolwezi's "cités" lived in extreme poverty and conditions of near famine. A French Embassy report written days before Shaba II, anecdotally reported that, "on voit beaucoup d'enfants au ventre bombé dans les cités des villes du Shaba."⁵⁹³ Inflation meant that a sack of flour cost over 35 Zaires⁵⁹⁴ when GECAMINES employees, representing less than 20 percent of Kolwezi's population, made between 70 and 100 Zaires per month.⁵⁹⁵ The rest of the population had no formal source of employment. In the midst of these difficult conditions lived the European expatriate population behind walled villas with guard dogs, cars, and servants.⁵⁹⁶ This helps to explain why, within hours of the Katangans' capture of the city, large numbers of locals began to break into shops, particularly for food. They also targeted a number of expatriate houses for goods and supplies.⁵⁹⁷ Here the first killings began. These included popular "tribunals" and summary executions of a number of Europeans and Zairians from other regions of the country. Additionally, the FLNC had, over the previous weeks and months infiltrated a number of people into the city to establish arms caches and to recruit a popular militia to bolster their forces once they captured the city.⁵⁹⁸ These elements benefited from far less experience and training than the FLNC's "regular" forces, and this could have easily contributed to a breakdown in discipline leading to killings of Europeans and Zairians.

Nonetheless, even if one discounts evidence of FAZ participation in the P2 massacre, Mobutu may well have played a role in helping to stoke tensions, perhaps in order to ensure the reality of "facts on the ground" to force a foreign intervention. Whether or not the airborne company that dropped onto Kolwezi survived or not, such an order on Mobutu's part was nearly suicidal. As mentioned above, Western embassies feared that such an attack could provoke the killings of more expatriates. It may have done so. General Babia's May 18 radio "intercept" which claimed that Mbumba had ordered a massacre of the European population, persuaded Gras to accelerate the French attack plans to the following day. The telegram that Babia showed to Gras however, stated that Mbumba had ordered the Katangans to execute "tous les

⁵⁹³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier, "1978," N. 353/DAM Rapport, "A/S Situation au SHABA à la veille de l'attaque de KOLWEZI," Embassy study, 18.05.1978, p. 6.

⁵⁹⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier, "1978," N. 353/DAM Rapport, "A/S Situation au SHABA à la veille de l'attaque de KOLWEZI," Embassy study, 18.05.1978, p. 4.

⁵⁹⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier, "1978," N. 353/DAM Rapport, "A/S Situation au SHABA à la veille de l'attaque de KOLWEZI," Embassy study, 18.05.1978, p. 5.

⁵⁹⁶ Willame, *FLNC*, 37.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 37.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 35.

expatriés arrêtés,” and to move the population en masse and by force across the Angolan border in a general retreat.⁵⁹⁹

Most sources attest to the beginnings of a Katangan retreat around May 17 or May 18. However, much of the evidence, particularly from French records, suggests that the height of the violence against Europeans took place on May 16-17.⁶⁰⁰ Nothing indicates that the Katangans tried to forcibly dislocate thousands of Kolwezi’s residents either. Thus, either the FLNC did not follow Mbumba’s apparent orders, could not follow his orders, or he never made such an order. In the latter case, as with a number of aspects with the intervention, it seems quite plausible that Mobutu simply harped upon French fears to his own advantage. As the next section will illustrate, this had worked for Mobutu quite effectively in the past when it came to shaping French perceptions about the nature of the threat to his regime, and the importance of his survival for the stability of the region.

The purpose behind this extended discussion is to illustrate a fundamental characteristic of the French intervention; the disconnect between the underlying ambiguity surrounding the nature of the massacres, and French certainty that an airborne assault represented the best response to their assessment of the situation. Fears of French policymakers about the safety of their fellow citizens may well have constituted the primary reason for the French intervention. If so, Mobutu’s regime managed to manipulate these fears, directly or indirectly, in a way which may have ensured the survival of the regime.

The Cubans

Substantial evidence exists, however, which suggest that the humanitarian motive for French intervention, while perhaps real, essentially served as an effective pretext for broader French security aims. Indeed, just nine months after Kolwezi, in February 1979, hundreds of French civilians found themselves trapped in a major series of street battles between government and rebel forces in Chad’s capital, N’Djamena. Despite the presence of a major French military base a few kilometers away, as well as the existence of a meticulously prepared evacuation plan for such an emergency, French troops did not intervene. Consequently, a number of French citizens died in the crossfire over several days. The French refusal to come to the aid of its own citizens rested on very particular political motivations that trumped humanitarian

⁵⁹⁹ Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 396.

⁶⁰⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Déclarations des réfugiés de Kolwezi,” 22.05.1978 and MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1978,” “Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi,” Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 6-7.

concerns.⁶⁰¹ In the case of Zaire, the two coincided with French interests. Again, Mobutu himself seemed to have played a crucial role in shaping French threat perceptions to his own needs.

The fact that André Ross and Yves Gras, began drawing up plans for a military intervention *before* the reports of massacres reached the Embassy, illustrates this point. Gras later explained that they requested a military intervention:

[...] uniquement pour des raisons politiques [...] C'est que nous savions parfaitement à qui nous avions affaire, quel était le but des Katangais manipulés par les Soviétiques et nous savions très bien que, s'ils parvenaient à s'étendre au Shaba, à séparer le Shaba du reste du Zaïre, cette opération provoquerait soit la chute du régime de Mobutu, soit, ce qui sur place nous semblait beaucoup plus grave, une guerre civile au Zaïre, entre le Nord et le Sud, du genre de celle du Biafra, dont on sait comment elle commence, mais dont on ne sait jamais comment elle se termine et qui, en tout cas, sert de prétexte à de longues interventions extérieures. Il fallait, par conséquent, couper court à cette affaire par une intervention militaire immédiate et éteindre l'incendie tant qu'on pouvait le faire encore.⁶⁰²

Jean François-Poncet, then Giscard's chief of staff, and afterwards Foreign Minister, later reiterated this point. He explained that in order to understand the Kolwezi airborne intervention, one should consider the broader context of Cuban intervention in Angola which, "a constitué une des caractéristiques de l'action soviétique dans le monde."⁶⁰³ He continued, "Si l'on veut comprendre les raisons qui ont amené la France à intervenir au Shaba il est indispensable de se souvenir de l'inquiétude que l'intervention cubaine en Angola avait répandue dans les capitales de l'Afrique noire. Notre motivation était politique, nullement économique."⁶⁰⁴

As early as May 15, French military intelligence judged that only an outside intervention could save Mobutu from a serious regime crisis.⁶⁰⁵ The threat to Kolwezi during Shaba I stirred fears among French policymakers that Mobutu's regime could fall, resulting in decisive French diplomatic and military action to protect it. This time, the Katangans had actually captured Kolwezi, potentially posing an even greater threat to regime survival than before. Following this logic, defeating the second invasion became just as essential. Gras later made this point clear, describing the success of the French intervention at Kolwezi: "Du

⁶⁰¹ Christian Bouquet, "Témoignage, Tchad : une sanglante évacuation," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 02.04.1979, and see pages 273-274 below.

⁶⁰² Intervention of Yves Gras in Samy Cohen et Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.), *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 321.

⁶⁰³ Intervention of Jean François-Poncet in Samy Cohen et Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.), *La politique extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1985, p. 313.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid. 314

⁶⁰⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/1, Fiche du Groupe d'Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, "Evaluation de la situation au Shaba le 15 mai à 10 heures," 15.05.1978, 2.

moins le but essentiel avait-il été atteint. Nous avons fait échec à la tentative de l'URSS d'étendre son influence sur l'Afrique centrale. Le Zaïre restait dans le camp occidental.”⁶⁰⁶

This leads us to a discussion of the intense Cold War-inspired mindset that shaped the worldviews of most French policymakers in Southern Africa during this time. The question of Cuban involvement in the Shaba invasions, particularly Shaba II, sheds important light on the broader nature of French involvement in Zaire. French policymakers seemed to have had an obsessive preoccupation with the Cuban presence across Zaire's border. They viewed the FLNC invasions through the prism of a perceived Cuban/Soviet expansionism which appeared to increase drastically during this period throughout the African continent. Although this section does not intend to delve into the sources of Cuban or Soviet policy in Africa, French perceptions of this activity and, more importantly, the sources of this worldview, are vital in explaining French behavior.

These perspectives came partially because of an increasingly alarming flow of intelligence reports suggesting significant Cuban activity in training, arming, organizing, and in some cases leading FLNC formations on the Angolan side of the border. At the end of 1977, a “Bulletin de situation” regrouping large amounts of intelligence gathered by the French Embassy on the FLNC places particular emphasis on their relationship with the Cubans.⁶⁰⁷ This intelligence report is worth quoting at length since it describes in detail the French perception of the nature of the military threat to Zaïre:

On signale dans la région de LUANDA (sur écoutes réseau ennemi), la création d'un camp de guérilla cubaine qui est peut-être l'indice d'un changement de mode d'action. A CHICAPA, de nouvelles recrues sont à l'entraînement (900 hommes et 155 femmes) avec encadrement cubain.

Le 11 novembre, les responsables de CHICAPA se sont tenus en réunion avec un capitaine cubain pour préparer une instruction de tir anti-aérien et aux armes lourdes (les stagiaires doivent pouvoir parler portugais), de plus, à cette date, était prévue l'arrivée à CHICAPA d'une délégation cubaine pour inspecter les troupes katangaises et contrôler l'armement, le matériel et les modalités du soutien logistique : un petit groupe d'officiers Etat-Major serait présent pour assurer la liaison entre le FNLC [sic] et les Cubains.

Le 14 novembre, infiltration d'une patrouille ennemie sud de DILOLO. 4 civils zaïrois tués. Les FAZ déclenchent une opération localisée de nettoyage et récupèrent 2 MAUSERS [...]

On peut affirmer qu'il existe environ une centaine d'instructeurs cubains entre SAURIMO (ex HENRIQUE de CARVALHO), [illegible] et CAIANDA. La reprise en main sur le plan discipline et rigueur des ex-gendarmes katangais semble poser des problèmes aux Cubains.

La visite de la délégation importante cubaine (avec un Général Cubain), le 20 ou le 23/11 n'a pas eu lieu par suite d'un malentendu imputable aux mauvaises liaisons radio.⁶⁰⁸

Reports that the Cubans had transferred some of the Katangan units to Cabinda seemed the most troubling. The report stated that the Cubans did this in order to create a “Cabinda

⁶⁰⁶ Gras, “L'Opération Kolwezi,” 702.

⁶⁰⁷ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, “Bulletin de situation,” from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 17.12.1977, p. 2.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. 2.

problem” which would have serious local and international consequences.⁶⁰⁹ Cabinda, an oil-rich enclave of Angola sandwiched between Zaire and the Republic of the Congo, represented an important strategic position. Zaire had consistently supported Cabindan separatist groups. Zaire’s only access to the sea consisted of a narrow strip between mainland Angola and Cabinda. Thus, the addition of an FLNC threat to this area would also seriously threaten Zaire.

A later report, compiled less than two weeks before the outbreak of Shaba II, also paints a bleak picture of growing Cuban influence around Zaire. It suggested the existence of a new Cuban presence in Burundi aimed at helping to organize and train the armed groups under Laurent Kabila’s command in neighboring South Kivu in Eastern Zaire along Lake Tanganyika.⁶¹⁰ It also noted that the Cubans had deployed a battalion of troops in Lumbala in Angola’s Moxico province in support of the Katangan units along the Zairian frontier.⁶¹¹ The spread of Cuban activities around Zaire’s borders fed fears of encirclement.

This view also emerges in French “after-action” reports following Shaba II. In a report written shortly after Kolwezi, André Ross noted that one of the most important observations drawn from the recent conflict consisted of:

[...] l’imprudence des Cubains, qui ont à peine dissimulé le rôle directeur qu’ils ont joué dans l’affaire : leur état-major était à 40 km. de la frontière, leurs liaisons radio ont été interceptées, les noms des cadres cubains sont connus. Dans ces conditions, il est très improbable que l’URSS n’ait pas été tenue informée...⁶¹²

The weight accorded by French observers to Cuban influence also explains their views in the aftermath of Shaba I on the possibility of a second invasion. As noted before, they judged this unlikely. French military intelligence officials felt that the Cubans, who supposedly played a crucial role in helping to arm and train the Katangans, had much less interest in renewing a conflict in Zaire than before.⁶¹³ They noted that Neto’s position had become increasingly fragile in Angola. Indeed, on May 27 1977, Nito Alves, the leader of a faction within the MPLA hostile to Neto staged a bloody coup attempt in Luanda. After hours of heavy fighting in the capital, Neto managed to regain the upper hand, although only with substantial Cuban military support. Government forces arrested Alves and thousands of his suspected sympathizers, and later executed many of those implicated along with large numbers of others.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. 4.

⁶¹⁰ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, “Bulletin de situation,” from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 02.05.1978, p. 2.

⁶¹¹ Ibid. 3.

⁶¹² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1978,” Dépêche d’actualité, “A/S : Le Zaïre après Kolwezi,” from Ross to Paris, 02.06.1978, p. 2.

⁶¹³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/1, Fiche du Groupe d’Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, “Evaluation de la situation au Zaïre,” 08.03.1978, p. 3.

Neto and his followers also subsequently purged the MPLA's Central Committee of nearly a third of its membership, and began to reorganize the party along Cuban lines.⁶¹⁴

Thus, while Neto and the MPLA worked to rebuild and consolidate its position in Luanda, French intelligence felt that the Cubans would not want to risk a new war in Zaire.⁶¹⁵ Furthermore, they saw Cuba's growing engagement alongside the Soviets in Ethiopia, which involved a diversion of troops from Angola, as another impediment to a Cuban commitment to destabilizing Zaire.⁶¹⁶ In fact, their assessment of the Cuban position was accurate. However, they took this to mean that a second Katangan invasion was less likely.⁶¹⁷ This assessment was bolstered by intelligence that :

Il semble [...] que le moral des gendarmes katangais ne soit pas, à l'heure actuelle, au plus haut. Sans doute, le souvenir des fâcheuses répercussions de l'aventure du printemps dernier n'a-t-il pas été dissipé, en dépit des efforts que les instructeurs cubains déploient pour tenter de réorganiser et d' 'éduquer' les formations disparates des ex-gendarmes katangais.⁶¹⁸

Additionally, André Ross felt that, "Une opération d'envergure devrait donc obligatoirement s'inscrire dans un contexte international plus large et nécessiterait, à tout le moins, l'aveu de l'Angola et de ses protecteurs cubains et soviétiques."⁶¹⁹ If anything, this kind of thinking illustrated the French view that the Katangans were dependent upon the Cubans for the conduct of their operations.

Sometimes, the "Cubans" became the "East Germans," or the "Soviets." Given the propensity of many American and French policymakers to conflate the aims of Cuba and Eastern Bloc countries with those of the Soviet Union, this attitude is not surprising. The official French Embassy study of the Kolwezi affair described the FLNC offensive as representative of a "new phase" in the strategy of the Soviet Union, which aimed to give "appui aux mouvements de libération politique et sociale, et paraissait s'orienter vers une satellisation poussée des pays dépendants (Angola)."⁶²⁰

Gras even later explained that "d'après certains renseignements," in March 1978, the Katangans, Cubans, and East Germans held a major conference in Ouargla in the Algerian desert to plan the Kolwezi attack under the auspices of a Soviet general, "dont j'ai oublié le

⁶¹⁴ For details of the origins of the coup and its aftermath, see: George. *The Cuban Intervention*, 126-132.

⁶¹⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/1, Fiche du Groupe d'Evaluation de Situation du Secrétariat General de la Défense Nationale, "Evaluation de la situation au Zaïre," 08.03.1978, p. 3.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1977," Dépêche d'actualité from Ross to Paris, "A/s. Situation au Shaba," 30.12.1977, p. 4.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 17.

nom.”⁶²¹ Gras also claimed that East German officers led the FLNC operation. According to Gras, the Katangan move through Zambia was planned by an East German colonel, “dont on ne connait que le pseudonyme,” and “conformément aux principes de la Kriegsakademie.”⁶²² In an almost comical explanation of this theory, the Embassy’s official study on the Kolwezi events affirms:

Il ne serait pas étonnant que les Allemands de l'Est aient pris part à l'élaboration du plan suivi, qui évoque le Blitzkrieg, le passage de la Zambie n'étant pas sans analogie avec la violation de la neutralité belge, vieux réflexe des Etats-majors prussiens.⁶²³

The accumulation of various fears inspired by apparent communist successes on the continent fed a mentality which led to a singular interpretation of the nature of the Katangan invasion. Such a litany of evidence, particularly detailed information on Cuban troop locations and personnel movements, seems damning. Carter administration officials certainly thought so too, and this perception became a centerpiece in their justifications for their participation in supporting the French intervention, as well as their renewed and increased support to Mobutu.

On May 20, the second day of the French assault on Kolwezi, the US State Department’s spokesman, Tom Reston, declared that Cuba had trained and equipped the FLNC.⁶²⁴ Five days later, Jimmy Carter declared at a press conference in Chicago that:

The Government of Angola must bear a heavy responsibility for the deadly attack which was launched from its territory, and it's a burden and a responsibility shared by Cuba. We believe that Cuba had known of the Katangan plans to invade and obviously did nothing to restrain them from crossing the border. We also know that the Cubans have played a key role in training and equipping the Katangans who attacked.⁶²⁵

However, doubts soon began to appear within the American government. On May 17, before the French and Belgian interventions, Fidel Castro summoned the head of the US Interests Section in Havana to a meeting. There, he emphatically denied any form of Cuban participation in the attacks. Castro insisted that Cubans had not accompanied the Katangans to Shaba, that Cuba had neither directly nor indirectly participated in the Shaba invasion, nor had it provided weapons or supplies to the FLNC. Furthermore, according to Castro, Cuba had played no role in training the Katangans, and, in fact, had had no contact with the FLNC for two years.⁶²⁶

⁶²¹ Intervention of Yves Gras in “Compte rendu de la séance du 8 novembre 1985,” *Mondes et Cultures*. Vol. 45. N.4. 1985, p. 714.

⁶²² Ibid. 713.

⁶²³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1978,” “Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi,” Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 16.

⁶²⁴ Gleijeses, “Truth or Credibility,” 87.

⁶²⁵ “The President's News Conference, May 25, 1978,” found online at the American Presidency Project: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30852#axzz1yR2LuvKM> (consulted on 21.06.2012)

⁶²⁶ CIA: CREST Database Document, CIA-RDP81B00401R002100020011-8, “Evidence of Cuban Support for Katangan Insurgents,” 28.05.1978, pp. 1-2.

While briefly receptive to this overture by Castro, within hours the White House affirmed that the Cubans had played an important role in the operation.⁶²⁷

The administration's arguments did not convince everyone though. In the days and weeks following the events at Kolwezi, several American Congressmen and government officials began to publically and privately express concerns over the quality of the intelligence.⁶²⁸ Much of the evidence seemed rather circumstantial. A CIA memo on the subject found Castro's vehement denials a bit unusual. To the CIA, Castro generally "has a fairly good track record for veracity, given the fact that he has ruled Cuba through almost 20 years of turbulent international involvement."⁶²⁹ Nevertheless, making a convincing case that Cuba had supported the Katangans would seriously threaten Castro's credibility in Africa. Up to this point, Cuban officials had justified their interventions in Angola and Ethiopia by citing legal requests by sovereign governments for help with their defense. If the CIA or someone else could prove that Cuba had offensive intentions vis-à-vis Zaire, it would undermine Castro's international legitimacy.⁶³⁰

In early June 1978, CIA Director Stansfield Turner briefed the US House Intelligence Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the evidence. Collectively, according to Turner, the evidence led the CIA to conclude that the Cubans had trained and advised the Katangans since 1975, that they and the Soviets had supplied the Katangans with arms and equipment, that this support had continued at least up until the second Shaba invasion, and that the Cubans had foreknowledge of the attack.⁶³¹ Taken at face value, these assertions were a far cry from accusations that the Cubans, East Germans, or Soviets had helped to plan and organize the attacks. Turner claimed that "virtually all the evidence we have on Cuban and Soviet involvement with the Katangans comes from clandestine reporting. The reporting is particularly convincing because it represents a wide variety of sources—many of them extremely sensitive—and because it is consistent." He added that, "we have discounted all reports from Zairian sources, given the high probability of bias."⁶³² As shown below, this contrasted with the French, whose substantially more ambitious claims of Cuban involvement relied largely upon Zairian sources.

⁶²⁷ Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 86.

⁶²⁸ For this debate in the US press and government, see: Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 86-92.

⁶²⁹ JCL: CREST Database Document NLC-24-77-7-2-2, CIA Memorandum, "Shaba, Castro, and the Evidence," 06.06.1978, p. 2.

⁶³⁰ JCL: CREST Database Document NLC-24-77-7-2-2, CIA Memorandum, "Shaba, Castro, and the Evidence," 06.06.1978, p. 1.

⁶³¹ CIA : CREST Database Document CIA-RDP81B00401R002100020012 -7, DCI Congressional Briefing, "Cubans in Angola," undated, June, 1978, p. 5.

⁶³² Ibid. 6.

Although most of the sources in the declassified CIA material have been redacted, it is possible to reconstruct some of these through later statements by American officials, and material from French records. For instance, Turner's assertion that Cuban and Angolan advisors accompanied the rebels as they made their way to Shaba in early May came from Newsweek journalist Arnaud de Borchgrave.⁶³³ Borchgrave gleaned this information from Katangan prisoners "Joseph and Antoine," captured during Shaba II.⁶³⁴ By Turner's own admission, the evidence for the claim that the Katangans had received weapons and equipment from the Cubans and Soviets was "limited," based on hearsay and the sighting of Soviet and Cuban ships in Luanda harbor.⁶³⁵

The French chargé and head of mission in Angola, Jean-Jacques Peyronnet, the only skeptical voice among French diplomats regarding the Cuban question, noted that the FLNC could have just as easily bought its weapons given its control over a number of diamond mines in the northeast of the country.⁶³⁶ Indeed, UNITA would later exploit these diamonds for the same purpose. Other claims, whose credibility Turner questioned, revolved around the actual presence of Cubans in Shaba during the invasion. Aside from noting that it would have represented a colossally stupid risk for Castro to have done such a thing, he did mention an "eyewitness" account from a European present in Kolwezi at the time claiming a Cuban presence.⁶³⁷ Peyronnet also knew of several such accounts, later used by French officials as "evidence" for the Cuban presence in Kolwezi. He noted that such accounts from eyewitnesses under severe duress and threat of death, "ne relèvent pas de l'observation scientifique: d'une part des "katangais" peuvent aussi être métis, barbus, décrépés, avoir un accent ibérique" since many had been in Angola for a long time. He sarcastically added that, "d'autre part le martelage des media crée des hallucinations qu'on parle d'OVNI [UFOs] dans une région, tout le monde en voit. Ainsi des cubains."⁶³⁸

⁶³³ Ibid. 7.

⁶³⁴ JCL: CREST Database Document NLC-24-77-7-2-2, CIA Memorandum, "Shaba, Castro, and the Evidence," 06.06.1978, p. 6.

⁶³⁵ CIA : CREST Database Document CIA-RDP81B00401R002100020012 -7, DCI Congressional Briefing, "Cubans in Angola," undated, June, 1978, p. 10.

⁶³⁶ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, "A/S. Shaba II-Questions et observations," Note from Peyronnet to Paris, 05.06.1978, p. 5.

⁶³⁷ CIA : CREST Database Document CIA-RDP81B00401R002100020012 -7, DCI Congressional Briefing, "Cubans in Angola," undated, June, 1978, p. 11.

⁶³⁸ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, "A/S. Shaba II-Questions et observations," Note from Peyronnet to Paris, 05.06.1978, p. 5.

Turner did think it probable, however, that Cuban advisors accompanied the Katangans to the Angolan border.⁶³⁹ As evidence, he cited Borchgrave's conversations with the Katangan prisoners, sources which also perhaps "ne relèvent pas de l'observation scientifique" given their incentives in saying things their captors wanted to hear, particularly if the FAZ had custody. Turner also cited a source, which has since been redacted, suggesting that "Cuban personnel were organizing a large number of Katangan troops and that Cuban advisers were moving with the troops towards the Zambian border."⁶⁴⁰ Peyronnet mentions a similar claim, which he heard from Belgian, British, and Portuguese diplomatic sources. However, he noted that these claims all originated with the same individual, an employee of Diamang, the Angolan parastatal diamond mining company.⁶⁴¹

With such a paucity of good sources, the only seemingly solid claim that Turner could make, was that the Cubans, with possible Soviet and East German assistance, had helped to train FLNC units at bases in Northern Angola. Although, again, all the sources are redacted in the declassified documents, each claim is based on what the source heard from other parties not directly linked to the FLNC. For example:

[Source redacted] reports a Cuban official stating in early May that Cuban, Soviet, and East German personnel were training Katangan rebels in Angola [...] In October 1977, [Source redacted] learned from Angolan military officers that 1,500 Katangan recruits in Angola had just completed their training and were under the control of Cuban and East German instructors.⁶⁴²

Although many of these claims appear to stem from hearsay, they also closely parallel the intelligence the French received before and after Shaba II as described above. Not everyone found Turner's evidence convincing, however. A number of members of the Senate Foreign Relations committee, notably its chairman, Democrat John Sparkman, were quite skeptical.⁶⁴³ The *New York Times* cited one member of the House as saying, "I think an impartial jury would acquit Castro for lack of evidence."⁶⁴⁴ Within the State Department and National Security Council, a number of officials remained privately sceptical about the quality of the intelligence. Jokes about finding the "smoking cigar" became common.⁶⁴⁵ In early June, Rick Inderfurth, one of Brzezinski's staffers in the NSC, wrote Brzezinski a joke memo including a picture of

⁶³⁹ CIA : CREST Database Document CIA-RDP81B00401R002100020012 -7, DCI Congressional Briefing, "Cubans in Angola," undated, June, 1978, p. 12.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, "A/S. Shaba II-Questions et observations," Note from Peyronnet to Paris, 05.06.1978, p. 4.

⁶⁴² CIA: CREST Database Document CIA-RDP81B00401R002100020012 -7, DCI Congressional Briefing, "Cubans in Angola," undated, June, 1978, p. 7-8.

⁶⁴³ Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 90.

⁶⁴⁴ Cited in Ibid. 91.

⁶⁴⁵ Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 58.

a cigar discovered through, “recent overhead reconnaissance.” Inderfurth “argued” that this constituted proof of Cuban participation in the Katangan invasion, writing that:

While it is possible that the cigar was smoked by a Katangan, this is highly unlikely. As you know, the Cubans do not like either the Katangans or the Angolans. Both groups consider the Cubans arrogant. Thus, the Cubans might pass arms to the Katangans, but NOT their best cigars. We have, to paraphrase the expression used during Watergate---found ‘the smoking Cuban.’⁶⁴⁶

Walter Cutler, the American Ambassador to Zaire at the time, later said of American intelligence gathering that:

It was very difficult to get information from the ground. Getting intelligence was tough, very difficult. In both Shaba I and Shaba II there was a lot of flying blind. It’s so difficult to get reliable intelligence. There was a fear of putting US human resources on the ground for fear that they might be captured, and this affected the quality of the intelligence.⁶⁴⁷

Interestingly, the same problems beset French intelligence gathering. Yves Gras later explained that after Shaba I, one Belgian and two French officers worked in the Zairian General Staff. The Belgian officer, Major Van Melle, worked with FAZ intelligence and regularly passed information on to all the military attachés. According to Gras, this meant that the French and other Western embassies often had a good idea of the Katangans’ activities.⁶⁴⁸ However, in January 1978, Mobutu had several FAZ officers in the General Staff executed under accusations of plotting against the regime. He also removed Van Melle from his post, without explanation. Mobutu replaced him with a Zairian colonel, who no longer kept informing Embassy military attachés on a regular basis.⁶⁴⁹ Pierre Sergent, in his interviews with various French diplomatic and military personnel wrote that this now meant that the French “ne possèdent plus désormais que des informations de seconde main, glanées ici ou là chez les Belges, civils ou militaires, ou chez les Américains.”⁶⁵⁰ The Belgian government, however, did not share the French view that the Cubans were playing an important role in the Katangan attack.⁶⁵¹ Combined with American evidence which also came from second and third hand sources, this translated into a very murky understanding of the nature of Cuban activities.

Historian Piero Gleijeses, who has had extensive access to Cuban records, suggests that this intelligence may have erred. Although the Cubans had a massive troop presence in Angola

⁶⁴⁶ JCL: CREST Database Document NLC-17-128-1-6-5, Memo from Inderfurth to Brzezinski, “Cuban Assistance to the Katangese,” 02.06.1978, p.1.

⁶⁴⁷ Cited in Gleijeses, “Truth or Credibility,” 102.

⁶⁴⁸ Intervention of Yves Gras in “Compte rendu de la séance du 8 novembre 1985,” *Mondes et Cultures*. Vol. 45. N.4. 1985, p. 713.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid. 714.

⁶⁵⁰ Sergent, *La Légion*, 29.

⁶⁵¹ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, “A/S. Shaba II-Questions et observations,” Note from Peyronnet to Paris, 05.06.1978, p. 3.

following the 1975-76 victory of the MPLA, Gleijeses outlines a number of reasons why Cuba may not have supported the FLNC at all. In February 1978, nearly three months before the second invasion of Shaba, Fidel Castro's special envoy to Angola, Jorge Risquet, wrote a memo to President Neto stating "The imperialists seek a pretext, a political 'justification' to launch an open attack on Angola. The renewal of the Shaba war could provide this pretext."⁶⁵²

Indeed, Cuba had made contacts with the Katangan leader, Mbumba two years previously, but the FLNC hardly impressed them. In his memo to Neto, Risquet reminded him that they had agreed that Mbumba's:

[...] strategy was wrong and that the 'regular army' he proposed organizing in Angolan territory was unacceptable [...] We also had similar qualms about the real political beliefs and aims of the Front and its leader...from that time on, we [Cubans] have intentionally kept our contacts with the Front at a relatively low level (the embassy's third secretary) and given a positive response to only one of their many requests, granting them a certain amount of medicine.⁶⁵³

The Cuban Ambassador to Luanda told Peyronnet as much. He explained that, "Pour [le] Cuba, le FLNC n'est pas un mouvement de libération. Son passé, les virements de cap de son chef au service des uns et des autres, n'en font pas un mouvement digne de soutien."⁶⁵⁴

Cuban officers even had orders forbidding them from contacts with the Katangans.⁶⁵⁵ The first Shaba invasion also apparently took the Cubans by surprise. East German records show that Castro had told Erich Honecker, the East German leader, that the Cubans knew nothing about the invasion before it happened. Risquet later told Gleijeses that it occurred "at the worst possible time for us."⁶⁵⁶

Historian Edward George also notes that the Shaba invasions would not have benefited the Cuban strategy in Angola. First, by early 1977, Fidel Castro had begun looking for ways to significantly scale back his country's troop commitment there. A risky investment in a cross border invasion of Zaire threatened to further destabilize Angola's political situation, which in turn would force the Cubans to alter their withdrawal plans.⁶⁵⁷ Furthermore, George notes that the first invasion took place during Castro's Africa tour where he aimed to act as a mediator in the Somali-Ethiopian dispute over the Ogaden. Any implication in the Katangan invasion could harm these efforts.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵² Memo from Risquet to Neto, February, 1978 cited in Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 97.

⁶⁵³ Memo from Risquet to Neto, February, 1978, cited in Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 93.

⁶⁵⁴ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 29, Telegram from Peyronnet to Paris, "A/S : Shaba," 13.06.1978.

⁶⁵⁵ Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 93n.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid. 94.

⁶⁵⁷ George, *The Cuban Intervention*, 126.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid. 126.

With the July 1977 invasion of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia by Somali forces, the Cubans began actively assisting the Ethiopian regime. By November, Somalia had expelled its Cuban and Soviet instructors, and the following month the Soviet Union and Cuba coordinated a massive military intervention to protect Ethiopia's borders and its regime. Castro transferred nearly 5,000 troops from Angola to participate in the operation. The last thing he would have wanted was another Shaba fiasco.⁶⁵⁹ Indeed, between Shaba I and Shaba II, the only diplomatic contacts that the Cubans had with the Katangans were rejections of various requests for weaponry.⁶⁶⁰

However, as Castro had told Lyle Lane, the Cubans did have some foreknowledge of the second invasion. Risquet told Neto during his February meeting, "We have learned from several sources that the National Front for the Liberation of the Congo is preparing to renew action against Mobutu in the near future."⁶⁶¹ He urged Neto to restrain the movement, arguing that a second Shaba war would inevitably provoke an "imperialist" intervention like that seen the previous year. However this time, "they would probably intervene more forcefully, perhaps even directly, not just with Moroccans, but with imperialist forces—from France, for example."⁶⁶² Additionally, Risquet argued that an "imperialist" response might include an invasion of Angola, an unacceptable risk for the MPLA regime in Luanda.⁶⁶³ The following day Neto informed Risquet that he took this advice very seriously and completely agreed. He even claimed that he had summoned Mbumba himself to inform him of his decision not to authorize a new invasion.⁶⁶⁴ The fact that Shaba II did not occur for more than two months after the final Somali withdrawal from Ethiopia may suggest that Castro's initiative worked, if Luanda could influence such things.⁶⁶⁵

The question of Angolan government control over the FLNC is not of importance here. However, one should note that the Cubans did believe that Neto tried to stop the Katangans.⁶⁶⁶ Larmer cites an eyewitness who claimed that Mbumba was even under house arrest in Luanda until the end of Shaba II.⁶⁶⁷ Peyronnet echoed this view, suggesting that the Angolan northeast

⁶⁵⁹ George, *The Cuban Intervention*, 133.

⁶⁶⁰ Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 95.

⁶⁶¹ Memo from Risquet to Neto, February, 1978, cited in Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 96.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ George, *The Cuban Intervention*, 133.

⁶⁶⁶ Gleijeses, "Truth or Credibility," 100n.

⁶⁶⁷ Larmer, "Local conflicts," 103.

escaped from a certain degree of central government control, although he conceded that some MPLA military and intelligence personnel might have abetted the invasion.⁶⁶⁸

Unlike the CIA who, at least to Congress, discounted Zairian sources in their search for conclusive evidence of communist collusion with the Gendarmes, the French took these sources seriously. French archival records show that most of the major pieces of French evidence came directly from Zairian government and military sources rather than French observers on the ground.

According to Peyronnet, the claim, repeated several times by Gras, that the FLNC held a planning conference with Cubans, Soviet, and East German officials in Algeria, originated with Mobutu himself.⁶⁶⁹ Furthermore, the seemingly precise intelligence that the French received regarding Cuban personnel movements, training operations, and military activities vis-à-vis the Katangans came directly from the FAZ. The French “Bulletins de situation” regrouping these reports cite their sources as “écoutes ennemies” or “écoutes reseau ennemies.”⁶⁷⁰ However, this designation only referred to FAZ “radio intercepts,” not those of the French who, according to Yves Gras and Pierre Sargent, did not have any operational intelligence presence along the Angolan border at that time.⁶⁷¹ Peyronnet found these charges a bit absurd. He observed that:

Là, il suffit de rappeler que les gendarmes ont été bien formés par les belges, constituaient, sous Tschombé [sic], une force organisée de militaires professionnels. Depuis Tschombé [sic], ils n’ont guère cessé de se battre... avec les ‘flechas negras’, auxiliaires de l’armée portugaise, puis, au moment de l’indépendance de l’Angola, contre le FNLA (ils ont contribué à tenir Caxito avant l’arrivée des cubains.) [...] alors que les katangais sont de bons combattants - techniquement supérieur aux FAPLA [the Angolan army], était-il militairement utile que des angolais, voire des cubains, les accompagnent ?⁶⁷²

He also noted that one did not need to resort to Cubans or East Germans as an explanation of their improved strategy in Shaba II; they probably learned from their mistakes in the previous

⁶⁶⁸ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, “A/S. Shaba II-Questions et observations,” Note from Peyronnet to Paris, 05.06.1978, p.11.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid. 2.

⁶⁷⁰ see : La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, “Bulletin de situation,” from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 17.12.1977, p. 2, La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, “Bulletin de situation,” from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 02.05.1978, p. 4.

⁶⁷¹ For the indication that “écoutes ennemies” always referred to FAZ intelligence, see: La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, “Bulletin de situation,” from Colonel Larzul, French military attaché in Kinshasa, to Paris, 02.05.1978, p. 4, and SHAT Archives, Vincennes : Missions militaires françaises à l’étranger, Inventory p. 46, GR 13 S 31, “écoutes radio effectuées par les forces armées zaïroises 1975-1978.

⁶⁷² La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, “A/S. Shaba II-Questions et observations,” Note from Peyronnet to Paris, 05.06.1978, p. 4.

invasion all by themselves. He also felt it unlikely that the Cubans ran training camps for the FLNC, since many of the Katangans actually had more combat experience than the Cubans.⁶⁷³

Additionally, the official French Embassy report of the Shaba II invasion explained that André Ross's claim, mentioned above, that the Cubans had a headquarters 40 kilometers from the frontier, and maintained radio links with the Katangan invaders, also came directly from FAZ sources, not French.⁶⁷⁴ Ross repeated this claim to Paris though, as if it were an indisputable fact.⁶⁷⁵ It would have been odd, however, that the FAZ intercepts, if legitimate, would have provided them and the French with "les noms des cadres cubains" as Ross claims.⁶⁷⁶ It seems a basic question of operational security that any officers involved in conducting this kind of clandestine operation would rely on codenames, so basic radio intercepts would not have revealed this kind of information. Indeed, previous Cuban military operations in Africa had employed this method.⁶⁷⁷ Perhaps the FAZ fed Ross what he wanted to hear.

Even if Gleijeses' Cuban interlocutors distorted the truth and falsified the documents he examined, this does not change the fact that Mobutu and the FAZ played a central role in reinforcing and reconfirming a French worldview that saw communist expansion in Africa as a major threat to African stability and French influence on the continent. According to this view, the Soviets and their Cuban puppets worked together to create a "ceinture d'insécurité" around Zaire, whose weaknesses made it particularly vulnerable.⁶⁷⁸ The evolution of African politics in the year preceding Shaba II reinforced this perspective.

The aforementioned outbreak of the Ogaden War between Ethiopia and Somalia in mid-1977, contributed to this interpretation. Starting in September, nearly 1,000 Soviet, and 12,000 Cuban military personnel deployed to Ethiopia to take charge of the country's defense.⁶⁷⁹ This constituted the Soviet Union's largest external military aid operation since the Korean War.⁶⁸⁰ By March 1978, they had expelled Somali forces from Ethiopian territory. At the same time,

⁶⁷³ Ibid. 5.

⁶⁷⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 17.

⁶⁷⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," Dépêche d'actualité, "A/S : Le Zaïre après Kolwezi," from Ross to Paris, 02.06.1978, p. 2.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ see Ernesto Che Guevara. *The African Dream: The Diaries of the Revolutionary War in the Congo*. New York: Grove Press, 2000.

⁶⁷⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 17.

⁶⁷⁹ Odd Arne Westad. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 276

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid, 277

this operation put a big nail into the coffin of détente. East-West tensions increased accordingly.⁶⁸¹ Furthermore, the Afghan communist Khalq party's coup d'état in late April 1978, just two weeks before the second invasion of Shaba, could only have intensified the perception of a true international communist offensive.⁶⁸² The increasing tension provoked by perceptions of major communist aggression in the Third World easily lent itself to more sinister interpretations of the second Shaba invasion.

Mobutu and FAZ intelligence obviously did not instill this worldview among French officials. However, their observations and conclusions seconded the French point of view, and thus were accepted unquestioningly. This certainly played a crucial role in convincing French policymakers that they needed to intervene in Zaire to “donner un coup d'arrêt à l'expansionnisme soviétique, au moment où la situation évoluait rapidement dans toute l'Afrique australe et centrale.”⁶⁸³

Interestingly, in his account of the Shaba invasion, Major Malutama di Malu, an intelligence officer in the Zairian army, assigned to the Zairian General Staff and present in Kolwezi during both invasions, only stated that “according to Washington,” Cubans had trained the FLNC.⁶⁸⁴ Additionally, his account principally argues that Zairian intelligence largely failed during the invasions.⁶⁸⁵ Malu notes that despite rumors of Gendarme activity preceding the Shaba invasion, the FAZ took no preventive measures.⁶⁸⁶ He even mentions the case of one officer who was punished and accused of trying to spread panic after warning of an imminent Gendarme invasion.⁶⁸⁷

Colonel Yemo's account echoes this view. According to Yemo, infighting between Zairian military intelligence and the *Centre national de documentation* resulted in the hoarding of information and lack of exchange. He lamented that “Il est cependant vrai que les services de renseignement du Zaïre se figent dans le renseignement à objectif unique : la sécurité personnelle du Président de la République.” This resulted in a situation where, at the beginning of Shaba II, neither intelligence service provided any useful information as to the movement or structure of the FLNC forces across the border.⁶⁸⁸ Rather shockingly, given the above discussion, Yemo asserts that the military attachés of Western embassies became a major

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, 282

⁶⁸² Ibid, 302

⁶⁸³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier “1978,” “Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi,” Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 17.

⁶⁸⁴ Malu, *The Shaba Invasions*, 55.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid. 71.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid. 54-55.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid. 71.

⁶⁸⁸ Yemo, 14.

source of intelligence for the FAZ. Yemo's account denounces the intelligence culture within the FAZ. Officers coveted supposedly top secret information for themselves, as it reinforced their status and authority. Echoing Malu's account, Yemo suggests that front-line units did not receive information on the Gendarmes for fear of provoking panic among the ranks.⁶⁸⁹ Yemo also emphatically denies allegations that Cubans had accompanied the FLNC to Kolwezi, and scathingly records :

Ils ne sont pas de supermans qui ne tombent point sous les balles ennemies et s'ils meurent, ne laissent jamais leurs cadavres tomber dans les mains de leurs ennemies [...] Comme à la première guerre du Shaba, la présence des Cubains dans les rangs des rebelles est un prétexte qui a tout simplement servi à déclencher l'intervention du monde occidental sans laquelle le régime de Kinshasa qui ne repose que sur une dictature militaire serait balayé. Témoin oculaire de l'entrée des insurgés à Kolwezi, acteur et un des responsables principaux de la situation, nous avons la fierté d'affirmer sans ambages qu'aucun soldat cubain n'a été vu dans les rangs rebelles lors du raid sur Kolwezi.⁶⁹⁰

If FAZ intelligence was uncertain about the extent of Cuban involvement, one could ask what Mobutu's staff really gave to French officials. This may indicate a level of manipulation on the part of Mobutu to encourage the French to protect his regime.

One should note, though, that Mobutu probably sincerely feared Soviet and Cuban motives. He certainly shared these worries with other like-minded African leaders. For example, Rwandan officials particularly feared the consequences of Soviet and Cuban policy. As late as 1981, an apparent "massive" arrival of Cuban personnel in neighboring Burundi provoked a mini-crisis within the Rwandan government. Rwandan officials saw themselves and Zaire as the main target of this buildup which, "constitue un évènement inquiétant étant donné ses menées subversives que le Cuba ne cesse d'effectuer là où ses Agents s'installent."⁶⁹¹ This threat encouraged Rwandan diplomats to continue their consultations with Zaire on the Cuban threat. Rwandan authorities particularly worried about the possibility of Zaire falling to nefarious socialist designs:

Surtout, il faudra ne pas perdre de vue l'entourage hostile qui risquerait de s'accroître si le Zaïre venait à tomber dans le giron socialiste, et si le danger de la déstabilisation par les Communistes est du côté de son voisin congolais, il est à craindre qu'il ne le soit également du côté de son voisin burundais qui ne manquerait pas de soutenir toute tentative semblable.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid. 17.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid. 67.

⁶⁹¹ Archives Minaffet Rwanda: Cote 3.3.4.19 Coopération Rwando-Congolais dans les domaines : Politique, Comptabilité, Diplomatie, Education, Sécurité, 1967-1996, "Mémoire confidentiel à Monsieur le Président de la République Rwandaise, du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères et de la Coopération, Fr. NGARUKIYINTWALI, "Mémoire sur le Zaïre," 21.02.1981, p. 14.

⁶⁹² Ibid. 15.

While the threat may have been exaggerated, or even invented, fears of communist intervention on the continent weighed heavily on “moderate” African leaderships. Mobutu, however, certainly knew how to play upon these fears and exploit them to his own benefit.

Chapter IV: After Kolwezi

In the early morning of May 20, the day of the landing of the French second wave, the Belgian Paracommando Regiment landed at the airport which the FAZ had retaken a few days earlier.⁶⁹³ The Belgian mission exclusively aimed at evacuating Kolwezi's European inhabitants. Lack of coordination and information sharing between the French and Belgians resulted in confusion and led to at least one friendly fire incident.⁶⁹⁴ After both Colonel Yves Gras, who oversaw the French operation from a flying command post, and Colonel Rik Depoorter, the head of the Belgian forces, realized the dangers of this lack of coordination, they briefly met on the ground at the airfield. Gras wanted the Belgians to stop their evacuations of Europeans.⁶⁹⁵ Despite his protests, within days, they had evacuated nearly all of the European population.⁶⁹⁶

Gras's disappointment stemmed from the French fear that a massive evacuation of expatriates from Kolwezi would trigger similar evacuations among the European populations living in Likasi, Lubumbashi, and other important mining centers. Erulin complained in a letter to his wife, "L'intervention belge a été catastrophique et nous a cassé le travail auprès des Européens. J'avais réussi à contenir la panique jusqu'à leur arrivé. Je me demande si le Zaïre va survivre après ce coup fatal porté à son économie."⁶⁹⁷ Although the invasion damaged some of Kolwezi's mining infrastructure, the damage was less widespread than initially feared. Apart from surface structures such as workshops, and some vehicles, the Gendarmes seemed to have committed no acts of deliberate destruction. A temporary loss of electricity meant that water pumps had stopped working and some of the mineshafts flooded in consequence. It seemed though that the mines could return to working order within a matter of weeks.⁶⁹⁸ Despite this, without the crucial presence of expatriate technicians within GECAMINES, the entire mining economy of Shaba ran the risk of ruin. For French officials then, it became imperative to stabilize Shaba and provide enough security to encourage the expatriate population to remain.

Late on May 19, after the first wave of the 2nd REP had already landed, French officials began insisting that Mobutu provide a written, retroactive request for the intervention. This would simply put into writing what Mobutu had requested orally several days previously.

⁶⁹³ Odom, *Shaba II*, 79.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid. 80

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid. 81

⁶⁹⁶ Gras, "L'Opération Kolwezi," 702.

⁶⁹⁷ Erulin cited in Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 434.

⁶⁹⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier "1978," Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Etat des installations minières à Kolwezi," 27.05.1978.

Diplomats in the Quai d'Orsay wrote series of several draft letters, the final version of which Mobutu signed and postdated to May 17. The first draft of this letter requested, "[...] je vous demande donc [...] de prendre toutes les mesures nécessaires pour assurer la protection des ressortissants français et de leurs biens *et d'apporter ainsi une aide précieuse au rétablissement de la sécurité dans la région.*"⁶⁹⁹ The wording effectively legitimized the French mission of restoring "security" to the province. Perhaps sensing this too blatant of a statement, the final version changes some of the words. After requesting French assistance, "pour assurer la protection des ressortissants Français ainsi que de leurs biens," the letter adds, "Je suis certain que Vous aurez ainsi apporté une aide précieuse au rétablissement de la sécurité dans cette partie de notre territoire national."⁷⁰⁰ This "aide précieuse" consisted, in the days following Kolwezi, of a series of raids outside of the city, described above, which aimed at pushing the Katangans out of the region.

In the immediate term, Erulin and Gras tried to assuage the fears of Europeans in other parts of Shaba. Erulin sent detachments of legionnaires to different towns and settlements throughout the province, as far east as Likasi to calm down the European population and to make a show of force to dissuade further FLNC attacks or a popular uprising.⁷⁰¹ However, expelling the Gendarmes did not suffice to restore a climate of security and confidence for the Europeans in Shaba. As soon as the fighting had ended and the 2nd REP had secured Kolwezi from the Katangans, elements of FAZ units who had regrouped took vengeance upon the local population. Erulin lamented to his wife upon leaving Kolwezi on May 28, "J'ai laissé la ville entre les mains des pillards de l'armée zaïroise."⁷⁰² The remaining European expatriates in Shaba made it clear to local French authorities that they feared the FAZ nearly as much as the Katangans.⁷⁰³

However, not everyone appreciated the French presence either. Soon after the recapture of Kolwezi, Mobutu gave Gras operational control over the sector, including over FAZ units. Colonel Yemo complained bitterly about Gras's attitude towards his Zairian interlocutors :

Il règne en maître, au mépris teinté de racisme et de complexe de supériorité vis-à-vis des Zaïrois [...] Au général qui lui demande de venir conférer avec lui à l'état-major de la Division Kamanyola, Gras répondra avec une

⁶⁹⁹ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, Telegram from Paris to Ross, "Shaba," 19.05.1978, p.2 my emphasis.

⁷⁰⁰ La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/2, Letter from Mobutu to Giscard, postdated to 17.05.1978.

⁷⁰¹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," Note from Thauvin to Ross, "A/s: Situation au Shaba," 03.06.1978, also see Erulin cited in Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois* 440.

⁷⁰² Erulin cited in Boissonnade, *Le mal zaïrois*, 434.

⁷⁰³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I.Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram: "Maintien de la Force Africaine" from André Ross to Paris, 7.12.1978

insolence ostensible. Dis ceci au général, dira-t-il à l'envoyé de ce dernier : 'Il a perdu une bataille, moi j'en ai gagné une. Donc c'est au général de venir à moi et non l'inverse !'⁷⁰⁴

The behavior of some of the French legionnaires also left a bitter taste. Yemo accuses French soldiers of breaking into his hotel room at the Hotel Impala, which also served as the French headquarters, and stealing his Nikon F camera and his money.⁷⁰⁵ This behavior continued as the French withdrew to Lubumbashi. There, the Rabbi of the local expatriate Jewish community offered his home, as well as the adjoining synagogue to Erulin to serve as his headquarters in the city. However, the French deputy consul later reported that the legionnaires had pillaged the rabbi's home, stealing electronic equipment, money, and jewelry, and had damaged furniture and the electrical system.⁷⁰⁶ The FAZ apparently did not have a monopoly on looting.

Despite the dramatic French and Belgian airborne intervention in Kolwezi, and the repulse of the FLNC rebels, the Katangan Gendarmes managed to withdrawal in good order.⁷⁰⁷ This meant that little could prevent a Shaba III at some future date.⁷⁰⁸ Clearly the FAZ was in no position to prevent, or even effectively combat a renewed invasion. Its abysmal performance and lack of discipline contributed to the total lack of confidence placed in it by Shaba's European expatriate community.

French military intelligence noted that the FAZ had in fact suffered few losses from the Gendarme invasion. This resulted from the fact that :

Les plupart des unités se sont débandées dès les premiers contacts avec le F.N.L.C. [sic]. Certains éléments ont même rejoint les rangs rebelles. Les pertes ont, de ce fait, été négligeables. Aucune réforme de structure, dissolution, fusion ou création d'unités, n'a été entreprise au cours des derniers jours bien que de nombreuses unités dont la XIV Brigade, se soient littéralement volatilisées.⁷⁰⁹

General Babia, the Zairian Chief of Staff, informed the military attachés of the French, Belgian, and American embassies that the FAZ could not hold Kolwezi in case of a renewed attack. He estimated that he would need at least three months to effectively reorganize the Zairian 14th

⁷⁰⁴ Yemo, 82.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. 84.

⁷⁰⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," Note from Guth to Ross, "A/s.: Grand Rabbin," 20.07.1978.

⁷⁰⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45 Consulat Lubumbashi, Dossier "1978," "Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi," Embassy report on the events, 09.08.1978 p. 12.

⁷⁰⁸ JCL: Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 [Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78], Folder [Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978], Document 1C, Memo from William Odom to David Aaron, "SCC Working Group Meeting on Zaire- May 22, 1978, 22.5.1978

⁷⁰⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/2, Fiche "Zaïre : Perspectives après le retrait des forces françaises et belges," Annexe, «Les Forces Armées Zaïroises en mai 1978," Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, 05.06.1978, p. 1.

Brigade and deploy the infantry units that the Belgians had agreed to train, in order to ensure Kolwezi's defense.⁷¹⁰

Furthermore, Mobutu's actions following Shaba II threatened to worsen an already tense situation. As after Shaba I, Mobutu removed politically unreliable officers from the FAZ, and even tried and convicted the 14th Brigade's commander, General Tshikeva, of cowardice and sentenced him to death. French intelligence officers considered this a legitimate and necessary move. They lamented Mobutu's later decision to commute the sentence to a prison term, fearing that, "cette clémence risque d'être interprétée comme une marque de faiblesse."⁷¹¹ Worse, however, was Mobutu's decision to impose martial law in the province. As a "security" measure, he declared in a press conference that "L'agriculture ne sera plus pratiquée et la population ne vivra plus le long de la frontière zaïro-angolaise."⁷¹² Additionally, the only valid identity papers for Shaba residents would be their working documents. As the UNHCR noted, however, only salaried workers had such documentation available, which made the vast majority of the population extremely vulnerable to officially sanctioned persecution.⁷¹³

Despite the relative lack of damage to Kolwezi's mining infrastructure, Zaire's economy remained on the brink of catastrophe. In mid-June, at Zaire's request, Belgium hosted a conference on Zairian economic recovery and stabilization. Along with Zaire, Belgium, France, and the United States, delegations from Canada, West Germany, Iran, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the World Bank, and the IMF attended the meeting. The so-called "Mobutu Plan" constituted the main object of discussion. Although Mobutu's "diplomacy of bankruptcy"⁷¹⁴ does not directly concern this study, a brief outline does serve to illustrate the ways that Mobutu managed to game the system to his own benefit. Also, IMF records show how Mobutu's Western backers, including the French, contributed in some ways to exacerbating the regime's corruption and the country's economic woes.

Of course, Western officials did not quite see it this way. Henri Simonet, Belgium's Foreign Minister, saw the IMF as a useful tool for safeguarding Western political and economic interests. In late May 1978, he met with Fund officials to discuss the upcoming meeting in

⁷¹⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier "1978," Telegram from MilFrance Kinshasa to Armées Paris, 26.05.1978.

⁷¹¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/2, Fiche "Zaïre : Perspectives après le retrait des forces françaises et belges," Annexe, «Les Forces Armées Zaïroises en mai 1978," Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, 05.06.1978, p. 1.

⁷¹² *Salongo*, 26.05.1978. in UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 2, Box 1029, 600.ZRE, Protection and General Legal matters [1974-1979] [Vol.6], Doc. 371, "Mesures de contrôle de la population au Shaba," 19.06.1978.

⁷¹³ UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 2, Box 1029, 600.ZRE, Protection and General Legal matters [1974-1979] [Vol.6], Doc. 371, "Mesures de contrôle de la population au Shaba," 19.06.1978.

⁷¹⁴ see, Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 378-379.

Brussels. In Simonet's view, "The economic considerations will need to go hand in hand with political ones and, in that connection, the IMF could play a vital role in paving the way for economic and financial stability."⁷¹⁵ Simonet noted that though Zaire's Western partners had planned this meeting long before Shaba II, the timing was now perfect since Mobutu had no choice but to accept Western "advice" and that "it would be wise to act while the iron was hot."⁷¹⁶

Mobutu deftly exploited this sentiment. His "Mobutu Plan" consisted of precisely those measures which his Western backers demanded, and even lay some of the blame for Zaire's fiscal and economic problems on governmental corruption and incompetence. To address these issues, the Zairian regime promised to improve Zaire's state institutions, to prepare an economic stabilization program, and to increase productivity in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing.⁷¹⁷ The regime even declared itself willing to accept the appointment of a foreign expert as a Chief Comptroller in the Finance Ministry, with full control and veto power over public spending.⁷¹⁸

Unfortunately for Mobutu, apart from emergency humanitarian assistance, most donor countries seemed unwilling to provide much economic assistance until he had agreed upon a stabilization program with the IMF. The IMF, on the other hand, did not want to draw up a stabilization program until it had received serious funding commitments from Zaire's donors. Though this commitment problem prevented an agreement on a stabilization program until 1979, Mobutu did take measures which signaled an apparent serious effort to reform. In addition to a comptroller, Mobutu had, in theory, agreed to foreign control or supervision of the customs administration and the central bank. French officials wanted these foreign technocrats to coordinate their policies on a steering committee which would report directly to the IMF. However, Mobutu managed to dilute this into an advisory commission within the Zairian government.⁷¹⁹ Nonetheless, over the course of the next few months, he made other moves demanded by the IMF as prerequisites for contributing towards the financing of a stabilization program.

⁷¹⁵ IMF Archives, Africa Department Fonds, AFRAI Country Files, Box 141, Zaire—Correspondence, 1971-1978, Memorandum for Files—Draft, from J.B. Zulu to Managing Director, "A Short Minute on the Meeting with the Belgian Foreign Minister on Zaire in Mr. Dale's Office," 30.05.1978, p. 1.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid. 2.

⁷¹⁷ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 67, "Lignes de Force du Plan Mobutu," June, 1978.

⁷¹⁸ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 67, Office Memorandum from E.L. Bornemann to Managing Director, "Zaire—Meeting in Brussels," 19.06.1978, p. 1.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid. 2.

One of the most important policies, in the IMF's view, consisted of another major exchange-rate devaluation aiming at reversing Zaire's balance of payment problems, improving GECAMINES financial situation, and increasing productivity.⁷²⁰ This devaluation became the subject of some debate as IMF head, Jacques de Larosière met with Erwin Blumenthal, the newly appointed West German Principal Director of the Zairian Central Bank in early October 1978. Blumenthal explained to Fund officials that, though he felt that Zaire needed a large currency devaluation, "a very large one-step devaluation would be counterproductive. It would have many undesirable social and political repercussions [...]." He also indicated that a large part of Kinshasa's population lived at starvation levels. While the prices of luxury products were at black-market rates, most low-end consumer goods, particularly basic food and fuel remained close to official prices. Thus a major devaluation would introduce immediate price increases in an already fragile socioeconomic situation. Instead, he argued for a staggered devaluation, eventually reaching 50 percent over six months.⁷²¹

Fund officials initially balked at this, fearing that drastic measures would be required before they could sign onto a stabilization package. However, Blumenthal emphasized that, "if donors wait too long, and insist that every last reform measure be in place before giving any further aid, it may be too late to stabilize anything."⁷²² He convinced Larosière that, "if the donors waited too long, they might kill the patient in the process."⁷²³ However, for this to happen, "it was very important to convince aid donors that a change in attitudes in Zaire was taking place," and that devaluation was one of the best ways to do this.⁷²⁴

Mobutu did enact a series of devaluations, beginning at the end of October 1978 and eventually reaching 50 percent versus the SDR by January 1979.⁷²⁵ Despite Blumenthal's efforts to minimize its impact on the population, the Bank of Zaire reported that prices of basic goods in shops and markets increased drastically during this period. From October to April, the Bank reported that shop prices increased on average over 50 percent, and food prices in markets increased by nearly 35 percent. These rates were significantly higher than inflation

⁷²⁰ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 64, "Note on the Economic and Financial Situation of Zaire," undated, early June 1978, p. 4.

⁷²¹ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Memorandum for Files, "Meeting with Mr. Blumenthal, Principal Director, Bank of Zaire, in the Managing Director's Office," 12.10.1978, p. 1.

⁷²² Ibid.

⁷²³ Ibid. 3.

⁷²⁴ Ibid. 4.

⁷²⁵ IMF Archives, Database files, "Zaire—Recent Economic Developments," 04.04.1979, p. 57.

experienced the previous year, and the Bank attributed this principally to the devaluation.⁷²⁶ Despite the hardships suffered by many of Zaire's urban poor, this program did signal Mobutu's apparent seriousness to the IMF and Zaire's donors. This led to an IMF agreement to finance an 18-month "stabilization program" with 118 million SDR in July 1979. This triggered lines of credit from other donors and significantly bolstered Mobutu's regime.⁷²⁷

The process by which this took place, however, provides a fascinating illustration of the ways Mobutu managed his international relationships. In September 1978, a World Bank assessment mission visited GECAMINES in Shaba. It returned with a very pessimistic evaluation. It reported that the Zairian government's interference seriously threatened GECAMINES' autonomy, and the regime diverted much of the company's earnings into special accounts. Management had collapsed, employee morale had fallen, and staffing problems threatened productivity. Furthermore, the lack of expatriate staff occasioned by the Shaba invasions had impaired maintenance work and contributed to a gradual decline in production.⁷²⁸

Also, before 1978, GECAMINES had sold its products through SGM, a Belgian marketing company, which pre-financed 70 percent of the various minerals' market value, and settled the remaining difference after sale. As early as January 1978, the regime altered this procedure. Now the difference would accrue to the Office of the Presidency, i.e. Mobutu. However, cobalt prices tripled during the year, and thus the regime would reap an enormous profit. The World Bank mission estimated that this included a shipment of 5,000 tons of cobalt which would bring the Presidency some 100 million SDR by year's end.⁷²⁹ This of course would not be used to plug budget shortfalls or service the country's ballooning debt.

In the same vein, the World Bank mission discovered that some 10 percent of GECAMINES' copper went unsold. Instead the regime "ceded" it in barter agreements to a number of different countries, including 10,000 tons to France in exchange for helicopters and 24,000 tons to Italy in exchange for aircraft.⁷³⁰ This of course meant that Zaire could not benefit from the sale of this copper to mitigate some of its balance of payment difficulties. It also illustrated the willingness of some of Zaire's Western partners, notably France, to facilitate

⁷²⁶ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 70, Banque du Zaïre, "Evolution des prix dans les magasins et aux marchés de Kinshasa entre novembre 1978 et mars 1979," 04.05.1979, p. 2.

⁷²⁷ IMF Archives, Database files, "Zaire—Staff Report for the 1981 Article IV Consultation," 15.12.1981, p. 4.

⁷²⁸ IMF Archives, African Department Fonds, AFR Country Division Desk Files Zaire, Box 72, Memorandum for Files, "Zaïre—Meeting with the IBRD and the Zaïrian [sic] Delegation, September 29, 1978, 2:00 p.m.," 04.10.1978, p. 1-2.

⁷²⁹ Ibid. 1.

⁷³⁰ Ibid. 4.

Mobutu's ability to sacrifice his country's financial and economic credibility to enrich himself and those around him. Barter agreements like this provided an easy way for Mobutu to avoid the kind of public expenditures for military equipment which drew the ire of foreign creditors.

Unfortunately for Mobutu, international assessment missions like that of the World Bank, threatened his international credibility with donors. It remained important for him to maintain the appearance of external supervision and control while subtly removing the real power held by figures like Blumenthal. In his negotiations with the IMF for a stand-by financing agreement for a stabilization program, Mobutu attempted to do just this. In a letter to Larosière in February 1979, Blumenthal vehemently protested what he saw as a blatant attempt by Zairian authorities to undermine his real role by changing the scope of his mission. Blumenthal scathingly criticized the wording of the Zairians' draft "letter of intent," which represented the initial step towards an IMF loan agreement, as an "anti-Blumenthal law in disguise."⁷³¹ Its wording removed responsibility for monetary decision-making from the Central Bank, and placed it in the hands of a government committee. Blumenthal observed that even if the final letter of intent eliminated this wording and replaced it with more orthodox formulations, it still represented a clear demonstration of Zairian intentions.⁷³² This removed even the nominal degree of independence afforded to the Central Bank, yet the IMF seemed to accept the implication.

Although the wording in the letter eventually did change to reflect Blumenthal's concerns,⁷³³ he informed IMF officials that he no longer thought that he could effectively perform his job.⁷³⁴ His situation grew worse over the coming months. In April, a candidate for the comptroller in the Finance Ministry had finally been found, but without the agreed veto powers over expenditure.⁷³⁵ This left Blumenthal increasingly frustrated and he soon left his position in disgust.

In a famous report written several years later,⁷³⁶ Blumenthal detailed the level of corruption in the regime and the ways in which Mobutu managed to gut his onerous

⁷³¹ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Letter from Blumenthal to Larosière, 24.02.1979, p. 1.

⁷³² Ibid. 1-2.

⁷³³ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Letter from Larosière to Blumenthal, 09.03.1979.

⁷³⁴ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Letter from Blumenthal to Larosière, 24.02.1979, p. 2.

⁷³⁵ IMF Archives, Central Files Collection, Economic Subject Files S872, Box 306, Letter from Blumenthal to Larosière, 15.04.1979.

⁷³⁶ IMF Archives, Office of the Managing Director Fonds, Jacques de Larosière sous-fond, County Files Zaire, Box 90, "Zaire: Rapport sur sa crédibilité financière internationale," 20.04.1982. See also leaked copies of this report in : Erwin Blumenthal, "Zaire: rapport sur sa crédibilité financière internationale," *La Revue Nouvelle*,

international commitments of their substance, while still maintaining appearances in the eyes of international partners. Blumenthal was even once threatened at gunpoint to hand over Central Bank money to a FAZ general.⁷³⁷ Blumenthal wrote this report in early 1982 after the IMF had agreed to several major loans in the course of the preceding years.

His report highlighted the enormous lack of credibility in Zaire's political, economic, and financial institutions. It warned creditors, particularly states, that, "Mobutu et son gouvernement se moquent de la question du remboursement des prêts et de la dette publique. Ils comptent surtout sur la générosité de leurs créanciers et sur le renouvellement indéfini des prêts et de leur remboursement."⁷³⁸ Indeed, by the end of 1980, Zaire's external debt had reached 4.5 billion dollars.⁷³⁹ Blumenthal noted that every single IMF program to date had failed in Zaire, which begged the following questions:

[...] pourquoi le FMI, pourquoi les pays donateurs n'ont-ils pas abandonné mais au contraire renouvelé chaque fois leurs engagements ? Pourquoi y-a-t-il eu un tel échec qui va certainement continuer si aucun changement radical n'intervient ? [...] Et pour quelles raisons, les pays occidentaux ont-ils persisté à accorder non seulement des prêts mais aussi des emprunts non remboursables ?⁷⁴⁰

After listing numerous instances of corruption, Blumenthal warned that, "il n'y a aucune-je répète aucune-chance à l'horizon pour que les nombreux créanciers du Zaïre récupèrent leurs fonds."⁷⁴¹ This blind commitment to Mobutu's survival and other needs also translated into the post-Kolwezi security architecture that the French and their allies tried to implement at the same time.

The Inter-African Force

In the aftermath of Shaba II, neither French nor Belgian policymakers wished their troops to remain in the province indefinitely. Particularly the Belgians felt uncomfortable about extending their mission beyond that of a simple evacuation of foreign personnel. This conflicted with the French desire to stabilize the province in order to encourage the expatriates to remain. As the expatriate community made clear, they did not trust the FAZ to provide

77:11 Nov 1982, 360-78, and Emmanuel Dungia. *Mobutu et l'argent du Zaïre: les révélations d'un diplomate, ex-agent des Services secrets*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992, pp. 136-177.

⁷³⁷Ibid. 16.

⁷³⁸Ibid. 6.

⁷³⁹Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰Ibid. 8.

⁷⁴¹Ibid. 26.

security, and would leave Zaire immediately without a more disciplined and better trained stabilization force.⁷⁴²

To counter this possibility, the French took a broader interpretation of the concept of a “humanitarian” mission. Simply saving Kolwezi’s Europeans from murder and pillage could not, in of itself, protect Shaba’s economic potential and Mobutu’s survival. Instead, the French wanted to create sustainably secure conditions which would allow the skilled expatriate workers to remain in Shaba. Thus, they needed to “pacify” Shaba, and dissuade the FLNC from a third invasion.

However, the French “humanitarian” mission could not turn into a long-term dissuasive presence or “pacification” operation without losing the character of its original publicly stated mandate.⁷⁴³ This might threaten its international legitimacy, as well as the important logistical support it received from the United States. Thus French diplomats began pushing for an “Inter-African Force” (IAF).⁷⁴⁴ This would provide a wider African dimension to the internationalization of the Shaba crisis. It would also help to legitimize foreign military intervention in Zaire by giving it an African veneer. Shortly after the Kolwezi operation, André Ross observed:

C’est en effet de l’Afrique soutenue par les Occidentaux, que le Zaïre peut espérer recevoir l’aide militaire dont il a le plus urgent besoin. Seules des forces extérieures pourront garantir durablement la sécurité du Shaba, face à la pression non négligeable que le FNLC [sic] continue à y exercer. Quelques milliers d’hommes suffiront. La modicité des moyens requis rend plus aisée la constitution de cette force de défense.⁷⁴⁵

American officials also began to see a need for such a force, but hesitated on the level of commitment. Immediately following the Kolwezi operation, the situation was not yet entirely clear to Carter administration officials. However, an early working group meeting of the National Security Council’s Special Coordinating Committee (SCC) made several grim initial observations. First, the CIA noted that the Katangans could invade again, and the FAZ probably could not stop them. On the other hand, the force that the French and Belgians had begun to discuss could prove useful in detecting another invasion early enough to react. Crucially however, the SCC’s working group concluded, “The Zaire economy can be expected to spiral downward with the exodus of Europeans which will continue from all parts of Zaire

⁷⁴² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I.Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram: “Maintien de la Force Africaine” from André Ross to Paris, 7.12.1978.

⁷⁴³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Général Force Africaine, “La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba--bilan” Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p.3.

⁷⁴⁴ For an abbreviated account of the IAF deployment, see: Nathaniel Kinsey Powell. “La France, les Etats-Unis et la Force interafricaine au Zaïre (1978-1979),” *Relations internationales*, 2012/2 (n. 150).

⁷⁴⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier Consulat Lubumbabshi, “1978,” “Depêche d’actualité: ‘Le Zaïre après Kolwezi,’” Ross to the Paris, 02.06.1978, p. 4.

unless the security situation can be changed. In a word, the outlook for the economy is disastrous.”⁷⁴⁶

On May 25, Giscard and Carter discussed Zaire’s future on the occasion of a state dinner in Washington D.C. Giscard explained to a skeptical Carter that Mobutu was “courageux” and “réaliste” and governed a country which, in Giscard’s view, “sera tôt ou tard détruit par des luttes tribales.” However, he worried greatly over the increase in Soviet and Cuban influence in Africa, which the French intervention served to deflect. Although he thanked Carter for the American logistical assistance provided in Shaba, he complained about the lack of a stronger American commitment to Africa’s defense. He told Carter that :

Les pays faibles ont l’impression qu’ils ne peuvent pas compter sur votre soutien. Or je pense qu’il est important que les démocraties occidentales montrent clairement qu’elles sont prêtes à agir quand certaines limites sont dépassées [...] Il faut que les gens sentent la présence de la puissance américaine, qui doit jouer un rôle important dans l’équilibre à réaliser. C’est une chose qui est ressentie très profondément [...] Quant à nous, nous avons envoyé six cent vingt soldats et cela a suffi.⁷⁴⁷

The SCC met the following day to discuss the possible extent of American commitment to Zaire. It noted that the French and Belgians had begun developing ideas for an ambitious program of economic and political reform, supported by the presence of the IAF. Zbigniew Brzezinski also observed that American participation in the Kolwezi operation had, “to some extent [...] identified us with European attempts to preserve the situation in Zaire.”⁷⁴⁸ However, a deeper American engagement along Franco-Belgian lines would mean that “we will have committed ourselves to an undertaking that will be costly with only a 50-50 chance of success. Most importantly, even the fact of consultations starts us on the road to commitment.”⁷⁴⁹

Despite questionable future reform prospects, the SCC, with strong backing from the State Department, agreed that “Zaire is too important and the global stakes too high for the United States to continue its past posture of marginal support for the Zaire economic effort.”⁷⁵⁰ In Brzezinski’s somber analysis, “The alternative of not participating in this effort would

⁷⁴⁶ JCL: Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 [Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78], Folder [Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978], Document 1C, Memo from William Odom to David Aaron, “SCC Working Group Meeting on Zaire- May 22, 1978, 22.5.1978

⁷⁴⁷ Entretien entre le président Jimmy Carter et le président Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, 26.05.1978, archives de la présidence de la République, 5AG3-984, Archives nationales, cited in Vincent Nouzille. *Des secrets si bien gardés. Les dossiers de la Maison-Blanche et de la CIA sur la France et ses présidents, 1958-1981*. Paris: Fayard, 2009, p. 445-446.

⁷⁴⁸ JCL: Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 [Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78], Folder [Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978], Document 1, Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, “Next Steps in Zaire,” 26.5.1978

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

probably lead to a rapid economic collapse in Zaire and political fragmentation of the country.”⁷⁵¹ However, Brzezinski warned Carter that, in his view:

[...] deeper U.S. economic involvement will mean that Zaire will become politically more important to us and, success or failure, strategically more significant. In this connection, everyone agrees that, to the maximum extent possible, we should be junior partners to the Europeans and others in this development program.⁷⁵²

Thus, Carter’s talking points for his meeting with Giscard indicate that while the US would support the airlift, the allies “must take care that this not seem to be a neocolonialist operation to protect our investments.”⁷⁵³

This reasoning formed the basis of subsequent American policy towards Zaire and its relations with France regarding the deployment of the IAF in Shaba. American officials did agree to provide much of the airlift and some logistical support for the IAF’s deployment. They did not want to promise anything more.⁷⁵⁴ By free-riding on the Europeans, the Americans seemed to hope that they could distance themselves from Mobutu, and avoid international fallout should the international effort to save his regime fail. This free-riding approach would mar American relations with the French, who consistently felt that the United States should bear more of the burden.

To lead the IAF, French officials again requested that the Moroccans return to Shaba. As discussed earlier, Morocco’s King Hassan II greatly feared communist expansion in Africa and connected consequences of destabilization in Zaire with his own conflict with Algeria over the Western Sahara. He thus agreed to lead the operation.⁷⁵⁵ Although Morocco would form the backbone of the IAF, Hassan wanted much broader African participation.⁷⁵⁶ This required a significant diplomatic effort on the part of both the French and the Zairians.

Mobutu, with French support, began to push for the establishment of the Inter-African Force within days of the victory over the Katangan Gendarmes. At the closing session of the Franco-African Summit in Paris, on May 23, Mobutu convincingly made the case for the IAF. He followed this up with personal visits to several African capitals, starting with Rabat.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Ibid.

⁷⁵³ Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 [Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78], Folder [Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978], Document 1A, “Attached talking Points for Carter’s meeting with Giscard, 26.5.1978

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, “La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba--bilan” Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 6.9.1979, p.4.

⁷⁵⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 45, Dossier Consulat Lubumbashi, 1978, «Etude sur les événements de Kolwezi,” 9.8.1978 p. 14.

⁷⁵⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, “La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba--bilan” Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p. 4.

However, getting enough African political support was not a straightforward task, particularly given Mobutu's lack of popularity. Even Moroccan officials expressed a number of doubts to their French interlocutors. King Hassan's Ambassador to Paris, Dr. Youssef Ben Abbès lamented Mobutu's complete lack of preparedness for the second Shaba invasion and privately wondered if the French had not found a Zairian who could replace Mobutu and conduct necessary reforms.⁷⁵⁸

The French had already begun to sound out the Senegalese for a possible deployment to Zaire before the first French troops landed on May 19. That day, the Senegalese Chief of Staff, General Idrissa Fall, told the French military attaché that Senghor's agreement to send a unit to Zaire would pose a major problem. Senegal had already sent a large contingent of troops to Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL peacekeeping operation. This meant that any other major deployment would seriously tax the resources of the Senegalese army. The army could therefore only afford to send a small number of troops as symbolic support of a larger force.⁷⁵⁹ Furthermore, the mere fact of supporting Mobutu would provoke Senghor's political opposition, as Mobutu had a bad reputation in the country, principally due to his expulsion of Senegalese traders in 1971.⁷⁶⁰

In early June, as the first Moroccan contingents prepared to deploy to Zaire, Senegalese officials decided to send a "reinforced battalion" instead. This move surprised French authorities, since they had made preparations to provide logistical and transportation assistance for a single symbolic company, as Fall had suggested.⁷⁶¹ The French Ambassador in Dakar, Pierre Morizot, felt that this significantly increased number of troops represented an attempt by Fall to sabotage the deployment by forcing the French to refuse support to a much larger contingent than planned. Although Fall was opposed to any deployment to Zaire, he had apparently told Senghor that in case the situation in Shaba deteriorated, a single company would not suffice for even self-defense purposes. Additionally, Prime Minister Abdou Diouf asked Morizot, "Quelle confiance peut-on, entre nous, accorder aux compagnies togolaises et gabonaises? Et quelle responsabilité serait la mienne si je ne tenais pas compte de l'avis de mes experts militaires et si le détachement sénégalais allait à un désastre de ce fait ?"⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Compte-rendu d'audience, "A/S-Entretien avec l'Ambassadeur du Maroc en France," 30.05.1978, p. 2.

⁷⁵⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Dakar to Paris, "A/S : Proposition sénégalaise d'envoi de matériel," 22.05.1978, p. 1.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid. 2.

⁷⁶¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Morizot to Paris, "Force d'intervention africaine," 03.06.1978, p. 1.

⁷⁶² Ibid.

The military environment in Shaba constituted a further worry for Senegalese officials. In addition to their lack of confidence in other African contingents, the FAZ posed a veritable threat. Senghor noted that Mobutu's previous military policy and consequent FAZ deficiencies might inspire disloyalty in the Zairian military. The IAF might have to prepare for a tense situation in Shaba where FAZ troops could turn on their erstwhile allies.⁷⁶³

Giscard paralleled these efforts with a meeting held in Paris on June 5 gathering representatives from the West German, American, Belgian, and British governments. Initially, the French wanted this meeting to focus on the development of a collective strategy towards Africa as a whole, particularly in light of the "destabilization" introduced on the continent by Soviet bloc activity.⁷⁶⁴ French officials wanted this to include the establishment of a military cooperation mechanism comprised of a joint General Staff committee.⁷⁶⁵ However, the American delegation, implicitly backed by the other countries present, insisted that the meeting focus on Zaire's problems alone.⁷⁶⁶ Although no one made any binding commitments, the participants did agree to a series of demands for reforms in Zaire. They collectively presented these to Mobutu as conditions for further Western aid to the country.⁷⁶⁷ These "recommendations," demanded an effort by Mobutu towards national reconciliation, improved institutions, improvements in the army, efforts at finding diplomatic solutions to Zaire's external problems, and reforms in Zaire's economic policy. True to form, Mobutu told Ross that "il n'y avait aucun point de désaccord" with these demands.⁷⁶⁸ As noted above however, Mobutu had little intention of following through with most of his promises.

On the same day, barely two weeks after the Kolwezi operation, the IAF began to deploy to Shaba.⁷⁶⁹ At its full strength, it consisted of some 1,500 Moroccan, 560 Senegalese, 150 Togolese, and 50 Gabonese troops, all under the nominal command of Colonel-Major Loubaris, the Moroccan force commander during Shaba I. It also included a 200-man strong medical detachment from Côte d'Ivoire.⁷⁷⁰ French and American transport aircraft transported these troops, with both countries also providing some vehicles and other equipment to the

⁷⁶³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Morizot to Paris, "Participation militaire sénégalaise au Zaïre," 14.06.1978, p. 2.

⁷⁶⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Zaïre," 09.06.1978, p. 2.

⁷⁶⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Paris to Dakar, "Force d'Intervention Africaine," 09.06.1978.

⁷⁶⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Zaïre," 09.06.1978, p. 2.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid. 3.

⁷⁶⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Zaïre," 21.06.1978, p. 2.

⁷⁶⁹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba--bilan" Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p. 4.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid. 5

units.⁷⁷¹ The French also left vehicles used during their intervention behind for the Moroccans to distribute among the IAF.⁷⁷² In the meantime, both France and Belgium agreed to train Zairian airborne and infantry units to a sufficient level of capacity where they could replace the IAF.⁷⁷³ The French concentrated on training a rapid intervention airborne brigade, and the Belgians trained infantry units.⁷⁷⁴

Shortly after the deployment of the IAF in early June, Mobutu undertook major diplomatic efforts to address the regional threats to his regime. With American encouragement, Congolese leader Dennis Sassou-Nguesso acted as mediator.⁷⁷⁵ On July 18, Mobutu and Neto met face to face in Khartoum at the OAU summit meeting to discuss a final agreement. Mobutu agreed to end his support to the FNLA, FLEC, and UNITA. Meanwhile, Neto agreed to disarm the FLNC and to reopen the Benguela railroad and both sides agreed to normalize diplomatic relations. This agreement became public when Neto came to Kinshasa for a two day visit on August 19.⁷⁷⁶ Mobutu coupled this agreement with an amnesty offer which would allow some 150,000 refugees to return to Zaire from Angola.⁷⁷⁷ In theory, the return of Zairian refugees, many of them Lunda, to Shaba, would undermine the FLNC's base of support within Angola and thus constitute a major step in the reduction of tensions between the two countries.

This reconciliation with Angola's leadership, which ostensibly removed or at least significantly undercut the external threat to Shaba, created concomitant problems for the IAF. The second Shaba invasion had worsened the uncertainty surrounding an already desperate economic situation in the province and insecurity was rife. The FAZ and Zairian police were unable to impose government authority and the IAF became an important dissuasive presence for any attempt at uprisings or rebellion. However, this was not its original mission. This confusion, coupled with severe financial problems relating to Western and Zairian support for

⁷⁷¹ Ibid, 5

⁷⁷² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Note à l'intention de Monsieur l'Ambassadeur de France, "Problèmes relatifs au retrait de la Force Inter Africaine," from French military attaché, Kinshasa, 24.4.1979, p. 2

⁷⁷³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "Note à l'intention de Monsieur l'Ambassadeur de France: "Maintien au Shaba de la Force Inter-Africain," from Colonel Larzul, Attaché des forces armées in Zaire, 04.10.1978, p.3

⁷⁷⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "Fiche sur la relève de la Force Interafricaine," from Colonel Yves Gras, Chef de la Mission Militaire, 26.8.1978.

⁷⁷⁵ JCL: CREST Database document NLC-129-1-1-6-0, "Telegram from US Embassy Brazzaville to Washington, "Das Walker Visit to Congo," June, 1979.

⁷⁷⁶ Colin Legum (ed.). *Africa Contemporary Record, 1978-1979* (New York and London, 1989), p. B579.

⁷⁷⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Note du ministère: "Sécurité au Shaba," 06.04.1979.

the IAF would, in the following months, lead its member governments to push for an early withdrawal.⁷⁷⁸

This move partly resulted from the situation of the troops of the various contingents on the ground. From the beginning of the deployment itself, questions over the nature of financing and logistical support remained unresolved. In early July, a delegation from the Moroccan Defense Ministry visited Paris in an attempt to address some of these problems. The Moroccans insisted that the French should pressure its other Western partners to ensure that the IAF would be fully equipped and financed.⁷⁷⁹ Indeed, the units suffered from a lack of serviceable vehicles and a chronic lack of spare parts. The Moroccan delegation made it clear to French defense officials that since the IAF resulted from a French initiative, the French should take charge of solving these problems.⁷⁸⁰

Colonel Gras, on the other hand, felt that IAF complaints were largely unjustified. According to Gras, French instructors could successfully train the full Zairian airborne brigade of some 3,000 men by May 1979, but only if the resources requested by the French Military Mission were provided. However, the difference in resources allocated to the IAF relative to those provided to the French training mission was “disproportionately” large. Gras suggested that, “Une telle politique risque de prolonger le séjour de la F.I.A. [IAF]”⁷⁸¹ The Belgians had not even started their training mission yet, which aimed to prepare a Zairian infantry brigade within the same timeframe.⁷⁸²

Lack of effective coordination between Zaire’s Western backers contributed to these problems of resource allocation and funding for the IAF and the FAZ training programs. In early August, Yves Vercauteren, the Belgian chargé d’affaires in Paris complained about the lack of coordination between the “Western Five.” In a discussion with French military officials and diplomats at the Quai, he noted that the interested powers had not created a coordination mechanism during their June meeting. Consequently, France was supposed to coordinate requests of the various African contingents in Shaba to participating Western governments. However, either France had failed in this role, or participating African states did not use France as a unique interlocutor since they made financial and logistical requests to various state parties

⁷⁷⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram from Ross to Paris, “Eventualité d’un retrait du contingent marocain,” 29.11.1978, p. 2.

⁷⁷⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Note du ministre de la défense à Monsieur le Président de la République, 13.07.1978, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁸¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Note from Gras to Paris, “Fiche sur la relève de la force interafricaine,” 26.08.1978, p. 1.

⁷⁸² Ibid. 2.

on a bilateral basis. Vercauteren wondered if this resulted from a misunderstanding over France's role, and suggested, on behalf of his government, that the Western states hold a new meeting to iron out this question, as well as to discuss the broader issue of the future of the IAF.⁷⁸³

In this vein, French, American, German, British, and Belgian officials agreed to a meeting in Paris to evaluate Zaire's situation in the four months following Kolwezi. French officials wanted to give the Zairian government responsibility for coordinating assistance requests to the five powers, rather than themselves playing this coordinating role.⁷⁸⁴ However the meeting, held in secret on September 18, determined that all material requests would occur bilaterally, and that the five Western countries would exchange information through normal diplomatic channels.⁷⁸⁵ Though less efficient, this allowed countries like the United States to avoid making a stronger commitment to the IAF through a more formal coordination mechanism.

In an October report to André Ross, French military attaché Colonel Larzul noted that, so far the IAF had succeeded in its mission. He waxed poetic about the fact that the IAF deployment had, "[...] rassemblé, fait assez exceptionnel dans l'histoire africaine, depuis l'indépendance des Etats, des unités marocaines et des unités noires, de races, d'ethnies et de mentalités différentes mais dans une même fraternité d'armes."⁷⁸⁶ However, serious problems loomed on the horizon. The contributing countries would soon need to relieve their troops in one way or another. As other observers had noted, no existing unit of the FAZ could relieve any IAF units. According to Larzul, "Tous les renseignements qui nous proviennent du SHABA font état non seulement de la valeur nulle des unités des F.A.Z. [...] mais encore de leur côté négatif (vol, pillage, etc..) Il vaudrait mieux qu'au SHABA, les F.A.Z. n'existent plus sauf pour garder les zones [...] qui ont une importance stratégique secondaire."⁷⁸⁷ Unfortunately, according to Larzul, the FAZ would not have any operational units prepared before the summer of the following year.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, Fiche, "A/s. Force interafricaine-démarche du Chargé d'affaires de Belgique," 11.08.1978.

⁷⁸⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, Fiche N. 2, "A/s. Situation au Shaba," 14.09.1978, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Réunion du 18 septembre sur le Zaïre," 19.09.1978, p. 2.

⁷⁸⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "Note à l'intention de Monsieur l'Ambassadeur de France, 'Maintien au SHABA de la Force Inter-Africain,'" 04.10.1978 p. 2.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid. emphasis in the original text.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid. 3

This state of unreadiness distressed officials from participating African countries. Togolese leader Gnassingbé Eyadéma complained to French Ambassador Bertrand Desmazières that the FAZ example might have “pernicious” effects on his own troops. This encouraged him to envisage soon withdrawing the small Togolese contingent.⁷⁸⁹ Furthermore, contrary to Larzul’s panegyrics, serious tensions marred relations between the different IAF units, particularly between the Moroccans and the rest. Colonel Larzul noted that the Moroccans in Lubumbashi had become very integrated within the expatriate community. Local expatriate organizations, clubs, and families frequently invited Moroccan officers to their events and homes. They conducted a number of effective reconnaissance operations towards the Zambian frontier, and even crossed it on occasion. Generally, their presence seemed to inspire confidence among the Europeans. However, these same officers and men had virtually no contact with the local Zairian population who apparently feared them.⁷⁹⁰

Senegalese Colonel N’doye, commander of the Kolwezi garrison, visited Larzul and Gras, a personal friend, in Kinshasa in mid-October. There, he harshly criticized the conduct of the Moroccans, particularly Loubaris. According to N’doye, the Moroccan troops nominally under his command in Kolwezi refused to follow his orders. His vehicles lacked spare parts and Loubaris refused to help him with resupply. While, in N’doye’s view, his Senegalese unit had become close to and well integrated within Kolwezi’s Zairian population, the Moroccans remained apart. He felt completely powerless and blamed Loubaris for his troubles. N’doye made it clear that he would report his frustration to military authorities in Dakar. Larzul concluded, “Officier compétent, dynamique et parfaitement apte à remplir sa mission, le Colonel N’DOYE souffre de la dépendance de l’Etat-major marocain.”⁷⁹¹

Problems within the IAF percolated to the rank and file. A later report from the Ivoirian medical unit on the state of morale among the IAF troops highlighted the necessity of relief. The report requested that the home governments do more to look after their soldiers, noting, “Si la ‘dignité’ et le ‘respect des autres’ caractérisent toujours notre mission, il n’en reste pas moins vrai que nous nous heurtons continuellement à un grand nombre de difficultés, difficultés qui atteignent profondément le moral des hommes [...]”⁷⁹² The report explained

⁷⁸⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Telegram from Desmazières to Paris, “Entretien avec le président Eyadéma,” 11.10.1978.

⁷⁹⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 24, 24/1, Note from Larzul to Ross, untitled, 20.10.1978, p. 3.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid. 4.

⁷⁹² MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, “IIIème rapport moral du Contingent médical militaire du SHABA,” from Dr. Lt. Colonel ATIN ORIA, head of the Ivoirian Military Medical Contingent in Shaba to the Ivoirian Minister of Defense, 02.02.1979 p. 1.

that many of their vehicles no longer functioned and the mission lacked tarpaulins to waterproof crucial supplies.⁷⁹³ Despite explaining this situation several times before, no one had done anything about it. Furthermore, the price increases resulting from the devaluation of the Zaire had a direct impact on the soldiers' standards of living. These problems obviously translated into a worsening morale. The report noted increasing incidents of indiscipline, nervous breakdowns, and, in the Moroccan contingent, even suicides.⁷⁹⁴

These deteriorating conditions may have contributed to the rumors that Moroccan officers began to spread about the imminent departure of their force in October 1978. Such declarations sowed panic among Shaba's expatriate population, who still very much feared the consequences of an IAF withdrawal.⁷⁹⁵ André Ross shared these fears. In a late November handwritten note to René Journiac, he noted that the Moroccans had declared that they intended to leave Shaba at the end of the year. He also referred to rumors that the Senegalese had made similar moves. He felt that these might be bluffs on the part of the two countries in order to obtain more financial support from the West. Nonetheless, a Moroccan retreat would have "most serious" consequences for Zaire. Furthermore, French and Belgian efforts at retraining FAZ units had suffered serious delays. Also, Angola had apparently failed to disarm all the Katangan Gendarmes, as a dissident group of the latter near the frontier threatened to cause some problems. Ross urged Journiac to do everything possible to keep the Moroccans in Shaba until at least the middle of the following year.⁷⁹⁶

In a meeting with his French, Belgian, and British colleagues in Kinshasa, American Ambassador Cutler noted that the Moroccans probably had multiple reasons to leave. However, apart from financial issues, the most important reason related to the fact that "[...] après la réconciliation de Kinshasa et de Luanda, cette force n'avait plus pour tâche de prévenir une agression extérieure, mais à assurer le maintien de l'ordre" in Shaba.⁷⁹⁷

Alarmed by the possibility of the IAF's collapse, and at the request of Belgium's Foreign Minister, Henri Simonet, France reconvened a meeting of Zaire's major Western partners on December 13. French officials at the Quai worried that without quick Western action, the withdrawal of the IAF would "replonger le pays dans l'insécurité" and cause the

⁷⁹³ Ibid. 1.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid. 2-3.

⁷⁹⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Memo from French Consul General in Lubumbashi, Pierre Guth, to the French Embassy, Kinshasa, "Départ des troupes marocaines," 04.10.1978.

⁷⁹⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Letter from André Ross to René Journiac, 25.11.1978

⁷⁹⁷ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram from Ross to Paris, "Eventualité d'un retrait du contingent marocain," 29.11.1978.

remaining 7,000 European expatriates in the province to leave. This would probably incapacitate Shaba's mines and thus compromise the regime's recovery.⁷⁹⁸

The representatives from the four other Western powers present at the meeting agreed with this analysis. Furthermore, they agreed that the IAF should continue to operate until at least mid-1979 when the first capable FAZ units would theoretically become operational. Thus it became urgent that the Western Five begin negotiations with Senegal and Morocco in order to convince them to maintain their deployments.⁷⁹⁹ However, no one, apart from Belgian policymakers, seemed particularly interested in augmenting their financial commitments to the mission.⁸⁰⁰ French officials found American reluctance particularly galling.

Indeed, American officials found an interesting and relatively cost-free method of prolonging the IAF's deployment. As Senegal and Morocco made repeated requests for their troops' repatriation, the American administration simply refused to comply. The Americans considered these requests "inopportune" and wanted the troops to stay for fear of a power vacuum.⁸⁰¹ This left the troops stranded in Shaba for neither country had the transport capacity to extract them.

In fact, this also had much to do with American desires to place as much responsibility for the Shaba operation on the African states themselves, and on their French and Belgian backers.⁸⁰² One of the reasons for this was financial. The Carter administration worked under rather stringent budgetary restraints which limited the amount of assistance it could provide for the IAF.⁸⁰³ Bilateral foreign military aid could not go to states without specific earmarks for this kind of assistance.⁸⁰⁴ In any case, the US had already spent 13 million dollars on their contribution to the airlift during Shaba II and had granted 11 million dollars of Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credits to Zaire in 1978 which Mobutu could use to support the IAF.⁸⁰⁵

Another reason for American reticence, however, lay in their perception of Mobutu as a possibly hopeless case. Despite Mobutu's reconciliation with Neto, the State Department

⁷⁹⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, Note pour le ministre, "Affaire du Zaïre," 01.12.1978, p. 1.

⁷⁹⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Réunion du 13 décembre sur le Zaïre," 14.12.1978, p. 1.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid. 2.

⁸⁰¹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram: "Force d'intervention au Zaïre" from French Embassy Lomé to Paris, 19.12.1978.

⁸⁰² JCL: CREST Database document NLC-15-119-6-8-0 Department of State Briefing Paper, "Support for the Inter-African Force in Shaba," 29.12.1978, p.1.

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, Telegram: "Réunion du 13 décembre sur le Zaïre" from French Embassy in Washington to Paris, 12.12.1978

⁸⁰⁵ JCL: CREST Database document NLC-15-119-6-8-0 Department of State Briefing Paper, "Support for the Inter-African Force in Shaba," 29.12.1978, p.2.

reported that “Shabans returning from Angola under Mobutu’s amnesty are being arrested, and the necessary measures have not been taken to achieve military reform [...] Meanwhile, Mobutu’s army in Shaba continues to exhibit an almost total lack of discipline.”⁸⁰⁶ American officials also felt that the pressure they put on the “Western Five,” Zaire, and IAF-participating countries, had more or less paid off. They noted that the French had begun negotiating with Senegal over its financial and logistical needs, and that Mobutu had put a C-130 transport aircraft at the disposal of the mission.⁸⁰⁷

France had indeed worked out a deal with Senegal. In exchange for five million dollars’ worth of military equipment for Senegalese army units in Dakar, Senegal agreed to postpone its request for repatriation.⁸⁰⁸ Morocco, on the other hand, posed more problems. King Hassan explained to his French interlocutors that Kuwaiti and Saudi subsidies went to the Moroccan military in general, and not to the IAF mission. Hassan may also have intended to use a Moroccan withdrawal as blackmail in order to get more Western support for his operations in the Western Sahara.⁸⁰⁹ Although he, apparently grudgingly, agreed to prolong his force’s presence in Shaba, the threat of Moroccan withdrawal weighed heavily on the mission over the next months.⁸¹⁰

French officials had also managed to convince the West German government to finance one fifth of the operational costs⁸¹¹ and the Belgian government agreed to provide more assistance.⁸¹² This only delayed the inevitable however. Rapidly deployed without a specific mandate, nor an appropriate finance mechanism, the IAF could only serve as a temporary measure while Zaire and its allies worked out a more sustainable security strategy. This longer-term solution essentially rested upon the Franco-Belgian efforts to train an “elite” force to serve as the core of a new and improved Zairian army capable of defending their country.

By March 1979, the Moroccans made it clear that they planned to leave. After an absence of several weeks, the IAF Commander, Colonel-Major Loubaris, returned to Shaba and called a meeting of all the IAF contingent heads. He handed each of them a letter, addressed to their respective heads of state from King Hassan II. The letter explained that, in

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid. 1-2.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, “IAF et Sommet de la GUADELOUPE,” handwritten note, 13.12.1978.

⁸⁰⁹ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force Africaine, “Départ de la Force Interafricaine,” Memo from Pierre Guth, French Consul in Lubumbashi to Kinshasa Embassy, 30.3.1979 p. 2.

⁸¹⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, “La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba--bilan” Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 06.09.1979, p. 8.

⁸¹¹ Ibid. 6.

⁸¹² Ibid.

Morocco's view, Shaba was secure, and the FAZ ready to take the place of the IAF. He no longer saw a reason for the continued presence of the mission in Zaire.⁸¹³ Hassan had also sent a letter to Mobutu announcing his decision, and asking for Mobutu's permission to withdrawal.⁸¹⁴

Mobutu negotiated an agreement with Morocco and the other contingents. The IAF would conduct a phased withdrawal over a three month period from July to September 1979.⁸¹⁵ The newly trained FAZ infantry units would gradually replace the peacekeepers as they left. French officials still worried that this retreat could cause an unacceptable political and military vacuum in the region.⁸¹⁶ Thus, they began to look for a way to again reassure the expatriates, and provide some deterrent element to Shaba security that could bolster the presence of the newly trained, though untried, FAZ units.

As the IAF began its withdrawal, French officers began to work out details of a joint Franco-Zairian military exercise to take place in Shaba shortly after the last IAF units had departed. Colonel Larzul, explained that this exercise:

[...] n'aura véritablement d'effet dissuasif sur les éléments rebelles encore existants au SHABA, que si elle est conçue et menée avec rigueur, précision et rapidité; tel est le but recherché dans certaines manœuvres franco-africaines où l'ennemi est imaginaire. Ici, là où les compagnies françaises parachutistes engagée évolueront en zone opérationnelle avec réactions ponctuelles possibles d'un ennemi difficile à évaluer mais présent dans les cités et susceptible de mener des actions de guérilla.⁸¹⁷

This joint exercise, named "Opération Porc-épic" (Operation Porcupine) aimed at complementing the deployment of the new Zairian units, and serve as a warning to future interlopers that France could intervene again if necessary.⁸¹⁸ Although it only involved a relatively small number of French units, it also meant to demonstrate French capacities to project force and provide security.⁸¹⁹

The French Consul General in Lubumbashi, Pierre Guth, noted the effect that the "Porc-Epic" exercise had on the local population. He asserted: "L'opinion est unanime: en participant à ces manœuvres, notre Gouvernement a confirmé son soutien absolu au Président MOBUTU

⁸¹³ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force Africaine, "Départ de la Force Interafricaine," Memo from Pierre Guth, French Consul in Lubumbashi to Kinshasa Embassy, 30.3.1979 p. 1.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid.

⁸¹⁵ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "La Force Inter Africaine au Shaba--bilan" Kinshasa Embassy report on the IAF, 6.9.1979 p. 9.

⁸¹⁶ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Force I. Africaine et aide militaire, "Fiche à l'intention de l'Ambassadeur de France, 'Problèmes relatifs au retrait de la Force Inter Africaine,' " from Colonel Larzul, Attaché des forces armées in Zaire, 24.04.1979 p. 6.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid. 5 (emphasis in the text).

⁸¹⁸ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier "Manoeuvres Zaïro-Françaises, 'Opération Porc-Epic,' Septembre 1979," 12-19.9.1979.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

et à son régime. La démonstration a été faite qu'en cas de besoin, la France interviendrait comme en 1977 et 1978.”⁸²⁰

However, analyzing more closely the impact of these maneuvers, Guth made the point that one had to separate expatriate opinion from the Zairians. Of course, the European expatriates felt reassured by this demonstration of force. Apart from those few supporters of Mobutu, however, the Zairian response substantially differed. According to Guth, “Pour les Zaïrois, à part les militants, tous regrettent notre soutien. Pour eux, irréductibles, l'action de notre pays, quelle qu'en soit la forme, ne peut que consolider un régime qui, à leur avis, fait le malheur du peuple.”⁸²¹ Indeed, some of the local population had suffered so much trauma in the previous months and years that the “Porc-Epic” exercise itself scared communities living along the Zambian frontier into fleeing their villages.⁸²²

African Diplomacy

While the IAF represented the first all-African peace enforcement operation, its existence provoked serious divisions in African diplomacy. The years 1977-1979 represented a time of increased external (i.e. non-African) military interventions on the African continent. The high levels of French and Cuban soldiers and “advisors,” as well as a large Soviet presence, ensured that the question of outside intervention lay at the core of debates at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit in Khartoum in mid-July 1978. However, it was the Franco-Belgian intervention in Kolwezi and subsequent efforts behind the IAF which provoked the most concerns.⁸²³

Nigerian scholar, Olajide Aluko, lamented that, “one can see that the effects of African response to external intervention in Africa have been insignificant. External interventions in the affairs of the continent have continued.”⁸²⁴ The historical record, however, does not completely bear out this pessimism. Although the OAU could develop little in the way of a concrete African response to foreign military interventionism, it did serve as a powerful tool

⁸²⁰ MAE Nantes Kinshasa Ambassade, Carton 51, Dossier Manoeuvres Zaïro-Françaises, ‘Opération Porc-Epic,’ Septembre 1979, Report from Guth to Kinshasa Embassy, “Manœuvres franco-zaïroises,” 04.10.1979, p. 1.

⁸²¹ Ibid. 2.

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ Zdenek Červenka and Colin Legum. “The Organization of African Unity in 1978 : The Challenge of Foreign Intervention,” in Legum, Colin (ed.). *Africa Contemporary Record, 1978-1979* (New York and London, 1989), p. A32.

⁸²⁴ Olajide Aluko. “African Response to External Intervention in Africa since Angola,” *African Affairs*, 80:319 (Apr., 1981), pp.159-179, p. 174-175.

for delegitimizing French designs to create a Pan-African security force outside of the OAU framework.

As early as the April 1977 Franco-African Summit held in Dakar, several “moderate” African states closely tied to France, raised the question of receiving French support for the creation of an Inter-African military force composed of Francophone countries.⁸²⁵ This suggestion, coming at the height of the first Shaba crisis, responded to increasing fears of foreign, particularly communist, interventionism. Giscard declared that “Tout Etat africain a droit à la sécurité à l’intérieur de ses frontières, quelles que soient ses opinions politiques.”⁸²⁶

Within days of the aftermath of the Kolwezi events, Paris hosted the Fifth Franco-African Summit. Clearly, security and the threats of external intervention lay at the heart of the Summit’s discussions. At this same Summit where France and Zaire managed to cobble together the IAF, Giscard, without a hint of irony, solemnly declared, “Nous devons refuser que la politique des blocs ne ravage l’Afrique.”⁸²⁷ Togolese leader, Gnassingbé Eyadéma went even further and denounced, “la violence aveugle, l’immixtion brutale des puissances étrangères dans les affaires de pays souverains [...]”⁸²⁸ Omar Bongo, the President of Gabon, suggested the creation of a common military assistance pact.⁸²⁹

French officials, enthusiastic about this idea, wanted American support for the initiative. They brought up the idea of a Pan-African Force with several American diplomats shortly after the Summit meeting. However, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, David Newsom, in Paris for consultations on the IAF, had instructions to “pour cold water on the idea.”⁸³⁰ The Americans had no desire to get involved in an initiative that sounded like another appendage to French neocolonialism.

In a statement, presumably sent to a number of francophone African capitals, the Americans outlined their position on the issue of the Pan-African Force:

As we have told our Congress and stated publicly, our support of African forces is limited to the immediate crisis situation in Shaba, and we have no thought of support for an African mutual defense force. Any wider

⁸²⁵ Červenka and Legum, A32.

⁸²⁶ “La montée des périls en Afrique (4ème sommet, Dakar, 1977),” website of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/afrique_1063/sommets-afrique-france_326/montee-perils-afrique-4eme-sommet-dakar-1977_1566.html, accessed on 9 March, 2011.

⁸²⁷ “Sécurité et développement (5ème sommet, Paris, 1978)” website of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/afrique_1063/sommets-afrique-france_326/securite-developpement-5eme-sommet-paris-1978_1567.html accessed on 9 March, 2011.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

⁸³⁰ JCL: White House Central File, Box CO-67: Zaire, Folder: [CO 177 Executive 1/20/77-1/20/81], Document (number unknown), Memorandum from Tom Thornton to David Aaron, “O’Neil Briefing,” Zaire talking points 05.06.1978 p. 3.

involvement by us would require high level policy decisions and close consultations with our African and European friends, as well as with the American Congress.⁸³¹

Regardless of American desires to distance themselves from French initiatives, the deployment of the IAF in Zaire served clear Western interests and saved Mobutu's crumbling authoritarian regime. This provoked significant divisions among African countries.

It infuriated Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere. On June 1 he summoned the American chargé d'affaires. He had also summoned the UK High Commissioner and the West German Ambassador the previous day. The American Embassy reported that Nyerere, "would have great suspicions about a Western-backed force in Shaba, especially if French involved [...] Nyerere wanted to warn us off altogether and would regard Western-backed military presence in Shaba as a dangerous first step in collaborating with France in what he would consider the military re-colonization of Africa." Although Nyerere supported the idea of territorial integrity, his concern seemed "overshadowed in this case by his concern that Western intervention to prop up Mobutu's regime (which he sees as hopelessly corrupt) would be a giant step backward for the African revolution."⁸³²

Other African leaders had serious suspicions of French motives. Nigeria, a country which often saw France as a competitor for influence, denounced Western intervention in Zaire. However, conscious of dangers to territorial integrity, a concept enshrined in the Charter of the OAU, Nigerian officials also attacked the Cuban and Soviet presence in Africa. Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, attacked the West and the East in equal measure:

The Soviets should, therefore, see it to be in their interest not to seek to perpetually maintain their presence in Africa, even after the purpose for which they were invited has been achieved. This way they run the risk of being dubbed a new imperial power as indeed they are already being called, even by those with whom they have had long association. Let the Soviets and their collaborators heed this timely counsel. To the Western powers I say [...] Paratroop drops in the twentieth century are no more acceptable to us than the gunboats of the last century were to our ancestors. Convening conferences in Europe and America to decide the fate of Africa raises too many ugly specters which should best be forgotten, both in our and in the Europeans' interests.⁸³³

Ultimately the Nigerian and Tanzanian positions prevailed in the OAU Conference's final resolution on the question of the Inter-African Force as drafted by the Council of Ministers. The "Resolution on the Inter-African Military Force of Intervention," specifically attacks the

⁸³¹ Archives Minaffet Rwanda: Cote 3.3.4.19 Coopération Rwando-Congolais dans les domaines : Politique, Comptabilité, Diplomatie, Education, Sécurité, 1967-1996, "Aide-Memoire to Rwandan Government from United States Government on Shaba II," 14.06.1978.

⁸³² JCL: CREST Database Document NLC-16-19-1-20-1, Telegram from US Embassy Dar es Salaam to Washington, "Consultations on Recovery Effort for Zaire," 02.06.1978.

⁸³³ Obasanjo Speech at OAU Khartoum Conference, cited in Červenka and Legum, A35.

French and Francophone states' proposal to establish a Pan-African military force outside of the authority of the OAU. The resolution:

1. Affirms that Africa's defence and security are the exclusive responsibility of the Africans;
2. Solemnly declares that the creation of an Inter-African force can be envisaged only within the context of the OAU's objectives and priorities for the elimination of the racist minority regimes of Southern Africa, the total liberation of the continent, and the safeguarding of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States.
3. Calls for the reactivation of the OAU Defence Commission to consider the desirability of establishing an Inter-African Military Force under the aegis of the OAU.⁸³⁴

This clear position of the OAU against any external Pan-African defense force helped to "pour cold water" over the idea. Countries originally interested in the idea of a Francophone security force suddenly became more hesitant. Before a meeting of the OAU's newly reactivated Defense Commission in April 1979, the Rwandan Foreign Ministry recommended prudence to its delegation due to "l'amertume et [...] la réprobation générale qu'a provoquées l'initiative de la création d'une force de sécurité de composition hétérogène et d'émanation étrangère" had aroused among many African countries.⁸³⁵ Indeed, the OAU had laid an obstacle in the path of French efforts to circumvent it.

This became clearer during the proceedings of the 6th annual Franco-African Summit held in Kigali, Rwanda. During the preparatory ministerial meeting in late April 1979, the question of African security provoked a heated debate among the delegates. Several delegates representing some of the more "radical" states such as Benin, Congo, and Mali, opposed the idea of placing the question of African security on the Summit's agenda. According to them, the Franco-African Summit was not the appropriate body to debate these issues since the OAU had created its own commission to discuss the matter.⁸³⁶ Also, they argued that the sensitive nature of the question would undermine African unity and would divide the Summit meeting.⁸³⁷

However, during the Franco-African Summit the following month, the French and African Heads of State only briefly discussed the matter. Senegalese President, Léopold Sédar Senghor noted that the idea of a Pan-African force had originated within the OAU. Unfortunately, he noted, the OAU suffered from too many ideological divisions for such a force to become practical or effective. Thus, Senghor concluded, Africans should abandon the

⁸³⁴ "On an Inter-African Military Force of Intervention," CM/Res. 635 (XXXI) in Legum, Colin (ed.). *Africa Contemporary Record, 1978-1979* (New York and London, 1989), p. C16.

⁸³⁵ Archives Minaffet Rwanda : Cote 3.8.2.0097 Correspondances relatives à l'OUA, 1979, "Mémoire relatif à la réunion de la commission de la défense de l'OUA du 21 au 25 avril 1979 à Addis-Abeba," undated, 1979.

⁸³⁶ Archives Minaffet Rwanda: Cote 3.10.8.0005 Sommet : Conférence Franco-Africaine, OCAM, Sommet régionale de l'Afrique Centrale et Orientale 1979-1991, VI^{ème} Conférence Franco-Africaine : Réunion préparatoire du Conseil des Ministres, Kigali du 24 au 26 avril, 1979, "Rapport sur les travaux du Conseil des Ministres," p. 15.

⁸³⁷ Ibid.

idea of a Pan-African force and instead rely upon “security solidarity.” After a brief discussion, the Summit decided to highlight, “la nécessité de la sécurité pour le développement économique des pays africains. Celle-ci devra être assurée dans le cadre des solidarités bilatérales.”⁸³⁸ The Francophone Pan-African force had died, but “bilateral solidarity” could only mean one thing: reliance upon France. The legacy of this “solidarity” has persisted over the decades.

⁸³⁸ Archives Minaffet Rwanda: Cote 3.10.8.0005 Sommet : Conférence Franco-Africaine, OCAM, Sommet régionale de l’Afrique Centrale et Orientale 1979-1991, VIe Conférence Franco-Africaine, Sommet, Kigali, 21-22 Mai 1979 : “Rapport sur les travaux du sommet,” p.8.

Conclusions: The “Cuba of the West”?

Essentially this section has argued that leading French policymakers saw Zaire as an important component of France’s broader security interests in Africa in the late 1970s. The growing influence of the Cold War in African politics during this time inspired fears among French policymakers and their African allies of an all-embracing communist threat. In this context, Zaire constituted a “frontline state” within broader framework of the Angolan conflict. Zaire’s size, natural wealth, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, and the weight of its history made it particularly vulnerable to outside interference and internal instability. As this section has attempted to demonstrate, Mobutu himself played a significant role in reinforcing this kind of worldview among French policymakers. Thus, when rebels supposedly linked to Cuba invaded Shaba province and threatened the survival of Mobutu’s regime, Giscard and other French policymakers felt compelled to act. This action took on a longer-term commitment to Zaire’s (really Mobutu’s) security when they realized that Mobutu’s regime was incapable of performing the job by itself.

Although the rescue of Europeans in Kolwezi received much favorable press, its underlying political motives and French support for such an unsavory regime did provoke significant criticism. Shortly after the Kolwezi intervention, Socialist Party leader and future French President François Mitterrand attacked Giscard’s interventionist African policies for making France the “Cuba of the West.”⁸³⁹ These criticisms found a large echo among the French left. However, it also attracted anger from the Gaullist right, which feared that France had become “NATO’s Gendarme” and worried about a “NATO-ization” of French policy.⁸⁴⁰ They further criticized Giscard for returning to a hardened Cold War logic.⁸⁴¹

These arguments had some merit. Of non-African countries, only Cuba had a stronger military presence than France on the continent. Furthermore, in Zaire, France cooperated with major NATO allies who coordinated on logistical, financial, and diplomatic support for the IAF. The previous administrations of Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou often viewed the Americans as a more serious threat to French interests than supposed communist designs in Africa.⁸⁴² However, during Giscard’s administration the East-West logic of the Cold War

⁸³⁹ *Le Monde* 13.06.1978.

⁸⁴⁰ Lellouche and Moisi. “French Policy in Africa,” 108-110.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴² see Pierre-Michel Durand. *L’Afrique et les relations franco-américaines des années soixante: Aux origines de l’obsession américaine*. Paris, France : l’Harmattan, 2007.

took center stage in French thinking about Zaire. America's partial withdrawal from the continent following its Angolan debacle left France as the sole Western power with major strategic interests in Africa. Although not formally part of NATO's military apparatus, France fought its own Cold War battles in the grand tradition of the Alliance. Like Cuba, France neither acted on the behalf nor at the behest of its superpower ally. However, both Paris and Havana required superpower assistance for certain logistical and financial aspects of their operations. Also, like Cuba, France could not always control or even substantially influence the actions of its African "client." Rather than acting as proxies of their superpower patrons, both French and Cuban policymakers acted with their own goals in mind. Nonetheless these tended to correspond with the broader aims and interest of their ideological "bloc" in the Cold War struggle. For these reasons, Mitterrand's observation was perhaps more pertinent than even he may have realized.

The first "intervention," consisting of the behind-the-scenes support for Mobutu's defense against the Katangans combined with the actual deployment of Moroccan troops, stemmed from purely geopolitical considerations. Zaire had become much more important to France as a regional power, and Shaba constituted its economic center. Threats to Zaire's stability would have had immeasurable consequences on regional politics, not to mention easy access to important strategic resources. Also, the existence of Angola as a major new revolutionary power on its borders, heavily supported by Cuba and the Soviet Union, made Zaire's stability all the more important for French policymakers.

The second Shaba invasion provoked a direct French military intervention because French policymakers perceived the situation as even more serious than the previous year. Significantly increased Soviet and Cuban intervention on the continent stoked fears of their intentions towards Zaire. Of course, the threats to the lives of French and other European expatriates in Kolwezi also played an important role in official French thinking. However, the chronology of planning and the fact that the intervention aimed at securing Shaba rather than evacuating its citizens points to the deeper political motives behind the intervention. Indeed, Ross's and Gras's various communications attest to this conclusion. Furthermore, the deployment of the IAF followed by highly public Franco-Zairian military exercises constituted a very visible prolongation of France's commitment.

Several other themes emerge from this story as well. The mutual attempts by French and African governments to cajole and influence the policies of one another highlights an

interesting aspect of the French role. By making themselves indispensable to French security interests, states like Morocco and Senegal could extract certain concessions from France and influence its policies. African states also managed to sabotage French efforts at building a regional security architecture by attacking its legitimacy and making it difficult for even the most sympathetic of France's African allies to sign on to the project. Mobutu himself effectively used his position as a necessary pillar of French, and more broadly Western, security policy to ensure that he could avoid making the kinds of substantial reforms demanded of him.

Zbigniew Brzezinski's military assistant in the National Security Council, Brigadier General William Odom, harshly criticized multinational efforts at reforming Zaire. For Odom, the efforts to establish expatriate control over the economy and to improve the FAZ seemed both counterproductive and dangerous. He angrily noted that, "The traditional name for this was 'Colonialism.'"⁸⁴³ He thought that the "logical contradictions" in what the West was trying to achieve in Zaire would "condemn them to disaster if implemented by the United States."⁸⁴⁴ As Zaire's subsequent history has shown, Odom may have been right.

In any case, the real tragedy of these policies lay in their narrow visions of security. As Zaire observer Michael Schatzberg noted, "the security of the state had nothing whatever in common with the security of its people. If anything, it could be argued that in saving Mobutu these interventions substantially decreased the security of ordinary Zairians."⁸⁴⁵ Of course, the definition of "security" depends upon one's perspective. For French policymakers, this meant a "stable" Zaire headed by a friendly regime which protected their expatriates while preventing dangerous communist expansion into other parts of Africa. Furthermore, committing to the security of Mobutu's regime with overt military force also strengthened French bonds with other francophone leaders on the continent. Leaders like Senghor, Bongo, and Houphouët-Boigny could sleep more safely at night knowing that France protected its own.⁸⁴⁶ Revealingly, Giscard later bragged to Jimmy Carter that the West had not only saved Zaire from disintegration, but that it had saved all of Africa as well.⁸⁴⁷ Mobutu was perhaps the biggest

⁸⁴³ JCL: Donated Historical Material: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Box 28 [Meetings—SCC 50: 1/9/78 through SCC 100: 8/10/78], Folder [Meetings—SCC 80: 5/26/1978], Document 1D, Memo from William Odom to Brzezinski and Aaron, "State Paper on 'Zaire: Options After Shaba II,'" 25.5.1978, p. 1.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 2.

⁸⁴⁵ Michael G. Schatzberg. 1989. "Military Intervention and the Myth of Collective Security: The Case of Zaïre". *Journal of Modern African Studies*. 272: 315-340, p. 335.

⁸⁴⁶ Ironically, the same month that the IAF completed its withdrawal, France overthrew Jean Bedel Bokassa in the Central African Republic. This however happened partially at the request of its other francophone African allies.

⁸⁴⁷ JCL: CREST Database document NLC-128-4-12-3-9, Carter's personal notes from the Guadeloupe Summit, 06.01.1979, p. 15.

beneficiary of this newly established “security.” He emerged from the Shaba wars stronger than ever, free to continue running his country into the ground as he saw fit.

Part II: Kidnappings, Rebellions, and War: France in Chad, 1974-1981

Chapter I: Introduction and Background

Unlike in Zaire, France had a military presence in Chad dating from its conquest of the Lake Chad region in 1900. Six decades of colonial administration followed by fourteen years of substantial economic and military presence in Chad preceded Giscard's assumption of the French presidency in May 1974. However, French policy in Chad during Giscard's *septennat* amply demonstrated the limits of Paris' political influence and military capabilities. Despite Foreign Minister Louis de Guiringaud boast that in Africa France could, "avec 500 hommes, changer le cours de l'Histoire,"⁸⁴⁸ French policymakers were unable to generate an outcome favorable to their perceived interests during Chad's civil wars.

During Giscard's years in office, Chad's political situation evolved considerably. The aftereffects of the April 1974 kidnapping of French nationals by rebels from a faction of the *Front de Liberation Nationale du Tchad* (Frolinat) in Northern Chad, later known as the "Claustre Affair" led to a major deterioration of French relations with the Chadian regime, a coup d'état, and an eventual intensification and regionalization of the country's ongoing civil war. French diplomacy contributed to this process by supporting, at various points, almost every major competing faction in the conflict in its efforts to stabilize the country. Giscard's 1978 decision to send a major expeditionary force to Chad failed to create the necessary conditions for peacemaking. By early 1980, the increasing political fragmentation of Chad, combined with a heightened level of involvement by regional actors, particularly Nigeria and Libya, overwhelmed French efforts to find a diplomatic solution, and French forces were forced to withdraw. Subsequent fighting between rebel factions in the Chadian capital, N'Djamena triggered a major Libyan military intervention. As Giscard left office after his bitter election defeat in May 1981, France's 80 year presence in Chad had almost completely disappeared and was replaced by a Libyan military occupation of much of the country.

The history of France's role in these events is relevant for a number of reasons. Gradual French abandonment of support for the Chadian regime was not matched with success in efforts at managing the end of the civil war and fostering political reconciliation. Instead, this period marked the emergence of what a number of scholars have described as "warlordism," based on the example of the Chinese civil war from 1916 to 1928.⁸⁴⁹ While this study has no intention

⁸⁴⁸ "Giscard l'Africain," *L'Express*, 15.12.1979.

⁸⁴⁹ see: Robert Buijtenhuijs. *Le Frolinat et les guerres civiles du Tchad: 1977-1984*. Paris, France: Karthala, 1987, p. 331 and Roger Charlton and Roy May. "Warlords and Militarism in Chad". *Review of African Political Economy*. 1989, no. 46: 12-25.

of delving into various conceptual models of “warlord politics”⁸⁵⁰ one should note that some of the characteristics of conflict which developed in Chad during the period under discussion also appeared in later decades in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Côte d’Ivoire, Zaire/Congo and elsewhere. Political scientist William Reno describes these “warlords” as:

[...] products of the systems of political authority that they fought. Even as they fought to overthrow regimes to become their country’s new political leaders, there was little that was even vaguely reformist in their public agendas. As they fought, they just appropriated the existing instruments of political power and used them in even more intensive ways at the expense of building bureaucratic institutions.⁸⁵¹

In some respects, the Chadian conflict serves as an example of a precursor to the kinds of conflicts which became more common on the continent later on. France’s inadvertent role in becoming a faction of its own during Chad’s conflicts provides a telling example of the ways in which foreign intervention aiming at stabilization and political reconciliation can contribute to increased factional strife. When Giscard came to power in France in 1974, warlordism was far from the Chadian political landscape. Only a series of events over the following five years, partly induced by French policy, led to the nearly complete collapse of the Chadian state. This initiated an intensification of the Chadian Civil War. In the ensuing years tens of thousands of people died, and hundreds of thousands fled their homes.⁸⁵² The story of French involvement in Chad may also provide a relevant object lesson for policymakers today. In some limited respects, the situation in Mali⁸⁵³ parallels Chad’s misfortunes of the 1970s and 1980s.

As in Chad, arms flows from Libya helped to upset the balance of power in the country, turning a low-intensity conflict into a full-blown civil war which split the country into two. In both Chad and Mali, political tensions arising from the conflict weakened the ruling regime as well as the state, resulting in a coup d’état. In both cases, ransoms derived from kidnappings by rebel groups helped to finance their acquisition of weapons and patronage, allowing them

⁸⁵⁰see: William Reno. *Warlord Politics and African States*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998 and his *Warfare in Independent Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Reno develops his concept based on his research in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, but also extends his analysis to Nigeria and Zaire. Interestingly, Reno does not consider the Chadian example truly representative of his model since many factional leaders had ties to clan elders or more locally entrenched leaderships (Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa*, pp. 170-171). However, as briefly described later, this was only partly the case.

⁸⁵¹ Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa*, p. 164.

⁸⁵² See Buijtenhuijs. *Le Frolinat et les guerres civiles*, 425. Buijtenhuijs, writing in 1987, estimated the number of deaths resulting from war and war-induced famine at some 200,000, between 1979 and 1984.

⁸⁵³ As of the time of this writing: 21.11.2013. For an overview of events in Mali, see: International Crisis Group. “Mali: Eviter l’escalade,” *Rapport Afrique*, No. 189, 18.07.2012, International Crisis Group. “Mali: sécuriser, dialoguer et réformer en profondeur,” *Rapport Afrique*, No. 201, 11.04.2013, Bruce Whitehouse, “What went wrong in Mali?” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 34, No. 16, 30.08.2012, pp. 17-18, Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, Bruce Whitehouse, Dida Badi, Lotte Pelckmans, Nadia Belalimat, Bruce Hall, and Wolfram Lacher, “One Hippopotamus and the Eight Blind Analysts: A multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali: Extended Editors Cut,” found at: <http://bamakobruce.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/lecocq-mann-et-al-hippo-directors-cut.pdf> (accessed on 01.05.2013).

to recruit and assert themselves more forcefully on the national stage. Also, both conflicts arose from political and economic imbalances between poorer communities in the North and a (relatively) wealthier and more educated South which dominated government. In both cases, fighters among the Northern populations, many from pastoralist communities, benefited from high levels of mobility and vast strategic depth to mount a guerilla campaign against Southern-dominated governmental authorities.

In both cases as well the North-South dichotomy, while in some respects predating colonialism, derived its particular characteristics from a colonial reconfiguration of political organization and the imposition of new institutions. The effective conquest of the North of both countries by a collection of rebel movements engendered serious splits among rebels in both situations, threatening to complicate attempts at mediation and peacemaking. In both Chad and Mali, rebel advances towards the capital triggered a major French intervention in defense of the ailing and deficient Southern government. In Chad, the OAU and regional powers attempted to mediate the conflict as well as organize interventions on behalf of the incumbent regimes. While these efforts all failed in their objectives in Chad, today the UN has deployed the MINUSMA peacekeeping mission aimed at helping the reconstituted Malian government to stabilize the country.

As of this writing though, initial promises to reduce the French military presence have faltered as some 3,000 out of an initial 4,500 French troops from *Opération Serval* remain in the country to support the under-deployed UN mission and the Malian army.⁸⁵⁴ Even if successful, given the French experience in Chad and elsewhere, one would be tempted to cite Clausewitz's famous dictum, "In war, the result is never final."⁸⁵⁵

After an overview of the relevant historiography, source material, and historical background, this section will begin with a discussion of the "Claustre Affair." This kidnapping incident in April 1974 set the stage for a nearly three year-long series of negotiations between French officials, the rebel movement which had taken the hostages, and the Chadian government. The discussion will focus on the weight of French influence in the Chadian regime's decision-making processes and the role this played in Franco-Chadian relations over the next few years. It will also chronicle the way that these negotiations facilitated increased Libyan military and diplomatic involvement with different factions of the Chadian rebellion.

⁸⁵⁴ "L'opération Serval s'installe dans la durée," *Le Figaro*, 03.11.2013, found at, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2013/11/03/01003-20131103ARTFIG00161-l-operation-serval-s-installe-dans-la-duree.php> (accessed on 21.11.2013).

⁸⁵⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Howard, and Peter Paret (ed). *On War*. London: David Campbell, 1993, p. 89.

Ultimately, this support upset the balance of power within the country and led to a de facto partition of Chad between the North and the South after the Libyan-supported Northern rebels captured a large swath of territory from government troops. The study will then evaluate the ensuing French military intervention, “*Opération Tacaud*,” which rebel success provoked in early 1978. While French forces halted the rebel advance, the Chadian regime attempted to co-opt an anti-Libyan dissident rebel faction under Hissène Habré.

However, this arrangement survived barely six months, and by February 1979 bloody street battles broke out in the Chadian capital. This study will analyze the French response to this crisis, the subsequent “diplomatic revolution” among Chad’s rebel groups, and French involvement in regional peacemaking efforts. This discussion will focus on French debates on a withdrawal timetable, and disputes between French diplomatic and military representatives on the ground. It will also situate Giscard’s controversial September 1979 decision to overthrow Emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa, the leader of the Central African Empire, within the framework of the Chadian Civil War and French fears of Libyan expansion. The section will then examine France’s increasingly ambiguous goals in Chad and the events that led to a complete French military and diplomatic departure in May 1980. Finally, this study briefly addresses French policy debates on Chad following the French retreat and their reaction to Libya’s large military intervention which broke the military deadlock between competing rebel factions in October 1980.

This case study argues that the limits in French capacity to influence events represented, in many ways, the antithesis of French policymakers’ success in achieving their ambitions in Zaire. Unlike in Zaire, French officials did not share a dominant strategic vision of the conflict. No clear-cut Cold War considerations played a role in French thinking as they did in Zaire. Furthermore, the combined and conflicting interests of states bordering Chad, particularly Libya and Nigeria, made it difficult for French diplomacy to benefit from the francophone African “famille” in support of French objectives. This contrasted with Zaire where France managed to gain the crucial support of its African allies to help secure Mobutu’s regime. Also, unlike Zaire, Chad’s political divisions and the limited authority of its central government greatly complicated French ambitions. This translated into changing French attitudes towards different factions in the country’s conflicts. Such a policy often lacked coherence and clearly elaborated goals. This incoherence and changes in the character and nature of French commitment in Chad over time also contributed to the eventual collapse of the Chadian state and helped to reinforce the country’s regional and political fragmentation.

Historiography and Sources

Given the relative importance of French involvement in Chad in both contemporary Chadian history and for the history of French military and diplomatic engagement in Africa, surprisingly little literature exists examining this question in detail. J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins's book *Africa's Thirty Years War: Libya, Chad, and the Sudan, 1963-1993* remains the most comprehensive and widely disseminated treatment of Chad's civil wars in English.⁸⁵⁶ The book commendably inserts the conflicts in their wider regional contexts, notably with respect to political developments in Sudan and Libya from the 1960s onwards. Due to Darfur's geographical proximity on Chad's eastern border, its increasing importance as a base for Chadian rebels and Libyan expansionist policies in the 1980s, as well as its elevated international profile resulting from genocidal violence in the mid-2000's, the authors cleverly renamed an updated version of this book *Darfur: The Long Road to Disaster*.⁸⁵⁷ However, Burr and Collins' work has limited usefulness for this study. It covers a long timeframe and relies overwhelmingly on journalistic sources. This becomes particularly apparent in its treatment of French policy in Chad, which contains a number of glaring errors. Furthermore, Burr and Collins' analysis of the conflict's origins and fault lines seems reductionist at times, ascribing the, "themes that have determined the course of [...] hostilities" as a, "familiar litany of confrontation between leaders, tribes, regions, races, and religions, of nomad against farmer, of cultivator against city dweller."⁸⁵⁸ For Burr and Collins, the motives ascribed to the various actors have "changed little in these arid lands in two thousand years."⁸⁵⁹ These kind of simplified characterizations pervade the book and detract from an otherwise fascinating narrative.

A more nuanced interpretation of Chadian state disintegration comes from the late American-based South African political scientist Sam Nolutshungu. His *Limits of Anarchy: Intervention and State Formation in Chad* provides a well-structured analysis of Chad's conflicts from the early 1960s until the mid-1990s.⁸⁶⁰ Nolutshungu particularly focuses on the interplay between internal war and foreign intervention to develop a theory of the nature of the postcolonial African state. For Nolutshungu, the Chadian conflicts serve as a case study on

⁸⁵⁶ J. Millard Burr, and Robert O. Collins. *Africa's Thirty Years War: Libya, Chad, and the Sudan, 1963-1993*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1999.

⁸⁵⁷ J. Millard Burr, and Robert O. Collins. *Darfur: The Long Road to Disaster*. Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2008.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid. 1.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid. 3.

⁸⁶⁰ Sam C. Nolutshungu. *Limits of Anarchy: Intervention and State Formation in Chad*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.

this interplay which resulted in a political system where, “disorder is self-regulating and, perhaps for that reason, self-perpetuating.”⁸⁶¹ Although an important contribution to the English language literature, Nolutshungu’s narrative of Chad’s wars essentially serves as a backdrop for a broader theoretical discussion of states and conflicts in Africa, as well as the dangers of foreign intervention.

Of works in French, the late Dutch anthropologist Robert Buijtenhuijs has written the most reliable and well-informed studies of the Chadian conflict in his treatments of Chad’s Northern rebellion. A prolific author, Buijtenhuijs’ work almost constitutes a literature in itself. In addition to his many journal articles on Chad,⁸⁶² his most important works considered here are his 1978 study *Le Frolinat et les révoltes populaires du Tchad 1965-1976* and his follow-up 1987 book *Le Frolinat et les guerres civiles du Tchad: 1977-1984*.⁸⁶³ Buijtenhuijs based his research on extensive interviews with individuals at different levels within Frolinat, the umbrella organization regrouping a number of Chad’s rebel factions, as well as within the Chadian and French governments. He also benefited from a wide range of internal documents provided by various interlocutors, as well as from other sources which elucidate the politics of the rebellion, its fragmentation, government responses, and French policy.

Buijtenhuijs’ intellectual relationship to the Frolinat rebels plays a critical role in his analysis however. In his introduction to his 1978 book on the rebellion, Buijtenhuijs admits his sympathy for the self-proclaimed revolutionary movement, “malgré toutes les réserves que l’on peut avoir au sujet de cette organisation et de ses dirigeants, et que je n’avais aucune sympathie pour le régime Tombalbaye [the Chadian President]; l’avènement, en avril 1975, du régime militaire à N’Djamena n’a guère modifié mes sentiments.”⁸⁶⁴ He also explains his vision of the role of anthropologists in this context, “d’être utiles à la révolution mondiale en cours, non seulement en tant que militants politiques, mais aussi en tant qu’anthropologues.”⁸⁶⁵ Despite his sympathy for the Chadian rebellion, Buijtenhuijs does not hesitate to denounce its

⁸⁶¹ Ibid. 16.

⁸⁶² Regarding his work on Chad, see: Robert Buijtenhuijs. 2001. "The Chadian Tubu: Contemporary Nomads Who Conquered a State". *Africa*. 71, no. 1: 149-161. RB 1984. "L'art de menager la chèvre et le chou: la politique tchadienne de François Mitterrand". *Politique Africaine*. no. 16: 102-117. RB 1984. "Le frolinat à l'épreuve du pouvoir: l'échec d'une révolution africaine". *Politique Africaine*. no. 16: 15-29. RB 1981. "Guerre de guérilla et révolution en Afrique noire: les leçons du Tchad". *Politique Africaine*. no. 1: 23-33. RB. "Les interventions militaires françaises : le cas du Tchad," in Bach, Daniel C., and Anthony A. Kirk-Greene. *États et sociétés en Afrique francophone*. Paris, Fr: Economica, 1993, pp. 235-251, RB. "La rébellion tchadienne: guerre Nord-Nord ou guerre Nord-Sud ?" *Politique Africaine*. no. 33: 130-135.

⁸⁶³ Robert Buijtenhuijs. *Le Frolinat et les révoltes populaires du Tchad 1965-1976*. The Hague: Mouton, 1978. and *Le Frolinat et les guerres civiles du Tchad: 1977-1984*. Paris, France : Karthala, 1987.

⁸⁶⁴ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 10.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid. 8.

mistakes and crimes when he sees fit. Once rebel factions assumed power in early 1979, Buijtenhuijs became increasingly embittered by what he considered as a betrayal of Frolinat's original revolutionary ideals. In his following book, which he had considered naming *Le suicide d'une révolution africaine*, Buijtenhuijs became harshly critical of Frolinat and its fragmented leadership, declaring, "ce livre a été écrit par quelqu'un qui, dans un premier temps, a trop fait confiance au mouvement révolutionnaire tchadien et dont la déception, aujourd'hui, est directement proportionnelle aux espoirs passés."⁸⁶⁶

This change of perspective and willingness to recognize errors in his initial conclusions makes Buijtenhuijs' work particularly valuable. It illustrates a certain level of intellectual honesty which lends credibility to his account of a conflict in which true neutrality became difficult, if not impossible. Thus, his work provides some of the best commentary and analysis for many of the political events of the time, including French involvement in Chad. Indeed, archival sources verify many of his observations and insights.

Journalist and veteran of the French Foreign Legion, Pierre Dufour has written the only dedicated book on French military interventions in Chad.⁸⁶⁷ Dufour's book, *La France au Tchad depuis 1969* is useful in several respects for this study. As a military history, the book provides the fullest available account of the scope and character of French military operations in Chad during the period covered by this section. It also includes reproductions of a number of after-action reports and first-hand accounts. Predictably though for this kind of coffee-table sized military volume, the book gives much space to photographs, and very little to political context or analysis. This emphasis often results in erroneous dates and baseless assertions regarding the nature of Frolinat, its leadership, as well as specific facts and the chronology of foreign (non-French) involvement in Chad's conflicts. As with many such histories, the book tends to glorify the French military and its role in Chad, glosses over or ignores crimes and mistakes, and often relays official propaganda from the time period.

French political scientist Nelly Mouric has written the only thorough analysis of Giscard's Chad policy to date.⁸⁶⁸ Based on a number of interviews and research in Chad in the 1980s, often in collaboration with Robert Buijtenhuijs, Mouric introduces a number of insights on French policy that are pertinent for this section. She provides a succinct and cogent overview of French diplomacy and characterizes it as a three-step evolution exemplified by

⁸⁶⁶ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 8.

⁸⁶⁷ Pierre Dufour. *La France au Tchad depuis 1969*. Boulogne-Billancourt: ETAI, 2009.

⁸⁶⁸ Nelly Mouric. "La politique tchadienne de la France sous Valéry Giscard d'Estaing : Vers la prise en compte de la rébellion," *Politique Africaine* : N. 16, Décembre, 1984, pp. 86-101.

gradual diplomatic engagement with the rebellion. Although her article provides an excellent baseline for discussion, Mouric presents French policy as a coherent whole. The archival evidence presented in this section however, suggests a certain level of dissension among French policymakers and their respective bureaucracies, and a certain lack of coherence in policy planning.

Terry Mays' study, *Africa's First Peacekeeping Operation: The OAU in Chad 1981-1982* provides a useful analysis of African efforts at bringing peace to Chad.⁸⁶⁹ Mays' study principally focuses on African diplomacy surrounding the OAU peacekeeping operation deployed in the country from 1981 to 1982. It also covers earlier peacekeeping efforts by Nigeria and Congo-Brazzaville in 1979 and 1980 in some detail. Mays helpfully places Chad within its regional diplomatic context and provides a good description of regional consultations and peacemaking efforts. This provides a useful basis for assessing the French relationship to these regional negotiations. However, Mays heavily derives much of his narrative from journalistic and English language sources. Also, apart from a few interviews, his book references few primary source materials. For the timeframe under consideration in this section, the primary sources available as well as subsequent scholarship largely fill this gap.

Romain Esmenjaud's 2012 IHEID doctoral dissertation furnishes a more recent evaluation of peacekeeping in Chad.⁸⁷⁰ His case study on the various African attempts at peacekeeping in the country between 1979 and 1982 makes heavy use of archival records from the French Foreign Ministry. While Esmenjaud does incorporate a thoughtful analysis of French policy in Chad during these years, his primary focus remains the peacekeeping operations. This section however, though partly based on much of the same material, differs in its focus and the period examined. Nonetheless, this study does share similar conclusions with Esmenjaud's narrative, particularly concerning the question of and perception of "security" in the African context.

More broadly speaking, none of the existing literature can be broken down into competing schools or approaches. Various studies have differed in focus and quality, but the lack of historiography based on official records provides an opportunity for researchers to go beyond existing scholarship to elucidate the French role in the country. Despite the lack of

⁸⁶⁹Terry M. Mays. *Africa's First Peacekeeping Operation: The OAU in Chad, 1981-1982*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002.

⁸⁷⁰Romain Esmenjaud. *L'Africanisation et l'appropriation africaine des opérations de paix : étude politique et historique à travers les missions africaines au Tchad (1979-1982), en République centrafricaine (1997 à nos jours) et au Darfour (2004 à nos jours)*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2012.

availability of French presidential papers and records, the existing archival material goes a long way in facilitating a new historical treatment of the French role in Chad.

A number of memoirs and accounts written by participants or witnesses to the events covered here also provide a valuable source of information. Among these, Pierre Claustre's memoirs represent a crucial perspective on the "Claustre Affair" hostage crisis, one of the key events in the evolution of Franco-Chadian relations. As the head of the French *Mission de réforme administrative* (MRA) in Chad, Claustre became directly involved in the crisis as the Chadian rebels took both his wife, Françoise Claustre, and one of his subordinates, Marc Combe, hostage. During the course of the year following their captivity, Claustre became involved in a number of efforts to secure their release, including epic trips through the Sahara desert to see his wife and Combe. Eventually, as an attempt to procure weapons to secure the hostages' release failed, the rebels took him hostage as well. His memoirs also provide a fascinating insight into the nature of the rebellion and the men who led it, with whom he spent considerable time, both before and during his captivity. Although at times understandably emotional, and partially aimed at countering critics, Claustre bases his memoir on solid documentation. Furthermore, the French Foreign Ministry and Cooperation Ministry archives support many of his assertions.⁸⁷¹

Marc Combe, the MRA advisor who became a hostage, also wrote a memoir of his time with the rebels. As one of the few technically skilled individuals available to the rebellion, the rebel leadership tasked him as a driver and mechanic for the rebels' small collection of Land Rovers. In this capacity, he often travelled with the organization's leadership and learned a great deal about its inner workings. He also managed to exploit this particular position in May 1975, to escape by hijacking a Land Rover and driving away to freedom. Due to his isolation from the negotiations, however, his account is of little use for this study.⁸⁷²

In that sense, Ambassador Raphaël Touze's diaries of his time as French Ambassador to Chad, should have more promise. As Ambassador from early 1974 to mid-1975, Touze participated in some of the early negotiations and decision-making processes regarding the hostage crisis. However, his diaries make a number of assertions not supported by the available archival material, and he has a particular grudge against Pierre Claustre, whom he ceaselessly attacks throughout.⁸⁷³

⁸⁷¹ Pierre Claustre. *L'affaire Claustre: Autopsie d'une prise d'otages*. Paris: Editions Karthala, 1990.

⁸⁷² Marc Combe. *Otage au Tibesti*. [Paris]: Flammarion, 1976.

⁸⁷³ R. L. Touze. *370 jours d'un ambassadeur au Tchad*. Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1989.

Former resistance hero, poet, and writer, Stéphane Hessel, also wrote memoirs. As a high-ranking Cooperation Ministry official at the time, he became France's chief negotiator in Chad for several months in mid-1975. His highly self-critical account fills an important gap in the historical record of the months leading up to the temporary break in Franco-Chadian relations.⁸⁷⁴

Another important eyewitness account comes from one of the rebel leaders, and future Chadian President, Goukouni Weddeye. In an extensive series of interviews with *Radio France Internationale* journalist Laurent Correau, Goukouni gives a detailed and important account from the point of view of the rebellion's leadership. This account also serves as an interesting, if not always reliable, counterpoint to assertions made by the press, French official documents, and academic writing on the Chadian conflict.⁸⁷⁵ Also, mid-level Frolinat official, Garodné Djarma, wrote a useful, if somewhat disorganized, collection of personal and other eyewitness accounts of the history of Frolinat. The memoir includes a rather detailed chronology of the Claustre Affair, including some remarks from Pierre Claustre himself. The book also includes commentary from a number of other scholars and veterans of Chad's civil wars.⁸⁷⁶

Colonel, then General, Pierre de Tonquédec, commander of *Opération Tacaud* from July 1979 to February 1980, also wrote a short account of his time in Chad, *Face au Kadhafi: Opération Tacaud, Tchad 1978-1980*.⁸⁷⁷ The book contains numerous anecdotes, and furnishes an important glimpse into French decision-making during the latter half of their military intervention. It illustrates the nature of the relationship between the French high command and the rebel leadership which came to power in early 1979. Tonquédec's account also helps to clarify the relationship between the September 1979 French intervention in the Central African Empire and the dynamics of the Chadian conflict. Furthermore, he fills an important gap in revealing the impact that this operation had in eventually undermining the French position in Chad itself.

Finally, the self-published online account of Yves Cadiou, a Captain in the French 3rd *Régiment d'Infanterie de Marine* (3rd RIMa) and veteran of the 1978 French military intervention in Chad, *Opération Tacaud*, presents a valuable narrative of the French military

⁸⁷⁴ Stéphane Hessel. *Danse avec le siècle*. Paris: Seuil, 1997.

⁸⁷⁵ Laurent Correau. *Goukouni Weddeye : Témoignage pour l'histoire du Tchad*. Entretiens publiés par Radio France Internationale, 2008 found at http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/images/104%5CGoukouni_Weddeye_Entretiens.pdf (consulted on 19.09.2011) .

⁸⁷⁶ Al Hadj Garodné Djarma. *Tchad, témoignage d'un militant du Frolinat*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003.

⁸⁷⁷ Pierre de Tonquédec. *Face à Kadhafi: Opération Tacaud, Tchad 1978-1980*. [Paris]: Soteca, 2012.

experience in the country.⁸⁷⁸ Cadiou's story well illustrates the challenges of mounting a large military operation in such a vast territory lacking significant infrastructure and with a difficult climate. It also makes it clear that French operations against many of the Chadian rebels were far from easy. Rebel units, supported by Libya, often had better weapons and equipment than their French opponents. Although superior training, logistics, and airpower ensured French success, Cadiou shows how difficult the situation appeared to French troops on the ground. Also, Cadiou's account gives us a classic soldier's view of the political leadership and decision-making which drove *Tacaud's* mission. Cadiou has a very negative view of French policymakers and even the General Staff, criticizing their indecision, changing goals, contradictory orders, and the consequences these had on the ground. These views also represent a broader manifestation of the tension which pervaded the relationship between France's diplomatic representatives and military commanders in Chad. Cadiou supplements his own memoirs with a number of brief first-hand accounts from other veterans of *Tacaud*.

Despite the relative dearth of literature focusing specifically on the character of French engagement in Chad during this time period (or any time period), there exists a wealth of material on the Chadian conflict as a whole. This includes fascinating studies covering the country's sociology, religion, and economy. Understanding the role of these factors in Chad's conflicts is extremely important in avoiding clichéd interpretation of events in the country. For the time period covered here, a bevy of extremely well researched articles from a number of prominent francophone Africanists appearing in the French periodical *Politique Africaine* from the early 1980s help to shed important light on the transformations and violence occurring in Chad.⁸⁷⁹ One can add to this list several more recent Chadian authors who have covered this period in some detail and with more documentation.⁸⁸⁰

The best available material, however, on Franco-Chadian relations during this time, comes from the mostly unexploited archives of the French Foreign and Cooperation Ministries. Both played important roles in the elaboration and implementation of French policy towards Chad. As in Zaire, they both highlight the key part played by ambassadors as representatives of French authority. The three French ambassadors present in Chad during the time of this

⁸⁷⁸ Yves Cadiou. *Opération Tacaud: Première Opex*. <http://operationtacaud.wordpress.com/> (accessed on 07.20.2011). Page numbers refer to a printed HTML version.

⁸⁷⁹ see particularly its special issue on Chad : *Politique Africaine* : N. 16, Décembre, 1984.

⁸⁸⁰ See Varsia Kovana. *Précis des guerres et conflits au Tchad*. Paris, France : L'Harmattan, 1994, Mohamed Tétémedi Bangoura. *Violence politique et conflits en Afrique: le cas du Tchad*. Paris, France: L'Harmattan, 2005, Bichara Idriss Hagggar. *Histoire politique du Tchad sous le régime du Président François Tombalbaye : 1960-1975*. Paris, France : L'Harmattan, 2007, Centre Al-Mouna. *Tchad: "conflit nord-sud" : mythe ou réalité?* : Sepia, 1996.

study all served as important interlocutors between the Chadian and French governments. They also participated in key negotiations between France and various Chadian actors. These records also illustrate the important roles played by mid and high-level officials within the Foreign and Cooperation Ministries during both negotiations and policy-planning.

France and Chad: 1900-1974

The French presence in Chad began at the end of the nineteenth century. In April 1900 after a brutal and bloody military campaign that killed and displaced large numbers of people across a large swathe of West Africa, the combined strength of several French expeditionary forces defeated the army of the slaver Rabih az-Zubayr in the region of Lake Chad.⁸⁸¹ Over the next few years, the French extended their control over a large portion of the country. In the following six decades, what limited infrastructure France put into place went mostly to the Southern third of Chad, often referred to as “Tchad utile.”⁸⁸² Here cotton became the sole export crop, and virtually all of the country’s economic development occurred in this region.⁸⁸³ The majority of Chad’s Southerners practiced traditional local religions, with a minority having converted to Christianity. However, some fifty percent of Chad’s population, divided between transhumant and sedentary communities, lived in the Northern two-thirds of the country.⁸⁸⁴ Many of these populations, almost entirely Muslim, belonged to previously powerful sultanates or confederations before the French conquest, and did not fully collaborate in French colonial attempts at assimilation. Adding to this, the Sahel and the Sahara dominated the environment and climate in the North and the French saw few profitable economic opportunities. Apart from military operations aimed at suppressing political independence and a few infrastructure projects, the French did little for the economic and political development of these parts of the country.⁸⁸⁵

Even after formal Chadian independence on August 11 1960, French economic and political influence was pervasive. Although Chad had little economic importance to France in the years following independence, the country was extremely dependent upon France both as

⁸⁸¹For details on the bloody nature of one of the columns participating in this campaign, see Chantal Ahounou. *A la recherche de Voulet : Sur les traces sanglantes de la mission Afrique centrale 1898-1899*. Paris : Cosmopole, 2009, and Bertrand Taithe. *The Killer Trail: A Colonial Scandal in the Heart of Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

⁸⁸² “Rappel Historique,” *Politique Africaine* : N. 16, Décembre, 1984, p. 9.

⁸⁸³B. Lanne. “Le sud du Tchad dans la guerre civile (1979-1980).” *Politique Africaine*, N. 3, Septembre 1981, p.75.

⁸⁸⁴ MAE Nantes N’djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier “Synthèses 1978,” Note from Dallier to Guiringaud, “A/S : Rôle et exploitation du facteur religieux au Tchad,” 25.11.1978 p. 1.

⁸⁸⁵ see Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, pp. 21-76.

a market for its exports and as a source of imports. Data from the late 1960s is telling in this respect. In 1968, France accounted for 50 percent of Chadian exports. The following year, this figure jumped to 80 percent⁸⁸⁶ following the leader of the Central African Republic, Jean-Bedel Bokassa's decision to close his border with Chad after a spat with Chadian President François Tombalbaye. Nearly half of Chad's cotton production transited through there on its way to export, thus highlighting Chad's vulnerability as a landlocked country.⁸⁸⁷

Unlike in later decades, oil had yet to become an important source of revenue. By the mid-1960s French firms had even stopped prospecting for it. In 1970, Tombalbaye did sign a prospecting agreement with the American oil company CONOCO. However, by the middle of the decade it had only found oil in relatively small quantities near Lake Chad.⁸⁸⁸

Cotton averaged between 70 and 80 percent of Chad's exports in the 1960s, the rest consisting of cattle, beef, and leather goods to neighboring countries.⁸⁸⁹ Cotton also represented the only significant source of foreign exchange earnings.⁸⁹⁰ Imposed by the French colonial government in 1928, cotton cultivation became generalized throughout the five prefectures that constitute Southern Chad.⁸⁹¹ Throughout the colonial period, small landholders dominated production. In 1954, some 451,000 planters worked 215,000 hectares.⁸⁹² By 1974, this increased to some 600,000 individual planters annually working between 270,000 and 300,000 hectares.⁸⁹³ Although low-levels of cotton growing existed in the region prior to colonization, colonial authorities systematized it. Colonial authorities made cultivation obligatory by setting per capita production quotas.⁸⁹⁴ In addition to its contribution to the colonial economy, cotton cultivation on a mass scale would allow the colonial government to extract taxes in the newly monetized economy. Colonial authorities granted the *Société cotonnière franco-tchadienne* (Cotonfran and, after 1971 Cotontchad) exclusive rights to the purchase, ginning, transportation, and marketing of the cotton.⁸⁹⁵ French economist Jean Cabot noted that mediocre rates given to Chadian producers provided them with little or no resources or incentives to invest in methods and equipment that would increase cotton output. Instead, they

⁸⁸⁶ *Tchad: une néo-colonie*. Paris: Éd. Gît-le-Coeur, 1972, p. 34.

⁸⁸⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1959-1969, Carton 14, Affaires économiques 1969, Letter from Cotonfran to le Secrétaire d'état chargé de la Coopération, Paris, 13.01.1969, p. 1.

⁸⁸⁸ FCMGT, Carton 2, A3/9, "Voyage du ministre au Tchad, septembre 1976," Cooperation Ministry Note, "Sur les problèmes pétroliers au Tchad," 21.09.1976, p. 2.

⁸⁸⁹ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 22.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid. 26.

⁸⁹¹ Jean Cabot. "La culture du coton au Tchad," *Annales de Géographie*. Vol. 66, No. 358. 1957, pp. 499-508.

⁸⁹² Ibid. 499.

⁸⁹³ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 25.

⁸⁹⁴ Cabot, "La culture du coton," 500.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid. 499-500 and Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 25.

devoted their remaining time, energy, and resources into food production for their own consumption.⁸⁹⁶

These arrangements and this situation continued well after independence. However, while Cotonfran acted as a marketing board and generated revenues for the state, the cultivating peasants suffered from a regime that demanded increased cotton output at the expense of subsistence crops. Faced with a loss of production and reduced cotton prices shortly after independence, Chadian government officials employed physical coercion to local leaders and villages in order to increase cotton yields. These efforts led to significant reductions in food production. Buijtenhuijs suggests that this contributed to the famine suffered in parts of Chad in the early and mid-1970s following major droughts in the Sahel.⁸⁹⁷

The importance of cotton exports highlighted Chadian dependence upon the French market. In 1971, the Chadian government partially “nationalized” Cotonfran, taking a 45 percent share. The French maintained control with a 51 percent share, and the rest taken by banking interests associated with France. The new company, renamed “Cotontchad” maintained a French-dominated monopsony over Chadian cotton growers.⁸⁹⁸

French dominance of the Chadian economy was reinforced by the character of the cooperation accords signed between the two countries upon Chadian independence in 1960. This arrangement allowed French nationals and firms to benefit from the same status accorded to Chadian citizens in terms of taxation and economic activity. This helped to provide French investors with a particularly favorable investment climate.⁸⁹⁹

Chad’s membership in the French supported CFA-franc zone also contributed to a certain level of economic dependence upon France. The *Banque des Etats de l’Afrique centrale* (BEAC), the collective central bank for the Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Cameroon, and Chad, provided the money supply to all its member states. All of their foreign exchange reserves were held in the French treasury.⁹⁰⁰ France guaranteed the free and unlimited convertibility of the CFA franc, which was pegged to the French franc at a rate of 1 FF = 50 CFA francs, and the Bank’s statutes and existing monetary conventions provided for

⁸⁹⁶ Cabot, “La culture du coton,” 500.

⁸⁹⁷ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 29.

⁸⁹⁸ Goni Ousman Abakar. *Le commerce extérieur du Tchad de 1960 à nos jours*. Doctoral Thesis, Université de Strasbourg, 2010, p. 39.

⁸⁹⁹ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 23.

⁹⁰⁰ Article 11. “Statuts de la Banque des Etats de l’Afrique centrale,” appended to “Convention de Coopération Monétaire entre les Etats membres de la Banque des Etats de l’Afrique centrale (B.E.A.C.) et la République française,” signed on 23.11.1972, found at http://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/Traites/Accords_Traites.php (accessed on 10.09.2012).

the free-flow of capital among member countries and France.⁹⁰¹ The original BEAC statutes also provided France with a third of the voting rights in the Bank's Board of Directors,⁹⁰² although this was reduced to a quarter in 1974.⁹⁰³ France also had veto power over the nomination of the Bank's Director-General.⁹⁰⁴ Chad had only one voting member out of the twelve on the Bank's board, due to its comparatively small economy.⁹⁰⁵

According to a 1977 World Bank survey, the lack of constraints on capital transfers within the franc zone, combined with differences between international and domestic interest rates, deterred local savings and the repatriation of funds to Chad.⁹⁰⁶ More cynical authors, such as the Chadian economist and former minister, Gatta Gali Ngothé, suggest that the franc zone only served to "drainer les richesses des colonies vers la métropole, et cela grace au système bancaire."⁹⁰⁷

Ngothé also argues that the franc zone inhibited the kinds of medium and long-term investments in Chad (and by extension other countries within its ambit) which would have allowed the country to boost its productivity, increase its competitiveness, and diversify its economy.⁹⁰⁸ Indeed, the BEAC ran the region's monetary policy, which meant that it could set interest rates and influence the availability of credit. Article 19 of BEAC's statutes severely limited the kind of credit it could extend to development projects. It required prior Bank approval of all lending for medium term development projects initiated by public, semi-private, or private companies, or by the governments of member states, and elaborated stringent conditions for credit approval.⁹⁰⁹ The Bank also restricted the credit it would provide to member states to 20 percent of the previous years' revenues.⁹¹⁰ According to a 1974 World Bank study, the Bank only provided these credits to member states for a maximum period of 240 days.⁹¹¹ Ngothé argues that these conditions and BEAC regulations, "réduisent et annihilent la marge de manœuvre des banques primaires. Au niveau de l'Etat, elles se traduisent par l'incapacité de financer des sérieux projets économiques."⁹¹² This meant that

⁹⁰¹ Article 58. «Statuts de la Banque des Etats de l'Afrique centrale.»

⁹⁰² Article 34. "Statuts de la Banque des Etats de l'Afrique centrale."

⁹⁰³ World Bank. *Republic of Chad Economic Memorandum*. World Bank, West African Region, 1977, p. 18.

⁹⁰⁴ Article 43. "Statuts de la Banque des Etats de l'Afrique centrale."

⁹⁰⁵ Article 34. "Statuts de la Banque des Etats de l'Afrique centrale."

⁹⁰⁶ World Bank. *Republic of Chad Economic Memorandum*. World Bank, West African Region, 1977, p. 18.

⁹⁰⁷ Gatta Gali Ngothé. *Tchad: guerre civile et désagrégation de l'Etat*. Paris: Présence africaine, 1985, p. 132.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid. 140-155.

⁹⁰⁹ Article 19. «Statuts de la Banque des Etats de l'Afrique centrale.»

⁹¹⁰ Article 22. «Statuts de la Banque des Etats de l'Afrique centrale.»

⁹¹¹ World Bank. "Le Développement du Tchad : Possibilités et Limites," *Rapport Economique de la Banque Mondiale*. 1974, p. 11.

⁹¹² Ngothé, *Tchad*, 145.

nearly all medium and long-term investment in development projects came from external aid.⁹¹³

Chad's membership in the franc zone did provide some benefits which offset some of the problems discussed here.⁹¹⁴ It nonetheless highlighted the country's close dependency upon France, and its marginal influence in deciding its own economic policies, over which France and the heavily French-influenced BEAC had a great deal of power. For instance, the August 1969 devaluation of the French franc by 11.1 percent had a substantial impact on franc-zone economies. In Chad, this resulted in a 12 percent increase in import costs from France. The revaluation of the Deutschmark that same year increased import costs from elsewhere by 13 percent. Meanwhile, cotton export prices only increased by 4.5 percent, thus hurting the country's balance of payments position.⁹¹⁵

The Chadian state itself was extremely poor, even by African standards. The government's total budget for the year 1974 was equivalent to 71.76 million dollars.⁹¹⁶ The French government frequently covered parts or all of Chadian budget deficits with direct subsidy payments.⁹¹⁷ For instance, in 1977, the French government made a 17.8 million French franc direct deposit into the Chadian treasury.⁹¹⁸ They also provided other kinds of direct financial assistance to the Chadian government. In 1977 France provided 1.8 million French francs for the maintenance of the presidential private jet (also provided by France), 756,000 French francs to pay the pilots of the jet, 411,000 French francs to cover the costs of Chadian President Félix Malloum's official visit to Cairo, and another 400,000 French francs to cover the costs of Chadian officials' medical stays in France.⁹¹⁹ This extensive dependence upon France both as a market and as a source of financing and aid supported the claims of both Frolinat and other opposition figures that Chad was a French neo-colony.

The nature of the Chadian economy had a powerful impact in the evolution of the country's politics. Due to cotton production, the South was much more "developed"

⁹¹³ Ibid.

⁹¹⁴ For discussions of the debate surrounding the franc zone's role in providing some degree of price stability, fiscal discipline, and international credibility, see: Shantayanan Devarajan and Jaime De Melo. *Membership in the CFA Zone: Odyssean Journey or Trojan Horse?* Washington, DC (1818 H St. NW, Washington 20433): Country Economics Dept., World Bank, 1990, and Anne-Marie Gulde and Charalambos G. Tsangarides. *The CFA Franc Zone Common Currency, Uncommon Challenges*. [Washington, D.C.]: International Monetary Fund, 2008.

⁹¹⁵ IBRD. "The Current Economic Situation and Prospects of Chad," West Africa Department, 09.04.1971, pp. 12-13.

⁹¹⁶ Nolutshungu, *Limits of Anarchy*, 40.

⁹¹⁷ World Bank. "Le Développement du Tchad : Possibilités et Limites," *Rapport Economique de la Banque Mondiale*. 1974, p. 52.

⁹¹⁸ FCMGT, Carton 2, A3/5, French Cooperation Mission Note, "Concours financier apporté au Tchad par la France en 1977," 09.1977, p. 1.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid.

economically than the Northern two-thirds of the country. At independence in 1960, most of the small number of Chadians educated in the colonial system came from the South. This meant that Southerners, predominately from the broad collection of communities known as the Sara, dominated the new government of a country of just three million people living in a space two and a half times the size of France. This included its bureaucracy and regional officials.⁹²⁰ Southerner François Tombalbaye, a leader of the *Parti progressiste tchadien* (PPT) became President at independence. Although the French maintained their colonial administration in the Northern Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti (known as the BET) region until 1965, the unbalanced nature of political power quickly resulted in growing tensions.⁹²¹

The replacement of French administrators with Southern cadres with little or no knowledge of the cultures and languages of the North reinforced a broad sense of alienation from the state. A number of abuses characterized the new government administration. A series of violent antigovernment riots and subsequent repression in 1965 provoked the development of an organized armed rebellion against Tombalbaye's regime. The *Front de Liberation Nationale du Tchad* (Frolinat), founded among exiles in Sudan in 1966, became the initial focal point of armed resistance. Beginning in the Center and East, by early 1969, the rebellion had spread throughout large swathes of the country. In 1968, it encompassed a growing rebellion in the BET as well. In the latter, guerillas launched a number of attacks against government outposts in the far north and baptized themselves the Frolinat "Second Army."⁹²²

The BET rebellion was provoked, in part, by a 1968 decision of the government to impose cultivation of food crops in areas unsuited to cultivation. This represented an awkward attempt at "sedentarizing" the population of the region.⁹²³ The pastoralist communities living in the BET, the famous "nomades noirs du Sahara" often generically referred to as the "Toubou," or "Gorane" by outsiders⁹²⁴ strongly resented heavy-handed attempts at asserting central government authority. This imposition, combined with the threats accompanying it and accumulated grievances born of oppressive governance, helped to drive many in the region into exile or the maquis.⁹²⁵ Among the refugees was the Derdé, an important and widely respected

⁹²⁰ For the colonial origins of this identity formation, see: René Lemarchand. 1980. "The Politics of Sara Ethnicity: A Note on the Origins of the Civil War in Chad". *Cahiers D'études Africaines*. 20, no. 80: 449-471.

⁹²¹ Mohamed Tétémedi Bangoura. *Violence politique et conflits en Afrique: le cas du Tchad*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 2005, p 143-150.

⁹²² Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 166.

⁹²³ Ibid. 149.

⁹²⁴ see Jean Chapelle. *Nomades noirs du Sahara: les Toubous*. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1982.

⁹²⁵ Report by (then) Captain Pierre Galopin, 04.05.1968, cited in *Tchad: une néo-colonie*, 63-66. Buijtenhuijs notes that many of his Chadian interlocutors confirmed Galopin's assessment of events in Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 147. For more on Galopin, his role in Chad, and his eventual fate, see below.

religious figure and judge among one of the Toubou clans. The Derdé's son, Goukouni Weddeye, became a leading figure in the Toubou rebellion.

In early 1969, the growing rebel threat and consequent loss of government control over much of the North and East led Tombalbaye to request French military assistance to crush the rebellion.⁹²⁶ Like many former French African colonies, Chad and France had signed a military assistance accord and a mutual defense pact. However, these alone did not sufficiently cover all possible threats to the regime. On March 6 1961, Chad and France also signed a secret convention providing for French assistance in the domestic "maintenance of order."⁹²⁷ According to this agreement, Chad could request direct French military participation in the repression of internal rebellions. Under these circumstances, command of the Chadian military would pass directly under French control.⁹²⁸

French policymakers had few illusions about the nature of the insurrection and the dangers it posed to Tombalbaye's regime. Officials at the Quai d'Orsay described the situation as serious:

Cette évolution aboutit dès à présent à l'isolement de cette capitale comme à celui de l'Administration et de l'Armée nationale, désormais coupées de tout contact avec des populations qui leur sont de plus en plus hostiles en conséquence d'une longue suite d'exactions assorties de répressions aveugles et brutales. Foncièrement défiante à l'endroit des islamisés du Nord, et de l'Est et du Centre, l'autorité gouvernementale, administrative et militaire a pratiqué, dès la proclamation de l'Indépendance (11 août 1960) une politique de ségrégation despotique ainsi qu'une élimination radicale des élites traditionnelles dans les régions considérées.⁹²⁹

A French intervention on behalf of the regime represented Tombalbaye's "last chance" and, "tout laisse penser qu'il sera trop tard dans six mois pour sauver celui-ci de la faillite."⁹³⁰ After some hesitation, much of it due to Tombalbaye's perceived incompetence and his often testy personal relations with the French, President Charles de Gaulle acceded to the Chadian request.

In the final weeks of his presidency, de Gaulle confided to his chief African affairs advisor, Jacques Foccart that, "Il va falloir voir ce qu'on peut faire pour lui."⁹³¹ In de Gaulle's estimation, despite the nature of the regime:

⁹²⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 98, Dossier 98/2 Notes de la direction, "Note A/S. Intervention militaire française au Tchad. (Avril 1969-Septembre 1972), 06.06.1978, p. 2.

⁹²⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 98, Dossier 98/2 Notes de la direction, "Note A/S. Intervention militaire française au Tchad. (Avril 1969-Septembre 1972), 06.06.1978, p. 1.

⁹²⁸ "ACCORDS et CONVENTIONS de MAINTIEN de l'ORDRE DANS LES ETATS AFRICAINS et MALGACHES," Cours supérieur interarmées, 1966-1967, Found at <http://www.rue89.com/files/20070726Defense.pdf> (Consulted on 30.11.2009), p.2.

⁹²⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1959-1969, Carton 13, Relations Franco-Tchadiennes 1969, Note from le Secrétaire d'Etat aux Affaires Etrangères chargé de la Coopération, "Situation au Tchad," undated, March 1969, p.1.

⁹³⁰ Ibid. 4.

⁹³¹ Foccart, Jacques. *Le Général en mai Journal de l'Élysée - II: 1968 - 1969*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard/Jeune Afrique, 1998, p. 641.

Il n'y a pas de solution de rechange à Tombalbaye. S'il disparaissait, le Tchad se casserait en deux ou plusieurs morceaux. Il n'est pas impossible que les Russes encouragent ce processus de morcellement. Il n'y a qu'une seule solution : réencadrer l'armée tchadienne avec des officiers français comme nous le faisons naguère pour les groupes nomades. Mais cela suppose qu'en même temps il soit procédé à une réorganisation complète de l'administration tchadienne, car il n'est pas pensable que nous dotions le Tchad d'un instrument militaire efficace pour permettre aux préfets de pressurer les populations paysannes.⁹³²

Thus, in addition to French military support and reorganization of the Chadian army, de Gaulle imposed a *Mission de réforme administrative* (MRA) upon Tombalbaye. This aimed to help reform Chadian governance in order to remove the alleged causes of the uprisings and to prevent rebellions in the future.⁹³³ The first head of the MRA, former colonial administrator Pierre Lami, prided himself as an “expert in decolonization.”⁹³⁴ However, his view of an effective state strongly reflected his own experience of “best practices” as a colonial administrator. One of his key initiatives aimed at reinforcing the authority of local “customary authorities,” once a bedrock principle of colonial rule.⁹³⁵ Tombalbaye’s policy had previously aimed at undermining and removing these authorities.⁹³⁶ Lami’s project combined this “opération-sultanats” with the creation of “groupes d’autodéfense,” or village militias aimed at protecting “traditional” authorities and supported by French and Chadian troops.⁹³⁷ This project involved fortifying villages as a counter-guerilla strategy, much like French efforts during the Algerian War, analogous Portuguese strategies in their colonial conflicts, and the “strategic hamlets” policy applied by the Americans in Vietnam.⁹³⁸

In his reports and recommendations to Tombalbaye and Chadian administrators, he frequently forwarded ethnographic surveys that he himself had conducted in the 1930s as a colonial official. These, he suggested, should serve as a model for good administration. He also suggested that “traditional” beliefs and rituals, particularly the “yondo” initiation rite among some Southern communities, could serve as authoritative moral supports for a regime based on power relayed through “customary” leaders.⁹³⁹ Tombalbaye eventually took this

⁹³² Ibid. 647.

⁹³³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 98, Dossier 98/2 Notes de la direction, “Note A/S. Intervention militaire française au Tchad. (Avril 1969-Septembre 1972), 06.06.1978, p. 2.

⁹³⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1959-1969, Carton 2, MRA, Report from Lami to Tombalbaye, 25.08.1969.

⁹³⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1959-1969, Carton 2, MRA

⁹³⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1959-1969, Carton 2, MRA, Report from Lami to Tombalbaye, “Rapport sur les activités de la Mission pour la Réforme Administrative pendant la période du 1^{er} octobre au 15 novembre 1969,” 15.11.1969, p. 15.

⁹³⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1959-1969, Carton 2, MRA, Memo from Lami to Tombalbaye, “Conférence annuelle des Préfets,” “Organisation de l’auto-défense,” 23.08.1969, p. 1.

⁹³⁸ Ibid. 2.

⁹³⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1959-1969, Carton 2, MRA, Memo from Lami to Tombalbaye, “Conférence annuelle des Préfets,” “L’Administrateur tchadien face aux problèmes des langues, des ethnies, du tribalisme et des structures de la société traditionnelle,” 24.08.1969, p. 3.

advice to heart, and his later brutal imposition of his own peculiar form of “yondo” rituals upon government cadres of diverse origins would help provoke his downfall.

Perhaps predictably, his recommendations threatened the prerogatives and authority of a number of Chadian officials and government figures. According to French reports, these administrators deliberately worked to sabotage a number of MRA initiatives, including Lami’s inspection visits to various Southern prefectures.⁹⁴⁰ These obstacles to his proposed reforms led a frustrated Lami to write a letter to French officials requesting the full-scale replacement of Chadian administrators with French officials. Someone leaked his letter to Tombalbaye who promptly demanded his removal.⁹⁴¹ Thus, less than a year after its creation, the MRA’s initial mission morphed into something of a public works administration.⁹⁴²

Beginning in April 1969, France sent troops to reinforce those already stationed in the country. French officers also took charge of reorganizing the Chadian army. In total, France deployed some 2,800 soldiers, notably the 2nd REP, in addition to some 600 personnel on detached duty as “advisors” and training cadres.⁹⁴³ For more than three years, until September 1972, the French-led military campaign managed to destroy or dismantle Frolinat groups in Central and Eastern Chad. However, the French never managed to fully “pacify” the BET.⁹⁴⁴ This did not stem from a lack of trying. Due to the immense distances involved, airpower played a primordial role in French operations. In addition to transportation and reconnaissance roles, the French also deployed helicopters and ten AD-4 Skyraider ground-attack aircraft.⁹⁴⁵ These planes launched deadly attack missions on a number of oases serving as rebel bases in Northern Chad. As the rebels completely lacked anti-aircraft capability, French pilots could attack with impunity.⁹⁴⁶

Unfortunately for the local population, many of these airstrikes killed innocent families, destroyed houses, and means of livelihood. In a 2008 interview, Goukouni Weddeye, one of the principal leaders of the “Second Army,” recalled the human costs of the airstrikes and attacks by Franco-Chadian ground forces:

⁹⁴⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1959-1969, Carton 2, MRA, Report from Ambassador Wibaux to Paris, “a/s. Activités de la Mission Civile française,” 23.05.1969, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁴¹ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 106.

⁹⁴² FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/2, Note, “A/S : Evolution de la Mission de réforme administrative au Tchad,” 31.10.1974, p. 2.

⁹⁴³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 98, Dossier 98/2 Notes de la direction, “Note A/S. Intervention militaire française au Tchad. (Avril 1969-Septembre 1972), 06.06.1978, p. 3.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid. 4.

⁹⁴⁵ Centre de Doctrine d’Emploi des Forces (CDEF). *Répertoire typologique des opérations : Tome 2 Afrique*. Paris, France: Ministère de la Défense, 2006 p. 13.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid. 18.

Les dégâts humains et matériels causés par l'intervention des légionnaires français dans le conflit tchadien ont été immenses. Des villages et des palmeraies ont été dévastés et incendiés partout dans le BET. A l'époque, les légionnaires combattaient avec des forces tchadiennes. Qui faisait quoi, nous ne savions pas. Nous attribuions la responsabilité de tous ces dégâts aux forces françaises, puisque ce sont elles qui dirigeaient les opérations. Des civils innocents ont été tués dans plusieurs combats au Borkou, en Ennedi et au Tibesti.⁹⁴⁷

Though certainly a biased observer, Goukouni's observations reflected those of local communities and coincide with those of other eyewitnesses and commentators. French Colonel Jean Chapelle, former prefect of the BET region, and development assistance advisor in Chad until 1974, harshly criticized the French intervention:

Ces combats ont été durs, les plus meurtriers pour les troupes françaises et pour les rebelles, et ils se sont accompagnés de destructions inutiles de palmeraies et de troupeaux. On peut se demander quel sens la France donnait à un combat qui n'avait d'autre raison que de soutenir un régime absurde. En l'espace d'un an, l'intervention militaire française a provoqué chez les Toubous une haine exaltée qui a galvanisé leur esprit guerrier et leur soif de revanche, qui a amené au combat tous les hommes en état de porter les armes et les a induits à faire appel aux Libyens, auxquels ils avaient toujours auparavant interdit leur territoire.⁹⁴⁸

Pierre Claustre, the last head of the MRA, who later joined his wife in captivity of the very same Goukouni, became a close observer of local attitudes to the French, and of their memories of the repression. Although generally well treated while held prisoners by the rebellion, Claustre noted that many of the people and communities that he encountered had suffered immensely from Franco-Chadian military operations.⁹⁴⁹

Robert Buijtenhuijs estimated that these operations during *Opération Limousin* cost the lives of some 10,000 people.⁹⁵⁰ According to official French figures, in 1969 alone, that is before the beginning of major combat operations, Franco-Chadian forces killed 983 rebels and took 41 prisoners.⁹⁵¹ The extremely low number of prisoners listed speaks for itself—not many were taken. This number also excludes reported civilian casualties, although it is possible that many of the “rebels” were simply civilians caught in the crossfire. Buijtenhuijs cites one French observer, close to the French units on the ground, who described the Foreign Legion troops from the 2nd REP participating in these operations as “hommes de corde et de sac,” in reference to their crude methods.⁹⁵²

De Gaulle's first commanding officer in Chad, General Michel Arnaud, detested the Legion. He felt de Gaulle should have dissolved it after the legionnaire-led abortive 1961 putsch. He opposed their use in Chad, as well as the repressive tactics employed by the Chadian army. This quickly led to criticisms however, that Arnaud waged war, “du bout des doigts et

⁹⁴⁷ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 36.

⁹⁴⁸ Chapelle. *Nomades noirs*, 414, also cited in Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 104.

⁹⁴⁹ Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 430.

⁹⁵⁰ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 425.

⁹⁵¹ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 237.

⁹⁵² Ibid.

en gants blancs [...] on le trouve mou.”⁹⁵³ This perspective quickly led to a falling-out with Tombalbaye, who requested his removal. In September 1969, the French replaced Arnaud with the less hesitant General Edouard Cortadellas.⁹⁵⁴ Cortadellas vehemently denied accusations of excesses. However, French observers on a mission from the National Assembly noted that the situation improved when the Legion left the country, replaced by French regular army units, “plus apte à pacifier que la légion.”⁹⁵⁵

The heaviest and most prolonged fighting occurred in the BET. There, three years of French ground and air operations aimed at destroying rebel units and supply bases, and cutting off communications.⁹⁵⁶ However, these “supply bases,” sometimes consisted of populated oases and their associated villages, and “communications,” sometimes meant camel caravans.⁹⁵⁷ Additionally, Frolinat later accused French forces of filling wells with sand in rebel-controlled regions in order to force the local populations into areas closer to administrative centers controlled by the government.⁹⁵⁸ French officers involved in the North later strongly denied having employed these kinds of tactics.⁹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, as shown below, French forces did train, equip, and provide logistical support to Chadian army units that employed these brutal methods.

Attacking the rebels thus meant attacking the physical infrastructure and local economy of an entire population. Indeed, the French Defense Ministry’s official *Répertoire typologique des opérations* somewhat tellingly notes that “Le nombre d’actions de feu conduites sur la totalité du territoire, en particulier dans le BET, et l’ampleur des moyens déployés ne sont d’ailleurs pas sans rappeler les opérations d’Algérie.”⁹⁶⁰ When one takes into account the fact that the population of the entire BET region numbered less than 70,000 people at this time, one can begin to understand the full extent of the social trauma caused by these “actions de feu.”⁹⁶¹

Although French ground troops officially ceased active military operations against the rebels in September 1972, their mission changed to one of logistical assistance and air support.⁹⁶² Furthermore, although the rebellion had seemingly suffered a severe military defeat,

⁹⁵³ René Backmann, “Les Chances des rebelles,” *Nouvel observateur*, 08.12.1969, p. 12.

⁹⁵⁴ Dufour, *La France au Tchad*, 37.

⁹⁵⁵ cited in Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 237.

⁹⁵⁶ CDEF, *Répertoire typologique*, 13.

⁹⁵⁷ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 168.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid. 227n.

⁹⁵⁹ Jackie Neau. *L’intervention de la France dans le conflit tchadien, 1969-1975: une guerre révolutionnaire introuvable, un fiasco en position de force*. Paris: Mémoires d’hommes, 2006, p. 110.

⁹⁶⁰ CDEF, *Répertoire typologique*, 19.

⁹⁶¹ Varsia Kovana. *Précis des guerres et conflits au Tchad*. Paris, France : L’Harmattan, 1994 p. 7.

⁹⁶² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 98, Dossier 98/2 Notes de la direction, “Note A/S. Intervention militaire française au Tchad. (Avril 1969-Septembre 1972), 06.06.1978, p. 4.

pockets survived in many parts of the country, especially in the BET. Cortadellas shrugged off the latter, asserting that the BET was a region, “habitée par des nomades qui, même au temps de la colonisation, n’ont jamais été contrôlés ; je crois qu’il faut tirer un trait dessus et les laisser dans leurs pierres. On ne pourra jamais les soumettre.”⁹⁶³

Even after the withdrawal of the bulk of French forces, the French presence within the Chadian military and security apparatus remained pervasive. The moment France officially ended combat operations in Chad, the head of the French military assistance mission donned a Chadian uniform and became the official military advisor to President Tombalbaye.⁹⁶⁴ Furthermore, France provided tens of millions of francs worth of military aid, which included weapons, munitions, equipment, and training. Up until 1974, this totaled some 165 million francs, excluding costs incurred by French military operations.⁹⁶⁵ Even in 1976, when French forces had left the country at the behest of the Chadian government, the French still spent 40 percent of their total annual military cooperation budget on Chad.⁹⁶⁶

Additionally, a number of retired and serving French military and intelligence personnel served on a private or on a detached basis within the Chadian security apparatus. The head of the Chadian intelligence service, Camille Gourvennec had formerly served as an artillery officer in the French army.⁹⁶⁷ His deputy during the repression of the rebellion, Pierre Galopin, worked for Chadian intelligence on detached duty from the French army. In this capacity, Galopin played a key role in both intelligence gathering and negotiations on behalf of the Tombalbaye regime.⁹⁶⁸

Despite this close collaboration with and dependence upon France, Tombalbaye did not always maintain a friendly relationship with his close ally. In March 1973, perhaps fearing political fallout from cozy ties, he sanctioned a quasi-official propaganda campaign against France.⁹⁶⁹ The government arrested several French residents on charges of “neo-colonialism.” The official press viciously denounced “the maneuvers of Paris Chadophobes,” and particularly

⁹⁶³ Cited in Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 238.

⁹⁶⁴ FCMGT, Carton 6, A8/1 Dossier “A.T. militaire,” Mission militaire de coopération, “Note sur notre assistance militaire technique au TCHAD,” 18.11.1974.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid. 2.

⁹⁶⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 67, “Notes politiques 1975-1979,” Note, “A/s. Le Tchad,” 01.04.1977, p. 7.

⁹⁶⁷ Arnaud Dingammadj, *Ngarta Tombalbaye: parcours et rôle dans la vie politique du Tchad (1959-1975)*. Paris, France: Harmattan, 2007, p. 356.

⁹⁶⁸ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 156.

⁹⁶⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, Dossier “Relations franco-tchadiennes – Visite du Premier ministre Jacques Chirac,” “Voyage du Premier ministre au Tchad 5-6 Mars 1976,” «Note A/S : les relations franco-tchadiennes,” 01.03.1976 p. 2.

took aim at Jacques Foccart.⁹⁷⁰ Additionally, the regime cancelled scholarships given to Chadian students in Belgium and France. Tombalbaye also withdrew Chad from the French-sponsored intergovernmental cooperation body, the Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache (OCAM). Insulted, and rather annoyed by this, French policymakers retaliated by threatening to reduce military and economic assistance and by early 1974, Tombalbaye decided to reconcile with his erstwhile friends in Paris.⁹⁷¹

At this point, in April 1974, the Quai d'Orsay felt it could finally replace its Ambassador to Chad, Fernand Wibaux. Due to Tombalbaye's vacillating policy towards France, Wibaux had stayed longer than initially planned. Thus, on the eve of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's election as President of France, Franco-Chadian relations were characterized by Tombalbaye's dependence upon France, as well as a chafing resentment at the need for such a relationship.

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁷¹ Ibid.

Chapter II: The Claustre Affair

On the night of April 21 1974, an armed group under the command of Hissène Habré stormed the remote garrison town of Bardaï in Northern Chad.⁹⁷² Defecting *Gardes nomades*, local auxiliaries of the Chadian army, assisted the rebels in the capture of Marc Combe, a French MRA worker, and Françoise Claustre, a French archeologist. Five-hundred meters away, another group of rebels surrounded the house of Dr. Christoph Staewen, a West German doctor who provided medical treatment to residents in the vicinity. That evening, Staewen and his wife had invited the Chadian garrison commander and his deputy for dinner. As the officers left the house and saw the rebel detachment, at least one of them drew his sidearm. The rebels opened fire, killing them both. Stray bullets hit Staewen's wife, who died on the spot. Within minutes, both rebel detachments, with the three hostages in tow, quickly loaded up three Land Rovers found on the site with fuel and supplies, as well as Combe's radio. The local garrison responded to the sound of gunfire and tried to pursue, but in the darkness of the desert, it was already too late.⁹⁷³

In the Chadian capital of N'Djamena, Pierre Claustre learned of what happened just hours after the event. Claustre, head of the MRA, was also the husband of Françoise Claustre. As MRA chief, he had access to an agency airplane, in which he flew to the Northern town of Faya-Largeau, the administrative capital of the BET region. There, he hoped to move on to Bardaï to learn more about the situation. On the night of April 22, he managed to make radio contact with Combe, who simply explained that Mrs. Staewen had died, and contact would resume the next day. The following morning, Habré's rebel group, the *Forces armées du Nord* (FAN), the new name given to the Frolinat "Second Army," broadcast a communiqué affirming that they had three prisoners in their possession, and that "Au cours de la fusillade, Madame Staewen a trouvé la mort. Les Forces armées révolutionnaires regrettent vivement ce drame, dû au tir désordonné des forces adverses, adressent leurs vifs regrets au peuple allemand et à la famille de la défunte."⁹⁷⁴

Over the next days and weeks, Pierre was the only French official in relatively constant contact with the rebel kidnappers. Partly, this resulted from the timing of the kidnapping, which

⁹⁷² For an abbreviated version of parts of this chapter, see: Nathaniel K. Powell. "The Claustre Affair: A Hostage Crisis, France, and Civil War in Chad, 1974-1977," in Hanhimäki, Jussi M., and Bernhard Blumenau. *An International History of Terrorism: Western and Non-Western Experiences*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013.

⁹⁷³ Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 16-17.

⁹⁷⁴ FCMGT Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Baldit to Paris, 23.04.1974, p. 2.

occurred just days after the French Ambassador, Fernand Wibaux, had left the country. Raphaël Touze, Wibaux's replacement, would not arrive until April 27. Furthermore, these events also occurred during an interregnum in French politics. President Georges Pompidou had died on April 2, and the final round of the presidential election would not occur until May 19. Thus, for several crucial weeks, French authorities acted without a central policymaking anchor. This did not stop the Chadian government from acting, however. Benefiting from military assistance and defense agreements with France, the Chadian regime enjoyed a strong French troop presence which provided air and logistical support to far-flung government garrisons.⁹⁷⁵ Tombalbaye ordered a Chadian army company flown to reinforce the garrison at Bardaï. However, both Claustre and the Chadian prefect in Faya-Largeau felt strongly that the rebels might execute the hostages in response to military actions. Thus, Luc Baldit, the French chargé d'affaires ordered a halt to the operation.⁹⁷⁶ The French instead flew the troops to Faya-Largeau, where, according to Baldit, the Franco-Chadian forces benefited from a "non-negligible" means of military pressure.⁹⁷⁷ Baldit immediately received instructions from Paris, however, that under no circumstances would the French provide support for military operations which could put the hostages' lives in danger. The instructions also insisted that Baldit should warn Tombalbaye that such actions would have, "en effet un tel retentissement dans l'opinion publique française que le Président Tombalbaye doit être amené à en mesurer par avance toutes les conséquences."⁹⁷⁸ Despite these warnings, two days later, Chadian paratroopers did drop onto Bardaï to reinforce the garrison using Chadian aircraft. Baldit, however, emphasized that no French planes had participated in the operation.⁹⁷⁹

Early Negotiations

By the beginning of May, two West German envoys had already arrived, ready to begin negotiations. French authorities also designated a high level official in the Cooperation Ministry, Robert Puissant to negotiate on the French behalf. However, it would take him some days to arrive. Meanwhile, Franz Wallner, one of the German envoys, joined Pierre Claustre

⁹⁷⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 98, Dossier 98/2 Notes de la direction, "Note A/S. Intervention militaire française au Tchad. (Avril 1969-Septembre 1972), 06.06.1978, p. 4.

⁹⁷⁶ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Baldit to Paris, 23.04.1974, p. 2.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid. 3.

⁹⁷⁸ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from DAM to Baldit, "Coup de main à Bardaï," 23.04.1974, p. 2.

⁹⁷⁹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Baldit to Paris, "Coup de main à Bardaï," 25.04.1974 p. 1.

who had since moved to Bardaï. On the morning of May 10, Habré informed Claustre and Wallner of the conditions for the release of the hostages. The leadership of the FAN, the *Conseil de commandement des Forces armées du Nord* (CCFAN) demanded the liberation of 32 political prisoners in N'Djamena, publication of a CCFAN political manifesto, and an “indemnity” for the property of local populations, particularly for the villages, palm groves, crops, and goods which Habré claimed French and Chadian government forces had destroyed.⁹⁸⁰

These demands placed French officials in an uncomfortable position. France’s new Ambassador to Chad, Raphaël Touze, feared that the nature of the demands would lead the Germans to negotiate separately with Habré for the release of Dr. Staewen alone. Indeed, since the negotiations occurred over the French radio network, Touze could monitor its progress. He noted that Wallner had twice asked the rebels their conditions for the separate release of Staewen.⁹⁸¹ According to Touze, this would serve the interests both of the rebels and certain elements within the Chadian government. For the rebels, a successful outcome of German negotiations would create difficulties between the French authorities and Tombalbaye. Furthermore, it would allow some of Tombalbaye’s entourage to exploit the fact that French direct negotiations with armed opponents to the regime helped to undermine Tombalbaye’s authority.⁹⁸² They could thus score political points at the expense of the French, and possibly at the expense of the negotiations themselves.

By conditioning the release of European hostages upon the release of prisoners held by the Chadian government, the CCFAN helped to drive a wedge between the French and Chadian authorities. The latter, understandably, did not feel that they had a stake in this particular crisis. Releasing potentially dangerous political prisoners in order to placate French opinion did not sit well with Chadian authorities. Given the somewhat strained nature of relations with the Tombalbaye regime, French policymakers wanted to carefully avoid giving the impression of threatening the authority of the Chadian government. Several Chadian officials, including the prefect of the BET, began to urge Tombalbaye to ban direct contacts with the rebels and

⁹⁸⁰ Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 62.

⁹⁸¹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Telegram from Touze to Paris, “Affaire de Bardaï,” 13.05.1974, p. 1

⁹⁸² *Ibid.* 2

Franco-German envoys.⁹⁸³ This forced the French to negotiate on two fronts in order to maintain their position.⁹⁸⁴

Both Claustre and Wallner wanted face-to-face talks with the rebels. They feared that Gourvennec's agency could monitor their radio communications and felt that the conclusion of an agreement should take place under more discreet circumstances.⁹⁸⁵ Given that the French Embassy had no problem listening to negotiations over the radio, these fears seemed justified.⁹⁸⁶ At this point, the Germans had resigned themselves to separate negotiations, and on May 13, Habré agreed to direct negotiations.⁹⁸⁷

The next day, Touze and Puissant met with West German diplomats in N'Djamena to discuss the negotiations. The Germans explained that, while willing to coordinate their negotiating strategy with the French, they would negotiate separately as long as the rebels maintained their demand for a prisoner release, since this could not concern the German government.⁹⁸⁸ Meanwhile, the Germans had already offered to broadcast a CCFAN manifesto over *Deutsche Welle* for three days in French and Arabic. Wallner also told Habré that Germany would agree to provide financial indemnities of 50 million francs CFA for the burned villages.⁹⁸⁹ Habré appeared to accept this offer in principle.⁹⁹⁰ In the course of the meeting with Touze and Puissant, the Germans expressed their desire to keep any liberation of the hostages, particularly that of Staewen, secret from Chadian authorities. To that end, they planned to fly out from Bardaï directly to Tunis, before the Tombalbaye regime could react.⁹⁹¹ The broadcast of anti-government manifestos over German radio, as well as the delivery of a large "indemnity" to the CCFAN, could only infuriate Chadian officials. However, the ultimate consequences of this did not seem to trouble policymakers in Bonn. According to

⁹⁸³ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Touze to Paris, "Affaire de Bardaï," 13.05.1974 p. 2

⁹⁸⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, Dossier "Relations franco-tchadiennes – Visite du Premier ministre Jacques Chirac", "Voyage du Premier ministre au Tchad 5-6 Mars 1976," «Note A/S : les relations franco-tchadiennes.» 01.03.1976 p. 3.

⁹⁸⁵ Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 67.

⁹⁸⁶ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Touze to Paris, "Affaire de Bardaï," 13.05.1974, p. 1.

⁹⁸⁷ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Touze to Paris, "Affaire de Bardaï," 13.05.1974, p. 1.

⁹⁸⁸ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram no. 389/392 from Touze to Paris, 15.05.1974, p. 2.

⁹⁸⁹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Touze to Paris, "Affaire de Bardaï," 13.05.1974, p. 1

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid. 1.

⁹⁹¹ Ibid. 2.

Pierre Claustre, Wallner told him that even if Tombalbaye got upset, “son réalisme et l’attrait des deutsche Mark le pousseront très vite à renouer avec Bonn.”⁹⁹²

The French, however, began to pressure Tombalbaye to consent to some kind of prisoner release. Puissant, in a meeting with the Chadian Foreign Minister, insisted that the demand for the prisoners represented a purely Chadian affair, and expressed fears that governmental inaction would lead to the failure of the negotiations.⁹⁹³ The regime refused to budge, although seemed willing to accept, or at least not to interfere with the fulfillment of the other two conditions posed by the rebels.⁹⁹⁴

On May 18, Puissant, along with Claustre and Wallner, met Habré for the first time in the village of Zoui, twelve kilometers to the east of Bardaï.⁹⁹⁵ Habré presented the French with a demand for 1 billion CFA, equal to 20 million French francs, along with the other conditions described above.⁹⁹⁶ During the course of this interview, Claustre offered to exchange himself for his wife. As the head of the MRA, an important French government agency, he felt that he could represent a much more attractive choice as a hostage. Habré refused. He later told Staewen that Claustre had more motivation than the French government, and thus had more worth on the outside than as a hostage.⁹⁹⁷ The next day, the delegation again drove to Zoui, where Wallner officially accepted Habré’s conditions for Staewen’s release.⁹⁹⁸

Two days later, the negotiators returned to Zoui, where the Germans hoped to finalize the deal. According to Claustre, during the meeting Puissant threatened Habré that, if he killed any of the hostages, “des représailles terrible s’abattront sur les populations du Tibesti.”⁹⁹⁹ Indeed, on May 26, Chadian troops in Bardaï, perhaps at the instigation of the new garrison commander, decided to take revenge on the families of the *Gardes nomades* who had deserted to the rebellion the night of the hostage taking. The gendarmes burnt their huts, without letting them save their belongings. The wind carried the fire throughout the commercial quarter, and even threatened the German scientific base where Claustre stayed. In the evening, the garrison commander ordered the palm grove burnt to the ground. The fire

⁹⁹² Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 56.

⁹⁹³ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Telegram from Touze to Paris, “Affaire de Bardaï,” 15.05.1974 p. 2.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁵ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 76-77.

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid. 77-78.

⁹⁹⁷ Ibid. 79.

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid. 80-81.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid. 83.

lasted for several days.¹⁰⁰⁰ The Chadian sub-prefect, with tears in his eyes, lamented to Claustre, “Ce sont des fous, comment voulez-vous que la population ne les haïsse pas?”¹⁰⁰¹

Meanwhile, the situation became worrisome for the French. The rebels would soon release Staewen under circumstances which could provoke the Chadian government into hindering French negotiations. French policymakers decided to increase pressure on Tombalbaye to release the 32 political prisoners demanded by Habré. Former Ambassador to Chad, Hubert Argod, who had apparently close and amicable relations with Tombalbaye, arrived in Chad at the end of May. Tombalbaye seemed to give Argod assurances that he would release prisoners with a view towards ending the hostage crisis.¹⁰⁰²

However, instead of a prisoner release, Tombalbaye gave an extremely inflammatory speech on June 2. After vaguely indicating that he had already agreed to give amnesty to “tous ceux qui se sont laissés égarer par les mensonges des tenants du Frolinat,” he flipped Habré’s demand on its head.¹⁰⁰³ Only if Habré released his hostages, would the government now consider a prisoner release. Tombalbaye, however, went one step further, and threatened Habré’s family. He declared that Habré should now know that “ses parents, ses frères de la tribu Anakasa sont aujourd’hui garants de ses otages [...] la sécurité des parents et des frères d’Issène Habré [sic] ne dépend actuellement que de lui.”¹⁰⁰⁴ Tombalbaye further threatened that if Habré hurt any of the hostages, “le peuple tchadien [...] céderait à sa colère. Et les autorités auraient sans doute les plus grandes difficultés à éviter le pire.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Chadian forces imprisoned some sixty of Habré’s relatives, including his mother and son.¹⁰⁰⁶ They also burned down the palm grove of Kirdimi.¹⁰⁰⁷ Claustre received word from one of his MRA subordinates that the prisoners were even carried aboard French Nord-Atlas transport aircraft.¹⁰⁰⁸

Ten days later, Habré finally released Staewen in exchange for four million French francs and the broadcast of a FAN manifesto over Deutsche Welle.¹⁰⁰⁹ West German officials had Staewen evacuated to Libya via Land Rover in order to avoid problems with the Chadian

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid. 84-85.

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid. 85.

¹⁰⁰² FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Telegram from Touze to Paris, “De l’Affaire de Bardaï,” 15.06.1974 p. 2.

¹⁰⁰³ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Note from Touze to Paris, “a/s : Affaire de BARDAÏ,” 05.06.1974, “La Position du Conseil exécutif du M.N.R.C.S. sur les événements de Bardaï,” p. 5.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 83.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Darma, *Temoignage*, 124.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 93.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Djarma, *Temoignage*, 124.

authorities.¹⁰¹⁰ However, that same day, the German Ambassador, Werner Seldis, met with an unhappy Tombalbaye. In order to soothe relations with the Chadian regime, and to avoid a major diplomatic crisis, Seldis promised Tombalbaye the unlimited use of two Luftwaffe Transall transport aircraft for three weeks in order to provide relief for areas of Chad affected by a major drought.¹⁰¹¹ This did not assuage the Chadian President, however. Later on June 12, the government officially broke diplomatic relations with West Germany.¹⁰¹² The official government communiqué also made vague accusations against Pierre Claustre, implying that he had tried to make a separate and secret deal with Habré.¹⁰¹³ The Chadian authorities declared Claustre, who had already returned to France, *persona non grata*.¹⁰¹⁴

On June 13, Touze met with Tombalbaye and argued that the recent actions taken by the Chadian government played into the hands of the rebellion. Touze suggested that he open a dialogue with different elements of the opposition in order to improve the current situation.¹⁰¹⁵ Touze warned, prophetically, as it turned out, that the rebels and their sympathizers probably hoped that the Bardaï affair would result in a serious break in Franco-Chadian relations. Tombalbaye responded, also somewhat prophetically, that he understood the dangers of this, and that he felt that the rebels really aimed at isolating him from all possible political alliances, including with the French, by forcing him to move ever closer towards open identification with the South.¹⁰¹⁶ They then began to discuss a new plan for the hostage negotiations. At Tombalbaye's request, the French named Commandant Pierre Galopin to accompany their Consul General, Georges Estrade, in the renewed negotiations with the CCFAN.¹⁰¹⁷

Galopin's Mission

The choice of Galopin as a negotiator provoked controversy. Upon Staewen's arrival in Libya, he warned French officials there that:

¹⁰¹⁰ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Touze to Paris, "De l'Affaire de Bardaï," 12.06.1974 p.1.

¹⁰¹¹ Ibid. 2.

¹⁰¹² FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Note from Touze to Paris, "a/s : Affaire de BARDAÏ. Rupture par le Tchad de ses relations avec la R.F.A. "17.06.1974, "Communiqué du Conseil exécutif du M.N.R.C.S. diffusé dans la soirée du 12 juin 1974," p. 5.

¹⁰¹³ Ibid. 3.

¹⁰¹⁴ Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 114.

¹⁰¹⁵ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Touze to Paris, "De l'Affaire de Bardaï," 15.06.1974 p. 1.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibid. 2.

¹⁰¹⁷ MAE Nantes N'djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Documents et notes trouvés dans la valise du Cdt Pierre GALOPIN le 18.2.76 (qu'il paraît inopportun de restituer à sa famille)," Telegram from DAM to N'djamena Embassy, "Otages de Bardaï," 12.06.1974, p. 1.

Hissène Habré considère comme une “racaille” le président tchadien et ne semble pas enclin à discuter avec lui ni même avec le Commandant Galopin au sujet duquel il emploie un adjectif équivalent et qu’il considère comme un ennemi car il le rend responsable de la division des toubous.¹⁰¹⁸

Claustre also repeatedly warned French authorities that the choice of Galopin as an emissary could result in serious problems for the negotiations.¹⁰¹⁹ He suspected that Tombalbaye had asked for Galopin upon the instigation of Gourvennec, the head of his intelligence services. As noted above, Galopin had played an important role in Chadian intelligence as Gourvennec’s deputy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In fact, most of the intelligence officers under Gourvennec were former French officers now working for the Chadian regime. Claustre notes that “ils n’hésitaient pas à procéder aux arrestations et aux interrogatoires musclés des opposants au président tchadien.”¹⁰²⁰ Numerous Frolinat and French sources attest to the extent of these kinds of abuses, as well as the use of torture by Chadian intelligence.¹⁰²¹ Some, like Galopin, continued to serve as active duty officers on detached service.¹⁰²² A few months before the Bardaï kidnappings, French authorities finally decided that they should no longer involve active-duty French personnel in these kinds of activities, and withdrew them.¹⁰²³

However, the memory of this collaboration remained. Goukouni Weddeye, who led the CCFAN along with Habré, nurtured a special grudge against Galopin. He accused Galopin of direct responsibility in sowing division amongst the Toubous, which resulted in the death of his eldest brother.¹⁰²⁴ Galopin had indeed led negotiations that, in 1969, resulted in the defection to the government side of a substantial part of the rebellion in the BET.¹⁰²⁵ Goukouni’s elder brother died during a firefight against a unit led by one of his erstwhile allies.¹⁰²⁶ Strangely, Galopin seemed to think that Goukouni held him in some esteem from their contacts several years earlier.¹⁰²⁷

Galopin also had very close personal relations with Gourvennec. A very interesting handwritten letter in the French Embassy archives attests to this. Gourvennec mentioned that his family often spoke warmly of Galopin, and the letter indicates a great deal of warmth

¹⁰¹⁸ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Telegram from Tripoli Embassy to Paris, “Affaire de Bardaï,” 19.06.1974, p. 2.

¹⁰¹⁹ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 112-113.

¹⁰²⁰ Ibid. 110.

¹⁰²¹ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 237.

¹⁰²² Ibid. 156.

¹⁰²³ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 110.

¹⁰²⁴ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 18-19.

¹⁰²⁵ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 273.

¹⁰²⁶ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 19.

¹⁰²⁷ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” “Mémorandum sur l’affaire des otages du Bardaï (Tchad),” 12.05.1975, p. 4, also see Claustre, 110.

between the two officers.¹⁰²⁸ Galopin's history of services to the Chadian regime, and Gourvennec in particular, probably explain Tombalbaye's desire to see him as a negotiator. Tombalbaye, rightly, feared a deal outside of Chadian government auspices. Galopin would fill this gap since Gourvennec trusted him completely. This way the Chadian government would certainly remain informed of the negotiations.

This state of affairs did not escape French officials in the Foreign Ministry. Its instructions to the Embassy in N'Djamena commanded that Galopin could only remain accountable to French authorities, not to the Chadian government.¹⁰²⁹ Furthermore, the instructions noted that the release of Staewen, and Tombalbaye's decision to take Habré's family hostage, had changed the situation. Now the cooperation of the Chadian regime had become essential. Touze had orders to make it clear to Tombalbaye that:

Compte tenu de l'ensemble des sacrifices de tous ordres que la France a consentis et continue de consentir en faveur du Tchad, l'opinion française ne comprendrait pas que des otages Français soient retenus dans son pays par sa faute. M. TOMBALBAYE ne doit pas sous-estimer les conséquences que pourrait avoir notre déception sur ce point.¹⁰³⁰

These pressures may have had an effect. During Touze's discussions with Tombalbaye, the Chadian President reiterated his willingness to release Habré's family in exchange for the hostages. After the hostages' release, he would promise to release political prisoners, although he did not specify which ones.¹⁰³¹ Tombalbaye also seemed willing to agree to France paying a ransom, as well as broadcasting a communiqué. Touze felt that Tombalbaye even thought that a ransom payment might help to reinforce divisions among the rebels by encouraging infighting over the spoils.¹⁰³² As events would soon demonstrate however, Galopin's mission would show that any attempt to divide the rebels could backfire disastrously.

Galopin and Estrade spent the following days and weeks shuttling back and forth between Bardaï and N'Djamena, while awaiting Habré's agreement to resume negotiations. In the meantime, they reported that the entire Toubou population of Bardaï had fled and joined the rebellion. Only small and marginalized ethnic communities had remained in the village.¹⁰³³

¹⁰²⁸ MAE Nantes N'djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Documents et notes trouvés dans la valise du Cdt Pierre GALOPIN le 18.2.76 (qu'il paraît inopportun de restituer à sa famille)," Handwritten note from Camille Gourvennec to Pierre Galopin, 04.07.1974 p. 2.

¹⁰²⁹ MAE Nantes N'djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Documents et notes trouvés dans la valise du Cdt Pierre GALOPIN le 18.2.76 (qu'il paraît inopportun de restituer à sa famille)," Telegram from DAM to N'djamena Embassy, "Otages de Bardaï," 12.06.1974, p. 1.

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid. 2.

¹⁰³¹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Touze to Paris, "De l'Affaire de Bardaï," 15.06.1974 p. 2.

¹⁰³² Ibid. 2.

¹⁰³³ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Touze to Paris, "De l'Affaire de Bardaï," 22.06.1974, p. 1.

This came as a result of the recent fire and destruction of the palm grove by the Chadian army. Finally, in early July, Habré agreed and they had their first face-to-face meeting. Touze saw this as a confirmation that, despite fears to the contrary, Habré had agreed to accept Galopin as a negotiator.¹⁰³⁴ For the release of the hostages, Estrade and Galopin had received authorization to agree to a broadcast of a FAN communiqué, as well as the payment of a ransom, although they did not have the authority to agree upon an amount.¹⁰³⁵

Over the course of the next month, the negotiations continued over several meetings in Zoui. Tombalbaye seemed ready to make the necessary concessions regarding the prisoners.¹⁰³⁶ On July 11, Habré also gave encouraging signs that he might accept a deal with a modified prisoner list.¹⁰³⁷ However, during a meeting between Touze and Tombalbaye on July 13, the Chadian President insisted that Habré should release the hostages *before* he would release the political prisoners.¹⁰³⁸ The next meeting with Habré, which did not take place until July 26, proved quite difficult. Habré felt that Tombalbaye, and thus the French, had begun to walk back on their promises.¹⁰³⁹ Matters came to a head on August 4. In the course of the meeting between the rebels and the French negotiators, Habré decided to arrest Galopin.¹⁰⁴⁰

A few weeks later Habré told a horrified French negotiator, Martial Laurens, that the CCFAN had, “décidé depuis fort longtemps d'appréhender le Commandant Galopin en raison de ses activités contre les Toubous. La France, l'ayant présenté dans un papier doré, il aurait été stupide de ne pas saisir cette occasion.”¹⁰⁴¹ Pierre Claustre, who later had numerous contacts with the rebel leadership, wrote that Galopin had fallen into a trap. According to his version, the rebels had set up Galopin's August 4 meeting with Habré's second in command, Adoum Togoï, in order to prove that Galopin's real mission aimed at dividing the rebels, as he had done in the past.¹⁰⁴² Thierry Desjardins, a reporter from *Le Figaro* who, with Pierre

¹⁰³⁴ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Telegram from Touze to Paris, “Otages de Bardaï,” 06.07.1974 p. 1.

¹⁰³⁵ MAE Nantes N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier “Documents et notes trouvés dans la valise du Cdt Pierre GALOPIN le 18.2.76 (qu'il parait inopportun de restituer à sa famille),” Telegram from DAM to N'djamena Embassy, “Otages de Bardaï,” 12.06.1974, p. 2.

¹⁰³⁶ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Telegram from Touze to Paris, “Otages à Bardaï,” 10.07.1974 p. 2.

¹⁰³⁷ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Telegram from Touze to Paris, “Otages à Bardaï,” 12.07.1974 p. 2.

¹⁰³⁸ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Telegram from Touze to Paris, “De nos otages à Bardaï,” 14.07.1974 p. 2.

¹⁰³⁹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Telegram from Touze to Paris, “Otages à Bardaï,” 28.07.1974 p. 1.

¹⁰⁴⁰ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” “Mémoire sur l'affaire des otages du Bardaï (Tchad),” 12.05.1975 p. 4.

¹⁰⁴¹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” “Compte Rendu de la mission effectuée à BARDAÏ du 30 Septembre au 3 Octobre 1974,” by Martial Laurens, p. 7.

¹⁰⁴² Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 118.

Claustre, spent time with the rebellion in early 1975, also reported this version of events.¹⁰⁴³ Goukouni, though not present at Galopin's arrest, later recalled that Habré and other rebels present accused Galopin of making contact with some of the former *Gardes nomades* in order to get them to return to the government side.¹⁰⁴⁴ Goukouni added that, though he could not confirm the accuracy of Habré's accusations, he would have had Galopin arrested anyway due to his past misdeeds.¹⁰⁴⁵

Evidence from the French archives however, lends weight to Habré's version as reported by Goukouni. Gourvennec's letter to Galopin, mentioned above, suggests that Galopin's mission as emissary went beyond that of a simple negotiator. First, Gourvennec wrote that Galopin should gather information on the state of the rebellion, particularly its relationship with Frolinat's formal leadership in Tripoli, and on Goukouni's relationship with Habré. Then, Gourvennec referred to a possible return of Bardaï's inhabitants who had fled to the rebellion following the Chadian army's reprisals, as well as a redefection of the *Gardes nomades* who had defected to the rebels:

--retour des habitants et des gardes à BARDAI= pour les premiers, aucun problème—pour les seconds, ils doivent être désarmés, gardés à vue en attendant d'être dirigés sur N'DJAMENA où leurs cas seront étudiés par mon service.¹⁰⁴⁶

The Chadian government and French intelligence had some evidence of dissensions within rebel ranks, particularly among the former *Gardes nomades* who had defected during the hostage operation in April.¹⁰⁴⁷ Thus, as Gourvennec's note suggests, Galopin's mission aimed both at intelligence gathering, and facilitating the re-defection of the *Gardes nomads*, who would probably not have appreciated getting disarmed and shipped off to N'Djamena for interrogation by Gourvennec's men.

With Galopin's capture, the stakes increased. Now the rebels demanded arms as well. Goukouni felt that Galopin's arrest represented an enormous boon for the rebellion. A lack of substantial weaponry and munitions constituted the FAN's most serious handicap. However, since Galopin had extremely close relations with both Gourvennec and Tombalbaye, the rebels now felt that they could ask for anything in exchange for his release:

Nous pensions que tout ce que nous allions exiger en contrepartie de la libération de Galopin, Tombalbaye allait se sentir obligé de nous le donner afin de récupérer son homme de confiance. Même la liste des armes que nous

¹⁰⁴³Thierry Desjardins. *Avec les otages du Tchad*. Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1975, p. 88.

¹⁰⁴⁴Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 60.

¹⁰⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁶MAE Nantes N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Documents et notes trouvés dans la valise du Cdt Pierre GALOPIN le 18.2.76 (qu'il paraît inopportun de restituer à sa famille),"Handwritten note from Camille Gourvennec to Pierre Galopin, 04.07.1974 p. 1-2.

¹⁰⁴⁷FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,"Telegram from Baldit to Paris, "Affaire de Bardaï,"17.07.1974 p. 1.

avons demandées au gouvernement a été préparée par Galopin lui-même [...] Il connaissait les armes qui pouvaient être utiles pour notre lutte, donc c'est lui qui a écrit la liste des armes. Nous l'avons recopiée, nous l'avons envoyée.¹⁰⁴⁸

After Galopin's arrest, the CCFAN broke off contact with the French for several weeks. Only on August 31 did they present their formal demand for arms. Of the one billion francs CFA (20 million French francs) they had asked for, they now wanted 600 million of this amount to take the form of weapons deliveries.¹⁰⁴⁹

Galopin's arrest added a sense of urgency to the negotiations, both for French officials and for Tombalbaye. The Chadian President suggested a joint military operation to punish Habré and free the hostages. His French interlocutors immediately rejected this proposal, explaining that it posed too much of a risk to the hostages.¹⁰⁵⁰ In late September, Cooperation Minister Pierre Abelin's Chief of Staff, Robert Toulemon, visited N'Djamena in order to pressure Tombalbaye to agree to Habré's conditions, minus that of arms deliveries.¹⁰⁵¹ In his meetings with Tombalbaye, the Chadian President agreed to a French counterproposition that would supply the rebels with a variety of goods of a non-military nature in lieu of arms. Tombalbaye also provided 500 million francs CFA to the negotiating team for the ransom.¹⁰⁵²

However, the negotiations with the CCFAN made little progress. Martial Laurens, the French Embassy's First Secretary, replaced Estrade as the official envoy. Laurens described the series of meetings between September 30 and October 3 as consisting of little more than, "d'une part à 'nous voulons des armes et munitions', et d'autre part, 'la France rejette cette condition.'"¹⁰⁵³ In a move that proved most troubling for the French and, presumably, Tombalbaye, Habré also declared that the rebels had decided to separate Galopin's case from that of the other two hostages. Furthermore, Habré promised that Galopin would face trial as an "international spy," adding, "Il subira le châtement qu'il mérite et qu'il a d'ailleurs fait subir à des Tchadiens."¹⁰⁵⁴ Laurens protested loudly that Galopin had no means of defense and that France could never recognize a revolutionary tribunal lacking judicial guarantees. Habré

¹⁰⁴⁸ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 60.

¹⁰⁴⁹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," "Mémoire sur l'affaire des otages du Bardaï (Tchad)," 12.05.1975 p. 4.

¹⁰⁵⁰ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Note from Touze to Paris, "a/s : Déroulement de l'affaire de BARDAI," 14.11.1974, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵¹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," "Compte-rendu de ma mission à N'Djamena," by Robert Toulemon, 30.09.1974 p. 1-2.

¹⁰⁵² Ibid. 2.

¹⁰⁵³ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," "Compte Rendu de la mission effectuée à BARDAÏ du 30 Septembre au 3 Octobre 1974," by Martial Laurens, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ibid. 4.

mockingly replied that the CCFAN did not intend to bring in lawyers from France.¹⁰⁵⁵ He also absolutely refused to budge on the issue of arms deliveries. Laurens asked him why he could not simply buy weapons on the black market with the ransom money since, “Les marchands de canons et les charognards sont toujours à l’affut de ce genre de transactions.” Habré admitted that it was not as easy as it seemed.¹⁰⁵⁶ Though Habré already had four million francs of ransom money provided by the Germans, he had yet to find a way to buy weaponry.

Over the next few days, the negotiations went no farther than this. On October 3, Habré declared a one month suspension of negotiations.¹⁰⁵⁷ Laurens however, might not have been the best choice to represent French interests. He seemed to have a rather prejudiced mindset towards the people of Northern Chad, writing of Habré, “Enfin s’il n’est pas Toubou, il paraît avoir le même comportement à savoir, non-respect de la parole donnée.”¹⁰⁵⁸ With such an attitude, the hostages would have a long road to freedom.

As this round of negotiations ended, Pierre Claustre, in France on an enforced leave of absence, decided to make his way alone to Chad via Libya. Touze feared that his presence with the rebels would complicate negotiations.¹⁰⁵⁹ Claustre risked joining the growing ranks of Habré’s hostage pool, and his presence could provoke renewed mistrust from Tombalbaye. On October 4, French Foreign Ministry officials began to put pressure on Libyan authorities to prevent Claustre’s passage through to Tibesti.¹⁰⁶⁰ By this time though, Claustre had already crossed the border.¹⁰⁶¹

Claustre’s presence actually had a positive effect on the negotiations. As talks resumed by radio in late October and early November, Habré maintained his inflexibility on the question of arms deliveries and on the separate nature of negotiations over Galopin and the two other hostages. However, he did hint that the return of Puissant, or another envoy from Paris, rather than an Embassy official, could bring the rebels to compromise.¹⁰⁶² Pierre Claustre even managed to convince Habré and Goukouni to modify the form of their demands.¹⁰⁶³ They agreed and requested that he pass the message on to Paris, which he reached on November

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ibid. 5.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibid. 8.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ibid. 11-12.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ibid. 13.

¹⁰⁵⁹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Note from Touze to Paris, “a/s : Déroulement de l’affaire de BARDAI,” 14.11.1974, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid. 4.

¹⁰⁶¹ Djarma, *Témoignage*, 125.

¹⁰⁶² FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” Note from Touze to Paris, “a/s : Déroulement de l’affaire de BARDAI,” 14.11.1974, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶³ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 173.

24.¹⁰⁶⁴ The proposals that Claustre and the CCFAN agreed to involved the liberation of Combe, followed by Françoise Claustre, in exchange for each of which the rebels would receive a third of the ransom money and the release of ten political prisoners from Tombalbaye's jails.¹⁰⁶⁵

In order to force the matter, on December 10, the rebels announced that they would execute Galopin if the French refused to name a high-level envoy. Two days later, Robert Puissant, again named special envoy to the rebels, arrived in Bardaï.¹⁰⁶⁶ By early January, Puissant and Habré had agreed on the conditions originally proposed by Claustre. In lieu of the ransom, however, the rebels would receive, for each hostage two Land Rovers, 2.5 tons of food, two radios, 100 uniforms, and 2,000 liters of gasoline.¹⁰⁶⁷

This time the French met with the refusal of Tombalbaye, who only agreed to these conditions if the rebels released Galopin first. Giscard sent a personal message demanding that Tombalbaye conform to the conditions, regardless of which hostage the rebels released first. The Chadian President refused to budge, claiming that, according to his sources, Galopin suffered from mistreatment.¹⁰⁶⁸

Thus, the negotiations had stalled once again, with the French unable to satisfy both of their interlocutors at the same time. Over the next few months, Habré tried to open dialogue with a view towards "national reconciliation," though he rejected all of the envoys that Tombalbaye sent, claiming their lack of representativeness. Eventually, as the position of the FAN had clearly not improved, Habré announced that the rebels would execute Galopin on April 4 if the French did not agree to deliver weapons.¹⁰⁶⁹

Indeed, the FAN's material situation appeared daunting. In a report to the Quai d'Orsay, Touze noted that rebel attacks had fallen from 134 in 1973 to only 34 in 1974. Furthermore, the rebels had lost nearly 200 fighters in the last six months of 1974, versus 15 deaths for the Chadian military. Additionally, in the entirety of 1974, Touze claimed that the rebellion only managed to capture one heavy, and six light weapons from the Chadian army. Touze concluded that the rebels, though far from being completely "pacified," no longer

¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁶ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," "Mémoire sur l'affaire des otages du Bardaï (Tchad) ," 12.05.1975 p. 5.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ibid. 6.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Ibid. 6.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ibid. 7.

seemed to gain ground.¹⁰⁷⁰ Even if Touze's report exaggerates the rebels' difficulties, this context may help to explain the circumstances surrounding Galopin's execution.

According to Claustre's rebel interlocutors, Habré waited until 10 o'clock in the morning of the appointed day, and when no French negotiator arrived from Bardaï, he ordered the execution of Galopin. Habré apparently did not stick around for the event.¹⁰⁷¹ Goukouni tells a different tale. According to him, the rebels did not intend to execute Galopin on the day their ultimatum expired. However, on April 4, Goukouni claims that the rebels received a mysterious message from Bardaï. He did not know whether it came from the French or the Chadian garrison, but it declared, "libérez Galopin, vous n'aurez rien. Si vous ne le libérez pas, vous serez décimés, vous les loqueteux."¹⁰⁷² Goukouni, Habré, and the rest of the CCFAN saw this as an imminent threat, and thus resolved to kill Galopin. Goukouni goes on to mention that, despite Galopin's request for a firing squad, the rebels decided to hang him. To this day, Goukouni does not regret the execution.¹⁰⁷³ While no archival evidence supports this version, Touze provides a hint in his memoirs. On the night of April 3, he sent a message to Estrade and Laurens in Bardaï, ordering them to remind Habré, "sur les conséquences très graves de l'acte qu'il annonce."¹⁰⁷⁴ Habré's treatment of Galopin had apparently traumatized Estrade, his co-negotiator the previous year.¹⁰⁷⁵ Had he sent the threatening message?

Regime Change in N'Djamena

Habré's threats on Galopin's life provoked a panic among French officials. On April 1, after his return from a second trip to Tibesti, Claustre met Puissant in his Paris office. To a stunned Claustre, Puissant asked him if he could procure arms for the rebels by finding an arms dealer.¹⁰⁷⁶ After two days, Claustre found some possibilities. Puissant then asked him to make his way to Tibesti and inform Habré that Puissant "lui fera des propositions qui devraient le satisfaire."¹⁰⁷⁷ When Puissant, accompanied by Estrade, met Habré on April 12 1975, at Zoui, Claustre had already arrived, in the company of *Figaro* journalist Thierry Desjardins. Habré confirmed to Puissant and Estrade that the rebels had indeed executed Galopin. This surprised

¹⁰⁷⁰ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Note from Touze to Paris, "a/s : Evolution de la rébellion," 04.02.1975, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷¹ Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 253.

¹⁰⁷² Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 60-61.

¹⁰⁷³ Ibid. 62.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Touze, *370 jours*, 364.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ibid. 157.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 223-224.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Ibid. 227.

the French negotiators, as they had received indications from Chadian government sources in Bardaï that Galopin remained alive.¹⁰⁷⁸ After returning to Bardaï for more instructions, they came back to Habré, proposing now 10 million francs, 4 million of which would take the form of non-military material. However, Puissant indicated that Claustre could help Habré contact an arms dealer. This turn of events seemed to satisfy Habré and Goukouni and the atmosphere surrounding the negotiations seemed to change.¹⁰⁷⁹

The next day, high-ranking Chadian military officers overthrew Tombalbaye in a coup d'état. A number of Chadian units, aided by the defection of the Presidential Guard, besieged Tombalbaye's villa. Tombalbaye died in the ensuing firefight, along with his wife.¹⁰⁸⁰ Over the next few days, the officers leading the coup, including several recently freed from prison, formed the *Conseil supérieur militaire* (CSM) as the new governing entity.¹⁰⁸¹ The new President, General Félix Malloum, had actually been on Habré's list of prisoners he wanted the Tombalbaye regime to free in exchange for the hostages.

One of the triggers of the coup lay in an escape attempt by members of Habré's family, who the regime had maintained in detention since the previous year. On the evening of April 2, two of Habré's relatives managed to steal two automatic weapons from their guards and attempted to break out of prison. The escapees wounded two French mercenaries and one French police advisor in the process.¹⁰⁸² Although recaptured shortly afterwards, this event served as a pretext for Tombalbaye to begin a purge of his security apparatus. He immediately arrested three high-ranking officers in the Army and Gendarmerie.¹⁰⁸³ On April 5, Tombalbaye made a number of accusations against the military, and prepared to arrest several more high-ranking officers.¹⁰⁸⁴ This incited the officer corps to react and take down the regime.

Later accounts imply French complicity, if not direct support to the coup plotters.¹⁰⁸⁵ Several observations support this conclusion. First, some Chadian units began their descent on the capital two days before the coup d'état. With French military advisors probably stationed among these units, the Embassy and the French military command would surely have had some

¹⁰⁷⁸ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," "Mémorandum sur l'affaire des otages du Bardaï (Tchad)," 12.05.1975 p. 7.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 243.

¹⁰⁸⁰ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/4 Telegram from Touze to Paris, "Coup d'état de N'Djamena," 14.04.1975, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸¹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/4 Note from Touze to Paris, "a/s : Après le coup d'Etat du 13 avril," 22.04.1975, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸² FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," Telegram from Touze to Paris, "Garde à vous du Général N'Djogo et de deux officiers supérieurs tchadiens," 03.04.1974, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁴ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/4 Note from Touze to Paris, "a/s : Après le coup d'Etat du 13 avril," 22.04.1975, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Mouric, "La politique tchadienne de la France," 88.

degree of foreknowledge.¹⁰⁸⁶ Secondly, Tombalbaye's successor regime retained Camille Gourvennec at his post as head of intelligence. As one of the most important individuals in Tombalbaye's regime, it seems unlikely that the coup plotters would have kept him in a high-level post without his complicity in the coup itself. It also seems unlikely that he would have acted without the foreknowledge of the French government.¹⁰⁸⁷ Some rumors suggested that Gourvennec even played a key role in the coup itself, perhaps even killing Tombalbaye personally.¹⁰⁸⁸ Although this seems improbable, the French military forces stationed in N'Djamena certainly did nothing to prevent or reverse the coup. The French command in N'Djamena received a telegram from the Defense Ministry stating:

Primo/ Face aux événements qui se déroulent à N'Djamena *vous ne devez prendre aucune initiative d'ordre militaire* autre que d'assurer la sûreté de votre dispositif [...] Vous devez recueillir [le] maximum [d'] informations sur [l'] évolution [de la] situation et les transmettre immédiatement [...] [la] seule situation où vous devriez intervenir militairement serait à la demande de l'Ambassadeur de France pour protéger l'ambassade.¹⁰⁸⁹

While nothing proves French involvement in the coup, this telegram demonstrates an explicit order, possibly coming from the Elysée itself, not to interfere.

That said, the Chadian coup-plotters, all from the higher echelons of the military and police, had plenty of reasons to overthrow Tombalbaye without outside instigation. Particularly, Tombalbaye's attempt at a "cultural revolution," beginning in 1973, substantially contributed towards alienating an important section of the Southern elite. Taking a page out of Mobutu's playbook, Tombalabaye imposed a "cultural revolution" aiming at a return to "authenticity." The most brutal aspect of this was Tombalbaye's reformulation of customary male initiation rites, known as "yondo." This involved harsh physical and mental trauma, and Tombalbaye forced thousands of Chadians, including hundreds of government officials, to undergo the experience. For the latter, their jobs depended on their participation. The regime meted out harsh punishments, including torture and death, to those, particularly religious leaders, who refused to sanction the regime's promotion of "authenticity."¹⁰⁹⁰ Needless to say, this substantially increased both popular and elite discontent with the regime, and provided fertile ground for plots aiming at Tombalbaye's downfall.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid, 88.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid, 88.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Philippe Gaillard, *Foccart parle. Tome 2*. Paris: Fayard, 1997, 295 and Pascal Le Pautremat, *Les guerriers de la République: forces spéciales et services secrets français, 1970-2009*. Paris: Choiseul, 2009, p. 130n.

¹⁰⁸⁹ MAE Nantes N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "CSM Avènement," Telegram from Chef d'Etat-Major des Armées to N'Djamena, 13.4.1975 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁹⁰ Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 304-306.

In the event, Touze claimed in his diaries that the coup came as a complete surprise to him, and even Gourvennec denied knowing about its preparation. Gourvennec requested protection in the Embassy, which Touze accorded, before smuggling him out to the French military base during the night.¹⁰⁹¹ The archival records from the Embassy also suggest that French officials, or at least their diplomatic representatives in N'Djamena, acted as little more than spectators.

Soon after taking power, the CSM made a number of statements that reassured their French interlocutors. Particularly, it arrested very few members of the former regime, and openly declared its desire for national reconciliation. Malloum called on the different Frolinat factions to return to the fold.¹⁰⁹² Nonetheless, Habré remained deaf to these overtures. Since the regime had released a number of prisoners, Habré did agree, however, to remove that condition from his list of demands.¹⁰⁹³

In May 1975, French policymakers decided to name a high-ranking official to try to close the deal with Habré. Stéphane Hessel, former resistance fighter and Buchenwald survivor, and now high-level official in the Cooperation Ministry, became the lead negotiator for the release of the hostages.¹⁰⁹⁴ On May 22, however, the situation changed again. Marc Combe, whom the rebels had used as a chauffeur and mechanic for their Land Rovers, managed to take advantage of his privileged position and escape. As Françoise Claustre remained the only hostage, Hessel would offer less to the rebels than promised before. In a meeting with Malloum, Hessel explained his instructions: a four million franc ransom, as well as a number of non-military goods.¹⁰⁹⁵ By June, Malloum had agreed to these conditions.¹⁰⁹⁶

After several attempts to meet Habré, Hessel finally arranged a meeting on July 14. Hessel told Habré that France would pay a ransom, provide supplies, Land Rovers, and radio equipment. Under no circumstances, however, could France provide weapons. Again, the negotiations bogged down, as neither Habré nor Goukouni seemed willing to back down on the issue. At this point, Hessel played his trump card. He told Habré and Goukouni, in front of a number of other CCFAN members and FAN fighters, that Claustre had acquired weapons

¹⁰⁹¹ Touze, *370 jours*, 381.

¹⁰⁹² Ibid. 5.

¹⁰⁹³ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier "Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974," "Mémorandum sur l'affaire des otages du Bardaï (Tchad)," 12.05.1975 p. 8.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Djarma, *Témoignage*, 128.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Hessel, *Dance avec le siècle*, 208.

¹⁰⁹⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, Dossier "Relations franco-tchadiennes – Visite du Premier ministre Jacques Chirac", "Voyage du Premier ministre au Tchad 5-6 Mars 1976," «Note A/S : les relations franco-tchadiennes.» 01.03.1976, p. 4.

and, at that very moment, he was delivering them in a chartered DC-4 aircraft to the rebel stronghold at Yebi-Bou.¹⁰⁹⁷

The rebel attitude changed immediately, and discussions began on the modalities of the prisoner release. Hessel even gave the rebels his Land Rover, so that they could reach Yebi-Bou more quickly in order to verify the weapons delivery. Hessel shook hands with Habré and Goukouni, and they reached an agreement. On August 1, Hessel would deliver the ransom and bring Françoise Claustre to freedom. Upon arrival in N'Djamena, Hessel held a press conference announcing the imminent liberation of Françoise Claustre.¹⁰⁹⁸

Indeed, since his April visit to the BET, Pierre Claustre had returned to France in order to arrange matters with potential arms dealers. Habré and Goukouni threatened Combe's life if Claustre's mission failed.¹⁰⁹⁹ Taking this threat seriously since Combe had not yet escaped, Claustre returned to Chad in less than three weeks, this time with a DC-3 aircraft capable of carrying the German ransom money out of Chad in order to buy weapons for the rebels. He brought with him famous French documentary filmmaker, Raymond Depardon, and photographer Marie-Laure de Decker, who wanted to make a documentary on the events in Chad. Not only would Depardon defray some of the costs of the voyage, but Claustre also felt that some publicity could help his case.¹¹⁰⁰ In any event, Goukouni gave Claustre one million francs in order to procure weapons.

Claustre managed to charter a DC-4 that would fly to Ghana to buy rifles. From there, it would deliver the weapons to Yebi-Bou. Unfortunately, this plan ended disastrously. The arms that his providers purchased lacked ammunition and consisted of light sub-machine guns good for combat at close quarters, but not for the kind of fighting engaged in by the FAN.¹¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the value of the arms delivered to the rebels was far less than the one million francs given to Claustre. This infuriated the CCFAN. Furthermore, on the return journey, the DC-4, which also now carried the French journalists, made a forced landing in Niger. The Nigerien authorities, discovering the true mission of the aircraft, impounded the plane, and deported its passengers. They also seized the film and recording equipment belonging to Depardon and de Decker. Given the public nature of such an action, the Chadian government

¹⁰⁹⁷ Hessel, *Dance avec le siècle*, 210.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Claustre, *L'affaire Claustre*, 260.

¹¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 274.

¹¹⁰¹ Ibid. 310.

quickly learned of the failed mission, thus confirming their worst fears about French duplicity.¹¹⁰²

On July 24, the CSM strictly forbade the French from making further direct contacts with the CCFAN. Instead, they announced to the French that any solution to the hostage situation would occur under the auspices of a general negotiated political settlement. French policymakers, seeing little choice in the matter, agreed. To this end, French diplomats worked with the CSM to facilitate the return of the Derdé to Chad.¹¹⁰³ The Derdé, an important religious and judicial figure among some of the Toubou, was also the father of Goukouni Weddeye. The Derdé had spent the previous nine years in exile in Libya, and the French now hoped that his return would have a substantial impact on the rebellion. Touze dismissed the opinions of “quelques ethnologues ou spécialistes des Toubous et du Tibesti qui déniaient toute importance au Derdé.”¹¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately for the CSM, the French, and Françoise Claustre, the Derdé’s return had little effect. At the end of August, the rebels announced that they would execute Françoise Claustre if the French did not pay the ransom agreed upon with Hessel by September 23.¹¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, Pierre Claustre had returned to Tibesti in the company of Depardon. The latter managed to conduct an interview with Françoise Claustre, whose broadcast would soon push the French government into action. On August 22 however, as Depardon headed back to France, the rebels decided to retain Pierre Claustre as a hostage.¹¹⁰⁶

On September 10 1975, the French television station TF1 broadcast Depardon’s moving interview with Claustre. She notably declared that “avant trois ans, je serai folle.”¹¹⁰⁷ The interview provoked a substantial public outcry that encouraged the French authorities to act. On September 25, after several days of negotiations, a French Transall aircraft landed and delivered four million francs to the CCFAN.¹¹⁰⁸ Several days later, according to Claustre, up to sixteen different French aircraft dropped clothing, blankets, shoes, and food.¹¹⁰⁹ Such an enormous demonstration could not have passed by the CSM unnoticed.

¹¹⁰² Ibid. 314-315.

¹¹⁰³ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,” *Dépêche d’actualité*, from Touze to Paris, “a/s : du retour du Derdé des Toubous,” 18.08.1975, p. 1-2.

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 1.

¹¹⁰⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, Dossier “Relations franco-tchadiennes – Visite du Premier ministre Jacques Chirac”, “Voyage du Premier ministre au Tchad 5-6 Mars 1976,” «Note A/S : les relations franco-tchadiennes,” 01.03.1976 p. 6.

¹¹⁰⁶ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 330-334.

¹¹⁰⁷ Djarma, *Temoignage*, 132.

¹¹⁰⁸ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 348.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 351-352.

Furious, the CSM accused French authorities of violating Chadian sovereignty by authorizing or tolerating arms deliveries, as well as “subversive” activities by its citizens in the rebel zone.¹¹¹⁰ On September 27, Malloum gave French forces one month to evacuate the country. At the same time, the CSM demanded a renegotiation of cooperation agreements linking the two countries.¹¹¹¹ Furthermore, the CSM denounced the defense agreements that had linked France to Chad for so long.¹¹¹² On October 28, as the last French forces left Chad, government army units launched a major attack against Zoui, the oasis and village east of Bardaï where many of the negotiations had taken place. Touze noted that French mercenaries piloting Chadian air force planes had observed fires burning around the oasis.¹¹¹³ Claustre later claimed that the Chadian army killed some sixty of its inhabitants in cold blood.¹¹¹⁴ If the CSM wanted to encourage national reconciliation, its tactics certainly did not help.

Franco-Chadian talks stalled until December when the French replaced Touze with a new Ambassador, Louis Dallier. Through the mediation of Gabonese president, Omar Bongo, French and Chadian emissaries agreed to begin negotiations on a new set of cooperation accords.¹¹¹⁵ In early March 1976, French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, visited N’Djamena to sign the new set of agreements. In some respects, particularly in the security domain, these new accords represented a significant change in the character of Franco-Chadian relations. These did not include a new defense agreement, but rather a military assistance accord that provided for French military equipment and training personnel for the Chadian army, but no French troop presence.¹¹¹⁶ Furthermore, Article 4 of the new military assistance agreement states that French military advisors could not “en aucun cas participer directement à l’exécution d’opérations de guerre, ni de maintien ou de rétablissement de l’ordre ou de la légalité.”¹¹¹⁷ This represented a formal change of great significance for Franco-Chadian relations by theoretically

¹¹¹⁰MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, Dossier “Relations franco-tchadiennes –Visite du Premier ministre Jacques Chirac”, “Voyage du Premier ministre au Tchad 5-6 Mars 1976,» «Note A/S : les relations franco-tchadiennes.”01.03.1976 p. 6.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid. 6.

¹¹¹²FCMGT, Carton 6, A8/1 Dossier “A.T. militaire,» Mission militaire de coopération, “Note sur notre assistance militaire technique au TCHAD,”31.12.1975.

¹¹¹³FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/3 Dossier “Affaire Bardaï 21 Avril 1974,”Telegram Touze to Paris, “D’une opération des Forces armées tchadiennes sur la palmeraie de Zoui,” 29.10.1975, p. 1.

¹¹¹⁴ Claustre, *L’affaire Claustre*, 362.

¹¹¹⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, Dossier “Relations franco-tchadiennes –Visite du Premier ministre Jacques Chirac”, “Voyage du Premier ministre au Tchad 5-6 Mars 1976,» «Note A/S : les relations franco-tchadiennes.”01.03.1976 p. 6-7.

¹¹¹⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, Dossier “Relations franco-tchadiennes –Visite du Premier ministre Jacques Chirac”, “Voyage du Premier ministre au Tchad 5-6 Mars 1976,» “Accord de coopération militaire technique.”

¹¹¹⁷“Accord de coopération militaire et technique,” Article IV found at <http://www.doc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/BASIS/pacte/webext/bilat/DDD/19760067.pdf> Consulted on 1.12.2009

reducing the Chadian state's dependency on France for its security needs. Nonetheless, in the coming years both parties would ignore this clause.

In his end of mission report, Dallier expressed resentment at what he perceived as Chadian ungratefulness during the negotiations of the cooperation agreements:

Les jeunes fonctionnaires de N'Djamena, ultra nationalistes, plus imbus de leurs pouvoirs que formés par l'expérience, encore marqués par la propagande anti-française qui avait été de mode à la fin du régime du président Tombalbaye, n'avaient pas facilité le dialogue et, conséquence de leur intransigeance, aucune nouvelle convention d'établissement, aucun accord domanial, ne succédèrent à ceux qui avaient été dénoncés.¹¹¹⁸

Later in the same report, he summarized this attitude of Chad's Southern-dominated leadership as having:

[...] une fâcheuse tendance à considérer que notre aide leur était due, en raison de la part que nous avons prise à la venue au monde de leur pays. Ce qui ne les empêchait pas d'estimer que cette aide, compte tenu du passé colonial, était notoirement insuffisante. En même temps, ils la supportaient mal car elle palliait trop ouvertement leurs insuffisances.¹¹¹⁹

However, this seemingly ungrateful attitude should not have surprised Dallier or other French policymakers. France had openly defied the Chadian government's authority in its effort to free the Claustres.

The Libyan Backdoor

Unhappy with the CSM's consistent refusal to authorize French negotiations with the CCFAN, French diplomats opened a Libyan backchannel to put pressure on the rebel leadership. With the arrival of Muammar Gaddafi in power in 1969, Libyan authorities began to see Chad as a Libyan zone of influence. In 1972, Libyan troops occupied the oasis town of Aozou, and unofficially annexed a large band of territory extending as far as 150 kilometers south of Libya's internationally recognized frontier. This area, known as the "Aozou strip," later became a major bone of contention in Chadian-Libyan relations.¹¹²⁰ The justification for this annexation lay in the never-ratified 1935 Mussolini-Laval treaty that awarded this territory to Italy's Libyan possessions. At the time, Tombalbaye made little protest at this amputation of Chadian territory,¹¹²¹ possibly because he had come to an agreement with Gaddafi on other issues, such as ending Chad's relations with Israel in exchange for the end of Libya's support

¹¹¹⁸ MAE Nantes Carton 3, "Rapport de fin de mission de l'Ambassadeur Dallier," p. 3.

¹¹¹⁹ Ibid. 37.

¹¹²⁰ For an in-depth discussion of Libyan policy in Chad and the rest of Africa during this time, see: René Lemarchand. *The Green and the Black: Qadhafi's Policies in Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, René Otaeyek. *La politique africaine de la Libye: 1969-1985*. Paris: Karthala, 1986, and René Otaeyek, "La Libye face à la France au Tchad : qui perd gagne ?" *Politique Africaine* : N. 16, Décembre, 1984, pp. 66-85.

¹¹²¹ Otaeyek, "La Libye face à la France au Tchad," 70.

for Frolinat.¹¹²² To buy Tombalbaye's silence on the Aozou Strip, Libya may have also offered some 23 billion francs CFA in economic assistance as part of the deal.¹¹²³

The motivation and aims of Libya's leadership go beyond the purview of this work and remain, even today, difficult to elucidate in detail. Perhaps the recent 2011 fall of Gaddafi will soon provide an opportunity for historians to access archives and other sources of information. One can deduce, however, at least two aspects of Libya's policy in Chad during this timeframe. First, Gaddafi intended to keep the Aozou Strip. To do this, he would eventually need some kind of assent from N'Djamena, whether formal or informal to provide at least a modicum of legitimacy to his claims. This required a government in Chad which was not fundamentally opposed to Libyan aims. Secondly, for this and other reasons linked to Gaddafi's visions of grandeur, Libyan policymakers wanted a permanently acknowledged *droit de regard* in Chadian affairs.

In early 1976, the only serious opposition to Libyan designs on Northern Chad came from Hissène Habré and his allies within the FAN leadership. Nonetheless, Libya served as an important rear base for the FAN. Furthermore, Frolinat, the organization to which the FAN officially belonged as its "Second Army," had its headquarters in Tripoli. However, the FAN had had serious disagreements with the Frolinat Secretary General, Abba Sidick.¹¹²⁴ Thus, until 1975, the FAN received extremely limited support from Libya. This began to change in late 1975 when Libyan relations with Sidick started to deteriorate. According to Goukouni, Libyan intelligence began sending feelers to the CCFAN. In February 1976, the CCFAN received Libyan envoys and sent emissaries of their own to Tripoli. In addition to providing a few weapons and other goods, the Libyans offered training for medics, drivers, and radio operators.¹¹²⁵

However, Habré maintained his anti-Libyan enmity. He even refused a personal request from Gaddafi for a meeting in late May. The CCFAN decided to send Goukouni instead. According to Goukouni, Gaddafi expressed a willingness to aid the rebellion, but also wanted the rebellion to free the Claustres via Libya.¹¹²⁶ Libyan overtures soon led to divisions within the CCFAN. For example, at the end of June, a FAN detachment ambushed Libyan soldiers south of Aozou and took a large number of prisoners. After difficult negotiations,

¹¹²² Mohamed Tétémadi Bangoura. *Violence politique et conflits en Afrique: le cas du Tchad*. Paris, France: L'Harmattan, 2005 p. 248.

¹¹²³ Otayek, "La Libye face à la France au Tchad," 70.

¹¹²⁴ For an extensive analysis of this split, see: Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 241-254.

¹¹²⁵ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 64-65.

¹¹²⁶ Ibid. 65.

during which Habré initially refused to return the prisoners, the CCFAN agreed to release the soldiers.¹¹²⁷

The CCFAN faced a difficult position, stuck between the government in N'Djamena, and growing Libyan ambitions in the North. Pulled between competing threats and options, tensions within the CCFAN reached the breaking point. Habré, viscerally anti-Libyan, resented Libyan interference and wanted to fight against its occupation of the Aozou strip.¹¹²⁸ Goukouni on the other hand, felt that Frolinat could not handle a two front war and should thus focus its efforts against the Chadian government.¹¹²⁹

In September 1976, the CCFAN and other Frolinat factions held a meeting at the Gouro oasis in the BET in order to coordinate upon a common position. However, the meeting soon turned into a clash of personalities, particularly between Goukouni and Habré. The gathering ended with Habré's decision to leave Gouro and the CCFAN with his supporters, while keeping the acronym FAN for his own troops. Habré moved his forces out of Tibesti towards Central Chad. Eventually, under heavy government assaults in mid-1977, he crossed into Sudan.¹¹³⁰

With Habré out of the way, Goukouni could begin to build a profitable relationship with Libya. However, Gaddafi continued to press for the release of the Claustres, and would provide little or no assistance until their release.¹¹³¹ By linking military assistance to the release of the hostages, Gaddafi signaled that, from now on it would have a seat at the Chadian table. Libyan authorities would henceforth become indispensable interlocutors for anyone looking to make peace in Northern Chad.

In late 1976, the CSM received disturbing reports that the French had begun negotiations with the Libyans for the release of the hostages. In early November, Malloum ordered his Ambassador in Paris to arrange a meeting with Giscard to clarify the French position. The French President responded quite angrily that he resented Chadian suspicion, particularly given that, as Giscard claimed, he was probably Malloum's "seul et véritable ami."¹¹³² He further explained to the Chadian Ambassador that if he had wanted to give weapons to the Toubous, he would have already done it and the hostages would be free. He asserted that "nous n'avons jamais voulu le faire et nous ne le ferons pas."¹¹³³ This claim must

¹¹²⁷ Ibid. 66.

¹¹²⁸ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 32.

¹¹²⁹ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 67.

¹¹³⁰ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 42.

¹¹³¹ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 70.

¹¹³² MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, "Relations Tchado-Libyenne," Telegram from Georgy to Dallier, "Entretien de M. Djimé avec le président de la République française," 12.11.1976, p. 1.

¹¹³³ Ibid.

have sounded rather strange to his Chadian interlocutor, given that Pierre Claustre had already attempted to deliver weapons to the FAN with official French connivance.

Until the very moment of the Claustres' liberation in Libya, the French government continued to assure its Chadian protégés that it had not negotiated with the rebels. On December 14 1976, in response to Chadian suspicions of this nature, Dallier informed Chadian Foreign Minister, Wadal Abdelkader Kamougué that:

Le gouvernement français ne négocie pas, et ne négociera pas, avec la rébellion la libération des époux CLAUSTRE. Il n'attend cette libération que d'un règlement général de la situation prévalant actuellement dans le Tibesti et souhaite vivement que les efforts menés par le gouvernement tchadien à ces fins aboutissent le plus tôt possible.¹¹³⁴

Though not technically a lie as no evidence suggests that France had actually negotiated with the rebels since the expulsion of its troops from Chad, Dallier simply avoided mentioning the fact that French diplomats had begun negotiations with Libya to secure the release of the hostages. This kind of dissimulation could only have insulted Chadian authorities once the Claustres' release became public. At the end of January 1977, Goukouni, now exclusively in charge of the Claustre situation, released the Claustres to the French Embassy in Tripoli. The French official press statement announcing the release of the Claustres thanked the Chadian government for its assistance as well as its "agreement" with French negotiations with Libya. Of course, Chadian officials had not agreed to this at all. This infuriated Malloum and his government.¹¹³⁵

Giscard's letter to Malloum following the release of the Claustres tried to calm Malloum's understandable anger. Giscard wrote "Je suis convaincu que votre inlassable politique de réconciliation nationale, de contact et de dialogue, ainsi que le climat d'apaisement et d'espoir [...] ont puissamment contribué à cette mesure de sagesse et d'humanité [the liberation of the hostages]"¹¹³⁶ However, this missive sounded insulting. Shortly afterwards, the CSM publically denounced France's role in the liberation of the Claustres and France's guilt in its violations of Chadian sovereignty.¹¹³⁷ Malloum sent Kamougué and the Health Minister, General Negue Djogo as personal envoys to Paris to discuss the issue with Giscard. Dallier informed Paris that these two members of the CSM represented the "moderate" position

¹¹³⁴ MAE Nantes N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Général Malloum," Note from Dallier to the Chadian Foreign Minister, 14.12.1976.

¹¹³⁵ MAE Nantes N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Relations Tchado-Libyennes," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S: Envoi à Paris de deux emissaires du chef de l'état," 15.02.1977, p. 2.

¹¹³⁶ MAE Nantes N'Djamena Ambassade Carton 7, Dossier "Relations Tchado-Libyennes," Telegram from Géorgy to Dallier, "Libération de M. et MME. Françoise Claustre," 31.01.1977.

¹¹³⁷ Mouric, "La politique tchadienne de la France," 92.

within the government that wished to maintain friendly relations with France, despite the Claustre debacle. Dallier warned Paris that the envoys would probably make the point that French efforts had brought Goukouni closer to Gaddafi, and thus more dependent upon Libyan influence. This seriously undermined the CSM's own reconciliation attempts and, by extension, prospects for peace in the country.¹¹³⁸ Goukouni even later admitted that he had begun testing the waters for a negotiated settlement with N'Djamena in 1976. However, he blamed the failure of these efforts on Malloum who tried to exploit a situation in which, "on était coincés côté de la Libye, coincés du côté de N'Djamena," and demanded too many concessions.¹¹³⁹ A rapprochement with Libya would help to break this deadlock. France acted as the unwitting catalyst for this.

In the meantime, unlike in 1975, the CSM took no steps to break relations with France.

In Dallier's words, this resulted from the simple fact that:

Le Tchad a trop besoin du concours de la France pour son développement, de nos coopérants civils pour ses services et ses établissements d'enseignement comme de celui de nos assistants techniques militaires pour son armée, pour pousser très avant l'expression de sa mauvaise humeur. Le C.S.M. a trop mis l'accent sur le rétablissement de ses bonnes relations avec la France pour, à mon sens, raidir outre mesure son comportement à notre égard.¹¹⁴⁰

On February 3, the French newspaper *Le Monde* claimed that Libya had provided Goukouni with 5 million francs, 100 Kalashnikov assault rifles, and 100,000 rounds of ammunition in exchange for the Claustres.¹¹⁴¹ Although France had no desire to aid the Frolinat Second Army, this backdoor deal nonetheless made France indirectly responsible for its subsequent rearmament. Goukouni denied the claims in *Le Monde*, although did admit to later receiving massive amounts of Libyan assistance.¹¹⁴² He also noted that the decision to liberate the Claustres came as a result of Libya's refusal to provide substantial assistance until the rebels agreed to liberate their hostages.¹¹⁴³

Ambassador Louis Dallier's final mission report indicates that French negotiations played a key role in Libyan pressure on the Second Army to release the Claustres.¹¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, French intelligence reports from the first half of 1977 indicate Libyan

¹¹³⁸ MAE Nantes N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Relations Tchado-Libyennes," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S: Envoi à Paris de deux émissaires du chef de l'état," 15.02.1977, p. 2.

¹¹³⁹ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 67.

¹¹⁴⁰ MAE Nantes N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Relations Tchado-Libyennes," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S: Envoi à Paris de deux émissaires du chef de l'état," 15.02.1977, p. 3.

¹¹⁴¹ cited in Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 39.

¹¹⁴² Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 71.

¹¹⁴³ Ibid. 63.

¹¹⁴⁴ MAE Nantes Carton 3, "Rapport de fin de mission de l'Ambassadeur Dallier," p. 5.

participation in a massive rearmament of Goukouni's forces.¹¹⁴⁵ These reports, combined with Goukouni's later affirmations that Libyan aid "a changé la face de la guerre au Tchad,"¹¹⁴⁶ also hint that French efforts to free the Claustres indirectly opened a veritable Pandora's Box on Chad's Northern frontier.

¹¹⁴⁵ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/4, Fiche, "Libye-Tchad-Egypte-Soudan : -Le Tibesti prochain champ de bataille inter-africain ?," 15.02.1977, p. 1.

¹¹⁴⁶ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 71.

Chapter III: The Empire Strikes Back: French Intervention and Return to War

Libyan support for Goukouni's rebellion in the aftermath of the Claustre Affair would soon disrupt the fragile equilibrium that had existed between the central government and the rebellion since the latter's apparent defeat in 1972. At the time of the Claustres' release in January 1977, the various Chadian rebel groups, still loosely grouped under the "Frolinat" label, remained divided ideologically, ethnically, and geographically across Chad's North and East.

Although never a perfectly cohesive movement, Frolinat began to fragment considerably after the 1968 death in combat of Ibrahima Abatcha, the rebellion's charismatic leader. Dr. Abba Sidick, a surgeon and former founding member of Tombalbaye's PPT party, then in exile, took over Frolinat's external representation and became the designated leader of the rebellion. Unlike Abatcha, however, Sidick never participated in combat, nor even visited the "front." Based in Tripoli and later Algiers, he principally concerned himself with raising money, acquiring military material for the rebellion, and managing Frolinat's external relations.¹¹⁴⁷ His distance from the ground, and his reputedly authoritarian style, eventually led to his marginalization as a real power broker by 1976. In May of that year, several members of Sidick's entourage in Algiers, upset by his policies and personality, left the country to meet with members of the "First Army" in Eastern Chad. These fighters, already somewhat disillusioned with their situation and political representation, replaced their military leadership and effectively broke with Sidick.¹¹⁴⁸

Goukouni's forces in the North, the Frolinat "Second Army," had also operated autonomously from Sidick since a falling out between the two men in 1972, although the Northern rebellion had never maintained strong links with Frolinat's official leadership.¹¹⁴⁹ As noted above, Habré's split with Goukouni occurred at a September 1976 meeting held in Gouro. A number of factors relating to strategy and personality clashes occasioned this split. However, it also partly resulted from Habré's opposition to the presence of another rebel leader, Mohammed El-Baghalani. Baghalani, a former close associate of Ibrahima Abatcha, also fell

¹¹⁴⁷ For an extended discussion of Sidick's role in the organization, see Buijtenhuijs, *Les révoltes populaires*, 187-206.

¹¹⁴⁸ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 31.

¹¹⁴⁹ see Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 41-46.

out with Abba Sidick in the years following Abatcha's death. In the meantime, he had organized a rival rebel faction in Eastern Chad, called "L'Armée Volcan."

This faction drew most of its support from minority Arab communities living in Northern and Eastern Chad. Other factions perceived it and Baghalani as having close ties with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, or at least representing Islamist tendencies.¹¹⁵⁰ Habré apparently feared that Baghalani, or his movement, also had close ties to Gaddafi. Although the level of collaboration at this point remains unclear,¹¹⁵¹ the movement did eventually become a major conduit for Libyan assistance in the years following Baghalani's mysterious death in a car crash in March 1977. Although Baghalani did not share the Libyan leader's particular brand of Islamic politics, some of his subordinates did.¹¹⁵² Furthermore, Habré may have seen the Arab ethnic constituency of the "Armée Volcan" as potential material for Gaddafi to exploit through his pan-Arabist policies and ambitions. At the same time that Habré split from Goukouni, the latter made moves towards an alliance between his "Second Army" and Baghalani's forces. The resulting formation, the *Comité militaire inter-armées provisoire* (CMIAP) did not bring the forces together under a single command structure, but did work as a coordination mechanism between the two groups well into the following year.¹¹⁵³

Thus, as Buijtenhuijs has observed, by the end of 1976 and the beginning of 1977, Frolinat was characterized by division into five different factions. None of these numbered more than a few hundred active combatants: Abba Sidick in Algiers, Goukouni's "Second Army" in the BET allied with Baghalani's "Armée Volcan," in the East, the "First Army," also in the East, and Habré's FAN.¹¹⁵⁴ The military situation was one of relative stalemate, with government forces controlling the major urban agglomerations, and the rebellion large parts of the countryside in the North and East. In January 1977, a French Foreign Ministry analysis observed that in the BET, "Actuellement une sorte de coexistence pacifique règle les rapports entre les forces de l'ordre et les insurgés."¹¹⁵⁵ This balance, however, would soon change.

As the Chadian scene endured a deceptive final period of relative calm, regional politics turned against Muammar Gaddafi. Tensions between Libya and Egypt had substantially grown over the previous years. Gaddafi had adopted an increasingly hostile position towards

¹¹⁵⁰ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 29-30. Buijtenhuijs does note however that both Baghalani and the Muslim Brotherhood denied the connection.

¹¹⁵¹ Ibid. 33.

¹¹⁵² Ibid.

¹¹⁵³ Ibid. 34.

¹¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 33-34.

¹¹⁵⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 67, "Notes politique 1975-1979," Note, "A/s. Le TCHAD," 20.01.1977, p. 4.

Egypt after a number of his attempts to create a union between the two countries had failed. He also became incensed at Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's refusal to include him in war planning against Israel in advance of the 1973 war, as well Egypt's later rapprochement with Tel-Aviv. Furthermore, Egypt had begun hosting Libyan opposition figures and allowing anti-Gaddafi radio broadcasts from its territory.¹¹⁵⁶ At the same time, Libyan relations with Sudan degenerated into near war. Initially close to Sudan's ruling regime under President Gaafar Nimeiry, the latter's apparent lack of total commitment to Arab unity, his successful peacemaking efforts with Sudan's Christian South, and his close ties with Egypt, provoked a strongly antagonistic attitude in Gaddafi. In July 1976, Gaddafi even sponsored a coup attempt against Nimeiry. The attempt failed as it degenerated into bloody street fighting in Khartoum, costing the lives of over 1,000 people.¹¹⁵⁷ Libya officially denied taking part in the coup attempt, despite its origin in Libyan territory. Nevertheless, its official communiqué concluded with the bizarre phrase, "The caravan is proceeding and the dogs are barking,"¹¹⁵⁸ indicating, at least, that Libya did not view the coup attempt with displeasure.

This atmosphere provided the context for Malloum's visit to Sudan and Egypt in January 1977. He signed a number of economic and cultural agreements with the Egyptian government. This represented an effort by the Chadian regime to counter Libyan influence by attracting the support of Gaddafi's more powerful neighbors. Officials in Tripoli viewed this as an affront and the Libyan media lambasted Malloum's efforts at acquiring diplomatic support.¹¹⁵⁹

Given the state of relations between Libya and Egypt, Sadat was more than happy to accord attention to Malloum's concerns. Giscard later wrote in his memoirs that Sadat approached the French President in February 1977 looking for support for a move against Gaddafi. Giscard informed Sadat that France would not let the Libyans take over Chad, and would do whatever was necessary to prevent that from happening. Sadat told Giscard that he himself had decided to attack Gaddafi, although he had not yet finished preparations and that he awaited a pretext. Meanwhile he wanted France to provide diplomatic support by helping to associate other Arab states, particularly Morocco, with his initiative. Giscard claims he agreed to help, explaining that, "un changement de régime en Libye eût été profitable à

¹¹⁵⁶René Otaek. *La politique africaine de la Libye: 1969-1985*. Paris: Karthala, 1986, pp. 32-40.

¹¹⁵⁷"Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia Form Mutual Defense Pact after Bloody Coup Attempt against Nimeiry," 1976, *MERIP Reports*, 50: 23-24.

¹¹⁵⁸Ibid. 23.

¹¹⁵⁹MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, "Tchad-Libye : avril 1976-juillet 1978," Telegram from Embassy Tripoli to Paris, "Les relations libyo-tchadiens et le voyage du président Malloum en Egypte," 15.01.1977, p. 1.

l’Egypte et à l’Afrique. Il aurait permis de faire l’économie de la crise sanglante que le Tchad allait traverser.”¹¹⁶⁰

Giscard’s account raises some questions, however. As discussed below, French policy towards Libya was highly ambiguous at the time. Giscard’s recollection may represent a retrospective effort at glossing this over. Indeed a number of French officials still saw Libya as a possibly constructive influence in Chad.¹¹⁶¹ Oddly, Giscard claims that Sadat eventually decided against a move on Gaddafi. However, in July 1977, the buildup of tension between Libya and Egypt resulted in the outbreak of a brief war between the two countries lasting for several days. It cost the lives of several hundred Egyptian and Libyan soldiers before Sadat unilaterally declared a cease-fire on July 25.¹¹⁶² Instead, in Giscard’s account, Sadat informed Giscard of his decision to not topple Gaddafi while sipping coffee in the French President’s library on July 24.¹¹⁶³ This seems highly improbable as the Egyptian President was then in the midst of a small war and probably had better things to do.

In any event, by early 1977, indications began to emerge that growing Libyan aid to Goukouni presaged a coming offensive. Chadian government authorities informed French officials that Goukouni had begun to receive substantial amounts of weapons and military equipment from the Libyans starting at the end of 1976. They even claimed that the Soviets had delivered some of these weapons to Goukouni’s forces.¹¹⁶⁴ By early January, they told their French interlocutors that they feared an, “attaque généralisée dans le nord du pays, notamment sur les centres de Fada, Bardaï, Zouar et Ounianga.”¹¹⁶⁵

These warnings led French intelligence officials to worry that:

La Libye renforce actuellement de façon notable le potentiel militaire des Toubous du Nord-Tibesti dans l’intention de fixer l’armée tchadienne et de créer les conditions favorables à la prise de pouvoir à N’Djamena d’un président musulman. Les autorités tchadiennes sont informées de cette situation et considèrent d’ailleurs la libération de Madame Claustre comme un geste anti-tchadien de la Libye pour riposter au récent voyage du général Malloum au Caire.¹¹⁶⁶

¹¹⁶⁰ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 181.

¹¹⁶¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, “Tchad-Libye : avril 1976-juillet 1978,” Note, «a/s : Situation au Tchad et différend tchado-libyen,” 21.07.1977, p.5.

¹¹⁶² CIA FOIA Reading Room, CIA Weekly Review, 29.07.1977, p. 1. Found at http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000215142/DOC_0000215142.pdf (consulted on 01.10.2012).

¹¹⁶³ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 181.

¹¹⁶⁴ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/4, Note de la Police Nationale, “Tchad-Libye-URSS —N’Djamena craint une offensive rebelle” 03.01.1977, p.1.

¹¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 1.

¹¹⁶⁶ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/4, Note de la Police Nationale, “Libye-Tchad-Egypte-Soudan—Le Tibesti prochain champ de bataille inter-africain ?” 15.02.1977, p.1.

French officials also became concerned that Frolinat rebels had begun to infiltrate the Chadian capital in order to launch a series of anti-government attacks.¹¹⁶⁷ This fear became reality on the night of March 31/April 1 1977 when a number of Chadian troops mutinied and attacked the headquarters of the CSM in N'Djamena. After several hours of heavy fighting, the mutineers succumbed to a government counterattack. Some apparently managed to escape and join (or rejoin) the ranks of Goukouni's rebellion in the North.¹¹⁶⁸

These events, combined with the growing threat in the North led the CSM to signal its desire to open talks with Goukouni's Second Army, as well as with Libya in order to settle the frontier dispute and its involvement in Chad's festering civil war. To this end, in April the CSM declared its willingness to proceed with several Libyan-financed projects including a school in Faya-Largeau, a clinic in N'Djamena, and the construction of a new Libyan Embassy.¹¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, neither the Libyans nor Goukouni responded to Malloum's overtures for broader negotiations.

In late April, at the Franco-African Summit in Dakar, Malloum accused Libya of obstructing possibilities for a negotiated settlement by keeping Goukouni in Libya. He implored Giscard to pressure the Libyans to facilitate a meeting between Goukouni and CSM representatives. Giscard responded that he would do his best with Libya, but that the Chadian government needed to show more "comprehension" towards their adversaries in order to reach a political settlement.¹¹⁷⁰ Ultimately this effort went nowhere.

On the night of June 20-21, the Second Army launched a major offensive against Chadian army garrisons in the North. Within a month, Goukouni's forces managed to capture the entirety of Tibesti, including Bardaï, as well as substantial portions of Borkou prefecture.¹¹⁷¹ This success resulted, in part, from a large-scale Libyan effort to arm Goukouni's rebels in the weeks following the end of the Claustre Affair. Based on documents captured by the Chadian army, French intelligence put together a partial inventory of the weaponry supplied by Libya to the rebels:

La Libye aurait remis aux Toubous:

--une douzaine de mitrailleuses 12.7

--une trentaine de F.M.

--une trentaine de mortiers 81 et 82 mm

--une dizaine de canon anti-aériens

¹¹⁶⁷ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/4, Note de la Police Nationale, "La rébellion au TCHAD," 14.01.1977, p. 1.

¹¹⁶⁸ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 37

¹¹⁶⁹ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/4, Note de la Police Nationale, "Tchad-Libye—N'Djamena prêt à négocier avec Tripoli et les rebelles tchadiens," undated, April 1977.

¹¹⁷⁰ FCMGT, Carton 2, A3/8, Note from the Presidency, "Audience du Président Malloum, Dakar le 21 avril 1977 à 17h30," 28.04.1977, p. 1.

¹¹⁷¹ Ibid. 39.

--plusieurs centaines de fusils Kalachnikov
Et environ 80 véhicules (camion FIAT, Land Rover, Toyota).¹¹⁷²

Additionally, the Chadian army captured a number of Soviet anti-tank missiles, a case of 82 mm mortar shells, and explosives with Libyan markings.¹¹⁷³ Buijtenhuijs cites a similar list from Chadian sources, though suggests that they exaggerated the extent of Libyan support.¹¹⁷⁴ While perhaps true, given the CSM's evident interest in exaggerating the figures, Libyan assistance was at least sufficient to allow Goukouni's forces to capture a number of major towns in the BET, something he failed to achieve in previous years. Goukouni himself later recounted the importance of Libyan aid, stating:

Elle nous a permis de libérer les garnisons militaires de Bardaï, de Zouar et Kirdimi bien que les deux dernières aient été évacuées par les forces gouvernementales devant les menaces pressantes du FROLINAT. L'aide libyenne a porté sur l'armement, surtout des kalachnikovs, des fusils FN Belges, des mitrailleuses, des mortiers, même des mitrailleuses lourdes 14,5 mm, 12,7... en allant jusqu'aux SAM7, etc. L'introduction du SAM7 a tout changé puisque les avions ne pouvaient pas intervenir... Il y avait aussi des véhicules... même notre parc auto a changé.¹¹⁷⁵

The defeat of the Chadian army and the loss of territory came as a shock to the CSM. In early July they publicly accused Libya of aggression and asked the OAU at its Libreville Summit to address the question of Chadian sovereignty and the Aozou Strip.¹¹⁷⁶ Given the nature of the OAU, the organization could not do much to help Malloum, but the initiative at least forced Libya onto the diplomatic defensive. In response to Chadian accusations, Libyan representatives at the meeting simply denounced the arbitrariness of colonial frontiers. Dallier thought this argument rather awkward, particularly at a meeting of an organization whose guiding principle was the respect of borders inherited from colonialism.¹¹⁷⁷

Shortly after the OAU summit, the Libyan chargé d'affaires in Paris met with Jean-Marie Soutou, Foreign Minister Louis de Guiringaud's chief of staff. The Libyan chargé accused the French of inciting the Chadian government to make baseless accusations against Libya in international fora. He told Soutou that Libya considered the Aozou issue a legal one and was always willing to negotiate. Soutou responded that France had not "incited" Chad, but that French officials had given the same message to their Chadian and Libyan interlocutors i.e. that France desired the victory of no particular camp, but aimed for Chadian reconciliation.

¹¹⁷² FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/4, Note de la Police Nationale, "La rébellion tchadienne," 08.07.1977, p. 2.

¹¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹¹⁷⁴ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 105.

¹¹⁷⁵ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 71.

¹¹⁷⁶ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1977," "Synthèse n. 7 pour la période du 1^{er} au 31 juillet 1977," 01.08.1977, p. 12.

¹¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

They had also asked other African leaders, “d’aider le chef de l’état tchadien dans sa modération.”¹¹⁷⁸

Despite rebel successes, the extent of Libyan assistance, and the increasingly weakened position of the CSM, officials at the Quai had an ambiguous view on a French response. They felt that Malloum had not made enough of an effort to respond to Gaddafi’s overtures to negotiate on the Aozou question. Additionally, while worried about the success of the rebellion, “il est évident que l’entreprise de réconciliation nationale est une affaire intérieure tchadienne dans laquelle nous n’avons pas à intervenir directement.”¹¹⁷⁹ In this spirit, France and Libya needed to, “joindre leurs efforts pour tenter de faire aboutir la réconciliation nationale.”¹¹⁸⁰ Despite the overwhelming evidence of Libyan support for the rebellion, French officials still had faith that Libyan and French interests coincided in the country. Thus, “toute intervention d’unités française étant exclue, nous considérons que la solution de la crise ne peut être obtenue par des actions militaires, mais que l’action diplomatique est à l’évidence primordiale.”¹¹⁸¹

On July 23, the Quai’s DAM director, Guy Georgy, visited Chad to express this view to the CSM, and attempt to pressure them into a more “conciliatory” attitude. This task would prove difficult though, given the nature of both the CSM and the rebellion. Georgy told Malloum’s Foreign Minister, Wadal Abdelkader Kamougué that France approved of the CSM’s reconciliation efforts and would support them, but that the main responsibility lay with the Chadian government. However, on the issue of the dispute with Libya, Georgy said that France could constructively contribute to a settlement, given that both countries were, “amis de la France.” He told Kamougué that French authorities felt that the Chadians had a “solid” case against Libya. Libya could not effectively support its claims to the Aozou strip, and its support to the rebellion was “flagrant.” He promised to tell the Libyan Foreign Minister, Ali Triki, as much during his upcoming visit to Paris.¹¹⁸²

Nonetheless, Georgy also exhorted Chadian authorities to declare publically their desire to peacefully resolve their differences with Libya, and lobby friendly African states to support the Chadian position in international fora. He urged the Chadians to compile a “White Paper”

¹¹⁷⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, “Tchad-Libye : avril 1976-juillet 1978,” Telegram from Paris to Tripoli Embassy, «Demarche du Chargé d’affaires de Libye,” 06.07.1977.

¹¹⁷⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, “Tchad-Libye : avril 1976-juillet 1978,” Note, «a/s : Situation au Tchad et différend tchado-libyen,” 21.07.1977, p.5.

¹¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹¹⁸¹ Ibid. 5-6.

¹¹⁸² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, “Visites de personnalités politiques françaises (janvier 1976-juillet 1979),” Note from Georgy, “A/s. Entretien avec le Colonel Kamougué,” 26.07.1977, pp. 1-2.

on the Chadian position, with supporting documentation. The French would provide material support for this initiative.¹¹⁸³ Kamougué confirmed to Georgy that the Chadians would do this. However, he also told Georgy that, while the CSM was ready to begin negotiations with Goukouni, the Libyans continued to obstruct the government's efforts to begin a dialogue.¹¹⁸⁴

In a meeting later in the day with Malloum, the Chadian President told Georgy that, in his opinion, and contrary to the French view, negotiations would lead nowhere as long as Goukouni remained close to Gaddafi, although military means did not seem to work either. He suggested that the best thing to do would be to, "kidnapper Goukouni au Tibesti ou en Libye et l'amener à discuter en nationaliste Toubou et non en creature de Gaddafi."¹¹⁸⁵ He also demanded that France provide financial and military support against the rebellion since, "actuellement l'armée nationale est trop faible, or les Libyens ne connaissent que la force."¹¹⁸⁶ He also wanted the French to use their military and economic ties to Libya to pressure Gaddafi to change the nature of his support to Goukouni. Furthermore, he insisted that the French, who had thus implicitly supported Chadian accusations against Libya, should publically declare their position in favor of Chad on the Aozou issue.¹¹⁸⁷

A public statement that France recognized the boundary claimed by Chad would help to bolster the CSM's case at the diplomatic level. After some delay, on August 6, the Elysée formally announced via a declaration made to Nigerian Foreign Minister, General Joseph Garba, that the only frontiers that France recognized as legitimate were those of Chad at its independence on August 11 1960. This included the entirety of the Aozou Strip.¹¹⁸⁸

While the situation in the North remained rather static as Goukouni's forces consolidated their gains, regrouped, and rearmed, the CSM decided on a different diplomatic strategy. Contrary to French complaints of inaction, throughout 1977 Malloum had begun quietly testing the possibility of bringing some rebel leaders back into the government fold. This began in January and May with talks with Abba Sidick, although these quickly failed to gain momentum. From the end of August through the middle of September though, CSM representatives met with Hissène Habré in Khartoum. These followed a series of bloody battles

¹¹⁸³ Ibid. 2.

¹¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 2.

¹¹⁸⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 90, "Visites de personnalités politiques françaises (janvier 1976-juillet 1979),"Note from Georgy, "A/s. Entretien avec le Général Malloum (23 juillet—18h30)"26.07.1977, p. 1.

¹¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 2.

¹¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁸ FCMGT, Carton 2, A4/1/4, Circular Telegram from Georgy, "Frontières entre le Tchad et la Libye,"06.08.1977.

in Eastern Chad during June and July with Chadian government forces which forced Habré's FAN across the border into Sudan's Darfur region.¹¹⁸⁹

From the CSM's point of view, its notional victory over Habré meant that it could both negotiate from a position of strength, and offer concessions. Furthermore, the loss of territory in the North and the threat posed by Libyan-supported rebels brought both the FAN and the CSM into some degree of political alignment. Malloum's renewed anti-Libyan and nationalist rhetoric sat well with Habré for whom Gaddafi represented the most important threat to Chadian sovereignty. Egyptian and Sudanese pressure on the CSM to come to an arrangement with Habré reinforced this concordance of views. As noted above, both countries' leaderships had cause to distrust Gaddafi and Egypt had even finished a brief war with Libya. Sudan also pushed Habré in the direction of reconciliation since Khartoum had some influence over his movement.¹¹⁹⁰

These negotiations resulted in the signature of the "Khartoum Accord" which declared the intention of both parties to fight together for a unified Chad against their "common enemy" and prevent "exterior forces" from occupying the country. The agreement made a number of major concessions to the FAN, including the creation of a provisional government including FAN representatives, general elections, a new constitution, and a reorganization of the army.¹¹⁹¹ However, for several months the agreement remained secret as the CSM attempted to encourage other rebel movements to sign. Unfortunately for Malloum, Goukouni rebuffed overtures, and no other rebel movement agreed to sign on.¹¹⁹²

On January 17 1978, the CSM and the FAN finalized the Khartoum accord and made it public. The agreement stipulated a general amnesty and ceasefire from February 5 onwards, and the eventual establishment of a national unity government mandated to organize the election of a constituent assembly. Furthermore, the FAN would become integrated into a reorganized national army and police, as well as the state's administrative apparatus. The agreement still left open the theoretical possibility that Goukouni and his allies could sign as well.¹¹⁹³

At the same time, however, French intelligence began to receive disturbing reports of growing Frolinat concentrations in Tibesti, as well as increased Libyan supplies of arms and

¹¹⁸⁹ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 42.

¹¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 42-43.

¹¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* 43.

¹¹⁹² *Ibid.* 44.

¹¹⁹³ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 1 pour la période du 1^{er} au 31 janvier 1978," 08.02.1978, p. 1.

vehicles to the rebellion. Ominously, on January 29 and 30, the rebels managed to shoot down two Chadian transport aircraft, a C-47 and a DC-4, and in the former case killing the French crew. This signaled a serious escalation in the capacities of the rebellion. Dallier later reported to Paris that Frolinat's apparent acquisition of surface-to-air missiles severely undermined the government's capacity to fight the rebellion, since air power had represented the CSM's most effective weapon against Frolinat to date.¹¹⁹⁴

These attacks presaged a general offensive which began the next day with an attack on Faya-Largeau, the capital of the BET region. On February 5, Goukouni's forces also laid siege to Fada, the most important town in Ennedi prefecture. To complicate matters even further, in mid-February, a series of attacks against gendarmerie and *Gardes nomades* posts in the Lake Chad region killed seven policemen and soldiers. The group carrying out the attacks, the self-declared Frolinat "Third Army," or the *Forces armées occidentales* (FAO), had also taken two tourists, a French and a Swiss, hostage in mid-January. Goukouni's Frolinat formally denied that this "Third Army" belonged to the movement, and denounced the hostage-taking. This led Dallier to conclude that the group's motives, "sont davantage d'ordre crapuleux que politiques." Although this "Third Army" did not distinguish itself in the 1978 fighting, its close relationship to certain elements of the Nigerian government gave it some weight in the peace negotiations the following year.

Malloum reacted to Libya's apparent role in arming and training the 2nd Army rebels by breaking diplomatic relations on February 6. Two days later, he instructed Kamougué to fly to New York to bring a formal complaint to the UN Security Council regarding Libya's involvement with the rebel offensive, and its occupation of the Aozou Strip.¹¹⁹⁵ On February 15, on his way to New York, Kamougué briefly stopped in Paris. There, he met Giscard and his top military advisor, the *Chef d'état-major particulier*, General Claude Vanbremeersch, to discuss the evolution of the Frolinat offensive.

Giscard complained that the Chadian army had not followed French advice concerning the organization of their logistics chain. He also noted that the CSM had even rejected the help of French airlift capacity for resupply and the transport of men and equipment. He added that the Chadians would have to help themselves if they were to benefit effectively from French

¹¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 5.

¹¹⁹⁵ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} au 28 février 1978," 07.03.1978, p. 10.

assistance provided for by the cooperation accords.¹¹⁹⁶ Giscard also wanted to know Chadian intentions regarding Faya-Largeau, then under siege by Frolinat rebels. Would the CSM decide to hold it, or evacuate? If they wanted to hold it, they would have to clear the town's airstrip and defend it for resupply and reinforcements. If they planned to evacuate, they should try to breakout, or negotiate a ceasefire with the rebels allowing for a withdrawal. Giscard told Kamougué that France had already begun to send teams of officers and noncoms to organize the defense of Abéché and the Moussoro-Ati line.¹¹⁹⁷

Kamougué told Giscard that the CSM wished that the French would provide the same level of air support that they had for Mauritania against the Polisario guerillas the previous year. He helpfully suggested that the French use napalm on Frolinat forces besieging Faya-Largeau. Vanbremeersch interjected and, according to the meeting minutes, explained to Kamougué, "l' inanité de cette solution." Nonetheless, Kamougué told Giscard and Vanbremeersch that the CSM intended to hold Faya-Largeau, "coûte que coûte et jusqu'à la dernière extrémité." Giscard suggested that the French could help the garrison, but again requested that the Chadians clear and hold the airstrip. More broadly, however, Giscard insisted that the CSM begin to open direct talks with Gaddafi in order to reach some kind of settlement with the rebellion.¹¹⁹⁸

At the end of the meeting, Giscard called the head of the French military advisory mission in Chad, General Huguet, then in a meeting with Malloum. Giscard ordered Huguet to do, "tout ce qui n'est pas idiot" to help the garrison in Faya-Largeau, including air resupply drops. Furthermore, he announced the deployment of two to three teams of advisors to organize the defense of Abéché.¹¹⁹⁹

However, that same day, Goukouni's forces announced the fall of Fada. Two days later, despite efforts to save Faya-Largeau, it fell as well. Frolinat announced its fall, and the surrender of its garrison the following day, February 18. This also marked the 10th anniversary of the death of Frolinat's founder, Ibrahima Abatcha, whose name they had given to their offensive. Faya-Largeau was the last remaining town under government control in the BET.¹²⁰⁰

¹¹⁹⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 90, Dossier, "Visites de personnalités tchadiennes en France," Note pour le ministre, "A/S. Entretien entre le Président de la République et le Colonel KAMOUGUE, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères du Tchad," 15.02.1978, p. 1.

¹¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 2.

¹¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 2-3.

¹¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 3.

¹²⁰⁰ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} au 28 février 1978," 07.03.1978, p. 10.

The fighting, which led to the loss of the entirety of the BET from the control of government forces, crippled the CSM's military capacity. It not only demonstrated its military ineffectiveness, but also the insufficiency of French logistical assistance. The French had attempted to resupply Faya-Largeau's garrison by parachute. However, fears that the rebels could shoot down aircraft with their portable SA-7 surface-to-air missiles meant that the resupply aircraft flew at a very high altitude. This resulted in many supplies falling into zones controlled by rebel units.¹²⁰¹ Dallier reported that the surrender of the government garrisons, coupled with the capture of a relief column, resulted in some 2,000 Chadian soldiers falling into the hands of the rebels as prisoners.¹²⁰² Given that the entire Chadian army numbered less than 12,000 men, this represented a significant loss of manpower.¹²⁰³

On the diplomatic front, the CSM had slightly more success. The regime's accusations of Libya at the UN Security Council induced Gaddafi, under pressure from other African states, to offer to negotiate. Via Sudanese mediation, Malloum sent two envoys to Tripoli where they met with Gaddafi. On February 18, they settled on a meeting between the two leaders in the Libyan town of Sebha, in exchange for Chad's agreement to withdraw its complaint from the Security Council. On February 23-24, the two leaders met and were joined by Nigerian President Seyni Kountche and Sudanese Vice-President Abu al-Gasim Mohamed Ibrahim as mediators. Malloum and Gaddafi issued a joint communiqué reestablishing diplomatic relations, and called for a meeting the following month with the various rebel factions and the Chadian government to negotiate a peace settlement.¹²⁰⁴

After the fall of Faya-Largeau the immediate evolution of the rebellion and Libya's role in it became less clear to French officials. Shortly following Malloum's Sebha meeting with Gaddafi, Goukouni declared his unwillingness to participate in the announced negotiations the following month. This occasioned a debate in French policymaking circles as to the nature of Libya's relationship to the rebellion. Such rebel intransigence in the face of Libyan demands that they participate in negotiations seemed to indicate that Goukouni depended much less on his Libyan minders than previously thought. Perhaps this had to do with a renewed sense of

¹²⁰¹ Ibid. Goukouni later seconded this assessment of the importance of SA-7s ; see Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 75.

¹²⁰² Ibid.

¹²⁰³ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 49.

¹²⁰⁴ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} au 28 février 1978," 07.03.1978, pp. 10-11.

independence resulting from the rebellion's control of more territory and newly acquired stash of government weaponry captured during the fighting.¹²⁰⁵

On the other hand, French officials wondered if this apparent division between Gaddafi and Goukouni masked a more subtle Libyan strategy. By giving the impression that he lacked control over the rebellion, Gaddafi could plausibly deny accusations, particularly by other African governments, of his involvement in Chad. This allowed him to retain credibility as a mediator all the while undermining the authority of the government in N'Djamena.¹²⁰⁶

Goukouni later claimed that Libya never had total control over his movement. Gaddafi's effort to impose negotiations on the rebels upset their leadership. Also, in the period following the fall of Faya-Largeau, various Frolinat factions had begun negotiations amongst themselves with a view towards (re)unifying the movement. They felt that the new negotiations with the Chadian government decided upon at Sebha, were premature. However, at Libyan insistence, Goukouni finally agreed to meet Malloum.¹²⁰⁷

Meanwhile, French observers placed a great deal of hope in the upcoming Sebha conference. Officials at the Quai worried about the incapacity of the Chadian army to withstand another offensive of the same character. They felt that even increased French logistical assistance would not suffice to hold the defensive line established after the fall of Faya-Largeau. With a military solution now unfeasible for the central government, a negotiated settlement represented the only opportunity for lasting peace.¹²⁰⁸

Although Malloum's concomitant rapprochement with Habré pleased French authorities, Foreign Ministry officials understood that this represented but a small step on the road to national reconciliation. They felt that Malloum's concept of reconciliation also helped to undermine the process, characterizing it as, "la faculté pour lui-même d'accorder la manne aux 'frères égarés' dans la rebellion,"¹²⁰⁹ meaning his proclivities for trying to buy-off opponents. They also criticized his decision to negotiate with Gaddafi as a stand-in interlocutor for Goukouni, rather than with the Frolinat leader himself.¹²¹⁰ This somewhat contradicted Giscard's earlier recommendations to Kamougué that the CSM open a dialogue with Gaddafi as soon as possible in order to reach a political settlement.

¹²⁰⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Draft Note, "a/s : Situation au Tchad," 09.03.1978, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁰⁶ Ibid. 2.

¹²⁰⁷ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 78.

¹²⁰⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Draft Note, "a/s : Situation au Tchad," 09.03.1978, p. 3.

¹²⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹²¹⁰ Ibid.

According to the same Quai officials, in order to gain the support of Chad's neighbors, as well as signal its seriousness, the CSM would have to make a number of public declarations pledging a reorganization of the state. This political program, "paraît assez simple à définir dans ses principales orientations."¹²¹¹ Since Chad's centralized state structure did not correspond to the country's large regional and cultural diversity, "il est donc vital de concevoir et de proposer une nouvelle organisation de l'Etat qui soit calquée sur le pays réel. L'avenir du Tchad, son indépendance et son développement sont liés à la constitution d'un Etat de type fédéral [...]."¹²¹²

As shown below, this thinking was not limited to the Quai d'Orsay. Later public declarations to this effect by French officials, notably Giscard himself, would actually serve to alienate potential allies and undermine French credibility among neighboring states and rebel groups. In the eyes of many Chadians and observers in neighboring countries, federalism meant secession, an unacceptable outcome for neighboring states and most of Chad's armed groups. Meanwhile, it well illustrated the character of French official thinking about the roots of the Chadian crisis, and provided clues as to the character of their oscillating policy.

Between March 12 and 16 1978, various Frolinat factions met at Faya-Largeau in an effort to reconcile their differences to provide a united front against N'Djamena. The factions present, the Frolinat First and Second Armies, along with "l'Armée Volcan," agreed to unify their forces under a *Conseil de la Révolution* presided by Goukouni.¹²¹³ Buijtenhuijs later called this reconciliation a, "réunification de façade," noting that, according to his sources in the rebellion, it alienated a number of partisans of the "First Army" and "l'Armée Volcan."¹²¹⁴ Nonetheless, this new formation, the *Forces armées populaires* (FAP), became the umbrella organization which represented the rebellion during the upcoming negotiations with the CSM.

On March 23, the CSM delegation, led by its Vice-President, Colonel Djimé Mamari Ngakinar, met with Goukouni in Sebha. The meeting, again presided by the Sudanese Vice-President Abu al-Gasim Mohamed Ibrahim, immediately ran into problems. The FAP demanded that, as a precondition for further negotiations, the CSM agree to the expulsion of all French advisors from the country.¹²¹⁵ Clearly this represented an unacceptable condition for the CSM as it would have left them helpless against a renewed FAP offensive. Gaddafi,

¹²¹¹ Ibid.

¹²¹² Ibid.

¹²¹³ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 79.

¹²¹⁴ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 50.

¹²¹⁵ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 3 pour la période du 1^{er} au 31 mars 1978," 05.04.1978, p. 4.

however pressured the participants to move their negotiations to Benghazi, where the CSM made a number of apparently sweeping concessions. Colonel Djimé agreed to a country-wide ceasefire, full recognition of the FAP, freedom of circulation for all parties on Chadian territory, and a mixed Libyan-Nigerien military committee to travel the country to “rendre compte de la présence ou non des troupes et des bases militaires étrangères.”¹²¹⁶ The parties also agreed to a follow-up meeting in June in Tripoli to examine the progress made towards reconciliation, and to define the modalities of its implementation.¹²¹⁷

French observers viewed these concessions as a disaster for the Chadian government. Dallier wrote that the Benghazi agreement not only gave Frolinat forces complete freedom of movement over Chadian territory, but also effectively implied that the CSM had renounced French military assistance. He concluded that:

Il apparaissait clairement qu’à Benghazi, le FROLINAT avait fait accepter par la délégation tchadienne la totalité de ses exigences et qu’ayant reconnu à la Libye un droit de regard sur l’ensemble du dispositif militaire tchadien, la délégation gouvernementale à Benghazi avait consenti à une grave atteinte à l’indépendance et à la souveraineté de son pays, sans aucune contrepartie de la part de la rébellion.¹²¹⁸

The Benghazi accords outraged French officials. Georgy cabled Dallier, telling him that he must immediately inform Malloum that the French considered the CSM’s concessions, “incompatible avec la poursuite de notre coopération militaire. Il ne peut en effet être question de laisser inspecter notre dispositif de coopération militaire [...] par une commission internationale créée en vertu d’un accord auquel nous ne sommes pas partie.”¹²¹⁹ Dallier passed this message on to Malloum.¹²²⁰

In the event, Malloum also did not seem particularly pleased with the concessions made by his delegation. On April 1, he had Djimé give a press conference in which he declared that the Benghazi Accords did not, in any way, call into question the character and size of French military assistance to the Chadian government.¹²²¹ Goukouni later claimed that the CSM had practically denounced the accords, thus rendering them obsolete.¹²²² However, the week following Djimé’s remarks, Malloum visited Khartoum, Tripoli, and Niamey to clarify to his

¹²¹⁶ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1978,” “Synthèse n. 3 pour la période du 1^{er} au 31 mars 1978,” 05.04.1978, p. 9.

¹²¹⁷ Ibid.

¹²¹⁸ Ibid. 5.

¹²¹⁹ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier “Correspondances entre Gen. Malloum et l’Ambassadeur de la République,” Telegram from Paris to Dallier, “Accord de Sebha,” 30.03.1978, p. 2.

¹²²⁰ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier “Correspondances entre Gen. Malloum et l’Ambassadeur de la République,” Letter from Dallier to Malloum, 30.03.1978.

¹²²¹ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1978,” “Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 avril 1978,” 09.05.1978, p. 5.

¹²²² Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 79.

various interlocutors that the French would stay, but that he had every intention of keeping the ceasefire agreement and preparing for the planned June meeting on Chadian reconciliation.¹²²³

One should note that, although the French and later observers found these concessions inexplicable, they did seem to obey a certain logic. By appearing to outsiders to be extremely flexible and willing to compromise, they managed to shift responsibility for a breakdown of the ceasefire onto the FAP. This provided a more substantial pretext for French intervention and support for the regime. By following this up with the progressive integration of Habré's FAN into its line of defense, and eventual institutionalization of their earlier accord, the CSM could better reinforce perceptions of its willingness to compromise and open its ranks to other movements, all the while improving its capacity to resist the FAP.

The ceasefire did not last for long. On April 16, FAP columns overran a small Chadian government garrison in the town of Salal, some 450 kilometers north of N'Djamena. In Eastern Chad, FAP forces also took the town of Arada. The FAP had sent several heavily armed units to Salal. French reports suggested that they possessed five or six companies, armed with SA-7 surface-to-air missiles, 120mm mortars, recoilless rifles, radar, and more. Dallier felt that the planning of the attack implied careful preparation among the rebels. In his eyes, the attack was premeditated aggression, rather than stemming from the initiative of a local commander, and demonstrated that the rebellion placed little faith in the Benghazi accords.¹²²⁴

As the French received news of the FAP attack, the only fully constituted French combat unit in the country, a company of *Auto-Mitrailleuse Légère* (AML—light armor) from the *Régiment d'Infanterie & Chars de Marine* (RICM), together with several Chadian army units and teams of French military advisors moved towards the town from their base in Moussoro. However, the rebels were well armed and well deployed. After three days of skirmishing, the Franco-Chadian troops were unable to take the town and the FAP managed to shoot down a Chadian Air Force AD-4 Skyraider ground-attack aircraft with an SA-7. The French also lost two soldiers in the fighting.¹²²⁵ Although Pierre Dufour writes, somewhat confusingly, that the French managed to take the town,¹²²⁶ the rebels in fact managed to hold their ground.¹²²⁷ Unlike the previous months though, the fighting at Salal provoked a significant French military response in the form of a much larger intervention force.

¹²²³ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 avril 1978," 09.05.1978, p. 2.

¹²²⁴ Ibid. 9.

¹²²⁵ Dufour, *La France au Tchad*, 73.

¹²²⁶ Ibid. 73.

¹²²⁷ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 avril 1978," 09.05.1978, p. 9.

France Intervenes

The details of the policymaking process behind the French decision to intervene on a larger scale remain somewhat unclear. As early as February, the seriousness of the military situation encouraged French policymakers to envisage a broader role for their troops. Giscard's mid-February decision to dispatch additional advisory teams and logistical support represented the very beginning of what would soon grow into a major military intervention, designated *Opération Tacaud*. What had changed in French official thinking since the first wave of the Frolinat offensive the previous year?

The 1976 renegotiated Franco-Chadian military assistance accords explicitly excluded any combat role for French forces in support of the CSM. In 1977 French officials also seemed to widely share the belief that Chadian internal affairs represented a purely Chadian matter and that Libya could play a constructive role in peacemaking, despite the evidence of widespread Libyan support to Goukouni's rebellion. However, in early 1978, Giscard reacted to the renewed offensive with the decision to intervene militarily to check the advance of the rebellion.

Initially, Giscard's decisions merely represented an intensification of the military assistance provided for by the military cooperation agreement between the two countries. In February, France dispatched several *Etats-majors tactiques* (EMT), seconded from several French regiments to organize a defensive line across Central Chad, focusing on the towns of Mongo, Moussoro, and Abéché.¹²²⁸ These groups, though small, played a crucial role in stiffening Chadian army defenses. Their orders consisted of training and reorganizing the local Chadian units, as well as planning the defense of the towns. During this first phase they had orders to avoid combat with Frolinat forces. In case their towns came under Frolinat attack however, they had orders to fight alongside their Chadian allies, with priority given to defense of the nearest airstrip. In case the Chadian units collapsed, the French advisors had orders to, "rejoindre N'Djamena par vos propres moyens."¹²²⁹

¹²²⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 101/1, "Chronologies," *Centre militaire d'information et de documentation sur l'outre-mer* (CMIDOM), "L'Affaire tchadienne : Chronologie succincte des événements depuis l'indépendance : 1^{ère} partie—de 1960 à 1978," undated, 1979, p. 13.

¹²²⁹ Dufour, *La France au Tchad*, 75.

Now, French policymakers saw the collapse of the Chadian army in the North as a major blow to the regime's credibility and legitimacy.¹²³⁰ They also increasingly viewed the success of the offensive as a manifestation of a broader threat. Dallier wrote to Paris that:

La victoire remportée sur l'armée nationale tchadienne par ceux qui n'étaient encore il y a deux ans que de petits groupes épars de rebelles faiblement armés, divisés au surplus par des querelles intestines et des ambitions rivales, met en évidence l'importance et l'efficacité du soutien que leur a apporté le gouvernement de TRIPOLI [...] Ce soutien a témoigné [un] double but d'étendre le Dar el Islam jusqu'au cœur du continent africain et d'imposer à N'DJAMENA un régime de leur choix [...] derrière la chute recherchée du régime militaire au pouvoir depuis le 13 août 1975, c'est la présence française au Tchad qui est au centre du problème et que pour la Libye il s'agit essentiellement d'y mettre fin et de faire rentrer ce pays voisin dans sa zone d'influence.¹²³¹

African leaders allied to France shared Dallier's fears and made this known to Giscard. According to the latter, the rapid and resounding success of the Libyan-backed Frolinat forces prompted a number of African leaders close to the French President to complain about French inaction and to urge more forthright measures to counter the threat. Giscard wrote that, in part his decision to return to Chad came as a response to pleas from Presidents Senghor, Houphouët, Eyadéma, and others who:

[...] insistent par téléphone auprès de moi pour une intervention française. Pour eux, c'est un test de survie. Au même moment, l'Union soviétique pèse de tout son poids en Afrique. Ses avions militaires font escale au Mali. Le président Carter n'esquisse pas un geste pour empêcher l'arrivée en Angola des techniciens soviétiques et des mercenaires cubains. Si nous laissons les Libyens avancer au Tchad sans réagir, ce sera le signal pour les chefs d'Etats francophone que la sécurité n'existe que dans un seul camp. Et ils me laissent entendre que certains d'entre eux se préparent déjà à en tirer les conséquences.¹²³²

Ultimately, Cold War-related fears did not play the same role for French policymaking in Chad as it did in Zaire. However, Frolinat's successful offensive did occur at the same time that Cuban and Soviet troops had nearly finished repelling Somalia's invasion of Ethiopia. Soviet involvement in Chad was negligible. In fact, Soviet policy was supportive of the CSM. Dallier noted in 1976 that, while the Soviets had provided no known assistance to the rebellion, they had provided some military support to the regime. This included deliveries of several multiple-rocket launchers, and a large quantity of small arms and ammunition.¹²³³ They also sent several instructors to train Chadian officers and soldiers in the use of Soviet equipment. Additionally, they trained a number of pilots and mechanics for the Chadian Air Force.¹²³⁴

¹²³⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Draft Note, "a/s : Situation au Tchad," 09.03.1978, p. 2.

¹²³¹ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} au 28 février 1978," 07.03.1978, pp. 1-2.

¹²³² Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 212.

¹²³³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 91, "Europe de l'est, URSS 1976-1979," Note from Dallier to Paris, "A/s : Politique de l'U.R.S.S. en Afrique—Tchad," 17.07.1976, p. 6-7.

¹²³⁴ Ibid.

Even this level of assistance, however, led French Foreign Minister Louis de Guiringaud to observe that it represented, “le début classique d’une action soviétique que peut prendre une ampleur inquiétante.” He further noted that fears of communist influence expressed by Cameroonian President Ahijdo seemed justified.¹²³⁵ This concern reflected the frequent warnings, sincere or otherwise, voiced by African leaders on the “dangers” of communist expansion. While it reflected some French fears as well, the lack of evidence of Soviet support to the rebellion, or encouragement of Libyan efforts in this direction, resulted in a marginalization of Cold War concerns in French policy discourse on Chad in the coming years. Instead, the issue that most concerned French policymakers related to the rapid success of the rebellion and its effect on African sensibilities about France’s commitment to the stability and security of friendly regimes.

Journalist Agnès Thivent, writing in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, suggests that Giscard had a major intervention in mind as soon as the major rebel offensive began. According to Thivent, in early February, Giscard sent General Jean-Louis Delayen, one of Malloum’s former military advisors, to N’Djamena to meet with the Chadian President. He allegedly told the latter that France would soon respond with sufficient military force, but that Malloum would have to buy time until the results of the French legislative elections in mid-March. According to this account, Malloum’s Sebha meeting with Gaddafi resulted from this injunction more than anything else. The advisors that Giscard dispatched in February and March to improve the Chadian army’s defensive capabilities thus represented a discreet beginning of a much larger deployment.¹²³⁶

Indeed, Malloum and the French initially agreed to keep the French military presence as invisible as possible. As early as mid-March, Malloum complained to Dallier that, “malgré mes recommandations, les éléments de l’Assistance Militaire Française continuent à silloner abusivement les rues et l’aéroport de N’Djaména, à bord des véhicules portant l’immatriculation de l’Armée Française.”¹²³⁷ This posed a serious problem by threatening “le caractère discret de la présence de ces éléments” which aimed at avoiding “toute extrapolation pouvant jeter un discrédit quelconque sur nos Etats respectifs.”¹²³⁸ Dallier replied the next day, informing Malloum that he had made arrangements so that French troops stationed in

¹²³⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 91, “Europe de l’est, URSS 1976-1979,” Note manuscrite du ministre, “a/s : présence soviétique au Tchad,” 24.12.1976.

¹²³⁶ Agnès Thivent. “L’impossible mission de l’armée française,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 01.03.1980.

¹²³⁷ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier “Correspondances entre Gen. Malloum et l’Ambassadeur de la République,” Letter from Malloum to Dallier, 14.03.1978.

¹²³⁸ Ibid.

N'Djamena would only leave their base in civilian clothes, and that no vehicles with military markings would circulate in the city.¹²³⁹

Thivent also suggests that after the first round of the French legislative elections held on March 12, full combat-ready units began to arrive in the country.¹²⁴⁰ CSM officials did fear that a victory of the French Left in the National Assembly, as polls had initially predicted, would hinder Giscard's support for their regime.¹²⁴¹ However, the unexpected victory of the two parliamentary right-wing parties on March 19 gave Giscard a majority and thus, something of a mandate for his policies.

Nevertheless, the timeline of the French deployment does not conform to this story. The first significant French unit to deploy to Chad, apart from the *Etats-majors tactiques* sent in February and the French military instructors already stationed in the country, was the AML company described above. This arrived on March 1. The next batch of French units did not arrive until April 20, four days after the fall of Salal and more than a month after the legislative elections.¹²⁴²

Giscard later stated that the earlier deployment of the armored company near N'Djamena originally aimed at protecting the French expatriate population and to prepare for a possible evacuation.¹²⁴³ Less than two weeks after the renewed FAP offensive, the French evacuated their expatriates from Abéché in Eastern Chad to N'Djamena.¹²⁴⁴ Thus, it does seem that the protection of French expatriates did play some role in French decision-making. However, the attack on Salal changed Giscard's appreciation of the situation, and resulted in the dispatch of an expeditionary force.

In a June press conference, Giscard outlined his decision-making process leading to the major increase in French forces and their participation in combat operations. According to Giscard, the small number of French forces already deployed in Chad at the time of the Benghazi accords, "avaient pour objet d'assurer la stabilité de la région où ils étaient, et la sécurité de la capitale pendant la durée du cessez-le-feu." Thus, the attacks on Salal and

¹²³⁹ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Correspondances entre Gen. Malloum et l'Ambassadeur de la République," Letter from Dallier to Malloum, 15.03.1978.

¹²⁴⁰ Thivent, "L'impossible mission.»

¹²⁴¹ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 3 pour la période du 1er au 31 mars 1978," 05.04.1978, p. 13.

¹²⁴² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 101/1, "Chronologies," *Centre militaire d'information et de documentation sur l'outre-mer (CMIDOM)*, "L'Affaire tchadienne : Chronologie succincte des événements depuis l'indépendance : 1^{ère} partie—de 1960 à 1978," undated, 1979, p. 14.

¹²⁴³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/2, "Réunion de presse du 14 juin 1978 à l'Elysée : Déclarations de M. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (extraits concernant la politique étrangère)," 15.06.1978, p. 17.

¹²⁴⁴ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Correspondances entre Gen. Malloum et l'Ambassadeur de la République," Letter from Dallier to Malloum, 12.02.1978.

elsewhere in mid-April represented, in Giscard's view, a violation of the ceasefire, and a move by the FAP, "au-delà de la ligne couverte par les accords et dans la zone où sont déployées les forces gouvernementales."¹²⁴⁵ Thus, French offensive action became necessary to maintain the status quo and to uphold the Benghazi agreement.

Giscard tells a slightly more dramatic, if not completely incompatible story, in his memoirs. Giscard wrote that, in mid-April, his military advisors called him to an emergency meeting in the Elysée's underground command center.¹²⁴⁶ They explained to him that the rebel columns were too strong for French forces to stop. The Libyan-supplied rebels which had taken Salal possessed heavy weaponry, superior to that of local French forces. Their SA-7 surface-to-air missiles made close air support impossible, and rebel anti-tank weapons were effective against French light armor. The high temperatures, clear skies, and flat terrain made the employment of helicopters problematic and they presented ideal targets to FAP forces.

His advisors, including General Huguet, the commander of French forces in Chad, told the Giscard that this meant that French troops could not retake Salal. Huguet added, "D'un moment à l'autre, les Libyens vont reprendre leur marche en avant en direction de N'Djamena. Plus aucun obstacle ne les sépare."¹²⁴⁷ Giscard inquired about the French advisors sent previously to train Chadian forces and organize the defense of their positions. Huguet responded that training had not advanced enough to prepare Chadian forces to withstand a full-fledged rebel assault. An impatient Giscard then asked what exactly the army required to stop the rebel advance. General Vanbremeersch, the head of Giscard's personal military staff, then responded that, "Nous avons abouti, monsieur le Président, à la conclusion qu'il était impossible de défendre N'Djamena. Nous vous demandons d'autoriser le retrait de nos forces du Tchad."¹²⁴⁸ According to Giscard, this request came as a shock, "Les Français battus par les Libyens et les Toubous! Jamais je ne l'admettrai."¹²⁴⁹

He wondered what could have really brought the military leadership to this conclusion:

Que s'est-il passé ? Ces chefs militaires sont courageux. Deux d'entre eux ont été déportés [during World War II]. Est-ce l'effet des longues frustrations d'Indochine et d'Algérie, du refus du pouvoir politique de leur fournir les moyens nécessaires au succès ? Pourtant j'avais donné la directive de répondre à tous les besoins exprimés sur le terrain. Ou bien pensent-ils que ces aventures africaines détournent l'armée de sa grande tâche, à laquelle ils se consacrent avec passion : reconstituer notre potentiel de combat en Europe ?¹²⁵⁰

¹²⁴⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/2, "Réunion de presse du 14 juin 1978 à l'Elysée : Déclarations de M. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (extraits concernant la politique étrangère)," 15.06.1978, p. 17.

¹²⁴⁶ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 213

¹²⁴⁷ Ibid. 215-216.

¹²⁴⁸ Ibid. 217.

¹²⁴⁹ Ibid. 217.

¹²⁵⁰ Ibid. 217.

Tonquédec later wrote that army officials also resented Malloum for the expulsion of French forces in 1975. Furthermore, ongoing French military reorganization, based upon assumptions of a European war, encouraged hesitation on questions of foreign interventions.¹²⁵¹

Giscard decided that the stakes in Chad were too high to simply abandon the French position there. The Army Chief of Staff, General Guy Méry, told Giscard that the operation would require at least several thousand troops, as well as a considerable amount of time for their deployment, given the range limitations of the French C-160 Transall transport aircraft. He added that even this might not suffice to stop the rebel advance.¹²⁵² For the French President, these apparent obstacles did not justify what he perceived as an abandonment of the country. It had also become a question of honor, fed by an active imagination. He described his reasoning in his memoirs:

Il n'est pas possible d'abandonner N'Djamena. Ce serait un triomphe pour Kadhafi et un signal de débandade pour les plus menacés de nos partenaires africains. Et puis ce n'est pas concevable pour la France ! L'idée de voir nos unités d'arrière-garde grimper dans les passerelles des avions, laissant derrière des matériels disloqués et des baraques sur les murs desquelles pendent les derniers ordres de service, me paraît ignominieuse. Et puis je n'y crois pas : nos unités, si elles sont structurées et commandées sur place, ne seront pas défaites par les Toubbous [sic] !¹²⁵³

He thus ordered his Defense Minister, Yvon Bourges, along with his military chiefs, to do everything necessary to secure N'Djamena and prevent a rebel advance further southward.¹²⁵⁴ The orders given to General Raoul Bredèche, who replaced Huguet, who was an Air Force officer, in early May, conformed to the spirit of the reasoning outlined in Giscard's memoirs. Bredèche had orders to "casser la dynamique de la victoire chez les rebelles, et de ramener la confiance à N'Djamena."¹²⁵⁵

Thus, between April 20 and April 23, the lead elements of the main French intervention force began to arrive in N'Djamena. This included infantry, AML, and artillery units.¹²⁵⁶ Over the course of the next month, other ground and air units would arrive, bringing the number of French combat troops to over 2,500 men.¹²⁵⁷ Their arrival also corresponded with intensified

¹²⁵¹ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 36.

¹²⁵² Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 218.

¹²⁵³ Ibid. 217.

¹²⁵⁴ Ibid. 218.

¹²⁵⁵ Cited in Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 41.

¹²⁵⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 101/1, "Chronologies," *Centre militaire d'information et de documentation sur l'outre-mer (CMIDOM)*, "L'Affaire tchadienne : Chronologie succincte des événements depuis l'indépendance : 1^{ère} partie—de 1960 à 1978," undated, 1979, p. 14.

¹²⁵⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Libye 1978-1979," Telegram from Paris, "Entretien du ministre avec le Dr. Ali Trikki[sic], Ministre des Affaires Etrangères de la Jamariyha Libyenne," 22.04.1978, p. 2.

diplomatic activity aiming to restrain the Libyans from their perceived role in the rebel advance.

On April 22, French Foreign Minister Louis de Guiringaud met his Libyan counterpart, Ali Triki, in Paris for a long meeting on the renewed FAP offensive in Chad. Guiringaud blamed Libya for its apparent complicity in violating the ceasefire agreement during the FAP's attack on Salal. Although he promised not to publically accuse Libya of interference in Chadian affairs, he demanded an explanation. He told Ali Triki that, while France sympathized with the aspirations of the people of Northern Chad and had no interest in maintaining the current governmental administration, it could not allow the FAP to extend its "subversion" south of the BET and to take power in N'Djamena. Guiringaud added that France not only considered the attack on Salal a violation of the Benghazi agreement, but also as a broken promise on the part of Gaddafi who had made commitments to the French to restrain the rebels. Guiringaud threatened, "Nous serions dès lors prêts, à notre corps défendant, à en tirer toutes les conséquences."¹²⁵⁸

Triki evasively observed that both sides had blamed each other and that Goukouni's forces could in any case circulate freely in Chadian territory in accordance with the Benghazi agreement. According to Triki, only a neutral observation force, such as the recently constituted joint military observation committee could determine the status of the ceasefire. Triki blamed the Chadian government for obstructing the deployment of this committee, and accused Malloum of planning to attack rebel positions.¹²⁵⁹

Triki pleaded that Libya had ceaselessly worked in favor of Chadian national reconciliation. He cited the improved tone of Frolinat radio broadcasts, and asserted that Libya had ceased shipping arms to the rebellion since the Benghazi agreement.¹²⁶⁰ Triki warned Guiringaud, however, that though Libya had "scrupulously" respected its own commitments, it rejected any idea of a Chad divided between zones of French and Libyan influence. He told his French counterpart that Libya wanted a unified Chad and that, in any case, Libya had more "fraternal" ties with even the Southern Chadians than France did. Instead, France should use its influence in N'Djamena to pressure the government to receive the joint military committee. Furthermore, he warned, if France reinforced the Chadian army, as well as its own military presence, Libya could no longer reject the FAP's requests for assistance. Guiringaud

¹²⁵⁸ Ibid. and Thivent. "L'impossible mission."

¹²⁵⁹ Ibid. 2-3.

¹²⁶⁰ Ibid. 3.

responded that the French could not refuse requests for assistance from the CSM as long as the FAP threatened the latter in its movement towards the South.¹²⁶¹

Unfortunately for the Libyans, Chadian authorities had managed to add Sudanese representation to the Libyan-Nigerien military committee called for by the Benghazi agreement. They also managed to change the mission of the committee to act as ceasefire observers rather than reporting on the location of French forces. The inclusion of the Sudanese, close to Habré and thus somewhat favorable to the CSM, ensured that the Chadian government would benefit from the committee's activities. Since it now focused on the ceasefire agreement, the Sudanese presence made it much more difficult for the FAP's violations of the ceasefire to go unnoticed. This helped to impute the responsibility for the failure of the Benghazi accords onto the FAP.¹²⁶² Indeed, as the military control commission arrived in N'Djamena on April 25, the Sudanese Vice-President openly condemned FAP's violation of the ceasefire, as well as its refusal to allow the commission to carry out its work in its territory. Thus, the military control commission whose presence French officials had initially considered "incompatible" with their own military presence helpfully handed the Chadian government the gift of a legitimate grievance.¹²⁶³

At the same time, the newly reinforced French forces renewed their attack on Salal alongside Chadian army units. The Franco-Chadian force, advancing from their base at Moussoro, spent April 25 skirmishing with the defenders of Salal, but deemed the position too strong to take.¹²⁶⁴ Partly this was due to the heavy armament possessed by the town's defenders. Furthermore, French artillery bombardments were hampered by ammunition problems related to the extreme heat, as well as the incompatibility of certain French munitions with their mortars.¹²⁶⁵ After exchanging fire at long range with the defenders at Salal, the Franco-Chadian force withdrew back to Moussoro.

Captain Litique, commander of the French artillery battery deployed in support of the operation, later noted that, "le but n'était pas de chasser les rebelles de Salal, mais de stabiliser la situation militaire afin de permettre la reprise (ou l'établissement) de contacts et de négociations politiques entre les protagonistes tchadiens."¹²⁶⁶ Dallier wrote that these attacks had inflicted losses on the FAP troops and signaled that French forces would block any move

¹²⁶¹ Ibid. 4.

¹²⁶² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Note pour le Ministre, "a/s : Situation au Tchad," 03.03.1978, p. 2.

¹²⁶³ Ibid. 1-2.

¹²⁶⁴ see account of Captain Litique in Cadiou, *Opération Tacaud*, 75.

¹²⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁶ Ibid. 74.

further south.¹²⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the French army's repeated failures to take Salal illustrated the quality of the rebel units. They managed to hold a fixed position against units from one of the most advanced militaries in the world. This also dealt a blow to French morale, and resulted in a French decision to send a squadron of Jaguar ground-attack aircraft to N'Djamena. From this point onwards, the French would undertake no major offensive action without close air support.¹²⁶⁸

Thivent suggests that one of the reasons the French did not actually take Salal was because the Arabic version of the Benghazi accord placed it in FAP "territory." This clause appeared in the French version of the agreement as a "free-circulation" clause. Although not mentioned specifically in any French documents, Giscard did allude to a "ligne couverte par les accords" in a June press conference.¹²⁶⁹ He cited the violation of this "line" as a justification for French intervention.

Thus, unlike the French intervention in 1969, *Opération Tacaud* had no mandate to defeat the rebellion or to conduct any kind of counterinsurgency operation. The French had established a defensive line centered on Moussoro, Mongo, and Abéché. This aimed at preventing further FAP advances while allowing the Chadian army to reorganize. However, the French would not conduct substantial offensive activity to the north of this line.¹²⁷⁰

At the end of April, the FAP refused the joint military commission access to their positions at Faya-Largeau, Arada, and Salal.¹²⁷¹ On April 30, the FAP released a communiqué denouncing the Benghazi agreement as obsolete. It also vehemently criticized Sudanese participation in the joint military commission, particularly its refusal to condemn the growing French military presence in the country.¹²⁷² Meanwhile, by mid-May, the bulk of the French expeditionary force had arrived in Chad. This included more Jaguar ground-attack aircraft and Puma attack helicopters.¹²⁷³ For months, Malloum had pleaded with Giscard to provide more

¹²⁶⁷ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1er au 30 avril 1978," 09.05.1978, p. 9.

¹²⁶⁸ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 39.

¹²⁶⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/2, "Réunion de presse du 14 juin 1978 à l'Elysée : Déclarations de M. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (extraits concernant la politique étrangère)," 15.06.1978, p. 17.

¹²⁷⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Note pour le Ministre, "a/s : Situation au Tchad," 03.03.1978, p. 2.

¹²⁷¹ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 5 pour la période du 1er au 31 mai 1978," 05.06.1978, p. 1.

¹²⁷² Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 56.

¹²⁷³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 101/1, "Chronologies," *Centre militaire d'information et de documentation sur l'outre-mer* (CMIDOM), "L'Affaire tchadienne : Chronologie succincte des événements depuis l'indépendance : 1^{ère} partie—de 1960 à 1978," undated, 1979, p. 14.

substantial air support. He renewed these demands in April and May as the rebellion gained ground.¹²⁷⁴ This time the French President complied.

Giscard later wrote fondly of the success of French air power. In imaginative prose, he described how he would collect and admire post-strike photographs:

[...] où l'on voit les camions libyens désertés par leurs conducteurs et, à côté, projetée sur le sable, l'ombre des ailes des Jaguars. Ce ne sont pas des secrets d'Etat : je les emporterai dans l'appartement privé, où je les garderai dans le tiroir de mon bureau, pour les contempler, de temps en temps, pendant que la lumière de Paris, venant de diagonale de la fenêtre, après avoir traversé la verrière du Grand Palais et survolé les embouteillages des Champs-Élysées, les éclairera par-dessus mon épaule pour en détailler les images : l'Afrique, la guerre cruelle, et le succès.¹²⁷⁵

This did not stop FAP elements from testing their luck. Perhaps emboldened by their apparent success at Salal, FAP units of "l'Armée Volcan" under their new leader, Ahmat Acyl, seized the town of Ati on the night of May 18-May 19. Ati, if held, represented a significant strategic prize as it lay in the middle of the route between Abéché in the East and N'Djamena in the West. However, they barely held the town for twenty-four hours. Receiving news of the fall of Ati, French units posted in Mongo, some 150 kilometers to the south organized a counterattack.

Lt. Colonel Lhopitallier, on detached duty from the 2nd REP (the same regiment which fought at Kolwezi), had arrived in Mongo in early March with a small detachment of some 25 officers and noncoms from the same regiment as part of Giscard's initial deployment of advisors. There, they found Chadian units lacking proper equipment and in a state of total despair and disorganization.¹²⁷⁶ However, by mid-April, Lhopitallier began to feel that French instructors had begun to make significant progress in training the Chadian units. At the same time, his command was reinforced by a company of the 3rd RIMa, and Puma helicopters. The improved readiness of the Chadian forces and the increased numbers of French troops meant that Lhopitallier could now engage in combat operations. In the early hours of May 19, the same day the rest of his regiment would jump over Kolwezi, he began to move his troops towards Ati.¹²⁷⁷

Despite the unexpected nature of the Franco-Chadian counterattack, Ati's defenders did not simply flee. The fighting was fierce and the rebels managed to hold their ground. At one point, the French even resorted to a bayonet charge across open terrain, apparently singing as

¹²⁷⁴ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Correspondances entre Gen. Malloum et l'Ambassadeur de la République," Telegram from Malloum to Dallier, No subject, 01.05.1978, and Letter from Malloum to Dallier, 03.05.1978.

¹²⁷⁵ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 219.

¹²⁷⁶ Dufour, *La France au Tchad*, 75.

¹²⁷⁷ Ibid.

they took casualties.¹²⁷⁸ However, although Lhopitallier's troops had air support in the form of Puma ground-attack helicopters and could call in airstrikes from Jaguars based in N'Djamena, they did not have sufficient numbers or firepower to take the town that day. Fortunately for them, they did not have to renew their efforts. The rebels, having taken heavy losses in the fighting, withdrew from the town overnight. The French suffered two killed, some ten wounded, and twelve cases of heat exhaustion.¹²⁷⁹ In addition, at least four Chadian soldiers were killed, and several wounded.¹²⁸⁰ However, the rebels suffered 80 killed, and left a large quantity of weapons and equipment behind.¹²⁸¹

The fall of Ati was soon followed by an even more substantial setback for the FAP. At the end of May, French troops stationed in Ati received intelligence that a large formation of several hundred FAP rebels had concentrated at the oasis town of Djedaa, some 50 kilometers to the northeast. The local French commander, Lt. Colonel Hamel, requested authorization to attack and destroy them. General Bredèche passed Hamel's request onto Paris where it was initially refused. According to Tonquédec, the losses sustained in previous engagements and the ferocity of the previous fighting made the French General Staff hesitant about undertaking another offensive operation.¹²⁸² Cadiou relates that when attack orders finally came to the French units stationed in Ati, Hamel told his unit commanders that, "le général est d'accord [...] je suppose qu'il a l'assentiment de Paris, mais ceci n'est pas de mon ressort."¹²⁸³ In reality, the orders that Cadiou and his men received stipulated that they should "disarm" the rebels, rather than explicitly ordering an assault.¹²⁸⁴

The attack, which began on the morning of May 31, was carried out according to plan. Despite advance warning, the FAP fighters who had not decided to preemptively withdraw suffered near total annihilation at the hands of French infantry, armor, and artillery backed up by air support in the form of Jaguar ground-attack aircraft. Although the French suffered no casualties, the rebels did manage to shoot down a Jaguar. The FAP units, however, lost some 150 dead and large amounts of weapons and equipment.¹²⁸⁵ Cadiou later sarcastically said of

¹²⁷⁸ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 43-44.

¹²⁷⁹ Dufour, *La France au Tchad*, 80.

¹²⁸⁰ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 43.

¹²⁸¹ Dufour, *La France au Tchad*, 80.

¹²⁸² Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 45.

¹²⁸³ Cadiou, *Opération Tacaud*, 24.

¹²⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁸⁵ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1978," "Synthèse n. 5 pour la période du 1er au 31 mai 1978," 05.06.1978, pp. 8-9.

“disarming,” “c’est un joli mot, mais si les intéressés ne sont pas d’accord, on désarme un cimetière.”¹²⁸⁶

The French successes in Ati and Djedaa followed the FAP’s loss of the town of Guéréda in Eastern Chad to Hissène Habré’s FAN earlier in the month. The FAN killed twenty-eight FAP rebels, took four prisoners, and captured a number of light-weapons.¹²⁸⁷ As negotiations moved apace for Habré’s integration into the Chadian government, his troops began to play a more active role alongside Chadian government forces. Soon, France would supply weapons to Habré as they took their place along the Franco-Chadian defensive line.

By June, the French intervention had imposed a sort of military equilibrium on the country. For Giscard, the French *cordon sanitaire* which effectively divided the North and South created a balance of power in which:

[...] je considère que les conditions sont réunies pour une solution politique, car l’objectif de la politique française, c’est de permettre qu’une solution politique appropriée soit apportée au problème du Tchad. Pourquoi dis-je que les conditions sont désormais réunies ? C’est d’abord parce que du point de vue des ethnies principales, chacun est chez soi. Dans le Tibesti, les habitants sont chez eux. Dans l’Enedi [sic], ils sont chez eux. Dans le sud, ils sont chez eux. Il n’y a donc pas d’affrontement, et d’ailleurs ils n’y a dans aucune région du pays de mouvement de soulèvement de la population.¹²⁸⁸

Unsurprisingly, Giscard’s analysis was both premature, and reductionist. While most Chadians were in fact, “chez eux,” this had little bearing on the conditions needed for a durable peace settlement. As subsequent events would demonstrate, an externally-imposed division of the country did nothing to alter the configurations of political imbalances and the fundamental substructure of power relations. It may in fact have made matters worse.

¹²⁸⁶ Cadiou, *Opération Tacaud*, 24.

¹²⁸⁷ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1978,” “Synthèse n. 5 pour la période du 1er au 31 mai 1978,” 05.06.1978, p. 7.

¹²⁸⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Zaïre 1975-1978, Carton 21, 21/2, “Réunion de presse du 14 juin 1978 à l’Elysée : Déclarations de M. Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (extraits concernant la politique étrangère),” 15.06.1978, p. 18.

Chapter IV: Habré Returns

In the meantime, Habré and Goukouni made a final effort to reach a settlement between their two movements. According to Goukouni, in May, before the attack on Ati, combatants from both the FAP and the FAN put pressure on their respective leaderships to meet with each other in order to hammer out some kind of a deal. Goukouni claimed that this came at the initiative of combatants from both groups who were from the region surrounding the town of Oum-Chalouba, 200 kilometers north of Abéché. Not wishing to fight each other, these fighters threatened their respective leaderships to defect to the other group if they refused to meet. Goukouni aimed to get Habré to renounce the Khartoum Agreement with the CSM, and jointly attack the French forces in Abéché and Ati with the FAP. Goukouni later claimed that his movement was prepared to break with the Libyans in order to get Habré's support. However, Habré apparently demanded the public execution of two Libyan soldiers who had accompanied Goukouni's group to handle their SA-7s, to signal a credible commitment on the part of the FAP. Goukouni refused and Habré broke off negotiations.¹²⁸⁹

Soon afterwards, the CSM renewed talks with the FAP in Tripoli. The Benghazi accords, which Goukouni had denounced at the end of April, called for another meeting in June, although this was postponed until early July. Malloum sent Kamougué, a noted hard-liner, instead of Djimé who had seemingly conceded too much to the FAP back in March. The conference lasted a mere two days and ended in failure. The CSM blamed the the FAP for its continued demands that French forces withdraw as a precondition for further negotiations. The FAP blamed the government's "arrogance" and lack of a real desire for peace.¹²⁹⁰

With the failure of the FAN-FAP discussions and those between FAP and the CSM, negotiations proceeded apace between the CSM and Habré's FAN for the full implementation of the Khartoum accords integrating the FAN into the government. Habré had provided valuable reinforcements in the Franco-Chadian efforts to hold their defensive line against FAP incursions. Malloum even requested that the French begin to provide heavy weaponry to Habré's forces in the East.¹²⁹¹ Giscard granted his request. However, a number of French officials still held Habré in suspicion. He had, after all, executed Pierre Galopin. Habré thus tried to reassure the French of his intentions and of his political orientation.

¹²⁸⁹ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 81.

¹²⁹⁰ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 59.

¹²⁹¹ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Correspondances entre Gen. Malloum et l'Ambassadeur de la République," Letter from Malloum to Dallier, No subject, 27.05.1978.

In N'Djamena in early June, French Embassy officials met with Ali Taher, one of Habré's lieutenants. Ali Taher had come to N'Djamena to pick up weapons that Malloum had promised to supply to Habré in the East. He told French officials that they had nothing to fear from the FAN, that they rejected communism, and their self-declared "progressivism," was nothing but, "une appellation de circonstance." Furthermore, the FAN understood the vital role that France played in Chad's economy, and wished for French influence in the country to continue. In this vein, he noted that current levels of French military assistance should increase, in order to protect Chad from the Libyan "invasion."¹²⁹² He insisted that the failure of the meeting in Oum-Chalouba between FAN and FAP representatives illustrated the fact that Goukouni was, "totalement entre les mains de Gaddafi."¹²⁹³

This meeting was followed by one between Dallier and Habré in July. This marked the first time that a high-level French representative met Habré since the hostage negotiations during the Claustre Affair. Habré insisted that his conflict with France belonged to the past, and reiterated Ali Taher's point that Libya represented the biggest threat to Chad. According to the FAN leader, Frolinat no longer existed; instead it had become a pure Libyan proxy. FAP's control of the majority of Northern Chad simply masked its effective annexation by Libya. In Habré's view, this, by itself, justified French military assistance. Furthermore, he asserted that Libya could never accept any kind of political compromise. Such a deal would, he said, counter Libya's principal goal of dominating Chad. In Habré's view, Goukouni's demand that French forces withdraw from the country before any further negotiations confirmed this, proving that Gaddafi, "entendait à Tripoli qu'on lui livra le Tchad pieds et poings liés."¹²⁹⁴

Habré promised to move as rapidly as possible to form a national unity government with Malloum, now that most of the obstacles had been cleared. He repeated Ali Taher's assertions that Chad needed France, asking "pouvait-on d'ailleurs renier ses parents?"¹²⁹⁵ To attract French investments and to encourage economic growth, Habré promised to promote a liberal economy. Furthermore, he said that the Chadian government should encourage local management of local affairs. It was urgent to create as representative a government as possible to, "donner aux gens de toutes les régions du Tchad, de toutes les confessions, de toutes les

¹²⁹² MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Crise intérieure 1978-1979," Report of meeting with Ali Taher, 07.06.1978, p. 1. Note, the Ali Taher here is not Mahamat Ali Taher, killed in combat against French forces in 1969.

¹²⁹³ Ibid. 2.

¹²⁹⁴ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Crise intérieure 1978-1979," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S. Entretien avec Hissein [sic] Habré," 13.07.1978, p. 2.

¹²⁹⁵ Ibid. 3.

appartenances politiques la certitude qu'ils seraient désormais équitablement représentés au sein du gouvernement."¹²⁹⁶

Habré clearly knew how to speak to his French interlocutor, and Dallier was impressed. He told Habré that, "ses aspirations répondaient aux vues du gouvernement français."¹²⁹⁷ However, Dallier noticed that Habré seemed unaware that the arms he had recently received from Malloum had come from the French. He also noted that it appeared the allotment received by Habré's FAN did not include the entirety of the shipment sent to N'Djamena for that purpose.¹²⁹⁸

French assessments apparently confirmed Habré's claims regarding Libyan influence within the FAP. French military intelligence reports suggested that several hundred Libyan troops had reinforced FAP units in the BET. Libyan C-130 transport aircraft frequently landed at Faya-Largeau to deliver equipment. They had also deployed anti-aircraft missile batteries and radar-guided anti-aircraft cannon to protect their airbase. Libyan engineers began to construct roads linking major settlements, and to improve a number of airstrips. The French saw this as part of a general effort to improve the FAP's defensive positions in case of Franco-Chadian incursions. However, they did not seem to take any offensive action, particularly after their defeat at Djedaa.¹²⁹⁹

Meanwhile, French efforts at retraining and reorganizing the Chadian army had not progressed particularly well. Only Habré's forces had played a significant role in helping to halt the FAP advance, but even these were limited in strength.¹³⁰⁰ At the same time, after the failure of the Tripoli meeting, Malloum seemed determined to end all negotiations with the FAP and its Libyan backers. French officials feared that this would only serve to reinforce the ongoing stalemate and thus solidify the de facto partition of the country between North and South. French military planners concluded, however, that this made *Tacaoud's* presence all the more necessary in order to counter increasing Libyan engagement.¹³⁰¹ Malloum's intransigence towards Libya led French military officials to urge Paris to pressure Malloum into

¹²⁹⁶ Ibid. 2.

¹²⁹⁷ Ibid. 3.

¹²⁹⁸ Ibid. 4.

¹²⁹⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, "Points chaud : évaluation de la situation 1978-1979," Fiche, Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, "Evaluation de la situation au Tchad," 27.07.1978, p. 1.

¹³⁰⁰ Ibid. 2.

¹³⁰¹ Ibid. 3.

reconsidering his position. Otherwise, in their view, FAP and its Libyan allies, “n’auraient d’autre solution, à terme, que de tenter une action spectaculaire contre nos forces.”¹³⁰²

Two events, however, dramatically altered the balance of power on the ground. First, despite Habré’s assertions, and French perceptions, Gaddafi’s control over the FAP was hardly absolute. In August, Goukouni broke decisively with Gaddafi, and the FAP itself split apart. Secondly, that same month, Habré entered the Chadian government as Malloum’s Prime Minister.

The series of reverses suffered by FAP troops contributed to a crisis within the rebellion. The defeat at Ati and the losses sustained at Djedaa fell principally upon FAP units belonging to “l’Armée Volcan” commanded by Ahmat Acyl. Acyl, a Chadian Arab and former government administrator and legislator, defected to the rebellion after an aborted coup attempt against the CSM in 1975. After the death of Mohammed El-Baghalani in 1977, Acyl became a leading figure within the Volcan force, gradually displacing its nominal leader, Abdoulaye Adoum Dana, within the organization. Partly this had to do with his closer links with Libya. Gaddafi viewed “L’Armée Volcan” as his closest ally within the FAP, particularly due to its Arab ethnic base.¹³⁰³

According to Goukouni, in 1978 the FAP had sent Acyl to Libya with orders to bring back recruits trained in camps near Sebha. He also received a significant quantity of heavy weapons, vehicles, and other equipment from the Libyans. Despite orders from the FAP’s military commander, Adoum Togoï, he refused to integrate his newfound force into other FAP units, and stated his desire to attack Ati. Togoï opposed this idea as too dangerous. The FAP’s “Revolutionary Council” decided that Acyl should only do this if the FAP managed to reach a general agreement with Habré at Oum-Chalouba involving simultaneous attacks on CSM and French positions in the Biltine in Eastern Chad. Despite the failure of Goukouni’s meeting with Habré, Acyl attacked Ati by anyway, without authorization from the movement as a whole.¹³⁰⁴ Distrust and enmity widened when, during the fighting at Ati and Djedaa, other FAP units refused to come to Acyl’s aid, ostensibly for “tribal” reasons.¹³⁰⁵

His enormous losses in men and materiel provoked a strong reaction within the FAP leadership, some of whom wanted to put Acyl on trial. Acyl fell seriously ill however, and Goukouni authorized him to return to Libya. Upon his arrival in Libya, Acyl began to make a

¹³⁰² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Points chaud : évaluation de la situation 1978-1979,” Fiche, Groupe Permanent d’Evaluation de Situations, “Situation au Tchad,” 11.08.1978, p. 2.

¹³⁰³ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 57- 59.

¹³⁰⁴ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 80.

¹³⁰⁵ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 59.

series of public declarations denouncing the FAP and its leadership, particularly targeting its Toubou constituency.¹³⁰⁶ This burgeoning ethnically-charged discourse within the rebellion would contribute enormously to its fragmentation.

In August, the FAP definitively split apart. On August 12-13, and again from August 27-30, fighting broke out in Faya-Largeau between different factions within the movement. Despite a number of contradictory accounts of the event, it seems that fighters coalesced around ethnic identities. The tension within the FAP leadership surrounding Acyl's independent actions reflected a deeper split among the combatants. Monique Brandily, a French researcher who visited the BET several months later, characterized the fighting as taking place between forces loyal to Acyl, and everyone else within the movement. However, she also suggested that ideology played the determinative role in FAP's fragmentation. According to Brandily, the ethnic dimension simply served to mask deeper ideological questions linked to Acyl's connections to Libya and his supposed adherence to the ideology promoted by Gaddafi and his *Green Book*.¹³⁰⁷ Goukouni on the other hand, later characterized the fighting as a struggle between Arabs and Toubous within the FAP units stationed at Faya-Largeau. He blamed Libya for plotting attacks against the Toubous in conjunction with Acyl, and claimed that the Libyans, "incitaient tous les autres combattants contre les originaires du BET."¹³⁰⁸ Buijtenhuijs's assessment seconds that of Goukouni. He further suggests, contrary to Brandily, that based on various FAP documents and interviews, the fighting was not only between Goukouni and Acyl's loyalist factions, but rather of Goukouni's Toubou factions against nearly everyone else in the movement.

Libyan forces stationed in Faya-Largeau participated in the fighting on Acyl's behalf, and had to hastily withdraw to Libya after Goukouni's men reestablished control of the town. Acyl withdrew as well. Goukouni kept the FAP acronym, but it no longer represented a unified rebellion.¹³⁰⁹ In response to the defeat of his troops, as well as those of Acyl, Gaddafi broke off ties with Goukouni and briefly closed the Chadian border. Gaddafi also withdrew all of his units from Northern Chad, except of course those stationed in the Aozou Strip.¹³¹⁰ As the events of the following year would show, this break with Libya would soon have enormous political consequences for Chad. In the meantime, it demonstrated that Goukouni was hardly a Libyan pawn.

¹³⁰⁶ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 81.

¹³⁰⁷ Monique Brandily. "Le Tchad face nord 1978-1979," *Politique Africaine*, n°16, Décembre 1984, p.59.

¹³⁰⁸ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 82.

¹³⁰⁹ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 74-78.

¹³¹⁰ Ibid. 77.

The “Fundamental Charter”

The same month, Habré and the CSM reached a final settlement. The “Fundamental Charter,” signed on August 25, formally dissolved the CSM and created a provisional national unity government charged with running the state and eventually organizing elections for a constituent assembly. On August 29, Malloum officially named Habré as his Prime Minister, and two days later he formed his government.¹³¹¹ In an interpretation that would seem ironic in a few months’ time, French officials saw the formation of the new government in N’Djamena in a very favorable light. Dallier enthused that the creation of the new unity government, “marquera dans l’histoire du Tchad la fin d’une époque: celle au cours de laquelle les populations du Sud, fortes de leur supériorité en cadres, de leur puissance numérique, de la richesse de leurs sols, imposaient leur loi aux autres composantes de la Nation tchadienne.”¹³¹² Furthermore, the break-up of the FAP into factions, and Libya’s role in their division, reassured him that the French had made the right decision in intervening to stop their initial advance. He shuddered at the potential consequences of the inter-group clashes had they taken place in N’Djamena rather than in Faya-Largeau.¹³¹³ Dallier’s sense of security and relief was premature. Less than six months later, the war would indeed come to the capital.

Slowly, French observers began to see signs of a newly deteriorating situation. Within weeks of the formation of the new government, both Habré and Malloum set the tone for a confrontational relationship. In a September 18 press conference outlining the new regime’s political orientation, Malloum insisted on the “Presidential” nature of the regime, implying that Habré’s authority as Prime Minister was ultimately subordinated to his own as President. On September 25, Habré gave a speech in which he harshly criticized the former CSM regime and its “aberrations.” He promised that, “le balai de l’assainissement passera là où il doit passer,” and that his government would take necessary measures to deal with structures, as well as people responsible for the disorder. He particularly singled out the Chadian Army as a case of “véritable dégénérescence.”¹³¹⁴ Habré’s intimations and subtle threats did not pass unnoticed among former members of the CSM, and Southern elites in general. Buijtenhuijs observed that these elites viewed Habré’s statements as a virtual declaration of war. Habré reinforced this

¹³¹¹ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1978,” “Synthèse n. 8 pour la période du 1er au 31 août 1978,” 05.09.1978, pp. 6-8.

¹³¹² Ibid. 1.

¹³¹³ Ibid. 4.

¹³¹⁴ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1978,” “Synthèse n. 9 pour la période du 1er au 30 septembre 1978,” 03.10.1978, p. 5.

impression by bursting into the Radio-Tchad studio and interrupting the Sara translation of his speech. He demanded that the broadcasters read the Arabic translation first, since it, and not Sara, was now an official language of the country.¹³¹⁵ The growing lack of trust between the two camps widened over the following weeks. By November, French observers had reduced the underlying problems between Habré and Malloum to, “une opposition encore plus fondamentale, les deux hommes s’efforçant, l’un de conserver, l’autre de s’approprier l’essentiel du pouvoir.”¹³¹⁶

That same month, French military intelligence observed that Goukouni’s break with Libya and FAP’s internal schism did not seem to undermine its control over the North. Contrary to Habré’s assertions that the FAP represented little else than a Libyan proxy, it seemed to have significant staying power of its own. Meanwhile, although the French defensive line apparently deterred major rebel offensives, large numbers of fighters managed to infiltrate it to gather supplies in Southern markets, to recruit, and even to collect (or extort) taxes from some communities. French officers complained that they could not easily identify these movements since they coincided with the annual migration of pastoralist communities. French intelligence estimated that somewhere around 1,000 rebels divided into smaller groups of 50-100 combatants had begun to organize in Central Chad. Despite the French presence along the N’Djamena-Abéché road, these groups managed to maintain a significant level of insecurity along this route through small-scale attacks by the “First Army.” Furthermore, Chadian regular army forces lacked the capacity to effectively counter the insurgency. French observers noted that, since the FAP offensive in April, the government had made no attempt to reorganize the army and improve its exceedingly low combat effectiveness. This failure of the government rendered French efforts to train individual Chadian units ineffective. Only Habré’s FAN represented a relatively well trained and disciplined fighting force capable of countering the insurrection.¹³¹⁷

This observation highlighted another problem: the balance of forces within the new unity government. The military superiority of the FAN units was somewhat counterbalanced by the numerical superiority of Chadian regular forces. By November, French military observers felt that, absent some kind of political reconciliation between Habré and Malloum, a breakup had become inevitable. In such a situation, either Habré would be forced back into

¹³¹⁵ Buijtenhuijs, *La guerre civile*, 64-65.

¹³¹⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Points chaud : évaluation de la situation 1978-1979,” Fiche, Groupe Permanent d’Evaluation de Situations, “Evaluation de la Situation au Tchad,” 09.11.1978, p. 2.

¹³¹⁷ Ibid. 1-2.

armed rebellion and the situation would resemble that of the previous year, or the FAN would emerge triumphant against the Chadian regular army and provoke, “une partition entre le nord et le sud.”¹³¹⁸ The French saw a train wreck coming, but had no idea what to do about it.

Indeed, the situation at the end of 1978 seemed precarious. The growing presence of the FAO, or “Frolinat 3rd Army,” active near Lake Chad, aggravated matters. This group, with rear bases in both Nigeria and Niger, comprised of some 400-500 men, according to French estimates. They managed to control a large area including several islands on Lake Chad and the region of Mao. They also threatened a CONOCO oil-drilling project in the area, although French intelligence considered them little more than bandits. The Chadian regular army had no more than a hundred men in the region, with the nearest reinforcements located some 200 kilometers away at Moussoro and N’Djamena.¹³¹⁹

Although French observers, the Chadian government, and the various Frolinat formations considered the FAO as a band of outlaws, they more likely represented local populations who lived off of fishing in Lake Chad. These communities lived on the borders of Chad with Nigeria and Niger. This often meant they lived at the mercy of these states’ frontier guards who continually harassed cross-border lake traffic and trade. In this sense, the FAO probably began as a sort of self-defense militia, led by a former member of the “Second Army,” Aboubakar Abderahmane. However, it seems this group also received some support in the form of weapons or financing from certain elements in Nigeria who wanted to begin to influence the Chadian political scene.¹³²⁰

Thus, by the end of the year 1978, one could count at least six different armed Chadian factions: Malloum’s faction within the provisional government, Habré’s FAN, Goukouni’s FAP in the BET, Acyl’s Volcan force taking refuge in Libya, remnants of the “First Army” launching small-scale attacks in the Center and East, and the FAO in the Lake Chad region. One could add to this two other “factions” whose political alliances would shift nearly as frequently as everyone else’s: France and Libya.

Libya’s failed attempt at controlling Goukouni, and its relatively ineffective alliance with Acyl, belied Habré’s claims, widely believed by French observers, that Goukouni represented little more than Gaddafi’s proxy. While it was true that Gaddafi’s military assistance made Goukouni’s successes possible, the Libyan leader never managed to exercise

¹³¹⁸ Ibid. 3.

¹³¹⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Points chaud : évaluation de la situation 1978-1979,” Fiche, Groupe Permanent d’Evaluation de Situations, “Tchad,” 02.01.1979, p. 1.

¹³²⁰ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 45-46.

the degree of political control that he had hoped. Monique Brandily, who spent several months with the FAP in late 1978 and early 1979 in the BET, noted as much. She wrote that Habré hardly had a monopoly on anti-Libyan sentiment and that this feeling was widespread among the Toubou in the North. Furthermore, the FAP managed to construct a reasonably effective administrative apparatus in the areas that it controlled, despite lacking significant sources of revenue. Primary schools continued to function and hospitals in the larger urban areas remained open, despite a lack of medications.¹³²¹ Brandily also observed that the FAP seemed to scrupulously conform to the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war. Red Cross personnel she talked to claimed that they had full access to all of the prisoners, none of whom were confined in close quarters or mistreated. They also tended to have access to better food than the FAP forces through supplies delivered under Red Cross auspices.¹³²² One should note, however, that this obviated the need for the FAP to find food and supplies for its two thousand prisoners when it often had difficulties supplying itself.

Goukouni's break with Gaddafi may have also contributed to the growing tension between Malloum and Habré. Although Habré seems to have strongly desired power for himself, his biggest conflict with Goukouni and the FAP was their reliance on Libyan aid and their supposed subservience to Libyan aims. With this obstacle out of the way by late August/early September, Malloum had to worry increasingly about a possible FAP-FAN rapprochement. The "Fundamental Charter" included provisions for adherence by other groups, and the FAP represented by far the largest rebel group. Its integration into the government would immediately marginalize the Southerners within the government.¹³²³ Paradoxically, Habré had reason to worry about the same thing. He possibly feared that Malloum had begun talks with the FAP with a view of joining them to the "Fundamental Charter." Such a move could marginalize Habré's own position within the government, and hand power to his rivals.

To counter this possibility, Habré attempted to widen his base of support. Since the FAN represented a minority among Northern Chadians, Habré shifted his discourse to emphasize his Muslim identity and the shared interests of Chadian Muslims. He managed to enlist a number of imams in N'Djamena to his cause and used Friday sermons to broadcast his message.¹³²⁴ However, his efforts did not sway the entirety of the Muslim population. A

¹³²¹ Monique Brandily. "Le Tchad face nord 1978-1979," 49.

¹³²² Ibid. 49-50.

¹³²³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, "Points chaud : évaluation de la situation 1978-1979," Fiche, Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, "Tchad," 02.01.1979, p. 2.

¹³²⁴ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 66.

number of Muslim religious elites remained either loyal to Malloum or attempted to maintain a degree of neutrality between the competing factions. This included the most important Muslim religious figure in the Chadian capital, Ibrahim Moussa, the Imam of the Grand Mosque of N'Djamena.¹³²⁵ Nonetheless, Habré's effort to introduce a religious dimension into his own political conflicts would have bloody consequences in the early months of 1979.

This power struggle within the N'Djamena government took place in a context of near total economic and administrative stagnation. Christian de La Rochère, Director of the DAM's West Africa division, noted during his visit that the state had practically ceased to function. In Abéché, the capital of Ouaddaï prefecture, government administrators refused to leave their administrative offices in the city and had no contact with the local population. The school system had shut down in the region, except in the town itself, and the only health services available was a hospital in Abéché with two doctors. Supplies had also become a real problem due to rebel attacks throughout the area. La Rochère wrote that the entirety of Central Chad also suffered from these conditions.¹³²⁶ In N'Djamena, the situation was hardly better. Public transport ceased, infrastructure maintenance had stopped, and one of the two ferries on the Chari River linking N'Djamena to Cameroon, and the rest of the world, had sunk.¹³²⁷ Even in the South, where the state had generally more of a foothold due to its dependence on cotton, conditions had visibly deteriorated. La Rochère observed that the lack of material and financial resources meant that local government could do little in the way of service provision. Smuggling was widespread, and locals suffered from high levels of official corruption.¹³²⁸

These conditions both contributed to and resulted from a steep drop in tax revenue. By December 1978 this had fallen by well over two-thirds from the the average. Government officials went unpaid, which contributed to corruption and high levels of absenteeism. Although state dysfunction of this sort had a long history in parts of Chad, by the beginning of 1979, it had reached unprecedented levels.¹³²⁹

State Collapse

The growing tension between Malloum and Habré reached a point of no return on February 12 1979. In the previous days, Habré called for a general strike in N'Djamena. On the morning

¹³²⁵ Ibid. 66-67.

¹³²⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," "a/s : Compte-rendu de la mission de M. de La Rochère, Sous-Directeur à la DAM," 24.01.1979, p. 2.

¹³²⁷ Ibid. 3.

¹³²⁸ Ibid.

¹³²⁹ Ibid. 3-4.

of February 12, striking students, principally Northern Muslims, at the Lycée Félix Eboué, clashed with others, mainly Southerners, who refused to strike. Although accounts differ slightly, it seems that FAN troops based at the nearby Prime Minister's residence responded quickly, as did police officers loyal to Malloum. Gendarmerie forces stationed nearby, commanded by Kamougué, reacted as well and soon the situation degenerated into street battles between FAN and Malloum loyalists. Habré's forces, well trained and disciplined, spread out in small groups throughout the Muslim quarters of N'Djamena. Meanwhile, Chadian regular forces bombarded these neighborhoods with AD-4 Skyraider ground attack aircraft, and a Puma helicopter, piloted by French civilians contracted by the former CSM. By nightfall, Malloum's forces managed to control the Chagoua Bridge in the eastern part of the city, linking the capital to the South, as well as the center, west, and northwestern parts of N'Djamena.¹³³⁰

Overnight, however, the Gendarme units under Kamougué's command withdrew from their positions and returned to their barracks. FAN units took advantage of this and advanced to the perimeter of the Gendarmerie base which lay near the European quarter. As dawn broke on February 13, the Gendarme units, realizing their situation, responded with heavy fire directed towards the FAN positions.¹³³¹ However, given the nature of the FAN deployment, this did little more than waste a great deal of ammunition.¹³³² Locals and European expatriates living nearby were caught in the crossfire.

Malloum and Habré's forces also fought each other in Abéché in the East. On February 12, as fighting broke out in N'Djamena, FAN forces attacked the regular army garrison. French forces stationed in the city had orders to maintain strict neutrality and not to intervene. This did not prevent French troops from suffering casualties in the crossfire, including one dead and several wounded. The fighting raged for over two days, but the FAN slowly overwhelmed their adversaries. Although some Chadian army soldiers managed to take refuge in the French camp, the rest surrendered after suffering heavy casualties.¹³³³ Following the surrender, the FAN massacred its prisoners while French troops were unable, or unwilling, to stop them.¹³³⁴

The fighting in N'Djamena continued non-stop until February 15 when the situation began to calm down following a provisional ceasefire agreement signed by the two parties in the presence of the new French force commander, General Louis Forest. The following day, a

¹³³⁰ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} février au 31 mars 1979," undated, April 1979, pp. 9-10.

¹³³¹ Ibid. 10.

¹³³² Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 49.

¹³³³ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 49-50.

¹³³⁴ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} février au 31 mars 1979," undated, April 1979, p. 13.

Sudanese delegation arrived in N'Djamena to attempt to mediate a more durable ceasefire arrangement. On February 19, after continued skirmishing and jockeying for position in the city, the warring parties signed a more formal ceasefire accord.

The week of fighting had immeasurable consequences for the future evolution of Chad. It had crystallized ethnic, religious, and regional divisions in a way which had only previously existed in more fluid and flexible forms. According to French researcher Bernard Lanne, a specialist on Southern Chad, many Southerners originally viewed Habré rather favorably. His proclaimed nationalism attracted a number of Southerners who saw in him a means of both overcoming the North-South divide and a figure who could help to unify the country. However, Habré's increasingly anti-Southern discourse as Prime Minister, combined with his efforts to politicize the Chadian Muslim identity for his own ends, alienated and scared off any possible supporters from the South.¹³³⁵

The fighting in N'Djamena and Abéché sparked more violence in other parts of the country. Government officials with Southern origins were killed systematically in a number of towns in Central and Eastern Chad.¹³³⁶ In Abéché itself, the FAN held a number of Southern teachers and nurses hostage for over two years.¹³³⁷ Violence against Southerners sparked a massive exodus from N'Djamena across the Chari River to the South. Lanne estimates that these refugees numbered some 70-80,000 people.¹³³⁸ This was out of a total population estimated at 130,000.¹³³⁹ French Cooperation Ministry official Alain Charon observed that, as he departed N'Djamena on February 25, the city, "était presque vidée des sarah [sic]." ¹³⁴⁰

Local committees focusing on healthcare provision, food delivery, and self-defense sprung up to organize the mass flight. Many of the refugees, particularly the youth "returning" to their "places of origin," had never actually lived in the South. For many of Chad's Southerners, the world they had known for nearly two decades had collapsed.¹³⁴¹ To make matters worse, the arrival of the refugees and news of massacres provoked a violent reaction within some Southern communities. Beginning around February 22, locals in the towns of Moundou and Sahr massacred several hundred people from the small Muslim communities in

¹³³⁵ Bernard Lanne. "Le sud du Tchad dans la Guerre Civile (1979-1980)". *Politique Africaine*. no. 3 octobre 1981, p. 77.

¹³³⁶ Ibid. 78.

¹³³⁷ Ibid.

¹³³⁸ Ibid. 77.

¹³³⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1978, Carton 67, "Notes politiques 1975-1979," Note, "A/S. Le Tchad : aperçu géographique et historique," 20.01.1977, p. 2.

¹³⁴⁰ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, "Rapport d'Alain Charon sur les récents événements du Tchad depuis le lundi 12 Février 1979," undated, 02.1979, p. 2.

¹³⁴¹ Lanne, "Le sud du Tchad," 80.

the region.¹³⁴² Furthermore, the role that French troops played during the fighting left many Southerners feeling betrayed. The official French position during the fighting was one of strict neutrality. However, this neutrality significantly benefited Habré's forces.

As the fighting broke out, the French withdrew their military advisors from Chadian regular army units. This decision contributed to their disorganization and made it more difficult to coordinate counterattacks.¹³⁴³ On February 13, the French commander, General Forest, who had replaced General Bredèche in December, prohibited Malloum's small air force from renewing their attacks on FAN positions. Buijtenhuijs cites accounts suggesting that this came after the entreaties of the Imam of the Grand Mosque, Ibrahim Moussa. Apparently, he told Forest that if the air attacks continued, the Muslim population would begin dumping corpses of civilian victims in front of the French Embassy.¹³⁴⁴ According to Tonquédec, Forest's decision came as a response to threats from Habré that the expatriate population would no longer remain safe if the air attacks continued.¹³⁴⁵ Perhaps knowing Habré's history with hostages, Forest did not take this as an idle threat. Regardless of French motives, to Southerners, this looked like a deliberate effort on the part of French forces to assist Habré.

On February 15, a number of officers in the Chadian army met with Forest and Dallier. They accused the French of favoring Habré, and wanted an explanation of France's lack of support for the regular army. They also demanded an immediate intervention by French forces to enforce the ceasefire recently agreed upon by Malloum and the army high command, which Habré had not yet signed. If the French refused, they threatened to block the runway of N'Djamena's airport and prevent the evacuations of expatriate civilians.¹³⁴⁶

Although they never carried out this threat, Southerners had other good reasons to fear that the French military had stabbed them in the back. Over the course of the previous year, a number of Chadian officials and French diplomats, both in the Foreign and Cooperation Ministries, began to worry that French military personnel had developed a marked sympathy for the FAN and its leadership. Indeed, while insisting that he had scrupulously maintained neutrality, even General Forest later admitted to Buijtenhuijs that he and most of his officers sympathized with the FAN. Their strict military discipline and the competence of their leaders contrasted sharply with a government army that seemed disorganized and lacking in effective

¹³⁴² Ibid. 78.

¹³⁴³ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 117.

¹³⁴⁴ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 117.

¹³⁴⁵ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhaï*, 49.

¹³⁴⁶ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/2, "Événements de février 1979," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S : Situation à N'Djamena," 15.02.1979.

leadership.¹³⁴⁷ Cooperation Ministry officials shared this assessment of their military colleagues. Alain Charon noted as much. He asserted that, while the French army had acted in a completely neutral way during the fighting, their known sympathies with the FAN had sharpened the level of distrust that Malloum and his faction felt towards their French allies.¹³⁴⁸ Furthermore, confusion had arisen during the fighting as to the respective competencies of Forest and Dallier. The resulting tension between the two personalities would increase substantially over the year.¹³⁴⁹ The mistrust of the South, and Forest's real or perceived penchant towards the FAN, would have devastating consequences in the months to come, and would soon contribute to a partition of the country.

Official French neutrality also enraged a number of French civilian expatriates living in the city. Between February 15 and 20, French troops evacuated some 1,600 foreigners from N'Djamena, including 900 French nationals. However, during the first two days of fighting, French forces did not intervene on behalf of their citizens. Shortly after the Kolwezi affair the previous year, a number of French staff officers visited the Chadian capital to develop contingency plans for a possible future evacuation of the European expatriates. According to Christian Bouquet, a French civilian *coopérant* working at the University of Chad (and later a well-known Africanist scholar), they had elaborated a very detailed plan which would allow a quick and effective intervention by the French army to extract the expatriates. They divided the city into zones and compiled the locations of the homes of each expatriate family in order to facilitate a rapid evacuation. However, as events began to unfold, neighborhood leaders attempted to contact the Embassy and the French base. An Embassy official told Bouquet that they would not attempt an evacuation until after the fighting had ended, stating, "Nous ne voulons pas donner l'impression à Hissen Habré [sic], s'il l'emporte, de nous défier de lui, en évacuant nos ressortissants."¹³⁵⁰

After two days without assistance, Bouquet and others organized a convoy of some 20 vehicles carrying white flags, transporting some 100 people. Although this group made it to the French military base, several French citizens were killed in the fighting. To make matters worse, officials from the Cooperation Ministry told the first *coopérants* who managed to evacuate safely to Libreville in Gabon that they would have to reimburse the cost of their

¹³⁴⁷ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 116.

¹³⁴⁸ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, "Rapport d'Alain Charon sur les récents événements du Tchad depuis le lundi 12 Février 1979," undated, 02.1979, p. 3.

¹³⁴⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Note pour le Ministre, "Situation au Tchad," 04.03.1979, p. 2.

¹³⁵⁰ Christian Bouquet, "Tchad : une sanglante évacuation," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 02.04.1979, p. 46.

flights, and cancel their work contracts. This led Jean-François Gibert, a teacher working in N'Djamena, to sarcastically observe that the French *coopérants* apparently had a choice between, “le chômage en France ou la mort au Tchad.”¹³⁵¹ He was killed shortly afterwards. Bouquet bitterly lamented:

Il faut tirer au moins une première conclusion des événements de N'Djamena : la sécurité des Français en Afrique est une carte importante de la politique française. Lorsqu'il apparaît intéressant de supplanter une autre puissance, comme au Zaïre, on l'utilise comme motif pour faire sauter la légion sur Kolwezi. Lorsque l'issue de la crise est imprévisible, comme au Tchad, alors que des moyens militaires français suffisants sont déjà sur place, on tolère des pertes en vies humaines pour préserver les bonnes relations avec le régime qui sortira vainqueur. Les Français qui vivent en Afrique le sauront désormais.¹³⁵²

Hissène Habré and the FAN, however, appreciated the French stance during the fighting. Habré loudly praised the French forces for their neutrality and their contribution towards the ceasefire arrangement. In a February 21 letter to Giscard, he expressed his, “grande reconnaissance pour la position adoptée par la France durant le conflit armé.”¹³⁵³ He also claimed to deeply regret that most of the French population had opted to leave N'Djamena.¹³⁵⁴ This would have sounded ironic to French civilians whose lives he had recently threatened. Needless to say, Habré's high praise of French inaction also contributed to growing Southern distrust of their French allies.

Meanwhile, it seemed as if Malloum and the Southern faction had begun to prepare for another round of fighting. On February 24, Dallier observed that Kamougué had made a number of inflammatory remarks about the Northerners which had increased tensions. Furthermore, the state had virtually collapsed; basic administration had vanished, the police had disappeared, the customs service had stopped functioning, as well as all other public services. The exodus to the South seemed well organized with vehicles from parastatal companies such as Cotontchad carrying people southwards.¹³⁵⁵ The same day, he met with Malloum to discuss the situation. Malloum claimed that the flight to the South represented a humanitarian operation aimed at helping Southern families escape from neighborhoods controlled by the FAN who “terrorized” the population.¹³⁵⁶ Southern authorities coupled the flight to the South with a quasi-blockade of the capital from south of the Chari River. Vehicles

¹³⁵¹ Ibid. 47.

¹³⁵² Ibid. 47.

¹³⁵³ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} février au 31 mars 1979,” undated, April 1979, p. 22.

¹³⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵⁵ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/3, “Activité diplomatique après l'évènement de Février 79,” Telegram from Dallier, “A/S : Situation au Tchad,” 24.02.1979.

¹³⁵⁶ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/3, “Activité diplomatique après l'évènement de Février 79,” Telegram from Dallier, “A/S Entretien avec le Général Malloum,” 24.02.1979, p. 1.

carrying supplies to N'Djamena from the South were stopped en route, and the ferry linking N'Djamena to Cameroun was halted. Dallier felt that this represented an effort on the part of Malloum and his allies to signal the extent to which N'Djamena was dependent on the wealth of the South.¹³⁵⁷ He warned that this virtual threat of secession could dangerously increase "tribalist" sentiment and result in more inter-group violence.¹³⁵⁸

The ceasefire agreement did not establish any mechanism aimed at resolving the conflict between Malloum and Habré's factions. Sudan's President, Gafaar Nimeiry offered to mediate a peace conference, and hoped to use his position as the annual President of the OAU to gather a broad African base of support for the effort. Other regional powers however, particularly Libya, objected strongly to Sudanese mediation. Libya's Foreign Minister, Ali Triki insisted that the OAU had no right to intervene in a Chadian internal matter, and emphasized that any peace process should conform to the dispositions agreed upon at Sebha/Benghazi, despite the fact that all the Chadian parties had denounced the agreement. This rather unrealistic position confirmed, in the mind of the French Ambassador to Libya, Jean-Pierre Cabouat, that the recent evolution of events in Chad had seriously embarrassed Libyan policymakers.¹³⁵⁹

To counter these objections, French officials attempted to organize a roundtable in N'Djamena regrouping all of the major Chadian factions in order to hammer out some kind of a settlement. The French wanted co-sponsors from neighboring governments, and offered to provide security for all the delegates to the meeting.¹³⁶⁰ To this end, Giscard sent personal letters to Malloum and Habré, as well as the Presidents of the three countries with most at stake in Chad, Nigeria, Libya, and Sudan, to propose their participation in a peace conference.¹³⁶¹ However, a Nigerian proposal to hold talks in Kano, in Northern Nigeria, won the consent of the Chadian factions in N'Djamena. The Nigerians initially set March 5 as the date for the meeting.¹³⁶²

At the same time, a new element had entered the picture. On February 20, a small unit of FAP forces heading south from Salal entered N'Djamena. Their commander, Goukouni

¹³⁵⁷ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/3, "Activité diplomatique après l'évènement de Février 79," Telegram from Dallier, "A/S : Situation à N'Djamena," 25.02.1979, p. 1.

¹³⁵⁸ Ibid. 2.

¹³⁵⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Libye 1978-1979," Telegram from Cabouat to Paris, "Tchad," 21.02.1979.

¹³⁶⁰ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/2, "Evénements de février 1979," Telegram from Georgy to African embassies, "Tchad," 26.02.1979, pp. 1-2.

¹³⁶¹ For the letters, see FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, 26.02.1979.

¹³⁶² FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/2, "Evénements de février 1979," Telegram from Embassy Nigeria to Paris, "Conférence de Kano," 27.02.1979.

Guet (no relation to Goukouni Weddeye) presented letters to both Forest and Dallier, in which he thanked the French for their role in arranging the cease fire, and claimed that he had come to “separate” (départager) the two sides. He insisted that he had not come to the capital to attack anyone, nor to support any faction, or for any reason linked to the North-South conflict. Rather, his was a reconciliation mission.¹³⁶³ He reached an agreement with Forest allowing a small number of FAP forces to reach the outskirts of N’Djamena, although, “pas d’intrusion massive.”¹³⁶⁴

According to Goukouni Weddeye, this initiative did not originate from the FAP’s leadership. The FAP had initially planned to launch an offensive against both Malloum’s forces and the FAN in the event that fighting broke out between them. However, a combination of the withdrawal of some FAN units south to Abéché and dissensions among FAP fighters who did not wish to wage war against fellow Northerners or Muslims, prevented a general attack.¹³⁶⁵ Given that the bulk of Malloum’s forces lay behind the French-established defensive line, attacks against Malloum’s forces had also become impossible. Instead, Goukouni Guet advanced on his own initiative with a small group of fighters from Salal towards N’Djamena, but arrived after the warring factions had already signed the ceasefire. Habré then began to make contacts with FAP in anticipation of further fighting with Malloum’s forces.¹³⁶⁶

On March 3, Nigerian Colonel Sani Abatcha, the future infamous military dictator of the 1990s, arrived in N’Djamena to propose the deployment of an interposition force aimed at monitoring and enforcing the ceasefire in advance of the planned Kano meeting. Both Malloum and Habré’s factions accepted the proposal and on March 6, an initial deployment of 85 Nigerian soldiers arrived in N’Djamena.¹³⁶⁷ Although the plan eventually aimed at the deployment of some 800-900 troops, this small unit could do little in the meantime but sit and wait. In any case, they had come too late to prevent a renewed outbreak of violence.

Increasing tension between the two factions resulted in some low-level skirmishing in the first few days of the month. Malloum ordered his forces reinforced by air from Mongo, which the FAN interpreted as a violation of the ceasefire agreement. Furthermore, the FAP informed the French that this ceasefire violation now meant that they no longer considered

¹³⁶³ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/3, “Activité diplomatique après l’évènement de Février 79,” Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “A/S Goukouni Guet,” 24.02.1979, p. 2.

¹³⁶⁴ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 80.

¹³⁶⁵ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 86-87.

¹³⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁶⁷ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/6, “Situation à N’Djamena Mars 79-Dec. 79,” Fiche, Groupe Permanent d’Evaluation de Situations, “Situation points chauds le 8 mars 1979 matin,” 08.03.1979, p. 1.

themselves bound by their promise to the French not to enter the capital in force.¹³⁶⁸ As N'Djamena erupted in fighting between Malloum and Habré's forces, FAP units entered the city and joined the fighting on Habré's side. FAP's contribution of heavy weapons, which the FAN did not possess, helped to decisively turn the tide of the fighting against the Southerners, and their combined forces managed to capture substantial portions of the city. Goukouni later claimed that this had less to do with any particular sympathy for Habré, but rather with the desire to protect the city's Muslim population.¹³⁶⁹

Partly this resulted from fears about the fate of Muslims living within Southern communities. For instance, several days previously, Colonel Kamougué visited the Southern city of Moundou where his presence apparently sparked mass violence against the local Muslim population. The local Imam claimed that some 600 Muslims had been massacred.¹³⁷⁰ Europeans residing in the city confirmed to Dallier that hundreds had probably perished, including a massacre of Muslim nurses and patients in the city's main hospital.¹³⁷¹

In any event, while French forces may have legitimately claimed to have played a neutral role in the N'Djamena fighting, Forest's decision to allow Goukouni's forces to arrive in force in the Chadian capital decisively altered the balance of power against the South. Goukouni's forces were equipped with heavy weaponry given to them by Libya before the breakdown of their alliance. This gave them a crucial edge over their Southern opponents.¹³⁷² By March 8, FAN and FAP units managed to gain control over most of the city, while forces loyal to Malloum began to collapse.¹³⁷³ The FAN-FAP offensive continued even as French and Nigerian military officials tried to mediate a ceasefire. Dallier felt that Habré aimed at taking as much of the city as possible before the bulk of the Nigerian force arrived and could be in a position to impose a ceasefire arrangement.¹³⁷⁴

Parallel to the fighting in N'Djamena, Ahmat Acyl's "Armée Volcan" launched a surprise attack on Abéché in Eastern Chad on March 5. After Volcan's split with the FAP, it maintained its close ties with Libya. Gaddafi supplied the group with heavy weaponry and

¹³⁶⁸ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/6, "Situation à N'Djamena Mars 79-Dec. 79," Fiche, Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, "Situation points chauds matin," 05.03.1979, p. 1.

¹³⁶⁹ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 88.

¹³⁷⁰ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/6, "Situation à N'Djamena Mars 79-Dec. 79," Fiche, Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, "Situation points chauds matin," 05.03.1979, p. 1.

¹³⁷¹ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/3, "Activité diplomatique après l'évènement de Février 79," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S : Massacre des musulmans à Moundou," 05.03.1979.

¹³⁷² Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 88.

¹³⁷³ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/6, "Situation à N'Djamena Mars 79-Dec. 79," Fiche, Groupe Permanent d'Evaluation de Situations, "Situation points chauds le 09 mars 1979 matin," 09.03.1979, p. 1.

¹³⁷⁴ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/3/6, "Situation à N'Djamena Mars 79-Dec. 79," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S : Second réunion du cessez-le-feu," 08.03.1979, p. 1.

supplies. Acyl decided to take advantage of the confusion reigning in N'Djamena and seize Abéché. In theory, the town would have provided two major advantages to Acyl. Its large airfield would make it easy to receive supplies and other forms of assistance from Libya. Furthermore, its extreme distance from N'Djamena made it more difficult for a major counterattack to materialize from that direction.¹³⁷⁵ Presumably, Acyl also assumed that French forces would not react, given their passivity in the face of the fighting between Malloum and Habré.

Acyl managed to assemble a large force of some 800 men near Kufra in Southern Libya. His troops were well supplied by their Libyan hosts, including 50 new jeeps and trucks, AK-47 assault rifles, heavy machine guns, heavy mortars, 106mm recoilless rifles, and SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles. This force carried an additional 800 automatic rifles and ammunition for the badly-supplied elements of the "First Army" active in Eastern Chad. Acyl's men made their way across 1,000 kilometers of desert, avoiding oases and other inhabited places to maximize secrecy. They arrived at Abéché undetected.¹³⁷⁶

As the Volcan troops began their attack in the early afternoon of March 5, Lt. Colonel Hamel, the commander of the *Tacaud* units in the region, was meeting with his staff and Ali Taher, the local FAN intelligence chief. Ironically, they had met to discuss reports that a large rebel column had entered Chad from Libya several days previously, destination unknown. The eruption of gunfire gave a rapid answer to their questions. Although the attack had come as a complete surprise, Hamel and his FAN counterparts reacted quickly. French artillery, armor, and helicopters ably defended the town's airstrip while FAN troops held the town. As the battle progressed, French units supported FAN counterattacks, and after several hours their combined forces managed to rout the Volcan rebels.¹³⁷⁷ The latter left some 150 dead as they fled, as well as large quantities of equipment, while one French soldier was killed.¹³⁷⁸ Much of the remaining force was then cut to pieces by FAP units moving south in support of the FAN at Abéché.¹³⁷⁹

Although a decisive military victory, French collaboration with the FAN forces substantially contributed to suspicions of French collusion with Habré. Pierre de Tonquédec, soon to become commander of the French forces in Chad, later wrote that for Habré:

¹³⁷⁵ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 51.

¹³⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷⁷ Ibid. 51-53.

¹³⁷⁸ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} février au 31 mars 1979," undated, April 1979, p. 15.

¹³⁷⁹ Ibid.

[...] la fraternité d'armes née du combat livré et gagné en commun avec les troupes françaises va indiscutablement constituer un atout dans ses rapports immédiats avec Tacaoud, mais elle va, en même temps, contribuer à l'isoler progressivement des autres factions tchadiennes.¹³⁸⁰

The Abéché action also angered Libyan policymakers, who felt that the official neutrality that the French had demonstrated in N'Djamena should have also applied at Abéché. Their reaction sheds an interesting light on their immediate goals in the Chadian conflict, i.e. a place at the negotiating table for Ahmat Acyl.

Three days after the fighting at Abéché, Gaddafi loudly condemned the French action in support of the FAN. In a speech, he accused the French, in connivance with the Egyptians, of launching an attack against the population of Abéché and killing dozens of Muslims.¹³⁸¹ On March 10 the French Ambassador to Libya, Jean-Pierre Cabouat, met with the Libyan Deputy Foreign Minister, Issa Baaba. Cabouat vigorously protested Gaddafi's accusations and insisted that the French had defended themselves, alongside the FAN, against an attack from Acyl's troops. Issa responded that Acyl's forces had no aggressive intentions towards the French, but that they simply wanted to "rentrer chez eux."¹³⁸² In preventing their return home, the French did not, in Issa's view, contribute to a favorable peacemaking climate. Issa intimated that the French should either abandon Abéché, or at least allow Acyl's forces to establish themselves there. This would give Acyl a solid basis from which to participate in the upcoming peace talks.¹³⁸³

Also on March 10, the factions in N'Djamena finally agreed upon a tenuous ceasefire and their respective leaderships prepared to leave for Kano to begin peace negotiations. Much of N'Djamena lay in ruins. Dallier estimated that some 4,000 people had lost their lives in the fighting over the previous month in the city. One mass grave in the capital contained 2,816 bodies.¹³⁸⁴ Buijtenhuijs cites estimates of between 10,000 and 20,000 dead for the entire country.¹³⁸⁵ This context of death and destruction formed the background to the talks in Kano.

¹³⁸⁰ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 53.

¹³⁸¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Libye 1978-1979," Telegram from Cabouat to Paris, "Déclaration du colonel Gaddafi (Tchad)," 10.03.1979, p. 2.

¹³⁸² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Libye 1978-1979," Telegram from Cabouat to Paris, "Tchad," 10.03.1979, p. 2.

¹³⁸³ *Ibid.* 2.

¹³⁸⁴ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} février au 31 mars 1979," undated, April 1979, p. 4.

¹³⁸⁵ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 424.

Chapter V: Nigeria Enters the Scene

Perhaps surprisingly, given Nigeria's large size, its border with Chad, and an often stated desire to play a leading role in African politics, the country's policymakers had not previously evinced a major interest in Chadian affairs. Before 1979, its involvement was limited to participation in a 1977 OAU commission briefly charged with examining the question of the Aozou Strip, and the limited and ambiguous support given to the Frolinat "Third Army" operating near Lake Chad. The appearance of this group on the scene in early 1978 seemed to many observers at the time as an effort by Nigerian authorities to exert some influence on the conflict. Indeed, Nigerian officials negotiated the release of two European (one French, one Swiss) hostages held by the group later that year, without any participation from the French or Swiss authorities. This may have indicated substantial Nigerian leverage over the movement.¹³⁸⁶ Goukouni however, whose group had alternately clashed and cooperated with the movement, later claimed that the Nigerian government had never directly supported the group, but rather closed its eyes and tolerated its cross-border activities.¹³⁸⁷

As late as February 19, as the first round of fighting in N'Djamena wound down, Yves Plattard, the French Ambassador in Lagos, seemed puzzled by the apparent lack of official Nigerian interest in Chad. He felt that the head of the Africa Desk in the Nigerian Foreign Ministry demonstrated, "une étonnante ignorance" of the Chadian question.¹³⁸⁸

French officials seem to have played a role in encouraging Nigerian involvement in the conflict. Plattard felt that he himself had influenced the Nigerian decision to hold a peace conference.¹³⁸⁹ After a March 5 meeting with Nigerian President, General Olusegun Obasanjo, Plattard reported that the Nigerian leader had marked his appreciation for Plattard's assistance in informing Nigerian officials about the Chadian situation and the important suggestions he had made to facilitate Nigeria's role. According to Plattard, Obasanjo seemed flattered that France had solicited Nigeria's assistance in such a situation.¹³⁹⁰ Plattard gave himself plaudits for his apparently newfound position as advisor to the Nigerian government:

Les Nigériens que je côtoie en vue de la préparation de la conférence me paraissent, comme sans doute la plupart des dirigeants de ce continent, ressentir un immense besoin d'être conseillé, de se raccrocher à ceux qui raisonnent,

¹³⁸⁶ Ibid. 123-124.

¹³⁸⁷ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 74.

¹³⁸⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Plattard to Paris, "Tchad," 19.02.1979, p. 2.

¹³⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁹⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Plattard to Paris, "Entretien avec le chef de l'état," 06.03.1979, pp. 1-2.

apportent des éléments concrets, peuvent analyser une situation et faire des suggestions. Je m'efforce d'être un de ceux-ci.¹³⁹¹

At first it seemed as if Franco-Nigerian cooperation in a Chadian peace effort heralded a new era in relations between the two countries. Ever since Nigerian independence, relations between France and Nigeria had often been tense, if not downright hostile. Throughout the 1960s, Charles de Gaulle and Jacques Foccart shared a strong antipathy towards Nigeria whose population and economic potential was larger than all the states of francophone West Africa combined. This sentiment was shared by key French allies on the continent, particularly Bongo and Houphouët-Boigny. Nigerian authorities, on the other hand, saw France as a rival for regional influence, as well as a potential threat.¹³⁹² This fear became reality during the 1967-1969 Nigerian Civil War when French officials provided military support to the secessionist Biafran regime through intermediaries in Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire.¹³⁹³

Although tensions persisted, relations between the two countries gradually improved during the 1970s. In line with Giscard's broader African policy, Nigeria's potential as a lucrative trade partner began to trump some of these geopolitical fears. In this vein, French diplomats actively encouraged increased French investment in Nigeria. Yves Plattard, French Ambassador in Nigeria from 1977 to 1982, became a very vocal advocate of closer ties between the two countries. Indeed, during Giscard's presidency, Nigeria became France's largest trading partner in Sub-Saharan Africa, reaching 22.3 percent of French trade with the continent. French exports to Nigeria doubled between 1975 and 1978, and Nigeria became France's third-largest oil supplier during the same period, reaching 11 percent of French oil imports. During Giscard's presidency, the value of French trade with Nigeria doubled that of its next largest partner on the continent, South Africa.¹³⁹⁴

More immediate geopolitical interests now brought France and Nigeria closer together in Chad. Both French and Nigerian policymakers had an interest in putting an end to Chad's seemingly chronic political instability. Up until 1978 however, Nigerian policymakers had tended to view Chad's problems as a purely internal affair. Despite their common border on Lake Chad, most trade and transportation passed through Cameroon, and the two countries shared few common ethnic or linguistic linkages.¹³⁹⁵ As ethnic, religious, and regional conflicts

¹³⁹¹ Ibid. 3-4.

¹³⁹² see : Daniel C Bach. "Dynamique et contradictions dans la politique africaine de la France: les rapports avec le Nigeria (1960-1981)". *Politique Africaine*. no. 5 mars 1982: 47-74.

¹³⁹³ see : Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, pp. 295-303.

¹³⁹⁴ Bach, "Dynamique et contradictions," 64.

¹³⁹⁵ Daniel C Bach. "Le Nigeria et le Tchad". *Politique Africaine*., no. 16 décembre 1984, p. 125.

threatened to provoke a partition of Chad however, Nigerian policymakers came to the conclusion that Nigeria should play a role as peacemaker.

On March 1, the Nigerian government broadcast a communiqué in which they praised, “the peacekeeping role the French authorities in N’Djamena are now playing, a role which is essential and without which the number of lives lost and the level of damage to property would have been incalculably higher.”¹³⁹⁶ This public declaration of Nigerian support for the French role in Chad delighted French officials who saw this as a good way of legitimizing France’s presence in Chad to a broader audience.¹³⁹⁷ It also acted as an effective counter to Libyan accusations to the contrary. Obasanjo even told Plattard that he felt that French policy had a positive impact in Africa and hoped that it would continue its active role on the continent.¹³⁹⁸ In this vein, he requested Plattard’s presence at Kano during the upcoming conference as a liaison with the French government.¹³⁹⁹

The Kano conference began on March 10, and included Malloum, Habré, Goukouni, and Aboubakar Mahamat Abderahmane, the leader of the “Third Army” which had profited from the Malloum-Habré fighting to seize significant amounts of territory around Lake Chad. After four days of arduous negotiations in the presence of delegations from Libya, Niger, Sudan, Cameroun, and Nigeria, the parties reached a tentative agreement. In its broad outline, the Kano Accord, later referred to as “Kano I,” settled on a general ceasefire, the demilitarization of N’Djamena, and approved the Nigerian army deployment and its mission of maintaining order and protecting high-level Chadian personalities. Furthermore, all existing government institutions were to be dissolved and by March 23 the factions committed to creating a provisional government, which would then select its own President. The Kano agreement also established a control commission composed of representatives from neighboring states and signatory factions to monitor the ceasefire and other aspects of the agreement.¹⁴⁰⁰

As a result of this arrangement, both Malloum and Habré agreed to resign their positions. Malloum apparently did this quite grudgingly, under pressure from Kamougué who

¹³⁹⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Nigeria février-septembre 1979,” Telegram from Plattard to Paris, “Action du Nigeria dans l’affaire du Tchad : Eloge du rôle de la France,” 01.03.1979, p. 3.

¹³⁹⁷ Ibid. 1.

¹³⁹⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Nigeria février-septembre 1979,” Telegram from Plattard to Paris, “Entretien avec le chef de l’état,” 06.03.1979, p. 2.

¹³⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰⁰ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier “GUNT I,” “Accord de Kano sur la réconciliation nationale au Tchad.»

had fast become the strongest representative within the Southern faction.¹⁴⁰¹ On March 23, in N'Djamena, the two adversaries formally resigned and Goukouni was sworn in as the head of the provisional government. That same day, Malloum left for self-imposed exile in Nigeria and removed himself from the political scene.¹⁴⁰² The new provisional government consisted of three Northern factions, and the faction representing the South as the *Forces armées tchadiennes* (FAT), found itself for the first time, in the minority. Just weeks before, the French military had been actively combating two of these factions, the FAP and the “Third Army,” newly renamed the *Mouvement populaire pour la libération du Tchad* (MPLT). Now they welcomed both to N'Djamena with open arms, hoping that the Kano agreement would augur an end to the civil war.

This outcome largely pleased French officials in another respect. It responded to their interest in Chadian reconciliation with support from neighboring countries. This provided some regional legitimacy to France's influence in the country, and it would allow French troops to leave. Their Nigerian army replacements ensured that the security vacuum would be filled by a, “une force africaine sympathique à l'Occident,” which also meant that Libyan influence remained limited.¹⁴⁰³ French policymakers in the Quai felt that they shared the same goals as their Nigerian counterparts:

[...] arrêter la décomposition du Tchad et éviter que n'apparaisse un élément de trouble dans la région. Ils [the Nigerians] désirent appliquer la méthode que nous préconisons : que les Africains se réunissent entre eux pour régler leurs propres affaires à l'abri des interventions extérieures, bref 'l'Afrique aux Africains.'¹⁴⁰⁴

One Quai policy memo described the commonality of Franco-Nigerian interests as “objective” in the Marxian sense of the word.¹⁴⁰⁵ Of particular importance to French policymakers lay the fact that the Kano agreement included no criticism of the French military presence, no demand for an immediate withdrawal, and, “pas de réconciliation démagogique sur notre dos.”¹⁴⁰⁶ Rather, the agreement left it up to the future Chadian government the question of addressing

¹⁴⁰¹ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 130-131 and Cameroonian President Ahijido's account in MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Cameroun février-juillet 1979,” Letter from Dubois to Journiac, No subject, 20.03.1979, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰² MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} février au 31 mars 1979,” undated, April 1979, p. 19.

¹⁴⁰³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Nigeria février-septembre 1979,” DAM Note, “A/S : Le Tchad, le Nigéria et la France,” 19.03.1979, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. 1

¹⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. 2.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Ibid. 3.

the issue of France's military presence.¹⁴⁰⁷ This represented an implicit rebuff to Libya and its allied Chadian factions who continually demanded an end to France's military intervention.

Nigerian Vice-President, Shehu Musa Yar'Adua told Plattard that during the Kano meeting, he had helped to deflect criticisms of the French role by asking participants not to discuss the question, since French forces did not at all constitute an obstacle to reconciliation and that their presence was perfectly legal.¹⁴⁰⁸ Furthermore, according to Yar'Adua, the French should view general Nigerian criticisms of foreign interventions on the continent as specifically directed against the Soviets and Cubans, and not against the French role in Chad.¹⁴⁰⁹

Thus, the newly-found rapprochement with Nigeria seemed to bear fruit. To some in the Quai, particularly DAM Director Guy Georgy, Kano:

[...] aurait contribué à établir enfin un lien politique entre la France et la principale puissance africaine (un Africain sur cinq est Nigérian). Nos positions économiques au Nigéria sont bonnes aussi bien pour le commerce, (presque la même place pour nos exportations que le Maroc), que pour les grands travaux. Notre influence culturelle grandit rapidement dans un pays qui veut s'ouvrir à la francophonie. Tout cela pour un 'coût' minime si on le compare à celui de pays voisins. Manque jusqu'à présent le chaînon politique que l'affaire tchadienne créera peut-être.¹⁴¹⁰

However, soon warning signs began to appear about the nature of Nigerian support for the French position. Though present in the city of Kano during the negotiations, Yves Plattard could not attend any of the sessions. Quai officials interpreted this stance as a rather paradoxical effort by Nigerian authorities to simultaneously distance themselves from the French, while keeping them close at hand to implicitly invoke French sanction for certain initiatives.¹⁴¹¹ However, this meant that the French had to rely on second or third-hand accounts of the conference's proceedings. On March 19, French Ambassador to Cameroon, Hubert Dubois, met with Cameroonian President Ahmadou Ahidjo to discuss the Chadian situation. Contrary to Yar'Adua's assertions, Ahidjo claimed that at Kano, the Nigerians forcefully advocated a rapid withdrawal of French forces in Chad and had attempted to "torpedo" French initiatives and influence.¹⁴¹² He also strongly urged the French to maintain their troops in Chad

¹⁴⁰⁷ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "GUNT I," "Accord de Kano sur la réconciliation nationale au Tchad." Article 8.

¹⁴⁰⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Plattard to Paris, "Tchad," 20.03.1979, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. 2.

¹⁴¹⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," DAM Note, "A/S : Le Tchad, le Nigéria et la France," 19.03.1979, p. 4.

¹⁴¹¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," DAM Note, "A/S : Le Tchad, le Nigéria et la France," 19.03.1979, p. 2.

¹⁴¹² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Cameroun février-juillet 1979," Letter from Dubois to Journiac, No subject, 20.03.1979, p. 1.

and to prevent a Nigerian bid for hegemony in Central Africa.¹⁴¹³ While longstanding disputes between Cameroon and Nigeria may have encouraged Ahidjo to foment French suspicions towards Lagos, it would soon become clear that French and Nigerian policymakers did not fully share the same objectives.

Despite potential warning signs, the apparently warm relations with Nigeria, largely reinforced by an impression of common aims, contributed to a sense of optimism among French officials. This led Giscard to declare, on March 20, that the French would begin a progressive withdrawal from Chad, in coordination with the new Chadian authorities.¹⁴¹⁴ However, this optimism would soon founder on the hard realities of Chadian politics.

The French decision to begin a troop withdrawal alarmed the signatory factions of the Kano agreement. On March 29 Goukouni wrote to Dallier, complaining that the French decision to withdrawal had occurred without consulting the provisional government. He cited the Kano agreement which stipulated that the transitional authorities would determine its position on the future status of French forces, and until then he requested that France maintain the status quo.¹⁴¹⁵

At the end of the month, Habré and Goukouni each sent envoys to Paris, independently of each other. Both envoys met with French Cooperation Minister Robert Galley, and Deputy Foreign Minister Olivier Stirn. Habré's envoy, Kerim Togoï explained to Stirn why the FAN leader opposed the withdrawal of French forces. First, only a French military presence could deter the ambitions of neighboring countries, particularly Libya and Nigeria. Second, the French army helped to maintain a certain balance of power within Chad. He feared that without the French presence, Goukouni's "Marxist" entourage might "maneuver" him into an antagonistic stance. Furthermore, the French presence reassured Southerners whose region would otherwise fall into disarray and thus threaten the fragile stability created after the Kano agreement. Finally, Togoï argued that a French retreat would prevent the return of French investment and *coopérants*.¹⁴¹⁶ Goukouni's representative, Adoum Kougou, expressed surprise that the French had made such a decision without consulting the new Chadian authorities.¹⁴¹⁷

¹⁴¹³ Ibid. 3.

¹⁴¹⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 101/1, "Chronologies," *Centre militaire d'information et de documentation sur l'outre-mer* (CMIDOM), "L'Affaire tchadienne : Chronologie succincte: 2^{ème} partie—de 1960 à 1978," Année 1979, undated 1980, p. 4.

¹⁴¹⁵ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Correspondances avec la Présidence du Conseil d'Etat," Letter from Goukouni to Dallier, 29.03.1979.

¹⁴¹⁶ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Correspondances avec la Présidence du Conseil d'Etat," Note, "a/s : Emissaires tchadiens," 29.03.1979, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴¹⁷ Ibid. 7.

Both Habré and Goukouni had concerns about public statements made by French officials calling for a federal structure. As early as February 15, as fighting broke out in N'Djamena, Giscard declared in a press conference that, “Il faut rechercher une structure de l’Etat tchadien, très décentralisée, voire sous forme fédérale, pour que chacune de ses communautés puisse assurer la gestion de ses propres affaires.”¹⁴¹⁸ Similar statements by other French officials, combined with the movement towards a de facto partition of the country between North and South, led to a feeling among Habré, Goukouni, and their supporters that Chad’s very existence as a single state was in jeopardy. Togoï told Stirn that anything other than a centralized state would encourage anarchy and facilitate the interventions of neighboring powers.¹⁴¹⁹ In his conversation with Galley, he voiced Habré’s apparent concern that the French idea of a “federal” option would result in a “balkanization” of the country, with its various prefectures becoming little more than satellites of other states.¹⁴²⁰ Adoum Kougou made the same point, adding that the word “federal” should be “exorcised” from the vocabulary of French policymakers, since it seemed to have a magical power to encourage secessionist tendencies among Southerners.¹⁴²¹

Both the FAP and FAN leaderships strongly desired to continue Chad’s close association with France. Kougou succinctly made the point that:

Notre passé ‘militant’ nous permet de dire deux choses: que la situation a totalement changé et que nous devons avoir un comportement réaliste; que le Tchad ne doit pas aujourd’hui changer de partenaire. Même si nous avons dans le passé dénoncé la politique française, nous savons que le Tchad a besoin de l’appui et de l’aide de la France et nous sommes persuadés que notre problème ne pourra se résoudre sans elle.¹⁴²²

This insistence may have seemed ironic to French policymakers, especially given that Goukouni had spent the previous decade fighting the French army and its local allies. Indeed, until the previous year Habré had also been an inveterate enemy of French imperialism. In this case, this attitude partly stemmed from the perception of FAN and FAP leaders that Libya posed a greater threat to their hold on power. The apparent Libyan threat, not to mention continuing anger at the occupation of the Aozou Strip, emerged as a constant theme in FAP and FAN communications with the French over the next several months. Pressure from

¹⁴¹⁸ Cited in Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 121.

¹⁴¹⁹ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier “Correspondances avec la Présidence du Conseil d’Etat,” Note, “a/s : Emissaires tchadiens,” 29.03.1979, p. 2.

¹⁴²⁰ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, “Ventilation du compte rendu des entretiens du ministre avec M. Kerim Togoï et MM. Maina Touka et Adoum Kougou,” 05.04.1979, p. 3.

¹⁴²¹ Ibid. 6.

¹⁴²² MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier “Correspondances avec la Présidence du Conseil d’Etat,” Note, “a/s : Emissaires tchadiens,” 29.03.1979, p. 6.

Chadian leaders persuaded Giscard to decide that a full withdrawal would await the formation of the provisional government called for by Kano I.¹⁴²³

The presence of the Nigerian peacekeeping contingent constituted another worry for the two main Northern factions. Habré complained that the Nigerian forces, under Colonel Magoro, had effectively taken over the city of N'Djamena and had even taken to issuing orders to the provisional authorities. The planned demilitarization of the capital would essentially, in his view, leave the new Chadian officials powerless at the hands of the Nigerian forces.¹⁴²⁴ Togoï also reflected these fears in his conversation with Galley and explained that all of the Chadian factions had begun to worry about Nigeria's ultimate intentions.¹⁴²⁵ Throughout the next several weeks, elements of both the FAP and FAN would frequently complain about the behavior of Nigerian troops, often accusing them of various exactions, particularly pillaging the property of the local population. However, Dallier later wrote that in his estimation the FAN and FAP had exaggerated, perhaps in order to undermine Nigeria's authority. After the first few days, when a number of Nigerian troops did steal from and mistreat locals, their leadership rapidly imposed discipline. Over the next few months, the 800 Nigerian soldiers, in Dallier's words, "firent honneur à leur pays par leur discipline, leur tenue, l'entretien de leur matériel, leur correction."¹⁴²⁶ On the other hand, their commander, Colonel Magoro, seemed to alienate local authorities and treat them, particularly the faction leaders, as if he ran an occupied city.¹⁴²⁷

In any event, the real or perceived nature of the Nigerian military presence served as a pretext for both FAN and FAP forces to remain in N'Djamena, despite Kano's stipulation that the city become demilitarized. FAN forces, on the other hand, left the city, thus reinforcing the general process of partition which seemed to afflict the country following the fighting in February.¹⁴²⁸

Although the four factions present at Kano I had begun to form a provisional government, the Nigerian authorities wanted it to have a broader base to include other Chadian

¹⁴²³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Note pour le Ministre, "A/S : Situation au Tchad," 08.05.1979, p. 1.

¹⁴²⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S : Attitude des forces nigérianes," 26.03.1979.

¹⁴²⁵ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, "Ventilation du compte rendu des entretiens du ministre avec M. Kerim Togoï et MM. Maina Touka et Adoum Koukou," 05.04.1979, p. 1.

¹⁴²⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "Troupes nigérianes," 28.08.1979.

¹⁴²⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴²⁸ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 2 pour la période du 1^{er} février au 31 mars 1979," undated, April 1979, p. 20.

armed groups. Thus, on April 1 began the second Kano conference in which five other Chadian factions joined the four signatories of Kano I. This effort to broaden the scope of the peace talks provoked stiff opposition from both Goukouni and Habré. Even before the conference began they, along with Kamougué and Abderahmane, had agreed that they would not accept negotiations with the other factions, particularly those with leaders close to Libya such as Acyl.¹⁴²⁹ Goukouni's pretext was that the 1978 decision by the Frolinat to unify its forces behind him meant that his movement alone, the FAP, represented the movement as a whole. Thus, he refused to recognize the legitimacy of any of the non-signatory factions.¹⁴³⁰ Furthermore, from Goukouni and Habré's point of view, some of the leaders of the other factions represented little more than a handful of armed men. For instance Abba Sidick represented no more than himself, yet his Libyan allies, with apparent Nigerian acquiescence, had given him a seat at the table on equal standing with everyone else.

Even the other factions present wrangled with each over the extent of their representativeness. Both Acyl and Abdoulaye Adoum Dana disputed the appellation "Volcan" for their respective movements. Acyl conceded the argument and renamed his armed group the *Conseil démocratique révolutionnaire* (CDR). Though Adoum Dana managed to become recognized as the leader of the "Volcan" force, in reality he had become something of a "général sans armée," much like Sidick and Hadjéro Senoussi, a relatively unknown former Sudanese military officer and Frolinat leader from the 1960s.¹⁴³¹ Apart from Acyl then, only Mahamat Abba Seïd, the leader of the rather ineffectual but still functioning "First Army" in Eastern Chad had any serious claim of possessing some kind of force to back up his position at the negotiating table.¹⁴³²

These different faction leaders aimed to become signatories to the Kano I agreement in order to participate in the formation of the new unity government. However, according to the same agreement, new signatories had to receive recognition as legitimate "tendances" (movements) by the original signatory parties.¹⁴³³ Clearly neither Goukouni nor Habré would accept this dilution of their authority, particularly as it came under the auspices of Libya and

¹⁴²⁹ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 89.

¹⁴³⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴³¹ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 148.

¹⁴³² Ibid.

¹⁴³³ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "GUNT I," "Accord de Kano sur la réconciliation nationale au Tchad," Article 9.

Nigeria. The intransigence of the FAP and FAN leaders infuriated Nigerian officials, who began to see French authorities as partly responsible for their attitude.¹⁴³⁴

This led Nigerian officials, in collaboration with the Libyan delegation, to exclude Habré and Goukouni from the negotiations. Soon, Kamougué and Abderahmane, respectively the leaders of the FAT and MPLT factions, seemed to cede to Libyan and Nigerian pressure (or their own particular interests), and break their previous agreement with Habré and Goukouni to not negotiate with the new “tendances.”¹⁴³⁵ With the FAT and MPLT, as original signatories of the Kano agreement onboard, it seemed as if the Nigerian delegation hoped to legitimize the addition of the five other factions to the Kano agreement. Ahmadou Ahidjo, the Cameroonian President, later claimed that this represented an effort by Nigerian and Libyan officials to form a new transitional government excluding the FAP and FAN. Since the FAP and FAN controlled N’Djamena, the new government would sit in the Southern city of Moundou until the Chadian capital could be cleared. Ahidjo even claimed that Libyan officials had begun to supply weapons to Southerners via the Central African Empire,¹⁴³⁶ an allegation which would later prove correct.¹⁴³⁷

To counter this effort to isolate them, on the night of April 6-7, Habré and Goukouni hatched a plan which Dallier later described as, “habilement monté et remarquablement exécuté.”¹⁴³⁸ Later claiming that the Nigerians had placed them in house arrest, they smuggled out several envoys to make their way overland through Cameroon to N’Djamena. Once there, they informed the FAN and FAP military leadership in the capital of the situation. In response, on April 8 the FAP and FAN told Colonel Magoro that he and his men should relinquish control of the airport and the ferry over the Chari River. Failure to comply would result in an attack. These two points were the Nigerians’ only sources of resupply and reinforcement. Given their material and numerical disadvantage, the Nigerians could not contest the combined FAP-FAN threats and had to practically surrender their control of the city.

¹⁴³⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Nigeria février-septembre 1979,” Telegram from Plattard to Paris, “Deuxième conférence de Kano,” 05.04.1979, p. 2.

¹⁴³⁵ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 3 pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 avril 1979,” 15.05.1979, p. 5.

¹⁴³⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Cameroun février-juillet 1979,” Letter from Dubois to Journiac, No subject, 19.04.1979, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴³⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 101/1, “Chronologies,” *Centre militaire d’information et de documentation sur l’outre-mer* (CMIDOM), “L’Affaire tchadienne : Chronologie succincte: 2^{ème} partie—de 1960 à 1978,” Année 1979, undated 1980, p. 5.

¹⁴³⁸ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 3 pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 avril 1979,” 15.05.1979, p. 6.

The Nigerian government was then told that the survival of their troops depended upon the release of Habré and Goukouni, and a halt to the creation of a separate transitional government.¹⁴³⁹ Dallier later described this dramatic act as, “ce que l’on aurait pu appeler un coup d’Etat, si l’Etat eut encore existé.”¹⁴⁴⁰ Nigerian officials were forced to acquiesce. Thus Kano II ended in failure. However, all the factions did agree to mandate a fact-finding commission charged with examining the relative strength and positions of the various factions at Kano. This represented an effort to respond to charges by Habré and Goukouni that a number of the “tendances” present at Kano II did not actually control any territory in Chad.¹⁴⁴¹

Upon their return to N’Djamena, Habré and Goukouni were welcomed back as heroes by their supporters. On the other hand, the MPLT arrested its leader Abderahmane on arrival, accusing him treason for switching sides during Kano II. Held in prison for a time, he later escaped and made his way to Nigeria.¹⁴⁴²

Meanwhile, Nigerian government officials considered the threats to their troops as a slap in the face. General Danjuma, the Nigerian Army Chief of Staff, and number three in the Nigerian regime, did not hesitate to accuse France of responsibility for what had happened. He told Plattard that Colonel Magoro had evidence of French support for FAN and FAP forces, and that this significantly undermined the Nigerian mission in the country. Moreover, Danjuma stated that any Chadian government which did not include all of the other factions would be unacceptable.¹⁴⁴³

This fear had already begun to materialize. On April 17 the Kano I signatories, the FAN, FAP, MPLT, and FAT, agreed to form a provisional government on their own. This “N’Djamena Accord” followed most of the provisions of Kano I, although it excluded all of the factions which Nigerian and Libyan officials had attempted to include in Kano II. It consisted of an “Action Program” which stipulated the creation of a unified army, and the organization of elections. In the meantime, the factional leaderships began a series of negotiations aiming to form a new *Gouvernement d’Union Nationale de Transition* (GUNT)

¹⁴³⁹ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), pp. 90-92.

¹⁴⁴⁰ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 3 pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 avril 1979,” 15.05.1979, p. 6.

¹⁴⁴¹ Yar’Adua Papers, Folder 303.482, “Resumed Conference on the Chadian Crisis : Bagauda Lake Hotel, April 10, 1979,” Closing Remarks, 10.04.1979. p. 2.

¹⁴⁴² French accounts at the time say that he was brutally assassinated, but Goukouni claimed that he escaped from prison. In any case, he was sufficiently alive to sign the Lagos Accord in August, 1979. See Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), p. 92. and Yar’Adua Papers, Folder 303.69, “Lagos Accord on National Reconciliation in Chad,” 18.08.1979.

¹⁴⁴³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Nigeria février-septembre 1979,” Telegram from Plattard to Paris, “Tchad,” 23.04.1979, pp. 2-3.

which aimed at maintaining an appropriate “geopolitical balance.”¹⁴⁴⁴ Nonetheless, this “balance” was strongly mitigated by the fact that only one of the four factions, the FAT, “represented,” the South. Kamougué signed on behalf of the FAT, despite the fact that he aligned with the Nigerian-Libyan position during Kano II. Unlike Abderahmane however, he had the backing of his own movement and remained at its head. Shortly after signing, Kamougué left N’Djamena, ostensibly to rally Southern opinion to the cause of the GUNT.¹⁴⁴⁵

However, the plane which was meant to carry him back to N’Djamena on April 23 arrived without him. Simultaneously, a Libyan aircraft landed in the Southern city of Moundou, which French, FAN, and FAP representatives interpreted as a sign that Kamougué had chosen to switch sides. Dallier even qualified the move as “secessionist.”¹⁴⁴⁶

Kamougué’s “defection” only served to increase French worries about the future legitimacy of the GUNT. La Rochère noted that the country was “coupé en deux,” and observed that some Southern elites began to call for secession.¹⁴⁴⁷ He warned that Libyan officials had also become interested in the South, where they saw an opportunity to support the Southerners against the anti-Libyan forces of Goukouni and Habré.¹⁴⁴⁸ This raised the difficult question of what should, or what could, the French do. *Tacaud*’s original mission had now become somewhat superfluous. Although Libya still posed a threat via its support to Acyl’s forces, N’Djamena was no longer in particular danger. Instead French forces had let the FAP into the city where they helped the FAN defeat the former government forces. The capital was ethnically cleansed and the French had done, or could do, little about it. This obviously encouraged various actors, particularly in the South and in Nigeria, to accuse the French military of complicity with the Northern rebel groups.

In such a deteriorating political environment, what strategy should the French adopt in the country? There was little agreement about this among French policymakers, and debates about the aims and mission of *Tacaud* would characterize French decision-making over the following year. Despite Giscard’s March announcement of his intention to withdrawal, the provisional Chadian government, dominated by the Northern factions, had requested that *Tacaud* remain in place.

¹⁴⁴⁴ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier, “GUNT I,” «Accord de N’Djamena : Programme d’Action,” 17.04.1979, Article IV.1.

¹⁴⁴⁵ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 3 pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 avril 1979,” 15.05.1979, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴⁷ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier “Crise intérieur 1978-1979,” Note pour le Ministre, “a/s: Dégradation de la situation au Tchad,” 25.04.1979, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. 2.

La Rochère cautioned French officials that the provisional government envisioned in the N'Djamena agreement represented little more than “une majorité nordiste flanquée de quelques sudistes non représentatifs.”¹⁴⁴⁹ Any future government should have, in his view, more solid foundations. At the same time, it remained important to maintain good relations with the Northern factions, particularly in light of the threat posed by Libyan ambitions. Nonetheless, France should not, in La Rochère's view, repeat the mistake of the previous two decades of exclusively supporting a minority in power.¹⁴⁵⁰ In this vein, French officials needed to reestablish open communication with Southern representatives. Southern elites had lost everything in N'Djamena and felt deeply betrayed by French “neutrality.” They also feared that *Tacaud* would actively assist a Northern attempt to conquer the South. La Rochère urged his superiors in the Quai and in the Elysée to remember that.

[...] il ne faut pas s'y tromper, c'est au Sud que sont les populations qui nous sont les plus proches (religion, enseignement etc...), c'est là où est la richesse actuelle du Tchad (coton) et sans doute le pétrole. Ce sont aussi ces populations qui ont la sympathie de nos amis traditionnels même musulmans comme Ahidjo ou Kountche [the Nigerien President].¹⁴⁵¹

La Rochère wrote that despite the rancor and the criticisms of those, “qui ne connaissent l'Afrique qu'à travers des prismes idéologiques—c'est le cas de la Libye ou du Nigéria,” all Chadians wished the French to remain in Chad, including militarily. No one else, in La Rochère's view, could help the country stand on its feet again. He argued, however, that the French must develop a coherent policy towards all the parties to the conflict. French officials should assure the Northern factions of French support against Libyan intervention, and the Southern factions that they would not have to fear a Northern invasion.¹⁴⁵² La Rochère concluded that:

Notre intérêt nous commande de ne pas désespérer et de persévérer. Notre action au Tchad constitue un test de notre crédibilité en Afrique. Si nous réussissons au Tchad nous aurons raffermi la clé de voûte de l'Afrique francophone. A contrario, un échec signifiera le début de la gangrène.¹⁴⁵³

La Rochère's proposals made sense. After all, the French presence could, in theory, substantially address the main fears of the various factional leaderships, thus removing one of the principal obstacles to peacemaking. However, even French observers recognized that the FAN-FAP coalition rested more upon an immediate commonality of interests and threats rather

¹⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. 3.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵¹ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier “Crise intérieure 1978-1979,” Note pour le Ministre, “a/s: Dégradation de la situation au Tchad,” 25.04.1979, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵² Ibid. 4.

¹⁴⁵³ Ibid. 5.

than any kind of long-term alliance. Furthermore, the ethnic composition of both movements, principally Toubou, only represented a fraction of the Northern population, despite their military predominance. Indeed, in 1976, French estimates put the Chadian Toubou population at some 120,000 people¹⁴⁵⁴ out of a Chadian population of roughly four million.¹⁴⁵⁵

The presence of token Southern representation within the government could do little to widen the GUNT's broader appeal. Thus even had the French offered guarantees to the GUNT against Libya, it would have done little to mitigate internal tensions, a conflict which the French had little power to significantly influence short of all-out war. Furthermore, the feeling among Southern elites that France had betrayed them seriously hurt French credibility. This made it difficult for French officials to open any sort of substantial dialogue with Southern leaders, much less make credible promises of support against Northern aggression. In short, French policymakers had lost substantial ability to influence the situation long before they realized it themselves.

Indecision and Stalemate

On April 29 the four N'Djamena factions, with General Djogo, the former Chadian Army Chief of Staff, taking the place of Kamougué as the nominal FAT representative, announced the composition of the GUNT. While all agreed that the newly created post of Vice-President should go to the FAT, neither Habré nor Goukouni could readily accept the other as President. Thus while Djogo took Kamougué's spot as Vice-President, the FAN and FAP found a compromise candidate for President in the person of Lol Mahamat Choua. Lol was virtually unknown to many Chadians, and even French observers knew little about him. Goukouni later claimed that he had never heard of Lol before, but since he was not Hissène Habré, he immediately accepted the idea.¹⁴⁵⁶ While Lol belonged to the MPLT, he also had close links to Habré, for whom he headed the civil administration of parts of N'Djamena during and after the February fighting.¹⁴⁵⁷ This may explain Habré's acquiescence to the compromise solution. In the meantime, Habré became Minister of Defense, and Goukouni Minister of the Interior in the new government. Lol would soon become little more than a figurehead among competing personalities and factions.

¹⁴⁵⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Note, "Les Toubous" undated, September 1976, see attached table.

¹⁴⁵⁵ World Bank. *Republic of Chad Economic Memorandum*. World Bank, West African Region, 1977, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), p. 92.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 134.

It was obvious from the beginning however, that this was a peculiar kind of unity government. Since the February fighting and the mass-evacuation of N'Djamena by its Southern population, the five Southern prefectures had begun to organize their own autonomous administration. Civil servants and leaders in the private sector, as well as other elites formed a number of committees in each prefecture to assess the situation and attempt to maintain a certain level of administration.¹⁴⁵⁸ On April 30, a number of officials representing the five Southern prefectures signed an open letter attacking the legitimacy of the GUNT which, in their minds, violated the Kano accords.

They had multiple grievances against the FAN and FAP. These included accusations that they had not fully respected the ceasefire, they had not demilitarized the capital, they continued to broadcast their own propaganda over Chadian national radio, and had not released their Southern prisoners. Furthermore, their refusal to open the Kano accord to the signatures of other factions indicated, in the eyes of the Southern representatives, that the FAN and FAP leaderships had little interest in reaching a final peace settlement. Additionally, FAN and FAP officials had systematically impeded the work of the commission established by Kano II to assess the level of importance and position of the various non-signatory factions. These grievances, combined with the impossibility for Southerners to return to the capital en masse, due to the destruction and theft of much of their property and physical threats, led Southern leaders to refuse to join the GUNT.¹⁴⁵⁹

The presence of Habré in the new government also seriously concerned Southern leaders. He was viewed as largely responsible for the massacres of Southerners in N'Djamena and elsewhere. Moreover, the Kano I agreement required Habré to resign from office. His continued presence in government appeared as a breach of faith. In light of the GUNT's lack of legitimacy, Southern cadres requested that a third conference, including all the factions, be held to reach a more lasting and sustainable peace agreement.¹⁴⁶⁰

Despite this, French officials briefly greeted the GUNT positively. On May 2, Georgy wrote that it augured well for the future, although he still worried about its true level of representativeness.¹⁴⁶¹ It had already become clear, however, that its effective exclusion of the South significantly undermined its legitimacy. Apart from General Djogo and a handful of

¹⁴⁵⁸ Lanne, "Le sud du Tchad," 81.

¹⁴⁵⁹ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier "Correspondances avec la Présidence du Conseil d'Etat," "Mise au point des populations et cadres du sud du Tchad," 30.04.1979.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Note pour le Ministre, "a/s : Sur le Tchad," 02.05.1979, p. 1.

others, Southern elites massively disassociated themselves from the GUNT. Most of Chad's neighbors did as well. In addition to Nigeria and Libya, government officials in Sudan, Cameroon, and Niger also expressed hesitation at recognizing the new entity.¹⁴⁶²

In reaction to the events in N'Djamena and the threats to their troops, in mid-April the Nigerian government prohibited exports to Chad. Most importantly, this included oil and gasoline, 85 percent of which Chad imported from Nigeria.¹⁴⁶³ This embargo would, in the following months cripple Chad's already failing economy. Colonel Magoro's secretary told Dallier that the embargo not only aimed at putting pressure on the GUNT, but also at punishing the French for their supposed role in facilitating FAP and FAN moves against the Nigerian forces in early April.¹⁴⁶⁴ Fuel scarcity would soon affect the ability of French forces to effectively function. Dallier wrote that if the embargo did not soon end, "les unités Tacaoud seraient clouées au sol et n'auraient plus aucun moyen de déplacement."¹⁴⁶⁵ N'Djamena's electric power plant would soon cease to function and the capital would no longer have access to functioning water and electricity. Already some of the industrial activity in the South had to shut down operations due to lack of fuel.¹⁴⁶⁶

As La Rochère had foreseen, the local and regional political configuration had placed France in a delicate position. Georgy noted that the GUNT acted as the legitimate government and made continual requests for French logistical support. General Djogo, had even left for Paris where he would meet with high-level French officials, including Giscard himself. Georgy warned that all the other faction and interested countries would view any particularly responsive attitude towards the GUNT as clear evidence of support for the FAN-FAP coalition. On the other hand, any kind of ambiguous relationship would, in his eyes, favor Libyan propaganda and the non-signatory factions.¹⁴⁶⁷

He asked Plattard to make it clear to his Nigerian interlocutors that France did not support any particular faction and still fully supported the Kano I agreement. At the same time though, it had become impossible to ignore the fact that the FAP and FAN had effective control of over two-thirds of Chadian territory and that all parties needed to take this into consideration.

¹⁴⁶² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," Note pour le Ministre, "A/S : Situation au Tchad," 08.05.1979, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶³ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} mai au 30 juin 1979," 07.07.1979, p. 8.

¹⁴⁶⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S : Arrêt des livraisons de carburant," 04.05.1979.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Georgy to Plattard, "Gouvernement provisoire du Tchad," 09.05.1979, p. 2.

He did admit that French officials, at least in the Quai, were aware that Habré presented a particular obstacle to peacemaking.¹⁴⁶⁸

On May 11, Plattard met with Yar'Adua and Colonel Magoro. Yar'Adua observed that Habré's violation of the Kano agreement and his position of strength within the GUNT had met with no protest from French authorities. It seemed that French officials not only approved of Habré's presence, but even provided him with supplies. The rapid formation of the GUNT in April also represented a sure indicator of French complicity. For Nigerian officials, General Djogo's visit to Paris and his subsequent meeting with Giscard confirmed this perception. Yar'Adua insisted that the French could no longer claim to maintain their support for Kano I while giving moral and material backing to Habré and his allies.¹⁴⁶⁹

While questions remain about the nature and extent of unofficial French relations, and even support, for Habré, French officials themselves seemed unsure of their own position. On the one hand, and contrary to General Danjuma's accusations of French complicity in FAN and FAP threats against Nigerian troops in early April, Dallier and Forest both greatly feared the prospect of renewed fighting breaking out in the capital. On April 8, they both intervened energetically with the FAN and FAP military commanders to urge restraint as the two factions threatened the Nigerian troops in the city. Dallier claimed to Paris that their coordinated efforts alone had averted a bloodbath.¹⁴⁷⁰ Nonetheless, Dallier shared the Nigerians' suspicions of the political orientation of the French army.

Dallier noted that the FAN had done everything to maintain good relations with General Forest and *Tacaud*. Habré had also made no secret of this fact to outside observers, particularly the Nigerians.¹⁴⁷¹ Dallier himself thought that the good feeling was mutual. As the situation degraded in April, he became increasingly convinced that the behavior of General Forest and *Tacaud* in general violated France's claim to neutrality. In doing so, it helped to bring Nigerian interests in line with Libya by sabotaging Franco-Nigerian rapprochement. In early May during one of Forest's visits to France, Dallier wrote a letter to La Rochère outlining his complaints. This letter is worth citing at length as it illustrates a certain lack of communication and trust within the French government itself:

Les généraux Brédèche et Forest peuvent se féliciter du succès de leur politique : la Libye et le Nigeria font cause commune pour nous évincer du Tchad ! [...] Si nous voulons nous sortir de ce guêpier, il est urgent, très urgent :

¹⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. 2-3.

¹⁴⁶⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Plattard to Paris, "Tchad—entretien avec le Général Yar'Adua," 11.05.1979, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴⁷⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S : Déclarations du Général Danjuma," 24.04.1979, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷¹ Ibid. 2.

1) de ne pas laisser Forest revenir à N'Djamena. C'est à juste titre que le Nigeria l'accuse d'avoir livré N'Djamena à Hissène Habré et d'avoir cherché à en faire sortir la force neutre. C'est l'appui qu'il apporte et les liens que lui et ses officiers affichent pour Hissène et les FAN qui empêchent Goukouni de réagir devant la poursuite du pouvoir, par tous les moyens, par Hissène et sa clique. Vous n'obtiendrez rien du Nigeria tant que Forest commandera Tacaoud. Vous n'obtiendrez aucun rapprochement avec le sud tant que vous ne l'aurez pas remplacé. [...]

2) d'intervenir énergétiquement auprès de Kountché [the Nigerien President] et des chefs d'Etat pour qu'ils ne tombent pas dans le panneau libo-nigérien et n'acceptent pas de se rendre au début mai à une troisième conférence de Kano. Ils y consacraient le partage du Tchad en deux zones d'influence, libyenne au nord, nigérienne au sud. [...]

Si nous perdons du temps, Khaddafi et Obasanjo, [...] ne tarderont pas à l'emporter. Il ne nous restera plus qu'à faire nos valises.¹⁴⁷²

Indeed, the growing concordance of views between Lagos and Tripoli seemed ominous to French policymakers. Predictably, Libyan officials echoed Nigerian accusations, accusations which the Libyans had made continuously since the previous year. Following Kano II the Libyan Foreign Minister, Ali Triki, told his French interlocutors that the Nigerians had reported French “connivance” with Habré’s forces to Libyan officials. He also indicated a convergence of views between Libyan and Nigerian policymakers, and insisted on tripartite consultations on the Chadian issue. This surprised Jean-Pierre Cabouat, the French Ambassador in Tripoli, since just the previous month, the Libyans had expressed much hesitation at the increased Nigerian role in the country.¹⁴⁷³

French officials found the idea of an entente between Libyan and Nigerian authorities disturbing. One of the motivations for encouraging Nigerian participation in Chadian peacemaking had aimed at giving these efforts a broader regional and “African” legitimacy while marginalizing Libya’s presence at the mediation table. Instead, the rapprochement between Nigeria and Libya helped to isolate the French position within the country.

The variety of actors accusing the French army of undue partiality towards Habré seem to make a fairly damning case that French efforts at reconciliation were undermined by its own military representatives. Nonetheless, it is possible that to some extent this perception originated with Habré himself. Since the fighting in February, Forest did not actually meet with Habré until late April. His account of the meeting to Paris emphasized Habré’s insistence on the need for a continued French presence, as well as requests for logistical support to FAP forces in Northern Chad to resist possible Libyan advances. Forest characterized Habré’s attitude as “très amical et très détendu—il cherchait manifestement à se présenter comme le

¹⁴⁷² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Etat et politique intérieure—mouvements d’opposition—situation militaire,” Handwritten note from Dallier to La Rochère, 06.05.1979. Also cited in Esmenjaud, *L’Africanisation*, 136. Many thanks go to Dr. Esmenjaud for his help in deciphering Dallier’s difficult handwriting.

¹⁴⁷³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Libye 1978-1979,” Telegram from Cabouat to Paris, “Tchad,” 18.04.1979, pp. 2-3.

meilleur ami de la France actuellement au Tchad.”¹⁴⁷⁴ As this mimicked Habré’s public attitude towards the French, it seems likely that outside observers, including those within the French government, viewed relations as a bit too friendly. Additionally, at times and at more junior levels, FAN cooperation with *Tacaud* was quite close. Tonquédec’s later observations on the “fraternité d’armes” linking French rank and file with FAN combatants, particularly following their cooperation during the Abéché fighting, supports this view.¹⁴⁷⁵ Thus, while Forest and his successor may not have deliberately privileged the FAN, the visibility of close relations between French troops and FAN combatants could only have reinforced rumors of higher-level collaboration.

In any case, deliberate support for Habré did not represent French policy at its highest echelons. Giscard’s controversial meeting with Djogo was in fact no more than a courtesy call since the two had known each other previously. Djogo briefly outlined his views on the crisis, which included assurances that the GUNT would respect the Kano agreement and prepare the ground for future elections. Giscard merely repeated banalities on the altruistic nature of French assistance and military presence in Chad which were maintained, “uniquement par amitié pour le peuple tchadien.”¹⁴⁷⁶

Nonetheless, the reception of Djogo’s delegation by French officials at various levels sent mixed signals about the French position. For Yar’Adua, this meeting clearly indicated that France, “n’hésitait donc plus à cacher ses sympathies.”¹⁴⁷⁷ The biggest problem for the French was that their policy was highly ambiguous. Giscard’s policy of “neutrality” encountered the classic dilemma of neutrality in a situation of civil war: that it tends to benefit one side over another. Georgy captured this quandary well when noting that:

Le problème fondamental pour la France est aujourd’hui le suivant: aux yeux de presque tous les protagonistes – à l’exception des Nordistes, ce qui renforce le sentiment général—notre neutralité s’est muée en complicité active en faveur d’Hissène Habré [sic]. De ce fait, notre politique aujourd’hui ne devrait avoir qu’un cap--: sortir de l’ambiguïté, favoriser activement un rééquilibrage du pays, sans se réfugier dans une attitude de neutralité toute théorique qui transforme notre engagement au Tchad en guépier extrêmement dangereux.¹⁴⁷⁸

Unfortunately for French policymakers, actively working towards such a “rééquilibrage” had become extremely difficult. Partly this had to do with a lack of control over the Chadian

¹⁴⁷⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Deuxième conférence de Kano mars-mai 1979,” Telegram from Forest to Paris “Entretien avec Hissène Habré,” 21.04.1979.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 54.

¹⁴⁷⁶ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, “Compte-rendu de l’entretien entre M. le Président de la République et le Général Djogo, Vice-Président du Gouvernement Tchadien,” 11.05.1979, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Nigeria février-septembre 1979,” Telegram from Plattard to Paris, “Tchad—entretien avec le Général Yar’Adua,” 11.05.1979, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, “Notes politiques,” Note pour le Ministre, “A/S : Situation au Tchad,” 15.05.1979, p. 4.

situation. In early May, the combined forces of the GUNT began to prepare a military offensive against the South. On May 7, the newly “integrated” Chadian army, combining elements of the FAP, FAN, and MPLT, occupied the Southern town of Bongor in the Mayo-Kebbi prefecture. They thus aimed at cutting off Southern communications and supply routes through Cameroon. The movement of predominately Northern forces into the Southern prefectures crystallized already strongly held anti-French sentiment. Many Southerners suspected French forces of providing significant logistical support to facilitate the invasion. This led to threats against the lives of the still substantial numbers of French expatriates living in Southern cities, particularly in Sarh and Moundou. Local commanders even held a number of French *coopérants* hostage for several days in Sarh before agreeing to their release.¹⁴⁷⁹

On May 10, Southern elites, responding in part to the Northern invasion, named Kamougué President of a *Comité permanent*, composed of ten members charged with running the Southern administration in the absence of a Chadian state.¹⁴⁸⁰ This newfound Southern unity stiffened the backbone of Southern forces, who managed to repulse the Northern invaders by the end of the month. Kamougué’s forces also received assistance from Libya in the form of the air transport of 200 of Acyl’s CDR combatants in support of Southern operations.¹⁴⁸¹ This followed a visit by Kamougué to Tripoli in early May where, according to French sources, Gaddafi promised him arms and supplies to support his fight against the GUNT.¹⁴⁸² On May 15 however, Forest managed to extract a promise from Habré not to renew his offensive in the South.¹⁴⁸³ Goukouni later claimed that the FAN abandonment of the GUNT mixed units contributed to their eventual defeat at the hands of Kamougué’s forces.¹⁴⁸⁴ Other factors such as the start of the rainy season, the unfamiliar climate, and improved cohesion among Southern units also played a significant role in GUNT’s setback.¹⁴⁸⁵ Some GUNT units were even pushed into Cameroon where they were disarmed,¹⁴⁸⁶ though not before committing numerous exactions upon various Southern communities.¹⁴⁸⁷

¹⁴⁷⁹ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} mai au 30 juin 1979,” 07.07.1979, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Lanne, “Le sud du Tchad,” 81-82.

¹⁴⁸¹ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} mai au 30 juin 1979,” 07.07.1979, p. 7.

¹⁴⁸² Ibid. 18.

¹⁴⁸³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Etat et politique intérieure—mouvements d’opposition—situation militaire,” Telegram from Forest to Paris, No subject, 15.05.1979.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 93.

¹⁴⁸⁵ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} mai au 30 juin 1979,” 07.07.1979, p. 7.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Lanne, “Le sud du Tchad,” 81.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Goukouni later admitted as much : see Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 93.

This setback was compounded by the GUNT's failure to receive outside recognition. General Djogo led a delegation to the Franco-African Summit in Kigali on May 21. After Rwandan authorities snubbed Djogo's party, he only managed to contact Ivoirian President Houphouët-Boigny. Houphouët told Djogo that, at the instigation of Nigerien President Seyni Kountche, the conference decided to exclude Chad from its proceedings under the pretext that the GUNT represented a violation of the Kano I agreement. Djogo's delegation claimed that, given Kountche's closeness to both Nigeria and Libya, this move must have come at their encouragement.¹⁴⁸⁸

Indeed, both Nigerian and Libyan officials had previously told their French interlocutors that they considered Chadian participation at the Franco-African Summit unacceptable.¹⁴⁸⁹ The growing French feeling of isolation on the Chadian issue may have contributed to their lack of effort in attempting to achieve some level of recognition for the GUNT at the conference. This position infuriated Dallier, who also saw Libyan pressure behind the decision of the other francophone states to not recognize the GUNT delegation. He wrote that, "il serait imprudent de laisser les dirigeants actuels de ce pays se tourner vers d'autres protecteurs [...] il me paraît indispensable de donner un gage tangible de notre volonté de poursuivre notre coopération."¹⁴⁹⁰

The FAN's ambiguous stance and French pressure for restraint in the South, combined with the GUNT's exclusion from the Kigali conference, led a number of FAP leadership elements to accuse the French of abandonment. Forest reported that FAP leaders had begun to openly speak of withdrawing from the GUNT and renewing their old alliance with Libya. Some even told their subordinates that, "ils ont fait une erreur en ne continuant pas le combat contre les français."¹⁴⁹¹ Forest warned Paris that even if this represented a form of blackmail, French authorities should not take these threats lightly. He cautioned that, "l'indécision actuelle sape chaque jour un peu plus le restant de crédit que nous conservions ici—l'unité du Tchad pourrait se faire contre nous avec la bénédiction de Lagos et de Tripoli."¹⁴⁹²

¹⁴⁸⁸ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 3, Dossier, "Décembre 1979-novembre 1979," "Compte rendu sur le voyage de la délégation tchadienne à Kigali," 23.05.1979, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴⁸⁹ see : MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Plattard to Paris, "Tchad—entretien avec le Général Yar'Adua," 11.05.1979, pp. 4-5, and MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Libye 1978-1979," Telegram from Cabouat to Paris, "Tchad," 16.05.1979, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹⁰ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/2, Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "A/S : Conférence de Kigali," undated, 05.1979, also cited in Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 60.

¹⁴⁹¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, "Etat et politique intérieure—mouvements d'opposition—situation militaire," Telegram from Forest to General Méry, "Attitude du Froinat," 23.05.1979.

¹⁴⁹² Ibid.

Despite the bad blood between Forest and Dallier, both developed similar analyses of the French position in the country. They both worried that the nature of French policy had alienated nearly all of Chad's factions, as well as neighboring governments. While Dallier accused Forest's alleged friendliness with the FAN as one of the root causes of this problem, he still advocated for more robust ties to the GUNT as a whole; a policy which in the eyes of observers from Libya and Nigeria, as well as the other Chadian factions, meant the same thing.

This context of indecision marked the opening of a third conference, this time in Lagos. General Yar'Adua warned the French chargé in Lagos, Yves Robin, that this would not only be the last conference that Nigeria would agree to organize, but also represented the "last chance" for a settlement.¹⁴⁹³ Yar'Adua again insisted that French authorities cease their apparent support for Habré. He explained that a high-level Nigerian mission in N'Djamena had returned convinced that both N'Djamena and the GUNT were under the effective control of Habré. He told Robin that only French support could fully explain the FAN leader's level of intransigence and refusal to compromise. Only a French decision to remove their support from Habré could bring him to reason. The Nigerian Vice-President reminded Robin that it was France who had initially invited Nigeria to assist with peacemaking there. In response, Nigeria had put its credibility on the line, as well as military and financial commitments which its authorities could have used more fruitfully elsewhere. If the Lagos conference failed, Nigeria, "se laverait les mains de cette affaire."¹⁴⁹⁴ According to Yar'Adua, most members of the Federal Military Government had begun to think that France had deliberately dragged Nigeria into Chad in order to undermine its regional authority, and hoped that French officials would prove them wrong.¹⁴⁹⁵

The Lagos conference opened on May 25. As the GUNT factions refused to attend, it seemed clear from the beginning that it would accomplish little. The first two days, delegates from Chad's neighboring countries met in closed sessions. Yar'Adua told the delegations that neither the fact-finding mission created under Kano II nor the Nigerian "neutral force" could effectively fulfill their mandates. He repeated earlier accusations that the formation of the GUNT both violated the Kano I agreement and completely lacked broad-based legitimacy. Furthermore, he denounced the apparent French "intrusion into the crisis, and the new dimension added to the situation by French support for the factions now in control of

¹⁴⁹³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, "Nigeria février-septembre 1979," Telegram from Robin to Paris, "Le Nigeria et le Tchad," 24.05.1979, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Ibid. 2-3.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. 3.

N'Djamena, particularly the Habré faction.”¹⁴⁹⁶ For Yar'Adua, the GUNT itself seemed paralyzed from within, as its President, Lol Mahamat Choua, “was only a cover for Habré, and he had no effective control of either the government or the Third Army.”¹⁴⁹⁷

Colonel Magoro then presented the delegations with his own reports pertaining to the Nigerian neutral force and the fact-finding mission. He accused the GUNT of deliberate efforts to undermine the force's mission. GUNT forces had taken control of the airport and prevented reinforcements from arriving to support Magoro's troops. Magoro particularly pointed his finger at Habré as obstructing both the neutral force, and the fact-finding mission.¹⁴⁹⁸

The fact-finding mission established by Kano II to examine the level of representativeness of the factions not party to Kano I, also accused Habré of obstructing its work. Its official report, signed by all of its commissioners from the participating states, Nigeria, Niger, Sudan, and Cameroon, noted that after spending 44 days in N'Djamena, and meeting with high-level GUNT officials at least seven times, it could not carry out its mandate. On one occasion, Lol and Djogo told the mission that it could not visit Abéché in the East because of “security problems.”¹⁴⁹⁹ In Magoro's view, this merely confirmed the accuracy of claims by Acyl, Dana, and others that large amounts of territory did actually fall under their control.¹⁵⁰⁰

The following day, the non-GUNT factions (interestingly not including Kamougué's representatives) met in the presence of the country delegations. In a joint communiqué, they stated their opposition to the GUNT and their intention to continue the war. They also “underlined the danger to peace and stability in Chad which the French intervention represented.”¹⁵⁰¹ The conference ended on May 27 with a communiqué by the country delegations demanding that the GUNT dissolve itself and open negotiations with all factions with the view of forming a new transitional authority. In an obvious barb aimed at the French, the communiqué, “noted with dismay the element of foreign involvement which had the effect of internationalising and further complicating an otherwise soluble domestic problem.”¹⁵⁰² The Lagos participants issued an ultimatum to the GUNT, warning that if, “by the 25th of June,

¹⁴⁹⁶ Yar'Adua Papers, Folder CHA 303.69, “Official Report on the Third Conference on the Situation in Chad Held in Lagos Nigeria, 25-27 May, 1979”, undated 1979, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Ibid. 5.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Yar'Adua Papers, Folder CHA 303.69, “Report of the Fact Finding Commission,” 26.05.1979, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Nigeria février-septembre 1979,” Telegram from Plattard to Paris, “Tchad—entretien avec le Général Yar'Adua,” 11.05.1979, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰¹ Yar'Adua Papers, Folder CHA 303.69, “Official Report on the Third Conference on the Situation in Chad Held in Lagos Nigeria, 25-27 May, 1979”, undated 1979, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰² Yar'Adua Papers, Folder CHA 303.69, “Joint Communiqué”, 27.05.1979, p. 3.

1979, the various factions in Chad failed to reach an accommodation [...] the participating countries will no longer feel that they have any moral obligation to continue their search for a just and lasting solution of the problem of Chad.”¹⁵⁰³

This very public denunciation of the GUNT provided the perfect excuse for its leadership to formally request the evacuation of the Nigerian neutral force. On May 31, the GUNT gave Colonel Magoro a letter accusing the Nigerian force of behaving as an army of occupation and demonstrating an attitude incompatible with Chadian sovereignty. Particularly, the ongoing embargo demonstrated that the GUNT could no longer consider Nigeria as an acceptable partner for mediation.¹⁵⁰⁴ On June 4, without ceremony, the Nigerian forces flew out of Chad.

Meanwhile the fuel situation had considerably worsened. Forced to import all of its fuel through Cameroon, Chad suffered significant reductions in resupply. Partly this related to fuel shortages in Northern Cameroon, linked to the embargo and the poor state of infrastructure in the country. Fuel truck rotations from the coastal regions to the Chadian border and back took three weeks, and the railway could not handle significant amounts of traffic. This led the Cameroonian government to restrict exports into Chad, thus worsening the situation. French officials did manage, however, to obtain small shipments for their own forces.¹⁵⁰⁵

Earlier in May, Forest had warned Habré that if the Nigerian embargo continued, he would soon be forced to withdraw from the East of the country and regroup near the capital.¹⁵⁰⁶ For this and reasons linked to the originally stated French desire to begin a general withdrawal, Forest informed the GUNT that he would withdraw French forces from Abéché. In the days following the announcement, the FAN organized large protests by the local population against the French withdrawal.¹⁵⁰⁷ Habré managed to extract promises from Forest that the French force would leave behind substantial quantities of ammunition for the FAN units.¹⁵⁰⁸ On May 29, French troops withdrew from Abéché, leaving the locality to FAN forces.

¹⁵⁰³ Ibid. 3-4.

¹⁵⁰⁴ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/2, Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “Force neutre,” 01.06.1979.

¹⁵⁰⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Nigeria février-septembre 1979,” Telegram from Dubois to Paris, «A/S : Ravitaillement en carburant du Tchad,” 29.05.1979, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Etat et politique intérieure—mouvements d’opposition—situation militaire,” Telegram from Forest to Paris, No subject, 15.05.1979.

¹⁵⁰⁷ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} mai au 30 juin 1979,” 07.07.1979, p. 20.

¹⁵⁰⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Etat et politique intérieure—mouvements d’opposition—situation militaire,” Telegram from Forest to Paris, “Entretien avec le Ministre de la Défense,” 20.05.1979.

In the meantime, the withdrawal of Nigerian forces paved the way for armed confrontation within the GUNT itself. Within days, a faction of the MPLT split off from the main group, reclaiming the movement's former name, the *Forces armées occidentales* (FAO). This faction, led by Moussa Medela, received significant support from the FAP. Over the course of the previous weeks, FAP leadership cadres had become increasingly suspicious of the MPLT whom they variously perceived as receiving support from both Nigeria and the FAN.¹⁵⁰⁹ After their arrival in the capital following the fighting in March, they quickly gained a reputation for their exactions upon the local and expatriate populations.¹⁵¹⁰ They also demonstrated a marked hostility towards the FAP, and had apparently killed a number of FAP combatants.¹⁵¹¹ As Medela looked for support within the FAP, this factional split rapidly degenerated into street battles on June 12 between the FAP and their new FAO allies versus the MPLT. This fighting resulted in at least 200 dead, and the N'Djamena MPLT faction was virtually annihilated.¹⁵¹² While Habré remained neutral in the fighting, Buijtenhuijs later spoke to French military personnel who admitted that they had provided some "indirect" support to the FAP units, as they had often had problems with the MPLT.¹⁵¹³

Goukouni claimed that this purge originated among the lower ranks of the FAP, and had not resulted from a decision at the top. He had even tried to prevent the fighting, and also saved the life of President Lol, who technically represented the MPLT.¹⁵¹⁴ After the fighting, Medela apparently asked Goukouni to incorporate his movement into the FAP. Goukouni refused, explaining that such a move would destroy the GUNT's fragile unity, as it needed a façade of four separate factions for purposes of legitimacy.¹⁵¹⁵

In the South, the month of June also saw the gradual advance of Kamougué's consolidated forces towards N'Djamena. By the end of the month, his forces were located a bare 100 kilometers south of the capital.¹⁵¹⁶ In the North, the GUNT's position also came under serious threat. Two well-equipped columns of over 600 men each, led by Acyl, entered Chad from Libya on June 25. Despite their material superiority, which included air support from Libyan Mirage fighter planes, Acyl's units were once again cut to pieces, losing several

¹⁵⁰⁹ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 93.

¹⁵¹⁰ see: MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} mai au 30 juin 1979," 07.07.1979, p. 9 and Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 146.

¹⁵¹¹ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 146.

¹⁵¹² Ibid.

¹⁵¹³ Ibid.

¹⁵¹⁴ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 94-96.

¹⁵¹⁵ Ibid. 95-96.

¹⁵¹⁶ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} mai au 30 juin 1979," 07.07.1979, pp. 7-8.

hundred dead.¹⁵¹⁷ Tonquédec later recounted that at Ounianga, a mere 13 FAP combatants managed to hold their positions against 150 of Acyl's men.¹⁵¹⁸ Despite this victory however, the situation of the GUNT had begun to seriously deteriorate. Not only had it completely lost control of the South, but threats from Libya in the North continued unabated while the strains within the governing coalition itself had more than exposed its underlying fragility.

Following the failure of the Lagos conference and the retreat of the Nigerian forces, the evolving situation forced French policymakers to reassess their role in the country. Whereas Dallier and Forest had both, despite their personal disagreements, argued for a clearer French position on the GUNT, officials within both the Foreign and Cooperation ministries began to argue that France should reprise the role of mediator in place of the failed regional efforts. In early June, officials from both ministries wrote a joint note proposing a renewal of France's active role in peacemaking. In their view, neither Northern nor Southern factions had sufficient strength to impose themselves on the other half of the country. The consequent stalemate and general exhaustion led a large number of Chadians from different ethnic and political origins to push for dialogue and national reconciliation. At the same time, Nigerian involvement had utterly failed, and Libya's interference only made a general settlement more difficult. Chad's other neighbors had neither sufficient means nor political will to play a substantial role in the country. In the view of Quai and Coopération officials, "la phase d'une recherche de la solution par les Africains eux-mêmes paraît close."¹⁵¹⁹

Consequently, "de l'avis même des Tchadiens qui l'ont combattu des années durant les armes à la main," France represented the "last chance" for peace in helping Chad's various factions, "trouver entre eux un consensus suffisant pour tenter de rebâtir leur pays."¹⁵²⁰ With this goal in mind the Foreign and Cooperation ministries advocated the organization of a round table including the representatives of the different factions, away from the presence of neighboring powers who could negatively influence the proceedings. Meanwhile, French forces should help maintain basic infrastructure and services, particularly water and electricity. In addition to its humanitarian nature, it would also constitute an effective means of pressure on the GUNT to encourage a more conciliatory orientation.¹⁵²¹

¹⁵¹⁷ Ibid. 11

¹⁵¹⁸ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 63.

¹⁵¹⁹ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, DAM and Cooperation Ministry Note, "A/S du Tchad," 06.06.1979, p. 1.

¹⁵²⁰ Ibid. 2.

¹⁵²¹ Ibid.

To this end, from June 10 to June 15, Georgy visited Chad and met with the leaders of the principal GUNT factions, as well as Kamougué and other Southern notables.¹⁵²² His mission aimed at testing the willingness of the factional leaderships to renew negotiations. The GUNT leadership, as well as Kamougué, agreed in principle to a meeting including all of the “tendances,” in which neighboring states would be admitted as simple observers. The meeting would aim at reaching a minimum consensus before they would hold a more formal and public conference to ratify the decisions made before, and to define the modalities of the political transition.¹⁵²³

However, contrary to the French prognostic, Chad’s neighbors did not share the opinion that an African regional peacemaking framework had reached a dead end. Despite General Yar’Adua’s warning that the Lagos conference represented the “last chance” for regional peace efforts, in late June, Nigerian President Obasanjo suggested another peace conference in the Nigerian capital. He also offered to consider lifting the embargo which Nigeria had imposed upon Chad if the Chadian factions showed signs of cooperation. His suggestions came after consultations with Sudanese President Gafaar Nimeiry, and it was Sudanese officials who passed the message on to President Lol.¹⁵²⁴ Dallier reported that this offer came as a surprise to GUNT leaders, who had, along with Kamougué, agreed in principle to a conference among Chadians which would not accord observer states the same status that they had enjoyed during the previous peace conferences. Furthermore, the FAN, FAP, and Southern leaderships had all previously rejected Lagos as well as Tripoli as possible locations for a new conference.¹⁵²⁵ Lol asked Dallier for advice on the response to give to the Nigerian proposition.¹⁵²⁶ Quai officials cabled Dallier to tell Lol that the Chadians could not really refuse the offer. Instead, they should make sure to request a date following the initial efforts at reaching an internal consensus.¹⁵²⁷

In mid-July, La Rochère was quietly sent to Chad to make contacts with various faction leaders, particularly Goukouni, Habré, and Kamougué. His mission aimed at convincing his

¹⁵²² MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 4 pour la période du 1^{er} mai au 30 juin 1979,” 07.07.1979, p. 21.

¹⁵²³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from Georgy to Dallier, “Perspectives de nouvelles négociations,” 26.06.1979, p. 1.

¹⁵²⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from Dallier to Georgy, “Conférence sur la réconciliation,” 29.06.1979.

¹⁵²⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “A/S : Proposition nigériane d’une nouvelle conférence,” 29.06.1979.

¹⁵²⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “A/S : Proposition nigériane” 30.06.1979.

¹⁵²⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from La Rochère to Dallier, “Réponse du gouvernement tchadien au président Nimeiry,” 30.06.1979, p. 2.

interlocutors to meet together in France before any major conference in order to avoid the pitfalls of the kinds that the public negotiations and meetings like Kano and Lagos had provoked. While not a substitute for a regionalist or “African” solution, it would form a basis for any future agreement.¹⁵²⁸

The GUNT factions quickly agreed to La Rochère’s proposals, but Southern leaders demurred. While Kamougué seemed favorable to the idea, the representatives of the Southern *Comité permanent* objected to France as a meeting location. In their view, a meeting in France could provoke loud criticism within Africa, and that a meeting in Chad would constitute a more politically acceptable option. While they preferred a meeting in the South, they also suggested the more centrally located town of Moussoro, and requested that French forces provide security and transportation of the various delegations.¹⁵²⁹

French officials agreed to this proposal, although rather than Moussoro, Dallier suggested Douguia, a former tourist hunting lodge situated 50 kilometers north of N’Djamena. French forces could easily secure this rather isolated site, and work began on rendering its buildings habitable.¹⁵³⁰ While the GUNT factions accepted the proposal, Kamougué again balked and insisted that the meeting take place in Bongor, a Southern city which the other factions were sure to reject as a location for a peace conference.¹⁵³¹ It quickly became clear that Kamougué had no interest in a preliminary meeting.

Dallier soon received indications from the French Embassy in Tripoli that Kamougué had visited Libya on several occasions.¹⁵³² Furthermore, French officials had learned that the Southern leader had met with representatives of other non-GUNT factions; a series of meetings which French officials felt explained his newfound intransigence.¹⁵³³ Indeed, during this period Kamougué’s forces had steadily advanced northwards towards N’Djamena. After defeating the GUNT forces in June, Kamougué had, by the end of July, established positions in Mandelia,

¹⁵²⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” DAM Note, “a/s : Mission à N’Djamena,” 10.07.1979, p. 3.

¹⁵²⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “A/S : Entretien avec le Colonel Kamougué,” 24.07.1979.

¹⁵³⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “A/S : Douguia,” 28.07.1979.

¹⁵³¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “Lieutenant-Colonel Kamougué,” 30.07.1979.

¹⁵³² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “Lieutenant-Colonel Kamougué,” 31.07.1979.

¹⁵³³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, “Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979,” Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “Lieutenant-Colonel Kamougué,” 30.07.1979.

a mere 55 kilometers south of the Chadian capital.¹⁵³⁴ This advance occurred with the active support of some of Acyl's forces and with supplies from Libya.¹⁵³⁵

Meanwhile, Libyan pressure significantly increased in the BET. While Acyl's columns had suffered serious losses at the end of June, on July 6 FAP positions came under attack once again. One column, consisting of some 1,900 men attacked Wour, around 100 kilometers west of Bardaï in Northwestern Chad. Another, consisting of some 600 men again attacked Ounianga-Kebir. These forces were supported by Mirage fighter jets from the Libyan Air Force, as well as Libyan armored units. At Wour, despite numerical inferiority, the FAP again won a major victory, killing some 200 men and capturing a large amount of equipment, including several artillery pieces and 300 small arms.¹⁵³⁶ The column attacking Ounianga-Kebir also suffered serious losses and was forced to retreat. Goukouni, who travelled north to take command of FAP units, estimated that the attacking columns had together lost between 500 and 600 men.¹⁵³⁷ These attacks clearly constituted, in the minds of the GUNT leadership, an external attack against Chad. No one could deny the presence of Libyan troops in the attacking columns. Ahmat Acyl and other rebel leaders obviously did not possess tanks and fighter jets. As Goukouni later sarcastically remarked, "les opposants n'ont pas de chars, ils n'ont pas d'avions."¹⁵³⁸

Despite entreaties from the GUNT to intervene militarily to help stop the Libyan invasion, French forces remained stationary. Although the original mandate of *Tacaud* aimed at protecting the Chadian government against externally-backed aggression, this time French authorities considered that the African political context made it impossible to act.¹⁵³⁹ Since virtually no one had recognized the GUNT, any French effort to defend it, even against a clearly proven Libyan effort to overthrow it, would not only substantially further undermine French credibility, but also likely stop the peace process. While Goukouni's military victories made such a decision unnecessary, it did highlight the delicate nature of France's military role in the country.

In this vein, French authorities replaced General Forest with Colonel Pierre de Tonquédec as commander of *Tacaud* at the end of July. Many of the accusations of a French

¹⁵³⁴ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 5 pour la période du 1^{er} au 31 juillet 1979," 16.08.1979, p. 7.

¹⁵³⁵ Ibid. 6-7.

¹⁵³⁶ Ibid. 5.

¹⁵³⁷ Ibid. 6.

¹⁵³⁸ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 97.

¹⁵³⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, "Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979," DAM Note, "a/s : Mission à N'Djamena," 10.07.1979, p. 2.

bias towards Habré had, rightly or wrongly, centered on Forest. As noted above, Dallier himself had requested Forest's removal and officials in Paris decided that replacing him might help counter accusations of favoritism towards the FAN.¹⁵⁴⁰ Tonquédec, the new commander, had already served in Chad during the first French intervention. Officials in the Defense Ministry felt that his closeness with a number of Southern military officers and experience with the mostly-Southern former Chadian Army would facilitate the French role in the reconciliation process.¹⁵⁴¹

In the short term, the choice of Tonquédec did little to bring the North and South together in a preliminary meeting. In early August, Georgy and La Rochère returned to Chad in an effort to meet different faction leaders and hammer out an agreement for the Douguia meeting.¹⁵⁴² While the leaders of the three major factions agreed in principle to such a meeting, as well as opening such a meeting to "all" of the other factions, they disagreed on who exactly should count as a "tendance." The role of General Djogo constituted a particular bone of contention between Kamougué and the GUNT factions. Kamougué refused to sit at the same table with him since, in his view, Djogo represented no one but himself. Goukouni told Dallier and La Rochère that Djogo's "tendance" was no smaller than that of some other rebel factions who Kamougué would accept as partners. He added that if Kamougué alone represented the South in negotiations, he would have the advantage of representing a united South against a fragmented North.¹⁵⁴³ Although Georgy and La Rochère did not ultimately manage to organize a meeting in Douguia, Dallier did feel that their mission helped the various factions to begin to understand each other's positions and, in that sense, helped to prepare the groundwork for the upcoming Lagos conference.¹⁵⁴⁴

The Second Lagos conference opened on August 13 and included representatives from 11 different Chadian factions. In addition to Chad's neighbors, representatives from Liberia, Senegal, Congo-Brazzaville, and Benin also attended the conference. Goukouni later explained that his decision to participate resulted in part from a serious deterioration of his relations with Habré. The latter had refused to help the FAP fend off the Libyan-backed attacks in June and July. This, combined with defections of some FAP combatants to the FAN led Goukouni and his supporters to believe that Habré had begun to prepare a move against the

¹⁵⁴⁰ Dufour, *La France au Tchad*, 89.

¹⁵⁴¹ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 93.

¹⁵⁴² MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 6 pour la période du 1^{er} au 31 août 1979," 20.09.1979, p. 15.

¹⁵⁴³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 78, "Conférence de Lagos I : avril-juin 1979," Telegram from Dallier to Paris, "Réunion de Douggia," 04.08.1979, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴⁴ MAE Nantes Carton 3, "Rapport de fin de mission de l'Ambassadeur Dallier," p. 26.

FAP for control of the capital. Goukouni and the FAP leadership concluded that, “Quoi qu’il arrive, Mahamat Abba, Acyl Ahmat sont plus proches de nous que Hissène Habré qui est en train de nous détruire.”¹⁵⁴⁵ Perhaps feeling isolated, Habré also agreed to participate.

After five days of negotiations, all 11 factions signed the Lagos II Accord. In its broad lines it differed little from the Kano I agreement. It demanded a demilitarization of a zone extending 100 kilometers from N’Djamena, the creation of an integrated army, inclusion of all the “tendances” in the transitional government, the establishment of a “neutral force,” and an observation commission to monitor the agreement. Furthermore, it charged the transitional government with the organization of elections within 18 months.¹⁵⁴⁶ In addition to the accord, the Lagos conference named Goukouni as President and Kamougué as Vice-President of the new GUNT. The composition of the new GUNT, including the distribution of ministerial portfolios, was left open to later negotiation.

Unlike the Kano agreement, Lagos II declared that the “neutral force” would consist of troops from countries that did not border Chad, and thus did not have clearly definable interests in the country or in particular factions.¹⁵⁴⁷ Additionally, and much to the chagrin of French policymakers, the accord stated:

Toutes les parties tchadiennes ont reconnue unanimement que le maintien de la présence des troupes françaises constitue un obstacle dans la recherche de la réconciliation nationale et empêche une solution pacifique du problème tchadien. Les parties tchadiennes sont donc convenues que le GUNT, une fois formé, devra procéder à l’évacuation des troupes françaises.¹⁵⁴⁸

This collective denunciation of the French presence triggered an immediate response from Paris. On August 22, Colonel de Tonquédec received orders from General Méry, the French Army Chief of Staff, to begin the withdrawal of French troops from Ati and Moussoro. He wanted this done as quickly as possible before the new transitional government could request a halt to the troop evacuation.¹⁵⁴⁹

Indeed, despite the unambiguous language of the Lagos Accord, it rapidly became clear that few of the Chadian factions actually favored a troop withdrawal. On August 25, Ibrahim Moussa, the Imam of the Grand Mosque of N’Djamena told Dallier of his community’s opposition to a French departure.¹⁵⁵⁰ On August 29, Goukouni wrote to Dallier to formally

¹⁵⁴⁵ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 97.

¹⁵⁴⁶ “Accords de Lagos sur la réconciliation nationale au Tchad,” reprinted in, Kovana, *Précis des guerres*, 102-105.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Ibid, Article 1D.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, Article 7.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 74.

¹⁵⁵⁰ MAE Nantes, N’Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 6 pour la période du 1^{er} au 31 août 1979,” 20.09.1979, p. 17.

request a halt to the French retreat which would, in his view, aggravate prevailing tensions. He explained that, since the GUNT had not officially been formed, the current authorities could not request a French withdrawal. Furthermore, pursuant to the Lagos Accord, the future GUNT should itself decide on a withdrawal timetable, rather than it being a unilateral French decision.¹⁵⁵¹ In conversations with Dallier, representatives from the FAP, the FAN, and the FAO all claimed that the Lagos provision on French forces came as a result of Nigerian and Libyan pressure. The main GUNT factions did not want to refuse to sign on this basis and thus be accused of sabotaging the negotiations.¹⁵⁵² Even Kamougué suggested that he thought a French retreat “premature.”¹⁵⁵³

President Ahidjo of Cameroon told French officials that the clause on French withdrawal came from the Nigerians, particularly General Yar'Adua. According to Ahidjo, the Nigerian military government wanted a major foreign policy success before leaving power in the hands of a democratically-elected government in October. They thus put a lot of pressure on Goukouni and Habré to cede on this point. Peter Onu, the Nigerian Deputy Secretary General of the OAU also played a role in presenting the clause to the faction leaders, falsely claiming that it was a resolution supported by the attending state parties. He then separately met with the heads of the state delegations and presented the same clause as a resolution of the Chadian factions.¹⁵⁵⁴ Although the details of this account seem rather exaggerated, it nonetheless seconded the claims of the factions opposed to French troop withdrawal that they had been subjected to pressure. Ahidjo himself firmly stated his own opposition to such a retreat, claiming that, “si vous partez, le pays sera déchiré et livré aux appétits de la Libye et des autres.”¹⁵⁵⁵

In any event, local conditions made the troop withdrawal more difficult than initially foreseen. The evacuation order came in the middle of the rainy season, which made the roads almost impassable to most vehicular traffic, and flooded the smaller airstrips. The civilian contractors charged with transporting some of the French units' heavy equipment exploited the situation and more than doubled their prices. Departing on August 26, the French troops leaving Ati took a week to reach N'Djamena. Moussoro also proved problematic, since FAN

¹⁵⁵¹ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 7, Dossier, «GUNT II,” Letter from Goukouni to Dallier, 29.08.1979.

¹⁵⁵² see FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3, Telegrams from Dallier to Paris, 03.9-08.9.1979.

¹⁵⁵³ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3, Circular Telegram from Georgy to French Africa Embassies, “Le Tchad et la France,” 07.09.1979, p. 4.

¹⁵⁵⁴ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3, Telegram from Pottier to Paris, “Audience avec le président: Situation au Tchad et retrait de nos troupes,” 04.09.1979, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Ibid. 3.

and FAT forces occupied different parts of the town. French officers stationed there feared that a precipitous French withdrawal could trigger heavy fighting between the two sides. Tonquédec himself travelled to Moussoro to negotiate a peaceful withdrawal with both the FAT and FAN commanders.¹⁵⁵⁶ While successful in his mission, its very necessity testified to the lack of ambient trust and the persistence of factional tensions on the Chadian scene. If Lagos II had brought a temporary halt to fighting, nothing in its provisions did much to address the more fundamental issues behind the conflict.

Giscard's decision to evacuate French troops from Central Chad was presented as a reaction to the Lagos Accord's declaration that French forces constituted an "obstacle" to national reconciliation. Such a declaration, Georgy wrote, put the French government in a position where, "vis-à-vis de l'opinion internationale et notamment vis-à-vis de l'opinion africaine, [it had] l'obligation de confirmer le retrait de ses forces et de donner à celui-ci un début d'exécution."¹⁵⁵⁷ However, given the immediate and vocal reaction it provoked among a number of prominent Chadians, the precipitous withdrawal order also seemed motivated by the desire to publicly telegraph to both Chadians and a wider African public that Chad needed France more than France needed Chad.

French officials were notably pessimistic from the moment Chad's factions signed the Lagos Accord. Jean Sribier, the Chief of Staff of Cooperation Minister Robert Galley, noted that, "jusqu'à présent aucun pays africain n'est parvenu à maintenir à sa tête un système de gouvernement du type 'union nationale.' Aussi peut-on émettre des doutes sérieux sur les chances de réussite tchadiennes."¹⁵⁵⁸ However, while a French withdrawal would give free reign to score-settling among the factions, he felt that such a conflict was in fact necessary as a, "prélude indispensable à la décantation d'une situation politique qui ne paraît pas de nature— en l'état présent des choses—à aboutir à la structuration d'un pouvoir capable de gouverner."¹⁵⁵⁹

Georgy seconded this pessimism, although not Sribier's fatalism. For him, Lagos II left every Chadian faction with their ambitions intact and did nothing to address deep-set antagonisms between them, particularly between the North and South. In the days and weeks that followed the signature of Lagos, the projected demilitarization of the capital had not yet

¹⁵⁵⁶ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 76.

¹⁵⁵⁷ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3, Circular Telegram from Georgy to French Africa Embassies, "Le Tchad et la France," 07.09.1979, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵⁸ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, Cooperation Ministry Note, "a/s: Premières observations concernant l'accord de Kano [sic] conclu entre les différentes tendances tchadiennes le 21 août 1979 [sic]," 23.08.1979, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

begun, nor did it seem likely that the “neutral force” would or could soon begin deployment. The delicate negotiations aimed at forming a second GUNT had made little progress, and the future seemed bleak.¹⁵⁶⁰

He also shared the views of the GUNT leaders that a full French withdrawal would threaten the entire reconciliation process. He wrote that :

[...] il serait déraisonnable d'introduire un facteur de déséquilibre supplémentaire dans la situation complexe et dangereux qui prévaut actuellement au Tchad en procédant dès maintenant à un retrait complet étant conscients du rôle stabilisateur de nos troupes, qui assurent le fonctionnement des services civils au profit de la population, dont la présence contribue à empêcher des affrontements sanglants entre factions rivales et permet d'envisager la poursuite d'une coopération internationale.¹⁵⁶¹

Shortly after Giscard had declared that France would begin withdrawing its forces, General Méry wrote to Tonquédec that, in his view, “les accords de Lagos ne règlent rien. Une situation confuse pourrait s'en suivre, à laquelle nous pourrions mieux faire face à partir d'une seule implantation dans N'Djamena.”¹⁵⁶² Thus, after the repeated entreaties of various Chadian leaders, Giscard agreed to limit the French departure to a partial withdrawal until the deployment of the “neutral force” and until the factions could agree on the composition of a new GUNT to later determine the status of French forces.¹⁵⁶³ This meant that all of the remaining French forces redeployed to the N'Djamena region.¹⁵⁶⁴

Despite French pessimism, during September it seemed as if tensions had begun to ease as momentum gradually built towards the formation of a new GUNT. On September 2^e the Lagos signatories agreed to form an “interim committee” composed of representatives of each “tendance” charged with running the government administration before the formation of the new GUNT. The Libyan threat also seemed to somewhat recede, as negotiations began between Tripoli and the interim committee on a prisoner exchange. Additionally, on September 5, Nigerian officials announced the end of their Chadian embargo.¹⁵⁶⁵

Preparations also began on the deployment of the “neutral force.” This force, under the aegis of the OAU, was to consist of contingents from Congo-Brazzaville, Benin, and Guinea, three francophone countries with more distant ties to France than the rest of its former colonies. However, shortly after the Lagos Accord, government officials in Benin and Guinea began to

¹⁵⁶⁰ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3, Circular Telegram from Georgy to French Africa Embassies, “Le Tchad et la France,” 07.09.1979, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶¹ Ibid. 4.

¹⁵⁶² cited in Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*. 74.

¹⁵⁶³ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3, Circular Telegram from Georgy to French Africa Embassies, “Le Tchad et la France,” 07.09.1979, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*. 77.

¹⁵⁶⁵ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, “Synthèses 1979,” “Synthèse n. 7 pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 septembre 1979,” 22.10.1979, pp. 1-3.

vacillate on deployment planning. It quickly became clear that neither government particularly desired to send troops to Chad. Despite this, the new President of Congo-Brazzaville, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, decided to demonstrate his determination to contribute to the force, even if the Congolese deployed alone. After preparatory staff visits in mid-September, Sassou-Nguesso made an unannounced visit to N'Djamena on September 23, along with a delegation of 75 people including Congolese journalists and camera crews. There he met with Goukouni and mediated a brief meeting between the Chadian President and Kamougué to resolve disputes over the interim committee.¹⁵⁶⁶

As the Lagos signatories seemed to make progress towards a new GUNT, Louis Dallier's mission as French Ambassador came to an end. On September 17, he left the country.¹⁵⁶⁷ Just three days later, French forces landed in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Empire, to overthrow the regime of Emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Ibid. 10-11.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Ibid. 14.

Chapter VI: Imperial Interlude

The French decision to overthrow Emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Empire represents perhaps the most emblematic event of Giscard's Africa policy, if not his presidency. In the aftermath of Bokassa's fall, the affair became a political scandal when the French satirical newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné* revealed that Giscard had received gifts of diamonds from Bokassa during various stays in the country. This "affaire de diamants" significantly contributed to Giscard's close electoral defeat in 1981. Thus, to a far greater extent than other French interventions, the events surrounding *Opération Barracuda* became highly imbricated with French domestic politics.

While it is not appropriate here to examine in depth the history of Franco-Central African relations, a short digression is in order to illustrate their character. The relationship between Bokassa and France exhibited a number of similarities to that of Tombalbaye's relations to France before his ouster in 1975. This not only suggests structural similarities in the postcolonial links between economic and political dependency, but also the extent to which the French penchant for the strong man in power could generate unintended consequences. Furthermore, the odd Franco-Central African relationship, personified in the ties between Giscard and Bokassa, ultimately led to Bokassa's overthrow and substantially undermined the French position in neighboring Chad.

Jean-Bedel Bokassa was born in 1921 or 1922 in the western Lobaye region of Obangui-Chari colony, later the Central African Republic. He experienced violence at an early age. Bokassa's father, a local community leader, was killed in a dispute with French colonial authorities and his mother apparently committed suicide shortly after the incident.¹⁵⁶⁸ Although no one can establish the exact details of these events, they seem to have played an important role in Bokassa's psyche.¹⁵⁶⁹

Bokassa's grandfather subsequently took charge of him and his siblings. He sent the young Jean-Bedel to missionary school. Bokassa later continued his schooling in Brazzaville, the capital of the French Congo. In 1939, he joined the French army where he served for over twenty years. While, despite his later affirmations, he did not directly serve in combat operations during the Second World War, he did participate in France's colonial war in

¹⁵⁶⁸ Geraldine Faes and Stephen Smith. *Bokassa 1^{er}, un empereur français*. Paris, France: Calmann-Lévy, 2000, p. 62.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. 63.

Indochina where he had some combat experience.¹⁵⁷⁰ As French policymakers realized the urgent necessity of training an African officer corps to prepare for the future independences, Bokassa received a commission. Captain Bokassa left the French army in 1960 as the highest-ranking Obanguian in French military service and thus became the Chief of Staff for the nascent Central African military.¹⁵⁷¹

On the night of December 31-January 1 1965-1966, he launched a coup d'état overthrowing Central African President David Dacko. After the coup, it took Charles de Gaulle several months to accept Bokassa as anyone but a "couillon."¹⁵⁷² However, Jacques Foccart finally convinced him not only to give Bokassa a C-47 transport aircraft, but also to receive him at the Elysée in July 1966.¹⁵⁷³ It did not take long before Bokassa began asserting himself. Before his first year ended, he expelled a number of French expatriates and demanded the recall of the French Ambassador, Jean Français, accusing him of homosexuality.¹⁵⁷⁴ Français later wrote that Bokassa had even ordered him poisoned and thus he was in a bad state of health when he finally left the country at the end of 1966.¹⁵⁷⁵ The next French Ambassador, Jean Herly lasted for two and a half years. By mid-1969 however, Bokassa accused him of climbing up a hill leading to Bokassa's main army base in order to spy on him.¹⁵⁷⁶ Soon, the Quai had to look hard to find people willing to represent France in Bangui. Albert de Schonen, France's next Ambassador, wrote that he had to receive assurances from his superiors that he would not have to worry about career repercussions should he encounter too many difficulties with Bokassa.¹⁵⁷⁷

Although there are too many examples to count, detailing just a few of Bokassa's problems with France well illustrates the broader picture. In 1968, Mobutu persuaded both Bokassa and Tombalbaye, to join a new *Union économique des Etats d'Afrique Centrale*, (UEAC).¹⁵⁷⁸ All of France's former Equatorial African colonies had, up to that point, belonged to the French dominated *Union Douanière et économique de l'Afrique centrale* (UDEAC). Congo-Kinshasa, as a former Belgian colony, did not belong to this economic grouping. As with many projects counter to their interests, de Gaulle and Foccart primarily saw an American

¹⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. 66-72.

¹⁵⁷¹ Ibid. 78.

¹⁵⁷² Foccart, cited in Jean Français. *Le putsch de Bokassa: Histoire secrète*. Paris, France: L'Harmattan, 2004, p. 68.

¹⁵⁷³ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 112.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Français, *Le putsch de Bokassa*, 103.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. 109.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 118.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Albert de Schonen. "Être ambassadeur à Bangui," *Le Monde*, 21 Septembre, 1979.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Durand, *L'Afrique est les relations franco-américaines*, 475.

hand behind these maneuvers aimed at undermining French influence.¹⁵⁷⁹ Although no evidence exists to substantiate this paranoia, and much evidenced to the contrary, it greatly worried French policymakers.¹⁵⁸⁰ Bokassa hoped to gain privileged access to the vast wealth of the Congo, especially cheaper imports, particularly cement.¹⁵⁸¹ Furthermore, Mobutu offered 1 million dollars to both Tombalbaye and Bokassa, as well as promises of economic aid.¹⁵⁸² As with other occasions, Bokassa knew that he could often jump at promises of quick money without any lasting consequences in French support for his regime.

Foccart managed to diffuse the situation by November of that year. Bokassa had always demonstrating an overwhelming admiration for Charles de Gaulle, whom he always referred to as “Papa,” even in person.¹⁵⁸³ Foccart threatened to cancel Bokassa’s official visit to France the following year, an event that Foccart described as “sa consécration, son ‘sacre’—avant l’autre, auquel il ne songeait pas encore [...] C’était infiniment plus important pour lui que l’UEAC ou l’UDEAC.”¹⁵⁸⁴ Bokassa backed down. Immediately thereafter, French Cooperation Minister Yvon Bourges flew to Bangui with a gift of a DC-4 aircraft.¹⁵⁸⁵

In August 1969, several months into Georges Pompidou’s presidency, Bokassa “converted” to socialism, and expelled the French troops stationed in Bangui for his protection, as well as the French Air Force squadron located there.¹⁵⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the Pompidou administration agreed to a 2 million franc loan to help construct a law faculty.¹⁵⁸⁷ The following year, Bokassa travelled to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in order to try to obtain economic aid. He publically declared himself willing to accept the ideology of any state willing to subsidize the construction of a railroad linking Central Africa to the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁵⁸⁸ Bokassa famously declared that, in his view, “il n’y avait que Dieu et l’argent, que les idéologies n’avaient pas d’importance et qu’il était, pour sa part, prêt à épouser n’importe laquelle pourvu qu’elle lui rapporte.”¹⁵⁸⁹

¹⁵⁷⁹ Jacques Foccart. *Foccart Parle: Entretiens avec Philippe Gaillard* (Vol. 1). Paris, France: Fayard, 1997, p. 292.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Durand, *L’Afrique est les relations franco-américaine*, 479.

¹⁵⁸¹ Ibid. 478.

¹⁵⁸² Ibid. 480.

¹⁵⁸³ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 113.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Foccart, *Foccart parle I*, 296.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 120.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. 129.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. 131.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. 132.

¹⁵⁸⁹ MAE Nantes, Bangui Ambassade, Carton12, Dossier, “Divers,” Note from French Chargé d’affaires to Paris, “a/s : Conversion à l’Islam du Président BOKASSA,” 26.10.1976, p. 2.

However, with the death of de Gaulle in November 1970, Bokassa discarded his “socialism” as quickly as he had picked it up.¹⁵⁹⁰ For the rest of Pompidou’s term until his death in 1974, relations remained relatively calm, with few exceptions.¹⁵⁹¹ As Foccart recognized, Bokassa demonstrated enough realism to understand the ultimate necessity of good relations with France for the budgetary support needed to pay his government employees.¹⁵⁹² However, if he could exploit an opportunity in order to demonstrate some degree of independence from France while gaining material benefits at the same time, Bokassa would seize the occasion.

The death of Pompidou in April 1974 provided just such an opportunity. Shortly after his funeral, Bokassa began nationalizing French and other foreign holdings in the hydrocarbon industry, particularly those of the French company Total.¹⁵⁹³ He also seized the French bookstore in Bangui, and closed down the French consulate. Finally, to cap it all, on the day Valéry Giscard d’Estaing won the second round of the French Presidential election, Bokassa promoted himself to the rank of Marshal.¹⁵⁹⁴ However, Giscard’s new administration quickly settled these affairs by signing an important uranium contract with the Central African government.¹⁵⁹⁵

Like his neighbor Tombalbaye, Bokassa seems to have understood all too well his dependence on France for his own survival. His often otherwise inexplicable behavior of sometimes defying the French by expelling expatriates and nationalizing French assets makes sense in this context. Bokassa’s dilemma consisted of needing French support for his regime’s survival, but also needing to demonstrate a degree of independence from France to maintain his own legitimacy. Furthermore, despite the essential nature of French economic and financial support, it was never enough to cover all of Bokassa and his government’s needs.

By the mid-1970s, after a decade and a half of independence, the Central African Republic remained deeply dependent upon French external aid. For instance, in 1975, foreign aid represented 77.4 percent of the Central African budget, with the French treasury contributing 52 percent of this figure.¹⁵⁹⁶ In 1977, French aid rose to 61 percent of foreign

¹⁵⁹⁰ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 133.

¹⁵⁹¹ Foccart, *Foccart parle I*, 212.

¹⁵⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹³ Claude Warthier, *Quatre Présidents et l’Afrique: de Gaulle, Pompidou, Giscard d’Estaing, Mitterrand*. Paris, France: Seuil, 1995, p. 301.

¹⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 303.

¹⁵⁹⁶ MC Archives Fontainebleau, Versement 19850149, 103 MC, Dossiers des chargés de mission géographique pour la République Centrafricaine, 1961-1982 (from now on FCMGTRC), Carton 23, “Tableaux ‘aide française,’” “La coopération française et la Centrafrique,” undated, 1977, pp. 1-2.

assistance, while 64 percent of the country's exports, mostly consisting of cotton, coffee, tobacco, timber, and industrial diamonds, went to France.¹⁵⁹⁷

Giscard himself later recounted an awkward story which illustrated the deep level of dependence upon France. During a hunting trip to the East of the country, one of Giscard's companions asked a local tending to their camp who he would vote for as President of the Central African Republic, Giscard, or Bokassa. After protesting the inanity of the question, the man responded, "Evidemment pour le président Giscard. C'est le père! C'est lui qui donne l'aide à la Centrafrique." Giscard commented that this represented a "compte rendu abrégé de la politique de la coopération!"¹⁵⁹⁸ This economic dependence was paralleled in many respects by Bokassa's own relationship with Giscard.

Bokassa and Giscard

Giscard himself had an interesting, if not always easily decipherable personal relationship with Bokassa. Giscard first met Bokassa at the funeral of Charles de Gaulle in November 1970. Then Finance Minister, Giscard had the delicate mission of approaching Bokassa in order to sound him out about his advances to the Soviets and, doubtless, to convey to him that moving too far in this direction would have consequences. Giscard later reported that Bokassa seamlessly shifted from emotion to emotion like a good actor, all the while professing his love for France.¹⁵⁹⁹

Over the course of the next several years, Giscard got to know Bokassa a bit better. As an avid big game hunter, Giscard enjoyed travelling to Africa on hunting expeditions. The Central African Republic had a number of hunting reserves that attracted the future French President. His first hunting expedition there, while still the Finance Minister, attracted Bokassa's attention. In December 1970, Bokassa invited Giscard to meet him after his hunting trip.

In 1973, during another hunting trip in the country, Bokassa again invited him to Bangui. After a sumptuous dinner reception, Bokassa offered his guest some diamonds as "souvenirs."¹⁶⁰⁰ This became the origin of the famous "affaire des diamants" which would contribute to Giscard's electoral defeat in 1981.

¹⁵⁹⁷ FCMGTRC, Carton 24, "Visite officielle de Monsieur Maïdou, Premier Ministre Centrafricaine à Paris, 15-16-17 janvier 1979," Cooperation Ministry Note, "Sur la situation politique économique et financière de l'Empire centrafricaine," 11.1978, pp. 3-7.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 615.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. 603.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. 603-606.

Giscard's interesting relationship with Bokassa continued during his presidency. Shortly after Giscard's election, Bokassa demanded that Giscard visit him at his private chateau in Sologne in France. If Giscard refused, Bokassa threatened him with more difficulties. Giscard ceded to the blackmail and paid Bokassa a visit in which he promised to make the Central African Republic his first official overseas visit for the next Franco-African summit in Bangui.¹⁶⁰¹

As Giscard arrived in Bangui in March 1975, he toasted the Central African President in glowing terms:

"Croyez bien, monsieur le Président à vie, mon cher parent et ami, que la France ressent profondément cette solidarité envers la République centrafricain, qui, sous votre autorité, s'est engagé dans une action en profondeur de développement économique, culturel et humain."¹⁶⁰²

Indeed, much of the official correspondence between the two men begins with greetings of "mon cher parent" or "mon cousin."¹⁶⁰³ This level of intimacy, perhaps affected by both leaders for their own ends, went beyond the protocol typically observed between Giscard and other African leaders. The giants of the Franco-African family, Houphouët-Boigny, Senghor, and even Bongo, viewed Bokassa as a leader whose antics gave a negative image of the African ruling classes, and thus saw Giscard's overtly obliging attitude towards him with some discomfort.¹⁶⁰⁴

However, close friendship, affected or otherwise, did not prevent Bokassa from provoking continuous crises in the Franco-Central African relationship. In July 1975, shortly after the Franco-African Summit, Bokassa demanded emergency financial assistance for a country on the brink of bankruptcy. His costly projects, such as the construction of a large statue of himself in Bangui, as well as palace improvements, ran down the treasury. Paris demanded some measure of control over Central African state expenses.¹⁶⁰⁵ However, Bokassa desperately needed money, so, in 1976 he flew to Libya and converted to Islam.¹⁶⁰⁶ He created a Revolutionary Command Council in imitation of Gaddafi's, and received, in consequence, a significant amount of Libyan financial aid.¹⁶⁰⁷ Several months later, Bokassa renounced his conversion in preparation for his plans to crown himself Emperor.¹⁶⁰⁸

¹⁶⁰¹ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 609-610.

¹⁶⁰² Cited in Warthier, *Quatre Présidents*, 302.

¹⁶⁰³ The archives contain a substantial sampling of this correspondence.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 372.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Ibid. 303.

¹⁶⁰⁶ MAE Nantes, Bangui Ambassade, Carton12, Dossier, "Divers," Note from French Chargé d'affaires to Paris, "a/s : Conversion à l'Islam du Président BOKASSA," 26.10.1976.

¹⁶⁰⁷ Emmanuel Germain. *La Centrafrique et Bokassa 1965-1979: Force et déclin d'un pouvoir personnel*. Paris, France: L'Harmattan, 2000, p. 153.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

The coronation affair perhaps epitomizes the often absurd nature of French relations with Bokassa. On December 4 1976, during the closing ceremony of his ruling party congress, party members were presented with a constitutional amendment declaring that, “Le maréchal Jean-Bedel Bokassa est proclamé premier empereur [...] et prend le nom d’empereur Bokassa I^{er}.”¹⁶⁰⁹ Interestingly, French observers recorded that the congress was only supposed to last two days, but continued for twenty-four. Some elements within the ruling party objected to Bokassa’s imperial pretensions and managed to extract constitutional concessions which, on paper at least, restored some democratic powers to an elected parliament and government.¹⁶¹⁰ While preparations began for an official coronation, the new emperor seemed to retire from politics. He even moved his “court” to his farm complex in Berengo, 80 kilometers southeast of Bangui. Some saw this as a positive evolution in which real power shifted away from Bokassa. Robert Picquet, the French Ambassador in Bangui, noted that:

Aussi forte que soit sa personnalité, le maître n’est plus à Bangui, et c’est là toute la différence [...] la Centrafrique a vécu plus d’une décennie dans la peur. Peur de la prison, ou pire encore; peur de l’expulsion et de la spoliation. C’était la chape de plomb de l’enfer de Dante. Et voici que maintenant, tout semble s’alléger.¹⁶¹¹

This feeling that Bokassa’s otherwise absurd gesture might have signaled the beginning of a certain political openness in the country may have contributed to the decision of French authorities to help the new emperor finance and plan his upcoming massive coronation.

However, by the middle of 1977, it had become clear that Bokassa’s withdrawal from the public sphere represented little more than a brief respite. He increasingly began interfering again in government decisions, and arrested opposition figures.¹⁶¹² He ordered his Prime Minister (and future Central African President), Ange-Félix Patassé to make the upcoming coronation, held on December 4 1977, the government’s number one priority. The government of the newly renamed Central African Empire needed to find sources of funding for an event to which Bokassa hoped to invite some 3,000 guests, including the Pope. He thus turned to France for assistance in organizing the transport of material and help in getting loans.¹⁶¹³

French authorities responded favorably and Bokassa benefited from substantial public and private assistance from French sources. Giscard’s cousin, François Giscard d’Estaing, the director of the *Banque française du commerce extérieur* (BFCE) and one of his business

¹⁶⁰⁹ Cited in Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 374-375.

¹⁶¹⁰ FCMGTRC, Carton 23, Dossier “Affaires politiques 1977,” Note from Ambassador Robert Picquet to Paris, “a/s: Cent jours,” 17.03.1977, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶¹¹ *Ibid.* 4.

¹⁶¹² FCMGTRC, Carton 23, Dossier “Affaires politiques 1977,” Note from Picquet to Paris, “a/s: Vers la fin de l’entracte,” 16.06.1977, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶¹³ *Ibid.* 4-5.

partners, Jean-Pierre Dupont, would help organize the logistics of the massive ceremony, designed to emulate Napoleon's coronation as emperor.¹⁶¹⁴ The overall cost of the ceremony equaled the average amount of annual French aid to Central Africa, and the French government covered some of these costs.¹⁶¹⁵

For instance, the BFCE provided credits to the Central African authorities to finance fifty percent of its cash purchases of luxury items in France needed for the coronation.¹⁶¹⁶ Additionally, COFACE, France's state investment insurance agency, agreed to insure 15 million francs worth of contracts, including for the imperial crown and scepter, gold jewelry, eating utensils, military uniforms, porcelain, and art objects.¹⁶¹⁷ Dupont himself also spent or loaned some 100 million francs for various facets of the coronation, including the construction of a throne, the purchase of crown jewels, and an imperial carriage. The Cooperation Ministry spent 4 million francs on the purchase and transport of 32 horses for the coronation parade, and the Defense Ministry loaned 625 sabers for the event.¹⁶¹⁸ The French Army took charge of the video footage of the coronation, creating a film as a gift for Bokassa. The latter was enthralled with its quality, later calling it, "non seulement un document d'archive irremplaçable mais aussi une œuvre d'art remarquable."¹⁶¹⁹

Ultimately, Giscard, as well as the Pope, wisely decided not to attend the ceremony itself. Instead René Journiac and Cooperation Minister Robert Galley represented the French delegation. The massive costs of the coronation, as well as its opulence, did come under attack from some French policymakers. Picquet himself, in detailing the elaborate preparation and planning, asked, "N'est-ce pas trop?"¹⁶²⁰ Cooperation Ministry officials also observed that the massive cost of the coronation had put enormous strains on the Empire's finances.¹⁶²¹

Despite this, Franco-Central African relations remained strong throughout the following year. In August, Giscard again undertook a hunting trip in the country followed by a meeting with Bokassa in Bangui. The latter presented Giscard with a memorandum

¹⁶¹⁴ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 18-19.

¹⁶¹⁵ Warthier, *Quatre Présidents*, 306.

¹⁶¹⁶ FCMGTRC, Carton 24, Dossier, "Voyage du ministre 2 au 7 octobre 1977," Cooperation Ministry Note, "Problèmes divers liés aux dépenses du Couronnement," undated, .09.1977, p. 1.

¹⁶¹⁷ Ibid. Annex "Commandes pour le couronnement pour lesquelles une garantie COFACE a été obtenue ou demandée."

¹⁶¹⁸ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 22-25.

¹⁶¹⁹ FCMGTRC, Carton 23, Dossier, "Affaires politiques 1978," Note from Picquet to Paris, "a/s: Film sur le couronnement," 29.12.1978.

¹⁶²⁰ FCMGTRC, Carton 23, Dossier "Affaires politiques 1978," Note from Picquet to Paris, "a/s: N'est-ce pas trop?" 28.10.1977.

¹⁶²¹ FCMGTRC, Carton 24, Dossier, "Voyage du ministre 2 au 7 octobre 1977," Cooperation Ministry Note, "Problèmes divers liés aux dépenses du Couronnement," undated, .09.1977, p. 1.

requesting substantially increased assistance to the country. Journiac, in his comments on the memorandum, suggested acceding to most of the demands, which included requests for increased military assistance, salaries for public sector workers, help meeting budgetary shortfalls, aid for administrative reform, and funding for infrastructure maintenance. Journiac noted that increased financial assistance was particularly necessary since, “On ne peut laisser l’ECA [l’Empire Centrafricaine] s’effondrer.”¹⁶²² Within the Cooperation Ministry however, officials felt less enthusiastic about the desirability of increased French aid. In response to Giscard’s formal decision to agree to most of Bokassa’s demands, Robert Galley’s Chief of Staff, Jean Sribier, told Journiac that:

[...] les instructions du président de la République me conduisent à augmenter la part du budget du département consacré à l’Empire centrafricaine. Il ne faut pas se cacher cependant que les résultats de notre coopération dans cet Etat ont toujours été particulièrement décevants en raison de l’attitude de fond des pouvoirs publics.¹⁶²³

A Massacre and a Commission

The events immediately leading up to the French break with Bokassa began in January 1979. Late the previous year, Bokassa proclaimed that all school children would henceforth wear school uniforms.¹⁶²⁴ Schools would refuse entry to students not wearing the uniform by January 1979. These uniforms were too costly for most parents. This directive alienated much of the population faced with a government ceaselessly looking for more ways to raise revenue at the expense of its citizens. On January 18, demonstrations of school children, mostly between the ages of thirteen and twenty, broke out in Bangui.¹⁶²⁵ These demonstrations not only aimed at changing the law on uniforms, but also covered a wide range of pressing economic demands such as the minimum wage and unpaid salaries.¹⁶²⁶

Chanting slogans demanding the payment of scholarships and their parents’ salaries, around 2,000 students marched down l’Avenue Boganda. Through paranoia, Bokassa never issued his police forces with munitions for their weapons except under exceptional circumstances, so the 200 or so police officers facing the protestors had few effective means of stopping them.¹⁶²⁷ Although they arrested some of the students who became isolated from the crowd, they could do little else. The following day, January 19, university students joined the

¹⁶²² FCMGTRC, Carton 25, Dossier, “Voyage Giscard d’Estaing Août 1978,” Journiac’s notes on Bokassa’s Memorandum, 22.08.1978, p. 3.

¹⁶²³ FCMGTRC, Carton 25, Dossier, “Voyage Giscard d’Estaing Août 1978,” Note from Sribier to Journiac, “Assistance technique à l’Empire centrafricaine,” 07.09.1978, p. 4.

¹⁶²⁴ Didier Bigo. *Pouvoir et obéissance en Centrafrique*. Paris, France: Editions Karthala, 1988, p. 193.

¹⁶²⁵ Ibid. 193 Bokassa later claimed that it was Prime Minister Henri Maïdou’s idea in the first place

¹⁶²⁶ Amnesty International. AFR 19/002/1979 – “Recent human rights violations in the Central African Empire,” 26.06.1979.

¹⁶²⁷ Bigo, *Pouvoir et obéissance*, 194.

protestors, although this time the government had called in the army. The protests quickly turned violent, with riots breaking out and some pillaging taking place.¹⁶²⁸ The government began distributing ammunition to the army, and some troops opened fire. However, many soldiers had not had previous weapons training and did not even know how to properly load and fire their weapons. Some of them even fled. Workers and, in some cases, entire neighborhoods began joining the revolt. By evening however, Bokassa himself arrived from his palace at Berengo with his own personal, better armed and trained reinforcements. He also brought in several armored vehicles from the army camp at Bouar, as well as machine guns.¹⁶²⁹

That night, Bokassa's own armed units mounted a ferocious repression in some neighborhoods of the city. Soldiers burst into bars and houses, shooting at everyone they found.¹⁶³⁰ The death toll proved horrendous, with witnesses describing corpses littering the streets in several different parts of the city. Amnesty International claimed that eyewitnesses reported between 400 and 500 dead, although later reports put the death toll significantly below that figure.¹⁶³¹

Despite the level of the repression, it received little attention in the international press. In the days and months that followed, Bokassa attempted to root out the presumed leaders of the demonstrations.¹⁶³² Possibly the lack of strong international reaction to the massacres encouraged him to pursue his presumed enemies.¹⁶³³ At the same time, he acceded to some of the protesters' demands by raising the minimum wage and giving government workers the back pay owed to them. However, his arrests of professors and student leaders provoked yet more unrest.

Protests resumed on April 7. The following week, the university union called for a general student strike. The army then proceeded to occupy the university, and students, as well as younger children, fled to neighboring hills. On April 18, the army surprised them there and conducted mass arrests. Soldiers pursued some of those who managed to flee into surrounding neighborhoods, where they swept the area and stuffed as many students as they could find, many of them children, into army trucks to transport to prison. Soldiers had put so many students in these trucks that, "By the time the lorries reached the prison many detainees were

¹⁶²⁸ Ibid, 195.

¹⁶²⁹ Ibid, 196-197.

¹⁶³⁰ Ibid, 198.

¹⁶³¹ Amnesty International. AFR 19/002/1979 – "Recent human rights violations in the Central African Empire," 26.06.1979.

¹⁶³² Bigo, *Pouvoir et obéissance*, 199.

¹⁶³³ Germain, *La Centrafrique et Bokassa*, 251.

already dead, having died either from their wounds or as a result of being crushed underneath the weight of other prisoners in the lorries.”¹⁶³⁴

Ngaragba prison had an infamous reputation in Central Africa as the place where many of Bokassa’s political enemies were tortured or killed. The army sent many of the children arrested on April 18 here. Amnesty reported that:

When the prisoners taken to Ngaragba reached the prison, guards hurled stones at them, killing several. The survivors were forced to drag the dead bodies out of the lorries; they were then taken to prison cells [...] Although the cells measured only about two metres square, as many as 30 were crammed into each cell [...] They were left without food or water in their stifling cells until the next day, by which time many were dead.¹⁶³⁵

Here reports surfaced that Bokassa himself showed up at the scene and personally participated in beatings and torture of individual children and students.¹⁶³⁶ These reports made it into the international press the following month when Amnesty International issued a statement condemning human rights abuses in the Central African Empire.¹⁶³⁷

In May, France and her African allies held their annual Franco-African summit in Kigali. Bokassa strenuously defended himself and denied the accuracy of Amnesty’s reports. He agreed to a multinational commission of inquiry consisting of five of the African states at the summit. Ominously, Giscard, when asked how France would respond to a possible guilty verdict in the report, responded “la France tirera toutes les conclusions que ce rapport appellera.”¹⁶³⁸

Bokassa gave the commission relatively unhindered access to most of the places and people needed for the investigation.¹⁶³⁹ Indeed, his meeting with the commissioners after their investigation convinced him that the report would exonerate him. “Leaks” reported by various French newspapers confirmed that others held this sentiment as well.¹⁶⁴⁰

After three months of investigations, including a week in Bangui, the commission delivered its verdict in a 133 page document, with over 40 more pages of annexes including interviews with top officials and witnesses. The report concluded, contrary to Bokassa’s apparent expectations, that :

¹⁶³⁴ Amnesty International. AFR 19/002/1979 – “Recent human rights violations in the Central African Empire,” 26.06.1979.

¹⁶³⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶³⁶ Bigo, *Le pouvoir et l’obéissance*, 200-201.

¹⁶³⁷ Amnesty International. AFR 19/001/1979 – “Amnesty International condemns merciless treatment of arrested children in Central African Empire,” 14.05.1979.

¹⁶³⁸ Cited in Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 194.

¹⁶³⁹ Amnesty International. AFR 19/004/1979 - Publication of International Commission of Inquiry’s Report on events in Bangui (Central African Empire), 28.08.1979.

¹⁶⁴⁰ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 197.

[...] la Mission de Constatation estime qu'au mois de janvier 1979, à Bangui, des émeutes ont été atrocement réprimées par les forces de l'ordre et qu'au mois d'avril 1979, des massacres d'une centaine d'enfants ont été perpétrés sous les ordres de l'Empereur Bokassa et avec sa participation quasi-certaine.¹⁶⁴¹

The fact that a panel of experts selected by other African states explicitly accused Bokassa of participation in a crime, seriously challenged the latter's international and regional legitimacy and paved the way for his removal. On August 17, the day following the report's publication, the Cooperation Ministry announced a cessation of assistance to the Central African Empire, with the exception of humanitarian aid. Meanwhile the Elysée intensified preparations for Bokassa's ouster.

Operation Barracuda

According to Giscard, he as well as a number of African Presidents saw a guilty verdict as a signal that Bokassa would have to leave power.¹⁶⁴² Nonetheless, Bokassa's embarrassingly public human rights record did not constitute the only reason behind the French decision to orchestrate his overthrow. Bokassa had always been known for his excesses, and whatever one could say, no one could really consider his regime particularly worse than France's great ally and Bokassa's southern neighbor, Mobutu. Alexandre de Marenches, the head of the SDECE, later wrote:

L'opération centrafricaine est une opération qui consistait à débarrasser ce malheureux pays de son "Empereur" et à faire en sorte que les Libyens ne prennent pas position au centre de l'Afrique. La pensée stratégique de Khadafi était d'occuper le Tchad, puis l'Empire centrafricaine situé juste en dessous. De là, ils se trouvaient dans un lieu stratégique, l'équivalent du plateau de Pratzen en fonction duquel Napoléon avait conçu la manœuvre de la bataille d'Austerlitz [...] Une telle victoire eut été exploitée soit en direction du golfe de Guinée, soit vers la Corne de l'Afrique et la mer Rouge en donnant la main à l'Éthiopie communiste, complétant ainsi la mise sous influence d'une grande partie du continent africain. C'était le maître plan de Khadafi.¹⁶⁴³

While Marenches' explanation does indicate that Bokassa was not alone in his unhealthy obsession with Napoleon, his view also represented those of other French policymakers at the time. As noted previously, Marenches and the SDECE had a reputation for hawkish interpretations of world politics, particularly in Africa. Nevertheless, with the development of the situation in Chad and the continuing Libyan presence in that country, the Central African Empire grew in strategic importance in French eyes. Libya's open support for Kamougué's forces and Acyl's incursions in Chad's North, illustrated this threat. Giscard and Journiac seemed to share these fears. Shortly before the International Commission released its damning

¹⁶⁴¹ Cited in Amnesty International. AFR 19/004/1979 - Publication of International Commission of Inquiry's Report on events in Bangui (Central African Empire), 28.08.1979.

¹⁶⁴² Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 624-627.

¹⁶⁴³ Marenches, *Dans le secret des princes*, 161-162.

report, Journiac warned Giscard that it could quickly provoke Bokassa to renew his former links with Gaddafi. The Libyan leader had already apparently sent envoys to Bangui.¹⁶⁴⁴ Giscard later wrote that Bokassa's removal had indeed prevented a possible Libyan presence in the Central African Empire and claimed that, "autrement, nous laissions s'installer au centre de l'Afrique un chantage politique et militaire, qui risquait de mettre en danger la stabilité de l'ensemble."¹⁶⁴⁵

Even before the release of the International Commission report, French officials began planning to replace Bokassa. In mid-July, Journiac met with Bokassa in Gabon and attempted to convince him to abdicate. The latter angrily refused and made threats concerning the French expatriate community living in Bangui. On August 3, Colonel de Tonquédec, commander of French forces in Chad, received urgent orders from Paris ordering him to prepare a force for the emergency evacuation of expatriates in Bangui. As it became clear that Bokassa's threats would not be carried out, the operation was aborted. Nonetheless, on August 8, Colonel Bernard Degenne arrived in N'Djamena charged with organizing an eventual intervention aimed at overthrowing the Central African Emperor.¹⁶⁴⁶

After the International Commission's report became public, Giscard asked both Senghor and Bongo with whom France should consider replacing Bokassa. Both suggested former President David Dacko, then living in Paris, whom Bokassa had overthrown 13 years previously. After some hesitation, Giscard agreed.¹⁶⁴⁷ Giscard could not simply send troops to Bangui and place Dacko in charge of the country. Dacko would have to "seize" power and make an official request for French protection in order to satisfy French requirements for an appropriate level of legal fiction.¹⁶⁴⁸ This resulted in a delicate situation in which Dacko would technically have to arrive in Bangui and publicly request French military protection *before* French forces officially arrived in the country. However, in order to get to Bangui in the first place, the French would have to transport him there from Paris and ensure his immediate safety. Marenches suggested using mercenaries to do this, but Giscard refused. Perhaps he remembered past debacles involving Bob Denard in Angola and Benin. Instead, this mission would be performed by a regular army unit attached to SDECE as a special operations force.¹⁶⁴⁹

¹⁶⁴⁴ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 624-627.

¹⁶⁴⁵ Ibid. 631.

¹⁶⁴⁶ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 85-86.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 624-627.

¹⁶⁴⁸ Ibid. 626.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 222.

The best way to avoid resistance and to succeed in the undertaking meant waiting until Bokassa had left the country.

As preparations moved forward however, Tonquédec began to worry that the use of Chad as a base for the coup, codenamed *Opération Barracuda*, could have negative consequences on the French role in the country. While he felt that using Chadian territory as a base from which to protect expatriates in the Central African Empire was legitimate, an active coup launched from Chadian territory, “serait traiter l’indépendance du Tchad avec une inacceptable désinvolture. Nos bonnes relations avec Goukouni n’y survivraient pas.”¹⁶⁵⁰ He passed these views on to General Méry, the French Army Chief of Staff. Tonquédec also told Méry that Gabon would be a more preferable base for the operation. Initially Méry seemed to agree, telling Tonquédec in an August 25 cable that, “il me semble difficile, politiquement, que l’affaire puisse avoir lieu à partir du Tchad.”¹⁶⁵¹

On September 17 Journiac received news that Bokassa planned to make an official visit to Libya two days later. This represented the best opportunity for the French to act.¹⁶⁵² The plan was for SDECE commandos, operating under codename *Opération Caban* (short for *CentraAfrique-BANgui*) to secure Bangui’s airport and ensure the safe arrival of ex-President David Dacko.¹⁶⁵³ These troops had removed their insignia from their uniforms in order to provide the French government with some degree of plausible deniability should the affair go sour.¹⁶⁵⁴ Dacko, whom SDECE officers had to cajole onto the aircraft before the flight, greatly feared for his personal safety and of the possible consequences to himself should the mission go awry. Thus French operatives made him pre-record a radio address proclaiming Bokassa’s overthrow and requesting French assistance, in case he felt physically or emotionally incapable of doing it himself upon landing. Despite this, on the night of September 19, Dacko landed after the SDECE operators secured the airport. The latter did this without firing a shot, partly by offering the local troops to pay the arrears on their salaries on the spot.¹⁶⁵⁵ Dacko delivered his message and minutes later regular French troops landed and secured the most important locations of the Central African capital. They also deployed to protect the expatriate community against potential unrest. The coup was bloodless.¹⁶⁵⁶

¹⁶⁵⁰ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhaï*, 86-87.

¹⁶⁵¹ Ibid. 87.

¹⁶⁵² Giscard, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, 627.

¹⁶⁵³ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 220.

¹⁶⁵⁴ Patrick Pesnot and Monsieur X. *Les dessous de la Françafrique*. Paris, France: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2008, p. 148.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Marenches, *Dans le secret des princes*, 165-167.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 224-226.

However, the SDECE had another mission as well, which aimed at identifying the extent of the Libyan presence in the Empire, and, if necessary, to engage Libyan troops who might try to resist.¹⁶⁵⁷ In the event, nothing of the sort occurred. Nonetheless, seemingly confirming fears of French policymakers, the French commandos captured some 40 Libyan special forces operatives along with five machine gun-equipped Toyota pickup trucks, 60 Kalashnikov assault rifles, a number of heavy machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers; all apparently recently supplied by Gaddafi.¹⁶⁵⁸

Upon hearing news of the coup from Libya's Foreign Minister, Ali Triki, Bokassa took the unusual decision to fly to France. He claimed that his French citizenship, awarded to him after his service in the French army gave him the right to reside in French territory. Indeed in 1973, the French Justice Ministry had informed the Quai that Bokassa was a French citizen and had the right to benefit from the same level of pension as other veterans of French nationality. Bokassa had even framed this decision and hung it on his bedroom wall.¹⁶⁵⁹ After a great deal of embarrassment among senior French officials, particularly René Journiac who had not expected such a move, Alain Peyrefitte, the French Justice Minister, called Bokassa's citizenship "une plaisanterie" and declared the fallen emperor's claims invalid. He would not be permitted to remain in France. Journiac finally managed to resolve the affair by persuading a reluctant Félix Houphouët-Boigny to offer Bokassa exile in Côte d'Ivoire. Thus ended the Central African Empire.¹⁶⁶⁰

Newspaper reports immediately following Bokassa's overthrow tended to highlight his most violent tendencies, and sometimes reporters or their editors went to excessive lengths to sell their papers. For example, in the week following Bokassa's overthrow, *Le Monde* ran stories on "Le mal africain" detailing the barbarities of his regime, and comparing it to the regimes of Idi Amin and Francisco Nguema, both overthrown that same year.¹⁶⁶¹ The most incredible stories, however, concerned Bokassa's supposed cannibalism. Famously, *Paris-Match* published a photo exposé of two corpses found in the "chambres froides du palais," with the additional commentary, "Les médecins affirment: 'Ils ont été mis vivants dans le réfrigérateur,'" followed by the question "Bokassa, anthropophage?"¹⁶⁶² It soon turned out that the refrigerator and corpses in question came from the morgue of Bangui, and not

¹⁶⁵⁷ Bat. *Le syndrome Foccart*, 378.

¹⁶⁵⁸ Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 225-226.

¹⁶⁵⁹ Ibid. 236.

¹⁶⁶⁰ Ibid. 237.

¹⁶⁶¹ Jean-Claude Pomonti. "Le mal africain I: La chute des maréchaux," *Le Monde*, 22 Septembre, 1979, and Jean-Claude Pomonti. "Le mal africain II: L'homme mange l'homme," *Le Monde*, 23-24 Septembre, 1979.

¹⁶⁶² Faes and Smith, *Bokassa*, 230

Bokassa's palace.¹⁶⁶³ The rumor spread however, and despite the shoddy nature of evidence and later retractions by some of those at the origin of the story, it became an enduring myth of the Bokassa years. One should also note that during his 1987 trial following his return to the country, Bokassa was acquitted on all charges of cannibalism.¹⁶⁶⁴

This kind of reporting helped to legitimize the French government narrative about the need for Bokassa's overthrow. However, it also raised uncomfortable questions about the character and extent of French support for Bokassa in the preceding years, particularly the Emperor's relations with Giscard. These somewhat conflicting tendencies manifested themselves within the Socialist opposition. Socialist leader, François Mitterrand called for the resignations of all those ministers and government officials who had become involved in France's close relationship with Bokassa, particularly regarding the coronation affair. However, neither he, nor other opposition figures condemned the principle of the intervention, nor its ultimate goal.¹⁶⁶⁵

Several weeks after Bokassa's overthrow, the French investigative/satirical paper *Le Canard enchaîné*, revealed that Giscard had previously received gifts of diamonds from Bokassa during one of his visits to the Central African Republic while Finance Minister. It valued the diamond gifts at 1 million francs and accused Giscard of ordering Special Forces units to the Imperial "palace" at Berengo to remove Bokassa's personal archives which included his correspondence with Giscard. This was apparently an attempt to remove important evidence of his close previous links with the Central African leader. Giscard's initial refusal to refute the charges made the accusations seem more serious. In hindsight it does seem that the *Canard* had seriously overvalued the worth of the diamonds (as industrial diamonds they were only worth several thousand francs). Likewise, reports of the theft of archives had little basis in eyewitness accounts and a number of journalists who visited Berengo following Bokassa's ouster found his "archives" relatively intact, if disorganized. Instead it seems that SDECE personnel had collected material relating to relations between Bokassa and Gaddafi. This, combined with souvenir-taking by soldiers and journalists, was later amplified in later reports into a mass theft of Bokassa's documentation.¹⁶⁶⁶

The story of the diamonds became "l'affaire des diamants" and persisted over the following months as Bokassa fed more stories of diamond gifts to the French press via the

¹⁶⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶⁴ Ibid. 231.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Ibid. 232.

¹⁶⁶⁶ see Ibid. 241-286.

right-wing French journalist Roger Delpey.¹⁶⁶⁷ The scandal subsequently played an important role in contributing to Giscard's close electoral defeat against François Mitterrand in May 1981. Thus, the gifts became “cadeaux empoisonnés” in which the relationship between Bokassa and Giscard had evolved to the point where the downfall of one dragged down the other.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Warthier, *Quatre Présidents*, 313.

Chapter VII: The Road to Withdrawal

Giscard's political future was not the only French casualty of the otherwise bloodless *Opération Barracuda*. The use of Chadian territory for Bokassa's overthrow infuriated Goukouni. On September 23, he sent a letter to the French Embassy protesting, "contre l'utilisation du territoire national tchadien comme tremplin pour des coups d'Etat dans des pays voisins ou lointains,"¹⁶⁶⁸ and threatened to, "tirer toutes les conséquences qui peuvent découler de cet acte inamicale."¹⁶⁶⁹ As Dallier had already left the country, and a new Ambassador would not arrive for over two weeks, Tonquédec was given the responsibility of explaining the French actions to the Chadian leader. According to Tonquédec, an exasperated Goukouni complained that:

Sans rien me dire, pendant des semaines, la France a préparé sur le sol de mon pays un coup d'Etat, et l'a mené à bien dans l'indifférence de mes réactions. L'armée française, dont je viens de demander le maintien pour m'aider à réussir la réconciliation des Tchadiens, est une armée de coup d'Etat. Il me faudra désormais apprendre à m'en méfier!¹⁶⁷⁰

The French decision to overthrow Bokassa dealt a serious blow to the confidence which a number of Chadian factions, particularly Goukouni, had placed in *Tacaud*. If Giscard would not hesitate to overthrow a formerly close friend and ally, how could Goukouni trust French intentions in Chad? The use of French bases in Chad for *Barracuda*, without authorization or even forewarning, represented in many respects another intolerable violation of Chadian sovereignty. As Goukouni had publically defended the French presence after Lagos II, the French actions reflected poorly upon him.

Tonquédec personally felt very sympathetic to Goukouni's position, as he himself had tried to convince French authorities to launch the coup from Gabon. He later wrote that the French attitude towards Goukouni was insulting. France had acted as if Goukouni and the Chadian transitional authorities did not exist.¹⁶⁷¹ This behavior was reflected in the attitude of officers in charge of the logistical chain. The general in charge of supplying *Barracuda* told Tonquédec that he would not make any changes in response to his requests, "que cela plaise ou non à monsieur Goukouni!"¹⁶⁷²

¹⁶⁶⁸ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 7 pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 septembre 1979," 22.10.1979, p. 15.

¹⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷⁰ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*. 88.

¹⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷² Ibid.

Although *Barracuda* soon played an important role in undermining Goukouni's confidence in the French presence, in the short term the Chadian leader needed French assistance in organizing the new GUNT. The Lagos II signatory factions had agreed on an interim governing arrangement, but it became urgently important to form the new GUNT as soon as possible. In this vein, he asked Tonquédec for the French army to secure Douguia again as a site for a future summit of the Chadian factions. Tonquédec agreed, but even as French forces had repaired and secured the site, Kamougué expressed a number of reservations about attending a meeting there. Goukouni asked Tonquédec to travel to the Southern city of Moundou to reassure Kamougué of his personal safety and to thus persuade him to attend the conference.¹⁶⁷³

Tonquédec later wrote that this request placed him in a dilemma since a refusal would only compound the difficulties and suspicions which the *Barracuda* operation had already provoked with Goukouni and other Chadian leaders. Still, he felt odd about contributing to a process which would result in the formation of a government whose first decision would, according to the Lagos II agreement, eject the French army from the country. Furthermore, despite the French commander's links with the South and certain Southern military officers, Kamougué still blamed the French for the loss of N'Djamena and had previously threatened French expatriates. Thus, a trip to the South could incur personal risks to Tonquédec himself, as the French military commander. He nevertheless decided to agree to Goukouni's request, and not to ask permission from General Méry ahead of time, fearing that the latter would almost certainly refuse.¹⁶⁷⁴ Fortunately for the French commander, after a stormy meeting with Kamougué and his subordinates in a packed aircraft hangar, the Southern leader agreed to join the other faction leaders in Douguia.

On November 7, all of the faction leaders, except Ahmat Acyl who claimed illness but sent a representative, met together at Douguia to hammer out an arrangement for the new GUNT. On November 11, after four days of discussions, 22 ministries were divided among the 11 movements. 10 went to the South, where Kamougué and his FAT divided the posts, and 12 went to the Northern factions. While Goukouni remained as President and Kamougué as Vice-President, Acyl received the Foreign Ministry, Habré received the Defense Ministry, and Mahamat Saleh Ahmat, a loyal Habré partisan, received the Finance Ministry.¹⁶⁷⁵ For the first

¹⁶⁷³ Ibid. 91-92.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Ibid. 92-94.

¹⁶⁷⁵ MAE Nantes, N'Djamena Ambassade, Carton 5, Dossier, "Synthèses 1979," "Synthèse n. 9 Période du 1^{er} au 30 novembre 1979," 10.12.1979, pp. 6-7.

time in fifteen years, Chad had something of an inclusive government, and hope seemed to emerge after continuous civil war.

Giscard quickly responded to GUNT II's formation with a Cooperation Ministry mission aimed at assessing the country's needs and developing an economic aid program. He promised Goukouni that France was willing to, "soutenir et à aider le gouvernement d'union nationale de transition, dans toute la mesure de ses moyens."¹⁶⁷⁶

However, Cooperation Ministry officials were skeptical of the possibilities of a major assistance program. During the Douguia negotiations, Jean Sribier complained that *Tacaud* no longer served any purpose. Instead, its units, based at the airport, no longer functioned as a deterrent to future outbreaks of violence. The "Force neutre" whose deployment the Lagos II agreement had demanded in part to play this deterrent role, had yet failed to materialize. *Tacaud* had transformed into a "présence passive, qui n'influe sur rien ni personne."¹⁶⁷⁷ Sribier quipped that now the French army served, "pour l'essentiel, le rôle de police de l'air et de compagnie de transport à la disposition des leaders politiques tchadiens."¹⁶⁷⁸ He worried that the de facto North-South partition, political fragmentation, deadlock, and generalized insecurity would only worsen. For these reasons, "nos initiatives d'assistance dans ce désordre et ce vide administratif, deviennent à la fois dérisoires et même dangereuses."¹⁶⁷⁹

Georgy suggested the creation of a "commando administratif" whose role aimed at restoring some level of function to the Chadian state apparatus over a six-month period.¹⁶⁸⁰ Sribier thought the idea interesting, but felt extremely pessimistic about its practicality and probable effectiveness. Cynically, he concluded that, "Lorsque l'on sait que les solutions dites 'à l'africaine' n'excluent pas dans leur registre le maintien du désordre, on est en droit de s'interroger sur l'opportunité de tenter une diversion raisonnable."¹⁶⁸¹

Regardless of the obstacles, Giscard insisted that the Cooperation Ministry devise a substantial aid program in order to both help bring Chad back from the brink of complete economic collapse, and to signal France's support for the new fragile governing arrangement. In late November, Cooperation Ministry officials met with representatives from different Chadian ministries and factions in order to create a list of needs for emergency aid. Ultimately, this consisted of a 50 million franc commitment over a four-month period, including 38 million

¹⁶⁷⁶ Ibid. 13.

¹⁶⁷⁷ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, Cooperation Ministry Note, «A/S: Une solution pour le Tchad?» 09.11.1979, p. 1.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸⁰ Ibid. 2.

¹⁶⁸¹ Ibid. 3.

for the civilian sector and 12 million francs for the military. It aimed at paying salaries, providing electricity, repairing buildings, constructing a new ferry (one had sunk), rebuilding the health system, improving agricultural production, and restoring parts of the education system. The military funding aimed at expediting demobilization and the demilitarization of the capital, as well as facilitating the functioning of the still-theoretical newly integrated national army.¹⁶⁸² Giscard signed off on this plan, but also told Cooperation Minister Robert Galley to create a special aid program for the BET and to increase the assistance levels for demobilizing combatants. This latter issue constituted, “un élément essentiel qui conditionne le reste.”¹⁶⁸³

Nothing the French could do, however, altered the fact that the GUNT II represented little more than an armed truce. Goukouni later noted that it barely functioned at all, recalling that, “Chaque mouvement avait sa zone, sur laquelle il avait le contrôle exclusif, et où il levait des taxes.”¹⁶⁸⁴ This made it nearly impossible to govern, and the consequent friction made a renewed outbreak of violence increasingly probable.

French policymaking circles were well aware of this fragmentation. Some officials at the Quai felt that regionalizing assistance measures could encourage a reduction in tensions. According to this view, the centralized state model had clearly not taken hold, in part because, “la période colonial a été trop courte.”¹⁶⁸⁵ However, one of the only things that the different Chadian factions seemed to agree upon was the maintenance of the colonial frontiers. From this perspective, any talk of “federalism” implied a break-up of the country. This feeling had grown particularly strong since early 1979 when the South had become a separately governed space. In the view of the Quai, the current state apparatus could no longer function since, “la structure doit coller à la réalité.”¹⁶⁸⁶ This meant that French economic aid efforts should focus on regional efforts rather than hoping that the GUNT would effectively coordinate assistance. This was particularly important for encouraging demobilization of Chadian armed groups since, “le Tchad vivra encore longtemps avec des armées privées, mais elles ne se dissoudront lentement que dans leurs région et avec un minimum d’activité économique.”¹⁶⁸⁷ In consequence, the Quai suggested that France discreetly orient its development assistance

¹⁶⁸² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 101, 101/2, “Synthèse n. 10 Période du 1^{er} au 31 décembre 1979,” 07.01.1980, p. 11.

¹⁶⁸³ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, Handwritten note from Journiac to Galley, No subject, 20.12.1979.

¹⁶⁸⁴ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 99.

¹⁶⁸⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, «A/S : De la régionalisation au Tchad,” 24.01.1980, p. 1.

¹⁶⁸⁶ Ibid. 2.

¹⁶⁸⁷ Ibid. 3.

towards local and regional initiatives in order to promote a more decentralized Chad. Publicly stating this would risk alienating most Chadian political elites, so it would become important to, “faire sans dire.”¹⁶⁸⁸

Due to the fragility of the Chadian political scene, many Chadian faction leaders privately wanted the French army to remain in Chad. Several days after the formation of the GUNT, Tonquédec received orders to fly to Maroua in Cameroon, alone, and in civilian clothes. The object of his orders soon became clear as he encountered René Journiac in an empty and isolated villa. After the two sat down, Ahmat Acyl, the most vocally anti-French of the various Chadian faction leaders entered the room. Tonquédec was stunned. Acyl explained to the French Colonel and Journiac that, in his view the Douguia agreement was illusory. Goukouni had no authority over the other movements, and even within the FAP dissensions had begun to appear. Habré seemed determined to seize power and awaited the best moment to do so. Such a conflict would be far worse than the past fighting in N’Djamena. Furthermore, he asserted that Gaddafi, who had hitherto supported Acyl with weapons, aimed at turning Chad into a Libyan protectorate.¹⁶⁸⁹

Journiac asked Acyl what his views were about how to counter these possibilities. Acyl responded that only France had the means of facilitating peace in the country, and it had a moral obligation to do so. Acyl even declared that France should “recolonize” Chad.¹⁶⁹⁰ He told his French interlocutors that he obviously could not say this publicly, but he counted on them to ensure that his feelings were known at the highest echelons of the French government.¹⁶⁹¹

This was not the first time that Acyl had made covert contacts with his adversaries. In early April 1979, before Kano II, Acyl passed a message to the French Embassy in Tripoli, offering a non-aggression pact.¹⁶⁹² At the end of May following Lagos I, he had sent a message via Sudanese diplomatic channels to Goukouni and Habré assuring them of his patriotism and that he was no Libyan “dupe.” He told the GUNT leaders that he well understood Gaddafi’s game, and would not support Libyan annexationist goals. He encouraged the GUNT leaders to broaden the GUNT to include his movement.¹⁶⁹³ While the GUNT leaders did not respond

¹⁶⁸⁸ Ibid. 3.

¹⁶⁸⁹ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*. 97-98. The meeting is also referenced, though not in detail, in MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note pour Monsieur Levitte, «A/s. Acyl Ahmat,” 22.02.1980, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹⁰ Ibid. 98.

¹⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 77, “Libye 1978-1979,” Telegram from Cabouat to Paris, “Tchad,” 10.04.1979, p. 2.

¹⁶⁹³ FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/2, Telegram from Dallier to Paris, “A/S : M. Acyl Ahmed et la Libye,” 01.06.1979.

to Acyl's overtures, it seemed to indicate Acyl's desire to look for a pretext to escape Libyan oversight.

After Lagos II and, more especially, Douguia, Acyl and his movement held an important position within the new GUNT. His fears about the transitional government's future seemed to prevent him from any open break with Gaddafi, but he certainly felt the weight of Libyan pressure on his own autonomy and, for this reason, sounded out French officials for possible guarantees. These contacts continued over the next few months. In February 1980, Acyl again made overtures to French officials. La Rochère suggested providing him with money to soften the blow of a break with Libya.¹⁶⁹⁴

On February 4, René Journiac visited N'Djamena in order to sound out various GUNT leaders on the future of *Tacaud* and other forms of French assistance. Like Acyl, Habré also expressed a strong desire for French forces to remain in the country. Even Kamougué, despite his negative feelings about the French since the Southern defeat the previous year, told Journiac that a French presence was indispensable. Goukouni, however, had become less enthusiastic. He told Journiac that Habré represented a serious obstacle to reconciliation, and that he feared the FAN leader's ambitions. Furthermore, he was convinced that, regardless of Journiac's reassurances, certain elements within *Tacaud* were actively collaborating with Habré. Kamougué repeated these accusations as well, although he was careful to add that the French military presence remained necessary to maintain stability.¹⁶⁹⁵

In a shift from his position of the preceding months, Goukouni wanted to move ahead with negotiating the modalities of a French withdrawal. Journiac suggested an exchange of letters which would set these modalities, and provide for the replacement of *Tacaud* with a new mission aiming at providing military aid, as well as humanitarian assistance. However, Journiac explained that any such deployment would have to be able to protect itself as well as provide a certain level of guarantee to foreign expatriates living in the capital. Goukouni rejected this proposal as it implied that French combat formations would remain in place. Instead he and Journiac agreed that the GUNT would charge a commission with elaborating the basis for negotiations on the withdrawal.¹⁶⁹⁶

On February 6, Journiac boarded a plane headed for Gabon. Tonquédec accompanied Journiac to the airport. He later wrote that Journiac's aircraft, which belonged to Gabonese

¹⁶⁹⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note pour Monsieur Levitte, «A/s. Acyl Ahmat,” 22.02.1980, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶⁹⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/1, Telegram from Beaux to Paris, “Mission de M. Journiac à N'Djamena,” 07.02.1980, p.3.

¹⁶⁹⁶ Ibid. 3-4.

President Omar Bongo, looked like it needed substantial maintenance work.¹⁶⁹⁷ That evening, it crashed in Northern Cameroon, killing Journiac and the flight crew. Journiac's death deprived Giscard of one of his closest advisors. Following his death, French policy in Chad would become increasingly ambiguous.

In many respects, this had less to do with any individual French personality, but with the position of *Tacaud* in N'Djamena. As his discussions with Journiac indicated, Goukouni had already decided by early February that the French would have to leave. Though other Chadian leaders, particularly Habré, did not share this view, no one could publicly denounce the infamous clause in the Lagos II agreement calling for French withdrawal. Doing so would stigmatize them as pawns of French neo-colonialism.

In Tonquédec's view, as well as that of some Quai officials, French policy had effectively pushed Goukouni back into the arms of Gaddafi.¹⁶⁹⁸ This process had not happened overnight, but almost certainly began with *Barracuda*. Tonquédec later wrote that in his meetings with Goukouni in the weeks following *Barracuda*, the Chadian President would often jokingly feign shock that he had not been arrested overnight by French troops.¹⁶⁹⁹ Although apparently lighthearted, this humor did reveal an aspect of Goukouni's insecurities about France's ultimate aims. By the end of 1979, these jokes transformed into a real suspicion of French motives. Two seemingly minor incidents illustrated Goukouni's growing fears.

According to Tonquédec, one night in late November 1979, a number of French soldiers deployed at N'Djamena airport moved to another section of the base in order to escape from hordes of mosquitos. Unbeknownst to the French, the FAP had deployed units to protect the aircraft of a visiting Congolese delegation. The movement of French troops provoked confusion among the Chadian forces, who sent conflicting reports back to Goukouni about French activities at the base. The same evening, the GUNT had organized a banquet for the visiting dignitaries. At the last minute Kamougué decided not to attend, and the officer he designated to replace him did not arrive either due to an accident. The absence of Southerners at the banquet, combined with confused reports from his men about suspicious French troop movements at the airport, led Goukouni to suspect a coup attempt. He stayed awake the whole night with his Kalashnikov awaiting such an eventuality.¹⁷⁰⁰

¹⁶⁹⁷ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 109.

¹⁶⁹⁸ FCMGT, Carton 5, A4/7/2, Centre d'analyse et de prévision, Note pour le ministre, "A/S Bref post-mortem tchadien" 31.12.1980, p. 2.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 92.

¹⁷⁰⁰ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 103.

On December 15, Goukouni had another scare. French officials agreed to have *Tacaud* units escort the transfer of some 1 billion CFA from the Central Bank to the airport, and then to Moundou where it would finance the purchase of cotton in the South. However, the prolonged presence of some forty French soldiers and a number of vehicles in front of the Central Bank caused nearby FAP units, unaware of the transfer arrangement, to sound the alert. Within moments armed men seized the central avenues of the capital. Fearing an imminent fight, hundreds of people fled across the Chari River and businesses closed down. At the last minute, French officers and the FAP leadership managed to avoid a firefight and calm down the FAP combatants.¹⁷⁰¹ Tonquédec later recalled that, “l’extrême nervosité, témoignée dans ces deux cas par les leaders tchadiens, me montre à quel point Barracuda a instauré un climat de méfiance, qui perdure, à l’égard de la France.”¹⁷⁰²

Goukouni especially felt this nervousness. While many other Chadian leaders felt that a continuing French military presence served their interests, Goukouni increasingly lost faith in his French interlocutors. In early January, Marcel Beaux, the new French Ambassador, met with the Chadian President. In a cable to Paris, Beaux accurately summarized Goukouni’s dilemma:

Il se trouvait partagé entre le souci de protéger le Tchad de la menace Libyenne avec l’aide des forces françaises et la crainte de se voir accuser de violer les accords de Lagos. En outre, il nourrissait l’espoir de bénéficier de la coopération de la France, tout en éprouvant un sentiment de méfiance quant à nos dispositions à l’égard du Tchad, et plus spécialement de son propre mouvement.¹⁷⁰³

In this vein, in late 1979 Goukouni had made a request for a French commitment against Libya. Before leaving for Paris for consultations with General Méry and a meeting with Giscard on December 17, Tonquédec met with Goukouni to ask if he could pass any messages to the French President. The FAP leader requested special food aid for the BET, and an eventual official visit to Paris to discuss the future of Franco-Chadian relations. Additionally, he asked Tonquédec to pass along a request for the French to establish a military base at Faya-Largeau to deter potential Libyan attacks.¹⁷⁰⁴ Shortly before his departure, Tonquédec asked Habré for his opinion. The FAN leader insisted that France agree to Goukouni’s request for a base, as it, “permettra sans doute d’éviter que Goukouni ne se jette dans les bras des Libyens!”¹⁷⁰⁵

¹⁷⁰¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 101, 101/2, “Synthèse n. 10 Période du 1^{er} au 31 décembre 1979,” 07.01.1980, pp. 12-13.

¹⁷⁰² Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 104.

¹⁷⁰³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/1, Telegram from Beaux to Paris, “Entretien avec le président Goukouni,” 10.01.1980.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 104.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. 105.

Upon arriving in Paris, Tonquédec met with Méry and told him of Goukouni's requests in advance of their meeting with Giscard at the Elysée's underground command center. Oddly, according to Tonquédec, Méry told him not to tell Giscard of Goukouni's request for the establishment of a French base in Faya-Largeau; instead he himself would take care of Goukouni's message. Thus, when Giscard asked Tonquédec what messages Goukouni had for him, the French colonel only relayed the first two requests. Giscard quickly agreed to both.¹⁷⁰⁶ When Giscard asked Méry his assessment, the French general failed to mention Goukouni's entreaty, but did assert that, "Si nous laissons le Tchad tomber sous influence libyenne, nous perdrons aussi la Centrafrique. Le Niger se trouverait dans une situation très difficile, sans parler de notre perte de crédibilité au Gabon, au Cameroun et ailleurs."¹⁷⁰⁷ Tonquédec agreed entirely and wanted to blurt out that France had to "s'installer à Faya-Largeau ou quitter le Tchad!"¹⁷⁰⁸ Out of respect for his superior though, he said nothing. On January 20 1980, Tonquédec received official confirmation of a decision not to deploy French forces in Northern Chad.¹⁷⁰⁹ Goukouni repeated his request in a meeting with Beaux on January 24, also to no avail.¹⁷¹⁰

In Tonquédec's view, it was a mistake to refuse Goukouni's request for a French force in the North. Such a force would have signaled to Goukouni and other Chadian leaders that French policymakers did not limit their commitment to only defending "Tchad utile," but the North as well. Tonquédec felt that this refusal helped to convince the Chadian President that he could not count on the French for his own long-term security. Against Habré, Gaddafi represented Goukouni's only possible ally.¹⁷¹¹

Goukouni's recollections are not particularly clear on this point, perhaps deliberately so. He makes veiled references to a deal with the Libyans in his 2008 interviews with *Radio France Internationale*, but suggests that he will later describe these relations in more detail in his forthcoming book (to date unpublished). He suggests that the FAP had made an initial deal with Libya to facilitate his selection as President during the Lagos II negotiations back in August 1979. By keeping Habré in the dark about it, he managed to gather support of both pro-Libyan factions and the FAN for his nomination to the post.¹⁷¹² However his narrative then

¹⁷⁰⁶ See: FCMGT, Carton 3, A4/2/3bis, Handwritten note from Journiac to Galley, No subject, 20.12.1979. for Giscard's special requests to the Cooperation Ministry for emergency assistance to the BET.

¹⁷⁰⁷ Quoted in Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 105.

¹⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 106.

¹⁷¹⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 107, 107/3, Telegram from Beaux to Paris, "Présence des forces françaises au Tchad," 24.01.1980, p. 3.

¹⁷¹¹ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhafi*, 105.

¹⁷¹² Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 97-98, and 102-103.

becomes somewhat confusing and makes no mention of his relations with France at this stage. Thirty years later, during a visit to Tonquédec's house in France, Goukouni told the former French General that he had decided to enlist Libyan support because he desperately needed money for the coming war with Habré.¹⁷¹³

Goukouni's fears and political reorientation seemed to come to a head shortly before Journiac's last visit on February 4. The previous day, Goukouni had summoned Tonquédec, recently promoted to the rank of Brigadier General, to the Presidential palace in the company of his intelligence chief, Lt. Colonel Saouli, and Beaux. Goukouni's Chief of Staff, Adoum Yacoub, immediately began to accuse Saouli of collaborating with Habré to help the FAN leader seize power. Tonquédec and Beaux rejected these accusations and defended Saouli's record. Nevertheless, Goukouni demanded the immediate departure of Saouli from Chad and, after Tonquédec's vigorous protests, of Tonquédec as well.¹⁷¹⁴ Tonquédec later felt that Saouli and, perhaps his, removal represented a signal to Gaddafi that Goukouni was ready to do business. Indeed, Libyan intelligence may have perceived Saouli's Arabic language skills and experience as a particular threat.¹⁷¹⁵

Return to Civil War

By early February 1980, tensions had grown considerably between Habré and the other GUNT factions. The previous month, FAN units had attacked the town of Am-Dam in the Ouaddaï prefecture of Eastern Chad. This town lay on the route between Abéché and N'Djamena and thus represented a strategically important point for Habré's forces to control.¹⁷¹⁶ However, units linked to the former Frolinat "First Army," now regrouped with other smaller factions allied to Goukouni, had held Am-Dam prior to Habré's attack, and lost over 100 men in the fighting.¹⁷¹⁷ Goukouni, furious at this move and fearful of Habré's intentions, began to group together allied factions in the capital. French observers estimated these at some 1,500 good fighters armed with ample weapons and ammunition though lacking somewhat in organization. French officials had also received intelligence that Goukouni had brought another 500-600 men from the BET down to the capital as reinforcements where they discreetly took up positions

¹⁷¹³ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhaï*, 109.

¹⁷¹⁴ FCMGT, Carton 4, A4/6/1bis, Report from Marcel Beaux, "A/S: Le retrait de N'Djamena des Forces Françaises et les relations franco-tchadiennes," 05.06.1980, p. 3 and Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhaï*, 108. Only Beaux mentions that Saouli was an intelligence officer.

¹⁷¹⁵ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhaï*, 108.

¹⁷¹⁶ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 155-156.

¹⁷¹⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, "a/s : Tension à N'Djamena et sécurité de la colonie française," 14.02.1980, p. 1.

just outside the city. Evidence also began to accumulate that Libya had begun supplying money.¹⁷¹⁸ Tonquédec later wrote that Brahim Yousouf, one of Goukouni's deputies had returned to N'Djamena from a trip to Tripoli with 200 million CFA for the FAP and its allies.¹⁷¹⁹

French officials judged Habré's position in the capital as somewhat weaker, with some 1,000 men, although these were better organized and had more experience of urban combat than their FAP adversaries. Furthermore, Goukouni could count on at least tacit support from Kamougué as he, like many Southerners, felt a deep personal enmity towards Habré as a result of the events of the previous year.¹⁷²⁰

The African "Force neutre" had finally deployed to the Chadian capital in January, though both Benin and Guinea ultimately refused to send contingents. Thus only a small 500 man Congolese force had arrived and taken up residence in the Gendarmerie base. However, they had received no specific orders and, in French eyes, lacked the capacity to play any decisive role in case fighting broke out in the capital. French officials even feared that in the event of hostilities, the Congolese force would take refuge at the French base, thus complicating *Tacaud's* mission.¹⁷²¹

By this point, however, *Tacaud's* mission had already become complicated. When Tonquédec left Chad on February 9, the four remaining Jaguar ground-attack aircraft left with him.¹⁷²² The force in N'Djamena now consisted of 1,080 men, of which only 500 were front-line combat troops. Shortly before he left, Tonquédec explained to officials in the Quai that in case of an outbreak of violence, *Tacaud* could no longer fulfill its now-principal mission: the protection of the some 750-800 French expatriates living in the capital.¹⁷²³ This population lived in various parts of the city, including in relatively vulnerable areas. This made an evacuation extremely difficult, especially since the French army barely had enough troops to protect their own base.¹⁷²⁴ Given the high probability of renewed violence, it had become necessary to facilitate a future evacuation by attempting to send the wives and children of French development workers (nearly all men), back to France, and regrouping the rest of the community in areas close to the French base or Embassy. Embassy officials feared though that

¹⁷¹⁸ Ibid. 2

¹⁷¹⁹ Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhaï*, 111.

¹⁷²⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, "a/s : Tension à N'Djamena et sécurité de la colonie française," 14.02.1980, p. 2.

¹⁷²¹ Ibid. 3.

¹⁷²² Tonquédec, *Face à Kadhaï*, 109-110.

¹⁷²³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, "a/s : Tension à N'Djamena et sécurité de la colonie française," 14.02.1980, p. 3.

¹⁷²⁴ Ibid.

major movements within the French expatriate community risked arousing Chadian suspicions of French motives and would contribute another “destabilizing” element to a very tense situation.¹⁷²⁵

Indeed, the perception that *Tacaud* constituted an essential stabilizing factor in Chadian politics became widespread in French policymaking circles. While French officials recognized that *Tacaud* itself would have to withdraw, they hoped to negotiate this in such a way that a substantial French military presence remained in the country, albeit under a different name and official mandate.¹⁷²⁶ Journiac had already begun to test the possibility of such a transformation during his last meeting with Goukouni in early February.¹⁷²⁷ While the latter rejected French proposals, officials in the Quai still strongly felt that they could reach some kind of agreement.

In mid-February, Goukouni tasked the GUNT Agriculture Minister, Raymond Naïmbaye as a personal emissary to Giscard to discuss the French military presence and the Chadian political situation. Naïmbaye was also one of Kamougué’s close advisors, so in a sense he spoke for both Chadian leaders. La Rochère wrote a memorandum to Giscard urging him to highlight the negative consequences of a full French withdrawal to his Chadian interlocutor. These included a:

[...] quasi certitude d’un affrontement FAN-FAP aux résultats dramatiques sur le plan humain et incertains sur le plan politique; absence de tout recours et aide en cas d’agression extérieure; disparition quasi certaine de toute forme de coopération pour raison d’insécurité. Bref, sans Tacaud, le Tchad se retrouvera quasiment dans la situation de l’Ouganda.¹⁷²⁸

Giscard received Naïmbaye on February 14. The Chadian Minister gave Giscard a letter from Goukouni confirming the GUNT’s position on the retreat of French forces. Nevertheless, Naïmbaye did reiterate that while the GUNT factions had agreed on the principle of French withdrawal, there existed a number of difference with regard to the calendar and modalities. He personally felt that since all the other clauses of the Lagos II agreement had either been violated or not yet been implemented, French forces should stay. The continued Libyan presence in the North and the threat they posed to the rest of Chad made the French military presence indispensable. A French withdrawal would, in his eyes, allow Libya to launch a full-scale invasion of the country. He insisted that, in fact, “seule une petite minorité souhaite

¹⁷²⁵ Ibid. 4.

¹⁷²⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, Note d’entretien from La Rochère to Giscard, “a/s : M. Naïmbaye,” 13.02.1980, p. 2.

¹⁷²⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/1, Telegram from Beaux to Paris, “Mission de M. Journiac à N’Djamena,” 07.02.1980, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷²⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, Note d’entretien from La Rochère to Giscard, “a/s : M. Naïmbaye,” 13.02.1980, p. 2.

réellement le départ des troupes françaises.” Giscard retorted that it was this small minority who made the most noise.¹⁷²⁹

Naïmbaye warned Giscard that Habré represented the principal obstacle to sustainable peace. He, along with Kamougué and Goukouni continued to worry that a number of French officers supported the FAN leader. He asked the French President, “Est-ce que la France préfère le Tchad ou un individu?” and expressed the worry that the French troop presence might also contribute to an eventual Habré military victory.¹⁷³⁰

Giscard responded that he had given very strict orders that French forces would not intervene on behalf of a faction, but only at the “unanimous” request of the GUNT, “en raison d’une menace extérieure.” He continued, “Je le répète, les rivalités de personnes sont l’affaire des Tchadiens, et nous ne nous en mêlons pas.” Giscard added that he personally felt that a French departure would have negative consequences. However he could not maintain his troops in the country against the will of the Chadians themselves.¹⁷³¹ Nonetheless, Naïmbaye’s discussion with Giscard, combined with other mixed signals from elements within the GUNT, convinced French policymakers that a negotiated solution that avoided a complete withdrawal remained possible.

While some in the French military, particularly Tonquédec, felt that Goukouni’s gradual moves toward pushing for a French withdrawal resulted from Libyan initiatives and incentives, the Quai had other views. La Rochère felt that Goukouni’s initiative had come as a result of the GUNT’s failure to make any progress on the other components of the Lagos II agreement such as demilitarization. The retreat of French forces represented the only objective that most parties had “officially” agreed upon. Thus, in La Rochère’s view, Goukouni’s motive stemmed more from a need to assert his own authority than anything else. La Rochère also felt that pressure from other African states may have played a role. Indeed, in the African international context, affirming a desire to remove French forces also helped to build Goukouni’s credibility as something other than a creature of neo-colonialism, as well as his preeminence at the head of the Chadian state.¹⁷³²

In this context, Quai officials felt that they could find the right formula for *Tacaud* that would effectively reconcile French interests with Chadian concerns. First though, French

¹⁷²⁹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/2, Elysée note, “Audience accordée par le Président de la République à M. Naïmbaye, Ministre de l’Agriculture du Tchad “ 14.02.1980, p. 2.

¹⁷³⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷³¹ Ibid. 3.

¹⁷³² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 107, 107/3, DAM Note, “A/s. Présence militaire française au TCHAD,” 12.03.1980, p. 2.

officials had to address the ambiguous nature of *Tacaud*'s actual role. While its initial goal in 1978 aimed at protecting General Malloum's regime from Libyan-backed aggression, the political situation had radically shifted in favor of the North. Yet, even while Giscard maintained in February 1980 that *Tacaud* would intervene in case of foreign intervention,¹⁷³³ he rejected Goukouni's pleas for protection against Libya.

In the face of Giscard's apparent indecisiveness, French officials identified several key components of *Tacaud*'s mission that benefited French interests. As noted above French officials felt that the force helped to stabilize N'Djamena's political scene. It also prevented the appearance of a political vacuum which could attract Libyan designs. From a geopolitical standpoint, the control of the airbase at N'Djamena served as a central location and staging ground for communications and support to French garrisons and African allies throughout the continent. Furthermore, the French presence maintained a sense of security among expatriates which allowed the continuation of French economic assistance programs. Finally, *Tacaud* maintained a basic level of humanitarian assistance and service provision in the capital.¹⁷³⁴ For these reasons, as well as a desire to keep a French seat at the Chadian political table, it became important to avoid getting forced into a precipitous withdrawal as had happened in 1975.

In this vein, La Rochère suggested the basis for a future agreement aiming at, "la transformation ou l'adaptation au contexte tchadien et africain de l'heure, de la présence militaire française."¹⁷³⁵ This would include the retreat of French combat units, but retain a logistics detachment including air transport, engineers, and a hospital to help maintain basic infrastructure and services. French officials wanted to keep their military base for this purpose, as well as control over parts of the airport. Furthermore, at least a small number of combat troops would have to remain to both protect this detachment and the Embassy. Meanwhile, French advisors could help with the creation and training of the new national integrated army called for in the Lagos II agreement.¹⁷³⁶ Unfortunately for French officials, they would not have the chance to work out such an arrangement. Despite their belief that *Tacaud* played a stabilizing role, on March 20 1980, the long-awaited struggle between Goukouni and Habré finally began.

¹⁷³³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/2, Elysée note, "Audience accordée par le Président de la République à M. Naïmbaye, Ministre de l'Agriculture du Tchad" 14.02.1980, p. 3.

¹⁷³⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 107, 107/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Présence militaire française au TCHAD," 12.03.1980, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷³⁵ Ibid. 4.

¹⁷³⁶ Ibid. 5-6.

The fighting began with an attack by FAP combatants on FAN elements occupying the military police barracks in N'Djamena. They killed some 27 FAN personnel in their beds. This came as a reaction to FAN attacks in the previous weeks, particularly the Am-Dam incident and an attack on Mongo. Goukouni later said that while he personally had nothing to do with the attack, he admitted that FAP troops and commanders were responsible for it and, consequently, the ensuing violence. However, he also felt that an armed struggle between the two factions had become inevitable and that the attack on the police barracks only precipitated events.¹⁷³⁷

Soon, clashes between FAN and FAP units escalated, with each side bringing in reinforcements from other parts of the country. Habré's FAN fought alone, with only some marginal support coming from the few fighters belonging to the "Frolinat Fondamental," led by Hadjéro Senoussi, one of Frolinat's founding members, but also a, "general sans armée."¹⁷³⁸ French sources and later accounts also suggest that Habré received some support in the form of arms supplies from Egyptian and Sudanese sources opposed to Libyan expansionism.¹⁷³⁹ Habré always denied this and claimed that his arms stocks came from captured supplies, as well as stockpiled material from the previous years.¹⁷⁴⁰

In the first two weeks of fighting, neither FAN nor FAP forces managed to gain considerable advantages and a war of attrition soon began to develop. FAP units under Kamougué advanced to the Chari River and began bombarding FAN positions with no effect other than causing significant civilian casualties.¹⁷⁴¹ FAN forces bloodily repulsed FAP attempts to cross the river, and soon Kamougué's troops somewhat withdrew from the fighting.¹⁷⁴² The extensive use of heavy weapons, including 106mm recoilless rifles, multiple rocket launchers, and 120mm mortars resulted in large-scale devastation. French observers in early April estimated that this had sparked a massive exodus towards Cameroun of some 80,000 people.¹⁷⁴³

¹⁷³⁷ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 101-102.

¹⁷³⁸ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 158.

¹⁷³⁹ Ibid. 160.

¹⁷⁴⁰ Ibid. 161-162. MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, Note pour le Ministre, «a/s : Situation au Tchad, » 02.04.1980, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴² Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 158.

¹⁷⁴³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, Note pour le Ministre, «a/s : Evolution de la situation au Tchad, » 08.04.1980, p. 3.

By the end of March, French forces helped the Congolese “Force neutre” detachment to evacuate.¹⁷⁴⁴ Their small number and isolation made it impossible to carry out their mission as an interposition force as the civil war erupted around them.¹⁷⁴⁵ Like the previous year, French officials also attempted to mediate a ceasefire. However neither Beaux nor *Tacaud*’s new commander, Colonel Lardry, succeeded in achieving anything more than very temporary arrangements on two separate occasions at the end of March. On April 6, Togo’s President General Eyadéma arrived in N’Djamena in a third attempt at mediating between the parties, though this too ended in failure. It seemed to French observers that both Goukouni and Habré had determined upon eliminating the other, and that peace was no longer an option. Goukouni himself said as much to his French interlocutors.¹⁷⁴⁶

The fighting placed *Tacaud* in a very difficult position. The intensity was such that, after the first week the French Embassy and its personnel withdrew to safety on the French military base. Over the course of the first few weeks of combat, elements on both sides requested French assistance to varying degrees. The fact that French forces found themselves largely in or near parts of N’Djamena controlled by FAP forces meant that it had become impossible to ignore FAT and GUNT pleas for certain levels of non-military assistance. This included supplying the city’s power grid, use of the ferry, and even transport of GUNT delegations out of the country for international meetings, particularly the Franco-African Summit in Nice in April and May. This naturally provoked complaints from Habré and French officials worried about possible reprisal actions.¹⁷⁴⁷

In this context, French officials debated *Tacaud*’s role. Some in the Quai advocated for a vigorous stance in favor of Goukouni and, by extension, the GUNT as the legally recognized authority in the country. For these officials, a precipitous withdrawal would severely threaten French interests in Africa, “parce que le Tchad constitue une double clef de voûte: celle de la zone géopolitique où nos intérêts sont évidents (Niger, Cameroun, RCA): celle de la crédibilité de notre politique active en Afrique.”¹⁷⁴⁸ A retreat would imply significantly increased Libyan involvement and allow Gaddafi to proclaim a victory against French imperialism.¹⁷⁴⁹ In late

¹⁷⁴⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 107, 107/4, Telegram from La Rochère to Defense Ministry, “Contingent congolais au Tchad,” 31.03.1980.

¹⁷⁴⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 107, 107/4, Telegram from Embassy Congo to Paris, “Retrait du contingent congolais,” 01.04.1980.

¹⁷⁴⁶ FCMGT, Carton 4, A4/6/1bis, Report from Marcel Beaux, “A/S: Le retrait de N’Djamena des Forces Françaises et les relations franco-tchadiennes,” 05.06.1980, p. 10.

¹⁷⁴⁷ Ibid. 9.

¹⁷⁴⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, “A/s. TCHAD. Que faire ? “ 25.04.1980, p. 1.

¹⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

April it seemed as if Habré had the upper hand and was slowly but surely wearing down Goukouni's forces. In French eyes this risked triggering decisive Libyan support for Goukouni in the coming weeks and months. However the broader political situation seemed favorable to Goukouni and his allies. First, nearly all of the Chadian factions had united, at least rhetorically, against Habré's movement and considered him a rebel. Second, French observers felt that the other Chadian factions were unanimous in their desire to eliminate the FAN leader and to respect the implementation of the Lagos agreement. Together this gave Goukouni a certain level of both domestic and international legitimacy.¹⁷⁵⁰ In this delicate climate, Quai officials felt that, "le salut du Tchad ne viendra pas de l'Afrique."¹⁷⁵¹

Quai officials suggested that France intervene actively on Goukouni's behalf. They gave several reasons for this. First, France should remain on the side of legitimacy. Second, he was the only Chadian leader who could plausibly reconcile the different movements (excepting the FAN). Third, clear support for Goukouni would prevent him from completely falling into the hands of Gaddafi. Other movements close to Libya, particularly Acyl's CDR would also become more likely to loosen their ties with Gaddafi and move close to France. Finally, a victory by Habré could be catastrophic for Chad.

In terms that would later prove prophetic, a Quai memo described the consequences of a FAN victory. Habré's politics had alienated the entire South and much of the North, thus after winning the "battle for N'Djamena," he would have to "pacify" other parts of the country to establish control. In the Quai's analysis, the "comportement brutal et cynique d'Hissène Habré comme ses sentiments profonds laisse à penser qu'il a plus de chances, en cas de succès, de devenir un nouveau dictateur sanguinaire que le fédérateur dont le Tchad a besoin."¹⁷⁵² Beaux later seconded this assessment, writing that he could not see how Habré could impose himself as a Chadian leader without, "une longue suite de combats et l'instauration d'une dictature sanglante."¹⁷⁵³

Neutrality would soon become impossible for France. Continuing their past policy of passivity was no longer an option. However, if *Tacaud* were to remain in N'Djamena, it would need a "massive" intervention requiring large numbers of reinforcements and the possibility of high troop losses. This could also spark negative reactions in French public opinion, and hurt

¹⁷⁵⁰ Ibid. 2.

¹⁷⁵¹ Ibid. 3.

¹⁷⁵² Ibid. 5.

¹⁷⁵³ FCMGT, Carton 4, A4/6/1bis, Report from Marcel Beaux, "A/S: Le retrait de N'Djamena des Forces Françaises et les relations franco-tchadiennes," 05.06.1980, p. 12.

French credibility in certain international fora, particularly following the recent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.¹⁷⁵⁴

Cooperation Ministry officials had reservations about the benefits of a continued troop presence. Contrary to earlier fears, French forces managed to evacuate most of the expatriate population within the first week of the fighting without loss. This now meant though that French forces had no mandate apart from protecting the airport and ferry, and caring for wounded Chadian civilians and combatants. One of Galley's advisors, Jean Chesneau, called these tasks "aussi utiles que subalternes," and complained that *Tacaud*, "est, en réalité, une unité de combat de l'armée française- et non pas une société de transport ou une annexe de la Croix Rouge."¹⁷⁵⁵

Ultimately, Giscard concluded that a complete troop withdrawal represented the only viable French response to the escalating civil war. On April 23, Martin Kirsch, Giscard's new Africa advisor and personal envoy following the death of Journiac, flew to N'Djamena for talks with Goukouni at the French military base. The two agreed to a French withdrawal, and made the decision public on April 26 in order to preempt any anti-French resolutions from the OAU meeting in Lagos shortly afterwards.¹⁷⁵⁶ On April 29, Giscard released a statement affirming that the French retreat would be total and swift. On May 17, the last French troops had departed, along with all the diplomatic staff.¹⁷⁵⁷

Following the French withdrawal, they reduced their presence in the country to a bare minimum. Initially, French officials wanted to maintain formal diplomatic relations. Thus, they established a diplomatic post in Maroua across the border in Cameroon, and created a consular office in Moundou in the South of Chad to provide services to the several hundred French expatriates working in the Chadian cotton sector. It would also continue to provide pension payments to the large numbers of Chadian veterans of the French Army which constituted an important source of income in the region.¹⁷⁵⁸ While the consular office in Maroua began functioning, Cameroonian authorities wished to restrict the activities of the French diplomatic representation in Moundou. Fearing spillover from the Chadian conflict, particularly due to the large numbers of refugees on their side of the border, Cameroonian

¹⁷⁵⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/3, DAM Note pour le Ministre, "A/s. Situation tchadienne," 21.04.1980, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵⁵ FCMGT, Carton 4, A4/6/1bis, Cooperation Ministry Note, "A/S: Présence de l'armée française au Tchad," 16.04.1980, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁵⁶ FCMGT, Carton 4, A4/6/1bis, Report from Marcel Beaux, "A/S: Le retrait de N'Djamena des Forces Françaises et les relations franco-tchadiennes," 05.06.1980, p. 6.

¹⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵⁸ Ibid. 7-8.

officials tried to seal off the border and limit French contacts with the other side. This forced the Quai to downgrade the level of its presence in Maroua to an “antenne diplomatique” attached to the French Embassy in Cameroon. This also briefly cut off French humanitarian aid.¹⁷⁵⁹

Meanwhile the fighting continued unabated. By early June the situation looked grim for Goukouni. While the FAN and FAP continued their bloody war of attrition in the capital, Habré’s forces in other parts of the country began to seize FAP strongholds in the BET, including Faya-Largeau. By pinning the bulk of FAP forces in N’Djamena, Habré threatened to cut Goukouni off from the North. Unfortunately for the FAP leader, neither Kamougué’s forces, nor those of Acyl seemed able to contribute much in weakening Habré. Goukouni later ascribed FAP’s inability to impose itself to a lack of ammunition which plagued the movement over the following weeks and months.¹⁷⁶⁰ French observers at the Quai worried that the situation would soon force Goukouni to call openly for Libyan assistance.¹⁷⁶¹

This prediction soon bore itself out. On June 11, Gaddafi had declared his neutrality in the conflict, stating that Libya would never intervene in Chadian internal affairs unless the two countries signed an official treaty to legitimize Libyan action. Four days later however, on June 15, Gaddafi and FAP representative Brahim Youssef signed a “Traité d’amitié et d’alliance” with Libya. While the two parties would not make the text public until September 28, it laid the groundwork for a much more overt Libyan military intervention in Chad.¹⁷⁶² One of the nightmare scenarios envisioned by the most alarmist French policymakers and their Chadian interlocutors would soon come to fruition. Gaddafi was preparing to invade Chad.

In September, French observers working in hospitals across the River Chari noticed a sharp uptick in casualty rates among FAN and FAP combatants in N’Djamena. Quai officials linked this to increased ammunition and weapons deliveries from Libya to FAP forces, and concomitant escalation from Sudanese and Egyptian sources to Habré.¹⁷⁶³ On September 29, Gaddafi gave a speech in which he suggested that if Libyan forces intervened in Chad, it would come as a result of the recently signed treaty. Furthermore, he demanded that France recognize that Chad represented part of Libya’s “vital space” as a cultural and geographical extension of Libya itself. In exchange, he stated that Libya had no interest in other African countries linked

¹⁷⁵⁹ Ibid. 8.

¹⁷⁶⁰ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 103-104.

¹⁷⁶¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, “A/s. Tchad-Perspectives,” 06.06.1980, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁶² Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 166.

¹⁷⁶³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, “a/s. Situation au Tchad,” 26.09.1980, pp. 1-2.

to France, including the CAR, Cameroon, Gabon, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire. These countries were free, in his words, to determine their own relations with France.¹⁷⁶⁴

On September 30, Libyan Foreign Minister Ahmed Shahati met with French Ambassador Charles Malo to discuss the recent speech and the Chadian situation. Shahati intimated that if France recognized Libya's "vital space" and continued its policy of arms sales to Libya, Libya would agree both to not interfere in French relations with other African states, and consider granting France favorable trade concessions, particularly for the provision of oil. Malo asked if this meant that Libya would soon intervene militarily in Chad's civil war. Shahati simply smiled in reply.¹⁷⁶⁵

Malo wrote to Paris that Libya's offers on possible oil concessions should be taken seriously, particularly given the effects that the recent outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war could have on long-term oil prices. However, Gaddafi's "offer" would also leave him with a free hand in Chad.¹⁷⁶⁶ Although Giscard never agreed to such a deal, over the following months Libyan officials often implied that France and Libya had made some kind of bargain over Chad. This served to renew suspicions among Chadian and other African observers worried about secret neo-colonial arrangements and French double-dealing.¹⁷⁶⁷

In the first half of October, the situation on the ground for Goukouni had begun to collapse. FAN forces had tightened their growing encirclement of Goukouni in the capital. French observers noted that the FAP had begun to suffer serious losses. These not only included casualties from combat, but also desertions and defections following a serious drop in morale. Goukouni only managed to prevent a complete collapse through the sudden appearance of heavy weaponry. Habré accused the FAP of employing "mercenaries," although to French officials this represented the beginning of a substantially increased Libyan commitment to FAP's survival.¹⁷⁶⁸ This was marked by unsuccessful Libyan ground and air attacks against FAN positions in Faya-Largeau, and a bombing raid on FAN's positions N'Djamena by a Tu-22 bomber.¹⁷⁶⁹

¹⁷⁶⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 107, 107/4, Telegram from Malo to Paris, "Discours du Colonel Kadhafi—Tchad--," 29.09.1980, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁶⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 107, 107/4, Telegram from Malo to Paris, "Entretien avec M. Shahati," 30.09.1980, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁶⁶ Ibid. 4.

¹⁷⁶⁷ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 170.

¹⁷⁶⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, "a/s : Le Tchad après Lomé," 24.10.1980, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶⁹ Ibid. 3.

On October 24, a Quai analysis predicted that without more substantial Libyan support in favor of Goukouni, Habré would certainly win the war.¹⁷⁷⁰ French observers felt unsure about whether Gaddafi would take the logical next step of a full-scale intervention on Goukouni's behalf. This would carry a number of risks for the Libyan leader, including the large numbers of troops and materiel necessary for such an effort, the enormous logistical difficulties resulting from the long distances and harsh climate, the negative international reaction, and the probability of eventually facing an armed insurgency.¹⁷⁷¹

By early November though, it became clear that Gaddafi had decided to fully commit himself to defeating Habré. French military intelligence saw early signs of this with the establishment of a logistical network based in the city of Sebha in Southern Libya, and Zouar in Northern Chad. From there Libyan aircraft flew weapons, ammunition, and other military equipment to Fada, Mongo, and N'Djamena. As early as the end of June, a reinforced battalion of regular Libyan army troops deployed to Zouar in support. Starting on October 19 and 20, Libyan troops flown to the airbase at Douguia participated in the fighting in N'Djamena. In the North, helicopters, ground-attack aircraft, light armor, and infantry intervened in support of Goukouni's forces. French military intelligence accused Libyan troops of committing various exactions on the local population. This movement culminated on the night of October 31/November 1 with a successful attack on Faya-Largeau by combined FAP-Libyan troops.¹⁷⁷² On November 4, Gaddafi dramatically flew into the city, thus removing any doubts about the Libyan presence and Habré's increasingly fragile situation.¹⁷⁷³

French observers felt certain that Libyan engagement would not stop at this. Despite some participation in the fighting in N'Djamena, Libyan involvement was not yet decisive in the main fighting between Habré and Goukouni. However, the Libyan military began to increase its rate of arms deliveries, and at least nine Mirage F1 fighter jets had left Libyan bases to join Libyan troops in Chad.¹⁷⁷⁴ This left French military intelligence to conclude that, "Une intervention libyenne majeure est donc probable à brève échéance. En cas de succès, elle ne manquerait pas d'être ressentie comme une menace directe pour les pays voisins et notamment le Cameroun, la R.C.A. et le Niger."¹⁷⁷⁵

¹⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 115, 115/1, Fiche CERM, "Menace libyenne sur le Tchad," 03.11.1980, pp.1- 2.

¹⁷⁷³ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, "a/s : L'intervention militaire libyenne," 12.11.1980, p. 1.

¹⁷⁷⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 115, 115/1, Fiche CERM, "Menace libyenne sur le Tchad," 03.11.1980, p. 2.

¹⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

Meanwhile, French officials watched on as little more than interested spectators. While they had managed to reestablish some level of humanitarian assistance from the Cameroonian side of the border, this mainly consisted of treating wounded from both sides who managed to get across the border for medical help, and providing aid to Chadian refugees. The Cooperation Ministry also provided some financial assistance in the South for cotton production.¹⁷⁷⁶ However, French policymakers seemed to recognize their inability to contribute substantially to a resolution of the conflict.

While the Libyan intervention provoked serious apprehensions among a number of France's African allies, French policymakers faced considerable restraints on any meaningful response. First, France, the OAU, and all of Chad's neighbors accepted the legitimacy of the GUNT and Goukouni as its President following Lagos II. The very same GUNT, minus Habré, had signed a treaty with Gaddafi and requested a military intervention. Second, regardless of their fears of Gaddafi's ultimate designs, few African leaders had yet publicly condemned Libya's intervention. Third, the international community's lack of interest in Chad would make it extremely difficult to mobilize support for a Libyan withdrawal.¹⁷⁷⁷

Indeed, the only international effort at bringing peace to Chad to date had been several failed attempts by Togolese President Gnassingbe Eyadéma to mediate a ceasefire agreement. French officials felt that other African states associated with Eyadéma's initiative might help to form a core of Africans willing to mobilize against Libyan expansion. However, the chances of success seemed slim. Quai officials felt the only alternative was to somehow encourage a Chadian nationalist reaction against the Libyan invaders. This implied a reorientation of French policy towards support for Hissène Habré, and an effort to reconcile Kamougué and Habré in order to form a "union sacrée" against Libyan aggression.¹⁷⁷⁸

The new head of the DAM, Jean Herly, argued that the Libyan intervention had fundamentally changed the character of the Chadian conflict. France's priority should now aim at blocking Libya's expansion. This meant that, "les inconvénients représentés par Hissène Habré deviennent secondaires." By supporting him, France would only be acting in continuity with its past policy which consisted of, "réconcilier les Tchadiens et à aider au maintien de l'indépendance et de l'intégrité du pays; l'Afrique nous reprocherait notre manque de réaction

¹⁷⁷⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, "a/s : Le Tchad après Lomé," 24.10.1980, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 115, 115/1, DAM Note, "a/s : Intervention libyenne au Tchad, Que faire ?" 05.11.1980, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁷⁸ Ibid. 3.

et il y va de notre crédibilité.”¹⁷⁷⁹ He also suggested that France should provide military guarantees to Kamougué to assuage his fears about Habré’s intentions towards the South. This, combined with financial assistance to Southern authorities could detach them from the GUNT and help to mobilize effective resistance against Libya.¹⁷⁸⁰

Unfortunately for Herly’s strategy, Habré and Kamougué had other plans. The OAU had, over the previous months attempted to mediate between the Chadian factions. Finally on November 28 in Lomé, OAU mediators including Togolese President Eyadéma and other West African heads of state, managed to persuade Goukouni to sign a ceasefire accord. This agreement would have fixed December 15 as the ceasefire date, and would have mandated the deployment of yet another “Force neutre,” and the demilitarization of the capital. However, Habré refused to sign under the pretext that Libyan troops had invaded Chad. The Senegalese and Cameroonian Foreign Ministers attempted to convince Habré to sign, explaining that they shared his goals of evincing Libya from Chad.¹⁷⁸¹ Presumably, such a signature would undercut the rationale behind Libya’s military intervention. Meanwhile Kamougué had finally committed some 1,500 men to N’Djamena to join the fight alongside Goukouni.¹⁷⁸²

Habré projected an image of unconcern about the Libyan invasion to French officials. He even seemed to welcome it, telling his French interlocutors that the Libyans, “sont tombés dans un piège et qu’il leur en coûtera très cher pour s’en dégager.”¹⁷⁸³ For Habré, the Libyans could not capture the Chadian capital without losing their image of anti-imperialist leadership in Africa. If Gaddafi bombed N’Djamena, he would kill thousands of civilians and, “ce sera un scandale en Afrique.” If he attacked with his own forces he would lose hundreds of men, “ce sera un scandale en Libye.” If, instead he pushed his Chadian clients into a more aggressive attempt to dislodge the FAN, “ce sera le ridicule,” due to their clear inferiority versus Habré’s men.¹⁷⁸⁴ Habré also confidently asserted that, regardless of what happened, FAN forces could easily disengage from the capital and launch a guerilla war.¹⁷⁸⁵ This explained his refusal to go to Lomé and sign the ceasefire, which he deemed premature given both the military and political situation. Habré told French officials that he would only negotiate when African

¹⁷⁷⁹ Ibid. 4, Emphasis in the original.

¹⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note, “a/s: Tchad,” 10.12.1980, p. 3.

¹⁷⁸² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, Note from Herly to Kirsch, «A/s: Reflexions sur le Tchad,” 05.12.1980, p. 3.

¹⁷⁸³ Ibid. 2.

¹⁷⁸⁴ Ibid. 1-2.

¹⁷⁸⁵ Ibid. 2.

leaders agreed to publicly condemn the Libyan invasion, and remove Goukouni's Lagos II mandate to head the GUNT.¹⁷⁸⁶

Habré's confidence was somewhat misplaced. It seems likely that Libyan officials were well aware of the potential risks of a major military operation in support of Goukouni. Although the Libyan invasion did detach some nationalist elements from the FAP and its allies by encouraging defections to Habré, the latter's polarizing role in Chadian politics severely limited his appeal. Southerners, particularly Kamougué, held him in deep suspicion and even hatred for his role in the massacres of the previous year. Habré made this worse by shooting a large number of Southerners in Abéché at the same moment as Libyan forces in the North freed some 700 Southern prisoners still held in Faya-Largeau.¹⁷⁸⁷ Furthermore, Gaddafi not only provided material support to Goukouni, he also committed to a massive invasion of the country.

Starting on December 7, Libyan regular forces substantially increased their presence in the Chadian capital and began to launch major assaults against Habré's positions. On the night of December 14 and 15, Habré managed to skillfully disengage his forces from N'Djamena and begin a general withdrawal. The bulk of his forces, some 2,000 men in total as well as several hundred civilians successfully made their way to the East in the direction of the Biltine and Sudan. Habré, with several hundred followers, escaped into Cameroon. FAN garrisons on the N'Djamena-Abéché axis either surrendered or joined their fellow combatants in the retreat.¹⁷⁸⁸ Goukouni's GUNT now controlled the capital and, nominally most of Chad. However, the defeat of Habré came at a steep political price.

The extent of Libyan engagement surprised French officials. A military intelligence assessment described the Libyan invasion force as consisting of over 6,000 regular troops, equipped with over 60 T-54/55 medium tanks, 150-200 light armored vehicles, large numbers of mobile multiple rocket launchers, at least 10 helicopters including CH-47 Chinooks and MI-24 Hind gunships, thirty light reconnaissance aircraft, a number of Mig-23 and Mirage F1 fighter aircraft, and TU-22 bombers.¹⁷⁸⁹ Such a diverse and well-equipped expeditionary force required a complex logistical support operation. This involved the use of five major airbases in both Chad and Libya, and the organization of numerous landing strips as staging locations for transporting supplies.¹⁷⁹⁰

¹⁷⁸⁶ Ibid. 2.

¹⁷⁸⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 104, 104/4, DAM Note for Kirsch, "a/s: Tchad," 01.12.1980, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 115, 115/2, CERM Note de renseignement, "L'intervention libyenne au Tchad," 16.01.1981, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷⁸⁹ Ibid. 4.

¹⁷⁹⁰ Ibid. 4-5.

Libyan forces did not markedly outnumber the FAN. Indeed the latter had demonstrated their capacity to defeat Libyan troops in the past. However the effective use of combined arms, including multiple rocket launchers, armor, and air support against FAN forces, “a eu raison de leur résistance.”¹⁷⁹¹ French military intelligence warned that only similarly equipped forces would be able to expel the Libyans from Chad. A January 1981 intelligence analysis of Libya’s intervention soberly concluded that, “Qaddafi grâce au pétrole et au soutien des pays de l’Est a pu se forger un outil militaire qui, à l’échelle de l’Afrique, ne peut plus être négligé. Il serait dangereux de prendre à la légère la détermination et les possibilités de Qaddafi.”¹⁷⁹²

Although a severe setback for France’s African strategy, Gaddafi’s Chadian ambitions would soon flounder in the very “trap” predicted by Habré in early December. On January 6 1981, during a visit by Goukouni to Tripoli, the Libyan press published a “joint” Libyan-Chadian communiqué which proclaimed that, “La Libye et le Tchad ont décidé d’œuvrer de manière à s’unir totalement en une seule ‘Jamahiriya’ dans laquelle le pouvoir, la richesse et les armes seront aux mains du peuple [...]”¹⁷⁹³ This declaration provoked a loud reaction within the OAU and a number of African leaders expressed their fear of Libyan designs. Some French policymakers saw this as a major blow to French credibility and prestige. Jean Herly even advocated occupying parts of Southern Chad as a “gage territorial” to discourage further Libyan ambitions.¹⁷⁹⁴

However, Kamougué soon disassociated himself with the planned merger, and Goukouni’s political position became increasingly fragile.¹⁷⁹⁵ Over the course of the following months, Goukouni came under pressure from both within his own coalition and from other African leaders to push for a Libyan departure. Furthermore, according to Goukouni’s own account the Libyans had even tried to foment a coup against him because they suspected his reliability. These combined factors pushed Goukouni into officially requesting a Libyan withdrawal on October 30 1981.¹⁷⁹⁶ Seemingly irritated at the loss of a pretext to remain, combined with the costs of a growing guerilla war against Habré and pressure from African

¹⁷⁹¹ Ibid. 5

¹⁷⁹² Ibid.

¹⁷⁹³ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 177.

¹⁷⁹⁴ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 103, 103/3, Note pour le Ministre, “Le Tchad—la dernière chance ?» 07.01.1981, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹⁵ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 103, 103/3, DAM Note, “A/s. Tchad» 26.01.1981, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁹⁶ Correau (entretiens avec Goukouni), 110-111.

leaders, Gaddafi ordered the immediate withdrawal of his entire army (except from the Aozou Strip). Habré seized on this occasion to retake Abéché and other parts of Eastern Chad.¹⁷⁹⁷

At the same time, the OAU had, with promises of French logistical assistance, agreed to send an Inter-African peacekeeping force to replace the Libyans. However, over the course of the following months, these troops did not actively resist Habré's forces. The latter gradually made progress as GUNT coalition units put up ineffectual resistance or defected. By the end of May 1982, Goukouni's FAP was the only remaining faction attempting to oppose Habré's advance. On June 7 1982, Habré's forces entered N'Djamena and Goukouni fled across the border to Cameroon.

This did not end Chad's wars. France would intervene again in 1983 and 1986 to prevent Libyan forces from advancing into the South. The latter operation, *Opération Épervier* continues to this day, though the circumstances behind its deployment have long since changed.¹⁷⁹⁸ Habré would rule for 8 years with significant military support from France and the United States in an effort to contain Libyan expansion. However, his human rights record during this time confirmed the fears that many Chadians and their French counterparts held before the Libyan invasion. His regime stands accused of killing at least 40,000 people in a number of brutal campaigns in Southern Chad, as well as tens of thousands of cases of torture. These subsequently earned him the bloody sobriquet of "Africa's Pinochet." Today, he remains in exile in Senegal while facing indictments for crimes against humanity from a number of countries, including Chad.¹⁷⁹⁹

¹⁷⁹⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 114, 114/3, DAM Note, "A/s. Le Tchad à l'arrivée de la force interafricaine," 07.12.1981, p. 1.

¹⁷⁹⁸ Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart*, 498.

¹⁷⁹⁹ See Anne Penketh. "Africa's Pinochet' Faces Extradition and Trial for Crimes Against Humanity," *Human Rights Watch*, 30.09.2005.

Conclusions

At the end of 1980, Jean-Louis Gergorin, the head of the Quai's *Centre d'analyse et de prévision*, the Foreign Ministry's policy planning staff, wrote a fascinating "post-mortem" of French policy in Chad.¹⁸⁰⁰ He identified two major "political errors" in the previous year of French policymaking. The first was the inability of French officials, "plus par hésitation que par un choix net," to clearly support the GUNT against Habré.¹⁸⁰¹ For Gergorin, French forces should have helped to defeat Habré rather than evacuate the country. Furthermore, he criticized what he saw as a contradiction between French official recognition of the GUNT and a "non-découragement" of support given to Habré by his Egyptian and francophone African allies.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly in the view of Gergorin and other French officials, France had demonstrated an, "extraordinaire indulgence" towards Libya and its activities.¹⁸⁰² On February 4 1980, a Libyan crowd had sacked the French Embassy in Tripoli and the consulate in Benghazi. This followed the deployment of French air and naval forces to Tunisia in response to an attack on the Tunisian city Gafsa by Libyan-backed rebels the previous month.¹⁸⁰³ Although the Quai recalled its Ambassador, Charles Malo, France took no action against Libya. Malo was even sent back before the Embassy had been rebuilt. Furthermore, despite clear indications of Libyan preparations for an invasion of Chad, French officials did not attempt to dissuade Gaddafi.¹⁸⁰⁴

In Gergorin's view, France had inadvertently given the Libyans a basis for intervention by pushing Goukouni into Gaddafi's arms. Also, rather than deterring Libyan ambitions, Gergorin sharply criticized a French policy which had, "crée l'impression que la France accordait une importance prioritaire au maintien des relations bilatérales franco-libyennes," thus encouraging the latter in their designs on Chad.¹⁸⁰⁵

Undoubtedly, French policy towards Libya during the years covered here seemed contradictory at times. Up until early 1978, many French policymakers saw Libya as a possibly constructive partner in bringing peace to Chad. The growing Libyan military support to Goukouni's rebellion, and the latter's astonishingly rapid success early that year, put paid to

¹⁸⁰⁰ FCMGT, Carton 5, A4/7/2, CAP Note pour le Ministre, «A/s: Bref post-mortem tchadien» 31.12.1980, Samy Cohen also cites this document at length, without naming Gergorin or the CAP in Cohen, *La monarchie nucléaire*, 224-225.

¹⁸⁰¹ FCMGT, Carton 5, A4/7/2, CAP Note pour le Ministre, «A/s: Bref post-mortem tchadien» 31.12.1980, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰² Ibid. 1-2.

¹⁸⁰³ Grimaud, "L'introuvable équilibre magrébin," 343.

¹⁸⁰⁴ FCMGT, Carton 5, A4/7/2, CAP Note pour le Ministre, «A/s: Bref post-mortem tchadien» 31.12.1980, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰⁵ Ibid. 3.

this theory. Indeed Giscard's decision to intervene derived from the threat that supposed Libyan proxies posed to N'Djamena and the CSM. In 1979, the French coup in the Central African Empire also partly aimed at stemming Libyan influence. However, this desire to counter Libyan interests was limited. In late 1979, French officials had refused Goukouni's request, supported by Habré, to deploy forces to Faya-Largeau to deter Libyan attacks.

In 1980, as Gergorin noted, neither the sack of the French Embassy, nor the Libyan invasion of Chad elicited any particularly strong French response. For instance, in December 1980 French authorities noted with dismay that the Libyans employed French-built Mirage F1 fighters during their invasion of Chad. Embassy officials in Tripoli felt that this represented a deliberate effort to implicate the French in the Libyan invasion in order to reinforce the impression that France and Libya had reached a secret deal partitioning Chad into spheres of influence. Despite this, French ammunition shipments, particularly of Matra air-to-ground rockets continued to arrive in Libya. Local officials made no effort to hide the shipments, thus making it clear to any interested observers at Tripoli airport that Gaddafi was receiving French weapons.¹⁸⁰⁶ This led a frustrated Jean Herly to write an angry missive arguing that, “il semble contradictoire à la fois d'inciter nos amis noirs à s'opposer à l'impérialisme de Ghaddafi et de fournir à ce dernier armements, munitions, mécaniciens et instructeurs.”¹⁸⁰⁷ For Herly, French policymakers had to make a clear choice, “entre la Libye et l'Afrique Noire.”¹⁸⁰⁸

Indeed, it seems hard to reconcile this behavior with the clear French interest in containing Libyan ambitions. Gergorin explained this as a result of a “fractionnement” of France's policymaking in Chad between:

- une politique africaine générale du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères visant notamment à contenir les pressions Soviétiques et assimilées [...]
- une politique ex-clientéliste vis-à-vis de nos amis francophones axée sur les relations personnelles et peut-être un certain néo-colonialisme élaboré surtout à l'Elysée et au Ministère de la Coopération.
- enfin, une politique bilatérale franco-libyenne menée par la Direction d'Afrique du Nord Moyen-Orient du Quai d'Orsay et la Direction des Affaires Internationales du Ministère de la Défense.¹⁸⁰⁹

Thus, while DAM officials, as well as some of Giscard's advisors and officials in the Cooperation Ministry aimed at keeping Libya out of Chad, other interests played a role in moderating this policy line to the point of indecision. General trade between Libya and France

¹⁸⁰⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 115, 115/1, Telegram from Malo to Paris, “Intervention libyenne au Tchad (matériel français),” 10.12.1980.

¹⁸⁰⁷ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 115, 115/1, Note à l'attention du Ministre, “A/s. Le choix entre l'Afrique Noire et la Libye,” 31.12.1980, p. 2. (emphasis in the original).

¹⁸⁰⁸ Ibid. 3.

¹⁸⁰⁹ FCMGT, Carton 5, A4/7/2, CAP Note pour le Ministre, «A/s: Bref post-mortem tchadien” 31.12.1980, pp. 3-4.

had waned during Giscard's *septennat*. Imports of Libyan oil declined from 17 million tons per year in 1970 to just 3.8 million tons in 1979. While French civilian exports slightly increased from 1.7 billion francs in 1974 to 2.7 billion in 1979, military deliveries had decreased substantially.¹⁸¹⁰ Nonetheless, Libya had represented an important market for French arms exports, notably Mirage fighter jets. In 1970, Libya purchased 110 Mirages, and France continued to supply spare parts and ammunition throughout the decade.¹⁸¹¹ Furthermore, Libya had ordered 10 Combattante Class fast attack missile boats slated for delivery in 1981.¹⁸¹²

To make matters more confusing, in November 1980, Albin Chalendon, the head of the French oil company, ELF, concluded a major contract with Libya. This provided for the additional export of 1.5 million tons of Libyan oil to France at a reduced price, as well as prospecting rights for the firm.¹⁸¹³ ELF and the Libyan government announced this contract on the same day that Gaddafi declared his intention to merge Libya and Chad.¹⁸¹⁴ The following week, *Le Canard enchaîné* summarized France's awkward policy with Libya with the headline, "Giscard tchado-maso—en pleine Libydo."¹⁸¹⁵

Ultimately, Giscard's administration's only response to the Libyan-Chadian merger was to suspend its contracts and pending deliveries to Libya. Defense Ministry officials later complained that these contract suspensions totaled some 5.5 billion francs worth of military hardware. In their view, such a suspension posed legal problems given the absence of a formal decision to impose an embargo.¹⁸¹⁶ ELF officials also explained that if the contract suspension persisted past July, they would have to forfeit 150 million francs for cancelling their contract. Together French contract and delivery suspensions totaled some 10.5 billion francs.¹⁸¹⁷

Regardless of these measures, Gergorin's angry critique remains valid. Arguably French ambiguity towards Libya encouraged Gaddafi's ambitions. Nonetheless, despite some voices demanding a French military intervention to rollback Libyan advances, Giscard could do little without risking diplomatic isolation on the continent. Despite the fear provoked by Libyan adventurism among a number of African heads of state, only Gabon's Omar Bongo

¹⁸¹⁰ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/1, Direction Afrique du Nord Note, "A.S. Relations franco-libyennes," 13.12.1980, p. 1.

¹⁸¹¹ See SIPRI Arms Transfers Database at http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php, (accessed on 15.05.2013), and Warthier, *Quatre présidents*, 211.

¹⁸¹² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/1, Direction Afrique du Nord Note, "A.S. Relations franco-libyennes," 13.12.1980, p. 1.

¹⁸¹³ *Ibid.* 3.

¹⁸¹⁴ Warthier, *Quatre présidents*, 337.

¹⁸¹⁵ *Le Canard enchaîné*, 14.01.1981, cited in Warthier, *Quatre présidents*, 337.

¹⁸¹⁶ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/3, Cooperation Ministry Note, "Réunion 'Task Force' sur la Libye, relevé de conclusions," 17.06.1981, Pièce jointe n. 1.

¹⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.* 2.

strongly urged the French to intervene.¹⁸¹⁸ Kamougué supported Bongo's request and secretly met with French emissaries in Gabon requesting French military occupation of the South. In public however, he had to support the GUNT until the French could make a firm commitment to his security.¹⁸¹⁹ At the end of January, Giscard declared in a press conference that a new French intervention in Chad would be "irresponsable." He explained, "on n'allait pas occuper la totalité du Tchad, reconduire les forces venues de Libye à la frontière et installer un gouvernement."¹⁸²⁰ Such an action would have undoubtedly simply compounded the mistakes that France had already made in Chad over the previous years.

To fully understand these, one needs to go back further in time. While the colonial era represents, in many ways, the original sin of French involvement, France's post-colonial role also did not always constructively contribute to the country's stability and "good governance." France's 1969 military intervention effectively helped Tombalbaye's regime to defeat and repress the most prominent rebel groups. Nonetheless, its inability to win the war in the North should have indicated to French policymakers that longer-term prospects of peace required a more open political engagement from Tombalbaye with marginalized parts of the country. The quick failure of the MRA to achieve its original goals should also have served as a warning that the Chadian regime was structurally incapable of making the kinds of changes necessary to build a national consensus and prevent continual conflict. Regardless, even during the first years of Giscard's administration, French authorities continued their unmitigated support for Tombalbaye. Most importantly, much of this aid extended to what was effectively the Chadian state's repressive apparatus. This included extensive assistance to the military and police, and the large presence of serving or retired French officers in Chad's ruthless intelligence services.

The dependence of the Chadian state and its ruling clique on French economic and military assistance made it vulnerable to attacks on its legitimacy. The Claustre Affair helped to expose this relationship by driving a wedge between French interests and those of Tombalbaye's regime. In forcing French policymakers to begin negotiations with the Northern rebellion, Habré and Goukouni effectively managed to embarrass both Tombalbaye and his successor, Malloum, by unmasking their degree of dependence on French power and the ultimate limits to Chadian "sovereignty." This belied even aggressive attempts to reassert it, as with Malloum's 1975 decision to expel French forces. While French officials quickly

¹⁸¹⁸ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 115, 115/1, DAM Note, "A/s. Intervention libyenne au Tchad. Position des Etats africains," 28.11.1981.

¹⁸¹⁹ FCMGT, Carton 5, A4/7/2, Cooperation Ministry Note, «A/s: Entretien avec le Colonel Kamougué» 02.01.1981, p. 2.

¹⁸²⁰ Cited in Warthier, *Quatre présidents*, 338.

complied, the loss of French protection ultimately demonstrated the true vulnerability of the regime.

Furthermore, the Claustre Affair afforded Libya a legitimate port of entry into Chad's conflicts. France's handling of the Claustre Affair provided Gaddafi with precisely the kind of legitimacy he craved. France's de facto recognition of a Libyan sphere of influence in Northern Chad also meant that any government in N'Djamena had to do so as well. France's subsequent military intervention drew a line in the sand which implicitly, though perhaps not consciously, offered Libya the sphere of influence which Gaddafi seemed to desire.

Although Giscard's decision to intervene in early 1978 clearly aimed at preventing the fall of N'Djamena by Libyan-backed forces, it lacked a broader ambition and hardly contributed to bringing peace to the country. It may have even served to worsen the situation. Christian de La Rochère, on a fact-finding mission to Chad in early January 1979 warned that:

[...] la présence militaire française a eu pour résultat de démobiliser définitivement les esprits et les volontés [...] Pour le Général Malloum et ses amis, même s'ils ne l'expriment pas, il est clair que "Tacaoud" devra assurer longtemps encore l'équilibre et la sécurité du Tchad. On peut être assuré, au cas où les relations se dégraderaient encore entre la Présidence et Hissène Habré, qu'il sera fait appel à la protection, sinon à l'intervention française.¹⁸²¹

By essentially signaling to Malloum that France would save his regime, French officials provided the Chadian President with a false sense of security. His government made little effort to improve the Chadian army's fighting capacity. Furthermore, while this sense of security may have facilitated the integration of Habré into the government, its vacillating nature turned the break-up of that arrangement into a crushing blow against the Southerners whom France had always seemed to protect. The collapse of the "Fundamental Charter" in February 1979, and French refusal to intervene on behalf of Malloum utterly destroyed French credibility in the South. Suspicions of active French collaboration with Habré compounded this loss of credibility and further weakened French capacities to effectively influence the ensuing "peace process."

As French diplomats encouraged regional peacemaking efforts throughout 1979, suspicion that French forces secretly supported Habré undermined this strategy. While this did not represent official French policy, the relationship between French troops and their officers with the FAN was ambiguous enough to raise eyebrows even within the ranks of French officialdom. The problem though, was not one of preference, but one of position. Despite an officially declared objective of withdrawal, *Tacaoud* remained largely in its original positions,

¹⁸²¹ MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1975-1979, Carton 67, "Notes politiques," "a/s : Compte-rendu de la mission de M. de La Rochère, Sous-Directeur à la DAM," 24.01.1979, p. 7.

with the exception of Abéché, until late August 1979. These positions happened to coincide with zones controlled by the FAP and FAN.

Additionally, French officers and diplomats unofficially treated with the first GUNT as something of a legitimate authority. Certainly, the GUNT faction leaders saw the French presence as reassuring, and vocally protested initial French declarations of withdrawal. When combined with *Tacaud's* open collaboration with the FAN in repelling attacks made by Acyl's forces, and its refusal to interpose itself between Northern and Southern rival factions, it became hard for opposing Chadian factions and regional governments to take France's neutrality very seriously. Nigerian accusations of French complicity with the GUNT, and particularly Habré, made a great deal of sense in this context. The claim made by Nigerian officials that the French position encouraged the FAN's refusal to negotiate with other factions is plausible. Indeed, as the mission's initial objectives had become more or less obsolete, one can reasonably ask what exactly *Tacaud's* mission had become by the spring and summer months of 1979.

During the summer of 1979, the GUNT came under military pressure from both the North and South, particularly resulting from substantial Libyan support to Kamougué, Acyl, and their allies. French policymakers became alarmed at this seemingly Libyan orchestrated offensive. The Lagos II agreement helped to reinforce these fears as its call for a French withdrawal dealt the legitimacy of the French presence a severe blow. Desperate entreaties from a number of Chadian factions and regional leaders who did not truly desire a French withdrawal encouraged the French to limit their retreat to those units stationed away from N'Djamena. However, this reduced force could do little to monitor or deter efforts at sabotaging the interim governing arrangements.

French fears of a possible Libyan role in this regard explains some aspects of *Opération Barracuda* whose goals partly aimed at containing Libya's ability to influence the Chadian political scene. However, French efforts at countering Libyan influence failed spectacularly as *Barracuda* embarrassed Goukouni and his allies through its unambiguous violation of Chad's (nominal) sovereignty. This not only engendered renewed suspicion of French motives among the leadership of a number of Chadian factions, it also seems to have contributed towards altering Goukouni's political calculus. His February 1980 expulsion of Tonquédec occurred at the same time as secret negotiations between the FAP and Tripoli had begun to reconfigure Chad's political alliances.

The reduced French force structure, its relatively passive mandate, and suspicions of French goals in Chad led Goukouni to conclude that he could not count on French support to

preserve the GUNT in the face of the virtually inevitable coming conflict with Habré. Giscard had even told one of Goukouni's envoys that personal rivalries were a Chadian affair, and France would not intervene.¹⁸²² Combined with a latent suspicion of French support for Habré, Goukouni apparently felt that he had few options. He needed to look towards another protector and Gaddafi seemed to offer the only plausible choice. Hence, Libya would soon become the dominant force in Chadian politics, despite French efforts and much to the chagrin of France's African allies.

This study ends with the French failures to contribute to a resolution of Chad's conflicts and to contain Libyan ambitions. Buijtenhuijs describes these failures as essentially the result of good intentions backed by faulty assumptions. From this perspective, French objectives made sense. These aimed at reconciling different government and rebel factions with the goal of repairing the congenital illegitimacy of the Chadian state, thus stabilizing the country's politics. In Buijtenhuijs' view, this policy suffered from unforeseen events, such as Habré's apparently overweening ambition, the rapid collapse of the South in 1979, and the increasing fragmentation of Northern political groupings.¹⁸²³ However, the real failure of French policy went deeper than this. By 1979, the sole aim of French policy seemed to consist of facilitating the creation of a transitional government whose main claim to legitimacy was that it included as many warlords as possible. This arrangement could hardly lead to lasting peace.

¹⁸²² MAE La Courneuve, DAM Tchad 1980-1983, Carton 113, 113/2, Elysée note, "Audience accordée par le Président de la République à M. Naïmbaye, Ministre de l'Agriculture du Tchad" 14.02.1980, p. 3.

¹⁸²³ Buijtenhuijs, *Les guerres civiles*, 171.

Concluding Remarks

One of the central contributions of this study is its careful use of archival records to examine French military activism during Giscard's presidency. It attempts to go beyond polemical discussions focused on the conspiracies of secret networks, neocolonial designs, crony capitalism, and economic imperialism.¹⁸²⁴ There is almost no doubt that each of these played some role in particular aspects of Franco-African relations. However, the influence of these factors on both the policymaking process and implementation in day-to-day practice with respect to military activism must be reexamined in light of the new material available to researchers. What emerges is a much more complex story.

Instead, questions of ideology, perceived strategic interests, bureaucratic politics, and the limitations of the French state emerge as important driving factors in both decision-making and policy implementation. While this does not discount other, more occult influences, these are often both hard to document, and lack the explanatory capacity of other, perhaps more mundane dynamics.

As should be obvious to readers, this study is somewhat limited in its scope. It does not pretend to be a comprehensive history of Franco-African relations during Giscard's presidency. In part this relates to the nature of the available sources and my own research interests. Instead it focuses on France's two most important military engagements in Africa during the 1970s. These case studies serve several purposes. One is an effort to understand the nature of French interventionism in Zaire and Chad on its own terms, as important events in the history of both French foreign policy and the history of those countries' conflicts. Secondly, the case studies represent an attempt to understand the broader nature of French security policy in Africa during Giscard's presidency. Thirdly, they try to provide detailed analyses of two important instances of foreign interventionism in Africa, a field which sorely demands more attention.

More broadly speaking however, the aims of this study have been twofold. The first is to contribute to the small but growing historiography on post-colonial interventions in Sub-

¹⁸²⁴ For example, see : Parti communiste français. *L'impérialisme français aujourd'hui : Journées d'étude de la Section de politique extérieure du Comité central du Parti communiste français (22-23 mai 1976)*. Paris : Editions Sociales, 1977, Agir ici (France), and Survie (France). *Les dossiers noirs de la politique africaine de la France*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995, and Raphaël Granvaud. *Que fait l'armée française en Afrique ?*. Marseille: Agone, 2009.

Saharan Africa. The second is to historicize more recent trends of thinking on African security issues.

Present-day historiography has attempted to re-center the focus of international history on the roles and agencies of more local and non-state actors. While this represents a very-necessary corrective to past trends, the role of “great powers” also needs reexamination in this light. Odd Arne Westad wrote in the introduction to his pioneering 2005 study *The Global Cold War*, that the literature on “Third World” revolutions and that on superpower interventions have not intersected.¹⁸²⁵ Since he wrote those lines, the question remains wide open to researchers from multiple disciplines. Fortunately the opening of archives and more recent trends in “Global History” have sparked the beginnings of a new wave of scholarship.¹⁸²⁶

This study has only addressed the “Third World” side of Westad’s equation in passing, as a target of French ambition and strategic vision. Due to source limitations, I could not cover in detail the character, aims, motivations, and sociology of local actors. However, if anything I have attempted to show French interventions as a result of a two way process between various African actors and French policymakers. I have tried to demonstrate that local agency was very important in shaping the nature of France’s involvement on the continent, as well as some of its consequences and limitations. This basic observation certainly also applies to the roles played by other powers both in and out of Africa. For example, in a recent study of the Vietnam Wars, Lien-Hang Nguyen concludes that, “Hanoi and Saigon were not only active agents in their own destinies, but they also heavily influenced the terms of American intervention and ultimately the outcome of their war.”¹⁸²⁷ Though not nearly as dramatic as the Vietnam Wars, the same judgment applies to the African role in French interventionism.

In Zaire, Mobutu managed to effectively present his regime as a bastion of anticommunism and stability. This exploited and reinforced French anti-communist fears. The opinions of other Francophone African heads of state were also important, particularly those of Senghor and Houphouët-Boigny in encouraging Giscard and other French officials to support Mobutu. On the other hand, French ambitions, shared by their more conservative African allies, to create a Francophone Pan-African security force, were thwarted by active efforts within the OAU and more “radical” states. The eventual deployment of the IAF also

¹⁸²⁵ Westad. *The Global Cold War*, p. 7.

¹⁸²⁶ In addition to works on Soviet and Cuban involvement in Africa mentioned above, see the collection of essays found in Artemy Kalinovsky and Sergeï Radchenko. *The End of the Cold War in the Third World: New Perspectives on Regional Conflict*. London: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁸²⁷ Lien-Hang T. Nguyen. *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012, p. 312.

illustrated the dependence of French policymaking on African interests. While French officials attempted to extract more assistance from their NATO allies, their African partners in Zaire did the same with the French. Tensions within the IAF-contributing countries meant that French officials had to juggle different demands and complaints in order to prolong the mission as long as possible.

In Chad, neighboring states played important roles in challenging French legitimacy and helped to marginalize French political influence in the country. No matter how hard French officials tried, they could not avoid suspicions of siding with Hissène Habré and attempting to sabotage the peace process. Strong African voices, particularly in Nigeria, exploited these suspicions and effectively exerted pressure which ensured that *Tacaud* could no longer play a major role in Chadian politics, and led to its withdrawal.

Furthermore, the dependency of certain African regimes upon French economic, financial, and military aid paradoxically gave them incentives and opportunities act in ways counter to French interests. This behavior may have largely aimed at building domestic and international legitimacy which their dependence had threatened to undermine. Before Giscard's tenure, Tombalbaye's regime in Chad had managed to effectively reap the benefits of French military intervention on its behalf without having to pay the price of reform and restructuring demanded by its French patrons. The events of the Claustre Affair demonstrated that Tombalbaye could impede French efforts to free the hostages despite his dependence upon French logistical and financial support for his military and state apparatus. This intransigence may have encouraged French officials to look the other way as Chadian military officers launched a coup d'état in April 1975. However, if French policymakers hoped that the CSM would prove more cooperative with French efforts to free the hostages in the North, the new regime soon proved them wrong. The delivery of arms, supplies, and ransom money to the FAN without the permission of the CSM triggered President Malloum's decision to expel French forces from the country. Although in retrospect this decision may have proved fatal to the regime, it did signal that regardless of their level of dependence upon France, the CSM would not simply act as a French pawn on the Chadian political scene.

In Zaire, Mobutu provoked similar conflicts with his American allies before the height of the Angolan Civil War. During and after the Shaba crises, Mobutu obtained effective aid from his French protectors. At the same time he also made commitments to reform as demanded by his Western allies in exchange for financial, economic, and security assistance. Like Tombalbaye before him though, he managed to reap the benefits of this assistance which amounted to a virtual security guarantee, while ably avoiding any real steps towards reform.

French policymakers were certainly aware of this, but felt that their own strategic imperatives had priority.

Similarly difficult relations marred French dealings with Bokassa in the Central African Republic/Empire. Despite a number of expulsions of French citizens, including diplomatic representatives, nationalizations, and anti-French press campaigns, Giscard and most of the French policymaking establishment, particularly in the Cooperation Ministry, went to great lengths to support the regime in Bangui. Bokassa's lavish 1977 imperial coronation represents only the most blatant example of this kind of support. Only gross human rights abuses, changing regional politics, and pressure from allied African leaders led Giscard to decide upon his ouster.

The abilities of these "client" regimes to frequently defy their French patrons while continuing to benefit in various ways from their unequal relationships testified to the nature of French security policy in Africa during this time. It also shows how African leaders could manage French interventions and support to serve their own interests in ways perhaps originally unintended by their French partners.

However, African influence on French policy should not mask other determinants. French officialdom held widely shared fears of communist subversion in Africa. These fears encouraged unsophisticated interpretations of local and regional politics. These analyses in turn had an impact upon policymaking decisions. In this respect, pressure from African leaders only played to existing French prejudices. The ideological aspect of French thinking went beyond simple anti-communism though.

A form of domino theory played an important role in the thinking of French authorities as well. This rested on the assumption, formulated at different times by Giscard and a number of French officials in their correspondence, that France had a stabilizing role to play within its former colonial empire and beyond. This meant that French policymakers had to meet threats to the territorial integrity or political stability of their allies with determination. Failure to act in the defense of threatened regimes would deal a blow to French credibility as a protector of its African friends. Loss of credibility and the resultant spread of instability implied that France could lose its special relationship with key allies on the continent. Such a loss would deal a severe blow to French pretensions of being a power of global reach and significance. This kind of thinking though led inevitably to the support of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes where democracy was a sham and popular participation was sidelined.

In Zaire support for Mobutu was based on the idea that only he could offer stability to the country and hence, the region. He thus needed protection. On a practical level, this meant

giving Mobutu the resources he needed to secure his own personal power within the country, at the expense of potentially competing interests. This can be seen through the French support to the FAZ which improved its capacities and performance at the margins, but represented perhaps the most destabilizing force in Zairian society, especially in Shaba. The FLNC hardly represented a more dangerous threat to ordinary citizens than the FAZ, who had years' worth of documented abuses, not to mention atrocities, under their belt. This commitment to Mobutu's security also manifested itself in the mobilization of international actors, whether in the form of the IAF, or the IMF, to stabilize and secure his regime against external, and potential internal threats.

French support for Tombalbaye and Malloum also resulted from the assumption that regardless of the flaws in their regimes, the alternative was chaos. While subsequent events seem to prove this view correct, it is impossible to understand the collapse of the Chadian state and polity without reference to the depredations of the *ancien régime*. French assistance to both Tombalbaye and the CSM encouraged repression and inflexibility in dealing with regional grievances. The events of the Claustre Affair finally convinced French officials that some kind of political settlement involving the Northern rebellion was essential to lasting security in Chad. The 1978 intervention represented an effort at preventing the CSM's defeat, and to force a political settlement on terms favorable to France's perceived interests. Habré's accession to the government briefly made it seem as if this policy could work. However, rather than contributing to a broader political solution to the civil war, the French military presence provided Malloum with a false sense of security. This led him to refuse serious negotiations with Goukouni's forces, even when these had clearly broken with Gaddafi late in the year. The subsequent defeat of the Southern forces and the ethnic cleansing of N'Djamena destroyed French credibility in half of the country and crippled future efforts at facilitating peace.

French policy aimed to sustain regimes threatened by an "instability" often generated by the practices of those same regimes. In Zaire, intervention on Mobutu's behalf arguably spared the regime a prolonged civil war or possible overthrow for nearly a generation. However the nature of Mobutu's rule ensured that the next invasion and civil war unleashed genocidal levels of violence on the country in the world's bloodiest conflict since 1945. In Chad, French policymakers made the same assumptions regarding the necessity of stabilization. However, changing political dynamics in the country eventually made this position untenable. Instead French officials took the risk of abandoning the old Southern regime in promoting a governing arrangement which was more representative than in the past. However, their efforts failed. Whereas supporting a dictator at least has the merit of providing

a definable goal, the French quickly found that adapting their policy to peacemaking was particularly difficult, and their policy quickly lost coherence.

In contrast to these issues, one should note that pure material or economic factors only played marginal or indirect roles in French evaluations of their security interests and in their decisions to use military force. In short, French policymakers did not send in their troops to protect their investments. Instead, though of marginal value to the French economy, Chad and the Central African Republic/Empire were heavily dependent on France for market access, financial support, and economic aid. Continued French assistance was thus necessary to maintain the stability of these regimes, hence the levels of French assistance to Tombalbaye and Bokassa regardless of their day-to-day stances towards France. In Zaire, the French had a vested interest in maintaining a functioning economy and Mobutu's fiscal credibility because these were essential for keeping him in power and maintaining the Zairian state as a rampart against communism.

In some respects, it is difficult to fully evaluate the impact of Giscard's military activism. One cannot know how the Shaba invasions would have ended in the absence of foreign intervention, or the Chadian conflicts without *Tacaud*. Nonetheless, the evidence presented here suggests that French interventionism did little or nothing to bring real peace and stability to the lives of countless communities living in any of the states discussed in this study. In Zaire it strengthened Mobutu's predatory regime. In Chad the French presence did not end the country's internecine conflicts and may well have contributed to exacerbating them. In the Central African Republic/Empire, Giscard only removed a dictator whose policies and whims France had relentlessly funded for over thirteen years.

On January 16 2013, days after French President François Hollande ordered a military intervention to halt and rollback an apparent Islamist advance on Mali's capital, Bamako, Giscard issued a "mise en garde." For the former President, a military engagement which went beyond simple logistical support to the Malian and eventual African intervention risked becoming an action, "de type néo-colonialiste." Giscard warned that airstrikes in Mali's North and East, "atteindraient des populations civiles, et reproduiraient les destructions inutiles de la guerre en Afghanistan. Elles auraient sans doute les mêmes résultats politiques."¹⁸²⁸ Though perhaps excessive and deeply ironic given his own record in Chad and elsewhere, Giscard's warning may indeed reflect some of the lessons from his own experiences. As in Chad and

¹⁸²⁸ "Mali: mise en garde de VGE." Le blog de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing : pour la démocratie en Europe, 16.01.2013, found at: <http://vge-europe.eu/index.php?post/2013/01/16/Mali%3A-mise-en-garde-de-VGE> (accessed on 28.05.2013).

Zaire, there is a risk that the French intervention in Mali will give future Malian governments a dangerous sense of security which may hinder future efforts at reform. This observation implies that some understanding of France's past experiences could prove useful in foreseeing potential pitfalls that current and future policymakers may encounter when faced with similar choices which may lead to military interventions in Africa and elsewhere.

This links with the second aim of this study, which is an attempt to encourage thinking on African security issues in their historical context. Given current events in Mali, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and elsewhere, a detailed study of past French experiences illustrates continuities in the kinds of questions which international policymakers address today. The impact of "failed states," arms flows, kidnappings, non-state armed groups, and perceived ideological threats lay at the heart of French security concerns in the late 1970s on the continent. These concerns remain at the top of the international agenda today.

If anything, the examination of past events highlights the limits of the abilities of great powers to influence local politics, in part due to flawed assumptions and analysis. For instance, in Zaire, Cold War-inspired reductionism shaped the worldviews of French policymakers and powerfully influenced their interpretations of regional developments. Although the Cold War is over, similar processes affect French and other policymakers today in the same regions. The role of the Cold War as a "great simplifier"¹⁸²⁹ has been replaced by other simplifying phenomena. For instance, reductionist characterizations of movements and ideas such as "Islamism" has led to international responses which ignore deeper and more fundamental issues to human security and prosperity. Examinations of conflicts which use ethnicity as an explanatory mechanism often fail to go beyond the language used by participants to try to understand why and how that particular form of identity has become central to inter-group struggle. The same applies to some observers who analyze "low intensity" conflict through the lens of proxy warfare, looking at armed groups as mere pawns in someone else's game. These categories of thought have not changed since the Cold War, and require imaginative rethinking on the part of policymakers today.

During the time period under discussion, French political engagement was directed at preventing the spread of political instability, especially that supposedly engendered by the

¹⁸²⁹ See: Graham Evans. "The Great Simplifier: The Cold War and Southern Africa, 1948-1994," in Alan P. Dobson, Shahin P. Malik, and Graham Evans. *Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Cold War*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 1999, pp. 136-151.

Soviet Union, Cuba, and Libya. Thus much assistance went to securing “strong men” and regimes who could promise to act as a safeguard against communism, as well as to rebels and leaders who seemed capable of undermining Soviet bloc or Libyan influence. Ultimately these policies, even when spectacularly successful on their own terms such as in Zaire, sowed the seeds for even greater instability and conflict in the future. Leaders like Mobutu benefited from enormous levels of French and Western bloc support from the late 1970s until the end of the Cold War. During this time they managed increasingly personalized regimes which destroyed all chances of peaceful post-regime transitions. Other efforts at establishing favorable political orders such as in Chad and the Central African Republic contributed to lasting power imbalances and prolonged conflict.

A more informed understanding of the nuances of French military activism is thus important for a number of reasons. First it can help in understanding both the role and limits that any one country, or even the international community, has in influencing conflict management and resolution. It also serves as a warning that policies based upon flawed assumptions often have negative consequences. Indeed, it should encourage policymakers to question their own conceptions about the nature of threats, their true scope, and appropriate policies aimed at addressing them. While the post-Cold War focus on issues such as human rights, poverty alleviation, and democratization have meant less support for more blatant dictatorships and “strong men,” the mere presence of elections does not necessarily confer the kind of sustainable response that international actors often seek to deep-seated problems. Indeed, though many things have changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the focus of today’s struggles against armed non-state actors, efforts at conflict management, and attempts at state building have powerful antecedents in this period. A better understanding of this past should contribute to more informed policymaking today.

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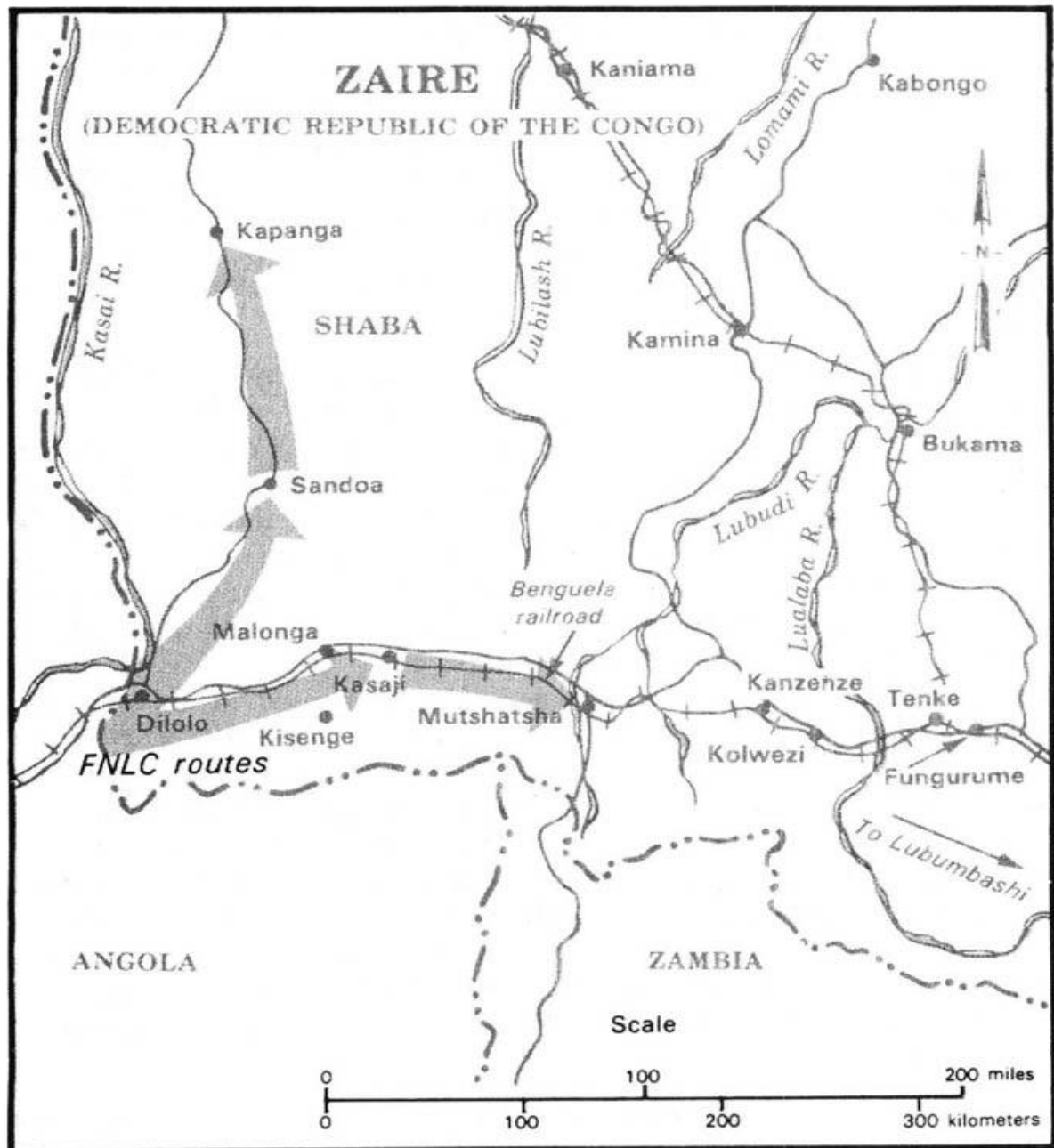
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Annexes

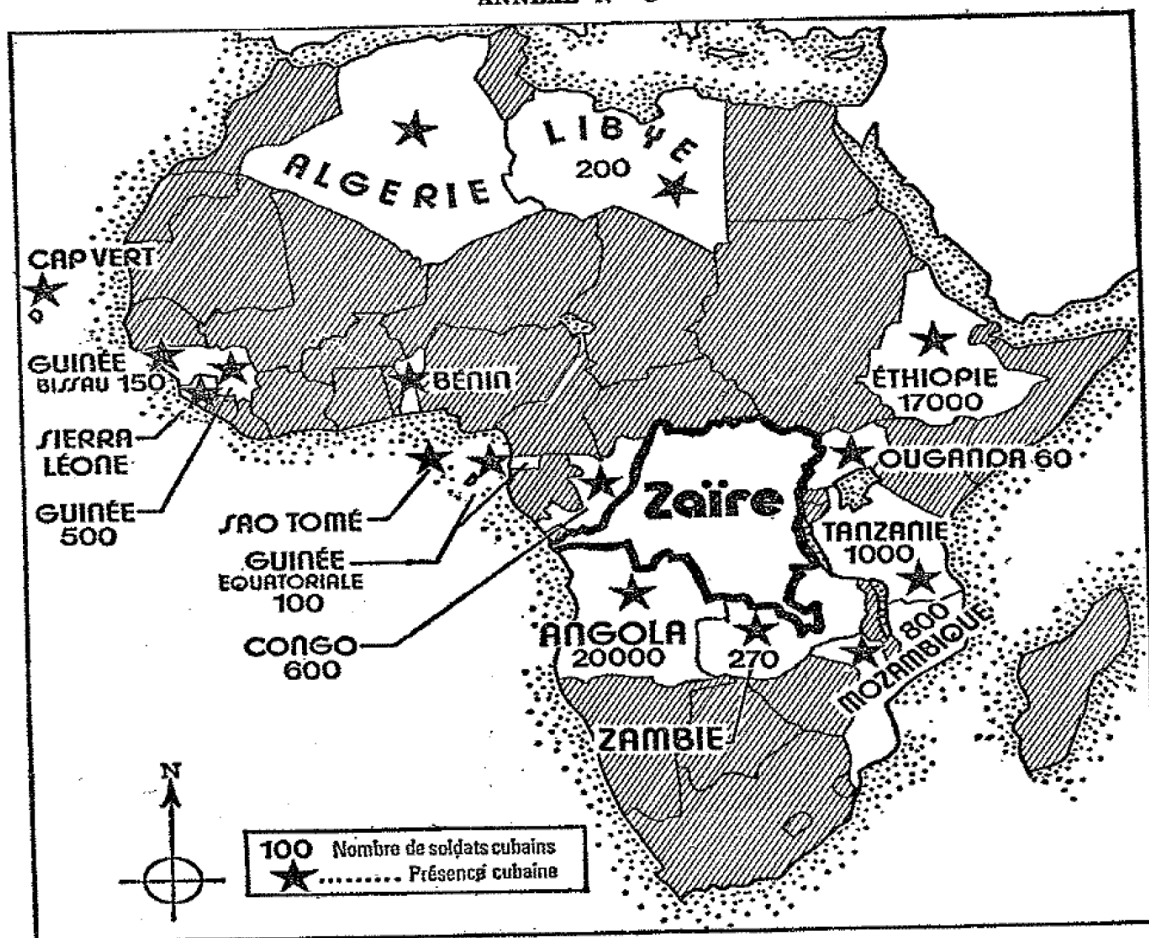


**“Despite all my attempts, I could not avoid having a leopard-skin hat put on my head--- fortunately only a single photo survives”---
Valéry Giscard d’Estaing**



First Shaba Invasion, 1977, from Odom, Thomas P. *Shaba II: The French and Belgian Intervention in Zaire in 1978*. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1993.

ANNEXE N° 3



PRÉSENCE CUBAINE EN AFRIQUE

L'attaque du Shaba a mis en évidence le rôle joué en Afrique par les Cubains. La participation de soldats cubains à la prise de Kolwezi a été prouvée. Ils se sont repliés en Angola le jeudi 18 mai 1978.

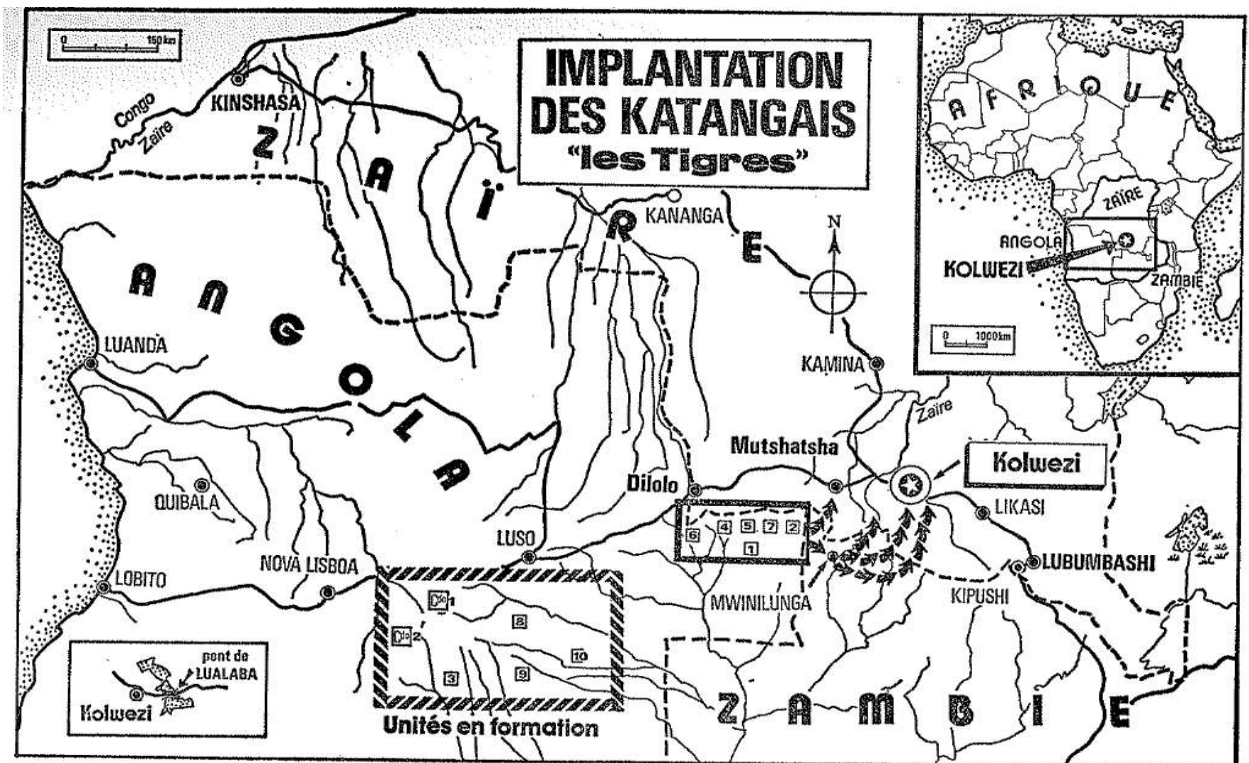
Fidel Castro a déclaré, le 9 juin 1978 : « Soviétiques et Cubains, nous nous efforçons toujours de coopérer au maximum. »

Un comité permanent soviéto-cubain a été mis en place à La Havane. Y siègent notamment **Raul Castro**, le frère du président, le général **Enio Leyva**, vice-ministre de l'Intérieur, et **Carlos Rafael Rodriguez** du Service secret cubain.

Le général **Vassili Ivanovitch Petrov** coordonne les mouvements des troupes cubaines en Afrique. Le général **Serguei Sokolov** contrôle les opérations. Les renforts cubains sont aérotransportés de Cuba en Angola par des avions cargos Antonov.

230

The French perception of the Cuban threat, from Sergent, Pierre. *La Légion saute sur Kolwezi: opération Léopard : le 2e R.E.P. au Zaïre, mai-juin 1978*. Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1978, p. 230.



Carte du Zaïre avec pays voisins

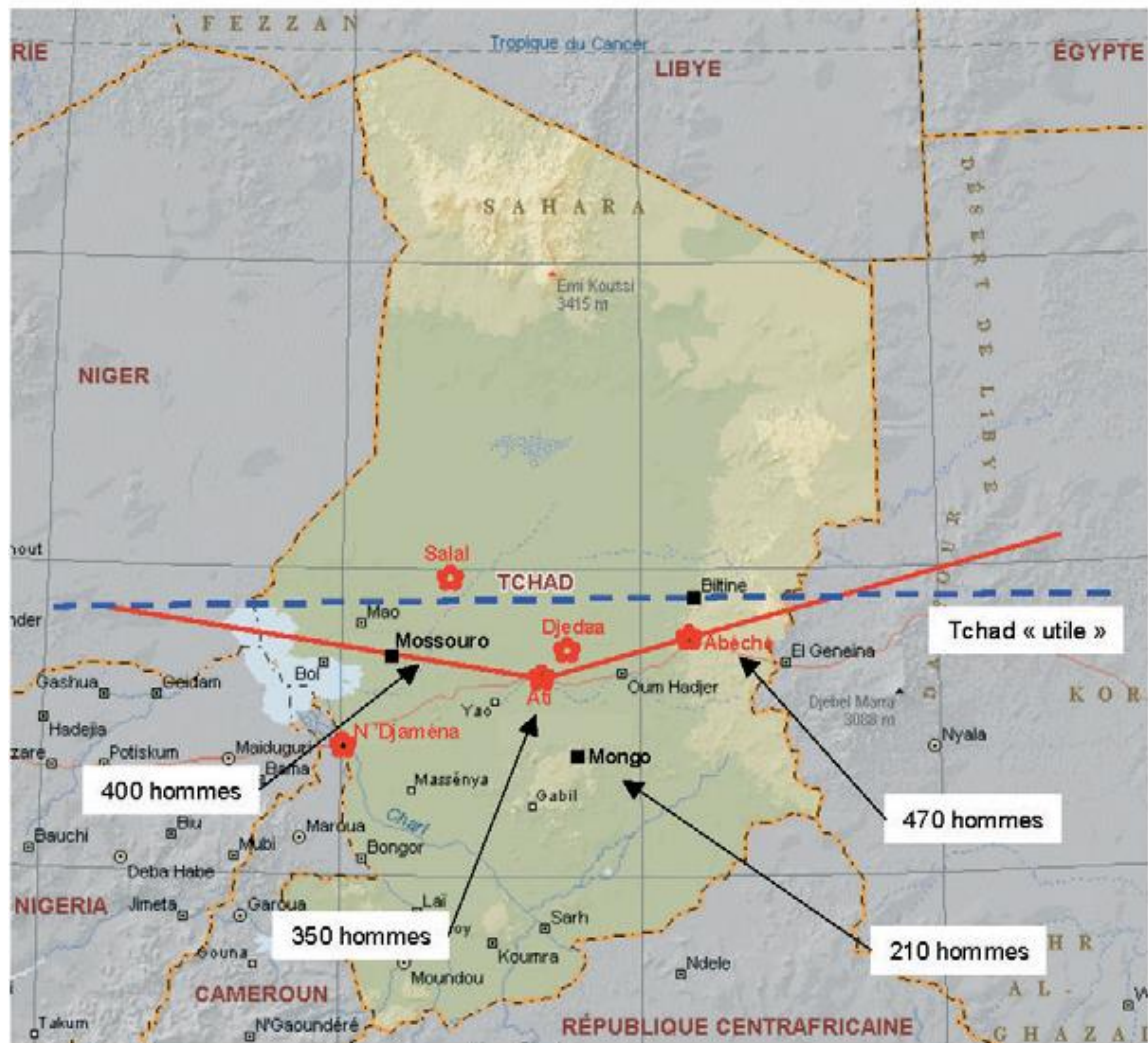
The position and invasion route of the Gendarmes during Shaba II, from Sergent, Pierre.
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CARTE DU TCHAD

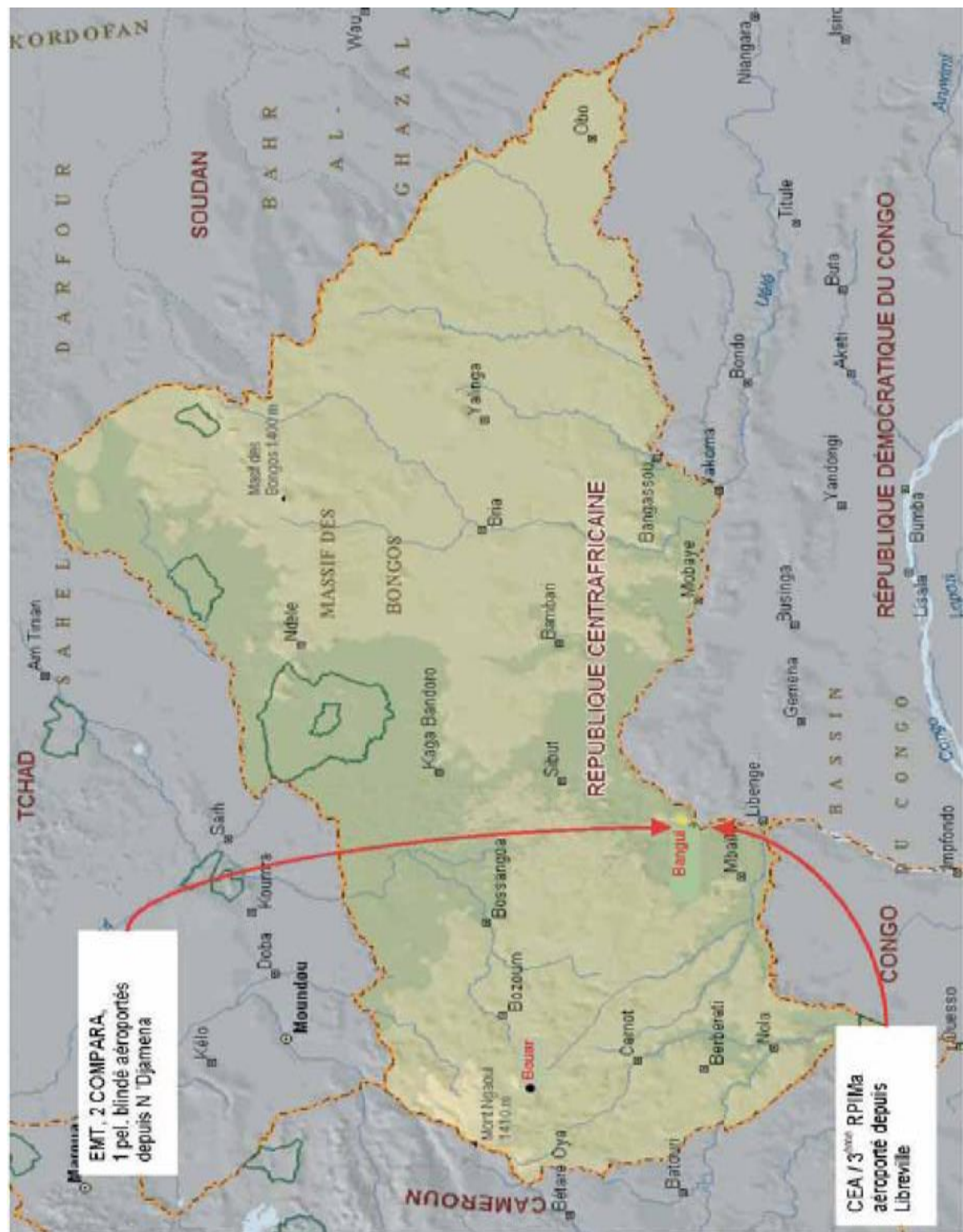
Map of Chad, from Robert Buijtenhuijs. *Le Frolinat et les guerres civiles du Tchad: 1977-1984*. Paris, France: Karthala, 1987, p. 4.

OPERATION TACAUD (mars 1978 - mai 1980)



Opération Tacaud, from Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces (CDEF).

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Opération Barracuda from Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces (CDEF).
Répertoire typologique des opérations : Tome 2 Afrique. Paris, France: Ministère de la Défense, 2006 p. 49.