



Study of Internal Conflict (SOIC) Case Studies

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Chad 1965–79

Executive Summary

The first phase of the Chadian civil war was fought between 1965–79. The central government led by President N’Garta (François) Tombalbaye engaged in hostilities with multiple rebel factions. The Front for the National Liberation Chad (Frolinat) acted as the primary insurgent group. France, Egypt, and Israel supported the government, while Algeria and Libya supported Frolinat. France and Libya conducted combat operations in Chad during the war.

Tombalbaye was a member of the southern Sara tribe, primarily composed of French-speaking Christians and animists. He suppressed the majority Muslim population between 1960–63 by promoting Sara tribal leaders in government and restricting Muslim representation.¹ The Muslim population primarily resided in the northern and eastern provinces, where most rebel activity emerged.

On March 26, 1963, Tombalbaye dissolved the National Assembly. Protests and rioting in the capital N’Djamena and the southeastern region of Salamat killed 19 civilians and one government officer, causing Tombalbaye to enact a state of emergency. By November 1, 1965, Muslim and non-Muslim tribes engaged in rebellion against the government, primarily in the northern and eastern provinces.²

In 1968, the central government requested French military assistance, and French troops performed military operations in northern Chad until their withdrawal in 1975. In 1975, General Noel Odingar led a military coup to assassinate Tombalbaye. Odingar suspended the constitution, appointed Felix Malloum as president, banned political parties, and continued combat operations against Frolinat.³ By 1979, Chad effectively had no national government. As part of an alliance, President Malloum appointed Hissène Habré, leader of the Armed Forces of the North (FAN), a splinter group from Frolinat, Prime Minister of Chad. This alliance was short-lived, as Habré’s and Malloum’s forces fought in the capital.

By this point in the conflict, Chad had separated into multiple autonomous zones led by different factions. Several nations brought the major factions to the negotiating table, and by November 1979, the war ended, and a new Transitional Government of National Unity was formed.

Assessing the Five Factors

1. Was the country at the time of the conflict a nation?

No. By 1960, Chad had more than 100 languages, more than 200 ethnicities, and traditional ethnic factionalism.⁴ The ruling Sara tribe constituted 24 percent of the population, and identity depended largely on geographical location.⁵

2. Was the government perceived as legitimate by 85 percent of the population?

No. Identity and legitimacy were based on regional and local identities. The Sara people constituted 24 percent of the population. By 1968, Muslim and non-Muslim tribes whose people lived in the northern, central, and eastern provinces were in open rebellion—roughly 45.9 percent of the population.⁶ Additionally, Tombalbaye’s “Africanization” program and political suppression of the Muslim tribal groups alienated a large part of the population.⁷

3. Did the government maintain or achieve security control over roughly 85 percent of the country’s overall population?

Yes → No. In the early stages of the conflict, the rebel groups operated in the north in unpopulated areas where most of the combat occurred and had no direct contact with the southern and central provinces. By the early 1970s, however, the insurgents had gained control of large amounts of Chadian territory and, by the late 1970s, threatened the capital.⁸

4. Did the rebel movement have persistent access to external sanctuary in a neighboring country to a militarily significant degree?

Yes. Sudan allowed Frolinat to train, equip, organize, and establish bases in western Sudan. This access to Western Sudan allowed the rebel group to conduct raids easily in eastern Chad.⁹

5. Was there a government army or armed constabulary force in existence at the start of the conflict?

Yes. The government created the armed forces upon national independence in 1960. The Chadian army was initially small, consisting of 400 men; by 1971, it had grown to 3,800. In addition, Chad established an Air Force with observation aircraft and helicopters in the early 1960s.

CHAD 1965–79	
NATIONAL IDENTITY	NO
GOVERNMENT LEGITIMACY	NO
POPULATION SECURITY	YES → NO
EXTERNAL SANCTUARY	YES
EXISTING SECURITY FORCES	YES

Outcome

Government defeat. By 1979, years of warfare and ravaged landscapes had left Chad divided into four nearly autonomous sections. Frolinat controlled the North, the central government controlled the capital, militias from the Sara ethnic group controlled the south, and Libya annexed the Aouzou Strip. No party could win the conflict militarily. The factions in Chad agreed to negotiations mediated in Nigeria. The parties signed the Lagos Accords in 1979, providing a ceasefire and the establishment of a Transitional Government of National Unity.¹⁰ This government would dissolve, however, and Chad would become embroiled in a Civil War again between 1979–82.¹¹ The Five Factor model would have predicted the government’s defeat.

Endnotes

1. Clay Arnold, “Chad (1960–Present),” University of Central Arkansas (website), n.d., <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/72-chad-1960-present/>.
2. Arnold, “Chad.”
3. Arnold, “Chad.”
4. Federal Research Division, *Chad: A Country Study*, DA Army Pamphlet 550-159, ed. Thomas Collelo (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1990), xiii, <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/master/frd/frdcstdy/ch/chadcountrystudy00coll/chadcountrystudy00coll.pdf>.
5. Harold D. Nelson et al., “Ethnic Groups and Languages” in *Area Handbook for Chad* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1972), 44,
6. Nelson et al., “Ethnic Groups,” 44.
7. Arnold, “Chad.”
8. Karl DeRouen Jr. and Uk Heo, eds. *Civil Wars of the World: Major Conflicts since World War II*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 240.
9. Federal Research Division, *Chad*, 163.
10. DeRouen and Heo, *Civil Wars*, 241–42.
11. Arnold, “Chad.”



<https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/Research-Commentary/Study-of-Internal-Conflict/SOIC-Conflict-Studies/>

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