



Sudan-Chad Proxy War (historical) *Updated 6 February 2012.*

This resource contains archive versions of documents on the Sudan-Chad proxy war.

The leaders of Sudan and Chad, Presidents Omar al Bashir and Idriss Déby, are both army officers who took power by force at about the same time—Bashir in 1989, and Déby in 1990 with the Sudanese leader's support. They maintained friendly relations for more than 12 years despite their very different political alignments: Bashir as the president of an Islamist regime mistrusted by the United States, and Déby as an ally of the West keen to solidify relations with Washington (as well as Exxon, which runs the Chadian oil project). Their good relationship survived numerous attempts by opposition groups from both countries to set up rear bases on both sides of the 600 km-long Sudan-Chad border.

The leaders' relationship began to change with the Darfur uprising in 2003, in particular after the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) attacked the al Fasher airport in North Darfur in April, humiliating the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF). The commanders who led these armed opposition groups were from the Beri tribe (Zaghawa and Deby's Bideyat), and included Chadian army officers whose defection Déby had been unable to prevent. The Chadian president then tried and failed to prevent more Beri from joining or supporting the Darfur rebellion. From 2005, Bashir supported Chadian armed opposition groups seeking rear bases and arms in Khartoum. This proxy war culminated in attacks on both capitals: N'Djaména in April 2006 and February 2008, and Khartoum in May 2008.

After May 2009, however, as raids on both sides of the border met unusual resistance, and as both leaders failed to unite their neighbour's opposition groups into efficient coalitions, Khartoum and N'Djaména began a serious rapprochement. As a result, Khartoum began to move Chadian groups away from the border. Chad reciprocated by demanding the withdrawal of the [UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad \(MINURCAT\)](#) from its territory, and pressuring JEM to sign a peace agreement before expelling it and its late chairman Khalil Ibrahim from Chadian territory. In July 2010, Sudan expelled the leaders of four main Chadian armed opposition groups, sending them to Qatar. Déby visited Khartoum in February 2010 and Bashir flew to N'Djaména in July. This last visit earned Chad—a signatory of the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court and thus obliged to arrest Bashir—fierce criticism from the West. Since July 2010, several hundred Chadian opposition fighters, most from marginal splinter groups, have returned home, some on flights chartered by the governments of Chad and Sudan, others under their own steam. In October, some 2,000 combatants—most of those remaining in Darfur—agreed to be disarmed by the Sudanese government.

As of mid-2010, it appeared that both countries had given up their proxy conflict to concentrate on other important events: the referendum on South Sudan's self-determination, which was held in January 2011, and the presidential election in Chad on 25 April 2011. But the rapprochement does not go far enough to resolve either the Darfur conflict or the problem of Chad's democratic deficit. The root causes of conflict remain in both countries and these internal crises could yet destabilize the region.

The armed opposition groups that joined the Chadian government remain largely dissatisfied as the administration shows no intention of fulfilling its many promises to them, in particular regarding the reintegration of rebel combatants into the army. Armed opposition members were also shocked by the arrests in November 2010 of several of their leaders, including Tahir Guinassou (Union des forces de la résistance/Union of Resistance Forces—UFR—splinter group) and Tahir Wodji (UFR ex-chief of staff), who returned to Chad after negotiations with the government in September and October 2010. The leaders were detained for some days and then released.

In May 2011, two leading UFR members, Adoum Erdimi (Timan Erdimi's brother) and Daoud Ali Bouyeneou (deputy chief of staff) were arrested in Khartoum and al Fasher respectively, and jailed in N'Djaména, reportedly for flirting with joining either JEM or the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLM-MM).

UFR Second Vice-President Abdelwahid About Makaye was arrested in Khartoum on 27 November 2011 and delivered to Chad. The Chadian opposition said this was done at the behest of Chadian security services. Many were shocked as Makaye had a close relationship with the Government of Sudan. There were rumours that he planned to get involved in the unrest in South Kordofan, or alternatively that the arrest was a favour granted to Déby by the Sudanese government.

A less high profile activist, trade union leader Djibrine Assali, was arrested in August 2011. He was loosely affiliated with the UFR rebel alliance. As of January 2012, he is believed to be in detention in Khartoum.

By early 2012, all of the Chadian rebel leaders had been expelled from Sudan. They either returned to Chad, or are in limbo in Doha, Qatar, Burkina Faso (Abakar Tollimi), and Ethiopia (Adouma Hassaballah). The number of Chadian armed opposition groups has since declined considerably (although difficult to accurately assess, it was estimated at 2,000 as of early 2012). Many of the fighters, sharing ethnicities with populations in Darfur and central Sudan, have settled in both countries and taken up farming or other manual labour. Some are rumoured to have joined armed groups in CAR. The exceptions are Chadian Zaghawas who belonged to Timan Erdimi's Rassemblement des forces pour le changement/Rally of the Forces for Change (RFC) and who have reportedly joined various Zaghawa Darfur rebel movements, namely JEM and the SLA-MM. This group is estimated to number between 200-300 people.

Given the close relations between Chad and Sudan, the Government of South Sudan may be inclined to sympathise with Chadian rebels. Reportedly, Chadians are now granted visas to South Sudan with greater ease than in the past. But material support is not (yet) being offered.

When JEM fighters returned to Darfur from Libya in early September 2011, they must have travelled through north-eastern Chad with the collusion of elements within the Chadian government. But in keeping with the new strategic orientation of the Chad/Sudan rapprochement, the Government of Sudan chose to accept Déby's explanation that influential Zaghawa had assisted JEM against his wishes. Déby, who has to contend with a delicate balance of power within his own inner circle, persuaded the Government of Sudan that he was powerless to counter this action.

The death of Khalil Ibrahim on 22-24 December 2011 may remove one of the last points of tension between Chad and Sudan. The inner circle, which supported JEM against Deby's wishes, may now change tactics. Much of this group's support was tied to Khalil himself who came from a noble Zaghawa family.

For a chronology of the Sudan-Chad proxy war, see below:

- [Sudan-Chad Proxy War Chronology](#) (01.03.2011)
- [Sudan-Chad Proxy War Chronology](#) (20.07.2010)

[Click here](#) for a chronology of the Darfur Peace Process.

Relevant HSBA Publications

[Renouncing the Rebels: Local and Regional Dimensions of Chad-Sudan Rapprochement](#), by Jérôme Tubiana, March 2011 (in [Arabic](#), in [French](#))