

# African Politics, African Peace

# United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) / European Union Force (EUFOR)

**Short Mission Brief** 

I. Activity Summary: MINURCAT and EUFOR

#### Overview

The United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), active from 2007 through 2010, was challenged from the start by the Chadian government's minimal consent for a UN presence, which precluded the political processes essential to successful peacekeeping and eventually forced the abrupt closure of the mission. Though MINURCAT and the associated European Union Force Chad/CAR (EUFOR Chad/CAR) represent an interesting example of peacekeeping partnerships, their work was limited largely to protection of civilians and security sector training activities, without the ability to address underlying causes of conflict and instability. Regional dynamics and the Chadian government's adept maneuvering hindered the intervention's success in protecting vulnerable populations.

# **Background**

Chad and its political fortunes have been deeply affected by regional actors since its days as a French colony. Since Chad's independence in 1960, France, Sudan, and Libya have provided patronage, arms, support to rebel groups, and peacekeepers. Chad has hosted around 1,000 French troops in N'Djamena since the end of the colonial regime, maintaining one of three permanent French African military bases in Chad's capital city. French and Chadian leaders place a premium on their personal relationships with one another to this day.

Chad was the first country to host a peacekeeping operation from the African Union's precursor, the Organization of African Unity, in response to a civil war between the government of President Goukouni Oueddei and the Northern Armed Forces of former Vice President Hissène Habré. The peacekeeping operation, advocated for by Nigeria, France, and the United States and active only from 1981-1982, attempted unsuccessfully to provide a barrier between the two forces before collapsing beneath its inexperience, weak command structure, and the indifference of the warring parties. [1] Since then, at least one region of the country has been at war at any given time, though the entire country has not been drawn into conflict. [2] Déby emerged from this unstable system to seize power with support from Sudan and Libya, overthrowing his former patron, Habré, in 1990. Following Déby's rise, however, sporadic fighting continued between the central government and a variety of rebel groups both in Chad and in the Central African Republic (CAR). Under Déby's authoritarian rule, elections have never been truly free and fair, [3] despite a plethora of opposition parties. As the International Crisis Group has noted, "Chad has known relative peace but never reconciliation," and political grievances are addressed through violent means. [4]

In the 1980s Chad was the recipient of one of the largest and most sustained French and US military assistance efforts to an African government, provided for its war against Libya. France's Operation Épervier provided special forces and air support to the Chadian operation, and the French military presence has remained ever since.

Both Chad and CAR have seen multiple interventions from France since their independence, especially to engineer or prevent coups.[5] CAR continues to be a safe haven for rebel groups focused on Chad. Conflict in CAR and Chad has also been heavily influenced by instability in Sudan, which has supported rebels in both countries, extending the conflicts. By the early 2000s, Chad was hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees from both Sudan and CAR. More refugees streamed across the border in 2003 when Chad and France supported the coup of François Bozizé, a onetime army chief of staff, in CAR, which Déby viewed as his sphere of influence.[6] Although Déby came to power through the support of Sudan's Bashir, by 2005, Chad and Sudan had descended into a proxy war, each sending mercenaries and rebels toward each other's capital. Sudan used Chadian warlords in its counter-insurgency efforts in Darfur, while Déby's ethnic group, the Zaghawa, supported Darfurian rebels.[7] France and Libya both provided support to Déby to help him remain in power,[8] but their efforts did little to alleviate the worsening humanitarian crisis.

Uninvolved in peacekeeping, the African Union and Libya took the lead in mediating the end to the proxy war, including through the Tripoli Agreement of 8 February 2006. Libya also helped to broker the Sirte Agreement of October 2007 between the government of Chad and rebel groups, but this agreement carried little weight. Sudanese-backed rebels attacked the capital in 2008, their mobile column evading not only Chadian defenses but also EU and French forces. [9] The rebels only failed in their bid to capture the presidency because of their last minute hesitation and internal disagreements as to who should inherit power: Déby declined a French offer of evacuation and hung on by his fingertips. Following this attack, the AU took a more active role in the mediation, as did Gaddafi and President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Republic of Congo. Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade later stepped in to mediate the Chad-Sudan Dakar Agreement, signed on 13 March 2008, which attempted to relations between Chad and Sudan. [10] The agreement envisioned an African force that would police the border between the two countries, but it was not operationalized.

Instead, the Sudanese rebel group the Justice and Equality Movement, supported by Chad and Libya, attacked the Sudanese capital in May 2008. During 2009-10, however, the presidents of Chad and Sudan pulled back from the brink of mutual destabilization, and negotiated a direct bilateral pact and security agreement, without any third party mediation. This was implemented from early 2010, with joint patrols on the border and reciprocal restrictions on one another's rebels. The agreement has held to date.

# **Political Challenges of Mission Start-up**

Direct French, UN, and EU involvement in Chad came in response to a combination of domestic rebel attacks in Chad and the deterioration of the Chad-Sudan relationship, including cross-border attacks from Janjaweed militias from Darfur.[11] Chad had faced growing violence, theft, and rebellion since 2005, with no justice sector institutions capable of responding.[12] In 2007, there were 281,000 refugees in Chad from Sudan and CAR, and another 150,000 internally displaced people.[13] A report by the Secretary-General in February 2007 (S/2007/97, 23 February 2007) proposed a multidimensional force of between 6,000 and 10,900 responsible for protecting civilians, human rights monitoring, and good offices work to improve regional relationships among Chad and Sudan, and between CAR and Sudan. Chad, however, would only consider a civilian presence and fiercely resisted proposals for UN troops over a series of consultations with the Security Council. President Déby was determined to minimize external interference with his internal affairs, and indeed during 2005-06 was active in suspending the agreement with the World Bank on the use of revenues from the Chadian oil sector. His preference was for an EU force that would be an extension of the French military presence in his country, as part of a defense pact against external (i.e. Sudanese) aggression. When that was not forthcoming his preference was for a very limited peacekeeping operation.

France, despite its special military relationship with Chad and its desire to stabilize the situation, was wary of unilateral involvement and sought an EU role to fill in where the UN could not.[14] In June 2007, France proposed that a special EU "bridging force" deploy troops alongside a UN peacekeeping operation that would initially have consist of civilian and police staff, for the purposes of protection of civilians and supporting humanitarian access.[15]France was eager to help to stabilize the region and the geopolitical

objectives of Chad, Europe and Libya were all aligned at the time.[16] France successfully pressured Chad and the EU to compromise in September 2007, which resulted in UN and EU missions deploying to Chad, but with very narrow mandates that excluded any involvement in domestic political affairs.

#### **Establishment of MINURCAT and EUFOR**

Security Council resolution 1778 (25 September 2007) established the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) with the primary goal of creating conditions to allow for the voluntary return of displaced persons and the provision of humanitarian aid. MINURCAT's initial mandate focused on liaising with all parties, including advising the Chadian police to monitor and promote human rights and the rule of law. Resolution 1778 also authorized for one year the EU Force in Chad and the Central African Republic (EUFOR Chad/CAR) under a Chapter VII mandate to monitor the ceasefire between government and rebel forces, some of whom were backed by Sudan, oversee the implementation of the peace agreement, and continue to deter violence in the region. For this reason, operations were focused on eastern Chad along the Sudanese border and northeastern CAR. Notably, neither MINURCAT nor EUFOR included a political mandate or any support for good offices, in line with Chad's wishes.

The EU authorized EUFOR via EU Council Joint Action 2007/677/CFSP (15 October 2007) to support MINURCAT, protect civilians and UN personnel, and facilitate humanitarian aid, especially for displaced persons. The French-dominated EUFOR deployed with 3,000 of the mandated 3,700 personnel. The Irish nominally shared command of the mission, but France's supremacy was evident. [17] While many European countries contributed troops to EUFOR, France contributed many times more troops than other countries, sending 1,770 troops followed far behind by Ireland, which contributed 447. [18] Operational headquarters for the mission were even based in France. The 2007-2008 EUFOR budget was \$98 million.

MINURCAT and EUFOR were complementary missions, with MINURCAT focusing on advisory and humanitarian goals while EUFOR provided a military force. MINURCAT did, however, provide police training, and in 2008 hosted the first UN police personnel, who trained 25 Chadian police to support MINURCAT.[19]

# **Difficult Deployments and Operating Environments, Limited Mandates**

Both MINURCAT and EUFOR faced challenges from the start. MINURCAT was late to deploy, putting strains on EUFOR, and operating in an environment of distrust by the Chadian government. EUFOR proved to a greater burden for France than expected in light of EU reluctance to contribute troops to the mission, a problem exacerbated by a Sudan-backed rebel attack on N'Djamena, in early 2008.[20] Germany and the United Kingdom did not deploy any troops to what they suspected was primarily a vehicle for France's Africa policy.[21] Worse, the military strength of EUFOR was oriented towards protection tasks and cross-border threats but ill-suited to address underlying lawlessness in the country. As the Center on International Cooperation noted in 2009, EUFOR had "neither the mandate, nor the resources to combat the banditry that is at the heart of the insecurity in eastern Chad [...] and was poorly configured to Chad's internal security dysfunctions."[22]

Facing challenges from rebels throughout the MINURCAT mandate, Chad received support from a declaration from the Assembly of the African Union that "strongly condemn[ed]" the rebel attacks and rejected unconstitutional changes in government. [23] The only actionable item was for Gaddafi and Sassou-Nguesso to engage the warring parties in hopes of finding an enduring solution. The President of the Security Council issued a statement soon after, supporting the decision and calling on member states to support Chad, [24] but the mandate remained focused on aiding the displaced population and keeping the peace even though there was no peace to keep. Ignoring the political situation on the ground, EUFOR and MINURCAT continued to operate across a small geographic area while a war continued around them.

Despite an active rebel movement and government forces' abuses in Chad, the attention of the UN was on the protracted conflict in Darfur. The arrival of rebel forces in N'Djamena in February 2008 had not changed the focus of the initial mandate, even though it forced UN civilians to flee the city. [25] The mandates placed blame for the conflict with Sudan, referring to "transborder activities of armed groups along the Sudanese borders with Chad and the Central African Republic." [26] The CAR government asked for a larger force from the UN in CAR and Chad, but to no avail. [27] The mandates, therefore, ignored the proxy war between Chad and Sudan despite rebel attacks on both countries' capital cities.

# **Transfer of EUFOR Duties to MINURCAT**

The Security Council acted on the bridging force concept through resolution 1834 (24 September 2008), which extended MINURCAT's mandate and signaled its intention to authorize a follow-up to EUFOR and transfer of troop responsibilities to MINURCAT. Resolution 1861 (14 January 2009) mandated that MINURCAT assume EUFOR's functions, with a maximum of 5,200 troops, 300 police, and 25 military liaison officers. Its activities were to include training Chad's Détachement integer de sécurité (DIS) security services for camps of internally displaced peoples, liaison with the security sector, and human rights monitoring, with Chapter VII authorization for protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and protection of UN facilities.

EUFOR was officially succeeded by MINURCAT on 15 March 2009, but delays in MINURCAT troop deployments marred the transition. With only two months rather than the typical six for mission transfer, MINURCAT faced difficulty in marshaling troops and equipment. [28] The UN mission had only reached troop levels of 2,411 (46% of authorized levels) by the end of 2009 and was hobbled by shortfalls of engineering units and helicopters, vital for Chad's difficult terrain. [29]

# Withdrawal of Consent and Rapid Drawdown

The proxy war between Sudan and Chad between 2005-2008 had several consequences for President Déby's calculations. First, the arms race was extremely costly to both countries, especially at a time of low oil prices. Second, the reciprocal attacks on one another's capitals had revealed their vulnerabilities, and had reminded Déby of the historical pattern whereby regime change in N'Djamena had arisen from invasion from Sudan. Third, the failure of both EUFOR and the French military to protect him from near-defeat in February 2008 showed dramatically that a peacekeeping force was no guarantee against forcible regime change. The option open was to resume the pre-2003 status quo: a security pact with Sudan. Fortunately, his old friend Omar al Bashir had much the same interests and calculations.

Following bilateral meetings between President Déby and President Bashir, in which they agreed to halt reciprocal destabilization and resume security cooperation, Chad abruptly demanded MINURCAT's withdrawal in a *note verbale* to the UN Security Council on 15 January 2010. Déby had retained a free hand domestically – politically, financially and militarily[30] – and had now secured the necessary external stabilization. This allowed Déby to dismiss the need for MINURCAT, which he criticized as an incomplete deployment with only 3,749 out of 5,500 authorized troops and police.[31]

Faced with MINURCAT's authorization expiring in March 2010, the Security Council sent a Technical Assessment Mission to Chad to discuss Chad's request and negotiate. A flurry of consultations was evident in the embarrassing stop-gap resolutions 1913 (2 March 2010) and 1922 (12 May 2010), which extended MINURCAT's authorization by two months and two weeks, respectively. The Security Council achieved a slight extension for MINURCAT but bowed to Chadian demands in resolution 1923 (25 May 2010), which heavily reduced MINURCAT troops in Chad from 3,300 to 1,900, with initial troop drawdown to be completed by 15 July 2010 and final withdrawal in the span between 15 October 2010 and 31 December 2010. Chad agreed to take greater responsibility for the protection of civilians and the provision of

humanitarian aid to refugees. Even at the time of withdrawal, observers around the world were concerned Chad would not appropriately protect civilians following MINURCAT's departure. [32]

For the remainder of its mandate, MINURCAT focused more on the security sector, especially on training Chad's DIS, and on helping to move refugees further away from the border with Sudan. Repudiated by Déby, MINURCAT had lost its teeth, but Chad still hoped to receive whatever aid it could receive from the international community without scrutiny. When MINURCAT withdrew, the humanitarian situation remained dire. The UN estimated 1.6 million people experienced food insecurity in the region. [33] While MINURCAT helped to train the DIS before its withdrawal, there was no guarantee they would be able or willing to protect civilians following MINURCAT's departure.

# A Troubled Legacy

MINURCAT cost an estimated \$1.39 billion, with 8 total deaths. It was overseen by Special Representatives of the Secretary-General Victor Da Silva Angelo (Portugal) from January 2008 – March 2010 and Youssef Mahmoud (Tunisia) from June 2010 – December 2010. Alex Bellamy and Paul Williams have described MINURCAT as one of a "string of highly vulnerable, relatively weak and under-resourced peace operations made more problematic by their complex mandates and the inter-institutional relationships" between the UN, EU, government, rebels, and regional actors.[34]

Withdrawn precipitously from Chad, MINURCAT was unable to craft a proper exit strategy that could consolidate any gains it had made under its limited mandate. The human rights situation in the country has not improved since MINURCAT's departure: Amnesty International noted a list of violations in 2014, including disappearances; torture and arbitrary detention; attacks on human rights defenders, journalists, and regime opponents; and continued use of child soldiers.[35] Despite this, the country has skillfully positioned itself as a regional anti-terrorism leader, including through battles with Boko Harem as well as sizeable support for the UN operation in Mali; in July 2014, Chad became the base for France's pan-Sahel counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane.[36]

# II. Key Issues, Dilemmas, and Lessons from MINURCAT and EUFOR

# 1. Absence of a Political Mandate

In focusing on humanitarian concerns and protection alone, EUFOR and MINURCAT were unusual in having no political mission. Failure to acknowledge or address the political dimensions of the proxy war between Chad and Sudan, as well as broader conflict drivers, ensured that the missions were never in control of a peace process and had no prospect of a reasonable exit strategy. Ian Johnstone has noted that "when MINURCAT was deployed with the grudging consent of the government, it had no political mandate and therefore no ability to nurture a political process." [37] The result was an intervention that could address only a narrow spectrum of concerns—those determined by the host government. The Secretary-General himself admitted in his final report prior to MINURCAT's closure that there had been differing interpretations of protection by different actors given the absence of a political mandate. [38]

As Arthur Boutellis points out, "heightened tension between Chad and Sudan during the very onset of the EUFOR/MINURCAT mission highlighted the disconnect between the mission's limited protection and humanitarian mandate and the regional political and security dynamics." [39] A political mission or even support for mediators from the UN, the AU, or Arab League would have been appropriate. Instead, the AU and Libya led mediation efforts between not only Sudan and Chad, but also between Chad and rebel forces, and CAR and rebel forces. MINURCAT and EUFOR were completely outside of these negotiations.

#### 2. Negotiating with Host Countries and the Importance of Consent

Even as definitions of consent and self-defense in UN peacekeeping have become more flexible in recent years, the case of Chad underlines the continued power of host countries in determining the nature and efficacy of interventions. A conflict-affected state but not a failed one, Chad shaped the international engagement in its favor. As Johnstone has noted, "the government made clear that it saw no need for UN peacekeepers, cooperated with them only reluctantly and decided to throw them out at the first opportunity." [40] Despite his initial opposition to outside involvement and fears that it would hamper his ability to fight rebels in the east, Déby was able to maneuver such that the missions provided Chad with significant military assets that in fact helped it fight rebel incursions.

The delayed arrival of EUFOR and MINURCAT in response to Chadian reluctance also weakened the missions; Alexandra Novosseloff and Richard Gowan suggest that "the debate over the nature of the mandate and its interpretation continued as both operations were deploying, reinforcing the lack of consensus about the purpose of the multidimensional presence. This undercut any leverage the mission had with the local authorities." [41]

MINURCAT may signal a negative trend in the form of new assertiveness among African leaders when dealing with the UN, even when facing Chapter VII mandates, which should allow the UN to operate freely in difficult conflict-affected environments. Déby's strong military and political position in N'Djamena enabled him to oppose or undermine UN intrusions into this sovereignty, and eventually expel the mission on a timetable that suited his aims, not those of the population the UN was meant to serve.

# 3. Impartiality and Bilateral Interests

Impartiality is a central tenet of UN peacekeeping, if difficult to impossible to achieve in practice. Lacking the ability to engage in mediation or political reconciliation, EUFOR and MINURCAT's structure and mandate undermined their impartiality and, therefore, legitimacy. They were seen as complicit in proxy wars, removing them as possible mediators between Sudan and Chad. Especially with France as a leading troop contributor to EUFOR, the peacekeeping missions were seen to support the regime and to serve as buffer against rebel groups, despite their humanitarian mandate. Low EU interest in a mission driven by France, known for its longstanding African policy interests and its past support for the government of Chad, further added to this impression. Déby's success in ensuring minimal interference in political matters reinforced the perception that France was coming to Déby's aid.

# 4. A Step Backward on Responsibility to Protect

The absence of responsibility to protect (R2P) language in MINURCAT and EUFOR's mandates at a time when R2P language was more and more common in the UN and its peacekeeping mandates is striking. MINURCAT and EUFOR both had clear mandates to protect civilians, but refrained from referring to R2P. Instead, they employed protection of civilians language without admonishing Chad for failing to protect its own citizens. It is unclear if this absence reflects Déby's unwillingness to take responsibility for protection civilians and risk legitimizing international intervention, or if an overstressed UN was unwilling to act on its own responsibility given its existing commitments in the region.

# 5. Coordination Challenges in Peacekeeping Partnerships

Though deploying EUFOR as a bridging mission seemed to offer a solution to the impasse stemming from Chad's aversion to a UN troop presence, peacekeeping partnerships between the UN and regional organizations can prove challenging even with highly able forces like the EU's. Whereas the UN perceived the EU as a component of a UN-led intervention, the Center on International Cooperation has noted that EUFOR considered itself as a "discreet, complementary" force, with both missions failing to approach the government of Chad in a unified fashion and "delays in the finalization of certain technical

agreements."[42] Relationships also frayed during the 2009 transfer of EUFOR duties to MINURCAT, which had continuously failed to deploy on time, leading to private criticism from the EU.[43]

# 6. The Importance of the French Relationship

Beyond Déby's close personal relationship with key French political and military leaders, France sees Chad as falling squarely within its sphere of influence. Since independence, France has sent troops to Chad to support a number of leaders against rebel groups, but just as long as they remained useful. France's support for Déby after he came to power in coup reflected the fall from grace of his former patron, Habré.

As France's concerns about terrorism in the Sahel have grown, its plans to shut down its African bases and reverse its neocolonial policies have been delayed. [44] As mentioned above, today France has yet another peacekeeping force based in N'Djamena, Operation Barkhane, currently deployed against Boko Haram. Choosing Chad as its basis of operations for counter-terror activities throughout the Sahel, France has indicated that instead of EUFOR symbolizing the end of a long error of intervention in Chadian affairs, it augured the beginning of a new period of French influence in Chad and throughout its former colonies. Despite sharing the command of EUFOR, France was continuing a century-long pattern of military action to advance its interests in Chad and its satellite state, CAR.

### III. MINURCAT and EUFOR Literature Review

# Reports/Scholarly Works:

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