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## Victory in Chad

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# Hope for an Africa without Qaddafi?

by Mary Lalevée

The military successes by the Chadian army at the end of March have ended 15 years of Libyan efforts to use Chad as a base for operations of destabilization of all of Central Africa.

According to official Chad sources, "All of northern Chad, except for the Aouzou strip, has been cleaned up. The last remaining localities, Wour, Bardai, and Zouar, are all now held by the Chad national forces." Chadian troops have now advanced right up to the Aouzou strip, a strip of territory along Chad's northern border, occupied since 1973 by Libyan troops, and claimed as part of Libyan territory.

Chadian forces, strongly backed by 9,000 Zairean soldiers, simply routed the Libyan dictator Col. Muammar Qaddafi's troops, killing more than 3,000 Libyan soldiers out of a force estimated at between 12,000 and 14,000 men, well-equipped with vastly superior Soviet-supplied weaponry, including even SAM missiles. This is not only a debacle for Qaddafi, but means a significant shift in the strategic situation in Africa.

Libya's efforts to subvert and destabilize countries like Zaire, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Rwanda, and Burundi, just to mention a few of Qaddafi's targets, have occurred in parallel with increasing economic problems in Africa, and pressure from international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund to submit to stringent "conditionalities."

The French newspaper *Le Matin* commented that the victory of Chad President Hissene Habré and the Chad national armed forces "is an example to the whole continent. . . . The military successes of the Chadians have done more harm to the Libyan regime than the American bombardment of Tripoli. . . . The crushing—by Africans—of an army which has been presented to the Libyans as invincible, will not be without consequences for Qaddafi's peace of mind."

### Parallels to debt fight

Parallels may well be drawn in the fight for a solution of the debt crisis and for economic development against the IMF and similar financial institutions.

Now the next step is the re-conquering of the Aouzou strip, and the unification of the whole country. However, the question of the Aouzou strip is complex, and the Chad government has offered to take the case of Libya's claim to the territory, tenuously based on the agreement between Laval and Mussolini in 1935, to the international court at The Hague. Libya has always refused "to produce one single document" proving its claim, said a Chadian source. Although the Chad government insists that they want a negotiated settlement of that conflict, given Libya's refusal to come to the negotiating table, it seems unlikely that the Chad forces will remain on the edge of the Aouzou strip for long.

Qaddafi has continued bombastic threats against Chad, declaring on March 28, "We fear no one. . . . Libya does not want to colonize Chad, we want neither war nor to change the map of Africa. . . . But if we took up the challenge, decided on war and general mobilization, millions of tanks and hundreds of planes would be able to free all French colonies in Africa. The fight will go on until Goukouni Weddei, Ascheik Ibn Oumar, and their forces return to N'djamena. . . . Any anti-Libyan regime in N'djamena should know that they will not have a peaceful night."

Speaking on American television March 29, Qaddafi announced his intention to join the Warsaw Pact, saying he would authorize the deployment of Soviet missiles along the Libyan coast if the Americans continued their "aggression" against his country. The Soviet response was cool, declaring that no official request from Libya to join the Warsaw Pact had been received in Moscow.

Sudanese Premier Sadeq al Mahdi has declared that all Libyan troops in Sudan's western Darfur province must leave, and he ordered Sudanese forces to surround the Libyan column and escort it to the border.

Now that the Soviets can no longer use Libya as a base for subversion of central Africa, other countries may find themselves targeted: Soviet interest in the strategically important Horn of Africa has never abated, with the control of the Red Sea and the Straits of Bab el-Mandeb at stake, and the Soviets would be very willing to win back Somalia as a Soviet ally, as well as Ethiopia.

The fact that the United States has stalled on providing long-promised economic aid to Somalia means that Moscow does not have to use much charm to attract interest. Somali President Siad Barre accused the United States on March 23 of ignoring Somalia's need to defend itself against Ethiopia. "We had an agreement that the U.S. would provide us with \$20 million a year, but now it has been cut to \$7 million."

A look at a map confirms why the victory in Chad could give new hope to Africa, provided U.S. foreign economic policy changes. The key to North and Central African development is the collaboration of three countries: Egypt, Nigeria, and Algeria. Any commercial relations among these three populous countries, as well as the long-overdue project of a trans-African railroad, would necessarily have to cross through Chad.