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SUBJECT The Situation in Chad

MAURY POVICH: We're going to talk, first of all, about the country of Chad. We have heard about Chad recently. If you were in this town last week, you know that there was a lot of jitters going on. Some people felt that the United States of America, for a moment, in the last couple of weeks, would dispatch military weapons and military people to Chad. Not just those couple of AWACS, but that the garrison would begin.

Well, apparently France has filled the bill there. We'll find out what happened.

Please welcome two people who know a lot about what is going on in Chad, particularly about the outside influence, first from Libya and then from France, which apparently is about to react.

On my left is Alex Rondose, who is the former correspondent for the London-based specialty magazine Western Africa, now director of the recently formed Commission on U.S.-African Relations. It's a project for the Center for Development Study. And also, Cord Meyer, syndicated columnist for Field Newspapers, teaches at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service, and at one time -- I think a member of the CIA at one time.

CORD MEYER: Right.

POVICH: Now then, let's ask why -- why, all of a sudden, should the United States be involved in the affairs of Chad?

MEYER: Well, I think the main reason is the fact that the Libyan leader, Muammar Qaddafi, launched his forces into this

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internecine civil war. I think if it had remained a civil war between the two rival parties, there would have been very little concern, and certainly no inclination to get involved.

POVICH: As I understand it, Cord, it started out as more or less of a tribal war.

MEYER: Well, it started out as a tribal war, but that was settled by the victory of Habre. And he was in charge of the government of Chad. The loser in that tribal war, Goukouni, was taken to southern Libya. Forces from the rest of Africa were transported to southern Libya, and a mercenary army was built there that included Libyan NCOs in charge. And this force, which was partially Chadian but partially from other African tribes and partially Libyan, was then launched, with Qaddafi's approval and support, into the attack that really created the crisis and the problem.

POVICH: And we know, of course, from past experiences that Muammar Qaddafi likes to beat his chest. He's had problems with the Sudan. He's had problems with Egypt.

MEYER: He hasn't had problems with the Sudan. He attempted to overthrow the Sudanese government on a number of occasions, and came pretty close to doing it.

POVICH: Does that mean, just because Muammar Qaddafi, Alex, is interested in Chad, that we should be interested in Chad?

ALEX RONDOSE: Well, this Administration's chosen to make Qaddafi public enemy number one. And he nourishes many prejudices, as it were. And so -- I happen to disagree with the way the Administration's gone about it. I think the Administration jumped in feet-first into an area about which it knows very little. And it didn't even prepare properly, I think, the whole diplomatic configuration that was needed.

POVICH: What should we have done?

RONDOSE: Well, I think, first of all, the evidence, as Cord suggested -- we all know that Libya was behind and backing the forces of Goukouni Oueddei in the North. I happen to think he also -- Goukouni Oueddei does have his own independent force [unintelligible] it's backed a lot by Libya. But I think the United States should, with all the warning it's had, and it's been worried about Chad for a year now, should have spoken to a number of its allies in Africa. We're talking about Egypt, Sudan.

POVICH: Could it have talked to the French, or not?

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RONDOSE: It has been talking to the French. And the interesting thing is that the French have the whole time been very, very reticent.

POVICH: Now, the reason why the French are involved is because Chad was at one time a colony of France. And France had a military presence there until, what, two or three years ago?

RONDOSE: Uh-huh.

POVICH: So it's a -- and the President said yesterday -- it is a sphere of influence in terms of the French.

RONDOSE: Right. But I think there's a slight complication here. There've been changes in France itself. To just suggest that because France has been involved in Chad for 20 years, or whatever, that suddenly they should step back in, it's easy to make that leap. In fact, there's been a lot of -- there've been changes in France domestically. There are changes in French attitudes to how to deal with Africa, which is a very peculiar relationship that France has with that part of the world.

POVICH: It's kind of a withdrawal attitude, isn't it?

RONDOSE: Certainly it amounts to that at the moment. And it has all sorts of implications for other aspects of U.S. policy in Africa. But it is amazing that given, as the President said, this was the French sphere of influence, that two-three weeks after the Libyans had really upped the ante in the war, that the French took so long to get involved, and she sent troops. And even now that they've sent troops into Chad, it is -- this is, effectively, a holding operation. I mean if the idea was to really bang Qaddafi over the head, that hasn't happened yet.

MEYER: Well, I think I would undertake to defend the Administration's policy in this situation. I think Chester Crocker, the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, and his colleagues have done a good job on this one. They followed it very closely, as far as the intelligence was concerned. As soon as they identified the fact that the Libans were involved -- and that information came in by bits and pieces -- they went to the France, as the responsible party, to present the evidence. And they tried to say to Mitterand, the President of France, in effect, "Look, you have a problem here. We are anxious to help you solve it. We can't act for you. You have to act for yourself."

As soon as the French put in 400 tons of equipment to help Habre in the first step, we upped the ante ourselves by supporting that move with \$25 million worth of military equipment.

In effect, what the U.S. Government in this situation has done all along the line is to encourage the French to move, to support them whenever they do move, and they have wished very strongly for the French to have moved more decisively sooner.

POVICH: Even if the French didn't want to move. I understand -- Alex is trying to make the point -- it's not French policy to move back into Africa.

MEYER: No. It's really the result of the fact the Socialist Party in France came to power with a policy that, in effect, ruled out French direct intervention in the Third World. And the Socialist Party, the ideological, doctrinaire wing of the party, was opposed to any action in this case because it would so clearly go against what their ideological position was.

RONDOSE: Well, I think that's certainly the case. In which event, how come this Administration wasn't prepared for the French reticence? It's as though...

POVICH: We should have known what the French...

RONDOSE: I think it should have been predicted. I think there was evidence building up from a long way back that the French -- the French relationship with Chad is, in itself, a very peculiar one. The French have had their fingers burnt there too many times. So there's a broader issue and a very particular one.

POVICH: We don't have too much time left, but let me throw this out. Is it the Administration policy that whenever Qaddafi makes a move, some kind of grandiose move of his or some expansionist move, that we seem to react immediately? He seems to be the burr under the Reagan Administration's saddle.

MEYER: Well, I think he is a very dangerous individual. The country is a small one, but Qaddafi is a big gambler. And he has a great deal of money at his disposal and he has caused a great deal of trouble and can cause a great deal more.

We have not talked about the real reason why both the French and ourselves are acting in this situation.

POVICH: Well, give me the real reason.

MEYER: And that is because the rest of the Francophone, French-allied African states in the area feel that they are very much endangered by Qaddafi's move into Chad, that he can use the adjoining boundaries to overthrow them, to organize dissident tribes against them. This is true of all the adjoining states, whether it be the Niger, the Central African Republic, Cameroons,

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the Sudan. They're all endangered by this move.

POVICH: There is a domino theory?

MEYER: There is definitely -- indeed there is.

RONDOSE: Well, I think that's a false assumption, really. First of all...

MEYER: That's not the way they think.

RONDOSE: I'm sure. But I would argue that...

MEYER: That they're not in danger?

RONDOSE: Chad is -- the issue here is the Administration is saying that Qaddafi wants to control Chad. To control a country like Chad, which is just in complete tatters, requires a hell of a lot of money. Qaddafi right now doesn't have too much money.

POVICH: Well, I hear he's bulging with military hardware.

RONDOSE: Yes. Yeah. And he's paying through the nose for it to the Soviet Union. Okay.

To control Chad is in itself a major task for Qaddafi. He tried that in 1981. His forces, many more than are present now in Chad, were in Chad in 1981. And that whole...

MEYER: Try to tell that to Houphouet-Boigny. Try to tell it to the President...

POVICH: Who is he?

MEYER: He's the head of the Ivory Coast government.

POVICH: Okay.

MEYER: They feel very strongly.

RONDOSE: I'm sure they feel very strongly.

MEYER: They're on the phone all the time to Paris saying, "When are you going to act?"

RONDOSE: Of course. Now we'd better ask another fundamental question about Africa. We're talking about governments that are a little worried about how they stand. I don't mean just the government of Ivory Coast, but a whole lot of

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governments which have not had the right type of policies, and therefore are open to any type of subversion.

And this is where Qaddafi -- Qaddafi doesn't need frontiers to subvert people.

POVICH: There have been recent reports that maybe Qaddafi now wants to tone down the fighting and maybe talk about withdrawing the troops and talk about peace. Do you believe that?

MEYER: Well, I think he's quite capable of going just as far as he can get, and then he's crazy like a fox and he's inclined to pull back a little. I wouldn't be surprised, once the French have moved these paratroopers in -- and I understand there are planes backing them up -- that he's got the message.

RONDOSE: Well, I think Qaddafi pushed as far as he would be allowed to push.

POVICH: It would be like the old Gulf of Sidra mentality, is that you challenge and then you pull back. He doesn't even feel embarrassed by it, apparently.

RONDOSE: No, no. And again, I'm surprised people don't appreciate that. You know, it's the old issue: either you're pregnant or you're not. Now, if the United States and France were really concerned about Qaddafi, why didn't they get stuck in there a lot earlier when there was all the evidence...

MEYER: ...the United States was trying to persuade the French to do. The French should have come in and saved Faya Largeau, in my opinion. But they didn't do it because they moved -- they were in the internal dispute among themselves as to whether they should do it.

POVICH: Very good. A good discussion.

If we have another big day on this, would you come back and talk about it again, because both of you seem to be very knowledgeable about it?

RONDOSE: Oh, gladly.

POVICH: Thank you. And I think that your points are very clear and you do contrast.

Thank you, both, very much.