



## **Union des Forces de Résistance/ Union of Resistance Forces (UFR)**

### **Origins/composition**

Founded on 18 January 2009, the UFR is the latest Khartoum-backed coalition of Chadian armed opposition groups. It is led by Timan Erdimi, a Bideyat and close cousin of President Idriss Déby. Its aim was to replace the Alliance Nationale/National Alliance (AN) led by Mahamat Nouri, who had failed to resolve divisions within the AN, in particular between himself and Erdimi. These divisions were among the main causes of the failure of the joint raid by Nouri and Erdimi's forces on N'Djaména in February 2008. Nevertheless, Khartoum, which had decided to give Mahamat Nouri a second chance as the main coalition leader, took almost a year to make the strategic changes needed to create the UFR. The Sudanese government had previously been more reluctant to support Beri armed opposition groups than other groups, and above all to put Erdimi at the head of a coalition. This position was based on the assumption that if he ever reached power, he would be no more able than Déby to prevent his kin from supporting Darfuri opposition groups. The new strategy seemed to rely on the hope that Erdimi might help convince the Beri community in N'Djaména, which had mobilized to defend the government against Nouri, to change sides. Timan Erdimi and his twin brother Tom, the latter in exile in the United States, have both occupied major positions in the Déby government, in particular as successive chiefs of staff.

The UFR initially comprised eight main Chadian armed opposition groups:

### **1. Rassemblement des forces pour le changement/Rally of the Forces for Change (RFC)**

Timan Erdimi's group, founded in December 2005, is itself a coalition of several Bideyat deserter groups. The principal one was the Socle pour le changement, l'unité et la démocratie/Platform for Change, Unity, and Democracy, established in October 2005. Its leader, Yaya Dillo Djérou, a nephew of the Erdimi brothers, joined the government in November 2007 with some of his troops. Initially known as the Rassemblement des forces démocratiques/Rally of Democratic Forces, the group took the name RFC in February 2007 during a brief alliance with the Ouaddaïan Rassemblement national démocratique populaire/Popular Democratic National Rally. The RFC consisted of approximately 800 men until Timan Erdimi's expulsion from Sudan, after which many started to return to Chad following separate negotiations with their Beri kin in the government. It still has an active nucleus in Wadi Seyra in southern Dar Zaghawa, which has turned to banditry under the command of Gerde Abdallah.

### **2. Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement/Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD)**

Originally, the UFDD was a major Sudanese-supported coalition, founded on 22 October 2006 and led by Mahamat Nouri, a Goran from the Anakazza sub-group. Since the founding of the UFR, Nouri had made it clear that he was loath to be pushed into a subordinate role or replaced by Timan Erdimi. The divide was evident during



and immediately after the battle of Am Dam, where the UFR was defeated by the Chadian army in May 2009. Only one year later, in May 2010, Nouri officially withdrew from the UFR to form his own coalition, the Alliance nationale pour le changement démocratique/National Alliance for Democratic Change.

Some members of the UFDD did not follow him, while others did only to return to the UFR a few days later. Among them, Abakar Tollimi started to demand autonomy from both Nouri and Erdimi, asking for Erdimi's removal as leader of the UFR, and threatening to leave the coalition if he was not ousted. The divide was aggravated in August 2010 after Abdelwahid Aboud Makaye, the UFR's interim president, dismissed Tollimi from his position as general secretary, a decision that Tollimi described as 'illegal'. At the same time, Tahir Wodji, the ex-UFDD chief of staff who had become UFR chief of staff, was also dismissed from his position because he had left the UFR to join troops loyal to Tollimi. Wodji and most of these troops, numbering some 500 combatants with 40 vehicles, joined the Chadian government a few days later. Tollimi, who had already left for France, and then Mali in July 2010, and is not permitted to return to Sudan, remains officially in rebellion, with a few troops loyal to him—namely those who refused to be disarmed by the Sudanese government and escaped to the northern Central African Republic.

Tahir Guinassou, former UFR defence secretary (and Déby's ex-security adviser), had initially followed Nouri before changing his mind, but he was never re-integrated into the UFR and, like Tollimi, remained largely autonomous. After being expelled to Doha in July 2010, Guinassou joined the Chadian government in October, after separate negotiations with Chadian officials in Addis Ababa. A few days later, in November 2010, he was arrested together with Tahir Wodji and other ex-UFDD leaders.

In July 2010, some of the ex-UFDD Goran and Bideyat Borogat troops were hoping to return to Chad and settle in their homeland of the Ennedi Mountains, where they had connections with a small group of Borogat defectors from the Chadian army. But this plan, perilous given the lack of material support from Khartoum—especially fuel—and the recently deployed Chad–Sudan joint patrols at the border, was never carried out.

### **3. Union des forces pour le changement et la démocratie/Union of Forces for Change and Democracy (UFCD)**

This faction was founded in March 2008 by Adouma Hassaballah Djadareb (half-Arab, half-Ouaddaïan), ex-vice president of the UFDD, in an attempt to become autonomous from Mahamat Nouri. Hassaballah had been a member of the Front populaire pour la renaissance nationale/Popular Front for National Rebirth (FPRN), and then of the first Khartoum-backed coalition, the Front uni pour le changement/United Front for Change (FUC) in 2005–06. He took numerous Ouaddaïan combatants with him to join the UFDD in the wake of the failed FUC attack on N'Djaména in 2006. Before being largely disarmed in October 2010 his faction numbered around 1,500 mostly Ouaddaïan combatants, making it the main component of the UFR (and the entire Chadian opposition). Hassaballah is the first vice-president of the group.



**4. UFDD–Fondamentale**

This group is an Arab breakaway faction from the UFDD and was founded in May 2007 by Abdelwahid Aboud Makaye, now the UFR’s second vice-president. After Timan Erdimi and Adouma Hassaballah were expelled to Doha, he became the UFR’s interim president. There have been unconfirmed reports, from both rival non-Arab Chadian rebels and Darfur rebels of the Justice Equality Movement (JEM), of the presence of 300 to 400 Chadian Missirya Arabs from the UFDD-Fondamentale (Makaye’s tribe), together with Missirya Jebel militias (including JEM defectors) from Jebel Mun in West Darfur, settling in the disputed Abyei area at the border between North and South Sudan.

**5. Conseil démocratique révolutionnaire/Revolutionary Democratic Council (CDR)**

One of the oldest Chadian opposition groups and the historic movement of Chadian Arabs, the CDR was founded in 1978 and led by Awlad Rashid Arab Acyl Ahmat Aghbach until his death in 1982, and then by Acheikh Ibn Oumar Saïd (also an Awlad Rashid Arab). Acheikh Ibn Oumar retained the name of the historic movement of Chadian Arabs when he left France, where he was a political refugee, to rejoin the rebellion in Sudan in 2006–07. Soon afterwards he founded the UFDD with Mahamat Nouri. In May 2007, as the head of a reduced CDR, he split with Nouri and returned to France. When the UFR was founded, he left the leadership and the name of the CDR to Albadour Acyl Ahmat Aghbach, son of the late first leader of the movement, and became the UFR’s representative in Europe.

**6. Front pour le salut de la république/Front for the Salvation of the Republic (FSR)**

The Sudanese government did not immediately support the FSR, which was founded in 2007 and led by Ahmat Hassaballah Soubiane, a Chadian Arab from the Rizeigat Mahamid branch and a former minister under Déby as well as Chad’s ambassador to the United States. But on 3 February 2008, the FSR joined UFDD troops to attack Adré and agreed to join Mahamat Nouri’s new coalition, the AN. Soubiane’s participation in the UFR did not last long. Just one week after the foundation of the coalition, he challenged Timan Erdimi’s leadership and withdrew from the movement, although he was not followed by all of his troops. This move allowed him to open direct negotiations with N’Djaména in Libya and to join the government in July 2009.

Chadians were surprised that Soubiane, such a prominent politician, was not immediately rewarded for his support with a government position, not even as part of the new government formed in March 2010. He was eventually granted the (weak) position of presidential adviser. Like to the UFDD–Fondamentale and the CDR, the FSR recruited among Arab communities straddling the Chad–Sudan border. More so than the two other movements, the FSR recruited among Khartoum-backed Arab militias in Darfur known as the ‘janjaweed’, among whom the Mahamid (Soubiane’s tribe, many originating from Chad) are well represented.



**7. Front populaire pour la renaissance nationale/Popular Front for National Rebirth (FPRN)**

Consisting mostly of Ouaddaïan combatants, the FPRN also broke away from the UFR after a few months. Until then, its leader, Adoum Yacoub ‘Kougou’ was commissioner of the armed forces in the UFR.

**8. Union démocratique pour le changement/Democratic Union for Change (UDC)**

The UDC is primarily a political group, led by Abderahman Koulamallah, the son of Ahmed Koulamallah, a Chadian politician since the colonial period and the heir of one of the great families of the Chadian elite, linked to the Baguirmi sultanate around N’Djaména. Ex-director of communications for the Chadian office of the president, Abderahman Koulamallah became the UFR’s spokesperson.

**Areas of activity/capacity**

Originally the UFR, and before it was formed most of the former Chadian armed opposition coalitions and movements that became part of it, were based in West Darfur. After the UFR defeat in Am Dam in May 2009, the Sudanese government and Timan Erdimi decided that the Chadian armed opposition groups that had returned to Sudan would move to North Darfur. They settled around the Ain Siro/Furnung Mountains and in the Abdeshakur area, along the government-controlled road between Kutum and Am Boru. The move appeared to indicate a clear change of strategy by Khartoum as a sign of goodwill towards N’Djaména. On the other hand, Khartoum may also have been hoping to use the UFR against Darfuri opposition groups, including both Sudan Liberation Army dissidents who control the Ain Siro Mountains and JEM, which has been active in north-western Darfur. In the event, the UFR made clear that it would not fight against Darfuri armed groups. Its strategy was to avoid proxy fighting that might make it look like a mercenary force. Its Beri leaders and troops were also unwilling to fight their Sudanese kin in JEM.

By September 2010, the fighters within the UFR were thought to number an estimated 3,000, with 300 vehicles at their disposal. The group thus had fewer than half of the vehicles it had had in May 2009, before its members had started to defect and after having been rearmed by the Sudanese government. Some had been lost during Am Dam and other battles in May, others had been dispersed into Chad, and about 40 were had been confiscated by Khartoum.

In October 2010, the Sudanese authorities disarmed some 2,000 UFR combatants in El Fasher. A small number of fighters refused to be disarmed and then left for the tri-border area between the Central African Republic, Chad, and Sudan to continue fighting. Others stayed in North Darfur where they seem to have turned to banditry.

**Sources of financing/support**

The Sudanese government played an important role in financing and supporting the UFR (with arms, ammunition, cars, fuel, and food), in particular before the group’s failed raid on eastern Chad in May 2009. Support has decreased since then, and especially since the rapprochement between Khartoum and N’Djaména in early 2010.



**Current status**

In October 2007, N'Djaména signed an agreement in Sirte, Libya, with four armed opposition groups, three of which are among the main factions of the UFR: the UFDD (which then included Adouma Hassaballah's faction); the UFDD–Fondamentale; and the RFC. Only the fourth one, the Concorde nationale du Tchad/Chadian National Concord, implemented the agreement and, after separate negotiations, joined the Chadian government. Since then, Chad (and a large part of the international community) has considered the Sirte agreement valid and in need of implementation by the groups that signed it. Meanwhile, these groups have been asking for more inclusive negotiations, including with non-armed opposition groups and civil society. Déby has refused to open up the talks. Since his rapprochement with Khartoum he has also resisted the idea of holding negotiations parallel to those between the Sudanese government and the Darfuri armed opposition groups. This idea initially seemed to be favoured by Khartoum, which was not ready to expel the UFR as Déby had done with JEM. In July 2010, Khartoum ordered the main Chadian armed opposition leaders (including the UFR's president Timan Erdimi) to leave its territory, but in a much softer manner, and their troops remained in Sudan.

The Chadian 'national mediator', Abderahman Moussa, who is in charge of bringing the Chadian armed opposition groups back to the government fold, has repeatedly expressed Chad's official position that these groups must implement the agreement they signed in Sirte and that new negotiations are unnecessary. In September 2010, he returned a small and relatively marginal group of UFR fighters to Chad from the Hadjeray ethnic group (from the Guéra Mountains of central Chad) under the leadership of Mokhtar Nantcho. These had initially been part of the Mouvement pour le salut national du Tchad/National Movement for the Salvation of Chad, the historic Hadjeray rebel movement, which was integrated into the UFCD in 2008. It is likely that N'Djaména will keep trying to divide the remaining rebel factions and leaders in order to negotiate with each separately, knowing that it will be easier to gain support from some—in particular those originating in marginal ethnic groups, as well as the factions who refused to be part of the UFR or split from it.

Some opposition leaders—particularly the Erdimi brothers—will find it difficult to support the government again, however, given the depth of their personal and family struggles with Déby. Without much hope of finding new support and with its remaining troops reduced to a few hundred, cut off from their political leadership, and scattered in remote areas, UFR leaders estimate that the movement has lost 80 per cent of its former capacity.

Updated March 2011