



International Boundary Study

No. 109 – April 30, 1971

**Central African Republic – Democratic Republic of the
Congo (Zaire)
Boundary**

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**The Geographer
Office of the Geographer
Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

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**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC –
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (Kinshasa) BOUNDARY**

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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC – DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (Kinshasa) BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

Except for less than a mile overland, the Central African Republic–Congo (Kinshasa) boundary of approximately 980 miles consists of the thalwegs of rivers. From the Congo (Brazzaville) tripoint at the confluence of the Ubangi and Gouga, the boundary follows the Ubangi for about 379 miles, continues along the Bomu for about 600 miles, and extends in a straight line from the headwaters of the Bomu to the tripoint with Sudan. The Sudan tripoint is located on the Congo–Nile drainage divide at 5° 01' 10" N. and 27° 26' 37" E. Typical of both the Ubangi and Bomu are many islands while the latter river particularly has numerous sharp meanders.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A convention between France and the International Association of the Congo on February 5, 1885, established a boundary between their respective territories in the Congo basin. For the sector north of Stanley Pool on the Congo river, the boundary was as follows:

The centre of Stanley Pool;

The Congo up to a point to be settled above the River Licona–Nkundja [Likouala–Kandeko];

A line to be settled from that point to the 17th degree of longitude east of Greenwich, following as closely as possible the water-parting of the basin of the Licona–Nkundja, which is part of the French Possessions;

The 17th degree of longitude east of Greenwich.

The Berlin Conference of 1884–5 recognized King Leopold II of Belgium as the sovereign head of state for the International Association of the Congo. On July 1, 1885, the entity was renamed the Congo Free State, and in 1908 it was accorded colonial status as the Belgian Congo.

A circular of the Congo Free State on August 1, 1885, delimited its boundary with the French territory somewhat differently than that contained in the convention of February 5th by extending the line northward along the 17th meridian to the 4th parallel and thence eastward along this parallel.

The median line of Stanley Pool;

The Congo from a point to be determined above the River Licona–Nkundja.

A line to be determined from this point to the 17th degree of longitude east of Greenwich until it meets the 4th parallel of north latitude;

The 4th parallel of north latitude until it meets the 30th degree of longitude east of Greenwich.

On April 29, 1887, a protocol was signed by the governments of the Congo Free State and France, which delimited a boundary between their respective territories in the Ubangi area as provided for in Article III of the Convention of February 5, 1885, and also in the Congo Free State Circular of August 1st. Northward from the point to be determined above the Likouala–Kandeko, the Congo Free State granted France possession of its holdings west of the Congo and Ubangi rivers to the 4th parallel north latitude.

"Boundary in the Oubangi [Ubangi] Region"

From its confluence with the Congo the Thalweg of the Oubangi shall form the boundary until its intersection by the 4th parallel of the north latitude.

"Congo Free State not to exercise Political Action on right bank of the Oubangi; nor France on left bank."

The Congo Free State promises the Government of the French Republic not to exercise any political action on the right bank of the Oubangi, to the north of the 4th parallel. The Government of the French Republic promises, on her side, not to exercise any political action on the left bank of the Oubangi to the north of the same parallel, the Thalweg forming in both cases the separation.

A French law of November 30, 1882, provided for a government in the French Congo, and the entity gradually extended its administration northward into previously little explored areas. A considerable penetration of the present state of the Central African Republic was made from the French Congo in 1887. Two years later the French outpost of Bangui was founded on the Ubangi, which served as the point of departure for a number of expeditions to explore the lands drained by the tributaries of the Chad and the Ubangi rivers. The territory of Ubangi–Shari (Oubangi–Chari) was constituted in 1894, and placed under the authority of a French High Commander. Also, in 1894 an agreement between France and the Congo Free State established the present Central African Republic–Congo (Kinshasa) boundary.

On December 29, 1903, a decree placed the colonies of Gabon and Middle Congo (Moyen Congo), the territory of Ubangi–Shari, and the military territory of Chad under the authority of a French commissioner. Two years later Ubangi–Shari and Chad were merged into a single territory. The colony of Ubangi–Shari–Chad was formed in 1906 with Chad under a regional commander at Fort-Lamy subordinate to Ubangi–Shari. The position of the commissioner was raised to that of a governorship in 1908; and by a

decree of January 15, 1910, the name of French Equatorial Africa was given to a federation of the three colonies of Gabon, Middle Congo, and Ubangi–Shari–Chad. In 1914 Chad was detached from the colony of Ubangi–Shari and became a separate territory. Six years later Chad was made the fourth colony of French Equatorial Africa.

Following World War II, Ubangi–Shari became an overseas territory in the French Union. In 1958 Ubangi–Shari elected to join the French Community as an autonomous member and adopted the name of the Central African Republic. After agreements of transfer of power and cooperation were signed in Paris on July 12, 1960, the Central African Republic proclaimed its independence on August 13, 1960.

The Belgian Congo was granted independence on June 30, 1960, as the Republic of the Congo. The name of the state was officially changed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo on August 1, 1964.

III. ALIGNMENT

The alignment of the Central African Republic–Congo (Kinshasa) boundary is determined by the Congo Free State–French agreement of August 14, 1894, which became effective on December 28th of the same year.

Article I. The frontier between the Congo Free State and the colony of French Congo, after following the thalweg of the Oubanghi [the tripoint with Congo (Brazzaville) is situated at the confluence of the Oubanghi (Ubangi) and Gouga] up to the confluence of the Mbomou [Bomu] and the Ouelle (Welle) [Uele], shall be constituted as follows: -- (1) the thalweg of the Mbomou up to its source ^[1] (2) a straight line to the watershed between the Congo and Nile basins. From this point the frontier of the Free State is constituted by the said watershed up to its intersection with longitude 30° East of Greenwich (27°40' E., Paris). ^[2]

The Sudan tripoint on the Congo–Nile drainage was determined to be at 5° 01' 10" N., 27° 26' 37" E. by an exchange of notes between the United Kingdom and France on January 24, 1924. The site was marked by a monument constructed of stones.

¹ Although the sovereignty of the islands in the Ubangi and Bomu might be implied from their locations relative to the thalwegs of the rivers, it should be noted that available information does not indicate the establishment of ownership to any of the numerous islands specifically by treaty. Likewise, seasonal and permanent changes in the course of the thalwegs could complicate the interpretation of territorial claims.

² The continuation of the northern limit of the Congo Free State eastward along the Congo–Nile drainage divide was in accordance with an agreement reached three months previously between the Government of the United Kingdom and King Leopold on May 12, 1894.

APPENDIX

I. Documents

1. Convention between the Government of the French Republic and the International Association of the Congo. Paris, February 5, 1885. Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, 3 vols., 3rd ed., (London: Harrison and Sons, 1909) Vol. 2, pp. 564–5.
2. Circular of the Administrator-General of Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of the Congo, declaring the Neutrality of that State, within its limits as defined by Treaties. Ibid. Vol. 2, pp. 552–3.
3. Protocol defining the Boundaries between the Congo Free State and the French Possessions in the Oubangi Region. Brussels, April 29, 1887. Ibid. Vol. 2, pp. 568–9.
4. Boundary Agreement between France and the Congo Free State, August 14, 1894. Ibid. Vol. 2, pp. 569–70.
5. Notes exchanged between the United Kingdom and France agreeing to the Ratification of the Protocol defining the boundary between French Equatorial Africa and the Anglo–Egyptian Soudan, together with the Protocol, London, January 21, 1924, Treaty Series No. 28 (1924), Command 2221.
6. Jentgen, P., "Les Frontieres du Congo Belge," Institute Royal Colonial Belge, Memoires, Tome XXV, 1952.
7. Jentgen, P., "Notice de la Carte des Frontieres du Congo Belge." Atlas General du Congo (Bruxelles, 1953).

II. Maps

1. Central African Republic: scale 1:200,000; published 1958–67 by Institute Geographique National (Paris), Centre d'Afrique Equatoriale de Brazzaville; sheets Congo (Brazzaville) tripoint to Sudan tripoint: NA-34-XIX (Zinga), NB-34-1 (Bangui), NB-34-VIII (Sibut), NB-34-III (Bianga), NB-34-IV (Mobaye), NB-34-V (Bangassou), NB-34-VI (Rafai), NB-35-VII (Dembia), NB-35-VIII (Zemio), and NB-35-IX-X (Obo-Banbouti).
2. Congo Kinshasa: scale 1:200,000; published 1961–6 by l'Institute Geographique du Congo; sheets Congo (Brazzaville) tripoint to Sudan tripoint: N4/18 (Zongo), N4/19–N5/19 (Bosobolo–Pandou), N4/20 (Molegbe), N4/21 (Banzyville), N4/22 (Yakoma), N4/23 (Sambili), N4/24–N5/24 (Kasambi), N4/25 (Ango), N4/26–N5/26 (Dakwa), and N4/27–N5/27 (Doruma).

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