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CHAPTER 10

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CHAD: REALPOLITIK AND ASPIRATIONAL DEPRIVATION

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KETIL FRED HANSEN

C10.P1 SINCE the formal end of French colonial rule on 11 August 1960, political developments in Chad seem to repeat themselves: Increasing presidential power together with rising political repression leads to a military coup d'état. If the coup is successful, the presidential change creates popular optimism about the future, but the lack of political deliveries leads quickly to disappointment. Successful or not, the coup is followed by the emergence of another insurgent movement, which splits into various factions due to quarrels over leadership positions and regime co-option among the faction leaders. A period of relative peace then follows, before a new "politico-military movement" helped by a foreign power makes another coup attempt. If successful, a new popular optimism follows, and the cycle repeats itself.

C10.P2 Six decades later, this cycle is still operative, with the only difference being that since December 1990 all coup attempts have been unsuccessful. President Idriss Déby Itno has cunningly managed to stay in power using both co-option and coercion of adversaries, as well as foreign diplomacy and proxy warfare. More than in any other country in the region, contemporary Chad has been defined by the personalization of power around Déby; the country's trajectory is intricately linked to his own. This chapter discusses the political survival of President Déby and situates his strategies and tactics to stay in power in the political history of postcolonial Chad.

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SERIAL COUPS AND DÉBY'S RISE TO POWER

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C10.P3 Idriss Déby took power on 1 December 1990, in a coup against his former boss, President Hissène Habré. In June 1982, Déby had been with then-Prime Minister

Habré when the latter ousted his former politico-military collaborator, President Goukouni Oueddeï. Déby subsequently held various important functions within the Chadian National Armed Forces (*Forces armées nationales du Tchad*, FANT), including commander-in-chief in 1984 during “Black September,” the start of the genocide to eliminate the Sahr and Hadjarai elites in southern parts of Chad. After graduating from the prestigious *École de guerre* in Paris in 1987, Déby served as Habré’s defense adviser. Suspected of plotting a coup against Habré on 1 April 1989, Déby and two cousins from his Zaghawa ethnic group, Minister of the Interior Mahamat Itno and army Commander Hassan Djamous, fled N’Djamena. While the latter two were captured, tortured, and killed by Habré’s forces, Déby made it to Sudan, from where he mounted a new rebellion, the *Mouvement patriotique du salut* (MPS). In response, Habré’s notorious political security organ, the *Direction de la documentation et de la sécurité* (DDS), arrested hundreds of elite Zaghawa. Dozens were executed before Déby and his MPS rebels—trained in Sudan, financed by Libya, and helped by France—succeeded in overthrowing the regime (Debos 2016b). When Déby reached the presidential palace in N’Djamena on the morning of Saturday 1 April 1990, Habré had already taken off with millions of dollars, cars, family, and close friends in a transport plane provided by the United States, traveling to his French-negotiated exile in Senegal (Bronner 2014).

C10.P4 In fact, no change in president in Chad has ever been the result of a democratic, inclusive process. Chad’s first president from independence in 1960–1975, François Tombalbaye,¹ was in fact a French creation, officially voted into office by all but twenty of the fewer than seven hundred Chadians with the right to vote in 1960 (Bangoura 2005, 130). Tombalbaye reduced Chad to a one-party state in January 1962 by banning all political parties except his own *Parti progressiste tchadien* (PTT), and then imposed a state of emergency condemning political opponents to life in prison or death following political riots in 1963. These actions quickly made him many political enemies (Bangoura 2005, 135), and he soon created the *Compagnies tchadiennes de sécurité* (CTS), a body outside the presidential guard and the regular army that was used to surveil, control, and repress political adversaries. From 1965 onward, some of these political enemies created rebel groups, with the *Front de Libération Nationale du Tchad*, or FROLINAT, being the most important (Buijtenhuijs 1978).

C10.P5 President Tombalbaye was killed by his own guards in a coup d’état on 3 April 1975. One of his former trusted men, turned enemy, General Félix Malloum, who at the time of the coup had been in prison since 1973 for sedition and an attempted coup, was sworn in as president. Upheavals and armed rivalries between various groups continued under Malloum’s presidency (1975–1979). Two attempted coups, one by a FROLINAT squad in April 1976 and another by soldiers from the northern Bourkou-Ennedi-Tibesti (BET) region in April 1977, were aborted (Nolutshungo 1996, 93). In 1976, FROLINAT split into two main factions. Goukouni Oueddai led one faction with support from Libya, while Hissène Habré, supported by Sudan, established the

Forces armées du Nord (FAN) as the military base for the other faction. In a reconciliation attempt, President Malloum made a fatal decision—creating the new post of prime minister and nominating Habré to it in August 1978. Habré’s power as prime minister quickly became clear. When riots in N’Djamena in February 1979 escalated to civil war, FAN declared loyalty to Prime Minister Habré while the *Forces armées tchadiennes* (FAT), under the command of Colonel Kamougué, supported President Malloum (Dadi 1987, 144). On March 24, President Malloum resigned and fled to Nigeria. A *Gouvernement d’Union nationale de transition* (GUNT), headed by FROLINAT leader Goukouni Oueddei, replaced him. The government, however, never lived up to its name; there was never anything resembling “national unity” in Chad during Goukouni Oueddei’s reign (1979–1982). In fact, various factions of FROLINAT multiplied, dominated by Muslims and northerners; Koulamallah (2014, 130) counts eleven different factions. Disagreements within the southern-based resistance against the GUNT, led by former Colonel Kamougué and elements of FAT, also led to splintering into factions. In 1980, Hissène Habré, at the time minister of defense, abandoned Goukouni Oueddei and the GUNT and fled to Sudan, transforming the FAN into a rebel movement (Brachet and Scheele 2019).

C10.P6 Qaddafi’s dream of a “Great Islamic State of the Sahel” came closer to realization when, in January 1981, President Goukouni Oueddei and Qaddafi announced the goal of bringing about complete unity between Libya and Chad. This announcement, however, quickly prompted French and US support for Habré as he and his men removed Goukouni Oueddei in a coup in June 1982. Still, Qaddafi continued to support Goukouni Oueddei, and GUNT took control of northern Chad in 1983 and held it until 1987. In fact, Goukouni Oueddei, supported by Libya, ran a parallel government in Bardai (Tibesti) until Habré, with French help, managed to regain control of the north in 1987. The area had been a zone of contention since Qaddafi had declared the annexation of the “Aouzou Strip” in 1975 (Debos and Powell 2017, 24–27). In 1989, Habré and Qaddafi agreed to put the border dispute before the International Court of Justice. In February 1994, the case was settled in Chad’s favor, and Qaddafi withdrew his troops soon after the verdict.

C10.P7 Supported militarily with artillery, training, and intelligence by both France and the United States, Habré had the capacity to coerce individuals and entire ethnic groups by which he felt threatened. Some forty thousand people were killed during Habré tenure, many of them tortured to death in his infamous “prison-piscine” in the center of N’Djamena. Habré often mistrusted his collaborators at the slightest sign of political disagreement. In 1984, for example, his popular minister of foreign affairs, Idriss Miskine, a Hadjerai, died suddenly under mysterious circumstances (Brody 2005, 11). The death created tensions and suspicion between the Hadjerai and Habré’s own Goran tribe, and Habré started to intimidate, imprison, torture, and kill Hadjerai en masse. In 1989, after Déby and his Zaghawa cousins abandoned him, Habré established a special death squadron within the DDS intended to eliminate Zaghawa elites, averted only when Déby put an end to his rule.

DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS, DEPRIVED

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C10.P8

One sentence from Déby's inaugural speech transmitted on the national radio on December 4, 1990, soon gained fame among the populace: "*Je ne vous apporte ni or ni argent, mais la liberté*" ("I bring you neither gold nor silver, but rather liberty").² At independence, Chadians were extremely poor monetarily and Chadians with Western higher education were exceptionally rare. In fact, most people were illiterate. The country had no university. Only one Chadian had an advanced degree in law, and only one had graduated from the *École nationale d'administration* (ENA) in France (Buijtenhuis 1978, 84). When Déby seized power forty years later, Chadians were still among the poorest people in the world. Everyone in Chad knew someone who had died in arbitrary detention, been tortured, or just disappeared during Habré's reign (Brody 2017).³ There is good reason to think that "liberty" was what Chadians most fervently desired when Déby seized power.

C10.P9

By promising democracy, releasing political prisoners, allowing new political parties, and increasing freedom of the media during his first year as president, Déby seemed to live up to his original proclamation. However, various elites from different ethnic groups created their own political parties, seemingly more for personal benefit than as an alternative to Déby and his MPS. In fact, Chadians had difficulty in distinguishing any ideological difference between the various political parties, despite their leaders' claims to be social democrats, liberals, or socialists (Comité de Suivi 2013, 49). All parties, including Déby's MPS purported to stand for "development," "justice," and "democracy."

C10.P10

Coming to power in a context of international optimism for democracy economic liberalization, with structural adjustment programs imposed as a condition for financial and diplomatic support, was not easy. The IMF instructed Déby to cut the civil service from twenty-five thousand employees to three thousand, and after Déby had reduced the army from forty-seven thousand to twenty-two thousand troops, France required the demobilization of an additional six and a half thousand former combatants (Nolutshungo 1996). With empty state coffers after twenty-five years of civil war, and a corrupt president fleeing the country with what was left of cash and gold, Déby had no choice but to accept the imposed conditions. A very high unemployment rate, together with a deprived population, made these cuts particularly unpopular, and Déby's good standing among the populace soon vanished.

C10.P11

Eight hundred people, from traditional authorities and administrative delegates to representatives of the thirty-four newly established political parties and civil society, participated in the National Sovereign Conference, which took place from January to April 1993. The disagreements during the conference on everything from language for voting procedures to the meaning of the word "sovereign" suggested that the transition to democratic governance would not be smooth. In addition, the presidential guard massacred some two hundred and fifty persons in the southern regions during the National Conference, engendering rage among many of the participants. Nevertheless,

by the end of the conference on 7 April, a provisional constitution had been adopted and an interim government had been established (Amnesty International 1993).⁴

C10.P12 A decade later, “democracy” still had not delivered according to expectations. There were some one hundred and forty political parties in Chad, yet the majority were closely associated with the ruling MPS, and a “democratic opposition” never managed to seriously challenge the “presidential majority.” While Déby received only 44 percent of votes in the first round in the 1996 presidential election, thus requiring a run-off, in all subsequent presidential elections (2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016) Déby solidified his victory in the first round, winning at least 60 percent of votes.

C10.P13 Chad’s first democratic constitution, adopted in 1996, imposed a two-term limit on the presidency. Déby won the elections in both 1996 and 2001. In June 2005, in the face of loud critiques of a “constitutional coup” from many quarters, Déby used a combination of threats and bribes to parliamentarians to eliminate term limits from the constitution. In October 2005, many troops, including parts of the presidential guard, left Déby and N’Djamena together with high-ranking civil servants. Installing themselves in Darfur and supported by the regime of Sudanese president al-Bashir in Khartoum, they mounted various politico-military movements. For the next four to five years, a proxy war raged as Déby provided diplomatic and military support to the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and other Sudanese insurgents in Darfur, while Khartoum supported and reinforced various Chadian rebel movements. These rebel movements were to launch several attacks and two serious coup attempts, before the January 2010 peace agreement between Chad and Sudan eliminated both their financial support and training grounds.

C10.P14 In March 2006, Sudan-supported Chadian insurgent, the *Rassemblement des forces pour le changement* (RFC), led by Tom and Timane Erdimi, nephews and newly deserted Zaghawa collaborators of Déby, tried to shoot down Déby’s presidential plane. Then, on 13 April 2006, only three weeks before scheduled presidential elections, Mahamat Nour Abdelkerim led his 5,600 “troops,” mostly young Tama civilians who had taken up arms under the banner *Front Uni pour le Changement Démocratique* (FUCD), all the way from Darfur to the outskirts of N’Djamena. The national army was taken by surprise, but with the help of French troops in “Operation Épervier” they managed to regain control, though not before leaving some four hundred casualties. Accusing Khartoum of the attempted coup, Déby called the rebels “Sudanese mercenaries” and immediately broke diplomatic relations with al-Bashir.

C10.P15 Given this failure, however, Khartoum lost hope in Mahamat Nour Abdelkerim, and by the end of the year Nour had reconciled with Déby. Indeed, Déby named him minister of defense in March 2007, although he was then removed in December when his “troops” failed to integrate into the national army.

C10.P16 The crisis led to negotiations with the civilian “democratic opposition” and eventually to the signing of the *Accord du 13 août 2007*, setting out the conditions for further democratic transition in Chad. Negotiations with the major politico-military movements resulted in the *Accord de Syrte*, facilitated by Qaddafi and signed in the presence of

Sudanese President al-Bashir by four major rebel leaders on 25 October 2007. However, neither of these accords was to resolve the crisis.

C10.P17 On 2 February 2008, three of the four signatories of the *Accord de Syrte* attacked N'Djamena. Some three hundred Toyota pickups loaded with roughly three thousand combatants, arms, and ammunition from Darfur entered the capital to popular applause. Easily making their way toward the presidential palace, the rebel leaders paused to discuss who among them should be Chad's next president. General Mahamat Nouri, a Goran, was militarily the strongest, while Timan Erdimi, a Zaghawa, risked the loss of support of his Zaghawa combatants if he gave power to a Goran. As the French military waited for a decision, Erdimi and Nouri failed to reach agreement; the next day France sided with Déby and helped chase the rebels from the capital (Hansen 2013a; Koulamallah 2014).

C10.P18 Some of the rebels negotiated positions within Déby's regime, but others returned to Sudan to prepare for new coups. In the wake of this new failure to remove Déby, Khartoum also lost trust in Nouri, as they two years earlier in Nour, and Timan Erdimi was instead selected to lead a new union of rebels, the *Union des forces de la résistance* (UFR) in January 2009 (Hansen 2011b). A graduate political rapprochement between Déby and al-Bashir, however, led eventually to the signing of a major peace agreement on 15 January 2010, ending Sudanese support for the UFR and leading to the expulsion of Erdimi from Sudan.

C10.P19 In the years that followed Déby has only gained in military strength and international reputation. The army grew to include thirty to forty thousand soldiers, including around fifteen thousand in the presidential guard, the *Direction générale des services de sécurité des institutions de l'État* (DGSSIE), which is better equipped and trained than the rest of the army. The DGSSIE is led by one of the president's sons, Mahamat "Kaka" Idriss Déby Itno, and it consists of the most trusted soldiers, most of them ethnic Zaghawa (Griffin 2016). By 2016 Déby could be characterized by a US Air Force employee as one of the "best performers in countering terrorism and violent extremist organizations in Africa" (Burgess 2016, 316), and both the United States and France expressed confidence in Déby and his ability to maintain regime stability in Chad.

C10.P20 This situation represented a significant shift for Déby. In his first few presidential years, Déby spent relatively small amounts on the military. While Chad's military expenditures were US\$50 million the year Déby took power, they declined steadily every year to reach US\$24 million by 1998. However, the sum spent on military increased tremendously in subsequent years as the regime experienced regular coup attempts, and following the near overthrow of the government in February 2008 it reached a high of US\$640 million in 2009, and has remained consistently high since then (SIPRI 2017).

C10.S3 The Electoral Marketplace: Co-option and Protest

C10.P21 The major opposition parties boycotted the presidential elections in both 2001 and 2006, and heavily criticized the elections for fraud in 2011. Following much debate, the

2016 presidential elections tried to use biometric voter cards that were intended to reduce cheating, but once again Chadians were deprived of their aspirations;⁵ although citizens participated massively in the elections in anticipation of real political change, none of these expectations materialized (Debos 2016a). While the major opposition parties all took part in the elections, and an all-time high of 76 percent of the 6.3 million registered voters participated, Déby won easily in the first round, gaining five times as many votes as his closest adversary, Saleh Kebzabo. Given the power of incumbency, every political opposition leader clearly anticipated that Déby would win; the MPS was in fact the only political party present in all districts in the country.

C10.P22 Why did the political opposition not come together to present a common front long before the 2016 election? It is likely that some leaders within the “democratic opposition” actually preferred Déby to an unknown adversary in order to maintain some stability within the state administration. For others, personal gain played an important role. Many of them lived a good life as opposition frontrunners, taking personal advantage of Déby’s co-option strategies. Saleh Kebzabo, Déby’s main challenger in 2016, for example, lived luxuriously in the center of N’Djamena, and was widely invited abroad as Chad’s leading opposition candidate. In addition, participating in the elections implied accessing public funds. And politicians were not the only ones who saw elections as a profitable endeavor. The total cost of the election, including training of personnel and all materials, was estimated at 47.5 billion CFA (some €72 million). While a French company received the €22 million contract to fabricate biometric voter cards (Debos 2016a), the remaining €50 million left many possibilities for others to benefit economically from the election.

C10.P23 Most Chadians, however, saw little benefit in Déby’s reign and co-option strategies. The sense of deprivation and popular frustration rose as Déby’s regime hardened; violence, corruption, and privatization of power became the norm. In addition, the persistence of the same old men as party leaders, within both the “democratic opposition” and the “presidential majority,” created mistrust in democracy itself. In fact, in 2013, the average age of a political party leader was sixty-four, all were men, and nearly all had been party leaders since the creation of their party (Comité de suivie 2013). Many younger party and civil society activists unable to accede to party leadership criticized the lack of democratic practices even within the “democratic opposition” (Collet 2016).

C10.P24 Political life in N’Djamena has thus come to be characterized less by a Muslim–Christian cleavage or by ideological divides than by a generational divide as student and workers movements together with other (more or less) organized civil society movements have gained strength and popularity. Many of the smaller movements have joined forces in umbrella organizations and gained both Déby’s and international attention. Among the most important is the *Trop C’est Trop!* movement, established in 2014 by nineteen different groups and headed by a woman, Céline Narmadj. Others, led by younger men, were subsequently founded and are very likely to influence political life in Chad. In early 2016, for example, former student leader Kaina Palmer Nadjo established *Iyina* (“we are tired” in Chadian

Arabic) primarily to protest Déby's candidacy in the 2016 elections. Along with *Ça Suffit* ("That's enough"), led by the human rights activist Mahamat Nour Ibedou, *Iyina* organized various peaceful protest activities—"villes mortes" strikes, rallies, Facebook postings, whistle blowing. These movements denounce how Déby's regime dealt with students and universities, women, elections, and public sector jobs. At the same time, they also protest against the "untouchables," the hierarchy of older men within both the political establishment and the opposition. Déby finds these movements so disturbing, provocative, and dangerous that he regularly imprisons their leaders for days or weeks (Eizenga 2018). Social media, however, are quick to react to an international audience, prompting both popular and diplomatic pressure to release prisoners. In response, the Déby regime turns to co-option strategies. In October 2018, for example, first lady Hinda Déby invited *Iyinas* leader Kaina Palmer Nadjo to the presidential palace for discussions. It was rumored that he received an important monetary gift. When the first lady posted a photo of herself together with Palmer on social media *Iyinas* was immediately discredited, and by the end of 2019 had largely disappeared.

POLITICS AS A FAMILY AFFAIR

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C10.P25

Déby's regime today "looks like an old family kingdom as his sons, brothers, and (Hinda) in-laws have been appointed in state positions that give them access to wealth, power and coercion" (Marchal 2016, 4). In the neo-patrimonial governance logic of much of Central Africa, President Déby has a moral duty to pay back family members and others who have supported him. This also secures personal and ethnic loyalty toward him. Some examples of Déby's nominations by presidential decree include his older brother Daoussa Déby as minister of post and telecommunication, brother Saleh Déby Itno as customs director, brother Oumar Déby Itno as director of the DGSSIE security forces, his wife's aunt Haoua Acyl as minister of aviation, his wife's father Mahamat Abderahim Acyl as ambassador to Sudan, his son Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno as chief of the army, his uncle Mahamat Saleh Brahim as governor of Ennedi, brother-in-law Ahmat Khazali Acyl as minister of education, and brother-in-law Ibrahim Bourma Hissein and nephew Mahamat Guihini Guet as directors within the national oil company (see e.g., *Tchadanthropus-Tribune* 2013; Rachid Ismael 2011).

C10.P26

These appointments, however, serve at Déby's pleasure; many relatives appointed to such positions are then shuffled to others, and those who become too powerful or greedy are disgraced. In fact, Déby thus balances the financial, military, and relational power of his kinsfolk and friends to secure his own power, ensuring their incapacity to attempt an internal coup. While adversaries of the Déby regime argue that the Zaghawa clan controls Chad, Nolutshungo rightly reminds us that "[the] Zaghawa are not homogenous" (1996, 251). Andrea Behrends argues that generations of intermarriage and economic interdependence among tribes in northern and eastern Chad have created a

porous ethnic reality and “cultural assimilations to the point of adopting new identities” (Behrends 2007, 100); in postcolonial Chad conflicts “often broke solidarities down to lineage or family level” (Foltz 1995, 17). Thus, explaining fighting over political power in Chad by ethnicity is much too simple (Hansen 2011a; Debos 2016b; Brachet and Scheele 2019).

C10.P27 In fact, family quarrels and fights over prestigious public positions sometimes end with animosity or worse. After close family participated in a coup attempt in 2006 and another one in 2008, Déby had the daughter of his nephew and Zaghawa kinsman Timan Erdimi killed in February 2008 and then sentenced Erdimi himself to death *in absentia* in August 2008 (Hansen 2011b). When Brahim Déby, son of the president, was killed in Paris in 2007, rumors speculated about whether someone in the president’s close family was involved and whether Brahim was planning a coup against his father (Passalet 2009, 109–113). When Saleh Déby Itno grew too greedy as the head of national customs, President Déby sacked and imprisoned his own brother in 2015 (Rainfroy 2015).

C10.P28 Beyond giving public positions to family members, Déby steadily increases the size of his close family. In January 2006, he added his maternal grandfather’s name, Itno, to his own father’s name and became Idriss Déby Itno (IDI), thus trying to make all Itnos in Chad remember their family connection to the president. More importantly in terms of building family ties are Déby’s numerous marriages. When he married Chad’s official first lady, Hinda Acyl (twenty-eight years his junior), on 2 October 2005, he already had numerous wives. He subsequently continued to marry additional wives. For example, in January 2012 he married Sudanese Amina Hilal, daughter of influential former Darfur Janjaweed leader Musa Hilal (Marchal 2016, 16). They divorced after seven months. In 2014, he was said to have had as many as fourteen wives (Dickow 2014b, 72). In August 2015, Déby reportedly married a young woman from his home region of Amdjaress to build relations with the Borgat clan from the Ennedi region. There was lively speculation that he may have done this to strengthen relations with Ali Ordjo Hemchi, head of the *Mouvement d’action pour le changement au Tchad* (MACT) rebel movement.

FOREIGN SUPPORT, REALPOLITIK, AND PROXY WARS

C10.S5

C10.P29 As a relatively unimportant warlord in mid-1989, Idriss Déby would never have managed to oust Habré if it had not been for the support of Libya, Sudan, and France. While Libya delivered cash, weapons, and vehicles, Sudan provided both men and training ground for Déby’s combatants. France’s main contribution was to withhold support from former protégé, Habré, although France also took an active role in Déby’s victory by providing intelligence and a military adviser (Nolutshungo 1996).

C10.S6 Déby and Qaddafi

C10.P30 Qaddafi never supported President Habré (1982–1990), and became a political ally of Déby's in 1989 when Libya supported Déby's rebel movement in Sudan. This political friendship was to last until August 2011 when Chad recognized the new regime claiming power in Libya, only weeks before Qaddafi was killed (Hansen 2013b). Over the two decades, Qaddafi took an active part in Chadian politics, sustaining Déby with arms and heavy military equipment, investments, and development aid. In addition, Qaddafi continually facilitated negotiations between the Chadian regime and various politico-military movements. Sometimes, Qaddafi also directly paid off politico-military adversaries of Déby with cash to calm resistance in Chad.

C10.P31 Both Qaddafi and the Libyan state invested substantially in Chad after Déby took power. Banks, hotels, oil, and telecommunications were the main areas of investment, but they also made more ideological investments such as financing mosques and Islamic learning centers. In addition, Libya provided development aid to Chad and financed projects such as drilling of wells and electrification of villages. Economic cooperation between Chad and Libya was at its peak when the “Arab Spring” uprising against Qaddafi's government broke out in February 2011. Following Qaddafi's death, however, it was difficult to distinguish the Libyan state's investments from the private investments of Qaddafi and his family. This uncertainty has created many opportunities for political elites in N'Djamena to pursue personal economic interests (Hansen 2013b).

C10.S7 Déby and France

C10.P32 Since independence, France has managed its dealings with the various regimes in Chad with unscrupulous realpolitik. Although France had helped Hissène Habré assume power in 1982 and offered Habré vital military support during critical situations in both 1983 (Operation Manta) and 1986 (Operation Épervier), in the changed political context of 1990 François Mitterrand abandoned France's protégé in favor of Déby (Nolutshungo 1996, 308; Powell 2017). Following the end of the Cold War and Mitterrand's new focus on democracy and human rights as announced at the Franco-African summit in La Baule in June 1990, it had become impossible for the French president to maintain support for the authoritarian Habré, known for his excessive human rights abuses. Ironically, Qaddafi—quite maligned in the Western world for his support of African dictators like Idi Amin in Uganda, Jean-Bédél Bokassa in the Central African Republic, and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe—also backed Déby. In September 1989, while Libya openly and France secretly supported Déby's insurgents against Habré, Qaddafi's close family and collaborators were responsible for exploding a French airliner on its way to Paris from N'Djamena. And yet France continued to support, and numerous times save, Qaddafi's ally and friend, President Déby.

C10.P33 This was not the first time France had helped Libya in Chad. In the 1970s, under the reign of French-supported Presidents Tombalbaye (1960–1975) and Malloum (1975–1979), France’s realpolitik supported then-rebel Habré. On 21 April 1974, Habré, at that time a FROLINAT rebel, had kidnapped Françoise Claustre, a French researcher working in northern Chad. France tried actively to find a solution to the situation, including sending a high-ranking French negotiator, Pierre Galopin, to negotiate with Habré. Habré, however, kidnapped Galopin and after more than six months of fruitless discussions with France hanged him on 5 April 1975. In September 1975, French authorities, without the consent of President Malloum, delivered weapons, clothing, and food to Habré with the hope of getting Claustre freed, an offer rejected by Habré (Powell 2013).

C10.P34 Another example is how France and Chad diverged in their stance toward Qaddafi in 2011. France eagerly supported a robust interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which allowed “all necessary measures” to protect civilians under threat of attack by Qaddafi, and was the first country to recognize the rebel leadership in the National Libyan Council as the legitimate representative of the Libyan people on 10 March. Chad, on the contrary, supported Qaddafi actively until 24 August, only abandoning him after Qaddafi had already fled Tripoli. Thus, Chad, more or less secretly, supported Qaddafi’s forces while France, Chad’s military ally, was among the most active bombers of Qaddafi’s forces. The diplomatic tensions between Chad and France produced by this situation lasted almost two years. Yet, in early 2013, Chad joined the French in fighting Islamic insurgents in Mali, and relations adjusted back to close collaboration (Heisbourg 2013).

C10.P35 French–Chadian relations have been full of contradictions and inconsistencies, not only in their dealings with Qaddafi (Marchal 2015, 34). Officially, all French presidents after Mitterrand have proclaimed an end to *Franceafrique*, the close personal form of politics between France and its former African colonies (see e.g., Mouric 1984; Foutoyet 2009). However, no one has managed to end it. At the same time, President Déby has repeatedly proclaimed that Chad is sovereign and does not accept the paternalistic, colonial French attitude (see e.g., Soudan 2017).

C10.P36 Still, Déby knows that, for the time being, he is fully dependent on French support, both military and diplomatic, to stay in power. Thus, both the various French presidents and Déby continue to foster their conventional relationships, only aborted now and then for a few months when either party has to show its own populace that the discourses are consistent and firm or when other realpolitik issues overshadow the relationship.

C10.P37 France was on the point of abandoning Déby in February 2008, as it had done with president Habré in December 1990. In fact, documents exposed in Wikileaks reveal that already in October 2006 President Chirac’s Africa adviser admitted to the US ambassador in Chad that “Déby could perish soon, even very soon,” describing Chad as “a fragile territory disguised as a state.” He also stated that “[its] leadership consists of warlords who project control but do not govern. A Southerner ought to rule Chad.” Yet a year and a half later, realpolitik made France actively support Déby during the February

2008 attempted coup, seeing no better alternative. France's need for a military base to secure its interests in Central Africa and its need for an unrestricted training ground for military exercises made the country overlook Déby's extensive human rights abuses and corruption.

C10.P38 Since 2013, the fight against terror has been central to the French agenda in the Sahel, and this policy has converged with the realpolitik approach to Chad. Beginning in January 2013, when the Chadian army wholeheartedly participated in fighting the Islamist insurgents in Mali, Chad became an important French partner in the war against terror. In February 2020, Chad contributed 1447 troops to MINUSMA, the UN stabilization mission in Mali. France supports the Chadian army with expertise, advice, capacity building, and training. In 2015, a French parliamentary report argued that the French presence in Chad “truly favored the construction of a state and armed forces which are among the most solid in the region” (cited in Powell 2016). Two years later, in February 2017, official France characterized Chad as having a high degree of internal political stability and being an important actor, contributing to collective security in Africa (see France Diplomatie 2017). In addition, the headquarters of the French anti-terror Operation Barkhane, counting some four thousand troops by the end of 2017, is located in N'Djamena.

C10.P39 Confronted with concrete human rights abuses committed in 2017 by Déby's political police, the *Agence nationale de sécurité*, the response of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs clearly indicated that this was not a major concern (see France Diplomatie 2017). As long as France needs a military base in Central Africa, both to secure its own interests and to fight radical Islam, or any other ideological enemy, and as long as the Chadian president is at risk of a coup attempt, whoever is president in either country, France or Chad, are mutually dependent on each other. There is an ambiguous power game between France and Chad; no one can be sure that either country is the more powerful in their complicated relationship.

C10.S8 Chad and the United States

C10.P40 The United States has actively supported the regimes in Chad more or less constantly since 1982, but for various reasons. Under President Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) the United States strongly supported Habré's rebellion against the pro-Qaddafi regime of Goukouni Oueddei (Human Rights Watch 2016; Brody 2017). Following the success of his 1982 coup, Habré's strong anti-USSR discourse spurred the United States to further generous military aid and support, including a monthly payment of 5 million CFA to his notorious *Direction de la DDS* (Human Rights Watch 2016, 41).

C10.P41 During Habré's regime, Chad became a donor darling, especially supported by the United States and France. While in 1980 less than 5 percent of GDP stemmed from development aid, during Habré's reign this increased to levels between 16 and 25 percent (Nolutshungo 1996, 248). President Reagan received Habré in the White House in June 1987, just after a joint French, US, and Chadian military effort drove Libyan forces

from northern Chad, which they had occupied since 1983. In a public speech, Reagan proclaimed that what Chad had achieved was admired by the entire free world and that Chad contributed seriously to regional stability.⁶

C10.P42 Under George W. Bush (2001–2009) the United States was again ready to support Déby in his fight against the regime of al-Bashir in Sudan. Especially from 2005 onward, when Déby openly supported Darfur rebels in their fight against Khartoum, the United States provided substantial military aid and assistance. This support was to continue under Barack Obama (2009–2017) for two main reasons. First, Obama regarded Déby as a trustworthy collaborator in the US-led Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCP) in the Sahel. Secondly, was the US interest in securing its investment in the 1,020 km pipeline from southern Chad to the Gulf of Guinea that had been built by a US-led oil consortium. The United States has a strong vested interest in regime stability in Chad (Pegg 2005; Massey 2009; Hansen 2017).

C10.S9 **Balancing Relations in Africa and the Middle East**

C10.P43 Fourteen African heads of state were present in N'Djamena at Déby's fifth inauguration on 8 August 2016. In 2016, no other African president made more official foreign visits than Déby, reflecting the regional and continental leadership role he came to assume. When Qaddafi took the initiative to establish the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) in 1998, Déby quickly endorsed it and made Chad one of the founding members. Aiming at regional economic integration and heavily sponsored by Qaddafi, membership of CEN-SAD eventually reached twenty-eight states. After Qaddafi was killed in 2011, President Déby organized a CEN-SAD summit in N'Djamena in February 2013 in a bid to assume the leadership—an ultimately fruitless effort in the post-Qaddafi context. From its founding in 2014, Déby also quickly became central to the G5 Sahel initiative, a regional security initiative to coordinate the fight against “radical Islamism,” with European and US support.

C10.P44 Déby's African outreach has paid off. At the UN General Assembly in October 2013, Chad narrowly gained, by a secret ballot vote of 191 to 186, a seat in the Security Council for two years (2014–2015). A year later, the Assembly of the African Union (AU) voted Déby its chairperson for 2016. When Déby left the position at the end of January 2017, his foreign minister, Moussa Faki Mahamat, was elected general secretary of the AU. Despite (or perhaps because of) his bad reputation among some Western governments and publics, Déby and his regime retain broad support among their African peers. Given his ability to manipulate realpolitik considerations with diplomatic performance in managing his relations with powerful states like the United States and France, and as an oil producer and with one of the best equipped armies on the continent, Déby has imposed itself in Africa beyond Chad's economic or demographic weight.

C10.P45 Fostering relations with regimes in the Middle East and Asia has also been central to Déby's efforts to balance and moderate his dependence on the West. He has traveled widely to the Middle East, especially to Riyadh and to Doha to keep close relations with

both the Saudi Royal Family and the Emir of Qatar. In 2016, five thousand of Déby's troops trained in Saudi Arabia. From 2010 to 2016, Qatar considerably increased its interest and investments in Chad. The Qatari Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization funded Islamic educational centers and mosques, while Qatar Charity also funded humanitarian needs and contributed with long-term development aid (*Ghiras Magazine* 2015). Toward the end of 2016, however, relations deteriorated as N'Djamena accused Doha of supporting Chadian rebels training in Libya, eventually ordering the closure of the two countries' respective embassies in August 2017. In February 2018, however, diplomatic ties were restored.

C10.P46 Déby was heavily criticized in the early years of his presidency for seemingly promoting a radical form of Islam. Hassan Hissein Abakar, who Déby named imam of the Great Mosque in N'Djamena in 1990, initially sparked fear both among Christians and moderate Muslims (Dickow 2014a, 46). Hassan Hissein was in the end to serve as a close ally of Déby until his death in January 2018, endorsing Déby's apparent move to promulgate a tolerant religious climate in Chad starting in the late 1990s. The official website of the Chadian presidency notes that both Déby and his wife Hinda are educated in both Qur'anic and secular schools (*écoles laïques*). At the same time, Déby has attempted to increase collaboration with the Middle East, accelerating after 2005 when many of his close family and collaborators abandoned him.

C10.P47 Many of these political enemies themselves sought refuge in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and Déby is certainly afraid that these regimes may again support Chadian rebels, as they did in 2006–2008. Reports in 2016 suggested that several of Déby's longtime opponents had received financial support from Qatar to launch new politico-military movements with the aim of toppling him. In February 2019, Déby's nephew Timan Erdimi and his politico-military movement, UFR, once more attempted a coup. Entering Chad from Libya with some forty pickups filled with men and arms, most probably supported by both General Haftar in Libya and by Qatar, they were only stopped 400 km into the Chadian territory with intensive French bombing. In August 2019, 243 UFR warriors were sentenced to ten to twenty years of prison. In absentia, Timan Erdimi was sentenced to life imprisonment (Hansen forthcoming; International Crisis Group 2019). The incident showed once more that as long as both the United States and France actively support Déby, he remains safe. However, fears linger that someone from his trusted inner circles within the presidential palace might someday manage to assassinate or poison him.

C10.S10 TOWARD A POST-DÉBY FUTURE?

C10.P48 Déby is the elected president of Chad at least until 2021. Given the range of political resources he has amassed, no rebel movement will be strong enough or coordinated enough to oust him by military means alone. While politico-military rebel movements continue to be launched with the stated aim of topping Déby, they tend to be composed of poorly armed young civilian men without an income and with only a slight hope of

glory and a paying job. Judith Scheele has reminded us that, in the case of the Tubu speakers of northern Chad, “images of success are bound up with armed violence rather than education” (Scheele 2014, 37). The leaders of the new rebellion efforts resemble their troops in this respect; the most they can hope for in their efforts is to raise their status within their community, and perhaps to be co-opted into the regime by Déby.

C10.P49

It is true that the nonviolent and more educated younger leaders of the new civil movements attempting to pursue change in Chad by electoral or other means are gaining both in popular support and international attention. But while the most prominent civil society leaders may be impossible to co-opt, Déby nevertheless successfully uses subtle carrots, like international scholarships or permanent jobs within the public sector, to attract less committed dissidents and hence divide the opposition.

C10.P50

One factor totally out of Déby’s control but very important for his political survival is the price of oil. Increasing oil prices will facilitate Déby’s co-option possibilities and allow him to mute dissent by making it possible to provide decent salaries to public servants and other services. Another factor, only partially dependent on Déby but still of prime importance for his political life, is the fate of Islamist inspired insurgents in the Sahel. If Boko Haram, AQIM, and other jihadi movements are crushed or driven from the region, there can be no guarantee of continued US or French interest in maintaining Déby’s dictatorial regime. Cognizance of this fact feeds rumors that Déby’s government is both supporting and fighting the same Islamic insurgents in the Sahel.

C10.P51

A third factor that will shape Chad’s future is Déby’s health. Since November 2013, there have been rumors in Chad that the president suffers from an untreatable cancer, and he is said to use morphine daily for his pain. When his close family applied for and received French citizenship in January 2017, the events sparked further rumors of his imminent death. If this were to happen suddenly, there is no indication that any of his sons or close relatives has the necessary authority to take over as president. Despite speculation that Mahamat “Kaka” Idriss Déby Itno could be his father’s choice for the next president, that scenario is unlikely given his profile and his leadership of the notorious DGSSIE presidential guard. Déby, it seems, has certainly not managed to accomplish what he told the French newspaper *Le Monde* on 5 June 2001: “It remains for me to prepare Chad for a succession” (“*il me reste à préparer le Tchad à l’alternance*”). Despite the fervent desire of so many for a Chad led by a non-military president more respectful of human rights, it is hard to imagine the future of a country so closely defined by its president when he is no longer on the scene. Unfortunately, the sudden death or removal of Déby is most likely to result in an intense power struggle, and one that is at risk of being severely bloody.

NOTES

1. Known as N’Garta Tombalbaye after a name change in 1973.
2. I borrow from Ted Gurr (1970) in suggesting that “aspirational deprivation,” as a form of “relative deprivation,” may be at the root of societal upheaval and political violence.

3. This was also eventually officially confirmed; after years of delay the Extraordinary African Chambers in Dakar convicted Habré of torture, war crimes, and crimes against humanity on 30 May 2016, and sentenced him to life in prison.
4. A 2014 Tele-Tchad report and debate on the National Conference is available on YouTube, under the title: “*Débat sur la conférence nationale de 1993 du 17 janvier sur tol.*”
5. In fact, many of the polling stations lacked equipment to make use of the biometric voter cards and thus had to register voters manually.
6. See the text of Reagan’s speech of 19 June 1987, “Remarks Following Meetings with President Hissène Habre of Chad,” <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34455>

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