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THE UNSTABLE FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL STABILITY IN CHAD

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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THE UNSTABLE FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL STABILITY IN CHAD

This paper has been prepared by

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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ABSTRACT

Chad has emerged as an important counter-terrorism partner in the Lake Chad Basin and the broader Sahel-Sahara region due to its recent political stability and military contribution to security efforts in these troubled zones. However, a closer look at developments in domestic politics, notably the continued and increasingly severe repression of the political opposition and civil society, suggests that this stability may not be built on solid foundations. This paper considers the role Chad has played in the fight against Boko Haram and other forms of regional violent extremism in an effort to take stock of the current threats the Chadian government faces from external actors. It then investigates growing domestic grievances due to an ongoing fiscal crisis, attacks on civil liberties, and a disrupted electoral calendar which risk escalating and destabilising the current government. The paper argues that the mitigation of these diverse and multi-dimensional security threats, particularly at the domestic level, would benefit from an environment that is more supportive of democratic institutions and the rule of law, thus enhancing the country's prospects for stability in the short- and long-term.

Keywords: political stability, security, Chad, Sahel, Boko Haram
JEL Classification: D74, F5, H56, N47

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NOTE TO READERS

This note is published as part of the partnership between SWAC/OECD and the Sahel Research Group of the University of Florida. The collaboration aims to: 1. Reinforce ties between research and policies for sustainable development that can help better anticipate changes within the Sahel and West Africa Region; 2. Promote West African expertise by reinforcing the links with African researchers and research centres through the Sahel Research Group network.

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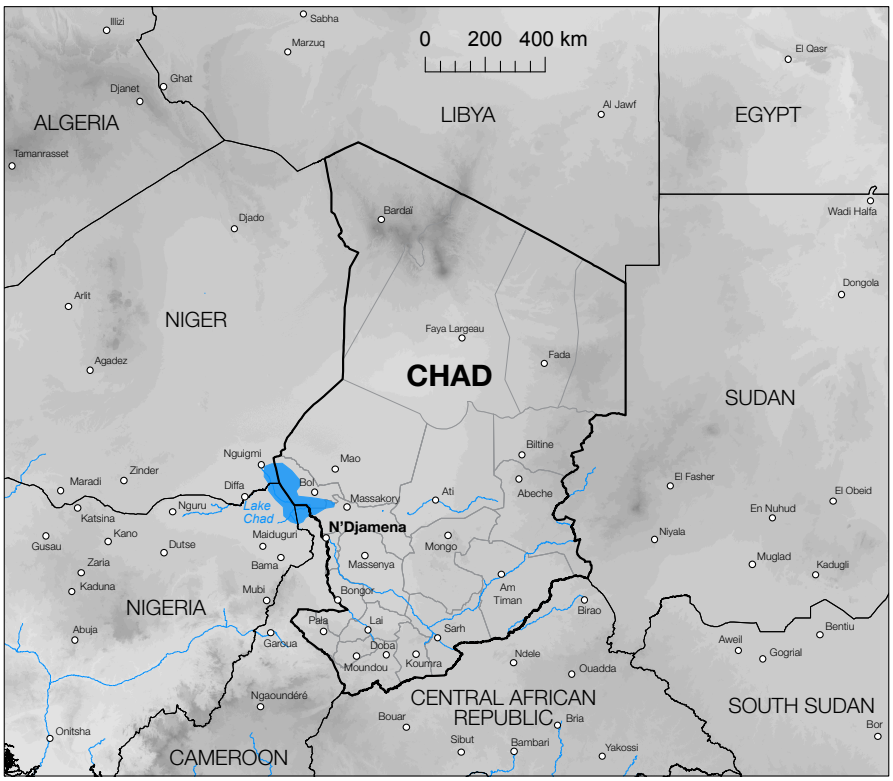
INTRODUCTION

Since late 2012, the Chadian government has successfully positioned itself as an increasingly important partner for security and stability in the Sahel-Sahara region (Map 1). The 2011 conflict in Libya sparked a series of events which precipitated instability throughout North and West Africa due to the displacement of armed combatants, widespread arms trafficking, and shifts in smuggling across the Sahara. These events led to an increasing number of security challenges, particularly in the case of northern Mali from 2012-15, which separatist and extremist groups have since sought to exploit, revealing significant gaps in the capacity of Sahelian states to provide security. The Chadian government, led by President Idriss Déby Itno, has sought to play a stabilising role in Mali and in other conflicts throughout the region. The Chadian military has routinely been recognised as a capable African force in some of the most challenging terrain while fighting alongside troops from France, the United Nations (UN), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Union (AU) in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin (Thurston, 2017). This recognition portrays Chad as a crucial ally, capable of providing much needed legitimate security in this destabilised region.

This paper attempts to offer short-term and long-term outlooks for security and political stability in Chad. It begins by briefly providing an overview of contemporary Chadian politics. It then considers the role Chad has played as a partner for security and counter-terrorism efforts against Boko Haram and other violent extremist actors that threaten to spill over its borders. The paper argues that by providing substantial support to these military interventions, the government helps to reinforce its own immediate stability and ensure continued international support. It finally offers a closer look at recent Chadian political developments — namely, growing domestic grievances provoked by the country's fiscal crisis, the crackdown on civil liberties, and a derailed electoral calendar — that threaten the political stability of the current government. Mitigating these diverse and multi-dimensional threats, particularly at the domestic level, needs to be given greater attention by the international community if the country's prospects for socio-economic growth and political reform are likely to improve in the short and long-term future.

Map 1
Chad and its neighbours



Cartography: Olivier Walther, 2017

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CHADIAN POLITICS AND INSTITUTIONS

In April 2011, Chadian President Idriss Déby Itno won a fourth term in office. Six years earlier, in 2005, a national referendum had eliminated presidential term limits ensuring that he would be able to run for re-election as many times as he wished. Only two months before his 2011 electoral victory, the *Mouvement Patriotique du Salut* (MPS), captured a sizeable majority of the National Assembly in the first legislative elections to be held in nine years. The political opposition accused the MPS of rigging the legislative elections and subsequently boycotted the presidential elections. This led to several national dialogues between the presidential majority parties and the political opposition, resulting in some superficial reforms, which led many to believe that after years of rebellion, political stability and even liberalisation might become possible. However, by the time of Déby's fifth electoral victory in 2016, this tenuous political stability had clearly begun to erode, and the current reforms proposed by the regime tend to suggest a strategy of consolidating authoritarian power rather than an effort at political liberalisation.

Tenuous political stability 2011-16

Following the 2011 presidential elections, it appeared that the government was willing to engage with the political opposition and make certain concessions toward improving the electoral process. These concessions included longstanding points of contention such as the electoral lists and a biometric electoral census, the composition of the electoral commission, *Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante* (CENI) and its regional offices, representation for opposition parties, and the organisation of municipal elections. A 2007 political accord first outlined these issues, but the resurgence of violent rebellion in the late 2000s shifted attention away from political reforms until the peace agreement of 2010. In 2013, leaders of the political parties constituting both the political opposition and presidential majority signed a new political accord addressing many of these same issues.

The 2013 accord outlined a process for conducting and organising a biometric census for the electoral registry, municipal elections in 2014, and legislative elections in 2015. It also established the *Cadre National pour le Dialogue Politique* (CNDP), which gave equal representation to each registered political party in an effort to establish consensus over the administration of the electoral process. However, when consensus could not be achieved in the CNDP, the government postponed the biometric census, then the municipal elections, and finally the legislative elections.

The CENI did not conduct a biometric census until late 2015. While this process updated the electoral lists, the opposition charged that its implementation failed to meet the standards necessary to ensure that elections would be free and fair. The problems with the implementation of a biometric census and the roll out of new voter identification cards caused the government to indefinitely postpone municipal and legislative elections (Freedom House, 2016). Legislative elections remained unscheduled, however, on 31 December 2017, Déby announced that these would be held by the end of 2018. The ad-hoc scheduling of the electoral calendar demonstrates that Chad no longer holds regular elections for national legislative office, a defining feature of democratic rule, government accountability and political legitimacy. The problems in organising legislative and municipal elections, however, did not prevent the organisation of presidential elections in 2016.

Déby's fifth presidential victory

On 10 April 2016, millions of Chadians headed to polling stations to cast their ballots in the fifth presidential election since the country adopted a multi-party electoral system in 1996. The election took place and the opposition candidates participated, despite the administrative failures related to the electoral calendar and the biometric census. After eleven days, the CENI had tabulated the votes and announced the provisional results, which gave Déby a clear majority with over 60% of the vote. The electoral victory, far from surprising to those familiar with Chadian politics, marked continued relative political stability in Chad and underscored the extent to which Déby had consolidated political power.

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However, Déby faced mounting disapproval in public opinion and stronger electoral challenges than ever before during the election. A wave of social protests in response to the February 2016 gang rape of an opposition politician's teenage daughter challenged the sitting president ahead of the election, and served to mobilise many demonstrators demanding political change. A coalition of anti-regime civil society groups modelled after similar movements in Senegal (e.g. *Y'en a Marre)* and Burkina Faso (e.g. *Balai Citoyen*) emerged out of these protests and demanded that Déby step down from power. Chadian authorities responded by arresting four leaders from the most visible groups, *Ça Suffit*, IYINA, and *Trop c'est Trop*, successfully suppressing the movement and intimidating potential voters ahead of the polls (Amnesty International, 2016).

As expected, the election itself was marred by many inconsistencies and irregularities noted by election observers and by the opposition including stuffing ballot boxes, removing ballots cast, and a lack of properly trained staff (Eizenga, 2016). Some in the opposition even declared that the provisional results announced by the CENI could not be accurate based on their own tabulations. During an August 2017 trip to Burkina Faso, the Chadian opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo continued to refer to the election as a *"coup d'État électoral"* (Battiono and Dembele, 2017). This election further emphasised the challenges facing those seeking democratic change in Chad and the obstacles to the current regime's ability to claim political legitimacy nationally.

The Chadian government has received subdued criticism for ongoing political repression of the opposition, student unions, women's groups, and the press. This weak international criticism highlights not only that Déby has successfully consolidated domestic political power in the last decade, but also that the administration in Chad has managed over the last five years to solidify the country's reputation as a crucial Western ally in a sub-region plagued by chronic instability. This is in part due to the emergence of Chad as an invaluable ally in the fight against violent extremism throughout the region.

Repression in the domestic political arena

While Chad actively participated, and continues to engage, in military interventions in and around the Sahelian region, its domestic politics might best be characterised as a "restoration of authoritarian rule" or an embrace of illiberal politics (Buijtenhuijs, 1998). The 2016 presidential elections signalled that the government lacked the intention to implement previously agreed upon liberalising reforms. Prior to the election, the government engaged in increasingly repressive activities targeting the political opposition and civil society-based anti-regime movements.

The government heavily repressed demonstrations in February 2016 resulting in the arrest of dozens of protesters who were also beaten by security forces (Jeune Afrique, 2016). The government then banned scheduled peaceful protests in March and arrested the four civil society leaders who planned the rallies. Authorities arrested another activist on 5 April for organising a peaceful demonstration demanding the release of the first four civil society leaders. The activists were detained for nearly three weeks before receiving a four-month suspended sentence (Amnesty International, 2016). The presidential election took place on 10 April, while these important civil society leaders remained imprisoned.

Since the election, the opposition's claims of widespread electoral fraud have remained unaddressed by the state institutions responsible for administering elections and the ruling party has sought to sideline the opposition from the political process. Chadian authorities have targeted and arrested opposition leaders and the government has banned scheduled opposition meetings (RFI, 2016; RFI, 2017b). The situation for civil society associations also remains challenging. According to Amnesty International (2017), 65 associations have been refused authorisation for peaceful protests and 10 critical websites have been blocked as the government increases the use of repressive laws, arrests human rights activists, and the intelligence service attempts to thwart the work of government critics.

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MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

The recognition received by the Chadian military for its role in regional counter-terrorism operations, notably from the French and Americans, has reinforced the view that Chad represents an effective African force to combat violent extremism and has solidified Chad as the linchpin for stability in the Sahel (Eizenga, 2017). The logic underpinning the importance of Chadian stability for regional stability, however, serves to reinforce the consolidation of authoritarian power, and creates incentives for Chad to continue fighting conflicts elsewhere rather than contributing to domestic political reform.

In particular, two military operations demonstrate the role Chad has played attempting to stabilise the region: the 2012 conflict in northern Mali and the 2015 regional expansion of the conflict against Boko Haram. The Chadian military intervened in both conflicts aiming to prevent the spread of violence and extremist ideology. In both cases, the intervention of the Chadian military changed the trajectory of the conflict, forcing insurgents and rebels to flee from cities or other occupied strongholds. However, by late 2017 both conflicts continued and Chadian forces remained essential to the ongoing peacekeeping, stabilisation and humanitarian efforts.

Intervention in Mali

In early January 2013, some 2 000 Chadian soldiers were deployed across the Sahel-Sahara expanse in northern Mali joining forces with the French and Nigerien militaries with the mission of pushing out jihadist insurgents from their local strongholds (RFI, 2013a). Initially, it appeared that the contribution of Chadian security forces played an essential role to the overall campaign by monitoring jihadist activities in the Tuareg-controlled Kidal region which was inaccessible to Malian and ECOWAS troops.[1] These Chadian troops were later integrated into the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) as military and police forces in Kidal.

Despite the initial success of the military intervention in Mali, the Chadian government remained cautious in statements about its outcome. Leaders in the French military and French government regularly stated that the intervention in Mali was almost complete and victorious, but the *Forces Armées Tchadiennes en Intervention au Mali* (FATIM) maintained that the longest part of the intervention was just beginning. French defense minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, commented that the intervention in Mali was 70% complete in early March 2013, while Chadian Foreign Affairs minister, Moussa Faki Mahamat, noted that the final 30% was likely to last much longer (RFI, 2013b). Similarly, General Mahamat Idriss Déby commented that the situation in Kidal was likely to last a long time before a negotiated settlement would be reached (Ag Emasseye, 2013). By the end of 2017, Chadian armed forces still comprised a significant component of MINUSMA and northern and central Mali were arguably less stable than immediately following the 2013 military intervention.

Chad maintains an incentive to keep its troops in Mali despite the fact that, geographically, the conflict is far removed from Chadian territory, because its role in counter-terrorism efforts confirms the position of the country as a regional power and Western ally. The presence and necessity of Chadian troops in the intervention makes it difficult for France and the United States to criticise the Chadian government on its domestic politics (Journal du Tchad, 2013). However, the recent addition of Chad to the United States travel ban, and American authorities' accusations of corruption between Chadian and Chinese companies have stressed diplomatic relations between the two countries (Stevenson, 2017; Thurston, 2017).

Prior to the current intensification in US-Chadian diplomatic relations, Déby successfully reinforced his military's prowess through negotiations for aid and military support from several Western countries which view the Chadian military as a defense against looming crises in the region (Allen, 2016; Deustche Welle, 2016; Trofimov, 2016; Quist-Arcton, 2017). The protagonists, however, haven't succeeded in developing long-term strategic policies

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aimed at preventing conflict and maintaining political stability. Furthermore, the lack of clear priorities reinforces the need for continued and growing security assistance to Chad without parallel developments in political reform.

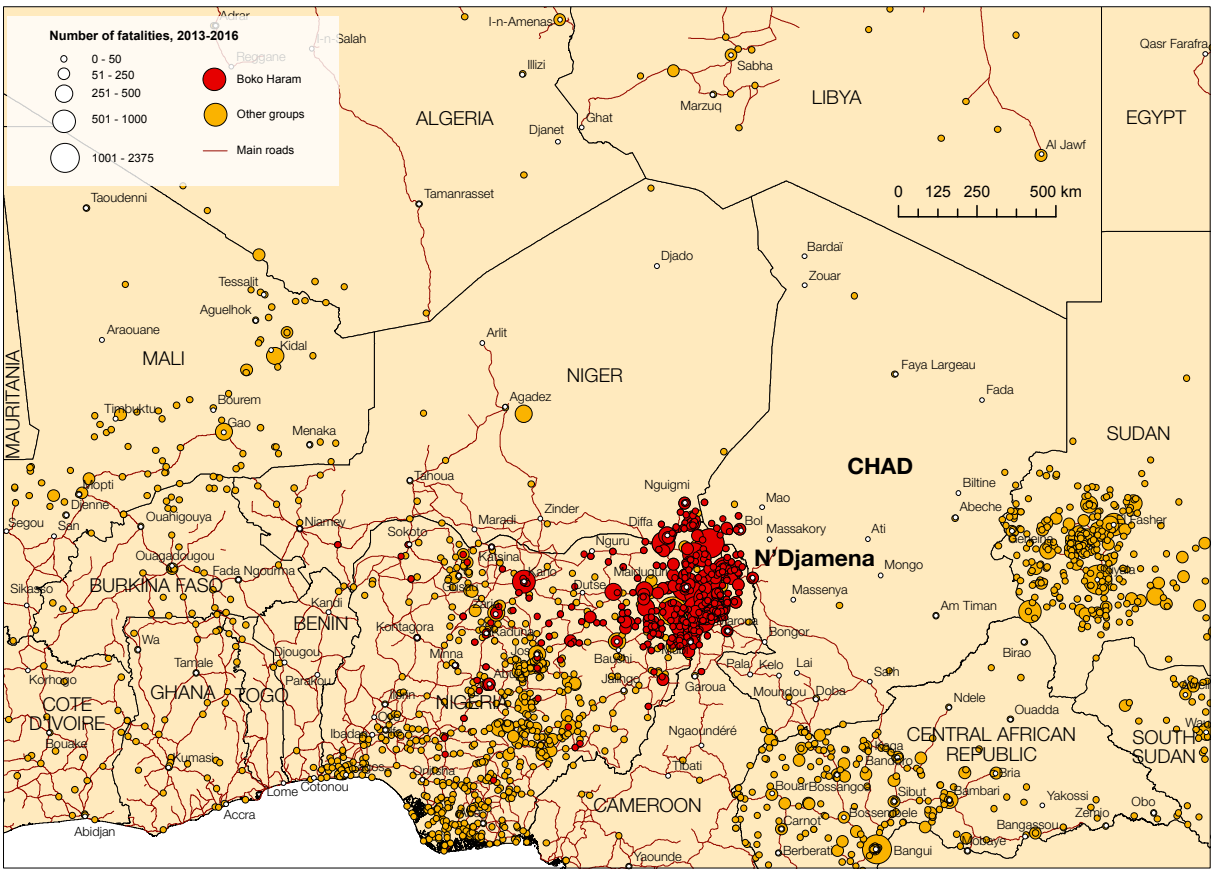
The fight against Boko Haram

Today, the regional role of the Chadian military is perhaps most important in the conflict against Boko Haram. When the group became violent in 2009, the Chadian government viewed it as a Nigerian problem, but inevitably the conflict began to spill over the border. Beginning in 2014, Nigerian refugees began seeking shelter from Boko Haram in Chad's Lac Region, which comprises the Chadian territory around Lake Chad. Boko Haram targeted these communities of people, connected through ethnicity and a long history of economic trade, as it established its so-called 'caliphate' in northeastern Nigeria. The first attack by Boko Haram in Chad took place against Nigerian refugees in the small village of Dubawa (Menner, 2014). Attacks significantly increased in the Lac Region over the course of 2015 resulting in the deaths of hundreds of Chadians (Map 2). In light of the growing instability across the lake in Nigeria, the Chadian military took action to root out Boko Haram from its stronghold in Borno State where Boko Haram had focused a disproportionate number of its attacks (Van Den Hoek, 2017).

The Chadian military deployed 2 500 soldiers after Boko Haram massacred the Nigerian village of Baga, during which some 2 000 people were killed (BBC, 2015). The deployment sent Chadian soldiers around Lake Chad crossing into Niger and Cameroon simultaneously to enter Nigeria as part of a co-ordinated operation to remove Boko Haram from an area roughly the size of Belgium. Boko Haram responded to the deployment of the Chadian military by attacking villages throughout the larger region of the Lake Chad Basin destroying Nigerian, Cameroonian, and Chadian villages resulting in over 28 000 deaths from 2009 to 2016 according to ACLED data (ACLED, 2017) and 2.4 million displaced persons as of March 2017 according to the World Food Programme (WFP, 2017).

Map 2

Fatalities related to Boko Haram and other violent groups around Chad, 2013-16



Source: ACLED, 2017; Cartography: Olivier Walther, 2017

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This widespread insecurity in the Lac Region alone caused the Chadian National Assembly to establish a state of emergency in the region, effectively placing it under military administration in November 2015. Since then the state of emergency has been renewed by the National Assembly several times. Boko Haram's retaliation against Chadian security forces also took place outside of the Lac Region. In June 2015, suicide bombers on motorcycles simultaneously attacked the police headquarters and the national police academy in N'Djamena, killing 37 people and wounding more than 100 others. At least four of the dead were suspected Boko Haram fighters. These co-ordinated suicide bombings were the first of their kind to take place in N'Djamena. The following day, two men tried to detonate suicide bombs outside the central police station but were intercepted and arrested.

These attacks spurred a significant crackdown by security forces in N'Djamena, which implemented several checkpoints throughout the city. However, a police operation investigating a suspected Boko Haram cell in N'Djamena resulted in the death of five police officers and six Boko Haram militants who detonated a suicide bomb upon being discovered. In July 2015, another suicide attack claimed the lives of at least 15 people and wounded over 70 others after an explosion took place near the capital's central market (BBC, 2015b). These deteriorating conditions led the Chadian government to increase its police presence in the capital, ban the burqa, and reinstate the death penalty for terrorist crimes by the end of 2015 (BBC, 2015c).

The Chadian military mission against Boko Haram successfully sent the violent extremist organisation into hiding around the swamps and islands of Lake Chad as well as in the Mandara Mountains between Nigeria and northern Cameroon. It also led to the rejuvenation of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) with its headquarters based in N'Djamena and which co-ordinates military efforts between Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Niger to fight Boko Haram. During 2017, Chadian soldiers continued to play a significant role providing security in the Lake Chad Basin through the MNJTF. The Chadian military also established additional headquarters in Baga Sola to protect refugees in the Lac Region, where a state of emergency, restrictive anti-terror laws and a curfew were established in a bid to restore security for the Chadian region.

Initially, the increased presence of the military resulted in a rise in suicide attacks from Boko Haram militants targeting the newly arrived security forces. Recently, however, attacks on Chadian soil appear to be in decline (Dowd, 2018) as Boko Haram seems to have re-focused its targets on Maiduguri and surrounding towns in northern Nigeria. However, many analysts continue to warn against the presence of Boko Haram fighters around Lake Chad and their potential to provoke further insecurity in Chad as well as in neighbouring countries. This is especially the case due to the rising number of civilian victims in the most recent attacks claimed by Boko Haram.

In October 2017, Chadian troops providing security against Boko Haram in the Diffa region of northeastern Niger were moved to northwestern Chad near the border with southern Libya following reports of increased Chadian rebel activity in that area. Shortly thereafter, on 19 October 2017, three Chadian rebels were arrested in Agadez, Niger, after crossing the Nigerien border with southern Libya. If conflict in southern Libya were to spill over into Chad or Niger, another counter-terrorism front could open up in this already destabilised region.

Chad maintains a vested interest in mitigating the threat of Boko Haram due to the conflict's proximity to Chadian territory and Boko Haram's proven ability to launch attacks in N'Djamena. However, positioning Chad as the linchpin for preventing further insecurity in the region may also enable the regime to pursue authoritarian policies, repressive tactics, and the suppression of political competition, undermining prospects for continued domestic stability.

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DOMESTIC POLITICS AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISIS

By most economic metrics, Chad faces serious challenges to economic development and governance. The country experienced decades of civil conflict, presents a logistical challenge due to its location in the centre of the continent and a general lack of infrastructure, experiences a high level of corruption, and depends heavily on the oil sector for economic growth. In short order, it exemplifies the four poverty traps detailed in Paul Collier's book *The Bottom Billion* (2007). It is routinely ranked in the lowest 5th percentile by several different indices attempting to measure development, governance, and corruption, including: the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance and Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. In recent years, Chad has experienced negative economic growth and economic forecasters predict that its economic and financial outlook is likely to remain unfavourable (N'Kodia and Gbetnkom, 2017).

Economics

The socio-economic climate in Chad eroded dramatically during 2016 due to a budgetary crisis. The fall of global oil prices in 2014 caused consecutive years of negative growth rates and split the country's largest source of revenue in half between 2014 and 2016. Currently, Chadian leaders are calling on the population to consider a future without oil (RFI, 2017a). In conjunction with plummeting oil prices, the government increased public expenditure for the fight against Boko Haram which placed the country in a dire fiscal situation. International economic institutions had promoted structural reforms and economic diversification before the fall in world oil prices, but very little actual reform was undertaken and the country increasingly finds itself in need of budgetary assistance (N'Kodia and Gbetnkom, 2017).

Lacking the necessary funds to support public services and faced with a deficit of roughly USD 550 million (United States dollars), the government of Chad downgraded the national budget multiple times in 2016 (Journal du Tchad, 2016). The government then adopted 16 austerity measures resulting in an increasingly tense socio-economic environment which had already been plagued by strikes, protests, and demonstrations earlier in the year. Political opposition and anti-regime civil society associations organised several protests calling for an inclusive national dialogue to resolve the socio-economic and political crises facing the country. In response, the government employed repressive tactics to stifle these movements.

Budgetary crisis

In addition to challenges from the opposition and civil society following the most recent presidential election, strikes in the public sector have practically shutdown all government services for months at a time due to the budgetary crisis. This crisis laid bare the Chadian government's fiscal dependence on oil and the continued financial challenges faced by one of the world's poorest countries. Unable to pay the salaries and benefits of civil servants and administrators, countrywide strikes began in August 2016. The strikes in public schools and universities risked forcing administrators to declare an *année blanche* for the 2016-17 academic year. The strikes also repeatedly shutdown hospitals and courts around the country. More than a year after the announcement of the austerity measures, negotiations between the government and public sector employees remained at an impasse and strikes resumed again in late 2017.

The current fiscal crisis, perhaps more than any other domestic challenge for the Chadian government, poses a serious threat to political stability. The crisis has resulted in large-scale student protests and strikes led by the unions of Chadian judges, civil servants and retired civil servants. The inability of the government to guarantee the regular payment of salaries and other benefits, much less ensure that the courts, schools, and even public hospitals remain open, weakens the current government's legitimacy and exacerbates socio-political grievances.

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Support for President Déby suffered ahead and immediately following re-election in 2016 and while the regime has so far been successful at silencing voices calling for change, these calls are likely to grow as the ongoing fiscal crisis worsens.

Socio-political crisis and lack of civil liberties

Several movements emerged during the 2016 presidential electoral campaign calling for President Déby to step down from power. Chadian security forces cracked down heavily on civil society in response, arresting the following leaders multiple times before and after the elections: Younous Mahadjir, Secretary General of *Union des Syndicats du Tchad*; Céline Narmadji, spokesperson for the movement *Trop c'est Trop;* Nadjo Kaina, spokesperson for the movement IYINA; and Mahamat Nour Ahmed Ibedou, spokesperson for the movement *Ça Suffit*. The arbitrary detentions of civil society activists became so rampant that Western allies, through their diplomatic representatives in Chad, condemned the government's repressive actions (US Embassy in Chad, 2017). Nevertheless, these condemnations did little to incite actual changes in the government's policies.

Leaders of the political opposition have also been targeted by the government. In August and November of 2016, the political opposition was banned from holding a meeting in protest of the austerity measures (RFI, 2016). Eleven members of the opposition were imprisoned for four weeks on charges of illegally assembling against the government. In June 2017, Laoukein Médard, a presidential candidate in the 2016 contest was dismissed as the mayor of Moundou, Chad's second city and an opposition stronghold. He was subsequently imprisoned on charges of corruption, and despite that an independent inquiry cast doubt on the allegations, Médard remained imprisoned until December when he was finally acquitted of the charges (RFI, 2017c).

Since President Déby's re-election several journalists and critical periodicals have been targeted by the government, waiting, at times, months for trial while being interrogated by authorities. On 30 August, Stéphane Mbaïrabé Ouaye, publication director of *Haut Parleur* newspaper, was arrested, questioned by agents of the Directorate of General Information and charged with "attempted fraud and blackmail." He was tried and acquitted, and released on 22 September. After reporting on illegal arms trafficking between Chad and Syria, another journalist, Juda Allahondoum was arrested in October 2017. Authorities claim he remained in prison for refusing to reveal political sources (Jeune Afrique, 2015; RFI, 2017b). He was released after being acquitted of all charges on 16 November.

These attacks on the media, civil society and opposition leaders exemplify the challenges faced by those seeking freedom of assembly and expression in Chad.

THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR STABILITY IN CHAD

Following the collapse of the Gadhafi regime in Libya, the Sahel-Sahara found itself caught in a cycle of instability that risked spreading throughout the region and beyond. In this context, the Chadian military's continued contributions to maintaining security and stability in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, reinforce the importance of a stable Chadian regime for regional stability. It will continue to be a priority not only for Western security policy, but also for Chad's neighbours. Meanwhile, the domestic political climate in Chad has gradually deteriorated as the government has failed to implement liberalising reforms, and a socio-economic crisis has intensified socio-political grievances throughout the country.

The limits of reform and the international community

Today, political reforms being advanced by the government have not included consultation with the political opposition or civil society, and risk further entrenching the power of the current regime (CSAPR, 2017). Yet the illiberal practices of the Chadian government continue to proceed with little criticism from the international community.

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Indeed, despite these issues, international donor support to the Chadian government has recently surged. According to the government, the ongoing costs of military interventions in Mali and Nigeria coupled with the drop in global oil prices instigated its current socio-economic crisis. The Chadian government called on the international community to pledge funds for the 2017-21 National Development Plan at a September 2017 donor roundtable conference in Paris. Donors pledged roughly USD 20 billion to fund the Plan, exceeding by a factor of three the amount the government had initially hoped to obtain.

The stabilising role of the Chadian military

Ultimately for the international community, the role of the Chadian military as a stabiliser in the region is of crucial importance. The success of FATIM in Mali produced powerful and positive sentiments amongst other African forces as well. Since the Malian intervention, Chad served its first term on the United Nations Security Council, Déby was elected chairperson of the African Union (2016), and the former minister of foreign affairs, Moussa Faki Mahamat, was elected chairperson of the African Union Commission (2017). It is also worth noting that the successor to the French military intervention in Mali, Operation Barkhane, is headquartered in N'Djamena, while a Chadian diplomat, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, leads MINUSMA. Chadian troops also play a central role in the African-led regional counter-terrorism force, the Sahel G5 (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger).

The Sahel G5 force further links Chad to counter-terrorism efforts across the Sahel and potentially opens up new sources of security assistance from the West and elsewhere including France, the United States, the European Union and, recently, Saudi Arabia (Monnier, 2017).

These efforts could offer a convenient exit to the conflict in Mali by providing an African-led force to combat the multidimensional Sahelian conflict. However, the risk of indirectly stirring stronger extremism in the region by further militarising the conflict, characterised by asymmetric warfare, and thus facing difficulty in advancing a long-term resolution, may still be a challenge.

The Sahel G5 reinforces Chad's role in the different intersecting conflicts and provides the Chadian military with a stronger mandate for counter-terrorism in the Sahel. It ensures that Chad maintains a seat at the table whereas other potential African forces, such as the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), would exclude Chad as it belongs to the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

The inevitable problem of succession

This strategic positioning is not a new strategy for Déby or for his western allies. Déby has built a long political career by being the dependable option for stability in Chad and Western governments have continued to support him.

However, as recent events in other countries such as Burkina Faso suggest, without a clear plan for political succession, political stability is far from guaranteed. This creates two opposed incentives for the international community: pressure to set a clear path to political change and the need to maintain, at a minimum, the status quo stability (Eizenga, 2017). Continued international support for the current regime in Chad is essential to its political survival, especially considering the aforementioned ongoing socio-economic crisis. For this reason, the recent pledges to fund the National Development Plan should not come as a surprise, but for those concerned with stability in Chad and its role maintaining stability in the Sahel, several threats still need to be considered.

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When the country inevitably confronts the question of political succession, will the Chadian linchpin hold against wider insecurity and instability in the region much less the country itself? Or are renewed cycles of violence and the end of Chad's most recent "inter-war" period more likely to emerge alongside a battle to take Déby's place (Debos, 2016)? Since independence, power in Chad has only been transferred through violent means and there is little to suggest that this will not repeat itself. A peaceful pathway to succession or a turnover in power remains obscured without the establishment of credible democratic institutions.

The limited role of international leverage

Some have hypothesised that international leverage or the credible threat of international donors to withhold aid may pressure poorer authoritarian regimes to embrace democratic reform (Levitsky and Way, 2010). However, in the case of Chad, the direction of the leverage is more complex, with what could be interpreted as pressure on donor countries to commit funds toward development in exchange for Chad's continued commitments to maintaining stability in the region. Attempts to convince Déby to agree to an electoral calendar for legislative elections following the donor round table and migration meetings in Paris serve as an example. The calls for legislative elections were initially ignored and resulted in little change. Western influence over the process of political reform in Chad is extremely limited and the lack of reform degrades the prospects for long-term stability by eroding the legitimacy and accountability of domestic political institutions deemed to be under Déby's complete control.

Another challenge to waning Western influence in the region is the growing presence of alternative sources of assistance and economic exchange. The growing international assertiveness of Russia and China, and the "resurgent authoritarianism" that some argue this represents, underscores the limits of conditionality for Western donors and security assistance in the region (Diamond et al., 2017). Plattner (2017) warns that the international community is witnessing the "fading allure of liberal democracy" as leading authoritarian regimes around the world offer alternatives to the West's aid conditions. Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes, such as Qatar in Libya and Saudi Arabia in the Sahel, have also demonstrated a desire to influence politics in the region. The increased number of potential actors complicates the situation facing European countries which are struggling to address migration issues and the risks of terrorism.

Consequently, it is difficult to see how under Déby's rule—which appears consolidated at least for the moment—domestic political reform might be pursued. Indeed, current efforts at political reform are aimed at further consolidating power in the executive and ruling party. The regime has pursued these reforms without consulting the political opposition or civil society and this appears unlikely to change in the short-, medium-, or long-term.

The immediate future of stability in the region and in Chad is also far from guaranteed. Without increased support from the international community, and the continued security presence of the Chadian military, the humanitarian crises in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin would certainly worsen. Meanwhile, the socio-economic crisis in Chad risks escalating into a larger political crisis and potential instability. Yet, continued support for the current government only exacerbates longstanding political grievances in the country and will likely lead to the continued deterioration of civil liberties in Chad. Thus, it remains unclear how long the dividends of international support will continue to pay for stability in the country, much less the region.

NOTE

1 In 2013, the Tuareg ethnic separatist movement, *Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad* (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, MNLA), controlled the city and region of Kidal following the defeat of terrorist forces in that area. There is insufficient space to elaborate on the Malian conflict here, but Chadians were allowed by the MNLA to operate in the region without dispute, however the MNLA initially refused to allow the Malian military or ECOWAS-member troops to operate in Kidal.

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