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Chad

The legacy of Hissène Habré in Chad

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The former dictator of Chad (1982-1990) died of Covid on 24 August. Unlike his successor Idriss Déby, who was killed last April and whose funeral was held with all the Franco-African pomp and circumstance imaginable, Hissène Habré left without any fanfare, trumpets, roses on his doorstep or ministerial tributes.

And for good reason! Hissène Habré had been in prison since 2015, sentenced to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity by a court specially created by the African Union for the occasion. A judicial sanction that had nothing to do with any French diplomatic pressure, though never stingy with lessons on human rights, nor with any moral concern of the African Union, that syndicate of dictators: it owed everything to the energy of the victims' associations that have fought relentlessly for years against the impunity organized with large bribes to Senegalese politicians and journalists.

A huge open-air hospital

Unfortunately, in order to avoid too much unpacking, the trial focused on Habré alone, leaving in the shadows the system he had built and bequeathed to the Déby family (father and son). Yet there was no lack of material. Hissène Habré's short dictatorship far exceeded that of his successor in ferocity. For eight years, the country was transformed into an immense open-air morgue, swarming with mass graves, prisons where all kinds of torture were practised, where people were killed with impunity, in a deliberately organized concentration camp: a single party, a single women's organisation, a single youth organization, all framed by a police system built on the model of the continent's most hideous dictatorships, such as that of Mobutu. All dissent was banned and the ban on strikes was even written into the constitution. This despicable regime justified its existence by a crude state lie according to which the Libya of the dictator Gaddafi, an underdeveloped country, also dominated by the imperialist powers despite its petrodollars, simply wanted to "colonize", "annex" or more trivially, "eat" Chad. No less than that!

From Habré to Déby

It was precisely in the name of the anti-Gaddafi struggle that France and the United States supported and armed the Habré regime, deploying (already) troops in the north of the country [\[1\]](#) and complacently turning a blind eye to the ethnic massacres [\[2\]](#), the violence, the corruption and the embezzlement of public funds by those close to the government, while the popular masses were being bled dry by the increasing contributions to the "war effort".

On 1 December 1990, the dictator finally had to flee his capital (after having raided the treasury and the coffers of public enterprises) in the face of the advance of the troops of Idriss Déby Ito, his former lieutenant. This episode was closer to a palace revolution than to a radical break with the deposed regime. The French DGSE reproached Habré for being too soft on the US ally and pushed Déby, who was then in a state of crisis, to revolt! For the rest, nothing had changed: from the generals to the prison guards, the ministers, the deputies, the prefects, the judges, the directors-general and other torturers, the entire Habré system remained in place. It is true that some formal changes had to be conceded to the times, such as the introduction of a multi-party system or the right to strike, but for the rest, the Chad of the Débys remains in the same vein as Habré: assassinations, ethnicism, regionalism, nepotism, clientelism, shameless exploitation of human and natural resources for the benefit of a minority of parasites, plundering of public funds, and nauseating religious rigorism! All this with the blessing of French imperialism.

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[1] Operation Épervier in northern Chad in 1986, which was extended and replaced by Operation Barkhane in 2014.

[2] Notably the “Black September” massacres in southern Chad in 1984 led by Idriss Déby, then those against the Adjaraïs, in 1987, and finally in 1989 against the Zakhawas, Déby's ethnic group, from which a significant part of the armed forces were recruited. Déby fled to Sudan and returned a few months later with his arms in his hands.