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## From Operation Serval to Barkhane

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### Understanding France's Increased Involvement in Africa in the Context of *Françafrique* and Post-colonialism

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François Hollande did not enter office amid expectations that he would become a foreign policy president. His 2012 presidential campaign carefully focused on domestic issues. Much like Nicolas Sarkozy and many of his predecessors, Hollande had declared, "I will break away from *Françafrique* by proposing a relationship based on equality, trust, and solidarity."<sup>1</sup> After his election on May 6, 2012, Hollande took steps to fulfill this promise. He became the first president of the Fifth Republic not to have an "Africa cell"<sup>2</sup> and appointed as his Africa adviser H el ene Le Gal, a diplomat with previous experience in East Africa and far removed from the old networks of France's former colonies.

Fast forward to January 2013. Four thousand French troops were deployed to Mali as part of Operation Serval, following the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2085 in December 2012 and an official request from the Malian interim government for French assistance.<sup>3</sup> That

same year, Hollande sent French troops to the Central African Republic (CAR) to curb ethno-religious warfare. During a visit to three African nations in the summer of 2014, the French president announced Operation Barkhane, a reorganization of troops in the region into a counter-terrorism force of 3,000 soldiers.

In light of this, what is one to make of Hollande's promise to break with tradition concerning France's African policy? To what extent has he actively pursued the fulfillment of this promise, and does continued French involvement in Africa constitute success or failure in this regard? France has a complex relationship with Africa, and these ties cannot be easily cut. This paper does not seek to provide a critique of President Hollande's policy toward France's former African colonies. Rather, it uses the current president's decisions and behavior to explain why France will not be able to distance itself from its former colonies anytime soon.

It is first necessary to outline a brief history of France's involvement in Africa, with an emphasis on the exclusivity of France's relationship with its former colonies and the period of "decolonization." Interpretations of the term *Françafrique* (a French word used to describe the special relationship between France and Africa) will be assessed, with particular attention paid to its neocolonial connotations, as well as an assessment of its utility and relevance as a tool of analysis. With this in mind, an examination of the French intervention in Mali will follow, with a focus on the *Françafrique* debate that has surrounded the conflict. Does the French intervention in Mali constitute change or continuity in terms of France's colonial past? Why has this intervention, unlike others, been received with such popular support in France and Mali alike? The recent announcement of Operation Barkhane has also raised many questions concerning France's involvement in Africa. This paper

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<sup>1</sup> "Engagement 58," *Parti Socialiste*, February 2, 2012, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/articles/engagement-58>.

<sup>2</sup> Founded during the Charles de Gaulle administration, this is a location where the President and his advisors take decisions on military support for African countries or for the ruling governments.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, "Security Council Authorizes Deployment of African-Led International Support Mission in Mali for Initial Year-Long Period Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," *UN News*

will analyze different interpretations of this operation, while highlighting a fundamental aspect of the relationship between France and her former colonies: debt. In assessing Hollande's decisions on African policy since his election in 2012, this paper examines France's special relationship with its former colonies and explores the reasons why it continues to be difficult for France to break away from a *Françafrique*-style relationship with its colonies.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF FRANCE IN AFRICA

Historically, France has deep economic and political relations with Africa that date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. A distinction can be made between the First colonial empire, which had been mostly lost by 1814, and the Second colonial empire, whose beginning and end are marked by the takeover and independence of Algeria in 1830 and 1862, respectively. This division is made because by 1814 France had lost most of the colonies gained in earlier years. The Berlin Conference of 1884 marked the beginning of organized conquest of the region, and aimed at regulating European colonization and trade in Africa. The federation of French West Africa (*Afrique occidentale française*) was established in 1904, and soon after in 1910, the federation of French Equatorial Africa (*Afrique équatoriale française*) was created. These federations grouped a number of French colonies together under the same authority in an effort to coordinate French colonization on the African continent. Countries today that were affected by this re-organization include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

It is important to note that France's involvement with its colonies was very different from other European powers' involvement in Africa. Britain's colonial policy was primarily based on economic exploitation of its colonies, but France had a distinct mission. Metropolitan France

additionally pursued a cultural and political assimilation policy that ignored regional cultures. This was done in a bid to enhance France's international influence by extending to Africa the French values of human rights. This is the defining notion of France's unique relationship with its colonies: "The British saw its colonies as foreign lands, the French saw them as a part of France, therefore France imposed its culture on Africa."<sup>4</sup> This distinction still lingers today, and it adds a layer of complexity to the relationship between France and her former African colonies.

The Brazzaville Conference of 1944 marked a pivotal point in this relationship. Held in the capital of French Equatorial Africa, the conference assembled many prominent African leaders to discuss the revision of France's relationship with its colonies. Many view this erroneously as the beginning of decolonization, when the reality is that, for Charles de Gaulle and other leading officials, the "aim of the conference was, on the contrary, to consolidate the colonial system definitively by renovating it."<sup>5</sup> Even at this point, however, the idea of independence for African states was rejected among the French. As De Gaulle stated, "The aims of France's civilizing mission preclude any thought of autonomy or any possibility of development outside the French empire. Self-government must be rejected—even in the more distant future."<sup>6</sup>

Yet, from the 1950s to the 1970s, independence became a reality for many French colonies. Many of these independences were achieved around the same time as each other and without

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<sup>4</sup> Abdurrahim Siradag, "Understanding French Foreign and Security Policy towards Africa: Pragmatism or Altruism", *Afro Eurasian Studies*, 3, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 100.

<sup>5</sup> Yves Person, "French West Africa and Decolonization," in *The Transfer of Power in Africa: Decolonization, 1940-1960*, ed. Prosser Gifford and Louis William Roger (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 144.

<sup>6</sup> Donald A. Low, *Britain and Indian Nationalism: The Imprint of Ambiguity 1929-1942*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 16.

considerable violence (with the exception of Cameroon). As such, France has continued to maintain its economic and political relations with its former colonies. Importantly, France has a special strategic security partnership with the African countries. At the time of independence, the French government created African national armies that would serve as branches of the French army overseas.<sup>7</sup> It was in this context that a number of bilateral security agreements were signed with each newly independent state: between 1960 and 1993, two-dozen agreements were signed between France and most of her former colonies.<sup>8</sup> France has intervened militarily in Africa more than 50 times since 1960.<sup>9</sup>

Two of these interventions, Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane, require further investigation. Serval refers to a 2013 operation in which France intervened in Mali following the country's request for assistance in the ousting of Islamic militants. Barkhane is France's latest military endeavor in Africa, another counter-terrorist operation stretching from Mauritania to Chad that aims at limiting the mobility of jihadists in the region. The particularities of French colonial history in Central and West Africa lay the foundation for a unique relationship between France and its former African colonies. This helps explain why France still has such a connection to Africa, while other former colonial powers do not.

## FRANÇAFRIQUE

Today this relationship is often referred to in France as *la Françafrique*. The term is not a new one, however, and its meaning has changed over time along with the shifting relationship between France and

her former African colonies. It was in 1963 that Felix Houphouët-Boigny, former president of Cote d'Ivoire, coined the term *Françafrique*. Initially Houphouët-Boigny's notion of *Françafrique* was positive, and was used "to describe the common destiny and promote the special relationship between France and Africa that he supported and wanted to maintain."<sup>10</sup> But today the term has negative connotations, often used to denounce France's alleged neocolonial relationship with its former colonies. Andrew McKillop has described the notion of *Françafrique* as "a colonial hangover."<sup>11</sup> François Xavier Vershave, founder of the NGO *Survie*, used the term *Françafrique* to describe "the unsullied tip of the iceberg [of Franco-African relations]: France as the best friend of Africa, development and democracy."<sup>12</sup> What lies beneath is a complicated connection that many believe signifies France's enduring domination of its former colonies.

In 2012, Hollande promised to move away from *Françafrique* behavior. During his first visit to the continent, in Senegal, Hollande declared, "The time of *Françafrique* is over: there is France, there is Africa, and there is the partnership between France and Africa, with relations based on respect, brightness, and solidarity."<sup>13</sup> Yet just three months later, he sent French troops to Mali, after having expressed that he would not send French troops on the

<sup>7</sup> Guy Martin, "Francophone Africa in the Context of Franco-African Relations," in *Africa in World Politics*, eds. John W. Haberson and Donald Rothchild (Boulder, CO: Westview 1995), 178.

<sup>8</sup> Xavier Renou, "A New French Policy For Africa?" *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 20, no. 1, (2002): 10.

<sup>9</sup> Siradag, "Understanding French Foreign and Security Policy towards Africa", 100.

<sup>10</sup> Tony Chafer, "Hollande and Africa Policy," *Modern Contemporary France*, 22, no. 4 (2014): 529.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew McKillop, "What's Really Behind France's Sudden Scramble to Save Central Africa", *21<sup>st</sup> Century Wire*, December 6, 2013, accessed on Nov. 30, 2014, <http://21stcenturywire.com/2013/12/06/whats-really-behind-frances-sudden-scramble-to-save-central-africa/>

<sup>12</sup> Francois X. Vershave, "Defining Francafrigue", *Survie*, February 18, 2006, accessed Nov. 27, 2014, <http://survie.org/francafrigue/article/defining-francafrigue-by-François>

<sup>13</sup> "François Hollande à Dakar: 'Le temps de la Françafrique est révolu,'" *Le Monde*, October 12, 2012, accessed November 27, 2014, [http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2012/10/12/hollande-exprime-sa-grande-confiance-dans-le-senegal-et-l-afrique\\_1774886\\_3212.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2012/10/12/hollande-exprime-sa-grande-confiance-dans-le-senegal-et-l-afrique_1774886_3212.html)

ground,<sup>14</sup> but would instead support an African-led force to deal with the crisis. The French intervention in Mali is highly complex in a number of ways, evident through the multitude of interpretations concerning French involvement in the conflict.

## UNDERSTANDING OPERATION SERVAL

Operation Serval was a successful effort to push Islamic militants out of Mali. It was President Hollande's first intervention in the region, spanning a total of 19 months, from January 2013 to July 2014. On January 11, 2013, after new clashes between the army and insurgent groups, President Hollande announced the launching of a military operation: Serval. Just a day later, hundreds of French troops were involved in the military operation in Mali. The French army, navy, and air force were all deployed to assist in the operation. It was led by approximately 4,000 French troops supported by 2,000 Chadians and implemented in coordination with the Malian army. In fact, assistance from France was specifically requested from the Malian government. The operation was considered a success. Three of the five Islamic militant leaders were killed and the militant groups were driven from cities and later from the mountains of Adrar.<sup>15</sup>

President Hollande celebrated this triumph on a visit to the capital of Bamako where, clearly impressed by the strength of the popular welcome in the streets, he claimed, "I have just, without a doubt, experienced the most important day of my

political life."<sup>16</sup> The intervention received a huge amount of popular support from Malians, and France's action "has very seldom been accused of neocolonialism internationally."<sup>17</sup> This may be in part due to historical reasons and the fact that Mali doesn't quite fall under the category of the French *pré carré*, a term used to describe France's sphere of influence in Africa: the country assumed one of the more radical positions towards Paris, unilaterally declaring independence in 1960.

This is why Tony Chafer, professor of French Area studies at Portsmouth University, argues, "the presentation of France's military intervention in the country in 2013 as the latest avatar of the *Françafrique* tradition is at the very least misleading, insofar as it fails to take account of the complex, often tense nature of Franco-Malian relations in the post-colonial period."<sup>18</sup> This refutes the notion of *Françafrique* as a model of analysis for the French intervention in Mali as it oversimplifies a long and complex history between France and Africa.

The intervention in Mali also received praise, in part due to Hollande's reluctance to intervene in Africa, a striking contrast to former president Nicolas Sarkozy. Sarkozy had a history of using aggressive foreign relation moves to gain or maintain popularity at home. In August 2008, for example, he succeeded in negotiating a Russo-Georgian cease-fire without being invited to be a peacemaker. In 2011, Sarkozy took France to war in Libya without informing his parliament or foreign minister, Alain Juppé. In opposition, "the trouble taken by Hollande to seek African opinion before

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<sup>14</sup> "François Hollande: 'Je viens pour écrire avec l'Afrique une nouvelle page,'" *RFI*, November 10, 2012, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20121011-François-hollande-afrique-francophonie-sommet-interview-nouvelle-page/>

<sup>15</sup> Isaline Bergamaschi, "French Military Intervention in Mali: Inevitable, Consensual, Yet Insufficient," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2, no.2 (2013), accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.stabilityjournal.org/rt/printerFriendly/ta.bb/70>

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<sup>16</sup> Ben Clift, and Raymond Kuhn, "The Hollande Presidency 2012-14," *Modern and Contemporary France*, 22, no. 4 (2014): 432.

<sup>17</sup> Isaline Bergamaschi and Mahamadou Diawara, "The French military intervention in Mali: Not exactly *Françafrique* but definitely postcolonial," in *Peace operations in the francophone world: global governance meets post-colonialism*, ed. Bruno Charbonneau and Tony Chafer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 137.

<sup>18</sup> Chafer, "Hollande and Africa Policy," 516.

going ahead with military intervention contrasted with past practice.”<sup>19</sup>

Yet, despite Hollande’s “subtler ear for the tone of African diplomacy,”<sup>20</sup> France still has a vested interest in the region, many aspects of which also contributed to France’s decision to intervene in Mali. Although France does not have specific economic interests in Mali, it certainly has economic interests in the wider region. Nigerian uranium, for instance, is central to France’s energy security: one quarter of France’s electricity production relies on uranium. There is also speculation concerning an interest in oil in the north of Mali that could be considered a new potential economic gain. However, Bergamaschi and Diawara assert, “the presence of oil resources has been suspected for a long time but never clearly and formally established.”<sup>21</sup>

French political motivations behind intervention should also be considered. France is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and thus, has international obligations specifically to West Africa, where it has troops stationed in Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Chad. As Chafer postulates, “faced with the threat of an Islamist takeover, the prospect of a humanitarian disaster and a request from the Malian government to intervene, it would have been extremely difficult for France to refuse.”<sup>22</sup> Chafer’s interpretation, that France is simply honoring its international obligations, may be overly generous. As Bergamaschi and Diawara explain, “acting for stability in Africa remains a key tool to defend the French seat at the UN Security

Council.”<sup>23</sup> It should also be noted that African countries provide a valuable source of supportive votes for France at the UN. Although France may have simply been fulfilling its international duty, the benefits of intervention in this sense are undeniable. Even if circumstances forced France to intervene in Africa, to be present militarily in a number of African countries requires a type of *Françafrique* behavior.

## BARKHANE: CASTING FURTHER DOUBT

In the summer of 2014, Hollande declared the objectives of Operation Serval accomplished,<sup>24</sup> but victory in Mali is not as absolute as has been suggested. This is demonstrated by the announcement in July 2014 of a new military operation in the region: Operation Barkhane. Unlike Serval, Barkhane is preventative in its intent. While Serval aimed at fixing a problem that was deteriorating in Mali, Operation Barkhane has been labeled as a counterterrorist operation, although many specifics remain unclear. Hollande has said the Barkhane force will allow for a “rapid and efficient intervention in the event of a crisis”<sup>25</sup> in the region. This summer, Hollande began a three-nation visit to Africa, stopping in Côte d’Ivoire, Niger, and Chad. The focus of the visit was related to security, with Operation Serval coming to a close, only to be replaced by Operation Barkhane. Named after a crescent-shaped sand dune in the Saharan desert, the operation involves the deployment of 3,000 military personnel across the vast Sahel region, backed by six

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Melly and Vincent Darracq, “A New Way to Engage? French Policy in Africa from Sarkozy to Hollande,” *Chatham House Africa 2013*, 10, accessed December 1, 2014.

[http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Africa/0513pp\\_franceafrica.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Africa/0513pp_franceafrica.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Bergamaschi and Diawara, “The French military intervention in Mali,” 141.

<sup>22</sup> Chafer, “Hollande and Africa Policy,” 524.

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<sup>23</sup> Bergamaschi and Diawara, “The French military intervention in Mali,” 141.

<sup>24</sup> Sara M. Llana, “Mali, one year later: France’s mission accomplished – but much left to do,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 11, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0111/Mali-one-year-later-France-s-mission-accomplished-but-much-left-to-do>

<sup>25</sup> “Hollande announces new military operation in West Africa,” *France 24*, July 19, 2014, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.france24.com/en/20140719-hollande-announces-new-military-operation-west-africa/>.

fighter jets, 20 helicopters and three drones. The mission forms a belt of French military presence in five African countries: Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Niger and Mauritania.

In an article published prior to the French president's three-nation visit this summer, *France 24* speculated, "mission accomplished or mission creep?"<sup>26</sup> Another article described Operation Barkhane as "a blurred French strategy."<sup>27</sup> The notion of mission creep describes a gradual shift in objectives during the course of a military campaign, often resulting in an unplanned long-term commitment. Operation Barkhane can be interpreted as a form of "mission creep" in that it is the expansion of a project (Operation Serval), following initial successes. Mission creep is considered dangerous because it tends to forge a path of increasingly ambitious attempts at victory that ultimately result in great failure. Understood in these terms, the transition from Serval to Barkhane is inconsistent with Hollande's promise to break from *Françafrique*, and Operation Barkhane may see French troops remain in the region for a number of years.

Some have dubbed Mali as the next Afghanistan,<sup>28</sup> comparing Operation Barkhane to the U.S. "war on terror." Using the same term coined at the dawn of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, this labeling provokes many pejorative conceptions of the motivations behind the operation. If the notion of *Françafrique* is based on the exploitation of African countries for the advancement of France's own power, viewing Operation

Barkhane in a similar light as the "war on terror" suggests that France is using the justificatory framework of counter-terrorism to remain involved in the region and benefit from this involvement. Such benefits include defending France's position in the UN, as well as in the international arena.

Hollande declared, during his presidential speech at Niamey, "Operation Barkhane is a structure built to accompany Africans and allow them to ensure their own security."<sup>29</sup> The operation was presented as a way to regionalize counterterrorist movements, and to protect both the security of countries in the West and Central Africa, and that of France. Hollande has made sure to present Operation Barkhane under his initial promise to break away from *Françafrique*, just as he did with Operation Serval. There is one distinct difference, however. Operation Serval was launched after the interim Malian president Dioncounda Traoré asked for the assistance of the UN and of France. Operation Barkhane has no such precedent; it merely constitutes a continuation of the work of Operation Serval.

Under Operation Serval, the French president and his advisors made claims to support Africans in their own development and security, when the role played by the French military was much more significant in reality. Hollande stated in late 2012, "France will not, in any case, intervene in Mali."<sup>30</sup> Due to UN support, the mission was presented as multilateral. Once French troops arrived in Mali, France worked hard to ensure legality through the UN framework, making the case for an interpretation of UN Resolution 2085. This resolution, however, only authorized an

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<sup>26</sup> Leela Jacinto, "It's time for Africa again as Hollande starts three-nation visit", *France24*, July 16, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.france24.com/en/20140716-france-west-africa-hollande-sahel-ivory-coast-niger-chad/>.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Diffalah, "De Serval à Barkhane : la mission française loin d'être terminée," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, July 16, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/guerre-au-mali/20140715.OBS3744/mali-de-serval-a-barkhane-la-mission-francaise-loin-d-etre-terminee.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Doyle, "Mali: Dangers of dealing with 'Afghanistan of West Africa,'" *BBC News*, June 14, 2012, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18427541>

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<sup>29</sup> Laurent Lagneau, "Selon M. Le Drian, l'objectif de l'opération Barkhane est 'l'éradication du terrorisme jihadiste,'" *Zone Militaire*, July 22, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, <http://www.opex360.com/2014/07/22/selon-m-le-drian-l'objectif-de-l-operation-barkhane-l'eradication-du-terrorisme-jihadiste/>.

<sup>30</sup> Ursula Soares, "Opération militaire au Mali : la France n'interviendra pas «elle-même»," *Radio France Internationale*, November 13, 2012, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20121113-operation-militaire-mali-france-interviendra-pas-elle-meme-union-africaine-addis-abebe-conseil-securite/>.

*African-led* mission.<sup>31</sup> Bergamaschi and Diawara claim “France’s decision to intervene was unilateral,”<sup>32</sup> but more accurately, it was a bilateral decision, considering support was in fact requested by Mali. Had it not been, France may not have intervened. This is not to say France acted solely out of obligation or as a response to Mali’s cry for help, but rather that such a request provided an opportunity upon which France could capitalize.

African responses to French intervention and involvement in the region are demonstrative of France’s special relationship with its former colonies. Despite the domination of the period of colonization, most countries achieved independence peacefully and responsibility rather than blame emerged in the discourse of the time.

## THE QUESTION OF DEBT

The expectation that France can and should continue to help its former African colonies is inextricably linked to the notion of debt: France’s debt to Africa for the period of colonization as well as their debt for African military participation in several wars including the two world wars. Those African soldiers who served France are known as *tirailleurs sénégalais* (Senegalese infantrymen), despite recruitment not being limited to Senegal. It was during this time that Blaise Diagne, mayor of Dakar, “cultivated the expectation that those who served would be rewarded both symbolically and materially.”<sup>33</sup> This notion of “blood debt” (*dette de sang*) or colonial debt is still noticeably present today.

Hollande was welcomed warmly in Cote d’Ivoire during his three-nation visit to

Africa in July 2014. *Fraternité Matin*, the local Ivorian governmental news outlet, ran a piece on the day of the French president’s visit to Abidjan that stated, “Even if France does not, at this moment, provide support economically, she still has a lot to contribute for the reconstruction of our infrastructure.”<sup>34</sup> There is a tendency to think France is responsible for development in its former colonies: both from citizens of former French colonies, and from within the French government itself.

This notion of debt may help to explain why the French intervention in Mali was received with such popular support in the country. During a speech delivered in Bamako in February 2013, the French president said, “I remember that when France was attacked, when she was looking for assistance and allies, when she was threatened, when her territorial unity was at stake, who came to support her then? Africa did, Mali did, thanks to Mali. Today we are paying our debt to Mali.”<sup>35</sup> Even the choice of the Chadian capital N’Djamena as the headquarters of Operation Barkhane could be interpreted as a reward for Chad’s timely intervention in Northern Mali. In early 2013 Chad sent troops to support Operation Serval, providing essential support to France with their experience in desert warfare. During a speech delivered in front of the French community at N’Djamena announcing the launch of Operation Barkhane, Hollande thanked Chad a number of times, stating, “I wanted to express to you my gratitude.”<sup>36</sup> His presentation of this

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<sup>31</sup> United Nations, *Resolution 2085*, December 20, 2012, accessed December 1, 2014, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2085](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2085).

<sup>32</sup> Bergamaschi and Diawara, “The French military intervention in Mali: Not exactly Françafrique but definitely postcolonial,” 143.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native sons: West African veterans and France in the twentieth century*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 70.

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<sup>34</sup> Venance Konan, “Akwaba, Hollande!”, *Fraternité Matin*, July 17, 2014, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.fratmat.info/edito/item/17429-akwaba-hollande>.

<sup>35</sup> François Hollande, cited in Bergamaschi and Diawara, “The French military intervention in Mali: Not exactly Françafrique but definitely postcolonial,” 146.

<sup>36</sup> François Hollande, “Discours du président François Hollande devant la communauté française à Ndjamena,” *Elysee*, July 19, 2014, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://www.elysee.fr/assets/pdf/discours-du-president-Francois-hollande-devant-la-communaute-francaise-a-ndjamena-2.pdf>

new operation within a context of appreciation demonstrates that a form of postcolonial debt still exists between France and its former colonies, and is being used as a way to justify involvement in the region.

France's notion of debt to its former colonies is a dangerous one. It perpetuates a postcolonial political community that makes it extremely hard for France to cut ties from her former African colonies. The notion of debt is problematic in two ways. First, it provides a justification for France to stay involved in African affairs. Second, it normalizes French involvement in Africa among the African population.

The central role to be played by Chad in Operation Barkhane is also concerning, given that the President of Chad since 1996, Idriss Déby, is widely considered to be a dictator.<sup>37</sup> Déby's administration is widely believed to be responsible for the disappearance of the opposition leader, Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh.<sup>38</sup> Saleh disappeared after his arrest by the Chadian government in 2008. Previously, he served in the Chadian army and was made commander-in-chief under Hissène Habré. In 1985, he was removed from his post and sent to Paris to pursue a course at the *École de Guerre*.

## THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN THE FRANCAFRIQUE RELATIONSHIP

One fundamental aspect of *Françafrique* has been the close bond shared by French and African leaders. Many African leaders at some point attended university in Paris, or elsewhere in France, where they met their French counterparts. This was the case with many prominent

figures, of which Leopold Sédar Senghor and Georges Pompidou are good examples. Senghor served as Senegal's first president for over two decades, and Pompidou was Prime Minister of France and later President from 1969 until his death in 1974. Their friendship began in 1929-30 and Senghor once admitted in an interview that it was Pompidou "who converted me to socialism."<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that Déby also has this academic connection with France, but what is even more concerning is the new relationship between Hollande and Déby.

Recently, with the announcement of Operation Barkhane and the use of Chad as the headquarters of the mission, Hollande has established diplomatic relations with Déby. During his speech at N'Djamena on July 19, 2014, Hollande stated, "We have a deep seeded relationship of cooperation with Chad. And a solid and precious relationship with Déby."<sup>40</sup> However, one reporter at the summit tweeted that Hollande in fact left at the start of Déby's speech and only returned upon its close: "@fhollande has returned to the room to listen to Paul Biya after blowing off Déby's speech @OIFfrancophonie #NAOIF14."<sup>41</sup> From this account, it seems that the relationship between the two leaders may not be as amicable as initially perceived. This does not, however, diminish the concern caused by collaborating with a dictator known to disregard human rights.

It is, of course, far too easy to judge President Hollande for his actions, especially in the context of *Françafrique*, when the reality is that, "military interventions in Mali

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<sup>37</sup> Joshua Norman, "The world's enduring dictators: Idriss Déby, Chad," *CBS News*, June 19, 2011, accessed December 9, 2014,

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-worlds-enduring-dictators-idriss-déby-chad-19-06-2011/>

<sup>38</sup> "Chad: Repressive tactics against government critics must come to an end," *Amnesty International*, October 24, 2013, accessed April 11, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/articles/news/2013/10/chad-repressive-tactics-against-government-critics-must-come-end/>.

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<sup>39</sup> Leopold S. Senghor, cited in Jean-François Sirinelli, "Deux étudiants "coloniaux" à Paris à l'aube des années trente," *Vingtième Siècle*, 18, (April – June 1988): 81.

<sup>40</sup> Lénaïg Bredoux, "Hollande au Tchad: Comment Idriss Déby est redevenue le meilleur ami de la France," *Makaila, plume combattante et indépendante*, July 19, 2014, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/190714/hollande-au-tchad-comment-idriss-déby-est-redevenu-le-meilleur-ami-de-la-france>.

<sup>41</sup> Thierry Hot's Twitter account, accessed December 3, 2014, <https://twitter.com/Hothiery1>



and Central Afrique mean there is no way around the despot Idriss Déby.”<sup>42</sup> Chad holds a very important position geographically in the region. It is true, however, that upon his election, Hollande not only promised a break from the old days of *Françafrique*, but also went so far as to condemn Déby. That has all changed now, in the name of security, and Chad is presented as vital, militarily (as proven during Operation Serval) and geographically, to the success of Operation Barkhane.

## CONCLUSION

It certainly is problematic to substantiate claims that Hollande’s actions comprise a definite return to *Françafrique*. As Chafer’s argument highlights, the use of *Françafrique* as a tool of analysis oversimplifies a very complex relationship. The fact that a relationship exists at all cannot be construed as *Françafrique* behavior, given France’s complicated history with Africa as well as their economic ties to the continent. It should be recognized that France’s role in Africa will always be shaped by history, by economics, and by international pressures. France has a very unique historical position concerning Africa, and this aspect of the relationship will not change: it is a factor that will always shape France’s policy toward Africa. Yet close historical bonds do not necessarily indicate a future of *Françafrique*, just as the very existence of a close relationship doesn’t immediately indicate a return to *Françafrique*.

The root of the problem may be that Hollande’s promise to break with *Françafrique* was simply too ambitious, and unrealistic. The mistake the president has made is not in simply maintaining a relationship with former colonies, or even supporting them (this may very well always be the case due to deep historical roots), but with trying to utterly deny the power of such a deep-seeded bond as he did back in 2012. Hollande’s presidency has proven that

completely avoiding Africa is not a viable option for France. As Mustapha Tossa, editor-in-chief of Monte Carlo Doualiya, *France 24*’s Arabic language sister radio station, explains, “The fact is, France was forced to intervene in Africa, to be present militarily in a number of African countries, which requires a type of *Françafrique* behavior. So, *Françafrique* is still alive under François Hollande. And I do not see how he can get rid of it since France is so engulfed in protecting its allies and interests in the region.”<sup>43</sup> It is for this reason that no matter how lightly President Hollande treads in Africa; he will always fall under criticism concerning the *Françafrique* nature of his policies, as will presidents to come.

While it is right to be skeptical of President Hollande’s motivations behind Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane, it is most certainly true that thus far, he has proceeded with more caution toward Africa than any other president before him. Hollande’s desire to lead France away from *Françafrique* may be genuine, but reality and circumstance will not permit him to fully follow through on his promise.



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<sup>42</sup> Bredoux, “Hollande au Tchad.”

<sup>43</sup> Mustapha Tossa, quoted in Jacinto, “It’s time for Africa again as Hollande starts three-nation visit.”

