CHAD’S HEREDITARY KLEPTOCRACY

A MASSACRE OF CIVILIANS, WASTED OIL WEALTH AND GROWING AUTHORITARIANISM

A SPECIAL REPORT BY FINANCE UNCOVERED
DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to the people who lost their lives in the protests that took place throughout Chad on October 20 2022.

The genesis of this report dates back to a workshop organised by the Opening Central Africa coalition and Global Integrity in April 2023.

The representative from Chad at the meeting was Delphine Djiraibe who runs the Public Interest Law Center. Delphine believes Chadians suffer from an information vacuum after decades of authoritarian rule.

Delphine felt that the October 20 massacre of hundreds of demonstrators demanding justice and equity needed to be commemorated with a report that documented the state of the nation.

We hope this publication provides some useful context on the one year anniversary of one of Chad’s darkest days since its independence 63 years ago.
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October 20 2023 marks the one-year anniversary of the violent repression by Chad’s transitional government that resulted in the arbitrary arrest, detention, and deaths of scores of civilians.

But what began in the streets with the indiscriminate use of live ammunition soon became a much more targeted campaign against perceived opponents of the transitional government. Many prominent critics of the government were forced to flee the country to escape the brutality of its clampdown.

The trigger for this shocking violence by authorities was a response to widespread protests calling on the government to do what it had publicly promised: to hold elections within 18 months of the death of former president Idriss Déby Itno in April 2021 which would then allow for a transition to civilian rule.

A year on from the massacre, this resource-rich but drastically underdeveloped country is no closer to holding the sort of elections capable of benefiting its people.

For the three decades Idriss Déby ruled the country, Chad was regarded as a kleptocracy. His regime was supported by the country’s former colonial power France through its FrancAfrique policy, a strategy long regarded as self-interested and expedient.

Through this “quid pro quo” with Chad, France gained access to natural resources and more recently an essential ally in the region to combat Boko Haram and other Islamist extremists.

But the price of so-called stability through FrancAfrique was the toleration of authoritarianism, even kleptocracy, resulting in deprivation for ordinary citizens.

Such authoritarianism has frequently led to a lack of accountability and pervasive corruption. In Chad, regional analysts believe this was manifested by cronyism, tribalism and nepotism – the appointment of cliques and family members to key positions throughout government and state-owned enterprises. NGOs such as Transparency International and BTI Transformation Index have alleged that state assets have been plundered.

With the death of President Déby in 2021, Chad became in the eyes of many observers an “hereditary kleptocracy” when power effectively transferred to his son, Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno. (Mahamat is commonly referred to as “Kaka” to distinguish him from his father).

There are no verified calculations of Déby’s wealth, but at the time of his death it was reported to be at least $50m. Where that may have been invested is unclear and a strand for future journalistic investigations.

To assess the state of the country a year on from the massacre, Finance Uncovered has spoken to a range of experts across the political, economic and civil rights landscape and examined various developments, especially in the petroleum sector.
Serious questions are being raised about how much of the country’s oil wealth is being utilised for development and the management of public resources.

For example, the government has once again restructured its oil-for-loan agreement with a syndicate led by international commodity giant Glencore as part of the requirement to access funding from the IMF.

In 2023, Chad also expropriated the oil assets of Savannah Energy, a UK-based oil company, without “full compensation”. The company has submitted a case to the international Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Court of Arbitration.

The uncertainty surrounding the case could be disastrous for future foreign investment in the economy and improving the desultory economic growth Chad has generated over the last decade.

Some analysts also told Finance Uncovered that there could also be a risk to Kaka’s inherited kleptocracy itself.

Arguably, no regime was as closely aligned with France as that of Idriss Déby, and this has persisted with the transfer of power to Kaka. France has accepted the transitional government and has provided an explicit security guarantee. This means it will continue to militarily support the regime.

But a growing anti-French feeling in Francophone Africa more generally – a sentiment born from the resentment citizens feel towards dictators who have ruled countries for many decades – also poses a risk to Kaka. His regime could be toppled from within.

Nathaniel Powell, Africa analyst at the Oxford Analytica political risk consultancy, says: “He is worried about plotting within his own security establishment. In the capital, the security has been beefed up at all the key installations. There has been a fear that after Niger maybe Chad is next. The French foundations in Chad are quite shaky because if Déby is overthrown any replacement junta may choose to legitimise their rule by ejecting the French.”

Elections are scheduled for 2024, but many Chadians do not believe these will be free or fair. They are more likely to resemble the highly conflicted polls held over the 30 years Déby was president.

All these developments are likely to stunt Chad’s progress and keep it pegged to the very bottom of measures, such as the UN’s Human Development Index where it has remained over the last two decades.

One year on from the October 2022 massacre, any prospects of meaningful democratic change have been squashed. The future is beginning to look as dismal as the past.

This feeling was summarised by Succès Masra, one of the main opposition leaders in Chad who fled the country in the wake of the massacre.

Asked to describe the health of the nation as he prepares to return for the anniversary, he told Finance Uncovered: “We still live in a country of apartheid where less than 2% of the population, who come from the same region, tribe and even family, use the oil revenues to buy guns and exercise power for their own benefit. This all happens with the diplomatic prestige of France and the silent support of the rest of the senior democratic countries.

“The best way to honour the memories of those killed in the massacre is to get to this promised land of democracy, where the Chadian people will be free to choose their leaders. A country where the ballot is stronger than the bullets which killed them.”

In response to questions posed by Finance Uncovered, a spokesman for the Chad government sent a report on the 20 October 2022 massacre. It blamed opposition figures, including Succès Masra, for the violence and said rioters were fuelled by “psychotic drugs”.

It said many military officers were killed and that in response the transitional government introduced curfews around the country which “calmed” the situation. The report’s conclusion stated: “The objective is to lead the country, in the near future, to the restoration of the constitutional order.”

French president Emmanuel Macron and Chad’s president Idriss Déby leave a press conference at the presidential palace in N’Djamena on December 23, 2018. (Photo by Ludovic Marin/AFP/Getty Images)
April 19 2021 brought the unexpected end of an era for Chad with news of the death of its president and self-titled “Marshall”, Idriss Déby Itno. Déby had ruled the country for over thirty years, having come to power in 1990 by overthrowing his former ally, Hissène Habré.5

Before the shock subsided, Kaka had orchestrated a seizure of power in direct contravention of the country’s constitution. He was backed by the Bidayat clan of the Zaghawa ethnic group and the military.

This power grab – through the vehicles of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and more recently the Transitional National Council (TNC) of which Kaka remains head, will, think observers and critics, most likely conclude with questionable elections. The suspected purpose of all this, they believe, is to ensure power is transferred from father to son, and control of the government and the associated flow of economic rents continues to benefit a small elite.

Analysts say that given the contempt with which Déby senior treated the principles of democracy over the three decades he was in power, it is not surprising that in the moment of his passing, and at a time when the regime’s authority was being challenged, the small elite ingrained into the fabric of the kleptocracy was unable and unwilling to relinquish its grasp on power.

Looking back, the creation of the TMC and the appointment of Kaka was the first step in ensuring that the regime created and defended by the father would remain intact as it was transferred to the son. With the benefit of hindsight, it seems everything that happened since has occurred with this goal in mind.
“The Marshall” – President Déby – had just been declared the provisional winner of the disputed April 2021 election when he travelled to the north of the country. It appears he wanted to rally his troops in engagements with the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), a rebel group based in northern Libya and led by Mahamat Madi Ali.

What exactly transpired on April 19 2021 has never been revealed. The Chadian military announced the following day that Déby was killed in frontline skirmishes near the town of Nokou, located in North Kanem, about 300 kilometres north of the capital N’Djamena. His death was subsequently attributed to gunshot wounds so severe that Déby was dead before his plane returned to the capital.

In a flurry of meetings involving the Bidayat clan and the military following the president’s death, it was decided that Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, one of Déby’s sons, would lead the newly established Transitional Military Council (TMC) convened to run the country. Mahamat Déby is often referred to as Kaka to distinguish him from his father. He was just 37 at the time, but already served as the head of the powerful presidential guard (DGSSIE). Kaka is half Zaghawa through his father’s lineage and half Gorane through his mother. In fact, both his mother and his wife are the same ethnicity. This was seen as a major advantage in placating the two clans that vie for power within the country’s political-military establishment.

With the endorsement of the elite, Kaka announced the suspension of the constitution and the dissolution of parliament. The TMC promised to administer power for the duration of an eighteen-month transitional period to prepare the country for elections and handover to a democratically elected government. The TMC included a 40-member cabinet with a new national reconciliation ministry. The decision contravened a clearly articulated process in the constitution for the handover of power. This states that the speaker of the national assembly is to assume the role of president for a maximum period of 90 days for the purpose of organising fresh elections.

The creation of the TMC and the appointment of Kaka as its head was the moment, in the words of one analyst, “when the constitution got thrown in the bin”. The announcement on April 21 was immediately condemned. The Union of Trade Unions in Chad called for a strike and opposition politicians denounced the power grab as an “institutional coup”. Days later, five citizens would lose their lives in clashes with police.
INTERNATIONAL REACTION

The reaction from Chad’s closest security allies was mixed. The United States issued a brief statement calling for “a peaceful transition of power in accordance with the Chadian constitution.”

French President Emmanuel Macron attended Déby’s funeral in N’Djamena on April 23 2021, itself illustrative of the relationship between the two countries. Macron paid tribute to Déby and provided the new regime with an explicit security guarantee by promising France would not let anyone threaten the stability of the country. This suggested the French were briefed on plans prior to the announcement of the TMC and may have agreed to it.

“They saw the seizure of power as continuity. The French fear that any alternative to the current political arrangement could be catastrophic for the region. Another Mali 2.0,” says Nathaniel Powell, Africa analyst at geopolitical and analysis firm Oxford Analytica.

Despite having an official policy of zero tolerance towards military seizures of power, and in direct contrast to the unconstitutional seizure of power by the military junta in Mali, the African Union did not sanction or bar Chad from normal diplomatic relations. Rather, it expressed “grave concern at developments” but chose to take Déby and the new regime at its word – that it would transition to civilian rule through credible elections held within eighteen months.

The African Union would subsequently find that its own decision exposed it to “charges of inconsistency and selective application” regarding condemnation of military seizures and dented its credibility. The string of military takeovers in Africa that have followed in the last eighteen months could in part be attributed to its weak-kneed attitude towards Chad.

One reason tabled for the leniency appears to be that like France, countries in the regional bloc viewed the situation in Chad through the prism of Chad’s regional security role. They appeared to focus on the short term perceived negative ramifications to their security cooperation with Chad were the country to be suspended.

Succès Masra, exiled leader of one of the largest opposition parties in Chad, The Transformers, accuses France of officially recognising the junta and persuading the AU not to condemn the coup.

He told Finance Uncovered: “Macron directly intervened in Chad, but now wants something else in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and other countries. Now everyone understands that you can organise a coup and the following day you will be accepted. If this is the case, democracy is going to decline in Africa. A coup is a coup. Don’t try to find an argument to try and explain or support a coup.”

Understanding Chad’s relationship with its former colonial power, and to a lesser extent, the United States, is central to understanding why the power grab launched in the wake of the death of Idriss Déby has been successful.
Idriss Déby’s reign was characterised by criticism of his human rights record and repression of political opponents. According to Amnesty International, killings, enforced disappearances, illegal detentions, and arbitrary arrests of opposition MP’s, journalists and academics were frequent during his reign.

Chad held six elections over the thirty years Déby was in power. These undermined any perceived legitimacy by irregularities, boycotts by opposition parties, and complaints of fraud.

Divisions between the Arab-Muslim ethnic groups located in the north of the country, and the Christian/Animist populations in the south have fuelled direct challenges to Déby’s regime over the last 30 years. This has seen rebel groups launching attacks from Libya, Darfur (Sudan), and the Central African Republic.15 16

Corruption within the country has persistently been described as endemic by the likes of Transparency International who noted in 2014, “the government is perceived as largely ineffective in a context where insecurity and weak maintenance of the rule of law perpetuate systemic corruption.”17

Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index tracks the perceived level of public sector corruption across countries and the extent it obstructs development. In 2022, Chad was ranked 167 out of 180 countries evaluated globally with a score of 19 out of 100, where 0 represents “highly corrupt” and 100 equates to “very clean.”18 This was one point below the level measured in 2021.19

Déby’s reign has achieved almost nothing for the development of the broader population. Chad is a persistent laggard in development indicators when evaluated according to criteria like the United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI).

The index gathers a range of metrics to establish the quality of life enjoyed by people in each country and is widely used to measure the progress of policies and government interventions in improving the quality of life of its citizens.

Chad was first assessed20 by the UNHDI in 2000 when it scored 0.291 and was ranked third from bottom in relation to the rest of the world. According to the latest iteration of the index published in 2021, Chad has made gains in life expectancy, mean years of schooling, and gross national income, which is consistent with progress made around the world.
But in relative terms, Chad is now ranked second last (190 out of 191 nations) with a score of 0.394. Citizens have a life expectancy of just 52.5 years, attend school on average for 2.6 years, and have a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of $1,364 per annum. In summary, Chadians are relatively no better off twenty years later under Déby’s reign than they were in 2000.

Chad’s economy surged in the early part of the century as the southern oilfields came on stream and began exporting petroleum. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose from approximately $1.4bn in 2000 to over $10bn in the decade to 2010. Since 2010, the country has only added another $2bn to its GDP (20%), which at the end of 2022 stood at $12.7bn. This does not compare favourably to the 40% increase in GDP for Sub-Saharan Africa over the same period, implying that Chad has lagged its peers.

Chadians have not prospered economically as a whole over the last decade. When GDP is evaluated on a per capita basis (which accommodates for population growth) and using purchasing power parity (to adjust for shift in exchange rates), GDP per capita has declined by 19% since 2010 versus an increase of 4% for Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

Why such a lack of progress for the country’s 18.4 million citizens, despite the perceived political stability Déby’s authoritarian rule has provided?

**CHAD’S TERRIBLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS**

Indicators leave huge room for improvement

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<th>Metric</th>
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<td>Life expectancy at birth (years)</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected years of schooling (years)</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of schooling (years)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross National Income per Capita</td>
<td>$882</td>
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**Source:** United Nations Human Development Index
The basis of French foreign policy towards its former colonies is encapsulated in the term FrancAfrique which in part reflects the belief that France could hermetically seal its former colonies with the participation of elites. Together with the security guarantee it could afford as a military power, it would be able to protect former colonies from “malicious outside influences” and thereby prevent prolonged political turmoil. This was seen as the first essential step in providing stability and a base from which its former colonies could develop.

Chad and Déby’s relationship with France reportedly became strained in the early part of the 2010’s following Déby’s suspected assassination of a political opponent. In February 2008 during an attack on the capital, the government arrested prominent opposition leader Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh.

His disappearance and suspected murder were reported to have greatly angered French president Francois Hollande. Déby repeatedly promised to find and arrest the murderers, but later appointed Oumar’s sons to positions in the state cotton company Cotontchad.

But around the same time, the rise of extremism in the Sahel and France’s determination to confront it, presented an opportunity for Déby to rekindle the alliance he had previously enjoyed.

Beginning with Operation Serval in Mali in 2013, Déby was willing to support these aims and intervene militarily in other regional security crises. Chad also became a founding nation of the G5 Sahel in 2014.

The G5 is a security alliance between five former French colonies established to coordinate efforts alongside France’s Operation Barkhane to counter the rise of extremist Islamist groups in the Sahel.

Déby committed hundreds of elite troops from his presidential guard to fighting in these operations and allowed France to establish a large military base in N’Djamena to serve as the headquarters of Barkhane. Chad would also commit troops to fighting Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region.

Déby’s authoritarian grip on power meant he could tolerate a much greater quantum of military casualties in pursuit of France’s various security objectives, than any French president could tolerate. These actions made Chad a strong, and arguably, essential ally of France in the region and restored the blanket security guarantee France extends to the present day.

One of the most tangible demonstrations of this came in 2019, when France launched airstrikes on rebel columns advancing from the north of the country in response to a request from Déby.

In response, the French foreign ministry says it is supportive of regional initiatives to assist Chad with a peaceful transition of limited duration. This is for the purpose of holding democratic elections ahead of a return to constitutional order.

“To this end, we are maintaining a demanding dialogue with the Chadian authorities, asking them to guarantee respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to open up the political space, particularly with a view to free, credible, inclusive and transparent elections, and to take strong measures in the economic and social fields to meet the expectations of Chadians.”

The French government takes umbrage with accusations it turns a blind eye to human rights violations. “On October 20, France publicly condemned ‘the use of lethal weapons against protesters.’ The next day, [we] condemned ‘in the strongest possible terms the unacceptable violence that has occurred’ in Chad and called for ‘an end to all forms of violence, wherever it comes from.’

It is therefore false to assert that ‘the role of the security forces has not been explicitly condemned by France’ and that the French statement merely called for ‘restraint on the part of all parties.’”

A Chadian soldier guards a helicopter as the army mobilizes against Boko Haram on the Island of Bouka-Toullorom, Chad, November 2022 (Photo by Alvaro Canovas/Paris Match/Getty Images)
**ECONOMY**

In the 1970s, oil was discovered in three distinct basins (the Doba, Doseo, and Salamat) located in the south of the country. It was 30 years before production started in 2003 thanks to the completion of a $4.8bn 1090-kilometre export pipeline plus a floating production storage and offloading facility which was in part financed by the World Bank.

The pipeline has a capacity of 250,000 barrels of oil per day (kbopd) and is the only export route for Chadian crude. During 2022, the pipeline transported an average of 124 kbopd estimated at $4.6bn per year.25

After financing the pipeline, the World Bank pulled out of the country in 2008, after Déby failed to use the proceeds from oil sales to develop the country, reduce poverty and diversify the economy as was the intention. Within a short space of time, oil came to account for half of nominal GDP, 70% of government revenue (excluding grants) and 90% of merchandise exports.26

In 2013, Chad concluded an initial $600m pre-payment agreement with Glencore that would provide the company with rights to sell 90% of oil produced by the Chadian government which was to be used for “budget financing.”27 The funds allowed Chad to purchase Chevron’s assets in the country, including a 25% share in several oilfields in the Doba basin operated by ExxonMobil as well as shares in COTCo (Cameroon) and TOTCo (Chad), the respective operating companies of the pipeline. The loans amounted to approximately 10% of Chad’s GDP at the time and were meant to be repaid over four years. The loan was to be serviced from the proceeds of oil cargoes sold by the national oil company, SHT, to Glencore.

By the end of 2016, 85% of the government’s net oil sales revenue was being spent on repaying the lenders. This prompted a restructuring of the loan in 2018, which extended the maturity through to 2026 and lowered the interest rate.

2013 would be an interesting year for other reasons. According to data provided by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a think-tank that monitors global arms spending, Chad’s military expenditure reached $726.5 million in 2013. This was the second highest amount on record and preceded both the formal start to operation Barkhane and the establishment of the G5 Sahel in 2014. Both were French-led initiatives to counter extremism in the Sahel.

There is no suggestion that Glencore knew about what the proceeds of the initial loan would be used for.

A consortium led by Glencore would advance a further $1.45bn in 2014.
THE SO-CALLED POLITICAL TRANSITION

In what was viewed as a genuine effort to broaden the support base of the regime through compromise and democratic reform, Kaka initiated the National Dialogue (formally called the Inclusive and Sovereign National Dialogue).

This took place in Doha for 42 exiled rebel groups and was followed on August 20 2022 by a gathering in the capital for political opposition, just two months before the end of the transitional period.

Parts of the military and civil society were represented amongst the estimated 1,400 delegates. But notable stakeholders including the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), the Transformers party, and the Wakit Tama coalition, opted to boycott proceedings on the basis that the regime could not guarantee a return to civilian rule.

The general climate was described by the African Union as being “tense” with frequent clashes between security forces and demonstrators. Committees and agendas at the forum were tightly controlled by the ruling authority.

On October 1 2022, the forum announced it would be extending the transition to elections for a further 24 months. An extension of eighteen months to the transitional period had previously been mentioned by the TMC on the basis that two conditions were met. First, that there was an agreement from Chadians “to move forward at the planned pace” which was a reference to some kind of consensus being found in which to do so. Secondly, international partners were prepared to assist Chad finance the dialogue and the elections.

At the time of the announcement, it appeared neither condition had been met.

The October 1 statement also announced Kaka would become the interim head of state or Transitional President and that he would be eligible to run in the elections.

The extension of the transitional period and the eligibility of Kaka represented a complete U-turn on the undertakings made to the African Union. The decision was highly criticised and immediately faced resistance.

The African Union subsequently rejected the extension of the transitional period by 24 months and reiterated its stance that members of the transition authority should not stand for election. The regime chose to ignore this completely.

The Transitional Military Council was dissolved on October 8 2022 and replaced by the Transitional National Council two days later when civilians were also included. On the face of it, it appeared to be inclusive with the government headed by long-time opposition leader, Saleh Kebzabo, who was named prime minister.

The announcement merely confirmed what everyone understood was happening: that Kaka and the regime were merely window dressing for what was the transfer of power from father to son.

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT DATES IN CHAD

11 August 1960: Chad gains independence from France.
2 December 1990: Idriss Déby overthrows Hissène Habré, who held power since 1982, to become Chad’s sixth president.
16 February 2014: The G5 Sahel comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger is established to coordinate counter-terrorism efforts between the countries and France.
1 August 2014: France’s Operation Barkhane begins.
8 October 2022: Transitional Military Council replaced by National Transitional Council led by Kaka.
20 October 2022: The violent repression by security forces of protests leads to arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, and executions.
19 April 2021: Déby is fatally injured on the battleground.
20 April 2021: The Transitional Military Council (TMC) is established and names Mahamat Idriss Déby as its leader.
19 April 2021: Déby is fatally injured on the battleground.
11 August 1960: Chad gains independence from France.
This led to one of the darkest chapters in Chad’s history on October 20 2022, a day which represented the expiry of the original 18-month transitional period.

Far from yielding credible elections that excluded members of the Transitional Military Council, including Kaka, there was widespread recognition that the transition to democracy had once again been subverted by a small elite.

A call for mass protest and demonstration on Thursday, October 20 was made by opposition politicians and civil society organisations.

The protest took place simultaneously in the capital, and towns and villages across the country. With emotions spilling over, clashes occurred between protestors and security forces and soon there were reports of a violent crackdown by security forces involving the use of lethal force.

The violence saw police opening fire indiscriminately on civilians in the streets which, according to official reports, claimed the lives of 50 people and injured hundreds more.

The second phase of the violence saw civilians being pulled from their homes, arbitrarily detained and in some cases executed. This indicated a premeditated attack on perceived enemies of the state. Authorities also detained military officers and the president of the Chadian Organization of Human Rights over alleged attempts to destabilise the country.

“We estimate that between 100 and 300 people were killed. This included on the streets but the army also moved into homes and arrested and detained people. It is an extremely secretive country. Citizens won’t tell you much because they live in fear and fear is at the highest right now,” the journalist says.

By one account, as many as 400 people were captured and taken to Koro Toro prison. Detainees were crammed into trucks for the eight-hour journey to the prison located about 600 kilometres north of the capital which is surrounded by arid desert. People that suffocated or died from injuries en route were reportedly thrown from the trucks onto the side of the road.

Fred Dainonet Jouhinet, former president and current board member of the Chadian Human Rights Commission, says: “Some of the people taken there were women and minors, but the government says this was an insurrection? Not a civil protest, an insurrection. That was the basis for using violence and shooting and killing civilians.” He estimates 20-25 minors were sent to the prison.
Upon arrival, the detainees did not have proper food or access to medicine. Neither did they have access to lawyers and or contact with their families as there is no phone signal at the facility.

After a couple of weeks, and without prior notification or opportunity to present a defence, the accused were judged en masse.

“People were sentenced to prison for five years if they were suspected of having a political affiliation, two years if you did not. The basis for determining the sentence appeared to be based solely on the response to questions by the accused regarding where they were on the day they were apprehended. Some people were arrested in their home,” says Jouhinet.

EXILE
Opposition leader Succès Masra went into hiding and subsequently fled the country following the protests. He has not returned. He claims hundreds of his supporters were killed during and after the protests, including 23 of 27 staff members who were arrested at party headquarters when the security forces came looking for him.

The French Foreign Ministry issued a statement on the day which directly translated says: “France condemns, in the strongest terms, the unacceptable violence that occurred yesterday in Chad. We extend our condolences to the bereaved families and best wishes for a speedy recovery to the injured. France calls for all forms of violence to stop, wherever it comes from.”

Nathaniel Powell, from Oxford Analytica, said this statement caused many eyebrows to be raised. He said: “The statement from the French foreign ministry was bizarre, calling on both sides to exercise restraint. Déby and Kebzabo’s line were that the protests were an attempted insurrection. There is a long history of the French internalising the claims of their African clients.”

According to another source who had an off-the-record conversation with French diplomats, the officials were happy to describe the repression as a reaction to what they deemed as an attempted coup.

In the wake of the killings, an international commission of inquiry was established by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), but this appeared to be drastically underfunded and incapable of undertaking any serious investigation of events. It is not known whether the commission has ever issued a report of its findings.

Chadian human rights expert Fred Dainonet Jouhinet said: “Almost immediately after they arrived, we knew they were not serious. They didn’t have a proper office. They were based in an old house and they didn’t even have equipment or vehicles. I don’t know if they handed a report to the government or not because we decided not to work with them after the first visit.”

He added: “To date, no-one in the army or security forces has yet been held accountable. Those responsible have not been held to account. We all know who gave the order. It was not unclear.”

Succès Masra has travelled extensively to “ensure that everyone understands what happened in Chad”. He said: “We have also filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court. Despite what happened, we submitted a proposal for a pro-democracy and national reconciliation agreement. Our will is to go back to Chad by October 20, 2023, to commemorate the first anniversary of this black Thursday and continue the struggle for democracy.”

The transitional government’s account differs radically from the description of Jouhinet and other human rights activists. The government states that the violence that occurred on 20 October was initiated by “thousands of young people, particularly wild, under the influence of psychotropic drugs and other doping products, [that] engaged in acts of incredible violence.”

These “violent demonstrations” the transitional government says, caused numerous loss of life and led to heavy damage to public property. It also resulted in the death and injury to members of the country’s security forces.

Far from increasing the hostility, the government argues that it chose to de-escalate the situation by quickly lifting curfews and later unbanning political parties and associations involved in the demonstrations.

The government also claims it has been transparent and open in establishing what happened in the aftermath of the event by facilitating the work of the ECCAS commission of inquiry.
Lewis Mudge, Human Rights Watch central Africa director, says: “When it came to October 20, Chadians were not expecting a crackdown in the manner that it happened. People were shocked. So, I think he (Kaka) made his point. This is the beginning of another entrenched authoritarian regime.”

A referendum to consider the new constitution is now scheduled for December. Under an amendment made in 2021 to reduce the eligible age to 40, Kaka will be eligible to run for president in the elections scheduled for October 2024.

Enrica Picco, Central Africa project director at the International Crisis Group, said: “They are basically following the transition checklist by the book and ticking all the boxes. It’s also what the Western partners (EU, US, France) are asking. I expect they will continue ticking the boxes and hold a constitutional referendum.

Then they will probably hold national legislative and presidential elections next year even though the situation in the east can be used as an excuse to postpone again or to extend the transitional calendar.”

According to Picco, the crackdown has presented a situation where there is little opposition so Kaka doesn’t even need to manipulate any future election.

“After the repression last year, there is basically no real opposition or civil society left in the country. It’s not just that Succès Masra and others that have been forced into exile, it’s that existing opposition parties have been co-opted into government,” says Picco.

This includes the likes of Albert Padacke who served as prime minister under the TMC, and current Prime Minister Saleh Kebzabo.
DISINVESTMENT AND EXPROPRIATION

Chad is struggling to attract foreign investors, as large multinational companies have opted to divest in recent years. This is most evident in the petroleum industry despite the country holding reserves of over a billion barrels.

In December 2022, Savannah Energy Plc (listed on London’s Alternative Investment Market) acquired the Chad and Cameroonian assets of ExxonMobil for $407m.

Its purchase included a 40% stake in the Doba Oil Production Sharing Contract (PSC) which during 2022 produced 28 thousand barrels of oil per day (Kbopd). The deal also included a 40% interest in TOTCo (Tchad Oil Transportation Company) and a 41% interest in COTCo (Cameroon Oil Transportation Company).

The government immediately contested the transaction, saying it had gone through despite its “express objections” and in violation of its first right of refusal. It warned that it may revert to legal action to reverse the sale to Savannah.

Kaka issued a Decree on March 23 2023 nationalising Savannah’s share of the PSC with no compensation paid to the company. This was confirmed by a law passed on March 31 which extended the nationalisation to include Savannah’s 40% interest in TOTCo. Savannah has since approached the International Commercial Court in Paris to seek redress.

MAJOR CONFRONTATION

Savannah subsequently reached an agreement to sell 10% of COTCo to the Cameroon national petroleum company, the Societe Nationale des Hydrocarbons (SNH), for $45m plus accrued dividends.

The government of Chad, at the direction of chief of staff Idriss Youssouf Boy created the Tchad Petroleum Company (TPC) in April 2023 to house the assets formerly owned by Savannah.

Subsequently, oil pumped from the Doba basin to the export facility in Cameroon was done through TPC. The company was to “reap the rewards” of its first sale of crude oil in July with a transaction for 950 000 barrels that would generate an estimated $80m.

Glencore chose to disinvest from Chad in July 2022 by selling all its upstream assets to Perenco, a UK-based company with French roots, for $197m. The company stated it recorded a loss of $34m on the sale in its annual report.

After months of negotiations, at the end of 2022, a deal was reached to restructure Chad’s $3bn in external debt, $625m of which was owed to the Glencore-led syndicate. This was the fourth restructuring of the loan agreement, but the first under the sovereign restructuring using the Group of 20 (G20) Common Framework.

The agreement was a prerequisite for a $570m loan Chad was concluding with the IMF, and was welcomed by the fund’s Managing Director, Kristalina Georgieva.

There appears to be no mention of a write-down of the loan on the part of the company, indicating that it was performing under the terms of the loan. Glencore stated that the syndicate it led which arranged the loan was owed $604m (of which its share was $293m) at the end of 2021.

The loan owed by Chad will now be settled through future oil deliveries stretching to 2029 at the latest, more than ten years later than was originally envisaged. The latest restructuring enables them to settle the loans and provide money to the state fiscus.

According to people familiar with the situation, thus far, the reworked deal is operating according to the revised contract.
Senior public officials were accused of acting with impunity in respect of alleged corruption involving claims of theft from the state.

In June 2022, the independent pan-African digital newspaper Confidentiel Afrique reported a scandal involving the national oil company SHT. The issue was announced by the country’s communications minister and an investigation into embezzlement was launched.

According to Confidentiel Afrique, the issue was first discovered by Chad’s intelligence agency (ANS), which presented its findings to Kaka.

The investigation centred around the apparent illicit transfers of as much as FCFA 120 billion ($193m) through unauthorised sub-accounts held at Orabank Chad. Millions of euros were alleged to have been funnelled from these accounts, which were said to have existed alongside the company’s legitimate accounts, to banks in Dubai and Turkey.

The crime was allegedly facilitated by collusion between executives at the company and the bank, some of whom were said to have been incentivised through payment of an estimated FCFA 45 billion ($72m) reportedly in the form of “dealer retro-commissions.”

The president reportedly became “unwell” when hearing about the sums involved and vowed to bring the alleged perpetrators to justice. It also resulted in a major confrontation between the president and his private secretary, Idriss Youssouf Boy who is Kaka’s cousin and long-time friend.

According to a report by Africanews, Boy was arrested in connection with the embezzlement investigation and was later dismissed by the president for his alleged involvement. Two directors of SHT were also dismissed from the company for their alleged role in the fiasco. The Malian country head of Orabank, Mamadou Bass was arrested in connection with the scandal.

Two months later, after the news broke, Kaka claimed that the government recovered the majority of funds, according to the U.S. State Department. But in early January, Boy was appointed as the President’s chief of staff. Bass would later be released and leave the country. His twelve-year employment with Orabank ended in September 2022.

There appears to be no record of whether an official investigation was completed and whether anyone has been held accountable for the alleged theft.

Bass and Boy did not respond to requests for comment.

The Orabank Group declined to comment when approached for a response.
SUPPRESSION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

Under Déby Senior, freedom of information and media rights were severely curtailed through the shutdown of the internet during periods of heightened dissent.

According to analysis published by Amnesty International, ahead of the 2021 election, the country experienced 911 days of internet disruptions over the five years between presidential elections held in 2016 and 2021. In many cases, social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook were targeted.

Notably, most of the restrictions took place during politically sensitive moments such as elections, demonstrations, and periods involving institutional reform.

Kaka’s regime has begun to display similar tendencies. On August 19 2023 and two days later, the independent and privately owned news website Alwihda Info published articles critical of Kaka’s dismissal of an army colonel and inflammatory remarks he made that appeared to conflict with his message of reconciliation.

The articles were reviewed by the country’s High Media and Audio-visual Authority regulator that found the website’s comments to be “insulting” to the president and were “of a nature undermining the cohesion and discipline within the army.”

The regulator suspended the website from publishing for eight days and the website’s publisher, Djimet Wiché, went into hiding after suspicions he was being followed by intelligence agents. Human Rights Watch called it a “troubling development” for free speech.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an organisation which monitors and reports on attacks on journalists and the freedom of the press, says the decision is unsurprising in the context of Chad.

“This suspension of the website (Alwihda Info) is consistent with previous punitive behaviour we have seen from authorities. Whether its security officers on the street or authorities with more institutional levers at their disposal, it fits into a broader pattern of those with power and authority in Chad wielding that power in attempts to prevent reporting that they find unfavourable,” says Jonathan Rozen, Senior Africa Researcher for the Committee to Protect Journalists.

JOURNALIST KILLING

The development follows the killing of another journalist, Narcisse Orédjé, who was shot while covering the protests on October 20. The CPJ classified Orédjé’s death as a “Dangerous Assignment” which means that with the information currently available, it cannot be firmly established where he was murdered in direct reprisal for his reporting.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions are used regularly to deter and disrupt protests and other civil acts of disobedience against the regime. Over two days in January 2022, 13 protestors were killed and 80 injured when they held a demonstration regarding the appointment of a new district chief in Abéché.

Similarly in May of the same year, six members of the Wakit Tama platform were detained and sent to the Moussoro prison, 300 kilometres from N’Djamena.
Recent developments in Sudan have been a cause for concern. While the two countries enjoy historical and cultural ties, the border has often been volatile. Nearby Darfur, located in western Sudan, has long served as a safe haven for Chadian rebels. In a similar vein, Déby senior in the past supported Darfuri rebels challenging former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir until a non-aggression pact was signed in 2010.17

The fighting which broke out in Khartoum between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the rival Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April this year has spread rapidly to other parts of the country, including the border with Chad where the RSF is active. This prompted the two countries to agree on coordinated patrols of their armies along the border areas.

The United Nations recently estimated that as many as 5,000 people have lost their lives in the conflict with a further 4.6 million displaced.18 Up to the middle of September, as many as 400,000 refugees arrived in Chad from Sudan.19

The security developments in Sudan may create unease in N'Djamena and may even be used as the pretext for further consolidation of power by the Déby regime.

Enrica Picco, from the International Crisis Group said: “With the war in Sudan and the coup in Niger, Déby becomes the only country in the region that is friendly towards the West. He had strong support from France even after the crackdown. The growing list of coups in Francophone countries means they have even less leverage to put pressure on him to adopt democratic processes. They need Déby to be their ally. So, he finds himself in a very favourable geopolitical situation.”
Recent military-led coups in Francophone Africa have come with a large amount of anti-French sentiment. This has resulted in the withdrawal since 2020 of the French military presence in the Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. These developments have been widely perceived as humiliating for France.

The withdrawal also coincides with the termination of France’s Operation Barkhane in late 2022, which has been replaced with a new initiative that does not have an operational name but is referred to as the French Forces in the Sahel (FFS).

Could a rethink of French foreign policy have consequences for Chad’s value to France and by default Kaka’s hold on power?

Thierry Vircoulon, an associate Research Fellow, Coordinator of the Observatory of Central and Southern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa Centre at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) thinks the substance of France’s relationship with Chad is changing, and this will have implications for its appetite to unconditionally support the Déby regime.

“I don’t think the quid pro quo holds anymore – what you are talking about might have been the case ten years ago. But now no-one in the West cares about Chad. The fight against extremism is over for the Europeans, as far as I understand. The Europeans for now are just happy that there is no war in Chad. I think the only reason why the Europeans would do anything is if they saw the Russians becoming active. The French relationship with the father was strong, but now under Kaka it is weakening.”

U.S. PRIORITIES

But Lewis Mudge from Human Rights Watch points out that France could yet be encouraged by the United States to act as the proxy for western interests in the region and may be required to maintain the relationship on behalf of its allies.

“The U.S. still has a pretty substantial intelligence operation in Chad and it remains a strategic policy of the United States to contain the extremists like Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram. Besides the war on terror, the West needs him [Kaka] to manage the spill over from Libya and Sudan. The flow of refugees from Sudan is a massive issue,” says Mudge.

The U.S State Department told us it is committed to supporting an inclusive democratic transition in Chad and will continue to cooperate with the country on multiple issues, including humanitarian relief and regional security. The U.S. says it has taken a leading role in condemning the October violence including calling for a transparent and thorough international investigation into what transpired that will result in accountability for those found to have killed protestors.

In what appears to be a reaction to the October violence, the State Departments says it has “significantly curtailed” assistance to the Chadian defence forces, and only further progress on an inclusive democratic transition will enable a “normalising” of the security cooperation relationship.

This includes releasing unjustly detained opposition protestors and permitting opposition politicians to return to the country. It would also like to see the government ensuring that there is broad participation in the constitutional referendum and in processes that develop the legal framework and mechanisms for the elections in 2024.

There is also the question for Kaka regarding when the ties to France become more a liability than an asset, which could make his own position precarious.

For now, the various components of power appear to be in balance and the objective of ensuring it passes from father to son is merely an exercise of jumping through the hoops and ticking all the boxes. The aspirations and needs of the broader population will take a back seat until something gives.
APPENDIX

United States of America Department of State response to Finance Uncovered questions on 6 October 2023

- The United States is committed to supporting an inclusive, democratic transition in Chad. We also cooperate with Chad on humanitarian relief, regional security priorities, and educational and cultural exchange.

- The United States has taken a leading role among partners in pressing the Chadian Government to condemn the October 20, 2023 violence, call for a transparent investigation, release unjustly detained opposition protesters, permit opposition leaders to return to Chad, restore the ability of opposition parties and civil society groups to operate, and conduct a transparent and inclusive constitutional process.

- The United States remains concerned about the lack of transparency and inclusivity during the recent drafting of Chad’s newest constitution. We continue to urge the government of Chad to ensure broad participation in the constitutional referendum and in developing a legal framework and mechanisms for elections in 2024.

- The U.S. government has condemned the violent clashes with protesters on October 20, 2022; we continue to press for a thorough international inquiry leading to accountability for those responsible for killing protesters. We also continue to work behind the scenes, advocating for protestors who remain unjustly detained to be released and for all detainees to be afforded their fair trial guarantees they are owed and for information on the whereabouts of prisoners who remain unaccounted for.

- The United States government has significantly curtailed assistance to Chadian defence forces. Further progress on an inclusive democratic transition will be critical to normalising our security cooperation relationship.

- We firmly believe that a democratic Chad that addresses the underlying causes of terrorism and insecurity will be able to more effectively counter terrorism and violent extremism and create a more prosperous future for all its citizens.

- Moreover, a democratic and inclusive Chadian Government can be a valuable partner in appropriately addressing corruption issues within the country. Countering corruption is a core national security threat and foreign policy priority for the United States.
FOOTNOTES

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30 Report translated as "CHAD: TURNING THE DARK PAGE ON THE TRAGIC EVENTS OF OCTOBER 20, 2022" provided by the Minister of Communications, Aziz Mahamat Saleh, to us on Thursday 5 October 2023.
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45 Chad’s ‘nationalization’ of all Exxon-owned assets disputed by UK’s Savannah Energy, 27 March 2023, found here https://northafrica-post.com/6394-chads-nationalization-of-all-exxon-owned-assets-disputed-by-oks-savannah-energy.html
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Written: Warren Thompson
Edited: Nick Mathiason and Ted Jeory
Production: Kate Fishpool

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