

Current Chaos in Chad Yet Another Challenge for France in Africa

By [Uriel Araujo](#)

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On October 20, deadly clashes between security forces and demonstrations erupted in Chad. This is a major cause of concern for Paris and can also be seen as a sign of the challenges European powers are to face in Africa in general. In May there were major anti-French protests in the country, which has been under French military occupation. Protests in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso (former French colonies) have included calls for greater military ties with Moscow instead of Paris.

Europe is considering relying more and more on African resources amid today's energy crisis - and this could increase should the EU's relations with China deteriorate, as seems to be Brussel's desire if one takes seriously the recent [anti-Chinese recommendations](#) the European External Action Service issued to its member states.

From 1900 to the country's independence in 1960 Paris controlled Chad. One could say in fact the country has hosted an almost non-stop succession of military operations since its independence.

In 1990, Paris went to great lengths to support Idriss Déby's coup d'état against then president **Hissene Habré**. France, in the following years, offered its support to Déby against internal attempts to overthrow him and has kept a military presence in Chad. It also maintains an air force base at N'Djamena International Airport.

The country is located in a strategic area, and the relationship between Paris and the Chad authorities in N'Djamena has been mostly about military interests. Déby was not just a mere provider of troops to French regional wars. Chadian armed forces are today regarded as among the most efficient in the region and have played an important part in interventions in Central Africa, including in Mali. By means of its military interventionism and Déby's role as a strongman, Chad was able to acquire global political capital as a partner of the West in the "war on terror". N'Djamena has maintained regional stability, from a French perspective, by combating terrorist groups Boko Haram and other organizations. However, its interference

elsewhere, particularly in the Central African Republic, could be described as having destabilizing outcomes instead.

Some analysts argue that N'Djamena diplomacy was successful in portraying the country and its government as indispensable to the West, and also argue that over the years Chad's government has skillfully instrumentalized the "war on terror" by branding internal rebels and opposition as "terrorists". French Operation Barkhane in the country, for example, has targeted several Chadian rebels that had nothing to do with the Jihadist organization in the Sahel with which Paris was really worried.

When Déby was killed by rebels in 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron attended his funeral and even Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US Representative to the UN, had very nice words to say about the departed leader (largely seen as a dictator). Upon Déby's death, the government and the parliament were dissolved, and a Transitional Military Council was set up, headed by Mahamat Déby Itno, the deceased leader's son. This opened the way to a troublesome transition crisis and conflict.

Paris and Washington cooperate and also sometimes compete for influence in Africa, but both powers see Chad as a major proxy – and now that it is haunted by the specter of instability and chaos, how will Paris respond?

We should expect an increase of European aggressive interventionism in Africa in general, but this could backfire and also expand the potential for [US-European competition](#), as France has its own interests in Djibouti and nearing Somalia, while US President Joe Biden has escalated the American "[forever war](#)" in the latter – a situation that very much concerns Paris.

The African continent is targeted to become a major stage of great power competition, in a neocolonial manner, it would seem. However, things are changing. African nations and other emerging states are increasingly building on [multi-alignment](#), [non-alignment](#), and multilateralism while developing beneficial relations with China and Russia, as exemplified by the [Egyptian Russian-built nuclear plant](#), while the West hypocritically [campaigns against energy projects in the continent](#). In fact, despite green commitments, [coal-fired plants are back](#) in Europe – and so is [Nazism](#), despite democratic commitments. These developments potentially undermine part of the Western soft power, [as we have seen recently](#) with the UN October 6 vote against a report (on China) written by its own human rights commissioner.

In fact, Europe today faces not only an economic, political and energy crisis, but a spiritual one, pertaining to its own values and self-perceptions – and this impacts on its very capacity to project its power abroad.

On October 13, Josep Borrell, the EU foreign policy chief, stated that "[Europe is a garden](#)" while most of the rest of the world "is a jungle". He bluntly added that the jungle "could invade the garden." This was of course not well received in Africa and elsewhere. Regarding Borrell's remarks, volumes could be spoken about European self-perceptions of exceptionalism and the implicit dichotomy of culture (or "civilisation") versus nature or "barbarism". One could argue that the so-called "garden" (of freedom, democracy and so on) already has to deal, from Brussels's perspective, with inconvenient dissonances inside, exemplified by [Hungary](#) and [Poland](#). By embracing Ukraine, with its long record of [neo-Nazism](#) and [human rights infringements](#), the "garden" has already opened its gates, so to

speak, according to its own standards. In any case, the political and diplomatic power of the West's human rights narratives is [wearing off](#).

Moscow and Beijing have much to gain from such a situation – as Europe seems to be bluntly unmasking its neocolonialist tendencies and exposing the hypocrisy of its green and human rights narratives in broad daylight. And African states also have much to gain, by navigating the emerging polycentric world through multialignment.

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Uriel Araujo is a researcher with a focus on international and ethnic conflicts.

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