

**Statement for Ambassador Alexander Mark Laskaris
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Chad
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 10, 2022**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member.

It is an honor to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for a second time.

I am deeply grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their support, and – if confirmed – for the opportunity to continue my 31 year-career as a Foreign Service Officer.

To an Africanist, the word “Chad” conjures up memories of great kingdoms rooted in storied civilizations dating back to some 1,000 years of recorded history. Today’s Chad is a rich mosaic of peoples, cultures, languages, and religions encompassing the worlds of the desert, the savannah, and the forest in an area three times the size of California.

A rich past notwithstanding, today’s Chad is also one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 187th out of 189 countries in the UN’s Human Development Index. It has some of the highest rates of maternal and infant mortality in the world, and some of the lowest incomes, life expectancies, and literacy rates.

It is within both our interests as a nation and our values as a people that we work to address these conditions. There are security issues that require our attention, but they should never divert us from the fundamental development challenges that call for greater action and must define our work in Chad.

We have been partners with Chad since its earliest days as an independent republic, and we helped defend its national sovereignty and territorial integrity against armed Libyan irredentism in the 1980s. Perhaps this memory of an attempt by Colonel Qadhafi to forcibly seize the northern third of its territory contributed to Chad’s strong and welcome denunciation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Two battalions of Chadian peacekeepers have long served in the UN Mission in Mali and Chadian soldiers have joined the regional and international coalitions against violent extremist organizations in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin. U.S. military personnel have always been welcomed in Chad, and today there some 75 American service members deployed to N’Djamena, where they support the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin, as well as our African and French partners in the Sahel.

Chad and its people have also been superb hosts to refugees fleeing violence in Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Cameroon. The people have welcomed their brothers and sisters fleeing violence, and the government has ensured that humanitarian assistance from the international community, led by the United States, has reached its intended beneficiaries.

Mr. Chairman, Chad gained its independence in 1960 and has had six presidents in the last 62 years. None of the incumbents left power voluntarily, and none of their successors assumed power via constitutional processes. In its modern history, Chad has been governed by and for narrow regional and ethno-linguistic interests. It has also been governed more by the force of arms than by the force of law.

Following the death of President Idriss Deby in April 2021 and under Chad's 2020 constitution, the President of the National Assembly ultimately should have assumed the powers of the presidency on an interim basis and led the country quickly through to new elections.

But he refused and that did not happen.

Instead of the process laid out in the constitution, Chad has had a Transitional Military Council led by one of the late President's sons. It has pledged a national dialogue leading to new elections.

After President Deby's death, the United States called for a peaceful, timely, and civilian-led transition of power to a democratically elected government. The pre-dialogue negotiations underway in Doha are a critical step.

If confirmed, I will continue to work with the African Union and our international partners to support an inclusive, peaceful, and timely transition to a democratic and civilian-led government. The goal - and the hope- that we share with the people of Chad is the first democratic transfer of power in the country's history, one that empowers a new government to tackle the profound development challenges it will face on inauguration day.

Unique in Chad's history, Transitional Military Council President Mahamat Deby has said publicly that he has no intention of running in the ensuing elections, the timing of which depends on a successful national dialogue. Effective elections alone will not guarantee the success of the transition, but it is an important signal to the people of Chad and to Chad's international partners that political power must be contested at the ballot box, and not on the battlefield.

As I begin to formulate my own thinking on how I will advance U.S. interests in Chad – if confirmed -- I go back to my two wonderful years on the faculty of the National War College, where we teach our students to formulate strategy by defining their ends, ways and means.

Our end state in Chad must be a stable country at peace with itself and able to contribute to peacebuilding in the region. Our ways consist of a small embassy; our portfolio of assistance and engagement programs; and our interagency and international partners. Our means are the hard work under challenging conditions of some 600 American and Chadian staff, including just 36 U.S. direct hires, and the generosity of the American people acting through their elected executive and legislative branches.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, and I am happy to answer any questions, either now or for the record.