

[✉ Email This](#)[🖨 Print This](#)

"Repression and Violence Are a Danger to the Whole Region", Richard Moncrieff in The Independent

30 September 2009

The Independent

The tragic events of Monday were born of a confrontation between sheer desperation and brute force. Guineans suffered appallingly under President Lansana Conté, who, like his successor, Moussa Dadis Camara, came to power in a military coup.

Conté installed a dictatorship that lasted from 1984 to 2008; when I talked to youth leaders in Conakry 10 days ago, it was clear they were anxious to stop that from happening again. With political dialogue stalling, and it becoming increasingly obvious that Dadis Camara intends to run for president, they saw the street as their only means of pressure.

On Monday evening, shortly after the rally, Dadis Camara sounded shaken as he spoke on French radio and all but admitted that he was losing control of the army. Given the killings, that may be the only position he can take. But his stance is indeed highly fragile in an army whose growing indiscipline he has at least tolerated over recent months.

This indiscipline can be traced back to the bloody repression of protests in February 2007, when over 100 people were killed in a crackdown very similar to this week's. Such repression, along with guaranteed immunity for the military's abuses against civilians, kept the ailing Conté in power.

The regional implications are disturbing. Five years after the terrible conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Monday's protests demonstrate that underlying problems are far from solved. Throughout the region, high levels of unemployment and poor governance continue to cause extreme frustration.

In Guinea, the weakness of countervailing powers – political parties, parliaments, media – has opened space for the military, with the disastrous consequences we now see. More worrying, the border area with Liberia, which suffered a spillover from the Liberian civil war in 2001, is the site of increasing ethnic tension.

Dadis Camara has not officially declared his intention to run for presidential office, and this may provide an opportunity for a combination of domestic and international pressure to get him to back down. But, after Monday's protests, the mood on the street is that he should leave now. Unless he can be persuaded that further repression will lead to sanctions and legal measures, the crisis in Guinea may be far from over.

Richard Moncrieff is West Africa project director of the International Crisis Group

[The Independent](#)

→ [🗨 comments](#)