

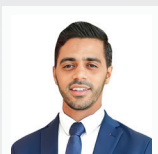


AFRICAN NARRATIVES

France's Withdrawal: Redefining Geopolitical Dynamics in West and Central Africa



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Introduction:

West Africa and the Sahel are undergoing profound and rapid geopolitical shifts as France continues to withdraw its forces from the region. Recently, France announced plans to pull its troops from Chad, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire, following its earlier withdrawals from Mali and Burkina Faso. This move is widely seen as part of a broader reconfiguration of France's strategy in Africa, driven by mounting local and regional criticism of its military presence, often labeled as "neo-colonial." Furthermore, escalating security challenges, the proliferation of armed groups, and France's failure to achieve stability in the region have prompted Paris to reassess its role in the African Sahel. Simultaneously, the region is witnessing the growing influence of Russia through the Wagner Group, which has positioned itself as a security alternative for African nations, alongside China's expanding economic and diplomatic footprint. Recently, military relations between France and several African countries have undergone significant changes, including the termination of defense cooperation agreements and the withdrawal of French forces from multiple African states. This development forms part of a broader reassessment of France's military presence in Africa, particularly in the Sahel region.

In November 2024, Chad terminated its security and defense cooperation agreements following a visit by French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot to the Chadian capital, N'Djamena. This decision mirrors Chad's earlier withdrawal from its military cooperation agreement with the United States in March 2024, further bolstering Russian presence in the region⁽¹⁾.

The decision to reduce military cooperation with France reflects a growing wave of anti-French sentiment in several African countries, especially in the Sahel and West Africa. In recent years, nations like Chad, Niger, and Burkina Faso have expelled French forces that had been present for decades. These developments are part of a broader shift in how Africa manages its relationship with France. While France has been a key military partner, especially in fighting Islamist insurgencies, the continent's move toward greater independence is reshaping its ties with former colonial powers⁽²⁾. For France, this withdrawal marks a significant setback. Once a dominant power in West Africa, France has spent recent years attempting to maintain and even revive its influence on both political and military fronts. However, these recent developments suggest a diminishing military footprint as African nations seek greater control over their security affairs. The withdrawal of French forces from Côte d'Ivoire, along with similar moves in other countries, marks a new chapter in France's involvement in Africa. It remains to be seen how this shift will impact the broader geopolitical landscape and what role other international powers, such as China and Russia, might play in filling the void left by France.

In this context, the consequences of France's withdrawal from several African countries on the region's stability will be explored through the following key points:

1 Chad Cancels Security and Defense Cooperation Agreements with France amid Declining Paris-African Relations, France 24. <https://24u.pw/XBHIMoyS>.

2 Ivory Coast begins withdrawal of French troops in January 2025, *ibid*.

First: France's Withdrawal from Chad

The French military withdrawal from Chad represents a historic turning point in the decades-long relationship between the two countries, characterized by military and security cooperation. Once a cornerstone of France's strategy in the Sahel, Chad decided to end its military agreement with France, calling it "outdated" and no longer in line with the current geopolitical context. This move reflects significant regional and international shifts, as French influence in the Sahel declines while powers like Russia smilitary base, with plans for a gradual exit, yet local pressures, including public protests and political disagreements, accelerated the process.⁽³⁾ With France's withdrawal, questions arise about the future of security in Chad, particularly as Russian influence grows in the region. Chad may turn to Moscow for military and intelligence support. However, Chad has emphasized that ending the agreement does not equate to severing diplomatic ties with France, but rather redefines the partnership according to its national priorities. This could reshape strategic alliances in one of the most unstable regions in the world.

Bilateral Relations between France and Chad under President Mahamat Déby

On November 6, 2023, President Mahamat Déby visited France, during which Paris sought to strengthen its leadership role in strategic issues in West Africa, particularly in Chad. France aimed to increase its military presence and expand its military bases to safeguard its interests against armed groups while supporting Chad's transitional government in the post-election phase. Additionally, Paris sought to improve its image in the region by enhancing military and economic cooperation with Chad, where France is a key economic partner through investments in agriculture, technology, and hydrocarbons⁽⁴⁾.

In 2018, France provided €10 million in direct budget aid to Chad, along with €40 million in concessional loans to support the budget as part of an International Monetary Fund program. Additionally, France contributed €862,000 through the Humanitarian Emergency Fund to finance humanitarian projects. In the field of development, the French Development Agency (AFD) committed €68 million in 2017 and €77 million in 2018, focusing on supporting agriculture, health, education, and urban planning in N'Djamena and Moundou. Following the 2022 peace agreement in Doha between the Chadian authorities and 43 political and military groups, France offered a financial aid package to support the transitional process and ensure peace and security. France hopes these efforts will encourage other Sahel countries to rebuild partnerships with it, especially amid its declining influence in the region.⁽⁵⁾ The military relationship between Chad and France spans several decades, beginning from the French colonial period when Chad was part of French Equatorial Africa, and continuing after Chad's independence in 1960. Notably, France played a pivotal role in supporting successive Chadian regimes, especially during the presidency of Idriss Déby, by providing military and logistical assistance to combat internal rebellions and terrorist groups. As a result, Chad became a strategic ally for France in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, hosting French military bases and troops as part of Operation Barkhane. Moreover, France sought to maintain a strong military presence in the country to protect its strategic interests and support the ruling regime. In addition, during the Chadian civil war, which lasted for decades, France provided military support to successive governments, particularly in their battles against rebel groups like the Chadian National Liberation Front (FROLINAT).

3 Chad Announces Termination of Defense Cooperation Agreements with France, Russia Today. <https://shorturl.at/NBqTC>

4 Salah Khalil, Strengthening Mutual Interests: What Lies Behind the Chadian President's Visit to France? Egyptian Center for Thought and Strategic Studies <https://ecss.com.eg/32891/>

5 Strengthening Mutual Interests: What Lies Behind the Chadian President's Visit to France?, Ibid.



In particular, France played a key role in consolidating the rule of former President Idriss Déby, who led Chad for over three decades until his death in 2021. Throughout Déby's presidency, France provided military and logistical support, including training and equipment, to assist the Chadian government in dealing with internal rebellions and terrorist groups such as Boko Haram. At the same time, French forces also formed part of Operation Barkhane, a mission aimed at combating terrorism in the Sahel region.

Subsequently, in 2019, the French-Chadian military agreement was signed as part of the ongoing security cooperation between the two countries since Chad's independence in 1960. This agreement, therefore, came in the context of strengthening military collaboration, especially in response to increasing security threats in the Sahel region, including the spread of terrorist groups like Boko Haram and ISIS. The agreement aimed to bolster regional security between France and Chad in the fight against terrorism and armed groups in the Sahel, support Chad's efforts to secure its borders and prevent the spread of terrorist groups, and provide logistical support and

training. In particular, France committed to offering logistical support and training to enhance the Chadian military's combat and intelligence capabilities. Additionally, the agreement included joint military exercises between French and Chadian forces to improve coordination and exchange of expertise. Moreover, Paris pledged to provide air support to Chadian forces, including the use of fighter jets and drones for border surveillance and military operations, as well as strengthening intelligence-sharing between the two countries to address shared security threats.

As a result, with Chad's announcement in December 2024 about terminating the military agreement with France, the future of military cooperation between the two countries has become uncertain. Chad is now seeking to redefine its security partnerships based on its national needs, with the possibility of strengthening cooperation with other regional and international powers. On November 28, 2024, the government of Chad unexpectedly announced the termination of its defense cooperation agreement with France, triggering the withdrawal of French troops stationed in the country. This included approximately 1,000

French soldiers, along with advanced military equipment, such as Mirage aircraft. This decision has raised questions about its causes, with many believing that the growing anti-foreign sentiment and Chad's desire to achieve full sovereignty over its territory played a pivotal role in this context. In this regard, France faced increasing pressure from local governments and populations demanding an end to foreign military presence. In Chad, several factors contributed to the termination of the military agreement with France, including the desire to strengthen national sovereignty, dissatisfaction with France's support in addressing security threats, and growing anti-France sentiment due to accusations of ineffectiveness in combating terrorism. Additionally, regional geopolitical shifts, such as the rise of Russian influence and Chad's closer ties with other powers, prompted Chad to reassess its security partnerships. This withdrawal reflects a broader shift in France's policy towards Africa, as it seeks to reorganize its military presence on the continent. The key reasons behind France's withdrawal from Chad are as follows⁽⁶⁾:

• **Rising Domestic Pressures:**

France faced increasing criticism from African populations who viewed the French military presence as a continuation of colonialism. In Chad, protests against the French presence led Paris to reconsider its policy.

• **Geopolitical Shifts:**

With the rise of new regional and international powers in Africa, such as Russia and China, France began reevaluating its strategic priorities. Additionally, the security threats in the Sahel region require a new approach beyond traditional military presence.

• **Internal Situation in Chad:**

After the death of President Déby, Chad experienced a period of political instability.

France, which had supported Déby's regime, found itself in a difficult position with the arrival of a new leadership that may not share the same interests.

- **Growing Political and Financial Disagreements:** President Mahamat Déby's government expressed dissatisfaction with the insufficient financial support from France and the European Union for the electoral process in Chad. Analysts noted that Chad's rapprochement with Russia and Turkey dismayed French authorities, exacerbating tensions.

• **France's Involvement in the Sudanese Conflict:**

France criticized Chad's role in the Sudanese conflict, accusing Chad of supporting the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), while France backed a negotiated settlement between the warring factions. Analysts also suggested that Chad supported the RSF because some Chadian opposition groups to the Déby regime had joined the Sudanese armed forces.

• **Rising Anti-French Sentiment:**

Like other African countries, Chad witnessed a growing anti-French sentiment, with some considering the French presence as an extension of colonial influence.

- **Shifting Regional Alliances:** With the growing influence of Russia and China in Africa, countries like Chad began reassessing their relations with foreign powers, leading to a reduction in cooperation with France.

• **Desire to Strengthen National Sovereignty:**

Ending the agreement with France is seen as a step towards strengthening independence and national sovereignty, relying on self-capacity to confront security challenges.

6 Farouk Hussein, "The French Presence in Africa and the Dimensions of President Macron's Recent Visit," African Studies and Consulting Center. <https://shorturl.at/MwsYC>



Implications of the French Withdrawal

The withdrawal of French forces from Chad carries significant consequences for regional security and the bilateral relations between the two countries:

• Regional Security:

Chad had been a key ally in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel. With France's withdrawal, the country may face difficulties in combating armed groups, potentially exacerbating the security crisis in the region.

• Bilateral Relations:

Despite the military withdrawal, France is likely to maintain strong diplomatic and economic relations with Chad. However, these relations may undergo changes, particularly as Russian and Chinese influence in the region grows.

• Chad's Future:

France's departure may open the door for other regional and international powers to increase

their presence in Chad. The Chadian government may also need to reassess its security policy and regional alliances.

• Loss of a Strategic Ally for France:

Chad had been a key strategic partner for France in combating terrorism in the Sahel, especially following France's withdrawals from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. With France's departure, Chad may face difficulties in addressing security threats, particularly from terrorist groups like Boko Haram.

• Growing Russian Influence:

The French exit from Chad could present a significant opportunity for Russia to strengthen its position in the Sahel and expand its dominance over the region's countries. Given that Chad borders countries hosting the Russian "Wagner Group," Chad may turn to Russia for military and intelligence support, following the model of Mali, which severed ties with the West and now relies on Russia, Turkey, and China.

Second: France's Withdrawal from Senegal

In recent years, there has been a growing wave of popular and political criticism towards the French presence in Senegal, with local voices calling for an end to what is described as “French hegemony” and a redefinition of the relationship based on a more balanced foundation. This shift occurred within the broader context of geopolitical changes in the region, as West African countries have undergone transformations in their stances towards traditional powers, alongside the growing influence of Russia and China. In this regard, Senegal announced the closure of all foreign military bases on its soil, without specifying a timeline for the withdrawal of foreign forces. This announcement came from Senegalese Prime Minister “Ousmane Sonko” during a statement presented to the National Assembly, confirming that the country had decided to close all foreign military bases in the near future. Furthermore, Senegalese President “Bassirou Diomay Faye” had expressed in November his desire to close French military bases in the country, emphasizing that Senegal is an independent and sovereign state, and sovereignty is incompatible with the presence of foreign military bases⁽⁷⁾.

It can be said that this decision appears to primarily target France, which has recently faced increasing opposition from some African leaders due to accusations of adopting an arrogant and harsh approach in its dealings with the continent. French officials have clarified that France aims to significantly reduce its presence in all of its military bases in Africa, except for Djibouti, including the 350 French soldiers stationed in Senegal. Instead, France may offer defensive training or targeted military support based on the needs of these countries. Additionally, the new Senegalese government, which assumed power less than a year ago, has taken a firm stance regarding the presence of French forces, as part of a broader regional response to what is seen as

the legacy of a repressive colonial empire.⁽⁸⁾

Thus, Senegal is one of the most prominent African countries for France, as it tops the list of priority countries in French development policy. Senegal came first with nearly 177 million euros, followed by Mali with 107 million euros, then Burkina Faso with 100 million euros, and Niger with 92.4 million euros⁽⁹⁾.

The military relations between France and Senegal

are one of the most significant strategic partnerships in West Africa, with roots dating back to the French colonial period, which officially ended in 1960 with Senegal's independence. Despite the end of the colonial era, both countries maintained close military ties, as evidenced by bilateral agreements, joint training exercises, and logistical support provided by France to Senegal.

Bilateral Military Agreements:

France and Senegal signed military agreements in 1974, regulating the presence of French troops in Senegal and setting the terms for cooperation between the two countries. Under these agreements, France maintains approximately 350 soldiers at the Diouck Air Base near Dakar, which serves as one of the most important French military bases in the region. The base is utilized to support French military operations in the Sahel region, in addition to offering training and logistical support to the Senegalese forces⁽¹⁰⁾.

7 Senegal to close foreign military bases, cuts ties to ex-colonial power France, Associated Press, 27 December 2024. <https://www.voanews.com/a/senegal-to-close-foreign-military-bases-cuts-ties-to-ex-colonial-power-france/7916172.html>

8 Senegal to close foreign military bases, cuts ties to ex-colonial power France, IBID.

9 French official development assistance in figures, French Foreign Policy - Development Assistance. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/development-assistance/french-official-development/>

10 Au Tchad et au Sénégal, l'armée française poussée vers la sortie. https://www.liberation.fr/international/afrique/au-tchad-et-au-senegal-larmee-francaise-poussee-vers-la-sortie-20241129_2BMNNG42FBE7IATSDCZ4H3QWE/

Joint Military Exercises:

France and Senegal regularly conduct joint military exercises, strengthening the combat capabilities of Senegalese forces and contributing to regional security. One of the most notable of these exercises is “Takuba,” which forms part of France’s efforts to combat terrorism in the Sahel region. In 2022, over 500 Senegalese soldiers participated in these drills, alongside forces from other countries such as Mali and Chad. These exercises help improve coordination between the Senegalese and French forces, while enhancing the logistical and intelligence capabilities of the Senegalese military⁽¹¹⁾.

French Support in Counterterrorism:

Senegal is a key partner for France in combating terrorism in the Sahel region, which faces growing threats from terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and ISIS. According to United Nations reports, terrorist attacks in the Sahel increased by 50% between 2020 and 2022. In this context, France has provided substantial military support to Senegal, including the supply of military equipment, training, and intelligence. In 2021, France offered military assistance worth €10 million to Senegal, including the provision of military vehicles and advanced communication systems.

Cooperation in Military Training and Education:

France plays a significant role in training and qualifying Senegalese officers and soldiers. Dozens of Senegalese officers attend French military academies, such as the prestigious Saint-Cyr Military School, annually. Additionally, France offers scholarships to Senegalese officers to study advanced military tactics and security management. In 2023, over 100 Senegalese officers received training in France, reflecting the depth of the collaboration between the two nations in this field.

French Objectives of Military Presence in Senegal⁽¹²⁾

Protecting Strategic Interests:

The French military presence aimed to safeguard France’s economic and political interests in the region, especially in light of the vast natural resources found in West African countries.

Counterterrorism Efforts:

With the rising threat of terrorism in the Sahel, French military bases in Senegal became part of a broader strategy to combat armed groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Enhancing Political Influence:

The military presence helped France maintain its political influence in the region, with Paris playing a pivotal role in shaping security and political decisions across several African nations.

Reasons for the French Withdrawal from Senegal

The French withdrawal from Senegal, or the reduction of its military presence in the country, can be attributed to several factors related to geopolitical changes in the region, local pressures in Senegal, and France’s new strategic direction in Africa. These combined factors led to a reassessment of the French military presence in Senegal.

Below are the key reasons⁽¹³⁾:

Local Pressures and Sovereignty Demands:

In recent years, Senegal has seen a rise in popular demands to reduce dependence on France, particularly in the military domain. Many Senegalese, especially the youth, feel that the French military presence serves as a reminder of the

11 DECRYPTAGE. Pourquoi le Sénégal demande le départ des militaires français de son territoire. <https://www.ladepeche.fr/2024/11/29/decryptage-pourquoi-le-senegal-demande-le-depart-des-militaires-francais-de-son-territoire-12354933.php>

12 Why France should close its permanent military bases in Africa, European Council on Foreign Relations, <https://ecfr.eu/article/why-france-should-close-its-permanent-military-bases-in-africa/>

13 Why France should close its permanent military bases in Africa, *ibid*.

colonial era and undermines the country's sovereignty. In 2022, large protests erupted in Dakar, where thousands of young people participated, calling for the termination of military agreements with France. These protests were part of a broader wave of unrest in West Africa against French military presence, especially after the coup in Mali and the expulsion of French forces from there.

Geopolitical Changes in the Region:

The Sahel region has experienced significant geopolitical changes in recent years, particularly following the 2021 military coup in Mali, which led to the expulsion of French forces. These developments have impacted France's strategy in the region, prompting Paris to reassess its military presence in West African countries, including Senegal. Moreover, Russia and China have increased their influence in the region, with countries like Mali and Burkina Faso starting to cooperate with the Russian Wagner Group, leading to a reduced reliance on France. These shifts have pushed France to reconsider its military strategy in the region, including scaling back its presence in Senegal.

The failure of the counter-terrorism strategy:

Despite France's significant efforts in combating terrorism in the Sahel region, the results have been limited. According to United Nations reports, terrorist attacks in the region increased by 50% between 2020 and 2022, raising questions about the effectiveness of the French strategy. This failure led to internal criticisms in France, with some politicians and analysts calling for a reevaluation of the French military presence in Africa. In this context, France began to scale down its forces in the region, including in Senegal, and shift its focus to supporting local forces rather than maintaining a direct presence⁽¹⁴⁾.

France's new strategic directions:

Under the leadership of President Emmanuel Macron, France began adopting a new strategy in

Africa, focusing on reducing direct military presence and increasing cooperation with local governments. In 2023, France announced a plan to reduce its forces in the Sahel by 30%, including a reduction in the number of soldiers in Senegal. This new strategy reflects France's desire to transition its role from a direct military power to a strategic partner that supports local governments in countering terrorism and enhancing security. In this context, France has started to increase logistical support and training for Senegalese forces while reducing its direct presence on the ground.

Cooperation with new partners:

Senegal has begun diversifying its military partnerships, which has led to a reduction in its reliance on France. In recent years, military cooperation between Senegal and Turkey has strengthened, with the two countries signing agreements for arms supplies and military training. Additionally, Senegal has started collaborating with China in the field of security and defense, altering the dynamics of military relations in the region. These shifts have prompted France to reassess its role in Senegal, with Paris becoming more cautious in its dealings with a country that seeks to diversify its military partnerships.

In the future, France is expected to continue providing support to Senegal through military training, equipment supply, and intelligence sharing, but with a reduced physical presence on the ground. Meanwhile, Senegal will seek to diversify its military partnerships with new players such as Turkey and China, which could alter the power dynamics in the region. This shift indicates that French-Senegalese military relations will rely less on direct presence and focus more on long-term strategic cooperation, while respecting Senegal's national sovereignty and its people's aspirations for full independence from the colonial legacy.

¹⁴ Why does France have military bases in Africa?, BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67278027>

Third: France's Withdrawal from Ivory Coast

In recent years, with the rising African criticism of France's presence on the continent, Paris began reassessing its strategy, leading to a gradual withdrawal from several countries in the Sahel region, including Ivory Coast. France has sought to maintain a strong military, diplomatic, and economic presence in the country, making it a key player in Ivory Coast's internal affairs. However, relations between the two countries have experienced significant fluctuations, especially during political crises such as the post-2010 election crisis, where France was accused of direct interference in the country's internal matters.

Recently, Ivory Coast announced that the French forces, stationed in the country for decades, will begin withdrawing from Ivorian territory this month. This marks another shift in the growing trend across Africa, where former colonial powers are reducing their military presence. This decision is part of the setbacks France is facing on the African continent. Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara announced in a statement to his people at the start of the New Year that the country had decided on a "coordinated and organized withdrawal of French forces" from its territory. He mentioned that the French military base in Abidjan would be handed over to Ivory Coast this month, and its name will be changed to "General Ouattara Thomas Dakouin," after the first Chief of Staff of the Ivorian Army. He also confirmed that the French Marine Infantry Battalion (BIMA) base will be handed over to the Ivorian army in early 2025.

In recent years, France maintained up to 600 sol-

diers in Ivory Coast, underscoring the long-standing military partnership between the two countries. However, this move is part of a broader trend across West Africa, where several countries have called for the removal of French military personnel. This reflects a significant shift in the political landscape of the region, as many African nations seek to redefine their relationships with former colonial powers⁽¹⁵⁾.

French Economic Interests in Ivory Coast Ivory Coast is one of the most important African countries that attracts significant economic interest from France. This interest is rooted in the deep historical ties between the two nations dating back to the colonial era, as Ivory Coast was a French colony until its independence in 1960. However, French influence has persisted in the country, deeply embedded in mutual economic interests that make France one of the primary trade and investment partners for Ivory Coast. This article explores French economic interests in Ivory Coast, focusing on key sectors, tools of French influence, and the economic and social implications of this influence. France has continued to affect the Ivorian economy through trade and investment agreements that have preserved its economic and political influence. Notably, one of the most significant agreements was the continued use of the West African CFA franc (CFA), originally pegged to the French franc and later linked to the euro, granting France substantial control over the monetary and financial policies of West African countries, including Ivory Coast⁽¹⁶⁾.

15 Ivory Coast begins withdrawal of French troops in January 2025, Africa News. <https://www.africanews.com/2025/01/02/ivory-coast-begins-withdrawal-of-french-troops-in-january-2025/>

16 France and Côte d'Ivoire, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/cote-d-ivoire/france-and-cote-d-ivoire-65124/>

Key Sectors of French Economic Interests in Ivory Coast Agricultural Sector and Natural Resources:

Ivory Coast is one of the world's largest cocoa producers, with cocoa accounting for over 40% of the country's exports. French companies dominate a significant portion of this sector, with major players such as Cargill and the French giant Barry Callebaut leading the cocoa trade and export business. The focus remains on refining raw materials in France rather than developing local manufacturing industries. French influence also extends to the production of coffee, rubber, and palm oil, with most of these products being exported to European markets, particularly France. Additionally, French companies are involved in the exploitation of other agricultural crops such as coffee, rubber, and palm oil. Despite the abundance of these resources, French control over production and distribution lines means that real added value is created in France, while the Ivorian economy remains reliant on the export of raw materials without significant development of local industrial capacities⁽¹⁷⁾.

Energy and Mineral Resources Sector:

French companies such as Total Energies and EDF have played a prominent role in the energy sector, including oil and natural gas. France directly contributes to the development of energy infrastructure, including power plants and renewable energy projects. French companies also dominate the extraction of mineral resources such as gold and bauxite through long-term concession contracts. Furthermore, France controls the exploitation of these minerals through French mining companies, giving it direct influence in this vital sector. Despite the country's rich resources, most of the revenue is extracted for the benefit of foreign companies, with a limited share remaining for the local economy.

Banking Sector and Financial Control:

One of the key tools of French economic dominance in Côte d'Ivoire is the West African CFA franc (CFA), a currency directly linked to the euro and subject to French oversight through the Central Bank of West African States. Major French banks such as Société Générale and BNP Paribas control a significant portion of the financial system in Côte d'Ivoire, allowing France to influence monetary policies and control the flow of capital and investments. This monetary system makes Côte d'Ivoire reliant on France for economic stability, preventing it from adopting independent monetary policies that align with its developmental needs⁽¹⁸⁾.

Infrastructure and Construction Sector:

France has made significant investments in strategic infrastructure projects in Côte d'Ivoire, with companies such as Vinci Construction and Bouygues dominating major project contracts. Notably, a French advanced operations base was established in 2015 as part of a defense partnership between the two countries. Over the previous 13 years, at least 950 French soldiers were deployed as part of Operation Licorne, a peacekeeping force created after the 2002 civil war⁽¹⁹⁾.

- Development of the Port of Abidjan, one of the most important commercial ports in West Africa.
- Construction of roads, bridges, and airports funded by French financial institutions under preferential terms benefiting French companies.

Despite the significance of these projects in boosting the local economy, most construction and execution contracts remain confined to French companies, which limits the development of the local construction sector and reinforces reliance on foreign expertise.

¹⁷ France vows to remain Ivory Coast's top economic partner, <https://www.france24.com/en/20110715-france-vows-remain-ivory-coast-top-economic-partner-fillon-ouattara-meet>

¹⁸ France vows to remain Ivory Coast's top economic partner, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Why does France have military bases in Africa?, *ibid.*



Trade and Direct Investments:

France is the largest trading partner of Côte d'Ivoire, with exports to France making up a significant portion of the country's total exports. These exports include cocoa, coffee, and rubber, while Côte d'Ivoire imports manufactured goods and technological equipment from France. On the other hand, French multinational companies dominate several sectors, including telecommunications and logistics, reinforcing France's control over the Ivorian economy through market monopolies.

Investment in Education and Culture as a Tool of Economic Influence:

France recognizes that economic dominance also requires cultural and educational influence. Therefore, it invests heavily in educational and cultural institutions in Côte d'Ivoire. Schools and institutes that follow the French curriculum play a key role in shaping the political and economic elite, ensuring that French culture and language remain primary tools in economic and political relations.

Political Dominance to Achieve Economic Interests:

Although this article focuses on the economic aspect, the close political relationship between France and Côte d'Ivoire cannot be separated

from economic interests. France has supported successive political regimes in Côte d'Ivoire that maintained preferential economic relations with Paris, such as its support for President Alassane Ouattara. This political support is reflected in preferential trade agreements and the continued French military presence through bases like the "Port Bouët" base in Abidjan, ensuring the continuity of French economic influence.

French Military Presence in Côte d'Ivoire

The French military presence in Côte d'Ivoire remains one of the most prominent features of France's continued influence in West Africa, with its origins tracing back to the colonial era. This presence persisted even after the country's independence in 1960. Despite the formal political separation, France maintained a permanent military presence in the country through defense agreements and military bases, establishing itself as a key player in regional security and geopolitical policies in West Africa.

The French military presence in Côte d'Ivoire began during the colonial period, where France used military force to assert control over the region as part of its broader colonial strategy in West Africa. After the country's independence in

In 1960, France and Côte d'Ivoire signed bilateral defense agreements, known as military cooperation agreements, which included⁽²⁰⁾:

- Allowing France to maintain military bases on Ivorian territory.
- Providing training and military assistance to the Ivorian armed forces.
- Ensuring direct French military intervention if the ruling regime faces threats.

One of the most prominent of these bases is the “Port Bouet” base, located near the economic capital Abidjan, which has become a key hub for French military operations in the region.

Reasons for French Military Presence in Ivory Coast

The reasons behind France's efforts to strengthen its military interests in Ivory Coast are varied, with some being public and others more hidden. Regarding the publicly stated reasons, they are as follows:

Maintaining Security and Stability:

France asserts that its military presence aims to enhance regional stability and protect African countries from armed movements and terrorism.

Counterterrorism Efforts:

The French presence is part of regional efforts to combat terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram.

Logistical Support and Training:

Support is provided to the Ivorian forces through training and military assistance.

As for the unspoken reasons, they include:

Protection of Economic Interests:

One of the main motivations is to protect France's economic interests, especially in sectors like natural resources and infrastructure.

Geopolitical Influence:

The military presence allows France to maintain its influence in West Africa and counter the growing influence of other powers such as China and Russia.

Securing Allied Regimes:

French military intervention during crises, such as the 2010-2011 crisis, reaffirmed France's role as a protector of political elites allied with it.

The Nature of French Military Presence in Côte d'Ivoire⁽²¹⁾

Military Bases

- Port-Bouët Base: This is the primary base, hosting units of special forces, logistical support, and military aviation.
- The base serves as a launch point for military operations in West Africa, including missions in Mali and Burkina Faso.

Military Operations

- Operation Licorne: Initiated in 2002 during Côte d'Ivoire's civil war, this operation saw France intervene to support the ruling regime against northern rebels.
- Counterterrorism Support: French forces participate in regional operations such as “Operation Barkhane” across the Sahel region.
- Training and Military Assistance: France provides training programs for Ivorian armed forces to enhance their capabilities in addressing security threats.

20 Keshav R. Prabhu-Schlosser, Postcolonial Exploitation through Economic Development Tools: a Case Study on France and the Ivory Coast. https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1270&context=senproj_s2019

21 Postcolonial Exploitation through Economic Development Tools: a Case Study on France and the Ivory Coast, *ibid.*



Implications of the French Troop Withdrawal from Côte d'Ivoire

The French withdrawal from Côte d'Ivoire marks a significant setback for Paris, particularly amidst its declining influence and presence in Africa in recent years. This decision is part of a broader reassessment of France's military presence on the continent, following similar withdrawals from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. It is likely to have substantial strategic, security, and economic repercussions for both Côte d'Ivoire and the African region as a whole.

The key implications of this withdrawal include:

Security and Military Implications:

The French withdrawal may create a security vacuum in Côte d'Ivoire, especially given the rising threats posed by terrorist groups in West Africa, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates. French forces have played a crucial role in training local troops and providing intelligence and logistical

support. Consequently, the Ivorian government may need to strengthen its defensive capabilities by investing in military equipment and expanding army training programs. However, questions remain about whether Ivorian forces are fully prepared to address these security challenges independently.

Impact on Bilateral Relations

The French military presence has been a cornerstone of the historical relationship between France and its former colonies. The military withdrawal signals a potential shift in these relations. Defense and economic cooperation between the two countries may be affected, as French forces were not only focused on ensuring security but also played a role in safeguarding French economic interests and investments in Côte d'Ivoire. On the other hand, the withdrawal could bolster a sense of national sovereignty among the Ivorian people, particularly amidst the growing anti-foreign sentiment across Africa. This change might pave the way for Côte d'Ivoire to redefine its foreign rela-

tions and strengthen its autonomy in shaping its future⁽²²⁾.

Economic Implications

Côte d'Ivoire is one of the fastest-growing economies in West Africa, with a significant portion of its economy reliant on foreign investments, including major French companies operating in energy, infrastructure, and agriculture. The withdrawal could undermine foreign investor confidence, particularly if accompanied by a deteriorating security situation.

Conversely, Côte d'Ivoire may look to diversify its economic partnerships, expanding ties with other global powers such as China and Russia. While this could open new opportunities, it would also bring distinct challenges, including navigating differing economic and geopolitical interests.

Regional Implications

The French withdrawal reflects a broader decline in France's influence in West Africa, potentially creating space for other international actors to assert themselves. Russia, for instance, has shown increasing interest in Africa, leveraging private security firms like the Wagner Group. At a regional level, the withdrawal may encourage stronger security cooperation among African nations, particularly through enhancing the role of ECOWAS forces. However, the absence of French logistical support could present significant obstacles to achieving comprehensive stability in the region.

The Rise of Calls for Western Withdrawal from Africa

The decision comes amidst growing popular demands to end foreign military presence in the country,

driven by an increasing sense of national sovereignty and a desire to break free from the colonial legacy. However, public opinion remains divided. Some view the withdrawal as a positive step towards strengthening the country's independence, while others fear potential negative security repercussions.

This development is likely to encourage other major powers, such as China and Russia, to capitalize on the vacuum France may leave behind in the region. Their increased presence could reshape the geopolitical landscape of West Africa, introducing new dynamics and challenges for local governance and regional stability⁽²³⁾.

In this context, it can be argued that France's departure from Ivory Coast at this time may present the African nation with a series of major challenges, the most notable of which include:

The need to strengthen local military capabilities:

The Ivorian army needs to develop its equipment and enhance its training programs.

The necessity to maintain economic stability: Efforts should be focused on reassuring investors and ensuring a continued flow of investments.

The push for diversifying international partnerships:

This withdrawal could be an opportunity to diversify international relations and open up to new economic and political powers.

22 Postcolonial Exploitation through Economic Development Tools: a Case Study on France and the Ivory Coastm ibid.

23 Farouk Hussein, French Presence in Africa and the Dimensions of President Macron's Recent Visit, African Studies and Consultancy Center. <https://shorturl.at/MwsYC>.



Conclusion:

In conclusion, recent years have seen a significant shift in France's military presence in Africa, with several countries, including Ivory Coast, Chad, and Senegal, announcing the end of French military presence on their territories by 2025. These steps are part of a broader wave of popular and official discontent towards France's presence, especially following its withdrawal from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger due to changes in ruling regimes and their shift towards reducing reliance on France. These developments have prompted France to reshape its military strategy on the continent, announcing the creation of a new military command for Africa (CPA) aimed at strengthening security partnerships with African nations, including English-speaking countries like Ghana and Nigeria, while scaling down its direct military presence in countries like Chad and Senegal.

In contrast, France maintains its military presence in Djibouti and Gabon, where these bases are seen as strategically vital for supporting its operations in the region. Additionally, France is working to transform its military bases into training academies, jointly managed with partner countries. These changes reflect France's desire to retain its influence in Africa while adapting to geopolitical shifts and local pressures, placing it in a challenging position as it reconfigures its military footprint across the continent.