Côte d'Ivoire: Next country in line to announce withdrawal of French troops | Credendo

Event

During a New Year's announcement, President Alassane Ouattara declared that France has been requested to withdraw the majority of its contingent from Côte d'Ivoire and transfer control of its military base to the Ivorian army. France, which has approximately 600 troops stationed in the country, will commence the withdrawal process this month.

Impact

President Ouattara's statement followed last November's announcement from both Chad and Senegal regarding the closure of French military bases within their territories. These nations were following the precedent of expelling the French military presence set by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in 2022. However, the motivations behind these decisions vary significantly among the countries. The three Sahel states severed their ties with France as part of a comprehensive diplomatic breakdown with former Western allies in favour of strong alliances with Russia. This included an immediate withdrawal of French troops following the overthrow of previous governments by military coups. In the recent cases of Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Chad, the tone is different. Aspirations to maintain relations and cooperation with France have been expressed, yet with respect for national sovereignty, reduced dependency and equal partnership.

In Chad, historically France's most loyal security partner in the Sahel region, internal pressures coupled with popular anti-French sentiments and attractive arrangements with new security partners such as Russia, led to the decision. Senegal's decision was primarily driven by a strong sovereignty narrative since President Faye assumed office in March 2024. In Côte d'Ivoire, the announcement is anticipated to bolster President Ouattara's popularity in his expected bid for a fourth presidential term, amid growing anti-French sentiments, particularly among younger voters. This development is part of a broader trend of African states rejecting Western influence and security actors. The impact of the French military withdrawal is expected to vary significantly from the consequences for the Sahel, as Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal do not face comparable security crises. In the Sahel states, insecurity has significantly worsened following the withdrawal of Western forces. The withdrawals from Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Chad reflect a more gradual shift, underscored by an assertion of sovereignty away from former colonial powers. The perception of this as a major geopolitical setback for France will be challenging to counter, especially considering that France's military presence in the region is now limited to a small number of troops in Gabon and a 1,500-strong base in Djibouti.

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