



By: TA | AP Brief

# By withdrawing from Senegal, France ended its permanent military presence in West Africa



The French military completed its withdrawal from Senegal, the last West African country where it maintained a permanent troop presence, amid **waning** regional influence in recent years.

France has faced **opposition** from leaders of some of its former colonies in Africa over what they described as a demeaning and heavy-handed approach to the continent.

The French military handed over Camp Geille, its largest base in Senegal, along with a nearby air facility, to the Senegalese government during a ceremony in the capital, Dakar.

Gen. Pascal Ianni, head of French forces in Africa, said the handover marked a new phase in military ties.

"It is part of France's decision to end permanent military bases in West and Central Africa, and responds to the Senegalese authorities' desire to no longer host permanent foreign forces on their territory," he said.

Senegal's military chief, Gen. Mbaye Cissé, said the withdrawal supports the country's new defense strategy.

"Its primary goal is to affirm the autonomy of the Senegalese armed forces while contributing to peace in the subregion, in Africa, and globally," Gen. Cissé said.

The ceremony marked the completion of a three-month withdrawal of roughly 350 French troops from the West African country, which began in March.

France's military had been present in Senegal since it gained independence from France in 1960, under military cooperation agreements between the two countries.

The withdrawal followed a call by Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye last year for all foreign troops to leave, citing Senegal's sovereignty as incompatible with hosting foreign bases.

Senegal's new government has **taken** a hard-line stance on the presence of French troops as part of a larger regional backlash against what many see as the legacy of an oppressive colonial empire.

## Partnership approach

France has said it is closing all permanent French military bases in Africa except in the eastern African country of Djibouti, where France has around 1,500 troops.

Col. Guillaume Vernet, spokesman for the French military's chief of the defence staff, said the withdrawal from Senegal is part of a shift away from France's strategy of permanent presence in West and Central Africa toward a more flexible "partnership" approach.

He said the French military would provide countries with defense training or targeted military support, based on needs expressed by those countries.

France has suffered setbacks in Africa recently, including in Chad and the Ivory Coast where it handed over its last military bases earlier this year.

They follow the ousting of French forces in recent years in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, where military-led governments have turned to Russia instead for military support.

While France is ending its permanent military presence in West and Central Africa, some of its army staff will remain in the region.

Around 350 French servicemen are still present in Gabon, where the army has turned its base into a camp shared with the central African nation. In the Ivory Coast, some 80 French servicemen advise and train the country's military.