

# *Maliens protest French military presence, call for troop withdrawal*

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Bamako, October 30 (RHC)-- Hundreds of Malian protesters have taken to the streets in the capital, Bamako, to demonstrate against the French military presence in the West African country.

The protesters gathered in central Bamako on Friday, chanting anti-France slogans and calling for the total withdrawal of French troops from their country. "We are here for Mali. We are here to demonstrate our national sovereignty. To remind the whole world that sovereignty belongs to the people and that those who have not understood this must get up to speed today," said Mohamed Ousmane Mohamedoun, a member of Mali's National Transition Council and a protest organizer.

"Because the transition for us today is the result of decades of mismanagement, misgovernance of our country and bad partnerships," he added.

Earlier this month, Mali's Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga said there is evidence that France has been training "terrorist" groups operating in the West African country.

Mali says it has evidence that France has been training "terrorist" groups. A French mission began operating in Mali in 2013 to allegedly counter militants that Paris claims are linked to the al-Qaeda and Daesh terrorist groups.

This summer, French President Emmanuel Macron announced a gradual drawdown of France's military presence in the Sahel and the end of the French military operation known as Barkhane.

Mali accused France of abandoning the conflict-ravaged country with the "unilateral" decision to withdraw troops. Mali's military-dominated government then asked private Russian security companies for help in its fight against terrorism.

Ever since, tensions have been high between France and its former colony. The French Barkhane force, operating in Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania, currently has 5,000 troops in the region.

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