

Mali tells France to pull out troops without delay

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This file photo shows French troops deployed to Operation Barkhane in the Sahel region of North Africa, including Mali.

Bamako, February 19 (RHC)-- The government of Mali has asked France to pull out its forces from the country "without delay," casting doubt on Paris' plans to withdraw troops over several months. The announcement came after Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga, the spokesman for the country's military-installed government, said in a statement on the public television that the results of France's nine-year military engagement in conflict-torn Mali were "not satisfactory."

Maiga described France's plan for a prolonged withdrawal from the African country as a "flagrant violation" of accords between the two countries. "In view of these repeated breaches of defense agreements, the government invites the French authorities to withdraw, without delay," he said.

Mali has also asked the smaller European Takuba group of special forces, which was created in 2020, to depart quickly. Macron responded with a statement saying that he would not compromise the safety of French soldiers and the withdrawal will take place "in orderly fashion."

Earlier this week, France announced that it will withdraw thousands of troops from Mali due to a breakdown in relations with the country, a decade after launching a war without the initial approval of the United Nations or even the French parliament.

A statement signed by France and its African and European allies said "multiple obstructions" meant the conditions were no longer in place to operate in Mali. The decision applies to both the 2,400 French troops in Mali, where France first deployed in 2013, and the European Takuba group of special forces.

Relations between Paris and Bamako have deteriorated since the ruling military took power in the former French colony in August 2020.

Macron confirmed at a news conference that France's bases in Gossi, Menaka and Gao in Mali would be closed within the next four to six months, "completely" rejecting the idea that France had failed its mission in the country.

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