

France hands over first base in Chad during withdrawal from former African colony



France currently has about 1,000 soldiers as well as warplanes stationed in Chad, which is the last Sahel country to host French troops [File: Emma Farge/Reuters]

N'Djamena, December 27 (RHC)-- France has handed over its first military base as part of the withdrawal of its military forces from Chad, the French and Chadian militaries say.

Chad's chief of military staff on Thursday said the base at Faya-Largeau in the north of the country had been handed over and the army would inform the public about progress concerning the withdrawal of French forces from bases in the eastern city of Abeche and the capital, N'Djamena.

Chad's military said French troops had left in vehicles for N'Djamena, 780 km (480 miles) to the south, without providing a precise figure. The French army had about 1,000 personnel in the country.

"The handover took place in accordance with the calendar and the conditions agreed with Chad," the French military chief of staff said separately.

Chad last month ended military cooperation with its former colonial power, and French troops began leaving the country on Friday, 10 days after French warplanes left. The move came as Chad prepares to hold parliamentary and local elections on Sunday.

Chad's military said an Antonov 124 took off on Thursday with 70 tonnes of cargo on board as part of the withdrawal. French authorities said military vehicles would leave by January and be repatriated via the Cameroonian port of Douala.

Chad had been a key link in France's military presence in Africa and its last foothold in the wider Sahel region after the withdrawal of French troops from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in the wake of a series of military coups.

The military authorities in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have pivoted towards Russia in recent years.

Landlocked Chad borders the Central African Republic, Sudan, Libya and Niger, all of which host paramilitary forces from Russia's Africa Corps, which took over the operations of the Wagner mercenary group on the continent.

Chad's leader, General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, has also sought closer ties with Moscow in recent months, but talks to strengthen economic cooperation have yet to bear concrete results.

French soldiers and fighter aircraft have been stationed in Chad almost continuously since the country's independence in 1960. They have helped train the Chadian military.

The planes provided air support that proved crucial on several occasions in stopping rebels moving to seize power.

The election of Deby in May brought an end to a three-year political transition triggered by his father's death in fighting with rebels in 2021.

Longtime ruler Idriss Deby Itno had received support from the French army to quell rebel offensives in 2008 and 2019.

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