

Chad ends longstanding military cooperation with France

Kumaran Ira

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On November 28, the Chadian government announced that it is “putting an end to the defense cooperation agreement signed with the French Republic.” The announcement came just after French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot left Chad. It signifies a major setback for French imperialism’s influence in its former African colonial empire.

Chad, in North-Central Africa, was under French rule from 1900 until formal independence in 1960. French imperialism has continued to exert strong influence on the post-independence regime, through military and political as well as financial means. Chad hosts a significant French presence, with about 1,000 soldiers as well as warplanes stationed in the country.

During the Operation Barkhane phase of France’s war in Mali, from 2014 to 2022, Chad played a pivotal role as a key enabler of France’s war. The operation’s headquarters were based in N’Djamena, the capital of Chad. This strategic location allowed French forces to coordinate and launch operations throughout the Sahel region, particularly targeting countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Chad also furnished a substantial number of troops as cannon fodder for the French army to mount operations.

After mass protests and military coups in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, however, France was compelled to withdraw its troops from these countries. They also left the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and established a rival defense alliance, the Alliance of Sahelian States (AES). Meanwhile, protests mounted in Chad against France’s military presence.

On Thursday, Chad's Foreign Minister Abderaman Koulamallah announced, “After 66 years since the independence of the Republic of Chad, it is time for Chad to assert its full sovereignty, and to redefine its strategic partnerships according to national priorities.”

Koulamallah stated this would result in the departure of

French soldiers stationed in the country “in accordance with the terms” and “within the time frames provided for in the defense agreement.” He said this decision was “taken after in-depth analysis” and marked “a historic turning point” in a century-long history of near-continuous French military presence in Chad.

The Chadian government, however, specified that “this decision in no way calls into question (...) the friendly ties between the two nations.”

Also on Thursday, Senegal, a former French colony in West Africa, announced France should close its bases in the country. This followed French President Emmanuel Macron’s admission that France was responsible for the massacre of Senegalese soldiers in 1944, as the country commemorated the 80th anniversary of the tragedy. “Senegal is an independent country; it is a sovereign country and sovereignty does not accept the presence of military bases in a sovereign country,” said Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye.

The Chadian government’s decision reportedly stunned not only the French authorities but also several Chadian officials.

Le Monde wrote, “At the Elysée presidential palace, the Defense Ministry, or at the Quai D’Orsay [Foreign Ministry], no one seemed to have been warned. Several French officers, visiting N’Djamena to discuss continuing military cooperation, did not seem to have been informed, either. And indeed, even on the Chadian side, some seemed surprised. According to multiple concurring sources, the minister of defense himself learned of the decision of President Mahamat Idriss Déby just before the communiqué was published.”

Chad was the first French colony to support Free France against the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy French authorities during World War II. Despite gaining independence in 1960, Chad was still partially governed by the French military until 1965.

The country has witnessed numerous French military operations, including “Limousin” (1969-1971) and “Epervier” (1986-2014). The French military played a key role in facilitating Hissène Habré’s rise to power in 1982, and then his overthrow by Idriss Déby in 1990. It attacked rebel forces who threatened to seize the capital, N’Djamena, in 2019.

Following the death of longtime President Idriss Déby Itno in April 2021, senior military officers staged a coup d’état, leading to the establishment of a military government. Idriss Déby’s son, Mahamat Idriss Déby, was appointed interim president. In February 2024, heavy gunfire erupted in N’Djamena after the announcement of a long-anticipated election date, as government forces clashed with members of the opposition Socialist Party Without Borders (PSF). A presidential election was held in May this year, with Mahamat Idriss Déby declared the winner.

Chad’s sudden ending military ties to France comes amid mounting geostrategic conflicts in Africa bound up with the NATO war with Russia in Ukraine and economic rivalry with China. Surging food and oil prices driven by disruption of grain imports from Russia and Ukraine have devastated millions. French imperialism in particular is challenged by growing economic and diplomatic ties between its former colonies and both Russia and China.

Russia is bolstering its military presence in Sahel countries, including Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Sudan, and Chad. Russian mercenaries, notably from the Wagner Group, have been deployed in several African countries. They are supporting the governments and armed forces of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, and are also engaging in combat alongside them against Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militants.

China has also strengthened its relations with Chad and Senegal, announcing projects for electricity, running water, farming, telecommunications and airport infrastructure. In May, former Chadian Ambassador to China Allamaye Halina had become the country’s prime minister. Later in the year, China also signed contracts to provide arms and equipment to the Chadian National Army.

The entire region is being pulled ever deeper into NATO’s escalating global war. Chad’s ending and Senegal’s threat to end military cooperation with France come as the NATO powers escalate war with Russia in Ukraine, and Trump’s election threatens war with China. Given the massive unpopularity of French imperialism in Africa, and the economic and military advantages of ties

to China and Russia, a number of African states are responding to these explosive military pressures by moving away from Paris.

This year, Russia has steadily worked to increase its influence in Chad through military cooperation and economic investments. In January, Idriss Déby met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. During their meeting, Putin stated that the two countries had “great opportunities to develop our bilateral ties.”

Déby continued to cultivate his relationship with Putin following their meeting. Ahead of Chad’s presidential elections, Déby published an autobiography titled “From Bedouin to President.” In February, Déby presented a copy of his book, inscribed with a personal message for Putin, to the Russian ambassador to Chad, Vladimir Sokolenko. The book also included a photograph of Déby and Putin from Déby’s January visit to Russia.

In his autobiography, Déby criticizes Macron for allegedly trying to dissuade him from running in the election during a phone call. “I’m not going to change the transition charter under threat!” he wrote.

Chad’s ending of the unpopular military cooperation with Paris comes just before parliamentary elections scheduled for December 29. His main opponent, former Prime Minister Succès Masra, who has criticized France for favoring Déby’s family, saying: “France has clearly chosen a family to the detriment of the Chadian people.”

Idriss Déby’s decision to end military cooperation undoubtedly reflects mass popular sentiment and increasing political pressure on the Chadian presidency. But the sudden geopolitical shift by leaders of the Chadian bourgeoisie, which faithfully served the interests of French imperialism for decades, does not make it an anti-imperialist force or give it a viable strategy to oppose the imperialist powers’ escalation of war across the region. The decisive question remains building an international, socialist movement against imperialist war in the African and world working class.



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