

Deadly Clashes in Central African Republic as France Ends Military Mission



Paris, November 1 (RHC)-- France has formally announced an end to its military mission in the Central African Republic amid flared tensions in the country affected by ethnic violence.

French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian announced the end of the "Sangaris Operation" in a speech to the parliament in Bangui on Monday. Le Drian noted, however, that Paris will still retain its military sway over its former colony.

"This does not mean the end of military relations between France and the Central African Republic," he said. "The French army will indeed be less visible but it will be present, active and vigilant. We're proud of Operation Sangaris, so it's out of the question to allow the gains to be put at risk," Le Drian said.

He said the French government will keep a "tactical reserve force of 350 soldiers" in the country. Many residents have voiced concern to see the French troops exit.

Earlier, Le Drian told the French parliament that the Sangaris mission had been "a success." He said: "We stopped the mass killings... allowed a process of inter-communal reconciliation, the reconstitution of

the state, a presidential election, and legislative elections."

Prominent CAR politician and former presidential candidate Anicet Georges Dologuele challenged Le Drian's comments, stating that "Sangaris is pulling out far too early." "Our security forces are not ready to take up the baton," Dologuele said.

Meanwhile, CAR's capital was rocked by deadly overnight clashes, leaving 10 people dead in the restive Muslim PK5 neighborhood of Bangui. The toll had yet to be confirmed by the United Nations force MINUSCA, which will now be alone in facing the militias terrorizing civilians.

CAR residents are continuously fleeing the country caught in ethnic conflict between Seleka rebels and anti-Balaka militia groups. CAR has not yet emerged from the disorder caused by civil war which erupted in 2013 following the overthrow of Francois Bozize, a Christian, by Muslim rebels from the Seleka coalition who installed their own leader.

The conflict in CAR since 2013 has left thousands of people dead and forced many to flee their homes. Rights groups have in a few occasions reported that Muslims in the war-torn country "are being butchered" at the hands of the Christians.

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