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Africa

Sahel: with or without Barkhane, a policy against the people

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In Toulon on 9 November 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron, in a speech presenting the national strategic review, formalized the end of Operation Barkhane, the French military's operation against Islamist groups in Africa's [Sahel region](#), which had begun nine years earlier. The unsatisfactory results of this operation are pushing the French General Staff to reflect on a new policy of engagement in the Sahel.

The end of Operation Barkhane sanctions its failure. This OPEX (external operation) which succeeded those of Serval in Mali and Épervier in Chad, had the stated aim of eradicating terrorism in the Sahel zone.

An overall negative balance sheet

In view of the initial results, the new target set has proved to be less ambitious. The aim was to contain jihadist attacks and protect populations. The toll that can be drawn on the ground is an increase in attacks accompanied by a humanitarian crisis. The jihadists are gaining ground to the point of controlling 40% of Burkina Faso's territory and entire regions in northern and central Mali. Now, the offensives by Islamist groups are spreading to coastal countries hitherto spared such as Côte d'Ivoire, Benin or Togo.

Barkhane's inability to put an end to insecurity in the Sahelian countries, in addition to feeding anti-French sentiment already widespread in view of France's iniquitous policy on the continent, signals a political readjustment of the France's military intervention in the Sahel.

A new direction?

What changes with the end of Barkhane? At first glance not much, since the French troops, around 3,000 soldiers, will still remain stationed in the region. They are mainly present in Chad, which also hosts the command centre, and to a lesser extent in Niger with a "projected air base" and three "desert tactical groups". The field of action of the French troops deployed remains the same with the exception of Mali.

On the other hand, the type of commitment will change. The General Staff speak of "a logic of co-construction" and of "conducting operational partnership missions of combat and support at the request of the countries of the region". In short, from the leadership role in the fight against armed jihadism, we would move to support for local armies. A strategy that resembles that developed in Africa by Obama, based on the concepts of "light footprint" and "leading from behind".

Barkhane was used against the people. We remember the exfiltration of the Burkinabe dictator Blaise Compaoré, following the revolution of 2014, allowing him to escape from the justice of his country. There was the intervention in Chad in February 2019 to defend Déby against the rebels of the Union of Resistance Forces (UFR) who had nothing to do with jihadist groups. Finally, the bloody repression causing three deaths in Niger during the demonstration in Tera against the passage of the Barkhane convoy.

The new military orientation advocated will, without a doubt, continue to be exercised against the peoples in struggle.

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Macron's support for the bloody dictatorship of Déby's son is a tragic illustration of this.

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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