

Beat: Politics

## FRENCH MINISTER OF THE ARMED FORCES PARLY PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE 13 SOLDIERS KILLED

### A CEREMONY CLOSED TO THE PRESS

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**USPA NEWS** - French Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly bowed Wednesday in Mali in front of the coffins of the thirteen (13) soldiers killed accidentally during an anti-jihadist operation, while the questions flow on the limits of the French intervention in the Sahel. She gathered in the enclosure of the burning chapel where the 13 bodies were gathered on the base of Gao, before their repatriation towards France, and met their brothers of arms, indicated the Ministry of the Armies in a communique. The minister reiterated "on this occasion the soldiers fighting terrorism in the Sahel the pain, recognition and determination of the Nation," the ministry added. The ceremony, dedicated to the soldiers, was closed to the press.

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These men, all officers and non-commissioned officers, were serving with the 5th Combat Helicopter Regiment (5th RHC), 4th Regiment of Hunters (4th RCH), 93rd Mountain Artillery Regiment (93rd RMA), and the Legion foreign.

A national tribute ceremony, presided over by President Emmanuel Macron, will also be held on Monday at Les Invalides, a military symbol in Paris, which since the 17th century has been home to war veterans and war veterans and is home to the tomb of Napoleon I.

#### A MOONLESS NIGHT-----

On the base of Pau Uzein (south-west), where seven of the 13 men came from, their brothers in arms saluted their memory on Wednesday in the presence of families, including former minister Jean-Marie Bockel, father of a pilots killed, noted an AFP journalist. Two Rafale fighter jets from the neighboring base of Mont-de-Marsan flew over Pau Uzein as a sign of homage. In a symbolic maneuver, one of the aircraft broke the formation to go straight to the sky, vertically. The French army has suffered with this tragedy one of its greatest losses since the attack against the French headquarters Drakkar in Beirut in 1983, which had killed 58 people. The two black boxes were retrieved for analysis by investigators. "In the coming days, they will talk," assured General Lecointre on France Inter radio. "I do not know exactly what happened," he added, "but a military operation in the Sahel is always an exercise in very haute couture (...) that requires extremely fine coordination, in always difficult conditions, in combat conditions," he explained. The aircraft, a Tiger combat helicopter and a Cougar used to transport commandos, flew at a very low altitude on a "moonless" night, said Colonel Frédéric Barbry, the spokesman for the Armed Forces Staff, on the BFMTV channel.-----

The French press pointed Wednesday the "heavy toll" paid by France in the fight against jihadist Sahel - 41 dead since 2013 - echoing questions that come back: must stay in Mali, for what? "Past the moment of homage and mourning, we can not escape a collective questioning on the future and the modalities of the French intervention. Where is Barkhane going?" Asked the regional daily Nice-Matin.

#### - NO FINAL « VICTORY »-----

The French operation Barkhane mobilizes 4,500 men in the Sahelo-Saharan band. But after six years of uninterrupted presence, the horizon is more and more obscured. Jihadist violence persists in northern Mali and has spread to the center of the country as well as neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. The losses are more and more heavy for the local armies, overwhelmed. "We will never reach a final victory," conceded, unabridged, General François Lecointre. But the fight of the French army is "useful and necessary", he reaffirmed. A quasi-consensus remains for the moment in the French political class on the need to continue the mission, with the exception of calls from La France Insoumise (LFI, radical left). A withdrawal would be "irresponsible," said the president of Modem (center) and mayor of Pau, François Bayrou, whose city is in mourning. Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian reiterated France's "total determination" to continue its action against "the terrorist threat". "It is at the same time the security of these countries but perhaps their very existence and it is our security, that of the French, the Europeans" which are at stake, he pointed out before the Committee of

Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly. Source : AFP

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