



MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE EU AND OTHER EXTERNAL ACTORS TO WEST AFRICA, 2010–25

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Introduction

Strengthening the military capabilities of European Union (EU) partner states, including by providing weapons, has become an important element of the EU's approach to peace and security over the past five years. This shift from an approach centred mainly around crisis management means the EU is entering a space occupied by several other actors, including some EU member states, allied states—notably the United States—and what the EU refers to as its 'strategic competitors'.¹

The shift is a rapid evolution that is occurring against a backdrop of volatility in US foreign policy and intensifying strategic competition in the EU's broader neighbourhood.

Together, these trends raise important questions about how the EU compares to other external actors as a provider of military assistance. To address these questions, SIPRI has produced three fact sheets mapping military assistance provided by the EU and other external actors to states in the broader European neighbourhood. The fact sheets will feed into a larger study into the effectiveness of the EU's military assistance to partner states and its coherence with that of EU member states.

'Military assistance' is here defined to include basing and deployment at the request or with the acceptance of host countries; supply of arms and military equipment; advisory support for military organizations; provision of training and education; and bilateral or multilateral exercises. The fact sheets also look into arms sales, as these reflect relations among states and the influence of external actors in a country or region.

This fact sheet provides an overview of the EU's and other external actors' military assistance to states in West Africa in 2010–25. It covers the period after the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force on 1 December 2009. The treaty considerably expanded the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (previously the European Security and Defence Policy).²

West Africa encompasses the original 15 members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo—and Cabo Verde, a total of 16 states.³

KEY FACTS

- Insurgencies-driven instabilities in the Sahel and illicit activities in the Gulf of Guinea were two key drivers of military assistance to West African states provided by the European Union (EU) and other external actors in the period 2010–25.
- By establishing the European Peace Facility, the EU radically changed its approach to military assistance to include direct aid in lethal equipment to partner states.
- During 2010–25 the United States and France were the only external actors to provide military assistance to all states in West Africa and to conduct regular multilateral exercises with West African armed forces.
- The EU and the EU member states have frequently worked in cooperation with allied states, notably the USA, in providing military assistance to West Africa.
- China was the largest major arms exporter to West African states, accounting for 27 per cent of their combined imports.
- Russia's military presence in West Africa, geographically focused on Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, increased after 2021.
- Türkiye is an emerging security actor, but its military presence has so far revolved mostly around its increasing arms sales to the region.

The European Union

The EU initiated security cooperation with Africa with the establishment in 2004 of the African Peace Facility (APF), a financial instrument to support the African Union, regional economic communities (such as ECOWAS) and regional mechanisms in conducting peace and security operations.⁴ The APF was funded through development aid because the Treaty of Lisbon enshrined barriers to using the EU budget for military expenditure.⁵ Accordingly, any EU aid provided to security forces was justified on the grounds of improving human security. The APF also had to abide by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development requirements regarding the use of development aid for peace and security, which do not allow delivery of lethal equipment as aid.⁶ The establishment of the European Peace Facility (EPF) as an off-budget instrument in 2021 enabled the EU to provide all types of arms to partners.

The EU provided military assistance to at least 12 states in West Africa between 2010 and 2025.⁷ The EU's two major areas of interest in West Africa have been counterterrorism and stabilization of countries affected by insurgencies; and maritime security in the Atlantic, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea.

Counterterrorism and stabilization

In response to the separatist and jihadist insurgency in Mali, which escalated in 2012, and at the formal request of the Mali government, the EU launched a military training mission (EUTM) in Mali in 2013.⁸ The EUTM's mandate was initially limited to Southern Mali, but was eventually extended to support the G5 Sahel Joint Force (JF-G5S), which was set up in 2017 comprising military units from the G5 states—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger—to contain insurgencies in the border areas between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.⁹ The EU also financed construction of command posts and provided the JF-G5S with equipment, including light armoured vehicles and, to Mali, a light aircraft for intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance (ISR).¹⁰ In 2022 the EU established the European Union Partnership Mission (EUPM) to assist the armed forces of Niger.¹¹

Mali withdrew from the JF-G5S in 2022, followed by Burkina Faso and Niger in 2023, after the coups in these states during 2021–23 led to a shift in their policies towards external military cooperation.¹² The EUTM in Mali and the EUPM in Niger both formally ended in 2024.¹³

In view of the southwards expansion of insurgencies to 'coastal countries'—Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo—the EU is conducting a new type of civilian and

military mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy: the EU Security and Defence Initiative in Support of West African Countries of the Gulf of Guinea (EU SDI GOG), which aims to support these states in building military capabilities to respond to spillover of violence from the Sahel. The EU SDI GOG includes permanent deployment of a small number of military advisers and deployments of mobile training teams from the EU member states.¹⁴

Since 2016 the EU has, through the African Union, supported the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against the Boko Haram insurgency. The MNJTF comprises armed forces from Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria, with Benin also contributing troops in a non-combat capacity.¹⁵ The EU aid was initially channelled through the APF and, since 2022, through two EPF assistance measures to the African Union (see table 1).¹⁶ The EU aid has included funding for infrastructure, vehicles, boats and drones.¹⁷

The EU has also funded projects to strengthen ECOWAS capacities to fulfil its peace and security mandate.¹⁸

Since 2021 the EPF has enabled the EU to provide direct military aid to partners' armed forces through its assistance measures pillar (see table 1). In contrast to previous practice under the APF, the African Union's role in facilitating the EU's provision of aid has diminished under the EPF, although it received two assistance measures in 2021 and 2022. In 2021–25 the EU adopted 14 assistance measures pertaining to aid for land and air forces of seven states. Two states were approved aid in ammunition: Niger (measure repealed after the coup) and Benin.¹⁹ The aid provided under the EPF has also included sensors and surveillance equipment, aircraft, and combat engineering equipment, which are all subject to the EU's arms export controls.²⁰

Maritime security in the Atlantic

The EU's assistance in the field of maritime security is centred around support to the Yaoundé Architecture, established through the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in 2013 as a regional approach to prevent and combat illicit activities in the Gulf of Guinea.²¹ Engagement with the Yaoundé Architecture entails holding political consultations and financing projects pertaining to maritime information-sharing, equipping ECOWAS maritime centres, and improving management and coordination procedures in maritime law enforcement.²²

In addition, five assistance measures adopted under the EPF until the end of 2025 fully or partially support four partner states' navies, two of which (Cabo Verde and Mauritania) are due to receive patrol boats (see table 1).²³

In 2021 the EU launched the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) in the Gulf of Guinea, not as an operation but as a tool to coordinate EU member states' national naval activities in the gulf.²⁴ The CMP has thus incorporated ongoing national activities such as France's Operation CORYMBE and the annual France- and USA-led multilateral maritime exercises.²⁵

EU member states

France

France was one of the leading security partners to West African states and engaged with all of them between 2010 and 2025. However, it closed all permanent military bases in West Africa by the end of 2025 and its relations with Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger deteriorated after the latest coups in these states.

Downsizing France's troops in Africa was a long-term process: at the end of the cold war, France had 8000 permanent troops (not counting those involved in operations) in the whole of the continent; by the end of the 1990s the number fell to 5000 and in 2019 it was reported to be 2700.²⁶ In West Africa, as of 2019 France had stationed around 1300 troops in its permanent military bases in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal.²⁷ The bases were handed over to these two states by 2025.²⁸

France conducted four land operations in West Africa between 2010 and 2025, focusing on the Sahel. (Outside the Sahel, Operation Licorne in Côte d'Ivoire ran from 2002 to 2015.²⁹) A special operations forces (SOF) task force, Operation Sabre, in Burkina Faso was first deployed in 2009 to fight jihadi rebels and terminated in 2023 at the request of the Burkinabe military junta.³⁰ The largest deployment was in the framework of operations Serval (2013–14) and Barkhane (2014–22). Operation Serval was initiated in Mali at the request of the Malian transitional authorities to help stop the progress of rebel groups from the north.³¹ It was replaced by Operation Barkhane which had a broader mandate of supporting partners' forces and expanded to Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger.³² During the operation, France relied on several states in addition to the JF-G5S states' militaries, including the USA for intelligence sharing and logistic support, and Canada, Denmark and the United Kingdom for logistic support.³³ Nine EU member states contributed SOF units to the Takuba Task Force under Operation Barkhane.³⁴ France took part in Nigerien efforts to set up 12 SOF battalions, known as the Force Generation Project, by providing training, equipment and infrastructure to one of these battalions.³⁵ At the request of the Nigerien junta, around 1500 French soldiers stationed in Niger in

2023 were withdrawn by the year's end, after civil protests against their presence.³⁶

The French Navy has conducted Operation CORYMBE in the Gulf of Guinea since 1990 with the aim of countering illicit activities at sea.³⁷ Since 2018 France has led annual multilateral naval exercises, known as Grand African NEMO, with the participation of the states belonging to the Yaoundé Architecture, several EU member states, the UK and the USA.³⁸ The exercise scenarios mostly pertain to maritime law enforcement issues. Nevertheless, this makes France the only other external actor besides the USA to conduct regular multilateral exercises with states in West Africa. France also conducts an annual bilateral amphibious forces exercise, 'Crocodile Lift', with Nigeria.³⁹

In terms of military assistance in the form of training and education, France has provided training to land forces of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal.⁴⁰ France has long offered military education in France for African personnel, but in the late 1990s significantly reduced the number of available places.⁴¹ In 2024 France began increasing the number of places again, starting with around 40 positions for officer cadets and at least 14 positions for non-commissioned officer trainees from all African states.⁴²

In the period 2010–25, France provided aid in arms and military equipment to several West African states, including aid in major arms to Guinea, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal; other military aid to Togo; and delivery of second-hand armoured vehicles, financed by the EU, to Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.⁴³ The largest aid provisions included around 90 armoured vehicles supplied to Mauritania, five second-hand light helicopters to Niger, and two trainer aircraft and a landing craft to Senegal.⁴⁴

France transferred major arms (including both aid and sales) to 11 states in West Africa in 2010–25, accounting for 12 per cent of their combined imports. Between 2021 and 2025 France exported major arms to six states, with 73 per cent of these exports going to Senegal.

Germany

Germany's military assistance to West African states has had two distinct aspects. First, Germany undertook a considerable and largely ad hoc engagement in the Sahel during 2013–24. Although Germany's military assistance to Mali and Niger, especially in military education, preceded the events of 2012, German presence in the Sahel spiked from 2013 with the deployment of the framework of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the EUTM in Mali and the EUPM in Niger.⁴⁵ In Niger, Germany

supported the establishment of a Nigerien SOF battalion under the Force Generation Project and provided arms, including armoured vehicles and radars, to Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger through the ‘Enable and Enhance Initiative’ (*Ertüchtigungsinitiative der Bundesregierung*).⁴⁶

The second aspect is Germany’s low-profile but long-term military cooperation with selected partner states in West Africa. Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal have received non-lethal equipment under Germany’s equipment aid programme for foreign armed forces (*Ausstattungshilfeprogramm der Bundesregierung für ausländische Streitkräfte*), which is a military partnership instrument created in 1960.⁴⁷ German military advisers who are permanently based in these states liaise with their ministries of defence to identify areas of cooperation and develop projects to be funded by Germany, such as construction of military infrastructure, training and equipment delivery.⁴⁸ For instance, in Nigeria, Germany has supported Nigerian capabilities for patrolling Lake Chad and border monitoring.⁴⁹ Germany has also deployed military advisers to ECOWAS and funded projects to strengthen managerial capacities of ECOWAS in its peace and security mandate.⁵⁰

Germany is not a prominent supplier of major arms to West African states. Between 2010 and 2025, it exported arms to four states in the region, but its aid included financing procurement of arms produced in other states, such as South African-produced armoured vehicles for Mali.⁵¹

The United Kingdom

The UK, which was part of the EU until 2020, has been an important military actor in West Africa, with interests in counterterrorism, fighting transnational organized crime, and maritime security.⁵² The UK has provided military assistance mostly to the Commonwealth members (Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone), primarily by providing advice on military (re)organization and training with their forces.

The UK’s most comprehensive engagement was in Sierra Leone where, following its military intervention in the civil war, the UK deployed the International Military Advisory and Training Team between 2002 and 2012 to help rebuild Sierra Leone’s armed forces.⁵³ During 2010–25 the UK’s longstanding military cooperation with Nigeria centred around supporting the fight against Boko Haram rebels and maritime security.⁵⁴ In 2016 the UK set up a new regional British Defence Staff in Abuja to reinforce its security cooperation with Nigeria and other countries around the Lake Chad Basin.⁵⁵

In Mali, British troops were deployed under the MINUSMA (2020–22) and EUTM (2013–22) mandates, and the UK contributed heavy transport helicopters to France’s Operation Barkhane in 2018–22.⁵⁶

The UK transferred major arms to three states in the region during 2010–25, the largest transfer being around 70 armoured personnel carriers to Ghana.⁵⁷

Other EU member states

Italy’s training mission to Niger, deployed in 2018, has remained active after the 2023 coup with a view to migration management.⁵⁸ Italy also donated four second-hand helicopters to Niger.⁵⁹

Belgium streamlined training of Nigerien SOF battalions in 2017–23 under the Force Generation Project, and has also trained Beninese forces.⁶⁰

Denmark has been active in the maritime and amphibious domains through deployment of a frigate in patrol missions in the Gulf of Guinea in 2021–22, and by providing aid to Ghana and Nigeria in the form of training, maritime military advisers and military equipment.⁶¹

Czechia has trained Mauritanian SOFs on the ground since 2024 in the framework of Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization assistance to Mauritania.⁶²

Spain has provided training for partner states’ armed forces, including under the EU SDI GOG and in the framework of the US-led Flintlock exercises.⁶³

In Mali, 19 EU member states were contributors to MINUSMA in 2013–23, which temporarily became the only UN operation in Africa with over 1000 European troops.⁶⁴

The United States

Among all external actors, the USA has had the most comprehensive military cooperation with states in West Africa, in terms of instruments of military assistance and types of activities, engaging with all the states in the region between 2010 and 2025.

The US Africa Command (AFRICOM), one of 11 US global combat commands, is responsible for exercises and security cooperation with partners in Africa.⁶⁵ Of the 16 states in West Africa, 11 have been involved in AFRICOM’s State Partnership Program, with their armed forces partnering with the National Guard of different US states.⁶⁶ The USA provided different types of training for around 150 000 participants from West African armed forces in 2010–23, including 4 700 soldiers sponsored under the US International Military Education and Training exchange programme to attend training in the USA.⁶⁷ Several states, prominently Niger and Nigeria, were

involved in the USA's Africa Military Education Program, which supports US partners' national military education capacities.⁶⁸ A US Army security force assistance brigade was active in four West African countries between 2018 and 2025 in an advisory and training role, but it was deactivated in late 2025.⁶⁹

Similarly to the EU, the USA's military assistance to West African states has focused on two areas: counterterrorism and maritime security. In 2005 the USA established the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership programme as a 'whole-of-government approach' in North and West Africa, with partners in West Africa including Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.⁷⁰

The USA has organized an annual multilateral exercise, Flintlock, to strengthen partner states' SOF abilities to counter 'violent extremism'.⁷¹ The exercise encompasses aspects such as small unit tactics, mission planning and combat casualty care.⁷²

The USA has supported the MNJTF and JF-G5S with military advice, equipment and training.⁷³ It deployed over 1000 troops to the Sahel in 2017, around 800 of those to Niger.⁷⁴ The US troops were, according to official statements, assisting France's Operation Barkhane and West African armed forces with intelligence and surveillance.⁷⁵ From Niger, the USA operated ISR drones in 2013–24 and armed drones in 2018–24.⁷⁶ Niger was also the largest recipient in the region of US aid in arms between 2010 and 2025, with deliveries including two second-hand transport aircraft and four light ISR aircraft.⁷⁷ In 2024 the US troops withdrew from Niger at the request of the Nigerien junta.⁷⁸

US military assistance to West African states in maritime security has, like that of the EU, largely focused on supporting the Yaoundé Architecture. The US-led annual multilateral exercise Obangame Express aims to improve information sharing and interoperability in the framework of the Yaoundé Architecture. Besides navies of the states of the Gulf of Guinea, navies of EU member states which are active under the CMP are involved in this exercise.⁷⁹ Mauritanian and Senegalese navies have also taken part in the Phoenix Express exercise led by the USA and Tunisia.⁸⁰ The USA has conducted bilateral training and exercises with Ghanaian and Nigerian special boat squadrons, and has engaged in joint patrols and training with Cabo Verde, Ghana and Senegal to counter illicit maritime activities.⁸¹ US aid in the maritime domain included two aircraft for maritime patrol tasks delivered to Mauritania in 2014 and two patrol ships delivered to Nigeria, one in 2011 and the other in 2014.⁸²

Some US activities are more focused on promoting military diplomacy than on tackling specific threats.

Bilateral training between the armed forces of West African states and the National Guard of their US partner states have primarily involved medical and engineering units.⁸³ The African Partnership Flight is organized in three-year cycles to share best aviation practices with and among the air forces of several African partners.⁸⁴ Ghana and Senegal have taken part in the annual multi-domain African Lion exercise to strengthen interoperability in 'crisis response'.⁸⁵

The USA has also been the largest provider of aid in the form of major arms deliveries to West African states between 2010 and 2025, accounting for half of all the aid in major arms supplies to the region. This includes USA-financed armoured vehicles produced in South Africa for Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger, and aid provided directly to Ghana, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria.⁸⁶ The USA also provided aid in the form of other arms and military equipment to at least four more states—Cabo Verde, Liberia, Mali and Senegal.⁸⁷ Much of the aid was channelled through Excess Defence Articles (donations of ex-US armed forces' arms) to Niger (2018) and Nigeria (2011, 2012, 2015, 2022); and through the Global Train and Equip Program (building partners' capacities for counterterrorist and maritime security operations) to Burkina Faso (2013, 2018), Mauritania (2011–13, 2018–19), Niger (2012–14, 2019) and Nigeria (2018–20).⁸⁸ Under the USA's Foreign Military Financing instrument, which authorizes grants and loans for partner states to buy US-produced arms, the only West African beneficiaries were Liberia and Nigeria in 2010 and 2011, receiving totals of \$13 million and \$1.4 million, respectively.⁸⁹

Although the USA is a significant aid provider to West Africa, US sales of major arms to this region remained low. The USA is not among the leading suppliers of major arms to West Africa overall, having supplied only 6 per cent of total imports (including both aid and sales) in 2010–25.⁹⁰

China

Between 2010 and 2025, China provided military assistance to at least 11 states in West Africa and was the largest supplier of major arms to the region.

A number of military personnel from West African states have completed at least part of their military education or training in China. It appears that 2000 places are offered annually at China's military education institutions for the whole of Africa.⁹¹ While there is no breakdown per country available, some examples could be indicative. China provided training for 217 Liberian soldiers (uncertain

grade) between 2004 and 2016 (16–17 soldiers per year).⁹² In 2017 China offered 28 scholarships for Ghanaian officers to study in China.⁹³ In 2024 the Nigerian Chief of the Air Staff stated that 57 Nigerian Air Force personnel had benefited from training in China since 2019, which is probably linked to Nigeria's procurement of Chinese–Pakistani JF-17 combat aircraft.⁹⁴

China's training on the ground with West African partners was limited to the maritime domain. China does not have a continuous maritime presence in the Gulf of Guinea, and the engagements with partners' navies were scheduled alongside port calls by the People's Liberation Army Navy.⁹⁵ These included several bilateral exercises with Nigeria and Ghana in 2014, 2018 and 2024, and a multilateral exercise with Nigeria, Cameroon and Brazil in 2024.⁹⁶ The exercises covered fleet formation, anti-piracy, and search and rescue operations.

China's only military deployment in West Africa in this period was contributing troops to MINUSMA in 2013–23.⁹⁷

China provided aid in arms and military equipment to at least seven states in the region between 2010 and 2025, including two 46-metre patrol boats to Nigeria, one patrol boat to Côte d'Ivoire and four small patrol boats to Ghana.⁹⁸ China also donated arms and military equipment to land forces of Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Mauritania, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.⁹⁹ In Ghana, China funded construction of military facilities by a Chinese company.¹⁰⁰

China was the largest supplier of major arms to West African states in 2010–25, accounting for 27 per cent of their combined imports, with deliveries to 11 states.¹⁰¹ Its largest recipient was Nigeria, which relies on diverse suppliers, but China was the key supplier of major arms to Mauritania. Almost 80 per cent of Mauritania's imports of major arms came from China.¹⁰²

Russia

Between 2010 and 2025, Russia provided military assistance to at least eight states in West Africa and signed bilateral agreements pertaining to defence with two more. Prior to 2021, Russia's cooperation with states in the region was inconspicuous. After the coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, Russia strengthened its military cooperation with these states, mainly through military deployment to support their armed forces in fighting rebels. Russia does not seem to have the resources to match the EU's or the USA's military assistance but is able to provide some troops and arms its partners need in fighting insurgencies.

Russia signed bilateral agreements on military cooperation with six states in West Africa—Niger (2017),

Nigeria (2017), Guinea (2018), Burkina Faso (2018), Mali (2019) and Togo (2025)—but the agreements with Guinea and Togo had not been enacted as of 30 April 2026.¹⁰³ These agreements facilitate military–political dialogue and 'relations development' in areas including training, and so could indicate which states have sent or considered sending military personnel for training in Russia. In addition, Russia and Cabo Verde signed a bilateral agreement (2018) allowing Russian navy ships access to Cabo Verdean territorial waters.¹⁰⁴ Russia also signed agreements on 'military-technical' cooperation with Guinea-Bissau (2018) and Nigeria (2023).¹⁰⁵ This type of agreement could facilitate acquisition of new military equipment, as well as maintenance of existing equipment.¹⁰⁶

There were no reports of joint exercises or training in West Africa prior to 2021.¹⁰⁷ However, 1200 Nigerian soldiers reportedly received anti-insurgency training in Russia in 2014, upon escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, an undisclosed number of cadets from Mali and Niger were among foreign military personnel receiving officer education in Russia in the 2010s.¹⁰⁹ Military education in Russia for soldiers from African countries appears to have been provided both as aid and on a commercial basis in 2019.¹¹⁰

In late 2021, the first units of private military company Wagner, which had close ties to the Russian government, were reportedly deployed to Mali.¹¹¹ In December 2023 the Russian Ministry of Defence set up Africa Corps to replace Wagner in Africa.¹¹² In January 2024 the first 100 of the planned 300 members of Africa Corps arrived in Burkina Faso.¹¹³ In April 2024 Russia also deployed 'dozens' of Africa Corps members in Niger.¹¹⁴ By early 2026, Russia confirmed the participation of Africa Corps in combat operations alongside national militaries in Mali and Niger.¹¹⁵ It seems that Africa Corps presence is strongest in Mali, with a reported personnel size of around 2000 in 2025.¹¹⁶ Russia has also provided at least two combat helicopters and two air search radars as aid to Mali.¹¹⁷

Russia supplied major arms to eight states in West Africa between 2010 and 2025.¹¹⁸ In this period, imports from Russia made up 14 per cent of combined arms imports by West African states.¹¹⁹

Türkiye

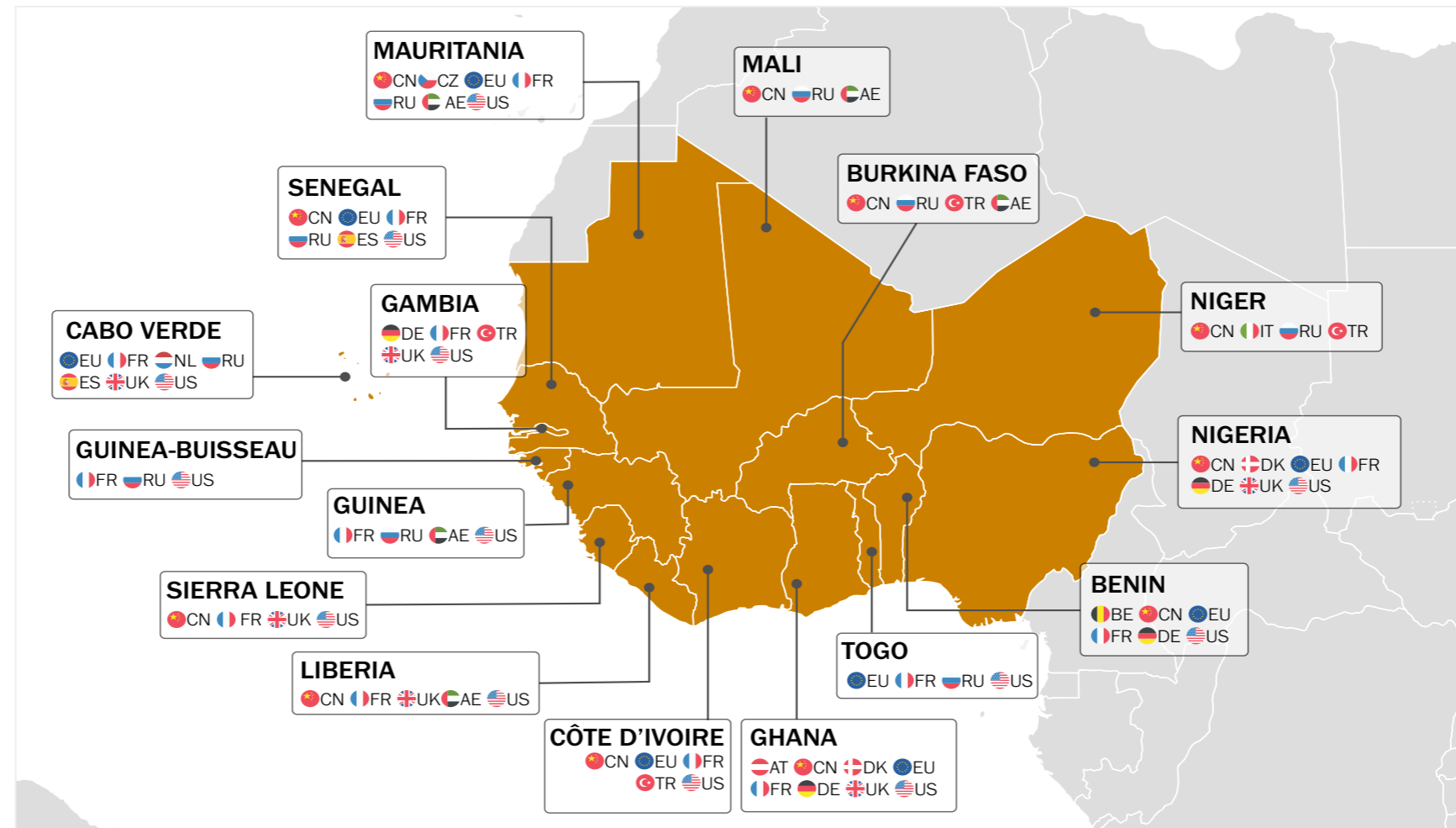
Türkiye's policy towards military assistance to West African states revolves around President Erdoğan's pledge from 2016 to assist them in addressing 'the growing threat of terrorism'.¹²⁰ This policy could also be

MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE EU AND OTHER EXTERNAL ACTORS TO WEST AFRICAN STATES

KEY FACTS

- ▶ Insurgencies-driven instabilities in the Sahel and illicit activities in the Gulf of Guinea were two key drivers of military assistance to West African states provided by the European Union (EU) and other external actors in the period 2010–25.
- ▶ By establishing the European Peace Facility (EPF), the EU radically changed its approach to military assistance to include direct aid in lethal equipment to partner states.
- ▶ During 2010–25 the United States and France were the only external actors to provide military assistance to all states in West Africa and to conduct regular multilateral exercises with West African armed forces.
- ▶ The EU and the EU member states have frequently worked in cooperation with allied states, notably the USA, in providing military assistance to West Africa.
- ▶ China was the largest major arms exporter to West African states, accounting for 27 per cent of their combined imports.
- ▶ Russia's military presence in West Africa, geographically focused on Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, increased after 2021.
- ▶ Türkiye is an emerging security actor, but its military presence has so far revolved mostly around its increasing arms sales to the region.

RECIPIENTS AND SUPPLIERS OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE



AE – United Arab Emirates
 AT – Austria
 BE – Belgium
 CN – China
 CZ – Czech Republic
 DE – Germany
 DK – Denmark
 ES – Spain
 EU – European Union
 FR – France
 IT – Italy
 NL – Netherlands
 RU – Russia
 TR – Türkiye
 UK – United Kingdom
 US – United States

KEY EVENTS

- 2004: The EU's Africa Peace Facility launched.
- 2012: Insurgency escalation in Mali.
- 2013: Start of EU, United Nations and French missions in Mali. Yaoundé Architecture for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea established.
- 2016: EU support for Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram begins.
- 2020: Coup in Mali.
- 2021: EPF established. Second coup in Mali. The EU's Coordinated Maritime Presences in the Gulf of Guinea launched.
- 2022: Coup in Burkina Faso.
- 2023: French deployment in the Sahel ends. UN mission in Mali ends. Coup in Niger. EU Security and Defence Initiative in the Gulf of Guinea launched.
- 2024: EUTM Mali ends.
- 2025: France withdraws all permanently stationed troops from West Africa.

MILITARY ASSISTANCE BY EU ACTORS

The EU started supporting West African armed forces through development aid instruments, which favoured military assistance through impact on human security. The creation of the EPF marked a shift towards strengthening partners' military capabilities to address national security threats. EU priorities have included stabilisation, counter-extremism and maritime security. From 2013 to 2024, the EU conducted the military training mission (EUTM) in Mali, which later expanded to support the G5 Sahel coalition against insurgencies. Amidst threat of violence spillover to coastal countries, the EU is conducting a new type of mission, the EU Security and Defence Initiative, in the Gulf of Guinea to support their armed forces with a much lighter footprint than EUTM Mali. This mission combines military advisers and mobile training teams with aid in military equipment provided under the EPF. France was the leading EU state providing military assistance to the region, alongside Germany, Italy and the UK, which also provided training, deployments, and aid in arms and military equipment.

MILITARY ASSISTANCE BY OTHER EXTERNAL ACTORS

CHINA

China has trained West African military personnel at its military education institutions (around 2000 places annually for the whole of Africa) and aid in arms, military equipment and financing construction of military infrastructure. China has conducted occasional maritime exercises with Ghana and Nigeria. China has been the largest supplier of major arms to the region, accounting for 27 per cent of combined imports.

RUSSIA

Russia's military cooperation with West African states has mostly consisted of arms sales to eight states in the region and, since 2021, military deployment to support Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in fighting insurgencies. Russia has also provided officer education for undisclosed numbers of participants from African states at its military education institutions.

TÜRKIYE

Türkiye has appeared as a military actor in West Africa since 2014 and has been a growing arms supplier to the region. Exports from Türkiye accounted for 6 per cent of West African states' major arms imports between 2010 and 2025, but double that (12 per cent) in the latest five-year period (2021–25). However, these growing armament relations have not yet been followed by more comprehensive military cooperation. The exception is Gambia, whose armed forces have received training and aid in arms by Türkiye.

THE UNITED STATES

The USA has provided West African states with comprehensive military assistance structured around a range of US instruments for international military cooperation, including in training and education, exercises and equipment. The USA has been the largest provider of aid in the form of major arms deliveries to West African states, accounting for half of all the aid in major arms supplies to the region between 2010 and 2025.

viewed in light of growing economic relations between Türkiye and states in West Africa.¹²¹

Türkiye has appeared as a military actor in West Africa since 2014, when it signed a military logistics assistance agreement with Gambia.¹²² According to reports, at least 2000 Gambian soldiers received military training in Türkiye between 2015 and 2023, which would amount to half of the total Gambian military personnel as of 2025.¹²³ Türkiye has also provided aid in military equipment, including second-hand armoured vehicles, to Gambia.¹²⁴

Türkiye has become a significant arms provider to other West African states. The first major arms transfers were recorded in 2015, to Mauritania, and Türkiye has exported major arms to nine more states in West Africa since, accounting for 6 per cent of their major arms imports between 2010 and 2025, and double that (12 per cent) in the latest five-year period (2021–25).¹²⁵ It has mostly sold armoured personnel carriers and armed drones, but also trainer/combat aircraft to Niger and combat helicopters to Nigeria.¹²⁶

These growing armament relations have not yet been followed by more comprehensive military cooperation. Most of Türkiye's bilateral agreements with West African states such as Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal seem to prioritize armament.¹²⁷ However, the bilateral agreement with Guinea contains clauses about possible assistance in maritime security, intelligence exchange and joint exercises.¹²⁸ In 2020 Türkiye and Niger signed a defence cooperation agreement which was interpreted as the basis for direct operational support for the Nigerien military, but such support seems not to have begun as of April 2026, when a further protocol on military training was signed.¹²⁹

Table 1. Approved assistance measures under the European Peace Facility

Recipient domains refer to maritime (M) or air and land (A/L) forces. Amounts are in millions (m) of euros.

Year	Council Decision ^a	Recipient	Recipient domain	Amount (€)	Lethal equipment?
2025	Council Decision (CFSP) 2025/1340 of 8 July 2025	Cabo Verde ^b	M	12 m	No
2025	Council Decision (CFSP) 2025/1333 of 8 July 2025	Senegal ^b	A/L	10 m	No
2025	Council Decision (CFSP) 2025/609 of 24 March 2025	Mauritania ^b	M, A/L	20 m	No
2024	Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/2015 of 2 July 2024	Mauritania ^b	M, A/L	15 m	No
2024	Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1980 of 15 July 2024	Benin ^b	A/L	5 m	Yes
2024	Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1715 of 13 June 2024	Benin ^c	M	5 m	No
2024	Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1455 of 21 May 2024	Benin ^b	A/L	25 m	No
2024	Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1248 of 29 April 2024	Côte d'Ivoire ^b	A/L	15 m	No
2024	Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1063 of 4 April 2024	Ghana ^b	A/L	25 m	No
2023	Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/2682 of 27 November 2023	Cameroon and Ghana ^{c,d}	M	21 m	No
2023	Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/2062 of 25 September 2023	Benin ^b	A/L	11.75 m	No
2023	Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1137 of 8 June 2023	Niger ^b	A/L	0.297 m	No
2023	Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1136 of 8 June 2023	Niger ^b	A/L	4.7 m	Yes
2023	Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/509 of 7 March 2023	Niger ^{b,e}	A/L	40 m	No
2022	Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/2355 of 1 December 2022	Mauritania ^b	A/L	12 m	No
2022	Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/1236 of 18 July 2022	Niger ^b	A/L	25 m	No
2022	Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/667 of 21 April 2022	African Union	A/L	600 m	No
2021	Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/2137 of 2 December 2021	Mali ^{b,e}	A/L	24 m	No
2021	Council Decision (EU) 2021/1210 of 22 July 2021	African Union	A/L	130 m	No

^a Council Decision titles abbreviated to the decision number and date, as the other components of the title (such as recipient) are shown in the other columns.

^b Measure assisting the recipient's Armed Forces.

^c Measure assisting the recipient's Navy.

^d Measure assisting 'military actors' in the recipient state.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The European Union	2
Counterterrorism and stabilization	2
Maritime security in the Atlantic	2
EU member states	3
France	3
Germany	3
The United Kingdom	4
Other EU member states	4
The United States	4
China	5
Russia	6
Türkiye	7
Table 1. Approved assistance measures under the European Peace Facility	8
Notes	9

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