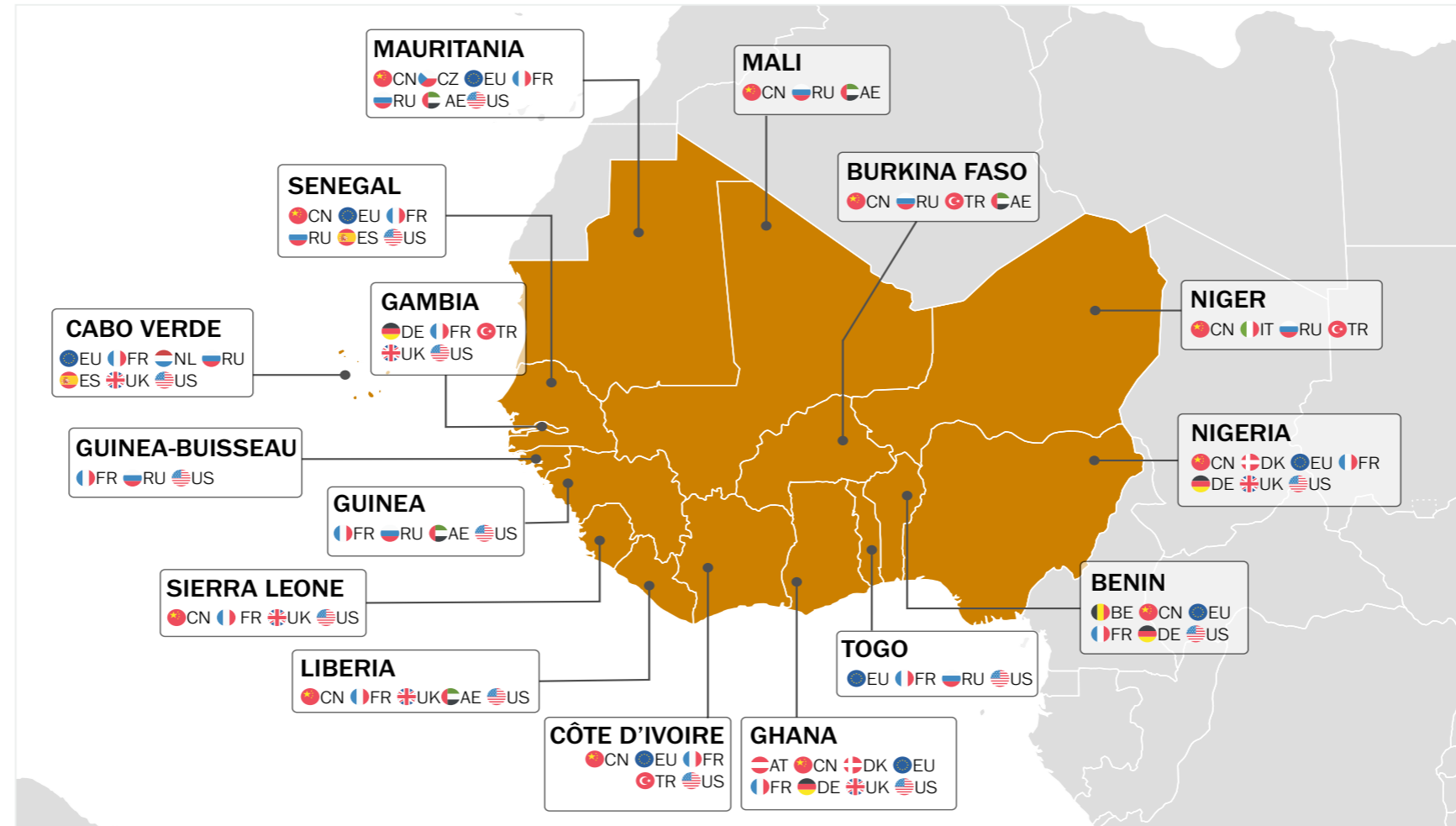


# MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE EU AND OTHER EXTERNAL ACTORS TO WEST AFRICAN STATES

## 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. This assistance has focused on counterterrorism and maritime security. 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.