

# France honours soldiers killed in Mali disaster

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AFP | Paris

Hundreds of people lined avenues in Paris yesterday to honour 13 soldiers killed while battling jihadist insurgents in Mali, ahead of a national ceremony to mourn a disaster that has prompted soul-searching over the costs of the over five-year campaign in West Africa.

Sporadic applause punctuated sombre silence as a motorcade bearing the coffins crossed the Alexandre III bridge toward the Invalides military hospital and museum.

The soldiers died when two helicopters collided last Monday while pursuing jihadists in northern Mali where militant violence has soared in recent months.

It was the biggest single-day loss for the French military in nearly four decades and raised fresh questions about the effectiveness of France's 4,500-member Barkhane operation in Mali



Soldiers saluted as the funeral convoy carrying 13 French soldiers killed in Mali crossed the Alexandre III bridge in Paris on Monday, ahead of a commemoration at the Invalides military hospital

and four other countries in the Sahel.

Margot Louvet, 23, came from Gap in southwest France to watch the procession, wearing a T-shirt with the official portrait of one of the soldiers killed, her friend Antoine Serre, 22.

"He was a pearl, the kindest and most generous," she said. "Being here is a way to mourn him, and realise that he won't be coming back."

President Emmanuel Macron

will lead the commemoration, which begins at 3:00 pm (1400 GMT) and bestow the Legion d'Honneur on the fallen soldiers.

Some 2,500 people are expected to attend, and the ceremony will also be broadcast on a giant screen set up outside the Invalides.

The French forces in Mali are tasked with training local security forces to take on the jihadists, but so far these remain woefully unprepared despite years

of pledges of more international funding and equipment.

Forty-one French soldiers have now died in the Sahel over the past six years.

## Cartoon controversy

France's intervention began in 2013, when insurgents swept into Mali's north and rapidly advanced before being pushed back. But despite France's

presence the jihadists have regrouped to carry out deadly attacks and violence has spread to neighbouring countries.

Macron said the government would begin a thorough review of Barkhane in the wake of the helicopter accident, vowing that "all options are on the table".

He also reiterated his call for EU allies to step up their participation in the West Africa operation after years of failing to secure significant support.

Only Britain has contributed helicopters and security personnel, while the U S

lished Monday, showed that 58 percent of respondents approve the Sahel operation, a level hardly changed from a previous poll in March 2013.

But controversy flared over the weekend after the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo published a series of cartoons online associating the 13 soldiers' deaths with the army's recent recruitment campaign.

In one drawing, Macron stands before a coffin in front of the slogan: "I joined the ranks to stand out from the crowd."

The French army's chief of staff, General Thierry Burkhard, expressed his "indignation" at the cartoons.

In an open letter to Charlie Hebdo's editor, Laurent "Riss" Sourisseau, he accused the magazine of having sullied the period of mourning for the bereaved families.

Sourisseau defended on Sunday the magazine's "satirical spirit", while acknowledging the importance of the work of the French army and the soldiers' sacrifice.

But Sourisseau, who was wounded when jihadist attackers massacred 12 people in an attack at the magazine's offices in January 2015, declined Burkhard's invitation to attend the Invalides ceremony.

"We know that their mission is difficult and that they are dealing with merciless enemies," he wrote in a response to Burkhard.



pro-

vides in-

telligence on

jihadist movements

across an area the size of Western Europe.

So far, only the far-left France Unbowed party has openly called for the Barkhane troops to be brought home.

An Ifop poll for the Lettre de l'Expansion newsletter, pub-

# US House panel to meet on Trump impeachment charges

AFP | Washington

A Congressional panel will begin drawing up charges against President Donald Trump on Wednesday as the likelihood grows of his becoming only the third US leader ever impeached.

However, Trump's attorney signaled on Sunday night that the White House won't send anyone to the hearings, at least not right away.

"We cannot fairly be expected to participate in a hearing while the witnesses are yet to be named and while it remains unclear whether the Judiciary Committee will afford the President a fair process through additional hearings," White House counsel Pat Cipollone wrote in a letter to Jerry Nadler, the Democratic chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.

But Cipollone also did not rule out White House participation in the hearings entirely, instead requesting further details from Nadler on how the inquiry will be conducted and saying he will give him an answer by next Friday.

Trump has been unable to quash allegations in the House of Representatives investigation that he illegally sought help from Ukraine to obtain dirt on his domestic political rivals, including possible 2020 challenger Joe Biden.

Nadler's committee meets on Wednesday to begin determining whether the evidence compiled in the investigative phase of the process meets the constitutional impeachment standard of "treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors."

The committee is expected to consider at least four counts, or articles of impeachment, including abuse of power, bribery, contempt of Congress and ob-



US President Donald Trump steps off Air Force One upon arrival in West Palm Beach, Florida, in November 2019



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IMRAN KHAN,  
PRIME MINISTER

struction of justice.

"The president has accepted or enlisted foreign nations to interfere in our upcoming elections," said House impeachment leader Adam Schiff, a Democrat, in a November 25 statement.

"This is an urgent matter that cannot wait if we are to protect the nation's security and the integrity of our elections."

Trump and Republicans continue to brand the accusations and process as a political "witch hunt."

"This is a complete American waste of time," said Doug Collins, who as the leading Republican on the Judiciary Committee will lead that party's counterattack. He appeared on "Fox News Sunday."

Impeachment vote by year-end

The inquiry could go fast -- Democrats reportedly want to have the entire House vote on impeachment before the end of the year.

They are confident that they have strong evidence that Trump committed impeachable offenses, despite the White House blocking the testimony of top presidential aides and refusing to hand over subpoenaed documents.

That refusal has angered Democrats.

"We're not going to play games with them," Val Demings, a Democratic member of the Judiciary Committee, told ABC on Sunday. "They need to respond to the request for documents and obey those lawful subpoenas."

Trump is alleged to have withheld military aid for Ukraine -- desperately sought by Kiev amid the ongoing border conflict against pro-Russian separatists -- as well as a desired high-profile summit with President Volodymyr Zelensky.

In exchange, Trump wanted Kiev to open investigations into Biden and a widely discredited theory that Ukraine interfered in the 2016 US elections on Democrats' behalf.

If the articles of impeachment are passed by the Democratic-controlled House as expected, Trump would go on trial in January in the Senate for removal from office.

Given Republican control of that chamber and the high hurdle of a two-thirds majority needed to convict, the president would very likely be cleared.

Still, Democrats see the process as important in reinforcing the rule of law and pushing back against a powerful president seen as showing little respect for Congress's powers.

## Trump won't take part

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler had last week invited Trump and his attorneys to take part in the first hearing on Wednesday, an invitation which Cipollone declined.

"It is too late to cure the profound procedural deficiencies that have tainted this entire inquiry," Cipollone wrote in reply.

"Nevertheless, if you are serious about conducting a fair process going forward, and in order to protect the rights and privileges of the President, we may consider participating in future Judiciary Committee proceedings if you afford the Administration the ability to do so meaningfully," he added.

But Nadler has said that Trump's ability to participate could depend on whether he continues to refuse to make witnesses and documents available.

One Republican on the committee, Tom McClintock, told Fox that he believed top Trump aides "absolutely" should testify.

Democrats want to hear from former national security adviser John Bolton, acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. All three should have direct knowledge of Trump's actions toward Ukraine.

So far they have refused to testify, claiming "absolute immunity" as confidants of the president.

Collins tried to turn the tables on Democrats, saying Republicans want Schiff, the House impeachment manager, to tes-



House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler, a longtime political nemesis of President Donald Trump, will lead the process to draw up articles of impeachment against him

tify. "If he chooses not to," he added, "then I really question his veracity."

Led by Nadler, Trump's longtime nemesis, the televised hearings -- set to open at 10:00 am (1500 GMT) Wednesday -- are expected to be fiery.

With national elections less than one year away, Democrats need to convince Americans that impeaching Trump is justified and necessary.

Presidential candidate Amy Klobuchar, appearing Sunday on NBC, described the Ukraine affair in dramatic terms as "a global Watergate" -- going beyond the scope of the scandal that brought down President Richard Nixon.

Republicans, for their part, aim to show the exercise as a political attack on Trump.

"He did nothing improper," Collins said. "There is nothing here that the president did wrong."