

AFRICA

French Troops, Rebels Clash in Ivory Coast

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast -- French troops clashed with rebels in western Ivory Coast yesterday, their second serious engagement in a three-month war that has crippled the former French colony.

Nearly 2,000 French troops are in Ivory Coast to enforce an often-violated cease-fire between the northern rebels and the government, and to protect French citizens and other foreign nationals.

But the French have been increasingly dragged into the fighting, especially in the west, where they are effectively blocking any rebel advance to the south.

Yesterday's clash took place near the strategic crossroads town of Duekoue, 55 miles south of the western rebel-held town of Man, scene of some of the fiercest fighting.

"A French patrol was set upon by a group of around 30 to 40 rebels on foot," said Lt. Col. Ange-Antoine Leccia, a spokesman for the French army. "They fired on the French soldiers, who responded." No soldiers were hurt, he said.

The rebels could not immediately be reached for comment.

Associated Press

AFRICA

France Beefs Up Ivory Coast Forces

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast -- Hundreds of French troops, dozens of armored vehicles and several helicopters docked here yesterday to reinforce French troops who again clashed with Ivory Coast rebels the day before.

Members of the French Foreign Legion and elite reconnaissance forces were among the roughly 300 new arrivals, beefing up the French forces in the former French colony to about 2,500.

French troops are charged with enforcing an often-violated cease-fire and protecting French citizens and other foreign nationals caught in a three-month war that has killed hundreds and crippled the world's largest cocoa producer.

Recently, however, French soldiers have been drawn deeper into the conflict, clashing with rebels in the coffee- and cocoa-rich west while also offering to host peace talks.

Associated Press

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