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## France Sending More Troops to Ivory Coast as Peace Talks Falter

By REUTERS

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Dec. 12 (Reuters) — French troops monitoring a shaky cease-fire in Ivory Coast said today that reinforcements would "get more involved," as peace talks edged closer to collapse and thousands of loyalist youths volunteered for the front.

France, Ivory Coast's former colonial power, is flying in hundreds of reinforcements to increase its military force in Ivory Coast to more than 2,000.

Since a failed coup on Sept. 19 and ensuing battles between the government and rebels, French troops have limited their activity. At first, they protected foreigners from the fighting. They then expanded their duties to policing a cease-fire signed on Oct. 17 between the government and the main rebel faction, the Movement for Justice and Peace.

That role has been largely confined to monitoring. But the emergence last month of new factions in western areas, joined by hundreds of Liberian fighters, has added to the chaos. And on Wednesday, Ivory Coast's army admitted that dozens of bodies found in a mass grave in the west were killed by government troops, but said they were rebels who died in fighting, and not civilians.

France said on Wednesday that the situation had prompted it to dispatch hundreds more troops within 72 hours to help about 1,500 already there. It was not immediately clear what the force's new role would be.

Le Monde, the Paris daily, said 500 to 600 troops and additional war equipment would be sent to Ivory Coast.

"It's a question of getting more widely involved with the preservation of stability on the ground," said the French Army spokesman in Ivory Coast, Frédéric Thomazo. But the rebels increasingly suspect France of taking the side of President Laurent Gbagbo's government.

"This is not a threat, but France is in danger of putting its interests and expatriates at risk if it is not going to be neutral," said a rebel spokesman who called himself Sergeant Bamba.

In the main city, Abidjan, thousands of young men massed at a barracks, heeding a government call for 3,000 volunteers.

The throng that trooped to a paramilitary police training academy easily surpassed that number. The rebels began a similar recruitment drive today.

While both sides bolstered their forces at home, peace talks between the rebels and the government, which started in Togo's capital, Lomé, on Oct. 30, appeared to be going nowhere.

Togo's president, Gnassingbe Eyadema, flew to Abidjan today to meet Mr. Gbagbo and the leaders of other political parties to try to salvage the talks. But the delegate of Ivory Coast's main opposition party, which is tied to northern Muslims, said the party would not sign a joint declaration backing the government and peace efforts.

The rebels said the declaration appeared to exclude them from the negotiating process, and their representatives in Lomé said they would take a break for consultations in Ivory Coast

Ivory Coast's war has its roots in years of mounting ethnic bitterness. The rebels say they want to see the departure of Mr. Gbagbo, a Christian from the Bete tribe of the southwest who won a controversial election two years ago.

The main rebel body holds the largely Muslim north, an opposition stronghold. Two other rebel factions in the far west, home of the Yacouba tribe, want to avenge the death of Robert Guéi, a former junta leader, at the hands of Mr. Gbagbo's men.