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French combat mission in Afghanistan ends

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The French combat mission in Afghanistan came to an end with the pullout of the last batch of soldiers from eastern Kapisa province on Tuesday, an official said.

Kapisa Governor Mehrabuddin Safi, in an exclusive interview with Pajhwok Afghan News, said the last 400 French soldiers left the Nijrab district before noon after a farewell ceremony. The move is in line with President François Hollande's election campaign pledge of an early withdrawal of soldiers from Afghanistan. However, 1,500 French troops will remain into 2013 to help train the Afghan army.

He said the Kapisa government and residents, acknowledging the French troops' role in stabilising and rebuilding the province, highly valued continued assistance from Paris. France had played a crucial role in reviving health, education and public works sectors of the province, the governor said, adding Afghan Local Police (ALP) personnel were deployed to different districts with cooperation from French troops.

Over the past 11 years, 86 French soldiers were killed in Afghanistan after they joined the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in late 2001.