

US withdrawing troops fighting Ebola

February 11 2015

President Barack Obama said Wednesday US military efforts to contain Ebola would give way to a civilian-led drive to "extinguish" the virus, as he ordered home American troops in West Africa.

"We are shifting our focus from fighting the epidemic to now extinguishing it," Obama said, flanked by Ebola response staff.

Obama said a military force that peaked at 2,800 troops would number not more than 100 by the end of April.

The forces, most of whom were stationed in Liberia, constructed Ebola treatment units, trained health workers, provided logistical support for aid agencies and set up labs to test blood samples.

"We have risen to the challenge" Obama said.

Guinea and its neighbors Sierra Leone and Liberia have registered more than 9,000 deaths since the Ebola epidemic flared up in December 2013.

During the seven days leading up to February 1, 124 new cases were confirmed across the three west African countries, a significant reduction from peak rates.

But with the weekly number of new Ebola cases registered in those three countries rising in the last week of January—marking the first increase in 2015—Obama was careful not to declare "mission accomplished."

"I want to be very clear here, while our troops are coming home America's work is not done. Our mission is not complete."

Liberia, he said, "has seen the best progress, Sierra Leone is moving in the right direction, Guinea has the longest way left to go."

"Our focus now is getting to zero."

"As long as there is even one case of Ebola that is active out there risks still exist. Every case is an ember that if not contained could light a new fire."

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