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More Russian Fighters from Private 'Wagner Group' Die in Syria

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Defense Ministry

Six Russians affiliated with the private military company known as the "Wagner Group" died in Syria this year, an investigation by the news website RBC has revealed.

RBC, working with the open-source investigation collective Conflict Intelligence Team, analyzed Russian social media and found evidence that six men aged 22 to 51 died this year while fighting in various provinces across Syria, including in the second Palmyra offensive.

The men, who were former members of the Russian military, allegedly ranked from private to lieutenant-colonel.

Their deaths have yet to be officially acknowledged by Russia's Defense Ministry.

The combatants' remains have been shipped to their relatives in Russia in sealed, zinc-lined caskets, and were buried in their hometowns across Russia without any fanfare or even the presence of Defense Ministry officials.

They are believed to be among 36 undocumented Russian fighters to have died in Syria since the official launch of Russia's campaign in October 2015.

Based on available evidence, most of the fighters belonged to the secretive “Wagner Group,” a private military company believed to be employed by Russia’s Defense Ministry for its military operations in Syria.

Private military companies are illegal in Russia. Mercenary activities are strictly prohibited by Russian law, which partly explains the secrecy surrounding these groups.

“Wagner Group,” a company of several thousand men is led by a reserve lieutenant-colonel named Dmitri Utkin. Most of his fighters have served in Russia's military or were volunteers for Ukraine’s self-declared pro-Russian “People’s Republics.”

Private military contractors fighting for groups such as the Wagner Group are reportedly paid between 80 thousand rubles a month ($1380) for service at a military base in Russia, and 250 thousand rubles ($4300) for active military service in Syria. The relatives of fighters are paid a handsome compensation in case of their deaths, which are never officially acknowledged.

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