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Libya to Send List of 800 Russian Mercenaries to Moscow – AP

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Libya's UN-backed government says the fighters are helping Khalifa Haftar's offensive on Tripoli.
Moskva News Agency

Libya's internationally recognized government plans to present a list of up to 800 Russian mercenaries fighting for its opponents to Russian officials, the Associated Press reported Thursday.

Tripoli has accused Moscow of escalating the conflict in the oil-rich North African nation following reports of at least two deployments of Kremlin-linked Wagner mercenaries in recent months. Forces loyal to eastern commander Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive this spring, with Wagner's reported help, to seize Tripoli from Libya's UN-backed government.

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Libya's government has found between 600 and 800 Russian mercenaries fighting for Haftar,

the AP reported, citing Khaled al-Meshri, the head of the UN-backed government's advisory body.

"We are going to visit Russia after we collect all evidence and present [it] to the authorities and see what they say," al-Meshri told the AP without specifying when that visit will take place.

The tally was reportedly based on flight data from Syria, as well as intercepted communications and personal belongings seized during the fighting, the AP reported. The news agency noted that it had not seen these documents.

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Around 300 Russians believed to Wagner contractors have arrived in Libya to support Haftar in his offensive, The New York Times and Bloomberg reported this fall. Wagner is a private army linked to President Vladimir Putin through businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Russia denies its military presence in Libya and says it supports conflict resolution efforts in the country gripped by five years of civil war.

U.S. officials pressed Haftar to end his offensive on Tripoli when they met him over the weekend.

They "expressed serious concern over Russia's exploitation of the conflict at the expense of the Libyan people," the U.S. State Department said in a statement Monday.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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