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Russia Managing Libya Conflict ‘at Highest Level,’ Turkey’s Erdogan Says

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Erdogan accused Russia's Wagner mercenary group and unspecified Western countries of supporting eastern commander Khalifa Haftar in the country's ongoing civil war. **Kremlin.ru**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Russia was managing the conflict in Libya "at the highest level," Turkey’s NTV broadcaster reported Saturday.

Erdogan, whose country backs Libya’s internationally recognized government, has publicly accused the Kremlin-linked Wagner mercenary group of supporting Libya’s rival faction headed by eastern commander Khalifa Haftar. Russia has repeatedly denied its military presence in Libya.

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"Russia is currently managing the war there at the highest level," NTV quoted Erdogan as saying on board a presidential plane.

Erdogan reportedly displayed a photograph showing the head of Wagner, whom he did not name, meeting Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov.

“They’re now directing Wagner there,” NTV quoted Erdogan as saying. “They still get up and say that [they] don’t have a relationship with it.”

While it is unclear which photograph Erdogan was said to have displayed, Shoigu and Gerasimov have been filmed meeting Haftar in 2018 with the reported head of Wagner, the sanctioned businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Erdogan also accused unspecified Western countries of supporting Haftar, whose campaign to take over the Libyan capital of Tripoli is approaching the one-year mark.

Ankara would continue to support Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj's internationally recognized government, Erdogan was quoted as saying. Turkey and al-Serraj’s government signed a security agreement in November.

The Kremlin on Monday again denied sending troops to Libya.

BBC Russia reported last week on the burial of a Russian national who it alleged may have been a uniformed soldier fighting in Libya.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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