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Libya Blames Chemical Attack on Kremlin-Linked Wagner Mercenary Group

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Russia's Wagner mercenaries are reported to be unofficially helping eastern commander Khalifa Haftar's year-long offensive to seize the Libyan capital. **Amru Salahuddien/ Xinhua / ZUMA / TASS**

Libya's UN-backed government has accused Kremlin-linked private military contractors for an alleged chemical attack in southern Tripoli, according to Arab and Turkish media.

Interior minister Fathi Bashaga's charges turn the spotlight back on Russia's Wagner mercenaries, who are reported to be unofficially helping eastern commander Khalifa Haftar's year-long offensive to seize the Libyan capital. The Wagner Group is a private army linked to President Vladimir Putin through catering magnate Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Related article: Libya Slams Russian Intervention: 'Wherever Wagner Goes Destruction Happens'

“In [southern Tripoli’s] Salah al-Din axis, our fighters were exposed to nerve gas from Haftar’s forces, and were paralyzed and then sniped,” the pan-Arab outlet The New Arab quoted Bashaga as saying Wednesday.

“This deed can only be carried out by Wagner,” Bashaga claimed.

Egyptian-Canadian photojournalist Amru Salahuddien said that he witnessed Libyan government fighters “shaking and unable to breathe normally” after the Haftar forces’ bombing run on Salah al-Din on Wednesday.

The attack allegedly followed him witnessing shaking and vomiting Government of National Accord (GNA) fighters over the weekend in what he said was a nerve gas attack.

Embed:

> After a regular #LNA bombing at Salahuddien frontline this afternoon, several #GNA fighters fell on the ground slightly shaking and unable to breathe normally. #libya #tripoli
>
> — Amru Salahuddien (@AmruSalahuddien) April 22, 2020

No other confirmation of the attack followed.

Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) is working “in strong cooperation with Turkey, U.S. and UK to ensure security,” Turkey’s state-run Anadolu news agency quoted Bashaga as saying Wednesday.

President Vladimir Putin said this year that Russian nationals in Libya do not represent the Russian state and are not paid by it. Russia denies that it uses mercenaries abroad.

Libya descended into chaos after the 2011 uprising against its ousted dictator Muammar Gaddafi, with the conflict evolving into a proxy war between foreign powers.

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