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# Libya Unity Govt Says Russian Mercenaries Evacuating

By AFP

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**Amru Salahuddien / Xinhua / ZUMA / TASS**

Forces backing Libya's unity government said Monday that hundreds of Russian mercenaries fighting for their rival, military commander Khalifa Haftar, had been evacuated from combat zones south of the capital Tripoli.

The claim comes after a series of setbacks for Haftar's year-long offensive to seize the capital from the UN-recognized Government of National Accord.

"An Antonov 32 military cargo plane landed at Bani Walid airport to resume the evacuation of Wagner (Group) mercenaries who had fled southern Tripoli, to an as-yet unconfirmed destination," pro-GNA forces wrote on Twitter.

Several countries including Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey have been accused of involvement in the battle between the GNA and Haftar's forces.

Earlier this month, United Nations experts confirmed US media reports that the Wagner Group, a shadowy Russian paramilitary organization seen as close to President Vladimir Putin, had sent fighters to back Haftar.

The Kremlin has always denied involvement.

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Pro-GNA forces, with growing support from Turkey, have chalked up a series of victories in recent weeks largely thanks to their air superiority.

They said Saturday they had seized three barracks south of the capital, days after Haftar's forces said their fighters would pull back from some positions south of Tripoli.

Haftar's forces did not immediately comment on the claim, and it was not possible to confirm it independently.

Pro-GNA forces said Monday some "1,500 to 1,600 mercenaries" had fled from the frontlines in Tripoli to Bani Walid, some 145 kilometers (90 miles) southeast of the capital.

They said the previous day seven cargo planes had landed at the town's airport, bringing in munitions and weaponry and evacuating the fleeing fighters.

Haftar's forces, which control much of eastern and southern Libya, launched their offensive on Tripoli last April, but despite early successes, stalled on the edge of the capital.

The battle has left hundreds dead, including dozens of civilians, and displaced more than 200,000 people.

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