

# Mercenaries Pulled From Libya as Ukraine Invasion Strains Russia's Military – FT

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Fighters of a Misurata-based armed group in Tripoli, Libya. **dpa / picture-alliance / TACC**

Some 1,200 Syrian and Russian mercenaries have been pulled out of Libya as Moscow's protracted invasion of Ukraine begins to place strain on the country's military, the Financial Times [reported](#) Thursday.

Unnamed Libyan officials told FT that 1,000 Syrians and 200 Russians from the Wagner Group had been moved from the war-torn North African country in recent weeks.

A further 5,000 Wagner mercenaries still remain in the country.

Private military company Wagner is believed to be funded by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian catering magnate with ties to President Vladimir Putin, although the Kremlin denies official links with the group.

Libya expert Emadeddin Badi said "there has been an uptick" of withdrawals in the past few

weeks.

“They are still there but there are a lot less of them,” Badi, the Atlantic Council’s Middle East Initiative senior fellow, told FT.

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The publication said separate reports indicated that an estimated 200 Wagner fighters had also left the Central African Republic.

Two unnamed Western officials cited by the newspaper linked these moves to Russian setbacks on the battlefield in Ukraine. Britain’s defense ministry [suggested](#) late last month that Russia has likely deployed Wagner fighters in Ukraine “at the expense of operations in Africa and Syria.”

The Western officials also told FT it was still unclear whether Syrian fighters would be deployed to Ukraine.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in mid-March that 40,000 Syrian soldiers had been [put on standby](#) for deployment in Europe.

Putin had earlier [backed](#) plans to allow foreign volunteers to fight alongside Russian troops in Ukraine.

Russia has deployed mercenaries in other north and west African countries, including Mali, as it seeks to wield military and economic influence on the continent.

Those efforts include backing Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar in his fight to seize power from the country’s UN-backed Government of National Accord.

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