Wagner Chief Announces Withdrawal From Ukraine's Bakhmut

May 25, 2023

Wagner Chief Yevgeny Prigozhin (L) with fighters in Bakhmut. **Prigozhin Press Service**

Russia's Wagner mercenary group has started withdrawing fighters from the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, its leader Yevgeny Prigozhin said Thursday.

The announcement comes days after he claimed full control of the war-ravaged city, an assertion that Kyiv disputes.

Prigozhin, a Putin ally who has clashed with Russia's Defense Ministry throughout its 15-month invasion of Ukraine, said "most" Wagner mercenaries will move to field camps by next Thursday.

"We're exiting to rear areas," Prigozhin told masked soldiers in a video published on his press service's Telegram channel.

"We'll hand over positions, ammunition, everything including dry rations, to the troops [of the Russian Armed Forces]," he said in front of the ruins of an apartment block in Bakhmut.

Related article: [Prigozhin Says 20K Wagner Fighters Killed in Battle for Bakhmut](#)

Wagner will "receive new tasks" after regrouping, Prigozhin was heard telling a tank crew without specifying when.

The three-minute footage showed Prigozhin walking across the deserted town, instructing his mercenaries and, at one point, carrying on with his speech against the sound of a loud explosion in the background.

The salt-mining town of Bakhmut, with a pre-war population of 70,000, has been destroyed during the fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces.

Prigozhin claimed total control of Bakhmut on Saturday after seven months of the war's longest and bloodiest fighting.

Ukraine's military maintains that Bakhmut has not fallen to Russian forces, saying it aims to encircle the city.

Prigozhin has long complained that the Defense Ministry regularly under-supplied Wagner with ammunition, causing a disproportionate number of casualties.

He revealed in an interview this week that Wagner had lost 20,000 fighters while fighting for Bakhmut.