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Kremlin Denies State Role in Wagner's Africa Businesses

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Wagner Orchestra / Telegram

The Russian state played no role in the Wagner mercenary group's multimillion-dollar business interests in Africa, the Kremlin said Wednesday.

Spokesman Dmitry Peskov issued the denial after President Vladimir Putin revealed Tuesday that Russia's state budget "fully financed" Wagner, detailing sums of 86 billion rubles ($1 billion) spent on upkeep and another 110 billion rubles ($1.3 billion) on insurance payouts.

Wagner "had an independent business there [in Africa] and the state had nothing to do with this business," Peskov told reporters.

"Putin talked about quite significant sums of money that were allocated through the Defense Ministry. He mentioned these figures, but the company [Wagner] has been engaged in its own business, which has nothing to do with the state," he added.

Related article: Wagner Will Continue Mali, C. Africa Operations – Lavrov

Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin's rupture with the Kremlin raises questions about the fate of Wagner's operations in the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali and Sudan.

Bloomberg has detailed Wagner's businesses in CAR ranging from a $290-million-per-year gold mine to precious hardwood processing and beer and vodka production.

"With Wagner, Russia has managed to create a very powerful business machine and tool for influence in Africa," International Crisis Group's Central Africa project director Enrica Picco told Bloomberg.

"So the system will not fail even if there are internal struggles in Russia. The Kremlin will not let the system fail — it's too important for them," Picco said.

After Prigozhin's confirmed exile in Belarus on Tuesday, the United States announced sanctions on Wagner-controlled companies that operate gold and diamond mines in CAR.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov meanwhile said Russia's military instructors will continue to operate in CAR and Mali.

Before being brought out of the shadows during Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Wagner operated mostly covertly in global hotspots including Ukraine, Syria and Africa.

Prigozhin had denied links to Wagner until last year.

Wagner fighters have been accused of committing mass executions, rape, child abductions and torture in their areas of operation.

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