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Wagner Still Recruiting Fighters After Failed Mutiny – Reports

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A Wagner recruitment office in Moscow. **Mikhail Tereshchenko / TASS**

Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner mercenary outfit continues to recruit fighters despite his exile in Belarus following a short-lived mutiny last weekend, according to multiple media reports.

"Everything's the same as before, for now. Nothing's changed," a recruiter for Wagner in the central Russian city of Saratov told the BBC.

"Nothing has stopped, we're still recruiting," said another recruiter from the city of Volgograd.

Prigozhin called off Wagner's march on Moscow late Saturday as part of a last-ditch deal that offered him immunity from prosecution in exchange for standing down and going into exile in neighboring Belarus.

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In a televised statement late Monday, President Vladimir Putin accused rebelling Wagner fighters of treason and — without mentioning Prigozhin by name — offered them to either sign contracts with the army or leave for Belarus.

When contacted by the BBC, one Wagner recruiter said Belarus was "now a possible destination" for prospective mercenary fighters.

The BBC noted that recruitment drives continued at dozens of Wagner contact points, mostly at martial arts schools and fight clubs in cities across Russia.

Earlier this week, journalists at Populyarnaya Politika — a news outlet created by associates of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny — contacted Wagner recruiters, who said the private army's headquarters remained in the small town of Molkino in southern Russia's Krasnodar region.

Embed:

> Awesome work here by journalist Dmitry Nizovtsev in a special report for the Telegram channel Sirena. He called a Wagner Group recruiter to see how the PMC is handling the aftermath of Prigozhin's failed mutiny. (I added some English-lang subtitles.) https://t.co/otjjNSJvgM pic.twitter.com/JXW74Fdp0f
>
> — Kevin Rothrock (@KevinRothrock) June 28, 2023

Recruiters who spoke to the BBC stressed that new fighters were signing contracts with Wagner and not with Russia's Defense Ministry.

Russia's Defense Ministry had allegedly threatened to cut off Wagner's funding if Prigozhin continued to defy demands to sign a contract with the military by July 1, a senior Russian lawmaker said Thursday.

Prigzohin said his armed revolt was aimed at saving his embattled mercenary outfit and bringing to justice Russia's military leadership, who made "huge mistakes" during the war in Ukraine.

Asked about the military's July 1 deadline for "volunteer formations" to come under the Russian Defense Ministry's formal command, a Saratov recruiter told BBC: "I hope not. I don't know. But people are still contacting us, of course."

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