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Russia, Mali To Strengthen Counterterrorism Efforts

By AFP

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The head of the Malian junta, Colonel Assimi Goita **Hadama Diakite / EPA / TASS**

Russia and Mali agreed to strengthen their cooperation over counterterrorism in a telephone call on Wednesday according to both parties, following the attack in Moscow that killed at least 137.

Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke to the head of the Malian junta, Colonel Assimi Goita, and the President of Congo-Brazzaville, Denis Sassou Nguesso, the Kremlin said in a statement.

Putin and Goita "agreed to strengthen anti-terrorist cooperation," the Kremlin said.

The Islamic State (IS) group has claimed responsibility on multiple occasions and published a graphic video of the gunmen carrying out the attack.

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Colonel Goita echoed the decision on social media: "We have agreed to cooperate more in the fight against terrorism."

France was forced to withdraw troops who had been fighting jihadist violence, from Mali in 2022 after coups in 2020 and 2021 saw relations nosedive. The regime moved towards a political and military partnership with Russia.

Moscow had steadily gained influence through the dispatch of fighters from the Wagner mercenary group, which has unofficially served the Kremlin's aims in resource-rich Africa since the 2010s.

Putin and Goita also discussed strengthening "cooperation in energy, agricultural and mining projects," the Kremlin reported.

The Kremlin mentioned Russia's "free" delivery of wheat, fertilizer and fuel to Mali.

Russia has also established itself as the main ally of the military regimes of Burkina Faso and Niger, who exited a wider Western African bloc in favor of a joint defense pact with Mali.

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