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Mali Army, Russian Allies Suffer Heavy Losses in North – Local Sources

By AFP

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Wagner mercenaries in Africa, July 2024. **t.me/grey_zone**

Mali's army and its Russian allies suffered a major setback and significant losses Saturday while fighting separatists in the country's north, a spokesman for the rebels told AFP.

The West African nation's military leaders that took power in a 2020 coup have made it a priority to retake all of the country from separatist and jihadist forces, particularly in Kidal, a pro-independence northern bastion.

"Azawad fighters are in control in Tinzaouatene and further south in the Kidal region," said Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadane, a spokesman for an alliance of predominantly Tuareg separatist armed groups called CSP-DPA.

"Russian mercenaries and Malian armed forces have fled," he added. "Others have surrendered."

He also shared videos of numerous corpses of soldiers and their allies.

"The Malian army has retreated," a local politician told AFP, citing at least 17 dead in a provisional toll.

"The CSP people are still in Tinzaouaten. The army and Wagner are no longer there," he added, referring to the Russian mercenary group.

Fighting also took place further south toward Abeibara, the politician said.

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A former UN mission worker in Kidal said: "At least 15 Wagner fighters were killed and arrested after three days of fighting" adding that "the CSP rebels have taken the lead in what happened in Tinzaouaten."

Mossa Ag Inzoma, a member of the separatist movement, claimed that "dozens and dozens" of Wagner fighters and soldiers had been killed or taken prisoner.

But the Malian army asserted that its units that had been on patrol in Tinzaouaten for three days had begun "retrograde" operations between Friday and Saturday.

"Violent fighting continues against the coalition of terrorists," it said in a statement.

The area remains "under surveillance and the situation is being particularly monitored," the army said, adding that "five terrorist targets had been successfully dealt with."

Years of unrest

The Malian army rarely communicates its losses and pressure from the ruling junta along with armed groups has silenced most independent sources of information in the areas of fighting.

On Friday, the junta army had reported that a helicopter made an emergency landing after encountering "difficulties."

According to CSP spokesman, the separatists had hit a helicopter, causing it to crash.

Fighting on a scale not seen in months broke out Thursday between the army and separatists in Tinzaouaten, near the border with Algeria, after the army announced it had taken control of In-Afarak, a commercial crossroads in Kidal.

Separatist groups lost control of several districts in 2023 after a military offensive that saw junta forces take Kidal, the pro-independence northern bastion and a major target for the government.

There have been several accusations of rights abuses of the civilian population by the army and Wagner forces. Mali authorities have denied the allegations.

Mali has been unsettled by violence by jihadist and criminal groups since 2012.

A junta led by Colonel Assimi Goita took power in 2022 and broke the country's traditional alliance with France, in favor of Russia.

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