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Bodies of Wagner Fighters Killed in Mali Repatriated to Russia

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The bodies of Wagner Group mercenaries killed in fighting in Mali this summer have been returned to Russia, the state-run TASS news agency reported Wednesday, citing a Russian officers' organization.

Russian mercenaries suffered heavy losses in two-day fighting against Tuareg rebels near Mali's border with Algeria in July in what experts called one of the deadliest battles for Wagner in overseas operations.

"On the night of Sept. 30, 2024, the Malian armed forces and Russian allies moved out to retrieve the bodies of their fallen comrades, and today they fulfilled their duty," Alexander Ivanov, the head of the Officer's Union for International Security, told TASS. "This was an important and demanding mission that had to be accomplished."

Ivanov said the repatriated soldiers would be buried with honors. He did not specify how many soldiers were returned in the operation.

Russian fighters have supported Mali's army in its fight against the rebel movement called the Permanent Strategic Framework for Peace, Security and Development (CSP-PSD).

Related article: Wagner Group Confirms Fighters Killed Battling Mali Rebels

Wagner did not say how many of its fighters were killed in the July battle, but reports claimed that anywhere from 20 to 80 had been killed in the attack.

From its founding in 2014 until Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin's death in a plane crash in 2023, Wagner had been seen as an armed extension of the Kremlin's influence campaigns in Africa.

Following his death, the Russian Defense Ministry assumed control of Wagner's operations in Africa, mainly incorporating them into a larger organization known as Africa Corps.

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