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Wagner Mercenary Group Ends Support Mission in Mali

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The Russian private military company Wagner announced Friday that it has completed its mission supporting Mali's military junta in its fight against Islamist insurgents.

"PMC Wagner completed its main mission in Mali," the group said in a statement on its official Telegram channel. "PMC Wagner is returning home."

Mali, a landlocked country in the Sahel region, has been plagued by jihadist and separatist insurgencies since 2012. A military junta seized power in 2020 and turned to Russia for political and military support after breaking ties with France and other Western partners.

In a video message, Wagner accused Western forces of "methodically pilfering" Mali's natural wealth and claimed Russian fighters arrived with "the best weapons and the most advanced military technology." Wagner itself has faced numerous allegations of exploiting Mali's gold reserves in exchange for its services.

“We helped local patriots create a strong and disciplined army capable of defending their land. All regional capitals have returned to the control of the legitimate authorities,” the group said.

“We’ve killed thousands of militants and their commanders who have been terrorizing civilians for years,” it claimed.

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Wagner made no mention of its losses, including a major setback in July 2023, when Tuareg rebels ambushed a convoy in northern Mali. Attacks continue across large parts of the country.

Human rights groups and analysts regularly accuse both Wagner and the Malian army of committing abuses against civilians. As of March, up to 1,500 Russian Wagner fighters were believed to be operating in Mali, according to Al Jazeera.

Wagner has also deployed its mercenaries in the Ukraine war, as well as conflicts in the Middle East and several other African countries.

Russia’s Defense Ministry absorbed Wagner’s overseas operations following the death of the group’s leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, in a plane crash after his failed uprising against the Kremlin two years ago.

Reuters contributed reporting.

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