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Wagner Replaced by Russia's Africa Corp in Mali, Diplomatic Sources Say

By AFP

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Sadio Camara (3rd L), Defense Minister of Mali, and Andrei Belousov (2nd R), Defense Minister of Russia, hold a meeting in Moscow on May 10, 2025. **Russian Defense Ministry / TASS**

The Russian paramilitary group Wagner has left Mali and its units there have been taken over by the Moscow-run Africa Corps, diplomatic and security sources told AFP on Sunday.

“Officially, Wagner is no longer present in Mali. But the Africa Corps is stepping up,” one diplomatic source in the Sahel region said.

A Telegram account affiliated with Wagner said: “Mission accomplished. PMC Wagner is going home.”

Mali's ruling junta, which seized power in coups in 2020 and 2021, broke off ties with former colonial power France and pivoted toward Russia for political and military support.

Wagner, Russia's best-known mercenary group, was disbanded and restructured after its

leader Yevgeny Prigozhin died in a mysterious plane crash in August 2023 following a short-lived rebellion against Moscow.

Mali has never officially admitted Wagner's presence, insisting it only worked with Russian instructors.

France withdrew its 2,400 troops from Mali in 2022 after ties with the junta soured and anti-French sentiment surged among the public.

“The Kremlin remains in control,” the same diplomatic source added.

“Most of the Wagner personnel in Mali, who are originally from Russia, will be reintegrated into Africa Corps and remain in northern regional capitals and Bamako.”

The Africa Corps is another paramilitary group with links to the Kremlin and seen as the successor to the Wagner group. Like Wagner, its mercenaries are active supporting several African governments.

For over three years, Mali had relied on Wagner in its fight against jihadists who have killed thousands across the country.

“Wagner yesterday or Africa Corps today, our point of contact remains the same, it is the central power in Russia, that is to say the Kremlin,” a Malian security source said Sunday.

Related article: Wagner Mercenary Group Ends Support Mission in Mali

The paramilitary group's brutal methods on the ground in Mali have been regularly denounced by human rights groups.

A UN report accused Mali's army and foreign fighters of executing at least 500 people during a March 2022 anti-jihadist sweep in Moura — a claim denied by the junta.

Western governments believe the foreign fighters were Wagner mercenaries.

Last April, bodies were discovered near a Malian military camp, days after the army and Wagner paramilitaries arrested dozens of civilians, most from the Fulani community.

Wagner's withdrawal comes amid what the Malian army calls a “resurgence” of jihadist attacks, including two assaults that killed dozens of soldiers and forced troops to abandon a key central base.

A European diplomatic source in the Sahel believes Africa Corps will probably do “much more training of Malian soldiers than Wagner did.”

“Although Wagner claims that its operations and support strengthened the Malian army, Africa Corps will need to continue training and support, especially after the recent wave of attacks against the FAMA [Malian Armed Forces],” said Beverly Ochieng, an analyst at the Washington think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

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