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Mali Rebel Group Demands Russia Leave Country Following Major Offensive

By AFP

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Tuareg rebels of the Azawad Liberation Front in Kidal, Mali. **AFP**

Tuareg rebels in Mali want Russian forces to leave the country, a spokesman for the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) coalition told AFP on Wednesday, coming after Al-Qaeda-linked militants and armed separatists launched a major offensive over the weekend.

Russia's Africa Corps was forced to retreat from the town of Kidal following the coordinated attacks. The central government's defense minister was killed in the offensive, and Assimi Goïta, Mali's junta leader, is reportedly in hiding.

"Our objective is for Russia to withdraw permanently from Azawad and beyond, from all of Mali," FLA spokesman, Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadane, told AFP in Paris.

"We have no particular problem with Russia, nor with any other country. Our problem is with the regime that governs Bamako," Ramadane said, but noted that rebels still viewed Russian

involvement in the conflict in a negative light.

"It supported people who committed serious crimes and massacres," he said.

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Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed Tuesday that its Africa Corps faced major setbacks in Mali and was forced to retreat from Kidal.

Ramadane said the Russians had asked for a secure corridor to pull back from the town.

"The Russians found themselves in danger. There was no way out," the spokesman said. "When they realized they could not hold out against our forces and our firepower, they requested these withdrawals."

Analysts have described the current offensive as the most significant threat to Mali's central government since 2012, when French troops stationed in the country helped the military junta defend against rebel attacks.

Since expelling France in 2022, Mali's central government has turned to Russia as its primary political and military backer.

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