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Russia and Sahel States Pledge Stronger Military Ties Amid Insurgent Attacks

By Reuters

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has his counterparts from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. **Russian Foreign Ministry**

Russia and the West African countries making up the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) have pledged to strengthen military cooperation as jihadist insurgents gain ground in the region, according to a joint statement issued on Wednesday night after talks in Niger's capital.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met his counterparts from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, all of which have turned to Moscow for support after breaking with France and other Western allies.

The officials welcomed "growing military and military-technical cooperation," including assistance from Russia's paramilitary Africa Corps.

Russia confirmed its intention to continue helping to strengthen the armed forces of the AES

member states and of their "Unified Force," the statement said.

In April, the regional al-Qaeda affiliate and a Tuareg-led separatist group staged attacks across Mali and killed the country's defense minister. On Saturday, they attacked numerous army posts.

Wednesday's joint statement alleged that "external state actors," including Ukraine and France, were involved in attacks in the region. Both have denied such allegations.

Lavrov also visited Ethiopia on his Africa tour. A Russia-Africa summit is planned for October.

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