

Wagner Boss Says Ended Prisoner Recruitment for Ukraine Fight

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Sergey Fadeichev / TASS

Russia's Wagner mercenary group has halted its recruitment of prisoners to join the fight in Ukraine, the head of the notorious paramilitary outfit [said](#) Thursday.

Yevgeny Prigozhin's claims, which could not be immediately verified, follow independent media [reports](#) of Wagner [resuming](#) its prisoner recruitment process this winter as it takes heavy losses in Russia's months-long assault on eastern Ukraine's Bakhmut.

Responding to a press inquiry claiming that Russian inmates have not been recruited into Wagner for more than a month, Prigozhin said:

“The recruitment of prisoners in the Wagner PMC has completely stopped.”

He did not provide an explanation for why the prisoner recruitment had been stopped.

Prigozhin, speaking through his press office, said Wagner is “fulfilling all its obligations to all those who work with us now.”

Related article: [‘There’s No Way Back’: Wagner Group Looks to Russia's Jails to Bolster Ukraine Force](#)

According to the Mediazona and Agentstvo online news outlets, fewer inmates were willing to join Wagner when its recruiters returned to Russian prisons this winter, after reports of convicts being sent to their deaths on the battlefield filtered back into prisons.

The two independent news websites said Wagner started threatening reluctant inmates with new prison sentences for refusing to enlist.

While there are no exact casualty figures available, special “Wagner cemeteries” [set up](#) in southern Russia have grown seven times in size since the start of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Wagner is [believed](#) to have as many as 50,000 fighters deployed in Ukraine.

These include thousands of Russian convicts who were promised pardons and early release from jail in exchange for signing six-month contracts to fight in Ukraine — but threatened with execution if they deserted.

In October, independent media [reported](#) that the Russian Defense Ministry had also started recruiting prisoners for the war in Ukraine.

"If the [Defense Ministry] takes over that source of manpower, Wagner's size and capabilities will be reduced. One way for the [Defense Ministry] to reassert itself and minimize Wagner's role," Rob Lee, a fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, [tweeted](#) Thursday.

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