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Yevgeny Prigozhin's Demise after Wagner Group's Fail Uprising



Yevgeny Prigozhin's Plane Crashes outside of Moscow Photo Credit: AFP.

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Wagner Group Leader Yevgeny Prigozhin announces his armed insurrection against the Russian Military with his March of Justice on Moscow, Rostov-on-Don, 600 miles south of Moscow. Photo Credit: SkyNews.

After the failure of Yevgeny Prigozhin's armed insurrection against Kremlin's military leadership in June, and his negotiated terms of withdrawal coordinated with Belarus dictator Lukashenko, reports out of Moscow suggest he was a passenger on an aircraft that crashed flying between St. Petersburg and Moscow. According to the Russian Ministry of Emergency Services, Prigozhin's Embraer aircraft crashed in the Tver Region, northwest of Moscow. Also, on board the plane was Utkin Dmitriy, Prigozhin's senior lieutenant and Valeriy Chekalov, his senior aide. Video of the event shows a plane burning with one wing missing, with Russian authorities opening a criminal investigation of the occurrence. Many commentators, including President Biden and CIA Director

Bill Burns have suggested that Putin and the FSB may have orchestrated the crash as payback for the rebellion. This event on August 23, 2023, marks another senior leader of Russia's war against Ukraine, either dead, missing, sacked, or eliminated on the battlefield. The current state of the Russian senior military leadership is in disarray with little room to maneuver for fear of failing on the battlefield. With Wagner forces taken off the battlefield, there is now a marked degradation of fighting forces in Ukraine and who will now lead Wagner forces in Africa?

The most important question of the day is how Ukraine can capitalize on the chaos in Russia's senior military leadership. If they can further make a strategic success on the battlefield, Russia's troops may be at a strategic turning point in terms of morale, risking further failures. The Kremlin is betting on the long-term war of attrition as Russia has three times the manpower reserves than Ukraine. It is also banking on a change in US leadership for the 2024 election, with Biden out, and the Republicans possibly cutting off aid and assistance to Ukraine.

Previous Report:

The Wagner Group stands at a historic crossroad in Russian history as a force that can severely handicap Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Once a strong source of support and perhaps the major fighting force in Ukraine, its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, had become increasingly disillusioned with Russia's military leadership of the war against Ukraine. His forces recently occupied Rostov-on-Don and there were some reports that a small, unidentified military column of Wagner's Group was in the Liptsek region, nearly 250 miles from Moscow. It was Prigozhin's declaration to create a "March of Justice" on Moscow to demand the removal of Russia's high military brass and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, which caught Putin off guard after he accused Russia's military leadership of directing an air strike on a Wagner Group camp in Ukraine. Some consider the strike on his troops to be a false flag operation to start the uprising against Russia's Defense Ministry.



Wagner Group mercenary guards a Southern Military District building in the city of Rostov-on-Don, Russia, on June 24, 2023. Photo Credit: Reuters

Prigozhin mentioned that the rest of the Russian army would be his strategic reserve and offered them a chance for them to join in his March on Moscow for Justice. There began a column of Wagner troops formed on the highway from Rostov-on-Don to Moscow composed of tanks, anti-aircraft guns, armored vehicles, and cars, estimated to be 5,000 strong. In a televised newscast to the Russian people, Putin came out to condemn the uprising in a Saturday morning state news broadcast. It was reported that Prigozhin would be arrested and face 12-20 years in jail. Putin labeled it as a treasonous military uprising that was a “stab in the back” which risked Russia’s war effort in Ukraine. He warned that anyone that “those who raised arms against their fellow military comrades will answer for it.” Moscow itself was on lockdown and preparations were made to defend Moscow, with soldiers building outposts and military vehicles covering strategic points in and around Moscow.



Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses the nation on Saturday morning denouncing Prigozhin and his armed rebellion against the Russian military's elites. Photo Credit: Sputnik

Putin vowed to “protect our people and state from any threats, including internal betrayal. What we’re facing is exactly internal betrayal. Extraordinary ambitions and personal interests led to treason. Treason of their own country and people and of the case that fighters of Wagner were dying for alongside our soldiers. Heroes who liberated Soledar and Artemivsk, towns and cities of the Donbas. They fought and were giving lives to Novorossiia and the unity of the Russian world. Their name and glory were also betrayed by those who are trying to organize the mutiny, pushing the country into anarchy and brother-killing, to a defeat, in the end, and capitulation.”

Recently, news has emerged that the Wagner mercenaries would be standing down after a deal was made with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko to halt Wagner’s March on Moscow. Their joint statement read, “as a result, they came to an agreement on the unacceptability of the state of bloody battles on Russian territory.” Meanwhile Putin vowed to restore order in Rostov-on-Don from Wagner control back to Russia and for Wagner Group soldiers to lay down their arms. In

addition, Prigozhin's apartment was searched in St. Petersburg and it was discovered to have \$47 million dollars.



Wagner military trucks heading east toward Voronezh, June 24, 2023. Photo Credit Reuters

The looming question is how Prigozhin's Wagner Group will reintegrate itself into Russia's military defense structure if it does not agree to the July 1st deadline that members of 'volunteer formations' sign contracts directly with the Russian Ministry of Defense. Wagner forces are estimated to be 50,000 strong in Ukraine and their withdrawal from front line areas in Ukraine will weaken the front as Ukrainian forces continue their counteroffensive. Currently Yevgeny Prigozhin will go to Belarus to ease tensions and those members of PMC Wagner Group who took part in the uprising will not be prosecuted as part of agreement. The agreement allows the remaining Wagner Group to sign contracts with the Ministry of Defense and to return to their campsites. It now seems like Prigozhin has been defanged and further disturbances from Wagner will not be tolerated. Prigozhin himself said in post online "We are turning our columns around and going back to field camps," adding he did not want to "spill Russian blood." Months earlier, Prigozhin had been touring Russian regions and complaining about Russia's military leadership in the war. He announced, "The war

was needed...so that Shoigu could become a marshal...so that he could get a second 'Hero' [of Russia] medal," Prigozhin said. "The war wasn't needed to demilitarize or 'denazify' Ukraine." It is questionable whether the feud between Prigozhin and the Russian Defense Ministry is settled. Perhaps Prigozhin will remain in exile in Belarus, however, leadership of his forces are now under question as well as the larger question of who will direct Wagner forces in Syria and Africa.

On further analysis, perhaps Prigozhin gambled during the insurrection, that his demand for changing the hierarchy at the Russian Defense Ministry would be heeded by Putin. However, when Putin rejected that demand and condemned Prigozhin, Prigozhin realized he would either have to follow up on his bluff to march to Moscow and fight the entire Russian military or capitulate. Lukashenko's negotiations provided a face-saving solution for both sides to dial back the uprising and attempt to unify Russia's fighting forces. Regardless, the outcome of this exercise has revealed once again that Putin's control as commander-in-chief is tenuous at best and still leaves Prigozhin as an option should his military face further disasters on the battlefield. Prigozhin and his troops were cheered by the local population of Rostov-on-Don when they left the city. The fact that Wagner forces were only 120 miles outside of Moscow is a testament to Putin's underestimation of Prigozhin's ability to shake his rule. The column was attacked by Russian helicopters of which six were shot down including an IL-22 airborne Russian command center airplane by Wagner forces, killing 13 aviators. The fact that Prigozhin survived this rebellion points to a possible retribution by Putin and his FSB agents in the near future.



Wagner forces leaving Rostov-on-Don Southern Military Headquarters. Photo Credit Reuters

Although now would seem like a perfect time to increase the tempo and force of the counteroffensive by Ukraine, perhaps in the near future further cracks may appear within the Russian military. There has been a number of remarks made by Prigozhin about the validity of the war, which may still resonate among dissatisfied soldiers or sections of the population. The continued failure to prosecute an unpopular war correctly may spell disaster for the Putin regime in the coming months, particularly if Ukraine's counteroffensive gathers steam. A long war in Ukraine, although perhaps more difficult to sustain for Ukraine, is starting to wear Russian morale and support for the war.



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