

After failed coup attempt, Kremlin gives Wagner free passage, tries to subordinate paramilitary formations

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In an indication of the ongoing and intense crisis of the Putin regime, in the 24 hours following the failed coup attempt by Yevgeny Prigozhin and his 25,000 Wagner group mercenaries, the Kremlin has maintained an almost complete silence as to the consequences it will draw from the insurrection by Putin's former ally.

Having launched his coup attempt Friday night with an appeal to the pro-NATO section of Russia's ruling class, Prigozhin announced a retreat Saturday evening just 120 miles away from Moscow. For almost a day, Wagner had been in control of the city of Rostov-on-Don and the headquarters of the Southern Military District, which oversees Russian military operations in the Black Sea region and East Ukraine.

The deal between Prigozhin and Putin was reportedly brokered by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. Apart from the safe passage granted to Prigozhin, who is now in Belarus, and the dropping of charges for "armed rebellion" against both him and his mercenaries, no further details about the deal have been revealed. While some reports indicated that the military leadership, including both Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and General Chief-of-Staff Valery Gerasimov, would step down, no such announcements have been made thus far.

Unconfirmed reports in the Russian media suggest that at least 13 servicemen died and the Russian army lost six helicopters, an airplane and a KAMAZ truck in the fight against Wagner. Officials confirmed that 19 houses in Voronezh were damaged and three civilians injured, and that 10,000 square kilometers of roadway were damaged in the Rostov region. Wagner troops were calmly leaving their positions throughout Sunday, creating miles-long traffic jams.

In the only brief public statement by Putin on Sunday, he told a reporter that his day "starts and ends with the special military operation" in Ukraine.

So far, the only clear move by the Kremlin in response to the coup attempt has been the announcement of a law that will bring private military contractors under the control of the Ministry of Defense.

But even in announcing the bill, the head of the committee for defense in the State Duma (parliament) and former Deputy

Defense Minister Andrei Kartapolov struck an extraordinarily conciliatory tone toward Wagner, saying:

They didn't offend anyone, they didn't break anything. No one has the slightest complaints about them—not the citizens of Rostov, not the servicemen of the Southern Military District, not the law enforcement agencies. Whoever wants to sign a contract with the Ministry of Defense will sign it. For those who don't: everyone is free to choose their fate, they'll do something else.

Kartapolov also opposed a ban of Wagner. He insisted that only Prigozhin should suffer consequences, stating that "children should not be held accountable for their parents."

In addition to Wagner, there are at least a dozen other paramilitary formations that have proliferated over the past 10 years. Many of them play a central role in the war in Ukraine. This includes 5,000-6,000 forces under the command of the president of the Republic of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov; an estimated 17,500 Cossack forces; and two paramilitary formations run by the separatist authorities of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics in East Ukraine. Over a dozen Russian regions, including several predominantly Muslim and non-Russian republics, have also announced the formation of volunteer units to fight in the war.

While these structures are largely integrated with the army and receive much of their supplies from the Defense Ministry, they have not been officially subordinated to the latter. However, after the seizure of Bakhmut by Wagner forces in May, the Defense Ministry forced private contractors to accept the command of the army leadership by July 1. The insurrection by Prigozhin, who has openly and aggressively attacked the army leadership for months, began to take shape publicly when he opposed the order by Putin to comply with this demand by the Defense Ministry.

The Russian *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* wrote that the country had

been brought to the “brink of civil war” by the coup attempt, and evaluated the insurrection by Prigozhin as an alarming sign of the weakness of the government and the state. The paper noted that “in conditions of turmoil and uncertainty, the security and law enforcement agencies tend to dissolve without a trace.”

Criticizing the Kremlin for letting Prigozhin run wild for months, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* called for the “complete disarmament of all armed units that are not formally part of the structures of the national security apparatus—this is demanded both by the law and by political reality. There should be no armed people in Russia that are loyal primarily to their field commander and only secondly to someone else.”

In an underhanded acknowledgement that the coup attempt reflected dissatisfaction with the continuation of the war in sections of the oligarchy, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* urged the Putin regime to make maximum concessions to the interests of “private companies and private entrepreneurs,” who “by definition” seek greater profits.

Both in Russia and internationally, the coup attempt and the response by the Kremlin to it have been interpreted above all as a sign of extreme weakness of the Putin regime.

With only two weeks until the NATO summit in Vilnius, the imperialist powers and the Zelensky regime in Ukraine are using the coup attempt to push for a further escalation of the war. After a discussion with US President Joe Biden on Sunday, Zelensky declared, “The world must put pressure on Russia until international order is restored.” The Ukrainian army claims that it is now pressing the counter-offensive, which so far has been an extremely bloody and expensive debacle for NATO.

More information has also emerged indicating that the US and Ukraine were informed about Prigozhin’s coup plans well in advance. On Sunday, the *Washington Post* reported that US intelligence knew about the impending coup as early as mid-June. In a previous interview with Ukrainian President Zelensky, the *Washington Post* noted that Ukrainian intelligence had been in contact with Prigozhin. A leading adviser to Zelensky, Mykhailo Podolyak, has publicly expressed disappointment with Prigozhin’s “sudden” retreat.

The ex-oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who until 2003 was in control of a large portion of Russia’s oil resources, is now playing a central role in a NATO-backed regime-change operation in Russia and has celebrated Prigozhin’s insurrection as a major blow to the Putin regime. Dropping any “democratic” pretenses, Khodorkovsky insisted that the coup attempt proved that Putin could only be overthrown by “armed men” and listed a number of operational and military “conclusions” that had to be drawn from this experience for future attempts to overthrow the Russian government.

Libuov’ Sobol’, a close ally of the imprisoned US-backed oppositionist Alexei Navalny, called on NATO during the coup to “help Prigozhin” and recognize him as NATO’s “partner.”

noted in its statement on the coup attempt. WWSWS

That the coup was prepared with some significant level of NATO involvement is clear enough. But to portray the coup as primarily the product of a CIA conspiracy would be to ignore the real divisions that exist in the Russian regime and the social interests that determine its policies.

The military strategy of the Putin regime in Ukraine has been based from the beginning on a self-deluding underestimation, rooted in its class interests and ideological hatred of Marxism, of the predatory character of imperialism. Putin has remained committed to the fantasy that his “Western partners” can be persuaded to accept the legitimate economic and security interests of the post-Soviet Russian capitalist state. This accounts for Putin’s repeated disavowals of his own “red lines” and infinite patience in the face of innumerable acts of NATO escalation, up to its de facto endorsement of Prigozhin’s coup.

With the Vilnius summit of imperialist powers fast approaching, the continuation of this policy will serve only to convince NATO that it can escalate the war with impunity.

Whatever the response of the Putin regime to the coup attempt in the coming days and weeks, the events of the past three days underscore, above all, the reactionary character of the oligarchic regime that has emerged out of the Stalinist reaction against the October Revolution of 1917 and the restoration of capitalism.

All warring factions of the oligarchy are seeking, ultimately, a settlement with imperialism and regard the working class as their principal enemy. A way out of this war in the interests of the working class can only be forged on the path of independent revolutionary class struggle and based on the unity of the Russian, Ukrainian and international working class.



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