



THE WAGNER MUTINY

Posted on July 1, 2023 by Jacques Baud



To understand what happened on June 24-25, 2023, we need to go back to the Battle of Bakhmut. In October 2022, the Russians realized that the West was trying to prolong the war by continuously supplying arms to Ukraine.

Russian Objectives

It should be remembered that the initial objectives of Russia's Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine were to neutralize the military ("demilitarization") and paramilitary ("denazification") threat to the population of the Donbass. The aim was not to seize territory, but to combat a threat. This is important for understanding the Battle of Bakhmut.

On March 28, 2022, during the encirclement of Mariupol and the neo-Nazi AZOV militia, the Russian military command announced that the objective of "denazification" [had been achieved](#). Then, at the beginning of June 2022, after its equipment had been destroyed, the Ukrainian army was forced to ask the West for help: the "demilitarization" objective had been achieved for the first time. From then on, Ukraine depended on the West to [pursue the war](#).

At this stage, the Europeans are convinced by their own propaganda that Kiev is on a winning streak. They've invested so much in this conflict that there's no turning back. On September 14, 2022, in her State of the European Union address, Ursula von der Leyen [declared](#) that "this is a time for determination, not appeasement." However, the Russians have already achieved their objectives over the last three months.

Believing that the West cannot lose face in this exercise, and that they will continue to support Ukraine all the more as their own economic situation deteriorates, the Russians are changing strategy. They decided to systematically destroy Ukraine's potential.

In other words, since the summer of 2022, Russian forces have been eliminating the human and material military potential entering the theater of operations. With the Ukrainians seeking to regain territory taken by the Russians, the latter don't really need to advance, but can simply wait for the adversary, to destroy it. This is exactly what General Surovikin, the newly appointed Commander of the Joint Task Force in the area of the special military operation in Ukraine, [said on October 18, 2022](#):

We have a different strategy... We do not aim at high rates of advance, we take care of every soldier and methodically "grind up" the advancing enemy.

While our "military experts" try to measure military success in kilometers on the ground, the Russians measure it in the number of opponents destroyed.

To implement this strategy, Surovikin chose the town of Bakhmut. The town was not important to the Russians, but it was at the heart of the Ukrainian defensive system, and Volodymyr Zelensky attached particular importance to it.

Wagner

Urban combat is extremely demanding and dangerous. It is personnel-intensive, and requires experienced, tough and battle-hardened fighters. On the other hand, it does not require sophisticated equipment or heavy weapons.

Wagner is a private military and security company (PMSC), mainly active in Africa. Countries such as Mali and the Central African Republic have preferred this firm to the French army in the fight against rebel movements. Not that the French military were bad, but their strategy wasn't exactly clear-cut, left little room for the decisions of African governments, and aroused the hostility of local populations. With "Wagner," these countries are advised but can conduct their own strategy. The success of the Wagner men in Africa is of course roundly criticized in the French media, which accuse them of all kinds of crimes. So much so that in October 2021, on the French-language *TV5 Monde* channel, Sylvie Baïpo-Temon, Foreign Minister of the Central African Republic, [responded](#) to her French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian. She denounced his "unacceptable" and "misleading" remarks and refuted all his accusations "which do not represent what is happening in the Central African Republic."

A UN employee I know (from a Baltic country), who was in contact with Wagner in the Central African Republic, told me that they were of a very high standard, far from what is portrayed in our media, and that they were appreciated by the population. In fact, not only has the Central African Parliament [thanked](#) "Wagner," but the government has also [erected a monument](#) to them.

In Ukraine, PMSCs developed in the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, with volunteer

fighters coming to help the Donbass autonomists as early as 2014. Wagner is just one of them, but the most important. Since the beginning of the SMO, Evgueny Prigozhin had been seeking to commit his men alongside the Russian army.

At the end of October 2022, General Surovikin signed a six-month contract for Wagner to destroy the enemy in Bakhmut. The aim was not to seize the city, but to destroy the enemy there, in line with Surovikin's strategy and the initial objective of "demilitarization" set out by Vladimir Putin on February 24, 2022. This was Operation MEAT GRINDER.

Indeed, *The New York Times* seems to have very well understood the Russian strategy, since in its November 27, 2022 issue, referring to the Battle of Bakhmut that was beginning, it spelled things out [very clearly](#):

Although Russia's hopes of expanding its territory have diminished, it can still turn the city into a resource-intensive black hole for Kiev, by withdrawing troops from other priorities, including, potentially, for future offensives.

In fact, only the European media and politicians seem to have understood nothing of what was at stake.

Tensions between Wagner and the Ministry of Defense

Wagner is not a military unit and is not integrated into the Russian command structure. Wagner has no artillery but is allocated rounds to fulfill its mission. On February 17, 2023, Prigozhin accused the Moscow command of wanting Wagner's demise by not allocating it enough artillery ammunition. The British Ministry of Defense intelligence report [saw tensions](#) within the Russian leadership over the difficulty of taking Bakhmut before the SMO anniversary date of February 24. The Western [media repeated](#) this unsubstantiated analysis.

British intelligence completely missed the point, and the reality was a little more nuanced. Firstly, according to Ukrainian sources, Russian forces had reduced their consumption of artillery projectiles to 20,000 [rounds per day](#). Difficult to verify, but this could be explained by preparations—on both sides of the front line—for the major Ukrainian counter-offensive in the spring. At this stage, the Russian army was aiming at spreading its capabilities, which were concentrated in the Donbass region, all along the

front line.

In response to these allegations, the Russian Ministry of Defense [stated](#) that it had allocated 1660 rockets for multiple rocket launchers and 10171 artillery shells to Wagner for two days (February 18 to 20). That's over 800 rockets and 5,000 shells per day. In other words, Wagner would have had more artillery ammunition per day in the Bakhmut sector alone than the [entire Ukrainian army had](#) in the whole theater of operations!

Prigozhin's accusations therefore appeared to be unfounded—there was no indication whatsoever that the Russian Ministry of Defense intended to harm Wagner.

At the end of April 2023, the six-month contract expired and the objective of destroying the enemy at Bakhmut was achieved. The Russian army therefore ceased its artillery and logistical support for Wagner's troops, who were to be withdrawn and replaced by regular Russian troops.

The problem was that to destroy the Ukrainian forces, Wagner's "musicians" had to take the town house-by-house. So, at the end of April, although Wagner had fulfilled its contract, a small part of the city remained under Ukrainian control. It was then that Prigozhin asked to be allowed to finish the job, reduce the last pockets of resistance, and take control of the whole city.

This explains the psychodrama of early May 2023, when Prigozhin [demanded](#) that he be given the means to continue taking Bakhmut. His very virulent and aggressive tone against Shoigu and Gerasimov made the Western [media fantasize](#) about internal division in the Russian camp and a [possible "coup"](#) against the Moscow "regime."

Russia doesn't need controversies to feed Western propaganda. In order to calm the situation, and above all to close the "Bakhmut" file once and for all, the Russian Ministry of Defense agreed to extend [Wagner's contract](#). The contract ended the day after the city was taken, on May 21, 2023, and Wagner's troops were withdrawn from the theater of operations.

The "March of Justice"

At the same time, the Russian command was preparing for the Ukrainian counter-offensive that had been heralded since July 2022 but systematically postponed due to the attrition of Ukrainian forces. In reality, this was the same offensive as the one that was planned on the basis of Volodymyr Zelensky's [decree of March 24, 2021](#), which started to be implemented in February 2022 and which sparked off the Russian SMO.

To counter this counter-offensive, the Russians needed fully integrated forces. This is why, on June 10, 2023, the Ministry of Defense decided to dismantle all private or semi-autonomous formations in order to integrate them into the Russian command & control structure, as explained by the Russian media [Gazeta](#):

Parallel armies are to be dismantled and the strictest vertical chain of command restored to the state military organization

Members of these PMCs were to be integrated into the armed forces by July 1, 2023.

It was to protest against this decision to dismantle the Wagner force that Prigozhin wanted to meet Sergei Shoigu, Minister of Defense, and Valeri Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff, "head-to-head" in Rostov-na-Donu. Since he couldn't meet them in Rostov, Prigozhin decided, in a spectacular move, to go to Moscow to meet them. In fact, all things considered, this action was nothing more than that of employees angry at the general management's decision to close down their company. It could be summed up as a protest against HR! As Prigozhin himself put it in [a voice message](#):

The aim of the march was not to let PMC Wagner be dissolved and to hold the military leadership accountable for the mistakes made during the war.

Clearly, then, there was no clandestine CIA action, nor any determination to overthrow Russian government. It was thanks to the mediation of Alexander Lukashenko, President of Belarus, that Prigozhin realized that his action had international resonance, with consequences he had certainly not been able to foresee and decided to halt his movement.

Western Disinformation

The reason why the Western media immediately rushed into a narrative asserting "regime weakness" and "regime change" was because of Westerners' hope in the Ukrainian counter-offensive. Indeed, since the beginning of 2023, we know that the Ukrainian counter-offensive would be disastrous for Ukraine, and that it would fail to achieve significant operational objectives. This gave rise to the crazy idea that maintaining uncertainty about its launch would [create a kind of panic](#) within the Russian forces, which would be echoed by the population and lead to the collapse of the "regime."

That's why, as soon as the first news of Wagner's move on Rostov appeared, Ukrainian social networks started to describe a chaotic situation, with defections within the Russian army, which could jeopardize Moscow's power. The Western media shamelessly relayed what soon appeared to be disinformation. All this turned out to be false, but clearly the West was acting as if its destabilization strategy was working.

The Consequences

Obviously, with an armed PMC, such protest actions could quickly develop into something dramatic; however, Western analyses have been totally out of proportion. Contrary to the assertions of media known for promoting conspiracy theories on Russia, such as [France 5](#) or [LCI](#) in France or [RTS](#) in Switzerland, at no time was this an action against Vladimir Putin or the government. The terms "putsch" or "coup" and "abortive uprising against Moscow" are totally inappropriate.

However, there is no doubt that this event was detrimental to Russia. Not by its very nature, but because it has given the West's propaganda and disinformation the upper hand. More significantly, it has certainly instilled the feeling in Ukraine and its allies that the promised counter-offensive could have an impact on the domestic situation in Russia, and that the goal of regime change is within reach if we keep going in the same direction.

An unexpected consequence is the change in Yevgeny Prigozhin's image in our media. Previously regarded as one of Vladimir Putin's pillars of power, he now appears as an opponent and is viewed favourably by our media. For example, the United States decided not to impose new sanctions on the Wagner group, ["for fear of siding with Putin!"](#) Prigozhin was even seen as [Putin's challenger](#) in the 2024 presidential election!

This shows how thin is Western understanding of Russia and the crisis in and around Ukraine. In fact, despite the prestige of Wagner's "musicians" among the Russian population, there was no widespread support for Prigozhin's action. The mutiny even highlighted his inability to see the bigger picture and the consequences of his action. He came across as an impulsive individual, focused on his business and incapable of strategic thinking.

On the contrary, and in contrast to what the analyses of our "experts" suggest, Vladimir Putin seems to have emerged strengthened. Clearly, Putin did everything he could to prevent the mutineers from reaching Moscow, where any clashes could have fed into Western propaganda. Playing with Lukashenko's mediation, Putin reacted with a mixture of firmness (adoption of anti-terrorist measures, trenches on access roads to Moscow, placing territorial units on alert) and magnanimity (offering a way out via Belarus) to calm things down. It should be noted that, despite his tough talk about "treason," and [contrary to the claims](#) of Western propagandists, the indictment of the mutineers does not refer to article 275 of the penal code (treason), but to article 279 (armed rebellion), which is less serious, as explained by John Helmer in [an excellent podcast](#).

That said, Vladimir Putin's statement on June 27 that Russian forces had "prevented a civil war" seems to have unnecessarily [over-dramatized](#) the situation. He probably wanted to give importance to the role of the armed forces in this crisis, but at the same time, he also suggested a greater fragility than the events had shown.

As to the idea that the intelligence services had foreseen this mutiny, it is most [probably false](#). In fact, Westerners are watching Russia's domestic situation for the slightest hint of regime change, which is the ultimate goal of our support for Ukraine. This is why, as early as May, with the first Prigozhin videos, Western services raised the possibility of a coup in Moscow. But, in terms of intelligence methodology, these are not "predictions," but simply working hypotheses and scenarios.

For an intelligence service, predicting an event implies having indicators and concrete indications on which to draw conclusions. However, neither the Ukrainians, nor the Americans, nor the French had the slightest indication, but only the hope that such a mutiny might take place. As a member of Ukrainian military intelligence told the French channel [France 24](#).

In reality, everyone was surprised, and no international actor has been able to exploit in Ukraine or elsewhere what could have been the beginning of a power crisis in Russia.

This also shows that Western understanding of the conflict is based exclusively on hypotheses, which are themselves often based on Ukrainian wishful thinking, but very rarely on facts. This is why we are pushing Ukraine towards defeat.

It is very likely that there was no Western involvement in Yevgeny Prigogin's decision. The USA made every effort to demonstrate its distance from the Prigozhin mutiny. Westerners, on the other hand, saw it as the realization of their "dream" and clearly stirred up the situation in the hope that it would lead to internal conflict. Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky tweeted that he might [spend his vacation in Crimea](#). Besides a childish behavior, it shows that he has understood absolutely nothing about the dynamics of events in Russia.

In the end, this situation was nothing more than that of a company director trying to save his business and doing so impulsively and thoughtlessly, with potentially dramatic consequences for combatants on both sides in Ukraine. This crisis demonstrates the inability of Westerners to think and act according to facts, rather than expectations. The Ukrainian people are beginning to understand this.

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