

# “PRIGOZHIN’S FINAL CHAPTER”

**BLUF:** On Wednesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin reportedly died in a crash of an aircraft transporting senior Wagner commanders in Russia. Although once a member of Putin’s inner circle, Prigozhin had fallen out of favor after attempting to force a Russian MoD leadership change through armed rebellion on June 23-24 during which Wagner forces in Ukraine took control of the Russian Southern Military District Headquarters and advanced to within 330 KM of Moscow. Putin initially and publicly labeled Wagner’s actions as treason, but then “pardoned” the private military company’s (PMC) fighters and leaders following an agreement that was to see them exiled from Russia to neighboring Belorussia. Although the Russian government leaders have disavowed any Russian involvement in the crash and started an investigation, Prigozhin’s death fits in with a long pattern of assassinations and suspicious deaths for those who have opposed or angered Vladimir Putin.

### Yevgeny Prigozhin



“A man with a difficult fate”

- Prigozhin life included early crimes that saw him convicted to a penal colony
- Upon release he sold hot dogs, which led to restaurant, construction, marketing, and gambling businesses
- Opening a casino likely introduced him to Putin, who at the time chaired a supervisory board on gambling
- Lucrative government contracts providing Russian military meals and the nickname of “Putin’s Chef” followed.
- These connections led to founding the Wagner Group in 2014, although Prigozhin denied ties until 2022.
- Wagner mercenaries supported Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea and were later active in Syria and other locations. However, Wagner’s profile rose significantly in the current war in Ukraine where it led the brutal battle over Bakhmut.
- Putin awarded Prigozhin the “Hero of Russia” title in 2022. Prigozhin became a frequent critic of Russia’s military leadership and blamed them for not resourcing his efforts.
- This led to short-lived rebellion seeking to force change in Russia’s military leadership which Putin publicly labeled as betrayal of their homeland and their people.

### Short summary of the rebellion



### In-depth Summary

**(U) WAGNER GROUP REBELLION**

**Wagner Group's Armed Rebellion in Southern Ukraine on June 23-24**

The Wagner Group, a Russian private-military organization, rebelled against the government of Russia. The rebel group seized control of the Russian Southern Military District Headquarters in Ukraine on June 23-24, 2022, and advanced to within 330 km of Moscow. The rebellion was led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wagner Group's founder and financier. The rebellion was a significant event in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as it represented a direct challenge to the Russian government's military leadership.

**Map Description:** The map shows the location of the Wagner Group's rebellion in Southern Ukraine. It highlights the area around the Russian Southern Military District Headquarters, which was seized by the Wagner Group on June 23-24, 2022. The map also shows the distance from the rebel base to Moscow, which is approximately 330 km.

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### Plane Crash Details

- Takeoff Moscow shortly before 6PM (local)
- Ten people aboard: 3 crew members and 7 senior Wagner personnel including Prigozhin and Wagner cofounder and second-in command Dmitry Utkin.
- A witness reported hearing an explosion and took video of the plane’s rapid descent and crash.
- Initial reports alleged Russian Air Defense involvement, but an unexplained mid-air explosion now a leading potential cause.
- Pentagon spokesman Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder stated there is no “information to indicate right now” that the plane Prigozhin was on was shot down.



### Familiar pattern

- Suspicious deaths and assassination attempts against Putin’s foes are common
- Examples include defenestration, poisoning, strangulation, and bodies found with head trauma and/or bullet holes.
- Russian Defector Alexander Litvinenko died in London after drinking radiation laced tea.
- Former Russian intelligence officer, Sergei Skripal and political opposition leader Alexei Navalny both survived nerve agent exposure.
- Russian politician Pavel Antov and Lukoil chairman Ravil Maganov both fell from windows after criticizing the Ukraine invasion.
- Speaking after the crash, President Biden stated, “I’m not surprised,” and “There’s not much that happens in Russia that Putin is not behind.”
- Putin’s statements on the crash “I had known Prigozhin for a very long time, since the start of the 90s. He was a man with a difficult fate, and he made serious mistakes in life.”

### Conclusions

- The Russian MoD had been attempting to dismantle/absorb Wagner and weakening Prigozhin’s authority since the rebellion. The assassination of leadership was likely the final step to eliminate Wagner’s independence.
- Despite their history, Putin likely ordered Prigozhin execution to reassert his dominance and exact vengeance for the humiliation of Wagner Group’s armed rebellion on June 24.
- The probable intended effect is to send a message that betrayal is not forgivable and to instill fear in anyone who may have considered to oppose Putin, the Kremlin, or the MoD.
- Additional assessments/information can be found at: <https://www.understandingwar.org/>