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Wagner Head Accuses Russia's Defense Ministry of Treason

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Wagner group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin. **Alexei Smagin / Kommersant**

The founder of Russia's Wagner mercenary group Yevgeny Prigozhin on Tuesday accused the country's Defense Ministry and the Chief of the General Staff of intentionally depriving his fighters of munitions in Ukraine.

According to Prigozhin, the Defense Ministry and the Chief of the General Staff gave orders not to supply the controversial mercenary group with ammunition or assist it with air transport.

"There is quite simply direct obstruction going on," Prigozhin said in an audio statement published by the Concord Group, another of his companies.

"This can be equated with high treason," he said, adding that due to a lack of ammunition, his fighters were "dying en masse."

Wagner mercenaries have been spearheading the Russian military's months-long efforts to

capture the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, which has become a key psychological prize for both sides in the conflict despite its relative lack of strategic importance.

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Last week, Prigozhin warned that the capture of Bakhmut could still take months, blaming Moscow's "monstrous bureaucracy" for slowing military gains.

"I think it's [going to be in] March or in April," Prigozhin said in one of several messages posted on Telegram.

"To take Bakhmut you have to cut all supply routes. It's a significant task," he said, adding that progress was “not as fast as we would like.”

Prigozhin and the Ministry of Defense have clashed repeatedly in the past. In January, Prigozhin accused the Russian military of attempting to take credit for Wagner group victories in the conflict, claiming that his forces had captured the eastern Ukrainian salt-mining town of Soledar without any involvement from the Russian military.

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