Wagner Group Founder Says 'Too Early' to Claim Bakhmut Is Surrounded

By [AFP](#)

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Valentin Sprinchak / TASS

Moscow said on Thursday that Russian troops were preventing Ukrainian forces from entering or leaving the frontline city of Bakhmut, which for months has been the focal point of Russia's assault in eastern Ukraine.

"Airborne troops are providing support to advancing assault troops, blocking the transfer of Ukrainian army reserves to the city and the possibility of retreat for enemy units," the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Wagner assault units "were continuing high-intensity combat operations to oust the enemy from the central quarters" of Bakhmut, the statement continued.

Kyiv has denied the Russian claims, however, with army spokesperson Sergiy Cherevaty saying that Ukrainian forces in the wartorn city were still able to "deliver provisions,

ammunition, and medicines" and evacuate wounded troops.

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The head of the Wagner mercenary group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, also poured cold water on the Russian Defense Ministry's claims, cautioning that it was still "too early" to say that Bakhmut was surrounded.

Wagner fighters have spearheaded most of the Russian side's efforts to capture the city.

In recent days, Russia's military appeared to have made considerable headway in its ongoing attempts to capture Bakhmut, with several high-profile Russian war correspondents publishing images from inside the city.

The Russian-installed head of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic in eastern Ukraine, Denis Pushilin, also made a trip to Bakhmut this week.

Bakhmut had a population of 70,000 before Moscow launched its invasion last year.

Both Russia and Ukraine are believed to have suffered heavy losses in the battle to gain control of the city, despite analysts saying that it has little strategic value.

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