The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Wagner Chief Says Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Unjustified

June 23, 2023

Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin. **Lev Borodin / TASS**

Russia did not face an imminent security threat to justify its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of Russia's Wagner mercenary outfit, said in a bombshell video posted on social media Friday.

"The Armed Forces of Ukraine were not going to attack Russia with the NATO bloc," Prigozhin explained in the half-hour tirade released by his press service.

"The Russian Defense Ministry is deceiving the public and the president," he added.

Prigozhin's comments were at odds with the casus belli given by President Vladimir Putin when he ordered troops into Ukraine last February, although the private army chief avoided personally attacking the Russian leader.

Putin has cited NATO expansion near Russia's borders as one of the main justifications for invading neighboring Ukraine.

Related article: Wagner Chief Accuses Moscow of 'Misleading Russians' Over Ukraine Offensive

Meanwhile, Prigozhin escalated his criticism of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu by claiming that Russia went to war "for the self-promotion of a bunch of bastards."

He blamed Russia's military leadership for "poorly planning" the invasion and "embarrassing" the military after a series of setbacks on the battlefield last year.

"Shoigu killed thousands of the most combat-ready Russian soldiers in the first days of the war," he charged.

"The mentally ill scumbags decided 'It's okay, we'll throw in a few thousand more Russian men as 'cannon fodder.' 'They'll die under artillery fire, but we'll get what we want'," Prigozhin continued.

"That's why it has become a protracted war."

Prigozhin also accused Kremlin-linked oligarchs of seeking to plunder Ukraine's resources after its military capture and appointment of a puppet regime in Kyiv.

"The task was to divide material assets in Ukraine. There was widespread theft in the [industrial eastern Ukrainian territory of the] Donbas, but they wanted more."

Some analysts have interpreted Prigozhin's latest comments as a sign of his growing political ambitions.

He addressed the Ukrainian forces' ongoing counteroffensive in similarly critical terms, saying the Russian army is retreating from the partially occupied Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions.

"We are washing ourselves in blood. No one is bringing reserves. What they tell us is the deepest deception," Prigozhin said, referring to Putin and Shoigu's claims that Russia is successfully pushing back Ukrainian counterattacks.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/06/23/wagner-chief-says-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-unjustified-a81609