

Prigozhin's Hometown St. Petersburg Mixed on Mercenary Chief's Armed Rebellion

By [Giovanni Pigni](#)

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Police stand in front of the PMC Wagner Center in St. Petersburg. **Giovanni Pigni / MT**

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia — Early Saturday morning, law enforcement agents in balaclavas were already guarding the entrance of the PMC Wagner Center, Yevgeny Prigozhin's headquarters just outside St. Petersburg's city center.

Some agents were patrolling the parking lot out front while others were already inside, probably searching the building.

"This was supposed to be my first day of work," said Maria, a Wagner Center employee, after being denied entry into the building.

"They told me to take the day off," added the young woman, who asked to remain anonymous for security concerns.

The opening of the Wagner Center in November 2022 was a sign of the once-shadowy Prigozhin's growing popularity against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.

Located in a steel and glass skyscraper, the Wagner Center is a high-tech hub inaugurated by Prigozhin with the purpose of "enhancing Russia's military capability." Besides acting as a working space for tech start-ups, the center has also hosted patriotic workshops and basic self-defense trainings.

Today, Prigozhin and Wagner's futures are shrouded in uncertainty after the erstwhile Kremlin caterer launched a revolt against the Defense Ministry and seized a key military headquarters in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don.

Russian President Vladimir Putin condemned Prigozhin's actions as a "betrayal" of the country and vowed that necessary measures would be taken to stop his rebellion.

In the latest announcement on its Telegram group, the Wagner Center [encouraged its](#) employees "to spend the weekend in nature and in good company" due to the "current situation."

"I am not saying we need to overthrow the whole thing [the government], but some reforms are needed for sure," said Rustam, 37, one of the few spectators standing not far from the Wagner Center building.

Rustam was among the thousands of Russians who took to the streets to protest in the early days of the war in Ukraine. Now, he says he sympathizes with Prigozhin's crusade against the Defense Ministry, and that's why he came out to support him.

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend," he said.

Related article: [Wagner Mercenary Group Opens Tech Center in St. Petersburg](#)

Criticisms toward the Defense Ministry appeared to be widespread in St. Petersburg, Prigozhin's hometown.

"Why did they send inexperienced guys to the frontline after just two months of training?" said Roman, 45, a taxi driver.

When asked about Prigozhin's attempted mutiny, he said Putin should take Prigozhin's side in his clash with the military leadership.

"He is a very tough man, but he keeps everything in order and he doesn't let his people down," he said of Prigozhin.

Meanwhile, life on the streets of St. Petersburg carried on as usual, with people enjoying the sunny weather and long hours of daylight.

In the morning, St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov said the situation in the city was "calm and controlled," [stressing](#) that the law enforcement activities at the Wagner Center "do not affect city life." Unlike in Moscow, where a counterterrorism regime has been

implemented, no special security measures have been announced in St. Petersburg.

Several of Prigozhin's businesses and activities are based in St. Petersburg. In addition to the Wagner Center, law enforcement agents reportedly raided [Prigozhin's luxury residence](#) and the headquarters of his Patriot media holding. Law enforcement agents were [also spotted](#) next to Street Food Bar No. 1, a Prigozhin-owned restaurant, as well as the headquarters of the Wagner-linked ultranationalist group Kiberfront-Z.

Elsewhere in Russia, law enforcement authorities have reportedly carried out searches at Wagner offices in at least four other Russian cities, including Yekaterinburg, Tyumen, Novosibirsk and Saratov.

Later in the day, a number of [websites](#) associated with Prigozhin's news website were no longer accessible in what seems to be a broader state effort to silence Prigozhin-linked media.

Prigozhin's clash with the country's military leadership has sharply escalated in the last 24 hours, with Prigozhin accusing Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov of being responsible for the death of Wagner's fighters.

While many St. Petersburg citizens seemed to share Prigozhin's criticism of the Defense Ministry, many said that Wagner's leader has gone too far this time.

"I used to have a positive opinion about him, but now I am not so sure," said Sergei, 23, a construction worker. "People should be united in these difficult times, this is not good," he added.

"If Putin still keeps him [Shoigu] as defense minister, then there must be a reason," said Vladimir, 63, a pensioner who had just arrived in town on the morning train.

Even though he was not aware of the latest developments, he had a clear position: "I support Putin. Wagner is a strange phenomenon and I don't like traitors."

Even some former Wagner fighters seemed to be critical of Prigozhin's latest actions.

"Prigozhin is making a difficult situation even more difficult," said Roman, 35, a former Wagner fighter from Moscow. "I have the feeling that he went crazy, they wanted to get rid of him, so he went all in."

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