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Timeline: Prigozhin's Escalating Standoff With Russia's Military

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Yevgeny Prigozhin pictured with Wagner mercenaries in eastern Ukraine. **concordgroup_official / Telegram**

A former convict turned Kremlin caterer, Yevgeny Prigozhin and his shadowy private military group Wagner have taken a prominent role in Russia's 16-month offensive on Ukraine.

Friction between Prigozhin and the Russian Defense Ministry has risen as the war has dragged on, ultimately reaching a breaking point Friday when Prigozhin accused military leaders of striking Wagner camps and launched an armed insurrection.

Below is a timeline of Prigozhin's often expletive-laden confrontations with the Russian military that have boiled over into the currently unfolding rebellion against the Defense Ministry.

September-October 2022

Prigozhin issued his first criticism of Russia's Defense Ministry after he publicly admitted to

being the founder of Wagner and President Vladimir Putin announced a "partial" mobilization.

Prigozhin joined the Kremlin-allied Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov in arguing that Russia's military should primarily mobilize members of the security and state services instead of civilians.

"Ramzan, you're the man, fire away," Prigozhin said through his press service in an Oct. 1 post slamming the Russian forces' withdrawal from occupied Ukrainian territories.

"All these scumbags [in the Russian military should be sent] to the frontline with guns and bare feet," Prigozhin said.

The discontent was deemed significant enough to be included in U.S. President Joe Biden's daily intelligence briefing, The Washington Post reported in October, citing anonymous sources.

It said Prigozhin had felt comfortable enough to voice his frustration about the Defense Ministry and Shoigu directly to Putin, in a sign of his rising influence. Prigozhin denied communicating personally with Putin at the time.

January-February 2023

After briefly feuding with the governor of Russia's second city of St. Petersburg where Wagner later opened its headquarters, Prigozhin stepped up his criticism of the military's war effort.

The Wagner founder raised concerns about the Russian forces' slow progress amid heavy battles in the eastern Ukrainian cities of Bakhmut and Soledar. He also accused the Russian military of attempting to "steal" victories from Wagner.

Prigozhin had spearheaded Wagner's months-long efforts to capture Bakhmut, a key symbolic prize for Russia despite its relative lack of strategic importance.

In February, after announcing the end of Wagner's prisoner recruitment, Prigozhin slammed Russia's "monstrous" military bureaucracy and leadership for low supplies of munitions that had slowed progress in Bakhmut.

"This can be equated with high treason," Prigozhin said in one of the first direct accusations.

After calling on Russians to press the top brass for stockpiles, Prigozhin said the Defense Ministry had relented and announced the shipment of ammunition.

March-April 2023

The truce appeared to be short-lived as Prigozhin again claimed "betrayal" over the military's continuing lack of deliveries to Wagner mercenaries.

"In order to stop me from asking for ammunition, [Russia's government] turned off all special phone lines [...] and blocked all passes to the decision-making offices," Prigozhin said.

Related article: Wagner Boss 'Cut Off' From Official Channels After Public Ammo Plea

Russian lawmakers passed legislation introducing long jail terms for anyone criticizing mercenaries in a move dismissed by Prigozhin, who argued that Russians should be free to criticize top military commanders.

May-June 2023

The arms delivery saga has escalated after Prigozhin — surrounded by the bodies of dead Wagner soldiers — threatened to pull out of Bakhmut.

"Shoigu, Gerasimov, where the f*ck is the ammunition?" he fumed, claiming days later that the Russian army had "promised" him armaments.

Prigozhin later claimed that Russia's Defense Ministry broke that promise and threatened to charge Wagner with treason if they withdrew from Bakhmut.

He accused the Russian army units of fleeing their positions due to "stupid" and "criminal" senior military commanders' orders.

As one of his last stands, Prigozhin refused the Defense Ministry's orders for "volunteer detachments" to sign contracts with the military by July 1. The Akhmat military unit was the first to sign that contract, signaling the Chechen leader Kadyrov shifting alliances away from Prigozhin and back into the Kremlin's fold.

Finally, hours before announcing the rebellion against military leadership on Friday night, Prigozhin questioned the leadership's casus belli for invading Ukraine and escalated his criticism of Shoigu for "poorly planning" the war and "embarrassing" Russia's military.

"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."

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