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Threats to Wagner Leaders' Families Preceded Mutiny Stand-Down – Telegraph

June 26, 2023



Members of the Wagner Group military company sit in their vehicle on a street in Rostov-on-Don. **AP / TASS**

Russian intelligence agencies made threats to harm the families of Wagner mercenary group leaders as the group marched on Moscow, Britain's The Telegraph daily reported Monday, citing anonymous U.K. security sources.

The account offers clues into why Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin may have abruptly called off his mutinous march just hours before reaching the Russian capital late Saturday.

"It has also been assessed that the mercenary force had only 8,000 fighters rather than the 25,000 claimed and faced likely defeat in any attempt to take the Russian capital," the newspaper wrote.

The Telegraph did not name the specific Wagner leaders whose families were allegedly

threatened and it was not possible to independently verify the report's claims.

Chechen leader and loyal Kremlin ally Ramzan Kadyrov had suggested Sunday that family business disputes may have in part influenced Prigozhin to launch his high-stakes standoff with the Russian military.

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"A chain of failed business deals created a lingering resentment in the businessman, which reached its peak when St. Petersburg's authorities did not grant [Prigozhin's] daughter a coveted land plot," Kadyrov said.

Kadyrov did not identify the daughter, the land plot or the date of when the alleged attempt to acquire it took place.

Prigozhin's daughters Polina and Veronika, as well as his son Pavel, were reported to be business owners in Russia's second-largest city St. Petersburg.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said late Saturday that President Vladimir Putin agreed to allow Prigozhin to escape criminal mutiny charges in exchange for standing down and going into exile in neighboring Belarus.

Wagner mercenaries headed back to base on Sunday after the announced deal.

But the Kommersant business daily, and later state news agencies, reported Monday that Prigozhin was still under investigation for an armed rebellion that Putin had slammed as a betrayal.

The Telegraph cited its sources as saying that President Vladimir Putin "will now try to assimilate Wagner Group soldiers into the Russian military and take out its former leaders" following this weekend's dramatic events.

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