

## Cries and Whispers Along the Russian Watchtowers

Remember Putin: “We haven’t even started anything yet.”

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*“Whispers of an ‘evil power’ were heard in lines at dairy shops, in streetcars, stores, apartments, kitchens, suburban and long-distance trains, at stations large and small, in dachas, and on beaches. Needless to say, truly mature and cultured people did not tell these stories about an evil power’s visit to the capital. In fact they even made fun of them and tried to talk sense into those who told them.” — Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita**

To quote Dylan, who might have been a Bulgakov epigone: “So let us stop talking falsely now/the hour’s getting late.” By now it’s quite clear the delusion of a “peace” deal in Ukraine is the latest wet dream of the “non-agreement capable” usual suspects, always hooked on lies and plunder while deftly manipulating selected liberals among the Russian elite.

The goal would be to appease Moscow with a few concessions, while crucially keeping Odessa, Nikolaev and Dnipro, and safeguarding what would be NATO’s access to the Black Sea.

All that while investing in rabid, resentful Poland to become an armed to the teeth EU military militia.

So any “negotiations” towards “peace” in fact mask a drive to postpone – just for a little while – the original masterplan: dismembering and destroying Russia.

There are very serious discussions in Moscow, even at the highest levels, on how the elite is really positioned. Roughly three groups can be identified: the Victory party; the “Peace” party – which Victory would describe as surrenders; and the Neutral/Undecided.

Victory certainly includes crucial actors such as Dmitry Medvedev; Rosneft’s Igor Sechin;

Foreign Minister Lavrov; Nikolai Patrushev; head of the Investigative Committee of Russia, Aleksandr Bastrykin; and – even under fire – certainly Defense Minister Shoigu.

“Peace” would include, among others, the head of Telegram, Pavel Durov; billionaire entrepreneur Andrey Melnichenko; metal/mining czar Alisher Usmanov (born in Uzbekistan); and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

Neutral/Undecided would include Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin; mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyanin; Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office, Anton Vaino; First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential administration and media czar, Alexey Gromov; Sberbank’s CEO Herman Gref; Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller; and – special bone of contention – perhaps FSB supremo Alexander Bortnikov.

It’s fair to argue the third group represents the elite majority. This means they heavily influence the entire course of the Special Military Operation (SMO), which by now has metastasized into an Anti-Terror Operation (ATO).

### The “counter-offensive” fog of war

These different Russian views at the very top predictably elicit frantic speculation among US and NATO Think Tankland. Hostages of their own excitement, they even forget what anyone with an IQ over room temperature is aware of: Kiev – stuffed with \$30 billion in NATO weaponry – may come up with less than zero effects out of its much lauded “counter-offensive”. Russian forces are more than prepared, and Ukraine lacks the surprise element.

Collective West hacks, after feverish head scratching, finally discovered that Kiev needs to go for a “combined arms operation” to get something out of its new deluge of NATO toys.

John Cleese has noted how the coronation of Charles The Tampax King looked like a Monty Python sketch. Now try this one as a sequel: the Hegemon cannot even pay its trillions in debt while Kiev P.R. goons complain that the \$30 billion they got is peanuts.

On the Russian front, the indispensable Andrei Martyanov – a maelstrom of wit – has observed how most alarmed Russian military correspondents simply have no idea “what type and volume of combat information is pouring to the command posts in Moscow, Rostov-on-Don or staffs of frontline formations.”

He stresses that “no serious operational level officer” will even talk to these guys, joyfully described as “voenkurva” (roughly, “military bitches”), and simply will not “divulge any kind of operational data which is highly classified.”

So, as it stands, all the sound and fury about the “counter-offensive” is shrouded by a thick fog of war.

And that only serves to add more fuel to the fire of US Think Tankland wishful thinking. The new dominant narrative in the Beltway is that the leadership in Moscow is “fragmented and unpredictable”. And that may be leading to “a conventional defeat of a major nuclear power” whose “command-and-control system broke down.”

Yes: they actually believe in their own silly (copyright John Cleese) propaganda. They are the American equivalent of the Ministry of Silly Walks. Incapable of analyzing why and how the Russian elite holds different views on the method and the extent of the SMO/ATO, the

best they can come up with is “protecting Ukraine is a strategic necessity, since the Russian threat increases if Moscow wins in Ukraine.”

## What’s behind Prigozhin’s sound and fury

Trademark American arrogance/ignorance does not erase the fact there seems to be a serious power struggle among the siloviki. Yevgeny Prigozhin, a siloviki, in fact denounced Shoigu and Gerasimov as incompetent, implying they only keep their posts out of loyalty to President Putin.

This is as serious as it gets. Because it’s linked to a key question posed across several educated silos in Moscow: if Russia is widely known to be the strongest military power in the world with the most advanced defensive and offensive missiles, how come they have not wrapped up the whole deal in the Ukrainian battlefield?

A plausible answer is that only 200,000 members of the Russian army are currently fighting, and about 400,000 to 600,000 are waiting in reserve for the Ukraine attack. While they wait they are in constant training; so waiting works to Russia’s advantage.

Once the famous “counter-offensive” peters out, Ukraine will be hit with massive force. There will be no negotiated settlement. Only unconditional surrender.

What goin’ on right now – the Prigozhin drama – is subordinated to this logic, running in parallel to a quite sophisticated media operation.

Yes, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) made several serious mistakes, as well as other Russian institutions, since the start of the SMO. To criticize them in public, constructively, is a salutary exercise.

Prigozhin’s tactics are a gem; he manipulates a degree of public outrage/indignation to put pressure on the MoD bureaucracy by essentially telling the truth. He could even go as far as naming names: officers who are abandoning different sectors of the frontlines. In contrast, his Wagner “musicians” are pictured as true heroes.

Whether Prigozhin’s sound and fury will be enough to fine tune the MoD’s entrenched bureaucracy is an open question. Still, media coverage of the whole drama is essential; now that these problems are in the public domain, people will expect the MoD to act.

And by the way, this is the essential fact: Prigozhin has been *allowed* (italics mine) to go as far as he wants by the Higher Power (the St. Petersburg connection). Otherwise he would be in a revamped-gulag by now.

So the next few weeks are absolutely crucial. Putin and the Security Council certainly know what everyone else doesn’t – including Prigozhin. The key take away is that the ground will start to be laid for US/NATO to eventually turn rump Ukraine, the Baltic lap dogs, rabid Poland and a few other extras into a sort of Fortress Eastern Europe engaged in a war of attrition against Russia with the potential to last decades.

That may be the ultimate argument for Russia to finally go for the jugular, as soon as possible. Otherwise the future will be bleak. Well, not so bleak. Remember Putin: “We haven’t even started anything yet.”

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