

Russia's Intel (FSB) Spooked the CIA on "Prigozhin Coup"

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*The [CNN](#), followed by the [New York Times](#), broke the story on Sunday that the US and western intelligence were indeed aware of the failed coup attempt on Friday night by **Yevgeny Prigozhin**, head of the Wagner Group of Russian military contractors, "for quite some time and making preparations for such a move, including by massing weapons and ammunition."*

What we do not know is at what point Russian intelligence got wind of it. The Kremlin acted forcefully, decisively and with foresight in real time to scotch the coup attempt within hours. By Saturday evening, the foreign intelligence chief Sergey Narishkin announced that the coup attempt had failed. The Russian authorities were waiting for Prigozhin to make his move.

It is only natural that Russian intelligence kept a strong presence right inside the Wagner tent all through. Damn it, it is a war zone where Russia's fate is hanging in the balance. The lyrics of the famous Sting song come to mind: 'Every breath you take / And every move you make / Every bond you break / Every step you take / I'll be watching you...'

And the Chorus sings, thereupon: 'Oh, can't you see / You belong to me? / How my poor heart aches / With every step you take...'

Just as the CIA or most intelligence organisations do, the FSB also psychoanalyses the remarks of their targets for profound meanings. They do that routinely and have trained analysts who do only that.

It wouldn't have escaped the attention of Russian intelligence analysts that Prigozhin's ranting and ravings from Donetsk from last autumn and winter began originally on the operational aspects of the Bakhmut war front in Donetsk oblast, but incrementally began acquiring political overtones, culminating finally in his incredible statement that the raison

d'être of the special military operation in Ukraine since February 2022, was all baloney.

Even more strangely, this man who physically witnessed the Battle of Bakhmut, came to the bizarre conclusion that Kiev or Nato had no *mala fide* intentions toward Donbass or Russia.

Therefore, the 'known known' here is that the Russian intelligence was under instructions to be in 'listening mode,' give the eddies a free flow in the Battle of Bakhmut where Wagner was in the driving seat. (Interestingly, though, at some point, much to Prigozhin's annoyance, Moscow also began deploying regular troops selectively on the Bakhmut front alongside the Wagner fighters.)

On Saturday, top US intelligence officials sprang into action to brief the media as it emerged that Russian authorities were literally waiting with a road map to squash Prigozhin's coup attempt. Even the Chechen militia was put on standby.

The crucial element in the deal struck with Prigozhin has been that he will not be prosecuted but must simply get lost. And where else could his exile be arranged better on Planet Earth than in Belarus under the benevolent eyes of **President Alexander Lukashenko**?

Now, we may get to know at some point from Lukashenko, who struggles to keep secrets for long, as to when exactly would Putin have taken him into confidence on a 'need-to-know basis.' It strains credulity that such a complex dealmaking was possible within a clutch of hours via tortuous 3-way negotiations between Moscow, Minsk and Rostov-on-Don even as the renegade Wagner column was approaching Moscow.

An intriguing sub-plot here is that amidst all this heavy traffic, Lukashenko also [negotiated with Nurusultan Nazarbayev](#), the former Kazakh dictator who headed a pro-western regime in Astana and was ousted from power after reigning for nearly three decades, following the failure of a similar US-backed coup attempt like Prigozhin's in the winter of 2021-2022, which too was crushed with the help of the CSTO forces (Russian troops) led by a Russian general.

On the previous day, in fact, Putin had spoken with two Central Asian leaders — Kazakh President Jomart Tokayev and Uzbek President Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev. Did he share any crucial intelligence? In fact, both these countries have been facing western plots for regime change lately. By the way, Given Moscow's preoccupations in Ukraine, Chinese President Xi Jinping has stepped in to take a hands-on role to consolidate the stability and security of the Central Asian region. (Please see my recent articles — [China takes leadership role in Central Asia](#) ; [An "Axis of Seven" to supplement SCO](#); and, [Russia, China take holistic view of the Pamirs and Hindu Kush](#).)

Clearly, something was seriously afoot in Kazakhstan, which is sandwiched between Russia and China and is the most crucial piece of real estate in geopolitical terms in Central Asia.

In all probability, this was what the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken alluded to when he told ABC on Sunday that the situation with the attempted coup in Russia "is still developing... I don't want to speculate, and I don't think we saw the final episode." That said, however, Blinken has piled up a consistent record for being horribly wrong on his assessments on Russia — starting from the deathly blow the 'sanctions from hell' were expected to give to the Russian economy; Putin's hold on power; Russia's catastrophic defeat in Ukraine; Russian military's deficiencies; Kiev's inexorable military victory, and so

on.

In this case, he has reason to feel embittered particularly because of the spectacular unity of the Russian state, political elite, media, regional and federal bureaucracy, and the military and security establishment in rallying behind Putin. Arguably, Putin's political stature is now unchallengeable and unassailable in Russia and the Americans have to live with that reality long after Joe Biden's departure from the scene.

Going forward

The Kremlin has adopted a very thoughtful strategy. From available details so far, it has the following five key elements:

1. Principally, the top priority is to avoid bloodshed so that life moves on and the focus on the war in Ukraine, which is at a tipping point, doesn't suffer;
2. In immediate terms, get the few renegade Wagner fighters and Prigozhin to leave Rostov-on-Don and return to their camps in Lugansk;
3. Clinically separate Prigozhin from the rest of Wagner Group (In fact, not a single Wagner commander or officer joined his revolt);
4. Offer immunity to the bulk of the Wagner Group — except the participants in the coup, of course — and facilitate their formal integration into the defence ministry. That is, the logic behind the creation of Wagner Group by the Defence Ministry (and an unnamed top secret internal security agency) holds good still, but it will no longer be a quasi-state force, but will have a habitation and name and led by designated professional military commanders instead of free-wheeling fortune hunters like Prigozhin.)
5. Get Prigozhin to leave for Belarus, which was not difficult once he realised that he should request mercy from none other than Putin (who agreed to the oligarch's safe passage to Belarus.)

The last element is utterly fascinating. The Kremlin is extremely annoyed with Prigozhin for his seditious behaviour but is also aware — presumably on the basis of intelligence inputs — that he has been manipulated by western powers. Of course, there is going to be a price to pay. Prigozhin will never get back his towering stature as an oligarch with a personal fortune of \$1.2 billion or the fabulous lifestyle he led.

But at least, the 62-year old oligarch is spared a possible twenty-year prison term. This is of a piece with Putin's handling of oligarchs in general. (Read my article [The Rise and fall of a Russian oligarch.](#))

Make no mistake, Lukashenko will eventually make Prigozhin sing — sooner rather later — and the song will be transmitted live to the Kremlin. And that accounts for the great nervousness in Washington, which has raised the spectre of nuclear war, etc. to give the spin to distract attention from the CIA's plot to destabilise Russia. The irrepressible Russian foreign minister [Sergey Lavrov calls it](#) a “turbulent stream of consciousness.”

To be sure, now that the CIA-MI6- Prigozhin plot has failed, out of its debris, new western narratives will be born like a Phoenix out of the ashes. And the US' sleeping cells abroad, including in the Indian media, will parrot that narrative.

But, not for long. For, what lies ahead is the manifestation of the steely resolve of the

Kremlin — and Putin himself — to seek an all-out military solution to the Ukraine crisis. Putin declared last week — most likely in anticipation of the storm brewing on the horizon — that the war will be over when no Ukrainian army will be left on the battlefield, or NATO weapons.

Read the [official transcript of a videoconference that Putin took](#) last Thursday, in the immediate run-up to Prigozhin's coup attempt, with the full quorum of the Security Council (post-Soviet Russia's 'Politburo'), which gives a flavour of the mood in the Kremlin and will provide some clues to what to expect on the battlefields of Ukraine, going forward. It is a huge signal in advance to the "collective West" that nothing will be forgotten.

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