# Mercenary Chief Yevgeny Prigozhin's Mutiny Rocks Russia's Security Establishment



### Mutiny by Mercenary Chief Yevgeny Prigozhin Shakes Russia

On a summer weekend in June 2023, Russia was unexpectedly thrown into turmoil when Yevgeny Prigozhin, the leader of the Kremlin-sponsored Wagner Group, initiated an armed rebellion. Prigozhin directed his mercenaries to seize a military headquarters in Rostov-on-Don, southern Russia, accusing the Defense Ministry of starving his forces of ammunition in Ukraine. The mutiny aimed to challenge the Defense Ministry’s leaders but was called off just hours later, representing the most significant threat to President Vladimir Putin’s authority in nearly 25 years.

Prigozhin, a former criminal-turned-businessman, earned notoriety as "Putin's chef" after gaining lucrative government contracts. He founded the Wagner Group in 2014, deploying mercenaries to conflict zones like Syria, Libya, and the Central African Republic. The group became known for its brutality and involvement in high-profile operations, including an alleged sledgehammer execution video and participating in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, capturing Bakhmut in May 2023.

Tensions escalated in early 2023 as Prigozhin openly criticized Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov for military setbacks and corruption. This culminated in Wagner’s brief but dramatic march towards Moscow, labeled as a "march of justice." Putin condemned the event as a betrayal, but it ended following a negotiated amnesty, with most Wagner troops relocating to Belarus or returning to military service.

On August 23, 2023, two months after the aborted rebellion, Prigozhin and his top aides died in a plane crash. Western intelligence suggested an onboard explosion, though the Kremlin denied involvement. Prigozhin was buried privately in St. Petersburg.

Following the mutiny, Wagner’s operations were restructured. Remaining mercenaries either joined the Russian military or redeployed to Africa. The formation of a successor unit, Africa Corps, highlighted Russia’s continued military engagements and partnerships, especially in Africa.

The rebellion underscored the fragility within Putin's administration. Since then, Putin has dismissed several senior officials, realigned his cabinet, and continues to consolidate power, maintaining control over both the military and political spheres.