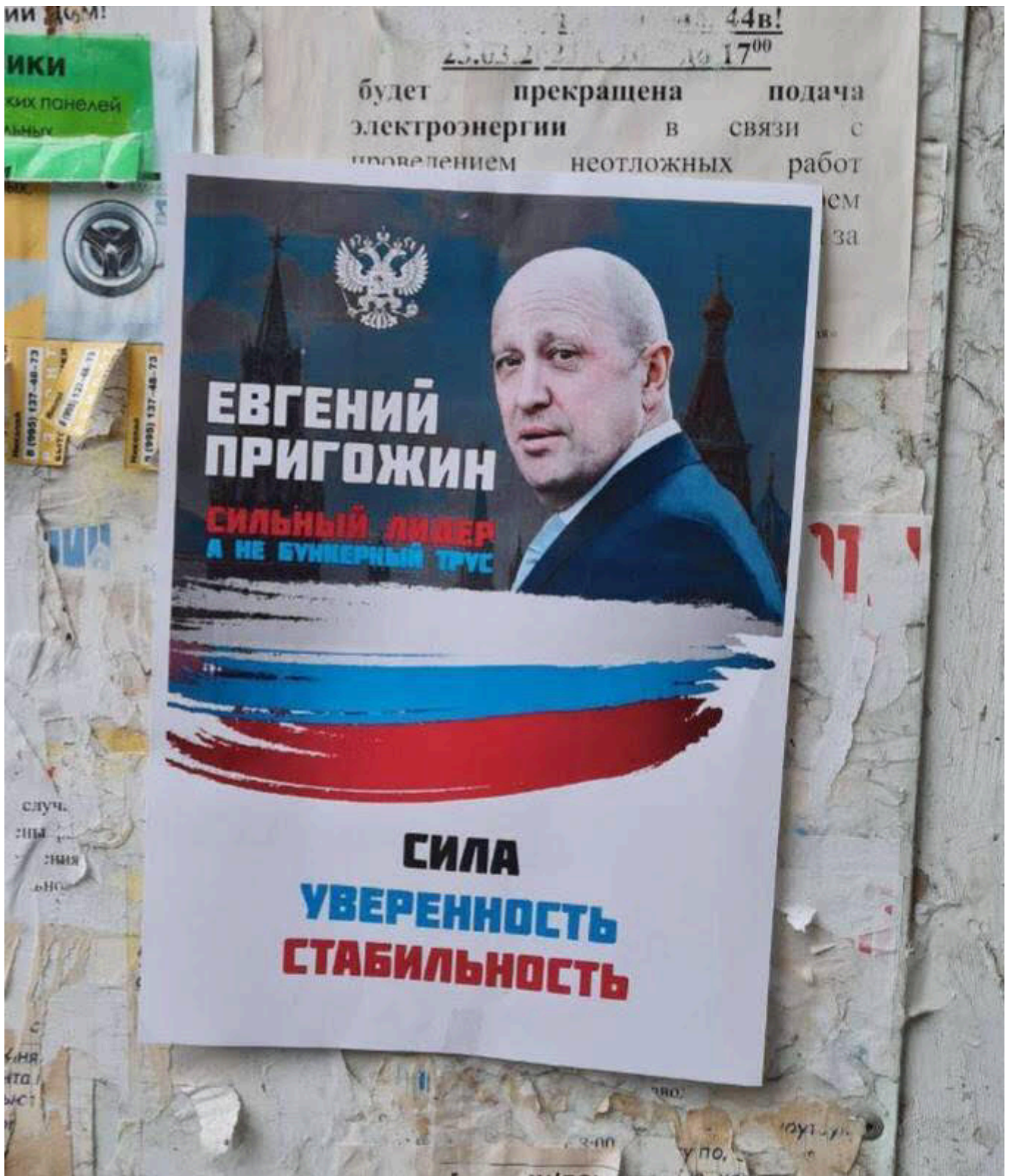




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Bakhmut and Belgorod - the scenes of the conflict for supremacy in the Kremlin



Today ‘

atmosphere in the Kremlin resembles a quote from Samuil Marshak’s poetry. He was a famous Soviet poet who successfully transitioned from Tsarist Russia to Soviet Russia.

One of the family quotes from Marshak ‘
om,
the cat’s house is on fire”.

Figuratively speaking, Putin’s house is on fire, but he still displays parody and alternative childish reality while his former world collapses.

The Russian capture of the city of Bakhmut in Ukraine and the immediate attack on Belgorod inside Russian territory are events that not only affect the situation at the front, but also complicate relations at the very top of Russia.

The vast majority of Russian people before the war did not know that city of Bakhmut existed. It is hard to be sure currently whether the takeover of Bakhmut occurred, or was staged to please Putin and the Russian majority.

Before the war, Bakhmut had a little over 70,000 inhabitants. It was a small city in terms of Ukrainian and particularly Russian sizes.

There are almost 30 different cities near Moscow that have a population between 50,000 to 70,000.

A city of 70,000 inhabitants is not something that would impress the Russian people. It all depended on the skilful and shameful Kremlin propaganda which could convince Russian TV viewers that securing Bakhmut could be compared with the Battle of Stalingrad.

Who in the Kremlin cares most about Bakhmut?

Russia spent almost a year trying to take this city in Ukraine. In the ongoing attempt, Russia razed Bakhmut to the ground, and then started spinning glorious and liberating sentiments in the Russian and the Kremlin-controlled mass media and patriotic online channels.

The Russians wanted Bakhmut just because the head of Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, wanted to demonstrate the incompetence of Sergei Shoigu and the Russian defence ministry to Vladimir Putin.

This city was important to the Russians because it would have added a victorious sentiment to May 9 Victory Day festivities. They wanted Bakhmut because the Kremlin and the Russian majority needed a victory in Ukraine just to boost their self-esteem.

Bakhmut has theoretically some geographical and logistical value but offers no fundamental strategic leverage to the Russian aggressor.

No one knows the state of affairs in Bakhmut, although Russian propaganda presents the capture of Bakhmut as a great victory and an important milestone.

Should Prigozhin be worried?

What we do know, however, is that Bakhmut may have been taken at the expense of a significant private army, the size of Prigozhin’s

request from Moscow to continue the offensive when it made no logic to continue when Wagner’s losses were dramatically high.

It seemed as if Moscow was trying to use Bakhmut to remove Prigozhin and the Wagner Group from the Russian post-war palette.

One must have armed people behind them to play a significant role in Russia. It was the same even before the war.

Prigozhin, with his army, is a prospective politician in today's Russia. His army, not so much.

Therefore Prigozhin's perspectives are not so good either. Someone in Moscow could have intentionally tried to reduce Prigozhin's political future. Possibly Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu was the one who orchestrated it.

Russian propaganda and thus the Kremlin and many other Kremliners now intensively glorifying Wagner's magnificent performance in Bakhmut, trying to keep Prigozhin popular.

Who is considered the conqueror of Bakhmut?

It all appears confusing because not only Prigozhin was trashing Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu, but he also publicly called the war arrogant, unplanned, and something that began with no clear goal.

On top of that, Prigozhin glorified Ukrainian defenders on several occasions and exchanged bodies of fallen Ukrainian soldiers with Ukrainian representatives.

At the same time, radical nationalist leaders such as Igor Strelkov (Girkin) are trashing Prigozhin's

achievements, calling him an incompetent meat grinder, and spinning various conspiracies, including that Bakhmut was the arena where the Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu clashed with Prigozhin because they are two possible Putin's successors.

The Bakhmut butchery spectacle included at least three Russian actors: the Kremlin, Prigozhin's Wagner, and the Russian defence ministry.

All parties involved were advancing their own interests. New and yet, unidentified stakeholders appeared on the Russian political horizon and could claim a share of the post-war pie.

Belgorod enigma

At the same time, armed and well-equipped insurgents crossed the Ukrainian-Russian border and raided Russian territory.

The event that shocked Russia was skilfully twisted and used by the Kremlin's propaganda to accuse Ukraine and even Ukrainian Western allies.

Rebels from the militia group which raided Russian territory near the city of Belgorod have proclaimed themselves as Russian freedom fighters opposing Putin's regime, and are fighting alongside the Ukrainian army.

Russian propaganda rejected this statement as false and said this militia group was dispatched by Ukrainian intelligence working in conjunction with Western intelligence services.

At this point, particularly in today's Russian ocean of lies, it is impossible to name as a fact

who those people were.

At first glance, one can assume that from a Ukrainian standpoint, it is reasonable for Ukraine to disperse Russian troops and cause unrest in Russian society.

It is also noteworthy that such an attack by Ukrainian forces should have occurred long ago. Not when Ukraine is preparing for an offensive, and the Ukrainian army is winning and is better equipped than the Russian army. At the moment when Western countries began supplying long-range missiles, tanks, and even fighter jets to Ukraine.

In the forthcoming humiliation of the Russian army in the face of the Ukrainian offensive, it does not make much sense for the Ukrainian army to implement such an insignificant military operation on Russian territory.

Ideological and propaganda injection

The attack on Belgorod might have provided a crucial ideological boost to the Kremlin. It might have also revealed domestic clandestine and, most importantly, capable and hostile forces for the Kremlin.

Knowing that Russia is a non-stop intelligence playground, created in 1917, the attack on Belgorod could be both inspired and sponsored by the Kremlin itself.

Or it could be inspired and sponsored by Kremlin's domestic adversaries, including those from the Russian leadership, intelligence, and upper class.

Kremlin has been desperately trying to

mobilise the Russian population and provide a more convincing justification for its actions regarding its original decision to attack Ukraine on Feb 24, 2022.

To achieve that goal, the Kremlin has been seeking evidence that would convince the Russian people that Ukraine is a country of fascists and a threat to Russia.

Since that is not available, the Kremlin does not hesitate, and constantly fabricates and presents false facts to the Russian public as truth.

Did the Kremlin attack itself?

Some of those self-proclaimed attackers in Belgorod made online videos and posted photos revealing their faces and identities. They are confirmed nationalists who have expressed very radical views in the past. This suggests that the attack on Belgorod could theoretically have been staged by the Kremlin.

It is fair to assume the world community got used to the fact that Russia is a country of the most dramatic and outrageous fabrications, myths, and unimaginable fake news, which are produced or inspired by the Kremlin.

As famous Russian satirist, Mikhail Zadornov once said: "Russia is a country with [an] unpredictable past".

No one can be certain there is a genuine connection between the attack on Belgorod and the people who revealed their faces claiming to be attackers.

The attack could have been organised by one group of people, and people who claimed on the web to be attackers could be some other

people hired by the Kremlin to discredit and devalue the initial attack on Belgorod, and to hijack the purpose of the attack.

Armed opposition

What we can be sure about is the fact that there is an armed and well-equipped domestic opposition willing to wage a real war against the regime which is frightening for the Kremlin.

The Kremlin has never realistically faced true opposition willing to deprive Putin of power and take power with force.

The only opposition the Kremlin is afraid of is the opposition of thousands of well-armed and equipped people. Maintenance of organisation as PMC Wagner costs billions of dollars per year.

Therefore, real domestic opposition to the Kremlin must have at least the same budget as Wagner's and the same number of men, if not greater.

In the current situation, the Russian elite is anxious about defeat in Ukraine, and the only way for them to save themselves is to consider seriously hiring or assembling a small army that will strike Putin's regime domestically and deprive him of power.

This is particularly true for those from the regime who were not compromised by taking part in the war, who could implement this scenario in conjunction with domestic intelligence services and possibly foreign governments.

In light of Russian corruption, we could easily imagine that local military, intelligence, or

interior bosses at a crucial point could neglect or even refuse to obey the Kremlin's orders, and even join rebel forces with their battalions or divisions.

We can only assume how vulnerable the Kremlin feels at the thought that these officers could join the rebellion and get immunity and a generous amount of cash in hard currency paid to them by the sponsors of an uprising.

Putin cannot guarantee security

Some of the domestic intelligence agencies 'bosses could be looking for a way out by overthrowing Putin, and some of them could consider assuming the post of Russian president after Putin is removed.

These people clearly understand that whoever stops the war and agrees on the 1991 Russian borders from Russia's side will automatically be welcomed by the West even if they have had dark periods in their careers.

All they need is to stage an attack on Russia, show the Russian people that Putin can no longer guarantee security to people, take over the TV and other crucial objects in Russia and then accuse Putin of incompetence.

They can even accuse Putin of waging criminal war against a neighbouring country.

Especially 'Eskoy Plista'

will most definitely think twice before following Putin's orders. He is the only one who has no way out of this. Everyone else around him could have a second chance.

The hypothesis of removing Putin from power by Russian intelligence and military bosses could be very probable in light of the

successful Ukrainian offensive. The raid on Belgorod could therefore be intelligence by combat.

Reformulating Samuil Marshak, we can now say

“House is a house”, Putin’s house is ironically on fire regardless of who is behind that attack on Belgorod.

The conflict over the title of hero

Even if the attack on Belgorod was staged by the Kremlin, it produced initial short-term ideological dividends. In the long run, it will be used as a model or propaganda instrument against the Kremlin by both foreign and domestic adversaries of the Kremlin.

It is hard to imagine what is in Putin’s head now. He wanted to be equal with the great Russian historical figures. He wanted to define the future in the world. He ended up fighting for a town no one but the Ukrainian people had heard of.

Alexander I of Russia conquered Paris.

Joseph Stalin conquered Berlin.

Vladimir Putin conquered Bakhmut.

However, someone else believes that he won in Bakhmut. Yevgeny Prigozhin, a criminal who speaks the language of criminals, can easily find mutual ground with some oligarchs who appeared in the 1990s and, therefore, to a degree, are criminals too. Prigozhin can secure some of the support of Russian business elites.

Both Putin and Prigozhin moved in the same criminal circles in St. Petersburg in the early 1990s.

After Putin ended up in Yeltsin’s orbit, he was rejected by the Russian top echelons of intelligence and military. It was a while before Putin neutralised and killed all who opposed him.

Prigozhin, on his possible but not certain path to Putin’s succession, will face many barriers and obstacles created by army and intelligence bosses.

In particular if the seizure of Bakhmut ends up being false and a patriotic lie, Prigozhin’s political career could become very vague.