

## Wartime Russian Civil-Military Relations

### *Dimensions, Tensions, and Disruptions*

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## Abstract

The study of civil-military relations considers the institutional and power relations between a country's decision-making political elite and the military leadership responsible for conducting combat and strategic operations, as well as a plethora of related issue areas capturing diverse political, societal, and military interactions. The Russian wartime experience since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 has been defined by significant and dynamic tensions between the political and military leadership. These tensions have ultimately led to strains on the public legitimacy of Russia's military leadership, notable political intervention into military decision-making, disruptive elite personnel changes, and a brief breakdown in political order due to the armed rebellion of PMC Wagner and its leader, Evgeny Prigozhin. This report provides a conceptual framework for dimensions of control, authority, hierarchy, institutionalization, and autonomy within Russia's shifting wartime civil-military relationship. It presents an overarching analytic narrative identifying changes and continuities in Russian civil-military relations since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, as well as detailed case studies on shifts in military elite leadership and the Prigozhin Rebellion.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines Russian civil-military relations<sup>1</sup> by focusing on high-level tensions between Russian political and military elites that have arisen since the start of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. To do so, the report employs a conceptual framework that breaks out interrelated dimensions of control, authority, hierarchy, institutionalization, and autonomy relevant to the broader Russian civil-military relationship. Across these dimensions, Russia has experienced stresses, frictions, and uncertainties at differing levels of severity since the war's onset. These have strained Russian civil-military relations, and even briefly disrupted Russia's political order, during the wartime period of February 2022 through the first half of 2024.

These tensions are observable across multiple dimensions of the Russian military's relationship with civilian authorities. First, the military leadership by the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces has been targeted for hostile oversight by a growing and influential media ecosystem of "war correspondents," who have partially undermined military elite legitimacy in the eyes of many regime loyalists. Second, the Kremlin, reacting to battlefield reverses, has interfered with stable military leadership and personnel choices over the course of the war, resulting in the potential for bad blood and creating uncertainty across the military-bureaucratic leadership cohort. Third, the Russian regime itself has been destabilized by hostile relations between the military hierarchy and powerful, irregular military organizations, principally the Wagner Group private military company (PMC), ultimately leading to the rebellion of its leader Evgeny Prigozhin in June 2023.

### Key findings, insights, and recommendations

First, the war in Ukraine has led to an unprecedented disruption in Russian civil-military relations. The events of the first two years of the war are likely to have considerable downstream effects on Russia's Armed Forces, including its ability to project power, organize its own internal affairs, and maintain its established place in the Russian political system. The downstream effects of consistently strained civil-military tensions also could increase the risk of escalation between Russia and its adversaries, including the United States and NATO, depending on the state of Russian domestic politics and whether the balance between civilian and military elements shifts in destabilizing ways.

Second, the rise of "political-military barons," the politically influential leaders of irregular armed groups with direct, patronage connections to regime decision-makers, has disrupted the standard hierarchy of decision-making and command authority within the Russian Armed Forces. The most prominent baron, PMC Wagner leader Evgeny Prigozhin, developed a power base that was distinct from other irregular military organizations and ultimately engaged in a high-stakes (and ultimately failed) rebellion that further disrupted civil-military relations. In the wake of this event, Russian political elites have been forced to focus on core questions of regime maintenance and stability vis-à-vis the military, leading to potential uncertainty and greater pressure on Russia's cohort of general officers below the most senior leadership level.

<sup>1</sup> The study of civil-military relations considers the institutional and power relations between a country's decision-making political elite and the military leadership responsible for conducting combat and directing operational and strategic activities, alongside a plethora of related issue areas capturing diverse political, societal, and military interactions between civilians and the military.

Third, political-military instability (characterized by, for example, the threat of regime change, general/flag-level officer purges, and the use of reactive mechanisms to reestablish control and hierarchy within the armed forces) will likely increase institutional sclerosis by entrenching existing internal bureaucratic hierarchies. Achieving adaptable and flexible decision-making within the Russian Armed Forces will be made more difficult by a renewed perception of the necessity of continued political oversight. This difficulty will likely affect force effectiveness, capacity, and the relative autonomy of military actors over the medium and long term. Kremlin fears about maintaining civilian control will remain a core focus point, and the regime will struggle to balance military-bureaucratic and elite stability with competing desires for military effectiveness, internal autonomy, and incentives for innovation. This need for oversight and control may also interact in uncertain ways with the further “securitization” of the Russian upper-tier elite and within the Kremlin itself as the Russian regime continues its shift towards more fully closed authoritarian politics.

Fourth, civil-military tensions may reorient Russia’s political leadership toward suboptimal reform efforts, focusing on maintaining and stabilizing the regime, coup-proofing, and ensuring officer loyalty. This may undermine the effectiveness and thoroughness of post-war medium- and long-term reform efforts for the Russian Armed Forces, including the constant pressure to avoid lopsided investments across Russian military service branches. Instead, Russia’s focus will likely remain primarily on the Russian Ground Forces and, to a lesser extent, the Aerospace Forces, which have conducted the bulk of the fighting in Ukraine and also have been the central locus for ongoing civil-military tensions.

Fifth, continued political instability in Russia resulting from civil-military issues may also increase the risk of a decisive “cleaning house” reform event that may decrease (in the short to medium term) or possibly increase (in the medium to long term) the ability of the Russian Armed Forces to conduct and sustain a future regional conflict in Eastern Europe. Efforts to ensure political control—or otherwise shake up the cadre of military leadership elites—will have negative immediate effects on cohesiveness and morale but may improve the quality of leadership in time.

Sixth, the role of certain political institutions, such as the Russian Security Council, remains relatively underemphasized in current research on the Russian military. Further studies on the Russian Security Council’s makeup and interaction with other core institutions, especially the Presidential Administration, the MOD, the General Staff, and the Federal Security Service (FSB), will likely provide new insights into how political and military leadership actors interact with each other, as well as how they coordinate—or fail to—during periods of crisis and as military events unfold.

Lastly, the Russian Armed Forces represent a core case of civilian control in a large, authoritarian regime with a highly institutionalized and powerful military. As major warfare conducted by such states is relatively rarely observed, the Russian case remains an important opportunity to see how such a system engages with, and is in turn influenced by, the experience of prolonged, high-casualty warfighting. The Russian case of wartime civil-military relations should be both juxtaposed with other such systems such as China and compared to less fully controlled systems—as in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East—to provide new insights into the systematic understanding of 21st-century civil-military relations in nondemocracies.

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## INTRODUCTION

This report surveys the state of civil-military relations in contemporary wartime Russia from February 2022 to May 2024, with a special empirical focus on the period of June 2022 through June 2023. In doing so, the report first assesses the general dynamics and patterns of civil-military relations before the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war, providing a holistic picture of how Russia's military and political leadership have interacted over the long tenure of the extended administration of President Vladimir Putin. This background provides baseline expectations for how Russian civil-military relations would extend into a wartime scenario.

The report then reviews how military and political leaders have changed their practices and perspectives over the course of the Russia-Ukraine war. To this end, it first provides a broad analytic narrative of Russian civil-military relations under extraordinary wartime conditions. It then presents two vignette case studies of key civil-military tension points during the war: 1) the appointment of General Sergei Surovikin in September 2022 to full command of the war effort, along with his replacement through the military-bureaucratic "revanche" of Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov in January 2023; and 2) the armed rebellion of PMC Wagner leader Evgeny Prigozhin in June 2023.

These vignette cases provide evidence of shifting civil-military relations across several conceptual dimensions, highlighting civil-military interactions related to personnel appointments, strategic- and operational-level decision-making, and an outright violent and politically charged rebellion all taking place over the course of a major interstate territorial war.

Taken alongside a broader narrative of civil-military relations that highlights the waxing and waning of tensions over the span of the war through May 2024, this report adds to Russian military studies' current understanding of the Russian military, the Russian military leadership's relationships with civilian political principals, and the ongoing dimensions of significant and shifting tensions within and across these relational networks.

To develop these case studies, as well as the broader analytic narrative, this report relies on a diverse methodological approach, using causal process analytical tools; item-count, event-count, and quantitative text and sentiment analysis; personnel-organizational data collection; qualitative dynamic analysis of temporal and spatial variation; and content analysis using a variety of primary Russian- and English-language research outputs and journalistic reporting. The report's findings are preliminary but intended to be instructive for further research on the changing dynamics of Russian civil-military relations since 2022.

### Framing questions on civil-military relations

Three general framing questions on the state of Russian civil-military relations, generated from initial observations on the current Russia-Ukraine war, inform the research approach of this report:

1. How have disruptions and stresses in Russia's legacy of relatively stable civil-military relations affected relations between the military leadership and regime-level political actors—in what ways, and to what degree?

2. How have nonstandard military elements, such as politically connected private and parastatal military organizations, affected and influenced Russian wartime civil-military relations?
3. How does characterizing the current state of Russian civil-military relations provide insights into the short- and medium-term future of the Russian Armed Forces and the broader Russian political regime?

These three framing questions inform the theoretical and empirical content of the report, focusing on issues of disruptions, uncertainties, tensions, and contestation across a variety of relevant military-bureaucratic and political actors nestled within a wide range of formal institutions and organizations.

### Motivations for the study of Russian civil-military relations

The need for an updated understanding of Russian civil-military relations since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war is evident for several reasons. First, it is a means to engage with and update existing scholarship on the topic in light of an unprecedented, contemporary wartime scenario. Second, it informs relevant inputs into how Western policy and military decision-makers understand and analyze a major US adversary and its internal political-military dynamics during a period of unique wartime conditions. Third, it provides a window into how shifts in civil-military relations may ultimately interact with internal regime politics and the future contours and loci of political decision-making in modern Russia.

Regarding overall scholarly impressions, both contemporary English- and Russian-language studies have generated a relative consensus picture of Russian civil-military relations against which observations in the ongoing conflict serve as a useful test. Contemporary peacetime Russia has been traditionally viewed as a case of dominant and unchallenged civilian control combined with relatively wide deference for military autonomy, albeit shaped by externally imposed reform efforts.<sup>2</sup> This consensus, however, is not comprehensive, and disagreement across a few important issue areas highlights the need for updates, which has only increased since the war's onset. It is crucial to assess the continued merits of maintaining this prewar general view of Russian civil-military relations, as well as identifying old and new points of interpretive conflict, because the political-military ground has shifted in dramatic fashion after contact with opposing kinetic forces from 2022 onward.

Second, in terms of adversary assessment, while the broader study of civil-military relations captures a tremendous variety of political-military, political, and organizational phenomena, core issue areas are associated with key relationships of control, authority, hierarchy, institutionalization, and autonomy at the highest levels of a polity's military and political elite. Put simply, where does decision-making influence and institutional power lie among civilian and military officials, and how can we characterize their relationship, their interactions, and their cooperation (or frictions)? Furthermore, an active wartime scenario simply puts unique stresses on the warring state's elite ecosystem in general, although different

<sup>2</sup> For examples of work with extensive and relevant reviews of the existing scholarly literature, see, for example, Kirill Shamiev, "Civil-Military Relations and Russia's Post-Soviet Military Culture: A Belief System Analysis," *Armed Forces & Society* 49, no. 2 (2023), pp. 252–74; Ihor Kovalevskyi, "Civil-Military Relations in Putin's Russia," in *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, ed. Florina Cristiana Matei, Carolyn Halladay, and Thomas C. Bruneau (Routledge, 2021), pp. 13–25; Aleksandr Golts, transl. Maia Kipp, *Military Reform and Militarism in Russia* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2018); Bettina Renz, "Russia's 'Force Structures' and the Study of Civil-Military Relations," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 18, no. 4 (2005), pp. 559–85; and Dale R. Herspring, ed., *Civil-Military Relations in Communist Systems* (Routledge, 2019).



dimensions of the civil-military relationship may be affected in distinct ways.<sup>3</sup>

For example, decisions made in the political center may be particularly difficult for the military leadership to accept, or, alternatively, to implement, depending on the state of the civil-military relationship, degrees of trust and deference, and points of contention. Similarly, normative assumptions about the privileged role of, competence of, and respect for military leadership may fall away depending on battlefield and operational performance as observed by political leadership.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, if the Russian military is performing poorly in combat operations, the value of its autonomy and the strength of its authority may diminish. The risk of political intervention into the military sphere of authority, and vice versa, grows under such conditions, as well as informs variation in the degree to which decision-making practices operate primarily formally or informally.<sup>5</sup> Observing events in a wartime scenario provides the opportunity to view these dynamics as they play out in real time.

Therefore, existing peacetime insights into Russian civil-military relations may require heavy modification

under wartime conditions in a hybrid local-regional war.<sup>6</sup> In essence, as a country moves from peacetime to wartime, internal elite politics and their dynamics can change—sometimes fundamentally.

Third, the contours and dynamics of civil-military relations may be relevant factors in explaining change in the foreign policy and political-military decision-making of states in wartime. In addition to stresses between the political and military decision-making hierarchies, decisions *for* war and the contingencies *of* war will have major foreign policy as well as domestic political ramifications.<sup>7</sup>

Shifts in civil-military relations, as noted in the prior point, may affect other areas of policy and political interest. This is especially the case insofar as they relate to questions of regime maintenance and survival, dynamics of domestic “rally” effects, and even foreign policy interests and geopolitical influence.<sup>8</sup> That Russia is a major, resilient authoritarian regime in sustained strategic competition with the United States makes it a particularly critical case study. An extended, if preliminary, research program characterizing current realities is therefore self-recommending.

<sup>3</sup> Louis-Alexandre Berg, “Civil–Military Relations and Civil War Recurrence: Security Forces in Postwar Politics,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 7–8 (2020), pp. 1307–34; Peter D. Feaver, “Civil-Military Relations,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999), pp. 211–41.

<sup>4</sup> Heidi A. Urben, “Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War: Party, Politics, and the Profession of Arms” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Vipin Narang and Caitlin Talmadge, “Civil-Military Pathologies and Defeat in War: Tests Using New Data,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 7 (2018), pp. 1379–1405; Patrick M. Cronin, *Irregular Warfare: New Challenges for Civil-Military Relations* (Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Kofman et al., *Russian Approaches to Competition*, CNA, DRM-2021-U-029439-Final, Oct. 2021, p. 21, <https://www.cna.org/reports/2021/10/russian-approaches-to-competition>.

<sup>7</sup> Kseniya Kizilova and Pippa Norris, “‘Rally Around the Flag’ Effects in the Russian-Ukrainian War,” *European Political Science* (Nov. 2023), pp. 1–17; Jessica Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace* (Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Dieuwertje Kuijpers, “Rally Around All the Flags: The Effect of Military Casualties on Incumbent Popularity in Ten Countries 1990–2014,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15, no. 3 (2019); Chiara Ruffa, Christopher Dandeker, and Pascal Vennesson, “Soldiers Drawn into Politics? The Influence of Tactics in Civil–Military Relations,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 2 (2013), pp. 322–34; J. Tyson Chatagnier, “The Effect of Trust in Government on Rallies ‘Round the Flag,’” *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 5 (2012), pp. 631–45; and Rebecca L. Schiff, *The Military and Domestic Politics: A Concordance Theory of Civil-Military Relations* (Routledge, 2008).

## Report structure

The report is organized into five sections and three appendices:

- The remaining introductory section, continued below, lays out the methodological approach of the report, as well as relevant limitations.
- The second section discusses civil-military relations theoretically and conceptually as they pertain to the Russian case of a stable, civilian-dominated civil-military relationship. It also introduces a conceptual framework used to characterize changes and continuities over time.
- The third section develops the core narrative of changing civil-military relations over the course of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war from February 2022 to May 2024.
- The fourth section details two vignette cases of civil-military tensions over the course of the war, examining dynamics surrounding political intervention into the personnel politics of the military leadership and the rebellion of Evgeny Prigozhin and PMC Wagner.
- The fifth section identifies downstream implications of these wartime civil-military dynamics and suggests recommendations and further avenues for research.
- Three appendices provide a guide to key actors relevant to civil-military relations, a list of flag-level officers dismissed since the start of the war, and additional data on the Prigozhin Rebellion that are relevant to future research.<sup>9</sup>

## Methodological approach

This section reviews the methodological approach taken by the report, specifying the choices in data collection, organization, and analysis. It notes the varied data sources used in the analytical and empirical sections of the study, highlighting the observational and causal claims that can be assessed through these choices. Finally, it identifies weaknesses and limitations of the current approach and highlights partial mitigation strategies.

## Methodological framework

This report leverages a variety of methodological tools to assess the current state of Russian civil-military relations. These include tracking personnel changes and organizational adaptations, trend analysis of variation in political-military and intra-military tensions that prioritizes event-count frequency, the detailed content analysis of public statements by key political and military elites, and quantitative text and sentiment analysis of core actors who have been particularly disruptive to stable civil-military lines of authority, hierarchy, and autonomy (see Table 1). These methods rely on observational data gathered from a variety of public sources.

## Data sources

Data sources for this report are varied, providing multiple points of observation complemented by an extensive survey of the secondary literature. Quantitative data come from speeches and statements posted on social media channels related to Prigozhin and other *voenkory* (“war

<sup>9</sup> Note that general/flag officers (i.e., one to five star officers), known sometimes as “higher officers” (*vysshiye ofitsery*) in Russian, are referred to as flag officers in this report for readability.

Table 1. Methodological toolkit

Methodological Tool	Analytical Relevance
Personnel-organizational analysis	Provides insight into elite politics, decision-making, and changes in military and military-adjacent authority structures
Temporal variation in public tensions (causal process analysis)	Provides insight into the evolution of civil-military relations over time across elite authority figures and episodes of political intervention
Event-count analysis in public tensions	Provides insight into the frequency and degree of civil-military tensions at key spike points
Content analysis	Provides insight into the substance of civil-military tensions and changes
Quantitative text analysis	Provides granular insight into the substance and tenor of civil-military tensions and changes

Source: CNA.

correspondents”) associated with him.<sup>10</sup> Event data of personnel changes rely on collection efforts by multiple outside organizations, including the Institute for the Study of War, the Jamestown Foundation, and a variety of Western media reporting. Russian-language domestic news reports are used where possible to corroborate or further illuminate qualitative empirical points. All findings are subject to data availability limitations, as discussed below.

## Outcome variable of interest: civil-military tensions

This study is framed around identifying potential and actual tensions that disrupt or undermine the status quo of Russian civil-military relations. The concept of *civil-military tensions* is defined here as major instances of stress, friction, or conflict between upper-tier elite political and military actors in the context of a stable civil-military relationship.<sup>11</sup> These tensions can be characterized as occurring within or across several dimensions of the civil-military relationship (i.e., control, authority, hierarchy, institutionalization, and autonomy).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The term “war correspondents” (*voenkory*, full: *voennye korrespondenty*) is used to describe anonymous or collective groups with news and commentary-oriented Telegram accounts, as well as other individuals who are now developing personal brands as embedded reporters. Although the term is properly specific to writers in or close to the field, the environment they inhabit includes a wider set of discontented, prowar commenters and opinion-shapers writing on the same or similar platforms. Not all war correspondents were associated with Prigozhin during the period under study, with many being indirectly controlled by the Russian government or acting functionally autonomously. Another term used for the same corpus of journalists and related observers is “military blogger.” See Appendix A: Key Russian Civil-Military Actors for additional discussion.

<sup>11</sup> An early version of political and systems tensions analysis in the study of Russia (or the Soviet Union) can be found in Merle Fainsod, “Controls and Tensions in the Soviet System,” *American Political Science Review* 44, no. 2 (1950), pp. 266–82. A more recent study on “political tensions” defines it as “disagreement over policy issues, hostility between leaders, and negative public sentiment” at the state and elite level; see Christina L. Davis and Sophie Meunier, “Business As Usual? Economic Responses to Political Tensions,” *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 3 (2011), pp. 628–46.

<sup>12</sup> See Table 2 on page 13 in the following section for the conceptual framework of civil-military relations applied in this report.

Tensions can lead to changes to or sustained frictions within these dimensions, which in turn informs the overall state, health, and tenor of the civil-military relationship. These five dimensions of the civil-military relationship are conceptualized and specified in the following section. Each dimension captures a distinct but oftentimes related or overlapping component of the relationship which in aggregate characterizes the stable interaction between military and civilian elites and institutions over time and across the decision-making space.

This report assumes that significant deviations from stable and regularized processes and procedures, sudden changes to the personnel or institutions within the civil-military ecosystem, and breakdowns in political, military, or institutional order are all precipitants or symptoms of potential civil-military tensions. We suggest that civil-military tensions can be observed as substantive *tension points*, either specific moments in time or concrete processes occurring over a longer period, with identifiable actors involved who are assumed to undermine or reassert distinct dimensions of the civil-military relationship.

Therefore, a military coup or armed rebellion would be a clear and observable tension point playing out a latent and metastasizing civil-military tension (e.g., between coup-plotter or rebel and the political regime itself or specified civilian authorities), as would the sudden dismissal of a commanding flag-officer or a political intervention into military decision-making for the purposes of modifying or directing military operations (i.e., as a disruption of existing hierarchy, the undermining of an actor's authority or legitimacy, or unusual political force applied on the military's self-understood internal affairs). As expected, civil-military tensions are subject to interpretation and contextual nuance, which makes them sometimes difficult to measure,

let alone to properly capture their ultimate meaning or relevance for the relationship, for the armed forces, or for civilian principals.

Indeed, some civil-military tensions are minor or relatively easy to overcome. They may be part of standard expectations of stress or friction within any naturally evolving civil-military relationship, especially in wartime conditions. This would include the inevitable tensions resulting from unexpected personnel changes, which are unavoidable over a long enough period. Such tensions may be manageable and have little effect in the short term.

Other civil-military tensions may be more grievous and dangerous, either for the stability and coherence of the relationship between military and civilian actors in general, for the effects that disrupted civil-military relations may have on internal military power dynamics or outside civilian pressures, or even for the survival of the political regime itself. These more dangerous instances would of course include military coups, but they would also capture lesser but still significant disruptions such as rebellions or barracks revolts, refusals to follow orders, or units taking operational decision-making that goes against command (or even political) intentions.

Given this, civil-military tensions are this report's primary outcome (or dependent) variable of interest, operationalized as key tension points identified through open-source research and analytic interpretation. The study explicitly selects on this variable for descriptive and identification purposes; its research approach therefore represents an initial survey of key tensions in Russian wartime civil-military relations and provides preliminary evidence suggesting the reasons and processes that led to and resolved these tensions.

In some instances, we can only note potential dimensions of tensions; we cannot provide evidence

that behavior has been changed, either because the evidence is not publicly available or the tension is not acted on in a clear way. In others, the tension is quite clear—we focus our case studies on these instances to provide analytic clarity and leverage. Further study will be needed, with much more diverse forms of data, to make full causal claims and fully map the space of civil-military tensions in wartime Russia.

### *Methodological limitations*

The primary methodological difficulty for this report is a paucity of reliable data from core decision-making actors, which is common to studies of civil-military relations and military decision-making in general.<sup>13</sup> This paucity is heightened considerably because of the wartime environmental conditions within Russia, which further inhibit public discussion and statements from key figures through self-censorship, official censorship, partial reporting, classification issues, interpersonal and political tensions, and overall authoritarian secrecy patterns. This also leads to an availability problem, one in which a variety of relevant data is selectively or randomly unavailable to outside data-gathering and collection efforts at the time of writing.

This study is limited further by the lack of available informational and interview contacts within the Russian Federation. Outside researchers cannot gain

qualitative insights through nonreported means during this period, which forces a strong reliance on observational data taken primarily from journalistic sources within Russia.

To mitigate these limitations, this study attempts to diversify and expand the data universe through the exploitation of public posts on social media (primarily the widely used mobile app Telegram). However, these data are also subject to considerable limitations, including variable usage over time, a variety of rhetorical framing and branding devices, and the vagaries of actor self-interest and motivations that make the data quality decidedly biased from the very nature of the data-generation process itself.

Finally, the report must be understood to be a preliminary and partial account of civil-military relations in Russia during the period under study. This is a function of the short period between data collection, analysis, and writing and the events themselves, the partial and biased nature of the data quality and availability, and considerable uncertainty over actor intentions, motivations, and interactions that are unobservable at present.

These issues all render this report a preliminary “first look” at—rather than a final statement on—the ongoing and evolving issue of wartime civil-military relations in Russia.

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<sup>13</sup> For an important and complementary report on methodological limitations while studying the wartime Russian military, see Maria Engqvist, ed., *Russian Military Capabilities at War: Reflections on Methodology and Sources Post-2022*, Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI), Apr. 2024, <https://www.foi.se/en/foi/reports/report-summary.html?reportNo=FOI-R--5502--SE>.

## THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES

This section provides theoretical background and a conceptual framework to understand Russian civil-military relations in application to both the prewar past and the wartime present. It first introduces the Russian case as one of relatively stable civil-military relations historically, a longstanding relationship which faces an extraordinary test under current wartime conditions. It then discusses civilian control of the military as the key to understanding interactions between military and political elites. In doing so, it presents a conceptual framework that disaggregates this core concern into a set of category dimensions, adding greater analytic granularity and providing a schema to capture changes as well as continuities in the relationship.

Finally, it notes the comparative challenge of the Russian case to existing accounts of civil-military relations, especially in authoritarian regimes, and provides a baseline, prewar characterization using the section's conceptual framework, which informs the report's analysis of developments since 2022. A supplemental appendix (Appendix A: Key Russian Civil-Military Actors) provides further details on the core, mixed, and peripheral actors within the civil-military relationship that are relevant to these theoretical characterizations.

### The importance of civil-military subordination

Civil-military relations in Russia have undergone a profound shift since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. The Russian Armed Forces and its leadership had long been viewed as one of the notable success stories of a stable and institutionalized relationship between political and military elites under authoritarian political conditions, one in which military authorities have been clearly and permanently subordinate to political leadership.<sup>14</sup> This condition of military subordination predates the Russian Federation. During the Soviet period, civilian domination of the military was described as "subjective control" by the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington because of the direct use of Communist Party cells inserted throughout the Russian Armed Forces, which blended the political into the military sphere, as well as the careful creation of institutionalized cadre mechanisms that ensured political control over military decision-makers with access to coercive force.<sup>15</sup>

The result of efforts during the Soviet Union (USSR) era to maintain political authority over the military resulted in a nearly unbroken stretch of relatively

<sup>14</sup> For a partial list, see, for example, Shamiev, "Civil-Military Relations and Russia's Post-Soviet Military Culture"; Brian D. Taylor, "Organizational Culture and the Future of Russian Civil-Military Relations," in *Politics and the Russian Army Civil-Military Relations, 1689–2000*, ed. Brian D. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Robert Burl Brannon, *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (Ashgate Publishing, 2009); Thomas Gomart, *Russian Civil-Military Relations: Putin's Legacy* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008); Lajos F. Szaszdi, *Russian Civil-Military Relations and the Origins of the Second Chechen War* (University Press of America, 2008); Renz, "Russia's 'Force Structures'"; David Betz, *Civil-Military Relations in Russia and Eastern Europe* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Dale R. Herspring, *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (Indiana University Press, 1996); Kimberly Marten Zisk, "Civil-Military Relations in the New Russia," *National Council for Soviet and East European Research*, June 1993; Timothy J. Colton and Thane Gustafson, eds., *Soldiers and the Soviet State: Civil-Military Relations from Brezhnev to Gorbachev* (Princeton University Press, 1990); and Timothy J. Colton, *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority: The Structure of Soviet Military Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> On "subjective" and "objective" control, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), and Dayne E. Nix, "American Civil-Military Relations: Samuel P. Huntington and the Political Dimensions of Military Professionalism," *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2012), pp. 1–17.

amicable civil-military relations. Tensions, although extant, remained embedded and channeled within institutional confines connecting political principals in the Communist Party to military decision-makers in the armed forces.<sup>16</sup> The most dangerous breakdown in Soviet civil-military relations occurred during the failed coup against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991, which was not supported by the broader military elite.<sup>17</sup>

Even so, it is notable that it took until the final year before the USSR's dissolution for such a level of civil-military breakdown to take place, and that the military-led State Committee on the State of Emergency proved to be so incompetent and unsupported.<sup>18</sup> Two other periods of heightened civil-military tensions of note during the Soviet era occurred as a result of leadership concerns about the popularity of Marshal Georgiy Zhukov in the later post-war Stalinist period as well as Zhukov's later efforts to increase the autonomy of the USSR Armed Forces under Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.<sup>19</sup>

More minor examples of tensions between the civilian authorities and the military included when Gorbachev engaged in a major round of personnel firings of high-level officers in the wake of the Matthias Rust incident in 1987, when a German-piloted aircraft flew through Russian air defenses

without issue and landed in Red Square in Moscow.<sup>20</sup> That incident led to the firing of Minister of Defense and Marshal of the USSR Sergei Sokolov and the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Air Defense Forces—and former World War II fighter pilot ace—Chief Marshal Alexander Koldunov.<sup>21</sup> Yet this act, if anything, underscored the continued civilian dominance of the civil-military relationship.

The immediate post-Soviet period under Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin proved to be an era of military quiescence, despite internal and neighboring separatist conflicts, painful economic restructuring and budget contractions, and political turbulence throughout the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> The loss of the leading and embedded role of the Communist Party meant that Russian civil-military relations could not be characterized as a form of subjective control any longer. However, the Russian military transitioned to a similarly subordinate position of civilian control that can be fruitfully compared to the emblematic American version of "objective control," with distinct, separate roles and overall civilian dominance.

The first Putin administration, formally elected in March 2000, therefore may have inherited a complicated and haggard military apparatus, but one which maintained a peaceful, if sometimes tense or unhappy, subordination to political authority in

<sup>16</sup> Zisk, "Civil-Military Relations in the New Russia"; Colton and Gustafson, *Soldiers and the Soviet State*; and Colton, *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority*. See also the discussion of the Soviet interagency process in Anya Fink, *The General Staff's Throw-Weight: The Russian Military's Role in and Views of US-Russian Arms Control*, CNA, IRM-2024-U-037906-Final, Mar. 2024, <https://www.cna.org/reports/2024/03/russian-military-role-in-us-russian-arms-control>.

<sup>17</sup> Vladislav M. Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> John W. R. Lepingwell, "Soviet Civil-Military Relations and the August Coup," *World Politics* 44, no. 4 (1992), pp. 539–72; Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union*.

<sup>19</sup> Colton and Gustafson, *Soldiers and the Soviet State*; Colton, *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority*.

<sup>20</sup> Tom LeCompte, "The Notorious Flight of Mathias Rust," *Air & Space Magazine*, July 2005, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/air-space-magazine/the-notorious-flight-of-mathias-rust-7101888/>.

<sup>21</sup> Archie Brown, "Perestroika and the End of the Cold War," *Cold War History* 7, no. 1 (2007), pp. 1–17.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, "Organizational Culture and the Future of Russian Civil-Military Relations"; Szaszdi, *Russian Civil-Military Relations and the Origins of the Second Chechen War*; Renz, "Russia's 'Force Structures' and the Study of Civil-Military Relations"; Betz, *Civil-Military Relations in Russia and Eastern Europe*; and Herspring, *Russian Civil-Military Relations*.

the Kremlin.<sup>23</sup> Core emphases in the civil-military domain continued to be on maintaining civilian control of the Russian Armed Forces, as well as issues of military reform and professionalization.<sup>24</sup> This state of affairs remained generally stable over the following 22 years even as Putin set to work gradually constructing and consolidating a cohesive and resilient authoritarian political regime.<sup>25</sup>

This stable situation no longer exists. Civil-military relations have changed dramatically since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Two disruptive developments stand out. First, "irregularized" private and parastatal semi-autonomous military organizations have emerged in parallel to standard hierarchical lines of command during the first two years of the war. These have ultimately proved to be disastrous to the stability of Russian civil-military relations, leading to an armed rebellion carried out as part of a direct negotiating strategy between the most important irregularized force in the war (PMC Wagner) and the Russian president himself. The use of irregularized forces at mass scale for combat operations is an innovation of the Russia-Ukraine war that expanded on previous experimentation during the Syrian Civil War and elsewhere in the 2010s.<sup>26</sup>

Second, Russian political leadership has dictated strategic-, operational-, and even tactical-level approaches at different times over the course of the Russia-Ukraine war. Relatedly, personnel changes among upper-echelon campaign positions have been frequent and, in some cases, politically

motivated. Finally, Russia's military leadership has lost public, and to some degree elite, legitimacy over the course of these events not least because of the development of a critical but prowar public sphere, as well as the general involvement of more civilians in military-related tasks due to the strains of the war, from occupation duties to the production of equipment for the war effort. These developments may have medium- and long-term consequences that are difficult to predict.

Importantly, Russian military leadership remains an active participant in these dynamics. Key military-bureaucratic officials at the top of the military hierarchy have sought to bolster their position by taking a hard line on intra-military politics with rival or contesting officers. This strategy worked surprisingly well after some reversals, although events in 2024 have illustrated their ultimate limits.<sup>27</sup>

For all these reasons, the wartime Russian civil-military relationship cannot be characterized as static and contented, but rather as a dynamic field with considerable tensions having developed over a short two-and-a-half-year period. It is vital to assess the increasing uncertainty and instability in Russian civil-military relations because these dynamics interact directly with the Russian Armed Forces' ability to conduct and sustain a local or regional war beyond state borders. Indeed, all aspects of the civil-military relationship likely affect battlefield effectiveness, operational capacity, and strategic decision-making in some way, although the degree or terms of influence vary widely.

<sup>23</sup> Gomart, *Russian Civil-Military Relations*.

<sup>24</sup> Dale R. Herspring, "Putin and the Re-Emergence of the Russian Military," *Problems of Post-Communism* 54, no. 1 (2007), pp. 17–27.

<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Gel'man, *Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015); Nikolay Petrov, Maria Lipman, and Henry E. Hale, "Three Dilemmas of Hybrid Regime Governance: Russia from Putin to Putin," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2014), pp. 1–26.

<sup>26</sup> Kimberly Marten et al., *Potential Russian Uses of Paramilitaries in Eurasia*, Center for New American Security, Jan. 14, 2024, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/potential-russian-uses-of-paramilitaries-in-eurasia>; Nathaniel Reynolds, *Putin's Not-So-Secret Mercenaries: Patronage, Geopolitics, and the Wagner Group*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2019.

<sup>27</sup> For an overview of a selected set of key civil-military actors both centrally and more peripherally relevant to the broader relationship and its dynamics, see Figure 1 at the end of this section as well as Appendix A: Key Russian Civil-Military Actors for further information and a more detailed set of characterizations.



## Theoretical approaches to civil-military relations

The study of civil-military relations primarily considers the institutional and power relations between a given country's decision-making political elite and the military leadership responsible for conducting combat and strategic operations.<sup>28</sup> Research on civil-military relations often seeks to answer a diverse set of questions pertaining to political order, policy-making and development, inter- and intra-institutional conflict and coordination, organizational culture, state-society dynamics, and other areas of interest relevant to the military and its relation to nonmilitary components of the social and political world.

As a result, the academic and policy literature on civil-military relations encompasses a multitude of research disciplines, from security studies, international relations, and political science to organizational and management studies and legal and constitutional theory. This literature is informed by a variety of public policy, sociological, cultural, and anthropological approaches.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, research on civil-military relations covers a wide and varied set of principal-agent relations between decision-making elite actors across a range of political and military institutions.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, research questions raised most often in the study of civil-military relations ultimately relate to the primary concern of maintaining *civilian*

*control* of the military and identifying when there are deviations (traditionally viewed negatively) from this normative baseline.<sup>31</sup> Scholarly interest in civilian control from both theoretical and normative perspectives has driven the study of civil-military relations both in the US and in other research communities for decades. For example, in a recent review, the scholar Chiara Ruffa has emphasized the dominant place of Huntington's influential work *The Soldier and the State* and its normative conceptualization of ideal civil-military relations, which "is premised on the clearly defined division of responsibility between the military and civilians, a division that would create an apolitical ethos among officers who would abstain from engaging in all dimensions of politics and policy debates."<sup>32</sup> The goal of ensuring stable civilian control is not limited to researchers, but it is an active and important point of interest for political and military leaderships cross-nationally and regularly taught in military academies and professional military education institutions.

Civilian control is a general statement on a given civil-military relationship, which very rarely changes over time except during truly extraordinary circumstances, such as outright regime changes. Yet there can be a great deal of dynamism hidden beneath this characterization that ultimately affects how civilian and military elites—as well as the institutions they run—interact, negotiate, and take decisions. Where institutional deference lies, when personnel can be changed (and who decides), the chain of command and relevant privileges and roles

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, chapters in *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, ed. Florina Cristiana Matei, Carolyn Halladay, and Thomas C. Bruneau (Routledge, 2012), and Mackubin T. Owens, "Civil-Military Relations," in *Oxford Reference International Studies Encyclopaedia*, ed. Robert A. Denemark and Renée Marlin-Bennett (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> See chapters in Matei, Halladay, and Bruneau, *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*.

<sup>30</sup> Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*.

<sup>32</sup> Chiara Ruffa, "Change and Continuity? #Reviewing Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations," review of *Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations: Military Society, Politics and Modern War*, ed. Lionel Beehner, Risa Brooks, and Daniel Maurer, The Strategy Bridge, Sept. 2023, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2023/9/26/change-and-continuity-reviewing-reconsidering-american-civil-military-relations>.

along its hierarchy, and the ad hoc or regular nature of these interactions are all important components of the civil-military relationship. Similarly, the locus of decision-making at foreign policy, strategic, operational, and tactical levels can shift over time either formally or informally.

Table 2 conceptualizes five dimensions of civil-military relations that delineate key components of civilian and military decision-making, influence, and relevance. Instead of a single characterization of civil-military relations, this framework assumes a multifaceted dynamic that in turn informs the overall relational picture. Separating out these dimensions allows for a more disaggregated approach to the study civil-military relations and provides a higher degree of analytic granularity than would be possible with a unidimensional approach.

All these dimensions can be understood as components making up an overall image of civil-military relations related to but more specified than the core concern about civilian control—does it exist, how do institutions exist within the dynamic, in what ways do they interact, and who takes lead when and where?

The dimension of *control* relates to the direct question of which side is the dominant entity in the relationship overall. The dimension of *authority* captures how assertive or influential each side is on strategic and policy questions within the context of the relationship, regardless of formal control. The dimension of *hierarchy* typifies the constitutional and statutory privileges related to civilian and military institutions. The dimension of *institutionalization* describes the degree of regularity (or informality and possibly corruption) in the relationship and in interactions across key elites and institutions.

Finally, the dimension of *autonomy* identifies the critical degree of internal self-governance (versus political meddling) on the part of the armed forces themselves.

All these dimensions are related, complementary, and potentially correlated. They are therefore not meant to be used as a strict typology, but rather as guiding conceptual categories. Even so, they provide a fuller picture of the civil-military relationship and allow us to better specify exactly what is changing during periods of evolution or disruption. This study therefore uses this framework to characterize the Russian civil-military relationship, both before the war and in wartime conditions, in order to show both changes and continuities in the relationship.

### *Civil-military relations in civilian-dominated authoritarian regimes*

Although the successful maintenance of civilian control over the military has been a through-line in civil-military relations in Western democracies since the Cold War, patterns of civil-military relations cross-nationally are considerably more diverse.<sup>33</sup> The traditional antipole of civilian control of the military in comparative perspective is the widespread existence of long-standing military dictatorships, temporary military juntas, and personalist authoritarian regimes. These military-dominated regimes produce a variety of structural and informal civil-military formats in which sustained and stable civilian control is hardly assured, if present at all.

Nevertheless, a simple binary of civilian control versus military control mapping on to democratic and nondemocratic practice is insufficient to describe civil-military relationship patterns across

<sup>33</sup> Moses Khisa and Christopher Day, "Reconceptualising Civil-Military Relations in Africa," *Civil Wars* 22, no. 2–3 (2020), pp. 174–97; N. Ngoma, "Civil-Military Relations in Africa: Navigating Uncharted Waters," *African Security Review* 15, no. 4 (2006), pp. 98–111; David R. Mares and Rafael Martínez, eds., *Debating Civil-Military Relations in Latin America* (Liverpool University Press, 2013); and David Pion-Berlin, "Study of Civil-Military Relations in New Democracies," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 3 (2011), pp. 222–30.

Table 2. Conceptual dimensions of civil-military relations

Dimension	Conceptualization	Characterizations
<b>Control</b>	<i>Which primary elite actor or organization is the ultimate principal in military and strategic decision-making?</i>	<p><b>Political control</b> (i.e., the civilian political executive)</p> <p><b>Military control</b> (i.e., the military leadership)</p>
<b>Authority</b>	<i>How is the flow of authority characterized in the polity?</i>	<p><b>Civilian assertiveness</b> (i.e., political elites determine decision-making)</p> <p><b>Civilian deference</b> (i.e., political elites defer to military elites in decision-making)</p> <p><b>Military influence</b> (i.e., military elites influence and interfere in political elite decisions)</p> <p><b>Military dominance</b> (i.e., military elites determine policy and strategy over political elites)</p>
<b>Hierarchy</b>	<i>What are the structural lines of authority between civilian and military decision-making entities and processes?</i>	<p><b>Formal civilian hierarchy</b> (i.e., the constitutional structure privileges civilian leadership relative to military leadership in a pyramidal chain of authority)</p> <p><b>Mixed hierarchy</b> (i.e., the constitutional structure is undefined or otherwise grants different privileges to political and military elites)</p> <p><b>Formal military hierarchy</b> (i.e., the constitutional structure privileges military leadership on issues of national security and other reserved issue areas)</p>
<b>Institutionalization</b>	<i>How institutionalized and regularized are relations between civilian and military elites/ organizations?</i>	<p><b>Institutionalized</b> (i.e., civil-military relations are stable and based in regular patterns of control, authority, and hierarchy)</p> <p><b>Noninstitutionalized</b> (i.e., civil-military relations are unstable, shifting, or dependent on conditions that vary widely over time and across issue areas)</p>
<b>Autonomy</b>	<i>To what degree is the military leadership or the military as an organization able to govern itself and make internal decisions?</i>	<p><b>Autonomous</b> (i.e., military leadership is allowed autonomy and self-governance in internal matters)</p> <p><b>Integrated</b> (i.e., military leadership is constrained by significant interference from political leadership)</p>

Source: CNA.

time and space. Several major authoritarian regimes have maintained clear civilian control over the armed forces and related security structures of their respective states for long periods of time, while less established democracies have sometimes found themselves with halting or consistent military influence on their politics and decision-making processes.<sup>34</sup>

Given that authoritarian regimes by nature are not subject to popular control and constraint through contested, multiparty elections, the question of regime survival through elite cooptation and coordination is particularly pressing.<sup>35</sup> As military leadership is a major elite group in any polity, authoritarian regimes have conflicting interests in ensuring the loyalty of those in control of its armed forces.<sup>36</sup> This is often understood as a potential tradeoff between loyalty to the authoritarian executive on the one hand and the benefits of efficient military decision-making and the overall autonomy of the armed forces' internal organization on the other.<sup>37</sup>

An important subset of contemporary authoritarian regimes, including the Russian Federation, has maintained strict civilian control over the military for long periods. Historically, communist party-states have been especially effective in maintaining civilian control, primarily through the integration of military authorities into the ruling party (i.e., the civilian political authority and its fundamental organizing structure) that acts as a means of close political oversight.<sup>38</sup> Authoritarian regimes with strong civilian control of the military may therefore benefit from both regime stability (they are unlikely to be overthrown) as well as military professionalism (the military can focus on military tasks and is not distracted by integration into the political system).

Relative to military juntas or personalist dictatorships, which are regularly studied for their personalized, irregular, or military-dominated political elites, party regimes have a successful track record of constraining military elites and subordinating military authority to civilian decision-making.<sup>39</sup> Important examples

<sup>34</sup> Herspring, *Civil-Military Relations in Communist Systems*; Pion-Berlin, "Study of Civil-Military Relations in New Democracies"; G. E. Frerks, "Civil-Military Cooperation: A Balancing Act Under Precarious Conditions," in *Peace, Security and Development in an Era of Globalization: The Integrated Security Approach Viewed from a Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Glijen Molier and Eva Nieuwenhuis (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009), pp. 207–23; and Paul Chambers, "Precarious Path: The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in the Philippines," *Asian Security* 8, no. 2 (2012), pp. 138–63.

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Geddes, Joseph George Wright, and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (Cambridge UP, 2018); Milan W. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Holger Albrecht and Dorothy Ohl, "Exit, Resistance, Loyalty: Military Behavior During Unrest in Authoritarian Regimes," *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 1 (2016), pp. 38–52; Caitlin Talmadge, "Different Threats, Different Militaries: Explaining Organizational Practices in Authoritarian Armies," *Security Studies* 25, no. 1 (2016), pp. 111–41; and Aurel Croissant and Tobias Selge, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Comparing Military (Non-) Cooperation During Authoritarian Regime Crises in the Arab World and Asia," in *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, ed. Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2016), pp. 97–124.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Powell, "Leader Survival Strategies and the Onset of Civil Conflict: A Coup-Proofing Paradox," *Armed Forces & Society* 45, no. 1 (2019), pp. 27–44; Jun Koga Sudduth, "Coup Risk, Coup-Proofing and Leader Survival," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017), pp. 3–15; and Holger Albrecht, "Does Coup-Proofing Work? Political-Military Relations in Authoritarian Regimes amid the Arab Uprisings," *Mediterranean Politics* 20, no. 1 (2015), pp. 36–54.

<sup>38</sup> Colton and Gustafson, *Soldiers and the Soviet State*; Colton, *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority*.

<sup>39</sup> Dan Slater et al., "The Origins of Military Supremacy in Dictatorships," *Journal of Democracy* 34, no. 3 (2023), pp. 5–20.

of party-based, civilian-dominated authoritarian regimes include the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, and North Korea, although there is notable variation at more granular levels of analysis.<sup>40</sup>

Civilian-dominated authoritarian regimes are not limited to party states, however. The contemporary Russian Federation is one of the most notable examples of a stable, fairly personalist authoritarian regime keeping a close and authoritative eye on military interference in politics, although other exemplar cases include party-dominated electoral authoritarian regimes in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. In fact, the post-Soviet Russian case is notable for featuring clear civilian domination over the armed forces while discarding the party-state or party-dominant features of other successful civilian-dominated authoritarian regimes.<sup>41</sup>

This suggests that the Russian case is of particular interest: a long-standing and resilient authoritarian regime with a top-tier military that does not need communist-style party control to ensure civilian domination. Without such mechanisms of control, Russia relies on the voluntary deference of the armed forces and the continuing legacy of military subordination.

### Prewar Russian civil-military relations

Recent approaches to understanding Russian civil-military relations have traditionally focused on professionalization (the deepening of objective or subjective civilian control of the armed forces, promoting institutional efficiencies, and developing a healthy internal culture) or reform (the degree of autonomy and direction in shaping and reshaping the organization and capabilities of the armed forces), as well as military-society relations (the degrees of the militarization of society relative to a more civilian-dominant societal-cultural environment).<sup>42</sup> These research efforts have provided key insights into the overall characterization of Russia's civil-military relationship before the Russia-Ukraine war, with a surprisingly consensus view on the dynamic.

At a high level of abstraction, the prewar Russian case represents an outlier relative to most other authoritarian regimes. Using the conceptual framework presented above, the Russian Federation can be characterized as having maintained a civil-military relationship typified by *political control*, *civilian assertiveness*, a *formal civilian hierarchy*, *institutionalized relations*, and *internal autonomy* (see Table 3). In this sense, and in important ways, the relationship has broadly paralleled a given Western democracy's ideal-typical form of civil-military relations, although under a fully authoritarian political order.

<sup>40</sup> Aurel Croissant, "Vietnam: The Socialist Party State," in *Comparative Politics of Southeast Asia: An Introduction to Governments and Political Regimes: An Introduction to Governments and Political Regimes* (Springer Cham, 2018), pp. 367–402; Jaehwan Lim, "Explaining Military Reforms Under Xi Jinping: Military Effectiveness, Power Consolidation, and Party-Military Relations in China," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 11, no. 2 (2022), pp. 264–81; and Larry Catá Backer, "The Party as Polity, the Communist Party, and the Chinese Constitutional State: A Theory of State-Party Constitutionalism," Penn State Legal Studies Research Paper, May 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Renz, "Russia's 'Force Structures' and the Study of Civil-Military Relations"; Betz, *Civil-Military Relations in Russia and Eastern Europe*; Herspring, *Russian Civil-Military Relations*; and Zisk, "Civil-Military Relations in the New Russia."

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of professionalization in the Russian Armed Forces, see, for example, Michael Connell, Brooke Lennox, and Paul Schwartz, *Training in the Russian Armed Forces: An Assessment of Recent Reforms and Their Impact on Russian Operations in Ukraine*, CNA, DRM-2023-U-035678-Final, Sept. 2023, <https://www.cna.org/reports/2023/09/training-in-the-russian-armed-forces>; Keith Crane, Olga Oliker, and Brian Nichiporuk, *Trends in Russia's Armed Forces: An Overview of Budgets and Capabilities*, RAND, RR-2573-A, 2019, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2573.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2573.html); and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Russia's Military Modernization: An Assessment*, Sept. 2020, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/russias-military-modernisation>.

Table 3. Dimensions of prewar Russian civil-military relations, 1992–2022

Dimensions	Characterizations
<b>Control</b>	Political control (stable over period)
<b>Authority</b>	Civilian assertiveness (stable or growing over period)
<b>Hierarchy</b>	Formal civilian hierarchy (stable over period)
<b>Institutionalization</b>	Institutionalized relations (growing over period)
<b>Autonomy</b>	Internal autonomy (present, albeit with periodic reform interventions)

Source: CNA.

Control, authority, and hierarchy have been largely unchanged across the period; at most, Russia has seen a strengthening of the civilian side of the relationship. The Russian Federation, as noted, has maintained clear civilian control over the armed forces. Furthermore, the leadership of the Russian Armed Forces has broadly sustained its relatively deferential position in decision-making, deferring to the civilian elite for major strategic and foreign policy decisions and preferring to implement — rather than direct—strategic thinking and rely on the Kremlin to determine high-level military goals.<sup>43</sup> The authority of the civilian leadership has been further seen through reform efforts, discussed a little later in this section, that have showcased the careful assertiveness of the Putin regime, which has sought to change periodically how the military is structured and conducts its affairs.

Meanwhile, in terms of hierarchy, the Russian Armed Forces formally defer to the president as commander-in-chief, and this has not changed since the collapse of the USSR. The formal close and subordinate relationship of the Minister of Defense to the president—the key connection between the

political system and the cadres of upper-tier military elites in the MOD and across the cadre of flag officers in the General Staff, the Military Districts, and operational commands—has similarly remained stable.

In the Soviet period, certain institutional bastions within the Russian Armed Forces were believed to be particularly powerful as decision-making entities. Writing on the Soviet experience, Rose Gottemoeller highlights the influence of the General Staff in particular:

In contrast to intramilitary conflict in the United States, which usually involves rivalry between or among services, that in the Soviet Union tends to arise between the General Staff and the services. The General Staff has traditionally held enormous power in the Soviet Union, serving as the main channel for requesting resources from the Communist Party and government leadership and for receiving party and government

<sup>43</sup> Valery Konyshchev and Alexander Sergunin, “Military,” in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Andrei Tsygankov (Routledge, 2018), pp. 168–81; Igor Sutyagin and Justin Bronk, “I. Military Force as a Tool of Russian Foreign Policy,” *Whitehall Papers* 89, no. 1 (2017), pp. 10–42; Szaszdi, *Russian Civil-Military Relations and the Origins of the Second Chechen War*.

decisions regarding the services. Its commanding position in the defense planning structure has thus made it a focal point for intramilitary conflict and confrontation.<sup>44</sup>

Yet while the General Staff is a central institutional hub for planning and operational decision-making within the Russian military overall, it does not overstep its bounds vis-à-vis the political system and has not sought to undermine the status quo of civil-military relations.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the last decade before the war saw a close tandem relationship between the chief of the General Staff and the minister of defense, the latter of whom was known specifically for his loyalty and deference, in turn, to the Russian president.

The largest uncertainty in the prewar civil-military picture in Russia lies in the military's own internal autonomy, given that Russian civilian leadership has in the past intervened forcefully and disruptively to reform and modify the organizational structure and internal practices of the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, since the late 2000s, Putin has felt comfortable putting officials without a real military background in charge as minister of defense. Even so, the Russian military leadership continues to enjoy significant day-to-day and year-to-year self-governance features.<sup>47</sup>

Much of the writing on Russian civil-military relations has focused especially on reformism and resistance, which provides evidence that military autonomy is perhaps the most unstable part of the pre-2022 civil-military relationship. In the Soviet period, this was most evident in the Ogarkov-era effort to revolutionize the USSR military's approach to technological change.<sup>48</sup> In Putin's Russia, the Serdyukov Reforms and their subsequent changes have taken center stage following Russia's self-perceived poor performance in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008.<sup>49</sup>

What is relevant to note is that reform—which is related to the autonomy element of civil-military relations in particular—is not the primary lens through which we should view civil-military relations in wartime Russia today. Russia has not undertaken an internal reform of the military during the active phases of the conflict so far and is unlikely to do so. Our focus is therefore rather questions of leadership, strategic decision-making, and the interaction between political and military authorities with regard to personnel choice and operational-strategic priorities.

At a more granular level, there are important caveats to the broad characterization above, as variation occurs within these large conceptual brackets. Civilian

<sup>44</sup> Rose E. Gottemoeller, *Conflict and Consensus in the Soviet Armed Forces*, RAND, No. R-3759-AF, Oct. 1989.

<sup>45</sup> This is distinct from other cases of powerful general staffs, such as the German General Staff of the First World War. See, for example, Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff: 1657–1945* (Barnes & Noble, reprint edition, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Alexander Golts, "Reform: The End of the First Phase—Will There Be a Second?," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27, no. 1 (2014), pp. 131–46; Athena Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War," *Demokratizatsiya* 21, no. 3 (2013), p. 339; and Charles K. Bartles, "Defense Reforms of Russian Defense Minister Anatolii Serdyukov," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 1 (2011), pp. 55–80.

<sup>47</sup> Kirill Shamiev, "Against a Bitter Pill: The Role of Interest Groups in Armed Forces Reform in Russia," *Armed Forces & Society* 47, no. 2 (2021), pp. 319–42.

<sup>48</sup> Brian A. Davenport, "The Ogarkov Ouster: The Development of Soviet Military Doctrine and Civil/Military Relations in the 1980s," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 14, no. 2 (1991), pp. 129–47; F. Stephen Larrabee, "Gorbachev and the Soviet Military," *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 5 (1988), pp. 1002–26; and Dale R. Herspring, "Nikolay Ogarkov and the Scientific-Technical Revolution in Soviet Military Affairs," *Comparative Strategy* 6, no. 1 (1987), pp. 29–59.

<sup>49</sup> Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform"; Gregory P. Lannon, "Russia's New Look Army Reforms and Russian Foreign Policy," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 1 (2011), pp. 26–54; and Bartles, "Defense Reforms of Russian Defense Minister Anatolii Serdyukov."

control of the military is uncontested, but it should be noted that the elite core of the contemporary Russian regime is highly penetrated by current and former security service personnel (termed *siloviki*), including the Russian president himself.<sup>50</sup>

Russian elite politics is thus heavily securitized, and elites who are trained in coercive, hierarchical institutions are overrepresented in key regime positions.<sup>51</sup> One recent study suggests that between 29 and 39 percent of the upper-tier Russian elite has substantive ties to the security services, and the percentage may be even higher within certain key executive decision-making and decision-influencing bodies, such as the Security Council and some subsections of the Presidential Administration.<sup>52</sup>

However, it is important to note that security service officials come from distinct organizational backgrounds and skill sets relative to military personnel per se.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, a key point of curiosity in the current Russian regime is the strong influence of security service figures, which is nevertheless largely firewalled and unpenetrated by officials from the Russian Armed Forces itself. Rather than military figures becoming increasingly enmeshed into Russia's authoritarian politics, it has been a separate category of elites associated with coercive institutions that has done so over the last two decades.

This is ultimately important because the securitization of the Russian political elite has meant that *siloviki* are relatively close to or embedded within major strategic decision-making centers. In addition to the prominence of elites with security backgrounds in the Presidential Administration, the prominence of Russia's Security Council has risen considerably during the last decade under the influence of Putin's trusted confidant, Nikolai Patrushev.<sup>54</sup> Security service influence therefore does not factor so much on the military side, but it has become an important part of Russia's authoritarian political order—and therefore it involves actors of relevance on the political side of the relationship.

### *The proliferation of actors in the civil-military relationship*

One point of interest that follows from the above is the general proliferation of actors within the wider ecosystem of Russia's civil-military relationship since the start of the war, alongside latent trends that had begun to develop in the prewar period. Traditionally, the relationship has been tightly bound to a set of core institutions responsible for civilian and military decision-making at the elite level—the presidency, the MOD, and the General Staff. However, for several reasons, this picture has become more complicated.

<sup>50</sup> *Siloviki* translates as “men of force” or “strongmen,” referring to their place in security structures known as power ministries or power structures (e.g., *siloviye struktury*), such as the Federal Security Service or the Ministry of Internal Affairs. On Russia's broader elite classes, see, for example, Andrei Yakovlev, “Composition of the Ruling Elite, Incentives for Productive Usage of Rents, and Prospects for Russia's Limited Access Order,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 37, no. 5 (2021), pp. 417–34.

<sup>51</sup> David W. Rivera and Sharon Werning Rivera, “Militaryization of the Russian Elite Under Putin: What We Know, What We Think We Know (But Don't), and What We Need to Know,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 4 (2018), pp. 221–32; David W. Rivera and Sharon Werning Rivera, “Is Russia a Militocracy? Conceptual Issues and Extant Findings Regarding Elite Militarization,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2014), pp. 27–50.

<sup>52</sup> Maria Snegovaya and Kirill Petrov, “Long Soviet Shadows: The Nomenklatura Ties of Putin Elites,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 38, no. 4 (2022), p. 338. Note that studies with broader definitions of the Russian elite estimate that between 20 and 32 percent of that group have security service backgrounds. See Rivera and Rivera, “Is Russia a Militocracy?” and Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White, “The Sovietization of Russian Politics,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 25, no. 4 (2009), pp. 283–309.

<sup>53</sup> Snegovaya and Petrov, “Long Soviet Shadows”; Andrei Soldatov and Michael Rochlitz, “The Siloviki in Russian Politics,” in *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin's Russia*, ed. Daniel Treisman (Brookings Institution Press, 2018), pp. 83–108.

<sup>54</sup> Ekaterina Schulmann and Mark Galeotti, “A Tale of Two Councils: The Changing Roles of the Security and State Councils During the Transformation Period of Modern Russian Politics,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 37, no. 5 (2021), pp. 453–69.



In short, a fuller picture of the civil-military relationship includes both core and peripheral actors that affect institutional dynamics, decision-making influence, and even the legitimacy of military and civilian elites within the broader system of Russia's authoritarian regime. This is a unique condition of the war experience of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has strained the capacity of the Russian Armed Forces, tested its leadership, and mobilized sections of society previously uninvolved in military tasks. Appendix A: Key Russian Civil-Military Actors discusses this ecosystem in detail but is noted here briefly. Core actors in the relationship are as expected and can be divided into the civilian and military sides of the civil-military ecosystem. This is depicted visually in Figure 1.

Core political actors in the relationship are the president (and associated decision-makers in the Kremlin and Presidential Administration), the Security Council, and the security services, most importantly the Federal Security Service (FSB). Core military actors include the MOD and the General Staff. In addition to these core actors, there are two groups that mix both military and political sides of the equation and have developed since the war: the prowar public sphere of war correspondents and the irregularized armed groupings led by politically connected "political-military barons" such as Prigozhin and Ramzan Kadyrov. Finally, there are important peripheral actors, such as the United Russia party—responsible for reconstruction efforts in the occupied territories of Ukraine—and volunteer groups that have stepped in as civilians to supplement and support weapons production, medical services, and logistics efforts.

This is perhaps the final wrinkle in understanding the Russian civil-military relationship. In peacetime, the relationship was stable and involved fewer moving pieces. In today's wartime conditions, though, this does not hold—the relationship is more strained, yet it also encompasses more groups than before.

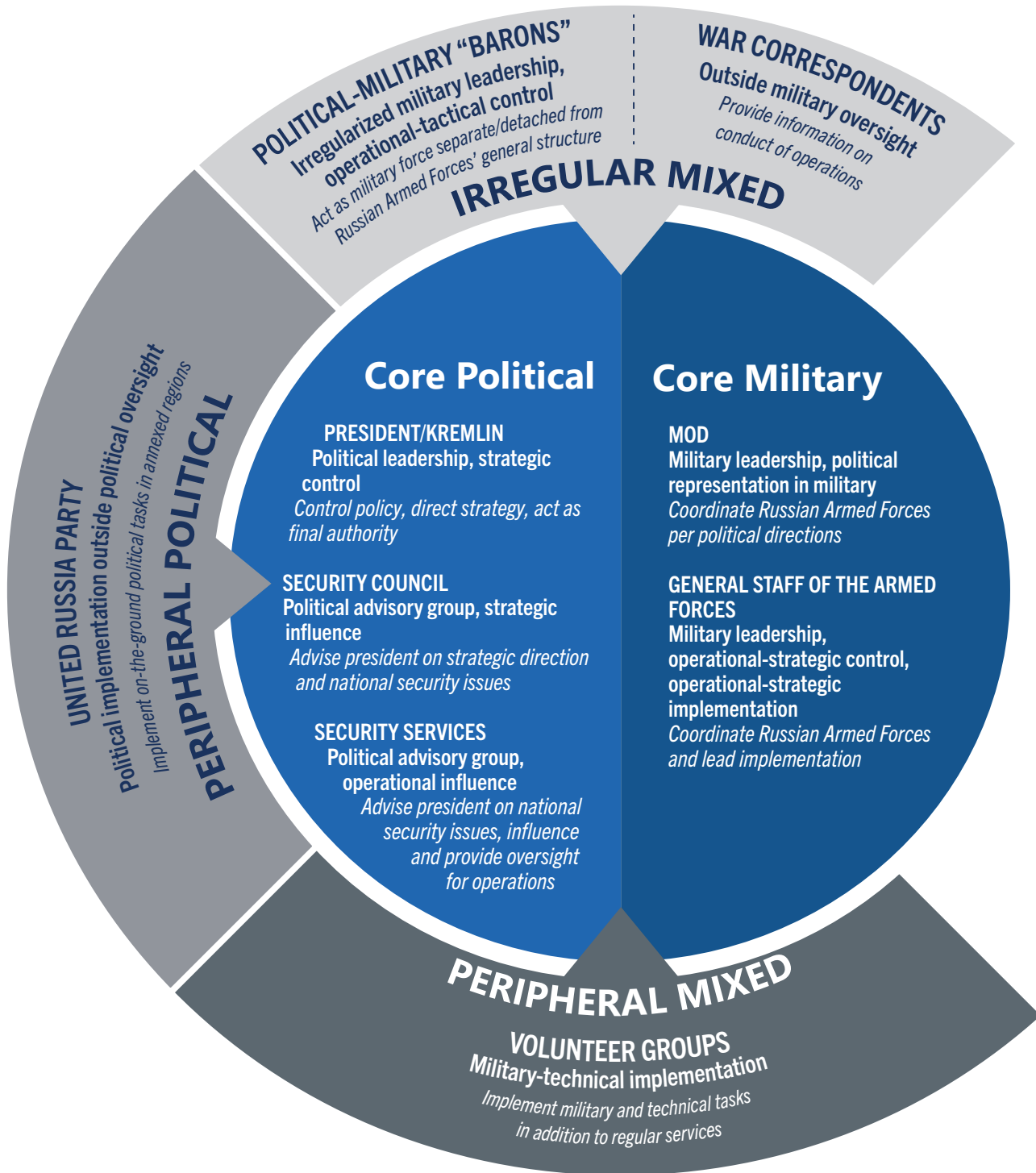
### Theoretical inputs and observational analysis

The theoretical emphasis on civilian control of the military in the field of civil-military relations is ultimately derived from core motivating questions concerning the danger of coups and the general intervention of military elites with access to coercive force into public and informal politics. Regime change is naturally the most disruptive event a polity can experience for any given political order, but even more minor or subdued military intervention is widely deemed to be a pernicious and destabilizing influence on political life.

Researchers focus on civil-military relations in large part to seek to understand when, why, and under what conditions militaries are likely to take such actions, or to be in the position to threaten to do so for their own purposes. Every instance of stress, strain, or conflict in relations between civilian and military elites can produce tensions that may result in catastrophic consequences. However, intrusive civilian control can also have unintended consequences, resulting in militaries that may lack autonomy or become pawns for political games, never develop leadership qualities such as initiative, daring, and productive experimentation, and become sclerotic because of overly strict oversight.

The conceptual framework presented in this section provides a baseline view of what Russia's civil-military relations looked like before the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022. The theoretical discussion develops the major issue areas relevant to the civil-military picture overall. Taken together, they provide a more nuanced understanding of what the civilian-controlled military of the modern Russian Federation looks like and how it has functioned for the last two decades. Although notably characterized by a stable pattern of subordination and regular order, this civil-military relationship has never been tested in a major wartime scenario.

Figure 1. Schema of key Russian civil-military actors



Source: CNA.

Note: For more information on key Russian civil-military actors and a tabular version of the figure here, see Appendix A: Key Russian Civil-Military Actors.

The rest of this report therefore presents an empirical study of Russian civil-military relations from 2022 through the first half of 2024, taking theoretical insights from the discussion above and applying the conceptual framework to an ongoing case of dynamic, shifting, and uncertain civil-military relations in unusual wartime conditions. Although ultimately a preliminary look given the reality of

the ongoing war as well as the limited quality and breadth of available public data, the study provides a comprehensive attempt to capture tensions in the civil-military relationship. These tensions, and their fallout, have critical implications for the study of Russia's military and its relationship to the authoritarian political system that directs and controls it.

# CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

This section outlines the main dynamics of Russian civil-military relations over the course of the Russia-Ukraine war. In doing so, it presents a broad analytic narrative account of how changes, stresses, and tensions have affected these elements over the course of more than two years of conflict, from February 2022 to May 2024. The section relies on secondary-source reporting from journalistic publications as well as quantitative data from Russian-language social media.

It identifies several key elements—political interference in the wake of battlefield setbacks, the resilience of top-level military leadership, the growing criticism of leadership from peripheral actors such as the war correspondents, and the extraordinary role of Prigozhin and PMC Wagner—as the primary tension points affecting the overall civil-military relationship. A second, follow-on empirical section provides additional, more granular data on two vignette cases of civil-military tensions that further track these points of interest.

## Typifying Russian wartime civil-military tensions

The Russian wartime experience since February 2022 has been defined by considerable civil-military tensions between political and military leadership (across dimensions of *control* and *autonomy*), as well as changing de facto lines of *authority*, *hierarchy*, and *institutionalization* resulting from the emergence of an important irregularized component of Russian

warfighting through parastatal, semi-mercenary forces.<sup>55</sup> These tensions have largely been observed along eight key elements:

- Major changes in flag-level personnel taken as political direction from the Kremlin
- Reported political intervention in operational and tactical decision-making
- The large-scale use of irregular military organizations in the field as a substitution for regular components of the Russian Armed Forces
- Public recriminations against the military leadership, directed specifically at the conduct of the war, battlefield reversals, and quality of leadership
- General criticism of military elites from public actors
- Armed rebellion
- The imprisonment of flag-level officers
- Assassinations and assassination attempts against military and political-military elites

These tensions are illustrated in Table 4, which identifies the relevant civil-military actors and aligns them with specific civil-military dimensions of most relevance.

These tension points have not been uniform throughout the wartime period, but rather have

<sup>55</sup> See Table 2 in the previous section for conceptualizations of these civil-military dimensions.

Table 4. Major tension points in Russian wartime civil-military relations

Key Tension Points	Civil-Military Actors	Tension Dimension
<b>Flag-level personnel changes</b>	Dismissals: Colonel General Teplinsky (Commander of the Aerospace Forces), Colonel General Mizintsev (Deputy Minister of Defense for Logistics), Lieutenant General Alekseyv (First Deputy of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff), Major General Popov (Commander of the 58th Army), Commanders of 7th and 106th Guards Airborne Divisions, the 90th Guards Tank Division, and the 27th Guards Motor Rifle Brigade <sup>a</sup>	<i>Autonomy, authority, hierarchy</i>
<b>Political interventions</b>	Putin	<i>Control, autonomy</i>
<b>Irregular military substitutions</b>	PMC Wagner, <i>Kadyrovtsy</i> , gubernatorial battalions, corporate battalions	<i>Hierarchy, autonomy</i>
<b>Public recriminations</b>	Shoigu, Gerasimov	<i>Authority, hierarchy</i>
<b>Criticism of military elites</b>	War correspondents	<i>Authority, control</i>
<b>Armed rebellion</b>	PMC Wagner, Prigozhin	<i>Control</i>
<b>Imprisonment of officers</b>	Surovikin	<i>Control</i>
<b>Assassinations</b>	Prigozhin	<i>Control</i>

Source: CNA.

<sup>a</sup> The list here is partial. See Table 8 on page 66 for full details.

ebbed and flowed in a pattern that has tracked broadly with the relative battlefield success of the Russian Armed Forces in the war and the downstream effects of earlier decisions to empower certain actors and undermine others.

Overall, these points of civil-military tension have progressed through distinct phases. First, the initial planning and execution of the special

military operation involved considerable stresses on the General Staff. Relying on a prewar model of civil-military relations (political control, civilian assertiveness, a formal civilian hierarchy, institutionalized relations, and internal autonomy), the Russian Armed Forces dutifully acquiesced and attempted to implement the political goal of a regime change operation that had been developed and ordered by Putin.<sup>56</sup> The effort did not achieve its

<sup>56</sup> Mykhaylo Zabrodskyi et al., *Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, Royal United Services Institute, Feb.–July 2022, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/preliminary-lessons-conventional-warfighting-russias-invasion-ukraine-february-july-2022>; Julian G. Waller, "Putin's Agency and the Decision for War," *RIDDLE Russia*, May 2023, <https://ridl.io/putin-s-agency-and-the-decision-for-war/>.

objectives, and that failure caused stresses between political principals and the military leadership as the Kremlin had to face hard choices after defeat in the Battle of Kyiv. One notable observation in these early days was the absence of Minister of Defense Shoigu, who was not seen for two weeks in the wake of this failure.<sup>57</sup>

Civil-military relations were damaged by the loss on the battlefield in the initial month of the invasion, leading to some reports of political intervention in the military process, whereby Putin himself was making operational-level decisions and even “helping determine movement of Russian soldiers” at the tactical level.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the president did not accept advice to mobilize or put the country on a full war footing, and subsequent modified plans were drawn up to continue the war with the forces already available and without an influx of reservists or freshly mobilized personnel.<sup>59</sup> Only residents in the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics were mobilized in the spring of 2022.<sup>60</sup> In the meantime, new challenges, such as constraining logistics problems and the threat of Western-supplied High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), were dealt with by field commanders, who learned to adapt over time.<sup>61</sup>

Civil-military tensions heightened further because Russia’s continued lack of wartime success coincided with the newly vocal war correspondent media ecosystem, which was growing considerably through uncensored social media channels through the summer of 2022. The war correspondents were highly critical of the war effort, as well as of the military leadership, and through connections with frontline units they had access to both ground-level information and audiovisual evidence corroborating their claims of incompetence, supply inefficiencies, high casualties, and operational-tactical mistakes.

This evidence forced a revision of the political side of the Russian war effort, one in which setbacks were reluctantly acknowledged even as the government sought to coopt and gain control of this semi-independent journalistic phenomenon.<sup>62</sup> President Putin would meet personally with the war correspondents several times starting as early as June 2022, and he would ultimately institutionalize connections between them and the government by the end of the year.<sup>63</sup> This confirmed the peripheral, but nevertheless meaningful, place of such critics, who acted as thorns in the rhetorical side of the MOD and provided background noise that helped delegitimize and undercut faith in the quality of their leadership.

<sup>57</sup> Claire Parker, Robyn Dixon, and Erin Cunningham, “Where Was Sergei Shoigu? Russia’s Missing Defense Minister Resurfaces,” *Washington Post*, Mar. 26, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/26/sergei-shoigu-russia-disappearance/>.

<sup>58</sup> Dan Sabbagh, “Putin Involved in War ‘At Level of Colonel or Brigadier,’ Say Western Sources,” *Guardian*, May 16, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/putin-involved-russia-ukraine-war-western-sources>.

<sup>59</sup> Jack Watling, “Time is the Hidden Flank in Assessing Russia’s Mobilisation,” Royal United Services Institute, Sept. 2022, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/time-hidden-flank-assessing-russias-mobilisation>; “Putin Says Will Not Use Conscript Soldiers in Ukraine,” Reuters, Mar. 8, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-will-not-use-conscript-soldiers-ukraine-2022-03-07/>.

<sup>60</sup> “All Men Are Allowed to Be Cannon Fodder [Всех мужчин пускают на пушечное мясо],” *Meduza*, Apr. 12, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/04/12/vseh-muzhchin-puskayut-na-pushechnoe-myaso>.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Schwartz et al., *Russian Military Logistics in the Ukraine War: Recent Reforms and Wartime Operations*, CNA, DRM-2023-U-036065-Final, Sept. 2023, <https://www.cna.org/reports/2023/10/russian-military-logistics-in-the-ukraine-war>.

<sup>62</sup> Julian G. Waller, “Public Politics in the Wartime Russian Dictatorship,” *War on the Rocks*, Jan. 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/public-politics-in-the-wartime-russian-dictatorship/>.

<sup>63</sup> “Putin Forms Mobilization Task Force Featuring Military Bloggers,” *Moscow Times*, Dec. 21, 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/12/21/putin-forms-mobilization-task-force-featuring-military-bloggers-a79759>.

At the same time, a major collapse on the Russian lines due to Ukraine's surprise counteroffensives in August and September 2022 forced further changes.<sup>64</sup> The loss of a considerable swath of occupied territory thoroughly undermined the Kremlin's belief that the war was under competent management. This set the stage for political intervention into the military hierarchy and its autonomy with the appointment of General Surovikin to overall command of the war. Surovikin's appointment was a direct change to the status quo military leadership and had downstream, reactive ramifications some months later.

In the meantime, Surovikin's appointment also set the stage for both the partial mobilization call-up that would take place in September and October 2022 and the building of the so-called Surovikin Line, a series of deep defensive trenches across the newly captured territory.<sup>65</sup> These two decisions reinforced the Russian war effort, strengthened its position on the battlefield, and would ultimately prepare it to weather future Ukrainian counteroffensives in 2023.

These decisions also heightened the political dangers to the regime because the war directly affected average Russians through conscription, with mobilized citizens providing new negative information on the war back home, and furthering society-wide economic pain. Polling data from this period shows that Russian citizens began to reassess the state of the war at this time—having believed it was going well for some time, most were now of the opinion that this was no longer the case. On the flip side, for the short term, the mobilization and the

shakeup of command actually improved Russian views on the necessity of the war and provided at least some social buy-in to its continued prosecution.<sup>66</sup>

Data are limited on the informal politics surrounding these measures, but observational evidence suggests that the military leadership successfully proved their loyalty to the president and inspired his renewed support over the fall and winter of 2022. The reasons for this are not ascertainable with any level of veracity as of this writing and should be a focus of future studies when possible. By January 2023, Surovikin's position had been undermined through subterranean military-bureaucratic politics, and he was duly removed from overall command of the war effort and demoted to deputy commander in favor of Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov. This is described in more detail in the subsequent section as a case vignette.

The removal of Surovikin from command of the overall war effort was one of the most important changes to upper-tier military personnel during the period under study but hardly the only one. Figure 2 presents all flag-level dismissals in the Russian Armed Forces between February 2022 and May 2024 noted in the public record, and Table 8 in Appendix B offers a tabular version of these data. Note that Surovikin's departure is labeled here as June 2023 to reflect his house arrest in the wake of the Prigozhin Rebellion—thus highlighting the extraordinary political nature of his full dismissal from de facto command in any way—but could also be coded as the January 2023 demotion or his final, formal

<sup>64</sup> The Kherson counteroffensive began on August 29 and the Kharkiv counteroffensive on September 6.

<sup>65</sup> Jake Epstein, "Ukraine's Front-Line Forces Are Trying to Fight Their Way Through Russia's Formidable Surovikin Line," *Business Insider*, Sept. 6, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraine-front-line-forces-fighting-through-russia-surovikin-line-2023-9>; Christina Harward et al., *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment*, Institute for the Study of War, Sept. 15, 2023, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-15-2023>.

<sup>66</sup> Farida Rustamova and Maxim Tovkaylo, "What Secret Russian State Polling Tells Us About Support for the War," *Faridaily (Substack)*, Dec. 2022, <https://faridaily.substack.com/p/what-secret-russian-state-polling>.

Figure 2. Timeline of flag-level dismissals, February 2022–May 2024



Source: CNA.

<sup>a</sup> Note: Demoted from Commander, Ukraine Theater in January 2023 to deputy commander, under house arrest June 2023, dismissed as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Aerospace Forces August 2023.

<sup>b</sup> Note: Unconfirmed as of May 2024.

<sup>c</sup> Note: Civilian, but 1st Class Active State Councilor and Army General equivalent rank. Included for comprehensiveness.



removal as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Aerospace Forces in August 2023.

It is relevant to note that although Surovikin's dismissal is difficult to interpret outside of a bureaucratic politics approach and was commented on as such by Russia's war correspondents online and in print media, there are other reasons for the varied pattern of dismissals during the conflict. Surovikin's case is in many ways a special event, reflecting an instance of bureaucratic pressure by the leaders of the MOD to force a change in command that only the apex head of the regime could decide on a core civil-military topic: running the war itself.

Other dismissals noted throughout the war are more varied. A survey of Russian commentary on the dismissals can only provide impressionistic insights but suggests a few relevant patterns. First, officers dismissed in 2022 were likely removed as part of an effort to assign blame for bad battlefield performance. It should be noted that these officers may in fact be objectively faulty in their actions or inactions, although it is beyond the scope of this report to examine this question in detail. Second, a mass of dismissals would occur after the events of June 2023 following the Prigozhin Rebellion, discussed below. Finally, another round of dismissals would appear close to and immediately after President Putin's reelection and the government shakeup in May 2024.

### *The runup to Prigozhin's Rebellion*

While the shifts in overall command of the war were occurring throughout the fall and winter of 2022 into 2023, PMC Wagner's role and Prigozhin's rise as political-military baron were becoming increasingly

evident. Wagner forces were used heavily to function as assault troops to spearhead operations in the long-running Battle of Bakhmut, a pyrrhic Russian victory that took months to accomplish and resulted in a "meat grinder"-style warfight.<sup>67</sup> During this time, Prigozhin was given informal dispensation to recruit soldiers directly through Russian prisons and penal colonies, promising high pay and sentence reduction to those who survived.

A burgeoning cult of personality was also developing around Prigozhin and the mythos of Wagner, which provided him with further degrees of separation from the military hierarchy and enforced his irregularized, partially autonomous status as a direct patron of the president. This patron-client relationship, long established between Putin and Prigozhin, did not survive the continued civil-military tensions developing around Prigozhin's autonomy and the military leadership's desire to reassert authority. And it perfectly exemplifies the contingent position of Russia's political-military barons, which rely on personal relations with the regime apex to cover them as they aggrandize resources and power outside the traditional, institutional hierarchies of Russia's coercive military and security apparatus.

Reporting in both Russian and Western media suggests that tensions surrounding the extensive use of irregular forces, as well as the brazenly clientelistic sense of special privilege afforded to Prigozhin, grew during the winter of 2022–2023. In lieu of repeating this narrative through qualitative sources, we provide a unique, quantitative approach in the section below that provides a window into rhetorical patterns that track this time period from the perspective of Prigozhin himself.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> For an example of this terminological usage, see Ilya Barabanov et al., "'Meat Grinder': The Grim Realities of Life on the Frontline for Mobilised Recruits," *BBC News Russian*, Mar. 17, 2023, <https://bbcrussian.substack.com/p/meat-grinder-the-grim-realities-of-ukraine-war>.

<sup>68</sup> For an important reference on the Rebellion and its aftermath, see Kimberly Marten, "Whither Wagner? The Consequences of Prigozhin's Mutiny and Demise," *Survival* 65, no. 5 (Sept. 2023), pp. 45–64.

### Quantifying Prigozhin-Shoigu-Gerasimov's civil-military tensions

The most important example of civil-military breakdown by far is the military rebellion by PMC Wagner leader Prigozhin. Contrary to some views, it was not a coup because it was not directed at overthrowing the Russian regime or deposing the Head of State. Rather, the events of June 23–24 should be understood as an armed rebellion by a political-military baron taken on as a desperate negotiating tactic with the Russian president, the goal of which was the ouster of the minister of defense and chief of the General Staff. In doing so, Prigozhin failed in his effort to save his own privileges and position.<sup>69</sup>

Partly analogous to a feudal “Baron’s Rebellion” given the personalized relationship between the petitioning rebel and regime head and the limited, political aims of this emotional show of force, the Prigozhin Rebellion is the most important and consequential disruption in civil-military relations for the wartime period.<sup>70</sup> The following section provides a close, vignette-style case study of the events of the Rebellion proper. But it is relevant also to understand this breakdown over a longer perspective. Indeed, by tracking the shifting relations between Prigozhin, the Kremlin, and the military hierarchy over the year-

long period as they moved toward collapse and breakdown, we can trace broader dynamics in civil-military relations changes since the start of the war.

To illustrate these tensions at a more granular level, we use a quantitative approach that samples Prigozhin’s public statements through both his personal and affiliated Telegram channels. These represent public rhetoric generated by Prigozhin in his efforts to influence political-military decision-making during the war and assert outside influence on internal Kremlin politics and military-bureaucratic positioning by the MOD leadership elite.

Prigozhin’s approach was to leverage the curious authoritarian public sphere that had developed on social media after the invasion’s initial failure. Tracking these data over time provides insights into the changing tenor of the relationship between Prigozhin and the Russian military leadership from the fall of 2022 to the beginning of July 2023, immediately after the Rebellion. The quantitative measurement provides helpful corroboration to the report’s overall qualitative analytic narrative.<sup>71</sup>

Scraping all text and audio data from these sources, we counted words or stems across 3,798 messages on two Telegram channels either directly controlled by or closely associated with Prigozhin. We searched for specific terms in both written text messages and

<sup>69</sup> Note that “Prigozhin’s Rebellion” is also often termed the “Prigozhin Mutiny,” among other alternatives. Here, “Rebellion” is capitalized when referring to the specific event, and uncapitalized when referring to the concept of armed rebellion in general. The term “rebellion” is preferred because the specific event is close to the activity in the definition of rebellion—“an organized and armed opposition to established authority”—without the common maritime or vehicle crew implication found in much more traditional English-language usage of “mutiny.” In Russian, Prigozhin’s Rebellion is usually written as the Мятёж ЧВК «Вагнер» (*myatezh ChVK “Vagner”*) or Мятёж Пригожина (*myatezh Prigozhina*). *Myatezh* can be translated as “rebellion,” “mutiny,” or “sedition” interchangeably.

<sup>70</sup> Alexander S. Burns, “Prigozhin as Pugachev or Pilgrim: The Wagner Rebellion in Historical Context,” *War on the Rocks*, June 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/06/prigozhin-as-pugachev-or-pilgrim-the-wagner-rebellion-in-historical-context/>.

<sup>71</sup> For other statistical treatments of major trends within and elements of the Russia-Ukraine war, see, for example, Viktoras Daukšas et al., “War on All Fronts: How the Kremlin’s Media Ecosystem Broadcasts the War in Ukraine,” NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Apr. 2024, <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/war-on-all-fronts-how-the-kremlins-media-ecosystem-broadcasts-the-war-in-ukraine/301>.

audio messages posted to the channel, all of which were made by the channel's administrators. We then used OpenAI's Whisper package to auto-transcribe audio messages. Text posts frequently took the form of a question from media followed by an answer from Prigozhin, marked by "OTBET" in the message. In these cases, we ran searches only on the text of Prigozhin's answer. Searches for "Putin," "Gerasimov," and "Shoigu" on audio message transcripts included several common mistranscriptions of these names. Searches for other terms used stems for associated nouns, verbs, and adjectives, regardless of case declension.

The first chart, shown in Figure 3, reports the number of posts on these Prigozhin and Prigozhin-affiliated Telegram channels that mention either Russian President Putin, Chief of Staff Gerasimov, or Minister of Defense Shoigu from January to July 2023. The thickness of the lines represents posts that are temporally proximate, while the height represents number per day. This data provides some structure to the period of time when Shoigu and Gerasimov returned to command the overall war effort in their "revanche" in January 2023 to the denouement and immediate aftermath of the Rebellion itself.

Figure 3 shows that mentions of Putin on these channels were particularly prominent in the first quarter of the year, when Prigozhin was complaining directly about logistics problems and appealing to the president for support. Similarly, we find that mentions of Gerasimov, and especially Shoigu, are more frequent as the timeline gets closer to the Rebellion. This suggests relative changes in rhetorical tactics from an appeal to authority to angry and emotional recriminations against the military hierarchy. Shoigu is particularly singled out as an actor of Prigozhin's focus in these data.

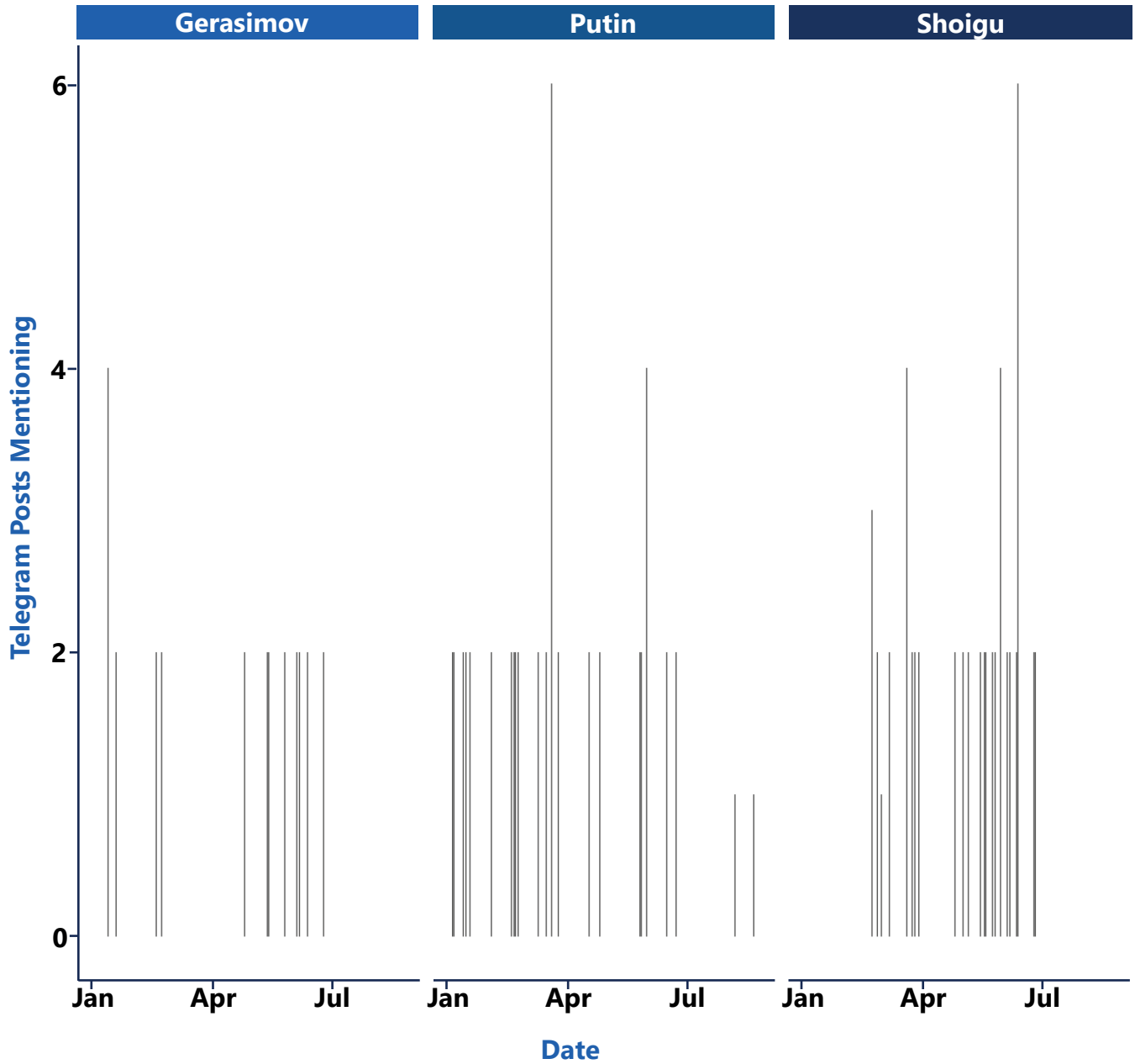
Figure 4 provides a visualized basic sentiment analysis of the text representing a longer time period from summer 2022 to summer 2023. Sentiment is measured using a Russian dictionary of positive and negative terms, with the lines representing average net sentiment (positive sentiment minus negative sentiment) per day. The gray area represents statistical variance. Although mentions of Shoigu and Gerasimov only appear starting in the fall of 2022, Putin is discussed throughout the collection period from July 2022 onward.

Figures 3 and 4 both provide evidence of deepening negative sentiment from Prigozhin-affiliated Telegram channels for all three leaders over the period from July 2022 to July 2023. However, this negative sentiment is especially marked for Shoigu. Furthermore, the smoothed lines give us more insight into the temporal dynamics on display. It is notable, for example, that negative sentiment for Putin—a figure who is not regularly criticized under normal circumstances—correlates to the period just before the October 2022 partial mobilization, when the war effort was deemed to be flagging and potentially in danger of total collapse. Similarly, Putin's negative sentiment, as expressed in these Telegram channels, again drops by the late spring 2023, but without the steep collapse seen with Shoigu or Gerasimov.

Finally, in Figure 5, we track the cumulative occurrences of a set of evocative terms used by Prigozhin-affiliated Telegram channels from November 2022 to July 2023. We tracked eight terms: enemy, defend, traitor, shells, Bakhmut, Gerasimov, Shoigu, and Putin.

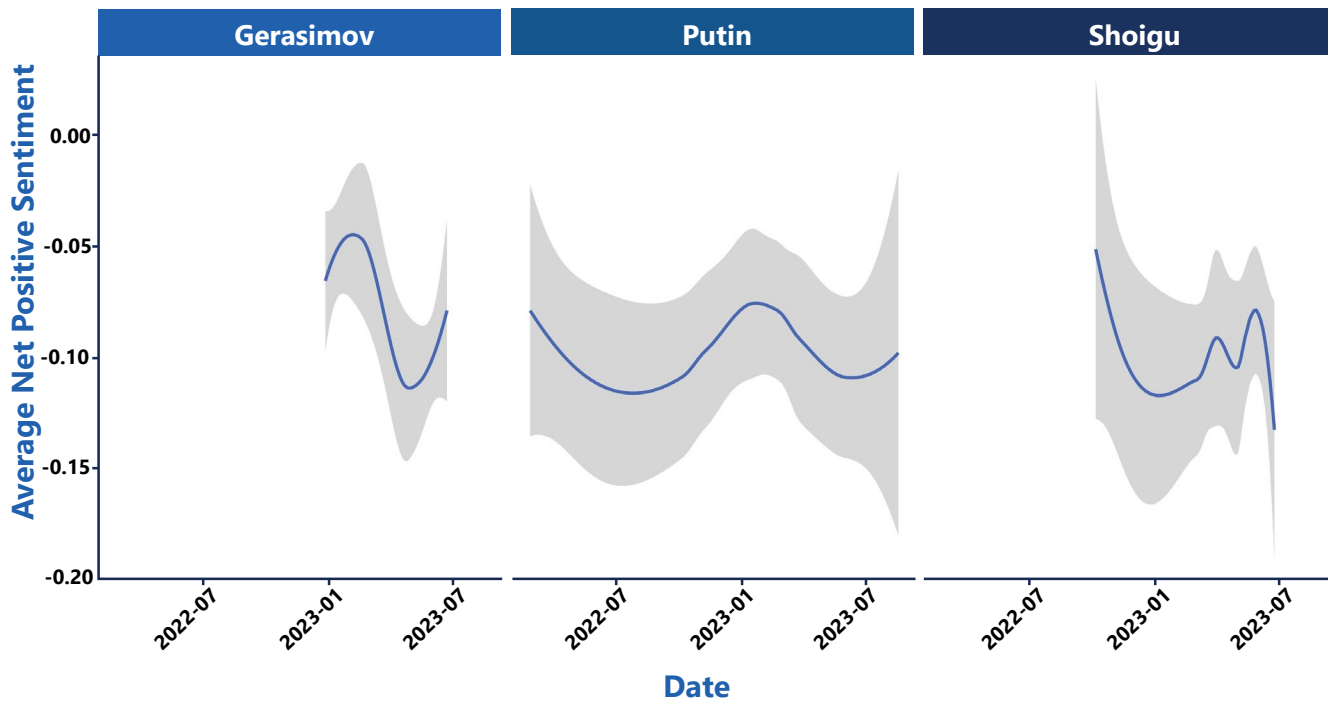
We find several patterns in these data. The mention of shells—the "ammo hunger" problem identified by Prigozhin—ticked up considerably in April and May 2023, although it began rising at the end of

Figure 3. Number of social media posts mentioning Putin, Gerasimov, and Shoigu on Prigozhin-affiliated Telegram channels, January–July 2023



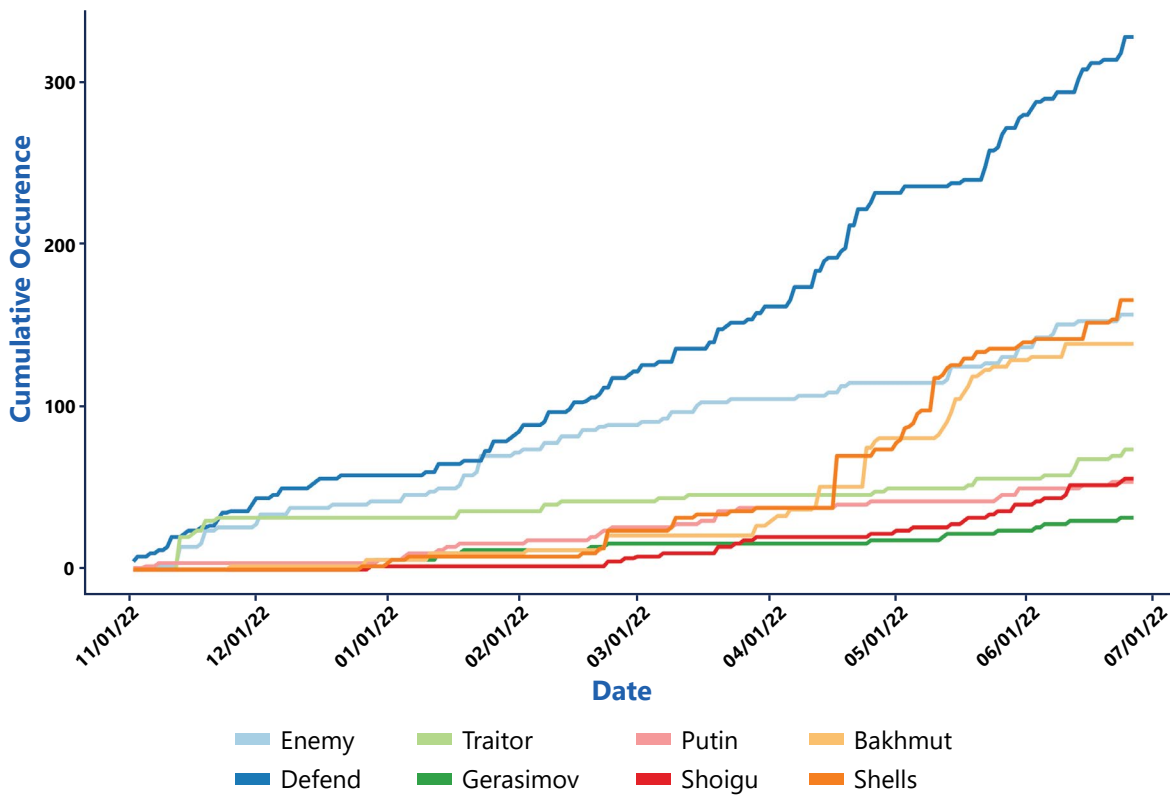
Source: CNA.

Figure 4. Net average sentiment of Prigozhin-linked Telegram accounts mentioning individuals



Source: CNA.

Figure 5. Cumulative term occurrences in Prigozhin-linked Telegram channels



Source: CNA.

February. We note that calls to “defend” rose sharply in February 2023, aligned with fierce fighting in Bakhmut, and then rose significantly again in April and then June. We believe these refer to different meanings of “defense”—territory in the Bakhmut case and then the overall military position, as well as the place of PMC Wagner in general later on. We further find two distinct upticks in mentions of “enemies,” with the first coming as the Bakhmut offensive was in high gear in January and February and the second just before the Rebellion in reference to Prigozhin’s views of Shoigu and Gerasimov as traitors (also noted in the increase in “traitor” at the same time).

The exploratory data analysis presented here provides quantitative evidence for significant dynamism in the relations between Prigozhin and the military and political leadership, which progressively declined from 2022 through 2023. Most critically, we find gradations in tensions across the period: they sharply increase in the wake of Shoigu and Gerasimov’s return to overall strategic-operational control (away from Surovikin) and after the Battle of Bakhmut.

The data therefore suggest that the conflict between Prigozhin and the military leadership was spurred by events on the ground and changing background conditions at the elite bureaucratic level. They further suggest, in line with qualitative reporting elsewhere, that the relationship between patron and vassal—here, Putin and the political-military baron Prigozhin—worsened most after the new year, at least in public.<sup>72</sup>

### Aftermath and uncertainty in Russian civil-military relations, June 2023 onward

Civil-military tensions do not end with the failure of Prigozhin’s Rebellion, which is discussed in more detail in the next section. On the contrary, even more points of stress in the overall ecosystem would emerge quickly. First, key flag-officers would be imprisoned or fired for their perceived (or real) support for Prigozhin, including General Surovikin.<sup>73</sup> The Rebellion and its aftermath produced considerable disruption across the political-military elite in Russia and had a direct effect on operational outcomes. Here this report highlights noted trends across several analysts, who all picked up on the observable rise in tensions since the Rebellion in different ways.

The scholar Gilbert W. Merckx, for example, discusses the fallout from the Rebellion from a command and control (C2) perspective:

The mutiny by Prigozhin and his Wagner Group troops in late 28 June 2023 was another illustration of C2 problems. Prigozhin’s widely disseminated criticisms of Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov cast doubt on their capacity as commanders. While it appears that Prigozhin’s mutiny was ill-conceived, ultimately unsuccessful, and without immediate consequences for fighting along the front, it nonetheless was damaging to Putin’s regime. President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, by negotiating Prigozhin’s

<sup>72</sup> For a discussion of “political-military barons,” see Appendix A: Key Russian Civil-Military Actors.

<sup>73</sup> A complete list of dismissed officers—either related to the aftermath of the Prigozhin Rebellion or for other reasons—can be found in Appendix B: Flag-Level Dismissals.

withdrawal, is the only figure involved to have enhanced his position. The mid-July 2023 dismissal of Russian major general Ivan Popov, the major general commanding the 58th Combined Arms Army, which has been engaged in heavy fighting in the Zaporizhzhia region, is further evidence of C2 issues. Popov's departing statement to his troops, which was unexpectedly circulated, said, "Our senior commander hit us from the rear, treacherously and vilely decapitating the army at the most difficult and tense moment."<sup>74</sup>

The situation would grow still more uncertain in August 2023, when Prigozhin was assassinated, reportedly on the orders of Russian Security Council head Nikolai Patrushev.<sup>75</sup> The killing of such an important political figure underlined both the Kremlin's near-total hold on power and the clear and continued undermining of institutionalized and regularized political practices. The assassination of Prigozhin would underline the supremacy of political authority vis-à-vis irregular armed groups, asserting a form of (quasi-feudal) civilian control and neutralizing the threat posed by the most prominent political-military baron. Yet that it came to such an act similarly exemplified the extraordinary conditions and dangerous mistake that had been made in allowing PMC Wagner to develop such considerable, semi-autonomous status outside the hierarchies and beyond the authority structure of the Russian Armed Forces.

Other actors in the Russian political system found themselves needing to adjust quickly to the new reality in which 1) the Rebellion happened, 2) the Rebellion was immediately crushed, and 3) its leader was decapitated in a brutal, unacknowledged state execution in due course. The Russian journalist Andrey Pertsev, who has close unofficial contacts to Kremlin elites, wrote in September 2023 about the problems facing the head of Russia's National Guard troops, Viktor Zolotov, as one example:

However, Zolotov's career trajectory almost suffered a setback: he bet on the wrong horse last year. With the help of Yevgeny Prigozhin, Zolotov and his close entourage, namely Dyumin [governor of Tula Oblast] and the head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov (Chechen paramilitary troops are part of the Rosgvardia), made an aggressive attempt to oust Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu. Prigozhin was doing business in Dyumin's region and clearly remained in contact with him. The attempt was not successful: the Kremlin did not give in to Prigozhin's verbal blackmail demanding Shoigu's dismissal, and certainly did not go along with Prigozhin after the mutiny. Dyumin was involved in negotiations with Prigozhin, while Zolotov gave no reason to doubt his loyalty: he took the "proper" side and did not support the mutiny. After Prigozhin's death, only Dyumin spoke sympathetically about him. Viktor Zolotov and other

<sup>74</sup> Gilbert W. Merx, "Russia's War in Ukraine: Two Decisive Factors," *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 14, no. 2 (2023), p. 28, [https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/JAMS\\_Fall%202023\\_14\\_2\\_Merx.pdf](https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/JAMS_Fall%202023_14_2_Merx.pdf), quoting Paul Sonne and Anatoly Kurmanaev, "Russian General Denounces His Bosses as Officers Are Fired or Questioned," *New York Times*, July 14, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/13/world/europe/russia-generals-ukraine-turmoil.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Grove, Alan Cullison, and Bojan Pancevski, "How Putin's Right-Hand Man Took Out Prigozhin," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 22, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/russia/putin-patrushev-plan-prigozhin-assassination-428d5ed8>.

high-profile FSO officials remained silent, while Ramzan Kadyrov actually repeated Putin's remarks about "a man with a complicated fate." As a result, the president rewarded the former head of his guard with gifts involving new powers and entitlements.<sup>76</sup>

Pertsev's analysis conforms with the view that the rise of political-military barons such as Prigozhin and Kadyrov, as well as ambitious governors who also raised their profile through mobilization and PMC forces, was a considerable shock to the stable expectations of the Russian political system and ultimately upset civil-military relations, angering both the military hierarchy and civilian authorities. Nonetheless, this legacy helps PMC Wagner, and other semiautonomous PMC organizations, retain a luster of legitimacy that the Kremlin still wishes to use, as well as considerable material power outside of Russia that will at the very least complicate efforts to rein in the organization fully and end the irregularization of Russian military forces entirely.<sup>77</sup>

The disruption caused by Prigozhin's Rebellion led to further personnel changes. PMC Wagner needed to be dealt with, and Putin himself was involved in the process of naming its new commander. The Hudson Institute military analyst Can Kasapoğlu wrote in October 2023 that in the wake of the Rebellion and assassination, new figures placed elsewhere in the military leadership were also emerging publicly as important political actors in their own rights:

News stories this week suggested that Vladimir Putin has reportedly endorsed Colonel Andrei Troshev to lead the Russian shadow army

Wagner. Russian state television broadcasted Putin's meeting with Troshev, in which the two men allegedly discussed how to utilize Wagner's volunteer personnel in Ukraine.

The meeting also featured Russian Deputy Minister of Defense Yunus-Bek Yevkurov. Yevkurov has been a notable figure in the Kremlin's machinations involving Wagner. He was one of the high-rank Russian generals who met with former Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin during the shadow army's failed mutiny in June 2023. At the time, videos filmed by Wagner personnel in the Southern Military District's main command post recorded Yevkurov listening to Prigozhin's boastful tales of downing three Russian aircraft.

Following Wagner's botched revolt, Yevkurov was dispatched to Syria to dismantle the organization's operations in the Levant in coordination with the Syrian security apparatus. The general likely played a kingmaker role in choosing who would succeed Prigozhin.<sup>78</sup>

Another inheritor to PMC Wagner's political-military legitimacy has been General Andrey Averyanov.<sup>79</sup> According to recent reports from the Russian journalistic outfit The Insider,

Averyanov's elevation may have coincided with Prigozhin's loss of

<sup>76</sup> Andrey Pertsev, "Putin's Head of Guard," *RIDDLE Russia*, Sept. 2023, <https://ridl.io/putin-s-head-of-guard/>.

<sup>77</sup> Marten, "Whither Wagner?"

<sup>78</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, "Ukraine Military Situation Report | October 4," Hudson Institute, Oct. 4, 2023.

<sup>79</sup> Roman Dobrokhotov, Christo Grozev, and Michael Weiss, "Exclusive: Inside an Infamous Russian Spy Unit's First Bombing in NATO," *Insider*, Oct. 20, 2023, <https://theins.ru/en/politics/266039>.



altitude but it far surpasses the heights ever attained by the slain Wagner chief. He is now deputy chief of the GRU and Putin's confidant overseeing military and hybrid operations in Africa, East Asia and the Middle East. One of those continents has experienced a series of violent putsches, completed or abortive, in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad resulting in pro-Russian juntas coming—or attempting to come to power, while another is currently engulfed in grisly war between Israel and Hamas, which threatens to become a regional conflagration and possibly distract or weaken Western support for the ongoing war in Ukraine.

As the fallout from the Rebellion continued, PMC Wagner itself would be split apart, although it retained its branding and some of its internal structures. By the early summer of 2024, according to Kimberly Marten, Wagner had been divided into three parts:

State oversight of the Wagner Group, while clearly more restrictive than before, is now confusingly split between three organizations: the Russian National Guard; Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's Akhmat special forces group (which is technically part of the National

Guard); and Russia's military intelligence agency [the GRU].<sup>80</sup>

Finally, the post-Prigozhin world would see the Kremlin strike a blow against the war correspondents, as Alexander Graef wrote in the summer of 2023:

Among the most vocal critics has been former FSB officer Igor Girkin (known as Strelkov), who in 2014 coordinated Russian-backed troops in Eastern Ukraine and briefly served as defence minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR). In April 2023, he announced the creation of the "Angry Patriots Club" as an informal association blaming state authorities for their "inept" waging of the war and the "incompetent organization on strategic, operation, and tactical levels"....Both cases...illustrate how Russian state authorities have sought to further regulate the contracting market of ideas and to regain narrative control.<sup>81</sup>

Yet Girkin and other "Angry Patriots" would be arrested later that summer and used as an example *pour encourager les autres* against supporting further rebellion and mutiny.<sup>82</sup> Peripheral political actors, including the loyalist-opposition *A Just Russia* political party, which had played with its own tentative "Angry Patriots" platform, quickly had to walk back their prior support for Prigozhin from what one Russian academic termed an "excessive

<sup>80</sup> Kimberly Marten, "Where's Wagner Now? One Year After the Mutiny," PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo, No. 903, June 2024, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wheres-wagner-now-one-year-after-the-mutiny/>.

<sup>81</sup> Alexander Graef, "The Limits of Critique: Responses to the War Against Ukraine from the Russian Foreign Policy Expert Community," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 26 (Aug. 30, 2023), pp. 762–75.

<sup>82</sup> "Russian Hard-Line Nationalist Ordered to Stay in Prison After Accusing Putin of Weakness," Associated Press, Aug. 29, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-igor-strelkov-arrest-f3321a0ebb2b55d19184345085c4ec0c>.

rapprochement.”<sup>83</sup> One Russian analyst noted their subsequent electoral losses:

[*A Just Russia*] has clearly hit a rough patch. Its excessive rapprochement with Yevgeny Prigozhin this spring triggered an exodus of strong politicians and activists from the party. Moreover, this friendship has not been forgotten by some of the regional authorities. For example, in the Rostov Region, where the rebels seized Rostov-on-Don in June, [*A Just Russia*] officially received merely 4.81% of the vote and was effectively ousted from the parliament (given that the official results in the Rostov Region are tightly controlled by the regional administration, this result is highly meaningful).<sup>84</sup>

This was made worse by reporting released in November 2023 that just before the Rebellion, Prigozhin had been planning to make an unscheduled speech in the Russian parliament, denouncing the military leadership and further inflaming the political system. According to the *Moscow Times*, “Prigozhin had secretly planned to attend this session to deliver a harsh criticism of Russia’s military top brass from the floor of the State Duma in a last-ditch attempt to win back Putin’s approval—but his plans were canceled at the last minute.”<sup>85</sup>

According to this report, Speaker of the Duma Vyacheslav Volodin, an important upper-tier elite in the Russian political system, rejected Prigozhin’s

attempt because there was a ban from the Kremlin on any activity by “Putin’s chef.”<sup>86</sup> In an additional and somehow even more egregious plan, the parliamentary source noted that “his inner circle was seriously considering the possibility that he would be accompanied by Gen. Sergei Surovikin, the former head of Russia’s invasion force, to make his address more convincing...adding that the two had been very close.”<sup>87</sup>

This reporting on both Prigozhin’s inflammatory political plans prior to the Rebellion and Speaker Volodin’s success in quashing them, as well as Security Council Secretary Patrushev’s subsequent masterminding of Prigozhin’s assassination, provide further evidence that civil-military relations have reached a crisis point due to the uniquely disruptive nature of Prigozhin’s irregularized powerbase, which had evolved over the previous year into a place of considerable threat. Furthermore, the situation required direct political intervention against this political-military baron, as the military leadership had proven itself incapable of handling Prigozhin without further increasing tensions. The aftermath of this disruption in the political order and the nature of Russian civil-military relations will likely reverberate further in the coming years.

Notably, the overall stability of Russian civil-military relations has been undermined through political interventions as well as the existence of irregularized units like PMC Wagner, which became important components of the war in the first half of 2023. Rather than stable patterns of relations across the other dimensions, we see unstable and shifting relations that depend on conditions that vary widely

<sup>83</sup> Ksenia Smolyakova, “Results of the September Elections in Russia,” *RIDDLE Russia*, Sept. 2023, <https://ridl.io/results-of-the-september-elections-in-russia/>.

<sup>84</sup> Smolyakova, “Results of the September Elections in Russia.”

<sup>85</sup> Pyotr Kozlov, “Hours Before Declaring Mutiny, Prigozhin Secretly Planned Duma Speech to Win Back Putin’s Favor,” *Moscow Times*, Nov. 21, 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/11/21/hours-before-declaring-mutiny-prigozhin-secretly-planned-duma-speech-to-win-back-putins-favor-a83167>.

<sup>86</sup> Kozlov, “Hours Before Declaring Mutiny.”

<sup>87</sup> Kozlov, “Hours Before Declaring Mutiny.”

over time and across issue areas. Furthermore, the ability of the Russian Armed Forces' leadership to govern itself and maintain internal independence through its own processes has been undermined significantly by repeated political interventions into both the strategic direction of the war and regular personnel changes at the command level.

Indeed, a new round of disruption would occur in May 2024 in the immediate months after Putin's plebiscitary election to an unprecedented fifth term as president. Given the opportunity to dissolve the government and reshuffle the cabinet, Putin made largely conservative choices, maintaining continuity across the key security ministries and agencies while promoting a few rising stars (as well as his own daughter). The two exceptions to this status quo appointment process, however, were central to the civil-military picture, because both Minister of Defense Shoigu and Security Council Secretary Patrushev were moved from their positions.<sup>88</sup>

Neither were "purged" in a true sense, but Shoigu was transferred to Patrushev's long-held seat on the Security Council, while Patrushev was given a position as a presidential aide, weakening his formal and institutional position while keeping him in close proximity to Putin. A partial purge began within the Ministry of Defense, however, which remains ongoing as of this report's final drafting. Figures both connected to Shoigu (including Deputy Chief of the General Staff Vadim Shamarin) and long-standing opponents (including General Ivan Popov, the former commander of the 58th Army and critic of Shoigu) were dismissed from their positions and in several cases arrested for corruption.

Replacing Shoigu as minister of defense is the statist economist Andrei Belousov, who holds no military experience and was given the tasks of integrating the MOD with the Russian war economy, improving efficiencies, and fighting corruption. Chief of the

General Staff Gerasimov was still in his position as of the early summer 2024, but the Russian journalistic ecosystem has continued to speculate as to how long he will last under a new minister and without the protections of his long relationship with Shoigu.

The change at the top of the Ministry of Defense is just the latest example of a civil-military tension point resulting from a direct political intervention by the Kremlin during the war. It is the Russian president's prerogative to make such interventions, but every case leads to at least the possibility for rising tensions between uniformed and civilian elites. In this situation, all observable evidence points to a successful navigation of these tensions by Putin, who married these major changes— incidentally fulfilling Prigozhin's wish almost exactly a year after the Rebellion—with little boat-rocking elsewhere.

Thus, the post-election reshuffle can be understood as a means to control the process of change. In doing so, it is an effort to ensure that the inevitable tensions resulting from a change at the top and the loss of the major patron within the MOD's intra-bureaucratic networks will be palatable to the broader political system as well as to the institution itself. Nevertheless, it remains unknown whether the new minister of defense will be able to effectively use his position, overcome internal resistance within the MOD, and successfully fight bureaucratic battles for authority within the institution, especially given his tasks of improving the efficiency of Russian military administration, procurement, and technology implementation, let alone prosecuting the war effectively.

In an effort to detail a more granular, process-based approach to understanding key tension points in Russian civil-military relations, the following section provides a set of vignette case studies that expand on the interpretive points above.

<sup>88</sup> Andrey Pertsev, "Fog of War," *RIDDLE Russia*, May 2024, <https://ridl.io/fog-of-war/>.

## KEY CASE STUDIES IN RUSSIAN CIVIL-MILITARY TENSIONS, 2022–2023

This section presents two vignette cases that illustrate critical points of civil-military tension in the wartime Russian context. In doing so, it provides a detailed narrative timeline of each event and engages in preliminary, process-tracing causal analysis of each event and its relevance to the overall state of Russian civil-military relations. The section relies on primary-source data from Russian Telegram channels and statements from Russian officials, and it is supplemented where necessary with secondary sourcing.

The two cases are broken into three distinct subsections, reflecting the distinct dimensions of each study. The first case study focuses on the dynamics of political intervention into the military leadership and its hierarchy. To do so, it looks at two sequential points of time: first, the political intervention to appoint General Sergei Surovikin in the fall of 2022, and second, the bureaucratic politics that brought Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Valeriy Gerasimov back into direct operational-strategic control of the war effort in January 2023.

The second case study focuses on regime stability questions and unprecedented armed challenges to leadership, in the form of the Rebellion of PMC Wagner led by Prigozhin in June 2023. The implications of these case studies are discussed in light of the overall conceptual framework in the final section.

### Vignette case I: military leadership contestation

#### *Part 1: Surovikin’s leadership appointment*

As Ukrainian counteroffensives began to gather steam in September 2022, the two most influential political-military barons (Ramzan Kadyrov and Evgeny Prigozhin) alongside several other notable figures in Russian politics began voicing serious criticisms of specific generals whom they deemed responsible for setbacks in the Russian campaign in Ukraine. Some independent reporting from sources close to the Kremlin suggested that Kadyrov and Prigozhin’s attacks were likely coordinated as part of a battle between the two on one side and Russia’s military leadership on the other. On October 8, Shoigu announced that Surovikin would be the inaugural commander of the “Joint Group of Forces in the area of the Special Military Operation.” Both Kadyrov and Prigozhin offered strong praise of Surovikin and remained supportive of Surovikin’s leadership through the withdrawal from Kherson in November 2022.<sup>89</sup>

#### **Surovikin appointment—background**

On October 1, Kadyrov took to Telegram to blame Alexander Lapin and, to a lesser extent, Gerasimov for the failed defense of Liman. Kadyrov reported several perceived lapses reported by his fighters in Liman under Lapin’s control to Gerasimov, but “the

<sup>89</sup> “Kadyrov and Prigozhin Regularly (and Suspiciously Simultaneously) Criticize the Russian Army. What Are They Trying to Achieve? [Кадыров и Пригожин регулярно (и подозрительно синхронно) критикуют российскую армию. Чего они добиваются?],” *Meduza*, Oct. 4, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/10/04/kadyrov-i-prigozhin-regulyarno-i-podozritelno-sinhronno-kritikuyut-rossiyskuyu-armiyu-chego-oni-dobivayutsya>.

general assured me that he did not doubt Lapin's leadership."<sup>90</sup> This was soon followed by Lapin moving his headquarters away from the front and, eventually, the Russian Army withdrawing from Liman. Kadyrov asserted that "leadership in the General Staff [were] covering up" Lapin's "incompetence" before condemning "army nepotism" (an apparent reference to Lapin's son commanding a tank regiment involved in a failed offensive)<sup>91</sup> and calling for commanders who were "courageous, principled, who care about their soldiers."<sup>92</sup>

In an October 2 statement, Prigozhin supported Kadyrov, writing, "Ramzan, you handsome man, light it up."<sup>93</sup> He added, "All these bastards [seemingly the ineffective generals] should be sent to the front with machine guns."<sup>94</sup> Additionally, *Washington Post* reporting alleged that Prigozhin, at some point before October, had criticized MOD leaders during a meeting with Putin.<sup>95</sup> Prigozhin subsequently denied the existence of any reported meeting.<sup>96</sup>

In the wake of these statements, the Russian news site *Meduza* released a feature on Kadyrov and Prigozhin's criticism and the official reactions to it. *Meduza* noted that two sources "close to the Kremlin" believed the statements to be coordinated. One said, "Prigozhin thinks that the army is fighting in a very old-fashioned way, while PMC Wagner fights in a super-effective and modern way. Shoigu and the generals, however, think that PMCs are just getting in the way."<sup>97</sup> Another source noted that Prigozhin and Shoigu had locked horns at private meetings even before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>98</sup>

Still another source close to the Presidential Administration explained that Putin had not reined in Kadyrov or Prigozhin because he "consider[ed] the work of the Chechen battalions and Prigozhin to be effective." And two other sources noted that Putin had grown interested in alternative approaches to the war after several setbacks during late summer and "now [liked] such people from the front line, real

<sup>90</sup> Ramzan (Rkadyrov\_95) Kadyrov, Telegram post, Oct. 1, 2022, [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/2911](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2911).

<sup>91</sup> "Kadyrov and Prigozhin Criticized the Commander of the Central Military District for the Retreat of Russian Troops from Liman [Кадыров и Пригожин раскритиковали командующего ЦВО за отступление российских войск из Лимана]," *Novaya Gazeta*, Oct. 2, 2022, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/10/01/kadyrov-i-prigozhin-raskritikovali-komanduiushchego-tsvo-za-otstuplenie-rossiiskikh-voisk-iz-limana-news>.

<sup>92</sup> Ramzan (Rkadyrov\_95) Kadyrov, Telegram post, Oct. 1, 2022, [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/2911](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2911).

<sup>93</sup> In Russian as: "Рамзан, красавчик, жги." See "'Ramzan, Burn': Prigozhin Responded to Kadyrov's Post About General Lapin [«Рамзан, жги»: Пригожин ответил Кадырову на пост о генерале Лاپине]," *Rostovskaya Oblast' Segodnya*, Oct. 1, 2022, <https://ro.today/16968-ramzan-zhgi-prigozhin-otvetil-kadyrovu-na-post-o-provale-rossijskogo-general.html>.

<sup>94</sup> "Kadyrov and Prigozhin Criticized the Commander of the Central Military District for the Retreat of Russian Troops from Liman."

<sup>95</sup> Ellen Nakashima, John Hudson, and Paul Sonne, "Mercenary Chief Vented to Putin over Ukraine War Bungling," *Washington Post*, Oct. 25, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/10/25/putin-insider-prigozhin-blasts-russian-generals-ukraine/>; "The Washington Post Revealed the Name of a Person from Putin's Entourage Who Directly Told the President About Mistakes in the War in Ukraine. This Is Yevgeny Prigozhin [Washington Post раскрыла имя человека из окружения Путина, который прямо сказал президенту об ошибках на войне в Украине. Это Евгений Пригожин]," *Meduza*, Oct. 25, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/10/25/the-washington-post-raskryla-imya-cheloveka-iz-okruzeniya-putina-kotoryy-pryamo-skazal-prezidentu-ob-oshibkah-na-voyne-v-ukraine-eto-evgeniy-prigozhin>.

<sup>96</sup> "Prigozhin Criticized the Military Leaders of the Russian Army in a Personal Conversation with Putin [WP: Пригожин критиковал военачальников российской армии в личном разговоре с Путиным]," *Golos Ameriki (Voice of America)*, Oct. 25, 2022, <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/prigozhin-putin-russian-armed-forces-criticism/6804724.html>.

<sup>97</sup> "Kadyrov and Prigozhin Regularly (and Suspiciously Simultaneously) Criticize the Russian Army."

<sup>98</sup> "Kadyrov and Prigozhin Regularly (and Suspiciously Simultaneously) Criticize the Russian Army."

people.”<sup>99</sup> Finally, *Meduza* reporting from October 2022 alleged that Prigozhin and Kadyrov had been in contact with Aleksey Dyumin and Dmitry Mironov, two former members of Putin’s bodyguard with ambitions to displace Shoigu. *Meduza’s* sources in the administration noted that such changes had been discussed in the Kremlin but were unlikely given Putin’s conservative approach to personnel changes.<sup>100</sup>

In late September and early October, several other notables in Russian society were also criticizing the MOD. As the partial mobilization swept up people clearly exempt from or unfit for service per the official criteria, Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of RT, started a running series to highlight stories of wrongful mobilization.<sup>101</sup> Andrei Kartapolov, a Duma member and former assistant minister of defense, accused the MOD of misleading the public about the course of the war by talking dishonestly about setbacks and retreats.<sup>102</sup> Roman Starovoit, governor of Kursk, criticized the poor condition of MOD’s barracks, saying he was “perplexed how the training units of the Ministry of Defense can be in such a state.”<sup>103</sup>

### Surovikin appointment—the personnel change

On October 8, the MOD announced that by the decision of Shoigu, then the minister of defense, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Aerospace Forces and General of the Army Sergei Surovikin had been appointed to command “the Joint Group of Forces in the area of the Special Military Operation.”<sup>104</sup> MOD did not provide any further details about the role.<sup>105</sup> Immediately before his elevation, Surovikin had been serving as both Commander-in-Chief of the Aerospace Forces and commander of the Southern Group of Forces from at least June 2022.<sup>106</sup> Before 2022, Surovikin had commanded forces in Syria, Donbass, and Chechnya.<sup>107</sup>

Kadyrov “welcomed” this news, saying he was “sure that Sergei Surovikin will improve the situation in the SVO zone.”<sup>108</sup> Based on 15 years of acquaintance, he added that Surovikin is “a real general and soldier, and an experienced, strong-willed, and far-sighted commander for whom concepts such as patriotism, honesty, and decency always come first.”<sup>109</sup> Prigozhin was also positive about Surovikin’s appointment, calling him the Russian military’s “most competent commander” who could “act in the current situation”

<sup>99</sup> “Kadyrov and Prigozhin Regularly (and Suspiciously Simultaneously) Criticize the Russian Army.”

<sup>100</sup> “Kadyrov and Prigozhin Regularly (and Suspiciously Simultaneously) Criticize the Russian Army.”

<sup>101</sup> “On Two Fronts: Russian Politicians and Propagandists Openly Criticize the Ministry of Defense [На два фронта: российские политики и пропагандисты открыто критикуют Минобороны],” *The Insider*, Oct. 7, 2022, <https://theins.ru/news/255793>.

<sup>102</sup> “On Two Fronts.”

<sup>103</sup> “On Two Fronts.”

<sup>104</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, Oct. 8, 2022, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/20672](https://t.me/mod_russia/20672).

<sup>105</sup> “Sergei Surovikin Led the Russian Army in the Zone of Special Military Operation in Ukraine [Сергей Суровикин возглавил армию России в зоне специальной военной операции на Украине],” *Vedomosti*, Oct. 9, 2022, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2022/10/10/944584-surovikin-v-spetsialnoi-voennoi-operatsii>.

<sup>106</sup> “The People Who Shot Our Fathers [Люди, стрелявшие в наших отцов],” *Novaya Gazeta*, June 26, 2022, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/06/26/liudi-streliavshie-v-nashikh-ottsov>.

<sup>107</sup> “Sergei Surovikin: What Is Known About the New Commander of Russian Troops in Ukraine [Сергей Суровикин: что известно о новом командующем российскими войсками в Украине],” *BBC News Russian*, Oct. 8, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-63187965>.

<sup>108</sup> Ramzan (Rkadyrov\_95) Kadyrov, Telegram post, Oct. 8, 2022, [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/2954](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2954).

<sup>109</sup> Ramzan (Rkadyrov\_95) Kadyrov, Telegram post, Oct. 8, 2022, [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/2954](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2954).

despite its being “handed over, to put it mildly, not in the best possible shape.”<sup>110</sup> Prigozhin praised Surovikin’s controversial role in the military response to protests in Moscow in 1991 and argued that if he had had more ammunition for his tank, implicitly for suppressing the protests, “We would live in a completely different country, one ten times more powerful.”<sup>111</sup> He added that Russian oligarchs had undermined Russia’s military industry and thus the fight for Russian interests; therefore, Surovikin’s success would depend on having “shells in his tank.”<sup>112</sup>

### Surovikin appointment—aftermath

In late October, Surovikin won plaudits from Kadyrov and Prigozhin for his frank style and for honestly explaining difficulties and tough decisions made during the course of the Ukraine war. On October 19, Surovikin told Rossiya 24 that the situation in Kherson was “difficult” and emphasized the importance of looking after every soldier to minimize Russian and civilian casualties.<sup>113</sup> After Surovikin and Shoigu ordered the withdrawal from Kherson in early November 2022,<sup>114</sup> Kadyrov took to Telegram to support the move. He asserted that Surovikin “made

the right, if difficult, decision between pointless victims for the sake of making a statement and saving the invaluable lives of soldiers.”<sup>115</sup> Likewise, Prigozhin told *RIA Novosti* that it was “a difficult decision. Surovikin took full decision-making upon himself without fear.”<sup>116</sup>

### Part 2: the Shoigu/Gerasimov *revanche*

Through the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, Wagner appeared to be in a struggle with the MOD over battle effectiveness, access to materiel, and due credit for successes. On January 11, amid the end of the Battle for Soledar, MOD announced that Gerasimov had been appointed to replace Surovikin as commander of the Joint Group of Forces. The MOD announcement stated that the change was necessitated by “the expansion of the scale of tasks that needed to be solved” during the war in Ukraine. Commentators in the Russian press were generally, if cautiously, positive about the reshuffle, while Kadyrov remained silent and Prigozhin initially only made oblique critiques of the defense leadership.

<sup>110</sup> “Sergei Surovikin Led the Russian Army in the Zone of Special Military Operation in Ukraine,” *Vedomosti*.

<sup>111</sup> Evgeny (Prigozhin\_hat) Prigozhin, Telegram post, Oct. 8, 2022, [https://t.me/Prigozhin\\_hat/1793](https://t.me/Prigozhin_hat/1793).

<sup>112</sup> Evgeny (Prigozhin\_hat) Prigozhin, Telegram post, Oct. 8, 2022, [https://t.me/Prigozhin\\_hat/1793](https://t.me/Prigozhin_hat/1793).

<sup>113</sup> Daria Bakhireva, “The Commander of the Northern Military District Forces Reported on the Difficult Situation in the Kherson Region [Командующий силами СВО доложил о непростой ситуации в Херсонской области],” *Ura*, Oct. 19, 2022, <https://ura.news/news/1052596170>; “The Commander of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine, Surovikin, Called the Situation in the War ‘Tense.’ This Is His First Public Appearance in His New Position [Командующий ВС РФ в Украине Суровикин назвал «напряженной» обстановку на войне. Это его первое выступление на публике в новой должности],” *Novaya Gazeta*, Oct. 18, 2022, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/10/18/komanduiushchii-vs-rf-v-ukraine-surovikin-nazval-napriazhennoi-obstanovku-na-voine-eto-ego-pervoe-vystuplenie-na-publike-v-novoi-dolzhnosti-news>.

<sup>114</sup> “General Surovikin Reported to Shoigu About the Successes of the Russian Army in Ukraine. And Then He Announced the Surrender of Kherson [Генерал Суровикин доложил Шойгу об успехах российской армии в Украине. А потом объявил о сдаче Херсона],” *Meduza*, Nov. 9, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/11/09/general-surovikin-dolozhil-shoigu-ob-uspehah-rossiyskoy-armii-v-ukraine-a-potom-ob-yavil-o-sdache-hersona>.

<sup>115</sup> Ramzan (Rkadyrov\_95) Kadyrov, Telegram post, Nov. 9, 2022, [https://t.me/Rkadyrov\\_95/3080](https://t.me/Rkadyrov_95/3080).

<sup>116</sup> “Prigozhin Called Surovikin’s Decision to Withdraw Troops Responsible [Пригожин назвал решение Суровикина об отводе войск ответственным],” *RIA Novosti*, Nov. 11, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20221109/surovikin-1830328209.html>.

### Shoigu/Gerasimov revanche—background

Toward the end of the year, Wagner seemed to be struggling with effectiveness and access to ammunition and other military equipment. According to Ukrainian intelligence, at some point in November or early December, the Russian forces under Surovikin transferred some materiel to Wagner to use in the fight as part of an alliance between the two.<sup>117</sup> On December 23, the US National Security Council stated that Wagner bought “infantry rockets and missiles” from North Korea for use in Ukraine.<sup>118</sup> Prigozhin dismissed the report about arms purchases from North Korea.<sup>119</sup> In late December, a video of Wagner fighters strongly criticizing Gerasimov for providing insufficient ammunition appeared on social media.<sup>120</sup> A few days later, Prigozhin met these same fighters at the front, dismissed rumors that this had been a Ukrainian information operation, and affirmed that the problems they had raised must be solved.<sup>121</sup>

Concurrently, MOD sources criticized Wagner group fighters and other mercenaries as being largely composed of freshly inducted ex-prisoners, uncoordinated and ineffective as a result.<sup>122</sup> One

Russian war journalist reported that “there is no trace of any administrative subordination of PMC fighters to local military commands.”<sup>123</sup> Abbas Galyamov, a prominent Russian commentator, argued that Prigozhin’s practice of recruiting prisoners clashed fundamentally with the outlook and attitude of the military high command. Meanwhile, he speculated that the military command, including Shoigu, bristled at materiel transfers to Wagner and assertions that Wagner fought more effectively than the Russian military.<sup>124</sup>

Rumors about reshuffles began circulating in early December, when some Telegram channels began hinting that Gerasimov would be or already had been dismissed from his post as chairman of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces. On December 13, Dmitry Peskov dismissed these rumors as “Telegram hoaxes.”<sup>125</sup> Government-linked channels blamed this rumor on Western media and information operations.<sup>126</sup>

The first official news of a reshuffle came on January 10, 2023. Several Russian sources began reporting that Lapin, one of the primary targets of criticism from Prigozhin, Kadyrov, and other extreme war

<sup>117</sup> Andrew E. Kramer, “Threat of Invasion from Belarus Low, Says Ukraine Spy Chief,” *New York Times*, Dec. 23, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/23/world/europe/belarus-ukraine-invasion-threat.html>.

<sup>118</sup> Steve Holland, “Exclusive: US Says Russia’s Wagner Group Bought North Korean Weapons for Ukraine War,” Reuters, Dec. 23, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-says-russias-wagner-group-bought-north-korean-weapons-ukraine-war-2022-12-22/>.

<sup>119</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, Dec. 23, 2022, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/194](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/194).

<sup>120</sup> Olesya Krasnolutska, “Split in the Russian Army. Conflict Between Prigozhin and Shoigu [Раскол в армии РФ. Конфликт Пригожина и Шойгу],” *Korrespondent.net*, Dec. 28, 2022, <https://korrespondent.net/world/4548319-raskol-v-armyy-rf-konflikt-pryhozhyna-y-shoihu>.

<sup>121</sup> Ilshat Zaripov, “‘Urka Will Finish the Game.’ Social Networks About Yevgeny Prigozhin’s Attacks [‘Урка доиграется.’ Соцсети о выпадах Евгения Пригожина],” *Svoboda.org*, Dec. 29, 2022, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/32198309.html>; Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, Dec. 26, 2022, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/206](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/206).

<sup>122</sup> Georgy Alexandrov, “Evgenics: The Head of the Wagner PMC Publicly Challenged the Leadership of the Russian Army. Prigozhin Is Now in Russia Forever [Евгеника Глава ЧВК ‘Вагнер’ бросил публичный вызов руководству российской армии. Пригожин что, теперь в России навсегда?],” *Novaya Gazeta*, Dec. 27, 2022, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/12/27/evgenika>.

<sup>123</sup> Alexandrov, “Evgenics.”

<sup>124</sup> Alexandrov, “Evgenics.”

<sup>125</sup> “Peskov Called Resignation Messages ‘Telegram Ducks’ [Песков назвал «телеграмными утками» сообщения об отставке],” *RBC*, Dec. 13, 2022, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/13/12/2022/63984eab9a7947eab5985780>.

<sup>126</sup> *Voina s feikami* (warfakes), Telegram post, Dec. 11, 2022, <https://t.me/warfakes/9834>.



hawks in the fall of 2022, had been appointed chief of staff of the Russian Ground Forces. This had apparently been done in secret in late 2022.<sup>127</sup> When asked for comment, Peskov said he could not comment but mentioned that some presidential decrees are secret.<sup>128</sup> Prigozhin noted that he had learned of the development two weeks prior. On his Telegram channel, he responded to a journalist's question about the development by reposting earlier criticisms, including a claim that "Lapin, like any general at the front, controls only his area of responsibility and carries out the decisions of higher commanders. Again, I emphasize that this should be figured out by those with the competency on these questions."<sup>129</sup>

### Shoigu/Gerasimov revanche—the events of the reshuffle

On January 11, the MOD formally announced that Gerasimov had been appointed head of the Joint Group of Forces, replacing Surovikin.<sup>130</sup> An announcement on the official MOD Telegram channel explained that "raising the rank of leadership of the Special Military Operation is linked with the expansion of the scale of tasks to be solved during [the Ukraine war's] execution, the need to organize closer interactions between the branches of the

Armed Forces, and also to improve the quality of all types of command and effectiveness of the joint force."<sup>131</sup>

Surovikin was reaffirmed as Commander-in-Chief of the Aerospace Forces engaged in the Ukraine war, while Generals Oleg Salyukov and Aleksey Kim were named commanders of ground and naval forces, respectively.<sup>132</sup> The following day, Peskov responded to questions about the reorganization by pointing back to the MOD's statement and declaring that he "had nothing to add."<sup>133</sup>

### Shoigu/Gerasimov revanche—aftermath

Reporting in several major Russian outlets praised Surovikin's removal and the new replacements. *Gazeta* cited an anonymous Spetsnaz veteran who described the move as stating the "already existing military-political reality," given that in his view Gerasimov had functionally been leading the warfight for "quite a long time."<sup>134</sup> Anatoly Matviychuk also welcomed the move as one that would make the Russian forces fighting in Ukraine more flexible. He cited the length of the front as the reason "the decision was taken that the commander of the joint group of forces should be some person obeyed by all armed forces, regardless of type,

<sup>127</sup> "Alexander Lapin Headed the Main Staff of the Ground Forces of the Russian Armed Forces [Александр Лапин возглавил Главный штаб Сухопутных войск ВС РФ]," TASS, Jan. 10, 2022, <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/16765741>; "General Lapin Headed the Main Headquarters of the Ground Forces [Генерал Лапин возглавил главный штаб Сухопутных войск]," RBC, Jan. 10, 2023, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/10/01/2023/63bd09389a794708391c3120>.

<sup>128</sup> "General Lapin, Who Was Scolded by Kadyrov and Prigozhin, Headed the Headquarters of the Ground Forces, Journalists Learned [Генерал Лапин, которого ругали Кадыров и Пригожин, возглавил штаб сухопутных войск, узнали журналисты]," *BBC News Russian*, Jan. 10, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-64221229>.

<sup>129</sup> Evgeny (Prigozhin\_hat) Prigozhin, Telegram post, Jan. 10, 2023, [https://t.me/Prigozhin\\_hat/2362](https://t.me/Prigozhin_hat/2362).

<sup>130</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, Jan. 11, 2023, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/23355](https://t.me/mod_russia/23355).

<sup>131</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, Jan. 11, 2023, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/23355](https://t.me/mod_russia/23355).

<sup>132</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, Jan. 11, 2023, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/23355](https://t.me/mod_russia/23355).

<sup>133</sup> Artyem Feoktistov, "Peskov Said That Gerasimov's Appointment Is Related to the Expansion of the Scope of the Tasks of the Special Military Operation [Песков заявил, что назначение Герасимова связано с расширением масштаба задач СВО]," *Gazeta*, Jan. 12, 2023, <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/news/2023/01/12/19469407.shtml>.

<sup>134</sup> Vyacheslav Dushin, "A Special Forces Veteran Commented on Personnel Changes in the Ministry of Defense [Ветеран спецназа прокомментировал кадровые перестановки в Минобороны]," *Gazeta*, Jan. 12, 2023, <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/news/2023/01/12/19467199.shtml>.

branch, or armament.”<sup>135</sup> *Komsomolskoye Pravda’s* commentary added that “it was clear that [Surovikin] could not go on the offensive with these depleted forces.”<sup>136</sup> Viktor Brantsev argued that the change augured a breakthrough for Russian forces because Surovikin had lacked certain administrative powers that Gerasimov possessed and the command posts would be moved closer to the front lines. Military expert Alexander Artamonov, meanwhile, said he viewed the move as an intensification of the effort rather than a demotion of Surovikin:

The responsibility for conducting the operation increases by an order of magnitude and the personal responsibility of the head of the General Staff for the execution of the special operation appears. This is not about releasing General Surovikin from his powers, but about expanding the field of the special operation.<sup>137</sup>

Prigozhin’s immediate response was muted but pointed at tensions between Wagner and the formal Russian Armed Forces. On January 11, Prigozhin alleged that “during the storming of Soledar, no units participated aside from those from PMC Wagner,” apparently part of a standing dispute over credit

for Russian battlefield successes.<sup>138</sup> After January 11, Prigozhin posted a short answer to a range of questions about the fight for Soledar: “These questions will need answers, but not now....I respect your attention, but I hope you will understand why I remained silent.”<sup>139</sup> He later referred an explicit question about Gerasimov’s elevation to this evasive answer.<sup>140</sup>

However, on January 13, Prigozhin used a question about US countermeasures against Wagner to contend that “inter-service fights, corruption, bureaucracy, and officials who want to stay in their posts” posed “a more serious threat to Wagner’s existence.”<sup>141</sup> To a question on January 15 about reports of conflict between Wagner and the Ministry of Defense, Prigozhin wrote, “Unfortunately, your questions have many provocative meanings. I see no reason not to trust Peskov [that no conflict exists].”<sup>142</sup>

On January 15, responding to a question about the rumored conflict between Prigozhin and the MOD, Peskov said, “We think this conflict exists mainly in the information space” and that while sometimes these are “manipulations” carried out by “information opponents,” in other cases, “our friends themselves behave in such a way that no enemies are needed.”<sup>143</sup> He then noted that Russians would

<sup>135</sup> Vyacheslav Dushin, “A Military Expert Named the Reason for Personnel Changes in the Russian Defense Ministry [Военный эксперт назвал причину кадровых перестановок в МО РФ],” *Gazeta*, Jan. 12, 2023, <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/news/2023/01/12/19470337.shtml>.

<sup>136</sup> “Ukraine Is Hastily Transferring Troops, Russia Is Leading to a General Battle: The Situation on the Front Line Has Changed [Украина спешно перебрасывает войска, Россия ведет к генеральному сражению: Ситуация на передовой изменилась],” *Komsomolskoye Pravda*, Jan. 16, 2023, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27452/4706552/>.

<sup>137</sup> Vyacheslav Dushin, “Military Expert Artamonov: The Appointment of Gerasimov as Commander of the Special Military Operation Does Not Mean the Demotion of Surovikin [Военный эксперт Артамонов: назначение Герасимова командующим СВО не означает понижения Суrowикина],” *Gazeta*, Jan. 18, 2022, <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/news/2023/01/18/19518763.shtml>.

<sup>138</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, Jan. 10, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/254](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/254).

<sup>139</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, Jan. 13, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/266](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/266).

<sup>140</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, Jan. 13, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/271](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/271).

<sup>141</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, Jan. 13, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/269](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/269).

<sup>142</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, Jan. 16, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/280](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/280).

<sup>143</sup> “Peskov Called Reports About the Conflict Between the Ministry of Defense and Wagner PMC Manipulation [Песков назвал манипуляцией сообщения о конфликте Минобороны и ЧВК Вагнера],” *RBC*, Jan. 16, 2023, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/16/01/2023/63c51de19a7947ccaf57811a>.

acknowledge heroes from both the Russian Armed Forces and from PMC Wagner.<sup>144</sup>

Overall, the case of Surovikin's appointment and then demotion is one of political intervention into the war effort, which was then overturned through unverifiable bureaucratic politics within the MOD and the Kremlin. During this time, the irregularized elements of Russia's military forces in the war, Prigozhin's PMC Wagner especially, became ever more powerful while also increasingly (if cautiously) clashing with the military-bureaucratic leadership in the MOD and General Staff. However, that drama would play out more fully in the subsequent months, only after Surovikin was pushed aside.

### Vignette case II: Prigozhin's Rebellion

On June 23, the long-simmering conflict between Prigozhin and the MOD leadership over ammunition supplies, credit, and treatment of fighters burst into the open. Early on June 23, Prigozhin released several audio and video clips on his Telegram channel in which he stridently criticized Russia's military leadership as incompetent and callous toward the lives of soldiers on the front lines. Late on June 23, after an alleged Russian rocket strike on a Wagner camp, Prigozhin announced that he would lead Wagner troops to hold Shoigu and Gerasimov to account for their crimes. Wagner troops quickly advanced on and took military headquarters in Rostov-on-Don before continuing toward Moscow.

On the way, Prigozhin alleged that several counterattacks by Russian loyalist forces were underway and downed several Russian military aircraft. No Russian armed forces units appeared to flip to Prigozhin's side, and Surovikin issued a video calling for Prigozhin to back down. On the evening of June 24, 2023, fewer than 24 hours after launching the mutiny and nearing Moscow, Prigozhin announced that Wagner troops would return to their barracks. Putin and other figures throughout the Russian leadership sharply criticized Prigozhin's move as irresponsible at a time when Russia faced dire threats to its integrity. Wagner was forced to surrender its heavy weaponry, and fighters were compelled either to sign contracts with the formal security forces or go into exile. Two months later, on August 23, Prigozhin was killed in a plane crash, apparently ordered by Patrushev, secretary of the Russian National Security Council.<sup>145</sup> The initial preparation for this series of events would begin in May, leading to a period of more than four months of considerable and dangerous civil-military tensions.

### Prigozhin's Rebellion—background

On May 5, Prigozhin published three videos attacking Russia's military leadership. In the first, he appeared with the corpses of slain Wagner mercenaries and excoriated Shoigu and Gerasimov for not providing sufficient ammunition.<sup>146</sup> In the second, he spoke in front of living Wagner fighters and alleged that "we received no more than 30 percent of our [ammunition] needs. Therefore, our losses were

<sup>144</sup> "Peskov Called Reports About the Conflict Between the Ministry of Defense and Wagner PMC Manipulation."

<sup>145</sup> "Prigozhin's 'Mutiny' June 23-24: Chronicle [«Мятеж» Пригожина 23—24 июня: хроника]," *Novaya Gazeta*, June 24, 2023, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2023/06/23/evgenii-prigozhin-vzbuntovalsia-protiv-rossiiskoi-armii-vozbuzhdeno-ugolovnoe-delo>; "Shoigu! Gerasimov! Where's the Ammunition? Look at Them Bitches." Prigozhin Promised that PMC 'Wagner' Will Leave Bakhmut ["Шойгу! Герасимов! Где боеприпасы? Посмотрите на них, суки." Пригожин пообещал, что ЧВК "Вагнер" покинет Бахмут]," *BBC News Russian*, May 5, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-65501087>; "The Russian Army Is Retreating. The Ministry of Defense Is Deceiving Putin. Ukraine and NATO Did Not Intend to Attack Russia [Российская армия отступает. Минобороны обманывает Путина. Украина и НАТО не собирались нападать на Россию]," *Meduza*, June 23, 2023, <https://meduza.io/feature/2023/06/23/rossiyskaya-armiya-otstupayet-minoborony-obmanyyvaet-putina-ukraina-i-nato-ne-sobiralis-napadat-na-rossiyu>.

<sup>146</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, May 5, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/895](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/895); "Shoigu! Gerasimov! Where's the Ammunition? Look at Them Bitches."

significantly higher than they should have been, but we moved forward. A month ago, they stopped giving us ammunition, and we now receive no more than 10 percent [of our needs].”<sup>147</sup>

Prigozhin warned Putin, Gerasimov, and Shoigu that mercenaries would not take “useless and unjust losses” and were thus leaving Bakhmut.<sup>148</sup> In a third video, Prigozhin promised that he would ensure that Gerasimov and Shoigu were held responsible for “tens of thousands” of Russian losses.<sup>149</sup> A few days later, *Meduza* reported that Prigozhin’s attacks “seriously concern the country’s senior leadership,” with some key supporters distancing themselves from Wagner’s leader and suggestions from sources that Russian state-controlled media might turn on Prigozhin or that “official security forces will certainly put a stop to it.”<sup>150</sup>

On June 23 at 9:09 a.m., Prigozhin posted an audio message on his Telegram channel in which he alleged that “the Ministry of Defense does not give us shells, because the leadership of the Ministry of Defense thinks that the lives of soldiers are much cheaper than shells” and because “the shells will be needed to defend Moscow.”<sup>151</sup> Later on the same day, he said that victory would require Russian forces “to stop lying, stop stealing, and stop thinking only of their own well-being and places, and instead think

of soldiers, their lives. If the army ends, Russia will end.”<sup>152</sup> Also early on June 23, 2023, Prigozhin shared a 30-minute video interview in which he criticized the grounds for launching the war on February 24 and the military leadership’s slowness in adjusting its approach or goals after initial setbacks caused by the MOD’s incompetent planning and lies to the public and the president.<sup>153</sup>

Reacting to this video interview, which was released before the uprising, Andrey Rudenko condemned Prigozhin for downplaying the alleged extent of Ukrainian violence against civilians in Donetsk and Luhansk. Igor Strelkov claimed that it seemed that Prigozhin was ripping off his own shows but said that Prigozhin’s fixation on the MOD, Shoigu, and Gerasimov missed the role played by Putin and antiwar oligarchs.<sup>154</sup> The Grey Zone Telegram channel associated with Prigozhin praised his analysis of the situation, including the shortcomings in military preparation and the implausibility of military goals.

At 5:10 p.m. on June 23, Prigozhin posted a response to a question about a statement that had appeared online. In it, he confirmed that he had charged that Gerasimov and Shoigu should bear responsibility for “the genocide of the Russian people, the death of tens of thousands of Russian citizens, and the loss of Russian territory to the enemy.”<sup>155</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, May 5, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/896](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/896); “Shoigu! Gerasimov! Where’s the Ammunition? Look at Them Bitches.”

<sup>148</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, May 5, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/900](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/900); “Shoigu! Gerasimov! Where’s the Ammunition? Look at Them Bitches.”

<sup>149</sup> “Shoigu! Gerasimov! Where’s the Ammunition? Look at Them Bitches.”

<sup>150</sup> “Security Forces Will Put a Stop to It,” *Meduza*, May 10, 2023, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2023/05/10/security-forces-will-put-a-stop-to-it>.

<sup>151</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1278](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1278).

<sup>152</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1280](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1280).

<sup>153</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1279](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1279); “The Russian Army Is Retreating.”

<sup>154</sup> “What Pro-War Bloggers and Military Correspondents Say About Yevgeny Prigozhin’s Interview,” RTVI, June 23, 2023, <https://rtvi.com/news/chto-provoennye-blogery-i-voenkory-govoryat-ob-intervyu-evgeniya-prigozhina/>.

<sup>155</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1283](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1283).

### *Prigozhin's Rebellion—the events of Prigozhin's Rebellion*

#### **June 23**

Prigozhin's mutiny began to take shape June 23 at 9:00 p.m. Moscow time. At 9:09 p.m., he stated that a Wagner camp had been struck by rockets launched by the Russian MOD and that Wagner was deciding how to respond to a "huge number" of losses.<sup>156</sup> Twenty minutes later, Prigozhin announced that "the Commanding Council of PMC Wagner has decided that the evil ones, who are in the military leadership of our country must be stopped." He tried to assuage possible concerns that the mutiny could develop into a coup, promising that Wagner's only targets were Shoigu and Gerasimov, while other elements of the Russian security apparatus would be untouched.<sup>157</sup>

Russian authorities began responding shortly afterwards, with Shoigu allegedly escaping Rostov-on-Don ahead of an anticipated Wagner advance and the MOD rejecting Prigozhin's allegations of a targeted strike on Wagner positions as "information provocation." Late on Friday, June 23, the president of Russia's website announced that Putin had been informed of Prigozhin's uprising and was "taking necessary measures."<sup>158</sup> Intelligence sources of the BBC shared that the FSB in Moscow had been put on alert.<sup>159</sup> Also late on June 23, the FSB reportedly opened a treason case against Prigozhin.<sup>160</sup>

As the night progressed, Prigozhin continued to accuse the military establishment of trying to destroy Wagner with rocket, artillery, and air strikes. He also emphasized Wagner's strength and invoked the Russian people as a "strategic reserve" who would support Wagner's "march for justice," which Prigozhin again emphasized was not a coup and did not threaten anyone but the military leadership.<sup>161</sup>

#### **June 24**

June 24 featured a rapid advance by the Wagner column, reports of clashes between Wagner and Russian military forces, and elite consolidation behind Putin and against Prigozhin. By 10:00 a.m., Wagner forces appeared to be in control of Rostov-on-Don, and they progressed quickly towards Moscow, reaching the outskirts of the city by evening. As Wagner advanced, Prigozhin continued to rail against the military establishment, alleging that Wagner had encountered some military resistance and counterattacks on the road but had shot down helicopters attacking their column. Prigozhin's messages tended to emphasize Wagner's patriotic commitment and its focus on stopping Gerasimov and Shoigu.

Shortly after 10:30 a.m., Putin addressed Russia's citizens, armed forces, law enforcement, and intelligence services, as well as "those who, by deception or threats, were drawn into a criminal adventure, pushed onto the path of a serious

<sup>156</sup> "Prigozhin's 'Mutiny' June 23-24: Chronicle"; Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1284](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1284).

<sup>157</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1285](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1285).

<sup>158</sup> "The President Was Informed About the Situation with E. Prigozhin," President of Russia, June 24, 2023, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71494>.

<sup>159</sup> "The FSB Opened a Case of Calls for Rebellion After Prigozhin's Statements About the 'March of Justice' [ФСБ возбудила дело о призывах к мятежу после заявлений Пригожина о «марше справедливости»]," *BBC News Russian*, June 23, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-66005704>.

<sup>160</sup> "The FSB Opened a Case of Calls for Rebellion After Prigozhin's Statements About the 'March of Justice.'"

<sup>161</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1287](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1287); Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1288](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1288); Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1289](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1289).

crime—armed rebellion.”<sup>162</sup> He called the uprising “a stab in our country’s back” at a time when the country needed to be united in its fight with the West for sovereignty and independence. He claimed that a similar “blow” in 1917 pushed the country into civil war: “We will not allow this [Russian civil war] to repeat. We defend both our people and our government from all threats. This includes from internal betrayal.”<sup>163</sup> Putin then stated that Wagner’s leaders were “pushing the country towards anarchy and fratricide. To defeat, and, ultimately, capitulation” and warned that “anyone who deliberately took the path of betrayal, who prepared the armed rebellion, who took the path of blackmail and terrorism, will suffer inevitable punishment, answering to both our laws and our people.”<sup>164</sup>

The consolidation against Prigozhin began shortly after midnight Moscow time, when a video of Surovikin appeared, in which he urged Prigozhin to stand down, warning that continuing would “play into the hands of the enemy.” Surovikin added, “Before it’s too late, what must be done is to obey the will and order of the popularly elected President of the Russian Federation and stop the column.”<sup>165</sup> This consolidation gathered pace after Putin’s harsh condemnation of Prigozhin’s move, including major figures such as Kadyrov, Sergei Sobyenin, Vyacheslav Volodin, and Dmitry Medvedev, in addition to a large number of governors and other political figures all announcing their support for Putin and the establishment.<sup>166</sup> Around 8:30 p.m. Moscow time, Prigozhin suddenly announced the mutiny’s end in

a de-escalation apparently negotiated by Belarusian president Lukashenko.

In the evening, Prigozhin announced that the mutiny had ended, just as Wagner forces reached Moscow’s outskirts:

On the 23rd, we departed on our march of justice. For 24 hours, we marched almost 200 kilometers to Moscow. In this time, we did not lose a single drop of our fighters’ blood. Now, the moment has come, when blood could flow. Thus, understanding all responsibility for this spilling of Russian blood, on one side, we have stopped our column and are departing in the opposite direction, back to the barracks, in accordance with the plan.<sup>167</sup>

Rossiya 24 reporting indicated that Belarusian president Lukashenko had played a key role in resolving the conflict. Peskov announced that the case against Prigozhin would be dropped, but that Prigozhin would have to go to Belarus.<sup>168</sup>

### *Prigozhin’s Rebellion—aftermath*

On June 26, Putin again addressed the Russian people, noting that civic solidarity and the consolidation of government power prevented both successful blackmail and the upending of the constitutional order.<sup>169</sup> He stated that the mutiny had always been

<sup>162</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens,” President of Russia, June 24, 2023, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71496>.

<sup>163</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

<sup>164</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

<sup>165</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/27805](https://t.me/mod_russia/27805).

<sup>166</sup> Ramzan (Rkadyrov\_95) Kadyrov, Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/Rkadyrov\\_95/3717](https://t.me/Rkadyrov_95/3717); “Prigozhin’s ‘Mutiny’ June 23-24: Chronicle.”

<sup>167</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1303](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1303).

<sup>168</sup> “Peskov Said That Prigozhin ‘Will Go to Belarus’ [Песков заявил, что Пригожин “уйдет в Белоруссию”],” TASS, June 25, 2023, <https://tass.ru/politika/18111371>.

<sup>169</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

doomed, and that its leaders understood that they had embarked on a criminal enterprise that betrayed both their country and their fighters. He thanked personnel in the military, law enforcement, and special forces who had “stood in the rebels’ way.”<sup>170</sup>

Putin also noted that most Wagner fighters were also Russian patriots who had fought bravely in Ukraine, and thus he ordered a gradual response that would minimize bloodshed and give Prigozhin and his associates time to realize their mistake.<sup>171</sup> He explicitly thanked “those soldiers and commanders of the Wagner group who made the only right decision—to not embark on fraternal bloodshed—and instead stopped at the precipice.” Putin stated that Wagner fighters could either sign contracts with the Russian MOD or other state forces or leave for Belarus.<sup>172</sup> Putin also thanked Lukashenko for helping to solve the situation peacefully.<sup>173</sup>

Also on June 26, Kadyrov reflected on his relationship with Prigozhin, expressing surprise that the latter had put “personal ambitions, profit, and arrogance” over love of Russia. Kadyrov urged Wagner fighters to be “sober in their decisions” and warned that “the extreme measure would be harsh suppression and destruction of anyone who threatens the integrity of the Russian Federation.”<sup>174</sup>

Prigozhin made his first public comments after the mutiny on June 26 in an audio message posted on a Wagner-associated Telegram channel. He described the march on Moscow as a “demonstration” of Wagner’s dispute with the MOD rather than a bid for power. When it became apparent that bloodshed around Moscow was inevitable, Prigozhin claimed that “we considered that a demonstration of what we were going to do was enough.”<sup>175</sup> Also on June 26, *Kommersant* reported that the case against Prigozhin remained open and the investigation was underway.<sup>176</sup>

On June 27, Putin gave a speech at Cathedral Square in the Kremlin to assembled military and paramilitary forces who had been involved in suppressing Prigozhin’s uprising. He praised these units for defending the constitution, stopping a civil war, and observing their military oaths. Putin noted that the fidelity of the armed and security forces meant that “the people who were drawn into the rebellion saw that the army and the people were not with them.”<sup>177</sup> Later that day, at a meeting with MOD officers, he claimed that if the assembled officers had not been loyal to their military oaths and the Russian people and the Rebellion had succeeded, “total chaos and civil war” would have followed.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

<sup>171</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

<sup>172</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

<sup>173</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

<sup>174</sup> Ramzan (Rkadyrov\_95) Kadyrov, Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/3719](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/3719).

<sup>175</sup> Evgeny (Prigozhin\_hat) Prigozhin, Telegram post, June 26, 2023, [https://t.me/Prigozhin\\_hat/3815](https://t.me/Prigozhin_hat/3815).

<sup>176</sup> “Evgeny Prigozhin Remains Under Investigation for Sedition [Евгений Пригожин остается под следствием по делу о мятеже],” *Kommersant*, June 26, 2023, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6068297>.

<sup>177</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Speech Before Units of the Ministry of Defense, Russian Guard, FSB, Ministry of Internal Affairs, FSO, Who Ensured Order and Lawfulness During the Rebellion,” President of Russia, June 27, 2023, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71533>.

<sup>178</sup> “Meeting with Military Personnel of the Ministry of Defense,” President of Russia, June 27, 2023, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71535>.

Prigozhin would spend some time in Belarus at least from June 27, although he would return to Russia quickly thereafter.<sup>179</sup> On June 29, Putin met with Prigozhin and commanders of Wagner to discuss their activities during the Ukraine War and the mutiny. Describing the meeting, Peskov stated that Putin listened to explanations from the commanders, all of whom “emphasized that they are staunch supporters and soldiers of the head of state...[and] ready to continue to fight for the Motherland.”<sup>180</sup>

Surovikin, who was suspected of knowing of the attack in advance, disappeared after his video message during the mutiny.<sup>181</sup> Rumors circulated that he had been arrested, while Russian officials stated that he was “resting.”<sup>182</sup> He eventually appeared in public, apparently freed but stripped of his commands, in late August or early September.<sup>183</sup>

On July 12, the Ministry of Defense announced that Wagner forces had completed the handover of their heavy military equipment.<sup>184</sup>

Prigozhin would be given perceived freedom to move and operate in Russia from June 27 to August

23. He was seen meeting with African delegations at the Russia-Africa Summit, held in St. Petersburg on July 27 and 28.<sup>185</sup>

On August 23, Prigozhin was killed when his plane crashed on a flight between St. Petersburg and Moscow.<sup>186</sup> Kadyrov responded by posting a picture of the two together and praising his problem-solving abilities and contributions to the war in Ukraine, but he also criticized him for “not seeing the full picture” recently, an apparent reference to the failed uprising.<sup>187</sup> State media and propagandists initially responded by downplaying Prigozhin’s presence on the plane and framing it as a straightforward accident.<sup>188</sup>

Other insiders stated that they were shocked by Prigozhin’s cavalier approach to safety and his willingness to continue working in Russia. One thought it inevitable that Prigozhin would “come to a bad end,” while another was surprised that Prigozhin had remained in Russia working food catering contracts despite his reported shift to mercenary work in Africa.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Elliot Smith, “Wagner’s Prigozhin Is in Russia, Belarus Leader Says, Despite Putin Deal to End Mutiny,” CNBC, July 6, 2023, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/07/06/wagners-prigozhin-is-in-russia-belarus-leader-says-despite-putin-deal.html>.

<sup>180</sup> “Peskov Confirmed Putin’s Meeting with Prigozhin and Wagner Commanders on June 29 [Песков подтвердил встречу Путина с Пригожиным и командирами “Вагнера” 29 июня],” Interfax, July 10, 2023, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/910904>.

<sup>181</sup> “Senior Russian General Knew About Prigozhin’s Plans, New York Times Reports,” Reuters, June 28, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/senior-russian-general-knew-about-prigozhins-plans-new-york-times-2023-06-28/>.

<sup>182</sup> “Detained, Resting, in Quarantine? Where Could Surovikin Be Located? [Задержан, отдыхает, на карантине? Где может находиться Суrowикин],” RTVI, July 14, 2023, <https://rtvi.com/news/zaderzhan-otdyhaet-na-karantine-gde-mozhet-nahoditsya-surovikin/>.

<sup>183</sup> “Surovikin Appeared in Public for the First Time Since Prigozhin’s Rebellion, Journalists Learned [Суrowикин появился на публике впервые после мятежа Пригожина, узнали журналисты],” *BBC News Russian*, Sept. 5, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/c6p0elvz3ngo>.

<sup>184</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, July 12, 2023, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/28295](https://t.me/mod_russia/28295).

<sup>185</sup> “What Is Prigozhin Doing at Russia-Africa Summit?,” *Albawaba*, July 27, 2023, <https://www.albawaba.com/node/what-prigozhin-doing-russia-africa-summit-1528334>.

<sup>186</sup> “Russia’s Investigative Committee Confirms Prigozhin’s Death,” *Meduza*, Aug. 27, 2023, <https://meduza.io/en/news/2023/08/27/russia-s-investigative-committee-confirms-prigozhin-s-death>.

<sup>187</sup> Ramzan (Rkadyrov\_95) Kadyrov, Telegram post, Aug. 24, 2023, [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/3844](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/3844).

<sup>188</sup> “How Prigozhin’s Death Is Covered by State Media and Propagandists [Как гибель Пригожина освещают государственные медиа и пропагандисты],” *The Bell*, Aug. 24, 2023, <https://thebell.io/amp/kak-gibel-prigozhina-osveshchayut-gosudarstvennye-media-i-propagandisty>.

<sup>189</sup> “There Was a Feeling That After the Riot He Would End Badly. This Is Not Forgiven [«Было ощущение, что после бунта он плохо закончит. Такого не прощают»],” *Meduza*, Aug. 24, 2023, <https://meduza.io/feature/2023/08/23/bylo-oschuschenie-cto-posle-bunta-on-ploho-zakonchit-takogo-ne-proschayut>.



### Insights from case vignettes

This section's case study vignettes provide a preliminary picture of key moments of tension in Russia's wartime civil-military relations. In doing so, they exploit publicly available data sources, including both social media posts and traditional media reporting, and the vignettes act as a first-cut effort at detailing these events at the process level.

Although a full process-tracing account would engage with a wider variety of sources than currently are accessible to outside researchers, the cases here suggest important dynamics at play in the changing face of Russian civil-military relations during wartime. Critically, we find that the place of political officials—such as Putin, Security Council head Patrushev, and the political-military barons (in this case, Prigozhin)—is central to these relations. Indeed, these officials have been and are still active participants in negotiating with and even challenging the military leadership.

Interestingly, the first case—that of the change in war leadership to Surovikin, and then his subsequent loss of authority—could alternatively be understood as a military-military (“mil-mil”) issue between Shoigu, Gerasimov, and Surovikin. Nonetheless, these decisions are impossible without the buy-in of political officials, and they strongly track in temporal terms with political dissatisfaction with the war effort. Furthermore, the return of Shoigu and Gerasimov to control reflects the continued relevance of the especially closed, court-like nature of Putin's form of personalized authoritarian rule. Shoigu and Gerasimov were sufficiently positioned to regain their own stature, even after the failure of the war's initial aims and the further backsteps taken after the Ukrainian counteroffensive.

The second case, that of the run-up to and then the brief Rebellion by PMC Wagner and Prigozhin, further points to the tense interrelations between political and military elite actors. The Prigozhin Rebellion was preceded by a war of words in public on the part of Prigozhin, which followed from the bureaucratic reassertion of authority that Shoigu and Gerasimov had managed in the winter of 2023. As a kind of “armed negotiation” reminiscent of a feudal patron-vassal relationship, it strongly suggests that the perpetual tensions between the informality of the Russian regime—and its shockingly large interpenetration into the most coercive capabilities of the Russian state—and the institutionalized structures of the Russian Armed Forces very much remain.

Indeed, given that the Rebellion failed, Prigozhin was assassinated, and further PMC forces have been kept quite strictly under the control of the MOD and various security services from the fall of 2023 onwards, it is clear that the Russian regime core is very aware of the dangers in relying on political-military barons and may seek to prevent such autonomous groupings from ever emerging again. Whether this prevention will be achievable is an empirical question only answerable in time, and in light of the continued existence of the other preeminent political-military baron in Russia, Chechen subnational dictator Ramzan Kadyrov.

The report's final section provides a concluding picture of wartime Russian civil-military relations, highlighting the conceptual dimensions that have seen particular change since 2022 in light of the two empirical sections above. We then provide a brief set of insights, recommendations, and avenues for further study before concluding.

## IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE STUDY

This concluding section briefly synthesizes the study findings across the identified theoretical dimensions of civil-military relations, offers a set of recommendations, and identifies several avenues of future research and inquiry. This section emphasizes the contingent and evolving nature of contemporary wartime Russian civil-military relations and their relevance to policy-making discussions in the US and among partners and allies, with specific focus on NATO planning, US combatant command coordination and monitoring efforts, and outlooks for the US Navy, among other service branches.

### Implications for the Russian Armed Forces

The experience of more than two years of warfighting has left Russian civil-military relations significantly more strained and confused than they had been in the prewar period. Across a variety of tension points, both the military leadership and the political leadership, as well as irregular and peripheral actors, have found themselves in conflicts that stressed multiple dimensions of a previously clear and regularized relationship.

Overall, the status quo dynamic of Russian civil-military relations suffered in several key ways over the past two years, as Table 5 shows. Along two of the five dimensions, there was a continuation in the relationship pattern. First, in terms of *control*, overall political control of the military by the civilian

leadership was maintained. Second, in terms of *authority*, the Russian civil-military tradition of civilian assertiveness and willingness to directly force political will and decision-making on the Russian Armed Forces was followed at several points, especially in the wake of battlefield defeats.

Along the three other dimensions—*hierarchy*, *institutionalization*, and *autonomy*—civil-military relations were disrupted in various ways, and the once-stable relationship was undermined. First, in terms of *hierarchy*, the formal civilian hierarchy was confused by the special nature of irregularized forces in the warfight, most importantly PMC Wagner and the personal patron-client relationship between the regime core and Prigozhin, but also those related to Kadyrov's Chechen fighters.

Here, the structural lines of authority were blurred, and unmediated connections existed between political elites and military actors outside of the formal structure of the Russian Armed Forces. That irregularized military outfits could become politically relevant—to such a degree that they could challenge the military leadership in an armed rebellion—is a significant breach in the previously existing civil-military hierarchy. For a time, civil-military hierarchy moved from a formal civilian hierarchy to a mixed hierarchy, one in which feudal-style relations with lower-level, semi-autonomous patrons existed and forces under a major political-military baron operated in very large numbers on the battlefield.<sup>190</sup>

<sup>190</sup> According to one estimate, PMC Wagner spent upwards of 108 billion rubles and conscripted close to 50,000 penal soldiers alone between the start of the war and August 2023, of which roughly 20,000 were killed. The vast majority died during the Battle of Bakhmut. This figure does not include volunteers from other sources or pre-existing Wagner units. See Dmitry Treshchanin, "The Bakhmut Price. We Received Documents from Wagner PMC About 'Project K'—and We Know Everything About the Dead and Recruited Prisoners [Цена Бахмута. Мы получили документы «ЧВК Вагнера» о «проекте К» — и знаем все о погибших и завербованных заключенных]," *Mediazona*, June 10, 2024, <https://zona.media/article/2024/06/10/42174>.

Second, in terms of *institutionalization*, civil-military relations were undermined through political interventions as well as the existence of irregularized units like PMC Wagner, which became important components of the war in the first half of 2023. Rather than stable patterns of relations across the other dimensions, we see unstable and shifting relations that are dependent on conditions that vary widely over time and across issue areas. Deinstitutionalization leads to greater uncertainty among military elites—both the highest leadership and other flag-officers—which may lead to a more brittle and transactional civil-military relationship paradigm and encourage resentment, grievance, and discontent in the medium to long term.

Third, in terms of *autonomy*, the ability of the Russian Armed Forces' leadership to govern itself and maintain internal independence through its own processes was undermined significantly by repeated political interventions into both the strategic direction of the war and regular personnel changes at the command level.

The experience of the Russia-Ukraine war has profoundly affected the Russian Armed Forces, its military leadership, its own internal chains of command, and its relationship with civilian, political principals. A civil-military relationship that had previously been based on a long-standing, Soviet-derived tradition of civilian control and relative deference has been disrupted in several ways. Nevertheless, since Prigozhin's Rebellion, Russia's political regime has reasserted presidential control sharply. The resilience of Russia's authoritarian political order should not be underestimated.

Indeed, as of 2024, few analysts are tracking new points of civil-military tensions in public. Nevertheless, the damage to the previously existing order of civil-military relations is considerable and will remain a core area of interest for outside observers as well as Russians themselves. The

government reshuffle in May 2024 represents one item of potential tension that has so far not seen any major observable downstream impacts. The shift of Minister of Defense Shoigu to the Security Council has not produced any public statements suggesting open discontent yet, and Russian elites seem willing to remain quiet for now. The small anti-corruption purges are events of considerable interest, however, and should they continue or target more well-connected elites, they could quickly raise new civil-military tensions to unpredictable heights.

Overall, despite the current (perhaps forced) calm of early summer 2024, civil-military relations are likely more brittle and fraught than they were prewar, with leaders' reputations damaged, levels of loyalty and trust between upper-tier military and political elites impaired, and careers undermined or advanced by the considerable personnel tumult and the reaction to Prigozhin's downfall. The following subsections suggest a few areas of interest for further study before concluding.

### Insights and recommendations on Russian civil-military relations

The subject of Russian civil-military relations will remain a core interest for scholars, policy-makers, and other stakeholders for the foreseeable future. As a topic of research interest, it remains relevant simply because of the continuation of the Russia-Ukraine war. Russian civil-military relations have been studied systematically in waves that often have been tied closely to the changing political and institutional realities in Russia during the last 30 years. From concerns about Russia's immediate post-Soviet transition (the 1990s) to interest in the relative lack of reform (the pre-2008 period) to studying reformism and its discontents (post-2008), the field has looked primarily to questions of military autonomy and continued political subordination.

As this study has shown, however, the issue of Russian civil-military relations has become newly complicated as a result of the growth in powerful irregularized, parastatal military forces with considerable military capacity, the political challenge of restraining and managing semi-autonomous political-military barons who exist outside the formal military hierarchy, the ongoing fight over military leadership autonomy vis-à-vis pressures from the Kremlin, and other points of interest.

Three relevant intellectual communities—national security policy-makers, observers in the broader field of Russian military studies, and scholars of civil-military relations—will gain from further research on Russian civil-military relations in overlapping but distinct ways. The following points represent partial, stylized suggestions, insights, and recommendations to follow in future research and continued debates across and within these communities in the coming years.

### *Key insights and recommendations for policy-makers*

- Rising civil-military tensions in Russia raise the specter of civil strife, civil war, coup-threats, or coups in the largest adversary bordering NATO member countries and could ratchet up escalation dangers depending on the state of Russian domestic politics, the control of the Russian Armed Forces, and other issues. Analysts in military and intelligence communities will gain from continuing to take civil-military dynamics seriously and should continue to map out networks of decision-making and decision-influencing actors to provide actionable heuristics on “who’s who” and where tension points lie.
- Political-military instability (characterized by, for example, changing regimes, purging flag-level officers, and engaging reactive mechanisms to reestablish control and hierarchy within the armed forces) will likely increase institutional sclerosis by entrenching existing bureaucratically dominant internal hierarchies. The difficulty of coordinating adaptive decision-making within the Russian Armed Forces will be made worse because there will be understandable incentives to raise concerns about the need for closer oversight by political authorities in the Kremlin. This difficulty will likely affect force effectiveness, capacity, and the relative autonomy of military actors. Kremlin fears about maintaining civilian control will remain a core focus point, and the Kremlin will struggle to balance competing desires for military effectiveness and the potential for further “securitization” of the Russian upper-tier elite and within the Kremlin itself.
- Continued political instability in Russia resulting from civil-military issues may also increase the risk of a decisive “cleaning house” reform event that may decrease (in the short to medium term) or possibly increase (in the medium to long term) the ability of the Russian Armed Forces to conduct and sustain a regional conflict in Eastern Europe. Planners need to take into account the plausibility of Russian beliefs in offensive operations given the likelihood of future reform efforts. If the MOD is preparing for major internal reform, its ability to engage in new conflicts may be temporarily limited. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether Russian perceptions of

Table 5. Changes and continuities in Russian civil-military dimensions

Prewar Dimension of Civil-Military Relations	Wartime Dynamics
<b>Control</b> (political control)	<b>Continuation</b> (political control maintained)
<b>Authority</b> (civilian assertiveness)	<b>Continuation</b> (civilian assertiveness maintained and strengthened)
<b>Hierarchy</b> (formal civilian hierarchy)	<b>Undermined</b> (political intervention, irregularization, and rebellion)
<b>Institutionalization</b> (institutionalized relations)	<b>Undermined</b> (political intervention through informal channels, irregularization, and crisis periods)
<b>Autonomy</b> (internal autonomy)	<b>Undermined</b> (political intervention in strategy and personnel)

Source: CNA.

the existing effectiveness of Armed Forces' ability to maintain coherency in high-tempo operations will be affected by elite-level instability.

- Civil-military tensions may reorient political leadership toward suboptimal reform efforts, focusing on regime maintenance and stability, coup-proofing, and ensuring officer loyalty. This may undermine the effectiveness of post-war medium- and long-term reform efforts for the Russian Armed Forces, including differing investments across Russian service branches. Instead, focus must remain primarily on the Russian Ground Forces and, to a lesser extent, the Aerospace Forces, which have conducted the bulk of the fighting in Ukraine and also have been the locus for ongoing civil-military tensions. The reputation and legacy of General Surovikin will loom large in future Russian reforms or lack thereof, as well as any potential efforts at new professionalization or leadership cadre regeneration.

## Key insights and future research avenues for Russian military studies

- The closed nature of intra-bureaucratic politics within the Kremlin, the MOD, and the General Staff remains a problem that hinders data availability and obscures the ability to check assumptions and assertions about how publicly available data observations match internal decision-making processes. The study of leadership and bureaucratic personnel is a vital path to better understand how civil-military tensions play out from actor perspectives. Integrating insights from Russia-based journalists and anonymous social media "insiders" can only go so far in confirming researcher assumptions, which means that findings must be understood as subject to interpretation pressures for the foreseeable future.
- As the war continues, more public writing from Russian military academics and practitioners in subject area journals such as *Military Thought* (*Voennaya Mysl*) continue

to be important sources for research. It is possible that these publications will be moved to classified or nonpublic status, which would hinder future research, as may already be the case for the latter outlet. Although Russian academic journals cannot be considered truly verifiable sources of information on internal military politics, a reading-between-the-lines approach will likely provide some insights into tension points, as well as a means of triangulating specific areas of interest that Russia-based actors see as important and relevant. Semipublic debates taking place on the Telegram channels of well-connected war correspondents will continue to be important sources of biased but plentiful data for future research as well.

- The place of certain political institutions such as the Russian Security Council remains relatively underemphasized in current scholarship. Further studies on the makeup and interaction of these institutions with other core institutions, especially the Presidential Administration and the MOD, will likely provide new insights into how political and military leadership actors interact with each other, as well as coordinate—or fail to coordinate—during periods of crisis and as military events unfold over time. Similarly, given the highly personalized nature of decision-making in the Kremlin, as well as clear antagonistic relationships between multiple key military figures during the period under study, it is likely that close and careful research on personality and the role of factions within Russian military politics will also yield important insights, even given the limitations of available data.

### *Key insights and future research avenues for scholarship on civil-military relations*

- The Russian Armed Forces represent a core case of civilian control in a large, authoritarian regime with a highly institutionalized and powerful military. As major warfare conducted by such a state is rare, the Russian case remains an important instance of seeing how such a system engages with, and is in turn influenced by, the experience of prolonged, high-casualty warfighting. The Russia case should be both juxtaposed with other such systems—such as China—and compared to less fully controlled systems—as in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East—to provide new insights into the systematic understanding of 21st century civil-military relations.
- The Prigozhin Rebellion represents an example of unexpected and extraordinary breakdown in the organization of military hierarchy and political authority in a country engaged in active warfare. Although the Rebellion should likely not be conceptualized as a coup, the rich, ongoing research agendas related to coups, mutinies, and rebellions in a variety of post-colonial settings should nevertheless be directly tapped to provide further analytic insight into Russia’s particular experience. Bringing comparative focus on military rebellions, with an eye to the unusual parastatal nature of organizations such as PMC Wagner, will provide new lenses through and theoretical viewpoints from which to understand such breakdowns.

### Concluding discussion

The study of civil-military relations primarily considers the institutional and power relations between a given country's decision-making political elite and the military leadership responsible for conducting combat and strategic operations, examining issues of control, authority, hierarchy, institutionalization, and autonomy. This area of study can also seek to answer a variety of questions pertaining to political order, policy-making and development, inter- and intra-institutional conflict and coordination, organizational culture, state-society dynamics, and other areas of interest surrounding the military and its relation to non-military components of the social and political world.

Approaches to understanding Russian civil-military relations have traditionally focused on professionalization (objective or subjective civilian control of the armed forces or lack thereof) or reform (degrees of autonomy and direction in shaping and reshaping the organization and capabilities of the armed forces), as well as military-society relations (degrees of social militarization relative to a more civilian-dominant societal-cultural environment). However, since the Russia-Ukraine war began, Russian civil-military relations have shifted to focus on the active question of regime stability itself and concerns over coups or violent civil strife. It is vital to assess the increasing uncertainty and instability in Russian civil-military relations because these

dynamics interact directly with the Russian Armed Forces' ability to conduct and sustain a local or regional war beyond state borders.

The Russian wartime experience since February 2022 has been defined by considerable tensions between political and military leadership (*control* and *autonomy*), as well as changing de facto lines of *authority*, *hierarchy*, and *institutionalization* resulting from the emergence of an important irregularized component of Russian warfighting through parastatal, semi-mercenary forces. These tensions have resulted in flag-level personnel changes (frequency of theater commander changes), notable public recriminations and criticism against military elites (the war correspondents phenomenon), an open, armed rebellion by a large parastatal force (PMC Wagner) directed against the MOD as a negotiation with the political leadership, and several cases of imprisonment and assassinations targeted at the highest level of strategic-operational military and quasi-military elites (Surovikin and Prigozhin).

Civil-military relations in Russian remain in considerable flux. Events and decisions, whether intended or otherwise, are likely to have important medium- and long-term consequences for the capabilities of the Russian Armed Forces, its ability to project sustained power, its ability to organize its own internal affairs (including uncertainty about who will be the key points of authority in such processes), and its place in the Russian political system.

## APPENDIX A: KEY RUSSIAN CIVIL-MILITARY ACTORS

This appendix reviews the key actors in Russian civil-military relations, identifying the figures and organizations of particular focus for this report. As we noted in the main report, this study does not comprehensively discuss all elements of Russian civil-military relations, instead focusing on key elite dynamics and impacts on the military leadership, structures of authority, and political principals. This appendix may be productively read alongside the theoretical and conceptual section (“Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives,” beginning on page 8).

### Key actors in Russian civil-military relations

A long list of elite actors and state organizations comprise the universe of cases for Russian civil-military relations. Nevertheless, a small subset of military, political, and societal entities constitute the decision-making core and relevant decision-influencing semi-peripheral figures. We can separate these into core, mixed, and peripheral actors of interest.

#### *Core military actors: the MOD and the General Staff*

Civil-military relations within the Russian high command touches most directly on a duopoly of power that sits atop the military hierarchy. These are namely the minister of defense and his military-administrative apparatus and the chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.<sup>191</sup>

A recent report from the Institute for the Study of War succinctly describes the basic position of this leadership core in the prewar period:

The Russian Armed Forces are administratively controlled by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), with longstanding Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reporting to President Vladimir Putin and sitting on the Security Council, the Russian President’s consultative body on national security. Shoigu runs the MoD through the Collegium, a standing body including several Deputy Defense Ministers, the heads of key MoD and General Staff Directorates, the commanders of Russia’s armed services and branches, and the Military District commanders.

The Russian General Staff is the executive body of the MoD. The Russian General Staff is often misunderstood by Western observers and differs from the US Joint Staff in several key ways. Often referred to as the “Arbat Military District” for the street in Moscow its headquarters is located on, the General Staff exerts a powerful influence on Russian military planning and was a major force behind resistance to previous Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov’s “New Look” reforms. The General

<sup>191</sup> For two recent analytical statements on the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, see Julian G. Waller and Dmitry Gorenburg, *The Central Brain of the Russian Armed Forces: The Modern Russian General Staff in Institutional Context*, CNA, DOP-2024-U-038956-1Rev, Sept. 2024; Alexis A. Blanc et al., *The Russian General Staff: Understanding the Military’s Decisionmaking Role in a “Besieged Fortress,”* RAND, Mar. 2023, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1233-7.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1233-7.html).



Staff is responsible for strategic defense planning—forecasting the wars Russia will likely need to fight; assessing predominant means of warfare; and developing the Russian military necessary to meet these requirements, in addition to holding operational control over Russian forces in wartime.<sup>192</sup>

In this sense, the minister of defense serves as the primary political and administrative component of the Russian Armed Forces command structure, while the General Staff provides strategic and operational planning and execution functions.<sup>193</sup> The minister of defense is both a core figure in the national security and military leadership as well as a member of the Cabinet of Ministers. The minister of defense sits on the Security Council and is the key point of contact for the president, who is also constitutionally the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

The chief of the General Staff holds operational-strategic command authority of the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>194</sup> The General Staff is relatively shielded from day-to-day politics, with its touchpoint to the political system coming mainly from how it directs and oversees the Russian Armed Forces. The chief of the General Staff is integrated into the MOD bureaucracy via his responsibility as first deputy minister of defense. In recent years, Minister of

Defense Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov have appeared to act in tandem across a range of issues.

### *Core political actors: the president, the Kremlin, the Security Council, and the FSB*

The second key component of the civil-military ecosystem in Russia is the political leadership. The Russian president acts as Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and is the primary decision-maker on political-strategic and foreign policy issues of the Russian state, which includes deploying and utilizing the Russian Armed Forces. In addition to the president and his supporting Presidential Administration, the Russian Security Council—a subordinate council body providing advice and elite consent to the president—acts as another institution of relevance on the political side.<sup>195</sup>

The Security Council reviews and provides advice to the president on strategic and security matters. Its membership is made up of a collection of senior leaders who have various responsibilities for the direction of Russian state policy (see Table 6).<sup>196</sup> Although the Security Council is a subordinate conciliar body within Russia's authoritarian political order, its institutional development has been especially notable as a place where the president

<sup>192</sup> Mason Clark and Karolina Hird, "Russian Regular Ground Forces Order of Battle," Institute for the Study of War, Oct. 2023, [https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/October%2012%2C%202023%20Russian%20Orbat\\_Final.pdf](https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/October%2012%2C%202023%20Russian%20Orbat_Final.pdf).

<sup>193</sup> Blanc et al., *The Russian General Staff*.

<sup>194</sup> Blanc et al., *The Russian General Staff*; Clark and Hird, "Russian Regular Ground Forces Order of Battle."

<sup>195</sup> Schulmann and Galeotti, "A Tale of Two Councils."

<sup>196</sup> As part of the secretary of the Security Council's official powers relevant to civil-military questions, he or she "exercises control over the implementation of decisions of the Security Council, as well as control over the activities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, other troops, military formations and bodies, including with the involvement of state control and supervisory authorities... organizes work to implement strategic planning in the field of ensuring national security, to develop and clarify the national security strategy of the Russian Federation, other conceptual and doctrinal documents in the field of ensuring national security and defense, strategic national priorities, [and,] if necessary, holds meetings on strategic planning with permanent members of the Security Council and members of the Security Council, as well as other officials." See "Regulations of the Security Council of the Russian Federation," Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, N. 175, Mar. 7, 2020, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/about/regulations/>.

coordinates support for his decisions and provides legitimating direction for policies in the national security sphere. As such, it is within this body that civil-military relations are most starkly represented.<sup>197</sup>

In addition to the Kremlin and upper-tier elite institutions such as the Security Council, the Federal Security Service (FSB) also serves a vital national security role. In addition to advising the president on national security issues, it has operated as the president's chief source of information on Ukraine.<sup>198</sup> Alongside members of other intelligence services, FSB officers have operational roles on the ground that require a degree of coordination and cooperation with the Russian MOD.<sup>199</sup>

### *Irregular and mixed political-military actors: the political-military barons and the war correspondents*

An important component in the ongoing war has been the flourishing of semi-autonomous armed actors engaged in military operations while partially or entirely outside the formal remit of the structures of the Russian Armed Forces. The most notable of these has been private military company (PMC) Wagner, headed by Putin loyalist and entrepreneur Evgeny Prigozhin.<sup>200</sup> The Wagner organization pioneered a form of parastatal irregularization of military force from its initial deployment in the Syria conflict through to other small-scale expeditionary activities in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>201</sup> Other actors that fit the profile include the so-called *Kadyrovtsy*, the personal military forces of Chechen dictator Ramzan Kadyrov, as well as a growing number of PMC outfits associated with corporate organizations and local governors.<sup>202</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Schulmann and Galeotti, "A Tale of Two Councils."

<sup>198</sup> Julian G. Waller, "Intelligence Failures and Political Misjudgment in an Age of Ideological Change," *The Strategy Bridge*, June 2023, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2023/6/14/intelligence-failures-and-political-misjudgment-in-an-age-of-ideological-change>; Reid Standish, "Interview: How Russia's Intelligence Agencies Have Adapted After Six Months of War," *RFE/RL*, Aug. 24, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-intelligence-agencies-ukraine-war-six-months/32003096.html>.

<sup>199</sup> For unconfirmed reports of tensions between the FSB and the MOD, see, for example, Martin Fornusek, "Military Intelligence: 'War between FSB and Russian Defense Ministry in Active Phase,'" *Kyiv Independent*, June 29, 2023, <https://kyivindependent.com/intelligence-war-between-fsb-and-russian/>. It is believed that the FSB has a strong presence in detaining Ukrainian citizens and running filtration camps in annexed territories as well; see Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, "How the War Affected the Russian Security Services," International Centre for Defence and Security, June 2023, <https://icds.ee/en/how-the-war-affected-the-russian-security-services/>.

<sup>200</sup> Kimberly Marten et al., *Potential Russian Uses of Paramilitaries in Eurasia*; Marten, "Whither Wagner?"; and Kimberly Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces: The Case of the Wagner Group," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, no. 3 (2019), pp. 181–204.

<sup>201</sup> Marten et al., *Potential Russian Uses of Paramilitaries in Eurasia*; Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces"; Reynolds, *Putin's Not-So-Secret Mercenaries: Patronage, Geopolitics, and the Wagner Group*; Candace Rondeaux, *Decoding the Wagner Group: Analyzing the Role of Private Military Security Contractors in Russian Proxy Warfare*, New America, 2019; and Sergey Sukhankin, "'Continuing War by Other Means': The Case of Wagner, Russia's Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East," *Russia in the Middle East* (Oct. 23, 2018), pp. 290–319.

<sup>202</sup> Marten et al., *Potential Russian Uses of Paramilitaries in Eurasia*; Kimberly Marten, "Russian Foreign Paramilitary Outfits Beyond Wagner," *The Wagner Group—A Preliminary Update* 18, no. 303 (2023), p. 12; Wilson A. Jones, "The Chechen Kadyrovtsy's Coercive Violence in Ukraine," *US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 53, no. 3 (2023), pp. 117–32; Tomáš Šmíd and Miroslav Mareš, "'Kadyrovtsy': Russia's Counterinsurgency Strategy and the Wars of Paramilitary Clans," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (2015), pp. 650–77; and Emil Souleimanov, "An Ethnography of Counterinsurgency: Kadyrovtsy and Russia's Policy of Chechenization," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 2 (2015), pp. 91–114.

Some of these parastatal military organizations are more clearly associated with and subordinated to the Russian government, such as the PMC Redut, which is an arm of the Russian Armed Forces and has grown since the Prigozhin Rebellion.<sup>203</sup> Both oil and gas companies and regional governors have also begun forming PMC groups, some of which are relatively closely connected to the state, although with variations in command and control.<sup>204</sup>

Others, such as PMC Wagner and the *Kadyrovtsy*, fit a different profile, one in which their recruitment, retainment, and to some degree financial support are separate from government structures. They are notable as well for the highly personalized leadership cults surrounding Prigozhin and Kadyrov, who act in a quasi-feudal manner analogically—they hold unique and direct connections to the Russian leadership that bypass institutional pathways and maintain autonomy from conventional Russian Armed Forces support structures.

Their ability to rely on financial resources outside the MOD furthers their relative autonomy, although they are still heavily dependent on the state overall. These political-military barons should be understood as more than just mercenary outfits; they are closer to “political figures with personal control over real military resources and favored, clientelist connections to the apex executive.”<sup>205</sup> These PMCs and their relationship with the Kremlin have spurred civil-military tensions that came to a head in the late spring of 2023.

Finally, Cossack groups also act as a sort of irregularized, parastatal entities. These groups have been found in increasing numbers as the war has gone on and have evolving relationships with the MOD. These relationships do not fit the profile of either the political-military barons or the more government-directed PMC outfits, however, because of both their unique status in Russian Cossack society and the peculiar identity privileges and prerogatives legally provided through the registration that they undertake with the Russian state. Indeed, their social role—serving as a means of generating patriotic education and preparing future soldiers—ties them to the civil-military relationship more than their battlefield activities have thus far.<sup>206</sup>

Other relevant irregular political-military actors include the so-called war correspondents (*voennye korrespondenty*, or *voenkory*). These are military journalists and analysts who write on the conflict, often embedded in frontline units or closely connected to them, and they write through popular social media channels on Telegram.<sup>207</sup> These war correspondent channels are subscribed to by tens or even hundreds of thousands of followers and have become key dissemination points for information on the war’s conduct, battlefield losses, supply insufficiencies, and other issues largely censored from the official newspaper- and TV-based press.

The war correspondents are irregular, volunteer actors but have a strong place in the Russian wartime dictatorship’s political public sphere.<sup>208</sup> Their influence grew over the course of the first

<sup>203</sup> Marten et al., *Potential Russian Uses of Paramilitaries in Eurasia*; Marten, “Russian Foreign Paramilitary Outfits Beyond Wagner.”

<sup>204</sup> Marten et al., *Potential Russian Uses of Paramilitaries in Eurasia*; Marten, “Russian Foreign Paramilitary Outfits Beyond Wagner.”

<sup>205</sup> Waller, “Public Politics in the Wartime Russian Dictatorship.”

<sup>206</sup> Richard Arnold, “Cossack Education Becoming Further Institutionalized Across Russia’s Regions,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 20, no. 173 (Nov. 8, 2023), <https://jamestown.org/program/cossack-education-is-becoming-further-institutionalized-in-russia/>.

<sup>207</sup> Vitaly Shevchenko, “Ukraine War: Who Are Russia’s War Bloggers and Why Are They Popular?,” *BBC*, Apr. 4, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65179954>.

<sup>208</sup> Waller, “Public Politics in the Wartime Russian Dictatorship.”

Table 6. Current membership of the Russian Security Council, January 2024

Name	Official Post
<b>PERMANENT MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL</b>	
Vladimir Putin	Chairman of the Security Council (as president of Russia, <i>ex officio</i> )
Dmitry Medvedev	Deputy Chairman of the Security Council
Nikolai Patrushev	Secretary of the Security Council
Mikhail Mishustin	Prime Minister of the Russian Federation
Valentina Matviyenko	Chairwoman of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly
Vyacheslav Volodin	Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly
Anton Vaino	Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration
Sergei Ivanov	Special Representative of the President on Issues of Environmental Activities, Ecology and Transport
Sergei Shoigu	Minister of Defense
Sergei Lavrov	Minister of Foreign Affairs
Vladimir Kolokoltsev	Minister of Internal Affairs
Alexander Bortnikov	Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB)
Sergei Naryshkin	Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)
<b>NONPERMANENT MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL</b>	
Rashid Nurgaliyev	First Deputy Secretary of the Security Council
Valery Gerasimov	Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and First Deputy Minister of Defense
Aleksandr Kurenkov	Minister of the Russian Federation for Affairs of Civil Defense, Emergency Situations, and the Liquidation of Consequences of Natural Disasters
Konstantin Chuichenko	Minister of Justice
Anton Siluanov	Minister of Finance
Viktor Zolotov	Director of the Federal Service of National Guard Troops and Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard Forces Command
Igor Shchegolev	Plenipotentiary Representative of the President to the Central Federal District
Aleksandr Gutsan	Plenipotentiary Representative of the President to the Northwestern Federal District
Vladimir Ustinov	Plenipotentiary Representative of the President to the Southern Federal District
Yury Chaika	Plenipotentiary Representative of the President to the North Caucasus Federal District
Igor Komarov	Plenipotentiary Representative of the President to the Volga Federal District
Vladimir Yakushev	Plenipotentiary Representative of the President to the Ural Federal District
Anatoly Seryshev	Plenipotentiary Representative of the President to the Siberian Federal District
Yury Trutnev	Plenipotentiary Representative of the President to the Far Eastern Federal District and Deputy Prime Minister
Sergei Sobyainin	Mayor of Moscow
Aleksandr Beglov	Governor of Saint-Petersburg
Igor Krasnov	Prosecutor General
Gennadiy Krasnikov	President of the Russian Academy of Sciences

Source: President of Russia, "Security Council Structure," Kremlin.ru.

year of the war, as successful battlefield outcomes eluded Russian forces, and the correspondents were reluctantly brought into the political system proper through official meetings with the Russian president himself.<sup>209</sup> It is likely that war correspondent pressure was a component in both the decision for mobilization and the appointment of General Surovikin in September 2022.<sup>210</sup> Since December 2022, a working group of war correspondents has been set up in part to ease tensions between these information-rich sources and political actors in the Kremlin and elsewhere.<sup>211</sup> This may be viewed as a form of cooptation, although war correspondent social media channels have remained central to Russian reporting on the war.<sup>212</sup>

### *Peripheral political actors: the United Russia party and volunteer groups*

The Russian political system remains quite closed, and interactions with military processes are largely firewalled from political or societal actors outside of the Kremlin or the ministries. It is worth noting, however, that the war has also brought both political party and civil society organizations into the broader wartime ecosystem, if only in relatively peripheral and marginal ways. Among several groups that fit in

this category, two stand out as relevant to political-military questions related to civil-military relations overall: Russia's current ruling party, United Russia, and volunteer groups who are providing materiel and support assistance to the battlefield, medical, veteran processing, and logistics efforts.

The United Russia party has been a mainstay of Russia's political system since the early 2000s and has been used as the primary party vehicle for elite advancement and coordination within Russia.<sup>213</sup> The party does not act as an autonomous institution and does not have independent authority separate from Vladimir Putin and other key upper-tier elites. Instead, it is a subordinate body tasked with occupying political institutions (the parliament, governors offices, regional and local councils, and mayoralties), coordinating elite career progressions, coopting relevant political actors and groups, and acting as an intermediary institution through which regime decision-making can be articulated and integrated to the broader Russian society.

Relevant to the civil-military component, the United Russia party—in coordination with the Presidential Administration—took upon itself the task of aiding and coordinating the rebuilding of newly annexed Ukrainian provinces (the Donetsk Peoples' Republic, the Luhansk Peoples' Republic,

<sup>209</sup> President of Russia, "Meeting with War Correspondents," June 13, 2023, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71391>; Gregory Asmolov, "Crisis Propaganda," *RIDDLE Russia*, Dec. 14, 2022, <https://ridl.io/crisis-propaganda/>.

<sup>210</sup> Waller, "Public Politics in the Wartime Russian Dictatorship"; Katie Bo Lillis, "Russia's Military Divided as Putin Struggles to Deal with Ukraine's Counteroffensive, US Sources Say," CNN, Sept. 22, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/22/politics/russia-military-divided-ukraine-putin/index.html>.

<sup>211</sup> "On the Working Group to Ensure Interaction Between Public Authorities and Organizations on Issues of Mobilization Preparation and Mobilization, Social and Legal Protection of Citizens of the Russian Federation Taking Part in a Special Military Operation, and Members of Their Families," Order of the President of the Russian Federation, No. 420-rp, Dec. 20, 2022, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202212200054?index=0&rangeSize=1>.

<sup>212</sup> Katya Arenina and Mikhail Rubin, "The House of Little Fame: The Tale of Kremlin's Fight Against the Bad News," *Meduza*, Dec. 19, 2022, <https://www.proekt.media/en/narrative-en/kremlin-telegram-meduza-en/>.

<sup>213</sup> Ora John Reuter, *The Origins of Dominant Parties: Building Authoritarian Institutions in Post-Soviet Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ora John Reuter and Thomas F. Remington, "Dominant Party Regimes and the Commitment Problem: The Case of United Russia," *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 4 (2009), pp. 501–26.

Kherson Oblast, and Zaporizhzhia Oblast).<sup>214</sup> United Russia undertook this task because many of its elites have strong connections with the construction and private logistics industries in the country, and many parliamentary representatives are interested in signaling loyalty and showing their worth to the Kremlin—and many of those parliamentary representatives likely are engaging in corruption through humanitarian initiatives as well.<sup>215</sup> The parliamentary party leader of United Russia, Anatoly Turchak, has been particularly prominent in this these efforts.<sup>216</sup> Other Russian political parties have similarly supported the war effort but are less well positioned relative to United Russia.<sup>217</sup> Turchak has acted as one of the key interlocutors with the Kremlin on managing the negative domestic reaction to mobilization.<sup>218</sup>

Other peripheral actors include the swath of neutral or civil society organizations that support the war and engage with military and occupation forces. This ranges from groups associated with the Russian Orthodox Church and the establishment Islamic Muftiates to medical groups to veterans' reintegration services, among many others.<sup>219</sup>

Volunteer organizations that support military efforts directly are worth noting, including those that supply, as well as train and experiment with, drone and other UAV technologies, which have proven critical for the Russian war effort.<sup>220</sup> These volunteer groups, which are important to on-the-ground battlefield dynamics, integrate into the civil-military picture in Russia. The political scientist Kirill Shamiev has noted how much their role has increased since the war:

<sup>214</sup> Mykhailo Minakov, "The Kremlin's Plans to Annex Southeastern Ukraine Go into Effect," Focus Ukraine, Kennan Institute, July 26, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/kremlins-plans-annex-southeastern-ukraine-go-effect>; Robyn Dixon, "How Russia Is Laying the Groundwork for Its Annexation of Ukraine," *Washington Post*, July 21, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/21/russia-ukraine-annex-referendum-kherson/>.

<sup>215</sup> For research on Russia's rebuilding program, see David Lewis' forthcoming book, *Occupation Russian Rule in South-Eastern Ukraine* (Hurst, 2024), as well as David Lewis, "Economic Crime and Illicit Finance in Russia's Occupation Regime in Ukraine," Serious Organised Crime & Anti-Corruption Evidence Research Paper No 20, University of Birmingham, 2023, [https://therussiaprogram.org/economic\\_crime](https://therussiaprogram.org/economic_crime).

<sup>216</sup> "He Walks the Walk': How United Russia General Secretary Andrey Turchak Turned the 'Party of Power' into the Party of War," *Meduza*, July 28, 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/07/28/he-walks-the-walk>.

<sup>217</sup> Simon Pirani, "How Russia's Loyal 'Opposition' Parties Support the War Against Ukraine," *OpenDemocracy*, Nov. 17, 2022, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/russia-opposition-communist-just-russia-support-ukraine-war/>; Waller, "Public Politics in the Wartime Russian Dictatorship."

<sup>218</sup> President of Russia, "Meeting with First Deputy Speaker of the Federation Council Andrei Turchak," Apr. 24, 2023, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70975>.

<sup>219</sup> "Putin Praises Russian 'Defenders' as Ukraine Deflects Another Barrage," Al Jazeera, Jan. 7, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/7/putin-praises-russian-defenders-as-ukraine-deflects-another-barrage>; Gulnaz Sibgatullina, "The Muftis and the Myths: Constructing the Russian 'Church for Islam,'" *Problems of Post-Communism* (2023), pp. 1–12; "Russia Creates the 'Muftiate of Muslims of Little Russia' in the Occupied Territories," Religious Information Service of Ukraine, Oct. 18, 2022, [https://risu.ua/en/russia-creates-the-muftiate-of-muslims-of-little-russia-in-the-occupied-territories\\_n133214](https://risu.ua/en/russia-creates-the-muftiate-of-muslims-of-little-russia-in-the-occupied-territories_n133214).

<sup>220</sup> Samuel Bendett and Jane Pinelis, "How the West Can Match Russia in Drone Innovation," *War on the Rocks*, January 2024, <https://warontherocks.com/2024/01/how-the-west-can-match-russia-in-drone-innovation/>; David Hambling, "Russian Volunteer Group Claims to Make 1,000 FPV Kamikaze Drones a Day," *Forbes*, Dec. 5, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2023/12/05/russian-volunteer-group-making-a-thousand-fpv-kamikaze-drones-each-day/?sh=51456f8e11ec>; Margarita Konaev, *Tomorrow's Technology in Today's War: The Use of AI And Autonomous Technologies in The War in Ukraine and Implications for Strategic Stability*, CNA, IOP-2023-U-036583-Final, Sept. 2023, <https://www.cna.org/reports/2023/10/Use-of-AI-and-Autonomous-Technologies-in-the-War-in-Ukraine.pdf>.

Private companies and civil society initiatives had to step up to plug the gaps in first aid and equipment supplies. Some of these private actors even questioned the “patriotism” of the Russian military leadership, as well as the organizational adaptability, flexibility, and adequacy of the

military to Russia’s contemporary security needs.<sup>221</sup>

A list of relevant civil-military actors, their positional role in the hierarchy of civil-military relations, and their expected functions can be found in Table 7.

Table 7. Schema of civil-military actors

Actor	Positional Role	Expectation
<b>MOD</b>	Military leadership, political representation in military	Coordinate Russian Armed Forces per political directions
<b>General Staff of the Armed Forces</b>	Military leadership, operational-strategic control, operational-strategic implementation	Coordinate Russian Armed Forces and lead implementation
<b>President/Kremlin</b>	Political leadership, strategic control	Control policy, strategic direction, act as final authority
<b>Security Council</b>	Political advisory group, strategic influence	Advise president on strategic direction and national-security issues
<b>Security Services</b>	Political advisory group, operational influence	Advise president on national-security issues, influence and provide oversight for operations
<b>Political-Military Barons</b>	Irregularized military leadership, operational-tactical control	Act as military force separate and detached from Russian Armed Forces’ general structure
<b>War Correspondents</b>	Outside military oversight	Provide information on conduct of operations
<b>United Russia Party</b>	Political implementation, outside political oversight	Implement on-the-ground political tasks in annexed regions
<b>Volunteer Groups</b>	Military-technical implementation	Implement military and technical tasks in addition to regular services

Source: CNA.

<sup>221</sup> Kirill Shamiev, “Suspensions, Detentions, and Mutinies: the Growing Gulf in Russia’s Civil-Military Relations,” *Carnegie Politika*, July 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2023/08/suspensions-detentions-and-mutinies-the-growing-gulf-in-russias-civil-military-relations>.

## APPENDIX B: FLAG-LEVEL DISMISSALS, FEBRUARY 2022–MAY 2024

This appendix reproduces the data in Figure 2 (page 26) in tabular form.

**Table 8. Confirmed flag-level dismissals, 2022–2024**

Flag-Level Officer	Command	Date of Suspension or Dismissal
Lieutenant General Sergei Kisel	Commander, 1st Guards Tank Army	May 2022
Vice Admiral Igor Osipov	Commander, Black Sea Fleet	May 2022
General Alexander Dvornikov	Commander, Southern Military District	June 2022
Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev	Commander, Western Military District	October 2022
General Sergei Surovikin	Commander, Ukraine Theater (“Commander of the Joint Grouping of Forces in the areas of the Special Military Operation”) <sup>a</sup>	January 2023
Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev	Deputy Defense Minister for Logistics	April 2023
Major General Vladimir Seliverstov	106th Guards Airborne Division	July 2023
Major General Ivan Popov	Commander, 58th Combined Arms Army	July 2023
Major General Aleksandr Kornev	Commander, 7th Guards Airborne Division	July 2023
Colonel General Oleg Makarevich	Commander, Russian Dnipro Grouping of Forces	October 2023
Lieutenant General Mikhail Alekseyev <sup>b</sup>	First Deputy of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff	Fall 2023 (?)
Admiral Viktor Sokolov	Commander, Black Sea Fleet	February 2024
Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov	Commander, Commander-in-Chief of the Navy	March 2024
Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov <sup>c</sup>	Deputy Defense Minister	April 2024
Lieutenant General Yury Kuznetsov	Head of the Main Personnel Directorate of the MOD	May 2024
Lieutenant General Vadim Shamarin	Deputy Chief of the General Staff	May 2024

Sources: Isabel van Brugen, “Full List of Russian Commanders Dismissed by Putin in Ukraine War,” *Newsweek*, July 18, 2023; Brendan Cole, “Putin Sacks Russian Navy Chief amid Crippling Losses,” *Newsweek*, Mar. 11, 2024; Isabel Van Brugen, “Putin’s Military Purge Ramps Up as General Gerasimov’s Top Deputy Arrested,” *Newsweek*, May 24, 2024; Tom Norton, “Is Putin Facing Another ‘Coup’? What We Know,” *Newsweek*, May 30, 2024; New Voice of Ukraine, “Crisis of Insubordination Grips Russian Military Command as Commanders Face Dismissals, Arrests – ISW,” *Yahoo News*, July 17, 2023; Kateryna Stepanenko et al., “Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 16, 2023,” Institute for the Study of War, July 16, 2023; “Knives Out: Russia’s Military Command, Post-Mutiny,” *RFE/RL*, July 26, 2023; Jessie Gretener, Darya Tarasova, and Christian Edwards, “Russian Deputy Defense Minister Dismissed After Arrest on Corruption Charges,” *CNN*, Apr. 25, 2024.

<sup>a</sup> Demoted from Commander, Ukraine Theater in January 2023 to deputy commander, under house arrest June 2023, dismissed as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Aerospace Forces August 2023.

<sup>b</sup> Unconfirmed as of May 2024.

<sup>c</sup> Civilian, but 1st Class Active State Councilor and Army General equivalent rank. Included for comprehensiveness.



## APPENDIX C: PRIGOZHIN'S REBELLION PLAY-BY-PLAY, JUNE 23–24, 2023

This section collects publicly available information on Prigozhin's Rebellion with approximate and exact times of events, as well as relevant quotes from Telegram and other sources.<sup>222</sup>

### Prigozhin's Rebellion, day one: June 23

**June 23:** Mutiny starts.

9:09 p.m.: Prigozhin announces, "They [the Russian MOD] carried out an attack on us....A huge number of our fighters were killed....We are making a decision on how to respond."<sup>223</sup>

In a message posted at 9:25 p.m., Prigozhin announces the start of what will become the "march of justice": "The Commanding Council of PMC Wagner has decided that the evil ones, who are in the military leadership of our country must be stopped." He warns that no one should counter their efforts to overthrow the military leadership and that Wagner will see and respond to these as threats. He promises that Wagner will return to the front once it has finished its action and that it is not threatening the Presidential Administration, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or Rosgvardiya.<sup>224</sup>

9:40 p.m.: Later in the evening, Prigozhin alleges that Shoigu has fled Rostov-on-Don, "like a grandmother," to avoid accountability for launching strikes at Wagner troops. He promises that "this creature will be stopped."<sup>225</sup>

9:48 p.m.: The MOD's Telegram channel denounces all Prigozhin posts online that have labeled an MOD attack on Wagner camps as "information provocations," and the MOD promises that operations on the Ukrainian front are continuing uninterrupted.<sup>226</sup>

9:49 p.m.: Prigozhin posts another message on Telegram: "There are 25,000 of us, and we are marching to sort things out. Why there is chaos in the country? 25,000 are waiting as the tactical reserve, but the strategic reserve is the whole army, the whole country. All who want, unite. We have to fix this disgrace."<sup>227</sup>

Late on Friday, June 23, the President of Russia's website announces that Putin has been informed of Prigozhin's uprising and is "taking necessary measures."<sup>228</sup> Intelligence sources of the BBC share that the Federal Security Service (FSB) in Moscow has been put on alert.<sup>229</sup> Also late on June 23, the FSB reportedly opens a treason case against Prigozhin.<sup>230</sup>

<sup>222</sup> Note that all reported times are local to Moscow, Russian Federation (GMT+3).

<sup>223</sup> "Prigozhin's 'Mutiny' June 23-24: Chronicle"; Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1284](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1284).

<sup>224</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1285](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1285).

<sup>225</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1286](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1286).

<sup>226</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/27801](https://t.me/mod_russia/27801).

<sup>227</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1287](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1287).

<sup>228</sup> "The President Was Informed About the Situation with E. Prigozhin."

<sup>229</sup> "The FSB Opened a Case of Calls for Rebellion After Prigozhin's Statements About the 'March of Justice.'"

<sup>230</sup> "The FSB Opened a Case of Calls for Rebellion After Prigozhin's Statements About the 'March of Justice.'"

10:15 p.m.: Prigozhin accuses Shoigu of using artillery and helicopters “to annihilate us.”<sup>231</sup>

10:29 p.m.: Prigozhin clarifies that “this is not a coup, this is a march of justice. Our activities will not at all interfere with the troops.”<sup>232</sup>

10:39 p.m.: Prigozhin accuses Shoigu of having hidden thousands of bodies at the morgue in Rostov-on-Don to hide the scale of Russian losses.<sup>233</sup>

### Prigozhin’s Rebellion, day two: June 24

12:45 a.m.: A video of General Surovikin urging Prigozhin to stand down appears, warning that continuing would “play into the hands of the enemy”:

Before it’s too late, what must be done is to obey the will and order of the popularly elected President of the Russian Federation and stop the column, return them...and solve all problems only with peaceful means under the leadership of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.<sup>234</sup>

1:15 a.m.: The MOD blames Prigozhin’s “provocation” for incentivizing Ukrainian forces to launch an offensive near Bakhmut.<sup>235</sup> Around the same time, security forces in Moscow appeared to be preparing defenses around the Kremlin.<sup>236</sup>

2:02 a.m.: Prigozhin claims that Wagner has suffered rocket, artillery, and helicopter strikes. He states that Shoigu and the General Staff took these decisions to destroy people ready to defend the homeland. He announces that they are headed to Rostov, promising that Wagner’s forces will not “kill children” on their advance and accusing Shoigu of “killing kids” by sending them to battle. Still, Prigozhin promises that Wagner forces will defeat all who stand in their way on “their way to the end.”<sup>237</sup>

2:59 a.m.: Prigozhin alleges that the General Staff has sent air forces to strike the Wagner column, and he thanks those pilots who “refused to carry out an illegal order.”<sup>238</sup>

3:20 a.m.: Prigozhin again speaks about airstrikes and the General Staff’s folly in ordering them in heavily settled areas. He also again states that their actions are not disturbing the front, “but only those trying to save their own asses, criminals responsible for about one hundred thousand Russian soldiers, Gerasimov and Shoigu.”<sup>239</sup>

3:43 a.m.: Prigozhin claims that Wagner has shot down a helicopter that opened fire on a civilian column.<sup>240</sup>

5:13 a.m.: Prigozhin again warns that Wagner is willing to fight any resistance it encounters and that all 25,000 men will fight to the death “for their motherland, for Russia.”<sup>241</sup>

<sup>231</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1288](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1288).

<sup>232</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1289](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1289).

<sup>233</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1290](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1290).

<sup>234</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/27805](https://t.me/mod_russia/27805).

<sup>235</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/27804](https://t.me/mod_russia/27804).

<sup>236</sup> “Prigozhin’s ‘Mutiny’ June 23-24: Chronicle.”

<sup>237</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1291](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1291).

<sup>238</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1292](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1292).

<sup>239</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1293](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1293).

<sup>240</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1294](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1294).

<sup>241</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1295](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1295).

6:59 a.m.: Prigozhin states that he thinks the “whole army is ready to march with us.”<sup>242</sup>

7:42 a.m.: Prigozhin publishes a video allegedly from within the military headquarters in Rostov. There, he promises that Wagner’s actions have not disrupted Russia’s warfighting capacity at the front and argues that any territorial losses that happen are not Wagner’s fault. He adds that the current military leadership has lost enormous amounts of territory and up to 10 times as many soldiers as has been reported to the Russian public.<sup>243</sup>

By morning, *Novaya Gazeta* notes that many “propagandists and officials who previously actively commented on the fighting are now silent.”<sup>244</sup>

9:04 a.m.: The MOD shares a post directed at Wagner fighters, telling them that they have been tricked by Prigozhin into participating in an armed uprising and that the MOD will guarantee the safety of those who contacted Russian authorities.<sup>245</sup>

By around 10:00 a.m., Wagner forces appear to be in control of Rostov-on-Don.<sup>246</sup>

10:36 a.m.: Putin addresses Russia’s citizens, armed forces, law enforcement, and intelligence services, as well as “those who, by deception or threats, were drawn into a criminal adventure, pushed onto the path of a serious crime—armed rebellion.”<sup>247</sup> Putin calls the uprising “a stab in our country’s back” at

a time when the country must be united in its fight with the West for sovereignty and independence.

He claims that a similar “blow” in 1917 pushed the country into civil war: “We will not allow this [Russian civil war] to repeat. We defend both our people and our government from all threats. This includes from internal betrayal.”<sup>248</sup> Putin states that Wagner’s leaders are “pushing the country towards anarchy and fratricide. To defeat, and, ultimately, capitulation” and warns that “anyone who deliberately took the path of betrayal, who prepared the armed rebellion, who took the path of blackmail and terrorism, will suffer inevitable punishment, answering to both our laws and our people.”<sup>249</sup>

Ten minutes later, Ramzan Kadyrov’s Telegram channel shares Putin’s address condemning the uprising, as well as a longer text message from Kadyrov in which he follows Putin’s lead, condemning Prigozhin’s move as “a stab in the back,” praising Putin’s leadership as commander-in-chief, and promising that “we are ready, in the event tough measures are necessary,” to put down the rebellion.<sup>250</sup> Other major figures, including Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, chair of the Duma Vyacheslav Volodin, and an array of governors in southern and western Russia and collaborationist figures from Donetsk and Luhansk, issue statements rallying behind Putin.<sup>251</sup> Medvedev decries the rebellion as a planned event undertaken with the purpose of seizing power.<sup>252</sup>

<sup>242</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 23, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1296](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1296).

<sup>243</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1297](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1297).

<sup>244</sup> “Prigozhin’s ‘Mutiny’ June 23-24: Chronicle.”

<sup>245</sup> Ministry of Defense of Russia (mod\_russia), Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/27806](https://t.me/mod_russia/27806).

<sup>246</sup> “Prigozhin’s ‘Mutiny’ June 23-24: Chronicle.”

<sup>247</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

<sup>248</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

<sup>249</sup> Putin, “Appeal to Russian Citizens.”

<sup>250</sup> Ramzan (Rkadyrov\_95) Kadyrov, Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/3717](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/3717).

<sup>251</sup> “Prigozhin’s ‘Mutiny’ June 23-24: Chronicle.”

<sup>252</sup> “Medvedev Called the Rebellion a Planned Operation, the Purpose of Which Is to Seize Power in the Country [Медведев назвал мятеж спланированной операцией, цель которой - захват власти в стране],” TASS, June 24, 2023, <https://tass.ru/politika/18109589>.

12:18 p.m.: Prigozhin responds to criticisms by arguing that Wagner members are patriots and will not target the FSB because they do not want the country to slide further into corruption as leaders steal for themselves and impose economy on their soldiers. He concludes by saying, "We are patriots. Everyone who stands against us today are surrounding scumbags."<sup>253</sup>

2:46 p.m.: Prigozhin defends Wagner's actions as just: "Why does the country support us? Because we set out on a march of justice....Without a shot we took the headquarters [in Rostov]....On the street are people with flags of PMC Wagner."<sup>254</sup>

3:23 p.m.: To allegations in the Russian media that Wagner is looting, Prigozhin says that they are simply taking back pay owed to them but unpaid.<sup>255</sup>

8:25 p.m.: In the evening, as Wagner forces reportedly reach Moscow's outskirts, Prigozhin announces that the mutiny has ended: "On the 23rd, we departed on our march of justice. For 24 hours, we marched almost 200 kilometers to Moscow. In this time, we did not lose a single drop of our fighters' blood. Now, the moment has come, when blood could flow. Thus, understanding all responsibility for this spilling of Russian blood, on one side, we have stopped our column and are departing in the opposite direction, back to the barracks, in accordance with the plan."<sup>256</sup>

Rossiia 24 reporting indicates that Aleksandr Lukashenko, president of Belarus, has played a key role in resolving the conflict. Dmitry Peskov announces that the case against Prigozhin will be dropped, but that Prigozhin will have to go to Belarus.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1298](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1298).

<sup>254</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1299](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1299).

<sup>255</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1302](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1302).

<sup>256</sup> Concord Group (concordgroup\_official), Telegram post, June 24, 2023, [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/1303](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1303).

<sup>257</sup> "Peskov Said That Prigozhin 'Will Go to Belarus.'"

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