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View from Kyiv: What Does the Wagner Revolt Mean for Ukraine, Mali, Sudan, Syria & Beyond?

Tuesday 4 July 2023, by [GOODMAN Amy](#), [PILASH Denis](#) (Date first published: 26 June 2023).

As we continue to look at the fallout of this weekend's mutiny in Russia by Wagner mercenary troops, we go to Kyiv to speak with Ukrainian political scientist and historian Denis Pilash, who notes that despite infighting inside Russia, the military still carried out devastating strikes across Ukraine. He adds that the Wagner revolt still shattered an illusion of consensus inside Russia. "The myth of civility — one of the pillars of Putin's regime — has eroded completely," says Pilash.

AMY GOODMAN: And we want to go to Kyiv, as well, where we're joined by Denis Pilash, Ukrainian political scientist, historian, member of the Ukrainian Democratic Socialist organization. He's also an editor at *Commons: Journal of Social Criticism*.

Denis Pilash, thanks for joining us again, but certainly under very different circumstances. How was this rebellion, if it is a short-lived rebellion — or is it the beginning of something — perceived in Kyiv? We just played the president, Zelensky, addressing Russians and Russian soldiers in Russian, which is actually his first language.

DENIS PILASH: Thanks, Amy.

So, first of all, we should say that even when Russia was caught by this rebellion, mutiny, attempt of a coup, still Ukrainian cities have been attacked by Russian missiles as usual, as they have been in recent two months almost constantly. So, we had people, civilians killed in Kyiv, in Kherson and other places. So, ultimately, not much has changed in terms of this war on Ukrainians, including ordinary civilian Ukrainians.

But lots of people were completely agreeing with this take that Russia's militarism now is reaping what it's sowed. So, it brought death and destruction to Ukraine, and now the same boomerang comes back to Russia itself — namely, in this same entity, the Wagner Group.

And like private military companies throughout the world, Wagner was established as an arm for shady, sneaky dealings of its superiors — namely, the Russian state and Putin's regime — and also giving them this plausible deniability for all these deeds. And as a rule, these PMCs, they display much less legal and moral constraints than regular armies, and thus they commit more war crimes. Just think about Nisoor Square massacre by Blackwater in Iraq.

But Wagner specifically, whose command is stocked by notorious, open Nazi sympathizers, like its founder, Utkin, so it's turned their extremely brutal way of wasting human lives almost to a brand, that was promoted by state propaganda. So, their constant war crimes committed in Syria, in Ukraine, in African countries, they include executions of civilians, prisoners of war, of their own

men. They include rape and sexual violence. They include things like torture and extrajudicial killings of Ukrainians in Kyiv Oblast and this massacre of hundreds of people in Moura in Mali, and both occurred almost simultaneously, like in spring 2022. So, Wagner Group is also heavily implied to have killed Russian journalists who went to investigate their dealings in the Central African Republic, and also to have eliminated those of these pro-Russian irredentist warlords in Donbas in eastern Ukraine that were deemed no more useful for the Kremlin. So, this is the way they were doing this, their regular activities abroad. And you can just imagine what they can do to Russia or the people of what's now Russian Federation itself. So, in Africa, they engaged in some kind of 19th century-type colonialism, pillaging communities, looting natural resources and installing military dictatorships.

And actually, I think that there were lots of parallels, lots of analogies, that emerged in Russian and Ukrainian social media concerning what can be compared to this short-lived mutiny of Prigozhin's forces. And lots were brought up, but I think the closest one was exactly what you have already mentioned in the news about the recent and ongoing conflict in Sudan, where a part of the ruling military junta, namely these Rapid Support Forces, formerly the Janjaweed militias, that were involved into genocidal acts in Darfur, they broke with the rest of the junta. And both these sides, they are equally oppressive, equally anti-democratic, and both are Wagner clients. So, here we see this parallel. And I completely agree with Professor Khrushcheva that this is a way where you see an extremely oppressive authoritarian regime, and it was opposed at this point by its part that is even more ultranationalist, outright far-right fascist. So, this is something that both Putin and Prigozhin, they embody something very terrible for both people inside Russia and outside Russia. So, another analogy that was also brought up was Mussolini's march on Rome. So, you can see the parallels.

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