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"Like spiders in a jar" – confusion and the search for a scapegoat in Moscow



Today's Russia's domestic political roller-coaster resembles a quote from Tolstoy's Anna Karenina: "Everything was in confusion in the Oblonskys' house."

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of Wagner, attacked the Russian Ministry of Defence, accused them of treason, and publicly threatened to pull Wagner troops from Bakhmut.

At the same time, Ramzan Kadyrov, a warlord and the head of the Chechen republic loyal to Putin, released two contradictory videos. In the first video, Kadyrov asked his brother Yevgeny not to rush with decisions and be patient.

Kadyrov subsequently released another video. He demanded that Prigozhin remain in Bakhmut and wait for Chechen fighters from the Akhmat regiment to arrive and take over the positions held by Wagner.

In parallel, Wagner accused the Ministry of Defence of refusing to supply much-needed ammunition. The Ministry of Defence has been ignoring Wagner, accusing them of making false statements.

Some politicians, like Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's notorious former Space Chief, are calling for additional mobilisation. Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov is reassuring the Russian people that everything is going as planned.

Others from the top echelons of the Kremlin have been proposing additional taxes to sponsor the war, or as Russia calls it, the "special military operation".

Gossip, propaganda, and puerile legends

While this cacophony lasts, everyone in Russia already knows that the Kremlin was hit by drones and the army is not advancing, but on the contrary, preparing to face the Ukrainian offensive.

Russia's patriotic community is confused and angry because of the poor performance in Ukraine, and is demanding accountability for the ongoing fiasco in Ukraine.

Russian people are already gossiping about a significant number of casualties.

The Kremlin is also confused and is trying to steer peoples' anger away from the Kremlin, blaming NATO and Anglo-Saxons.

There is another major performance occurring on the Russian ideological front similar to the reality show initiated by Wagner, Kadyrov, and the defence ministry.

Russian propagandists in conjunction with Dmitry Medvedev, former head of Russia, and other propagandists of varying calibres, have started spinning different narratives to confuse the Russian majority and frighten the West.

Russian grand propagandists like TV presenter Vladimir Solovyov, all the way down to smaller propagandists like Sergei Markov, have started producing bizarre, unrealistic, and even childish legends, proclamations, and suggestions on how to deal with the situation in Ukraine, and punish Western countries because they help "Ukrainian Nazis and Satanists".

The parade added to the confusion

The general confusion, projected by the highest government representatives, was further fuelled by the Victory Day parade on Red Square.

Old Soviet outdated equipment on Red Square. Fake veterans next to Putin. Corrupt and probably intimidated heads of a few former USSR republics were most definitely forced to attend the parade, and be there to honour Putin and demonstrate false unity and solidarity with the ongoing Russian attempt to commit suicide in Ukraine.

At the parade, Putin spoke of aggression against Russia. He said that Russia was in danger and under attack. He tried to make a parallel with Nazi Germany attacking the USSR in 1941.

People remember that less than 20 years ago, the leaders of major world countries, including US President George W. Bush, French President Jacques Chirac, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, and many others, attended the Victory Day parade in Moscow.

There is an immense gap between the US president, the leader of the free world who was in Moscow in 2005, and a corrupt, frightened, and possibly ill Alexander Lukashenko, leader of the occupied Republic of Belarus, who attended the 2023 Victory Day parade in Moscow.

From an organisational and structural standpoint, today's Russia is the same. Nothing has changed in the Russian leadership and political class since the 2005 parade.

In less than 20 years, people who seemed to want to integrate with a free and democratic world are bombing civilians, kidnapping children, creating food shortages, and blackmailing the world with nuclear

catastrophe.

Two faces of Russia

Over the years, the world has been presented with a friendly, democracy-oriented country that wanted to blend in and fight corruption. Russian occasional shrewdness was viewed as a local peculiarity.

In reality, Russia was always the country that bombed and killed its citizens in 1999 just to gain much-needed support from the intimidated and frightened majority.

After February 24, 2022, when the horrific atrocities and war crimes committed by the Russian army were revealed, the whole world was finally familiarised with the real Russia, which is the very same country that joined Nazi Germany in occupied Poland in 1939.

Russian elites, even Putin himself, were not prepared for these developments. Ever since Yeltsin's presidency, Russia has skilfully pretended to be humble, friendly, vulnerable, and weak in times of need.

Russian elites got used to the new double-think. They were insulting the West for internal purposes, whilst at the same time, they comfortably lived in the West. Vladimir Solovyov lived in Italy and travelled to Moscow for his patriotic television programmes where he insulted Europe and Western values.

It was all going well for everyone in the Russian upper and political class before Putin and the people around him got confused and mixed up the real and fake Russia displayed to the West.

No one was ready for the truth

No one in Russia was prepared for sanctions and isolation. No one expected Russia to perform so poorly in the war. No one expected the West to be united.

Ironically, over the years of lies and fakes, everyone in the Russian upper and political class became convinced that fake narratives on Russian glory are the truth.

Russia enjoyed being a part of the global economic system. No one knows what to do next now that Russia is a pariah, and a country that knows nothing but stealing and lying.

Even people such as Ramzan Kadyrov and Yevgeny Prigozhin were previously involved in entirely different businesses.

Prigozhin was comfortably securing rare mineral deposits in Africa, while Kadyrov owned generous federal financial allocations to Chechnya, and was attempting to become leader of all Muslims in Russia.

Kadyrov's Akhmat militia was only good at terrorising civilians domestically, predominantly in Chechnya. Kadyrov permanently keeps a few hundred fighters in Moscow involved in extortion and other secret and unpleasant activities.

Prigozhin, in parallel to his troll farm business, did an outstanding job at meddling in the US and other countries' elections. He was involved in domestic corruption schemes related to embezzlement of budget allocations. All these false patriots enjoyed very comfortable lives in Putin's corrupt empire before the war.

No one was prepared for Russia's true face to

be revealed so soon, particularly in Ukraine. Losing in Ukraine is particularly painful to the Russian chauvinist majority.

Spiders in a jar

There is an expression in Russia, "to behave like spiders in a jar", used to describe a scenario when predators begin to cannibalise one another if placed in an enclosed space. This is precisely what is now happening in Russia within its leadership.

In addition to disarray within the Kremlin, the majority is confused and scared.

The Kremlin lied to the Russian citizens and the West about its true intentions and the state of affairs in the Russian army.

Although Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, seemed to oppose a treacherous attack on Ukraine, he was convinced that Russia could take Kyiv, as he said to William Burns, head of the CIA, when he last visited Moscow in an attempt to dissuade the Kremlin from attacking Ukraine.

No one in Kremlin realised that the Russian army was just an unqualified gang of looters and rapists and that criminals recruited by Wagner would be its most famous military brigade.

Russia was used to politicians like Merkel and Obama, who refused to supply much-needed Javelins to Ukraine in 2014.

Donald Trump and MAGA republicans promised to end the war but did not publicly reveal what this really meant: stop assisting Ukraine and force it to concede to please the

Kremlin. They hid this fact from their voters.

This picture of Dorian Gray existed for so long and successfully fulfilled its purpose on both domestic and foreign fronts. At one point, Putin and the people around him believed the Russian army was magnificent, and the Ukrainian people wanted to be liberated.

Since the war started, Russia has been in disarray. All of a sudden, Russia's true face and strength were revealed.

Looking for a scapegoat

Russian elites are now trying to evaluate their chances of survival after the war is over and the Ukrainian territorial integrity is restored.

Many are silent. For example, we don't hear much from Sergey Sobyanin, the mayor of Moscow, or from many other prominent Russian politicians and heavyweights like Sergei Ivanov, Russian Special Representative on Environment, Ecology and Transport.

Dmitry Medvedev could have been the person to play a role in the new post-war Russia. Many are probably puzzled by his parody style harsh publications and statements, yet everything can be easily explained from the Russian standpoint.

Putin needs to sacrifice someone publicly. He needs to frighten the elites and please the Russian majority. He needs a scapegoat to be slaughtered on the Russian patriotic altar for the amusement of the masses.

This would distract people, entertain them and demonstrate Putin's alpha male credentials the Russian majority loves.

Dmitry Medvedev is intelligent enough to understand that he is a perfect candidate to be publicly sacrificed. Russian people despise him for his weakness, for the liberalism he showed in the past, and for his lack of aggressive language while he was president.

Dmitry Medvedev is now fighting for his life, so the Kremlin's Machiavellian admirers will have a hard time convincing the public that he is the right man whose head should be on the block.

It is hard to imagine what is in the minds of the Russian elites now that the victory parade was pathetic, the city of Bakhmut has not been taken, European leaders keep visiting Ukraine, the large investment firm, Black Rock, has signed an agreement with Ukraine, and the US has begun transferring seized Russian assets to Ukraine.

The spiders in the Russian jar will surely intensify the fight. Putin will be preoccupied with entertaining the majority with domestic persecution or anything else which would please or distract them.