

Dr. Pavel K. Baev is a Research Professor at the Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). He is also a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Center for the United States and Europe (CUSE) at the Brookings Institution, Washington DC; a Senior Associate Researcher at the Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI), Paris; and a Senior Associate Research Fellow at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI, Milan). His weekly column appears in *Eurasia Daily Monitor*. He graduated from Moscow State University (MGU) in September 1974 and has a PhD from the USSR Academy of Sciences in International Relations. His research areas include Russian military reform, Russia's conflict management in the Caucasus and Central Asia, energy interests in Russia's foreign and security policy, and Russia's relations with Europe and NATO.

Question 1:

The failed Wagner group's mutiny resulted in the redirection of Wagner forces to Belarus, then Africa, and ultimately led to the demise of Prigozhin and Utkin. How can this sequence of events be interpreted from the prism of Russian Statecraft?

The Wagner Group mutiny might now – at the end of 2023 – seem to be an odd deviation in the course of Russia's military campaign against Ukraine. It revealed, nevertheless, serious flaws in the strategy of this deadlocked campaign. Firstly, this mutiny, short-lived as it was, exposed the scale of the problems created by the criminalization of the Russian army, which is compelled to rely on recruitment among the prison population. Secondly, Prigozhin's ugly rise and spectacular fall illuminated the hidden and carefully camouflaged tensions and discord in the Russian leadership caused by the war.

Thirdly, and most importantly for the international stake-holders, the extermination of the Wagner Group undermined Russia's policy of manipulating and exploiting conflicts in Africa, particularly in the conflict-prone Sahel region. Moscow's attempts to reconfigure this policy by making the military intelligence (GRU) the master and supervisor of the mercenary enterprises are plain unsuccessful because of the shortage of material and financial resources and the impossibility of regaining the benefits of deniability.

Question 2:

Taking into account recent geopolitical developments like the war in Ukraine, Israel's war on Gaza, and Sweden's NATO bid, what is the expected trajectory of Russia's foreign policy worldwide?

Russia's foreign policy is clearly discredited by the apparent disconnect between high rhetoric and low capacity. The loud "anti-colonial" discourse is not supported by even minimalist allocation of material resources necessary for supporting the political efforts aimed at countering the US influence. The most obvious shortcoming is the drastic reduction of the arms export, which used to be one of the key instrument of Russian foreign policy. Moscow's attempts to use food exports as a new tool are unsuccessful because of the desire to profit from this trade and – more disconcertingly – because of President Putin's decision to break the "grain deal" negotiated with the help of Türkiye.

Question 3:

What does the relationship between Türkiye and Russia mean for international and regional security?

This is a uniquely complex and delicate relationship, and its material basis is shifting faster than the hugely important personal ties between the two leaders. Moscow seeks to capitalize on opportunities arising from changes in the sanctions regime, but a key factor remains Turkey's NATO membership. The prospects of Turkish mediation and contribution to the peace talks between Russia and Ukraine remain open, but if hostilities between NATO and Russia were to occur, Turkey would have to reevaluate its current balancing act.