

# Putin's failures are becoming apparent to the Russian people: UK statement to the OSCE

Thank you, Mr Chair. It is now over 250 days since we, along with the rest of the world, witnessed the start of President Putin's unprovoked, premeditated and barbaric attack on Ukraine. Throughout this time, we have highlighted the truth in the face of Russia's disinformation and propaganda. In addition to the horrendous violence Russia has and continues inflict on the Ukrainian people, there has been an enormous cost to the people of Russia too. Thousands of young Russian lives have been lost on land, at sea and in the air; fighting in an illegal war of choice based on contrived rationales, confused narratives and shifting goals. This is not conjecture, this is not opinion, it is fact.

The failures of Putin's horrendous adventurism are becoming increasingly apparent to the Russian people. They are becoming increasingly aware that their recently mobilised family members, neighbours and friends are being badly trained, badly equipped and then sent to the battlefield to reinforce poorly equipped, poorly led and demoralised professional soldiers. It is perhaps no wonder then that so many Russians have chosen to flee their own country to avoid mobilisation.

Meanwhile, on the battlefield, Russian military leaders continue to commit more and more Russian troops to the war in an attempt to overcome their failures. Due to low morale and a reluctance to fight, Russian forces have now reportedly started to deploy "barrier troops" or "block units". These units threaten to shoot their own retreating soldiers in order to compel offensives.

Low morale, indiscipline and dysfunction continues to reach the highest levels of Russia's military leadership too. On 3 November, Major General Alexander Linkov was reportedly appointed acting commander of Russia's Central Military District. Linkov replaces Colonel General Alexander Lapin who was purportedly removed from office at the end of October. If confirmed, this is just the latest in a series of dismissals of senior Russian military commanders since the onset of the invasion last February, including the Commanders of the Eastern, Southern, and Western Military Districts. A pattern of blame against senior Russian military commanders for failures to achieve President Putin's objectives on the battlefield.

It is worth noting that Colonel General Lapin had been widely criticised for poor performance on the battlefield in Ukraine by both Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin. The latter appears to be gaining increasing influence in the Kremlin, with his private military company being increasingly relied upon to provide fundamental security tasks normally expected of the Russian State.

For example, on 6 November, Prigozhin announced the creation of centres for the training and management of “people’s militias” in Belgorod and Kursk oblasts in

Russia. These “people’s militias” probably function outside the Russian MOD’s structure and chain of command. Their stated intent is to establish units to help defend Russia’s borders.

Meanwhile, as Russia scrambles to fortify its defensive lines throughout eastern Ukraine, Prigozhin announced the construction of a fortified ‘Wagner Line’ of defences in Luhansk oblast. The construction represents a significant effort to prepare defences in depth behind the current Russian front line and protect a key logistics line of communication.

However, as we noted last week, Wagner’s recruitment of Russian convicts including individuals suffering from serious diseases and medical conditions, is a sign of desperation to recruit numbers not fighters. According to the Ukrainian Centre for Researching and Combating Hybrid Threats, 500 Wagner recruited convicts had died fighting in Ukraine by mid-October. In total, the centre assesses 800-1000 Wagner recruits have likely died in Ukraine. Wagner numbers have been further depleted by substantial non-fatal casualties.

That Wagner, a private military company linked to human rights abuses, is being increasingly relied upon to conduct roles normally expected of a government’s security and military apparatus is itself a telling indicator of the parlous state of Putin’s war machine: more defeats; more Generals sacked; more demoralised troops; more discontent amongst the Russian population; and more critique from Russia’s elites.

Mr Chair, Putin and the Russian military leadership have consistently underestimated the will, determination and courage of the Ukrainian military and civilians to defend their homeland from a brutal and barbaric invader. They continue to fail to understand that every horrendous attack strengthens the Ukrainian resolve and that of its friends, like the UK, who remain steadfast in our support – for however long it takes – to ensure that the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the independence of Ukraine is fully restored. Thank you.