

Interviewer (00:00:00)

OutFront tonight; a new and bigger threat to the United States from Putin. A top official with Russia's foreign ministry tonight warning that American commercial satellites could be a target because of America's aid for Ukraine. It is a direct threat from Russia to the United States and this threat from one superpower to another comes as Putin's forces are reeling on the frontlines in a video shared by Ukrainian journalists. We want to show you this, you can see what appear to be Russian soldiers complaining that they don't have the basic tools to survive. Watch it for yourself.

Interviewee 1 (in video) (00:00:34)

That's the frontline just over there. They sent us here without any training without anything at all. They've been [censored] us around constantly our division, the Kantemir Division. We don't have any training or supplies and our guys showed up in their own uniforms, paid for with their own money. [foreign language] We have no weapons, no ammo mags, no grenades, no belt pouches, no food, no water. It's absolutely [censored] hell. Who the hell knows [censored], long live the goddamn Russian army.

Interviewer (00:01:18)

Absolute effing hell. I mean look, CNN can't independently confirm this video, but we show it to you as it is consistent with everything we have heard and been sharing with you again and again, night after night from Russian soldiers, you know, you heard they're paying for their own uniforms. We continue to hear that—not enough food, no food they say, no ammo, no training, in many cases not getting paid. Well, the Kremlin in a rare admission today acknowledging some equipment issues. Putin's top spokesperson telling reporters *quote*, "There were issues with the equipment, but measures are being taken to eliminate these problems," unclear what those are. But, of course this is way bigger than equipment. There's a severe shortage of human beings. There is a severe shortage of troops. The chief of Ukraine's military intelligence telling CNN today that Putin's private army is now recruiting prisoners who have tuberculosis, hepatitis and HIV and sending them to the frontlines, and here's what's even more bizarre and disturbing about this—the new soldiers are wearing colored wrist bands to signify to their colleagues their disease.

Speaker 1 (00:02:21)

We're gonna have more on that in just a moment. But, we also tonight have some incredible new forensic reporting on the military unit that Putin uses to carry out some of his deadliest missile strikes on Ukraine. This is a unit that many don't even know exists, a unit that is taking out playgrounds, homes and businesses in Ukraine, and in a moment, I'm going to speak to Christo Grozev. He is the lead Russia investigator for Bellingcat. He has spent six months investigating the secretive group and he's going to tell you what he knows. OutFront now, Christo Grozev, he is executive director and lead Russia investigator for Bellingcat. He was able to identify the Russians involved in poisoning Putin opposition leader Alexei Navalny and he has now used those same forensic data methods to identify the secretive Russian military unit responsible for the deadly missile strikes that have been killing civilians across Ukraine. And Christo, thank you so much for being with me. I want to talk about your new investigation, at first though, Fred talking about the Wagner Group sending prisoners with diseases to the frontlines. I know you have been following the Wagner Group closely as well. What are you learning?

Interviewee 2 (00:03:25)

Well, this sounds credible. This sounds compatible with some early reporting in the days after the initial visit by Prigozhin to Russian prisons where they were recruiting people straight from prisons and some prisoners actually reported on—even not on opposition channels, but on pro-Russian, pro-war channels—they reported that they ask, "Well, I'm sick, can I still be recruited into this sort of a convict unit of the Wagner army?" And they were told, "Yes, you will be in a separate group; you'll be isolated from the others." And therefore, what we're hearing today, what the Ukrainians have seen on the frontline in terms of these bracelets, seems compatible. But, what is more interesting here is that of course there is a shortage of people and of talent across the board and of equipment as well. But, what is interesting are from my point of view is the new ambition that Prigozhin has obtained, in that he believes he's much better than the regular army. His people are better equipped than the regular army. He knows how to manage them and motivate them and incentivize them better, and this has been kind of a growing competition between him and the regular army, and Shoigu—the Minister of the Defense.

Interviewer (00:04:38)

Yeah.

Interviewee 2 (00:04:38)

And I think today, just an hour ago it has kind of escalated to a point that we haven't seen before where Prigozhin—in a fake response to a fake question from one of his own media—said that in fact some people should get the boot, and he clearly was referring to Shoigu in this statement.

Interviewer (00:04:55)

Which is incredible, right? Shoigu, obviously, you know, Putin's Minister of Defense who he just appeared with at last week in a very public showing of support could be a very significant fault line here, Christo, and this comes in the context of your new reporting, which I know you have spent many months on. You have tracked the Russian military group that has been targeting Ukraine in mass missile attacks, killing civilians blowing up playgrounds as we saw in Kyiv last week. And I know you used methods to track this group, that you used to track those involved in poisoning the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. How did you figure out who these people are who are launching these missiles?

Interviewee 2 (00:05:36)

Well, it was a couple of months into the war that we started wondering in Bellingcat, who are the people that are manually programming the flight paths of these so called high-precision missiles. They were relatively new missiles, they were first used in the Syrian war by Russia. There are three types of them the Kalibr that are launched from ships and submarines. The X- or the H-101 type that are launched from planes, and that third one the Iskander-M or P-500 that are launched from the ground. But, all of them have one thing in common. They can't just rely on satellite data for their routes because Russian satellite GPS positioning data is faulty and it's easily jammable by NATO equipment and by the Ukrainian. So, they require manual programming of the flight path. So, we started looking at who's doing that. No military experts seem to have any input on that or to know. So for us it became a priority, and we started looking at the most likely candidates, for this people that have graduated from the missile engineering IT institutions of the army, and there are only two of these in Russia.

Speaker 1 (00:06:46)

So, we started browsing and parsing through yearbook photos of these people and checking out what they're doing now. And we found that some of them actually are described by their friends in phone sharing books' apps—that are very popular in Russia—as people working at the unit called the GVC. The GVC in Russian transcribes as the Central Computation Institute which is a sort of an IT support system within the Ministry of Defense. But, it didn't make a lot of sense that we have so many rocket scientists and missile specialist that work in an IT support structure. So we had this early hypothesis that maybe they're involved in exactly this. So, we obtained like we did with the Navalny investigation, we obtained a lot of phone records, meta data [crosstalk] from the Russian black market and we found exactly what we expected that there are peaks of communication between this group of people at the time just before some of the most significant launches of missiles at Ukraine. We needed to understand how they're doing it. So we tracked their communications for about six months now and we were able to not only identify all of them we believe but also group them in specialization. Some of them are only working with the Kalibr missiles others only with the Iskander and so on and so forth.

Interviewer (00:08:01)

And Christo just interesting one final point here, I know they masquerade, they'll say they're a pig farmer or a florist and one of them I know is a coin collector and literally as missiles are launching he's texting some to launch missiles while also literally trading coins.

Interviewee 2 (00:08:19)

Yeah. Well, first of all we tried to approach each of them and we got sort of a response only from the first one who admitted essentially that he's working at that department and all the other ones received apparently prefabricated lies that they were supposed to deliver to us. One of them was a pig farmer, as you said, and the other one was a florist. They claimed that never been in the military establishment despite us showing them photographs of them themselves in military uniform. But what really was shocking is that as we could see from a lot of the phone communication while at work, while targeting missiles, they were also doing extraneous things like hobbies like collecting coins, and

some of them were even on dating sites while the missiles that they had just programmed were flying in the direction of kindergartens.

Interviewer (00:09:02)

Wow! Christo. Thank you very much. Powerful reporting, and I hope everyone will read Christo's article. He goes through each of these individuals. He shows you who they are. You can see their faces and his forensic reporting. Christo. Thank you.