

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

This is a Global Player original podcast.
Wagner! Wagner! Wagner! Wagner! Wagner!
It's got the sort of happy chant of a football team,
but it's Wagner that they're shouting.
These are people in the crowds,
normal Russian citizens cheering on the group
that try to unseat their president this weekend.
The definitive account of the Russian Revolution in 1917
was the 10 days that shook the world, and they did shake the world.
What we've had this weekend is the 24 hours that befuddled the world,
and it has sort of befuddled us.
Famously, there was a Chinese leader who was asked in the 1970s
what he made of the French Revolution, and replied,
it's too early to tell.
Well, we're feeling a bit like that today.
We know that there's a lot of information circling,
and we know there's a lot of disinformation also circling.
We're trying to sort out what we know and what we know isn't true.
Welcome to the news agents.
The news agents.
It's John.
It's Emily.
Now, if you've spent the weekend, I don't know,
at Glastonbury or in a very calming retreat,
or maybe splashing around in the waves on the coast,
you might have got back and thought, what have I missed?
And the answer is,
what looked like an entire military coup in Russia
that threatened to turn the whole world upside down,
and then suddenly went away and seemed like nothing had happened.
Yeah, same with Glastonbury.
It was guns and roses without the roses.
And yet today, we might be back where we started.
Yeah.
Everything is the same.
Everything is different.
And we don't know how the pieces are going to fall.
We've been told things that we thought were certain on Saturday,
which now look like they are wrong on Monday.
We know that Vladimir Putin is in charge,
but we haven't actually seen the Russian leaders
since a pre-recorded message.
We know supposedly that a deal was done over this guy,
Yevgeny Prigozhin,

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

who was the leader of the Wagner Group,
the group of mercenaries that has been helping Russia
and fighting for Russia against Ukraine.

Where is he?

Dunno.

Haven't seen him.

So we're going to try and start with the dramatist persona,
like you'd have in a play.

Is that the actors?

That is all the characters.

And we start with President Putin,
who obviously you know,
who is, as far as we know,
the only one really within the Russian military,
the Russian leadership,
who thinks the war in Ukraine is a good idea.

And if you've listened previously to the news agents,
you'll have heard us talking about this man, Prigozhin,
who is the leader of the Wagner Group,
this band of mercenaries.

And the relationship that he forged with Putin
is a particularly unusual one,
because he started as a hot dog seller,
he was actually a prisoner in St. Petersburg,
and he became Putin's go-to man,
his solver, his fixer,
for everything that he didn't quite want written down,
whether it was wars fought or contracts sorted
or people bumped off,
that was the man he went to,
until Prigozhin got too big.

And stop being Putin's fixer
and stop being Putin's chef,
and we think put the hot dog stand away,
and went off with his mercenary army,
made up of these odd fellows,
mostly from prisons,
and started fighting in the Central African Republic,
in Sudan, in parts of Venezuela, in Syria,
places where they were hired guns,
and quite often,
received their payment in diamonds,
in oil, in natural reserves.

When we say mercenary,

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

we literally mean people doing this stuff for money.
And it's fair to say that the rumblings started,
I think, a few months ago,
when we began to understand that there was a power play
between Prigozhin,
who used to be working for Putin,
who now might be telling Putin what he can and can't do.
And what's interesting is that Prigozhin thinks
that the Russian military leadership
are just absolutely crap.
They are no use to man or beast,
and should be kicked out.
And so, you have the mercenary,
the hired gun,
is telling Putin,
you have to get rid of the chief of the armed forces,
a guy called Sergei Shoigu,
and Gerasimov,
who is the chief of the general staff.
And Prigozhin wants these two people booted out,
kicked out,
and so you've got a power struggle.
You have got the military high command,
who are useless,
but have a massive weaponry at their disposal,
against the mercenary leader,
who is very effective, utterly brutal,
better organised,
than the lumbering bureaucratic machine of Russian military.
And that is the stage,
and Putin is in the middle of a pincer movement.
Yeah, and Gerasimov, who is leading the army,
might well be thinking,
well, this isn't really working out,
because we thought we were being sent to fight a war,
that we could win,
and it's become increasingly clear
that the might of the Russian military in Ukraine
is not enough.
So there is every chance
that both Shoigu and Gerasimov
don't really want to be in Ukraine either,
because they are the ones losing soldiers day after day.
The only person, as I said,

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

that thinks that the Ukraine war is a good idea right now,
is Putin.

And so on Saturday,
we saw the embodiment of this coup take place,
with an actual march,
what was meant to be a march on Moscow.
I think Mussolini, the march on Rome,
but this was pro-Gozhin marching towards Moscow.
Make this, we have done the dramatic personai,
as you call them,

I call them the cast.
We need to do the locations as well,
because it all starts off in Rostov-on-Don,
which sounds like it's just outside Sheffield.
We literally have the river Don outside Sheffield.
So when I hear Rostov-on-Don,
I just expect to find a very nice tea shop outside,
where after a long day's hiking,
you would sit down and...
Have crumpets by the fire.

Yeah, exactly.
Yeah, except it's not that Rostov-on-Don near Sheffield.
The other confusing bit of geography about it,
is that they were driving,
when they left Rostov-on-Don to go north,
up towards Moscow, which is Long Drive,
they were driving up the M4.

And I thought the BBC very helpfully,
on the news channel over the weekend said,
and this isn't to be confused with the M4
that runs between London and Wales.
And you thought, thank God for that.
Do you know, I can just hear that now.
I can hear the dialogue between the sort of
various commanders under progression going,
well, yeah, think about the M4 is,
if you're not careful, you run into that 50 speed limit.
What you want to do is come off...

And the Contraflow is like awful.
Come off at Felton, come off at Junction 3,
then you go back on after the M25,
otherwise you get yourself into a real tangle.
Yeah, and Swindon, the road works around there.
Nightmare.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

Nightmare.

So anyway, they left Rostov-on-Don,
no crumpets, but curiously,
they did stop for coffee.

And we know this because they got their coffee
in these bright yellow coffee cups.
And everyone was looking at these
properly militarized soldiers
walking through the town carrying bright yellow coffee cups.
And they also stopped, we understand,
for burgers.

What would have been a McDonald's at one point
before the sanctions, the Western sanctions hit,
and is now called...

Something else.

McDonskies or something.

They stopped and had burgers.

And, funnily enough, we were going to play you the audio
from inside the takeaway, the burger place.

But it's so kind of normal,
it doesn't tell you anything.

So what we're trying to say is
there doesn't seem to have been
any resistance to what they were doing.

They were going in, they were buying coffee,
they were buying burgers,
and they were getting cheered on
by people, as you heard at the beginning,
who didn't seem to want to get in their way.

And I think that in itself is a story.

The other thing that Prugoshin said,
which I thought was really important,
was he completely undermined
the argument for the invasion.

If you think back to last February,
Putin was saying that in the Donbass,
Russian nationals were coming under sustained attack,
Western-backed, NATO-backed forces were doing that.

And Prugoshin said that was all absolute nonsense.

So has undercut the whole argument.

I've just heard that Putin has actually spoken again.

He's just released an address to young engineers,
it's been released by the Kremlin,
in which he makes zero mention

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

of the aborted coup attempt at the weekend.

So A, that might be right.

B, if anything's released by the Kremlin,
or indeed by a state-sponsored broadcaster,
you have to ask yourself very carefully
when it was filmed, when it was put out,
and what message they're trying to send
because, as we've said, this is both a military war
and clearly a propaganda war,
and we've just left, the troops have moved on from Rostov on Don,
and they get towards Moscow,
but a short distance away,

I mean literally the distance between sort of
Pennsylvania and Washington DC.

They've got within 200 miles of Moscow,
it's about 800 miles.

We should actually keep it on the M4.

London to Cardiff.

Right.

No, London Cardiff's only about 130, 40 miles.

Well, Cardiff plus.

Yeah.

They stop.

The point is, they stop doing what they're doing,
which doesn't make any sense
because we're all looking at this progress
and thinking they are unimpeded.

You know, they've got the burgers,
full stomachs, coffees,
and actually we think that they're going to start
to try and take Moscow
when suddenly the whole thing's called off.

We understand a deal is done,
a deal somehow brokered with Belarus,
Lukashenko, this is for your cast list,
is the Belarusian president
who's been very friendly with Putin.

So we assume that Putin has helped
or is behind some of the broking.

And suddenly we hear that
Progosian doesn't want to create
any civilian death or disaster
and is quite happy to what?

Go off to Belarus and just leave

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

Putin as it is.

Quietly tend to his cucumbers and tomatoes.

Really?

It makes no sense at all.

Now there are a contradictory report saying that the FSB are still looking at a criminal charge for treason against him.

So we are none the wiser.

As we said, there are still a whole ton of questions.

There is a fog that surrounds so much of this.

I mean, the one thing I would say is that

if Progosian was to ring up

one of the big insurance companies and say, could I get a life policy?

I think he'd probably find it quite difficult now, given what happens when people go near windows or trip over vials of poison or...

There's a lot of spiky fences, aren't there?

Yeah, a lot of spiky fences.

So much.

It would be so unfortunate that you'd have to think that he is a marked man.

Or maybe it's Putin who's a marked man.

But also, it's easier when you've got 10,000 people around you who are your army.

And you've got your own private army, which is what he has got.

And as long as he can carry on paying their wages, then we still don't know what impact they're going to have in Ukraine or in Russia.

Joe Enlai, too early to say.

Too early to say.

So somebody who's going to help us with this is Sir Lawrence Friedman.

He's Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King's College, and he has been watching the events unfold over the weekend.

And I think Sir Lawrence can tell us which are the batshit crazy ideas and all this and which are the things that you yourself believe.

There are so many theories and oddball conspiracy ideas out there.

We know for certain that Prigozin has been pretty angry for some time with the Ministry of Defence.

We know for certain that on Friday night

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

he decided he'd had enough.
We don't know for certain that his base camp was shelled.
That may well have been a put up job, but we don't know that.
But we do know that he then embarked on a march.
But it was easier, I think, than he anticipated.
So he got to Rostov and then he went to Moscow,
at which point he announced a deal.
Why didn't he go through with it?
What he said was he wanted to avoid bloodshed,
but I don't think that is high on Prigozin to list the priorities.
He's caused a lot of bloodshed over the years.
He's caused a lot of bloodshed over the years.
I think it's not a good look to be killing other Russian forces,
and he did kill a number.
I think he didn't have the support.
It wasn't that Putin had the support.
Most people were just watching, possibly aghast,
and when to see what happened.
But if you're going to do something like this,
you at least need some sign that the masses are behind you.
Sorry, so didn't have the support meant
he wasn't finding Russian military, individual soldiers
who were prepared to follow him and his gang?
Well, I think the problem that both he and Putin had
was that most of the soldiers are in Ukraine.
So there weren't units that were available.
There's lists circulating of some commanders and units
that did support him,
but there's not a lot they could do about it.
I think also he wasn't sure what he was going to do when he got there.
There was no obvious means by which he could take power.
I mean, he might be able to find Putin, but he might not.
So I think he also, I think he just got in over his head.
I don't think his intention was to mount a coup.
It was a mutiny designed to force changes in the Ministry of Defence,
which got a bit out of hand.
So he was trying to get rid of Shoigu and Gerasimov.
Yeah, well, that's what he said he was,
and there's no reason to doubt.
I think basically he wanted independence of action for himself.
It's a strange arrangement.
It's a private military company,
but it basically depends on its funding, on its weapons,
on its ammunition from the Russian state.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

And he felt the Russian state wasn't giving him what he wanted.
He'd fought this big battle in Bakhmut,
which had left his people exhausted.
What was his role going to be in the future?
I think basically he was after independence of action,
but Putin had sort of ignored him.
So he decided to make his case more loudly than before
and then embarked on a bold move,
which he hadn't really thought through where it was going.
Meanwhile, Putin felt he had to denounce the treachery,
and then suddenly realized that he didn't have very much to protect him,
because everybody was in Ukraine.
Well, let's stay with that thought,
because on Saturday morning, Putin goes on national television
and says, this is treachery, this is treason,
this is a stab in the back, and there'll be severe punishment.
Later in the day, oh no, there's not going to be severe punishment.
We've done a deal.
He's off to Belarus,
and Lukashenko is going to make him comfortable there,
and there are going to be no prosecutions.
Except now, three Russian news agencies and Russian TV are reporting,
there is no deal.
There is a deal.
I mean, because Lukashenko has got a lot particularly foolish
if there's nothing at all.
Lukashenko is the Belarusian president
who is very close to Putin
and has supported him throughout the Ukraine war.
And has been close to Prigozin.
But it's Russia.
So what said one moment isn't true the next,
but the bird has flown.
I mean, Prigozin is not going to be arrested very easily now.
Is he going to go quietly to Belarus?
Exactly.
Well, he'll move on from Belarus, I can't imagine.
I mean, this is sort of your Stalin and Trotsky moment,
except now the men are quite the same quality, shall we say.
Trotsky eventually went off to Mexico
where he was found by Stalin's agents and got a pickaxe.
But I suspect it wouldn't surprise me.
I don't know.
It wouldn't surprise me if Prigozin went off to Africa

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

where he's had dealings in the past.

There are big issues about what happens to his group.

So can I ask you something?

It's because the hot take is that everyone's been weakened by this, that Putin's in a mess and Prigozin hasn't managed to do what he wanted and Ukraine triumphs.

I guess the alternative reading is that Putin's actually seen off a coup and he's done away with him and he's out of his eye line now and he is strengthened by not having this rumbling in the wings.

I think he's basically weakened for a number of reasons.

First, Prigozin said things on Friday that were undoubtedly true, but in the Russian context, pretty incendiary allegations, which was essentially that the reasons given for starting the war were fabrications and reflected corruption.

He's also keeps on, say, said things about the way the war has been run and the course of the question...

And he said that publicly in Russian to the whole...

Yeah, so everybody knows that's what he thinks.

That's been said.

Secondly, Putin didn't seem to know what to do

and the reason why I suspect he's...

they're trying to walk back a bit on negotiations now

is because he wishes to appear as a resolute figure who doesn't bend easily,

but the conclusion you draw from this is, well, he does bend.

Third, and this was exposed by this episode,

is that all his forces are in Ukraine, bogged down there.

And this isn't the only episode.

This was obviously Prigozin, but some far-right Russian nationalist

sponsored by Ukraine went into the border area of Bogorod

and caused mayhem because there was nobody much there to deal with him.

So I think it raises a big question for him

about the vulnerabilities within Russia itself.

And basically, if Prigozin does, at least for the moment, get away, then he wasn't crushed.

He wasn't, hasn't been punished in the way promised.

So there are...

I mean, there are two other big questions that strike me from the Weekend 1

is the impact that this has on the war in Ukraine

and whether this is an advantage for Ukraine

that presumably the Wagner forces that were around Bakhmut,

who were leading the fight there, have gone across the border to Rostov,

which is not that huge a distance and are no longer there.

So does it make a difference to the war that the Ukrainians are prosecuting

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

to try and dislodge the Russians?

And I'm really fascinated, we've come to about where American public opinion is on whether you want Putin there, you know, because of the... or not.

I think...

Is this the Bashir al-Assad moment?

Do you want a weakened Putin with wings clipped in the Kremlin?

But you don't want civil war?

Well, take them in turn.

On the effect on the war...

I mean Bakhmut is actually still an area of fighting and the fact that Wagner groupers withdrawn from there, which happened largely before this particular episode because they're taking quite a lot of punishment in the battle.

So it makes a difference, but I wouldn't highlight that.

It makes a difference that Shogun and Gerasimov stay in position.

I think the Ukrainians...

This is the chief of staff.

The Ukrainians will be very happy about that

because they're pretty incompetent.

It'll cause a certain amount of dismay amongst the Russian military, but there's no evidence at the moment that it's affecting the way the battles are being fought.

So it's a moderate plus for Ukraine,

but I wouldn't overstate it, except that it indicates that if pushed, Putin may be prepared to reconsider the position rather than just hang out forever and ever, which was the assumption before.

On America's view of, is it better to have the devil you know?

I don't think anybody expected...

However this crisis had been resolved, that Bregozin would end up as president.

I mean, it would have provided an opening maybe for somebody else.

But the problem is Putin doesn't have a succession plan.

He hasn't identified the successor

because autocrats like Matt Raul were scared to do so because the successor might think the time is ripe.

So there's a mixed view in the West.

Generally people don't want Russia to fall apart.

They're nervous about the instability,

but it's very hard to see how you have any sort of normal relations again with Russia while Putin's in charge.

So I think the preference, which you know,

good luck if you can get it,

would be for an orderly succession rather than chaos.

The basic problem we have with Russia is that the moderates,

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

to the extent that they ever existed, are either in prison or in exile.
And the critics, including Bregozin, come from the nationalist right.
So you're saying all the options are pretty terrible.
They're just degrees of awful.
You know, at this stage in this sort of war,
all the options are pretty awful.
I mean, there are some options that are less awful than others.
And the best option is, my view,
is that Ukraine makes considerable progress
in the next month or so and forces a change of heart.
This will produce more doubts in the Kremlin.
But, you know, as this episode again demonstrates,
our grasp of Russian politics is not great.
So the whisperings now that we're hearing,
you know, the UK sort of civil service or foreign office
being readied for the fall of Putin,
what does that mean?
How do you ready yourself for the fall of Putin?
You're right, papers.
Right.
When in doubt.
When in doubt, write a long memo.
Write a long memo.
I mean, what can we do?
I think it's worth thinking these things through.
I think, you know, the government has been pretty active all weekend
because it's potentially a big deal
and what looked like might happen on Saturday night
was potentially a big deal.
But all they can really do is watch.
I think what was clear is how little they said.
They really didn't want anybody to be able to say
what was going on and anything to do with the West at all.
This was an internal Russian matter
and that's how it should be viewed.
And I think that's how they'll continue to want to view it.
They don't want to be seen,
especially given Putin's rhetoric
which is engaged in this sort of existential threat from NATO.
They don't want to give any confirmation to that sort of rhetoric.
I think they want it to be worked out in that sense on Russian terms.
Meanwhile, they'll help the Ukrainians as best they can.
So Lawrence, you said at the start that there are lots of crazy theories out there.
It's worth just dismissing, addressing some of them.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

This was a CIA instigated plot to deflect attention away from Hunter Biden and his legal travails. And that was being said seriously in some parts of America. Well, I think there is a view in some parts of America that everything that happens at the moment is meant as a deflection from Hunter Biden which is obviously the biggest issue facing the international community at the moment. There are others... Well, one of the others, let me put to you Pippa Malgrom, who used to work for George Bush, she thinks that this is an opportunity for, ironically, for the army heads to come through the middle and actually end up being the victors in all this. Can you see this being the sort of the army military over the intelligence military? Well, there's a point that the FSB, the inheritors of the KGB, have been weakened because they never seem to know what's going on at all and got the original invasion wrong and they got this wrong and weren't much help. So I think the military, in that sense, are in a stronger position. However, Shoigu and Garasimov are creatures of Putin. I mean, they've been there forever. The issue is whether some of the other commanders, Serovkin, who was the one that was closest to Brigosin, may have played some sort of mediating role, but there's clear dissatisfaction with the way this war has been run and there is a view that at some point it may become untenable for Russia. If it wants to maintain a serious military, given all its other responsibilities, given the size of the country that, as we can see, is not being particularly well defended at the moment, whether it's really wise to pursue what turns out to be a pretty futile war. I think those arguments are there. They'll be bubbling around and in the end, it's the Russian military who will call the shots on that. Not that they'll mount a coup, there's no particular tradition in Russia of that, but they have in the past shown themselves to be perfectly realistic about when their position is weak and when withdrawal makes sense. So Lawrence, thank you. I think we might need you back very soon to explain latest developments. In a moment, we're going to be speaking to Yuri Gologorsky. He's formerly of the Russian service and has got great insight into the mindset of some of the leading figures in the Kremlin and who are making the decisions. We're back and joining us now is Yuri Gologorsky, formerly of the BBC Russian service, but a man who I like to think can take us in the psychology of Putin

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

and Russia's leaders, maybe Russia's people as well, Yuri. I think the last time you were on the news agents, we were talking about the unfortunate end that so many of Putin's enemies were coming to. And this is the first time, feels like, he is the one who has been on the receiving end of a real attack. To a degree, you are right. That's rather unfortunate ending for Putin. He's been severely damaged, not mortally, but heavily damaged because he lost two things. He lost the monopoly of power and he lost the monopoly for institutional violence, which he had until last weekend. Now, pre-Gorgen, he has lost, ostensibly. Was it a defeat for him? Not necessarily. We haven't seen the last of him. We don't know where he is. We don't know where Putin is until when I'm sitting here and talking to you and John, I don't exactly know where Putin is because he hasn't been seen. We have seen a pre-recorded message from him on Monday morning but that doesn't mean that he is in Moscow. His two planes flew out of Moscow to Valdai region. Whether he was in these planes, we don't know. That's near the St. Petersburg region because he's famous for sending all sorts of planes, trains, cars in various directions and where he is exactly at the time. So how important is it if Putin is seeking to restore his authority and you say that he's been badly damaged, that he is seen by the Russian people? Because presumably, Russian people are going to be asking the same questions that Emily and I are asking. Well, where is he? Who's leading the country at the moment? The country was rudderless during the ostensil coup because no one was seen. Again, he appeared in a pre-recorded five-minute message. His message wasn't extremely powerful. It was almost ad-lib. He fluffed and he made mistakes. Well, what can we say? People will be asking, is it as powerful as we thought until the last weekend? And that will change the psychology. But another thing, pre-Goshen and his people managed to drive from their base,

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

they crossed off without a single shot.

Also, they say a couple of pilots, military pilots,

lost their lives and the price of people who tried to attack pre-Goshen.

We still don't know the full story.

Then they go to Voronezh, they take over Voronezh

and still they do not meet any resistance.

So it means that the military, at least some of the military,

are very supportive of what pre-Goshen represented until then.

What kind of a deal was agreed between Putin's man and pre-Goshen?

It is still unclear.

But the fact that they are saying that Putin will be going to Belarus,

probably that will be just a stopover.

We know that a lot of planes converged during the weekend in Turkey, including Lukashenko's plane.

And that's probably where the negotiations were conducted.

That's where the deal was struck.

It also shows an interesting behavior of the Russian elite, who ostensibly were very protective of Putin.

So this means Erdogan, Turkey's president, could have been instrumental in helping to bring about some sort of a settlement between various factions.

So the question you always get when there's a settlement, is it going to last?

Is it durable?

Is this the roadmap?

If I were pre-Goshen, I wouldn't trust Putin's guarantees on paper it was written on, because Putin is known not to forget one thing, treachery.

He doesn't forgive his own record, saying,

I can forget and forgive anything but treachery.

But as far as pre-Goshen is concerned, pre-Goshen has been sending messages to the West over the past fortnight, three weeks, effectively indicating that he doesn't need Ukraine, he doesn't want Ukraine.

All he needs, surprise, surprise, is a free hand in the Central Republic of Africa.

He needs Africa, because for him, the value of diamonds, of rough diamonds, is much bigger than the value of cold dust in Donbass.

He's the hard-nosed commercial businessman.

He's a mercenary, a businessman, whoever pays more will get his attention.

And Ukraine is entirely Putin's project.

And we don't know for how long the Russian elite

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

and the Russian army and obviously pre-Goshen's people will want to subscribe to this notion.

You must have spoken to friends at home in Russia.

What is the mindset, I'm not saying all Russian people think the same, but what is the sense now from those people that you're hearing from?

Vote with your feet, run away as fast as possible.

From whom?

From Russia.

So get out.

Get out as fast as possible, because Russia isn't stable.

Russia is rather less, at least in the days when we are talking, and it's unpredictable who is going to be in control of the nuclear button.

So nukes out of control, no proper state.

Sounds terrifying.

It is a terrifying prospect.

Yes, it is.

But that was...

All chiefs of staff will tell you that Russia is very unpredictable and Russia is unpredictable.

It is very dangerous.

Does anything stabilize it?

Does anything stabilize things for Putin?

I mean, can the West help Putin in a weird kind of way?

John, funny you should ask us.

The deputy chief of security council, the former president, Mr Medvedev, who kept issued threatening noises and telling the West that he personally was going to destroy the West over the weekend almost trying to persuade the West that it would be too dangerous not to support Putin.

Putin is the last resort.

He's the one who can keep Russia stable and prevent murderous and thugs of getting control of the nuclear button.

So he was effectively appealing to the West, help us to destroy the rebellion.

It is mind-boggling.

Absolutely mind-boggling.

And do you think the West is inclined to listen?

Not necessarily, not at this stage, no.

The West took the view with which success to both sides.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

Oh, you cancel each other out as quickly as you can.
Yuri, if you had a crystal ball,
if you were trying to look to the future
to a month's time or three months' time,
are we where we are now?
Or do things continue to change?
No, things will continue to change
if the way elections tomorrow,
Putin will get 150% as usual
because we know how the election is conducted.
They get it counting on the Russians.
Yeah, but he will have to seek power.
He now realized, finally,
that he cannot go on like that forever.
And if you're Zelensky?
I will be troubled
because we'll have pre-government north of Kiev,
much closer to Kiev in Belarus.
And if pre-government and his people are paid enough,
that's a threat to Kiev.
So I wouldn't relax if I were Ukrainian president,
not just yet.
Even though he's not interested,
territorial in Ukraine,
he would fight for money.
Emily, he is a mercenary.
Yeah.
He's a businessman.
He has a set of principles.
You don't like them.
He had another one.
Fascinating.
Thank you so much.
That was really illuminating.
Thank you, guys.
This is The News Agents.
Welcome back.
We're going to stay with Russia on tomorrow's episode, sort of.
We've got a spectacular guest coming in.
You're going to hear a little clip
from the play he's doing at the West End right now.
It's called Patriots.
We are here today to urge the West to open its eyes
and see that this Russia will never be a good neighbor.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Has Putin lost control?

It will threaten the world order.
It will be an enemy of freedom and we must act now.
In this play, Tom Hollander plays Berezovsky,
who was one of those billionaires that came to power
after the collapse of the Soviet Union.
And in a sense, he made Putin.
He created the man that Putin became.
And we're going to talk to Tom tomorrow
about what it's like being Berezovsky,
about what he's learned about modern Russia,
and about all those other brilliant, crazy roles he's done
in the White Lotus or with the...
I'm doing the lobster thing.
Lobster thing.
The lobster thing in The Night Manager.
Rev, if you have questions for Tom,
I'm sure he'd love to hear it.
And the other thing is I kind of want to ask him
whether he thought at this weekend when he was going on stage,
oh, my God, are we going to have to rewrite this?
If Putin...
Yeah, what happens?
You're in the middle of a coup
and you've got a whole play about the kind of ubiquitous power
of this man, the omniscience of him.
And then you kind of think he was out of night.
Blimey, he could be gone by Sunday morning.
But that's the perfect thing about theatre.
It is just a stretch of time.
And it's great.
Anyway, Tom Hollander with us tomorrow.
Hope you will be too.
We'll see you then.
Bye-bye.
Bye for now.
This has been a global player original podcast
and a Persephoneka production.