

US, NATO had no involvement in Wagner's 'short-lived' revolt in Russia: Biden

June 27, 2023

Online Desk: President Joe Biden on Monday said United States and NATO had no involvement in the short-lived insurrection in Russia by the Wagner Group mercenary force. He said it's "too early" to assess the impact on the war in Ukraine.

Biden said he held a video call with allies over the weekend and they are all in sync in working to ensure that they give Russian President Vladimir Putin "no excuse to blame this on the West" or NATO. "We made clear that we were not involved. We had nothing to do with it," Biden said. "This was part of a struggle within Russian system."

Biden also spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy over the weekend about the situation and said he intended to speak with him again later Monday or early Tuesday. "I told him that no matter what happened in Russia, let me say again, no matter what happened in Russia, we in the United States would continue to support Ukraine's defense and sovereignty and its territorial integrity."

A feud between the Wagner Group leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and Russia's military brass that has festered throughout the war erupted into a mutiny that saw the mercenaries leave Ukraine to seize a military headquarters in a southern Russian city. They rolled for hundreds of kilometers toward Moscow, before turning around after less than 24 hours on Saturday.

Earlier Monday, Prigozhin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu made public comments with both aiming to play down the crisis. In an 11-minute audio statement, Prigozhin said he acted "to prevent the destruction of the Wagner private military company" and moved in response to an attack on a Wagner camp that killed some 30 of his fighters.

Biden said much remains in flux in the aftermath of the most significant challenge to Putin's authority during his long tenure. "We're going to keep assessing the fallout of this weekend's events and the implications from Russia and Ukraine," Biden said. "But it's still too early to reach a definitive conclusion about where this is going."