# Russian Mercenary Leader Attends Kremlin Banquet

December 15, 2016



**Kremlin Press Service**

The leader of a Russian private security firm Dmitry Utkin is reported to have been on the guest list of a Nov. 9 Kremlin banquet.

"Dmitry Utkin was really there," Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov said in response to questions about the mercenary leader's attendance.

Peskov added that Utkin, who is also known by his *nom de guerre* Wagner, had previously been awarded the Order of Courage for his military service.

When asked why Utkin was awarded the Order of Courage, Peskov hesitated saying that such awards are common.

Peskov said he had no information whether Uktin or employees of his private military company were currently participating in the conflict in Syria.

Utkin served as commander of the 700th Special Forces Detachment of the 2nd Separate Special Forces Brigade of the Russian Military Intelligence until 2013, before becoming a reservist.

He subsequently worked for Moran Security Group, a private security company in Moscow, where he was among the so-called "Slavic Corps" expedition to Syria in 2013.

Since 2014, Uktin has headed of his own firm PMC Wagner.

In 2014-15, PMC Wagner contractors were spotted in separatist-controlled Donbass in Ukraine. In late 2015, members of the unit were deployed to Syria.

The security company is believed to have played a role in the initial capture of the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra from Islamic State in 2016.

On Dec. 12, the St. Petersburg news site Fontanka.ru reported that Utkin could be seen in news footage from a presidential reception at the Kremlin.