

# 'Putin's Chef' Prigozhin Loses Defense Ministry's Favor, Report Says

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Evgeny Prigozhin assists Vladimir Putin during a dinner **Misha Japaridze / Pool / File Photo / Reuters**

A network of businesses linked to Yegeny Prigozhin, a figure known as “Putin’s chef,” has lost billions of rubles in defense ministry contracts in the past year, the Bell news outlet has reported.

Billionaire restaurateur Prigozhin has a [history](#) of catering to St. Petersburg’s elites and winning lucrative government procurement deals. The U.S. Treasury [sanctioned](#) Prigozhin in 2016 for “extensive business dealings” with Russia’s Defense Ministry.

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These dealings may have now dried up after Prigozhin’s alleged businesses earned less than one billion rubles (\$17.6 million) in 2017, the Bell news outlet [reported](#) Friday.

The same contracts totalled a combined 40 billion rubles (\$705 million) in 2015 and 2016,

according to the Bell's analysis of the Defense Ministry's procurement deals.

The outlet cites two ministry contractors as saying that Prigozhin's businesses no longer provided cleaning services to the military, while six of the nine contractors that allegedly belonged to the oligarch have been liquidated or are in the process of liquidation.

Prigozhin also allegedly [controls](#) a private military contractor called Wagner that deploys mercenaries to eastern Ukraine and Syria.

Up to 200 Wagner-linked Russian mercenaries were reportedly [killed](#) in U.S. airstrikes on Feb. 7 after entering territory controlled by anti-Assad forces in eastern Syria.

Prigozhin's ties with the Russian military may have soured over Wagner's poorly hidden activities in Syria, the Fontanka news website — which was [the first](#) to write about Prigozhin's possible ties to defense contracts in 2016 — [reported](#) last year.

U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller [indicted](#) Prigozhin with 12 other Russians last month for overseeing a coordinated campaign to interfere in the 2016 presidential election.

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