

Peskov Son's Alleged Wagner Deployment Risks Backfiring for Kremlin

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Nikolai Peskov, archive photo. **Nikolay Choles / Facebook**

Attempts by the Kremlin to present the children of Russia's elite as equal participants in the war against Ukraine alongside ordinary soldiers have fallen flat, according to experts and former officials who spoke to The Moscow Times.

Instead, these efforts have sparked more questions than answers, they said.

Last Saturday the Wagner mercenary group's leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, announced that Nikolai Peskov, the son of President Vladimir Putin's longtime spokesman Dmitry Peskov, had allegedly been "knee-deep in mud and s**t" on the battlefield alongside his mercenaries for almost six months.

Dmitry Peskov confirmed this to the Russian media days later, but offered no further details.

Holes and inconsistencies in the story of Peskov Jr.'s alleged Wagner service mean it could

backfire for the Kremlin as it seeks to motivate ordinary Russians to enlist to fight ahead of a Ukrainian counterattack.

Abbas Gallyamov, an independent expert and former speechwriter for Putin, said the revelation this week that a senior Kremlin official's son had fought in Ukraine was no accident.

One of Russians' main grievances against the regime is its tendency to shift the negative consequences of its decisions onto the public while withholding the benefits, Gallyamov told The Moscow Times.

"In the situation of war, this injustice is perceived particularly sharply, because it is not about economic revenues, but about life itself," Gallyamov said.

"That is why the Kremlin has launched a project in which members of the elite go to the front and appear there as 'participants in the [special military operation]'."

Fourteen months of warfare have left Russia's forces heavily depleted, experts say, and an anticipated counteroffensive by Kyiv has added urgency to Moscow's need to bolster its numbers.

At the same time, the Kremlin's narrative of the war — and [advertising efforts](#) — have failed to compel masses of Russian men to join the army.

To increase opportunities to recruit conscripts for the army, the Kremlin [quietly](#) prepared laws to digitize conscription and mobilization which were swiftly approved in the State Duma this month.

The news of Peskov Jr.'s apparent deployment to Ukraine was apparently part of the Kremlin's efforts to boost enlistment.

But Nikolai Peskov, 33, who spent several years in his youth in London and later worked as a correspondent for pro-Kremlin broadcaster RT, was the target of a telephone prank in September in which he appeared reluctant to join the army.

In the phone [conversation](#) broadcast live on YouTube, an associate of jailed opposition activist Alexei Navalny introduced himself to Nikolai Peskov as a military recruiter.

Peskov Jr. declined the caller's request to appear at the recruitment office, promising to "solve the issue at another level," likely alluding to his influential father.

The prankster also called Alexei Mishustin, the son of Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, who said that he was studying at university and "had no desire to fight yet."

Following Prigozhin's statement this week, Peskov Jr. [told](#) the pro-Kremlin tabloid Komsomolskaya Pravda that he had already been planning to join Wagner on the day of the prank phone call.

"I felt it was my duty. I could not sit on the sidelines and watch both friends and other people go there," he said, claiming he "performed a feat" and even earned a medal for bravery.

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Russian state propagandists were quick to jump on the story of Peskov Jr.'s alleged military service.

RT chief editor Margarita Simonyan said that she had known about Peskov Jr.'s service in Wagner for a long time, as his father personally told her about it during a friendly dinner, but asked not to make the information public. But in her statement, she referred to Peskov Jr. as "Sasha," a BBC Russian journalist [noted](#).

And Vladimir Solovyov, a host on state broadcaster Rossiya-1, published an [interview](#) with Peskov Jr. in the combat zone allegedly filmed during a winter trip to the frontlines.

"His name came up just recently, he's fighting in Wagner, he's become very famous. But what other choice does he have? He is the grandson of a legendary marshal, the son of a famous Russian state official. This is Nikolai Dmitrievich Peskov," Solovyov said.

According to Prigozhin, Peskov Jr. spent almost six months fighting in Ukraine as part of a rocket launcher crew but served under another name, using "forged documents" to conceal his identity.

"He [Dmitry Peskov] came to me saying, 'Why don't you take him, just as a simple artilleryman.' And the guy served like anybody else. Just a simple artilleryman, knee-deep in mud and s**t, manning a Uragan [rocket launcher]," Prigozhin said, adding that Peskov Sr. "once reputed to be a total liberal."

However, independent experts have voiced doubts that Peskov's son ever made it to the frontlines.

Independent military analyst and Conflict Intelligence Team founder Ruslan Leviev said that Uragan rocket launcher systems are normally positioned tens of kilometers away from the battlefield.

"These [systems] stand far enough from the frontline (they have a firing range of up to 35 kilometers), the risks are minimal, and I don't understand why 'knee-deep in mud' is mentioned," Leviev [tweeted](#).

Moreover, the claim of Peskov Jr.'s extended stay at the front appears inconsistent with the fact that during the fall and winter of 2022-2023, the Tesla Model X he owns was repeatedly caught violating speed limits in Moscow, leading to several [fines](#).

And on March 28, while Peskov Jr. was allegedly serving at the front, his car was sold to a man registered in Russia's northwestern Tver region, the independent Sota [news outlet reported](#).

"It's very clumsily done. It is clear they wanted to show that the children of the elite are also involved in the [military] operation. But there are questions as to how it is done, because it's been more than a year since the war began. And the reactions to this are unclear," a former high-ranking government official told The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity.

"If it had been cleanly performed, it would have been effective. But since there were many

revelations about the fact that this was a fake, and Peskov Jr. had in fact never been to Ukraine, the real effect was instead negative,” Gallyamov told The Moscow Times.

“The Russian people are used to the fact that the authorities are constantly building Potemkin villages, so as soon as any reasonable denials appear, people easily believe them,” he said.

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