

Putin Continues to Feed the Siloviki

By [Nikolai Petrov](#)

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According to tradition, Russia's law enforcement officials started off the year by summing up the previous 12 months and making plans for the coming year at board meetings of the Interior Ministry and Federal Security Service. President Vladimir Putin attended both meetings, held during the last two weeks. These are especially noteworthy considering that last year the FSB was stripped of its supervisory role over all law enforcement agencies, with the Interior Ministry now under Putin's personal control. That move might have been a reaction to the protest movement that the FSB was unable to halt and because the police are the government's first line of defense against mass protests.☒☒

Addressing the top brass, Putin said, "The Interior Ministry has always played a key role in Russia's law enforcement system — and not just in law enforcement, but in the state government system in general." Putin also drew attention to the fact that salaries for Interior Ministry and military personnel had been doubled, and that funding for their housing had been increased six-fold. At the same time, Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev reported that as a result of the decision to end co-financing at the expense of regional budgets, the funding for police did not rise at the same rate in Moscow, the Moscow region and in St.

Petersburg.☒☒

In contrast to most regions, where the number of applicants exceeds the number of police jobs available, police forces in the capital suffer from chronic manpower shortages. Putin described the top priority for the Interior Ministry as ensuring the public's safety and fighting extremism and called for beefing up measures to ensure law and order in public places — that is, at locations where mass protests are held. "But the political battle and public discussion must remain within the Constitution's limits," Putin said, "and not erode and destroy the foundations of our country and society."☒☒

Putin's address to the FSB was more terse and strict. Agency employees were also given a significant raise of 40 percent effective Jan. 1. As with the Interior Ministry, Putin set the top priorities for the FSB as fighting terrorism and providing security for the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi. On the subject of terrorism, Putin spoke of a direct link between extremist and terrorist groups and firmly recommended "neutralizing a variety of extremist structures," defining them as those who "sow hatred, destabilize our society and country, and thereby endanger the lives, well-being and peaceful existence of millions of our people." He also made direct reference to nongovernmental organizations receiving foreign funding that "inevitably serve the interests of others."☒☒

Presumably, the transcripts of the president's speeches posted on the official Kremlin website do not contain all of his remarks at those meetings, or else his words have been edited for public consumption. Even still, they show that the Kremlin is paranoid about "political extremism" — loosely interpreted as any public criticism of the authorities — as well as foreign-funded NGOs that are believed to support extremism. First, the State Duma passed tougher laws against "illegal protests," which include exorbitant fines that even the Kremlin-friendly Constitutional Court ruled against earlier this week. Now the president has told his principle law enforcement agencies that strict enforcement of those laws is a top priority in the fight against terrorism.☒☒

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