

Russians to Get Access to FBI Data

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May 26, 2013



Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev

After the Boston bombings last month and ahead of the Winter Olympics in Sochi next February, U.S. authorities are expanding their work with the Interior Ministry by granting the Russians access to some FBI information.

The development, which came during a visit by Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev to the U.S. last week, underscores a U.S. desire to better identify terrorist and extremist threats even as it simultaneously enforces a blacklist of Interior Ministry officials.

The Interior Ministry also faces renewed scrutiny over its independence after Interpol on Friday rejected its request to place British fund manager William Browder on an international search list.

FBI director Robert Mueller promised Kolokoltsev in Washington late last week to open some FBI data to the Russians, saying, "Such resources could be useful to Russian law enforcement agencies in view of the Sochi Olympics," the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

About 15,000 U.S. citizens could attend the Sochi Olympics, according to Mueller.

Mueller also thanked the Russian side for the help it provided in investigating the Boston Marathon bombing, which U.S. investigators believe was masterminded and carried out by brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who have mixed Chechen-Dagestani origin. Tamerlan Tsarnaev died during a police showdown days after the April 15 attack, while his younger brother has been arrested and may face the death penalty on charges of using a weapon of mass destruction.

The investigation into the Boston attack, which killed three people and injured scores of others, revealed a lack of working coordination between the two countries' law enforcement agencies when it emerged that the Federal Security Service had alerted the FBI that Tamerlan Tsarnaev might be involved with Islamist groups but did not provide further information after he visited Russia for six months last year.

The breakdown in communication in the Tsarnaev case has been widely criticized in the media and by a number of U.S. lawmakers.

At the same time, Russia sees U.S. law enforcement as a model to emulate. During a stop in New York earlier last week, Kolokoltsev told police chief Raymond Kelly that the Interior Ministry had closely studied the New York police department while carrying out national police reforms last year.

"One of the main principles that we employ today is making superior officers directly responsible for their subordinates' actions," Kolokoltsev told Kelly, Interfax reported.

As a consequence, he said, Moscow is now safer than New York when it comes to crimes such as burglary and rape.

At a separate meeting with the head of the Homeland Security Department, Janet Napolitano, Kolokoltsev called for Russia and the U.S. to form a joint working group to counter common crime threats. "I have always underlined that extremists and terrorists have the same negative attitude toward Russians, Americans and representatives of other states. That's why it is important to unite our forces in countering them," Kolokoltsev said.

Kolokoltsev also met with U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and suggested that the Interior Ministry sign a legal cooperation agreement with the U.S. Justice Department.

"Since the beginning of this year, we have exchanged 827 documents with U.S. law enforcement agencies," Kolokoltsev told reporters, noting that the U.S. is one of top five countries with which Russia cooperates within the framework of the Interpol.

But a shadow was cast over Russia's use of Interpol over the weekend after the international police agency said it would not honor a Russian request to place Browder, head of the Hermitage Capital fund, on an international search list. Interpol said the ministry's tax evasion charges were "of a predominantly political nature." (Related story, p. XX)

Browder's supporters have linked the tax case to a Browder-led campaign to hold Russian officials with the Interior Ministry and other agencies responsible for the death of Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer who died in a Moscow jail after a beating by prison guards in 2009.

Magnitsky was imprisoned after accusing the officials of using Browder-linked companies to steal millions of dollars from the Russian government.

The Interior Ministry won a court ruling to authorize Browder's arrest and place him on an international arrest warrant shortly after the U.S. released its so-called Magnitsky list of 18 Russians banned from entry into the country. Among those on the list are Artyom Kuznetsov and Pavel Karpov, Interior Ministry investigators who put Magnitsky behind bars.

The blacklist, published April 12, provoked a storm of protest from Moscow and a tit-for-tat release of a blacklist of U.S. officials. But the Boston bombing occurred just three days later, causing the two sides to tone down their rhetoric and take a second look at relations.

U.S. and Russian law enforcement agencies have been finding new ways to work together in recent years, and Kolokoltsev's trip to the U.S. represents the latest step in that process, said Gennady Gudkov, former deputy head of the State Duma's Security Committee.

"Russian-U.S. security cooperation has been developing gradually for a number of years because both countries have many common issues and enemies," said Gudkov, an opposition-minded politician who himself was ousted from the Duma in a politically tinged ethics probe last fall.

But, Gudkov added, political considerations will hinder close cooperation.

"There must be no illusions. Both sides will still be very cautious in cooperating with each other," he said by phone.

He added: "Even the law enforcement agencies of the NATO countries do not share all the information that they have with one another. I predict that the volume of data that is exchanged will not be great."

In any case, both sides will have another chance to improve relations this week. A group of U.S. lawmakers led by Republican Representative Dana Rohrabacher will arrive in Moscow to investigate the Boston bombing and to further develop cooperation between the two countries' security agencies.

"The Boston bombing is not primary purpose for the trip. It's just one facet of it," Rohrabacher's spokeswoman told RIA Novosti.

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