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Poroshenko Says Evidence Shows Kremlin Aide Surkov Directed Snipers in Kiev

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A woman reacts near flowers and flags placed in honour of people, killed in anti-government protests in 2014, during a commemorating ceremony near Independence Square in Kiev on Feb. 20, 2015.

KIEV/MOSCOW — Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said Friday that police evidence showed that a top Russian presidential aide, Vladislav Surkov, had directed "foreign sniper groups" who shot and killed protesters in Kiev a year ago.

"Just a few days ago, the head of state security told me that, in questioning, special forces operatives gave evidence that the Russian presidential aide Vladislav Surkov led the organization of groups of foreign snipers on the Maidan," Poroshenko said, according to his website.

Poroshenko made his comments during a meeting with relatives of some of the 100 or so people who were shot dead over a three-day period a year ago during protests on Kiev's Independence Square against the Moscow-backed president, Viktor Yanukovych. Yanukovych

subsequently fled to Russia.

Poroshenko added that investigating authorities had established a "clear Russian link" to the shootings, in which 77 protesters and 18 police officers were killed.

Valentin Nalivaichenko, head of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), repeated what he had told the president in comments to Ukrainian news agency Ukrainski Novini.

"[SBU Alpha special forces unit] members gave us concrete information [under interrogation] about the positions of foreign sniper groups that were targeting both protesters ... and Interior Ministry police officers," he said.

"There's [evidence] of their ranks, last names, copies of their passports, dates of arrival and departure, what cellphone network they used, where they stayed and how Putin's advisor Surkov coordinated their activity in Kiev," he was quoted as saying.

Nalivaichenko also told the news agency that three groups from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) had gone to Kiev from December 2013 to February 2014 in preparation to disperse the protests.

The list of suspects wanted in Ukraine over the Maidan shootings includes Yanukovych, former SBU head Alexander Yakimenko and former Internal Affairs Minister Vitaly Zakharchenko.

Surkov, known as the Kremlin's "gray cardinal," was formerly deputy chief of the presidential administration and is widely credited with the development of the "managed democracy" concept and creation of pro-Kremlin youth movements.

After resigning from his position as Deputy Prime Minister in 2013, Surkov became Putin's point man for relations with Ukraine, as well as with the pro-Russian breakaway Georgian republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

(MT, Reuters)

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