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Cossacks Burn Effigies of Obama, Erdogan

By Anna Dolgov

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The rally was billed as a demonstration in support of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and participants chanted “Russia” and “Putin” as they watched the flames.

Cossacks in southern Russia burned effigies of U.S. President Barack Obama and Turkish President Recep Erdogan, while rallying this weekend in support of the Kremlin's policies, according to news reports and videos posted online.

A crowd of Cossacks clad in their traditional uniforms and fur hats also trampled on the American and Turkish flags before setting them on fire during the Saturday rally in the southern Kuban region.

“Burn, Obama,” a man could be heard saying in the video.

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A Cossack leader, whom the Russkaya Vesna (Russian Spring) website identified as ataman Ivan Bezugly, addressed the gathering to vow that his para-military group would soon be fighting various unspecified enemies of Russia around the country.

“Tomorrow things will flare up in Cossack villages and farmsteads, and common citizens will hide under benches and behind wardrobes, while we shall be on the front lines,” the Cossack leader said in the video.

“Because today in the evenings, when citizens are drinking their tea and playing with their kids, it is Cossacks who are on the front lines, protecting public order,” he said.

Cossack militias have been patrolling Moscow parks and city beaches since last year, appointed by the city government primarily to combat drinking in public spaces and smoking in prohibited areas.

But Cossacks are expected to begin regular patrols of Moscow streets next year, and have been bidding for government contracts to serve as security guards at the capital's schools and stores, according to news reports.

In 2012, Cossack patrols showed up at Moscow's Belorussky Station, but the city administration later argued the militia had acted without consulting the authorities, BBC's Russian-language service has reported.

A month later, Moscow's south-eastern district banned the use of Cossack volunteer squads for crowd control, citing their frequent failure to get official permission for their actions, the report said.

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