

Putin's National Guard May Gain Right to Shoot at Crowds

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April 21, 2016



The newly created National Guard could be given the power to shoot into crowds of people under proposals from State Duma deputies.

The recommendations were made by the State Duma Committee on Defense after an evaluation of the presidential decree on the National Guard. The committee recommended that the State Duma approve the decree, the RBC news website reported Friday, citing a copy of a document.

Under the current version of the bill, the National Guard is prohibited from using weapons in the case of “a large gathering of people, as a result of which random people may be affected.”

Deputies have argued that the rule must have certain exceptions in case of terrorists attacks, hostage situations, large-scale unrest or armed attacks on important state property.

“We believe that in these cases the risk of harming random individuals will be justified,” the

Committee's statement said, RBC reported.

Deputies have said that if such actions from National Guard members were legal, they should also be freed from the responsibility for causing damage to both individual or legal entities.

Putin announced the creation of the National Guard on April 5. The new force, subject directly to the head of state, is headed by the chief of the president's security service Viktor Zolotov. Putin has said that the new army is designed to maintain the public order and fight terrorism and extremism.

“The Committee's proposal to expand the new army's powers can be seen as an expression of the deputies' desire to oblige the new head of the National guard, but its success depends on whether interested parties among the siloviki agree to it or not,” said Yekaterina Schulmann, a political scientist and associate professor at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.

“This is a presidential decree and traditionally they are not revised,” she said. “If there will be any changes made, they will have to be made at the initiative of Zolotov himself, not the deputies.”

The National Guard has been created to replace a number of Russia's Interior Ministry's forces and will take over a wide range of the police forces' functions. Its work will also partially overlap with the Federal Security Service (FSB).

“The fact that the new army will not be responsible for causing damage is just transferring the general powers of the riot police and interior troops to the National Guard,” Schulmann said.

“The question is that these powers are extremely wide and it's practically impossible to receive any compensation if damage is caused,” she added.

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Original url:

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