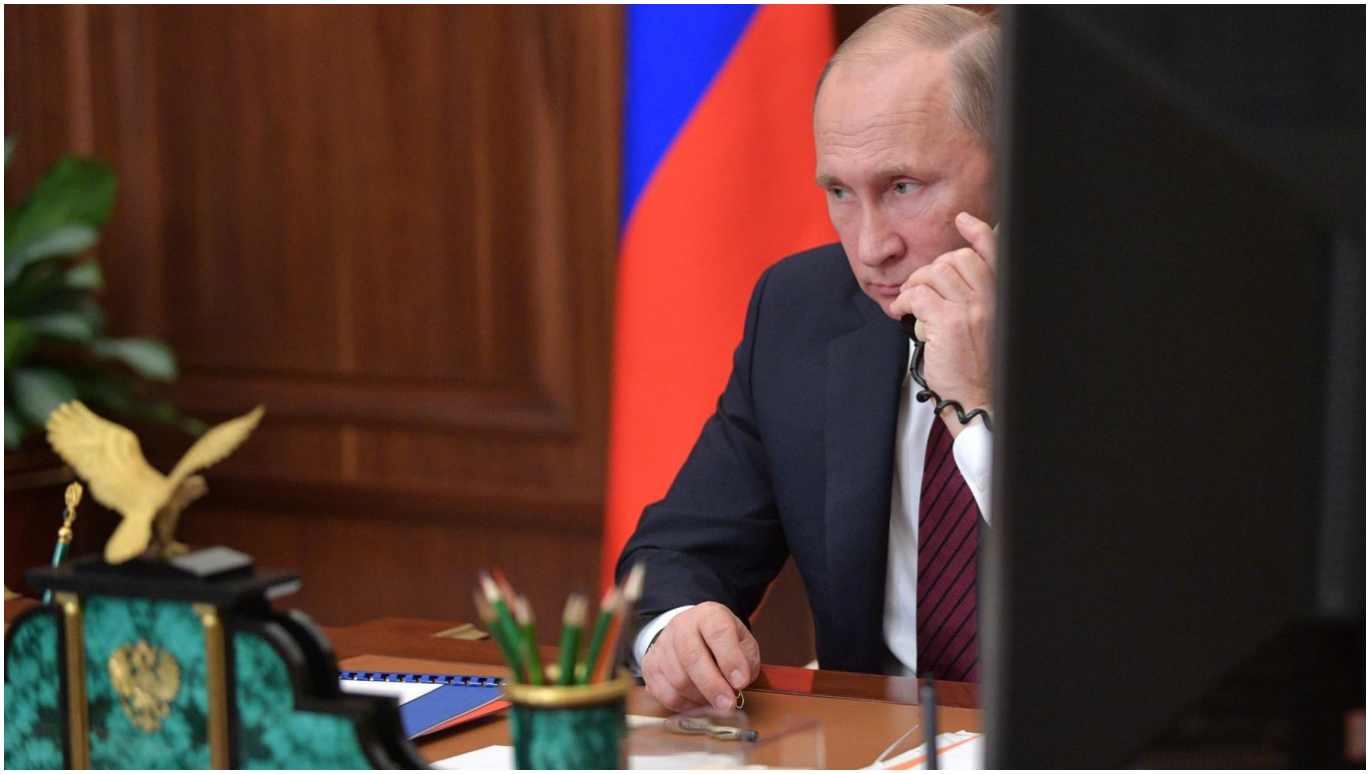
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

News From Russia: What you Missed Over the Weekend

December 18, 2017



Vladimir Putin / Kremlin Press Service

Thank You Call

President Vladimir Putin spoke to U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday to thank him for the U.S. help in foiling a terrorist plot in St. Petersburg.

The Kremlin said that "the information received from the CIA was enough to locate and detain the criminals."

Putin assured Trump that Russian intelligence would "promptly pass on" any information about terrorist threats to the U.S. and its citizens.

Mercenary Death

A Russian military contractor in Syria taken hostage by Islamic State (IS), has died, according to the man's family. Grigory Tsurkan died of wounds he sustained in captivity, a

representative of the Wagner private military group reportedly told his mother. A second hostage, Roman Zabolotny, was executed by militants, the Wagner representative said. IS is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

Terrorists Foiled

A member of a suspected IS sleeper cell detained Friday said the group planned to blow up the Kazan Cathedral and target other public spaces in St. Petersburg over the weekend.

Militants Killed

Three militants were killed in a counter-terrorist operation led by special forces in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan on Sunday.

The National Anti-Terrorist Committee said special forces surrounded a home and shot dead the leader of an underground Islamist group said to be responsible for the murder of civilians and police, as well as two others.

Olympic Rules

The R-Sport website has published details of new rules for Russian athletes competing at the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang.

Their uniforms will have the five Olympic rings instead of Russia's emblem, the traditional "RUS" will be replaced with "OAR" (Olympic Athlete from Russia) and the name "Team Russia" must not be visible on any sports equipment. The rules also apply to all supporting staff.

Also according to the rules, only one or two colors from Russia's tricolor flag can be used — but never all three at the same time.

Opposition Jailed

A court in St. Petersburg on Friday sentenced a regional leader of the PARNAS opposition party Alexander Rastorguyev to nine days behind bars for organizing an unauthorized rally on Oct. 7.

Rastorguyev said the actual purpose of the sentence was to prevent him from participating in a truckers' protest Dec. 15-20.

Sakharov Vandals

The word "Sodomites" was painted on the wall of the Sakharov Center in Moscow this weekend.

The Sakharov Center is hosting an exhibition titled "New Activism," discussing the role of human rights NGOs designated as “foreign agents” by the government.

Secret Sanctions

Washington will publish a list of hundreds of names of Russians who the EU should not do business with when it passes fresh sanctions on Moscow in February, the Izvestia newspaper has reported, citing three unnamed sources.

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