

# Russian Hackers Targeted Top Orthodox Church Officials, Media Reports

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Patriarch Bartholomew I / Flickr (CC BY-ND 2.0)

Russian hackers have reportedly tried to breach the emails of senior Eastern Orthodox Church members for years, amid controversy surrounding the Ukrainian church's possible move to break away from the Moscow Patriarchate.

Ukraine's Prime Minister Petro Poroshenko called for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate to split off from the Russian church in April as a matter of "national security." This week, Russian Orthodox leader Patriarch Kirill [visits](#) Patriarch Bartholomew I of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, which holds the right to recognize the legitimacy of the Ukrainian church, in a bid to prevent the move.

Related article: [Russian Orthodox Church Facing Ukraine Split](#)

The Russia-linked hacking group Fancy Bear [targeted](#) the emails of Bartholomew I's three

senior aides, The Associated Press reported Monday.

“The Kremlin is scrambling to help Moscow’s Patriarch Kirill retain his traditional role as the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church,” the AP said, citing an assessment from observers that the religious divorce would deal a severe blow to the Moscow Patriarchate’s power.

The revelation came from a digital “hit list” of 4,700 U.S., Russian and other email accounts that Fancy Bear tried to breach in 2015–2016, AP [reported](#) last year.

Fancy Bear also reportedly targeted the Moscow Patriarch’s spokesman, the head of Ukraine’s Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities and an umbrella group for Ukrainian Muslims.

The Moscow-based church said it was unaware of the reported hacking attempts, and Russian officials referred to the Kremlin’s repeated denials that it has anything to do with Fancy Bear.

“The one who made this is someone who knows us,” one unnamed church official told the AP, commenting on the hackers’ command of church jargon and inside knowledge of upcoming appointments.

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