

Bulletproof Vests on Red Square: Kremlin Secretly Beefs Up Putin's Personal Security

By [Pyotr Kozlov](#)

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Putin surrounded by security guards while laying flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow. **Ramil Sitdikov, RIA Novosti / kremlin.ru**

Russia's special services have ramped up the already strict security measures surrounding President Vladimir Putin to an unprecedented degree, two Russian officials who have been present at many of Putin's public appearances as well as a source close to the Kremlin told The Moscow Times.

The Kremlin — already on heightened security alert due to its invasion of Ukraine — has been rattled by recent attacks on high-ranking politicians in Europe and Asia and has stepped up Putin's security in response.

“The Kremlin takes Vladimir Putin's security very seriously. He is protected by a whole army

of visible and invisible guards,” a Russian official who attended the Victory Day parade on May 9 told The Moscow Times.

He, like all Russian sources interviewed for this story, spoke to The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Among the risk factors for the Kremlin are the International Criminal Court (ICC)’s arrest warrant for Putin on war crimes charges as well as the risk of Ukrainian [drone](#) and sabotage attacks and attacks by Islamist [radicals](#), a second official said.

He added that the Kremlin was on especially high alert following the 2022 assassination of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and last month’s attempt on Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico’s life.

The Kremlin has publicly said that there was no need to increase its security.

“Security measures are at the standard level. We are doing everything that needs to be done to ensure the president’s security,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov [told reporters](#) in May following the assassination attempt on Fico.

In reality, the special services control practically every aspect of Putin’s life, down to testing all of his meals for poison using a portable lab, a source close to the Kremlin said.

“The president has personal chefs who always travel with him. Groceries are brought with him too,” the source told The Moscow Times. “But even then, there is always a special group of officers traveling with Putin who check all the meals before Putin gets to them.”

Putin has been wearing body armor at public outdoor events, including in Moscow, since at least 2023, the two Russian officials who have seen Putin in person during several of these appearances told The Moscow Times.

He has been doing so on the strong recommendation of the Presidential Security Service (SBP), a unit within the Federal Guard Service (FSO) that protects the president, said one of the two officials familiar with the matter.

Putin was even wearing body armor beneath his coat for this year’s events marking Victory Day, which celebrates the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, one of the two Russian officials said.

“This year on May 9, the chief [Putin] was clearly wearing concealed body armor during the parade. And that precaution, I think, is necessary,” the first official said.

“God protects the cautious,” the second official said.

Jade Miller, an independent British hostile environment and high-risk security consultant, examined video [footage](#) of Putin at the Victory Day parade at The Moscow Times’ request. She concluded that he was indeed wearing a bulletproof vest.

“Putin appears to be walking in a rather rigid manner and there are no natural creases appearing at the back of his overcoat when walking and shaking military personnel hands,”

Miller said.

“Putin's upper body frame looks unnatural and his shoulders appear rather wide & square, showing no shape of the back and shoulder blades. At approximately 1:44, a part of his overcoat appears to get caught under what could potentially be a ballistic vest.”

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In several instances, Putin “appears to lift and adjust his shoulders in a way that shows discomfort from how a ballistic vest is designed to sit on the shoulders or collarbone,” she said, noting that the weight of the vest can cause discomfort and irritation when worn for a prolonged period.

“Putin is observed to keep his overcoat fastened up high and is seen to be checking that it is closed, as though he is trying to ensure no one can see an undergarment,” she added.

“In my professional opinion, Putin is wearing some form of ballistic protection during his time attending the parade,” she concluded.

Victory Day is one of the most important and symbolic holidays of the year for the Kremlin, with tight security measures and preparations for the massive military parade on Red Square starting well in advance.

Each year, the FSO, which protects the country's top officials, closes Red Square to the public two weeks ahead of the May 9 parade. It also closes off the area surrounding the war memorial near the Kremlin walls where Putin, his foreign guests and Russian elites lay flowers.

Every person who watches the parade from the stands alongside Putin can only do so with a personal invitation from the Kremlin. The security services perform a rigorous background check on each guest that examines their political credibility and loyalty.

Before they can enter Red Square, all parade attendees — including World War II veterans, officials and deputies — must undergo a thorough personal inspection.

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This year on May 9, as Putin oversaw the parade and laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier beside the Kremlin walls, he was surrounded by about two dozen security guards in sunglasses with portable body armor disguised as briefcases. Dozens of special forces officers stood out of sight of the live TV cameras.

Meanwhile, dozens of snipers from the SBP were stationed on the roof of the Kremlin, the GUM department store and other buildings surrounding Red Square throughout the parade.

Investigative journalist Andrei Soldatov, a non-resident senior fellow with the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) and the co-founder of Russian secret service watchdog Agentura.ru, said Putin — a former KGB agent and FSB boss — generally follows his security services' requests.

“Putin is a rather unique leader in that he usually agrees to increased security/expansion of the security perimeter when his guards ask for it,” Soldatov told The Moscow Times.

“Usually, other leaders tend to be in constant conflict with their guards, but not Putin. He almost always goes along with their demands. And right now, I think he's going along with them,” Soldatov said.

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