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Russian Law Enforcement and Internal Security Agencies

Russia has an extensive internal security system, with multiple, overlapping, and competitive security agencies vying for bureaucratic, political, and economic influence. Since Vladimir Putin assumed Russia's leadership, these agencies have grown in both size and power, and they have become integral to the security and stability of the government. If Putin extends his rule beyond 2024, as is now legally permissible, these agencies could play a role in the leadership succession process and affect the ability of a transitional regime to quell domestic dissent. For Members of Congress, understanding the numerous internal security agencies in Russia could be helpful in assessing the prospects of regime stability and dynamics of a transition after Putin leaves office. In addition, Russian security agencies and their personnel have been targeted by U.S. sanctions for cyberattacks and human rights abuses.

Overview and Context

After the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, Russia inherited the vast internal security apparatus overseen by the Committee for State Security (KGB). Although the KGB initially was broken up into several smaller organizations that were weakened by corruption, Putin's rise to the presidency in 2000 increased the security services' power and importance for regime security. As a former KGB member and head of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) from 1998 to 1999, Putin valued the security services; he installed close associates, many with backgrounds in security agencies, to head the various agencies. The relative power and influence of these agencies are often shaped by their leaders' close, personal connections to Putin.

In Russia, internal security agencies are responsible for both the maintenance of law and order and the regime's security. They have overlapping roles, leading to competition among agencies to increase political influence, budgets, and control over lucrative issue areas for illicit gain. As a result, some observers contend, various internal security agencies use fabricated or selective prosecutions of regime opponents to demonstrate their utility to the political leadership.

Competition is also a feature of Russia's internal security architecture. Analysts have noted the cannibalistic nature of the security agencies, with some conflicts leading to the ousting of agency leaders, the creation of new agencies, or even the total dissolution of agencies (such as the Tax Police in 2003 or the Federal Drug Control Service in 2016). In practice, competition prevents any one organization or leader from becoming too powerful, independent, or threatening to the political leadership. Often competition is factional, defined by personal relationships, and can cross organizational lines in pursuit of opportunities for enrichment and political advancement.

Competition frequently leads to arrests and prosecutions, often for real or imagined corruption allegations to undercut targeted organizations and senior leadership both institutionally and politically.

Russian Law Enforcement and Internal Security Agencies and Heads

(as of September 2020)

Ministry of Interior (MVD): Vladimir Kolokoltsev

National Guard (Rosgvardiya, FSVNG): Viktor Zolotov

- Special Purpose Mobile Units (OMON)
- Special Rapid Response Detachment (SOBR)
- Interior Troops (VV)
- *Kadyrovtsy*

Federal Security Service (FSB): Alexander Bortnikov

Federal Protective Service (FSO): Dmitri Kochnev

- Presidential Security Service (SBP)

Investigative Committee (SK): Alexander Bastrykin

Prosecutor General's Office: Igor Krasnov

Interior Ministry

The Interior Ministry (MVD) oversees Russia's local police and criminal investigative forces. In 2011, Russia initiated a wide-ranging reform effort to professionalize its historically low-paid and corrupt police by raising salaries and training standards. Although media reporting and analysts still consider corruption to exist within the police, the MVD is largely a professional force with responsibilities ranging from criminal investigation to traffic control. It also has broad investigative powers into lucrative areas for corruption, such as economic and organized crime.

Under the MVD's current leader, career police officer Vladimir Kolokoltsev, analysts have noted a hesitance to conduct blatantly political prosecutions and public order operations. This reflects, in part, the fact that most MVD officers spend much of their careers in the same communities, as well as the progress made in professionalizing the police. The MVD's hesitation to engage in political activities and Kolokoltsev's professional rather than personal relationship with Putin may have contributed to the loss of some political influence and increased the MVD's susceptibility to power grabs by rival agencies.

National Guard

Russia's National Guard (*Rosgvardiya*) was created in 2016 under the command of Putin's former bodyguard, Viktor Zolotov. The National Guard brings together 200,000-250,000 of Russia's various public order and internal security forces deemed essential for regime security; these

forces had been under the MVD's command. Many analysts contend the National Guard was created in response to questions about the MVD's willingness to suppress dissent and the need to ensure the loyalty of key security forces. The National Guard also took control of the MVD's private security arm, the FGUP Okhrana, an important source of funding and potential opportunities for illicit gain.

The National Guard commands the Special Purpose Mobile Units (OMON), Special Rapid Response Detachment (SOBR), and Interior Troops (VV). OMON are well-trained units that focus on riot and crowd control, public order, and armed response backup for the police. They are deployed in every region and large city, and they are commonly seen controlling protests. SOBR are elite police units that operate in a similar fashion to SWAT teams in the United States. The VV include some 140,000 paramilitary troops spread across the country. Some units are professionally manned and can act as mechanized light infantry in counterinsurgency operations (organized into two divisions and 10 brigades). The most famous and capable of these units is the Moscow-based 1st Independent Special Purpose Division, (ODON), also known as the "Dzerzhinsky Division." The VV also have numerous elite special forces (*spetsnaz*) units, such as the units of the 604th Special Purpose Center. Other VV units are far less capable, staffed by conscripts, and primarily act as static security conducting garrison duties.

Also nominally under the National Guard's command are the forces of Chechen Republic head Ramzan Kadyrov. The so-called *Kadyrovtsy* number anywhere from 20,000 to 30,000, swear personal loyalty to Kadyrov, and generally operate autonomously from Moscow. Kadyrov reportedly has been linked to numerous assassinations in Russia and abroad in recent years and is subject to U.S. sanctions for allegations of human rights abuses.

Analysts note that both Kadyrov and Zolotov have close, personal connections to Putin that underpin their positions and political power. Some observers and reporting suggest Kadyrov and Zolotov are on friendly terms with each other but have generated some resentment among other security services and members of the security elite.

Federal Security Service

The FSB is considered one of the largest and most powerful of Russia's security agencies. Headed by Alexander Bortnikov since 2008, the FSB inherited most of the KGB's domestic security missions and controls Russia's Federal Border Guard Service. It has an expansive list of responsibilities covering counterintelligence, counterterrorism, economic crimes, and political prosecutions. It also is responsible for combating cyber-related crimes. The FSB controls Russia's two elite counterterrorism special force units, Alpha and Vypmel (along with other various special force units).

Within Russia, the FSB is noted for allegedly high levels of corruption and aggressive attempts to increase its political and economic power, often at the expense of other agencies. The FSB reportedly is involved in political prosecutions of regime opponents and operates as a key political enforcer. Not invulnerable, the FSB has been

challenged by competing agencies seeking to exploit its overreach. Although primarily focused domestically, the FSB has gradually increased its international presence and developed significant offensive cyber capabilities. It has a large operational capability in neighboring countries (including Ukraine) and allegedly has been linked to extraterritorial assassinations across Europe and Turkey. Analysts and reporting also allege the FSB has close connections to organized crime and has often used criminal networks to aid its operations.

Federal Protective Service

The Federal Protective Service (FSO) is responsible for guarding the Russian president, government officials, and state property. It controls the Presidential Security Service (SBP), which directly protects the president, and the presidential (or Kremlin) regiment that guards the Kremlin grounds. The FSO also controls the Service of Special Communications and Information (*Spetssviaz*), which oversees much of Russia's signals intelligence capabilities and the protection of government communications. In 2016, longtime head Evgeny Murov was replaced by career FSO officer and former SBP head Dmitri Kochnev.

In addition to protecting government officials and property, the FSO reportedly fulfills a key regime security role by monitoring other security agencies. This responsibility includes not only ensuring information reaching the political leadership is truthful but also monitoring conflicts and ambitions among various agencies and personnel. The FSO also conducts important public opinion surveys and monitoring of the population.

Investigative Committee

Headed by Alexander Bastrykin, the Investigative Committee (SK) was established as an independent agency in 2011. Emerging from a power struggle with Russia's Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika, the Investigative Committee was separated from the Prosecutor General's Office. Some analysts argue the Investigative Committee also was created to be a counterweight to the FSB. Due to its origins in the Prosecutor General's Office, the SK's responsibilities include investigating corruption in the government and security agencies, making it important to the political elite's control over the security agencies. Additionally, the SK conducts investigations of and arrests political opponents of the regime. This emphasis on political policing, analysts contend, may derive from Bastrykin's efforts to demonstrate his utility to the political leadership. Several high-ranking SK officers have been arrested on corruption allegations in recent years.

Prosecutor General

The Prosecutor General's Office conducts the Russian government's prosecutions and some limited investigations, making it a key law enforcement and security agency. Longtime head Yuri Chaika was replaced in 2020 by Deputy Head of the SK Igor Krasnov. Krasnov has a reputation as an effective, professional investigator, similar to that of Interior Minister Kolokol'tsev.

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