

Putin, Before Vote, Says Russia Has Thwarted Hundreds of Foreign Spies

By [Reuters](#)

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Kremlin Press Service

President Vladimir Putin boasted Russia had thwarted more than 400 foreign spies last year and on Monday called on the FSB, the domestic intelligence agency, to act to block further foreign attempts to obtain political, economic and military information.

Putin, who polls show should be comfortably re-elected on March 18, made the comments in a speech to FSB employees in Moscow where he also spoke of the need to step up Russia's cyber defenses and strengthen the security of confidential communications systems used by Russian officials.

Putin once ran the FSB himself and his comments played into one of his core narratives which depicts Russia as a fortress besieged by hostile foreign powers and him as its defender-in-chief.

"In recent years, as you know very well, there has been an increase in foreign intelligence agency activity," he said.

"They are working diligently on Russia, using the most modern methods, spy craft and technical espionage means. During the course of last year alone, the activities of 72 career intelligence officers and 397 agents of foreign spy services was thwarted," he said.

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Earlier on Monday, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Moscow had evidence that the United States was trying to interfere in Russia's presidential election, but did not say what that evidence was.

U.S. intelligence agencies have accused Russia of hacking and meddling in the 2016 presidential election, while European politicians have accused it of trying to interfere in several elections. Russia denies those allegations.

Putin last week announced an array of new nuclear weapons, in one of his most bellicose speeches in years, saying they could hit almost any point in the world and evade a U.S.-built missile shield.

On Monday, he thanked the FSB for what he said was its successful counter-intelligence work in keeping the arms projects secret.

Putin said that the threat of terrorism meant that Russia had to remain open to cooperation with foreign spy agencies, however, even with those from countries with whom Moscow had disagreements.

He said Russia had prevented 25 acts of terrorism last year and 68 terrorist crimes, and told the FSB he wanted it to protect young people from extremism.

"Radicalism, whatever political or ideological nature it has, is in essence destructive, and we're obliged to protect the country and people's future from this threat," said Putin.

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