

Putin Says Russia 'Firmly' Defended Interests in 2021

By [AFP](#)

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The Russian president delivers a televised message every New Year's Eve at midnight. [kremlin.ru](https://www.kremlin.ru)

President Vladimir Putin said Moscow "firmly" defended its interests in 2021 — a year marked by an unprecedented crackdown on the opposition and increased tensions with the West — in a New Year's address.

"We firmly and consistently defended our national interests, the security of the country and (of) citizens," Putin said in a televised speech.

The broadcast aired at midnight in the Far Eastern Kamchatka peninsula and was reported by Russian agencies.

Embed:

Путин поздравил россиян с Новым годом. Первыми были Петропавловск-камчатский и Анадырь ? pic.twitter.com/NK7lF73hxs

— Кремлевский пул РИА (@Kremlinpool_RIA) [December 31, 2021](#)

This year Russia implemented a major crackdown on organizations and people critical of Putin — starting with the jailing of his top critic Alexei Navalny in February.

Tensions between Russia and the West have also reached new highs over Ukraine.

Putin discussed the soaring tensions in a phone call with U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday.

The Kremlin chief, in power since 1999, also expressed support to Russians who lost relatives to Covid. His country is among the hardest-hit in the world by the pandemic.

"The insidious disease has claimed tens of thousands of lives," he said.

"I want to express my sincere support to everyone who has lost relatives, loved-ones, friends," he added.

Russia's state statistics agency said Thursday that more than 71,000 people died of coronavirus in the country in November, setting a new monthly fatality record since the pandemic began.

Putin also told Russians that Moscow's "main goal" for the future is to "improve the welfare and quality of life for people."

Russia celebrates New Year over its 11 time zones, starting in Kamchatka and ending in the western Kaliningrad exclave.

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