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[Home](#) > ... > [Russia](#)

Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Russia

BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM

IN THIS SECTION

Russia

Overview: The Russian Federation continued to prioritize counterterrorism efforts in 2021, primarily focusing on perceived domestic terrorist groups. Russia has used counterterrorism and “extremism” as pretexts to suppress political opposition and the exercise of human rights, or for other objectives in both domestic and foreign policy. Russia remained concerned about violent extremist Islamic groups, including those with ideological ties to ISIS and al-Qa’ida. Following the Taliban takeover of Kabul, Russia has looked to build inroads with the Taliban, both to establish influential regional footholds and out of concern that terrorism would spill over into Central Asia and the broader former Soviet space.

2021 Terrorist Incidents: There were no reported incidents in Russia in 2021.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Under the coordination of the National Antiterrorism Committee, the Federal Security Service (the FSB) — with aid from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the MVD) and Rosgvardiya (the National Guard of Russia), when appropriate — perform counterterrorism functions. Russia has continued to use its counterterrorism and anti-extremism legislation as a tool to stifle political opposition, independent media, and certain religious organizations, including Jehovah’s Witnesses criminalize the exercise of freedoms of religion or belief, expression, and association.

In 2021, Russia continued to use terrorism as a pretext to stifle internal dissent. The State Duma (Parliament) adopted three bills meant to silence individuals who provide any dissent toward the government and prevent them from participating in public life. These bills target Russians who support civil society and religious organizations that have been declared “extremist” or “terrorist” under the law that designates organizations as “undesirable.”

Those bills are

Adopted on June 4, Bill No.1165649-7 bans leaders, staff, and supporters of organizations labeled as “extremist” from running for parliamentary elections. The bill gives Russian authorities the power to label any political group or entity as “extremist.”

Adopted on June 9, Bill No.1165650-7 amends the law on “undesirable” organizations and prohibits Russian citizens from participating in activities of these organizations. It also imposes stricter measures on finances for organizations that operate with Russian bank accounts and those that receive money from persons who have been labeled as foreign agents.

Adopted on July 1, Bill No.1165661-7 simplifies the process for charging and convicting those who have been designated as affiliates of “undesirable” organizations.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reported that Russia’s security agencies saw a decline in terrorist threats and claimed that Russia had prevented 32 terrorist attacks over an 11-month span in 2021. Russia’s FSB Director General Alexander Bortnikov reported in December that terrorist attacks had been averted this year as a result of using “forceful and preventive measures,” according to Russian state news agency TASS.

Additionally, Russian media has claimed that Russia has stopped 62 clandestine cells of international terrorist groups and prevented 926 people involved in terrorist activities from entering Russia. According to Russian media, the government conducted at least 327 regional counterterrorism exercises and more than 323,000 preventive efforts designed to promote intolerance to terrorism.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: In 2021, Russia was a member of FATF, MONEYVAL, and the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG). Its FIU, the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring), is a member of the Egmont Group. In addition, according to the federal law “On the Central Bank of Russia (CBR),” the CBR has the authority to monitor activities of Russian financial organizations to assess their compliance with provision of the federal law “On the Prevention

of Criminal Proceeds Legalization and Terrorist Financing.” The CBR monitors the implementation of AML/CFT laws and imposes liability for violations committed by banking institutions. Criminal cases involving money laundering are investigated by the MVD, the Russian Investigative Committee, and/or the FSB.

Countering Violent Extremism: According to NGO reports, Russian government authorities, including the MVD’s Center for Countering Extremism and the FSB, continue to misuse the country’s expansive definition of extremism to curtail freedoms of expression, religion or belief, peaceful assembly, and association. Under new legal amendments, the Russian government has continued to add notable entities, such as Bard College in Annandale, New York, to the “undesirable” organizations list allegedly owing to the “program’s threat to order and security.”

International and Regional Cooperation: Russia is a member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum and the Collective Security Treaty Organization in addition to being an active participant in several multilateral organizations, including the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the UN, the Eurasian Economic Community, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and APEC.

Following the Taliban takeover of Kabul, Russia and Tajikistan have strengthened their military alliance and held joint exercises at the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border. These exercises were intended to strengthen Tajik-Russian relations and to fortify border security.

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