

World Cup Host Russia Must Brace for Lone Terrorist Attacks, Analyst Warns

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Andrei Kiselyov / Moskva News Agency

The FIFA World Cup this summer is threatened by terrorist fighters returning to Russia from hotspots in the Middle East, a defense think tank has [warned](#).

Hundreds of Russian fighters are [estimated](#) to have returned from battlegrounds in Iraq and Syria as the country prepares to host the 32-nation tournament in 11 Russian cities. Some of the world's biggest football stars have been [featured](#) in terrorist propaganda posters threatening fans and players alike in the months ahead of the international event.

Related article: [Russia Named Top Source of Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq](#)

“As the tournament approaches, unofficial Islamic State propaganda and media channels [are] seeking to inspire lone- or self-directed individuals to conduct attacks,” IHS Jane’s terrorism and insurgency analyst Chris Hawkins said in a report published Tuesday.

Although the returnees are proficient at handling weapons and building bombs, Islamist militants in the North Caucasus pose “a more locally-driven threat.”

Potential attacks during the tournament — which runs from June 14 to July 15 — are likely to involve vehicles, knives or crude improvised explosive devices, the report states.

In an April 23 video [detailing](#) the threats, Hawkins named Sochi and Volgograd as the high-risk host cities other than Moscow and St. Petersburg for their proximity to the North Caucasus.

Related article: [Islamic State Releases Execution Poster Threatening World Cup](#)

Increased security measures have been enacted following the March presidential election, and will continue through President Vladimir Putin’s inauguration and the Victory Day parade on May 9.

Counter-terrorist operations are also expected to take place in restive areas outside the 11 World Cup host cities, Hawkins said, citing similar steps ahead of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

The championship “offers a significant aspirational target” for would-be perpetrators who have so far escaped detention or surveillance by security services despite diminishing “attack trends in Russia.”

IHS Jane’s Hawkins warned that the returning fighters are “motivated by their opposition to the military involvement of Russia and other World Cup participants in the Middle East.”

Islamic State is a terrorist group banned in Russia.

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