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Putin Demands Protection for Olympics, World Cup

By The Moscow Times

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President Vladimir Putin told security forces Tuesday that they must outsmart and outmuscle Islamist militants to prevent attacks on major events in Russia like the 2014 Winter Olympics and the 2018 World Cup.

Russia is working hard to prevent its image from being tarnished by security problems at the events, which will be watched around the world.

Islamist insurgents, who wage nearly daily violence in the North Caucasus, have promised to attack the Olympics in Sochi, near the region they want to turn into an Islamic state.

"In the coming years, a whole series of very large political and sporting events are going to be held in Russia, and it should be a matter of honor for law enforcement officials and special forces to do everything so that these events take place in a normal, businesslike, festive atmosphere," Putin told law enforcement officials, Interfax reported.

While Putin did not mention Islamist insurgents by name, Russia's security efforts at the Olympics are geared almost exclusively at preventing militants from reaching the venues.

"We have lots of tension and conflict hot spots here, but we also have enough strength, skills and means to deter possible threats," said Putin, who has personally overseen Moscow's successful bids to host large-scale sporting events.

Authorities said in May that they had foiled a plot by Islamist insurgents to attack the Olympics, and they confiscated arms, ammunition and explosives, including surface-to-air missiles.

The Anti-Terror Committee suggested that the plot was likely the work of the insurgent group Caucasus Emirate, led by Chechnya-born Doku Umarov, Russia's most wanted man.

Umarov took responsibility for a suicide bombing at Domodedovo Airport that killed 37 people in January 2011 and twin bombings that killed 40 people on Moscow's metro in 2010.

The government plans to spend $20 billion to host the 2018 World Cup, building stadiums in 11 cities, including Sochi, Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Kazan, another city where football games are to be held, was rocked by an attack on the region's top Muslim religious leader earlier this year, sparking fears of a rise in Islamist extremism beyond the North Caucasus.

The insurgency, stoked by corruption, religion and human rights abuses in the North Caucasus, is rooted in two wars that Moscow fought with Chechen separatists in the periods 1994-96 and 1999-2000.

Olympics officials have said that security at the games will be among the top priorities and that a number of electronic surveillance methods will prevent any attacks on them.

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