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Russia Warns of Islamic State Fighters From Former Soviet Union

By The Moscow Times

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A woman carries a weapon during the funeral of Lebanese soldier Ali al-Sayyed, who was beheaded by Islamic State militants.

Russia's Security Council has sounded the alarm about Islamic State fighters from former Soviet countries returning home "politically and religiously 'loaded,'" TASS news agency reported Friday.

"We understand that these people, having gained military experience and on top of that being religiously and politically 'loaded,' upon returning home can pose a serious threat to the national security of their own countries," Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the Security Council, was cited as saying at a meeting of the council Friday.

There have been numerous reports of men from Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Uzbekistan fighting alongside anti-government rebels in Syria, some of them reportedly with the Islamic State. Several men from Russia's turbulent North Caucasus have also been

detained and charged for allegedly fighting in Syria.

Patrushev estimated the Islamic State's manpower at between 30,000 and 50,000 fighters, adding that "this is a serious force that without the necessary countermeasures is capable of destroying the system of interstate relations and security that currently exists in the world."

Patrushev is not the first Russian official to warn of the potential dangers of militants returning from Syria to Russian soil or the territory of former Soviet republics.

In late August, Ilya Rogachyov, head of the Foreign Ministry's department on new and rising threats, said the Islamic State could pose a major ideological threat to Russia.

"From an ideological standpoint, there are no limits to the Islamic State's expansion. And we're not talking only about the southern regions of Russia. They would be focused on all Muslim regions," Rogachyov said in comments to Interfax at that time.

Last September, Russia's Federal Security Service estimated that about 400 Russians were fighting in various militant factions in Syria.

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