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Terrorist Attacks in Russia's North Caucasus Down 50%

By Alexey Eremenko

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While the number of attacks committed on Russian territory may have decreased, Bortnikov warned that Russians are continually being recruited by international terrorist organizations to operate within Russia and abroad.

The number of terrorist attacks in Russia's restive North Caucasus has halved year-on-year, but the situation remains tense, the head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) said Tuesday.

Sixty-nine terrorism-related crimes have been registered in the region since the start of the year, Alexander Bortnikov was cited by Interfax as saying.

Forty-one security services operatives were killed in this year's attacks, Bortnikov said. He did not give any year-on-year figures.

Independent Caucasus news website Kavkazsky Uzel put security service losses between January and August at 28, compared with 71 in the same period last year.

But the 2014 tally does not include five policemen killed by a suicide bomber in the Chechen republic's capital Grozny last week.

Chechnya used to be a hotbed of militant Islamists, but local strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov largely pushed them out to other Caucasus republics, where an insurgency continues to seethe.

Bortnikov did not give any figures for terrorist losses or civilian casualties, of which the latter were on the increase year-on-year in 2013, according to Kavkazsky Uzel. The website reported 104 civilian deaths throughout the region last year, compared with 87 in 2012.

Bortnikov credited the decrease in attacks to Russia's anti-terrorism propaganda and amnesty programs for militants.

Russia mounted a harsh crackdown on militants ahead of the Sochi Olympics last February, largely abandoning peaceful outreach. Independent experts warned at the time it could result in a violent backlash if the FSB and other anti-terrorism agencies do not add peaceful measures to their overall strategy.

While the number of attacks committed on Russian territory may have decreased, Bortnikov warned that Russians are continually being recruited by international terrorist organizations to operate within Russia and abroad.

The FSB head said some Russians were being swayed by the "aggressive" nature of international extremist and terrorist websites aimed at recruiting people to commit terrorist acts in the North Caucasus and in foreign countries such as Syria.

Russia's Investigative Committee said Tuesday that it was set to announce an international arrest warrant for a resident of the restive Russian republic of Kabardino-Balkaria who had joined a rebel group in Syria.

Bortnikov, who noted that low standards of living and corruption can lead people to join terrorist organizations, also stressed the importance of teaching Islam based on Russia's existing religious institutions.

"The development of the spiritual teaching of traditional Islam based on domestic religious institutions is long overdue," he was quoted by Interfax as saying.

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