

Dozens Detained in Hunt for Islamic State Supporters in Russia, Report Says

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Islamic State flags flutter on the Mullah Abdullah bridge in southern Kirkuk, Iraq.

Dozens of individuals have been detained across Russia on suspicion of aiding and abetting terrorist group the Islamic State amid a widespread crackdown by the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Rosbalt news site reported.

Citing unnamed FSB officials, the news site reported that the raids remain ongoing.

Among those detained were an Azerbaijan-born director of a car repair service in Moscow and five compatriots in his employ, the report said. All reportedly embraced radical Islam a year ago and promoted the idea of joining the jihad in Syria among the Azeri diaspora in the Russian capital.

Another story cited by FSB sources concerned a family of 20 in the republic of Bashkortostan, where moderate Muslims make up the majority of the population. The family allegedly sold its business and moved to join the Islamists on the Pakistani border, where all perished in the fighting.

Prominent human rights activist Svetlana Gannushkina of the Civil Assistance Committee, an NGO, confirmed reports of continuing raids on people the FSB links to the Islamic State, Rosbalt said.

But she attested such mass sweeps as “pointless” and said “they largely look like psychosis.”

Russian law enforcement officials earned a reputation for harshness and a disregard for the presumption of innocence during the two Chechen wars in the 1990s and 2000s.

A new clampdown on Islamists was launched in the North Caucasus ahead of the 2014 Sochi Olympics, despite warnings by independent analysts that this could further radicalize the Islamic dissent.

Meanwhile, Russian authorities have not limited efforts to combat the threat of Islamic terrorism to the country's borders.

The Russian Embassy in Damascus has opened an investigation into the fate of engineer Sergei Gorbunov, who was reportedly shot and killed by Islamic State militants earlier this year, TASS reported Tuesday.

The New York Times reported last week that Islamic State militants killed Gorbunov in the spring and then showed their hostages video footage of his dead body as a deterrent. “This ... is what will happen to you if your government doesn’t pay,” the militants reportedly warned the other detainees.

Gorbunov, who was last seen in video footage released in October 2013, was viewed as the “least marketable commodity” among the hostages, the newspaper reported.

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