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FSB Says Nearly 2,000 Russians Fighting in Iraq

By The Moscow Times

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An armed man, believed to be an Islamic state militant, is seen near the northern Syrian town of Tal Abyad as he is pictured from the Turkish border town of Akcakale.

About 1,700 Russians are fighting in Iraq where the Islamic State terrorist group is waging a war against the authorities, the director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) told a summit on extremism.

The number of Russians fighting there has almost doubled in the past year, Alexander Bortnikov said at a summit in Washington devoted to combating violent extremism hosted by U.S. President Barack Obama, state news agency RIA Novosti reported Friday.

"We must work to prevent them from leaving, and at the same time do everything necessary ... to prevent terrorist attacks after their return to their country of origin," Bortnikov was quoted as saying.

He said that up to 20,000 foreigners from as many as 100 countries were fighting on the side of the terrorists, RIA reported.

The Islamic State has seized large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria over the past year. The group, whose declared aim is the establishment of an international caliphate, has carried out mass killings of civilians, soldiers and prisoners of war along the way, including the high-profile beheadings of several foreign hostages, whose deaths were recorded and then posted by the group on the Internet.

Police in Russia's predominantly Muslim republic of Chechnya, where a low-level Islamic insurgency continues to simmer, named four Chechens this week who they said were fighting in war-torn Syria, the regional news site Kavkazky Uzel reported.

Grigory Shvedov, a human rights activist and the editor of Kavkazky Uzel, said Tuesday that experts on the North Caucasus terror situation were aware of about 120 cases of local men returning from Syria and facing criminal charges, but suggested there were many others who have not been caught.

Under Russian law, fighting in a foreign state in an armed group outlawed by that country's government for purposes that conflict with Russian interests is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

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