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300 Cases Launched Against Russians Accused of Joining Foreign Terrorist Groups

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An Islamic State flag hangs on the wall of an abandoned building after the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) took control of the area.

Criminal cases have been launched against hundreds of Russian citizens suspected of having joined the ranks of terrorist organizations abroad, RIA Novosti reported Monday.

"At present, criminal cases have been launched with respect to 300 people," Vladimir Makarov, deputy head of the Interior Ministry's anti-extremism department, said in comments carried by RIA Novosti.

The organizations at issue include Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic State, according to the report.

Waging a savvy and high-tech propaganda campaign online, the Islamic State has proved adept at seducing young men and women across Europe into abandoning their homes

and families and joining its violent crusade in Iraq and Syria.

Russia is no exception. Some 1,500 natives of Russia's predominantly Muslim North Caucasus are currently fighting alongside the Islamic State and other militant groups in Syria and Iraq, the Kremlin's envoy for the North Caucasus, Sergei Melikov, was cited as saying Thursday by Russian media.

Nor does the Islamic State's recruitment drive toward Russians appear to be letting up. Last Tuesday, a Russian-language guide offering practical advice on how to join the Islamic State appeared on leading Russian social network site VKontakte.

Advice includes how to travel unhindered from Russia to Turkey — the relay point for crossing into Syria — with guidance on how to answer difficult questions from border guards, and where to shop for military gear.

Russia's Supreme Court designated the Islamic State and Jabhat an-Nusra — a branch of al-Qaida operating in Syria and Lebanon — terrorist organizations in December last year, and have strictly outlawed any form of involvement in their operations.

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