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Chechen Woman Arrested on Way to Syria

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The Syrian national flag flutters in front of a damaged mosque in a government-controlled area near Aleppo international airport Apr. 22.

A young woman from Russia's republic of Chechnya has been detained on her way to Syria, where she was to join her fiance in the ranks of an armed group in the conflict-stricken country, the Kavkazsky Uzel (Caucasian Knot) news site reported Wednesday.

Eighteen-year-old Petimat Oisayeva, a native of Chechnya's Urus-Martanovsky district, was detained Monday in the southern Russian city of Nalchik on her way to catch a flight to Turkey and head to neighboring Syria, the report said, citing police. Her Chechen fiance had reportedly been fighting alongside an unidentified armed group for the past few months.

Earlier this month, another young woman from Moscow detained in Nalchik said she had been planning to go to Syria together with a 25-year-old man from Russia's North Caucasus, Kavkazsky Uzel reported. The parents of another Chechen girl who fled her Grozny home with

the intention of joining a militant group in Syria are facing charges for having neglected their parental duties, the news website reported, citing an unnamed source in the regional prosecutor's office.

Reports of Russians, mostly from the country's mainly Muslim southern republics, attempting to join the ranks of Islamic terrorist organizations and other militant groups abroad have proliferated in recent months. Last month, four Russians were deported from Turkey after attempting to illegally cross the country's border with Syria to join the Islamic State terrorist organization, the RIA Novosti state news agency reported at the time.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Wednesday that Russia was arming the governments of Syria and Iraq in an attempt to combat the Islamic State, which has conquered large swathes of territory in those two countries, and which he said represented the biggest threat to his country's security.

"The Islamic State is our biggest enemy at the moment, if only for one simple reason: Hundreds of Russians, hundreds of Europeans, hundreds of Americans are fighting alongside the Islamic State," Lavrov said Wednesday in an interview with three Russian media outlets. "They are already coming back ... and for their own entertainment could perpetrate horrible acts at home."

Syria's ambassador to Moscow, Riad Haddad, claimed back in December 2013 that some 1,700 Chechens were fighting in the country, Kavkazsky Uzel reported. That figure was significantly higher than an estimate in May that year by Federal Security Service (FSB) head Alexander Bortnikov, who said that about 200 Russians had joined the ranks of militant groups in Syria.

Last month, the Kremlin's envoy for the North Caucasus, Sergei Melikov, claimed that about 1,500 natives of Russia's North Caucasus region were fighting alongside the Islamic State and other militant groups in Syria and Iraq.

Criminal cases were opened earlier this month against two 17-year-old Chechens suspected of financing terrorism and preparing to joining the Islamic State's operations in Syria, the regional branch of the Investigative Committee said. According to investigators, the teenagers had managed to attract 13,000 rubles ($246) in donations to pay for their travel costs to Syria by posting an appeal for their cause and a digital wallet number on the popular social network VKontakte.

The anti-extremism department of Russia's Interior Ministry said last month that criminal cases had been launched involving 300 people suspected of having joined terrorist organizations abroad, including the Islamic State.

Under Russian law, individuals found guilty of taking part in foreign armed conflicts can face up to 10 years in prison.

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