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## Securing Sochi's Winter Olympics: potentially a bumpy ride

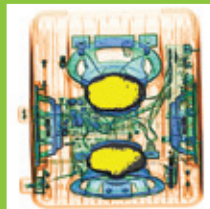


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# IMARAT KAVKAZ: aiming for a Black February

by Philip Baum

Accompanying every high profile event, from a meeting of world leaders to a sporting extravaganza, there is always a heightened sense of tension. Security concerns ooze through media broadcasts and infiltrate social conversation with a “will they” or “could they” as we question whether those with an evil inclination could try to convert a celebration into a catastrophe. The Olympic Games have long been tainted by the actions of those Black September terrorists who used the stage afforded them at the 1972 Munich Olympiad as an opportunity to violently express the Palestinian cause and, in doing so, callously murder innocent athletes.

Despite all the doomsday prophecies, the targeting of high profile events is not commonplace. In part, this is due to the security infrastructure which is deployed to counter the threat; at the very least, it is an effective deterrent. However, it is also due to the nature of terrorist organisations who generally attack when and where we least expect it. They have, traditionally, tended to keep it simple and take action at places where they are certain of success and not when we are at our most vigilant.

But no venue, no matter how heavily protected it is by the security agencies, can offer any guarantees. In the era of the lone wolf terrorist, where homemade explosives may be the weapon of choice, every city centre has its Achilles Heel. The London Olympics of 2012 were regarded as a triumph of the security apparatus but that does not mean that an attack was impossible to perpetrate. The actors simply chose not to.

From a UK perspective, it is almost surprising that attacks have not taken place against West End theatres, Premier League football matches, the Wimbledon Championships, and the host of tourist attractions and iconic buildings which all symbolise our way of life, our heritage and place us upon the world's stage. The reality is that, fortunately, terrorist attacks are a rarity in the West. We are not having to respond to the almost daily suicidal attacks taking place in other parts of the world. This then poses us with a question: how do we avoid inconveniencing society yet do enough to maintain the deterrent and reassure the general public, whilst not spending vast sums of money, which could be better spent on health, education or international aid?

In part, the answer must lie in doing whatever we can where money is not a factor. As a simple example, I am surprised that so many airlines worry about the security of their crews as they travel between airports and hotels whilst overseas, yet do not take the very simple step of requiring their pilots and flight attendants to take such journeys in civilian clothing, thereby not drawing attention to themselves and appearing more like a tourist group than as representatives of their carrier.

Interestingly, British and American athletes attending the Winter Olympics in Sochi this February were told not to wear clothing bearing big logos depicting their nationality. Ultimately, it's a case of not turning oneself into a target.

The Russian government, and Sochi in particular, has long been preparing to host the 2014 Winter Olympiad. Understandably, especially in a region which has long been associated with political

unrest that has been expressed by the perpetration of suicidal missions, and where Russian civilians have fallen victim all too many times - in theatres, at schools, at rock concerts, at airports, and on buses, trains and aeroplanes – security costs were always going to be astronomical. Mention Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, or North Ossetia and, sadly, one thinks ‘terrorism’. In the last quarter of 2013, there were three suicidal attacks against public transportation in Volgograd alone exacting a toll of 41 deaths and 110 injuries.

In terms of aviation, Chechen Black Widows were responsible for the destruction of two airliners, one of which was bound for Sochi, in 2004.

**“...Umarov declared that the Sochi Olympics would be targeted...”**

Few would disagree that threat of action by Imarat Kavkaz (Islamic Caucasus Emirate) is very real and highly probable. The group itself has al-Qaeda ideology and many of its members have fought in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Its leader, Doku Umarov, has claimed responsibility for orchestrating the attack against Moscow's Domodedovo Airport in 2011, which killed 35, and for despatching two female suicide bombers to target the Moscow Metro in 2010 which left 39 people dead. Furthermore, last year Umarov declared that the Sochi Olympics would be targeted.

Against this backdrop, safeguarding aviation at a time of increased passenger flow, with many athletes transporting unusual loads (bobsleighs, luges, skis, rocks etc.), is no easy task. Ensuring that checkpoints not become chokepoints was deemed a priority. One option embraced by the Russian authorities was to ban all liquids, aerosols and gels, regardless as to quantity, from flights departing gateway airports. This was not because the Russians feared such substances, but rather to enhance facilitation. But, with the Olympics about to start, and concerns being expressed about terrorists infiltrating explosives onto aircraft in tubes of toothpaste, the restriction was broadly accepted.

And so let the Games begin. But just as they do (and this is a case of Stop Press!), let's not forget the non-terrorist actors. Unlike football fans, winter sports aficionados, whilst keen on the odd après-ski tipples, are not renowned for intoxicated excess. But, there's always the odd idiot who can challenge the system. It appears that, this time, it was a 45-year-old Ukrainian, Artem Kozlov, who jumped up from his seat on a Pegasus Airlines flight en route from Kharkov to Istanbul claiming he had a bomb and, whilst the Opening Ceremony of the Games was underway, said, “Let's all go to Sochi”! Hijack? Questionable. Unnerving? For sure. ■

