

Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games Threat Assessment

Threat Assessment Overview

The identified threats in this document pose credible risks of incidental exposure to operational security and personnel safety during the upcoming Sochi Olympics Winter Games. Key threats potentially affecting HTH members during this period are likely to stem from petty criminal activity, terrorism and activist unrest. On 10 January 2014, the US State Department issued a travel alert to Americans travelling to the Olympics Winter Games in Sochi from 7 to 23 February. The alert advised travellers to practice normal security precautions and procedures and have contingency plans readily available.

Security Measures

The security response to the Olympic Games is unprecedented in scale, interoperability and cost. A security zone has been created around Sochi that stretches about 100km (60 miles) along the Black Sea coast and up to 40km (25 miles) inland. More than 30,000 police and military personnel will be deployed to protect Olympic facilities, bridges, railway networks, schools, hospitals, hotels and restaurants.

There will be transport restrictions implemented along with restricted and controlled security zones throughout the city and its environs. Air traffic and sea access will be restricted, and everyone going into the zone will have to go through rigorous security and identity checks. To pass through checkpoints into these zones, travellers will have to produce both a ticket and a biometric spectator pass. Sochi itself is protected by extremely rugged terrain on one side and the Black Sea on the other.

Crime

While crime in Sochi is not a pervasive threat, it remains one of the most likely sources of harm to travellers. Major events such as the Olympic Games are an attractive opportunity for criminals to target visitors. Petty crimes involving pick-pocketing, bag-snatching and other forms of street theft are prevalent and are usually opportunistic, occurring in crowded tourist areas, markets and transport terminals.

Though infrequent, robberies can be conducted using the threat of physical harm or the use of a knife. Travellers should avoid carrying large amounts of money or displaying other valuables. Fraud associated with credit card use and use of ATM machines is on the rise in Russia. If using credit/debit cards, it is important to monitor accounts frequently. For getting around Sochi travellers are advised to only use marked taxi services and prearrange transportation through hotel concierge or other reputable services whenever possible.

Terrorism

Russian security and intelligence are deeply concerned about the threat of attack on the Sochi Winter Games by Islamist militants from the North Caucasus. In an online video address Doku Umarov, the leader of the al-Qaeda-linked Caucasus Emirate, has called upon supporters to

“use all means” to disrupt the international sports event. Three suicide bombings in two months in the southern city of Volgograd, a major transit point for people travelling to Sochi, just over 645km (400 miles) to the southwest, have been a grim reminder of the terrorist threat.

The recent attacks in Volgograd may show the difficulties in penetrating all the defences set up by the security forces in Sochi. Overall the extremely tight security for the Games is likely to have a deterrence effect. What the bombings in Volgograd underscore is that there are no guarantees that such an attack will not take place in other parts of Russia.

The greater threat will be posed to softer targets such as transport networks elsewhere in the country or events organised by Olympic sponsors away from the main security zones. Potential targets include bus terminals in Adler and Krasnodar and high-speed rail links connecting Moscow to Sochi. Suicide bombers previously struck the Moscow subway system in 2010 and the city’s Domodedovo Airport in 2011.

Potential assailants could disrupt the games using low-tech methods akin to the Boston marathon bombing, where two pressure cookers packed with metal and ball bearings killed three people and damaged property in April 2013. These less elaborate plots are unpredictable and more volatile compared to high-profile attacks. A telephoned bomb threat could see the evacuation of Olympic sites, causing major disruption. In addition, suspect packages and vehicles could see an exclusion zone formed around the site causing restrictions to the freedom of movement.

Activism and Unrest

There are reasons to believe that the global sporting spectacle will attract numerous activists protesting against Russian domestic policies. President Putin has attracted international criticism due to a law punishing people for homosexual “propaganda”. Russian citizens found guilty of violating the law could face a fine of up to RUB100,000 (USD3,100). Foreign citizens face similar fines, up to 14 days in jail, and deportation. The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community has called the bill homophobic.

Environmentalists have staged numerous protests over Russia’s oil production in the Arctic, which is being carried out by Gazprom. Greenpeace has used direct action campaigns to raise awareness of the issue in Russia. Five UK Greenpeace activists were held in Russia for 100 days on hooliganism charges and were released under a new Russian amnesty law in December 2013. There is the heightened potential that activists may latch on to Winter Games to organise protest activities.

The government has designated an area in which demonstrators will be able to legally hold protests during the Sochi Winter Olympics. Activists will have the right to rally in a park in the coastal city of Khosta, some 12km (7.5 miles) south of Sochi. In addition, all rallies will need to be approved by local authorities. The Chinese authorities imposed similar restrictions on protests for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Spontaneous gatherings of any kind of protesting activists are likely to be met with a swift and forceful response by police, posing an incidental risk to anyone in the vicinity. There may also be disruption to pedestrian and vehicular movement in the vicinity of rallies amid a heightened security presence.

Risk Mitigation

There are risk mitigation measures that should be considered to represent the baseline security precautions to ensure asset and traveller safety. These pertain primarily to travel and accommodation. Due to heightened security, delays are anticipated at airports, buses and rail hubs transporting visitors to Sochi. There is likely to be an increase in stop-and-searches and a more visible and prolific use of control measures such as firearms. Travellers should be aware that the Russian authorities tightly control demonstrations, and security forces have been known to adopt aggressive tactics to break up unauthorised rallies. Allow for extra time if travel is necessary through known protest sites and plan alternate routes.

In light of the terrorism threat, travellers should be vigilant, take notice of your surroundings, and report any suspicious object, package, person or activity to local authorities immediately. Travellers should stay well-informed of the security environment and the threats through proactive information and intelligence gathering. Time spent in the vicinity of security installations and in transport hubs where attacks may take place should be limited as much as possible. Note any individuals seemingly loitering outside restricted and controlled security zones as well as any vehicles that seem to be suspicious and any other unusual incidents.

If one becomes a victim of crime, remain calm and non-confrontational. Report the incident to your host, hotel management, crisis management team and diplomatic mission as soon as possible. In the event that valuables are stolen (e.g. wallet and mobile phones), cancel credit/bank cards, have mobile phone barred and contact airlines to obtain a replacement ticket. In the event that a passport is stolen, make sure you have all the relevant information needed in order to obtain a replacement.