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Militant cell that planned NY & Christmas attacks in Moscow detained – anti-terrorism committee

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Russian security services detained all members of a terrorist cell that had been plotting attacks during the holiday season in Moscow, the National Anti-Terrorism Committee says. The group reportedly received orders from a Syria-based top-tier commander.

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The Syrian terrorist commander, identified as Abu-Zarra, ordered militants to move to Moscow in order to get weapons supplies or seize firearms from police officers, Andrey Przewdonsky, head of the National Anti-Terrorism

Committee (NAC) press service, said on Tuesday.

*"At this point, all members of the terrorist cells are in custody,"* he added.

According to the official, migrants from central Asia and the Caucasus form the nucleus of most terrorist sleeper cells active in Russia. *"Migrants coming from [these regions] – who failed to integrate into society and are locked in mono-ethnic groups – are fertile soil for terrorist activities,"* Przewdonsky said.

Over the course of 2016, Russian security services eliminated over 140 members of terrorist cells, among them 24 top-tier militants, said Igor Kulyagin, the NAC's deputy chief of staff.

All militants were shot dead in counter-terrorism operations or brief encounters with security servicemen, he said, also mentioning the killing of the "notorious leader" of Vilayat Kavkaz, an Islamic State-affiliated (IS, previously ISIS/ISIL) international terrorist group.

Kulyagin added that the intelligence agencies also foiled a cell planning terrorist attacks during the 2016 Ice Hockey World Championship hosted by Russia.

Terrorists tend to employ unconventional tactics to save money, as they cannot afford to maintain a broad network of militants, Przewdonsky added, mentioning the emergence of so-called *"one-day groups,"* tasked with carrying out a single attack. *"They are not linked to other cells, they don't need guidance or sanctions [for an attack],"* the official noted.

In February and December last year, 11 Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL) militants were detained in Moscow and Yekaterinburg, Przewdonsky said. They were planning attacks in Moscow and St. Petersburg under the control of IS emissaries, according to the NAC official. *"All members of that cell knew each other in person, and came from Central Asian countries,"* he said.

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