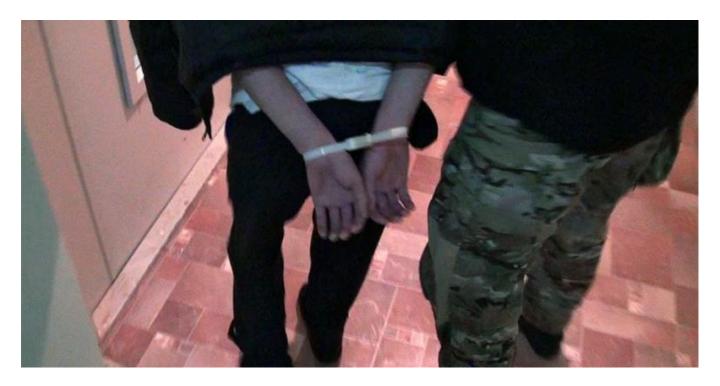


Militant cell that planned NY & Christmas attacks in Moscow detained – anti-terrorism committee

31/01/2017



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 Syriabased 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 Przezdomsky, 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,"* Przezdomsky 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, Przezdomsky 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, Przezdomsky 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.