

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.eurasiareview.com/17012014-russian-security-spiral-lead-sochi-olympics-analysis/>

The Russian Security Spiral In The Lead Up To The Sochi Olympics – Analysis

By Habibe Ozdal

January 17, 2014

Russia has been drawing attention recently as a result of the upcoming February 2014 Winter Olympics due to take place in the Black Sea coast city of Sochi. Much has been said in the news recently about security, and the country has recently been in a state of alarm following the two recent terrorist attacks that took place within 24 hours in Volgograd, killing 34 people. After the explosions, the Kremlin deployed 5,000 security personnel in and around Volgograd, and security was increased in the train stations, subways, and malls of Moscow and Russia's other major cities.

In addition, Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin signed a law setting a punishment of five years' imprisonment for separatist speech and activities, and a further law that came into force on January 7, 2014, that raised security in Sochi to the maximum. This second law determines a closed region in the North Caucasus that is bordered by the Karachay-Cherkessia Republic and Abkhazia, entry to which is forbidden except for official or mandatory business. A security check will be made for anyone entering Sochi, where the Olympic Games will take place, and these extraordinary security measures will remain in place after the Olympics have ended, until March 21st.

Recently, Putin made a move that contrasted with the common reflex to increase security measures, a product of "the security approach" after the terrorist attacks. Four months ago a

presidential decree banned protests from taking place during the Sochi Olympics; a new decree, however, permits meetings, protests, and other events, so long as they are not about the Sochi Olympics and on the condition that the Ministry of Interior and the federal security units are informed.[1] We will see in the upcoming days whether or not these changes are enough to reduce the effects of the boycott on the Olympics by human rights organizations reacting to the high security precautions.

Why Volgograd?

Who carried out the attacks on Volgograd, who were the targets, and what was the purpose? These are major topics that need to be discussed, and while doing so, it is also necessary to look at the short and long-term aims of these incidents and their possible effects.

When thinking about the perpetrators of these attacks, eyes turn to the “Caucasian Emirate” led by Doku Umarov, who has stated that everything needs to be done to stop the Olympics from happening, and that they would carry out attacks in order to achieve this goal.

Volgograd, where two terrorist attacks took place within 24 hours, is 700 kilometers from Sochi, the venue for the Olympics. It has a population of one million people and borders the North Caucasus. The city is a central hub for regional transport, especially on the north-south railway. Aside from the recent terrorist attacks in the last days of 2013, the city was also subjected to a suicide attack in October 2013 that caused the death of 12 people. The choice of Volgograd as the target for the attacks may be based on a strategy to debunk the false assumption that terrorism occurs only in the North Caucasus region by spreading terror across the country.

In the North Caucasus, separatist movements and radicalism are far from new, as the North Caucasus is known to be a region characterized by long-term conflicts. It should also be underlined that even though the Chechen War has officially come to an end, tension in the North Caucasus cannot be said to have decreased. Putin may be remembered as the leader who brought an end to the Chechen War, but it was also under his rule that the terrorist threat expanded beyond the North Caucasus region to other parts of the country. With these most recent attacks in Volgograd, the message of the terrorist movements can be analyzed as the terror will spread to other territories of Russia, since the battles taking place in the North Caucasus are not mentioned in the mainstream media. There have been several incidents that offer a clear indication that terrorism is not limited to the North Caucasus, such as the theater attack in Moscow in 2002, the school in Beslan in 2004, the explosions in the Moscow metro in 2010, and Moscow’s Domodedovo Airport in January 2011. Taking these factors into account, it can be said that the purpose of the terrorist attacks that took place in Volgograd was to increase the sense of insecurity across the whole of Russia.

A sort of “state of emergency” in Sochi

There is no doubt that the security measures taken in and around Sochi are very strong. To prevent terrorism from becoming a problem during the Olympics, many new police stations have been built near the border of the Caucasus, vehicular access to the city has been prohibited, and this ban will remain in place for the duration of the Games. All the workers who had been recruited from outside Sochi to work on the organization of the event were sent home at the end of December. Under the security precautions determined in 2009, 42,000 police officers and

10,000 military units from the Ministry of Interior will be available for the event. 23,000 personnel from the Ministry of Emergencies will be deployed along the coastline and in the hilly area nearby.

Despite all these precautions, it's far from guaranteed that the organizers will be able to prevent terrorist activities. In the new picture, it seems that the only regions that have improved are those in which terrorist incidents have taken place. According to Prof. Dr. İhsan Bal, increasing security in order to prevent terrorist attacks from happening without finding their source does not stop them; it merely changes the location of the incidents. In other words, terrorist attacks are more than likely to take place in other areas/regions where there is less effective security. Mirroring what Turkey has been experiencing for many years, a solution does not seem possible if the real reason behind the terrorist attacks is not identified. It is hard to say that the source of the problem has been identified during the so-called period of stability under Putin, as one needs to remember that during the Putin era, an attempt was made to weaken the power of ethnic nationalism through the strengthening of central authority. Two clear indicators of how Russia approaches the fight against terrorism are the "vertical power" governing strategy that centralizes power- especially against increasing terrorist activity- and the fact that even if the autonomous regions in Russia are allowed to elect their own regional governors, like they did before 2004, the Caucasus are omitted from this practice. In the Caucasus, despite the aim to create a foundation of legitimacy, it is the candidate selected by Putin who will be elected by the Parliament to lead the region.

In October 2010, it was suggested that a Social and Economic Development Strategy until 2025 for the Northern Caucasus should be drawn up. In October 2011, an economic development and social support program to address the issue of unemployment in the Caucasus was decided upon.[2] The program detailed 37 huge projects and \$13.4 million worth of investments in the Caucasus, which is an indication that the Kremlin finally understands that if the problem is to be resolved a comprehensive strategy will be required. That said, the fact is that political strategies addressing the problem through means other than deploying military forces to the region are set aside every time there is new terrorist attack. This creates new elements of risk.

The aim of the Volgograd attacks: Sochi and beyond

It can be said that the Volgograd attacks had three different aims: First, as a short-term goal, to lay the groundwork for a boycott of the Sochi Olympics for security reasons, showing that despite all the security measures, Russia is not safe enough. The intention in this regard is to decrease the number of countries attending- which would certainly cast a shadow on the Sochi Olympics. The second goal, which may be defined as medium term, is to make Russia lose the prestige of organizing the Sochi Olympics. The Sochi Winter Olympics are the most expensive to date, with a budget of \$51 billion.[3] Western media organizations have recently mentioned police malpractices, presenting evidence showing that the system has collapsed. There is a claim that shortcomings in intelligence are due to this degeneration, and that preventing further terrorist attacks will be no easy task. This shows that the medium-term purpose of weakening the investments that Russia has made for the Sochi Olympics seems to be working, at least in the period just after the Volgograd attacks.

The third goal, which has both medium and long-term aspects, seems to strike at Putin's "stability" discourse. In 2013, the fact that Putin was presented as a world leader trying to resolve the Syrian crisis through diplomatic methods (of course, with the influence of Western countries' domestic political debates) added much to the president's prestige in Russia. Also, in the last quarter of 2013, Ukraine started to favor Russia over the EU in its foreign policy, thus strengthening the argument about Russia regaining its power in its "Near Abroad".

In addition to this, Putin signed the amnesty law that led to the release from prison of a band called Pussy Riot and the Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky[4], who had spent ten years in confinement. This seemed to be aimed at weakening the global perception of Putin as a "human rights violator" and softening Russia's bad reputation in this regard. These acts of terrorism aim to weaken Putin's "everything is under control" image, created through his maneuverings in politics both inside and outside Russia, by showing that there are some long-term, unresolved issues that continue to exist.

As a result, regardless of the level of security in place and how much effort is put into the preparations for the Sochi Olympics scheduled to take place in February 2014, it would be no big surprise if the terrorists struck both before and during Sochi. In addition, the inclination to increase the "sense of insecurity" in Russia through the spread of terrorist acts outside the North Caucasus to other regions of the country seems to be continuing; as seen in the latest example, rather than halting terrorist acts, increasing security measures merely pushes them to other regions where security is lower than in Sochi.

In order to fight terrorism, Putin, through his wholesale acts and the old reflexes, is returning to policies of securitization. Just like during the Chechen War, when it comes to fighting terrorism Putin's practices are supported by Western countries without criticism. Unfortunately, however, this type of approach is only a short-term one, and will not remove the source of the problem.

[1] According to the decree, the event organizers must inform the authorities of the place or route of the protest, the number of participants and the duration.

[2] In Northern Caucasia, a region that has long been linked with terrorist activity, unemployment is close to 50 percent in some of the Republics. Therefore, developing this region is a milestone in achieving stability in the country.

[3] According to official numbers, the money spent on the Sochi Olympics is around 10 billion dollars. Other numbers that can be heard in the media include investments in the Krasnodar region, of which Sochi is a part. 'Sochi 2014 to be safest, most secure Olympics ever' – organizers", Russia Today, January 7, 2014. <http://rt.com/news/chernyshenko-sochi-olympics-security-276/>

[4] Khodorkovsky was sentenced to 10 years 10 months in prison after selling illegally stocks in his petroleum company Yukos to American Exxon and Chevron companies. Khodorkovsky claimed that the punishment was political, although the ECHR found that not to be the case.