



Nearly seven years ago, Russian President Vladimir Putin successfully won the bid to host this week's Winter Olympics in Sochi. For Putin, this is an opportunity to show off Russia as a leader on an international stage. For others, this may be a chance to send a message to the world.

In July of last year, Doha Umarov, leader of the al-Qaeda affiliated "Caucasus Emirate" terrorist group, released a statement [vowing an attack](#) on the Sochi games, which he called "Satanic dances on our ancestor's graves." Umarov also claimed responsibility for two major explosions in Volgograd in December 2013, calling them rehearsals for future Sochi attacks.

Responding to the current threats, Putin has deployed more than 40,000 additional security forces to Sochi, restricted automobile access to several sites, and has spent more than US \$50 billion on the games. Despite these measures and precautions, however, many security experts remain concerned because these particular Islamist terrorists may be outside Putin's sphere of influence.

Unlike the Chechen nationalists or separatists that Russian security forces were able to quell over the years, the current threats come from Dagestan-based Wahhabist Islamic militants sponsored by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.

Islam originally came to the Caucasus through Dagestan, and by the 1990's, Wahhabism - a radical fundamentalist form of Islam - spread throughout this sub-region. While Chechen rebels operated in Dagestan, their separatist message failed to take root among Dagestan's disparate population, which numbers over fifty nationalities. But the idea of an Islamic "Caucasus Emirate," however, gained adherents in the region and many became sympathetic to their terrorist cause.

Examples of this are the infamous "black widows," female relatives of martyred or imprisoned terrorists. One such "black widow" is Naida Asiyalova, who recently [killed herself along with six innocent victims](#) in Volgograd aided by her husband, an explosives expert and Islamist militant in Dagestan. Many other "black widows," once described by families and friends as happy and apathetic to politics or religion, have become increasingly ideological and are now used as weapons of asymmetric warfare by Islamist militant groups in the region.

Knowing this, Vladimir Putin engaged with Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, in July of last year, only to receive the [following subtle threat](#): "I can give you a guarantee of protection of the Winter Olympics next year. We monitor those Chechen



groups that threaten the security of the games.”

Bandar’s comments were taken as an ultimatum for Russia to cease its support for Syria and to discontinue arms delivery to the Assad regime. According to the Russian media, Putin could barely contain his anger during the meeting, which only emboldened his support for the Assad regime in Syria.

Contrary to its weak relations with the Saudis, Russia has maintained close relations with Syria’s sponsor Iran and its terror-proxy Lebanese Hezbollah. Both are allies that may be called upon in retaliation for any Wahhabi-inspired terrorist attack at Sochi. Damage to Saudi oil production, after all, would only benefit Russia’s own oil production through an increase in prices.

Nevertheless, Putin is taking the security of the upcoming winter games seriously and has placed a “ring of steel” around Sochi. Unfortunately, the home court advantage goes to the Caucasus Emirate and their ominous “black widows,” as they can take advantage of their intimate knowledge of the terrain and their ability to hide among small cells, making them difficult to track and infiltrate.

The fact that the games are being held near the Islamists’ home turf creates a complex challenge for any counterterrorism professional. This makes the threat to Sochi even more serious and sets up what may be seen by these groups as a necessary target in their battle for increased relevancy and legitimacy.

Understanding the high stakes in Sochi, Putin has encouraged Russian security agencies to seek support and cooperation from the U.S. and other countries as added force protection for the Olympic games. In turn, the U.S. has offered to send two naval vessels to the Black Sea as a contingency. The question is, will these added measures prevent or deter a terrorist attack? Lets hope so.

Read the [original article](#) at Breitbart.com.