



## Security of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi

Adam RADOMYSKI

Military University of Aviation, Deblin, Poland; a.radomyski@law.mil.pl,  
ORCID: 0000-0001-7522-308X

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37105/sd.117>

### Abstract

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Given the fact that major sporting events such as the Olympic Games attract attention all over the world, the aspect of their security has become even more important, especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Organizers of this type of mass sports event treat the issue of safety as top priority.

The paper examines the empirical data from scientific publications, press releases and formal government documents that pertain to Russia's preparation to properly secure the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics in terms of security.

The aim of this article was to identify the threats to the Winter Olympics in Sochi and to characterize the security system organized by Russia against this background.

The conducted research confirmed that the greatest threat in Russia was the high activity of national liberation groups, fighters and terrorists from the Sochi area, which clearly intensified in the period preceding the Olympics. In addition, the security system created by Russia involved many different state bodies, including agencies, police and law enforcement services, and the army.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that the security system created in Sochi may be a good example for other countries that will try to organize the Olympic Games in the future.

### Keywords

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air defense system, air safety, restricted areas, security system, terrorist attack

Submitted: 15.04.2021 Accepted: 03.06.2021 Published: 13.06.2021

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## Introduction

Terrorism is a systematically recurring phenomenon that generates threats of various scale, form and scope. In this regard, the global reach that accompanies sporting events such as the Olympic Games makes them attractive to terrorists. By carrying out attacks during the Olympic Games, they can ensure a wide publicity and disturb the sense of security among the international community. Analyzing various aspects of terrorist attacks in relation to this type of mass sporting events, it can be noticed that the potential perpetrators commit these acts not because they have any particular claims against the Olympic movement, but because of its powerful symbolism – associated with the peaceful dimension of this type of sporting events. In addition, terrorist attacks are sometimes also part of a campaign against an enemy, e.g. the government of the state or its representatives participating in the Olympic Games (Silke, 2010). At this point, it should also be noted that terrorist threats at the Olympic Games have their tragic history, which have been outlined, among others, by the events of 1972 in Munich, where extremists from the Black September organization killed five Israeli athletes and six coaches, and a German policeman. This tragic event became a specific impulse to intensify the counter-terrorism activities in the world, also during subsequent mass sports events such as the Olympics. Security gained even greater importance after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States (Spaaij, 2016). This made the Olympic Games a serious challenge for the host countries. One of the researchers of terrorism, Ronald Crelinsten, refers to the issues related to the safety of the Olympic Games, and considers terrorism to be a new form of war, in which all far-reaching means should be used. In practice, this way of thinking translates into a systematic increase in security costs (Boyle, 2012). This is also confirmed by the words of a security expert Neil Fergus, who, in relation to the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, stated that it was "the largest security operation since the time of Alexander the Great marching through Persia" (Fergus, 2010). Concerning the 2008 Beijing Olympics, a political scientist Ying Yu described it as "the largest peace security operation in the history of the country" (Yu et al., 2009, p. 390). A dozen or so years ago, sociologists John Horne and Wolfram Manzenreiter also commented on this issue, and predicted that security issues "are likely to be of the utmost importance during the organization of the subsequent great sports events" (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006, p. 19). Bearing in mind the above opinions, one should not be surprised that ensuring safety at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi has become a priority for the Russian authorities.

Taking into account the problem situation outlined, it was assumed that the aim of the article will be: *to identify the threats to the Winter Olympics in Sochi and, against this background, to characterize the security system organized by Russia*. It has been assumed that this goal will be achieved as a result of theoretical research. In order to obtain the most reliable information about the subject of the research, a critical analysis of factual documents was carried out, mainly reports on the preparation and conduct of international sports events. In addition, scientific publications and documents relating to the threats of mass sports events, the organizational measures used by Russia and the technical solutions implemented into the security system of the Olympics in Sochi were also included in the analysis. Comparisons and analogies with the organizers of the Olympic Games before 2014 were also used.

## 2. An assessment of the threats to the Sochi Winter Olympics

The security concerns were fully justified as they had their historical background. The time of two wars in Chechnya in 1994–1996 and 1999–2003 was a period of particularly intensified violence in this region. Despite their termination, various types of local military operations continued throughout the North Caucasus. The Krasnoyarsk Krai, in which Sochi is located, was not a battlefield during the years of the wars in Chechnya, but it fell victim to several terrorist attacks. According to the US warnings issued on January 24, 2014 to travelers from the United States to Sochi, there were reports of terrorist acts that had taken place in this region over the past 15 years. Most commonly terrorist attacks targeted Russian government buildings, airfields, hotels, tourist spots, markets, entertainment venues, schools and housing facilities. There have also been large-scale attacks on public transport, including the underground, buses, trains and regular commercial flights.

Russian experts themselves confirmed that in the North Caucasus there are about 500-1000 terrorists operating mainly in small groups of several dozen people, which were associated with the Chechen terrorist Doku Umarov, the head of the self-appointed group, the Caucasus Emirate (Radomyski et al., 2012).

Despite these difficulties, it should be emphasized that the Russian security forces managed to frustrate terrorists' plans to attack the Black Sea resort of Sochi. However, concerns over terrorism during the Olympic Games intensified in July 2013. This was related to the call for attacks on civilian targets across Russia, announced online by Umarov himself. The leader of the Caucasus Emirate called on his supporters to make attacks during the Winter Olympics in Sochi. In a four-minute video posted on an independent website *kavkazcenter.com*, Umarov called on all Muslims and his followers to use any methods, including brutal ones. On May 10, 2012, the Russian National Antiterrorism Committee announced that the Russian and Abkhazian security agents had confirmed that Umarov indeed planned large-scale attacks during the Winter Olympics in Sochi. This was evidenced, among others, by the hiding places with a large number of grenade launchers, surface-to-air missiles, mines and other weapons discovered in Abkhazia (a detached region of Georgia bordering with the north of the Caucasus and declared independent by Russia) (Lovelace, 2017). These actions, however, sparked off terrorist activities. On October 21, 2013, a suicide bomber blew up a bus in Volgograd in the Southern Federal District, which includes Sochi. It was the first bomb attack since the attack at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport in January 2011. On December 27, 2013, as a result of a car bomb explosion in front of the police building in Pyatigorsk, Stavropol Krai, the administrative center of the North Caucasian Federal District, three people died. Following this attack, six alleged terrorists were arrested in Kabardino-Balkaria. On December 29-30, 2013, two suicide bombings took place in Volgograd, the first at a railway station and the second in a trolleybus. As a result, over thirty people died and over 100 were seriously injured. On January 12, 2014, a Fatwa justifying the attacks in Volgograd was published on a website related to the Caucasus Emirate. Quoting Osama bin Laden, the Fatwa argued that such attacks were "necessary" as they "enraged the infidels" who were responsible for the deaths of Muslims in the North Caucasus and Syria (related to Russia's support for the Syrian government) (Lovelace, 2017, p. 71).

Bearing in mind the real threats, several analysts outlined different scenarios of the possible terrorist incidents before and during the Games, including attacks on the Olympic venues or attacks elsewhere in Russia. They were to consist of taking hostages, carrying out suicide attacks and other bombings or armed violence. In addition, they warned that the attacks could also be targeted at Russian embassies abroad and even at the embassies of other countries' sending athletes to the Olympics in Sochi.

### 3. Characteristics of the security system of the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi

After Russia was granted the right to host the Olympic Games in Sochi, many domestic and foreign analysts and media outlets drew attention to the high cost of the Olympics and the potential organizational problems and security threats. Particular attention was paid to the very high costs of building the Olympic venues and the entire infrastructure, often recalling the total cost of the preceding Summer Olympics (a much larger event than the Winter Olympics) and all previous Winter Olympics. This is also confirmed by the data in Table 1 (Müller, 2014, pp. 628–655).

**Table 1.**

*Tabulation of resources spent for the organization of the Olympic Games*

Year	Host city	Budget
1996	Atlanta	USD 3.6 billion
2000	Sydney	USD 6.9 billion
2002	Salt Lake City	USD 2.5 billion
2004	Athens	USD 16.0 billion
2006	Turin	USD 4.5 billion
2008	Beijing	USD 45.0 billion
2010	Vancouver	USD 7.6 billion
2012	London	USD 18.0 billion
2014	Sochi	USD 51.0 billion

Adapted from: *The Economics of Hosting the Olympic Games* by J. McBride Council on Foreign Relations Copyright 2018 January 19 by Publisher; *Security Requirements at the Olympic Games*, by V. Šiljak, V. Vukašinić, D. Đurović, Copyright 2016 by Publisher.

It has been confirmed by hard financial data that show that the budget proposed by Russia as part of the offer has been significantly exceeded. The budget initially planned for 2007 was USD 12 billion (RUB 314 billion). By 2010, this figure had risen to about RUB 950 billion, about USD 30.6 billion, and official estimates for 2013 were USD 51 billion (Dean, 2014, p. 5).

Despite the rising costs for the Russian authorities, the safety of the participants of the Olympics was a matter of the utmost importance. Pursuant to the Act of December 2007 and the Presidential Decree of August 2013, a special safety zone was created around the Olympic venues. Additional controls and other restrictions were introduced for people and vehicles entering and leaving this zone. From January 7, 2014, a special security regime was introduced in Sochi (Nichol et. al. 2014). It provided for the introduction of increased security measures during the Winter Olympics, including the establishment of a restricted zone. Apart from that, the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation has created an unprecedented security cordon around the venues for sports competitions. The boundaries of the area were defined in detail: part of its territory lay on the Karachay-Cherkessia border and it extended to the Russian border with Abkhazia. Security measures were also increased in the area that encompassed some 100 km of the coast in the Sochi region and extended deep into the city to a depth of 20-40 km (Luccacioni & Cohen, 2014). It also included a ski resort in Krasnaya Polyana, opened before the Olympics, located 39 km from Sochi. Starting in January 2014, a more stringent air traffic safety control system has been introduced. Shipments and luggage have also been subject to detailed control. In addition to the Olympic venues, controlling bridges, railway tunnels, power grid facilities, schools, hospitals, hotels, restaurants and shops have also been reinforced. What is more, the sale of firearms, dual-

use chemicals and other prohibited items has been banned. A restriction on the entry of vehicles into the security area has also been adopted. Only vehicles with special license plates were authorized to enter. Local car owners had to leave their cars in parking lots that were located 50 miles from Sochi. Even more rigorous security measures applied to checks on Olympic visitors and support staff at Olympic venues. A decision was also made to introduce a "forbidden zone" on the border with Abkhazia. Restrictions also applied to the air space and water in the vicinity of the Olympic Games and national parks. In total, the safety zones extended approximately 60 miles along the Black Sea coast and up to 24 miles on land (Figure 1). In addition, on March 21, restrictions on the entry, permanent or temporary stay of visitors came into force under a special regime.



**Figure 1.** The Sochi Area. Adopted from: *The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics: Security and Human Rights Issues, Report*, Congressional Research Service by J. Nichol, E. Halchin, J. W. Rollins, A. Tiersky, S. Woehrel. Copyright 2014 by Publisher.

Starting on February 4, 2014, ships from the Russian fleet were on duty at the seaside of Sochi. These forces included a group of small tactical submarines "Aleksandrovets" and "Muromets" (the best ship of the Black Sea fleet in 2013). They were prepared to combat submarines, surface ships and carry out air defense tasks. The naval forces also included the tactical minesweepers "Kovrovets" and "Turbinist". The naval force was complemented by the missile cruiser and patrol ships "Pytliviy", which departed from the naval base from Sevastopol. Their task was to protect sea waters and air space in the area of the Olympic Games 2014. Other fleet units were also ready to go to sea.

The security system described above was in force during the Games in Sochi, which took place from February 7 to 23, and during the Paralympic Games, which were held from March 7 to 16. An important stage in the preparation of the military forces to protect sports facilities in Sochi was the Kavkaz-2012 exercise, which ended in southern Russia in the second half of September. It was a kind of war game aimed at ensuring internal security. The maneuvers were carried out taking into account the volatility of the situation in the North Caucasus during the Winter Olympics in Sochi. The exercises took place from September 17 to 23 and

covered a large theater of operations that enclosed a large part of the area of responsibility of the Russian joint strategic command "South", which corresponds to an area of operation extending from the Black Sea in the west to the Caspian Sea in the east. The exercise was carried out in November 2013, and 7,000 soldiers, officers of the Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Security Service participated in it.

In order to coordinate the activities of the forces responsible for the security of Sochi, an inter-agency operational center was created, which also included the Federal Security Service, as the leading agency, and the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defense and other bodies. According to official reports, the size of the security forces was estimated differently, from several tens of thousands to even 100,000 people. Around 22,000 soldiers, 2,000 military vehicles, 72 planes, 40,000 police officers and 8,900 medical workers with 1,600 vehicles were involved in securing the Olympic Games in Sochi. These forces were supported by uncertain number of Federal Security Service functionaries. According to some estimates, the number of the Russian security personnel deployed to the Games was significantly greater than that of the 2012 London Summer Olympics.

International cooperation was an important element from the point of view of security. In November 2013, a Russian general Oleg Syromolotov, the head of the operational command, announced that representatives of intelligence services from several dozen countries were invited to help, and they were to send their national delegates to Sochi. He also pointed out that this type of cooperation had been being prepared since 2011, when the Operations Center initiated the creation of a group of experts that met several times in Sochi. The cooperation included exercises at sports facilities in Sochi. In addition, President Putin announced in early September 2013 that Russia had concluded agreements with the United States and several European countries on cooperation in the field of security at the Sochi Olympics (Interview to Russian and Foreign Media, 2014). In order to discuss the military cooperation and resolve the most important issues related to ensuring the security of the American delegation, on January 21, 2014, General Martin Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Chief of the Russian General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, met in Brussels (Garamone, 2014). The US Department of Defense announced that General Gerasimov had confirmed that the armed forces would support the Olympic Games by providing air and sea defense, defense against chemical and biological weapons, as well as providing medical support and electronic protection. The Department of Defense also said Gerasimov had expressed an interest in the US technology of counteracting improvised explosives (IED). In addition, according to the information provided by the Press Secretary of the Department of Defense John Kirby, General Philip Breedlove, the commander of the European command of the US forces, was to be responsible for preparing an emergency military operation in the event that the State Department needed US military forces to support Russia during the Olympic Games in Sochi (US Department of Defense, 2014). Two US Navy ships were also directed to the Black Sea region. Apparently, some American planes stationed at military bases in Germany were also ready to carry out a possible evacuation of the members of the American delegation from Sochi (U.S. Department of Defense, 2014). Private companies were also involved in the protection of the American athletes in Sochi, e.g. Global Rescue (Global Rescue, 2013), whose employees protected members of the U.S. Ski & Snowboard Association (USSA) during the Games in Turin, Italy (2006) and Vancouver, Canada (2010).

The large-scale US action was principally due to both the safety of the athletes and other US citizens who were to take part in the Sochi Winter Olympics. These fears were also expressed by conducted surveys. They indicated that more than half of the American population were unsure that Sochi would be safe from terrorist attacks, but most people still wanted the United States to participate in it. A recent Economist/YouGov poll showed that most

Americans were unsure that the Olympics in Russia would be well protected against terrorism (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The results of a survey presenting Americans' opinions on the threat of terrorism during the Winter Olympics in Sochi. Adopted from: More than half of Americans have little to no confidence that Sochi will be safe from terrorist attacks, but most people still want the US to participate by K. Frankovic, Copyright 2014 by Publisher.

To sum up, all activities related to ensuring safety and security during the Olympic Games in Sochi were implemented in accordance with the concept approved by the President of the Russian Federation in 2009. The concept defined the main goals, tasks, the scope of activities and measures that were necessary to ensure safety and security at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The main threats include (Demidov, 2015): the possibility of seizing (hijacking) civil aircraft flying on domestic and international routes, both in the air and on the ground. They were considered means that could be used to launch attacks on the Olympic venues. This group of measures also includes small and ultra-light aircrafts, and radio-controlled models (Radomyski & Bernat, 2018).

#### 4. Securing the airspace over Sochi

Bearing in mind the forecasted threat, it is hardly surprising that the airspace safety was one of the most important areas for the Russian authorities during the organization of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. This was also clearly demonstrated by the words of General Viktor Gumenny, the commander of the air defense forces of the Russian air force, spoken during one of the press conferences: “We will do anything possible to perform the task of protecting the Russian airspace along the southern borders and ensuring safety during the Winter Olympics” (Demidov, 2015).

With regard to the identified threats, it was decided that the forces and means of air defense will be the pillar of the airspace security system. Their use was to prevent unauthorized entry into the Olympic area airspace by unidentified aircraft (Radomyski, 2019). Therefore, all facilities in the Sochi region (the seaport, the Adler airport, the Olympic venues and the Olympic Village in the Lower Imereti Plain). Krasnaya Polyana was also to be protected, as

well as the roads between the individual amenities. After analyzing the location of these places, two groups of them were distinguished, which were concentrated in two clusters (coastal and mountain), as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Facilities under special protection during the Olympic Games in Sochi. The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics: Security and Human Rights Issues, Report, Adopted from: Congressional Research Service by J. Nichol, E. Halchin, J. W. Rollins, A. Tiersky, S. Woehrel, Copyright 2015 by Publisher.

The first of them included the Olympic venues that were located on the Black Sea coast in the immediate vicinity of the state border of the Russian Federation with the Republic of Abkhazia. The sports facilities and the Olympic Village were considered as one facility (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Facilities included in the coastal cluster. Adopted from: Sky over Sochi at the castle Organization of air defense of facilities for the XXII Winter Olympic Games and XI Winter Paralympic Games 2014, Aerospace Defense, by D. D. B. Demidov, Copyright 2015 by Publisher.

In turn, the facilities located in the Krasnaya Polyana and Estosadok areas were located on the slopes of the Aibga and Psekhako ridges and formed the mountain cluster. In order to organize an airspace protection system in Sochi, a special working group was established in 2011, composed of representatives of the military command and control bodies from the

Southern Military District, research institutes and industrial enterprises. As a result of the work of this group, an air defense group was organized in Sochi to secure the air defense of the XXII Winter Olympic Games and the XI Winter Paralympic Games in 2014. Its fundamental element was the Sochi anti-aircraft missile regiment, which was reinforced with additional forces. The supporting units included squadrons armed with Pantsir-S sets and the anti-aircraft battery of the Tor-M2 missile sets as shown in photo 1. On the left side of the photo a passive reconnaissance radar is visible, very similar to the Ukrainian Kolchuga. Two masked Tor-M2 anti-aircraft missile sets with new air target detection radars (Figure 5) are visible on the next photo.



**Figure. 5.** The Tor-M2 missile system deployed to protect the Olympic venues in Sochi. Adopted from: *Meanwhile, air defense is being deployed in Sochi*, Military Review, Copyright 2013 by Publisher <http://karelmilitary.livejournal.com>

It is a weapon designed to detect, track and destroy ballistic and cruise missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles and possibly also stealth airplanes. In addition, the airspace over Sochi was also protected by other anti-aircraft missile systems, such as: Buk-M1, S-300PS, S-300PM, three S-300V4 missile batteries with a greater range, which were ordered by the Ministry of Defense in 2012. The air zone was controlled by squadrons of Su-24 bombers, Su-25 attack aircraft, Su-27 and MiG-29 interceptors, MiG-31 and Mi-8, Mi-24 and Mi-28 military helicopters located near the city of Krymsk.

The most problematic zone was the heavily forested mountainous area with a large number of ravines stretching for tens of kilometers into the territory of neighboring countries. Such topography created favorable conditions for hidden penetration of saboteurs, terrorist groups, and unmanned aerial vehicles. Thus, in order to control these critical areas, the reconnaissance unmanned helicopter "Horizon Air S-100", which was produced by the company from Rostov-on-Don, was used. It was designed for vertical take-off and landing, which meant that it did not require any runway or special ground equipment. It could also take off from decks of ships and sea platforms (Figure 6).



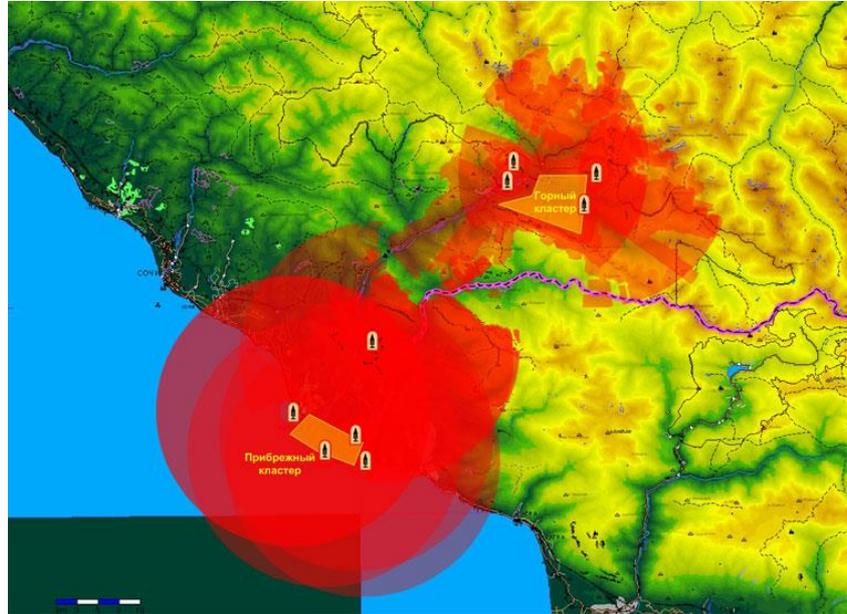
**Figure 6.** The air reconnaissance kit – unmanned helicopter „Horizon Air S-100”. Winter Olympics in Sochi: Potential Threats and Security Measures That Are Being Taken Adopted from: Independent Analytical Center For Geopolitical Studies Borysfen Intel, Copyright 2013 by Publisher. [http://bintel.com.ua/uploads/spravka/spravka\\_vvs.html#s100](http://bintel.com.ua/uploads/spravka/spravka_vvs.html#s100)

Moreover, such difficult terrain conditions seriously hindered the proper distribution of radar reconnaissance means. After a detailed reconnaissance in the field, a solution was adopted which consisted in placing the air defense systems at different altitudes, which allowed to provide the facilities with multi-layer cover at different heights. In addition to the serious terrain limitations, additional difficulties arose related to the dense layout of the built-up area, the lack of roads and the need to organize a location in the Sochi National Park. One of the units with air defense means was located in the area of the Adler Sanatorium, under construction, which made it possible to obtain very good conditions for the protection of facilities located in the coastal cluster from the sea (see photo 1). It became more difficult to organize the locations for air defense means for the facilities located in the mountain cluster. An example was the position "Rosa Khutor", which was located in the immediate vicinity of the ski resort of the same name (Figure 7). This location was the only possible place to deploy air defense systems to cover the Olympic venues from the east, where the longest gorges extended further southeast. These are just some examples illustrating the difficulties in organizing the combat positions for the air defense assets (Demidov, 2015).



**Figure 7.** Rosa Khutor From the left: the Pantsir-S system at the "Sanatorium Adler" position; the Pantsir-S system at the Rosa Khutor position. Adopted from: Sky over Sochi at the castle Organization of air defense of facilities for the XXII Winter Olympic Games and XI Winter Paralympic Games 2014, Aerospace Defense, by D. D. B. Demidov, Copyright 2015 by Publisher.

As a result of the deployment of air defense assets in the selected regions, all facilities of the Olympic and Paralympic Games were in the air-defense zones and were protected against air threats from all directions, as shown in Figure 8. The restrictions on the use of airspace in the Sochi area in the form of no-fly zones and zones restricting the movement of aircraft were also introduced.



**Figure 8.** The layout of zones for the protection of the Olympic venues in Sochi against air threats at very low altitudes. Adopted from: Sky over Sochi at the castle Organization of air defense of facilities for the XXII Winter Olympic Games and XI Winter Paralympic Games 2014, Aerospace Defense, by D. D. B. Demidov, Copyright 2015 by Publisher.

The forces and resources deployed to protect the Olympic venues were managed by the Safety Management Center, created especially for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In addition, it should be emphasized that the air defense system also included the air defense forces of the Black Sea Fleet.

#### 4. Conclusions

Analyzing the threats of the Olympic Games in Sochi, one can risk making the statement that the experience gathered in the organization of the safety system in the case of such large and spectacular international sports events indicates that as early as at the planning stage, the threats that may occur during the event should be identified.

The Russian security forces were directly responsible for ensuring the safety of the guests, fans and participants of the Olympics. However, a very important role was also played by the specialized forces and means of air defense assigned by the Russian Armed Forces, which fully fulfilled the task of securing the airspace over the Olympic facilities. The operations carried out at sea by the separated forces from the Black Sea Fleet looked equally efficient.

The need to effectively counter the diagnosed threats also forced the search for new procedural, organizational and technical solutions. One such solutions was the introduction

of temporary No-Fly Zones, the use of unmanned reconnaissance systems around the potential Olympic facilities threatened by an air attack. The implementation of such restrictions is now becoming a global standard. This is confirmed by the security of subsequent mass sports events, e.g. the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2016), PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games in South Korea and other important international events, i.e. the G-8 economic summits, G-20, NATO summits, important national and religious celebrations and anniversaries. In the case of the organization of the security system of the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, it should be emphasized that it took into account the use of a wide range of civil and military means. Moreover, the practice of Sochi confirmed that the effective use of the forces and resources subordinate to various governmental institutions requires an enormous effort to coordinate and prepare for joint operations.

**The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.**

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