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SPOTLIGHT ON SOCHI: Social Media Analysis Series

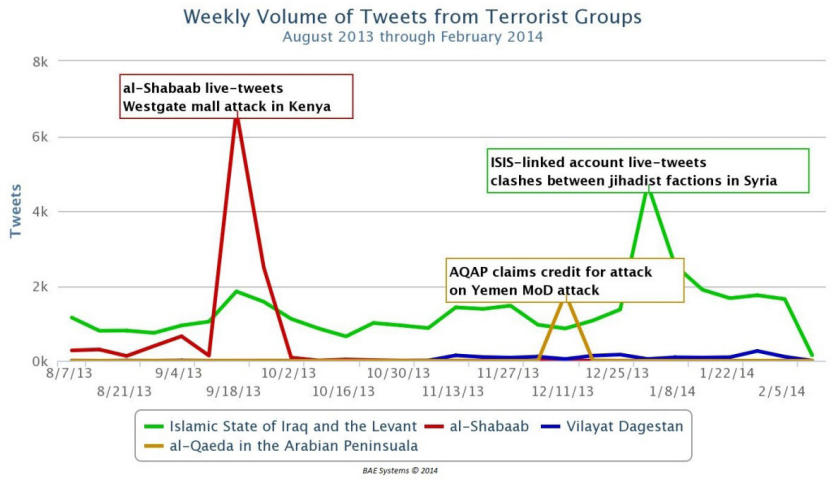
TERROR IN THE TWITTERSPHERE

BAE Systems is partnering with Homeland Security Today magazine to produce a daily report that provides a unique perspective on the 2014 winter games in Sochi, Russia.

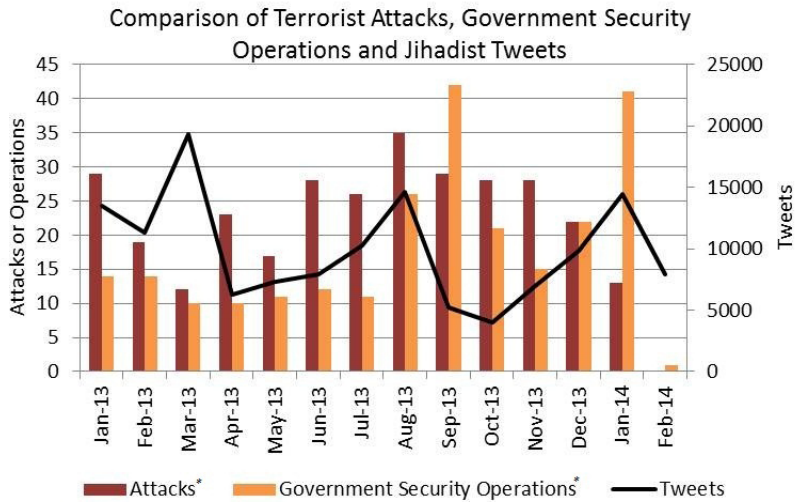
The terrorist threat to the Sochi games has been an oft-reported topic in the news as well as social media. Most of the discussion is centered on the threat posed by the al-Qaeda-affiliated Caucasus Emirate and its local branches. The Caucasus Emirate uses social media, blogs and web forums to disseminate messages and propaganda, much like other terrorist groups around the world. In recent days, Russian jihadist media outlets have disseminated threats from the Caucasus Emirate that may have precipitated an increased security presence in Sochi. Journalists using social media in Sochi have noted an increased number of security forces and a more visible presence of officers in black tactical uniforms with automatic weapons. One journalist also noted that traffic between the city of Sochi and the competition sites has been curtailed.

The Caucasus Emirate (Imarat Kavkaz) is the umbrella organization for the various insurgent movements in the North Caucasus. The group is led by Doku Umarov, a veteran of both Chechen Wars. On several occasions Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of the Chechen Republic and ally of Russian president Putin, has made unsubstantiated claims via his Instagram account that Umarov is dead. Kadyrov's most recent claim came on January 17. Even with rumors of Umarov's demise persisting, the decentralized movement has continued in its dissemination of information to an audience preparing for the worst in Sochi. The Caucasus Emirate's regional branch in Dagestan - Vilayat Dagestan - has been a particularly popular topic of discussion in both traditional and social media. Vilayat Dagestan claimed responsibility for the December 2013 suicide bombings in Volgograd which killed 34 people. The group also claimed, via its YouTube account, to have a "surprise" for the games. Earlier this year, Vilayat Dagestan released an opaque statement following the Boston Bombings where they neither confirmed nor denied connections to Tamerlan Tsarnaev.

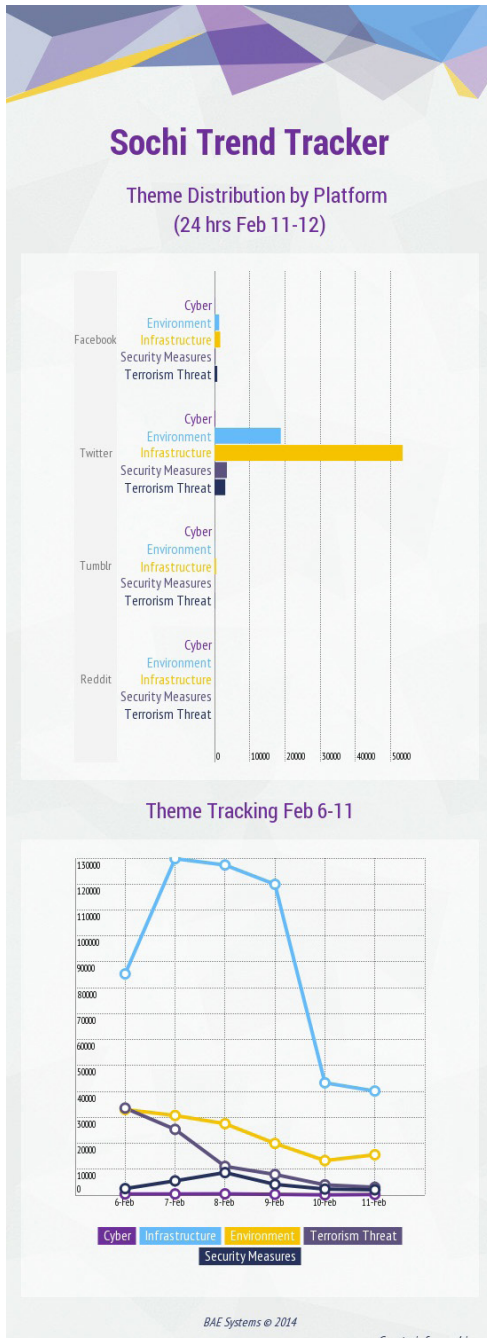
Terrorist groups and their sympathizers around the world use Twitter to varying degrees. Most jihadist groups on Twitter use the platform to disseminate statements and propaganda, often in the form of pictures or video. Interestingly, their Twitter messaging seems geared toward reaching an outside audience. Vilayat Dagestan has become much more active on their Arabic Twitter account rather than their Russian account, though their Russian website is still updated daily. Similarly, al-Qaeda affiliated al-Shabaab in Somalia uses its English account more often than its Somali or Arabic accounts. Some groups, such as al-Shabaab and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, are particularly active on Twitter and have live-tweeted updates during major attacks. Other groups, such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, have only recently joined Twitter and use it sparingly.



Social media data serves as a mechanism for measuring the messaging activity of such organizations. The Caucasus Emirate has several types of accounts. There are several Twitter accounts which report on the news of the region, discussing successful insurgent activities and highlighting the alleged misdeeds of Russian forces. They also report on other conflicts such as Syria and Iraq. These sources have typically stuck to Russian and Arabic for their messaging. Local groups such as Vilayat Dagestan also had a social media presence. Vilayat Dagestan primarily uses two different Twitter handles, one in Russian and a second in Arabic.



The chart depicts a collection of twitter handles associated with the Caucasus Emirate, which highlights two interesting phenomena. The first is a correlation between an increasing number of attacks and greater numbers of tweets between April and August 2013. This likely reflects the attempt to disseminate propaganda as the



Caucasus Emirate increased attacks, as reported by the University of New Haven’s Institute for the Study of Violent Groups (ISVG). The second is the reduction of twitter volume which occurs during or following a period of increased government security operations. This reduction in twitter volume may reflect an attempt by the Caucasus Emirate to lower their profile during government operations or the impact of Russian security forces on Jihadist media networks.

Social media can also surface more specific threats. For example, on February 9 a Twitter account associated with the Caucasus Emirate issued a series of tweets in Arabic, one of which state that “Sochi is now the most dangerous point in the world”. The threat also implied some action would be taken as early as February 10. The statement was released across several tweets with an average retweet in the teens. In a video released February 10 by a local branch of the Caucasus Emirate, several members encouraged followers to pray for an earthquake to disrupt the games. These threats may have found some traction with Russia’s security elements. We will continue to monitor social media for any indications of an impending terrorist attack or Russian security measures to preempt an attack.

Concerns about security issues, and likewise the social media chatter about them, change constantly as the environment around the winter games evolves. Understanding how and why those changes occur will help us better understand both the mood on the ground in Sochi and emerging concerns from the worldwide audience. For the duration of the games, the BAE Systems Advanced Analytics Lab is tracking dynamic social media activity related to common security issues by category and will report daily on how that discussion progresses.

The BAE Systems Advanced Analytics Lab integrates analytic expertise, technology and tradecraft to make sense of big data and support critical customer missions. Much of the data analyzed in this series was processed and visualized using cutting-edge BAE Systems Applied Intelligence solutions, such as the Open Source Intelligence Product. All geospatial images were produced using BAE Systems’ enterprise solution suite of Geospatial eXploitation Products®.

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