



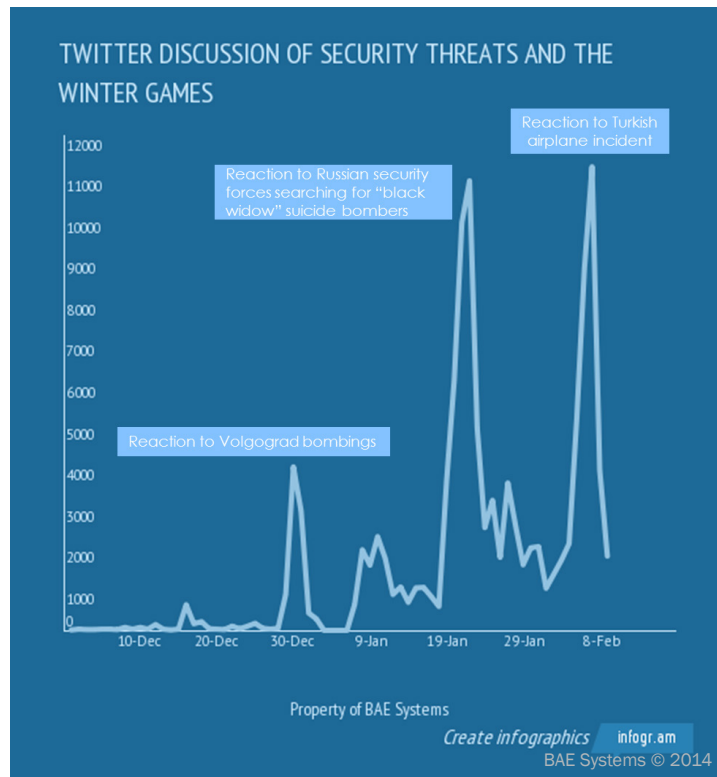
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# SPOTLIGHT ON SOCHI: Social Media Analysis Series

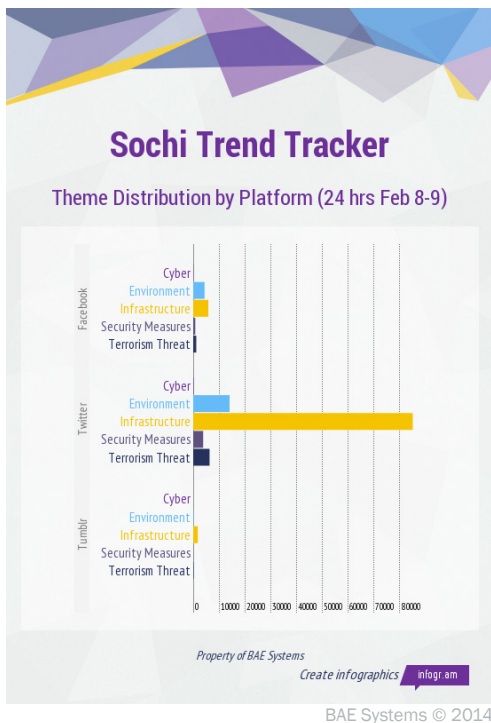
# ALL QUIET ON THE EASTERN FRONT

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 threat of terrorist attacks during the Sochi games saturated news and social media coverage in the weeks leading up to the opening ceremony and the beginning of athletic competition. As we've written in previous posts, discussion of political and security issues has largely been replaced by commentary on hotel deficiencies, malfunctioning rings, mascot memes and, most recently, the athletic events themselves. Aside from a brief spike in traffic related to the recently-reported hijacking of a Turkish plane, terrorism and security issues have sharply declined as conversation points. One factor that is contributing to this decline is the actual decline in security incidents in the North Caucasus in recent weeks.



As Homeland Security Today reported in its January 30 article "Southern Russia, North Africa Hotbeds Of Islamist Related Terror Attacks", terrorist and insurgent attacks



throughout Russia, though centered largely in the North Caucasus, increased over the last decade, with a peak in 2010, according to data compiled by the University of Maryland’s National Consortium Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) Global Terrorism Database (GTD). The vast majority of attacks were IEDs and other bombings or small arms assaults. Mass-casualty attacks, such as the December 2013 Volgograd suicide bombings, were far rarer. While complete data for 2013 is not yet compiled, preliminary data from the University of New Haven’s Institute for the Study of Violent Groups (ISVG) Violent Extremism Knowledge Base (VKB), and the independent news site Kavkaz-Uzel, suggests attacks in 2013 declined slightly from 2012 figures.

More recently, attacks in January and early-February 2014 have declined sharply, according to data from ISVG VKB. This is likely a direct result of increased Russian security operations in the region, both in reaction to the December 2013 suicide attacks in Volgograd and in preparation for the Sochi games. In the final quarter of 2013, there were roughly 20 Russian security operations in the North Caucasus every month. There were over 40 such operations in January 2014. Russian military and police forces have conducted near-daily operations in Dagestan since late January.

World media and social networks will react quickly to any developments related to terrorism and the security situation over the next several weeks. The social media activity regarding a threat of toothpaste tubes being used to hide explosives on airliners petered out within 48 hours, for example. Then, reports of the Turkish airplane hijacking demonstrated that even the slightest indication of a terrorist incident will rapidly garner attention around the world. We expect Russian security operations to continue apace in Dagestan and across the North Caucasus throughout the duration of the games. If these operations are successful in preventing, or at least dampening, violent incidents in the region, media and social conversation about terrorism will remain low. Low-level bombings and shootings confined to Dagestan or Chechnya are unlikely to result in significant media attention. However, any incident closer to Sochi proper – especially if Americans or other foreign personnel are targeted – will certainly result in increased social media conversation. Likewise a bombing, hostage-taking or assassination in a major city (such as Moscow or Kazan), or a mass-casualty attack anywhere in Russia, will quickly detract from general games discussion.

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.

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