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# SPOTLIGHT ON SOCHI: Social Media Analysis Series

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INSPIRED WORK

# POST GAME PROTEST

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.

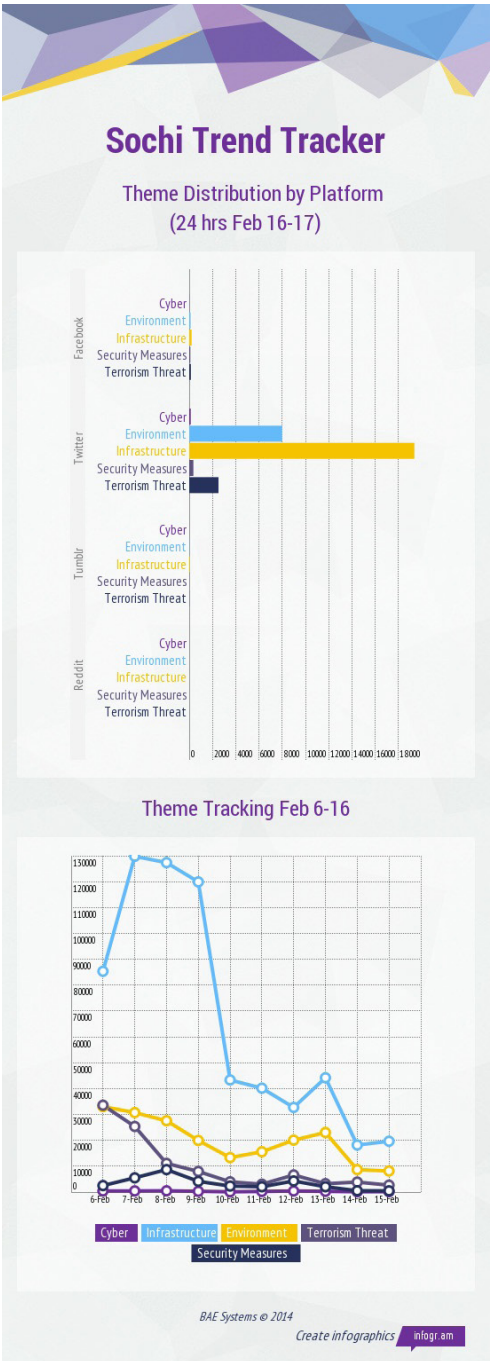
We reported yesterday that many Russians, including some government officials, took to social media to express their frustration and disagreement over a controversial call made by a referee in the United States vs. Russia hockey game on Saturday. The call, which disallowed a goal that would have given Russia the lead late in the game, turned out to be significant. Because the game was tied at the end of regulation, the match was decided in a shootout, which the US won in dramatic fashion. Yesterday's social media posts have since become today's street protest.

News of the protest first broke early this morning when a Russian hockey journalist tweeted a picture of a protest staged outside of Moscow State Agroengineering University, which was then picked up by several major international media outlets. We examined the distribution of hockey-related tweets in Russian from Moscow vs. Krasnodar (where Sochi is located) and saw a spike of Moscow tweets after the game.

The protest directly targeted American referee Brad Meier, who made the call during the game, even though authority for the decision actually resided with a video review in the booth by the International Ice Hockey Federation. Protesters brandished a large sign with Meier's picture on it and a statement that reads "Turn the referee into soap!" a common Russian idiom. Although the protest was relatively small—reportedly only attended by a few dozen people—and there were no indications of violence, it is a security indicator worth watching.

The protest was staged by the Young Guard of United Russia (MGER), the youth branch of the current ruling party, United Russia. MGER was established by Vladimir Putin in 2001, and the youth wing was founded in 2005, headquartered in Moscow. It claims to have 83 branches across the country. MGER states its goal is to involve the youth in building a "democratic and socially just society" while also promoting a sense of patriotism through volunteer projects. MGER claimed credit for the protest and proudly posted pictures, video, and commentary on several of their English and Russian language social





media sites, including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, and their own website. Although we have no indication that the group is dangerous or has plans to carry out future protests, the fact that the protest isolated Mr. Meier specifically, and was touted so publically, is cause to be vigilant in the coming week.

The US and Russia remain locked in a tense and precarious political relationship, both on

issues directly related to the games and on broader geopolitics. Should anti-American sentiment surface and escalate in Sochi or elsewhere in the country, individual Americans including athletes, coaches, referees, staff, spectators, or anyone else traveling in the country, could be targeted for harassment and violence. Hockey has an impassioned following during the winter games and the US and Russia have a particularly ripe history in this event. The two teams are not yet scheduled to play each other again, but certainly could, in a game far more meaningful than the preliminary round match played last weekend. As the playoff qualification games and early elimination rounds get under way this week, leading up to the medal games this coming weekend on February 22 and 23, we expect the atmosphere will intensify. We will continue to monitor social media and other channels for any indicators of security issues arising as the tournament unfolds.

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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