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SOCHI CRISIS TEAM READY

Kevin Johnson
@bykevinj
USA TODAY

Private Security Firm Plans Quick Escape for Athletes



The illuminated Olympic Bolshoy stadium, in the background, and Iceberg stadium are seen in Sochi, Russia, on October 24. (Photo: Lesya Polyakova, AP)

A private crisis-response firm assisting the U.S. ski and snowboard teams for the Winter Olympic Games in Russia has up to five aircraft on standby in the event that medical or security emergencies require an evacuation from Sochi.

The extraordinary preparations a month before the games begin are in response to what Global Rescue CEO Dan Richards describes as the “unique challenge” represented in part by Olympic venues located in the shadow of a terrorist battleground.

“This environment is unique,” said Richards, whose Boston-based firm has worked for the teams since the 2006 Winter Games in Turin, Italy. “You just don’t have competitions in places like Sochi with any frequency. ... In the last 10 years, there has been nothing like it.” Richards said one of the company’s available aircraft has the capacity to ferry about 200 passengers out of the region, if needed. The security executive declined to discuss details about the company’s activities, yet the evacuation contingencies underscore growing concerns about Olympic security in the wake of two suicide bombings last week on transportation targets nearly 500 miles from Sochi.

Although Russian authorities are primarily responsible for security during the Games (about 40,000 police and military personnel have been dispatched to the region), the U.S. government also provides security for the U.S. Olympic delegation.

U.S. Olympic Committee spokesman Mark Jones declined to elaborate on the security arrangement for Sochi, except to say the committee had not sought additional private security assistance similar to that arranged by the ski and snowboard teams.

With the exception of the professional roster being fielded by the U.S. hockey team, the ski and snowboard teams had featured some of the highest profile athletes of the Games with past Olympic champions Lindsey Vonn and Shaun White. Vonn announced her withdrawal Tuesday from the Sochi Games due to injury, but Global Rescue spokeswoman Ann Shannon said the move does not change the company’s overall plan for the teams.

USA Hockey spokesman Dave Fischer declined to discuss the team’s security plan and the involvement of private security, though he maintained that the safety of the team is “the first priority.” “We have utilized various tactics over the course of history,” Fischer said. “Private security absolutely is a tactic.”

THURSDAY

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Poverty rate has risen and now: **19%** (1967), **12.5%** (2007), **15%** (2012)

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF SUNDON GENERAL REPORT
\$M saved; views on smoking transformed
Study: People gained 20 years by quitting habit

Anti-tobacco efforts have saved a million lives in the 50 years since the publication of a landmark Surgeon General report, which concluded that tobacco use was causing cancer, led to a sea change in American attitudes toward smoking. Smoking rates have fallen from 42% of adults in 1964 to 19% in 2012, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. By ending tobacco or quitting the habit, people have gained nearly two decades of life, according to the analysis, published Tuesday in the

Why al-Qaeda is back in Iraq
Gunmen gather in Fallujah, 40 miles west of Baghdad, Tuesday to demand that Iraq's Shiite-led government not send troops into the city. The resurgence of al-Qaeda-linked militants in Sunni areas is threatening stability after the exit of U.S. troops. **Stokes, 2A.**

Ex-Defense chief's new book puts White House on defense
Robert Gates' new book may be giving President Obama and his administration a boost. Defense secretary writes that Obama "eventually just showed that the president was not a naïf." Gates also writes that he has a clear plan for winding down the war, which will end this year. National Security Council spokesman Caitlin Hayden said: "Hayden and the president 'deeply appreciate' Gates' service." According to reports by The New York Times, Washington Post and others who obtained early copies of the book, Gates has critical things to say about Vice President Biden, Obama's strategy and doesn't consider the war to be his. The book, it's all about getting out."

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"It's got the possibility for there to be some kind of event, though we don't expect there to be."

Global Rescue CEO Dan Richards

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Not since the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Games and the 2004 Summer Games in Athens — closely following the 9/11 attacks — has Olympic security captured the attention seen so far in the run-up to Sochi.

Last week, more than 30 people were killed in two suicide bombings in the city of Volgograd, a key Russian transportation hub and a place of great symbolic value to Russia. Formerly called Stalingrad, the city held out against a German onslaught during World War II that produced more than a million casualties and left the city a smoking ruin.

The recent attacks prompted Russian President Vladimir Putin to reassert his commitment to the safety of the Olympics and to step up security efforts throughout the nation.

The \$2 billion Sochi security operation, dubbed the “ring of steel” for its heavily fortified perimeter stretching from the Black Sea coast to the Caucasus Mountains to the east, was officially set in motion Tuesday, nearly a month before opening ceremonies.

“The Russians are doing everything that can reasonably be done,” Richards said, adding that the company was there to help identify “safe havens, rally points and methods of egress.”

“It’s got the possibility for there to be some kind of event, though we don’t expect there to be.”

Global Rescue CEO Dan Richards

We’re really there to help and act as enablers,” Richards said, adding that the company will be assisting about 375 athletes, staff and guests.

Among other related services the company is providing is a “set of guidelines for athletes and guests to minimize the possibility that they become targets or have a problem.”

“Our advance preparations are dramatically enhanced for Sochi, particularly considering planning for potential mass evacuation involving dozens or hundreds of people,” he said. “Our medical evacuation, in contrast, is typically (for) just one or a few people.”

Richards declined to discuss the value of the contract. U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association spokesman Tom Kelly also said the group would not discuss “contractual information,” describing Global Rescue as a “fantastic company.”