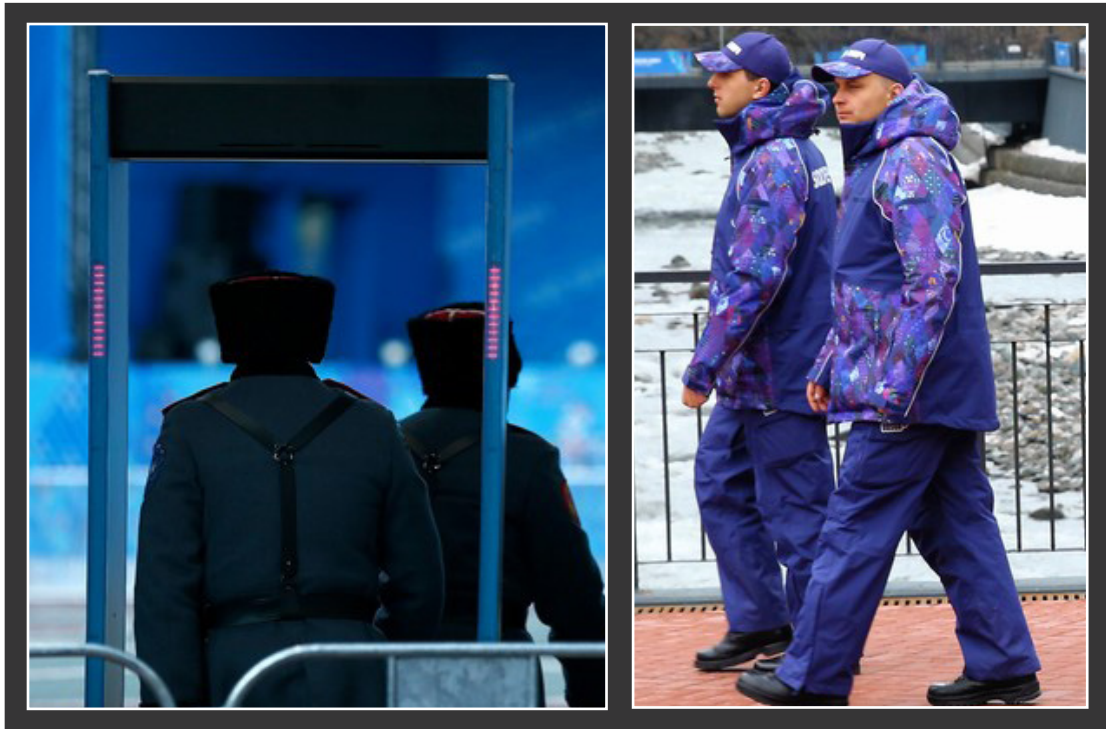


# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

By Paul Sonne and Anton Troianovski | February 10th, 2014

## Sochi's Softened State of Security



A security checkpoint in Sochi *Reuters* Security patrolling the Rosa Khutor 'mountain cluster' village *Getty Images*

### A Ring of Steel Outside These Games Gives Way to a Softer Security Presence Inside

The roughly 40,000 Russian security officials checking bags, scanning water bottles and patrolling train stations to safeguard the Olympic Games are part of one of the world's fiercest security machines. They are also dressed a bit like Barney.

Russia has responded to a terrorist threat from the neighboring North Caucasus that brought two suicide bombings to the city of Volgograd in late December by rolling out what's likely the most extensive security apparatus to guard any modern Olympic Games. But there is barely a Kalashnikov in sight. Fearing that visitors' first impression of Russia would be that of a militarized zone, Russian security services have taken significant measures to make the operation seem warm and fuzzy, a rarity in a place where police often come across as intimidating.

"The main thesis that we're operating under for the event is that security will be unnoticeable," Federal Security Service official Alexei Lavrishchev said last fall. "It will not be in your face, it won't interfere with anyone in public spaces."

The effort is noticeable—or unnoticeable, as it were. Just about all of the Russian security forces—drawn from the police, the military, and other agencies—visible inside and at the entrances to the Olympic Park wear purple pants and athletic jackets decorated with the Sochi 2014 logo and colorful traditional Russian patterns. A heavily fenced-in building that appears to be part of the security operation—an unmarked surveillance blimp is lowered into its parking lot at night—is decorated with a colorful mural showing a giant green tree and purple eggplant.

*"It's present but it's not obtrusive," said Scott Hume, associate director of security operations with Global Rescue, a security firm that is providing support to the U.S. Ski Team and to corporate clients in Sochi.*

That doesn't mean it isn't there. Russian security forces have developed what officials describe as a "ring of steel" with checks around the perimeter of the city. People who bought tickets to the games were required to submit their passport details and a photo, and they must scan their photo-adorned badges at checkpoints to get into the venues and the Olympic Park.

Along the roads, railways and even airport runways around Sochi stand police sentries, sometimes just a few hundred feet apart. The road and railroad leading from the Olympic Park on the Black Sea coast to the cluster of ski resorts where the outdoor events take place is lined with surveillance cameras. Military boats are visible off the coast.



**Scott Hume**  
Associate Director  
of Security Operations  
for Global Recsue

But the Russian organizers appear to have concentrated on securing a large perimeter around Sochi and keeping to a minimum any show of force in the immediate vicinity of Olympic venues. Another part of the security apparatus is surveillance. Andrei Soldatov, a Russian security watchdog and editor of the Russian security website *Agentura.ru*, says that surveillance across the city includes communications interception, drones, sonars to identify hostile submarines and a record amount of CCTV cameras employed in an Olympic area. He says that setup allows for a lower-visibility physical security presence.

Russian security forces didn't respond to a request for comment regarding Sochi's surveillance and security setup. The International Olympic Committee declined to comment.

When prompted, security forces can emerge quickly from the background. When a private Wi-Fi network was switched on during the opening ceremony, which security forces prohibited, a purple-clad agent carrying a large electronic device showed up immediately to investigate.

The approach marks a contrast from other large events that Russia has guarded, including protest marches in Moscow and the recent G-20 summit in St. Petersburg, where uniformed and at-times armed security officers were prominent.

Soldatov says it is clear why Russia would roll out intimidating security officials ahead of a protest in Moscow. "At these events, you don't have ordinary visitors," he says. "You don't have tourist. You don't have visitors you want to impress with your civilized approach." He says that actions against activists ahead of the Games intimidated many people into avoiding Sochi altogether.

Fans and journalists entering the Olympic Park or taking Sochi's new rail system undergo an airport-style security check when entering one of the train stations. On Saturday, the check even included a device to test whether or not the contents of a water bottle were harmless.

But after that, there are few if any checkpoints ahead of the sports facilities, because security personnel have created a connected "clear zone" that allows people who have already gone through security checks to move fairly easily around the venues. The forces are confident enough in the security to allow prominent leaders to mingle close to the fans, as when Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev attended a biathlon event Saturday night.

Perhaps the most noticeable change from past Olympics is the relative lack of visible guns.

"I'm sure they're not that far away," Hume said.

Security has been a high—and usually highly visible—priority at the Olympics ever since terrorists murdered 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team at the 1972 Munich Games. A bombing at the 1996 Atlanta Games killed one and injured 111.

At the London Olympics in 2012, the U.K. deployed army personnel in camouflage who patrolled alongside private security guards with machine guns. At the Salt Lake City Olympics in 2002, Utah deployed its National Guard in uniform. News photographs from those Games, which took place months after 9/11, show soldiers in military garb, guns hanging from their shoulders, guarding a speed skating practice session.

In Sochi, the most-visible guns are those the biathlon racers carry on their backs. The security is far heavier in farther-flung areas of Sochi outside the Olympic vicinity. Terrorism experts have warned that such "soft targets" are more vulnerable than highly-guarded areas closer to the Games themselves.

During the opening ceremony, security was intense in downtown Sochi. Fans entering a downtown "live zone" to watch the festivities had to submit to searches and metal detectors.

But nearly an hour away, nothing so intense greeted visitors to the seaside Olympic Park. Martin Sutterluetti, a 55-year-old visitor from Austria, said he felt certain security was high around the Olympics. But "you don't feel it," he said.

A pair of German tour operators complained about having to register their passports for photographic ID to receive tickets. But Dina Galejeva, 53, visiting from central Russia, said that that early screening probably explains why public security seems subdued at the Games.

"They already know about everyone who is here, anyway," she said. As for the design of those special purple outfits the security personnel are wearing? Ms. Galejeva is a fan. So much so, she said, that she planned to buy one if possible for her son.