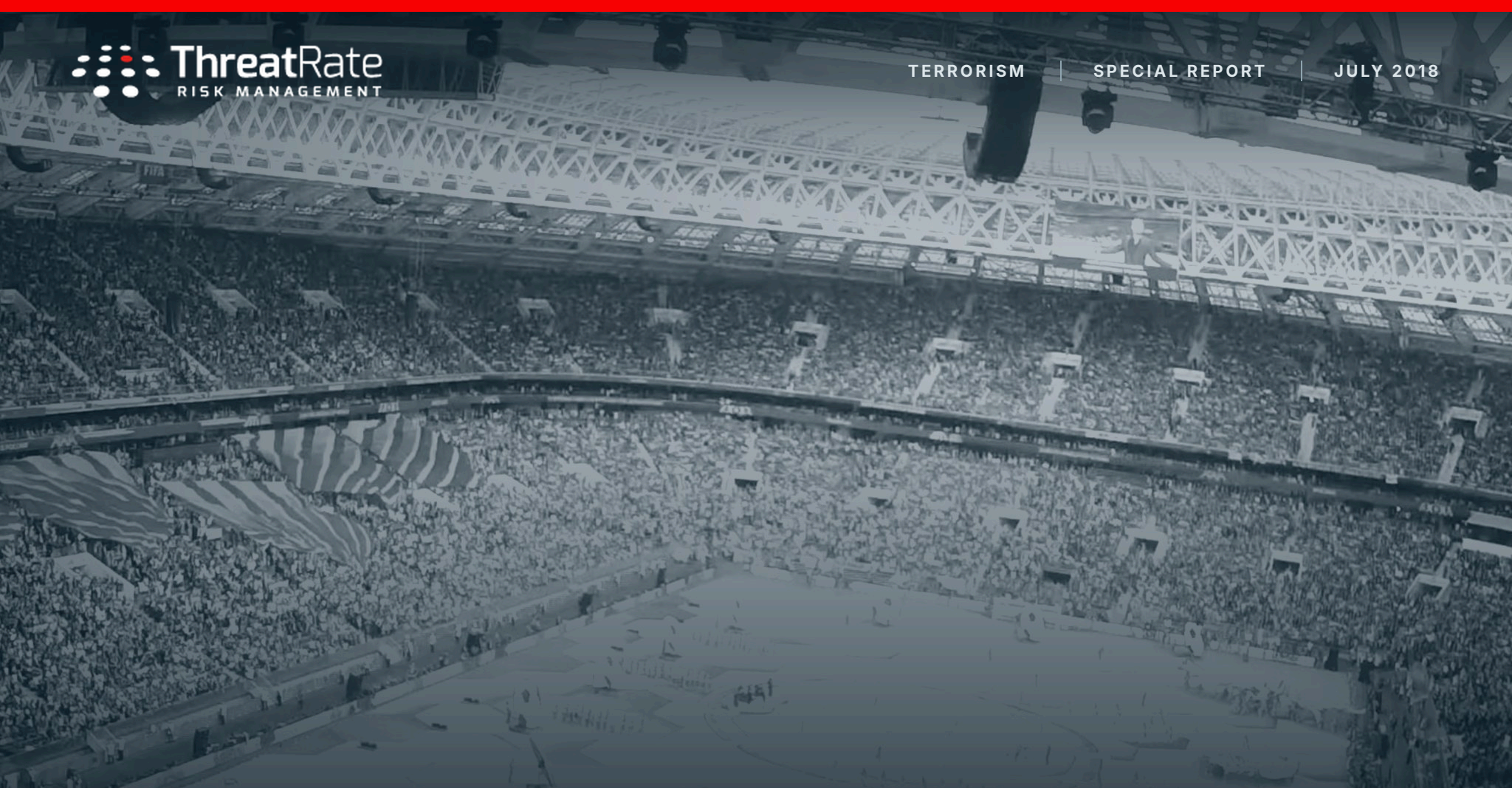


HOW THE 2018 WORLD CUP EVENT WAS KEPT SECURED

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How the 2018 World Cup Event Was Kept Secured

The 2018 World Cup, hosted by Russia, was – as are all World Cups – one of the largest sporting events in the world. More than thirty nations compete over the course of roughly a month in a tournament that is watched both remotely and in-person by countless individuals throughout the world. For many, the World Cup and similar events are intended to be times to acknowledge extremely talented athleticism and to revel in national pride; however, for security in the host country and throughout the world, it is also a time to raise awareness and to be even more vigilant to prevent attacks by criminals, other nation-states, or terrorist organizations.

It is not just the threat of physical attacks on the athletes and the venue that concern security officials throughout the world. Rather, there is also now an ever-present concern about attacks by hackers. This is not merely normal cautionary activity by security services – the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea fell victim to a cyber attack that caused press center televisions to malfunction during the opening ceremonies. To this day, cybersecurity experts are unable to conclusively determine who was behind the attack that has been called the Olympic Destroyer.

Typically, when Western governments think of Russia and cyberattacks, it is usually under the guise of government associated hacking groups inflicting attacks on third parties; thus, there was concern by Western governments that visitors would be targeted by state-sponsored hacking groups. In fact, the United States government warned individuals travelling to the World Cup that hackers or cybercriminals may target their laptops or smartphones during the event and to practice extra vigilance during the event to mitigate the likelihood of one falling victim to an attack.

Physical security is also a high priority to security officials – primarily Russian in this case – during the World Cup. Due to Russia's involvement in the Syrian Civil War and the existence in its country – primarily in the Caucasus – of Islamic terrorist groups, the Kremlin is well-aware that its event is a significant target to those looking to damage Russia's standing in the world. For that reason, the Kremlin made security a top priority, and, as an example, in Kaliningrad – a Russian exclave in Central/Eastern Europe – over one thousand cameras have been put into a stadium and face-recognition technology has been put in place. Security forces have also been conducting exercises including parachuting into stadiums to remediate a hostage situation.

In fact, prior to the start of World Cup, to weaken Islamic extremist groups active within the country, the Russian special forces conducted operations in Dagestan – an area known for its anti-government activities and associations with international Islamic extremist groups. The operations were against sleeper cells and culminated in the use, by the Russian special forces, of a robot to kill more than nearly a dozen militants. The Interior Ministry noted that at one operation site, a grenade launcher, assault weapons, and ammunition were found. In one case, three men were shot dead when

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they attack security forces that prompted them for their identity.

The hope by the Russian government is such operations will weaken militants and render them incapable of operating in a significant manner during the World Cup as the Russian government is anxious for the event to be conducted smoothly as it wants - as governments do – to use it as a testament to the country's success.

Soundbite analytics

- 11 Russian cities will host World Cup matches.
- There are an estimated 900,000 police officers in Russia.
- The average stadium occupancy rate during the tournament was 97%.
- More than a million people in total attended the 2018 World Cup.

SOURCES

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