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France Files Preliminary Terrorism Charges Against Teenager Accused of Plan to Attack Olympic Fans

French authorities have handed preliminary terrorism charges to an 18-year-old accused of a plot targeting spectators attending Olympic soccer games

By [Associated Press](#) | May 31, 2024 |

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MICHEL EULER

FILE - Police officers patrol the Trocadero plaza near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2023. The French Interior Minister said Friday that security authorities have foiled a plan to attack soccer events during the Paris Olympics. Gerald Darmanin said in a statement Friday May 31, 2024 that an 18-year-old man from Chechnya was arrested on May 22 on suspicion of being behind a plan to attack soccer events that will be held in the city of Saint-Etienne, southwest of Lyon. (AP Photo/Michel Euler, File)



at the upcoming [Paris Olympics](#). The interior minister said it was the first such thwarted plot targeting the Games, which start in eight weeks as France is on its highest threat alert level.

The man is accused of planning a "violent action" on behalf of the Islamic State group's jihadist ideology, the national counterterrorism prosecutor's office said in a statement Friday. The man, who was not identified, is behind held in custody pending further investigation.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said in a statement that members of the General Directorate of Internal Security arrested an 18-year-old man from Chechnya on May 22 on suspicion of being behind a plan to attack soccer events that will be held in the southern city of Saint-Etienne.

According to the initial investigation, the man was preparing an attack targeting the Geoffroy-Guichard stadium in Saint-Etienne that will host several soccer matches during the Summer Games. The planned attack was to target spectators and police forces, the statement said. The suspect wanted to attack the Olympic events "to die and become a martyr," the statement also said.

France is on in its highest security alert ahead of the [Paris Olympics and Paralympics](#), which are expected to draw millions of visitors, and run July 26-Aug. 11. Soccer matches will take place in cities across France before the final in Paris' Stade de France.

Darmanin, the interior minister, did not cite a specific security threat against the soccer event, but has said there are [multiple potential threats](#), including those from Islamic extremist groups, violent environmental activists, far-right groups and cyberattacks from Russia or other adversaries.

The Paris Olympics organizing committee said it was made aware of the arrest and praised intelligence and security services. "Security is the highest priority of Paris 2024. We are working daily in close coordination with the Interior Ministry and all stakeholders — and will continue to be fully mobilized," it said in a statement.

Security concerns are notably high for the the [exceptional opening ceremony](#), which brings more than 100 world leaders to the French capital. It involves boats carrying athletes along the Seine River on a 6-kilometer (3.7-mile) open-air parade and huge crowds watching from the embankments.



too high.

Organizers had originally planned to host as many as 600,000 people, most watching free of charge from riverbanks. But security and logistical concerns have led the government to progressively scale back its ambitions. Earlier this year, the overall number of spectators was reduced to around 300,000.



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The French government also decided that [tourists won't be given free access](#) to watch the opening ceremony because of security concerns. Free access will be invitation-only instead.

Extra security is also on hand for the Olympic torch relay, which passed on Friday through the monastery outcropping of Mont-Saint-Michel, which sees thousands of tourists daily.

Follow AP coverage of Paris Olympics <https://apnews.com/hub/2024-paris-olympic-games>

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