

Seven die in suicide attack in southern Russia

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A suicide attack in the southern Russian city of Volgograd on Monday afternoon killed at least seven people. Another 40 were injured, many seriously.

According to media reports the attack took place at 14.05 local time in a bus filled mainly with students of the Volgograd State University. The bomb was apparently detonated by a suicide bomber and consisted of a mixture of TNT, two hand grenades, nails, and screws. The explosion killed six passengers and the suicide bomber.

31 of the 40 injured had to be hospitalized and eight are still in critical condition. Among the wounded are also 14 children under 18 years old, and a toddler.

The Russian authorities believe that the attack was perpetrated by 30-year-old Naida Asijalova, who came from the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan. A bus ticket was found at the scene of the bombing bearing her name and her travel route—Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, to Volgograd. Eyewitnesses say they saw a young woman with a headscarf entering the bus shortly before the explosion.

According to official reports the husband of the alleged assassin, Dmitry Sokolov, is an explosives expert with an Islamist rebel group operating in Makhachkala. The authorities claim he is the builder of the explosive device used in the attack.

The attack in Volgograd is the worst terrorist attack in a non-Caucasian republic of Russia since January 2011, when two suicide bombers killed 36 people in a bomb attack at Moscow's Domodedovo airport.

There have been numerous terrorist attacks by members of Islamist separatist tendencies in the North Caucasus since the beginning of the second Chechen war in 1999. The Kremlin has used the terror attacks and the wars in Chechnya as the pretext for a government-supported campaign against Muslims, far-reaching attacks on democratic rights, and the expansion of the country's police state apparatus.

The introduction of capitalism and several wars have ruined the North Caucasus and resulted in long-term social and political destabilization. The two Russian wars against Chechnya in 1994-1996 and 1999-2006 resulted in the liquidation of around 100,000 people, one-tenth of the population. Additional tens of thousands were injured and displaced.

There have been continuous terror attacks and fierce clashes between Islamists and Russian security forces both in Chechnya and in the neighbouring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan. Due to their geographical position on the border of energy-rich Caucasus and near the Black Sea, the region is of great geostrategic importance to Moscow.

In particular, Dagestan, one of the poorest republics of the country, has for years been the scene of bombings and clashes between security forces and Islamist insurgents.

Last year over 400 people were killed due to terrorist attacks and raids carried out by Russian security forces. Bombings, the assassination of politicians and policemen, as well as the kidnapping and murder of innocent civilians, are a regular occurrence.

In the run up to the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, in southern Russia, in 2014 the Kremlin has stepped up its offensive against Islamist insurgents in recent months.

Dagestan is one of the poorest republics of the country. Around 33 different ethnic groups, all with different languages, live side by side in the predominantly Muslim republic. Only one in ten of the nearly 3 million inhabitants of Dagestan are Russian. The social crisis, ethnic tensions, the Kremlin's brutal wars and a lack of any progressive political perspective have led to a growth of support for Islamist tendencies, especially amongst youth.

The assassination in Volgograd underscores the fragility of the region. Despite the enormous brutality

employed by the Kremlin in its so-called “war on terror,” it has been unable to contain the Islamist separatist movement in the North Caucasus.

The attack was regarded by sections of the Russian press as a warning by the Islamists that they are capable of endangering the Winter Olympics planned in nearby Sochi. It is not yet clear which group organised the latest terror attack.

Terrorist threats against the Winter Games have been made by Doku Umarov, head of the Caucasus Emirate group, which has proven links to Al Qaeda. Umarov has claimed responsibility for the 2011 terrorist attacks at Domodedovo airport and the 2010 bomb attack in the Moscow metro, which killed 76 people and injured hundreds.

The Caucasus Emirate and other Islamist tendencies in the North Caucasus also support the western-financed Islamist opposition to the Syrian President Assad. According to the Russian authorities and media sources, around 200 fighters from Dagestan are fighting in Syria on the side of the anti-government opposition, with another 100 anti-Assad fighters coming from Chechnya.



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