

Explosion in St. Petersburg kills at least 10

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On Monday, April 3, at about 2:40 PM, an explosion occurred on a subway car in St. Petersburg that was traveling between the “Sennaya Square” and the “Technological Institute” metro stations. Eleven people were killed and around 50 people, including children, were injured.

The power of the blast indicated an equivalent of 300 grams of TNT. One more explosive device was found and defused at the station at “Uprising Square.” It was 3 to 5 times more powerful.

The Investigative Committee of Russia opened a criminal case for a suspected terrorist act, although it announced that it was verifying other possibilities. No terrorist groups have so far taken responsibility for what has happened.

Soon after the explosion, all metro stations in St. Petersburg were closed, and security measures were increased at places where people gather, on public transportation and at the Pulkovo airport.

For several hours, the city of five million was practically paralyzed, since remaining city transport could not handle the flood of passengers, the bulk of whom usually use the metro. No panic or disorder was observed in the city as thousands of inhabitants had to walk long distances on foot.

The governor of Petersburg, Georgy Poltavchenko, declared three days of mourning for the victims.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was in Petersburg on the day of the terrorist act. He was meeting with participants of a media forum under the aegis of the pro-Kremlin All-Russian Popular Front, as well as with the President of Belorussia, Aleksandr Lukashenko. During his discussion with the Belorussian leader, Putin made a brief statement, expressing sympathy for the victims and saying that “security organs and special services are at work and doing everything in order to discover the causes of what happened and give a full evaluation of what had occurred.”

Later he placed flowers at the “Technological Institute” metro station.

During the investigation, two people were declared to be under suspicion for preparing the explosions. In addition, according to an unnamed source in the security forces, the explosion in the St. Petersburg metro might have been caused by a suicide terrorist who tentatively appeared to be a 23-year-old from Central Asia who was connected with radical Islamic groups.

For now, it is impossible with any degree of certainty to say who is guilty of this crime, whose victims were dozens of peaceful citizens. However, there are undoubtedly factors which may have played a role in this tragic event.

Primarily, in the course of the last 25 years, Russia has repeatedly encountered manifestations of Islamic terrorism, whose growth in many regions of the former Soviet Union—in particular, in the Northern Caucasus and in Central Asia—has been aided by the catastrophic social consequences of the restoration of capitalism carried out by the former Stalinist bureaucracy and accompanied by an outburst of national, ethnic and religious conflicts.

Russia conducted two bloody wars in Chechnya (in 1994-1996, and also in 1999 to the beginning of the 2000s), killing tens of thousands of people. Many cities of this republic in the Northern Caucasus were turned into ruins, including its capital, Grozny.

The growth of Islamic fundamentalism was also aided by the policies of leading powers in the West, in particular the United States, who viewed it as an instrument for advancing their own interests in the region, by weakening Russia internally and destroying its territorial integrity.

For the last year and a half, Russia has been drawn into the civil war in Syria on the side of the government of Bashar al-Assad, conducting military operations

against a number of Islamic armed groups supported by the USA, European powers, Turkey and the monarchies of the Persian Gulf.

In an extraordinary statement last year, US State Department Spokesman John Kirby said at a news conference that unless Russia “stops the violence” in Syria, “Extremist groups will continue to exploit the vacuums that are there in Syria to expand their operations, which could include attacks against Russian interests, perhaps even Russian cities.”

According to the media accounts, several thousand emigrants from the former USSR are fighting in the ranks of the anti-government coalition. After painful defeats at the hands of Damascus, achieved in part due to bombing by Russian air forces, leading to the loss of Aleppo by the Islamic armed opposition at the end of last year, many of these fighters could return to their native land in search of revenge.



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