

Thousands mourn victims of school shooting in Crimea

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Thousands of people attended funerals and memorial services in recent days for the victims of a mass shooting that took place in Crimea, Russia last Wednesday. More burials in towns across the country are expected this week, as families from as far away as the Ural Mountains mourn their loss.

Just before noon on October 17, Vladislav Roslyakov opened fire at the Kerch Polytechnical College, killing 21 people and injuring 73. The fourth-year student, aged 18, began his rampage in the college's cafeteria, where he detonated a homemade bomb, according to some reports. He then made his way through the building, shooting bystanders at random before turning his gun on himself.

Among the dead were five staff members of the college. The other fatalities were students at the vocational institution, which offers training in a variety of applied sciences. Of the students killed, a majority were under the age of 18.

A special team of pediatric surgeons from Saint Petersburg was dispatched to nearby hospitals to help treat the youngest among the injured. Doctors are dealing with shrapnel wounds as well as gunshot wounds as a result of the explosive device apparently set off during the attack.

There is some speculation, based on video evidence, that Roslyakov had an accomplice. A copy of surveillance camera footage was recently posted on *Vesti.ru*, but has since been taken down, after objections to making it public.

Public officials have announced that families of the dead will receive 1 million rubles, just over \$15,000. Those of the injured will get half that amount.

Kerch, the site of the tragedy, is a port city of just under 150,000 on the far eastern edge of Crimea. In addition to attracting tourists to its ancient ruins and

nearby beaches along the Black and Azov seas, Kerch is home to fishing, metallurgical, iron and shipbuilding enterprises. A newly opened bridge connects Kerch and all of Crimea to Russia's mainland.

The Crimean peninsula, formerly a part of Ukraine, became a region of Russia in 2014 after a popular referendum held in the aftermath of a far-right coup in Kiev. In opposition to the anti-Russian government installed in Ukraine with the support of the US and Germany, in March 2014 Crimea's population—overwhelmingly Russian-speaking—voted to become a part of their eastern neighbor. While the Kremlin has sought to make much of the social and economic improvements made in Crimea in the aftermath of Russia's takeover, wages still remain well below the national average and much of the population struggles to pay for basic necessities.

Roslyakov's motives are unknown. He was, by all accounts, a quiet and socially isolated young man. In 2016, he stopped using his social media accounts but continued to have an internet presence using a number of pseudonyms. According to press reports, Roslyakov followed sites that promoted Nazis and violence and viewed material on executions and bomb-making. He had a gun permit and purchased his weapon legally, although Russia has relatively tight gun laws and widespread gun violence is uncommon.

Prior to carrying out the attack, Roslyakov destroyed his personal effects in a fire, including his clothes, laptop and cell phone. Investigators are currently working to retrieve information from his electronic devices.

There is some speculation, based on what he was wearing at the time of the shooting and the videos he watched online, that Roslyakov modeled himself after the Columbine massacre killers. In 1999, two seniors at

Columbine High School in Colorado murdered 12 people in one of the first mass school shootings in the US. Dozens more such horrific events have taken place at schools in the US since.

The Kremlin blamed Western influences for the crime, with Russian President Vladimir Putin declaring that one could see in the event the effects of “globalization” and “social networks.” The Russian authorities, which preside over a society with extreme levels of social inequality and widespread feelings of despair, are incapable of providing any sort of honest account, much less an explanation, of what kind of reality might drive an individual to such psychopathic levels of violence. Instead, they seek to use the tragedy as a means to crack down on the internet and promote Russian nationalism by implying that what happened is the product of a Western culture they oppose.

In Ukraine there has been an effort to blame Russian influence for Roslyakov’s murder spree. One pro-Kiev human rights group declared that it was a product of the militarization of everyday life in the region, which they insist was illegally invaded and seized by Moscow. The idea, however, that such pro-Ukrainian forces are concerned about mass violence is absurd. The government in Kiev is under the control of far-right politicians who allow murderous gangs of Nazi sympathizers to rage around the country.



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