

At least 60 dead, 145 wounded, in Moscow terrorist attack

Clara Weiss
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A terror attack at a popular Moscow concert hall, Crocus City Hall, Friday evening local time left at least 60 dead and 145 injured. Russian authorities declared that the number of dead may well rise. Among those injured are several children. The Afghan-based fundamentalist Islamist group ISIS-K has claimed responsibility for what is the largest terrorist attack in Russia in two decades.

The attack involved a group of at least four armed men who began shooting at the crowd of some 6,000 people shortly before the beginning of a concert by the popular rock group “Piknik” (Picnic) at 8pm local time. Video footage of the attack has widely circulated on social media and survivors of the attack have described horrific scenes to the media. A woman called Eva told *Gazeta.Ru*, “First we saw something that looked like fireworks, and then the sounds of gunfire began, people shouting to run. Of course, people were in panic. People in Crocus were building barricades, trying to break the windows.”

The Russian secret service FSB and Russia’s national guard stormed the building but reports indicate that the rescue operation took well over an hour. According to Russian media reports, drivers who passed by the building helped people evacuate the site of the attack.

In addition to the machine gunfire, several explosive devices went off, setting the theater ablaze and leading to the collapse of its roof. Russian media reports indicated that the fire extended to an area of almost 13,000 square meters.

As of this writing, fire-fighting operations were ongoing and Russian authorities were still looking for the perpetrators. Heightened security measures were introduced at metro stations throughout the capital as well as the airports in the Moscow area, and all large-scale public events in the capital were canceled for this weekend. Russian President Vladimir Putin has not yet issued a statement.

The terror attack took place as tensions between NATO

and Russia, which are engaged in a proxy war in Ukraine, were reaching fever-pitch. Days before the attack, Vladimir Putin was confirmed the victor in last weekend’s presidential elections. The elections were preceded by announcements of French President Emmanuel Macron that NATO was considering to deploy troops to Ukraine amidst a severe crisis of the NATO-backed Ukrainian army. In the days leading up to the election, a series of missile strikes on the border region of Belgorod killed at least 5 civilians and forced the closure of schools and shopping malls. During the election itself, Russian neo-Nazi militias, backed by Ukraine and NATO, launched an incursion of Russian territory. It was the first attack on Russian territory involving tanks since the defeat of the Nazis by the Red Army in World War II.

Over the past two years of the war, terrorist attacks, mostly targeting prominent supporters of the Kremlin in the war, drone strikes on Moscow as well as Russian oil refineries and ports, have become a central component of NATO’s and Ukraine’s war strategy. Hours before the attack took place, Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin’s press secretary, for the first time used the term “war”, as opposed to the official term of a “special military operation”, to describe Russia’s conflict with NATO in Ukraine. Peskov stated, “Yes, it started as a special military operation. But as soon as this gang developed and the collective west started participating in the conflict on the side of Ukraine, for us it became a war.”

Volodymyr Zelensky and several of his advisers were quick to deny wide-spread speculations that Ukraine was behind the terrorist attacks and John Kirby, Coordinator for Strategic Communications for the National Security Council, declared that the US believed that Ukraine was not involved in the attack.

On March 7, the US embassy in Moscow had issued a security alert, urging Americans to avoid crowded places in the Russian capital for the next 48 hours in view of

“imminent” plans by terrorists to target large gatherings, including concerts. Several Western embassies repeated the warnings. On Tuesday, Putin denounced these warnings as “provocative statements” and “blackmail” aimed to “destabilize” the country.

When asked about the March 7 warning of the US embassy on Friday, John Kirby stated that “I don’t think that was related to this specific attack.”

Shortly thereafter, ISIS-K (Islamic State-Khorasan), the Afghanistan-based group of the Islamist terrorist organization Islamic State (ISIS), claimed responsibility for the attack on social media. US officials confirmed the claim and told the *New York Times* that they had gathered intelligence in March about an impending attack. According to the *Times*, which routinely functions as a mouthpiece for the US intelligence services, US officials “had privately told Russian officials about the intelligence pointing to an impending attack.”

As of this writing, the Russian authorities have not commented on the claims by the US or ISIS-K. In February, the Russian secret service, FSB claimed that it had broken up an ISIS cell in Kaluga, a city southwest of Moscow, and killed two ISIS members from Central Asia. In early March, the FSB reported that it had “liquidated” another ISIS cell in the Kaluga region, which was composed of militant Islamists from Afghanistan.

Friday’s attack was the deadliest attack in Russia since the 2004 Beslan school siege by Islamist fundamentalists, which killed at least 334 people, roughly half of them children, and the deadliest in the Russian capital since the 2002 siege of a Moscow theater which resulted in more than 170 dead.

These sieges were part of a series of Islamist terrorist attacks that rocked Russia, especially in the 2000s. There have also been several Islamist terrorist attacks over the past decade, but virtually all of them took place in the predominantly Muslim North Caucasus.

That wave of terrorist attacks took place in the context of two brutal wars that the Kremlin waged on Chechnya and an Islamist separatist movement between 1994 and 2009 to prevent the break-off of the predominantly Muslim North Caucasian republic from the Russian Federation. It is estimated that up to a tenth of the Chechen population was killed in these wars.

Especially in the 1990s, Chechen separatist forces enjoyed the backing of US imperialism which has long sought to foster separatist, ethnic and religious tensions in the multi-national country, in order to bring about the destabilization and break-up of Russia. The country is

home to about 14 million Muslims (roughly ten percent of the population.)

Islamist separatists from the North Caucasus are known to have developed close ties with al-Qaeda, ISIS as well as the Taliban which have ruled Afghanistan since the US troop withdrawal in 2021. Other Chechen radical Islamists have joined US-backed Islamist militias that have been fighting against the Russian-backed Assad government in the civil war in Syria.

The close ties between Chechen Islamist separatists and various Islamist fundamentalist groups throughout Central Asia and the Middle East, many of which have connections to the US, have been a central concern of the Kremlin for many years.

In 2021, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that US intelligence agents and elite counterinsurgency troops, who had been trained by the CIA and the Pentagon during the 20-year US occupation of Afghanistan, were joining the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K), the group that now claims responsibility for the attack in Moscow. As the WSWS explained at the time, the CIA had “intimate connections to the emergence of ISIS.” The CIA had also trained Osama bin Laden and other future al-Qaeda leaders as part of the US-funded mujahideen guerrilla war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

Regardless of the immediate culprit of Friday’s terrorist attack, it is clear that it took place in a context of an expanding and escalating war against Russia by the imperialist powers. This conflict already extends well beyond Ukraine to the Middle East and other parts of the world. It has destabilized the entire former Soviet Union, large parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe, and the forces unleashed by this growing global conflict involve not only Russian and Ukrainian neo-Nazis but also Islamist militias that have been bred by decades of US wars of plunder in the Middle East.



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