

Instant denials of Ukrainian intelligence involvement in Russian terror attack are not credible

Clara Weiss
25 March 2024

Friday's terror attack at the Crocus City Hall in Moscow, which killed at least 137 people and wounded over 180, is a dangerous new stage in the imperialist war against Russia.

According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, the perpetrators were captured on their way to the Ukrainian border, where "a window" had been prepared for them to cross into Ukraine. The four main suspects were identified as immigrants from Tajikistan, a desperately impoverished former Soviet republic in Central Asia. They have pleaded guilty and claim to have acted on behalf of as yet unidentified intermediaries for money. The Afghan-based Islamist terrorist group ISIS-K has claimed responsibility for the attack.

The principal mouthpieces of US imperialism, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, have promptly initiated a campaign to deny the involvement of the US and Ukraine in this attack. Both outlets immediately dismissed Putin's statement about a connection to Ukraine, citing unnamed "US security officials." Without providing any evidence, they simply echoed the claims of the White House and Kiev, made almost as soon as the attack occurred, that neither the US nor Ukraine were involved.

How is it possible for the major US media outlets to immediately exclude any connection between this attack and a war raging between Russia and Ukraine, with significant US involvement?

In fact, their claims have no more credibility than their earlier denials of US and Ukrainian involvement in the bombing of the German-Russian Nord Stream gas pipeline. There have been many instances where US denials of culpability later proved to be false. This places the burden of proof on the US to prove its innocence. The attack has the mark of the CIA and its proxies in Kiev all over it.

The war propaganda in the media about the terrorist attack reveals its political purpose. The *Times* wrote, with barely concealed glee, that the attack was "a blow to Mr. Putin's aura as a leader for whom national security is paramount."

Now, the *Times* surmised, Russians "might ask whether Mr. Putin, with the invasion and his conflict with the West, truly has the country's security interests at heart—or whether he is woefully forsaking them, as many of his opponents say he is."

Taking an almost identical line, the *Washington Post* published a piece under the headline, "Terrorist attack in Russia exposes vulnerabilities of Putin's regime." It gloated that the attack "smashed through Putin's efforts to present Russia as strong, united and resilient," and quoted a "Moscow businessman" as criticizing the "lack of responsibility for security at large public events" under Putin.

The same line was taken by the *Financial Times*, which declared that Russian allegations of Ukrainian responsibility serve to "deflect attention from gaps in Moscow's security system, which have widened since Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago."

The claim that Putin was "distracted" by the Ukraine war does not refute US-Ukrainian involvement in the attack. Rather, it might have been a factor that led NATO plotters to believe that an attack had a high probability of success.

Central to the imperialist propaganda about the supposed "non-involvement" of the US and Ukraine is the fact that ISIS-K has claimed responsibility for the attack. But the involvement of ISIS-K would not disprove Ukrainian and US involvement. On the contrary.

ISIS-K is largely a creation of US imperialism and its decades-long wars in the Middle East and Central Asia. In 2021, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that US-trained intelligence agents and elite counterinsurgency troops were joining ISIS-K in Afghanistan. Tajikistan, from where the suspected terrorists hail, has long been entangled in the armed conflicts in Afghanistan, going back to the 1980s, when the US trained and funded Islamist fundamentalists in its war against the Soviet Union.

In this context, the March 7 warning by the US embassy in

Moscow of an impending major terrorist attack in Russia can only be interpreted as an attempt to create an alibi for the US in the lead-up to the operation by its proxies.

The involvement of Ukrainian intelligence, which coordinates its day-to-day operations closely with NATO and the US, is also all but evident. In January 2023, the *Times* reported that nationalist and far-right elements from across the former Soviet Union, including Russia's North Caucasus and Central Asia, had flocked to Ukraine to fight in NATO's war against Russia.

As the *Times* wrote, "most of them harbor long-term political ambitions to return home and overthrow the Russian and Belarusian governments. ... The volunteers themselves say that they are acting with the full knowledge and under the orders of the Ukrainian Army and intelligence services. Many of their operations are covert, including dangerous reconnaissance or sabotage missions behind Russian lines."

And just days before the Moscow terror attack, the *Times* hailed Russian neo-Nazis who "were openly backed by Ukraine's military intelligence agency" and who carried out an incursion into Russia during the presidential elections. The *Times* called them "rebellious Russians."

Their "daring attacks," the *Times* wrote, could help "undermine the sense of stability in Russia and divert the country's military resources from Ukraine."

The line of argument developed by the *Times* and rebroadcast in the world press reveals the political purpose of the terrorist operation. With NATO's proxy forces in Ukraine facing a military debacle, the terror attack in Moscow was part of the efforts to open up a second front in the war, within Russia itself.

The aim is three-fold: First, to embolden opposition to the Putin regime within the oligarchy and state apparatus; second, to provoke a military response by the Kremlin that can serve as the pretext for a further escalation of the war by NATO; and third, to foster ethnic and religious tensions within Russia that would destabilize the regime and facilitate the carve-up of the entire region by the imperialist powers.

This strategy stands in a long and sinister tradition. The Nazis mobilized nationalist and far-right forces of the so-called Intermarium alliance throughout Eastern Europe and the Caucasus when they invaded the Soviet Union in World War II. During the Cold War, the US deployed these fascist networks in its covert warfare against the Soviet Union. The Stalinist destruction of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism enabled the imperialist powers to pursue this reactionary strategy on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

This goes not least for Russia itself. For over a decade, the imperialist powers have systematically built up an anti-Putin faction in the Russian oligarchy and state around the late

Alexei Navalny. While glorified by the *Times* as a "democrat," Navalny for years co-organized Russia's largest annual fascist event, the "Russian March," denounced immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia as "cockroaches" and maintained close ties to separatist tendencies throughout the country. Other prominent opposition leaders, the ex-oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Ilya Ponomaryov, openly advocate the break-up of the Russian Federation into a series of separate statelets.

While over 70 percent of Russia's population of about 140 million are ethnic Russians, the country is home to over 190 ethnic groups. Muslims comprise at least a tenth of the population. Many of them live in a few largely Muslim republics as well as the North Caucasus, where the Kremlin waged two brutal wars against Chechen separatists between 1994 and 2009. In addition, there are some 17 million immigrants living in Russia who mostly come from former Soviet republics such as Tajikistan and belong to the most exploited sections of the working class.

The social basis and politics of the oligarchic Putin regime make it highly vulnerable to the machinations of the imperialist powers. Its invocation of Great Russian chauvinism and nationalism serves to disorient, divide and demobilize the working class, and, ultimately, aids the imperialist war aims.

There is a real danger that the Putin regime and other right-wing forces will try to direct popular shock over the terror attack toward the targeting of different national and ethnic communities, while stepping up state repression. Already, on Saturday, Moscow police launched raids on immigrant living quarters, and social media reports indicated a developing boycott of predominantly Tajik cab drivers.

The Moscow terrorist attack is a dangerous and criminal escalation of a war that has already claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. The recklessness of the imperialist powers is staggering. While backing the cold-blooded genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza by Israel, they are encouraging violent national and ethnic conflicts in Russia and risk the deployment of nuclear weapons by the Putin regime.

The only viable path for the working class out of this dangerous situation lies in the development of a powerful, socialist anti-war movement, which must be rooted in the traditions of revolutionary Marxism and its fight for the international unification of the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact