

# Unraveling the Geopolitical Fallout: Analyzing the Moscow Concert Hall Attack and Its Ramifications

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May 2024

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*This analysis delves into the tragic events surrounding the terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall in Moscow, revealing the profound geopolitical implications for Russia and its relations with the international community. The assault, perpetrated by gunmen affiliated with the Islamic State group, showcased the vulnerability of Russian society to extremist threats despite prior warnings from the United States. The attack highlighted the complexities of Russia's security landscape, with President Putin's response reflecting a delicate balance between asserting sovereignty and deflecting blame onto external actors, notably Ukraine.*

**Tragedy at Crocus City Hall: the Deadly Assault and Its Aftermath**

Crocus City Hall, an expansive entertainment and commercial complex nestled in Krasnogorsk, a suburb adorning the northwestern periphery of Moscow. [Crafted by the vision of the Azerbaijan-born magnate and real estate tycoon, Aras Agalarov, whose preeminence included notable connections to Donald Trump prior to his ascendancy to the U.S. presidency.](#) The nexus between Agalarov and Trump crystallized during the co-ownership of the Miss Universe beauty pageant, culminating in a pact to hosted the prestigious event at Crocus in 2013.

On March 22nd, the auditorium at Crocus City Hall was approximately seventy-five percent occupied, as eager attendees awaited the performance of Picnic, a band that has maintained its popularity since the Soviet era of the early 1980s. Despite the concert being sold out in the 6,200-seat venue, it appeared that some members of the audience were still engaged in enjoying refreshments from the buffet or were in the process of depositing their heavy coats at the cloakroom. It was 7-10 minutes before the start of the show, scheduled for 8 p.m. expectant atmosphere was disrupted by a sudden event— a series of sharp, popping sounds shattered the ambiance. [„We heard what seemed like the sound of fireworks.”– stated one of the concert attendees Dave Primov<sup>1</sup>.](#) However reality proved far more sinister: based on the video footages a group of at least four seemingly experienced individuals armed with automatic -Kalashnikov- weapons entered the premises, opened fire and detonated explosives. Soon thereafter, the hall was engulfed in flames. Thus began the deadliest assault on Russian soil in recent memory, claiming the lives of 137 individuals and leaving over 180 wounded. Authorities said that the victims came from Krasnogorsk, Khimki and other nearby towns on Moscow's north-western fringe.

Some of them worn vests laden with assorted ammunition. Additionally, it was noted that at least two assailants were seen carrying backpacks, presumed to contain Molotov cocktails. Furthermore the attackers deployed explosives during the assault, with at least two detonations occurring. Disturbing footage circulated online depicted individuals atop the concert hall's roof, engulfed in flames, pleading for assistance. Simultaneously, other recordings captured scenes of panic and terror, as individuals crawled on hands and knees to flee the venue or hastily descended staircases. According to some reports, the entire ordeal, lasting

approximately 20 minutes, concluded with the suspects fleeing the scene. Tragically, hundreds were left dead or injured in the aftermath. The casualties included those who succumbed to gunshot wounds, as well as individuals who perished due to smoke inhalation.

In the meantime, the highly anticipated Picnic performance remained in a state of uncertainty, as the band members failed to make an appearance on the revered stage. Their abrupt departure from the venue served as a somber reflection of the unfolding tragedy. [Yury Chernyshevsky, the band's spokesperson, expressed a profound sense of doubt, raising concerns about safety in the midst of the chaotic situation.](#)

Russian Member of Parliament Alexander Khinshtein reported that the assailants made their escape in a white Renault car. He stated that law enforcement attempted to intercept the vehicle in the Bryansk region, approximately 340 kilometers (210 miles) from Moscow, resulting in the apprehension of two individuals while the others managed to evade capture. Approximately 14 hours following the initial reports of gunfire, [Russia's Federal Security Service \(FSB\) declared the arrest of 11 individuals, four tajik people of whom were deemed to have direct involvement in the incident.](#) At the end four suspects were brought before a court in Moscow and identified as Dalerdzhon Mirzoyev, Saidakrami Murodali Rachabalizoda, Shamsidin Fariduni, and Muhammadsobir Fayzov. They were charged with acts of terrorism and are likely to face life imprisonment.

### **Global Response: Condemnation and Complexity After the Moscow Terror Attack**

The significance of the terrorist act is indicated by the reaction of the international community despite of the current -ever-worsening- relationship with the Russian Federation. [The UN Security Council condemned the event as a heinous and cowardly terrorist attack.](#) Moreover leaders around the world - such as the Israeli, Turkish or French presidents, the Polish Prime Minister or the President of the European Commission- have expressed their condolences and condemnation of the terror attack that took place.

Through its Amaq news agency, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for an assault on a sizable congregation of individuals identified as Christians in Krasnogorsk purportedly resulting in numerous casualties. In this post on Telegram the group also claimed that the

gunmen had managed to escape afterwards. However the authenticity of this assertion could not be immediately substantiated. Nonetheless, confirmation of the Islamic State group's involvement in the Moscow attack was provided by U.S. intelligence officials, who cited the claim made by the group's branch based in Afghanistan. Furthermore, in recent weeks, U.S. intelligence agencies had acquired intelligence indicating that the ISIS branch was plotting an attack in Moscow. [In adherence to its longstanding "duty to warn" policy, the U.S. government discreetly shared this information with Russian authorities on the 7th of March.](#) Earlier this month, western countries led by the US even had issued terror warnings and told their citizens not to join public gatherings in Russia. The embassy conveyed on March 8th that it was ["closely monitoring intelligence indicating that extremists are preparing to target sizable congregations in Moscow, including concerts, and cautioned U.S. citizens to steer clear of large gatherings for the ensuing 48 hours."](#)<sup>2</sup>

Regarding the assault on the Christian community, [Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, an authority on the terrorist organization, suggested that it mirrored the group's strategy of striking wherever they can as part of a global 'fight the infidels and apostates everywhere' approach.](#) For instance, in October 2015, an explosive device planted by ISIS brought down a Russian passenger plane over Sinai, claiming the lives of all 224 individuals on board, predominantly Russian vacationers returning from Egypt. While primarily operational in Syria and Iraq, ISIS also maintains a presence in Afghanistan and Africa, with several claimed attacks in Russia's volatile Caucasus region and other areas in recent years. The Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), an extremist faction aiming to establish a caliphate spanning Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran, has drawn attention from the United States. In addition the group has recruited combatants from Russia and various former Soviet Union territories. According to Colin Clarke, a New York-based counterterrorism analyst cited by the New York Times, IS-K has focused its attention on Russia over the last two years. Clarke highlighted that the group accuses the Kremlin of being responsible for Muslim casualties, citing Russia's involvement in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Syria as reasons for its fixation.

ISIS-K has not explicitly claimed responsibility for the attack, unlike ISIS core in the Middle East, which has not specified which regional branch carried it out. However, ISIS-K released a 30-page pamphlet on Monday celebrating the attack, indicating significant involvement. The

statement also criticizes the Taliban, arguing that Russia deserved the attack due to the Taliban's failure to prevent international attacks from Afghanistan, as promised in the U.S.-Taliban agreement signed in Doha in February 2020. Furthermore, it condemns the Taliban for sympathizing with Russia after the Moscow attack, citing Russia's targeting of Muslims in Syria in support of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Additionally, ISIS-K threatens to carry out more external attacks beyond Afghanistan. The message highlights various factors influencing ISIS-K's decision to carry out attacks, emphasizing the need for further confirmation of their involvement in specific incidents. It suggests that ISIS-K targets Russia not only for ideological reasons but also in response to its actions in the Syrian civil war. Furthermore, it indicates that ISIS-K's targeting decisions are influenced by competitive dynamics with other militant groups, particularly the Taliban, aiming to assert dominance and attract support for their cause. The combination of ideological fervor and competitiveness may explain ISIS-K's diverse range of targets, spanning from traditional areas like Afghanistan and Pakistan to newer regions such as Iran, Europe, and Russia.

Following the assault, an outpouring of condemnation, shock, and solidarity with the victims of the concert hall attack emanated from across the globe. Some observers on Russian social media platforms raised questions about how authorities, known for their stringent surveillance and pressure on Kremlin critics, failed to detect the threat and forestall the attack. Russian officials announced heightened security measures at Moscow's airports, railway stations, and the extensive subway network. Mass gatherings were cancelled by Moscow's mayor, while theaters and museums closed their doors for the weekend. Also across the expansive breadth of Russia authorities needed to fortify preemptive security measures and cancel forthcoming weekend festivities. For example in the bustling metropolis of St. Petersburg, reports emerged of hurried evacuations from prominent commercial hubs, heightening the pervasive sense of unease.

Amidst the tumultuous backdrop, Vladimir Putin as the paramount figure in Russian governance, maintained a conspicuous silence, his restraint emblematic of the gravity of the moment. As the day of the attack near passed, the Kremlin issued a succinct communiqué outlining Putin's purported acknowledgment of the unfolding catastrophe and subsequent

directives, albeit lacking substantive detail, as conveyed by spokesperson Dmitry Peskov. [The tragedy later denounced by President Putin as "a bloody, barbaric terrorist act."](#)<sup>3</sup> [Although the Kremlin refrained from attributing blame immediately, certain Russian legislators swiftly accused Ukraine and advocated for intensified military actions.](#) Notably, hours prior to the assault, the Russian military launched a widespread barrage on Ukraine's power infrastructure, resulting in substantial damage and leaving over a million individuals without electricity.

It is a legitimate inquiry to ponder why the Russian political leadership did not accord due gravity to the intelligence provided by the United States, nor undertake measures to thoroughly investigate or preemptively brace for the looming specter of a potential assault. The Moscow attack raises particularly difficult issues for Vladimir Putin at a time of international tension and mistrust and much of that comes because of a warning from Washington. The answer lies in the reaction of President Putin, who extended his grip on Russia for another six years in the March presidential vote, denounced the Western warnings as an attempt to intimidate Russians. He interpreted this as hallmarks of open blackmail, aiming to intimidate and unsettle the Russian society. Three days before the attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed the Federal Security Service (FSB) to ensure national security. He emphasized to the assembled security personnel the necessity of supporting what he referred to as the "special military operation," the official term for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. [Putin asserted that Ukraine had transitioned to what he labeled "terrorist tactics," while also directly addressing what he characterized as "provocative statements" from Western entities regarding potential assaults within Russia.](#)<sup>4</sup> He denounced these warnings as resembling "outright blackmail" and as efforts to intimidate and destabilize Russian society. This perspective suggests that the prevailing mistrust between the United States and Russia might have led Moscow to disregard the warnings, interpreting them as part of a broader attempt to threaten Russia, particularly in the context of the Ukraine conflict.

### **Impact of the Attack on the Russian Political Leadership**

The aftermath of the attack on the Moscow concert hall appears to be paving the way for stricter governance under President Vladimir Putin, following his highly orchestrated electoral victory last month. Less than a week after the vote that extended his tenure for another six

years, the attack dealt a significant blow to Putin's authority. It highlighted a major lapse by his security agencies, despite receiving prior warning from the U.S. about extremist plans for an imminent attack.

Critics of the Kremlin state that the relentless focus of security forces on suppressing dissent has also led them to overlook genuine threats, reminiscent of the stringent measures seen during the Soviet era. In what appears to be an effort to divert attention from this security lapse and garner support for the conflict in Ukraine, Putin and his associates have baselessly alleged Kyiv's involvement in the arrest of four suspects near the Ukrainian border. Russia has also failed to provide any evidence of a Ukrainian link. Meanwhile, ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack. Putin's efforts to suggest Ukrainian involvement appear to be simply designed to divert blame and attention from his and his security service's inability to protect the Russian population.

Presumably aiming to bolster his public image and authority, President Putin ominously warned that terrorism is a "double-edged weapon." Shortly after this statement, videos and photos surfaced showing suspects in the mass shooting allegedly being mistreated by Russian security forces, without any official reprimand. While Russian news outlets released video confessions implicating them in the attack, doubts have been raised about the credibility of these statements due to visible signs of severe physical abuse when the men appeared in court. Human Rights Watch confirmed the identity of the suspects in court pretrial hearings based on photographs and videos. Political analyst Kirill Rogov remarked, "[All that serves a double function -- a show of terror as a mechanism of intimidation and rallying hatred. It normalizes hatred as a response, including to those who have questions and disagreements.](#)"<sup>5</sup> In a significant sign of this, the Russian Ministry of Defence has reported a significant increase in the number of people signing up for the armed forces following the recent tragic attack on a concert hall near Moscow. [More than 100,000 people have signed up for military service since the beginning of the year, with some 16,000 signing up in the last ten days alone.](#) The previous conclusion may also be confirmed by two other points: firstly the statements of Dimitry Medvedev, Deputy Head of Russia's Security Council, who previously served as a liberal-minded interim president from 2008 to 2012, has recently emerged as one of the Kremlin's more authoritarian voices. Secondly the attack has prompted calls from hardliners and some



senior lawmakers to reinstate the death penalty, which has been suspended since Russia joined the Council of Europe in 1996, the continent's leading human rights organization.

Summarized the recent terrorist attack on a Moscow concert hall, despite being acknowledged by Russian President Vladimir Putin as carried out by Islamic militants, has prompted the Kremlin to shift blame onto Ukrainian nationalism and Western powers. This narrative, while far-fetched to many in the West, is being promoted by Russia as a means to explain its failure to prevent the attack and to bolster support for Putin's leadership and the ongoing conflict with Ukraine. By invoking historical themes and portraying efforts to counter Russian messaging as unpatriotic, the Kremlin seeks to shape a coherent Russian identity and justify its actions. Despite lacking evidence, Russia has accused Ukraine and Western countries of involvement in the attack, aligning with longstanding propaganda themes of Western threats to Russia's security. While the resonance of these claims among the Russian public is uncertain, they are propagated daily in Russian media and could find traction among those receptive to such narratives.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Platonova-Goryashko, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Newsweek, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> РИА Новости, 2024.03.23

<sup>4</sup> United States Institute of Peace, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024.

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