

# Russia: Moscow terror attack met with repression, racism

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**At least 139 people have been confirmed dead, with many more injured or still unaccounted for, following the horrific terrorist attack carried out at Moscow's Crocus City Hall on March 22. But Russian leftists are warning that the government's response is "more frightening than the terrorist attack itself".**

Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) claimed responsibility for one of the worst terror attacks in modern day Russia. Shortly after the attack, the local affiliate of the global ISIS terror network posted footage on its website of the brutal actions taken by the terrorists .

ISIS-K was formed in 2015 and is active in historic "Khorasan" — which covers parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and other Central Asian countries. Its reasons for wanting to attack Russia are many: from Russia's brutal wars against the predominantly Muslim population of Chechnya, through to its support for Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and the Islamic regimes in Afghanistan and Iran, all of which ISIS considers as key rivals.

Several weeks before the attack, Western intelligence agencies warned that a terror attack by Islamic militants on Russian soil was imminent. According to Russian state media outlet *RIA*, in March alone, Russia's security service thwarted four ISIS-K plots, including an attempted attack on a Moscow synagogue on March 7.

## Deflecting blame

Despite this, it took Russian President Vladimir Putin three days to refer to the four suspects arrested on the day of the attack as "radical Islamists". He made no reference to ISIS-K in his remarks; instead, hinting that Ukraine and the West were behind the attack.

"The question that arises is who benefits from this?" Putin said. "This atrocity may be just a link in a whole series of attempts by those who have been at war with our country since 2014 by the hands of the neo-Nazi Kyiv regime."

FSB head Alexander Bortnikov backed Putin's claims on March 26, adding: "We think the act was prepared by the radical Islamists, but of course, the Western special services have aided."

Following Ukraine's February 2014 Maidan rebellion, which saw millions take to the streets to topple pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich, Russia began arming separatist rebels in Ukraine's Donbas region and invaded and annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea.

Putin justified his action then as a response to what he deemed was a pro-Western coup in Kyiv. When Putin ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, he again claimed that a coup regime had "taken Ukraine hostage" and was using the country against Russia.

Ukraine has strenuously denied any involvement with the terror attack. In response, President Volodymyr Zelensky called Putin “scum” for seeking to link his country to the attack and noted it was Putin who had sent “hundreds of thousands of [Russian] terrorists” to Ukraine since February 2022.

## Fighting terror with terror

Meanwhile, Russian leftists believe Putin will seek to use the terror attack to strengthen his own regime of terror, both in Ukraine and at home.

In a statement published on its Telegram channel, Russian group Nowar said: “Whoever organised the massacre in Crocus, its consequences will inevitably be terrorist.” They note that the tragedy will no doubt be used to justify “sending hundreds of thousands of newly mobilised soldiers to the meat grinder” in Ukraine.

Leftist website *Posle (After)* agreed, writing in an editorial: “The Russian state, as always, will try to profit from this situation ... There is no doubt that the terrorist attack will be used to justify further crackdowns, the adoption of new repressive laws, the escalation of violence in Ukraine and, possibly, a new wave of mobilisation...”

“This is why the state’s reaction can be more frightening than the terrorist attack itself...”

Government spokespeople have lost no time in calling for the use of terror to fight “terrorists”, with several calling for the return of the death penalty.

Stating that it is not enough to simply target terrorists themselves, former president and current deputy chair of the National Security Council of Russia Dmitry Medvedev said: “no trials or investigations will help if force is not countered with force, and deaths with executions of terrorists and a crackdown on their families.”

But, as Nowar notes, in Putin’s Russia, “it is not so much mujahideen and militants who are imprisoned under terrorist articles but rather professors and students”. They point to the examples of sociologist Boris Kagarlitsky and mathematician Azat Miftakhov, two leftists who are currently facing years in prison on trumped-up charges related to “terrorism”.

*Posle* also highlighted how, “symptomatically, the day before the attack, the Russian financial watchdog Rosfinmonitoring added the non-existent ‘international LGBT public movement’ to its list of ‘terrorists and extremists’.”

## Stoking racism

Using the fact that those arrested were originally from Tajikistan, Russian authorities have also seized the opportunity to stoke racism against Muslims and migrants, with State Duma deputy Mikhail Sheremet proposing a ban on all migrants until the war in Ukraine is over.

Not to be outdone, fellow deputy Vladislav Davankov — who ran against Putin as a supposed “anti-war” candidate in the recent elections — has proposed going further and deporting any foreigners who commit an offence.

An article published by *Rabkor* (Workers Correspondent), the leftist media platform that Kagarlitsky edited until his jailing, noted that “all of this is called racism — instead of analysing the causes of terrorism, we are asked to believe that the only reason is their nationality...”

“Under this logic, the police check documents in the subway. Under this logic, neo-Nazis carry out attacks (there have been 263 of them over the past six months). Under this logic, yesterday [March 23] there were raids against migrants in Moscow, Volgograd and Tula...”

With Russia providing migrants with little more than “slave-like conditions ... beatings, humiliation and threats of expulsion ... today, millions of migrants in Russia live in genuine ghettos, amid dirt, humiliation and information isolation — ideal conditions for preachers of terrorism who recruit suicide bombers”.

## **Mirror-image of West**

Putin’s response has been no different to that taken by Western governments after similar terrorist attacks, notes Russian socialist Mikhail Lobanov.

“We have seen over the past 25 years that after each such tragedy, the Kremlin does not provide answers, but only launches a new attack on peaceful Russian society.

“Unfortunately, this is not a purely domestic reality. Like Putin, the authorities of various countries around the world, under the slogan of endless war against terrorism, have for several decades been pursuing a policy that only strengthens the preconditions leading to the emergence and reproduction of terrorist groups.”

Lobanov notes how repression at home, war abroad and unjust economic policies “that condemn a huge part of humanity to live in unbearable circumstances” have created “the perfect conditions for the growth and reproduction of hatred and horrific terrorist practices”.

“A real solution to this problem requires going much further and deeper than demanding that the perpetrators and organisers be found and punished.”

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