



## America-Eurasia Center International Security Program

March 29, 2024

### Terrorism and Tragedy Hit Moscow



*Crocus Concert Hall Moscow Destroyed by Terrorists: Photo Credit ABC News*

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## Tragedy and Narratives: How Russia is Framing the Crocus City Hall Shooting.



*Images of the four captured terrorists facing justice in Russian Court, Source: TASS*

On Friday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March, a four-man team of terrorists stormed the Crocus City Hall in Moscow during a concert. The attack resulted in the deaths of 140 people and 360 wounded.<sup>1</sup> The city hall was also severely damaged as the militants used incendiary devices ultimately resulting in the collapse of the roof. After the attack, the ISIS branch in Afghanistan, also known as the Islamic State Khorasan Province or simply ISIS-K, claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>2</sup> The Amaq News Agency, the news outlet linked to ISIS, published videos of the attackers firing directly into the crowds of people.<sup>3</sup>

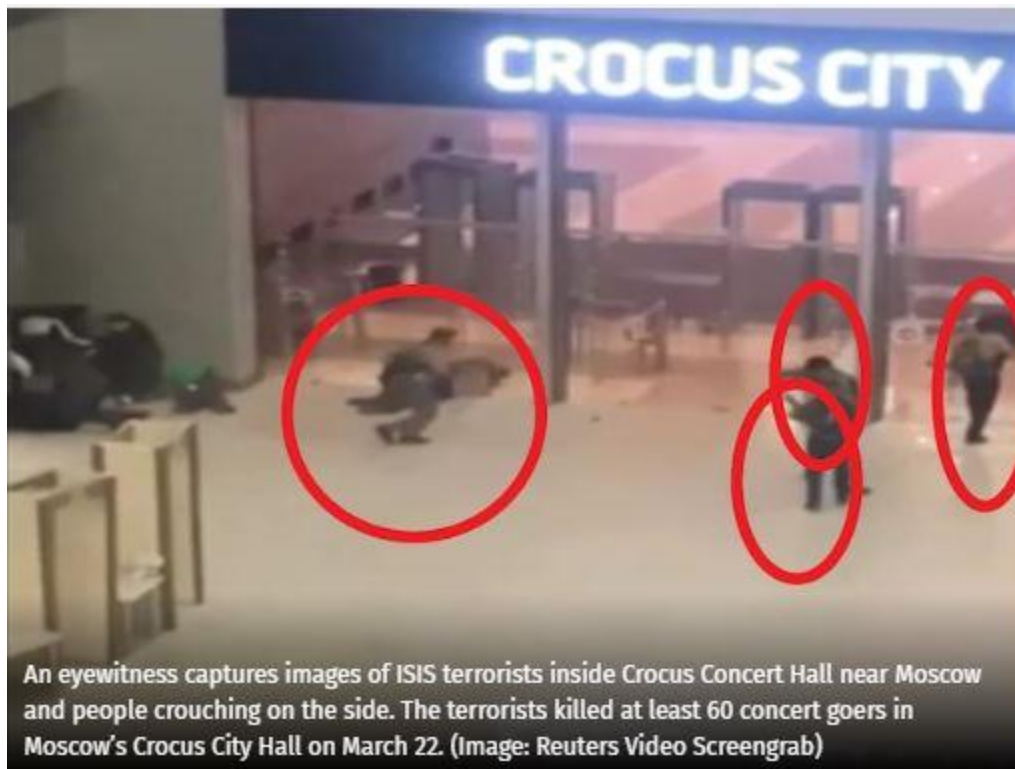
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/27/number-of-wounded-in-crocus-city-hall-attack-rises-to-360-a84642>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/22/us/politics/isis-k-moscow-attack.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/24/new-islamic-state-videos-back-claim-it-carried-out-moscow-concert-hall-attack>

While the outlet had stated that the fighters had "retreated to their bases safely,"<sup>4</sup> four men were captured and arrested. All of them were Tajik nationals with the youngest being only 19 years old.<sup>5</sup> The defendants appeared in court badly beaten and scarred with one militant appearing with a gauze around his ear where it had been cut off. A court statement confirmed that two of the suspects accepted their guilty charge but the poor condition they appeared in aroused suspicion about their ability to accept or deny the charges.<sup>6</sup> The youngest defendant appeared barely conscious during the hearing.



After the attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the nation calling the attack “barbaric” and, as we’ll assess in the next section, began to foment the notion that Ukraine was involved in some way with the attack by stating that the attackers were heading towards the border.<sup>7</sup> Since the attackers were all from Tajikistan, President Emomali Rahmon called his

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/23/islamic-state-group-claims-russia-gun-attack-a84583>

<sup>5</sup> [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/moscow-russia-shooting-03-24-24/h\\_075f38cea1af3ddcced1d4ab1880c055](https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/moscow-russia-shooting-03-24-24/h_075f38cea1af3ddcced1d4ab1880c055)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-concert-hall-attack-suspects-court-putin-isis-searching/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2024/03/23/vladimir-putin-response-russia-moscow-concert-terror-attack-vpx.cnn>

Russian counterpart to offer his condolences and stated “Terrorists have no nationality, no homeland, and no religion.”<sup>8</sup> The two reaffirmed their intention to cooperate on anti-terrorism efforts. Before the attack, US Intelligence Services had warned of “imminent plans” to “target gatherings in Moscow, to include concerts.”<sup>9</sup> The intelligence services, as a part of their obligation to warn all US and non-US personnel of impending attacks also known as the “duty to warn,” had shared this information with the Putin regime but it was dismissed.<sup>10</sup>

## **Contorting the Narrative during Wartime**

In the aftermath of the terrorist attack, media and government officials began to link the events of March 22<sup>nd</sup> with the war in Ukraine. Four days after the attack, FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov stated that, while radical Islamists had conducted the attack, but that the Ukrainian special services were also involved.<sup>11</sup> He stated, “we believe that the action was prepared both by the radical Islamists themselves and, naturally, by Western intelligence services, and the Ukrainian intelligence services themselves are directly related to this.”<sup>12</sup>

Putin himself has not strayed away from fomenting these rumors. During a televised government meeting, the Russian president stated that “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.”<sup>13</sup> This sort of rhetoric has been picked up by state backed media. In fact, according to a report by the media outlet Meduza, “state-funded and pro-government media have been instructed by the Putin administration to emphasize possible “traces” of Ukrainian involvement in their reporting on Friday’s Crocus City Hall terrorist attack.”<sup>14</sup>

However, the most noteworthy case of media manipulation occurred during a broadcast of NTV, one of Russia’s major news channels, wherein a deep-faked video of the Ukrainian

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/24/terrorists-have-no-nationality-tajik-president-tells-putin-a84602>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/22/world/europe/moscow-concert-attack-us-embassy.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/russia-intelligence-duty-to-warn-ab89b8b933c1c51b25903166951a1c7a>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/952541>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/03/27/putin-isis-russia-islamic-state-blame-terrorist-attack/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://meduza.io/en/news/2024/03/23/kremlin-tells-pro-government-media-to-emphasize-possible-traces-of-ukrainian-involvement-in-reporting-on-moscow-terrorist-attack>

Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council Oleksiy Danilov was aired.<sup>15</sup> Danilov appears to state that "It is fun in Moscow today. I think it's a lot of fun. I would like to believe that we will arrange such fun for them more often."<sup>16</sup> The video was crafted by splicing clips from previous interviews featuring him and using AI-generated audio to give the impression he was making a statement.<sup>17</sup>



Deep fake photo of Ukrainians created in Russia to link Ukraine to Terrorists, Photo Credit Reuters.

The ISIS attack at the Crocus City Hall proved to be the worst terrorist attack on the country in years. In its aftermath, Russian media and government officials seized the opportunity to help craft the narrative that Ukraine was somehow involved in the terrorist assault, a claim that remains baseless. With news regarding the attack still emerging, it is key to separate the facts from the fiction, especially in times of war.

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-68642036?ns\\_mchannel=social&ns\\_source=twitter&ns\\_campaign=bbc\\_live&ns\\_linkname=65feee133c0b7a6946ae3614%26Russian%20TV%20airs%20fake%20video%20blaming%20Ukraine%20for%20Moscow%20attack%262024-03-23T15%3A40%3A04.475Z&ns\\_fee=0&pinned\\_post\\_locator=urn:asset:b8f8fd75-07a2-4302-866a-aeb2c5e0aff&pinned\\_post\\_asset\\_id=65feee133c0b7a6946ae3614&pinned\\_post\\_type=share](https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-68642036?ns_mchannel=social&ns_source=twitter&ns_campaign=bbc_live&ns_linkname=65feee133c0b7a6946ae3614%26Russian%20TV%20airs%20fake%20video%20blaming%20Ukraine%20for%20Moscow%20attack%262024-03-23T15%3A40%3A04.475Z&ns_fee=0&pinned_post_locator=urn:asset:b8f8fd75-07a2-4302-866a-aeb2c5e0aff&pinned_post_asset_id=65feee133c0b7a6946ae3614&pinned_post_type=share)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

