**UNRAVELLING THE MOSCOW TERRORIST ATTACK**

[Syed Atiq ul Hassan](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/syed-atiq-ul-hassan/" \o "More Articles by Syed Atiq ul Hassan)

April 3, 2024

Moscow’s famous Crocus City Hall is a renowned concert venue located about twenty kilometres from the central Kremlin in Moscow. On March 22, Crocus Hall was targeted by terrorists at 2 am during a musical festival. Russia maintains strict media policies, allowing only the government’s perspective to be disseminated outside of its borders during major events. According to international media reports, over six thousand attendees were enjoying the festival when four armed terrorists stormed the hall and opened fire. Moscow’s local news sources reported 133 fatalities and several hundred injuries in this act of terrorism.

The hall was engulfed in flames due to the indiscriminate shooting, which took about eight hours to contain. Dozens of helicopters dropped water to extinguish the fire. However, the official statement from Moscow, along with video footage, provided vague details about the casualties, leading to questions regarding the news’s authenticity. Despite the indiscriminate firing by terrorists, only 133 casualties were reported out of 6,000 attendees, raising doubts. Additionally, there was a lack of detailed statements from President Putin.

Russia’s portrayal of the attack as an external threat serves to bolster national unity and justify assertive foreign policies.

President Putin addressed the nation after the incident, confirming the terrorist attack at Crocus Hall, resulting in approximately 130 fatalities. Russia’s official agencies claim that eleven terrorists, including four gunmen who entered the hall and initiated the attack, were involved. These perpetrators arrived in a car, carried out the attack, and fled in the same vehicle. Law enforcement arrested eleven individuals, including the 4 attackers and their accomplices. President Putin mentioned that the terrorists attempted to flee to Ukraine but were apprehended by the police before crossing the border. However, Ukraine’s government denied any involvement in the attack.

Some analysts posit alternative theories, suggesting the possibility of internal actors orchestrating the attack as part of extending the war with Ukraine to other neighbouring countries. Speculation abounds regarding potential motives, ranging from destabilizing the region to galvanizing support for military interventions. The absence of conclusive evidence fuels conjecture and underscores the complexity of the situation.

According to Russian officials, a comprehensive investigation is ongoing to uncover the perpetrators’ motives and details. Meanwhile, American intelligence agencies allege that the terrorists belong to the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISIS-K), a faction operating in Iran, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan. Despite ISIS-K claiming responsibility, Moscow has not responded to these claims. US intelligence provided Russia with information about a potential terrorist attack in Moscow just days before the incident. However, considering the circumstances, some experts speculate that the attack might have been orchestrated internally as part of a larger scheme. Larry Johnson, a former CIA analyst, argued that the casualty count and the timing of the attack don’t align with typical ISIS operations. He suggested that the Biden administration’s failures in various regions might have prompted them to fabricate a narrative to justify further military involvement. Western media, on the other hand, portray the attack as orchestrated by the Putin government. They argue that Putin’s victory in the recent elections, despite widespread opposition, has led to international scrutiny. Western analysts predict that Putin might blame Ukraine for the attack to escalate military operations.

After winning a fifth six-year term in a landslide in an election, Putin again warned the West against deploying troops to Ukraine. A possible conflict between Russia and NATO would put the world “a step away” from World War III, he said. President Putin aims to engage other neighbouring East European countries in the conflict, hoping to expand Russia’s influence in the region.

On the international stage, divergent interpretations emerge, reflecting geopolitical rivalries and strategic interests. Western media scrutinize the Putin government’s response, casting doubt on its legitimacy and raising suspicions of political manipulation. Conversely, Russia’s portrayal of the attack as an external threat serves to bolster national unity and justify assertive foreign policies.

Meanwhile, Britain, France, and Germany, fatigued by the ongoing war in Ukraine, face economic challenges and public discontent. As tensions escalate, the possibility of further military engagements looms over Eastern Europe.

*The writer is a Sydney-based journalist, political analyst, writer and commentator. His email is shassan*  
*@tribune-intl.com*