

Bombshell. Who Was Behind the Crocus City Hall Terrorists? Statement by Alexander Bortnikov, Director of Russia's FSB

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To the uninitiated, I explain first that the FSB is the successor organization to the Soviet Union's well-known and much feared KGB. However, the FSB today might be better compared with the FBI in the United States. It deals with domestic criminality of all kinds and with threats to Russian civilians such as terrorism. The agency and its head are rarely in the news.

In this respect, the FSB is less visible both at home and abroad than the Foreign Intelligence Service headed by Sergei Naryshkin, a state figure who spent five years of this millennium as chairman of the State Duma, Russia's lower house of the legislature, and also three years as head of the Presidential Administration. In both positions Naryshkin was very often seen on television performing his duties.

By contrast, Bortnikov spent the past 15 years in his FSB offices out of sight. However, the spectacular attack on the Crocus City Hall concert venue has propelled him to center stage and yesterday he met with the Russian state television journalist Pavel Zarubin for an interview and then allowed himself to be questioned further by a gaggle of other journalists on his way out along a corridor. This spontaneous Q&A was later broadcast on the television news. What Bortnikov had to say was extraordinary and bears directly on whether you and I

should now be looking for bomb shelters. Regrettably you will not find any of it in the lead stories of today's mainstream media. *The Financial Times*, for example, features an account of Xi's meeting with CEOs of American businesses to mend ties: interesting, but not very relevant if we are at the cusp of WWIII.

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Bortnikov is by definition a member of Vladimir Putin's inner circle of advisors. He, Putin and Naryshkin are all roughly the same age. At 72, Bortnikov is just several years older.

I was struck in particular by his poise and prudent, carefully weighed choice of words while setting out where the investigation is heading with transparency and a 'let the chips fall where they may' unaffected demeanor.

The journalists were all probing the question of who stood behind the terror attack. Bortnikov told them...and us: standing behind the terror act committed by Islamist extremists are the United States, Great Britain and Ukraine.



Russian Crocus City Hall amphitheater interiors, day after terrorist attack on 22 March 2024 (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)

Bortnikov said that the preliminary findings indicate that the four perpetrators of the slaughter were headed by car to the border with Ukraine where they were awaited on the other side.

He very calmly explained that the involvement of foreign powers is being clarified and that he will say nothing out of pure emotion now but will wait for the facts to be solidly collected before being presented.

Nonetheless, it was entirely newsworthy that he named the United States, Great Britain and Ukraine as the likely puppet masters of the terror act. Let us remember that following the bombing of the Nord Stream pipelines, the most significant attack on critical civilian infrastructure globally in the last 50 years, Russian officials did not point the finger directly

at any country. There was innuendo but no direct accusations such as we heard from Bortnikov yesterday.

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Meanwhile, quite apart from Mr. Bortnikov's chat with journalists, a lot of new elements to the terror attack at Crocus City Hall were posted yesterday on the Russian state television news and analysis program *Sixty Minutes*.

In particular, we learned that in the last days of February and first couple of days of March two of the four attackers were in Istanbul. The departure and arrival of one at a Moscow airport was recorded on video. We were told which hotels they stayed in, and the selfies and other photos taken by one in Istanbul were put up on the screen. It is still not clear with whom they met in Turkey. However, the timing itself is very important, because the point was made that they returned to Moscow to carry out a terror attack on 8 March, International Women's Day, a sacred date on the Russian calendar. Had they done so on that day, the effect would have been catastrophic for the presidential elections in Russia one week later.

However, per *Sixty Minutes*, it was determined that Russian state security on 8 March was too tight for the terrorist mission to succeed and the United States decided to pull the plug on that operation. Note that this is approximately the time when Victoria Nuland tendered her resignation at the State Department (5 March). The possible causal link here surely deserves attention by my peers in the U.S. 'dissident' community.

In any case, the scenario which was explored later in the day on the *Evening with Vladimir Solovyov* talk show is that the Ukrainians decided to proceed with the terror attack a week after the Russian presidential elections, when it lost most of its rationale. They did so over the objections of Washington.

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From time to time, readers ask why I pay attention to talk shows like Vladimir Solovyov's. These skeptics tend to ignore that Solovyov invites not just the usual irresponsible academics and journalists who can amuse the public but also some very serious statesmen who are close to the center of power in Russia and exert influence on the conduct of foreign and domestic policy, including in particular committee chairmen and other key personalities from the State Duma.

So it was last night when we heard from a member of the Committee on Relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States (Former Soviet Union). With reference to the never ending terror attacks on civilians in the Russian border region of Belgorod coming from nearby Kharkiv (Ukraine), he said it is time to raze Kharkov to the ground: issue a warning to the population to get in their cars and head West, then blow it all to bits. Kharkiv is, by the way, Ukraine's second most populous city after Kiev.

In general, the mood of panelists and of the host Solovyov himself is now changing in a cardinal manner: Ukraine is seen as an enemy state and the sooner it is finished off the better. There was talk last night on the need for missile strikes to flatten the presidential palace in Kiev along with all military and other decision making government centers in the capital.

As we have observed repeatedly over the past two years. President Putin has been a voice for moderation and restraint, resisting actions that might precipitate WWII. That is clearly coming to an end when his own FSB director names the United States and the UK as planners of the biggest terror attack in Russia in 20 years.

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