

Attack on a bus in Volgograd

Wojciech Górecki

On 21 October, a bomb was detonated on a bus in Volgograd in southern Russia. According to the Russian Investigative Committee, the attack was carried out by a suicide bomber from Dagestan, 31-year-old Naida Asiyalova. Six people were killed together with her, and a further 37 were injured.

The Investigative Committee said Asiyalova was going by coach from Makhachkala (Dagestan's capital) to Moscow, but in Volgograd she unexpectedly got off, and an hour later she carried out the attack. The explosive charge may have been prepared by her husband, Dmitri Sokolov, who is suspected of preparing a number of attacks in Makhachkala and has a warrant out for his arrest; he is an ethnic Russian, although after meeting Asiyalova he allegedly converted to Islam and joined the armed underground in Dagestan. She was not on the wanted list herself, although Russian law enforcement agencies were already interested in her.

Commentary

- It is not known whether the attack was carried out by Dokku Umarov's 'Caucasian Emirate', a decentralised terrorist organisation which is fighting to break the region's dependence on Russia and establish an Islamic republic there. In a statement published on 3 July on the Emirate's website, Umarov called off the moratorium on attacks outside the Caucasus (including civilian targets) which he had declared six months previously, and urged militants to disrupt the Winter Olympics in Sochi "at all costs". Despite calling off the ceasefire, there had as yet been no attacks; the last (at Domodedovo Airport in Moscow) took place on 24 January 2011.
- It seems that this was an indirect strike at the Interior Ministry (a terrorist carrying explosives travelled over 800 km into Russia). In this context, the interview given after the attack to the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper by Ramazan Abdulatipov, the President of Dagestan, is noteworthy. In it he stated that the fight against terrorism is being carried out by the FSB alone, and implies that appointments to this ministry in the republic are being made behind his back. Abdulatipov's suggestions are a veiled attack on Vladimir Kolokoltsev, the Russian interior minister, whose prestige had earlier been damaged by the ethnic clashes in Moscow on 13 October (Kolokoltsev, who before becoming a minister was chief of police in Moscow, had proved ineffective at monitoring the wholesale markets in the capital, which are targets of competition between Caucasian organised crime groups, as well as storehouses for illegal migrants).

- The rapid publication of the name and photographs of the terrorist (less than three hours after the incident, indicating that the special services have detailed dossiers on potential terrorists) was most likely intended to increase public confidence in the state authorities. At the same time it represents a break with the past practice of reporting the details of similar acts of terrorism only after pyrotechnic, forensic and other investigations, which are all quite time-consuming. It seems that the attack may lead to increased vigilance on the part of ordinary citizens, who in the near future are likely to pay closer attention to unattended baggage and people behaving suspiciously, and report such matters to the police.