

True North. Krasnogorsk Mass Murder. Scott Ritter

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Global Research, March 27, 2024

[Scott Ritter Extra](#)

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Terrorism](#)

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Point to point navigation describes the long-lost art of celestial navigation, the ability to use the stars to chart a course across the open seas in the age before compasses. The key to successfully executing point to point navigation lay in fixing one's position vis-à-vis the North Star. Failure to do so meant risking sailing aimlessly about a sea with no fixed reference points, an act that leads to death or, perhaps worse, becoming a castaway on some uncharted point on earth.

After a storm, a ship's captain and his navigator would scan the skies for the North Star, from which they could establish not only what direction true north was, but also where they were in reference to the position of the North Star in the sky, so that they might navigate to safety.

When special operations forces are compromised behind enemy lines, they conduct what they call "escape and evasion," the act of avoiding detection and probable death or capture, while making their way to a pre-designated haven from which they can regroup or be extracted. The CIA trains its operations officers in similar skill sets. Both colloquially refer to such actions as "finding their true north."

The perpetrators of the horrific attack on the Crocus City Hall and Concert Center in Krasnogorsk, a metropolitan community located to the northwest of Moscow, were no different than any other terrorist/militant before them; after their act of mass murder, they sought out their "true north" to make good their escape.

Western governments, analysts, and pundits have loudly proclaimed that the men who carried out the attack on the Crocus City Hall had nothing whatsoever to do with Ukraine, and instead have collectively embraced a narrative that paints the men as members of the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K). ISIS is an off-shoot of Al-Qaeda-Iraq (AQI) which emerged in 2013 when core AQI members relocated to Syria. In 2014 ISIS declared itself to be a

caliphate and began a series of operations which saw it take control on a third of Syria and a quarter of Iraq before being driven back and ultimately defeated by a coalition which included Iraq, the United States and Iran.

In 2014 Central Asian fighters affiliated with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan formed a branch of ISIS in Afghanistan known as ISIS-K, where they stood for Khorasan (ISIS-K). Khorasan is an ancient term for the territory encompassed by modern day Iran, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan. ISIS-K continues to operate today in Afghanistan and Iran, as well as inside the former Soviet Central Asian republics, including Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.



Terrorists attacking the Crocus City Hall

According to US officials, the United States collected intelligence that ISIS-K was planning an attack on Moscow in early March.

This intelligence was behind a public warning issued by the US embassy in Russia on March 7 that “extremists” were planning an imminent attack on large gatherings in Moscow.

“US citizens should be advised to avoid large gatherings over the next 48 hours,” the warning, published on the embassy website, stated. American citizens were warned to avoid crowds, including concerts. These US officials likewise claimed (and Russia has acknowledged) that Russia had been informed about the intelligence behind the March 7 warning. This information was shared based upon the “duty to warn” principle where US intelligence about potential terrorist attacks must be shared with the suspected targets. However, rather than passing this information through formal channels, it was done unofficially, through informal channels, significantly diluting the impact of the information.

The attackers posted a photograph of them reciting the Shahada, or Islamic oath and creed (“I bear witness that there is no deity but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God”) which, if made sincerely, is all that is required to be identified as a Muslim in the eyes of God. While Islamic scholars note that it is only necessary to recite the words, for jihadists reciting Shahada accompanied by a raised right index finger, has

become de rigueur—Osama Bin Laden delivered it in this fashion, as did Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the founder of the Islamic State.

Shahada is a ritual, and those who make Shahada must understand its importance for it to have any meaning. As such, if one incorporates the raising of the right index finger as part of the Shahada ritual, it must be done piously. The use of the right hand is critical—in the Muslim faith, the right hand symbolizes all that is good, and the left is reserved for unclean acts:

“No one among you should eat with his left hand or drink with it, for the shaytaan (devil) eats with his left hand and drinks with it.”

The four attackers delivered this oath by raising their left hands.

They also published this photograph with their faces blurred—they were shielding their identity.

There can be no subterfuge when reciting Shahada—it is an oath made before God and in the eyes of men.

Moreover, the blurring of their faces indicated that the attackers intended to survive their mission.



The Crocus City Hall attackers making Shahada

For most militants affiliated with ISIS-K, true north is the path to martyrdom, a one-way ticket to paradise.

Their goal is to inflict as much harm as possible before being dispatched from this mortal earth, an act that is usually made certain using a suicide vest detonated at a time when more death and destruction can be wrought.

The perpetrators of the Crocus City Hall attack, however, did not wear suicide vests. Indeed, they had no intention of losing their lives, but rather to live and be able to enjoy the fruits of

their labor, a purported \$5,500 payment for services rendered.

These weren't Islamist militants.

These were mercenaries who disguised themselves as Islamic militants.



The Crocus City Hall attackers in their getaway car

And when they finished their murderous rampage, the purported ISIS-K fighters jumped into their car and headed toward their “true north.”

Ukraine.

Ukraine. The source of their money.

Ukraine. The source of their motivation.

The Russian investigation into the terror attack is still in its early stages. There are many facts left to be uncovered.

But there is a plethora of data which allows one to populate the puzzle with enough pieces to begin to see a discernable shape take form.

Russian authorities went out of their way to make sure that all four perpetrators were captured alive.

The perpetrators are in the process of being interrogated. Many of the techniques being used by Russia would not be permitted in the United States as they could readily be classified as torture. And many intelligence professionals—me included—discount the value of any confession made under severe duress.

But the Russian interrogations are aided by the fact that the Russian investigators are not engaged in a fishing expedition, but rather are guided by specific facts derived from the forensic examination of the cell phones of the four terrorists, which are currently in the possession of Russian authorities.

One of these phones was recovered at the crime scene, and the data contained on this phone was used by Russian security officials to track the terrorists as they drove out of Moscow, toward Ukraine. Telephone numbers contained on the recovered phone allowed the Russians to zero in on the remaining phones, and monitor phone calls made by the terrorists in real time—including numerous calls to persons inside Ukraine who were working to create a gap in the Russian-Ukrainian border that the terrorists could escape through.

True North.

The Russians have been able to identify the core structure of a support network in Moscow which provided the four terrorists with transportation and housing.

Eleven arrests have been made in this regard.

The Russians have identified a network operating in Turkey who were affiliated with the recruitment, training and logistical preparation and support of the terrorist operation in Moscow.

Forty arrests have been made as a result.

But more importantly, Russia has gathered enough information to issue a warrant for the head of the Ukrainian security service, Vasyl Malyuk, on charges of public incitement of terrorism. Likewise, the head of the Russian security service, Alexander Boritnikov, has stated that when it comes to delivering justice to Ukrainians who may have been involved in the attack on the Crocus concert venue, “Everything is ahead of us.”

Russia, it seems, is navigating point to point.

Not toward a safe haven, but rather on a path of retribution.

And its “true north” is the same as that of the terrorists.

Ukraine.

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