

The Central Asia Conundrum

Description

Yesterday's terrorist attack* is a reminder that Russia's problems don't start and end in Ukraine.

When not surrounded by enemies, Russia is surrounded by fragile states incapable of exercising control over what happens on their soil, easy prey to malign influence from foreign actors. Of those, Tajikistan, the presumed land of the attackers, is the worst – Literally the second poorest country outside of Africa, and just behind Haiti.

It fought for five years against islamists who continue to receive handsome funding and covert support from abroad. A basket case of an economy where half of the wealth is generated by workers in Russia sending money back to their families. The government tries to combat religious extremism with a heavy hand, but it doesn't have control of what happens everywhere in its country. The "international community" also deeply scolds the government efforts to crack down on the islamist opposition, the "Islamic Renaissance Party," cast by Westerners as freedom fighters. Their leaders, by the way, are based in Poland.

While all of Central Asia has similar issues, as seen for example in the number of "volunteers" who joined ISIS in the Syrian conflict, most of the terrorist incidents involving islamists in Russia had perpetrators radicalized on Russian soil. The overcrowded, squalid dorms where migrant workers spend the little free time they have are also fertile ground for the actions of such groups. Since the resolution of the conflict in Chechnya and the end of the lawlessness of the 90s, terrorist attacks and grim headlines rarely come from the Russian Muslim minorities, which form at least 6% of the country. Against the work of radicals, there are occasional arrests but as seen by today's events they aren't enough – Mostly small fish and actors dumb enough to get caught. The source of radicalism continues operating.

The volume of migrant workers from Central Asia is massive; without their cheap labor the Russian construction sector would particularly suffer, and making the lives of the vast majority of law abiding, non-Wahhabi Tajiks, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Russia even worse isn't a solution. Just as the influx of migrants and refugees from Central America bites the USA in the back, there is no permanent solution to Russia's problem other than the economic and social development of those places, even if they are not under the Russian government. If Russia doesn't exert influence, and a positive influence, over those places, less benign actors such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the US will. That is the root of what happened today. The same West, that is low-key celebrating yet another terrorist attack on Russian soil, created, and fed extremism and undermines attempts to fight against it, such as with the accusations against China in Xinjiang.

A lot of questions remain unasked: is the vetting of military volunteers that poor? Especially in the case of foreign volunteers such as these supposedly are? Tajikistan is not a member of the EAEU, their citizens do not have free movement to Russia, and therefore the authorities must have some sort of record of them. Before the war in Ukraine and the importation of the "lone school-shooter" phenomenon from the US, every single terrorist attack in Russia came with those motivations. Lack of

experience cannot be used as an excuse.

- Note: An act of terror at a training ground in the Bryansk region. What is known at the moment:

On the evening of October 15, 2022, two citizens of a CIS country opened fire on military personnel being trained before being sent to a special operation zone in Ukraine at the training ground of the Western Military District in the Belgorod region. According to the Russian Defence Ministry, 11 people were killed, 15 were injured and are receiving medical treatment.

It all happened during the training: the terrorists fired on the unit's personnel but were destroyed by return fire. Three attackers were initially reported.

According to some reports, the shooting took place on the training ground in the village of Soloti. At least 100 troops may have been undergoing fire training at the time of the attack.