50 Masked Men Beat Up Building Defenders

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About 50 masked men attacked a group of about 15 architectural preservationists who tried to stop the demolition of a 19th-century building in downtown Moscow on Monday, activists said.

A video [uploaded](#) on YouTube shows brief scuffles between masked men and activists, who are beaten and driven away from the demolition site's fence, as are several news crews attempting to film the incident. Several police officers were visible but did not intervene.

The clash was the culmination of a months-long standoff that has pitted activists and local residents against the developer, which plans to replace an old apartment building on Kozikhinsky Pereulok with a new seven-story house complete with an underground parking lot.

About 15 activists were beaten by the masked men, apparently private guards hired by the

Vektor company, which owns the building, said Yelena Tkach of the Coalition in Defense of Old Moscow, a public group, Interfax reported.

The attackers blocked with logs a hall in a nearby apartment building to prevent residents from coming out and stopping them, slashed the tires of residents' cars and refused to allow paramedics access to people injured during the attack, the Coalition in Defense of Old Moscow said in a [statement](#) carried by Gazeta.ru.

A Vektor representative, reached by telephone, said the company would have no comment on the matter. A representative for the developer, Satori, also refused to speak about the clash but said by telephone that the company had acted within the law while carrying out the demolition.

"Fighting bulldozers is useless. You should deal with the people responsible for the project," said the representative, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Vektor head Anzori Khasiya was himself attacked on Monday. An unidentified young man gassed him with pepper spray and seized documentation authorizing the demolition, he said, adding that the company had retained copies of all the paperwork.

"It's obvious to us that this was done in the interest of an organized group of provocateurs that obstructs the construction work and probably intends to blackmail us," Khasiya said, Interfax reported. He did not identify the provocateurs.

Preservationists picketed City Hall later Monday, demanding that police open criminal cases into the attack. The police have not commented on the incident, while a representative for City Hall's architectural department said the Moscow government had nothing to do with the dispute, Interfax reported.

City authorities said earlier that the building on Kozikhinsky Pereulok, though built in the 19th century, is not a historical landmark and can be demolished.

Preservationists insist that the demolition permit was issued illegally because the building is adjacent to a house that is officially recognized as an architectural landmark, which means buildings near it cannot be destroyed.

The conflict, which has dragged on since last year, was to be resolved by a special commission including representatives for both sides. The commission had not reached a decision before the demolition started.