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Slain Kazan Gunmen Planned Terror Attack

By Alexander Winning

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Muslims praying in St. Petersburg ahead of the Eid al-Adha fest. A terror attack had been planned for the holiday. **Alexander Demianchuk**

Two Islamist gunmen killed in a special operation in Kazan were planning a major terrorist attack in the city on an upcoming Muslim holiday, the Federal Security Service said Thursday.

The FSB said in a statement on its website that the gunmen, Robert Valeyev and Ruslan Kashapov, had planned to launch the attack on Oct. 26 in areas crowded with people celebrating the first day of the three-day Eid al-Adha holiday.

The two were also suspects in attacks on two senior religious officials in Kazan in July, the statement said.

The FSB said Valeyev shot dead prominent cleric Valiulla Yakupov and planted bombs in the SUV of Tatarstan Mufti Ildus Faizov, who survived the July 19 explosions.

Kashapov was named as an accomplice in those attacks, which the FSB said "aimed to sow fear among the population" on the eve of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Law enforcement agencies had earlier issued federal search warrants for the pair.

Unidentified law enforcement officials told the Interfax-Religion news agency that the gunmen were part of an Islamic terrorist organization with links to the Taliban and that they had trained in camps on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Investigators said in a separate statement Thursday that they had opened a criminal case on charges of attempted murder of a law enforcement officer and illegal weapons possession.

The charges carry maximum sentences of life imprisonment and a six-year jail term, respectively, and will be included in the same investigation as the attacks on the lives of the Kazan clerics, investigators said.

On Wednesday, the FSB cornered Valeyev and Kashapov in a building on Ulitsa Khimikov in Kazan, the capital of the mostly Muslim Tatarstan republic, a normally peaceful region favored by foreign investors.

FSB officers ordered the gunmen to lay down their arms, but they opened fire, the statement said. Media reports said the firefight lasted several hours.

Both militants were killed after the FSB stormed the building. An unidentified FSB officer was killed after throwing himself on one of the militants, who was igniting an unspecified explosive device.

"The officer's actions saved the lives of the remaining members of the operation and innocent civilians in the surrounding area," the FSB statement said, describing the officer as a hero.

Inside the Kazan apartment, FSB officers found weapons, ammunition, a bomb-making laboratory and 3 kilograms of explosives, RIA-Novosti reported, citing Tatarstan police.

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