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Surprise 'Anti-Terrorist' Training Exercise Terrifies Russian College Students

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Photo taken by a student present at the "anti-terrorist training exercise." **Photo: Tikhvinskaya Soroka / Vkontakte**

A medical college outside St. Petersburg hosted a surprise "anti-terrorist training exercise" on Dec. 3, using armed and masked individuals pretending to be terrorists. One woman in the group even wore a fake suicide bomb vest. According to reports on social media, neither the students nor the faculty at Tikhvinsky Medical College were warned in advance, and many believed terrorists had actually seized the school.

"People were in shock," one witness wrote on the Internet. "Some went into hysterics. They faced some people to the wall, and didn't let them use their phones. When one girl refused to give up her phone (or to turn it off), they put a gun to another student's head and said they'd shoot, if she didn't give in."

According to the Russian tabloid "Life," the training exercises were carried out by the

“Patriot” Military-Patriotic Education and Citizen Training Center — an organization created by the local regional government. Pavel Baranenko, the group’s director, told Life that the college’s administration should have notified students about upcoming “safety prevention measures,” but he says there was no need to disclose any further details.

“Why should they have been warned? If you warn people, then there’s no point to the training. Children think everything is a joke, and in case of a real-life situation [like this], your colleagues [in the media] will be writing about their corpses. My job is to make sure there aren’t any corpses,” Baranenko told Life, explaining that these simulations are designed to familiarize young people with methods used by groups like the Islamic State (a terrorist group banned in Russia).

Baranenko says he believes such experiences also help prevent terrorists from recruiting Russian youths. “If somebody gets scared, that means he definitely won’t be going on social media to support them, writing about how great ISIS and these terrorists are, and that they’re fighting for freedom. They’ll lose that ‘Robin Hood’ shine. If we scared someone, all the better,” he said.

According to Radio Baltika, local prosecutors have already visited the college to conduct a preliminary investigation, in response to the reports online. Meanwhile, local officials in the regional government say they’ve received only “favorable reviews” about the training exercise.

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