

Terror Attack or Accident?

Uncertainty remains after the crash.

June 18, 2018



Jack Stubbs / Reuters

The day after a taxi plowed into a crowd of pedestrians in central Moscow, injuring eight, it was back to partying for most foreign football fans.

It only took about an hour on Saturday afternoon for the yellow Hyundai, which had swerved onto the pavement earlier on Ulitsa Ilinka, to be towed away, the victims to be rushed to hospital and the street to be reopened to the public. Nothing to see here.

Only a handful of shocked witnesses remained to talk to the media, while rowdy football fans around them seemed blissfully unaware.

Related article: [Taxi Runs Into Crowd in Central Moscow](#)

“He yelled: ‘It wasn’t me,’” said Emile, 30, a Russian witness on the scene, referring to the taxi driver who dashed from his car after hitting the sidewalk. “We’re all in shock. Russians

most of all.”

Among those injured were citizens of Russia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Mexico, the state-funded RIA news agency reported. City health officials on Sunday told media that three people who were still in hospital would be discharged soon.

Although the incident played out next to the Mexico House community center and the Embassy set up an emergency hotline, many fans only found out about the crash later. “Someone wrote to me saying some Mexicans were involved, people were asking, are you ok?” Renee Romero, 40, told The Moscow Times in Rostov-on-Don. “But I hadn’t heard anything.”

The driver has been identified as a citizen of Kyrgyzstan, a predominantly Muslim country in Central Asia and former-Soviet republic.

Related article: [Taxi Driver Who Drove Into Crowd in Moscow Says He Lost Control](#)

Several versions of what happened have been doing the rounds. In one telling, the driver was drunk or lost control behind the wheel. In a video released by the Moscow branch of the Interior Ministry, the driver denied he had been drinking and said he had worked a 20-hour shift on two hours of sleep, seemingly confirming it had been an accident.

The Russian authorities will be keen to downplay fears of terrorism. But concerns remain, fueled by a video of the incident circulating on social media.

“I watched the video attentively and saw he deliberately drove the car into the crowd,” tweeted opposition politician Yevgeny Roizman. “I consider it an act of terrorism.”

“My first impression was that it was not deliberate. But after I saw the video, I changed my mind,” said Anna Castillejos, 29, from Mexico City. “I don’t feel unsafe, but it’s a little weird.”

Related article: [Two Mexican Women Injured After Taxi Ploughs Into Pedestrians in Central Moscow](#)

While it is too early for conclusions, the incident is a reminder of a looming risk, said Nabi Abdullaev, a Control Risks analyst and former chief editor of The Moscow Times.

He cited a suicide bombing by another native of Kyrgyzstan last year in St. Petersburg, in which 15 people died.

“We warned about the emergence of a new streak of the terrorist threat,” Abdullaev said in a written comment, namely, “the radicalization of young Muslims in Central Asian states who can easily travel to Russian cities and blend in among millions of labor migrants.”

But, he added, “the Russian government continues to invest enormous resources in its security agencies, and there can be no doubt as to its motivation to prevent terrorist attacks during the football tournament.”

One fight Russia appears to have mastered hands-down: that of winning hearts and minds. “I’ve met a lot of Russians and they have explained how their country works,” said Sinuhe Garcia, 28. “They’re very nice.”

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/06/18/terror-attack-or-accident-a61875>