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Russian YouTuber Charged With 'Justifying Terror' Over Theater Siege Song

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Yury Khovansky faces up to 7 years in prison on the charges. **Screenshot YouTube**

A popular Russian YouTuber has been charged with justifying terrorism over an alleged performance mocking the deadly 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis, investigators announced Wednesday.

Yury Khovansky, 31, who boasts 4.4 million YouTube subscribers, was apprehended at his St. Petersburg apartment Tuesday evening.

"Is it because of that song?" Khovansky Khovansky can be heard asking in the footage of his detention broadcast by the state-run REN TV channel.

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The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said in its statement that

Khovansky intended to "form the ideology of terrorism" and "belief in its attractiveness" with the song.

"Experts concluded that the song contained signs of public calls to carry out terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism and its propaganda," it said.

It added that the song also contained "signs of threats, humiliation and use of violence against a group of persons based on nationality."

The song in question appears to be a leaked July 2020 performance ironically approving the Oct. 2, 2002, attack on Moscow's Dubrovka Theater during an evening performance of "Nord-Ost."

The 2 ½-day siege by a Chechen insurgent group ended with Russian security services pumping toxic gas into the theater in an attempt to knock the terrorists unconscious and free the hostages. About 130 of the hostages died from the chemical and all 40 attackers were killed in the rescue operation.

The leaked song appeared to advocate the "killing of Russian children" and urge Chechen separatists to stage "some new terrorist act" in the country.

In the video of his detention published by REN TV, Khovansky tells a law enforcement officer that he has never performed the song in public.

But video published by the Investigative Committee shows Khovansky expressing remorse and admitting his guilt at a police station.

Khovansky said on social media in February that he regrets performing the Nord-Ost song and blamed a rival blogger for unearthing and publishing it.

The charges of justifying terrorism carry a maximum sentence of 7 years in prison.

Khovansky has since 2019 been an unpaid assistant for one of Russia's youngest lawmakers, who had pointed to the blogger's 4 million YouTube subscribers as a conduit for driving up young Russians' support.

On Wednesday, the far-right Liberal Democratic Party told the Znak.com news website that it had withdrawn Khovansky's membership card out of "questions surrounding the blogger's reputation."

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