The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

At Least 20 Dead After Church and Synagogue Attacks in Russia's Dagestan

June 23, 2024



Social media

Armed assailants on Sunday evening attacked Orthodox churches and synagogues in Russia's majority Muslim republic of Dagestan, killing at least 15 law enforcement officials and five civilians including a priest, regional authorities said.

The unidentified gunmen launched simultaneous attacks in Dagestan's largest city of Makhachkala and in the coastal city of Derbent.

Dagestan leader, Sergei Melikov, said in a video shared on Telegram that "this evening in Derbent and Makhachkala unknown [attackers] made attempts to destabilize the situation in society."

"We know who is behind these terrorist attacks and what objective they are pursuing," he added later, without clarifying to whom he was referring, but later mentioning the war in Ukraine.

"We must understand that war comes to our homes too. We felt it, but today we face it," he said.

The authorities will try to find "all the members of these sleeper cells who prepared [the attacks] and who were prepared, including abroad," he added.

Dagestan's Interior Ministry said police had killed four of the gunmen in Makhachkala and two in Derbent.

Attackers opened fire at the synagogue and church in Derbent with automatic rifles at around 6:00 p.m. local time before driving away from the scene, officials reported.

The synagogue caught fire shortly after the attack, as seen in videos shared online.

Nikolai Kotelnikov, a 66-year-old priest at the Orthodox church in Derbent, was killed in a knife attack, said the chairman of Dagestan's Public Monitoring Commission, Shamil Khadulaev.

Embed:

> ⛒ Unknown assailants have attacked an Orthodox church and a synagogue in Derbent, Dagestan, state media reported, with video showing the synagogue on fire.
>
> One policeman was killed and six others were wounded in a shootout at the synagogue, regional police said. pic.twitter.com/huEMMRdIGY
>
> — The Moscow Times (@MoscowTimes) June 23, 2024

A security guard at the Orthodox church in Makhachkala was also killed, Khadulaev said. Dagestan's Interior Ministry said 19 people took shelter inside the church in Makhachkala and were later led out to safety.

The synagogue in Makhachkala was set on fire and burned down, said the chairman of the public council of Russia's Federation of Jewish Communities, Boruch Gorin.

Separately, a group of unknown assailants attacked a traffic police post in Makhachkala. At least one police officer was killed and six others injured in the armed standoff that followed the attack, the region's Interior Ministry said.

Stated media quoted the Dagestan Interior Ministry's spokeswoman as saying that "unknown [attackers] fired on a police car" on the central square of the village of Sergokal, located some 65 kilometers from Makhachkala. At least one police officer was wounded in the attack.

The National Anti-Terrorism Committee introduced a counterterrorism regime in Dagestan, with video posted online showing that roads leading in and out of Derbent and Makhachkala

had been closed.

The counterterrorism operation was ended Monday morning, the National Anti-Terrorism Committee said.

"Following the neutralization of the threats to the lives and health of citizens, it was decided to end the anti-terrorist operation in Dagestan from 08:15," it was quoted as saying by state media.

Magomed Omarov, the head of Dagestan's Sergokalinsky district — whose sons allegedly took part in the attacks — was detained following Sunday's attack, state media reported, citing law enforcement.

Russia's Investigative Committee said it had opened criminal probes over "acts of terror" in Dagestan.

The state-run TASS news agency cited a law enforcement source as saying the "gunmen who carried out attacks in Makhachkala and Derbent are supporters of an international terrorist organization," but did not specify the organization.

Russia's FSB security service in April said it had arrested four people in Dagestan on suspicion of plotting a deadly shooting at Moscow's Crocus City Hall concert venue in March, an attack claimed by Islamic State.

Militants from Dagestan are known to have traveled to join the Islamic State group in Syria. In 2015, the group declared it had established a "franchise" in the North Caucasus.

Dagestan lies east of Chechnya where Russian authorities battled separatists in two brutal wars, first in 1994-1996 and then in 1999-2000.

After the defeat of Chechen insurgents, Russian authorities have been locked in a simmering conflict with Islamist militants from across the North Caucasus that has killed scores of civilians and police.

AFP contributed reporting.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/06/23/at-least-19-dead-after-church-and-synagogue-attacks-in-russias-dagestan-a85496