

Russia to step up repression after Moscow bombing

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The Russian government has promised to increase state repression in the aftermath of Monday's deadly terror attack at Moscow's international airport. At the same time, mid-level state officials are being blamed for the security breach that resulted in the deaths of 35 people, with President Dmitri Medvedev announcing the sacking of the head of transportation for Russia's central region, along with Domodedovo airport's police chief and two deputies.

The death toll from the blast may continue to rise, with 116 people still hospitalized as of Wednesday morning, many in critical condition. In addition, some family members are reportedly still searching for loved ones whose remains are unaccounted for. Among the dead are citizens of Russia, Central Asia, and Europe, including the Ukrainian dramatist and poet, Anna Yablonskaya. The internationally recognized artist, who wrote in Russian, was on her way to an awards ceremony sponsored by the magazine *Iskusstvo Kino* (Art Film). She did not know that she was about to receive a prize for her play, *The Pagans*, when she died.

There is speculation that the terror attack, in which a suicide bomber set off 7 kilograms of TNT in the airport arrivals hall, is the work of militants from the North Caucasus. While the Russian government, through military violence and its proxy agents, has effectively suppressed opposition to its rule in Chechnya, the conflict between Moscow and secessionist forces has spilled over into the neighboring regions of Dagestan and Ingushetia. A low-scale civil war has engulfed the two provinces, with the brutal conditions in the region fueling hostility towards Moscow.

An ongoing state investigation has yet to produce an official version of Monday's events. The Russian security services are currently looking for three

individuals believed to have been working with the suicide bomber (possibly bombers). No one has claimed responsibility for the attack thus far.

There is a great deal of speculation swirling in the press regarding who carried out the bombing and their relationship to Islamic militants. There are media reports that the bombers were trained at an Al Qaeda operation in Pakistan, that they were members of a militant group set up by Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev called the Nogaisky Battalion, and that they were not from the Caucasus at all—all or none of which may be true.

In releasing information to the public, the Russian government is anxious both to prevent a backlash against its policies in the North Caucasus, lest they be blamed for spawning terrorism, as well as prepare the groundwork for further repressive measures. By sacking mid-level officials, Medvedev is seeking to draw public attention away from the responsibility of the highest levels of the state for Monday's bombing.

Some questions have emerged as to whether the government had advance knowledge of Monday's attack, but failed to take preventive action.

A source inside the security services told the online news agency *Lifenews.ru*, "Around a week before the explosion, we were told that someone is preparing something. They even told us the location—near the customs area."

According to the source, no specific measures were taken in the period leading up to the attack to beef up security. Rather, it appears that the exact opposite occurred. "In the last few months, security was reduced by 50 percent. The only thing the police did was fleece people arriving from Central Asia," he said.

While the foreign press has up the *Lifenews.ru* story,

it has received little coverage in Russia and no official commentary. The report has not been verified, although it is not beyond the realm of possibility. If accurate, it would not be the first time that government agencies were somehow implicated in terrorist attacks on Russian soil. A 1999 apartment bombing in Moscow that killed 300 people is generally believed to have occurred with the active involvement the Federal Security Service (FSB).

In the aftermath of Monday's bombing it has come to light that events in recent weeks were pointing to the possibility of another terrorist attack in Russia. Law enforcement officials have told media out that the explosion at Domodedovo airport may be tied to the work of a terrorist cell that had planned to set off a bomb in central Moscow on New Year's Day. This assault apparently failed when the device accidentally detonated inside an apartment ahead of time, killing one of the perpetrators. On January 5, two individuals implicated in this botched affair were arrested.

The Kremlin has responded to Monday's terror attack with promises of retribution, which will undoubtedly be brutal and do nothing to stem the rising tide of violence. As has happened in the past, this politically reactionary and horrific assault on innocent people will only serve to further consolidate state power and increase the authority of the security services.

"This crime will be solved," insisted Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Tuesday, adding, "revenge is inevitable." In tough talk typical of his crude style, Putin commanded the FSB to deal with those responsible "without ceremony." "They must be destroyed there and then."

President Medvedev said on Wednesday that the state would increase "control on a day-to-day basis" on public transportation, insisting that it should be "intrusive."

His remarks were partly directed towards international investors, whom Moscow is currently attempting to court at the world economic forum in Davos, Switzerland. At this event, the Russian delegation unveiled a \$15 billion plan to build five ski resorts in the North Caucasus, including Dagestan. While Medvedev has stated that he intends to pacify the region by creating economic opportunities for the population, the commencement of such a development project will demand a ferocious crackdown on dissent

in the area.

Monday's bombing comes amidst heightened political and ethnic tensions in Russia. Towards the end of last year, a violent anti-immigrant riot broke out in Moscow, resulting in the deaths of at least 10 people when marauding gangs of Russian nationalists began attacking people who looked like they were from the Caucasus or Central Asia. While riot police beat back the crowd, they did little to prevent the subsequent assaults of passersby on the metro, whom are regularly harassed by the security services.

Since then the atmosphere in the country has been fraught. While the Kremlin officially condemned the violence, Putin openly solidarized himself with far-right sentiments by visiting the grave of a Slavic man allegedly murdered by a group of Caucasians in the fall. His death was the immediate spark for the anti-immigrant riot in December.

On Tuesday, Moscow riot police turned out en masse at a square in the city center to disperse another planned anti-immigrant rally.



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