

Moscow airport bombing kills 35

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An apparent suicide bombing in Moscow's main international airport Monday killed at least 35 people and injured at least another 130.

The blast ripped through the international arrivals hall at Domodedovo Airport, the largest airport serving the Russian capital.

The bomb was allegedly packed "full of metal pieces," a source in the Russian Investigation Committee told the RIA Novosti news agency, maximizing the deadly impact of the explosion.

Witnesses posted pictures on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, that show the aftermath of the atrocity, a chaotic scene, with dozens of horrifically injured people being assisted by airport workers and their fellow passengers.

One eyewitness, Artyom Zhilenkov, reported the alleged bomber was a man with a briefcase standing in a crowded area.

Zhilenkov, who was protected from the blast by a pillar, told media he saw a flash from the suitcase, then felt a shock wave. "People all around me were lying on the ground. A choking smoke was quickly filling up the place."

"The place was full of dead people, torn-off limbs, arms and legs, and people who were still alive," Zhilenkov said. He added that though the arrivals hall was equipped with a metal detector for visitors entering to greet passengers, it appeared that nobody was manning it.

Police spokesman Vladimir Markin told Russia 24 television that a search had been launched for three suspects who had assisted the dead bomber.

Though there has been no claim of responsibility, there is widespread speculation in government and media circles that Islamist militants from the Caucasus region carried out the bombing.

There have been numerous bombings and assassinations carried out by separatist groups from the

region against Russian state and civilian targets, though most have taken place in the three Muslim-majority republics of Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia.

The explosion at Domodedovo is the worst such loss of life in Russia since a twin attack on the Moscow underground transport system in April last year. At that time, two female suicide bombers blew themselves up in Moscow Metro stations, killing 40 and injuring over 100. Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov claimed responsibility for that attack, though his group, the Caucasus Emirate, had initially denied involvement.

The Russian government has fought two brutal wars in Chechnya that killed tens of thousands of civilians and leveled much of the province, which was seeking to secede from the Russian Federation.

The Chechen conflict has spilled out into the neighboring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan, where many militants escaped and now operate in the remote mountainous areas. All three provinces suffer from chronic poverty, unemployment and official corruption.

Though Russia's President Dmitri Medvedev—who cancelled a trip to the Davos Economic Summit following the airport bombing—claimed in 2009 that "counter-terrorism operations" in the three North Caucasus provinces had come to an end, Russian security forces continue to fight a low-level war there.

Over the past three years Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan have experienced a rise in violence, with almost daily reports of killings, assaults, and kidnappings carried out by local police, militias—either separatist or allied to provincial government officials—and Russian security forces. Hundreds of people have "disappeared," and Russian authorities are accused of routinely using torture there.

Despite Kremlin claims that Russian security forces and their local proxies are winning their war against Islamist separatist groups, most commentators

acknowledge that the North Caucasus insurgency is growing and increasingly able to strike across Russia.

The bloody attack on innocent civilians in Moscow is reactionary and can serve no legitimate political purpose. Instead, Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin will use it to justify new militarist and antidemocratic measures, aimed at crushing any opposition to Moscow's rule in the Caucasus, as well as political dissent at home.

With presidential elections due to take place next year, the issue of security and Russia's own "war on terror" will no doubt be used to ramp up support for the official Kremlin candidate. There is speculation that Putin, who presents himself as a hard-liner on security, and who as prime minister under Boris Yeltsin launched and oversaw the Second Chechen War in 1999, could use the issue of terrorism to reclaim the presidency from Medvedev.



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